Legions or Legends: Assessing U.S. Army and Marine Effectiveness in the Korean War, 1950-1951

by

Michael Richard Eastman

B.S., Political Science (1991)

United States Military Academy

Submitted to the Department of Political Science in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

June 2001

© 2001 Massachusetts Institute of Technology All rights reserved

Signature of Author...........................................

Department of Political Science
May 10, 2001

Certified By...........................................

Barry R. Posen
Professor of Political Science
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted By...........................................

Barry R. Posen
Professor of Political Science
Chairman, Graduate Program Committee
LEGIONS OR LEGENDS: ASSESSING U.S. ARMY AND
MARINE EFFECTIVENESS IN THE KOREAN WAR, 1950-1951

by

MICHAEL RICHARD EASTMAN

Submitted to the Department of Political Science
on May 10, 2001 in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in
Political Science

ABSTRACT

This study compares the military effectiveness of the United States Army and United States Marine Corps during the first 10 months of the Korean War. Representative battles selected from the Pusan Perimeter, the Liberation of Seoul, and the Retreat from the Yalu are analyzed using a process-tracing methodology to identify variations in performance between the two services and to determine the source of these differences when they exist. Predictions drawn from functional and cultural theories are employed to determine which theory provides the best explanation for variations in battlefield performance.

Based on this historical analysis, there is little evidence to support general claims of superior Marine Corps effectiveness. When operating under similar conditions, the military effectiveness of both organizations was roughly the same. Those variations in battlefield performance that did exist were largely the result of idiosyncratic geographic conditions combined with physical advantages gained through superior weaponry and organic close air support. Differences in organizational culture had marginal impact. Popular perceptions of Marine Corps achievements based on combat during this period resulted from an organizational strategy that emphasized battlefield exploits as part of a conscious effort to maintain a positive public image.

Thesis Supervisor: Barry R. Posen

Title: Professor of Political Science
I. Rethinking the Forgotten War

Scholars and historians of the 1950’s invariably fault the state of the American military at the onset of hostilities against the North Korean invasion. Defense budgets under President Harry Truman and Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson cut deeply into the readiness of the American military establishment.¹ Inter-service squabbles over emerging roles and missions in the nuclear era encouraged further division. Each service arm battled to secure its slice of a reduced postwar defense budget at the expense of doctrine and training aimed at improving their cooperative military efforts.² A war weary public eager for demobilization in the aftermath of World War II and the strategic imperative to rebuild the shattered political and economic infrastructures of Germany and Japan further compounded problems of readiness for an unexpected conventional war.

In retrospect, it hardly seems surprising that when the North Koreans attacked across the 38th parallel, the American force sent to repulse them was ill equipped, poorly trained, and woefully unprepared.³ The first units sent to Korea were committed piecemeal from hastily assembled Army of Occupation forces in Japan. These troops, softened by months of garrison duty and wielding obsolete World War II equipment, were simply no match for their heavily armored opponents. Unable to blunt North Korean armored thrusts, the Army’s 24th Infantry Division rapidly collapsed into the fragile Pusan perimeter at the Southern tip of the Korean

peninsula.4 It was not until MacArthur’s surprising successful landings at Inchon that the tide
turned decisively against the overextended North Koreans in favor of United Nations forces, only
to be reversed once more with the entry of Chinese Communist forces into the war in late 1950.

The dismal first efforts of these American ground combat units have been the focus of
much historical and inter-service dispute ever since. A common feature of popular literature on
the Korean War, and a core assumption of most scholarly analysis of the conflict, is that Marines
outperformed their Army counterparts in nearly all aspects of combat effectiveness. Where the
Army represented “exactly the kind of pampered, undisciplined, egalitarian (force) their society
had long desired”, the Marines were “the men who man our legions” to defend us from the
“tigers” in the world.5 For Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, the retreat from the Yalu provided an
“instructive contrast” between the professionalism and combat proficiency of the Marines and
the lack of the same qualities within the Army.6 Similarly, for Samuel Huntington, actions in
Korea reinforced the belief that whereas Marines “serve their country with unvarying and
impartial competence whatever the campaign,” soldiers must be inspired to fight by higher
political ideals.7

However, such over-simplified generalizations of Marine and Army combat effectiveness
in Korea fail to satisfy on at least two points. First, they succumb to subjective historical
interpretations of combat effectiveness that overstate the qualitative differences in performance
between the services. When considered against a set of objective standards, there is scant

4 Roy K. Flint, “Task Force Smith and the 24th Division: Delay and Withdrawal, 5-19 July 1950,” America’s First
See also Alexander Babb, “Task Force Smith Revisited,” Military Review (January 2000):3-12; Robert Bateman,
“What We Haven’t Learned,” Military Review (January 2000): 49-56; T.R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War, 2d
5 Fehrenbach, 123, 455-456.
6 Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War (New York: The Free Press,
1990) 172,185, 193.
evidence that the mean effectiveness of Army units lagged far behind that of Marine units, even during the critical first year of the war. Second, those variations in performance that did exist can be largely explained as the product of pre-war material and training differences, along with idiosyncratic characteristics of the battlefield, rather than as the result of any unique Marine martial culture. Specifically, in the great majority of cases cited as examples of Marine Corps combat superiority, it was usually organic close air support that provided the edge in effectiveness, not ground combat proficiency. While considerable distinctions existed between the military cultures of the two services and there is no doubt that they approached identical tasks quite differently, the historical record simply does not support cultural explanations of superior Marine effectiveness.

What a comprehensive review of historical accounts since the Korean War does demonstrate, however, is a stark contrast in organizational strategies between the Army and the Marine Corps. On the one side, it reveals an Army given to critical self-evaluation, clumsy in its wartime dealings with the media, and strangely acceptant of the organizational maneuverings at the root of its combat shortcomings. On the other, a Marine Corps adept at public relations, focused on cultivating a positive warrior image, and aggressively safeguarding the combined arms components of the organization that would serve it well on the battlefields of Korea. It was this difference in bureaucratic strategies that accounts for both the major shortcomings the Army experienced in close air support and the perpetuation of the popular image of Marines as the heroes of the Korean War to this day.

In this study, I will contend that the Army's failure to hold the newly independent Air Force responsible for close air support operations in the aftermath of World War II led directly to its subsequent difficulties in Korea. At the same time, aggressive self-promotion and favorable
historical interpretations have allowed the Marine Corps to exploit legitimate battlefield accomplishments for organizational ends at the expense of the Army, culminating in the perpetuation of a mystique more myth than reality. This work will proceed in three stages. First, I confront the popular misconception that Marines outperformed their Army counterparts in the critical first year of combat in Korea. After establishing the pre-war status of both services in terms of training, equipment, and manning, critical aspects of three specific instances of side-by-side combat are examined against an objective standard to identify and account for variations in combat effectiveness. The next section highlights the most significant material differences in both services, paying particular attention to the role of firepower in accounting for the marginal edge the Marines demonstrated during the first year of the war. The final section deals specifically with the organizational strategies and media tactics the Army and the Marine Corps employed during and after the war, and the impact these have had on subsequent military history.

II. Research Methodology

The first year of the Korean War presents an exceptional natural laboratory for a comparative assessment of combat effectiveness between the United States Army and Marine Corps. Committed within weeks of one another, the two services fought side by side on the mountainous terrain of the Korean peninsula. Both labored under the oppressive heat of summer and the numbing chill of winter against an identical progression of enemies, beginning with the North Korean Peoples Army and transitioning in October 1950 to the People’s Liberation Army of Communist China. Both fought under the theater command of General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander, Allied Forces in the Pacific. Yet, popular historical analysis of their combat performance overwhelmingly finds Marine units more effective than their Army
counterparts at the operational and tactical levels of war, often based on nothing more than anecdotal observations and the fond recollection of veterans.

There are two contending theoretical explanations for the effectiveness of military units in Korea at the core of this study. In both, the dependent variable is the ability to generate combat power from a given amount of material in order to accomplish assigned missions. However, where the first explanation attributes variations in performance directly to the quality of weapons, pre-war training, and manning levels, the second emphasizes the role of organizational culture. For purposes of this work, I will refer to the first theoretical approach as the functional theory of military effectiveness and to the second as the cultural theory of military effectiveness.

Functional explanations of service performance in Korea emphasize the tangible differences in military hardware that existed between the Army and the Marine Corps. Holding all other aspects of combat constant, the combination of superior firepower and technical proficiency dictate the amount of combat power a given unit can generate. In terms of the battlefields of Korea, a unit that possesses adequate anti-armor weaponry should outperform a unit that lacks the same when confronted with an armored threat. Similarly, a unit organized for joint operations should be expected to better coordinate the actions of air and land forces than one that failed to develop a working control system prior to combat operations. In those instances when neither service holds an edge in terms of training or weaponry, either because it is confronting an unexpected combat scenario or because both possess equivalent types and quantities of hardware, the theory would predict roughly equal levels of performance.

---

8 Martin Van Creveld, Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982) represents the classic study on the generation of combat power and provides a more comprehensive examination of the physical and mental components of military effectiveness.
On the other hand, cultural explanations of combat effectiveness focus on the impact of intangible factors on the performance of a military organization. It is not the weapons, but the soldiers that determine how effectively a unit performs, based on their internalization of organizational attitudes towards combat and one another. While not dismissing the importance of superior weaponry or training proficiency, cultural explanations highlight the role of collective organizational values as the critical variable linking physical equipment to wartime performance. Unlike functional approaches to combat, cultural theories predict differences in the performance of similarly equipped and trained units whose magnitude varies directly with their level of appropriate battlefield values. In terms of the Korean war, for example, many historians attribute the willingness of Marine pilots to risk repeated low level ground attacks to a unique culture within the Marine Corps that emphasizes to each flyer that he is infantryman first, and an aviator second.

Prior to proceeding, it is necessary to differentiate the ways in which culture might affect performance. Organizational values operate at both the individual and the group level. The previous example of Marine pilots, for instance, can be attributed to the Marine Corps’ focus on the importance of the ground troops, the pilot’s willingness to risk his life in close support, and a historical emphasis on combined arms operations. However, given the collective nature of ground combat, the effect of group values on unit performance is likely to have much larger relative effect on performance. Individual sacrifices or demonstrations of bravery are of little use unless accompanied by unit cohesion. Within the context of a tightly knit organization, however, values manifested at the individual level can have significant impact. Even lacking individual standouts, a cohesive unit of mediocre soldiers would reasonably be expected to outperform an internally fragmented unit that relied on a few heroic figures. This study
considers manifestations of culture at both the individual and the group level, but lends greater causal weight to those at the group level.

The personal accounts of two extremely successful Korean War commanders contain components of both theories, although with telling variations in their emphasis. In his history of the Korean War, General Matthew Ridgway credited early failures to the combination of poor tactical leadership and an Army that “had been economized almost into ineffectiveness and then... asked to meet modern armor with obsolescent weapons and sent into sub-arctic temperatures in clothing fit for fall maneuvers at home.”9 This contrasts with Marine General O.P. Smith, who recorded that while his forces possessed air support and weapons far superior to their Chinese opponents, such advantages “would have been to no avail had not these Marines... demonstrated to a superlative degree that physical obstacles, weather, and the enemy could not stop men” imbued with the cultural values of the Corps, which he cites as discipline, personal competence, loyalty, devotion, and self-sacrifice.10

There are two major difficulties with establishing the validity of either of the potential theoretical explanations. The first lies in the chaotic nature of warfare and the problems associated with recreating battlefield experiences from a historical record that often reflects organizational interests. For example, one is hardly surprised to find a great deal of technical information included in official Marine accounts of the landings at Inchon, and a correspondingly superficial account of this same information by Army historians. Both services emphasize the military exploits of their own members, and understandably so. Such variations in historical emphasis underscore the need for careful, objective analysis. It is possible, however,

---

to develop a set of opposing predictions from the two theories that, when combined with careful case selection, provide a fairly strong test of these contending explanations.\textsuperscript{11}

The more significant theoretical obstacle to applying these two theories of military effectiveness is that they are not mutually exclusive. In many instances, the greater effectiveness of the Marines was overdetermined. Not only did they possess more and better weaponry, but the units selected for historical comparison arbitrarily pit trained and cohesive Marine regiments against hastily assembled and untrained garrison troops.\textsuperscript{12} It becomes difficult to separate the effects of the tangible from the intangible, and the author is left free to choose whichever factor suits his personal whims. Moreover, at some point most every material difference between organizations can be reduced to some cultural explanation. For instance, the Marines might have possessed sufficient cold weather gear because they paid greater attention to the care of their men than the Army. For these reasons, this study focuses strictly on those manifestations of culture presumed to have a direct and immediate impact on battlefield performance, relegating the indirect effect of culture on such decisions as weapon procurement to a lesser role.

Given the potential pitfalls identified above, determining the relative explanatory power of these two theories demands explicit presentation of the predictions derived from each. The most straightforward prediction derived from functional explanations addresses the role of weapons, manning, and training on combat performance. Simply put, this family of explanations predicts that units with better training, modern weapons, and a full complement of personnel should be more effective than those lacking in one or all of these areas, regardless of organizational culture. This does not assume that cultural differences are unimportant, but that


\textsuperscript{12} This is exacerbated when Marine historians emphasize the problems of cohesion attributed to the Army’s segregated regiments or its shattered 24\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division as representative of the entire organization.
their impact is only distantly related to the more tangible assets a military organization brings to the fight. Thus, when both soldiers and Marines possessed roughly equivalent levels of key material factors, this theory predicts little or no variation in their military effectiveness. Evidence that one service consistently outperformed the other while employing the same weapons would be quite damaging. In cases where the outcome of an operation clearly hinged on a particular weapon system unique to one of the two services, testing this prediction is also relatively simple as long as proper attention is given to idiosyncratic conditions on the battlefield.

A variant of this prediction states that if organizational culture possesses little explanatory power, any material factor taken in isolation should affect the combat performance of both services in roughly equal measure. For example, if success in one instance can be attributed to a specific weapon system, such as the 3.5-inch anti-tank rocket or the M-26 Pershing Tank, than the acquisition of that particular weapon by an organization that previously lacked it should be accompanied by a comparable rise in military effectiveness. Similarly, if battlefield performance is tied to a specific weapon system, than levels of effectiveness between organizations should converge as the target of this weapon disappears. In keeping with the previous example, as the North Koreans depleted their stock of armor, any advantage the Marines’ gained from possession of anti-tank rockets should visibly diminish. In both cases, evidence that some cultural value such as superior discipline enabled one organization to utilize a weapon system that its sister service proved incapable of mastering would be especially damaging to this theory.

A competing prediction deals with the impact of culture on military effectiveness. If there is some quality in the organizational culture of the Marine Corps that magnifies its military
effectiveness, then in cases where similarly equipped soldiers and Marines fought a common enemy, there should be measurable differences in the performance of the two services not attributable to unique battlefield conditions.\textsuperscript{13} While this prediction offers the strongest head-to-head test of the two theories, it also presents a number of methodological challenges. The universe of cases that meet the constraints necessary for comparison is extremely small. The tendency to overvalue results based on an evaluation of a very small number of battles must also be avoided. Furthermore, even in instances of joint combat against a common enemy, seemingly inconsequential idiosyncratic variations in the battle might conceivably play a disproportionately large role in determining the outcome. The depth of the Pusan at a particular river bend, timely changes in the weather, or even the masking effects of terrain on local radio communications could mean the difference between victory and defeat. Nor can any assessment ignore both exceptional and extremely poor military performance on the part of the enemy. Testing this prediction demands careful evaluation of the historical record and a reasoned sensitivity to the role of chance, idiosyncratic conditions, and the enemy in addition to material and cultural factors.

A second prediction inferred from the cultural hypothesis complements this test. The way Marines approached certain missions, insofar as it reflected their specific organizational values, should prove superior to Army methods in terms of military effectiveness. For example, the recurring emphasis on single-minded determination that pervades many accounts of Marine battlefield exploits must be shown to contribute to mission accomplishment. Along these same lines, it seems reasonable to expect that Army failures could be traced back to a lack of determination at the small unit level. Tests of this particular prediction attempt to verify the

\textsuperscript{13} See James Toner, "American Society and the American Way of War," Parameters (March 1981): 79-90, for one particularly strong example directly linking poor Army performance in Korea with cultural deficiencies.
causal link between specific cultural values and behavior, and then from that behavior to battlefield consequences. It is not enough to simply note that Marines and soldiers approached identical tasks in very different ways. That observation is self-evident from even the most cursory reading of popular historical accounts of the war. However, most studies fail to demonstrate exactly how a certain culturally motivated behavior ultimately impacted combat effectiveness.

The difficulty with testing this prediction is that it can come perilously close to blurring the line between efficiency and effectiveness. In those cases where one service reached its military objective while the other either failed or incurred much higher casualties under similar conditions, this problem is mitigated somewhat. However, when one service fails outright while the other succeeds, but only at a much higher cost, the assessment becomes unavoidably more subjective. It is no simple task to weigh lives lost against the military importance of a given piece of terrain, particularly without access to the thoughts and beliefs of the commanders on the ground at the time. Rather than arbitrarily scaling costs and benefits, in these circumstances one must necessarily rely on primary and secondary source performance assessments augmented by a careful study of the quantifiable aspects of the battle.

To systematically establish and explain general trends of service effectiveness in the Korean War, this study compares Army and Marine accomplishments in three specific operations. I contrast battlefield performances in defense of the Pusan Perimeter, during the liberation of Seoul, and on the withdrawal from the Yalu after the Chinese First Phase Offensive. Variations in combat effectiveness are then paired with functional, cultural, and idiosyncratic factors in an attempt to match available historical evidence with the predictions of the two respective theoretical explanations. However, quantifiable differences alone do not always
provide a complete explanation for the total breakdown of certain Army units. Where appropriate, this analysis shifts focus to examine the human factors of military effectiveness, specifically addressing the impact of military culture on the intangible elements of military leadership, professional competence and unit cohesion.

