

Naval War College  
Newport, R.I.

**THE UNITED NATIONS LANDING AT INCHON: OPERATION CHROMITE**

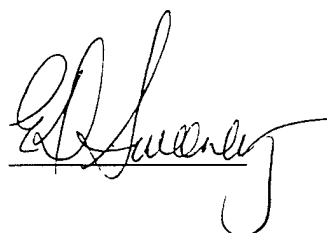
By

Eric D. Sweeney

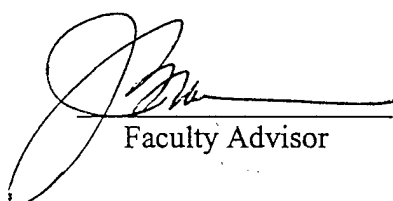
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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Thesis.....	2
The Strategic Situation In Korea .....	3
Task Force Smith.....	7
The Pusan Perimeter.....	8
The Planning for Operation CHORMITE.....	9
The Preparation for Operation CHORMITE.....	11
The Execution of Operation CHORMITE .....	13
Conclusion and Operational Lessons Learned.....	16
End Notes.....	19
Bibliography.....	21

## **ABSTRACT OF**

### **THE UNITED NATIONS LANDING AT INCHON: OPERATION CHROMITE**

On 25 June 1950 the North Korean Peoples Army (NKPA) attacked South Korea by crossing the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel to obtain their national strategic objective with overwhelming force and extreme violence. During this time period, the United States had problems with its force structure and combat readiness. In response to the North Korean invasion, the United States acted as an agent of the United Nations. The United States political and military leaders were confident that American forces on occupational duty in Japan could delay or repel the advancing NKPA. Initially, United States troops were defeated, therefore the Commander In Chief Far East (CINCFE) had to restructure his forces to conduct a joint amphibious operation to gain the offensive initiative from the North Koreans. Analyzing problems with the United States forces before it conducted the Inchon landing is valuable for discussion and military lessons learned.

Operation CHROMITE was a brilliant combined joint military operation which allowed the CINCFE forces to defeat the NKPA center of gravity. This operation surprised the North Korean forces allowing General MacArthur's forces to go on the offensive and cut the enemy's lines of operations and lines of communications. Operation CHROMITE saved thousands of lives, demoralized the NKPA, led to the liberation of Seoul, enabled the Far East forces to break out of the Pusan perimeter, and eventually led to the recovery of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Analyzing the planning, preparation, execution, and reviewing the lessons learned of this joint amphibious operation are invaluable to planners of future joint military operations.

## INTRODUCTION

The United States drastically downsized its military from 1945-1950 after the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan during WWII. The United States strategic leaders were comfortable downsizing their forces because America had demonstrated its technological superiority over its enemies by the use of the atomic bomb against Japan in 1945. In 1945 America had 12 million personnel serving in its military and was capable of meeting any challenge in the world; by December 1948 its military had shrunk to less than 1.5 million personnel and its combat readiness had severely declined since WWII. In 1945 it is estimated that the United States had an Army that numbered six million soldiers and nearly 100 battle hardened and well equipped divisions; yet, by 1950, the Army's number of personnel was less than 600,000 soldiers that were organized to make up ten poorly trained and inadequately equipped divisions. <sup>1</sup>

In 1949, despite knowledge of a North Korean military build up, the United States withdrew its two Army divisions stationed in South Korea because the Korean peninsula was outside of the United States strategic interest in the Far East. After WWII, the United States forces were in poor condition to fight a limited conventional war against a well trained, organized, and equipped North Korean Peoples Army (NKPA). The United States had ten divisions and eleven separate regiments on active duty at the start of the Korean War. General MacArthur, the Commander In Chief Far East (CINCFE), had only four divisions from the Eighth United States Army (of which three were understrength) on occupational duty in Japan readily available in response to the North Korean invasion. Initially, General MacArthur's forces were inadequately structured, equipped, and prepared to fight a limited conventional war in Korea. Many senior military leaders believed that the WWII force

reduction had left the United States military a hollow shell which lacked depth.

The North Koreans structured their forces to achieve an overwhelming offensive capability prior to their 25 June 1950 invasion of South Korea. Before attacking across the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, intelligence confirmed (through North Korean enemy prisoners of war [EPW] reports) that the NKPA could field an Army of eight divisions (11,000 personnel each at full strength), two divisions at half strength, a separate infantry regiment, a motorcycle reconnaissance regiment, an armored brigade with 100 to 150 (Soviet) T-34 Tanks, and five brigades of border constabulary forces to make a combined force of 135,000.<sup>2</sup> One third of the NKPA were battle hardened veterans from WWII or the Chinese Civil War (CCW). The North Korean forces had a remarkable force structure that resembled the Russian divisions of WWII. Its combat divisions had adequate combined arms teams, numerous soldiers supported by 122-mm howitzers, 76-mm howitzers, 45-mm antitank guns, and large amounts of supporting weapons and mortars.<sup>3</sup> The North Koreans ensured that their planning, preparation, and force structure was superior to that of the Republic of Korea and United States before they attacked across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Once the NKPA invaded South Korea, the United States, acting as an agent for the United Nations, overestimated its forces capability to repel the NKPA from South Korea. After the United States failed during its initial attempt to repel the North Koreans from South Korea, it restructured its forces to conduct a surprise joint military operation at Inchon that would lead to the defeat of the NKPA.

## THESIS

During the initial phase of the Korean War, the United States had problems with its force structure. This caused the United States forces to fail as they tried to repel the NKPA from

South Korea. General MacArthur tailored his forces to conduct a surprise joint amphibious operation that was designed to take the offensive initiative from the NKPA. Operation CHROMITE (Operation Plan 100-B) was a brilliant joint military operation which allowed the United States to defeat the North Korean center of gravity (NKPA). This joint military operation divided the North Korean ground forces, it cut their main supply routes, and disrupted their command, control, and communications. Operation CHROMITE demoralized the NKPA and allowed General MacArthur's forces to go on the offensive. This paper will analyze specific problems with the United States force structure before it conducted Operation CHROMITE. It will analyze Operation CHROMITE'S planning, preparation, and execution, and will review lessons learned that are invaluable to planners of future joint military operations.

