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**MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

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**US Forces Critical Vulnerabilities Before and During the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

**Major Monica Bury**

AY 2020-21

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** U.S. Forces Leadership Crisis Before and During the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir

**Author:** Major Monica Bury, United States Army

**Thesis:** The decisions of key leaders of the U.S. military after crossing the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel before and during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir, placement of units, quantity, and training of troops under commands, lack of communication, and the language barriers adversely affected the outcome of the events leading up to and during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir.

**Discussion:** In 1950, the national security policy of the United States focused on the containment of communism, concentrating on the USSR and China. The postwar American occupation of South Korea ended in 1948, and in a speech in January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson did not include Korea in a western Pacific "defense perimeter." The Truman administration was unaware of discussions between Kim II-sung, Mao Zedong, and Stalin about unifying Korea, debating the use of military force. Thus, the North Korean invasion of South Korea came as a surprise to the United States and armed forces.

Additionally, after the United States decided to cross the 38th Parallel in an attempt to unify Korea, the presence of Chinese forces in North Korea in late 1950 also came as a shock. The diplomatic and intelligence reports about possible Chinese intervention were ignored or only received scant attention. This lack of awareness set the stage for how operations and strategic responses were handled in Korea leading up to and during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir.

The more remembered wars of World War II and the Vietnam War bookends the Korean War. Thus, the Korean War is sometimes called the Forgotten War. It was a three-year conflict that started with limited participation from the United States. It quickly escalated. Within a few months, the United States, with support from the United Nations and contribution of forces from several UN members, was all in, especially after the Inchon landing and the breakout from the Pusan perimeter had seemingly turned the tide. The Chosin Reservoir battle November 26 – December 13, 1950, helped change how the United States viewed Communist participation and determination. The catastrophe took a toll on the U.S. forces, reducing some units to mere numbers. Some factors in this operational disaster were poorly trained Soldiers, poor decisions, and a lack of accurate intelligence information before and during the Chosin Reservoir battle.

The decisions of key leaders of the U.S. military after the United Nations forces crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel played a significant role in the Chosin Reservoir battle outcome. Quality and training of the assigned troops in both the Eighth Army and the X Corps should be considered, along with the lack of communication and language barriers. Units pulled hurriedly together from poorly trained recruits. Gaps in the perimeter provided avenues of entry for the Chinese Communist Forces. Intelligence on enemy forces was ignored, discounted, and underestimated. Language barriers existed due to Korean Augmentees or KATUSAs (Korean Augmentee to the United States Army) and to units reinforced with armies from other countries. And finally, communication, or lack of, contributed to the loss of territory the United States started with on the push to the Yalu.

**Conclusion:** The Chosin Reservoir battle was fraught with intelligence failures, strategic miscalculations, operational failures, and language barriers of several different kinds.

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION Place Holder

*“Success of any military organization depends on the experience and good judgment of its leaders.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Leadership has many dimensions and facets. A good leader can be defined as someone who has the ability to balance accomplishing the mission with taking care of its greatest asset, the service member. In 2021, the Army defines leadership as “the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”<sup>2</sup> Effective Leadership can be recognized in many ways: the morale of an organization, the planning and execution of a mission, the processing of essential information, training and equipping of forces, and the ability to use experience and critical thinking to plan and react to the enemy forces, to name a few. To better understand leadership, it can be helpful to analyze times of leadership challenges. The units assigned around the Chosin Reservoir from November to mid-December 1950 faced many leadership challenges.

In 1950, the national security policy of the United States focused on the containment of communism, concentrating on the USSR and China. The post-Second World War American occupation of South Korea ended in 1948, and in a speech in January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson did not include Korea in a western Pacific “defense perimeter.”<sup>3</sup> The Truman administration was unaware of discussions between Kim Il-sung, Mao Zedong, and Stalin about unifying Korea and the debate on the use of military force. Thus, the North Korean invasion of South Korea came as a surprise to the United States and its armed forces.

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<sup>1</sup> Milan Vego, "On Operational Leadership," *Joint Force Quarterly* 77 (2015), 1, [https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-77/jfq-77\\_60-69\\_Vego.pdf](https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-77/jfq-77_60-69_Vego.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *ADP 6-22, "Army Leadership,"* (2012), 1

<sup>3</sup> Carter Malkasian, *The Korean War 1950-1953,* Great Britain: Osprey Publishing, (2001), 15

Additionally, after the United States decided to cross the 38th Parallel to reunite Korea under a democratic South Korean government, the presence of Chinese forces in North Korea in late 1950 also came as a shock. The diplomatic and intelligence reports received scant attention or ignored a possible Chinese assault. The lack of awareness by key leaders in Korea set the stage for handling operations and strategic responses leading up to and during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir.

The more remembered wars of World War II and the Vietnam War bookends the Korean War. It was a three-year conflict that started with limited participation from the United States. It quickly escalated. Within a few months, the United States, with support from the United Nations and contribution of forces from several UN members, was all in, especially after the Inchon landing and the breakout from the Pusan perimeter had seemingly turned the tide. The events leading up to and during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir November 26 -13 December 1950, helped change how the United States viewed Communist participation and determination. The catastrophe took a toll on the U.S. forces, reducing some units to a handful of survivors. Numerous factors played a role in the UN's withdrawal to the south of the 38th Parallel.

This paper argues that decisions from key United States military leaders, the lack of adequate training, communication barriers, and poor liaison among units played a decisive role in the events between November and December 1950. The analysis will show how intelligence issues, training challenges, and the lack of communication played a vital role in mission command failures and will reveal a theme of leadership challenges applicable to the modern warfighter.

This paper will start the discussion with a look at intelligence failures and how this impacted leader decisions. Several levels of leadership ignored, discounted, and underestimated

reports of enemy activity on numerous occasions. Next, it highlights the lack of initial training in the service members assigned to severely understrength units. Demonstrating that in the months leading up to the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir, the military threw together units from untrained service members to backfill the soldiers and Marines killed in action or missing. The following section explores communication and language barriers and the impact these elements had on the mission and unit cohesion. Communication, or lack of, may have contributed to the loss of territory the United States started with on the push from Inchon to the Yalu. The language barriers existed due to Korean Augmentees or KATUSAs (Korean Augmentee to the United States Army) and units reinforced with armies from other countries and challenges the UN forces faced when operating in below freezing temperatures. The paper continues with a discussion of poor unit liaison and gaps in the perimeter, with an emphasis on the loss of control that occurred due to the gaps—supplying examples of how gaps in the Eighth Army and the 31<sup>st</sup> Regimental Combat Team’s perimeter provided avenues of entry for the Chinese Communist Forces. Finally, the paper will analyze leadership with a focus on key military leaders of the time period.