**Summary of Competing Predictions**

1. Units with better training, superior weapons, and a full complement of personnel will be more effective than units lacking in one or all of these areas regardless of organizational culture. (Material Hypothesis)

2. When a particular weapon system is critical to battlefield success, its acquisition by an organization will be accompanied by a discernable rise in effectiveness. (Material Hypothesis)

2a. Similarly, a reduction in appropriate targets for a critical system will be accompanied by a convergence in performance between otherwise similarly equipped organizations. (Material Hypothesis)

3. In cases where similarly equipped soldiers and marines fought a common enemy, there will be measurable differences in their performance not attributable to unique battlefield conditions. (Cultural Hypothesis)

4. The way a unit approaches a military task, insofar as it reflects specific organizational values, should contribute to mission accomplishment. (Cultural Hypothesis)

**Case Selection**

The three cases examined in this study are selected in accordance with several criteria. The driving consideration is an effort to capture the actions of Army and Marine forces battling under similar environmental conditions against a common enemy. In this way, potential third variables and idiosyncratic conditions should impact the two organizations in roughly equal
Battles fought by either force in isolation are useful as sources of additional information on operational characteristics and idiosyncratic factors. However, they are utilized only when examples of joint interaction are not available.

The universe of cases is further restricted to include only those significant battles that occurred during the first 10 months of the war. This constraint is imposed to capitalize on the maneuver-oriented phase of wartime operations. The fluid nature of offensive operations against the North Koreans and the initial reaction to the surprise Chinese attack represent the most comprehensive tests of Army and Marine Corps culture and combat effectiveness. With the reestablishment of defensive lines in 1951 and the interminable wrangling over prisoner exchanges and peace settlements, the shift to attrition warfare offers much less in terms of relative assessment. Tactical objectives were frequently restricted to avoid upsetting negotiation, and limit further casualties, and an operational uniformity of sorts was imposed on the American conduct of the war due to the reforms of General Matthew Ridgway.15

Cases are also selected with an eye towards the availability of historical evidence from both government and open sources. As previously noted, many single source historical and biographical accounts of Korean War exploits blend detached observation with emotion-laden analysis. Others clearly serve institutional interests at the expense of objective historical assessment. Multiple accounts of the same battle provide a wider range of case-specific data, while offsetting biased accounts somewhat through competing perspectives. Finally, prominent battles are utilized whenever possible. The cases examined should be commonly cited as

---

14 This statement is made fully cognizant of the chaotic nature of combat and the difficulties associated with maintaining anything remotely resembling experimental control. However, the lack of control that plagues most social science, and studies of warfare in particular, must be offset to the maximum extent possible. This study hopes to limit the impact of external factors through a combination of judicious case selection and within-case process tracing, as recommended in Alexander George and Timothy McKeown, “Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making,” Advances in Information Processing in Organizations, Vol 2 (Connecticut: JAI Press, 1985): 21-58.
confirming either cultural and organizational theories, or both. These types of cases provide the best available test for the specific, through rarely formalized, predictions of the two most plausible explanations of combat effectiveness in this war.

All three of these general criteria are met by the first two battles selected from operations in defense of the Pusan Perimeter. Both the exploits of Task Force Kean and the Battle of the Naktong Bulge witnessed American forces composed of soldiers and Marines fighting in pursuit of a joint tactical objective against a common North Korean enemy unit. However, with the passage of the summer months, the two services tended towards independent actions in pursuit of larger operational goals, and additional side-by-side comparisons are either unavailable or poorly documented. Given these constraints, the liberation of Seoul is included, although Marine and Army units fought under different conditions and against very different enemy formations. Despite significant methodological shortcomings in this particular case, actions in Seoul represent the next best available example of Army and Marine units working in cooperation to seize a joint objective. The case also highlights operational differences between soldiers and Marines against a common background.

The final case examines the devastating American retreat from the Yalu River. This running battle also presents significant experimental control problems. Army and Marine units operated at great distances from one another. The Marines faced three times as many Chinese communist divisions as their Army counterparts over a period of time many days longer.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Ridgway, 97-102.

\textsuperscript{16} Units from the Army’s 7\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division did retreat alongside the 1\textsuperscript{st} Marine Division. However, these Army units constituted the northernmost elements of X Corps, and suffered near total losses in the initial Chinese offensive. As a result, they were integrated into the Marine column as individuals rather than cohesive units, making comparison difficult. Nonetheless, the vast majority of historical accounts construct an over-simplified comparison between Army operations in the West and Marine operations in the East. See Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, \textit{Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War} (New York: The Free Press, 1990).
Geographic variations alone had a significant impact on the performance of the two organizations. However, the case is of particular historical and theoretical importance for different reasons. Given the prominence of this series of battles in subsequent accounts of Army and Marine Corps performance, it is impossible to construct an argument for one theory or the other without directly addressing the many competing assessments of this case.\footnote{For favorable accounts attributing success to USMC culture, see GEN O.P. Smith, “Looking Back at Chosin,” Marine Corps Gazette 84 (November 2000): 62-63; Martin Russ, Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign, Korea 1950, (New York: Fromm International, 1999); and Andrew Geer, The New Breed: The Story of U.S. Marines in Korea (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952); Examples linking performance to material and training differences include Roy Appleman, Disaster in Korea (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989) and Collins, War in Peacetime. Balanced accounts include Clay Blair, The Forgotten War (New York: Times Books, 1987) and Max Hastings, The Korean War (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987).} Not only is it the most frequently cited example of superior Marine culture and combat effectiveness, but it represents the most thoroughly researched and documented action of the entire war. Careful process-tracing, leveraging the wealth of data available concerning this particular case, can compensate somewhat for the impact of idiosyncratic factors and poor inter-case comparison.

\textit{Measuring Military Effectiveness}

The way in which military effectiveness is defined and then measured is critical to the internal and external validity of this study. Unfortunately, the concept of military effectiveness has proven quite elusive. One recent study defined it as “the amount of offensive and defensive power that can be generated from a given quantity of material resources.”\footnote{Stephen Rosen, “Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters”, International Security, Vol 19 (Spring 1995): 6.} However, this definition implies a quantitative interpretation somehow disconnected from actual performance in combat. The mere distinction between offensive and defensive power at the tactical or strategic level is an extremely difficult one to make. Further, military units can be extremely effective in a losing effort, owing to any number of factors besides the generation of the rather amorphous concept of power. Witness the reputation of German Wehrmacht soldiers, based on
consistently positive casualty-to-loss ratios, who persevered despite inferior equipment and logistical support. Units can also suffer defeat despite possessing an overwhelming advantage in relative combat power by applying it inappropriately.

In their classic three-volume study of military effectiveness, Allan Millett and Williamson Murray append to the concept of power generation the "notion of efficiency." For these scholars, any attempt to measure military effectiveness must incorporate an appreciation of organizational process and proportional cost, as well as sensitivity to the different levels of analysis. Kenneth Pollack offers a further refined definition of effectiveness that encompasses both power and efficiency. To Pollack, military effectiveness "refers to the ability of soldiers and officers to perform on the battlefield, to accomplish military missions, and to execute the strategies devised by the political-military leaders." It is this last definition that will serve as the basis for evaluating soldier and Marine performances in the four cases examined.

In terms of how military effectiveness is measured, military historian Trevor Dupuy's model, The Causes of Defeat, serves as the touchstone for conducting this assessment of battlefield performance in Korea. Dupuy provides a comprehensive list of major factors that contribute to defeat in battle. While focusing on combat losses, his model improves on many official military attempts to measure combat performance by recognizing that simple adherence to the principles of war will not necessarily lead directly to victory. It also identifies both tangible and intangible factors with a potential effect on battlefield outcomes in a way that meshes well with the contending theories employed in this work. Through the careful

---

22 Trevor Dupuy, Understanding Defeat (New York: Paragon House, 1990)
application of this model to the cases selected for comparison, those factors that impacted the combatants in each can be systematically identified and examined.

In general terms, Dupuy identifies three categories of conditions and command actions that have a direct impact on outcomes at the tactical level. Idiosyncratic factors, consisting of those unique circumstances and conditions beyond the control of the commander, define the political and military environment within which the military unit must function.23 Combat forces have no choice but to cope with oppressive heat or biting cold, for example. Similarly, restrictions on attacks across international boundaries or prohibitions on the employment of certain weapons impact on how and where a battle is fought. The second category concerns those unfavorable circumstances in combat that a commander can influence through the preparation for and conduct of a military operation. These include actions taken to improve troop morale, insure proficiency in fundamental combat tasks, and adjustments made to accommodate enemy tactics. The third category is comprised of outright command failures and physical differences in weapons and tactics. These include inadequate control of friendly forces, inferior leadership and faulty tactics, and permitting the unit to be surprised by detectable enemy actions.

Considered together, this comprehensive list represents actions and circumstances that can be traced through the careful historical analysis of the respective engagements. Assessing the impact of these factors on overall military effectiveness remains an unavoidably subjective exercise at some level. Whether idiosyncratic conditions will have a net positive or negative effect depends on the tactics, equipment, and training of the forces being evaluated. For example, the care taken by Marine Corps small unit leaders to ensure that all their subordinates

23 Ibid, 52-53.
had appropriate cold weather gear and erected warming tents whenever the tactical situation permitted, demonstrate an adaptation to environmental conditions that paid real dividends in terms of combat performance. However, by clearly articulating the different causes of battlefield outcomes, Dupuy’s model provides an objective template for determining military effectiveness.

Determining the impact of battlefield conditions is not always clear-cut. Mountainous terrain that hinders armored movement may in turn favor dismounted infantry techniques. Foul weather may offset any advantage gained from air superiority, yet simultaneously present optimal conditions for an organized ground assault. The advantage of cross-service comparison in the Korean case lies in the fact that the Army and Marine units committed to this conflict were similar in so many regards. With a few notable exceptions, most of their weapons and heavy equipment used were the same in both organizations. Soldiers and Marines entered into combat operations within the span of a few weeks, so neither enjoyed any significant edge in terms of battlefield socialization to the particular demands of the Korean peninsula or the tactics and techniques of the enemy. With minor differences, both drew from the same pool of available manpower in the United States. And perhaps most importantly, they fought the same progression of enemies, beginning with the North Koreans and concluding with the Chinese Communists. These institutional and environmental similarities significantly reduce the difficulty of making a balanced assessment of military effectiveness.

III. Five Years of Chronic Neglect, 1945-1950

While most historical accounts acknowledge the damaging impact of post-WWII budget cuts across the defense establishment, they often paint the entire military with an unnecessarily broad brush. Similarly, although cultural explanations rarely focus on material conditions, it is
necessary to demonstrate that the Army and Marine Corps were manned, equipped, and trained at roughly equivalent levels. Otherwise, explanations that focus solely on organizational culture overlook significant potential material advantages that might present a more satisfying explanation for variations in military effectiveness. Therefore, before an objective comparison of soldier and Marine performance can be conducted, it is critical to briefly establish the readiness status of both services at the outset of the war.

This section examines the pre-war Army and Marine Corps in three general areas: manning and manpower quality, equipment status and materiel preparations, and level of training. The intent is not to provide a comprehensive account of President Truman’s economic or political motives, but only to establish the readiness baseline from which cross-service comparison becomes possible. In general terms, I will demonstrate that events of the late 1940’s affected the two organizations, and particularly those combat units deployed to fight in Korea, very differently. By and large, both services suffered from personnel shortages that resulted in unmanned units and prevented them from fighting according to their established doctrine. However, the Marine Corps as a whole enjoyed a significant edge in terms of critical weapon systems, experienced personnel and logistical support. More importantly, in the 5th Marines, the Corps fielded the only fully trained, cohesive combat unit in the theater. The frequently unacknowledged advantages accrued to this particular unit through the combination of multiple large-scale training exercises, superior weaponry, and pre-existing levels of cohesion account for much of the Marine Corps’ initial successes. Outside of this one unit, however, the ground combat performance of soldiers and Marines was much more closely matched.
Manning and Manpower Quality

Neither the Army nor the Marine Corps enjoyed an edge in terms of manning during the initial stages of the war. As a result of massive defense reductions after World War II, both organizations suffered deep cuts in active duty personnel. Across the board, active units were only manned to 2/3 of their authorized fill. Critical personnel shortages forced the two services to rely heavily on stateside reserves and recently discharged veterans in the case of war, with damaging consequences for unit cohesion. Within the Army, the four occupation divisions under MacArthur in the Pacific all operated at one-third below strength. Organized to fight as regiments, each of these core combat units "had only two instead of three battalions" of soldiers.\textsuperscript{24} This shortage of troops meant that units accustomed and trained to fight with two battalions committed and one in reserve quickly found themselves operating without any reserve at all, frequently while attempting to hold frontages doctrinally assigned to a fully manned unit.\textsuperscript{25}

Similarly, the Fleet Marine Force shrunk from a World War II peak of 300,000 troops to a mere 27,656 Marines on active duty by 1950.\textsuperscript{26} When the order to deploy for Korea arrived, the Marine Corps leadership hastily activated the entire Marine Corps Ground Reserve of 33,000 to bring the force up to authorized strength.\textsuperscript{27} Even with this infusion of troops, "it proved impossible to get a third rifle company for each of the three battalions."\textsuperscript{28} As with the Army, unmanned units forced a deviation from accepted doctrine, and resulted in Marine infantry battalions being committed to battle without their traditional reserves. Compounding this problem, the activation of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Marine Brigade was accomplished by the immediate

\textsuperscript{25} Collins, 57. For the often disastrous mismatch between doctrine and personnel policies, see Robert Bateman, "What We Haven't Learned," Military Review (Jan 2000): 49-56.
\textsuperscript{26} Krulak, 122.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 126-128.
reassignment of Marines from 105 different posts scattered throughout the United States.29
Aside from the 5th Marines, there was little opportunity for these men to develop any sort of
small-unit cohesion prior to their commitment to battle.

However, while both services suffered equally in terms of quantity, the Marines
possessed some advantages in the quality of their troops. There had been no young men drafted
to active duty among the enlisted soldiers and Marines serving in 1950.30 Among Army
volunteers, the quality of personnel was uniformly quite poor. More than 40% were in the
lowest two mental categories on the military’s evaluation scale.31 Those soldiers that did
volunteer often did so with little expectation of fighting. In the words of LTG Edward Almond,
commander of the Army X Corps, many volunteer soldiers’ “main reason for coming was that
they were interested in seeing what they could in the Far East rather then becoming well-trained,
disciplined soldiers.”32 On the whole, Army volunteers had lower educational, physical, and
mental standards than the typical draftee. They were also less efficient, more delinquent, and
less likely to honorably complete a full term of service.33

The Marine Corps, on the other hand, did not suffer from a precipitous drop in the quality
of its enlisted men. Rather than perform occupation duties, the Corps returned to the states after
World War II focused on refining its amphibious doctrine and sharpening its proficiency on basic
combat missions. Unlike the Army, which undertook dramatic reforms in order to attract
sufficient numbers of volunteers to active service, “the Marine Corps was not made pleasant for

29 Geer, 3.
30 George Q. Flynn, The Draft: 1940-1973 (Lexington: University of Kansas Press, 1990), 118-119; Selective
32 Interview with LTG Edward Almon, Senior Officers Debriefing Program (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army Military
History Institute, 1976) 16. See also Lynn Montross and Nicholas Canzona, U.S. Marine Operations in Korea,
33 Flynn, 119. These findings are based on a study of 2291 men in Korean combat.
men who served in it. It remained the same hard, dirty, brutal way of life it had always been.\textsuperscript{34} More importantly, those Marines that deployed to fight in Korea were more experienced than their Army counterparts. Approximately 90\% of the Marine officers and 65\% of the non-commissioned officers were combat veterans, compared to roughly 40\% of the Army leaders.\textsuperscript{35}

Finally, specific units within both services possessed levels of cohesion that directly affected their combat performance, yet was not necessarily representative of the parent organization. The 5\textsuperscript{th} Marines, for example, enjoyed a tremendous advantage in terms of pre-existing cohesion. This unit had trained together for an entire year “with virtually no turnover,” as compared to the average 43\% annual turnover that plagued Army units in Japan.\textsuperscript{36} This resulting high level of cohesion contrasts with the severe problems experienced by the Army’s segregated infantry regiments.\textsuperscript{37} The introduction of KATUSAs (Koreans Assigned to the United States Army) through an agreement brokered by MacArthur also had negative consequences for Army unit cohesion not suffered by the Marine Corps.\textsuperscript{38} Any cross-service comparison must take these unit specific variations into account, rather than holding up individual units as representative of the service as a whole.

\textit{Equipment Status and Materiel Preparations}

Throughout the first half of the Korean War, the Marine Corps enjoyed significant advantages in terms of equipment and logistical support. The dismal state of material readiness

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item Fehrenbach, 192-193.
\item Geer, 4. The much higher percentage of veterans that remained in the active Marine Corps does appear to be largely a manifestation of culture, rather than the outcome of any intentional effort or unique incentive program.
\end{itemize}
in MacArthur's occupation forces is well documented. According to British historian Max Hastings, as a direct consequence of Truman's defense policies, "by June 1950 MacArthur's divisions in Korea lacked 62 percent of their infantry firepower and 14 percent of their tanks...80 percent of the Army's sixty day reserve was unusable, and the Army in Japan possessed only forty-five days supply of ammunition." Not only did Marine Corps combat forces possess larger stocks of vehicles and ammunition, but they also arrived in Korea armed with three weapon systems that would prove critical in these early confrontations.

