

# 8

## SO TERRIBLE A LIBERATION

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*The situation is very serious.*

PRAVDA, September 23, 1950

“BY THE TIME we got to Seoul,” General O. P. Smith reminisced, “the 1st Regiment was as good as the 5th.”<sup>1</sup> Well that they were. When Puller’s regiment crossed the Han on the morning of September 24 (D+9), the zone of action which stretched ahead went squarely up the long axis of Seoul, fifth city of the Orient. To the front lay crowded slums, railroad yards, factories, crooked streets, barricades, mines, roadblocks, and an enemy who desired that Seoul be consumed by its liberation.

### *Into Seoul*

Although Murray’s desperate fighting in the western outskirts had uncovered a crossing site opposite the Yongdungpo sandspit for the 1st Marines, neither O. P. Smith nor Puller was a man to take unnecessary chances. Covered by 5th Marines troops (Ike Fenton on his miserable Hill 105 South), C Company of the engineer battalion checked the riverbank. The precaution was well taken: the first thing they found was a large minefield. By eight in the morning—late in the day by Chesty Puller’s clock—the mines were cleared. Then came a reconnaissance party in amtracs, followed in due course by Allan Sutter and the 2d Battalion. Sutter advanced inland a few hundred yards against light, scattering fire, and established touch with right-flank positions of the 5th Marines. Then he wheeled half-right to the east and commenced moving toward the day’s objective, a hill (79) with a fine view of Yongsan railroad yards, the electric power plant and the gasworks. Still farther upstream were the ruined railroad and highway bridge abutments whose

early capture was much desired in case X Corps engineers developed a bridging capacity. As there were neither bridges nor tank ferries here, B Company of the tank battalion (assigned to support Puller) was being sent around via Haengju ferry on what would prove to be an exciting trip.

Meanwhile the 1st Battalion crossed, and soon afterward so did Colonel Puller. Finding the battalion standing by in an assembly area, Puller greeted the commander bluntly: "What the hell are you doing, Hawkins?"

"I'm in reserve, sir."

"Well, you won't be in it long. Get in the attack."

"Sir, we can't pass Sutter. He's moving fast. Are you going to stop him so I can get out front?"

"Hell no. I had trouble enough getting 'em started."<sup>2</sup> Then, by way of clarification, Puller added, "You'll just have to advance a little faster."

A little faster at this point meant double time and high port for most of the 1st Battalion. The ordinarily minuetted passage of lines which is taught in the schools became, in Captain Wray's memory, ". . . just knots of men driving across the landscape so fast that the enemy didn't have a chance to get organized."

As Barrow's Able Company whipped through Carter's Easy, the latter called to his friend, "What the hell's going on?"

Imperturbable even at double time, Barrow replied, "Take it easy, Johnny. This constitutes a passage of lines—Puller style."<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the fact that celerity is practically always a military virtue, there was one good reason to move the battalions eastward without delay. Hill 105 South, regardless of the fact that Marines had been on top of it for two days, still had NKPA at the bottom. As each of the two battalions crossed its front, the malign hill spat at them with small-arms and automatic-weapons fire, inflicting a few casualties. Despite this and other desultory obstructions, including the usual crude minefields, Hawkins had his battalion on Hill 79 by 1500. Here—acting on Puller's instructions—Barrow outraged the 5th Marines by running up a set of colors on a schoolhouse (the first flag raising inside the city limits), where a *Life* photographer just happened to be around to snap the picture. Thereafter, as Andy Geer recounted, "Each unit obtained a supply of flags and the race was on."<sup>4</sup>

Next morning (September 25, D+10) Puller had two battalions in line: Sutter more or less in touch with the 5th Marines on the left,

Hawkins holding Hill 79. Ridge's 3d Battalion which, in division reserve, had covered the Yongdungpo end of the crossing, was now released and preparing to pass through Sutter. Thus Colonel Puller's attack up the center of town would have the 1st and 3d Battalions abreast. Behind—on Puller's sound judgment that "They're the only ones who can tell the cowboys from the Indians"<sup>5</sup>—was Major Kim's 2d Battalion, Korean Marines, mopping up as at Inchon.

The 1st Marines' jump-off on the 25th called for tactical finesse: Ridge had to displace eastward through Sutter's 2d Battalion, then wheel north. Meanwhile Hawkins, on Hill 79, would pull back a little, pivoting on its left, to align with the 3d Battalion.

Like most of Puller's attacks this jumped off on time, which was 0700. However, there were no tanks. Company B, the 1st Tank Battalion's usual direct-support unit for the regiment, was delayed by a private battle of its own.

Remember that the tanks had to go around by Haengju where the Marine engineers had their ferry, in order to rejoin Puller on the north shore. Captain Williams, in command of the tankers, had two platoons, two dozer tanks, and a section of flame tanks. Because of mines specifically, and the problems of tanks in this terrain generally, Williams also had Lieutenant Babe and a handful of engineers, as well as an infantry support—a rifle platoon commanded by Staff Sergeant Arthur Farrington.

The tanks were already running late. Trying to come in along the Kaesong-Seoul railroad line, whose bridges were the only reliable ones for the Pershing tanks, Williams had encountered minefields on the 24th. Despite Babe's usual energetic efforts, these took time, and Williams had to make his way back to Puller that night to tell him the armor might well be delayed.

The approach to the 1st Marines' new zone took Williams through a no-man's-land vacated by the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, and left behind by Puller's advance. Cautiously approaching an egg-shaped hill on the right with a flat, truncated top, Farrington's fire team in the point saw arms stacked beside some huts to the front. Then one of the engineers, like Macbeth at Dunsinane, saw trees moving down the slope of the hill toward the right flank of the column. By the map, this was behind the 5th Marines' front lines; Captain Fenton, whose two companies had held the top without ever getting to the bottom of it, would have regarded this ambush, for such it was, as par for the course on Hill 105 South.