## **INTELLIGENCE**

Intelligence on enemy forces was ignored, discounted, and underestimated at several levels from Washington down to the operational leaders. At the outset of the war, General Douglas MacArthur headed the U.S. Far Eastern Command (FEC). He was also named Commander of the United Nations (UN) Command<sup>4</sup>, which included the ROK Army and units from other UN members. After his successful amphibious landing at Inchon and Seoul’s

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<sup>4</sup> Stanley Weintraub, “*MacArthur's War: Korea and the Undoing of an American Hero*”, A Division of Simon & Simon Inc, (2000), 47

<sup>4</sup> S. Weintraub, (2000), 47

liberation, MacArthur requested permission from the Defense Department to continue across the 38th Parallel and reunite Korea. Original guidance given by the President of the United States and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to General MacArthur had been not to cross the 38th Parallel due to reservations concerning China's and the Soviet Union's desire for involvement. The United States had received word from an Indian ambassador stating that China intended to intervene if the United Nations forces pushed further towards the Chinese border.<sup>5</sup> But in Washington, this information was discounted as nothing more than a bluff from China in response to the United States sending naval vessels to Taiwan's coast.<sup>6</sup> President Truman believed his Far Eastern Commander when MacArthur told him that China did not have the military to support a North Korean invasion. It appeared that additional intelligence was not gathered to rebuff the claim.

Despite the intelligence received from the Indian delegate, "on September 27, 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed MacArthur to move across the 38th Parallel and destroy North Korea's military "providing that no Chinese or Soviet forces had entered, or threatened to enter, North Korea."<sup>7</sup> Additionally, they added the following guidance to their directive, "as long as, in your judgment, action by forces now under your control offers a reasonable chance of success."<sup>8</sup> By October 9, 1950, U.S. forces had crossed the border. Before the month was over, important cities like Pyongyang and Wonsan fell to the U.S. and allied soldiers.<sup>9</sup> While focused on

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<sup>5</sup> James L. Murray, "Leadership in the Korean War. Vol. 2, in *U.S. Leadership in Wartime*," edited by Spencer C. Tucker. ABC-CLIO, (2009)

<sup>6</sup> J. L. Murray, (2009)

<sup>7</sup> Stephen L.Y. Gammons, "Korean War." *Army History*, (n.d.)  
[www.history.army.mil/koreanwar](http://www.history.army.mil/koreanwar), Accessed December 15, 2020

<sup>8</sup> Billy C. Mossman, "Korean War." *Center for Military History*. Superintendents of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, (1990) Accessed December 15, 2020

<sup>9</sup> Unk, "The Inchon Campaign" *Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency*.  
<https://dpaa.secure.force.com/dpaaFamWebInCampaignInchon>, Accessed January 3, 2021

containing communism, the United States did not want a war with either China or the U.S.S.R. for the fear that it had the potential to start a third World War.

China, concerned about an invasion by the West, warned that it would join the fight if the United Nations (UN) forces crossed the 38th Parallel. The UN forces continued pushing north, ignoring the Chinese warnings, intent on reaching the Yalu River. Keeping its promise, China prepared for war. Traveling at night, the Chinese People's Volunteer Force (CPVF) moved over 300,000 troops across the Yalu River<sup>10</sup> into North Korea. General MacArthur and staff received numerous intelligence reports, including sightings of a large Chinese force traveling close to the Yalu, which they ignored. The Chinese Army had entered Korea, and UN troops on the ground were encountering the People's Liberation Army (PLA). But the size and determination of the Chinese Army continued to be downplayed and ignored.

Several Central Intelligence reports included a sighting of soldiers near the Manchuria border reputed to be Chinese and numerous engagements between friendly and enemy forces before November's end. Reports such as the one dated 14 October 1950 that read, "another report of troops crossing the border from Manchuria into North Korea has been received, this time from the Netherlands Charge'd Affairs in Peking. The report estimates the number at four divisions, unidentified, but presumed to be Chinese."<sup>11</sup> And then the one dated 26 October 1950, "official reports give no confirmation of the widely circulated press reports that 20,000 Chinese Communist troops have entered North Korea and engaged ROK troops."<sup>12</sup> The November 6<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came from the North*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, (2010)

<sup>11</sup> "Central Intelligence Agency (CIA): Analysis of the Korean War." *Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room: DAILY KOREAN SUMMARY*. October 14, , (1950),

<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP91T01172R000200040002-5.pdf>. Accessed April 25, 2021, 10

<sup>12</sup> CIA, (1950), 30

report estimates the number of Chinese forces to be around 27,000.<sup>13</sup> These reports and many others show Washington was aware of Chinese presence yet continued to believe the FEC Commander. In a meeting with President Truman in early October 1950, General MacArthur stated, “It will be over by Thanksgiving; I hope we will be able to withdraw the Eighth Army almost immediately into Japan, probably by Christmas.”<sup>14</sup> MacArthur continued to reassure President Truman and the American people that the war would be over soon, discounting the intelligence reports reflecting that China had crossed the Yalu into North Korea.

When General MacArthur ordered the Eighth Army and X Corps to push north to the Yalu River, Almond’s X Corps moved towards the Chosin Reservoir as the initial leg of its planned advance to the Yalu, at first meeting little enemy resistance. According to Stanley Weintraub, “Press reports were that UN forces on the Eighth Army’s front were driving north with little opposition, with the South Korean 6<sup>th</sup> Division leading the race to the Yalu. Yet, the hints of Chinese intervention multiplied. On October 24, two American planes flying over Korea about three miles south of the Yalu were fired upon by anti-aircraft guns across the river in Manchuria- ‘too accurately to be comfortable.’”<sup>15</sup> The aerial attack on the American planes sparked zero interest from anyone other than the pilots. Despite the American planes receiving fire, the X Corps’ push north on the east side of the Taebak mountain range was going so well that “MacArthur had authorized commanders ‘to use any and all ground forces...as necessary to secure all of North Korea.’”<sup>16</sup> On October 25, the first Chinese prisoner of war was captured and interrogated. The information gleaned from the prisoner was that he was one of the thousands of soldiers crawling the hills between the North and South Pyongan provinces. Tokyo, the Far

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<sup>13</sup> CIA, (1950), 47

<sup>14</sup> S. Weintraub, (2000), 189

<sup>15</sup> S. Weintraub, (2000), 206

<sup>16</sup> S. Weintraub, (2000)



Eastern Command's headquarters, received the information and subsequently marked it as unfounded. Thus, they ignored it. The summary of intelligence that was provided on October 27 was "blindly MacArthuresque."<sup>17</sup> The report provided was that "from a tactical standpoint, with victorious US division in full deployment, it would appear that the auspicious time for such [Chinese] intervention has long since passed; it is difficult to believe that such a move if planned, would have been postponed to a time when remnant North Korean forces have been reduced to a few effective."<sup>18</sup> This statement downplays the presence of Chinese forces or that very idea that the area around the Taebak Mountains was hiding anything other than the broken North Korean Army. This report gave the field and leaders back in Washington distorted information and a feeling of false security: the Chinese had yet to act on their promise of entering the conflict; it was not going to occur. It was not until days later after numerous reports of Chinese sightings and intelligence reports did the FEC daily reports acknowledge that the Chinese had indeed entered Korea. However, they continued to deny or ignore the possibility that it was not simply thousands but hundreds of thousands of Chinese Communist Forces. For example, on such report was that:

In mid-November...two civilian draftsmen, formerly employed by the Traffic Department of the P'yongyang Railway Bureau, reported on what they saw and heard of Chinese intervention before they left Manp'ojin on October 26. According to them, there had been a continuous flow of CCF soldiers through Manp'ojin beginning on October 12. One of the men estimated 80,000 Chinese had passed south through the border town. Chinese officers had variously told the two men that 200,000 and 400,000 Chinese soldiers were to enter Korea.<sup>19</sup>

Below is a picture of the Taebak Mountains, which provided cover and concealment of the Chinese Communist Forces.

