



The Korean War: From the Inchon Landing to the Chosin Reservoir

**Keystone Battle Series
Marine Corps History Division**

Agenda:

- Strategic Context: Why was there a war in Korea?
- Invasion and the Defense of the Pusan Perimeter
- Counter-attack: The Inchon Landing
- The Fight for Seoul
- On to North Korea (and to the Chosin Reservoir)
- Discussion

Korea – The Division of a Nation

- Korea had been occupied by Japan from 1910-1945
- After WWII, the Soviets and Americans agree to divide Korea at the 38th parallel.
- The Soviets occupied the North and the U.S. occupied the South.
- Koreans on both sides of the border wanted to reunify the country



The Roots of War

- Both North and South Korea are run by autocrats; neither one is democratic.
- North Korea's leader – Kim Il Sung – is the grandfather of the current North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un.
- The leader in the South – Syngman Rhee – was pro-US, but was just as autocratic as North Korea. Rhee leaves office in 1960; the South Korea democratizes thereafter.



South Korean President Rhee

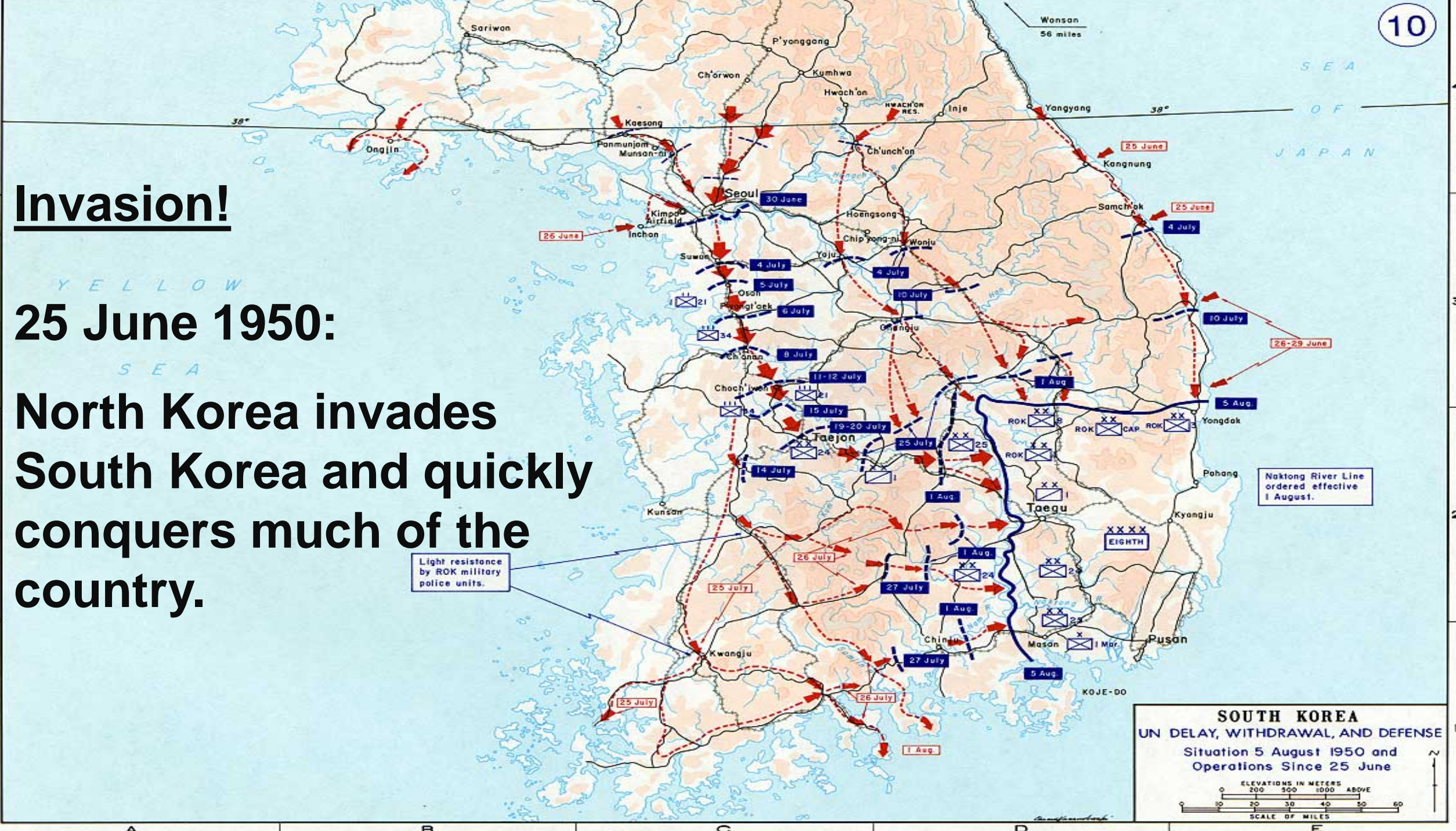


North Korean Premier Kim Il Sung

Invasion!

**25 June 1950:
North Korea invades
South Korea and quickly
conquers much of the
country.**

Light resistance
by ROK military
police units.



**SOUTH KOREA
UN DELAY, WITHDRAWAL, AND DEFENSE
Situation 5 August 1950 and
Operations Since 25 June**

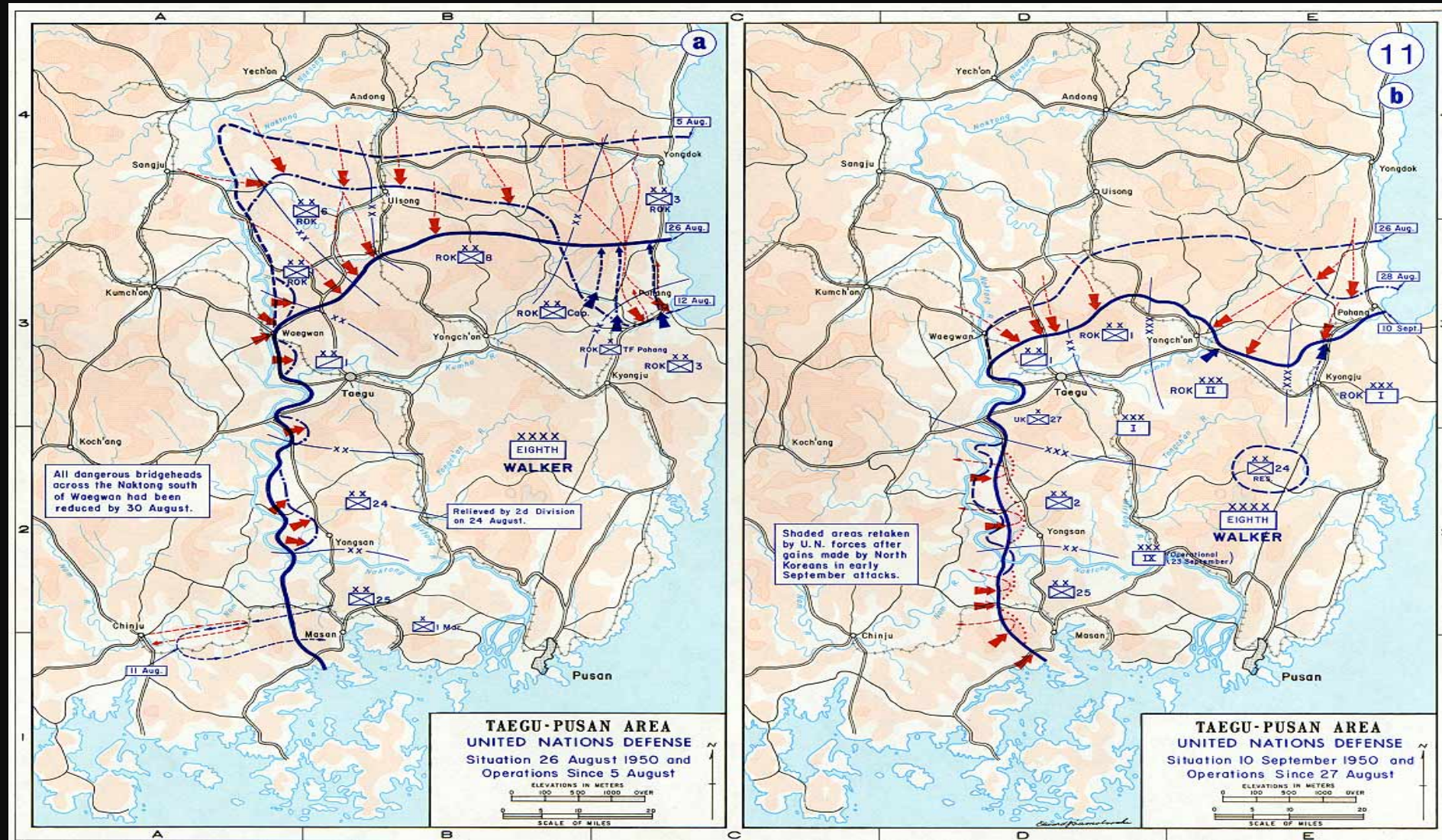
ELEVATIONS IN METERS
200 500 1000 ABOVE

SCALE OF MILES
0 10 20 30 40 50 60

On the Brink of Defeat

By mid-July, all South Korean and US forces are pushed into the southeast corner of the country: The Pusan Perimeter.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff start planning for a total withdrawal from South Korea.



