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THE BATTLE OF THE TWIN TUNNELS:
KOREA, 1 FEBRUARY 1951

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL TED C. CHILCOTE, IN

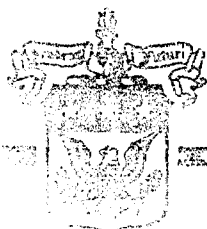
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THE BATTLE OF THE TWIN TUNNELS: KOREA, 1 FEBRUARY 1951

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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The Battle of CHIPYONG-NI, fought 13 - 15 February 1951, on the Central Korean Front by the 23rd Regimental Combat Team (RCT), is considered a classic perimeter defense and is regarded as a pivotal engagement in the Korean War that dealt the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) their first decisive operational defeat following their intervention in the war. The Battle of the TWIN TUNNELS, fought on 1 February 1951 by the RCT, is frequently overlooked by historians, but is a part of the same combat action or operation that concluded with the successful Battle of CHIPYONG-NI. Additionally, the Battle of the TWIN TUNNELS was fought under conditions nearly identical to those of the later, larger and more spectacular Battle of CHIPYONG-NI. While the latter dealt a decisive operational defeat to the CCF, the former dealt a decisive tactical defeat. The TWIN TUNNELS, then, serves as a preview of the decisive Battle of CHIPYONG-NI.

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THE BATTLE OF THE TWIN TUNNELS KOREA, 1 FEBRUARY 1951

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Preface

This paper was originally intended to be a case study of the Battle of the TWIN TUNNELS, an engagement fought by the 23rd Regimental Combat Team (hereinafter referred to as the Regiment or RCT), in Korea, on 1 February 1951. Limited source materials and sketchy and incomplete unit records have caused the scope to be narrowed to a battle narrative. Certainly, some conclusions and lessons learned can be drawn from the materials.

The significance of the action is that the Regiment was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, that a numerically superior Chinese force was decisively beaten and driven off the field (still a remarkable feat at that particular time in the Far East Command) and that the TWIN TUNNELS was

the "testing ground" for tactics and techniques that were successful at the later Battle of CHIPYONG-NI, where the Chinese were stopped in their southward drive for the first time since their intervention in the war. Additionally, the action is significant because it forms a part of the heritage of the 23rd Infantry Regiment, for the citation for the TWIN TUNNELS is one of three Presidential Unit Citations (two United States and one Republic of Korea) earned in a single 30 day period of nearly continuous winter combat. The later Battle of CHIPYONG-NI has eclipsed the TWIN TUNNELS, in large measure because of the more dramatic and decisive result realized; however, General Paul L. Freeman, Jr., the then regimental commander, remembers the TWIN TUNNELS as the "more desperate fight." ¹

One hopes that serious military historians will develop the story of the TWIN TUNNELS and accord it the place that it deserves in the continuum of successful battle that wrested the initiative from the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) at the small crossroads village of CHIPYONG-NI.

The Battle of CHIPYONG-NI

The engagement fought at CHIPYONG-NI, 13-15 February 1951, by the 23rd RCT² was, perhaps, the single most decisive action fought in Korea during that crucial period immediately following the CCF intervention in the war. The significance of the TWIN TUNNELS comes into focus only when examined against the backdrop of CHIPYONG-NI; so the narrative begins with a description of that action as a point of departure and as a reference point for understanding

The War Diary or Command Report of the X Corps (US) for February 1951 provides a succinct summary of the action:

The successful perimeter defense of CHIPYONG-NI by the 23rd Regimental Combat Team, 2d US Infantry Division, during the period 13-15 February played a vital role in the successful operations of UN Forces on the Central Korean Front during the month of February.

CHIPYONG-NI was a vital communications center along the HONGCHON - YODJU axis at the juncture of the US IX and X Corps Boundaries. Its importance to both the UN Forces and the enemy was paramount. Not only did it control the entire road net in the immediate area and serve as a gateway to the HAN River Corridor, but it was also a strong blocking position to protect the left flank of the X Corps Line and threaten the enemy's forces south of the HAN River to the southwest. Accordingly, the 23rd Regimental Combat Team was ordered to hold CHIPYONG-NI at all costs, while the enemy employed elements of five (5) Chinese Divisions in a vain attempt to seize it.

The perimeter defense of CHIPYONG-NI was a classic example of the employment to the fullest of the principles of all-around military defense by a unit of regimental size. Although the limited number of troops

available prohibited the defense of all key terrain in the CHIPYONG-NI area, the 23rd RCT Commander organized his defenses on the most commanding terrain available, consistent with the number of troops at his disposal. The defense was so integrated that every unit was able to lend fire support to the units on either flank. Although the terrain available to the defense was limited in area, the maximum defense in depth possible was employed so that the enemy met continuous resistance in his attempts to penetrate the perimeter. A mobile reserve was maintained at all times.

Seldom if ever has war seen a unit of regimental size integrated into so effective an all-around defense. Planned concentrations of fire from automatic weapons, mortars, and artillery at all times denied to the enemy a fire-free avenue of approach to friendly positions. Maximum use was made of air strikes on enemy troops and concentrations and positions. The use of armor, though limited by terrain and weather, was made in establishing key blocking positions outside the perimeter during the night, and in augmenting the defensive fires from within the perimeter during the day. Although the defense was closely integrated with each unit having an assigned zone, sufficient flexibility in the defense was provided to meet each new enemy threat.

The Battle of CHIPYONG-NI reaffirmed the fact that a friendly force of any size, employing to the fullest extent the basic concepts of the US Military Doctrine of Defense and utilizing to the utmost friendly superiority in firepower, can successfully defend against a vastly numerically superior enemy force.³

The official record, usually a laconic recitation of bare facts, captures the essence of the significance and import of the action. It does not, however, pin down the fact that CHIPYONG-NI was the first operational defeat handed out to a major Chinese formation after the Chinese intervention. Furthermore, the record does not place the engagement in an operational continuum that began on or about 21 January 1951, when the

Regiment began to dispatch long-range patrols toward CHIPYONG-NI from its patrol bases in the vicinity of MUNMANG-NI (southwest of WDNJU) to find and fix the Chinese forces that had temporarily disappeared from the front. CHIPYONG-NI was the predictable outcome of the sharp patrol action at the TWIN TUNNELS on 29-30 January and the Regiment's near perfect defense of the TWIN TUNNELS on 1 February as the Regiment moved northwestward to the crossroads of CHIPYONG-NI.

The Chinese Communist Forces Intervention

The intervention of veteran Chinese Communist "volunteers",⁴ including some 300,000 infantry of the 4th Field Army⁵ inflicted a series of reverses of tactical, operational and strategic significance on United Nations Forces in November and December 1950 that shocked, embarrassed and dismayed the free world. More critically, the intervention widened the war. The fresh Chinese forces, together with some 65,000 refitted North Korean troops,⁶ executed a massive ambush on the approaches to the YALU River in northern North Korea that achieved near total tactical surprise

and isolated divisions and regiments for defeat in detail. The Far East Command's change of fortune signalled, if not a new war, a new phase in its five month old police action.

By mid-January 1951, the United Nations Forces had stabilized a line south of SEOUL and the HAN River, generally along the 37th Parallel and described by a line running from PYONGTAEK - WONJU - KANGNUNG.⁷ Forces were deployed, from west to east: I Corps (US), IX Corps (US), X Corps (US), III Corps (ROK) and I Corps (ROK).⁸ The Communist Forces did not follow south of the HAN River in any appreciable numbers, clearly to allow an unsophisticated sustainment system time to catch up to its forward elements and to allow the combat elements an opportunity to consolidate their gains and reorganize their scattered units. Only along the Central Korean Front, forward of III Corps (ROK) on the approaches to WONJU was there any immediate threat. The break in the action took the pressure off and allowed the United Nations Forces to rest, rearm and refit, to integrate replacements into their ranks, and to regain their confidence and spirit.

