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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Joseph William Easterling entitled "George's Last Stand: Strategic Decisions and Their Tactical Consequences in the Final Days of the Korean War." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

G. Kurt Piehler, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Stephen Ash, Monica Black

Accepted for the Council:
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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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George's Last Stand: Strategic Decisions and Their Tactical Consequences in the Final Days of the Korean War

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Joseph William Easterling
May 2012

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DEDICATION

For my Uncle Bob.

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ABSTRACT

This historical analysis concerns the final ground engagement of the Korean War from 24-27 July 1953 at the outpost known as Boulder City. During this period, Marines from George Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment withstood a continuous assault by a reinforced Chinese regiment. The purpose of this analysis is twofold. First, this battle provides a single case descriptive case study as to the linkages between the Strategic, Operational, and Tactical levels of war. By providing the full Strategic, Operational and Tactical context to this battle, the second purpose of this analysis is to clarify the historical record concerning this battle and demonstrate the political motivations which orchestrated it as the final engagement of the Korean War.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Roughly twenty miles inland from the western coast of the Korean peninsula in what is now the demilitarized zone separating North Korea and South Korea rests a hill with large granite boulders near its crest. Located at map coordinate 52S CT 0860 0780 in an area known as Panbudong, the hill is bisected north-south by the 38th parallel sitting only a few hundred feet south of the international boundary, making it South Korean territory.[1] At 119 feet in elevation, it is distinguishable from adjacent hills only by the granite outcropping near its crest. Compared to the surrounding landscape of modern Korea, this hill is a rather unremarkable terrain feature.

This hill, however, has an important place in both Asian and American history. Part of what makes it significant is the fact that it overlooks a north-south corridor that was once used by Mongol invaders in their conquest of the peninsula. This same corridor was used again in June, 1950, when North Korean forces marched toward Seoul in their invasion of South Korea at the outset of the Korean War. In July, 1953, during the final days of that war, this hill cemented its place in American history. However, this episode has been largely overlooked except by those who were there in the final brutal days of the Korean War.

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[1] Army Map Service (AMS), Type F (AMS 2) 1946, Series L 751, Sheet 6527 I, Korea 1:50000, Musan-Ni. It should be noted that the map reference point for this specific location is from the AMS L751 series of 1946 which was created from data collected during the Japanese Imperial Land Survey of 1933. This data set, also known as the Tokyo B, is slightly different from the World Geodetic System (WGS) in use today. The WGS location for this hill is 52S CH 0840 0853.

Known then as Boulder City, this hill was the sight of one of the most vicious battles in the history of the US military. During 24-26 July 1953, the Marines of George Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division withstood a massive combined arms assault which came at the hands of a Chinese force many times their size.[2] During three nights of ferocious, often hand-to-hand combat, George Company lost 36 Marines killed, scores wounded, and several declared missing or captured as prisoners of war.[3] When the firing ceased, Boulder City was littered with American and Chinese dead, making the hill a macabre landscape that showcased the destruction of the preceding days. This battle decimated the ranks of George Company and the ranks of several other infantry companies that were sent to reinforce the hill to keep it from being completely overrun. Within the first few hours of the battle, George Company was down to 25% of its effective strength and a separate company suffered 35 killed and wounded in an attempt to reinforce the Marines struggling to maintain control of the hill.[4]

The intensity of this battle was remarkable by today's standards. Were a modern day Marine Corps infantry company to suffer human loss equivalent to

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[2] Command Chronology, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953.

[3] Compilation of Unit Diary Reports from George Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, 24-28 July 1953; Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, Report for United States Marine Corps UnAccounted For, 28 October 2011. Following this battle, there were 24 George Company Marines and one Navy Corpsman listed as MIA. Of these, two Marines and the Corpsman were captured as POWs and later returned to US control. The remains of 13 Marines were found and identified after the battle. Of the remaining eleven Marines, the remains of six were incrementally identified and returned. Three were returned in February 1955, one in May 1955 and the other two in May 1957. Five George Company Marines remain unaccounted for. In addition to these George Company Marines, there are two additional Marines unaccounted for from the same night of action. One is from F 2/1 and the other is from H 3/1 on nearby hill 111.

[4] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 3-4.

that which was exacted from George Company, it would be a national sensation. This is evidenced by the aftermath of the 6 August 2011 helicopter crash in Afghanistan that left 30 American servicemen, mostly Navy Seals, dead: within hours of the crash, media outlets focused breaking news coverage on the event, and within a matter of days, the American public knew the names of all killed and were given glimpses into some of their personal lives.

This was not the case for the American and Chinese dead at Boulder City. Their deaths were anonymous to all except those who knew them. The only popular media chronicle of the fighting at Boulder City was a short photo essay in the 10 August 1953 edition of *Life* magazine.[5] In this account, however, as has been the case in nearly all narratives focusing on the Korean War in late July 1953, the heavy losses of American and Chinese life at Boulder City were overshadowed by an event deemed more significant. This event was the signing of the Armistice at nearby Panmunjom on 27 July 1953. This agreement, which had been years in the making between United Nations and Communist negotiators, effectively ended combat operations on the Korean peninsula.

The location of the Armistice signing at Panmunjom adds yet another ironic and tragic reality to the events that transpired on Boulder City from 24-26 July 1953. The two locations were separated by less than six miles. The two were so close that John Comp, who was a Corporal with George Company on Boulder City, recalls that in the nights before this final battle he saw the night sky

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[5] Rougier, Michael and Miki, Jun, "How the Truce Came to Korea," *Life*, Vol.35, No.6, 10 August 1953, pgs 15-27.

being illuminated by the lights from the Peace Village at Panmunjom. Comp states, "We could see the lights at Panmunjom…you couldn't get shot if you were on the road to Panmunjom."[6] In this statement Comp references the no-fire zone that had been established in the immediate area of the Peace Village at Panmunjom. However, Comp and his fellow Marines of George Company would enjoy no such luxury in the final days of the war. The no-fire zone that had been established for the peace talks at Panmunjom did not apply to those on nearby Boulder City. As the final details of the Armistice were being negotiated before the agreement was to be signed, hand-to-hand fighting raged in the trenches of Boulder City.[7] Although it was just a few miles from the Peace Village, Boulder City was far from peaceful.

This battle is eerily reminiscent of the conclusion of World War I, in which combatants were sent to their deaths up until the final moments of the war for no definable gain. As such, it can be argued without engaging in speculative history that this battle too is a fight that did not have to be. The major tenets of the Armistice had been previously agreed upon by negotiators and there was to be little gained by the capture of Boulder City.[8] With the major agreement having been reached, leaving only relatively minor details, there existed a sentiment that the end of the war was near. Despite this, the agreement was not yet cause for celebration, because, as John Comp asserts, "We knew what was coming, that

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[6] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[7] Command Diary, 1st Marine Division, July 1953, pgs 9-10.
[8] U.S. Military Academy, *Operations in Korea*, (West Point: Department of Military Art and Engineering, U.S. Military Academy, 1956), pg 51.

the end was near…when we got up there they told us to be on the alert because they expected an attack, and they were correct…you knew something was going to happen."[9] George Broadhead, who was a corporal with How Company 3/1 on nearby Hill 111 recalls, "I've always felt the [communists] knew for some time they were going to sign the cease-fire. They were willing to lose thousands of more troops just to take all our high ground."[10]

Statements such as these ring true as a matter of hindsight, given the sheer number of casualties on Boulder City and Hill 111, but they do not answer the most pressing historical question as to *why* this battle took place. On the rare occasion that the events of Boulder City and of the larger offensive in which this battle is embedded are recounted, it is often done so in a manner that denies an opportunity of understanding the larger context of the Korean War. Most accounts simply do not portray the historical significance of this battle.

The histories of the Korean War in July 1953 are primarily written in one of two manners. One focuses on the high level politics of the Armistice negotiations while the other is derived from trench-line observances and first-hand accounts. Neither of these methods provide the means of understanding the full context and complexity of this period. Although the political focus may provide the necessary context, such histories do not relay the consequences of politics in war: the human experience of combat. These accounts negate the human loss and suffering endured by those sent into harm's way as a result of political

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[9] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[10] Allen C Bevilacqua, The Last Battle: Korea 1953, *Leatherneck*, Vol. 86, No. 7, July 2003, pg 16.

decisions. First-hand accounts, however, often lack the overarching political context. This context is lost because the combatants are far separated from the political arena. For the combatants, the goal is to survive, and there is often little knowledge of the complex political decision-making process. Without knowledge of this, there cannot be a full understanding of what was occurring throughout the political and military battlefield that was the Korean War. Although both means of relaying this story are important in their own right, neither provides the full story.

Although these methods of documenting warfare make certain omissions, this is not to say that these accounts are not necessary. Quite the opposite is true. Inclusion of these accounts is absolutely necessary because each provides a unique perspective from which a more comprehensive history may be developed. What these histories lack is a combination of two arguably inseparable subjects, politics and warfare. The linkage of these topics will provide the political context in addition to presenting the voice of the individuals who experienced warfare on a personal level.

On the individual level, warfare is a very personal subject. Combatants live, form friendships, fight, and die alongside one another while forming memories that are often known only to those with the shared experience. Given the nature of combat on Boulder City, an individual's memories of this event are likely to be among some of the most vivid of their lives. Experiences of combat such as this are of the type that is forever etched into the memory of those who endured them. This is evidenced by Claude Wirt who, as a Private in George

Company, earned a Silver Star on Boulder City. He states that, "Every time I go to sleep I'm fighting the war."[11]

However clear the memories may be for the individual, the accounts they produce are not without error. The histories gleaned from an individual's memory are often the topic of increased scrutiny for a variety of reasons. Whether it is lack of specific recollection, embellishment, or omission, memory is not without flaw. Philosopher and historian Georg Hegel asserts that

> Such original historians, then, change the events, deeds, and the states of society with which they are conversant, into an object for the conceptive faculty. The narratives they leave us cannot….be very comprehensive in their range…What is present and living in their environment is their proper material. The influences that have formed the writer are identical with those which have moulded the events that constitute the matter of his story. The author's spirit, and that of the actions he narrates, is one and the same. He describes scenes in which he himself has been an actor, or at any rate an interested spectator….Reflections are none of his business, for he lives in the spirit of his subject; he has not attained an elevation above it.[12]

Military historian Allan Millett echoes Hegel's statement when writing of combat accounts and memory from the Korean War. Millet argues that,

> The common soldier's experience in combat has always proved irresistible to the readers of military history, and even the Korean War has provided oral historians and vicarious consumers of war with ample material. The genre has limitations beyond faulty memory and vivid imaginations.[13]

Aside from the intended and unintended errors of first-hand accounts, they fall short on one significant front. Although these often gritty narratives work well to sell books, they do little to answer or convey one of the most significant

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[11] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[12] Georg W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, (NY: Promethius, 1991), pg. 2.
[13] Allan R. Millett, *The Korean War*, (Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, 2007), pg. 163.

historical questions: Why? And, although it may seem folly to ask this question with regard to war, the failure of battlefield accounts to answer this question is the result of a fact as old as war itself. Combatants on the battlefield are directed by the authority of the state and often have little knowledge of the political environment which determines their fates. This is a fact that spans societies and time, providing a commonality between combatants on the battlefield. In describing his Chinese enemy on Bolder City, Claude Wirt states that, "They was doing what we was doing…half of them didn't know what they was over there for. They was just there because they told them to go there, probably the same way as I was."[14] John Comp asserts that the Chinese combatants he was fighting "had to do what we had to do and they had no choice."[15]

The concept of a ruling or political class directing military action is a concept that has remained unchanged over the ages. Sun Tzu, one of the earliest warfare theorists writes that "Normally, when the army is employed, the general first receives his command from the sovereign."[16] Tzu goes on to state that "enlightened rulers deliberate upon the plans, and good generals execute them….If not in the interests of the state, do not act."[17] Tzu's sentiments are echoed by the 19th century Prussian military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz in that, "War, therefore is an act of policy…[policy] will permeate all military operations…it will have a continuous influence on them…war is not merely an act

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[14] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis Tennessee.
[15] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[16] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Trans., Samuel B Griffith, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963), pg 102.
[17] Ibid, 142.

of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."[18] The 20th century military historian Samuel Marshall validates Tzu and Clausewitz by arguing, "It is the nation and not its army which makes war."[19]

A more modern interpretation of this concept can be found in Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (MCDP 1) *Warfighting*. This text, which forms the foundation of how the US military, specifically the US Marine Corps, conceptualizes and conducts warfare, serves as a suitable means to understanding the full historical circumstances surrounding the combat action on Boulder City. *Warfighting* bridges the gap between the combatant and the politician by arguing that the conduct of warfare is a hierarchical affair. It states, "Activities in war take place at several interrelated levels which form a hierarchy. These levels are the strategic, operational, and tactical."[20] *Warfighting* details the interrelation between the battlefield and governmental policy by describing the various levels at which war is conducted. It states,

> the highest level is the strategic….Activities at the strategic level focus directly on policy objectives….The lowest level is the tactical…tactics focuses on the application of combat power to defeat an enemy force in combat at a particular time and place….The operational level of war links the strategic and tactical…Actions at this level imply a broader dimension of time and space than actions at the tactical level. As strategy deals with

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[18] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) pg 87.
[19] Samuel LA Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000) pg 28.
[20] United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication* (MCDP) *1: Warfighting*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), pg. 28.

