COUNTERATTACK: THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN THE DEFENSE

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Air/Land Battle doctrine stresses the need for Army units to fight successfully out-numbered. This dictum implies the conduct of defensive operations at the beginning of a war. The shift to offensive operations, the counterattack, can be the key to fighting out-numbered and winning. This monograph discusses the selection of the objective of a counterattack; and the proper conduct of a counterattack.

The paper begins with an examination of classical and modern works on military theory and doctrine in order to determine the theoretical basis for the use of the counterattack as a defensive tactic. A lack of modern doctrine concerning the use of counterattacks becomes quickly evident. Next examined are the use of counterattacks in the battles of Cowpens, Austerlitz, Second Bull Run, and the experiences of Task Force Kean at the beginning of the battles of the Pusan perimeter during the Korean War. The
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The paper concludes with observations on practical objectives for counterattacks, the proper size for a counterattacking force, the selection of the physical target of the counterattack, and the timing of the counterattack.

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ABSTRACT

COUNTERATTACK: THE KEY TO SUCCESSS IN THE DEFENSE by MAJ Michael T Johnson, USA 43 pages.

The Air/Land Battle doctrine stresses the need for Army units to fight successfully out-numbered. This dictum implies the conduct of defensive operations at the beginning of a war. The shift to offensive operations, the counterattack, can be the key to fighting out-numbered and winning. This monograph discusses the selection of the objective of a counterattack, and the proper conduct of the counterattack.

The paper begins with an examination of classical and modern works on military theory and doctrine to determine the theoretical basis for the use of the counterattack as a defensive tactic. A lack of modern doctrine concerning the use of counterattacks becomes quickly evident. Next examined are the use of counterattacks in the battles of Cowpens, Austerlitz, Second Bull Run, and the experience of Task Force Kean at the beginning of the battles of the Pusan perimeter during the Korean War. The comparison of the results of battlefield use of the counterattack with the considerations of the theorists fills in the apparent gap in doctrine.

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COUNTERATTACK: THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN THE DEFENSE

I. Introduction

Both military theory and doctrine stress the importance of the counterattack as a method for achieving decisive results during a defensive operation. A casual reading of military history, however, will reveal many battles in which counterattacks failed to achieve victory for the defender, and as large a number of battles in which counterattacks were the keys to victory for the defender.

The classical writers, Clausewitz and Jomini, both discuss the theoretical basis for the importance of counterattacks in the planning and execution of a defensive battle. The doctrinal link required to translate theory into action, however, appears to be incomplete. This relative paucity of counterattack doctrine may explain why counterattacks have failed to achieve decisive results in numerous battles. An analysis of the characteristics common to successful counterattacks, when examined in the light of theory, offers several ideas that may help increase the officer's understanding of the role of the counterattack in the defensive battle.

This paper examines the theoretical role that counterattacks play in battle and how that theory has been translated into

tactical doctrine. The following crucial considerations of counterattack planning and execution are discussed in detail:

- The selection of the proper objective of a counterattack.
- When a counterattack should be launched.
- Counterattack planning within the broader plan of the defense.

II. Theoretical And Doctrinal Considerations

The defense is the stronger form of war because it provides the opportunity to counterattack the enemy. Both Clausewitz and Jomini provide strong support for this thesis. Clausewitz states this openly: "We have already stated what defense is --simply the more effective form of war: a means to win a victory that enables one to take the offensive after superiority has been gained; that is to proceed to the active object of war[1]"; and "A sudden powerful transition to the offensive--the flashing sword of vengeance--is the greatest moment for the defense. If it is not in the commander's mind from the start, or rather if it is not an integral part of his idea of defense, he will never be persuaded of the superiority of the defensive form; all he will see is how much of the enemy's resources he can destroy or capture."[2]

1. Clausewitz, Carl von, ON WAR; Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976, page 370.

2. Ibid.

Jomini implies this thesis in his discussion of the principles underlying the operations of war. He considers it a maxim that a commander should strive to use the bulk of his forces upon the enemy's decisive point, and in a manner that would engage the enemy at the proper time and with energy.[3] In his discussion of grand tactics Jomini provides further elaboration:

> "The simultaneous employment of the largest number of troops of all arms combined . . . will therefore, at the critical moment of battle, be the problem which every skillful general will attempt to solve and to which he should give his whole attention. The critical moment is usually when the first line of the parties is broken, and all the efforts of both contestants are put forth,--on the one side to complete the victory, on the other to wrest it from the enemy. It is scarcely necessary to say that, to make this decisive blow more certain and effectual, a simultaneous attack on the enemy's flank would be very advantageous "[4]

Both of these theorists favor the use of of the counterattack as a means of defeating one's enemy because the period of defensive combat prior to the launching of a counterattack allows the defender to weaken the attacker, define the force and direction of the attack, and finally strike the enemy when he is fully committed and thus unable to resist the counterattack effectively.

3. Jomini, Antoine Henri, THE ART OF WAR; Translated by G. H Mendell and W. P. Craighill, Philadelphia, Penn J B Lippincott & Co., 1862 page 63

4. Ibid, page 185

Clausewitz calls this progressive weakening of the attacker the "Diminishing Force Of The Attack"[5], and links this phenomenon to that of the "Culminating Point Of The Attack"[6]. These two factors are the prime causes of the vulnerability of an attacker to a properly directed and timed counterattack

In addition to providing the basic rationale for the utility of counterattacks, Clausewitz and Jomini furnish valuable guidance on selecting the objects of counterattacks and in timing the launching of counterattacks Both men, however, express their views in general terms Since the counterattack is an offensive maneuver, the object of this maneuver, according to Clausewitz, is the destruction of the enemy "We do claim, however, that direct annihilation of the enemy forces must always be the dominant consideration..."[7]. He elaborates on this idea with his statement that this concept of victory is an immediate purpose of battle and is universal[8].

If the object of a counterattack is the destruction of the attacking force, then when should the counterattack be launched? Jomini provides a clear answer to this question As previously

5 Clausewitz, ON WAR, page 527

6. Ibid, page 528

7. Ibid, page 228

8. Ibid, page 233

stated, Jomini felt that the best time to launch a counterattack was when the attacker was making his maximum exertion

Determining where to counterattack is as important as determining when to counterattack Clausewitz's concept of the 'center of gravity'-- " the hub of all power and movement on which everything depends " [9] --serves as a useful target for the operational planner, but the tactical commander requires a more tangible objective Fortunately, Jomini provides one in the idea of the 'decisive point' " there is in every battlefield a decisive point, the possession of which, more than any other, helps to secure the victory by enabling its holder to make a proper application of the principles of war, arrangements should therefore be made for striking the decisive blow at this point " [10] He elaborates on this concept by stating that when your enemy is in an extended formation, the decisive point will normally be his center; and when he is in a compact formation, the decisive point will usually be one of his flanks [11] To the tactical commander the enemy's center of gravity will most often be the enemy force itself; therefore, attacking at the decisive point is how the enemy's center of gravity is assailed

9 ON WAR, page 595

10 THE ART OF WAR, page 170

11 Ibid

While the classical theorists, Clausewitz and Jomini, discuss counterattacks, modern theory and doctrine, both U. S. and Soviet, do not address counterattacks as a specific item. Current U. S. Army doctrine on counterattacks is sparse and not very illuminating. FM 100-5, Operations, recommends the use of counterattacks as a method of wresting the iniative from the attacker, and thus defeating his attack: " The defender resists and contains the enemy where he must but seeks every opportunity to go over to the offensive."[12]; and "While reactive measures may halt the enemy, early counterattacks improve the chances for success. The defense can greatly damage the enemy only when early counterstrokes accompany the reactive phase of a battle."[13] It should be noted that these dictums from FM 100-5 are not supported by Jomini's belief on when to launch a counterattack; nor do Clausewitz's concepts of the diminishing force of the attack and the culminating point of the attack appear to agree with the idea of early counterattacks as part of a defensive battle.

