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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

The Landing and Liberation

A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE KOREAN WAR'S OPERATION CHROMITE, SEPTEMBER 1950

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In fall 1950, United Nations Command (UNC) forces, with U.S. Marines in the lead, executed an amphibious landing at Inchon, Korea, initiating an offensive on Seoul that changed the course of the Korean War. Known as Operation Chromite, the advance into Inchon and Seoul scrambled North Korean forces and enabled the UNC 8th Army to break through the Pusan perimeter. These campaigns also made it possible for UNC forces to reach the 38th parallel days after Marine Corps and other Allied forces liberated Seoul. At the same time, the stunning victory at Inchon had a more deleterious effect on military decision-making in the days ahead. Few questioned General Douglas MacArthur in the months following the campaign, a silence that contributed to the disastrous Chinese intervention and the difficult winter fighting of 1950–51.

The significant turn in the war brought on by Operation Chromite has generated considerable scholarly argument regarding the operation's significance and the Marine Corps' performance, including conflicting assessments of MacArthur's

contribution to the campaign, ranging from celebrations of his choices to more nuanced interpretations. Chronological distance from the operation enabled historians in the twenty-first century to interrogate common conclusions about the campaign and open it to comparative analysis. Declassified documents offer further encouragement to examine Chromite in all its complexity. Evaluation of these historiographical trends and sources encourages scholars to rethink Chromite's position in modern military history, how it speaks to leadership techniques, and the insights it offers into Marine Corps performance in the Korean War.

A review of Operation Chromite's basic history is necessary to fully understand the historiographical trends and available archival resources. To adequately capture the campaign's origins, historical analysis must begin not in September 1950 but with U.S. leaders' contradictory approach to security after World War II. On the one hand, the United States took a leading role in world security, forming numerous alliances and international institutions in the context of emerging Cold War rivalry. On the other hand, U.S. military forces atrophied after 1945. Imposition of defense budget ceilings and other efforts by the Harry S. Truman administration, abetted by a thrifty Congress, left a shell of a force in place. Postwar cuts left units undermanned and at low levels of readiness. The Marine Corps fought an especially difficult political battle to

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prove the value of Marine air support and a Marine expeditionary capability.¹

In this context, the Soviet Union–supported Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) attack on the United States and United Nations–backed Republic of Korea (ROK) in June 1950 created a major military crisis when DPRK forces crushed ROK forces. The underprepared U.S. Army units backstopping the retreating Koreans suffered repeated reverses. At the same time, the UN established a U.S.-led coalition (the UNC) to help the ROK. Intense DPRK pressure on UNC lines near Pusan motivated U.S. military leadership to find a way to change the tide of the war.²

General MacArthur, in command of the UNC coalition, hatched a provocative plan called Operation Bluehearts to reverse the tempo of the war. In early July 1950, MacArthur proposed landing at Inchon and then advancing on Seoul, but the DPRK had other plans. By the end of the month, North Korean pressure on the United Nations position forced MacArthur to concede that the operation would have to be postponed until September.³

MacArthur based his commitment to an Inchon landing and drive to Seoul (Operation Chromite) on his experience working with U.S. Navy and Marine forces in World War II and his reading of the Korean War and military strategy. The general believed that by landing at Inchon and pushing to Seoul, he could cut the DPRK’s logistical lines. Additionally, UN forces along the Pusan perimeter and at Seoul would create a hammer-and-anvil force that could break the DPRK’S efforts. MacArthur believed a stunning victory in Seoul would impress both America’s Asian allies and adversaries, repairing the damage that early reverses had done to the U.S. image. He also worried

delay would extend operations into winter and risk direct Soviet or Chinese intervention.⁴

High-ranking Navy, Marine, and Army officers all questioned MacArthur’s plans. Navy leaders pointed out that Inchon’s tides made the city a difficult place to land. Navy, Marine, and Army officials supported alternative landing sites, with Navy and Marine officers advocating a landing at Posung-myon, 48 kilometers south of Seoul.⁵ MacArthur rejected each of these arguments because he believed, in biographer Arthur Herman’s words, that the capture of Seoul “transcended matters of strategy” because it was the capital of Korea and thus had high symbolic value.⁶ He also thought the success of a bold landing at Inchon would further cement his name and reputation in history. To convince naysayers, MacArthur proclaimed in August 1950, “We shall land at Inchon, and I shall crush them [the DPRK].”⁷ During the run-up to the landings, MacArthur was not always transparent with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and others, especially if he believed they could ruin his plans for Inchon.

