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IN THE JAWS OF THE DRAGON:
The United States Second Infantry Division
in the Battle of the Chongchon River, Korea
November 24 - December 1, 1950

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha
by
Robert B. Bruce
April, 1994

UMI Number: EP73070

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University
of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Dedicated in Loving and Respectful
Memory to My Father:

Corporal Robert B. Bruce, Sr.
1930-1978
Machinegunner, Company C, Ninth Infantry Regiment
United States Second Infantry Division

Died of Causes Connected to Wounds Received
in Action With the Enemy at the
Battle of the Chongchon River

"In thy faint slumbers I by thee have watched,
and heard thee murmur tales of iron wars."
Shakespeare, Henry IV

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest and sincerest thanks to my mother Dr. Willa M. Bruce. Dr. Bruce has been a constant source of support and inspiration to me throughout my undergraduate and graduate career, and the thesis you now see before you could never have been written without her devotion and help. For my mother, the Korean War was not waged on the battlefields of Asia. It was fought by her in the wards of the Veteran's Administration hospitals of West Virginia, as she tried to raise three young boys while slowly losing her husband to the ravages of a war she could not remember and he could not forget. I will forever be indebted to her for the strength and courage she displayed during those terrible years.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all the veterans who gave so willingly of their time to help make this thesis possible. I would especially like to single out for thanks the President of the Ninth Infantry "Manchu" Association, Mr. Alvin Moore. Alvin was a tremendous help to me at the Second "Indianhead" Division's 72nd Annual Reunion held in Ft. Worth Texas in 1993. Alvin "took me under his wing" at this reunion, and made sure that I was able to not only get my interviews, but also have a good

time. He has treated me with the utmost respect and courtesy since I first wrote to him in 1992, to inquire about his service in the Battle of the Chongchon River. I am proud to call Alvin my friend.

Colonel Reginald Hinton also deserves a special thank you. Colonel Hinton provided me with a tremendous amount of information on the Battle of the Chongchon River, and wrote me several times offering additional insights on this battle and the U.S. Army during the Korean War. His story is well told in this thesis, and I am honored that he was willing to share so much of his time with me to help make this thesis a reality.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisor at the University Library Acquisitions Division, Mr. William Kvasnicka. Throughout my graduate school career, and a substantial portion of my undergraduate career as well, Mr. Kvasnicka was always willing to change my work schedule, and allow me to take time off, so that I could finish my school work. As anyone who has tried it knows, working full-time while attending college is not an easy proposition. It is hard work juggling the two responsibilities, and without Mr. Kvasnicka's help and support I never could have done it. My co-worker Mrs. Sybil Oliver also deserves a special thank you. Sybil always had

time to listen when the stress of work and school simply overwhelmed me, and I needed a friend to talk to. I will forever treasure her friendship, and will always be grateful to her for being there for me.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the University Committee on Research, and the Rhoden Graduate Thesis Scholarship Committee, especially Dr. Richard Thill. The financial support provided by the awards I received from those two committees, enabled me to travel to Texas for the Second Division's reunion, and thus provided invaluable support to the researching and writing of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis committee members for the time and energy they devoted to reading and commenting on this thesis. Dr. William Pratt, Dr. Joong-Gun Chung, and my committee chair Dr. Bruce Garver, gave freely of their time and offered helpful advice and encouragement all along the way. I would especially like to single out Dr. Garver for the help and guidance he provided to this project. His willingness to sponsor this thesis topic, and his help in securing financial awards to sponsor the research was invaluable. Dr. Garver's tireless editorial work with this thesis enabled it to become the polished and refined product which you now see. Although it was difficult for me at times to

accept his criticisms, they were virtually all justified and were a tremendous help to the writing of this thesis.

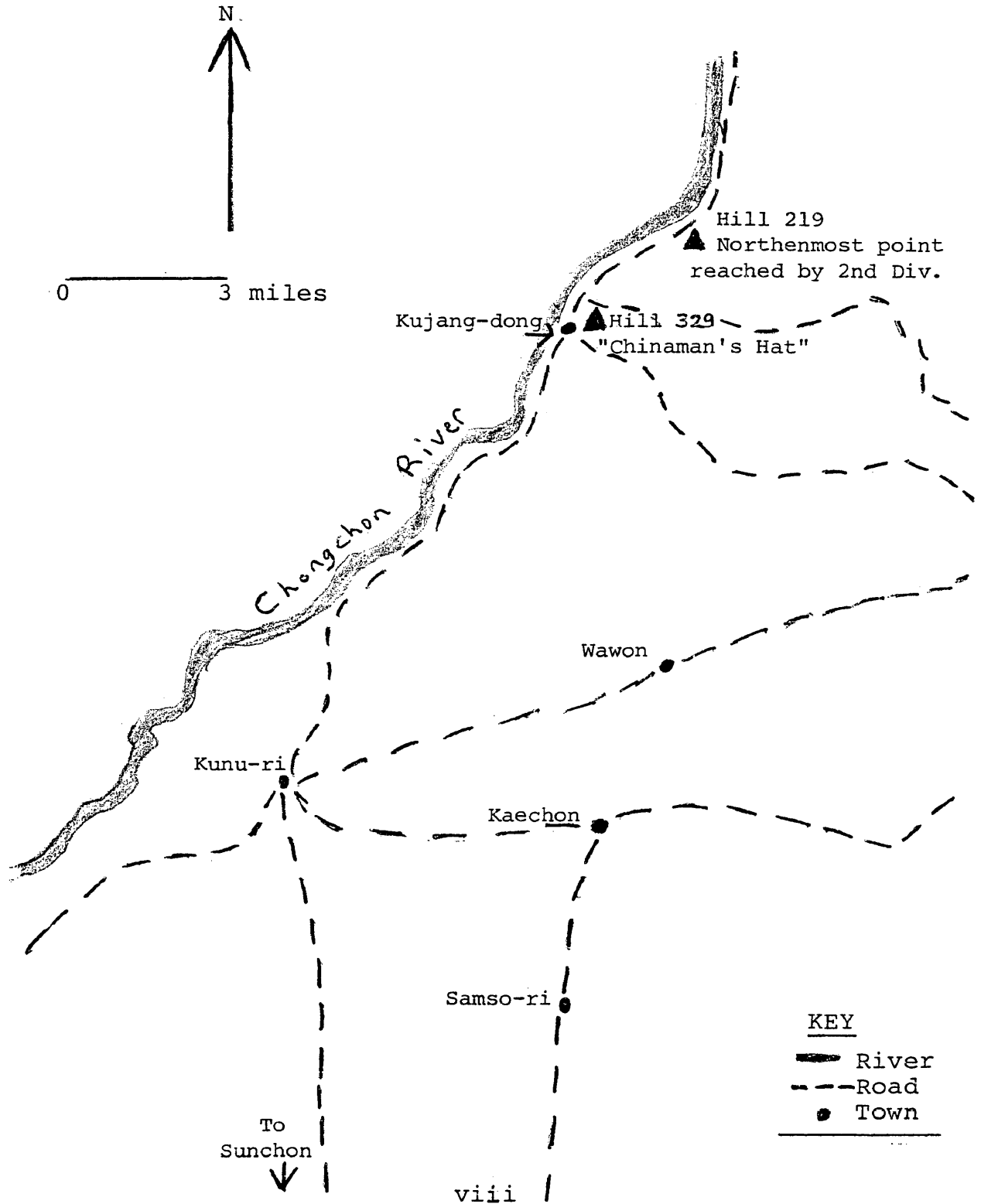
Abstract of Thesis

In the Jaws of the Dragon: The United
States Second Infantry Division in the
Battle of the Chongchon River, Korea
November 24 - December 1, 1950

The Battle of the Chongchon River was the worst defeat suffered by the U.S. Army since the fall of Bataan and Corregidor in 1942, and claimed more American lives than any other battle ever fought by the United States in the post-World War II era. The United States Second Infantry Division was the principal American division engaged in this battle, as it fought a desperate rearguard action to hold off overwhelming numbers of Chinese soldiers in order to allow other American and South Korean divisions to escape to safety.

This thesis is a detailed study of the actions fought by the United States Second Infantry Division in the Battle of the Chongchon River. The thesis utilizes interviews conducted by the author with Second Division veterans of the battle, as well as official United States Army documents and records, to demonstrate that the valiant delaying action fought by the Second Division in this battle greatly slowed the Chinese Second Phase Offensive and helped to save the Eighth United States Army in Korea from destruction.

BATTLEFIELD OF THE CHONGCHON RIVER



INTRODUCTION

This thesis provides a detailed examination of the actions fought by the United States Second Infantry Division in the Battle of the Chongchon River, Korea. The thesis seeks to demonstrate that the Second Infantry Division fought valiantly in this battle and greatly slowed the Chinese army's Second Phase Offensive, and therefore helped prevent the Chinese from accomplishing their strategic objective of destroying the Eighth United States Army.

This thesis introduces new information on the Battle of the Chongchon River, gathered from the author's interviews and correspondence with sixteen veterans of the U.S. Second Infantry Division who fought in the battle. The thesis is also based on a thorough examination of the U.S. Army's official records of the Battle of the Chongchon River, and a comprehensive study of the existing literature on the subject.

The Battle of the Chongchon River was the worst defeat suffered by the United States Army since the surrender of Bataan and Corregidor in 1942, and it precipitated the longest retreat in the history of the U.S. Army. In the forty-three years that have passed since the fight at the Chongchon, no battle has claimed more American lives. The Second Infantry Division not only suffered more casualties

than any other division in this battle, but also received the most post-battle criticism.

Controversy has surrounded the Battle of the Chongchon River from the moment it ended. Only weeks after the fight at the Chongchon was over, the United States Army launched a formal investigation into the reasons for the American defeat there. The commanding general of the Second Infantry Division, Major General Laurence Keiser, was relieved of command by his superior Eighth Army commander Lieutenant General Walton Walker. Both Walker and his superior, supreme commander General Douglas MacArthur, were also heavily criticized for the mistakes they made during the battle. Yet in spite of its importance in American military history, there has been little scholarly interest in the Battle of the Chongchon River.

I was inspired to write about the Battle of the Chongchon River in 1987 when, as an undergraduate student majoring in History at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, I read a best-selling book by the British author Max Hastings entitled The Korean War.¹ Hastings' book was well received both in Britain and the United States, and it was made a selection of the History Book Club and the Military History Book Club. After reading the book I was disturbed by many of Hastings' negative, and unsubstantiated, comments about the United States Army. His chapter on the Battle of

the Chongchon River especially outraged me.

When he wrote on the Battle of the Chongchon River in his book The Korean War , Hastings completely ignored the desperate delaying action fought by the Second Infantry Division from November 25-29, 1950, and instead focused his attention on the disaster which befell the division on November 30th along the Kunu-ri - Sunchon road. Hastings alleges that the Second Infantry Division performed in a cowardly fashion during the battle, and his convoluted prose drips with anti-American rhetoric, most of which is completely undocumented.²

Among other allegations, Hastings makes the outlandish charge that panic stricken soldiers from the Second Infantry Division inflicted casualties on the British 27th Commonwealth Brigade, as they fired wildly, running away from the Chinese ambush.³ This statement is not footnoted, and there is absolutely no evidence to support this charge. The statement by Hastings is especially infuriating as, by his own accounting, the British suffered only 31 casualties in this battle. By contrast the U.S. Second Infantry Division lost over 4,500 men in the Battle of the Chongchon River, more casualties than the British would suffer during the entire Korean War. This is a typical example of Hastings poor scholarship on the battle in particular, and the Korean War in general.

Lieutenant Colonel Walter Killilae, who assisted Hastings in some of his research, later wrote to me stating that he very much regretted having helped Hastings. Killilae stated that much of what he told Hastings was twisted by that author, and taken out of context. Among other misrepresentations, Hastings even misspells Killilae's name!⁴

As I began my research on the Battle of the Chongchon River, I consulted Keith McFarland's excellent work The Korean War: An Annotated Bibliography. This bibliography contains a comprehensive listing of books, articles, personal memoirs, and doctoral dissertations which have as their subject any facet of the Korean War. Of its approximately 2,500 entries, there are only 3 which pertain specifically to the Battle of the Chongchon River.⁵

One of these entries is an article written by John Fralish entitled "Roadblock" which appeared in the now defunct Combat Forces Journal in 1953.⁶ The other two entries are both by S.L.A. Marshall. The first is an article, also published in Combat Forces Journal, entitled "They Fought to Save Their Guns." This article was actually an excerpt from Marshall's then forthcoming book The River and the Gauntlet, and this volume is the third and final entry in McFarland's list on the Battle of the Chongchon River.⁷

Because McFarland's bibliography appeared in 1986, I thoroughly searched the abstracts of articles published from 1984 to the present on Korean, Military, and U.S. History. This search revealed no journal articles on the battle. Continuing my search for information, I contacted University Microfilms Incorporated (UMI), the primary source for obtaining copies of doctoral dissertations and master's theses. UMI personnel sent me a computer printout of their thorough search of their computer databanks which contain dissertations and theses going back to the turn of the century. Therein no dissertation or thesis was found which discussed the Battle of the Chongchon River.⁸

Two books that provide detailed coverage of the Battle of the Chongchon River have appeared since the publication of McFarland's bibliography: Roy Appleman's Disaster in Korea and Billy Mossman's official U.S. Army history Ebb and Flow.⁹ I found both of these books to be invaluable in the preparation of my thesis. Although these books cover broad areas of the Korean War, they nevertheless stand with S.L.A. Marshall's River and the Gauntlet, as the best sources for information on the battle.

As part of its investigation into the reasons for the American defeat at the Battle of the Chongchon River, the U.S. Army sent Brigadier General (then Colonel) S.L.A. Marshall to Korea in December 1950, to interview men who had

fought in the battle. Marshall later turned these interviews into a book, The River and the Gauntlet, which was published in 1953. This volume remains today as the only book to devote itself entirely to the Battle of the Chongchon River. Since many of the U.S. Army's official records were destroyed in the fighting and in the subsequent withdrawal from North Korea, Marshall's book has stood for four decades as the primary source for information on the fight at the Chongchon River.¹⁰

Although an invaluable source for first hand accounts of the fighting, Marshall's work does have its weaknesses. The main fault in Marshall's work is that it is not footnoted at all and aside from mentioning his interviews, Marshall does not cite any other sources for his information. I have read Marshall's book several times and have concluded from the information he presents that he did use at least some of the official U.S. Army records, although he himself does not mention this.

Marshall's work is further limited by the fact that it was written and published while the Korean War was still going on. As a result much of Marshall's information, especially on the Chinese army, is vague and even incorrect. For example only in rare instances does Marshall mention Chinese unit designations. When a Chinese army unit is mentioned by its designation, like the CCF 94th Infantry

Regiment, the information is usually incorrect. I have made extensive use of U.S. Army documents on the battle which were still classified as "Secret" at the time Marshall's book appeared and have drawn on official U.S. Army records to document the Chinese order of battle as well.

As part of my research for this thesis, I located and corresponded with several key figures who appear in Marshall's book. I interviewed many of these men, and other veterans with whom they put me in touch with, at the 72nd Annual Reunion of the Second "Indianhead" Division Association, held in Ft. Worth, Texas from July 21-25, 1993. These men offered not only a unique perspective on the battle but also interesting insights into Marshall's research methods. All of these men agreed that Marshall's book gave an accurate portrayal of the battle, and all offered laudatory praise of Marshall. The weakness in Marshall's interviews was the atmosphere of suspicion in which they were conducted. As Colonel Reginald Hinton explained to me:

We thought they [Marshall's investigation team] were trying to blame someone for the loss of the battle, and we didn't want to get anybody in trouble. So it's not that I lied or anything like that, it's just that I didn't offer any additional information either. I answered the questions they put to me with little or no comment.¹¹

Not all of the men mentioned in Marshall's work were actually interviewed by him. Some were placed in the book

as part of an interview gathered from another individual. For example Lieutenant William "Sam" Mace makes a prominent appearance in Marshall's chapter on the Chinese ambush along the Kunu-ri - Sunchon road. Mace's first name is erroneously given as "Jim" in the book, because the unnamed individual who Marshall interviewed provided inaccurate information. Since Marshall has been relied upon as the primary source of information on the battle, other authors have quoted Marshall and compounded his mistake by also referring to Mace as either Jim or James.¹² I personally interviewed Sam Mace, and his testimony on the battle differs from that attributed to him by Marshall's unnamed source. I have incorporated this new testimony into the thesis along with his correct name.

Roy Appleman's Disaster in Korea is a ponderously written work on Eighth Army's campaign in northwest Korea from mid-November to mid-December 1950. Appleman was the first U.S. Army historian of the Korean War and in this position authored the mammoth South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu, which is the official account of the Korean War from June 25th, 1950 to November 24th, 1950.¹³ Although originally scheduled to write the next volume covering the Battle of the Chongchon River, as well as X Corps' battle at the Chosin Reservoir, Appleman left the project. Many years later Appleman began writing again as a private citizen, and

in rapid succession published several works on the Korean War, using material he had originally gathered when assigned to the project by the U.S. Army.

Disaster in Korea, published in 1989, is Appleman's book covering the Battle of the Chongchon River and it is superior to Marshall's work on the same subject in several ways. The most readily noticeable difference is that Appleman extensively footnotes and documents his sources for information. These sources are almost exclusively U.S. Army documents and letters that Appleman collected from senior officers in his capacity as the official historian of the battle. In its use of primary documents, Appleman's work is without parallel.

The weakness in Appleman's work is a lack of originality in his accounts of small unit actions. Despite a rather sharp critique of Marshall's book that Appleman includes in his discussion of sources, Appleman repeatedly lifts whole sections from Marshall's work to describe the fighting. This is somewhat surprising considering the quality of Appleman's scholarship throughout most of the book. As mentioned previously this thesis includes not only new interviews with the men in Marshall's (and Appleman's) book, but also new interviews with men who never spoke with Marshall. Consequently, the small unit actions described in this thesis are completely original and do not appear in any

other writing on the Battle of the Chongchon River.

In regard to sources of information on the Battle of the Chongchon River Appleman makes the comment:

It is a matter of regret that some of the Engineer survivors (2nd Engineer Combat Battalion) did not leave a record or that a report was not assembled soon after the event and made a part of the official records of the 2nd Division. Such a record would have revealed details of this unit's valor below Kunu-ri in the afternoon and evening of 30 November 1950.¹⁴

This thesis includes interviews and correspondence with four members of the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion who survived the Battle of the Chongchon River, and it is with a great sense of honor that I add their testimony to the body of literature on this battle.

When Appleman left the U.S. Army's historical project on the Korean War, the task of providing the official account of the Battle of the Chongchon River was delegated to Billy C. Mossman. Progressing in fits and starts Mossman's book Ebb and Flow took almost a quarter century to complete, finally being published in 1990.¹⁵ Mossman's official history is comparable to Appleman's book in the sense that they both used many of the same U.S. Army documents as sources. Mossman's work is more general than Appleman's or Marshall's, as it covers the Korean War from November, 1950 - July, 1951. Thus only two chapters of the book deal with the Battle of the Chongchon River.

Mossman's book does a wonderful job of describing the Battle of the Chongchon River in the sense of its strategic importance to the entire United Nations command in Korea. At the same time, because the book is written at an operational/strategic level, there is extremely scanty coverage of fighting at battalion level and lower. The few accounts of such actions that Mossman does provide are in the main drawn from Marshall's The River and the Gauntlet. As mentioned previously, I have used my own interviews to provide information on tactical operations as well as official U.S. Army records, although I have interpreted many of these records differently than Mossman or Appleman.

There are several general histories of the Korean War which provide good coverage of the Battle of the Chongchon River. Chief among these is T.R. Fehrenbach's This Kind of War.¹⁶ Fehrenbach commanded a rifle company in the Second Infantry Division during the Korean War and his book provides an excellent narrative on the Battle of the Chongchon River. Although he relies heavily on Marshall for much of his information, Fehrenbach nevertheless provides some new data as well.

Bevin Alexander, another former U.S. Army historian of the campaign, gives a good (albeit brief) account of the battle in his provocatively titled Korea: The First War We

Lost.¹⁷ Clay Blair's The Forgotten War is a wonderful source of information on the Korean War, and he provides an incredible amount of biographical detail on U.S. Army officers down to battalion level. Blair also gives a solid and detailed account of the Battle of the Chongchon River, although he, like most others, relies almost exclusively on S.L.A. Marshall for his information.

As the son of a machinegunner who fought at the Chongchon River, I grew up with the stories of gallantry, cowardice, brilliance and stupidity that made up this terrible battle. When I reached adulthood and began to investigate the battle from a military historian's perspective, I combed through archival collections reading lengthy war diaries, and intelligence reports. I was very disappointed to discover that in addition to the horrendous human loss suffered by the Second Division at the Chongchon River, many original documents had also been lost in the fighting. For example, the records of the Second Division's ordeal in the retreat from Kunu-ri on the final day of the battle were mere sketchy outlines composed months after the event. Only Marshall's The River and the Gauntlet provided any information at all on the ambush below Kunu-ri.

I therefore decided that the only way to form an accurate picture of what had happened to the Second Infantry Division along the banks of the Chongchon River in November

1950, was to seek out and interview the men who were actually there. I was able to find many of these men and interview them at great length concerning their experiences in the battle. I consider these interviews to be the greatest contribution of this thesis to the literature on the Battle of the Chongchon River.

Because of the heavy casualties suffered by the Second Infantry Division at the Chongchon River and because some veterans of the fight have died during the past forty-three years, I was extremely pleased to be able to locate so many survivors of the battle. Many of these men told me that only because my late father had fought in the battle with them, were they willing to speak with me about this extremely traumatic event in their lives.

For many of these men, including my father, this battle was the most horrible of all in which they fought. Several veterans told me about having "flashbacks" about the battle, and many suffered from nightmares for years afterwards. All this helps demonstrate how war scars the soul of a man as much as it scars his body.

I believe the tales of these men give a human face to the mere numbers of troops and casualties which historians often impersonally bandy about as if they were cardboard pieces on a game table. These men are real, and their stories are real. Some are heroes and others just ordinary

soldiers. But what they all have in common, is that they were combat soldiers who fought at the Battle of the Chongchon River. When their country called, these men answered, and on the killing ground of Korea they fought this nation's enemies with rifle, machinegun, and even bare fists.

The only reward these veterans seek now is that their tale be told so that future generations of Americans might know the price that they and other veterans paid for the freedom we now enjoy. Robert Hammersmith, who served with the Second Division in the battle, told me:

I feel it's great what you're doing about this because like they say it's the 'Forgotten War'. You mention it to people and they don't know what the hell you mean. They don't realize how many people got killed over there. They have no idea what the guys went through over there. I'm glad to see you do something like this because somebody's got to get this stuff and document it, and put it down to let the damn people know.¹⁸

Above all else, this thesis presents the story of these forgotten soldiers of the "Forgotten War."

ENDNOTES

1. Max Hastings, The Korean War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).
2. Ibid., pp. 140-145.
3. Ibid., p. 143-144.
4. Letter to author from Lt. Colonel Walter Killilae, January 6, 1993.
5. Keith McFarland, The Korean War: An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), p. 446. McFarland only lists one entry for the Battle of the Chongchon River in his subject index, but a close reading of the text by this author revealed three entries.
6. John Fralish, "Roadblock", Combat Forces Journal 6 (1953): 32-37.
7. S.L.A. Marshall, "They Fought to Save Their Guns", Combat Forces Journal, 3 (1953): 10-18 and S.L.A. Marshall, The River and the Gauntlet (New York: Morrow, 1953).
8. Author's correspondence and telephone conversations with UMI sales representative Mary Zach, September - November 1992.
9. Roy Appleman, Disaster in Korea (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1989) and Billy Mossman, United States Army in the Korean War: Ebb and Flow November 1950 - July 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990).
10. See; Headquarters 2d Infantry Division, Command Report, Period From: 1 December 1950 Through: 31 December 1950 and Clark Munroe, The Second United States Infantry Division in Korea 1950-1951 (Tokyo: Toppan, 1952).
11. Author's interview with Colonel Reginald Hinton, July 23, 1993.
12. See index in Marshall, Gauntlet and Appleman, Disaster.
13. Roy Appleman, The United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1961).

14. Appleman, Disaster, p. 326.
15. See discussion of this in Clay Blair, The Forgotten War (New York: Times Books, 1987).
16. T.R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War (New York: Macmillan, 1963).
17. Bevin Alexander, Korea: The First War We Lost (New York: Hippocrene, 1986).
18. Author's interview with Sergeant Robert Hammersmith, July 24, 1993.

CHAPTER I

WAR IN A DISTANT LAND

Leaves of autumn hurrying through the courtyard--
Last year the patter of dancing footsteps.
This year the sound of falling tears.
Deep red maples mirrored in still, deep water--
Last year the heart of a happy poet.
This year the blood of a warrior slain.

Yi Soong-in, "Autumn Song", 14th Century Korea

On November 23, 1950, Thanksgiving Day was celebrated by the men of the United States Second Infantry Division, 8,000 miles from home in the heart of North Korea. The Second Division was part of a multi-national force deployed to the Korean peninsula, under the authority of the United Nations, to repel the invasion of South Korea by communist North Korea.¹ The Second Division had seen heavy fighting during three months in Korea, but little did its men know that their greatest trial lay ahead. In the next week, the men of the Second Division would be engaged in the Battle of the Chongchon River, the largest and most important battle they had ever fought in Korea. Although Americans would little remember this battle, the survival of the United States Eighth Army in Korea came to depend in large part on the fighting abilities of the men of the United States Second Infantry Division.

The United States Second Infantry Division was commanded by Major General Laurence Keiser, a West Point

graduate (Class of 1917) and a decorated combat veteran of the First World War.² The Second Division was composed of the 9th Infantry Regiment, 23rd Infantry Regiment, and 38th Infantry Regiment. There were also artillery, tank, and engineer battalions attached to the Second Division, which brought the total strength of the division at the time of the Battle of the Chongchon River to approximately 15,000 men.³

A U.S. Army infantry division in 1950 was composed of three infantry regiments, each with an authorized strength of approximately 3,700 men. These three regiments were the principal combat units of the division. Each regiment was comprised of three battalions, and each of these battalions contained four companies. In addition to the infantry regiments, there were usually four artillery battalions (of 18 guns each) assigned to an infantry division, although this varied greatly during the Korean War. A tank battalion, and an engineer battalion were also attached to an infantry division, along with medical, communication, and transport companies.

