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**FLAWED DECISIONS: THE KOREAN WAR
SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 1950**

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ABSTRACT

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In the months following North Korea's invasion of South Korea, United Nations forces fought back from near defeat to the brink of victory. General MacArthur received high praise for the successful amphibious assault at Inchon. This paper argues that his decision making after Inchon, between 15 September and late November 1950, was flawed and led to the selection of an inappropriate course of action for operations in North Korea. The paper questions General MacArthur's failure to pursue the nearly defeated North Korean forces, his decision to leave Eighth Army and X Corps as separate commands, and the fatal decision to advance his forces to the Manchurian border. Further, this paper argues that General MacArthur's success at Inchon, created an atmosphere in which his superiors hesitated to question his decision making.

INTRODUCTION

In the months following the June 1950 North Korean invasion of South Korea, United Nation forces, commanded by General Douglas MacArthur, fought back from near defeat to the brink of victory. In an even shorter period of time those same forces suffered another massive defeat in November 1950, after crossing the 38th Parallel. This case study will examine General MacArthur's decision making between 15 September and late November 1950, to argue that his course of action after Inchon was inappropriate and resulted in a prolonged war without victory.

Popular Korean War history dwells on operations around the Pusan perimeter and the amphibious assault at Inchon. At Pusan, United States and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces bought necessary time to build up forces in Korea. This early defensive operation prevented a total defeat in South Korea. Inchon severed the supply lines of an already over extended North Korean Peoples's Army (NKPA) and sent it fleeing north in retreat. Historical records are less clear on why United Nations forces did not immediately exploit the success of Inchon. Rather than pursue and destroy the remaining North Korean forces, General MacArthur elected to prepare his forces for another amphibious operation on the east coast of Korea. After wasting valuable time repositioning his forces, General MacArthur crossed the 38th Parallel in pursuit of the NKPA. Was he justified in these actions, or did he fail to capitalize on the success of Inchon?

Did he have other options which would have lead to a more decisive end to hostilities? Inchon could have been the prelude to a major victory in Korean. Instead, it lead to missed opportunities, and as General Matthew Ridgway accurately suggested:

A more subtle result of the Inchon triumph was the development of an almost superstitious regard for General MacArthur's infallibility. Even his superiors, it seemed, began to doubt if they should question any of MacArthur's decisions and as a result he was deprived of the advantage of forthright and informed criticism, such as every commander should have--particularly when he is trying to "run a war" from 700 miles away.¹

General Ridgway's comments illustrate two important points. One, General MacArthur escaped the detailed and critical scrutiny of his superiors concerning his proposed course of action after Inchon. Also, he violated the basic principles of war; *unity of command* by not appointing a single commander for operations in North Korea, *the offensive* for failing to exploit the success at Inchon, *mass* when he split his forces, and *objective* when he lost focus on the enemy and ordered a race toward the Yalu. He did so without professional criticism from his superiors. Both points proved costly in time and lives.

AFTER INCHON

Although the counterattack at Inchon was a success, the hammer and anvil strategy envisioned for X Corps and Eighth Army failed to materialize. Not until September 26, over a week after

Inchon, did Eighth Army begin to link up with X Corps. As a result an estimated 25,000 to 40,000 NKPA soldiers slipped north escaping United Nation forces.²

Following Inchon, President Truman decided that United States forces should cross the 38th Parallel to destroy the remaining NKPA. Undoubtedly, he was influenced in this decision by his renewed confidence in the military abilities of General MacArthur. He also received personal reassurances from General MacArthur that Russia and China would not enter the Korean War.³ General MacArthur was not the only voice urging President Truman to expand the war. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, the president's most trusted advisor, also advocated crossing the 38th Parallel. He said the boundary had no political validity and that "troops could not be expected to march up to a surveyor's line and stop".⁴ This new course of action was a substantial departure from the original objectives which prompted General MacArthur's defense of South Korea. Forcing the NKPA out of South Korea and restoring the border between the two Koreas was all the initial United Nations resolution had authorized. It was also a departure from Secretary Acheson's initial position on United States policy in Korea. On 29 June, he stated that United States policy was aimed at "...restoring the Republic of Korea to its status prior to the invasion from the north and of reestablishing the peace broken by that aggression".⁵ This new decision was aimed at totally destroying the remaining NKPA forces and unifying Korea under one government.⁶