Ridgway Takes Command

As if the currents that swept the United Nations Forces out of North Korea were not unsettling enough, Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, Commanding General, Eighth United States Army, was killed in a jeep accident on 23 December 1950, as the United Nations Forces were attempting to counter the Communist New Year's Offensive that ultimately took SEOUL. Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway was notified the same day by the Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, of Walker's death, of his appointment to fill the office and of the requirement to depart immediately for Korea.⁹ Ridgway met with General Douglas MacArthur in his TOKYO headquarters on 26 December to receive guidance on the prosecution of the war and recalled that the "talk was detailed, specific, frank, and far-ranging."¹⁰ Ridgway recalled further that he was to hold "in the most advanced positions in which you can maintain yourself."¹¹ SEOUL was to be held as long as possible for its psychological and political significance, but holding the city was already beyond the means at hand.¹² MacArthur stated that "A military success will

strengthen our diplomacy."¹³ MacArthur went further to provide his own analysis and interpretation of the Chinese tactical strengths, characteristics and capabilities and admonished Ridgway "not to underestimate the Chinese."¹⁴ MacArthur's goal was simply "inflicting a broadening defeat making possible the retention and security of South Korea."¹⁵ MacArthur's closing was to the point: "Form your own opinions; use your own judgment. I will support you. You have my complete confidence."¹⁶ After a few questions to clarify some details, Ridgway asked, "If I find the situation to my liking, would you have any objections to my attacking?"¹⁷ "The Eighth Army is yours, Matt. Do what you think best."¹⁸

General Ridgway recalled that he was determined to go over to the offensive as soon as the Eighth Army could be readied.¹⁹ He set about making his own assessment of the conditions in and affecting his command and establishing, top down, a renewed sense of pride, confidence and a readiness to go back into the fight. Among specific actions ordered, all elements were directed to initiate an aggressive program of patrolling to regain lost contact with the Communists, to determine enemy dispositions

and capabilities and to reintroduce the experience and expectation of winning in offensive combat. Ridgway visited all his major and principal subordinate commanders, assessing conditions, explaining his intent for the conduct of future operations and stressing basic combat fundamentals that had not always been practiced theretofore, and that were basic to wresting the initiative away from the enemy. He preached "Find them! Fix them! Fight them! [Follow them!] Finish them!"²⁰ In essence, the Commanding General was about to undertake a series of reconnaissances in force and limited objective attacks across the Eighth Army front, carefully maneuvering under the cover of supporting fires on dominating terrain, attacking and consolidating when combat power ratios were favorable, achieving mutual support between adjacent units and, most critically, taking the fight to the enemy under conditions that virtually guaranteed success in each passage of arms.

CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND SITUATION

The Enemy.

During the month of January 1951, the Communists renewed their offensive, concentrating the bulk of their energies on the X Corps (US) - III Corps (ROK) sectors. The concentration on the Central Korean Front may have been influenced by the fact that the X Corps (US) was the last US corps to establish itself on line and that the Central Korean Front presented a sensitive seam or boundary between US and ROK forces. A penetration of the front would isolate the III Corps (ROK) from US support, would disrupt communications to a significant depth and would probably force a general withdrawal of X Corps (US).

A two-corps coordinated attack was launched against WONJU on 7 January 1951. The V Corps (NK), composed of the 6th, 7th, 12th, 38th and

43rd NK Divisions, attacked south along the line HONGCHON - HOENGSONG - WONJU to seize WONJU and to effect a penetration of the UN front. The II Corps (NK), composed of the 2nd, 9th, 10th, 27th and 31st NK Divisions, infiltrated its 2nd and 10th Divisions through ROK lines to cut the X Corps (US) main supply route (MSR), to isolate WONJU and to support the attack of the V Corps (NK).²¹ For the first time, attacking formations met forces that would not withdraw when pressured by numerically superior forces or when by-passed by sizeable elements and would strike aggressively every time a target was presented.²² In a series of engagements loosely called the First and Second Battles of WONJU by the participants,²³ the 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd US Infantry Division, checked and then repulsed the attacking V Corps (NK), inflicting heavy casualties that resulted in two of the attacking divisions being deactivated and the survivors being absorbed into the remaining formations.²⁴ The V Corps (NK) withdrew on 17 January to the vicinity of HOENGSONG and established itself in a series of positions laid out in a large arc above the city. The infiltrated II Corps (NK) elements were destroyed in sharp fights that raged in the rear areas. Survivors either slipped back to the north or broke into guerilla bands to

operate in and around TAEGU.²⁵

Remarkably, "known CCF activity in X Corps sector during January was minor."²⁶ It is difficult to determine if the Chinese were not, in fact, in X Corps' sector or if they had successfully avoided discovery. The first mention of the Chinese occurred in the third week of January; an estimated two regiments were located in the vicinity of YOJU on the Corps' west boundary and an unknown size force was believed to be in the vicinity of HOENGSONG.²⁷ For some reason, the Chinese were avoiding contact and/or discovery. The X Corps (US) did know that Chinese forces in the vicinity of SEOUL were positioned such that they could strike the Corps along its left or west boundary and that a sizeable Chinese force believed to be in the vicinity of CHUNCHON could attack down the same axis that the V Corps (NK) had just tried. The X Corps (US) reported "there was no indication . . . that the Chinese were yet ready to launch another large scale offensive . . ."²⁸ The intelligence community was not producing much in the way of timely, detailed or accurate order of battle information for the committed forces.

The X Corps (US) does note that January 1951 was something of a

tactical and operational watershed, for the January offensive on the Central Korean Front was a North Korean Army operation. Thereafter, the Chinese would constitute the dominant and controlling hostile threat on the battlefield.²⁹

The 23rd Infantry Regiment

The 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd US Infantry Division, that settled into a blocking position in the vicinity of MOKYE-DONG in mid-January 1951 was a tired, tried and mature organization that had played a major role in all operations since its deployment into the PUSAN Perimeter from Fort Lewis in August 1950.

Upon arriving in country, the 2d US Infantry Division relieved the 24th US Infantry Division on the western face of the PUSAN Perimeter along the line of the NAKTONG River. The baptism of fire was the successful defense of the NAKTONG Line that raged during the period 6-26 August.³⁰ The North Koreans forced several shallow bridgeheads across the river that were contained and then eliminated by the end of August. The North

Koreans staged a series of poorly coordinated general attacks all around the perimeter during the period 27 August-10 September³¹ in a last gasp attempt to reach PUSAN and destroy the UN Forces. Though penetrations occurred in the 2d US Infantry Division sector, all were contained and eliminated by mid-September.

The 2d US Infantry Division conducted supporting attacks to the west and west-northwest of its sector to cover the left flank of the I Corps (US) that effected link-up in the vicinity of OSAN with the forces that landed at INCHON on 15 September. After reaching CHONJU near the west coast, the Division attacked to the north along the coast, joining the general exploitation and pursuit undertaken by Eighth Army after the liberation of SEOUL.

By 24 November 1950, the Division, part of the IX Corps (US), was strung out along the CHONGCHON River in northwestern North Korea preparing to continue the attack to the YALU River to destroy the North Korean Army. The entire Eighth Army, particularly the IX Corps (US), was rushing forward to attack, believing that the remaining enemy was disorganized and incapable of offering a coordinated or effective defense. The

attacking formations were advancing on the few narrow and compartmentalized avenues of approach that caused regiments, divisions and corps to function in near isolation from adjacent formations. The dispositions were not those of an army expecting imminent contact with a fresh, numerically superior enemy. The rugged terrain and the UN Forces' dependence on the limited, primitive road net contributed in equal measure to the conditions that set up defeat at the hands of the Chinese. On the Regiment's first night on the CHONGCHON River, 25 November, massive Chinese attacks struck units to its east, sweeping away three ROK divisions of the II Corps (ROK) and threatening IX Corps (US) with envelopment.³² The 23rd Infantry Regiment's sister regiments were forced to withdraw back through its lines.³³ By the end of the second day of heavy fighting, the gravity of the situation facing the entire Eighth Army seems to have been appreciated, and IX Corps (US) ordered a withdrawal. The 23rd Infantry Regiment was designated the rear guard for the Corps.³⁴ General Paul L. Freeman, Jr., then a colonel commanding the Regiment, recalls that his regiment executed "as fine an operation as I have ever known"³⁵ despite the inherent difficulties of executing a withdrawal under

heavy pressure, compounded by severe winter weather and mountainous terrain. The fact is, the Regiment held in good order at KUNI-RI until all elements of IX Corps (US) had passed rearward. Finally ordered to withdraw, the Regiment expended all of its artillery ammunition in a "mad minute" that rocked back the Chinese long enough for the Regiment to break contact and slip away. Colonel Freeman brought the Regiment out on the adjacent (west) 25th US Infantry Division's withdrawal route and avoided the "Gauntlet" (KUNI-RI to SUNCHON road) that has been chronicled by Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall. Whatever the debate over the circumstances of the decision not to follow the rest of the 2nd US Infantry Division, the decision was correct. The Regiment came out in good order, intact, still combat effective, and in possession of its equipment and weapons.³⁶

Having broken contact, the 2nd US Infantry Division was moved back through PYONGYANG to the vicinity of SEOUL to reconstitute itself. The 23rd Infantry Regiment, as the only regiment "being still combat worthy, was used to patrol in the vicinity of SEOUL and to cover the assembly positions [areas]" for other Eighth Army elements.³⁷ A significant addition

was made to the Regiment's task organization by the attachment of the French Battalion on 21 December. The French Battalion was France's contribution to the UN commitment to the defense of the ROK and would be habitually associated with the Regiment for the rest of the war.³⁸

The 2nd US Infantry Division was moved to the Central Korean Front and took up positions to cover WONJU on or about 24 December³⁹ to counter a serious, rapidly developing threat to the Eighth Army's right rear.⁴⁰ A renewed Communist general offensive was expected to coincide with the advent of the New Year, which in fact, was launched 31 December on the Central Korean Front against III Corps (ROK). Delaying his plans for a resumption of offensive operations, Lieutenant General Ridgway withdrew his forces to defensible terrain south of SEOUL on 4 January 1951, generally along the line PYONGTAEK - WONJU - KANGNUNG.⁴¹ The X Corps (US) that had been withdrawn by sea from the west coast of North Korea in December 1950 and debarked at PUSAN was rushed northward to take positions in the gap between IX Corps (US) and III Corps (ROK). Except for the Central Korean Front, the situation was quickly stabilized; and the enemy offered "little or no follow-up."⁴² On the Central Korean Front,

elements of III Corps (ROK) were broken after hard fighting and withdrew through WONJU, exposing the right flank of X Corps (US).