The Second Infantry Division had been in continuous service as a component of the U.S. Army, since the division was first activated in 1917. The Second Division had an enviable combat record in both World Wars, and was retained as an active unit in the wake of U.S. demobilization

following World War II. The men serving with the Second Infantry Division in 1950, were volunteers drawn from all parts of the United States. The Second Division was stationed at Ft. Lewis, Washington on June 25, 1950, when news arrived that the communist Democratic People's Republic of (North) Korea had invaded the Republic of (South) Korea.⁴

President Harry Truman interpreted the North Korean attack as but another move by a pawn of the Soviet Union in the Soviet Unions's quest for world domination. As Republic of Korea (ROK) forces collapsed and the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) began to overrun the south, Truman decided the United States had to halt this aggression and ordered the commitment of American forces to the Korean peninsula. At the same time, Truman called for an emergency session of the United Nations Security Council and immediately proposed that its members commit forces to the struggle as well. The Security Council passed this proposal and established a United Nations command under General of the Army Douglas MacArthur who was designated as Supreme Commander.⁵

Shortly afterward, the United States Second Infantry Division had been alerted for overseas deployment and was shipped to Korea, arriving in August 1950. Within days of its arrival in Korea, the Second Division joined in the vicious struggle raging around the vital South Korean port

of Pusan.

In fierce battles with the North Koreans along the Naktong River, the men of the Second Infantry Division received their baptism of fire. The Second Division performed well in these early battles, and played a major role in defeating the North Korean attempts to break through to Pusan. In one incredible week from August 31 - September 5, 1950, seven men from the Second Infantry Division won their nation's highest award for bravery in battle, the Medal of Honor.⁶

On September 15, 1950, United States forces landed behind North Korean lines at the port of Inchon cutting NKPA supply routes to North Korea, and the disintegration of the North Korean army began. Within a matter of weeks, North Korean resistance in occupied South Korea had collapsed, and United States, ROK, and other United Nations forces were fighting their way northward.⁷

Flushed with success, President Truman and General MacArthur made the decision to cross into North Korea and win a complete victory by conquering the communist aggressors.⁸ On September 30, 1950, the ROK 3rd Division crossed the 38th Parallel which formed the boundary between North and South Korea. Within days United States and other United Nations forces followed, and the United Nations attempt to conquer North Korea had begun. Unheeded in the

euphoria of victory, were ominous warnings that began to be issued by North Korea's fellow communist neighbor to the north, the People's Republic of China.

Communist China

Fresh from its victory over the U.S.-backed Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War, Mao Zedong's communist regime in China interpreted all American intentions in Asia in the worst possible light. The thought of a U.S.-led coalition of armed forces sweeping towards their border sparked fear in the Chinese. The destruction of a fellow communist nation in Asia could also have serious implications for China. If North Korea could be destroyed, the Chinese reasoned, then the United States might begin to think in terms of "rolling back" communism in Asia, and China would be next on its list.⁹

On October 2, 1950, Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai sent a message to the United Nations through the Indian ambassador to China in which Zhou warned that if any non-Korean forces crossed into North Korea, China would consider itself obliged to intervene in the war.¹⁰ Neither MacArthur nor the Truman administration were impressed with this warning, and both considered it to be a bluff. Several days later, the first American forces crossed into North Korea.

Over the years, many scholars have argued that if only

South Korean Forces alone had crossed the 38th Parallel into North Korea, China would not have intervened in the war. This argument has been destroyed by the remarkable findings presented by Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Xue Litai in their book, Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War. Taking advantage of the new academic freedom in the former Soviet Union, Goncharov and his colleagues gained access to previously unavailable Soviet documents, including a cache of messages exchanged by Mao and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin just before China's entry into the Korean War.

In a telegram dated October 2, 1950, the same date that Zhou issued his warning and before American forces had entered North Korea, Mao informed Stalin that "We (Chinese) have decided to send some of our troops to Korea under the name of Chinese People's Volunteers to fight the United States and its lackey (ROK President) Syngman Rhee and to aid our Korean comrades."¹¹

Soon afterward, the Chinese began secretly deploying vast armies across the Yalu River into North Korea. Mao appointed General Peng Dehuai as commander-in-chief of the Chinese forces deployed to Korea. On October 14th, 1950, Peng told his troops why they were being sent to fight in Korea:

The U.S. imperialists are employing seven divisions and the lackey troops of Syngman Rhee in unbridled aggression against the Korean

revolutionary government and people. Having crossed the 38th Parallel, the enemy is continuing to advance northward with all his might. We will actively support the North Korean people to oppose the aggressors and help them strive for independence, freedom, and liberation. If we do not dispatch troops to actively support the Korean revolutionary government and people, the reactionaries at home and abroad will be swollen with arrogance. We will be put under direct threat if U.S. imperialism should occupy all of Korea.¹²

Shortly after the capture of the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, elements of Lieutenant General Walton Walker's Eighth United States Army encountered Chinese soldiers for the first time near the village of Unsan, North Korea. In a desperate battle lasting from October 25th - November 6th, 1950, a ROK division and a U.S. regiment were badly mauled by the Chinese. The United Nations offensive north was halted in its tracks, as U.S. and ROK units pulled back into defensive positions to counter an anticipated all-out assault by the Chinese. Then as suddenly as they had appeared, the Chinese broke contact with United Nations forces and faded back into the bleak hills of North Korea.¹³

A strange calm descended over Korea. After approximately two weeks of only sporadic contact by American and ROK forces with the Chinese, MacArthur decided that the initial intervention by the Chinese army had been nothing but a bluff. On November 24, 1950, he ordered a resumption of the United Nations offensive with the intention of

pushing north to the Chinese border and bringing all of North Korea under United Nations control.¹⁴

Repeated American aerial reconnaissance of the area between the UN lines and the Chinese border revealed no large enemy troop concentrations.¹⁵ Ominously though, Chinese pilots flying the most modern Soviet fighter aircraft, the Mig-15, began making repeated sorties from air bases in China against American reconnaissance flights over North Korea. In spite of this provocation, the Truman administration adhered to its policy of prohibiting U.S. aircraft from entering Chinese airspace to engage the enemy planes or to attack their bases.¹⁶

On November 9, 1950, an American RB-29 propeller driven reconnaissance plane was attacked over North Korean airspace near the Yalu River by two Chinese Mig-15's and was so badly damaged that it crashed while attempting to land at its airbase. After this incident, the United States Air Force forbade the use of the slow RB-29's near the Chinese border due to their vulnerability to attack. The U.S. Air Force, with only three squadrons of jet propelled reconnaissance aircraft in Asia, had severely limited intelligence gathering capacity.¹⁷

Additionally, in the days before the resumption of the United Nations offensive, billowing black smoke from forest fires covered large areas of North Korea, further hampering

aerial reconnaissance. U.S. reconnaissance planes had spotted similar fires just before the battle with the Chinese at Unsan, and U.S. Army intelligence was gradually becoming aware that the Chinese set these fires in order to mask daylight troop movements. The Chinese were drawing a cloak of secrecy over their vast armies massing in North Korea.¹⁸

On November 23, 1950, MacArthur's military intelligence chief, Major General Charles Willoughby, estimated that there were between 44,000 and 70,000 Chinese soldiers in all of Korea, along with scattered remnants of the North Korean army. According to Willoughby, the Chinese and North Koreans intended to fight a delaying action with United Nations forces, while retreating north into China. This estimate of communist strength and intentions was accepted by both Lieutenant General Walton Walker's Eighth Army in Korea, as well as by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C.¹⁹

Although correct in its estimate of North Korean strength, both MacArthur's military intelligence gravely underestimated Chinese strength and intentions. By November 23, 1950, approximately 300,000 Chinese soldiers had entered Korea and rather than retreating, this massive force was preparing to launch its own offensive.²⁰

November 23, 1950

On November 23, 1950, the United Nations forces celebrated Thanksgiving Day, with what many would later describe as the best meal they ever had in Korea. Even frontline troops were served turkey with all the trimmings. A joyous mood of optimism prevailed among all U.N. forces regarding their imminent attack north, and talk of victory parades in Tokyo and being home by Christmas flew up and down the grapevine. Sharing this jubilant mood were the officers and men of the United States Second Infantry Division.²¹

The Second Infantry Division was a component of the Eighth United States Army in Korea. On November 23, 1950, the Eighth Army was comprised of:

I Corps: U.S. 24th Infantry Division, British 27th Commonwealth Brigade, ROK 1st Division

IX Corps: U.S. 2nd Infantry Division, U.S. 25th Infantry Division, Turkish Brigade

ROK II Corps: ROK 6th Division, ROK 7th Division, ROK 8th Division

Eighth Army Reserve: U.S. 1st Cavalry Division, U.S. 187th Airborne Regiment, British 29th Brigade, Filipino Battalion, Thai Battalion.²²

Walker's plan of attack called for all three corps to advance abreast of one another with I Corps in the west, IX

Corps in the center, and the ROK II Corps in the east. The Eighth Army reserve would follow behind the advancing corps and be prepared to either exploit any sudden enemy collapse, or reinforce a threatened sector of the line, as events warranted.²³

Further to the east of Eighth Army, across the rugged Myomyang Mountain range, the U.S. X Corps was deployed in northeastern Korea. Because U.N. forces lacked the manpower to establish a solid frontline across the Korean peninsula, Eighth Army and X Corps would be fighting their own individual battles out of touch with one another.²⁴

Communist opposition to the U.N. offensive seemed to be a remote possibility because no Chinese had been encountered in over two weeks, and no United Nations unit had engaged a North Korean force larger than a regiment since October. Eighth Army commander Lieutenant General Walton Walker perceived the main obstacles to his advance to be the rugged hills and steep valleys, which made overland marching through North Korea an extremely arduous task. In addition, the broken terrain made radio communication between units extremely difficult and made physical contact virtually impossible.²⁵

November 24, 1950

On November 24, 1950, General of the Army Douglas

MacArthur issued the following communique from his headquarters in Tokyo, Japan:

The United Nations massive compression envelopment in North Korea against the new Red armies operating there is now approaching its decisive effort. This morning the western sector of the pincer [Eighth Army] moves forward in general assault in an effort to complete the compression and close the vise. If successful this should for all practical purposes end the war, restore peace and unity to Korea, enable the prompt withdrawal of United Nations military forces, and permit the complete assumption by the Korean people and nation of full sovereignty and international equality. It is that for which we fight.²⁶

With those words, the great United Nations offensive to end the war in Korea began.

As part of the Eighth Army's advance in northwestern Korea, the United States Second Infantry Division moved north on November 24 with its regiments in an inverted pyramid battle formation: the 9th Infantry Regiment on the west, the 38th Infantry Regiment on the east, and the 23rd Infantry Regiment and division artillery to the south. This great offensive punch by the Second Infantry Division encountered only the expected sporadic skirmishing by small retreating enemy units.²⁷

After making solid advances against little to no resistance on November 24th, the U.N. offensive resumed at dawn on November 25th. Eighth Army units in the west again made excellent progress, encountering virtually no opposition. Although to the east of the Second Infantry

Division, Major General Yu Hae Ueng reported to Eighth Army Headquarters that his ROK II Corps was encountering heavy enemy resistance.²⁸ These reports from the South Koreans were not taken seriously by Eighth Army Headquarters. With some justification, the U. S. Army had a low regard for the abilities of the South Korean soldiers. What the undertrained and underequipped ROK's regarded as "heavy resistance" could be the same amount that United States troops regarded as "light."

The Second Infantry Division also ran into a sharp fight on November 25th at its northernmost point of advance, Hill 219 which lay alongside the main road leading north through the valley of the Chongchon River. In a fight which lasted all day on November 25th, Company B of the 9th Infantry Regiment was able to secure only part of the hill against determined resistance by enemy troops positively identified as being Chinese.²⁹ Despite this engagement, Second Division Headquarters seems to have been no more alarmed by developments than Eighth Army was.³⁰

As the frigid darkness of an autumn night fell across the rugged hills of North Korea on November 25th, 1950, the temperature dropped to 20 degrees fahrenheit. The icy winds blowing out of the sub-arctic wastes of Manchuria made it feel much colder.³¹ The men of the Second Infantry Division shivered as they lay on the open ground, but still, most

kept their optimism. The delay at Hill 219 was only temporary, many of the men thought, and soon this whole damned business would be over.

But what if the Chinese had not retreated like MacArthur was telling them? What if the Chinese were still there, watching and waiting for the moment to strike? If that were true then there would be Hell to pay for the over-optimism of MacArthur, the political miscalculations of Truman, and the soldiers own lack of caution. Indeed there would be Hell to pay. And on the night of November 25, 1950, the blare of Chinese bugles announced that Hell had come to collect.

ENDNOTES

1. In November 1950, the ground element of this United Nations force consisted of the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division, 2nd Infantry Division, 3rd Infantry Division, 7th Infantry Division, 24th Infantry Division, 25th Infantry Division and 187th Airborne Regiment, as well as the U.S. 1st Marine Division. Great Britain sent the British 29th Brigade as well as the British Commonwealth (British, Australian, and Canadian troops) 27th Brigade and a Royal Marine Commando company. Turkey sent a brigade sized unit dubbed the Turkish Army Command Force. The Philippines and Thailand each had one battalion in Korea as well. The Republic of Korea Army consisted of ten infantry divisions.
2. Clay Blair, The Forgotten War (New York: Times Books, 1987), p. 201.
3. This is my own estimate of the Second Infantry Division's strength when the Battle of the Chongchon River began on November 24, 1950. The authorized strength of the U.S. Second Infantry Division was 18,931 officers and men. At the time of the battle, however, all U.S. Army divisions were understrength due to the casualties suffered during the previous five months of combat with the North Korean army. This manpower shortage was partially alleviated by using South Koreans in United States divisions. Nevertheless, Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall still estimated that United States Army divisions were "about 30 percent short of full strength." See minutes of National Security Council meeting held on November 28, 1950, p. 11.
4. Clark C. Munroe, The Second United States Infantry Division in Korea, 1950-1951 (Tokyo: Toppan, 1952), p. 3.
5. Clay Blair, The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950-1953 (New York: Times Books, 1987), pp. 65-73. For a complete discussion of President Truman's decision to enter the Korean War see: James F. Schnabel, U.S. Army in the Korean War: Policy and Direction, the First Year (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1972), Harry S. Truman, Memoirs by Harry S. Truman, Volume 2: Years of Trial and Hope (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), Joseph Goulden, Korea: The Untold Story of the War (New York: Times Books, 1982), and Richard Whelan, Drawing the Line (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1990).

6. Munroe, Second, pp. 15-22 and pp. 205-208.
7. For a complete account of the Inchon campaign see: Lynn Montross and Nicholas Canzona, U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch Headquarters, USMC, 1954), Robert Debs Heinl, Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968), and Shelby Stanton, America's Tenth Legion: X Corps in Korea (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989).
8. MacArthur and Truman each have their own version of the events leading to the decision to invade North Korea. For more information see: Douglas MacArthur, Reminiscences (New York: Time, Inc., 1964), Truman, Memoirs, vol. 2., and Goulden, Korea.
9. For a detailed examination of the motives behind China's entry into the Korean War see: Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis & Xue Litai, Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), Allen S. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War (New York: Macmillan, 1960) and Russell Spurr, Enter the Dragon: China's Undeclared War Against the U.S. in Korea, 1950-51 (New York: Newmarket Press, 1988).
10. Goulden, Korea, pp. 281-282.
11. Gonchorov, et al, Uncertain, p. 275.
12. Ibid., pp. 284-289.
13. Roy Appleman, United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1961), pp. 675-681 & 689-708.
14. William Manchester, American Caesar (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1978), pp. 603-606. Also see D. Clayton James, The Years of MacArthur: Volume 3, Triumph and Disaster (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), pp. 527-528.
15. Major General James Skeldon was a Lt. Colonel commanding the 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division at the Battle of the Chongchon River. In a telephone interview with this author on February 9, 1993, Skeldon related that on the day before his battalion was scheduled to move north he commandeered an artillery spotter plane, and had its pilot fly him north to scout his proposed route of advance. Skeldon reported flying at altitudes as low as 100

hundred feet, weaving through the valleys and across the ridges which lay to the north of his position. Skeldon flew to within a few miles of the Chinese border before returning. He related to me that he did not see any soldiers, North Korean or Chinese, and only a few stray civilians.

16. Robert Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983; revised edition), pp. 228-229.
17. Ibid.
18. Headquarters Eighth United States Army Korea (EUSAK), G2 (Intelligence), G-2 Daily Staff Report for War Diary, Period 232400 to 242400 November 1950, p. 3. Note: In this and other U.S. Army documents, time period is often described by a six digit code referencing the day and military time of the period covered by the document. Thus, the above time period covered is from midnight November 23rd to midnight November 24th, 1950.
19. Appleman, Naktong, p. 754.
20. Billy C. Mossman, United States Army in the Korean War: Ebb and Flow (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1990), pp. 51-55.
21. Roy E. Appleman, Disaster in Korea (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1989), p. 40. Although most units did enjoy a Thanksgiving dinner, several of the veterans I interviewed said that they did not get to share in this feast.
22. Mossman, Ebb, p. 29.
23. Ibid., pp. 45-47.
24. There is a tremendous amount of literature on X Corps' battle with the Chinese in November-December 1950, mainly focusing on the U.S. 1st Marine Division deployed near the Chosin Reservoir. The best accounts of X Corps' battle are: Roy Appleman, East of Chosin (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), Montross & Canzona, U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, vol. 3: The Chosin Campaign (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters USMC, 1957), Robert Leckie, The March to Glory (New York: World Publishing Co., 1960) and Eric Hammel, Chosin: Heroic Ordeal of the Korean War (New York: Vanguard Press, 1981).

25. T.R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 304. Fehrenbach commanded a rifle company in the Second Infantry Division during the Korean War and, although his work is a general history of the war and not a memoir, he provides numerous insights into the Battle of the Chongchon River from a first-hand perspective.
26. Major Vorin E. Whan Jr., ed., A Soldier Speaks: Public Papers and Speeches of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 227-228.
27. Historical Section, G-2, HQ 2d Infantry Division, The 2d Infantry Division and the Korean Campaign Volume III, (Part I), p. 28.
28. Headquarters Eighth United States Army Korea, War Diary, November 25, 1950; Entry #1, paragraph 4.
29. United States Second Infantry Division War Diary, Period 250001 Nov 50 - 252400 Nov 50, Entry #9.
30. Appleman, Disaster, p. 71.
31. EUSAK G-2, Period 242400 - 252400 November 1950, p. 3. Every veteran of the Battle of the Chongchon River that I interviewed disputed the official Eighth Army weather report concerning the temperature at the time of the battle. All claimed that the temperature was much colder than that officially recorded. I attribute this to the then unknown concept of chill factor.

CHAPTER II

NIGHT OF THE DRAGON

**"Let your plans be as dark and impenetrable as night
and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt."**

Sun Tze, The Art of War

Shortly after dark, on the evening of November 25, 1950, the 30,000 Chinese soldiers of General Han Kuang-chu's Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) 40th Army emerged from their hiding places in the caves, mineshafts, and villages of the North Korean countryside. The CCF 40th Army was considered by Chinese military leaders to be the finest unit in their army, and as such it was chosen to lead the Chinese Second Phase Offensive in the west. The target of Han's assault was the United States Second Infantry Division, then deployed opposite his 40th Army, along the valley of the Chongchon River.¹

The men of Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, Second Infantry Division held a small hill astride the main axis of the CCF 40th Army's attack. Expecting to renew their own offensive north the following morning, "Charlie" Company had not dug defensive positions but rather took advantage of whatever natural cover was available. On the far right of the company, PFC Robert B. Bruce aided his gun crew in setting up their .30-caliber machinegun in a

small depression near the top of the hill. It provided little cover, but was better than nothing at all. Since Bruce and his crew did not plan on staying in the position long, they were not too concerned about the lack of defensive preparations.²

Approximately one hundred yards to Bruce's left, Corporal Alvin G. Moore helped his squad set up their .30-caliber machinegun. Moore wasn't concerned about an enemy attack that night either, as he was more worried about staying warm.³ Icy winds howled through the valleys of North Korea, and swirled about the hilltop position of Charlie Company, cutting right through the summer uniforms that the men had been wearing since arriving in Korea in August. Pile caps were the one item of winter clothing that had been universally issued to the frontline troops. Other cold weather gear was still being distributed at the time of the attack north, and many units had yet to receive their issue.⁴

All was quiet when, from out of the frigid night, the blare of Chinese bugles startled the men of Company C. Almost simultaneously mortar fire began to land on their positions. Men scrambled from sleeping bags and struggled to put on their boots, tripping over each other in the darkness. Bruce was already awake, as he had been on watch when the Chinese attack began. Bruce quickly threw back the

bolt on his .30-caliber machinegun, locking and loading the weapon, his eyes searching for enemy movement in the moonlit darkness.⁵

Suddenly, Chinese soldiers leapt up no more than 30 yards from Bruce's gun position, and using their peculiar underhand sidearm throw, hurled a volley of grenades at him. Bruce opened fire with his machinegun while the grenades were still in midair, cutting down several of the Chinese grenadiers before they regained cover. The grenades themselves fell short of Bruce's position, and exploded harmlessly on the frozen earth. In this battle, and in the coming battles in Korea, Chinese soldiers would prove to be notoriously weak-armed grenade throwers.⁶

Behind the Chinese grenadier skirmishers, Bruce could see the main Chinese assault force moving up the hill at him in large waves of men, firing their rifles and sub-machineguns as they came. The staccato bursts of the enemy's small arms fire added their lethality to the ghastly orchestra of battle, whose sounds filled the frozen night air on Charlie Company's hill. Bruce swung his .30-caliber machinegun in a wide arc, bringing the attacking Chinese under fire, and killing or wounding dozens of them. But the holes in the Chinese lines were rapidly filled, as the seemingly endless lines of enemy soldiers continued to close on Bruce's position.⁷

On the left flank of Charlie Company, Alvin Moore was also firing on the Chinese infantry with his .30-caliber machinegun. Moore recalled inflicting heavy casualties on the Chinese infantry. But onward the Chinese came, running full speed, hurling grenades, and firing their deadly sub-machineguns. The Chinese assault wave swept right over Moore's gun position, as the enemy soldiers went running past him on either side.⁸

In daylight, American airstrikes could have wreaked havoc on the dense Chinese formations. But the Chinese attack along the Chongchon River, as all their offensives in the Korean War, came at night. In 1950 few American aircraft were capable of flying close support missions at night, because of their inability to identify and distinguish between enemy and friendly forces in the darkness.

The Second Infantry Division had six battalions of artillery attached to it, and one of these, the 37th Field Artillery, began to provide supporting fire to the 9th Infantry Regiment.⁹ Like close air support, the artillery could only be directed against Chinese targets not in close proximity to friendly forces, for fear of hitting their own men. The Chinese were well aware of the limitations that night operations and close combat placed on American forces, and had tactics designed to exploit these weaknesses to the

utmost. The commander-in-chief of the Chinese forces in Korea, Peng Dehuai, told his men on the eve of their entry into the Korean War:

Our resolute and brave tactical operations consist in having the courage to fight close combat using dynamite, fighting the enemy with bayonets, and throwing hand grenades. The enemy is afraid of such operations.¹⁰

Deprived of its air support, and unable to use its supporting artillery effectively, the U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment was forced to engage an enemy force of overwhelming numerical superiority in a "straight-up" infantry fight. The outcome was almost a foregone conclusion.

As the Chinese assault waves swept over Company C's position, they began to regroup on the other side of the hill in an attempt to surround the Americans. Corporal Alvin Moore recalled: "The Chinese began yelling at us in English; 'What's the matter GI?', 'You no like me GI?', 'We kill you tonight GI', and other things of that nature."¹¹ Though several men that were in Moore's squad had "bugged out" and ran, Moore stayed at his post firing his weapon until "the barrel glowed red" in the darkness.¹² Finally Moore ran out of ammunition. At almost the same time he heard an explosion, and the machinegun on his right (probably Bruce's gun) ceased firing. Out of ammo, and realizing his position was no longer tenable, Moore disabled his machinegun so as to render it useless to the Chinese.

Then, along with the other two remaining members of his squad, Moore began to move down the back side of the hill.¹³

Meanwhile on Charlie Company's right flank, Bruce's machinegun position had also been flanked. Small arms fire was raking the small depression in the ground that served as cover for Bruce and his crew, and they began taking casualties. The man serving as Bruce's loader was killed, and then another man was cut down as he tried to replace the loader. Realizing that the Chinese had his position surrounded, Bruce began to think that this might be the end of the line. Fully aware of how North Korean's had tortured and killed American prisoners, and with no reason to assume the Chinese would be any different, Bruce made up his mind to go down fighting, rather than surrender.¹⁴ Having to serve as his own loader, Bruce reached across the shallow depression to drag over another box of ammunition for his machinegun. As his hand groped through the darkness for the ammo box, he suddenly felt an enemy hand grenade laying on the ground. He had never seen it come in. Instinctively, Bruce grasped the deadly missile, and in one motion hurled it skyward while bringing his hands over his face. The grenade detonated in mid-air. Bruce remembered a red flash, and then everything went black.¹⁵

In a matter of minutes Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment had been overrun and destroyed. Elsewhere

the rest of the 1st Battalion was being hit hard, as well as the 3rd Battalion. Incredibly, the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Regiment was not engaged in battle on the night of November 25th.¹⁶ Even as its sister battalions were being destroyed, the 2nd Battalion was hardly aware there was even a battle going on. The rugged terrain of Korea so channeled the sounds of battle through the valleys that the Chinese were able to attack individual U.S. companies and battalions, without being detected by nearby U.S. units.

In addition, the Chinese displayed an incredible ability to infiltrate American positions and attack vulnerable rear areas, especially headquarters. Attacking American headquarters units became a favorite and effective tactic of the Chinese in the Battle of the Chongchon River. Everything a frontline American infantry company needed in the way of artillery or air support, or reinforcements, had to be requested through battalion and regimental headquarters. If the lines of communication between the headquarters and the frontline units could be cut, either by destroying the headquarters, forcing it to displace, or keeping it so busy defending itself that it could not function properly, then the frontline companies would be isolated from any support and could be chopped up piece-meal.