Additionally, FM 100-5 provides little insight on the connection between the counterattack and the overall defensive plan: why counterattacks can achieve decisive results in battle, how the ends of a counterattack are linked to the means, and when

12. Field Manual 100-5, OPERATIONS, Washington, D. C. Dept. of the Army, 1986. page 129

13. Ibid

in the course of a battle a counterattack should be launched in order to achieve the desired end. The lack of an index reference to counterattacks in FM 100-5 illuminates this doctrinal void in the manual.

The U. S. Army's FM 100-15, CORPS OPERATIONS, provides no more insight on the nature and use of counterattacks than does FM 100-5; and worse yet, it establishes doctrine that is not only contradicted by theory, but if followed could result in the defeat of the defending force. Examples of this are found in the manual's advice on when to counterattack: "...a properly conducted defense provides the commander the opportunity to seize the initiative and to take advantage of the attacker's error. Once the attacker has committed himself and moved into the defended area, the corps commander can strike him with powerful fires and counterattacks to gain positions of advantage from which the enemy can be destroyed[14]"; and "The advantage of awaiting the attack is fully realized when the enemy has committed his forces[15]." As we have already established, both Clausewitz and Jomini felt that the advantage of the defense was that it allowed the defender to wear down the attacker and cause him fully to commit his force, and it was at this moment of maximum exertion that the defender should

14. Field Manual 100-15(Final Draft), CORPS OPERATIONS, Fort Leavenworth, KS: U S Army Command and General Staff College, 1985 page 6-2

15. Ibid, page 6-15

counterattack. Additionally, the reference to taking advantage of the enemy's error raises some interesting questions, such as: What does the defender do if the enemy makes no errors? Must the enemy err for the defender to succeed?; If the enemy does err, how will it be so recognized by the defender?

Field Circular 71-100, ARMORED AND MECHANIZED DIVISION AND BRIGADE OPERATIONS, another U. S. Army source of tactical doctrine, while sharing some of the faults of FM 100-15, provides advice on counterattacks that is both logical and supported by theory when it comments on the place a counterattack should have in the overall defensive plan--" The commander does not attack or counterattack as an automatic reaction to an enemy penetration nor does he commit the reserve solely because the enemy has reached a certain phase line or area. When possible the attack is launched when the enemy presents his flank or rear, when he has become over extended, or when his momentum dissipates."[16] It should be noted, however, that FC 71-100, like FM 100-5 and FM 100-15, does not cover any reasons why the counterattack is a powerful tactic, nor what the objects of counterattacks should be.

An early Soviet theorist, V. K. Triandafilov, thought that the nature of a defensive operation changed when a counterattack

16. Field Circular 71-100, ARMORED AND MECHANIZED DIVISION AND BRIGADE OPERATIONS; Fort Leavenworth, KS: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1984. page 6-42

was conducted: "The entire defensive operation takes on new planning from the moment the major decision is made to move forces laterally...From that time, the new operation is prepared as a purely offensive operation,..."[17] Triandafilov describes the object of these new operations as the moving of masses of reserves to the flanks of an attacking enemy in order to counterattack him or at least to force the enemy to react to these new forces.[18] His emphasis on the need to counterattack with massed forces is a strong element in his discussion of defensive operations. Triandafilov stresses this by stating that a weak counter strike will lead to the rout of the counterattacking forces and may further the aims of the enemy.[19] This theortical concern on properly sizing the counterattack force is seen in the form of official doctrine in the Soviet Army's Field Service Regulations of 1936.[20] The work of Triandafilov, however, was not elaborated by later Soviet authors. Neither Savkin's "Basic Principles Of Operational Art and Tactics" nor Sidorenko's "Offensive" discuss the counterattack as a tactic in its own right

17. Triandafilov, V. K., NATURE OF THE OPERATIONS OF MODERN ARMIES; Moscow-Leningrad, 1929; Translated by William Burhans RUSS-ENG Translations, Inc., Woodbridge, VA page 151

18. Ibid, page 150

19. Ibid, page 151

20. FIELD SERVICE REGULATIONS, SOVIET ARMY, 1936; Commissariat of Defense, USSR, Moscow, 1937: Translation Section, US Army War College, Washington, D. C. page 97

In both the American and Soviet works doctrine on counterattacks can be discerned only from the treatment of offensive operations in general. Of the two sources, the Soviet books cover operations from a theoretical perspective, while the American manuals are dicussions on methods of conducting operations.

An analysis of the theoretical and doctrinal works on the subject of counterattacks reveals strong theoretical support for the following conclusions:

- The counterattack is the maneuver that makes the defense superior to the offense.
- The object of a counterattack is the destruction of the enemy force.
- An enemy should be counterattacked when he is unable to parry the blow. Quite often this occurs when he is fully committed to his attack.
- An enemy should be counterattacked in strength.
- The enemy should be counterattacked at the decisive point.

There is little material available that translates these theoretical considerations into practical doctrine; thus we must turn to historical example for lessons on applying the theory to the practice of counterattacks.

III. The Objectives Of Counterattacks

The ultimate object of a counterattack is the destruction of the enemy. However, this end can be reached through the attainment of various intermediate objectives. An analysis of the use of counterattacks in the battles of Cowpens(1781), Austerlitz(1805), Second Bull Run(1862), and the counterattack of Task Force Kean in 1950, during the Korean War battles of the Pusan perimeter, can provide some insight on the proper tactical objectives and timing of counterattacks.

The battle of Cowpens is a good example of the use of a counterattack as a means for inflicting a decisive defeat on an enemy. By November of 1780 the British under Lord Cornwallis had completed the subjugation of South Carolina and were preparing to invade North Carolina, with the ultimate objective of invading Virginia. BG Daniel Morgan, with a mixed force of Continental soldiers and local militia totaling ~900 men, was ordered to move from North Carolina into the western portion of South Carolina in order to divert British attention away from the north. This diversion succeeded when Cornwallis sent a force of approximately 1100 men under the command of LTC Banastre Tarelton after Morgan. They met at Cowpens.

On the day of battle, 17 January 1781, Morgan deployed his force in three lines along the road to North Carolina(see map 1).

The first line consisted of skirmishers from the North and South Carolina militias. The second line was the main body of the Carolina Militias formed into two adjacent lines on either side of the road. The third line was Morgan's main force of Continental soldiers, about 300, and around 300 equally good soldiers from the Virginia Militia. Morgan's reserve, approximately 125 cavalry and mounted infantry, were posted to the rear of the third line

The British force arrived on the field at about 0900 after a march of six hours. In the lead was the British advance guard, three companies of light infantry. When the advance guard made contact with Morgan's forward elements, Tarleton organized his force for battle. He formed a main line from his advance guard, the 7th Infantry Regiment, and two troops of dragoons. About 500 men were in this line. A second line consisting of 1st Battalion, 71st Regiment, and his legionary cavalry deployed to the left rear of the main line.[21]

Tarleton intended to assault Morgan's force frontally and expected to be able to rout it. His contempt for the fighting abilities of the American militia led him to this belief. Morgan, on the other hand, intended to use the militia to disrupt the

21 HISTORICAL STATEMENTS CONCERNING THE BATTLE OF KING'S MOUNTAIN AND THE BATTLE OF COWPENS. A Report To The 70th Congress By The Historical Section Of The Army War College, U. S. Govt. Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1928, map 2

initial advance of the British, then stop and defeat their attack with his main force.