### **THE STRATEGIC SITUATION IN KOREA**

*"War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied."*<sup>4</sup> (SUN TZU)

After Japan's defeat in 1945, the United States and Soviet Union agreed to occupy the Korean peninsula on opposing sides of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Once the post WWII occupation forces withdrew from the Korean peninsula, the North Koreans had hopes of obtaining their national strategic objective of unifying the Korean peninsula under its Communist government. To achieve the North Korean national strategic objective, the NKPA would have to obtain their major operational objectives of seizing Seoul, Kimpo Airfield, and defeat of the Republic of Korea's (ROK) Army. The NKPA also would have to resist any external attempt to reestablish the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel.

During the post WWII years, the United States focused on the Cold War threat that remained in Europe. Although it had one combat division, two infantry regiments, and a

constabulary force in Europe, the majority of Americans forward-deployed troops, resources, and equipment were on station in Japan. By June of 1950, the United States had serious problems with its force structure that came as a result of post -WWII force reductions and budget cuts. In June of 1950, the Eighth United States Army, on occupational duty in Japan, was the United States major combat force in the Far East. Three of the Eighth United States Army's four divisions were severely below their authorized peacetime strength of 12,500; which, in itself, was 66 percent of their authorized war time strength of 18,900.<sup>5</sup> The Eighth United States Army combat forces did not have adequate combined arms teams consisting of infantry, combat engineers, artillery, armor, and close air support. Although before the Korean War the Eighth United States Army was severely understrength, inadequately trained, and poorly equipped, it would soon face the battle hardened NKPA.

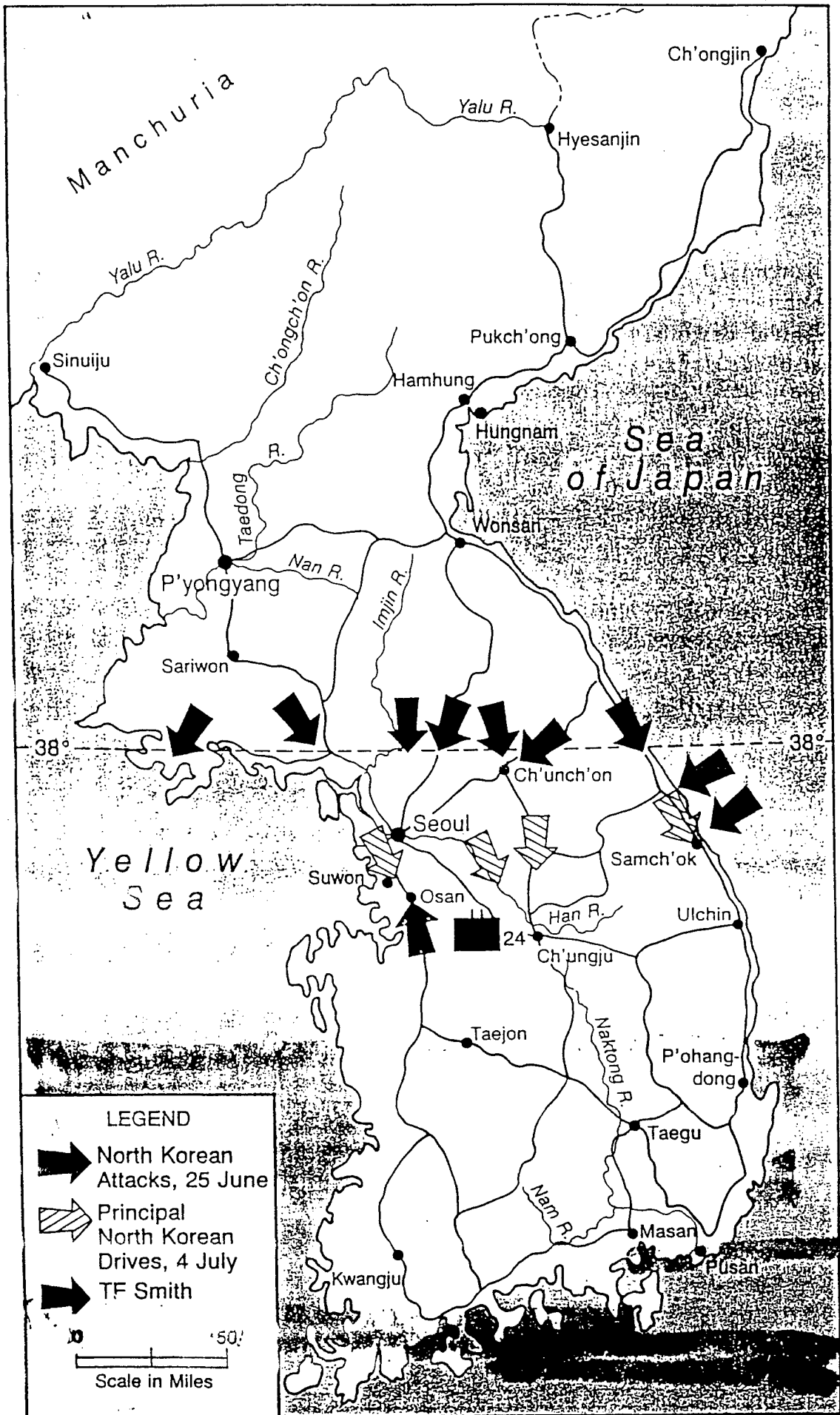
By June 1947, the United States Air Force was reduced from 218 groups to 38 groups, and of these, only 11 were combat ready. The Air Force had 48 wings instead of its authorized 55 wings and only nine wings were in the Far East. The Air Force was severely short on attack and close air support planes that supported ground units.<sup>6</sup> In 1950, the Far East Air Force was structured primarily in the defense of Japan. LTG Stratemyer, the commander of the Far East Air Force had a total of 1,172 aircraft under his control; and only 553 of these aircraft were in combat units. The Air Force had insufficient air component commands in support of ground combat units, and its training bases, support facilities, and communications were inadequate for combat operations.<sup>7</sup> There was very little coordination and training between air and ground units.