To support the pressed III Corps (ROK), on New Year's Day 1951, the 23rd Infantry Regiment attacked north from blocking positions in the vicinity of CHUNJU (approximately 10-12 miles south of WONJU) through WONJU and HOENGSONG toward HONGCHON to relieve pressure on and free five ROK divisions cut off north of HOENGSONG.⁴³ From blocking positions on the north side of WONJU taken up after the attack toward HONGCHON had achieved its purpose, the Division absorbed and repulsed strong Communist attacks against the city. A precipitous withdrawal by ROK forces on the Division's right flank created another crisis and forced a withdrawal on 7 January to defensible terrain some five kilometers south of WONJU that would protect the Division's MSR and frustrate envelopment from the east.⁴⁴ On 8 January, the X Corps (US) ordered WONJU retaken.⁴⁵ In three days of bitter fighting, often hand-to-hand, in a driving wet snow in temperatures that dropped as low as -30 degrees Fahrenheit, the 23rd Infantry Regiment fought its way back to the southern outskirts of the city⁴⁶ and stabilized the Corps line.⁴⁷ Disappointingly, yet another

withdrawal from WONJU was ordered because of reverses to the east. On 15 January, the Regiment was put into division reserve and ordered to occupy an assembly area (blocking position) in the vicinity of MOKYE-DONG some 8-10 miles south of WONJU.⁴⁸

Enroute to MOKYE-DONG on 15 January, Colonel Freeman was met by the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General George C. Stewart, beside the road, greeted with small talk, and given a change of orders. "You are assigned responsibility for this sector (south of MICHON-NI, extending from the left side of the WONJU - CHUNGJIN [sic] road, west to the HAN River)⁴⁹ to the west of the road and over to the HAN River. You will hold it with two battalions, the other two (French and Second Battalions) will continue on to Division Reserve in accordance with original instructions."⁵⁰

The 1st and 3rd Battalions set about establishing defensive positions, refitting and conducting some training for replacements.⁵¹ After one day's rest in reserve, the French Battalion was directed to conduct long-range patrols to the Division's front, and the 2nd Battalion was detached to the 9th Infantry Regiment to help reduce a threat to the east

in the vicinity of CHECKON. The French Battalion established an advanced patrol base in the vicinity of MUNMANG-NI on 16 January with one company, the remainder of the battalion was returned to regimental control and took up positions on the right of the regimental line.⁵² The 2nd Battalion was returned to regimental control and directed to relieve the company on the patrol base at MUNMANG-NI on 25 January.⁵³ Enemy resistance/ presence was light to nil to the Regiment's front, though daily long-range patrols, some motorized, ranged out miles to reestablish contact.⁵⁴

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF TWIN TUNNEL

Prelude to Battle

The TWIN TUNNELS is an area some five miles south and east of CHIPYONG-NI and about a mile to the northwest of the village of SINCHON on the main rail line between SEOUL - CHIPYONG-NI - WONJU. It was so named because the line passes through two hill masses and two nearly identical tunnels, end to end, east - west. The road that serves the area crosses the tracks midway between the tunnels as it meanders on a northwest -southeast axis. From the small valley between the tunnels, "On the west side the ridge rose toward the south to the hill mass of which Hill 453 was a part, the ridge on the east side of the road sloped north to Hill 333. Between these two ridges were a stream, terraced rice paddies, and scattered Lombardy poplars, all typical of the Korean

landscape "55

General Ridgway's preoccupation with and commitment to an early resumption of offensive operations was well understood in the Eighth Army. The X Corps (US) Operations Instruction Number 82, published 27 January 1951, among other things, directed the 2nd US Infantry Division "to intensify patrolling in the Eastern portion of assigned area to 12 miles north of present MLR [main line of resistance]." 56 General Freeman recalls that "we were at MOKYE-DONG for a few days . . . then began an intensive period of patrolling." 57

Concurrent with the return of 2nd Battalion to Regimental control and its occupation of the patrol base at MUNMANG-NI, the Regiment was given the mission of patrolling "the road leading west from WONJU to the East bank of the HAN River." 58 This particular axis is the approach into the X Corps (US) sector from the SEOUL area to the northwest. Though contact with the enemy was lost or only incompletely maintained after the threat to WONJU was reduced, concern about the unidentified Chinese formations believed to be in the YOJU area and positioned around SEOUL had to be addressed. The X Corps (US) main effort was still oriented to the north

(WONJU - HOENGSONG - HONGCHON - CHUNCHON); however, the vulnerable left flank/boundary was not slighted. The 23rd Infantry Regiment was given the "particular requirement ... location of the Chinese Forty-Second Army."⁵⁹ To adapt the tactical scheme of maneuver to the intensified patrol operations, 1st Battalion established a patrol base at IHO-RI, on the east bank of the HAN River in sector, and the French Battalion opened a patrol base north of MUNMANG-NI.⁶⁰

The Enemy Is Found

On 28 January, 1st Battalion sent a mounted patrol, in compliance with a X Corps (US) order, to the area of the TWIN TUNNELS where Chinese forces were believed to be.⁶¹ The patrol objective lay some 20 air miles from the closest friendly element and was 40 road miles from the Regiment.⁶² The TWIN TUNNELS area is about 5 miles south and east of the communications hub of CHIPYONG-NI. The Corps order directed that elements of the 24th US Infantry Division would participate in the patrol;

however, late receipt of the order, unfordability of the HAN River, and an absence of bridging for even light vehicles precluded participation by the 24th US Infantry Division. The Regiment's patrol, covered by a light observation aircraft, proceeded on alone to the objective. "To the surprise of higher headquarters [X Corps (US)] the patrol which had conducted its mission with great skill and thoroughness returned late in the day with no enemy contact",⁶³ but it had seen the enemy in the distance,⁶⁴ moving away to avoid contact or observation. The X Corps (US) ordered a second patrol the following day, 29 January, to return to the TWIN TUNNELS area to contact the enemy, but to avoid combat with any larger force.⁶⁵ The timely receipt of the patrol order allowed the necessary coordination for the augmentation by soldiers from the 24th US Infantry Division, though Regiment would have to provide all transportation. The details of the events and circumstances of the second patrol are recorded in Gugeler's classic account of small unit actions in Korea, Combat Actions in Korea: Infantry, Artillery, Armor.⁶⁶ The mounted patrol of 44 officers and men departed the 1st Battalion base at 0900 hours, 29 January, rendezvoused with 15 soldiers of the 21st Infantry Regiment that had crossed the ice of

the HAN River at IHO-RI and proceeded to the patrol objective area some 15 miles away.⁶⁷ Again, an observation aircraft flew aerial cover, but was initially hampered by the morning fog and ground haze characteristic of that area. The temperature hovered just above zero degrees Fahrenheit as the patrol started out. Though contact with the enemy had not suggested an imminent threat of any proportion, the patrol went prepared. In addition to the individual rifles and carbines, the patrol had eight Browning Automatic Rifles, one 75mm recoilless rifle, one 57mm recoilless rifle, one 3.5" rocket launcher, one 60mm mortar, two caliber .50 machine guns and four caliber .30 machine guns.⁶⁸