The battle started off as envisioned by Morgan with the line of militia, including skirmishers, engaging the British advance and then retiring behind the main line. When the British main body made contact with Morgan's main force it was stopped by heavy, damaging fire from the Continentals and Virginians. Tarleton then ordered the dragoons on his right to attack the militia that was behind the Virginian left, and ordered the 1/71st into line against the right of the Continentals. At this point Morgan's plan began to unravel. The attack of the dragoons posed a threat to the militia until the American cavalry charged and drove the British dragoons from the field. The threat to the right of the Continentals was more serious. COL Howard, the commander of the Continentals, saw that his flank was about to be enveloped and ordered his right-most unit to change front to the right. Seeing this move being executed the rest of the Continentals took it to be an order to retreat, and began an orderly movement to the rear. The Virginians followed suit. Tarleton interpreted this movement as the begining of a rout and ordered his entire force forward in pursuit. Morgan managed to stop this rearward movement, the Continentals and Virginians faced about, fired a devastating volley into the British at a range of about 30 meters, and charged into the stunned British. The Redcoats halted in confusion and then fled in panic. Morgan ordered the militia and mounted force

to envelope the fleeing British, resulting in the British losing 85% of their force.[22]

An analysis of Morgan's success at Cowpens provides two lessons on the role played by the counterattack in this battle. First, the counterattack occurred after Tarleton had fully committed all of his forces and had no uncommitted element left to thwart the counterattack. Second, the counterattack was directed against the decisive point of the British force, the source of the power and strength of Tarelton's command, its center. The defeat of the British main body automatically resulted in the destruction of Tarleton. These two elements, the objective of the counterattack and the timing of the counterattack, reappear in the other battles examined.

In three battles examined in this paper, counterattacks were used in an "ad hoc" manner, either to take advantage of a situation that had appeared on the battlefield(Cowpens and Second Bull Run), or to restore a deteriorating tactical situation(Second Bull Run and the counterattack of Task Force Kean) In fighting the Battle of Austerlitz, in December of 1805, Napoleon planned his entire scheme of maneuver around the use of a counterattack intended to inflict a decisive defeat on his enemy

22 Lee, Henry jr , THE CAMPAIGN OF 1781 IN THE CAROLINAS, Quadrangle Books, Inc , Chicago, Ill , 1962,(a reprint of the 1824 edition), page 96.

After defeating a major portion of the Austrian Army at Ulm in October of 1805, Napoleon attempted to engage the army of Austria's Russian ally, which, under the command of GEN Katusov, had moved west along the Danube in order to link up with the Austrians at Ulm. The defeat of the Austrians at Ulm caused Katusov to move east back along the Danube and then north to Olmutz, in Moravia, in order to link up with another Russian Army that Tsar Alexander had brought west. Additionally the last substantial Austrian force north of the Alps also moved with the Austrian Emperor Francis to this meeting point at Olmutz.

Katusov's success in avoiding engagement with Napoleon presented the French with the dilemma of either retiring from Moravia and giving up the strategic advantages gained by the victory at Ulm, or fighting a superior Allied army in the vicinity of Olmutz. Napoleon's solution to this problem is a classic example of defensive planning

The massed Allied Army totaled approximately 80,000 men Against this force Napoleon could muster 73,500 men, assembled into four infantry corps, a cavalry corps, Oudinot's Grenadier division and the Imperial Guard. In addition to being outnumbered by the Allies on the battlefield, the French were faced with the prospect of an imminent Prussian entry into the war on the side

of the Allies.[23] The strategic situation that was developing was much to the disadvantage of the French. Besides the Allied army at Olmutz, an Austrian Army of approximately 120,000 men was moving north toward Moravia from the Italian Tyrol. The entry of Prussia into the war would add another 200,000 men to the forces opposing the French.[24] Napoleon knew that he had to act quickly to defeat the Allied army at Olmutz if he wanted to end the war on his terms.

Napoleon's solution to the problem posed by the superior Allied army was to deceive the Allies into believing that the French Army was retiring to the west in disorder, and was uncovering its line of retreat to Vienna. He expected the Allies to attempt to cut off the French line of retreat to the south, thus exposing their own line of retreat to the east and making themselves vulnerable to a counterattack.

After conducting a reconnaisance of the area btween Brunn and Olmutz, Napoleon selected the ground just west of Austerlitz as being ideal for the type of battle he wanted to fight.[25] The dominant terrain feature in the area was the Pratzen Heights. This piece of high ground overlooked the route to Vienna to the

23. Chandler, David G., THE CAMPAIGNS OF NAPOLEON, New York, N. Y.: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1966 page 403

24. IBID

25. IBID, page 412

south(see map 2). Napoleon moved his army off the Pratzen Heights, making sure that the Allies saw this maneuver, and concentrated his forces to the northwest of Pratzen. He then deliberately weakened his southern flank in order to give the impression that his line of operations from Vienna could be severed easily. The Allies fell for this ruse, not knowing that the French line of operations ran to the west, to Brunn; and moved on to the Pratzen Heights in force. (Map 2 shows the initial dispositions of the opposing forces.)

Napoleon's plan of battle was to lure the Allies into attacking his weakened right flank, refuse his left flank, and at the opportune time launch an overwhelming counterattack against the Allies center in order to envelope the Allies left(see map 3).[26]

Having fallen for Napoleon's operational trap, the Allies plan made the success of the French tactical plan more probable. The Allies planned to launch a strong attack, with about 39,000 of their 80,000 men, against the French right, turn this flank, and envelope the entire French Army. They would launch a supporting attack along the Brunn-Olmutz road, and maintain only a small number of troops in their center.[27]

26. THE CAMPAIGNS OF NAPOLEON, page 413

27. Ibid, page 417

The battle on 2 December 1805 flowed much as envisioned by Napoleon. The Allies main force struck Legrand's division along Goldbach Stream, and gradually forced it back. At 0830 Davout's corps, having arrived from the south, counterattacked the Allies' left wing and restored the French line along Goldbach Stream. At approximately 0800, Napoleon observed the Russian forces that had been stationed in the Allied center(about 20,000 men) moving east and then south to join the attack on the French left. This was the moment for which Napoleon had been waiting.[28] The mass of the Allied army was being committed; the Allied center was now vulnerable to the corps that Napoleon had saved for this moment(approximately 40,000 men).

After about two hours of hard fighting, the massive French counterattack penetrated the weakened Allied center and began to envelop the Allied left. The Allied reserve, approximately 8,500 men of the Russian Imperial Guard, was driven off the field when it attempted to intervene in the battle. By day's end, the Allied right wing had been defeated and was retreating back to Olmutz, the Allied center had been forced from the field, and the bulk of the Allied Army, its left wing, had been enveloped and destroyed. About a third of the Allied Army was killed or captured(see map 4).

28. THE CAMPAIGNS OF NAPOLEON, page 425.

The operational and strategic consequences of this battle were immediately felt by all parties concerned The Austrians had to sue for peace because they could no longer resist the French the Prussians were detered from entering the war, and the Russians returned home since they no longer had an European ally[29]

An analysis of the French success at Austerlitz reveals the application of the theoretical principles described by Clausewitz and Jomini The object of the counterattack was the destruction of the Allied Army The center of gravity of the Allied Army was its left wing The route of attack that led to the Allied left was through its center, the decisive point In particular, the Allied center was the decisive point because the Allied wings were too far apart to provide mutual support for the Allied center(see map 3) Finally, the counterattack was launched when the Allied Army was fully committed against the French left and had only 8,500 men(the Russian Imperial Guard) readily available to oppose the French counterattack "A last lesson that Austerlitz teaches is that the counterattack or tactical offensive is the true key to defense Strategically Napoleon was undoubtedly on the defensive but this did not dissuade him from reassuming the tactical initiative all along the battle line(once the trap was sprung) thus snatching overwhelming victory from the jaws of apparent

29 THE CAMPAIGNS OF NAPOLEON, page 432

defeat."[30]

A counterattack that succeeded in accomplishing the diversion of an attacking enemy occurred on the second day of the Second Battle of Bull Run, in August of 1862. The success of LTG James Longstreet's counterattack into the flank of Porter's corps of the Army of Virginia[31] forced it to turn away from its attack on the right flank of Stonewall Jackson's wing of the Army of Northern Virginia; and eventually resulted in the general retirement of the Army of Virginia from the field of battle.

