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EDITOR'S NOTE:

***This concludes for the time being
our coverage of the first 6 months
of the Korean War. We will try to get
more stories on the latter stages in the
following editions.***



EDITORIAL COMMENTS

To all of those readers whom I have thoroughly confused as to the subscription policy, I apologize and will attempt to explain it somewhat better than I have.

A volume consists of 10 issues starting in September and ending with the June issue. Our first volume was September of 1989 and ended with the June 1990 issue. The second volume started with the September 1990 issue.

When we first started this we figured \$10 per volume would cover it and we sent it out as 3rd class mail, which is much less expensive than first class, but you must have 200 pieces to mail or you can't get a 3rd class permit. We have never gotten 200 subscribers, though it was close, so we would send out enough to cover the paid subscribers, then send enough more to make up the 200 pieces, and send those as samples to folks we thought might want to subscribe.

A problem quickly became evident. Many of you move around and change addresses. 3rd class mail is not forwarded and we never knew it wasn't delivered. Also 3rd class mail can take anywhere from several weeks to several months to be delivered. The postoffice does not give any urgency to delivering 3rd class. We had one fellow get his June mailing in September.

The postoffice also increased postage rates.

We decided that we would give you a choice between First class and Third class. We were not too surprised to find that most of you chose First class at \$15 a year over 3rd class at \$12.50. But that brought about another problem we hadn't really thought about at the time. We now had fewer than 30 people who wanted 3rd class. That blew the 3rd class permit. We simply are not allowed to mail that few and get 3rd class postage permits. So we decided to just go

ahead and mail everyone at First class and either absorb the cost ourselves or ask those of you who have sent in \$12.50 to send another \$2.50, if you can. You'll continue to get the Battle Report whether or not you do.

Now, one other item of confusion to correct, and that is the way we handle the beginning and ending of a subscription.

When you subscribe we plan on sending you the ten issues for the year in which you subscribed. So if you sent in a subscription anywhere from October to April, we will send you the back issues up to the date of your subscription, but if you came in real late, like May or June, we figured you for the next year's subscription. The reason for this is just that this is a one man job on my end. I do not have the sophisticated bookkeeping system that Time Magazine uses, and we never know whether this thing will continue from year to year. It is much easier to just put your name on the mailing list and show your deposit into the bank account. But if I had to keep up with every name and what date they subscribed and start and stop the mailings accordingly, I'd need to either hire someone to do that or spend an extra number of hours per month myself, and I don't have that kind of time.

In any event, the back issues are available at \$1.00 per or \$10 for the entire past year, volume 1. So if you came in on volume 2, you can get all of volume 1 for \$10. If you came in late on volume 1 and did not get all that year, PLEASE let us know and we will send them to you. We are doing our best to make sure you get what you paid for.

If you have any questions you want answered, please send a self addressed and stamped envelope and I will quickly respond. Or if you want to call me, the number is (615) 377-6011 or 377-6009.

I hope I have straightened out most of the questions you might have.

LAST BARRIER

Reprinted from the January 1953 issue of the Marine Corps Gazette. Article was written by S.L.A. Marshall and details 1st Battalion 1st Marines' actions at Hill 1081 December 1950.



ONLY TWO YEARS HAVE passed since the Chosin Reservoir operation, but that is enough time to warrant saying that history already is selling it short. By the people it is remembered mainly as a fight marked by endurance and inspiration in heroic dimension. That is good so far as it goes, but it is not enough by half.

No other operation in the American book of war quite compares with this show by the 1st Marine Division in the perfection of tactical concepts precisely executed, in accuracy of estimate of situation by leadership at all levels, and in promptness of utilization of all supporting forces.

Of these things, which are the epitome of power conservation, came in natural flow the extraordinary spirit which supercharged the fighting. And this, I truly believe, is the main point that the battle from Chinhungni to Yudamni needs to be studied and remembered as a classic example in the application of means. For it is ever the way with fighting men that they will do their utmost when they know beyond doubting that the utmost is being done for them by those who lead.

The lesson of the Reservoir is that inspiration in war develops out of a solid base of realism. Of the operation came a phrase now justly celebrated: "We are not retreating; we are attacking in a new direction."

Shortly after the event, an Army friend said to me: "That was beautiful but it was bunk; it was not an appeal to reason." What my friend mistook, not having studied the operation, was that the saying rang out over the battle because it was a considered reckoning

of the tactical fact. At the hour in which it was uttered, the main weight of the enemy was pressing on the division flanks and rear. The main battle having gone awry elsewhere, no decisive objective remained except the killing of the maximum number of Chinese. It was as simple as that.

But there was one battalion whose portion it became to attack in the old direction—due north. First Battalion of 1st Marines had come but recently to Chinhung-ni, and there composed the hedgehog farthest south covering the road to the base port. Between Chinhung-ni and Koto-ri, on which the main body of the division was moving, there interposed a mountain height of almost alpine character, solidly bunkered and garrisoned by the enemy. It became the mission of LtCol Donald M. Schmuck's men to destroy this bastion that the passage of the division might be eased through the most dangerous defile in North Korea.

This study deals exclusively with the operations of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. By the circumstances in which the division initially was employed, the battalion was engaged more briefly than any other fighting element. If its fighting accomplishment is worthy of remark, it therefore must still be noted that this unit experienced less than the others in unremitting strain.

ON 29 NOVEMBER, the MSR was cut between Chinhungni and Kotori. The closure was but one minor part of an enemy buildup and onfall which organized in the preceding days against all portions of the division column, now holding the main villages along fifty-eight miles of road, closed violently against the whole Marine deployment within a twenty-four hour period. For the manner in which this envelopment was staged, the enemy is entitled to his share of credit. He had a plan promising

total entrapment, and he held to it undeviatingly, though his difficulties of weather, communications, and transport were enormous. That in the end his resources were proved inadequate does not minimize the fact that in the beginning his aim and timing were well-nigh perfect.

The 1st Battalion at Chinhung-ni was hit from the west in the same hour that the road was cut between the battalion and the division. It was a probe, delivered in such way as to leave the battalion commander doubtful whether the object was harassment or a feeling-out preparatory to assault in strength. But he decided at once that the best policy was counter-attack. A number of North Korean civilians had entered his perimeter. They told him that the Chinese, in the number of "several companies," had dug in along the ridges 1,200 yards to the westward and were jam-packed in the villages on the low ground. They had seen the positions; they described in detail the locations; the truth of this information was confirmed by subsequent operations.

The valley winding westward from Chinhung-ni is a mere slit between the ubiquitous ridges. There was scarce room at any point for a rifle platoon to deploy in line across its floor. The 1st Battalion hit westward on the morning of 30 November, taking two rifle companies and one battery of artillery, and moving in column.

But along the ridgetops to both sides of the column there advanced patrols in platoon strength. With the patrols went mortarmen and forward observers. About 1,000 yards west of Chinhung-ni, the column drew its first fire from a platoon of enemy dug in along the lower ridge-folds above a point where the valley narrowed almost to a dead end. By then the patrols already had the enemy position outflanked; they closed in and destroyed the blocking

party with no loss to the column.

This small success was the pattern in embryo for all that followed. Four fighter aircraft had been ordered up for the attack on the main enemy positions. The defensive array was cut to order for the offensive arrangements which Schmuck had already made. Approximately one squadron of Chinese cavalry had come into the valley. Subsequently, the mounts had been withdrawn westward, but the discovery of several large, well fertilized tethering spots showed that the force had come riding. It was disposed around two villages on the valley floor. Part of the force, probably the headquarters element, held to the houses. The deployed element was foxholed in along the ridges on both sides of the settlement along a length of 400-600 yards. But these were not skyline positions. They were so placed along the slopes that their fire would bear upon the road coming from the eastward. The 1st Battalion's patrols on the ridgetops were therefore already pinching toward the enemy works when the column in the valley drew first fire.

Thereafter, the elimination of these positions was an exercise by the clock. The force was already out of radio contact with its base, but wire had been strung back to the battalion operations center. The flank patrols had a good view of the most forward enemy positions, and their forward observers took over. The attack opened with ten minutes of fire by the 4.2 mortars, followed by a shelling from the howitzers. Then waiting a minute or so for the smoke to clear so that the target could be cleanly defined, the 4.2s marked the spot with white phosphorous smoke under the direction of the mortarmen with the patrols. The four planes were already on station. Under control by the forward observers with the flank patrols, they struck with rockets and napalm. As the air attack ended, more 4.2 fire was put

on the ridges, holding till the last moment while the rifle parties from the valley made the closing rush.

This was the formula applied throughout, with minor exceptions, in the cross-buck by which the Chinese holdings west of Chinhungni were fragmented. Part of the time the tactical air control party traveling with the road column had the Chinese Communist works under direct observation and therefore controlled the planes. They directed the strike against the villages, and despite the constriction of the valley, they saw the planes get in low enough to blow Chinese gunners from machine gun pits dug in next to the houses.

It was a rout. The hill positions were rended knob by knob. At the end, the Chinese who survived along the low ground tried to take it on the lam, making for a valley exit wending to the northward. The hour being about 1600, CO, 1/1 held his infantry in place for a return to base. But the air continued a strafing chase for so long as there were Chinese to see.