To achieve his vision, MacArthur made another controversial choice: he appointed his loyal chief of staff, Major General Edward M. Almond, as commander of the X Corps, a unit comprising the 1st Marine Division, 7th Infantry Division, and attached Allied and supporting units. MacArthur’s confidence in the operation’s success led him to decide against appointing a new chief of staff to replace Almond, who would instead hold both the X Corps command and chief of staff of the Far Eastern Command (FECOM) position. Almond’s abrasive leadership style and intimacy with MacArthur created problems within the X

¹ See Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Secretary of Defense: The Formative Years, 1947–1950*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1984), 365–67, 386–96. See also Doris M. Condit, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Test of War, 1950–1953*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1988), 5–10.

² Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013) 73–80. See also David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 82–168.

³ Roy E. Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June–November 1950)* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1973), 488–89.

⁴ See H. W. Brands, *The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Doubleday, 2016), 153–58; Stephen Taaffe, *MacArthur’s Korean War Generals* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016), 60–65; Geoffrey Perrett, *Old Soldiers Never Die: The Life of Douglas MacArthur* (New York: Random House, 1996), 545–47; and Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao and the Origins of the Korean War* (Dulles, VA: Brassey’s, 2000), 265.

⁵ Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 494.

⁶ Arthur Herman, *Douglas MacArthur: American Warrior* (New York: Random House, 2016), 735.

⁷ BGen Edwin H. Simmons, “Over the Seawall: U.S. Marines at Inchon,” in *U.S. Marines in the Korean War*, ed. Charles R. Smith (Washington, DC: Marine Corps History Division, 2007), 87.

Corps, especially in relation to its large Marine Corps component.

Choosing Almond over a Marine general was all the more striking given the Corps' role in Operation Chromite. Marine forces had been part of the plan from the beginning. Their role only grew over time, with the 1st Marine Division bearing much of the weight of the operation. Additionally, the Marines had made a titanic effort to coordinate and move Marine reservists (dubbed the "Minutemen of 1950") from across the United States to meet the mission's needs.⁸ Only with the commitment and fast work of Marine leadership was Operation Chromite possible, at least as MacArthur conceived it.

The weather also posed a challenge to campaign preparations. On 3 September 1950, Typhoon Jane ruined some supplies and stopped the transfer of others. Meteorologists forecasted another typhoon in Jane's wake, which motivated MacArthur to accelerate his plans. The 1st Marine Division commander Major General Oliver P. Smith and others worried that common practices to prepare for amphibious operations that had guided the Marines during World War II were being shortened or ignored to make the operation fit MacArthur's time frame. The breakneck speed to get Operation Chromite launched made the operation a great gamble.⁹

Fortune favored the X Corps in the first days of the campaign. Following American and British naval bombardment and air strikes, Marines of the 1st and 5th Marine Regiments captured Wolmido island, a key geographic feature connected to Inchon, and other important positions in the city on 15 September. By the next day, Marine units advanced far into Inchon, enabling Smith to set up his command post in the city. During the night of 17 September, Kimpo Airfield fell to the 5th Marine Regiment. Good news continued to come with the arrival of the 32d Infantry Regiment of the 7th Infantry Division and the fall of key North Korean positions in the hills between Kimpo Airfield

and the Han River. The Marines' skillful capture on 21 September of Yeongdeungpo, a city between Inchon and Seoul, raised their esprit de corps.¹⁰

However, the confidence inspired by these campaigns would be tested as North Korean resistance stiffened. Between 17 and 20 September, thousands of North Korean soldiers arrived in Seoul. U.S. Marines faced difficult fighting reminiscent, historian and retired Marine Corps colonel Allan R. Millett wrote, of "Iwo Jima intensity" in the Ansan-Yonhui Ridge complex, a set of terrain features armies had historically fought over since the sixteenth century.¹¹ Marine casualties rose sharply as the North Koreans secured their position.