After WWII, the United States Navy was reduced from 3.3 million to 429,000 sailors, and its Marine Corps was reduced from 480,000 to 86,000 Marines.<sup>8</sup> Although the United States



Navy suffered from force reductions and had budget problems, the North Koreans did not have naval forces capable of challenging the Far East Navy. The Far East Navy was structured and positioned around Japan. Although it was never seriously challenged by the North Koreans, it had adequate cruisers, destroyer divisions, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet had the aircraft carrier Valley Forge. Its units eventually formed a combined task force which operated in Korean waters providing coastal gunfire support, carrier air strike capability, logistics, and a transportation group to project the invasion force for Operation CHROMITE. The Navy would eventually prove its versatility, flexibility, and power projection capability during the execution stage of the Inchon landing.

Before attacking across the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, the factors of space, time, and force were major considerations for the North Korean strategic planners. On 25 June 1950, the North Koreans invaded South Korea in numerous areas with speed, extreme violence, and overwhelming force (See map one). The North Korean attack achieved surprise on its operational objectives of seizing Seoul, Kimpo Airfield, Inchon, Ch'unch'on, Samch'ok, Suwon, and the Suwon Airfield because it was extremely well planned and executed. The NKPA structured their forces to concentrate on the South Korean COG (the ROK Army), mass fires, secure its flanks, conduct an amphibious landing, mingle with civilian refugees as they infiltrated, disrupt its enemy's command, control & communications, and neutralize enemy defensive positions. Their movement and maneuver supported by T-34 (Soviet) Tanks from Kaesong to Chorwon was well timed, phased, and synchronized. The North Korean strategic leaders maintained the offensive initiative by exploiting the success of its initial assault force. The NKPA took advantage of the geography of the Korean peninsula by launching their main



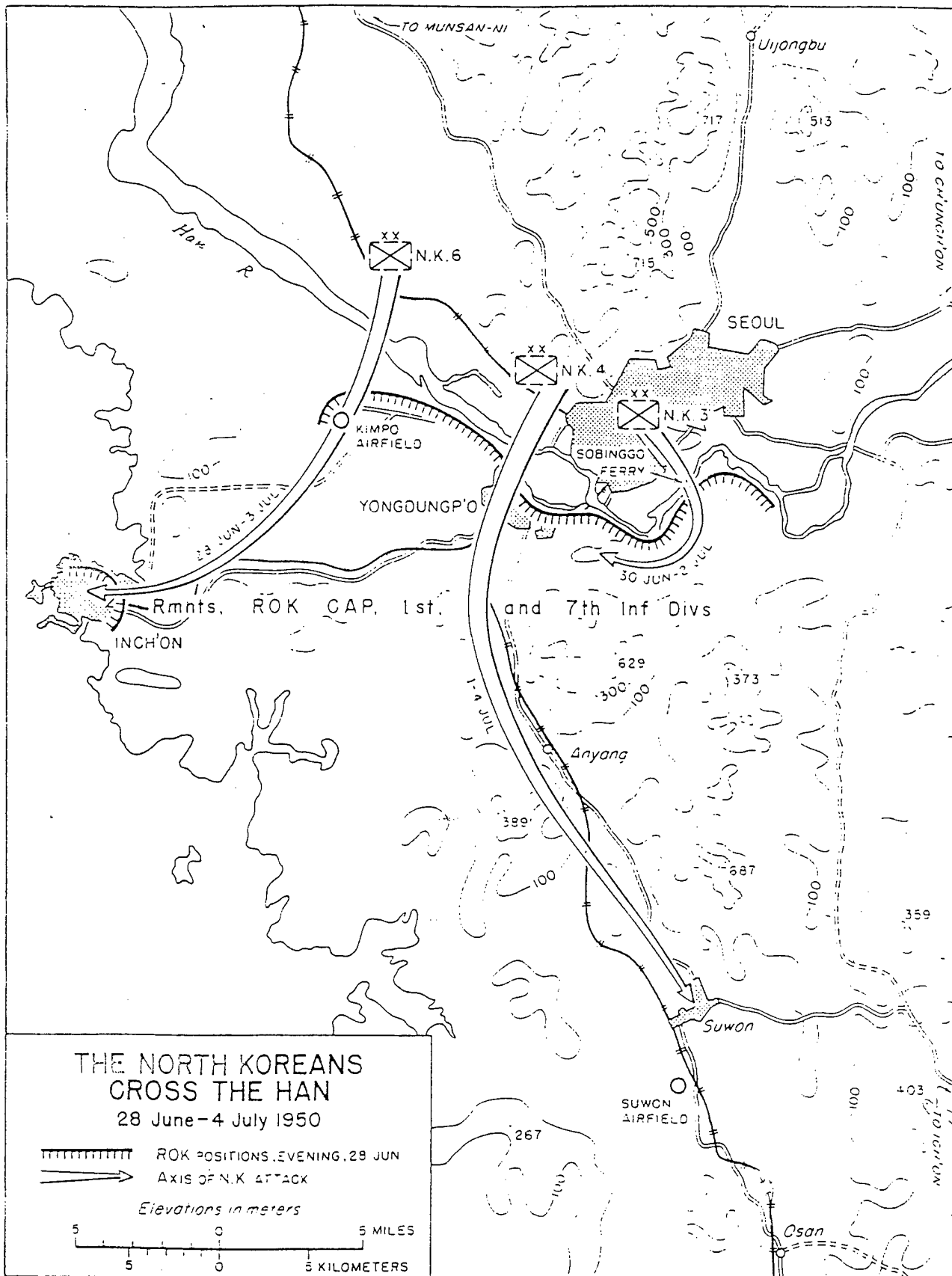
MAP 1 The North Korean Invasion

assault force down an axis of advance that led them down the Chorwon Valley and through the Uijonbu Corridor which led them toward Seoul.