Twelve days after the Inchon landing, General MacArthur received authorization from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to cross the 38th Parallel:

"Your military objective is the destruction of the North Korean Armed Forces. In attaining this objective you are authorized to conduct military operations... north of the 38th Parallel in Korea, provided that at the time of such operation there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist Forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea..."⁷

Here lies the most revealing explanation of General MacArthur's failure after Inchon. The decision to cross the 38th Parallel was made after operations at Inchon. President Truman, the Joint Chiefs, and General MacArthur should have made a decision of this magnitude prior to Inchon. If the original objective of forcing the NKPA back across the 38th Parallel had been retained, plans could have been developed to destroy as much of the enemy as possible. With proper planning, United Nations forces could have deployed immediately out of Seoul and cut off the roads in the east which NKPA forces used as retreat routes into North Korea. This course of action might not have ensured total destruction of all NKPA forces, but had it been executed quickly, it would have eliminated most of the defeated NKPA as they fled north.

Likewise, had a decision to cross the 38th Parallel been made before Inchon, General MacArthur could have developed a more aggressive plan to pursue and cut off the NKPA. A drive out of Seoul directly for Wonsan by mechanized forces would have cut off

most of the NKPA. This course of action would have prevented the reconstitution of the North Korean military since most of its leadership would have been trapped. It would also have negated occupying all of North Korea, since a depleted NKPA would have been incapable of posing a serious military threat to South Korea.

Because there was no plan for operations after Inchon, the decision to cross the 38th Parallel was more than a reassessment of strategic objectives. It marked a tragic change in the basic strategy towards Korea. No longer was General MacArthur focused on destruction of enemy forces. Now the aim was elimination of the communist government in North Korea and a reunited Korea. This change in strategy was made in haste after Inchon, without due regard for political or military consequences. It failed to consider possible second and third order effects and was fatally flawed.

A HASTY PLAN

In compliance with the 27 September JCS directive, General MacArthur developed a new operations plan. According to this plan, Eighth Army would attack north along the west coast and seize the North Korean capital at P'yongyang. Simultaneously, the X Corps would make an amphibious landing at the east coast port of Wonsan.⁸

Writing about MacArthur's solution to destroy the NKPA,

General Omar N. Bradley said that if a major at the Command and General Staff School had developed such a solution, he would have been laughed out of the classroom.⁹ It is interesting that General Bradley, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs at the time, raised no objections to the proposed plan. He reviewed it and forwarded it to George Marshall, then Secretary of Defense, who finally recommended it to President Truman. In fairness to General Bradley, it should be noted that the Korean War was the first involvement by the United States following the National Security Act of 1947, and the amendments in 1949, which created the Department of Defense. Under this Act, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not legally empowered to make decisions concerning the conduct of the war. Their responsibility consisted of making recommendations to the Secretary of Defense and the President. Members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as a general rule did not interfere with the decisions of a theater commander. However, the actions of the Joint Chiefs during Korea represented, at a minimum, a moral failure on their part to assume responsibility for the actions of General MacArthur. General Bradley alluded to this when he wrote, "...we let ourselves (JCS) be misled by MacArthur's wildly erroneous estimates of the situation and his eloquent rhetoric, as well as by too much wishful thinking of our own. And we had adhered too closely to the established tradition of giving the theater commander the utmost latitude."¹⁰ Additionally, the United States acted as the executive agent for the United Nations during the Korean War. This fact also limited