One detail remained; Marines torched everything in sight which might provide shelter to a man. The villages were ablaze when the battalion marched back.

So described in outline, the fight reads like a field day for heavy weapons, with just a little guidance from the foot force. As to shock effect, it was that. But it was estimated that of the Chinese killed on this ground (they numbered several hundred) eighty per cent were dispatched by small arms fire delivered at less than 200 yards range. The enemy had defended with mortars, machine guns, and rifles but had been unable at any point to get a killing fire going. There had been no use of the grenade.

Chinhung-ni was not again threatened from the west following this foray.

Its next few days were quiet.

The enemy moved south looking for a softer touch. He seemed to find it at Sudong-ni, two miles down the road, where a Marine engineer platoon, under Lt Glendinning, was holding forth next to a power plant. On 6 December the Chinese invested the engineer unit, their automatic fire from the ridge above the village sealing its camp and effectively blocking the road to the north. The platoon commander flew an American flag from his command post. An early volley cut it down. He personally put it up again and told his men that it would be kept there. Then he sent word to the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines that he would probably need help if he was to extricate his force. One reinforced platoon, with a quad-50 and an artillery forward observer were sent south. The quad and the battery at Chinhung-ni brought the enemy held ridge under fire. When the moment for withdrawal arrived, the flag was lowered, and the platoon marched out, covering the trucks in which its wounded were riding. Last out of the position was a bulldozer—blade-high—"the damndest sight," said Schmuck, "that I ever saw."

All along, CO, 1/1 had felt certain that someone would have to attack north when the division wheeled south, and he reckoned that the finger pointed toward him. One of his first actions had been to ask G2 at Hamhung for aerial photos of the country to the northward—an almost unheard of asset in Korean operations. Three days later he got the photos. That had happened on 1 December, five days before the call came through from the engineer platoon which signaled that the Chinese were across his rear. Looking the obliques over, and noting the harsh aspect of the ridges, the battalion commander decided that he had better scout the defile to the north well in advance of any order to attack in that direction, no

matter that the enemy held it in strength.

On 2 December he sent a patrol northward along the canyon. Its mission, "to determine how far it could advance toward Kotori." The patrol was kept small in hope that it could make a sneak run. But it was heavy with authority. Attached to the rifle squad which went forward under Lt Cooper were an artillery FO, Maj Bates, the Weapons Company commander, and finally the commanding officer of the battalion.

As a decoy to cover the movement of the reconnaissance patrol, a rifle platoon was sent north along the canyon one hour before Cooper got underway. It was told to move via the railroad tracks, remain in the open, make no particular effort at concealment, and retire if engaged. The battalion commander's group moved via the canyon road for the first leg of the distance, barreling along rapidly in three jeeps and one 2 1/2 ton. The passage was uninterrupted. At the last bend in the road just prior to reaching the great power house which figures so prominently in the division story, the convoy stopped. The vehicles were turned about so that they faced down canyon. The drivers were left there to guard them; CO 1/1 led the patrol forward afoot, its members hugging the embankment.

They passed the power plant and approached the first bend beyond it, still having seen no sign of life. But as they made the turn and scanned the ridges north and to the leftward of the road, the vista was as that described in the Song of Roland "the valley and the mountains are covered with them; great are the hosts of this strange people." For as far as the eye could carry the ridgetops ascending to Kotori were alive with enemy soldiers in such number that the men deemed it useless to attempt to count them.

The first startled reaction was a sunk feeling that the Chinese must have the patrol under observation. Then it was concluded this could not be so; the whole bearing of the people opposite, as studied through glasses, was casual and normal. They were behaving much as Americans might do, some laughing and talking together, some shaking out blankets, others digging or hacking away at brushwood.

The patrol moved north one more turn, then slipped up through a draw to left of the road and came out on a ridgetop within perhaps 300 yards of the nearest visible enemy position. From there it could see almost to Kotori.

The Bn CO and Maj Bates had remained on the road with the radio. The moment came when CO 1/1 felt he could resist temptation no longer. His whole foreground was an array of artillery targets. He would never get the same chance again. It was just a matter of calling for the fires and bringing them in as quickly and in as great volume as possible.

The artillery FO was with the group which had climbed to the ridgetop. He could raise the guns in Kotori. After he was briefed on the fire mission, it was agreed that control would be passed back and forth between the canyon road and the peak, according to which targets looked the best at the moment.

As the first salvo hit dead on, the Chinese were still standing bunched on the skyline. They broke for cover, moving in all directions, but they did not go fast enough. There followed a few minutes of slaughter grim and great. Said the battalion commander of that experience: "It was the most rewarding few minutes of my whole period of service."

But it could not hold long. The patrol was told to fall back at the run. Everyone legged it down the canyon and the vehicles were underway by the moment the last man had loaded. It was

a close thing. As the convoy took the dip where the road ran under the railway track, it missed interception by 150 yards or less by a Chinese party in company strength marching south along the right-of-way. On radio the decoy platoon was told to fall back on Chinhung-ni immediately. Both groups rejoined without having received one round of hostile fire.

A more decisive patrol action than this one can scarce be imagined. It gave the battalion priceless knowledge of how the country looked and where it could expect to meet the enemy.

The personal effect on the leader was no less pronounced; "From that hour, I felt that I was in good position to attack up the canyon and I was confident we could carry it."

The attack westward had served to give the battalion a free hand in its own neighborhood and it used the respite in preparing to the fullest for further offensive action.

As to the effect on higher levels of his aggressive action, it can be measured by the words of the man in command. On 7 December, the division reached Kotori. Of how the division stood in that hour, MajGen Oliver P. Smith said: "Knowing that Schmuck was there and that his men had already given a working-over to the ridges commanding the road running down the mountainside did more than all else to convince the division that the operation would be successfully completed. I sensed that feeling at Koto-ri. The very air had a lift to it. The column was dog-tired but all forebodings of failure had suddenly disappeared. That night I heard singing in the tent next to mine. It came from our drivers. They were singing the Marine hymn, and doing it in a spirit of exultation. It was quite a remarkable thing. We were aware that great difficulties still confronted us, that the blown-out bridge had to be repaired

and that the road ahead ran through an ice-covered mountain pass. But we discounted the dangers because we knew that Schmuck had already been over the ground."

On the same day the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines got orders to attack north at 0800 on the following morning. The order remained subject to confirmation by regiment in the hour when it became certain that the division would attack from the north coincidentally. That day at 2310 the battalion was relieved in place by 3d Bn, 7th Inf Regt (TF Dog) which had cut through the resistance in the lower valley, and CO, 1/1 proceeded immediately to move his troops to an assembly area north of Chinhungni.

The battalion was pointed toward the same commanding ridge where the patrol last completed its reconnaissance. Objective 1 was the southwestern nose of the ridgeline embracing Hill 1081. Objective 2 was the hill itself, and the sub-ridges extending northward from it, the mass of which dominated the hairpin turn in the main supply route (MSR). These were the loftiest crags against which any American attack had been launched during the war in Korea. Once in the battalion's hands, they were to be held until the division had passed down the mountainside. The battalion would then fall in as rear-guard.

This was the plan: to move out in column of companies under the cover of dark, take Objective 1 with the lead company as soon after first light as possible, and pass the two remaining companies through to the big hill without loss of momentum. The column got on the road at 0300; the distance to Objective 1 was six and a half miles. Had the weather stayed as moderate as during the battalion's earlier operations, the march schedule would have entailed no excessive strain.

But they took off in a heavy snowstorm. There was little wind behind it, but it was a fine, powdery snow which already covered the ground to a depth of six to seven inches, made every step a partial skid and balled up thickly on the marchers' feet. By 0800, the battalion had come to the high end of the big ridge and Charley Company was climbing to Objective 1. What had been a curse now became salvation. The snowfall had so thickened that visibility had been cut to less than seventy-five yards. In consequence, Charley Company seized the first knob without firing or receiving a shot, whereas otherwise the whole battalion movement would have been under fire from the enemy main positions during the last 700 yards of the approach.

The 4.2 mortars were at once emplaced next to Objective 1. Three quad 50s and two twin 40s were run out to a side road which connected the MSR with a hydroelectric plant at the bottom of the gorge, and there aligned to fire against Hill 1081. By 1000, the main assault was underway, with Baker Company advancing astride the main road and Able pushing forward in file column along the knife-edged ridgeline, now ice coated. The shooting started the moment Baker turned the next fold in the highway. But it was limited to spasmodic and erratic rifle fire from a few greatly surprised outposts. The storm still screened the attack from the main enemy positions along the higher ground. It was well so, since Baker was headed into a horseshoe-shaped battlement manned on three sides by enemy strength equivalent to one regiment. Approximately one battalion was bunkered-in along the upper knobs of Hill 1081. There were two strong roadblocks across the MSR just short of the hairpin turn. Another battalion was dug in on the far side of the gorge beyond the turn, and the transverse ridge which

blocked the gorge and therefore dominated the hairpin turn was also crowned with enemy works.

