

THE KOREAN WAR



MORE AIRPLANES!

The arrival of the Soviet MIG-15 fighters over northern Korea in late November 1950 sent shockwaves through the U.S. Air Force. Until then, the U.S. held undisputed air supremacy over all of Korea, able to carry out its missions at will. But the planes in theater could not handle the Soviet MIGs.

Initially in North Korean markings (above), they were flown entirely by Russian pilots for several months before the first North Korean squadron appeared in the north. (The North Korean pilots were not nearly as challenging.) The first Chinese squadrons entered the fray in October 1951 (below) – and generally were better than the North Koreans but not at the same skill level as the Russians. That being said, some of the Chinese pilots proved more than capable.





The answer was the F-86 Sabre. This jet had only just entered service in the U.S. Air Force in late 1949 and still had problems (as did the MIG-15s). But it was about equal to the MIGs. The MIGs could reach higher altitudes, had a higher rate of climb, and were more maneuverable at lower speeds. The F-86 was slightly faster in level flight, capable of supersonic speeds in a dive (the

MIG would lose its wings if it tried), and slightly more maneuverable at high speed. The MIG was better armed with 2 20mm cannons and a 37mm against 6 shorter ranged, less effective .50 cal machine guns. But the F-86 had a far better fire control system, meaning it was more accurate when it fired and, as the Soviet pilots would grudgingly admit, the Americans were better trained.

The U.S. deployed the 49th Fighter/Interceptor Group of two squadrons to Korea in late December 1950. There would be no increase in numbers during the war thus the F-86 was outnumbered. But it had far greater range than the MIGs and while northern Korea became known as MIG Alley and was contested air space, most of Korea including all of the front lines were uncontested and the Americans retained air supremacy over the front throughout the war.



Both planes had been built primarily as interceptors – intended to shoot down enemy bombers. The MIG was especially designed with this mission in mind given its heavy armament, fast climbing ability and short range. In Korea, they had to fight other fighters.



And both planes had a similar problem. Their flight controls were not significantly more advanced than WWI technology. The pilots controls were mechanically connected to the control surfaces. At high speed, this meant that it was physically difficult to cause the plane to maneuver sharply – not a good idea in a dogfight against a similar aircraft.

Although both U.S. and Soviet pilots practiced air combat maneuvers, they generally did not do so under conditions remotely approaching true air combat. In the U.S., the lean budgets and “Bomber Barons” played a role...



Fighters were to shoot down bombers or escort bombers although the escort role was a problem given bombers now flew much further than any fighter. Air refueling was in its infancy and the focus was on the bombers.

The U.S. Air Force toyed with the idea of a “Parasite Fighter” that would be carried by a bomber (instead of bombs) and used to defend the bomber force from enemy interceptors. The problem was the planes used in this role were no match for the MIGs so the idea was abandoned after the U.S. encountered the MIGs over Korea.



As for the flight control problems, by the middle of 1951, both the F-86 and MIG-15 had been modified with electro-hydraulic flight controls (B-29’s and larger already had similar systems.) Moreover, the F-86 moved the entire tail and not just the elevators (which had been removed.)



The U.S. Air Force claimed a 10 to 1 kill ratio against all MIGs (less against Russian pilots, more against North Korean.) Russians claimed a 3 to 1 advantage. It is only within the last twenty years or so that the reality came to light with the opening of the Soviet archives, access to Chinese reports and comparison with U.S. Air Force records. In reality, the U.S. pilots enjoyed a mere 2 to one advantage based on reported aircraft losses over MIG Alley and not pilot claims.



Pilots had claimed more than reality since the first time one pilot shot at another one. The high speeds of the jet fighters made confirmation extremely difficult. Unless you saw the target explode, or crash or the pilot eject all that could be confirmed (maybe) was a hit (smoke or bits flying off the enemy airplane when under fire).

Regardless of claims, MIG Alley (near the Yalu) was effectively no man's land in the air for most of the war.

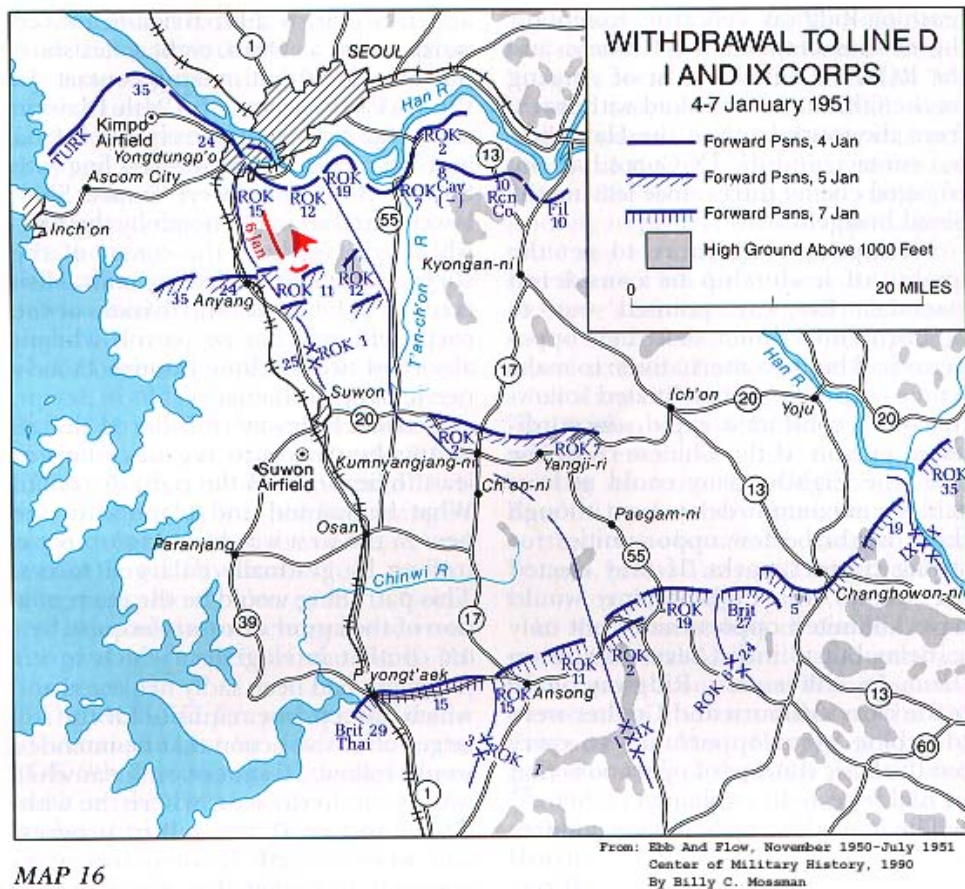
The U.S. Pilots also destroyed gun camera footage or otherwise made claims (even correct one) that could never be verified.

Why?

Several engagements happened over Manchuria, even over communist air bases. The rules allowed a U.S. pilot to cross the border when in “hot pursuit” of an enemy aircraft. U.S. pilots interpreted “hot pursuit” liberally – enough so they did not admit what they did for years.

If there was even a slight chance of catching a MIG over the border, often that meant they went in “hot pursuit” of possible targets. They also considered strafing Manchurian airfield to fall within their definition (but not the Pentagon’s) of “hot pursuit” if there were MIGs on the ground. The MIGs could not reach the U.S. bases near Seoul so this was rather one sided.





MAP 16

an enemy who is not yet there.

Ridgway did not see the situation as either dire or disastrous (provided the Army got its collective act together.) The word from MacArthur in Tokyo was another matter. He was convinced disaster loomed and he was facing the worst defeat in U.S. history. Aside from limited bombing of the Yalu River bridges – which had stopped once the river iced over – every request he made to expand the war had been denied.

The war did not wait for Ridgway to sort things out. He arrived in Korea with the Chinese threatening Seoul. There was already a plan in place to fall back to Line D (lower positions) which was deemed a defensible line. There were lines closer to Pusan, but Ridgway ordered his officer to ignore them.

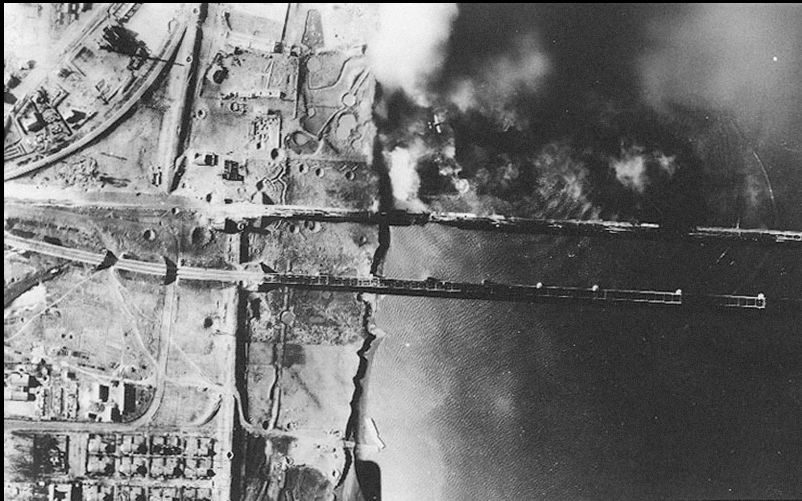
8th Army manned Line D by Jan 7th. What annoyed Ridgway was many units had no contact with the Chinese and had not had contact in days. He ordered aggressive patrolling to re-establish contact. (Find them. Fix them. Fight them.) One cannot fight

Photo # 80-G-423495 Bombing Yalu bridges at Sinuiju, North Korea, Nov. 1950



The bombing of the Yalu bridges began in late November 1950 once it was clear that the Chinese had intervened in force. The approval from Washington came with restrictions:

- U.S. warplanes could not violate Chinese airspace – the north side of the river.**
- The U.S. could not bomb or strafe anything on the Chinese side of the river, and**
- Only the southern bank and southern spans could be bombed.**



The Air Force could not manage the navigation without violating China's airspace nor were their bombers accurate enough to hit the Korean side consistently.

The Navy and Marine Corps – flying much lower – could hit the designated targets without violating Chinese airspace.

Photo # 80-G-423495 Bombing Yalu bridges at Sinuiju, North Korea, Nov. 1950

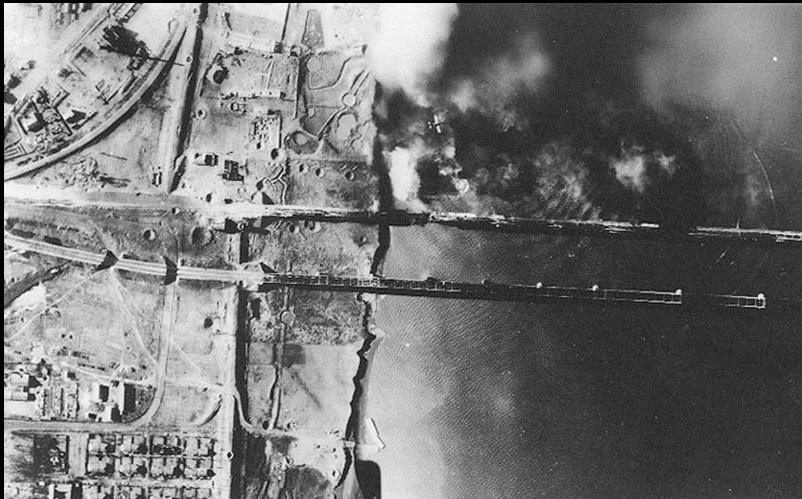


The mission, therefore, fell to the A-1's and F4Us of the Navy and Marine Corps operating from carriers off shore. They hated the assignment mainly because the restrictions meant the air defense could be placed on the north side of the Yalu and would be untouchable.

They also hated the job because while damaging a bridge was easy, destroying it was not. Spans could be replaced – in hours for foot traffic and days for vehicles – meaning they had to return again and again.

By late December, the river froze over so bombing had no effect as troops and equipment could cross almost anywhere.

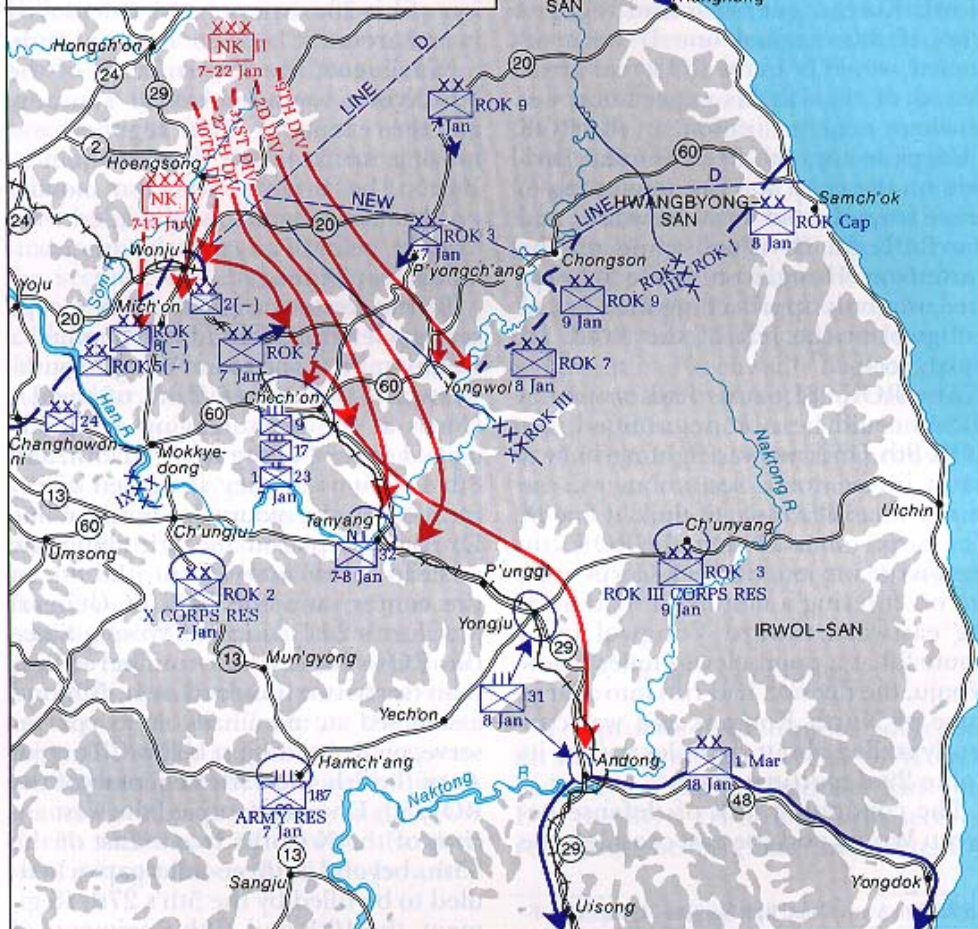
But the immediate effect was not the reduction of supplies (they were being bombed everywhere), but the arrival of the Russian flown jet fighters, which came as a rude shock. Prior to that point, the U.S. enjoyed air supremacy over all of Korea. After, "Mig Alley" (far north Korea) became no man's land (or sky).