The results of the battle are particularly surprising considering the relative strengths of the opposing armies. The Army of Virginia contained seven corps(Banks, Franklin, Heintzelman, McDowell, Porter, Reno, and Sigel)[32] and totaled approximately 75,000 men.[33] The Army of Northern Virginia, under the

30. THE CAMPAIGNS OF NAPOLEON, page 438

31. The Union had two major armies operating in Virginia at this time. The Army of Virginia, under the command of MG John Pope, fought the Second Battle of Bull Run. The Army of the Potomac, commanded by MG George McClellan was concluding the Peninsular Campaign along the James river, and was redeploying to the vicinity of Washington, D. C. Four of the corps of the Army of the Potomac were assigned to the Army of Virginia as they arrived at the Potomac river debarcation ports.

32. WEST POINT ATLAS OF AMERICAN WARS, Edited by BG Vincent J. Esposito: U. S. Military Academy, West Point, N. Y., Praeger Publishers, N. Y., 959. page 62

33. McWhiney, Grady and Jamieson, Perry D., ATTACK AND DIE: CIVIL WAR MILITARY TACTICS AND THE SOUTHERN HERITAGE, University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1982. page 8

command of GEN Robert E. Lee, was organized into two equal wings(Jackson, Longstreet)[34] and contained about 48,000 men[35] Pope made poor use of his numerical superiority by detaching Banks' corps to guard Union communications at Bristoe Station and Franklin's corps to perform the same function at Centreville Thus Pope's available strength on the day of battle was about 56,000 men.[36]

The key elements of Longstreet's success included the earlier heavy attacks against the center and left of Jackson's wing by the Army of Virginia; the placement of the Union army's reserve, Reno's and Sigel's corps, behind the corps of Heintzelman and McDowell; and the flow of the battle itself

At approximately 1500 hrs MG Pope, the Union commander, ordered Porter's corps, the last uncommitted Union element, to attack Jackson's right At the same time Heintzelman and Mcdowell again assailed Jackson's center and left Jackson was hard pressed to maintain his position because of these attacks and asked for help from Lee GEN Lee ordered Longstreet to come to Jackson's assistance; but Longstreet had seen the opportunity presented by Porter's open left flank and ordered a counterattack prior to

34 WEST POINT ATLAS OF AMERICAN WARS, page 63

35 ATTACK AND DIE, page 8

36 WEST POINT ATLAS OF AMERICAN WARS, page 63

receiving Lee's order. Longstreet's counterattack took Porter's corps in the flank, compelling Porter to face to his left, away from Jackson, and to move east to defensible ground(see map 5)[37] The ultimate consequence of Longstreet's counterattack into the flank of Porter's corps was the retirement of the Army of Virginia to the defenses of Washington[38]

A brief examination of this counterattack reveals that Pope had no reserves readily available on his left flank when he ordered Porter to attack Jackson's right; Porter moved his entire force into the assault on Jackson, not being aware of Longstreet on his left; and Longstreet attacked Porter's Corps directly It was the physical and moral destruction wrought by Longstreet's counterattack that compelled Porter to break off his assault on Jackson. The unexpected attack on the left flank of the corps bewildered and overwhelmed Porter's men who turned away from the assault[39]

Thus, we see a counterattack forcing an enemy to divert from his attack. Yet the immediate tactical objective, in common with the other battles examined, remained the destruction of an enemy

37 Freeman, Douglas Southall, LEE'S LIEUTENANTS, New York, N Y Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943 page 126

38 WEST POINT ATLAS OF AMERICAN WARS, page 64

39 LEE'S LIEUTENANTS, page 126

force. Secondly, the counterattack was launched when the opponent was committed to the extent that he had no forces readily available to defeat the counterattack. Finally, the counterattack was directed against the decisive point; in this case, the exposed flank of the massed Army of Virginia.

Another counterattack that attempted to divert an enemy away from an endangered point occurred during the early stages of the Korean War. During the battles of the Pusan perimeter in August 1950, Eighth Army(US) attempted but failed to divert major portions of the attacking North Korean Army away from the northwest portion of the Pusan perimeter through the use of a division size counterattack in the southwest sector of the perimeter. Eighth Army failed to achieve its operational objective because it selected the wrong tactical objectives for its counterattack.

By August of 1950 the United Nations forces were trying to halt the North Korean advance along the general line of the Naktong river(see map 6) The North Koreans were massing against the northwest part of the Pusan perimeter, which was defended by weak South Korean divisions Eighth Army decided to use a counterattack to divert North Korean strength away from this

sector.[40] The force ordered to conduct this attack was Task Force Kean. The tactical objective selected by Eighth Army was the Chinju pass, which controlled the Chinju-Masan approach into the Pusan perimeter and the line of the Nam river(see map 7). The Chinju-Masan corridor was selected as the axis of the counterattack because it was the area toward which Eighth Army wanted to divert major North Korean forces, and the units allocated to the counterattack were already concentrated on the Masan end of the corridor.[41]

Task Force Kean consisted of the 25th Infantry Division less one regiment, the 5th Regimental Combat Team, the 1st Marine Brigade(Prov), the 89th Tank Battalion, and the 1st Marine Tank Battalion. The Task Force totaled about 20,000 men and was commanded by MG William B. Kean, the commanding general of the 25th Infantry Division. The Eighth Army plan required Task Force Kean to attack with three regiments along separate axes, with a fourth regiment clearing the Task Force's rear.[42] The major North Korean force located in the area of the counterattack was the reinforced 6th Division with about 7500 men. This concept of operations(see map 7) oriented on controlling the three east-west

40. Appleman, Roy E., SOUTH TO THE NAKTONG, NORTH TO THE YALU, Washington, D. C.: Office of The Chief of Military History, Dept of the Army, 1961. page 267

41. SOUTH TO THE NAKTONG, NORTH TO THE YALU, page 268

42. IBID, page 269

roads in the area, and concluded with the seizure of the major road intersection at Chinju. If the enemy had been as heavily dependent on road bound logistical support as was the Eighth Army, then these would have been good objectives. The North Korean Army however, was not as sensitive to these concerns as was the American Army. The North Korean 6th Division's logistical needs could be met through the use of porters moving along trails, and the 6th Division's general lack of heavy equipment gave it a mobility in Korean terrain that exceeded the mobility of Task Force Kean.[43] The accomplishment of the Eighth Army operational objective would have required the tactical objective to be the physical destruction of the North Korean 6th Division. Why? Because only a threat to the North Korean main drive against the Pusan perimeter could compel them to divert forces away from this main effort. Operations against the flank of this main effort (Task Force Kean) could not result in a threat to the North Korean Army unless the attack first destroyed the enemy element that was securing the flank of the main effort(North Korean 6th Division).