Of these strong dispositions there was practically no sign as the battalion advanced through the storm. CO 1/1, remembering what he had seen of the Chinese in the open, knew about where he could expect to find them. But they had reacted so sluggishly, that he already felt his plan had "achieved a tactical surprise which knocked them off balance."

Despite the initial thinness of the fire, Capt Wesley C. Noren and the men of Baker Company already had proof that they were in the presence of a numerous enemy. Along the road, the snow had been beaten down by hundreds of footprints, and the ridge slope was similarly marked as if a large force had moved in recent minutes to the peak. Baker came to the first Chinese roadblock. It was covered by the fire of two machine guns, but the fire pattern appeared to be mixed, whether because the guns couldn't traverse or because the gunners couldn't see the targets through the storm. The beaten zones were interdicting the embankments and missing the road. The men watched for a few minutes, then climbed over the rubble and went on. Baker's own machine guns and 60mm mortars were passed through the hoop, and then set up farther along the road at a point adjudged even with the enemy sites. By direct laying, the company's weapons silenced these guns, while still unable to see the ground whence the fire came. Its further fight with the roadblocks was almost an exact repetition of this incident.

Such was the celerity with which this initial maneuver along the road had been carried through that the battalion commander, following right on the heels of Baker Company, set up his CP in the sandbagged bunkers beside the first

roadblock while it was still warm with the smell of the enemy. The occupants had fled without firing a shot, leaving behind two light machine guns which were sited to fire straight down the canyon road. A kettle of rice was simmering on a small cook stove. One Chinese had been doing his laundry, and the abandoned garments were not only wet but warm. The bunkers were log revetted, backed up with rice bags filled with sand, the whole structure being neatly camouflaged with brush. The roof had an earth overhead thick enough to resist light artillery fire.

The 81 mm mortars were set up within ten feet of the CP at the closest point, and thence strung out along the upslope. This was a stricture which bedeviled the operation. Neither weapons nor vehicles were permitted standing on the road surface—the only flat space available—because no one knew at what time the head of the column might appear or how fast the lead vehicles might be coming. The fact was that the road was still barred, the bridge not having been repaired, but for lack of information about the main body, CO 1/1 worked his own force under wraps.

Able Company, fighting forward amid the clouds, was harassed by no such major calculation. Among Capt Robert H. Barrow's men on the ridgetop, the problem was to find any spot where a weapon could be based or two men could stand abreast without danger of careening into the abyss. At Chinhung-ni that morning they had started the march at 1,200 feet above sea level. In the hour's climb to Charley's position they had gained to 3,000 feet, moving up a forty-five degree slope. Already they felt giddy, and though they were not exhausted, they visibly sagged. Much of the way they had kept their footing only by forming a human chain. When that became necessary, the rifles

were not only an impediment but a positive danger to the man forward and rear. Bruised skulls and sprained knees and ankles had been frequent.

From Charley's knob, Able proceeded slowly forward, moving Indian file. The ridge as it faced the road was almost sheer cliff, iced like a toboggan slide. The men moved bent far over, grabbing for rocks or the occasional shrubs. Their first warning that the Chinese were on the crest was when they heard them talking and shouting somewhere out beyond the storm. Visibility came and went as the wind ripped holes in the snow curtain. Then for just a moment the snow ceased, and looking ahead, the company commander caught one brief glimpse of a group of enemy riflemen standing on a knob about 200 yards to his front. The curtain closed down so quickly that his own force went unobserved.

Hoping for another such respite, CO, Able Co brought his platoon leaders and the artillery and mortar FOs forward, pointed into the storm and waited. But there was no slackening; the snow swirled more thickly than ever. So he attempted to bring in 4.2 fire by sound, figuring that he might follow it as it moved from the flank to across his front. One long try at this was enough. He could feel the ground shake around him but still could not see where the shells were exploding. So he knew it was time to drop the experiment.

He had already issued his attack order while the FOs were attempting the adjustment, and he knew now that he would have to go forward without benefit of softening-up fires. Second platoon led off, advancing like men walking a tight-rope. The narrow crest scarcely permitted of one fire team forming abreast as they organized. It was a formation made formless by the desperate conditions of the ground. Men slith-

ered along by ones or twos, forming a group front only as they emerged occasionally onto wider ground.

Right behind the second platoon came the 60mm mortars. It was the intention to fire them, if the ground permitted at any point, like cannon, by direct laying. The third platoon followed. The first platoon had been deployed in a partial perimeter around a knob to form a base.

There were three main knobs along the skyline, where the ridge folds joined, but unlike most Korean ridges, there were no flat saddles in between. These high points were all in enemy hands, and all were fitted with bunkers which both covered the road and faced down the ridgeline.

For perhaps seventy-five yards the lead files went along uninterrupted. Then automatic fire in heavy volume broke out against them. Men sought cover in the few crevices and behind the rocks, but the fire was consistently high, and the deployment paused only momentarily.

The men on the crest were told to go on "by fire and movement." In the tactical situation, it was a misnomer. Only one or two men could bound forward at a time; only a remnant could fire with a clear line to the target. Barrow knew he couldn't win that way. Either his men would land a hook on the enemy redoubt or the company would be jabbed to a standstill.

But it looked impossible: the embankments were as steep as they were thick. Two squads were told off to crawl along the left facing of the ridge, then come up and over; it was a task better suited to mountain goats than to men. On the right flank, two other squads were sent along a more favorable roundabout route, via which they could approach the enemy knob along a draw.

Such was the strain and danger of the movement due to the icing that it

took a matter of hours to close this final 150 yards.

While the precarious envelopment proceeded, the 60mm mortars were brought forward. They set up wherever crewmen could find a purchase where the weapon could steady and the tube could bear on the target.

About one half hour before dark, all things became ready. On both sides of the redoubt, the rifle and BAR men had crawled up to closing distance, and lay in defilade behind the rocks. The mortars had been firing for about twenty minutes, and altogether had loosed thirty rounds against the knob, though without getting one hit into the main bunkers.

Then from three sides Able closed all at once as the company commander gave the signal, the men on the flanks scrambling upward hand over foot, while the party on the crest bore straight forward with as much run as the footing allowed. It was bedlam, for in those last minutes the men remembered what Barrow had schooled them to do in training: "When you charge, yell with everything you've got." Some screamed rebel yells. Others shouted, "Let's go!" and other things. They kept it up even when the ranks were thinned as men went down from bullets, and the dead or hard wounded skidded on down the incline.

The effect on the Chinese was startling. The knob suddenly came alive with people. They darted back and forth aimlessly as if unstrung by not finding a route out. Most of these targets in the open were cut down by machine gun fire from the crest and the BARs among the climbers.

But one hard core of resistance within the bunkers fired until the very last, and its members were eliminated by rifle fire and grenades through the embrasures. The hill had been strongly defended with grenades, but bullets had

taken out most of the seven dead and eleven wounded, nearly all of whom were hit in the last rush. To evacuate the casualties, the stretcher teams were one and a half hours in climbing the hill. But they took five hours on the return journey, and worked in three relays, such was the hazard of the slope and the strain of the passage. There were about three score enemy dead in and around the bunkers.

Noren & Company during these hours had been proceeding with their work along the MSR. They had expected to receive fire from the far side of the hairpin turn, and they got it, mainly from machine guns, in the moments when the snowfall abated. But it, too, was inflexible, as if parts of the guns were frozen. The third enemy roadblock was the most tenacious of the three. But the ground was such that Baker could maneuver against it, despite the steepness of the embankment. For the third time that day the company commander used both his 60mm mortars and 3.5 launchers against the Chinese bunkers without having any luck. The position was not squeezed out until riflemen were put on its rear, and then rushed the works. Only three Chinese chose to die beside their weapons; the rest got away down the gorge.

That happened at about 1630. CO, Baker Co was becoming concerned about his objective. He knew he was close to it, but couldn't be sure of the spot because the snowdrifts made identification almost impossible. By then Baker had lost three men killed and six wounded. The battalion commander, checking the situation aloft and below, told both companies to "dig in" and hold for the night. But the ground all around was pitted with enemy diggings, and that was a bonus, for both outfits were now well worn.

Noren picked out a subridge about 200 yards up the slope. As a measure of

the fight with the rocks and the weather, it took the main body one hour to climb to the perimeter ground. The company also set up two roadblocks along the MSR to halt any enemy movement toward the south. Able had set up around the enemy redoubt on the skyline.

Nothing had come down from Kotori and the division's progress could be only guessed at.

The battalion was to spend one more bad night and another good day before the sight of a sea of friendly faces sealed the completion of its mission.

At dark on 8 December, The snowfall ceased and the cold intensified. Down along the canyon road near the water gate, a brisk wind was piling the drifts high as the head of a man.

At the battalion CP, which was partly sheltered by the canyon wall, the thermometer read fourteen degrees below zero. Up on the windswept crags where Able Company was clearing Chinese dead from the bunkers to make room for its own ranks, and at the same time preparing to evacuate its own casualties down the iced slopes of the mountain, it must have been a touch colder than that, though there was no reading of the temperature.