NK II CORPS AND V CORPS ATTACKS 7-22 January 1951

- X Corps Frontline, Morning, 7 Jan
- Other U.S. and ROK Positions Occupied or Established on Dates Indicated
- Axis of N.K. Attacks, Dates Indicated
- High Ground Above 1000 Feet

0 25 MILES



From: Ebb And Flow, November 1950-July 1951
Center of Military History, 1990
By Billy C. Mossman





MAP 17

On Jan 7th, just as the Chinese offensive ground to a halt in western and central Korea, the NKPA re-entered the war on the east side of Korea. Their attack happened to exploit a gap between the ROK III Corps and U.S X Corps and broke into the rear.

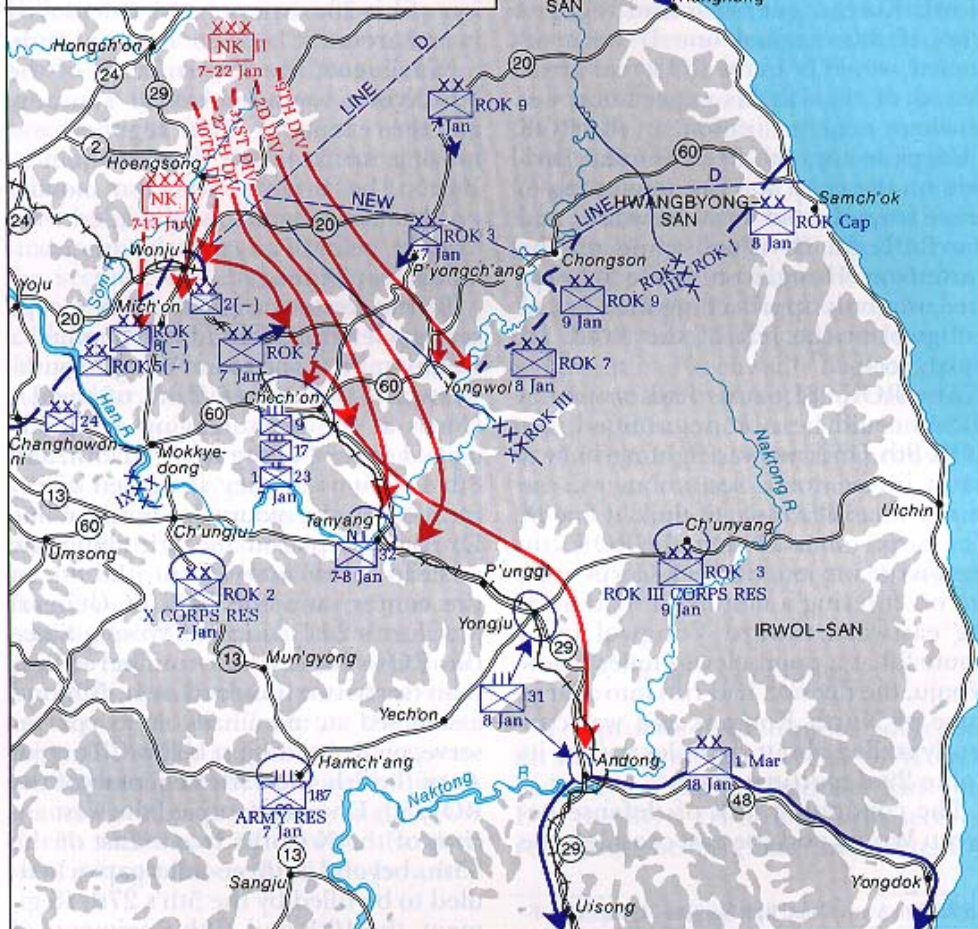
This cause a panic in Tokyo as the attack seemed to threaten Pusan.

Ridgway and the ROK army, however did not panic. The U.S. and Korean forces had not run off at the attack, but held the flanks of the breakthrough. The penetration was over poor ground – meaning the NKPA could barely supply their troops. This presented an opportunity to cripple the reconstituted NKPA before they had a chance...

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By holding the flanks of the breakthrough, Ridgway and the UN forced the NKPA into a narrow corridor without any north/south roads. The air forces and artillery pounded this corridor over the next several days.

Elements of the NKPA 31st Division made it as far south as Andong, which months before had been the northern part of the Pusan Perimeter, but by then it lacked the strength or supply to continue and was forced to pull back.

Poorly supplied and under constant air attack and artillery bombardment, the NKPA offensive ground to a halt and then yielded the ground gained – albeit slowly. The result, in the end, was the decimation of what little remained of the veterans in the NKPA and no lasting success.

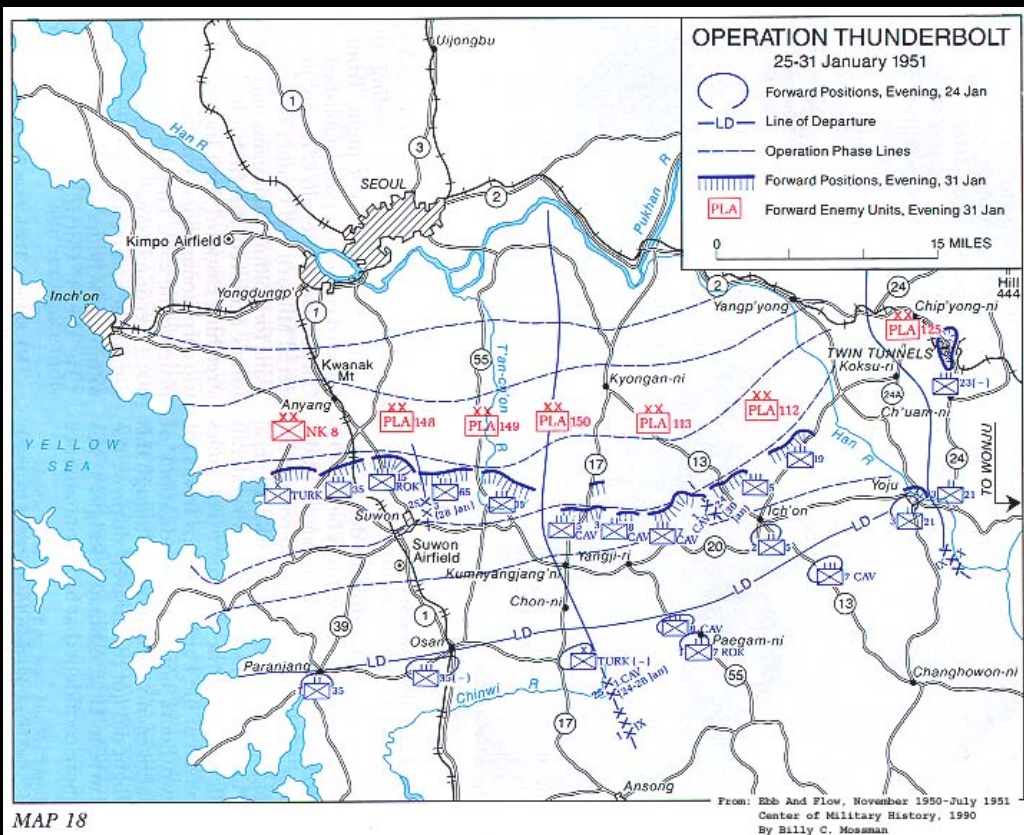


But that is not what the American people were hearing at the time. Following the breakthrough, MacArthur made his complaints about the war public via press interviews. He said the war could be lost and the consequences disastrous unless he was given full reign to prosecute the war as he saw fit.

This was completely the opposite of the reports coming out of 8th Army from General Ridgway, although unlike MacArthur, Ridgway was not holding inflammatory press interviews. Truman considered firing MacArthur but held back as relieving the man at this juncture – when the outcome was not truly certain – might destroy 8th Army.

He did, however, send MacArthur a message forbidding any future press interviews and directing SCAP to forward any questions to the Pentagon.

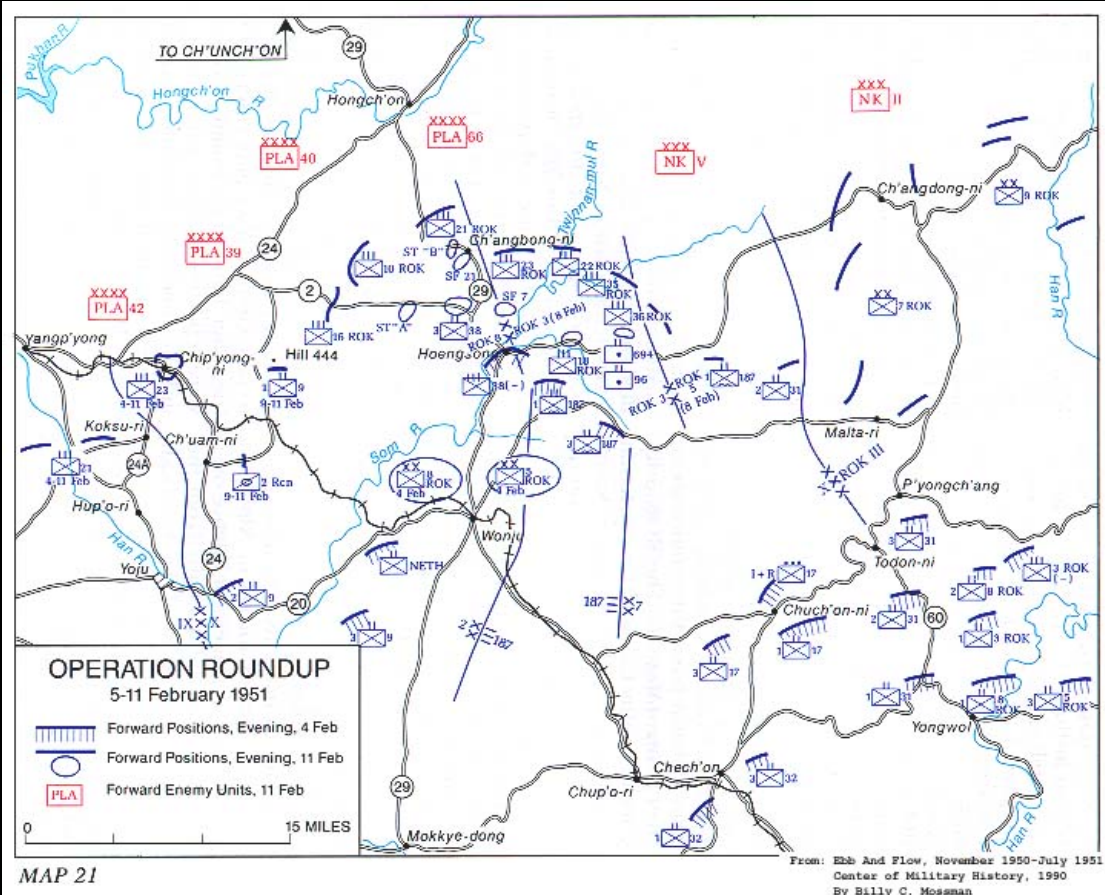
MacArthur clearly chafed under this order but for now he complied...



While MacArthur railed about how Washington was denying him the ability to win the war, 8th Army patrols indicated that the ground to the north was largely devoid of Chinese. Ridgway ordered a limited offensive. 8th Army would advance to contact and then push. But this was not intended as a general counter offensive as Ridgway felt 8th Army was not quite recovered from the defeats earlier. The operation in the West – I and XI Corps – was named “Thunderbolt.”

In the east, X Corps and ROK III Corps advanced in a separate operation called “Roundup.” (next slide)

The advance met little resistance at first and was carried out cautiously. When the army met the Chinese main line of resistance, the operation was halted as 8th Army prepared for a new operation. At the far right of the line, 23rd Regiment from 2nd Division X Corps advanced towards Chip’yong-no – a vital crossroad village. It failed to reach the village, hit by a force about three times its size in the vicinity of twin railway tunnels. It held out for over a day before the Chinese retreated and then entered the vital town and was ordered to dig in.



MAP 21

Operation Roundup kicked off just as Operation Thunderbolt wound down. The goal was to regain all ground lost to the NKPA in the earlier battle and move the line of X Corps and II ROK Corps forward until it linked up with the line to the west.