Serving as a jeep driver with Headquarters Company, 1st

Battalion, 9th Infantry was PFC James D. Moran, an 18 year-old volunteer from Omaha, Nebraska. Moran was asleep with the other men in his company, on the floor of a small hut in a tiny Korean village where 1st Battalion of the 9th had established its headquarters. Around 2200 hours, Moore and his men were jolted awake by the sound of automatic weapons fire in the headquarters compound. Hurriedly dressing and grabbing their rifles, Moran and the rest of his company spilled out into the compound. Moran headed for his jeep to await his Captain, not realizing that virtually everyone else in the headquarters, had gone to a low stone wall on the east side of the village. Suddenly, Moran found himself in a one-on-one firefight. Recalled Moran:

An enemy soldier, in civilian clothes, opened fire from the rear on me with a "burp gun", very inaccurate weapon, automatic fire. I dove behind [a] haystack and he was still shooting at me into it. I crawled to the other side. He had backed into the moonlight shadow, but was still firing. I sighted just below the muzzle flash, and fired, presumably killing him as he ceased firing. As it was then quiet, I ran to the wall where the others were.¹⁷

The man Moran killed could have been either a North Korean guerilla thousands of whom operated in the Eighth Army's rear, or a Chinese infiltrator who had slipped past friendly lines in order to attack the battalion headquarters.¹⁸ Regardless of the man's actual identity he and the other men in his group succeeded in severely

disrupting 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry's headquarters, and ensuring that its infantry companies would be without support during the Chinese assault.

Moran soon joined up with the rest of battalion headquarters behind the stone wall. By this time, enemy forces were swarming over the compound and even the wall was no longer a safe place. An unknown officer gave the order "Everyone up this hill!". There were two hills there, however, and so half the little force went up one hill, and half went up the other. Moran's best friend "Rickey" called out to him as he was half-way up one of the hills, "No Jim! Up this hill!" But Moran was almost to the top of his hill, and Chinese soldiers had poured into the gap between them. It was the last time Moran saw his friend.¹⁹

The Chinese in the valley below assaulted the hill that Moran's friend and others had gone up. The moon came out from behind the clouds, illuminating the battlefield, and Moran's little band of men watched in horror as the Chinese massacred his friend's group on the other hill. Moran and the others then braced for the expected Chinese attack on their position, but it never came. When the battlefield finally quieted shortly before dawn, Moran's group slipped off their hill and headed south, reaching friendly lines a few hours later.²⁰

Elsewhere, the survivors of Charlie Company, 1st

Battalion were also trying to make their escape. Corporal Alvin Moore had reached the back of his hill, along with the two remaining members of his squad, expecting to find the rest of Company C reforming there. Instead, Moore found only seven other men, including his company commander. With Chinese soldiers swarming everywhere, Moore's group found a small gully which they climbed down into and began to move south along. As Moore's group worked their way through the gully, Chinese soldiers above them were at times as close as 10-15 feet away. But staying low, and staying quiet, Moore's men avoided them. Rounding a turn in the gully, Moore and his men stumbled into a group of Korean laborers. The U.S. Army used Korean civilians to carry food and ammunition to frontline units on hilltops (such as Charlie company's position) which supply trucks could not reach. It was just such a labor party that Moore's group had stumbled into.²¹

Luckily for the Koreans, Moore's men did not shoot for fear of attracting the Chinese still all around them. As Moore's men prepared to attack the South Koreans with clubbed rifles and knives, the Korean laborers threw up their hands, and frantically tried to communicate in broken English who they were. Moore remembered that:

We thought they were Chinese or North Koreans, so we searched them down and all they had on them were some rations and some five gallon cans of

water. One of them could speak fairly good English, and we told them [through this interpreter] that we were being overrun. So they told us how to get out of there, and so we followed them on out, and they left us later on. And so we came upon the [Chongchon] river [and] it was real, real cold. I don't know how cold it was, but it was down below zero, but it was a running river, it wasn't frozen. The water was running real swift so it didn't freeze solid. And so we started wading across it, and at no time did I get to water above my shoulders. I managed to walk all the way across this river [and when] we got on the other side, a massive retreat had already started.²²

Meanwhile, back at Charlie Company's original position, PFC Robert Bruce came back to consciousness. It was still dark, but Bruce had no idea how long he had been out. His head throbbed with pain, and as he raised his hands, he saw that the backs of them had been shredded by grenade fragments. Laying next to him were the dead bodies of the other men in his machinegun squad. Not sure if the Chinese were still nearby or not, Bruce quietly groped around his position looking for his M1 carbine, but it was gone, as were the rifles of the dead men around him. The holster for his .45-caliber automatic pistol was also empty. Obviously the Chinese had stripped the bodies of their weapons and had mistaken Bruce, covered in his own and the others blood, for dead. The only weapons Bruce had left were his hunting knife and two hand grenades, which were clipped to his web gear.²³

Using his first aid pack, Bruce bandaged his hands as

best he could, then quietly began to crawl down the hill. Reaching the base of the hill, Bruce still saw no sign of the Chinese until he reached a small trail about a hundred yards away from his original position. As he stood beside the trail trying to determine which was the best way to go to try and reach friendly lines, he heard oriental voices. Bruce quickly dove behind a small group of bushes alongside the trail.²⁴

Laying prone on the ground, Bruce looked out from behind his scanty cover at the moonlit trail. A column of Chinese soldiers were jogging up the trail towards him from the south. Suddenly he detected more voices, this time coming from the north. Turning his head, he saw another Chinese column, this one trotting south down the trail towards his position. Realizing that the tiny bushes he was hiding behind would not conceal him from the Chinese once they got close, Bruce determined to make a run for it.²⁵

Calmly pulling the pins on his two grenades, Bruce waited till the Chinese were within range, and then hurled one at each column. When the grenades exploded Bruce broke cover, ran across the trail and down a long, sloping, brush covered embankment on the other side. Hoarse shouts and high-pitched screams of agony from the Chinese were soon followed by an eruption of small arms fire as they sought to kill their ambusher. Bruce ran as fast as he could, with

bullets whipping through the chill night air around him, clipping nearby bushes and tree limbs. The Chinese soon directed their fire in another direction, and Bruce realized that they had not seen him, but rather were firing blindly. Soon he had put plenty of distance between himself and the Chinese patrols.²⁶

As Bruce walked on through the night, he stumbled and fell into a small creek bed. Cursing and regaining his balance at the bottom, Bruce suddenly sensed someone near him. Spinning quickly around, Bruce saw a figure crouched at the side of the embankment. Bruce whipped out his large hunting knife and leaped on the figure, driving the blade deep into the man's chest. To his horror, Bruce suddenly recognized that the man was an American soldier. Then realizing that the man had not cried out when he stabbed him, Bruce felt the body. It was cold and stiff. Examining him closer, Bruce saw that there was a small hole in the man's forehead, and that the back of his skull had been blown off.²⁷

Recoiling in fright and disgust, Bruce scrambled out of the gully, and continued on his way. With Chinese patrols all around, Bruce soon determined that the only way out was to cross the Chongchon River. Quietly wading through icy water that reached up to his neck at times, Bruce finally reached the 9th Regiment's 2nd Battalion position and was

immediately taken to an aid station.²⁸

Many veterans of the 9th Infantry Regiment stated to me that they remember wading across the Chongchon River countless times during the battle, either retreating from the Chinese at night, or counterattacking them during the day. One can only imagine the sort of physical trauma endured by these men who waded through shoulder high water, in temperatures averaging 20 degrees, chunks of ice rushing by them, with only the swift current of the river keeping it from freezing solid. Finally they would emerge on the opposite bank, clothes freezing into blocks of ice on their bodies before they could walk a hundred paces. The lucky ones found warming tents and changes of clothing, the unlucky ones suffered frostbite losing toes, feet, or legs, and some even froze to death. This physical hardship added to the normal rigors of war to make the Battle of the Chongchon River one of the most miserable that the United States Army has ever fought.

Bruce and Moore had been forced to wade to the west bank of the Chongchon River, because the CCF 40th Army's attack had ruptured the center of the Second Infantry Division's lines, and allowed the Chinese to make a serious penetration into the division rear area. As the Chinese swept over the 9th Regiment, they headed straight down the valley of the Chongchon River, attempting to assault the two

battalions of the Second Division's artillery that were in forward firing positions near the village of Kujang-dong. Unknown to the Chinese, however, the 1st Battalion of the Second Division's reserve regiment, the 23rd Infantry, had moved into Kujang-dong shortly before nightfall.²⁹

Colonel Paul Freeman's 23rd Infantry Regiment had been in division reserve during the advance on November 25th. The stiffening enemy resistance encountered by the 9th Regiment led General Keiser to order the 23rd Regiment to move forward and assist the 9th Regiment when the advance was renewed at dawn on November 26th.

Captain Sherman W. Pratt was in command of Company B, 23rd Infantry Regiment, when it settled into its new positions near Kujang-dong shortly before nightfall on November 25th. To the front of "Baker" Company were the 61st and 99th Field Artillery Battalions.³⁰ In the 23rd Regiment, everyone's mind was on the news of the resistance encountered by the 9th Regiment at Hill 219. Just how serious were the Chinese about stopping the United Nations advance to the Yalu? In his memoirs, Pratt recalled that his commanding officer Colonel Freeman was very concerned about the overall situation in North Korea at that moment. "I don't like it at all" said Freeman to Pratt. "Last thing I think should happen to us, is to lock horns with any Chinese in this remote area, far forward of our supply

sources, and so close to theirs."³¹

At approximately 1820 hours on the night of November 25th, a force of Chinese estimated at 1200 men, waded the icy waters of the Chongchon River and attacked the 61st Field Artillery Battalion's position.³²

The timing of this attack is important. It occurred approximately two hours prior to the general assault against the Second Infantry Division, and was thus apparently designed to deprive the division's infantry of their artillery support when the main Chinese assault hit.

In this respect, the Chinese were successful. Forced to fight for their guns, the 61st Field Artillery was in no position to offer fire support to any sector of the division front. The Chinese were apparently surprised by the presence of Freeman's 23rd Infantry Regiment, as many of them were not carrying small arms, but rather were armed only with demolition charges with which to blow up the artillery pieces. Military historian S.L.A. Marshall has theorized that Chinese scouts had observed the artillery moving into position early in the day, and then left to report this information, thus missing the arrival of Freeman's 23rd Regiment late that afternoon.³³

As hundreds of Chinese spilled into their positions, the 61st Field Artillery fought back with small arms, fists, and clubbed rifles. After approximately an hour of intense

battle, all of the officers of Battery A, 61st Field Artillery were either killed or wounded. At that point, Battery A broke and fled, abandoning guns and equipment. This panic spread to the rest of the 61st, and soon the entire battalion was retreating in disorder back into the 23rd Infantry Regiment's lines. As the Chinese attempted to follow up on their success and pursue the retreating artillerymen, they ran into the riflemen of the 1st Battalion of the 23rd.³⁴

As firing broke out across the 1st Battalion's front, Captain Pratt moved through the darkness in order to try and discern what the situation was. Finding the position of Company A, Pratt interrogated a young lieutenant in command of a rifle platoon:

'Lieutenant, I'm Baker Company CO [Commanding Officer]. Can You tell me what is going on?'
'We've got gooks out the anus [replied the lieutenant]. They are everywhere. They've been pouring into our area since dark. We've been mowing them down, and still they come. They seem to be pouring across the Chongchon River to our left flank.' 'But there are companies over there from the 9th Regiment' [replied Pratt] 'Are?' the lieutenant said. 'Better say were! Gangs of GI stragglers have been pouring into our positions all evening. The stragglers are thoroughly shook up, most are wet from wading the river and almost frozen. They say their whole outfit has been overrun.'³⁵

The 23rd Infantry Regiment held against the onrushing enemy, and soon the snowy fields in front of them were piled high with Chinese corpses. Later the next day, 410 Chinese

bodies were counted in front of the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment's line.³⁶ Lacking the strength to break the 23rd Infantry Regiment, the survivors of the Chinese infiltration group retreated to the top of Hill 329. Here they were joined by elements of the CCF 40th Army that had smashed the 9th Regiment's 1st Battalion, and together these groups became an independent force operating in the rear of the Second Infantry Division. Hill 329 would go down in Second Infantry Division history as "Chinaman's Hat", so named for its resemblance to the hat of a Chinese "coolie", and in reference to who would own it for the remainder of the battle.³⁷

As the Chinese blows rained down on the Second Infantry Division, they eventually worked their way to the east, where Colonel George Peploe's 38th Infantry Regiment was deployed in mountainous terrain on the right flank of the division. Making the 38th's position even more awkward, was the fact that their supply route was an east-west road that ran laterally behind their front to division supply route on the main north-south road. If the regiment were suddenly forced to withdraw, they would have to first move several miles west, before they could move south. This fact was not lost on the Chinese, as they opened their assault on the 38th Infantry Regiment shortly before midnight on November 25th.³⁸

Commanding the Tank Company of the 38th Infantry Regiment, composed of M4A3E8 Sherman tanks, was Captain Reginald J. Hinton. Attaching a tank company to an infantry regiment, was a new concept in infantry tactics. As Hinton explained:

You see, the way you deploy your regimental tank company is you put [the tanks] in direct support of the [infantry] battalions. And your control was limited to your getting your butt around there in a jeep and finding out what they're doing. That's why I rode around in a jeep, instead of assigning myself to one of the tanks.³⁹

Unlike most others, Hinton and his tankers were a bit more skeptical about the "Home By Christmas" talk. Sergeant First Class James Grigsby was one such tanker. Grigsby's Sherman tank was deployed just outside the small North Korean village of Somindong on the night of November 25, 1950. Stated Grigsby:

Somehow I had a hunch that the stuff would hit the wind machine, so I said out of a clear sky: 'Two men on guard in the turret tonight.' Oh, the bitching! (But) I says 'Them guys (Chinese) didn't go home. They didn't knock off when it was five o'clock. So two men in the turret.'⁴⁰

Captain Hinton also was on edge that night and, rather than going to sleep, stayed up late reading a book in his tent. With the bitter cold outside, Hinton was concerned about keeping his tank crews warm, and so set up a system of rotating the crews back to his tent to warm up a little bit by the small stove he had set up in there. Shortly before

midnight, Hinton received a call on the radio from 2nd Lt. William "Sam" Mace, one of his tank platoon commanders who was supporting the 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment.⁴¹ Mace said that the 3rd Battalion was coming under heavy fire, and that enemy troops were trying to rush his position. Hinton raced out of his tent into the cold night air, and soon heard the sounds of battle all around him, "bugles blowing all over the damn place."⁴²

In Mace's tank platoon, was Sergeant J.D. Elliott who was an assistant driver in one of the platoon's Shermans. In combat, the assistant driver's job in a Sherman tank was to fire the .30-caliber machinegun mounted in the right front hull of the tank. Elliott's tank was deployed about a 1000 yards down the road from Grigsby's tank, across from a small embankment which sloped down to a narrow stream about 10-15 feet wide. The Chinese attack on the 3rd Battalion began shortly before midnight, and Elliott's tank was soon in the thick of the battle. Fighting from an open hatch, so as to see better to fire his .30-caliber machinegun, Elliott was wounded by a burst of fire from an enemy machinegun.⁴³

The enemy bullets struck the turret behind Elliott's head, and ricocheted into his shoulder and back. Elliott slumped back inside the tank, severely wounded. While lying on the floor of the tank Elliott saw a blinding flash, as a bazooka rocket slammed into the Sherman on the opposite side

of the tank from where he lay wounded. The rocket tore through the front of the tank, and exploded inside. The entire crew of the tank were wounded by shrapnel, some severely, and the Sherman began to burn.⁴⁴ Elliott's platoon commander 2nd Lieutenant Sam Mace, who observed the attack on Elliott's Sherman from a short distance away, determined that the Chinese had crossed the small stream in front of Elliott and were on the lip of the embankment when they put the bazooka round into the tank.⁴⁵

The bazooka, as most weapons of the CCF at this stage of the Korean War, was not of Chinese manufacture. The Chinese Communist Forces in the Korean War were armed with a menagerie of small arms, machineguns, and heavy weapons which they had acquired from various sources over their years of fighting the Chinese Nationalists, the Japanese and, most recently, U.S. and South Korean forces. The bazooka that was used against Elliott's tank was in all likelihood a U.S. 3.5-inch bazooka, captured during the early skirmishes between U.S./ROK and Chinese forces in late October- early November 1950.⁴⁶

Just a short distance away 2nd Lieutenant Sam Mace was in the turret of his Sherman tank, and was also fighting from an open hatch, so as to use his turret mounted .50-caliber machinegun against the onrushing waves of Chinese. Upon arriving in Korea, Mace had the .50-caliber machinegun

mount on his Sherman modified by Second Division engineers. Originally designed as an anti-aircraft system for the Sherman, the .50-caliber was set up to be fired by a person standing on the back of the tank. Mace's modification allowed him to stand in the hatch of his tank and fire the weapon himself. In earlier battles with the North Koreans, and now against the Chinese, Mace's modification served him well, as he inflicted heavy damage on the attacking enemy.⁴⁷

The M4A3E8 Sherman, though a World War Two era design and in the process of being phased out as the Korean War began, was a formidable weapon system to employ against Chinese infantry. Its 76-mm cannon, one .50-caliber machinegun, and two .30-caliber machineguns could bring a tremendous amount of firepower to bear on an enemy target. The Sherman's armor stopped any small arms fire or artillery fragments, and it would take a direct hit from a large anti-tank gun or a hit from an American bazooka in enemy hands to destroy the tank. Lacking heavy weapons, the Chinese infantry resorted to close infantry assaults on the tanks in an effort to destroy them.

On several occasions during the Battle of the Chongchon River, Chinese infantry literally swarmed American tanks, and destroyed them by tossing grenade bundles down one of the hatches, or by placing an explosive charge underneath the tank, and blowing one of its treads off, thus rendering

the tank immobile.⁴⁸ Rushing a Sherman tank would seem to be nearly impossible but the tank had its weaknesses, especially at night. Sam Mace recalled:

At night you have no defense in a tank. Once you start shooting, because you always have tracers⁴⁹, you can't see anything. You have to wait till things die down before your night vision will come back. It's not like today. I'd have given my left arm for a night scope. And buckshot! We had no canister rounds at all. I would have loved to have had canister. Because we had to shoot HE [high explosive] at them, and that's not very effective. I mean you can only get, depending on how crowded they are, 4-5 or 6-8 people at one time with an HE round. That doesn't do the job. You need something that will get out there about 50 yards and start spreading.⁵⁰

Fortunately for Mace, the Chinese bazooka team either had only one round of ammunition for their weapon, or were killed by the intense machinegun and small arms fire, as they did not employ their weapon again that night. However, the Chinese did try another weapon against Mace's tank. A Chinese soldier crawled up out of the same creek bed the bazooka team had come from, and started towards Mace's tank carrying a bundle in his arms. Mace spotted him right away though, and killed him with the .50 caliber machinegun. Later inspection of the dead Chinese soldier revealed that his bundle was a satchel charge of TNT.⁵¹

Sergeant Elliott and the other wounded survivors of his tank crew began limping down the road toward the battalion aid station. All around the little group, the battle still

raged, and Elliott noticed many soldiers standing no more than forty feet away from them. "They weren't GI's, not of our faith anyway. We could have been taken prisoner very easily." But because everyone in Elliott's band was both wounded and unarmed, the Chinese made no effort to molest them. One of Elliott's group, becoming panicky as they moved past the Chinese, started to pick up a weapon from a dead soldier lying on the road. The others stopped him, however, and the wounded Americans walked right past the Chinese. These Chinese "had already exhausted themselves," said Elliott, "One of them had a rifle hanging down in front of his legs; he was standing just staring."⁵²

As dawn broke across the icy valley of the Chongchon River on November 26th, 1950, the main force of the CCF 40th Army broke contact with the Second Infantry Division, and faded back into the snow covered hills. But hundreds of Chinese infiltrators continued to move south, in an effort to disrupt the Second Infantry Division's lines and establish roadblocks on main U.S. supply roads.

On the morning of November 26th, Eighth Army headquarters did not fully appreciate just what had happened to the Second Infantry Division on the night of November 25th. EUSAK G-2's summary of enemy operations for the previous night described the Second Division's death grapple with the CCF 40th Army with the phrase: "a series of attacks

by enemy of unknown strength made limited gains on the right flank."⁵³ EUSAK G-2 had grounds for this estimate of the situation. With the exception of limited enemy attacks against the U.S. 25th Infantry Division on the Second Division's left, other Eighth Army units were encountering only the expected token resistance from retreating North Korean and Chinese forces. EUSAK G-2 therefore decided that the Second Infantry Division's battle was an isolated incident, and that the ROK II Corps was also facing only token enemy resistance. Concluding its summary of the developing battle, EUSAK G-2 gave its estimate of the enemy's probable course of action as: "to conduct an active defense in depth along present lines employing strong local counterattack."⁵⁴

ENDNOTES

1. Alexander L. George, The Chinese Communist Army in Action: The Korean War and its Aftermath (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 6. Also see: Roy Appleman, Disaster in Korea (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1989), p. 81, and Charles Willoughby, MacArthur, 1941-1951 (New York: McGraw Hill, 1954) p. 394. Willoughby served as MacArthur's chief of intelligence during the Korean War.
2. Author's interview with Corporal Robert B. Bruce, Sr., October 10, 1978. Note: The rank of veterans that I interviewed and corresponded with is given as it was at the time of the battle in the text, and as their final rank in the notes.
3. Author's interview with Corporal Alvin G. Moore, July 21, 1993.
4. Author's interviews with U.S. Second Infantry Division veterans. Also see: James A. Huston, Guns and Butter, Powder and Rice: U.S. Army Logistics in the Korean War (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1989), pp. 198-200.
5. Author's interviews with Bruce and Moore.
6. S.L.A. Marshall, Handbook on the Chinese Communist Army (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1952), p. 45.
7. Interviews with Bruce.
8. Interviews with Moore.
9. Headquarters 2d Division Artillery War Diary, Entry No. 42, 251800 - 261800 Nov 50.
10. Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Xue Litai, Uncertain Partners (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 287.
11. Interview with Moore. Many veterans of the Second Infantry Division have stated to me that the CCF infantry would shout at them in English, and this added its own peculiar psychological effect to the sounds of the bugles, gongs, and whistles employed by the Chinese as communication devices.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.

14. Both Robert B. Bruce, Sr. and Alvin G. Moore stated to me that following earlier battles with North Korean forces, they found the remains of murdered American prisoners. From the condition of the bodies, it was apparent that the captured Americans had first been tortured, and then executed. The standard execution method employed by the North Koreans, was to first bind the American's hands behind their back with telephone wire or barbed wire. The Americans would then be savagely beaten, and finally executed by being shot in the back of the head. For detailed accounts of North Korean atrocities committed against American soldiers see: Roy Appleman, South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1961) and Edward L. Daily, Skirmish: Red, White and Blue: The History of the 7th U.S. Cavalry (1945-1953) (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1992). Daily was a lieutenant with the 7th Cavalry Regiment in Korea and was captured by the North Koreans. Daily was held captive for 32 days by the North Koreans before he managed to escape. During his captivity Daily witnessed the torture and execution of both American and South Korean soldiers by the North Koreans. Daily's book also contains photographs of American soldiers tortured and executed by the North Koreans.
15. Interviews with Bruce.
16. Clay Blair, The Forgotten War (New York: Times Books, 1987), pp. 443-444.
17. Letter to author from Sergeant James D. Moran, January 20, 1993.
18. See map in EUSAK G-2 reports for month of November 1950, showing remnants of NKPA operating as guerrillas in rear area of Eighth Army.
19. Letter from Moran.
20. Ibid.
21. Interview with Moore.
22. Ibid.
23. Interviews with Bruce.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. S.L.A. Marshall, The River and the Gauntlet (New York: Morrow, 1953).
30. 2nd Art WD, Entry No. 42, 251800 - 261800 Nov 50.
31. Sherman W. Pratt, Decisive Battles of the Korean War: An Infantry Company Commander's View of the War's Most Critical Engagements (New York: Vantage Press, 1992), p. 18.
32. 2nd Art WD, Entry No. 42, 251800 - 261800, Nov 50. For a detailed account of the Chinese crossing see Marshall, Gauntlet, pp. 41-55.
33. Marshall, Gauntlet, pp. 48-55.
34. Bill C. Mossman, United States Army in the Korean War: Ebb and Flow, November 1950 - July 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), p. 67.
35. Pratt, Decisive, pp. 28-29.
36. Marshall, Gauntlet, p. 53.
37. Pratt, Decisive, p. 23.
38. Historical Section, G-2, Hq 2d Infantry Division, The 2d Infantry Division and the Korean Campaign, Volume III (Part 1), p. 30.
39. Author's interview with Colonel Reginald J. Hinton, July 23, 1993.
40. Author's interview with Sergeant First Class James Grigsby, July 23, 1993.
41. In S.L.A. Marshall's book The River and the Gauntlet, Marshall incorrectly identifies William Mace as "Jim Mace". As Marshall, until now, has been the only source for first hand accounts of the Battle of the Chongchon River, this erroneous identification has been picked up by every author who has named Mace in his work, including Roy Appleman and Clay Blair. In my conversation with Lieutenant Mace, he agreed to allow me to quote him as a source on the condition that I put his

correct name in my work. Mace's first name is William, but his nickname is "Sam", which is what all of his friends in Korea called him.

