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## MacArthur and Frozen Chosin: An Analysis of the Press Coverage of Douglas MacArthur during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir

**Chris Collodel**

During the cold Korean November of 1950, General Douglas MacArthur's 8th Army and X Corps army units were in a race along the Korean coasts toward the border with China. General Walton Walker commanded the 8th Army, which attacked along western Korea, while General Edward Almond led X Corps on the eastern drive. Unlike previous endeavors, MacArthur's "Home by Christmas" offensive ended in defeat, with the United Nation's forces retreating back over the 38th Parallel after a Chinese counter attack. The Battle of Chosin Reservoir took place during this offensive and lasted from 27 November to 13 December, 1950. Following this Battle, MacArthur's uncontroverted legacy was tarnished. Scholars have since debated the efficacy of his command in Korea. Some have condemned his military intelligence and the strategy he implemented, others have defended his decisions and argued that he made the best out of a situation with limited resources and options available to him. It was during this Battle that members of the national newspapers began to criticize MacArthur's advance into North Korea. Most scholars agree that in retrospect MacArthur's advance was overzealous, while some maintain that it was the only move, which would have brought the war to a swift and decisive conclusion. The press coverage during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir helped to ensure that MacArthur's legacy included debate and polarization rather than his unanimous admiration as a war hero.

Since the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, scholars have demonstrated the dichotomy, and the ambivalence, regarding MacArthur's legacy. The Battle of Chosin Reservoir marked the inception of an abrupt decline in MacArthur's military career. His eccentricities as a commander were tolerable when he won, but the sacrifice many made during the battle resulted in the questioning of what role the United States should have played in the Korean War. Only four months after Chosin Reservoir, President Harry Truman relieved MacArthur of his command. Even after his replacement, however, MacArthur remained immensely popular with the American people. This was exemplified when he returned to the United States and received two ticker-tape parades. The parade in New York City was even larger than eventual-president Dwight Eisenhower's had been upon his return from World War Two. MacArthur would return to America as a hero, but his assault into North Korea left an indelible blemish on his career. Launching a two-pronged attack was a mistake. The arctic climate and mountainous terrain were not conducive to operating a swift and decisive military action. At Chosin Reservoir, soldiers were commanded by two men who detested each other and had different views as to how the advance should have been carried out. Also, a false perception of a Communist hierarchy existed in the American government, which surmised that the Chinese would not enter the war and prompted a major military intelligence breakdown.<sup>1</sup> These factors were not a conducive for success although some have still argued in defense of the General. This paper draws upon articles from *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* to investigate how the national newspaper syndicates portrayed MacArthur and the Battle itself to the American people at the time. Examination of how the major press wrote about him during the Battle mirrored how MacArthur has since become a subject of debate. Previous scholarly works have not examined the articles during the Battle from the major press in relation to the abrupt decline in MacArthur's military career and a reputation shrouded with controversy.

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MacArthur, a graduate of West Point, was the son of a soldier. He served valiantly in France during the First World War. Following his success in the Second World War, MacArthur cemented his place in history as one of the greatest American military leaders of all time. Polls in America showed that MacArthur was viewed as a military hero and President Harry Truman appointed him to the position Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, which made him the temporary viceroy of Japan after the World War Two.<sup>2</sup> When North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel on June 25, 1950, MacArthur would become the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command to help stop Communist aggression.<sup>3</sup> From the start, the relationship between MacArthur and President Truman was filled with tension. In 1948, MacArthur had sought the Republican nomination for Presidency. Since he had ran for President, a layer of distrust of MacArthur existed in Washington. MacArthur showed he had political ambitions, and therefore every action he made was automatically viewed with a veneer of scrutiny and doubt about MacArthur's true motives. The United States firmly believes in a civilian controlled military, and political opponents focused on MacArthur's purported obfuscation of the lines, which separated the government and the military. Nonetheless, Truman recognized MacArthur's success during World War Two and his skillful management of postwar Japan. The two agreed that Communism had to be stopped and could not spread to South Korea, and that was enough for Truman to allow MacArthur to take command of the United Nations' Forces.

The situation in Korea seemed abysmal before MacArthur took over command of the UN forces. Before UN intervention, the South Korean forces had been decimated to about a third of their original size and faced destruction while desperately holding a small pocket of South Korea. When MacArthur took over command, he immediately sought to implement plans developed to attack north. The UN Forces helped maintain that pocket called the Pusan Perimeter, and held the front line while more soldiers and supplies entered through Port of Pusan. During the Battle for the Pusan Perimeter, the North Koreans suffered heavy casualties and lost many of their armored weapons. Since the Pusan Perimeter was secured, the UN forces were able to amass the men and supplies needed to help them switch from a defensive posture to an offensive one that attacked the enemy. The assault at Inchon was an extremely bold plan. MacArthur desired a quick conclusion to the war and to do so he would need to eradicate the North Korean army. The General believed that landing at Inchon would relieve the fighting around the Pusan Perimeter and completely alter the course of the war. It would be the largest amphibious assault undertaken since D-Day in World War Two, and would take place over 200 Kilometers north of the front lines.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the war department met the Inchon plan with unanimous disapproval.<sup>4</sup> The Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, thought the location of the landings would be too difficult to land the troops ashore and supply them against counterattacks.<sup>5</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff initially found themselves inclined to attack closer to the front lines, and sought a plan which required less of a gamble even if the rewards paled in comparison to MacArthur's. General Collins and Admiral Forrest Sherman, Naval Chief of Operations, were sent by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consult with MacArthur, review the Inchon plans, and to discuss other possible landings and possible alternative operations.<sup>6</sup> Yet, MacArthur sold his plan to them despite their trepidations. Every person in America desired a swift end to the war and the preservation of American lives. MacArthur's hyperbolic estimations that 100,000 American lives would be saved and the war would end by winter convinced the Joint Chiefs to endorse the Inchon landing.<sup>7</sup> On September 16, MacArthur sent word to the Joint Chiefs that "Marine attacks this morning . . . secured the City of Inchon . . . Air support has destroyed hostile tank and motorized elements attempting to converge on our advance . . . all combat and logistical elements maintain planned schedules."<sup>8</sup> The Invasion of Inchon was a massive success and cemented MacArthur's place among the greatest American generals. The war quickly switched from the North Koreans almost completely capturing the south, to the North Koreans rapidly retreating north.

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This achievement at Inchon left a huge impression on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a message on September 19, the Joint Chiefs wrote to MacArthur and lauded his performance in the war. They said that they were:

. . . proud of the great successes you have achieved. We realized that they would have been impossible without your brilliant and audacious leadership . . . From the sudden initiation of hostilities you have exploited to the utmost all capabilities and opportunities. Your transition from defensive to offensive operations was magnificently planned, timed and executed. You have given new inspiration to the freedom-loving peoples of the world. We remain completely confident that the great task entrusted to you by the United Nations will be carried out to a successful conclusion.<sup>9</sup>

Following this huge victory, the UN forces were able to force the North Koreans into a retreat and allowed the UN to advance. On September 28, MacArthur sent a draft of a broadcast he was going to make to the Commander-in-Chief of the North Korean Forces. MacArthur stated, “the early and total defeat and complete destruction of your armed forces and war making potential is now inevitable. In order that the decisions of the UN may be carried out with a minimum of further loss of life and destruction of property, I . . . call upon you and the forces under your command. . . to lay down your arms and cease hostilities.”<sup>10</sup> At this point the United States’ foreign policy was dictated by the Soviet Union. They believed that Communist countries did not have autonomous decision making processes, especially regarding going to war, and did not believe the Soviets would allow China to intervene in North Korea.<sup>11</sup> Since the North Korean Army had almost been destroyed, the end of the war appeared near as the Communists seemingly had no more forces available to fight the UN in Korea.

