



# FACT SHEET



A F-51 Mustang drops napalm on North Korean positions during the U.N. Summer-Fall Offensive, August 1951.

## U.N. Summer - Fall Offensive

July 9 - November 27, 1951

### Attempts at Peace

On Sunday June 23, 1951, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Jacob Malik made a statement in New York implying a general communist willingness to discuss armistice terms to end the Korean War that had begun a year earlier. When Communist China and North Korea also indicated that they, too, desired peace, President Harry S. Truman authorized United Nations forces commander General Matthew B. Ridgway to arrange for an armistice conference. Both sides agreed to begin negotiations at Kaesong on July 10, 1951. The chief U.N. delegate was U.S. Navy Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy. The communists selected North Korea's Lieutenant General Nam Il as their chief negotiator.

It was agreed at the first meeting that military operations would continue until an armistice agreement was signed. At that time neither side was willing to start any large-scale offensive while talks were in progress for fear of jeopardizing the new peace process. In addition, as the fighting stabilized close to the 38th parallel, U.N. reliance on obtaining a military solution to the crisis in Korea had waned. The costs had become too high and the risks to the general world peace were too great. Yet, no one knew the negotiations would drag on for two more bloody and frustrating years.

During the summer of 1951 the strength of U.N. ground forces in the four corps under Eighth Army command totaled approximately 554,577 men. This included 253,250 Americans in the U.S. Army and U.S.

Marine Corps; 260,548 in the Army of the Republic of [South] Korea (ROK); and 28,061 men in United Nations contingents from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Greece, India, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey and the Union of South Africa. Communist forces in Korea numbered some 459,200 men, of whom 248,100 were Chinese. The remainder were North Korean. According to U.N. intelligence reports, another 7,000 North Koreans were operating as guerrillas behind the lines in the south.

### Limited but Deadly

U.N. military actions during this period were limited to improving and consolidating front line positions, combat patrolling and artillery and air bombardments of enemy front line fortifications. Considerable U.N. attention was devoted to repulsing persistent enemy small-unit attacks all along the front that now extended from the Imjin River to Ch'orwon, paralleled the base of the area referred to as the "Iron Triangle," swung southeast to the lower edge of a position known as the "Punchbowl," and then ran north and east to the Sea of Japan above Kansong. With the exception of a flare-up in the fall of 1951, this general pattern of combat was to prevail until just before the signing of the truce in July 1953. Nonetheless, throughout the summer months, and into the fall of 1951, there was continuous fighting for limited objectives, and, tragically, no day passed without casualties on both sides. In general, the front lines remained stable despite efforts by both sides to improve their positions.

On July 21, 1951, in keeping with this situation, Eighth Army commander Lieutenant General James A. Van Fleet ordered a northward advance in the X Corps zone to shorten the line, to prevent the enemy from freely observing Line KANSAS, and to force the enemy to pull back his mortars and artillery. The specific objective was a 3,890-foot-high mountain designated Hill 1179, or Taeu-san, at the southwest edge of the "Punchbowl," which ROK Marines had unsuccessfully attacked earlier. The area was defended by what was estimated to be comparable to a regiment of 1,700 North Koreans. Elements of the U.S. 2d Division, commanded by Major General Clark L. Ruffner, strongly supported by U.N. aircraft and artillery, managed to secure the crest of Hill 1179 in a four-day battle.

On Aug. 18, Fifth Air Force initiated a second interdiction campaign, dubbed STRANGLE, this time against the North Korean rail system. That same day, action again was focused in the zone of X

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Corps and the ROK I Corps. Supported by warships offshore, the U.S. 2d Division; the U.S. 1st Marine Division; and the ROK 5th, 8th, 11th and Capital divisions advanced to gain more favorable terrain to the northeast and west of the Punchbowl, including Hill 983, the tallest peak in a series of three hills known as "Bloody Ridge." Whoever controlled these ridgelines held a commanding observation position along the main line of resistance. Although the South Koreans were originally successful in gaining a foothold here, on the night of Aug. 27-28, the ROK 5<sup>th</sup> Division crumpled under an enemy counterattack and failed to regain its position.

### Fight for Heartbreak Ridge

Shortly before, on Aug. 22, the communists broke off truce negotiations. In response, Van Fleet decided to launch a series of limited-objective attacks until the communists returned to the conference table prepared to bargain in good faith and for the purpose of improving the Eighth Army's defensive positions. These attacks were to occur in the X Corps and ROK I Corps zones, the scene of the recent action around the Punchbowl and Bloody Ridge. The U.N. drive opened Aug. 31 when the 1st Marine Division, with attached ROK Marine units, drove against the northern portion of the Punchbowl. Two days later, the U.S. 2d Division attacked northward toward Bloody Ridge and Hills 851, 931 and 894, known collectively as "Heartbreak Ridge," in the vicinity of the Punchbowl's western edge and Taeu-san. The Marines secured the northern lip of the Punchbowl against moderate resistance; by Sept. 5, the 2d Division secured Bloody Ridge. On the ridge, American soldiers discovered substantial stores of communist supplies and 500 enemy dead, a small number relative to the 15,000 casualties suffered by the communists during the previous three weeks defending Bloody Ridge. U.N. and ROK casualties numbered some 2,700 men during the same period. In spite of the American success on Bloody Ridge, however, Heartbreak Ridge located 1,500 yards to the north still remained in enemy hands.