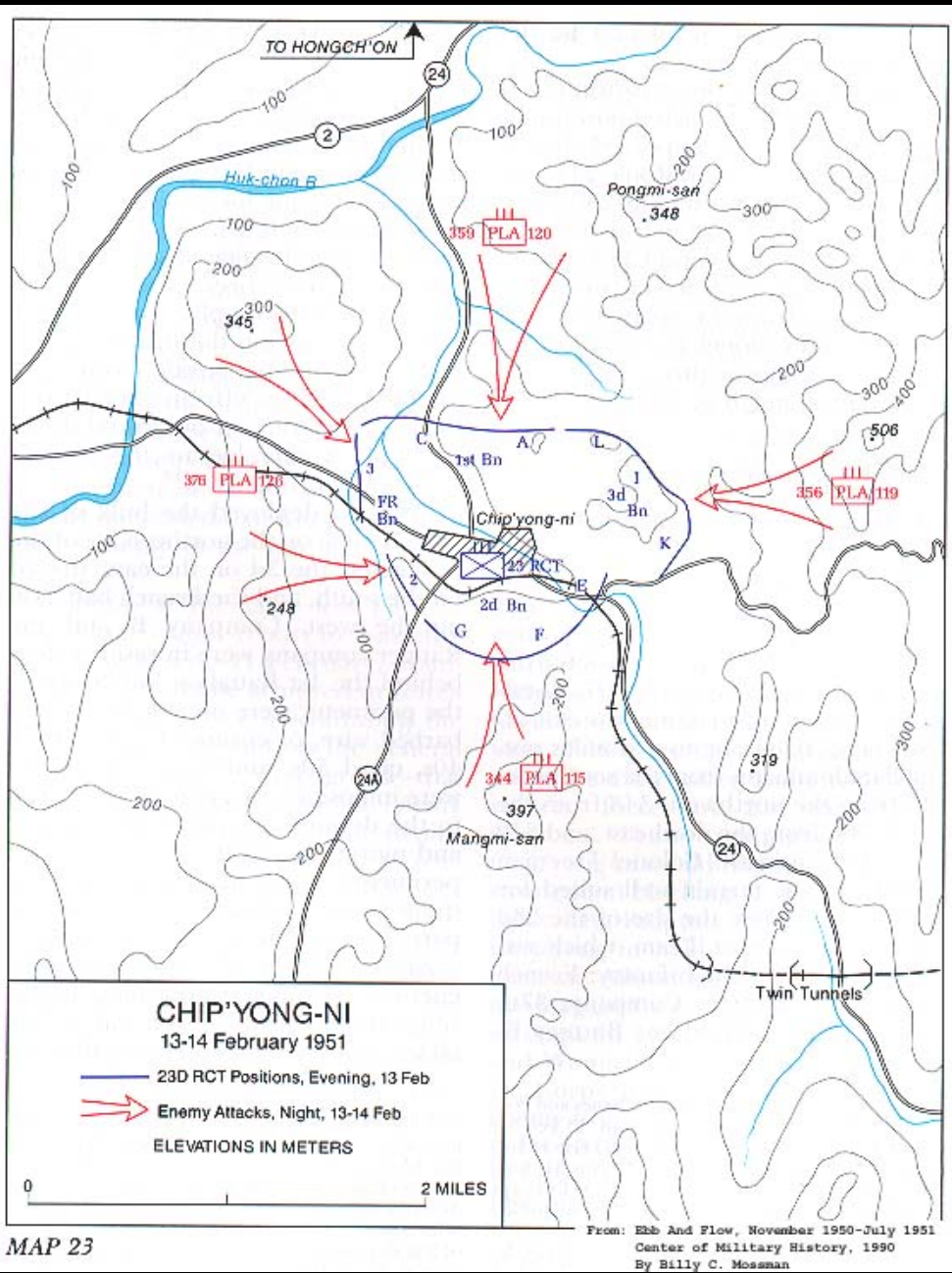
The purpose of both advances was to maintain contact with the enemy forces thus limiting the enemy's ability to achieve surprise.

A secondary goal was to establish a forward line that could be

defended and to close the gaps between formations to limit the potential of another enemy breakthrough.

What the limited advances had not done was quell the fear of the Chinese. For that to happen, a unit would need to be cut off and survive the worst the Chinese could muster.

And Ridgway was planning to do just that...

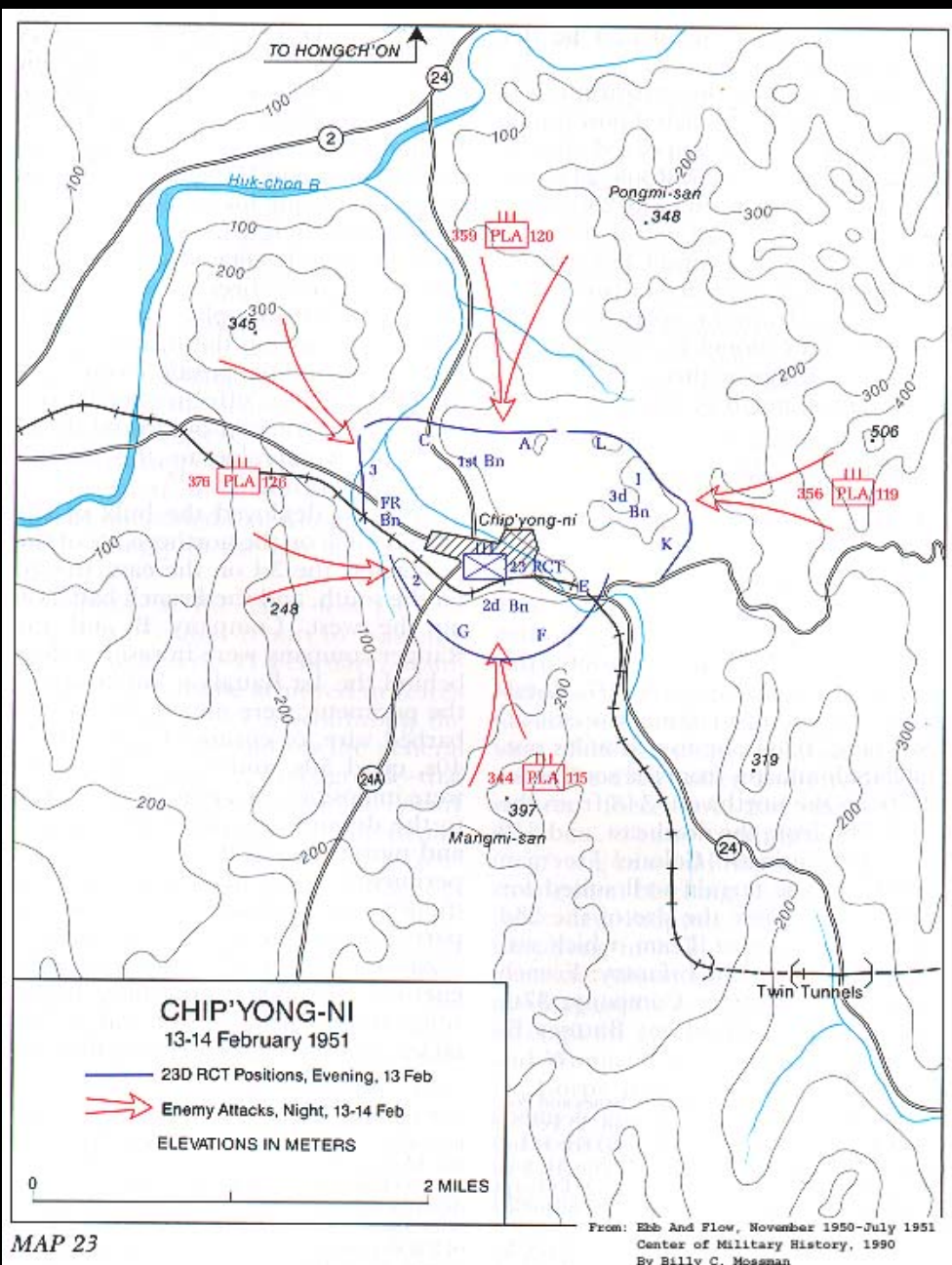


MAP 23

The crossroads of Chip'yong-ni would be the place. The Chinese had to retake it – otherwise their east-west supply route would be forced back over fifty miles. The 23rd Inf. Regt. Had dug in around the town and scraped out an airfield in their perimeter and this time they had effect forward air controllers to coordinate resupply, medical evacuation flights and close air support.

By the 12th, the 23rd was cut off and surrounded by three Chinese divisions intent on taking the town. A relief force from the 1st Cav was forming 15 miles to the south but there was serious concerns as to whether it would make it in time.

Dogged fighting and effective close air support – despite dangerously low overcast – exacted a crippling toll on the attacking Chinese.

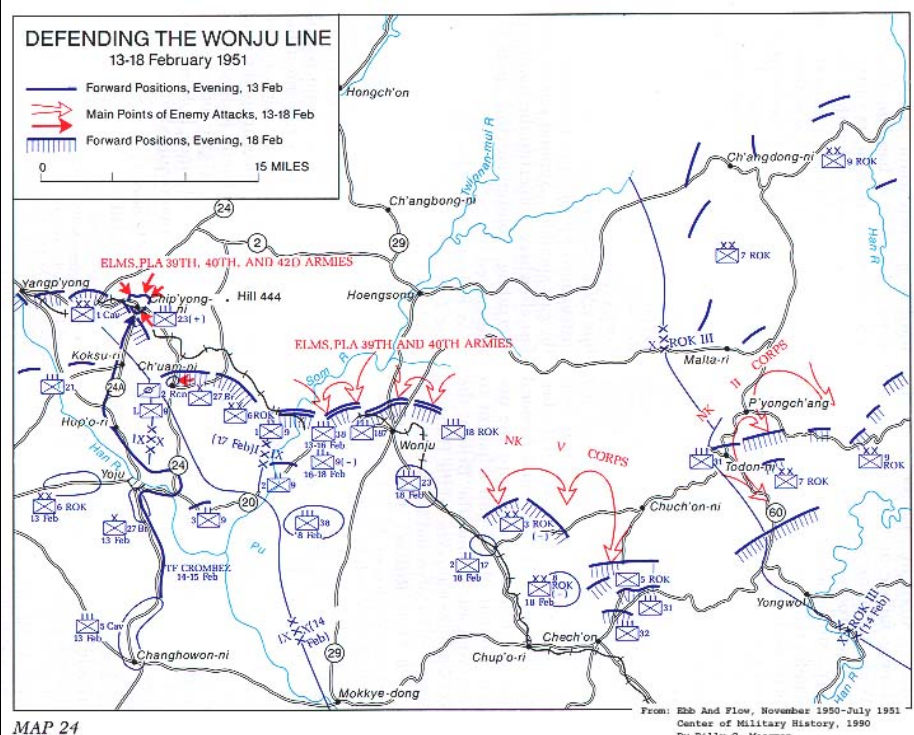


MAP 23

A small force of Chinese managed to break into the perimeter on the afternoon of the 15th, but was destroyed by a napalm strike. The Chinese southern flank then came under attack from the relief force of 20 tanks with a battalion of supporting infantry and broke.

The 23rd Regiment (and attached battalion of French Foreign Legion) suffered about 350 casualties. The Chinese had lost ten times their number – almost one per man in the defending regiment. The Chinese were no longer invincible.

And 8th Army now knew this as the battle for the besieged village had been made known to the entire army as it happened. The morale of the army turned almost overnight.



The siege of the 23rd Inf. Reg. at Chip'yong-ni was a small part of a much bigger operation that the communists launched in an effort to regain the initiative and continue to drive UN forces to the south. The communists were most successful against the ROK III Corps which had advanced rapidly in the previous days and failed to establish a solid line of resistance in the east.

In the center and west, however, the advances gained little ground against more concentrated defensive lines. Moreover,

even in the east, the NKPA found itself once again countered by heavy air and artillery attacks. While the communists gained some ground, it had come at a terrible price in lives without inflicting similar losses on the UN forces.

Moreover, it did not deter Ridgway's plans. After the successful defense of Chip'yong-ni and the effect on the army's morale, he planned a series of counter-offensives to retake Seoul and push the communists north of the 38th parallel. The offensives would not be nearly as ambitious as MacArthur's drive north had been. Each attack would gain ground then consolidate a solid defense and resupply before the next advance. (In WWI, this limited thrust was known as "bite and hold.")