Striving to meet MacArthur's goal of capturing Seoul by 25 September, Almond pressed Smith to accelerate the attack. When Smith refused, fearing that rushing would cause unnecessary risks, Almond changed plans and drew the 32d Infantry Regiment into the fight. In this moment of tension and others throughout the campaign, Almond undermined Smith. Almond's micromanaging continued well after Inchon and would create problems within the X Corps in the months to come.

Despite Almond's efforts and MacArthur's claims to have liberated Seoul on 25 September, intense urban warfare wracked Seoul. From 25 through 28 September, DPRK forces attacked UNC forces along Ma Po Boulevard and other thoroughfares. Pockets of DPRK forces fired on U.S. Marines from behind makeshift barricades set up in the streets. Smith worried that MacArthur, ROK president Syngman Rhee, and other leaders might come under attack from the DPRK holdovers in the city during the ceremony formally turning the city over to the ROK government on 29 September.¹²

Such a disaster did not come to pass. By the campaign's end, the 8th Army pushed well beyond the Pusan perimeter to connect with the X Corps. The X

⁸ Lynn Montross and Capt Nicholas A. Canzona, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950–1953: The Inchon-Seoul Operation*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Historical Branch G-3, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1955), 18–22.

⁹ Simmons, "Over the Seawall," 92–97.

¹⁰ Col Joseph H. Alexander, "Battle of the Barricades: U.S. Marines in the Recapture of Seoul," in *U.S. Marines in the Korean War*, 146–54.

¹¹ This region was also known as the Hill 296 complex. See Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950–1951: They Came from the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 254–55.

¹² Alexander, "Battle of the Barricades," 188.

Corps would continue to fight in the north until early October, when the Marines were shipped to Wonsan for another amphibious landing. This time, however, the UNC's luck ran out as the decision to push north of the 38th parallel triggered Chinese intervention, leading to one of the most challenging retreats in modern military history in late November and December 1950.

Cold War–Era Historical Analysis of Operation Chromite

Access to both internal documents and interview subjects gave government-employed historians the first chance to undertake serious study of Operation Chromite. Historian and World War I veteran Lynn Montross and Korean War veteran Captain Nicholas A. Canzona's 1955 study *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950–1953: The Inchon Seoul Operation* offered an early analysis of the campaign. Emphasizing the desperate fighting along the Pusan Perimeter and the DPRK's relationship with the USSR, Montross and Canzona find Operation Chromite to have been a strategic necessity, effusively praising MacArthur's leadership. Montross and Canzona accordingly interpret the discord between Almond and Smith as a positive feature in their relationship that was "more likely to sharpen than [to] blunt [the] military intellects" of the two leaders.¹³ This conclusion connected to Montross and Canzona's larger purpose to celebrate inter-Service cooperation, a point that is notable as inter-Service rivalry was alive and well in 1955.

While offering plaudits to the other Services and allies, Montross and Canzona celebrate Marine Corps performance throughout the campaign, citing special action reports and interviews with key participants to highlight the logistical feat of supporting the operation effectively. The authors also celebrate parts of the campaign that went well, like medical Service support. Errors during the campaign are ascribed to the "premature acceptance" of nuclear weapons as the primary way to meet security needs after World War II.¹⁴

Here, Montross and Canzona speak less to the operation and more to the concerns of 1955 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower sought heavy cuts to military spending and greater reliance on nuclear strikes to contain Communist expansion.

Another government-sponsored history, historian and X Corps veteran Roy E. Appleman's *United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June–November 1950)*, offers a more nuanced analysis, although it reaches similar conclusions. Like Montross and Canzona, Appleman deems Chromite to have been a necessity, especially as he claims that fighting along the Pusan perimeter had been indecisive. He also portrays the campaign in a positive light, although he underscores heavy losses in the fight for Seoul. Appleman breaks most starkly with Montross and Canzona in his portrayal of MacArthur. While Montross and Canzona depict MacArthur as an inspiring, visionary leader, Appleman contextualizes his ideas about the campaign within his career during World War II and his commonsense understanding that "mobility and war of maneuver have always brought the greatest prizes and quickest decisions to their practitioners."¹⁵ This difference is in accord with Appleman's highly detailed, less positive discussion of the campaign and the first months of the war more generally.

