

Chapter 2

The Chinese Communist Forces in Korea

Introduction

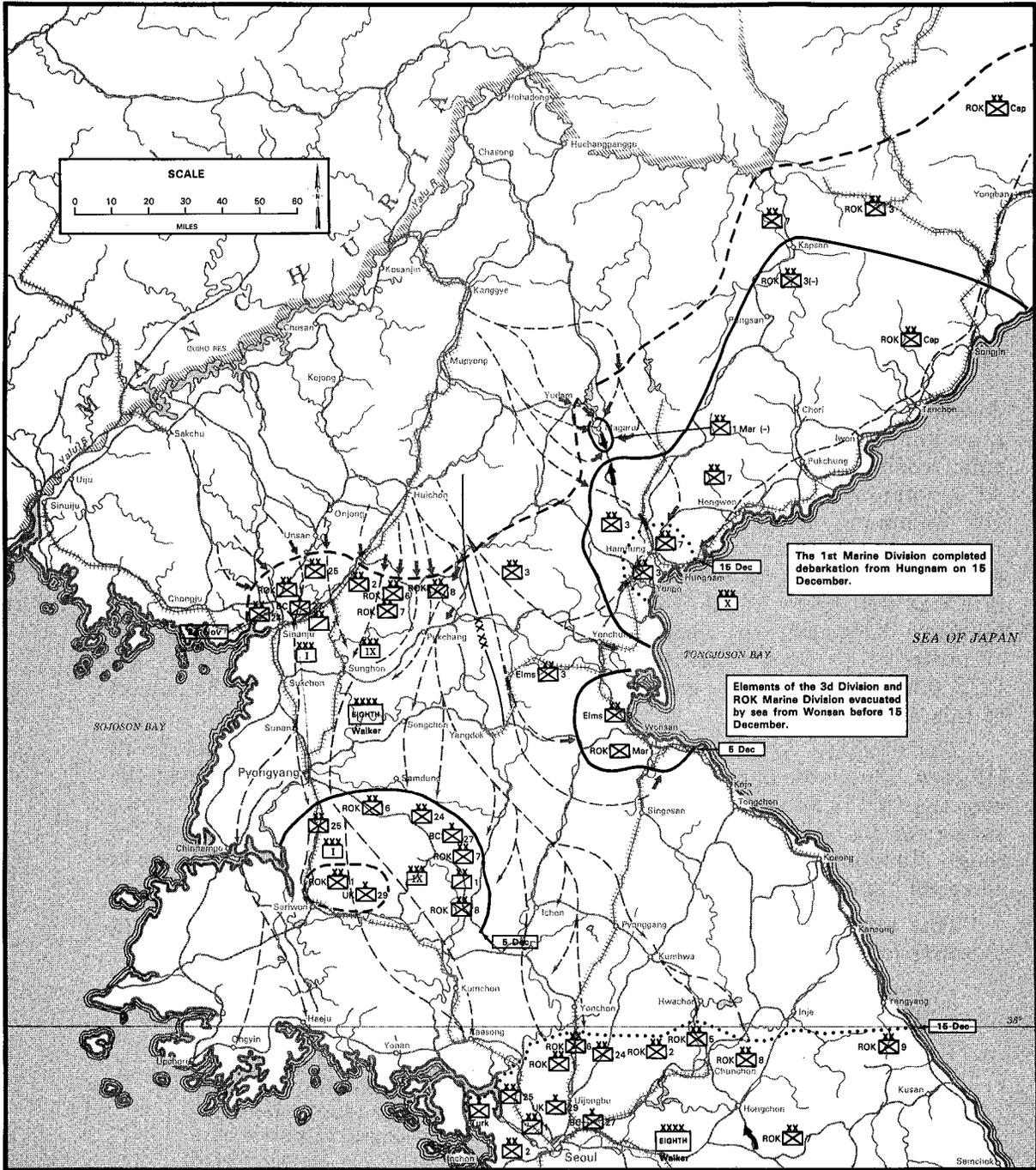
In the autumn of 1950, forces of the United Nations (UN) Command, directed by General Douglas MacArthur, pushed confidently through the mountains of North Korea toward the Yalu River and the Manchurian border. Composed in almost equal parts of U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) divisions, with a sprinkling of other national forces, the UN Command advanced dreamily, even daring to forecast an end to the war by Christmas. Little did they know (despite adequate indicators) that a huge Chinese Army lay in wait, tensing for the right moment to pounce on the unsuspecting UN columns. At the appropriate instant, the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) fell on the UN Command achieving strategic, operational, and tactical surprise, while attacking with such ferocity and shock that MacArthur's formations were pushed to the brink of disaster, reeling back under relentless Chinese pressure to a line well below Seoul (see map 8). That the Eighth Army, under General Matthew Ridgway, was able to recover and eventually restore the military situation in no sense detracts from this remarkable accomplishment by the CCF. This Chinese army—essentially a light infantry army—forms the subject of this chapter.

The Chinese Army's dependency on manpower (due to its shortage of military hardware) and the ruggedness of the Korean terrain determined the way the CCF was structured and employed during the Korean War. Compensating for its weakness in armaments and exploiting the possibilities of the rough Korean landscape, the Chinese developed a philosophy of "man over weapons" and organized a light infantry army to fight the war.

This army operated on a Korean peninsula whose physical and military characteristics have been described by S. L. A. Marshall as follows:

There is no coastwise country in the world less suited than Korea to the movement of military forces in war, and there is none that offers so little comfort and reward to its conquerors.

Almost the entire length of the country is mountainous, and the ridgeline heights are massive rock. At best, only small shrubs, stunted trees, and sparse grass maintain a foothold on the eroded slopes. There are no thick forests anywhere. The few hard-surface roads that run between the larger cities never have more than two lines of pavement, and this pavement is laid so thin that it cracks everywhere. Away from the main arteries of traffic there are only dirt tracks suitable for oxcarts and pedestrians. The few bridges that span the waterways are usually crudely built, and capable of handling one-way traffic



Source: *West Point Atlas of American Wars*, vol. 2, map 9.

Map 8. Chinese intervention in Korea, 24 November—15 December 1950

only. The usual river crossing is a ford. Most of the valley floors are so narrow that there is room only for a narrow path or a brook-size stream bed . . . ridges go on and on as far as the eye can see. All fighting in Korea is either uphill or downhill. Coping with the hills is more exhausting to fighting forces than meeting the fire of the enemy.¹

Virtually every historian, analyst, or soldier who reflects on the Korean War points to the overwhelming influence of the terrain on military operations. Not only were combat actions constrained by the close terrain, logistical operations were also hindered, slowed, and severely interrupted by the poor transportation network and rugged escarpments. Under these conditions, the unique qualities and experiences of the CCF gave it, at least initially, a decided advantage over the less-spartan UN Command: "Without armor, with little artillery, unencumbered by complex communications, lightly equipped and carrying hand weapons only, the Chinese armies, which were inured to the extremes of weather and the scantiness of food, superbly disciplined and thoroughly trained, found choice opportunities here for maneuver and concealment."² From the beginning of the war, the CCF viewed the terrain as its ally, a combat multiplier against the heavier, road-bound UN forces. Indeed, the CCF viewed the terrain from an entirely different perspective than the UN Command.