All batteries had frozen. Weapons were stiffening. The camp long since had run out of water because of the freezing of canteens. To ease their thirst, the men ate snow and seemed to thrive upon it.

But of the many problems raised by the weather, the most severe one was getting an average good man to observe what the field manuals so easily describe as a "common sense precaution."

For example, prior to marching from Chirnhung-ni, Capt Barrow of Able had made certain that each of his men carried two spare pair of socks. But that safeguard did not of itself insure his force, though the men, with feet sweated

from the rigors of the day, were all at the point of becoming frostbite casualties by the hour of bivouac.

Let Barrow tell it. "I learned that night that only leadership will save men under winter conditions. It's easy to say that men should change socks; getting it done is another matter. Boot laces become iced over during prolonged engagements in snowdrifts. It's a fight to get a boot off the foot. When a man removes his gloves to struggle with the laces; it seems to him that his hands are freezing. His impulse is all against it. So I found it necessary to do this by order, staying with the individuals until they had changed, then making them get up and move about to restore the circulation."

That process, simple in the telling, consumed hours. By the time Barrow was satisfied that his command was relatively snug, it was wearing on toward midnight. Right then, his perimeter was hit by a counterattack, an enemy force in platoon-strength-plus striking along the ridgeline from 1081 in approximately the same formation which Barrow had used during the afternoon.

All that needs be told about this small action was summed in Barrow's brief radio report to Schmuck. "They hit us. We killed them all—all that we could see. We have counted eighteen fresh bodies just outside our lines."

This was the lesser activity of the night, the greater being the evacuation of Able's casualties to the low ground. It was a man-killing task, conducted round the clock. Battalion had detailed the men of H & S Company, with a complement from Weapons Company, to this duty. They walked singly going up, carrying ammunition, and despite the glaciated condition of the slope, they made the climb in about one and one-half hours. But for the descent, they had to group in relay teams of eight

men each, just to handle one body in a litter. Without ropes, it would have been impossible. Sometimes they were needed to tie the party together; at other points, they were used to lower the litter down an iced bank where no man could stand.

The downward journey for each evacuation required from five to six hours. The battalion had a forward aid station just behind its CP, and a rear at Chinhung-ni, each under a battalion surgeon. Motors were kept running through the night so that casualties could be speeded to the base.

The plain recital of these difficulties, however, does not begin to reflect the extraordinary hazards of the situation. The 1st Battalion was encamped cheek by jowl next to a vastly superior enemy force which had not yet begun to feel the pressure of the division driving down from the north.

Though there was nothing to prevent the Chinese from swinging around the left via the canyon floor and closing across its rear, the battalion had to remain committed to the heights if it was to accomplish its mission of safeguarding the division's passage through the worst deadfall along its route out.

Though battalion had given a brilliant account of itself throughout the fight, as things looked on the night of 8 December, its main hope of delivering the package according to plan was that the enemy would suffer even more direly from the one adversary against which they were mutually contending. Even though 1/1's own people were near to freezing, and in the operations of that night was to lose sixty-even men to frostbite (only six or seven became amputees) the weather simply had to be on its side. The main chance was that the weather would produce greater immobility in the enemy camp than in the Marines'. Already, in repeated situations, the division had won through

because, while the enemy brutally wasted his manpower against the weather, Gen Smith missed no opportunity to conserve the powers of his men. The deliberate rest periods given the division on its way out are among the salient lessons attending the success of the operation.

But the tactical and human risks still to be faced were but one-half the jeopardy. There was the other great question of whether the technical and materiel calculations would prove sound. The battalion was only standing guard on a peak 1500 yards distant; the breach at the water gate still had to be spanned if the division was to get through the canyon with anything left save numbers of men.

Bad luck in the handling of this bottleneck had dogged the operation from the beginning. But no one looked the other way. In fact, the division's continuing concern with this relatively small fester on its rear gives increased breadth to the maxim that anticipation is seventy percent of the art of command.

Going up the mountain, Col John H. Partridge had recognized that the bridge was a weak link in the MSR chain if winter operations were to be sustained, and had reinforced the structure to fifty ton strength. A day or two later it was partly demolished, either by guerrillas or CCF.

Meanwhile the 73d Engineer Battalion of X Corps had taken over maintenance of the MSR. They put two sections of steel treadway across the gap and the road was again whole.

Then the Communists struck it again. On 4 December, a reconnaissance flight into the canyon verified that the bridge was blown, the treadway sections had been dropped and the abutment on the downhill side had been partly destroyed. The gap was estimated at eighteen feet.

Gen Smith suggested that a Bailey bridge be brought up the mountain by corps troops, and emplaced by his own engineers as they moved south in the van of the division. Partridge and his staff returned the answer that the roadway was too narrow at that point to support a Bailey.

By chance the 58th Treadway Bridge Company had been caught at Kotori when the CCF attack struck on 28 November. It had the necessary Brockway trucks but no bridging material, the vehicles being loaded with prefabricated housing intended to shelter the Corps CP when it set up in Hagaruri.

The request was sent to Hamhung; have a bridge airdropped on Koto-ri; for double insurance, the 1st Engineer Battalion was asked to proceed from that point up the mountain with a duplicate set of treadway material.

The siege at Koto-ri had also closed on the 185th Engineer Battalion. Its commander was directed to beat the camp for all lumber and other materials which might be used for bridging and to make ready the equipment of the Treadway Company, his attachment.

On 6 December, Col Partridge was flown down over the water gate so that he could personally survey the problem. Returning to Koto-ri, he called Hamhung and was told that a test drop of the bridge had damaged its parts beyond repair. But a specialist parachute rigger was already flying from Japan. He would re-rig with large chutes eight pieces of a treadway which would be dropped on Kotori on the morning of 7 December.

They came in on schedule, eight C-119s, carrying the eight bridge sections, center plywood section, pins, etc. Seven of the sections were retrieved, the eighth falling into enemy country. Two of the four plywood sections were salvageable.

The bridge was loaded with its essential pieces on one Brockway truck, the spare pieces and extra lumber aboard a second. This unit was then fitted into the plan for the attack by the 7th Marines so that it would be well forward.

On the morning of 8 December, it stood by briefly. At noon the forward battalion of the 7th Marines sent word that the situation was in hand and the bridge could roll. Its arrival amid the attacking battalion coincided with the highest pitch of the snowstorm and a reborn fury in the enemy resistance. Mortar and small arms fire threatened the destruction of the entire hope.

The two Brockways were withdrawn to Col Homer Litzenberg's CP. There was a convenient flat space near his tent which had been used for parking lighter vehicles. The bridge-loaded trucks cut off the road into this area. But the flat space was the frozen surface of a lake. One Brockway broke through the ice, drowned its motor and damaged its radiator. The other Brockway and a pack of jeeps were used to tug it out.

That was enough for Litzenberg. He directed that because of "the tactical situation," the bridge unit be returned to Koto-ri. But because of the dark, the depth of the drifts and the fact that one Brockway was towing the other, they got no farther than the tank park which was just to the rear of the regimental CP.

After this record of adversity and mishap, in which fate had so consistently balked the best-laid plans that the play would have seemed comic had the stakes been less, there was no longer any margin for error.

In the next turn of the wheel, the right number had to come up, and no doubt about it.

Schmuck had to hold.

The bridge had to fit.

Partridge's long-range estimate of

the requirement had to match the exact need on the spot.

Either that, or the entire plan for bringing out the division as a whole would dissolve at the fatal gap.

But on the night of 8-9 December, there was no way of knowing. The die had been cast and men could only hope.

The morning dawned sunny, absolutely clear and terribly cold. Able's CO, taking his first view of the weather, concluded that he would get full help from supporting arms, and particularly from the air.

Moving among the platoons, he ordered an immediate test firing of all weapons. It was well so, for about forty percent of them had frozen, with the carbines and BARs giving the worst trouble. Down at the battalion CP they heard the volleying from this freezing exercise and Maj Bridges called to inquire: "Are you being counter-attacked?"

Barrow answered that his bullets weren't being wasted. The dome of 1081 glistened in the sun just 500 yards away, and over its surface the Chinese swarmed like a bed of ants on moving day. The machine guns had pointed that way for their warmup fires. Two or three of the enemy were felled by this automatic volley, but the others paid little heed. At that range the gunners could not see where the bullets were hitting. So Able's CO put his riflemen against the target and under pressure of the aimed fire, the Chinese slowly beat back to their earth holes. By the time the light mortars along the ridge and the heavies from the battalion position had joined the action, it was too late to catch any important number of the Chinese in the open. Point 1081 looked almost depopulated, as did the intervening portion of the hogback.

Able Company expected to encounter little trouble as it jumped off in the same formation as the day before, with

First Platoon in the assault, followed by Third Platoon and then the mortars. But immediately the squad working along the slope on the right flank came under direct fire from two machine guns on 1081 and had to take refuge behind the rocks. Barrow saw clearly enough that their way was barred, and adding a LMG section to the flank, directed the men to continue their fire against the main knob.