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<sup>17</sup> S. Weintraub, (2000), 209

<sup>18</sup> S. Weintraub, (2000), 209

<sup>19</sup> R. Appleman, "South to Naktong, North to Yalu". Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept. of the Army; 1st edition, (1961), 756



THE AXIAL TAEBAEK MOUNTAINS ALONG THE EAST COAST

Figure 1 Taebaek Mountain range, Billy C. Mossman, "Ebb and Flow November 1950- July 1951; Korean War." *Center for Military History*. Superintendents of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office. Accessed December 15, 2020 (1990), 5

The presence of the Chinese Communist Forces was not taken seriously by the key decision-makers until the end of November 1950, after the 31<sup>st</sup> Regimental Combat Team and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at the Chosin Reservoir faced devastating attacks on their perimeters.

The data shows that General MacArthur ignored intelligence reports and significantly miscalculated the intent of Communist China and its leaders to follow through with their threat of retaliation. His confidence in the forces assigned to him was instrumental in underestimating the Chinese strength. Surrounding himself with soldiers who revered him—yes, men—MacArthur's staff refused to believe anything other than what the General told them. The critical information included intelligence accounts about the Chinese crossing the Yalu and

subsequently deploying over 300,000 People's Liberation Army troops into the surrounding hills.

The intelligence information referencing the Chinese forces closing in would have provided the ground forces much-needed time to form a more robust defensive line, slow the advance, or maintain unit integrity instead of spreading units to cover more area. It could have provided time to increase ammunition reserves or call in for aerial support. A lack of accurate intelligence reports affects the tactical and strategic decisions when building a plan for an attack. MacArthur's leadership failed when he underestimated China's determination to push the United States back across the 38th Parallel. On several occasions, MacArthur and the key leaders from Washington had the opportunity to reevaluate the legitimacy of China's determination, and one particular event that occurred 15 October 1950 on Wake Island. But instead of sharing thoughts on China's involvement or lack of, the meeting centered around the rebuilding of South Korea and when troops would be available for missions elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> None of the key leaders felt that China was a threat. Stewart summarizes this sentiment by saying that in the "opinion of many military observers, the huge Chinese infantry forces that could be put in the field would be poorly equipped, poorly fed, and abysmally supplied...These 'experts' failed' to give full due to the revolutionary zeal and military experience of many of the Chinese Soldiers."<sup>21</sup> Truman, for his part, did not see the benefit of getting further involved; containing the spread of communism was his goal, putting an end to communism was not.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> T.R. Fehrenbach, "This Kind of War: The Classic Military History of the Korean War." New York: Potomac Books, (2001), 243

<sup>21</sup> Richard W. Stewart, "U.S. Army Center of Military History Publications Catalog." *Korean War Commemorative Brochures: The Korean War The Chinese Intervention: Campaign*, . (n.d), 4 [www.army.mil/emh-pg/catalog/brochure.htm](http://www.army.mil/emh-pg/catalog/brochure.htm), Accessed January 3, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> T. R. Fehrenbach, (2001), 243

The lack of prewar intelligence can be contributed to the United States 1950 National Security Strategy. The United States policy on Korea and manpower shortage played a prominent role in the handling of information. After WWII, the United States military faced drawdowns due to a National Strategy focus on nuclear weapons, and neither Korea nor Taiwan were addressed as part of the strategy.<sup>23</sup> It can be assumed that because the January 1950 speech on the U.S. strategy did not specifically address Korea, intelligence reports were not given appropriate attention due to financial cutbacks that contributed to manpower shortages. The lack of personnel meant that only countries listed in the national security strategy would receive oversight and the full attention of an analyst.<sup>24</sup>

## TRAINING

Lack of or inadequate training for the terrain and environment was another contributing factor to the negative results of this timeframe. During a person's initial entry into the military, the training was reduced from thirteen weeks down to eight. Thomas Hanson notes in his book titled *Combat ready? Eighth U.S. Army on the eve of the Korean War* that, the reduced time "failed to maintain a sufficient flow of replacements, and the Army Ground Forces resorted to sending partially trained or even untrained men directly to the theater." Hanson also wrote that, "For long periods between 1945 and 1950 the training centers were little more than way stations between the recruiter's office and the gaining unit, with only cursory attention devoted to imparting soldier skills or socialization into the army."<sup>25</sup> Further, a second lieutenant company commander stated that the 'inductees were "almost right off the streets...three to four weeks

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<sup>23</sup> T. R. Fehrenbach, (2001), 50

<sup>24</sup> James F. Schnabel "Center of Military History." *The Korean War Era.* (2021), 62  
[https://history.army.mil/html/books/020/20-1/CMH\\_Pub\\_20-1.pdf](https://history.army.mil/html/books/020/20-1/CMH_Pub_20-1.pdf). (1992), Accessed January 05,

<sup>25</sup> Thomas E. Hanson, "*Combat Ready? : The Eighth U.S. Army on the Eve of the Korean War.*" C. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, (2010), Accessed April 17, 2021

away from home. [and had undergone] no training.”<sup>26</sup> The United States military was seriously short on manpower due to downsizing after WWII and budget reductions, and President Truman did not want to reinstate the draft. But as a result of the Cold War and manpower shortages, the peace time draft was eventually reinstated, sending approximately 219,771 men into combat in 1950<sup>27</sup>. Draftees and new recruits were rushed through basic training, shipped to the combat zone, and handed a weapon. To quickly increase the American force’s manpower, an agreement was made with the South Korean president Syngman Rhee on a program that would supplement the United States Army with augmentees to the U.S. forces; in addition to the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) already fighting alongside the UN forces. These supplements were called KATUSAs, which stood for the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army,<sup>28a</sup> a program still in use today.