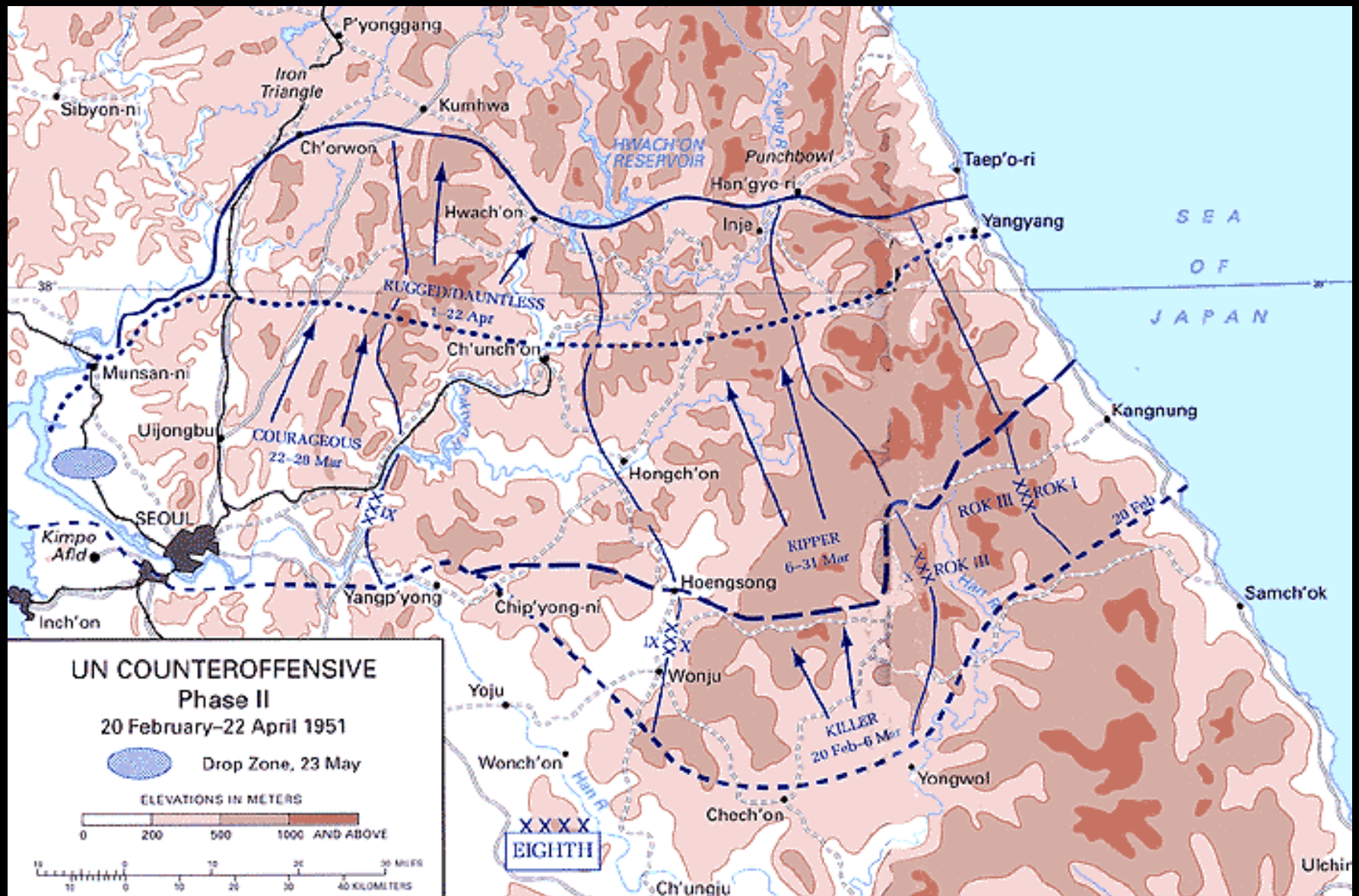


It was during the defense of the Wonju Line in February 1951 that the Puerto Ricans made a name for themselves. The 65th Infantry had a respectable record in WWII and had served well in supporting the Marines' retreat from the Chosin Reservoir. But around Feb 17th, 1951, it was hit hard by a large Chinese attack. It held the line but eventually ran out of ammunition.

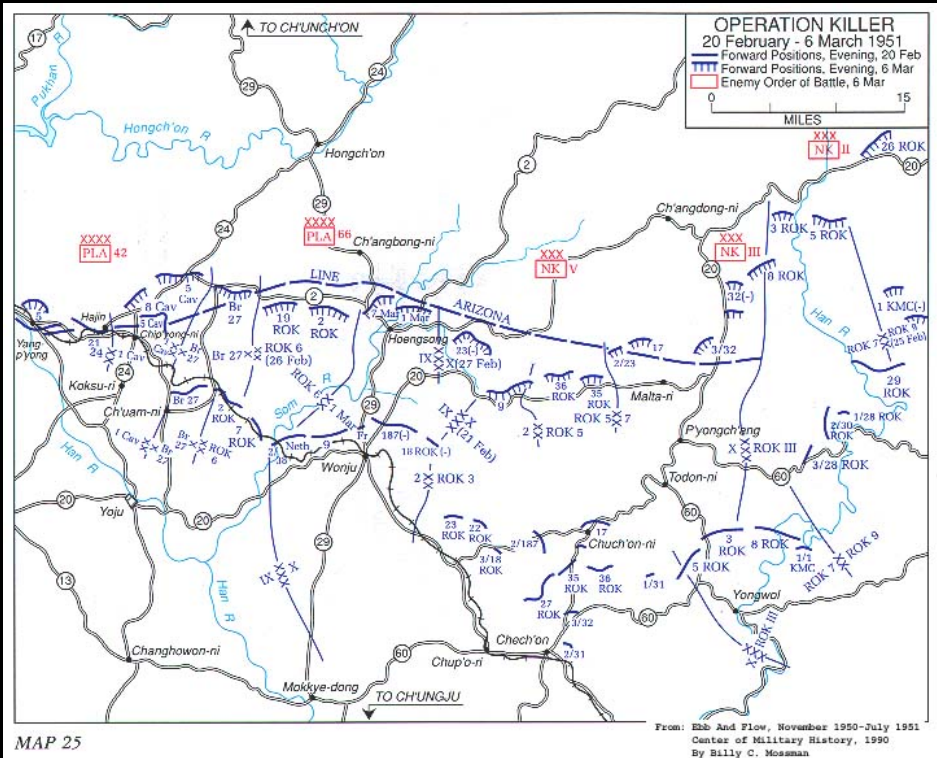
Rather than retreat, which had been the practice up to then, the lead

battalion fixed bayonets and charged the oncoming Chinese despite being massively outnumbered. The Chinese were taken completely by surprise and routed. The 65th Regiment was able to advance, but was later called back to its original positions lest it find itself encircled – and still out of ammunition.

It was the last bayonet charge in the history of the U.S. Army.



Map depicting UN offensive operations in the spring of 1951. (The airborne drop is a typo. It should be 23 March not 23 May.)



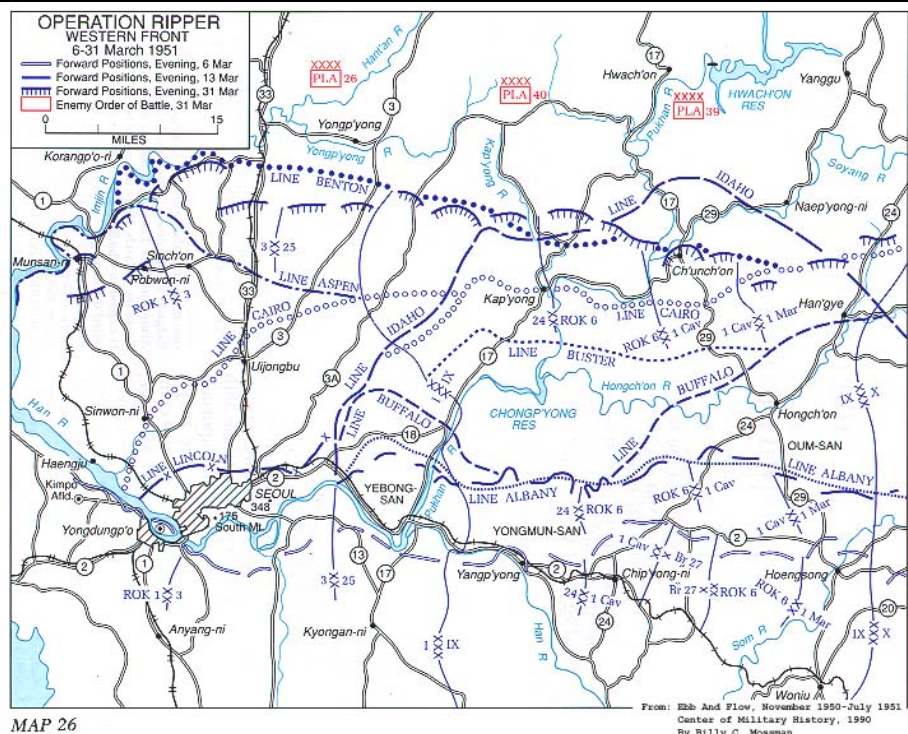
The first operation, "Killer" had been scheduled to kick off around Feb 17th. On the morning it was set to begin, MacArthur arrived and Almond's headquarters to watch the attack go in. Upon hearing MacArthur arrived in Korea (and before he arrived at Almond's Headquarters) Ridgway called off the attack. MacArthur sought an explanation.

Ridgway had one. Since 1942, every time there had been a major offensive operation under MacArthur's command, he had been

present at the opening of the attack even if his headquarters was hundreds or more miles to the rear. While it seemed that the Japanese had never made the connection, the Chinese had and by showing up, MacArthur was broadcasting that a major attack was imminent.

Oddly, MacArthur left without comment. Operation Killer went forward a few days later catching the communist forces unprepared.

MacArthur returned to Tokyo and spent time drafting a lengthy letter to be presented at the annual meeting of the VFW. Once again, it railed against the restrictions imposed upon him.



Operation Killer was followed almost without pause by operation Ripper. This was an attack across the entire front with the goals of retaking Seoul and driving the communists to the 38th parallel. Ridgway did not consider the 38th parallel sacred in any way and intended to move north somewhat to a line he considered far more suitable for defense but that was for later.

Seoul was retaken by March 12th. In the west, the advance stalled just north of the city. On March 23rd, the 187th Airborne

Regimental Combat Team was dropped north of Seoul and south of the Imjin River. As had been the case in their jump north of Pyongyang back in November, 1950, the objective had been to catch the enemy from behind. As had been the case previously, while the jump itself was successful, the prize had already slipped away to the north. All that was found were stragglers.

But in the whole, Operation Ripper succeeded in driving the communists north and into North Korea.



The VFW forwarded MacArthur's letter to the Pentagon for comment about two weeks before their annual meeting. The Pentagon exploded. The VFW was told that the letter was unauthorized and contrary to orders moreover it had no relation whatsoever to the situation in Korea and therefore it should be shelved. The VFW complied.

MacArthur received an informal reprimand where, in effect, all communications from his office had to be cleared through the Pentagon in advance. But the damage was done as a fan of MacArthur's in the VFW hierarchy leaked the letter to the press. Still, MacArthur was left in place.

But not for long. As Ridgway prepared to move further north, the President considered the war "won" and asked both Ridgway and MacArthur for their opinions regarding a ceasefire.

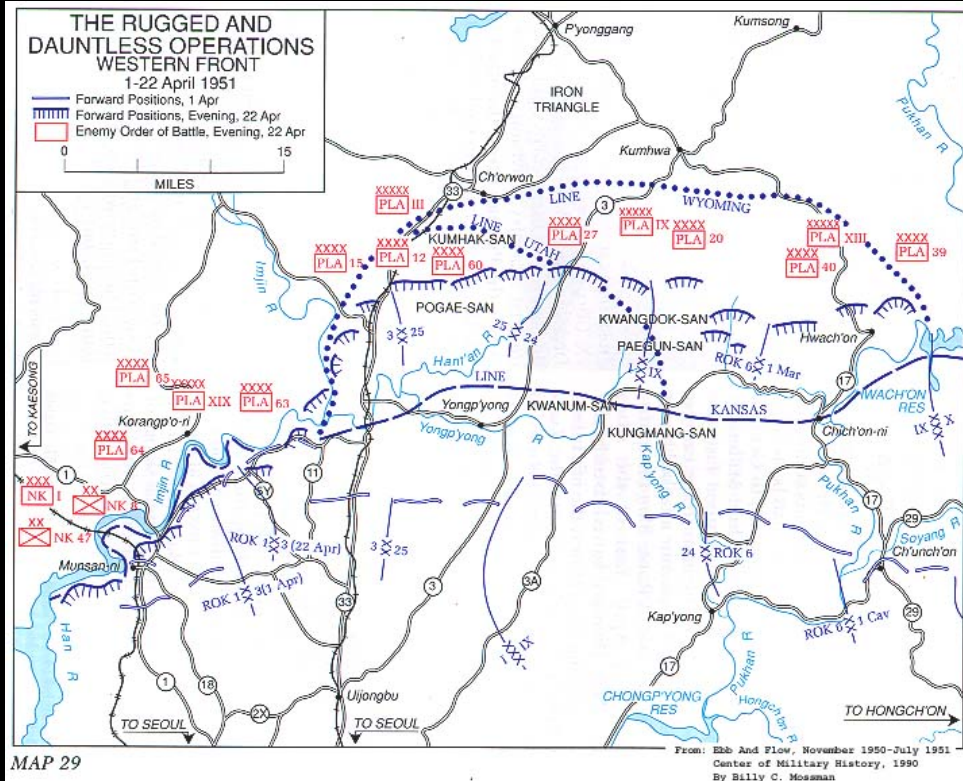


Ridgway wanted to consolidate a defensible line north of the 38th parallel otherwise he had no concerns about an armistice.

MacArthur's response was a radio message from Tokyo in plain voice (no encryption) demanding the unconditional surrender of communist forces in Korea or else. The message was sent on April 10th, Washington time.

MacArthur was fired the next day.

In fact, the press release that he had been relieved of all his commands and responsibilities and recalled to Washington was published in Tokyo before the message informing MacArthur of his relief from command had made it through the SCAP communications center.



MacArthur's message to the Chinese that ended his career meant any talk of an armistice was off the table for now. Ridgway was informed he would take over as UN commander and SCAP as soon as his replacement for command of 8th Army arrived from the states. In the meantime, Ridgway continued his slow but steady drive north.

It was during this drive that the Han River overflowed its banks. There had not been rain nor enough runoff to

cause the river to flood, but it had and the effect was that many of the pontoon bridges across the Han had washed out, interrupting supply of the units in Seoul and to the north.

It was determined the cause of the flooding was the Hwochon Reservoir. While some of the south bank was in UN hands, most of the bank and more critically the dam remained in communist control. The 7th Infantry Division was tasked to take the dam and put it out of operations. While they managed to get to the dam and hold on for about three days, they lacked the means to disable the spillways before they were driven back.



The Air Force then lunched B-29 raids against the dam and while they managed to knock out the powerplant, they failed to damage the spillways or dam itself. (Similar efforts had been tried in WWII with similar lack of results. Dams are hard to bomb.)

The UN needed to take out the dam. So long as it remained in operation, the communists could control the level of the Han, raising it to thwart UN efforts and lowering it to assist in their own.



A Navy commander of an A-1 squadron had an idea. The A-1 was designed to drop torpedoes. (It had been a replacement of both the dive bombers and torpedo bombers.) The commander had flown torpedo bombers in the war and figured well placed torpedeos could take out the spillways at the top of the dam. And his ship had Mk-13 torpedoes somewhere in its magazines. The problem was, he was about the only pilot who had ever dropped a torpedo.



