

UNJUST BLAME?

The Korean War, the Chinese Intervention, and Douglas MacArthur

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*To the GIs of X Corps and Eighth Army, the Marines, Airmen, and
Republic of Korea and United Nations troops who faced the Chinese intervention.*

and

*To General of the Army Douglas MacArthur — legendary
American soldier and patriot unjustly blamed for
organizational failures not of his making nor within his control.*

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Douglas MacArthur was one of the most complex characters of modern times

D. Clayton James¹

. . . he was . . . endowed with great personal charm, a will of iron, and a soaring intellect. Unquestionably he was the most gifted man-at-arms this nation has produced.

William Manchester²

We face a brand new war.

Douglas MacArthur³

PREFACE

The longest time period with which this book is concerned are the ten months from June 25, 1950, when the Communist North Korean Army (NKPA) invaded South Korea, until April 11, 1951, when General of the Army Douglas MacArthur was relieved of his commands by President Harry Truman.

The narrower focus is the roughly three-month period from mid-October 1950 when the Chinese Communists began to infiltrate North Korea, to mid-January 1951, when Communist attacks subsided. During this period, MacArthur's earlier triumph at Inchon deteriorated into near disaster at the Yalu River because of massive Chinese Communist intervention in the Korean War.

That focus will be sharpened if the reader has available a chronology of major events bearing on that intervention and its immediate consequences.

1950

June 25. The NKPA smashes across the 38th Parallel, beginning an attack that will push South Korean, American and UN forces almost into the sea at the south end of the Korean peninsula.

September 15. United States X Corps,⁴ led by the 1st Marine Division and supported by South Korean marines, successfully make an amphibious landing at the port of Inchon, approximately half-way up Korea's west coast.

September 16. United States Eighth Army breaks out of the Pusan Perimeter and begins its northward advance.

September 20. The 1st Marine Division leaves Inchon and drives northeast, crossing the Han River south of Seoul, the South Korean capital.

September 26. The 31st Infantry Regiment (7th Infantry Division, X Corps), moving east from Inchon, links up at Suwon with the 7th Cavalry Regiment (1st Cavalry Division, Eighth Army) moving north from the Pusan Perimeter.

September 27. American and Republic of Korea (ROK) troops re-take Seoul, the South Korean capital. Advance elements of Eighth Army and X Corps meet at Osan, about 30 miles south of Seoul.

October 1. For the first time since Korea was divided in 1945, South Korean troops (ROK I Corps) crosses the 38th Parallel. It advances up the peninsula's east coast.

October 6-7. Two divisions of ROK II Corps cross the 38th Parallel in central Korea.

October 9. In the first politically and militarily momentous action of the Korean War after the Inchon landing and breakout from the Pusan perimeter, elements of the United States Eighth Army cross the 38th Parallel north of Kaesong and attack north toward the

North Korean capital of Pyongyang. American forces are now in North Korea for the first time.

October 10. ROK I Corps captures the major east coast port of Wonsan.

October 14-17. Elements of the stay-behind 7th Infantry Division board ships at the port of Pusan. They will be transported to the northeastern coast of Korea above the 38th Parallel and with the rest of X Corps make amphibious landings.

October 19. Pyongyang falls to the American 1st Cavalry and 1st ROK Divisions.

October 25. The third momentous event of the Korean War occurs: Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) appear in North Korea and engage ROK troops near Unsan, where the first Chinese soldier is captured.

October 25. The 1st Marine Division of X Corps lands on the northeastern coast at Wonsan, while that day and the next ROK elements reach the Yalu River at Chosin, across from Manchuria.

October 29. The 7th Infantry division lands at Iwon, on the east coast 150 miles north of Wonsan. In the west, advance elements of Eighth Army in northwest Korea are not far from the Yalu River.

November 1-2. Hit hard, American Eighth Army troops in the west, for the first time engage CCF troops near Unsan. The CCF attacks X Corps in the east at the Chosin Reservoir.

November 6. Although Eighth Army in the west is dug-in awaiting a CCF attack, most of the Chinese break contact and disappear.

November 11. X Corps resumes its advance in the northeast.

November 21. Advance elements of X Corps reach the Yalu River. On the other side is Manchuria, Communist China.

November 24. In the west, Eighth Army moves north from the Chongchon River. The offensive to the Yalu begins.

November 25. CCF attack Eighth Army in the center of its line and on its right flank, which is supposed to be secured by the ROK II Corps.

November 27. When in the east, the Marines and associated Army units begin their advance, CCF attack X Corps on the east and west sides of the Chosin Reservoir just south of the Yalu River.

November 28. X Corps in the east and Eighth Army in the west are being slammed by relentless CCF attacks. The X Corps commander changes the 1st Marine Division's orders from attack to defend.

November 29. In the face of the CCF attack, Eighth Army begins a general withdrawal from its former attack line on the Chongchon River, south to a defensive line at Pyongyang, under UN control, but still the capital of North Korea.

November 29-December 1. In the west, CCF almost annihilate the American 2d Infantry Division, as it runs a gauntlet attempting to cover Eighth Army's withdrawal south.

November 30. In the east, X Corps begins to move south from the Chosin Reservoir. Its goal is sea evacuation from the southeastern port of Hungnam.

December 2. Eighth Army is in and around Pyongyang. General Walton Walker formalizes what had been happening for a few days: Withdraw from Pyongyang.

December 5. Eighth Army cannot hold Pyongyang and in the following days falls back to the Imjin River, south of the 38th Parallel.

December 9-24. X Corps loads at Hungnam for sea evacuation to Pusan.

December 31-January 5. A new CCF offensive begins against Eighth Army.

1951

January 4. Seoul falls to the Chinese, again

January 5. Port of Inchon is abandoned by UN forces.

January 7- 15. Apparently for its troops to refit, the CCF offensive subsides but does not end, stabilizing the UNC's (UN Command's) tactical situation.

January 25. Under General Ridgway (General Walker having been killed in a jeep accident on December 23) Eighth Army (now including X Corps) counterattacks.

February 10. The port of Inchon is recaptured, and Eighth Army's I Corps again approaches the Han River south of Seoul.

February 18. Intelligence reports confirm that the enemy has withdrawn from contact across the entire central front.

February 21. Eighth Army begins a general advance north, led by two American corps. Ridgway is on the move.

February 28. South of the Han River, enemy resistance crumbles.

March 7. UN forces seek to establish “Line Idaho” north of Seoul and south of the 38th Parallel, between the two.

March 14-15. UN troops enter Seoul.

March 31. Eighth Army is manning positions on Line Idaho.

April 2-5. Ridgeway now advances his line, named Kansas, to ten miles north of the 38th Parallel.

April 9. The American I and IX Corps, and the ROK I Corps, reach Line Kansas. The two American corps keep going north.

April 11. President Truman sacks General MacArthur. He is succeeded in Tokyo by General Ridgeway. And so, ends Douglas MacArthur’s connection with the Korean War.

INTRODUCTION

This book is about the blame that for over a three-quarters of a century has been heaped on General of the Army Douglas MacArthur for the Chinese Communist intervention in the Korean War during October-November 1950, resulting in X Corps and Eighth Army being driven south from the vicinity of the Yalu River to the line of the 38th Parallel.

The argument of this book is that blaming MacArthur is unjust because American civilian and military authorities—*organizations*—had failed to:

- (1) *Learn*, that from the Chinese perspective, the Communists had compelling reasons to intervene.
- (2) *Anticipate*, that because of those reasons and the way the Chinese would have to fight, their intervention needed to be on a massive scale, and;
- (3) *Adapt*, American forces' response to the Chinese strategy and tactics.

The result was an organizationally-caused military misfortune. Disastrous in many respects, yes. But not the fault of any one man, let alone General of the Army Douglas MacArthur.⁵

For virtually his entire military career MacArthur had been a lightning rod for both criticism and adulation, from his days at West Point where he finished at the top of his class in 1903, to 1951 when he was sacked by President Harry S. Truman as commander of United Nations forces during the Korean War.

MacArthur has been excoriated for what occurred in North Korea. For example, journalist Clay Blair has written that the General was a blunderer, reckless, egotistical, arrogant and blind.⁶ MacArthur has been accused of not listening to superiors and subordinates, and of relying on his “gut instinct” that the Chinese would not intervene.⁷

Unfortunately, Blair's book about the Korean War has been among the most influential.⁸ It, like much of Korean War literature, reflects prodigious research, and provides comprehensive coverage of the hostilities and the context surrounding them.⁹

But much of Blair's attack against MacArthur is misplaced, some of it even facially indefensible. Blair and other MacArthur critics are mistaken in blaming him *personally* for the Chinese intervention and ensuing debacle in North Korea. They err in believing that any one person, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, or anyone, could have been personally responsible for the Chinese intervention and what followed or, for that matter, any other military misfortune.

There is no denying that the Chinese intervention was a military misfortune of the first magnitude, with fatal consequences for countless individuals on both sides and serious political and other results for the entire world. Accordingly, it is not surprising that as with all such misfortunes, civilian as well as military, those directly involved and

hecklers on the sidelines eagerly looked for a scapegoat. For those seeking someone to blame for the Chinese intervention and its consequences, the most obvious target was the Commander in Chief Far East (CINCFE)/Commander in Chief United Nations Command (CINCUNC), five-star General of the Army Douglas MacArthur.

Cohen and Gooch would call him “the man in the dock.”

While it’s always comforting to find a single person to blame for a military misfortune or disaster,¹⁰ even five-star general Douglas MacArthur’s power and conduct was subject hierarchically to those *above* him, who made policy and provided direction (i.e., the President of the United States and the Joint Chiefs of Staff).

At the same time, MacArthur was reliant on those *below* him (i.e., commanders of Eighth Army and X Corps) to execute his orders faithfully and competently, exercising their own judgment only when appropriate. MacArthur’s superiors and subordinates, of course, had their own needs, agendas, and personal and professional failings.

As we shall see, General MacArthur was neither *personally* to blame when Eighth Army’s 2^d Infantry Division fell apart in northwest Korea and was virtually destroyed, nor did he deserve to be *personally* lauded when the 1st Marine Division at the Chosin Reservoir in northeast Korea “attacked to the rear” in an orderly fashion while bringing out their men, wounded, and equipment and, in the bargain, killing countless Chinese soldiers.¹¹

The 2^d Infantry Division debacle in the northeast and successful 1st Marine Division/7th (Army) Division attack to the sea in the northwest were not shaped and executed by one man any more than was the American response to the initial North Korean invasion and the later Chinese intervention. These events were the result of decisions taken, and not taken, by countless military and civilian leaders in the United States government over the span of decades, and by their counterparts and enemies elsewhere in the world. All those decisions were rooted in self-serving considerations of politics, manpower, elections, alliances, budgets, security, training, priorities, procurement, taxes and all the other considerations affecting national security in a dangerous world. Glib assertions of causality are easy to make, but difficult to sustain.

The implicit (sometimes explicit) common denominator in the public and political indictment and summary “conviction” of General Douglas MacArthur for the Chinese intervention has been his alleged but oft-unspecified “incompetence.” In positing the question of “why do competent military organizations fail?” Cohen and Gooch make a crucial distinction between incompetence (“lacking the skills, qualities, or ability to do something properly”¹²) and “misfortune,” which they define as “failures attributable [1] neither to gross disproportions in odds [2] nor to egregious incompetence on the part of the victim nor yet to extraordinary skill on the part of the victor.”¹³

The Chinese intervention in late 1950 was not because of *incompetence* by General MacArthur. Instead, the intervention and its immediate aftermath was a military *misfortune* attributable to something else entirely: *a long-standing organizational*

failure up and down the line—the causes of which, Cohen and Gooch readily concede, “are not easy to discern.”¹⁴

The causes may not be easy to discern, but to their credit the authors have succeeded in identifying them. In laying blame for disbelief about Chinese intentions and their eventual massive presence on the ground in North Korea, let alone for not understanding the kind of war Mao Zedong’s troops would necessarily have to fight, General MacArthur must personally be exonerated even if he may have, in the words of Cohen and Gooch, “utterly misjudged the likelihood and imminence of China’s entry into the Korean War”¹⁵ *Misjudgment* is not the same as *incompetence*. What happened in Korea was an organizational failure rather than a personal one.

In examining that failure, this book will traverse the following topics:

1. At the conclusion of World War II—amidst America’s demobilization fervor to “bring the boys home”—neither the President of the United States, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, nor the National Security Council understood the current and potential importance of South Korea to the national defense of the United States, a failure reflected in the lack of coherent American policy concerning the peninsula.
2. As a result, either deliberately or negligently, the United States was wholly unprepared—with intelligence assets, or military personnel and equipment—to anticipate, assess, or repel, a cross-38th Parallel invasion of South Korea by Communist North Korea.
3. That unpreparedness—and Kim-Il Sung’s desire for a unified Communist Korea, together with the Machiavellian interests of Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin—led to the invasion on June 25, 1950.
4. In response, with President Harry Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson in the lead, the *United Nations Organization* resolved not only to repel the North Korean invaders beyond the 38th Parallel, *but to unify all of Korea under a democratic government from the peninsula’s southern tip to the Yalu River’s northern boundary with Communist China*.
5. Although a noble goal, the United States was ignorant of Communist China’s interests in Korea generally and in North Korea in particular, a paramount one being that there be no unified democratic Korea.
6. To achieve a unified Korea, United Nations forces would have to cross the 38th Parallel, seize the Communist North Korean capital of Pyongyang, traverse all of North Korea, reach the Yalu River, secure that boundary, and along the way annihilate the NKPA.
7. Unheeded were Chinese warnings to intervene in the war.

8. Despite those warnings, the United Nations Command knew little about the Chinese order of battle¹⁶—especially its strength—in Manchuria, until they intervened in North Korea.
9. Nor did the UN know the Chinese intentions, or what could force them to intervene.
10. Nor how they would intervene.
11. Nor how they would fight once they intervened.

As we shall see, the causes of the Korean War's organizational failures relating to the Chinese Intervention are to be found well before a single Chinese Communist soldier set foot on North Korean soil in October 1950.

PART I
THE NORTH KOREAN INVASION

As noted military writer T.R. Fehrenbach has written,

It was Sunday morning in Seoul now, and the embassy bars were closing. Only a few dreaming—or drunken—young people still lingered in the KMAG Officers' Open Mess. It was almost dawn, and even the private parties were dying.

Any young officer who had not made out by now never would.

And the storm that had hovered over the high peaks of Bukhan Mountain north of the city broke. The rain sheeted down, true monsoon, and it was good to sleep by. People woke, smiled in the dawn's freshness, and returned to sleep. Workers, passing out of the city through Namdai Mun, the South Gate, laughed and sang as they crossed the bridge over the Han [River]. Below them the gray shapes of massive junks and the thin shadows of motor launches lay quietly on the rain-speckled dark water.

White-clad farmers smiled as they scooped up chamber pots outside the surrounding villages' doors, and filled their reeking honey buckets. Life was hard, but again the people would be able to buy rice.

The million and a half people of Seoul did not expect the future to be good. They expected to survive.

And miles to the north, beyond the roads the Americans had named Long Russia and Short Russia ended, beyond the religious missions on the parallel at Kaesong, where the Methodist missionaries, reassured by [United States] Ambassador Muccio, still slept, far to the east of Seoul in a town called H'wach'on, Senior Colonel Lee Hak Ku looked once again at his watch.

He looked up, met the eyes of the booted and blue-breeched officers standing about him in the Operations Post. They were all young, and hard, and most of their adult lives had been spent at war, with the Chinese, with the Soviets. They had fought Japanese; they had fought Nationalists. Now they would fight the running dogs of the American Imperialists, or whoever else got in their way.

All around, men in mustard-colored cotton uniforms were moving in the wet, predawn murkiness. Covers were coming off stubby howitzer muzzles; diesel tank engines shuddered into raucous life. The monsoon was turning into drizzle now along the dark hills that framed the demarcation zone [between North and South Korea].

The varihued green paddies glistened with water, but the roads were hard and firm. The big long-gunned tanks began to move.

Back along the valley, where two divisions awaited the order to slash southward, officers raised their right arms. Section chiefs filled their lungs for shouting. The heavy guns had been trained and loaded long before.

Then men shouted, and dark cannon spat flame into the lowering sky. From the cold Eastern Sea to the foggy sandbanks of the Yellow Sea to the west, along every corridor that led to the South, night ended in a continuous flare of light and noise.

The low-slung, sleek tanks attached to the 7th Division spurted forward, throwing mud from their tracks. Designed for the bogs of Russia, they rolled easily over the hard-packed earth. Behind them poured hordes of shrieking small men in brown shirts.

"Manzai!" Senior Colonel Lee Hak Ku said, and, eyes gleaming, his staff repeated it.

It was 4:00 a.m., Sunday, 25 June 1950. The world, whether it would ever admit it or not, was at war.¹⁷

The seeds of that war, which would soon lead to Chinese intervention, had been planted many decades before.

1. **WORLD WAR II**

The genesis of the Chinese intervention in the Korean War and one of many clues about where blame for it properly belongs, lies in the distant histories of Russia and China.

Czarist Russia and centuries of earlier Russian rulers sought to dominate, or at least neutralize, populations across their borders.¹⁸

So, too, in modern times did Stalin and Mao believe in the necessity for buffer zones protecting their countries' borders. That perceived need of the two Communist leaders—with China's pre-1949 Nationalist government's complicating presence in the mix—was at the core of modern Sino-Soviet relations.

Thus, to understand China's role in the Korean War it is necessary to begin with the period close to the end of World War II, about five years before the June 25, 1950 North Korean invasion of South Korea.

During February 4-11, 1945, Josef Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt met in Yalta on the Crimean Peninsula to settle post-war affairs.

The end of the war in Europe was finally in sight. When it ended the allies would face the horrific prospect of a land invasion of the Japanese home islands. It was estimated that despite the ceaseless, devastating bombing the Japanese mainland had endured by February 1945, with much more to come, the enemy still possessed some 5,000 kamikaze aircraft and perhaps as many as two-million ground troops—let alone countless more likely fanatical civilians.

There was more: American planners feared that after the allies conquered the Japanese main island, they would still have to engage hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops in Chinese Manchuria,¹⁹ portending a long, bloody campaign there as well.

Because the American high command was operating on the untested—and it was later learned, erroneous—assumption that the allies would need Soviet help to defeat the Japanese in Manchuria, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General MacArthur, then Commander in Chief Far East Command, were anxious for the USSR to declare war on Japan.²⁰ They wanted the Soviet Union actively in the war against Japan even though in February 1945 General MacArthur predicted that the Communists would inevitably seize Manchuria, Korea and perhaps even North China.²¹

Earlier, in the European war, the Soviet Union had confronted some two-hundred German divisions in savage fighting on the eastern front. For that reason—and surely to gain leverage over, and obtain post-war concessions from, Roosevelt—Stalin had remained cannily neutral about when, or even if, the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan.

At Yalta, however, Stalin finally made an agreement with Roosevelt and Churchill to settle questions relating to the post-war Far East. But the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan was contingent on that agreement, the purpose of which would be to legitimize the USSR's expansion in Asia.²² A few months after Germany's surrender, the Soviet Union would finally enter the war against Japan.

One provision of the three-party agreement was that Soviet dominance in Outer Mongolia (the Mongolian People's Republic ²³) would be preserved. Another was that Russia's territorial losses to Japan in their 1904 war would be restored. "In addition to validating various Soviet claims against Japan itself, Yalta gave Moscow extraterritorial rights in China and prescribed the conclusion of a treaty of alliance between Moscow and the Nationalist government [of Chiang Kai-shek]. . . ." ²⁴

Specifically, in return for declaring war on Japan the Soviets would receive half of Sakhalin Island, the Kurile Islands, and the Soviets' interests in Manchuria would be recognized.²⁵ Mongolia would be detached from Chinese control (without consulting the Nationalist Chinese Government).²⁶

The Yalta Accords relating to Asia, let alone those affecting Europe, were a coup for Stalin. Finally realizing the goals of Czarist Russia, Stalin was able to promote the interests of dominant nations at the expense of the less powerful, carve out spheres of influence and, probably most important to him, substantially enlarge the Russians' long-desired buffer area outside the borders of the USSR.²⁷

As we shall see, Stalin's main concerns and maneuvers at Yalta continued into the next decade and explain much about his central, albeit less-than-obvious, role in the Korean War.

By the time the Yalta Conference was over, Stalin had received game-changing concessions from the ill, war-weary Roosevelt (who would die within months) and the tired, pragmatic Churchill (who would soon be voted out of office by British ingrates)—all in return for agreeing to participate belatedly in what would amount to a virtual non-Soviet war against Japan.²⁸

General MacArthur was not present at Yalta, neither in spirit nor in person, even though important military, political, economic, and geographic decisions affecting his far-reaching Pacific Command and post-war Asia were made by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin.

When in April 1945 Franklin Delano Roosevelt died, the architect of America's war against the Axis Powers was replaced by his Vice President, Harry S. Truman.

Despite his modest beginnings, Truman was well read in history and literature.²⁹ As a World War I captain of artillery, he fought in two 1918 French battles. He had held political office in Missouri, and later made a name for himself in the United States Senate.

Regrettably, in the three months between Truman's inauguration as Vice President on January 20, 1945, and FDR's death on April 12, 1945, the new President had not been made privy by the FDR clique to much of Roosevelt's war strategy or its already-decided, inevitably consequential Yalta-driven aftermath.

On May 2, 1945 Germany surrendered unconditionally.

That momentous event, however, did not assuage Stalin's long-standing fear of Japan, even though the Land of the Rising Sun was about to lose the Pacific war.

Indeed, because of his concerns about a resurgent Japan, from late June to early August 1945 Stalin negotiated with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese for a treaty of "friendship and alliance." "In the past," the Soviet dictator told the Nationalist foreign minister, "Russia wanted an alliance with Japan to break up China. Now, we want an alliance with China to curb Japan" because "Japan will not be ruined even if she accepts unconditional surrender, like Germany. . . . We [the Soviet Union] are closed up. We have no outlet. One should keep Japan vulnerable from all sides, north, west, south, east; then she will keep quiet."³⁰

In July 1945 Churchill and Stalin met in Potsdam, Germany, this time with Truman instead of Roosevelt. Again, even though the war in Europe had ended, leaving the many problems of Asia still to be dealt with, General MacArthur played no role. As at the Yalta Conference, the politicians were again in charge.

One of the lesser issues at the Potsdam Conference was Korea. It was understood that given the agreement at Yalta for the Soviet Union to take the Japanese surrender somewhere in the north of the Korean peninsula and the United States in the south, there would have to be a boundary line drawn somewhere. General Marshall instructed a member of the U.S. military delegation to be ready to send American troops to Korea.³¹ Notwithstanding Marshall's instructions, nothing more happened concerning Korea during the rest of the conference, which ended on July 26, 1945.

Immediately after the Potsdam Conference, President Truman authorized the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan.

On August 6, 1945, Hiroshima was first.

Two days later, the Soviet Union finally declared war on Japan—after, in reality, the war in Asia had *de facto* ended.

The second atomic bomb was dropped, on Nagasaki, August 9, 1945.

The next day the Japanese offered to surrender unconditionally. The offer included their garrisons in Manchuria and on the entire Korean peninsula.

The Japanese unconditional surrender, however, did nothing to assuage Stalin's continuing, near-paranoid fears about a potentially dangerous post-World War II resurgent Japan.

Accordingly, on August 14, 1945 the Communist Soviet Union and Chiang Kai-shek's non-Communist Nationalist China signed a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance—"a formal partnership" so as to "render impossible the repetition of aggression and violation of the peace by Japan."³² Strange bedfellows, indeed—at least for that moment.

Among the many issues the Japanese unconditional surrender in mid-April 1945 had raised for the United States and the USSR was the immediate need for a demarcation line in Korea, especially due to the proximity of the Soviet Army in Manchuria, north of and contiguous to the Korean peninsula.

Late in August, it was agreed that the Japanese surrender south of the 38th Parallel would be taken by the United States and north of it by the Soviet Army.³³ General MacArthur had no role in the 38th Parallel divide-the-peninsula decision. He was later confronted with it as a *fait accompli*.

As a result of the 38th Parallel dividing line, Soviet troops would be securely anchored not only in Chinese Manchuria, but also in the industrialized northern half of the Korean Peninsula.

This arbitrary but strategically important division of Korea at the 38th Parallel handed Stalin a trump card he would play a few years later in his Machiavellian game against North Korea's Kim Il-sung, China's Mao Zedong and the United States' Harry Truman.

By August 26, 1945, the Red Army had reached the 38th Parallel. Korea was now *de facto* two countries, one under the domination of the Red Army in the north and the other occupied in the south by a smattering of United States troops.

Lest one jump to the unwarranted conclusion that by dividing Korea the United States had gratuitously gifted the North to the Soviet Union (or China), it's important to recognize that the Red Army was already on the ground in Korea, having rolled through Manchuria with lightning speed. In contrast, the nearest American ground forces were far away in the Philippine Islands and on the island of Okinawa. Professor James has noted that if no demarcation line had been agreed on Stalin could have easily occupied all of Korea.³⁴

On September 2, 1945, the Japanese formally surrendered unconditionally. Additional American occupation troops quickly landed at Inchon on Korea's west coast, and a week later Lt. Gen. John R. Hodge accepted the Japanese surrender south of the 38th Parallel.

The Chinese civil war, which by then had been waged for over a decade, showed no signs of abating, let alone ending. Stalin, however, had just signed a treaty with the Nationalists and it was in his interest to keep Mao's Communist revolution in check.

Stalin's distrust of Mao, which in a few years would surface more obviously in connection with the Korean War, was nothing new. The Soviet dictator considered Mao a "soft Marxist" who could not be relied on, and could even become anti-Marxist and anti-Soviet.³⁵

Worse, when in 1941 the Soviet Union was on the edge of collapse from the onslaught of the German army and Stalin feared a Japanese attack on the Soviet Far East where he would have to commit much-needed troops who were fighting on the Eastern Front, he had implored Mao to fight the Japanese more aggressively so the Russians would have to worry about them less. Mao did not oblige Stalin because for the Chinese Communists Chiang Kai-shek was more of an enemy than the Japanese.³⁶

And worse, in 1945 Mao appeared to many observers as actually warming up to the United States. Even though during World War II more than once the Russians attempted to have Mao remove American representatives from Communist controlled areas, the Chinese leader failed to oblige.³⁷

Everything considered it is not surprising that Stalin had not informed Comrade Mao about the Soviet Union's Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with his enemy, Chiang's non-Communist Nationalists, or even about the USSR's imminent entry into the war against Japan. Stalin was concerned about a rapid buildup of Chinese Communist strength in Manchuria, which might imperil the conclusion of the Soviet's treaty with the non-Communist Chinese Nationalists and thus jeopardize the USSR's Yalta-recognized "special rights" in China. Stalin's aim all along was to make Manchuria part of the Soviet security belt—in effect, the USSR's buffer zone in the Far East.

Notwithstanding this goal, playing both sides of the street Stalin did make a major contribution to Mao's military forces. For example, when the Japanese surrendered in Manchuria, the Soviets captured huge amounts of equipment, including not just small arms, but also tanks and heavy artillery. Estimates were that the war materiel could arm some 600,000 of Mao's Chinese Communist fighters. That is to whom the Soviet Army delivered it. We can only imagine how much of the small arms found their way into North Korea five years later when the Chinese intervened in the Korean War. That some of it did, is beyond question.³⁸ As the UN forces would learn the hard way some five years later.

2. **FROM THE END OF ONE WAR, TO THE EVE OF ANOTHER**

A year after the Japanese surrender, the United States Department of State decided that notwithstanding the existence of a hardcore Communist regime a scant twenty-five miles to the north, South Korea would have to fend for itself.³⁹

In September 1947, the United States, having about a division's-worth of occupation forces in South Korea, handed off to the newly-founded United Nations Organization the problem of Korean independence and reunification.⁴⁰

At the same time, as part of the United States' withdrawal from South Korea, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that the divided country had such little strategic value that keeping some 45,000 occupation troops there was unwarranted especially given America's self-chosen military obligations in Europe.⁴¹ Indeed, MacArthur biographer William Manchester characterized the attitude about South Korea in Washington—by military luminaries such as Eisenhower, Leahy, Nimitz and Spaatz—as “almost contemptuous” and added that that “[i]n envisioning the Pacific as ‘an Anglo-Saxon lake,’ even MacArthur excluded Korea. . . .”⁴²

The record from at least 1943 to late 1947 could not be clearer. Politically and militarily, the United States government had little or no interest in the Korean peninsula—even though during that period a fierce civil war was raging in nearby China, bordering Korea in the north, with the likely winner the Chinese Communists.

In November 1947—in an American-sponsored resolution, which even then was not worth the paper it was written on— the United Nations General Assembly called for reunification of Korea with one democratic government for the entire country. The neophyte international body would supervise national elections.⁴³ The Soviets, of course, objected, knowing full well what they and their North Korean vassals had in store for South Korea.

In January 1948, the Soviets refused to allow the United Nations into North Korea to administer countrywide elections. In a timid response the next month, the Joint Chiefs of Staff once again washed their hands of Korea, recommending that all American troops be removed from the south—even though the chiefs acknowledged that cutting and running would sooner or later lead to Soviet domination of Korea by the Kim Il-sung Communist regime.⁴⁴

In April 1948, the American hands-off-Korea policy was made even more explicit. A formal National Security Council paper, NSC-8, approved by President Harry Truman expressly stated that the security of South Korea would have to be in the hands of the South Koreans themselves.⁴⁵ Even worse than the United States sending Kim Il-sung that open invitation for his army to invade South Korea in pursuance of his own idea of reunification, Truman assured the Communist dictator that if he invaded South Korea the United States would not consider that a cause for war.⁴⁶ United States foreign policy

having given North Korea free rein to invade South Korea, it was no coincidence that within months the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) was formally activated.⁴⁷

On August 15, 1948—the North Koreans never having allowed free elections throughout the divided peninsula—the government of South Korea was formally installed in Seoul, assuming responsibility for administering the new half-nation. The American occupation was over. Before the Korean War would end five years later, millions would die, billions would be spent, and the world would be a vastly different place.

Withdrawal of American troops began a month later, in September 1948.

On September 8, 1948, the Communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea adopted a "constitution" and the next day claimed jurisdiction over the entire peninsula.⁴⁸ Kim-Il-sung had earlier stated openly that the Communists would reunify Korea in their own way, when they were ready—and under Communist domination.

Lt. Col. Appleman has observed that within three years from Japan's surrender of South Korea to the United States, two hostile governments hostile to each other existed on the peninsula, one a Communist dictatorship, the other nominally a fledgling democracy. The North's patron was the Soviet Union. The South, at that time had none. Certainly not the ephemeral United States of America and the impotent United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea.⁴⁹

The United States recognized the Republic of Korea diplomatically on January 1, 1949.

Meanwhile, as Supreme Commander Allied Powers (SCAP), in Tokyo MacArthur was overseeing the recovery and democratization of Japan. As before, *he had no role concerning South Korea* even though he was also United States Commander in Chief Far East (CINCFE).

Soon after the United States recognized the Republic of Korea, in a communiqué which gives the lie to the undeserved allegations that Douglas MacArthur was an unrealistic war monger, he informed "the Joint Chiefs of Staff that ROK [Republic of Korea] armed forces *could not turn back an invasion from the North*, that the U.S. *should not commit troops in case of such an invasion*, and that the U.S. *should remove all of its combat forces [from South Korea] as soon as possible.*"⁵⁰ No one could honestly misunderstand what MacArthur was telling the Joint Chiefs.

Note that MacArthur was not talking about an invasion by the powerful Soviet Union. Nor even by Chinese Communist troops. Even facing what was then erroneously believed to be a rag-tag North Korean army MacArthur was unequivocally opposed to committing American troops on the Korean Peninsula.

To the extent MacArthur's command would have been responsible for trying to repel a North Korean attack, CINCFE knew it would fail, knew that the United States should not even try to resist an invasion, and knew that it was in his government's interest to depart as soon as possible from the then relatively peaceful South Korea. CINCFE lacked even

the slightest interest in a unified Korea, let alone in fighting a war to achieve that result—let alone against the North Koreans and/or the Chinese and/or the Soviet Union. There is no credible evidence to the contrary. None.

As if to underscore his point, three months later, on March 1, 1949, MacArthur told a *New York Times* reporter that America's "defensive positions against Asiatic aggression used to be based on the west coast of the American continent. The Pacific was looked upon as the avenue of possible enemy approach. Now . . . our line of defense runs through the chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia. *It starts from the Philippines and continues through the Ryukyu Archipelago, which includes its main bastion, Okinawa. Then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian Island chain to Alaska.*"⁵¹

Note that MacArthur did not mention either Formosa (now called Taiwan) or South Korea as being within the United States' defensive perimeter, just as United States Secretary of State Dean Acheson would not include them the following year.

To further underscore America's disinterest in South Korea, also in March 1949 President Truman approved withdrawal of the last American occupation troops stationed there, a regiment of the United States 7th Infantry Division.

After the 7th Infantry departed, *the United States would no longer have any military presence in South Korea*—except for some 500 advisors (Korea Military Assistance Group, KMAG)—until the Korean War began fifteen months later.

Significantly, when MacArthur withdrew the 7th Infantry's regiment he acknowledged that any American military forces left anywhere in continental Asia could be trapped.⁵² Not just in South Korea. Anywhere in continental Asia.

It was plain at that time that General MacArthur's Far East Command wanted nothing to do with South Korea. *Any notion that Douglas MacArthur expected or desired to fight anyone in Korea at any time for any reason is flatly contradicted by the General's consistently unambiguous statements, which reflected precisely the then-policy of the United States government.* MacArthur's position on Korea was militarily obedient to Presidential, State and Defense Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Congressional policy. He was a general. He followed orders.

As a corollary to United States policy and the withdrawal of American occupation forces from South Korea, in June 1949 the Department of State, washing its hands of the pesky Korean problem, suggested that if the North invaded the South the United States should pass the problem off to the United Nations.⁵³ This was yet another official reiteration that Korea was none of the United States' concern.

Maybe not, but on June 19, 1949, the State Department's John Foster Dulles told the Korean Legislature in Seoul that if Korea were attacked, the United States *would* defend. This apparent reversal in Washington's position on Korea generally, and about South

Korea in particular, made MacArthur wonder exactly what American policy in Asia was.⁵⁴

As later events proved, the Far East commander was right to wonder.

By June 29, 1949, all American occupation forces had departed South Korea, leaving only the KMAG advisors behind. A few days later, five hundred officers and enlisted men under command of Brigadier General W. Lynn Roberts were officially the only military left in South Korea.

That summer all responsibility for Korea was deliberately and expressly shifted away from the military Far East Command in Tokyo to the civilian Department of State in Washington. The diplomats and bureaucrats were then in charge concerning South Korea. The American ambassador to Seoul, a civilian, was John J. Muccio who knew little or nothing about military affairs. KMAG, which did, was placed under ambassador Muccio's control. That left General Roberts as military advisor to Ambassador Muccio, and to the South Korean president and the Republic of Korea Army.⁵⁵ An American general with no American troops.

This major shift in the on-the-ground military responsibility for South Korea from the military to the politicians and bureaucrats is extremely important because of its relationship to the coming June 25, 1950, North Korean invasion— which, in turn, is related to MacArthur's later role in the Chinese intervention.

In sum, as of the summer of 1949—*a full year before the North Korean invasion of South Korea*—even though General Douglas MacArthur was Supreme Commander Allied Powers and Commander in Chief Far East, *he had no civilian or military responsibilities for South Korea.* Not even over the American KMAG troops—who served under the civilian ambassador and thus ultimately under the civilian diplomats and bureaucrats at the State Department in Washington, D.C.—whose commander-in-chief was President Harry Truman. The official history of KMAG is very clear that MacArthur's responsibility was limited to the logistical support of KMAG only “to the water line of Korea and to the emergency evacuation of U.S. personnel from the country if the need arose.”⁵⁶

Professor D. Clayton James has observed that as to Roberts's and KMAG's military and intelligence responsibility for Korea after June 1950, they did not know much about the North Korean People's Army capabilities. Yet, that did not inhibit Roberts from ignorantly or dishonestly predicting that a North Korean attack would be easily repulsed by the South Korean armed forces.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. Whatever Roberts's motive was for puffing up the capabilities of the ROK Army, and no matter how false the rosy picture he painted, his deception worked.

General Roberts and Ambassador Muccio had created Potemkin tours of South Korea for VIPs and journalists, showing them a staged ROK Army that did not exist in reality—

much like General Patton's fake Britain-based phantom First U.S. Army Group in World War II, which had been designed to mislead the Germans about where the Allied cross-channel invasion would take place. As a result, United States Senators, writers, journalists, public officials, and others loudly sang the praises of the Roberts-Muccio ghost army that lacked adequately numbers of trained manpower and possessed virtually no equipment.

Even if the Roberts-Muccio deceit had been true, the indisputable fact was that neither the American KMAG advisors in Korea nor the ROKs were under the command of General MacArthur. KMAG was "commanded" by a civilian State Department "advisor," the ROKs by combat untested, ill-equipped South Koreans.

As William Manchester has written, "The Dai Ichi's [MacArthur's Tokyo headquarters building] Korea file was closed."⁵⁷

3. WRITING OFF KOREA

The Korea file may have been closed as far as MacArthur's Far East Command was concerned, but on the Korean Peninsula there were increasing tensions, even mounting border clashes.⁵⁸ They did not, however, give MacArthur pause. He told a group of touring congressmen in September 1949 that North Korea posed no danger to South Korea.⁵⁹ (In the end—after Eighth Army's breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, the Inchon landing, the debacle at the Yalu, and the Chinese intervention—South Korea was not overrun.)

It needs to be reiterated that United States interests on the Korean Peninsula were at that time controlled not even by the Pentagon, let alone by General MacArthur in Tokyo, but instead by the Washington civilian diplomats and bureaucrats in the Department of State. Indeed, MacArthur would later remind a committee of the United States Senate that his Far East Command's only responsibility to Americans in South Korea was to provide them food and clothing. *The record is clear that MacArthur had nothing whatever to do with the policies, the administration, or the command responsibilities in Korea until the war broke out on June 25, 1950.*⁶⁰

The Supreme Commander Allied Powers/Commander in Chief Far East was completely out of the Korea loop. A significant corollary of this indisputable fact is that MacArthur's Far East Command in Tokyo had no official intelligence or order of battle⁶¹ responsibilities for North Korea.

In January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson made ill-fated, reiterative remarks (without providing a printed text to the media), at the National Press Club in Washington, and contradicted what John Foster Dulles had told the Koreans just six months before about America's role in Korea.

Just as NSC-8, Truman, the Joint Chiefs, and MacArthur had done previously, Acheson precisely defined the Asian perimeter which the United States would defend. *He pointedly omitted South Korea and Formosa.* They would have to fend for themselves until the United Nations got around to passing some resolutions or perhaps mustering some troops.⁶² Acheson's defense line ran from the Aleutian Islands off Alaska down to Japan, then to Okinawa and associated Ryukyu Islands, and on to the Philippines.

Had Dean Acheson, American Secretary of State, and diplomat extraordinaire, gone off the reservation by extending an open invitation to the covetous Soviet Union to allow its North Korean proxy to gobble up South Korea, or its Chinese stand-in to seize Formosa? And if Acheson had, why did he? The Ryukyus and the Philippines, which were within Acheson's defined defense perimeter, were islands, considerably more difficult to supply and defend than South Korea, a peninsula with lengthy coastlines jutting out from the Asian mainland and not far from Japan. Was there something else going on which, at the time, only Truman and Acheson, and perhaps a few trusted others, was aware of?

Not at all. Acheson was merely reiterating the oft-stated policy of the political and military leadership of the United States government.

In fact, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff themselves—Bradley, Collins, Vandenberg and Sherman—visited General MacArthur’s Far East Command in late January-early February 1950, according to JCS Chairman General Omar Bradley all of them agreed about what was to be done, and not done, in the Far East. Bradley wrote that the conferees were in nearly full agreement on most specific Far East matters. *“We shared the view that Korea was still of little strategic interest and that in the event of ‘trouble,’ the ROK Army could handle North Korea.”*⁶³

Note that there was a faintly implicit recognition that there might be “trouble,” but it wouldn’t be the United States’ problem.

Note, also, that Bradley was speaking on behalf of General MacArthur— *“We shared the view—without any recorded dissent from him.”*

But even as the United States was excluding South Korea from America’s defense perimeter, the military situation on the peninsula was deteriorating rapidly.