The press unanimously praised the decisive landing at Inchon, and detailed how it changed the complexion of the war. On September 17, 1950, General Walker stated the war would end quickly.<sup>12</sup> The *New York Times* reported on the day of the landings that it was “sound,” and explained that the attack at Inchon drove into the heart of Korea, and left the North Korean army fighting in the Pusan area without any means of supply or support.<sup>13</sup> The news of the success at Inchon led to a morale boost in the Pusan Perimeter, which previously bore all of the fighting.<sup>14</sup> “The general reaction was: ‘We’re over the hump boys, but there was a tough fight ahead,’” wrote the *New York Times*.<sup>15</sup> Not only was morale boosted, but the initiative provided a huge relief in terms of fighting because the landing at, and drive from, Inchon drew many North Korean soldiers and materials away from the hard-contested Pusan Perimeter. The fighting in the Pusan Perimeter area was a last-stand effort by the UN Forces to retain the vital Port of Pusan. In the scalding late summer, heat exhaustion hampered the soldiers caused casualties as well. In the brutal fighting around both the UN Forces and the North Koreans sustained around 50,000 casualties. When the soldiers who fought desperately to hold the Pusan Perimeter heard that the North Koreans were retreating, a sense of hope arose for the first time in the conflict. The UN forces only experienced defeat in major actions prior to the Inchon landings, and the UN soldiers at the Pusan Perimeter hung on by their fingernails to that last tiny stronghold. Soldiers and supplies poured in from the beachhead at Inchon, and the South Korean capital city of Seoul was soon reclaimed.<sup>16</sup> The *Washington Post* reported on September 19, 1950, that the “Reds were withdrawing north,” and “had not yet recovered from the initial tactical surprise,” of the landings.<sup>17</sup> The press articles about the landing at Inchon and subsequent push from the Pusan Perimeter referred it as a “Nutcracker drive” as victory before Christmas was predicted.<sup>18</sup> Morale was high and the push north was carried out with ease. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on September 23 that “North Korean troops fled in ever increasing numbers,” and that “front dispatches told of entire enemy divisions taking to their heels.”<sup>19</sup> On September 22, the *Washington Post* published an article titled “MacArthur Returns to Tokyo with Situation ‘Well in Hand.’”<sup>20</sup> It explained the situation in Korea looked good as the UN forces advanced steadily and destroyed any resistance they met. Elimination of the North Korean army was the only way to end the war in the eyes of MacArthur. After the successful landings at Inchon and subsequent recapture of Seoul, MacArthur made a plan to recapture and unite all of Korea as well as destroy the remaining Communist forces. On October 15, President Truman and General

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MacArthur met at the Wake Island Conference to discuss the Chinese involvement in Korea. At this point, the UN forces knew Chinese soldiers were present in North Korea and on the border, but believed there was not a significant force capable of launching an offensive against them. "What Truman took away from Wake Island was that the war in Korea was won and that the Chinese Communists would not attack."<sup>21</sup> The Chinese soldiers were known to be in Korea at the time were in a retreat. MacArthur did not believe Truman's motives were pure and perceived the visit as merely an attempt to bolster the chances of the Democratic Party's success at upcoming congressional elections.<sup>22</sup> Still, the General convinced the President that attacking north was the best course of action for winning the war.

For the assault in North Korea, MacArthur adopted the encirclement strategy, which German and Russian generals implemented so effectively during World War Two.<sup>23</sup> The two UN armies MacArthur commanded were physically divided by the Taebaek Mountains, forming a gap in the assault. MacArthur ordered the 8th Army to advance along the west and the X Corps to advance in the east. Once the two groups reached the Yalu River, they would complete the pincer move and encircle North Korea which MacArthur believed would successfully secure a united Korea and end the war quickly.<sup>24</sup> Dividing his two armies and spreading them across a long stretch of North Korea, with little ability to support each other, was a major strategic gamble made by MacArthur. The Joint Chiefs and Truman adopted this risky plan because of the previous success MacArthur had with his bold strategies. In particular, the success of MacArthur's wager at Inchon remained fresh in the Joint Chiefs' and President's minds when MacArthur decided to push further north. The amphibious assault at Inchon took place in enemy territory over 100 miles above the front lines. It took place during difficult tides and was a momentous amphibious assault. When plans for that landing were revealed many high ranking government officials and military leaders had believed it simply would not work. Once, again, MacArthur brought a risky plan to the table, but at this point his gambles had brought only huge success and it was difficult for Washington to say "no" to a successful commander in the field.

The separation of forces in combat is almost always questionable strategy. The two forces must be able to not only advance combat troops rapidly but also provide logistical support for the advancing forces. If the soldiers and their supply lines are stretched too far apart, they cannot properly support each other if attacked. Overextended lines open the forces to attack and prevented the pincer move from ever being completed and, more often than not, resulted in disaster. Roy Appleman was attached to X Corps as a historian in the field during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir and believed that the gap was necessary. Appleman argued that although "critics have simply not understood the terrain conditions in this part of Korea, MacArthur did. The plain fact was that no gap existed between the 8th Army and X Corps that could have been used militarily."<sup>25</sup> The gap's terrain was simply too mountainous for a modern army to navigate straight through. The geography and climate necessitated the creation of two separate supply bases.<sup>26</sup> In order to carry out MacArthur's plan, a gap needed to exist. However, Appleman explained, "the wisdom of that decision and its probability is another matter."<sup>27</sup> Specifically for X Corps, Appleman thought "the plan was optimistic, spreading troops over a vast expanse of the frozen northeast of Korea, with little possibility that any major unit could support another in any sudden crisis. Only if all went well could it work."<sup>28</sup> Despite the daunting odds, the Joint Chiefs and the President had faith that MacArthur's risky plan would work out, as the General's previous gambles had.

X Corps was assigned to some of the roughest terrain in North Korea. The X Corps consisted of the 1st Marine Division, elements of the Army's 3rd and 7th Infantry Divisions, the 41st British Royal Marine Commandos and units of the South Korean Army. Their area of operation had only three to five miles of semi-level land on the coastal plain. Past the coastal plain stood the Taebaek Range, which included sudden, steep slopes that reach up to 8,000 feet and narrow, twisting valleys filled with forests.<sup>29</sup> Also, there were very few roads and most of them

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ran north and south. Roads that ran east and west were virtually nonexistent. There was “only a jumble of tracks that ran for relatively short distances and then branched off into trails in different directions.”<sup>30</sup> During the winter, temperatures dropped to as low as -30 degrees Fahrenheit. Vehicles had difficulty maneuvering over the frozen roads while foot soldiers did everything in their power to prevent the cold from consuming them.