CDR Dick Merritt spent a couple of days briefing his pilots on how to drop torpedoes and then on the specific mission to attack the dam. On April 30th, 1950, 8 A-1's from USS Princeton took off armed with torpedoes escorted by 24 F-4U's to suppress any air defenses around the reservoir and dam. Six of the torpedoes struck the spillways dead on and detonated, destroying two spillway gates and critically damaging a third making the dam inoperable for flood control purposes.

VA-195 had been called the Tigers prior to this mission. Since the mission and to this day they are called the Dam Busters. It was the last air attack with anti-surface torpedoes in history. (Not to be confused with RAF 617 Squadron which successfully bombed German dams in the Ruhr in WWII.)

VA-195 had been lucky. USS Princeton was in the process of being mothballed when the Korean War broke out and the ship had not yet offloaded its magazines, which included a supply of surplus (and no longer used) Mk-13 torpedoes.



On April 19th, 1950, barely a week after he was fired, MacArthur appeared before a Joint Session of Congress. He had arrived in San Francisco a few days before. It was the first time he had set foot in the continental United States in sixteen years and he received a hero's welcome and an invitation to address congress.

In his address, he reiterated the point he had made since the Chinese intervention, but without the hysteria of his prior missives. He had wanted massive reinforcements. He wanted to bomb Manchuria – to include control over nuclear weapons. He wanted to blockade China – which would have required a blockade of the Soviet border as that was their trade route. And he wanted to land the Chinese Nationalist Army on the mainland. Anything less, he argued, would see defeat.

He went on to a ticker tape parade in New York.

Had that been the end of it, his reputation would not have been as tarnished as it became. But before the ink had dried in the press, his supporters in congress (mostly Republican and China Lobby) launched an investigation into the Truman Administration and its handling of the Korean War planning on using MacArthur as their star witness.



The Joint Chiefs of Staff and several other senior generals, active and retired were called in to testify. All refuted MacArthur. Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs made it clear that had MacArthur had his way, the war would escalate. It would become the wrong war, in the wrong place and against the wrong enemy. Europe was the critical geopolitical theater, not mainland Asia. The deeper

the Republicans dug looking for something that supported MacArthur, the worse it got for MacArthur.

When he was called to testify, it was a disaster. The eloquence of his farewell to congress was lacking. A man usually in command of the facts seemed to be unable to recall any. The Democrats begged the hearings end to salvage what little was left of MacArthur's reputation and eventually they relented. But too much had been made public. Instead of crucifying Truman, the hearings had destroyed MacArthur and Truman seemed almost reasonable by comparison.

In the end, while few liked the notion of "limited war," the alternative – WWII – was unthinkable and that was what would have happened had MacArthur had his way.



The day after MacArthur was fired was known as “Black Thursday” by the U.S. Air Force in Korea but the name had nothing to do with MacArthur.

In the weeks leading up to that date, air reconnaissance had detected construction at sights near Pyongyang, Wosan and another location indicating that the communists were building or improving airfields. The new facilities, if completed, could handle the MIG-15 which would move the MIGs within range of the front line and thus threaten UN air supremacy at the front and, perhaps, allow the communist realistic opportunities to conduct close air support for their forces.

The B-29’s from Okinawa launched massive (for Korea) raids against these airfields with the hope of preventing them from becoming operational.





On April 12th, 1951, a raid consisting of 48 B-29's with 80 escort fighters (all older P-80 and F-84 fighters) set out to hit the airfields again.

This time they were jumped by two regiments of MIG 15s (30 aircraft). The mission was aborted as ten B-29's were shot down and several others were damaged, some beyond repair. Not one MIG was shot down.

The F-86's were far to the north. They were supposed to prevent MIGs from entering Korea during the raid but were themselves attacked by four times their number. While they suffered no losses, they missed the strike sent after the bombers completely.

As a result, all B-29 missions were suspended for three months. When they resumed, they were only allowed to bomb at night. They would not be accurate in such a role against anything smaller than a town or city.





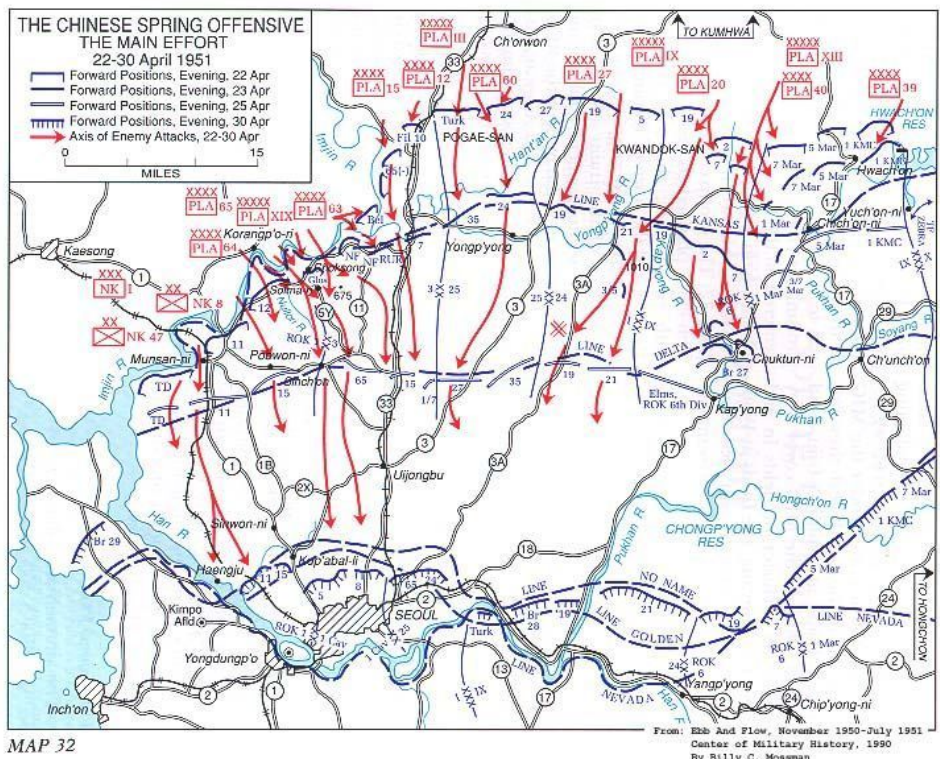
Despite the drama in Washington, the war went on. Ridgway became supreme commander when LGEN James Van Fleet arrived to take over 8th Army. Van Fleet had been a successful commander in Europe in WWII. He took command of the hapless 90th Infantry Division (when Theodore Roosevelt Jr died of a heart attack before assuming

command) and turned the division into an effective one before being named as Commanding General, 2nd Army before the war ended.

He was not Airborne, but is considered the “grandfather” of the Green Berets and Special Forces. This was due to his activities as Commander of the Military Advisory Group in Greece after WWII where he led advisors who “advised” the Greeks then involved in a war with Bulgarian backed communist forces and he had been successful.

Truman would later say of Van Fleet “He’s the winningest general we’ve got. I sent him to Greece and he won. I sent him to Korea and he won.”

Like Ridgway before him, Van Fleet took command just in time to face a major Chinese offensive.



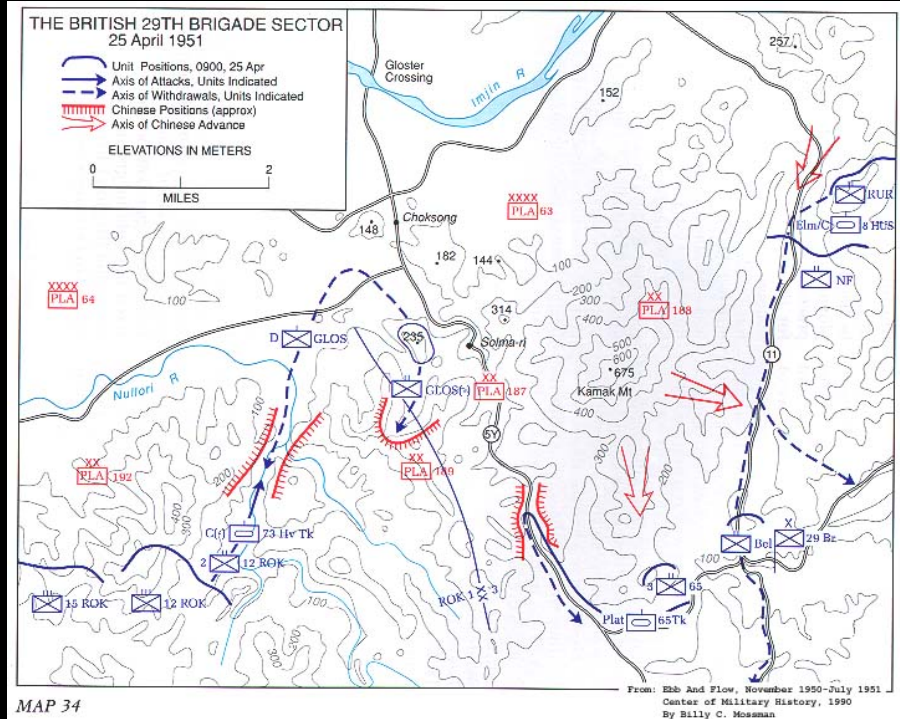
On April 22nd, the Chinese launched their last major offensive of the war. They hoped to force an American withdrawal now that MacArthur was no longer in command. It was also the largest army sent against the UN forces at over 500,000 across the front.

UN forces would be pushed back to just north of Seoul, but the city would not change hands again. The Spring Offensive effectively erased the gains the UN had made in Operation

Ripper, pushing the UN almost back to the start line from early March. But then, the offensive ground to a halt. Supply lines were stretched and under constant attack. Moreover, Chinese casualties had been horrendous.

The Chinese had intervened in part to rally support behind Mao at home. That had been achieved but it could be lost if the army bled to death on Korea. Despite protests from Kim (and Stalin), the Chinese ended the offensive and refused to consider another of such scale now or in the future.

North Korea could not hope to win without Chinese support.



In the opening days of the Chinese Spring Offensive, the British Commonwealth Brigade (Brits and Australians) held key positions defending the Imjin River. Its most critical position – a then unnamed hill, was held by a battalion of the Gloucester Regiment.

They were soon surrounded by upwards of five Chinese divisions.

Despite the overwhelming odds, they held their position, breaking up the main assault in the area until they ran low on ammunition.

They were told to hold on as relief forces were assembled to break through to their position. The Gloucesters had a priority for close air support and the equivalent of an armored battalion with two infantry battalions in support were trying to break through.

(This force included Centurion Tanks, then arguably the best in the world and still relevant to this day.)





The relief force could come no closer than about 2000m from the Gloucester position. When relief became impossible, soldiers were told to make their own way back to friendly lines. 217 would muster for duty a few days later. 54 were dead. 522 were POW's and most of the rest wounded but returned to UN lines.

The Chinese suffered around 10,000 casualties in its fight with the Commonwealth Brigade.

The result of the Spring Offensive was that the Chinese were willing to seek an armistice. They had achieved their objectives. The country had rallied. And the Army had shown it could fight the Americans and not lose.

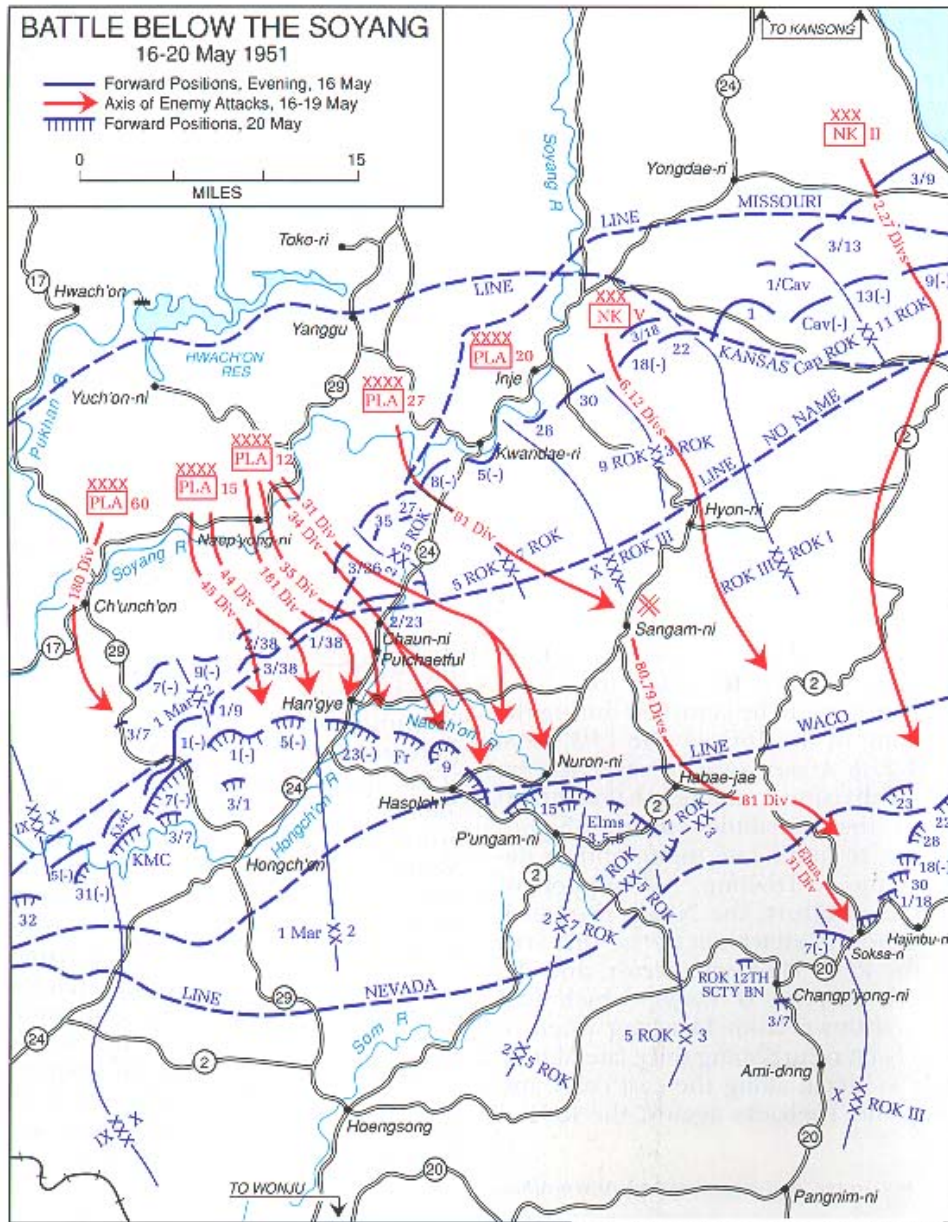
But to continue to bleed as they had would risk everything. Unfortunately, for the time being the North Koreans were in no mood to talk.