Army divisions in Korea were outfitted predominantly with World War II vintage weapons that had been refurbished in Japan as part of American reconstruction efforts in that occupied nation. Most of the work on these weapons was superficial, normally consisting of a new coat of paint and the occasional application of grease. As a result of inadequate maintenance, Army equipment experienced unusually high failure rates, including uncharacteristically large amounts of dud ammunition and numerous dead vehicle batteries. The Marines, on the other hand, had taken a different approach to their military hardware at the end of World War II. Anticipating a massive demobilization, Marine Corps headquarters insisted that significant amounts of equipment in the Pacific theater be returned to the States, rehabilitated, and then stored at one of several supply depots. As a result, the 1st Marine Division had significant quantities of well-maintained jeeps, trucks, and tractors, as well as several brand new M-26 tanks, in storage at the Marine Supply Depot at Barstow, California.

---

41 Appleman, 113-114.
42 Millett, *Semper Fi*, 447.
43 Chapin, 9.
The M-26 Pershing Tank was one of three weapon systems the Marines possessed that would prove critical to their early successes against the North Koreans. Unlike the Army M-24 Chaffee Light Tank, which sported a 75mm main gun, or the slightly larger 76mm gun on early model M4A3 Sherman Medium Tanks, the M-26 Pershing boasted an improved 90mm main gun capable of penetrating the hull of the North Korean T-34.\textsuperscript{44} Armored platoons outfitted with Pershings provided the Marines with a lethal anti-armor capability against the NKPA sadly lacking in the most Army units.\textsuperscript{45} As a result of this weapon system, Marines scored tank-on-tank kills during the war that were simply not physically possible with the reduced penetrating power of the Army's various armored vehicles.\textsuperscript{46}

Superior tanks were not the only weapons the Marines brought to the fight. Along with a full complement of Pershings, the Marines arrived at Pusan harbor in possession of M-20 3.5-inch rocket launchers, "new weapons that the battered Army divisions lacked."\textsuperscript{47} This weapon was developed after experiences in World War II demonstrated the ineffectiveness of its lighter predecessor, the 2.36-in rocket, against the 1.8 inches of side and frontal armor on the Soviet-built T-34.\textsuperscript{48} Ultimately, this second tank-killing system had an even greater impact on battles between American ground forces and the North Koreans. As the Marines demonstrated at the Naktong, while 2.36-inch rockets simply bounced off the T-34, the improved 3.5-inch rocket

\textsuperscript{44} Fehrenbach, 463-464; Chapin, 6. For an example of the effectiveness of the M-26, see Donald Snedeker, "One Was Enough," Marine Corps Gazette (November 2000): 71-77.

\textsuperscript{45} Babb, 8. Both services actually preferred the improved M4A3E8 "Easy 8" Heavy Tank, a modified version of the Sherman outfitted with a new high velocity 76mm main gun. This tank was more reliable, maneuverable, and fuel efficient than the Pershing, more than offsetting the smaller bore main gun. Historian Clay Blair notes that Army tankers unanimously condemned the Pershing as a "lousy tank" and a "complete flop" due to its poor reliability. Both services replaced their Pershings with Easy 8's as rapidly as possible. However, mechanical problems aside, the larger gun on the Pershing nonetheless proved critical in the opening battles of this war. Blair, 637-638.


\textsuperscript{47} Chapin, 4; Montross and Canzona, 52.

\textsuperscript{48} For specifications on the T-34, see Combat Information Bulletin No. 1, Headquarters, Eighth United States Army Korea, 9.
could and did stop this enemy tank its tracks. With this weapon in their arsenal, the Marines never faced a situation in which they confronted a North Korean armored attack without the means to defeat it. The Army could make no such claim.

The third and greatest material advantage of the Marines lay in their composition as an air-ground team. While Army units relied on planes of the Far East Air Force for close air support, the Marine Division deployed to Korea accompanied by 2 squadrons of Corsairs aboard the escort carriers *Baedong Straits* and *Sicily*. Leaving aside for the moment questions of training and coordination, these particular planes possessed physical characteristics that made them more effective than those of the Air Force when used in the ground support role. Navy and marine pilots flew the propeller-driven F-4U Corsair, while the Air Force performed its close air support role with a combination of WWII propeller-driven fighters like the F-51D/K Mustang and early jet fighter-bombers, such as the F-80C Shooting Star. Although the Corsair was a slower aircraft not particularly suited to an air superiority role, it possessed significant advantages over Air Force planes in terms of loiter time, survivability and bombing accuracy. As a result, Marine Corps close air support was often much more effective than that received by the Army, with direct positive consequences for Marine ground forces in contact.

This final Marine Corps advantage in the air was magnified by the lack of artillery

---

49 Geer, 98-99. The M-20 “Super Bazooka” entered production shortly before the Korean War, and was issued to the Marines initially as a short-range anti-pillbox weapon. Though available evidence is scant, it appears that the Marines were the first to get this weapon solely by virtue of their being stationed in the U.S., bypassing the need for overseas shipment. Neither service appeared to place much emphasis on large-scale production. Unlike the 2.36-inch rocket, the M-20 could penetrate 11 inches of armor at a range of 150 yards. See Burt Kortegaard, “The Korean War: Principal Infantry Weapons,” The Korean War Site Online, March 2001.


support on the ground in the Korean theater. Truman’s budget reductions produced shortages in
the artillery support available to MacArthur commensurate with those in American armor and
infantry units. Roughly one-third of the authorized field artillery units were lacking both
personnel and equipment. However, the lack of indirect fire assets in the Korean theater
impacted the two organizations much differently. The Marine Corps historically confronted the
dual constraints of an amphibious assault mission that required quick shock action from the sea,
as well as strict limits on the amount of equipment that could be stowed on its amphibious
assault craft. As a consequence, the Corps had minimal authorized artillery assets, and
compensated for the lack of ground fire support with its assigned air squadrons and a combat
document that maximized ground-air support.

The Army, with its air assets now reorganized into an independent service, instead relied
on massive amounts of artillery as the core of its combat operations. Based on his experiences
in the Pacific theater, MacArthur sought to double his fire support assets for combat in Korea,
augmenting every divisional battalion with a second non-divisional unit. This added firepower
was thought to be the only way “a field army could sustain itself” on the offensive. However,
there were only 11 non-divisional artillery battalions remaining throughout the entire Army, and
even these were chronically under-strength. As a result, while the lack of supporting fires had
negative consequences for both services, the Marine Corps compensated with a complement of
trained forward air controllers and a doctrine that relied heavily on air rather than ground
support. The Army, on the other hand, enjoyed no such luxuries. Lacking both artillery and
trained forward air controllers, the organization’s primary source of indirect fire support was

---

54 Ibid, 254.
limited to that provided by the U.S. Air Force.

Training and Readiness Status

The final category to be addressed is pre-war training. With the exception of the 5th Marines, neither service had conducted significant large-scale training prior to the Korean War. Army units engaged in occupation duties in Japan paid scant attention to training on basic wartime missions, and the Marine Corps was reduced in numbers to the point that those Marines that remained on active duty were widely dispersed in a number of posts. Only the 5th Marines under LTC Raymond Murray had conducted any rigorous large-unit training in the form of numerous training exercises culminating in full regimental operations.\(^55\) As a result, a large proportion of both services were forced to relearn fundamental combat skills under fire, magnifying the importance of the Marines’ higher numbers of experienced combat veterans.

As General J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff of the Army, noted in his account of the Army experience in post-war Japan, “Peacetime occupation duty in a foreign land probably is the worst possible precondition for combat...(and the) divisions of the Far East had little time or incentive to engage in training.”\(^56\) The severe lack of training space in Japan, inadequate spare parts and ammunition, and a wide dispersal of units posed real obstacles to training for Army leaders.\(^57\) Despite these difficulties, an intense training program was instituted in 1949 under LTG Walton Walker that aimed to qualify infantry regiments on their basic combat missions. Unfortunately, this was a case of too little, too late. At the outbreak of hostilities, while some

---


\(^{57}\) Blair, 50.
Army units had progressed through battalion level tasks, many had failed, and the Far East command rated itself a generous 40% in terms of readiness.58

The Marine Corps also suffered from the wide dispersal of its active duty members and budget-inspired shortages in ammunition and repair parts. While the ranks swelled with volunteers and activated reserves, the Marines sailed to Korea without “further individual training, adequate weapons firing, or physical conditioning.”59 Hastily assembled tank crews were limited to a single day of training on their new Pershing tanks, with each team restricted to firing two rounds.60 Similarly, bazooka and anti-tank teams conducted only shipboard familiarization with their weapons during the 20-day journey to Pusan harbor before using them in battle.61 Nor was the physical conditioning of the Marine Division, fully half of which were reserves, significantly better than that of most Army units.62

In summary, it is important to identify the specific characteristics and capabilities of both Army and Marine units in order to conduct a balanced assessment of combat effectiveness. While both services were sorely undermanned and performed admirably with the equipment they possessed, critical qualitative differences would prove to have a real impact on the battlefield. The Marines held a significant advantage in anti-armor systems over the Army that took several months of emergency requisitions and stateside shipments to redress. Air Force jets never achieved the level of proficiency at air-ground operations demonstrated by Navy and Marine pilots in their Corsairs. Furthermore, until Army units relearned the harsh lessons of battlefield survival, the higher percentage of combat veterans in the Marine Corps had a disproportionately

59 Millett, 480.
60 Montross and Canzona, 51.
61 Ibid, 64.
62 Millett, 484.
large influence on their success in the opening phase of the war. Finally, the advantages of low turnover and extensive pre-war training in the 5th Marine Regiment made this unit an outlier not representative of the performance of the Corps as a whole.

IV. Movement to Contact

The first days after the North Koreans Peoples Army (NKPA) launched their surprise attack across the 38th parallel ushered in a period of mass confusion and disarray for American forces destined to fight on the peninsula. Republic of Korea (ROK) forces staggered and collapsed in the face of their more heavily armored foe. While Soviet advisors had designed, equipped, and trained a heavy armored force with significant offensive power, the South Koreans suffered a decisive disadvantage in terms of military hardware. Although the ROK army fielded 8 infantry divisions on paper, they had “no tanks, no medium artillery, no 4.2 inch mortars, no recoilless rifles. They had no spare parts for their transport. They had not even one combat aircraft.”63 Faced with nine divisions of a determined enemy, numbering 80,000 men and nearly 150 T-34 tanks, elements of the ROK Army fought bravely but often against hopeless odds.64

Recognizing that NKPA forces threatened to rout the South Korean defenders in short order, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur pressed for the immediate release of four full divisions of American forces to stem the tide. With the approval of President Truman, MacArthur hastily deployed lead elements of his occupation forces in Japan to Korea. Neither their dismal levels of combat readiness nor the significant shortfalls in manning and equipment

---

63 Fehrenbach, 7.
64 Flint, 267.
came as a surprise to the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Command and United Nations Command. However, faced with the prospect of ROK forces being driven off the Korean peninsula entirely, MacArthur made the deliberate decision to employ these ill-prepared garrison troops. In his autobiographical Reminiscences, he recalled that “My only chance... was to commit my forces piecemeal as rapidly as I could get them to the front, relying upon the stratagem that the presence of American ground forces in the battle area would chill the enemy

---

Hastings, 52. For example, MacArthur’s “absolute lack of attention to the combat training of his divisions can only be explained by his conviction what they would not be called upon to fight.”
commander into taking precautionary and time-consuming methods."\textsuperscript{66} Initially, limitations on both lift assets and time restricted MacArthur to committing the 24\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division from Japan.

Assessing the success or failure of their initial efforts depends a great deal upon the level of analysis selected. At the tactical level, opening with the destruction of the now infamous Task Force Smith and concluding with the withdrawal of all U.S. forces south of the Naktong River two weeks later, "the 24\textsuperscript{th} suffered heavy casualties and gave up more ground than it should have in nearly every engagement."\textsuperscript{67} Softened by years of occupation duty in Japan, undermanned and unequipped, Army units offered minimal resistance to the onrushing columns of NKPA infantry.\textsuperscript{68} However, despite their poor initial showing, 24\textsuperscript{th} Infantry division forces managed to slow the North Korean advance and maintain a foothold on the Korean peninsula, satisfying the theater objectives of their commander. In any case, Army forces, though bloodied, had halted the North Korean advance. This tenuous defensive line became known as the Pusan perimeter.

Under the command of Lieutenant General Walton Walker of Eighth Army, United Nations forces funneled into Korea at a breakneck pace. By 2 August 1950, these included 3 divisions from the Japanese Army of Occupation (24\textsuperscript{th} ID, 25\textsuperscript{th} ID, and 1\textsuperscript{st} Cavalry Division), the British 27\textsuperscript{th} Brigade, and the newly arrived 1\textsuperscript{st} Provisional Marine Brigade.\textsuperscript{69} The Pusan perimeter itself covered roughly 130 miles of frontage, extending north along the Naktong River.

\textsuperscript{66} MacArthur, 335-337. Orders from Washington restricted MacArthur to those assets present in theater, in order to maintain a military presence in other parts of the world, most notably Europe.
\textsuperscript{67} Flint, 266. See also Joseph Babb, "Task Force Smith Revisited," Military Review (Dec 1999), 3-12.
\textsuperscript{68} Appleman, \textit{South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu}. 179-181. Final statistics regarding 24\textsuperscript{th} ID losses during the initial two weeks of combat and withdrawal to the Naktong illustrate the losses suffered at the tactical level. Roughly 30 percent of the division were assessed as casualties, with those Missing in Action (MIA) accounting for a staggering 874 of 1150 lost. This unusually high number of MIAs was symptomatic of the tendency of certain army units to disintegrate, or "bug out", in the face of enemy contact, leaving weapons and wounded behind in an all out flight for the rear.
\textsuperscript{69} Hastings, 84-85.
to the city of Taegu and then east to the coast. Fordable in spots, it was “commanded on both sides by steep hill ranges on both banks.” From this defensible and steadily growing base of operations, soldiers and Marines were committed together against the North Koreans for the first time in this war.

**Case #1: Task Force Kean, 6-14 August 1950.**

Task Force Kean, named after its commander, Major General William Kean of the 25th Infantry Division, conducted the first deliberate American counterattack of the Korean War. Composed of two full regiments of the newly arrived 25th Infantry division, each with three infantry battalions, plus the 5th Regimental Combat Team from Hawaii and the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, Kean’s force totaled some 20,000 men. It also included two medium tank battalions, the Army’s 89th (M4A3) and the 1st Marine (M26 Pershings). Their mission was to “relieve enemy pressure against the perimeter in the Taegu area by forcing the diversion of some North Korean units southward.” Opposing the Task Force was the NKPA 6th Division, numbering some 7500 strong and augmented by 36 howitzers and 25 tanks. Given a favorable intelligence assessment and the positive balance of forces, Eighth Army planners expected to meet little resistance, forcing the North Koreans either to shift units south to reinforce the 6th Division or permit a breakout of the perimeter.

Kean’s tactical plan for the counterattack provides the first opportunity for a side-by-side assessment of soldier and Marine combat effectiveness. The task force attacked from east to

---

70 Ibid, 85.
72 Ibid, 267.
73 Ibid, 270.
west three regiments abreast, with the 35th Infantry Regiment in the North on the main inland 
road, the 5th Regimental Combat Team in the center on a secondary road, and Murray’s 5th 
Marine Regiment in the south on a coastal road. Launched on August 7th, Kean’s units had 
barely advanced when they ran straight into a divisional attack by the North Koreans. For three 
days, the forces fought a series of small-unit actions. By daybreak on the 10th, Task Force Kean 
broke through the unexpected NKPA resistance, and executed the intended three-pronged attack 
towards the Chinju Pass to the west. However, despite a week of hard fighting, U.S. forces 
ultimately proved unable to clear this mountainous region. Losses on both sides were heavy. On 
August 14th, General Walker pulled the Marines from Kean and sent them to plug another gap in 
the Perimeter, while army forces settled back into their original, pre-attack defensive lines.74

This first week of fighting against the North Koreans contained several notable instances 
of both effective and ineffective combat performance. Objective factors impacted Marines and 
soldiers with rough equality. Struggling with outdated Japanese maps and coping with the 
oppressive climate, the fighting men of both services acquitted themselves well considering the 
conditions. Yet, neither Marines nor soldiers proved immune to the heat of a Korean summer. 
Within the first two days of fighting, for example, the Marines had suffered six times as many 
casualties from heat exhaustion as from enemy fire. Army units fared no better.75

With only a few days to consider, it is admittedly dangerous to paint the performance of 
the committed forces with broad strokes, equating the actions of small units with the overall 
effectiveness of their parent organizations. However, in a methodology employed in each of the

74 Ibid, 286-287. Appleman cites further sources, which indicate that in operational terms, the mission never 
achieved its objectives, as the North Koreans failed to reinforce the NKPA 6th Division “with a single squad from 
the northern to the southern front during the action.”

75 Ibid, 272, 274.
cases examined in this study, notable variations in combat performance are identified for the purpose of establishing trends in military effectiveness that can then be assessed in greater detail.

While the tendency of Army units to 'bug out' in the face of North Korean attacks had largely subsided as U.N. forces collapsed into defensible positions behind the Pusan Perimeter, some units during this first battle of the Naktong Bulge continued to demonstrate questionable reliability. The most conspicuous of these failings, and the only one to appear in the official Army records concerning Task Force Kean, occurred on the 12th of August. North Korean forces had encircled the 555th (Triple Nickel) Field Artillery Battalion during its movement along one of the many narrow roadways criss-crossing the perimeter. To prevent its piecemeal destruction, General Kean ordered the commander of his 24th Infantry Regiment to relieve enemy pressure on the endangered artillerymen trapped in what came to be called "Bloody Gulch." The commander of the 25th Infantry Division's only segregated unit, Lieutenant Colonel John Corley, an experienced and respected battalion commander, immediately dispatched two infantry companies. Despite facing only slight resistance, however, these units failed to reach their objective. Within hours of being committed, the two companies, each 100 men strong, could muster only half that number of combat effective troops. By noon on the 13th, both friendly infantry units had been rendered combat ineffective. The attack "stopped two and a half miles from the captured artillery battalion," and the beleaguered cannoneers lost three firing batteries worth of howitzers, along with upwards of one hundred men.