the flexibility of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

General MacArthur's proposed course of action was flawed in ways which marked the beginning of a doomed strategy. First, the command structure dictated by the plan was inadequate. Those concerned with operations following Inchon assumed that X Corps and Eighth Army would combine forces under a single commander with Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker the most likely choice. Even General Bradley stated that, "most of the senior commanders and staffers (Walker, Allen, Hickey) had simply assumed that the senior man, Walker, would take command."¹¹ General Almond was still dual hatted as the Chief of Staff, Far East Command in Tokyo, under General MacArthur. His assignment as commander of X Corps for the Inchon landing was predicated on the assumption that after completing the first portion of the operation, he would return to his post as Chief of Staff.¹² By leaving General Almond in command of X Corps, United Nations forces were divided. This increased the difficult task of coordinating efforts between Eighth Army in the west and X Corps in the east. In effect, there was no single commander in the theater of operations. General MacArthur's inappropriate decision making in this matter was recognized by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the administration in Washington. Once again they failed to question the leadership of General MacArthur. General Lawton J. Collins, then Army Chief of Staff wrote, "Perhaps awed by the stunning success of the Inchon operation, the JCS, Secretary of Defense Marshall, and President Truman approved the plan in spite of some

doubts about the command arrangements."¹³

General Walker had managed to breakout from the Pusan perimeter and link up his Eighth Army with X Corps. In effect, General Walker had by-passed the beaten NKPA. Even with a battle weary Eighth Army, this was the time General MacArthur should have pursued and attempted to destroy retreating NKPA forces. This obvious failure can only be explained by the fact that General MacArthur had not developed any plans describing how to exploit the successful operations at Inchon. He left an open door for the NKPA when he failed to drive immediately across the Korean peninsula and cut off the remaining NKPA forces.

Placing General Walker in command of both X Corps and Eighth Army would have saved time and expedited the pursuit of North Korean forces. General Walker and his staff had developed a concept for destroying the NKPA. General Walker wanted to send X Corps overland to seize P'yongyang. Eighth Army would follow and then move overland to seize Wonsan and link up with the ROK I Corps, already moving up the east coast of Korea.¹⁴ This plan made sense because X Corps was already in Seoul ahead of Eighth Army. X Corps was also relatively fresh compared to Eighth Army which had just completed fighting its way up from the Naktong line.

Even though General Walker and his staff developed a plan of operation contrary to that presented by General MacArthur, there is no written record that it was submitted. Colonel John A. Dabney, Eighth Army Operations Officer, did write a memorandum

expressing opposition to General MacArthur's plan which General Walker read, but refused to forward to General MacArthur.¹⁵ General Walker did ask that Eighth Army be informed about the progress of X Corps. On 26 September, General MacArthur advised him that X Corps would remain as General Headquarters Reserve and occupy the Seoul-Inchon area. If General Walker had any question concerning a united Eighth Army and X Corps, General MacArthur's response clearly indicated they would not. After this date General Walker never revisited the subject.¹⁶

Another major obstacle in executing the plan was logistics. Backloading X Corps through the port at Inchon meant that supplies destined for Eighth Army would be severely delayed. The only ports available to General MacArthur in South Korea were Inchon and Pusan. When X Corps was relieved in Seoul and ordered to embark for Wonsan, the move completely tied up port facilities at Inchon for ten days. This was ten days wasted that should have been used in pursuit of the NKPA. The commander of the Army's 3d Logistical Command at Inchon wrote that the operation "came as a devastating blow" to his outfit. "It reduced the flow of supplies to Eighth Army...lowered moral...and halted the advance of Eighth Army."¹⁷ General MacArthur had argued that one of his reasons for taking Wonsan was to improve his logistic situation. General Bradley accurately described the result of General MacArthur's flawed decision making when he wrote, "The end results was that in the name of improving logistics, MacArthur created a logistical nightmare at Inchon, on the

southern highways and at Pusan. The enemy himself could not have concocted a more diabolical scheme to delay our pursuit."¹⁸

Another warning General MacArthur should have heeded was a prediction by Eighth Army's staff that the ROK I Corps would capture Wonsan before X Corps could get there and that P'yongyang would be captured by Eighth Army before X Corps could land at Wonsan and attack west.¹⁹ Both of these prediction came true. It seems curious that General Walker's staff could see these future events, but General MacArthur failed to comprehend the consequences of his proposed plan for operations in North Korea.

