

## MARINES IN KOREA

The following is taken from *A Brief History of the United States Marine Corps*, Marine Corps Historical Reference Series, reprinted 1964.

On 25 June 1950, the Russian-trained North Korean People's Army [NKPA] attacked the Republic of Korea [ROK]. The United Nations immediately branded the North Koreans as aggressors, and requested the United States to dispatch military assistance to the South Korean Republic. Within a month, ROK and UN troops were holding on a small beachhead [about 90 by 60 miles] around the southeastern seaport of Pusan.

On 2 July 1950, Marine Commandant General Clifton B. Cates had cabled the Far East Commander, General Douglas MacArthur, volunteering Marines for combat duty. MacArthur enthusiastically accepted this offer and persuaded the joint Chiefs of Staff to concur. The 5th Marines and MAG-33 received the assignment, and on 7 July, they became the major elements of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. One week later, the brigade sailed for Korea.

On 2 August, the Marines arrived in Pusan. The brigade commander, Brigadier General Edward A. Craig, had been given the temporary assignment of "plugging holes in the dike," reinforcing the defensive lines as weak spots opened up. While the ground troops were accomplishing this mission, MAG-33 had arrived in Japan, and by 3 August, two fighter-bomber squadrons were flying close air support missions from the decks of carriers. A night fighter squadron [VMF (N) -513] flew missions from Japan, and an observation squadron [VMO-6], with its helicopters and light planes, joined ground elements in Korea to provide direct support.

Within the Pusan perimeter, the Marines became "trouble shooters" for hard-pressed Army troops. On three separate occasions, the brigade counterattacked the enemy, stopped his attack, and eliminated the penetration. Several NKPA divisions were decimated. On 5 September, the brigade moved to Pusan in preparation for joining the 1st Marine Division which had recently arrived in Japan.

In one month, the brigade had killed and wounded an estimated 10,000 communists while executing three arduous counterattacks and traveling some 300 miles in the process. The enemy had been thrown back some 8,000 to 10,000 yards. Now plans for a major amphibious assault on communist-held territory were formulated.

## THE INCHON LANDING

As late as 20 July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had informed General MacArthur that a Marine division could not be sent before November or December, but incredibly swift action within the Marine Corps exceeded that expectation. A war-strength 1st Marine

Division [which absorbed the brigade], commanded by Major General Oliver P. Smith, arrived off the coast of Korea by 14 September. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing was on hand to provide air support. Thousands of reserves had been mobilized, and Marines from posts and stations all over the world had poured into these units.

Five days of continual pounding by air and naval gunfire preceded the arrival of the assault troops at Inchon, on the South Korean west coast, the morning of 15 September. By the afternoon of D plus 1, almost exactly 24 hours after beginning the assault, the force beachhead line had been secured, and the amphibious assault phase of the landing, launched under extremely unfavorable hydrographic conditions, completed.

By the afternoon of the 27th, Korean and United States flags had been raised in Seoul, the capital city. The battle for its possession was over.

The Marine infantry troops established blocking positions around the city. On the morning of the 29th, General MacArthur and American and Korean dignitaries gathered for a ceremony in a bombed building, and the Korean capital was returned to the control of civil government.

From 5-7 October, Marines of the 1st Division reembarked and prepared to move to the east coast. As they did, they could look back with pride. In accounting for some 14,000 North Korean casualties and 6,500 POWs, while paying a price of 400 killed and 2,000 wounded, Marines had accomplished the important morale uplift of liberating Seoul.

Along the east coast, meanwhile, the ROK and Allied troops of the Eighth United States Army [EUSAK] had advanced rapidly northward after the Inchon landing and crossed the 38th parallel on 1 October. The drive to the north continued. On 25 October, the Marines on board ship reached Wonsan harbor. This campaign was to be one of the most demanding in the entire history of the Corps.

### **THE CHOSIN RESERVOIR CAMPAIGN**

The United Nations Forces, of which the 1st Marine Division was a part, had spread all over North Korea. With the North Koreans seemingly beaten, the Chinese Communist Forces [CCF] entered the war.