As the patrol approached the objective area and drew abreast of Hill 453 on its left, the dominant terrain in the area, Captain Melvin R. Stai, the Assistant Battalion Operations Officer, who was accompanying the patrol to ease coordination with the 21st Infantry Regiment elements, offered to proceed alone to SINCHON to check out the area and to speed things up to get the patrol back on its schedule.⁶⁹ Captain Stai and his driver were never heard from again.⁷⁰ At about 1300 hours, the screening aircraft observed "suspicious signs and movement in the objective area,"

but could not make contact with the patrol because Stal had the compatible radio.⁷¹ The patrol continued on to the vicinity of the tracks between the tunnels and dismounted to reconnoiter the tunnels and the adjacent high ground. In rapid succession, the patrol saw and took under fire 15-20 enemy soldiers who were evading to the north (Hill 333); the aerial observer saw the evading soldiers and an enemy company on Hill 453; and the patrol was taken under fire by mortars, automatic weapons and small arms.⁷² The aerial observer tried again unsuccessfully to warn off the patrol. The enemy on Hill 453 rushed down to the road, closing off the patrol's escape. With escape denied, the patrol leader, Lieutenant James P. Mitchell, ordered his men to take up defensive positions on the ridge over the eastern tunnel.⁷³ The patrol won a foot race with the enemy for possession of the high ground and drew into a tight perimeter to make a stand. The patrol had to leave many of its heavy weapons and some of its ammunition on the vehicles when it moved to the high ground. It lost 12 men in getting into the perimeter.⁷⁴ Through the afternoon and evening, the patrol repulsed assaults from all sides by at least two companies of enemy soldiers.⁷⁵ The Regimental Command Report for January 1951

estimated the enemy force to be two battalions, effectively placing a regiment in the TWIN TUNNELS area.⁷⁶ The aerial observer stayed on station and coordinated air strikes to support the encircled patrol. An attempt was made to drop ammunition and medical supplies to the patrol from an observation aircraft; small amounts were recovered.⁷⁷ As soon as the report of the ambush was received at Regiment, approximately 1300 hours, a rescue was organized around Captain Stanley C. Tyrrell and his Company F, reinforced with heavy weapons from Company H. The rescue patrol arrived in the vicinity of Hill 453 at dusk, approximately 1730 hours, and went to work.⁷⁸

After clearing Hill 453, the linchpin in the enemy positions in the area, Company F attacked to effect link-up.⁷⁹ Company F was to fight through an estimated two battalions before effecting link-up and relief of the beleaguered patrol.⁸⁰ At about midnight, the enemy had had enough and withdrew, and evacuation of the survivors of the ambushed patrol began.⁸¹

The patrols reached the Regiment at MUNMANG-NI at daybreak, 30 January, "to find the regiment on the move."⁸² Unit records and Guegler both refer to the enemy force as Chinese, though the basis of that

determination can only be presumed. Enemy casualties were unknown, but it is believed that "the enemy pay[ed] dearly for his ambush."⁸³ Of the 48 soldiers who made it to the perimeter over the eastern tunnel, "thirty-odd" were wounded.⁸⁴

At mid-day, 29 January, while the patrol action raged at the TWIN TUNNELS, Regiment was ordered forward to take up defensive positions on the line, YOJU - MUNMANG-NI, by 301800 January to block an anticipated attack down the HAN River Corridor.⁸⁵ The laborious movement down off snowy mountains and out of prepared positions that began straight-away was interrupted later in the evening by a change of orders that sought to capitalize on the opportunity presented by a confirmed enemy presence at the TWIN TUNNELS. The Regiment was to move on 31 January with two battalions to the TWIN TUNNELS area "to find and destroy the enemy there and to occupy the high ground."⁸⁶

The Battle

The 3rd and French Battalions were safely diverted into an assembly area in the vicinity of CHONGAM-NI, a village approximately four miles

south of the TWIN TUNNELS, late in the afternoon of 30 January after hurried foot and motor marches. General Freeman recalled that, except for the leading elements of the advance guard, a premium was on speed of movement and the niceties of movement control were ignored or finessed.⁸⁷ In addition to the two battalions of Infantry, the Regiment would take its advanced command group, Mortar and Medical Companies, a platoon of Tank Company that arrived during the night after a forced march from CHECHON and Battery B, 82nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion to the TWIN TUNNELS. The attached 2nd Reconnaissance Company would provide route security on the MSR, from the rear of the Regiment back to the trains. The 37th Field Artillery Battalion (-) was in direct support, initially from KORUN-NI. First Battalion was in reserve, occupying defensive positions from KORUN-NI to MUNMANG-NI (command post at IHO-RI) and provided close defense for the artillery with one company. Second Battalion, supported by one artillery battery, was retained under Division control in the vicinity of MUNMANG-NI. The Regimental Command Post (Rear) was at MUNMANG-NI under the Executive Officer; Service Company (and the trains) were at MOKYE-DONG.⁸⁸

The operations order for the movement to contact was issued in the Regimental assembly area during the evening of 30 January. The night passed uneventfully for all elements. The day's aerial reconnaissance found no activity or presence in or around the TWIN TUNNELS.⁸⁹

The Regiment fed a pre-dawn hot breakfast in the assembly area before moving out at 0630 hours, 31 January, to reach the line of departure.⁹⁰ The French Battalion led the regimental column to the line of departure which was crossed at 1000 hours.⁹¹ The scheme of maneuver was simple and straight-forward: the Regiment would advance with battalions abreast, the French Battalion on the left (west) and the 3rd Battalion on the right (east); combat vehicles and combat support and combat service support elements would creep forward on the road as the Infantry secured the flanks.⁹² The Regiment had taken the full measure of the enemy and understood full well that control of the dominating ridges and hill masses was critical to the security of the force and that the enemy was a master of concealment, avoiding contact or discovery until he was ready to initiate contact. The commander's concept was solid: each Infantry battalion would move through a succession of intermediate objectives that

coincided with the key or dominating terrain on either side of the KORUN-NI - TWIN TUNNELS - CHIPYONG-NI road.⁹³ As an intermediate objective was secured, a base of fire was established to cover the continuation of the march. As expected, the advance was slow and methodical, compounded by the steep terrain, snowy slopes, heavy loads and bitter cold. Colonel Freeman had directed that heavy coats and extra blankets be left with the trains; cold soldiers might be uncomfortable, but they would be alert and ready to fight.⁹⁴ The soldiers understood the necessity of carrying all the ammunition and hand grenades that they could carry; the individual loads were heavy. The combat vehicles on the road in the valley floor were prepared to provide overwatching/supporting direct fires in the event of contact. The 37th Field Artillery (-), protected by Company B, displaced forward in the early afternoon from KORUN-NI to WONCHON to be able to range the column and the objective area. In the event, neither the advancing Infantry nor aerial observation found the enemy during the march.⁹⁵

The French Battalion had the more difficult terrain to negotiate and, *de facto*, set the pace for the march. Additionally, the commander whose *nom*

de guerre was General Monclar, in fact a French lieutenant general who had taken a reduction in rank to lieutenant colonel to accompany the battalion to Korea, had difficulty on the march. Monclar, "the most wounded the most decorated French officer of World War I [II]," had been wounded 13 times and had a bad leg that plagued him on difficult marches, though he insisted on marching with his battalion.⁹⁶ Colonel Freeman was sensitive to the absolute requirement for mutual support between all elements and for the significance of Hill 453 to the entire operation.⁹⁷ The French Battalion had to secure Hill 453 before either 3rd Battalion or the column could safely move into the TWIN TUNNELS area proper. The closure on the objective area was, in essence, a double envelopment: supported by a base of fire from Hill 453 and the combat vehicles of the column, the French Battalion converged from the west; the 3rd Battalion, from the east.⁹⁸ Having found no enemy, the Regiment established a tight perimeter for the night at the TWIN TUNNELS at 1630 hours, 31 January.⁹⁹

During the afternoon, 2nd Battalion's Company E screened the Regiment's right flank along the railroad tracks, on the line MUNMANG-NI - ANCHANG-NI - SOKKONG-NI.¹⁰⁰ Visual contact was established

periodically during the afternoon with 3rd Battalion; after making contact with 3rd Battalion at 1830 hours, the company returned to its parent battalion at MUNMANG-NI.¹⁰¹ First Battalion, less Company B with the artillery at WONCHON, remained in the vicinity of IHO-RI.¹⁰²

Though the enemy had not been located, Colonel Freeman was convinced that they were near.¹⁰³ The lateness of the hour increased the concern for getting the perimeter defense tightly organized as soon as possible. Preparations were made for continuing the movement to contact the next day.¹⁰⁴

The perimeter that was centered on the two tunnels was nearly circular, about one mile in diameter. It was drawn up on high ground that encircled the intersection of the road and railroad tracks between the tunnels. The key or dominating terrain incorporated into the perimeter included Hill 453 on the southwest face, Hill 279 on the west face and portions of Hill 333 on the northeast face. Hill 453 was the critical terrain in the area and its incorporation into the frontline trace created a small bulge or salient in the line that caused the defenders to be somewhat isolated from the rest of the perimeter. The road that ran

nearly north to south through the perimeter was the boundary between the two infantry battalions. The French Battalion was to the west; the 3rd Battalion to the east. Hill 453, slightly outside the neat circle that generally described the perimeter, was the dominant terrain in the area and was essential to the defense.¹⁰⁵ The 1st Company, French Battalion, occupied Hill 453 on the southwest face of the perimeter. Hill 279 on the western face of the perimeter was occupied by 2nd Company, French Battalion. The small valley between Hills 453 and 279 would be covered by fire from those two hills and would be blocked by Support Company, French Battalion. The 3rd Company, French Battalion, occupied positions from atop the western tunnel to the road where it exited the perimeter on the northwest. Company L tied into 3rd Company's right flank and was oriented due north with its own right flank sharply refused to tie into Company I on the lower slopes of Hill 333. Company K was oriented to the southeast, responsible for the rather large gap between its position and the adjacent 1st Company; the responsibility included the road entering the perimeter from the southeast. Tanks and self-propelled guns from Battery B established roadblocks on road on either side of the perimeter

The Regimental Mortar Company was prepared to fire in defense of the perimeter or in defense of the artillery position at WONCHON. The artillery's defensive targets and final protective fires for the perimeter were fired, adjusted and recorded.¹⁰⁶ Heavy mortar defensive targets and final protective fires for the artillery positions were similarly fired, adjusted, and recorded. Positioning of the artillery and the heavy mortars was made with a view toward mutual support between the two perimeters and considered the minimum effective ranges of the weapons and optimum ballistics.

Colonel Freeman was confident that the artillery at WONCHON with its additional support and heavy weapons could take care of itself.¹⁰⁷ In addition to the usual compliment with the artillery, Regiment had displaced unneeded vehicles back to the artillery positions so the drivers augmented and reinforced the close-in defenses.

"... Not too satisfied with the hasty defenses and over-extended position, the force settled down to a night of vigilance prior to a continuation of the attack."¹⁰⁸

Shortly after dark settled, Colonel Freeman noted [warming] fires in

the French positions and reluctantly had to "reprimand" General Monclier to get the fires extinguished.¹⁰⁹ The embarrassment and discomfort may have been exacerbated by the fact that the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Stewart, had accompanied the Regiment to experience his first fire fight.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, the damage was done, and the French positions were compromised. General Freeman recalled that the French were more concerned about the terrible cold than the enemy.¹¹¹

The Regimental Journal records "NTR" (nothing to report) from either the perimeter or Company B with the artillery for the evening.¹¹² Then, at 0450 hours, 1 February, small arms and mortar fire were reported to the north at a distance of two miles.¹¹³ In fact, the firing was at the roadblock between 3rd Company and Company L against a M4 tank and a M19 dual-40 flack gun. At 0453 hours, Company L reported heavy firing from its front¹¹⁴ and the first of several determined assaults. Supported by both mortar and artillery fires, Company L repulsed the assaults. Illumination and pursuing indirect fires and sporadic small arms fire forced the enemy to seek cover.¹¹⁵ A lull fell over Company L's front.

The two armored vehicles from the northwestern roadblock, both partially disabled and with wounded crewmen, returned to the center of the perimeter at 0505 hours.¹¹⁶ The tank commander reported that a "long column of enemy had marched right up the road to the block, that they had been fired on by both ... armored vehicles inflicting heavy casualties, that the enemy had then deployed on each side of the road immediately on being fired upon and had attacked the armored vehicles with bazookas (2 36" rocket launchers) and grenades."¹¹⁷

The enemy's attack coming some two hours before daylight was unusual, for he normally struck in the middle of the night when he would be less vulnerable to the full weight of supporting fires and air strikes. The Regimental Command Group concluded: the enemy had sufficient forces at hand to press his attack after daylight without fear of supporting fires, the attack was hurriedly put together from forces quickly assembled and a vital area or objective was threatened by the Regiment's unexpected appearance at the TWIN TUNNELS.¹¹⁸ In fact, documents taken from a dead officer and prisoner interrogations later in the day supported the initial analysis of the situation. Later, Regiment

would learn that it was attacked by the 125th Division of the 42nd Army with approximately 8,000 men that were assembled in the vicinity of CHIPYONG-NI to prepare for offensive operations.¹¹⁹ The elusive Chinese had been found. In the course of the day's fight, all three regiments of the 125th Division would be engaged--and destroyed. The 375th Regiment was the force that marched into the roadblock at 0450 hours to start the fight and would continue to attack the north face of the perimeter throughout the day. The 374th Regiment marched south along the high ground that led into the Company L positions and would spend the day attacking from the east. The 373rd Regiment had come cross-country from the CHIPYONG-NI area to attack from the west and southwest.¹²⁰

Strangely, the Chinese assaults launched during the hours of darkness occurred without the usual and expected whistles, bugles and horns, but the "field music" accompaniment started at daybreak and would herald each new assault during the day.¹²¹

Day broke heavily overcast and gray with low ceilings and limited visibility.¹²² Daybreak also brought a continuation of the attacks around the perimeter. Until mid to late afternoon when the issue was finally

resolved, action would be continuous with no significant lulls in the action anywhere. Additionally, artillery and mortar fires would become a normal and expected part of the din of the battlefield. The volume and intensity of supporting fires is difficult to imagine and impossible to explain.

At 0520 hours, Company L was again under heavy attack,¹²³ but was dealing with the problem.

The seriousness of the developing contact was appreciated at Division, and Regiment was advised around 0600 hours that it had priority for air support when conditions improved and that air support would be on station as soon as possible.¹²⁴

The tempo of battle dramatically peaked at 0605 hours; Company L reported that it was now being hit with "banzai" attacks, accompanied by bugles and "noise;" and 1st Company reported heavy attacks that would continue unabated for the next three hours or so against Hill 453.¹²⁵ The attacks against Hill 453 were initially developed on a narrow front and generated considerable mass.¹²⁶ These attacks were supported by mortar fires that were not particularly effective,¹²⁷ but that would fall on the perimeter through the day. It was learned later that few mortar rounds

were brought forward by the enemy; Colonel Freeman believed that the enemy was fully confident that his numbers and small arms alone could carry the day.¹²⁸

Supporting artillery and mortars took a terrific toll of the enemy¹²⁹ and were instrumental in the successful defense of the TWIN TUNNELS. Additionally, the armored vehicles of the platoon of Tank Company and of Battery B were able to engage the enemy in the intervals between companies and within some friendly positions through the day.

Company L was still hard pressed at 0620 hours and offered an updated situation report citing more "bonzei" attacks supported by small arms, automatic weapons and mortar fires.¹³⁰ The company, though stressed, was holding.

At 0800 hours, the attack on Company L lapped over onto Company I.¹³¹ The contact was reported as heavy. Colonel Freeman recalled that the attacks were launched from Hill 333, a key terrain feature that afforded the enemy superior position on the ground, but that was never fully exploited.¹³² The assaults continued to push up the steepest slopes in the Company I sector and cost the enemy heavily. Both companies repulsed

wave after wave of Chinese.¹³³ The 400 - 500 yard gap between the companies was being given considerable attention by the enemy and would create problems for the defense later in the day.

At the same time, Company K got its first heavy attack, but was able to repulse it with no particular difficulty. Through the day, Company K would not be as battered as some of the other companies, but would get "the bulk of the enemy's mortar fire."¹³⁴

At 0815 hours, Regiment was advised that Company I was losing ground on its left flank.¹³⁵

At 0815 hours, Colonel Freeman ordered 1st Battalion to move to the perimeter. He also directed 3rd Battalion to try to restore its lines, for fires from Chinese in the gap between Companies I and L were falling inside the perimeter. The situation on Hill 453 was reported "easing off."¹³⁶

Division released 2nd Battalion and its direct support artillery battery to Regimental control at 0845 hours and was ordered to move soonest to 1st Battalion's position at IHQ-RI.¹³⁷ Second Battalion put Company E (+) on the road almost immediately; however, the remainder of the Battalion

and Headquarters Company (Regimental Rear) would have to shuttle by truck and would not close IHO-RI before darkness.¹³⁸

At 0855 hours, the Regimental Rear Command Post attempted the first of several ground ammunition resupply missions.¹³⁹ The only ground resupply mission that made it to the perimeter closed at 1100 hours and consisted of four trucks of ammunition.¹⁴⁰

At 0900 hours, 3rd Battalion reported that the situation at Companies I and L was critical and that any help possible was needed.¹⁴¹ Little was available.

The enemy did not entirely depart from his familiar patterns, for an enveloping force of undetermined size had worked south of the perimeter. Company B cleared out a roadblock discovered just north of the artillery positions at WONCHON and reported that enemy were on the ridges above the artillery positions. The company was ordered back to the artillery positions to be ready to defend the guns. At 0915 hours, Company B was in contact at the artillery positions.¹⁴² Additionally, firing was heard to the south of the perimeter, leading to a presumption that a second roadblock might be in place and the MSR might be cut. In fact, the road had been

interdicted, for vehicles trying to go to the rear were fired on and turned back at 1003 hours.¹⁴³

A crisis was developing in the French Battalion's sector. At 0930 hours, 1st Company was engaged in hand-to-hand combat on Hill 453.¹⁴⁴ Ammunition was starting to run low and casualties were mounting after almost three hours of steady fighting.¹⁴⁵ Colonel Freeman recalled that as the positions on Hill 453 were becoming untenable, the 1st Company counterattacked at 1020 hours with the bayonet.¹⁴⁶ The French showed a flair and esprit that are the stuff of melodrama, except that it was real. The French Battalion included many Foreign Legionnaires in its ranks, and the Legion traditions and customs were internalized. The troopers discarded their helmets and fought bareheaded or in Legion *kepis*, the officers tied red scarves around their heads and led bayonet assaults shouting "Camerone," the Legion battlecry.¹⁴⁷ The shock of the bayonet assault tipped the scale in favor of 1st Company, for the issue on Hill 453 was never again seriously in doubt. By about 1130 hours, the 1st Company had restored its positions with a bitter hand-to-hand counterattack.¹⁴⁸ Though 1st Company would be engaged for the rest of the day, the crisis on

Hill 453 was over by noon. The 373rd Regiment would shift its efforts elsewhere.