The South Korean Army was no match for the superior NKPA. The North Korean attack is a good example of the principles of surprise, security, maneuver, mass, offensive, objective, and an economy of force. This attack was a brilliant use of the principle of surprise because the NKPA struck its enemy at a time and in places that they were unprepared to defend. The eight division (95,000) ROK Army advised by the United States Korean military Advisory Group ( 500 American officer and soldier advisors [KMAG] under the command of Brigadier General William L. Roberts) was inadequately trained, equipped, and structured. The ROK Army had no tanks, very few antitank weapons, and no heavy artillery.<sup>9</sup> The NKPA quickly defeated the ROK Army and concentrated its forces on Seoul. The North Korean planners did a good job developing a centralized direction of attack with a decentralized level of execution. The NKPA attacked across the Han River then advanced southeast toward Taejon, Taegu, and Pusan (See map two).

The United Nations (UN) Security Council convened the same day and requested that the NKPA cease fire and withdraw their forces back North across the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Once the North Koreans refused the demands of the United Nations Security Council, its members were called on to render support to the Republic of Korea. President Truman committed United States Army (communication and service support), Air, and Naval forces hoping that it would help the South Koreans delay the rapid advance of the North Koreans. After General MacArthur conducted a personal reconnaissance of Korea, he sent the following message to Washington:

“The only assurance for holding of the present line, and the ability to regain later the lost ground, is through the introduction of U.S. ground combat forces into the Korean battle area.



D. Holmes, Jr.

MAP 2

To continue to utilize the forces of our Air and Navy without an effective ground element cannot be decisive.”<sup>10</sup>

Although General MacArthur’s forces had air superiority and control of the sea, he knew that his air and naval forces could not win the war alone because they could not defeat the North Korean COG, the NKPA. The factor of time was critical for the North Koreans because its number of troops and tanks were reduced by numerous days of combat. The North Korean lines of communications grew longer as the NKPA drove deeper into South Korea.

### TASK FORCE SMITH

*“No commander likes to commit troops piecemeal, and I’m no exception.”*<sup>11</sup>  
(Major General William Dean, CG, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division)

Upon receiving Presidential approval to commit U.S. ground troops to South Korea, General MacArthur ordered a makeshift task force to Korea to make contact and delay or halt the NKPA’s advance as far North on the peninsula as possible. Task Force Smith concept of operation was to fight a delaying action halting the NKPA north of Osan until the CINCFE could get more troops to Korea. This task force, under the command of LTC Charles B. Smith, was not prepared to fight a major operation because it lacked the adequate force structure, was insufficiently trained, had no tanks, had small numbers of antitank weapons, had insufficient artillery support, insufficient ammunition, weak communications, and had no antitank mines or close air support to delay the rapidly advancing NKPA. Task Force Smith would face more than a hundred times as many enemy troops, who were adequately trained, battle hardened, and well equipped with T-34 (Soviet) Tanks. The rapid deployment of this piecemeal task force is a good example of the poor condition of the United States military and its force structure during the initial stage of the Korean War. The NKPA concentrated its forces and used a mass of fire power, synchronization, economy of force, and a unity of

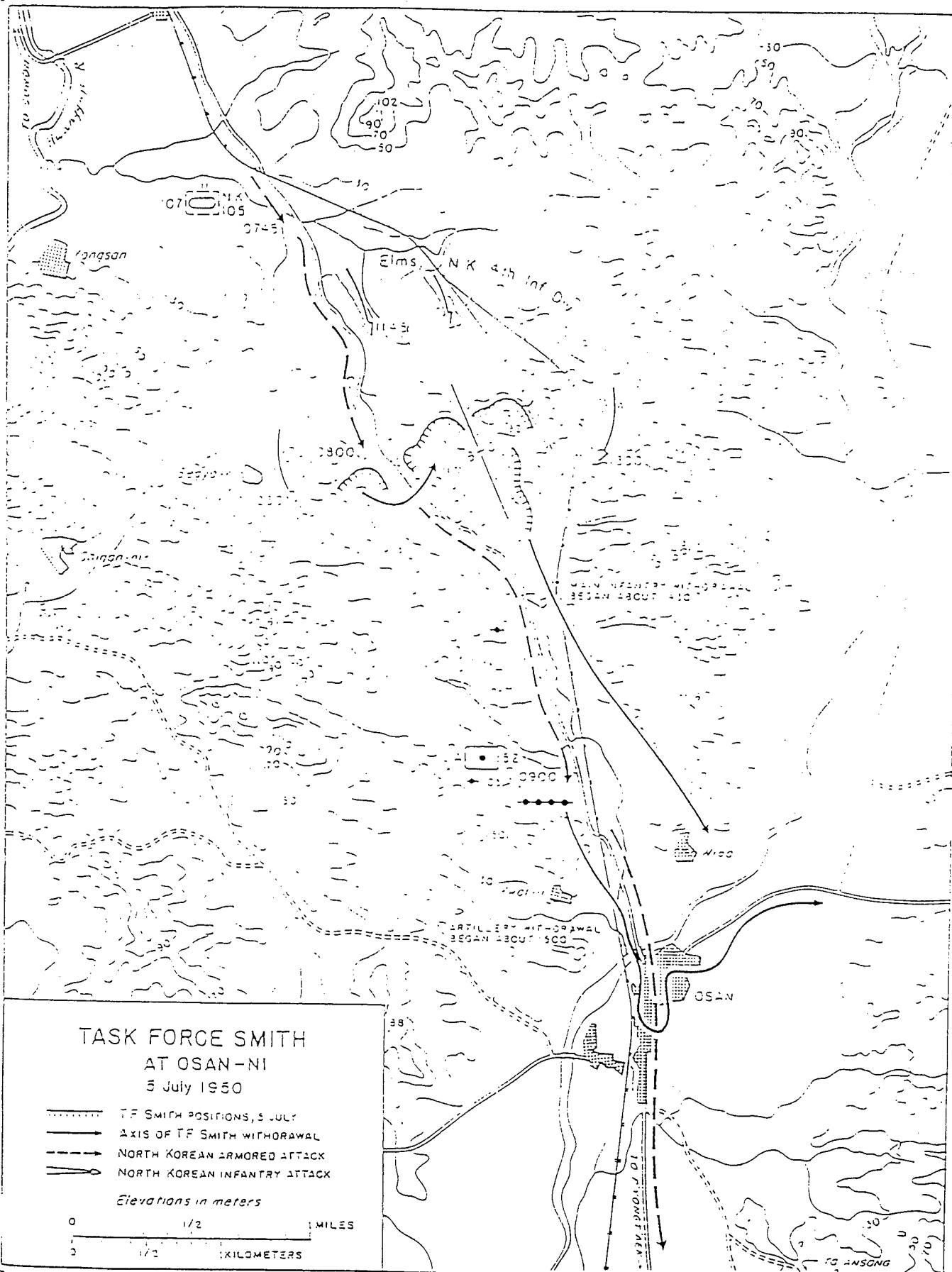
effort forcing the Americans to withdraw under heavy enemy fire leaving its wounded, dead, and weapons. The NKPA enveloped the over confident Task Force Smith, forcing it to withdraw toward Pusan in order to avoid being completely annihilated. (See map three)