The attack commenced on 7 August 1950. The northern arm of the attack, the 35th Infantry Regiment, fought an enemy battalion for about five hours on the line of departure near the pass at Chungam-ni. After defeating this enemy unit, the 35th Infantry made rapid progress toward its objective, the Chinju pass, and by

43. SOUTH TO THE NAKTONG, NORTH TO THE YALU, page 270

the next day was a short march away from the pass

The 5th Regimental Combat Team and the 1st Marine Brigade(Prov), the center and southern arms of the counterattack, however, ran into a North Korean attack that was aimed at Masan The defeat of this North Korean drive on Masan required about two day's worth of fighting; and these two units were unable to begin their planned counterattack until 9 August 1950

The experience of the 24th Infantry Regiment when it attempted to fulfill its mission of clearing the Task Force's rear is perhaps more significant The 24th Infantry immediately encountered strong elements of the North Korean 6th Division that were entrenched on the Sobuk-san(see map 7) and received a sound drubbing[44] Thus after two days of fighting, the Task Force Kean counterattack had yet to move forward of its line of departure, and more ominously, had identified a substantial enemy force that was located between two of its axes of advance

By 12 August 1950 the Eighth Army counterattack had moved forward along all three axes, but was beginning to run out of steam The 5th Marine Regiment, the unit attacking on the southern axis, had been stopped at Changchon, just east of the Nam river while the center unit, the 5th Regimental Combat Team was being

44. SOUTH TO THE NAKTONG, NORTH TO THE YALU, page 270

attacked on its flanks by the bypassed North Korean 6th Division By 14 August 1950 Task Force Kean was back at its starting positions The 1st Marine Brigade(Prov) had been taken away by Eighth Army and North Korean pressure on the Flanks of the remainder of the Task Force had compelled its withdrawal back to Masan. No North Korean troops had been diverted away from the northwest sector of the Pusan perimeter,[45] and the counterattack failed.

Why did Task Force Kean fail to accomplish the Army objective of diverting North Korean strength to the south? I believe the answer lies with the selection of the tactical objectives of the counterattack Eighth Army evidently felt that a threat to the communications of the North Korean 6th Division would result in a southward movement of North Korean strength The Eighth Army plan, however, contained the seeds of its own failure when it did not include a direct attack on the 6th Division itself The enemy division was thus free to respond to the American strike

Why were the tactical objectives of Task Force Kean incorrect? Since the start of the war in June of 1950, the North Koreans had demonstrated a disregard for the immediate security of their flanks and a marked ability to operate against the flanks of the UN forces[46] By ordering Task Force Kean to attack on three

45 SOUTH TO THE NAKTONG, NORTH TO THE YALU, page 287

46 IBID, page 210

axes, Eighth Army dispersed the power of the counterattack and directed it against an objective that was of little short term danger to the North Koreans. The real danger to the North Korean offensive against the Pusan perimeter would occur if the 6th Division was destroyed; since the North Koreans were fully committed against the perimeter and had no reserves available to deal with this contingency,[47] the destruction of the 6th Division would have compelled a diversion of North Korean strength to the south. Yet the Army plan called for the 6th Division to be bypassed by the main force of Task Force Kean and attacked only by the 24th Infantry Regiment.[48] Consequently, Task Force Kean was placed in danger of being isolated and destroyed by a force that was centrally positioned to operate against its flanks and yet was outnumbered by Task Force Kean by a ratio of 3 to 1.

The Eighth Army decision to use a counterattack to divert the enemy from a threatened sector had a practical and realizable objective; however, the failure to orient on the destruction of the North Korean 6th Division as the immediate objective of the counterattack resulted in the defeat of Task Force Kean.

47. IBID, Map VI

48. SOUTH TO THE NAKTONG, NORTH TO THE YALU, page 270

IV. Conclusions

Military theory suggests that the counterattack is a seperate and distinct tactic which although offensive in nature is intimately tied to the defense. Clausewitz, Jomini, and Triandafilov provide sufficient guidance for the conceptual planning of a counterattack. A synthesis of their writings and the results of the analysis of the four battles examined in this paper provides some consistent conclusions.

The counterattack is the tactic that makes the defense the superior form of war. The results of the battles of Cowpens, Austerlitz, and Second Bull Run have in common this tenet of Clausewitz. Another Clausewitzian concept that is substantiated by historical results is the idea of aiming for the destruction of the enemy force. Three of the battles studied (Second Bull Run, Austerlitz, and Cowpens) had this end as the ultimate objective of the counterattack and brought success to the defender. Task Force Kean oriented on terrain instead of the enemy and failed.

Jomini's contribution to the theoretical basis of a doctrine for counterattacks is also well supported by the results of battles. The effect of striking the enemy at the decisive point in time and space was clearly seen in the the battles of Cowpens, Second Bull, and Au terlitz, as was the identification of when to launch the counterattack. Jomini's thoughts on the timing of the

counterattack are especially pertinent; the time to strike the enemy is when he is making his maximum exertion. This theoretical point is modified and refined by the analysis of the battles studied in this paper. All of the battles share the point that the reason why the enemy was especially vulnerable at the time of his maximum exertion was because he no longer had any forces readily available to parry the counterattack. This point in the battle is when the enemy should be counterattacked.

Triandafilov's advice on the strength of the counterattack force is a refinement of the ideas of Clausewitz and Jomini. His precept that a counterattack must be launched in strength or risk defeat and thus endanger the entire plan of the defense is substantiated by all four battles examined. The three examples of successful counterattacks used the preponderance of the defending force in the counterattack. The unsuccessful counterattack, that of Task Force Kean, crippled itself by dispersing its strength along diverging axes.

These theoretical considerations of counterattacks are not adequately addressed in current doctrine, but can be developed through the study of historical example. The battles of Cowpens, Austerlitz, Second Bull Run, and the counterattack of Task Force Kean reveal various objectives that should be considered in the formulation of tactical doctrine. The diversion of an enemy from his original intent is a good use of a counterattack. The battle

of Second Bull Run illustrates the successful use of a counterattack for this purpose, while the example of Task Force Kean demonstrates how a counterattack intended to attain this end can fail because of an improper selection of tactical objectives for the counterattack.

Another useful objective for a counterattack is the establishment of the pre-conditions for subsequent decisive victory. Napoleon's use of the counterattack at Austerlitz resulted in the envelopment and destruction of the Allied army and the ensuing collapse of the Second Coalition. Longstreet's counterattack at Second Bull Run was not as disastrous for the Army of Virginia as Napoleon's was for the Allied Army. However, Lee's army drove the Union back to the defenses of Washington as a consequence of this counterattack, an impressive operational result.

Finally, another significant objective of a counterattack is the attainment of the initiative on the operational level as a result of a successful counterattack on the tactical level. Both Austerlitz and Second Bull Run illustrate this point.