But even had the terrain in Korea been amenable to operations by heavy forces, the Chinese High Command still would have retained its light organization—through necessity. Insubstantial military stocks, low levels of military aid from the USSR, and the absence of a military-industrial base in China to produce tanks, artillery, trucks, and aircraft dictated that the Chinese organize their only substantial military resource—manpower—into light infantry armies. Moreover, the Communist leadership, by virtue of its long experience as guerrilla warriors against the heavier armed Nationalist Chinese forces, had elaborated and refined its philosophy of "man over weapons" to compensate for CCF inferiority in weapons and materiel.³

Understanding this philosophy is central to understanding how and why the Chinese operated as they did in the Korean War. The expression "man over weapons" was not an empty slogan. The CCF's leadership and its soldiers firmly believed that by exploiting their superior human capabilities they would inevitably achieve success over the machine-burdened UN Command. This doctrine, they believed, had a certain moral strength to it, a spiritual power that guaranteed ascendancy on the battlefield. Furthermore, the Chinese were firmly convinced that when it came to soldiering—to the unyielding discipline and sacrifice required of men in combat—that the American and ROK soldiers were no match for them. Certainly, the early successes of the CCF reinforced its ideas that weapons did not count and that men did.

Organization and Equipment of the CCF

The organization of the CCF varied widely over time and from unit to unit. Figures 3 through 5 and table 3 present a composite picture of the CCF army, infantry division, infantry regiment, and infantry battalion.⁴ (The CCF did not utilize corps headquarters. The army, essentially, was a corps.) These figures and table should be considered representative but not necessarily exact.

