
LETTER FROM SMITH TO CATES ON CHOSIN RESERVOIR

by Major General Oliver P. Smith

FROM THE COMMANDING
GENERAL, 1st MARINE DIVISION
TO THE COMMANDANT
OF THE MARINE CORPS
17 December 1950⁶⁷

At the present moment, I am in Masan. I sailed on the USS *Bayfield* [APA 33] from Hungnam on 15 December for Pusan. With the exception of certain shore party elements, elements of the AmphTrac [Landing Vehicle, Tracked] battalion, and NGF [naval gun-fire] teams and TAC [tactical air control] parties, which are being retained by Corps at Hungnam for the time being, the entire division should close Masan today.⁶⁸ What our mission will be I do not know. When the remainder of the X Corps arrives in the Pusan area, the Corps will

become a part of the 8th Army. [General] Lemuel C. Shepherd has made representations to Corps regarding the need for a period of time in which the division can integrate replacements, repair equipment, and be resupplied. The Corps is aware of this need, not only for us but also for the 7th Division, which lost practically en toto [sic] two infantry battalions and a field artillery battalion. However, Corps will not be calling the turns here.

You have probably read a lot of misinformation in the newspapers and it might be well to give you a factual account of what we have been doing for the past two weeks.

When I last wrote you, the 8th Army had not yet launched its attack. At that time, my mission was to establish a blocking position at Yudam-ni and with the remainder of the division to push north to the Manchurian border. As I explained to you, I did not press the 5th and 7th Marines, which had reached the Chosin Reservoir, to make any rapid advances. I wanted to proceed cautiously for two reasons. First, I had back of me 50 miles of MSR [main supply route],

⁶⁷ The original content came from Commanding General, 1st Marine Division ltr to Commandant of the Marine Corps, subj Chosin, 17 December 1950 (MCHC, Quantico, VA). Minor revisions were made to the text based on current standards for style, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

⁶⁸ Masan was the former capital city of South Gyeongsang Province, South Korea.



In front of the commanding general's quarters at Masan, 1950. From left: LtCol Raymond L. Murray, commanding officer, 5th Marines; Gen Oliver P. Smith; Col Lewis B. Puller, commanding officer, 1st Marines. *Oliver P. Smith Collection (COLL/213), Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division*

14 miles of which was a tortuous mountain road which could be blocked by bad weather, and I wanted to accumulate at Hagaru-ri at the southern end of the reservoir a few days supply of ammunition and rations before proceeding further [sic]. Second, I wanted to move [Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty"] Puller up behind me to protect the MSR and he had not yet been entirely released from other commitments.

By 23 November, both the 5th and 7th Marines were in contact with the CCF [Chinese Communist forces], the 5th to the east of the Chosin Reservoir and the 7th to the west thereof. The 7th was advancing to the blocking position assigned by Corps at Yudam-ni. In the

15-mile stretch of road between Hagaru-ri and Yudam-ni, the 7th had to traverse a 4,000-foot mountain pass and was impeded by the enemy, roadblocks, and snow drifts. Patrols of the 5th pushed to the north end of the reservoir.

On 24 November, the 8th Army's attack jumped off. With the attack came General MacArthur's communiqué, which explained the "massive compression envelopment" that was to take place. I learned for the first time that the 1st Marine Division was to be the northern "pincers" of this envelopment. At a briefing on 25 November, the details were explained. I was to make the main effort of the Corps in a zone of action oriented to the westward. I was



Commissioned by the Chosin Few Association to mark the dedication of the missile cruiser USS *Chosin* (CG 65), Col Charles H. Waterhouse's painting *Eternal Band of Brothers, Korea* depicts the U.S. military winding its way down Funchilin Pass.

Art Collection, National Museum of the Marine Corps

to advance along the road from Yudam-ni toward Mupyong-ni, cut the road and railroad there, send one column on to the Manchurian border at Kuup-tong, and another column north to Kanggyeo. The 7th Infantry Division was to take over my former mission of advancing north up the east side of the reservoir and thence to the Manchurian border. The 3d Infantry Division was to take over the protection of the MSR up to Hagaru-ri. (This never transpired; and to the end of the operation, I had to retain one battalion of the 1st Marines at Chinhung-ni at the foot of the mountain and another battalion of the 1st Marines at Koto-ri at the top of the mountain. Otherwise, there would have been no protection for this vital part of the MSR). Under the plan, the Corps assumed responsibility for engineer

maintenance of the MSR to Hagaru-ri. It also agreed to stock 10-days supplies at Hagaru-ri. I doubt if the Corps would have been able to do this. In any event, the enemy gave us no opportunity to prove whether or not it could be done.