Ever since the South Korean government had been installed in the summer of 1948 and recognized diplomatically by the United States on January 1, 1949, the North Korean Communists had been fomenting disturbances, and conducting guerilla operations in the south. The guerillas even threatened the United Nations, which became concerned about a cross-border attack by the North Koreans. According to Lt. Col. Appleman, during March 1950, “there were rumors of an impending invasion of South Korea and, in one week alone, 3-10 March, there occurred twenty-nine guerilla attacks in South Korea and eighteen incidents along the [38th] Parallel.”⁶⁴

In Tokyo, beginning with the Japanese surrender in 1945, MacArthur’s G-2 (intelligence) was one Charles A. Willoughby, a man whose origins were, to say the least, murky, but who was to play a major role in the debacle of Chinese intervention. As we shall see, Willoughby’s “performance as an intelligence officer was characterized by both success and failure, *but the latter showed up chiefly in estimation of enemy capabilities and intentions.*”⁶⁵

Born Karl Weidenbach in 1892 of uncertain parentage, eighteen years later the boy left Heidelberg, Germany, and emigrated to the United States. Soon after, he became an American citizen, adopted his American mother’s surname, and Karl Weidenbach became Charles A. Willoughby. He joined the Regular Army, served as an enlisted man from 1910 to 1913, and graduated from Gettysburg College in 1914 with a B.A. degree.

Willoughby served as an officer in France during 1917-1918 and then began to climb the military ladder: pilot training, military attaché, author of military-related books, advanced infantry training, Command and General Staff School, teaching intelligence and military history. In 1936 he graduated from the United States Army War College. By 1938 he was a Lt. Colonel, and in 1940 the Spanish-speaking Willoughby was posted to

Headquarters, Philippine Department, Manila. In 1941 his association began with MacArthur, who had recently become commander of the United States Far Eastern Command. Willoughby was appointed MacArthur's Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, United States Forces, Far East, and promoted to Colonel in October 1941, two months before Pearl Harbor. In March 1942 he was evacuated with MacArthur from the Philippines to Australia.

A month later, Willoughby became MacArthur's G-2, Assistant Chief of for Intelligence, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, and in June was promoted to Brigadier General.

According to Dr. Kenneth A. Campbell, in this position Willoughby was "severely hampered not only by his own weak background in intelligence, but also by limited means for collecting intelligence in this part of the world." He had to "begin from scratch."

To best understand Willoughby's uneven, even fatally wrong, track record as MacArthur's G-2 during the early days of the Korean War, it is necessary to evaluate his performance during WW II. Especially his strengths and weaknesses.

Giving credit where it's due, Campbell, no admirer of Willoughby, praises his organizational ability, especially when one "realizes that, despite his limited experience in intelligence, he created a vast intelligence organization from nothing in a relatively short period of time."

His intelligence *estimates*, however, were a different story. As Campbell has said and as we shall see later, Willoughby's "total performance in World War II was indeed a mixed one, reflecting considerable accomplishment in *organizational* matters, but serious flaws in the estimation of enemy *capabilities and intentions*."⁶⁶

A glaring and costly example was MacArthur's preparation for the 1944 invasion of Luzon in the Philippines. Willoughby estimated that United States forces would confront some 137,000 Japanese troops. There were 276,000.⁶⁷ Another concerned the South Pacific island of Biak. Roger A. Beaumont⁶⁸ has written that "in June 1943 Willoughby underestimated Japanese forces on the island of Biak, a misappreciation which caused heavy casualties, and slowed the pace of MacArthur's strategic advance in the Southwest Pacific. Another major miscalculation of enemy strength came in September 1943, when the 9th Australian Division attacked north of Finschafen; 5000 Japanese were encountered, instead of the approximately 300 indicated by Willoughby."⁶⁹

It has been said that in World War II "Willoughby often evaluated information in light of his preconceived notions. Throughout World War II, Willoughby had the bad habit of superimposing his view of the situation onto the Japanese. Rather than trying to understand the enemy, he allowed his first impressions to shape his estimates."⁷⁰

In the few months before the North Korean invasion of South Korea, in Tokyo Willoughby received and analyzed intelligence reports from “sources” in Korea that an invasion from the north was imminent—including one report that claimed the attack would come in June 1950.

That said, however, according to Stanley Sandler, MacArthur’s Intelligence Section in Japan did not believe a North Korean attack on the South was “imminent.”⁷¹ According to Blair, a March 1950 analysis from Willoughby to the Pentagon contemplated ongoing guerilla and psychological warfare directed to South Korea but no civil war either in spring or summer.⁷²

There are two interesting points to be made about G-2 Willoughby.

First, there was an obvious difference, indeed a contradiction, between the little raw data from on the ground in Korea and how it was evaluated by Willoughby’s G-2 at theater level in Tokyo.

The other is Willoughby’s implicit perspective that war in Korea would be a “civil war” between North and South, not aggression instigated by a foreign power such as the Soviet Union or Communist China using North Korea as a surrogate. It was naïve in the extreme for General MacArthur’s long-time aide, a Brigadier General responsible for theater intelligence, to believe that an unprovoked North Korean invasion of South Korea would be the start of a “civil war.” That view would be akin to characterizing a cold war era attack by East Germany on West Germany as a “civil war” simply because there were Germans on each side of the conflict.

Willoughby’s superior at the pentagon was Army-level G-2 General Joe Collins. At about the same time that Willoughby was opining about threats in Korea, Collins wrote that there was no need to worry about Communist war-making on the peninsula because they were busy elsewhere in Southeast Asia (e.g. Vietnam). According to Acheson, Collins’s analysis was supported by intelligence personnel in Tokyo, at the CIA, and the Department of State. Of course it was always possible that the North would attack the South, but it was not “imminent” in the summer of 1950.⁷³

By then, the situation was this: The United States government’s official position, as consistently expressed by its civilian and military leadership, was that South Korea was of no strategic importance to the United States, that there might or might not be a North Korean invasion which might or might not be imminent, but if an invasion occurred the ROKs could handle it. But in no event was North Korean aggression of any concern to the United States. The United Nations would have to deal with the problem. Kissinger Realpolitik, pre-Kissinger.

On March 15, 1950, KMAC’s General Roberts, apparently having suffered a dose of realism as an antidote to his earlier unwarranted optimism, conceded that in case of an attack the North Korean Army would give the Republic of Korea “a bloody nose” and that it “would be gobbled up to be added to the rest of Red Asia.”⁷⁴

Thus, against the official Washington policy of “hands-off-Korea-we don’t care-the ROKs-can-handle-things-and-it’s-the-U.N.’s-problem-anyhow,” was the contradictory and pessimistic opinion of the KMAG commander on the ground in Korea that the ROKs could *not* handle North Korean aggression, and that South Korea *would* fall under North Korean domination.

But General Roberts like all the others was not expecting an invasion, even though he was in South Korea and was so close to the 38th Parallel he could have driven there in an hour or two.

As if the government’s policy had not been made clear enough, in May 1950 the United States handed another engraved invitation to the North Korean Communists (and their Chinese and Soviet patrons). No lesser a public figure than Senator Tom Connally of Texas, then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told *U.S. News and World Report*, explicitly, that the United States would abandon South Korea if the North attacked because the security of the south was not essential to the strategy the United States had in place for Asia.⁷⁵ Whatever that strategy was.

Worse was Connally’s elaboration of his remarks about abandoning South Korea. He predicted an invasion was going to happen, South Korea would be overrun and, for good measure, eventually Formosa as well.

In the same interview, Connally was asked whether Korea was an essential part of America’s defense strategy. Though he had already answered the question, he said flatly “no,” repeating the MacArthur-Acheson boundaries of America’s defense perimeter. South Korea was not “absolutely essential.”⁷⁶

Professor Richard C. Thornton makes three important points about these statements by Senator Connally.

First, they were a complete about-face from statements he had made just three months earlier about Korea being a democratic country and a testing ground for keeping communism out of Asia.

Second, Connally was a close friend—Thornton calls him a “partner”—of Truman and so the Senator’s words were considered weighty and as sending a devastating message to South Korea.

Third, and most damning, is that the day after Connally’s interview appeared on the newsstands, Acheson at a news conference (which to Professor Thornton seemed not coincidental) did not contradict the Senator’s remarks.⁷⁷

At about the same time, the CIA weighed in with the same conclusion: Even without Chinese or Soviet military units in play, North Korea could overrun and hold *at minimum* the upper area of South Korea, including the capital city of Seoul.⁷⁸

Two months later, on June 1, 1950, with the invasion fuse burning ever closer to South Korea, the United States Far East Air Force's Intelligence Section offered the same conclusion: "South Korea will fall before a North Korean invasion. . . ."79

None of these opinions are surprising, considering the available intelligence. According to William Manchester, "Willoughby, who maintained an extensive intelligence net on the peninsula, [had] filed 1,195 reports between June 1949 and June 1950, reporting among other things, that Chinese Communist troops of Korean descent had been entering the Democratic People's Republic in great numbers since the defeat of Chiang [Kai-shek], and that a massive buildup of Red shock troops, far in excess of [South Korea President] Rhee's forces in the south, was under way north of the 38th Parallel." In the third week of March Willoughby's G-2 section in Tokyo, agreeing with the CIA, prophesied war in the late spring or early summer." 80

In light of all this, on the surface it's puzzling how just a few weeks earlier, in mid-May 1950, MacArthur could have told C.L. Sulzberger of *The New York Times* that he did not believe war was imminent, because the world would not permit it.81

One explanation for MacArthur's statement (assuming the General was quoted accurately by the *Times*), is that he was still outside the Washington-dominated South Korea intelligence loop, from which he had been completely removed earlier.

In sum, there was no doubt that the American political and military leadership had officially and publicly turned its back on the defense of South Korea. There was disagreement, however, about whether a North Korean attack was imminent and, if one were launched, whether it could be repulsed by the ROKs, because various intelligence agencies had reached different conclusions.

Intelligence, in this context, consists of raw data which is then evaluated. Analysts must make predictions about how others will behave. Other intelligence personnel e.g. order of battle specialists—must determine from the available data what is happening.

In matters of such crucial importance —the fate of South Korea and the stability of Asia—it must be asked why the intelligence picture, especially North Korean order of battle, was so cloudy.

Professor James has offered an explanation⁸² of what went wrong, and the role played by MacArthur's Far East Command headquarters in the lack of reliable and actionable intelligence—one which, unfortunately, presaged the Chinese intervention several months later and which, in principle, exhibited the same kind of organizational, but not personal, failure as did the latter.

James reminds us that after mid-1949 responsibility for intelligence concerning North Korea was removed from the jurisdiction of MacArthur's Far East Command in Tokyo (even though G-2 Willoughby apparently had some assets on the ground in Korea). This crucially important task was shifted to the relatively small KMAG detachment of American advisors in South Korea. Its expertise in and capability for tactical, let alone

strategic, intelligence was virtually nil, and KMAG should not have been tasked with any intelligence responsibility at all, let alone one of such paramount importance. Because there were no American combat troops in South Korea, the intelligence function, especially order of battle, properly belonged at theater level in Tokyo.⁸³

For the next year, the State Department and CIA did send reports to Washington about military events in North Korea, especially in the late spring of 1950 when a large buildup of men and materiel was seen just north of the 38th Parallel. At the same time, the CIA reported continuation of the same business-as-usual incursions, infiltrations, guerilla warfare and propagandistic saber-rattling by both sides, which had been occurring for years. Acheson later claimed that the same sources, though recognizing the possibility of an attack, discounted it occurring in the summer of 1950.

Nor did the Joint Intelligence Committee, in a report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff *a mere three days before the attack*, predict imminent military action.⁸⁴

Nor, it later claimed, did the Department of Defense, anticipate such action.

Nor, Truman later asserted, did any of the intelligence reports provided to him.

Ranking State Department officer, Dean Rusk, later to become Secretary of State, has written in his memoirs that the “North Korean invasion came as a complete surprise. Only four days before I had told a congressional committee we saw no evidence of war brewing in Korea.”⁸⁵ Apparently, like Captain Renault in *Casablanca* when Rusk learned that gambling was occurring at Rick’s Cafe, the State Department functionary and his colleagues were “shocked, shocked.”

To say the least, even absent a formal intelligence or order of battle detachment on the ground in Seoul there was no way the massive movement of North Korean troops and equipment close to the 38th Parallel, and removal of countless North Korean civilians from that area, could have escaped KMAG and South Korean eyes. Nor could even rookie intelligence operatives have avoided the obvious conclusion that the enemy was massing just across the 38th parallel for a specific purpose. And it was not maneuvers.

As a matter of fact, when in May 1950, only a month before the invasion, South Korea’s defense minister reported that the North’s order of battle (which he underestimated), included Soviet T-34 medium tanks against which South Korea possessed no defensive weapons, Everette Drumright, American Charge d’Affaires in Seoul, came up with his own low-ball numbers for the Communist armor. According to Professor Thornton, Drumright must have been under orders to minimize the danger of invasion.⁸⁶

Soon after, a North Korean informant gave Far East Command intelligence in Tokyo a detailed report about a new NKPA tank brigade consisting of an estimated 180 light and medium tanks, thousands of troops and a plethora of anti-tank guns, artillery, and vehicles. No one warned Seoul.⁸⁷

In mid-June 1950 MacArthur, Willoughby, and senior staff met in Tokyo with Secretary of Defense Johnson, Joint Chiefs' Chairman General Bradley, and KMAG's General Roberts. From what MacArthur was told, Bradley was greatly relieved that the United States had no cause for concern in Korea. It is not known who, or what, provided General Bradley with that measure of relief.

However, the day after the North Korean attack, CIA Director Rear Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter passed the buck when testifying before a Senate committee. He claimed that the CIA had predicted an imminent attack, but that unnamed *federal* officials had not paid proper attention to them. Hillenkoetter, choosing his words carefully by use of the characterization "federal," did not expressly implicate *military* officials. By implication at least, that left Washington civilians.

Also, in the attack's aftermath General MacArthur contended that Willoughby expected an attack in the summer, that he had passed on his analyses to Washington, but his information was met with apathy.

Note that Douglas MacArthur, a precise wordsmith when he needed to be, had used oblique words—for example, "Washington"—not laying specific blame on any named individuals. But the "apathy" of which he spoke had to have been in Washington, because nowhere else did the Far East Command have military superiors and they, in turn, had civilian superiors who were ultimately accountable to the commander in chief, President Harry Truman.

For his part, Willoughby, "who had set up a small intelligence unit on the peninsula called the Korean Liaison Office, vehemently asserted that he had provided adequate warnings to the Army G-2 [his superior] in Washington. * * * In his memoirs of 1954, Willoughby quoted a number of his G-2 reports to Washington predicting a North Korean attack in June."⁸⁸

Professor James surmises that Washington discounted Willoughby's reports principally for three reasons:

- (1) Willoughby had been arrogant and irascible in his prior dealings with the Office of Strategic Services [the legendary OSS of World War II], CIA, and State Department intelligence efforts in his theater.

In other words, Willoughby's intelligence reports predicting an attack that later occurred exactly when he had claimed it would, were discounted by the Washington politicians, civilian and military alike, because his earlier relationship with them had made him some powerful enemies. If true, this would have hardly been MacArthur's fault, even if he had knowledge of the intelligence and order of battle estimates.

- (2) Korea had been declared outside the jurisdiction of the Far East Command [MacArthur's, in Tokyo] since June 1949, so his [Willoughby's] Korean Liaison Office [in Korea] was regarded by some in Washington as a brazen, extralegal creation.

In other words, Willoughby's attempt from distant Tokyo to obtain intelligence and order of battle information about the NKPA in closed North Korea took him off his own reservation and onto turf which "some in Washington" regarded as their own—even though Willoughby was geographically much closer to North Korea and actually had some agents and other intelligence assets on the ground.

(3) Most important, Willoughby's warnings were interspersed with assurances by him that no invasion was near. For instance, on March 10 he reported that "the North Korean P.A. [People's Army] will invade South Korea in June," but only two weeks later he notified Army intelligence in Washington, "It is believed there will be no civil war in Korea this spring or summer." Bolling, the Army G-2, told Collins that fall after reading some press comments by Willoughby critical of the Washington G-2 office, "The statements made by Willoughby [about a June attack] are correct in part, but he failed to indicate in his press statements his conclusions that definitely discount the report referred to." At the Senate hearings in May-June 1951 on MacArthur's dismissal, Acheson also pointed out the qualifications and contradictions in Willoughby's predictions.⁸⁹

Assuming, as we must, that the Bolling and Acheson comments are correct, they reveal that Willoughby's intelligence assets on the ground in Korea were providing him hedged, contradictory information, and that in turn caused the data he forwarded up the chain of command to Washington to be similarly tainted. Considering what Professor James offers as the other two reasons for Washington's displeasure with Willoughby, it is easy to understand why his hedged and contradictory reports of a North Korean attack on South Korea were not warmly embraced. Surely this situation could in no way be laid at MacArthur's door.

Whether there was an unforgivable intelligence failure somewhere between agents on the ground in Korea and the commander-in-chief in Washington, rather than something more sinister, is a crucial question.

For example, the United States Army's study of policy and command in the first year of the Korean War asserted categorically that "American intelligence failed to predict the time, strength, and actual launching of the attack *because of reluctance to accept all the reports rendered by Koreans, a distrust of Oriental agents and sources, and a belief that the South Koreans were inclined to cry wolf*. . . . Signs which marked the prelude of the North Korean attack had become accepted as routine communist activity."⁹⁰

There are two serious problems with the Army's explanation for the alleged intelligence "failure to predict." One is that there were other reports, even possible signals intelligence and code-breaking information, which did not rest on distrusted "Orientals" (and which would have been held close). The other is that previous "routine communist activity" did not exhibit the massive buildup and movement of countless North Korean troops and equipment close to, and civilians away from, the 38th Parallel.

The Army report makes two more startling statements.

One is the dismissive observation that “In the final analysis, the controversy over the intelligence failure in Korea is academic.”⁹¹

If there was an intelligence failure, it was hardly “academic.”

“In the final analysis,” if there was an intelligence failure building on the ground in Korea during June 1950, it facilitated the North Korean “surprise” attack. It also cost the United States, South Korea and our other allies uncounted lives and treasure.

The failure, at least on this analysis, appears to lie not in Tokyo, but in Washington.⁹²

Indeed, “[t]he United States was caught by surprise because, within political and military leadership circles in Washington, the perception existed that only the Soviets could order an invasion by a ‘client state’ and that such an act would be a prelude to a world war. Washington was confident that the Soviets were not ready to take such a step, and, therefore, no such invasion would occur.”⁹³

This perception, and indeed its broad acceptance within the Washington policy community, is clearly stated in a 19 June [1950] CIA paper on DRPK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea] military capabilities. The paper said that “The DPRK is a firmly controlled Soviet satellite that exercises no independent initiative and depends entirely on the support of the USSR for existence.”⁹⁴

Although MacArthur’s Far East Command had been cut out of the Korea loop an entire year before the North Korean invasion, still, his G-2 had some assets on the ground on the peninsula. Yes, Willoughby sent his intelligence up the chain of command to Washington, but according to Professor James’s analysis it met with a hostile reception for personal reasons, policy reasons, and because of an apparent inability or unwillingness of Willoughby’s superior G-2 officers in the Pentagon to separate the useful wheat from the useless chaff which, after all, is what intelligence officers are supposed to do.

But there is another possible explanation of what occurred in Korea on June 25, 1950, one which has serious implications well beyond MacArthur’s role in the later Chinese intervention—an explanation even worse than an intelligence failure about whether and when the North Koreans would invade the South. That explanation posits such immorally Machiavellian conduct by America’s national leadership as to be nearly unbelievable, yet it is grounded in the Army’s own study of *policy* and command for the first year of the Korean War.

With amazing candor, the Army study states that “[t]he United States had no plans to counter an invasion, even had it been forecast to the very day.”⁹⁵

That is correct. Please read the sentence again.

According to an official United States Army study, even if the intelligence coming out of Korea and passed up the line through Tokyo to Washington had revealed the very day, even the actual hour, North Korea would attack, *the United States had no plans to defend South Korea against the Communist invasion.*

This astonishing admission confirms what we have seen in the oft-repeated official statements that the South Koreans were on their own in case of an attack and why, despite considerable and mounting evidence to the contrary, Washington and others did not seem too concerned with the likelihood of a North Korean invasion, let alone an imminent one. Indeed, it explains why the United States civilian and military axis was on the same page about North Korean intentions and capabilities.

But it does not explain *why* in 1949 and 1950 the United States would allow North Korea to invade South Korea, nor does it explain the apparent contradiction that once the attack occurred Truman, and through him the United Nations, came to the South's defense.

For that explanation we must turn to the scholarship of Professor Richard C. Thornton, who describes his provocative book—*Odd Man Out, Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War*—as “not another military history of the Korean War,” but a “political history of the American-Soviet-Chinese interaction that produced the war and determined the shape of global politics from then to now.”⁹⁶

Odd Man Out is a revelation—and perhaps an indictment.

4. STALIN, MAO, KIM—AND KOREA

Professor Thornton's thoroughly sourced facts are damning, and the conclusions he draws from them are even worse.

*The Truman administration's policy toward South Korea in 1950 resembled nothing so much as tethering a goat to trap a tiger, a tiger that American leaders knew was preparing to spring.*⁹⁷

Why?

Because, argues Thornton, *official American policy* (i.e. Truman's and Acheson's) *wanted North Korea to attack the South.*

Strong medicine?

Here's Professor Thornton's explanation:

Stalin's war [in Korea] . . . was designed to serve larger purposes beyond the [Communist] unification of Korea, which, however, was Kim Il Sung's only interest. Above all, the war marked the decisive step in Stalin's struggle with Mao to pit China against the United States and prevent the Chinese leader from establishing relations with the United States. *Yet the conflict also offered the United States the opportunity to put into place a global containment strategy that went far beyond the immediate issue of Korea.*⁹⁸

As we shall see, as the result of the Korean War Stalin was a big winner. Kim broke even. Mao and the United States won some points, but lost others.

The big losers? The countless dead, wounded, captured, and missing.

Consider the following indisputable facts about the five major players.

Chiang Kai-shek and the remnant of his anti-Communist Nationalist forces had retreated to the island fortress of Formosa some ninety miles off the Chinese mainland. Other than as a source of often dubious intelligence about the Chinese in North Korea, and as a threat that Nationalist troops might attack the mainland or be used on the ground in Korea, Nationalist forces played no role in the Korean War. Chiang's goal was to stay safe on Formosa and, quixotically, regain the mainland.

Mao Zedong had secured much of the Chinese mainland by October 1949 and established a Communist government. But his revolution was incomplete, lacking achievement of three major goals: (1) establishing a new, hopefully more equal, relationship with the Soviet Union; (2) "liberating" Formosa and defeating Chiang; and, after that, (3) fostering workable relations with the United States and other nations.

Kim Il Sung's only goal was the reunification of Korea under his Communist dictatorship.

Josef Stalin's major goal was to create buffers around the USSR and keep Communist China dependent on the Soviet Union, preventing it from establishing workable relations with the United States.⁹⁹

Harry Truman's goal, formalized as early as January 1949, was to contain the Soviet Union in Europe, establish workable relations with Mao's China, and prevent it from becoming too cozy with the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰ However, because of powerful domestic political considerations ("Who lost China?"), getting cozy with the mainland Chinese Communists first required Truman's abandonment of the Formosa regime and the downfall of Chiang, our wartime ally. For the United States, it was an "either/or" choice.

Thus, as to the Stalin-Mao axis of the Stalin-Mao-Kim-Truman quartet, Professor Thornton suggests that "[i]t was Stalin's objective to employ conflict in Korea to maneuver China into confrontation with the United States, and thus subordinate Mao to Soviet strategy."¹⁰¹ Stalin's sacrificial pawn would be North Korea's Kim Il-sung.

The plot thickened for Mao, Stalin, Kim and Truman in August 1949 when the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb—an event which impelled American policymakers to make even more of an effort to keep Communist China and the Soviet Union out of each other's embrace.

But on Formosa our old World War II ally Chiang Kai-shek, his Nationalist government, and the Kuomintang Party were inconvenient millstones around the neck of American foreign policy, especially because of the strong public and Congressional support for the anti-Communist Chinese hunkered down on their island across from the mainland.

On October 1, 1949, through an announcement in Beijing by the Chinese Communist Party, the People's Republic of China came into formal existence. Stalin's nightmare—a total Mao victory, not a fragmented China divided between the Communists and Nationalists which would have kept the Chinese Communists weaker and more dependent on the Soviet Union—had become a reality.

On December 16, 1949, Mao arrived in Moscow to negotiate a Sino-Soviet "Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance." In the background, very much a junior partner, was North Korea's Kim Il-sung. He had just requested that Mao repatriate to North Korea and put under Kim's command thousands of indigenous Korean fighters who, having been sent to China by the Soviet Union, had fought for years on the side of the Chinese Communists against both the Japanese Empire and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists.

Professor Thornton maintains these troops were "a critical component in the CCP's [Chinese Communist Party's] victory in the civil war."¹⁰² As T.R. Fehrenbach has noted, "[w]ith Chiang Kai-shek defeated and his Nationalist remnants exiled to [Formosa], Red China could release her Korean-speaking soldiers; by June 1950, they made up 30

percent of the [NKPA].” Fehrenbach characterizes the North Korean officers as “all young, and hard, and most of their adult lives had been spent at war, with the Chinese, with the Soviets. They had fought Japanese; they had fought Nationalists. Now they would fight the running dogs of the American Imperialists, or whoever else got in their way.”¹⁰³ Initially, they would outfight the untested, ill-equipped and sacrificial South Koreans.

Mao’s desire to unify China by taking Formosa and Kim’s obsession for a Korea united under his Communist dictatorship, combined with the latter’s request for repatriation of Korean troops, unavoidably raised for Mao what Professor Thornton calls the “Who first?” question. Other important questions were: “Would a North Korean attempt to unify the peninsula preempt Mao’s determination to complete the Chinese revolution with the seizure of [Formosa], or conversely would Mao forestall Kim? How would Stalin try to gain leverage on Mao in the coming treaty negotiations? What was the Soviet dictator up to?”¹⁰⁴

Thus, out of the Stalin-Mao December 1949 meetings came, among other things, Mao’s fervently expressed desire that Kim’s unification war in Korea be delayed until Formosa was conquered by the Chinese Communists. What also came of the meetings, thanks to master chess player Stalin but against Mao’s wishes, was the commencement of the Korean War six months later—and, consequently, a new challenge and different direction for American foreign policy.

As to the Korean War itself, some believe Stalin was pushed over the edge to approve Kim’s attack on South Korea when on December 19, 1949, Mao cabled his comrades in China—in what may have been simply an adroit chess move—authorizing them to pursue diplomatic relations with the United States, which was then at least theoretically feasible. There is no doubt that a Communist China-United States rapprochement was unacceptable to the Soviet dictator. Stalin’s way of preventing it was to start a war in Korea which would eventually force Mao into it on Kim’s side, against the United States.¹⁰⁵

Accordingly, at the end of 1949 and early 1950 Stalin and the North Koreans began gearing up for an attack on South Korea. Mao, for his part, was preparing to complete the Chinese revolution by “liberating” Formosa.

As to the forthcoming Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Soviet financial assistance to the Chinese, and mutual trade agreements, the American foreign policy establishment was caught flat-footed. It had believed that Mao would look toward the United States as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union, but apparently not. China appeared to be moving closer to the USSR.¹⁰⁶

Among other problems a Sino-Soviet entente would cause for the United States, were those arising from America’s post-World War II demobilization and recent Soviet possession of the atomic bomb, because with the Communists’ borders secure each could turn to other matters of concern to them. Formosa, for Mao. Europe, for Stalin.

To keep Mao from consummating the treaty with Stalin, in early January 1950 Truman and Acheson capitulated. They announced a shutdown of the military equipment pipeline to Chiang's remnant forces on Formosa, recognition of the Communists' "right" to the island, acceptance of Communist domination in China, and an assurance that the Chinese Communists had nothing to fear from the United States. In short, the President of the United States and his Secretary of State gave away the store to Mao.

America—a scant five years earlier the World War II victor in Europe and Asia, and the world's uncontested superpower—had become a supplicant to the backward, war-weary, non-industrialized nation of near universally illiterate Chinese peasants.

The paranoiac Stalin concluded from the Truman Administration's supplication to Mao that the Chinese and Americans had an agreement about Formosa. That Mao could work his will on Chiang once Sino-American relations had been normalized. This, Stalin reasoned, meant that somehow he had to pit Mao against the United States sooner than later.¹⁰⁷

The Truman-Acheson attempted seduction of Mao, who relentlessly continued to plan for an attack on Formosa sometime in the summer of 1950, was unsuccessful.

The United States' grand strategy of keeping China and the Soviet Union apart—despite the proffered, one-sided concessions, including the sellout of Formosa— failed.

Their failure caused Truman and Acheson, consummate pragmatists each, to shift gears into a new strategy built on the world as it was and would be, rather than on the one they wished for—a strategy which necessarily assumed that both China and the Soviet Union would be America's antagonists. Stalin had the atomic bomb, Mao had China, and the two Communists were apparently in cahoots.

The Truman Administration's new policy was contained in the supposedly secret NSC [National Security Council]-68, a "fundamental reassessment" of the ends and means of American national security, which, according to Professor Thornton, "established the basic rationale for American rearmament and global containment in the face of growing Soviet military power augmented by the Sino-Soviet alliance."¹⁰⁸

Chiang Kai-shek and Formosa would no longer be left to the tender mercies of Mao and his Chinese Communists. Now, in an amazing reversal, the nearly sold-out Generalissimo and his island would be part of America's Asian containment defense perimeter.

As between Mao and Kim, the race was on as to who would strike first, thereby almost certainly precluding the other from acting. Would Mao move first, against Formosa, or would Kim against South Korea?

If Mao moved first and succeeded in eliminating Nationalist control over Formosa and bringing the island under Chinese Communist control, it was believed that he could establish relations with the United States.

If Kim moved first, and inevitably China had to go to war against the United States in Korea, no Chinese relationship with the United States would be possible—the outcome devoutly wished by Stalin.¹⁰⁹

In another move to keep China and the United States apart, Stalin met with Kim Il-sung in Moscow for three weeks in early May 1950. The Soviet dictator made it clear to the would-be Communist unifier of Korea that should the United States intervene in the war, the North Koreans would have to rely on help only from Mao's Chinese Communists, not from Stalin.

How convenient for Stalin. Kim and Mao against the United States and the United Nations. With Stalin on the sidelines.

While Truman and Acheson were keeping NSC-68 and its radical gear-shifting policies and provisions secret, the Soviet Union provided thousands of tons of military hardware to North Korea. While China was preparing to invade Formosa. American intelligence watched.¹¹⁰

The race was on—although Stalin was doing more to supply Kim for his South Korea adventure than he was doing to assist Mao with his plans to invade Formosa—all the while allowing Kim to believe Mao would support the Korean's attack on the South, if necessary.

One part of this complicated chess game was that “Stalin's strategy of employing Korea as a tar baby to pit China against the United States required that North Korea *fail* in its attempt to defeat the South.”¹¹¹ Another part of Stalin's Machiavellian scheme was that if Kim did fail, in order to protect Communist China's own border from a Korea unified under the flags of the United States, South Korea and the United Nations, the Chinese would have to intervene and go to war with the United States.¹¹²

Another aspect of the chess game was related to the United States. We will soon see that although for obvious reasons the United States, too, wanted the North Koreans to fail, Professor Thornton argues that in another, more important, respect Truman and Acheson did not want Kim's invasion to fail *too quickly*.

In a curious sense American and Soviet strategy ran parallel. Stalin precipitated a war in Korea to preclude China's move toward the United States, while Washington secretly prepared to employ a conflict to satisfy larger global containment objectives that no longer included a relationship with China. *Stalin started the Korean War, but the United States used it for larger purposes.*¹¹³

At first, this horrific explanation of Stalin's Machiavellian-like gambit seems absurd. Kim was a long-time, die-hard Communist, who had devoted his entire adult life to

Communist reunification of North Korea. Communist hegemony over the entire Korean Peninsula, through Kim's dictatorship, would certainly be in Stalin's interest.

But Stalin, looking at merely an acceptable half-a-loaf, had a much larger appetite. He wanted a war between China and the United States, and if Kim's North Korean Army had to be sacrificed for the greater Soviet good, then so be it. All in the cause of Communist solidarity.

Professor Thornton's thesis goes a long way to explaining the conduct of both the Soviet Union and the United States in the early 1950 run-up to the commencement of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula later in June. New data he examined¹¹⁴ about the North's war plans, designed in large part by the Soviets, and the war materiel provided and not provided by Moscow to Kim's regime and the timing of its delivery, "*show rather clearly Stalin's intent to prevent the North from winning.*"¹¹⁵

As NKA [North Korean Army] supply lines grew longer they grew more vulnerable to devastating American air and sea attack. * * * A lengthy conflict spelled doom for the North. Worse, Stalin did nothing to offset NKA vulnerabilities: he provided no air support, no air defenses, no sea support, no modern weapons, and no bridging equipment. New documents show that the original [Soviet] plan called for the seizure of Seoul with the explicit assumptions that the Republic of Korea would promptly fall and the United States would not intervene. Moscow's war planners were experienced World War II general officers. Clearly, while a war planner might have expectations along those lines, to make explicit planning assumptions on these crucial matters was an obvious, deliberate design flaw. New evidence also demonstrates that the North Korean minister of defense objected to the Soviet Plan and was temporarily shelved, returning to his duties only after the offensive had failed.¹¹⁶

There is additional evidence to support Professor Thornton's thesis that Stalin wanted, and expected, Kim's invasion of South Korea to fail. Immediately after the invasion began—prematurely, because as far as anyone knew at that time the attack's success remained unclear—Stalin began urging Mao to intervene. Stalin wanted Mao in the fight as early as possible.

As the NKPA invasion forces rolled south, Stalin counseled Kim to throw all his forces at the Pusan Perimeter. If Kim had, that tactic would have left the North Koreans exposed to a United Nations counterattack not only from the Pusan Perimeter, but in their rear—which is exactly what happened when MacArthur's forces later landed on the West Coast at Inchon.

When the Inchon landing occurred, leading to encirclement of the North Korean Army, Stalin provided no assistance to the Communist survivors. Instead, he kept demanding that Mao intervene—even before MacArthur's forces crossed the 38th Parallel, let alone headed for the Yalu River border between North Korea and China.¹¹⁷

If the plausibility of Stalin's "use-Kim-to-get-Mao" gambit understandably seems difficult to accept, even more unbelievable, indeed sinister, is Professor Thornton's thesis that while Truman and Acheson wanted the United States/United Nations to repel the North Korean aggression—about the possibility of which the two were at best equivocal—they didn't want that to happen "too fast."

Again, Professor Thornton makes a compelling case.

A partial reason for American conduct during the Korean War, he explains, was the need to have Congress appropriate rearmament funds far more than what was required for that limited conflict alone.

Only when the Korean conflict began was American policy revealed, layer by layer, as one peels an onion. The Korean conflict would be the springboard to American rearmament *only if the conflict lasted long enough and produced the desired geographical confrontation for congressional appropriations to reach previously programmed levels*. The drafters of NSC-68 subsequently divulged what was not included in that document: that they had envisaged successive \$50 billion defense budgets *to produce the level of rearmament required to satisfy the needs of globalized containment beyond that required for the Korean conflict*.¹¹⁸

Worse even than the revelation of this Machiavellian Truman/Acheson scheme to use the Korean hostilities as a mere means to a wider global defense end, Professor Thornton believes that in the time period between Eighth Army's successful breakout from the Pusan Perimeter combined with MacArthur's simultaneous spectacular landing at Inchon, and several weeks later when the Chinese intervened, there existed possible ways to end the war. But ending it then, according to Professor Thornton, *"would not have generated a threat large enough to produce desired appropriations levels. There can be little doubt that a short war in which American forces were victorious would not have resulted in major defense budget appropriations."*¹¹⁹

In the starkly revealing three paragraphs below Professor Thornton has not only elaborated on this point, but provided an explanation of American policy that makes sense out of what earlier appeared to be mixed signals coming out of the Truman Administration about the defense of South Korea.

A brief conflict, quickly contained, would not, however, serve the larger strategy of global containment, which now required a sustained national commitment to build up American military power to contend with the multiple threats expected to emanate from the Sino-Soviet bloc.

The second response—the response decided upon—would be to ignore the North Korean buildup, acclaim South Korean defense capability, but decline any compensatory buildup in the South. In fact, Washington would wait until the Communists struck the first blow and then come to the defense of the Republic of Korea. In that case, during what would be a lengthy conflict because of the initial

advantages gained by the aggressor, the United States would mobilize the “free world” in justifiable defense against the Communist menace, giving firm structure to the Cold War. A long conflict against Communist aggression would be ample justification to fund the already planned rearmament called for in NSC-68.

. . . the United States proceeded to treat the [South Korean] Rhee government in a manner designed to leave South Korea vulnerable to invasion. American leaders knew war was brewing on the peninsula—if not because United States cryptographic and signals specialists had broken Communist codes and tracked military unit movements, then through unambiguous tactical indicators provided by the truly massive Soviet arms supply in the spring, which dramatically changed the relative balance of forces between North and South. Yet American leaders took no steps to strengthen the Republic of Korea against attack. Despite the rapidly escalating military capabilities of the North, which were evident in intelligence dispatches in 1950, before the war began Washington had supplied a grand total of military assistance to the ROK worth only [paltry millions of dollars], for signal wire.¹²⁰

If this monstrously immoral scenario is true—and it certainly appears plausible—Truman and Acheson sacrificed uncountable human lives, over 30,000 of them American, and billions of dollars, on the altar of their global rearmament and containment policy.¹²¹

By deliberately leaving South Korea defenseless in the face of a known massive buildup of North Korean infantry, artillery and armor power, the Truman/Acheson Realpolitik¹²² trumped both principle and morality. “[T]he *United States did not wish to deter an attack. Indeed, from its actions and inaction in 1950, Washington invited one.*”¹²³

To the everlasting shame of President Harry Truman, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and other apparatchik members of the administration in Washington who marched in lockstep to ignore North Korea’s evident intention to attack South Korea while denying the South even the rudiments of self-defense, the Korean War was a mere gambit in a worldwide chess game played against the Soviet Union by American politicians, diplomats and bureaucrats.

The pieces in that game were moved around the board not in Seoul or even Tokyo, but in Washington. *Douglas MacArthur, however, was not a player.* He had not been dealt any cards. There is no evidence that the General knew about the Truman/Acheson scheme, let alone that he had a seat at their table.

If MacArthur had been involved, it is near impossible to believe he would have allowed events to be played out as they were. He would not have allowed American troops to be staked out by Washington politicians as bait for rapacious North Korean, let alone Chinese Communist, armies.

Douglas MacArthur was the son of distinguished General Arthur MacArthur (also a recipient of the Medal of Honor); leader of his 1906 class at West Point; holder of every important executive position in the United States Army; multiple-decorated war-fighter in the Philippine Insurrection, Mexican Campaign, World War I and World War II; pro-consul who turned militaristic Imperial Japan into a working democracy; and patriotic man-at-arms who repeatedly counseled against United States involvement in an Asian land war.

It is simply not credible that Douglas MacArthur could knowingly have been complicit with Washington politicians, who arguably provoked United States involvement in the Korean War in order to obtain substantial rearmament appropriations from Congress in facilitation of the Truman-Acheson global anti-Communist containment strategy.

Getting to the truth of this matter of blame is important for at least two reasons. First, because General MacArthur's military reputation was unfairly and irremediably sullied by subtle implications that he knew, or should have known, of the North Korean invasion in advance. Second, and this is a crucially important point, because the reasons for MacArthur's lack of culpability for the North Korean invasion shed light on why he was not *personally* to blame for the Chinese intervention four months later.

That is not to say there is no blame to be found. There is blame, and it must lie *somewhere*, because beginning on June 25, 1950 an incalculably high price began to be paid by the non-communist world—in American, United Nations and South Korean lives, in United States treasure and prestige, and in the balance of power throughout Asia between Communism and the free world.

The exaction of that price began on Sunday, June 25, 1950, at 4:40 a.m. local time, when hordes of North Korean troops, supported by armor and artillery, swarmed across the 38th parallel into the virtually defenseless Republic of South Korea.¹²⁴

There are many theories about what the primary cause was for the invasion, an oft-cited one being Truman's lack of any capacity for grand strategy and thus his failure to bolster American foreign policy with military power. In turn, his failure was supposedly attributable to his myopic experience as an artillery commander in World War I, and his resulting belief that the Pentagon was trying to take advantage of him on budgetary matters.¹²⁵

A corollary for those who hold this view is that the United States should have had a much greater military presence in South Korea, and that administration statements invited the North to attack.¹²⁶

But while Blair and those who share his view of the invasion's disastrous causes are correct as far as their analyses go, they do not account for Professor Thornton thesis that Truman and Acheson wanted a semi-prolonged war, which would serve their wider global rearmament goals. Thus, Blair and the rest do not address the real reason the American government starved the South Korean military of training and equipment with which it could have better, if not necessarily successfully, defended its country.

And starve the South Koreans we did.

5. **REPUBLIC OF KOREA ARMY vs. NORTH KOREA PEOPLE'S ARMY**

To understand fully the consequences of the American policy machinations that bore fruit on June 25, 1950, it is necessary to know how outmanned and outgunned the South Koreans were on that day, and what had caused them to be defenseless.

On the eve of the North Korean invasion of the South, the Republic of Korea's armed forces consisted of about 100,000 Army troops, 6,000 sailors in the Coast Guard, 2,000 Air Force personnel, and nearly 50,000 national police.