Meanwhile the squad working along the left slope in relative defilade had made rapid progress. Gaining to within 200 yards of the big knob, it was suddenly brought under machine gun fire from its direct right. A hitherto concealed position, the CCF were holding two bunkers in a saddle about 175 yards short of 1081. From behind rock cover, the squad engaged this block with rifles and BARs, firing steadily but making no effort to rush. While the diversion continued, a third squad was sent on a wider sweep along the same flank, and coming at the bunkers from their blind side (still without being observed from 1081), killed the inmates with grenades and rifle fire in a closing rush without losing one man.

Able now held the whole ridge except for 1081. Almost within throwing distance, it towered seventy-five feet above the saddle which he had just gained. The 60mm mortars were advanced to the rocky battlement from behind which the LMGs had been firing, and fired forty-three rounds against the big knob, which was all they had. There was no noticeable effect, other than that the automatic fire from the height was temporarily depressed, enabling the CO of A Co to get his two assault platoons forward on both sides of the ridgeline, until they were deployed in an arc around the final objective, 150 yards from the summit. From behind crag cover the riflemen maintained a steady fire against the peak. Such was the

perspective that even at this short distance the bunker embrasures looked like a hairline.

That was when the air was brought in. Capt Robert B. Robinson, the air officer of 1/1, had been with Able through the morning, and from the boulder-strewn knob just to rearward of the two platoons had witnessed their squeeze play against the last redoubt. The 60-mms had put a few smoke rounds on the summit just as a precaution, though its mass was almost unmistakable. Already orbiting, the four aircraft were under control by Robinson via a backpacked VHF radio. They followed SOP. First there was a dummy run, then a quick strafing pass to make sure they were exactly on target. Thereafter it was up to the flight leader to make his own runs in the direction indicated, and drop his bombs and rockets with no further corrections from the ground unless he got off target.

Directly atop 1081 there was a double telephone pole—the perfect aiming stake. Each plane made five passes. The air officer was just 200 yards away while he was calling the strike, and the closest men in Able's line halved that distance. They saw several of the 265 pound frag bombs land dead on, smashing two of the bunkers and killing their crews. As the smoke lifted, one Chinese jumped up in clear silhouette and turned to run from the hill. Rifle fire cut him down before he could take a stride.

In the middle of the strike, Able Company had been moving. First Platoon, on the left flank, displaced once again down the westward slope, and made a circuit halfway around 1081, so that when it emerged once again on the skyline it was approaching the redoubt from the north. For the first time during the operation it was advantaged by good tree and underbrush cover as it made the swing around. During this envelop-

ment, the men still confronting 1081 did not cease fire, but in keeping with the maneuver, shifted their line more and more to the right.

So they were all ready for the final play, and right then occurred one of those happy accidents of timing which so frequently build the fortunes of men who are willing to make their own luck in battle. As First Platoon came out on the skyline, some one of its members happened to glance out northwestward toward the Koto-ri road. Someone yelled: "Look! There comes the division!" True enough they could be seen now, perhaps a dozen men turning the bend in the road on the far side of the canyon, obviously the point of the 7th Regiment in the van of the division column. Others took up the cry; it was the only spur the attack needed; all hands knew that 1081 had to be taken and the Chinese cleared from every other point whence they could fire toward the wrecked bridge before the division main body began the descent into the defile.

First Platoon bounded toward the cap, and once in motion, slackened its pace only as the detail of hitting or being hit so required. It was no push-over. On the reverse slope, where the air had struck, the Chinese responded numbly to Third Platoon's fire. Had it been done at once, the hill might have been carried more easily from that side, but the other maneuver was already two-thirds complete and to countermand it would have wrought only confusion. So there was no choice but to continue on the hard way.

Upgrade perhaps thirty feet or so, two bunkers were directly athwart First Platoon's path. No machine guns here, but only rifles, submachine guns, and potato mashers, with both ports still blazing and the grenades showering down seemingly out of nowhere. Seven or eight of Able's men went down; the survivors rushed straight for the embra

tures and killed the bunkers by tossing in their last grenades. Not one Chinese made any attempt to surrender, though perhaps twenty of them were shot down in the open as they arose from among the rocks on both sides of the bunkers in an effort to break the charge with small arms fire. Subsequent examination showed that the majority of them had been armed with U.S. carbines.

The fight was not yet over. First Platoon had silenced only an outwork of the north slope position. From this minor terrace the men saw a line of four bunkers another thirty yards upslope. Until then masked to their sight, these positions had remained in defile to the fires put against the cap from both directions.

There was only one visible source of resupply for this job. Dead Chinese littered the ground just taken. In each bunker (these installations were five feet deep in the ground, log walled and with an eighteen-inch earth roof) there were about seven or eight enemy dead. Most of these figures still had a few potato mashers slung in their belts. While First Platoon collected the enemy grenades, a reinforcement from Third Platoon crept around 1081 to build up the pressure against the bunker line by fire and grenading from the flanks.

This closing scene was handled a little more deliberately and stealthily. Using rock cover, the Marine line simply made it a squeeze-out, the rifles and the BARs keeping the bunker line practically neutralized until the grenadiers could crawl forward to within killing range. In another half hour it was over. No Chinese had gotten away from Hill 1081. It had been a tenacious garrison and not one member of it survived to tell how things had been with the defender.

Those who saw this ruin under the noonday sun recalled most vividly its startling contrast. For as far as eye

could see the countryside wore a white blanket. But the de-iced and shattered cap of Hill 1081 had been burned black by the shelling and bombfire. Within the boundaries of this torched area the victors counted more than 300 Chinese bodies.

Down in the canyon, however, the situation was still in flux, and though the linchpin of the general position was gone, enemy bands were continuing a disorganized resistance. Whereas Barrow's problem was the relatively simple one of loosing a battering ram against a brick wall, Noren was pressed to find anything solid on which to crunch. There were Chinese all about him but they were peculiarly elusive.

Baker's night had been quiet, only one Chinese having blundered into its lines. But Capt Noren, awake at his post all night, saw no bright omen in that fact. He said to the others, "Wait till dawn and you'll see them swarming." First light confirmed his powers as a prophet. He glanced up the road, and to the ridges beyond; the vista was alive with people, but there was no pattern to what they were doing; most of them were milling about in small groups, and at least half seemed to be unarmed. This was the beginning of the backwash from the division's drive out of Koto-ri, the trapper recolling into his own trap.

That quick look also showed the CO of Baker that in the dark of the previous evening he had missed his proper objective by one ridge fold, and was not in position to cover the hairpin turn. Baker corrected that by banging ahead immediately, reestablishing its weapons right on the pivot.

Even this brief movement showed who was master. Instead of concentrating toward the thrust, the Chinese gave way, scampering toward the high ground east and west. Baker had already registered its supporting 105s on the ridges ahead, and found their fire so

erratic that the CO hesitated to use it. (This is a not infrequent entry in the Reservoir operation.) Communications with the 4.2 and 81mm mortars were out, and were not reestablished until midmorning. So Baker went potshooting with the 155mm howitzers as a man might bang away at quail with a scatter gun. Consistently, the shells came in right where the CO wanted them. So he kept calling the 155s to chase Chinese up and down the road and blast them from the ridge tops. Concurrently his own machine guns and rifles at the bend of the hairpin were chopping down an incoherent mass not more than 200 yards away, Chinese trying without plan or leader to break through along the road. It was an act of utter hysteria.

As the morning wore along, these signs of mass frenzy increased. Buffeted by the point of 7th Regiment pushing down from Koto-ri, finding no thoroughfare via the canyon road, these increments succumbed emotionally to the vestiges of an entrapment not even half-formed. Schmuck, who watched this phenomenon develop, said of it: "The column flushed them into our foreground as beaters drive birds into a blind. All day it went on. Noren had a clear view of the whole slot and put the mortars and artillery on them when they were beyond range of company weapons. If they tried to escape eastward over the ridges, they came under Barrow's fire from 1081, or were hit by air strikes called in by Robinson. From the high ground northward of us, they could range in on our lines with mortars and machine guns. But they were too panic stricken to settle and so their fire went wild. Charley Company had extended to the westward along the east/west ridge to tie-in with Able; that strengthened our command of the high ground. From our part of the road, the Quad-50s were in perfect position to bring down what the other weapons

missed."

At noontime came the first brief interlude in this ordeal of carnage. From the heights, at a decisive moment, CO Able Co had seen the point of 7th Regiment during the approach. The battalion commander witnessed the same group of riflemen as they began their descent into the canyon. There was one excited moment of waving and yelling across the far spaces. But the new entry was only a small patrol from Baker Company, 7th. Chinese hidden in a thicket directly across the canyon from the battalion CP brought them under fire. In a flash they had vanished, at least from Schmuck's ken. But Noren had a better view of the incident. He saw a CCF machine gun open fire on the patrol. He saw seven Marines attack up the hill behind the fire of one BAR. He saw the seven go into the thicket throwing grenades, and when they came out a few minutes later the machine gun was silent, and the seven still seemed to be all right. Then the patrol became lost to sight. Some time later they entered 1/1's lines, helping along five walking wounded. Quitting the road, they had reached home base via a circuitous route through the canyon.