> winning wars and tactics with winning battles and engagements, the operational level of war is the art and science of winning campaigns.[21]

The overarching theme of these warfare scholars and of *Warfighting* is that no battle is an isolated event. Each is part of a larger operational picture, which seeks to achieve strategic political goals. Ultimately "Strategy derived from political and policy objectives must be clearly understood to be the sole authoritative basis for all operations."[22]

With this in mind, it can be observed that the action at Boulder City did seek to achieve a goal. However, in order to determine the course of events and to answer the pressing question of *why* this battle occurred, it must be presented in the full context. Evidence from each level of war must be collected and placed in this context in order to reveal an explanation for this event. No one level alone will suffice to provide a full explanation.

The case of Boulder City provides clear evidence as to the linkages between the Strategic, Operational, and Tactical levels of war. However, these linkages have been largely ignored by historians, who have instead focused on either the battlefield horrors or the political agreement of the Armistice. Although these topics are undoubtedly of historic significance, they must not continue to prevent a full understanding of this event. It is both the political agreement and the sacrifices of the combatants which must be revealed if either of these topics is to be fully understood. Such a continued oversight by the historical community

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[21] MCDP 1, pg 28-30.
[22] MCDP 1, pg 28.

is unacceptable because "In general, diplomats rarely pay for services already rendered—especially in wartime. Typically, it is pressure on the battlefield that generates negotiation."[23]

This work seeks to clarify those linkages by providing a more comprehensive political and military framework concerning the battle for Boulder City from 24-26 July 1953. This account will link this violent battlefield to the peaceful deliberations that were taking place just a few miles away and demonstrate that the two are, in fact, inseparable. Through archival evidence, secondary source works, and institutional and individual accounts, this work will link the everyday combatants to the political class that controlled their fates. This will explain, in the fullest detail, how and why this battle transpired as well as the political conditions in place which made it one of the most horrific in American history. As this work will provide the full context, it will refute the findings of other works which have focused on only one particular aspect of this period. Ultimately, this work seeks to clarify the historical record regarding how and why American and Chinese combatants paid the human toll for political decisions beyond their control in the final days of the Korean War.

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[23] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pg. 488.

CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL OMISSION

Although the story of what transpired on Boulder City has either been overlooked or misunderstood by historians, the event is nonetheless a significant moment in American history. However, the significance of this event within the American historical record has yet to be fully recognized. Decades after the guns fell silent on the Korean front historians have thus far failed to fully demonstrate how this event fits into the larger historical framework. The interrelated circumstances have not been fully connected by previous research.

A major factor in this is that, on the rare occasion that this event is investigated, there exists a recurring issue of perception that directly effects how the event is portrayed. In order to understand this reality, it is important first to consider Leopold Von Ranke's statement, "The purpose of an historian depends on his point of view."[24] This point of view will be influenced by a variety of cultural and ideological factors and ultimately will determine the tone in which the account is written. Having knowledge of a historian's point of view is an important consideration when examining his or her work. This is especially true when trying to understand texts regarding warfare, as they are often charged with emotion.

Just as emotions over the fighting took a toll on the Armistice negotiations, those same emotions are still playing out years later in the histories written about

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[24] Leopold Von Ranke, *The Secret World of History*, (NY: Fordham University Press, 1981), pg. 56.

these wartime events.[25] These texts often bear marks of the ideological divide of the Cold War as the emotions surrounding the conflict are still present in the societies that were engaged. This polarizing trend emerged as the Cold War developed and continues to influence texts addressing conflict of this period.

As Peter Novick writes, the subjective trend of Cold War histories developed in America because the Cold War presented a crisis for the American historical community. Tension surrounding the polarization of power and fear of a seemingly imminent general war between the United States and the Soviet Union encouraged many historians to utilize their abilities and their profession as a utility for freedom. Novick notes that during this period,

> In circumstances of such urgent peril, it is not surprising that there were many voices in the historical community arguing for the mobilization of scholarship…Historians were prepared to respond to appeals to render patriotic service in their writing so long as the contradiction between norms of detachment and objectivity on the one hand, and of mobilization and usefulness on the other, were not posed too sharply; so long as the requirement for doublethink was not made too manifest.[26]

Novick explains that in this situation, when American society mobilized for war, so too did its historians. The end result of this trend was that histories were written in defense of national values and subjective texts on the topic of the Cold War became the norm.

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[25] Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 1990. Foot chronicles the actions of armistice negotiators and how their inability to understand the cultural dynamics of the opposing side lead to more protracted negotiations. Foot is extremely critical of the negotiators in this regard in that they were unable to detach themselves from their military perceptions of conflict in order to reach an agreement to stop the fighting.
[26] Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pg. 315-316.

Despite the passage of several decades since the Korean War, the trend of openly subjective histories can still be observed through the examination of Korean War literature. Philip West mulls this trend in *The American Historical Review* by stating, "Heroic modes of inquiry have dominated most interpretations of the Korean War….For decades, Korean, American, and Chinese writers have told their stories of the war, but there is little consensus as to what really happened. Claims of victory, fairness, or moral superiority appear hollow to the other side."[27] West argues that a tendency towards heroic histories has come to dominate Korean War accounts.

Under these conditions it becomes more difficult to interpret the true nature of events. However, much of the difficulty of interpretation originates with the historian's point of view. Many historians of this period have adopted a conceptual framework which prevents them from accurately interpreting the nature of events. Whether the framework is culturally or ideologically derived, it will ultimately impact the historical work itself.

This work has attempted a three-fold framework in terms of point of view. This approach was adopted in order to better interpret this event. Division of evidentiary sources into strategic, operational, and tactical categories allowed for a more thorough understanding of this event and demonstrated that the same historical event may be interpreted vastly different at differently levels.

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[27] Phillip West, "Interpreting the Korean War," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 1, (Feb., 1989), pp 80-96.

An example of this can be found in the comparison of sources originating from the various levels. Here, tactical and operational sources lead the authors to suggest that the aim of the final Chinese offensive was to improve territorial position in advance of the Armistice. Lee Ballenger, who has written two of the most well received works on Marine operations in Korea writes of Boulder City that,

> For the enemy, Hill 119 on the MLR was tactically and strategically the logical point of attack….Had the Chinese captured Hill 119, they would have surely broken off truce negotiations and continue to exploit their gains. A victory there would have been decisive.[28]

Similarly, in a thoroughly researched account written by James Meid and Pat Yingling, this sentiment is echoed while describing combat operations in the closing days of the Korean War. Meid and Yingling write that,

> Despite impressive tenacity and determination, the Chinese Communist attacks throughout most of July on the two Berlin outposts and Hills 119 and 111 achieved no real gain. The repetitive assaults on strongly defended Boulder City up until the last day of the war was an attempt to place the Marines (and the United Nations Command) in as unfavorable position as possible when the armistice was signed. While talking at Panmunjom, the Communists pressed hungrily on the battlefront for as much critical terrain as they could get under their control before the final cease-fire line was established.[29]

These works are among the few that discuss the topic of Boulder City and these authors, in particular, have made significant contributions to understanding the Korean War. As such, this is not to argue that these accounts are altogether inaccurate. Both works are well researched and provide a number of previously

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[28] Lee Ballenger, *The Final Crucible: U.S. Marines in Korea Volume II*, (Dulles, Virginia: Brassey's Inc, 2001), pg. 240.
[29] Pat Meid & James Yingling, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea Volume V*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pg. 391.

unknown facts. However, the issue here concerns point of view. From the point of view of these authors, and their sources, the conclusions they reach are absolutely logical. For Ballenger, his sources were institutional records and personal accounts. These included his personal experiences, as he is himself a Korean War veteran. Meid and Yingling, as official Marine Corps historians, utilize institutional records as their primary sources.

The end result of both works is that there is a thorough understanding of many tactical and operational aspects of the war. However, working solely within the tactical and operational framework excludes other possible explanations for the event. It leads these historians to erroneously judge Chinese intentions within their own conceptual framework. Matthew Ridgeway argues that this was a significant problem during the war as well by arguing, "One of the major mistakes of Korea was our tendency to try to base our strategy on a reading of enemy intentions, while failing to give proper weight to what we knew of enemy capabilities."[30]

This mistake is being recreated by historians of this conflict. Despite the availability of resources to demonstrate the contrary, many historians fail to recognize the larger significance of this event. In these particular cases it has led to speculation that is unsupported by evidence. In documents utilized by these authors, military assessments indicate that the Chinese forces present for this offensive lacked the capability for major offensive operations. Reports from 3rd

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[30] Matthew R. Ridgeway, *The Korean War*, (New York, New York: Doubleday, 1967), pg. 243.

Battalion 1st Marines and 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, as well as their regimental commands, stand in contrast to the assessments of historians who argue that this offensive was essentially a land grab.

The summary for the monthly command diary for 3/1 states that the Chinese offensive at Hill 119 was a "major limited objective attack."[31] The intelligence assessment of 3/7 for the month of July 1953 concurs with the assessment that Chinese forces were only capable of "limited objective attacks."[32] This intelligence report also states that heavy rains in the month of July decreased the possibility of large scale attack because battlefield mobility was significantly decreased. This statement is also present in Chinese accounts.[33]

The assessments of these battlefield commanders provide an example of how original participants can, in some instances, have a more realistic assessment than later secondary interpretations written from a similar analytical framework. These assessments state that the Chinese offensives sought to gain better observation in order to launch more effective artillery barrages, but that Chinese forces lacked the capability to dislodge American forces despite the ability to be quickly reinforced. It should be noted that these commanders display healthy respect for their Chinese adversary, with specific regard for the Chinese proficiency in nighttime operations and their ability to conduct attacks utilizing

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[31] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953, pg. 1.
[32] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, July 1953, Annex Able (Intelligence), pg. 6.
[33] Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 243-244.

coordinated combined arms. However, given their first-hand experiences against Chinese combatants, these officers did not believe that the Chinese had the ability to conduct a major offensive such as some historians suggest.

When evidence from the strategic level is incorporated with that of the operational and tactical levels, a more accurate interpretation of this event becomes possible. Although strategic sources are just as likely to portray a particular ideological view, they are important in depicting the larger political atmosphere in which an event occurs. In general, these sources allow for emotional separation from an event. This is a critical factor when attempting to understand emotionally charged issues of warfare.

Utilization of strategic level sources is necessary to illuminate the larger historical aspects of a situation. These accounts can be used to bridge an ideological divide or correct an assumption. Incorporation of a broader framework of analysis, such as this, provides the opportunity to reverse the notion that, "Given the depth of emotions that still surround the Korean War…it may be some time before an interpretation conceived in the higher historiography, penned with an even hand, and credible to more than one side can be expected to appear."[34]

By examining the strategic context of this particular event, it can be seen that the renewed offensive of the Chinese was not likely intended to improve territorial position. Instead, it is more likely that this offensive was, in fact, an effort to punish the South Korean president for his release of prisoners of war.

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[34] Phillip West, "Interpreting the Korean War," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 1, (Feb., 1989), pp 80-96.

Evidence of this is provided in diplomatic communication of the era as well as in accounts written by strategic participants. A prime example is written by General Mark Clark, the commander of all UN forces in Korea, in which he states,

> There is no doubt in my mind that one of the principle reasons, if not the only reason, for the Communist offensive was to give the ROKs a "bloody nose" and to show them and the world that "puk chin"—"go north"—was easier said than done.[35]

Noted military historian Allan Millet provides reinforcement to Clark's assessment by arguing that the Chinese were tired of war. The one exception to this was their execution of this final offensive. Millet states that, "The exception was the Chinese offensive to eliminate the Kumsong salient (July 1953), which served as a direct warning to Syngman Rhee and the ROK Army that South Korea had better accept its dependence on American military power and abide by the armistice terms."[36] As Millett argues, the intent of this renewed offensive was not to capture ground in advance of the armistice; it was meant to send a message.

Notwithstanding the need for a conceptual framework that incorporates numerous points of view in its analysis, there is still much to be said for histories which portray life experiences. Seldom is this more the case than when documenting the human experience of war. This is arguably the worst of human experiences, yet there is much that can be gleaned from an understanding of it. Such an understanding would demonstrate the utility and the futility, the gains

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[35] Mark W. Clark, *From the Danube to the Yalu,* (New York, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), pg. 291-292.
[36] Allan R. Millett, *The Korean War*, (Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, 2007), pg. 161.

and the losses that are associated with such an endeavor. It provides the opportunity to glimpse simultaneously the best and worst aspects of human nature. It will demonstrate the lengths to which humans will go to help a friend or to inflict cruelty on an enemy.

Throughout time, the historical community has sought to document and understand warfare. Given the severity of the topic, it should be no surprise that Herodotus, the father of history, was documenting warfare. Since that time volumes have been produced on great stands, and epic defeats; and entire societies have become familiar with terms such Thermopylae, Waterloo, Gettysburg, Rorke's Drift, Normandy, and Iwo Jima. Despite the severity of the topic and the popularity of wartime accounts, there still exists a significant void in the historical record on the topic of the Korean War.

In many regards this is attributable to the fact that the "Forgotten War" is "sandwiched somewhere between the 'Good War,' World War II, and the 'Bad War,' Vietnam."[37] This fact is particularly acute with regard to later stages of the war in which trench warfare became the norm. Review of current literature reveals a pattern which suggests that, as the battle lines stopped moving, so too did interest from the historical community.

Surprisingly, institutional histories of the Marine Corps demonstrate this trend as well. Although topics such as the Inchon landing, the battle for Seoul,

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[37] Melinda Pash, "*The Age for Conformity?: Korean War Veterans in the Age of McCarthy and Kerouac*," (Manuscript; under review New York: NYU Press 2011), pg 10.

and the Chosin Reservoir campaign coexist in the same war was Boulder City, the latter has yet to receive a portion of the interest displayed in the former.

The Chosin Reservoir campaign alone is argued to be one of the greatest periods in Marine Corps history. If not the greatest, then it is quite possibly the most researched and documented. Here, the tactical judgment of General O.P. Smith and his absolute refusal, to the point of belligerence, to split up his division in spite of orders to the contrary are credited with saving the 1st Marine Division. Smith and the heroics displayed by his Marines who fought their way, as a cohesive unit, out of a well laid trap while Army units operating in the same area were destroyed is heralded as upholding the highest standards of discipline and military conduct.

The standards upheld in this final stage of the war are of no less significance. However, for all that the early months of the Korean War did to perpetuate the legacy and fighting reputation of the Marine Corps, the final month, which was statistically much bloodier, has been largely overlooked.[38] Although the fact that this stage of the war is recognized as more costly in terms of personnel, the period is not portrayed in historical literature on the same plane of prestige. This presents a peculiar situation for an institution that prides itself on its historical reputation and is arguably among the best at maintaining it.

While it is not the point of this work to call attention to the failings of the American historical community, it is the point of this work to help correct this

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[38] Pat Meid & James Yingling, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea Volume V*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pg. 391.

situation. It is to demonstrate that regardless of time period, location, or nationality, those who fought in the Korean War paid a terrible price to do what they were asked to do, often in impossible situations. It may never be known exactly how the Marines of George Company retained control of Boulder City in the final days of this war. However, the search for answers into this human experience should still be sought.

CHAPTER 3
SHARED IDENTITY

Before the men of George Company had their futures shaped by the political and military realities of the Korean War, their pasts had been shaped by the historical realities of American society.[39] Before they came to know the horrors of combat, they had already lived lives of hardship and adversity. Their childhoods had been overshadowed by the economic realities of the Great Depression and the national mobilization in support of the Second World War. As such, these men shared a common social history that was undoubtedly specific to their generation. This common historical thread worked to prepare them for the realities of war like no other generation. Historian Melinda Pash states that the generation of Korean War veterans

> were a generation of their own, influenced by a childhood made common by the uncommon events they shared—a deep and nearly universal economic depression and then a war of unprecedented scale followed by what many hoped would be an enduring peace. Little did they know it then, but this historical backdrop served to uniquely prepare some of them to accept their roles in Harry Truman's war over a small, squalid, maybe even insignificant piece of Asia called Korea.[40]

The Marines of George Company hailed from small towns and big cities; some were rich and some poor. They grew up in the coal towns of Appalachia, the farming communities of Tennessee, and in large cities across the nation. One

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[39] The lack of Chinese perspective from the individual level is a known shortfall of this work. The availability and accessibility of works relating to Chinese veterans prevents this account from providing the Chinese perspective on the combat at Boulder City. Although memoirs exists of Chinese veterans of the Korean War, none have been found to date which pertain to offensives conducted late in the war. Additional research will be required in order to gain an individual Chinese perspective of this event.
[40] Melinda Pash, "*The Age for Conformity?: Korean War Veterans in the Age of McCarthy and Kerouac*," (Manuscript; under review New York: NYU Press 2011), pg 10.

was a Harvard graduate while another had only a sixth grade education. One officer had been drafted to play professional football, but voluntarily ended his athletic career to receive a commission. For others, their service was not voluntary. They had answered the call to service only after receipt of a draft notice.

No matter how these men came to find themselves in Korea, each had been shaped by the experiences of their childhoods. Growing up during the Great Depression, many became accustomed to hard work at an early age. Faced with the inescapable economic reality of the time, "the Great Depression served as an effective teacher to these kids, even if most of the lessons were bitter to learn."[41] Some in rural areas left school for the fields in an attempt to support themselves and their families.[42] Other families survived the hard economic times by becoming self sufficient and living only off what they could themselves produce.[43]

For some, the Great Depression was only part of the hardship they endured. In the case of Claude Wirt, his childhood was framed by the deep seeded racism that permeated the South. It was a reality that impacted all aspects of his daily life. He recalls that,

> There were black schools and white schools, white went to white schools, black went to black schools. Whites rode the bus, blacks walked. We read the books that the white kids, when they finished with them, they would be going on to another grade of books and we would get them. I made it

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[41] Melinda Pash, "*The Age for Conformity?: Korean War Veterans in the Age of McCarthy and Kerouac*," (Manuscript; under review New York: NYU Press 2011), pg 11.
[42] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[43] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.

> alright, I just got used to being what it was. That's all I knew….Everybody knows. He was brought up to know what to do and how to act, all that…But if you just walk off into a thicket or something, you don't know if there briars in there or not. But you now know your father, his father and all "Yes sir, no sir" do what so and so…as long as you did that, it was alright, but when you didn't do that anything could happen.[44]

Wirt made it through this by conditioning himself to abide the societal rules of racism in order to avoid often violent repercussions. However, he also accepted that such events also happened at random. Remembering one incident of white on black violence, Wirt recalled that a black field foreman was shot by a white man simply because he had not shot anyone before. This excuse satisfied local law enforcement, who released the man.[45]

As if times were not difficult enough, in the midst of their hardships, there was the Second World War. Although most George Company Marines were too young for military service at that time, it nonetheless had a significant effect on their lives. The war worked in many ways to effectively turn their lives upside down. As bystanders to the national mobilization, they watched as their older relatives donned military uniforms or took on new roles in support of the war effort. Typical of many families at the time, John Comp had an older brother in the European theatre with the Army, while Robert Easterling had two Marine brothers fighting in the South Pacific and a father helping to build Oak Ridge National Laboratory.[46]

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[44] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[45] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[46] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia; Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.