The enemy established two company size roadblocks south of the perimeter, one between 1st Battalion and the artillery and one between the artillery and the perimeter. The armored patrols of the 2nd Reconnaissance Company located both sometime about daybreak.¹⁴⁹ The 1st Battalion would deal with both as it moved up to join the Regiment at the TWIN TUNNELS.

As the 1st Company's fight was reaching its climax on Hill 453, Company L reported at 1023 hours that it was having to give ground. Though the line was stretching, it never completely broke; and local counterattacks restored the position at 1200 hours.¹⁵⁰ Pressure remained heavy on Company L, however.

Colonel Freeman recalled "with our inability to employ air, and our rapidly diminishing ammunition as a result of the tremendous fire required to stop [his] human sea attacks, [he] almost succeeded."¹⁵¹ The heavy volume of fire that was maintained was almost continuous around the perimeter.

Having failed to break 1st Company on Hill 453, the enemy shifted his attacks late in the morning to the valley between 1st and 2nd Companies and against the positions of 3rd Company on Hill 279. Support Company's blocking position in the small valley between 1st and 2nd Companies kept the waves of attacking Chinese from breaking into the perimeter, but took exceptionally heavy casualties, including the company commander, in so doing.¹⁵² The arrival of the rest of Tank Company with nine M4 tanks in the late morning and the subsequent posting of one platoon with Support Company finally determined the issue.¹⁵³

The 3rd Company came under heavy attack about 1030 hours and was briefly driven off its positions but successfully counterattacked at 1205 hours to restore its line.¹⁵⁴ Company L's left flank was left dangerously exposed for a time. During the brief time that the enemy occupied 3rd Company's positions, he placed heavy machinegun fire on Company L, the Regimental command post and the aid station and the vehicle park.¹⁵⁵ In fact, several counterattacks were necessary to restore the 3rd Company position. At this time, the entire perimeter was heavily engaged and neither reinforcement nor a shift in forces was possible.¹⁵⁶ Every

available man had already been committed to the line.

The noon hour brought no rest nor refreshment, but it is possible now to see that the momentum of battle was slowly starting to shift in favor of the Regiment. All counterattacks had been successful and the line was holding, reinforcing tanks had made it into the perimeter and had come on line and the skies were starting to clear. Regiment was advised at 1220 hours that its first of two emergency aerial resupply missions with ammunition, radio batteries, gasoline, water and medical supplies was scheduled for 1430 hours.¹⁵⁷ The first airdrop was to go in near SINCHON in Company K's sector, the second near 1st Company. Additionally, the first three of some 80 sorties¹⁵⁸ of close air support to be flown in support of the perimeter reported on station at 1338 hours and were vectored to support Company I.¹⁵⁹

At 1300 hours, Regiment called the rear to send as many litters, blankets and ambulances forward as could be gathered to deal with the mounting casualties.¹⁶⁰

The furious attacks continued against the French Battalion, and 2nd Company was pushed off its positions at 1400 hours. Within

approximately an hour's time, local counterattacks pushed home with the bayonet, supported by heavy direct fires from tanks, flack guns of Battery B and air strikes, regained the lost positions.¹⁶¹ Characteristically, the fighting was at very close range and neither asked for nor gave quarter.

By 1400 hours, 1st Battalion (-) had assembled its scattered elements and was on the road to join the Regiment. Companies A and C began a foot march immediately following the order to join the perimeter at 0830 hours and closed at 1515 hours to reinforce the defense.¹⁶²

Second Battalion, with its supporting artillery battery, began to move at 1430 hours to occupy 1st Battalion's vacated positions at IHD-R1¹⁶³ and was expected to close at 1900 hours.¹⁶⁴

The actual crisis at TWIN TUNNELS occurred sometime between 1400 hours and 1500 hours. The centers of both battalions were in imminent danger of breaking, casualties were heavy and growing, ammunition was dangerously low, the enemy was able to place direct fire inside the perimeter, no reserves remained to commit to the firing line, and further shifting of forces was out of the question.¹⁶⁵ An inner perimeter had been designated over the eastern tunnel, though it would be simply an area for a

last stand¹⁶⁶

In rapid succession, the arrival of close air support, reinforcing infantry and continued success in mounting local counterattacks finally broke the Chinese.

By 1700 hours, with sporadic firing still going on around the perimeter, the enemy was clearly trying to break contact and get away. Air strikes were punishing any enemy formations that were seen. Artillery, adjusted by aerial observers, was pursuing the enemy. Tanks and flak guns moved out of the perimeter to add their fires to the pursuit by fire. Infantry patrols swept the areas in and around the defensive positions to deal with stragglers. The French were occupied until 1800 hours in clearing the valley between 1st and 2nd Companies.¹⁶⁷

In the last hour of daylight and first few hours of the evening, the Regiment consolidated its positions and set about reorganizing the defense. Casualties were collected, treated and evacuated to the rear at YDUU. Supplies from the airdrops were collected and distributed.

The 1st Battalion (-) closed the perimeter at 1830 hours, having cleared the MSR enroute. Company E (+) closed at 1900 hours, with the

rest of 2nd Battalion expected by 0200 hours the following morning. The detached artillery battery was returned to its parent battalion.¹⁶⁸

A resumption of the furious attacks was expected during the night of 1-2 February, so the Regiment made every possible preparation to repel an attack. Strangely, the enemy again did the unexpected and neither attacked nor maintained contact.¹⁶⁹ The night passed quietly, if not restfully. Only one entry in the S3 Journal suggests an anticlimactic bit of excitement: at 2030 hours, 10 rounds of artillery fire fell in Company L's position. The matter was passed to the artillery for counterbattery fire.¹⁷⁰

The Regiment spent 2 February consolidating, refitting and patrolling. There was light patrol action on the approaches to CHIPYONG-NI, however, the day was quiet.

The 125th Chinese Division had been destroyed. In addition to an actual count of 1300 enemy dead immediately to the front of the perimeter (600 in front of 3rd Battalion, 300 on Hill 453 and 400 in front of the rest of the French Battalion), an estimated additional 3600 casualties were evacuated by the withdrawing enemy or were never located.¹⁷¹ The

Regiment suffered 225 casualties, wounded and killed.¹⁷² General Freeman recalls that General Ridgway flew out to the TWIN TUNNELS on 2 February, perhaps a bit doubtful of the reports passed from Regiment to higher headquarters. General Ridgway left a believer.¹⁷³

On 3 February, the Regiment, fully assembled again and refitted, was ordered to continue its movement to contact in the direction of CHIPYONG-NI "to dominate the road center of CHIPYONG-NI and occupy the high ground in the vicinity so as to protect the right flank of the IX Corps and establish the western anchor of a X Corps line of departure for the offensive."¹⁷⁴

At CHIPYONG-NI, the 23rd Infantry Regiment would meet five divisions of the 42nd Army under conditions nearly identical to those at the TWIN TUNNELS. The Regiment would deal the Chinese Communist Forces their first decisive operational defeat at CHIPYONG-NI just as it had dealt the Chinese their first decisive tactical defeat at the TWIN TUNNELS.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The single, timeless truth that emerges from the study of any engagement or battle is that man, not systems, wins or loses the action. Systems, including doctrine, force structure, organization, and so forth, properly contribute to and support man's endeavors, but are not -- and should not be -- the end.

The command reports of all echelons concerned with the TWIN TUNNELS and CHIPYONG-NI have examined and addressed the specific and particular lessons learned or relearned. To restate the obvious-- that a successful perimeter defense depends on a comprehensive plan for the mutual support by and between all elements and supporting fires or that the skillful use

of terrain affords a positional advantage-- seems trivial, though absolutely true

Leadership must be tactically and technically proficient, but successful combat commanders all seem to share other characteristics that include the ability to adapt to prevailing conditions and situations, to be flexible in their thinking, to be comfortable with risk on the battlefield, and to be supremely confident in themselves and their organizations. In the final analysis, no template exists to measure or identify the successful combat commander, but their traits and characteristics are proclaimed by their accomplishments.

Successful organizations and units must also be judged by their accomplishments, rather than by some formula. The things that contribute to making a successful organization include: strong leadership at all levels; confidence and trust in one's leaders and comrades; that something called esprit that defies neat definition; respect up and down the chain of command; proficiency with one's weapons and equipment, and courage in generous measure. Those that have "it" are easy to identify, as are those that do not. At the TWIN TUNNELS, the 23rd Infantry Regiment had "it."