Certainly, when General MacArthur conceived this plan he must have seriously considered the current situation. He did not want to conduct a frontal assault on the remaining NKPA forces. By enveloping from the east with X Corps, he could avoid this form of maneuver. Also, if he could establish another line across the Korean peninsula, he might still be able to cut off the defeated North Korean forces. And since he was unwilling to send General Almond back to Tokyo or give General Walker command of both Eighth Army and X Corps, it temporarily solved his problem of what to do with both generals.²⁰ Unfortunately, the time required to execute the plan, negated its effectiveness on almost all counts.

Part of General MacArthur's failure to exploit the success of Inchon can be explained by an analysis of his own historical background as a soldier. His courage and ability as one of this countries greatest military leaders cannot be denied. However,

all his experiences in war up through Korea, were limited in the nature of warfare itself. During World War I, he experienced attrition warfare firsthand and knew well the carnage of frontal assaults and trench warfare. In the Pacific during World War II, his island campaigns were once again frontal assault and pure attrition combat. Although he had used maneuver to by-pass Japanese strongholds, General MacArthur had no experience in the art of mechanized maneuver warfare over large land masses. He incorrectly viewed Korea as an island, much as he had the Philippines. And once he established a beachhead, victory came through attrition or surrender of the enemy. Enemy resupply and replacement, areas of sanctuary, and maneuver were concepts either beyond his understanding or willingness to learn. His lack of experience in conventional mechanized land warfare precluded any initiative or creative form of operation other than those of his past experience.

This also explains why General Walker and his staff made more accurate projections concerning future operations against the Koreans. He and his staff had experienced mechanized land warfare in Europe during World War II and were better attuned to operational requirements in Korea. General Walker had worked for General Patton in the 3rd Army during World War II. He kept in his possession a copy of Patton's *War As I Knew It*, and always adhered to Patton's advice that "senior commanders must focus on where rather than how to defeat an enemy." Compared to General MacArthur, he had a much broader experience in mobile operations

and shared them with his subordinates.²¹

While Inchon was General MacArthur's shining moment as a commander, it was also his last. He had failed to learn all the lessons of modern war and worse, he refused to heed the advice of his subordinates or superiors. As a result, his flawed decision making led United Nations forces into a precarious position after Inchon. General MacArthur selected a course of action which ensured his last months of command were filled with defeat and loss.

X CORPS MOVES TO WONSAN

D-Day for the amphibious attack at Wonsan was set for 15 October. On 2 October, X Corps was relieved in the Seoul area and began embarkation for the east coast of Korea. 7th Division was ordered to displace to Pusan overland by truck and rail. 1st Marine Division, then approaching Uijongbu, was to embark aboard amphibious shipping and sail around the peninsula to the port of Wonsan. Completion date for the relief of X Corps did not occur until 7 October. Planning for the operation was behind schedule from the beginning. Shipping ran behind schedule and arrived at Inchon without the required ten-day level of supplies for the marines. Eventually, due to delays, D-Day was moved back to 20 October.²²

On 5 October, Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble published his Seventh Fleet Operations Order 16-50, which identified the task

organization for the Wonsan amphibious envelopment. It mirrored the organization used for the Inchon assault, including Rear Admiral James H. Doyle as commander of TF 90, the attack force.²³ For transportation of the landing force, Admiral Doyle had collected a variety of ships from the Military Sea Transportation Service, Japanese-manned LSTs, and Navy amphibious ships. The landing force established at Inchon was divided into seven embarkation groups and consisted of 1902 officers and 28,287 men of the X Corps. The last ships of TF 90 departed for Wonsan on 16 October.²⁴ Since port facilities at Inchon were limited, the remainder of X Corps which consisted mainly of 7th Division, was forced to motor march south to the port at Pusan. On 17 October, the division completed loading, but did not sail for Wonsan until 27 October, due to mines in the Wonsan area. It was not until 9 November, when the last units of 7th Division offloaded at Iwon, 150 miles north of Wonsan.²⁵

