STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS AT THE PUSAN PERIMETER JULY-SEPTEMBER 1950

BY

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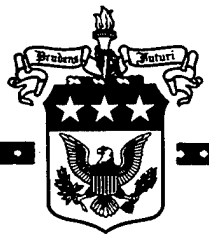

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ABSTRACT

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As we prepare for the strategic challenges ahead, our experiences in the early days of the Korean War offer invaluable food for thought. This paper outlines the strategic decisions and results at the national, theater, and component command level. In particular, the paper examines the contribution made by Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker in overcoming significant challenges to hold off a North Korean People's Army attack long enough for MacArthur to conduct his amphibious turning movement at Inchon.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early morning hours of 25 June 1950, following a barrage of artillery and mortar fire, seven infantry divisions and an armored brigade of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) charged across the 38th Parallel into South Korea. The NKPA force of approximately 90,000 attacked in four columns against the four Republic of Korea (ROK) divisions and one regiment which were stationed along the border. On that day, however, only about a third of these ROK forces were actually occupying defensive positions; the remainder were in reserve miles to the south.[1] Despite months of provocations and warnings, the NKPA achieved complete tactical surprise against the ROK Army.[2] Within hours, NKPA forces had seized initial objectives and the South was reeling.

News of the attack quickly reached Washington where leaders were also surprised by the turn of events in Korea.[3] Although initial reports were vague, it was soon clear that a major offensive was underway. Less than 24 hours after the NKPA attack, President Truman convened a meeting of his key advisors at Blair House to assess the crisis. The consensus at this meeting was that the United States would act to counter the aggression. Days later, U.S. forces were engaged in a ground war that would leave 33,629 Americans dead and 103,284 wounded.[4]

From the U.S. perspective, the Korean War was fought at an unexpected time and place. Severe setbacks at the outset reflected a lack of prior planning for this conflict. Early engagements also highlighted the U.S. armed forces' poor state of combat readiness. Notwithstanding an inauspicious start, and a very real threat of being driven off the Korean Peninsula in defeat, U.S. and ROK forces eventually halted the NKPA onslaught and established a defensive perimeter in South Korea. This defensive effort, conducted from July to September 1950, allowed for a buildup of U.S. and allied combat power and a subsequent counteroffensive. In fact, the operations conducted during this period, orchestrated by Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, Commanding General, Eighth United States Army, were the linchpin for General Douglas MacArthur's bold amphibious turning movement at Inchon on 15 September 1950.

This paper will examine U.S. military strategy during the opening days of the Korean War. Particular emphasis will be placed on the U.S. failure to prepare for the conflict and the role of General Walker in overcoming that lack of preparedness.

EYE OFF THE BALL

The disastrous events that took place on the Korean Peninsula in the early summer of 1950 can be traced to several factors related to the aftermath of World War II. These factors included a military balance of power that was unfavorable to the Republic of Korea, drastic reductions in the conventional military power of the United States, a lack of emphasis placed on the Korean Peninsula in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy and military planning, and the failure of U.S. intelligence agencies to anticipate North Korean aggression.

For most of the half-century preceding the war, Korea had been under Japanese subjugation. When World War II ended, the United States, British, and Soviet Governments agreed that U.S. forces would receive the surrender of Japanese forces south of the 38th Parallel and Soviet forces would do so north of the parallel. The selection of the 38th parallel was hastily and arbitrarily decided upon; Koreans thought of it as a temporary arrangement to be superseded by the establishment of a unified and independent Korea.[5] Dreams of a united Korea were soon shattered. By 1948, the peninsula was divided into a communist north and a nascent democratic south along an artificial boundary that bore no political, geographic, economic, or cultural logic.

Following the establishment of the Republic of Korea in the South, U.S. occupation troops were gradually withdrawn. The last U.S. combat troops departed on 30 June 1949.[6] Left behind were 500 members of the Korea Military Advisory Group whose mission was to assist in the development of ROK security forces. In June 1950, the ROK armed forces consisted of approximately 114,000 men who were largely outfitted with equipment left behind during the U.S. withdrawal. Organized into eight divisions, the ROK Army was without tanks, medium artillery, fighter aircraft and bombers.[7] The U.S. had deliberately withheld such equipment from the ROK Army to avoid provoking North Korea. General MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in the Pacific (SCAP) and Commander-in Chief, Far East Command (FECOM), was responsible for the occupation of Korea from 1945 through 1948.

> General MacArthur wanted the ROK Army to be strong enough to maintain internal security within the republic, but no stronger, and he saw no need for a ROK air force or navy which had no internal security role and which could not become strong enough to defeat North Korean air and naval forces.[8]

Thus, at the time of the U.S. withdrawal, South Korea was poorly equipped to defend itself against a full-scale invasion by the North Koreans. In the haste to withdraw forces from the peninsula, The U.S. had knowingly left its former ward unprepared for the challenges of June 1950.[9]

The Soviets also withdrew their forces from the Korean Peninsula in accordance with an agreement brokered by the United Nations. However, they were much more generous to the NKPA than the U.S. was to the ROK Army. Before departing, the Soviets trained, organized, and equipped an offensively capable military force; they also left behind a cadre of advisors who continued to assist in NKPA development. By June 1950, the NKPA consisted of 10 infantry divisions, one tank division, a significant number of light and heavy artillery pieces, as well as fighter, bomber, and reconnaissance planes.[10] Several thousand Korean Veterans who had fought with Chinese Communist Forces added seasoned leadership and combat experience to the NKPA.[11] In many important ways, the NKPA was more powerful than their counterparts to the south.