### **THE PUSAN PERIMETER**

*“The fighting forces must be destroyed: that is, they must be put in such a condition that they can no longer carry on the fight. Whenever we use the phrase ‘destruction of enemy’s forces’ this alone is what we mean.”*<sup>12</sup> (Clausewitz)

The North Koreans took advantage of the factor of space during their attack by exploiting the narrow size of the peninsula through operational movement and maneuver. They took advantage of their geostrategic position by establishing a much needed base of operations in Seoul. By August 1950, the United States and Republic of Korea Armies’ had been pushed back into a small corner known as the Pusan perimeter. “They had lost mountains of equipment and thousands of men. Staggering back into the small remaining toehold at the corner of the peninsula, the fighting men were exhausted, dispirited, and bitter.”<sup>13</sup> They were forced to trade space for time to avoid being annihilated before completing the CINCFE buildup on the Korean peninsula. The North Koreans were in a desperate race against time to defeat Far East troops inside the Pusan perimeter before the United States could get more troops, resources, weapons, and equipment to Korea.

Although the North Koreans had extended lines of operations, lengthy lines of communications, and lesser numbers of troops, it maintained the offensive against the CINCFE’s less experienced and, by now, battle weary and demoralized forces. In August 1950, the CINCFE had about of 140,000 troops within the Pusan perimeter. The North Koreans combat troops were down to an estimated 70,000 with less than half of its original armor strength (50 T-34 Tanks). In September 1950, General MacArthur had about 180,000 troops with nearly 500 tanks that were stalemated against the NKPA within the Pusan



D. Holmer, Jr.

MAP 3

Perimeter.<sup>14</sup> Although the CINCFE had more troops, air superiority, and command of the seas, his forces could not repel the NKPA from south of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel.

### **THE PLANNING FOR OPERATION CHROMITE**

*“Could I...cut those lines, then envelop and destroy the enemy’s main force...?”<sup>15</sup>*  
(General Douglas MacArthur)

On 29 June 1950, General MacArthur made an assessment while conducting an aerial reconnaissance of Korea, that the only way to counter the NKPA offensive was to conduct a joint amphibious operation at Inchon. The CINCFE knew that the North Koreans were vulnerable in their rear because most of their warfighting forces were concentrated around the Pusan perimeter. General MacArthur knew that his forces had a unique opportunity to attack the enemy’s critical weakness, its and lines of communications. The Joint Strategic Plans and Operation Group (JSPOG), Far East Command initially planned on conducting an amphibious landing code named Operation BLUEHEARTS on 22 July 1950. This plan consisted of landing the United States 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division in the rear of the NKPA to cut their lines of communications, and disrupt its command, control, logistics, and seize Seoul. General MacArthur believed that this amphibious operation was the only way to defeat and repel the NKPA from South Korea. Operation BLUEHEARTS was cancelled almost immediately because the forces allocated for this amphibious operation were needed to stop the southward drive of the NKPA. If the CINCFE had any hope of conducting an amphibious operation at Inchon, he would have to carefully restructure his forces to avoid being annihilated by the NKPA inside the Pusan perimeter. Before General McArthur’s forces were backed up into the Pusan perimeter they could trade space for time, but by this stage of the war, his forces had run out of space and there was no further time to lose.



General MacArthur considered conducting a risky joint amphibious operation at a time when General Omar Bradley, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, believed that major amphibious operations had no future in modern warfare. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) were more concerned with the risk of Operation CHROMITE than the unique opportunity that it offered the CINCFE to attack the NKPA with overwhelming force, and demoralize them at one of the most critical points of the entire war. The location that the CINCFE chose for conducting a joint amphibious operation was full of controversy and was opposed by the Navy because of its difficult tidal conditions. The Navy favored an amphibious landing at Kunsan but the CINCFE did not believe that it would cut the North Korean's lines of communications. General MacArthur's theory of victory was to conduct a surprise joint amphibious landing in the enemy's rear at Inchon simultaneous with an attack out of the Pusan perimeter. These attacks were expected to deliver both an indirect and direct decisive blow to the North Korean COG (NKPA). General MacArthur also had to persuade General J. Lawton Collins, the Army Chief of Staff, and Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, the Chief of Naval Operations of the validity of conducting such a risky joint amphibious operation. Faced with major opposition about Operation CHROMITE, in a speech in Tokyo, Japan, General MacArthur won the support of the JCS:

“Only the capture of Inchon and Seoul with it would...cut the enemy's supply line and seal off the entire southern peninsula...Cutting the enemy's supply lines from Seoul obviously could not seal off the entire southern peninsula.”<sup>16</sup>

Before approval by the JCS, General MacArthur's JSPOG had courses of action prepared for Operation CHROMITE. The first course of action was Operation Plan 100-B, which called for an amphibious landing in September at Inchon, on the west coast. The second course of action was Operation Plan 100-C, which called for an amphibious landing at

Kunsan on the west coast. The third course of action was Operation Plan 100-D, which called for an amphibious landing near Chumunjin-up on the east coast.<sup>17</sup> General MacArthur continued to favor his initial idea of an amphibious landing at Inchon, OPLAN 100-B. He also would have a simultaneous attack by the Eighth United States Army in an attempt to break out of the Pusan perimeter.

The CINCFE knew that conducting Operation CHROMITE was very risky, but had a “5000-to-1” chance of successfully seizing the initiative from the NKPA if all went as planned. The JSPOG had to conduct a very detailed mission analysis if Operation CHROMITE was to be a success because Inchon was divided into an outer harbor and an inner one created by the small Islands of Wolmi-do. Operation CHROMITE had to be well planned and synchronized to achieve success because its forces were to seize the port of Inchon, Kimpo airfield, and seize and occupy Seoul. Further it had to facilitate simultaneous attacks between X Corps and the Eighth United States Army from the Pusan perimeter. The landing on the Island of Wolmi-do was scheduled for 0630 hours on D-Day (15 September). The JSPOG decided that once Wolmi-do was seized by friendly forces, the main landing would occur eleven hours later that evening during the next high tide.<sup>18</sup>

### **THE PREPARATION FOR OPERATION CHROMITE**

*“There is no one but yourself to keep your back door open. You can live without food, but you cannot last long with out ammunition.”*<sup>19</sup> (LTG Walton H. Walker, Korea, 1950)

On 12 August 1950, the Far East Command (FECOM) issued Operation Plan 100-B, Operation CHROMITE. It identified Inchon and Seoul as the objectives to be attacked by the amphibious invasion force. The CINCFE had to tailor his forces to conduct an amphibious landing at Inchon in conjunction with an enveloping attack by the Eighth United States Army out of the Pusan perimeter. General McArthur selected 15 September 1950 as

D-Day because a favorable high tide was scheduled and would give the Far East forces at least 31.2 feet of water allowing naval vessels to put the assault force on shore. Maximum tidal conditions would not come again until 27 September 1950.<sup>20</sup> Naval craft needed a minimum of 23 feet of tide to clear mud flats and reach their landing sites.

Time was a critical factor for the CINCFE forces by August 1950, therefore the CINCFE had to quickly restructure his forces to achieve surprise, mass, versatility, flexibility, and an economy of force against the NKPA critical weakness (lines of communications). The Navy's seventh fleet was restructured for Operation CHROMITE to form Joint Task Force 7 (JTF-7) with Admiral Stubble as its commander. The CINCFE expected JTF-7 to conduct a naval blockade along the west coast of Korea, and be prepared to conduct pre D-Day operations including pre D-Day shore bombardments. D-day would commence with an amphibious assault to seize beachheads in the Inchon joint area of operations, provide carrier air support, conduct coastal gun fire support as needed, and transport troops and logistics.<sup>21</sup>

General MacArthur requested approval for the activation of X Corps Headquarters as the primary invasion force for Operation CHROMITE. GHQ FEC General Order 24 was issued on 26 August 1950 activating the invasion corps. The CINCFE selected MG Almond, his Chief of Staff to command the newly activated Corps. General MacArthur believed that surprising the NKPA from the rear would lead to a quick and decisive victory and that the war would be terminated. General MacArthur was very decisive about his intention for JTF-7 during Operation CHROMITE. "Inchon will succeed", he said, "...the capture of that port would save 100,000 lives... We shall land at Inchon and I shall crush them."<sup>22</sup> General Almond could then return to his position as the FECOM Chief of Staff. Upon the seizure of Seoul, X Corps would be the anvil against the force of the hammer of the Eighth United

States Army's attack out of the Pusan perimeter. MG Almond's invasion force was made up of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from the Eighth United States Army. These forces offered the JTF-7 Commander great versatility and flexibility because during the amphibious assault stage, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division would be under the control of the Landing Force Commander. Upon a successful landing, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division would be returned to the control of the X Corps Commander.

Operational intelligence about the enemy in the Inchon, Seoul, and Kimpo Airfield area was critical before committing JTF-7 forces against the battle hardened NKPA. The JTF-7 intelligence estimate provided by the X Corps G-2 placed the enemy's troop strength at approximately 5,000 in Seoul, about 1000 in Inchon, and about 500 around Kimpo. <sup>23</sup> During this major operation, the JSPOG planned on surprising enemy forces by attacking them with massive amounts of ground forces from X Corps (70,000) concentrating on enemy forces around Inchon and Seoul. Kimpo Airfield was a decisive point because it was South Korea's largest airfield and would provide a future support base for Far East forces.