These factors were overlooked by MacArthur out of his desire to advance with speed and bring the war to a swift conclusion. General Almond was a great corps commander, but had one great weakness: his unwavering loyalty to MacArthur.<sup>31</sup> MacArthur gave Almond command of X Corps for the Inchon landing while he also held the position as MacArthur’s chief of staff at Far East Command.<sup>32</sup> Almond did as MacArthur ordered, and never strayed from those orders even when, at times, he probably should have. Almond advanced rapidly north as MacArthur desired, but paid little attention to the logistical predicament his force was in. “Almond’s over-riding ambition was to beat his rival, General Walker, to the Yalu.”<sup>33</sup> Problems arose between Almond and the Marine General Oliver P. Smith, who was the commander of the First Marine Division that comprised most of X Corps. The two men began to mutually loathe one another during the planning of the Inchon assault, and when MacArthur ordered X Corps to attack north, they disagreed as to how the First Marine Division was to be used. Almond wanted to rapidly advance to the border as MacArthur had ordered, while Smith, who was following Marine doctrine, resisted rapid movement north without first building up bases of supply; the two views naturally conflicted.<sup>34</sup> Almond also desired to beat his chief rival, General Walker. Appleman also argued that while Smith was cautious about Chinese intervention, Almond had fallen into agreement with MacArthur’s staff that significant involvement by the Chinese was unlikely. As a result, Almond pushed northwards, stretching X Corps’ lines over 160 miles.<sup>35</sup> Historian Max Hastings stressed that the relationship between the two men was not conducive to success in battle. After one conversation between the two X Corps leaders, Almond turned to one of his colonels and said about Smith “this guy is a maniac. He’s nuts. I can’t believe the way he’s saying these things.”<sup>36</sup> As Smith feared, the Chinese offensive began on the night of November 26. The assault consisted of Chinese Communist veterans hardened by their recent victory over the Chinese Nationalists in their own Civil War, and who were experienced and well-disciplined soldiers.<sup>37</sup> Disaster came quickly to X Corps on November 27, after the Chinese surprise attack severed the supply lines of the soldiers positioned around the Chosin Reservoir. By November 28, the First Marine Division was totally surrounded. They had no supply lines and were resupplied by airdrops. After two weeks of ferocious combat, Marines led a fighting retreat from the Chosin Reservoir to the port of Hungnam, where they went on to reinforce the 8th Army, which had already retreated back south of the 38th Parallel.

By January 22, 1951, following the Chinese intervention and only a month and a half after the Battle of Chosin Reservoir and the failure of the “Home By Christmas Offensive,” polls showed that 66 percent of Americans believed that the United States should completely pull out their forces from Korea.<sup>38</sup> The mood in America completely changed from only a couple months earlier. Back on October 13, 1950, 64 percent of Americans had believed that fighting should continue after crossing the 38th Parallel, but by January the majority of people wanted all the soldiers out.<sup>39</sup> The decision to spread troops over a massive area during a brutal winter raised a red flag for many. The horrific nature of the fighting between X Corps and the Chinese Communist Forces at Chosin Reservoir prompted a reexamination of the situation in Korea, and of MacArthur. Soldiers told stories of wounded prisoners that were burned alive, thrown on a highway and ran over, bayoneted and shot.<sup>40</sup> There were close to 18,000 UN casualties at the battle, a massive increase compared to the Battle of Inchon where there were only about 1,000 UN casualties. The Chinese were not unscathed, as they secured their Pyrrhic victory at a cost of figures as high as 60,000 casualties; the exact number remains unknown and bodies were still being found in 2006.<sup>41</sup> The fighting left the Chinese Communist Forces severely weakened, and forced them to rebuild their forces rather than pursue the UN troops who were in retreat. Most of the wounded at Chosin Reservoir were non-battle casualties, suffering from frostbite because both sides did not adequately prepare for the arctic climate.

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Scholarly arguments demonstrated the various opinions that surround MacArthur, and helped explain the battle's context in the Korean War. One specific decision MacArthur made during the Battle that garnered scrutiny was to ignore Washington's policy of sending only South Korean troops further north, closer to the Chinese border.<sup>42</sup> Historian John Spanier viewed MacArthur's actions as a violation of Washington's policy.<sup>43</sup> Jack Kenny disputed this, and wrote that MacArthur was "frustrated by the restrictions put on the military by the administration in Washington," and claimed the Soviet Union may have been drawn directly into the conflict if MacArthur was allowed to bomb targets across the Yalu River.<sup>44</sup> MacArthur was not overly concerned about the Soviet Union's entry into the Korean conflict. Spanier viewed MacArthur's advance as a move, which contradicted orders from the Joint Chiefs, and ultimately viewed it as too costly. Unlike Spanier, Kenny painted a picture of a MacArthur as a military genius who was hampered by political restraints. Kenny did not consider MacArthur's actions as a contradiction of orders, but rather he presented them as the necessary actions undertaken by a highly regarded military mind. I.F. Stone posited that the existing state of the war made it appear the Chinese were ready to accept the North Korean's defeat and were focusing on other objectives.<sup>45</sup> Stone even stated that in October "it did indeed look as if the Korean War was over."<sup>46</sup> Stone argued that rather than the crossing of the 38th Parallel, it was the UN forces approaching too close to border that caused the Chinese to intervene and attack. Stone stated "the 38th Parallel had been crossed on the 7th of October by non-Korean forces without provoking Chinese intervention. It appeared that Peking had abandoned North Korea and decided to reverse itself and take part in the United Nations discussion on Formosa but had massed troops to protect its frontier."<sup>47</sup> This quote illustrates how Stone saw the Chinese as an unlikely threat to enter the conflict at the time. Stone agreed that MacArthur's quest to "clear Korea" contradicted the aims of the United States, but believed the situation in China may have influenced MacArthur to be more aggressive.<sup>48</sup> The North Korean army was no longer combat effective. The UN troops who had crossed past the 38th Parallel had not seen any Chinese presence in force. MacArthur's actions in North Korea stemmed from the fact that he held little trepidation regarding Chinese intervention and thought the war was all but over.

An important and controversial subject was the number of Chinese soldiers involved in the battle, and when they entered Korea. Historians now know that the Chinese only moved during the night to avoid being spotted by UN reconnaissance planes and, therefore, were able to disguise their true numbers. The number of Chinese soldiers involved mattered because MacArthur stressed to the President and Joint Chiefs when they planned the offensive into North Korea that he was confident the Chinese would not launch a major attack. Following the Chinese surprise offensive, varying numbers of Chinese troops were reported in the papers and usually exceeded reality. The *Los Angeles Times* even reported that MacArthur had announced 800,000 Chinese soldiers were involved on December 4, 1950.<sup>49</sup> In actuality, the Chinese had around 150,000 soldiers on the eastern front and 230,000 for the attack on the western front.<sup>50</sup> An intelligence breakdown occurred at the time and left the major presence of Chinese soldiers unknown to the advancing UN forces. 55-60,000 of these Chinese soldiers fought in the Battle of Chosin Reservoir against a UN force of about 30,000.<sup>51</sup> Kaufman credited the successful Chinese counteroffensive to the unpreparedness of the UN soldiers, and noted that the Chinese would face a UN opponent "who had thrown away their helmets, bayonets, blankets, and spare ammunition, so certain were they that the Korean conflict would soon be over."<sup>52</sup> John Spanier also credited mistaken judgments for the UN failure during the Chinese counterattack. Spanier used a specific statement from MacArthur to illustrate the false hopes held regarding the "Chinese mind." MacArthur stated that the Chinese broke off contact for two weeks, however he had failed to learn that this was to secretly build up their forces and take advantage of frozen rivers and roadbeds.<sup>53</sup> Kaufman found the success of the Chinese counteroffensive rooted in how poorly MacArthur judged the Chinese willingness to enter the war.<sup>54</sup>