BATTLE BELOW THE SOYANG

16-20 May 1951

- Forward Positions, Evening, 16 May
- Axis of Enemy Attacks, 16-19 May
- ||||| Forward Positions, 20 May

0 15
MILES

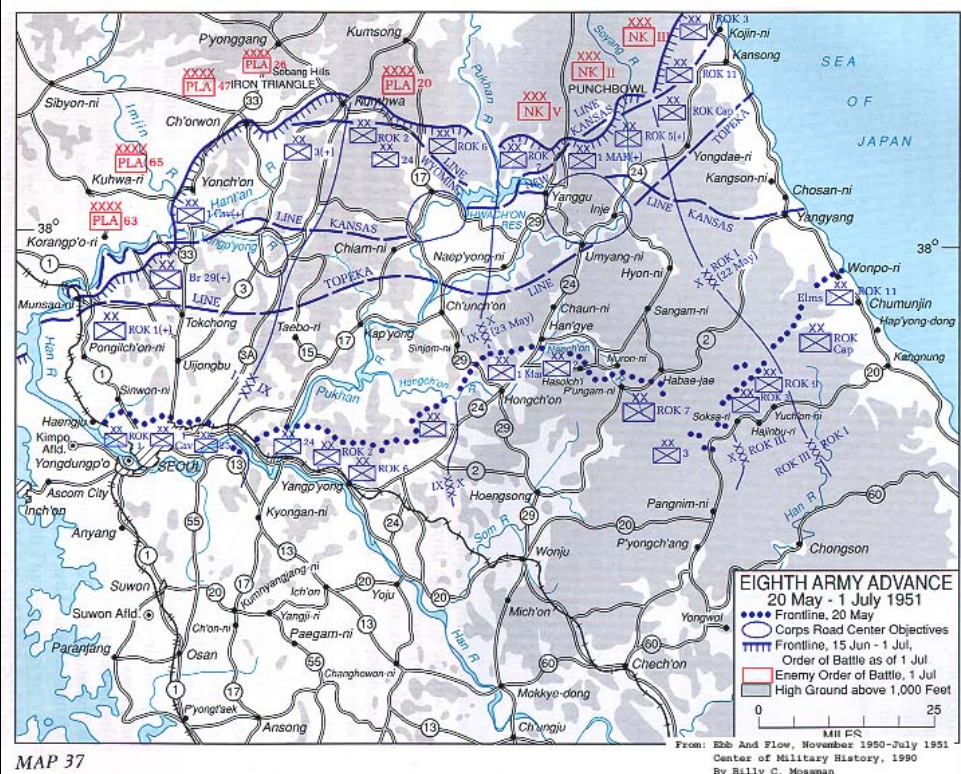


From: Ebb And Flow, November 1950-July 1951
Center of Military History, 1990
By Billy C. Mossman

MAP 35

The Chinese Spring Offensive on the Eastern side of the front.





MAP 37

Once the Chinese offensive came to a halt, the UN began a counteroffensive.

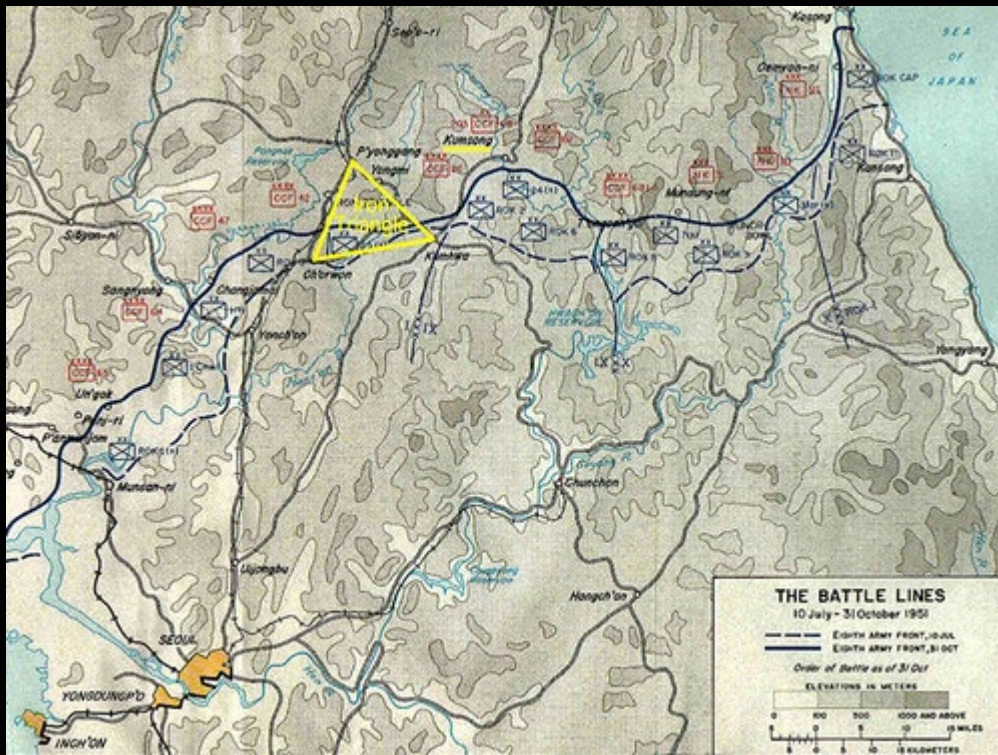
There was no break to reorganize and the communists were not set up for defense. For the next month, the UN forces slowly advanced beyond the 38th Parallel towards a line Ridgway had selected as a possible stopping point months earlier. They achieved the line by the end of June and dug in.

The front line at the end of June is roughly where the demilitarized zone exists today.

By this time (beginning of July, 1951) the Chinese had managed to convince Kim and the North Koreans to seek an Armistice by threatening to leave if they did not. As the Soviets were unwilling to do more than they had up to this point, the North Koreans agreed – although they did not agree to make it easy on anyone.

What followed would be two years of nearly static, positional warfare...

As of July, 1951, the Chinese Air Force had yet to make any appearance in the war.



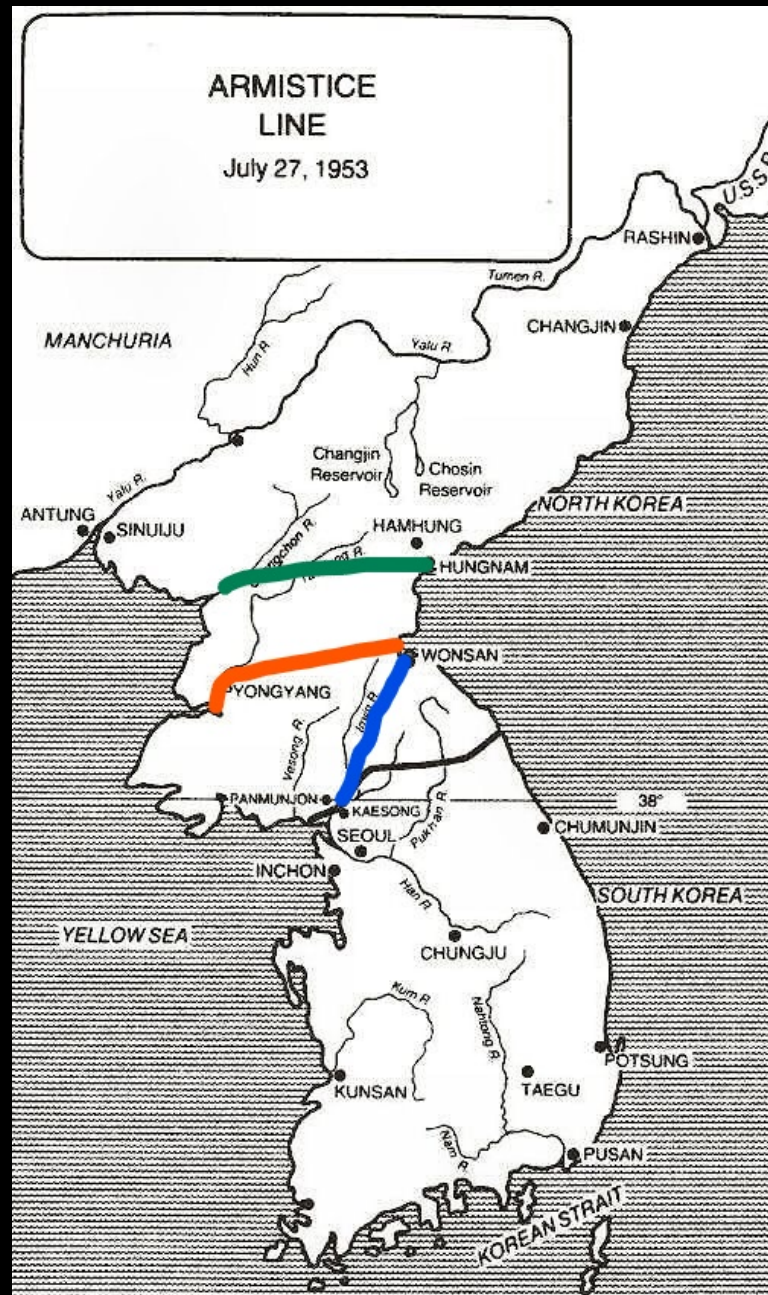
UN forces had pushed north to the dashed line on the map by early July. A request for armistice talks had been made through the Soviet Union mission to the UN in June but it was not until July that the communist forces in Korea – the Chinese and North Koreans – agreed to talks. UN operations in the final weeks of June had been solely to gain defensible ground, not to gain much additional territory.

Stalin agreed to talks, but not to any

resolution of the situation. He believed that a stalemate in Korea with long, drawn out talks about a cease fire would be to the detriment of the reputation of the United States and thus to the ultimate advantage of the Soviets.

The Chinese agreed having achieved their principal objectives and so long as the U.S. remained well to the south of the Yalu had no further interest in Korea.

The North Koreans were opposed to talks mainly because Kim had utterly failed to achieve his goals of toppling the South Korean government and unifying Korea under his rule. But while it was his country, he was a very junior partner and had to rely on Soviet and Chinese aid.



There have been questions as to why Ridgway stopped where he did in June 1951. They existed both at the time and to the present day. The belief was that the communists were beaten such that further advances should have been feasible.

Three stop lines had been proposed at some point. The line in green was proposed by Ridgway before he was sent to Korea. The other two lines were proposed later. They have the advantage of being shorter than the line established in 1951.

But Ridgway felt that by 1951 they were either unattainable or unrealistic. The communists had been driven out of the South, but they were not a broken army as had been the case after Inchon. Besides, the further north the UN went, the longer and less effective their supply lines became while the opposite was the case for the communists.

The UN resolution did not define a line nor mandate greater control of the north and as it stood, the line stressed communist logistics far more than it did the UN.



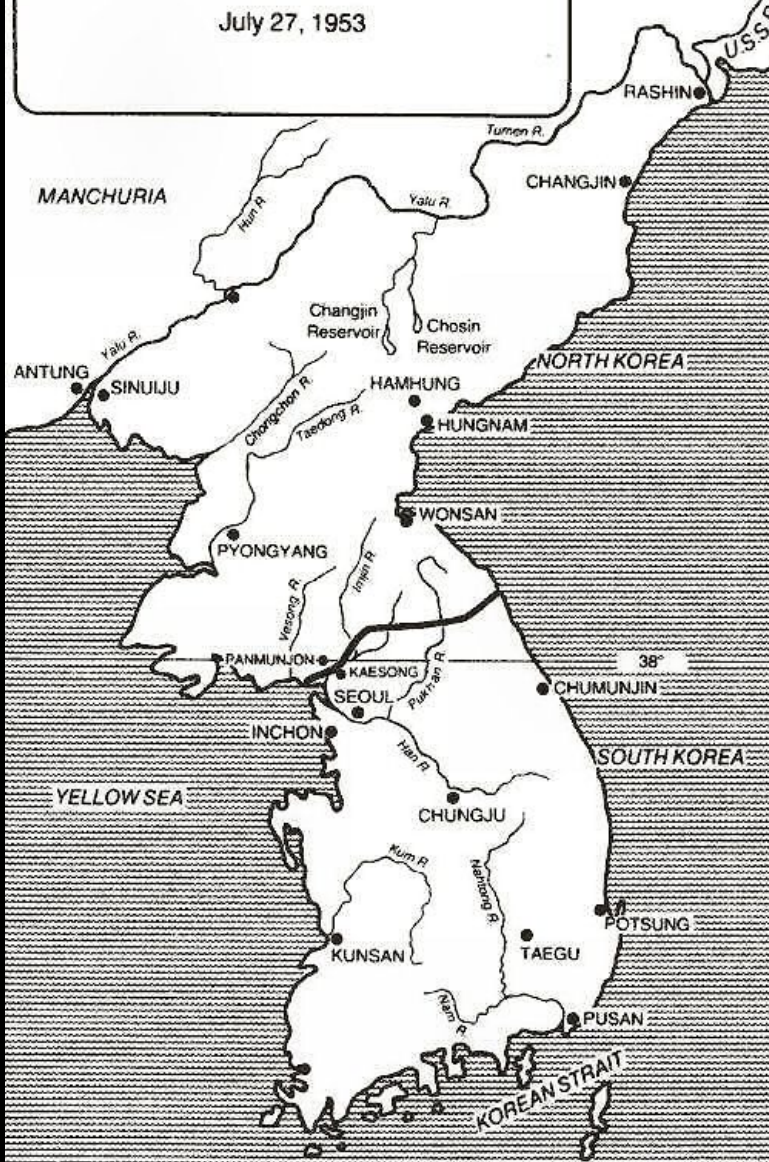
Negotiations began on July 10th. The lead North Korean negotiator was Gen. Nam (above with notebook) although he had little real authority. The Chinese and Soviets with their different agendas had greater say although only the Chinese were present.

