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MAJOR JOHN EMORY HURST, JR., USA

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ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD
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ON 1 AUGUST, 1950, 8TH ARMY WITHDREW BEHIND THE NATURAL BARRIER OF THE NAKTONG RIVER ON THE WEST AND THE MOUNTAINS FROM WAEGWAN TO POHANG DONG ON THE NORTH. HERE THE ARMY FOUGHT A DOGGED DEFENSE FOR 1 1/2 MONTHS. THE SCHEME BY WHICH 8TH ARMY WAS TO BREAK OUT OF THE PERIMETER INVOLVED A COORDINATED ATTACK ALL ALONG THE FRONT.

THE 24TH DIVISION WAS TO MAKE AN ASSAULT CROSSING OF THE NAKTONG RIVER.

IN TEN DAYS, ~~THE 24TH DIVISION~~ THE 24TH DIVISION AND ITS ATTACHED UNITS HAD CROSSED TWO RIVERS, DEFEATED AN ENEMY THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY PINNED THE DIVISION TO THE DEFENSIVE FOR TWO MONTHS, AND WERE ABOUT TO LAUNCH A PURSUIT THAT WOULD TAKE THE DIVISION IN AN UNINTERRUPTED ADVANCE TO THE FAR REACHES OF NORTH KOREA.

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CROSSING IN SEPTEMBER 1950

An abstract for a thesis presented to the Faculty of
the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree of

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by
JOHN EMORY HURST, JR., Major, U. S. Army

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
1964

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Approved for Publication by:

Joseph J. C. Smith, Research and Thesis Monitor
Walter D. McKee, Assistant Research and Thesis Monitor
Paul R. King, Assistant Research and Thesis Monitor

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At 0400 on the morning of 25 June 1950, the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) launched a violent attack across the 38th parallel against an ill-prepared Republic of Korea (ROK) army. Realizing that the South Koreans could not defend themselves, the United States through the United Nations reacted swiftly. On 2 July, a battalion task force, dispatched to Korea to delay the North Korean onslaught, contacted the enemy; but the outnumbered Americans were no match for the North Korean division spearheading the Communist attack down the Suwon-Taejon axis. The defeat of Task Force Smith north of Osan was the first reversal in a succession of defeats that were to follow while 8th Army sacrificed ground to gain time in an effort to build up its forces on the Korean Peninsula. By 12 July, the entire 24th Division had arrived in Korea; and within the next 1½ months, the 2d and 25th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Divisions had arrived together with the 1st Marine Brigade and two separate army regimental combat teams.

On 1 August, 8th Army withdrew behind the natural barrier of the Nakdong River on the west and the mountains from Waegwan to Pohang-dong on the north. Here the army fought a dogged defense for 1½ months while the NKPA bled itself in repeated attempts to drive 8th Army off the Korean Peninsula. As late as 8 September, Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker, Commanding General, 8th Army, was still shifting his forces to counter North Korean attempts to penetrate the perimeter. While 8th Army was fighting for its very existence in the Pusan

Perimeter, 8th Army staff officers were busily engaged in planning an operation to assume the offensive.

The scheme by which 8th Army was to break out of the perimeter involved a coordinated attack all along the front with 1st Corps making the main effort along the Taegu-Kumchon-Taejon-Suwon axis to link-up with 10th Corps which was to make an amphibious assault at Inchon. First Corps headquarters did not arrive in Korea until 6 September, yet became operational on 12 September. On 13 September the 1st Cavalry Division, the ROK 1st Division, the 5th RCT (less one battalion), and corps engineer support units were attached to 1st Corps. Not until the eve of the attack was General Walker able to shift the 3d Battalion, 5th RCT, to the Taegu sector; and it was after the attack had started when the 24th Division and engineer support units arrived in the area. General Walker could mass combat power under 1st Corps command only by piecemealing units into the area, for the entire 8th Army front was still under continuous pressure from the North Koreans.

On 16 September at 0900, 8th Army's Operation Plan 10 to break the North Korean's stranglehold on the defensive perimeter was implemented. At this time, the 5th RCT, that had been attached earlier to the 1st Cavalry Division, moved from its assembly area west of Taegu, attacked west from a shallow bridgehead across the Kumho River toward the Naktong River, then turned north and advanced toward Waegwan. By 18 September, all three battalions of the 5th RCT were committed in a full-scale assault on Hill 268, the commanding terrain south of Waegwan. Against stiff opposition, the 5th RCT stormed Hill 268 and secured Waegwan on 19 September. The following

day, the 2d Battalion, 5th RCT, occupied Hill 303, the high ground north of the town. With Hill 303 secured, the 5th RCT had cleared in five days the east bank of the Naktong River from west of Taegu to Waegwan.

The task to clear the Taegu-Waegwan road north of Taegu, a vital artery in any scheme to advance toward Taejon, fell to the 5th Cavalry Regiment. This regiment, like the 5th RCT, attacked on the morning of 16 September, but was stopped the same afternoon. In an effort to regain momentum, the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, was committed between the 5th Cavalry and the 5th RCT. Not until 19 September after bitter fighting did the 2d Battalion succeed in taking Hill 300, the controlling hill mass north of the Taegu-Waegwan road. With the enemy pushed north of Waegwan, the 5th RCT and the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, had secured the area through which the 24th Division was to pass in its assault crossing of the Naktong River.

Massing the 24th Division for a thrust to the west, however, was a complex gamble; for as late as 15 September, elements of the division were still in blocking positions in the vicinity of Kyongju. By 17 September, the division (less one battalion still in army reserve) had been assembled in the vicinity of Taegu. On this same day, the division received its mission: to force a crossing of the Naktong River in the vicinity of Hasan-dong, attack to the north and northwest to secure a bridgehead near Waegwan. The 21st Regiment, the only complete infantry regiment in the 24th Division at the time, was given the key role in the crossing. It was to cross the river at Hasan-dong and approximately 5,000 yards north and attack to the north after establishing a bridgehead. The 19th Infantry, together with the division

reconnaissance company, was to follow the 21st Infantry across the river and protect the approaches to the bridgehead from the west. But what had been carefully planned was to be altered drastically in the subsequent forty-eight hours, primarily because engineers had concentrated their attention on the Nakdong River and had overlooked an apparently innocuous stream--the Kumho River. The oversight had not been unintentional, however, because sufficient bridging to span only the Nakdong River was all that 8th Army could spare 1st Corps; the crossing of the Kumho and consequently the Nakdong were delayed.

Early in the afternoon of 18 September, the 21st Infantry started its motor march from the Taegu airstrip to assembly areas east of the crossing sites. By late afternoon, traffic on the single road from Taegu had backed up five miles from the Kumho River toward Taegu. The improved ford and one raft across the Kumho River proved insufficient to accomodate a regiment moving into the attack. Earlier in the afternoon, 24th Division staff officers became convinced that the 19th Regiment would never reach the river in time to support the 21st Regiment; therefore, the crossing plan was changed. The 21st Regiment would cross at only one site. Because the infantrymen did not start arriving at the crossing site until 2300 and assault boats did not arrive until 0400, Colonel Richard W. Stephens, Commanding Officer, 21st Regiment, postponed the crossing two times during the night and finally set a new H-hour at 0500 on the morning of 19 September. The 21st Regiment, crossing at daybreak, met stiff opposition initially, but once across the river had little difficulty in securing its bridgehead and advancing north on the west bank of the

river toward the Waegwan-Kumchon road. The 19th Regiment crossed the same day at 1600 at Hasan-dong, meeting no opposition on the west bank but suffering heavy casualties from mortar and artillery fire on the near shore.

On the morning of 20 September, the 24th Division had the elements of two regiments across the Naktong River; and by evening, the 5th RCT was crossing north of Waegwan. The line of communication, however, remained a problem. Earlier on 19 September, elements of the 11th and 14th Engineer Combat Battalions had combined efforts to improve the Kumho River crossing with semi-permanent bridge. In addition, starting at 0800 on 21 September and working for twenty-six hours, elements of the 11th and 3d Engineer Combat Battalions and the 55th Treadway Bridge Company constructed a float bridge across the Naktong River at Waegwan. As soon as the bridge opened on the morning of 22 September, an endless stream of 24th Division traffic moved over the bridge to the west throughout the remainder of the day. By midnight on 22 September, the bulk of the 24th Division was on the west side of the river moving toward Kumchon.

As the 24th Division stood poised to drive on Kumchon, however, the British Commonwealth 27th Brigade that had been attached to the division on 20 September and given the mission to seize Songju and protect the south flank of the division ran into unexpected resistance. Crossing the Naktong on 21 September under heavy artillery fire over a makeshift footbridge, the 27th Brigade advanced on Songju from the east. After an unsuccessful and costly attack to occupy the high ground east of Songju, the brigade withdrew into defensive

positions west of its crossing site. Songju was not secured until the following night when the 19th Regiment, advancing southwest from Waegwan and south from Pusang-dong, struck at the backbone of the North Korean defenses in the area. The two-pronged attack dissolved the last resistance that threatened the 24th Division's Naktong River bridgehead.

In ten days, starting with the 5th RCT's attack toward Waegwan and concluding with the 19th Regiment's securing Songju, the 24th Division and its attached units had crossed two rivers, defeated an enemy that had previously pinned the division to the defensive for two months, and were about to launch a pursuit that would take the division in an uninterrupted advance to the far reaches of North Korea.

THE 24TH INFANTRY DIVISION'S NAKTONG RIVER
CROSSING IN SEPTEMBER 1950

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U. S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree of

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by
JOHN EMORY HURST, JR., Major, U. S. Army

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
1964

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Name of Candidate: JOHN EMORY HURST, JR.

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Approved by:

Joseph P. C. Smith, Research and Thesis Monitor
Robert D. McKenney, Assistant Research and Thesis Monitor
Robert D. McKenney, Assistant Research and Thesis Monitor

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PREFACE

In less than three months after the United States had committed herself in June 1950 to containing world communism by meeting North Korean aggression with armed might, General Douglas MacArthur executed one of his most masterful strokes of tactical genius. He struck with the U. S. 10th Corps in an amphibious assault landing more than one hundred miles to the rear of the forward elements of the invading force that were hammering away at 8th Army in the Pusan Perimeter. One day later on 16 September, another operation of equal importance but much less dramatic and therefore much less publicized was initiated--the U. S. 8th Army launched an offensive to break out of the defense perimeter behind which it had been humbled for better than a month. Spearheading this drive north from the gates of Taegu to Waegwan on the Naktong River were the 5th Regimental Combat Team and the 1st Cavalry Division which cleared a corridor so that the 24th Division could be committed across the river to the west and north.

It is the story of the 24th Division's Naktong River crossing with which this thesis is concerned. In writing an account of the 24th Division's crossing, the historian cannot detract from the praise due the officers and men of the division who sacrificed so much in crossing the Naktong River barrier; neither can he omit the roles played by the non-divisional troops who supported the crossing. Likewise, he should not disregard the adjacent units' actions that materially assisted the 24th Division in accomplishing its mission. For these reasons, I have

chosen to relate the 5th Regimental Combat Team's attack on Waegwan and the 5th Cavalry Regiment's attack to secure the Taegu-Waegwan highway. Both of these operations were vital to the 24th Division's success; the first cleared the enemy from the east bank of the river and the second secured a main supply route for the division.

In analyzing this river crossing operation, the reader should infer from this account at least three axioms. These are: (1) all deliberate river crossings require the utmost in detailed planning and meticulous execution, (2) river crossings can be successful even when austere conditions would indicate impending failure, and (3) examination of past military operations is a source of insight into future operations. But examining history in search of a set of canon to apply to future situations has never in itself motivated me to explore history. My affinity to the study of history, and particularly military history, has grown from a professional interest in how my forebears have reacted under stress of combat.

I possess a more personal reason, however, for having selected this specific action to relate. As an army engineer, I am particularly interested in river crossing operations, for with the engineer rests the responsibility in combat of transporting troops and their equipment across inland water barriers. In addition, I sense a strong personal attachment to this operation because I participated in it as a member of the 11th Engineer Combat Battalion. But perhaps more important than personal reasons is the reality that few accounts of river crossing operations that were conducted during the Korean War exist, and the ones that do exist either relate only tactical aspects of the operation or the support phases of the crossing. Few, indeed if

any, integrate all aspects of an entire operation. It is my sincere hope, therefore, that this account in contrast is sufficiently detailed, accurate, and readable so that I will have contributed some additional knowledge to the art of river crossing operations.

Researching material for a thesis is always an arduous task, and my undertaking has proved no exception. This subject area, however, has proved particularly difficult for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most frustrating, yet most awakening experience has been my realization that unit war diaries are not in many cases complete accounts of unit actions and activities. In addition, I have discovered that unit war diaries occasionally are inaccurate and misleading. In those instances where I have discovered inaccuracies in or conflicts between official documents, I have attempted to reason to the most logically plausible conclusion. Furthermore, I have resorted to personal knowledge or depended on interviews with officers who participated in the operation for background information. Fully realizing that some events may have escaped the minds of the participants during the thirteen years since the Naktong crossing, I have concluded that those events that can still be recalled have left such impressions on individuals that frequently their accounts are more detailed than corresponding unit accounts.

In addition to my being inhibited initially by a lack of written source material describing this operation, my task was further complicated by an inability to acquire copies of military maps of Korea projected from the polyconic grid system. As a result, all map coordinates required conversion from the old system to the presently used transverse mercator projection. But perhaps the most

formidable obstacle to overcome was the secret security classification of many of the unit war diaries which compelled me to accomplish most of my research and much of my writing in the library archives at Fort Leavenworth.

Assisting me and providing me with the stimulus to see this paper completed have been three individuals to whom I must express my appreciation. The first to whom I am indebted is Mrs. Gladys E. Morrison, a gracious, persevering lady who located and acquired much of the material that has made this thesis possible. In addition, I am indebted to Mr. Edward C. Cook, Jr., Office of the G-2, Fort Leavenworth, who contacted the National Archives in Washington, D. C., to obtain reclassification authority for the war diaries I used, then patiently read all my notecards to ascertain that I would not include any classified security information in my thesis. And finally, I am most grateful to my wife for having allowed me isolation necessary to write.

J. E. H.

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
April, 1964

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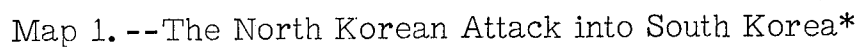
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CHAPTER I

THE PRELUDE

The 24th Division's breakout from the Pusan Perimeter across the Naktong River can be appreciated in proper perspective only when one considers the circumstances under which this difficult operation was successfully accomplished. This conflict in which the United States was enmeshed was really never popularly dignified to war status by being called a war--only a police action. The country never forced itself to more than a partial mobilization, and what is more important, many people in the United States never realized the purpose in our fighting for a piece of frozen, barren land on the other side of the world. But to the men of the United States armed forces in Korea, this was a war. This was combat at its bloodiest; men were being killed in a war that was just as real and just as frightful as any in which Americans had ever fought. And it all started early one Sunday morning in the summer of 1950.

At 0400, 25 June 1950, the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) struck south across the 38th parallel into South Korea along two corridors: Pochon-Uijongbu and Yonchon-Uijongbu, the age-old invasion routes into Seoul, the South Korean capital (Map 1). The Communists covered their main attack with simultaneous thrusts on both flanks--one along the Kaesong-Munsan axis and the other toward Chunchon. Catching an ill-equipped and inadequately trained Republic



*U.S. Military Academy, Operations in Korea, Map 3.

of Korea (ROK) army completely by surprise, the NKPA overran Seoul and by 28 June had closed on the Han River south of Seoul in a continuous line from the mouth of the river in the west to twenty miles east of the city. By 4 July the NKPA had advanced south to a line running along Suwon-Wonju-Samchok, and had virtually routed the ROK Army.¹

In answer to this blatant challenge to freedom, the United Nations on the afternoon of the day of the invasion called an emergency meeting of its Security Council. At this meeting the assembled council adopted a resolution calling for

1. an immediate cessation of hostilities, and
2. the authorities of North Korea to withdraw their forces back to the 38th parallel, and
3. all members to render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution and to refrain from giving assistance to the North Korean authorities.²

But the North Koreans did not heed the call of the United Nations.

Later in the same day, the Security Council passed another resolution that recommended UN members, in an effort to restore peace, furnish assistance to the Republic of Korea in repelling the armed attack.³

The United States answered the call. On 27 June President Truman ordered American sea and air forces to give the ROK Army cover and support.⁴ When this commitment failed to slow the North Korean

¹U. S. Military Academy, Operations in Korea (West Point, New York: Department of Military Art and Engineering, United States Military Academy, 1953), pp. 5-6 (hereafter cited Operations).

²T. R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 78.

³Operations, op. cit., p. 6.

⁴Ibid.

attack appreciably, President Truman on 30 June authorized General of the Army Douglas MacArthur to use American ground forces in Korea.⁵

At this time, the American Army was in the throes of a peacetime economy drive. The U. S. 8th Army stationed in Japan consisted of four undermanned divisions that were at 70% strength. The division's combat regiments had only two battalions each and the division tank units were equipped with M24 light tanks because the Japanese roads would not accommodate heavier vehicles.⁶ More tragic than equipment and personnel shortages, however, were the men who comprised the fighting forces of these divisions. They had been living a complacent occupation life in Japan since World War II and were conditioned neither physically nor emotionally for the rigors of combat when they appeared in 1950. But they were to mature as fighting men in a few short weeks.

Once President Truman authorized the use of American ground troops in Korea, General Headquarters in Tokyo reacted quickly. General MacArthur dispatched to Korea a survey group, later designated GHQ Advanced Command Group (ADCOM), under the command of Brig. Gen. John H. Church that arrived at Suwon on the night of 27 June. By this time General MacArthur had received permission from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assume command of all military forces in Korea, and gave ADCOM the added mission of assuming command of the Korean Advisory Group and helping the ROK Army.⁷ ADCOM

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁶"Eighth United States Army, Korea War Diary" (hereafter cited EUSAK WD), Prologue, p. vi.

⁷Fehrenbach, op. cit., p. 82.

functioned until 4 July when its responsibilities were assumed by the United States Army Forces in Korea under the command of Maj. Gen. William F. Dean.⁸ This group began the reorganization of the ROK forces and expedited badly needed supplies to their armies.⁹

Meanwhile, on 2 July the first elements of American ground forces began arriving in Korea--a small task force under the command of Lt. Col. Charles B. Smith. This task force consisted of two infantry companies, one battery of artillery, two 4.2" mortar platoons, a platoon of 75mm recoilless rifles, and six 2.36" rocket launcher teams.¹⁰ Soon after arrival in Korea, TF Smith went forward to meet the advancing enemy. The Americans dug in between Suwon and Osan a few miles north of Osan and waited for the enemy that was commonly believed would run when they saw whom they were fighting. Only they did not run. The enemy contacted TF Smith on the morning of 5 July at 0800.¹¹ One division of the NKPA supported by thirty T34 tanks had little difficulty in encircling the positions of the outmanned and outgunned U. S. forces and then riddling them with devastating fires. The overwhelmed U. S. soldiers abandoned all but their individual weapons and fought their way to the rear.¹² On 6 July only 185 men out of the original force of less than 500 could be accounted for,

⁸Roy E. Appleman, U. S. Army in the Korean War: South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, 1961), p. 64.

⁹Operations, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

¹⁰Fehrenbach, op. cit., p. 98.

¹¹Appleman, op. cit., p. 68.

¹²Operations, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

although 66 more drifted in later. The artillery battery alone had lost 5 officers and 26 men.¹³ And what had TF Smith accomplished? It had delayed the North Korean advance for about four to five hours.¹⁴ But reinforcements were beginning to arrive. The 24th Division was now in Korea, and the 25th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Divisions were en route from Japan.

By 12 July the American 24th Division was forced to retreat across the Kum River north of Taejon,¹⁵ and at 0100 on 13 July Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker became the commander of all U. S. ground forces in Korea. The following day he established 8th Army headquarters in Korea, and on 16 July 8th Army assumed control of all ROK ground forces.¹⁶

On 19 July the NKPA started its attack against the 24th Division positions around the key communications center of Taejon.¹⁷ Here the division executed its most important yet most costly delay of the early Korean War. The approximately 4000 troops of the division were no match for the three reinforced divisions that the NKPA shot down the Seoul-Taejon corridor.¹⁸ The attack lasted only two days, but the 24th Division had suffered approximately 30 percent

¹³Fehrenbach, op. cit., p. 106.

¹⁴Operations, loc. cit.

¹⁵"24th Infantry Division War Diary" (hereafter cited 24th Inf Div WD), 112400-122400 July 1950.

¹⁶EUSAK WD, Summary, 13-31 July 1950, pp. 1 and 8.

¹⁷24th Inf Div WD, Enemy Information, 181800-191800 July 1950.

¹⁸Operations, op. cit., p. 9.

casualties--48 known dead, 228 wounded, and 874 missing. By this time, the division had become so depleted that it was replaced on 22 July near Yongdong by the 1st Cavalry Division¹⁹ that had landed near Pohang on 18 July.²⁰

Earlier on 14 July the 25th Division had arrived in Korea and was deployed in the eastern sector where remnants of approximately five ROK divisions were offering resistance. On 22 July the division was concentrated in the Sangju area, and by 23 July had relieved two ROK divisions along a twenty-five mile front extending southwest from Hamchang on the right flank of the 1st Cavalry Division.²¹ The 25th and 1st Cavalry Divisions delayed grudgingly to slow the North Korean advance down the Chungu-Hamchang corridor which threatened the Taegu-Taejon supply line and the right flank of the American positions east and north of Yongdong.²² At the end of July, the two divisions faced a continuous line of enemy from south of Kumchon to north of Hamchang.²³

By 25 July a two division North Korean force had driven past Chonju and had reached Kwangju west and south of the American positions. From Kwangju, the enemy drove east toward Chinju and Umyong. General Walker recognized this turning movement and countered by committing in the Chinju area two battalions of the 29th

¹⁹EUSAK WD, Summary, 13-31 July 1950, p. 14.