Army Historian Roy Appleman passes lightly over the reasons behind the failed attack.

---

76 Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1995), 81. Grossman notes that "the rate of psychological casualties was almost seven times higher than the average for World War II. Only after the war settled down, lines stabilized, and the threat of having enemies in the rear areas decreased did the average rate go down to slightly less than World War II.

77 Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 285.
Noting that the two companies confronted “an estimated two enemy companies, and...only a few rounds of mortar fire, (their strength) dwindled from...more than 100 men per company to half that number. There were only 10 casualties that day.” He goes on to observe blandly that their precipitous loss in combat power “was not due to casualties.”\textsuperscript{78} Contending versions of this incident are not as forgiving. Edwin Hoyt, citing the official Marine Corps history, explains that the reason these two companies failed to appear was that “the troops ran away from the fighting...in the face of very limited enemy fire.”\textsuperscript{79} Without first-hand knowledge of the events as they transpired that day, it is difficult to make an objective assessment of the Army units’ performance. However, the low level of reported casualties, coupled with the disappearance of these two units from the field, provide an initial indication of the shaky nature of select regiments.

It is also difficult to ascertain the cause of these unit breakdowns with much confidence. The devastating defeats visited upon the first units sent to Korea clearly had lasting effects on their cohesion and subsequent performance. The 24\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, in particular, had never fully recovered from its initial defeats in July. In the words of Colonel Paul Freeman of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division, “Whenever their units were on our flanks, we found that they were liable to vanish without notice.”\textsuperscript{80} The segregated units, beginning with the 24\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment of the 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division noted above, also earned a reputation for fragmentation in the face of the slightest resistance. However, Army historians to this day disagree on the validity of such claims, and there is some evidence that the official record was influenced by racist attitudes.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 285.
\textsuperscript{79} Hoyt, 168.
\textsuperscript{80} Colonel Paul Freeman, as cited in an interview with Max Hastings, \textit{The Korean War}, 95.
prevailant at the time.\(^1\) Less damning than the outright disintegration of certain units, but still a possible indication of lower effectiveness, was a tendency among retreating Army forces to abandon vast quantities of personal arms and equipment in their headlong rush to safety.

Fortunately, American efforts in the Pusan perimeter were not uniformly poor. Marine units scored the greatest coup of these early days against the North Korean 6\(^{th}\) Division in an impressive display of coordinated ground and air strikes. While advancing along the southern coastal road, the chance shelling of a North Korean motorized force that had taken refuge in the Chingu area flushed some 200 vehicles from camouflaged positions and into the open. Taking advantage of a nearby reconnaissance flight of Corsairs from the escort carriers Sicily and Baedong, the 5\(^{th}\) Marines called in a series of rocket and strafing runs that destroyed some “31 trucks, 24 jeeps, 45 motorcycles, and much ammunition” at the cost of two aircraft.\(^2\)

Much has been made of this Marine success. Yet, clearly, the encounter owes a great deal to chance. Not only did the North Koreans overreact to essentially unobserved harassing fires from U.S. artillery, but the ability of the Marines to fully exploit their error depended on the ready availability of the armed Corsair flight. However, in terms of tactical military effectiveness, the incident at Chinju does hint at the significant advantages in lethality and responsiveness the Marine Corps air-ground team had over the joint Army-Air Force close air support system.\(^3\) Historical accounts consistently emphasize the Marines' effective use of close air support in the Pusan Perimeter, often citing Marine air as “providing the margin of victory” to


\(^3\) *Combat Information Bulletin* #1, Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army Korea, 1950, 5-7. Problems with the Army-Air Force procedures ranged from a shortage of Forward Air Controllers to improper targeting and request procedures.
units committed to Task Force Kean and elsewhere. Aside from a small number of Air Force Mustangs contributing strafing fires to the Marine strike at Chinju, however, these same records fail to cite any significant Army-Air Force close air strikes during Task Force Kean’s seven-day struggle. Initial Army requests for close air strikes in support of the beleaguered 24th Infantry Division suffered from short loiter times, the unavailability of aircraft, and poor coordination. By all indications, these shortcomings had not been addressed by the first weeks of August. Task Force Kean suffered from the same poor inter-service coordination and general lack of quality close air support that would mark Army-Air Force relations for the entirety of the war.

Case #2: Battle of the Naktong Bulge, 6-19 August 1950.

The first serious penetration of the Pusan Perimeter by North Korean forces occurred in a jutting three-sided finger of land christened the Naktong Bulge. Attacking with a veteran force of 7000 soldiers, the NKPA 4th division surged across the shallow Naktong River and struck the surprised 24th Infantry Division defenders at midnight on the 5th of August. In short order, they captured the high grounds of Cloverleaf Hill and the Obong-ni Ridge. From these positions, the North Koreans dominated the approaches to Miryang, and subsequently threatened to penetrate into the heart of the American defensive perimeter. The 24th Infantry Division, under the command of Major General John Church, immediately set out to regain this key terrain through a series of counterattacks.

86 Collins, 57.
87 Fehrenbach, 119-120.
The task fell initially to the three regiments of infantry in the Naktong Bulge area, consisting of the 9th Regimental Combat Team, along with two regiments of the 24th Infantry division and their supporting artillery. This composite group assembled as Task Force Hill, under the command of Colonel John Hill, the commander of the 9th Regiment.\(^{88}\) Over the course of the next few days, Task Force Hill conducted a series of unsuccessful attacks against the rapidly consolidating North Korean positions. Under cover of darkness, the North Koreans had augmented their positions with 100 machine guns, several artillery pieces, and even managed to transport a small number of T-34 tanks across the fordable river.\(^{89}\)

By the 15th of August, "the North Koreans had fought Task Force Hill to a standstill." Fighting without reserves, counterattacks by Task Force Hill repeatedly stalled, failing to dispossess the North Koreans of their dominant positions.\(^{90}\) Impatient at the lack of progress, General Walker decided to divert Taplett’s 5th Marines, slotted for a brief bivouac period as Eighth Army reserve after fighting with Task Force Kean, to the Naktong Bulge.\(^{91}\) With the added punch of the Marine brigade, Obong-ni and the Cloverleaf quickly fell to U.S. forces. By August the 19th the North Korean 4th Division was knocked completely out the war until reconstituted from scratch some three months later.

This second week of heavy fighting provides another prime opportunity to compare and contrast the performance of soldiers and Marines as they battled side by side to retake Obong-ni ridge and Cloverleaf Hill. Although Army forces clearly suffered from fatigue and lowered morale after their defeats earlier in the week, the Marines of the 1st Brigade could hardly have been in better physical condition. Weary from their actions against the NKPA 4th division and

\(^{88}\) Appleman, 299.  
\(^{89}\) Hoyt, 178.  
\(^{90}\) Appleman, 307.  
\(^{91}\) Ibid, 308.
the sweltering march along the coastal road, they found themselves thrust into action with little advance notice against a determined new foe on unfamiliar terrain. Once again, both soldiers and Marines distinguished themselves through individual acts of bravery. However, the Marines ability to accomplish the mission where Task Force Hill had failed, along with two significant deviations in combat performance, merit further examination as possible indications of some larger trend in military effectiveness.

Official Marine Corps accounts of the actions to retake Obong-ni tout this bloody series of infantry actions as the first “Brigade Victory in Korea.” Clearly, the tide turned with the commitment of Marine Corps units to the battle. The critical question is whether the Marines brought some unique quality to the fighting beyond their physical contributions of material and firepower. However, rather than replay the individual unit actions that led to the defeat of the NKPA 4th division, it is more useful to examine the underlying conditions that contributed to the ultimately successful outcome. According to battlefield estimates of the Task Force commander, the enemy force had grown “weaker and might have exhausted its offensive power in the costly stalemate fighting” of the days prior to the Marine arrival. This tactical assessment, although unconfirmed by intelligence available at the time, ultimately proved quite accurate. Unknown to the Americans, the North Korean 4th Division suffered from extreme shortages in ammunition and food, and desertions among its unwilling conscript forces reached nearly 40 percent by the time the Marines were committed.

On the American side of the lines, the appearance of the 1st Marine Brigade coincided with a timely improvement in weather conditions. Heavily overcast skies had scrubbed a

---

92 Montross, 47. Hoyt, 187-188.
93 Appleman, 307.
94 Ibid, 310.
planned 100-plane strike on NKPA positions in support of the Task Force Hill assault on the 14th. Rain and low clouds similarly impeded close air support strikes against dug-in enemy positions the following day. However, conditions had improved enough by the 16th to permit an 18 Corsair carrier air strike on Obong-ni ridge as part of the preparatory fires for the 5th Marine’s attack. While clearly beyond the sway of the tactical commanders, these changes in objective battlefield conditions must surely be credited with tilting the probability of victory towards U.S. forces, regardless of their service affiliation.

Closer consideration should also be given to the results of the first Marine assault on Obong-ni. Confident that the ridge could be retaken through an independent attack by the 2d Marine battalion and then used as a launching pad for a coordinated attack to seize the remainder of the Naktong Bulge, Taplett attacked without Army support in four platoon columns at daybreak on the 17th of August. Five hours and two consecutive frontal assaults later, the Marines had suffered 60% casualties in their fighting ranks without making any measurable progress towards retaking the ridge. Only when the Army and Marine Corps units later combined to increase the pressure on both Cloverleaf and Obong-ni simultaneously did American forces succeed in knocking the North Koreans off the hill.

Such results fail to substantiate claims that the Marine Corps saved the day at Obong-ni. Operating independently, Marine gains mirrored the frustrating lack of progress endured by Task Force Hill. Both services suffered comparable levels of casualties to enemy fire and heat stroke. The critical role of air power in reducing enemy emplacements, timely improvements in the weather, and the additional offensive striking power the Marines provided to an Army task force

---

96 Hoyt, 179-180.
97 Appleman, 313.
operating without reserves, appear both obvious and curiously overlooked in most assessments of this battle. On the whole, there seems little to distinguish the effectiveness of the services from one another in general terms based on their performances here.

However, though preceding the arrival of Marines by a few days, one aspect of the difficulties encountered by Task Force Hill does deserve mention. The initial attack to retake the Cloverleaf marked the second occasion in which Army units contradicted orders and abandoned their positions on their own volition. On this occasion, several elements of the 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, including the Heavy Weapons Company and a line infantry company, conducted an unauthorized withdrawal from their positions on the regimental flank despite not being under enemy attack. Subsequently, the regimental commander relieved all the commanders involved and personally returned the wayward soldiers to their place on the line.98

This second collapse of an Army unit stands in marked contrast to the record of the Marines. There is no recorded evidence of any unauthorized Marine collapse, particularly in the absence of hostile fire.99 However, it is equally significant that this poor performance, which threatened the security of the entire task force effort, once again involved a subordinate unit of the nearly ineffective 24th Infantry Division. As such, their actions may be nothing more than a further indication of serious shortcomings within the leadership hierarchy of this individual division.100 Much like the unique conditions surrounding the success of the 5th Marines at

98 Ibid, 297.
99 Rudy Tomedi, No Bugles, No Drums: An Oral History of the Korean War (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 26. The accounts of the participants themselves underscore the Marines' open reluctance towards disobeying orders and letting their buddies down. He also highlights the role of unit cohesion. Fehrenbach arrives at similar conclusions, see 128-130. However, the Marines are not the only unit to boast of their reliability in combat. The 27th Infantry Wolfhounds, among others, have a similar claim to never retreating in the face of battle. Their exploits, echoed by Clay Blair, are documented on their organizational website.
100 Robert L. Bateman, “What We Haven’t Learned,” Military Review (Mar 1998), 49-56. Bateman underscores the tendency of the 24th Infantry Division, along with elements of the 1st Cavalry, to dissolve from units into a mass of retreating individuals once ordered to withdraw in the face of North Korean forces during the first year of the war. As previously noted, while Fehrenbach and Appleman offer harsh criticism regarding the reliability and
Chingu, isolated incidents of unit breakdown should be considered as discrete events within the larger context of institutional performance. They do not necessarily constitute a trend in the overall effectiveness of the parent services. Nonetheless, this contrast in combat performance is consistently used to highlight the military effectiveness of Marines in the Pusan perimeter.

Infantry actions at Obong-ni also marked the first ground clash between U.S. Marines and the vaunted North Korean T-34.\textsuperscript{101} As previously noted, the World War II vintage 2.36-inch bazookas possessed by most army units had proven completely ineffective against the 1.8 inches of frontal and side armor encasing the Russian-built tanks. This shortcoming, first experienced by the men of Task Force Smith, recurred with alarming consistency whenever American troops employed their aging anti-tank rockets against NKPA armor.\textsuperscript{102} The Marines of 1st Brigade, however, "were among the first American troops to be issued the new 3.5-inch rocket launcher."\textsuperscript{103} Possession of this weapon, along with a platoon of M-26 Pershing tanks, made a world of difference during their initial encounter with the vaunted North Korean armor.

The details of this first encounter are uniformly preserved in both Army and Marine Corps official histories. In the final hours of the battle for the Naktong Bulge salient, the North Koreans committed four T-34 tanks in a frontal attack in an effort to displace the Marines from their gains on the ridge. However, forewarned of their presence, the Marines responded with three of their own M-26 Pershing tanks, along with armor-piercing 75-mm recoilless rifles and a

\footnotesize{performance of the all-black units prior to desegregation, more recent contentions of the surviving veterans of these units are at odds with official accounts.}

\textsuperscript{102} Flint, 278. See also Fehrenbach, 67-69. He notes that "the American Army had developed improved 3.5-inch rocket launchers, which would penetrate the T-34. But happy with having designed them, it hadn’t thought to place them in the hands of the troops." The greater effectiveness of the 3.5 inch rocket launcher, once fielded in regular army units, is cited in lessons learned, \textit{Combat Information Bulletin #1}, Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army Korea (EUSAK), 1950, 5.
\textsuperscript{103} Montross, 52.
full complement of 3.5-inch bazooka teams. In a coordinated attack supported by a trio of strafing Air Force F-51s, the enemy armored thrust was completely destroyed in short order with no friendly losses. All four enemy tank kills were credited to lethal and effective ground fires.

However, the Marines’ success against North Korean armor in this initial confrontation, much like their close air support strikes of the previous week, occupies a dubious place in terms of establishing superior military effectiveness. The anti-armor weaponry of the Marines, particularly when compared to the aging, refurbished equipment of the Army’s 24th Infantry Division, clearly accounts for a great deal of the outcome. Further, there is ample evidence to show that Marines suffered an identical impotence when they employed the 2.36-inch bazookas that made up the bulk of the Army inventory. As in the previous battle, material rather than cultural differences dictated the outcome of the encounter.

Assessment of Actions in the Pusan Perimeter

Following the seizure of Obong-ni, Marine forces detached from the 24th Infantry division to refit and reconstitute their forces as the Eighth Army reserve. However, their second contact with the North Koreans alongside their Army counterparts brought several institutional differences into relief. Marine close air support inflicted extensive punishment on the North Koreans. However, as historian Bevin Alexander observes, the effective use of Marine air strikes in the Pusan Perimeter was only made possible by the confluence of several underlying conditions. Since the Marines relied heavily on air support rather than field artillery as part of their doctrinal approach to war, they did not suffer from the lack of indirect fire assets that plagued the Army. Marine F-4U Corsairs stationed on nearby escort carriers were readily

104 Appleman, 314-315.
available and had developed close ties with the supported ground units during extensive peacetime training. And finally, the complete absence of North Korean air power permitted long loiter times with heavy bomb loads.\textsuperscript{107} Army forces, working through hastily established joint air request channels operated without the benefit of a practiced system. Nor did close air support occupy top billing in terms of Air Force priorities.\textsuperscript{108}

The Marines also enjoyed much greater success than the Army against North Korean armor. However, it was effective anti-tank weapons, rather than superior tactics or fighting skills, which dictated the outcome of these early confrontations. Not only did the Marines possess 3.5-inch anti-tank rockets in sufficient quantity, but they also had the opportunity to conduct nearly three weeks of shipboard training on their use during the long journey from the states.\textsuperscript{109} This was an opportunity sorely missed by Army units, which both fielded and conducted initial training on this weapon system in the heat of battle. Colonel Paul Freeman of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division concisely captured the combined advantages of Marine Corps equipment and airpower recalling, "the Marines on our left were a sight to behold. Not only was their equipment superior or equal to ours, but they had squadrons of airpower in direct support. They used it like artillery...they had it day and night. It came off nearby carriers and not from Japan with only 15 minutes of fuel to accomplish the mission."\textsuperscript{110}

The one significant difference between the combat performances of the two services not attributable, at least in part, to tangible material differences, was the tendency of certain Army units to disintegrate in the field. Twice in the span of ten days, Army regiments from two different divisions had either abandoned their designated positions or retreated in the face of

\textsuperscript{107} Alexander, 129-130.
\textsuperscript{108} Millett, "Case Studies in the Development of Close Air Support," 347-351.
\textsuperscript{109} Montross, 52, 64.
\textsuperscript{110} Paul Freeman, as quoted in Montross and Canzona, 243.
minimal enemy resistance. The disturbing trend of Army units abandoning large quantities of equipment during withdrawals was also well established by this point in the war. Clearly, the relative number of Army and Marine units committed to defend the perimeter should allow for some variation in performance. By the 4th of August, there were over 50,000 Army officers and enlisted soldiers in Korea, as compared to only 4713 Marines.\textsuperscript{111} This meant that the lone Marine regiment fought alongside some 9 equivalent Army units, each with varying levels of competence and officer leadership. Nor did all Army units behave in the manner of the infamous 24\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment. For example, twice during fighting in the Pusan perimeter, another of the 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division's units, the 27\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment under Colonel Mike Michaelis, won critical tactical victories, leading to its designation as "Walker's own Fire Brigade."\textsuperscript{112} The Wolfhounds enjoyed no significant advantages over its sister regiments in terms of training or equipment. Michaelis' own charismatic leadership and extremely keen sense of tactics contributed greatly to his regiment's initial success, and the unit continued to perform at high levels after its commander was promoted to brigadier general and moved to the division headquarters. Its continuing success may be attributed in part to its selection as the Eighth Army Reserve, which conferred an elite status on the unit and also led to its receiving a priority on individual replacements and equipment.