Over a week before Admiral Doyle and TF 90 departed Inchon, Task Group 95.6 began preparations to sweep the waters off Wonsan for mines. Only twelve minesweeping vessels were available for this mission as compared to over one hundred used in the assault on Okinawa during World War II. On 18 October, one of the minesweepers hit a mine and sank. It was then discovered that some of the mines were magnetic and could be set to allow up to twelve ships to pass over before the mine would explode. This discovery increased the length of time required to clear the approaches to Wonsan. The minefield at Wonsan consisted of over

2000 Soviet made mines. It was not until 25 October, that Admiral Doyle notified General Almond that the landing force could administratively land over YELLOW and BLUE Beaches on Kalma Peninsula, southeast of Wonsan.²⁶ D-Day had been missed by five days. And just as General Walker's staff had predicted, the ROK I Corps was already in possession of Wonsan.

ADVANCE OF THE ROK ARMY

While General Walker advanced north out of the Naktong perimeter, the ROK Army started its own largely unopposed march north. Along the east coast the ROK I Corps, supported by naval gunfire from U.S. ships, captured Yongdok on 25 September. On the last day of September, ROK forces were within five miles of the 38th Parallel, in the vicinity of Chumunjin. They were the northern most force of the United Nations Command and only seventy miles south of Wonsan.²⁷

On 30 September, ROK forces began crossing the 38th Parallel. Along the east coast, the ROK 3d Division was ordered to continue its advance north to Wonsan as quickly as possible. It is doubtful they needed these orders in view of remarks made on 19 September, by Syngman Rhee. At a meeting in Pusan he stated that he did not expect United Nations forces to stop at the 38th Parallel. He also said that ROK forces would advance all the way to the Manchurian border in order to rid their country of enemy soldiers.²⁸

Forces from the ROK II Corps crossed the 38th Parallel on 6 October, and by 8 October, the Corps' 6th Division had secured the area around Hwach'on. The 8th Division moved north on 7 October, and both divisions advanced on the Iron Triangle area. This area is described by the towns of Ch'orwon, Kumhwa and Pyonggang. It was the area where retreating NKPA forces sought refuge and was a major center of communications, with converging roads and rail lines. By 13 October, all ROK divisions, except one division assigned to the U.S. I Corps, were across the 38th Parallel. On 11 October, the 3d Division, followed by the ROK Capital Division, secured the town of Wonsan.²⁹

General MacArthur did not take maximum advantage of the positions occupied by his forces in mid October. This is partly true because of his earlier miscalculation concerning the proper disposition of Eighth Army and X Corps. If X Corps had continued advancing on toward P'yongyang, United Nations forces would have controlled a line across the narrowest portion of the Korean peninsula. With X Corps in the west and the ROK divisions on the east, General Walker could have advanced north to cut off retreating NKPA forces. This distribution of United Nations forces could have been established in sufficient time to destroy all, if not a major part, of the remaining NKPA. It might also have prevented the introduction of Chinese forces into the Korean theater. Since the line cut across Korea well below the Yalu River and the border between Korea and China, it established a buffer zone of reasonable size between United Nations forces and

the Chinese. If General MacArthur had limited his advance to a line between P'yongyang and Wonsan, the Chinese would not have been able to argue that United Nations forces were threatening it's borders.

EIGHTH ARMY ADVANCES NORTH

General Walker and his Eighth Army occupied the Seoul-Inchon area during the second week of October. Armed with knowledge that General MacArthur would not consolidate United Nations forces under one commander, General Walker was eager to press the attack north. Resentment was high in General Walker's command over the preferential treatment given to X Corps. Beating X Corps to P'yongyang would vindicate Eighth Army's plans and cast further doubts on the decision to leave General Almond in command of X Corps.³⁰

The most difficult obstacles facing General Walker's advance north were the mounting logistical problems created by the outloading of X Corps through Inchon. Lieutenant General Frank W. Milburn, commander of the I Corps, which would lead the attack on P'yongyang, wanted at least 3,000 tons of ammunition at forward supply bases. With his supply railhead located at Waegwan, 200 miles to the south, this was impossible.³¹ Still, on 5 October, General Milburn started moving his forces to Kaesong, just south of the 38th Parallel in preparation for operations in North Korea.