²⁰Ibid., p. 9.

²¹Operations, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

Regiment that had just arrived from Okinawa and the 24th Division in the vicinity of Anui and Hadong. In addition, the 25th Division crossed the Nakdong River at Waegwan on 31 July and shifted from the northern sector to the southern sector in two days to help protect the vital port of Pusan from the west. With the threat from the west and the resultant shift of the 25th Division to the southern sector, the 1st Cavalry Division on 1 August was forced to withdraw behind the Nakdong River at Waegwan and destroy the three bridges that crossed the river there.²⁴

The Nakdong River on the west and the rugged mountains on the north, enclosing a rectangle approximately ninety miles long and sixty miles wide, represented the last natural defensible obstacles that 8th Army could use effectively to maintain a foothold on the Korean peninsula. It was behind this barrier, later called the Pusan Perimeter, that 8th Army made its gallant stand for one and one-half months to gain time while reinforcements arrived so that an offensive could be launched to drive the enemy from South Korea. At this time the forces defending the Pusan Perimeter amounted to three understrength American divisions and five ROK divisions. Between 31 July and 15 August, the 2d Division arrived from the United States; and the 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) and the 5th Regimental Combat Team landed on 3 August.²⁵ But while the American forces were increasing in numbers and equipment during August and early September, the NKPA was bleeding itself to death in repeated attempts to rupture the perimeter defense. The NKPA of thirteen divisions and one armored

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 11.

division that had crossed the 38th parallel in late June had already suffered an estimated 37,000 casualties and had extended its supply line better than 100 miles.²⁶ In spite of the heavy casualties suffered by both sides up to the time of the fighting in the Pusan Perimeter, some of the bloodiest fighting of the war remained for the Americans who were to defend the position.

The strategy employed by the North Korean Army in repeated attempts to break the cordon around Pusan during the period from about 6 September to 15 September can be divided into two distinct phases.

The first phase, lasting from about 6 August to 26 August, was marked by successive blows at individual points in determined attempts to break through the defense line; the second, between 27 August and 15 September, was a period of heavy and almost simultaneous attacks around the entire perimeter.²⁷

In an attempt to regain initiative, strike the enemy off balance, and protect the exposed western flank approaches to Pusan, General Walker on 7 August committed under Maj. Gen. William B. Kean the 25th Division less the 27th RCT, the 1st Marine Brigade, and the 5th RCT in a spoiling attack toward Chinju. The enemy attacked the same day resulting in the two forces meeting east of Chinju in bitter fighting, but by 11 August TF Kean occupied the high ground east of Chinju. Threats elsewhere around the perimeter, however, required the withdrawal of some of the units that participated in the attack. TF Kean, thus weakened, withdrew to the original positions from which

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 12.

it had attacked a few days earlier.²⁸ Elsewhere along the Nakdong River, and particularly where it and the Nam River join, the enemy was successful from 6 August to 15 August in establishing numerous bridgeheads. During the second half of August, the divisions occupying the positions along this portion of the front engaged in desperate fighting to hold the river line. On 24 August, additional help arrived from the United States when the 2d Division relieved the 24th Division along the Nakdong Front.²⁹

While the 24th and 25th Divisions were trying to hold the river line on the west, the North Koreans were not inactive in the northeast. A force of guerrillas estimated as large as a division infiltrated down the east coast, cut off the ROK 3d Division south of Yongdok, and by 12 August had taken the port city of Pohang. Only by evacuating the ROK 3d Division by sea and redeploying them south of Yongdok plus committing the 8th Army reserve to hold the Yonil airfield south of Yongdok was General Walker able to stabilize the line in the eastern sector. But the enemy was not able to exploit its initial success south of Pohang, and the port was retaken by ROK forces on 18 August.³⁰

The last major North Korean effort during the first phase of the perimeter defense occurred in mid-August when the enemy applied pressure down the Waegwan-Taegu road. This attack met with little success, but an attack from Kunwi to Taegu forced the 1st ROK

²⁸EUSAK WD, Summary, 1-31 August 1950, pp. 16-23.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 68-69.

³⁰Operations, op. cit., p. 13.

Division to withdraw, exposing the valley road from Tabu to Taegu. The 27th and 23d Regiments, in army reserve, were committed to reinforce the 1st ROK Division. General Walker once again was able to utilize a mobile reserve along short lines of communication to halt the enemy threat. The North Koreans by this time had established a pattern in their attacks during this period: no single assault lasted for more than three days, the peak of the attack usually came the second day, and the ferocity of the attack ebbed on the third day.³¹ And though they had undoubtedly expended heavily in resources and manpower during this period, they still had not yet launched their most concerted attempt to force the Americans off the peninsula.

On 26 August, however, the North Koreans launched their strongest offensive to break the Naktong barrier. The battle started with a strong secondary attack in the Pohang area on 26 August and was followed on 31 August at 2400 hours by a major attack with six divisions and several tank regiments along a forty-five mile front of the 2d and 25th Divisions³² (Map 2). In the 2d Division sector on 1 September

as information slowly built up at division headquarters it became apparent that the North Koreans had punched a hole six miles wide and eight miles deep in the middle of the division line. . . .³³

In addition, the North Koreans had succeeded in crossing the Naktong River in seventeen different places in the 2d Division sector alone.³⁴

³¹Ibid., pp. 13-14.

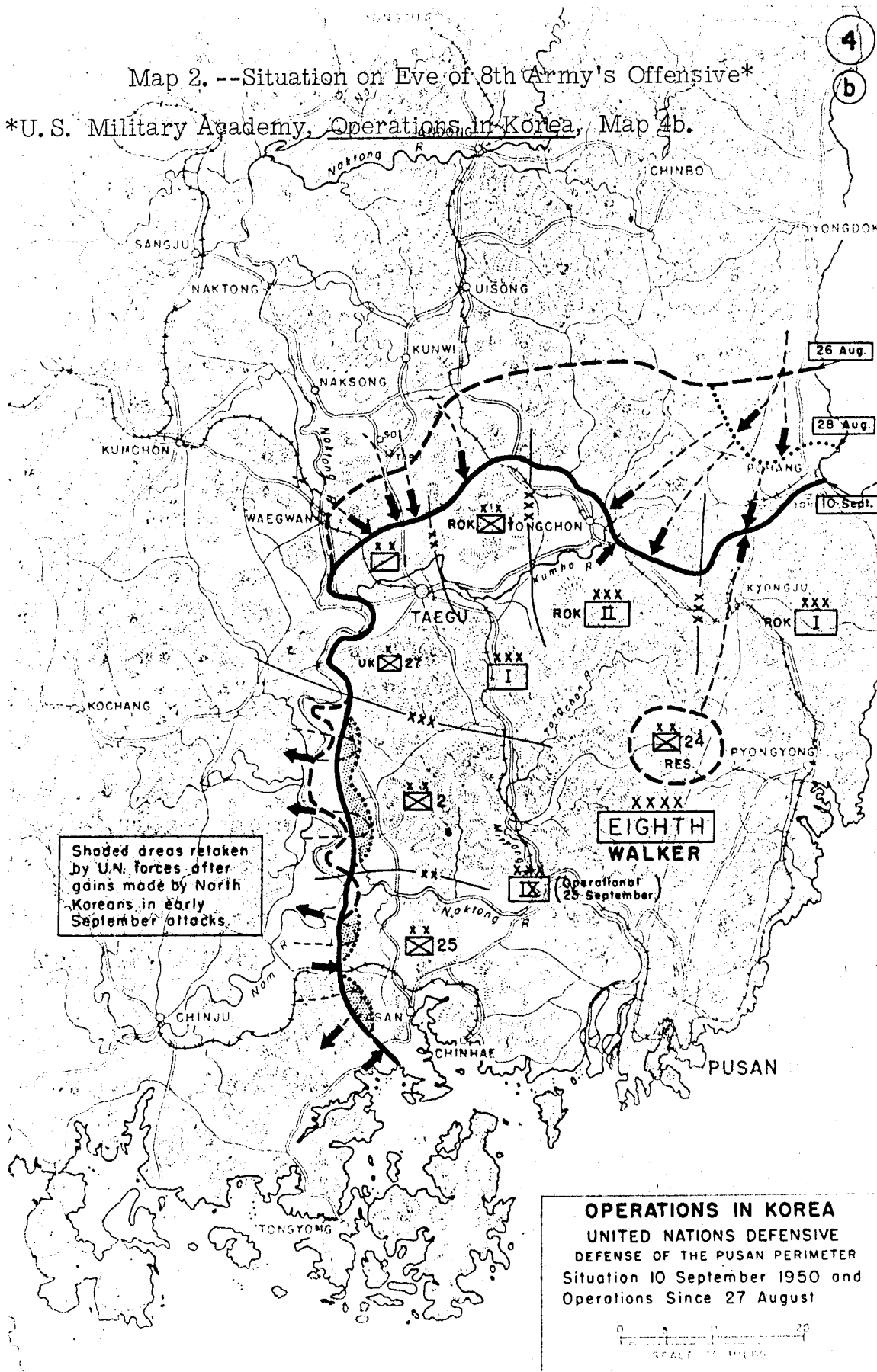
³²Ibid., p. 14.

³³Appleman, op. cit., p. 452.

³⁴Operations, loc. cit.

Map 2. -- Situation on Eve of 8th Army's Offensive*

*U.S. Military Academy, Operations in Korea, Map 4b.



Within a week, after bitter and bloody fighting, the bridgeheads along the Nakdong had been contained by the timely use of local reserve forces and the 1st Marine Brigade. But the 2d and 25th Divisions were not the only American units to feel the thrust of the North Korean offensive.

On the east, a three division attack that started on 2 September penetrated the ROK 1st Corps and captured Pohang on 6 September. Once again the Taegu-Kyongju-Pusan supply line was threatened. To counter this penetration that had cut the supply line near Yongchon, General Walker committed the 24th Division north of Kyongju which together with the counterattacking ROK troops reduced the enemy salient that would have soon rendered the Taegu area untenable for American forces.³⁵

Even though the situation had eased by 5 September over three-fourths of the front, the threat in the Taegu area became critical.

By 8 September, the enemy 1st and 13th divisions were only eight air miles from Taegu. The Cavalry Division was so depleted that one battalion commander said that any company that could muster one hundred men immediately became his assault company for the day. And a critical shortage of ammunition was developing. The expenditures of 105mm artillery shells had to be curtailed.³⁶

To reduce the possibility of the enemy's capturing vital communications equipment, 8th Army moved its headquarters and signal equipment from Taegu south to Pusan.³⁷ To compound the gravity of the situation on the Taegu front, 8th Army lost the 1st Marine Brigade--it embarked

³⁵24th Inf Div WD, Narrative Summary, 26 August-28 September 1950, pp. 1-2.

³⁶Fehrenbach, op. cit., p. 230.

³⁷Ibid.

from the port of Pusan to rendezvous with the remainder of 10th Corps somewhere at sea in preparation for the amphibious assault at Inchon.³⁸ By 13 September the NKPA 13th Division had occupied Hill 314, the "key to Taegu." From this ridge line the enemy possessed visual observation on the city and commanded the terrain about the Taegu valley. Realizing that the enemy's retention of this vital terrain feature was the key to success or failure of the 1st Cavalry Division in this area, the division committed the 3d Battalion of the 7th Cavalry Regiment at 1100 hours on 12 September to retake the hill. This the battalion did after suffering enormous casualties.³⁹

After 12 September the situation improved for the United States forces even though heavy fighting continued.⁴⁰ Even during the darkest hours of fighting in the Pusan Perimeter, however, the 8th Army staff had been planning for an operation to break out of the perimeter and assume the offensive that would culminate in one of the most rapid advances and pursuits in the history of the United States Army.

³⁸Ibid., p. 242.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 231-232.

⁴⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE OFFENSIVE

The scheme by which 8th Army was to break out of the Pusan Perimeter and assume the offensive was approved by General Headquarters in Tokyo on 10 September and published as Operation Plan 10 on 11 September.¹ In this plan, the army was to attack

from present bridgehead with main effort directed along the
TAEGU . . . - KUMCHON . . . - TAEJON . . . -
SUWON . . . axis, [advance] to phase lines indicated . . . ,
[destroy] enemy forces on line of advance and [effect] junction
with X Corps.²

While this plan together with the 10th Corps plan to land at Inchon represented an aggressive solution to the tactical situation in Korea, 8th Army planners did not disregard the critical facts of the tactical situation, for they included two alternate plans developed on 6 September as annexes to Operation Plan 10. The first stated that

1. In the event that elements of this command are under heavy enemy attack immediately prior to D-Day to the extent that the initial concentration of troops for the main effort is not possible, limited objective attacks will be launched in all zones to insure that any enemy withdrawal is not being covered by light covering detachments.
2. As soon as the hostile reaction to the amphibious assault of the X Corps is apparent and conditions permit the concentration

¹"Eighth United States Army, Korea War Diary" (hereafter cited EUSAK WD), Daily Report from Plans Section, 100001-102400 September 1950.

²EUSAK WD, Operations Plan 10, 11 September 1950.

of troops and assumption of an offensive from the Eighth Army bridgehead, Operation Plan No. 10 will be implemented. Implementation will be effected by separate orders from this headquarters.³

The second alternative stipulated that on direction of the Commander in Chief, Far East Command, 8th Army would provide one infantry division to be water lifted from Pusan to make an amphibious assault on Kunsan and drive along the Kunsan-Taejon axis.⁴

To the U. S. 1st Corps fell the task of making the main attack in the execution of 8th Army's Operation Plan 10. The plan stated that 1st Corps

(1) Assumes command of elements indicated in Annex A beginning D [minus] 3.

(2) Effects crossings of NAKTONG RIVER in zone; continues attack to reach phase lines shown in Operations Overlay, Annex C destroying enemy in zone.

(3) The artillery with I Corps supports the attack with a preparation.⁵

First Corps was to accomplish its assigned tasks with an organization consisting of the 1st Cavalry Division, the 27th Infantry Brigade (British Commonwealth), two regimental combat teams (less one battalion) of the 24th Division, and the ROK 1st Division.⁶ But the plan as published on 11 September and its resultant execution were fraught with complex problems that could be solved only as the tenuous string of events unwound in the succeeding few days.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

Two corps headquarters (1st and 9th) arrived in Korea only days before the scheduled offensive, but their arrival resulted in posing two immediate problems for General Walker. The first involved the advisability of placing the divisions of 8th Army under the control of corps headquarters, and the second involved the problem of which corps commander to place in charge of the main effort should corps be used as controlling headquarters. The latter problem was in no way a simple one to solve. First Corps headquarters had been activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, on 2 August. Only eleven days later, the commander, Maj. Gen. John B. Coulter, and a command group arrived in Korea and began formulating plans for the breakout. The main body of the corps headquarters followed and arrived in Korea on 6 September. They, like the command group, also began immediately to formulate plans for the forthcoming operation, but the corps headquarters still had no troops attached to it.⁷ General Walker had decided earlier to utilize corps groupings during the breakout for two obviously overriding reasons--to reduce the number of subordinate headquarters reporting directly to army headquarters and to lend greater unity of effort to the breakout forces. The other problem, however, was more difficult for General Walker to solve, and his decision was not announced until 11 September when he shifted Maj. Gen. Frank Milburn from Commanding General, 9th Corps, to command 1st Corps in Taegu.⁸ With General Milburn came key members of his corps staff including a new engineer, Col. Emerson C. Itschner,

⁷"I Corps War Diary" (hereafter cited I Corps WD), Historical Narrative, 2 August-30 September 1950, pp. 1-3.

⁸Ibid., p. 3.

who was to play a key role in the subsequent river crossing.⁹ One may question General Walker's decision to make command changes in major subordinate headquarters at this late date, but the success of the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter and the subsequent rapid movement across the Naktong River vindicated his actions.

With the command structure for the main attack force organized, 1st Corps became operational on 12 September at 1200.¹⁰ Effective 1200 on 13 September, the 1st Cavalry Division, the ROK 1st Division, the 5th Regimental Combat Team (less one battalion), the 14th Engineer Combat Battalion, the 55th Engineer Treadway Bridge Company, and the Bridge Platoon, Headquarters and Service Company, 65th Engineer Combat Battalion, were attached.¹¹ With this task organization, 1st Corps continued to plan for the forthcoming offensive not knowing if either the 24th Division or the 3d Battalion, 5th RCT, would be released from army control in sufficient time to participate in the attack.

At this time the 1st Battalion, 5th RCT, was in army reserve in the vicinity of Samnangjin with a mission of preparing to be employed either in the zone of the 25th Division or joining the remainder of the combat team in the vicinity of Taegu.¹² Likewise, at the opposite end of the Pusan Perimeter, the 24th Division, which had been attached to

⁹I Corps WD, Unit Historical Report, Engineer Section, 2 August-19 September 1950, p. 3.

¹⁰I Corps WD, Historical Narrative, loc. cit.

¹¹EUSAK WD, Narrative Summary, 1-30 September 1950, p. 20.

¹²EUSAK WD, Operations Plan 10, loc. cit.

Task Force Jackson, was busily engaged in blocking North Korean thrusts south in the vicinity of Pohang-dong. The 11th Engineer Combat Battalion and the 55th Engineer Treadway Bridge Company with the bridging that 1st Corps needed to cross the Nakdong River were in Masan. Not until the eve of the attack was General Walker able to shift the 3d Battalion, 5th RCT, to Taegu, and it was after the attack had started when the 24th Division and the planned corps engineer support troops arrived in the area. But General Walker was unable to mass his forces for the breakout except by piecemeal methods, for the entire 8th Army front was still under continuous pressure from the North Korean forces that had been hammering away at the Pusan Perimeter defense for almost one and one-half months.

According to the intelligence annex to 8th Army's plan, the strength of the North Koreans facing the combined United Nations forces in the perimeter amounted to 102,000 men.¹³ A more reasonable estimate, as later events proved, would have been approximately 70,000 men. In addition, 8th Army's estimate that the NKPA's equipment strength was approximately seventy-five percent of what it had when it crossed the 38th parallel proved also excessively high. A more realistic figure would probably have been closer to fifty percent.¹⁴ Opposing these forces were approximately 140,000 men in the combat units of the U. S. 8th and ROK Armies.¹⁵ But

¹³Ibid., Appendix 1 to Annex A (Intelligence).

¹⁴Roy E. Appleman, U. S. Army in the Korean War: South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, 1961), p. 546.

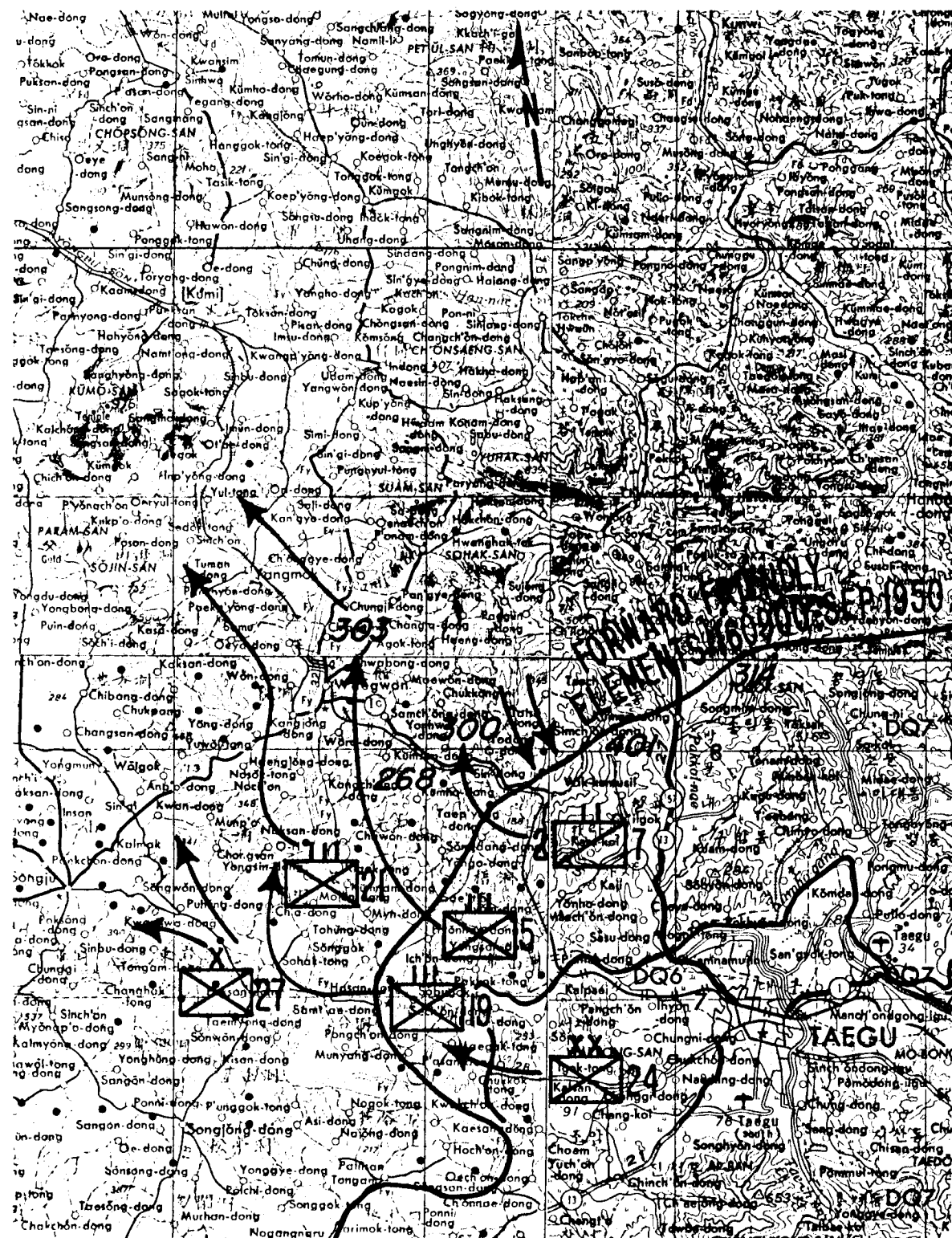
¹⁵Ibid., p. 547.

the assigned strength of the U. S. divisions belied the number of men in the rifle companies, the men who actually did the fighting. Some of the rifle companies at this time were down to fifty or fewer effectives--little more than 25% strength. The Korean augmentation recruits, virtually untrained and not yet satisfactorily integrated were of little combat value at this time.¹⁶

In addition to the understrength rifle companies and the as yet ineffective Korean augmentation recruits, 8th Army was inhibited by another and perhaps much more powerful force. The North Koreans had maintained their initiative since the beginning of the conflict and had compelled General Walker to shift forces as small as battalions to counter numerous threats to his command. Nowhere was this North Korean initiative, aggressiveness, and determination more apparent during the few days before the 8th Army offensive than in the sector of the 1st Cavalry Division.