The shared sacrifice required of all Americans at the time worked to promote a national identity and engrain an unshakable sense of patriotism in many of the Korean War generation. In fact, the unique historical setting of their childhoods would cause many of them to feel that they had missed a great opportunity to serve in the Second World War. They would, however, have that opportunity in Korea. For this generation, the immense patriotism developed during World War II when coupled with the hardships endured during the Great Depression had created a generation that knew and accepted hard times and was willing to answer the call to service for Korea. The historical factors of their childhoods had engrained in them a sense of hard work, self sufficiency, and patriotism that would be tested on the battlefields of Korea.

A personal history that included a childhood in the United States was not shared by all Marines present on Boulder City. One, in particular, had a childhood and early adult life that was dramatically different than the vast majority of Marines of 3rd Battalion 1st Marines. Ultimately, the responsibility for commanding the Marines of 3/1 on Boulder City would fall to this man, Major John Canton, the battalion's Intelligence Officer (S-2). Canton had joined 3/1 only days earlier, on the 21st, after being transferred from Headquarters Battalion of the Pacific Command.[47] On the morning of 27 July, Canton would assume the duties of battalion Operations Officer (S-3) when the previous Operations Officer,

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[47] Unit Diary # 153-53, Headquarters and Service Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, 22 July 1953.

Major Robert Thurston, was wounded shortly after midnight, suffering a traumatic amputation of his right arm.[48]

The succession of commanders from 3/1 on Boulder City would end with Major Canton. Preceding him had been full compliment of officers who had been taken out of action as a result of their wounds, and Canton would be no exception. His short tenure as the battlefield commander on Boulder City did not save him from injury. Nearly a week after the Armistice went into effect, he was evacuated on 2 August 1953 because of sickness, a likely complication of the shrapnel wound to the kidney he received while commanding action on Boulder City.[49]

Among the list of combat commanders present at Boulder City, Major Canton's life story and combat history are unique. Canton was born in 1919 in Brooklyn, New York to Spanish immigrants but had little connection with the United States until his adult life. Canton's father had died shortly before he was born and as a small child Canton moved with his mother and stepfather to French Morocco.[50] He spent his childhood in Rabat and Casablanca, where he became fluent in French, Arabic, and Berber, while also speaking Portuguese,

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[48] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953, pg 7; USMC Casualty Report, Casualty Number 113750, Thurston, Robert D., 27 July 1953.
[49] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, August 1953, pg 2; Jack Williams, Colonel John S Canton; Marine Was Well-Spoken Man of the World, Oct 27 2005, San Diego Union Tribune.
[50] Jack Williams, Colonel John S Canton; Marine Was Well-Spoken Man of the World, Oct 27 2005, San Diego Union Tribune.

Spanish, and some Czech. It was not until he was a 20 year old private in the Marine Corps that he learned to speak English.[51]

At the outset of World War II, Canton was a student in Bordeaux, France. Here he attempted to join the French Army in 1939. After failing to be accepted because of his American citizenship, he traveled to Algeria to enlist in the French Foreign Legion. Canton later returned to France as a member of a colonial battalion and rose to the rank of Corporal in the Legion Etrangere while engaging in numerous combat operations against the Germans in Belgium and France. Among these was the Battle of Dunkirk in May, 1940, in which he was among the thousands of Allied combatants evacuated to England in the face of a crushing German assault. Noting that Canton was an American citizen, the British shipped him to New York. Within a few months of arrival to New York, Canton had enlisted in the Marine Corps "thinking he would go back to Europe and fight the Nazis."[52] Canton enlisted in the Marines despite the fact that the US was not yet at war and that he did not speak English. This was the beginning of what would eventually be a 31 year career as a Marine.

His eagerness to return to the fight was realized with his decision to join the Marine Corps, although he would be destined for the South Pacific, not the European theater. His service in the Legion served him well during recruit training at Parris Island, South Carolina, where he "picked up English along the

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[51] Jeremiah O'Leary, "Diplomat" *Leatherneck* (pre-1998), Vol. 49, No. 1, January 1965 pp 52-53.
[52] Jack Williams, Colonel John S Canton; Marine Was Well-Spoken Man of the World, Oct 27 2005, San Diego Union Tribune.

way."[53] As an enlisted Marine, Canton made a quick rise to Staff Sergeant and by 1943, he had been recommended to receive a commission. Upon receiving his commission in the Marine Corps Reserve, Canton was assigned as an intelligence officer and fought in a number of South Pacific campaigns as a member of the 1st Amphibious Corps.[54]

Canton returned from the South Pacific in 1944 and was augmented into the regular Marine Corps in 1946. Following this, he served in China, Guam, and Saudi Arabia, and in Korea with 3/1. Prior to his assignment to 3/1 in 1953, "his intelligence-gathering duties took him to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, Ceylon, Yugoslavia, and Albania."[55] His abilities as an intelligence officer familiar with several foreign cultures proved to be of great service to him throughout his career.

Although Canton did not share the social history familiar to the Marines of 3/1, he did share with them the identity of being a Marine. He, like every other Marine, shared a familiar past in that each had been indoctrinated through a rigorous training process that marked them as distinctly separate from their counterparts in the other branches of the Armed Forces. The difference began with location. Unlike the Army, which had several entry level training sites throughout the US, the Marine Corps only had three. All enlisted Marines, whether volunteer or draftee, attended Recruit Training at one of two Recruit

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[53] Jeremiah O'Leary, "Diplomat" pg 53.
[54] Jack Williams, Colonel John S Canton; Marine Was Well-Spoken Man of the World, Oct 27 2005, San Diego Union Tribune. Jeremiah O'Leary, "Diplomat" pg 53.
[55] Ibid.

Depots, either Parris Island, South Carolina, or San Diego, California. All officers would endure their Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia. These locations had a common goal, to build Marines.