42. Letter to author from Colonel Reginald J. Hinton, January 26, 1993.
43. Author's interview with Sergeant J.D. Elliott, July 23, 1993.
44. Ibid.
45. Author's interview with Lieutenant William "Sam" Mace, July 22-23, 1993.
46. This was the unanimous conclusion of the six members of the 38th Infantry Regiment's Tank Company that I interviewed, and is supported with statements in the Second Infantry Division's War Diary concerning armament of the Chinese during the battle.
47. Mace.
48. Ibid.
49. Chemically coated bullets which leave a streak of light behind them as they travel so as to allow the shooter to see where his bullets are going.
50. Interview with Mace.
51. Ibid.
52. Interview with Elliott.
53. Eighth United States Army Korea G-2 (Intelligence) Report for Period 252400 - 262400 November 1950, Periodic Intelligence Report No. 137, "Enemy Operations During Period."
54. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE FOG OF BATTLE

**"A general should say to himself many times a day:
If the hostile army were to make its appearance in
front, on my right, or on my left, what should I do?
And if he is embarrassed, his arrangements are bad;
there is something wrong; he must rectify his mistake."**

Napoleon, Military Maxims of Napoleon

As dawn arrived on November 26, 1950, the commanding general of the U.S. Second Infantry Division, Major General Laurence Keiser, did not share EUSAK G-2's optimistic estimate of enemy strength and intentions. His division had been struck across its entire front by a strong enemy force unequivocally identified as Chinese.¹

On the Second Division's left flank Colonel Charles Sloane's 9th Infantry Regiment had been attacked by the entire CCF 120th Division. The 9th Infantry had suffered staggering losses in the fight, been driven back 3000 yards, and was still under heavy Chinese pressure as daylight came on November 26th.²

The timely arrival of Colonel Paul Freeman's 23rd Infantry Regiment had saved the Second Division's artillery park and had the hole in the division's center caused by the destruction of the 9th Regiment's 1st Battalion. On the right flank Colonel George Peplow's 38th Infantry Regiment

had been hit hard by elements of the CCF 118th & 119th Divisions, but had still managed to hold its ground.³

Exactly how many Chinese struck the Second Infantry Division on the night of November 25th is a matter of much debate. Initial estimates by the Second Infantry Division's G-2 intelligence section made on November 26th 1950, placed enemy strength at one CCF regiment attacking the 9th, and two CCF regiments hitting the 23rd and 38th regiments; a total of one Chinese division.⁴ This estimate has for many years been accepted as providing a fairly accurate indication of the strength of Chinese forces during their opening attacks against the U.S. Second Infantry Division and has been cited in virtually every reference to the battle in secondary works on the Korean War.⁵

But each of the three thoroughly detailed studies of the Battle of the Chongchon River differs in its estimate of the numbers of Chinese troops who initiated the first assaults against the Second Infantry Division. In his book The River and the Gauntlet, historian and military analyst Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall states that the CCF 94th Regiment attacked the U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment on November 25, while two unidentified Chinese regiments struck the 23rd and 38th Infantry Regiments.⁶ This statement by Marshall is inaccurate because there was no CCF 94th Regiment serving in the Chinese Communist Forces then deployed in Korea.⁷ In

all fairness to Marshall, much of the information on the CCF was still classified as "Secret" by the United States Army when his book was published in 1953. Nevertheless Marshall never wrote a revised edition of The River and the Gauntlet, and so his flawed information on the size and identity of the Chinese force attacking the U.S. Second Infantry Division on the night of November 25, 1950 remained intact.

In Ebb and Flow, the official United States Army historian of this portion of the Korean War, Billy C. Mossman, accepts the presence of three Chinese regiments. Mossman states that two CCF regiments struck the 9th Infantry while infiltrating elements of those two regiments hit the Second Division artillery and 23rd Infantry, and one CCF regiment attacked the 38th Infantry. Although identifying the CCF 40th Army as having faced the Second Division, Mossman does not identify the actual regiments that he believes made the initial attacks.⁸

Roy Appleman states in his ponderous work Disaster in Korea, that "the CCF 120th Division, 40th Army, led the Chinese Army's attack against the US 2nd Division." Based on Chinese prisoner interrogation reports, Appleman identifies the CCF 358th and 359th Infantry Regiments (of the CCF 120th Division) as the force that struck the U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment, and slipped past the 9th to strike the 23rd Infantry and the 2nd Division artillery.⁹

Appleman is more vague in his estimate of Chinese strength in their attack on the 38th Infantry Regiment on the 2nd Division's right flank. "It is apparent", states Appleman, "that by daylight of 26 November large numbers of CCF from the 40th Army, and probably also from the 38th Army, were behind Colonel Peplow's 38th Infantry east of the Chongchon River."¹⁰

Based on an analysis of the intelligence reports filed by the Second Infantry Division, prisoner interrogation reports on Chinese soldiers captured in the fighting, and my interviews with survivors of the U.S. Second Infantry Division, I have concluded that the entire Chinese 120th Division struck the U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment on the night of November 25, 1950. As the CCF 120th Division's attack rolled over the 9th Regiment's 3rd and 1st Battalions, a regimental sized detachment forded the Chongchon River, and struck the division artillery and 23rd Infantry Regiment. Another Chinese Division (either the CCF 118th or 119th) attacked the 38th Infantry Regiment.¹¹

Although my estimation of Chinese strength is triple the size of the conventional figure used by other military historians, it should be noted that I believe this figure to still be a conservative estimate. For even with my higher estimate of enemy troop strength the CCF 40th Army, which made the opening attack against the Second Infantry

Division, would have still had an entire division in reserve and unengaged.

Among the more serious losses to the 38th Infantry Regiment in the first night of battle, was Company G, which had seemingly disappeared.¹² Sergeant Robert Hammersmith commanded a 57-mm recoilless rifle squad in Company C of the 38th Infantry Regiment. As the sun rose over the battlefield on the morning of November 26th, Hammersmith gazed through his binoculars at Company G's hilltop position of the night before, and saw that it was "crawling" with Chinese infantry. "Just like a swarm of locusts" recalled Hammersmith, "they were all over the hillside, and I couldn't see any Americans." Hammersmith's gun crew set up their 57-mm recoilless rifle, and began firing into the mass of Chinese, at 1800 to 2000 yards range. "We were using high explosive and white phosphorous shells" stated Hammersmith, "just trying to inflict as many casualties as we could."¹³

The Americans had better weapons than Hammersmith's recoilless rifle with which to attack the Chinese in daylight, and these instruments of destruction were not long in coming. Like avenging harpies, U.S. Air Force B-26 Invaders, F-51 Mustangs, and F-80 Shooting Stars swept down on those Chinese who had not sought cover after daylight arrived.¹⁴ The Air Force planes strafed the Chinese with

cannons and machineguns and scourged them with fire from thousands of gallons of napalm. Hundreds of Chinese were blasted apart or burned alive, and the survivors fled back into the hills. The War Diary of the Second Infantry Division recorded that the airstrikes produced "excellent results."¹⁵

Backed by these airstrikes, the Second Infantry Division launched limited counterattacks of its own. Colonel Paul Freeman formed a task force composed of four rifle companies and a tank battalion, and launched an attack on the Chinese infiltration force holding Hill 329, the "Chinaman's Hat". Backed by airstrikes and supported with the combined firepower of the division artillery, Freeman's task force attacked up the steep slopes of Chinaman's Hat.

Sergeant John A. Pittman commanded an infantry squad of Company C, 23rd Infantry Regiment, and was in the lead elements of the task force as the attack began. In the face of intense Chinese machinegun and mortar fire, Brown led his squad forward. Despite being wounded several times by mortar shrapnel, Brown continued to advance right up to the Chinese lines, until suddenly a grenade landed right in the middle of his squad. Without hesitation, Pittman flung himself on top of the enemy grenade, absorbing the blast with his body. As a medical aid man reached him, Pittman's first request was to know how many of his men had been hit.

Pittman would survive his wounds, to become the only man in the Battle of the Chongchon River to win his nation's highest award; the Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor citation stated:

Sergeant Pittman distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty, in action against the enemy. Sergeant Pittman's extraordinary heroism reflects the highest credit upon himself, and is in keeping with the esteemed traditions of the military service.¹⁶

In spite of such individual acts of courage, the Chinese held their positions. The level of resistance that Freeman's task force encountered revealed that the enemy holding Chinaman's Hat was well dug-in, and had been heavily reinforced during the pre-dawn hours of November 26th. Against this fierce Chinese resistance, Freeman's attack ground to a halt. Thus a major pocket of enemy resistance remained intact, almost two miles behind the main line of resistance of the Second Infantry Division.¹⁷

In the 38th Infantry Regiment's sector, Lt. Colonel Reginald Hinton commanding the 38th's Regimental Tank Company, was still full of fight when daylight broke. Hinton observed the former positions of the 38th Regiment's 3rd Battalion Command Post through his binoculars from a nearby hill. Chinese soldiers occupied the command post area, and were milling about looting the tents and supply trucks, as well as searching the bodies of the dead for

anything of value. More disturbing to Hinton, was the fact that he could see the tents of the 3rd Battalion aid station still standing. The aid station had been left behind when 3rd Battalion retreated during the night, and Hinton feared for the lives of any wounded men who may have been left behind in the aid station tents. Unable to contact regimental headquarters, Hinton decided on his own initiative to counterattack and retake the 3rd Battalion Command Post. Hinton recalled:

We encountered some minor resistance from what appeared to be Chinese rear guard personnel, some of which were engaged in looting. We also picked up several U.S. soldiers who had become separated from their units or had been wounded. We soon reached the battalion command post area, and I observed that the position had been well defended, as evidenced by many killed and wounded [Chinese] at the approaches to the position. I also saw from the dead enemy soldiers, that they were well set up. Many of the dead Chinese were armed with Thompson sub-machineguns. We policed these up, and later put them to good use against the Chinese in the battle. It was later determined that the [3rd] battalion had been forced to withdraw southward during the night of fighting [because of] the exposure of their right flank by the disappearance of the 2d ROK Corps.¹⁸

The developments of the first night of battle, with the heavy assaults against the 9th Infantry, coupled with attacks against the U.S. 25th Infantry Division on the Second's left, led Major General Keiser to believe that the objective of the Chinese attack was to break through on his left flank and separate the Second Infantry Division from

the rest of 8th Army to the west, by penetrating down the Chongchon River valley.¹⁹

In an attempt to foil this supposed enemy stratagem, Keiser took steps to bolster the heavily damaged 9th Infantry Regiment holding his left flank. Two infantry battalions from the 23rd Infantry Regiment were moved into position on the 9th Infantry's right flank astride the Chongchon River.²⁰ In addition the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion was ordered to join the 9th Regiment and go into the line as infantry.²¹ Commanding a platoon of engineers in the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion was Lieutenant James Malone and he recalled:

My platoon was working on the road that served as the MSR [main supply route] for the division, when we got a message about 1400 hours to return to the company area and reorganize as infantry. No one briefed us on the situation, but the mere fact that we engineers were being committed as infantry communicated to the last pioneer soldier that the situation was in itself desperate.²²

Keiser also reorganized the Second Infantry Division's artillery battalions. The 61st and 99th Field Artillery were returned to the U.S. First Cavalry Division on orders from 8th Army. This move was ordered by 8th Army commander Lieutenant General Walton Walker to bring the First Cavalry Division, then in 8th Army reserve, up to full strength preparatory to its being committed to the battle now developing along the Chongchon River.²³ Keiser's remaining

artillery battalions were organized as follows:

15th Field Artillery - Direct Support 23rd Infantry Regiment

37th Field Artillery - Direct Support 9th Infantry Regiment

38th Field Artillery - Attached 38th Infantry Regiment

503rd Field Artillery - General Support

17th Field Artillery - General Support²⁴

As these moves were being carried out, the Second Infantry Division encountered resistance from hundreds of Chinese infiltrators operating both in and behind the division's positions.²⁵ These infiltrators set up roadblocks, and harassed American units as they attempted to move into position. The rugged terrain of the Chongchon battlefield, made cross country movement by American vehicles impossible.

All tanks, trucks, and jeeps, along with any equipment (such as artillery) that they might be towing, had to use the primitive road network of the area for movement. Chinese infantry, unencumbered by heavy equipment or vehicles, moved nimbly and quickly over the rugged hills and steep valleys that were impassable to United States forces. Although American units, with their plethora of vehicles, were theoretically much more mobile than Chinese forces, in reality the rough terrain and poor road network of the battlefield actually gave the advantage to the CCF.

Realizing the importance of the road network to the

American forces, the Chinese began establishing roadblocks behind American lines with their infiltrators. These roadblocks were often merely some logs and large rocks that were laid in the road, and were usually lightly defended as they were manned only by small infiltration groups. But the roadblocks proved to be a source of constant harassment for the Second Infantry Division during the Battle of the Chongchon River, and were a harbinger of the disaster which was to come.

By the morning of November 26th, only the 2nd Battalion of Colonel Charles Sloane's 9th Infantry Regiment remained intact. The 9th Regiment's 1st and 3rd Battalions had been decimated, and only scattered individuals and platoons remained of them.²⁶ Sloane was ordered to reform his regiment into defensive positions, and prepare for a renewed Chinese attack that night.

As the 9th Regiment made its preparations, Major Cesides Barberis, commanding the 9th Regiment's 2nd Battalion, became concerned over the large numbers of wounded men from the 1st and 3rd Battalions that had accumulated in his aid station. Fearing for the safety of these wounded men should the Chinese renew their offensive, and needing his battalion aid station to be clear to handle any new casualties that would result from the Chinese attack, Barberis gave the order to evacuate as many of the

wounded men as possible to safety. As his men began preparing to withdraw the wounded, Barberis learned that infiltrating Chinese had established a roadblock along the only road leading south out of the 9th Regiment's positions. Corporal James L. Brown of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment was placed in charge of the casualties with orders to break through the enemy roadblock and get the wounded men to safety.²⁷

Moving south along the road in a truck convoy, Brown soon discovered the enemy roadblock. Approximately fifteen to twenty Chinese were established in a culvert which crossed under train tracks on the left side of the road. Sizing up the situation, Brown had the "walking wounded" in his column place suppressing fire on the Chinese, while he took two men and commandeered an abandoned railroad hand car.²⁸

Pushing the hand car in front of themselves for cover Brown and his two men ran down the train tracks towards the Chinese position, firing their rifles as they came. The Chinese met Brown with small arms fire and grenades. Undeterred, Brown and his two comrades ran right into the Chinese manning the roadblock. As his rifle ran out of ammunition Brown did not pause to reload, but instead leaped into the remaining Chinese, clubbing them to death with his rifle. Brown's intrepid action cleared the road, and

allowed the wounded men to be withdrawn to safety. For this action, Corporal James L. Brown received the Distinguished Service Cross, the United States Army's second highest award for bravery in battle.²⁹

As the Second Infantry Division shifted into defensive positions, disturbing news reached General Keiser's headquarters. Large numbers of South Korean soldiers were arriving in the 38th Infantry Regiment's sector. Interrogation of the South Koreans revealed that they were from the ROK 3rd Infantry Regiment, and that the entire ROK II Corps had collapsed and was in full retreat on the Second Division's right flank!³⁰

The ROK II Corps, composed of the ROK 6th, 7th, and 8th Divisions, was on the right flank of the Second Infantry Division, and had reported on the 24th and 25th of November that they were meeting stiff enemy resistance to their advance up the spine of the rugged Myomyang Mountain range.³¹ On the night of November 25, and during the early morning hours of November 26, 1950, the ROK II Corps was struck with a massive attack by the CCF 38th and 42nd Armies which smashed open the front of the South Koreans. Major General Yu Hae Ueng, commanding general of the ROK II Corps, moved swiftly in an attempt to seal the breach in his lines. But as Yu attempted to move up his reserves through the mountainous terrain, he found the roads blocked by Chinese

infiltrators and North Korean guerrillas. Outnumbered, outmaneuvered, and outfought, the front of the ROK II Corps collapsed, as the survivors of the ROK 8th and 7th Divisions dissolved into a panic stricken mob fleeing south. Only the ROK 3rd Regiment, which had been missed by the main Chinese attack, and the understrength ROK 6th Division some 25 miles to the rear in ROK II Corps reserve, survived the initial Chinese assault.³²

Both during and after the Korean War, American soldiers severely criticized the fighting abilities of their South Korean ally. This American belief that the South Koreans were poor soldiers was shared not only by other United Nations forces, but by the Communist enemy as well. From their initial intervention to their final offensives of the Korean War, the Chinese Communist Forces routinely made the South Koreans the target of their initial assault, in order to better their chances at achieving a breach in the United Nations front. The failures of the South Korean soldiery were in large part due to inadequacies in training and equipment, rather than any lack of courage on the part of the South Koreans.

The small standing army of 98,000 men that South Korea possessed at the beginning of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, was decimated in the early stages of the fighting.³³ Whole divisions had to be rebuilt with raw recruits

conscripted from the rice fields and city streets of South Korea. These South Korean draftees were officially given only ten days of training, and many times less, before being hurled into the inferno of battle.³⁴ In contrast, American soldiers received 12 weeks of basic training followed by advanced training once they were assigned to a unit.³⁵ North Korean and Chinese soldiers received an average of six to eight weeks of instruction before being committed to the front.³⁶

In addition to the lack of training, equipment shortages also plagued the ROK army. South Korean divisions possessed only a fraction of the normal complement of machineguns and mortars assigned to a United States division, and their artillery support was limited to a single battalion of 105-mm howitzers. Even in terms of numbers, a South Korean division contained only 60 percent of the strength of a United States Army division; although in numbers alone this was also the approximate strength of Chinese and North Korean divisions.³⁷

The ROK II Corps provides an excellent example of the deficiencies found in the South Korean army. Of the three divisions (6th, 7th & 8th) composing the ROK II Corps at the Battle of the Chongchon River, only the 8th Division was at full strength. The ROK 7th Division had almost been destroyed in the summer battles with the North Koreans, and

was completely rebuilt with half-trained draftees. The ROK 6th Division had suffered heavy casualties in battles with the Chinese forces near Unsan, North Korea just three weeks earlier, and had received virtually no replacements for its lost men and equipment.³⁸

Against the undermanned and underequipped ROK II Corps the Chinese hurled two veteran armies (CCF 38th and CCF 42nd), each over 30,000 men strong, and coordinated this assault with North Korean guerrilla attacks in the South Koreans rear area. By noon of November 26th the ROK II Corps had collapsed, its survivors streaming southward and still under attack by pursuing Chinese forces. The right flank of the Second Infantry Division had now become the right flank of the whole Eighth Army, and was in serious danger of being turned.³⁹

In Eighth Army Headquarters, the collapse of the ROK II Corps was still treated as a "local enemy counterattack". The Second Infantry Division's report of the arrival of the ROK 3rd Regiment in its lines alerted Eighth Army headquarters to the fact that the ROKs were retreating, but just how serious their defeat had been was still not appreciated by Eighth Army commander Lieutenant General Walton Walker on November 26th.⁴⁰

Colonel George Peplow, commanding the Second Division's 38th Infantry Regiment, also was not certain of the

situation he faced either. If what Peploe had learned from the surviving ROK 3rd Regiment was true, then there was nothing on his right flank but retreating South Koreans and unknown numbers of Chinese. Peploe's 38th Infantry Regiment held the right flank of the Second Infantry Division, and the Second Infantry Division had now become the right flank of the entire Eighth Army. Reacting to this situation, Peploe attached the remnants of the ROK 3rd Regiment to his command, and then bent the lines of his 3rd Battalion to the south, so as to refuse his right flank to any enemy threat.⁴¹

Peploe was concerned about the fate of his Company G as well, because they had not been heard from since the first night of the battle. Worried that there might be survivors of Company G trapped behind Chinese lines, and determined to maintain his hold on the narrow supply road to his rear, Peploe ordered Company C of the 38th to go out and retake "George" Company's lost position.⁴² Sergeant Robert Hammersmith, commanding a recoilless rifle squad in Company C recalled:

Our company commander, Captain Taylor, got orders from regiment to go out and help George Company. And I remember Captain Taylor told the Colonel [Peploe] that it was suicide, because we could see them [the Chinese] out there in front of us. And the Colonel said 'Those are your orders.'⁴³

Just before dusk on the night of November 26th,

Hammersmith and the rest of Charlie Company of the 38th Infantry Regiment, dropped their backpacks and extra gear so as to travel as light as possible, and headed towards Company G's former position 2000 yards to their front. Moving over the rugged hills, Charlie Company was able to cover only a few hundred yards before darkness once more covered the battlefield. A feeling of uneasiness crept over the men as they struggled over the broken ground, shivering as the temperature steadily dropped, and a light snow began to fall. No one in Charlie Company was certain just what was waiting for them in the gathering darkness but, whatever it was, it had destroyed George Company, and they were heading right for it.⁴⁴

"Americans, you surrender we no kill!" The heavily accented words startled Hammersmith and the rest of Charlie Company. Men dove for cover, as the sound of rifles being locked and loaded clattered along Charlie Company's column. After going only 800 yards, Company C had walked right into an enemy trap. Again the oriental voice called out "Americans, you surrender we no kill!" Recovering from their initial shock, the Americans shouted back profanity into the darkness. "When that happened, they (the Chinese) just opened up" recalled Hammersmith, "They just started raking the valley with machinegun fire."⁴⁵

Realizing now that he had walked into an ambush,

Captain Taylor maneuvered his company so as to seize the high ground. Leaving the 3rd Platoon as a base of fire to cover the move, Taylor attacked the hill on his left flank with his remaining three platoons. Tracers from the encircling Chinese machineguns crisscrossed the slopes of the hill, but the suddenness of the American attack confused the Chinese, and Charlie Company soon seized the top of the hill.⁴⁶

Hammersmith's recoilless rifle gunner was wounded in the ambush. Consequently, Hammersmith found himself carrying his own weapon plus the 47 pound 57-mm recoilless rifle up the hillside. Struggling with his heavy load, Hammersmith fell behind the attacking platoons.

Hammersmith:

I felt someone's shoulder hit me in the butt as I was climbing this hill. Well at this time it was dark and I didn't know who the hell it was, but I just felt somebody's shoulder hit me right in the butt and started pushing me up the hill. So I said 'Come on let's go!' When we got to the top of the hill, I turned around and looked, and it was a Chinese man!⁴⁷

A group of three Chinese had followed the Americans up the hillside, not to fight them but rather to surrender to them. The Chinese were apparently unarmed, and the Americans quickly tied their hands and feet and placed a guard on them. Captain Taylor rapidly formed Charlie Company into a defensive perimeter along the crest of the

hill, and laid down suppressing fire to cover the withdrawal of his 3rd Platoon from their covering position in the valley, up the hillside to join the rest of the company.⁴⁸

Charlie Company had escaped the initial Chinese ambush, but now found themselves cut off from their battalion by large numbers of Chinese who they could see as flickering black shadows, swarming on the ridges and in the valleys around them. The blaring of bugles, and the answering calls from whistles and gongs, revealed to them that large numbers of Chinese were readying for an attack on the 38th Infantry Regiment. Captain Taylor tried to reach regimental headquarters by radio, both to warn headquarters of the impending Chinese attack and to request help. But all attempts failed, as the rugged countryside of Korea blocked the radio transmission. Taylor then ordered runners to be sent out to try and slip past the encircling Chinese, and reach the 38th Regiment's lines. But as the hours went by, the runners did not return, and the Chinese attack was now beginning in full force against the 38th Infantry Regiment.⁴⁹

Help suddenly came to the men of Charlie Company from an unexpected source. One of the Chinese prisoners spoke excellent English, and he told his besieged captors that he knew a way through the Chinese positions. According to Hammersmith, Taylor at first rejected the offer out of hand.

But with the failure of the runners, and knowing that at any moment the Chinese might decide to eliminate the cut-off Americans, Taylor gave his approval. Sergeant Hammersmith and the others loosed the bonds on the Chinese prisoners, and warned them of just what they would do to them if this was a trick. As his recoilless rifle was now out of ammunition, and not wanting to be slowed by its weight, Hammersmith disassembled the weapon in the darkness, and "scattered the parts to the four winds". Then he and the rest of Charlie Company moved out, following the lead of their Chinese prisoner. Learning a lesson in infiltration from their Chinese captive, Charlie Company succeeded in slipping past the encircling Chinese, and at first light on November 27th, reached their original positions from where they had set out early on the previous evening.⁵⁰

Reaching friendly positions, Taylor's half-frozen men eagerly headed for a fire that had just been started in the company area. Their Chinese prisoners moved over by the fire as well, and as they warmed themselves the Chinese removed their bulky, padded jackets. When the Chinese removed their jackets, the Americans were shocked to see that all three Chinese had loaded Thompson sub-machineguns strapped to their backs! In the darkness and excitement, no one had thought to actually search the Chinese prisoners, who had appeared to be unarmed. As hoarse shouts of

profanity rang out, the Americans quickly knocked the Chinese to the ground and stripped them of their weapons. In spite of the commotion they caused, the Chinese had shown no interest in using their weapons, and seemed "happy to be out of the war." Recalled Hammersmith: "If they (the Chinese prisoners) had wanted to, they could have killed everybody there, especially when we were trying to slip past their buddies."⁵¹

Hammersmith later had a chance to talk to the Chinese prisoner who spoke English. According to Hammersmith, the Chinese prisoner had graduated from UCLA, and then returned to China to try and bring the rest of his family to the United States. While in China, a Chinese Communist unit came through his village looking for "volunteers" for their army. "Well, they call it 'volunteering'" stated the Chinese prisoner to Hammersmith, "when they come through your village and say 'Either you join us or we kill you and your family'."⁵²

Peploe's company-sized probe of the Chinese lines to his front was a bold move, considering the size of the Chinese force confronting the 38th Infantry Regiment on the night of November 26, 1950. Peploe was unaware of the actual strength of the Chinese force in his sector, and perhaps Charlie Company's true mission had been to ascertain just how many Chinese the 38th Regiment was facing. Unknown

to Peploe, elements of two Chinese Armies (40th, and 38th) were at that time to his north and northeast. A third Chinese army (42nd) was sweeping southwest through the gap on his right flank where the ROK II Corps had been, attempting to come in behind Peploe's regiment and the rest of the Second Infantry Division.⁵³

As stated earlier Major General Keiser, commanding general of the Second Infantry Division, was convinced by the previous night's fighting that the main enemy attack was aimed at his left flank and center, down the Chongchon River valley. Keiser's maneuvers of November 26th had been designed to bolster that section of his front, while he left the hard pressed 38th Infantry Regiment to fend for itself on the right.⁵⁴

One of Keiser's maneuvers had been to assign the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion as infantry to the 9th Regiment. Colonel Charles Sloane's 9th Infantry Regiment had suffered heavy losses on the night of November 25th, and essentially only Major Barberis' 2nd Battalion was still intact when night fell on November 26th. Sergeant Harry Lohmeyer was manning a .50 caliber machinegun with the 2nd Engineers when they took up positions on a small hill, just west of the ice choked Chongchon River, on the night of November 26th. "We were to backup the 3rd Battalion of the 9th Infantry Regiment" recalled Lohmeyer.⁵⁵

In spite of the reinforcements Keiser had sent them, the heavy casualties that the 9th Infantry had suffered in the previous night's battle left them in no shape for another major fight. But as bugles bleated through the frigid night air, and Chinese signal rockets went up along their lines, the men of the 9th Infantry realized that their battle was far from over. Once more the Chinese 40th Army rose to the attack, and once again the battered 9th Infantry Regiment was their main target.⁵⁶

The remnants of the 9th Infantry Regiment, as well as the two battalions from the 23rd Infantry Regiment which had been brought up to reinforce the 9th's right flank, were soon under heavy attack. The Chinese attack was more subtle this time, as they probed for weakness in the 9th Infantry's defensive positions. The Chinese soon found their weakspot, the battered survivors of the 9th Infantry's 3rd Battalion.