All four examples studied share the fact that for a counterattack to succeed it must either result in the physical destruction of the enemy force being attacked, or cause the enemy to believe that his destruction will be the inevitable result of

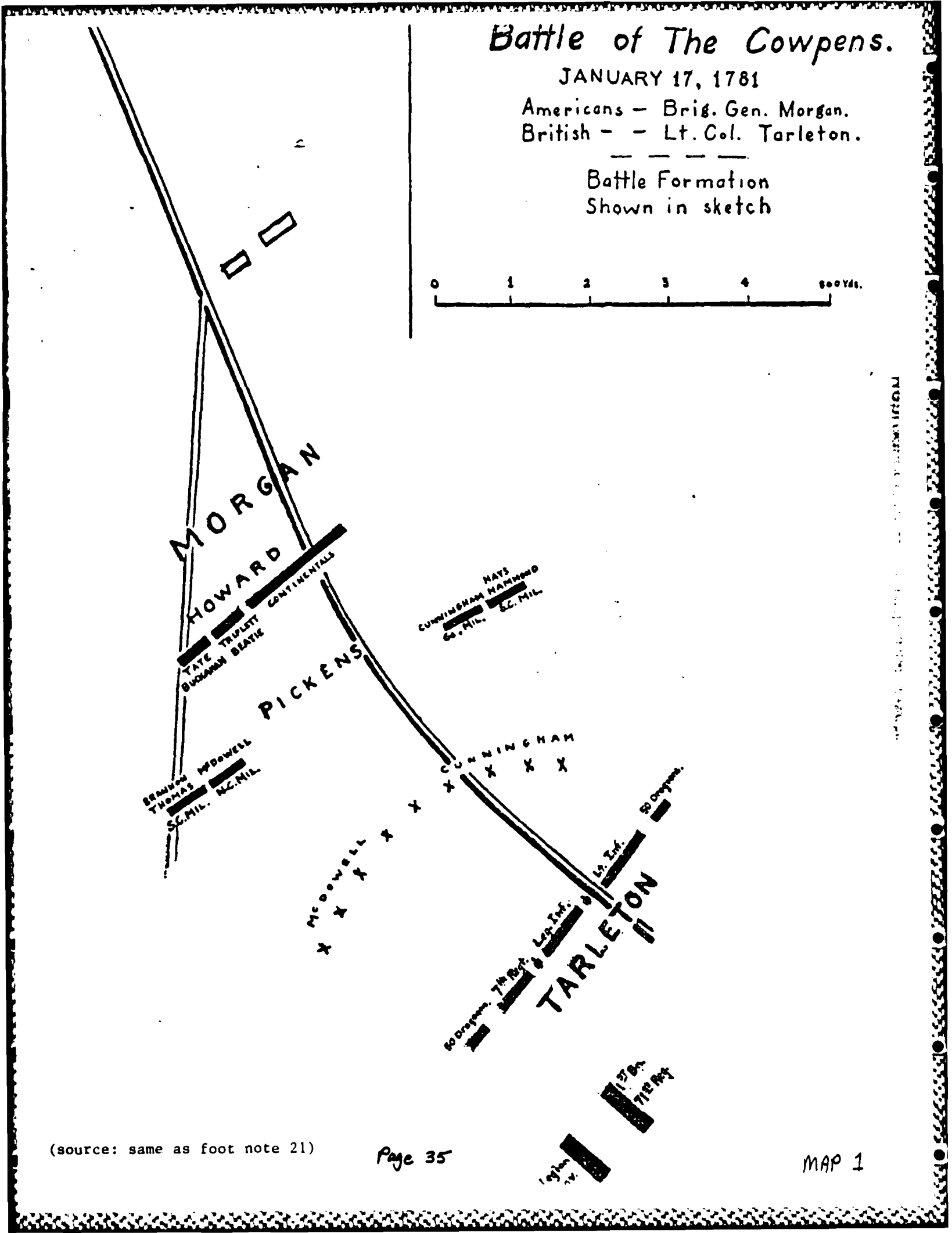
the counterattack. Cowpens, Austerlitz, and Second Bull Run accomplished or threatened the physical destruction of the enemy forces that were the direct targets of the counterattacks. Task Force Kean avoided the major enemy force in its path and failed to accomplish its mission.

The selection of the point at which to counterattack is as important as the selection of the objective of the counterattack. In all three of the successful examples of counterattacks the decisive points on the battlefield were attacked; while in the case of Task Force Kean, the decisive point was the 6th Division, and it was not attacked.

The questions of when to attack and in what strength are connected to the question of where to attack. The analysis of the these four battles confirms the theory: the enemy should be counterattacked when he is unable to parry the blow and with the strongest element possible. This combination produced victory at Cowpens, Austerlitz, and Second Bull Run.

In conclusion, the key elements of a counterattack are the selection of the desired end or object, the selection of the tactical objective of the counterattack, the identification of the decisive point in the enemy's disposition, the size of the counterattack force, and most importantly, the timing of the counterattack.

The counterattack should be recognized as a separate tactic that is the critical element of an effective defense. I recommend that counterattacks be studied by serving officers with the objective of including them in the body of tactical doctrine.



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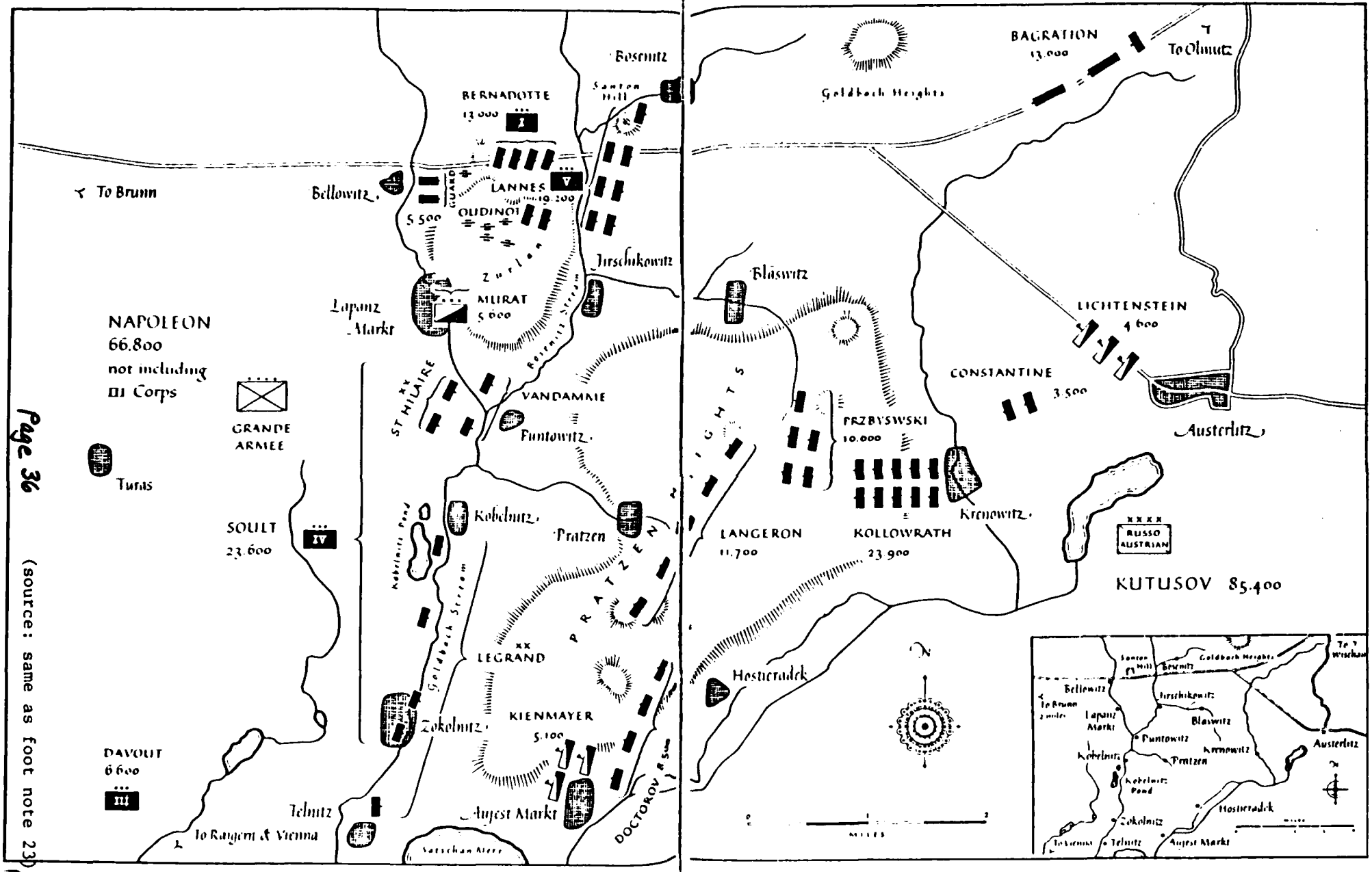
MAP 1