Perhaps the Commanding General, Eighth United States Army,
Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway, should provide the concluding
observation:

Among the many tough engagements fought in those three weeks (January 31 - February 18), none was conducted with greater skill, gallantry, and tenacity than that fought by the 23rd Regimental Combat Team (with the intrepid Monclar's French Battalion attached, Colonel (now General) Paul L. Freeman commanding . . . I never had the slightest doubt over the outcome of this battle.¹⁷⁵

ENDNOTES

1. Interview with Paul L. Freeman, Jr., GEN USA (Ret), telephone conversation Carlisle Barracks to Carmel, CA, October 1987.

2. The task organization that normally composed the 23rd Regimental Combat Team included: the 23rd Infantry Regiment, the French Battalion, the 37th Field Artillery Battalion and Battery B, 82nd Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion.

3. Headquarters, X Corps (US), Command Report, February 1951, pp. 1-2 of incl 1.

4. T. R. Fehrenbach, The Fight for Korea: From the War of 1950 to the Pueblo Incident, p. 84.

5. J. Lawton Collins, War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea, p. 217.

6. Ibid, p. 218.

7. Korean Ministry of National Defense, The History of the United Nations Forces in the Korean War, Volume II, p. 197.

8. Vincent J. Esposito, et al, The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Volume II, 1900 - 1953, Korea Map 10.

9. Matthew B. Ridgway, The Korean War: How We Met the Challenge, How All-Out Asian War Was Averted, Why MacArthur Was Dismissed, Why Today's War Objectives Must Be Limited, p. 79.

10. Ibid., p. 81.
11. Ibid., p. 82.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 83.
16. Ibid.
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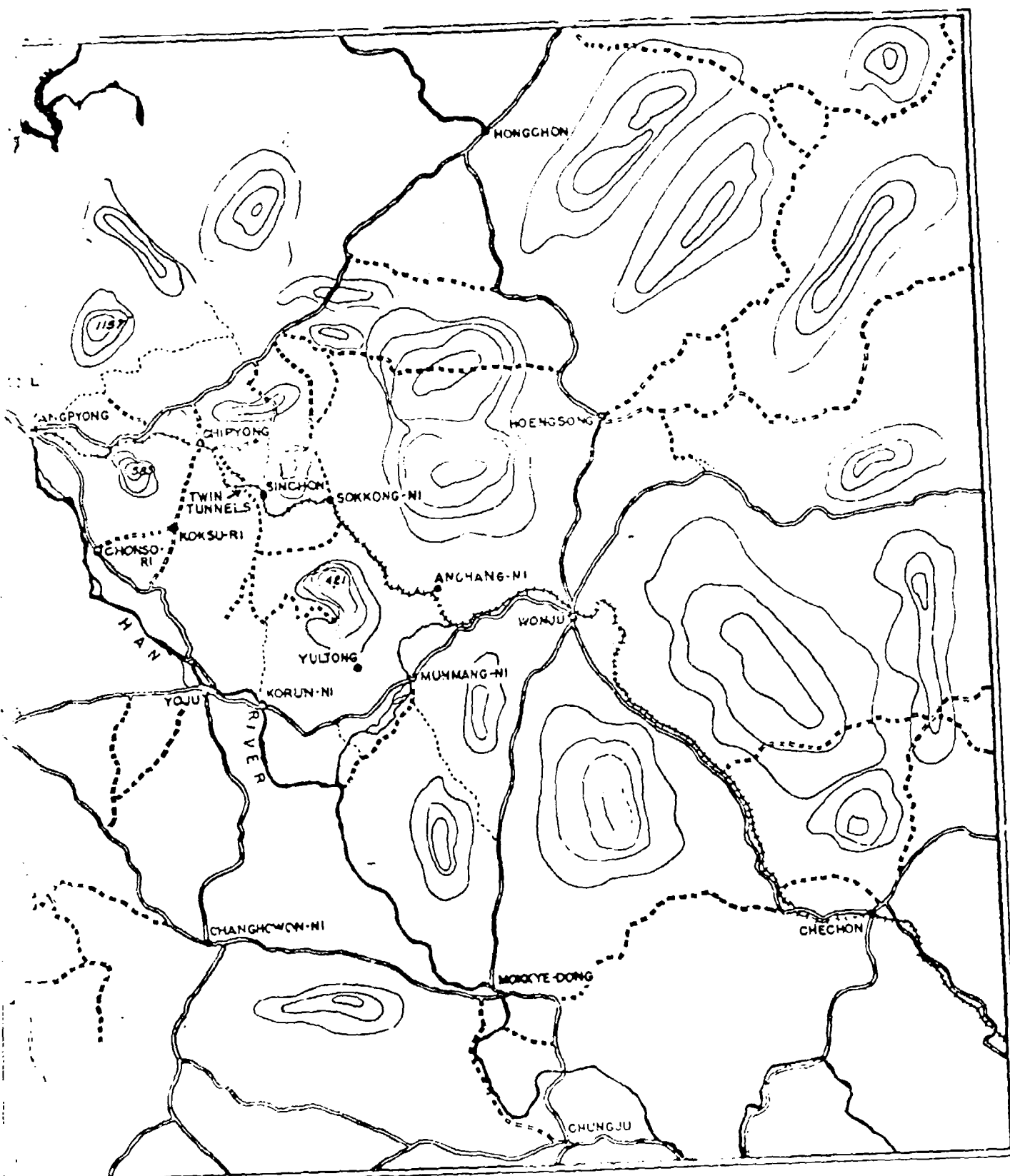
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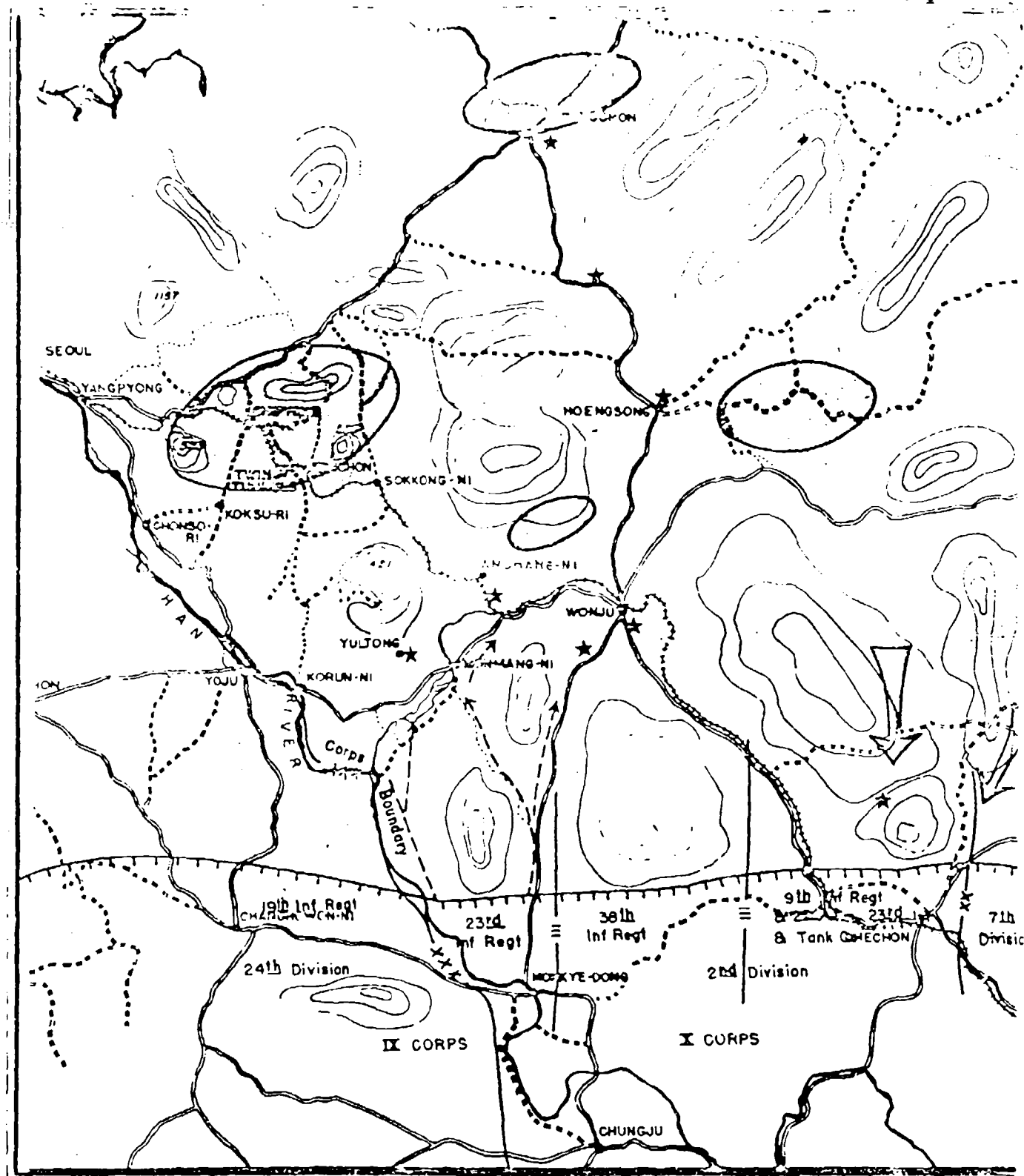