Colonel Charles Sloane, commanding the 9th Infantry, knew that the decimated 3rd Battalion's position was the weak link in his defensive position, which is why he had deployed the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion as a "backstop" to this unit. Even with this added support, the 3rd Battalion was still hurting from the heavy losses it had sustained the previous night. Once the Chinese ascertained where the American line was weakest, they massed their units opposite this point and attacked in great strength,

supported by mortar and machinegun fire. The Chinese rained blows down on the 3rd Battalion and under the intense enemy pressure, the battered battalion began falling back.

From their reserve position, the 2nd Engineers had been spectators to the opening rounds of the Chinese attack. However, at approximately 2345 hours on November 26th, the 2nd Engineers were informed via radio that the remnants of the 9th Infantry Regiment's 3rd Battalion would be withdrawing through their lines. With this in mind, the 2nd Engineers were not too concerned when from out of the darkness appeared a large formation of soldiers, walking towards the Engineer's lines with slung weapons. Without a sound, the soldiers moved like phantoms across the silvery snow, until they were only twenty yards from Sergeant Lohmeyer's .50-caliber machinegun position. Suddenly Corporal Lark, manning a .30-caliber machinegun some fifteen yards to Lohmeyer's left, screamed "Americans my ass!" and cut loose with his machinegun on the enemy column. "All hell broke loose then" recalled Lohmeyer, "and before we knew it we and the Chinese were engaged in some real heavy fighting".⁵⁷

As the fight was joined, the initial Chinese force was soon heavily reinforced as, to the blare of bugles and banging of gongs, large waves of Chinese attacked the 2nd Engineers across the nightmarish, blue-black landscape of

the battlefield. Recalled Lohmeyer:

As during previous engagements, I [was] having trouble maintaining the realization that I was in a major life threatening situation. My mind kept putting me in a position of removal from the action. I can still remember feeling like a spectator viewing a war movie.⁵⁸

Chinese concussion grenades began landing all around Lohmeyer's gun position, and his assistant gunner was felled by Chinese small arms fire. Lohmeyer, an experienced engineer, had dug a good fighting position for his .50-caliber machinegun, and it protected him from the enemy fire. Within the shelter of this position Lohmeyer inflicted heavy casualties with his machinegun on the attacking Chinese infantry. Then suddenly a concussion grenade landed right in his position, "blowing my boot apart, leaving my leg numb, and my head feeling like a used accordion."⁵⁹

Dazed by the blow, Lohmeyer nevertheless continued to fire his weapon at the onrushing Chinese. But the large Chinese assault waves merely flowed around and past Lohmeyer, sweeping over the hill. The dead were soon piled high in front of the 2nd Engineers' position, but onward the Chinese came, seemingly heedless of their own losses. The Chinese assault waves that had swept past the engineers' hilltop position, reformed on the other side of the hill, and began attacking the engineers from the rear. In danger

of being surrounded and completely destroyed, the 2nd Engineers began to fall back.

"With their continuous frontal attacks and massive numbers" recalled Lohmeyer, "they finally overran our position, and kicked us off of the hill, with heavy losses to their side." Ordered to withdraw by his commanding officer, Lohmeyer took out the two sections of his machinegun's bolt (thus disabling the weapon) and began retreating down the hillside, heading towards the Chongchon River.⁶⁰

Major Barberis' 2nd Battalion of the 9th Infantry Regiment had not been engaged on the first night of battle, and now he again found his battalion unengaged. While the battle raged all around it, the 2nd Battalion received orders from their regimental commander Colonel Charles Sloane to cross to the east side of the Chongchon River, and reinforce the 1st Battalion of the 23rd Infantry Regiment, which was holding the right flank of the 9th Infantry Regiment on the east bank of the Chongchon River. The enemy forces holding the "Chinaman's Hat" had attacked down its icy slopes shortly after darkness, and were driving the 23rd Regiment back down the valley of the Chongchon. Determined not to once again miss the battle, Barberis readied his battalion to cross the Chongchon and reinforce the beleaguered 23rd Regiment. As Barberis' battalion prepared

to move, however, they were suddenly hit by a full-scale Chinese assault. Caught off balance, the 2nd Battalion was sent reeling back towards the icy waters of the Chongchon.

In the 2nd Battalion's aid station on the night of November 26th was PFC Robert Bruce, one of the survivors of the 9th Infantry's 1st Battalion, who had been wounded and suffered a concussion in the previous night's fighting. As the sounds of battle grew to a roar outside the aid station, Bruce feared that the 2nd Battalion was going to be overrun. An American officer suddenly burst into the tent and said the battalion was withdrawing, and asked if there were any wounded men there who could still fight. Bruce and several other "walking wounded" volunteered. Bruce explained that he was not trying to be a hero by volunteering, just trying to survive. The 1st Battalion's Aid Station had been overrun the night before, and the wounded men there massacred by the Chinese. Bruce was not sure which way the battle was going, but if they were asking for walking wounded to join the fight, then he knew the situation must be getting desperate. Deciding he had a better chance fighting than laying in the hospital tent, Bruce and the other volunteers were handed rifles and ammunition and sent out into the darkness to join the battle.⁶¹

Bruce and the others did not have to go very far because the Chinese assault waves were already lapping at

the 2nd Battalion's Command Post and Aid Station area. As tracers from the machineguns of both sides crisscrossed through the darkness, the sounds of battle reached Bruce's ears. The long "brrrrrrp" of the Chinese sub-machineguns, the crack of American and Chinese rifles, and the muffled explosions from hand grenades filled the frigid night air. American artillery was also at work, pounding away at the back of the Chinese formations, and then working their fire ever closer to the American lines, until the big shells were dropping a scant fifty yards in front of the 2nd Battalion's positions.⁶²

But many Chinese had already penetrated to within a few feet of the 2nd Battalion and, to the blare of bugles, they rose as one and rushed the Americans. Bruce and the other walking wounded were moving towards a low earthen embankment when the Chinese made their rush. Bruce opened fire with his rifle, dropping several of the Chinese attackers. But then the metallic "ping" of his empty M1 clip ejecting itself signaled his need to reload. By that time the Chinese were only a few feet away, and so Bruce turned his M1 and swung it as a club at the nearest Chinese, striking the enemy soldier full in the face with the steel butt-plate of the rifle. After that, a wild melee ensued as the fight became hand-to-hand. Swinging his clubbed rifle, Bruce felled several more Chinese then broke free of the melee to

join the main body of the 2nd Battalion which was now withdrawing east across the Chongchon River. Once again, Bruce plunged into the icy waters of the Chongchon River, as he and the rest of the men with the 2nd Battalion (including survivors of the 1st & 3rd battalions) waded across to join in a defensive position with the 23rd Infantry Regiment.⁶³

Colonel Paul Freeman's 23rd Infantry Regiment had come under heavy attack at approximately 2030 hours on November 26th, just prior to the Chinese assault on the 9th Infantry Regiment. Holding the Second Infantry Division's center, the 23rd Regiment's lines were assailed by large numbers of Chinese, attacking in at least division strength. Again the Chinese showed their uncanny ability to infiltrate past American frontline units, as a Chinese infiltration team slipped past the 23rd Regiment's 1st Battalion and attacked Freeman's regimental command post itself. Surprised to find such large numbers of enemy in their rear area, the lightly armed headquarters staff fought back as best they could, but were soon forced to retreat.

In his haste to withdraw, Colonel Freeman left his code books and other classified information in his tent. Upon reaching his 1st Battalion's Command Post, Freeman regrouped and led a counter-attack in an attempt to retake his regimental headquarters, and recover the lost code books. Freeman's attack was soon halted by intense Chinese

machinegun and mortar fire, and it became apparent that the Chinese now held the former positions of the 23rd Regimental Command Post in great strength. The battle turned into a long range firefight, with the Americans gradually achieving the upper hand.⁶⁴

The remnants of the 9th Infantry Regiment, meanwhile, regrouped on the east bank of the Chongchon River, and held their ground, inflicting heavy loss on the Chinese attackers. Shortly after daybreak, Freeman again attacked up the valley of the Chongchon and this time succeeded in recovering his regimental command post at 0845 hours on the morning of November 27th. Luckily, Freeman found his tent undisturbed, and his code books and maps safe.⁶⁵ The 9th Infantry Regiment, gravely weakened though it was, followed up Freeman's success by attacking back across the Chongchon and retaking its lost position as well. Thus, although the Chinese attacks on November 26th had inflicted heavy casualties on the 9th and 23rd Infantry Regiments, their gains in territory proved to be only temporary. Having recovered from their initial shock and surprise at the strength of the Chinese force confronting them, the Second Infantry Division was beginning to strike back at its tormentor.

The casualties were mounting in the Second Infantry Division, however, and if the battle became one of attrition

the Second had no hope against the overwhelming number of enemy forces opposing it.

Major General Keiser was not yet completely aware of the insurmountable pressure now beginning to build up on the Second Infantry Division's right flank, as thousands of Chinese poured through the gaping hole left by the retreating ROK II Corps. With Keiser's attention fixed on the frontal assault of the first two night's of the battle by the CCF 40th Army down the Chongchon River valley, he was slow to realize the fact that the main enemy effort was actually being directed against his right flank. Against this exposed flank the CCF 42nd and 38th Armies (app. 60,000 men), having defeated the ROK II Corps, were now maneuvering to encircle and destroy not only the U.S. Second Infantry Division, but the entire Eighth United States Army in Korea. Only the battered U.S. Second Infantry Division now stood in the path of the onrushing Chinese. If the Chinese could get past the Second Division, they would be able to come in behind the Eighth Army and completely surround it.

Although Major General Keiser was still unaware of the overall Chinese plan, he did at least appreciate that the Chinese had now entered the Korean War in force and were launching a major offensive.⁶⁶ Eighth Army Intelligence was only dimly aware of either of these facts, and highly skeptical of the grave danger that now faced the entire

army. In its discussion of enemy capabilities and probable course of action for the period ending at 2400 hours on November 26th, EUSAK G-2 wrote:

Friendly unit withdrawals from north and northeast of Tokchon indicate a determined enemy effort in that area, however, [enemy] unit identification and strength estimates are not presently available. It should be considered possible that a determined enemy drive may be made in this area, especially considering the apparent exploitation opportunity after the limited withdrawal of friendly units on the east flank. However, with the possible exception of the relatively vague situation on the east flank, the enemy reaction to the EUSAK attack has been one of active defense with local counterattacks in strength. This last is believed as the likely course of action.⁶⁷

After two full nights of battle, the U.S. Second Infantry Division had been knocked back on its heels and the ROK II Corps had ceased to exist as a cohesive fighting unit. Yet despite this evidence that a major offensive by the Chinese army was underway, EUSAK G-2 still referred to the massive Chinese assault as a "local counterattack."

Through the fog of battle the Dragon was striking, and its victim could not even determine from where the blows came. Over two thousand years before the Korean War, the Chinese military philosopher Sun Tze wrote: "O divine art of subtlety and secrecy! Through you we learn to be invisible, through you inaudible; and hence hold the enemy's fate in our hands."⁶⁸

ENDNOTES

1. Historical Section, G-2, Hq 2d Infantry Division, The 2d Infantry Division and the Korean Campaign, Volume III (Part 1), p. 30.
2. Ibid.
3. War Diary, Second Infantry Division, Period 260001 Nov 50 - 262400 Nov 50, Entry No. 1, Periodic Intelligence Report #68 and author's own estimate of Chinese strength based on eyewitness accounts of the fighting, interrogation reports of Chinese prisoners captured in the Battle of the Chongchon River, and Order of Battle for CCF found in Billy Mossman, United States Army in the Korean War: Ebb and Flow, November 1950 - July 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), p. 66.
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5. see T.R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War (New York: Macmillan, 1963), Bevin Alexander, Korea: The First War We Lost (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1986), Robert Leckie, Conflict: The History of the Korean War (New York: Putnam's, 1962) and Clay Blair, The Forgotten War (New York: Times Books, 1987).
6. S.L.A. Marshall, The River and the Gauntlet (New York: Morrow, 1953), p. 54.
7. Mossman, Ebb, p. 54.
8. Mossman, Ebb, pp. 65-67.
9. Roy Appleman, Disaster in Korea (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), p. 193.
10. Appleman, Disaster, p. 211.
11. This estimate is based on my own analysis of the Chinese Order of Battle at the Chongchon River (found in Mossman, Ebb), interrogation reports on Chinese soldiers captured at the Battle of the Chongchon River, and eyewitness accounts of the fighting by veterans of the Second Infantry Division. These veterans almost unanimously agreed that the conventional estimate of one Chinese division attacking the Second Infantry Division was low. This estimate is also based on my analysis of the damage inflicted on the Second Infantry Division on the first night of the Battle of the Chongchon River, which was

far greater than any one Chinese division could have inflicted.

12. Marshall, Gauntlet, pp. 89-103. Marshall states that out of a pre-battle strength of 163 men, only 66 men from Company G could be accounted for the next day.
13. Author's interview with Staff Sergeant Robert Hammersmith, July 24, 1993.
14. 2nd Div WD, Period 260001 - 262400 Nov 50, Entry No. 2, Periodic Operations Report #339.
15. Ibid.
16. Medal of Honor citation for Sergeant John A. Pittman, Company C, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division; For action against the enemy vicinity Kujang-dong, Korea; 26 November 1950. reprinted in N.A., The Congressional Medal of Honor Library: Korea: The Names, The Deeds (New York: Dell Publishing, 1987) p. 167.
17. Marshall, Gauntlet, p. 41.
18. Letter to author from Colonel Reginald J. Hinton, January 26, 1993.
19. Mossman, Ebb, p. 69.
20. Eight United States Army Korea, War Diary, 26 NOV 1950, Entry No. 1, paragraph 2.
21. 2nd Div WD, Period 260001 Nov 50 - 262400 Nov 50, entry No. 2, POR #339.
22. Letter to author from Lieutenant James F. Malone, January 3, 1993.
23. EUSAK War Diary, 26 November 1950, Entry No. 1.
24. 2nd Division Artillery War Diary, Entry No. 44, 1700 hours 26 Nov 50.
25. Ibid., entry #47, 260001 - 262400 Nov 50.
26. Fehrenbach, War, p. 308.
27. Clark C. Munroe, The Second United States Infantry Division in the Korean War (Tokyo: Toppan, 1952), p. 60.

28. Ibid.
29. Award of the Distinguished Service Cross to Corporal James L. Brown, Company E, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, for action against the enemy in the vicinity of Sinjang on 26 November 1950. Citation reproduced in Munroe, Second, p. 60.
30. EUSAK War Diary, 26 NOV 1950, Entry No. 1.
31. See EUSAK War Diary for 24 Nov & 25 Nov 1950, and EUSAK G-2 Reports for period 240001 - 252400 Nov 50.
32. Robert C. Cameron, "The Lost Corps", Military Review 18 (1953): 57-68.
33. Appleman, Naktong, p. 15.
34. Robert K. Sawyer, Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1962) p. 148.
35. Author's interviews with Moore, Bruce, Hammersmith, Moran, et al. Hinton, Mace, Grigsby, Elliott, Scoon, and Sevy, were unanimous in their criticism of tank training in the months prior to the outbreak of Korean War. All of these men stated that their training was severely limited due to ammunition and fuel shortages.
36. Frank J. Harris, Training the Combat Rifleman in the Chinese Communist Forces and North Korean Army (Chevy Chase, MD: Operations research Office, Johns Hopkins University, 1954), p. 9.
37. Ibid.; also see Appleman, Naktong, p. 11 and S.L.A. Marshall, Handbook on the Chinese Communist Army (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1952), p. 37.
38. Cameron, "Lost", and Appleman, Naktong, pp. 689-708.
39. EUSAK War Diary for 26 November 1950, entry #1.
40. EUSAK G-2 Report for Period 252400 - 262400, Nov 50.
41. Mossman, Ebb, p. 70.
42. For a complete account of the destruction of Company G, 38th Infantry Regiment see Marshall, Gauntlet, pp. 89-103.

43. Author's interview with Staff Sergeant Robert Hammersmith, July 24th, 1993.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Mossman, Ebb, pp. 72-73.
54. Ibid., p. 69.
55. Letter to author from Command Sergeant Major Harry Lohmeyer, January 9, 1993.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Author's conversations with Corporal Robert B. Bruce, Sr., October 10, 1978.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. 2nd Div WD, Period 252400 - 262400, entry 2.
65. Ibid.

66. 2nd Div, Campaign, p. 30.
67. Headquarters Eighth United States Army Korea (EUSAK), Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G2 (Intelligence), G-2 Daily Staff Report for War Diary, Period 252400 to 262400 November 1950, EUSAK Periodic Intelligence Report #137.
68. Sun Tze, Samuel Griffith trans., The Art of War (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1940), p. 34.

CHAPTER IV

RIGHT FLANK AND REARGUARD

**Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
They stood, and earth's foundations stay;
What God abandoned, these defended,
And saved the sum of things for pay.**

Alfred Housman, "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries"

At dawn on November 27, 1950, the first rays of sunlight glinted off of the snow which covered the battlefield of the Chongchon River valley. The pristine beauty of the scene was horribly tainted by the twisted corpses of Chinese and American soldiers, which lay strewn in great heaps along the hillsides and valley floor. The lines of the U.S. Second Infantry Division had been bent but not broken, despite its two days and two nights of fierce battle against a numerically superior foe.¹

In the center of the Second Division's line, the 23rd Infantry Regiment had with comparative ease retaken its ground lost on November 26th. The 23rd Regiment had mainly been fighting Chinese infiltrators who continued to grow in strength and attacked off of Hill 329, the "Chinaman's Hat."² The Chinese had directed their main assaults at both flanks of the Second Infantry Division and were succeeding in slowly driving them in. The 9th Infantry Regiment held the left flank of the Second Division, and despite having suffered the heaviest losses of any of the division's

regiments, counterattacked across the Chongchon River at first light and retook much of the ground it had relinquished the night before.³

On the right flank the 38th Infantry Regiment was living up to its nickname "The Rock of the Marne," and was holding its ground against fierce Chinese assaults. The Chinese attack on the 38th Infantry Regiment continued into the daylight hours of the 27th, as large numbers of Chinese, in at least division strength, pressed their assault.⁴

As dawn broke, outposts of the 38th Regiment reported seeing a column of approximately 800 Chinese trotting straight towards the regimental command post. Simultaneously a large firefight erupted behind the command post, where the 503rd Field Artillery was fighting for its guns as Chinese soldiers in a different column spilled into its positions.⁵

The headquarters staff of the 38th Infantry Regiment grabbed their weapons, and the I&R (Intelligence and Reconnaissance) Platoon of the headquarters formed a skirmish line behind the dike of a frozen rice paddy next to the command post. Captain Reginald Hinton had just pulled up in his jeep to report to headquarters on the night's fighting, when he saw the I&R Platoon formed up in the rice paddy. He grabbed his carbine and quickly joined the headquarters staff.⁶

As eyes peered into the half-light of dawn, a strange

noise came to everyone's ears. Recalled regimental operations officer Major Warren G. Hodges:

We heard this "pitty-pat" coming down through the snow, and here's this big black sergeant in his long-johns, with one boot on, coming down through the snow pitty-patting, and he says "Don't shoot! I's an American and there's more coming."⁷

This sergeant came from the 503rd Field Artillery, many of whose men remained in position. These men, after having finally beaten back the Chinese force that had entered their gun pits, saw the lead elements of the previously sighted Chinese column come up through a draw, and head straight at them and the 38th's regimental command post. But the 155-mm guns of the 503rd were pointed in the opposite direction, as they had been shelling the Chinese that had flanked the command post. With the other Chinese column only a few hundred yards away, there seemed to be no way that the guns could be traversed in time. Then both Hodges and Hinton witnessed an incredible event. Recalled Hodges:

We were amazed. There was one sergeant and one of his cannoneers that switched trails on a 155, that is they swung the piece around. It will only traverse so far right and left, and they needed to get it around further so they picked the trails up and swung it around. It's physically impossible for two people to do it, but I guess their adrenaline was running so high. They switched it around and fired point blank up the draw where the Chinese were coming out, it was just like shooting a rifle. Just splattered them [Chinese] all over the country, and pretty much cleaned that group of infiltrators out.⁸

The Chinese succeeded in penetrating the 38th

Regiment's position to the point where they appeared likely to sever the narrow dirt track which served as the regiment's only supply road. In a desperate attempt to maintain control over his supply road, Colonel George Peploe ordered his 38th Infantry Regiment to retake certain key roadside hills that had been lost in the previous night's fighting.⁹

Corporal Robert K. Imrie, a machinegunner in Company F, 38th Infantry Regiment, provided support fire for his platoon as it advanced back up the hill they had lost the night before. Suddenly two Chinese machineguns, one on the left and one on the right, delivered a deadly cross-fire on the attacking Americans. Several men were hit, and the rest of the platoon dove onto the ground. As the Chinese machineguns raked the ground with their fire, it became apparent to Corporal Imrie that the entire platoon was in danger of being destroyed. Imrie stood up from his position, cradled his .30 caliber machinegun in his arms and charged directly at the Chinese machinegun on the right flank, firing as he ran.¹⁰

Imrie's personal duel with the Chinese gun crew ended when he succeeded in killing all of them with his fire, whereupon the Chinese machinegun crew on the opposite flank mortally wounded him with a burst of bullets. Imrie's platoon soon avenged him as, inspired by Imrie's bravery,

they silenced this remaining Chinese machinegun, and secured the hill. For his valor Imrie was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.¹¹

As the commander of the Second Infantry Division, Major General Laurence Keiser, surveyed the scene of battle he realized that after having fought against overwhelming odds for two days and two nights, his division could not continue to trade men with the Chinese army. With its right flank in mid-air, and heavy Chinese attacks continually striking its left flank, the Second Infantry Division's lines were being bent back onto each other in the shape of a horseshoe.

As reports of the fighting on the night of November 26/27 1950, began to filter into Eighth Army Headquarters on the morning of November 27th, Lieutenant General Walton Walker at last began to realize the immense danger his right flank was in. Although unwilling to officially cancel the Eighth Army's offensive, Walker nevertheless began to pull all of his forward units back into defensive positions.¹²

Along the west coast of North Korea, the U.S. 24th Infantry Division and the ROK 12th Regiment, neither of which had encountered serious resistance thus far, were ordered to withdraw five miles south in order to consolidate into a defensive position near the ROK 1st Division.¹³

Elsewhere in Korea, the U.S. 1st Marine Division and U.S. 7th Infantry Division began to encounter heavy

resistance from Chinese forces approximately 80 miles east of the Chongchon River battlefield, near the Chosin Reservoir. It was becoming painfully obvious to Lieutenant General Walker that the Chinese had entered the Korean War in great strength.¹⁴

By midday on November 27th, 1950, United Nations supreme commander General Douglas MacArthur also finally realized that the Chinese had launched a major offensive against his overextended forces in Korea. It is important to note that in his memoirs, MacArthur gives November 27, 1950, as the date that the Chinese launched their offensive in Korea. Yet this date is two days later than when the offensive actually started. Even though the memoirs were published fourteen years after the battle, MacArthur still gives this erroneous date. This reveals that Walker was not alone in being slow to recognize the nature and scope of the Chinese intervention and indicates that perhaps he was even influenced by MacArthur's over-optimism.¹⁵

Regardless of his miscalculations over the past forty-eight hours, Walker had finally realized that the Chinese had entered the Korean War in force. Large numbers of Chinese soldiers were moving into the void left by the collapse of the ROK II Corps and appeared poised to envelop the Eighth Army's right flank. ROK II Corps commander General Yu Hae Ueng was making a valiant effort to collect

stragglers from his shattered corps and deploy them into defensive positions near the village of Pukchang-ni.¹⁶

Even if Yu succeeded his new defensive position would be 20 miles southeast of the Second Infantry Division, thus leaving the Second's right flank still dangling in mid-air. The precarious position of the Second Infantry Division did not appear to bother Walker, as he was more concerned about the possibility of a Chinese drive towards the town of Sunchon, approximately 45 miles south of where the Second Division was fighting.¹⁷

Accordingly on November 27th, Walker decided to rearrange his units so as to protect against this Chinese threat to Sunchon. Walker altered the organizational structure of the Eighth Army so as to reinforce his IX Corps which now held the threatened right flank.

The IX Corps was reinforced by units drawn from Eighth Army reserve, so that by nightfall on November 27th, the IX Corps was comprised of the U.S. Second Infantry Division, U.S. 1st Cavalry Division, ROK 6th Division, British Commonwealth (CW) 27th Brigade, and the Turkish Brigade.¹⁸ It thus appeared that Walker had strengthened his right flank, and lent great assistance to the beleaguered Second Infantry Division. But this reinforcement was illusory.

At the same time Walker reinforced the IX Corps, he also stripped it of the U.S. 25th Infantry Division which he

reassigned to I Corps in the west. He also extended IX Corps area of operations, making it responsible for the former ROK II Corps positions and thus spreading its lines ever thinner.¹⁹

The assignment of the ROK 6th Division to the IX Corps provided little help for, as mentioned previously, this division was grievously understrength and in no shape to move north and bolster the Second Infantry Division. The ROK 6th Division remained in the vicinity of Pukchang-ni, and tried to collect up stragglers from the other units of the ROK II Corps.