\textit{V. From Defeat to Victory}

The end of summer ushered in an abrupt reversal of fortunes for the two sides in the Korean War. United Nations forces, augmented by the steady flow of supplies, individual replacements, and fresh units into the port at Pusan and profiting from the operational benefits of

\textsuperscript{111} Appleman, 264.
\textsuperscript{112} Blair, 184.
greatly reduced interior lines, achieved a numerical advantage over the North Koreans. The NKPA, on the other hand, suffered at the extreme limit of a tenuous supply line. United States Air Force and Marine planes executed daily aerial bombardments of the major supply routes to the south. “Owing to complete, uncontested (American) air and sea supremacy,” the North Koreans could provide only the most minimal support to its troops in contact.\textsuperscript{113} Korean veterans of the Chinese Civil War had thinned in the ranks, usually replaced by poorly trained, unwilling conscripts just as likely to flee as fight.\textsuperscript{114} While combat along the Pusan perimeter remained fierce, the North Korean main offensive had been turned back on its two major axes.\textsuperscript{115} After weeks of retreating and a string of painful defeats, United Nations forces were finally poised to regain the offensive.

Just as fighting in the Southern tip of the peninsula began to favor the U.N. Command, MacArthur executed the most daring, and arguably most successful, amphibious landing in American military history. Rebelling against the conventional wisdom of nearly every senior officer both in theater and in Washington, he engineered the delivery of a 70,000-man assault force of soldiers and Marines at Inchon. Dubbed \textit{Operation Chromite}, elements of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Marine Division and the 7\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division executed a surprise landing on the port city against nominal resistance from an NKPA garrison of 2000.\textsuperscript{116} Within two days, American units fighting under the command of General Almond of X Corps secured the critical landing field at

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 172.
\textsuperscript{114} Fehrenbach, 112-114. NKPA forces lost an estimated 60,000 men in the summer of 1950. Ground forces at the end of August favored UN Command by a ratio of 2:1
\textsuperscript{115} Appleman, 487.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, 488-515. There are indications that the North Koreans possessed intelligence regarding the planned Inchon landing, which was common knowledge among the American troops in the weeks leading up to execution. However, whether lost in the mass of incoming reports or intentionally disregarded by North Korean leaders, the failure to reinforce garrison troops and oppose the landing had the desired effect of surprising these scant forces. Had the port been reinforced and well defended, the operation would have undoubtedly been much costlier to American units.
Kimpo, providing a forward airstrip and logistical base for American cargo planes, and began advancing on the capitol city.\textsuperscript{117} Flush with success, MacArthur turned his attention to the reunification of the two Koreas, beginning with the recapture of Seoul.

Several critical factors changed during this phase of the war. The enemy of September was not the same confident, experienced foe of the hot summer months. His supply lines severed, pressured from north and south by U.N. forces superior in both numbers and firepower, and suffering an inexorable decline in the quality of his frontline troops, the North Korean People’s Army now confronted the possibility of total military defeat. While American and allied casualties continued to mount, most were taken in the course of victory rather than defeat. Even the weather, which had inflicted more casualties among the poorly acclimated American soldiers than enemy fire, yielded to the cooler temperatures of fall. The eight weeks between the landings at Inchon and the entry of Chinese combat units into the war provide a different basis for the purposes of inter-service comparison. Instances of Army-Marine tactical cooperation in the pursuit of joint objectives were infrequent, supplanted by the coordinated employment of service-pure forces fighting in pursuit of complementary objectives. The cooperative tactical effort that marked Task Force Kean, for example, yielded to separate regimental attacks against enemy units defending in vastly different terrain. These operations, which witnessed the Marines establish unit integrity and operate as a complete division under the command of Major General O. P. Smith for the first time, form the basis for the observations in this section.

Due to the introduction of so many additional factors accompanying the separation of Army and Marine operations into separate spheres, the trends identified here are unavoidably more subjective than the previous phase. The pseudo-control of the previous two cases simply does not hold as well. Operations to seize Seoul, as the case in point, involved both Army and

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 511.
Marine units, but the former attacked through mountainous terrain and open rice paddies to gain dominant, but lightly defended, hilltops. The latter drew the unpleasant task of house-to-house urban fighting against a stubborn rearguard resistance. In light of these specific differences, individual battles under similar conditions were analyzed in order to establish broader observations of the tactics and relative effectiveness of the two services. These are, however, offered with caution and a clear sensitivity to the very real danger of underestimating unique conditions and drawing unsupported, anecdotal conclusions based on the testimony of individual participants.

In the specific case examined in this section, it is possible to make a broad observation based on an objective reading of the available historical and autobiographical accounts. Most Army units favored tactics of maneuver to seize key terrain, which minimized casualties but frequently resulted in the isolation of individual units beyond the range of supporting arms. Marine commanders tended to maintain tighter centralized control of their individual regiments. Smaller frontages and the requirement for mutual support between units predisposed the Marines towards frontal assaults, both inflicting and receiving heavier casualties than their Army counterparts. This operational approach to combat came at the expense of some loss in freedom of maneuver. Using frontal assault tactics, the Marines often accomplished difficult missions where comparable Army units had failed, but only at great cost. This general observation represents a broad trend rather than a universal truth, and isolated incidents of both services operating to the contrary can be found. However, it seems a fair and objective assessment in terms of general tendencies and practices drawn from this particular phase of the war.

Driving inland after the successful amphibious landings at Inchon, MacArthur turned his attention to the liberation of Seoul for both the military and psychological benefits retaking this major city would confer on the United Nations war effort. Edward Almond, commanding forces made up of the Army’s 7th Infantry Division and the 1st Marine Division, assured his superior that he would control the city within two weeks. The X Corps operational plan to recapture Seoul assigned the Marines the primary task of liberating the city, while the 7th ID “protected (the Marines’) right flank and engaged enemy units moving toward the battle area from the south.” In short, the Marines would bear the brunt of the fighting while Army units guarded against the arrival of reinforcing units. Almond’s ambitious promise started the clock on this difficult mission, and served as a constant source of irritation between the 1st Marine Division and their Army corps headquarters.

As a function of the very different missions assigned to the two services, operations around Seoul became a study in contrasts. A single regiment of the 7th Infantry Division made rapid overland progress in a wide arc around the city. Facing only moderate resistance and taking a handful of casualties, soldiers of the 34th Infantry Regiment occupied critical road junctures and hilltops just south of Seoul. The Marines confronted a very different enemy situation. Elements of three North Korean divisions were firmly entrenched in the town of Yongdungpo, a small urban area that guarded the Southern approaches into Seoul. Multiple infantry assaults, massive artillery shelling and skillful cover by several sorties of Corsairs were required to overcome this town’s North Korean defenders.

---

118 MacArthur, 346-356.
119 Ibid, 520.
120 Montross and Canzona, 224-225.
Once again, exceptional acts of individual bravery marked both Army and Marine efforts. At the operational level, the style employed in Yongdungpo foreshadowed Marine operations for the remainder of the maneuver phase of the war. Prior to committing troops to the assault on the town, artillery forward observers massed all available ground and air fires on their objective in a conscious effort to substitute firepower for lives.\footnote{This is one of the first recorded incidents of the decision to “destroy the town in order to save it” which came to characterize U.S. operations in subsequent battles, particularly in Vietnam.} Once these supporting fires were expended, however, Marine ground forces employed coordinated frontal assaults against the entrenched Korean defenders, often at a high cost in lives. The official Marine history, for instance, recalls “Grinding forward with heavy casualties, ... the Marines then formed a line with their backs to the Han and shot it out with the Communists at a range of 500 yards. At the point, the attack stalled, and the fight settled down to one of attrition.”\footnote{Ibid, 222.} This preference for consolidation and massed infantry attacks would come to characterize Marine offensive and defensive operations.

The capture of Yongdungpo set the stage for the battle over Seoul itself. The 1st Marine Division initially planned to commit all three of its regiments to an assault on the city along the Inchon-Seoul highway, unassisted by any other X Corps ground units. General Almond modified the plan slightly, adding the offensive punch of the ROK Marines and ROK 17th Regiment but approving the general concept of operations.\footnote{Appleman, 520.} Seoul was defended by an estimated 13,000 troops, with reinforcements swelling those numbers to almost 20,000 over the course of the attack.\footnote{Ibid, 540. There has been much subsequent disagreement over the importance of the 7ID flanking maneuver. See Blair, 293.} However, the North Korean defense was a fairly disorganized affair. Fragmented reinforcing units entered the fight too late to be of use, and coordination between NKPA elements proved haphazard at best.
History has repeatedly shown that fighting in an urban environment is a difficult, time-consuming affair, and the Marine experience proved no different. Stiff resistance in the hills and villages that skirted the edge of the city, and General Smith's desire to maintain some semblance of mutual support between his three regiments slowed progress to a crawl. Almond, dissatisfied with the speed of events and under the self-imposed deadline to declare Seoul liberated by the three-month anniversary of the North Korean invasion, urged Smith to pick up the pace. He informed the Marine commander that "he could continue his frontal assaults but that he strongly urged him to use the space south of the Han River for an envelopment maneuver."  

There is some objective support for the possible success of a less direct scheme of maneuver than that taken by the Marines. Smith expended a great deal of time and effort capturing the town of Yongdongpo, a small urban area guarding the southwestern approach into Seoul. Marine Division planners justified the attack as a prerequisite to the liberation of Seoul. Yet even the official Marine Corps history of the campaign acknowledges that the town was little more than "an isolated landmark of only symbolic significance." Yongdongpo was separated from Seoul by 2 miles of sand and seawater. Its geographic location made it essentially untenable defensive ground, and any efforts to augment the forces defending Seoul from Yongdongpo would have been quite vulnerable to both artillery fire and close air support. Though admittedly hypothetical, it appears quite likely that a flanking maneuver which bypassed the town and committed the Marines directly to the recapture of Seoul could have speeded the Marine advance by four to five days, satisfying both Almond's demand for haste while further constraining North Korean efforts to reinforce the city.

---

125 Ibid, 527.
126 Montross and Canzona, 205.
Nonetheless, Smith declined to accept the Corps Commander’s advice, noting pointedly that his rate of advance was at least partially determined by the enemy. Almond responded by redrawing operational lines of responsibility through the center of Seoul, and committing the 7th Infantry Division to occupy the key high ground east of Seoul to relieve some of the pressure on the attacking Marines. A single Army infantry regiment accomplished this mission by the 25th of September, and despite the heavy fighting that occupied Smith’s troops for the next several days, MacArthur declared the city liberated as scheduled. Almond continued to express dissatisfaction with Marine tactics, however, for several months. No only did he repeatedly find their advances too cautious, but frequently declared Smith’s desire to keep his regiments together and his proclivity for frontal assaults unnecessarily cautious.

There was clearly an element of emotion underlying Almond’s evaluation of the Marines. Renowned for his intense personal loyalty to MacArthur and his own boundless ambition, the potential failure to retake Seoul by the promised date surely colored his professional opinion of the Marines’ progress. However, Max Hastings provides additional anecdotal evidence of a widespread dissatisfaction among respected senior Army officers with the Marines’ combat techniques. Colonel Mike Michaelis, the decorated commander of the 27th Infantry Regiment, observed plainly “the Marines were always too keen on frontal attacks.” Similarly, Colonel Ellis

---

128 Appleman, 534. This incident is one of many in which MacArthur sought personal glory through both actual and exaggerated battlefield exploits of his units.
129 Interview with Lieutenant General Edward Almond, 294-295.
130 The reputation of LTG Almond as a fiery, difficult leader was well known within the corps. His peers also questioned their counterpart’s competence. “Discussions about military matters had already convinced Walker that Almond’s knowledge of combat fundamentals and principles was limited. Even worse, his impetuous nature led him to underestimate the enemy while overestimating his own competence.” See Toland, 205. The Corps’ general opinion of Almond, decked out with his “living-van rig with its refrigerator, hot water shower, and flush toilet” was somewhat harsher, regarding him as “mercurial and flighty...militarily unintelligent.” See Martin Russ, Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign (New York: Fromm International, 1999), 17.
Williamson, Operations Officer of X Corps, recalled that "on the march to Seoul, I saw Marines doing things no Army outfit would think of. I watched them crossing that great sweep of wide open ground in front of Kimpo airport...They took far more casualties than we considered appropriate." Once the Chinese entered the war, even Marine historians would echo these sentiments, noting that Marines "took twice as much ground and killed twice as many Chinese, but also lost twice as many men." 132

Figures for the two weeks of combat leading up to the capture of Seoul confirm that the overwhelming majority of casualties taken within X Corps fell to the Marines. Of some 3,500 total losses, the 1st Marine Division accounted for fully two thirds. 133 However, these figures must be considered objectively within the context of the tactical environment and Marine's mission as the corps main effort. First in Yongdungpo and later in Seoul, the Marine Corps faced the prepared defenses of two North Korean divisions, as well as the North Korean 25th Brigade, which denied the western approaches into the capital city. Army forces, by way of comparison, maneuvered around fixed NKPA positions and encountered only modest opposition. Nor did Army units engage in the costly barricade street fighting that tied up Marine units for nearly a week. This very different level of enemy resistance surely accounts for the greater casualties inflicted on the Marines.

Assessment of Actions Around Seoul

At the tactical level, the liberation of Seoul does not contribute much to an understanding of cross-service military effectiveness. Close examination of the numerous battles that led up to

---

131 Both officers as quoted in Hastings, 110. Colonel Michaelis went on to become the youngest division commander in Korea. His leadership of the 27th Infantry Wolfhounds, the Army's own "fire brigade," serves as a useful counterpoint to the unreliable and spotty performance of certain Army units.

132 Russ, 153.

133 Appleman, 540-541; Montross and Canzona, 297. Marines lost 285 men on September 24th alone on the final push through the defenses barring entrance into Seoul from the West.
the liberation of Seoul does reveal a discernable difference in the way Army and Marine units planned and fought. However, detailed analysis of small-unit actions in contact shows that the services had a great deal in common at the level of the individual fighting man. What differences that did exist surfaced at the large unit level. The 1st Marine Division, heavily influenced by the desires of its commanding general, placed a premium on mutual support and coordinated attacks. As a result, the three Marine regiments consistently operated at relatively short distances from one another. Army units, by way of comparison, executed sweeping envelopments in deliberate attempts to bypass known enemy defenses. The drawback of such maneuvers was the strain that wide geographic dispersion placed on the supporting arms. Army close air and field artillery, always at a premium, could not be brought to bear equally across a wide frontage. The Marine air-ground team, in support of relatively well-defined and concentrated objectives, was consequently better positioned to focus its considerable organic assets to better effect.

While not examined at length in most historical accounts, a number of additional contributing factors should be considered before ascertaining whether this difference in operating styles had any meaningful impact on combat effectiveness. First, the Marines constituted a unique subordinate unit under a headquarters staffed almost entirely by Army officers. As such, pressures to maintain command and control over their own service must have impacted on the Marine planners at some level. Any wide dispersion of Marine regiments threatened to result in their subordination to Army division commanders for purposes of battlefield unity of command. Operating in close proximity to each other, however, ensured that they would remain under the consolidated command of the 1st Marine Division headquarters. This would necessarily reinforce any pre-existing preference for attacks across a smaller frontage, with units
consolidated under a single Marine command rather than piecemealed out and subject to greater influence by the X Corps staff. In fact, Marine officers would chafe publicly under the dispersion that resulted from Almond’s headlong rush to the Yalu a few weeks later.

Second, General Smith received some criticism after the fact from within his own service for expressing the desire, deemed excessive at times, to “have his ranks dressed all the time.” His personal preference for the consolidation and mutual support of combat units, while drawing criticism during the September offensive, would serve the Marines well on the withdrawal from the Yalu. However, during the battle to liberate Seoul, the cautious, methodical approach of Smith towards his appointed objectives encouraged relentless pressure from the corps commander. In retrospect, it is difficult to imagine any other way to liberate Seoul proper aside from the time-consuming barricade fighting the Marines engaged in. That same statement does not hold for the five days Smith used to capture Yongdungpo, when a flanking maneuver might have avoided the relatively insignificant town altogether. In any case, a balanced assessment of differences between institutional operating styles should consider the impact the idiosyncrasies of these individual leaders before prematurely attributing the findings of isolated battles to the organization at large.

Therefore, while this series of battles indicates a tendency towards smaller frontages and a preference for frontal assault on the part of Marine units, operations in the vicinity of Seoul alone do not provide evidence of significant variations in the combat effectiveness of the two organizations. The Marine Division confronted a determined, prepared enemy in a three-dimensional urban battle, while Army infantry regiments marched across mountainous terrain against slight opposition. In addition to these different combat conditions, much of the recorded

134 Marine General Lemuel Shepherd, as quoted in Hastings, 110.
135 Toland, 215-217.
dissatisfaction with Marine frontal assaults originates from within the officer nucleus surrounding General Almond. The corps commander himself, however, shares some measure of responsibility for both the tactics and difficulties of the Marine division by consistently underestimating the strength of the North Korean defenders. Anticipating an easy victory, he may well have harbored unreasonable expectations for the Marines that prompted much of his later criticism of their operations.

In short, nothing in the liberation of Seoul suggests a greater effectiveness on the part of either service. This case does reinforce the role unique battlefield conditions contribute to ultimate success or failure. While the Marines succeeded in uprooting the North Korean units entrenched in Seoul, they did so only after repeated frontal assaults on Yongdungpo that were neither necessary nor supported by their higher headquarters. Contemporary assessments of the Marine performance have attributed their level of casualties at least in part to the Corps' stubborn determination to fight these battles in its own preferred tactical style. While this would prove quite advantageous in future operations, in this particular case, the frontal assault drew much criticism from Army observers and arguably resulted in many preventable losses.