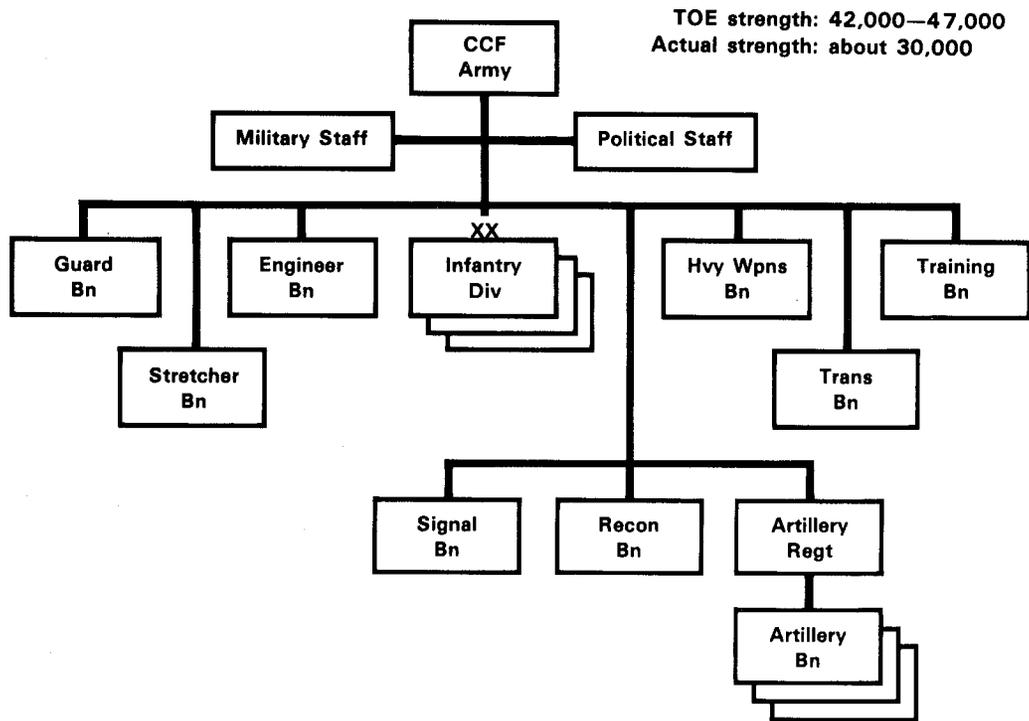


Figure 3. CCF army

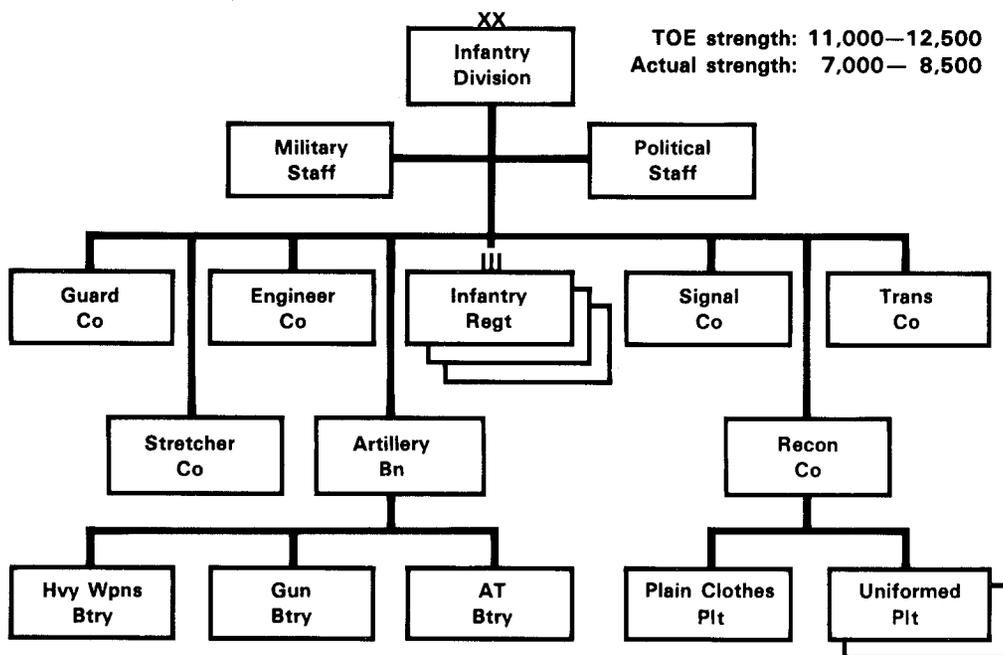


Figure 4. CCF infantry division

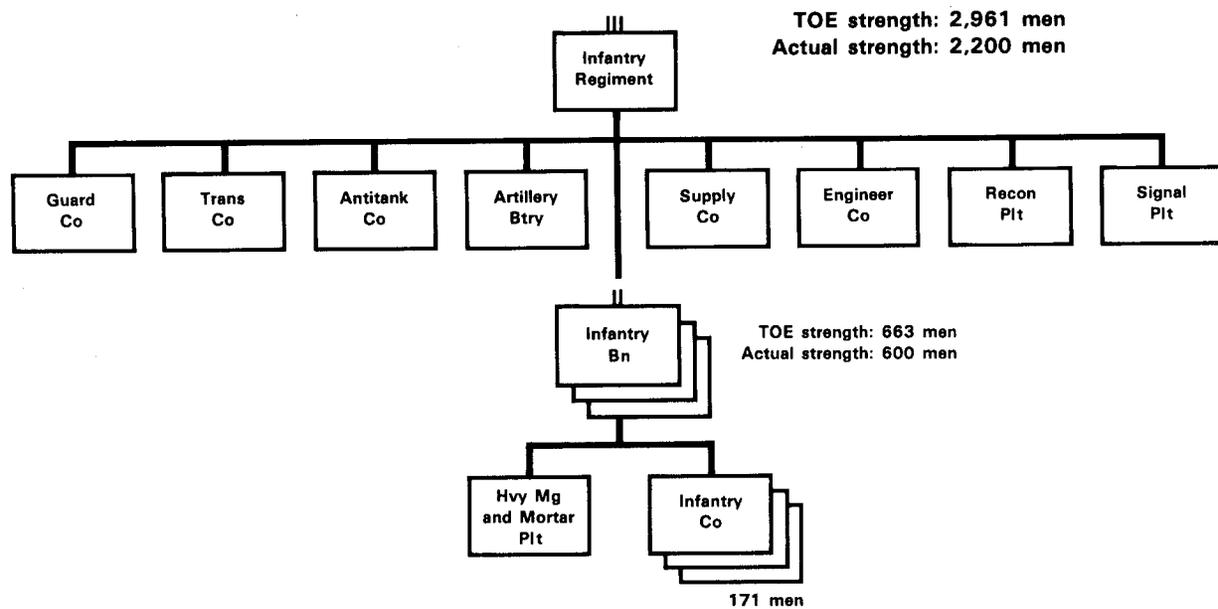


Figure 5. CCF infantry regiment

Table 3. Equipment Totals per Regiment

<i>Item</i>	<i>Number</i>
Submachine guns	168
Light machine guns	94
Heavy machine guns	27
50-mm mortars	30
60-mm mortars	28
81- and 82-mm mortars	12
Antitank guns	6
75-mm guns	3
Bazookas	4
Trucks	20
Horses	405
Carts	40
Radios	5

The two most apparent observations to be drawn from inspection of these charts are that (1) every level of Chinese infantry organization from battalion to army suffered from a severe lack of combat support, and (2) motor transport in significant amounts did not exist. The meager equipment totals put the burden of the fighting on the infantrymen. Moreover, the lack of long-range systems ensured that CCF attacks would be conducted and decided at close range. Finally, the absence of transport guaranteed that operations would proceed no faster than the foot pace of CCF soldiers.

General Tactical Style of the CCF

In contrast to the wide variations that existed in CCF organization, CCF units generally exhibited a uniform tactical style. This common tactical style manifested itself in the use of surprise, deception and camouflage, movement, patrolling and reconnaissance, and individual skills.

Of these elements of tactical style, the Chinese attempted to employ surprise in almost every operation. And they frequently succeeded, in part, because they did things to achieve surprise that no western commander would dream of having his soldiers do.⁵ Most of these measures fall into the category of deception and camouflage.

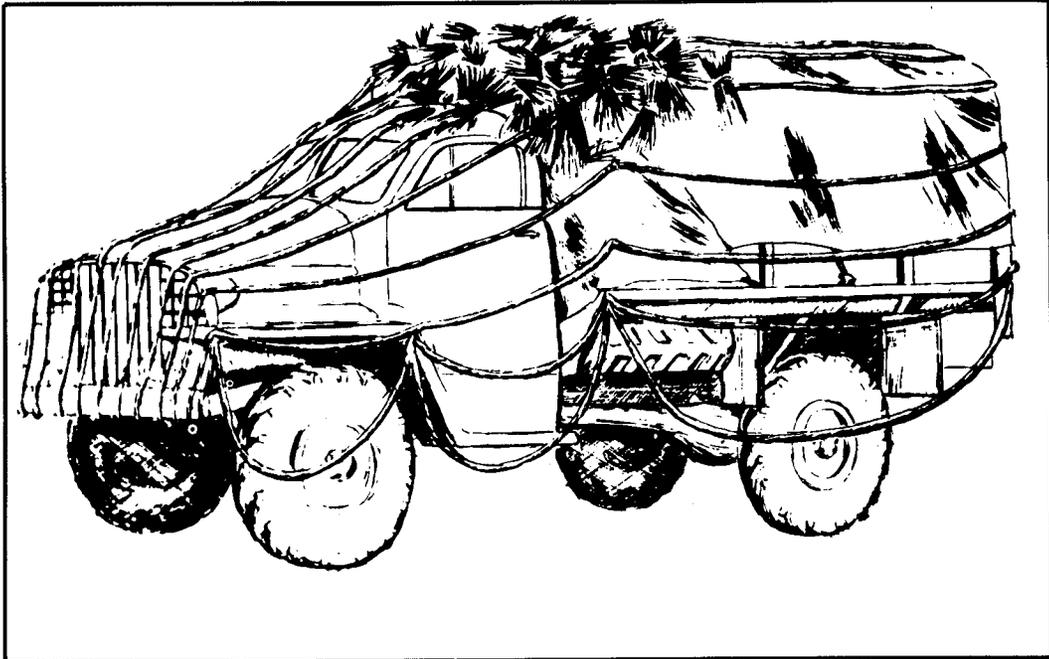
Deception and Camouflage

Chinese secret preparations for their initial assault on the Eighth Army in November 1950 typified their techniques of deception and camouflage. As part of this operation, up to 300,000 soldiers, undetected by U.S. intelligence, moved into secret assembly areas. Moving almost exclusively at night and hiding during daylight, whole rifle platoons were packed sometimes into single Korean huts, where they remained until dark. If shelter was not available, the soldiers lay huddled and motionless in ditches, gullies, and draws, covering themselves with straw, mud, and other materials. Sometimes forced to move by day in later operations, the Chinese picketed the hills along the route with observers. If a UN aircraft was spotted, the observer fired a shot, signaling troops within hearing to take cover. At times, troops on the march during the day carried straw mats on their backs. When lying down on the ground in orderly rows, the troop formation gave the appearance of a recently cut field to air observers. Some troops dressed in white, like the Koreans, and moved openly on the roads.⁶ Others pretended to be ROK soldiers.

Vehicles were camouflaged by day or hidden in tunnels, under bridges, or in dugouts. The Chinese also parked operational vehicles among vehicles that had been destroyed or disabled in previous air strikes, or they left them in awkward positions in ditches to appear disabled. Such measures often fooled pilots during subsequent air strikes. In the same deceptive manner, the Chinese camouflaged destroyed vehicles to cause the UN air forces to waste their ordnance on what they thought were operational vehicles.⁷

Avoiding detection and choosing routes across difficult terrain and away from roads, the CCF infantry gathered its strength to attack. Prior to intervention, it initiated small combat actions to occupy the enemy's attention and to reinforce the myth that only weakness lay before the UN forces—a ploy described as “the pretense of picking around with a finger to cover the raising of a mailed fist.”⁸ Their actions were extremely effective; only deep patrolling by strong combat patrols would have detected them. The terrain enhanced the deception effort.