The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division could have been sent north to reinforce the Second Infantry Division but, under orders from Eighth Army, its commander Major General Hobart Gay scattered his regiments. Gay moved his 7th and 8th Cavalry Regiments ten miles east into blocking positions near Sinchang-ni, behind the ROK 6th Division. Gay then sent his 5th Cavalry Regiment north but halted them at the village of Kaechon, approximately twenty miles south of the Second Infantry Division, to await developments. The British CW 27th Brigade remained in place at Sunchon as a reserve.²⁰

Thus of all the units Walker used to reinforce the IX Corps, only the 5,000 man strong Turkish Brigade was actually ordered to move north and bolster the dangling

right flank of the Second Infantry Division. Military historian and analyst Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall described the deployment of this lone Turkish Brigade against the two Chinese armies bearing down on the Second Division's right flank as "applying an aspirin bottle cork to the bung hole in a beer barrel."²¹

Major General Keiser realized that his Second Infantry Division was becoming more and more isolated, and thus he decided to withdraw the Second Infantry Division approximately three miles south, to better defensive positions near the village of Kujang-dong. Thus after forty-eight hours of battle against overwhelming numbers of Chinese, with both of its flanks driven back and in danger of envelopment, the Second Infantry Division finally prepared to yield its forward ground.²²

Keiser wanted to completely break contact with the Chinese and fall back to Sunchon, where the rest of IX Corps was deploying. Such a move would have endangered the elements of the Eighth Army in the west which had become overextended, and were trying to withdraw into defensive positions. Consequently, Walker ordered the Second Infantry Division to continue its delaying action against the advancing Chinese from its new defensive position near Kujang-dong. Walker intended to use the Second Division as a shield to stave off the Chinese offensive, while his other

units withdrew and regrouped. The few would be sacrificed, so that the many could be saved.²³

The only help that came to the Second Infantry Division during the Battle of the Chongchon River, was from the U.S. Air Force. The official U.S. Air Force history of the Korean War states that:

Although it was far from niggardly in allocating air support to the other Eighth Army divisions, the [USAF] Joint Operations Center gave priority to air-support requests received from the U.S. 2d Infantry Division, whose holding action was permitting other units to withdraw southward.²⁴

These requests for air support poured into the Joint Operations Center on November 27th, as the Second Infantry Division reported large numbers of Chinese moving against it in broad daylight. The skies over the Chongchon River valley were clear and cold on November 27th making for good flying weather.²⁵ On that date, the U.S. Air Force flew seventy-four sorties in support of the Second Infantry, some of which produced spectacular results.²⁶ One air strike struck a group of 50 Chinese while they were crossing an open field and "burned them to a crisp with napalm."²⁷

In another sector of the Second Infantry Division front, observers detected large numbers of Chinese filing into a mine shaft, presumably to rest till darkness, safe from the circling American aircraft. But American fighter-bombers dived onto the mine shaft, scourging its entrance

with napalm and then scoring several direct hits with 500-pound bombs. This attack caved in the entrance to the mine shaft and trapped an estimated 600 Chinese inside. It was determined by observers on the ground that all 600 Chinese perished in the attack.²⁸

At 1900 hours on November 27, Keiser issued Operations Order #11 to the Second Infantry Division. This order called for the Second Infantry Division to withdraw three miles south and establish defensive positions along the hills and ridges outside the village of Kujang-dong. Having been ordered by Eighth Army to hold back the onrushing Chinese, Keiser at least wanted to make his stand on good ground. His order applied to all units of the Second Infantry Division except the decimated 9th Infantry Regiment, which due to its heavy losses was ordered to move further south and go into division reserve near Pugwon.²⁹

The order was not to go into effect until 0600 hours on November 28th, which meant that the Second Infantry Division would have to undergo another night of combat in its present vulnerable defensive position. One can only speculate why Keiser chose not to make the withdrawal order effective until the following day. In all likelihood he was concerned that if the withdrawal were to begin when the order was issued in the late afternoon of the 27th, it would not be completed before nightfall. This would leave the Second

Division strung out along the road and vulnerable to renewed Chinese attacks. Keiser therefore decided to move his division at first light, and endure another night of battle with the Chinese from his present position.

The Chinese were not slow to press their advantage. As darkness again shrouded the battlefield of the Chongchon River, the Chinese army renewed their assault on the Second Infantry Division. Shortly after midnight on the night of November 27/28 the U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment, heavily damaged and scheduled to be withdrawn into division reserve on the morrow, found itself assailed by at least a full division of Chinese. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 9th Regiment held their ground, although the 3rd's command post was overrun. After an hour of heavy fighting, the 1st Battalion was knocked backward and, under intense enemy pressure, retreated eastward across the Chongchon River.³⁰

The 1st Battalion of the 9th Infantry at this time barely existed except on paper. Its rifle "companies" were by this time hardly stronger than a normal sized platoon, and it is small wonder that this decimated battalion was forced backward. The wonder is how it was able to fight at all, considering its grievous losses over the past three days.

PFC Robert B. Bruce had been reunited with the remnants of the 1st Battalion just before nightfall, and thus found

himself once more wading the icy waters of the Chongchon River. Bruce's wounded hands were bleeding again and had become infected. His head was still pounding and his ears ringing from the effects of the grenade blast two nights earlier, and he had lost feeling in his feet due to "mild" frostbite suffered in his countless trips across the Chongchon River. Bruce had not been evacuated out because the battered 9th Infantry Regiment needed every man it could muster. The regiment was supposed to go into reserve soon, and until that time every man who could carry a rifle was needed on the line.³¹

The more seriously wounded men of the Second Infantry Division were sent to the 8076th MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital), which was set up near the crossroads at Kunu-ri. By November 27th 1950, the large numbers of wounded men from the Second Infantry Division were beginning to overwhelm the staff of the 8076th. In addition the temperature dropped precipitously on the night of November 27th, and the bitter cold greatly hampered the medical staff. Intravenous solutions froze solid. Space heaters burned out from overuse. The water nurses boiled to sterilize surgical instruments had ice forming in it before they could finish washing them.³²

All through the day of November 27th, the doctors and nurses of the 8076th worked on the broken bodies of the men

of the Second Infantry Division. Surgeons were seen warming their freezing hands over the steam rising from fresh incisions. Soon after dark the generator providing electricity to the operating room broke down, forcing the surgeons to work by flashlight. And so they did, on through the night of November 27th as casualties continued to pour in.³³

Added to the hazards that the cold weather placed on the men of the Second Infantry Division was the strain of the round-the-clock nature of the battle, whereby Chinese units would attack at night and then the Second Infantry Division would regroup and counter-attack during the day. By the evening of November 27th 1950, the men of the Second Infantry Division had been fighting for three days and two nights with hardly more than a few hours pause to rest, all while engaging an enemy who possessed overwhelming numerical superiority. "As the days wore on" recalled Sergeant Robert Hammersmith of the 38th Infantry Regiment, "I don't remember hardly getting any sleep at all, just constant continuously moving and fighting."³⁴

Hammersmith's 38th Infantry Regiment was the most hard pressed of any unit in the Second Infantry Division or for that matter in the whole Eighth Army. On the night of November 27th, elements of the Chinese 42nd Army turned west from their breach in the ROK II Corps former positions, and

struck the 38th Infantry Regiment shortly before 2400 hours on November 27th. Another Chinese force, from either the 40th or 39th Army, launched heavy attacks on the 38th Infantry Regiment from the north. Although U.S. Army estimates vary, at least one and possibly as many as three Chinese divisions took turns striking the 38th Infantry Regiment throughout the night of November 27th and into the morning hours of November 28th.³⁵

It is difficult to discern exactly which Chinese units were attacking the Second Infantry Division at this stage of the battle, because the Chinese were shifting large numbers of men eastward, so as to exploit the opening in the former ROK II Corps position. Four Chinese armies (the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 42nd) were identified in the Second Infantry Division zone of operations by November 28th, and elements of all these units were either attacking the division or moving past its right flank to come around behind it.

This Chinese movement around the right flank of the Second Infantry Division, and the simultaneous Chinese assaults, were facilitated by the lack of any covering force on the right flank of the division. It will be remembered that, of all the units transferred to the right flank of Eighth Army, only the Turkish Brigade had been ordered to move northeast to cover the exposed flank of the Second Infantry Division. But this small force had run into a

large amount of trouble.

As an early recipient of United States aid under the "Truman Doctrine," and as a nation which bordered the Soviet Union and was itself a possible target of communist aggression, Turkey had both moral and political reasons for sending troops to fight in Korea. The Turks sent a 5,000 man brigade, officially titled the Turkish Army Command Force, under the command of Brigadier General Tahsin Yazici. The Turks were equipped with U.S. weapons and transported to Korea. They arrived at the South Korean port of Pusan on October 18, 1950.³⁶

Although a hand-picked force, the Turkish Brigade was green to combat. Turkey had not fought a war since 1923 and, with a few notable exceptions, none of the men in the Turkish Brigade had been in battle. Their brief one month in Korea had been spent mainly in shuttling from one place to another without ever getting into the fighting. That was all about to change.³⁷

The Turks were alerted for possible action on the night of November 26th, when Eighth Army headquarters first learned of the collapse of the ROK II Corps. The Turkish Brigade was ordered to move northeast to the village of Wawon that night, and then resume its advance the following day (27th) by moving further north retaking the village of Tokchon, and join up with the Second Infantry Division. The

Turkish commander Brigadier General Yazici recalled:

Further intelligence was asked for about the enemy and the ROK corps, but none was available: or more information was not supplied lest it lower the morale of the Turkish Brigade.³⁸

Moving north from Wawon along a narrow dirt road the Turks encountered large numbers of civilians and South Korean soldiers streaming towards the rear. Unknown to the Turks, interspersed in the refugee columns were large numbers of North Korean guerrillas and Chinese soldiers wearing South Korean uniforms. These men filed past the Turks, along with the rest of the refugees. Once out of sight, they shed their disguises and set up ambush positions all along the road up which the Turks had just traveled.³⁹

Chinese infiltration teams and North Korean guerrillas were an integral part of the Chinese plan of attack at the Battle of the Chongchon River. Not only did these guerrillas set up roadblocks behind combat units, they also operated far behind the United Nations frontline. At 0300 hours on November 28th, 1950, a Chinese biplane dropped a string of fragmentation bombs on the U.S. Air Force 8th Fighter Bomber Group's parking ramp at Pyongyang Airfield, approximately 80 miles south of where the Second Infantry Division was engaged. The bombs killed one man, destroyed three F-51 Mustangs, and damaged eight more. A subsequent U.S. Air Force investigation of the incident revealed that

the uncanny accuracy of the communist aircraft's attack may have been due to help from the ground in illuminating the target. Six of the "Korean" laborers employed at the base turned out to be Chinese, one of whom was positively identified as an officer in the Chinese Communist Forces.⁴⁰

As the Turkish Brigade moved north, a U.S. observation aircraft detected a large force of Chinese moving southwest towards the Turks. Upon receiving this information, Eighth Army ordered Yazici to turn his column around and take up a defensive position approximately seven miles east of Wawon. Yazici misinterpreted this command, and instead ordered his Brigade to return to Wawon itself.⁴¹

Just turning the column around was a major accomplishment for Yazici. The narrow one-lane road his brigade was on was flanked by a sheer cliff on one side, and a sharply sloping embankment on the other. As a result it took several hours to get their trucks and other vehicles turned around.⁴²

Much of the Turkish brigade was still on the road when darkness fell on November 27th. As it grew dark, the Turks began receiving sniper fire from the Chinese infiltrators on the hillsides around them. Suddenly the rear of the Turkish column was attacked by a large Chinese force, which Yazici later estimated at division strength. The Turks fought their way back down the road, finally reaching Wawon where

they hastily deployed into a defensive perimeter.

When a large force of soldiers suddenly appeared out of the darkness, the Turks opened fire and charged the "enemy" with fixed bayonets. They took over 100 prisoners and killed or wounded hundreds more. Yazici informed Eighth Army headquarters that his men had won a great victory and sent the prisoners back for interrogation. These prisoners turned out to be South Korean soldiers who had been caught between the Turks and the advancing Chinese.⁴³

The real Chinese were right on the South Korean's heels and soon launched a massive attack on the Turks. Yazici later estimated that at least 20,000 Chinese struck his brigade that night.⁴⁴

"They were attacking in hundreds, thousands" stated Turkish 2nd Lieutenant Orhan Akpolat, "In truth this is the way it was, they were encircling us. It was very difficult to break out of their encirclement. The fighting was at very close quarters."⁴⁵

The fight was "at very close quarters," because both the Chinese and Turks welcomed hand-to-hand fighting. The Turks would fire their weapons for awhile before meeting the Chinese assault with a bayonet charge of their own. These tactics seemed to throw the Chinese off balance, and the Turks forced back several Chinese attacks. Gradually, the superior numbers of the Chinese began to turn the tide of

battle in their favor.

As the Chinese assault waves struck the Turkish lines at Wawon, Turkish officers were seen throwing their fur hats onto the ground, to mark the spot from which they would rather die than retreat. Many Turks did die, but they hurled back the Chinese with cold steel. Turkish Private Hacı Altiner recalled: "How shall I say? We and the Chinese suffered enormous casualties. There was so much blood that it ran like rivulets in a thunderstorm. That was a great battle."⁴⁶ The Turks held their ground and, as daylight came on November 28th, Wawon remained in friendly hands.

The Turkish Brigade, for all its valor, had taken heavy casualties; and its position at Wawon was still 10 miles southeast of the Second Infantry Division's position near Kujang-dong. Through that ten mile wide gap, units of General Li Tianyu's CCF XIII Army Group were moving, in an attempt to encircle and destroy the Second Infantry Division. The Second Division was the sole remaining obstacle barring Li's men from their objective of enveloping and destroying the Eighth Army.

Once again, EUSAK 'G-2 was slow to recognize the dangerous situation Eighth Army now faced. Its intelligence summary for November 27th, 1950, described the Chinese assault on the Second Infantry Division and Turks as "regimental sized enemy attacks on three fronts (resulting

in) friendly readjustment of positions." Ominously though, EUSAK G-2 concluded its "Enemy Capabilities" report for November 27th by estimating that the Chinese and North Korean's would "attack south with reinforced forces against friendly positions, continue guerilla activity throughout EUSAK zone, and be further reinforced by Chinese Communist and/or Soviet Forces."⁴⁷

November 28th

The Second Infantry Division began to assemble in the early morning hours of November 28th, 1950 in preparation to execute Division Operations Order #11. But the battles of November 27th, 1950, had already made the order obsolete because most of the positions to which the elements of the Second Division were to withdraw to, were now held by Chinese forces that had rushed through the breach on the right flank. The Second Infantry Division found itself in a "cul de sac," with strong Chinese units on three sides which were moving to cut across the rear of the division and encircle it completely.⁴⁸

Consequently, Keiser countermanded Operations Order #11 with Operations Order #12, by which the Second Division would execute a fighting withdrawal 15 miles southward to the crossroads of Kunu-ri. The 23rd Infantry Regiment was reinforced with the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Infantry

Regiment to form a task force charged with guarding the rear of the division as it made its withdrawal. The withdrawal was complicated by the need of the 38th Infantry Regiment to withdraw three miles west along its narrow supply road, before it could move south down the main valley road. As a result, the division's rearguard had to hold a forward position north of Kujang-dong.⁴⁹

The tremendous traffic load was too much to be accommodated by the two lane gravel road that served as the main "highway" in the Chongchon River valley and traffic "was often literally solid from Kujang-dong to Kunu-ri."⁵⁰

The rearguard during the Second Division's withdrawal to Kunu-ri consisted of the 1st Battalion of the 23rd Infantry Regiment, and the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Infantry Regiment. The 2nd Battalion of the 9th Regiment set up a blocking position behind the 1st Battalion of the 23rd, after which the 1st would "leap-frog" that unit to establish another position further down the road. In this manner, these units would guard the rear of the column as it slowly traveled southward. Captain Sherman W. Pratt, who commanded "Baker" Company, 1st Battalion 23rd Infantry Regiment, later recalled the appearance of the men of the Second Infantry Division who retreated past his rearguard position:

Their appearance attested to the severity of the fighting in which they had been engaged now for almost three days. They were all dirty, unshaven,

weary looking beyond description and with blank expressions on hollow and gaunt faces.⁵¹

The Chinese followed the retreating Second Infantry Division closely, sniping at the column from the hills, firing mortar shells at it, and occasionally even launching small assaults on its rearguard. Pratt walked among his soldiers in their rearguard positions and tried to keep their spirits up. As he made his rounds Pratt spied a soldier, whom he remembered only as "Ernie," and whom he had last seen fighting off a large group of Chinese the night before. Noticing the depressed look in the man's face, Pratt said "Cheer up Ernie! We'll get out of this okay." Ernie replied "Wish I could believe that, Captain, but I doubt if you very much believe it yourself." "You're right" Pratt replied "It's a dark hour just now." Ernie was killed later that night by a Chinese hand grenade.⁵²

The narrow road along the Chongchon River became so clogged with the vehicles of the Second Infantry Division, that total gridlock soon ensued. The column moved so slowly that most of the division had yet to cover the 15 miles to Kunu-ri before darkness fell on November 28th. It was after midnight before all of the Second Division's units were able to deploy into their assigned positions.

On November 28th, the rest of the Eighth Army was withdrawing in the west under light enemy pressure. Many of

its units had yet to see any action against the enemy, as the main Chinese offensive was still striking the Eighth Army's right flank held by the U.S. Second Infantry Division. On the left flank of the Eighth Army was the crack ROK 1st Division, which was commanded by General Paik Sun Yup. Paik later recalled:

Most of my officers and men were bewildered that the mighty ROK 1st Division was withdrawing without a single slugfest worthy of the name. We crossed the Chongchon River [at its mouth] heading south on November 28, 1950. It was snowing.⁵³

While the entire Eighth Army moved south on November 28th, an event occurred that was completely overlooked at the time, yet would have terrifying consequences later.

Roadblock at Samsori

The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division had been ordered by Eighth Army to move into position alongside the ROK 6th Division near Pukchang-ni. Before deploying his division, Major General Gay ordered the 5th Cavalry Regiment to move south from the village of Kaechon to Sunchon, to rejoin the rest of the 1st Cavalry Division.⁵⁴

The 5th Cavalry Regiment headed south on the morning of November 28th, but after moving approximately six miles the lead elements of the regiment were ambushed near the village of Samsori. The Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon of the regiment was cut to pieces by enemy automatic weapons

fire, with only the platoon sergeant and three other men escaping. The 5th Cavalry rushed its 2nd battalion forward and attacked down both sides of the road, but failed to dislodge the Chinese holding the high ground.⁵⁵

After the initial skirmishing, the Americans realized that the enemy soldiers facing them were not North Korean guerrillas but Chinese soldiers who held the road in force. After several probes by the 5th Cavalry failed to dislodge the enemy, its commander decided to bypass the roadblock by moving several miles west before turning south towards Sunchon. After many hours, the 5th Cavalry Regiment finally reached its destination of Sunchon well after dark on the night of November 28th.⁵⁶

A Chinese force, large enough to stop an entire fresh and full strength U.S. Army regiment, had established a roadblock at Samsori, just three miles east of the Second Infantry Division's main supply route and ten miles south of where the division was deploying for battle. Yet there is no record that the Second Division was ever notified of this development. Thus Major General Laurence Keiser's attention remained focused on his front and dangling right flank, while powerful Chinese forces were establishing themselves behind his positions.

As its units filed in on the night of November 28th, the Second Infantry Division formed a defensive arc north of

the village of Kunu-ri. The left flank of the Second Division was held by the remnants of the 9th Infantry Regiment and the center by the 23rd Infantry Regiment. On the right flank, the ROK 3rd and U.S. 38th Infantry Regiments were supposed to deploy on the high ground along Piho-san Ridge, a few miles north of Kunu-ri. But upon arriving at the ridge, the 38th and ROK 3rd discovered powerful Chinese forces had sideslipped past the Second Division's open right flank and had occupied the ridge in great strength.⁵⁷

Consequently, the ROK 3rd and U.S. 38th Infantry Regiments deployed on the low ground south of Piho-san Ridge, where they once again found themselves with a narrow east-west road at their backs as their only supply route and their only possible route of retreat. On the extreme right flank, the Turkish Brigade held the line near the village of Kaechon, as it had been assigned directly to the Second Infantry Division after its encounter with the Chinese at Wawon.⁵⁸

Once again, on paper, this deployment looked formidable, but in the words of the official Second Infantry Division history, the units holding the defensive line at Kunu-ri on the night of November 28th "bore little resemblance to their previous organizations."⁵⁹ All the regiments had experienced severe combat, some for four

consecutive days and nights. The 9th Infantry Regiment had been reduced to one effective battalion (the 2nd) after the first night of combat, and that battalion had suffered grievous losses during its trial of battle over the following three days and nights. The 38th Infantry had suffered heavy losses as well, though not as grievous as the 9th Regiment. Thus Colonel Paul Freeman's 23rd Infantry Regiment remained the most powerful force left in the Second Infantry Division by the evening of November 28th, and for this reason, Keiser gave the 23rd Infantry the task of holding the Second Division's center.⁶⁰

From its new positions at Kunu-ri, the Second Infantry Division was ordered by Eighth Army headquarters to continue its delaying action against the Chinese until other Eighth Army units had completed their withdrawal south of the Chinese flanking attack.⁶¹ Keiser would have preferred that the Second Division continue its withdrawal on November 29th, south to Sunchon where he could form a solid defensive line with his right flank anchored by the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division. But Lt. General Walton Walker decided otherwise and continued to believe the safety of the rest of Eighth Army required the Second Division to make a stand at Kunu-ri. Walker's views are well expressed by historian Roy Appleman: "For compelling reasons the 2nd Division had to be stopped in a vulnerable position at Kunu-ri for the benefit

of the rest of the army."⁶²

On the front and flanks of the Second Infantry Division, approximately 5-6 Chinese divisions (50,000-60,000 men) were massing to try and shatter it, and enable the Chinese to intercept the rest of Eighth Army as it was retreating southward.⁶³ The men of the Second Infantry Division were unaware that they were fighting not just for their own lives, but also to buy time for tens of thousands of their fellow soldiers in other divisions to disengage and form a new defensive line. In war there is only one way to buy time, and that is with the blood of your soldiers. It is written in the book of the Apostle John that: "No greater love hath any man than this. That he lay down his life for his friend."⁶⁴ In those final bitter days of November 1950, the soldiers of the Second Infantry Division fought and died so that others might be saved.

Crisis at the Top

While the Second Infantry Division redeployed near the crossroads of Kunu-ri, the news of the Chinese intervention into the Korean War was being flashed around the world. On November 28, 1950, the Supreme Commander of United Nations forces in Korea, General Douglas MacArthur, informed President Harry Truman that at least 200,000 Chinese soldiers had entered the Korean War, and were launching a

massive offensive against UN forces throughout the whole of Korea. As a result, MacArthur informed Truman that he had halted offensive operations, and authorized local withdrawals. MacArthur's message continued:

All hope of localization of the Korean conflict to North Korean troops...can now be completely abandoned. The Chinese military forces are committed in Korea in great and ever increasing strength. We face an entirely new war. It is quite evident that our present strength of force is not sufficient to meet this undeclared war by the Chinese.⁶⁵

Unknown to MacArthur, his army now faced 300,000 Chinese soldiers, 100,000 more than he had reported to Truman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶⁶ This is an important point, because MacArthur was arguing that "our present strength of force is not sufficient" to fight 200,000 Chinese. Obviously then, his forces were even less prepared to do battle with 300,000 Chinese. Thus the largest American military force deployed anywhere in the world at that time was in danger of being completely overwhelmed and destroyed by the Communist Chinese.

Alan Jackson of CBS Radio began his morning broadcast on November 28th, 1950, with the following news bulletin:

Good morning everybody, although it's not a good morning for the United Nations army in Korea, or the cause of democracy throughout the world. General MacArthur has announced a brand new war against 200,000 [sic] Chinese Communist troops who right now are rolling back American, British, Turkish, and South Korean forces in the most serious U.N. retreat of the war. These

developments have come with stunning suddenness in the past few hours resulting in a communique from MacArthur's headquarters which is perhaps the gravest document of its kind since World War II. It makes news so serious that all other developments this morning, storms, domestic politics, seem minor indeed in comparison.⁶⁷

The news from Korea sent shockwaves through Washington and on the afternoon of November 28th, Truman hastily convened an emergency meeting of the National Security Council. The minutes of that meeting reveal that the leading figures of the Truman Administration were confused by the sudden turn of events in Korea. Overnight, the Truman Administration's policy for waging the Korean War changed from a quest for military victory to an effort to end the conflict by diplomatic means.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley, opened the meeting with an incredibly optimistic briefing on the rapidly deteriorating military situation in Korea. Bradley contended that the "reports...about the strength and momentum of the Chinese communist offensive might well be exaggerated." He went on to say that he "doubted that our lines had been breached...and that it was entirely possible that the Chinese offensive might not go very far because of the extremely difficult terrain...and difficult Chinese supply situation."⁶⁸

General Bradley then expressed his estimate that: "The

Chinese communists have an air potential of at least 300 bombers on nearby fields in Manchuria. These bombers could seriously curtail our airlift (of supplies), and our planes were jammed so closely on the fields in Korea that surprise raids could do us very great damage."⁶⁹ In spite of this danger to which he had alluded, Bradley said that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not believe that MacArthur should be authorized to bomb airfields in Manchuria. General Bradley concluded his briefing by reporting that:

the Joint Chiefs of Staff would not recommend that any additional Reserve components be ordered up now. He said that there were no additional troops that could be sent to General MacArthur and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not plan to try and send any others. General Bradley said that the Joint Chiefs felt just as strongly as the three Secretaries [Army, Navy, Air Force] that we should not let ourselves be pulled into any war in China.⁷⁰

Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall heartily concurred with Bradley's opinion on war with China in asserting that:

he would like to repeat again the point which the three Service Secretaries had regarded as the most important item in their memorandum, namely, not getting ourselves involved individually, or as a United Nations matter, in a general war with China.⁷¹

Vice President Alben Barkley interrupted the discussion to launch a rambling attack on General MacArthur, demanding to know if MacArthur had really made "the statement attributed to him a week ago that the boys in Korea would be

home by Christmas." "I am going to be asked all kinds of questions about this on the Hill", Barkley complained.⁷²

Secretary of State Dean Acheson joined the discussion and:

asked everyone to remember that the Soviet Union had been behind every move. Whatever we think of current happenings in Korea must be in the light of world events, and the three Secretaries and General Marshall were very wise in emphasizing the fact that we must not, under any circumstances, become involved in a general war with China. Mr. Acheson said we must ask ourselves, what do we want in Korea? The answer is easy, "We want to terminate it". We don't want to beat China in Korea,--we can't. We don't want to beat China any place--we can't.⁷³

MacArthur was as outraged at the lack of support from President Truman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department, as he was at the Chinese. Years later when writing his memoirs, MacArthur expressed the frustration he felt at what he considered to be a lack of support by the leadership in Washington for his men in Korea. MacArthur wrote:

No solution was advanced as to the problem of reinforcement but rather toward unrealistically expecting the impossible from men who had gone in to fight one war [against North Korea], had won it, and were now trying to fight a much bigger one.⁷⁴

In regards to whether or not China could be defeated in Korea, MacArthur would write:

The thought of defeat in Korea had never been entertained by me. It was my belief that, if allowed to use my full military might, without

artificial restrictions, I could not only save Korea, but also inflict such a destructive blow upon Red China's capacity to wage aggressive war that it would remove her as a further threat to peace in Asia for generations to come.⁷⁵

The "artificial restrictions" that MacArthur referred to were the orders from President Truman which prohibited him from attacking the Chinese mainland, even with only air or naval forces. MacArthur was only allowed to fight those Chinese forces which actually entered Korea, while the Truman Administration maintained the diplomatic fiction that the United States was engaged in a "police action" in Korea and was not at war with Communist China.⁷⁶

War with China had nonetheless already come, whether Truman or his advisors wanted to admit it or not. While Truman and his advisors worried over possible Soviet moves against Europe, and MacArthur ranted over the lack of support his command was receiving, the men of the United States Second Infantry Division tried to stay alive for just one more day.