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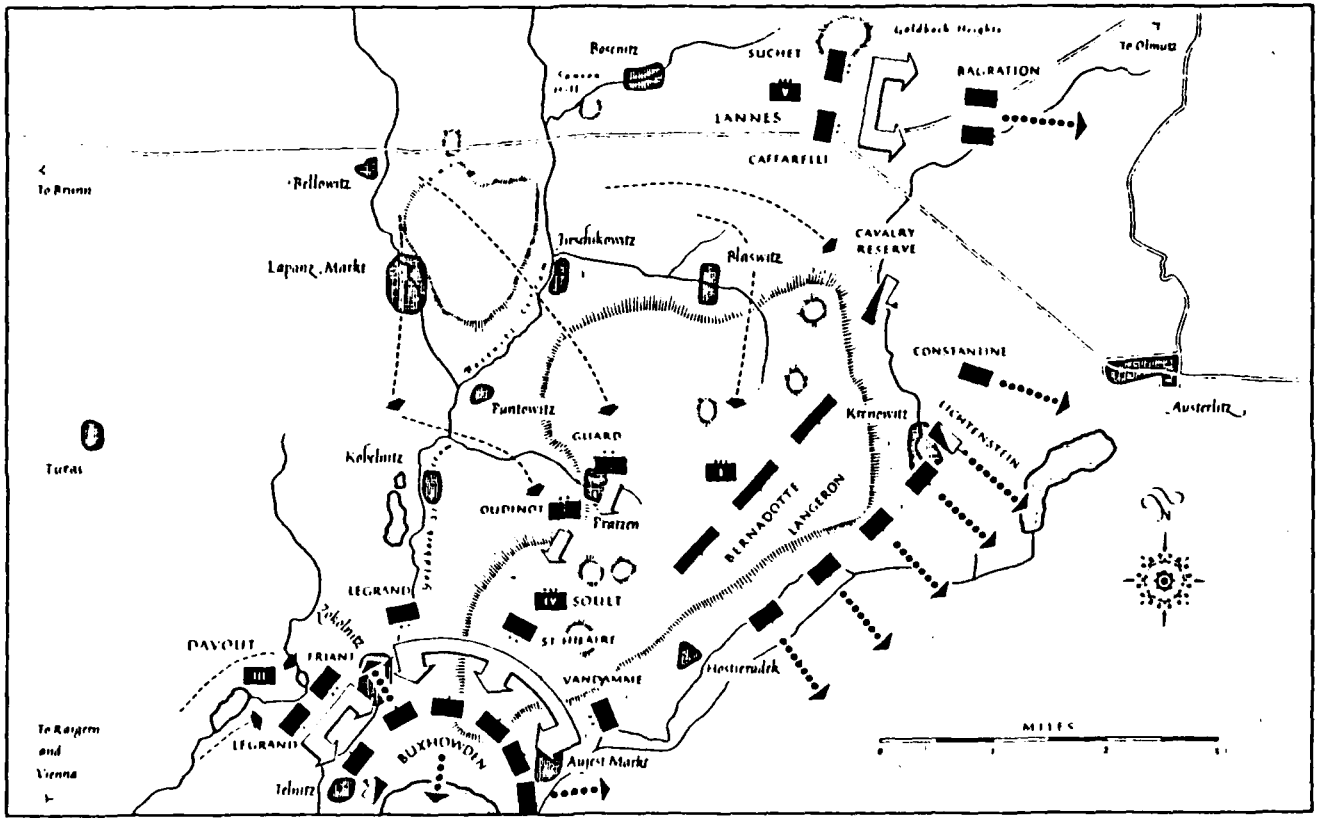
MAP 2

The Battle of Austerlitz, December 2, 1805: Allied and French plans

MAP 3

(source: same as foot note 23)



MAP 4

The Battle of Austerlitz, December 2, 1805: the final French attack, 2:30 p.m.

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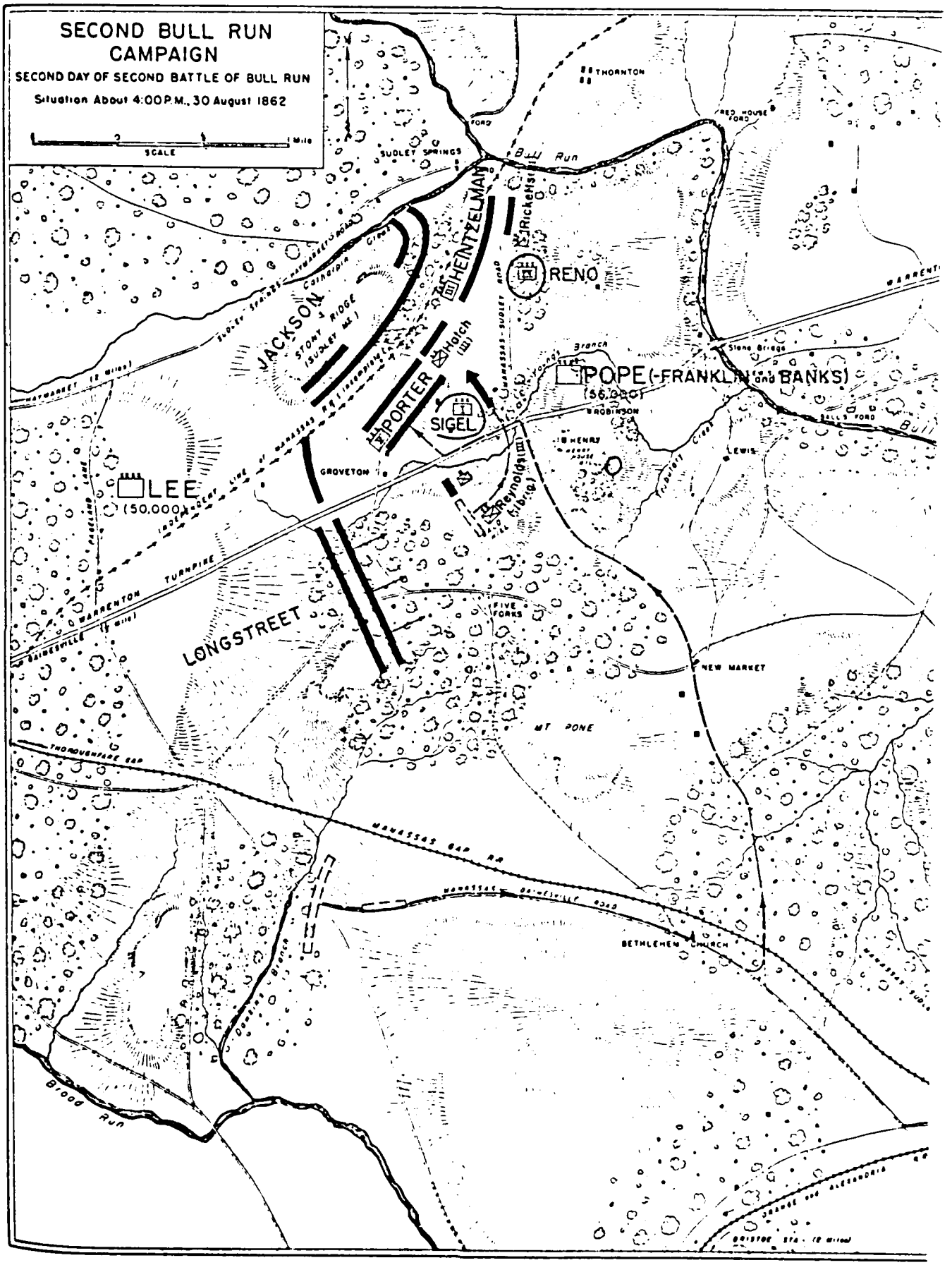
(source: same as foot note 23)