As the North Korean invasion approached, South Korean infantry divisions along the 38th Parallel were armed mostly with American World War II weapons. "The South Korean armed forces had no tanks, no medium artillery, no 4.2 in. mortars, no recoilless rifles, and no fighter aircraft or bombers. The divisions engaged in fighting guerillas in the eastern and southern mountains had a miscellany of small arms, including many Japanese . . . World War II rifles."¹²⁷

Even worse, "[i]n June 1950 the ROK Army supply of artillery and mortar ammunition on hand was small and would be exhausted by a few days of combat. An estimated 15 percent of the weapons and 35 percent of the vehicles of the ROK Army were unserviceable. The six months' supply of spare parts originally provided by the United States was exhausted."¹²⁸

It has been said that the United States Government deliberately kept the South Korean military forces ill equipped because of fear that the Rhee regime might provoke North Korea or even attack it.

On the north side of the 38th Parallel, however, things were vastly different.

Beginning long before the Japanese surrender in 1945, North Korean Communists and their Soviet and Chinese patrons made plans for the entire Korean peninsula to fall under control of a Kim Il-sung dictatorship. To understand what they had in mind it is necessary first to consider the early days of the Communist revolution in China.

The North Korean People's Army¹²⁹ that would attack South Korea on June 25, 1950, had its origin in two groups that competed politically and militarily. One was the Yen'an Group, the other the Kapson Group.

The Yen'an Group consisted of Koreans who, beginning in 1939, were led by Mao Zedong, and fought with him in World War II against the Japanese and then against Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists in the Chinese civil war. About 2,500 of these Koreans had been conscripted into the Japanese army, deserted, and joined the Chinese Communists. Some of them were then formed into the Korean Volunteer Army (KVA).

The Kapsan Group was made up mostly of Soviet citizens of Korean ancestry and anti-Japanese Korean partisans who had emigrated from Korea to the Soviet Union. The most prominent leader of this group was Kim Il- Sung.

Kim had left Korea in his youth, resided in China for many years, and was trained in revolution and war in the Soviet Union. During the mid-1930s, Kim led Korean guerillas who fought the Japanese in the northern regions of Korea and in Manchuria. In 1939 Kim and his force were driven out of their operational area and fled to the USSR where he was recruited by Soviet intelligence and eventually given command of a battalion-strength formation consisting of Chinese, Koreans, and Soviets. Kim Il Sung's troops' mission was obtaining intelligence on the Japanese forces in Korea and Manchuria.

When in September 1945 the Soviets occupied Korea north of the 38th Parallel, Korean troops under Kim's command were returned to Korea by ship. There, in North Korea, he soon established a Communist regime.

Early the next year, the North Koreans began to create the nucleus of their army, calling it the "Peace Preservation Officers' Training Schools."¹³⁰

By late 1946, the Soviets were aggressively creating the NKPA and North Korean Communist internal security forces. Tables of organization were drawn up, officer training schools and centers were established, equipment was obtained. "With the establishment of these centers and schools, members of the Kapson . . . and KVA were systematically returned [to Korea], trained, equipped, and organized first into border and railroad constabularies and then into regular military units."¹³¹

The so-called "constabularies" were actually infantry units led by officers who were members of the Kapsan, and they were mostly Communists. But one way or another, the Soviets were in charge.

At the core of the NKPA were battle-hardened veterans from World War II and the Chinese Civil War who for years had fought the Japanese and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces.¹³²

By 1949, the Chinese Communists controlled most of the mainland, with, as we have seen, hardly a tear shed by the Truman Administration.

Early in 1950, Soviet and Communist Chinese officials met to consider an invasion of the South. As a result, the human and materiel buildup of the NKPA went into high gear. Tens of thousands of Korean fighters, battle-hardened veterans who had fought with the Chinese Communist Army against the Japanese and Nationalists were at Kim Il-Sung's request returned by Mao to Korea. There were between 50,000 and 70,000 of these troops (about one-third of the NKPA), and they would be the vanguard of Kim's attack on the South.¹³³

By then, thanks to their Soviet patrons, the North Koreans had excellent medium tanks, versus the South Koreans' none. The Communists had three different kinds of artillery, one of which had almost twice the range of South Korean howitzers, and the North outgunned the South in artillery pieces three to one.

The North Koreans had “a small tactical air force, the South Koreans had none.”¹³⁴ And there was another “important if not measurable difference between the two sides,” what Professor James characterized as “the vastly superior training of the North Korean combat forces.”¹³⁵ Let alone their years of combat experience, of which the South Korean army had virtually none.

The North Koreans—longstanding ideological, political, and military junior allies of their Soviet and Chinese Communist patrons—possessed all the requisites for ground combat: infantry, artillery, and armor. Professor Thornton writes: “. . . in the month and a half before the war began, it would be fair to conclude that the Soviet Union doubled the number of North Korean planes, tripled its infantry divisions, more than doubled and possibly even quadrupled the number of tanks, and massively increased the [NKPA's] artillery and mortar capabilities. What had been essentially a ‘defensive-type army,’ in Appleman's characterization, and, as late as mid-May had caused no undue alarm in the CIA, had suddenly been transformed into a massive strike force of overwhelming superiority by the end of June.”¹³⁶

It is gross understatement to say the North Koreans—even putting aside the aggressive ideology that drove them—were merely superior to the South's forces, and that the latter were woefully unprepared for the attack that would inevitably, and soon, come. The situation was far worse than that.

However, for those on the ground, like the MAC contingent in South Korea—which had no access to the high level intelligence which others were supposed to possess—the North Korean superiority “was not generally recognized . . . by [some] United States military authorities before the invasion. In fact, there was the general feeling, apparently shared by Brig. Gen. William L. Roberts on the eve of invasion, that *if attacked from North Korea the ROK Army would have no trouble in repelling the invaders.*”¹³⁷ In an absurd, utterly unsupported, down-home-sounding statement that would rightly haunt him later, Roberts continued to opine that the South Koreans had “the best doggoned shooting army outside the United States.”¹³⁸

Unlike the Yalu, Imjin, Han and Naktong, denial is not a river in Korea! Indeed, denial is often fatal—as it proved to be starting in the dark hours of June 25, 1950.¹³⁹

6. THE NORTH KOREAN INVASION

Although two years earlier Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley “had stated that ‘the Army of 1948 could not fight its way out of a paper bag’,”¹⁴⁰ still, American occupation forces from Japan were quickly thrust into the Hermit Kingdom to support the sitting ducks of the Republic of Korea Army, who had been attacked by at least ten divisions of the NKPA supported by tanks, artillery and some minor air assets.

The American forces had been drawn from four understrength and, as Cohen and Gooch characterized them, “peacetime-soft” occupation duty divisions.¹⁴¹ The first troops on the ground were from the 24th Infantry, and they faced a ruthless, well-equipped enemy.

Bazooka rounds bounced off Soviet T-34 tanks. Unaccustomed to the Korean heat and omnipresent stench, fatigue and disease took a toll. Within the first two weeks, the 24th Infantry Division lost nearly one-third of its initial strength. The division’s commanding officer, Major General William F. Dean, was taken prisoner fighting side by side with his men.

By August, the Americans and their ROK allies had been driven south from the 38th Parallel to the southeast tip of the peninsula at the under-defended Port of Pusan. Despite huge Communist losses in men and materiel, long and fragile supply lines, and dominant daytime American air power, the NKPA hit the defenders’ lines day and night, around the clock.

By early September [1950] the tide had turned. Reinforcements streamed in from the United States and Japan. American aircraft—including propeller-driven P-51 Mustangs left over from World War II—harried the enemy; the ROK forces reorganized, and the first foreign contingents began to arrive. Under the overall command of General Douglas MacArthur, who served as commander in chief, Far East Command (CINCFE) and commander in chief, United Nations Command (CINCUNC), UN forces ground down the NKPA. The Eighth Army, which consisted of all U.S., Allied, and ROK forces in the Pusan perimeter held the enemy in check, while a new force, X Corps, spearheaded by the First Marine Division, prepared to outflank the enemy.¹⁴²

MacArthur’s flanking maneuver, his legendary landing at Inchon on Korea’s west coast south of the 38th Parallel by X Corps, put some 70,000 troops behind North Korean lines. About a week later, General Walton Walker’s Eighth Army punched out of the Pusan perimeter, and in another week linked up with X Corps.

Cohn and Gooch again:

MacArthur, *with the consent of his superiors in Washington*, now planned to complete the destruction of Communist forces in Korea, to cross the 38th Parallel, which had once divided South and North Korea, and to reunify Korea under [South Korean] President Syngman Rhee. MacArthur's Washington superiors, like CINCUNC himself, paid little attention to warnings from the newly created People's Republic of China that it would not tolerate the movement of UN forces north to the Yalu [River border of China and North Korea]—indeed, past the 38th Parallel. * * * [I]n late September they and the secretary of defense instructed him: “We want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to *proceed north of the 38th Parallel*.¹⁴³

This needs to be emphasized: In their Washingtonian patois, *MacArthur's superiors told the General to cross the 38th Parallel*.

All well and good, but what was the plan? Colonel Rod Paschall has written that “[w]hen Washington finally ordered MacArthur north, his headquarters stitched together a hasty, complex, and logistically questionable plan in twenty-four hours. * * * By not allowing MacArthur an opportunity to prepare for the conquest of North Korea, the Truman administration forced hasty planning in September and early October to prepare for the coming winter. . . .”¹⁴⁴

Seoul, the South Korean capital, was retaken by United Nations troops in late September. *On October 7, 1950 MacArthur's forces crossed the 38th Parallel*.

Eighth Army was in the west. X Corps, having come up from Inchon, was landing on the east coast.

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur was a hero. Again. For now.

When the NKPA poured across the 38th Parallel less than four months before in the early morning hours of June 25, 1950 General Douglas MacArthur had been proconsul in Japan for nearly five years, an enormously powerful presence who had his hands full there, with Korea a mere sideshow until the invasion.

Clay Blair, no friend of the General, noted that MacArthur had little interest in what was happening politically and militarily in China and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. According to Blair, the general who was attempting to turn vanquished Imperial Japan—with its centuries of Emperor worship, ancestor veneration and ancient bushido and samurai codes—into a Western-type democracy, had little time to leave Tokyo, as if that in some way implicated him in the North Korean invasion of South Korea or the later Chinese intervention.

What MacArthur could have done about the Chinese civil war or incipient Communist-dominated guerilla activities in Vietnam, Blair did not inform his readers.

Blair's second implicit charge was even more important. He recognized that because MacArthur was burdened with pressing postwar problems in occupied Japan, he had little time for Korea. But Blair neglected to add that the general “had little time for

Korea” not because of disinterest, but *because he had been explicitly removed from the loop by his military and civilian superiors in Washington*. So much so that, according to Colonel Paschall, because MacArthur had no instructions from Washington to defend South Korea against a North Korean attack, his staff had made no plans for such a contingency.

Thus, when the North Koreans invaded the South on June 25, 1950, before MacArthur could get back in the game he had to first be invited to sit at the table.

Events on the ground caused the invitation to come quickly.

Because of time differences, it was just before 9:30 in the evening that “the official news of the beginning of the Korean War reached Washington. The State Department received a telegram from Ambassador Muccio, declaring that North Korea had launched an ‘all-out offensive’.”¹⁴⁵

I will continue with the quotation from Professor James in a moment, but first it's necessary to emphasize once again just how out of the Korea loop General MacArthur's headquarters was.

North Korea had attacked South Korea in the early morning hours. *Because Far East Command had no responsibility for Korea the American embassy in South Korea, a State Department installation, did not even report the North Korean attack initially to Tokyo*. MacArthur's Far East Command headquarters merely received a “for your information” copy of the embassy's emergency message to the Pentagon. And that, not until several hours later. *An afterthought by the civilian bureaucrats*: “From embassy to Pentagon, cc to MacArthur: North Korea has attacked South Korea, in your command.”

The war was on, and although MacArthur's conscience and hands were clean concerning what had started the hostilities, there were many others who had played prominent roles in the events of June 25, 1950.

Ten years earlier, in the Cairo Declaration of December 1943, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek had stated that “in due course” Korea was to become “free and independent.” The implication, of course, was that Korea would be unified, not divided. Since at that time the Japanese still controlled Korea, as they had since 1905, the word “free” had to mean that Korea would be a democracy, not ruled by Communists or other totalitarians. But, as the Koreans would learn, “in due course” has no meaning, and implications are not express covenants.

In the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945, the promise of a “free and independent” Korea was reaffirmed by Truman, Churchill, and Stalin. At least two of the conferees contemplated a unified democracy, although they should have realized (and probably did) that the third member, Stalin, had other ideas. As we have seen, Korea was a sideshow for Truman and Churchill.

The Soviet Union's August 8, 1945 declaration of war against Japan contained a commitment for Korean independence, though under whose flag was again left

ambiguously unsaid. Again, Stalin had his fingers crossed behind his back.

Thus, questions arise. Did Roosevelt, Churchill, Chiang and then Truman, mistakenly pledge a free, independent, and united Korea? Were their tactics misguided in somehow not preventing Stalin from joining the war against Japan only at the last minute, and in not stopping the Soviet dictator from occupying Manchuria? Were Pentagon and State Department officials incompetent in not understanding Czarist Russia's, and later Stalin's, desperately felt need for buffer states to protect their borders? Were American planners naive in not realizing the game-changing potential of Mao's insurrection in China?

Or did the realities trump whatever choices America and our allies may have had?

The conferees at Cairo, Yalta and Potsdam had little or no choice about what they resolved about post-war Korea. The war would be over, the Japanese occupation would be finished, and an elephant in the room would be the Korean peninsula with its long border contiguous to China and shorter one with the USSR. Certainly, Korea should be unified, free, and independent. At least in principle. But what about in the real world?

As to Soviet troops occupying Manchuria, there was nothing to be done. The Red Army was already there. Indeed, it was already in Korea when the Japanese surrendered.

What if the Americans (and Nationalist Chinese) had not agreed to the 38th Parallel line of demarcation? The Soviets could have occupied the entire peninsula, and there was nothing the United States or anyone else could have done about it.

Who was incompetent, and about what?

These were the fortunes of war—the military, political and topographical realities at that time. Wishing would not have changed anything, except for the worst. The military and political problems could not have been solved in any other way.

No one individual was to blame. Certainly not MacArthur.

The failures were purely organizational and derived from imperatives of policy, strategy, and tactics—and, above all, the dictates of the real world.

And these mostly military misfortunes were only the beginning, because in 1945 South Korea was an orphan nation largely ignored by the American government from top to bottom, from Washington to Tokyo. This indifference revealed a systemic organizational failure.

Unfortunately, as I have described earlier, that failure persisted.

Recall what Chapter 4 reveals:

- Stalin's interest in keeping Mao from a rapprochement with the Americans, while

- appearing to support Chinese liberation of Formosa.
- Kim's plan to unify Korea under a Communist dictatorship.
- Mao's possible openness to rapprochement with the United States, but his more important design on Formosa.
- Truman and Acheson's scheme to use a war in Korea to force Congress into funding a worldwide containment of the Soviet Union.

Considering this cast of players and their complicated maneuvers affecting countless others, it is impossible to say that any single one of them, or even a combination, was to blame for the North Korean attack on the South. Three of them controlled some of the most dangerous countries in the world through institutions—Communist parties, military organizations—which had agendas of their own.

I have devoted the foregoing pages to the North Korean invasion of South Korea to make two points relevant to the Chinese intervention discussed in the following chapters.

First, by no stretch of the fertile imaginations of Douglas MacArthur's worst detractors can he be held blameworthy for the NKPA attack on June 25, 1950. No matter where blame can or should be placed for the North Korean invasion of South Korea, none of it could legitimately be laid at the doorstep of Douglas MacArthur.¹⁴⁶

Second, the military misfortune that befell South Korea beginning on June 25, 1950, did not have its genesis on that day. It began at least as far back as the final days of World War II and was caused not only by legitimate mistakes (e.g. post-war demobilization), but by Machiavellian schemes concocted and executed by many others. The decades of failures—beginning at least at the end of World War II and continuing to the early morning of June 25, 1950—were institutional in every sense of that word and fit perfectly into the Cohen-Gooch template.

As does the Chinese intervention.

PART II

THE CHINESE INTERVENTION

The dean of Korean War historians was the late Lt. Col. Roy E. Appleman, Army of the United States (Ret.), author of *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu; Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur; Escaping the Trap: The U.S. Army X Corps in Northeast Korea, 1950*; and *East of Chosin: Entrapment and Breakout in Korea, 1950*.

In his Preface to *Disaster in Korea*, Lt. Col. Appleman has written that his book “is a story of a sophisticated modern army being overwhelmed by a Chinese army group of light infantry that carried small arms and grenades and that emerged from its mountain hideouts to strike at night with stunning speed against a surprised American and United Nations army. * * * The Chinese onslaught in late November and early December [1950] in the hills south of the Yalu was not that of an ignorant command system. . . . It was characterized by surprise and frontal attack to hold an enemy while other formations attacked one or both flanks and still other parts executed forced marches to reach the rear of the enemy and cut off his retreat.”¹⁴⁷

In concluding his Preface, Appleman notes that “[t]he period of time covered in this volume is from 24 November to 26 December 1950. In that short time the CCF [Chinese Communist Forces] had not only defeated but routed the UN forces under General Walker in the west of North Korea to such an extent that the evacuation of Pyongyang and the frantic retreat south toward the Han River and Seoul, below the 38th Parallel, often seemed a ‘bug out.’ This volume recounts one of the worst defeats an American Army has ever suffered. *It also reveals astonishing military-command failures that are possibly unique in our history.*”¹⁴⁸

Lt. General Matthew B. Ridgway assumed command of Eighth Army and associated United Nations forces on December 26, 1950. “By that time the Chinese had moved south from the Pyongyang area and had established contact with the new Eighth Army defense line just north of Seoul and the Han River [in the vicinity of the 38th Parallel]. Reorganized North Korean divisions had also moved south from the [Yalu River] border to form an assault line east of the North Koreans who had remained in the mountains of central Korea. Together they were ready to launch a major attack across the breadth of Korea. . . . * * * The Chinese and North Korean attack, beginning on New Year’s Eve 1950, mark[ed] the beginning of a new phase of the war.”¹⁴⁹

Let us examine what brought the United Nations forces to that rendezvous.

7.
MacARTHUR'S RUBICON: THE 38TH PARALLEL

The Rubicon is a muddy, red-colored river in northern Italy. It has given its name to the expression “crossing the Rubicon,” which means the passing of a point of no return.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “point of no return” originated in popular usage as referring to the time when an airplane cannot return to the field it took off from because of a diminished fuel level. In current usage, the phrase is more widely used to mean that, for whatever reason, one must go forward rather than return to the place of beginning.¹⁵⁰

Julius Caesar and his legions literally crossed the Rubicon, where he is supposed to have uttered the now famous phrase *alea iacta est*, “the die is cast.”

Just as the die was similarly cast when General of the Army Douglas MacArthur and his United Nations army crossed *his* Rubicon, the 38th Parallel.

* * *

Inchon is on the west coast of South Korea, southwest of Seoul. Its tides and mud flats make an amphibious landing extremely problematic, to say the least.

Osan is south of Inchon, but not on the coast.

Pusan is at the southeastern tip of the Korean peninsula.

On August 16, 1950, the Chinese Communist weekly journal, *World Culture*, a publication emanating from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, contended that American participation in the Korean War “was a threat to Chinese security and that the problem of Korea could not be settled without the participation of its closest neighbor, China. More ominously, the article had stated: ‘. . . North Korea’s enemy is our enemy. North Korea’s defense is our defense. North Korea’s victory is our victory. A few days later, [Chinese premier Chou En-lai, whose name is now spelled Zhou Enlai] sent a telegram to the UN with essentially that same message.’”¹⁵¹

Within the week, Chou sent another telegram to the UN, characterizing “U.S. support of Chiang [Kai-shek’s Nationalists on Formosa] a criminal act of armed aggression and vowed to liberate all Oriental territory from the tentacles of the U.S. aggressors.”¹⁵²

Mid-September 1950 found American, South Korean and UN troops—who had been pushed back from the 38th Parallel beginning with the North Korean invasion in June—

barely holding an undermanned east-west, north-south perimeter at Pusan on the southeast tip of Korea, with their backs to the Korea Strait.

Far East Command G-2 reported on September 9-10 that massive numbers of Chinese Communist troops were moving within China into Manchuria, not into North Korea. But because the intelligence had come from Chiang Kai-shek's Ministry of Defense, the Americans viewed it with skepticism.

On September 15, in a bold action only MacArthur and few others had confidence in, he threw the X Corp Marines and Army Seventh Infantry Division, with supporting units and ROK Marines, against the mud-flats and dangerous tides seaport of Inchon. Some 70,000 troops broke through light North Korean resistance, moved east, and planted themselves deep in the enemy's rear.¹⁵³

A day or two later, Eighth Army fought its way out of the Pusan Perimeter.

On September 20, K.M. Panikkar, Indian ambassador to Peking reported that in a conversation with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai he "displayed no interest [in Korea] beyond [an] expression of sympathy." * * * Panikkar felt that China by herself would not interfere. He also reported his additional belief, based on firsthand observations, that, on balance, 'there is no evidence of military preparations in Manchuria'.¹⁵⁴

However, Roe writes that "[b]y 21 September, there were believed to be 244,000 regular CCF [Chinese Communist Forces] ground troops in Manchuria. * * * It was considered possible that there were an additional eight armies with twenty-four divisions, potentially 396,000 troops."¹⁵⁵

"On 22 September, a [Chinese Communist] Foreign Ministry spokesman answered MacArthur's earlier complaints that the Chinese had returned ethnic Korean members of the [People's Liberation Army] to North Korea to augment the NKPA. The spokesman admitted the charge and claimed that China would always stand by the side of the Korean people."¹⁵⁶

Chou then militantly extended the substance of his telegram in the Chinese publication *Renmin Ribao*: "The flames of war being extended by the United States are burning more fiercely. [If the UN went along with the United States, the organization] would not escape a share in the responsibility for lighting up the war-flames in the Far East."¹⁵⁷

On September 23, a supposedly reliable source reported to the United States consul general in Hong Kong that Chou had recently said "the Chinese would not get involved in the Korean War or fight outside China unless attacked."¹⁵⁸

By September 24, according to an unverified report from the Chinese Nationalists, some Chinese Communist Forces had left Manchuria, crossed the Yalu River, and entered North Korea. On that day, Chou sent another telegram to the UN complaining of U.S. bombing of Chinese territory

On or about September 25, a leading People's Liberation Army commander said that China would not intervene in Korea. Yet on September 25, the PLA's acting chief of staff told Panikkar "that the Chinese did not intend to sit back with folded hands and let the Americans come up to the border" because "American aggression has to be stopped."¹⁵⁹

On September 27, X Corps from Inchon and Eighth Army from Pusan linked up at Osan, virtually cutting South Korea in half geographically. To visualize this, imagine a horizontal line in Florida running from Sarasota in the west to Palm Beach in the east. Most of the North Korean army was trapped between that horizontal line and the Florida Keys in the south.

A slight digression is necessary here. In his book *Escaping the Trap, The US Army X Corps in Northeast Korea, 1950*¹⁶⁰ Lt. Col. Appleman posited one of the most crucial questions that can be asked about the Korean War: "*Why was the X Corps not joined to Eighth Army after the successful Inchon landing and the capture of Seoul in September 1950 and the simultaneous breakout of Eighth Army from the Naktong [Pusan] perimeter?*"¹⁶¹ We will soon learn the answer.

On September 27, advance elements of each force met at Osan. Although by month's end Eighth Army had reached Seoul, about 22 miles north of Osan, much of X Corp never left the area of Uijongbu, some 12 miles north of Seoul.

General Walker wanted X Corps to be integrated into an Eighth Army unified command, but on September 27 he was informed by MacArthur that the General had other plans for X Corps. The entire Corps would be sealifted from Inchon on the west coast of Korea to Wonsan on the east coast, even though the men and equipment could more speedily be moved overland (especially since the Wonsan harbor had been heavily mined by the North Koreans, and clearing it would be a time-consuming task).¹⁶²

MacArthur has been excoriated for this tactic, but before readers jump to the conclusion that his move of X Corps was a mistake, consider the rationale that Appleman provides: "General MacArthur apparently contemplated an extensive operation in northeast Korea to reach the [Yalu River] border at all places, and he felt that the force operating there could be supplied better from the east coast ports of Wonsan and [further south] Hungnam than to have all of Eighth Army and the X Corps supplied from [the southernmost port of] Pusan and Inchon [on the west coast]. As one moved northward in the Korean peninsula, the Northern Taebeak Range grew ever higher, and roads across were fewer and poorer in quality. Ground contact between Eighth Army and X Corps in the northern extremities of Korea near the border would be extremely difficult, *if not impossible*. This factor made it seem likely that the forces operating on the west and east sides of the Northern Taebeaks *would have to operate as separate forces*."¹⁶³

By the end of September, Seoul had been retaken by Eighth Army.

What now?

Alea iacta est.

Indeed, the die *was* cast. Recall what I wrote in Chapter 6:

MacArthur, *with the consent of his superiors in Washington*, now planned to complete the destruction of Communist forces in Korea, *to cross the 38th Parallel*, which had once divided South and North Korea, and to reunify Korea under [South Korean] President Syngman Rhee [from Pusan in the south to the Yalu River in the north].

MacArthur's Washington superiors, like CINCUNC [the General] himself, paid little attention to *warnings from the newly created People's Republic of China* that it would not tolerate the movement of UN forces north to the Yalu [border of China and North Korea]—indeed, past the 38th Parallel.

* * * [I]n late September they and the secretary of defense instructed him: “We want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to *proceed north of the 38th Parallel*.”¹⁶⁴

What were the warnings from the People's Republic of China, and from whom did they come?¹⁶⁵

On September 28, based on the evidence the British possessed, they saw Chinese intervention as unlikely though the former were aware the Communists were escalating their propaganda campaign against the United States.

Information from a Dutch source, forwarded to Washington on September 29, reported that the Chinese were considering intervention. The information was discounted, Washington believing that it was too late for the Chinese to intervene, and that they were bluffing.

On September 30 or October 1, Chou-En-lai “issued his strongest public warning . . . of Red China's possible belligerency, asserting that his people ‘will not tolerate foreign aggression, nor will they supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by the imperialists’.”¹⁶⁶

On the very day of Chou's speech, elements of the ROK Army crossed the 38th Parallel. Note that the penetration into North Korea was made by ROK troops, not those of the United Nations—*much less by American ground forces*. Note also that Washington had told MacArthur that “[w]e want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to *proceed north of the 38th Parallel*.”

History was about to repeat itself.

Recall that prior to the *North Korean* invasion only three months earlier there had been warnings of an imminent attack. Unfortunately, there were also “anti-warnings”: either outright dismissal of the warnings, or adoption of a “who knows?” attitude. That was what was about to happen regarding warnings of Chinese intervention; They were balanced

with anti-warnings and created an Alice in Wonderland situation where no one in the West really knew what the Chinese intended. Indeed, the Chinese themselves may not have known for certain at that time. Or, more likely, they were engaged in a massive disinformation campaign, with Chou making not-so-veiled threats to intervene and others claiming that there would be no intervention.

Three days after Chou En-lai's explicit warning, in the middle of the night on October 3 he informed Indian ambassador Panikkar "that in crossing the 38th Parallel, 'the South Koreans did not matter, but American intrusion into North Korea would encounter Chinese resistance'."¹⁶⁷

This statement was a reiteration of Chou's September 30 warning, and while slightly (and doubtless deliberately) ambiguous, it was clear enough considering the overall context in which it was made. How was Chou's statement received?

"When the warning was passed on by the Indian government to Washington, American officials dismissed it, some not trusting Panikkar's reports and others figuring Peking was either bluffing or trying to influence opinion in the UN about the war. Panikkar's message was duly forwarded to MacArthur, as had been sundry previous reports regarding possible actions by Red China"¹⁶⁸

As to the credibility of Panikkar's report, Patrick C. Roe has written that ". . . opinion within the State Department *again* was mixed. At a morning meeting with the deputy secretary, the majority, nervous at the report, seemed to regard it as *more bluff*, pending further information. The majority in the Far East Department were *not so sure*. [Dean] Acheson [Secretary of State of the United States] *said the warning was not to be disregarded but was ' . . . not an authoritative statement of policy.*' Deputy Secretary James E. Webb thought the statement was indirect and obscure."¹⁶⁹

In the Daily Intelligence Summary of October 4, with the NKPA in tatters and facing destruction Far East Command G-2 Willoughby noted that the North Koreans have "a potential for reinforcement by the CCF."

And so, the seesaw went up and down, warnings and anti-warnings. For example, while the intervention threat from the Chinese to Panikkar was passed on to Washington and discussed thoroughly, in the end the Communists' warning was not taken seriously. The ambassador was, if not pro-Communist, at least anti-American and seen to be not a neutral observer just passing messages as a courtesy. There were contradictions with his earlier statements. Warning of intervention seemed odd. And on and on: It was too late for intervention. The Chinese were bluffing, blackmailing, dissuading Americans from crossing the 38th Parallel and the United Nations from issuing a Resolution that MacArthur could cross, let alone that he could go all the way to the Yalu River.¹⁷⁰

The Burmese ambassador to Beijing took Chou seriously, especially because the city seemed to be preparing for war and there were already reports of some half-million Chinese troops massing on the North Korean border. Yet the ambassador's own foreign minister believed that the former was exaggerating the possibility of intervention.

The Daily Intelligence Summary for 9 October included a report that a high-ranking CCF officer had claimed 90,000 Communist troops would intervene if American troops crossed the thirty-eighth parallel.¹⁷¹ In hindsight, it could surely appear that the Chinese were engaged in a carefully thought out campaign of disinformation.

Backed by an October 7 United Nations resolution to unify Korea by force—in effect, to invade North Korea—President Truman authorized pursuit of the fleeing NKPA. There was only one direction the pursuers could go: north.

Note that in late September Washington had given MacArthur his marching orders, and now so too had the United Nations—and Truman, again.

On or about October 8, and lasting for about a week, the Chinese began their clandestine move from Manchuria across the Yalu River into North Korea.

To chase the NKPA north, on the fateful day of October 9, 1950 *American troops of the Eighth United States Army crossed the 38th parallel near the town of Kaesong*. The Army's I Corps was the first to attack in force across the Imjin River.¹⁷²

On October 10, a heightened propaganda campaign began. Radio Beijing broadcast a bombastic parroting of Chou's recent cryptic statements delivered by a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman. Few from Seoul from Washington saw, or allowed themselves to see, the all-too-evident handwriting on the wall.

Because United Nations forces (i.e. American) had crossed the 38th Parallel, there was a crucially important question hanging fire: *What were MacArthur's orders if he met the Chinese in North Korea?* Here is what the Joint Chiefs of Staff told its commander:

Hereafter in the event of open or covert employment *anywhere in Korea* [i.e. north of the 38th Parallel] of *major* Chinese Communist units . . . [MacArthur] should continue the action as long as, *in your judgment*, action by forces now under your control offers a *reasonable* chance of success. In any case you will obtain authorization from Washington prior to taking any military action against objectives *in Chinese territory*.¹⁷³

Apart from being told not to enter China itself—i.e. *north* of the Yalu River's North Korea-China boundary, and probably the Chinese half of the bridges spanning the river—how clear were MacArthur's orders? In telling the general that *he* would have to assess what constituted “major” units and what was a “reasonable” chance of success, *the JCS was passing the buck to MacArthur* and providing an escape hatch for Washington if anything went wrong. A lawyer's dream, depending what side one was on.

President Truman, realizing there was a threat from the Chinese but that no one had yet quantified the danger sufficiently to allow for intelligent policy-making, asked the CIA to make an assessment. The agency's October 12 report could only have added to the confusion about the inscrutable Chinese intentions.

The CIA report noted that although the Chinese Communists lacked “requisite [defined as “necessary”] air and naval support,” still, they “were capable of intervening effectively” [defined as “in a way that produces a desired result”], but “not necessarily decisively” [defined as “settling or ending something”]. So, according to the CIA, the Red Chinese didn’t have what was necessary, but they could still achieve what they wanted, but what they got would not settle or end anything.¹⁷⁴ Orwellian double-speak, amidst a war.

There was more from the CIA. “Despite statements by Chou-En-lai [see above], troop movements [from China in]to Manchuria [massive, and apparently known to the CIA] and propaganda charges of atrocities and border violations [apparently monitored by the CIA], there are no convincing [defined as “persuasive”] indications of an actual [defined as “existing as fact”] Chinese Communist intention to resort to full-scale [defined as “total”] intervention [defined as “involvement”] in Korea.”¹⁷⁵

Translation: Despite Chou’s repeated oral, written and telegraphic warnings; hundreds of thousands of Chinese Communist troops moving within China to an area in Manchuria contiguous to North Korea; a barrage of inflammatory Chinese propaganda; and claims by that nation that its sovereignty had been violated; the Central Intelligence Agency was not persuaded that the Chinese Communist really had the objective of mounting an “all-in” intervention.

But it didn’t matter because the CIA report noted in anticlimax that “the most favorable time for Chinese intervention in Korea had passed—a conclusion that partially mooted everything else the spy agency had reported.”¹⁷⁶

When the dust settled on all the warnings and anti-warnings, Harry Truman, the Department of State, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council all signed on to the conclusions of the CIA report—such as they were.¹⁷⁷

On October 15, 1950—on Wake Island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean—for the second time that day President Truman asked General MacArthur “What are the chances for Chinese . . . interference [in the Korean War]?”¹⁷⁸

According to notes taken at the meeting by General Omar Bradley, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, MacArthur is supposed to have responded:

Very little [chance]. Had they interfered in the first or second months [late June to late August, 1950] it would have been decisive. We are no longer fearful of their intervention. We no longer stand hat in hand. The Chinese have 300,000 men in Manchuria [across the Yalu River from North Korea]. Of these probably not more than 100/125,000 are distributed along the Yalu River. Only 50/60,000 could be gotten across the Yalu River. They have no air force. Now that we have bases for our Air Force in Korea, *if* the Chinese tried to get down to Pyongyang [North Korea’s capital, then in UN hands] *there would be the greatest slaughter.*¹⁷⁹

MacArthur, on the other hand, described his response to the president differently:

My views were asked as to the chance of Red China's intervention. I replied that *the answer could only be speculative; that neither the State Department through its diplomatic listening posts abroad, nor the Central Intelligence Agency to whom a field commander must look for guidance as to a foreign nation's intention to move from peace to war, reported any evidence of intent by the Peiping government to intervene with major forces; that my own local intelligence, which I regarded as unsurpassed anywhere, reported heavy concentrations near the Yalu border in Manchuria whose movements were indeterminate; that my own military estimate that with our largely unopposed air forces, with their potential capable of destroying, at will, bases of attack and lines of supply north as well as south of the Yalu, no Chinese military commander would hazard the commitment of large forces upon the devastated Korean peninsula. The risk of their utter destruction through lack of supply would be too great. There was no disagreement from anyone. This episode was later completely misrepresented to the public through an alleged but spurious report in an effort to pervert the position taken by me. It was an ingeniously fostered implication that I flatly and unequivocally predicted that under no circumstances would the Chinese Communists enter the Korean War. This is prevarication.*¹⁸⁰

Blair noted that “when MacArthur returned to Tokyo from Wake Island, he had no inkling of the CCF armies gathering in North Korea.”¹⁸¹ (*Why* he did not, Blair did not inform his readers.)

This is consistent with what MacArthur could not have told Truman, because the general did not know: That the Chinese were already in North Korea. Even Blair, no fan of MacArthur, acknowledged that at the time of the Wake Island meeting the General did not know substantial numbers of Chinese had clandestinely infiltrated from Manchuria across the Yalu into North Korea. We shall soon see who did know, or should have known.

Although after the Wake Island meeting allegations were made that Bradley's notes were not fully accurate, Professor James has written that “[n]ot much is known about what Truman and MacArthur discussed before the general session [which included their aides]. While they were talking on the back seat of the small Chevrolet en route to the Quonset [hut], the Secret Service agent who was on the front seat beside the driver remembered that Truman asked about the probability of Peking's intervention in the Korean conflict. MacArthur replied that his intelligence did not indicate the Red Chinese would enter the war, but if they did his UNC [United Nations Command] could handle them. Truman said that at the Quonset the general ‘assured’ him that ‘the victory was won in Korea’ and reasserted that ‘there was little possibility of the Chinese Communists coming in.’”¹⁸²

More about Professor James's view of the Bradley notes later.

Thus, did MacArthur offer his commander-in-chief three reasons not to be concerned about the Chinese:

- (1) The General had no intelligence indicating they would intervene;
- (2) But if they did, only about twenty-percent of their total strength would be able to cross the Yalu River, and;
- (3) However, many Chinese troops entered North Korea, they would be decimated by unopposed UN (i.e. American) air power.

Was General MacArthur wrong on all three counts? If so, who is to blame? We will soon find out.

Military historian S.L.A. Marshall has noted that “[t]hat there is invariably a lag in intelligence flow between the frontal unit where the thing happens and the higher headquarters where it is evaluated. ROK II Corps at first reported possession of two Chinese prisoners, then later added to the number. Summary interviews conducted on the spot revealed mainly that the captives belonged to small provisional units of Chinese which had entered Korea as ‘volunteers’ after being dragooned from their regular formations. These morsels of information— hardly significant in themselves—were about all that had reached topside when two days later General MacArthur flew to Wake Island to tell President Truman that Chinese intervention was not a plausible or potent threat in the war.”¹⁸³

There are two related questions here. One is whether MacArthur at Wake Island knew the Chinese order of battle in Manchuria, what their political and military intentions were, and what they would do if they intervened. *The answer is unequivocally that he did not.* Apparently, despite the Monday morning quarterbacks, *no one knew.* The other question is whether MacArthur should have known and, if he did not, why he did not.

The answer to this second question is equally plain. MacArthur should have known.

We’ll learn in a little while why it was among the worst failures of Twentieth Century military intelligence that MacArthur had no information that the Chinese were massing in Manchuria, would intervene in strength, and fight a war that they were suited for but we, the UN, and the South Koreans were not.

Indeed, while Truman and MacArthur were meeting at Wake Island, on “October 15, 1950, major elements of Lin Pao’s Fourth Field Army were crossing the Yalu River into North Korea. The Chinese moved mostly by night, on foot, and were not detected.”¹⁸⁴

On October 19, United Nations forces took the North Korean capital of Pyongyang.

As far as Chinese Communist intervention was concerned, the fat was now in the fire. MacArthur’s armies had not only crossed the 38th parallel and seized the North Korean capital, but MacArthur’s United Nations forces were on the move north to the Yalu River, just south of sovereign Chinese territory in Manchuria.

Much of the discussion so far has been about the September-October 1950 warnings of Chinese intervention. There was, however, a more fundamental “warning” well known to historians, though apparently not to the Truman Administration. As Roe has noted, “[h]istorically, Korea was within the Chinese sphere of influence. From medieval times until 1905, when it was occupied by the Japanese, Korea had been a buffer and satellite state of China. The Chinese had a keen appreciation of Korea’s value as an avenue of approach [by its enemies].”¹⁸⁵

Indeed, it is difficult to fathom why American officials, historians, and scholars failed to understand what the Chinese must have been thinking. After all, there were many individuals in the United States who know a lot about China: the China section in the Department of State, old “China hands” throughout the government and in retirement, institutes and foundations specializing in China, academic historians, and many others who had forgotten more about the history and culture of China than Truman, Acheson, Marshall and the Joint Chiefs of Staff together.

Anyone who could read a map should have recognized that an American military outpost at the Yalu River could easily reach Chinese industrial facilities in Manchuria, let alone deprive China of a geographical buffer zone. Anyone who knew anything about the Mao regime—even if it was merely a bunch of “agrarian reformers,” as the worldwide left painted the Communist regime—should have understood such a state of affairs would be intolerable to the Communists.¹⁸⁶

Even so, among the Chinese Politburo and senior People’s Liberation Army (PLA) members, but not including Chou En-lai, there were cautious dissenters. Civil War losses had to be regained, debts incurred to finance it had to be rescheduled or forgiven, landholdings had to be broken up and redistributed, Nationalist forces were still active on the mainland, the Communists were reaching into French Indochina. The Chinese Army had only manpower, not artillery, armor, or air assets—and the Soviets could not be relied on. Resupply for infantry units was a colossal problem. Other countries had to be seduced or threatened into recognizing the new Communist regime. There was the American atomic bomb to worry about.¹⁸⁷ War with the United States would not be a walk in the park.

These were just some of the considerations and dangers for the new mainland Communist government. On the other hand, there was great gain potential for the Mao regime in going to war with the world’s only superpower.