VI. *The Chinese First and Second Phase Offensive*

In late September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff transmitted to MacArthur a set of "amplifying instructions as to further military action to be taken by you in Korea." These instructions contained three directives: complete the destruction of all North Korean military forces, attempt the reunification of North and South Korea under Syngman Rhee, and determine whether

---

136 *MacArthur*, 358.
Chinese or Russian involvement in the expanding conflict seemed possible. With apparent presidential approval to conduct a pursuit of the retreating North Koreans in hand, MacArthur formulated his plans to cross the 38th parallel.

The political and military ramifications of crossing the 38th parallel, culminating in Truman's dismissal of MacArthur as the supreme military commander, remain the focus of intense academic debate to this very day. The advance of United Nations forces into North Korea and ultimately to the banks of the Yalu produced two important military consequences for the U.N. war effort. First, the party leadership of communist China interpreted these maneuvers as provocative, and responded with the introduction of the People's Liberation Army into the war. Second, MacArthur's dismissal resulted in the promotion of General Matthew Ridgway as commander of all United Nations forces in Korea. Ridgway's operational approach to the war differed greatly from MacArthur's, and transformed the face of the war.

A brief sketch of the theater and MacArthur's concept of operations sets the stage for an examination of critical aspects of this third phase of the war. The terrain of North Korea posed an extremely difficult challenge to MacArthur's operations staff. Army historian Roy Appleman described the region north of the 38th parallel as "an almost trackless mountainous waste... (where the) principal routes of travel follow the deep mountain valleys in a generally north-south direction." Even a cursory examination of a map of the area of operations revealed that advancing units would be split along both sides of the Taebaek Range, with lateral

---

137 Fehrenbacher, 181. See also MacArthur, 353-360, for a transcript of these orders as MacArthur received them on 27 September 1950.
138 Thomas Christensen provides a different interpretation of events based on his translation of the telegrams between Mao Zedong and Stalin, which indicate that the 38th parallel in and of itself had no real meaning for the Chinese. By crossing the parallel and advancing North, U.S. forces simply accelerated a timeline that prevented the CCF from completing a buildup of combat power before its eventual invasion. See Thomas Christensen, Useful Adversaries (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 155-166.
140 Appleman, 610.
movement restricted to a single road that ran from Pyongyang to Wonsan. For all practical purposes, physical and even radio contact from one side of this mountain range to the other was nearly impossible.

Given the obstacles to logistics and communications posed by the mountainous terrain, MacArthur decided to maneuver Eighth Army and X Corps independently rather than unite them under a single ground commander.\textsuperscript{141} The two units began crossing the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel on 7\textsuperscript{th} of October, with Eighth Army in the western corridor and X Corp in the east. LTG Walton Walker, still in command of Eighth Army and flush from the victorious breakout from the Pusan perimeter, led U.N. Command forces built around four U.S. infantry divisions: the 24\textsuperscript{th} ID, 25\textsuperscript{th} ID, 1\textsuperscript{st} Cavalry, and the newly arrived 2d Infantry Division. MG Almond retained control over the 7\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, as well as the 1\textsuperscript{st} Marine Division, the British Commonwealth Brigade and several smaller allied and ROK units.\textsuperscript{142}

Encountering little organized resistance from the North Koreans, U.N. forces advanced steadily up both sides of the Taebaek range. Eighth Army, on the inland route, captured Pyongyang by the 19\textsuperscript{th} of October, and after a brief refitting, continued the march north to the Yalu.\textsuperscript{143} X Corps, after lengthy preparations and a serious of delays caused by harbor mines, disembarked at Wonsan in an unopposed amphibious landing.\textsuperscript{144} From there, they joined the race to the Yalu following a route parallel to the coast on the eastern side of the mountain range.

Concern that the Chinese might enter the war at this point was at its lowest ebb. Army

Chief of Staff Omar Bradley, commenting at a joint meeting of British and American senior

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 610-611. See also Fehrenbach, 190-191; Hastings, 118-120, for an assessment of this decision to split command of the forces, as well as brief discussion of how it was received by both Walker and Almond.

\textsuperscript{142} Appleman, 605, for a detailed breakdown of troop strength and command relationships on 1 October 1950. Eighth Army forces accounted for roughly 2/3 of all committed ground units, as the Marines were reinforced to a total end strength of 21,525, about 5000 more men than the standard army division.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 638-653.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, 635-637.
military staff, casually noted that "if the Chinese communists come into Korea, we get out," but no plans existed which seriously addressed that possibility. As Hastings concisely remarked, "the very great political and diplomatic hazards were submerged by the public perception of the prospect of outright military victory." Senior military leaders planned for the victorious return of units to the states. General Walker, with MacArthur’s permission, even diverted several shiploads of ammunition back to their home ports, in the mistaken belief that existing stocks would suffice for the mopping up operations that remained. To make matters worse, "Walker allowed the professional standards of some units to deteriorate on the march north to the Yalu. Because there was little resistance from the NKPA, he and his subordinates…made the fatal mistake of assuming the war was over." However, as the next few weeks would make abundantly clear to all, such optimism at the end of October was sorely misplaced.

The Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) launched a series of major attacks across the U.N. front in late October through early November. After inflicting a number of surprising tactical defeats, they then mysteriously disappeared into the North Korean countryside. Three CCF Armies had driven Eighth Army back to the Chongchon River and delayed the advance of X Corps toward the Chosin Reservoir. Misinterpreting the available intelligence and disregarding the testimony of any increasing number of Chinese prisoners, MacArthur and his staff refused to recognize the deliberate entry of Chinese Communist forces into the war, and ordered the continued advance to the Yalu.

---

145 Hastings, 126.
146 Ibid, 127.
147 Appleman, 669.
149 Appleman, 749.
Both Eighth Army and X Corps restarted their advance north on the 25th of November.
The very next day, the Chinese launched the second of their massive offensive campaigns.
"Americans found themselves wakened in their sleeping bags by a terrifying cacophony of
bugles, drums, rattles, whistles—and gunfire. Again and again, Chinese assault troops smashed
though ill-prepared perimeters, overrunning infantry positions, gun lines, rear areas."150 This
time, however, the Chinese did not vanish back into the hills. Instead, they pressed their
advantage. In the belated words of General MacArthur, "We faced an entirely new war."151

Case #4: Retreat from the Yalu, November 28-December 11, 1950.
The retreat southward, under the twin pressures of relentless Chinese infantry assaults
and the biting cold of the Korean winter, provides another opportunity to compare critical
aspects of both Army and Marine performance. Reeling from the crush of massed CCF infantry
attacks, both Eighth Army and X Corps conducted that most dangerous of military operations, a
withdrawal under contact. They faced a common enemy in the Chinese People’s Liberation
Army (PLA), whose small unit tactics and rudimentary equipment did not vary significantly
across the front.152 Under the worst of conditions, soldiers and Marines struggled to escape the
nightly infantry rushes of a seemingly inexhaustible mass of peasant soldiers. Due to these
apparent similarities in their objective conditions, the performance of the Army and Marine
Corps on the retreat south is treated as the prime example of the vastly uneven effectiveness of
the two services. In the words of Cohen and Gooch:

150 Hastings, 140.
151 MacArthur, 375.
152 Roy Appleman, Disaster in Korea (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1989), 17-22. According to
Appleman, the CCF was a mass guerilla army whose standard tactics were “a frontal attack to fix the enemy (while)
sending equal or stronger forces in enveloping moves to attack the enemy flanks and to cut off a retreat.” They were
equipped with a mix of discarded U.S., Soviet, and Chinese small arms and possessed few heavy weapons or
artillery.
The experiences of the 1st Marine Division at the Chosin Reservoir and the (newly arrived) 2d Infantry Division at Kunu-ri offer instructive contrasts. The former retreated in good order, bringing their dead and wounded and all their equipment with them. Casualties were heavy, but the Chinese forces opposite them suffered far more heavily, losing tens of thousands of men to Marine firepower and the bitter winter...The Second Infantry Division, by way of contrast, suffered approximately 30 percent casualties, lost virtually all its equipment, and escaped the gauntlet...a collection of small, desperate groups of men.\textsuperscript{153}

Yet close study of events as they unfolded reveals a much different tale. After a brief overview of the actions and losses incurred by these two desperate columns of men, the relative importance of firepower, geography and manpower are examined. Altogether, these factors

\textsuperscript{153} Cohen and Gooch, 172.
combined to greatly advantage the X Corps units and account for the critical margin of
difference usually attributed to Marine Corps organizational culture.

Soon after the onslaught of Chinese divisions, both Army and Marine leaders ordered the
withdrawal of American forces to more defensible positions to the south. For the 2nd Infantry
division in the west, this meant a 20-mile trek from the city of Kunu-ri to positions near
Sunch'on. The 1st Marine Division confronted a two-stage journey, beginning with the 14
mile forced march from Yudamni to Hagaru to link up with remaining Marine units, followed by
an additional several days march through Kotori and out to the coastal port of Hungnam. Both

---

154 Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 227-228.
these routes have been described as classic gauntlets; narrow roads with steep rocky impasses on either side. Once in column, mechanized units were committed to moving forward. The Chinese occupied the heights, firing down on American troops with small arms and grenades, and turning around was often physically impossible.\textsuperscript{156} Fighting was characterized by American troops riding forward in their vehicles, halting at regular intervals by Chinese roadblocks, and dismounting under a hail of enemy fire to clear the road and resume the march south. Extreme cold temperatures added to the casualties inflicted by the enemy, and while both units successfully completed their withdrawals, neither was in any condition for further combat for several months.

In purely quantitative terms, retreat from the Yalu proved extremely costly to both services. However, Cohen and Gooch to the contrary, losses were fairly equitable in absolute terms. The 2d Infantry Division incurred total casualties of 4940 out of 15000 troops, or approximately 33\%, with the majority concentrated in the rearguard infantry regiment.\textsuperscript{157} The 1\textsuperscript{st} Marine Division lost 2484 of 11,686 men, for an average of 21\%.\textsuperscript{158} Equipment and vehicle losses to enemy fire were significant, but claims that the Army units lost “all their equipment” are also grossly overstated. In reality, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division’s major equipment losses were concentrated in the rear of the march column. When the rearguard infantry battalion took an inopportune wrong turn and left the main body exposed, 3 battalions of artillery and the 2d Combat Engineer Battalion destroyed their equipment rather than risk its capture by Chinese

\textsuperscript{156} Blair, 486. An often-overlooked fact is that the X Corp column included some 2300 Army troops, the sole survivors of the 7\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division. While incorporated into the Marine Division as individuals rather than units, their efforts in breaking out to the coast parallel those of their Marine counterparts, despite the lack of Marine Corps indoctrination.


\textsuperscript{158} Ibid, 148.
forces.\textsuperscript{159} These 52 artillery pieces and assorted engineering equipment account for the majority of the division’s material losses.\textsuperscript{160} Losses alone, however, do not provide the complete story. Over the course of their retreat, the Marine Division faced some 9 Chinese divisions, compared to only three divisions that surrounded withdrawing Army units. Yet, despite the greater effort directed at their destruction, the Marines suffered fewer casualties and preserved more of their equipment. On its face, this combination of statistics would seem to support claims of greater combat effectiveness.\textsuperscript{161} However, the straightforward comparison of statistics once again overlooks critical advantages the Marines possessed that contributed to their success.

A number of logistical and personnel factors left the Marine Division better prepared to face the dual challenges of the Korean winter and the Chinese onslaught. Army troops were completely unprepared for winter fighting. While every Marine was outfitted in extreme cold weather attire, fewer than half of Army soldiers were so equipped.\textsuperscript{162} In fact, scarce transport trucks were held at the airstrip in Pyongyang “to bring forward as fast as possible any winter clothing that arrived there by airlift. If no clothing arrived, then the trucks would haul

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid, 124. 2 ID ordnance records reported approximately 20 vehicles lost per day due to a lack of spare parts in late November. In total, 39 wheeled and 47 tracked vehicles were abandoned for this reason, contributing to the overall cumulative totals. See Appleman, 191.

\textsuperscript{160} Cohen and Gooch, among others, refer to 64 artillery pieces as the avoidable losses of the 21ID. However, this number is inappropriately derived and misleading. The 52 howitzers cited above consist of 17 guns from the 503\textsuperscript{rd} FA BN (155 mm) and all 18 guns of the 38\textsuperscript{th} FA Bn (105 mm), which were abandoned in the face of withering small arms fire at the unprotected rear of the division column, along with 17 guns of the 15\textsuperscript{th} FA Bn (105 mm), whose crews expended all their ammunition in a devastating twenty minute shoot, removed the firing mechanisms from their guns, and placed grenades in the tubes to ensure they would not be turned on friendly forces. The higher number includes 10 guns lost by the 37\textsuperscript{th} FA Bn (105 mm) during the exposed crossing at the Kahjon Dong Ford early in the retreat, as well as a single 8-inch howitzer from the 17\textsuperscript{th} FA Bn, which tipped over into a deep gully early in the march and proved unrecoverable. Nor did the Marines avoid similar mishaps. For example, 8 USMC 155mm howitzers and their support vehicles were abandoned on 3 December when they ran out of gas enroute to the Hagaru-ri perimeter. See Blair, 490-492, Mossman, 137.

\textsuperscript{161} Bin Yu, “What China Learned From its Forgotten War in Korea,” Strategic Review (Summer 1998), 13. This author claims that the Chinese ranked the Marine Division as the “best among American units”, and were particularly impressed with its coordination of ground, air, and artillery assets.

\textsuperscript{162} There is no clear reason why Army troops were not prepared for cold weather fighting. Ridgway attributes the lack of proper gear to the irresponsible actions of unnamed “government economizers” under Secretary of Defense Johnson, but offers no supporting evidence. See Ridgway, The Korean War, 66.
rations.” As a result, the Army lost more soldiers to cold weather than the Marines. Similarly, half the 2nd Infantry Division’s vehicles were deadlined due to a lack of spare parts. The Army logistical system was simply not up to the task of supplying five full divisions in active combat given the lack of local infrastructure and shortage of critical equipment in the theater.

While this reflects poorly on the organization, it does not translate into a lack of fighting spirit on the part of the affected troops. The Army also fought with some 16,000 Korean augmentees in its ranks, compared to 105 attached to the Marine Corps. Although resisted by the Army leadership, Korean augmentees proved the only available recourse to relieve the operationally critical imbalance between American losses and incoming replacements. Within the 2nd Infantry Division, these troops were integrated into frontline combat units as replacements. However, due to a lack of training and equipment, the KATUSAs combat effectiveness was rated as low as 25 percent that of their American counterparts. While intended as an injection of fresh troops familiar with the terrain and the local populace, Korean augmentees instead contributed to a rapid drop in morale while adding little to the combat power of American units.

A second significant advantage enjoyed by the Marines was provided by their proximity to the coast, and with it access to tremendous numbers of aircraft. Twice during their retreat, Marine casualties were evacuated in aircraft ranging from light observation planes to C-47 transports. By December 5th, some 4300 dead and wounded Marines had been evacuated from

---

163 Appleman, Disaster in Korea, 60.
164 Ibid, 33.
165 Appleman, North to the Yalu, 385-389.
166 Special Problems in the Korean Conflict, Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army Korea, September 1952, 64-66.
167 Ibid, 64. See also Martin Russ, 107, for a frank assessment of the KATUSA program.
Hagaru, adding to those already airlifted out by helicopter. Aircraft landing at Hagaru arrived with fresh stocks of ammunition and critical supplies, without which “the retreat would have become a debacle.” A second airlift from an improvised airstrip at Kotori brought out all remaining casualties. In addition, non-essential equipment was transported out by plane prior to the march south, relieving the Marine Division of this second logistical burden. The 2nd Infantry Division enjoyed no such relief. Several factors account for the lack of an airlift during the Army withdrawal. Despite daily urging from X Corps, the Marine Division had proceeded north to the Yalu methodically, preparing potential airstrips along the way. Walker’s divisions moved to the Yalu with all possible haste. Falsely believing the conflict was coming to an end, they failed to perform many of the fundamental tasks a unit would normally undertake when moving through occupied territory, to include identifying evacuation routes and garrisoning critical road junctures. Once they recognized their plight, the retreat southward took only 2 days. The combined pressures of time, the imposing Taebaek mountain range, bad weather, and poor preparation forced Army units to evacuate their dead and wounded by vehicle. Estimating the burden this imposed on men already fighting extreme temperatures and a determined enemy is no easy task. However, it does provide a plausible explanation for the Marine’s ability to better conduct a “retreat in good order.”

---


169 Fehrenbach, 369.

170 Ibid, 142.

171 Ibid, 138. In fact, the whole Marine regiment at Hagaru could have been evacuated by air. Almond promised to replace any combat vehicles left behind, but O.P. Smith decided to risk the overland march rather than surrender his heavier weapons and equipment.

172 Singlaub, 173.
Finally, the contributions of close air support during this difficult time cannot be overstated. In fact, “without the dedicated support of the Marine Air Wings, few men believed they would ever have made it.” The combination of distance and weather greatly reduced the quantity and quality of close air support the Air Force could provide to withdrawing Eighth Army troops. Appleman records that as a result of heavy clouds and snow showers, “air support and aerial observation were largely missing for the continued withdrawal of the 2nd Infantry Division.” X Corps, however, benefited again from geography. Located close to the coastline and their two supporting escort carriers, Marines enjoyed “blanket coverage throughout the withdrawal.” In fact, 24 Corsairs flew round-the-clock ground support sorties during the movement to the coast, inflicting an estimated 15,000 casualties on the Chinese attackers. This complemented Marine efforts to seize the high ground as they withdrew, securing passage for the main body of the column, while Army units, lacking in both air and artillery support, were forced to ascend the ridgeline and root out entrenched Chinese attackers with infantry units.