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MAP 5

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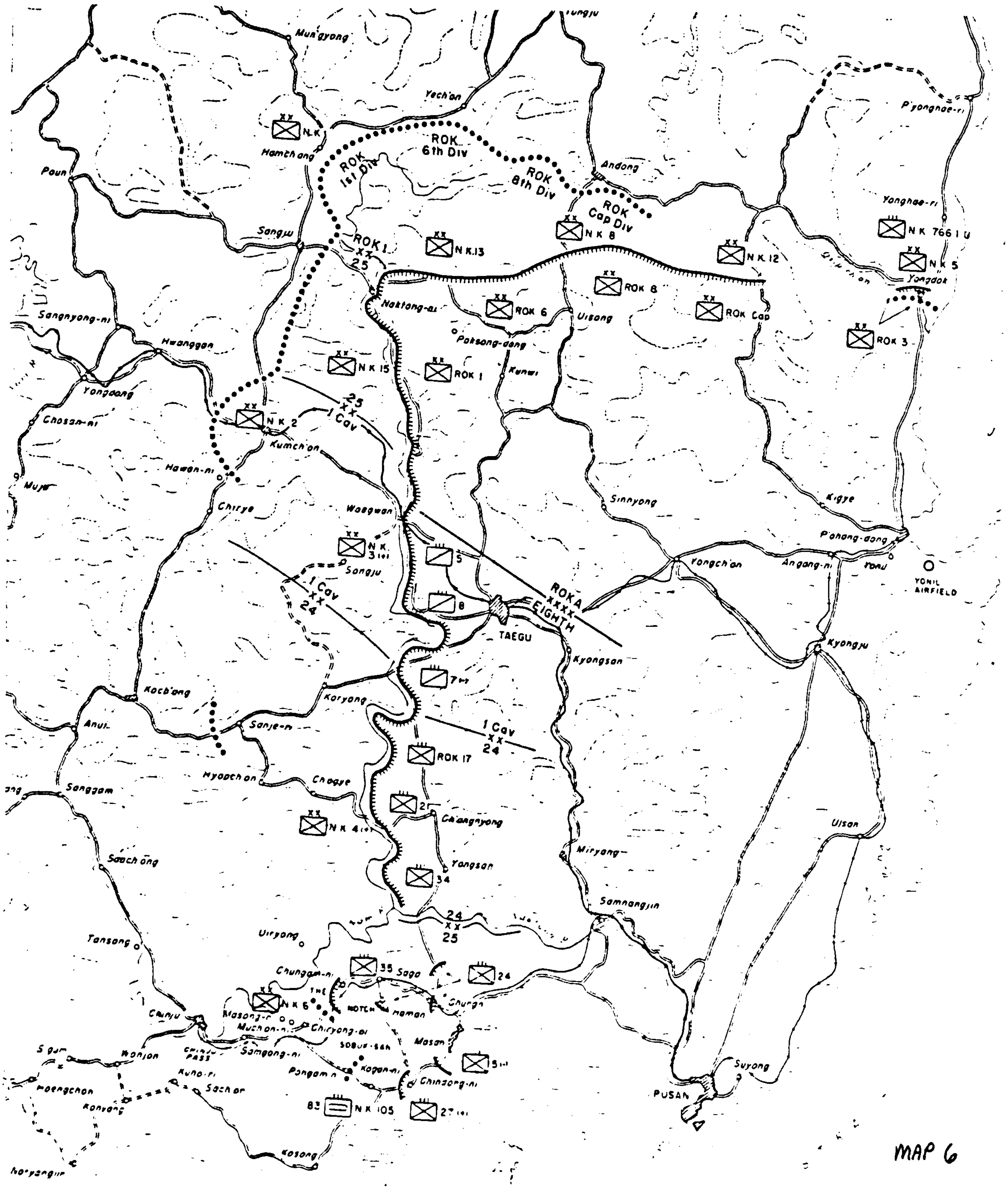

MAP 6

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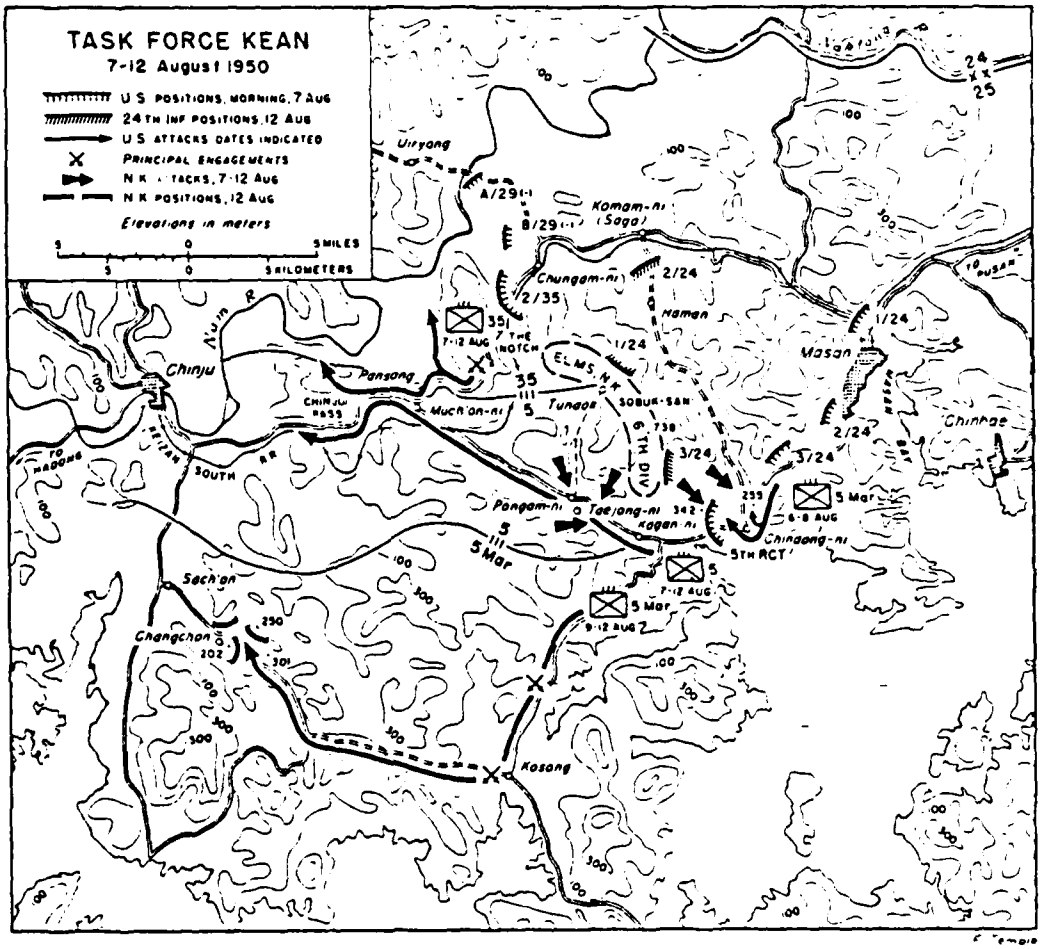

MAP

(source: same as foot note 40)

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