LEGEND

ROADS
RAILROADS
RIVERS

UNIMPROVED ROADS
TRAILS

FIGURE 1



LEGEND

--- HILLS
 --- RAILROADS
 --- RIVERS

--- IMPROVED ROADS
 --- TRAILS

0 1 2
 SCALE

I GENERAL SITUATION - JAN 15, 1951

★ BATTLES FOUGHT IN JANUARY
 ○ ENEMY CONCENTRATIONS
 --- PATROL ROUTES
 --- UN LINES

-FIGURE 2

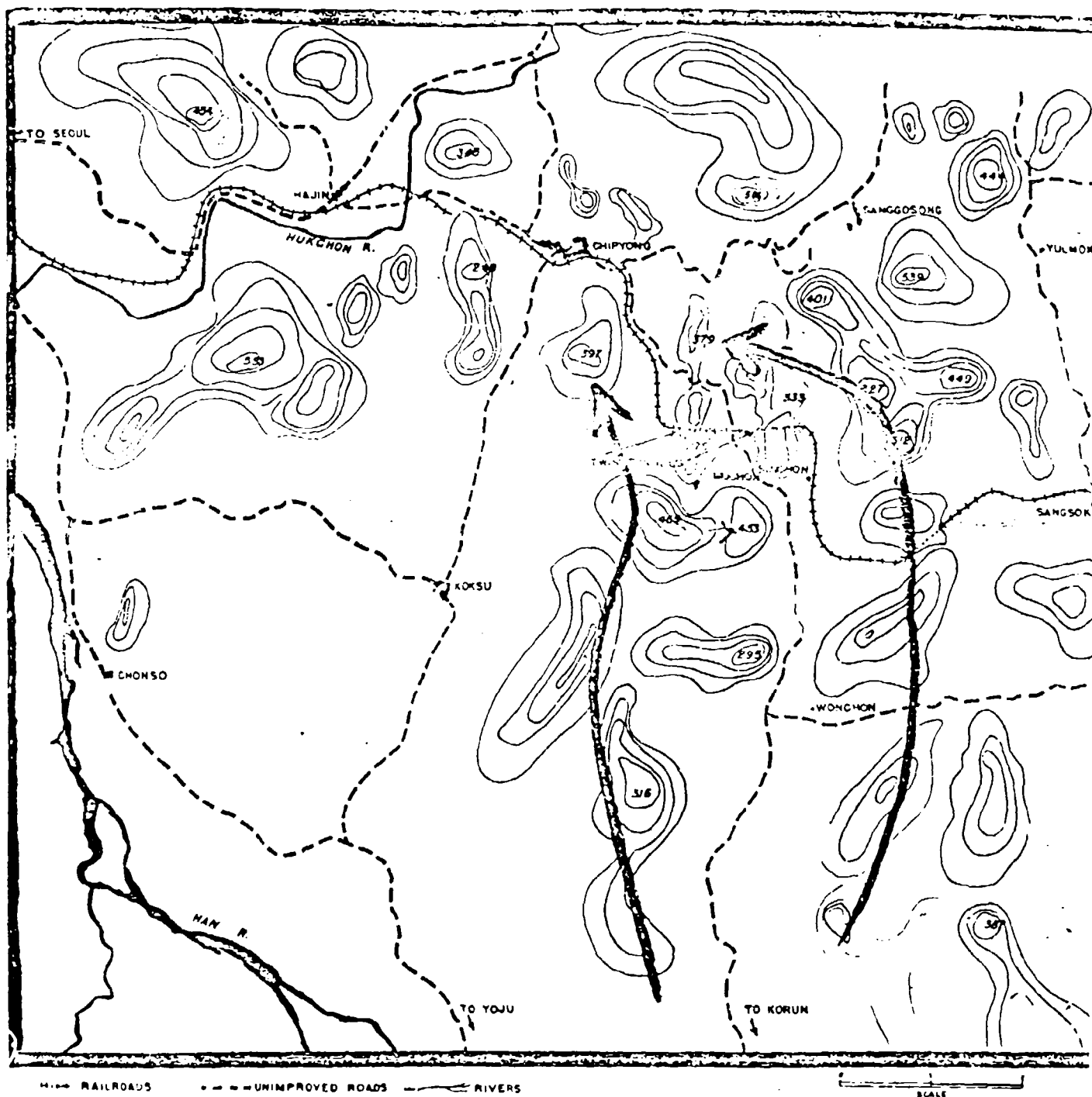
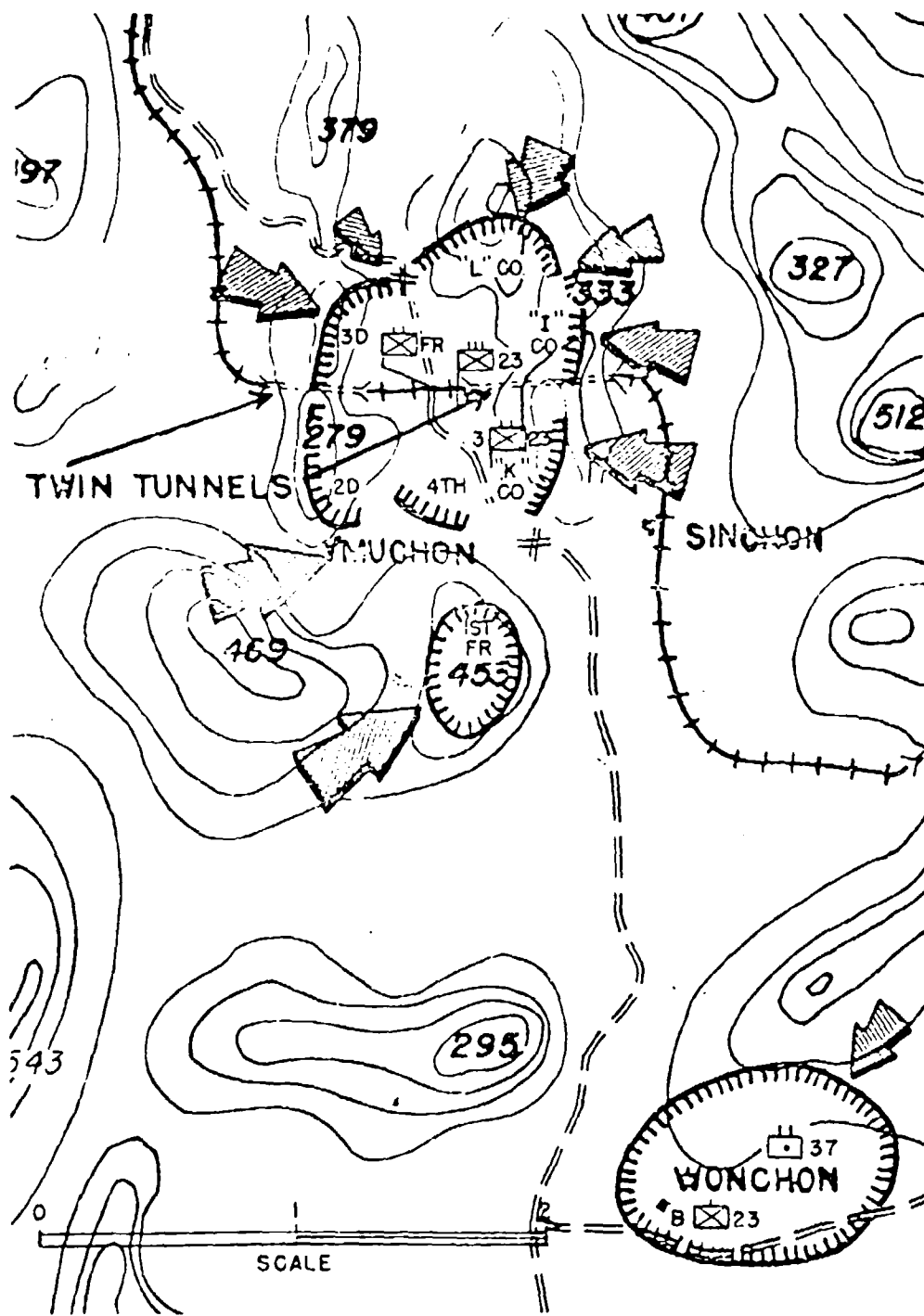


FIGURE 3



TWIN TUNNELS BATTLE
JAN 31 - FEB 1, 1951

LEGEND.

-  PERIMETER DEFENSE
-  ROAD BLOCKS
-  ENEMY ATTACKS

FIGURE 4