Conflict with America . . . was an excuse to carry out an aggressive campaign against domestic dissidents, to eliminate opponents and solidify total internal control. It was a chance to mobilize the masses, to demand extraordinary effort to resist foreign imperialism. * * * On the regional scene, it offered the chance to demonstrate Chinese leadership to the people of Asia, to show that China was not afraid to stand up to the most powerful member of the Western imperialist bloc.¹⁸⁸

But if the Chinese were to intervene, that would happen later. In the meantime, the North Koreans needed help. Accordingly, as the United Nations forces were readying to leave Seoul and strike out for the Yalu, Kim asked Mao for assistance. Earlier, on October 2 Mao had met with the Chinese Politburo and announced he would send troops. The only open questions were when, and who would command the CCF in Korea.¹⁸⁹

It is not known with certainty whether, or in how much detail, at that meeting or later the Chinese Politburo considered the consequences, intended and unintended, of MacArthur crossing the 38th Parallel, let alone what the Communists would do if United Nations troops continued northward to the Yalu River, let alone if they reached it. In Washington, *that* MacArthur would cross the 38th Parallel was never in doubt; he had orders to do that. But how far he would be allowed to advance, was still unclear.

On October 24, MacArthur changed his own orders: United Nations forces were to head for the Yalu. For the North Korean boundary with Communist China.

Then occurred the first shock warning. At Unsan on the night of 26 October one squadron of the 8th Cavalry Regiment entered into a fully prepared enemy [Chinese] ambush, got cut off, and lost a great part of its strength [i.e. its men and equipment]. Its parent, 1st Cavalry division, was on a rescue mission at the time. Two days earlier one of 6th ROK Division's columns had been hit and broken in a fight east of Unsan. Already north of the Chongchon [River], the cavalry division was rushed along to stiffen the ROKs. These developments signaled more than a brief flare-up of organized resistance after weeks of desultory skirmishing. Both traps had been sprung by Chinese troops in superior strength.¹⁹⁰

On October 25-26, ROK elements reached the Yalu River in the east.

At the same time, in the Eighth Army west sector the first CCF prisoner of the Korean War was taken. By midday on the 25th, there were three more. Still, the Eighth Army G-2 on the ground (not MacArthur's G-2 in Tokyo) could see no overt Chinese intervention.

On October 28, the ROKs captured two more Chinese prisoners.

By October 29, advance elements of Eighth Army in northwest Korea were not far from the Yalu River. One regiment was blocked from moving forward by NKPA troops, supported by tanks and self-propelled guns. Eighty-nine enemy prisoners were taken, *two of whom were Chinese*. "We had interrogators who were part Chinese, who spoke Chinese. There was absolutely no question that these prisoners were Chinese. After we had questioned them, we sent them to the rear—back to the division G-2 people for further interrogation. *But nobody back at division, or higher echelons, believed they were Chinese.*"¹⁹¹

At about the same time, on Eighth Army's right flank a single ROK division stumbled into a three-division 30,000-man army, but managed to take some

prisoners. *Among them were Chinese soldiers.* This was two weeks after the MacArthur-Truman meeting at Wake Island. It should be emphasized that above the disbelieving division G-2, the three ascending higher commands were corps, army and, at the top of the totem pole, Far East Command (theater) in Tokyo, with G-2 intelligence officers at all three levels.

Further east, ROK troops in General Almond's X Corps sector, hell-bent on their way to the Chosin Reservoir and then the Yalu River, encountered Chinese troops. Again, the ROKs took prisoners, *sixteen of whom were Chinese.* The POWs admitted they were from the 124th Division with another division in the vicinity. X Corps commander Ned Almond promptly notified MacArthur that "fully organized [strength unknown] *CCF units were present in northeast Korea. . . .*"¹⁹²

Fine. But at that time no one from General MacArthur himself in Tokyo down to a squad leader in one of Almond's line platoons knew how many CCF were in Manchuria, let alone in North Korea, what the Chinese intentions were, or when, where, and how they would be implemented.

8.
EIGHTH ARMY, X CORPS, AND THE
CHINESE “FIRST PHASE” OFFENSIVE¹⁹³

To begin focusing on upon whom blame should lie for not knowing what the Chinese were up to in Manchuria, not understanding the immediate consequences of their intervention and early aftermath, and not realizing the kind of war the Communists were fighting, we must begin with the final days of October 1950.

Toward the end of October 1950 many American officers on the frontline knew they were facing Chinese troops in the far reaches of North Korea. Even the gung-ho X Corps commander Ned Almond would inform MacArthur of that indisputable fact on October 30. “Yet rear-area intelligence analysts [on the ground] continued to doubt the evidence.”¹⁹⁴

Preeminent among those unnamed “rear-area intelligence analysts” was MacArthur’s G-2, Charles Willoughby. Whatever other vested interests Willoughby and the rest of MacArthur’s headquarters in Tokyo may have had in not taking seriously the conviction of frontline commanders that the Chinese had intervened, though in unknown strength, there was what Blair calls the “MacArthur Factor”¹⁹⁵

Almond’s G-3 [Operations and Plans], Jack Chiles, an alumnus of GHQ [General Headquarters, in Tokyo], who had observed Willoughby at close hand, remembered: “MacArthur did not *want*” the Chinese to enter the war in Korea. Anything MacArthur wanted, Willoughby produced intelligence for. . . . *In this case, Willoughby falsified the intelligence reports. . . . He should have gone to jail.*¹⁹⁶

John H. Chiles, eventually to become a Major General, was interviewed on July 27, 1977, by Professor D. Clayton James. Chiles had been General Ned Almond’s G-3 from July or August 1950 until February 1951, and roundly praised him as a soldier.¹⁹⁷

More important regarding Willoughby, Chiles had been secretary to MacArthur’s General Staff in Tokyo. Chiles was there on June 25, 1950, when he took the telephone call informing MacArthur that the North Koreans had just invaded, which according to Chiles “*came as a complete surprise.*”¹⁹⁸ Chiles was involved in events around MacArthur, and had been able to observe Willoughby closely. Here is a brief excerpt from the James interview.

DCJ: Okay, let’s turn to another man- -Willoughby. Did you ever see him?

JHC: “Sir Charles,” yes.

DCJ: Okay, how would you describe him?

JHC: Insufferably hardy. I’m sure, a highly intelligent guy, but moody. *He manufactured intelligence he wanted General MacArthur to hear. That’s a pretty damning statement, and I don’t think I could prove it.*

DCJ: Yes, I’ve got it elsewhere on tape- -I mean, *similar statements.*¹⁹⁹

Allegations by Chiles and others that Willoughby cooked the intelligence books to deny

or minimize that the Chinese were in North Korea are so serious as to be almost incredible. Yet, when one examines Willoughby's statements and conduct, there appears to be corroboration.

For example, as noted in Chapter 7, we know that both Eighth Army and X Corps had taken Chinese prisoners in the last days of October. The two captured by Eighth Army admitted that the CCF had intervened massively in North Korea. Willoughby dismissed their information out-of-hand.

When General Almond himself interrogated the sixteen X Corp CCF prisoners and radioed a personal message directly to MacArthur about the Chinese being in Korea, *Major General Charles Willoughby himself soon showed up at X Corps in Northeast Korea, having flown from Tokyo, to conduct in-person interviews of the POWs.* As Blair notes, MacArthur's G-2 couldn't very well deny they were Chinese.²⁰⁰ So, Willoughby did the next best thing: "he cavalierly dismissed them as possibly 'stragglers' or 'volunteers' of no real significance."²⁰¹ "Stragglers" or "volunteers" from what, one might ask?

As obvious as Willoughby's game was, he was virtually unchallengeable because he worked for MacArthur, basking in the general's reflected reputation. Worse than that, because of Willoughby's eminence there was an undesirable trickle-down effect. Influenced by Willoughby's minimalist belief in the Chinese presence, Far East Command's subordinate Eighth Army G-2 and his staff likewise were highly skeptical that the Chinese had intervened massively.

That G-2 was thirty-four year old Lt. Colonel Clint Tarkenton—and a protégé of none other than Charles Willoughby. A year earlier Tarkenton had been assigned to G-2 in Tokyo where he worked for Willoughby. At the outbreak of the Korean War, he sent Tarkenton to be Walker's Eighth Army G-2.²⁰²

One does not have to know anything about the military — common sense is sufficient — to know that Willoughby had planted his man at the right hand of the commander of all United Nations forces in Korea, and he was Willoughby's man.

In light of that, it is hardly surprising that at the end of October 1950, Tarkenton's intelligence reports reflected the views of the *upstream* Far East Commander's G-2, Charles Willoughby. That was bad enough. Worse, was that others *downstream* relied on Tarkenton.

On October 26 Tarkenton denied there was any evidence of overt CCF intervention.²⁰³

Perhaps Tarkenton and his mentor in Tokyo thought that the CCF prisoners taken by Eighth Army and X Corps were tourists. The Eighth Army interrogations of some ten Chinese POWs didn't convince Tarkenton.²⁰⁴ Apparently he never asked himself what the prisoners—simply more "stragglers" and "volunteers"?—were doing in the far reaches of North Korea.

It was bad enough that Tarkenton was, to be charitable, mistaken. Unfortunately, his mistake trickled down the line, and then up the line to a level higher even than Far East Command.

On October 30, an American diplomat in Seoul told Washington that Eighth Army intelligence [i.e. Tarkenton, channeling Willoughby] believed there were *two Chinese regiments* [!], *less than a single division*, facing them—fighting perhaps as independent units, perhaps inserted into the NKPA. Maybe, possibly, perhaps, could-be 2,000 Chinese.²⁰⁵

None of my research has disclosed where Tarkenton got that figure, but no matter. That was Tarkenton's estimate, he told the State Department people in Seoul, they told their superiors in Washington. *De minimus* Chinese. We do not know whether Willoughby gave his protégé's estimate of Chinese strength to MacArthur, but it is not unreasonable to believe he did (after all, that was his job). No matter, because "no study was conducted that investigated the strengths of the Chinese Communist Forces, namely their strict discipline, excellent close-order combat, and ability to withstand tremendous deprivations in wartime. . . ." ²⁰⁶

Yet, Tarkenton's estimate was absurd on its face. At that time Eighth Army was closing on the Yalu River. Walker's "sector" was a vast expanse of North Korea. Let us assume it was as little as ten miles by fifteen miles, a total of 150 square miles. Using Tarkenton's figure of 2,000 Chinese engaged in the Eighth Army sector, that meant about thirteen CCF troops per square mile. Tarkenton's estimate could only have been concocted for ulterior purposes.

But Tarkenton was stuck with his Chinese tar baby, and so the plot thickened. At about the same time Tarkenton was playing his guessing game, interrogators in the field ascertained that the handful of Chinese POWs were not from the same unit, but from several different *armies*, roughly three divisions. This meant that there had to be more CCF, many more, in Northeast Korea than Tarkenton had claimed.

To talk his way out of the corner he had painted himself into, Tarkenton spun the nearly incomprehensible explanation that, well, the prisoners had been taken from two or three *different* Chinese regiments in Manchuria and then placed in the *same* unit in North Korea. Tarkenton's story then became even more incredible: "It further appears Sino [Chinese] Communist units engaged in Northwest Korea [Eighth Army's sector] are not integrated with North Korean forces, but fighting as separate units. . . . *Eighth Army Intelligence* [Tarkenton] *is of view, with which Embassy inclined to concur, Sino Communists will avoid overt intervention.*" ²⁰⁷

One wonders what resources the embassy possessed that enabled it to reach the conclusion that the CCF was not integrated with the NKPA and that the CCF would not intervene. However, Tarkenton was sticking to his (and Willoughby's) guns, sure that the CCF was not going to intervene.

There is indirect evidence that Tarkenton was dancing to Willoughby's tune.

Within the Eighth Army staff there soon arose a sharp division of opinion over the extent of CCF intervention. The G-3 [Plans and Operations], John Dabney, and his senior planner, William F. Train, who pored over the intelligence reports late into the night, concluded that the CCF was coming into North Korea in great numbers. However, Tarkenton believed it inconceivable that such a mass movement could occur without its being spotted by FEAF [Far East Air Force] or other intelligence sources, and he continued to doubt. In retrospect Dabney wrote that Tarkenton's views were "*unduly influenced*" and "*colored*" by Willoughby's views. Train agreed, adding that Tarkenton may also have been overwhelmed by the paperwork, which included "10,000 intelligence items a month."²⁰⁸

Historians and others who have written extensively about the situation of Eighth Army at the end of October argue that because Chinese intentions were unclear—yet General Walker's G-3 (not Tarkenton, the G-2) believed they were coming in heavily—Walker should have held Eighth Army at the Chongchon River awaiting more information about the Chinese order of battle. After all, the judgmental stakes were enormous.

Why didn't Walker wait?

Most likely because MacArthur was hell-bent on getting to the Yalu River—which would explain Willoughby's minimizing of the extent to which the Chinese were present opposite Eighth Army, and further explain why Walker pressed north.

At about the same time in the east, the I Corps G-2 was certain that any Chinese present were members of well-organized and strong CCF units which had entered North Korea in force. But not unlike what had happened when the North Koreans attacked several months earlier, history repeated itself. "When . . . senior 1st Cav[alry] officers rushed to the combat zone," the X Corps G-2 told them what to expect. "But the 1st Cav officers . . . perhaps influenced by Eighth Army [Tarkenton] and Tokyo [Willoughby] intelligence reports greeted this news with disbelief and indifference."²⁰⁹ One could say, with denial.

Just as denial is not a river in Egypt, it was not one in North Korea. Disbelief and indifference would soon be trumped by reality, which would quickly overwhelm the naysayers, just as the Chinese would.

As noted in Chapter 7, late in October two Chinese divisions—at least 20,000 fighters—had hit the town of Unsan from three directions. Defended by one ROK and two American regiments, "[b]lowing bugles, horns, whistles and firing signal flares, the Chinese infantry, supported by light mortars, swarmed skillfully—and bravely—over the hills. To the ROKs and Americans, the oncoming waves of massed manpower were astonishing, terrifying, and, to those Americans who believed the war was over,²¹⁰ utterly demoralizing."²¹¹

The attack was a set-piece example of how the CCF fought. Unlike the UN forces, the CCF had no armor, close air support, or much artillery. They fought at night, mostly unseen until contact was made, using “frontal assaults on revealed positions, infiltration and ambush to cut the enemy’s rear, and massed manpower attacks on the open flanks of his main elements. War correspondents were to describe the attacking waves of the CCF as a ‘human sea’ or ‘swarm of locusts’.”²¹² “One must keep in mind that, in the initial campaigns in Korea, when the Chinese achieved their greatest successes, only one in three or four soldiers, on average, had a rifle, carbine, burp gun, or pistol. Most of the Chinese soldiers were simply grenade throwers.”²¹³

By close to midnight, the ROK regiment in Unsan had disintegrated and the two American regiments “were out of ammo, more or less overrun, cut off from the rear, and desperate.”²¹⁴

The next day the debacle compounded. Units cut off, little or no ammunition, abandoned equipment, weakened leadership, ROK disintegration, massive Chinese assaults, hundreds of Americans killed or captured.

Walker could read the tea leaves. Unsan had taught him what he was up against, and that in moving toward the Yalu he was courting disaster.

Accordingly, the Eighth Army and assorted UN troops retreated to south of the Chongchon River, some fifty miles from the Manchurian border.

Finally, despite Willoughby, Tarkenton, and the rest of the deniers and doubters, it was painfully—*no, it was agonizingly, brutally, fatally*—clear that the CCF intervention was real. The Americans and ROKs had their dead, captured wounded and missing to prove it.

Then, two incredible events occurred. Even though on November 6th Eighth Army in the west was dug in waiting for another Chinese mass attack, *most of the CCF disappeared*. Gone. Nowhere to be found by United Nations ground or air assets.²¹⁵

The second event involved in X Corps’ eastern sector. By now, General Almond knew very well that the Chinese had intervened and already were close to the Chosin Reservoir. But apparently for the X corps commander and his G-2, William Quinn, there was a big difference between knowing large CCF forces had intervened, and believing that they posed a real danger to X Corps.²¹⁶

They and many others serving under Almond were soon to learn differently. The hard way.

Almond saddled up his X Corps and issued orders to get rid of the remaining NKPA in northeast Korea, secure two seaports on the eastern coast, and seize inland roads and towns. And, not forgetting the Yalu River prize, get there before Walker’s Eighth Army. Not expecting much resistance—just ask Willoughby, or Quinn! —Almond spread X

Corps across a huge, harsh-terrain front; his 1st Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division were already deep in enemy territory.

Actually, “harsh-terrain” is probably an understatement. A large part of the X Corps sector was dominated by the Taebaek Mountains, about 7,000-8,000 feet high. There were no roads as westerners know them, just trails which on a good day might support small vehicles but not the Army’s standard “deuce-and-a-half” trucks or heavy artillery.²¹⁷

Few who have written about the Taebaek Mountains have failed to mention that in late October-early November 1950 it was already cold. Very cold!

General Oliver P. Smith, commander of X Corps’ 1st Marine Division, knew that the orders to move toward the Yalu River were fraught with unreasonable danger but still he moved north.

On November 3, a Chinese division hit the 7th Marine Regiment of the 1st Marine Division at the Chosin Reservoir, for the leatherneck’s first contact with the CCF. Dawn broke after fierce hand-to-hand night fighting, and once there was daylight Marine air and artillery left some 700 CCF dead, with thousands more wounded.

For the next three days, the Marines moved steadily northward, continuing to inflict savage casualties on the Chinese division, in the end perhaps as many as several thousand.

Despite the Marines decimating thousands of CCF in the east, and increasing attacks by Chinese troops against Eighth Army in the west, Willoughby and Tarkenton still insisted that the Chinese were not in North Korea in any strength.

But reality must have begun to intrude on them because on November 3 Willoughby finally conceded that there were between 16,000 and 34,000 CCF in North Korea—even though at the same time the Marines were fighting division-strength Chinese just in the east alone.

Willoughby’s November 3 estimate of 16,000 to 34,000 was off by at least a factor of ten: At that time, there were actually some 300,000 CCF in North Korea, augmented by artillery, cavalry and supporting units. Of those, 180,000 faced Eighth Army in the west, and 120,000 were deployed opposite X Corps in the east. Not 50,000, but 350,000!

These facts invoke memories of Willoughby’s World War II fatal enemy-strength miscalculations.

Then, about a day after the same Chinese disappearing act had occurred in the Eighth Army sector, they disappeared from the X Corps sector.

The disappearances were part of a Chinese withdrawal across all of North Korea.

Thus concluded what the Chinese would characterize as their “First Phase Offensive.”²¹⁸

9.
THE CHINESE “SECOND PHASE OFFENSIVE: PART I

Recall that at Wake Island General MacArthur, seconded by the CIA, seemed to have assured President Truman that the Chinese would not intervene in Korea. Truman, however, was not stupid and could read the handwriting on the wall. Accordingly, on November 3, while the Marines and Eighth Army had their hands full with the CCF, the President directed the Joint Chiefs to ask MacArthur what was happening in light of the Chinese attacks.

MacArthur responded promptly, reassuringly adopting the Willoughby-Tarkenton position:

. . . while large-scale CCF intervention in Korea was a “distinct possibility,” there were “many fundamental logistic reasons against it.” He suggested a “final appraisal” should await “a more complete accumulation of military facts.” He leaned to the belief that rather than open intervention, Peking would render covert assistance to the NKPA, providing “voluntary personnel” to retain a “nominal foothold in North Korea” and “salvage something from the wreckage.”²¹⁹

Consistent with this view of CCF non-intervention, MacArthur jumped on Eighth Army’s General Walker, asking rhetorically why he had broken off his advance to the Yalu—instead withdrawing defensively behind the Chongchon River—if all Walker faced was a bunch of Chinese “volunteers.” MacArthur was making it clear to his subordinate that no matter how many Chinese were in front of him, Walker should get on to the Yalu River.

In response, Walker blamed the ROKs and logistics. He cited ambushes by some capable Chinese forces. He adverted to the ROK’s near-pathological fear of the Chinese. ROK complacency and overconfidence. All of which caused them to collapse and disintegrate as fighting units.

But whatever Walker’s reasons not to move north, in reality he had no real idea of the extent of the Chinese intervention already accomplished or yet to come, perhaps imminently.

Rather than presenting MacArthur with another plan—for example, keep Eighth Army where it was at Sinanju in the west and X Corps just south of Hamhung in the east, thereby creating a solid defense line across the narrow neck of the peninsula²²⁰—Walker capitulated to his superior, promising he’d get back in the saddle and move north when the ROKs were reorganized, after he had more supplies, and more troops had been provided.

While Walker was waiting, MacArthur decided to unleash his Wake Island-promised air-slaughter campaign. He told his FEAF chief that in the next two weeks he wanted to

destroy virtually everything close to the south side of the Yalu River, to choke off the southbound CCF and their supplies. As to the dozen or so bridges over the Yalu, MacArthur's orders were for FEAF to bomb only the Korean half! Especially the important large bridges at Sinanju. But MacArthur cautioned his air chief, no American or other aircraft could violate the Chinese border.

Theoretically, all this may have been possible. But not in the real world. Difficult terrain, a zigzag border, anti-aircraft batteries. Russian fighter planes and likely pilots. Trying to drop only half of a bridge span. All of which presented terrible dangers for the UN pilots and flight crews. Worse, even if MacArthur's plan were successful there was no guarantee the CCF flow of men and materiel would cease. They had already proved adept at night crossing, sight unseen, and when the river soon froze the CCF would be able simply to walk across in the dark, where UN air power could not reach them. Even trucks and artillery could cross the ice. Perhaps even a railroad line could be laid.

More to the point, the Joint Chiefs had made it clear to MacArthur, or so they thought, that he was to stay clear of the Manchurian Border.

Accordingly, MacArthur's bombing orders ignited a firestorm in Washington, but not the one the General expected. Truman imposed the condition that the bombing could occur only if our troops were immediately and seriously threatened. MacArthur had to justify the mission, especially the part about bombing the Yalu River bridges. The JCS reminded him of our commitment to consult with allies before threatening Manchuria. MacArthur was prohibited from bombing within five miles of the border, until otherwise authorized. What a way to run a war!

Douglas MacArthur was not going to take this lying down. Through his acting Chief of Staff, he leaked a threat that he might resign. On November 6—*with the off-year American congressional elections to be held on the next day*—MacArthur informed the JCS that “[m]en and materiel in large force are pouring across all bridges over Yalu from Manchuria. This movement not only jeopardizes but threatens the ultimate destruction of the forces under my command. . . . The only way to stop this reinforcement . . . is the destruction of these bridges. . . . Every hour that this is postponed will be paid for dearly in American and other United Nations blood. . . . Under the gravest protest that I can make, I am suspending this strike [at the bridges] and carrying out your instructions. . . .”²²¹

But MacArthur was not finished. No other member of the United States military, only five-star General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, would have the temerity to go over the heads of the Joints Chiefs of Staff.

I cannot overemphasize the disastrous effect, both physical and psychological, that will result from the restrictions which you are imposing. I trust that the matter *be immediately brought to the attention of the President* as I believe your instructions may result in a calamity of major proportions for which I cannot accept the responsibility without his personal and direct understanding of the situation.²²²

That was all Truman and the Democratic Party needed to hear, mere hours before the polls opened. They already had serious electoral problems. The Senate was up for grabs. Some Democrat seats in the House were surely going to be lost.

Truman and the Joint Chiefs capitulated. MacArthur won. He could bomb the bridges. *But only the Korean half of each one.* Typical Washington compromise.

But even then, neither MacArthur nor the Joint Chiefs knew much about Chinese order of battle in North Korea, let alone in Manchuria or beyond. By then, however, everyone concerned knew that however strong the Chinese intervention, it was strong enough to have pushed Eighth Army back to the Chongchon River in the west and to have significantly slowed X Corps' move to the Chosin Reservoir in the east.²²³

But what were the Chinese intentions, and how many troops had they clandestinely moved into North Korea?

The next day—November 7, 1950, Election Day in the United States—MacArthur provided the JCS with the additional information they had requested. In relating what MacArthur told the JCS, Blair has written that “while the CCF had ‘unquestionably’ intervened in Korea with ‘organized units,’ it had not intervened in North Korea in force. However, the CCF posture in North Korea could be ‘augmented at will’.”²²⁴

True to form, having ‘won’ the battle of half the length of the Yalu River bridges, MacArthur stretched a bit further in his communications with the JCS—doubtless in anticipation that he would have to raise another sensitive issue later. In another November message to the JCS he raised his problem with Chinese (and Russian?) air assets flying over North Korea and when in trouble fleeing across the river to sanctuary in Manchuria. He alluded to the need for “corrective measures” before the situation became serious. It would be this real problem of the North Koreans and especially the Chinese having sanctuary across the Yalu River in Manchuria that would eventually contribute to MacArthur’s doom.

Even though the JCS was literally and figuratively gun-shy about Manchuria, it recommended to General Marshall that MacArthur be cut some slack. FEAF could penetrate up to about 6-8 miles into Manchuria in “hot pursuit” of the Communists’ border-crossing hostile aircraft.

On November 9, the JCS informed MacArthur that considering the CCF developments, his mission might have to be reexamined, hinting that negotiating with the Chinese might be a better tactic than fighting.

MacArthur wasn’t having any. The UN policy was to destroy all enemy forces in North Korea and unify the entire peninsula under democratic rule. To accomplish that, on or about November 15 MacArthur’s forces would drive to the Yalu River. Failing to do so would destroy his troops’ morale with inestimable consequences. He would have to maintain defensive forces in North Korea indefinitely. The South Koreans would resent

this; they might collapse and even turn against us. A large increment of additional troops would be necessary. No matter what the Chinese agreed to, sooner or later they would move against UN forces and strike south.

The five-star general—venerated hero of World War II's Pacific War, was not finished. To allow the Chinese to have any territory in North Korea as a result of their aggression would be the greatest defeat of the free world in modern times. Our leadership and influence in Asia would be bankrupt, rendering our political and military position untenable. It doubtless would lead to another war later, but probably without Asian allies who now trusted us but would no longer if we capitulated.

Instead, MacArthur countered with the request that the UN condemn Chinese Communist aggression in Korea and demand that they get out of North Korea—or risk military sanctions.

MacArthur's adamancy had illuminated the polarized situation. *The General wanted to fight. The Washington insider civilian and military politicians wanted to negotiate.*

The JCS, again plainly concerned about what MacArthur was capable of doing, compromised: Until the JCS knew more about what the Chinese were up to, MacArthur should be allowed to bomb and move his ground troops to the Yalu River. The National Security Council agreed. The "hot-pursuit" into Manchuria issue was shelved (Truman would later deny permission because of British objections about going into China).

There were many historians who believed "[t]his large concession to MacArthur proved to be one of the worst mistakes in American history—and indisputably the worst of Truman's presidency."²²⁵

Strong words, in Blair's case sought to be supported by an extensive quotation from Secretary of State Dean Acheson—one, as we shall see later, which has great relevance for the Cohen-Gooch theory of "organizational failure."

In their memoirs Acheson and Bradley dealt with it [the JCS capitulation to MacArthur] candidly. "All the president's advisors in this matter," Acheson wrote, "civilian and military, knew that something was badly wrong, though *what it was, how to find out, and what to do about it, they muffed*. . . . None of us, myself prominently included, served him [President Truman] as he was entitled to be served." Bradley wrote: "We read, we sat, we deliberated and, unfortunately, *we reached drastically wrong conclusions and decision*. . . . The JCS should have taken firmest control of the Korean War and dealt with MacArthur bluntly. . . . At the very least, the chiefs should have cancelled MacArthur's planned offensive. Instead *we let ourselves be misled by MacArthur's widely erroneous estimates* of the situation and his eloquent rhetoric, as well as by *too much wishful thinking of our own*."²²⁶

I will come back to the Acheson-Bradley confession in a moment, but since the Secretary of States mentioned Truman let us see what the President had to say, but in retrospect.

What we should have done is stop at the neck of Korea. . . .^[227] That is what the British wanted. . . . We knew the Chinese had close to a million men on the border and all that. . . .^[228] But [MacArthur] was commander in the field. You pick your man, you've got to back him up. That's the only way a military organization can work. I got the best advice I could^[229] and the man on the spot said this was the thing to do. . . . So I agreed. That was my decision—no matter what hindsight shows.²³⁰

Though candid, these appalling confessions of impotence by America's military and civilian leadership—upon whose judgments rested the lives of countless human beings—do nothing to absolve them. Instead, their reputations are intact while MacArthur's has been sullied. After all, Bradley and Truman were MacArthur's superiors.

Having received a blank war-making check from the JCS, MacArthur made plans to cash it by having FEAF commence its bombing campaign on November 8, 1950. Eighth Army and X Corp would begin their ground assault to the Yalu River on November 15, with the goal of reaching it ten days later.

The air campaign turned out different than planned. Bluntly, it was a failure. American aircraft were greeted by heavy anti-aircraft fire and Soviet MiG jet fighters likely flown by Russian pilots. The south portion of just one of the three Sinuiju bridges was barely hit. Although upriver three bridges were knocked out, the CCF laid pontoon bridges. On or about November 19 at Sinuiju the river froze, and the Chinese simply walked across. The bombing "successfully" killed or wounded thousands, but they were civilians not the Chinese troops who were laying low, well camouflaged in the hills and elsewhere. Air reconnaissance was unable to find them.

Some military historians believe that between overly enthusiastic reports from FEAF, and MacArthur's desire to destroy as many Chinese as he could who stood between his troops and the Yalu, he had to believe in the efficacy of the air campaign, especially that part of it which was supposed to interdict CCF forces' movement into North Korea.

Worse, MacArthur told the U.S. ambassador to South Korea who was visiting Tokyo that he was certain there were no more than 30,000 CCF in North Korea. Since MacArthur believed that number, doubtless provided by Willoughby, the UN commander believed also that once Eighth Army got going, North Korea would be cleaned up within ten days.

It was not to be.

If Lt. General Walton Walker's Eighth Army were going to the Yalu, though no one knew how many Chinese troops he would encounter on his way there he wanted to go as strong as possible. But Walker had only half the supplies he needed, and other logistical problems made his situation worse.²³¹ So he wouldn't jump off on November 15. Not

until November 24. That was about the time MacArthur's plan expected Walker already to be at the Yalu River. The day after Thanksgiving.

The bad news for Walker was that MacArthur informed the JCS that the delay was Walker's fault. The worse news for Walker was that MacArthur also informed the JSC that during the last ten days his air campaign "has been largely successful in isolating the battle area from added [CCF] reinforcement and has greatly diminished the enemy flow of supplies."²³² Doubtless, Mao and his generals in the field would have been greatly surprised to hear that.

At about the same time, X Corps under the command of Lt. General Almond—oddly still holding the official title of MacArthur's Tokyo Chief of Staff—was operating independently in northeast Korea, and spreading his forces thinly across a huge front. Fearing the consequences, General Oliver P. Smith, commanding the 1st Marine Division component of X Corps, took the unusual step of sending a written complaint directly to the Commandant of the X Corps:

I do not like the prospect of stringing out a Marine division along a single mountain road for 120 air miles from Hamhung to the [North Korea/Chinese] border. There is a continual splitting up of units and assignment of missions to small units which puts them out on a limb [with] disregard for the integrity of units and the time and space factor
. . . . Manifestly we should not push on without regard to Eighth Army. We would simply get farther out on a limb.²³³

Probably because of General Smith's letter, MacArthur's G-3 in Tokyo got involved, delicately suggesting to Almond that X Corps (including Smith's 1st Marine Division) be made quasi-subordinate to Eighth Army. Almond was having none of that. In the unofficial race to the Yalu, Almond wanted to get there first, especially since Eighth Army had not gotten there yet. Politics and machismo reared their ugly heads.

However, MacArthur's G-3 prevailed, seemingly. Orders were issued directing Almond to plan on going west and send "minimum forces only" to the Yalu River. As Blair put it, "[t]he new orders were not warmly received at X Corps; they were regarded as something as a slap in the face. Almond's grand 'conquest' of northeast Korea and the 'race' to the Yalu, in effect, were to be canceled in favor of a less glamorous operation in support of Eighth Army."²³⁴

Almond, however, essentially disregarded the orders, with his 7th [Army Infantry] Division encouraged to continue its drive to the Yalu, even though that put it still further advanced than the Marines at the Chosin Reservoir. Then Almond ordered an additional division to move toward the Yalu. This meant that substantial Army elements moved even further away from the Marines at the reservoir.

*"The consequences [of the gap between the Army and Marine forces], in the reservoir area were to be tragic."*²³⁵

As Walker was preparing Eighth Army for its attack toward the Yalu, on November 17 MacArthur stated that 30,000 CCF, maximum, were across the river.

On November 21 Eighth Army G-2 Tarkenton upped the ante to 60,000, only about 27,000 of whom were facing Eighth Army. The rest, he believed, were near the Chosin Reservoir or somewhere in the Chinese rear.

I will see you, and I'll raise you. On November 24 Willoughby raised Tarkenton's raise: Now, according to Willoughby, there were at least 40,000 Chinese, maybe even as many as 71,000 CCF.

But that was not all Willoughby contributed.

In the most exact order of battle calculation of enemy troops in the history of warfare, Willoughby somehow knew the *precise* number of NKPA troops in all of Korea, both South and North, everywhere between the Yalu River and Pusan: 82,799! Precisely. Not 82,798 nor 82,800.

82,799!

According to General MacArthur's G-2 at the Far East Command in Tokyo, taking account of every NKPA soldier in all of Korea—those on the line, in reserve, at the rear, guerillas in the mountains, the sick, wounded and all others—Willoughby's mega census had somehow accounted for every single one of them. Apparently, also those on leave and the North Korean version of R & R. No one knew if Willoughby's total included North Korean naval forces.

This "exact" number was so evidently invented, fraudulent, and impossible on its face (and thus fatally dangerous) that Willoughby should have been cashiered on the spot, especially since he was a General Officer and MacArthur's G-2.

On November 21, advance elements of X Corps had reached the Yalu River. It was close to 30-degrees below zero. Troops of the 17th Infantry Regiment were freezing, exhausted and hungry. From across the river, the Chinese were lobbing mortar rounds while the Americans tried to build a road parallel to the river.

Yet, even that late in the game, the American forces did not reliably know the CCF strength in that sector. CCF strength at and near the Chosin Reservoir was a mystery, although on November 23 the Marine's General Smith, who had two Chinese prisoners, believed their comrades had entered in large numbers. True to form, however, Almond and his X Corps staff continued to believe the opposite. The Army historian wrote that Almond doubted that there were more than "one or two" CCF divisions on his Chosin front, comprising 10,000 to 20,000 CCF troops. *In the real world, the true figure was twelve CCF divisions comprising about 120,000 men.*²³⁶

Five facts more than any others probably set the stage for the debacle that would soon ensue.

- No one in Washington knew what the Soviet Union’s game was, whether Stalin was using the Chinese as pawns or whether they were independent actors or, if they were, what their game was.
- Given Washington’s desire for a negotiated settlement, and the belief that the Chinese (and North Koreans) had to be dealt with from a position of strength, neither Acheson, the JCS nor the President of the United States did anything to inhibit MacArthur from having crossed the 38th Parallel and heading for the Yalu, each with American troops. Indeed, they and the United Nations encouraged him to do so.
- But in contradiction to the idea of showing strength, while sandbagging MacArthur at the same time, on November 15 Truman announced to the world that Washington had no intention of crossing the Yalu River. Truman even had his UN ambassador introduce a Security Council resolution to that effect. “Inviolable” was the term used to refer to the Chinese border.²³⁷ The Chinese were not impressed. Blair has written:

All these overtures got nowhere. In response to Truman’s public reassurances, Peking Radio declaimed: “America has lied and smashed her way across the world to Chinese territory and into it, has seized Chinese Taiwan [Formosa] and is threatening another neighbor, Vietnam. The *People’s Daily* newspaper, referring to the recent fighting in Korea, trumpeted: ‘The imperialists have only begun to be battered and they will continue to carry out atrocities. Therefore we must continue to conduct firm counter-attacks against them. Forward! March on under enemy gunfire and bombs, to final victory.’ Other bellicose Peking media warned of the probability of an American nuclear attack on Chinese cities.²³⁸

- One of our UN allies who had less than a division fighting with us in Korea, Britain, wanted to cancel Eighth Army’s drive to the Yalu, pull back X Corp, and then create a demilitarized buffer zone. Another ally, with even fewer troops in Korea, the French, was in favor of the British DMZ idea—as were many others in the Washington Korean War apparatus. Fissures were appearing on the ‘united’ UN front.²³⁹
- The movement for a cessation in hostilities, creation of a buffer zone and a negotiated political escape for the United Nations, and especially the United States, led to a November 21 meeting of Truman’s war cabinet in General George Marshall’s office in the Pentagon, but without the presence of President Truman. Somewhat surprisingly, Marshall and Acheson were in favor of allowing MacArthur to reach the Yalu and deferring consideration of a buffer zone until Eighth Army got there. After much discussion, the upshot was to allow MacArthur’s offensive to go forward, deal with the buffer zone idea after he succeeded, and meantime pursue a negotiated political resolution of the war. The War Cabinet would not meet again until after Eighth Army reached the Yalu. . . .

Even then no one knew how many Chinese were there, or what they intended.

In sum, the War Cabinet and president were flying blind about everything the Chinese were up to, even where they were and how many of them were wherever they were.

While Acheson and the rest wanted a negotiated political settlement, even though Truman had conveyed weakness in his assurances of Chinese border inviolability, the War Cabinet still believed such a settlement could best be achieved from a position of strength. So, Walker in the west *would* go to the Yalu, and in the east, X Corps *would* pull back. After MacArthur was successful in annihilating the few Chinese he believed were in North Korea (and, for good measure, the remaining elements of the NKPA) and driving the survivors back into Manchuria, then there could be talk of a buffer zone.

Because MacArthur earlier had vehemently opposed a buffer zone *before* total victory and the War Cabinet had finally agreed, it queried the General about his thoughts of a buffer zone *after* the Chinese were, one way or the other, gone from North Korea.

Predictably, MacArthur would have none of it. To the ROKs it would be a betrayal. To the Chinese, a weakness. No! wrote MacArthur, he was going to the Yalu, but no further. And that was that!

As one looks at the events on the ground in North Korea during October and November 1950 it is impossible not to ask a simple question: What happened? As Lt. Col. Appleman has written, “[s]tarting with an acceptance of only a few Chinese “volunteers” mixed with North Korean units, the U.N. Command in the course of a month had gradually raised its estimate to accept about 60,000 to 70,000 Chinese troops by 24 November, *less than one-fourth the number actually there. How was it possible for the U.N. Command to mistake so grossly the facts in the situation, even after it had met a considerable part of these Chinese forces in combat?*”²⁴⁰

For Appleman, “[t]he answer seems clear enough.”²⁴¹ He offers three principal reasons.

Even though, as we have seen, the Beijing government threatened to intervene if troops other than ROKs crossed the 38th Parallel, Washington considered the Communists’ statements mere diplomatic blackmail.

As we shall see shortly, the Chinese armies moved across the Yalu quietly at night when aerial observation was not possible. Their movement during the day was unseen because they were swallowed in the hills by the terrain and perfect camouflage.

Eighth Army intelligence left a lot to be desired, and civilian reports of Chinese presence were simply not deemed credible.

In a cogent elaboration of how the Chinese were able to accomplish the feat of invisibly moving so many fighting men across the Yalu River, Lt. Col. Appleman has written:

A word should be said about the CCF march discipline and capabilities, which in large part accounted for the secrecy with which the Chinese Communists entered and deployed in North Korea. This march capability and performance equaled the best examples of antiquity. * * *

In a well-documented instance, a CCF army of three divisions marched on foot from An-tung in Manchuria, on the north side of the Yalu River, 286 miles to its assembly area in North Korea, in the combat zone, in a period ranging from 16 to 19 days. One division of this army, marching at night over circuitous mountain roads, averaged 18 miles a day for 18 days. The day's march began after dark at 1900 [7:00 p.m.] and ended at 0300 [3:00 a.m.] the next morning. Defense measures against aircraft were to be completed before 0530 [5:30 a.m.]. *Every man, animal, and piece of equipment were to be concealed and camouflaged.* During daylight only bivouac scouting parties moved ahead to select the next day's bivouac area.

When CCF units were compelled for any reason to march by day, they were under standing orders for every man to stop in his tracks and remain motionless if aircraft appeared overhead. *Officers were empowered to shoot immediately any man who violated this order.*

These practices, especially the march and bivouac discipline, explain why *United Nations aerial observation never discovered the CCF deployment into Korea.* The Chinese Communist Forces moved 300,000 men into position in October and November and *none of them was ever discovered* by the UN Command prior to actual contact. While the planes were overhead searching for possible Chinese movement into Korea, the Chinese, perfectly camouflaged, lay hidden below. The aerial observers did not see them nor did the aerial photographs reveal their presence.²⁴²

But they *were* there. Waiting for Ned Almond's X Corps and Walton Walker's Eighth Army. And there were a lot of them.

How had the situation deteriorated so fast, and so thoroughly?

Dr. Rosemary Foot, a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Sussex has written cogently about some of the popular wisdom:

- The United States government simply did not believe the Chinese were serious about intervening.
- Indian Ambassador Panikkar was not taken seriously.
- We believed China to be weak in the domestic and foreign policy field, wholly dependent on Moscow to provide help in case of war.
- A unified Korea under Communist control was not a high priority for Stalin.
- Assessment of Soviet imperatives excluded Moscow starting a World War over Korea.