The 1st Cavalry Division was defending the key communications center of Taegu in a quarter circle arc about eight air miles from the city and had been under constant pressure since the NKPA had launched its September offensive. The key to the offensive as envisioned in 8th Army's operation plan remained in the hands of the men in the 1st Cavalry Division, for it was they who had to advance to the Nakdong in order to spring the 1st Corps forces across the river up the Taejon-Suwon axis for a link-up with 10th Corps. But a critical situation in the northern portion of the 1st Cavalry Division sector remained even though it had partially attenuated by 12 September when the 3d Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, retook Hill 314, the "key to Taegu" (Map 3).

¹⁶Ibid.



Map 3. --Taegu and Vicinity

Standing opposite the 1st Cavalry Division astride the Sangju-Taegu axis were the NKPA 1st Rifle Division estimated at a strength of 7,200 men and the 13th Rifle Division estimated at 8,000 men. In addition, farther west stood the 3d Rifle Division estimated at 8,000 strong and the 65th Motorized Infantry at a strength of 1,500.¹⁷ Even though later events indicated that these estimates had been too high, a more reasonable figure of half this strength still represented a formidable force for the division to fight in its drive north from Taegu. As late as 13 September, 1st Corps remained convinced that the "continued pressure by the 1st and 13th North Korean Divisions indicated the enemy's determination to capture Taegu from the north."¹⁸ The ruthless facts of the tactical situation logically supported this conclusion.

Although the 3d Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, had been successful in retaking Hill 174 north of Taegu on 14 September, the enemy in the early morning hours of 15 September launched a coordinated regimental attack against the 5th Cavalry Regiment that started a period of some of the bloodiest fighting in the Korean War. The enemy soon overran Hills 174, 350, and the north side of Hill 401 but the 5th Cavalry held fast to Hill 188. Heavy pressure continued all day and by nightfall elements of the regiment had been forced off Hills 312, 350, and 392. The North Koreans had penetrated in strength between Hills 174 and 203, pushed the 5th Cavalry Regiment back on its heels, and repulsed a counterattack by the 3d Battalion to retake Hills 174 and 312.¹⁹

¹⁷EUSAK WD, Operations Plan 10, loc. cit.

¹⁸I Corps WD, Historical Narrative, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

¹⁹Ibid.

On the left of the 5th Cavalry, the 5th RCT's sector was relatively quiet. A 1st Battalion patrol on 15 September had established contact with the enemy just west of the Kumho River and a reconnaissance party had been ambushed in approximately the same location resulting in three killed, four wounded, and two missing.²⁰ On the south flank of the 5th RCT, the 27th Brigade continued its patrolling to keep the North Koreans west of the Naktong River south of Taegu. Such was the situation in the 1st Corps sector around Taegu during the night before the attack to break out from the Pusan Perimeter.

The problem was to spring with inadequate forces and inadequate materiel from the defensive to the offensive overnight, push the enemy back approximately eight miles, pass one division through another, cross a major river, and exploit an enemy that two weeks before had pinned 8th Army at every chance and every location. The following day, 8th Army took to the offensive that accomplished the improbable.

On 16 September, Operation Plan 10 became an operational directive and H-hour was set for 0900.²¹ At this time, the U. S. and ROK forces launched a general attack all along the front.²² Earlier, on 14 September, the 5th RCT (less one battalion) had been attached to the 1st Cavalry Division; the 1st Battalion remained in Samnangjin as part of army reserve. At 0930 on 15 September, the 1st Battalion commander received a message from the Commanding General, 8th

²⁰EUSAK WD, Notes used to brief the Commanding General, EUSAK, on situation from 150001-160800 September 1950, 160800 September 1950.

²¹EUSAK WD, G-3 Section, 160001-162400 September 1950.

²²EUSAK WD, G-3 Staff Section Report, 16 September 1950.

Army to move his battalion without delay to the vicinity of Taegu and upon arrival revert to the control of his parent unit.²³ The battalion arrived in Taegu at 2230 on 15 September,²⁴ the night before the regiment jumped off in an attack that was to prove to be the first key to the success of the corps in establishing a bridgehead across the Nakdong River. On the following morning when the regiment attacked, its strength stood at 2,599 men with approximately 600 men in each of the three battalions, 1,194 short of its full complement.²⁵

In spite of its personnel shortages, at 0900 on 16 September, the 5th RCT moved from its assembly area west of Taegu, attacked west from a shallow bridgehead across the Kumho River toward the Nakdong River, then turned north and advanced toward Waegwan (Map 4). During that day, only the 2d Battalion engaged the enemy, but on 17 September, the 3d Battalion was committed on the right of the 2d Battalion and the 1st Battalion was positioned to enter battle. The following day, the 1st Battalion was committed with the other two in a full scale regimental assault on the high ground south of Waegwan.

The first day of the attack, the regiment advanced to and seized Hill 154 against light to moderate resistance.²⁶ During the early morning hours of 17 September, however, the 2d Battalion

²³EUSAK WD, Message from the Commanding General, EUSAK, to the Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 5th Regimental Combat Team, 150930 September 1950.

²⁴EUSAK WD, Notes used to brief the Commanding General, EUSAK, . . . loc. cit.

²⁵"24th Infantry Division War Diary, " G-1 Staff Section Report, 102400-112400 September 1950.

²⁶EUSAK WD, Periodic Operations Report 198, 161200-162400 September 1950.

Map 4. --5th RCT Attack on Waegwan and Hill 303

command post began receiving mortar and artillery fire; and by daylight, the battalion came under heavy enemy pressure. Earlier, Company E had pushed to Hill 140, but small arms fire became so intense that the unit was ordered to withdraw so that an artillery preparation could be placed on the hill to soften resistance. After the artillery preparation and two air strikes on the north slope of the hill later in the day that proved effective, the 2d Battalion reoccupied the hill that night²⁷ and held despite heavy enemy counterattacks.²⁸ "In the view of [the] circumstances in front of [the] 2nd Battalion [that morning, the] Regimental Commander decided to have [the] 3rd Battalion assault Hill 268."²⁹ The 3d Battalion moved from its hill positions at 0632 on the morning of 17 September in preparation for the attack on Hill 268, but the lead elements made a wrong turn which delayed the jump off until approximately 1150. As the battalion approached Hill 268, small arms, mortar, and high velocity gun fire increased; yet by 1300 the battalion was within one thousand yards of its objective.³⁰ During the afternoon, resistance had stiffened considerably, resulting in frustration for the 3d Battalion in its efforts that day to take Hill 268. Meanwhile, the situation had become so serious in the 2d Battalion sector that Company C from the 1st Battalion, then in reserve, was ordered at 2300 to support the 2d Battalion. Company B had been

²⁷EUSAK WD, G-3 Journal, 170001-172400 September 1950.

²⁸"5th Regimental Combat Team War Diary" (hereafter cited 5th RCT WD), 170001-172400 September 1950. The earliest records of the 5th RCT in the Korean War are the records for 17 September 1950.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

relieved at 1115 from its task of securing the ford across the Kumho River and was instructed to join the 1st Battalion.³¹ At midnight, Company G experienced a "Banzai" attack but was able to withstand the onslaught even though Company C had not yet arrived in the area.³²

By the end of the day on 17 September, resistance had increased so much north and west of Taegu that officers in the 1st Cavalry Division were convinced that a major fight was inevitable in order to accomplish their tasks as outlined in Operation Plan 10. The 5th RCT just east of the Nakdong River was not only meeting stiff resistance to the north, but it was also receiving heavy shelling on its east flank as well as from the west bank of the river.³³ In addition, the 5th Cavalry Regiment on the right flank of the 5th RCT had met such stiff resistance that one battalion of the 7th Cavalry Regiment was committed between it and the 5th RCT to attempt to take the high ground north of and secure the Taegu-Waegwan road, and to protect the right flank of the advancing 5th RCT. That the North Koreans were determined to defend south and east of Waegwan became apparent when aerial observers earlier in the day reported that numerous small groups of enemy were moving from Waegwan southeast toward Hill 268.³⁴ In addition,

the enemy in front of the 1st Cavalry Division displayed increasing resistance by determined defensive action, and by his employment

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³EUSAK WD, Periodic Operations Report 199, 170001-170600 September 1950.

³⁴5th RCT WD, loc. cit.

of counterattacking forces. The movement of troops into the area south and southeast of WAEGWAN, coupled with increased resistance in that area and the withdrawal of his troops in front of the 1st ROK Division to the west, indicated a defense along the high ground east of the NAKTONG RIVER.³⁵

The defense that the North Koreans could muster became bloodily apparent during the remainder of the fight to Waegwan.

When one looks at the map of the Waegwan area, the importance of Hill 268 is obvious. It commands the southern and the southeastern approach into Waegwan and is the dominant hill mass in the immediate area. The North Koreans realized the tactical importance of this piece of terrain and accordingly placed an estimated 1200 soldiers of the NKPA 3d Division supported by tanks to defend the approaches to Waegwan. The hills in this area were the anchor for the left flank of the enemy 2d Corps. As a result, if the North Koreans lost this ground, their positions in front of the 5th Cavalry Regiment to the east would become untenable.

The tactical importance of Hill 268 and related positions was made the greater by reason of the gap in the enemy line to the south. At the lower side of this gap the British 27th Infantry Brigade held vital blocking positions just above strong forces of the N. K. 10th Division.³⁶

Realizing early in the evening of 17 September that the North Koreans were reinforcing, the 5th RCT called for air strikes to be placed on Hill 268 the following morning to soften the enemy prior to the regimental attack to secure the objective.³⁷ During the night, the 2d Battalion received small arms fire into its positions on Hill 140,

³⁵I Corps WD, Historical Narrative, op. cit., p. 8.

³⁶Appleman, op. cit., p. 553.

³⁷5th RCT WD, loc. cit.

and the 1st Battalion was subjected to sporadic mortar fire plus occasional flat trajectory fire from the west bank of the river.³⁸ Early in the morning, the 3d Battalion started the assault on Hill 268, and by 1105 had stormed the crest and secured all the hill but the north slope.³⁹ Certainly, the dogged determination of the infantry had insured the success of the capture of Hill 268; but equally as certain, the Air Force had materially aided in this success by repeatedly attacking enemy positions, tanks, and reinforcements.⁴⁰

Once Hill 268 had been secured, the 1st and 2d Battalions crossed the line of departure north of Hill 140 at 1530 in an attack to secure the high ground just south of Waegwan. Meeting stiff opposition and utilizing tactical air support to blast the enemy on Hill 178 and the south slope of Hill 100, the 2d Battalion advanced one thousand yards and the 1st Battalion four hundred yards by 1700. As night fell, the 1st Battalion became temporarily slowed by enemy tanks and self propelled guns; but by 2030, Company C had occupied Hill 178, Company A had arrived on Hill 132 by 2200,⁴¹ and the 2d Battalion had occupied Hill 121 a mile south of Waegwan on the road paralleling the river.⁴² At 1800, while the 5th RCT was attacking north toward Waegwan, the regiment and its 555th Artillery Battalion were attached

³⁸5th RCT WD, 180001-182400 September 1950.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²I Corps WD, Historical Narrative, op. cit., p. 9.

to the 24th Division which was in corps reserve near Taegu.⁴³ Meanwhile, on the right flank of the 5th Infantry, the 5th Cavalry Regiment had been completely frustrated in its attempts to take Hills 371 and 253,⁴⁴ both of which overlooked the vital supply artery from Taegu to Waegwan, a requisite for any sustained advance west of the Naktong River from Waegwan.

On the morning of 19 September, the battle for Hill 268 continued. The 3d Battalion attacked at 1045 the diehard Koreans on its right flank who were dug-in in log-covered bunkers and fought fanatically to defend their positions on the north slope of Hill 268. Three flights of F-51's, using napalm, rockets, and machine guns devastated the North Koreans before noon enabling the infantry to move in and secure the area.⁴⁵ Meanwhile on the west flank of the regimental sector, the 2d Battalion, after a tank battle at 0200, advanced meeting no opposition but was slowed by heavy shelling from the west side of the river at about 0620. By 0900, the battalion had taken the last high ground south of Waegwan and was in the town by 1415 that afternoon.⁴⁶ The 1st Battalion in the center of the regimental sector advanced steadily from Hill 178 northward and joined the 2d Battalion in Waegwan at 1430.⁴⁷ Afterwards, at 1527, the 2d Battalion jumped off in the attack to its final objective on the east side of the Naktong River--

⁴³EUSAK WD, General Order 79, 23 September 1950.

⁴⁴EUSAK WD, Periodic Intelligence Report 68, 172400-182400 September 1950.

⁴⁵5th RCT WD, 190001-192400 September 1950.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

Hill 303, and by the end of the day had advanced and secured its southern slopes.⁴⁸ The 1st Battalion, blocking the approaches into Waegwan from the east, was alerted not to fire on elements of the 7th Cavalry that were moving up that road from the southeast to envelop the west flank of the enemy opposite the 1st Cavalry Division.⁴⁹

On the morning of 20 September, the 2d Battalion was set to assault Hill 303, the commanding terrain feature immediately north of Waegwan. By now enemy resistance had weakened in the sector east of the river; he was less inclined to attack but still "covered his withdrawal with bitter resistance in most positions."⁵⁰ He also increased his use of mines as the 3d Battalion was to discover in its attack on Hill 300 later in the day. In order to hinder the determined delay that the North Koreans were executing, four F-80's rocketed and strafed enemy positions on Hill 303 at 0630. Following the air strike, artillery pounded the hill for fifteen minutes starting at 0745, and the 2d Battalion jumped off at 0800 in the final assault to take the hill. At 0945, the 3d Battalion executed an enveloping move to seize Hill 300 and assist the 2d Battalion. After being delayed from 1150 to 1300 by an enemy minefield, the battalion marched unopposed to its objective. At 0945, however, Hill 303 had been secured by the 2d Battalion except for small isolated pockets on the northeast slope of the hill, and by 1630 the entire hill had been taken and cleared of enemy. The 3d Battalion seized the forward slope of Hill 300 by 1400

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰I Corps WD, Historical Narrative, op. cit., p. 11.

and moved unopposed to the top of the hill.⁵¹ With the enemy cleared from the high ground north of Waegwan and the regiment poised to cross the Naktong River to the west, the 5th Infantry command post moved to Waegwan. As it did, the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon from the regiment passed through the lines of the 5th Cavalry Regiment on the road running southeast out of Waegwan and informed them of the regiment's new positions.⁵²

What the 5th Regimental Combat Team had done to the North Koreans on the east bank of the Naktong River contributed materially to the success the 24th Division enjoyed when it started crossing the river south of Waegwan on 19 September. The 5th RCT in the five days from 16 to 20 September had crushed the entire right flank of and a portion of the center of the NKPA 3d Rifle Division.⁵³ This action, together with the envelopment by the 7th Cavalry northeast toward Tabu-dong virtually forced a North Korean withdrawal, even though the NKPA still remained locked in bitter fighting with the 5th Cavalry Regiment north of Taegu. While the 5th Cavalry was still engaged in bloody fighting north of Taegu, the 5th RCT had completed its fighting on the east bank of the Naktong River. But the ground that this unit had won had not been gained easily. On the second day of the attack when resistance had stiffened, the 5th RCT suffered two men killed and fifty-nine wounded.⁵⁴ On the final day of the attack, the unit suffered

⁵¹5th RCT WD, 20001-202400 September 1950.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Appleman, op. cit., p. 554.

⁵⁴5th RCT WD, 170001-172400 September 1950, loc. cit.

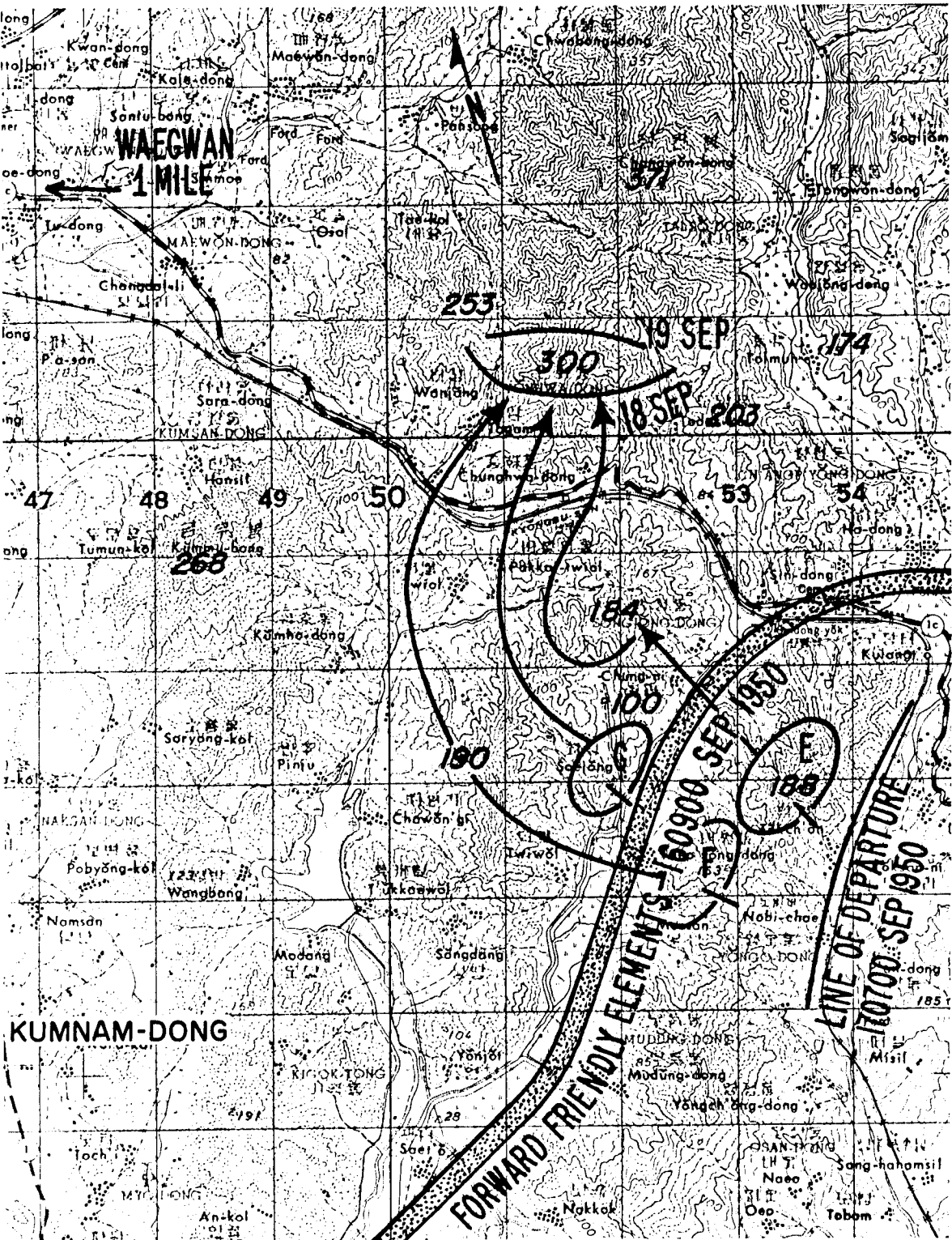
eighteen killed and 114 wounded.⁵⁵ And the casualties would have in all probability been higher had not the 5th Cavalry Regiment on the right flank of the 5th RCT been able to advance northward. Further, the 5th Cavalry's advance to the north cleared a vitally needed supply road from Taegu to Waegwan, an absolute necessity for the 24th Division to sustain an attack west of the Naktong River in the direction of Kumchon and Taejon.