In rear areas or in assembly areas, CCF troops dug two-man or squad-size foxholes on reverse slopes. The soldiers carefully distributed the excavated soil, covering it with branches and straw and replanting the turf. These foxholes were cunningly selected and camouflaged to blend in with the terrain; they were virtually undetectable except from close range.⁹ The Chinese also selected bivouac areas in or near burned-out villages, often taking up residence



CCF Method of camouflaging vehicles

among the rubble. The CCF avoided high ground, which characteristically attracted air strikes.¹⁰ In addition, the Chinese used natural materials almost exclusively for camouflage and concealment, employing them with great imagination. UN patrols sometimes approached within killing range of the CCF, but the Chinese often did not fire, choosing to remain hidden.

Setting fires to produce smoke to cover movement was another CCF technique. During May 1951, they burned debris and vegetation for four days, obscuring the entire eastern part of the Eighth Army's lines to conceal the shifting of Chinese forces for a major offensive.¹¹

The Chinese also intensified their night activities, which protected them from the prying eyes of UN aircraft. The CCF's willingness to act at night, coupled with the tendency of the UN Command to remain in a static defense, gave the Chinese a great advantage.

Patrolling and Intelligence

Heavy Chinese reliance on thorough reconnaissance and intelligence gathering prior to every operation also enhanced their war efforts. These activities took many forms but were usually the function of the reconnaissance companies organic to each infantry division. Regular infantry squads were used to reinforce or support these reconnaissance units, but they were rarely sent out on their own.

Reconnaissance companies were composed of two uniformed platoons and one plainclothes platoon. The uniformed platoons, composed of two officers and three squads of ten men, performed missions of reconnaissance patrolling. Most of the patrols sent out were of squad size and were armed with rifles and submachine guns. Generally, they first conducted reconnaissance to within

a few kilometers of UN lines to obtain local guides, learn routes, become familiar with the terrain, and prepare to guide parent units into forward assembly areas. These patrols avoided contact.

As the date of an attack drew nearer, reconnaissance patrols approached right up to outposts and the main line of resistance. There, they tried to draw fire upon themselves to identify fighting positions, locate boundaries and flanks, and discover weak spots. In scouting out a particular objective, patrols normally took the shortest route to the site, usually moving in single file with no flank or rear guards. Once near the objective, the patrol separated, each member accomplishing his specific task, with all members reassembling at a predesignated point and returning to camp, often by the same route as they had come.

Patrols usually moved along low ground or below the crests of ridges and mountain sides. Patrol formations varied with the terrain but remained prescribed to a few specific variations. Patrol leaders often took the lead, but when they moved through dangerous ground, they used one- to three-man points.¹²

Chinese patrols were always vulnerable to ambushes due to their rigid adherence to standing operating procedures (SOPs), their failure to use flank or rear guards, and their habit of using the same routes to and from objectives. Nonetheless, Chinese patrols continued to follow these methods even after falling victim to UN ambushes. In spite of their limitations, however, Chinese patrol methods worked well. Most accounts of combat actions in Korea credit the CCF with an uncanny ability to locate the weakest sector, flank, or boundary between U.S. units.

Whenever uniformed patrols went behind enemy lines, they were reinforced with regular infantry for support. Most of the time, however, deep patrolling was undertaken by plainclothes platoons. The most common tactic of these plainclothes units was to infiltrate the UN lines through normal traffic or the refugee stream. Weapons were concealed on the person of individual Chinese soldiers or in accompanying carts. Having cleared the UN security screen, these forces then scouted out UN boundaries, positions, and rear areas before exfiltrating.¹³

The Chinese also placed a high value on intelligence obtained from local villagers. As mentioned above, they employed native guides, both voluntarily and involuntarily, to assist patrols and to guide units into positions. In addition, capture teams were sometimes sent out to seize UN soldiers for interrogation. Through the use of these methods—reconnaissance patrols, plainclothes unit infiltration, and local sources of intelligence—the CCF was always well informed in tactical intelligence prior to any attack.

Movement, Maneuver, and Infiltration

The CCF rarely used roads for movement of troops into assembly areas or attack positions. Instead, relying on the information provided by reconnaissance patrols, they moved cross-country. The CCF's high level of physical fitness and its recognition that the terrain offered concealment and protection permitted it to cover large distances on foot. Conducting long approach marches by night and hiding and resting by day, the Chinese

continually surprised U.S.-UN observers with their ability to carry huge burdens on foot, as they rapidly covered long distances in the most hostile weather.

The Chinese did not walk or hike; they moved at a steady run that they could keep up for hours. Lacking radios, they moved in single files and column formations, with scouts out front to maintain command and control.¹⁴ Occasionally, leaders were mounted to control movement better. S. L. A. Marshall provides a vivid description of this kind of movement, reporting the experience of Private First Class Louis Giudici from his perimeter guard post:

At first there were just small groups of men, moving about six in a bunch with a 10-yard interval between them. They moved at double time, and though there were five of these small groups, none seemed to be carrying small arms. He had sighted them first at about 250 feet. The first were just drawing abreast of him when he reached for the trigger with the intention of opening fire.

But things had changed, and he stayed his hand. A whole column of enemy infantry was now pouring into the creek bed, right on the heels of the reconnaissance groups. They seemed to be very large men, perhaps because the conspicuous white bandoliers which crossed their breasts and the overcoats which almost touched the ground increased their bulk. They carried rifles and tommy guns at the port as they, too, moved down the creek bed at a run. The column was four abreast. With every company or so rode a man on horseback, who shouted orders at the others as he moved along.

For seventeen minutes this solid column moved at a run past this nineteen-year-old gunner, its closest files within 35 yards of his weapon. The time interval shows that at least one Chinese regiment raced by. They did not see him, and he felt that if he fired, it would mean the destruction of the company.¹⁵

Such units were well trained in immediate-action drills. Taking unexpected fire while still in march formation, they quickly took cover, then formed assault elements to eliminate the threat before reforming into column and moving on.

Rivers and streams were no barriers to the Chinese. They used existing bridges and fords where possible and, at other times, improvised bridges and rafts, which they could hide or dismantle by day. Typically, the CCF chose the physically easiest crossing sites, not the tactically best-positioned ones. Despite the cold, the hardy soldiers often waded and swam rivers at night in multiple columns. Speed and security were their main concerns.¹⁶

During the first year of the war, before the UN command was able to tie in its flanks from coast to coast, movements like those described above permitted the CCF to infiltrate between UN units. Many times, these infiltrations went undetected and unreported until the CCF actually attacked the flanks or rear of UN positions. At the close of the first Chinese offensive, an entire North Korean division infiltrated into the rear of the right flank of the Eighth Army, where it relied on the countryside for food and clothing and obtained arms and ammunition by raids on UN stocks. The U.S. Marine 1st Division and ROK security forces finally turned it around. Even so, the enemy division was able to maintain its coherence, break into small groups, and exfiltrate.¹⁷

Most infiltrations, however, were conducted by small units. One historian, in fact, has described the Chinese conduct of the war as an "endless succession of platoon infiltrations."¹⁸ These small-unit infiltrations followed the patterns

already described: thorough reconnaissance, adept use of terrain, identification of enemy unit boundaries and weak points along extended perimeters, noiseless movement, avoidance of UN patrols and outposts, and strict fire discipline. All of these tasks were accomplished at night. Successful infiltration depended on the abilities of the individual soldier. That the CCF was so adept at infiltration is a tribute to the unbelievable stealth of its soldiers. Indeed, the official U.S. Marine Corps history credits Chinese soldiers with being able to infiltrate at night better than any other soldiers on earth.¹⁹ Innumerable accounts recall how Red soldiers were able to creep noiselessly within yards of UN positions and then rise up to attack violently.