Assessment of the Withdrawal From the Yalu

Closer examination of this series of battles reveals that the macro-level comparison of performances greatly oversimplifies the vastly different situations confronted by the two withdrawing columns. It is practically impossible to weigh the contributions of continuous Marine close air support against the crush of three times as many enemy soldiers attacking the X

---

173 See Comments on Close Air Support Provided by 1st Marine Air Wing by BG Homer Kiefer, USA, Montross and Canzona, 335-337.
175 Mossman, 111.
176 Appleman, Disaster in Korea, 205.
177 Kopets, 79.
178 Ibid, 79; Mossman, 139. This number represents an estimate of losses due to Marine Air from 26 October through 15 December.
Corps troops. Similarly, the absence of aircraft for either casualty evacuation or ground support missions in the 2d Infantry sector placed nearly insurmountable burdens on already weary soldiers. As a result, contrasts drawn between the two services supported only by quantifiable final losses are quite misleading. Without effective air support, it seems quite realistic to posit far greater losses by the Marine Division than by the Army. However, this case does allow for a few general observations about service effectiveness based on recorded performance trends.

First, the shorter frontages and mutually supporting positions that proved costly in the Marine's battle for Seoul reaped real dividends against the Chinese. Through the use of consolidated battalion positions and massed air and artillery strikes, Marine units repeatedly defeated the enveloping infantry assaults of the CCF.  

Within the Army column, those combat effective troops and tanks that remained were "scattered...along the length of the column." Building upon this error, Army units frequently advanced down roads without flank security, often outdistancing their supporting artillery. While both services suffered from a lack of large caliber artillery assets, this problem loomed larger for the Army than the Marines. The Marine Corps, limited in the amount of heavy equipment it could transport and utilize in amphibious operations, compensated for the resultant firepower imbalance with a greater emphasis on air support. Army doctrine, on the other hand, incorporated large amounts of artillery support into the ground scheme of maneuver. However, the combined effect of battlefield attrition, pre-war shortages, and the geographic constraints posed by the gauntlet stripped most Army units of this critical asset. In conjunction

---

179 Sinclaire, 177.
180 Blair, 482.
181 Russ, 84.
with the lack of reliable close air support, this repeatedly left the Eighth Army columns at the mercy of Chinese infantry on the surrounding heights. However, while much has been made of this difference in tactics, it must also be considered in the context of the respective battlefield conditions.

The presence of a large and growing number of casualties presented a real problem for soldiers in the Eighth Army column, reducing the number of able-bodied troops capable of providing flank security and adding to vehicles already overburdened with men. Second, according to Army historian S.L.A. Marshall, Marine tactics to reduce the Chinese barricades consisted of infantry units under fire holding their ground, while first artillery and then close air strikes pounded the enemy position until it was sufficiently weakened to permit a ground assault.\(^{183}\) Lacking the critical air component of this combined assault and unable to employ their artillery, Army units had to rely solely on exhausting, repeated infantry assaults up the steep ridgelines. Over time, troops were either physically exhausted, out of ammunition, or added to the expanding list of casualties. Examined in this light, while Marine tactics were clearly more effective, it is difficult to imagine Army units performing much differently considering their uniquely disadvantaged situation. This does not excuse the fundamental tactical errors that plagued Army troops in the period immediately preceding the Chinese attack, ranging from poorly prepared bivouac sites to a lack of patrolling.\(^{184}\) However, variations in combat proficiency at the individual level had a minor effect on the outcome of the withdrawal compared to the vulnerabilities introduced by a lack of reliable airpower.

Differences in supply discipline also resurfaced during this phase of the war. Army units displayed much poorer equipment accountability than their Marine counterparts, both prior to

\(^{183}\) Marshall, as cited in Kopets, 78-79.

\(^{184}\) Cohen and Gooch, 187.
and during the withdrawal. As S.L.A. Marshall recounts, “as of November and December, 1950, the only (soldiers) possessing bayonets were the replacements who had not yet learned that they could heave it and not face a court martial.”\footnote{Marshall, 48.} Similarly, “after a five or six day carry, in which there had been no close-in fighting, the men threw away their hand grenades.”\footnote{Ibid, 48.} Prior to the Chinese offensive, troops certain they were on the way home were disposed to dropping as much equipment as possible to lighten their load on the painful overland march north. There is no evidence of a similar practice on the part of Marines, and this represents an indisputable contrast in the culture, and indirectly the combat effectiveness, of the two services at the individual level. However, variations in unit performance during the retreat south were not the product of a lack of bayonets or hand grenades. Once again, while contrasts drawn from this case serve the institutional interests of the Marine Corps, battlefield success is inappropriately attributed to the military culture of Marine ground units.

VII. The Roots of Marine Combat Effectiveness

As these three cases demonstrate, variations in the effectiveness of Army and Marine Corps units depend a great deal upon the specific units selected for comparison. On the whole, when similarly equipped soldiers and Marines fought side-by-side against a common enemy, neither service stood out as particularly effective in terms of its ground combat skills. That does not denigrate the achievements of either organization in any way. Both endured terrible hardships, and by and large conducted themselves adequately given the generally low levels of readiness that permeated the entire American defense establishment. However, those battlefield achievements commonly mentioned as proof of the Marine Corps' superior fighting skills and
Table 1. Summary of Case Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prediction</th>
<th>Expected Outcome</th>
<th>Pusan Perimeter</th>
<th>Liberation of Seoul</th>
<th>Retreat From the Yalu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Superior Training and Weapons → Higher Effectiveness</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Acquisition of a Key Weapon → Rise in Effectiveness</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2A</td>
<td>Reduction in Key Weapon-Specific Targets → Convergence in Effectiveness</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Similarly Equipped Units → Variations in Effectiveness not Attributable to Material Factors</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Organizational Approaches to a Combat Task → Variations in Effectiveness</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

martial culture were simply not the product of any unique values or belief system.

The greatest problem with such claims is that they rely on a biased comparison group. Neither the initial failures of the Army’s shattered 24th Infantry Division nor the much-heralded successes of the 5th Marine Regiment are wholly representative of the parent organization’s performance during the war. While contrasts drawn between these two serve the vested institutional interests of the Marine Corps, they pit outliers from both ends of the effectiveness spectrum against one another with easily predictable results. As the battles examined in this study have demonstrated, however, the combat performances of the average Army and Marine infantry unit were much more closely matched than popularly believed.

In the Pusan perimeter, neither service made appreciable headway on the ground against a determined North Korean adversary, and both suffered equal numbers of non-battle casualties from heat exhaustion and poor physical conditioning. What differences in battlefield performance that existed can be attributed to the combined advantages of superior air support and effective anti-tank weapons. The Liberation of Seoul highlighted the Marine Corps’
organizational preference for shorter frontages and mutual support at the expense of flexibility of maneuver. While quite successful against lightly armed masses of Chinese conscripts, these tactics proved extremely costly against the dug-in defenders of Yongdungpo. Finally, but for the constant presence of supporting airpower and the air evacuation of several thousand injured, the Marine retreat from the Yalu River would in all likelihood have been a mirror image of the Eighth Army’s disastrous experience. Aside from differences in air support, however, the ground combat performance of the two services converged as advantages previously gained from anti-tank weapons and Pershing tanks became less relevant against a poorly equipped infantry force.

Overall, the Marines did score some real victories during the maneuver phase of the war. However, their relative successes can be traced to three sources. First, sole possession of a robust anti-armor capability in the form of both M-26 Pershing tanks and 3.5-inch antitank rockets gave the Marines a viable defense against the armored columns of the North Koreans that wreaked havoc on ill-equipped Army units. Second, a number of idiosyncratic geographical and organizational factors favored the Marines at critical junctures during the war. These included proximity to the coast and sea-borne logistical assets, command of the only trained, cohesive combat regiment in the theater, and a greater latitude on the part of senior Marine officers to selectively obey questionable directives from X Corps headquarters. Most importantly, the Marine Air-Ground Team provided close air support far superior to that tendered by the Far East Air Force to Army ground units. The 1st Marine Division’s established coordination procedures,

187 For example, Colonel Alpha Bowser, Chief of Operations for the 1st Marine Division, recalls “We pulled every trick in the book to slow down our advance, hoping the enemy would show his hand before we got even more wildly dispersed than we already were.” These stalling tactics infuriated Almond, who constantly urged X Corp forward to reach the Yalu before Eighth Army. However, they also provided the Marines sufficient time to prepare rough airfields and stockpile ammunition what became the withdrawal route. See Russ, 52, 64.
executed by propeller-driven aircraft better suited for slow moving ground support missions than air-to-air combat or strategic bombing, frequently contributed the margin of difference on the battlefield.

Close Air Support

In his very first meeting with Douglas MacArthur, Marine General Craig remarked, “if they took our air force away from us, our fighting potential would be cut about 99 percent as far as I was concerned.” Fortunately for the 1st Marine Division, the air-ground team was left intact, and the truth of this claim was born out on numerous occasions. Marine airpower inflicted the greatest losses on the North Koreans in the Pusan perimeter, softened up defensive positions unaffected by scarce American artillery assets, and provided round-the-clock protection to Marine and Army units retreating from the Chosin Reservoir. The accounts of several respected veterans of the Korean War attest to the importance of airpower in the Marines’ successes. As General O.P. Smith wrote to the commander of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in 1950, “Without your support our task would have been infinitely more difficult and more costly...Never in its history has Marine Aviation given more convincing proof of its indispensable value to the ground Marines.” However, there is more than anecdotal evidence to demonstrate the superiority of Marine close air support over that provided by the U.S. Air Force to Eighth Army.

---

188 GEN O.P. Craig, quoted in Chapin, 10.
189 Joseph Alexander, “Remembering the Forgotten War,” Naval History Magazine (March 1999), 8-9;
190 O.P. Smith, as quoted in Keith Kopets, “Withdrawal From the Chosin Reservoir,” Marine Corps Gazette (November 2000), 78.
Table 2. Close Air Support Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Army Divisions</th>
<th>Marine Divisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Response Time</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Loiter Time</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>73 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Sorties/Day</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombing Distance From Front Lines</td>
<td>5300 yards</td>
<td>1600 yards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the United States Air Force in the Korean Campaign, Report ORO-R-3 (Barcus Report), Appendix B.

As previously noted, F-4U Corsairs launched from the flight decks of the Sicily and the Baedong Straits possessed real physical advantages over the jet aircraft the Air Force used in the ground support role. Payloads for the Corsair consisted of eight 5-inch rockets and an upper limit of 2000 pounds of ordnance.\textsuperscript{191} This closely matched the maximum bombing payload of both FEAF F-80C fighter-bombers and F-51D Mustangs under ideal conditions.\textsuperscript{192} However, the need to deploy from distant airstrips in Japan frequently forced Air Force pilots to halve their ordnance load in an effort to extend flight range. Laboring under these additional fuel and weight constraints, Air Force sorties consistently flew well below their optimal ordnance payloads.\textsuperscript{193} In addition, “Fifth Air Force experienced more defects in readiness and effectiveness than did Navy and Marine Corps tactical aviation,” due at least in part to the mechanical characteristics of the planes themselves.\textsuperscript{194} In general terms, not only were Marine

\textsuperscript{191} Chapin, 14.
\textsuperscript{192} The F-80C Shooting Star could carry a maximum ordnance payload of 2000 pounds under optimal conditions. This was augmented by 16 5-in rockets, as compared to the 8 rockets carried on the F-4U Corsair. The F-51D/K Mustang also carried 2 1000-pound bombs, but was equipped with 6 .50 cal machineguns rather than rockets. However, the 5-inch HVAR (High Velocity Aerial Rocket) proved to be of limited effect against the T-34. The rocket frequently failed to penetrate the tank’s frontal armor, instead usually producing mobility kills and disabling the tank by destroying the treads. For the technical specifications of these aircraft, see Marcelle Knack, Post-World War II Fighters, 1945-1973 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986), 8, 305; and Janes Fighting Aircraft of WWll (London: Studio Editions, 1989), 213-214, 248-249. On the 5-inch HVAR Rocket effectiveness, see John Sherwood, Officers in Flight Suits: The Story of the American Air Force Fighter Pilots in the Korean War (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 171.
\textsuperscript{193} Bruning, 59.
Corsairs available for more sorties, but those they flew could potentially inflict twice as much damage on North Korean and Chinese formations.

Working from statistics compiled by the Operations Research Office, historian Conrad Crane has shown that there were significant quantifiable differences between the Air Force and Marine close air support systems (See Table 2). Due to geographic proximity and a streamlined request system, Marine Corps response time to missions averaged 10 minutes, compared to the 45-minute delay from Air Force planes. Once called to an area of operations, Marine planes loitered more than twice as long as their Air Force counterparts and safely delivered their munitions more than three times closer to committed troops.\(^{195}\) Within the Pusan perimeter, loiter times in excess of 4 hours were not uncommon as Corsairs circled above their embattled ground brethren in search of targets.\(^{196}\)

More than aircraft technical specifications contributed to the performance of the Marine air-ground team. Marine pilots were consistently more willing than Air Force fliers to risk low-level strikes in the face of North Korean and Chinese anti-aircraft fire.\(^{197}\) These aviators spent years in the 1940s perfecting aerial bombing in support of troop concentrations, with minimum safe distances calculated ahead of time and practiced with precision.\(^{198}\) By way of contrast, the basic curriculum for Air Force pilots included an 18 week transition course for fighter pilots and similar advanced training for future bomber pilots, but no specific course devoted to ground

---

\(^{196}\) Kopets, 79.  
\(^{197}\) Sewell, 58; Crane, 26, 172. This cannot be wholly attributed to Marine culture. John Sherwood provides a partial technical explanation for the Air Force pilot's reluctance to engage in ground support missions. The F-51 Mustangs were extremely vulnerable to ground fire due to a poorly protected water-cooled engine. The F-4U, on the other hand, was arguably one of the hardest planes in the American inventory. Its radial engine could endure a great deal of punishment and still get the plane back to the carriers. This vulnerability must have had some impact on the risk calculations of the average flyer. See John Sherwood, *Officers in Flight Suits: The Story of the American Air Force Fighter Pilots in the Korean War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 171.  
\(^{198}\) Geer, 78-79.
support tactics. 199 Few Far East Air Force pilots had ever even fired a 5-inch rocket in training, and had to “get their rocketry training in the heat of combat.” 200 Additionally, problems with the Army-Air Force tactical air control system surfaced very early in the war. In Eighth Army’s initial Combat Information Bulletin, a severe shortage of trained forward air controllers, inadequate communications gear, and an unwieldy centralized coordination process were all cited as areas in need of immediate improvement. 201 Dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of Air Force close air support persisted throughout the war, spearheaded by Almond himself. 202 Having witnessed the lethal and responsive Marine air-ground team at work, the X Corps commander pushed to have the entire Army adopt the Marines’ flexible request system, and succeeded in doing so within his own command for several months. 203

In short, the pivotal role of effective close air support cannot be overstated. The Marine Air Wing clearly depended on air superiority over the miniscule North Korean Air Force to perform in the manner that it did. 204 However, once dominance of the skies was secured, every single instance commonly cited as an example of Marine Corps’ combat prowess was less an example of organizational culture or superior ground combat skills, and more a demonstration of the lethality of properly employed air and ground forces working in unison. Unfortunately for the Army, organizational maneuverings in the wake of the Defense Unification Act of 1947 had the opposite effect on joint operations with the newly independent United States Air Force.

199 Sherwood, 42-43.
200 Futrell, 60.
202 Crane, 61.
203 Millett, Korea, 1950-1953, 370. See also Army Tactical Air Support Requirements, X Corps Staff Study, December 1950.
204 Sewell, 57. The author notes that USAF fighters “wiped out three-quarters of the North Koreans’ propeller-driven air force in less than three months.”
The Residual Role of Organizational Culture

None of the above implies that organizational culture can be readily dismissed as a causal force on the battlefield. While this assessment of battlefield performance in the three cases selected does not suggest that culture had a huge impact on military effectiveness, there are discernable variations in unit performance that cannot be traced to physical causes. Manifestations of cultural differences first emerged during the immediate pre-war period. The Marine Corps retained a much higher percentage of veteran officers than the Army despite suffering a comparable reduction in manning levels. As previously noted, at the outbreak of hostilities, there were two Marine Corps officers on active duty service with combat experience for every one in the Army. There is no evidence to indicate that the Marines had any explicit incentive program to retain its veteran officers, and the difference is too large to simply overlook.

Once committed to battle, additional hints of organizational differences surfaced. Marines appeared far less likely to abandon equipment than their Army counterparts. From the sweltering days of August, when many soldiers felt that grenades and shovels were an unnecessary encumbrance, to the retreat from the Chosin, when O.P. Smith declared that he would rather fight his way out than abandon his heavy weapons, Marines displayed an attachment to the tools of their trade noticeably absent from the Army.

Furthermore, the problems with cohesion that plagued many Army units never surfaced in the Marine Corps. While some portion of the Army difficulties might be attributed to the haphazard way in which the units were rushed into combat, we have seen that Marine regiments were similarly composed of strangers from over 100 posts. The presence of segregated units within the Army did appear to pose real problems in terms of cohesion not experienced by the
Marines. However, the historical record does not provide clear evidence for why units such as the 24th Infantry Regiment suffered from such internal fragmentation. Explanations range from a reluctance on the part of capable white officers to command the segregated forces to an inaccurate historical account biased by racial prejudice. Assuming that these units did perform in the way that is recorded in official accounts, their actions highlight another potential difference in the way the two services valued and achieved unit cohesion. In a similar fashion, the misguided attempt to fill depleted Army ranks with conscripted Korean augmentees, a plan successfully resisted by the Marine Corps, raises additional questions concerning the way the two services valued the individual infantryman within their ranks.