Events within the United States also contributed to South Korea's dire straits during the opening days of the Korean War. Several post-World War II decisions and policies implemented by the Truman Administration caused a "death spiral" in the readiness of the U.S. armed forces. In the words of historian Clay Blair, "by June 25, 1950, Harry Truman and Louis Johnson had all but wrecked the conventional military forces of the United States."[12] Among the factors influencing the Truman Administration's actions were the traditional American sentiment

against large standing armies and a desire to balance the federal budget and reduce the national debt.[13]

The resulting changes in the capabilities of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force were dramatic. At the end of World War II, there had been 12 million men and women in uniform; by 1948 that number had shrunk to 1.5 million. The Army went from 100 divisions to 10 that were undermanned and poorly trained.[14] The most potent Navy in the world had been savaged; in World War II it consisted of 3.3 million men, 40 aircraft carriers, and 24 battleships. By 1948 the Navy had an endstrength of 429,000 and 11 carriers.[15] The 480,000 man Marine Corps of 1945 stood at 74,279 men formed in two understaffed divisions.[16] The Air force had shriveled from 218 groups to less than 50.[17] Training, modernization, and morale were also adversely affected. The state of affairs General Omar Bradley found when he became the Army Chief of Staff in 1948 was an example of the general state of affairs in the armed forces. In his own words: "the Army of 1948 could not fight its way out of a paper bag."[18]

A complete lack of planning further limited the U.S. ability to respond to the Korean crisis of June 1950. In April 1948, President Truman approved a policy stating that the United States "should not be so irrevocably involved in any Korean situation that an action taken by any faction in Korea or by any other power in Korea could be considered a 'casus belli' for the

United States."[19] This policy was reflected in the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) strategy for global war. The war plan, known as Offtackle, assumed the foe would be the Soviet Union. In many ways, Offtackle was similar to the global strategy for World War II. It called for the U.S. to conduct a strategic offensive in Eurasia and a strategic defense in the Far East. The thrust of Far East defensive plans was to defend Japan and Okinawa for use as platforms for a strategic air offensive while defending the Philippines Islands for use by the Navy in controlling the seas.[20] Korea was relegated to secondary importance in U.S. war planning. The JCS assumed that if war came to Korea it would be part of a larger war with the Soviet Union; in such an event, the introduction of U.S. ground forces on the peninsula was considered unlikely.[21]

In 1949, General Bradley had second thoughts about the U.S. strategy in Korea. His concern prompted an Army study that examined possible options for a Korean contingency.[22] The study considered two potential courses of action that might be followed. First, it looked at the option of applying the Truman Doctrine to South Korea. In the event of conflict, the U.S. would supply sufficient aid to enable the ROK Army to defeat the NKPA. It also looked at the possibility of unilateral intervention by the United States. The staff rejected both of these options:

> on the grounds that the resulting commitment of US resources would be out of proportion to the low strategic value of Korea. Instead, it was recommended that the United States appeal to the UN Security Council. Depending on the decision taken by that body, the United States might subsequently participate in a "police action" under UN sanction, furnishing US units as part of an international force. Such military action should, however, be regarded as a last resort.[23]

Following the study, General Bradley remained concerned and he suggested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff request a National Security Council review of U.S. Korean policy. The Joint Chiefs, however, believed their position on Korea was already clear and the matter was dropped. In a memorandum back to General Bradley, the JCS said:

> From the strategic viewpoint the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding Korea, summarized briefly, is that Korea is of little strategic value to the United States and that any commitment to United States use of military force in Korea would be ill-advised and impracticable in view of the over-all world situation and of our heavy international obligations as compared with our current strength.[24]

In short, there seems to have been little expectation that U.S. forces would ever be called upon to fight a conventional war on Korean soil nor was a war plan developed for that eventuality.[25]

The U.S. Korea strategy, or perhaps more accurately the lack of a U.S. Korea strategy, was hardly a secret. Two public pronouncements in particular highlighted U.S. ambivalence toward Korea. In an on the record interview with a British journalist

in January 1949, General MacArthur omitted Korea from what he thought should be the American defensive line in the Pacific:

> Now the Pacific has become an Anglo-Saxon lake and our line of Defense runs through the chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia. It starts from the Philippines and continues through the Ryukyu archipelago which includes its broad main bastion, Okinawa. Then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian Island chain to Alaska.[26]

In January 1950, in a pronouncement to the National Press Club in Washington, Secretary of State Dean Acheson also omitted Korea from his description of the U.S. line of defense in the Far East.[27] Many have attributed Acheson's remarks as contributing to the outbreak of the Korean War. Whether or not that is true, neither Acheson's nor MacArthurs's remarks announced a new U.S. strategy for the Far East. By the time their remarks were made, the secondary importance of Korea in U.S. defense planning was well-established.