As the Marines deployed for action to the right front, grenades

showered out of the cluster of huts, accompanied by a vicious, swelling burst of fire. Lieutenant Babe was in the act of forming his engineers as infantry when he pushed his luck once too often and dropped with a wounded arm ("... and he a ball player, too," Farrington wrote afterward). As Babe fell, three of his men rushed a demolition charge against an offending hut and blew it to pieces. Meanwhile, Sergeant Farrington, a spunky, blue-eyed little NCO and a sharp tactician, advanced to the right and built up a firing line on a knoll facing 105 South across an intervening draw. Behind the infantry, the engineers guided a flame tank forward to where it could play on the slope of the draw. The enemy fire slackened.

The Korean interpreter with the Marines called to the Communists to surrender. Picking up the phrase, the Marines yelled it, too. In Farrington's words,

Everything got quiet as we yelled. The "trees" on the hillside stopped moving. A Korean stood up halfway up the hill and held his rifle over his head. He started down the hill, steep, still holding his rifle. I just knew that he was going to be shot by his own or my men. For several minutes he was out of sight in the draw. Upon appearing on the knoll, we ordered him to strip in full view of his comrades. That did it. They started coming in in numbers, all carrying their burp guns. We stripped every one as he came in—pretty hard trying to get trousers off over leggings. . . .

As this was going on, the Marines covering the rear, back on the road, heard noises from a hut. Were these huts what they seemed? Banging on the hull of the command tank, Technical Sergeant Pasquale Paolino, the engineer gunnery sergeant, explained his suspicions over the external telephone that tanks carry aft for infantry use in such moments. With the gunnery sergeant coaching them on, the tank gunners rapped out five quick rounds that blew the huts into shards and kindling. Behind lay a large cave mouth.

As the flame tank moved grimly in, caves being its special prey, 15 North Korean soldiers straggled out, hands up, and surrendered. Moments later, seeing these unharmed, a swarm of Communists began pouring out of the cave while the Marines held fire. When the last Red was in the open, the 50 infantrymen and engineers had 131 stark-naked prisoners (including two female comrades, who were chivalrously provided with long johns from somebody's pack).

The enemy wounded were hoisted on board the tanks [Farrington recounted], 129 bare asses were lined up three abreast . . . when about 40-50 Koreans jumped up to the left of the railroad tracks. They had been lying there doggo behind us all this time. We killed them with rifle, machine-gun, and 90mm fire as they went across the paddies, into the villages, and across the far railway.

With 150 dead counted in the draw and on the hillside, Hill 105 South was at length liberated.<sup>6</sup>

Williams finally brought up his tanks and his catch to Puller's CP well after noon. Before he could tell his tale of victory, Puller rasped around the stem of his bulldog pipe, "I'm not interested in your sea-stories, young man. You're late. Get your unit into position. We've got fish to fry." As the crestfallen young officer withdrew, Puller's face softened and he said to Farrington, "Thanks, sergeant. I can sure use those tanks down there."<sup>7</sup>

Puller's fish to fry consisted of one alley fight after another. Every intersection was barricaded after the fashion of the Paris Commune: carts, earth-filled rice bags, poor people's furniture and rubble. Likening Seoul to Stalingrad, *Pravda* reported on September 23:

Cement, streetcar rails, beams and stones are being used to build barricades in the streets, and workers are joining soldiers in the defense. The situation is very serious. Pillboxes and tank points dot the scene. Every home must be defended as a fortress. There is firing from behind every stone. When a soldier is killed, his gun continues to fire. It is picked up by a worker, tradesman, or office-worker. . . . General MacArthur landed the most arrant criminals at Inchon, gathered from the ends of the earth. . . . He sends British and New Zealand adventure-seekers ahead of his own executioners, letting them drag Yankee chest-nuts from the fire. American bandits are shooting every Seoul inhabitant taken prisoner.

The 1st Regiment's fire teams would have agreed at least with *Pravda's* report of "firing behind every stone." To overcome this resistance, rifle-men and tank machine guns scourged the barricades, doorways and rooftops. Remembering Marine tactics at Veracruz, Puller had his people advance from house to house, smashing through interior walls. Engineers crawled forward, probed, scooped, cried, "Fire in the hole!" and exploded the enemy mines. Behind the demolitions men the tanks clattered up and blew holes in the barricades with their guns or crunched

them with tracks and dozer blades. Sufficiently obdurate resistance brought in four-deuces with earth-shaking crumps, or even the artillery or the Corsairs.

The 1st Battalion, it will be remembered, had launched northeast into the heart of Seoul. Hawkins had two companies, A and B, in assault, the former on the left. Opposition was at first light, tantalizingly so for Able Company, which in these hours formed the spearhead of the regiment. By midday Captain Barrow had his company on high ground overlooking the railroad yards and passenger station to his right front (northeast). For the officer who had thrust deep into Yongdungpo (and for his superiors) the temptation to advance reckless of flanks was great. Pressure descending from X Corps trumpeted, in Colonel Chiles's phrase, that "rapid maneuver was imperative."

Along with his forward observers, Barrow carefully checked the low ground ahead and the railroad embankment beyond. As he was preparing for the next bound forward, an observer lowered his binoculars and said, "Gooks." From behind the embankment there peered enemy heads. Barrow ordered all his machine guns forward. The FOs commenced transmitting fire missions to mortars and the 11th Marines.

As the first concentrations began to swish in, there was "a mass scurrying. Literally hundreds [Barrow later wrote] scampered from behind the railroad embankment . . . and we were killing them without any loss to ourselves." Amid all this, pressure mounted from battalion for A Company to advance. Barrow switched off his radio and, in the guise of a liaison officer bridging a radio failure, sent back Swords, his most persuasive lieutenant, to try to convey to Hawkins what was happening. Swords returned soon after with the battalion commander himself; what Hawkins saw convinced him, and Barrow turned on his SCR-300 again.