- China's domestic frailty and obsession with Formosa militated against intervention in the Korean War.
- The PLA's combat experience against the Japanese and the Nationalists was deemed unsuitable to the kind of war Korea would be.
- Early October was not the most advantageous time for the Chinese to intervene, as compared to earlier when UN forces were bottled up at the Pusan Perimeter.
- Surely the Chinese knew that UN (i.e. American) firepower, especially air and Naval, would decimate their infantry forces.
- Starting a war in Korea would risk China not securing a UN seat and a place on the Security Council.
- China's losses in men and materiel would be enormous.²⁴³

As we will soon see, once again the conventional wisdom was wrong.

10.

THE CHINESE “SECOND PHASE OFFENSIVE: PART II

As General Walton Walker readied his offensive, he might as well have been wearing a blindfold and earplugs. He had no realistic idea of what his Eighth Army was facing. On the basis of what MacArthur had said, and the utterly erroneous Chinese order of battle Willoughby and Tarkenton had given him a day or so earlier, Walker thought there were some 50,000 Communist fighters facing him, divided about evenly between CCF and NKPA, giving Eighth Army a 2-1 numerical superiority.

The equation was correct, but reversed. On the assumption that there were about 23,000 NKPA, there were a total of about 203,000 Communist troops opposing Eighth Army, double Walton's forces—four-times the number he believed. Against those odds, the Eighth Army commander was about to launch American, ROK and UN troops.²⁴⁴

Walker thought he was ready to start for the Yalu River by November 22: A 70-mile-wide front, 118,000 men. To understand why that would not be enough, it's useful to know the Eighth Army order of battle from west to east:

- Left flank: I Corps, consisting of the 24th Infantry (attacking northwest) and the ROK 1st Division (attacking north). In corps reserve were the 5,000 men of the Commonwealth Brigade.
- Center of the line: IX Corps, consisting of the 25th Division (attacking north) and the 2d Division (attacking northeast). In corps reserve was the recently arrived Turkish Brigade.
- Right flank: ROK II Corps, consisting of the ROK 7th and 8th Divisions (attacking northeast). In corps reserve was the ROK 6th division, *which had recently been decimated*.²⁴⁵

Unfortunately, even without the benefit of hindsight, there were glaring and ultimately devastating problems facing General Walker. Clay Blair captured those problems, both in essence and concretely:

The terrain was ghastly: hill upon hill upon hill, most snow-covered and divided by narrow gorges and defiles [narrow passes between hills and mountains]. There were few roads, none in some sectors. The geography was confused by the confluence of the Kuryong and Chongchon rivers and minor tributaries, all of them partly frozen but their ice not yet strong enough to support vehicles. And it was very, very cold, actual temperatures well below freezing, often in the low teens. The wind chill factor plunged the apparent (or felt) cold to well below zero. Few of the men had proper clothing for such inhospitable weather. Vehicles would not start; radios conked out; weapons—notably carbines—would not fire; mortar base plates cracked in recoil on the frozen ground. Under such conditions

it was almost impossible to tie in flanks and lay [communications] wire, maintain liaison with artillery, and do other things called for in the [attack] plan.

Nor were the GIs in IX Corps [the center of the seventy-mile-wide front] properly equipped for heavy combat. A tabulation in one infantry company was typical: All but 12 of 29 men had thrown away their steel helmets, preferring to wear warm pile caps. Only 2 men — new arrivals — had bayonets. About half the men had discarded entrenching tools for digging foxholes. All were acutely short of grenades and ammo: an average of less than one grenade per man; as few as sixteen to thirty rounds per rifle and carbine.²⁴⁶

Given the essentially worthless and largely misleading intelligence about the Chinese order of battle, Walker's necessary reliance on the ROK II Corps to secure Eighth Army's right flank, the brutal geography and weather, and the severe logistical problems, Walton's advance was a colossal disaster waiting to happen.

And happen it did.

Not surprisingly, on the eve of the jump-off, there was great concern among senior commanders about what they were getting into. But General MacArthur was of a different mind. His communique was issued just before he left for Korea to watch the kickoff in person:

The United Nations massive envelopment in North Korea against the new Red Armies cooperating there is now approaching its decisive effort. The isolating component of the pincer, our Air Forces of all types, have for the past three weeks, in a sustained attack of model coordination and effectiveness, successfully interdicted enemy lines of support from the North so that further reinforcement therefrom has been sharply curtailed and essential supplies markedly limited. The eastern sector of the pincer [X Corps], with noteworthy and effective Naval support, has steadily advanced in a brilliant tactical movement and has now reached a commanding enveloping position, cutting in two the northern reaches of the enemy's geographical potential. This morning the western sector of the pincer moves forward in general assault in an effort to complete the compression and close the vise. If successful this should for all practical purposes end the war, restore peace and unity to Korea, enable the prompt withdrawal of United Nations military forces, and permit the compete assumption by the Korean people and nation of full sovereignty and international equality. It is that for which we fight.²⁴⁷

Lt. Col. Appleman characterizes this "amazing document" as reflecting "a colossal misjudgment of the military situation in Korea."²⁴⁸

The next day, November 24, on the ground in Korea MacArthur took a personal look at I ("Eye") and IX Corps on the left flank and in the center of the line, riding in a jeep in 15-degree weather. He quickly recognized that the ROK II Corps (supposedly securing Eighth Army's right flank) was "not yet in good shape." Indeed, everything he saw worried him

especially that Eighth Army overall was deplorably undermanned. Yet, MacArthur's concerns apparently didn't undermine Willoughby's enthusiasm for the imminent attack. The G-2s Far East Command DISUM (Daily Intelligence Summary) for November 24 pointed to "some indications which point to the possibility of a withdrawal of CCF to the Yalu River or across the border into Manchuria."²⁴⁹ Note the hedging: "some indications," "point," "possibility."

Even worse, it was later learned that the ROK II Corps was severely underequipped. At corps level, for example, the ROKs had no artillery or tanks. Line units had only a small amount of machine guns and mortars. There were no American supporting units.²⁵⁰ And ROK II Corps was supposed to protect Eighth Army's right flank! Instead, the ROK troops were no more than cannon fodder.

Joined by other commentators Blair has forcefully observed that "[t]he failure of [General] Johnnie Walker to appreciate fully the grave weaknesses in ROK II Corps was a *major blunder* which would have dire consequences."²⁵¹ As we shall soon see.

When MacArthur returned to his Tokyo headquarters, he informed the United Nations that "[t]he giant U.N. pincer moved according to schedule today. The air forces, in full strength completely interdicted the rear areas and air reconnaissance behind the enemy line, and along the entire length of the Yalu River border, showed little sign of hostile military activity. . . . Our losses were extraordinarily light. The logistics situation is fully geared to sustain offensive operations. The justice of our cause and promise of early completion of our mission is reflected in the morale of troops and commanders alike."²⁵²

Regarding this statement, Lt. Colonel Appleman pulled no punches: "*The Far East commander was living in a dream world. * * * Rarely in warfare was the reality 'on the other side of the hill' so different from that contemplated by an opponent. Rarely in military history has a commander made so erroneous a mistake of the capability of the enemy he expected to encounter.*"²⁵³

In Tokyo, MacArthur also gave away the intelligence store. He announced publicly that his air campaign had sanitized the north of North Korea and significantly reduced the flow of Chinese men and materiel. He promised that Eighth Army and X Corps would saddle up that very morning, enveloping the enemy in a pincer movement. The war could be over then and there.

MacArthur might as well have called Mao on the telephone and told him that the infiltrated CCF forces in strength had not been detected in North Korea, that a major offensive was about to begin, and that crucial to the success of the attack was Walker's Eighth Army in the west linking up with Almond's X Corps in the east.

Even before receiving this unexpected gift, the Chinese had planned a simultaneous attack against Eighth Army and X Corps with everything they had, which among other assets included a massive number of ground troops. Now the Chinese knew for sure what they had to do, when they had to do it, and where. In a night attack, the CCF would

destroy the ROK II Corps²⁵⁴ exposing Eighth Army's right flank, and then go west to envelop Walker's troops and destroy Eighth Army.

In the Chinese plan, X Corps awaited the same fate. Envelopment, capture, destruction. No linkup of X Corps with Eighth Army. No more United Nations forces in North Korea. Simple and direct.

The debacle began mid-morning on November 24 with Eighth Army mounting a huge artillery barrage. As Bakich notes, "[a]t no time before China's major offensive on November 24 did MacArthur have a clear idea of the number of Chinese forces in North Korea. *Willoughby's theater intelligence estimates are largely to blame for this.* During November, Willoughby continually received reports from both 8th Army and X Corp that indicated the Chinese were crossing the Yalu with full divisions. Because *the FEC intelligence chief failed to accurately compare the evidence from the two sources,* however, he stubbornly retained belief that American forces faced only individual 'units'. Although his reports to MacArthur did show a dramatic increase in the number of Chinese troops in the North over time, *Willoughby's wild estimates were completely off the mark.*"²⁵⁵ World War II, revisited.

Despite the CCF attack on Eighth Army three days earlier, Almond's X Corps went ahead with its offensive from the Chosin Reservoir.

From then on, despite outstandingly courageous heroism, particularly in some of the ranks, it was downhill for both commands, with killing, wounding, surrendering and retreating the order of the day. In one sense, as we shall see, the Korean War was over.

Until late in the day on November 25 some of Walker's troops met no CCF or NKPA resistance, but IX Corps in the middle of the line did. A warning from one regiment was ignored at division headquarters, because the G-2 believed the Chinese were merely covering themselves as they retreated.

Despite that resistance and other contact with the CCF, on the second day of his offensive in areas across his entire front Walker had gained nearly ten miles, so he appeared not to be worried. Apparently neither he nor anyone else on the Eighth Army staff wondered whether the real estate gained had come too easy.

But Walker should have been worried plenty because partial reports from ROK II Corps indicated that its 7th and 8th Divisions had encountered very heavy CCF resistance. Although the reports were 'duly noted' at Walker's headquarters, because of difficult communications with the ROKs the information could not be confirmed immediately. Despite the crucial importance of communications generally, let alone Walker's with ROK II Corps on his right flank, apparently no one did anything to improve them. The ROKs were not reinforced. The danger to them was either not understood or ignored, as were the consequences to the entire Eighth Army front if ROK II Corps was destroyed.²⁵⁶

Due in large measure to how easy the first two days of combat had been for most of Eighth Army, and given Walker's complacency, few if any of the senior officers anticipated trouble on the night of November 25. The temperature in some places was as low as 15-degrees, there was a full moon, campfires were ablaze, only a few troops had winter clothing. In other words, a perfect storm for the CCF.

At about 8:00 P.M. the Chinese Communists attacked in massive force. They swarmed over the hills, blowing bugles and horns, shaking rattles and other noisemakers, and shooting flares into the sky. They came on foot, firing rifles and burp guns, hurling grenades, and shouting and chanting shrilly. The total surprise of this awesome ground attack shocked and paralyzed most Americans and panicked not a few.²⁵⁷

As the Chinese generals had planned, the CCF hit IX Corp in the middle of the line and ROK II Corps on Eighth Army's right flank. There have been many detailed descriptions of what the fighting was like that night by small units. There are also "big picture" accounts of what was experienced at the corps and army level.²⁵⁸ So much happened in so many places on the American and ROK line on November 26 that it is not possible to recount it here. For my purposes, a few important points will suffice.

General Walker could not grasp how so many CCF could have sneaked into North Korea without being seen. The Commanding General of Eighth Army—like so many others from the bottom to the top of the military organization—had no idea whether the Chinese would fight as they had against the Japanese and then the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek. Military historian S.L.A. Marshall has explained:

At Pearl Harbor surprise had come against the United States like a bolt from the blue. The surprise in South Korea [on June 25, 1950] had been another full-armed effort, landing sudden and total. There was less chance that it could be done a third time in the same way, and besides there was something better.

Surprise could be won by eschewing all its conventional methods. The new way entailed the slow creep forward . . . the appearance of confusion and weakness in commitment to screen a well-laid offensive plan . . . the pretense of picking around with a finger to cover the raising of a mailed fist . . . the schooling of troops on details of the order of battle so that they would be always communicative and in the beginning always wrong . . . the hiding of armies in motion by marching them only under cover of night and holding them under rooftops during day . . . the staging of little actions to divert attention from the chosen battlefield.

These things were warp and woof of the enemy pattern of deception. All were suited to the Oriental nature. But what most favored their cunning was the wide-front deployment of Eighth Army and the great spaces intervening between its tactical columns as they neared the Manchurian border.²⁵⁹

But now, with the evidence of the successful deception and the enemy' strength literally in front of him Walker could no longer ignore the reality he faced.

Yet, he went forward with his offensive, informing MacArthur the CCF was attacking in strength. But Eighth Army still did not know if it was a major attack, or merely local counterattacks.

Most American Eighth Army units were hit hard, some wiped out entirely.

The ROK II Corps on Walker's right flank collapsed entirely, but he did not know whether the exact cause was Chinese infiltration, counterattack, full scale offensive or some combination.

As unbelievable as it might seem, senior commanders, including General Walker himself, considered Eighth Army's right flank exposure as not overly serious and correctable.

Finally, on the morning of the next day, Walker finally realized the Chinese had launched a major offensive. He began to move his forces. A crucial part of his plan relied on the Turkish Brigade, which was to secure Eighth Army's right flank where ROK II Corps no longer existed. As it turned out, unfortunately the Turks were nearly worthless despite their reputation as fierce fighters. The Turkish Brigade's training had been subpar, and they had no combat experience. Hardly any spoke English; there were no Americans in the vicinity who spoke Turkish.²⁶⁰

The Turkish commander was long over the hill.²⁶¹

Worse than all that, much worse, to secure the right flank of Eighth Army's line the Turkish commander was ordered to dig in at a place called Tokchon but, supposedly misunderstanding, went elsewhere—and left Walker's right flank wide open. Again!

In relating the events in the Eighth Army sector from the evening of November 24 to December 1, 1950, historians and journalists describing the Chinese have used such words and phrases as "relentless," "awesome numbers," "swarming," "closing in from all sides," "massively." And they have described the UN forces using such words as "beset from all sides," "gave way," "fell back in disarray," "killed, wounded or captured," "wiped out," "swallowed up," "shattered," "riddled," "crippling losses," "overrun," "bugged out," "mounting pressure."

Recall that the center of Eighth Army's line was anchored by IX Corps, consisting of two divisions, one of which was the 2d Infantry Division. Lt. Colonel Appleman has written that "[f]ull scale retreat of the 2d Infantry Division got under way during the night of 27-28 November. * * * [As to Eighth Army itself], "it was in the fourth day of its well-advertised 'attack' to the North Korean border, but it was no longer an attack. It was now a retreat on all sectors of the front. The Chinese counterattack was rolling south and southwest against Eighth Army."²⁶² The Communists knew they had Eighth Army

on the run, so much so that some CCF elements were actually in the rear of the Americans.

What about General Almond's X Corps in the east?

While Walker was reeling in the west, on November 27 Almond saddled up and, not unwillingly, launched his Yalu River offensive starting from the Chosin Reservoir. The battle plan had been dreamed up by General Headquarters in Tokyo.

Almond was facing forbidding terrain, colder weather than his Marines and soldiers had ever encountered, insufficient troop strength, actual and potential supply problems, and the knowledge of what Walker's Eighth Army in the west was receiving from the Chinese. It has been said that Almond's offensive on November 27 "ranks as *the most ill-advised and unfortunate operation of the Korean War*. * * * Almond's [own] chief of staff . . . wrote: 'It was an insane plan'."²⁶³

Since this book is about blame—just and unjust—it is worth noting that Almond's X Corps staff tried to offload the blame on the general's G-2. But it was Almond himself who was in charge on the ground. Given his relationship with MacArthur, a strong, principled, and convincing argument against the operation and in favor of its cancellation, or at least suspension, might have caused MacArthur to reconsider. But just as Walker had not been up to challenging MacArthur's wisdom—remember Inchon! —Almond remained mute, with horrendous consequences.

Greatly contributing to Almond's unwillingness to argue with MacArthur was most likely the X Corps commander's belief—just like Walton's, even then—that he faced only inconsequential CCF. As we have seen, that is what Willoughby thought (or at least said), seconded by Almond's own G-2, Bill Quinn.

Yet CCF prisoners from *six different divisions* had been captured by November 27, and they candidly told the X Corps Marines that an all-out offensive was imminent, whose purpose was to destroy them and X Corps. Unfortunately, not only were Willoughby and Quinn disbelievers, so too was the Marine division's own G-2. He was a Willoughby-Tarkenton adherent of the Chinese "volunteers" school, and believed that when the Marines attacked, the CCF would retreat.

We will never know for certain why most of the X Corps hierarchy and others entertained such an erroneous view of CCF strength and capabilities. Was it fear, denial, stupidity, faulty intelligence, wishful thinking, command influence? We do know, however, that their opinion, and Almond's compulsive need to begin his Yalu offensive on November 27, resulted in catastrophic consequences.

One was that X Corps was spread extremely thin on the west side of the Chosin Reservoir, so thin that for at least one day only a single battalion of Marines occupied the unit's far forward position.

The Marines jumped off from a place called Yudam, at the mid-west side of the Chosin Reservoir, with orders to meet up with Eighth Army in the west. The folly of their attack was soon evident. “The weather at Yudam was miserable: zero degrees and a blinding snowstorm. Because of the intense cold, carbines, and BARs [Browning Automatic Rifles] locked, mortars cracked, canteens burst, blood plasma and rations froze solid. [The] 5th Marines, which had arrived only the day before to join the 7th Marines, mounted what one Marine historian described as an ‘unenthusiastic’ attack. Almost immediately the men met unexpected and fierce CCF resistance. In sixteen brutal hours of struggle, the 7th Marines suffered heavy casualties and gained merely 1,500 yards.”²⁶⁴

In the meantime, other Marine elements were arriving.

The massive CCF formations at the reservoir were preparing for a night offensive, simultaneously hitting X Corps, which was widely spread out and lacking in adequate communications, principally at Yudam in the west and Hugaru at the south of the reservoir.

That is exactly what the CCF did. Picture it: night, zero-degree temperature, swarming, bugles, horns, flares, burp guns, mortars, grenades, screaming, seemingly endless attackers.

Because of the failure of communications, UN forces in the east and west did not know what the other was undergoing. Each was on its own.

Early on November 28—two of Almond’s commanders at Hudam having already recommended to Marine General Oliver P. Smith that the offensive be terminated, and Smith having concurred—Almond grudgingly agreed to the Marines assuming a defensive posture. The 5th and 7th Marines offensive were shut down.

Almond then visited the east side of the Chosin Reservoir, near the middle of its north-south length. Incredibly, after all that had happened during the past two days, in front of an Army historian and others Almond insisted that “[t]he enemy who is delaying you for the moment is nothing more than *remnants of Chinese divisions fleeing north*. . . . *We’re still attacking and we’re going all the way to the Yalu. Don’t let a bunch of Chinese laundrymen stop you.*”²⁶⁵

One can only be incredulous. “Remnants,” “fleeing,” “all the way,” “laundrymen?” Laundrymen who had managed to sneak at least 300,000 of their kind across a river, under aerial scrutiny, and hide unseen in North Korea for days.

Dr. Richard W. Stewart²⁶⁶ has written that “[t]he divisional history of the 3d [United States Infantry] Division during this period adequately sums up the situation: During the 1st of December to the 3d of December 1950 three different plans of operations were either initiated or considered and later abolished following changes in orders and missions from higher headquarters. . . . [due to the] rapidly changing requirements of [X] Corps. The result was chaos. As another critic of the X Corps staff noted:

For several days the harassed and overburdened X Corps staff, in response to Almond's directives, had been issuing a Niagara of orders to his far-flung units. These orders came down to the divisions, and then to the regiments, in a steady stream. The recipients remembered them as *a series of conflicting "march and countermarch" orders that were consistently overtaken by events and that seemed to make little sense and gave the impression that X Corps had lost all control of the situation.*²⁶⁷

Under the totality of the circumstances, which were actually going from bleak to worse, instead of ordering his east-of-the-reservoir commanders to withdraw, Almond ordered them to regain terrain lost the night before and be ready to attack again.

Blair and others are correct that, in his words, "[a] serious command failure was thus in the making. MacLean [a subordinate commander] was at fault for failing to have a clear picture of the situation in his own task force or for concealing it from Almond. But Almond was also at fault for failing to appreciate the enemy strength at the Chosin Reservoir and for failing to assess the situation in Task Force MacLean correctly, regardless of what he had heard from MacLean."²⁶⁸

These failings soon became moot because in the early hours of November 28, the CCF fiercely attacked MacLean's perimeters again. Savage, close combat. Two hours into the battle, while it was still dark, MacLean decided to withdraw into another perimeter and consolidate his forces.

Despite what was happening, he still planned to follow Almond's orders for an attack after dawn.

While Eighth Army in the west and X Corps in the east had their hands full, a lot was occurring between MacArthur and his superiors in Washington. Indeed, in the opinion of many observers the events of November 27 and 28 are seen as a watershed for MacArthur's handling of the war, and for Washington's response to the General's management of the conflict.

Blair sums up how he and many other observers viewed the Korean chessboard at the end of November 1950. Those harsh views, with which one can take exception, explicitly raise the question at the heart of this book.²⁶⁹ The following necessarily lengthy quotation accurately captures those views, perhaps expressed with more forcefulness than was necessary:

By November 28 it must have been clear to Douglas MacArthur that he had blundered badly in Korea. * * * His reckless, egotistical strategy after Inchon, undertaken in defiance of war warnings from Peking and a massive CCF buildup in Manchuria, had been an arrogant, blind march to disaster.

What must have been more galling and humiliating was that MacArthur was on record with everyone from the president on down as unequivocally assuring that

the CCF would not intervene in Korea in force, and if it did, he would “slaughter” it with his air power. His considerable intelligence-gathering apparatus had scandalously failed to detect or interpret the massive scope of the CCF intervention. His air power had abjectly failed to “slaughter” any appreciable number of CCF or even to knock out the Yalu bridges.

He had made many mistakes in Korea, but the most egregious was his insistence that Jonnie Walker launch the “final offensive” on November 24. He had done so against cautionary advice from Washington and knowing full well that Walker, and probably many of his field commanders, believed it to be ill advised. He had rejected the reasonable British idea for a buffer zone (and other similar proposals) as “appeasement.” The price for this arrogant blunder would be high: thousands more Americans killed, maimed, or captured on the battlefield; MacArthur himself shorn of his reputation for brilliance and infallibility.²⁷⁰

These are unforgiving words, questionable facts, and devastating conclusions. Whether they are justified is another matter, one that I will examine in the next chapter. But relevant to that examination is Washington’s role in what was unfolding in North Korea.

On November 28, while Eighth Army and X Corps were being slammed by relentless CCF attacks, MacArthur made public the contents of a letter he had written to the Pentagon. Blair, whom we have seen throughout this book was no admirer of the General, has written that MacArthur “dishonestly and absurdly claimed that he had not blundered by rashly launching full-scale offensives to the Yalu but rather had merely conducted limited ‘assault movements’ or a ‘reconnaissance in force for the purpose of probing enemy strength’.”²⁷¹

To assess whether Blair’s characterization of what MacArthur wrote is fair, let us look at some of the General’s statements themselves:

The developments resulting from our assault movements . . . have now assumed a clear definition. All hope of localization of the Korean conflict to enemy forces composed of North Korean troops with alien token [Chinese] elements can now be completely abandoned. The Chinese military forces are committed to North Korea in great and ever increasing strength.^[272] No pretext of minor support under guise of volunteerism or other subterfuges now has the slightest validity. *We face an entirely new war.*²⁷³

MacArthur was not finished.

It is quite evident that our present strength of force is not sufficient to meet this undeclared war by the Chinese with the inherent advantages which accrue thereby to them. The resulting situation presents an entire new picture which broadens the potentialities to world-embracing considerations beyond the sphere of decisions by the Theater Commander. This command has done everything possible within its capabilities but is now faced with conditions beyond its control and strength. . . . My strategic plan for the immediate future is to *pass from the*

offensive to the defense with such local adjustments as may be required by a constantly fluid situation.²⁷⁴

It was nearly dawn in Washington on November 28 when MacArthur's cable was received at the Pentagon. From there it went to Bradley, who called Truman and read it to him. At a quickly convened meeting of an expanded War Cabinet of about twenty men, the emerging strategy was for the United States to negotiate itself out of Korea while holding a defensible line well south of the Yalu River. The question was where. There was some confusion because, unbelievably, no one present was closely familiar with the geography of Korea. Some referred to the "narrow neck" of Korea (from Sinanju to Hamhung), others to the further south "narrow waist" (from Pyongyang to Wonsan).

Meanwhile, in Tokyo on November 29 MacArthur met with Generals Walker and Almond, between whom there was no love lost.

According to Lt. Colonel Appleman, both Walker and Almond expressed optimism about their commands' situations. Walker said he could hold Pyongyang. Almond said his north and northwest attacks from the Chosin Reservoir by the 1st Marine and 7th Infantry Divisions could cut the Chinese lines of communication in the rear.

Charitably, Appleman attributes Walker's optimism—though characterizing it as "not a cautious evaluation"²⁷⁵—to the general's nature and because when he left the Chongchon River front earlier that day "not all was disaster"²⁷⁶—hardly a ringing endorsement of Eighth Army's position or Walker's reason for optimism.

What about Almond? "General Almond's unrealistic view that he could continue his attack . . . is hard to explain. Just the day before, he had visited the 1st Marine Division front at Yudam-ni, and just that afternoon he had visited the 7th Infantry Division forward battalion position on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir. . . . At neither place was there any reason for optimism."²⁷⁷

MacArthur must finally have seen through the baseless optimism of his commanders because he promptly issued new orders to them. He told Walker to defend Pyongyang, but if the Chinese began to use his weak right flank to reach Eighth Army's rear then to withdraw south. MacArthur told Almond to cease his attacks, withdraw, and move X Corps south to the port of Hungnam from where it could be evacuated by sea.

There had been considerable discussion at the MacArthur-Walker-Almond meeting about where a defensive line could be established and then maintained. MacArthur rejected the idea of an Eighth Army-X Corps linkup to secure a "narrow waist" line from Pyongyang in the west to Wonsan in the east. All along, the geography north of the 38th Parallel had played a large part in determining military movements, occasioning MacArthur to tell the JCS (as Appleman wrote in *Disaster*, 296) that "[a]ny concept of actual physical combination of the forces of Eighth Army and X Corps in a practically continuous line across the narrow neck [or waist?] of Korea is quite impracticable due to the length of that line, the numerical weakness of our forces and the logistical problems due to the mountainous divide which splits such a front from north to south."

Since the commencement of hostilities some five months earlier and painfully cognizant that they were dealing with the legendary five-star General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, the JCS had tread carefully not to give their theater commander direct tactical orders. But the events of the last few days in November—combined with what the JCS saw as MacArthur’s dissembling, his patronizing of them, and his continuing to read the Chinese threat wrong—caused the JCS to edge closer to giving the General specific tactical orders. Especially because the JCS considered dangerous MacArthur’s plan to withdraw the west-deployed Eighth Army to the south, while leaving X Corp in an isolated area in the northeast.

Indeed, the JCS considered it urgent to remove X Corp from where it was in the vastness of northeast Korea. General George Marshall told MacArthur to ignore the territory in northeast Korea that X Corps would be vacating.

As to the positioning of X Corps in relation to Eighth Army, if there could not be a linkup for any of MacArthur’s plausible reasons or any others, at the least the two units “should be sufficiently coordinated to prevent large enemy forces from passing between them or outflanking either of them.”²⁷⁸

A crucial turning point had been reached in the relationship between the JCS and General Douglas MacArthur, and in another respect between him and the Korean War, as the Eighth Army and X Corps withdrawals would soon show.

In the end, as Lt. Col. Appleman has written, “[a]s both sides prepared for a new offensive in late November 1950, neither Eighth Army nor X Corps knew the size and extent of the Chinese forces in their front. They were so poorly informed and simultaneously so confident of their capability to overcome the Chinese who might oppose them that, on 24 November, when the Eighth Army advance began in the west, and on 27 November, when the X Corps began its advance, the UN command expected a quick victory that would give them control of all Korea to the Chinese border—and end the war.”²⁷⁹

This was not to be because “[b]y the end of November and the first day of December, the Chinese 2d Phase Offensive had decisively defeated the Eighth Army, and the latter was gathering speed in a headlong retreat southward. The days and nights from the evening of 25 November to 1 December 1950 are crowded with a churning, hectic, often bizarre, series of battles, large and small, clear across the Eighth Army front.”²⁸⁰

Let us unwind the clock several days to see how that rout unfolded.

11.
ATTACKING IN ANOTHER DIRECTION²⁸¹

When General Walker returned to Korea on November 29, he began to implement Eighth Army's general withdrawal, which noted military historian S.L.A. Marshall and many others unhesitatingly call a defeat. Walker's most difficult task was moving his troops and their equipment across the Chongchon River and then south to Pyongyang where a strong defensive line was supposed to be established.

There are many accounts of Eighth Army's disastrous withdrawal from its position at the Chongchon River ultimately to Pyongyang, through the gauntlet of fire established by the Chinese.²⁸² The consensus is that for certain units, though not all, it was a disaster mitigated only by the heroism of some; indeed, for many soldiers of Eighth Army the less than ten mile transit was a living nightmare. Description after description, in words barely adequate to the task, convey the horror of Chinese small arms and mortar fire slaughtering Americans, ROKs and Turks in what can best be described as a shooting gallery.

Roads were blocked and bridges destroyed, creating massive vehicle and heavy equipment jams. Communications were at best difficult, at worst non-existent. The dead and wounded toll often militated against knowing who was in command. CCF on high ground rained down grenades, mortar rounds and machine gun fire on men trying to run the gauntlet. Many wounded were left by the roadside, never to be heard from again. Literally countless Americans, ROKs and Turks were dead, wounded, captured, and missing. Unit cohesiveness was mostly nonexistent. Some casualties were caused by "friendly fire." Abandoned vehicles made the roads look like military surplus junkyards, with their burned, twisted and bullet-riddled hulks. Thousands of Korean refugees filled the roads and ditches, scattered among them ROKs and even CCF. The Commonwealth Brigade was largely inept. To advert to an overused, but apt, cliché, Eighth Army's retreat from the Chongchon River was hell on earth, especially considering not only the decimation of the 2d Infantry Division but how it occurred.

One description does not even begin to describe the slaughter-house gauntlet the retreating soldiers had to run:

Three ROK divisions . . . had disintegrated. The American 2d Division had been wrecked; the Turkish Brigade had lost a fifth of its men (about 1,000) and was utterly disorganized. [The] 25th Division had suffered heavy losses in [two] regiments and [a tank battalion]. [T]he 1st Cav[alry] Division had incurred heavy losses in [two regiments]. Of the major Eighth Army units which had been at the Chongchon [River] on November 27, only [the] 24th Division and the Commonwealth Brigade had escaped severe losses.²⁸³

True, but what is missing from this clinical, journalistic description are the stories of individual heroism, ceaseless fear, self-sacrifice, uncommon bravery, compassionate acts, fighting spirit—all prevailing against the rivers of blood, mangled limbs, frozen corpses, and seemingly ceaseless death. Marshall makes an interesting point: "At Valley

Forge, in the birth struggle of a nation, but 3,000 of 7,000 Continentals died or faded from the force *in one terrible winter*. In round figures, the wasting away of the 2d Division and its attachments is roughly comparable. *But it all happened in one day.*"²⁸⁴

But somehow, at a high cost in lives and materiel, Eighth Army's withdrawal from the Chongchon River to the vicinity of Pyongyang had been completed by December 2, 1950.

The longest retreat in American military history was over, painted in blood and etched in the memories of all who ran the gauntlet.

As to blame, Lt. Colonel Appleton, has written at length that:

. . . Maj. Gen. John B. Coulter of IX Corps and Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker of Eighth Army *must share a large burden of responsibility for what happened to the 2d Infantry Division at Kunu-ri*. They did not send an adequate force of the available troops from the Sunchon [southern] area to attack the Chinese fire block area from the south on 30 November and to help the exhausted 2d Division. *While the Middlesex Battalion of the 27th Commonwealth Brigade was under orders to attack north on 30 November for this purpose, it never did so.*

The crisis for Eighth Army, and for its subordinate 2d Infantry Division in covering the final stages of the army withdrawal from contact with the Chinese forces along the Chongchon River on 30 November 1950, was along the 2d Infantry Division withdrawal route [south] from Kuni-ri to Suchon [and thence on to Pyongyang]. There was no other crisis at that time for Eighth Army—all the other subordinate units of the army had broken contact with the enemy and executed successful withdrawals or were in the final stages of doing so. Only the 2d Infantry Division, after covering the right flank of the army and the successful withdrawal of the army units in the center and on the left, was in danger in its own efforts to break contact with the Chinese and then to withdraw successfully. There was the crisis for the 2d Division, the IX Corps, and the Eighth Army on 30 November.²⁸⁵

Now for the indictment. During the afternoon and night of November 30, General Coulter was in Pyongyang, miles south of the Chinese roadblocks and fire blocks on the road from Kunu-ri to Suchon in the south, where his 2d Infantry Division was being slaughtered in the enemy gauntlet. Walker was in Pyongyang by late afternoon, having flown there and seen from the air that the 2d Infantry Division was in trouble.

Appleman's conclusion, expressly asking the question raised by this book about General MacArthur:

Neither General Coulter nor General Walker, the superior commanders responsible for taking action to assist one of their subordinate units [the 2d Infantry Division] in its crisis, did anything on 30 November or that night, nor is there evidence that they gave any special thought to it. Where did the greater failure lay? With General Keiser [commander of the 2d Division] in whatever

mistakes he may have made in trying to carry out General Coulter's orders, *or in the indifference or carelessness of superior command* [Coulter and Walker] in failing to keep on top of the developing situation with regard to the 2d Infantry Division and to intercede with whatever force was necessary to save it from disaster? * * *²⁸⁶

Despite Eighth Army's general difficulties in retreating from the Chongchon River and decimation of the 2d Infantry Division, Walker was able to establish a defensive area around Pyongyang, the former capital of North Korea. But there was more form to the defense than substance. The plan may have sounded good in Tokyo discussions with MacArthur, but the retreat from the Chongchon River on the ground in Korea had caused such significant losses in men and equipment that Walker lacked the ability to defend the Pyongyang enclave. The human and materiel losses were bad enough, and by themselves sufficient to sink hopes of an adequate defense, but there was more. Eighth Army morale was shot, so much so that, rightly or wrongly, *Walker feared that if the Chinese attacked massively, his army might cut and run.*

To avoid another disaster, in another turning point in the Korean War General Walker decided to withdraw entirely from North Korea to below the 38th Parallel where he could defend at the Imjin River. Luckily, south of the Imjin River was the Han River, then the Kum River, and eventually the Naktong where Walker had stopped the NKPA before breaking out of the Pusan Perimeter. The decision to withdraw was, in reality, a confession by General Walton H. Walker that the way his forces were then constituted he could not stop a strong CCF attack.²⁸⁷

This had to be a difficult decision for the three-star general. Among other considerations, at that moment the CCF was not attacking. If it did not, Walker would have cut and run from Pyongyang unnecessarily, not only handing the city over to the Chinese without a fight but also given up a large piece of North Korea.

Walker had other problems.

I have not been able to get MacArthur's headquarters to advise me of their intentions. In the absence of instructions, I shall assume that the tactical integrity of this [Eighth] Army, on which the entire defense of Japan depends, is my paramount objective. Accordingly, I will give up any amount of real estate if necessary to prevent this army from being endangered.²⁸⁸

Having learned some hard lessons on the retreat to Pyongyang, among them how Eighth Army was crucially dependent on unclogged roads, little materiel would come with Eighth Army on its way south to the Imjin River. Anything of use to the CCF would be destroyed, particularly bridges, roads, rolling stock. The CCF would find a scorched earth. In the end, the scale of destroyed rations, ammunition, gasoline, winter clothing, even tanks, was huge.

In sum, Eighth Army was to disengage entirely from the Chinese everywhere, and move to defensive positions southward during the first week in December, especially because

adding to Walker's woes was the newly recognized fact that there were no reserve forces available for months at best—a problem greatly exacerbated because as of December 1 the 2d Infantry Division, the Turkish Brigade and ROK II Corps were all combat ineffective.

On December 2, Eighth Army was planning to evacuate Pyongyang. The next day, Walker ordered it to begin officially, although retreat had been already happening unofficially for a few days. Some southbound troops coming down from the Chongchan River did not even pause in the former capital of North Korea. They just kept going south.

Although reasonable general officers could disagree about whether Walker could have successfully defended Pyongyang considering the weakened condition of the Chinese, Lt. Colonel Appleman has written that:

The failure of the UN forces to make a defensive stand at Pyongyang was probably one of the important tactical mistakes of the war. With its air power almost uncontested, with strong armor forces at hand against none for the CCF, with far superior artillery and mortar fire, with the nearby port of Chinnampo now open and the logistical support of Eighth Army, including a repaired railroad line reaching the Taedong River at Pyongyang, the best it had been thus far in the war, well-selected hedgehog-type defense perimeters should have given Eighth Army a good chance of turning back an attack by the CCF, whose logistic and resupply situation at this point must have been inadequate for a sustained assault.²⁸⁹

We will never know.

What we do know is that by December 5, some five months after the North Korean invasion and 47 days after UN forces had taken Pyongyang, the capital was back in enemy hands.

At the risk of devaluing the number of “turning points” in the Korean War—e.g. the Inchon landing and Pusan Perimeter breakout, the U.S. and UN approving MacArthur crossing the 38th Parallel, and their policy of Korean reunification—Walker's apparent decision not to fight at Pyongyang is thought by some to have been another such pivotal point, one which Lt. Colonel Appleman has explained cogently.

First, the Army historian revealed that Eighth Army Headquarters had never developed even a contingency plan for the defense of Pyongyang.²⁹⁰ Although at the MacArthur-Walker-Almond Tokyo meeting on November 28-29 Walker told his commander “that he hoped to hold Pyongyang . . . there is no indication how he expected to do it.”

Although there was a defensible line, “instead of Eighth Army slowing and assuming a position there to halt the Chinese, it rushed right on south, with Walker making no effort to slow its pace and instead apparently doing everything he could to accelerate it.

* * * It would now be a frantic and headlong retreat— where it would slow and stop, no one at that moment could tell. The [probably defensible] waist of Korea was to be abandoned.”

Appleman has written that, early on, the retreating troops were seized by “a near hysteria,” accompanied by “uncalled-for loss of military equipment” with virtually everyone from the non-commissioned to the command level “frantic.” Soon, what little morale had survived so far was lost, and there was no taste left to engage the CCF (though they were nowhere near). Perhaps Eighth Army’s appetite for a fight would have been stronger had they possessed better intelligence about the CCF.

For example, the CCF had come long distances even before reaching Manchuria, let alone infiltrating into North Korea, and most of them had traveled by foot. Their food, consisting almost entirely of grains and rice, were exhausted. Of those still alive, countless numbers were wounded with no real hope of serious medical attention. Victuals and ammunition had been drawn down to almost nothing, and significant resupply was wishful thinking, making them resort to battlefield scavenging. Their footwear consisted of the Chinese version of tennis shoes, and frostbite was rampant. To quote Appleman: “Their arms were those of light infantry—rifle, submachine gun, grenades, small mortars, a few 57 mm recoilless rifles—no artillery, no heavy mortars, no combat aircraft over the battlefield, no armor, few radios, few vehicles. * * * Most of the soldiers were of peasant origin, with a high rate of illiteracy at the beginning.”

As if these weren’t enough reasons to doubt the CCF’s capability and sustainability—and for Walker to have mounted a defense at Pyongyang— consider the potpourri of CCF weaponry: Nationalist, American, German, Czech. Putting the point another way, as Appleman has written, the CCF’s “major assets were stamina, foot power, willingness to climb hills and to exist on poverty rations, and capability to achieve surprise.”

It is unnecessary to dwell on UN equipment: aircraft with heavy duty ordinance; field artillery; considerable armor; three kinds of mortars; jeeps and other types of vehicles; field and rear echelon medical facilities; a usually well-functioning system of food and ammunition resupply; radio, telephone and other communication equipment; acceptable clothing and footwear (eventually); naval gunfire reaching both side of the peninsula; control of the coastal waters. The UN infantry so outgunned the CCF in everything from handguns to heavy machine guns that it could wreak “horrendous human destruction.” It would be gilding the lily to say more.