The overall faith the press had in MacArthur's decision to advance further into North Korea was demonstrated by a reporter on November 25, "on the military side it would have been running a grave risk to assume that the Chinese would continue their withdrawal. General MacArthur has taken a gamble, and it must be assumed that in this score he knows his business."<sup>55</sup> On November 25, the Chinese were reported to have broken off contact with UN forces, their intentions were still unknown and their support was believed to perhaps been only a token gesture to their Communist allies.<sup>56</sup> The *New York Times* suggested that this withdrawal by the Chinese could be an attempt to promote false optimism amongst the UN forces.<sup>57</sup> During the night of November 25, the Chinese launched the initial phase of their surprise offensive with an attack on the 8th Army in the northwest. The 8th Army had been completely surprised and was soon in a full retreat south. The day the Battle of Chosin Reservoir began, the *Chicago Tribune* reported the Marines of X Corps attack from the northeast to relieve pressure on the 8th Army.<sup>58</sup> The night of November 27, the Chinese Communist Forces attacked X Corps' main supply route and isolated the soldiers around Chosin Reservoir. The entire First Marine Division and the Army's 7th Infantry division faced complete destruction. The UN forces' situation in Korea had changed from almost securing victory to a bitter fight for their survival.

The *New York Times* reported on November 29, 1950 that MacArthur was misquoted and never seriously thought that the troops would be home from Korea by Christmas.<sup>59</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* reported MacArthur's clarification about the "Home By Christmas" statement differently. On November 29, the *Tribune* reported that MacArthur stated that the "Home by Christmas" prediction was merely the "universal hope" for an early end to the war.<sup>60</sup> On the same day, the *New York Times* released another article that focused on Secretary of State Acheson's remark that Chinese intervention created a "situation of unparalleled danger" to the entire world.<sup>61</sup> Two days into the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, the gravity of the situation was known and already MacArthur calculated damage control by trying to dissuade people from taking his initial forecast too seriously.

On December 3, the *New York Times* covered the actions in Washington and presented the dire predicament in which the UN Forces were mired. The article stated that "every official movement in the capital today . . . reflected a sense of emergency and even alarm about the state of the United Nations Army."<sup>62</sup> The article continued to paint an extremely bleak portrait of the situation and even stated that no course of action to fix the problem existed.<sup>63</sup> Another article from the *New York Times* that day covered the Army Chief of Staff, General Collins, flying to Korea to confer with MacArthur about the Korean War situation.<sup>64</sup> Collins had made two previous trips to the Far East, but this trip was to figure how best to support the Far East Command in light of the daunting new developments. On December 5, Ferdinand Kuhn wrote an article for the *Washington Post* that stated "the United Nations forces had lost control of the military situation," and "could no longer hope to hold any defense lines across the Korean peninsula."<sup>65</sup> Throughout the press, the status of X Corps during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir and the retreat to the port of Hungnam was compared to the evacuation at Dunkirk during World War Two, where the British and allies were able to save their forces from destruction in France. The *Washington Post* released another article on December 5 that questioned if General Collins' trip to the Far East was to prepare for the evacuation of UN forces from Korea.<sup>66</sup> This article stated that the circumstances were desperate and there were few forces remained in reserve, but that the enemy's lengthened supply lines and the UN shortened supply lines was advantageous.<sup>67</sup> The article did not condemn the stretched lines the UN had when they faced the Chinese counterattack. The tenuous portrayal of advantage arising from having a shortened supply line provided an optimistic take on a grim situation to the American people.

Opinions in the press regarding how MacArthur conducted the war soon emerged following the Chinese counteroffensive. While most of the national coverage during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir offered little direct criticism of MacArthur, some members of the press voiced concern at this time. On December 1, 1950, the *Chicago*



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*Tribune* released an article titled “Criticize Split Command in U. S. Forces in Korea.”<sup>68</sup> This article explained that “in effect, Gen. MacArthur has two forces fighting in Korea, one labeled as an army and the other as a corps,” and that the Taebek mountains made it impossible for the two to support each other.<sup>69</sup> The author attributed the collapse of the allied offensive to MacArthur implementing this two-pronged approach.<sup>70</sup> Also on December 1, the *Washington Post* released an article titled “MacArthur Under Fire,” which told of Europe’s growing distrust of MacArthur’s “extracurricular activities, as well as the feeling that he has been acting virtually unsupervised.”<sup>71</sup> The article defended MacArthur and claimed that the General had made decisions that belonged in the political sphere because the UN itself had not made them as the war went on.<sup>72</sup> The *New York Times* author Lindesay Parrott covered the issue of military intelligence in an article released on December 3, 1950. Parrott stated,

That the United Nations command miscalculated the entire situation is now clear, though hindsight is easy. . . General MacArthur and his ground commanders believed only remnants of the wrecked North Korean army when actually they found themselves in contact with one third the whole Chinese Communist Army.<sup>73</sup>

Parrott laid out a series of events which suggested that the indications of possible Chinese intervention were ignored by MacArthur’s command in an effort to end the war before Communist preparations to relieve the North Korean Army were complete.<sup>74</sup> While some in the press reported MacArthur’s errors, others focused on supporting the General. The *Washington Post* reported on December 8 that four veterans groups had written President Truman and asked to give full authority to General MacArthur.<sup>75</sup> The veteran’s groups viewed limitations placed on MacArthur’s ability to fight in Manchuria as the cause for the problems in Korea.<sup>76</sup> The author, John Norris, expressed that contrasting views existed on Capitol Hill and amongst our European allies. Norris wrote that they charged MacArthur’s intelligence division of having failed at estimating China’s intentions and capabilities and that the UN offensive was a fatal mistake.<sup>77</sup> In this article, the *Washington Post* gave voice to the two major trains of thought at the time. The veterans were a part of the mindset that MacArthur was the man for the job and should have absolute power, and believed Washington was hampering his success.

Even after the encirclement of the First Marine Division occurred, many in the press remained very sympathetic when writing about MacArthur. The *Los Angeles Times*, in particular, released many of these articles, which favored MacArthur. The General had been stationed in California for a bit and his father had served as the commander of the Department of the Pacific, therefore MacArthur had connections to the State. The *Los Angeles Times* released an article by Alexander Holmes five days before the Battle of Chosin Reservoir titled “Korean War Interpreted in Terms of Football.” Holmes described the intricacies of the Korean War succinctly, “the difficulty is, of course, that the Korean adventure is an odd mixture of war, politics, and diplomacy.”<sup>78</sup> From beginning to end, the article blatantly blamed Truman’s decisions for problems in Korea. Holmes stated the success at Inchon “pushed the enemy to the 20-yard line,” however it was then that “the President ordered the coach to send in the second-stringers.”<sup>79</sup> Holmes claimed MacArthur was “the coach whose sole purpose is to win the game,” and “can’t be expected to understand double-thinking from on high.”<sup>80</sup> The “second stringers,” were the South Korean soldiers, and Holmes criticized their fighting capabilities as well as condemned the President for trying to have them fight. Holmes wrote that the South Koreans stalled after “the Americans made that brilliant run at Inchon,” and that the Americans “hurried to the rescue . . . and drove to the Red capital of Pyongyang.”<sup>81</sup> He then stated that the South Koreans bungled badly when they approached the Chinese border, and the Americans once more rescued them; Holmes never acknowledged the other members of the UN forces involved in the fighting.<sup>82</sup> He contended that Truman called the war a United Nation’s police action as a ploy to appease the war-sickened Americans, and even dubbed it a dangerously romantic motif.<sup>83</sup> He continued with a list of prior events in Korea and offered his interpretation of the events:

Mr. Truman ordered the Air Force and Navy into the fight but withheld the Ground Forces. He was going to rely on the UN-created Korean republic to defend its own land. This turned out to be a wishful delusion. So did the early notion that we would not bomb behind the 38th parallel. So did the theory that

American troops would not invade North Korea. So has every attempt to make the South Koreans look good.<sup>84</sup>

Holmes clearly viewed MacArthur as in the right and Truman in the wrong. Holmes claimed that with each predicament Truman caused, “MacArthur—sometimes in excess of specific orders—has had to go beyond the original intent of the White House.”<sup>85</sup> Truman’s was compared to an over controlling school president without having his own football experience or knowledge that micro-managed the football team with the amazing coach. Holmes’ article served to reaffirm MacArthur as an impeccable military strategist, and while the football analogy related MacArthur to the common man, it ostracized Truman. Truman was portrayed as meddling, while MacArthur was presented as a man doing the best with what he was given. On 29 November, 1950 the *Los Angeles Times* released a short article that told how President Truman would not speak on the Korean War. The article read, “Mr. Truman was smiling broadly when he greeted newsmen . . . he stopped smiling when a reporter asked him what he thought of the Korean situation. The President replied, ‘I don’t think,’ and quickly entered his car.”<sup>86</sup> This article made Truman appear to have scurried away from the discussion like a coward in this article, and served to reinforce the notion that MacArthur was the man who should make decisions in Korea.

Such favorability towards MacArthur by the *Los Angeles Times* continued during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir. On December 2, the *Los Angeles Times* released an article titled “MacArthur’s Hands Need Untying.” The author wrote that MacArthur believed he could not properly command his forces due to strict orders not to cross into Communist China, an action which would allow the Chinese to freely attack the United Nation’s Forces.<sup>87</sup> MacArthur stated that he was “enormously handicapped” although he understood the sound reasoning of the restrictions.<sup>88</sup> The article also stated that “there is some evidence there are people in Washington who enjoy seeing General MacArthur in a hole.”<sup>89</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* article supported MacArthur, which was in line with how the newspaper always had written about him. But this article completely ignored the logistical problems MacArthur created by separating and stretching his forces. The news account failed to acknowledge that even if MacArthur was allowed to attack China, his ground forces simply could not have effectively done so because they were spread too thinly across North Korea.

December 2nd featured another article from the *Los Angeles Times* titled “MACARTHUR SAYS: ‘UNDECLARED WAR EXISTS WITH CHINA’ 600,000 Enemy Troops Vastly Outnumber U.N. Force, General Reveals.”<sup>90</sup> The author quoted MacArthur, who stated that “this is a new war with a new opponent and a new army.”<sup>91</sup> This article appeared to be an attempt to help MacArthur save face for many reasons. Initially, the Chinese had been in Korea since October. In addition, the Army Center of Military History has since written that the first time the American and Chinese met in a significant battle was on November 1st.<sup>92</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* also reported that MacArthur’s head of intelligence stated that they knew of possibly 30 Chinese divisions in Korea or along the Yalu River when they further advanced on November 25, 1950.<sup>93</sup> This statement was made during the middle of the battle and read more like damage control because it claimed that the advance was the only way to truly know the intentions of the Chinese. The *Los Angeles Times* article did not mention any failure in military intelligence, although clearly there was one. Instead, it featured quotes from MacArthur that defended his actions. For example, “he explained that he is certain his command has done ‘everything that was humanly possible under conditions which existed.’”<sup>94</sup> MacArthur also stated that “the new allied offensive that opened just before the U.N. troops ran into the Chinese hordes was a ‘fortunate move . . . the only other recourse would have been to resign ourselves to the possibility of a devastating strike.’”<sup>95</sup> This was simply untrue, as the intention of the progression into North Korea was not investigation, but destruction. The UN forces were spread so far apart that they could not effectively support one another during the Chinese attack. A significant factor that allowed X Corps to escape Chosin Reservoir was Marine General O.P. Smith’s decision to advance with prudence, which allowed pockets of strength to form. It was these

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pockets of strength, not MacArthur's probing of the Manchurian border, which allowed members of X Corps to successfully turn the situation from a complete disaster into only a shallow victory for the Chinese. X Corps was able to inflict enough Chinese casualties to prevent a complete breakdown by the UN forces. Even after other writers in other major press stations acknowledged flaws in MacArthur's plan, the *Los Angeles Times* continued to support the General.

The *Los Angeles Times* published letters sent by their readers, Edward Engson and George Todt, to President Truman on December 11, under the title "Merits of Acheson and MacArthur." Engson called for the removal of Secretary of State Acheson, and asked Truman "why don't you let the great American, General MacArthur, really direct the Korean War drama?"<sup>96</sup> He called on true patriots to serve at this time and viewed MacArthur as "a symbol of character, integrity, statesmanship and bravery under great stress and strain of adversity."<sup>97</sup> Todt blatantly condemned Engson's "MacArthur can do no wrong," attitude and actually examined the Korean issue from a larger perspective.<sup>98</sup> He stated, "reality is that even a complete victory in Asia would be meaningless for us without first a comparable victory in Europe against Russia. The key to this situation is Germany, not Korea or even China."<sup>99</sup> Again, the two men represented the two trains of thought that MacArthur and Truman followed. Todt and Truman both focused more on the how the fighting affected the situation with the Soviet Union. Engson and MacArthur both lacked the patience for such a political climate and sought a swift conclusion to the war without regard for what would happen.

The *New York Times* conducted an interview with MacArthur on December 2, 1950, and released it the following day. The reporter asked "could this have been avoided?" to which MacArthur replied no, and added that he believed the Chinese had decided to give their military support to North Korea when the war began.<sup>100</sup> MacArthur attributed his problems to the overwhelming numbers of Chinese ground forces. Although repeatedly questioned about it, he believed his decision to advance could not have been altered to avoid the problems of fighting with the Chinese. Having his men so far north was important in discovering the purpose and strength of the Chinese, which prevented a greater disaster.<sup>101</sup> The author did not offer any criticisms of MacArthur's strategy and the tone of the interview remained positive towards the General. Although before the Battle of Chosin Reservoir MacArthur repeatedly stated he did not believe the Chinese would attack, this interview failed to mention that initial belief anywhere. The omission of that fact reinforced MacArthur's image as a great general, and perpetuated the notion that the disaster throughout North Korea was unavoidable.

Even though faults in MacArthur's execution of his command were abundant, the public still viewed him as a hero and most writers continued to write favorably about him. This apparent bias toward MacArthur could be linked to censorship practices by the Army at the time. The *Chicago Tribune* released an article titled "Pentagon Hides Facts on Korea from U. S. Public."<sup>102</sup> It claimed that the Pentagon kept all of the facts about the war from the people at the request of defense leaders.<sup>103</sup> It reported that "Pentagon officials have withdrawn behind a wall of silence leaving the delicate task of explaining to General MacArthur."<sup>104</sup> The *New York Times* also covered this, but wrote that the Army applied censorship indirectly at top levels.<sup>105</sup> The *New York Times* could not determine who ordered the censorship, but suggested that generals wanted tighter security.<sup>106</sup> The Army insisted that no direct censorship took place, however the *New York Times* argued that the Army achieved the same result by withholding information.<sup>107</sup> MacArthur was the primary representative to the press at the time affected how the press covered the situation. Generally, the articles throughout the press that covered the battle explained the gravity of the situation, vaguely explained what had allowed such a precarious situation to develop, and included explanations from MacArthur as to why the situation was out of his control. Since an explanation of the situation to the press fell on MacArthur's shoulders, it would make sense that favorable reports would emerge in newspapers that already had a history of supporting him.