For the Marine Corps, this entry level training was a rite of passage for officer and enlisted men alike. Graduation was not a given; it was a goal that had to be achieved. The result of the manner in which the Marine Corps indoctrinated its recruits was that "the Marine Corps stood unparalleled in instilling esprit de corps in those who would join its ranks."[56] The training process worked to strip all manner of individualism from the recruits and form the group into a cohesive team. The reasoning for this was quite clear. The Marine Corps was "determined to not only achieve the highest possible survival rate in battle, but to be the premier branch of the Armed Forces, the Marine Corps pushed its trainees…to the limit both mentally and physically."[57]

The experiences from this entry level training still resonate in the memories of George Company Marines. No matter where they attended training, it was equally challenging. John Comp enlisted in New York City and unlike others entering the Marine Corps east of the Mississippi River, he attended Recruit Training in San Diego due to an outbreak of meningitis at the Recruit Depot at Parris Island. Comp states that his experiences from Recruit Training "were something to write a book about….I can remember arriving there and the

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[56] Melinda Pash, "*The Age for Conformity?: Korean War Veterans in the Age of McCarthy and Kerouac*," (Manuscript; under review New York: NYU Press 2011), pg 90.
[57] Melinda Pash, "*The Age for Conformity?: Korean War Veterans in the Age of McCarthy and Kerouac*," (Manuscript; under review New York: NYU Press 2011), pg 91.

instructions that we received to keep us in line and I can remember the first night I heard a lot of crying…we had a lot of draftees that were in there."[58] Robert Easterling recalls that his drill instructor was a two time Purple Heart recipient from World War II and that, although he was harsh, everyone listened because "he had been there."[59]

Easterling also recalls that the draftees had a harder time during this initial training than did those who had volunteered. The draftees were often singled out for a failure to volunteer. Such treatment compounded the misfortunes of these draftees. Not only had they been drafted, but they had been drafted into the Marine Corps. John Comp recalls the process at which they were selected. He states that, "They had a line of people that were drafted, and they lined them up they said count off by threes….Every third one, after it was all over, they said please step forward, you are now in the Marine Corps."[60]

Whereas the draftees' reasons for becoming Marines had been a matter of chance and involuntary direction, the volunteers had many more reasons to become Marines. For Claude Wirt, the harsh treatment by drill instructors and the dangers of Korea were an escape from the hard, monotonous farm work in the fields of western Tennessee. He attests

> When I found out about that I said I'm not farming no more. You get up in the morning time when the bell rang, go to the fields. When the bell rang again you come eat lunch. Bell rang again, back to the fields. Rang again

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[58] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[59] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[60] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia

> when the sun goes down. Dusk till dawn. If I could figure out any way to get away from there, I would go.[61]

Enlisting in 1952, Wirt knew little of what was going on in Korea at the time, "Just what I saw on the television, I thought it was just like the television. Their guns didn't shoot or something. John Wayne played a big part."[62]

John Comp echoes Wirt's statement of the importance of John Wayne in determining his choice to join the Marine Corps. Speaking of how he was repeatedly exposed to John Wayne by way of his high school job, Comp states,

> When I was going to high school I used to work in the theatre in town and I was an usher. "Sands of Iwo Jima" was playing at the theatre I saw that movie maybe about a hundred times….I said to myself I am not going to join any other service than the Marine Corps….From what I had watched in the movie…it was a shock compared to what the movie showed…. All I saw was in the theatre on the newsreels…that's the only thing I knew about what was going on…and what I read in the paper…fighting Communism and what they did to the people there, how brutal they were with the people. So, I was really anxious to go. I joined because we were at war with Korea…being in a situation where I kinda brainwashed myself watching the "Sands of Iwo Jima" I decided if I was going to go in the service that's the service I wanted to go into.[63]

Although Wirt and Comp shared exposure to the exploits of John Wayne, they did not share exposure to the overarching argument of the Cold War. Wirt explains that "I didn't have no idea about that [Communism], I had heard it, but it was just another word. Coming from the cotton fields….I didn't know anything about that."[64]

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[61] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[62] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[63] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[64] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.

Regardless of how or why they had entered the Marine Corps, the entry level training they faced was an arduous affair. For Marine Corps trainees, it was clear that the intense regimen of training they were receiving was in preparation for their responsibilities in Korea. Many George Company veterans credit this training with helping to get them through the war. Robert Easterling equates the training received with survival of the war in that, "we wouldn't have made it, what few made it wouldn't have made it without training."[65] Claude Wirt comments on the realism of his training and credits it for his return, "They fixed it so you would think you were in Korea. They did a good job of getting you back home."[66]

The course of training that these Marines received in preparation for Korea did not end after graduation from Recruit Training. The majority of Marines immediately began advanced infantry training while others went to specialty schools before the additional infantry training. Throughout their time in the Marine Corps, training would be a continuous cycle. Upon arrival in Korea, each Marine went through an additional course of training meant to familiarize him with enemy tactics and with operations in Korea such as night patrols. Even as units rotated from the front lines to rear echelons in the reserve, training was a priority. For the men of George Company, all the training was working to prepare them for their final test of survival at Boulder City.

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[65] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[66] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.

CHAPTER 4
TACTICAL

The reality of life for those at the tactical level is much different than for those experiencing war at the operational or strategic levels. While these levels provide safety through distance, the tactical level is where the horrors of war are realized first hand. At this level the combatants are routinely expected to do the extraordinary and the unspeakable while living in an environment that is often physically and, usually, mentally challenging. It is at this level that the combatants live and die in the human experience of war.

For the Marines of George Company, it was an experience of harsh conditions, conditions set by man and nature alike. Not only did they have to face the hardships inflicted by the enemy, but they also had to confront the conditions set by their natural environment. As John Comp attests, the Korean peninsula was an unforgiving natural environment that was well known for its frigid winters and sweltering summers. Arriving in Korea in January 1953, Comp recalls, "It was quite cold. The first night that I slept in my sleeping bag, I got in…and I left my head out. I woke up early in the morning and I couldn't feel my head."[67] The experience of confronting the arduous natural environment was exacerbated by the man-made environment of war. Regarding this man-made environment, Matthew Ridgeway states that,

> Conditions on the battle front now grew to resemble the fighting in World War I, with deep-dug emplacements, trenches, barbed-wire defenses and an extensive outpost line where most of the action took place. As the

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[67] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.