In early November, after four days of fierce fighting, the 7th Marines became the first United States unit to defeat the Chinese Communists in battle. By 27 November, other Allied units had received the full force of a CCF counterattack and retreated rapidly south of the 38th parallel. The 1st Marine Division was still attacking.

That night, assault battalions of the CCF Ninth Army Group, a ten-division force sent to Korea specifically to annihilate the 1st Marine Division, began to attack. Enemy units struck all around Marine positions from Yudam-ni to Hagaru, the Marine base camp 14 miles to the south. On 29 November, the U.S. X Army Corps issued to the Marine division an oral warning order for redeployment of Marine units in the Yudam-ni area to Hagaru. General Smith ordered his assault regiments to fight their way back to Hagaru. On the afternoon of 4 December, 79 hours and 14 miles after the division commenced its attack, the last elements of the 5th and 7th Marines reached the base camp.

While the two regiments plus supporting troops were fighting their way down to Hagaru, the 1st Marines and attacked elements repulsed the continued assaults of CCF divisions coming up from the south to cut off Marine logistical support. Once the division was inside the Hagaru perimeter, General Smith ordered the division to strike out for the Hamhung area, 56 miles away to the southeast. Since the Marines were completely surrounded by communists armies, press correspondents asked the commanding general if he intended to retreat. They quoted him as giving an immediate reply: "Retreat hell! We're just attacking in another direction."

Within two days, the men at Hagaru had moved south to Koto-ri, arriving on the afternoon of the 7th. As usual, the invaluable close air support of Marine pilots continued to provide that overhead protection so necessary to defeat the numerically superior enemy. Continuing the attack to the south, the Marines moved on towards the harbor at Hungnam, where shipping awaited. There they boarded ships and moved into South Korea.

### A LAND ARMY

During the two and a half years that followed the Chosin Reservoir fighting, the 1st Marine Division and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing fought as a part of EUSAK, not as an amphibious force, but as part of a land army. The Marines were assigned missions similar to Army divisions, and aviation elements were placed under overall control of the Air Force. Although the Marines were not employed in their amphibious assault role, there certainly was a need for their proven combat ability and courage.

The division's operations, as part of EUSAK, continued. After a brief rest from the strenuous Reservoir campaign, the Marines spent some time hunting down vanishing guerrillas around Pohang, some 65 miles north of Pusan.

In February 1951, the order came to attack to the north. By the 4th of April, the Marines were among the first United Nations troops to recross the 38th parallel in central Korea. The advance continued. Two weeks later, the CCF started a gigantic counteroffensive. After heavy fighting and many casualties on both sides, the enemy was stopped. Once again the Marines attacked north.

**ARMISTICE MEETINGS**

The fighting continued, and counterattack followed attack. In June, the lines were again north of the 38th parallel. The following month, July 1951, an armistice appeared on the horizon. Communist and UN negotiators met to discuss armistice meetings. The truce talks continued periodically, while the fighting intermittently grew cold and flared hot.

During this time, both sides engaged in limited offensives across the entire front, mainly for the purpose of securing more territory, either for bargaining purposes or for better defensive positions. Extensive trench systems were dug, and log and earthen bunkers were built. The war at times became static while both sides awaited the results of the drawn-out truce negotiations. At other times the fighting reached ferocious intensity.

In March of 1952, the Marines moved from the eastern front to the western front in order to ensure the security of the section of the Allied line near Panmunjom, the site of truce talks. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, rendered outstanding service flying close support missions for the Marine Division as well as for other ground troops. Marine air support was constantly in demand by all frontline units.

**CEASE FIRE AND UNLOAD**

Finally, after two years of frustrating and often fruitless meetings with the obdurate communist negotiators, an armistice was signed and the fighting ended on 27 June 1953. Notwithstanding that the end was in sight, and a truce was imminent, the opposing armies did not slack off. Some of the most fierce fighting in the war occurred during that month--the struggle for Outpost Berlin.

After the signing of an armistice, the Marines were relieved of any further combat responsibility, but the division remained in Korea until 1955, when it returned to Camp Pendleton, California. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing remained in the Far East, and a few Marines continued on duty in Korea as military advisors to various ROK units, but combat in Korea was finished.