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Much of the press coverage during the Chosin Reservoir Campaign focused on creating a positive perception of the fighting men. An optimistic take on the battle was offered by the *Los Angeles Times* on December 3rd. The article included quotes from General Smith, who said “we have hurt them badly,” in reference to inflicting casualties on six Chinese Communist divisions in the area of his First Marine Division.<sup>108</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Smith said “the overwhelming Red forces caused the Marines to pull back but, ‘there is nothing disorderly in their withdrawal.’ Smith said his forces counted 700 enemy dead in one small sector.”<sup>109</sup> The article finished by stating that “Chinese losses . . . were ‘way out of proportion’ to Marine casualties.”<sup>110</sup> The article did not question the situation in which the Marines found themselves. It also completely ignored the notion that a military intelligence blunder had occurred somewhere, which led directly to the Marines and the rest of X Corps’ problems. The press stressed how bravely the soldiers met the extremely adverse conditions. The initial withdrawal by the UN forces was reported as “orderly despite heavy enemy pressure,” by the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>111</sup> The *Tribune* released an article on December 3, 1950, which included a report from the First Marine Division that they had killed 6,000 Chinese soldiers and that pilots reported to have killed as many as 3,300 in northwest Korea.<sup>112</sup> This article did not mention any American casualty report, and thus, provided the sense that the Americans were almost winning the Battle.

Marguerite Higgins conveyed a sense of despair felt by the soldiers in an article released in the *Washington Post* on December 6th. Her article focused on the discouragement the Marines experienced during their retreat from Chosin Reservoir. One colonel said “I’m afraid we are all a part of a sad piece of history. A withdrawal on this scale is certainly something new in Marine Corps history.”<sup>113</sup> Higgins reported that most of the Marines felt if they had more soldiers they would have easily defeated the enemy, and that their pride was especially hurt. The article conveyed the Marines’ disbelief and perceived inadequacy, “retreat may happen to the Army, but how did the United States ever get in to such a predicament as to let this happen to the Marines?”<sup>114</sup> The Marines also told Higgins the boots they had did not work in the arctic temperatures and the deficient gear decimated up to half of the troops in some of the Marine companies. Higgins did not place blame nor offer any explanation for the lack of proper cold weather equipment. On December 11, 1950 the *Washington Post* released an article titled “Marine Guts Turn Disaster Into Day of Moral Triumph,” which succinctly summarized the campaign. The Marines were referred to by their tough nickname, “leathernecks,” and called the retreat from Chosin Reservoir “one of the fightingest retreats in military history.”<sup>115</sup> The author referred to the First Marine Division’s encirclement as a “. . . deathtrap sprung by many thousand Chinese and North Koreans,” and claimed that the Marines “. . . converted what looked like almost certain disaster into a moral triumph if not a military victory.”<sup>116</sup> The “almost certain disaster,” mentioned in the article was not attributed to anyone specifically. It paid no attention to the predicament MacArthur put his men in by advancing with poor logistics.

In an almost solemn tone, *The New York Times* released a news account entitled “Retreat From Changjin,” on December 11, 1950. This article described the various elements of the Battle, but focused on the retreat. “Surrounded and vastly outnumbered by savage enemies, fighting in temperatures as low as 25 below zero, not certain that there was any possible escape, the little United Nations army moved down in perfect order.”<sup>117</sup> The *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* all referred to the Chinese as “hordes,” and claimed they used human wave attacks, which served to dehumanize and derogate the Chinese. MacArthur’s choice to spread his forces was not discussed. Instead, the *New York Times* condemned the “Chinese or Russian strategy of sacrificing masses of men to win a position . . .” and editorialized “. . . we count human life too valuable for such suicidal practices.”<sup>118</sup> The article reminded the American people that this was not just about the conflict in Korea, but also sending a message to the Soviet Union. The feature vilified the Communists’ fighting style and exalted the American fighting man’s bravery. The *Chicago Tribune* released an Article by Lloyd Norman which

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offered a different take on the Chinese fighting style than was normally found in the national press. Norman's article explained that the Chinese force consisted mainly of foot soldiers with little armor or artillery support.<sup>119</sup> He suggested they used these overwhelming numbers to make up for this, but did not refer to their strategy as a "human wave." He even gave credit to the implementation of baseless mortar tubes, which the Chinese could accurately and rapidly deploy.<sup>120</sup> The Chinese Communists were presented as a dangerous force that knew how to implement their advantages and used ingenuity to make up for their impediments.

Drew Pearson was a leader among the national media who sought to bring attention to MacArthur's flawed strategy. Pearson described himself as "a newspaper man who has been working in Washington since 1925. That's about it."<sup>121</sup> Yes, a very humble self-description for a man who spent many years as one of the most famous news reporters in the country.<sup>122</sup> Pearson established a reputation for himself as a muckraker who "went after anybody in authority who offended their personal and political morality."<sup>123</sup> During the 1950s Pearson gained national popularity due to the feud that erupted between himself and Senator Joseph McCarthy. The rivalry began when Pearson criticized McCarthy's list of 57 names of Communists working in the State Department. His quarrel with McCarthy garnered more attention in retrospect. During the Korean War, however, Pearson's column led the way in questioning MacArthur's tactics during the Korean War. Pearson was an open critic of the military during World War Two, and seemed to always be dredging up a story that was of embarrassment to the US military. During the Korean War he was a constant critic of General MacArthur, and the primary reporter to bring attention to errors in MacArthur's strategy during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir. Pearson's column implemented this muckraking technique to increase public awareness towards the manner in which MacArthur executed his command in Korea.

MacArthur and Pearson were far from strangers by the time the Chinese encircled the X Corps in icy northeast Korea. In 1934, MacArthur had claimed that Pearson slandered him after Pearson wrote about the General's role in the Bonus March affair.<sup>124</sup> MacArthur sought to sue Pearson, but rescinded after Pearson threatened to make the public letters between MacArthur and his mistress.<sup>125</sup> In the initial stages of the Korean War, Pearson's articles on MacArthur did not criticize the General's capability as a military commander. He even stated that President Truman and MacArthur collaborated on the "Korean crisis extremely well."<sup>126</sup> But Pearson quickly scrutinized MacArthur, even at a time when the General was one of the most popular men in America. For example, MacArthur had the largest segment of the United States Army under his command prior to the war, and reporters sent word back that the soldiers fighting in Korea appeared poorly trained, a fault which Pearson directly pinned on MacArthur and his chief commander, General Walker.<sup>127</sup> Pearson also condemned MacArthur's directive to reporters that prohibited criticisms of command decisions or the conduct of Allied soldiers on the battlefield. On July 20th, Pearson detailed MacArthur's censorship practices, and suggested that observers wondered whether his "censorship may have caused not only the American public but perhaps the general himself to get the wrong view of what was happening in Korea."<sup>128</sup> Pearson asserted that if reporters questioned more, then perhaps American soldiers would have received better training and fought with more efficiency.<sup>129</sup> To place the blame on MacArthur for not preparing the soldiers for battle was unmerited because the General had many other responsibilities prior to this. In addition, during the war MacArthur commanded a multi-national force in Korea, not only the men he had under his command before this conflict. Nonetheless, Pearson's attack on the unconstitutional practices of MacArthur of censoring the media was well received in the press corp.