Despite the already apparent need for trained soldiers to bring units to combat strength, General MacArthur created X Corps, a hugely understrength unit, for the Inchon landing. He built up the unit’s combat readiness "by giving it a high priority on replacements from the United States and by assigning it to eighty-six hundred undertrained South Korean recruits, called KATUSAs. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division came directly from the US and was augmented by the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Marine Brigade from the Pusan Perimeter and by a Republic of Korea (ROK) Marine Corps regiment."<sup>29</sup>

The KATUSA was pulled from farms and villages throughout South Korea. In his book titled *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came from the North*, Alan Millet states, “They had

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<sup>26</sup> T. E. Hanson, (2010), 25

<sup>27</sup> *Selective Service System Induction Statistics*. (n.d.), <https://www.sss.gov/history-and-records/induction-statistics/>, Accessed April 26, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> A. R. Millet, (2010), 159

<sup>29</sup> S. L. Y. Gammons, (n.d.), 2

little or no military training, spoke no English....and feared big American weapons.”<sup>30</sup> The American Soldiers did not trust the KATUSA and did not feel any type of security having them in their ranks. David Curtis Skaggs’ “The KATUSA Experiment: The Integration of Korean Nationals into The U.S. Army” explained that “during this initial period KATUSA;s were a greater liability than an asset...the Koreans lack of training and the cultural problems made them more of a burden than a help.”<sup>31</sup> This would support an argument that forgoing training and integrating a recruit into the military environment is essential to creating a quality combat ready force. In the 21st century, the military requires all current and future leaders to attend training commensurate to the level of authority they will be promoting into. This type of training prepares a leader for future responsibilities above and beyond what they are currently executing, starting with basic training, which is the foundation that service members should begin with. Without a solid training foundation, a service member has limited experiences to build upon and creates a liability in terms of unit combat readiness. Advanced training continues to build on that foundation, supplying future leaders viable information that can inform and guide their decision-making processes. The service members thrown into Battle during the Korean War were not provided with a foundation to build on, they were not treated like an asset only like a number. The lesson that can be taken from this signifies the importance of training and preparation of service members for war is detrimental to the superiority, cohesion, and defense of a unit strength. Train as one fights, so they can fight as they train, represents the importance of building a combat trained, cohesive team/

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<sup>30</sup> A. R. Millet, (2010), 159

<sup>31</sup> Wesly J. Curtis, Major, "Operations of the First Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, Seventh Infantry Division, in the Chosin Reservoir area of Korea during the Period 25 November-2 December 1950 Personal Experience of the Battalion Operations Officer." manuscript , Carlisle, (1978)

## COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS

There are many types of barriers to communication. From manmade to those created by Mother Nature to actual language barriers. The Eighth Army and the X Corps commands were further challenged with conducting multinational operations and the language barriers that came with working with a multinational force. The UN forces assigned north of the Yalu faced several different forms of communication barriers. One of the biggest for the Eighth Army was terrain. The Eighth Army's advance towards the Yalu in late October started with little resistance and moved fast. The units:

moving northward, the I Corps, with the Republic of Korea (ROK) 1<sup>st</sup> Division, advanced on the right. To the east, the ROK 8<sup>th</sup> Division reached Tokch'on, forty miles north of Pyongyang, during the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> and then turned north and arrived at Kujang-dong on the Ch'ongch'on River, about ten miles from Tokch'on, ten days later. The ROK 6<sup>th</sup> Division, meeting little opposition, and traveling fast up the Ch'ong'on River valley, reached Huich'on, nearly sixteen miles north of Kujan-dong, on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Passing through Onjon, 26 miles from Huich'on, during the night of the 24<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, ROK 6<sup>th</sup> Division, turned north and advanced toward Ch'osan, fifty miles away on the Yalu.

In the meantime, on October 22, the 24<sup>th</sup> Division, relieved by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, moved northward from Pyongyang and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry, reached Chonggong-dong, just southwest of Sinuiju; on the Yalu River, the northmost penetration of the Eighth Army.<sup>32</sup>

The Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) attack on the Eighth Army that destroyed the ROK Army 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment occurred on October 25. This attack prompted the ROK 7<sup>th</sup> Regiments to withdraw; as they retreated, they encountered a CCF roadblock south of Kojan about 20 miles out. Nonstop, the Chinese forces appeared to come out of nowhere in massive numbers, with surprise attacks, at different points of the perimeter. The attacks continued for several days as the enemy forces broke through the ROK boundary. The Chinese attacks not only created confusion within the units, but they also effectively further deteriorated lines of

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<sup>32</sup> S. L. Y. Gammons, (n.d.), 13

communication, which were already hampered by terrain and distance between elements. The mountainous terrain severely interfered with communication, forcing the two United Nations Armies to conduct two separate operations. According to Roy Appleman in *North to Naktong, South to Yalu*, “the mountainous backbone of North Korea was so destitute of roads and usable means of communication that it would be impossible for the U.N. forces to maintain a continuous line across the peninsula that far north, and that the enemy would be unable to use this mountainous spine for effective military operations.”<sup>33</sup> This geographical information further supports MacArthur’s belief that the Chinese Communist forces would not invade or, if they did, that they would not have the means or the capabilities to provide any sort of viable resistance.

The Figure below shows the UN Forces as of October 1950, demonstrating the expanse of terrain they covered.

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<sup>33</sup> R. Appleman, (1961), 745





Figure 2. UN Forces location October 1950,  
[http://www.emersonkent.com/map\\_archive/korean\\_war\\_oct\\_1950.htm](http://www.emersonkent.com/map_archive/korean_war_oct_1950.htm)

As mentioned earlier mother-nature contributed to the loss of communication as well. Temperatures and outdated equipment separately and together played a role in communication failures. The UN forces faced temperatures that dipped to 35 degrees below zero. “The mountainous country and the extremely cold weather, which weakened batteries, rendered...radios all but useless. The radios were mostly World War II instruments rebuilt in Japan. Their life-span in Korea proved to be short.”<sup>34</sup> Additionally other issues that may have been present due to the extreme cold was freezing of equipment and degraded verbal communications because of fabric placed over the nose and mouth to protect the lungs from the

<sup>34</sup> R. Appleman, *East of Chosin: Entrapment and Breakout in Korea*. Texas A&M University Press Kindle edition (1990), Kindle edition 3952

freezing air . Thus further reducing the ability to quickly operate equipment and verbal comprehension

The loss in communication contributed to a weakening of operational control. According to the 2019 ADP 6-0, “Effective command is impossible without control. Control is inherent in command.”<sup>35</sup> Without effective control, the success of a mission is put in jeopardy, along with the lives of the service members that are part of that mission. Today’s military may not face the communication issues associated with terrain that the units faced during the Korean War due to the advanced technologies that can use satellites to return a signal or a retransmission station. “The station location is often on a prominent terrain feature to ensure maximum reach, especially in areas prone to breaks in communication or "dead space" such as mountainous terrain.”<sup>36</sup> Because of the growing capabilities of cyber and cyberwarfare, today’s warfighter must still be aware of the difficulties faced during a time when these technologies did not exist and generate a plan B to enable effective communication in the event of a return to Korea or an area with similar terrain. Multiple technologies have been developed to deter or jam a radio signal or send false information to further impair the operational environment. Today’s leader needs to be aware of these challenges and be prepared for a counter offensive to maintain communications.

As mentioned previously, there are different forms of communication barriers. Language barriers also posed a significant problem during the Korean War. The Korean Augmentee to the United States Army was a prime example. KATUSAs were used to augment both the Eighth Army and X Corps forces. These soldiers were pulled from remote villages throughout South

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<sup>35</sup> ADP 6-0 “*MISSION COMMAND; Command and Control of Army Forces*”. Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, July 31 (2019), 1-78

<sup>36</sup> Mark Gerasimas, “*All About Circuits.*” September 01. (2015).