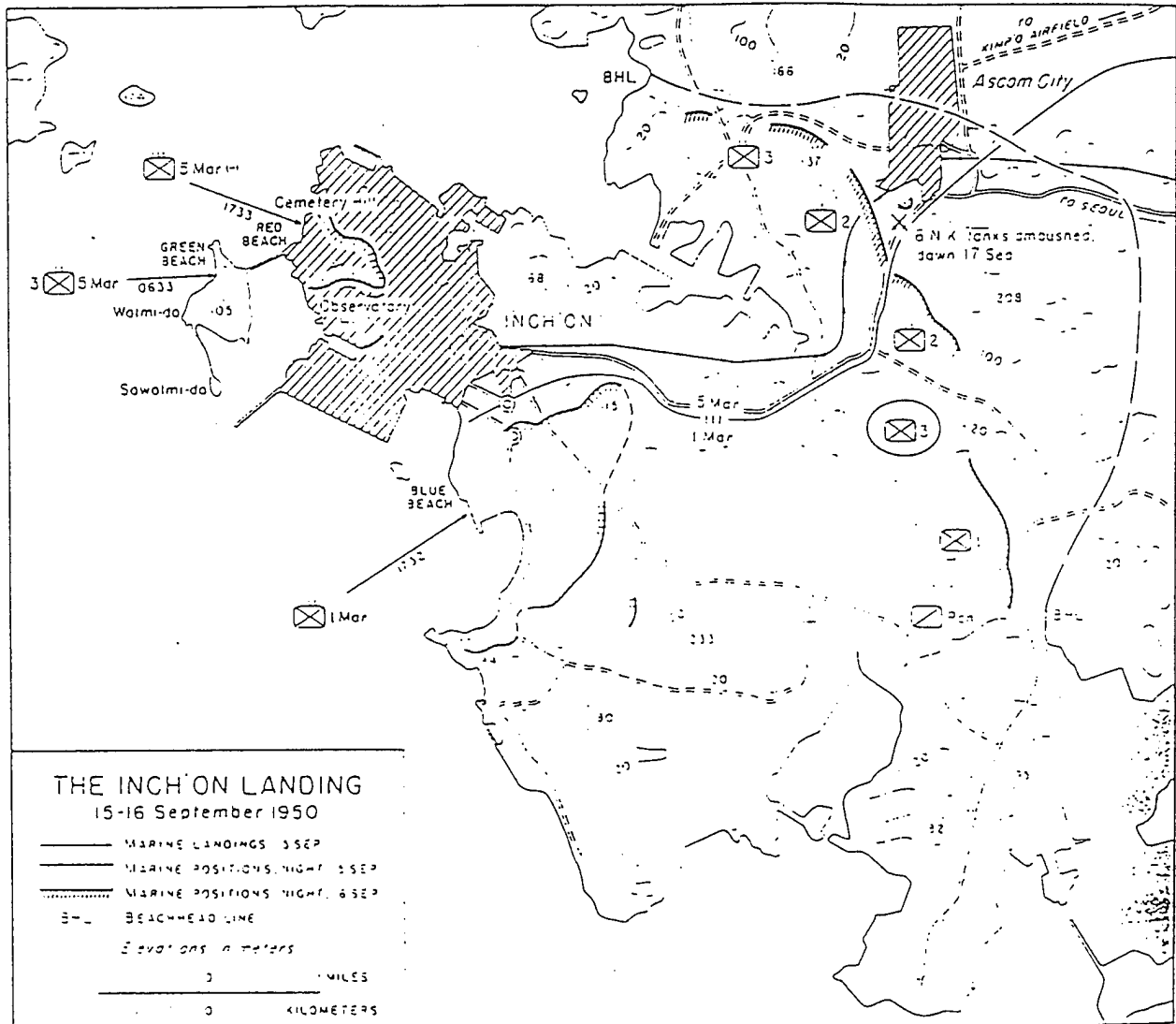
### **THE EXECUTION OF OPERATION CHROMITE**

*"Take him unaware by surprise attacks where he is unprepared."* <sup>24</sup> (SUN TZU)

JTF-7 initiated operational fires on 4 September 1950 to isolate the joint area of operations for Operation CHROMITE. These fires included an intensive bombardment on 10 September to reduce enemy artillery around the Inchon Harbor. On D-2 and D-1 (13-14 September) the Naval Gun Fire Support Group bombarded the Island of Wolmi-Do. JTF-7 successfully carried out a planned operational deception on the night of 12-13 September to maintain an illusion of the location of the main assault force's amphibious landing. This deception was conducted at Kunsan by U.S. Special Operation forces and British Royal Marine Commandos. <sup>25</sup>

JTF-7 Advance Attack Group began transporting Marines to their landing positions on Green Beach at 0200 hours on 15 September. The Marines quickly seized the Islands of Wolmi-Do and So Wolmi-Do by 0750 hours on 15 September. The initial stage of Operation CHROMITE was highly successful because JTF-7 forces had obtained a foothold in preparation for the invasion of Red and Blue Beaches. The Far East forces exploited the initial attack force successes by landing Marines simultaneously during the next high tide on Red and Blue Beaches. They were met by very little resistance from the NKPA, as predicted by the JTF-7 intelligence estimate. Amazingly, within 24 hours of the first landing, JTF-7 forces had seized and isolated critical terrain in the Inchon joint area of operation preventing the enemy from reinforcing it with soldiers from the Pusan perimeter. (See Map four)

Securing the Islands of Wolmi-Do and So Wolmi-Do cut the North Korean lines of communications from Inchon to Seoul. Securing these operational objectives was critical to the Far East forces because it attacked the North Korean's most important critical weakness (LOC) that supported their concentration of the Pusan perimeter. The North Korean soldiers in the Inchon area were surprised and shocked by JTF-7 ability to rapidly project combat power from the sea. The next stage of Operation CHROMITE was for JTF-7 forces to seize and isolate Kimpo Airfield. This was one of the Far East forces major objectives because its occupation was critical to the defeat of the NKPA. On 16-17 September, JTF-7 forces occupied forward positions securing the Seoul highway West of Ascom City, and on 17 September, positions on the edge of Kimpo Airfield were secured. On 18 September, they successfully seized that major objective, to the surprise of North Korean soldiers. The capture of this hard surface airfield greatly enhanced the CINCFE air power capability to disrupt the North Korean's lines of operations.<sup>26</sup> The seizure of Kimpo



MAP 4

E. Female

Airfield also greatly enhanced the United Nations air operations during its subsequent attacks on Seoul and the Eighth United States Army's attack out of the Pusan perimeter.