Individual Soldier Skills

Stealth and infiltration were not the only skills of Chinese light infantrymen. In the absence of significant combat support, CCF tactical success required that Chinese soldiers possess many highly developed skills and attributes. Two of these attributes, physical conditioning and stamina, gave Chinese soldiers the strength to conquer the terrain and to keep pace with the more road-mobile UN forces. In fact, the CCF was far more tactically mobile than the UN command. In addition, the men of the CCF had the endurance to survive in the harsh, open climate, often on short rations. The fierceness and tenacity of Chinese soldiers gave their units a shock value that, when coupled with the surprise they achieved through stealth, often overwhelmed the superior firepower of the UN defenders.

Chinese infantrymen also knew how to use every fold in the terrain for cover and concealment. They seldom got lost or disoriented in the darkness and showed an unerring appreciation for the advantages of ground in the choice of their routes, placement of their machine guns and mortars, and in their selection of fighting positions.

CCF soldiers also enjoyed, at least initially, a mental advantage over their U.S. and ROK counterparts. Confident of their own superiority, scornful of American problems with the terrain, darkness, and weather, and convinced of their eventual victory, Chinese infantrymen had a psychological edge over their opponents. Moreover, their self-reliance enabled them to fight on against unfavorable odds and taught them not to depend on their own unreliable lines of supply. Indeed, they often sustained and equipped themselves with UN rations, arms, ammunition, and materiel.

The Chinese infantrymen of the Korean War were formidable opponents. Hardy, resilient, and tough, they earned the respect of their foes and carved themselves a niche in military history. Their skill and determination as light infantry soldiers were central to the tactical successes of the CCF.

The Attack

Prior to an attack, the CCF always performed thorough reconnaissance. Then, it accomplished its approach marches to forward assembly areas by night, in fast column formations. As the CCF closed with the enemy, separate combat groups split off to their sectors for the attack. Generally, combat groups entered their final assembly areas, ten kilometers or so from the UN lines, the night before the attack.



Surrendering Chinese soldier

With amazing regularity, CCF units from battalion to army level attacked while employing the following method. At dusk on the day of an attack, battalions moved out from their assembly areas and halted in sheltered positions one to two kilometers short of the UN lines. There, units took a short rest and perhaps ate a meal. Company commanders then received their orders and took charge of their units for the attack.

Each company subsequently moved out according to a detailed SOP. One company moved up to fix the enemy, while the other two companies attempted to envelop the flanks of the enemy position. Sometimes, only one company attempted envelopment, while the third company was held in reserve pending development of the situation. Timing seemed to be relatively fixed. Control lines were established between the rest position and the line of departure, which was about 200 meters from the UN lines (see figure 6).²⁰

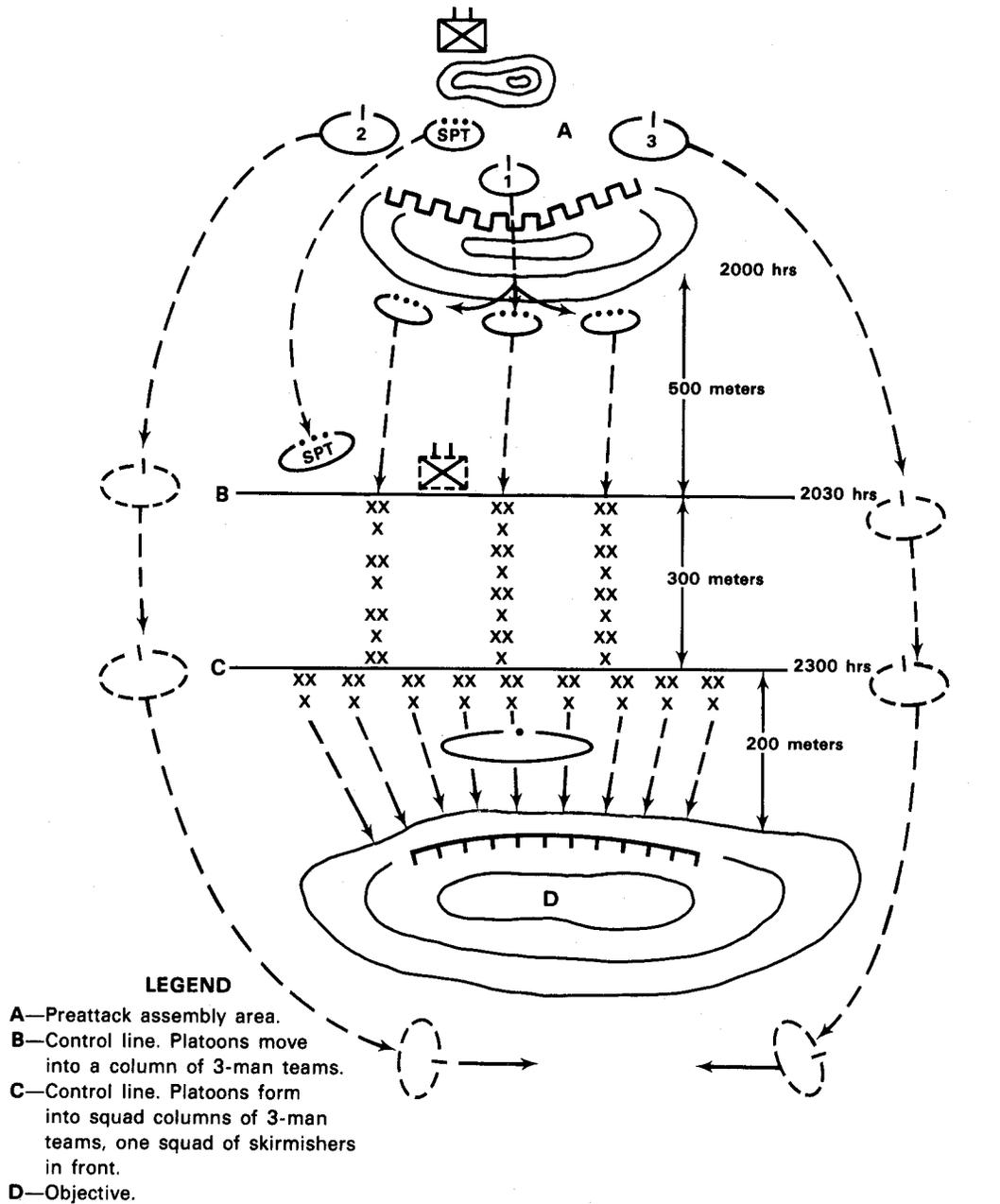


Figure 6. CCF battalion attack

Source: U.S. Army, IX Corps (Korea), "Enemy Tactics, Techniques and Doctrine," 14 September 1951, 17a.

The actual attack was normally launched between 2300 and 0100. First, lead elements in the attack tried to approach as close as possible to the enemy foxholes, with a thin skirmish line of scouts in front making the first contact. Many combat reports indicate that the CCF often succeeded in approaching to within 15 to 150 yards of the UN lines before being detected. On occasion, the first signs of an attack were exploding hand grenades lobbed by the Chinese from only yards away.

The Chinese company fixing the UN forces then maintained its pressure until the flanking companies began to roll up the flank. Meanwhile, soldiers practiced excellent fire discipline in order to conserve their ammunition for critical moments. Personnel also advanced during lulls in firing and took cover when necessary. As the UN resistance began to break, all the CCF elements then pressed forward in what one observer has described as an "assembly on the objective."²¹

In the attack, the Chinese demonstrated a willingness to take high casualties to maintain momentum, knowing that once one objective was taken, the rest of the enemy line could be unhinged with less effort. After seizing one enemy position, the CCF quickly and silently moved against other UN positions on the left or right. If the attack failed, however, Chinese units would break off the attack before dawn and retire to secure positions. (Figures 7 and 8 show how this type of attack might be conducted by a CCF army of three divisions.)²²

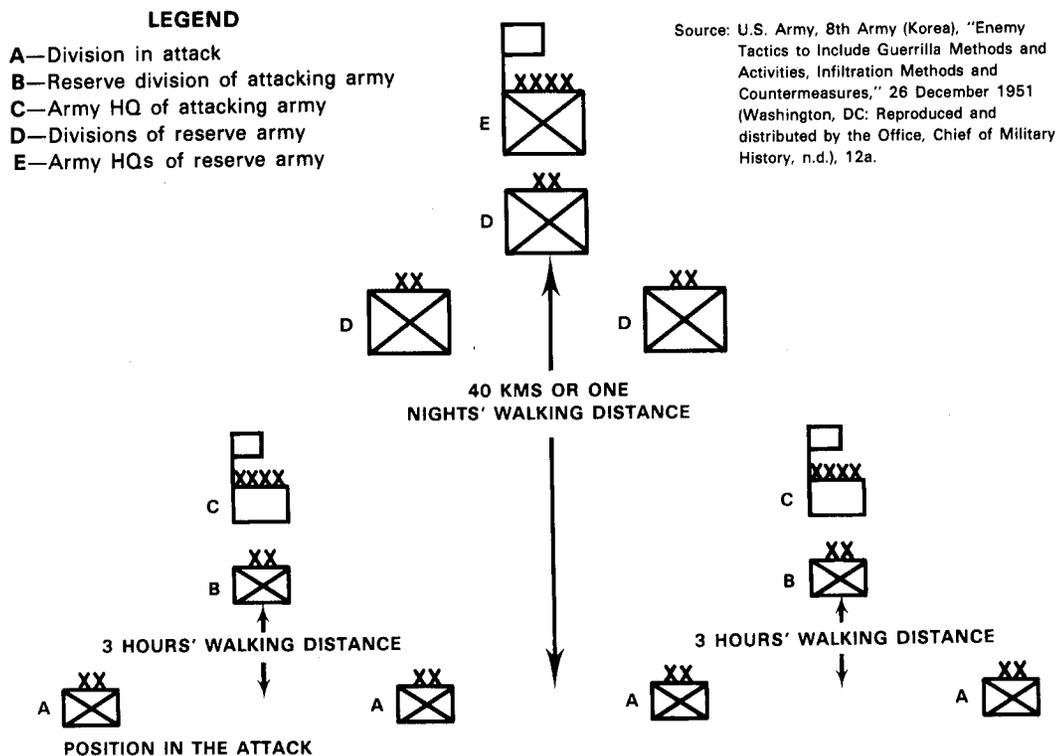


Figure 7. CCF army approach march

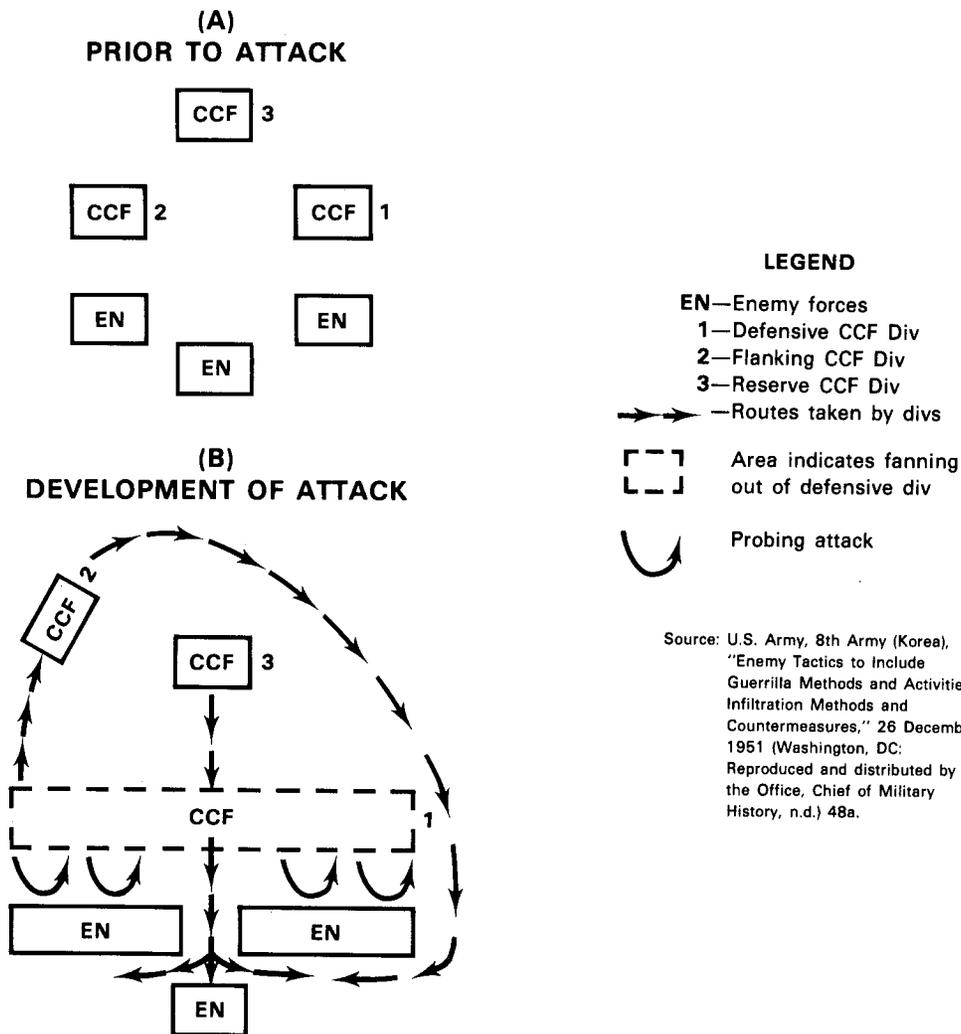
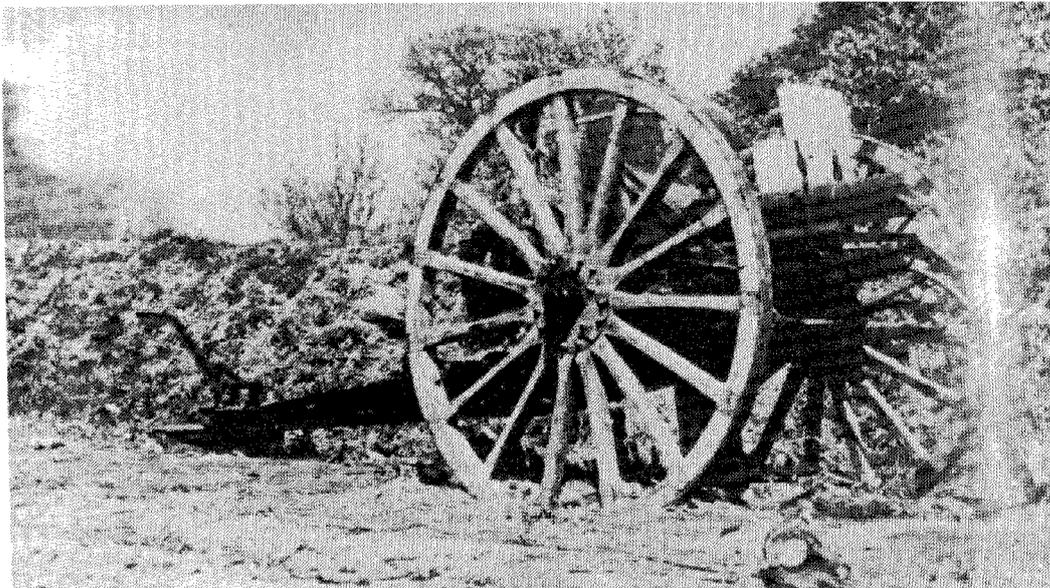


Figure 8. CCF army attack

Once committed, CCF units were permitted little flexibility. The same method of attack was used each time, and a battalion had to pursue the attack until its last rounds were fired or until it succeeded. Company commanders did not have the latitude to change the plan or call off the attack without permission.

Apparently, the main reason for this tactical rigidity in the attack was the problem of communications. Generally, radios were unavailable below regimental level, though wire was laid to battalion and sometimes company level in static situations. In the attack, however, communications at battalion level were based on runners and signals. (Sometimes, battalion and company commanders enjoyed the use of captured U.S. walkie-talkies.) Under these conditions, unyielding adherence to SOPs was the solution selected by the Chinese to guarantee command and control. Furthermore, to enhance command and control, the CCF preferred to attack on nights when bright moonlight could be expected.

During the attack, for a variety of purposes, the Chinese used bugles, whistles, flutes, and shepherd horns. To facilitate command and control, different tunes or notes meant different things: to advance, to increase fire, to cease fire, and so forth. The Chinese also used these signals to simulate to the enemy a more extended deployment than they had actually accomplished. The CCF also used the instruments to create an atmosphere of fear and terror before or during the attack, showing ingenuity in its methods. To obtain this effect, the CCF blew taps on the bugle, played haunting, eerie tunes on the flute, and created a cacophony of sound during the actual attack. Until American troops grew used to this tactic, they reacted with true alarm, especially at night.



An example of a Chinese artillery piece of ancient vintage used in Korea

Because of a continuing shortage of artillery and mortar rounds, the CCF did not rely on heavy bombardments prior to an attack. If artillery was used at all, it was used with discrimination because of the danger of its being detected and destroyed by UN artillery. Chinese artillery also was seldom massed, owing in part to a lack of training among the CCF artillery troops.²³ Mortars were employed more commonly and quite effectively. When artillery or mortar fires were used in quantity, Chinese troops followed closely behind the barrage. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Chinese indirect fires paled in comparison to those employed by the UN. When the CCF experienced a tactical stalemate, however, it began to rely more on artillery as a battlefield killer.²⁴ Consequently, in the last two years of the war, the Chinese made more extensive use of massed artillery fires to defend against UN attacks. The Chinese seldom used tanks to augment their firepower; they simply did not have sufficient numbers of them in their inventory, except for occasional use as mobile artillery.

At the soldier level, the preferred weapons were hand grenades and sub-machine guns. Each Chinese infantryman carried four to five grenades apiece. Even though 25 to 30 percent of them were duds and the Chinese were weak armed and could not throw them far, they used them time after time, believing U.S. soldiers were afraid of grenades.²⁵