Using the patrol's radio, Schmuck raised First Battalion, 7th. But the van of the column was still some distance away.

With the coming of twilight, the enemy numbers suddenly thickened. The new bands seemed better organized and proceeded to positions astride the inclined railway and confronting the hairpin turn. Guns and tubes were running short of ammunition. So the battalion CO called for an air strike and eight planes responded to give him the best show of the day. One 500 pound bomb exploded dead center on a large building that was packed with Chinese. The others strafed liberally up and down the tracks and blasted the

buildup with a rain of rockets.

Still the numbers grew. When shortly afterward, CO 1/1 got a call from First Battalion, 7th, with the message: "We're about to come through," he answered, "My God, don't do it. Half the road is still held by Chinese." The reply was final: "Can't help it; the pressure is on from the rear."

At that point, perhaps, Schmuck was being a little unrealistic. The mobile Brockway carrying the treadway (the damaged vehicle had proved such a hindrance that it had been left behind) had already reached the water gate under heavy escort and the bridging operation had been going on for several hours amid all the fire. A quick survey showed that additional demolitions had now widened the gap between solid abutments to twenty nine feet. The solution recommended on the spot was to build on the downhill side a cribbing structure which would narrow the gap to dimensions suitable for the treadway. The engineers had not brought forward enough material for this job, but they quickly prowled the hydroelectric plant and came up with what they needed. By late afternoon the bridge looked stout enough to withstand the column's passage. The engineers sent word to the tactical body to come on down the mountain.

First Battalion, 7th, crossed the bridge first and entered Baker's position about 2300. The Chinese who were still confronting Baker took a few half-hearted shots at the approaching line and then came in with their hands up—300 of them. "Buzz" Sawyer the battalion commander passed the prize over to Baker Company which later marched them down the hill to Chinhung-ni, whence they were escorted to the coast by elements of 3d Infantry Division.

This was the beginning of the long march-through which kept Able and Baker tied to their snowbanked diggings

through all the next day.

Again on this night the enemy crumpled to the attack by the cold and made no effort to harass the column's passage. But disaster of quite another sort threatened just as the movement got well underway. A TD18 engineer dozer hauling an eight cubic yard pan started across the bridge. The treadways in construction had been spread for use by the M26 tank and the plywood center section, suspended on a tracer bar, was thought to be capable of sustaining all weights and treads other than the M26. But the plywood centerway collapsed under the weight of the dozer, and one treadway track went down. That left the tractor suspended in midair, and to the eyes of the engineers it looked that the bridge was ruined beyond repair.

TSgt Prosser mounted the dozer atop the tottering structure, and by some magic which the others never understood, managed to manipulate it back onto solid earth. The plywood centerway was removed and the failed spacers taken out. Then by the sweat of many men and ingenious use of the tractor blade—it being employed as a lever—the treadways were put back into position. All of this was done in darkness except as the feeble glow of a few flashlights assisted the operation. Hundreds of men were milling around on the highside of the gap, including fifty Chinese prisoners who had chosen this hour to surrender. The flashlight welders had to stay there through the night so that the now malformed treadway could be illuminated.

When first light arrived, the column began to receive small arms fire from the draw where the incline railway cut out to the northeastward. The battalion commander told Baker Co to get a patrol up there and stop the racket. Two squads went along reinforced with a 3.5 rocket team. They quickly located the Chinese in two stoutly-formed bunkers,

halfway up the ridge. The first was knocked out with four rounds from the launcher. The second was too well fronted with brush for the rockets to cut through. The rifle squads took it with fire and movement, using hand grenades at the finish. Four Chinese were killed, two surrendered, four got away. Each nest had contained one machine gun. The patrol got back with only two men slightly wounded.

That was the final skirmish around the water gate. It took the division column twenty-eight hours to pass through Baker's roadblock. When at last the tank battalion cleared, Schmuck ordered Barrow to come down from his icy hilltop. The dead came out with the living. The score was counted: total losses were forty-seven killed and wounded and 190 cold casualties. CO 1/1 also checked his other list on which he had kept tab of the division units passing through: it was complete.

But still they tarried. (*Streams of refugees were coming down the ridges trying to escape the Chinese; all converged on the treadway bridge. Thrice a charge of 800 pounds of Composition C placed under the span had been at the point of detonation, and thrice the blast had been deferred to accommodate the wayfarers.*) Finally the road cleared, and at 0900 on 11 December, the fuse lighters were pulled and the engineers moved around the bend for protection from the blast. As luck would have it this day only one tread blew, the last tank across having cut the charge somehow.

And contrary to history CWO Willie Harrison was not with the rear guard. Harrison may have been there earlier but not at the last. The fuse lighters were pulled by two engineers (of the eight or so who stayed at the water gate until all the Marines got across but before the refugees started across).

Schmuck formed the battalion and accompanied the armor down the mountain. As he expressed it, they were delighted with one another's company.

All hands could then look back over the road traveled and reflect with understanding on the words of the division commander: "Not even Genghis Khan would have put an army across these mountains in the wintertime."

* Error in facts: CWO Harrison was not present when the bridge was blown, and it wasn't 2:00 a.m. as in the original story, it was 9:00 a.m. and the refugees did not cross while we were there. - R.J. Speights.

(EDITOR'S COMMENT: Speights was among the engineers who blew this bridge and has added his corrections to the official history. If any of you spot similar errors in any of these stories and you were there, let us know)

This is a reprint from the September 1960 Marine Corps Gazette

LARGE SEDENTARY TARGETS ON RED BEACH

By Lynn Montross and Nicholas A. Canzona

The letters LST, as everyone knows, originally stood for "Landing Ship—Tank." But it was discovered in WWII that you didn't have to be discriminating as to the nature or amount of the cargo. You could stuff a couple of bulldozers, a few howitzers and a combat-equipped company of troops into one of those floating warehouses and have enough room left for a locomotive or two.

Nobody loves an LST. Alongside a destroyer or cruiser, an LST has no romantic appeal whatever. Yet it was those wallflowers of the USN who supplied the derring-do in one of the greatest amphibious assault operations of American history. It was those thin-skinned cargo vessels, carrying enough

gas and ammunition to blow them sky-high, who went in on the heels of the landing force at Inchon while the DDs and CLs looked on from a safe back seat.

At H-hour a man feels like an iron duck in a shooting gallery when he climbs into a LVT or LCVP. But that is nothing compared to the targets presented by the eight LSTS carrying the mail to Red Beach at H plus one hour on 15 September 1950. Marines who landed in the last waves of the assault force will never forget the spectacle of those eight hulls wallowing toward shore in the murky overcast just before dusk. Red Beach and the urban area immediately behind it - the waterfront of an asiatic seaport of some 250,000 prewar population - were hidden from sight except for the flashes resembling heat lightning as our bombardment scorched unseen objectives on shore. But there was no difficulty in seeing the LSTs if you could make out your hand in front of your face.

At Inchon it was their mission to nourish the beachhead assault with the supplies most immediately needed. This meant grounding all eight LSTs abreast. Grouped so close together that the hulls had only about 50 feet of sea room on either side, they could scarcely have been missed by an enemy lobbing in a few mortar rounds. A single shell landing among the drums of high octane gas might have started a chain reaction involving the entire supply squadron in a major disaster.

This is the story of those eight nameless cargo vessels. It is a story based not only on special action reports and other official documents, but also the replies to letters of inquiry sent by the authors to all eight commanding officers.

Every amphibious operation, of course, is unique in the opinion of the men who were there. But Inchon came

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Every amphibious operation, of course, is unique in the opinion of the men who were there. But Inchon came

just a little closer to being unique than the others. To begin with, the objective area was a hydrographer's nightmare in which mudflats were combined with one of the world's greatest tidal ranges. These physical difficulties were compounded by a planning interval amounting to a fraction of the time usually allotted to a major amphibious operation. For the final decision was reached on 23 August and D-day was set for 15 September 1950.

So much has been written about Inchon that it may perhaps be assumed that all readers are familiar with the broad outlines. The most distinguishing feature was that the planners had practically no options. D-day had to be one of a few days in the middle of September. Only then did the tidal range provide a minimum depth of 29 feet to float the LSTs over the mudflats of the harbor, and a comparable period in October was deemed too late for strategic reasons.

Swift currents and narrow, twisting channels made it undestirable, if not impossible, to plan a large-scale approach under cover of darkness for a dawn landing. Besides, a fortified island in the inner harbor, Wolmi-do, had to be neutralized in advance of the mainland assault if the landing craft were not to risk being blown out of the water by flanking fire. The only solution, as the planners saw it, was to take this objective in a preliminary landing on the morning high tide, and to hit the mainland beaches when the evening high tide permitted. This meant that the enemy would be given the entire day for strengthening his mainland defenses, though the assault troops would have only about an hour and a half of daylight left for gaining a foothold in a strange Oriental city.