JTF-7 planned to concentrate its forces in the Inchon joint area of operations as soon as possible, therefore on 16-17 September the X Corps landed its 7 Infantry Division to block the escape route of the NKPA which fought along the Naktong River.<sup>27</sup> The brilliant planning and execution of the initial stages of Operation CHROMITE provided hope for the CINCFE forces, because for the first time during the Korean War, the Far East forces achieved operational success against the NKPA. The CINCFE did an excellent job achieving the principle of surprise, maneuvering his forces to put the enemy in a position of disadvantage, seizing and exploiting the offensive, massing his forces to gain desired results, securing his forces, and achieving an economy of force by allocating combat power to decisive points in the joint area of operations.

The most important thing about the Inchon-Seoul victory is that it saved thousands of lives. By surprising the North Koreans from the rear, the Far East forces had limited their losses to 3,500 casualties, which is considerably low when compared to those that might have occurred from a frontal attack against the NKPA. General MacArthur's forces demoralized the NKPA by destroying large amounts of equipment, killing 14,000 of its soldiers, and capturing a total of 7,000 enemy prisoners of war.<sup>28</sup> The in-depth planning and preparation for Operation CHROMITE gave the CINCFE forces the offensive initiative allowing them to execute an attack that led to the defeat of the NKPA and the recovery of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Although very risky, Far East forces executed a well synchronized attack conducted in accordance with Operation Plan 100-B. They took advantage of space, time, and force, and employed operational intelligence, operational fires, operational maneuver, and deception that allowed them to concentrate their forces against the NKPA's critical weaknesses and

vulnerabilities. The success of JTF-7 proved the validity of the CINCFE's decision to tailor his forces to provide him with flexibility and versatility during Operation CHROMITE. This major defeat of enemy forces enabled the Far East forces to break out of the Pusan perimeter and eventually defeat the NKPA.

### CONCLUSION AND OPERATIONAL LESSONS LEARNED

*"The history of war proves that nine out ten times an army has been destroyed because its supply lines have been cut off..."*<sup>29</sup> (General Douglas MacArthur)

A thorough understanding of the problems that the United States had with its forces during the initial stage of the Korean War are critical to a discussion of lessons learned. The United States planning, preparation, and execution of Operation CHROMITE also provide valuable lessons learned and serve as a model for future joint military operations.

During the initial stage of the Korean War, the United States forces were inadequately structured, equipped, and trained for numerous days of combat operations. Once the United States forces were deployed in an attempt to delay the NKPA, they were defeated because the North Koreans had established the offensive momentum. Although the CINCFE had more forces inside of the Pusan perimeter than the North Koreans, they were unable to defeat or repel the NKPA from South Korea. *It is critical to maintain adequate, well-trained forces capable of providing a rapid response to an enemy's challenge. Joint military operations offer a commander the necessary versatility and flexibility that is needed during combat operations.*

During the initial stage of the Korean War, the United States conducted inadequate planning and preparation before committing its forces against a well prepared, equipped, and battle hardened NKPA. Upon North Korea's initial defeat of the Far East forces, the FECOM staff conducted the thorough planning and preparation necessary to execute a major joint



military operation. During Operation CHROMITE, the CINCFE forces were synchronized throughout the entire operation to ensure that follow on forces exploited the success of its initial attack forces. *Before committing forces and resources to combat, a detailed mission analysis must be conducted to obtain the best employment of troops, and ensure that operations are synchronized to prevent the loss of lives and equipment.*

The CINCFE relied on surprise during Operation CHROMITE to counter the North Koreans offensive. The North Koreans underestimated the power projection capability of the United States. *During combat operations, a commander must never be surprised or underestimate the power projection capability of his enemy. The size of the joint area of operations must be analyzed and forces structured to prevent the enemy from freely projecting his combat power from air, land, or sea.*

During the initial phase of Operation CHROMITE, operational fires were invaluable to the success of Far East forces securing the Inchon Harbor. Air strikes, combined with naval gun fire reduced enemy strong points and artillery that threatened Far East forces in the Inchon joint area of operations. During Operation CHROMITE, the United States Navy used a combination of air, destroyers, cruisers, and battleships with 16-inch guns. *During future Joint amphibious operations, a similar combination of weapon systems will be needed to provide operational fires and naval gun fire support in order to shape the battlespace to meet the operational needs of the commander.*

Operational intelligence during Operation CHROMITE enabled the JTF-7 commander to adequately match his forces against the enemy in the Inchon and Seoul joint area of operations. *Accurate information about enemy forces is critical to commanders at all levels and ensures that friendly operations are directed against enemy critical strengths*

*and vulnerabilities, and must importantly, their strategic and operational centers of gravity.*

Operation OVERLORD (the United Nations invasion of France) and Operation CHROMITE proved that the concept of a Supreme Allied Commander is very valuable for a clear unity of command. *During coalition warfare a Supreme Allied Commander is necessary for a clear command and control structure.*

During Operation CHROMITE, JTF-7 had a clear command structure which gave the CINCFE freedom of action throughout the duration of the operation. *During joint military operations a joint force commander is needed to give the CINC freedom of action throughout the theater of operations.*

Operation CHROMITE was very complex involving multiple stages, each of which caused the CINCFE and the JTF-7 commander to accept a high level of risk. In this operation, risk was necessary to enable Far East forces to cut the North Koreans lines of communications. *During joint military operations, commanders at all levels need to accept the amount of risk necessary to attack the enemy's critical weaknesses or COG.*

Operation CHROMITE was a brilliant combined joint military operation that surprised the North Koreans and eventually led to the recovery of Seoul and relief of United Nations forces breaking out of the Pusan perimeter. This joint military operation displayed surprise, a unity of effort, a mass of fire power, flexibility, synchronization, depth, versatility, and an economy of force enabling the attacking forces to obtain their operational objectives.

*“The question now arises how success can be made likely. One way...is to choose objectives that will incidentally bring about the enemy's collapse-the destruction of his armed forces...”*<sup>30</sup> (Clausewitz)

## END NOTES

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