



FACT SHEET



Marines including bazookamen, flame throwers, automatic riflemen and sharpshooters, find low flying Marine "Corsair" fighter-bombers flying to their aid.

U.N. Defensive Campaign

June 27 – September 15, 1950

The Invasion

Communist North Korea, having failed to persuade the South Korean people to unite with their northern neighbors, decided to subjugate them by military force. On Sunday, June 25, 1950, seven divisions and an armored brigade of the 135,000-man North Korean People's Army (NKPA) struck without warning and gained complete surprise as they burst across the 38th parallel and invaded the Republic of Korea (ROK). Following massed artillery fires, columns of Soviet-made T-34 tanks and Soviet-trained infantry launched their main effort toward the South Korean capital, Seoul. The NKPA engulfed and destroyed whole ROK units as it executed a well-conceived and carefully prepared operation. Strong attacks were also directed through Kaesong toward Munsan on the right and toward Chunchon on the left. On the west coast the NKPA quickly captured the Ongjin Peninsula.

At the time of the invasion, the ROK Army (ROKA) had 98,000 men and eight infantry divisions, four of which were near full strength of 10,000 men and were deployed along the 38th parallel. A sizable portion of the Army's strength concentrated on suppressing North Korean guerrillas. Combat training for the South Korean Army was incomplete, and the Army had no tanks, medium or heavy artillery, or any of the supporting services normal to American divisions. Six of the eight divisions each had the

quivalent of one battalion of 105-mm howitzers; the other two divisions had no field artillery. When the war began, the U.S. presence in Korea consisted of the 500-man Korean Military Advisory Group.

By June 28, the North Koreans had captured Seoul, positioned forces along the Han River from its mouth to a point about 20 miles east of Seoul, and advanced as far as Samchok on the east coast. In its flight south, the ROKA suffered serious losses during the withdrawal across the Han River. In the confusion of the retreat, the bridges over the Han were blown up while most of the ROK forces defending the capital were still north of the river. The greater part of these forces escaped across the river by boat but without their vehicles and heavy weapons.

Reactions

The United Nations (U.N.) Security Council acted quickly and firmly upon hearing the news of the invasion. On June 25 the Security Council adopted a resolution calling for the cessation of hostilities. Two days later, as the situation in Korea deteriorated, the United Nations asked its members to furnish military assistance to repel the invasion.

President Harry S. Truman, on June 26, authorized the use of American air and naval forces south of the 38th parallel and ordered the evacuation of American dependents from South Korea. The following day U.S. aircraft of the Far East Air Forces (FEAF) were involved in the first aerial combat of the war. FEAF F-82s and F-80s shot down seven North Korean Air Force aircraft. Another five North Korean planes were downed on June 29. Truman authorized air and naval operations against targets in North Korea on June 30 and directed the Far East Commander in Tokyo, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, to use American ground forces available to his command to defend South Korea. Truman expanded this authority on the following day to include all available U.S. military forces in the Far East.

A July 7 Security Council resolution recommended the establishment of a unified command in Korea and requested that the United States designate a commander. President Truman announced on July 8 the appointment of MacArthur as Commander in Chief, United Nations Command. South Korean President Syngman Rhee placed all ROK security forces under the U.N. commander on July 14. The American ground forces at MacArthur's disposal included the Army's 1st Cavalry Division and the 7th,

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24th and 25th Infantry Divisions stationed in Japan and the 29th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) in Okinawa.

The divisions were understrength, lacking a third of their infantry and artillery units and almost all of their armor. Weapons and equipment were relics of World War II, and ammunition reserves amounted to only a 45-day supply. Combat proficiency was low, since training had been neglected during the occupation of Japan.

Task Force Smith

On June 30, 1950, MacArthur ordered the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division to Korea. This 540-man unit, known as Task Force SMITH, for its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith, was flown in by FEAF transports on July 2 and moved forward to establish a defensive position astride the main road between Osan and Suwon to the north. Task Force SMITH's mission was to fight a delaying action to gain time for the arrival of the rest of the 24th Division and other Army units from Japan. This small force encountered advancing enemy tanks on July 5. Heavily outnumbered and lacking effective antitank weapons, Task Force SMITH was outflanked by the North Koreans. Suffering more than 150 casualties and the loss of all equipment except small arms, Task Force SMITH broke into disordered retreat.

While Task Force SMITH fought the NKPA on the ground, the first strategic air attacks of the war occurred on July 6, when nine B-29s bombed an oil refinery at Wosan and a chemical plant at Hungnam.

Holding the Perimeter

The remaining elements of the 24th Division reached Korea by July 13 and took defensive positions along the Kum River north of Taejon and 60 miles south of Osan. To the east, ROK Army elements held positions some 50 miles above Taegu. By July 15 the 25th Infantry Division arrived in Korea and held positions east of the 24th Division. The 1st Cavalry Division closed on the Pohang-dong area on July 18.

MacArthur placed Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, Commander of the Eighth U.S. Army, in command of all U.S. ground troops in Korea on July 13, and, at the request of President Rhee, the South Korean Army as well. As the ground troops of other U.N. members reached Korea, they likewise were placed under Walker.

North Korean forces crossed the Kum River on July

14 and six days later captured Taejon, an important communications center. U.S. and ROK troops continued to withdraw to the southeast under constant North Korean pressure. During the withdrawal, the U.S. Army's 3.5-inch rocket launcher was used in battle for the first time, with good results against North Korean tanks. The 24th Division commander, Major General William F. Dean, was reported missing when North Korean tanks broke through forward elements of his division. Not until December 1951 did the communists report that Dean was a prisoner of war.