The UN team was led by VADM Turner Joy (center lower). The first issue was where the talks would occur. The parties eventually chose the town of Kaesong which was roughly at the front. The first full meetings took place beginning July 24th. Over the next few weeks, the sides discussed what it was they would discuss – in other words the agenda of the talks.

One of the problems was that none of the communists negotiators had full authority to agree to anything. Even the UN team had to run proposals through Washington for final approval.



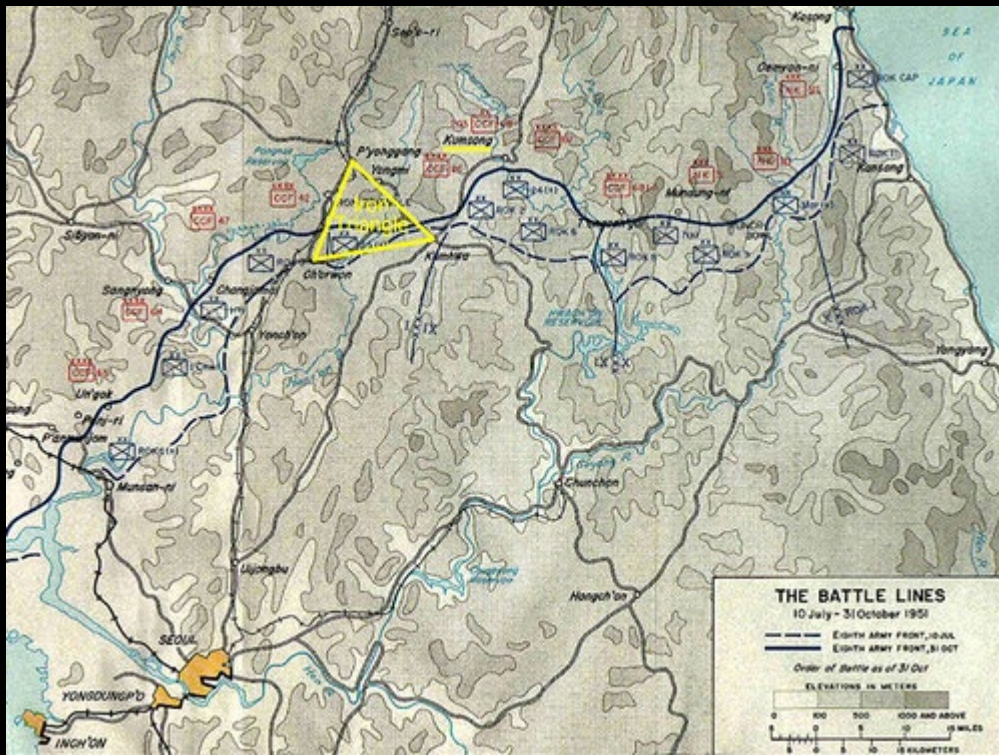
**ARMISTICE
LINE**
July 27, 1953



On August 16th, 1951, the negotiators signed an agreement as to the agenda for the talks that had been approved by their governments. The key points for discussion:

- The line of the final boundary,
- The issue of POW's,
- The specific conditions of the armistice pending a final peace treaty, and
- agreed upon recommendations to the respective governments in regards to such a future peace treaty.

On August 17th, the North Koreans cancelled further talks claiming that in the night the UN had bombed Kaesong. While there was clear evidence of explosions in the town, the UN was denied any chance to investigate (and had not flown missions anywhere near the town). It was clearly a fabrication.



With the war back on, it was the UN that struck. Limited offensives were launched across the front to gain control over key positions to strengthen the UN line with the greater gains aimed at territory defended by the NKPA (as they were the problem).

The talks resumed on October 16th 1951 at a new location, Panmunjom. They broke down again very quickly when the North Koreans again walked

out in protest. The issue was the first issue on the agenda – the cease fire line. The UN insisted that it be the front as of the signing of any armistice. The Chinese agreed in principal but as the front was now mostly north of the 38th Parallel, the North Koreans refused to agree to ceding any territory to the South (even if they could not hope to gain it back by force any time soon given the indifference of the Chinese and the fact that the Chinese were the only capable ground force the communists had at the time.)

This walkout would last several months.



The war after July 1951 has been called a stalemate. This is not entirely accurate as the UN/US forces held the ground they wanted, in other words they had achieved their objectives. Only the Koreans were arguably stalemated as both sides wanted more ground but found gaining ground for more than a few days at most all but impossible.



The war of maneuver was over on the ground. It became a war of position. The UN trying to hold the line it chose as the armistice line and the communists (mainly the NKPA) trying to gain better ground to hold. It became a positional war.

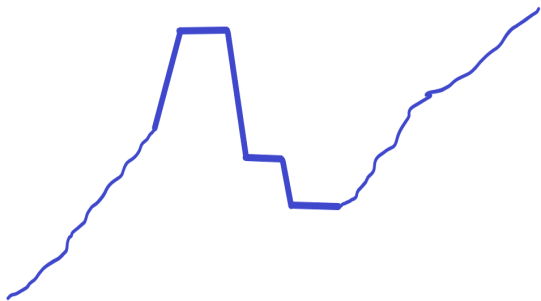
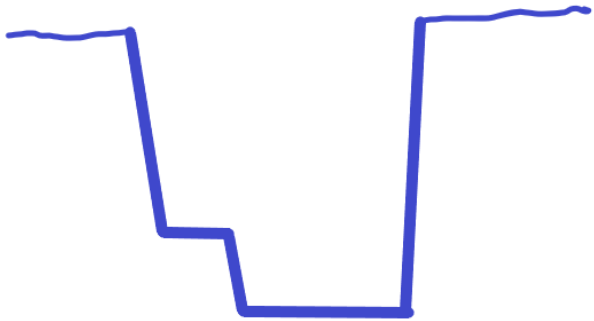
Over half the UN casualties had already been incurred.

The war now resembled WWI rather than WWII.

It resembled WWI, but was not the same as that war; certainly not the war on the Western Front of 1914 – 1918. The ground did not allow for an extensive system of trenches or even anything like the trenches of WWI. Most of the line was mountainous and rocky.

A WWI trench (above) was entirely below ground wherever possible so that troops would not be exposed except when on the firing step to defend the line from attack.

Korea (below) was on mountainsides. In the UN line, a parapet was partially dug and partially erected from sandbags and earth protecting the defenders from enemy fire. Bunkers were placed every few yards to provide protection from artillery. It had a clear field of fire and was easily defended. But it had no rear defense in part because the terrain did not allow it, but also because they learned that it was not necessary and, in the event the position fell, it could not defend against a counter-attack.





The key positions were the high ground which dominated the land around it. Most were hill numbers – Hill 338 for example – which denoted its elevation in meters. Some key positions had names, or at least the men that defended them gave them names such as Heartbreak Ridge (top) and Pork Chop Hill (bottom).



Positional warfare is historically less casualty intensive as compared with maneuver warfare – particularly for the defender. But it is also arguably far more draining on the morale of the soldiers for whom war is static, still dangerous and there is no clear measure of success. This is particularly true where the soldiers remember WWII where the allies advanced from the summer of 1942 until the end of the war.

Now they held nameless ground – or at least tried to hold it.



The communists and in particular the North Koreans could not be satisfied with the status quo. North Korea had left the talks when it was clear that an armistice would see them worse off (in terms of land area) than they were before the war (never mind that they were still being bombed). The Chinese hoped for improved bargaining power which could only come through at least limited success on the battlefield.

While attacks died down when negotiations were actually in progress, they would pick up again once negotiations broke down with the communists launching attacks against UN positions.

For the most part, these attacks often failed or at best resulted in temporary success before they were driven back by counterattacks.





The opposing armies manned ridgelines opposite one another. The distance between each front line was often a half a mile or more in a straight line, but the line was not straight as one had to descend the ridge, cross the low ground and climb the next. In an attack, this was under observation from the defenders' position and under fire.

Control of the high ground was critical. Unless one reduced the enemy's positions on the peaks and ridges, an attack over the low ground or through the valleys was doomed to failure. Defenders on the high ground could fire at will and, more critically, they could see the enemy advance and call in support.



All movement was observed and every square yard was pre-sighted by artillery batteries. Thus the attacks tended to be overly large – a division against a defending battalion – just to hope that enough attackers were alive and still fighting to take the position.



And attacks in daylight against the UN positions was mass suicide.

The UN held complete air supremacy over the entire front thus an enemy attack would be set upon by the men on the hills and ridges, the artillery and close air support. After a few disastrous attempts against the UN lines by the NKPA, all attacks had to take place – and succeed or fail – entirely at night. Daylight brought a rain of bombs on any enemy in the open.



Night was not much better. The artillery did not need to see the target to hit it. But their spotters had to see or suspect a target to call in fire.

The result was that a few defenders could often hold against a major attack so long as their ammunition held out. (The Gloucesters held for almost 2 days and inflicted 10,000 casualties in April).



Despite the lack of a credible air threat at the front (aside from the occasional North Korean Po-2's), the U.S. deployed anti-aircraft artillery just in case.

They were not, however, underemployed.

While there may not have been any enemy airplanes to shoot at, there were plenty of other enemy things in need of shooting – namely their soldiers and positions.



Guns such as the 90mm anti-aircraft gun (above) and 40mm Bofors (below) saw service as artillery. In the case of the Bofors, mostly in a direct fire mode.

The 40mm made a real mess of an enemy massed infantry attack. But it was not the best at dealing with such a threat.



The best weapon against a large enemy assault force was the M45 – a quad .50 cal mount on a WWII era halftrack. It was called the “Meat Chopper” by the infantry which pretty much described what it did to attacking infantry. If there was a problem with these ad hoc anti-personnel weapons, it was that as far as the soldiers were concerned there were never enough of them and certainly never enough when they were really needed.

The halftracks were being phased out and Korea was their last war for the U.S. Army. The other weapons were still relevant (in fact the Bofors is still relevant to this day). But the priority for such equipment was and remain Europe. Throughout the war there was a concern that Korea was merely the beginning and the real blow would fall on the German frontier thus it received the lion’s share of equipment as well as manpower.

It seemed that the U.S. was always more concerned more with the “Red Hoard” than with the “Yellow Hoard.”



But fighting was not a constant at any given location. While there was some skirmish somewhere along the nearly 200 mile front on any given day, major fights were uncommon for the most part – usually initiated when one side or the other wished to make a point in negotiations or were annoyed about the negotiations – more often the line at any given point was quiet.

The lack of movement and boredom had an impact on the troops.



The artillery “made work” whenever ammo was available. More artillery was expended in Korea than in all of WWII. The same was true in the air as the U.S. dropped more bombs on Korea than they had in the entirety of WWII in all theaters.

It kept them busy, but not successful and certainly not even as little as they expected.



Positional warfare was testing on morale. But it could be made worse by poor officers. In March of 1952, the 65th Infantry, PRNG, had a new commander. Its two previous commanders were Spanish speakers with Spanish speaking staffs and one had been a Puerto Rican. Their new commander was from NYC and a West Point graduate and had replaced most of the staff on assuming command. The day before, a battalion of the 65th had been pushed off of Hill 338 by a division of Chinese. The new commander declared the men no account

cowards, lazy and useless as soldiers and cut off their special rations (beans and rice).

They refused to return to the line.

75 NCO's were charged with mutiny and Court Martialed, all receiving lengthy sentences in military prison (no parole).

As they awaited transport to prison, their new commanding officer was investigate, relieved of command and given a dead end job ending his career. Some of his staff suffered similar fates while the rest were reassigned. The 75 convicts had their sentences commuted and were returned to their unit.



While the UN scraped positions along the ridgelines and mountain tops, the Chinese really dug in. Most of their “positions” were in tunnels deep below ground – thanks to American air supremacy.

There were concealed artillery emplacements and fighting positions and sally ports but the bulk of their position was underground. In caves and tunnels, they had barracks for their soldiers, offices, hospitals, meeting rooms, theaters, dining facilities and supply rooms. Lighting and limited ventilation was provided by their own generators – at least when they had the fuel.



They were protected from the worst of American artillery and bombardment, but conditions were hardly ideal and as stressful on their soldiers as the more exposed positions were on the UN. And unlike the UN, the Chinese soldier could not leave the front for the rear to relax for a time.



In October, 1951, the armistice talks resumed. After three months of effort, mostly by the NKPA, the North Koreans realized they could not realistically regain their former frontier at the 38th Parallel. They agreed in principal that the future frontier would be defined by the front lines on the date of the armistice (still in the future.)

The next issue would be the exchange of prisoners of war.



Both sides agreed prisoners should be exchanged. But to the North Koreans (and to a lesser extent, the Chinese), the UN conditions were unacceptable. Talks broke down in early 1952 and would not resume again until March 1953.

What was the issue?



The UN insisted that each individual prisoner should decide whether they wanted to be repatriated. There was a reason for this:

Many of the “North Korean” prisoners were actually South Koreans who had been drafted into the NKPA at bayonet point following the North Korean invasion and had surrendered at the first opportunity. The North Koreans refused to admit this, or that any of their soldiers could willingly defect.