Disaster at Unsan

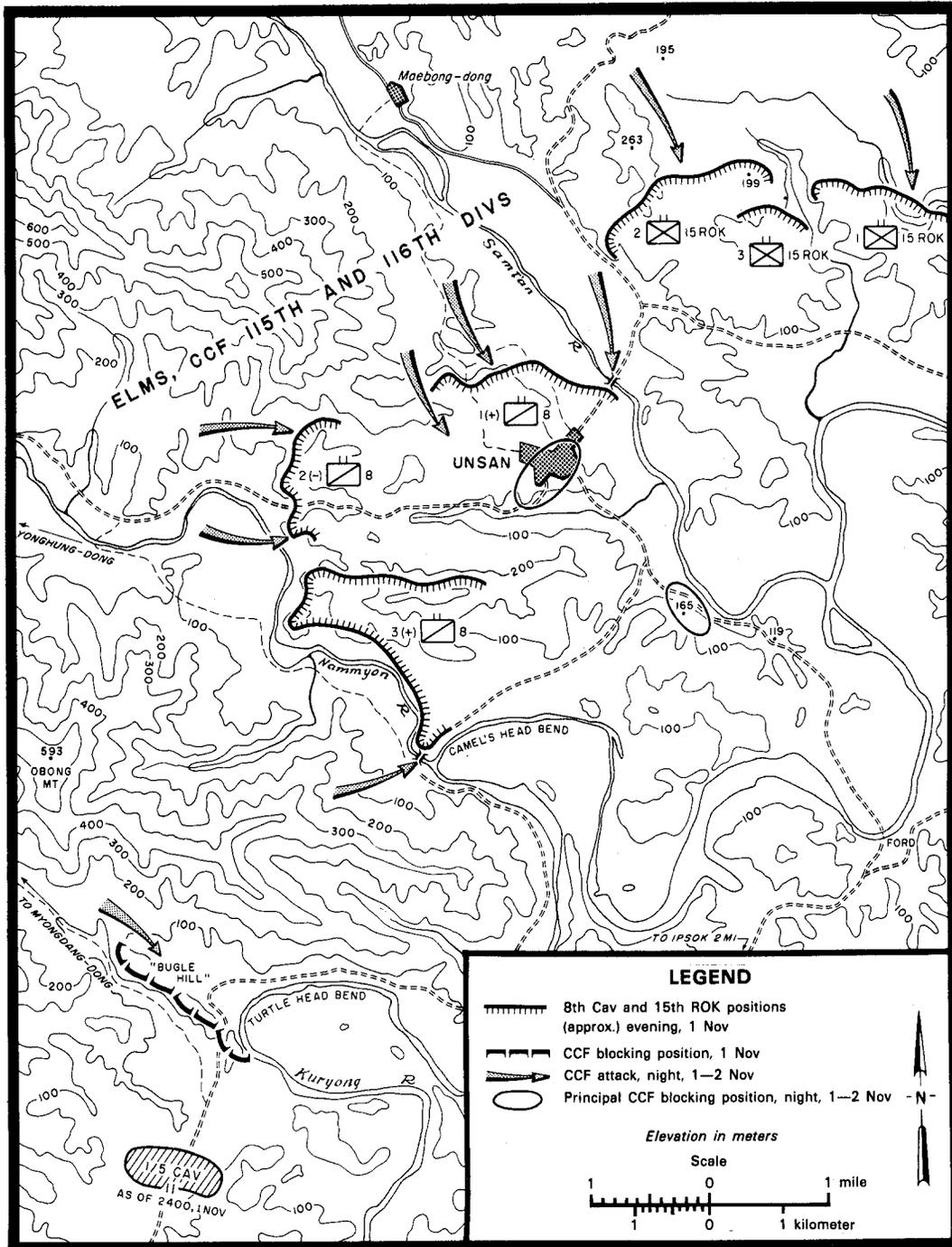
The Battle of Unsan, analyzed below, illustrates how the offensive tactics and techniques of the CCF worked in actual operations. In October 1950, the U.S. Eighth Army continued its steady advance into North Korea toward the Yalu River. The farther the army advanced, the thinner its lines stretched, the more extended its lines of communication became, and the greater the gaps between units grew. While the Chinese had not yet intervened in force, they monitored the progress of the UN Command with the same sharp-eyed interest that a wolf displays while watching a rabbit playing too far from its hole. On 30 and 31 October, the 8th Cavalry Regiment, leading the forward movement of the 1st Cavalry Division, occupied defensive positions on the high ground north and west of the town of Unsan (see map 9). Sent to bolster the 15th ROK Regiment, which was under heavy enemy attack, the members of the 8th Cavalry noticed the unusual presence of large smoke clouds hanging in the area. Unknown to them, the Chinese were setting forest fires to cover their movements. In fact, on occupying Unsan, the 8th Cavalry had walked unknowingly into a vicious trap. Here, the U.S. Army in Korea would experience one of its first tastes of the Chinese style of war.

Unbeknown to the 8th Cavalry, the Thirty-Ninth Army of the CCF had infiltrated its 115th and 116th Divisions into the Unsan area. Moving with their characteristic stealth and discipline, the Chinese had thoroughly investigated the area and identified key routes and terrain. Although they had not fully pinpointed the American positions, the Chinese prepared to attack on the night of 1 November. Preparatory to this attack, five companies from the Thirty-Ninth Army established a strong blocking position across the road leading into Unsan, just west of the Turtle Head Bend of the Kuryong River—the obvious route to be taken by U.S. reinforcements if sent.

Meanwhile, on the afternoon of 31 October, the 8th Cavalry settled into its defensive positions. Across the Samtan River, the ROK 15th Regiment was slowly disintegrating in the face of the strong Chinese pressure. The sounds of this battle were clear; the men of the 8th Cavalry, particularly the 1st Battalion on the right flank, followed the progress of the combat with growing alarm.

As shown on map 9, neither flank of the 1st Battalion was connected to the units on the left and right. The bridge over the Samtan River was held by a platoon of tanks. Below the bridge, the right flank and rear of the battalion lay exposed, protected only as long as the ROK 15th Regiment held its positions.

At 1700, the battle spilled over into the 1st Battalion sector. At 1930, the enemy intensified its attacks, driving the right flank company in 400 yards. About 2100, the Chinese found the gap between the 1st and 2d Battalions and began infiltrating behind the Americans into Unsan. By 2200, the



Source: Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 692.

Map 9. The Unsan engagement, 1-2 November 1950

battalion commander, Major John Millikin Jr., realized that the Chinese held the right bank of the Samtan River. Recognizing that his position was tenuous, Major Millikin ordered his trains to withdraw through Unsan to the road fork about one and one-half miles south of the town, thence southeastward across the ford over the Kuryong River and into Ipsok about seven miles away.

After dark, the 2d Battalion also came under heavy attack. By 2300, the Chinese had penetrated both battalions and driven them from their primary positions. In the process, the battalions consumed most of their ammunition. The 3d Battalion was not yet threatened.

About this time, the 1st Cavalry Division ordered the regiment to withdraw. The regimental commander, however, decided to have the 1st Battalion hold Unsan while the 2d Battalion withdrew. Then, the 1st Battalion would withdraw. The 3d Battalion was ordered to keep the road fork below Unsan open until the 1st and 2d Battalions had cleared, then it was to withdraw also. The plan was a good one, but it came too late.

When Major Millikin moved to Unsan around midnight to direct the withdrawal of his battalion, he found the town occupied by Chinese. Consequently, he ordered his companies to bypass the town to the east and wait at the road fork below the town. Arriving there, Millikin discovered that his waiting elements were beginning to take small-arms fire from the Chinese in the area. Even worse, a small artillery convoy moving south of the road junction ran into a Chinese unit establishing a roadblock in the vicinity of Hill 165. Radio reports a few minutes later indicated that the Chinese also blocked the ford over the Kuryong. From this point on, no convoys were able to get out of the area. The road fork itself fell to a Chinese attack a short time later. The withdrawal of the 1st and 2d Battalions ended in a desperate attempt at escape and evasion by small groups over the next two to three days.

The 3d Battalion of the 8th Cavalry was the last to be hit by the CCF. Despite its awareness of the collapse of the 1st and 2d Battalions, this unit was also taken by surprise. About 0300, a company of Chinese crossed the bridge over the Nammyon River on the southern flank of the battalion position. The two squads guarding the bridge let them pass, thinking they were ROKs. Suddenly, the leader of the enemy column blew his bugle. Within seconds, the company launched an assault against the battalion command post, and other waiting enemy forces attacked across the river.

From the start, the CCF had the upper hand in this fight, catching some of the Americans sleeping while they waited for the order to evacuate. The Chinese penetrated the U.S. lines immediately, and the attack dissolved into isolated but fierce actions against U.S. strongpoints.

At daylight, the strength of the 3d Battalion stood at 6 officers and 200 men, with 150 wounded. Out of range of supporting artillery, the battalion held on during the day. Supporting air strikes did not help much because of the proximity of the Chinese and the continuing smoky haze.

The 1st Cavalry Division sent a relief column to extract the 3d Battalion, but the Chinese had correctly anticipated this maneuver. Two battalions of the 5th Cavalry Regiment could not break through the defensive block at