The Marines Arrive!

- The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade ("Fire Brigade") arrived in Korea on 3 August – just 5 weeks after the start of hostilities.
- The combination of infantry, close air support, and other support elements were rushed immediately into the fight.
- Their arrival helped stabilize the Pusan Perimeter and staved off an imminent defeat.
- However, GEN MacArthur still needed to reverse the initiative and liberate South Korea.



MacArthur's Plan: Land at Inchon and surround the North Korean Forces

Light resistance by ROK military police units.

Naktong River Line ordered effective 1 August.

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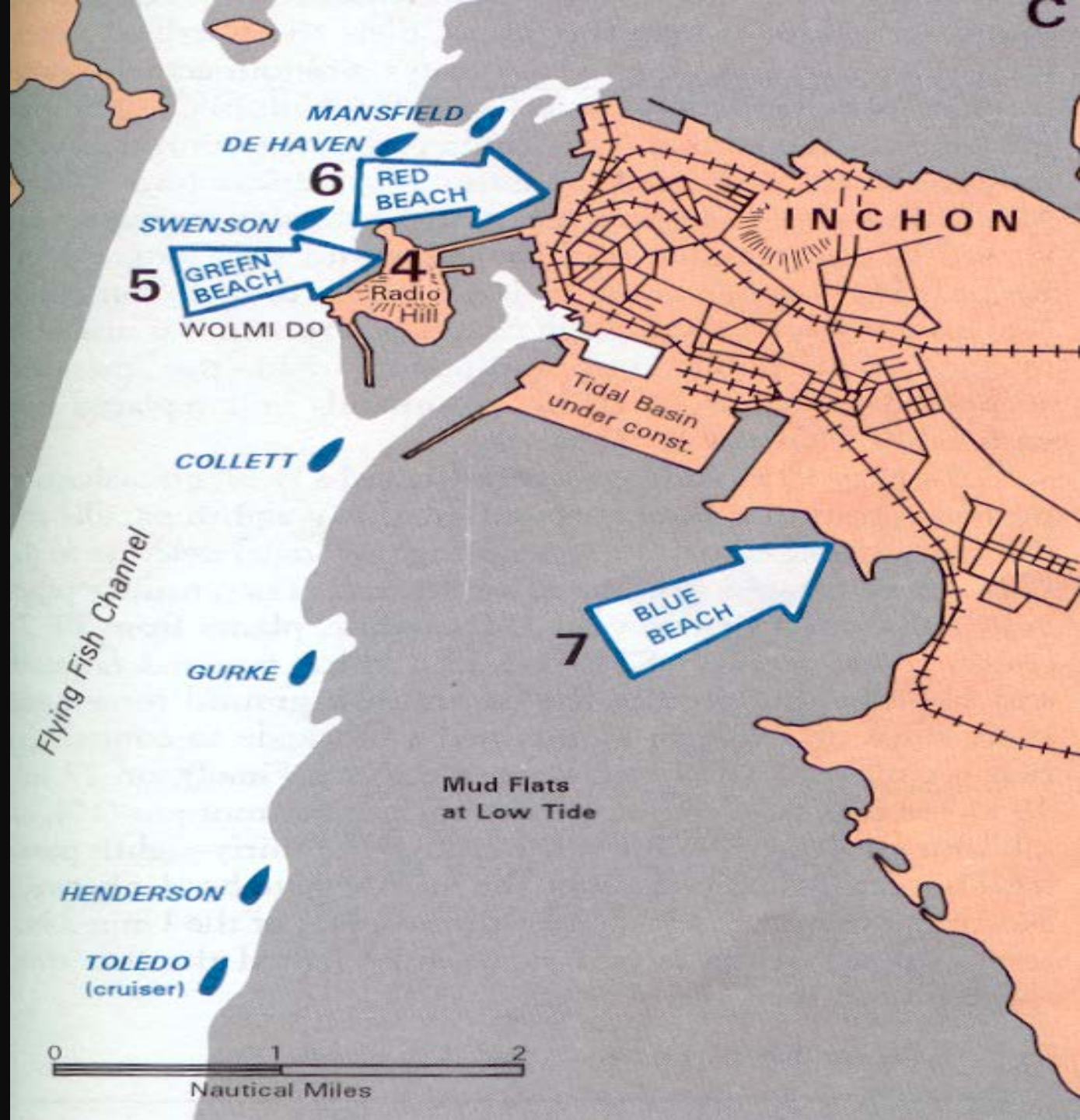
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The Inchon Plan



We shall land at Inchon and I shall crush them!

-- GEN Douglas MacArthur,
August 1950



The Interservice Politics of Amphibious Assaults

“An amphibious landing is not a particularly difficult thing You put your men in boats, and as long as you get well-trained crews to take the boats in, it is the simplest deployment in the world – the men can go nowhere else except the beach.”

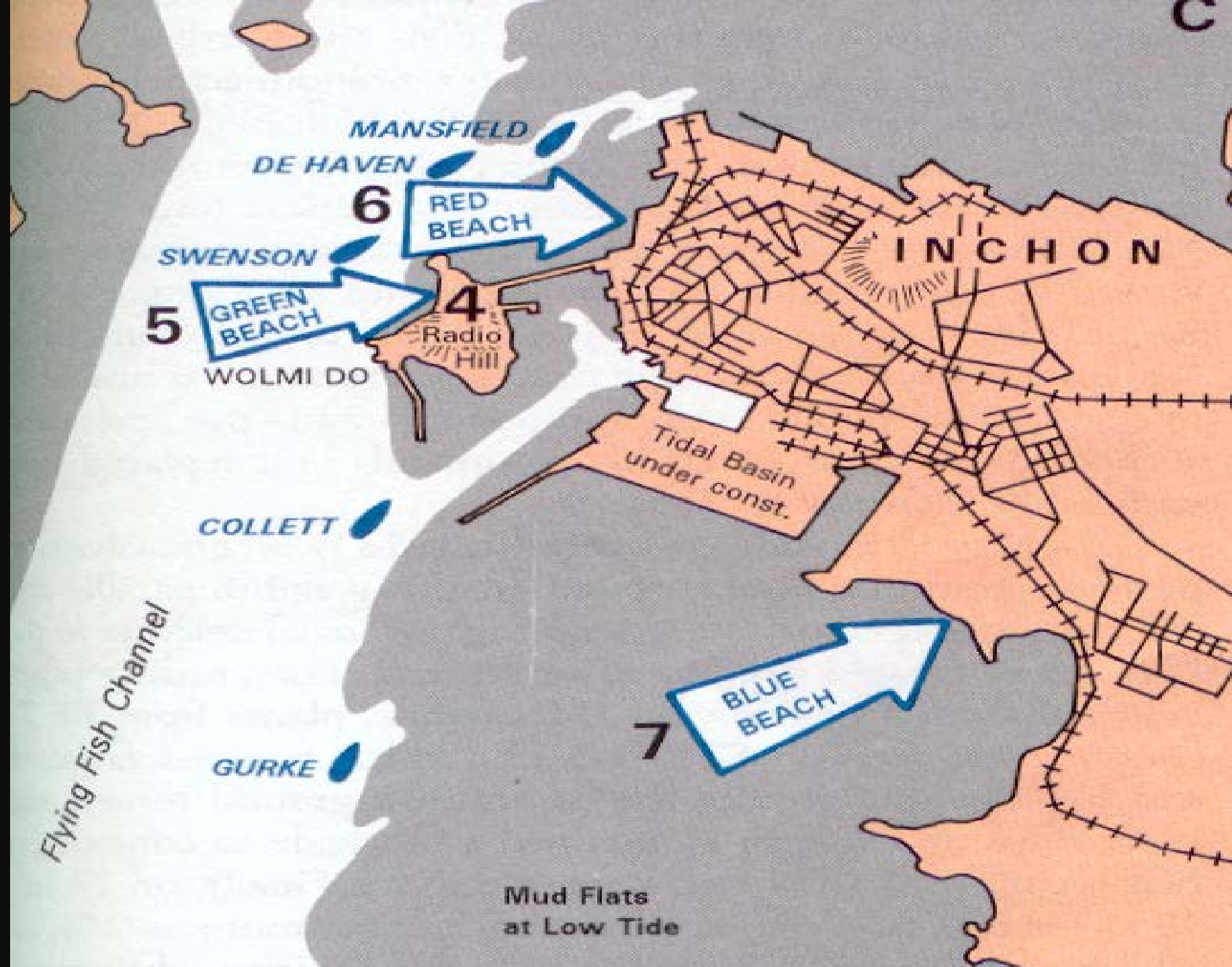
– **General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1950**

“ I am wondering whether we shall ever have another large-scale amphibious operation.”

-- **General Omar Bradley, 1949**

The Landing

- Seize Wolmi Do "Radio Hill"
- Secure red beach
- Secure blue beach
- Consolidate, and continue into Seoul



The Inchon Landing (Operation CHROMITE) 15 SEPT 1950



Marines from the 5th Marines approach the seawall (Blue Beach) and surmount it.



North Korean field gun on Wolmi Do Island (Green Beach)

Heroes of Inchon

- 1stLt Baldomero Lopez (on ladder)
- Platoon Commander, Co A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines
- Led his platoon over the seawall
- Hit by machine gun fire just as he was preparing to throw a grenade
- Pulled the grenade into his body to save his men.
- Posthumously awarded the MOH



The Mud Flats at Inchon



**Low tide:
LSTs stuck in the mud
16 SEPT 1950**



**Off-loading
The beachhead is secure!
16 SEPT 1950**

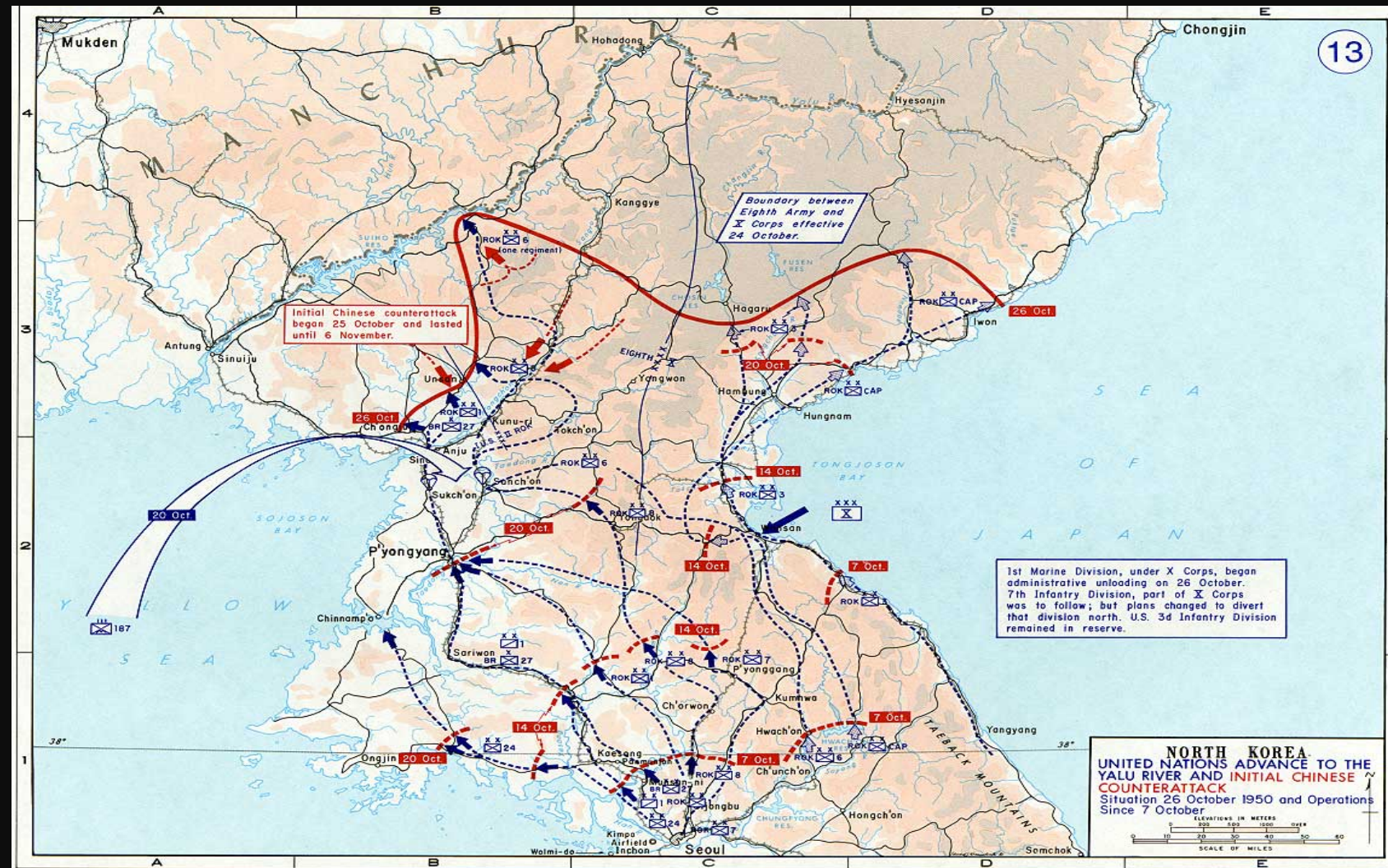
The Fight for Seoul

September 1950



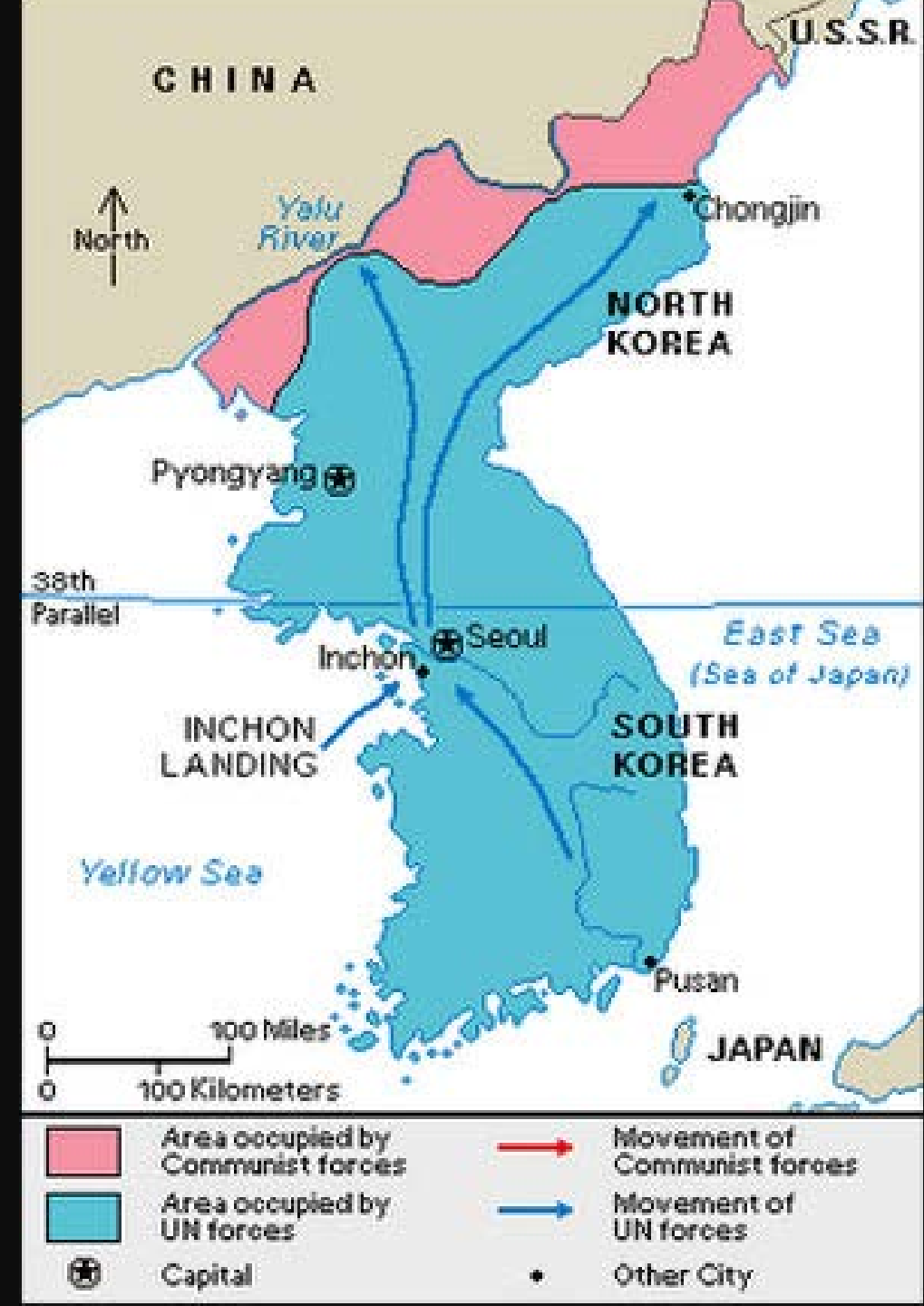
After Seoul: A New Strategic Objective

- The Inchon Landing reversed the initiative. Now the US and South Korea went on the attack.
- By 15 October the North Koreans had been pushed back across the 38th Parallel.
- MacArthur and the JCS had convinced Truman that the North Korean Army had to be destroyed to prevent a renewal of aggression.
- Truman changed his objective from defending South Korea to unifying the peninsula.
- The Americans crossed into North Korea, determined to overthrow the communist regime in North Korea