The task of attacking north from Taegu to clear and secure the road to Waegwan fell to the 1st Cavalry Division. In accordance with Operations Plan 10 from 8th Army, the assigned regiments of the division attacked on the morning of 16 September to the right of the 5th RCT that had been attached to division for the breakout operation. With the 5th Cavalry on the left, 8th Cavalry on the right, and the 7th Cavalry following, the division was to make a sweeping movement from its position north of Taegu toward the Naktong River and Waegwan.⁵⁶ Following a heavy artillery preparation, the 1st Cavalry Division jumped off in the attack at 0900. The unit to the right of the 5th RCT, the 5th Cavalry Regiment, advanced slowly under heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire toward Hills 203, 174, and 350.⁵⁷ By 1100, the 5th Cavalry was so slowed in its advance that the division commander ordered the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, to move to the vicinity of Hill 246 to attack along the Taegu - Waegwan road (Map 5). The

⁵⁵5th RCT WD, 200001-202400 September 1950, loc. cit.

⁵⁶Lt. Col. Melbourne C. Chandler, Of Garryowen in Glory (Annandale, Virginia: The Turnpike Press, Inc., 1960), p. 269.

⁵⁷EUSAK WD, Periodic Operations Report 197, 160600-161200 September 1950.



Map 5. --2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, Attack on Hill 300

battalion objective was to be Hill 300, which was the center of a larger hill mass 253-300-203 that elements of the 1st Cavalry Division had unsuccessfully assaulted for the preceding three days. At 1426 that afternoon the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, was attached to the 5th Cavalry⁵⁸ and the following morning at 0700 was committed on the south flank of the regiment to attack north toward Hill 300.⁵⁹

In the 2d Battalion attack, Company E crossed the line of departure toward the forward slope of Hill 188. Company F moved southwest of Hill 188 to protect the battalion's south flank, but drew heavy enemy fire from Hill 184 to the north. Just as the attack appeared to falter, orders were received to contain the enemy on Hill 184 and bypass the battalion around the hill across the Taegu - Waegwan road toward the battalion objective. By 1330, Company G had advanced to a position between Hills 184 and 190 and was receiving heavy fire. Company F, meanwhile, had occupied the crest of Hill 190; so in order to extricate Company G from its valley position, Company F was ordered to make contact with Company G and together advance north and east toward the battalion objective.⁶⁰ In order to release Company E so it could be used in the attack across the road on Hill 300, the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, attacked from the southeast and helped Company E take Hill 184, key terrain in the advance toward Hill 300. In the meantime, Companies F and G assaulted the base of

⁵⁸Chandler, loc. cit.

⁵⁹EUSAK WD, Periodic Operations Report 201, 171200-172400 September 1950.

⁶⁰Chandler, op. cit., pp. 269-270.

Hill 300 north of the road, overrunning several enemy mortar positions; but enemy resistance had stiffened considerably.⁶¹

On the morning of 18 September, the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, continued its attack up Hill 300; and although the battalion was locked in close fighting all day, the unit could not take the objective. During the day, the unit sustained staggering losses: Company F was reduced to forty-five men, and Companies E and G were consolidated into one unit totaling 120 men. By nightfall, however, the battalion had advanced to within two hundred yards of the summit of Hill 300 and there dug in for the night unable to carry the crest.⁶² Meanwhile, the troops on Hill 300 were being aided materially by the units' successes on the flanks. The 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, had seized Hill 203 and was advancing toward Hill 317, while on its right, the 3d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, was attacking from Hill 174 toward Hill 371.⁶³ In spite of these apparent encircling movements, the North Koreans held on doggedly to Hill 300.

The following morning, before the men of the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, could mount their final assault on Hill 300, a column of troops and vehicles were observed moving up the road between Hills 300 and 268 toward Waegwan.⁶⁴ Taking a calculated risk in an effort to encircle the enemy forces opposite the 1st Cavalry Division, Maj. Gen. Hobart R. Gay had committed a portion of his division to strike northwest toward Waegwan, turn north short of the town to hit the

⁶¹Ibid., p. 270.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 270-271.

⁶³EUSAK WD, Periodic Operations Report 204, 181200-182400 September 1950.

⁶⁴Chandler, op. cit., p. 271.

Waegwan - Tabu-dong road, and then advance up the road toward Tabu-dong to link up with forces moving in from the east. Although this was a brilliant tactical maneuver that trapped thousands of North Korean soldiers in a pocket north of Taegu, it did not materially assist the assaulting troops on Hill 300.

At 0830, Company F assaulted the crest of Hill 300 and by 0900 had occupied the southern tip of the hill. Although Companies E and G supported the assault by fire, they could not move forward; and by 1000 Company F had been forced to withdraw approximately one hundred yards in the face of a violent counterattack. At 1000, all companies were ordered to make a coordinated assault on the hill following an artillery preparation that was shorter than desired because of the existing artillery ammunition shortage. Again the battalion was stopped short of its objective. Twice more during the day the battalion hammered away at its objective, and finally at 1815 with the assistance of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, the battle weary American forces stormed the crest of Hill 300.⁶⁵

In the attack on Hill 300, the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, took frightful losses. During the advance over 8,000 yards of hills, rice paddies, and open terrain, the battalion had suffered 28 killed, 202 wounded, and 4 missing in addition to 34 casualties among Korean augmentation personnel attached to the battalion. In addition, three company commanders and one company executive officer had been wounded and one company commander had been killed.⁶⁶ And what had this bloody assault accomplished?

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

The task in evaluating the influence this battle had on the 5th RCT's success in accomplishing its mission is difficult, but it should be obvious that the 5th RCT's advance up the Nakdong was materially enhanced by the action on its right flank. Moreover, the Taegu - Waegwan road that had been secured on 19 September provided the forces of the 24th Division that would soon be west of the Nakdong River a sorely needed supply route. But even more important, the action had been a key to General Gay's entrapment of North Korean forces north of Taegu.

While the 5th RCT was battering at Hill 268 and before the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, had secured Hill 300, General Walker was massing his forces under 1st Corps to attack across the Nakdong River toward Kumchon and Taejon.

CHAPTER III

THE CONCENTRATION

The force that General Walker decided to mass in the Taegu area for his strike west across the Naktong River toward Kumchon and Taejon was the 24th Division. But the task of massing the 24th Division was a complex gamble, for it had been moved repeatedly since the opening phases of the war from one part of the front to another to parry North Korean blows. During the period from 3 September to 17 September alone, the division had fought in almost every sector of the 8th Army defense perimeter. At the beginning of the North Korean September offensive, heavy pressure in the southern zone of action caused General Walker to shift the division (less the 21st RCT which remained in Kyongju) from this location to the vicinity of Susan-ni. Fortunately for the 24th Division, the 1st Marine Brigade, together with the 2d and 25th Divisions, was able to contain the North Korean penetrations, and the 24th Division was not committed to action.¹

Meanwhile, the North Koreans attacked in strength in the northeast portion of the front and made a sizable penetration between Pohang-dong and Kyongju, threatening the Pusan-Taegu lifeline. The 21st Regiment was committed northeast of Kyongju on 4 September and

¹"24th Infantry Division War Diary" (hereafter cited 24th Inf Div WD), Narrative Summary, 26 August-28 September 1950, pp. 1-2.

the remainder of the division moved from Susan-ni to that area on 5 and 6 September. By this time, the situation had become so critical that General Walker organized Task Force Jackson under Maj. Gen. John H. Church, Commanding General, 24th Division; attached the ROK 1st Corps, the 24th Infantry Division, and a small combat team from the 9th Infantry Regiment; and ordered the task force to contain and reduce the penetration that had severed the army main supply route. General Church, in turn, organized Task Force Davidson under the command of his assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. Garrison H. Davidson, with the 1st and 2d Battalions, 19th Infantry and supporting artillery to move by a southern route to Yonil on the east coast and attack to the west against the flank of the penetration. At the same time, the 21st Infantry and the 3d Battalion, 19th Infantry, defended, then counterattacked north of Kyongju. In three days fighting, these forces, aided by elements of the ROK 1st Corps, successfully reduced the North Korean salient.²

By 13 September, the threat in the eastern sector of the front had materially attenuated. Task Force Davidson returned to the 24th Division assembly area near Kyongju and was dissolved upon arrival.³ The 19th Regiment command post opened near Kyongju at 1030, and all units of the command were in the new area by 1545, including the 3d Battalion which had been returned to the control of the regiment.⁴ On the evening of 13 September, the 19th Regiment was ordered to

²Ibid.

³"19th Infantry Regiment War Diary (hereafter cited 19th Inf WD), 122400-132400 September 1950.

⁴Ibid.

relieve in place on the following day the 21st Regiment which was still occupying blocking positions north of Kyongju.⁵ Earlier in the day, the 21st Regiment had been ordered to move from Kyongju to Kyongsan for attachment to 1st Corps on arrival. The projected move was to begin on 14 September and the regiment was to clear its old assembly area by 1800 on 15 September.⁶ Shortly after the receipt of orders, Colonel Richard W. Stephens, Commanding Officer, 21st Infantry Regiment, issued warning orders to his subordinate units, scheduling the 1st Battalion to move at 0800 on 14 September followed closely by the remaining two battalions. Division headquarters intervened, however, and ordered only one battalion to move on 14 September and the remaining units to move on 15 September. Shortly after noon, division headquarters again contacted the 21st Regiment ordering it to change its destination from Kyongsan to the Taegu airstrip.⁷ The move to mass the 24th Division had begun.

On 14 September, according to plans, the 2d Battalion, 19th Infantry, relieved elements of the 21st Infantry in positions north of Kyongju⁸ but made no contact with the enemy on that day or the following day.⁹ As the 21st Regiment was preparing in the afternoon for its move to Taegu, General Walker arrived in the area and delivered a speech to the officers and men which he highlighted by

⁵Ibid.

⁶"21st Infantry Regiment War Diary" (hereafter cited 21st Inf WD), 122400-132400 September 1950.

⁷Ibid.

⁸19th Inf WD, 132400-142400 September 1950.

⁹19th Inf WD, 142400-152400 September 1950.

stating that "the 21st Infantry would be the first unit in the South Korean Capital of Seoul and that [they] would eat Thanksgiving dinner in Japan."¹⁰ The men of the regiment now knew that they were to play a major part in 8th Army's forthcoming offensive.

With one battalion already in Taegu, the remaining two battalions of the 21st Regiment began their move from Kyongju to Taegu at 0740 on the morning of 15 September, arriving at their destination by 1640.¹¹ With the 21st Regiment in Taegu attached to 1st Corps and the 19th Regiment in the area of Kyongju occupying blocking positions, the need for Task Force Jackson vanished and it was dissolved.¹² Shortly after the final units of the 21st Regiment closed in Taegu, the Commanding General, 24th Division, received a message from General Walker to move the remainder of the 24th Division in the Kyongju area (less the 19th RCT and Company A, 6th Medium Tank Battalion) to the Kyongsan area by motor and rail, to close by 1800 on 16 September, and to be attached to 1st Corps. The same message stated that the 19th RCT was to remain in Kyongju as army reserve and was to be prepared to rejoin the 24th Division on order of 8th Army.¹³ Eighth Army's order for the 19th Regiment to join the 24th Division came on the same day that the division troops moved from Kyongju to Kyongsan, 16 September. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 19th Infantry were released to 1st Corps control, subsequently released to

¹⁰21st Inf WD, 132400-142400 September 1950.

¹¹21st Inf WD, 142400-152400 September 1950.

¹²24th Inf Div WD, 132400-142400 September 1950.

¹³"Eighth United States Army, Korea War Diary" (hereafter cited EUSAK WD), Message from the Commanding General, EUSAK to the Commanding Generals, 1st Corps and 24th Infantry Division, 151615 September 1950.

24th Division control, and ordered to move to Kyongsan.¹⁴ The 3d Battalion, meanwhile, was retained attached to 8th Army, and as army reserve was ordered to move to Samnangjin to protect the main supply route and the army left flank.¹⁵ As a result, the 3d Battalion departed for Samnangjin at 1800 on 16 September,¹⁶ and the 1st and 2d Battalions moved to Kyongsan the following morning at 0700 closing at their new destination by 1445.¹⁷ With the movement of two battalions of the 19th Infantry into the division assembly area on 17 September, the 24th Division had assembled in one locale all its major combat units with the exception of the 3d Battalion, 19th Infantry.

On the eve of its attack west across the Naktong River, the 24th Division's combat effectiveness stood higher than at any time since the start of the Korean War. Its ranks included over 12,200 personnel, approximately 65 % of its authorized strength. Even more significant were the strengths of the regiments and their supporting artillery. The 19th Infantry was at 84% of its authorized strength, the 21st Infantry at 90% authorized, and division artillery at 76 %. In addition, the division stood to gain an additional 3,500 personnel if and when the 5th RCT became attached. Attachment of the 5th RCT would not only complete the division's triangular organization of three regiments but would also bring the division strength up to almost

¹⁴19th Inf WD, Operations Summary, 16 September 1950.

¹⁵EUSAK WD, G-3 Section, 160001-162400 September 1950.

¹⁶19th Inf WD, Operations Summary, 16 September 1950.

¹⁷19th Inf WD, 162400-172400 September 1950.

16,000 personnel, or 83% of what it was authorized.¹⁸ Some of the personnel shortages could be rationalized, however, because of the absence of certain units in the division that were authorized. For example, the regiments were assigned no organic tank companies, yet the division's 6th Tank Battalion was considered adequate tank strength for the type terrain in which the division was fighting. Likewise, the division had only one battery of antiaircraft artillery in lieu of its authorized battalion, yet the shortage was not considered critical because of the almost total absence of enemy aircraft in the theater.¹⁹

The division was, however, seriously deficient in experienced, trained personnel. Besides its tremendous turnover in personnel since the days of Taejon and Chochiwon, the division had just absorbed over 2,000 Korean augmentation recruits. Of these 2,000 recruits, who had only three to five days basic training prior to reporting to the division, the infantry regiments had by far the greatest percentage. Both the 19th and 21st Regiments had received approximately 800 apiece, the 3d Engineer Battalion had received over 200, and the division artillery had received approximately 400. Although these recruits later proved reasonably effective soldiers, at this time they were woefully untrained. In comparison with American soldiers, the infantry rated them 46% combat effective, the engineers 35% combat effective, and the artillery 25% effective.²⁰ In addition

¹⁸24th Inf Div WD, 142400-152400 September 1950 (The division's 34th Infantry on 31 August had been reduced to zero strength to form the 3d Battalion, 19th Infantry and 2d Battalion, 21st Infantry).

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰24th Inf Div WD, 132400-142400 September 1950.

to the Korean augmentation recruits, the replacements that had been received in the combat units had been far from what was desired. In an effort to build the combat divisions to strength, many replacements had been shipped from service units in Japan, and a good percentage of these men were neither ready physically for the rigors of combat nor did they possess the requisite knowledge of infantry weapons and tactics.²¹ Yet in spite of these multiple shortcomings, the 24th Division, marshalling in its assembly area east of Taegu, was a fighting outfit ready to regain its pride and take its vengeance for the bitter defeats it had suffered less than two months previously.

On 17 September, while the 5th RCT and the 5th Cavalry Regiment were engaged in fierce fighting only a few miles away, the 24th Division received its mission for the 8th Army offensive. At noon, the division G-3 went to the 1st Corps command post where he was told that the division was to

force a crossing of the NAKTONG RIVER in the vicinity of [Hasan-dong], attack to the north and northwest to secure a bridgehead near WAEGWAN . . . , and then continue to attack to the northwest along the WAEGWAN-KUMCHON axis.²²

At 1430, the regimental commanders were called to the division command post to receive instructions for the Naktong crossing.²³ The 24th Division's plan was to cross the river after dark on the night of 18-19 September and attack north along the west bank of the Naktong River toward Waegwan. The 24th Reconnaissance Company was to cross the river west of Taegu and block roads into Songju from the

²¹19th Inf WD, 152400-162400 September 1950.

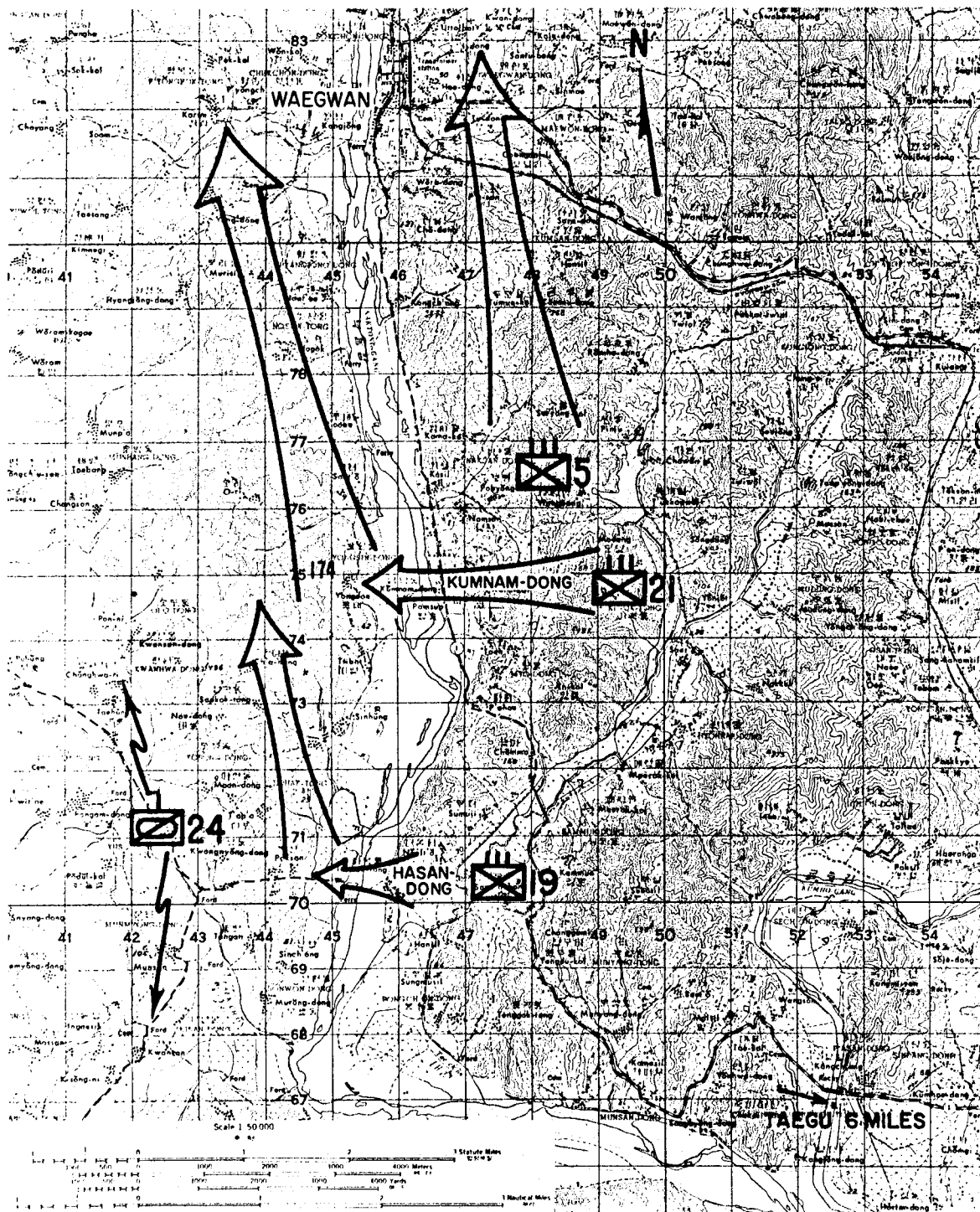
²²24th Inf Div WD, 162400-172400 September 1950.

²³19th Inf WD, Operations Summary, 17 September 1950.

southeast and northeast. One battalion of the 19th Infantry was to follow the reconnaissance company to Songju and then attack northeast to Waegwan. The remainder of the 19th Infantry less the battalion still at Samnangjin in army reserve was to follow the 21st Infantry. The division artillery would support the attack initially from the east bank until either the division engineers who were to construct rafts could transport them across to the west shore or the supporting corps engineers who were to build a float bridge could get them across on the bridge. Although the 5th RCT was ordered attached to the 24th Division at midnight on 17 September and was not in fact attached until twenty-four hours later, the mission of the RCT remained the same: to continue the attack northwest and north along the east bank of the Naktong to seize Waegwan²⁴ (Map 6).

The 21st Regiment, the only complete infantry regiment in the 24th Division at this time, was given the major role in the division plan. As the men in the regiment maintained their equipment in preparation for the forthcoming offensive, Colonel Richard W. Stephens, the regimental commander, received the regimental mission at the division command post. When he returned from division headquarters, he announced his plan at a unit commanders conference at 1800 on the evening of 17 September. The 21st Regiment's mission was to cross the Naktong River during the night of 18-19 September at two separate locations: (1) in the vicinity of the Hasan-dong ferry site and (2) near Kumnam-dong, approximately 5,000 yards north; attack as a whole due west; and after establishing a bridgehead, pivot and drive north

²⁴24th Inf Div WD, 162400-172400 September 1950.



Map 6. -- The 24th Infantry Division's Plan to Cross the Nakdong River

and northwest. The plan called for the 1st and 2d Battalions to jump-off simultaneously at 2200 on the night of 18 September with the 3d Battalion to follow the 1st Battalion. The 1st Battalion would cross the river at 2200 at the northern site; seize and hold its bridgehead objectives; and block enemy threats from the west until the 3d Battalion had crossed the river, pushed through the bridgehead, and driven north. The 2d Battalion was to cross at the same time, seize and hold the high ground west of the crossing site and block enemy threats from the west until the 24th Reconnaissance Company and one battalion of the 19th Regiment had crossed the river to effect a relief in place. And finally, the 3d Battalion was to follow the 1st Battalion across the river; push through the 1st Battalion; and attack north, maintaining security patrols to the west for protection. The heavy mortar company would remain under regimental control to render close support from the near shore until rafts had been constructed to cross the unit and its equipment to the far shore. And without any means to cross the river initially except by assault boat, evacuation of casualties would have to be by assault boat.²⁵

Although plans for the crossing had been carefully formulated by the staff of the 21st Regiment, the entire scheme was to be altered drastically in the subsequent forty-eight hours, primarily because the engineer planners had concentrated their attention on the mighty Nak-tong River and its associated problems and had overlooked a little, inconsequential tributary, the Kumho River, a stream that the 21st Infantry had to cross prior to its assault crossing of the Naktong.

²⁵21st Inf WD, 162400-172400 September 1950.

If the engineers of 1st Corps and 8th Army had been overly concerned with the problems inherent in crossing the Nakdong, they had every reason to be. Eighth Army's Operations Plan 10 stated that the Nakdong River

varies in width from 300-400 feet in [the] NAKTONG-NI area . . . to 500-600 feet [in the] vicinity of HYONPUNG. . . . Normal depth varies from 3' to 18' and is navigable for light craft (sailing or motor boats) for about 200 miles from [the] mouth of [the] river. Stream beds of [the] main river and its tributaries have very moderate gradients except near their sources. Stream bottoms are mostly sand, gravel and cobbles. Nearly all banks of the NAKTONG are low (5-10 feet) and are moderately steep. They consist mostly of sand and gravel. Steepest slopes may be expected on curves of the river.²⁶

The river obstacle itself, however, did not present the most formidable problem; instead, the most critical task for the engineers was to muster the means to bridge this water barrier.

During the perimeter fighting, 8th Army had only a token of non-divisional engineer effort: one half-strength engineer combat battalion and one treadway bridge company, one dump truck company, and one water supply company that were formed into a composite battalion. By the time of the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, this force had been augmented by the addition of one construction group headquarters, one construction battalion, and two additional combat battalions.²⁷ First Corps' share of these engineer units amounted to the 11th Engineer Combat Battalion, an understrength organization consisting of two engineer combat companies instead of the authorized three; the 14th Engineer Combat Battalion; and the 55th Engineer

²⁶EUSAK WD, Operations Plan 10, Annex A, Appendix 1.

²⁷Colonel Paschal N. Strong, "Army Engineers in Korea," The Military Engineer, XLIV (November-December, 1952), 406.

Treadway Bridge Company.²⁸ Supporting the 24th Division directly were the 11th Engineer Battalion and the 55th Treadway Bridge Company, although elements of the 14th Engineer Battalion did materially assist the 24th Division in its crossing of the Kumho River.

Even more critical than the engineer manpower available, however, were the meager amounts of engineer equipment and supplies in the area for support of the crossing. Although only approximately 1000 feet of floating bridge and a few units of Bailey bridging were available in Korea at this time,²⁹ 1st Corps had been allocated 864 feet of treadway bridge, which accounted for more than 80% of the total available to the army.³⁰ In addition to the floating bridge available, 1st Corps had on hand several fifty ton raft sets that were to be used in the Nakdong crossing.³¹ Although one complete float bridge set had been shipped from Yokohama at 1600 on 17 September to Korea, and another was expected to be shipped on the following day,³² their tardy arrival precluded their planned use in the Nakdong crossing. In addition to a painful shortage of float bridging, the necessary erection equipment also remained in critical short supply. On 11 September, the 1st Corps Engineer was informed that the 55th Treadway Bridge Company had no serviceable power boats, although one was

²⁸EUSAK WD, Operations Plan 10, Annex E, Engineer.

²⁹Strong, loc. cit.

³⁰Colonel Emerson C. Itschner, "The Nakdong River Crossings in Korea," The Military Engineer, XLIII (March-April, 1951), 96.

³¹"I Corps War Diary" (hereafter cited I Corps WD), Historical Report, Engineer Section, 17 September 1950.

³²EUSAK WD, G-4 Staff Section Report, 180001-182400 September 1950.

expected to be operational by 15 September.³³ Moreover, functioning outboard motors were practically nonexistent.³⁴ But perhaps the most important immediate tactical need was for assault boats; and like other engineer materiel, they also were scarce. The 112 boats and 32 plywood treads that were to be furnished the 3d Engineer Combat Battalion and the 104 boats and 40 treads to be furnished the 14th Engineer Combat Battalion³⁵ represented almost the entire 8th Army stock, for the 3d Engineers' allocation alone represented over half the stock available in South Korea.³⁶ With these meager means, the engineer planners at 1st Corps, 24th Division, and units supporting the crossing devised a workable plan to launch the 24th Division across the Nakdong River.

The 3d Engineer Combat Battalion of the 24th Division was to play the key part in transporting the infantry units of the division across the river and were formulating plans to accomplish this mission. Earlier on 16 September, while the division was enroute from Kyongju to Kyongsan, the 3d Engineers were "alerted to move to the vicinity of Kyongsan . . . preceded by [Company] D, still attached to [the] 21st RCT, and followed by [Company] A on September 17."³⁷ At 2300

³³EUSAK WD, Historical Report, Office of the Engineer, 11 September 1950.

³⁴EUSAK WD, G-4 Staff Section Report, 180001-182400 September 1950.

³⁵I Corps WD, Historical Report, Engineer Section, 15 September 1950.

³⁶Itchner, op. cit., p. 97.

³⁷Lt. Col. Peter C. Hyzer, "The Third Engineers in Korea, July-October 1950," The Military Engineer, XLIII (March-April, 1951), 104-105.

on the night of 17 September, while the battalion bivouacked in the division assembly area at Kyongsan, the battalion staff and company commanders were notified by the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Peter C. Hyzer, that the 24th Division would make a series of river crossings across the Naktong south of Waegwan and northwest of Taegu during the night of 18-19 September.³⁸ The plan as outlined by the division engineer envisioned Company C with one platoon of Company D crossing two battalions of the 21st Infantry at the northern crossing site and Company A with one platoon of Company D crossing the remaining assault elements 5,000 yards farther south. Company B was to construct infantry support rafts at both sites and Company D less two platoons was to remain in battalion reserve.³⁹ At the time of this meeting in which Colonel Hyzer outlined his plan, none of the officers of the battalion had been given an opportunity to make a reconnaissance of the crossing areas or examine aerial photographs of the river. Although the operation was a scant twenty-seven hours away, the engineer battalion had received no assault boats for training even though they had been promised by the Corps Engineer.⁴⁰

In support of the 3d Engineer Combat Battalion, the 55th Engineer Treadway Bridge Company, on the following day, was to provide each company of the division engineers with one assault boat in order to allow the engineer crews some time to familiarize infantry-

³⁸John Glenbower Westover, Combat Support in Korea: The United States Army in the Korean Conflict (Washington, D. C.: Combat Forces Press, 1955), p. 5.

³⁹Hyzer, op. cit., p. 105.

⁴⁰Westover, loc. cit.

men with assault boat procedures. In addition, the bridge company was scheduled to deliver assault boats to the crossing sites in time for the assaulting infantry to cross as planned, and they were to transport the necessary rafting equipment to the southern site to support a platoon of engineers from the 11th Engineer Combat Battalion in constructing a fifty ton raft.

The 11th Engineer Combat Battalion was to relieve the 3d Engineer Battalion from all road maintenance responsibility from Taegu to the ford across the Kumho River and continue to improve two airstrips in the Taegu area for 8th Army. In support of the assault crossing, Company B was to construct a road from the Kumho River ford into the 21st Infantry assembly area on the east bank of the Naktong River. Furthermore, in order to insure an early crossing of the 24th Reconnaissance Company, one platoon of Company B was to construct a fifty ton raft at the southern crossing site. By far the most important task, however, assigned to the 11th Engineer Battalion and the 55th Treadway Bridge Company was the construction of a widened steel treadway float bridge across the Naktong River to provide the division's heavy loads access to the west shore.⁴¹ But this task was still four days away, and events were to occur that would materially alter the plans that had been so carefully formulated. On the following morning, 18 September, when the 24th Division started its move from its assembly area near the Taegu airstrip and Kyongsan, a normally easily fordable stream was to wreak havoc with the division's plans for the Naktong crossing.

⁴¹"11th Engineer Combat Battalion War Diary, " 17-18 September 1950.

CHAPTER IV

THE CROSSINGS

The Kumho River, a small tributary of the larger Nakdong River, winds its way to the north of Taegu in a flattened semicircle and crosses the road leading west from Taegu to the Nakdong River approximately six miles west of the city. During dry weather, the Kumho poses no great crossing problems for vehicular traffic; it is readily fordable where the road dips into the river. But heavy rains had inundated Korea during the week prior to the Nakdong River crossing,¹ and engineers in support of the 5th RCT who had been maintaining the road from Taegu west to the Nakdong River as a regimental supply route had been required to repair the Kumho ford to make it passable for regimental traffic. By the time the 3d Engineer Combat Battalion assumed responsibility for the maintenance of the road from Taegu to the Hasan-dong ferry site on the Nakdong River, the Kumho River represented a formidable obstacle for the 24th Division.

In order to sustain heavy military traffic and decrease the depth of water at the ford, engineers had installed in the stream four eighteen inch diameter culverts and additional culverts fabricated from fifty-five gallon gasoline drums. Over the culverts had been constructed

¹"11th Engineer Combat Battalion War Diary" (hereafter cited 11th ECB WD), 7 September-19 September 1950.

a fill of sand and gravel approximately three feet high off the stream floor revetted on both the upstream and downstream faces with sandbags. This "sandbag bridge," while not passing sufficient flow through the culverts to lower the water level below the top of the roadway fill across the river, did lower the depth approximately eighteen inches which allowed all vehicles but jeeps to use the ford. To transport jeep traffic across the river, engineers had constructed from ten assault boats and plywood treads an infantry support raft capable of ferrying seven jeeps per trip.² Two and one-half ton trucks on the banks provided power through bumper winches to pull the raft across the stream, and a cable stretched across the river provided a guide line for the ferry to follow.³ Although this crossing arrangement satisfied the needs of the 5th RCT, it proved completely inadequate for the requirements of a division moving into the attack.

By 17 September, heavier loads on the improved ford had crushed the barrel culverts, resulting in increasing the depth of water flowing over the top of the filled causeway. The 24th Division, as a result, was left with a one-way ford over the top of a narrow sand and gravel weir that had impounded water to a depth of greater than five feet on the upstream side of the roadway. By now, the river had become marginally fordable for three-quarter ton trucks; they were drowning out with increasing regularity on the ford. In addition, the increased traffic had begun to show its wear on the pioneered crossing.

¹"I Corps War Diary" (hereafter cited I Corps WD), Historical Report, Engineer Section, 20 September 1950.

²Colonel Emerson C. Itschner, "The Naktong River Crossings in Korea," The Military Engineer, XLIII (March-April, 1951), 96.

Because the ford required constant maintenance to keep it operational,⁴ the 3d Engineers were compelled to work continually to keep the ford open for traffic and at the same time prepare for an assault crossing that was now only hours away.

On the morning of 18 September, at 0630, the company commanders and staff of the 3d Engineer Combat Battalion departed from Kyongsan to make a reconnaissance of the Naktong River crossing sites. As the reconnaissance was in progress, the engineer companies continued training with the infantry troops on assault boat procedures.⁵ Colonel Stephens, meanwhile, had departed at 0700 from his regimental bivouac area near Taegu with his staff, his battalion commanders, and their staffs to make a similar reconnaissance of the crossing sites.⁶ On arrival at the Kumho River at 0800, Colonel Stephens instructed his operations officer to send a message to General Church informing him that "the bridge which was supposed to have been repaired shows no sign of any effort having been made to repair it."⁷ Although no bridge over the Kumho River existed in this vicinity, obviously Colonel Stephens alluded to the primitive crossing means that were to play such an important part in disrupting his plans. Shortly after noon, both reconnaissance parties, returning to their

⁴"5th Regimental Combat Team War Diary, " Unit Report Number 37, 171800-181800 September 1950.

⁵John Glenbower Westover, Combat Support in Korea: The United States Army in the Korean Conflict (Washington, D. C.: Combat Forces Press, 1955), p. 6.

⁶"21st Infantry Regiment War Diary" (hereafter cited 21st Inf WD), 172400-182400 September 1950.

⁷Ibid.

bivouac areas by way of the Kumho River ford, were startled to discover that vehicles had already begun to form a single lane of traffic waiting to cross the river.⁸

Earlier in the morning, the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry had been alerted to move toward the Naktong at 1230 and the 3d Battalion had been alerted to move at 1300,⁹ but the truck companies that were to transport the infantry troops did not arrive in the regimental area until 1330.¹⁰ As a result, the 1st Battalion did not start its move until 1435 and the 3d Battalion did not leave the Taegu airstrip until 1545.¹¹ What was to have been an hour ride at most for the infantry resulted in a delayed, confused traffic snarl that kept the infantry from their assembly areas until long after dark.

A few hours prior to the 21st Regiment's motor march to the Naktong River on the afternoon of 18 September, the 11th Engineer Combat Battalion had assumed maintenance responsibility for the road from Taegu to the Kumho River, including relief of the 3d Engineers from the tasks of operating the ferry and maintaining the ford.¹² By midafternoon, however, despite back-breaking engineering efforts to keep vehicles moving, traffic had become hopelessly delayed. As far as the eye could see from the Kumho River down the one and one-half lane road to Taegu, trucks and jeeps of the advancing 24th Division and supporting units sat bumper to bumper in one long, immobile column.

⁸Westover, loc. cit.

⁹21st Inf WD, loc. cit.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²11th ECB WD, 18 September 1950.

By dark, the column of vehicles waiting to cross the Kumho River stretched for five miles toward Taegu.¹³ At the Kumho crossing, the ford had begun to disintegrate. It now required constant attention to keep it passable. Each time an engineer truck drove onto the "sandbag bridge" to place additional fill, the single, snake-like column ground to a time-consuming, agonizing halt. Because the ford had deteriorated so badly under the division's vehicles, three-quarter ton truck drivers were beginning to use the ferry more regularly rather than risk stalling their vehicles while crossing the ford. This increased use of the pitifully inadequate raft resulted in compounding the confusion that already existed: jeeps and three-quarter ton trucks were pulled out of column to wait their turn on the raft, resulting in unit vehicles becoming widely separated¹⁴ at a time when tactical integrity should have been paramount. Late in the afternoon, to make matters worse, a high priority convoy of forty vehicles moving toward Taegu stopped traffic moving toward the front for better than two hours.¹⁵ But the source of greatest trouble remained at the raft. Although it could carry only seven jeeps per trip across the river to the west, its operations were further slowed by the necessity to accommodate predominantly ambulances returning to Taegu with casualties of the 5th RCT that at the time was bloodily engaged in its assault on Hill 268 to the north.

By late afternoon on 18 September, while 21st Regiment vehicles were trying vainly to cross the Kumho, Colonel Emerson C.

¹³Itschner, loc. cit.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

Itschner, 1st Corps Engineer, visited the Kumho crossing site in an effort to solve the dilemma that existed.¹⁶ In view of the paramount importance of the Taegu-Hasan-dong road to the 24th Division at this moment as a main supply route, Colonel Itschner decided to bridge the Kumho River with a portion of the corps' existing allocation of heavy float bridge. His decision involved bridging the river with widened steel treadway float bridging; cutting a sixty foot section from the sandbagged causeway across the river (a sufficient gap to take the entire flow of the river); constructing a trestle bridge of wooden bents and steel treadways across the gap; and after completing the trestle bridge, then removing the float bridge for subsequent use in bridging the Naktong River.¹⁷ This decision to alleviate the Kumho River traffic "bottleneck," although too late to support the rapid movement of the 21st Regiment, necessitated Colonel Itschner's gambling with the corps' resources of float bridging. The 864 feet available to 1st Corps¹⁸ was insufficient to span simultaneously both the 700 feet wide Naktong and the 270 feet wide Kumho. In view of the inadequate amount of bridging, certainly the Naktong should have received first priority. Although this decision with its resultant engineer effort solved the Kumho problem in less than twenty-four hours, on the evening of 18 September an endless column of vehicles inched its way to the front on the one hand, and on the other, Colonel Stephens was charged with a

¹⁶I Corps WD, Historical Report, Engineer Section, 18 September 1950.

¹⁷Itschner, loc. cit.

¹⁸Ibid.

mission to jump off across the Nakdong River at dark--a task that was impossible under the circumstances.

The 24th Infantry Division War Diary states that

it had been planned that I Corps (U.S.) would furnish engineers to bridge this stream so that the 24th Division Engineers could be used at the crossing of the Nakdong River. However, at the last moment, Corps sent word that it would be impossible for them to furnish the required engineers. The 24th Division engineers had to be used at the Kumho [sic]. . . . A makeshift ferry was improvised, from assault boats, to move jeeps across. All this took time and by 1800 hours there was a solid line of trucks extending for miles east of the river. Furthermore, this took many engineers away from their original mission of building rafts and providing assault boats for the crossing of the Nakdong.¹⁹

Considering the critical shortage of float bridging allotted to 1st Corps for the Nakdong crossing, it seems highly unlikely that corps had anticipated using a portion of the bridging available for the Nakdong River to bridge the Kumho. To substantiate this hypothesis, neither Colonel Itschner in his article in The Military Engineer entitled "The Nakdong River Crossings in Korea" nor the documents in the 1st Corps War Diary indicates in any manner that bridging had been promised for the Kumho crossing. Furthermore, the ferry in use across the Kumho was not a makeshift raft; rather it was constructed from standard Corps of Engineers bridging equipment. And finally, one platoon from Company A, 11th Engineer Combat Battalion assumed responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the crossing means over the Kumho River on 18 September,²⁰ thereby releasing all the division engineers for their tasks at the Nakdong River. Rafting across the Nakdong, obviously, had not yet begun; neither were the 3d Engineers

¹⁹"24th Infantry Division War Diary" (hereafter cited 24th Inf Div WD), 172400-182400 September 1950.

²⁰11th ECB WD, 18 September 1950.

involved in providing assault boats. So even though the 24th Division's case concerning the confusion at the Kumho River is overstated, one inescapable fact remains: engineer support had failed at a crucial time which undoubtedly cost infantry lives the following morning.

By midafternoon, the 24th Division General Staff had become convinced that the 21st Infantry could not cross the Naktong River shortly after dark as originally planned. Furthermore, because the 19th Infantry would be even more hopelessly delayed than the 21st Infantry, General Church changed the crossing plan: the 21st Regiment now would cross at the northern site rather than at two separate sites.²¹ To implement this plan, Company C, 3d Engineer Combat Battalion with one platoon each from Companies B and D attached started its move at 1700 from Kyongsan to the crossing site. Moving independently of the remainder of the battalion, the company was delayed about an hour at the Kumho River but arrived at its initial assembly area near Naksan-dong by 1930. Because darkness had not yet fallen, the company infiltrated from the initial assembly area into its final assembly area--an apple orchard approximately three hundred yards east of the crossing site at Kumnam-dong. Although the company received heavy enemy mortar fire on one flat stretch of road, the unit closed unharmed into its final assembly area by 2100.²² Immediately, the 2d Platoon, Company C started to cut approaches through the steep banks to facilitate transporting the assault boats from the assembly area to the water's edge. First and Second Platoons were to stand by at the crossing sites to

²¹24th Inf Div WD, 172400-182400 September 1950.

²²Westover, op. cit., p. 7.

guide the boats across the river, while the 3d Platoon was to remain in the assembly area to unload the assault boats from trucks and assign infantrymen to boat crews. The platoon from Company B, as soon as the first wave was landed on the far shore, was to start laying pierced steel plank over the beach for a roadway on the untrafficable sand. The platoon from Company D was ordered to stand by as an available reserve.²³ Although the engineers had arrived in the assembly area by early evening, the infantry, on the other hand, had been delayed for an unbearably long time.

Not until 2300 did the advanced elements of the 21st Infantry start to arrive in the assembly area. Furthermore, an additional two hours passed before the infantrymen had closed in the area. But the intolerable irony that resulted from the confusion at the Kumho River was that the assault boats had not yet arrived.²⁴ Now the chances of the regiment's making an assault crossing during darkness looked so slim that Colonel Stephens even considered calling off the attack.²⁵ He had already postponed the attack once from the originally planned time of 2200; and once again, at 0355, he postponed the attack and set a new H-hour for 0500 on the morning of 19 September. At 0400, General Church contacted Colonel Stephens and urged him to get the maximum number of men across the river before daylight in order to minimize their vulnerability to small arms fire on the river during

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 7-8.

²⁵Ibid.

daylight hours.²⁶ As General Church talked to Colonel Stephens, the 55th Engineer Company soldiers finally arrived in the assembly area with twenty-eight assault boats loaded on trucks and pole type trailers.²⁷ They, like the other personnel and equipment moving to the front, had been delayed by the traffic "bottleneck" at the Kumho River. But worse, no one had thought to give them priority on the route in spite of the infantry's being helpless without the assault boats to reach the far shore of the Naktong River. Forty minutes after the assault boats arrived in the assembly area, General Church again urged Colonel Stephens to cross his regiment by the fastest means possible. Colonel Stephens, however, had already changed his crossing plan: the 2d Battalion had been ordered to cross at the northern site with the remainder of the regiment rather than at Hasan-dong.²⁸

At the site where the 21st Regiment was to cross, the Naktong River was a moderately flowing, 400' wide stream. On the near shore, the river bank dropped over a seven foot high escarpment to a flat sandy beach. On the beach that ran approximately 100 yards to the water's edge, a network of tactical wire had been abandoned.²⁹ Across the river a long, slender ridge (Hill 174) parallel to the river dominated the crossing site, and it was here that the North Koreans mounted their strongest defense of the river line in the 24th Division sector.

²⁶21st Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

²⁷Westover, loc. cit.

²⁸21st Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

²⁹Westover, op. cit., p. 7.

At 0530 on the morning of 19 September, ³⁰ just one hour after assault boats arrived in the assembly area and just as dawn broke over the foggy river, twenty-eight assault boats guided by men of Company C, 3d Engineer Battalion, and loaded with men of the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry, slipped into the water to start to the west side of the Naktong. ³¹ All was quiet on the mist-enshrouded river until the first wave of boats reached midstream. Without warning, the enemy riddled the water surface with a crossfire of small arms, machine gun, and mortar fire; and as could have been expected, the most intense fire came from Hill 174. At the same time, artillery fire began falling on the beach area. Caught in this devastating fire, units of the 1st Battalion reached the west side of the river, organized quickly, and started to move against stiff opposition to their objectives. In answer to a request to neutralize the fires that had inflicted numerous casualties on the 1st Battalion in crossing, the air force struck Hill 174 at 0705, but the enemy had shifted his main fires from Hill 174 to a ridge approximately 500 yards to the south. ³² Again the air force struck, but by 0745 the lead elements of the 1st Battalion were so close to Hill 174 that they requested air strikes be discontinued on the ridge. Despite the 1st Battalion's precarious foothold on the west bank of the Naktong, the North Koreans slowly began to give ground. By mid-morning Company A was still meeting stiff opposition in its advance;

³⁰21st Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

³¹Westover, op. cit., p. 8.

³²21st Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

but by this time also, the engineers had crossed the other two rifle companies of the 1st Battalion.³³

Company C, 3d Engineer Battalion, however, had not been without its share of problems as it crossed the lead elements of the 21st Infantry. As the small arms and machine gun fire raked the crossing site, artillery and mortar fire began falling in the assembly areas. Because of the murderous fire on the crossing site, eight of the original twenty-eight assault boats in the initial wave failed to return to the near shore. Some had been blasted out of the water in the middle of the river, and others had drifted too far downstream to be of any use in subsequent trips. None of the Korean augmentation recruits from the 3d Engineers in the first wave returned. Perhaps they had misunderstood their mission and stayed with the infantry on the far shore. But boats were the critical problem. With better than one-fourth of its boats out of action from the first trip across the river, Company C urgently requested additional boats from its headquarters. Within an hour, sixteen additional boats arrived.³⁴ While Company C crossed infantry to the far bank, the platoon from Company B remained stymied in its efforts to lay planking on the sand to serve as a roadway from the river bank to the water's edge. The fire had become so heavy on the beach that remaining in the area was tantamount to suicide.³⁵ Amidst this withering fire, however, Company C continued to cross infantry throughout the day.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Westover, loc. cit.

³⁵Ibid.

By 1100, elements of the 1st Battalion stormed the crest of Hill 174,³⁶ and by noon the remaining units of the 1st Battalion had crossed the river.³⁷ Earlier in the morning, General Church had told the operations officer of the regiment that the entire regiment should cross the river because one battalion was not a sufficient force to continue the advance to the north.³⁸ As a result, Colonel Stephens at noon ordered the 3d Battalion to cross the river.³⁹ In addition, at 1600 the Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, was ordered to cross one company to support the 1st Battalion, move the remainder of his battalion into the 1st Battalion's former assembly area after dark,⁴⁰ and prepare to cross these elements of the battalion early the next day.⁴¹

By the end of the day, the 21st Regiment had secured its bridgehead. The 1st Battalion had advanced north approximately 4,000 yards to the hill mass immediately south of Hill 192,⁴² the 3d Battalion had consolidated its positions on Hill 150 to the west of the crossing site,⁴³ and the 2d Battalion had crossed one company to support the 1st Battalion and was in position to complete its crossing by the following morning⁴⁴ (Map 7). During the evening, however, the

³⁶21st Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

³⁷24th Inf Div WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

³⁸21st Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

³⁹Ibid.

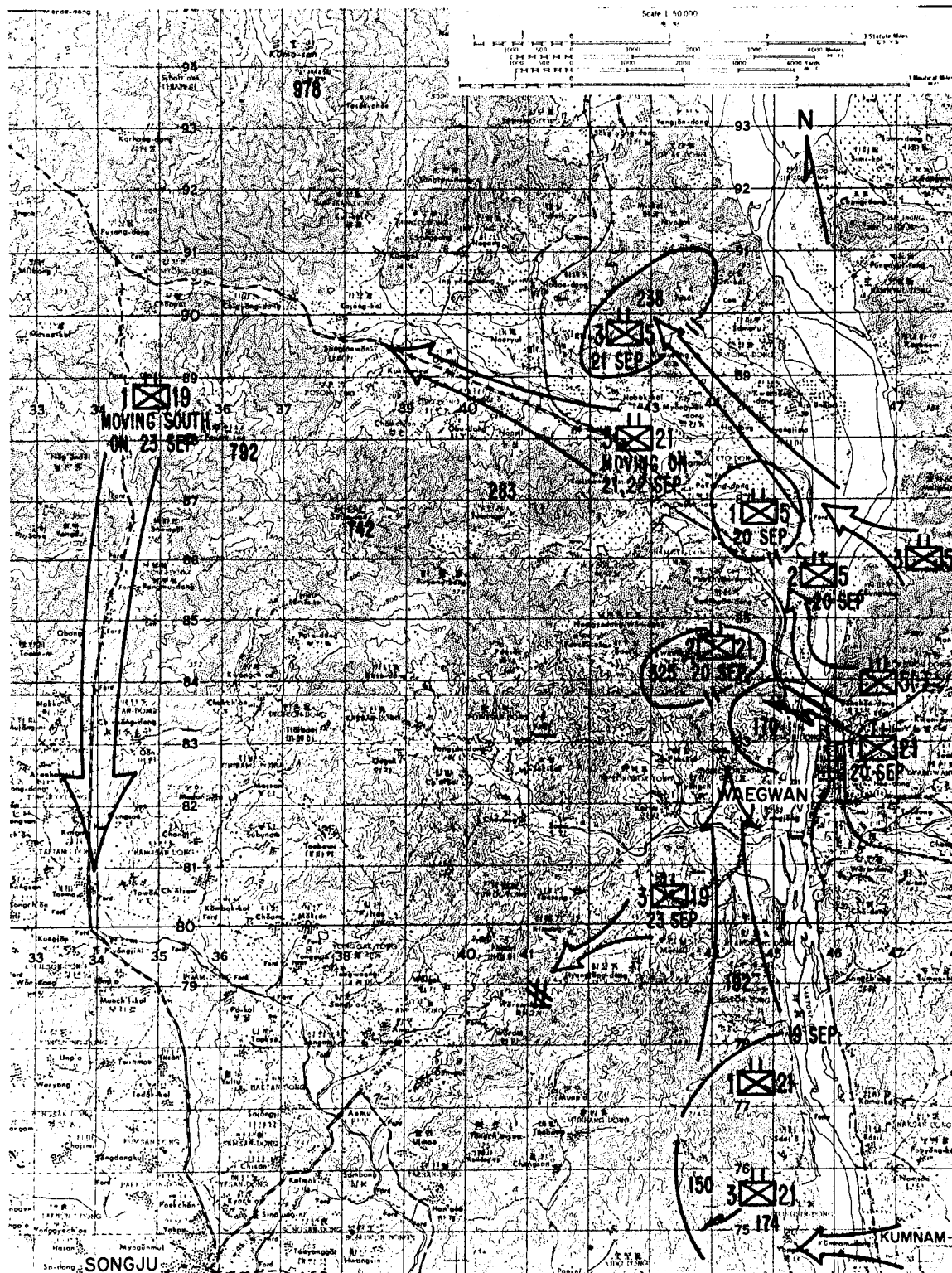
⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹24th Inf Div WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³21st Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

⁴⁴Ibid.



Map 7. --The 24th Infantry Division's Attack West of the Nakdong River

21st Regiment received new orders from division headquarters. The regiment was to complete its crossing of the Nakdong River the following morning, attack to the north to seize Hills 325 and 283, and be prepared to seize Hill 978 north of the Waegwan-Kumchon road.⁴⁵ As the 21st Regiment stood ready to attack the following morning from a secure bridgehead, the supporting engineers were not experiencing success at the crossing site. Because of the artillery and mortar fire that continued to fall on the beach area throughout the day,⁴⁶ the men of Company B attached to Company C, 3d Engineer Battalion, were unable to assemble an infantry support raft that was badly needed to ferry supplies and vehicles to the combat elements of the regiment.⁴⁷ Heavy tonnages of supplies, however, were not nearly so important to cross on this day as were infantrymen. And the 21st Regiment was now gaining support from the 19th Infantry crossing the Nakdong River to the south.

In much the same manner that the 21st Regiment prepared for crossing the Nakdong River, so did the 19th Regiment. During the afternoon of 18 September, the battalion commanders and their operations officers and the regimental staff made a reconnaissance of the Nakdong River area,⁴⁸ returned to the regimental bivouac area at Kyongsan through the traffic congestion at the Kumho River crossing,

⁴⁵24th Inf Div WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

⁴⁶21st Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

⁴⁷"3d Engineer Combat Battalion War Diary, " 190001-192400 September 1950.

⁴⁸"19th Infantry Regiment War Diary" (hereafter cited 19th Inf WD), 172400-182400 September 1950.

and made final preparations to cross the Nakdong River the following day. Before departing Kyongsan, the regiment conducted a final check of equipment and supplies which included two days of rations, two days of gasoline, and one basic load of ammunition.⁴⁹ At 0630 on the morning of 19 September, just one hour after its sister regiment had started across the Nakdong, the 19th Infantry (less the 3d Battalion that was still in army reserve at Samnangjin) started moving from Kyongsan to its assembly area east of Hasan-dong. When the regiment closed in this location at 1345,⁵⁰ its crossing plan had already changed from one that called for crossing one battalion at Hasan-dong and the other behind the 21st Regiment at Kumnam-dong. The 19th Infantry plan was to cross the Nakdong near Hasan-dong at 1600 with the 2d Battalion leading followed by the 1st Battalion. And finally, the 24th Reconnaissance Company would cross as soon as the fifty ton raft had been constructed.

The crossing site at Hasan-dong was topographically similar to the one the 21st Regiment used 5,000 yards to the north. The assembly area lay in apple orchards, a steep escarpment approximately seven feet high dominated the east bank of the river, and a sandy beach approximately 100 yards wide ran from the escarpment to the water's edge. Two important differences existed, however:

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰24th Inf Div WD, 182400-192400 September 1950. The 19th Inf WD states that the move from Kyongsan started at 191930 [sic] September and the regiment closed at Hasan-dong at 190430 September. This seems unlikely in view of the delay the 21st Infantry had experienced. Likewise, it seems unlikely that the 19th Infantry would have delayed its crossing for twelve hours after arrival in forward assembly areas.

(1) a 2,500 yard long road offered access to the river and (2) a single lane concrete ramp across the sandy beach connected the end of the access road to the water's edge. This concrete ramp had obviously been considered an asset when the decision was made to construct the heavy raft at this site. On the other hand, the access road that had been considered advantageous as a supply line for the crossing forces turned into another standing, continuous line of vehicles for the road-bound Americans.

At the crossing site, after a well-coordinated artillery preparation and air strikes on the high ground across the river, Company A, 3d Engineer Combat Battalion, guided its boats loaded with the 2d Battalion infantrymen into the water at 1600. Although an estimated company of North Koreans had occupied the high ground west of the river prior to the attack, Company G, 19th Infantry, was able to occupy its objective by 1645, suffering negligible casualties during the assault.⁵¹ But the ease with which the 2d Battalion advanced on the west side of the river was in direct contrast to the heavy casualties the unit had suffered on the near shore prior to the crossing. At the road junction where the access road to the river joined the Kumho ferry-Waegwan road, insufferable traffic congestion existed. The cause was obvious: traffic using the access road to the 19th Infantry crossing site had no place to clear the road and park. Once this traffic backed up to the road junction, traffic going north to the 21st Regiment crossing site likewise stopped. Had the North Koreans been able to mass effective artillery fire on this lucrative

⁵¹19th Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

target, the 19th Regiment's equipment and personnel losses could have become appalling. As it was, the 2d Battalion suffered approximately fifty casualties and a few vehicles damaged from mortar and artillery fire falling on the near shore.⁵² Ironically, the lead elements of the 19th Infantry had sustained most of their casualties and damage on the east side of the river and had been virtually unopposed once across the Nakdong.

During the evening of 19 September, two companies of the 1st Battalion crossed the river behind the 2d Battalion and occupied positions to continue the attack the following morning.⁵³ Before the end of the day, the 19th Infantry received new orders: to complete the crossing and to continue the attack to the northwest to seize Hills 742 and 792⁵⁴ on the left flank of the 21st Infantry's objectives. While the 19th Infantry assault elements met practically no opposition on the west bank of the river, the 24th Reconnaissance Company remained immobile on the east bank waiting for the engineers to complete construction of a heavy raft. And until the company could screen to the west in the direction of Songju, the 19th Regiment had an exposed flank. Because the engineers were utilizing more time for raft construction than they had originally planned, the infantry units on the far shore depended on assault boats to transport supplies across the river and company carrying parties consisting of Korean laborers to carry the supplies from the boats to the forward elements.⁵⁵

⁵²24th Inf Div WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

⁵³19th Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

⁵⁴24th Inf Div WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

⁵⁵19th Inf WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

Although the 24th Division stood on the west bank of the Nakdong River on the morning of 20 September ready to expand its bridgehead, it had not achieved its success during the preceding day without its share of casualties. The 21st Regiment had suffered approximately 120 casualties in gaining its hold on the west side of the river,⁵⁶ and the 19th Infantry as already stated lost approximately 50 men from one battalion. Like the infantry, the engineers also sacrificed heavily in their difficult role. In the crossing, the 3d Engineer Combat Battalion had suffered 61 casualties that included 41 American soldiers and 20 Korean augmentation recruits.⁵⁷ What the infantry assault elements and the forward combat engineers had accomplished, however, would become seriously jeopardized without supplies moving to the forward elements. Even though raft construction at the crossing sites was progressing much more slowly than had been anticipated, engineers in support of the 24th Division were busily engaged all day of 19 September in repairing the ford at the Kumho River.

The job of repairing the "sandbag bridge" over the Kumho River fell to the 14th Engineer Combat Battalion. But before the 14th Engineers could start repairing the ford, the 11th Engineer Battalion had to complete construction of a widened steel treadway floating bridge across the river to insure a flow of traffic over the main supply route for the 24th Division. By 1050 on the morning of 19 September, all necessary bridge equipment arrived at the site. Company A, 11th Engineer Combat Battalion (less one platoon that was still required to

⁵⁶24th Inf Div WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

⁵⁷Lt. Col. Peter C. Hyzer, "The Third Engineers in Korea, July-October 1950," The Military Engineer, XLIII (March-April, 1951), 105.

maintain the "sandbag bridge" and operate the infantry support raft), immediately started construction of the bridge and completed the task in slightly more than nine hours. Once the 276' long bridge opened at 2020 on the evening of 19 September,⁵⁸ Company B, 14th Engineer Battalion, was free to remove a sixty foot long section of the "sandbag bridge" and span the removed gap with a timber trestle bent and steel treadway deck bridge. Earlier in the evening the 14th Engineers had submitted their design plans for the project to the corps engineer section and were ordered to complete the job by 1800 the following day, 20 September.⁵⁹ Because of the absence of a mechanical excavator (dragline) on the site,⁶⁰ the removal of the sixty foot section of fill was initially delayed. When the section of the "sandbag bridge" was finally removed, however, the water level was lowered two feet below the top of the roadway across the river. During the night Company B, 14th Engineers, fabricated the timber bents for the bridge. The following day and on into the night the engineers worked finishing the bridge and improving the approaches. At 0200⁶¹ on the morning of 21 September⁶² the improved crossing over the Kumho River was opened for traffic.

⁵⁸Itchner, op. cit., p. 97.

⁵⁹I Corps WD, Historical Report, Engineer Section, 19 September 1950.

⁶⁰I Corps WD, Historical Report, Engineer Section, 20 September 1950.

⁶¹"14th Engineer Combat Battalion War Diary, " Letter, subject: Historical Report, 14th Engineer Combat Battalion, 14 November 1950.

⁶²I Corps WD, Historical Report, Engineer Section, 21 September 1950.

As daylight broke on the morning of 20 September, the 24th Division had the major portions of two regiments across the Nakdong River and a third, the 5th RCT, still attacking north to secure the key terrain north of Waegwan. Other important events had occurred on the preceding day that were to bear heavily on the future actions of the 24th Division. The 24th Division was ordered to assume control of the 3d Battalion, 19th Regiment, that had been in army reserve, and the British Commonwealth 27th Brigade that was occupying positions south of the crossing sites along the Nakdong River. As an added mission, the division was ordered to protect the corps left flank, a task that it later assigned to the 27th Brigade.⁶³ Thus on 20 September, the 24th Division, attacking as a division with three regiments of three battalions each for the first time in the Korean War (plus an additional unit, the 27th Infantry Brigade), stood ready to consolidate its gains of the day before in a drive to the northwest to expand its bridgehead.

⁶³I Corps WD, Historical Narrative, 2 August - 30 September 1950, p. 11.

CHAPTER V

THE BUILDUP

As the hands of the clock passed midnight ending the first day's operations west of the Naktong River, what had initially been a vigorous battle at the crossing sites had turned into a relatively unopposed advance. After midnight in the early hours of the morning of 20 September, the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 21st Regiment, much to their amazement, had not yet received a counterattack from the North Koreans. Because of this light resistance, the remainder of the 2d Battalion was ordered not to cross the river until 0700. At 0430, however, Companies I and K sent patrols north and northwest; and by 0720, the patrols reached the crest of Hill 173. Had the enemy then attacked in force, the 3d Battalion was to have pushed forward to contact the patrols and hold Hill 173.¹ But the enemy did not counter-attack during the night.

Shortly after daylight, the remaining elements of the 2d Battalion crossed the river, passed through the 1st Battalion positions, and pushed forward aggressively against heavy enemy artillery fire and light resistance in an effort to seize Hills 192 and 325 north of the crossing site. By noon, Company E had occupied Hill 192, having met only slight resistance. Companies F and G, meanwhile, moved

¹"21st Infantry Regiment War Diary" (hereafter cited 21st Inf WD), 192400-202400 September 1950.

around the north flank of Hill 192 and advanced toward Hill 325. As the attack toward Hill 325 progressed, Colonel Stephens, fearing an enemy counterattack from the direction of Songju, ordered Company B to relieve Company E on Hill 192 and place a blocking position northwest of the hill on the main northeast road from Songju to Waegwan.² That Colonel Stephens was concerned for his left flank is logical, for tactical air reconnaissance flights had reported 600 North Koreans west of the 21st Regiment, an undetermined number of North Koreans in the direction of Songju, and an estimated 100 to 300 enemy troops retreating northwest from just north of Waegwan.³

In the afternoon, however, as the 2d Battalion's advance continued, the 1st Battalion (less Company B) was directed to move to the small village west of Waegwan and there establish a defense on the high ground that included Hill 170. At the same time, Company B was directed to continue its blocking mission until relieved.⁴ Colonel Stephens, meanwhile, at 1600 had informed division headquarters that Hill 325 would be taken by nightfall; and as predicted, Companies F and G reached the north slope of Hill 325 by 1700, having received only a few scattered rounds of enemy artillery fire during the advance.⁵ After consolidating its position on Hill 325, the 2d Battalion was ordered to send a platoon size patrol to Hill 283.⁶ At the same time,

²Ibid.

³"24th Infantry Division War Diary" (hereafter cited 24th Inf Div WD), G-2 Summary, 191800-201800 September 1950.

⁴21st Inf WD, 192400-202400 September 1950.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

the 3d Battalion, having remained immediately west of the crossing site during the day, was told to be prepared to move from its position on the following morning, 21 September, in a direction that would depend on where and in what strength the enemy could be found.⁷ Later in the evening, the 3d Battalion's instructions were modified. The unit was now ordered to move north, pass through the 2d Battalion, and attack northwest along the Waegwan-Kumchon road as early as possible after daylight.⁸

In contrast to the substantial losses initially sustained in its river crossing operation, the 21st Regiment on 20 September had swept up the west bank of the Nakdong River to Waegwan virtually unopposed. And the situation in the 19th Regiment's sector to the south was not much different.

By daylight on the morning of 20 September, the remainder of the 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry, had crossed the Nakdong at Hasandong. Following an air strike and an artillery preparation on bridge-head objectives, the 1st and 2d Battalions launched a coordinated attack and seized their objectives, the high ground west of the crossing site.⁹ Once the dominating terrain to the west of the crossing site had been occupied, the 2d Battalion moved north and by the end of the day had occupied the positions that had been vacated earlier by the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry.¹⁰ As the 2d Battalion moved north, the 3d Battalion, 19th Infantry, released earlier to regimental control,

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹24th Inf Div WD, 192400-202400 September 1950.

¹⁰21st Inf WD, loc. cit.

arrived at the crossing site but was ordered to remain in an assembly area on the east side of the river¹¹ until engineers could raft badly needed equipment and supplies to the assault elements on the west.

By 20 September, however, the engineers had begun to witness the results of their back-breaking efforts. Companies A and C, 3d Engineer Battalion, had crossed the assault elements of two regiments to the west side of the Nakdong River. Elements of Company B had completed in the early morning an infantry support raft at the Hasan-dong site and had started ferrying supplies and equipment to the advancing infantry troops.¹² And a platoon from Company B, 11th Engineer Battalion, had completed construction of the fifty ton capacity raft at the same site later in the day. Once this heavy raft had been completed, the engineers ferried to the west side of the river the 24th Reconnaissance Company, the organic vehicles of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 19th Infantry, and one squad of the regiment's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon.¹³ While vehicles and supplies were crossing at Hasan-dong, the support situation at the 21st Regiment's crossing site, on the other hand, had not progressed so smoothly. The platoon from Company B, 3d Engineer Battalion, had finally succeeded in assembling an infantry support raft, but the supported regiment was already far to the north. To complicate the engineer's role in this area, Company C had been alerted to support another

¹¹"19th Infantry Regiment War Diary" (hereafter cited 19th Inf WD), 192400-202400 September 1950.

¹²Lt. Col. Peter C. Hyzer, "The Third Engineers in Korea, July-October 1950," The Military Engineer, XLIII (March-April, 1951), 105.

¹³19th Inf WD, loc. cit.

crossing in the evening--the 5th Regimental Combat Team above Waegwan. To fill the resultant void in the engineer support for the 21st Regiment, Company D, 3d Engineer Battalion, was ordered to relieve Company C.¹⁴

As Company C moved up the road toward Waegwan to prepare to cross the 5th RCT, the regiment was still occupied in clearing the last vestiges of enemy resistance from Hill 303, the commanding hill mass immediately to the north of Waegwan. Once the enemy had been denied access to Hill 300, the next high ground north of Hill 303, the 5th RCT was free to cross the Nakdong River at any site along the river from Waegwan north approximately four miles. By late afternoon, however, the 21st Regiment had advanced on the west side of the Nakdong as far north as Waegwan meeting only token opposition. Furthermore, the deteriorating enemy situation was emphasized when two F-51's strafed and napalmed enemy troops trying to escape west across the Nakdong north of Waegwan from the advancing elements of the 24th Division.¹⁵ A little over an hour later, the 1st Battalion, 5th RCT, was in position to cross the river just north of the damaged bridges at Waegwan, a site that had been selected previously in the afternoon by the company commander of Company C, 3d Engineer Battalion.^{16, 17} After a brief artillery preparation on the far shore,

¹⁴John Glenbower Westover, Combat Support in Korea: The United States Army in the Korean Conflict (Washington, D. C.: Combat Forces Press, 1955), p. 9.

¹⁵"5th Regimental Combat Team War Diary" (hereafter cited 5th RCT WD), 200001-202400 September 1950.

¹⁶Westover, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁷5th RCT WD, loc. cit.

the first elements of the 5th RCT started across the river at 1945, and by 2130 the 1st Battalion had completed its crossing. As soon as the 1st Battalion units were landed on the west shore of the Naktong, they began advancing north and northwest of the Waegwan-Kumchon road and by midnight were approximately 1500 yards from the crossing site, having captured twelve prisoners in their advance.¹⁸ Starting at 2100, the 2d Battalion followed the 1st Battalion across the river and completed crossing by 2230. By midnight, the 1st and 2d Battalions were in defensive positions short of the regimental objective, Hill 238;¹⁹ while the 3d Battalion on Hill 300 continued to be harassed throughout the night by enemy artillery and mortar fire.²⁰

With the bulk of the combat elements of the division across the river meeting little opposition, the 24th Division headquarters issued Operations Instructions Number 46 on the evening of 20 September. These instructions directed (1) the 5th RCT to attack and seize Hill 238 and to be prepared to seize Hill 978 on order; (2) the British Commonwealth 27th Infantry Brigade, that had been attached to the division earlier in the day, with the 24th Reconnaissance Company, Assault Gun Platoon, 6th Medium Tank Battalion, and the Tank Platoon, Company A, 78th Heavy Tank Battalion attached, to cross the Naktong River on 21 September, attack northwest to Songju and continue through Wolgoktong to the Taegu-Kumchon axis; and (3) the 19th and 21st

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹24th Inf Div WD, 182400-192400 September 1950.

²⁰5th RCT WD, loc. cit.

Regiments to continue their current missions.²¹ With the bridgehead consolidated and the regiments poised to attack to the northwest along the Waegwan-Kumchon road,

it had been a very successful day. The big problem [however,] was logistical--how to get roops [sic] and supplies across the Naktong River in fast time with insufficient bridging. If this obstacle could be overcome the enemy retreat could be turned into a rout.²²

Within the next thirty-four hours, this obstacle was to be overcome as the 24th Division was in reality to turn the retreat into a rout.

In the early morning hours of 21 September, the 24th Division's logistical and combat support situation on the west bank of the Naktong River was far from adequate. The only permanent bridges across the Naktong in the area spanned the river immediately north of Waegwan, but the two railroad and one highway through truss bridges each had one span dropped by retreating 1st Cavalry Division engineers as they withdrew into the Pusan Perimeter.²³ As inadequate substitutes across the river, three infantry support rafts were operational: one at Hasan-dong operated by Company A, 3d Engineer Battalion, one at Waegwan that had just been completed at 0100 by Company B,²⁴ and one north of Waegwan in support of the 5th RCT that had just been completed by Company B.²⁵ In addition to these three rafts that could

²¹24th Inf Div WD, 192400-202400 September 1950.

²²Ibid.

²³Colonel Emerson C. Itschner, "The Naktong River Crossings in Korea," The Military Engineer, XLIII (March-April, 1951), 97.

²⁴21st Inf WD, 202400-212400 September 1950.

²⁵"3d Engineer Combat Battalion War Diary" (hereafter cited 3d ECB WD), 210001-212400 September 1950.

carry loads only as heavy as 2-1/2 ton trucks, a fifty ton capacity raft was operational at Hasan-dong, but was soon to become the target of enemy artillery and mortar fire.²⁶ And although the crucial ford across the Kumho River was repaired by 0200 on the morning of 21 September, almost 300 feet of widened steel treadway float bridge required for the Naktong crossing were still in place across the Kumho River. But orders issued by the Corps and 24th Division Engineers on 20 September were to implement a plan that would solve the problem.

On the afternoon of 20 September, the 11th Engineer Battalion had been alerted for movement to Waegwan to construct a widened steel treadway float bridge across the Naktong River. The plan for construction of the bridge called for Company A, with as many men from Headquarters and Service Company as could be spared, to construct the bridge while Company B at the same time dismantled the treadway bridge across the Kumho River. The 55th Treadway Bridge Company was to transport the dismantled bridge on its organic bridge trucks to Waegwan and offer such assistance in construction as would be necessary. In addition, the 11th Engineers were to prepare the bridge assembly sites and construct the access road to the bridge on the near shore. Assisting the 11th Engineers in construction of the bridge would be Company B, 3d Engineer Battalion, which had already moved to Waegwan on 20 September. Company B would have the responsibility to construct the egress road on the west bank and to clear any mines from the approaches to the bridge site.²⁷ But one

²⁶Itchner, op.cit., p. 99.

²⁷Hyzer, loc. cit.

important consideration had to be solved before this plan could be successfully implemented.

What treadway bridge was not in place across the Kumho River was on trucks twenty miles from the Waegwan site over a "winding, narrow, steep, mountainous road commonly referred to as the 'Burma Road.'"²⁸ Furthermore, the Taegu-Waegwan road had been secured less than thirty hours before, and enemy pockets of resistance still remained behind the front occupied by the 5th Cavalry Regiment just north of the road.²⁹ By midnight, however, a convoy of twenty-three trucks of the 11th Engineer Combat Battalion and the 55th Engineer Treadway Bridge Company was snaking its way to the bridge site. Driving under blackout conditions all night, the men in the convoy did not reach their destination in Waegwan until daylight.³⁰ What remained the most critical result of the motor march was that two bridge trucks loaded with bridging and two 2-1/2 trucks loaded with components of bridging had overturned during the move. Because the overturned trucks loaded with bridging represented forty-eight feet of floating bridge that would not be available for the Naktong bridge, considerable effort on the following morning was expended to right the trucks and transport the bridging to the Waegwan site.³¹

The site where the bridge was to be constructed, having been previously selected by the 3d Engineers,³² was located approximately

²⁸Itchner, op. cit., p. 98.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²"I Corps War Diary" (hereafter cited I Corps WD), Historical Report, Engineer Section, 21 September 1950.

1,000 yards south of the town of Waegwan at an abandoned ferry site. Here the moderately flowing river had carved a six foot deep channel, but in many places sand bars had emerged from the surface of the water. About 660 feet wide at this point, the river was bound on both banks by flat, gently sloping sandy beaches. On the far shore, approximately 500 feet of sandy beach lay between the water's edge and trafficable soil;³² however, on the near shore, the more narrow 100 foot wide beach ended abruptly in a twenty-five foot high escarpment to the surrounding area.³³ An excellent road, parallel to the river and approximately 100 yards from the water, existed on the east bank. In addition, an old concrete ferry ramp ran from the roadway to the water's edge, offering excellent access to the river.³⁴ On the far shore, on the other hand, less desirable approach characteristics existed. Besides the 500 foot wide sandy beach over which an access road had to be constructed, an additional 1,500 feet of road was required to join the bridge with an existing road on the far shore. While far from being an ideal site to construct a floating bridge, this location did offer advantages over other sites in the area. First, it was on the line of communication for the 24th Division. Second, all enemy fire had been cleared from the area. And finally, this point offered just about the minimum width of sandy beach to cross in order to gain access to a bridge.

³²"I Corps War Diary" (hereafter cited I Corps WD), Historical Report, Engineer Section, 21 September 1950.

³³Itchner, loc. cit.

³⁴Ibid.

As the convoy carrying the 11th Engineer Battalion soldiers arrived at the bridge site, the members of Company B, 3d Engineer Battalion, had already started to clear the near shore assembly area of mines and had started to construct approaches through the escarpment down to the river's edge.³⁵ Shortly after arrival and after an initial delay in organizing work parties, the 11th Engineer Battalion (less Company B) started construction of the bridge at 0800. Throughout the day of 21 September on into the night and half way through the following morning, the 11th Engineer Battalion with the 55th Engineer Company and elements of Company B, 3d Engineer Battalion, labored to complete the 700 foot long ribbon of steel. And while the bridge across the Nakdong was being floated into place, Company B, 11th Engineer Battalion, was frantically engaged in dismantling the float bridge across the Kumho River, loading the parts, and transporting them to the Nakdong site.³⁶ Although Company B had started to dismantle the bridge across the Kumho shortly after midnight on the morning of 21 September to gain a time advantage on their fellow workers at the Nakdong, the engineers at the Nakdong River never wanted for bridging from the Kumho site, for the bridge across the Nakdong was not flowing into place as rapidly as had been planned.

From the start, events occurred that were to impede the bridge builders at the Nakdong River. Because of the anxiety to see evidence of bridge spanning the river, the 11th Engineers started assembling the bridge using two inadequately prepared assembly sites.

³⁵3d ECB WD, 210001-212400 September 1950.

³⁶I Corps WD, loc. cit.

First, insufficient level space in which trucks could maneuver proved to be overly restrictive; and second, an insufficient amount of earthwork had been done on the approaches to flatten the steep gradient from the river bank to the water's edge. As a result, the bridge trucks backing to their unloading sites were frequently unable to retain their loads of treadway. And once the trucks had dumped their bridge parts on the ground, the vehicles were inclined at such a steep angle that the hydraulic twin crane booms attached to the rear of the trucks would not lift the steel treadways.³⁷ To alleviate this obvious restriction, engineers on the afternoon of 21 September constructed an additional assembly site.³⁸ But just as assembly problems were being solved on the shore, serious problems also developed on the river where the parts were being joined into the bridge.

Perhaps the most serious problem in assembling the bridge sections together could be attributed to the absence of operable bridge erection boats. Only one outboard motor from the 55th Engineer Company would run, and this lone motor functioned only sporadically during the day and the following night. Because of the absence of power boats to assist in joining the bridge sections together, the completed float sections had to be pulled into line with each other along the bridge anchor cable or be polled into place.³⁹ This process of joining completed float sections one at a time to the end of the bridge necessarily slowed bridge assembly considerably. During one hour in the

³⁷Itchner, op. cit., p. 98.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

night, only four connections totaling forty-eight feet of bridge were made.⁴⁰

In order to accomplish work on the approaches on the far shore concurrently with the work on the bridge, the engineers constructed a six-float raft to ferry a bulldozer to the far shore, but the ferry grounded on one of the numerous sand bars in the middle of the stream and never did reach the far side of the river. Later, however, the ferry was incorporated into the bridge.⁴¹ Despite the many complex problems that arose during construction, a bright moon during the night of 21-22 September materially aided the engineers in completing the bridge on the morning of 22 September.⁴² Having traveled to the site during the night of 20-21 September and having worked steadily for twenty-six hours, two platoons of Company A (the entire strength of the company at this time) and Headquarters and Service Company (less battalion headquarters personnel), 11th Engineer Battalion, and the 55th Engineer Treadway Bridge Company completed the Naktong River floating bridge at 1000.⁴³

As soon as the bridge opened, traffic from the 24th Division immediately started to move across the river in an endless stream.⁴⁴ But the endless stream was closely controlled to make certain that engineer units necessary to repair the far shore approaches crossed

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³I Corps WD, Historical Report, Engineer Section, 22 September 1950.

⁴⁴24th Inf Div WD, 212400-222400 September 1950.

first, followed closely by the support vehicles of the infantry and the 24th Division artillery. Almost as soon as the vehicles started across the bridge, however, Company B was compelled to lay pierced steel plank on the far shore to stabilize the sandy approach. With the far shore approach road repaired later in the day, traffic continued to flow uninterrupted throughout the remainder of the day. By midnight, the bulk of the 24th Division had crossed the Nakdong River to the west.⁴⁵

On this day that the 24th Division was crossing the Nakdong River at Waegwan, 8th Army issued Operations Order Number 101 which was based on a plan that had been prepared earlier by G3 Plans and approved by the 8th Army chief of staff on 21 September.⁴⁶ The concept of the order envisioned that

all units, both US and ROK were . . . to effect the destruction of the enemy by effecting deep penetrations and, through enveloping and encircling maneuvers, to get astride of the enemy's line of withdrawal to cut his attempted retreat and destroy him.⁴⁷

First Corps' part in this plan was to

continue the main effort with unlimited objective attacks, [destroy] enemy in zone and [exploit] break-throughs by combining direct pressure against withdrawal forces with enveloping and encircling maneuver.⁴⁸

But unfortunately just as the 24th Division was positioned to launch its attack up the Waegwan-Kumchon axis, the 27th Brigade, protecting the south flank of the advancing division as well as the corps south flank, ran into unexpected resistance which ultimately demanded an abrupt change in mission for the 19th Regiment.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶"Eighth United States Army, Korea War Diary" (hereafter cited EUSAK WD), G-3 Section, 220001-222400 September 1950.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸EUSAK WD, Operations Order 101, 22 September 1950.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONSOLIDATION

In the early hours of the morning of 21 September, as the corps engineers were snaking up the road toward Waegwan with the mission of bridging the Nakdong River, the 5th RCT continued to advance on the west side of the river. By 0035 the 2d Battalion had moved up on the right of the 1st Battalion and both units were moving forward. Only an hour later, the 1st Battalion drew fire from two tanks, but quickly destroyed one as the other withdrew. The advance against scattered resistance continued during the night and into the early daylight hours. At 0730, the 1st Battalion encountered four more tanks, destroying one and flushing two more into the open so that the air force could strafe them. By now the air force was operating with ruthless efficiency on the retreating North Korean forces. Repeatedly during the day, the fighters swooped onto the retreating columns of enemy equipment and personnel riddling them with machine gun fire. ¹

At 0840, supported by the air force, the 1st Battalion, 5th RCT, with the 2d Battalion on its right, jumped off in its main attack to seize the regimental objective west of the Nakdong River--Hill 238. ²

¹"5th Regimental Combat Team War Diary" (hereafter cited 5th RCT WD), 210001-212400 September 1950.

²Ibid.

The lead elements of the 1st Battalion met some resistance in the village of Yangmok, but continued their advance against relatively little opposition.³ Meanwhile, the 3d Battalion, 5th RCT, had been relieved on Hill 300 at 1015 by elements of the 5th Cavalry Regiment.⁴ At 1330, the 3d Battalion started across the Naktong River at a crossing site two miles north of Waegwan. Supported by a company of tanks from the east side of the river, the battalion completed crossing by 1405 and advanced toward the regimental objective virtually unopposed until receiving small arms fire from the direction of Hill 238. The crossing executed by the 3d Battalion had, however, enabled it to approach Hill 238 from the right flank. As a result, what little force the North Koreans had on the hill were outflanked and therefore were forced to withdraw. The 1st Battalion occupied its objective by 1730, the 3d Battalion by 1900, and the 2d Battalion by 1940.⁵ In the first full day's operations on the west bank of the Naktong River, the 5th RCT had advanced to and secured the high ground north of the Waegwan-Kumchon road in the vicinity of Hill 238, having met only slight resistance in its advance. The evaporating resistance was reflected in fewer American casualties and an increasing number of North Korean prisoners, for the 5th RCT during the day had suffered only fifteen wounded and had captured ninety-five prisoners.⁶ Whereas

³"21st Infantry Regiment War Diary" (hereafter cited 21st Inf WD), 202400-212400 September 1950.

⁴5th RCT WD, loc. cit.

⁵Ibid.

⁶5th RCT WD, Unit Report Number 39, 201800-211800 September 1950.

resistance had been light in the 5th RCT sector, it was practically nonexistent in the sectors of the 19th and 21st Regiments.⁷

At 0800 on the morning of 21 September in accordance with division instructions announced the preceding night, the 3d Battalion, 21st Regiment, started its advance northwest along the Waegwan-Kumchon road with one company as advance guard.⁸ At 0815, the 1st Battalion was notified to stand by while the 2d Battalion sent a patrol to Hill 283. As the 2d Battalion patrol advanced, it met light enemy resistance on each succeeding ridge line.⁹ Company G slowly followed the patrol northwest from Hill 325, received fire from its right flank, and contacted twenty enemy soldiers, killing two and dispersing the remainder.¹⁰ Meantime, while the 5th RCT cleared the town of Yangmok, the 3d Battalion was delayed for a short time in its advance up the Kumchon road but occupied the town shortly afterwards. By 1320 the 2d Battalion patrol had ascended Hill 283, the 3d Battalion on the Kumchon road was still moving northwest, elements of Companies F and G had occupied the slopes of Hill 283, and the 19th Infantry had relieved Companies B and E, both of which returned to their parent organizations.¹¹ By 1600, Company L, the lead unit of the 3d Battalion, was still moving but had contacted the left flank elements of the 5th RCT on the Kumchon road between Hills 283 and

⁷"24th Infantry Division War Diary" (hereafter cited 24th Inf Div WD), 202400-212400 September 1950.

⁸21st Inf WD, loc. cit.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

238.¹² By the end of the day, the 3d Battalion was astride the Kumchon road approximately 3-1/2 miles northwest of Waegwan,¹³ the 2d Battalion had a reinforced company on Hill 283 on the left flank of the 3d Battalion with the remainder of the battalion on the ridge line south of Yangmok,¹⁴ and the 1st Battalion was in regimental reserve having been ordered to remain in new positions west of Waegwan.¹⁵

Although only light to negligible resistance had been encountered during the day, the regiments had been inhibited in pressing their attacks because of an inability to cross combat support and combat service support vehicles to the west side of the river. In addition to an insufficient flow of supplies to the west, heavier supporting weapons had not been crossed either. A platoon of heavy mortars that had been attached to the 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry, could not join the advancing infantrymen because the infantry support raft that had been moved from Hasan-dong to a site more proximate to the regimental line of communication was not yet operational. By the night of 21 September, still having not completed the raft, the 3d Engineers notified the 21st Regiment that they were abandoning the attempted construction of the raft in favor of the float bridge that was expected to become operational by 0600 the following morning.¹⁶

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴"Eighth United States Army, Korea War Diary" (hereafter cited EUSAK WD), Notes used to brief the Commanding General, EUSAK, on situation from 210001-220800 September 1950, 220800 September 1950.

¹⁵21st Inf WD, loc. cit.

¹⁶Ibid.