Van Fleet ordered the U.N. forces to continue their advance toward the northwesterly leg of the Soyang River above the Punchbowl. On Sept. 11, U.N. forces resumed their attacks with the Marines gaining their objectives one week later. Meanwhile, the 23d Infantry, U.S. 2d Division, on Bloody Ridge west of the Punchbowl fought to take Heartbreak Ridge on Sept. 13. Like the Marines, the 2d Division infantrymen often carried 60-mm mortar or 75-mm recoilless rifle rounds in addition to their own equipment. They crawled up the towering, knife-crested ridges to assault the hard-fighting and well-entrenched North Korean enemy who would yield a

ridge only in desperation and then counter attack. The crests of Heartbreak Ridge often changed hands several times each day.

By Sept. 19, the X Corps front was stabilized except in the 2d Division's zone, where bitter fighting for Heartbreak Ridge continued. The struggle here was especially brutal. In one case, troops of the division carried out at least 11 unsuccessful assaults against a single ridge within a span of 24 hours. Finally, in late September, the U.N. halted its attacks on Heartbreak Ridge as commanders sought to develop a new plan to take the ridgelines. The battle resumed as Operation TOUCHDOWN on Oct. 5 with a series of U.N. flanking operations conducted by the 2d Division's 9th, 23d and 38th infantries. Finally, after 10 days of intense combat, and after the enemy seemed to be willing to reopen the truce talks, the last ridge was secured on Oct. 15 and the 2d Division consolidated its hard-won gains.

During the previous 30 days of combat, the 2d Division suffered over 3,700 casualties, over half coming from the 23d Infantry and its attached French battalion. Enemy losses on Heartbreak Ridge were estimated to have exceeded 25,000 men.

The increase in casualties had been accompanied by a similar rise in allied ammunition expenditures. U.N. forces, possessing enormous firepower, often attempted to blast their communist opponents out of

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their positions rather than risking the lives of U.N. infantrymen in frontal assaults. Aside from the millions of rounds of small arms fire that were used to take Heartbreak Ridge, the 2d Division received the following artillery support in a 30-day period: 76-mm gun — 62,000 rounds; 105-mm howitzer — 401,000 rounds; 155-mm howitzer — 84,000 rounds; and 8-inch howitzer — 13,000 rounds. The division's mortar crews sent over 119,000 rounds of 60-mm, 81-mm and 4.2-inch mortar fire and the 57-mm and 75-mm recoilless rifle teams directed nearly 18,000 rounds at the enemy. In addition, the Fifth Air Force flew two-thirds of its 2,400 close-air support sorties for the month in support of the X Corps.

### **Fighting in the West and UNC Advances**

In contrast to the heated battles for the Punchbowl and for Bloody and Heartbreak ridges in the east, local attacks, counterattacks and combat patrols culminating in a series of successful raids characterized action along the western portion of the front held by IX Corps. Once these raids were concluded, five divisions — the ROK 1st, the 1st British Commonwealth, the U.S. 1st Cavalry, and U.S. 3d and 25th Divisions — struck across a 40-mile front from the Kaesong area to Ch'orwon to advance the front by four miles — Line JAMESTOWN. By Oct. 21, Line JAMESTOWN was secure and U.N. forces had seized the commanding heights just south of Kumsong.

The successful allied advances of August,



Personnel of Battery B, 937th Field Artillery Battalion, 8th U.S. Army fire their guns in support of the 25th U.S. Infantry Division somewhere in Korea Nov. 26, 1951.

September and October 1951 gave the U.N. forces possession of the commanding ground along their entire front. This may have influenced enemy leaders to sit down at the peace table once again, as talks resumed Oct. 25 at a new site —Panmunjon.

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were to be limited to those necessary for straightening the main line of resistance, extending from the Yellow Sea eastward to the Sea of Japan 155 miles away, and for establishing an outpost line 3,000 - 5,000 yards forward of the main positions. Action on the Eighth Army front for the last two months of 1951 was limited to patrol clashes and repelling light enemy attacks.

### **A Lull Seizes the Battlefield**

In November the character of the conflict returned to that of July and early August. Fighting tapered off into a monotonous routine of patrol clashes, raids and bitter, small-unit struggles for key outpost positions. Soon a lull settled over the battlefield, the result of General Ridgway's decision to halt offensive ground operations. Two factors influenced his decision: the cost of further major assaults on the enemy's defenses would outweigh any results that may be gained, and the possibility that a peace might be brokered at the recently reopened armistice talks ruled out the mounting of any costly large-scale offensives. On Nov. 12, 1951, Ridgway ordered Van Fleet to cease offensive operations and begin an active defense of the Eighth Army's front. Attacks

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