Of the many nongovernment-sponsored Korean War histories published in the first 40 years following the operation, historian and retired Marine Corps colonel Robert Debs Heintz Jr.'s award-winning *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign* remains the most cited in studies of Operation Chromite. First published in 1968 and reissued multiple times, this volume relies on interviews with participants because key archival sources like the Joint Chiefs of Staff papers, the Douglas MacArthur Library collection, and other sources were closed to the public. Similar to the government-sponsored studies, Heintz finds the operation strategically necessary.

However, unlike other scholars, Heintz is critical of MacArthur and Almond, especially MacArthur's

¹³ Montross and Canzona, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950–1953*, vol. 2, 39.

¹⁴ Montross and Canzona, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950–1953*, vol. 2, 97.

¹⁵ Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 488.

decision to appoint Almond head of the X Corps instead of relying on Marine Corps commanders. Heintz concludes that creating the X Corps instead of using the Fleet Marine Force headquarters constituted an “unnecessary improvisation.”¹⁶ Heintz continues that the Almond-led X Corps provided insufficient guidance in the campaign’s planning stages. He disapproves of Almond’s heavy-handed involvement in the latter stages of the campaign, especially the pressure he placed on Smith to bring the campaign to a conclusion via night fighting on 25 September 1950. He also emphasizes inter-Service rivalry, detailing Marine officers’ objections to Almond’s orders and arguing that the Marines never received due credit for the operation’s success.

Post–Cold War Era Analysis of Operation Chromite (1990–2010)

The end of the Cold War rivalry and declassification of key government documents in the 1990s and 2000s encouraged new analysis of the Inchon landings and the fight for Seoul. In 1993, MacArthur biographer D. Clayton James and historian Anne Sharp Wells published *Refighting the Last War: Command and Crisis in Korea, 1950–1953*. Using declassified archival records from the Douglas MacArthur Memorial Library, National Archives and Records Administration, and U.S. Army, along with memoirs, James and Wells’s study analyzes the Korean War through close readings of the performance of five key leaders and the history of six “most crucial command decisions,” including Operation Chromite.¹⁷ James and Wells openly question the strategic necessity of the campaign, observing that the fighting in Naktong broke DPRK logistical and communication lines, and that U.S. and ROK forces outnumbered DPRK forces. The real utility MacArthur and the Marines found in the dramatic landings was that the operation made them relevant again. Success at Inchon burnished MacArthur’s reputation and res-

cued the Marines from becoming, in General Lemuel C. Shepherd’s apt words, “only a ship landing force under Navy control.”¹⁸

James and Wells follow these observations with a critical analysis of the campaign, specifically faulting MacArthur’s appointment of Almond as both X Corps commander and FECOM chief of staff because it enabled Almond to prioritize the needs of X Corps for troops and supplies consistently over the 8th Army’s equally important demands. From James and Wells’s vantage, this created unnecessary dissension within the 8th Army. In their final analysis of the campaign, James and Wells conclude that the “immediate glorious afterglow” following Seoul’s liberation led American leaders to believe they had destroyed the DPRK’s forces, when in fact most senior DPRK officers and a significant part of the Korean People’s Army (DPRK’s army) had escaped north of the 38th parallel.

This negative perspective on the operation continued into the 2000s. In 2004, historian and retired Marine Corps colonel Russel H. S. Stolfi took aim at Smith’s campaign decisions in a *Journal of Military History* article entitled “A Critique of Pure Success: Inchon Revisited, Revised, and Contrasted.” Comparing the Inchon operation to the German 1941 Baltic offensive, Stolfi faults Smith and his subordinates for having “little sense of urgency” in moving from Inchon toward Seoul after the successful landing.¹⁹ Smith’s systematic clearing of positions near Kimpo enabled the DPRK to, in Stolfi’s words, “regain its balance and gather forces for a strong defense” of Seoul.²⁰ Stolfi believes that had the U.S. commanders acted as the Germans had in 1941, they would have captured a more intact city and more thoroughly defeated DPRK forces at a lower cost in personnel and material.

While provocative in its conclusions, this study has serious flaws. It is hard to imagine two historical examples that are more different than the landing at Inchon and the German offensive, especially in

¹⁶ Robert Debs Heintz Jr., *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*, 8th ed. (Baltimore, MD: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992), 259.

¹⁷ D. Clayton James and Anne Sharp Wells, *Refighting the Last War: Command and Crisis in Korea, 1950–1953* (New York: Free Press, 1993), xi.

¹⁸ James and Wells, *Refighting the Last War*, 160.

¹⁹ Col Russel H. S. Stolfi, “A Critique of Pure Success: Inchon Revisited, Revised, and Contrasted,” *Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2 (April 2004): 511, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2004.0075>.

²⁰ Stolfi, “A Critique of Pure Success,” 517.

their respective historical contexts, which pertains directly to Stolfi's conclusions about Smith's leadership. For example, Stolfi criticizes Smith's concerns about MacArthur's visit on 17 September 1950, instead of focusing on operations to take Seoul. Recognizing the historical context of that moment, however, requires acknowledging the risks inherent in MacArthur's visit and his influence on the campaign's origin and execution. Smith could not simply ignore MacArthur. Additionally, the sources for this study are lacking. Stolfi relies too much on Montross and Canzona for details of the Inchon operation despite the availability of archives, memoirs, and oral histories. These flaws aside, Stolfi's contribution still matters because it encouraged fresh thinking on Marine performance and leaves room for future scholars to leverage comparative analysis to better understand the campaign.

Allan R. Millett offered perhaps the most pointed critique of the operation in his 2010 book *The War for Korea 1950–1951: They Came from the North*, a richly sourced study that covers the June 1950 attack to the start of armistice negotiations in July 1951. Millett opens his assessment of Chromite in blunt terms: the campaign did not help defeat the DPRK military. Instead, it created overconfidence in MacArthur and U.S. strategy. The landings at Inchon and liberation of Seoul were a “strategic success” only “in the minds of its American participants, who badly needed a victory of any kind in September 1950.”²¹ Generally bad news from Korea during the summer of 1950 made Seoul's liberation shine bright. In Millett's account, the collapse of the DPRK near the Pusan perimeter was the product of the efforts of the 8th Army and 5th Air Force, not the shock of the landings.

Millett is also critical of both MacArthur and Almond. He portrays MacArthur as both delusional and theatrical to the point of making poor decisions. According to Millett, Almond's ignorance of Marine Corps practices and amphibious operations make him appear a neophyte whose “enthusiasm exceeded his grasp of reality.”²² Millett's review of Marine per-

formance is even-handed. He acknowledges Marine valor while also identifying the sheer luck that helped move Marine units forward. In the sum of its parts, including its strong footnotes and bibliographic essay, this book is an excellent source for understanding the campaign's many dimensions.

More Recent Analysis of Operation Chromite

Studies on Operation Chromite during the past decade have continued to ask new questions about MacArthur and Almond's contributions to the campaign. For example, in his historiographical essay in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War*, historian Michael Pearlman examines popular writing about the campaign to understand why many continue to celebrate MacArthur's contribution and the campaign when scholars like James, Wells, and Millett have proven it was not a pivotal victory. Pearlman's well-researched essay concludes that Army and Navy “service pride” and the heavy losses before Inchon elevated the operation and motivated journalists, military officers, and other writers to argue for its military necessity.²³ Pearlman's perspective is a renewed call to reconsider the immediate and long-term legacy of the campaign.