The lack of interest demonstrated by the U.S. toward the Korean Peninsula also contributed to the failure of the U.S. to forecast the North Korean attack in 1950. While adequate intelligence was at hand concerning North Korean capabilities, insufficient emphasis was placed on determining North Korean intentions.[28] "The United States had written Korea out of its national defense plans, and as a result indications from Korea received less attention than those from areas considered more vital to American interests."[29] When the attack came, U.S.

leaders were caught flatfooted. "The surprise in Washington on Sunday, 25 June 1950, according to some observers, resembled that of another, earlier Sunday-Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941."[30]

In summary, the South Koreans and the United States were grossly unprepared for the NKPA onslaught. Notwithstanding this lack of preparedness, and a record of what can generously be described as benign neglect of the Korean Peninsula, President Truman was almost unhesitating in his commitment to respond to the North Korean aggression. Truman was heavily influenced by what happened in Europe and Asia the last time the world failed to react to aggression. He and his advisors were also under the assumption that events in Korea were a test by the communist monolith controlled and directed by Stalin in Moscow; they were determined to make a stand.[31] So despite all of the policy papers, speeches, and war plans:

> On June 25, 1950, South Korea had suddenly become an area of vital importance, not strategically or militarily, but psychologically and symbolically. Stalin had chosen that place to escalate cold war to hot war. The line would be drawn. South Korea would be supported, not because its conquest would directly threaten America's vital interests but because a failure to meet Stalin's challenge there would be so morally derelict it might fatally damage America's prestige and lead to a collapse of the free world's will to resist Communist aggression in places that really counted.[32]

What took place on the battlefield is the rest of the story.

INTO THE BREACH

During the early hours of the crisis, it was far from clear what level of U.S. commitment would be necessary to repel the NKPA attack. The news from Korea was fragmentary and, at that point, U.S. leaders held an inflated opinion of the capabilities of the ROK Army vis-à-vis the NKPA.[33] Early discussions and decisions reflected that unfounded confidence in the ROK Army and the U.S. predilection to avoid being so deeply engaged in Korea that it might be vulnerable elsewhere. At the initial Blair House meeting, Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations, and General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, "thought a combination of naval forces and air cover would be sufficient to do the job."[34] Whether such views reflected wishful thinking or naiveté, they were short lived. The gravity of the situation was well known in Washington by the end of June, when President Truman authorized General MacArthur to meet the aggressor in ground combat, employ naval and air forces against military targets in North Korea, and establish a naval blockade.[35] This action followed a resolution in the United Nation's Security Council recommending that member nations provide South Korea with assistance in repelling the attack and restoring peace in the area.[36] At that time, the U.S. Department of State also advised General MacArthur to make it

clear that U.S. operations in Korea were being conducted to restore peace and the pre-invasion border at the 38th parallel.[37] The U.S. had crossed the Rubicon.

To accomplish his mission of restoring the status quo ante bellum, General MacArthur had four divisions of the Eighth Army. Additionally, he had the Far East Air and Naval Forces. The divisions of the Eighth Army had been left behind for occupation duty in Japan at the end of World War II. In the ensuing years, they had lost much of their combat effectiveness. In June 1950, they could deploy about two-thirds of wartime strength. One deficiency that would prove to be particularly costly was the lack of a third battalion in most infantry regiments. This lack of depth severely limited commanders' flexibility and made it impossible to execute doctrinal tactics. Additionally, some of the Eighth Army's combat essential equipment was outmoded or in disrepair and there were severe shortages of crew served weapons, artillery, armor, and other vehicles. Stocks of ammunition and other critical supplies were also insufficient. The level of training and combat readiness within the Army also suffered from the focus on occupation duty, a lack of training resources, personnel turbulence, and poor leadership.[38] Personnel shortages and other problems also weakened the air and naval forces. In general, FECOM was hardly ready for the task at hand.

Notwithstanding the issue of combat readiness, General MacArthur issued a directive to dispatch the 24th Infantry Division to assist the beleaguered ROK Army almost immediately after President Truman authorized the use of ground forces. With the NKPA south of Seoul and threatening Suwon, MacArthur began a piecemeal deployment of his forces to stem the tide. The first unit of the 24th Division to arrive on the peninsula was the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry, lead by Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith. This battalion and its reinforcements, designated as Task Force Smith, was composed of two understrength rifle companies, two 75mm recoilless rifles, two 4.2-inch mortars, six 2.36-inch rocket launchers, four 60mm mortars, and a battery of six light howitzers. The experience of Task Force Smith illustrates how unprepared U.S. forces were to confront the NKPA in the early days of the conflict and demonstrates that U.S. ground forces were committed to combat on the Korean Peninsula prior to the development of a capabilities based strategy.[39]

When Lieutenant Colonel Smith arrived at the Itazuke Air Base to link up with the aircraft that would take him and his soldiers to Pusan, his division commander, General William F. Dean, met him. Dean gave Smith his instructions:

> When you get to Pusan, head for Taejon. We want to stop the North Koreans as far from Pusan as we can. Block the main road as far north as possible. Contact

> General Church. If you can't locate him go to Taejon and beyond if you can. Sorry I can't give you more information. That's all I've got. Good luck to you, and God bless you and your men.[40]

When Smith arrived in Korea he was able to link up with Church, head of MacArthur's Advanced Command and Liaison Group in Korea, at Taejon. There, at his headquarters, Church pointed at a map and gave Smith further instructions: "We have a little action up here. All we need is some men up there who won't run when they see tanks. We're going to move you up to support the ROKs and give them moral support."[41] A few days later, Smith's men were awaiting the enemy in hastily established defensive positions along the main highway between Suwon and Osan. Smith had no specific information on the enemy and had not been able to secure the anti-tank mines he requested.[42]

> It was generally agreed that the North Koreans, when they found out who they were fighting, would turn around and go back. The young soldiers of Task Force Smith were quite confident; at this point none of them felt fear. At Pusan, when they boarded the train, the Koreans had unfurled gay banners and bands had played in the station yard. They had been told that this was a police action, and that they'd soon be home in Japan.[43]

Nothing could have been further from the truth.

The NKPA forces that approached Task Force Smith in the early hours of 5 July were led by over 30 T-34 Russian tanks; the 16th and 18th Regiments of the NKPA 4th Division followed the tanks. The tanks proved virtually impervious to Smith's

obsolete anti-tank weapons and quickly passed through his lines toward Osan. Behind the tanks, Smith's force faced a 4000 man torrent of NKPA infantry supported by artillery. When the enemy came within range, Smith ordered his force to engage and a fierce firefight ensued. While the NKPA forces suffered casualties, they were far too much for the relatively feeble task force to handle. The situation soon became desperate. Despite Smith's determination to hold his ground, he was forced to order a withdrawal. As the enemy pressed, the withdrawal fell apart and Smith's men fled to the rear in small groups.[44]

The first combat action of U.S. forces in the Korean War had delayed the enemy advance approximately 7 hours.[45] The price had been steep, Task Force Smith lost approximately 185 killed, wounded, and missing. In spite of many individual acts of bravery and the capable leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Smith, the U.S. soldiers were considerably outmatched. Any hope that the mere presence of U.S. forces in Korea would halt the NKPA advance was extinguished. Over the next several days, the pattern of Task Force Smith's experience was repeated when other elements of the 24th Infantry Division were hurled into the breach as MacArthur attempted to trade space for time.

While the 24th Infantry Division attempted to blunt the NKPA attack, General MacArthur and his staff in Tokyo were busy putting together a plan for a counteroffensive to regain the

initiative. MacArthur's broad plan had been articulated in earlier message traffic to Washington when he requested approval to commit ground forces:

> If authorized, it is my intention to immediately move a United States Regimental Combat Team to the reinforcement of the vital area discussed and to provide for a possible build-up to a two-division strength from the troops in Japan for an early counter-offensive.[46]

From the beginning, MacArthur recognized the importance of Pusan as a decisive point. It was the only port capable of accommodating the buildup he required to execute his concept of operations. MacArthur hoped that his initial piecemeal deployment of the 24th Infantry Division would provide him with the requisite time to establish sufficient combat power on the peninsula for a strong defense above Pusan. Once this was accomplished, he planned a dual counteroffensive with an amphibious landing far behind enemy lines and a surface assault up the peninsula from the south.[47] MacArthur's General Headquarters Staff later developed this broad concept into a proposal for Operation Bluehearts. Bluehearts called for the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions along with ROK forces to block the NKPA drive south while the 1st Cavalry Division and a Marine Regimental Combat Team conducted an amphibious assault at the port of Inchon. The 24th and 25th Divisions along with the ROK forces would then attack north. The plan called for the landing

to take place on 22 July.[48] However, any hope that Bluehearts could be executed on schedule evaporated within days of the 24th Infantry Division's arrival in Korea. As U.S. and ROK forces continued to be driven toward Pusan, it was clear that the 1st Cavalry Division and the requested Marine RCT would be needed just to keep MacArthur's forces from being driven into the sea. By 9 July, MacArthur had revised his estimate of forces required to accomplish his mission to eight divisions including a division of Marines.[49] The situation was anything but well in hand.

General MacArthur directed Lieutenant General Walton Walker to assume command of ground operations in Korea effective 13 July 1950.[50] Prior to that time MacArthur had personally directed ground operations through Major General Edward M. Almond, his chief of staff. When he arrived in Korea, Walker's command extended over United States Army forces in Korea. Within days, his authority also extended over all ROK ground forces and the ground forces provided by other members of the United Nations. His force initially consisted of approximately 18,000 U.S. soldiers and 58,000 ROK soldiers.[51] The bulk of the U.S. forces were in the 24th Infantry Division. The 25th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division were en route as he took the helm. His plan of action was straight forward: he intended to delay the NKPA drive south, secure a stable defensive line,

and build up his forces for future offensive operations.[52] In his initial letter of instruction to what was designated the Eighth United States Army in Korea (EUSAK), he stated that the Army was temporarily in a strategic defense pending an opportunity to commence an offensive. In the meantime, he wanted his soldiers to counterattack at all levels to keep the enemy off balance, aggressively patrol in order to maintain contact with the enemy, and utilize combat engineer assets to disrupt the enemy advance.[53]

When Walker assumed command, the 24th Division had just been driven across the Kum River after a week of bitter fighting and was preparing to occupy a subsequent defensive position in the vicinity of Taejon. Taejon was an important communications center in South Korea; it was a hub of militarily significant rail and highway lines. Major General Dean had intended to briefly delay at Taejon and continue to fall back; he changed his plan after General Walker told him that the division needed to hold this key terrain for two days to allow the 1st Cavalry Division to complete debarkation and get into the fight. The battle at Taejon did last for two days; but the division was outflanked and fled further south in disarray just as it had at the Kum River line. At the Kum River and Taejon, the NKPA had executed two highly successful attacks by fixing elements of the 24th Division to the front while assaulting them on the flanks;

these envelopments were supported by units that infiltrated to establish roadblocks and cut off American avenues of egress. Suffering from poor communications, a lack of reconnaissance, unprotected flanks, as well as the fundamental weaknesses cited earlier, the results for the 24th Division were disastrous. In a little over two weeks, the division had been driven back 100 miles by elements of two NKPA divisions. It had suffered over 30 percent casualties; more than 2,400 men were missing in action. One of the missing was the division commander. The NKPA had also suffered significant casualties but they continued their relentless drive south.[54]

While the 24th Division fought at Taejon, the 25th Infantry Division and 1st Cavalry Division arrived in Korea. They immediately went into action. Walker dispatched the 25th to support ROK units engaged to the east of the 24th Division. They were quickly bloodied in the vicinity of Sanju and Yechon. The 1st Cavalry Division conducted an unopposed landing at P'ohang-dong and quickly moved to relieve the 24th Division of responsibility for the Taejon-Taegu corridor. They established initial positions near Yongdong on 22 July. For the next several days, both divisions steadily withdrew in the face of NKPA attacks. For the most part, their performance was on par with that of the 24th Division.[55]

As the NKPA continued to press down the east coast and along the Taejon-Taegu-Pusan corridor, a far more serious threat was beginning to emerge in the south. The NKPA had moved its 6th Division down the west of the peninsula around U.S. and ROK forces and threatened to envelop Walker's left flank at Masan; the NKPA 4th Division had also moved south and was in a position to support. "A breakthrough at this point could have meant complete disaster, abandonment of the peninsula, and a bloody slaughter of our piecedout forces as they tried to fight their way to safety."[56] As soon as Walker identified the threat, he dispatched the exhausted 24th Division to counter it; the division had been out of action for just two days after the battle at Taejon. Two battalions of the 29th Infantry, which had recently arrived from Okinawa, reinforced two regiments of the 24th Division. Subsequently, Walker moved the 27th Infantry to reinforce the endangered area. Despite the heavy U.S. casualties, particularly in the 29th Infantry, the NKPA threat to Pusan from the south was temporarily halted. The situation, however, remained tenuous.[57]

FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT

General Walker was gravely concerned about the events that took place in the closing days of July and very dissatisfied with the recent performance of the 25th and 1st Cavalry Divisions.[58] He was a fighter, however, and he was absolutely determined to stop the NKPA. At this point, he made two key decisions: he ordered a withdrawal of his forces to a final defensive line dubbed the Pusan Perimeter; and, he shifted the 25th Division to the Masan area. His intent at that time can be gleaned from his description of the situation to reporters following a meeting with his division commanders. His remarks have been described as his "Stand or Die" speech:

> We will hold the positions we have and fight it out here. We have been trying our best to shore up the holes in our lines. As has been forecast this is a fight against time. We will not give up an inch of ground that's not already lost ... There's no thought in the mind of anyone in this Army-even though we might be so disposed-that there can possibly be a Dunkirk. It would be impossible for us to get out. The thought in the minds of everyone is to hold the lines we now have-to keep fighting-and that no individual, squad, company or higher unit under any conditions will surrender.[59]

In today's lexicon, Walker had established a no penetration line; the delaying phase of his plan was over.

By 4 August, Walker for the first time had established what could be described as a defensive line with the ability to secure his flanks. The Pusan Perimeter was approximately 100

miles south to north and 50 miles east to west. The Naktong River, the last natural barrier before Pusan, formed much of the western front of the perimeter; the southern end was anchored on the Korea Strait and the northern end-ran east from the Naktong through rugged mountains to the Sea of Japan. There were generally four main avenues of approach into the perimeter and in the event, the NKPA utilized all of them.[60] The enemy lines of operation from north to south were generally: Pohang to Kyongju to Pusan, Taejon to Taegu to Pusan, Taejon to Yongson to Miryang to Pusan, and Chinju to Masan to Pusan. In studying the situation, Walker recognized that his forces were insufficient to continuously occupy such an extended front. He needed to develop a concept of operations that overcame his chronic shortage of manpower and capitalized on the factors that were in his favor. His ability to do just that rescued the U.S. and ROK forces from the jaws of defeat.

Walker's defensive scheme employed both of the primary types of defensive operations used by the U.S. Armed Forces today. In the northern sector, from the Naktong River east to the Sea of Japan, Walker established what Field Manual 100-5 defines as an area defense.

> In an area defense, the bulk of defending forces deploys to retain ground, using a combination of defensive positions and small, mobile reserves. Commanders organize the defense around a static

framework provided by defensive positions, seeking to destroy the enemy with interlocking fires.[61]

An area defense in the north made sense for several reasons: the terrain in the north was mountainous which naturally canalized the enemy into a limited number of avenues of approach; in the restrictive terrain along the coast, U.S air power could be used to effectively disrupt NKPA efforts to resupply or reinforce; Walker had sufficient forces in the north to physically occupy the key terrain dominating the main avenues of approach; and the ROK Army, which defended in this sector, had limited mobility.[62]

The situation along the Naktong to the Korean Strait was much different. Walker clearly didn't have sufficient forces to conduct an area defense. The U.S. 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions along with the 1st Cavalry Division were the primary units assigned defensive responsibilities along the Naktong River; each was assigned a frontage from 20 to 40 miles long-3 to 5 times the doctrinal frontage for a division at that time.[63] Defending such a large frontage would have been difficult for full strength divisions; for the ravaged divisions of EUSAK, to do so would be impossible. The Pusan Perimeter, however, did offer General Walker at least one very significant advantage. The good rail and road network surrounding Pusan provided him with interior lines which allowed forces to be quickly

transferred within the perimeter to counter NKPA attacks. Carefully estimating the situation and perhaps influenced by his Word War II experience as XX Corps commander in Patton's Third Army, Walker conducted what Field Manual 100-5 defines as a mobile defense.[64]

> Mobile defense orients on the destruction of the enemy force by employing a combination of fire and maneuver, offense, defense, and delay to defeat his attack. The minimum force possible is committed to pure defense; maximum combat power is placed in a striking force that catches the enemy as it is attempting to overcome that part of the defense dedicated to the defense. … A mobile defense requires a mobility greater than that of the attacker.[65]

Thus, General Walker's forces defended certain key terrain along the perimeter such as key river crossings and road junctions while relying on counterattacks by his reserves to destroy the enemy and blunt his penetrations.[66]

As always, it is not the plan that wins the battle but rather the execution of the plan. In conducting the defense of the Pusan Perimeter, General Walker's solid assessment of enemy intentions and his decisiveness allowed him to wrest the initiative from the NKPA and generate the operational speed and tempo necessary to accomplish the mission. His initial movement of the 25th Division from 2 to 3 August to reinforce the south of his perimeter provided an early demonstration of how interior lines contributed to his defensive efforts. When the scope of the threat posed by the NKPA 6th Division became clear, Walker

ordered the 25th Division to the vicinity of Masan. While he accepted some risk in pulling the 25th Division from the central front, Walker believed the situation in the southwest had become more critical. He also realized that he could quickly move the 25th Division back if that became necessary. The rail and road network within the perimeter allowed the 25th Division to complete the 150-mile movement from Sangju to Masan within 36 hours.[67] "In recognizing the critical nature of the situation in the southwest and in acting with great energy and decisiveness to meet it, General Walker and his staff conceived and executed one of the most important command decisions of the Korean War."[68]

While the battle in the southwest raged, the 2d Infantry Division began to arrive in Korea along with the 5th Regimental Combat Team (RCT), the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, and armor units. "With his perimeter around Taegu and Pusan, General Walker now directed an army composed of four U.S. divisions, a Marine brigade, and five ROK divisions."[69] Walker quickly integrated the new arrivals using the 5th RCT and the Marines to support the 25th Division when they conducted the first major counterattack of the war on 7 August.[70] Throughout the remainder of August, the NKPA continued its attempts to drive on to Pusan. It was successful in breaking through Walker's lines in several locations. Particularly menacing penetrations took place at the Naktong Bulge, near Taegu, and in the Kyongju corridor. Walker

met each challenge by shuttling his meager reserves from one critical area to another and counterattacking to force the enemy back.[71]

> There was from the second week of August, combat everywhere, and Walton Walker lived in crisis. His command decisions had to be never-ending series of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Faced with danger everywhere along his line, he had to guess where the greatest peril lay, and guess correctly, for in war there is no prize for being almost right.[72]

The final NKPA push began on 31 August when the NKPA began an offensive against virtually the entire perimeter. The NKPA amassed 98,000 men formed in 13 infantry divisions reinforced with armor for this attack.[73] The NKPA plan was to put pressure all along the line and hope that somewhere they would achieve a breakthrough.[74] The NKPA nearly succeeded on several occasions. The attacks in September were better coordinated than those in August.[75] For example, in early September, Walker faced at least five distinct and dangerous situations on the Perimeter simultaneously.[76]

While the entire defensive line was engulfed in prolonged and bitter combat, a particularly critical battle raged in the 2nd Infantry Division sector at the Naktong Bulge. Walker had not expected the NKPA to attack this point in strength; thus, it was the weakest sector.[77] Yet, as reports of attacks along the perimeter poured into his headquarters on 1 and 2 September, Walker was notified that the 2nd Division had been split in two.

After conducting a personal reconnaissance, Walker realized the impact of the attack at the Naktong Bulge. The hole cut by the NKPA into the 2nd Division's line was eight miles deep and six miles across; this NKPA salient threatened Miryang and the main road and rail links connecting the Perimeter.[78] Once again, Walker acted with speed and decisiveness. Although the Marine Brigade had already begun to move equipment to Pusan in preparation for their participation in the landing at Inchon on 15 September, Walker moved his "Fire Brigade" back to the Bulge.[79] In a series of coordinated counterattacks by the 2nd Infantry Division and the Marines, the penetration was blunted. "By 12 September the NKPA September offensive was spent."[80] Many factors contributed to the NKPA reaching culmination at this point. The months of fighting had taken their toll on the NKPA; by September, many units were below strength and filled with raw recruits. The NKPA lines of communication had become over extended and subject to interdiction. The NKPA decision to attack along multiple axes rather than massing their forces at a decisive point must be considered. Additionally, U.S. air and naval power made a significant contribution to the ability of the U.N. forces to thwart the NKPA drive to Pusan. Walker himself said that: "I will gladly lay my cards on the table and state that if it had not been for the air support that we received from the Fifth Air Force, we would not have been able

to stay in Korea."[81] And, "while the United States Navy never engaged in heavy combat during the Korean conflict, it was as essential as the Air Force to the American continuance on the peninsula."[82] Sea control contained the crisis and allowed the buildup and resupply of Walker's forces to take place; Naval air, to include Marine air, played a key role in the Navy's efforts. Notwithstanding all of the above, the most significant factor leading to the exhaustion of the NKPA and the ability of the U.N. forces to hold the Pusan Perimeter were the actions taken by forces on the ground. At the operational level, it was the decisive and determined leadership of Walton Walker that had the greatest impact. "He skillfully utilized his meager reserves and employed threats, coercion, and exhortation to stiffen American and ROK leadership. He absolutely refused to give up one inch of the perimeter without a desperate struggle."[83]

> The man who saved Korea was "The Little Bulldog." He was Lieut. Gen. Walton H. Walker, first of the Eighth Army's four commanders in the 37-month campaign. And when the military history of that frustrating operation is written it must show "Johnny" Walker as a crucial figure. One wrong guess by him and the war would have been over within the first two months. We would have been shoved off the peninsula. … He was short of everything - men, tanks, anti-tank weapons, artillery. Walker saved the day by a defensive that amounted to an offensive. He shuttled regiments and battalions and companies around the front in a continuous razzle-dazzle, throwing the enemy off balance by magically showing strength where they least expected it. … The line bent, but never broke.[84]

CONCLUSION

Despite its legacy as a forgotten war, the Korean conflict offers a great deal of food for thought that is strikingly relevant today. It provides strategic planners an example of the price of "getting it wrong." Where will we fight tomorrow that we aren't planning for today? Korea also stands as a classic study in unpreparedess-"no more Task Force Smith's" was the clarion call of a former Army Chief of Staff. Is there a parallel between the peacekeeping duties and high operational tempo that consume us today and the Army's occupation duties in the 1940s? Will the post-Cold War cutbacks exact a price similar to that paid as a result of the post-World War II drawdown?

Today we spend a great deal of time discussing asymmetric threats. Some talk about the concept as though it were new. In June 1950, "the world's greatest air-nuclear power was about to engage in a conventional land war against the soldiery of Asia. It is hard to imagine a more asymmetrical situation."[85] Is there a correlation between the reliance on airpower and nuclear weapons in our strategy after World War II and the increased reliance on high technology weapons and information systems today? How will we fight a low-tech infantry force in close terrain with a force designed for the 21st Century? Will that be necessary?

The Korean War also serves as a primer for understanding the elements of strategy-ends, ways, and means. The first few months of the Korean War clearly illustrate the relationship among the three factors of the strategic equation and the link between the strategic and operational levels of war. In the opening days one can see the dangers inherent in attempting to execute a strategy that lacks balance among the ends, ways, and means. President Truman's strategic objective was to restore the status quo ante bellum; the way chosen to accomplish this objective was the commitment of ground forces; the forces of the Eighth U.S. Army were the specific means initially available. The initial experiences of the 24th Infantry Division indicate that when the decision was made to put "boots on the ground," the strategic equation was out of balance. This imbalance cost the lives of many soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen-and nearly resulted in an ignominious defeat.

On the other hand, the early days of Korea provide a very positive example of the operational art. It is clear that Lieutenant General Walton Walker knew exactly what he needed to accomplish and developed a plan that took into full consideration the limited resources he had available. It was his leadership and competence at the operational level that allowed the U.S. to finally halt the NKPA drive and accomplish the strategic objective established by the President.

In short, a review of the early days of the Korean War highlights many issues worthy of consideration and suggests many questions for which there are no easy answers. However, the complexity of the issues and the ambiguity of the lessons learned must not deter us from studying this experience in an effort to get it right the next time.

WORD COUNT = 7,192

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[2] Edgar O'Ballance, Korea 1950-1953 (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1969), 30.

[3] David McCullough, Truman (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster:1992), 777.