On 21 September, while the 21st Regiment attempted to push the attack toward Kumchon at a more rapid pace, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 19th Infantry, moving behind the 21st Regiment, advanced north up the west side of the Nakdong River to the vicinity of Hill 192, having met no opposition between Hasan-dong and Kumnam-dong.¹⁷ The 3d Battalion, meanwhile, remained on the east side of the river at the crossing site awaiting orders to cross to the west, move north, and consolidate a position in the vicinity of Waegwan.¹⁸

By now the tactical situation indicated to the staff of the 24th Division that the enemy was being pressed vigorously. "Tanks, SP [self-propelled], and AT [antitank] guns were being employed as mobile artillery by the NK [North Korean] forces to cover his withdrawals and delay our forces."¹⁹ As if to increase the North Korean's plight, the 24th Division had inflicted a reported 580 casualties on the fleeing enemy and had taken 98 prisoners during the day.²⁰ Anticipating an operational bridge across the Nakdong on the following morning, 24th Division headquarters issued Operations Instructions Number 47 on the evening of 21 September. These instructions directed (1) the 21st Infantry to attack at 0600 on the morning of 22 September along the Waegwan-Kumchon road for a twenty-four hour period and then revert to division reserve; (2) the 19th Infantry to

¹⁷EUSAK WD, G-3 Log, 210001-212400 September 1950.

¹⁸EUSAK WD, Notes used to brief the Commanding General, EUSAK, on situation from 210001-220800 September 1950, 220800 September 1950.

¹⁹24th Inf Div WD, G-2 Summary, 201800-211800 September 1950.

²⁰EUSAK WD, Periodic Intelligence Report 71, 202400-212400 September 1950.

consolidate west of the Nakdong River opposite Waegwan and be prepared to pass through the 21st Infantry at 0600 on the morning of 23 September; (3) the 5th RCT to continue to consolidate west of the Nakdong River, secure the high ground in the vicinity of Hill 978, and be prepared to pass through the 19th Infantry on the morning of 24 September. In addition, the British Commonwealth 27th Brigade was directed to complete crossing the Nakdong and attack northwest along the Songju-Wolgoktong-Kumchon axis.²¹

The 27th Infantry Brigade had been attached to the 24th Division on 20 September; moved from its position south of Munsan-dong on the Nakdong River; and was prepared to cross the Nakdong River at Hasan-dong on the afternoon of 21 September, pass through the slowed 24th Reconnaissance Company, and attack toward Songju.²² Although Songju did not lie in the path of the advancing 24th Division heading toward Kumchon, the town did constitute a serious threat to the left flank of the main thrust toward Kumchon as an enemy troop concentration and communications center. For this reason, it soon became apparent that once the reconnaissance company had been slowed, additional effort had to be committed in order to secure the town and deny its use to the North Koreans.

On the afternoon of 21 September when the 27th Brigade was about to cross the Nakdong, Company A, 3d Engineer Battalion still had soldiers at Hasan-dong operating the 50 ton capacity raft and an infantry support raft that had been constructed the preceding day. In

²¹24th Inf Div WD, 202400-212400 September 1950.

²²24th Inf Div WD, 192400-202400 September 1950.

order to provide a partial substitute for the infantry support raft that was moved from this site to Waegwan, engineers had completed a makeshift footbridge across the river from sandbags, pierced steel plank, boards, plywood treads, poles, and various native material. To add to their frustrated efforts to support actions on the far shore, the engineers soon found that a sudden drop in the water level on the Nakdong together with the guide cable for the raft becoming worn were making operation of the raft at this site exceedingly difficult.²³ But to cease operations at a critical time when a raft would be needed to support an additional two battalions in crossing would have been unthinkable. Added to the technical problems at the crossing site, enemy artillery and self-propelled gun fire began to land in the area with increasing frequency.²⁴ Under these adverse conditions the 27th Brigade began its crossing.

At 1700 on 21 September, the 27th Brigade started across the Nakdong with the 1st Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, leading the way in a single file dash over the pioneered footbridge.²⁵ Even though increased artillery and mortar fire on the crossing site resulted in a few casualties²⁶ and suspension of rafting operations until after dark,²⁷ the Middlesex were across the river by midnight and were advancing

²³"3d Engineer Combat Battalion War Diary" (hereafter cited 3d ECB WD), 210001-212400 September 1950.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵EUSAK WD, G-3 Log, 210001-212400 September 1950.

²⁶Eric Linklater, Our Men in Korea (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), p. 18.

²⁷3d ECB WD, 230001-232400 September 1950.

west toward the 24th Reconnaissance Company, preparing to pass through the company at first light in the morning.²⁸ Following the Middlesex across the river in the early hours of 22 September were the soldiers of the 1st Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. By 0400, the majority of the troops of the 27th Brigade were across the river²⁹ and had made contact with the stalled elements of the 24th Division approximately 3-1/2 miles west of the crossing site.³⁰

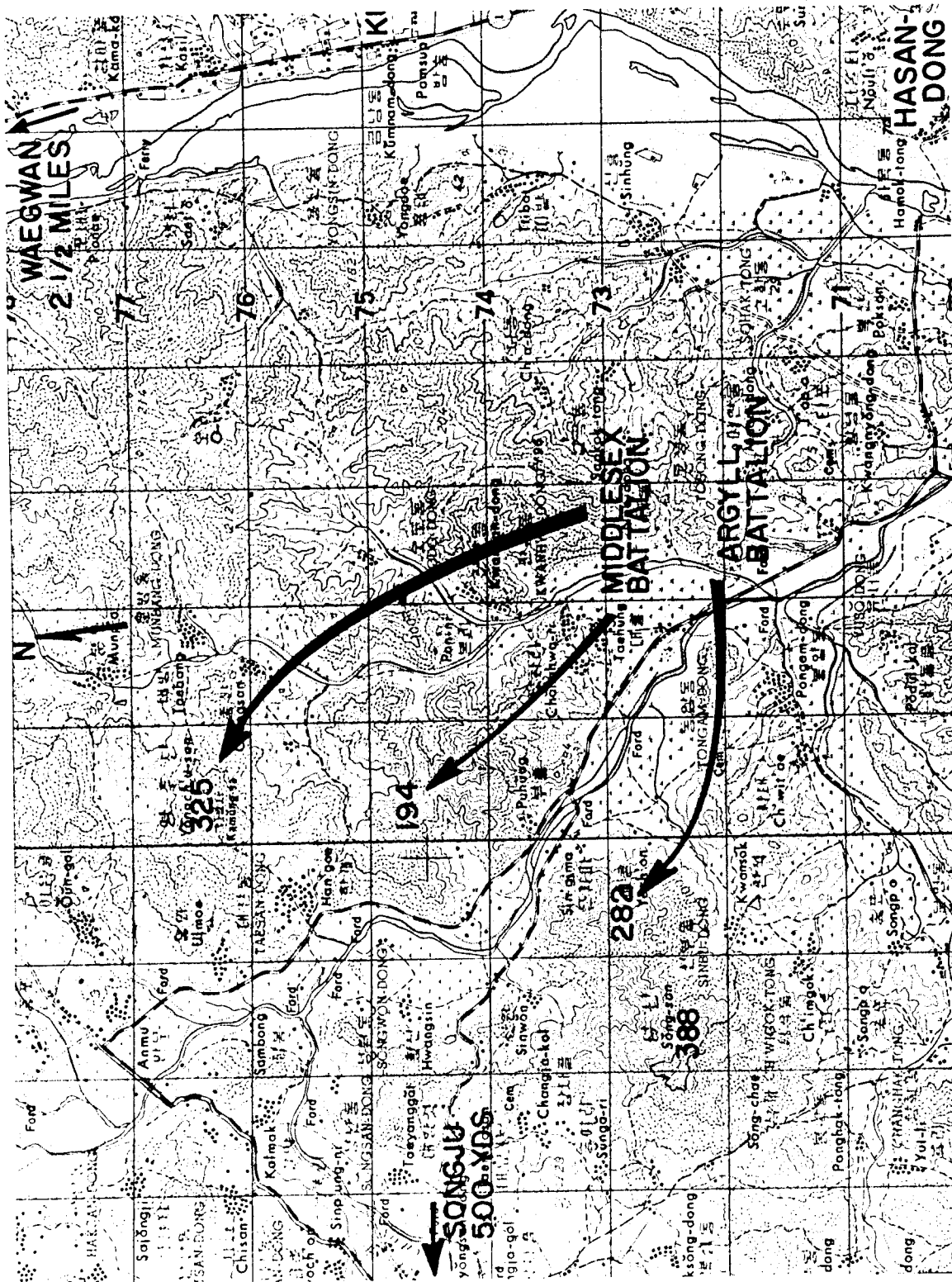
At dawn on the morning of 22 September, the battalion of Middlesex, having passed through the 24th Reconnaissance Company earlier in the morning, jumped off in the attack to seize the high ground on the north side of the Songju road approximately 3-1/2 miles west of Kumnam-dong. Immediately, the lead elements of the advancing British troops met heavy small arms fire. By midday, however, a platoon from Company B supported by two American tanks secured Hill 194 ("Plum Pudding Hill")³¹ (Map 8). As soon as Hill 194 had been secured, the right half of the main position, Hill 325 (Middlesex Hill), was then attacked by Company D supported by tank fire from the road below. Charging up the steep slopes of Hill 325 against well dug in enemy forces, Companies A and D stormed the crest of the hill, suffering only a few casualties in the assault. What had undoubtedly assisted the British greatly in their success was the arrival of American

²⁸EUSAK WD, G-3 Log, 220001-222400 September 1950.

²⁹EUSAK WD, Periodic Operations Report 215, 220001-220600 September 1950.

³⁰EUSAK WD, Periodic Operations Report 214, 211200-212400 September 1950.

³¹Linklater, loc. cit.



Map 8. -- The British Commonwealth 27th Brigade's Attack on Songju

forward observers from the 24th Division medium artillery who were able to call in fire in support of the assault. By nightfall, the battalion of Middlesex was digging in to consolidate its position.³²

During the day of 22 September, while the men of the Middlesex were attacking Hills 194 and 325, the Battalion of Argylls, supported by five American tanks and a battery of 24th Division artillery, advanced west on the road toward Songju and prepared to attack Hill 282. During the afternoon, Company A captured the high ground southeast of Hill 282. Later, after a night advance, Companies B and C passed through Company A and occupied Hill 282 by 0630 the following morning.³³ While the infantrymen from the 27th Brigade were meeting with initial success on 22 September, however, their lifeline of support across the Nakdong River was suffering extensively. Because of intense artillery fire on the crossing site,³⁴ only three jeeps had been able to cross the river on the raft by nightfall. After darkness fell, additional vehicles crossed, but supply of ammunition, rations, and equipment remained critical.³⁵ But the most crucial setback at the crossing site came with the loss of the heavy ferry--an artillery round landed sufficiently close to puncture the floats and render the raft useless.³⁶ For two days, any vehicles that moved on the beach near

³²Ibid.

³³Brigadier C. N. Barclay, The First Commonwealth Division (Aldershot, Hampshire: Gale and Polden Ltd., 1954), p. 19.

³⁴3d ECB WD, 230001-232400 September 1950.

³⁵Linklater, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

³⁶"I Corps War Diary" (hereafter cited I Corps WD), Historical Report, Engineer Section, 23 September 1950.

Hasan-dong were promptly fired upon by what was suspected to be an enemy self-propelled gun that had been camouflaged perfectly in the mountains on the far shore.³⁷ Despite every effort to locate the gun, the fire was not removed from the crossing site until after Songju fell to the units of the 19th Infantry.³⁸

In spite of the absence of critical supplies in support of the operation on the west bank of the Nakdong, Companies B and C of the Argylls occupied Hill 282. Company C on the left was then ordered to move to the south to seize Hill 388, the dominant terrain between Hasan-dong and Songju. Starting at daylight on 23 September, both companies began to receive intense artillery and mortar fire. And before Company C could start moving against the North Koreans on Hill 388, the North Koreans started to move against the left flank of Company C. Simultaneously, Company A which was directly behind Companies B and C began to sustain enemy pressure on its left flank and was therefore unable to reinforce either of the front two companies. Without reinforcements, the Argylls rapidly became outnumbered and outgunned.³⁹

As if to add to the plight of the battered battalion, the 24th Division at 1100 withdrew its medium artillery support, in all probability to cross the Nakdong at Waegwan to support better the advancing 21st Regiment. Furthermore, the mortar platoon supporting the

³⁷Colonel Emerson C. Itschner, "The Nakdong River Crossings in Korea," The Military Engineer, XLIII (March-April, 1951), 99.

³⁸24th Inf Div WD, 212400-222400 September 1950.

³⁹Linklater, op. cit., p. 19.

Argylls could not engage the enemy from its positions, and a lack of vehicles prevented the platoon's displacing to more favorable positions. The flat trajectory tank guns, in addition, could not engage the enemy on the ridges. And finally, Companies B and C were desperately low on ammunition and could not evacuate their wounded by stretcher--the mountain slope was too steep.⁴⁰

Without any fires to support them and having been engaged in heavy fighting since morning, the Argyll Battalion called for an air strike on Hill 388. Soon after noon, three American planes swept down from the sky; but to the Argylls' horror, the machine gun fire and napalm landed directly on their positions on Hill 282 rather than on the intended target, Hill 388.⁴¹ Although the Argylls had recognition panels displayed on the crest of Hill 282,⁴² the American pilots had thought that the North Koreans had overrun the friendly positions.⁴³ Companies B and C, now reduced to a strength of about five officers and thirty-five men and desperately short of ammunition,⁴⁴ withdrew approximately fifty feet off the crest of the hill in the face of an enemy counterattack.⁴⁵ Because the enemy did not press his attack further, Major Muir, the battalion second in command, assuming command of both companies, rallied together some thirty men, stormed the hill,

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 19-20.

⁴¹Barclay, op. cit., p. 20.

⁴²EUSAK WD, G-3 Log, 231400 [sic]-232400 September 1950.

⁴³Barclay, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

⁴⁴Linklater, op. cit., p. 20.

⁴⁵Ibid.

carried the crest,⁴⁶ and occupied the high ground for about a half hour. His action in retaking the crest of Hill 282 undoubtedly saved the battalion from annihilation and did allow stretcher bearers from the Middlesex Battalion to remove the wounded.⁴⁷ Realizing the retention of Hill 282 would be impossible with such a meager force, the remaining twenty men withdrew at 1400,⁴⁸ covered by the fires of Company A.⁴⁹ After the withdrawal, Companies B and C were united into one unit and the battalion consolidated its position to the east spending a relatively quiet evening except for sporadic shelling.⁵⁰

What had started as a routine mission to protect the flank of the 24th Division that at the time was advancing against scattered resistance had turned into a bloody massacre for the Argylls. And certainly their first taste of battle in the Korean theater was the result of an unfortunate chain of circumstances. In addition to their having been subjected to a friendly air force strafing attack, they had been committed in a zone in which an enemy force estimated to be a reinforced regiment was still present despite the 19th Infantry's having presumably secured the area 3½ days earlier.⁵¹ Against this determined resistance,

⁴⁶Barclay, op. cit., p. 21. (Later in the same action, Major Muir was mortally wounded and awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously. His was the only award of the Victoria Cross during the Korean Conflict.)

⁴⁷Linklater, loc. cit.

⁴⁸Barclay, loc. cit.

⁴⁹Linklater, loc. cit.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁵¹24th Inf Div WD, G-2 Summary, 221800-231800 September 1950.

the 1st Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlander Regiment, had suffered 13 killed, 74 wounded, and 2 missing.⁵² In contrast to the vigorous fighting that was occurring in the 27th Brigade sector, however, the regiments of the 24th Division were still meeting only scattered enemy delaying action in their advance toward Kumchon.

As the lead elements of the 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry, moved up the road to Kumchon on the morning of 22 September from their positions between Hills 238 and 283, they immediately ran into small enemy detachments left along the road to delay the advancing Americans. At 0800, after encountering an enemy force of approximately fifty men north of Hill 742, the 1st Battalion contained the force with a platoon and pushed on with the remainder of the battalion.⁵³ Within 2,000 yards of the town of Pusang-dong later in the day, another roadblock consisting of an estimated fifty men and a tank confronted the advancing Americans. After an air strike on the roadblock destroyed the tank, the 3d Battalion attacked and dispersed the enemy force.⁵⁴ By late in the afternoon, the advancing 3d Battalion had arrived at the village of Pusang-dong. Here it encountered approximately 100 enemy and a tank that were continuing the delaying operation. Again, after an air strike that resulted in the destruction of the tank, the battalion assaulted the town and continued its advance 1,000 yards past Pusang-dong.⁵⁵ By the end of the day, the 3d Battalion,

⁵²Linklater, loc. cit.

⁵³21st Inf WD, 212400-222400 September 1950.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

21st Regiment, had carried the advance approximately 3,000 yards to the west of Pusang-dong along the Kumchon road.⁵⁶

While the 21st Regiment was leading the column of regiments attack of the 24th Division, the 5th RCT was relatively inactive. Small enemy patrols probed the front of the 1st Battalion during the early morning hours but decreased later in the day; the 2d and 3d Battalions meanwhile had made no contact with the enemy during the day.⁵⁷ Like the 5th RCT, the 19th Regiment did not establish contact with the enemy during the day. The 3d Battalion, having crossed the Nakdong River earlier at Hasan-dong, moved north to Waegwan to establish a blocking position on the road southwest to Songju,⁵⁸ while the remainder of the regiment followed the 21st Infantry, preparing to pass through the 21st Infantry on the morning of 23 September and continue the attack toward Kumchon.⁵⁹

On the morning of 23 September, however, the 19th Infantry did not pass through the 21st Infantry as General Church had planned. Instead, the 21st Infantry continued the attack toward Kumchon by passing the 2d Battalion through the 3d Battalion at 0620.⁶⁰ By early in the afternoon, Colonel Stephens notified the Division G-3 that the lead elements of the regiment were within 4,000 yards of Kumchon;

⁵⁶21st Inf WD, 222400-232400 September 1950.

⁵⁷5th RCT WD, 220001-222400 September 1950.

⁵⁸"19th Infantry Regiment War Diary" (hereafter cited 19th Inf WD), 212400-222400 September 1950.

⁵⁹EUSAK WD, Notes used to brief the Commanding General, EUSAK, on situation from 220001-222400 September 1950, 230800 September 1950.

⁶⁰21st Inf WD, 222400-232400 September 1950.

but the regiment was worn out and had to be relieved.⁶¹ General Church later issued oral instructions to his combat units which directed (1) the 5th RCT to attack through the 21st Infantry on the night of 23 September, (2) the 19th Regiment (less two battalions) to secure Hill 978 and provide protection for a radio relay station site, (3) the 21st Regiment to revert to division reserve, and (4) the 27th Brigade to consolidate, defend, and block the road from Songju to the Nakdong River. In addition, these same orders relieved the division artillery from its mission to support the 27th Brigade,⁶² but unfortunately, the British and Scottish infantrymen had already missed the artillery support at a crucial point in their battle.

Earlier in the morning, General Church, realizing that the North Korean forces in the Songju area posed a serious threat to his division, ordered the 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry, to attack south from Pusang-dong to Songju and the 3d Battalion, 19th Infantry, to protect the Waegwan bridge and block the Songju-Waegwan road at the mountain pass midway between Waegwan and Songju.⁶³ In answer to these orders, at 1205 the 1st Battalion moved south from Pusang-dong through the 1st Battalion, 21st Regiment, with the mission to seize Songju. Reinforced with a platoon of heavy mortars, a platoon of tanks, a platoon of engineers, and a battery of artillery, the battalion combat team advanced unopposed to Songju, losing only one tank from

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²24th Inf Div WD, 222400-232400 September 1950.

⁶³Ibid.

a mine in the advance. By midnight the force had occupied Songju.⁶⁴ In contrast, the 3d Battalion advancing from Waegwan toward Songju met stubborn resistance during the afternoon⁶⁵ from an estimated 400 enemy soldiers who were defending the mountain pass.⁶⁶ When darkness fell over the battlefield, the 2d Battalion, 19th Infantry, also moved into the area to assist the remainder of the regiment in destroying the 27th Infantry of the 10th NKPA Division that had been defending in the Songju area.⁶⁷ But the 1st Battalion's advance into the backbone of the North Korean defenses of the Songju area destroyed the enemy's will to fight. By the morning of 24 September, all organized resistance had ended, including the fire from the lone self-propelled gun that had wreaked so much havoc on the crossing site during the preceding two days. By 26 September, the enemy was completely cleared from Songju, the 19th Regiment had another mission in the 24th Division's planned pursuit toward Taejon, and the 27th Brigade reverted to corps control.⁶⁸ The British and Scottish soldiers had, however, endured a bitter fight in the battle west of the Naktong River.

The personnel had proven themselves to be good fighters but the unit had been sent to Korea without its own artillery and with only a few vehicles. The overtaxed facilities of the 24th Division could not adequately cope with the problems of supply, transportation, and artillery support and assistance from higher headquarters was not forthcoming.⁶⁹

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵19th Inf WD, 232400-242400 September 1950.

⁶⁶I Corps WD, Historical Narrative, 2 August-30 September 1950, p. 14.

⁶⁷19th Inf WD, 232400-242400 September 1950.

⁶⁸19th Inf WD, 242400-252400 September 1950.

⁶⁹24th Inf Div WD, Narrative Summary, 26 August-28 September 1950, p. 5.

With the 19th Regiment's departure from Songju, the 24th Division closed the pages of history on the Naktong River crossing in the Waegwan area. Starting with the attack toward Waegwan on 16 September and concluding with the departure from Songju, the 24th Division and attached units had crossed two rivers, defeated an enemy that had previously pinned the division to the defensive for two months, and were launched in a pursuit that would take the division in an uninterrupted advance to the far reaches of North Korea. And the Naktong River line had been successfully assaulted under the most austere conditions. This ten day period had truly been one of the finest for the men who wore the "taro leaf."

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