MajGen Oliver P. Smith's 1stMar Div, as Landing Force, was short one infantry regiment, RCT-7, which could

not arrive until D plus 7. Thus the plan of attack called for the 3d Bn of RCT-5 to hit Green Beach (Wolmi-do) on the morning of D-day. On the afternoon high tide, RCT-5 (less 3/5) was to land on Red Beach, skirting the Inchon industrial area, while RCT-1 hit Blue Beach, southeast of the city. Both so called beaches were mere strips of urban waterfront with sea walls which made scaling ladders necessary.

The LSTs enter the picture for the simple reason that the assault troops on Red Beach had to be supplied immediately with tanks, vehicles, rations, water, gasoline and ammunition. Arrangements also had to be made for casualty evacuation.

The supply vessels were limited to eight because no more could be squeezed into the limited space on Red Beach. Each was to carry a cargo of 500 tons: 400 tons of trucks, bulldozers and other heavy equipment, and 100 tons of high priority supplies—50 of ammunition, 30 of rations, 15 of water, and five of fuel.

H-hour was set for 1730. LCVPs were designated for the Red Beach landings, since their comparative speed would clear the area for beaching the LSTs when they moved in about an hour later. As for Blue Beach, the planners had decided that it wasn't feasible to land LSTs and the area wouldn't be developed beyond the immediate needs of the assault. For this purpose 16 preloaded LVTs were to serve as floating dumps until RCT-1 could link up with RCT-5.

The importance of the eight LSTs was enhanced by the fact that Navy medical officers were using them to initiate a revolutionary new technique in coordinating the care of casualties with the tactics of a major amphibious operation. On the principle that delays in definitive surgery often proved fatal, it was planned for six surgical teams,

each consisting of three doctors and ten corpsmen, to hit Red Beach with the LSTs. Four of these teams were to give first aid on the beach before evacuating patients to the cargo vessels, where the other two teams were equipped to provide definitive surgical care for critical cases in improvised operating rooms.

Somewhat similar teams had been employed in the Normandy landings and South Pacific operations of WWII. But Inchon, according to a Navy medical announcement, was the first amphibious assault in which a carefully plotted surgical technique was integrated with military tactics.

Obviously, the contribution of the LSTs both in logistical and medical respects would depend on how well they survived the calculated risks. G-2 summaries indicated a light enemy resistance, but a single Communist mortar or shore gun was capable of doing a great deal of harm. LST meant Large Sedentary Target on such occasions.

In addition to their vulnerability, the landing ships labored under disadvantages heaped upon them by circumstances. The American government, in order to provide sufficient vessels for the Attack Force during August 1950, reclaimed many of the LSTs lent to Japan for island trade after WWII. Thirty of these rusting hulks were to remain in the hands of Japanese crews for the amphibious operation, but ComNavFE recommissioned others as US ships. The eight chosen for the Red Beach landings and their skippers were as follows:

LST 859—Lt Leland T. Tinsley;
LST 883—Lt Charles M. Miller;
LST 914—Lt Ralph L. Holzhaus;
LST 973—Lt Robert Trapp;
LST 857—Lt Dick Weidemeyer;
LST 799—Lt Trumond E. Houston;
LSTH 898—Lt Robert M. Beckley;
LSTH 975—Lt Arnold W. Harer.
Officers and crews were rushed to

Japan from all over the United States. Although some of the men had never set foot in an LST, their job was to make the ill-kept ships seaworthy and battle-worthy in about two weeks. And it is to the ever-lasting pride of the naval service that when the time came, the LSTs were ready to go. The ships were reasonably clean, the guns reasonably reliable, and the engines and equipment reasonably operative.

Some of the "intrepid eight" sailed to Pusan in early September to pick up units of the 1stProvMarBrig, just released from combat in southeast Korea. The remainder took on elements of the 1stMarDiv at Kobe after weathering the 74 MPH winds of Typhoon Jane. On 10 September, D minus 5, the LSTs at that port departed for the objective as part of the two tractor movement elements of Task Force 90. Two days later, at a checkpoint in the East China Sea, they were joined by the Pusan contingent.

The ungainly fleet then lumbered into the Yellow Sea one jump ahead of Typhoon Kezia, which struck Japanese waters only ten days after Jane's violent visit. To nerve-taut commanders, it was like racing turtles across a highway in the path of an onrushing steamroller. But the LSTs made it. And with the other ships of TF 90, they safely closed on the final check point off the west coast of Korea on D minus 1.

In the early morning blackness of 15 September the Fire Support ships nosed their way up Flying Fish Channel toward the target area. Following in column, the Advance Attack Force threaded the perilous passageway with the 3d Bn of RCT-5. Thanks to radar and seamanship, all vessels of these vanguard detachments were intact as they took station off Wolmi-do just before dawn on D-day. Planes of the ASptGp (Badoeng Strait and Sicily) and of TF 77 (Boxer, Valley Forge and Philippine Sea) assembled overhead.

Since this is the story of the LSTs, suffice it to say that 3/5 overran Wolmi-do in short order and at an astonishingly low cost in casualties. By 0800 the fortress island was secured and all eyes turned toward Inchon as the 29 foot tide receded from the mud flats fronting the seaport.

Early in the afternoon RAdm James H. Doyle, the Attack Force commander, confirmed 1730 as H-hour after receiving a hydrographic report from the senior control officer, LtCdr Clyde E. Allmon, aboard Diachenko (APD 123). The word went out to all ships, and at 1430, H minus 180 minutes, the narrows exploded in a succession of orange flashes and mustard-colored blasts. Great clouds of smoke shot up from Inchon as the cruisers and destroyers poured in salvo after salvo. Flights of Skyraiders and Corsairs plummeted down intermittently to plaster the seaport with rockets and bombs.

As luck would have it, nature stepped in with still another handicap during the final hours before the assault. Rain squalls added to the density of the overcast until the objective area was almost blotted from sight. Moisture-laden clouds of smoke even rolled seaward to befog the boat lanes. VAdm Arthur D. Struble, CJTF 7, who roamed the Blue Beach area in his barge during the assault, later commented:

"In my previous amphibious experience in a large number of landings in the Southwest Pacific as an amphibious commander, I had never before seen smoke hanging so completely over the approach to the beach area."

With some 550 landing craft now in the water, the Red Beach control vessel, Horace A. Bass (APD 124), swung slowly past Wolmi-do toward the line of departure. Strung out behind, like a file of ducklings, were the LCVPs carrying assault troops of the 5th Ma-

rines. Wantuck (APD 125) edged forward to her station at the head of the murky boat lanes to Blue Beach.

As H-hour approached, the support ships increased the tempo of their gunfire. But all at once the seemingly dead objectives showed signs of life that boded no good for the assault craft, let alone the eight Large Sedentary Targets. Lt Theodore B. Clark, USN, Blue Beach control officer, later summed up the first enemy threat as follows:

"At about H minus 50 minutes, while press boats and the initial waves of LVT (A) and LVT were milling around the Blue Beach control vessel, mortar fire was received in the immediate vicinity. This created some confusion until a destroyer spun around on her anchor and silenced the battery."

As the vanguard tractors of the 1st Marines were crossing the midway point of their boat lanes about 1705 (H minus 25 minutes), the cruisers and destroyers ceased firing and the three LSMRs poured their rockets into the objective. Some 6,000 of these missiles hit Inchon during the next 20 minutes. This thundering barrage doubtless drove the Communist defenders to cover but it also added to the blanket of smoke shrouding the seaport.

On signal from Bass at 1722, eight LCVPs comprising the first wave of RCT-5, crossed the line of departure and steered toward the sea wall of Red Beach, 2200 yards away. One of the P-boats broke down but the others reached the revetments between H plus one minute and H plus two. The Marines of the first wave braced their scaling ladders and threw grenades over the wall. Then they scrambled up, one at a time, while the boats bobbed and the ladders swayed. The landing craft quickly retracted and the second wave hit, then the third.

Low visibility and currents made for a certain amount of confusion and

mingling of landing waves, both on Red and Blue Beaches. But the assault troops did get ashore, and in most instances company officers and veteran NCOs soon restored a semblance of order. What counted was that the Landing Force landed and drove inland from the two beaches in accordance with its mission.

Roaring down through the overcast, Corsairs raked the objective areas with machinegun fire 50 yards ahead of the assault troops. On the left of Red Beach the troops of 1/5 were pinned down at first by fire from a Red Korean bunker, but one platoon of Able Company, advancing on its own initiative, surprised the enemy and captured Cemetery Hill along with a whole company of North Koreans ten minutes after landing. (2nd Platoon under Lt. Muetzel. Ed.)

On the right of Red Beach, the attack on Observatory Hill was delayed by trouble in the form of mixing of waves due to smoke, inexperience of boat crews and lack of rehearsal. Two companies of 2/5 landed in the wrong beach zones, and the attack on the dominating height got off to a late start.

This loss of momentum, with darkness imminent, seemed to give new hope and courage to the Communist defenders of Observatory Hill. They opened up with machine guns while mortar shells came from farther back in the city.

For the first time the Red Koreans were showing signs of putting up a stiff resistance - just as the first of the eight Large Sedentary Targets crossed the line of departure and went plodding through the dusk toward Red Beach. It was now 1830, H plus one hour, and the time had come to beach the supply vessels.