General Milburn's attack north was lead by the 1st Cavalry Division under Major General Hobart R. Gay, followed by the 24th Division, the ROK 1st Division, and finally the British 27th Brigade. These forces fought several difficult battles as they advanced north, until they finally captured the town of Kumchon on 14 October, and then Sariwon on 17 October. There was only sporadic resistance after Sariwon. By now it was clear to the advancing United Nations forces that a strong defense of P'yongyang was beyond the capabilities of remaining NKPA forces. With the focused effort of General Milburn's I Corps advancing along the main avenues of approach into P'yongyang, ROK forces enveloped from the east. This was how General MacArthur originally intended to capture P'yongyang, using X Corps as the enveloping force. On 17 October, X Corps was still off the east coast near Wonsan.³² United Nations Forces were less than thirty miles from the capital of North Korea, and General Almond's X Corps was yet to land at Wonsan. This turn of events must have provided Eighth Army's staff some degree of satisfaction.

On 18 October, General Gay ordered the 7th Cavalry Regiment to continue the attack on P'yongyang. F Company, 5th Cavalry Regiment, of the 1st Cavalry Division entered P'yongyang during midday, 19 October, as did lead elements of the ROK 1st Division. On 20 October, the city was secured and General MacArthur flew in from Tokyo on 21 October for a ceremony and meetings with General Walker. During his visit, General MacArthur asked all the men of F Company who had landed with the company in Korea ninety-six

days earlier, to step forward. Only five, three of them wounded, of the original 200 in the company stepped forward.³³

AN ADVANCE TOO FAR

Based on the Joint Chiefs of Staff 27 September directive, United Nations forces operated no further north than a line beginning on the west coast at Ch'ongju and ending in the east at Hamhung. This line was generally thirty to forty miles north of P'yongyang and Wonsan. On 19 October, General MacArthur issued new orders and moved the line north only thirty to forty miles south of the Yalu River and Manchurian border. Finally, on 24 October, General MacArthur lifted all restrictions and ordered his commanders to advance north with all available forces to the North Korean border along the Yalu.³⁴

In a message to General MacArthur, the Joint Chiefs of Staff objected to his order and stated that it violated the 27 September directive. General MacArthur justified his decision on grounds of military necessity. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff clearly indicated their opposition to General MacArthur's new order, they did not prevent him from carrying it out.³⁵ Here again the Joint Chiefs of Staff failed to assert any authority and tacitly allowed General MacArthur to continue in a dangerous operation. General Collins later admitted to the failure of the Joint Chiefs with regard to General MacArthur:

The success of Inchon was so great, and the subsequent prestige of General MacArthur was so overpowering, that the

Chiefs (JCS) hesitated thereafter to question later plans and decisions of the general which should have been. In this we must share with General MacArthur some of the responsibility for actions that led to defeat in North Korea.³⁶

At the same time General MacArthur issued his order for an advance into the northern regions of Korea, the Chinese government in Peking was making obvious statements about their position on United Nations forces entering this area. Even though the administration in Washington did not believe these statements, General MacArthur should have exercised more caution and reconsidered his course of action. Information concerning Red Chinese military capabilities in Manchuria was available to General MacArthur and his staff.

It appears that General MacArthur simply ignored the warning signs of Chinese intervention and refused to believe threats made by the Chinese government. It is also quite probable that he actually believed the Chinese would not intervene and the war would end quickly. This is supported by General MacArthur's approval to divert all ammunition ships bound for Korea from Japan. He also gave directions to unload any ships still in port. This request was initiated by General Walker on 22 October.³⁷ If General MacArthur truly believed that China would assist North Korea, it seems highly unlikely he would have jeopardized United Nations forces by limiting vital materials such as ammunition.