[4] Clay Blair, The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950-1953 (New York: Random House, Inc., 1987), ix.

[5] D. Clayton James, Refighting the Last War: Command and Crisis in Korea 1950-1953 (New York, New York: The Free Press, 1993), 16.

[6] James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, The History of The Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: Volume III The Korean War (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), 27.

[7] Appleman, 16.

[8] James F. Schnabel, Policy and Direction: The First Year (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1992), 34-35.

[9] Schnabel and Watson, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 25.

[10] Schnabel, Policy and Direction, 39.

[11] Ibid., 37.

[12] Blair, The Forgotten War, 29.

[13] United States Army Center of Military History, Korea 1950 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, Department of The Army, 1997), 14.

[14] Blair, The Forgotten War, 7-8.

[15] Ibid., 8.

[16] Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A. Canzona, U.S. Marine Operations in Korea 1950-1953, Volume I (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1954), 48.

[17] Blair, The Forgotten War, 9.

[18] Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, A General's Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 474.

[19] Schnabel, Policy and Direction, 50.

[20] Bradley and Blair, 524.

[21] Matthew B. Ridgway, The Korean War (New York, New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1967), 11.

[22] Schnabel, Policy and Direction, 50.

[23] Schnabel and Watson, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 26.

[24] Joint Chiefs of Staff 1776/4, dated June 1949; quoted in Schnabel, Policy and Direction, 50.

[25] McCullough, 780.

[26] D. Clayton James, The Years of MacArthur: Triumph and Disaster 1945-1964 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 401.

[27] Bradley and Blair, A General's Life, 528.

[28] Ridgway, 11-13.

[29] Schnabel, Policy and Direction, 62.

[30] Appleman, 37.

[31] McCullough, 778-779.

[32] Blair, The Forgotten War, 72.

[33] Schnabel and Watson, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 71. Blair, The Forgotten War, 55-56,70.

[34] McCullough, 778.

[35] United States Army Center for Military History, Korea 1950, 13.

[36] Ibid., 13.

[37] Robert F. Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 41.

[38] Brigadier General Uzal W. Ent, "With Their Backs to the Wall: Defending the Pusan Perimeter," Command 38 (July 1996): 50-51.

[39] United States Army Center for Military History, Korea 1950, 16.

[40] Appleman, 60.

[41] Ibid., 61.

[42] Brigadier General Uzal W. Ent, Fighting on the Brink: Defense of the Pusan Perimeter (Paducah, Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 1996), 32.

[43] T.R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War (Dulles, Virginia: Brassey's, 1998), 66.

[44] Ent, Fighting on the Brink, 34-40.

[45] United States Army Center for Military History, Korea 1950, 14.

[46] Radio File, C 56942, CINCFE to JCS, 30 June 1950; quoted in Schnabel, Policy and Direction, 78.

[47] James, Years of MacArthur, 434.

[48] Schnabel, Policy and Direction, 149-150.

[49] Schnabel and Watson, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 185.

[50] Futrell, 103.

[51] Ent, "With their Backs to the Wall," 44.

[52] Appleman, 110-111.

[53] Ent, Fighting on the Brink, 57.
[54] Ibid., 62-86.
[55] Appleman, 190-205.
[56] Ridgway, 28-29.
[57] United States Army Center for Military History, Korea 1950, 22.
[58] Edwin P. Hoyt, The Pusan Perimeter (New York: Stein and Day, 1985) 152.
[59] Washington D.C. Evening Star, 29 July 1950.
[60] Ent, "With Their Backs to the Wall," 46.
[61] Department of the Army, FM 100-5 (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 14 June1993), 9-3.
[62] Ent, "With Their Backs to the Wall," 47.
[63] Appleman, 254.
[64] The actions at the Pusan Perimeter are in many ways similar to those conducted by Walker's XX Corps from December 1944-January 1945. As Patton's Army raced north to the Ardennes, Walker's Corps was left to protect the Army's south in the Saar-Moselle Triangle. After conducting a series of limited objective attacks in this area, Walker's forces were able to penetrate the Siegfried line anchored on the Moselle at Thorn.
[65] FM 100-5, 9-2.
[66] Ent, "With Their Backs to the Wall," 45.
[67] Appleman, 249.
[68] Ibid., 249.
[69] United States Army Center for Military History, Korea 1950, 24.
[70] Blair, The Forgotten War, 190-196.
[71] United States Army Center for Military History, Korea 1950, 26-29.
[72] Fehrenbach p. 127
[73] John Toland, In Mortal Combat: Korea 1950-1953 (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 161.
[74] Fehrenbach, 139.
[75] J. Lawton Collins, War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 110.
[76] Appleman, 397.
[77] Blair, The Forgotten War, 240.
[78] Fehrenbach, 146.
[79] Montross and Canzona, 209-213.
[80] Collins, 112.
[81] Futrell, 146.
[82] Fehrenbach, 115.

[83] Ent, "With their Backs to the Wall," 60.

[84] Hal Boyle, "Little Bulldog Saved Korea," New York American Journal, 3 August 1953.

[85] Roy K. Flint, Confrontation in Asia: The Korean War (Wayne, NJ: Avery, 1987), 10.

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