<https://www.allaboutcircuits.com/news/military-tactics-and-the-future-of-mobile-communications/>, Accessed April 27, 2021

Korea. In the *War for Korea*, Millet reveals, “They had little or no military training, spoke no English....and feared big American weapons.”<sup>37</sup> The soldiers who had to work with them felt they were a risk to security and were not confident the KATUSA would have their back in a firefight. The use of KATUSAs as part of the United Forces was used as a means to expeditiously and swiftly bring units up to combat strength. The goal was to fortify the forces and it appears training was not taken into consideration in the rush to increase combat strength. Of the 16,000 Soldiers assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, X Corps, over 6700 were KATUSA soldiers.<sup>38</sup> Elements of 7<sup>th</sup> Division formed the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT, commonly known as Task Force McLean and Task Force Faith. It was common for units to buddy a U.S. Soldier with a Korean Augmentee creating a more robust defensive perimeter. However, this simply made communication difficult due to the language barrier. Being unable to communicate effectively during a firefight proved to be disastrous as it was difficult to demonstrate immediate and last-minute needs during a firefight. In *Truce Tent, Fighting Front* by Walter Hermes provides the additional information; “the "buddy" system enabled the Americans to train and supervise the Koreans in U.S. methods, care of weapons, and at the same time to teach his "buddy" some words of English. For the most part, the language barrier prevented the two from becoming close.”<sup>39</sup> This lack of closeness further suggests to the internal struggles the units had with cohesion and morale issues, greatly inhibiting the commander’s leadership abilities, especially when combined with the gaps in the perimeter, attacks from the rear, and units being destroyed to the point of only a few handfuls of survivors.

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<sup>37</sup> A. R. Millet, (2010), 159

<sup>38</sup> E.H. Simmons, (2015), 42

<sup>39</sup> Walker K. Hermes, “*Truce Tent, Fighting Front.*” Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

A review of the existing literature reveals a significant gap, as sources written on the topic have not sufficiently addressed how the inability to communicate with the KATUSAs affected the mission or whether enough interpreters were assigned. In Mr. Skaggs paper titled: *the KATUSA Experiment: The Integration of Korean Nations into the U.S Army*, he states that, “there was a vast language barrier and cultural gulf between the KATUSA’s and GI’s which adversely affected the tactical performance of both groups.”<sup>40</sup> This statement from Skaggs suggests more than language barriers existed between the KATUSA and the U.S. Soldier.

### **POOR LIAISON / GAPS IN PERIMETER**

In the quest to follow orders and reach the Yalu River first, the United Nation forces were spread out with unintentional gaps in the perimeters, suggesting a failure in one or more areas of command and control. When the Chinese Communist Forces attacked, they created gaps in the perimeter, generated confusion, and forced an eastern pivot in the ROK II line, severely crippling the unit and opening the Eighth Army's I Corps right flank. On November 1, the CCF attacked the ROK 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment, moving down that perimeter to the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry's right, obliterating the ROK 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment in the process. With the loss of the ROK army elements, significant gaps existed in the 8th Cavalry Division sectors, providing a gateway for the CCF forces to attack the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions on several different sides. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion lost about 15 Officers and 250 enlisted men, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion scattered into the hills.<sup>41</sup> These gaps in the perimeter produced an unbarred avenue of approach for the Chinese forces to attack United

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<sup>40</sup> David C. Skaggs, "Marne Corps Research Library." *The KATUSA Experiment: The Integration of Korean Nationals into The U.S. Army, 1950-1965*. Edited by Military Affairs 38, (1974), [https://usmc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?query=any,contains,the%20katusa%20experiment&tab=Everything&search\\_scope=MyInst and CI&vid=01USMCU\\_INST:USMC&ofset=0](https://usmc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?query=any,contains,the%20katusa%20experiment&tab=Everything&search_scope=MyInst%20and%20CI&vid=01USMCU_INST:USMC&ofset=0), Accessed April 12, 2021

<sup>41</sup> S. L. Y. Gammons, (n.d.), 14

Nations Forces from the rear. Because enemy forces were coming from behind, they may have initially thought them to be friendly forces and were allowed to advance, giving them the element of surprise. Conversely, with friendly forces scattered into the hills, they could be mistaken as enemy troops and subject to fratricide as they attempted to rejoin UN forces.<sup>42</sup> The break in perimeter and the scatter of forces into the hills created a tactical problem of uncertainty for mission accomplishment, regrouping of troops in an uncertain terrain, shortage of manpower, and a withdrawal to safety.

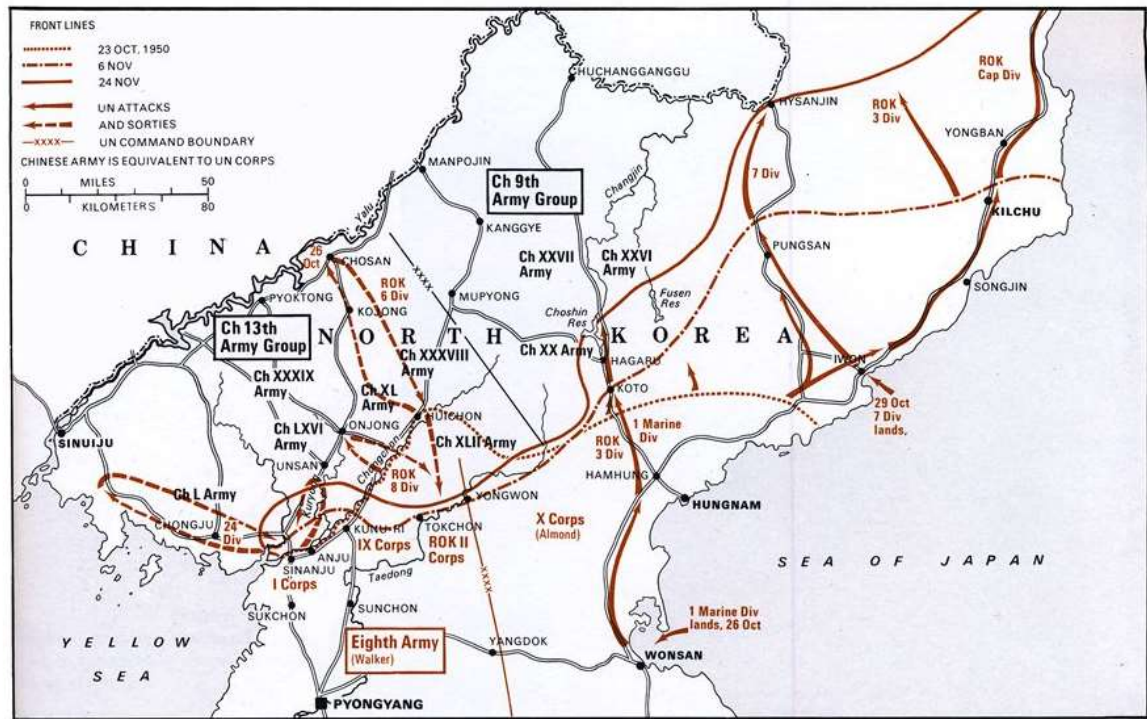
While his forward element was defending off attacks from the Chinese Army, LTG Walker had decided to split his forces to cover his large area of operations, sending the ROK Army's 6<sup>th</sup> Division in one direction and the American troops in the other direction, creating an unintentional break in the line. The Chinese, seeing this gap, used it to their advantage. On the morning of November 26, the Chinese attacked under cover of fog and darkness during the early morning hours, forcing the 6<sup>th</sup> Division to withdraw. Simultaneously, the ROK 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment was also under attack; hundreds of South Korean soldiers were taken as prisoners of war. As described by Stanley Weintraub, "the ROKs began reeling, exposing the flanks of the unprepared US divisions."<sup>43</sup> Once the integrity of the ROK perimeter was broken, soldiers from the ROK Army began fleeing, leaving a more significant gap in the Eighth Army's defensive line as well as widening the already 80 plus miles that separated the Eighth Army from the X Corps. Not having good intel, Walker made a poor decision that led his under-trained units to create a gap the led to disaster.