Eight thousand miles from the council rooms of Washington, D.C., amidst the frozen wind-swept hills of Korea, the men of the Second Division prepared for another day of battle with the Chinese foe. There would be no relief for these men, only more suffering and more dying.

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CHAPTER V

KUNU-RI

**"If you have a son overseas, write to him.
If you have a son in the Second Division, pray for him."**

Walter Winchell

On November 29, 1950, the U.S. Second Infantry Division braced itself for another day of battle amidst the low hills south of the crossroads at Kunu-ri. Although the attention of the Second Infantry Division was focused on the Chinese threat to its front and flanks, large numbers of Chinese soldiers were slipping past its open right flank and preparing to spring a massive ambush on the division.

In the pre-dawn darkness of November 29, 1950, a Turkish convoy carrying supplies for the Turkish Brigade, headed north from Sunchon up the main supply road of the Second Infantry Division bound for Kunu-ri, a journey of approximately seven miles. Along the way, this Turkish convoy was ambushed, and lost several men and vehicles. The survivors of the ambush pulled into Major General Laurence Keiser's Second Infantry Division command post shortly after sunrise and in broken English desperately attempted to communicate what had happened to them.¹

The only thing the Americans could discern from what the excited Turks said, was that they had been shot at

somewhere along the road from Sunchon to Kunu-ri. As the remnants of the Turkish supply convoy continued on their way towards Kaechon to try and join their Brigade attached to the right flank of the Second Infantry Division, Keiser ordered a Military Police (MP) platoon to move south and see if they could find out exactly what the Turks had encountered.²

The MP platoon headed south at 0900 hours on November 29th, and after proceeding approximately two miles came under heavy machinegun and small arms fire. The MPs lost four men killed and wounded, before beating a hasty retreat back up the road to inform Second Division headquarters that there was a roadblock in place on the division's supply road. Keiser immediately dispatched the 2nd Reconnaissance Company to attack the roadblock and eliminate it. The 2nd Reconnaissance Company attacked the roadblock at 1000 hours but failed to make any headway.³

The enemy forces holding the road were ascertained to be Chinese, and the roadblock was actually discovered to be a "fireblock" of Chinese with automatic weapons entrenched on both sides of the road. Even though no physical obstruction appeared to block the road far larger numbers of Chinese were present than the Americans had anticipated.

At 1240 hours, Keiser reinforced the 2nd Reconnaissance Company with Company C of the 38th Infantry Regiment and a

tank platoon from the 72nd Tank Battalion and ordered this task force to destroy the enemy roadblock. But this attack failed as well, and Second Division headquarters' estimate enemy strength at the roadblock was now raised from a few dozen men to a reinforced company of approximately 300 men.⁴

Keiser next ordered a battery of 155-mm howitzers from the 503rd Field Artillery to give supporting fire to the task force attempting to eliminate the roadblock. Even with this additional support the task force still could not dislodge the Chinese from their entrenched positions on the high ground overlooking the road.⁵

Keiser grew increasingly frustrated with what he considered to be a nuisance in his division's rear area, but considered it to be no more than that. Of far greater concern to him were the large formations of Chinese moving down the Chongchon valley to his front and massing in the hills and valleys on his flanks.

Exactly how many Chinese attacked the Second Infantry Division on November 29th, 1950, and to which units they belonged, is difficult to ascertain. The Chinese shifted many divisions from their initial battle deployment in order to concentrate their forces against the open right flank of the Second Infantry Division. Chinese units first identified by the Second Division to be on its front had now redeployed on its right, and fresh Chinese units had moved

eastward into the division's zone of operations as the remainder of Eighth Army in the west disengaged and withdrew.

From the prisoner interrogation reports filed by Eighth Army Intelligence at the time of the battle, and from captured Chinese documents reproduced in official U.S. Army histories, I have been able to determine the Chinese order of battle facing the Second Infantry Division when night fell on November 29, 1950:

On the left flank and left center: two divisions from the CCF 39th Army

In the center: entire CCF 40th Army (118th, 119th, and 120th Divisions)

On the right flank: 112th and 114th Divisions of the CCF 38th Army

Holding roadblock on Second Division's supply road: 113th Division, CCF 38th Army.⁶

Taking into account the probable casualties suffered by the Chinese in the previous four days and nights of battle, the total strength of Chinese forces opposing the Second Infantry Division for the final two days of the Battle of the Chongchon River was approximately 65,000 men. This is 5,000 more men than both MacArthur's Intelligence and EUSAK G-2 had estimated China had throughout the whole of Korea, when the UN offensive had begun on November 24th.⁷

Across the south end of the Chongchon valley the United States Second Infantry Division deployed for battle. Given

enough time, the Second Division could have dug into the hills south of Kunu-ri, and possibly turned back the onrushing Chinese. But time was something that Li Tianyu's Chinese XIII Army Group would not allow the Americans to have. Determined to press his advantage, Li ordered his men to continue their attacks and their pursuit of the withdrawing Second Division during the daylight hours of November 29th.

Smoke screens were laid down by the advancing Chinese to mask their troop movements. Once again, the forests of Korea burned as the Dragon moved. Through brief openings in the haze, aerial observers reported entire Chinese regiments "dog-trotting" down the roads and valley floors on the east flank of the Second Infantry Division. Air strikes were called in, but the Chinese quickly disappeared into the haze. The air strikes themselves set more fires and generated yet more smoke, furthering hampering U.S. air support.⁸

By late afternoon the Chinese fireblock was still in place on the Second Division's main supply road, and both Keiser and his regimental commanders were beginning to worry about this threat.

At 1445 hours Colonel George Peploe, commanding the 38th Infantry Regiment, radioed Keiser's headquarters requesting permission to evacuate his supply trains and aid

station through Kunu-ri southward to Sunchon. Peplow was "informed that roadblock not cleared and to remain in position until given word. Periodic checks should be made every hour."⁹

At 1528 hours, Peplow again radioed in "Can we go through to Sunchon yet? We have a lot of wounded." The G-3 (Operations) officer of the Second Infantry Division, Lt. Colonel Maurice Holden, informed Peplow that his supply trains and wounded would be diverted west "through Anju and then Sinanju, where a MASH Hospital and air evacuation facilities are located. The roadblock is still in."¹⁰

At 1630 hours, Major General Keiser sent a message requesting assistance to Major General John Coulter, the commanding general of the IX Corps. It marked the first time in the Battle of the Chongchon River that the Second Infantry Division actually requested reinforcements.

Keiser's message stated:

Serious roadblock to South. Estimated enemy battalion or more. Air strikes, artillery, and Infantry Company attacks have failed. Road jammed with vehicles prevents movement North or South. Request immediate assistance from the South to relieve situation. Please notify action taken as all infantry elements definitely engaged.¹¹

The function of the American corps commanders in the Battle of the Chongchon River was almost purely administrative, as they were concerned mainly with coordinating movements of troops and supplies rather than

making tactical decisions in combat. But if the Second Infantry Division was to be reinforced, it would have to be by the authority of either IX Corps or, further up the chain of command, Eighth Army.

Since Lieutenant General Walton Walker had reinforced IX Corps, Coulter had units available that could assist the Second Division. Accordingly IX Corps informed Keiser that a battalion from the British Commonwealth 27th Brigade, would attack north from Sunchon on the morning of November 30th. Simultaneously the Second Division was to drive south to join the 27th Brigade in eliminating the Chinese roadblock.¹²

At approximately 1700 hours on November 29th, while the Second Division's task force was still attacking the Chinese fireblock on the Kunu-ri - Sunchon road, Lieutenant General Walton Walker ordered the entire Eighth Army to fall back to a new defensive position. The Second Infantry Division was ordered to abandon Kunu-ri, and retreat 20 miles south to Sunchon. Only minutes before Walker made this decision, the lead elements of the CCF 38th Army emerged from the smoke filled valleys in the east, and attacked the Second Infantry Division's right flank, held by the 38th Infantry Regiment and the Turkish Brigade near the village of Kaechon.¹³

The CCF 38th Army hit the 38th Regiment's 3rd Battalion head on, then sent strong columns wheeling westward and

southward around the Turkish Brigade at Kaecheon. The Turks immediately opened fire on the Chinese, but the Chinese had no intention of assaulting Kaecheon. While Chinese mortar fire crashed into Kaecheon, pinning the Turks down, Chinese units in regimental strength swung south around Kaecheon, and then headed northwest, grabbing a hill mass that dominated the supply road of the 38th Infantry Regiment and the Turkish Brigade.¹⁴

Colonel George Peploe's worst nightmare had come true. For the entire battle Peploe's 38th Infantry Regiment had been forced to use for both supply and withdrawal, narrow roads that ran parallel to his frontline. The threat of a Chinese penetration of his lines that might result in a severing of his regimental supply road, had been foremost in Peploe's mind.¹⁵

Now the Chinese forces had severed this line and held the road connecting the 38th Regiment and Turkish Brigade to the rest of the Second Infantry Division. No sooner had Peploe learned this, than he found the entire Turkish Brigade retreating west out of Kaecheon and clogging the road with its vehicles. Attempts by Keiser and Peploe to contact Brigadier General Yazici over the radio failed, and no one seemed to know the whereabouts of his headquarters.¹⁶

Unknown to the Second Infantry Division, Yazici, after seeing that his position was flanked, had ordered the

Turkish Brigade to withdraw west before the Chinese completely cut the 38th Regiment's supply road. Then Yazici and his staff drove off, running by the Chinese in the hills and apparently driving past Keiser's Second Infantry Division command post later that evening. When Yazici disappeared, the Turks were left leaderless and they soon became a disorganized mass retreating west down the road.¹⁷

The heavy Chinese attacks on the 38th Infantry Regiment prompted General Keiser to issue new orders to Peploe, commanding him to withdraw west to Kunu-ri. Under heavy attack, Peploe attempted to withdraw his units as best he could. Peploe's movement was made infinitely more complicated by the unauthorized withdrawal of the Turkish Brigade, and by the fact that large numbers of Chinese had already established firing positions overlooking the withdrawal route.¹⁸

Captain Reginald Hinton dispatched two tanks from his regimental tank company to guard the 38th Infantry Regiment's artillery pieces until they could safely withdraw.¹⁹

Commanding one of these M4A3E8 Sherman tanks was Sergeant First Class Robert Sevy, and he and his tank driver Corporal James Scoon have vivid memories of that night of November 29, 1950. Assigned to guard the regimental

artillery, Sevy and Scoon had no sooner arrived and taken up positions east of the guns, than the artillerymen hooked up their guns to their trailers and withdrew, never telling the tankers that they were leaving. By the time the tankers realized that the artillerymen had left, large numbers of Chinese were deploying along the ridges that dominated the narrow dirt road that the tanks were on.²⁰

Gunning his engine, Scoon drove his Sherman west down the road, falling in behind a battalion of Turkish soldiers who were in trucks and jeeps and also retreating. But upon reaching a point where the road went through a narrow pass, the column was brought to a halt. Chinese forces held both sides of the pass in great strength and were delivering deadly machinegun and mortar fire onto the clogged road. The Turkish soldiers apparently panicked at this point and abandoned their vehicles on the road.²¹

Sevy and Scoon found their tank stuck in the "log jam" of vehicles, east of the pass. To their front was the abandoned column of Turkish vehicles. Behind them was the other tank in their platoon as well as advancing units of the Chinese 38th Army. Somewhere further up the road, caught up in the Turkish vehicles, were the other tanks of their company. On the tankers right was a sheer cliff dropping down nearly forty feet to a dry wash, and to their left was another cliff rising forty to fifty feet above

them, and literally swarming with Chinese. Sevy and Scoon would spend the entire night of November 29th, 1950 in this precarious position. Sevy recalled:

We really caught hell that night boy! They [Chinese] were throwing white phosphorous grenades on top of the tank, off of the cliff above us, and the bugles and everything going, and just a horrendous thing. Them old seals on those hatches wasn't no damn good on those wore out World War II tanks, and I looked down at the drivers seat and Jim [Scoon] was a sitting down there just glowing. And I said; 'Jim you better get them goddamn clothes off and throw them out because you got white phosphorous all over you.'²²

At the west end of the road, Captain Hinton recalled watching the Turkish Brigade come spilling out of the pass late on the night of November 29th:

I had tanks up this valley and they got stuck up in there because the Turks bugged out. I don't mind saying that because I was there. Nobody said anything about it at the time because it was an international operation and they didn't want to degrade anybody. Bullshit! They bugged! Jim Nabors [one of Hinton's officers] and I stood on the road and they were running out of that valley like a crowd coming out of a football stadium. We found an officer with them, and we knew he spoke English because he had been in the command post earlier. And we stopped him and told him to help us get them [the Turks] turned around. He said 'I have no command authority, I'm an adjutant!', and off he went. So they abandoned their artillery, their trucks, everything up in this narrow valley, and nothing could get out of there.²³

This description of the Turkish Brigade completely contradicts the first American reports of its courageous stand at Wawon, and brings up a subject of some controversy in writings both on the Battle of the Chongchon River in

particular and the Korean War in general.

Billy Mossman, the official Army historian of this phase of the Korean War, and military historian Clay Blair in his book The Forgotten War, offer extremely negative views of the performance of the Turkish troops and their commander. S.L.A. Marshall and Roy Appleman have a somewhat neutral opinion on the Turks fighting abilities, while T.R. Fehrenbach, a rifle company commander in the Second Infantry Division at the battle, heaps laudatory praise on the brigade in his book This Kind of War. Major General Warren Hodges served as the 38th Infantry Regiment's operations officer during the Battle of the Chongchon River, and he sheds some light on the controversy:

I got all kinds of reports at the time. Ones that said they were great fighters and ones that said they weren't worth a damn. I know that later on [in his career] I observed the Turkish Army, and I found out they were typical of most of those countries over there [Middle East]. There's no initiative. If they're not told what to do, they don't usually know what to do. I think if they are well led they are damn good fighters, and brother as individuals they are as bloodthirsty as they come. But it's the leadership that they need.²⁴

On the basis of Hodge's testimony and other eyewitness accounts of the Turks fighting abilities, it would appear that the main cause of the Turkish Brigade's poor performance on the night of November 29, 1950, was the absence of its commander, Brigadier General Yazici, who had

inexplicably abandoned his brigade at this critical moment of the battle.

Hinton, who remained concerned about his tank crews still stuck on the road, desperately attempted to reach them on the radio from his command jeep. But because of the mountainous terrain, he had trouble radioing them and was obliged to drive his jeep up to the entrance of the valley in order to communicate.²⁵

Hinton had a SCR 503 radio designed for use inside a tank. Consequently the console of the radio had two large lights on the front. When one turned on the radio a blue light lit up; and when one depressed a button to speak into the transmitter, a red light came on as well. In the darkness of the battlefield that night, the lights from the radio brought unwelcome attention to Hinton from the nearby Chinese, who would open fire when they saw the lights come on. "Everytime I had to go over to that jeep," Hinton recalled, "I was scared to death, because those lightbulbs made it just like daylight over there." Hinton informed Lieutenant William "Sam" Mace of his dilemma and, after a moment of thought, Mace calmly walked over to the radio and unscrewed the light bulbs.²⁶

Meanwhile, the trapped tankers were literally swarmed over by Chinese infantry. Chinese soldiers actually leaped onto the decks and turrets of the tanks, in order to try to

place explosive charges or throw grenades down an open hatch. Tankers took turns spraying each other's tanks with machinegun fire to knock the Chinese off. Jim Scoon remembered:

There was one miserable son of a bitch got on my tank above the drivers hatch, and I had my periscope up, and he kept stomping it out. And I finally got pissed off at him, took my .45 [pistol] and opened a little hatch and boom! Then he didn't stomp anymore.²⁷

As Hinton's tankers tried to fight their way out of the trap they had been caught in, Keiser ordered the task force he had organized to eliminate the main Chinese roadblock on the Second Division's supply road, to halt their attacks. The task force had made no headway whatsoever and the men were exhausted. Keiser decided to reinforce the task force the following morning and renew the attack then, preparatory to moving the entire Second Infantry Division southward down the Kunu-ri - Sunchon road.²⁸

Just after the first Chinese units struck the 38th Infantry Regiment and the Turkish Brigade, Keiser's headquarters received a message from the Second Infantry Division's Artillery Commander, Brigadier General Loyal M. Haynes, concerning the proposed withdrawal south. Due to the Chinese roadblock on the Kunu-ri - Sunchon road, Haynes requested permission to withdraw his guns west to Anju and then south to Sunchon, thus avoiding the block. This

request was denied by the Second Division's chief of staff, Colonel Gerald C. Epley, on the grounds that the Anju - Sunchon road was assigned to I Corps, and as such was off limits to the Second Infantry Division. Epley did so in spite of the fact that the 8076th MASH and other service units of the Second Infantry Division had already withdrawn that way to avoid the Chinese.²⁹

At 1730 hours Keiser ordered the 23rd Infantry Regiment to withdraw from its position at Kunu-ri and take up a new defensive position in the hills south of the town. Captain Sherman Pratt commanding Baker Company of the 23rd Infantry recalled:

We had been in constant combat for almost a week without any letup or rest, and most of my men were on the verge of complete collapse. Many were little more than walking zombies. I ordered the company to move out. 'Off and on,' I announced-- off their butts and on the road in the military colloquial of the [time]. Our column began its climb, slowly, cautiously, and with enormous effort. It was dark, cold, and windy, and we had no idea what the high hill had in store for us.³⁰

The fact that 23rd Infantry Regiment was the strongest and freshest unit in the Second Infantry Division on the night of November 29, 1950, says much about the condition of the rest of the division.

Keiser and his headquarters staff were still trying to figure out a plan for the Second Division's withdrawal when, at 2020 hours, Chinese mortar fire began landing on his

command post. Soon the tell-tale "brrrrp" of Chinese sub-machineguns were heard in the compound, as Chinese infiltration teams attacked Keiser's headquarters.³¹

In the midst of this swirling firefight, radio transmissions continued to arrive at headquarters from the Second Division's artillery, requesting permission to withdraw that night rather than waiting until morning and to use the I Corps road through Anju to reach Sunchon rather than the blocked Second Division main supply road. Keiser's headquarters angrily shot back: "Request to move 17th FA BN (field artillery battalion) by alternate route through Anju disapproved. Second request to displace the 15th and 38th FA BNs also disapproved. Div Commander has ordered that all units stay in position and fight it out."³² The strain of almost a week of constant battle was beginning to show.

Keiser's headquarters staff, supported by the 2nd Reconnaissance Company and a battery of guns from the 82nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons (AAA AW) succeeded in driving back the Chinese infantry, but enemy mortar fire continued to land sporadically on the Second Division's command post. Amidst this intermittent shelling, Keiser and his staff worked feverishly through the night attempting to formulate a withdrawal plan. Sometime during the night while these plans were being formulated, Keiser received a radio transmission from I Corps commander Major General

Frank Milburn.

Milburn: How are things going?

Keiser: Bad, right now. We're getting hit in my CP.

Milburn: Well, come on out my way.³³

"My way" meant the I Corps main supply road which ran south from Anju to Sunchon. This was the road that the Second Division's artillery commander had been radioing in requests all that night to use. Milburn and Keiser were good friends, and so Milburn's offer was purely personal because he lacked the authority to actually authorize the move. Any such maneuver by Keiser that would involve moving his division out of the IX Corps area of operations and into I Corps' area would need clearance from IX Corps commander Major General John Coulter.

According to the Second Infantry Division's War Diary, sometime during the night of November 29th the Second Division initiated a request to IX Corps for authorization to move units down the Kunu-ri - Sinanju road, into I Corps' sector.³⁴ There is no record that IX Corps ever acted on this request.

The plan that Keiser and his headquarters staff finally arrived at called for the previously formed task force of Company C, 38th Infantry Regiment and tank platoons of the 72nd Tank Battalion to be reinforced by the entire 9th Infantry Regiment. This force would be supported by the

Second Division artillery and would drive south to eliminate the Chinese roadblock on the Kunu-ri - Sunchon road, thus clearing a path for the Second Infantry Division to withdraw down. By this time the 9th Infantry Regiment was a "regiment" in name only.

Colonel Charles Sloane's 9th Infantry Regiment had begun the Battle of the Chongchon River with approximately 2,800 soldiers. By the night of November 29, 1950, Sloane could only muster approximately 400 dazed and exhausted men. When Sloane was summoned to Keiser's headquarters and handed his assignment, he brought this fact to the attention of Keiser and his staff, but they were not too concerned.³⁵

Keiser and his staff assured Sloane that the Chinese fireblock was shallow and lightly held, and they promised that his regiment would be reinforced with tanks as well as receive both air and artillery support. With this assurance Sloane accepted his assignment, and left to prepare his men for the job ahead.³⁶

Despite the inability of the Second Division to remove the Chinese from the high ground along its proposed withdrawal route, Keiser apparently remained convinced that this enemy force in his rear was not a serious threat. Overwhelming numbers of Chinese were pressing his division on three sides, and the threat posed by any infiltration force on his rear was decided to be minor compared to the

danger threatening the division in other sectors of the front.³⁷

Meanwhile Captain Reginald Hinton's tankers were still under close attack by surrounding Chinese infantry and were trying to find a way out of their predicament on the Kaechon - Kunu-ri road. By the early morning hours of November 30th, Hinton still had two tank platoons stuck on the road and blocked from further movement by the wrecked and abandoned Turkish vehicles in front of them. When the first rays of dawn gave Hinton's men enough light to see what they were doing, Corporal Jim Scoon decided that the best way out was to try and smash through the abandoned Turkish vehicles.³⁸ Shifting the big Sherman into low gear, with his tank commander Sergeant First Class Bob Sevy in the turret giving directions, Scoon moved the tank up against the first truck in front of them, and pushed it over the edge of the road and down the steep drop to the right. Scoon continued on down the road, shoving the abandoned trucks and jeeps right over the side, until he finally came up against something that wouldn't budge.³⁹

That "something" turned out to be the remains of a tank that the Chinese had been able to destroy in their close assaults of the past few hours. Unable to proceed any further, Sevy and Scoon started to wonder if they were ever going to get out of this mess alive.⁴⁰

A worried Captain Hinton finally received a message that Sergeant Perrone in one of the trapped tanks had found a place where he thought the tanks could slide down the sharp drop on their right, and then drive out through a dry wash. Hinton radioed back "For God's sake you might as well try it, even if you tip the tank over, because you can't sit there!" After a short-while Hinton's radio crackled again: "Perrone is down with that tank, and we are going to follow him out." Recalled SFC Bob Sevy:

We looked the situation over [and] we decided we was going right over the side of the hill. And it was purt near straight down. We unloaded the crew and turned the big gun around and Jim, good ol' Jim [tank driver Jim Scoon] he got in there and drove it right over the side, and when she hit bottom boy she just went "Kawop!" We got back in the tank and started up the [draw], making our way back to where we thought the line was. I mean we had no idea because we were completely lost and we were the only few out there, just two tanks.⁴¹

As the morning of November 30th dawned, the skies were cloudy and there was a hint of snow in the air. Unknown to the men of the Second Infantry Division, the Chinese were already in ambush position along the division's withdrawal route to Sunchon. The men of the Second Infantry Division had one final horror to endure before their battle would be over. That horror awaited them along a one-lane gravel road which wound south through a narrow valley, and into the jaws of the Dragon.

ENDNOTES

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4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., entry 12, 1350 hours.
6. Headquarters, Eighth United States Army Korea, G-2 Daily Staff Reports for War Diary, from November 24th to November 30th, 1950. These reports include a section entitled "Prisoner of War Preliminary Interrogation Report" which are interviews with selected Chinese prisoners captured in Eighth Army's area of operations. Also see Billy Mossman, The United States Army in the Korean War: Ebb and Flow November 1950 - July 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), pp. 115-116.
7. Mossman, Ebb, p. 49.
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9. 2nd Div WD, 290001 - 292400 Nov 50, entry 14.
10. Ibid., entry 16.
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12. Roy Appleman, Disaster in Korea (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press), p. 271.
13. 2nd Div WD, entry 18.
14. Mossman, Ebb, pp. 109-110.
15. Author's interview with Major General Warren Hodges, July 23rd, 1993. Hodges was Peplow's operations officer during the battle.
16. 2nd Div WD, entry 18.
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18. Interview with Hodges.
19. Author's interview with Colonel Reginald Hinton, July 23rd, 1993.
20. Author's interview with Sergeant First Class Robert Sevy and Corporal James Scoon, July 23rd, 1993.
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22. Interview with Sevy.
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27. Interview with Scoon.
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31. 2nd Div Artillery WD, entry 60, 2020 hours, 29 November 1950.
32. Ibid., entry 61, 2100 hours, 29 November 1950.
33. Marshall, Gauntlet, p. 205.
34. 2nd Div WD for period 300001 - 302400 November 1950.
35. Appleman, Disaster, pp. 270-271.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Author's interviews with Hinton, Sevy, Scoon.
39. Interview with Scoon.

40. Interview with Scoon and Sevy.
41. Interview with Sevy.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE JAWS OF THE DRAGON

**"That road wound through a valley of sorrows.
The God of Death himself hovered over that road,
with heavy, beating wings."**

General Paik Sun Yup

As the first rays of sunlight began to penetrate the early morning mist of November 30, 1950, the men of the United States Second Infantry Division mounted up on tanks, jeeps, and trucks and began to roll south from Kunu-ri towards Sunchon. The Second Infantry Division was the last unit in the Eighth Army still engaged in combat with the Chinese, and was finally being ordered by Eighth Army commander Lieutenant General Walton Walker to move south to safety. Major General Laurence Keiser assigned his 23rd Infantry Regiment the usually hazardous job of serving as rear guard for the Second Division as it withdrew. As the men of the 23rd Regiment watched their comrades move out, they had no idea that this time, their assignment would save many of their lives.

As the Second Infantry Division prepared to make its withdrawal, Keiser ordered the 38th Infantry Regiment to assist the remnants of the 9th Regiment in clearing the road to the south. Captain Reginald Hinton, who commanded the Tank Company of the 38th Regiment, recalled:

We arrived on the main road, and halted at the top of a hill. We could see fire coming from the top of the next hill to our front which overlooked the road which wound through the valley below. Suddenly, General Keiser appeared. He came up to my tank and told me that the 9th Regiment was trying to reduce the enemy occupying the hill overlooking our withdrawal route. He then asked me if I thought I could run through what he described as a roadblock. I replied that my tankers had been running one roadblock after another and could not see why we could not take on one more. It was my understanding at the time, that this so called road block was only a few yards deep. I was then told that the plan was for the 9th Infantry to continue its attack, while my Tank Company would spearhead the column composed of the rest of the Second Division, which would barrel down the road and run through the block.¹

Riding aboard Hinton's lead tank was Lieutenant Charley Heath. Heath was attached to Headquarters Company of the 38th Regiment. Coming out of Kunu-ri though Heath, like others, found the best ride available. Heath clambered aboard Lieutenant William "Sam" Mace's Sherman tank. Clinging to the sides of the big tank, Heath stared anxiously at the bleak hills rising ever more precipitously on either side of the road. The area of the previous night's firefight was reached, and the lead units in the column halted and deployed for battle. Amazingly though, little resistance was offered by the few Chinese seen. A wave of relief swept through the ranks, as word was quickly passed that the block was clear. The infantry rapidly remounted their vehicles, and the long column once again began snaking its way forward.²

As Heath's tank rounded a sharp bend in the road, however, they came upon a group of wrecked vehicles. The great column came grinding to a halt. While men cursed, and drivers blared their horns, Heath and his fellow travellers on the tank dismounted and moved towards the wrecked vehicles. The vehicles were badly shot up, and as Heath walked towards a large truck he saw a body. The blood on the man was dark, and coagulated, ice forming on his open wounds. As Heath neared the man, he saw he was still alive. "Me Turk, me Turk," the man mumbled. As cold as he was at that moment, Heath still felt an icy chill sweep down his spine. The Turkish convoy had reported being ambushed, but they had already passed that point on the road several miles back. What the Turks had failed to communicate, was that they had actually been ambushed twice on this same stretch of road. That meant that the roadblock was neither shallow nor lightly defended.³

The Second Infantry Division had unwittingly driven headlong into a Chinese trap. The entire Chinese 113th Division had side-slipped past the open right flank of the Second Division, and gotten into position along its withdrawal route south.⁴ What had been thought to be a shallow roadblock several hundred yards deep, was instead a gauntlet of fire stretching for six miles along both sides of the road.

As Heath's mind began to race, the ghastly cacophony of bugles blasted across the narrow valley, and Chinese machinegunners concealed on either side of the road opened fire at near point blank range into the halted column. Trucks filled with men disintegrated under the concentrated fire, bursting into flame. Soon the narrow road was clogged with burning and disabled vehicles, as men dove for the cover of drainage ditches. Some men ran, others turned and fought back. Either way, the Chinese gunners killed hero and coward alike with their deadly fire. The Second Division's officers soon lost contact with their troops, and in that frightful situation it became a matter of every man for himself. Heath scrambled back aboard his tank, just as the driver gunned the engine and flattened the disabled jeep which blocked their path. Heath and his fellow riders swept down the road and cleared the ambush without losing a man. They would be the lucky ones.⁵

Captain Reginald Hinton, further back in the column, was soon on the radio, calling for air strikes to be laid down on both sides of the road.

Fortunately the 38th Infantry S-3 Air Officer was back in the column someplace and picked up this request. The air response came quickly. These aircraft were P-51's [sic] and strafed at low, and I mean low, level. This succeeded in suppressing the Chinese for a little while. The column began moving again, although at an agonizingly slow pace.⁶

Behind Hinton, the vehicles of the 82nd AAA (anti-aircraft artillery) Battalion began to blast the surrounding hillsides with concentrated fire from their twin-40mm cannons and Quad-.50 machineguns. Commanding the 82nd AAA was Lt. Colonel Walter Killilae and he remembered the battle:

We were receiving small arms and machinegun fire from what appeared to be small hay stacks. I got out of my jeep and ran to an M-19 to direct its fire on the stacks. The Chinese fire slackened, and the column began moving again. Further down the road, the mortar and machinegun fire became so intense that I dived into a ditch on the left side of the road. I and Colonel Messinger [Executive Officer for the 9th Regiment] were cowering there when John Hector, CO of the 37th Field Artillery came along. He suggested that we get out and help him to try and get the stalled column moving again. I credit him with saving our lives, as we would have surely been killed had we stayed where we were.⁷

19 year-old Billy Smith was a Corporal in the 9th Regiment's Reconnaissance Company, and he and his comrades found themselves with Killilae's AW vehicles.

The road was total gridlock. You could have walked faster than that column was moving. A particularly heavy concentration of fire knocked our jeep off the side of the road, and we found ourselves next to this M-19 [anti-aircraft vehicle]. That M-19 was blasting away at the Chinese with its 40mm cannons, and soon the Chinese fire died down. My squad leader had fought in World War II, and he told us to stay together, and stay close to that M-19. And so we did. Every time we took fire, those twin 40's would knock out the Chinese gun. And when the Chinese tried to rush the M-19, we drove them off with our small arms fire. We made a pretty good team, and we managed to make it through the

Chinese fire gauntlet.⁸

Other surviving members of the 9th Infantry Regiment were also trying to make their way out. PFC Robert Bruce, in spite of his wounded hands, had been assigned to drive a 2 1/2 ton truck filled with other wounded men. When the Chinese ambush took place, the truck that was just a few feet in front of Bruce on the jammed road, was struck on both sides by Chinese machinegun fire. The men inside the truck were literally blown apart by the concentrated fire, and their blood splattered across Bruce's windshield. The stricken vehicle began to burn, and Bruce could see that there were still wounded men inside it.⁹

Stopping his truck, Bruce started to climb down, and try to rescue some of the men. But an officer came running up from one of the vehicles behind Bruce, and screamed at him to get back in the truck and keep moving. "The only chance we have", the officer told Bruce, "is to keep this damn column moving. You are not to stop for anything, and that's an order!" Bruce climbed back into the driver's seat, shifted his truck into low gear, and managed to maneuver it around the burning vehicle in front of him. The screams of the wounded men slowly burning to death in the truck would stay with him forever.¹⁰

By this time, the entire road was clogged with burning vehicles, and the roadside ditches filled with the charred

and bloodied remains of their former occupants. Many of these hideously wounded men were not dead, however, but rather lay screaming in agony alongside the road. Bullets began slamming into Bruce's truck, and screams from behind him signaled that the wounded men in the back of the truck were being hit.

There seemed to be no way out of this trap to Bruce, as another vehicle to his front was struck by a Chinese mortar round and literally disintegrated in a blinding flash. Bruce swerved his big truck around the flaming debris, the sickening thud of his tires running over the bodies of American soldiers filling his ears. Whether the men on the roadside that he had just run over were dead, or only wounded, Bruce tried not to think about. His responsibility was to the men in his truck.

In addition to the litter cases in the back of the truck, Bruce had three other men piled into the cab of the vehicle with him, all wounded, and all just as scared as he was. Though his hands hurt, it was Bruce's head that ached horribly now. The concussion he had suffered from the Chinese hand grenade five days earlier still pained him, and the inside of his ears had begun to bleed as well, the blood running in little streams down the sides of his cheeks. The man next to Bruce was the calmest of the group, and he kept repeating in a soothing voice: "Just get us out of here

Bobby, just get us out of here Bobby."¹¹

Weaving the big truck down the icy road, dodging Chinese machinegun and mortar fire, as well as the other vehicles in the column, Bruce finally drove through the narrow pass that marked the end of the Chinese ambush area. Bruce skidded to a stop on the icy road, as he reached the position of the British 27th Brigade, which was trying to hold open the south end of the ambush area for the trapped Americans.

Bruce nursed his badly damaged truck to a nearby aid station, which was already overflowing with casualties. Bruce told the orderlies at the aid station that he had a truckful of wounded men, and several of the orderlies came over to his truck to help unload the litter cases. When they dropped the gate on the back of the truck, however, their eyes were met with a scene of utter horror. Almost everyone in the back of the truck had been struck by Chinese fire coming through the ambush. Blood stood several inches deep on the floor of the truck and many of the men were dead. Bruce recoiled back from the sight, staggered away, and began vomiting. His ears began to bleed again.¹²

Other men had their trucks hit and disabled. Abandoning their knocked out vehicles, these men walked along the road, desperately seeking another vehicle to climb aboard. Some scrambled aboard passing trucks, others were

savagely kicked or punched, and knocked away from already overcrowded vehicles.

Staff Sergeant Robert Hammersmith came through the Chinese ambush on foot, leading his squad, and firing into the hills at the Chinese. Laying alongside the road were a group of wounded men, and one of them recognized him.

"Hammer!" the man called out. Hammersmith walked over, and saw that the soldier was a man from his company. The man (both he and Hammersmith were 18 years old at the time) was crying, and cradling his arm, as he had been shot through the elbow. "I'm scared Hammer," the man sobbed. "It's going to be alright," Hammersmith replied. Just then, a truck carrying wounded men was forced to halt near them, as the motor column continued its "herky-jerky" pace through the ambush.¹³

When the truck halted, Hammersmith helped his wounded friend to his feet, and walked him over to the back of the truck. "There's no damn room here!" one of the riders snarled at Hammersmith as he tried to put his wounded friend aboard. Noticing that the person who had spoken was not wounded, Hammersmith told the man to get out of the truck and let the wounded man aboard. When the man responded with further obscenities, Hammersmith reached up, grabbed the man by his shirt collar, and yanked him out of the truck, sending him sprawling onto the road. Then Hammermith

boosted his friend up into the truck, and told him to stay there. "And that was the last I ever saw of the man," Hammersmith recalled of his friend.¹⁴

To the north, Colonel Paul Freeman's 23rd Infantry Regiment was continuing to hold off the pursuing Chinese, and protect the division artillery, which was placed under his care until it could move south. But as Freeman's men fought off attack after attack, their attention was being drawn to the scene of horror unfolding behind them. As minutes became hours, Freeman still awaited word authorizing him to withdraw. But the sounds of battle continued to drift up to him, and the smoke from burning vehicles could be clearly seen in the dull November skies. Freeman was not sure exactly what was happening on the south road to Sunchon, but he feared the worst. Casting an anxious eye at the sun which now was sinking in the leaden Korean skies, Freeman knew he had to act. The Chinese had been hitting him with heavy attacks in broad daylight. If they were this strong during the day, then God help him when nightfall came.¹⁵

Freeman called a conference with his battalion commanders, as well as the artillery battalion commanders, and other various infantry elements awaiting their turn to move south to Sunchon. Freeman told them that he felt that the road south was hopelessly blocked, and that there was no

way they could make it out before sundown. Freeman then notified them that he had received authorization from division headquarters to withdraw down the alternate retreat route to the west through Anju. The other commanders not attached to the 23rd Infantry Regiment balked at Freeman's suggestion because they had orders to use the south road. Freeman told them to do what they wanted, but that he was pulling out and moving west before nightfall.¹⁶

Behind the cover of a thunderous artillery barrage laid down by the remaining artillery, Freeman and the 23rd moved west to safety. The Second Division artillery, as well as what was left of the 9th Regiment, the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, and other service units were unable to clear the trap before darkness. These men would spend the night of November 30, 1950, in Hell.

As night fell across the battlefield, the U.S. aircraft that had been protecting the column were forced to return to base, leaving the survivors of the Second Infantry Division to fend for themselves. Incredibly, although no other unit of Eighth Army was engaged in battle on the night of November 30, no attempt was made by Eighth Army high command to organize a relief column to rescue the trapped remnants of the Second Infantry Division.¹⁷ The men of the Second were abandoned to their fate.

Sergeant Harry Lohmeyer of the 2nd Engineers was one of

those still on the road when night fell:

It was after dark when our vehicles began moving towards the pass at the end of the gauntlet. As we neared it, the enemy took charge and blew us to Hell. People, equipment, vehicles were blowing up, tracers all around. The Chinese charged down the hillsides right at us. Our artillery uncoupled from their trucks, lowered their sights and fired point blank into the Chinese. Great balls of flame rolled along the ground at the oncoming enemy. We were ordered out of the trucks, and after that it was every man for himself. The Chinese were all over us, and the fighting became hand-to-hand. In the pitch black darkness, it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe and I remember grabbing men by the neck to check for dog tags, before killing them. A couple of us managed to clear the melee, and moved west over the hills. We walked all that night, and well into the next day. After about 18 hours, a U.S. plane spotted us, and dropped messages telling us which direction to go in and the enemy locations. When we finally linked up with a First Cavalry Division patrol, I had just two rounds of ammo left.¹⁸

Not all of the men trapped on the road on the night of November 30, 1950, were as fortunate as Lohmeyer. PFC Thomas Kappell, also a member of the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, was in a truck several hundred yards behind Lohmeyer, when the Chinese rushed the column. After engaging in desperate hand-to-hand combat, Kappell and several other members of his platoon broke free and headed into the hills. There they joined up with other stragglers, until they had a group of almost one hundred men, which included many South Koreans. A lieutenant was the ranking member of the group, and so he assumed command. Kappell recalled that the

lieutenant was very inexperienced, and had apparently become confused during the battle. As a result, when the lieutenant led the group away from the ambush area, instead of heading south to safety, he took them north by mistake.¹⁹

Kappell's ragged band staggered into a North Korean village, shortly after dawn on December 1. They thought they had reached friendly lines, but then Chinese soldiers began emerging from the small huts, and Kappell suddenly realized that they had stumbled into an enemy held village. Kappell's group tried to remain calm and, keeping their heads down and not speaking, they tried to walk right on through the village. At first the bluff worked, as the half-light of dawn combined with the presence of the South Koreans in the group to conceal their identity. Right at the edge of the village, however, a suspicious Chinese sentry challenged the group. One of the South Koreans spoke Chinese, and he tried to answer the sentry. Kappell was not sure exactly what was said but, whatever it was, it didn't lower the suspicions of the sentry, who called out to the other guards nearby.²⁰

At that point, everyone decided that the "jig was up", and took off running. The startled sentries fired wildly, and Kappell's group raced out of the village. Emerging from the village, however, Kappell discovered that the hamlet was just one small part of a vast encampment of Chinese, which

they had foolishly walked right into the middle of.

As bugles began to blare, and Chinese machinegun bullets began tearing through the air around them, Kappell and the others saw a railroad tunnel, with what looked to be Chinese railroad workers milling about the entrance, approximately 800 yards away. Assuming that troops working on the railroad would be less heavily armed than normal Chinese infantry, Kappell and the others ran towards the tunnel, hoping to at least find cover from the fire of the pursuing Chinese from the village, and perhaps even find a train to commandeer.

After running several hundred yards towards the tunnel, however, several hidden Chinese machineguns emplaced near the entrance of the tunnel opened fire on Kappell's group. These machineguns cut down several men and the others dove onto the hard, frozen ground, as bullets whizzed over their heads. With absolutely no cover, and completely surrounded by literally thousands of Chinese, the decision was made to surrender. One of the South Koreans, who spoke Chinese, called out that they and the Americans wanted to surrender, and the Chinese machinegunners ceased firing. By this time, however, the Chinese troops in the village had caught up with Kappell's group, and were firing at them. Many of the bullets from the pursuing Chinese went high, and landed among the Chinese machinegunners in front of Kappell.²¹

Thinking that the Americans had started shooting at them again, the Chinese machingunners opened fire once more, raking the ground with bulletts. Caught in a vicious cross-fire, Kappell was struck through the foot, but dozens of other men were cut to shreds. Grabbing several of the dead men, Kappell piled their lifeless bodies on top of himself as a shield against the bullets, and then lay still for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, the Chinese fire slackened, and then stopped. Kappell waited breathlessly, praying that he would somehow live through this nightmare. There was a sudden babbling of oriental voices near him, and then the bodies on top of him were yanked clear, and Kappell stared up into the barrells of Chinese rifles and sub-machineguns pointed straight at him. Kappell was taken prisoner, but of the approximately 100 men who had broke free of the gauntlet with him, only three others remained alive. Kappell was transported north several days later, and would spend the rest of the war in a prison camp.²²

Late on the evening of November 30, 1950, Captain Reginald Hinton pulled up in his bullet-riddled jeep, at a headquarters tent belonging to an Eighth Army engineer unit. Hoping that the engineers might be able to tell him where he could locate other elements of the Second Infantry Division, Hinton climbed out of his jeep, and walked into the tent.

Hinton was bedraggled, and haggard looking after five

days and nights of battle. His uniform was filthy and stained with blood from his wounded wrist, which had been shattered by a Chinese bullet during the ambush. Hinton's appearance startled the clean-cut engineers as he strode into their immaculate tent. "Could you tell me where the Second Infantry Division is reforming at?", Hinton asked. "You from the Second Division?", the engineer's commanding officer asked in an astounded tone. Hinton wearily shook his head in the affirmative. "We just heard they got wiped out!" the engineer exclaimed. "No," Hinton replied, "we're still here."²³

ENDNOTES

1. Letter to author from Colonel Reginald J. Hinton, January 26, 1993.
2. Author's interview with Lieutenant Charley Heath, July 23, 1993.
3. Ibid.
4. Billy C. Mossman, The United States Army in the Korean War: Ebb and Flow, November 1950 - July 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History), p. 110.
5. Interview with Heath.
6. Letter to author from Colonel Reginald J. Hinton, January 26, 1993.
7. Letter to author from Lt. Colonel Walter Killilae, January 6, 1993.
8. Letter to author from Corporal Bill L. Smith, January 21, 1993.
9. Author's personal conversations with Corporal Robert B. Bruce, Sr., October 10, 1978.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Author's interview with Sergeant Robert Hammersmith, July 24, 1950.
14. Ibid.
15. Blair, Forgotten, pp. 491-494.
16. Ibid.
17. Eighth United States Army Korea War Diary, all entries for 30 November 1950. Also see Appleman, Disaster, p. 342.
18. Letter to author from Command Sergeant Major Harry Lohmeyer, January 12, 1993.

19. Author's telephone interview with Corporal Thomas Kappell, February 3, 1993.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Interview with Hinton.

CHAPTER VII

AFTERMATH

"There stood before General Dumas a man in a ragged brown coat, dishevelled, his eyes red rimmed and glaring. Underneath his coat he wore the rags and shreds of a discolored and filthy uniform. 'Here I am then,' the newcomer exclaimed. 'But who are you?' the general cried."

'What! Don't you recognize me? I am Marshal Ney: the rearguard of the Grand Army! I have fired the last shot on the bridge at Kovno. I have thrown the last of our muskets into the Niemen and have made my way here across a hundred fields of snow.'

Raymond Horricks, Marshal Ney

The heroic delaying action fought by the men of the United States Second Infantry Division in the Battle of the Chongchon River, greatly slowed the Chinese Second Phase Offensive and helped to save the Eighth United States Army in Korea from destruction. Thus the main objective of the Chinese offensive was foiled.¹ But the price paid by the Second Infantry Division was heavy.

Out of a pre-battle strength of approximately 15,000 men, the Second Infantry Division lost over 4,500 soldiers killed, wounded, or missing in the Battle of the Chongchon River.² This staggering total remains the heaviest casualties ever suffered by a United States Army or Marine Corps division in a single engagement in the post-World War II era. This shocking "butcher's bill", and the disastrous ambush on the Kunu-ri - Sunchon road, would cost Major

General Laurence Keiser his command.

Officially, Keiser was evacuated to Japan from Korea for treatment of pneumonia, and on December 5, 1950, was relieved of his command by Eighth Army commander Lieutenant General Walton Walker.³ S.L.A. Marshall, who was in Korea when Keiser was relieved, relates that Keiser went out of his way to demonstrate to him that he was not ill. Keiser was angry, Marshall reported, and felt like he was being made the scapegoat for the Second Division's defeat at the Chongchon River.⁴ Keiser retired from the United States Army in 1954, a broken man.

Eighth Army commander, Lieutenant General Walton Walker, was killed in a jeep accident just weeks after he had relieved Keiser of his command. MacArthur replaced Walker with Lieutenant General Matthew Ridgway. In an effort to better understand his new command, Ridgway wrote to his former West Point classmate, Laurence Keiser, asking him for information about what had happened along the Chongchon River. Keiser never replied and years later would remark about the battle: "It is over--it is done. Let it lie."⁵

Although Keiser lost his command, some of the highest ranking officers to serve in Korea praised the Second Infantry Division for its valor in the Battle of the Chongchon River. United Nations Supreme Commander General

Douglas MacArthur, described the Second Infantry Division's battle as a "notable rearguard action which enabled the Eighth Army to break contact and avoid any enemy flanking movement."⁶ General Matthew Ridgway, Walker's and later MacArthur's replacement, called the Second Infantry a "gallant division" that was "badly mauled...as it was holding the Chongchon River so the balance of Eighth Army could cross."⁷

General Paik Sun Yup, commanding general of the ROK 1st Division at the time of the battle, and destined to rise to supreme command of the South Korean army wrote: "The U.S. 2nd Division propped up the unraveling line (at the Battle of the Chongchon River) until the very last minute."⁸

In December 1950, the Second Infantry Division's war was far from over, and in the month's that followed it would avenge its losses at the Battle of the Chongchon River. From January 31 - February 15, 1951, the Second Division's 23rd Infantry Regiment made a glorious stand at the siege of Chipyong-ni. Surrounded by five Chinese divisions, the men of the 23rd Regiment turned back wave after wave of Chinese attackers at bayonet-point. When the battle ended, 7,855 Chinese corpses lay strewn across the Korean countryside.⁹

When spring came to Korea in 1951, the Chinese made what would turn out to be their last attempt to achieve a military victory in the Korean War. Smoke from forest fires

again filled the skies over Korea, as 120,000 Chinese soldiers massed in front of the U.S. Second Infantry Division and the ROK III Corps. A captured enemy officer revealed that the objective of the forthcoming Chinese attack was to destroy the Second Infantry Division for having disrupted so many former Chinese offensives.¹⁰

The Chinese assault began on May 15, 1951, and appeared to be an exact replica of their plan of attack at the Chongchon River. A massive blow shattered the ROK III Corps, exposing the Second Division's right flank and again threatening it with encirclement and destruction. But the men of the Second Division had learned much about their Chinese foe during the past six months.

Because of their experience at the Chongchon River, the men of the Second Infantry Division had anticipated the attack against their flank, and had already formed a defensive line along that sector, complete with barbed wire and minefields. Wave after wave of Chinese slammed into the Second Division, but they were thrown backward by a hailstorm of artillery and small arms fire. When the smoke of the battlefield cleared on May 22, 1951, a shocking total of 90,000 Chinese lay dead or wounded in front of the lines of the Second Infantry Division.¹¹

In conclusion, it is apparent from the evidence I have presented in this thesis, that the officers and men of the

United States Second Infantry Division fought bravely at the Battle of the Chongchon River and performed their duty in the highest traditions of the United States Army. The defeat of the Second Infantry Division at the Chongchon River may be attributed to the overwhelming numerical superiority of a veteran Chinese army, combined with the suddenness of the enemy's offensive, his having completely surprised the Americans, and the novelty of his tactics.

In spite its tactical defeat along the Chongchon the Second Infantry Division still helped deny the enemy his ultimate objective of destroying the Eighth Army. Although the battle was lost, honor was not. It is my hope that this thesis will help to insure that the courageous men of the United States Second Infantry Division, will forever be remembered for their epic struggle with the Chinese along the banks of the Chongchon River.

These courageous men walk among us yet today, and behind the kindly eyes of grandfathers, one can still see the fire of the warrior's soul. These men remember a time when the snows of Korea were stained red with the blood of heroes. It was a time for courage. It was a time for sacrifice. It was the time of the Dragon.

ENDNOTES

1. See cable from Mao Zedong to Joseph Stalin reprinted in: Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis and Xue Litai, Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 177-178.
2. Billy C. Mossman, United States Army in the Korean War: Ebb and Flow, November 1950 - July 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1990), pp. 126-127.
3. Eighth Army Command Report, G-3 Section, 5 December 1950.
4. S.L.A. Marshall, Bringing Up the Rear, (New York: Praeger, 1971), pp. 183-188.
5. Appleman, Disaster, p. 341.
6. Douglas MacArthur, Reminiscences (New York: Time, Inc., 1964), p. 374.
7. Matthew Ridgway, Korean War (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 69 & 73.
8. Paik Sun Yup, From Pusan to Panmunjom (New York: Brassey's (U.S.), 1992), p. 107.
9. Clark Munroe, The Second United States Infantry Division in Korea 1950-1951 (Tokyo: Toppan, 1952), pp. 105-106.
10. Ibid., p. 129.
11. Ibid., pp. 129-138.

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