Finally, there are clear differences in the way members of the two organizations regarded the importance of public criticism. Army officers tended towards a frank and often critical assessment of their service, both publicly and privately. Evidence of this behavior ranges from the negative wartime press briefings by field commanders like Michaelis to the published postwar assessments of Army actions in Korea. The Marine Corps, however, was far more attuned to the importance of popular perceptions. Press releases focused on organizational heroics while criticism was reserved for the sister services. There is no record of an organizational effort by the Marine Corps to restrict the public statements of its officers. The more convincing explanation for this difference emerges from a socialization process that emphasizes the collective history and reputation of the organization over the individual.

These organizational values belie any functional explanation, and such cultural traits merit further study in a wider range of battlefield circumstances. However, within the context of combat in Korea, the synergistic effects of superior firepower and favorable geography, rather
than organizational culture, proved to be key to the overdetermined relative success of Marine
ground units during the first year of this war.

VIII. Organizational Strategies and Popular Perceptions

Having established that commonly accepted beliefs in the greater combat effectiveness of
the Marine Corps in Korea are not supported by an objective examination of the facts raises two
additional issues. First, what accounts for the drastic difference between Army and Marine
Corps close air support systems that ultimately proved so costly in the early months of the war?
Second, how did the Marine Corps’ warrior image emerge from its performance in Korea, and
why does it persist to this day? Both questions are deserving of additional study in their own
right, and I will not attempt a complete answer here. However, it is interesting to note that
organizational strategy, rather than military culture, is at the root of both these outcomes.

The Korean War broke out at a very opportune moment for the Marine Corps in political,
if not military, terms. Inter-service conflicts over roles, missions, and shares of a constantly
shrinking defense budget extended beyond the Air Force struggle for independence. Unification
efforts, spearheaded by the Army, also raised serious questions about the relevance of the Marine
Corps, particularly in a future of nuclear weapons and large-scale European land wars.\textsuperscript{205} Army
leaders favored the creation of a single military chief of staff serving under a civilian Secretary
of Defense. J. Lawton Collins, among others, felt that centralization would reduce inter-service
competition, but it was usually perceived as the first step towards drastic reductions in Navy and
Marine Corps independence.\textsuperscript{206} In particular, Army proposals for a unified defense department

tended to regard the Marine Corps as an unnecessary “second land army...(essentially)‘incidental’ in the whole military establishment.”  

Combat in Korea presented the Marine Corps a timely chance to demonstrate its unique military capabilities as the nation’s only rapidly deployable immediate reaction force. According to Marine Lieutenant General Lemuel Shepard, by 1950 “the Marine Corps was fighting for its very existence. In Korea...(the) Marines perceived a supreme opportunity to show their nation what the Corps could still do.” The war also offered the Air Force the chance to demonstrate its independent effectiveness through a conventional bombing campaign against North Korean cities and industrial nodes intended “to compel complete surrender.” While Air Force pilots flew in support of ground units, the close air support role clearly took a back set to both strategic bombing and air superiority.

Operations in Korea plainly reflected the organizational priorities of the respective organizations. In the years following World War II, emphasis within the Air Force shifted strongly towards dominating the nuclear battlefield. Aircraft were procured and tactics devised with this goal in mind. As a result, when called upon to fly in support of infantry units in contact, the requisite levels of inter-service coordination and pilot training simply did not exist.

Close Air Support: The First Casualty of Peace

In the words of military historian Roy Appleman, “truth is the first casualty in battle.” During the Truman administration’s battle over defense budgets, close air support became the first casualty of peace. The development and successful detonation of the atomic bomb in the

---

207 Marutollo, 73.
208 Hastings, 104.
210 Millett and Maslowksi, 524.
211 Appleman, South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu, xiv.
closing days of the WWII presented the newly independent Air Force an opportunity to secure a major role in future military operations free from the interference of the other services. In addition, nuclear weapons brought along a larger share of the defense budget. To capitalize on the promise of an atomic future, the Air Force transformed itself to perform the strategic bombing mission, to the exclusion of both close air support and strategic mobility. At the same time, the Marine Corps returned from the war intent on perfecting the craft of close air support.

Organizational differences began with the previously identified procurement of nominally dual-role jet aircraft by the Air Force. Senior Air Force leaders believed that existing fighter aircraft designs were “sufficiently versatile” to perform multiple roles, thus negating the need for a plane developed specifically for ground support. In addition, the Air Force subordinated the previously independent Tactical Air Command to the Continental Air Command. The development of doctrine in the late 1940’s was also representative of the organizational interests of the two air services. While the Marine Corps emerged from World War II convinced of the integral role of close air support in the ground fight, the Air Force viewed committing “specific air units to the support of specific ground units...(as a) gross waste.” Consequently, although Marine Air Squadrons refined their air-ground coordination

---


213 Robert Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force*, (Alabama: Air University Press, 1989), 307. These actions resulted in the protest resignation of USAF Gen Elwood Quesada, a proponent of close air support operations much admired within the Army for his outspoken dedication to this task. For the circumstances surrounding Quesada’s resignation, see Crane, 21-22.

system, the Air Force saw little need for “tactical” air power and focused on its role in a nuclear world.\textsuperscript{215}

Rather than improve upon existing techniques for close air support operations, Air Force leaders jealously husbanded control over their air assets. Requests for close air support were made through a rigid, centralized coordination system at a considerable loss of responsiveness. Little attention was placed on the efficiency of this control system, which was \textsuperscript{216} “evolving both formally and informally prior to and during the outbreak of hostilities in Korea.” This contrasts sharply with the Navy and Marine system, which stressed decentralized control and rapid response to the needs of the ground commander. As we have shown, the quality of air support provided by the Far East Air Force clearly suffered as a result.\textsuperscript{217}

Further, despite the great dissatisfaction Army leaders in Korea expressed in the Air Force system, efforts to adopt the more responsive Marine air-ground control practices were effectively blocked. In personal correspondence, Air Force Lieutenant General George Stratemeyer warned his fellow senior air commanders in the theater of a “sly attitude” on the part of the Army, evidenced by attempts to bypass centralized control and request air support directly from the more responsive carrier-based assets, that must be “brought under control.”\textsuperscript{218} Subsequently, Army efforts to decentralize operational control after 1950 were stifled by limiting the number of available ground FACs (forward air controllers), forcing a reliance on airborne

\textsuperscript{215} Murray, 250.
\textsuperscript{216} Millett, \textit{Korea, 1950-1953}, 347-351.
\textsuperscript{217} Robert Futrell attributes this lack of responsiveness to Eighth Army for failing to provide a sufficient number of radios for its personnel to operate, along with a chronic misunderstanding of the role of the Tactical Air Control Party (TAC-P) on the battlefield. However, the fact remains that neither service jointly codified air-ground coordination procedures prior to the outbreak of hostilities. See Futrell, \textit{The United States Air Force in Korea}, 107-109.
controllers, and prevailing upon MacArthur to ensure that the alternative close air support system championed by the Navy and Marine Corps did not operate outside of X Corps. In fact, Air Force leaders convinced General Ridgway to impose their centralized coordination system on the entire command by 1951 in the name of greater efficiency.

This bureaucratic behavior represented a familiar pattern, as “the Air Force sought an independent mission for itself, (although) its greatest and most effective employment had come in concert with the efforts of the other service.” A telling measure of organizational priorities lies in the breakdown of sorties over the course of the war. Marine Corsairs flew 32,482 close air support sorties over the course of the war, most in support of a single Marine Division. The Air Force, though supporting up to five Army divisions, flew only 57,665 close air sorties. As a percentage of total sorties flown, this is roughly 30% of the Marine Corps effort, and less than 8% of the Air Force total. Its poor performance in Korea, then, was the predictable outcome of an organizational strategy that valued bureaucratic independence over joint military effectiveness.

IX. Constructing the Warrior Image

Airpower was not the only facet of the war shaped by bureaucratic self-interest.

Coverage of the Korean War consisted primarily of written accounts in the major American print media. Only 2 percent of American homeowners possessed a television set, and “newscasts (in 1950) were primitive, underfinanced, fifteen-minute operations.” Journalists and combat

---

219 Ibid, 397.
220 Murray, 253.
221 Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea, 690.
photographers covered the day-to-day progress of the war, and initially neither service was particularly concerned with their reports, nor prepared to influence their content. In fact, during the time period covered in this study, journalists were allowed relatively free reign over the battlefield. Limited command censorship of reports did not begin until some months after the fighting ensued.\(^{223}\) However, the relative skill with which the two services handled their early encounters with the press produced vastly different public perceptions of their wartime performance. The Marine Corps perceived the war as an excellent opportunity to secure its organizational existence. While the Army was singularly unprepared for contact with the media, the Marine Corps consciously utilized every opportunity to distinguish itself in the press. As a result, the popular image of Marine as consummate professional and soldier as uninspired civilian under arms was reinforced and continues to be exploited to this day.

Several factors account for the dismal press accounts of Army units. First, the Army as an organization did not perceive the long-term consequences of poor public relations. Its business was fighting wars, and that was what senior Army leaders in Korea intended to do.\(^{224}\) Such thinking was noticeable in the brusque treatment LTG Walton Walker reserved for the press corps prior to Eighth Army's breakout from the Pusan perimeter in late 1950. Secondly, what positive press coverage that existed was frequently manipulated to enhance the personal reputation of Douglas MacArthur, rather than the image of the organization as a whole. The U.N. Commander made a habit of announcing every major offensive with an 'impromptu' appearance at the front lines, always accompanied by an entourage of reporters. Ridgway, among others,


\(^{224}\) It was not until the bleak years of the New Look that the Army came to realize the importance of public relations, as reflected in the 1956 statement of Secretary of the Army Wilbur Brucker, "The time has come when no Army officer can sit in the bleachers and act as a mere spectator. Public relations is not a job of the few, but of the many." Quoted in Andrew Bacevich, The Pentomic Era: The U.S. Army Between Korea and Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1986), 22.
chafed under these affairs, which he felt were staged to keep MacArthur’s substantial “public image always glowing,” and eventually prevailed on his superior to curtail the practice.\textsuperscript{225}

However, the short-term result was that battlefield accolades accumulated to MacArthur, while operational failures by default were attributed to the service as a whole.

Finally, a declassified study by military historian S.L.A. Marshall revealed substantial organizational shortcomings within the Army that contributed to its poor public image. While normally quite critical of Army effectiveness in the war, Marshall nonetheless disputed media reports of ‘bug-outs’ and widespread panic in the field. “Nowhere along the line,” he wrote, “was there any incidence of what could fairly be called panic…until (units) had at last been cut down to 20-30 men per unit through battle losses.”\textsuperscript{226} Instead, he attributed such accounts to unsubstantiated stories by inexperienced journalists and an Eighth Army staff itself so poorly informed that it could not correct them prior to release. “Lacking factual data, the younger, less-experienced, and more irresponsible correspondents let their imaginations run riot, wrote reams based on hearsay evidence, and put a tragic overemphasis on some of the minor happenings on the battlefield to the exclusion of a fair report on the…the majority of troops.”\textsuperscript{227} However, Eighth Army possessed neither the correct information nor public affairs staff dedicated to placing it in the hands of the journalists.\textsuperscript{228} As a result, media accounts went straight from the front lines to the front page, and gained wide acceptance as fact.

The Marine Corps, on the other hand, recognized in the press a potential ally. As Frank Marutollo has shown, the Corps depends upon both the Navy and the American public for its

\textsuperscript{225} Ridgway, 109.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid, 116.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid, 117. See Cohen and Gooch, 165-195, for an account of intelligence failures within Eighth Army, especially during the retreat from the Chosin Reservoir.
continued survival. The service’s greatest political asset is its image as an elite force, instantly ready to defend the nation’s interest in any arena, and throughout history, the Marine Corps “has sustained its strength with the people-at-large and with the Congress overall…through genuine combat achievement and the mystique of its daring and achievement.” The perceived threat to organizational survival in the late 1940’s provided considerable motive to parlay the smallest combat victories in Korea into public relations coups against the Army.

This does not imply that Marine officers consciously exaggerated their battlefield exploits during the war. However, their organizational mindset was manifested in different ways. Decorated Army officers such as Colonel Mike Michaelis, soon to be the youngest General officer in the war, was quoted in the Saturday Evening Post as saying, “These kids of mine….when they started out, they couldn’t shoot. They didn’t know their weapons.” This contrasted with the widely publicized statements of popular Marines such as Chesty Puller, who spoke in memorable, gritty prose. Marines didn’t retreat; they simply attacked in another direction. Similarly, being surrounded by Chinese divisions was not a danger, but merely simplified the task of finding the enemy so he could be killed. Additionally, there is no evidence of an individual Marine seeking credit for the performance of the service, and very few incidents of publicly vented criticism. While Army officers openly lambasted their organization for shortcomings ranging from the quality of equipment to the lackluster performance of

---

229 Marutollo, 174.
230 Hastings, 95.
231 Chesty Puller and O.P. Smith, as quoted in Gina DiNicolò, “Chosin Reservoir,” Retired Officer (November 2000), 65.
segregated units, the Marine Corps emphasized the positive aspects of its corporate actions.\textsuperscript{232} Differences in organizational culture provide a plausible explanation for these variations. Senior Marines were arguably more sensitive to the long-term implications both success and failure could have on the service’s future than their Army counterparts. For instance, not a few Army officers felt that the Marines operational plan to liberate Seoul reflected a desire to capture the entire city single-handedly and score a public relations victory.\textsuperscript{233}

The fact that a widespread belief in the Marine Corps’ superiority in Korea persists to this day can also be attributed to the combined influence of cultural mindset and deliberate organizational strategy. Tales of the Marine Corps’ experience in Korea are aptly characterized by the phrase ‘history of Marines by Marines.’ As the author of one recent history of Chosin wrote, “we always regarded ourselves as vastly superior to any Army mob.”\textsuperscript{234} Unfortunately, this perception invariably colors the content of historical accounts presented as objective and factual. Andrew Geer, in his widely cited work, notes that “defeat and want of will and discipline on the part of many had made fearful ravages in the (Army) ranks.”\textsuperscript{235} John Chapin, in a recently released commemorative edition on Marines in the Korean War, similarly emphasizes poor morale and discipline within Army ranks as the primary cause of defeat. The negative accounts of retired Army officers are commonly cited (with little concern for context), from the

\textsuperscript{232} The Marine Corps did not contend with segregated or integrated units, particularly during the period examined in this work. While complying with Truman’s decision to integrate the service, at the start of the war there were fewer than 1500 African-American Marines in the entire Corps. The vast majority were assigned either as stewards or service troops. The first Black Officer to serve as a platoon leader in the 1st Marine Division, LT Thomas McCalla, arrived in late 1952. He was subsequently reassigned as the Division Historical Officer in 1953 owing to his graduate education. See Millett, \textit{Semper Fi}. 468; and Robert Greene, \textit{Black Defenders of America} (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1974), 215.

\textsuperscript{233} \textit{Interview with LTG Edward Almond}, 52.

\textsuperscript{234} Russ, 232.

\textsuperscript{235} Geer, 10.
ubiquitous T.R. Fehrenbach to the recently published Uzal Ent.\textsuperscript{236} Nowhere do the Marine advantages in firepower, training, and geography receive attention commensurate with their impact during the war.\textsuperscript{237} The Corps is overwhelming portrayed in the best possible light, with its successes attributed to a set of superior values and beliefs.

Again, none of this is meant to suggest conspiratorial overtones on the part of the Marine Corps. It is simply indicative of an organization that recognizes the importance of its public image and works harder to insure its storied history and inimitable mystique remain in the public eye. However, as these cases have attempted to demonstrate, soldiers and Marines considered in isolation did not perform much differently in combat. On those occasions when the Marine Corps did demonstrate greater effectiveness, its victories are more properly attributed to a superior air component, better equipment, and the selection of biased comparison groups.

Given the apparent imbalance between popular perception and historical reality, does this study offer any organizational strategies to the Army that could boost its image in the eyes of the public? Unfortunately, I am forced to conclude on a largely negative note. Superficial changes in the Army's public affairs campaign are possible. The Army has a proud heritage of battlefield experiences, and there are many which would serve to improve the reputation of the service. Borrowing a page from the Marine Corps media manual, glossy accounts of combat victories might improve organizational morale and could eventually polish the service's public image over time. However, the fundamental problem is one of size. The Marine Corps, besides enjoying legislative guarantees of a minimum force structure, benefits publicly from its reputation as an

\textsuperscript{236} Chapin, 24. Ent claims three principle deficiencies led to Army failures: lack of knowledge of infantry fundamentals, poor leadership, and the absence of fighting spirit. The material and training differences are relegated to a minor role that could apparently have been overcome with sufficient motivation. See Uzal Ent, \textit{Fighting On The Brink} (Paducah: Turner Publishing, 1996).

\textsuperscript{237} One exception is James Stokesbury, who attributes the Marines effectiveness to 1) cohesive units, 2) combat training in the states, 3) better physical conditioning, and 4) control over their own airpower. See Stokesbury, 75.
elite force. It can preserve this image because there are enough willing citizens to endure the challenges of becoming a Marine. The Army, however, must attract a much larger number of recruits each year. The radical restructuring of internal values, standards, and priorities that would be required to spread an elite image throughout the entire Army would force both services to compete for the same pool of volunteers. In the absence of some form of universal military training, the likely outcome would be severe manpower shortages in the Army. Nor would such an image necessarily mesh well with a liberal American society that prefers to view its soldiers as citizens under arms. As S.L.A. Marshall identified in 1951, such contradictions are a necessary burden for the largest military arm in a liberal society. "The Army would be less than human if it did not chafe under this crossfire," but chafe it must.238

REFERENCES


**ARTICLES**


Bevilaequa, MAJ Allan. “Send in the Fire Brigade.” Leatherneck Online (July 2000).


GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS