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<sup>42</sup> S. L. Y. Gammons, (n.d.), 14

<sup>43</sup> S. Weintraub, (2000)

The figure below shows the location of the Eighth Army from 23 October – 24 November 1950, and their movements during that timeframe. The upper left-hand corner of the maps shows the different lines that are designated for each date.



Map of the early part of Phase 3: October 24–November 24, 1950; copyright by Richard Natkiel

Figure 3: Eighth Army Location 23 October-24 November 1950, <https://www.historyonthenet.com/authentichistory/1946-1960/2-korea/1-overview/>

In South Naktong, North to Yalu, historian Appleman comments on the distance between commands as "this wide gap between the two major tactical organizations of the UN Command in Korea caused great concern to Eighth Army and some to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington; but less concern in X Corps, and very little, apparently, to General MacArthur."<sup>44</sup> In Tokyo, MacArthur was confident in his success at this point, and the consensus was that the war was almost over. Supplies and ammunition were beginning to be rerouted to Japan, and two B-29 bomber groups were sent back to the United States. MacArthur continued to reassure the

<sup>44</sup> R. Appleman, (1961), 745

JCS, the President, and the country that the Chinese communist involvement would be minimal, if at all. The key decision makers believed the war would be over and, therefore, failed to acknowledge the validity of the information presented to them. Service members beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel had met enemy opposition and were being pushed back. The United Nation forces were losing ground. The Chinese Communist Forces outplayed the UN forces in the maneuver warfare game, mostly because key leaders underestimated their intent and capabilities. The CCF created confusion within the UN forces, physically and psychologically hampering the effectiveness of the unit capabilities through disruption and disorder in unit integrity.

When General Almond issued a new order for attack on 24 November, he created a chaotic scramble within the 7<sup>th</sup> Division to assembly the scattered units of the 31st RCT. They were to replace the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment on the reservoirs east side, allowing the Marines to strength their position on the west for their attack to the Yalu. The date for the attack was November 27th and the 31st RCT had two days to consolidate troops, organize the unit, and travel over 100 miles across the rough, two-lane roads and poorly developed North Korea terrain. When the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT arrived to replace the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, they came in bits and pieces. The first unit to arrive was 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, it was a solid day before the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry, and two artillery batteries arrived. The tank unit was located on the road just beyond the Marine's perimeter on the reservoir's southern end. While another infantry battalion was en route, it did not arrive and the 31<sup>st</sup> Regimental Combat team did not reach full strength before the Chinese Communist forces attacked on 27 November,<sup>45</sup>

The 31<sup>st</sup> RCT's fate was partially sealed when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion commander made the call to move from the RCT's assembly area before all elements arrived. On November 26, Lieutenant

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<sup>45</sup> R. E. Appleman, (1990), 1873

Colonel Faith was to relieve the Marine units on the reservoir's east side. However, the Marine battalion did not wait for the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion to arrive; they moved out at first light. As the Marines moved past down the road, Faith's men learned that "that a few small enemy patrols had proved their positions during the night. In one instance, a Chinese soldier had pulled a Marine from his foxhole and disarmed and beaten him"<sup>46</sup> LTC Faith's move to the east further divided the Task Force isolating the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion from the rest of the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT. The battalion was located furthest north on the east side of the reservoir, this position left Faith's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion perilously unprotected and without support. The 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry arrived on November 27 and was stopped at the base of the mountain, in an encampment area that was a weak spot to set up a defensive perimeter. The site was low ground, surrounded on three sides by a ridge and an inlet on the fourth. "It appears that on the night of the 27th, there was a defensive line only on the east of the assembly area, on the north, there was the frozen inlet; on the west and south there was no organized line-only scattered foxholes, and in between were foxholes of the artillerymen near their howitzers and the parked trucks and other vehicles of the troops north of the artillery pieces just off the road."<sup>47</sup> On the evening of the 27th, the 31st RCT was spread out from Hagaru-ri along the eastern side of the Chosin Reservoir; unit integrity was lost to the distance between the units,<sup>48</sup> the terrain, and one unit entirely unaccounted for.

The Chinese Army attacked late on November 27, 1950, on both sides of the Chosin Reservoir. On the west side of the Reservoir there were approximately 25,000<sup>49</sup> Marines against an enemy force of two Chinese Communist Divisions, the 79th and 89th. On the east side, all elements of the 31st RCT were not in place or accounted for, giving them a combat strength of

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<sup>46</sup> R. Appleman, (1990), 527

<sup>47</sup> R. Appleman, (1990), 471

<sup>48</sup> R. Appleman, (1990)

<sup>49</sup> R. Appleman, (1990), 4378



less than 16,000. Of that number the unit was supplemented with approximately 6,000 KATUSAs<sup>50</sup>, against the Chinese 80th Division. <sup>51</sup> Enemy forces struck in the dark with blaring bugles and horns to communicate within their ranks. Leaving no avenue of escape, the Chinese Army closed on both sides of the Chosin Reservoir, surrounding the American forces. With the X Corps forces spread out as they were, they were easy targets for the Chinese Communist forces. The placement of the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT troops on low ground, in non-defensible positions created a situation that allowed for the enemy forces to take up positions within the surrounding hills and surround the vulnerable units below them. This envelopment action cut the 31st RCT off from supporting friendly elements and blocked their escape route.