Considering these uncontestable facts, Appleman and many other observers strongly believed that Eighth Army could have made a successful, and certainly respectable, stand at Pyongyang “*with adequate leadership and a decent morale in the soldiery.*”

But at Pyongyang there was no intent, attempt, or effort of any kind to make a stand and fight the Chinese in a defensive battle, which the UN should have been able to win. The essentials to win such a battle — the will to fight, moral to contest the outcome, confidence in the professional leadership — were lacking in the top leadership and the officer corps, and in the rank-and-file as well. The

rank-and-file might have responded had the leadership been up to it. But it was not. *Eighth Army as a whole panicked and fled; it was a shameful performance.*²⁹¹

Lt. Colonel Appleman's characterization pulls no punches, giving rise to questions he posits in his *Disaster in Korea*: "Was Eighth Army's precipitate retreat from the Chongchon River front 120 miles south to the Imjin River [through and around Pyongyang], just short of Seoul in early December 1950, a 'bug-out', as many termed it at the time and later? Or was it a skillful and timely retreat that saved Eighth Army, as General Walker claimed, and as General MacArthur stated to the world?"²⁹²

Although Appleman does not answer his own questions squarely, the reader is left with the clear impression that many officers and men serving under General Walker believed they were indeed part of a massive "bug out" from the Chongchon River area to a defensive line some 300 miles south six weeks later.

The situation at X Corps in the east was quite different, especially because there was not a single campaign at the Chosin Reservoir but two, one involving the 1st Marine Division in the west and the other in the east principally fought by the Army's 7th Infantry Division.²⁹³

I will begin with the marines.

Their history with X Corps commander Lt. General Ned Almond went back to the Pusan Perimeter, followed by the Inchon landing. At the former, the understrength Marine brigade not surprisingly acquitted itself far better than Army regiments and unlike them did not abandon their weapons and equipment. As to Inchon, the first problem was that MacArthur had given command of an amphibious assault, which was the specialty of Marines, to his chief of staff, the same General Ned Almond. Worse, instead of using the 5th Marine Regiment for the landing, Almond intended to use the Army's 32nd Infantry Regiment—forty percent of which consisted of "Korean civilians, raw conscripts who had received no training in amphibious warfare."²⁹⁴ Marine General Smith refused to countenance Almond's plan, and the invasion commander backed down. In the end, the tip of the Inchon landing spear had been the 1st and 5th Marine Regiments.²⁹⁵

As to the Chosin Reservoir campaign, Appleman has written that "[t]he battles X Corps fought in the Chosin Reservoir area were in the roughest terrain and during the coldest and harshest weather of any in the Korean War. * * * No America troops before or since have ever fought in as harsh and hostile environment as did the Marine and Army troops of the US X Corps in Korea in November and December 1950. [Yet] . . . most Marine and Army units escaped from the trap they entered with only one road of egress from the mountain fastness, in paralyzing cold, and with ever-present Chinese infantry on all sides. . . ." ²⁹⁶

To understand the momentous achievement of the Marines and Army in their attack from the Chosin Reservoir to the east coast evacuation port of Hungnam, it is essential to know something about the road connecting the two.

Earlier, after X Corp had been sealifted from Inchon on the west coast around the peninsula to Wonsan on the east coast the Marines and Army headed for Hamhung, then the largest city in northeast Korea. Eight miles north from Hamhung lay Oro-ri, fourteen miles later Majon-dong, seven miles after that Sudong, and then after six miles more Chinhung-ni. Thirty-five miles from Hamhung to Chinhung-ni ran the dirt gravel road.²⁹⁷

For those thirty-five miles the MSR (Main Supply Route) was flat, at least relatively, but there were many curves.

A radical topographical change occurred at Chinghung-ni, where “the road climbs northward to the top of the Koto-ri plateau by a cliff-hanging, twisting narrow road that climbs 2,500 feet in elevation in eight miles. This stretch of road was called Funchilin Pass,”²⁹⁸ an eight-mile gauntlet: “[T]he road was a one-way shelf with a cliff on the right, a chasm on the left, and a series of hairpin turns so tight that trucks with trailers sometimes had to unhitch to negotiate the passage.”²⁹⁹

About ten miles later came Koto-ri. Then, after eleven miles more, Hagaru-ri, which would play a crucial role in the Marine and Army escape from the CCF trap.

Hagaru-ri was not on the shore of the Chosin Reservoir. It was about a mile-and-a-half from its southern tip.

The fourteen mile long reservoir lay in a north-south direction. Imagine its shape as a modified letter “Y” with (1) the left prong of the “V” portion of the “Y” laying almost horizontally east-west, and (2) the right prong running due north.³⁰⁰

At the bottom center of the “V”, was Hagaru-ri. There the road became forked, a topographical fact that was to play a major role in the disaster that was fast approaching.

One fork, the right hand, passed north and east into equally miserable terrain. The other skirted the reservoir and turned west; it climbed the 4,000-foot peaks of Toktong Pass, and after fourteen miles through sullen gorges it devolved into a broad valley ringed by five great ridges.

Here, in this valley, sat the lowly village of Yudam-ni, 3,500 feet above sea level, hardly sheltered from the bitter winds and snow of Siberia by its mile-high ring of peaks. Here, and along the whole [nearly eighty mile], length of the road from Hungnam, the land is barren and bleak in winter. The grass dies, and rustles sere and brown in the sharp winds; snow falls repeatedly, and ice covers the gorges and craggy ridges.³⁰¹

Thus, at (1) the left horizontal prong of the “V,” going west about 7 miles from Hagaru-ri was Yudam-ni on the west side of the reservoir. Between Hagaru and Yudam was the

Toktong Pass. At (2) the due north right prong of the “V,” several miles north from Hagaru-ri was Hudong.

It was seventy-eight miles overall from Hungnam to Yudam-ni. Just as earlier the Marines and Army units had gone north on the MSR and through the passes, to escape they would soon have to go south. But this time fighting much of the way. The UN forces were being sucked into a trap by the cagey CCF.

When the Marines had originally moved west from their landing at Wonsan, supposedly on their way to the Yalu River, by the night of November 3 they had concluded a first engagement with CCF elements in the vicinity of Sudong. It had taken just short of a week for the Marines to clean out the CCF in and around Sudong. On the night of November 7-8, any remaining CCF disappeared.

As the Marines had set out from Wonsan on their march to the Yalu River General Smith confronted Almond with a looming problem: the planned dispersion of the 1st Marine Division, some elements of which would be as much as 170 miles apart. Capitulating, Almond agreed to concentrate Smith’s division, but to send it through the Funchilin Pass, past Koto, and up to Hagaru at the southwestern tip of the Chosin Reservoir.

In one sense, unit dispersion for the Marines was as much of an enemy as the CCF, so General Smith’s division dragged its feet in moving forward. Also, as Martin Russ has explained, General Smith knew his Marines were logistically unprepared for a winter campaign in northeast Korea’s unforgiving terrain—and to boot, he was receiving unrealistic demands from General Almond.³⁰² Indeed, Russ characterizes Smith’s slowing of his advance “to the point of insubordination.”

As Marine elements moved north, Smith detached some of them at Chinhung-ni and then Koto-ri to guard the 1st Marine Division’s supplies, partly because of his distrust of Almond’s assurances that the army would protect them.

On November 10 the first battalion of the 7th Marine Regiment had moved through the Funchilin Pass uneventfully and reached Koto-ri without contacting the CCF. But only a fool would have believed the Chinese were not out there.

That day, the temperature suddenly dropped forty-degrees. That night it was eight below zero with fierce winds roaring down from Siberia.

On November 15, President Truman publicly assured the Chinese Communists that American forces would not advance into China—thus guaranteeing the CCF ironclad sanctuary north of the Yalu River, and foretelling what would bring down General MacArthur.

In Tokyo, MacArthur sent orders to Almond directing the 1st Marine Division to move northwest through the Toktong Pass and on to the hamlet of Yudam-ri, which was at the far west point of the Chosin Reservoir.³⁰³

As usual, Almond was in a hurry.

Smith was not. Indeed, he was so opposed to MacArthur's plan and Almond's rush to execute it that the Marine general took the unusual step of complaining in writing from his headquarters in Hungnam to the Commandant of the Marine Corps in Washington. I reproduce much of Smith's letter here for what it says about the Marine General's tactical sense, his opinion of X Corps leadership and Smith's deep concern for the men under his command and those who were not:

Although the Chinese have withdrawn to the north, I have not pressed Litzenberg to make any rapid advance. Our left flank is wide open. There is no unit of the Eighth Army nearer than 80 miles to the southwest of Litzenberg. . . . I do not like the prospect of stringing out a Marine Division along a single mountain road for 120 miles from Hamhung to the Manchurian border. . . . There is considerable difference in temperature where we are [Hungnam] and where Litzenberg is. Yesterday at 0900 it was 18 degrees Fahrenheit here and 0 [zero] degrees Fahrenheit in Hagaru. . . . Even though the men who are up front are young and are equipped with parkas, shoe-pacs, and mountain sleeping bags, they are taking a beating. . . . I have little confidence in the tactical judgment of X Corps or in the realism of their planning.

There is a continual splitting up of units and assignment of missions which puts them out on a limb. Time and time again I have tried to tell the Corps Commander [Almond] that in a Marine Division he has a powerful instrument, and that it cannot help but lose its effectiveness when dispersed. My mission is still to advance to the [Yalu] border. The 8th Army, 80 miles to the southwest, will not attack until the 20th. Manifestly we should not push on without regard to the 8th Army; we would simply get farther out on a limb. I believe a winter campaign in the mountains of Korea is too much to ask of the American soldier or Marine, and I doubt the feasibility of supplying troops in this area during the winter or providing for the evacuation of sick and wounded.³⁰⁴

By now, the 5th Marine Regiment had cleared the Funchilin Pass on its way to Koto-ri and Hagaru-ri.

Elements of the 7th Marine Regiment slowly moved in the direction of Yudam-ri, encountering no CCF opposition.

By November 24, Thanksgiving, one battalion of the 7th Marines was just south of Yudam-ri. The next day, the regiment occupied the hamlet and the high ground around the village.

A digression. Apart from the madness of sending the 7th Marines west from Yudam-ri to find Eighth Army somewhere across the Taebaek Mountains, the Marines' position in that hamlet was utterly untenable should they have to withdraw. North was the Yalu

River and China, with no one knew how many CCF in between. East was the Chosin Reservoir. West, the Taebek Mountains.

That left the reverse way the 7th Marines had come north: back down from Yudam-ri through the Toktong Pass to Hugaru-ri. Should the Marines be withdrawn even further, for example all the way to the port of Hungnam, they would have to traverse the road from Hugaru-ri to Koto-ri, from there through the Funchilin Pass to Chinhung-ni, thence to Sudong, south to Hamhung and finally southeast to Hungnam.

Only one way out, on a road in many places little more than a deer trail. Potentially, the 7th Marines were in deep trouble.

And that was the story confirmed by three Chinese prisoners taken in Yudam-ni on November 25. Russ has related their tale: “. . . one division was going to attack the Marines at Yudam-ni from the north [CCF-land] and another from the west [no-man’s land]. A third division, they said, would cut the road between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri [probably at the Toktong Pass]. A fourth would attack Hagaru-ri and cut the road [south] to Koto-ri. And a fifth would cut the road between Koto-ri and Chinhung-ni [probably at the Funchilin Pass].”³⁰⁵ All at night.

The road between Yudam-ni and Chinhung-ni would be like a three-section caterpillar. The Marines’ supply route would be chopped up, and they would be attacked from all sides.

The same day, at Hagaru-ri, Lt. Colonel Don G. Faith’s 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry Regiment, Seventh United States Army Division, took the right fork and began going north on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir.

As of November 26, this was the 1st Marine Division’s order of battle. The 5th and 7th Regiments were in the Yudam-ni area on the west of the Chosin Reservoir, though separated by one of its fingers. The 1st Regiment had its three battalions at Hagaru-ri, Koto-ri and Chinhung-ni—the latter separated from the others by the Funchilin Pass.³⁰⁶

This was a disaster waiting to happen because, among other reasons, in case of CCF attacks it would be difficult for the 5th and 7th Regiments to support each other, let alone for the 1st Regiment to support either of them. Perhaps the latter’s battalions could support each other. Maybe.

By November 27 Eighth Army in the east was in full retreat, its right flank smashed. On the other side of the impassible Taebaek Mountains there stood two Marine regiments unaware of the disaster unfolding to their west.

According to Martin Russ, on the night of November 27,

- East of the Chosin Reservoir there were three Army battalions, some 3,000 troops.
- West, most of two Marine regiments (5th and 7th), some 8,200 Marines.

- South three miles, below the Toktong Pass, a company of the 7th Marines, 190 men.
- Two miles beyond, a reinforced company of 218.
- Further south at Hugaru-ri, 3,000 Marines and 600 GIs.
- Further south at Koto-ri, 1,500 Marines and 1,000 GIs.
- Further south, at Chinhung-ni, 1,600 Marines.

In all, about 13,500 Marines and 4,500 Army troops.

They were grossly outnumbered 3 to 1 by Chinese troops in the sector, whose strength was estimated about 60,000.

At Yudam-ni, the 5th and 7th Regiments were being hammered by three CCF divisions, with others not far behind. Although the Marines were holding on, they were in desperate trouble. For their part, the Chinese had succeeded in isolating two Marine regiments in the Yudam-ni area, other Marine units at Hagaru-ri, and another at Koto-ri. And the CCF had blocked the road between them.

And, still, there was the outstanding MacArthur-Almond order for the 5th Marine Regiment to move west over the mountains to provide some relief to Eighth Army.

By now it was November 28.

On November 27-28, the CCF cut some 25 miles of the road between Yudam-ni, Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri. CCF roadblocks abounded. They had blown all the bridges. The Chinese held the high ground between Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri.

Add this up. As Appleton has written: “The Marines at Yudam-ni were effectively cut off from all supporting troops south of them; and those at Hagaru-ri . . . were cut off from all other units of the division and X Corps troops to the north, northeast, and to the south. Troops of the [Army] 7th Infantry Division on the east side of Chosin Reservoir were similarly cut off unit from unit and from all other friendly forces south of them.”³⁰⁷

While MacArthur, Walker and Almond were meeting in Tokyo on November 28, X Corps’ Marines were being hit hard by the CCF. The next day, Marine General O.P. Smith, never fully on board with Almond’s plans, tried heroically to extricate his men from the west of the Chosin Reservoir.

At the same time, on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir Almond’s forces were in severe disarray, far flung and being hit by the CCF from all directions.

Conflicting orders were given. Chaos ruled.

As of November 28, Almond persisted in his fantasy that X Corps faced few Chinese troops. Patrick C. Roe has written that when Lt. Colonel Don C. Faith, Jr. told Almond that the night before he had been hit by elements of two different Chinese divisions, the X Corps commander wouldn’t believe it, “telling Faith: “That’s impossible. There are

not two Chinese Communist divisions in the whole of North Korea.’” There was more from Almond: “The enemy who is delaying you for the moment is nothing more than remnants of a Chinese division fleeing north. . . . We’re still attacking and we’re going all the way to the Yalu. *Don’t let a bunch of Chinese laundrymen stop you.*”³⁰⁸

Finally, despite Almond’s bravado refusal to see the harsh reality that had been unfolding before his unseeing eyes, MacArthur saw the light and ordered Almond to cancel the planned X Corps offensive, consolidate his forces and assume a defensive posture.

On November 30, Almond flew to Hagaru-ri on the southern tip of Chosin Reservoir. The news that awaited him there was not good. According to Blair, “[b]y that time the full impact of the possible disaster confronting the X Corps forces at the Chosin Reservoir had finally sunk home. At the Hagaru-ri meeting, the historian Roy Appleman wrote, Almond was ‘an entirely different man from the one who had visited his troops there two days earlier.’ He showed ‘genuine alarm’ and ‘stressed the need for speedy action’. *It was now clear that all X Corps forces in the Chosin Reservoir area must be withdrawn as rapidly as possible toward Hamhung [close to the escape port of Hungnam].*”³⁰⁹

General Almond and the men around him, indeed everyone who would soon be part of that fighting attack south, would soon learn the hard way that to escape the CCF was a very tall order.

The story of how the 1st Marine Division and the Army 7th Division attacked their way south for some eighty miles, fighting their way through CCF forces for at least half of the way, is, to say the least, inspiring—especially considering the weather, terrain, and the odds against them. It is one of the great feats of American military history.

General Smith was directed to get his 1st Marine Division to Hungnam, Almond by now finally realizing what he was up against and having MacArthur’s orders as a prod. Almond was now in a hurry. He also wanted as soon as possible to rescue units that had been cut off.

At substantial cost in men and materiel, Smith consolidated his Yudam and Hudong forces at Hagaru-ri. About 10 miles south of Hagaru-ri, at Koto-ri, other Marines (and an Army regiment) were holding that important site on the Main Supply Route to Hamhung and Hungnam.

Although Smith’s Marines were surrounded, he rejected an Air Force-Almond suggestion that they destroy their equipment and escape by airlift. No way! The Marines would fight their way out, together with Army elements under Smith’s command. ³¹⁰

Because the MSR between Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri was under control of the CCF, Smith’s forces would have to run the gauntlet fighting for every step they took going south. Once

the Hagaru-ri troops reached Koto-ri, some 15,000 Marines and soldiers would start the trek south to Hamhung and Hungnam.

Smith moved his forces out on December 6. As they left, Hugaru-ri was destroyed by his rear guard.

The column attacked south with the CCF in the hills raining down grenades, small arms fire, and mortar shells.

General Smith, then in Koto-ri, ordered the 7th Marines to continue advancing through the night. By late afternoon on December 7 some 2,000 Marines and two Army regiments had reached Koto-ri. Covering the approximately ten miles had taken thirty-six hours. Blair has written:

The rest of the Hagaru forces followed in a long snaking line. By noon on December 7 all 10,000 men were strung out along the route, interspersed among artillery . . . and vehicles of all types, the tanks . . . last. It was bitterly cold. The men were exhausted, walking like zombies. The CCF attacked the column repeatedly, like raiding Indians in the Old West. The Americans fought back. Many men fell by the wayside, wounded or too weary to go on. Medics picked up these men and put them on trucks. The road and ditches were littered with burned-out vehicles and dead CCF bodies, frozen stiff.³¹¹

South of Koto-ri the blown Funchin Pass bridge was replaced, and on December 9 troops and vehicles began crossing it to the south.

As Appleman has written:

Only after it had won the battle of the Yudam-ni perimeter did the 1st Marine Division begin its long attack to the rear—40 miles of it—from Yudam-ni through Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri to Chinhung-ni. And it won that week and a half continuing battle, and salvation, by adhering to an indispensable basic tactic. All along the way it climbed the hills flanking the road and cleared the enemy there before allowing its [columns] to move ahead on the only road by which they could reach safety. And their rear guard meanwhile held off enemy pressing from the rear. This was indeed a retreat, *but it was planned as an attack and executed as such*. The Marines and attached Army troops had to fight and defeat the Chinese for every mile of the way, or they would never have reached the coast.³¹²

It is tempting to pause here to pay richly deserved homage to the Marines and attached Army units that ran the gauntlet from the Chosin Reservoir south to Chinhung-ni, where they were relatively safe. But doing so would distract from the subject and theme of this book. Suffice to say that the Bibliography contains excellent accounts of how American forces heroically saved themselves from a brilliantly conceived and well-executed CCF plan to annihilate X Corps in the wasteland of northeast Korea in the winter of 1950.

As we know, too well, the X Corps fight with the Chinese was not the only one.

In the second week of December General Walton Walker withdrew Eighth Army to the Imjin River, below the 38th Parallel. There, he waited for the evacuated X Corps to each reach Pusan.

The situation was looking better. Replacements of men and equipment, provision of cold weather gear, hot food. Much better medical facilities and more personnel.

But the bad news was that Eighth Army believed it could not stop a massed CCF frontal assault. Walker would have to withdraw south to Seoul and probably the south side of the Han River. Then there was the serious risk, as Walker believed, that if “the CCF mounted another flanking attack at the ROKs (as it had twice before) and the ROKs collapsed (as fully expected), Eighth Army’s right flank might again be exposed dangerously, forcing another hurried and messy withdrawal.”³¹³

On December 20 it appeared that NKPA and CCF troops were moving south from Pyongyang toward the 38th Parallel. To some, including Eighth Army G-2 Tarkenton, it looked like a replay of how the Chinese earlier had hit and destroyed the ROKs and then tried to encircle Eighth Army and pour into Seoul.

Three days later Lt. General Walton Walker was killed in a vehicle crash.

As Clay Blair and others have said, the period during which Walker died was in other respects a turning point in the Korean War. X Corp withdrew from Northeast Korea, landed in Pusan, and was consolidated with Eighth Army. The CCF crossed the 38th Parallel, thus invading South Korea, as the NKPA had done six months earlier.

Much had happened in six weeks, little of it good, much blamed on General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. To set the stage for the next chapter— “Assessing the Blame”—we have to consider three statements about MacArthur. The first, directly about MacArthur and quite lengthy, is by Clay Blair, expressing the views of many others. The second, also by Blair, though mostly about General Walker, is implicitly about MacArthur. The third, by Walton’s successor, General Matthew Ridgeway, is expressly about MacArthur.

To this point [Walker’s death] the war had not been well fought. Most of the large mistakes had been MacArthur’s: grossly underestimating the professionalism of the NKPA; the inhumane, piecemeal commitment of the untrained Eighth Army; the shift of X Corps after Inchon from hot pursuit to a meaningless amphibious landing at Wonson; scandalously underestimating CCF strength and intentions; the foolish “race” to the Yalu in both the Eighth Army and X Corps sectors. As a result, some 60,000 American soldiers and Marines and probably five times that number of ROK soldiers were dead, missing, wounded, or missing.³¹⁴

General Walker did not get off any easier:

He would not challenge his superior, MacArthur. * * * Walker made many mistakes, especially in the early days of the war. The first was to underestimate

vastly and even to ridicule his enemy. * * * Within the Pusan Perimeter Walker was overly forgiving of too many old, inexperienced, or incompetent staffers and division and regimental commanders for far too long. * * * . . . Walker should have raised Cain until he got the competent leaders he required. He did not do apparently out of concern that he would offend the Pentagon or MacArthur or old friends. This reluctance cost many lives.

Walker's pursuit of the NKPA from the Pusan Perimeter was not well conceived. He placed the major emphasis on glamorous, headline-making armored "attacks to unlimited objectives" or, in the vernacular, gaining "real estate" rather than on destruction of enemy forces.

Walker must also share some of the blame for launching Eighth Army's "Home by Christmas" offensive from the Chongchin River. All his battlefield instincts and experience warned him that the offensive was not right. His army was pitifully undersupplied. His men had no ammo or warm clothing or food. ROK II Corps on his right flank was not armed or competent to anchor that important sector. His field commanders had already met substantial CCF troops in early November, and his G-3 [not G-2] section . . . believed the CCF had come into Korea in full strength. Yet in response to intense pressure from MacArthur, Walker proceeded northward, grudgingly accepting the gross underestimate of CCF strength of the GHQ G-2 (Willoughby) and his own G-2 (Tarkenton). [When necessary, he quickly shifted to the defensive] but he was much too slow to recognize the dangerous threat to his right flank when ROK II Corps collapsed. The disaster which befell the 2^d Division as a result was largely Walker's fault. His decision to withdraw Eighth Army from Pyongyang—and destroy its supplies—was probably premature and deserved the criticism it provoked.³¹⁵

Although appearing to sincerely profess great respect for Mac Arthur, Blair has approvingly written that Walker's successor, General Ridgeway, had this to say about MacArthur:

[Ridgeway regarded] MacArthur's "insistence on retaining control from Tokyo, 700 miles from the battle areas, as unwarranted and unsound" and "largely responsible for the heavy casualties and near disaster which followed." Moreover, he was "convinced" that many military decisions MacArthur had made were "wrong": the retaining of direct command of X Corps after its junction with Eighth Army at Seoul; the withdrawal of X Corps through Inchon, "preventing the urgently needed resupply of Eighth Army" and "precluding the prompt dispatch of forces overland to the Wonsan area"; the "reckless" dispersion of all ground forces in Korea; the advance of Eighth Army after taking POWs from "major units" of the CCF; the assignment of zones of advance to Eighth Army and X Corps which separated them by "hundreds of miles of extremely rough terrain, practically devoid of roads essential to the supply of our large units, with few and inaccurate maps, and with no possibility of the two commands being mutually supporting"; and, finally, the ordering of all American units to "advance with all possible speed to the Yalu."³¹⁶

It would take an entire volume to discuss, let alone refute, these serious charges some of which are absurd on their face. For example: “grossly underestimating the professionalism of the NKPA; the inhumane, piecemeal commitment of the untrained Eighth Army.”

As the earlier chapters of this book show, well before the North Korean buildup and then its attack on June 25, 1950, Korea had been taken out of MacArthur’s jurisdiction and given to the Department of State which should have been concerned not merely with “the professionalism of the NKPA” but much more.

As to “the inhumane, piecemeal commitment of the untrained Eighth Army” (whatever that is supposed to mean), General MacArthur was tasked by his commander-in-chief and by the United Nations to resist the North Korean invasion of South Korea. For whatever reasons, none of them MacArthur’s fault, the South Koreans were unable to stop, let alone reverse, the NKPA onslaught, and all MacArthur had at the beginning of the invasion were soft occupation troops from Japan. Perhaps Blair and others who were so glibly critical of MacArthur would have had him disobey orders and allow South Korea to be swamped by the Communists.

There is much more of this sort of shotgun criticism by Clay Blair and concurred in by others: The “race” to the Yalu (ordered by the President of the United States and the United Nations); the Wonsan landing being “meaningless” (when getting X Corps from Inchon to the east coast of Korea overland would have probably been impossible).

I mention these examples to underscore that this book is *not* about them. It is *not* about real or imagined strategic and/or tactical mistakes by MacArthur.

While there is much useful material in Blair’s book and others critical of MacArthur for this or that, their near rabid blaming him *for the only three main charges that this book addresses* are not sustainable.

12. ASSESSING THE BLAME

Introduction

To establish the context for what follows in this last chapter, I want to quote from the beginning of this book:

This book is about the blame that for over a half-century has been heaped on General of the Army Douglas MacArthur for the Chinese Communist intervention in the Korean War during October-November 1950, resulting in X Corps and Eighth Army being driven from the vicinity of the Yalu River south to the area of the 38th Parallel.

I hold that blaming MacArthur is unjust because American civilian and military authorities had failed to:

- (1) *Learn* that from the Chinese perspective the Communists had compelling reasons to intervene;
- (2) *Anticipate* that because of those reasons and the way the Chinese would have to fight, their intervention needed to be on a massive scale, and;
- (3) *Adapt* American forces' response to the Chinese strategy and tactics.

The result was an organizationally-caused military misfortune. Disastrous in many respects, yes. But not the fault of any one man, let alone General of the Army Douglas MacArthur.

Related to these points is Cohen and Gooch's recognition that "[m]isfortunes. . . which occur at the *tactical* level and are *localized* in scope, may often be properly laid at the door of individuals."³¹⁷ They cite Napoleon, who visually controlled the entire battlefield and thus could personally manage events occurring there. Compare this with MacArthur in Tokyo, with between him in distant Korea two separate commands (Eighth Army and X Corps), under which were other corps with their own divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, companies, platoons, and squads.

They compare the modern commander to chief operating officers of large business entities, who use all available information to draw conclusions and make decisions which will then be implemented by subordinates.

Yet, despite this parallel between the military and the business world, as Cohen and Gooch, observe, "[t]he urge to blame military misfortunes on individuals runs as deep as the inclination to blame human error for civil disasters."³¹⁸

As noted, at the beginning of their analysis, the authors identify the three kinds of military misfortunes that I've mentioned above, which they call "failures."

1. The failure to *learn* from the *past*. For example, although American naval and air assets were sitting ducks at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, eight hours later the Far East Command's air force sat wing to wing in Manila where it was destroyed on the ground by Japanese aircraft.³¹⁹
2. The failure to *anticipate* an adversary's *future* conduct. For example, after Hitler invaded Poland it was inevitable he would attack France.
3. The failure to *adapt* to *present* events. For example, the World I combatants' inability to cope with the new phenomenon of tanks, airplanes, machine guns and trench warfare.

According to Cohen and Gooch, when one type of these misfortunes occurs the failure can be characterized as "simple." Two together can be called an "aggregate" failure (most commonly consisting of learning failure and anticipatory failure).³²⁰ All three happening at the same time they call a "catastrophic" failure. Korea presented at least an aggregate failure.

Not learning from history:
Blame for not knowing the Chinese
would intervene in the Korean War

As we shall see, although Chinese intentions regarding intervention in the Korean War were hidden in contradictions fostered by them and dismissed with evasions and denials by our political and military leaders, there was sufficient evidence that the Communists would intervene. Indeed, evidence that Mao's forces had little choice but to intervene.

In considering how unlearned lessons were a substantial cause of the Chinese intervention, it is important to understand the chain of military command at the time of the Korean War. Article II of the Constitution designates the President as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States. He appoints the Secretary of Defense, with the advice and consent of the Senate. The National Security Act of 1947 officially established the Joint Chiefs of Staff: A Chairman (appointed by the President) and the Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy and Air Force.³²¹

The intent of the 1947 act was that the joint chiefs would function as advisers and planners, but not directly as force commanders. As we have seen, in the early days of the Korean War the Chairman and the JCS organization through him assumed a more active role, especially when dealing with General MacArthur.

Thus, while the formal *constitutional-statutory* military chain of command ran from President Truman to the Secretary and then to the individual chiefs, and then from them to theater commanders such as MacArthur, the *operational* hierarchy was from the President to the JCS Chairman, then to MacArthur. (The Department of State, National Security Council, and other individuals and entities often were involved in Korean War policy, but they were not in the *military* chain of command.)

There were at least ten important lessons some or all these six men and their organizations should have learned about what were, and necessarily had to be, Chinese intentions. Had they learned those lessons earlier, the Chinese intervention should not have been a surprise.³²²

1. Washington (the President and executive branch, especially the Departments of Defense and State) should have learned that historically and contemporaneously, China believed it could ill-afford a hostile country (the United States) on its Yalu River border, rather than a friendly regime (North Korea). Although many authorities in and out of government knew this, apparently their knowledge was never exploited by the policy and military establishment.
2. The same people should have learned that related to the Chinese need for a “buffer zone” was the principle of international “Communist solidarity,” as reflected in Stalin’s use of the Comintern and his support even then of indigenous movements such as Mao’s and Ho Chi Minh’s. Indeed, after taking the Japanese surrender in Manchuria and North Korea, the Soviet Union turned over captured arms to Mao’s fighters, many of whom had fought in the Chinese Civil War and showed up later in Korea.
3. The Department of Defense, JCS, and FEC should have learned after the earlier North Korean invasion that having virtually no solid intelligence on CCF order of battle in North Korea, let alone in Manchuria, the on-the-ground Eighth Army and X Corps commanders were in the dark (literally and figuratively) about what they faced.
4. G-2 at the Pentagon should have learned immediately after the North Korean invasion (as FEC did) that if anyone had at least facially plausible intelligence on Chinese Communist order of battle and other important information, it would have been Chiang Kai-shek’s forces on Formosa, obtained both from mainland agents left behind at the end of the civil war and others infiltrated there once the Nationalists fled.³²³
5. The President and JCS should have learned, at least after Inchon, that if they—and the United Nations—ordered General of the Army Douglas MacArthur to annihilate the NKPA and CCF, cross the 38th Parallel, reach the Yalu River, and unify Korea under a democratic government, that is exactly what he would do as long as there were grey cells in his brain and breath in his body. No matter what the impact on the Chinese Communists in Manchuria and/or North Korea. But the more one knows about the relationship between MacArthur and the JCS (especially Bradley, Collins and even Ridgeway) the more it becomes apparent that they really didn’t know what they needed to know about the five-star general, the JCS generals having served in World War II in Europe rather than with MacArthur in the Pacific.

6. The JCS, by its own later admission, should have learned not to defer to MacArthur, dazzled by the General's record, his performance in the Pacific and Japan, and his Korean War Inchon-Pusan Perimeter success. MacArthur was—five stars, Medal of Honor, and the rest—still a “subordinate” in the chain of command.³²⁴
7. The military establishment and State Department—both of which had Americans imbedded with the Chinese Communists during World War II and the Civil War—should have learned that they could not be trusted, and like Communists everywhere propaganda and disinformation was as much a tool of war as machine guns.
8. The foreign policy establishment, especially the Department of State, should have learned from the North Korean invasion—and the roles played in it by the Soviet Union and Kim Il-sung—that its goal was reunification of the peninsula, and that no matter what the cost in men, materiel and money the Communists would see the struggle through to the end even if that meant somehow getting the Chinese involved. They should have known long before the North Korean invasion that Josef Stalin—Mao's patron—could not have been an innocent bystander, merely watching from the sidelines as the war unfolded and his North Korean pawn was being taken off the board.
9. The CIA, State Department, and Defense Department analysts should have learned from the Chinese Civil War and the five years following it that “[c]onflict with America . . . was an excuse to carry out an aggressive campaign against domestic dissidents, to eliminate opponents and solidify total internal control. It was a chance to mobilize the masses, to demand extraordinary effort to resist foreign imperialism. * * * On the regional scene, it offered the chance to demonstrate Chinese leadership to the people of Asia, to show that China was not afraid to stand up to the most powerful member of the Western imperialist bloc.”³²⁵
10. The same analysts should have learned that the hydroelectric plants on the north side of the Yalu River were of considerable importance to the Chinese, and that they would not sit idly by while they were threatened by American air power.

Or, as Cohen and Gooch summed up from this analysis, “In retrospect the signs of large-scale Chinese intervention seem unambiguous. Intelligence from a variety of sources—direct communication from the enemy, espionage, prisoner-of-war interrogations, and others—pointed to a massive Chinese intervention in the war. The American experience suggests a failure of organizational learning as well, because UN forces had had at least one direct experience with Chinese forces a month before the real onslaught [the First Phase Offensive]. Moreover, the People's Liberation Army . . . had demonstrated its abilities during protracted war with both the Japanese and the government of Chiang Kai-shek.”³²⁶

There were, of course, other lessons that should have been learned about Chinese intentions before they intervened, but if these ten do not make the case that MacArthur was not *personally* blameworthy, nothing more will.³²⁷

If Clay Blair and others are looking for a scapegoat to blame for the United States and United Nations not knowing whether the Chinese would intervene in the Korean War, they must look away from General MacArthur. As Cohen and Gooch have written,

We cannot hold MacArthur solely or even primarily responsible for provoking the Chinese into attacking UN forces. [Based on lessons unlearned,] [o]nce the UN, and above all the American government, had adopted the goal of unifying Korea, it set in motion the Chinese intervention. MacArthur shared, no doubt, in the making of a flawed policy, but he did not initiate or determine it. We will, moreover, exclude that larger failure from our analysis here, *for it is distinct from the second and equally disturbing one: the operational failure.*³²⁸

Lest there be any misunderstanding about what the authors think about the failure too often attributed to General MacArthur, I quote Cohen and Gooch again:

There were two quite distinct failures in Korea in the summer and fall of 1950. The first [discussed above] *which involved not just MacArthur but the entire American government*, stemmed from the misjudgment of Chinese willingness to fight a large war to prevent [non-Communist] unification of Korea. Whether or not this failure was a culpable one or not, *it clearly concerned [implicated?] all who participated in the decision to allow UN forces north of the 38th Parallel.*³²⁹

Operational failure in not anticipating
the Chinese would have to intervene massively.

For all the reasons mentioned above as to why the Chinese would have to intervene, and then have to fight in a unique way, it was a failure from Washington at least down to division level in Korea not to have anticipated that UN forces would face massive CCF formations in the northeast and northwest of Korea.

In Chapters 8, 9, and 10 I have discussed how the estimates of CCF facing Eighth Army and X Corps were pathetically erroneous. The question is *why*. What were the reasons for such irrational underestimates of the enemy?

1. Charles A. Willoughby, promoted to Major General shortly after the Wake Island meeting, was not a stupid man. Not if he was a member of MacArthur's inner circle staff, a "Bataan Boy" who had served with the General in the Philippines, evacuated with him by PT boat and air to Australia, and for years served as his G-2 in Tokyo. But not only was Willoughby colossally wrong about the Chinese order of battle in North Korea, but at one crucial time he invented the numbers. His protégé, Lt. Colonel Tarkenton, the Eighth Army G-2, went along for the ride, apparently unable or unwilling to reach different,

- independent conclusions from those of his mentor. It is difficult to explain why Willoughby cooked the books given that he had only one client, General MacArthur. However, an educated guess is that Willoughby invented low Chinese strength to protect his boss who was out on a limb himself regarding the CCF facing UN forces on the Korean peninsula. Willoughby may have known the truth, but he likely suppressed and falsified it—which is much worse than a mere failure to anticipate.
2. To the extent reports of Chinese strength first in Manchuria and then North Korea came from Nationalist sources they were discounted by the civilian and military establishment because Chiang Kai-shek was distrusted and believed to have his own agenda, one not necessarily the same as the UN and the United States.
 3. Politically and diplomatically it was awkward to admit early in the war that the Chinese Communist government was itself behind the fighters, so it was convenient to conspire in the lie that they were “volunteers” and thus few in number.
 4. General Almond was trying for the brass ring—his forces to be the first Americans to reach the Yalu River—and if he admitted to himself or higher command that he faced massive CCF his mission might be aborted, as eventually it was. Hence Almond’s “stragglers” and “remnants” characterizations.
 5. The Chinese First Phase Offensive involved only a modest number of enemy forces, who broke off contact and disappeared after initial contacts creating the impression that there were not many of them. As we shall see in the following section, this was a failure also of understanding, let alone adapting, to how the Chinese fought.
 6. Apparently, no one from the JCS down to line units understood the Chinese way of virtually invisible infiltration, night marching, camouflage, and discipline—and thus had no idea how many of the enemy were in Manchuria and then North Korea. Far East Air Force was thus of no help in estimating Chinese strength. More about this in the following section.
 7. If it were unclear whether the Chinese would intervene at all, it had to be equally unclear to everyone how many of them would enter North Korea from Manchuria.

It should be self-evident that General MacArthur could not *personally* been responsible for any of this. A valued member of his staff was lying to him. In the entire military establishment, MacArthur was one of few who trusted Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists. There is no evidence he, unlike others, believed the Chinese fighters were “volunteers” or that his chief of staff, General Almond, was so possessed to reach the Yalu first that he would knowingly underestimate CCF strength. For intelligence on the mysterious withdrawal of the Chinese from contact with Eighth Army and X Corp

—the Communists’ First Phase Offensive— MacArthur relied on Generals Walker and Almond, and they in turn on their own and subordinate G-2s. As explained in more detail below, apparently no one knew how the CCF needed to fight, and thus how massive were the formations they required. If for reasons we have seen, MacArthur did not believe the Chinese would intervene or, if they did, they would come only in small numbers, he would not have anticipated massive formations.

Clay Blair and his cohort will have to look elsewhere for failure to anticipate the massive Chinese intervention. That place is at the organizations responsible for the actions and inactions described above.

Operational failure in not adapting
to how the Chinese had to, and did, fight.

The Chinese Communist Army in Korea turned its substantial deficiencies into combat strengths in a war with the most powerful military machine on earth. It is an incredible story, well told by Cohen and Gooch, from whom much of the above and what follows is taken.

Even though he may have been fighting much of his adult life, the Chinese infantryman was an illiterate peasant. His light infantry army had no tanks, field artillery or motor transport (even animal transport was in short supply). CCF weapons were a disparate mix of other countries’ rifles and ammunition: some light and fewer heavy machine guns, infantry-level mortars, and a seemingly endless supply of hand grenades.

The Chinese infantryman carried his food, usually a few days’ worth of rice, and could remain in the field only a few days until returning to base for resupply of food and ammunition.

His clothes were mostly substandard for the piercing wet cold and snow of North Korea, and during the first year of the war the Chinese infantry lost literally uncountable numbers of troop to exposure and frostbite.

Seriously wounded Chinese had little or no chance of survival and were often left to fend for themselves where they fell.

On the other hand, especially when their logistics were organized, the UN forces usually had an abundance of everything needed to wage a modern war: Standardized weapons, ammunition, tanks, artillery, clothes, food, medics, transport, air power.

But that was not the war the Chinese fought; their disadvantages forced them to fight very differently.

To begin with, as Cohen and Gooch observed, “[t]he PLA was not a simply watered-down version of the NKPA [with its Soviet-supplied weaponry] but a *different* army, with unique strengths, weaknesses, tactics, and operational preferences.”³³⁰ Nor did the

Chinese fight like the Soviets, with “frontal assault backed by tanks and artillery, supported by powerful flank attacks, and accompanied by infiltration behind enemy lines.”³³¹ They fought, literally, by the principles of an ancient book, *The Art of War*, attributed to Sun Tzu.

- ✓ All warfare is based on deception.
- ✓ Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity.
- ✓ When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near.
- ✓ Offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him.
- ✓ When he concentrates [his forces], prepare against him; where he is strong avoid him.
- ✓ Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance.
- ✓ Keep him under a strain and wear him down.
- ✓ When he is united, divide him.
- ✓ Attack where he is unprepared; sally out when he does not expect you.

The CCF fought the only way they could, which befuddled their UN enemy and contributed to the Communists’ successes.

They attacked mainly by night, using large quantities of hand grenades, light machine gun and mortar fire . . . from very close ranges. They usually approached from the rear, after drawing enemy fire by sniping and bugle or pipe music. Operationally, the Chinese had a more subtle approach than the North Koreans: feinting, probing, or withdrawing (as they did after the First Phase Offensive) in order to test enemy reactions or to confuse and intimidate them.³³²

Whereas UN tactical air power saved the Pusan Perimeter, in North Korea the CCF hid during the day. UN aircraft were blind at night.