D-day, H-hour for the attack to the westward was fixed by Corps as 27 November, 0800. By 26 November, [General Homer L.] Litzenberg, with all of the 7th, was at Yudam-ni. I decided to have him remain in the Yudam-ni area and pass the 5th through him for the attack to the westward. The 5th had not been in a serious engagement since the attack on Seoul.

The attack jumped off on schedule, but it was not long before both the 5th and 7th were hit in strength by the CCF. By 28 November,



Tank convoy of 1st Tank Battalion cross mountains on the way to Chosin Reservoir from Hamhung, Korea, 19 November 1950.

Defense Department photo (Marine Corps) A5343, Marine Corps History Division, courtesy of TSgt J. W. Helms Jr.

reports of casualties left no doubt as to the seriousness of the attack. At the same time, the 8th Army front was crumbling. No word was received from Corps regarding discontinuance of the attack or withdrawal. Under the circumstances, I felt it was rash to have [General Raymond L.] Murray attempt to push on and I directed him to consolidate on the positions he then held west of Yudam-ni. At the same time, I directed Litzenberg to open up the MSR between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri, which had been blocked by the Chinese, as had also the stretch of road between Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri. On this same day, 28 November, I moved my operational CP [command post] to Hagaru-ri. The movement was made by helicopter, the only feasible

method in view of the cutting of the MSR. Fortunately, we had been able to get some vehicles and working personnel into Hagaru-ri before the road was cut.

Litzenberg's efforts to clear the MSR between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri were unsuccessful on the twenty-eighth. He reported he would make another effort with a battalion the following day, 29 November.

On 28 November, Puller organized Task Force Drysdale to open up the MSR between Koto-ri and Hagaru-ri. This force was under command of Lieutenant Colonel [Douglas B.] Drysdale of the RM [Royal Marine] Commandos. It consisted of the RM Commandos, 235 strong, G Company of 3/1 [3d Battalion, 1st Marines] coming north to join its parent unit at Hagaru-ri, and a rifle company of the 31st Infantry, which was moving north to join its parent unit east of the Chosin Reservoir. (The 7th Infantry Division had pushed north a battalion of the 31st, a battalion of the 32d, and a field artillery battalion to relieve the 5th Marines on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir.) In addition to the units enumerated, the Drysdale column included two companies of our M26 [Pershing] tanks, each less a platoon, and a truck convoy. The column was to move out on the twenty-ninth. I will cover its operations later.

During the night of 28–29 November, the enemy attacked Hagaru-ri in force. The attack started at 2130 and lasted all night. First the attack came in from the south, then shifted to the west, and then to the east. Our defense force consisted of 3/1, less G Company, and personnel of our Headquarters and Service units. Our casualties were 500, of whom about 300 were from the infantry and 200 from Headquarters and Service units. The Headquarters Battalion alone had 60 casualties.



Troops of Regimental Combat Team 7 held up just south of Hagaru-ri while Marine and naval close air support work over enemy positions with napalm, 6 December 1950.

Oliver P. Smith Collection (COLL/213), Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division

We had at an early date realized the importance of Hagaru-ri as a base. On 16 November, [Lieutenant General] Field Harris and I had tentatively approved a site for a [Douglas] C-47 [Skytrain] strip at Hagaru-ri. Work was begun by our 1st Engineer Battalion on 19 November and the strip was first used by C-47s on 1 December, although at the time it was only 40 percent completed. This strip was essential for the evacuation of wounded and air supply in case our road went out either due to weather or enemy action. Hagaru-ri had to be held to protect this strip and the supplies that we were accumulating there. The movement of the Drysdale column from Koto-ri to Hagaru-ri would not only open the road, but would also furnish us needed reinforcements for the defense of Hagaru-ri.