No one in JTF-7 was more apprehensive at this moment than Control Officer Schneeloch, who had signaled the LSTs to make their approach. No

one knew better than this Navy veteran what could happen when an LST went up in flames. Watching the mortar bursts in the water and the enemy's muzzle flashes on Observatory Hill, he recalled all too vividly a scene of fiery death at Pearl Harbor on a May day in 1944. LSTs loaded with Marines for the Saipan operation were jammed side by side in West Loch. Suddenly one of the ships was ablaze. Tons of ammunition exploded almost immediately as the fire reached out to four other LSTs. Within a matter of minutes the five vessels were enveloped in a raging inferno. Shattering detonations rocked the entire naval base. Sailors and Marines, many of them flaming human torches, leaped into the water. Rescuers tried to save the stricken ships but the best they could do was to move other LSTs out of danger.

Schneeloch knew how fast the thin-skinned vessels could become firetraps. He had taken part with the scorched rescuers that May day at Pearl Harbor when hundreds of casualties were incurred in one of the worst disasters of American naval history.

The potential for catastrophe at Inchon on 15 September 1950 was even worse. After the LSTs reached their narrow berthing space, one mortar round, a single machine-gun burst, could set off hundreds of tons of gasoline and ammunition. Maneuver and retraction were out of the question; the eight Large Sedentary Targets could only remain beached until the high tide of the following morning—if they managed to survive that long. And in case of disaster, there were not the facilities for fire-fighting and rescue which existed at a great naval base like Pearl Harbor.

Such grim possibilities, of course, had not been overlooked by the planners. But they placed their faith in the often demonstrated ability of the US Navy to generate the irresistible force

which moves the immovable body.

Thus it was a contest of US Navy tradition against a bristling array of calculated risks when Lt Tinsley and his LST 859 led the column of supply ships heading toward Red Beach. With him on the bridge was LtCdr James C. Wilson, who had overall command of the eight vessels for the landing.

Approaching the sea wall at 1835, the ship ran into heavy enemy mortar and machine gun fire. The gun crews, straining their eyes into the murky dusk, could make out Marines on the beach and muzzle flashes on the misty high ground beyond. They opened up with 20mm and 40mm fire, spraying not only Observatory hill but the right flank of Red beach as well. Some of the shells ripped into troops of the 2d Bn of RCT-5 who had just landed. One man was killed and 23 wounded as the Marines raced for the sheltering walls of the Nippon Flour Company building.

LST 859 eased into her berth at about 1840, guns still blazing. Close behind, LSTs 975H and 857 were also shooting as they beached to port a few minutes later. On LST 857 gun crews of the No 1 and No 6 40mm mounts directed their fire on the high ground to the left front—Cemetery Hill. The stream of shells chased the Marines from the top of this captured objective to the slope facing Inchon. There they were caught flatfooted by an enemy machine gun firing from a building on Observatory Hill. Luckily, a 40mm round from either the 859 or 975H obliterated this Red Korean position with a timely direct hit, and the Marines got off without a single casualty.

Trailing fourth in the column, LST 914 grated to a stop at the sea wall with its weapons silent. Lt Holzhaus had received orders not to fire "... at any targets ashore or in the air." Glowering from his exposed position on the bridge, the rugged old "mustang" saw to it that

the orders were obeyed.

The fifth LST to land was Trapp's 973. He too had forbidden his men to fire. As the ramp of this vessel started down, a mortar explosion dislodged several Marines perched on top. They fell to the beach beneath the descending steel door, but it was checked in midair just short of crushing them.

It was now about 1845 and nearly dark. The crowded waterfront presented a scene of seeming, rather than actual, chaos. Marines had boarded LST 859 and yelled to the crew to cease firing. Then they helped themselves to ammunition and ran off toward Observatory Hill. Another group of assault troops roared indignation as the men invaded LST 973. Trapp refuted their charges by inviting them to feel the cold barrels of the ship's topside guns.

The last three supply vessels, LSTs 883, 898H and 799, had crossed the harbor safely and beached by 1900. Not all of the Red Korean mortar rounds were falling wide of the mark, however, and the crucial stage came when all eight Large Sedentary Targets were lined up so closely that it would be difficult for an enemy gunners to miss them.

LSTs 975H and 857, the only ships besides 859 that had fired, had taken hits during the approach and while in their berths. Enemy bullets killed one sailor and wounded another at the No 2 mount on the 857. Some of the fuel drums were punctured but crewmen managed to check the spouts of gasoline before explosions occurred.

On LSTH 975 a mortar explosion wounded one man just as unloading began, and another Communist missile felled a sailor on the 859. But the most seriously hit of all was LST 973. A mortar round blasted the forward weather deck on the port side and fragments ripped into the fuel drums. Gasoline gushed out in every direction. Within

seconds the whole forward deck was awash. Then a second shell exploded in the same area, penetrating one of the troop compartments in the well. Gasoline seeped below decks into the very heart of the ship.

LST 973 was now a potential volcano, awaiting only a spark to set off the eruption. Damage control teams flashed into action with high pressure hoses. Trapp ordered all electric motors and equipment turned off. Sailors sealed off the damaged troop compartment immediately. Tension soared as the crew forced the pools of gasoline over the side with powerful saltwater jets.

One tracer bullet during those anxious moments could have meant flaming death for every ship on the beach.

The officers and men of LST 973 won their fight against catastrophe. Seven of the crew were cut down by enemy fire but the remainder stuck to their exposed stations and cleared the deck.

To starboard of Trapp's imperiled vessel, LST 914 had taken several hits from enemy small arms. One machinegun burst started a fire amidships near a truck loaded with ammunition. The danger was heightened when fragments from the mortar explosions on LST 973 whirred across the deck. But fragments and bullets be damned! That was the watchword on LST 914 as Marines and sailors pitched in without hesitation to smother the flames. And though the ship was hit several more times, the pressure never again became acute. Nor were any of the other LSTs gravely threatened beyond the incidents already described.

Marines of the 1st and 2d Bns of RCT-5 secured Observatory Hill in the darkness at about 2000 and tied in for the night. Messages were also received that units of RCT-1 had encountered only light opposition after pushing

inland from Blue Beach.

Another great amphibious assault operation had been added to the two hundred in the long history of the Marine Corps. With all the main objectives of D-day secured, the situation on the Inchon waterfront settled down to the normal organized tumult which characterizes the unloading stage of every amphibious landing.

It remained now to unload 4,000 tons of cargo and retract on the morning high tide, so that other LSTs could land more supplies. This was the responsibility of a logistical task force headed by the commanding officer of the US Army 2d Engineer Special Brigade and composed also of the Marine 1stSPBn and 1stCSG, with the 7th MTBn attached.

Soldiers and Marines worked all night under floodlights, paying no attention to the scattered smallarms fire which continued until dawn. So cramped were the confines of Red Beach that cargo had to be stockpiled wherever space could be found. Tactical dumps were established later, but the great object that first night was to get the LSTs unloaded.

There were times, however, when the trend of beach traffic was reversed as a jeep drove back over the ramp of an LST with a wounded Marine. Casualties of the Landing Force on D-day amounted to 20 killed, 174 wounded, and a single death from wounds. This last statistic is significant, since most of the wound casualties were given first aid by the advance surgical teams of Red Beach and evacuated to LSTH 975 or LSTH 898 for immediate surgery when necessary.

These surgical teams had been drilled like football squads. Team No 2 on LSTH 898 received 95 wounded Marines on the night of D-day, many requiring chest or abdominal surgery,

without the loss of a single man. Even a specialist in plastic surgery was available for facial wounds requiring an operation to prevent unsightly scars.

So successful were the Navy surgical teams at Inchon that they were recalled to Japan afterwards to become preceptors. And within a year the number of teams had increased to 22 on standby duty in the Far East.

Returning to the logistical side of the Inchon landing, so much progress had been made by midnight of D-day at unloading the LSTs that completion of the task by daybreak was assured. The morning of D plus 1 found Red Beach operating according to schedule as the original eight Large Sedentary Targets retracted to make room for other LSTs bulging with supplies.

Surveys indicated that the tidal basin could soon be made operative without major repairs. Army engineers were already starting to round up Korean crews and rolling stock while repairing track on the Inchon-Seoul line. On D plus 4 the first supply train made a five-mile run with rations and ammunition for the advancing Marine ground forces. And during the course of the operation, 350,000 rations, 315,000 gallons of fuel, 1260 tons of ammunition and 10,000 troops were transported by rail in addition to the trucked and airborne supplies.

The moving of that logistical mountain had been given its first impetus by the eight bullet-scarred LSTs of Red Beach. Still, it is not likely that anyone paused to throw a salute to those floating warehouses when they heaved a rusty sigh and retracted on the morning high tide of 16 September 1950. Heroic stanzas are reserved for fighting ships, and writing an ode to an LST would be much like addressing a sonnet to a pregnant whale. Yet it may be, after all is said and done, that a battered and smelly old LST will be first to hit the beach on the shores of Valhalla while the cruisers and the DDs are left behind.



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