That is why MacArthur wanted to bomb the Yalu Bridges. That’s why tactical air power was a core part of the General’s answer to Truman at Wake Island where on October 15, 1950, for the second time that day President Truman asked General MacArthur “What are the chances for Chinese . . . interference [in the Korean War]?”³³³

As I noted above, according to notes taken at the meeting by General Omar Bradley, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, MacArthur responded:

Very little [chance]. Had they interfered in the first or second months [late June to late August 1950] it would have been decisive. We are no longer fearful of their intervention. We no longer stand hat in hand. The Chinese have 300,000 men *in Manchuria* [across the Yalu River from North Korea]. Of these probably not more than 100/125,000 are distributed along the Yalu River. Only 50/60,000 could be gotten across the Yalu River. They have no air force. Now that we have bases for our Air Force in Korea, *if* the Chinese tried to get down to Pyongyang [North Korea’s capital, then in UN hands] *there would be the greatest slaughter*.³³⁴

Blair noted that “when MacArthur returned to Tokyo from Wake Island, he had no inkling of the CCF armies gathering in North Korea.”³³⁵ (Why he didn’t, Blair did not inform his readers.)

This is consistent with what MacArthur did *not* tell Truman: The General did not tell the President that the Chinese were *already* in North Korea. Even Blair, no fan of MacArthur, acknowledged that the General did not know at Wake Island that substantial numbers of Chinese had already secretly infiltrated across the Yalu River.

Although after the Wake Island meeting allegations were made that Bradley’s notes were not fully accurate, Professor James has written that “[n]ot much is known about what Truman and MacArthur discussed before the general session [which included their aides]. While they were talking on the back seat of the small Chevrolet en route to the Quonset [hut], the Secret Service agent who was on the front seat beside the driver remembered that Truman asked about the probability of Peking’s intervention in the Korean conflict. MacArthur replied that his intelligence did not indicate the Red Chinese would enter the war, but if they did his UNC [United Nations Command] could handle them. Truman said that at the Quonset the general ‘assured’ him that ‘the victory was won in Korea’ and reasserted that ‘there was little possibility of the Chinese Communists coming in.’”³³⁶

Thus, did MacArthur offer his commander-in-chief three reasons not to be concerned about the Chinese:

- (1) The General had no intelligence indicating they *would* intervene— which is vastly different from MacArthur saying he *did* have intelligence indicating the Chinese would *not* intervene. I have discussed this above.
- (2) But if they did want to intervene, only about twenty-percent of their total strength would be able to cross the Yalu River. In large part because the bridges would have been destroyed.
- (3) Regardless of how many Chinese troops entered North Korea, they would be decimated by unopposed UN air power. If tactical air could find them.

Military historian S.L.A. Marshall has noted that “[t]hat there is invariably a lag in intelligence flow between the frontal unit where the thing happens and the higher headquarters where it is evaluated. ROK II Corps at first reported possession of two Chinese prisoners, then later added to the number. Summary interviews conducted on the spot revealed mainly that the captives belonged to small provisional units of Chinese which had entered Korea as ‘volunteers’ after being dragooned from their regular formations. These morsels of information— hardly significant in themselves—were about all that had reached topside when two days later General MacArthur flew to Wake Island to tell President Truman that Chinese intervention was not a plausible or potent threat in the war.”³³⁷

Other deficiencies suffered by the Chinese worked in their favor. Even UN air power that could spot the Chinese was often impotent because the CCF would fight close-in to UN

forces, and the danger of hitting their own troops with bombs, napalm, machine gun and rocket fire would often stay the fighters' guns and bombs.

Very few of the Chinese officers spoke English, so if captured they could not easily be interrogated, especially because the UN forces were short on interpreters in the various Chinese dialects.

Among the equipment lacked by the Chinese were wire and wireless radios, so they used runners and bugles, providing no signals intelligence for the UN to intercept.

UN photo reconnaissance was useless in the dark, and the Chinese were often holed-up during the day, even when they attacked in the light.

Overall, hundreds of thousand Chinese fought a guerilla war against the most formidable modern army on earth.

How did that army respond?

Once again, I turn to Cohen and Gooch. They have observed that the Korean War “was peculiar in the nature of the enemy and the operational and tactical patterns required to beat it. It was strange too in the flaws it revealed in the American methods and practices that had brought—or at least accompanied—victory only five years earlier [in World War II]. In fact, the more we study the failure of November-December 1950, the more it appears that it resulted from the greatest military success of American arms—the triumph of World War II.”³³⁸

In other words, the elements of American strategy and tactics that contributed to victory in World War II, worked against our adapting to the war the Chinese were fighting in Korea. It is often said that the generals always fight ‘the last war’.”

The most succinct yet powerful identification from Cohen and Gooch, which they italicized for emphasis, is that:

*The failure of American leaders fully to understand that the enemy's situation and their own bore little resemblance to those they had faced [against Germans, Italians, and Japanese] less than a decade before best explains the debacle in North Korea.*³³⁹

For example, MacArthur's almost religious belief in air power. But Pyongyang, Hagaruri, and Sudong were not Berlin, Milan, and Tokyo. Nor were the rail lines of North Korea like those of Germany. Nor the dispersed, day-hiding Chinese troops akin to the concentration of Germans above the cliffs at Normandy.

As Cohen and Gooch further observe, many American infantry officers in Korea were former World War II European Theater armor commanders. The terrain there was different. The weather. The enemy's stamina, fighting experience, and willingness to die. The supply lines. Virtually everything was different, and those differences called for the kind of adapting that was not often forthcoming in Korea.

Except from the 1st Marine Division, which prevailed against a new enemy, in a different place, under circumstances that whipped others.

Cohen and Gooch make some profoundly important points about the Marines.

Every marine had been trained as an infantryman, imbued with the skills necessary for him to fight his way through the Chinese to evacuation at Hungnam.

Their commander, General Smith, refused the proffer of air rescue for his troops choosing instead for them to walk out with their wounded and equipment.

Some Marines running the gauntlet knew a bit about the Chinese from duty in China during World War II, and used that knowledge to their advantage.

Marine unit cohesion was an article of faith, unlike with some Army units.

Also, unlike Army units, the Marines arrived in Korea at full divisional strength, and their ranks were not diluted with South Korean soldiers as were the Army's. Unlike the Army, Marine strength had not been drained to support garrisons in Europe.

Marine air support was from their own tactical aircraft.

The Marines established battalion-size perimeters to hold off the Chinese, while the Army used far fewer men. And the Marines dug in at night, which many Army units did not. They set out barbed wire and other alarms, patrolled aggressively, took, and mostly held, the high ground, maintained discipline, changed socks nightly to prevent frostbite. Wore their steel helmets. Kept their grenades, until they used them effectively.

There is much more to be said about the 1st First Marine Division in Korea, but at the risk of gilding the lily, I will make just three more points. Take every movie depiction of Marines in combat, multiply tenfold, and you will see the Corps in action during the Korean War. Second, because they were Marines, they assessed the war correctly, adapting to what Korea and the Chinese threw at them—and they threw it back many times over.³⁴⁰

As to failure to adapt, the organizational failures described above can all be subsumed under a single reason: *From top to bottom in the civilian and military establishment there was little or no recognition of the kind of war the Chinese were fighting in November-December 1950, and thus virtually no organizational adaptation to it.*

We have seen the results.

As to blaming General MacArthur for what went wrong During October-December 1950 in Korea, Cohen and Gooch remind us that “. . . a commander can be, and often is . . . at

the mercy of organizations not under his control, of organizational subcultures so deeply ingrained that they are oblivious to his influence, of political pressures he cannot counteract, of military technologies he cannot change, of allocations of human and material resources he cannot affect. He can be a prisoner of assumptions he shares and of earlier decisions he cannot unmake. * * * It is precisely in these gray regions that a commander cannot control (or can do so only with great difficulty) that military misfortune develops.”³⁴¹

And did!

Conclusion

By March 1950 Ridgeway's Eighth Army was steadily moving north. The UN retook Seoul in mid-month. Only some twenty miles ahead, once again, loomed the Rubicon: The 38th Parallel. No one—military and civilian alike—had forgotten what happened just five months earlier when UN forces crossed into North Korea.

That awareness and the wavering attitudes of the United States' co-combatants, together with the mounting Chinese and North Korean casualties, combined to make Washington believe a peace overture to the Communists might bear fruit.

Hanging the overture on the fact that most of South Korea had been cleared of the aggressors, Washington said UN forces would not cross the 38th Parallel until a diplomatic settlement had been explored.

MacArthur was informed.

His response avoided the Washington's peace initiative plan, and reiterated what he had been saying for months:

- No more restrictions on UN action in Korea.
- Existing restrictions on air and naval operations made it impracticable to clear all North Korea.
- "My present directives, establishing the security of the command [i.e. the defensive lines] as the paramount consideration are adequate to cover the two points raised by the State Department [time for State to make diplomatic overtures, and MacArthur to maintain contact with the enemy]."

The five-star General of the Army was not finished. Three days later, he had something to say about Washington's incipient peace initiative. Plenty.

On March 24, 1951, MacArthur "issued a public statement that, in effect, was an arrogant challenge to the pride of Communist China and also to the authority of his Washington superiors."³⁴²

- Organized Communist forces have been mostly cleared from North Korea.
- China lacks the industrial capacity for modern war, not possessing either the manufacturing base or raw materials necessary.
- Its numerical potential—no matter how brave nor fanatical—can be destroyed by superior firepower, which UN forces possess.
- Because of these facts, the Chinese have been unable to conquer Korea.
- If the UN ceased geographically limiting its operations to Korea and expanded them to China's coastal and interior areas, the Communist military might face imminent collapse.

- Do not complicate a Korean settlement with issues about Formosa or the “China seat” in the United Nations Security Council.
- Now to be resolved in Korea were not military, but political, questions.
- He was ready to meet with the enemy commander-in-chief to negotiate a military solution which would accomplish the political objectives.

Although some observers read MacArthur’s statement as one of principle, Professor James notes that “[b]y insulting Communist China and calling on it to admit that it had been defeated he assuredly killed any hope that Peking might have considered the overture by the President. In that sense he succeeded, but in the process he [MacArthur] brought his own military career to an end.”³⁴³

Truman was livid, and decided immediately to relieve MacArthur. When and how were left open for the time being. MacArthur’s foray into foreign policy and insubordination was too much for the President of the United States, who later would write that “MacA’s Mar. 24 statement, after the Mar. 20 statement to him, was not just a public disagreement over policy, but deliberate, premeditated sabotage of US and UN policy.” Acheson said MacArthur had “perpetrated a major act of sabotage of a government operation.” Professor James believed that MacArthur’s “objective was nothing less than a major redirection of American foreign and military policies, particularly toward placing a much higher priority on what he believed to be national self-interests at stake in East Asia.”³⁴⁴

Despite this, on the same day, Truman had the JCS issue a reminder to MacArthur that he had previously been ordered to “coordinate” all public statements with Washington. If Communist military leaders asked for an armistice, MacArthur was immediately to ask the JCS for instructions about how to proceed. No unilateral action was to be taken by the general.

Shortly before, MacArthur had written to House Minority Leader Joseph Martin that, among other things, in Korea the United States was fighting Europe’s war on the battlefield while the diplomats there were fighting with words. Truman construed this and other content of the letter as MacArthur not only disagreeing with the government’s policy, but openly opposing it by insubordination to the President of the United States. Martin made the letter public. Other critical comments by the General followed in press interviews with MacArthur.

Truman and his cohort—Acheson, Marshall, Bradley, Harriman—dawdled. Recommendations flowed back and forth about what to do about the five-star general in Tokyo who was upsetting them so much.

In early April, some Brits weighted in attacking MacArthur.

On April 9, Truman’s four advisors and the JCS were finally in accord; if the President wanted to relieve General MacArthur, they agreed.

Under date of April 10, 1951, and signed by five-star General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the order relieving General Douglas MacArthur of his four commands stated:

I have been directed to relay the following message to you from President Truman: I deeply regret that it becomes my duty as President and Commander in Chief of the United States military forces to replace you as Supreme Commander, Allied Powers; Commander in Chief, United Nations Command; Commander in Chief, Far East; and Commanding General, US Army, Far East. * * * My reasons for your replacement will be made concurrently with the delivery to you of the foregoing order, and are contained in the next following message. Harry S. Truman.

Among Truman's reasons:

. . . General of the Army Douglas MacArthur is unable to give his wholehearted support to the policies of the United States Government and of the United Nations in matters pertaining to his official duties. * * * It is fundamental . . . that military commanders must be governed by the policies and directives issued to them in the manner provided by our laws and Constitution. In time of crisis, this consideration is particularly compelling.³⁴⁵

Harry Truman's sacking of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur on April 11, 1951 ended the military career of America's most illustrious soldier. He had led his Corps of Cadets at West Point, served with distinction in all his country's wars, and held its highest military positions. After vanquishing the Japanese in the Pacific, MacArthur accepted Japan's unconditional surrender on the battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay, and then turned his former imperial foe into a democracy.

After Truman and his political and military cronies in Washington deliberately quarantined MacArthur from unfolding events in Korea, they immediately turned to him after North Korean Communists attacked the defenseless South in June 1950.

With barely a toehold at the Pusan Perimeter, MacArthur orchestrated a breakout simultaneously with a bold amphibious landing in the enemy's rear at Inchon. He destroyed the North Korean Army, followed orders to liberate Seoul, crossed the 38th Parallel, seized Pyongyang, and drove for the Yalu River to fulfill the United Nations' unequivocal mandate to reunify Korea under a democratic government of the people's choosing in a free election.

MacArthur refused to be silent when Machiavellian politicians in Washington prevented him from attacking Manchurian sanctuaries from which the Chinese Communists and North Korean remnant ventured forth to kill troops under his command. He spoke out against political policies he deemed inimical to his troops and the best interests of the country he loved and for so many years, in so many places, had fought for.

So, the civilian Commander-in-Chief fired the military commander-in-chief.

When MacArthur returned to the country he had left sixteen years earlier, millions of his fellow Americans cheered the cashiered hero as he made his way by train from San Francisco to Washington. Among those welcoming home the unconquered hero were those who had stood at arms with him in many conflicts, from the Philippines to Korea.

On April 19, 1951, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and tie, shorn of his uniform, rank and medals but not his dignity and stature—let alone his storied eloquence—General of the Army Douglas MacArthur delivered his valedictory speech to America at a joint session of Congress. As to Korea, the unrepentant, unapologetic MacArthur stood tall openly criticizing the Truman Administration for sacrificing to politics his men and what could have been their victory.

While I was not consulted prior to the President's decision to intervene in support of the Republic of Korea, that decision from a military standpoint, proved a sound one. As I said, it proved to be a sound one, as we hurled back the invader and decimated his forces. Our victory was complete, and our objectives within reach, when Red China intervened with numerically superior ground forces.

This created a new war and an entirely new situation, a situation not contemplated when our forces were committed against the North Korean invaders; a situation which called for new decisions in the diplomatic sphere to permit the realistic adjustment of military strategy. Such decisions have not been forthcoming.

While no man in his right mind would advocate sending our ground forces into continental China, and such was never given a thought, the new situation did urgently demand a drastic revision of strategic planning if our political aim was to defeat this new enemy as we had defeated the old one.

Apart from the military need, as I saw it, to neutralize sanctuary protection given the enemy north of the Yalu, I felt that military necessity in the conduct of the war made necessary the intensification of our economic blockade against China, the imposition of a naval blockade against the China coast, removal of restrictions on air reconnaissance of China's coastal area and of Manchuria, removal of restrictions on the forces of the Republic of China on Formosa, with logistical support to contribute to their effective operations against the Chinese mainland.

For entertaining these views, all professionally designed to support our forces in Korea and to bring hostilities to an end with the least possible delay and at a saving of countless American and allied lives, I have been severely criticized in lay circles, principally abroad, despite my understanding that from a military standpoint the above views have been fully shared in the past by practically every

military leader concerned with the Korean campaign, including our own Joint Chiefs of Staff.

I called for reinforcements, but was informed that reinforcements were not available. I made clear that if not permitted to destroy the enemy built-up bases north of the Yalu, if not permitted to utilize the friendly Chinese Force of some 600,000 men on Formosa, if not permitted to blockade the China coast to prevent the Chinese Reds from getting succor from without, and if there was to be no hope of major reinforcements, the position of the command from the military standpoint forbade victory.

We could hold in Korea by constant maneuver and in an approximate area where our supply line advantages were in balance with the supply line disadvantages of the enemy, but we could hope at best for only an indecisive campaign with its terrible and constant attrition upon our forces if the enemy utilized its full military potential.

I have constantly called for the new political decisions essential to a solution.

Efforts have been made to distort my position. It has been said in effect that I was a warmonger. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I know war as few other men now living know it, and nothing to me — and nothing to me is more revolting. I have long advocated its complete abolition, as its very destructiveness on both friend and foe has rendered it useless as a means of settling international disputes.

Indeed, the Second Day of September 1945, just following the surrender of the Japanese nation on the Battleship Missouri, I formally cautioned as follows:

Men since the beginning of time have sought peace. Various methods through the ages have been attempted to devise an international process to prevent or settle disputes between nations. From the very start workable methods were found in so far as individual citizens were concerned, but the mechanics of an instrumentality of larger international scope have never been successful. Military alliances, balances of power, Leagues of Nations, all in turn failed, leaving the only path to be by way of the crucible of war. The utter destructiveness of war now blocks out this alternative. We have had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advances in science, art, literature and all the material and cultural developments of the past 2000 years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh.

But once war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very object is victory, not prolonged indecision.

In war there can be no substitute for victory.

There are some who for varying reasons would appease Red China. They are blind to history's clear lesson, for history teaches with unmistakable emphasis that appeasement but begets new and bloodier wars. It points to no single instance where this end has justified that means, where appeasement has led to more than a sham peace. Like blackmail, it lays the basis for new and successively greater demands until, as in blackmail, violence becomes the only other alternative. Why, my soldiers asked me, surrender military advantages to an enemy in the field? I could not answer.

Some may say to avoid spread of the conflict into an all-out war with China. Others, to avoid Soviet intervention. Neither explanation seems valid, for China is already engaging with the maximum power it can commit, and the Soviet will not necessarily mesh its actions with our moves. Like a cobra, any new enemy, will more likely strike whenever it feels that the relativity of military and other potentialities is in its favor on a world-wide basis.

The tragedy of Korea is further heightened by the fact that its military action was confined to its territorial limits. It condemns that nation, which it is our purpose to save, to suffer the devastating impact of full naval and air bombardment while the enemy's sanctuaries are fully protected from such attack and devastation.

Of the nations of the world, Korea alone, up to now, is the sole one which has risked its all against communism. The magnificence of the courage and fortitude of the Korean people defies description. They have chosen to risk death rather than slavery. Their last words to me were: "Don't scuttle the Pacific."

I have just left your fighting sons in Korea. They have done their best there, and I can report to you without reservation that they are splendid in every way.

It was my constant effort to preserve them and end this savage conflict honorably and with the least loss of time and a minimum sacrifice of life. Its growing bloodshed has caused me the deepest anguish and anxiety. Those gallant men will remain often in my thoughts and in my prayers always.

I am closing my 52 years of military service. When I joined the Army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all of my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the

oath at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have all since vanished, but I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barracks ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that old soldiers never die; they just fade away. And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty.

Goodbye.³⁴⁶

As age and infirmity drew Douglas MacArthur ever closer to Valhalla,³⁴⁷ there was one last goodbye to be said. On May 12, 1962 General MacArthur returned to the bluffs over New York's Hudson River where he began his military career . . . to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

There, standing soul-naked before the Corps of Cadets, in words that deserve to be quoted verbatim and oft-repeated, Douglas MacArthur took his leave.

No human being could fail to be deeply moved by such a tribute as this, coming from a profession I have served so long and a people I have loved so well. It fills me with an emotion I cannot express. But this [Thayer] award is not intended primarily to honor a personality, but to symbolize a great moral code — the code of conduct and chivalry of those who guard this beloved land of culture and ancient descent. That is the animation of this medallion. For all eyes and for all time, it is an expression of the ethics of the American soldier. That I should be integrated in this way with so noble an ideal, arouses a sense of pride and yet of humility which will be with me always.

“Duty, Honor, Country”—those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn.

Unhappily, I possess neither that eloquence of diction, that poetry of imagination, nor that brilliance of metaphor to tell you all that they mean.

The unbelievers will say they are but words, but a slogan, but a flamboyant phrase. Every pedant, every demagogue, every cynic, every hypocrite, every troublemaker, and, I am sorry to say, some others of an entirely different character, will try to downgrade them even to the extent of mockery and ridicule.

But these are some of the things they do. They build your basic character. They mold you for your future roles as the custodians of the nation's defense. They make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid.

They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure, but humble and gentle in success; not to substitute words for action; not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm, but to have compassion on those who fall; to master

yourself before you seek to master others; to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high; to learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; to reach into the future, yet never neglect the past; to be serious, yet never take yourself too seriously; to be modest so that you will remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength.

They give you a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions, a freshness of the deep springs of life, a temperamental predominance of courage over timidity, an appetite for adventure over love of ease.

They create in your heart the sense of wonder, the unfailing hope of what next, and the joy and inspiration of life. They teach you in this way to be an officer and a gentleman.

And what sort of soldiers are those you are to lead? Are they reliable? Are they brave? Are they capable of victory?

Their story is known to all of you. It is the story of the American man at arms. My estimate of him was formed on the battlefield many, many years ago, and has never changed. I regarded him then, as I regard him now, as one of the world's noblest figures; not only as one of the finest military characters, but also as one of the most stainless.

His name and fame are the birthright of every American citizen. In his youth and strength, his love and loyalty, he gave all that mortality can give. He needs no eulogy from me, or from any other man. He has written his own history and written it in red on his enemy's breast.

But when I think of his patience under adversity, of his courage under fire, and of his modesty in victory, I am filled with an emotion of admiration I cannot put into words. He belongs to history as furnishing one of the greatest examples of successful patriotism. He belongs to posterity as the instructor of future generations in the principles of liberty and freedom. He belongs to the present, to us, by his virtues and by his achievements.

In twenty campaigns, on a hundred battlefields, around a thousand campfires, I have witnessed that enduring fortitude, that patriotic self-abnegation, and that invincible determination which have carved his statue in the hearts of his people. From one end of the world to the other, he has drained deep the chalice of courage.

As I listened to those songs, in memory's eye I could see those staggering columns of the First World War, bending under soggy packs on many a weary march, from dripping dusk to drizzling dawn, slogging ankle-deep through the mire of shell-pocked roads, to form grimly for the attack, blue-lipped, covered with sludge and mud, chilled by the wind and rain, driving home to their objective, and for many, to the judgment seat of God.

I do not know the dignity of their birth, but I do know the glory of their death. They died unquestioning, uncomplaining, with faith in their hearts, and on their lips the hope that we would go on to victory.

Always for them: Duty, Honor, Country. Always their blood, and sweat, and tears, as we sought the way and the light and the truth. And twenty years after, on the other side of the globe, again the filth of dirty foxholes, the stench of ghostly trenches, the slime of dripping dugouts, those broiling suns of relentless heat, those torrential rains of devastating storms, the loneliness and utter desolation of jungle trails, the bitterness of long separation of those they loved and cherished, the deadly pestilence of tropical disease, the horror of stricken areas of war.

Their resolute and determined defense, their swift and sure attack, their indomitable purpose, their complete and decisive victory—always victory, always through the bloody haze of their last reverberating shot, the vision of gaunt, ghastly men, reverently following your password of Duty, Honor, Country.

The code which those words perpetuate embraces the highest moral law and will stand the test of any ethics or philosophies ever promoted for the uplift of mankind. Its requirements are for the things that are right, and its restraints are from the things that are wrong. The soldier, above all other men, is required to practice the greatest act of religious training: sacrifice. In battle and in the face of danger and death, he disposes those divine attributes which his Maker gave when he created man in His own image. No physical courage and no brute instinct can take the place of the divine help which alone can sustain him. However hard the incidents of war may be, the soldier who is called upon to offer and to give his life for his country is the noblest development of mankind.

You now face a new world, a world of change. The thrust into outer space of the satellite spheres and missiles mark a beginning of another epoch in the long story of mankind. In the five or more billions of years the scientists tell us it has taken to form the earth, in the three or more billion years of development of the human race, there has never been a more abrupt or staggering evolution. We deal now, not with things of this world alone, but with the illimitable distances and as yet unfathomed mysteries of the universe. We are reaching out for a new and boundless frontier. We speak in strange terms: of harnessing the cosmic energy; of making winds and tides work for us; of creating unheard synthetic materials to supplement or even replace our old standard basics; to purify sea water for our drink; of mining the ocean floors for new fields of wealth and food; of disease preventatives to expand life into the hundreds of years; of controlling the weather for a more equitable distribution of heat and cold, of rain and shine; of spaceships to the Moon; of the primary target in war, no longer limited to the armed forces of an enemy, but instead to include his civil populations; of ultimate conflict between a united human race and the sinister forces of some other planetary galaxy; of such dreams and fantasies as to make life the most exciting of all time.

And through all this welter of change and development your mission remains

fixed, determined, inviolable. It is to win our wars. Everything else in your professional career is but corollary to this vital dedication. All other public purposes, all other public projects, all other public needs, great or small, will find others for their accomplishment; but you are the ones who are trained to fight. Yours is the profession of arms, the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory, that if you lose, the Nation will be destroyed, that the very obsession of your public service must be Duty, Honor, Country.

Others will debate the controversial issues, national and international, which divide men's minds. But serene, calm, aloof, you stand as the Nation's war guardians, as its lifeguards from the raging tides of international conflict, as its gladiators in the arena of battle. For a century and a half you have defended, guarded and protected its hallowed traditions of liberty and freedom, of right and justice. Let civilian voices argue the merits or demerits of our processes of government: whether our strength is being sapped by deficit financing indulged in too long, by federal paternalism grown too mighty, by power groups grown too arrogant, by politics grown too corrupt, by crime grown too rampant, by morals grown too low, by taxes grown too high, by extremists grown too violent; whether our personal liberties are as firm and complete as they should be; these great national problems are not for your professional participation or military solution. Your guidepost stands out like a tenfold beacon in the night: Duty, Honor, Country.

You are the leaven which binds together the entire fabric of our national system of defense. From your ranks come the great captains who hold the Nation's destiny in their hands the moment the war tocsin sounds.

The Long Gray Line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and gray, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, Honor, Country.

This does not mean that you are warmongers. On the contrary, the soldier above all other people prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war. But always in our ears ring the ominous words of Plato, that wisest of all philosophers: "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here. My days of old have vanished — tone and tint. They have gone glimmering through the dreams of things that were. Their memory is one of wondrous beauty, watered by tears and coaxed and caressed by the smiles of yesterday. I listen then, but with thirsty ear, for the witching melody of faint bugles blowing reveille, of far drums beating the long roll. In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange, mournful mutter of the battlefield. But in the evening of my memory always I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and re-echoes: Duty, Honor, Country.

Today marks my final roll call with you. But I want you to know that when I cross

the river, my last conscious thoughts will be of the Corps, and the Corps, and the Corps.

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur left the hall at West Point to a thunderous standing ovation . . .

. . . and just faded away.

NOTES

¹ James, D. Clayton, *The Years of MacArthur, Volume I, 1880-1941*, viii. Subsequent quotations will cite “James I.” My citations to Professor James and others throughout this book incorporate the original and other sources from which they have drawn their quotations, facts, and conclusions, unless otherwise noted.

² Manchester, William, *American Caesar*, 3. Subsequent quotations will cite “Manchester.”

While reasonable people may disagree about whether General MacArthur deserved blame for Chinese intervention in the Korean War, there can be no question about his personal bravery despite unfounded (and often malicious) anecdotes to the contrary, as in the oft-heard deprecating reference to him as “Dugout Doug.”

By 1951 MacArthur had received some twenty-two medals, more than half for courageous conduct. In battle after battle and war after war he frequently ignored personal danger. In Korea he was flown in an unarmed aircraft along the Yalu River, the border between Communist North Korea and Communist China. Manchuria, across the river, was then teeming with Chinese Communist troops. Manchester, 4.

Another testimonial to MacArthur’s fearlessness: “. . . anybody that says Douglas MacArthur was a coward is crazy. * * * He may have thought he was Jesus Christ and invulnerable to anything—that could well be—but he was not scared of anything. I watched him come ashore at Inchon, walk around a burning North Korean tank, and he could well have been in the range of small-arms fire. So he was no coward.” Professor D. Clayton James’s interview of Major General John H. Chiles, 32. Subsequent quotations will cite “James-Chiles.”

³ Cohen, Eliot M. and Gooch, John, *Military Misfortunes, The Anatomy of Failure in War*, 168, quoting General of the Army Douglas MacArthur when in late November 1950 massive Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) smashed into the American Eighth

Army in northwestern Korea and X Corps in the northeast. Subsequent quotations will cite “Cohen and Gooch.”

⁴ In the military, to identify corps Roman numerals are used in place of the Arabic. Thus, Tenth Corps is routinely designated “X Corps.”

⁵ My debt to Messrs. Cohen and Gooch cannot be overemphasized. Their identification and explication of the distinction between military incompetence and military misfortune explains much about war in general and the Korean War in particular. As will be evident later in this book, I have relied upon their work extensively to make my case exonerating General MacArthur and emphasizing that the failure regarding Chinese intervention in the Korean War was a military misfortune, not attributable to incompetence on General MacArthur’s part. When *Military Misfortunes* was published in 1990, it was a groundbreaking analysis applicable, as the authors prove, to all wars. Yet decades later, the lessons they teach in *Military Misfortunes* have remained largely unlearned regarding America’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

⁶ See Blair, Clay, *The Forgotten War*, 464. Subsequent quotations will cite “Blair.”

⁷ See Hanson, Victor Davis, *Claremont Review of Books*, Winter 2007/2008, 9. Yet, on December 12, 2012—http://pjmedia.com/victordavishanson/20th-century-war-paradoxes/?print=1—Dr. Hanson, for whom I have the greatest respect, characterized the Inchon invasion as brilliant and MacArthur’s “rapid advance to the Yalu River and the Chinese border” inspired.

⁸ Others—in addition to authors D. Clayton James and William Manchester—include books by Roy E. Appleman, Cohen and Gooch, T.R. Fehrenbach, David Halberstam, S.L.A. Marshall, Patrick C. Roe, Martin Russ, Stanley Sandler, Richard C. Thornton, Allen S. Whiting and Kenneth Ray Young. Also, those cited in the Notes and listed in the Bibliography. General Douglas MacArthur’s autobiography, *Reminiscences*, has been informative, although like many autobiographies there is always a danger that portions can be read as self-serving. Accordingly, I have not relied on *Reminiscences* to any considerable extent.

⁹ It would not have been possible for me to propound and develop the subject and theme of this book without drawing heavily on the work of some of the authors named above, and others cited in the Notes and listed in the Bibliography— especially Messrs. Cohen and Gooch. I gladly acknowledge my debt to all of them. Nothing said or implied in this book should be understood as suggesting that any of these authors agree with my thesis.

¹⁰ See Cohen and Gooch, 6.

¹¹ See Cohen and Gooch, 43.

¹² *Encarta Dictionary*.

¹³ Cohen and Gooch, vii.

¹⁴ Cohen and Gooch, 3.

¹⁵ Cohen and Gooch, 9.

¹⁶ According to *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopedia, “order of battle” is “an organizational tool used by military intelligence to list and analyze enemy military units. In [current] United States Army practice, an order of battle should relate to what an American unit might be expected to encounter while on field operations.” This will include the enemy’s composition (command structure and organization of headquarters and sub-units), strength, equipment, training, tactics, logistics, combat effectiveness, personalities, unit histories, and uniforms and insignia. Full disclosure: From approximately March 1955 to June 1956, I was Chief Order of Battle Analyst (Chinese Communist Forces) for Eighth United States Army, Korea.

¹⁷ Fehrenbach, 8- 9.

¹⁸ See Goncharov, Sergei N., Lewis, John W., and Litai, Xue, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War*, 1. Subsequent quotations will cite “Goncharev, *et al.*.”)

¹⁹ Manchuria at that time was the name of China’s northeastern region, consisting of three provinces. In March 1932, Japanese invaders organized the three provinces into a puppet “state” they named Manchukuo.

²⁰ Unfortunately, neither for the first nor the last time United States intelligence made a colossal mistake. One, which together with the Roosevelt-Churchill concessions to Stalin at Yalta, would come home to roost in the Korean War five years later. American-British intelligence was apparently unaware that while its leaders were cajoling Stalin to enter the war in Asia, at about the same time the best Japanese troops in Manchuria had been removed to defend various Japanese-occupied islands, including the home islands, leaving the remaining Manchuria garrisons under-strength and a much weakened fighting force. Probably, given the Soviet assets already on the ground in Manchuria, it’s likely Stalin knew he could easily deal with those Japanese troops.

²¹ See Manchester, 535.

²² See Goncharov, *et al.*, 2

²³ Outer Mongolia is today a country known by the name Mongolia, located between Siberia and China. The Chinese had long considered Outer Mongolia as part of China. In 1921, Soviet troops occupied the country. In 1924, the Communists facilitated the establishment of a “republic” by Mongolian revolutionaries, but nonetheless recognized the country as part of China. A 1936 treaty of mutual cooperation was signed by the Soviets and the Mongolian People’s Republic. Under a 1945 treaty between the Chinese Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek and the Soviet Union, China agreed to relinquish claims to Outer Mongolia, which, after a plebiscite, became a nominally independent country.

²⁴ See Goncharov, et al., 2.

²⁵ “[A]bout 375,000 of the Manchurian [Japanese] army, who [later] . . . surrendered to the Russians, were kept for years in Siberia doing forced labor; only in 1950 did Russia begin returning those who had been indoctrinated as communists, in the hope of disrupting the occupation policy and throwing Japan into turmoil.” Morison, Samuel, *The Oxford History of the American People*, 1063.

²⁶ Chiang Kai-shek was not invited to the Yalta Conference.

²⁷ See Goncharov, et al., 2.

²⁸ At Yalta, the Soviet dictator did very well for himself in Europe as well. Soviet troops overran Berlin, which was partitioned into zones (as was Vienna). Germany was divided. The United States, Britain, and France subdivided the western part, and the Soviets received the east. There, they fostered a Communist government. Stalin established a puppet government in Poland, annexed the eastern part of the country, and promised free elections in areas within the Soviet’s sphere of influence: Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. In Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania overt Communist governments were installed.

²⁹ Truman was not unmindful of how President Lincoln fired Civil War General George McClellan, a fate which would later befall MacArthur at the President’s hands.

³⁰ Goncharov, et al., 3.

³¹ See Appleman, Roy Edgar, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June-November 1950): United States Army in the Korean War*, 2-3. Subsequent quotations will cite “Appleman South.”) Lt. Colonel Appleman’s four books about the Korean War are the historical gold standard for information about that conflict, from small unit action at the squad level to the workings of the Far East Command in Tokyo. “With the exception of a few passages, and these largely in the first chapters,” Appleman has written, “the entire work [Appleton South, and his other three books are] based on primary sources. These consist of the official records of the United States and United Nations armed forces bearing on the land, sea, and air action. ROK records were also consulted, but generally they were scant and sometimes nonexistent.” Appleman South, 777.

³² Goncharov, *et al.*, 5.

³³ See Appleman South, 3. Apparently, several brigadier generals were tasked with finding an east-west dividing line in Korea “by four o’clock this afternoon,” even though a colonel with experience in the Far East told them it made no social or economic sense. Manchester, 539, quotes Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s memoirs to the effect that “[a] young officer recently returned to the Pentagon, Dean Rusk [later himself Secretary of State] from the Chinese theater, found an administrative dividing line along the 38th Parallel.”

³⁴ See *The Years of MacArthur, Volume III*, 388-89. Subsequent quotations will cite “James III.”

³⁵ See Goncharov, et al., 8.

³⁶ See Goncharov, et al., 8. Moreover, ever since the 1930s Mao had spent much of his military resources fighting not the Japanese invaders, but Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists. When the famous Chinese writer Lin Yutang—born at the turn of the Twentieth Century in China, but long resident in the United States and author of the classic *The Importance of Living* and other non-fiction and fiction books about China—returned to his homeland to report on the war, he was stunned to observe that while Chiang was fighting both the Japanese and Mao, the latter was mainly interested in fighting his Nationalist countrymen. When Dr. Lin returned to the United States and described the civil war in China, his non-fiction account, *The Vigil of a Nation*, was pilloried by American liberals, Communists, and fellow travelers alike, and he was quickly “demoted” from being a revered icon like Pearl Buck to that of *persona non grata*.

³⁷ See Goncharov, et al., 27.

³⁸ See Goncharov, *et al.*, 14.

³⁹ See Sandler, Stanley (ed.), *The Korean War, An Encyclopedia*, xiv. Subsequent quotations will cite “Sandler.” The Soviets claimed that all their troops had been removed from North Korea by December 31, 1949.

⁴⁰ See Sandler, xiv.

⁴¹ See Sandler, xiv.

⁴² Manchester, 539-40.

⁴³ See Sandler, xiv.

⁴⁴ See Sandler, xiv.

⁴⁵ See Sandler, xiv.

⁴⁶ See Manchester, 540.

⁴⁷ See Sandler, xiv.

⁴⁸ See Appleman, South, 5

⁴⁹ See Appleman, South, 5.

⁵⁰ Sandler, xiv. Emphasis supplied.

⁵¹ Manchester, 542. Emphasis supplied.

⁵² See Manchester, 538.

⁵³ See Sandler, xv.

⁵⁴ See MacArthur, Douglas, *Reminiscences*, 324. Subsequent quotations will cite “*Reminiscences*.” If the military and civilian politicians didn’t themselves know what their South Korea policy was, there is no way General MacArthur could have known.

⁵⁵ See Blair, 46.

⁵⁶ James III, 397.

⁵⁷ Manchester, 540.

⁵⁸ While the Americans were pulling out of South Korea, Kim Il-sung was in Moscow importuning Stalin to allow the Korean Communist to attack South Korea. At that time, Stalin granted permission for only a counterattack if South Korea attacked first. As we shall see, Stalin had his own game plan.

⁵⁹ See James *III*, 400.

⁶⁰ See Manchester, 540.

⁶¹ See Note 16..

⁶² See Sandler, xv.

⁶³ James III, 413. Emphasis supplied.

⁶⁴ Appleman South, 6.

⁶⁵ Unpublished paper, an edited version of which was published as Campbell, Kenneth J. “Major General Charles A. Willoughby: General MacArthur’s G-2 —a Biographical Sketch.” *American Intelligence Journal* 18, No. 1/2 (1998): 87-91. Campbell, a former college professor, researched biographic information about persons prominent in the intelligence field. Subsequent quotations will cite “Campbell.”)

⁶⁶ Emphasis supplied.

⁶⁷ As Editor-in-Chief of the history of MacArthur’s World War II campaign in the Pacific and author of another volume about intelligence in that theater, according to Campbell “there was no mention of his numerous errors in estimation in the Pacific conflict, and because these publications were under his direction, we can only conclude that Willoughby was responsible for these distortions.”

⁶⁸ Military historian Roger A. Beaumont was a prolific author, an editor of *Defense Analysis*, and Director of the Texas A&M History Department's 1985 Symposium on Military History.

⁶⁹ Beaumont, Roger A., "The Flawed Soothsayer—Willoughby: General MacArthur's G-2." *Espionage*, July, 1985, 27.

⁷⁰ Bigelow, Michael E., "Disaster along the Ch'ongch'on [River: Intelligence Breakdown in Korea." *Military Intelligence*, July-September 1992, 11.

⁷¹ Sandler, xv.

⁷² See Blair, 58.

⁷³ Blair, 58.

⁷⁴ Sandler, xv.

⁷⁵ See Sandler, xv.

⁷⁶ See Thornton, Richard C., *Odd Man Out, Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War*, 165. Subsequent quotations will cite "Thornton."

⁷⁷ See Thornton, 165.

⁷⁸ See Sandler, xv.

⁷⁹ Sandler, xv. Quoting from Air Force intelligence.

⁸⁰ See Manchester, 543.

⁸¹ See Manchester, 544.

⁸² See James III, 414-17.

⁸³ When I was Chief CCF Order of Battle Analyst for Eighth Army in Korea, my responsibility was for three hierarchical levels of the Chinese Communist Forces opposing us. In descending order, it began at the Chinese army level, down to corps, and then down to division—although with Chinese designations different from ours, such as "Field Army," often my portfolio began at that high level and descended four or more levels. Similarly, the order of battle section of U.S. Army I Corps, then headquartered at Uijongbu, was responsible for the Chinese corps facing it, down to division, and then down to regiment level. When possible, our jurisdictions were based on actual CCF strength, not their designations.

⁸⁴ See Rusk, Dean, *As I Saw It: Dean Rusk, as Told to Richard Rusk*, ed., 124. Subsequent quotations will cite "Rusk."

⁸⁵ Rusk, 124.

⁸⁶ See Thornton, 174.

⁸⁷ See Thornton, 175.

⁸⁸ See James III, 416.

⁸⁹ All quotations above are James, III, 416.

⁹⁰ James III, 417. Emphasis supplied.

⁹¹ James III, 417.

⁹² In writing about how the Communists outgunned the South's forces, Lt. Col. Appleman noted that "[t]he superiority of the North Korean Army over the South Korean . . . was not generally recognized, however, by United States *military* authorities before the invasion." Appleman South, 18. Emphasis supplied. This view is consistent with the fact that the Department of State in Washington, not the United States Army nor MacArthur in Tokyo, was running the show in South Korea.

⁹³ Daigler, Kenneth A. (writing as P.K.Rose), "Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea, 1950." *Studies in Intelligence*, Fall-Winter 2001, 3. Subsequent quotations will cite "Daigler."

⁹⁴ Daigler, 3.

⁹⁵ James III, 417. Emphasis supplied.

⁹⁶ Thornton, x.

⁹⁷ Thornton, 148. Emphasis supplied.

⁹⁸ Thornton, 1. Emphasis supplied.

⁹⁹ See Thornton, 2.

¹⁰⁰ There was, of course, the American government's not insubstantial concern about protecting American commercial and treaty interests in China.

¹⁰¹ Thornton, 2.

¹⁰² Thornton, 27.

¹⁰³ Fehrenbach, 4, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Thornton, 88.

¹⁰⁵ See Thornton, 46.

¹⁰⁶ See Thornton, 22.

¹⁰⁷ See Thornton, 80. As Professor Thornton notes, although Stalin had to unite the West against Mao, first the Soviet dictator had to unite the West itself. This presented a tactical problem for Stalin because a North Korean attack on South Korea would invoke the United Nations Charter, the Security Council would have jurisdiction, and Mao would expect the Soviets to use their veto to protect the Chinese Communists from adverse action. So, Stalin made another move on his chess board. He contrived to have the Chinese Communists protest to the United Nations the Nationalists' occupancy of the "China" seat on the Security Council. In support of that "protest," the Soviets staged a walkout from the U.N., which was complete by January 13, 1950, some six months before the North Korean invasion.

"Of course, the Soviet ploy failed. The Nationalist representative retained his seat and Beijing remained isolated, but Stalin achieved his underlying objective. *The absence of a Soviet representative at the U.N. would enable the United States, without hindrance, to mobilize that body under American leadership in the wake of a North Korean attack on the South. It would not only leave China permanently dependent on Moscow, but it would also make a formal United States [Congressional] declaration of war extremely unlikely.*" Thornton, 82. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁰⁸ Thornton, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Apart from the other considerations described above, Mao had strong political/geographic/military motives to intervene later in Korea. As Fehrenbach, 10-11, observes: "Korea is a buffer state. Neither China, nor Russia, nor whatever power is dominant in the Island of the Rising Sun [Japan], dares ignore Korea. It is, has been, and will always be either a bridge to the Asian continent, or a stepping-stone to the islands, depending on where power is ascendant. * * * [F]or Korea is a breeding ground for war. * * * [W]hoever owns Manchuria [Mao's Chinese Communists after 1949], to be secure, must also own Chosun [Korea]." Thus, from Mao's perspective, for this reason alone he had no choice but to intervene on the side of the remnant North Korean army in the closing days of 1950.

¹¹⁰ See Thornton, 3.

¹¹¹ Thornton 3-4. Emphasis supplied.

¹¹² To add another consideration, as Patrick C. Roe has written in *The Dragon Strikes*, "The Chinese [Communists] resented Soviet influence in North Korea. Historically, Korea was within the Chinese sphere of influence. From medieval times until 1905, when it was occupied by the Japanese, Korea had been a buffer and a satellite state of China. The Chinese had a keen appreciation of Korea's value as an avenue of approach [to the mainland]." Roe, 25. Subsequent quotations will cite "Roe."

¹¹³ Thornton, 5. Emphasis supplied.

¹¹⁴ Professor Thornton's *Odd Man Out* was published in 2000.

¹¹⁵ Thornton, 4. Emphasis supplied.

¹¹⁶ Thornton, 4.

¹¹⁷ See Thornton, 4-5.

¹¹⁸ Thornton, 5. Emphasis supplied. Regarding the fiscal implications of NSC-68, especially the huge increase in defense spending it contemplated, David Halberstam has written that when “the Korean War began and the Cold War escalated into a hot war . . . the force of events had their own financial imperatives. The debate over NSC-68 had become academic, the issue overtaken by events. The budget, which NSC-68 suggested would have to triple, now tripled because of the war. Truman himself never had to make a decision on NSC-68. In fact, by the late fall of 1951 when the fiscal 1952 Pentagon budget was being prepared, it had quadrupled from \$13 billion in pre-Korean War days to \$55 billion. ‘Korea,’ Acheson would cynically note years later at a seminar at Princeton, ‘*saved us.*’” Halberstam, David, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, 201. Emphasis supplied. Subsequent quotations will cite “Halberstam.”

¹¹⁹ Thornton, 5. Emphasis supplied.

¹²⁰ Thornton, 147-48. Professor Thornton has written in detail that as early as April 1950 Washington had discovered the Soviet’s massive buildup flowing by sea from Vladivostok to ports on the east coast of North Korea. We knew there were at least 150 T-34 tanks in the shipments. Those tanks presented the Machiavellians in Washington with a grave dilemma. It was now clear the North Koreans would soon attack, which was alright with Washington. But the tanks also meant that a lightning armor attack supporting infantry and backed by artillery might achieve a quick victory, which Truman, Acheson, and company did not want for at least two reasons. One was that the loss of South Korea to the Communists shortly after the fall of China to Mao would have been political suicide for Truman and the Democrat Party. The other was that a quick Communist victory might not create the crisis that Truman and Acheson needed to unite the free world, make rearmament in the United States possible, and extend containment of communism in Asia to include South Korea and Formosa. On the other hand, the United States could provide the South Koreans with arms that might check the invasion at the 38th Parallel—but again there might be an insufficient crisis for the administration’s plan. A third possibility, apparently the one chosen, was not to assist the South Koreans, but for American forces—Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force—to move onto the peninsula when, not if, the attack came.

¹²¹ There are other theories of what caused the Korean War, but none that analyze its genesis exactly from Professor Thornton’s unique perspective. For example, Blair writes:

The causes for this disaster [narrowly, the June 25, 1950 invasion, and more broadly the war itself] were numerous, but the main ones were Truman’s inability to grasp grand strategy—to back American foreign policy with adequate military

power—and his [World War I artillery] battery commander’s view that he was a victim of Pentagon budget flimflams.

South Korea obviously required a continuing American military presence to ensure its survival until the embryonic ROK Army had matured and been properly equipped. Truman’s crippling cuts in the [United States] Army’s budget had compelled a premature American withdrawal from South Korea, leaving that new and unstable nation ripe for conquest.

The inexplicable and ill-advised public statements by Acheson and Connally in the spring of 1950 may well have encouraged Moscow and Pyongyang to proceed when they did. The timing may also have been prompted by the status of training in the ROK and American Eighth armies. Further delays would have confronted the NKPA with a better-trained ROK Army and, should America intervene (as MacArthur had promised Rhee he would) a better-trained Eighth Army. Whatever the case, considering the strategic situation that existed, an NKPA invasion on June 25, 1950, was bound to succeed. Blair, 61.

In fairness to Clay Blair, his *The Forgotten War* was published in the late 1980s based on earlier research. As Professor Thornton has noted in *Odd Man Out*, published in 2000, his study “would not have been attempted but for the release of new materials from American, Russian, and Chinese sources.” Thornton, xii. Thus, it is understandable that while Blair’s analysis does identify certain obvious causes for the Korean War, it does not consider the Thornton thesis which explains the genesis of that conflict on a more fundamental global level.

¹²² “Realpolitik” is defined as a “politics based on pragmatism or practicality rather than on ethical or theoretical considerations.” (*Encarta Dictionary*.)

¹²³ Thornton, 149. Emphasis supplied. Professor Thornton notes that “from April 20 [1950] until the outbreak of the war [on June 25, 1950], a span of over two months that covered the period of the massive Soviet buildup in North Korea, Secretary Acheson said nothing in response to the Seoul embassy’s repeated requests to bolster the Republic of Korea’s defenses.” Thornton, 163.

¹²⁴ Lt. Colonel Appleman has written that in March 1950 “there were rumors of an impending invasion of South Korea and, in one week alone, 3-10 March, there occurred twenty-nine guerrilla attacks in South Korea and eighteen incidents along the [38th] Parallel. Beginning in May 1950 incidents along the Parallel, and guerilla activity in the interior, dropped off sharply. It was the lull preceding the storm.” Appleman, South, 6.

It was bad enough that the South Koreans were virtually defenseless on June 25, 1950. But even if the United States wanted to help the country that we had created, America was in no position to defend it. Clay Blair has written:

By June 25, 1950, Harry Truman and Louis Johnson [the President’s crony and Secretary of Defense] had all but wrecked the conventional military forces of the

United States. The fault was Truman's alone. Acting out of an expressed belief that his grasp of strategy and military power was superior to that of his "dumb" and "wrong" and spendthrift generals and admirals who wore blinders and couldn't see beyond their own noses, he had allowed his obsessive fiscal conservatism to dominate his military thinking and decisions. If there was also a deep-seated unconscious need to continue to "cuss" and punish the military establishment for its early rejection of him, he had succeeded. Moreover, he had set the stage for even more grievous punishment, should it be called upon for an emergency. Blair, 29.

¹²⁵ This view is what Cohen and Gooch call blaming the "man in the dock"—namely, that a military failure can be attributable to a single, identifiable individual.

¹²⁶ See Blair, 61.

¹²⁷ Appleman South, 16

¹²⁸ Appleman South, 17.

¹²⁹ Different names have been used to designate the North Korean Army, e.g., "Korean People's Army, "In Min Gun." Throughout this book the designation NKPA has been used, except in quotations or if the context requires a different name.

¹³⁰ See Sandler, xiv.

¹³¹ See Sandler, 181.

¹³² During the Chinese civil war the Soviet Union sent North Korean troops to fight with Communist forces against the Nationalists, which Professor Thornton claims to have "proved to be a critical component in the CCP's victory in the civil war." Thornton, 27. As T.R. Fehrenbach has noted, "[w]ith Chiang Kai-shek defeated and his Nationalist remnants exiled to Taiwan, Red China could release her Korean-speaking soldiers; by June 1950, they made up 30 percent of the [NKPA]." Fehrenbach characterizes the North Korean officers as "all young, and hard, and most of their adult lives had been spent at war, with the Chinese, with the Soviets. They had fought Japanese; they had fought Nationalists. Now they would fight the running dogs of the American Imperialists, or whoever else got in their way." Fehrenbach, 4, 9.

¹³³ See Thornton, 87.

¹³⁴ Appleman South, 18.

¹³⁵ James III, 412.

¹³⁶ Thornton, 109.

¹³⁷ Appleman South, 18. Emphasis supplied.

¹³⁸ See James III, 412.

¹³⁹ To understand the ebb and flow of the Korean War, especially the debacle resulting from Chinese intervention, it's useful to understand the Korean Peninsula's geography.

Korea is about 600 miles long and 150 miles wide at its narrowest point.

Its northern border runs from the west to north-by-northeast, the major northern boundary being the mostly east-running Yalu River and then the minor Tumen River.

North of the Yalu in the west-east direction is Manchuria, north of it China proper, and furthest north-east the former USSR. One could say it looks like Florida, with the panhandle more level and running not west, but northeast.

Off the peninsula's east coast is the Sea of Japan, off the west coast is the Yellow Sea, and between the south end of Korea and Japan is the Korea Strait.

"The high, almost trackless, Taebaek Range of mountains in northern Korea [which, as we shall see, separated Eighth Army and X Corps] . . . was rugged, partly forested, well drained, but unfavorable to lateral (east-west) cross-country movement. The hills generally rose to 6,500 feet elevation, and their slopes were steep. Valleys were narrow, winding, and gorge-like. * * * There are no routes across this region for rapid, large-scale military movement. The existing roads or tracks, all dirt and gravel, were narrow and winding and crossed the cut-up and rugged terrain in steep 2,000 to 3,500-foot-high passes." Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 27. Subsequent quotations will cite "Appleman, Disaster".

¹⁴⁰ Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Anti-Defense Secretary," *The Weekly Standard*, January 28, 2013, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ Dr. Campbell has noted that MacArthur's "staff, which included Willoughby, had shielded him before the outbreak of hostilities from evidence suggesting that Eighth Army's combat readiness was not adequate."

¹⁴² Cohen and Gooch, 166.

¹⁴³ Cohen and Gooch, 166. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁴⁴ Colonel Paschall was editor of *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*. Subsequent quotations will cite "Paschall."

¹⁴⁵ James, III, 419.

¹⁴⁶ I am inserting an author's note here on the subject of personal versus organizational blame, based on my own experience in Korea not long after the armistice was signed. I mentioned earlier that I was the Chief Chinese Communist Forces Order of Battle Analyst for Eighth Army during 1955-1956, in the early years of the armistice.

We obtained our intelligence from several sources, including Chinese Communist military defectors, North Korean military and civilian defectors, agents sent north by American and South Korean clandestine operators, and even individuals kidnapped from the North.

All of them had to be interrogated in their own languages.

Yet, the interpreter-interrogation situation in Eighth Army's 528th Military Intelligence Company—the sole American MI company in all of South Korea—was scandalous. But who to blame? Let the reader be the judge. Here are the facts.

In the 1950s, Army enlistees who signed up for three years could opt to attend a military service school of their choice. Accordingly, many regulars who had to continue reenlisting every several years while working toward their twenty-or-more-year retirement pensions (as well as those who for other reasons, like avoiding the draft, enlisted for three years), chose the Army Language School in beautiful Monterey, California. There, for about one year of their three year commitment, they would study a foreign language and then *supposedly* be assigned to a country whose language they *supposedly* had mastered. Especially in those days, Russian (which, without my having attended the Army Language School is what got me into MI, and then to Korea), Korean, various Chinese dialects, and other languages.

That is how it was supposed to work. The reality was quite different.

In practice, the 528th Military Intelligence Company was a dumping ground for Army Language School graduates in Russian, Korean and Chinese.

Once in Korea, the Monterey graduates were assigned to interrogate in the language they were *supposed* to speak, principally Korean or Chinese. The problem, however, was that virtually every one of the Monterey graduates could not adequately speak either Korean or any Chinese dialect.

The Army's "solution" to the language problem was to hire English-speaking South Koreans, and Nationalist Chinese civilians from Taiwan, to interpret for the regular army enlisted and officer Monterey graduates, who were then supposed to conduct the interrogations.

The problem with this part of the Army's "solution," however, was that the Monterey graduates had never been trained as interrogators.

The Army's "solution" for the interrogation part of the problem was to use the untrained-as-interrogators South Korean and Chinese civilian linguists to conduct, in their native languages, the interrogations, while the Army Language School graduates looked on or performed other tasks in the 528th Military Intelligence Company.

Thus, in the context of the question addressed in this book, the necessary question arises: Who was to blame for second-rate interpreting, third-rate interrogating, and the resulting dubious order of battle and other intelligence obtained from the Chinese and North Koreans? The Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Army, Army Chief of Staff, Recruiting Command, Monterey enlistees, Army Language School, Eighth Army commanding general, his G-1 or G-2, the 528th Military Intelligence Company commander, chief of the interrogation section? All of whom doubtless believed that everyone who was supposed to be doing his job—interrogating in the language he was trained in—was doing it. Or was the failure an organizational one from top to bottom?

¹⁴⁷ In 1961 the United States Department of the Army published Lt. Col. Appleman's *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*. The volume was constituted as the official combat history of the Korean War from its beginning on June 25, 1950 to and including November 24, 1950, the kickoff of General MacArthur's drive to the Yalu River where, it was expected, the war would end. The text here is from Appleman, *Disaster*, vii. Subsequent quotations will cite "Appleman, *Disaster*."

¹⁴⁸ Appleman, *Disaster*, xvi. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁴⁹ Appleman, *Disaster*, xvi.

¹⁵⁰ In 1955—never having flown until two weeks earlier—I was en route as a passenger in an Air Force MATS piston aircraft from Travis Air Force base in Oakland, California, to Seoul, South Korea, via Hawaii, Wake Island and Tokyo. It was nine hours flying time between Wake and Tokyo. About midway through the flight, one of the pilots came on the intercom and announced that he had just shut down one of the four engines. He added that we had to keep going west rather than heading back to Wake Island because the aircraft had just "passed the point of no return." I doubt that anyone on that aircraft needed an explanation of what the pilot meant. Even if they had never heard of that river in Italy.

¹⁵¹ Roe, 16-17, 25.

¹⁵² Roe, 87.

¹⁵³ Cohen and Gooch, 166. Paschall has written that "Mao . . . provided Kim with basic and critical intelligence. He forewarned North Korea's military forces about the likelihood of a U.S. landing at the South Korean port of Inchon. On August 23 [1950], the PLA's Operational Bureau predicted an American amphibious operation behind North Korean lines, a forecast based on intelligence reports, observations, and logical deductions."

¹⁵⁴ Roe, 100.

¹⁵⁵ Roe, 112.

¹⁵⁶ Roe, 87.

¹⁵⁷ Roe 87.

¹⁵⁸ Roe, 99.

¹⁵⁹ Roe, 101.

¹⁶⁰ Subsequent quotations will cite Appleman, *Escaping*.

¹⁶¹ Appleman, *Escaping* ix.

¹⁶² Appleman, *Escaping* ix. The 7th Infantry Division was diverted to Iwon, some 175 miles north of Wonsan on the east coast. The 1st Marine Division landed at Wonsan.

¹⁶³ Appleman, *Escaping* x. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁶⁴ Cohen and Gooch, 166. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁶⁵ An excellent chronology of the major warnings has been provided by Patrick C. Roe in his *The Dragon Strikes*, from which much of the following is taken. Roe, 25.

¹⁶⁶ James, III, 490-91.

¹⁶⁷ Roe, 103.

¹⁶⁸ James, III, 489-90.

¹⁶⁹ Roe, 104. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁷⁰ See Blair, 336-37.

¹⁷¹ See Roe, 114. While the Chinese intention to intervene was certainly correct, the number 90,000 was deliberate disinformation because at the time the Chinese entered the war they did so with hundreds of thousands of troops.

¹⁷² Blair, 340.

¹⁷³ Emphasis supplied.

¹⁷⁴ Roe, 107.

¹⁷⁵ Roe, 107-08.

¹⁷⁶ Roe, 108.

¹⁷⁷ The intelligence upon which the CIA made its assessment of Chinese intentions came from sources in addition to what Mao's regime had said publicly.

Willoughby had been MacArthur's G-2 for years, and beginning in World War II had prepared a Daily Intelligence Summary (DIS) for the General. Willoughby obtained his information for the DIS from various sources: infiltrated agents, prisoners of war, enemy documents, Chiang Kai-shek intelligence, and radio intercepts. Patrick C. Roe claims that "MacArthur did complain [after the Chinese offensive] that some information known in Washington was not made available to him." Roe, 111.

¹⁷⁸ Blair, 348.

¹⁷⁹ Blair, 348. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁸⁰ *Reminiscences*, 362. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁸¹ Blair, 350. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁸² James III, 504-05.

¹⁸³ Marshall, S.L.A., *The River and the Gauntlet*, 6. Subsequent quotations will cite "Marshall."

¹⁸⁴ Blair, 349.

¹⁸⁵ Roe, 86-7.

¹⁸⁶ See Roe, 68.

¹⁸⁷ See Roe, 88.

¹⁸⁸ Roe, 68.

¹⁸⁹ Roe, 87.

¹⁹⁰ Marshall, 8.

¹⁹¹ Blair, 370. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁹² Blair, 372. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁹³ The "First Phase Offensive" is understood to have occurred between October 25 and November 8, 1950. Appleman, *Disaster*, 19.

¹⁹⁴ See Blair, 375.

¹⁹⁵ See Blair, 377.

¹⁹⁶ See Blair, 377, citing "Chiles oral history; author-Chiles interview."

¹⁹⁷ Once, when Chiles was wounded in Korea, "Almond cried when he saw I was hurt. But he'd send me into certain death if he thought it necessary. He was highly intelligent,

opinionated, and completely devoted to General MacArthur. General MacArthur didn't have anybody that was more of a disciple than Ned Almond." James-Chiles, 17.

¹⁹⁸ James-Chiles, 11. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁹⁹ James-Chiles, 19. Emphasis supplied. At least once in Korea, as chief CCF order of battle analyst for Eighth Army in 1955-56, I was present when the OB officer cooked the books on the location of, as I recall, the 16th Chinese Field Army.

²⁰⁰ Several years later, as chief CCF order of battle analyst for Eighth Army, I had occasion to interrogate (through an interpreter) a Communist Chinese army defector. There was no question of what he was. He looked Chinese not Korean, he spoke Chinese not Korean, his uniform was Chinese not Korean, and his documents were written in Chinese not Korean. Although it was gilding the lily, he admitted he was Chinese—as *did the POWs in Almond's custody*.

²⁰¹ See Blair, 377.

²⁰² See Blair, 378.

²⁰³ See Blair, 378.

²⁰⁴ See Blair, 378.

²⁰⁵ See Blair, 378.

²⁰⁶ Bakich, Spencer D., *Information Structures and Balancing Avoidance in Limited Warfare*, 2006. Conference paper, 34. Subsequent quotations will cite "Bakich."

²⁰⁷ Blair 379. Emphasis supplied.

²⁰⁸ Blair, 379. Emphasis supplied. Dabney and Train went on to become general officers.

²⁰⁹ Blair, 380. See Appleman South, 690.

²¹⁰ Why wouldn't many of the Americans have thought the war was over? Eighth Army had broken out of the Pusan Perimeter, retaken and held Seoul and Pyongyang and was moving to the Yalu River. X Corps had landed at Inchon. Much of the NKPA had been annihilated. X Corps had then shipped to the East Coast port of Wonsan, and it too was moving to the Yalu River.

²¹¹ Blair, 382. Not only were there masses of Chinese troops, but most of them had fought in the successful CCF battles against Nationalist troops in China's Civil War. "The fear that a nation of 450 million people might throw into battle increasing numbers of readily available light infantry, even though poorly armed and supplied, was one of the imponderables that influenced the battle in Korea after the Chinese soldiers first appeared. The Chinese peasant was used to political indoctrination and accepted death as a matter of course. He was usually illiterate and therefore could not be trained

quickly in the use of technical weapons and equipment, had they been available. His main strengths were superb ability as a night fighter possessed of raw courage to do as ordered, great physical endurance on the march, and tenacity in attack.” Appleman Disaster, 18.

²¹² Blair, 382.

²¹³ Appleman Disaster, 18.

²¹⁴ Blair, 382.

²¹⁵ See Appleman Disaster, 3.

²¹⁶ See Blair, 387.

²¹⁷ See Blair, 388.

²¹⁸ “In the First Phase Offensive, highly skilled enemy light infantry troops had carried out the Chinese attacks, generally unaided by any weapons larger than mortars. Their attacks had demonstrated that the Chinese were well-trained disciplined fire fighters, and particularly adept at night fighting. They were masters of the art of camouflage. Their patrols were remarkably successful in locating the positions of the U.N. forces. They planned their attacks to get in the rear of these forces, cut them off from their escape and supply roads, and then send in frontal and flanking attacks to precipitate the battle. * * * The Chinese soldiers engaging in the First Phase Offensive were well-fed, in excellent physical condition, well-clothed, and well-equipped. As the British had noted, some of them even wore fur-lined boots.” Appleman South, 718-19.

²¹⁹ Blair, 391.

²²⁰ MacArthur himself had earlier drawn this line as a contingency, and the Joint Chiefs had then approved it.

²²¹ Blair, 395.

²²² Blair, 395. Emphasis added.

²²³ Appleman South, 749.

²²⁴ Blair, 398.

²²⁵ Blair, 401.

²²⁶ Blair, 401-02. Emphasis supplied.

²²⁷ The line would have run from Sinanju in the west to X Corps in the east just south of Hamhung, thereby creating a solid defense line across the narrow neck of the peninsula. Earlier, MacArthur had approved of that line if it became necessary.

²²⁸ This number would have come as a big surprise to MacArthur, Willoughby, Tarkenton, Almond and Quinn.

²²⁹ Truman was mistaken that he had received “the best advice [he] could,” according to Acheson and Bradley, who admitted their conclusions and decisions were “drastically wrong.”

²³⁰ Blair, 402.

²³¹ Just how bad Walker’s logistical situation was can be understood from these few facts: Almost everyone in Eighth Army was, in temperatures freezing and below, lacking winter clothing. Waterproof laced boots were in short supply, and many of those provided didn’t fit. An entire infantry division was out of gasoline for two days. Half that unit’s vehicles were useless for lack of spare parts.

²³² *Blair*, 404.

²³³ Blair, 415.

²³⁴ Blair, 417.

²³⁵ Blair, 418. Emphasis supplied.

²³⁶ Blair, 423. Emphasis supplied.

²³⁷ This gratuitous display of weakness, if not fear, this show-and-tell tactic, guaranteed that Manchuria would continue as a sanctuary for CCF forces fighting in North Korea—and contribute to MacArthur’s imminent downfall.

²³⁸ Blair, 424.

²³⁹ The British had recognized Communist China the year before, and possessed extensive interests there. The same could be said of the French in Indochina.

²⁴⁰ Appleman South, 769. Emphasis supplied.

²⁴¹ Appleman South 769.

²⁴² *Appleman*, South, 770. Emphasis supplied.

²⁴³ See Foot, Rosemary, “The Sino-American Conflict in Korea: The U.S. Assessment of China’s Ability to Intervene in the War.” *Asian Affairs*, June. 1983, 160-166.

²⁴⁴ See Blair, 431.

²⁴⁵ See Blair, 429. Emphasis supplied.

²⁴⁶ Blair, 430-31. See also Marshall, 15.

²⁴⁷ Appleman Disaster, 56.

²⁴⁸ Appleman Disaster, 56.

²⁴⁹ Appleman Disaster, 37.

²⁵⁰ Blair, 433.

²⁵¹ Blair, 433. Emphasis supplied.

²⁵² Appleton *Disaster*, 59.

²⁵³ Appleman *Disaster*, 59. Emphasis supplied.

²⁵⁴ Blair, 436, writes that “From his experience in the First Phase Offensive Lin Piao knew that the ROKs had a pathological fear of the CCF and that a massive assault directly against the ROK II Corps front would quickly buckle the right flank of Eighth Army, gaining his initial objective far more economically than an attack from the gap in the east.”

²⁵⁵ Bakich, 36-7. Emphasis supplied.

²⁵⁶ See Blair, 440.

²⁵⁷ Blair, 440.

²⁵⁸ In the Bibliography’s “Books” section, see for example: *Disaster in Korea; East of Chosin; Escaping the Trap; The Coldest Winter; The Years of MacArthur 1945-1964; American Caesar; General Walton H. Walker, Forgotten Hero of the Forgotten War; The Dragon Strikes; Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign, Korea 1950; The River and the Gauntlet.*

²⁵⁹ Marshall, 7.

²⁶⁰ One anecdote should suffice to demonstrate their ineptitude. Although on the day the Turks moved to the wrong location, they did capture 125 prisoners, it turned out the POWs were actually ROKs.

²⁶¹ A brigadier general, he had fought the British at Gallipoli in 1916, 35 years earlier, in an entirely different kind of war.

²⁶² Appleman Disaster, 193.

²⁶³ Blair, 456. Emphasis supplied.

²⁶⁴ Blair, 458. Fifteen hundred yards is about three-quarters of a mile.

²⁶⁵ Blair, 462. Emphasis supplied.

²⁶⁶ Dr. Stewart was the command historian at Ft. Bragg's United States Army Special Operations Command, and the research historian at the Center for Army Lessons Learned at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. At the time of this study, he was a United States Army Reserve major in Military Intelligence and a graduate of the United States Army Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth.

²⁶⁷ Stewart, Richard W., *Staff Operations: The X Corps in Korea, December 1950*, 6. Combat Studies Institute. Emphasis supplied. Interior quotation marks omitted.

²⁶⁸ Blair, 463.

²⁶⁹ I will attempt to deconstruct these views in Chapter 12.

²⁷⁰ Blair, 464.

²⁷¹ Blair, 464.

²⁷² By then MacArthur believed CCF strength south of the Yalu River was approximately 200,000 men, seeking to organize for a powerful offensive in the spring.

²⁷³ Blair, 465. Emphasis supplied.

²⁷⁴ Blair, 464-65. Emphasis supplied.

²⁷⁵ Appleman Disaster, 216.

²⁷⁶ Appleman Disaster, 216.

²⁷⁷ Appleman Disaster, 216-17.

²⁷⁸ Blair, 472.

²⁷⁹ Appleman Disaster, 22.

²⁸⁰ Appleman Disaster, 75.

²⁸¹ There has been some misunderstanding about this statement, and the difference between a "withdrawal," "retreat" and "attack." In June 1969 the Chief Historian of the United States Marine Corps, Ben Frank, conducted an interview of General O.P. Smith. Frank asked General Smith this question: "Knowing of you, your reputation and your career and what you've done during the war, this business of writing an attack order [as the 1st Marine Division was about to move south]—was that a grandstand play—was this the logical move at this time?" General Smith's answer: 'Sure, you couldn't withdraw when you're surrounded. I've tried to explain that "retreat hell" business to people. You cannot retreat or withdraw when you are surrounded. The only thing you can do is break out, and when you break out, that's an attack. And the only fellow who understood that was [military historian] S.L.A. Marshall— he understood it thoroughly. He wrote up a top secret report on the 1st Division breakout. A very fine document'. The entire Frank Interview with General Smith is archived at the Marine Corps

Research Center in Quantico, Virginia. interview with General Smith is archived at the Marine Corps Research Center, Quantico, Virginia.

²⁸² Blair's is one. Others are Appleman's *Disaster in Korea* and S.L.A. Marshall's *The River and the Gauntlet*.

²⁸³ Blair, 501-02.

²⁸⁴ Marshall, 280. Emphasis supplied.

²⁸⁵ Appleman Disaster, 292. Emphasis supplied.

²⁸⁶ Appleman Disaster, 293. Emphasis supplied.

²⁸⁷ Walker knew that in reality he could not successfully defend at Pyongyang or maintain a line anywhere across the Korean Peninsula. After the Imjin River, he would move further south to the area of Inchon-Seoul.

²⁸⁸ See Blair, 503.

²⁸⁹ Appleman Disaster, 314. Emphasis supplied. Disaster 350-53 is the source for the discussion of this topic.

²⁹⁰ See Appleman Disaster, 350.

²⁹¹ Appleman Disaster 353. Emphasis supplied.

²⁹² Appleman Disaster 381. Emphasis supplied.

²⁹³ As we have seen, the 1st Marine Division was commanded by Major General Oliver P. Smith and consisted of three infantry regiments (1st, 5th and 7th) and one of artillery (11th). The 7th Infantry Division's 31st Regiment, commanded by Colonel Allen McLean carried the Army's colors at the Chosin Reservoir, especially its First Battalion, commanded by Lt. Colonel Don Faith. See *Breakout. The Chosin Reservoir Campaign, Korea, 1959* by Martin Russ. Subsequent quotations will cite Russ.

²⁹⁴ Russ, 14.

²⁹⁵ Almond went into Marine Corps lore as a pleasure-loving, untrustworthy and unintelligent combat commander. Events from the 1st Marine Division's landing in Wonson to its evacuation days later from Hungnam didn't change the Leathernecks' opinion.

²⁹⁶ Appleman Escaping, 24-25.

²⁹⁷ For the nearly forty miles from Hungnam to Chinhung-ni the narrow two lane dirt-gravel road snaked into the hills on "reasonably rolling ground. But at Chinhung-ni, the aspect changed. The remaining thirty-five miles north by west to the sordid little hamlet of Yudam-ni became a multiple nightmare. Beyond Chinhung-ni the road rose 2,500

feet into cold, thin mountain air. The second lane disappeared; now the road crept ribbon-like into the soaring wastes, a yawning abyss on one side and a precipice on the other. It climbed and climbed, struggling upward to the Kot'o plateau, on which sat the single, miserable village of Kot'o-ri. From Kot'o-ri the road crept through mile-high hills to the city of Hagaru, straggling near the southern tip of the thirty-mile-long [Chosin] Reservoir." Fehrenbach 238.

²⁹⁸ Appleman Escaping, 29.

²⁹⁹ Russ, 50.

³⁰⁰ The shorelines of the entire Chosin Reservoir were irregular, with inlets and bulges across its entire length and width.

³⁰¹ Fehrenbach, 238.

³⁰² Once, Almond tried to appropriate Marine vehicles. Another time he asked for an entire company of Marines to guard his command post in Hamhung, miles from the enemy, thus taking them out of combat.

³⁰³ Even though the rest of MacArthur's plan never fully came to fruition, it is worth mentioning here for reasons that will be obvious. Russ has explained it clearly: Once the 1st Marine Division reached Yudam-ni it was to "turn west, cross the formidable Taebek Range, and occupy the road-junction town of Mupyong, fifty-five miles away. General Oliver P. Smith's anxiety over the separation of his regiments now became acute because of one component of the plan: As [Colonel] Litzenberg's 7th Marines [Regiment] swung west from the reservoir [en route to Yudam-ni], Murray's 5th [Regiment], after ascending Funchilin Pass, was to march up the east side of the lake, ostensibly to guard Litzenberg's right flank but really too far distant to provide any protection. Puller's 1st Marines [Regiment] were still fifty miles to the rear." Russ, 71. Thus, under the march orders, the 7th Marines would be separated from the 5th Marines by the Chosin Reservoir—and each regiment would be at least fifty miles from the 1st Marine Regiment in the rear.

³⁰⁴ Quoted at Russ 72.

³⁰⁵ Russ, 79.

³⁰⁶ One company of an engineer battalion remained on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir. A company of the 7th Regiment remained at Hagaru.

³⁰⁷ Appleman Escaping, 72.

³⁰⁸ Roe, 313. Emphasis supplied.

³⁰⁹ Blair 510. Emphasis supplied.

³¹⁰ Almond “authorized Smith to burn or destroy equipment or supplies and promised that he would be supplied by air drop as he withdrew. [Marine] General Smith thought it unnecessary to abandon equipment. He told his corps commander that his movement would be governed by his ability to evacuate the wounded, that he would have to fight his way back and could not afford to discard equipment, and that, therefore, he intended to bring out the bulk of his equipment.” Roe, 338.

³¹¹ Blair, 538.

³¹² Appleman Escaping, 365. Emphasis supplied. Lt. Colonel Appleman added an interesting historical note, very apt to X Corps’ march to the sea: “The Marines fighting retreat from the Chosin Reservoir through enemy held territory is a textbook application of Xenophon’s lessons. No better analysis and exposition of the tactics of retreat has ever been written than Xenophon’s account of the escape of 10,000 Greeks in 401 B.C. from Asia Minor. Xenophon commanded the rear guard. The prime lesson, if there was a single most important one, was that enemy held high ground along the route of march must be seized before a column attempts to pass below it. The Marines and attached X Corps troops did this. *It is a pity that the Eighth Army, fighting in the west at the same time, did not do it in the Kunu-ri area.*” Appleman Escaping, 365-66. Emphasis supplied.

³¹³ Blair, 549.

³¹⁴ Blair, 554.

³¹⁵ Blair, 554-56.

³¹⁶ Blair, 528-29

³¹⁷ Cohen and Gooch, 6. Emphasis supplied.

³¹⁸ Cohen and Gooch, 7.

³¹⁹ In May 1945 President Harry Truman reiterated to the French that the United States, a recent ally in World War II, recognized France’s interests in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Soon after, the French were fighting a guerilla war with Ho Chi Minh’s nationalists/Communists in Vietnam.

During the next seven years, the French suffered greatly. Their dead, wounded, missing, and captured totaled more than ninety thousand. Financially, it had cost the French alone at least twice the amount of Marshall Plan aid.

In May 1954 the French lost the decisive battle of Dienbienphu in the north, and the Geneva Conference commenced. It resulted in partition of Vietnam at the 17th Parallel, pending a nationwide election to be held two years later.

The French left. The Communists in the North supported the Viet Cong guerillas in the South, and the United States sent in “advisors” for the South Vietnamese military.

The North's border with China was secure; men and material could easily cross into Vietnam while American supply lines stretched thousands of miles back to the United States.

The American advisors morphed into Marines and other personnel—Army, Navy, Air Force, Special Forces, Commandos, and the civilian CIA—who fought the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, many of whom believed that as an indigenous population they were fighting a nationalist war to free their country from yet another colonial oppressor.

Then, years into the war, domestic American enthusiasm waned and protests grew. Thousands of our citizens had been killed, wounded, captured and gone missing, the conflict was costing taxpayers billions of dollars, and the Communists showed no sign of quitting.

The United States pulled out. The North overran the South. The Communists had won.

What had the United States learned from the post-World War II French experience in Vietnam and ours in Korea, as a few years later we drifted into engagement in Vietnam? Very little, it seemed. Which in large measure explains why in 1975 the last Americans in that benighted country were airlifted off the roof of the American embassy in Saigon.

³²⁰ The authors note that aggregate failures “are not necessarily likely to be mortal, since an ability to cope [adapt] can make it possible to redeem error.” Cohen and Gooch, 27.

³²¹ In 1975 the Commandant of the Marine Corps was added as a full time member of the JCS, on complete parity with the three chiefs.

³²² “. . . it is an error to think that surprise [such as the Chinese intervention] by itself determines more than the outcome of the first engagement.” Cohen and Gooch, 42.

³²³ I can attest from personal knowledge that during my time running the CCF order of battle section at Eighth Army, information provided by local agents sent north by CCRAFE (“Combined Command Reconnaissance Far East”) was not very helpful.

³²⁴ Omar Bradley received his fifth star when becoming Chairman of the JCS so that with only his four he would not be subordinate to MacArthur's five.

³²⁵ Roe, 68.

³²⁶ Cohen and Gooch, 169.

³²⁷ The famous screenwriter William Goldman is often quoted as saying about Hollywood that “nobody knows anything.” One could say the same thing about our large cast of characters' understanding of what the Chinese intended regarding their intervention into the Korean War. United States intelligence was concerned that China

would intervene if United Nations troops, especially American, threatened Manchuria's hydroelectric plants and, further north, its substantial industry. There were other theories. The Office of Chinese affairs at the Department of State thought China might intervene for ideological reasons. The CIA focused on China's need for a *cordon sanitaire* south of Manchuria. The JCS agreed, and for a while ordered MacArthur not to bomb within five miles of the border and not to send American troops to the Yalu River. See Cohen and Gooch, 170.

³²⁸ Cohen and Gooch, 171-72. Emphasis supplied.

³²⁹ Cohen and Gooch, 173-74.

³³⁰ Cohen and Gooch, 177.

³³¹ Cohen and Gooch, 177.

³³² Cohen and Gooch, 177.

³³³ Blair, 348.

³³⁴ Blair, 348. Emphasis supplied.

³³⁵ Blair, 350. Emphasis supplied.

³³⁶ James III, 504-05.

³³⁷ Marshall, 6.

³³⁸ Cohen and Gooch, 192.

³³⁹ Cohen and Gooch, 192.

³⁴⁰ "When the Chinese intervened in force in Korea in late November 1950, they routed some American forces but not others: where the Second Division of the United States [Eighth] Army soon crumbled into small groups of desperate men, the First Marine Division conducted an orderly retreat, inflicting extremely heavy losses on its opponents and remaining intact to the end as an effective fighting force. If all American units had suffered the fate of the Second Division, the UN Command might well have had to evacuate the Korean Peninsula; if all had fought and endured as hardily as the First Marine Division, the rebound might have come well before UN forces had fallen back behind the 38th Parallel." Cohen and Gooch, 43.

³⁴¹ Cohen and Gooch, 34.

³⁴² James, III, 586. Much of the foregoing and following material is found in James, III.

³⁴³ James, III, 587.

³⁴⁴ James, III, 589.

³⁴⁵ James, III, 598. At the risk of digressing, it is worth noting that at no time did General MacArthur refuse to obey an order of his civilian or military superiors. Any implication in Truman's relief order otherwise was a great disservice to the general. MacArthur did air his policy disagreements publicly, however, and that was sufficient justification for the Commander-in-Chief to relieve him.

An interesting sidelight to MacArthur's relief is that when on the evening of April 11, 1951, Truman in a radio broadcast tried to justify his action, 55 percent of the 84,000 letters received by the White House afterwards were pro-MacArthur. Congressional mail was ten to one against Truman. James, III, 602.

³⁴⁶ McHale, Jonathan R., *A History of the American Ambassador's Residence in Tokyo, Embassy*, 1995.

³⁴⁷ Valhalla, in Norse mythology, is the great hall where the souls of heroes killed in battle spend eternity. Though Douglas MacArthur was spared death in battle despite his many close calls, there are those who believe in his case the gods would make an exception.