The Drysdale column started north from

Koto-ri on the morning of 29 November. About halfway to Hagaru-ri, it became engaged in a heavy firefight. Embarrassed as he was by a truck convoy, Drysdale was on the point of turning back to Koto-ri, but I sent him a message to push on through if at all possible. He started the truck convoy back toward Koto-ri under the protection of a company of tanks and some infantry, while the remainder of the column continued to fight its way toward Hagaru-ri. The truck convoy returning to Koto-ri was jumped by the Chinese, who had closed in on the MSR again. There was considerable mortar fire and tanks as well as trucks were pretty badly shot up before they got back to Koto-ri. There were also a considerable number of personnel casualties. Drysdale continued to fight on toward Hagaru-ri and toward evening arrived with about 150



John A. Groth's *Village near Hagaru* shows three Marines heavily clothed against the bitter Korean cold in November 1950.

Art Collection, National Museum of the Marine Corps

of his Commandos and G Company of the 1st Marines. The Army company never arrived, although some stragglers came in to Koto-ri. The conclusion was inescapable that a considerable force would be required to open up the MSR between Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri. We would not have any such force until the 5th and 7th Marines joined us at Hagaru-ri.

On 29 November, the 7th Marines started a battalion back along the MSR to open up it, but the battalion got nowhere. I then ordered Litzenberg to employ the entire 7th Marines on the following day, 30 November, to open up the MSR. At the same time, I ordered Murray to pull back his regiment to Yudam-nio. Late in the day of 29 November, I received a telephone call (radio link) from Corps stating that the whole

scheme of maneuver was changed, that the Army battalions on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir, who were now cut off from us were attached to me and I was to extricate them, and that I was to withdraw the 5th and 7th Marines and consolidate around Hagaru-ri.

On 30 November, the Corps turned over to me command of all troops as far south as Sudo-dong, which is four or five miles below the foot of the mountain. These comprised a battalion of the 31st Infantry, which was on its way up the mountain and miscellaneous engineer and service units.

During the day of 30 November, Puller was attacked rather heavily at Koto-ri but kept his perimeter intact.

On the afternoon of 30 November, General



Col Charles H. Waterhouse, *Road to Hagaru, North Korea*, acrylic on canvas.
Art Collection, National Museum of the Marine Corps

[Edward M.] Almond flew up to see me. By this time, he had given up any idea of consolidating positions in the vicinity of Hagaru-ri. He wanted us to fall back in the direction of Hamhung and stressed the necessity for speed. He authorized me to burn or destroy equipment and supplies, stating that I would be supplied by airdrop as I withdrew. I told him that my movements would be governed by my ability to evacuate the wounded, that I would have to fight my way back and could not afford to discard equipment, and that, therefore, I intended to bring out the bulk of my equipment.

The problems of the 5th and 7th Marines could not be separated. By 30 November, between them, they had accumulated about 450 wounded who had to be protected. The only feasible thing to do was to pool their resources.

The two regimental commanders drew up a joint plan (an ADC [assistant division commander] would have come in handy at this point) which was flown to me by helicopter and which I approved. Briefly, the 7th was to lead out from Yudam-ni and the 5th was to cover the rear. Artillery and trains were in the middle. The walking wounded were given weapons and marched in column on the road. Other wounded were loaded in trucks. The route these two regiments had to traverse was tortuous. From Yudam-ni, the road first led south up a narrow mountain valley and then turned eastward toward Hagaru-ri. At about the halfway point, the road crossed a 4,000-foot mountain pass and then descended toward Hagaru-ri. This last section of the road more or less followed the ridgelines and did not offer the same opportunities to the enemy to

block the road as did the first part of the road out of Yudam-ni. As events transpired, the 7th and 5th did have a hard fight to get up to the pass, but the descent to Hagaru-ri, although opposed, was relatively easier.

During these operations, one company of the 7th Marines had a unique and remarkable experience. This was F Company. In his initial advance to Yudam-ni, Litzenberg had left E and F Companies in occupancy of high ground along the road to the rear. Litzenberg was able to extricate E Company, but could not reach F Company, which was in position at the top of the mountain. It was completely surrounded but held excellent positions. By pinpoint airdrops, we were able to keep the company supplied with ammunition and rations. It had 18 killed and 60 wounded but held out for more than three days when it was relieved by 1/7 [1st Battalion, 7th Marines] pushing back up the mountain from Yudam-ni.

During the night of 30 November–1 December, Hagaru-ri was again heavily attacked but the perimeter held. We were stronger this time as G Company of 3/1 and the Commandos had joined our defense force. The attacks were from the southwest and the east. The attack from the east fell on the sector manned by the Service Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel [Charles L.] Banks, an ex-[Edson] Raider, was in command of the Service Battalion. He did an excellent job in beating back the attack.

By 1 December, the situation with regard to care of casualties was becoming serious. Dr. [Navy Captain Eugene R.] Hering had at Hagaru-ri 600 casualties awaiting evacuation. These were being cared for by C and E Medical Companies. It was estimated 400 casualties would be brought in if the Army battalions east of the reservoir broke out. (Actually, we even-

tually evacuated more than 900 men from these battalions). We estimated the 5th and 7th would bring in 500 casualties. (Actually, they brought in 1,500.)

It was manifest that the only solution to our casualty problem was completion of the C-47 strip. (OYs [light observation planes] and helicopters could not make a dent in our casualty load.) Our engineers had worked night and day on the C-47 strip. On two nights, work had to be interrupted because of enemy attacks and the engineers manned their part of the perimeter near the field. The front lines were only 300 yards from the end of the runway. The strip was rather crude; 3,800 feet long, 50 feet wide, no taxiways, and a 2-percent grade to the north. The soil was black loam but it was frozen. Our equipment had considerable difficulty with the frozen ground. On 1 December, the strip, as I have described it, was considered to be 40 percent completed.

On the advice of the aviators, it was decided to bring in a C-47 for a trial run on the afternoon of 1 December. The plane landed successfully at about 1500 and took off 24 wounded. It takes about a half hour to load a plane with litter patients. Ambulatory patients go very much faster. At first, we could accommodate only two planes on the ground simultaneously. Eventually, as the field was improved, we were able to accommodate six planes on the ground without blocking the runway. Hours of daylight were from about 0700 to 1745 and use of the strip was limited to those hours. After the first plane landed, more planes came in. Five additional plane loads of wounded were taken out that afternoon. We would have gotten out more but an incoming plane, loaded with 105mm ammunition, collapsed its landing gear. The plane was too heavy with its load to push off the run-

way and we had to unload it, thus losing valuable time. (We attempted to have incoming planes loaded with ammunition and other needed supplies to supplement airdrops.)

I will complete the story of evacuation of casualties from Hagaru-ri out of chronology, as it is all one story and a very remarkable accomplishment when viewed as a whole. On the evening of 1 December, stragglers from the breakup of the Army battalions east of the lake began to drift in. During the day of 2 December, we evacuated 919 casualties by air, the majority of them from the Army battalions. During the morning of 3 December, the doctor cleaned out by air evacuation all his remaining casualties. This gave us an opportunity to fly out our accumulation of dead. The estimate of casualties of the 5th and 7th Marines had now risen to 900. At 1935, 3 December, the advance guard of the 7th Marines arrived at the perimeter. It was closely followed by the column of walking wounded. The column continued the movement during the night and each vehicle brought in more wounded, some on the hoods of jeeps. By morning, the doctor's hospital installations were full. On the day of 4 December, 1,000 casualties were evacuated by air. On the day of 5 December, 1,400 more casualties were evacuated by air. When we moved out from Hagaru-ri to Koto-ri on 6 December, we had no remaining casualties to evacuate.

I believe the story of this evacuation is without parallel. Credit must go to the troop commanders whose determination and self-sacrifice made it possible to get the wounded out, to the medical personnel whose devotion to duty and untiring efforts saved many lives, and to the Marine and Air Force [air crews] (including fatal accident[s] in spite of the hazards of the weather and a rudimentary landing strip.)

To get back to the story of the operation



Breakthrough to Fox Hill, by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, portrays LtCol Raymond Gilbert Davis during the action for which he was awarded a Medal of Honor. Davis leads his battalion in the fourth attempt to rescue the beleaguered 1st Marine Division at Toktong Pass, who for six days and nights held off the sudden emerging forces of the Chinese armies. On the main supply route, adjacent to the Chosin Reservoir, the Toktong Pass was a lifeline. Davis led his battalion over three successive ridges in the dark and in blizzard snow at close to minus 75 windchill and in continuous attacks against the enemy.

Courtesy Waterhouse estate

in its proper chronological sequence. At 1335, 1 December, we got our first airdrop from Japan. These drops were known as "Baldwins." Each Baldwin contained a prearranged quantity of small arms ammunition, weapons, water, rations, and medical supplies. Artillery ammunition had to be requested separately. A Baldwin could be dropped by about six [Fairchild] C-119 [Flying Boxcar] planes. We were required to make request on Corps for the number of Baldwins desired, modified as desired. We usually requested Baldwins less weapons and water and plus given quantities of artillery ammunition.

Airdrop did not have the capability of supplying a Marine division in combat. When the drops were started, the total capability of the

Far East Air Force was 70 tons a day. This was stepped up to 100 tons a day. But to support an RCT [regimental combat team] in combat requires 105 tons a day. What gave us some cushion was the fact that, with our own transportation, before the roads were cut, we had built up at Hagaru-ri a level of six days rations and two units of fire. The airdrops continued until we left Hagaru-ri and were also made at Koto-ri, where Puller had to be supplied and where we had to accumulate supplies in anticipation of the arrival of the bulk of the division there. The drops were not always accurate, and we had personnel and materiel casualties as a result of inaccurate drops; however, we owe a considerable debt of gratitude to the Air Force for their efforts.

During the afternoon of 1 December, a deputy chief of staff of the Corps arrived and gave me the outline of the latest plan. Under this plan, the 3d Infantry Division was to move elements to Majong-dong (about 10 miles south of the foot of the mountain) and establish a covering force through which I would withdraw. Upon withdrawal, I was to occupy a defensive sector west and southwest of Hungnam and the 7th Division was to occupy a sector northeast and north of Hungnam.

Toward evening on 1 December, some 300 stragglers of the cutoff Army battalions up the reservoir drifted into camp, having made their way in over the frozen surface of the reservoir. They continued to drift in during the night and for three or four days thereafter. I have never found out exactly what happened. Apparently, the two battalions that had holed up at Sinhung-ni started south and had made some progress, with the support of a considerable amount of Marine aviation (10 planes on either side of the road). Then the acting regimental commander was killed and the column must

have fallen apart and men made the best of their way out to the lake and thence down the lake to our perimeter. For some unknown reason, the Chinese did not do much firing at people on the surface of the lake. We evacuated some 900 men of the two infantry battalions and artillery battalion. There remained with us some 385 more or less able-bodied men whom I had the senior Army officer present form into a provisional battalion. We brought these out with us.

During the day of 2 December, Lieutenant Colonel [Olin] Beall and other volunteers conducted a remarkable rescue operation on the lake. Air cover was provided. They drove jeeps, often towing improvised sleds, as far as four miles over the surface of the reservoir, and picked up wounded and frostbitten men. Although the Chinese did not often fire on the wounded on the lake, they did fire at the jeeps. During the day, 250 men were rescued by these jeeps. Operations were continued the following day, but a lesser number were found. Beall was awarded the DSC [Distinguished Service Cross] by the Corps commander.

The 5th and 7th made some progress up the mountain during 2 December. Enemy opposition was still strong.

On 3 December, Litzenberg reached the top of the mountain between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri. However, there was still a buildup of enemy between him and us and he was running short of gasoline. In a slow-moving column, there is considerable idling of motors and in any event, in cold weather, motors have to be started up frequently. All this consumes a large quantity of gasoline. At Litzenberg's request, we made a pinpoint drop of gasoline to the head of the truck column. Unfortunately, he did not request diesel fuel, a lack of which later was responsible for the loss of several artillery pieces.

During the day of 3 December, Litzenberg continued to push over and down the mountain. At 1630, we sent out tanks with the Commandos to clean out the Chinese who were on the road near camp. At 1935, the advance guard of the 7th Marines arrived at the perimeter. Movement continued during the night, the 5th Marines following in after the 7th. In the darkness, it takes a long time to get units in from covering positions and on to the road. When they were only a few miles from Hagaru-ri, some of the tractors drawing the 155mm howitzers ran out of diesel fuel. This stopped the column. The Chinese closed in with mortar and automatic weapon fire. Some of the tractors were disabled. We later sent a column back with diesel fuel, but not all the guns could be gotten out because of disabled tractors. We lost 10 out of 18 155mm howitzers and 4 out of 30 105mm howitzers. The guns were spiked and later an air strike was put down on them. Despite the losses, it was still a remarkable feat to bring out three battalions of artillery minus these guns.

The last elements of the 5th and 7th Marines did not arrive at Hagaru-ri until about noon of 4 December. I was considerably relieved to have these two regiments rejoin. I considered that the critical part of the operation had been completed. Even with two depleted RCTs, I felt confident we could fight our way to Koto-ri where we would gain additional strength. The terrain was not as difficult, it lent itself well to air support, and we were able to lay down preparatory artillery fires all the way to Koto-ri. Artillery emplaced at Hagaru-ri could reach halfway to Koto-ri and Puller's artillery at Koto-ri could reach back to meet our fires.

After their grueling experience, the regiments were not in condition to continue the advance on 5 December. Also, we wanted to be



This blown bridge at Funchilin Pass blocks the only way out for U.S. and British forces withdrawing from the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea during the Korean War. Air Force C-119 Flying Boxcars dropped portable bridge sections to span the chasm in December 1950, allowing men and equipment to reach safety.

Official U.S. Air Force photo

sure that all our casualties were evacuated. Our order, therefore, provided for an advance on Koto-ri at first light on 6 December.

The order for the advance on Koto-ri provided for an advance in two RCT [regimental combat team] columns. RCT 7 led out. The RCT was normal as to combat troops, with the provisional Army battalion attached. In addition, Litzenberg had within his column his own regimental train and Division Train No. 1. RCT 5 was to follow RCT 7. Its composition was normal except for the attachment of 3/1. Murray also had within his column his own regimental train and Division Train No. 2. He was to hold the perimeter until RCT 7 had gained sufficient distance to permit him to move out on the road.

The embarrassing part of this move was the trains. More than a thousand vehicles were involved. We carried two-days rations and two units of fire. We brought out all usable equip-

ment and supplies, including tentage and stoves. Even the engineer pans were used as trucks to carry tentage.

Litzenberg had not advanced more than two miles before he ran into trouble. Using maximum air and artillery support, it required until 1400 to break through. Peculiarly enough, all the opposition came from the east side of the road.

At 1420, I moved my operational CP by OY plane and helicopter to Koto-ri. My radios, vans, and working personnel were mostly in Division Train No. 1.

By 1800, 6 December, Litzenberg had reached the halfway point and was progressing satisfactorily. However, during the night, the Chinese cut into the train in two places. There was confused and close range fighting. We lost men and vehicles but remarkably few vehicles.

The column continued to move during the night and by 0590, 7 December, the leading elements of the 7th Marines began to arrive at Koto-ri.

The 5th Marines did not clear Hagaru-ri until 7 December. Murray had quite a rear guard action at that place, but came off with 200 prisoners. His last elements did not close Koto-ri until 2135, 7 December.

The advance from Hagaru-ri to Koto-ri cost us more than 500 casualties. Puller had an OY strip only. However, Field Harris agreed to land TBM [turboprop] planes, of which he had three, on this strip. During the day of 7 December, between OYs and TBMs, 200 casualties were evacuated. However, there were still 300 more casualties to evacuate. The aviators stated that, if 400 feet [were] added to the strip, it would be possible for C-47s to land. Therefore, during the night of 7–8 December, our engineers lengthened the strip by 400 feet. Unfortunately, the

strip was periodically under enemy fire. On 8 December, C-47s began to land and we soon completed evacuation of our casualties.

Koto-ri is about two miles north of the lip of the mountain. From the lip of the mountain the road descends tortuously to Chinhung-ni about 10 road miles distant. At Chinhung-ni was Puller's 1st Battalion. On 7 December, the Corps had moved an Army battalion to Chinhung-ni in order to free 1/1 [1st Battalion, 1st Marines]. Theoretically, the road was open from Chinhung-ni to the south.

Our plan for getting down the mountain was simple. (However, it must be borne in mind that the enemy surrounded Koto-ri as they had closed in behind our columns.) The 5th and 7th Marines were to seize and hold the commanding ground to about the halfway point. 1/1 was to push up from Chinhung-ni and seize and hold commanding ground about halfway up the mountain. The 1st Marines, which had regained 3/1 from Hagaru-ri and additionally had a battalion of the 31st Infantry attached, was to hold the perimeter at Koto-ri until the trains cleared when it was to follow out (We now had 1,400 vehicles as a result of the addition of Puller's train and Army vehicles.) Once the commanding ground was seized, it was our intention to push the trains down the mountain. As the trains cleared, infantry would leave the high ground and move down the road. The last vehicles in the column were the tanks. We realized that if an M-26 ever stalled or threw a tread on a one-way mountain road, it would be very difficult to clear it out of the way.

In all this planning, there was one serious catch. The Chinese had blown out a 24-foot section of a bridge about one-third of the way down the mountain. They could not have picked a better spot to cause us serious trouble. At this

point, four large pipes, carrying water to the turbines of the power plant in the valley below, crossed the road. A sort of concrete substation was built over the pipes on the uphill side of the road. A one-way concrete bridge went around the substation. The drop down the mountainside was sheer. It was a section of this bridge, which was blown. There was no possibility of a bypass.

[Lieutenant Colonel John H.] Partridge, our engineer, got together with the commanding officer of a Treadway Bridge unit, which was stranded at Koto-ri, and they devised a plan. This involved dropping by parachute at Koto-ri the necessary Treadway Bridge sections. These were dropped on 7 December. As a precaution, additional sections were spotted at Chinhung-ni at the foot of the mountain.

At 0800 on 8 December, the 7th Marines jumped off to seize Objectives A and B at the lip of the mountain; then it pushed on to Objective C further along. The 5th moved out and captured Objective D above the bridge site. 1/1 moved up the mountain and captured Objective E. All this was not accomplished as easily as it is described. There were delays and casualties. The bridging material did not get to the bridge site until 9 December. The bridge was completed at 1615 that date. In anticipation of completion of the bridge, the truck column had been moved forward and the leading truck was ready to cross as soon as the bridge was completed. Unfortunately, another block developed farther down the mountain where the road passed under the cableway. This block was caused partly by enemy fire and partly by additional demolition. This block was not opened until 0600, 10 December.

What we had feared regarding the tanks occurred. As I explained previously, we had placed them last in the column. As they were proceeding down the mountain, the brake on the seventh



Marines on the road between Funchilin Pass and Chin-hung-ni, 1950. The weather was a constant enemy.

Oliver P. Smith Collection (COLL/213), Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division

tank from the tail of the column locked. The tank jammed into the bank. Efforts to bypass the tank or push it out of the way were fruitless. To complicate matters, the Chinese closed in with mortar fire and thermite grenades and mingled with the crowds of refugees following the column. The tankers dismounted and fought on foot with the Reconnaissance Company, which was covering the tail of the column. There were casualties. Finally, the tankers did their best to disable the seven tanks and moved down the mountain. Next morning, an air strike was put in on the tanks as well as the bridge, which we had laboriously constructed.

During the day of 10 December, both Division Trains Nos. 1 and 2 cleared Chinhung-ni at the foot of the mountain and leading elements of the trains began arriving at Hamhung that afternoon. After the trains cleared the road, empty trucks were sent up for troops.

At 1300, 11 December, the last elements of the division cleared Chinhung-ni. The 3d Division was supposed to keep the road open south

of Chinhung-ni, but Puller's regimental train was ambushed near Sudong. He lost a couple of trucks and had some casualties. However, Puller arrived at his assembly area with more vehicles than he had started down the mountain with. He had picked up and towed in some vehicles he had found at the scene of a previous ambush of Army trucks. Puller's last elements arrived in the assembly area at 2100, 11 December. This completed the move of the division from the Chosin Reservoir area.

Our rear echelon had set up 150 tents with stoves for each regiment. Hot food was available when the troops arrived.

While Puller was closing his assembly area on 11 December, the 7th Marines was embarking in the MSTs *Daniel I. Sultan* [T-AP 120]. The 5th Marines embarked 12 December and the 1st Marines on 13 December. Loading out of the division was completed about midnight 14 December, and the last ship of the convoy sailed at 1030, 15 December.

An approximation of the casualties from the date (27 November) we jumped off in the attack to the westward until we returned to Hungnam (11 December) is as follows:

KIA [killed in action]	400
WIA [wounded in action]	2,265
MIA [missing in action]	90
Total Battle	2,755
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Non-Battle	1,395
	(mostly frostbite)
Grand Total	4,150
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This is not the complete picture as there are many more frostbite cases, which are now being screened.

I am understandably proud of the performance of this division. The officers and men were magnificent. They came down the mountains bearded, footsore, and physically exhausted, but their spirits were high. They were still a fighting division.