### **LEADERSHIP ANALYSIS**

LTG Walker made several leadership errors during the first few months of the Korean War. He failed to coordinate with General Almond to keep the gap between the two units from happening. The breaks in the perimeter created an avenue for the Communist forces to move between the separated friendly forces and attack the element's rear. He failed to maintain communication between himself and his forward elements as knowledge of the attacks on his forward elements may have changed his decision to split his main body to cover a larger area. He also did not consider the mountainous terrain. This failure restricted his units' ability to protect the adjacent units' flanks and created breaks in the perimeter, allowing an avenue for Chinese forces to breach the line unobstructed. The gaps created through the lack of coordination and the division of forces provided an opening for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to break through the perimeter and further deteriorate the Eighth Army defenses. As the lines continued to breakdown and enemy forces continued their attacks from the rear, lines of

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<sup>50</sup> R. Appleman, (1990), 4411

<sup>51</sup> R.W. Stewart, (n.d.), 9

communication were further reduced, contributing to loss of operational control. The loss of communication and operational control presented many challenges. Loss of communication prevented information from getting back the headquarters and inhibited the chain of command's decision-making. In reference to General Walker himself, Allan Millet notes in his *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came from the North* that "Walker learned that he faced many enemies as he watched his American forces give too much ground too fast with excessive losses...the newspaper correspondence....and Douglas MacArthur."<sup>52</sup> LTG Walker did not appear to be a MacArthur fan and opposed him on several different occasions. The most notable was his decision to move back to South Korea in a bid to save what was left of his Army before the Chinese forces decimated it. However, despite some notable failures, General Walker portrayed some of the leadership values that are taught in advanced military education classes today. He had the moral courage to retreat in the face of an overpowering and underestimated enemy until his unit could regroup, resupply, and rebuild his forces. Having a different view and supplying an opposition to a leader's position provides a different perspective and can identify gaps or fallacies in each operation or intelligence; however, it takes courage and a moral compass to stand up for what is right.

Conceived as an independent unit, X Corps reported directly to the Far Eastern Command. Some believed that the X Corps should have fallen under the Eighth Army; this organization may have provided a better coordinated and executed strategy. Regardless of opinion, MacArthur assigned Lieutenant General Edward Almond, previously his Chief of Staff, as the X Corps commander<sup>53</sup> just before the September 1950 Inchon landing. "General Almond

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<sup>52</sup> A. R. Millet, (2010), 200

<sup>53</sup> Edward H. Simmons, Brigadier General, "*Frozen Chosin: U.S. Marines At The Changjin Reservoir*" Normanby Press, (2015), 3

in 1950 and 1951 in Korea had several nicknames," wrote Roy E. Appleman in his *Escaping the Trap: The U.S. Army X Corps in Northeast Korea*. "Generally, he was known to his friends and close associates as Ned. Other names were 'Ned, the Anointed,' which meant he was a favorite of General MacArthur's and 'Ned, the Dread.' Which referred to his power, his brusque manner, and sometimes arbitrary actions."<sup>54</sup> It is possible that MacArthur created an independent unit for this operation to have more control over the commander or a commander who thought more like him, as General Almond was very much a MacArthur favorite. Almond's previous command experience was with the 92nd Infantry Division, a black unit during WWII. According to writings from Faris Kirkland, "His conduct was the principal cause of the poor morale and repeated failure of his division during its six months of combat in Italy."<sup>55</sup> Suggesting his leadership actions were in question even then. He was extremely difficult to deal with and had no patience for people he felt were incompetent. Reading indicates that General Almond's subordinates made every attempt possible to keep him happy, obeying all orders with extreme promptness and zero pushback.<sup>56</sup> General Almond, in support of MacArthur's belief that the communist forces would not enter Korea, was blind to the indications that the Chinese forces existed in Korea. In the "During the day on November 28, General Almond and his aide, 1st Lt. Alexander Haig, helicoptered into the perimeter of the 31st RCT. Despite all the evidence of massive Chinese intervention, Almond blindly encouraged the soldiers to begin the offensive.

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<sup>54</sup> E.H. Simmons, (2015), 4

<sup>55</sup> Faris R. Kirkland, "Soldiers and Marines at Chosin Reservoir: Criteria for Assignment to Combat Command." *Armed Forces Society* 257-274, (1995), 3  
[https://usmc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi\\_proquest\\_journals\\_236551614&context=PC&vid=01USMCU\\_INST:USMC&lang=en&search\\_scope=MyInst\\_and\\_CI&daptor=Primo%20Central&tab=Everything&query=any.contains,Soldiers%20and%20Marines%20at%20](https://usmc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_proquest_journals_236551614&context=PC&vid=01USMCU_INST:USMC&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&daptor=Primo%20Central&tab=Everything&query=any.contains,Soldiers%20and%20Marines%20at%20)

<sup>56</sup> Hampton Sides, "*On Desperate Ground: The Marines at the Reservoir, The Korean War's Greatest Battle*." New York: Doubleday, (2018)

"We're still attacking," he told the Soldiers, "and we're going all the way to the Yalu." The corps commander then flew back to Hagaru-ri, convinced that RCT was strong enough to begin its attack and deal with whatever "remnants" of CCF forces were in their way."<sup>57</sup> General Almond's short-sightedness, last minute change of plans creating units to jump through hoops, his failure to recognize his units' catastrophic predicament combined with the lack of response to supplied intelligence about the Chinese forces, created a disaster waiting to happen. General Almond's inability to read the tactical and strategic situation and immediately request reinforcements of air support, repositioning of units to assist, or both, was instrumental in losing "reported a total of 10,495 battle casualties: 4,385 US Marines, 3,163 US Army personnel, 2,812 South Koreans attached to American formations and 78 British Royal Marines."<sup>58</sup> This is an example of why the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Commander found him not favorable.

An example of an officer who put his unit's interests before his own is General O.P. Smith who commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, an assigned element under the Army's X Corps. General Smith did not appear to have a high opinion of General Almond. According to text in *Frozen Chosin: U.S. Marines At The Changjin Reservoir* by Brigadier General Edward Simmons "Tensions and differences between General Almond and General Smith were no secret."<sup>59</sup> Smith questioned the good sense of the X Corps commander's offensive plan and showed it through his actions, a lack of confidence in Almond's generalship and the current weather and terrain in which they were operating.<sup>60</sup> Smith thought that Almond was too aggressive and deliberately worked to find ways to slow his advance towards the Yalu. General Smith's actions were border

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<sup>57</sup> R.W. Stewart, (n.d.), 17

<sup>58</sup> Roy Appleman, "Escaping the Trap: The US Army X Corps in Northeast Korea, 1950." *Military History Series*. exas A&M University Press, (2000)

<sup>59</sup> E.H. Simmons, (2015), 4

<sup>60</sup> A. R. Millet, (2010), 334

line insubordinate. In the end he was justified in his actions, but if the Chinese had not attacked, his behavior may have been considered overly circumspect and criticized.

General Smith's 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division mission was to advance up the north and west sides of the Chosin Reservoir and link up with the ROK II Corps assigned to the Eighth Army, closing the gap between the two units, then continue the rest of the way to the Yalu River. Frequently General Almond would request or urge the Marine Division to advance faster. Instead, General Smith instructed his unit to keep a steady pace and maintain unit integrity. He established supply routes and landing strips to facilitate the evacuation of casualties. It is possible that General Smith's only failure during this offensive was his resistance to the orders from General Almond to advance faster. If he had followed orders and pushed his forces more quickly, he might have been able to close the gap between the X Corps and Eighth Army before the Chinese attacked, eliminating one of the points of weaknesses in their defense, while maintaining the security on his left flank and that of the Army's 7<sup>th</sup> Division that was created from his slower approach.<sup>61</sup> However, the disadvantageous terrain played a role in Smith's decision to slow the advance; this same disadvantage was also advantageous for the Chinese Communist Forces. Additionally, when the Chinese did attack the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, the Marines' elements may have been in a better defensible position by having had the time to dig in and establish communications.

The table below shows the number of Marine casualties from 30 November – 3 December 1950, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines alone lost 1140 service men during these four days alone.

Date	KIA	DOW	MIA	WIA	Total Battle	Total Non-Battle
30 November	27	6	6	183	222	102

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<sup>61</sup> R. Vallowe, *Korean War Educator: Chosin Reservoir - Ray Vallowe Research*. (2015) [http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/chosin/vallowe\\_research/vallowe\\_chapter\\_06.htm](http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/chosin/vallowe_research/vallowe_chapter_06.htm), Accessed May 01, 2021

1 December	27	14	6	111	158	134
2 December	55	2	33	231	321	180
3 December	16	1	6	194	217	196
Totals	135	29	55	921	1140	1194

Table 1 Shows Marine Casualties - 30 November 1950-3 December 1950 (1stMarDiv SAR, annex E (Division Adjutant), appendix II, 3, “*Chosin Reservoir — Epic of Endurance*,” (n.d. )*Korean War Educator*'. Accessed 4 21, 2021. <http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/chosin/index.htm>.

It is worth mentioning that the Marines and the Army had a very different philosophy when assigning a commander. During the Korean War, the Marines chose leaders from those who had previously commanded a unit during combat. While the Army chose a commander based on the supply of the officer or who was a favorite. Of the twenty-four senior commanders (Generals and Colonels combined) 79 percent had no previous combat experience.<sup>62</sup> It is also worth mentioning that at the start of this war, units were thrown together to make complete units. X Corps, in particular, was pieced milled together. It would seem logical then that the senior officers assigned to X Corps may have been left over after all of the experience gleaned from WWII had been assigned to Eighth Army to bring that unit up to combat strength in June 1950 when North Korea invaded South Korea.

### CONCLUSION

The national security policy in 1950 concentrated on the USSR and China. Focusing mainly on the containment of the spread of communism, the United States failure to send sufficient munitions to the newly liberated country of South Korea, creating a situation where they were in need of backing from a stronger force as they rebuilt their country after the Japanese occupation. The United States was ignorant of discussions between China, North Korea, and the

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<sup>62</sup> F. R. Kirkland, (1995), 2

USSR referencing the use of military force to reunify South Korea. Consequently, when North Korea invaded South Korea the United States and the armed forces stationed in South Korea were caught off guard. Adding to this surprise was the presence of a large Chinese force in the mountains of North Korea after the US crossed the 38th Parallel. To add to the intelligence failure, diplomatic and intelligence reports about possible Chinese intervention were repeatedly ignored, discounted, or received scant attention. This lack of awareness set the stage for how operations and strategic responses were handled in Korea leading up to and during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir.

The Korean War was a three-year conflict that was bracketed by the more remembered wars of World War II and the Vietnam War. Prior to North Korea's invasion of South Korea, the United States had decided that their involvement in another country's affairs should be minimal. However, the concern over the spread of communism prompted the United States' increase in forces once North Korea decided to invade. With support from the United Nations and contribution of forces from several UN members, the United States was all in. The Chosin Reservoir battle from November 26 -13 December helped change how the United States viewed Communist participation and determination. The catastrophe took a toll on the U.S. forces, reducing some units to nonoperational force. Decisions from key United States military leaders, the placement of units, and training of troops played a decisive role in the events that occurred between November and December 1950. Additionally, intelligence issues and the lack of communication played a vital role in mission command failures and revealed a theme of leadership challenges applicable to the modern warfighter.

As the paper shows, the relationships and bias between commanders created tension and may have contributed to the decision process of the key leaders assigned to the units north of the

38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. While LTG Walker and LTG Almond were equal in rank and position, Almond could do little wrong in the eyes of the FEC, creating a situation of rivalry that may have contributed to the no holds barred approach to reaching the Yalu River. The 1st Marine Division Commander perpetrated the interservice rivalry with his “just shy of insubordination behavior” of disobeying the orders of his Corps commander and MacArthur. While he was also equal in rank, his position made him subordinate to General Almond and subject to the orders of the X Corps commander, despite his beliefs and personal feelings. As far as LTG Almond himself, his previous behavior during WWII should have spoken volumes. Despite his past behavior, he had ingratiated himself with MacArthur and “earned” another chance at command, which history shows he failed at again.

Analyzing the decisions of key leaders of the U.S. military after the United Nations forces crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel before and during the Chosin Reservoir battle and placement of units around the reservoir provides today's military lessons learned from a forgotten war. The quality and training of troops in the Eighth Army and X Corps, lack of communication, and language barriers all played a role in destroying several units and incapacitating mission command functions. Units were thrown together from minimally trained recruits to backfill the soldiers and Marines killed in action or missing. Gaps in the perimeter provided avenues of entry for the Chinese Communist Forces, demoralizing units physically and psychologically. Intelligence on enemy forces was ignored, discounted, and underestimated. The lack of accurate intelligence reports affected the tactical and strategic decisions of operational commanders.

Analyzing aspects of any military operation can provide important insights into what went well and what went wrong. Using the elements of mission command can help provide a foundation for what to look for. Mission command has five elements that support the successful



outcome of the assigned mission: intelligence, command and control, fires, sustainment, protection, and movement and maneuver. The United States faced many challenges while deployed to the Korean peninsula. Starting with a look at the intelligence failures, how they impacted leader decisions, and United States policy on Korea and manpower shortage; noting how these shortages played a large role in the handling of information. Several levels of leadership ignored discounted, and underestimated reports of enemy activity on numerous occasions. Highlighting the lack of initial training in the service members assigned to severely understrength units, demonstrated the importance of preparing units for combat action. Exploring communication and language barriers and the impact these elements had on the mission and unit cohesion shows how these elements can affect the results of an operation. The language barriers existed due to Korean Augmentees or KATUSAs (Korean Augmentee to the United States Army) and to some extent, units reinforced with armies from other countries. The placement of units and gaps in the perimeter, with an emphasis on the loss of control that occurred due to the gaps. Demonstrating the effects on command and control to the detriment of the mission and territory. Examples provided showed gaps in the Eighth Army and the 31st Regimental Combat Team's perimeter providing avenues of entry for the Chinese Communist Forces. Analyzing the actions of the leaders demonstrated decisions that had disastrous results at Chosin in the Korean War. Learning from these lessons and drawing from the history. Leaders should always be aware of and take into account the enemies' determination, be over cautious versus rushing to the goal. Establishing and maintaining effective communications and liaison with sister units keeps involved apprised of a situation. Recognizing the dangers of spreading the units to thin and moving to quickly towards an object. With the United States and allies still

at odds with North Korea, China, and Russia, there is a very real possibility the warfighters of today may find themselves back in those hills of North Korea.

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