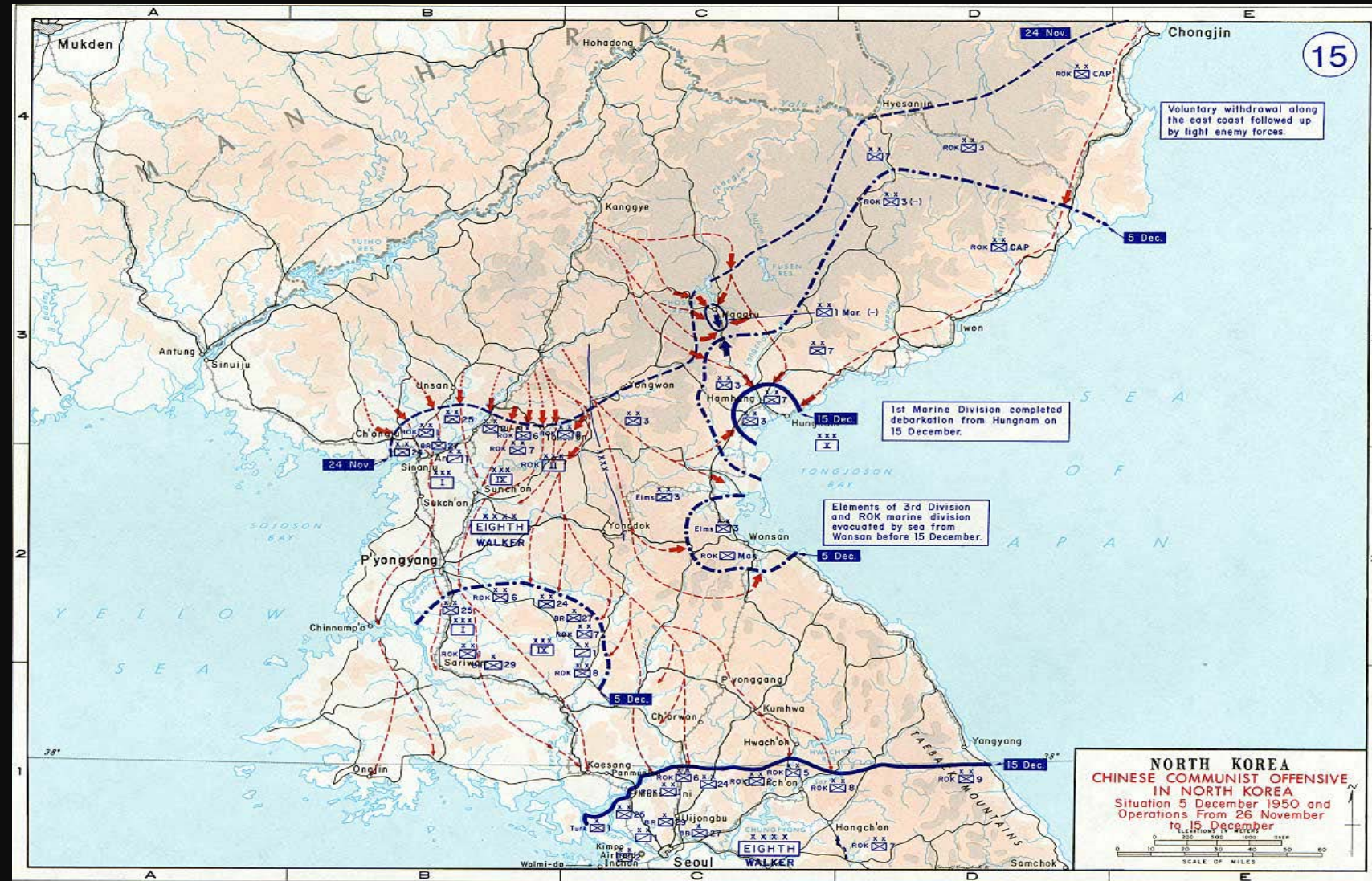
The Chinese Decide to Intervene

- The Chinese felt threatened by 'imperialist' forces so close to their border.
- Chinese leader Mao Zedong was newly in power and had just won the Chinese Civil War a year earlier.
- The U.S.'s new goal was to unify Korea, which would deprive China of a security buffer.
- On 19 October 1950, the Chinese began crossing the Yalu, massing to attack the arriving 1st Marine Division and the soldiers of the 8th Army



The Chinese Trap

- MacArthur was overconfident and vowed the troops would be home by Christmas.
- He knew the Chinese were entering the war, but thought it was just a few thousand troops. He was wrong.
- The 1st Marine Division advanced to the Chosin Reservoir unaware that 6 Chinese Divisions were already positioned in the hills.



The "Chosin Few" of the Chosin Reservoir (Changjin)

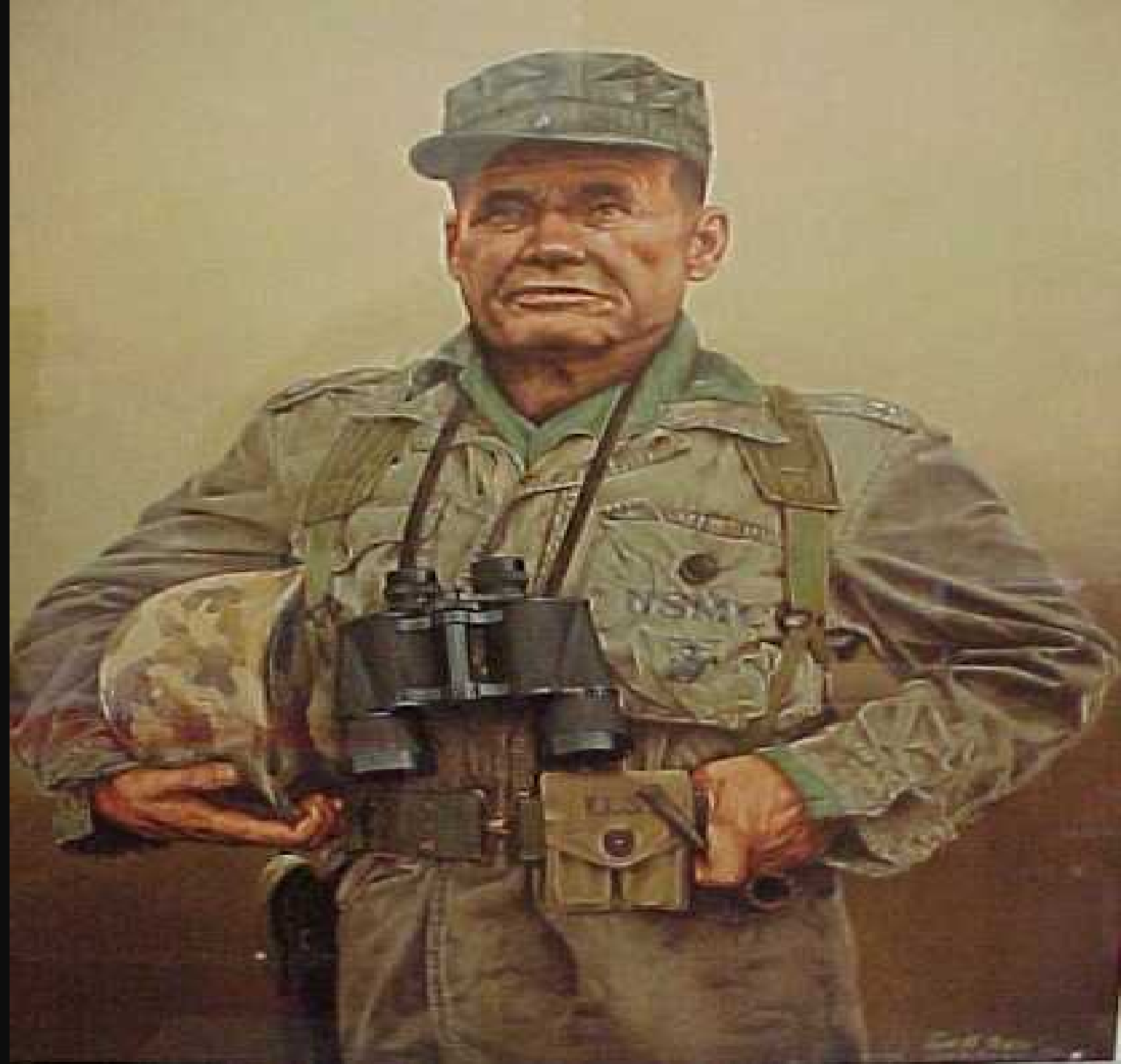
- Temperature: Between 10 and 30 degrees below freezing. Boots, food, water, equipment, medicine and skin all froze in minutes in this severe weather.
- Forces: 6 Chinese Divisions against the 1st Marine Division
- Terrain: One road in and out with numerous narrow passes and bombed out bridges; the Marines held the road; the Chinese held the high ground.

The 1st Marine Division's Fighting Withdrawal Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, December 1950



Guts and Determination

“You’re the 1st Marine Division, and don’t you forget it. We’re the greatest military outfit that ever walked on this earth. Not all the Communists in hell can stop you.” - Chesty Puller, 1950



Discussion

- Why did the Army think the US would never do another amphibious landing?
- What were the risks of landing at Inchon?
- What went right at Inchon? What went wrong?
- Why were the Marines landing at Inchon in the first place? What was the tactical objective? What was the strategic objective?
- What made the fight for Seoul so brutal?
- How did the Marines find themselves outnumbered and surrounded at the Chosin Reservoir? What went wrong?



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