While the ground troops did their best to hold their ground, by July 20, FFAF aircraft had almost completely driven the enemy from the air, attaining air superiority. Air supremacy was achieved by mid-August.

The final days of July 1950 witnessed a series of hard-fought battles all along the 200-mile front of the U.N. perimeter. At critical points, ROK troops and the U.S. 25th Division defended the northern front. The 1st Cavalry Division was battling on the west flank to keep the Yongdong-Kumchon-Taegu rail line open. To block the southwestern approaches to Pusan, the 29th RCT advanced to Chinju, but was ambushed by a North Korean division and suffered heavy losses.

The Pusan Perimeter

By the beginning of August, U.S. and ROK forces had withdrawn behind the Naktong River, a position that the U.N. Command (UNC) was determined to hold.

Walker declared the strategy of trading space for time to be at an end and ordered a final stand along this 140-mile perimeter around the port of Pusan. The port had become a well-stocked Eighth Army supply base and the hub of a rail and road net leading to the battlefield. By now the enemy's long supply lines were under heavy air attack, enemy naval opposition had been destroyed, and the blockade of the Korean coast was in place.

During the next month and a half, 14 North Korean divisions dissipated their strength in piecemeal attacks against the Pusan Perimeter. FFAF and navy aircraft flew numerous close-air support sorties, destroying tanks and other vehicles and killing many North Korean soldiers. With this support and by rapidly shuttling his forces to meet the greatest threats, Walker inflicted heavy casualties on the North Koreans and prevented serious penetrations. The enemy, determined to annihilate the Eighth Army and take Taegu and Pusan, massed for a two-

3 pronged attack across the Naktong, one prong from the west and the other from the southwest.

By mid-August, the offensive capability of the Eighth Army had been augmented by the arrival of the U.S. 2d Infantry Division, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, four battalions of medium tanks from the United States and the 5th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) from Hawaii. Before the month was out, five ROK divisions were restored to some semblance of order, and Great Britain committed its 27th Brigade from Hong Kong. With the arrival of these reinforcements, Walker could not only bolster his perimeter but also begin an offensive in southeastern Korea.

While U.S. troops were fighting along the banks of the Naktong, other battles took place in the south. The North Korean 6th Division, a veteran unit, had concentrated for an assault upon Masan and Pusan but was hit by Task Force KEAN. Named for Major General William B. Kean, the 25th Division Commander, the task force consisted of the 5th RCT, the 35th RCT of the 25th Division, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade and a ROK battalion. It opened a strong counteroffensive on Aug. 7 to secure the left flank of the perimeter and prevent the enemy from driving on Pusan. Overcoming heavy resistance, Task Force KEAN defeated the North Koreans and by Aug. 11 commanded the high ground east of Chinju.

On the eastern flank of the perimeter, ROK units lost the town of Yongdok, and some of them had to be evacuated by sea. On Aug. 12 enemy forces attacked the port of Pohang-dong led by tanks which mounted screaming sirens. This force poured through a break in the ROK lines and linked up with North Korean advance agents in the port. These agents, disguised as innocent-looking refugees, carried mortars, machine guns and other weapons in oxcarts, on A-frames and on their persons. The adjoining Yonil airfield, of great importance to the U.N. forces as a base for tactical aircraft, was threatened. Because the danger was so pressing, on Aug. 13 all aircraft were evacuated. Within the next five days, however, ROK troops and a small U.S. task force recaptured Pohang-dong.

During this time a much larger force of North Koreans breached U.N. positions at several points in the Naktong River sector but failed to capture the rail junctions at Taegu. To hold a line near the river, Walker rearranged the defensive positions of the 24th and 25th Divisions, the 1st Cavalry Division and the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. The enemy, continuing his efforts to crack the perimeter, massed several divisions above Waegwan to assault Taegu

from the north. At the request of the Army, FEAF Bomber Command B-29s dropped almost 850 tons of bombs on a supposed enemy concentration near Waegwan. Later reconnaissance showed little destruction because the enemy had moved from the area prior to the attack. Meanwhile, the North Koreans launched a powerful attack that carried through the ROK positions and threatened Taegu.

Stalwart defense, strong air strikes and swift counter-measures by the U.S. 23d and 27th RCTs and the ROKA 1st Division on Aug. 19 saved Taegu from almost certain capture and stopped the momentum of the enemy offensive.

Shortly before midnight Aug. 31, enemy forces again attacked the Naktong River Line, this time with tremendous force. Disregarding heavy casualties from U.S. Air Force air attacks, they struck the entire Pusan beach-head from Haman in the south to Pohang-dong in the northern sector. The North Koreans captured the port of Pohang-dong for a second time on Sept. 6, but again failed to capture the Yonil airfield. Waegwan and the walled city of Kusan were lost as U.N. defenders fell back for a last ditch stand at Taegu. Between Sept. 4 and 11, the enemy made gains along the Naktong in some of the heaviest fighting of the war, but U.N. forces, aided by relentless air attacks, again blunted the drive on Taegu and began to show slow progress of their own. On the southern front, the North Korean offensive, which opened with a massive artillery barrage near Haman, struck the 25th Division on Sept. 1 with tanks and waves of infantry, imperiling U.S. forward positions. But Haman was held after several days of fierce battles.

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Although the enemy had made impressive gains along the perimeter and Walker still had to shuttle units from one critical area to another, a strong beachhead remained in the hands of the UNC. The Eighth Army, the Marines and the other U.N. forces had survived their last major crisis in the Pusan beachhead area, but hard fighting continued through mid-September along the entire line of contact. For six weeks the defending U.N. force had used its interior lines and greater mobility and a constant airlift of men and materiel from Japan to Korea to fend off enemy forces that at no time were able to assemble sufficient logistical support to exploit a breakthrough.

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