"Our advance this day was a foot-by-foot basis," said Ridge, whose 3d Battalion was on Hawkins's left. Ridge's advance took his battalion doggedly up Ma-Po Boulevard, once a busy, pleasant avenue lined with sycamores, groceries, wine and tea shops. At the day's end—while air strikes and artillery continued to hammer the enemy beyond the railroad station—Ridge held a built-up rise, Hill 97, to the right rear of which Hawkins was on Hill 82.<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere in the X Corps zone about Seoul the Communists were being gnawed away. As we have seen, Murray had at long last cracked General Wol's line and established the 5th Marines, still somewhat

precariously, on the long shoulder of An-San that drops southward along the edge of town. One battalion of the 32d Infantry, General Almond's "maneuver element," was standing pat atop Nam-San and had been digging itself in since three that afternoon.<sup>9</sup> Litzenberg's 7th Marines, well shaken down by patrolling and security missions on Kumpo Peninsula and north of the Haengju bridgehead, had been assigned a zone of action on the left of the corps, with the mission of wheeling right to cover the 5th Marines' flank and to cut the Seoul-Pyongyang highway. As night fell, Litzenberg's 2d Battalion was on high ground overlooking this major escape route. In all, about 40 per cent of the city was in U.N. hands.

*"Enemy Fleeing . . ."*

Night had fallen on Seoul in its agony. The darkness was broken only by the loom-up of flames from burning buildings or the chilly white light of an occasional star shell. Intense fighting had gone on at every barricade as long as there was light to line up sights, hold, and squeeze trigger.

O. P. Smith's driver had heated the general a can of C rations over the little Coleman stove General Shepherd had given him before landing, and the general, no more a gourmet than his driver a *cordon bleu*, was soberly spooning up supper. Down in the G-3 Section, by the light of hissing pressure lanterns, Colonel Bowser was getting out next day's order so it could reach the regiments in decent time. Just after eight, the EE-8 field telephone on the hot line from X Corps G-3 jingled insistently.

The incoming message which was quickly passed to Bowser read as follows:

Info addressee [X Corps TacAir Commander] reports enemy fleeing city of Seoul on road north of [*sic*] Uijongbu 1003-1665, and he is conducting heavy air attack and will continue same. You will attack *now* to the limit of your objectives in order to insure maximum destruction of enemy forces. Signed. Almond.

The cause which prompted this startling order had been an air observer's report a half hour earlier of "what looks to be a mass evacuation of Seoul." On receiving this, General Almond, in his later words, arrived at "a command decision regardless of the recommendations of Staff or others." "Mass evacuation" quickly became "enemy fleeing," and so the order went out.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from its premise that the enemy who had fought so hard all day was fleeing by night, and aside from its alarming directive for an unplanned nocturnal plunge through the belly of an Oriental city, there are certain aspects of this order which should be noted.

1. By its own text it literally relates to movements *north* of Uijongbu, a town 16 miles from Seoul.

2. The map coordinates given in the message do not fall on the Seoul-Uijongbu road at all. One set (1003) bears no relation to any location in the vicinity of Seoul. The other (1665) falls on a highway leading north from Seoul, but it is not the Uijongbu road: the coordinates fall on the Seoul-Kaesong highway not far from the positions of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, who had blocked this road before nightfall and were certainly not reporting any exodus. While (as Bowser soon verified from Chiles) the Uijongbu road was, regardless of coordinates, the highway in question, it suggests much as to the functioning of X Corps headquarters that an attack order of this importance could have been sent out with so gross an error undetected.<sup>11</sup>

3. While this order for a general night action to destroy a supposedly fleeing enemy went to both the Marine division and the 7th Division, corps subsequently instructed the latter division to hold position and support the Marines' attack by fire. If we are to believe that the 32d Infantry was seriously considered as the "maneuver element" intended to maneuver the NKPA out of Seoul, here surely was the moment above all. Yet the 32d Infantry received no attack order that night, and of course did not attack.<sup>12</sup>

But the foregoing points are those of history, after the event. To Bowser, experienced operations officer that he was, the message seemed inconceivable. There was no evidence whatever of a fleeing enemy along the barricades and he doubted the ability of any aviator at night to distinguish herds of refugees from herds of soldiers. And that a night attack—most complex, delicate and difficult of all attacks, requiring the utmost in prior planning and coordination—should be ordered on the spur of the moment through the teeming warrens of an unfamiliar city was almost beyond comprehension.

Bowser promptly phoned Chiles to find out what was happening. The questions as to coordinates and the 7th Division were cleared up. But when Bowser questioned the order itself, Chiles, as completely Almond's man as Almond was MacArthur's, simply said the order was to be

carried out and the Marines must attack. Bowser went outside, waited for a moment to get his eyes accustomed to the black night, then picked his way to General Smith. Captain Sexton, the aide, hesitated to disturb the general at supper, but the G-3 is no man to turn aside.

General Smith bolted the last of his C ration, shook his head, and ordered that a call be put through to General Ruffner, Almond's chief of staff.