Worse yet, by moving north General MacArthur was significantly increasing the distances between his forces in the

east and west, since they were now moving into the widest part of the Korean peninsula.³⁸ It is difficult to imagine that he would place the United Nations forces in such a dangerous position if he thought the Chinese would intervene.

RED CHINA INTERVENES

Chinese forces began entering North Korea between 14 October and 1 November. On 22 October, the ROK 1st Division encountered enemy forces about one and a half miles northeast of Unsan. After the initial skirmish they captured the first Chinese soldier in the Korean War.³⁹ From this point on, it was clear that Chinese forces were in North Korea. Still, General MacArthur pressed the attack north to the Yalu river. Eventually Eighth Army was forced to withdraw south of the Chongchon river, but not before Chinese forces had inflicted serious damage to United Nations forces.

General MacArthur should have realized he had reached the limit of his advance. There were no attacks on United Nations forces south of the Chongchon river. It is possible that China viewed this distance as a sufficient buffer between the advancing United Nations forces and the Manchurian border. United Nations forces were not attacked until they advanced less than fifty miles from the Yalu river. If the Chinese did not feel threatened by General MacArthur's forces when they maintained positions south of the Chongchon river, this would support an

argument that United Nations forces could have cut the Korean peninsula in half at the narrow neck between P'yongyang and Wonsan without provoking Chinese intervention. In this position General MacArthur would have controlled the major portion of Korea and most of the Korean population. His erroneous decision to continue the advance to the Yalu river resulted in a less favorable settlement along the 38th Parallel two years later.

On 6 November, Chinese forces ceased their attack along General Walker's front in the west. In X Corps area of responsibility the Chinese forces reacted much like they did in the west. After stopping the 1st Marine Division at the Chosin reservoir, Chinese forces quit the battle and moved north on 7 November. Whether or not the Chinese intended their withdrawal as a message to General MacArthur is a moot question. He should have read it as one and stopped the advance of his forces. Chinese forces remained out of contact with United Nations forces as long as they limited their advance to the Chongchon river. When General MacArthur once again launched his forces north of the Chongchon river on 24 November, the Chinese retaliated. General MacArthur's decision making returned United Nations forces to the brink of defeat.

In his *Reminiscences*, General MacArthur stated that his losses during the Yalu operations were relatively light and the withdrawal of United Nations forces was conducted with great skill.⁴⁰ He blamed the failure and near defeat on insufficient troop strength, unclear policy statements and a host of other

explanations. What he never admitted was his own failure as the commander of United Nations forces. He refused to acknowledge that his course of action following Inchon was flawed.

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the failures and defeat after Inchon must fall to the commander of the United Nations forces. General MacArthur's decision making between 15 September and late November 1950 was flawed in many respects. His greatest failure was simply not adhering to the basic principles of war. Unity of command, offense, objective and mass, are as applicable today as they were in the fall of 1950.

Others must share responsibility for decisions made after Inchon. President Truman, Secretary of State Acheson, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were awed by the success of Inchon, and were hesitant to question the authority and prestige of General MacArthur. This was a professional, if not moral failure on their part. But in the final analysis, the commander is responsible for all that happens or fails to happen. General MacArthur should have assigned command of all United Nations forces to General Walker and united the command effort. General Walker could have massed his forces at the proper place and time to destroy the remaining NKPA troops. These actions would have precluded a race to the Yalu and possibly prevented the Chinese intervention.

By far, the most tragic mistake in General MacArthur's decision making was his failure to develop an adequate plan for operations in North Korea, prior to the assault at Inchon. If plans had been developed for operations in North Korea following Inchon, a proper course of action could have been selected. Instead, valuable time was wasted and the NKPA took advantage of an open door to escape north. When a plan was finally developed for operations in North Korea, it marked a change in the strategic objective of United Nations forces. Changing strategies in mid stream proved disastrous and led to defeat in November 1950.

General MacArthur did not understand the requirements for mechanized maneuver warfare over large land masses. His inexperience with this type of warfare directly contributed to his flawed decision making after Inchon. General MacArthur's course of action between 15 September and late November 1950, resulted in a prolonged war without victory.

Endnotes

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