On August 31, 1950, Pearson reported that the White House cracked down on MacArthur out of eagerness to knock down the increasing eagerness of the military to encroach on the civilian branches of Government.<sup>130</sup> Pearson stated, "a lot of things have been going on which the public doesn't know about all pointing toward more and more military rule."<sup>131</sup> Pearson cited the examples of the Navy attempting to hold onto islands in the Pacific that were supposed to go under a civilian governor, eleven generals secretly asking Congress for funds, and

MacArthur's repeated attempts to dictate foreign policy.<sup>132</sup> Pearson wrote that after hearing of this, President Truman was "determined that the original concept of military duty laid down by the Founding Fathers shall be followed, namely that it is the military job to win wars not declare them."<sup>133</sup> Pearson viewed MacArthur as a man with dangerous ambitions. He scrutinized MacArthur's actions based on the premise that the General coveted the Presidency, and wrote in an extremely critical manner about MacArthur whenever the opportunity arose. During the drive into North Korea, Pearson again questioned the General's actions as he had always done.

Pearson began to examine issues raised by MacArthur's advance into North Korea when the General first sent his forces toward the Chinese border. In his column on November 8, 1950, Pearson wrote that Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated that UN troops must stop before they got near the hydroelectric projects along the Yalu River, which supplied most of the power for Manchuria, and that approaching these projects would prompt a response from the Chinese similar to one from the United States if a large Mexican army approached Boulder Dam.<sup>134</sup> Although Pearson did not write in a critical tone about MacArthur, this comparison showed the gravity of the UN forces approaching the Manchurian border and how much of a role it played in provoking Chinese intervention. Pearson also indicated that the only reason MacArthur received permission to approach the border was because South Korean troops, who were sent to act as military police, found themselves outnumbered and this enabled MacArthur to request permission to rescue them. Moreover, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not like to overrule a commander in the field.<sup>135</sup> On November 25th, Pearson wrote in his column, "meanwhile, US intelligence continues to be baffled over the behavior of the Chinese troops in North Korea. . . Either they have no quarrel with the United States, or else are sucking our troops into a trap."<sup>136</sup> In retrospect, many could not understand how Pearson was more perceptive about the Chinese intentions than MacArthur and his staff. Pearson did not publish his prescient comment in the *Washington Post*, but the *Ludington Daily News*. This indicated that this was only conjecture by Pearson since he did not repeat it in the national media. Pearson subtly indicated that MacArthur became aware of this risk, but chose to seek a rapid and complete destruction of the North Koreans for personal glory.

Six days into the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, on December 2, 1950, Pearson published a column titled "Bungled Intelligence is Charged." This article focused on Secretary Acheson and his claim that World War Three was imminent if it had not already begun.<sup>137</sup> Pearson reported that Acheson had attributed the Korean crisis in large part to mistakes made by MacArthur's intelligence staff, and cited the example of the General's military intelligence reporting 60-65,000 Chinese troops intervening throughout Korea while the true number was almost four times as large.<sup>138</sup> He finished this article by quoting Secretary Acheson. "This blunder might have been avoided if we had a centralized and alert intelligence agency in Washington, instead of depending almost entirely on MacArthur's intelligence scouts."<sup>139</sup> Pearson included the last, critical clause at a time when most reporters would have omitted such a comment because of the general's popularity with the American people. Pearson referred to the intelligence scouts in a manner that made them an extension of MacArthur, not the US military, to further undermine the efficacy of MacArthur's command.

Pearson was well aware of the widespread admiration with which MacArthur was imbued. On December 3rd, Pearson recognized that "for a long time, criticism of General MacArthur in the Pentagon Building was like criticizing George Washington."<sup>140</sup> He also observed that "some mild criticism is now being expressed privately," about MacArthur's faulty military intelligence.<sup>141</sup> "This was an error of disastrous and major proportion . . . it was based on this intelligence that Washington authorized MacArthur to advance toward the Yalu River as quickly as possible."<sup>142</sup> He called the head of MacArthur's intelligence, General Charles Willoughby, "one of the hero worshippers around him who tends to the 'Supreme Commander' what he wants to hear rather than disagreeable facts."<sup>143</sup> Pearson believed that Willoughby operated as a pawn of MacArthur and pointed out that the intelligence

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was not only wrong about the number of Chinese in Korea, but had a history of making mistakes. Pearson alluded to the fact that the only reason given for the violation of the 40-mile buffer zone between UN forces and the Manchurian border came when the intelligence claimed there were few enemy soldiers in the area and because of this MacArthur requested South Korean troops sent north to maintain order.<sup>144</sup> The South Koreans suddenly became overwhelmed by an enemy that was not supposed to be there, and MacArthur then asked permission to send US troops to rescue them. Pearson believed MacArthur's latter action was responsible for the Chinese surprise counteroffensive.<sup>145</sup> On December 11th, Pearson's column, titled "Legislators Spurred by Korea Report," featured an ominous quote from a member of the Joint Chiefs, "we've got to face the facts. Our military position today is worse than it was after Pearl Harbor."<sup>146</sup> Pearson reported that the Seventh Infantry of X Corps had been shredded to ribbons while the Marines of X Corps were in better shape and were holding a line together for evacuation purposes.<sup>147</sup> Pearson did not offer any sort of optimistic take on the battle. He failed to elaborate on the braveness of the UN soldiers fighting nor did he demonize the Chinese soldiers. With a critical tone, he painted a desolate portrait of the situation in which the men of X Corps found themselves after venturing into North Korea.

Pearson covered the greater Cold War climate in an article on December 10, 1950. As X Corps retreated from Chosin Reservoir, he informed readers that "one of the most important things to be remembered about North Korea is that there are... a total of about one million Red Army troops in Siberia generally."<sup>148</sup> Pearson explained that this was why the State Department had "kept warning the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who in turn were supposed to inform MacArthur, that the Russians would never permit an American army to come within 40 miles," of the Red Army stationed in Siberia.<sup>149</sup> At this point, Pearson believed that the Red Army invading Japan was a possible threat.<sup>150</sup> Pearson suggested without explicitly stating it that MacArthur had more than likely ignored warnings from the Joint Chiefs. He mentioned that Chinese soldiers were using opium during the fighting, but did not attach much significance to it.<sup>151</sup> Pearson completed his article with quoted sections from newspapers in Europe that uniformly condemned MacArthur's actions in Korea.

MacArthur did not know the strength of the enemy south of the Yalu River, though he thought it small. To reconnoiter would have been wise; to attack foolish. A standstill in Korea was strongly urged two weeks ago. . . hoped a cease-fire order could be arranged and a buffer state created. These ideas were still ripening when the new MacArthur offensive opened. They died away at once. The general has too often pretended to ignore the United Nations. American charges alone will not solve the problem.<sup>152</sup>

Pearson offered this foreign perspective as another way to indirectly impugn MacArthur's decision to advance further north. Europe disagreed with MacArthur's decisions in North Korea, and Pearson sought to establish similar sentiment in America.

On December 12, 1950, *The Washington Post* released Pearson's column titled "'Paper' Curtain for Chinese Reds," which analyzed the attack on the First Marine Division. Pearson's article began with an ominous statement: "Worried Pentagon strategists will only talk about it privately, but one of the most serious errors of any recent war was responsible for trapping the First Marine Division and the (Army's) two Seventh Infantry regiments."<sup>153</sup> The newspaper story attributed three key reasons to the First Marine Division's encirclement at the Chosin Reservoir. The first problem he identified was the lack of battle communication between the 8th Army and X Corps, which Pearson claimed forced the two armies to talk to each other through the command in Tokyo, and that only General MacArthur knew the reason for this flawed system of communication.<sup>154</sup> Second, both armies were racing north, spreading out the troops instead of driving in force with a compact spearhead formation because MacArthur had reassured them they had nothing to fear from the Chinese.<sup>155</sup> Third, Pearson noted that MacArthur ignored the French and British advice to avoid the 700 mile long border between China and North Korea.<sup>156</sup> The article questioned why soldiers advanced so close to the Manchurian border and why they were in such close proximity to the Chinese border in the first place. In short, the column blamed MacArthur and his defective strategy. Finally,

Pearson commented, “during this period, MacArthur had time to send five messages to American newspapers explaining why he was not to blame in Korea.”<sup>157</sup> Pearson suggested that MacArthur wanted to make himself look good to the American public. The tone of the news account was extremely unforgiving throughout. Pearson knew of MacArthur’s political ambitions, and believed the General’s excuses were attempted damage control in an effort to maintain his presidential aspirations.<sup>158</sup>

After the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, Pearson wrote an article titled “MacArthur Puzzles Pentagon,” which dealt mainly with MacArthur’s intelligence reports.<sup>159</sup> In this article, Pearson revealed the reports MacArthur gave publicly on Chinese troop estimates as compared to what the General told the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On December 2, MacArthur had publicly stated that there were 500,000 Chinese troops in Korea which was in contrast to his statement from six days earlier when he had stated there were not enough Chinese in Korea to interfere with the offensive.<sup>160</sup> Also, MacArthur’s head of intelligence, General Willoughby, cabled home that only 96,000 troops were there on December 6th.<sup>161</sup> Willoughby also cabled that the attacking Chinese soldiers only carried a rifle or sub-machine gun and three grenades, an extremely light amount of firepower for an attacking army.<sup>162</sup> Pearson ended his article with the statement that “. . . either Willoughby is wrong or MacArthur’s press communiques had deceived the public.”<sup>163</sup> Clearly something was amiss with the MacArthur command as it could not get its story straight, and Pearson brought media attention to it. Pearson asserted that MacArthur had exaggerated the figures to make the situation appear worse than it was in reality. While the statement of 500,000 soldiers in Korea by MacArthur in this particular article was not incredibly far off from the 380,000 that were there in actuality, it prompts scrutiny that figures as high as 800,000 were reported to the press. Whether MacArthur had actually lied or not no longer mattered. His reputation no longer proved unanimously that of a war hero.

Pearson’s attack continued on January 8, 1951 in an article titled “Korea Differences Recounted.”<sup>164</sup> Pearson explained that “to understand fully the tragic headlines from Korea, it is necessary to know the main strategy being followed in the Pentagon Building, plus some of the differences between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General MacArthur.”<sup>165</sup> In this article, Pearson opined that the first and foremost reason for the disaster was “the Joint Chiefs were lax in letting MacArthur spread his troops over North Manchuria as easy prey to the Chinese.”<sup>166</sup> He also noted that some Pentagon leaders decided that the practical move in Korea was to retire, and that the military situation in Asia appeared to be a bottomless pit before the Chinese surprise attack.<sup>167</sup> He rebuked MacArthur’s declaration that it was impossible to forecast the Chinese offensive. He argued that since the Chinese authorities repeatedly announced that they would not let American forces camp on the Manchurian frontier, there was no justification for the statement that the UN forces were surprised.<sup>168</sup> Pearson also reported that the enemy’s assault did not exceed 250,000 soldiers, and that newspapers in Europe already unveiled this fact to their public because they did not have any censorship.<sup>169</sup> On July 10th, Pearson released an article which again criticized MacArthur’s head of intelligence, General Willoughby. Pearson stated,

Two errors of judgement laid at General Willoughby’s door are: [First] the National Security Council decision that Korea’s threat was to its ‘internal security.’ Thus was made despite a report from General Willoughby’s own staff that there were some 70 tanks in North Korea. Tanks are strictly an offensive weapon, and now the key to the Communist successes. Yet Willoughby attached no significance to the presence of these tanks. [Second] Overrating the South Korean army.<sup>170</sup>

Pearson’s article portrayed Willoughby as an incompetent, and cited the example that Willoughby had dismissed Korea as “not important,” only a few weeks before the North Koreans invaded the South.<sup>171</sup>

MacArthur would command the UN forces for only another four months before he was relieved of his command on April 11, 1951. He was succeeded by General Matthew Ridgeway, who took over command the 8th Army after General Walker perished in a car accident. Then, fighting tactics for the rest of the conflict in Korea shifted from



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swift open engagements, what had been done in World War Two, to a trench- filled war of attrition reminiscent of World War One. Over 1.2 million people are believed to have died during the three years of fighting.<sup>172</sup> The Korean War would end in 1953, much like it began, with a Communist state in the North and a Democratic state in the South. The decision to relieve MacArthur of his command remains a topic of debate. Soon after the change in command, political journalists wrote that it was “doubtful if there has ever been in this country so violent and spontaneous a discharge of political passion as that provoked by the President’s dismissal of the General ... Certainly nothing to match it since the Civil War.”<sup>173</sup> The vast majority of Americans still viewed the General as a larger than life war hero. “Not until the death of President Kennedy would the nation experience so profound and simultaneous of an experience.”<sup>174</sup> One historian stated that MacArthur’s dismissal was

a great day for Reds and Internationalists and the faint-hearted American leaders .No longer would they be plagued by the soldier who opposed their brazen attempts to neutralize and emasculate American interests and betray American honor and courage. No longer would this old warrior, almost single-handed, attempt to block the surrender of the State Department, the Pentagon and the White House to a U.N. Security Council dominated by One-Worlders, Socialists and communists and by nations more interested in trade with Russia and Red China than with the preservation of a free world.<sup>175</sup>

Truman stated in a message:

General MacArthur's place in history as one of our greatest commanders is fully established. The Nation owes him a debt of gratitude for the distinguished and exceptional service which he has rendered his country in posts of great responsibility. For that reason I repeat my regret at the necessity for the action I feel compelled to take in his case.<sup>176</sup>

Some scholars who study the Battle of Chosin Reservoir agree that the advance proved overzealous, while others viewed it as the only means to end the war quickly. Some argued that MacArthur should have had more control in Korea, while others insisted that he was a man driven by his ego and only tried to secure a speedy victory to bolster his reputation and presidential aspirations. General MacArthur remains a figure of disparity among scholars largely because he did a lot of commendable things as a commander, but his motives always seemed unclear. The beginnings of MacArthur’s debate-filled legacy became apparent in the press coverage during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir. Although the bulk of the press coverage during the battle covered it without significant editorial comment, many articles showed that the press began to take an increasingly stronger stance against MacArthur. Pearson’s articles strongly influenced the group shifting its allegiance away from the General. MacArthur no longer relied on his previous success in battle as an excuse for the manner in which he executed his command. During the Battle of Chosin Reservoir a line became apparent, separating writers who sympathized with the very popular general, and writers, like Pearson, who were not overawed by MacArthur’s previous successes and openly criticized the General’s actions.

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