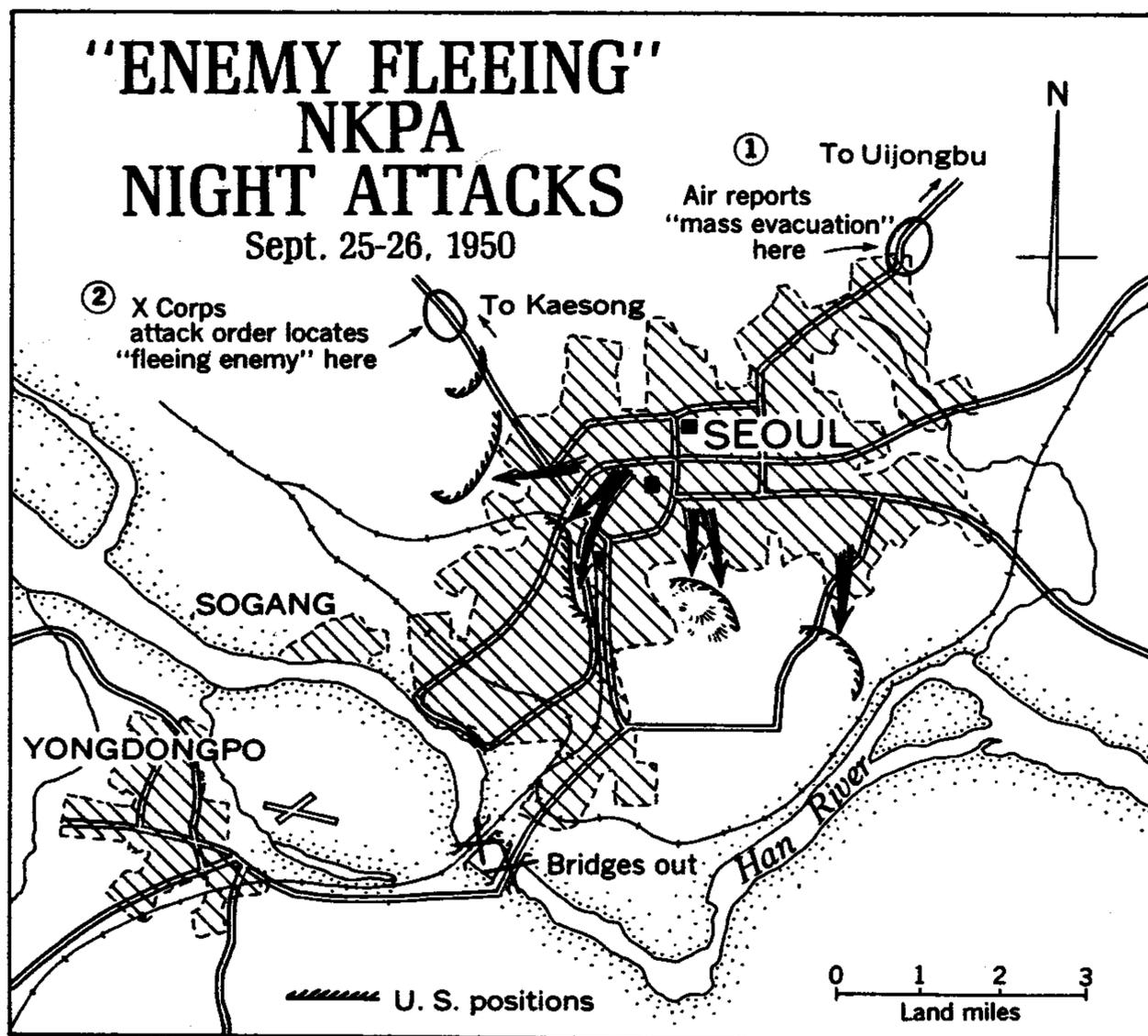
When the call came through, General Smith asked that Ruffner reaffirm the order just received. He said (1) the Marine regiments had no indication whatever that the *In Min Gun* was fleeing, and (2) as an officer of Ruffner's experience hardly needed telling, it was, to say the least, inadvisable to stumble headlong into a night attack under existing conditions.

General Ruffner, tactful, sympathetic, professional cavalryman that he was, had no recourse but to tell the Marine general that the order had gone out exactly as Almond had dictated it himself, and was to be executed without delay.

General Smith has never disclosed his exact feelings when he put the phone down, and perhaps it is just as well. Feelings or not, he had no alternative. He immediately telephoned Murray and Puller, while Bowser called Litzenberg (7th Marines) and Brower (11th Marines). As soon as he got through to Murray and Puller, General Smith told them they must attack, but that the attack must be coordinated carefully, must follow main avenues, and that there should be no effort to score a hasty advance. As senior regimental commander, Puller was to effect coordination.<sup>13</sup>

As it happened, at the very moment General Smith conveyed these tidings to Ray Murray, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, which had been receiving tank and high-velocity fire throughout the early evening, was being hit by the enemy in force. When Murray turned to Colonel Stewart, Joe Stewart replied, "I'm afraid we'll have to delay pursuit of the fleeing enemy until we see if Tap [Taplett] can beat off this counterattack."<sup>14</sup>

Orders, however, are orders. Puller and Murray accordingly decided on a coordinated attack by both regiments, to jump off at 0145. Colonel Brower's howitzers would give them a 15-minute preparation. To effect coordination between the two infantry regiments, Taplett, besides beating off his attackers, was to send out a patrol toward the 1st Marines. Ridge, left-flank battalion commander of that regiment, was to do the same.



Ridge had had a hard day's advance up Ma-Po Boulevard, and his battalion held the shoulder of something of a salient. To his left, toward the 5th Marines, the North Koreans occupied a corresponding re-entrant along the boundary between the Marine regiments. Because of the heavy fighting encountered all day, because of the length of frontage involved and, above all, because Ridge was a canny, pessimistic, suspicious officer, he decided to hold his front in maximum strength that night. Company I, on the right, occupied Hill 97 (known to the troops as "Slaughterhouse Hill"). On the left, G Company held a knoll and a roadblock on Ma-Po Boulevard. How, Ridge's third company, filled the gap between the other two. To strengthen his defense ("For obvious reasons I never told Puller," said Ridge) he pulled back some 200 yards on Ma-Po to a dogleg which occurs where the road crosses the Kaesong-Seoul railroad tracks. Making textbook use of his weapons company commander, Ridge ordered Major Simmons, of far cheerier though equally probing men-

tality, to site and coordinate the crew-served weapons of the 3d Battalion so as to cover every chink and cranny of the front. This done, Simmons was to establish and occupy a battalion OP on a knoll commanding the Ma-Po dogleg, where George Company's CP was also located.

Simmons personally laid out the roadblock, which was commanded by First Lieutenant Harold Savage. In addition to riflemen and mines out front, the roadblock included a heavy machine-gun section, a 3.5 rocket squad and a 75mm recoilless gun section. Simmons also sited the battalion's 81mm mortars in "unconventional proximity to the front line," only 150 yards rearward.

At about midnight, Ridge was shaken to receive orders to prepare for a night attack. "I protested to such a degree," he recounted, "that I thought I would be relieved. Since this did not work, I then procrastinated by having problems with artillery registration." Ridge was of course not the only person in the Marine division who was protesting. When he in turn issued instructions to his companies and to Simmons, via conference call, Simmons pointed out that the planned artillery preparation would be bound to fall on the 1st and 5th Marine patrols. All Ridge could say was, "Well, that's the fortunes of war."

The patrol leader whom Simmons sent out to gain touch with the 5th Marines was Corporal Charles E. Collins. Collins had two fire teams and three Korean guides. Close to 0130, only 15 minutes until H-hour for the attack, Collins made contact. But his contact was not with the 5th Marines. Instead, his patrol virtually collided with a large body of enemy infantry, tanks and self-propelled guns. These troops were not fleeing; they were forming for an attack on the Ma-Po Boulevard roadblock of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines.

There was a heavy burst of small-arms fire from both sides. Collins did exactly the right thing. Dropping into kneeling position with his M1, he ordered his people to get word back to the roadblock, no matter what the cost. As the rest of the patrol scampered rearward, Collins covered them with aimed rapid fire from his rifle.<sup>15</sup>

At 0130, minus Collins, the patrol returned and warned Simmons what was afoot. About this time, Ridge's stalling over the artillery preparation paid off: H-hour for the attack was delayed until 0200. Just then the defenders of the roadblock began to hear the clank of tanks.

"As I was verbally battling, via telephone and radio," Ridge related,

... Ed Simmons came up on the tactical radio with a voice at nearly the level of high C and said, "Enemy tanks are coming down the Boule-

vard—they're about to hit us!" My response was "Thank God!", whereupon Ed's voice dropped back to normal and he asked, "What did you say?" Almost immediately thereafter, battle was joined.

The first round fired by the enemy was an 85mm armor-piercing shell from a tank which killed Simmons's radioman by his side ("Overkill for him—but underkill for me," he said). Amid a storm of high-velocity shell and small-arms fire, two T-34 tanks and a mass of infantry bore down. At close range the Marines opened fire with all they had. One tank was hit and stopped; the other spun on its tracks and took cover behind a corner. Lieutenant Savage fell wounded; Sergeant Robert Caldwell, senior NCO on the block, took command, and reported back to Simmons that he had done so.

This was no mere probe. (In fact, the attackers were a reinforced battalion from the 25th Brigade.) Although the Marines, poised for an attack of their own, could hardly have been more ready to receive the enemy, the fierceness of the onslaught—like *banzai* charges in the Pacific—was unmatched. While General Smith was in the act of deferring the night attack, the 11th Marines' forward observers, encountering no further "difficulties" with registration, called in three battalions—everything not engaged in supporting Taplett's fight, which was still going on, too.

About 0230 [Simmons reported] enemy small-arms fire reached a crescendo and the distinctive sound of their submachine-guns indicated that the assault was about to begin. I ordered the artillery to shorten their range to the minimum that would clear the mask of the high ground we were occupying. The 81mm mortars continued to fire at minimum range.

Despite the fury of artillery and mortar fire crashing down, the Communist battalion, supported by 10 or 12 tanks or self-propelled guns, surged in. At 0315 the 11th Marines had to reduce their fires—virtually continuous for the past hour and a half—to keep from burning out the tubes of their howitzers. When the artillery slackened, the enemy tank attack renewed, silhouetted clear against the fires set by white-phosphorus mortar barrages. One self-propelled gun, evidently aware of the location of the battalion OP, fired round after round, just over the top of the building. Three more tanks or self-propelled guns concentrated their fire on the roadblock during the 11th Marines' enforced lull. Renewed artillery support was mandatory.

As it happened, the 31st Field Artillery Battalion, General Barr's medium howitzers, had previously been in general support of the 1st Marines, and one of their liaison officers was still with Puller's regiment. Seeing the desperate attack in progress, with numerous enemy tanks and self-propelled guns in action, this young officer called his fire-direction center and asked for heavy defensive concentrations, even though the 31st was actually no longer in support of the Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Welch, USA, the battalion's well-loved Bostonian commander, unhesitatingly broke the rules and accepted the mission, personally bringing in "Battalion, 20 rounds"—a sledgehammer barrage of 360 155mm shells—among the enemy tanks.

Moments later the voice-call "Blade" (1st Marines) came up on Welch's radio, and a deep voice with a tidewater Virginia accent said, "I don't know who in the hell you are, but *Thank God!* . . . Out." At least this night, Lewis Puller was well pleased to have the Army hard by.<sup>16</sup>

By now almost every building out front had been set afire by the rain of shells, giving George Company, as well as the others, light to shoot by. But ammunition began to run low, and Ridge had to get in more of everything by an improvised ammunition train made up of every jeep in sight. As for the artillery, the 11th Marines shot up all their on-position reserves before daybreak and cleaned out an entire Army dump as well. The regimental four-deuces shot 326 rounds, and the 3d Battalion's 81mm mortars, 650. Simmons's machine guns fired 120 boxes (30,000 rounds), topping a previous Marine Corps record from Guadalcanal, where machine gunners under Sergeant "Manila John" Basilone shot 26,000 rounds against a furious night attack by a Japanese regiment. Basilone's battalion commander that night was Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. Puller.<sup>17</sup>

As daybreak neared, Simmons became increasingly concerned over the succession of very near misses (a mil or so in elevation, not more) which the Communist self-propelled gun was steadily firing over the OP. When darkness waned he judged that the enemy gunner would quickly adjust the error. Sending for one of the 75mm recoilless rifles, he placed it beside the house so as to command the full length of the Ma-Po dogleg and, in his words, "gave the gunner a project." In the first streak of dawn, the gunner discerned his quarry, closed the firing key, and blew the SP into a heap of junk. Only one thing had been overlooked: in sighting the 75 reckless, nobody thought about the backblast. Even before the shell found its target, the whole side was blown off the flimsy house

that had sheltered the OP, and, said Simmons, "the battle ended on that note."<sup>18</sup>

By early daylight, Puller came up to the 3d Battalion's command post. "You had better show me some results of the alleged battle you had last night," was his greeting to Ridge. The immediately visible results included seven tanks, two self-propelled guns and eight 45mm antitank guns, all shattered in the night's action. More than four hundred North Korean soldiers lay dead, many more wounded had obviously been dragged away, and 83 shaken prisoners were in hand. "I believe Puller was satisfied," said Ridge.

As the correspondents flocked to the scene, one asked Colonel Puller about the reported enemy retreat of the night before. The reply was characteristic: "All I know about a fleeing enemy is that there's two or three hundred out there that won't be fleeing anywhere. They're dead."<sup>19</sup>

Besides the 25th Brigade's main effort down Ma-Po Boulevard, there were three other hard-fought Communist assaults during the night. One, as we have seen, was by a reinforced company against Taplett's battalion. The first probe came at 2230, and attacks continued almost all night, the last being fought off at 0445. Later, more than a hundred dead were counted outside Taplett's positions. After this attack subsided, he sent out his patrol toward the 1st Regiment. Since the planned rendezvous of the two patrols had been on Ma-Po about 500 yards forward of Simmons's roadblock, it is not surprising that the 5th Marines' patrol was turned back by strong enemy forces. There was one "casualty": the patrol leader, Second Lieutenant Lawrence O'Connell, fell through rotten planking in a dark courtyard—straight down into a cesspool eyeball-deep in fragrant night soil.<sup>20</sup>

About the time that the Marines realized the worst was past, the NKPA launched its third violent attack, this time against Lieutenant Colonel Mount's battalion of the 32d Infantry atop Nam-San. Hearing the din of fighting 900 feet below and seeing the rolling flames of midtown Seoul, the soldiers had expected trouble all night. At 0430 Mount's outposts heard the clatter of tanks downhill in the network of roadways with which Nam-San (the Rock Creek Park of Seoul) is reticulated. Shortly afterward a reinforced battalion surged against Mount's company perimeters.

George Company, on Nam-San's western high point, with its beautiful view and terraced shrine, held firm. Fox Company, to the east on a lower

knob, was not so lucky. The Communist attack penetrated and finally overran the company. Mount threw in his reserve and by 0700 regained the original positions after a hard fight. One hundred ten dead enemy were counted inside the 2d Battalion's positions; 284 more strewn the mountain's dells and groves.

Colonel Mount's friend and fierce rival, Lieutenant Colonel Don Faith, whose 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry, was east of Nam-San and downhill from Mount, was also attacked in the gray dawn. This clash, which settled into a heavy fire fight, was apparently a secondary effort to the Nam-San assault.<sup>21</sup>

Commenting on the night's fighting to a *New York Times* correspondent, General Almond said:<sup>22</sup>

Nothing could have been more fortunate than the tank-led enemy counter-attacks. It gave us a greater opportunity to kill more enemy soldiers and destroy his tanks more easily than if we had had to take the city house by house.

The suggestion that Seoul didn't have to be taken "house by house" would have come as a surprise to the riflemen of the 1st and 5th Marines and 32d Infantry, who had not yet learned that just before midnight on September 25—90 days to the minute since the Communist invasion—Seoul was liberated. General Almond released this fact to the press shortly before midnight and so reported to General MacArthur in Tokyo. Next day, he issued the following communiqué:<sup>23</sup>

Three months to the day after the North Koreans launched their surprise attack south of the 38th Parallel the combat troops of X Corps recaptured the capital city of Seoul. . . . The liberation of Seoul was accomplished by a co-ordinated attack of X Corps troops. . . . By 1400 hours 25 September the military defenses of Seoul were broken. . . . The enemy is fleeing the city to the northeast.

That same day, as the attack ground slowly forward against unremitting enemy resistance at every house and street corner, the Associated Press rather conservatively reported, "If the city had been liberated, the remaining North Koreans did not know it."<sup>24</sup>

Obviously taking the X Corps commander's report at face value, General MacArthur personally drew up and released United Nations Command Communiqué 9 on the afternoon of the 26th:

Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea, is again in friendly hands. United Nations forces, including the 17th Regiment of the ROK Army

and elements of the U. S. 7th and 1st Marine Divisions, have completed the envelopment and seizure of the city.

For once, Radio Pyongyang was more accurate. Its September 27 broadcast said, "The People's Forces in Seoul are desperately resisting . . . and will fight to the last man."<sup>25</sup>

General Almond made no further reports of continued fighting for Seoul and maintains to this day that the city fell before midnight on the 25th. Commenting on a subsequent statement in an official history that the Marines in particular felt his announcement "a bit premature," he wrote, "Soldiers always feel that way when mopping up the last defenses of a captured area. Military results and newspaper views often differ." Alluding to the point, Colonel Chiles echoed his commander: "History is replete with examples of mopping-up exercises following seizure of military objectives."<sup>26</sup>

To MacArthur's credit, his United Nations Command Sixth Report (October 21, 1950) straightforwardly recorded: "The liberation of Seoul . . . was completed on 28 September with only mop-up fighting continuing."

### "Ma-Po Wore a Different Look . . ."

Walking warily up Ma-Po Boulevard behind the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines (whom Puller committed to spell Ridge's battalion after their night fight), *Time's* Dwight Martin reported on the morning of the 26th:

This morning Ma-Po wore a different look. The burned and blackened remains of the boulevard's shops and homes sent clouds of acrid smoke billowing over the city. Buildings still ablaze showered sparks and ashes high into the air to cascade down on red-eyed, soot-faced Marines.

In the center of the street, six Pershing tanks wheeled into position to advance. Directly in front of the lead tank lay the body of a Red soldier who had been caught in the burst of a white phosphorus shell. The corpse was still burning as the tank's right tread passed over it, extinguishing the flame and grinding the body into a grisly compost. . . .

A group of Marines waited behind a wall, tending three of their wounded and a wounded enemy soldier. The corpsmen shouted for an ambulance. A Marine from the other side of the street replied: "Bring 'em out on litters. The Major says we've lost four ambulances, seven corpsmen and four drivers since last night. We ain't got the ambulances to replace 'em.'" . . .

Further along, behind a barricade just seized by the Marines, we saw another amazing sight. Less than 50 yards away, through dense smoke, came 40 to 50 North Korean soldiers. They dragged a light antitank

gun. Apparently they thought the barricade was held by their side. The Marines first stared in disbelief, then opened fire with every weapon available. The Reds screamed, buckled, pitched and died on Ma-Po's pavement.

General Almond visited the Marine division this morning. There is no record of what passed between him and General Smith. Then he went down to see Colonel Murray, whose regiment was still grinding slowly into bitter resistance in the western edge of town (and did in fact finally effect patrol contact with the 1st Regiment).

Intending to contrast the undiminished fighting ardor of the city's defenders to the report that they had been fleeing, Ray Murray quoted the old Marine saying, "There's always some son of a bitch that don't get the word."

Instants later, transfixed by an icy stare from Almond's blue eyes, Murray realized that the corps commander attributed the allusion to X Corps headquarters rather than the *In Min Gun*. "I looked around for a sword to fall on," Murray later said.<sup>27</sup>

The main job of the 5th Regiment on the 26th was finally to clean out the long lower spur of An-San (Hill 296), and this task remained in the hands of Taplett's battalion. Taplett launched a two-company sweep down the ridge.

Captain McMullen's Company I had the hardest going, on the left and on the bare, high ground. The intense enemy fire from 25th Brigade troops inflicted heavy casualties from the start. The two assault platoon leaders were wounded early. Undeterred, McMullen committed his reserve and pressed ahead into a heavily entrenched strong point, defended by over 200 Communists. The momentum of McMullen's advance pushed the enemy out of their positions. Then came a wild, swirling counterattack. Item Company held, but only just. And in the final moments of the free-for-all, McMullen fell wounded. He thereby qualified for his seventh Purple Heart in two wars.

Amid less spectacular but hard fighting on lower ground to the right of Company I, two members of George Company—Lieutenant Counselman and Sergeant Jack Macy—each received his fifth wound since the Marine brigade's arrival in Korea 53 days earlier.<sup>28</sup>

At long last, what remained of Seoul's western defense could be dealt with by mopping up.

Watching the relentless, heartbreakingly slow progress of the 1st

Marines through the holocaust of central Seoul, the London *Daily Telegraph's* Reginald Thompson was moved to write, "Few people can have suffered so terrible a liberation." Later, in what otherwise must be one of the worst books written about the Korean War (*Cry Korea*), Thompson said:

It is an appalling inferno of din and destruction with the tearing noise of Corsair dive bombers blasting right ahead, and the livid flashes of tank guns, the harsh, fierce crackle of blazing wooden buildings, telegraph and high-tension poles collapsing in utter chaos of wires. Great palls of smoke lie over us as massive buildings collapse in showers of sparks, puffing masses of smoke and rubble upon us in terrific heat.

Frontally assaulting eight-foot barricades every two or three hundred yards, mopping up every house, even flushing Communist defenders from the city's malodorous sewers, engineers, tankers and riflemen of Sutter's battalion hacked their way up Ma-Po's car tracks. It took, they figured, about 45 minutes per barricade. After each assault there followed a lull to reorganize, evacuate casualties, sometimes to refuel and rearm tanks. Then the platoon leaders wearily took on the next one. In a long day of this kind of thing, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines—a hard-driving battalion of proven fighting qualities against sustained opposition—gained exactly 1,200 yards.

On the 1st Regiment's right, Hawkins worked forward from Hill 82, sending Wray's company through the passenger-car yards of the railroad station, a dowdy relic of Japanese times. Here there was a confusing game of hide-and-seek among cars, platforms, ash pits, water tanks and interlocking towers. After capturing the station in a brisk fight, Wray's people found warm bodies of South Korean women and children, hostages massacred by the Himmlers and Berias of North Korea.

The other two companies of the 1st Battalion hooked below and right of the railroad station. Besides securing Nam-San's long projection into the 1st Marines' zone, they had to establish contact with Mount's battalion of the 32d Infantry, which remained on its perch. One significant capture by Baker Company was the ridge where today stands the handsome headquarters of the Korean Marine Corps.<sup>29</sup>

At midday on the 26th General Smith realized that the 1st and 5th Marines needed help if the stubborn defense of Seoul were to be liquidated. Taking the 7th Regiment from its flanking role to the north, he

directed that Litzenberg attack due east toward northern Seoul, pinch out Murray's tired regiment, and wheel north beside Puller. This envelopment of Seoul from the north was in reality O. P. Smith's commitment of his reserve.

Leaving one battalion, that of Lieutenant Colonel Raymond G. Davis, to protect the division and corps left rear above Haengju ferry, Colonel Litzenberg launched the 2d and 3d Battalions east. To gain contact with Murray, he ordered Major Webb D. Sawyer (2d Battalion) to send one company southward down the Kaesong-Seoul highway into town.

The two assault battalions of the 7th Regiment had to fight terrain as much as the enemy. Their advance, across compartments, was designed to secure the precipitous hills, small mountains really, that girdle Seoul on the north. Once at the Seoul-Uijongbu highway, the regiment would be in position to advance north on the latter place.

Although both battalions had scattered, troublesome fighting in the rocky hills and valleys, it was D Company, 7th Marines, sent south to make contact, which ran into trouble.

Captain Richard R. Breen led Dog Company down the highway which runs narrowly between Hills 296 (An-San) and 338, both well known to the 5th Marines. As the Marines advanced, they were welcomed and cheered by dense crowds of citizens who apparently preferred liberation, however traumatic, to life under a Communist regime. Advancing rapidly, the company apparently overshot the 5th Marines (who held high ground on either side). Passing the Sodaemun (North Gate) Prison, leading elements reached the Arch of Independence, a quarter mile below the prison.

Without warning, at 0830, a heavy blast of automatic-weapons and small-arms fire opened up, felling the advance guard commander, Lieutenant W. F. Goggin. This frontal attack then spread rearward. Soon the entire company was fighting, right, left and ahead. All through the forenoon, Captain Breen tried to subdue his opponents with no success. What he had walked into was a section of the 25th Brigade's final line of resistance.

By noon the company had made no progress. In fact, enemy units had closed the defile to its rear. Dog Company was surrounded. Breen, already wounded once, pulled his people rearward into better ground for a perimeter defense, carefully bringing in his dead and wounded in a deliberate withdrawal. When Colonel Litzenberg called by radio to see if the company needed help, Breen replied, "We're okay, Colonel." Two

Air Force C-47s dropped ammunition, rations and medical supplies, one aircraft being so badly shot up by Communist flak that it had to crash-land at Kimpo.

In the night, the regimental surgeon, Lieutenant (jg) Edward Burns, USN, led a convoy of jeep ambulances through the enemy lines and took out the worst of D Company's 40 wounded. Next morning, despite the last-stand implications of the situation, the enemy had wilted, and a relief column of tanks, infantry and engineers reopened the road out, and the company withdrew. Captain Breen, suffering from his second wound, then turned over to a successor.<sup>30</sup>

By the afternoon of the 26th, the 3d Battalion, 32d Infantry (Schumann's), had swung wide of town out toward Hill 348 in Seoul's eastern approaches. Now, they discovered, the enemy really did show signs of fleeing. On the main road leading east, one of Colonel Schumann's companies fell on a column of some 40 vehicles, several artillery pieces, and what obviously was part of a senior headquarters. Conceivably this may have been the remnants of the 18th Division. The soldiers attacked boldly, cut the column to pieces, and inflicted heavy casualties.<sup>31</sup>

*"It Looks Like the 4th of July . . ."*

There comes a time in every battle when men know they have won. This is what Foch meant when he said, "*La victoire, c'est la volonté*" ("Victory is a matter of willpower"). That time, and that conviction, became clear early on September 27 (D+12).

When the weary 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, moved out to clear the very last resistance from the lower end of their great spur of An-San, there were no more fierce tempests of fire. Instead, there was only the sound of "the distant and random gun, that the foe was sullenly firing." By midmorning George Company had solid contact with Sutter's battalion of the 1st Regiment, and Taplett had wheeled left (northeast) and taken the Middle School. Ahead, still decked with red banners and grinning portraits of Josef Stalin and Kim Il Sung, stood Government House and Changdok Palace.

Abreast of Taplett, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, pushed ahead. Here, too, though the *In Min Gun* had not collapsed, Sutter's people could smell victory. At 1057, guided by Richard J. H. Johnston, a New York *Times* man who knew Seoul from earlier times, Marines of the 2d Battalion raised the flag of her oldest ally over France's deserted Embassy

—an act of liberation as little remembered in the Elysée Palace today as those of 1918 and 1944.

Then there was a hot fight west of the Duksoo Palace where the two car lines cross. Self-propelled guns and towed artillery pieces covered minefields and barricades. Lieutenant Cummings, who had such a close shave in the defile between Mahang-ri and Sosa, knocked out both Communist SPs, but then ran his own tank onto a mine. Today, aside from a bad jolt, he was in no trouble; the riflemen were in close and already swarming at the barricades. Up the car track to the left (the line that takes families out to Sodaemun Prison on visiting days), George Newton had the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, scrambling up the jagged rock pile of Hill 338, which had so venomously harried the flanks of the 5th Marines on An-San.

Just after three, with the final urging of a flame tank, the Communists caved in ahead of Taplett. Moving at the high port up Kwangwhamun Boulevard, Company G, 5th Marines, burst into the Court of the Lions at Government House, ripped down the red flag, and Gunnery Sergeant Harold Beaver ran up those same colors his forebears had hoisted 103 years earlier atop the Palace of the Montezumas.<sup>32</sup>

When Easy Company, 1st Marines, still guided by Dick Johnston, reached the Russian Embassy, it was abandoned. Measuring American behavior in such moments by their own standards, the Russian delegation had decamped. Conceivably they might have been influenced by *Pravda's* dispatch of September 23 which purported to publish MacArthur's order of the day for the capture of Seoul:

Before you is a rich city. In it are many sweets and wines. Take Seoul and all the girls will be yours. The property of the inhabitants belongs to the victors and you can send it home in packages.

After running up the Stars and Stripes in lieu of Hammer and Sickle, E Company pressed forward to the nearby American Embassy residence. Weeds were knee-high on what had been Ambassador Muccio's trim lawn; the house was stripped of all furnishings, which had been trucked away to Pyongyang some days after Communist occupation of Seoul. Seeing the Marines, a squad of NKPA machine gunners in the gateway threw down their arms. Recognizing Johnston as a friend from old days, Chon, Ambassador Muccio's chauffeur, materialized from some hidden place and rushed to make obeisance; the riflemen almost shot him before Johnston could explain. As the Marines broke out another set of colors

and bent them on the halyards, there came the crack of a sniper's rifle and the whine of a ricochet. A dozen Marines raised their pieces toward the rooftop of the nearby Duksoo Palace. With one motion, the company commander, Captain Charles D. Frederick, stopped them. "One sniper," he said, "one Marine." Then he designated a rifleman, who slid his elbow into a hasty-sling, sighted in, squeezed off a round, and dropped the Communist from his perch. After that, at 1537, the colors went up without further interruption.<sup>33</sup>

Gunnery Sergeant Max Stein gazed about Seoul as American flags began to appear, and every young Marine just hoped that AP's Joe Rosenthal, who snapped the Iwo Jima flag raising, might be along for this war, too. "It looks," growled Stein, "like the Fourth of July around this burg."

And when Army people chaffed Colonel Puller about the Marines' flag-raising fixation, the reply spoke like a howitzer: "A man with a flag in his pack and the desire to run it up on an enemy strongpoint isn't likely to bug out."<sup>34</sup>

While Marines beat down the final resistance in Seoul, the 32d Infantry perforce remained static on Nam-San, since (as O. P. Smith predicted) its fires would rake the 1st and 5th Marines' advance. When Puller had his regiment abreast of South Mountain and wheeled eastward, Beauchamp then was able to advance and secure the southeast suburbs. Here, as elsewhere, the arrival of United States troops, even amid the wrack and havoc of the tormented city, was greeted with Korean enthusiasm. Across one freshly contested street, infantrymen of the 32d advanced past a banner: COMIES ARE RUNNING AWAY. CHASE EM. CHASE EM.

### *Linkup*

Although only 70,000 North Korean soldiers ringed the Pusan perimeter, which by mid-September contained 140,000 Eighth Army and ROK troops, General Walker found it hard to overcome the inertia of defense grown habitual. Not until a week after Inchon did Eighth Army begin to make real headway toward the hammer-anvil linkup with X Corps which was an essential of MacArthur's strategy.

By September 23 (when the 5th Marines were hammering at the western gates of Seoul) the Communists were in evident retreat. Amid a multipronged breakout and pursuit, the 1st Cavalry Division, commanded by Major General Hobart R. Gay, received the mission of