The Chinese had similar concerns at the start.

Neither could believe the Americans meant that this choice applied to American soldiers in communist custody equally.

The North Koreans refused to believe that anything other than trickery (of some sort) could entice their soldiers to defect. (They would try to do this with their American prisoners with very, very limited success.)



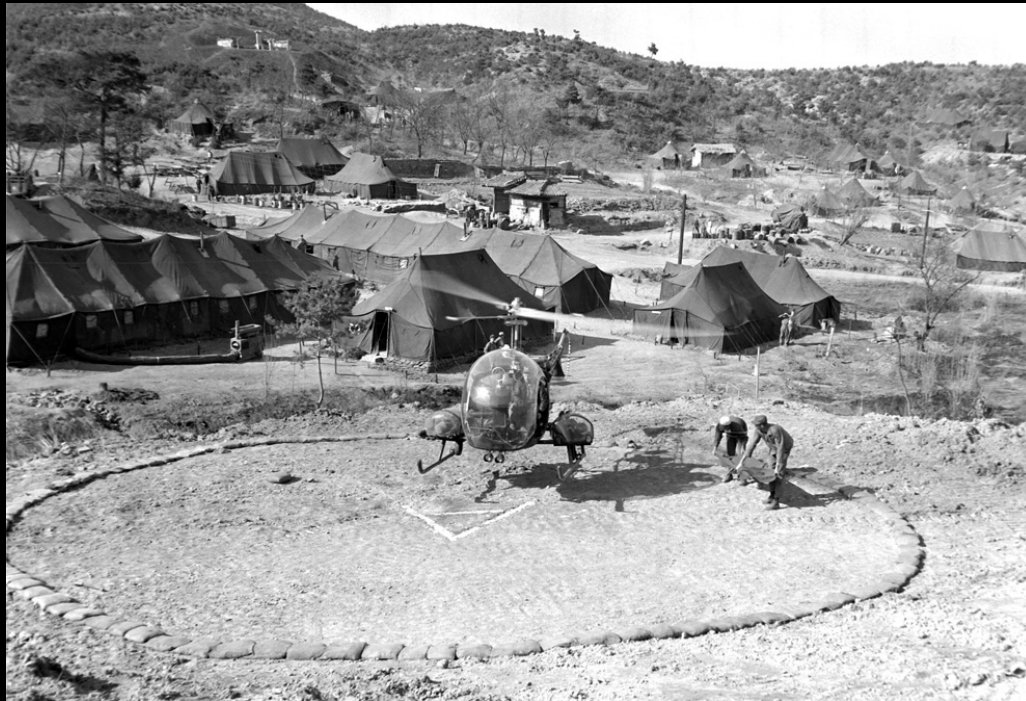


What was not discussed during the negotiations was the treatment of prisoners of war. In general, the communist prisoners were the best treated but they were confined to a remote island off Korea and, often under orders from Kim Il Sung, North Korean officers (as such or posing as enlisted) staged mutinies and attempted uprisings or break outs, all of which saw the instigators shot – and others just to be certain.

North Koreans were more likely to shoot a surrendering UN soldier (particularly American or ROK) than take them prisoner. It could be argued those were the lucky ones. North Koreans frequently starved, beat and tortured prisoners just because. The worst treatment was reserved for B-29 crews, most of whom were tortured to death.

The death rate among American prisoners of the North Koreans was higher than the death rate for Americans who were prisoners of the Japanese – both in excess of 50%.

Ultimately, the UN prisoners were transferred to the Chinese who were mild only by comparison – but they had to get to the Chinese – by forces march, without food or water (or very little) and falling out would be the last thing a prisoner ever did.



The one group of soldiers with little real let up were the medical personnel in the MASH units. There were not many such units – each serviced an entire Corps. As there was always some fighting somewhere, they were busy although they were really busy when the enemy made a major push.

Conceived in WWII, the units were full hospitals, only exceeded in capability by the Navy Hospital Ships (which were actually better equipped than almost any stateside hospital).



If a soldier made it to a Battalion Aide Station alive, his survival rate was over 90%. If he made it to a MASH unit (or Hospital Ship) it was over 98%. The medical community learned of the need for urgent, trauma care, the first hour being critical.



In May of 1952 with negotiations still stalled, General Ridgway was transferred to take command in Europe upon General Eisenhower's retirement. His replacement was General Mark Clark, most recently Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy. Clark had commanded 5th Army in Italy during WWII and under his command were the operations at Salerno, Monte Cassino and Anzio, none of which earned him a stellar reputation.

As Commander Far East, however, he redeemed himself. He would oversee the armistice negotiations to their ultimate conclusion. Moreover, he would be instrumental in the preparation and signing of the final peace treaty with Japan in 1953, formally ending both the U.S. occupation of Japan (although troops are still stationed there) and the Pacific War.

Moreover, he would be the driving force behind the "rearming" of Japan – the creation of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.



1952 was an election year. Truman chose not to run (his approval rating was abysmal, - under 36%.) Eisenhower ran for the Republican nomination and promised he would go to Korea if elected. He was and he went in November 1952.

It might have been great PR, but it was mostly useless. Korea was what it was. Unless and until the communists stopped stalling, there was little the US could realistically do to change the situation without unacceptable costs.

Eisenhower did not express any disappointment in the field – but was more expressive upon his return to the U.S. when he was back under the eyes of the uncensored press and his political backers.

But there was little he could really do although he and others thought they had managed something...





In March, 1953, Eisenhower ordered deployment of nuclear armed B-36 bombers to Guam hoping this would tip the balance. The deployment was not announced.

A couple of days after the order issued, but before a single B-36 had deployed, the communists reopened negotiations and conceded to every demand the UN had made to date to include voluntary repatriation of prisoners.

Their only stipulation was that either they or a neutral party verify the intent of the communist prisoners. (India would volunteer, but it proved unnecessary.) For the next 40 years, the Air Force is convinced the B-36 deployment changed things. But it is now known that the communist were unaware of the deployment until weeks later and never considered it particularly relevant to anything. But something had changed...



On March 5th, 1953, Joseph Stalin died. His death saw Soviet support for North Korea's adventure disappear overnight. China became the senior partner and China wanted a cease fire.

Neither of the Korean governments were in favor of any cease fire. The North Koreans had no choice. China made it clear there would be an armistice or China would pull out and leave North Korea to the mercy of the UN. Given that the NKPA had not had a success in over two years and even lost against the ROK, this meant North Korea had no real choice.

Syman Rhee wanted the war to continue. He wanted a unified Korea and threatened to keep at it regardless (until it was made clear that he would get absolutely no support were he to do so.) So he tried sabotage of a sort.

All of the suspected South Koreans in the NKPA who were prisoners were released. No notice was given to anyone.

The communists took issue with this and responded by launching attacks all along the front – the last serious fighting of the war. Of note, the ROKs received no artillery or air support from the UN. They lost about ten miles of ground and hundreds of casualties until the attacks stopped and the Chinese withdrew to their original lines. It was a message.

And Rhee seemed to get it.

But the fighting had some rather humorous results...



The 5th Marines occupied a position north of Uijongbu they called Nevada. It was a series of advanced outposts – most of which are now within the DMZ. The key positions were named Vega, Carson City and Reno. The CO said they were called that because he felt holding them was always a bit of a gamble.

Vegas was on a high, steep mountain. Among its defenders was a heavy weapons platoon armed with 75mm recoilless rifles. A few months earlier, a CPL Pederson had been approached by a Korean boy who wanted to sell a horse. He

asked his CO – figuring the platoon could really use a pack horse. The boy wanted \$100 to pay for medical care for his sister. With the CO's permission, Pederson paid \$250.

The horse was over ten years old and had been a racing mare from a respected pedigree in Korea. Her line dated to the Mongol war horses.

Now, she was a mule and was trained to haul 180 lbs of ammunition up hill to the platoon's position. But she turned out to be very, very good at her new job.



Originally named “Recoilless”, her name was changed to Reckless as she proved utterly fearless and reliable even under the heaviest fire. She learned the route from her platoon to the ammunition supply point and battalion aid station and was so reliable that once she knew the route, she needed no handler whatsoever.

If she had a wounded Marine on her back, she went to the Battalion Aid Station. Once the Marine was under care, she would pick up ammo and return to the front.



Between March 23rd and 26th, 1953, her unit was involved in heavy fighting at point Vegas. Under constant fire, she made her trips to and from the platoon with wounded on the way down and ammo on the way up. She was (slightly) wounded by artillery twice but never stopped (except for water and maybe some bacon and eggs which she liked.)



When the war ended some months later, the Marines wanted Reckless to return to the States with them. Their CO – Col. Pace agreed and saw to it she was enlisted as a Marine Sergeant and given two Purple Hearts and service medals. Customs could care less but the Department of Agriculture refused at first and only under pressure from the Commandant of the Marine Corps allowed the horse to enter without quarantine. She was tested for disease. The Marines were insulted as the disease of concern was sexually

transmitted and thus impugned her honor.

She made it back in time to be guest of honor in San Francisco at the Marine Corps Birthday Ball. She proceeded to dine on the flower arrangements until she tried the cake and decided one piece was not enough given there was so much cake. When taken away from her cake, she ended the night dining on a general's hat.

In 1959, General Pace, now Commandant of the Marine Corps promoted SGT Reckless to Staff Sergeant.



SSGT Reckless USMC (Ret) died in 1965 aged twenty-something (no one knows for sure) having given birth to three other horses during her tenure as a Marine.

Memorials to her memory now stand at the Marine Corps Museum, Quantico VA and her home at Camp Pendleton CA. She was awarded the British Dinkins medal for bravery, posthumously, and was one of the first animals to receive the American equivalent when it was first awarded in 2017.



Shortly after the fighting at Vegas and other places died down, Operation “Little Switch” began.

This was the repatriation of sick and wounded prisoners of war (provided they wished to be repatriated).

The sides had finally agreed mostly when the Chinese learned that the Chinese prisoners who did not want to return had almost to a man been in Chaing’s Army during the Civil War and drafted into the PLA either during the war or immediately afterwards and thus were deemed sufficiently unreliable and expendable so as to be a non-issue.



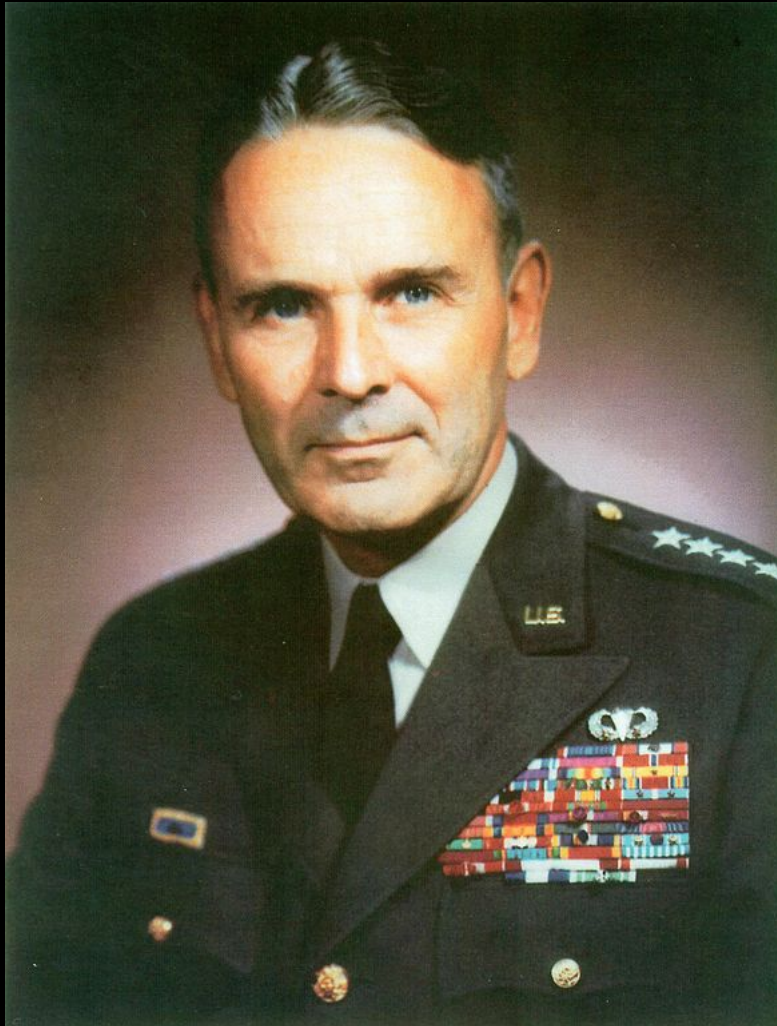
6,670 Chinese and North Korean sick and wounded were returned to the north. 684 UN prisoners came South including 149 Americans.

In May, 1953, Maxwell D. Taylor assumed command of 8th Army from LGEN James Van Fleet. It was a routine rotation.

Taylor had commanded the 101st Airborne Division from before D-Day until the end of WWII. He would arrive near the end of the fighting in Korea and would have little to do with its conclusion.

His role in the Far East would come later.

In Korea itself, he would set up the system of patrolling the DMZ that remains in effect to this day.





Mark Clark would sign the final Armistice Agreement which went into effect on July 27th, 1953. This ended the shooting, but not the war. While the size of the armies on the front would be reduced over the coming months (and years), the armies never truly left. 8th Army and the 1st Cavalry Division remained in place (although 1st Cav became 2nd Inf. During Vietnam when the first helicopter assault division was formed.)



Operation Big Switch began in August. Some 75,823 (~70,000 NKPA and almost 6,000 Chinese) were repatriated. Over 22,600 refused, most being former Chinese Nationalist soldiers. 12,773 UN prisoners were returned including 3,597 Americans. 21 Americans refused repatriation – almost everyone faced Court Martial for cooperating with the enemy.

The Hot War in Korea was over. The Cold War in Korea has never ended as no peace has ever been attained...