Historian Stephen R. Taaffe extended the criticism of MacArthur and Almond in *MacArthur's Korean War Generals*. Taaffe mines oral history interviews and uses MacArthur's and others' written criticisms of Appleman's *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, held at the National Archives. Taaffe's book highlights the poor leadership MacArthur, Almond, and others exhibited during the first 11 months of the Korean War. Taaffe finds fault in MacArthur's dual appointment of Almond as X Corps commander and FECOM chief of staff. That decision, Taaffe reasons, failed to conform to Army protocol and created unnecessarily difficult coordination between the 8th Army and X Corps that was, in Taaffe's words, “simply asking for trouble, especially because there was bad blood” between Almond

²¹ Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950–1951*, 240.

²² Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950–1951*, 245.

²³ Michael Pearlman, “Inchon Landings,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War*, eds. James I. Matray and Donald W. Boose Jr. (London: Routledge, 2014), 341.

and 8th Army commander Walton H. Walker.²⁴ As in Millett's analysis, Taaffe's Almond emerges as a poor leader whose criticism of Marine decisions shows his ignorance of amphibious operational best practices. Taaffe's clear writing and his efforts to contextualize each commander's views makes his indictment of MacArthur and Almond compelling.

However, not all scholars agree with Taaffe, Millett, and others' negative assessment of MacArthur and Almond. More recent studies have employed innovative techniques to make the case that MacArthur and Almond excelled during the Inchon operation. In a 2018 article for *Armed Forces and Society* entitled "The General's Intuition: Overconfidence, Pattern Matching, and the Inchon Landing Decision," political scientists Pascal Vennesson and Amanda Huan argue from an interdisciplinary perspective that MacArthur's optimism about the operation did not lead to poor decisions. To pursue this topic, they leverage cognitive psychological methods, historical analysis, and other tools to claim that MacArthur's experience with amphibious operations in World War II, his practiced ability at "pattern recognition," and his understanding of military history enabled him to see the potential in landing at Inchon and convince others to support him.²⁵ Vennesson and Huan's perspective provides an alternative view on MacArthur's leadership apart from emphasizing his skills as a dramatic bureaucratic infighter and toward an appreciation for MacArthur's views on history and command.

The importance of ideas about command and the role of experience along with Service culture features prominently in historian and retired Army officer Michael E. Lynch's groundbreaking biography *Edward M. Almond and the US Army: From the 92nd Infantry Division to the X Corps*. In this book, the first scholarly biography of Almond, Lynch uses an extensive collection of archival documents to reinterpret Almond's military biography. In the Korean War portion of the

book, Lynch counters criticism of Almond's dual role of X Corps command and as MacArthur's chief of staff by pointing out the heavy load of leading the X Corps. In practice, Almond could not both run X Corps and serve as chief of staff to FECOM. Many FECOM decisions fell to Major General Doyle O. Hickey, Almond's deputy and acting chief of staff. Additionally, Lynch argues the Almond–Smith rivalry stemmed more from Service culture clashes and differences of perspective on how to run an amphibious operation than Almond's bad leadership practices. While no apologist for Almond, Lynch offers a thought-provoking perspective on Almond's approach to the operation that future scholars of Chromite should take into account.

Along with the ongoing debate on MacArthur and Almond's choices, additional recent studies comparing Operation Chromite to other such undertakings have also proved fruitful. This approach has opened up new questions and insights on the campaign missed in earlier studies. For example, in *Storming the City: U.S. Military Performance in Urban Warfare from World War II to Vietnam*, national security analyst Alec Wahlman reviews the battle for Seoul as a case study in twentieth-century urban warfare. In his discussion of the efforts to recapture Seoul and four other cases of urban warfare, Wahlman finds "transferable competence and battlefield adaptation" as the keys to success in twentieth-century warfare.²⁶ By Wahlman's reckoning, "transferable competence" means that skills gained in one type of fighting could be transferred to a different type of fighting. Adaptation centers on battlefield improvisation. In essence, Wahlman argues that in the case of Seoul's liberation, Americans achieved military success through strong training and a capacity for on-the-ground problem-solving.

Comparative analysis leads Wahlman to assess Marine performance in Operation Chromite positively. Marines overcame many challenges on the battlefield despite, as Wahlman observes, the "pau-

²⁴ Taaffe, *MacArthur's Korean War Generals*, 93.

²⁵ Pascal Vennesson and Amanda Huan, "The General's Intuition: Overconfidence, Pattern Matching, and the Inchon Landing Decision," *Armed Forces and Society* 44, no. 3 (July 2018): 503, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X17738771>.

²⁶ Alec Wahlman, *Storming the City: U.S. Military Performance in Urban Warfare from World War II to Vietnam* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2015), 6.

city of attention” given to urban warfare from 1945 to 1950.²⁷ Marine mastery of combined arms, the general strength of the logistical system, and on-the-ground problem-solving bridged difficulties arising from Almond and others’ emphasis on speed. Wahlman uses the campaigns for Aachen and Manila in World War II to heighten the contrast. The insights of this study invite further urban warfare comparisons, especially those from the 1960s and after.

Oceanographer and Army reservist Thomas M. Mitchell’s *Winds, Waves, and Warriors: Battling the Surf at Normandy, Tarawa, and Inchon* offers another example of the analytical usefulness of comparing Operation Chromite to other campaigns. Drawing on his understanding of oceanography and military campaigns, Mitchell underscores the significance of tidal science and landing obstacles. These commonly known aspects of the campaign emerge as all the more significant as Mitchell reasons how “embayments” like the Inchon harbor “can amplify the ocean tide and create conditions inside the bay much more severe than those outside” it.²⁸ Observations like these and Mitchell’s efforts to bring Inchon into conversation with the Normandy landings and Tarawa campaign make Marine performance all the more impressive. Still, Mitchell’s overreliance on one memoir, Eugene Franklin Clark’s *The Secrets of Inchon*, and a few secondary sources means Operation Chromite’s rich archival base remains to be examined for a fuller comparison of the Marine landing to similar World War II-era campaigns.

Bibliographies and Archival Resources Available on Operation Chromite

Extensive bibliographical guides and large declassified archival resources make it possible for the next generation of studies of Chromite to be strongly supported with direct evidence. In terms of general guides to the literature, Allan Millett’s *Korean War: The Essential*

Bibliography stands out. This slim, accessible volume begins with a cogent summary of the key details of the war. In each essay that follows this orientation, Millett reviews the literature on each aspect of the war, including not only the history of each campaign but also the changing international context from 1950 to 1953. For a bibliographic guide more closely tied to the operation, students of the campaign should consult historian and Korean War veteran Paul M. Edwards’s *The Inchon Landing, Korea, 1950: An Annotated Bibliography*, which provides excellent coverage of writings on the landings from the 1950s to the mid-1990s. Edwards’s book is especially helpful in tracking *Marine Corps Gazette* articles published during this period.

Varied archival collections are also available to enterprising researchers. For example, the Historical Resources Branch of the Marine Corps History Division at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, maintains a large collection of archival resources related to the Korean War that includes maps, personal papers, and photographs. The personal papers of General Smith are housed in this repository. Another good place to find relevant archival material is the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. This archive holds the papers of General Almond, numerous soldier surveys from the 32d Infantry Regiment, and other sources related to the X Corps. The Douglas MacArthur Memorial and Library preserves not only MacArthur’s personal correspondence but also radiograms and other messages from the general headquarters of the UNC. The personal papers and oral histories of many of MacArthur’s key advisers can be found there as well. These unique sources, along with the holdings of the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, provide a great deal of data on Operation Chromite for historians and students to mine.

Conclusion

While scholars have pursued many avenues of analysis related to the Inchon operation, questions about the operation remain. The operation’s effect on the Korean War and its place in Cold War strategy is a continuing conversation that does not look like it will soon conclude. Questions about MacArthur, Almond,

²⁷ Wahlman, *Storming the City*, 178.

²⁸ Thomas M. Mitchell, *Winds, Waves, and Warriors: Battling the Surf at Normandy, Tarawa, and Inchon* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2019), 81.

and Smith's performance, easily trackable with the robust archives available, continues to be a useful way to examine ideas about what makes effective leadership. Comparative analysis and the integration of interdis-

ciplinary methodologies promise more nuanced and holistic assessments of Marine performance and other aspects of the campaign. Accordingly, Operation Chromite continues to merit close historical analysis.

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