> enemy built up his artillery strength, increasing it in efficiency as well as in number, the possession of dominating heights, for observation, became more and more important, and so the fights along the outpost line were often bloody and persistent.[68]

Despite the natural and man-made conditions set for them, the Marines of George Company accepted the reality of the Korean War and went about doing what they had been trained to do. Robert Easterling comments that "we'd go on patrol every third night, whatever we ran into we took care of" while John Comp states that "it was almost like a bus schedule."[69] A routine, albeit a frequently violent one, was not uncommon to the Korean War combatant by this stage of the war. Jim Byrne and Gerard Pendas write that as the Korean War stalemated into a more static and positional war,

> George Company, like the other 26 rifle companies of the Division, settled into the routine of the Western Front very quickly…men were wounded, men died and virtually everyone at one time or another came close to being a casualty; however, their sacrifices and close brushes with death took place in what military historians refer to as small unit actions. Throughout the war the main focus of any Marine was his squad and his platoon. At this stage of the Korean War, the squad and the platoon took on even greater significance.[70]

It did not take these Marines long to confront the reality of their new existence in combat. Robert Easterling realized what he was in for upon his assignment to George Company. Prior to the arrival of his replacement draft, George Company had conducted a raid in which a number of Marines had been killed and wounded. When his draft received its unit assignments, 25 men

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[68] Matthew R. Ridgeway, *The Korean War*, (New York, New York: Doubleday, 1967), Pg. 217.
[69] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia; Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[70] Jim Byrne & Gerard Pendas Jr., eds., *Bloody George, Vol. 4, Western Front Korea, 1952-53*, (George 3/1 Association, 1991), pg 4.

including him were sent to the same platoon in George Company. To Easterling, this signaled that "we wouldn't be there long."[71] Similarly, John Comp, although having previously encouraged himself with John Wayne, came to terms with his new reality his first night in the trenches. He states that,

> The first night on line…we wound up on an outpost….So from that time on I played it pretty cool and I kept my head down…it was initial shock at first, but then the situation we found out that we were in everybody was in the same boat so it had to be done.[72]

The experiences of these Marines in combat remain in their minds today as vivid, personal memories. Despite the passage of several decades each retains pieces of his time in Korea. Among his many memories from the time, Claude Wirt recalls watching in amazement as a group of F4 Corsairs came in to provide close air support against Chinese targets. He states that "Those Corsairs come in and it looked like they sat down on the ground…just fly right on the ground and eat everything up within line….You could tell just about who was flying."[73] Easterling too recalls being amazed by the show provided during close air support runs, stating, "when they'd hit a hill with that white phosphorous, it would light up like Christmas."[74]

Easterling also recognized that the pilots conducting those runs sacrificed their safety for the sake of those on the ground. In one instance, he remembers that a Corsair was shot down by Chinese ground fire. The plane crashed in the no man's land between American and Chinese positions. After days passed

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[71] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[72] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[73] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[74] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.

without sign of the pilot, some of the men of George Company conducted what is now known as a Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP). He recalls that,

> We went on patrol one night to that plane that got shot down; to make sure he wasn't still there…they had already removed his body… They wanted to check on that airplane and make sure he wasn't still there. We were to bring him back if he was still there, bring his body back.[75]

In addition to the memories and scars of combat, some of the men retain other mementos of their combat service. One such memento retained by John Comp is a bullet that has remained lodged in his leg since his first encounter with Chinese personnel in March 1953 near Outpost Esther. Recalling this encounter he states that,

> First combat experience was on March 19th, 1953. We were on a six man screening patrol around the outpost. We came from the main line up and we notified the outpost that we were gonna go around and screen, and we went on the outside of the barbed wire. We got about a third of the way around when we heard some noise and we stopped and it was the enemy on their way up to attack the outpost. The squad leader who was more familiar with the area than we were he told us 'Everybody lay down on the slope, have a grenade ready…when you see their bodies hit the skyline, throw the grenade behind them and then open up on them from the front.' So we waited and when they came we threw the grenades, and then we opened up. I had an M-1 carbine, 30 rounds, and I just turned it sideways and sprayed it across…After that they hollered…We turned and went to go back up to the outpost…The sling on my carbine got tangled in the barbed wire and I couldn't get it loose, so I let it go…As I was going I got hit in the leg and I had to crawl up and fall into the trench.[76]

The hit that Comp had received was a bullet. The wound was serious enough to require his evacuation from the front. However, when he was evacuated to a

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[75] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[76] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.

medical facility, doctors did not want to risk removing the bullet because it was precariously close to an artery. The treatment plan for this wound was to leave the bullet in place and to allow the infantryman time to recuperate in the rear.

Not all of the memories that remain are of combat. Many are of a much lighter nature. Each retains warm memories of friends that they made in their squad, platoon, and company. Many surviving George Company Marines state that the bond of camaraderie that they developed with their fellow Marines in Korea made the experience worth all the while.

For some it is difficult. Robert Easterling was the sole surviving member of his squad, so memory of his squad mates is often associated with their loss. However, he still recalls with joy the friendship he developed with them and the loyalty they had for one another. He smiles as he recounts how his temporary replacement did not fare well with his men. He states,

> I went to NCO school and they sent him up to take care of my squad. The day I got back we had a live firing problem. He got shot in the calf of the leg with a BAR, with one round. You think he didn't know what he was doing? That was one of my BAR men…They told me he had been mean to them while I was gone.[77]

No matter how jovial these veterans' memories may be today, their business at the time was one of the utmost seriousness. There would be constant reminders for these men that theirs was a dangerous environment. It was one where injury and death were unforgettable realities and the act of killing

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[77] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.

became almost natural. John Comp remembers just how serious it was and how easily death could come, stating,

> There was an enemy that was out there hollering 'Help me, help me, help me!' and they didn't know if it was a trap or if it was really so…Somebody went to go out and the burp gun went off and then they fired back and killed the enemy.[78]

Citing the reality of his duty in Korea, Claude Wirt argues that when it came to the job of killing,

> Every job I ever learned I could do it as well as anybody….I could clean and kill like anybody else; better than a lot. Better than a whole lot. But that's all really I learned. I already know how to get along with people. But they taught you that. They taught you how to kill if you wanted to. And I learned that good.[79]

There would be periods of respite from the violence and uncertainty that characterized life in the trenches. Units rotated on and off the front while individuals earned rest and relaxation periods in Japan. In May 1953, the entire 1st Marine Division, with the exception of the 11th Marines artillery, was rotated to the rear and replaced by the US Army's 25th Infantry Division.[80] Upon relief from the front, the regiments and battalions of the division retired to camps far removed from the front where they began a rigorous training cycle.[81]

Despite training as if they would soon return to the front, many of the Marines felt as if the war would soon be over. Soon, they would spend early July

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[78] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[79] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[80] Pat Meid & James Yingling, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea Volume V*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pg. 364-365.
[81] Command Diary, 1st Marine Division, May 1953.

1953 celebrating Independence Day.[82] However, the 25th Infantry had been fiercely engaged in the area previously occupied by the Marines. During this, a number of positions had fallen to Chinese control and "word like that gets around."[83]

In echelon, the Marines units began to return to the front in early July, in the order in which they had been relieved months earlier. Soon it would be George Company's turn. It was ordered to Boulder City to relieve George Company, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, a battalion that had suffered heavy casualties in previous weeks' fighting.[84]

John Comp remembers when he was told, about Boulder City, that "they wanted to make that part of the main line of resistance because when the treaty would be signed, the positioning of the dividing of the property would be from the main line of resistance."[85] Robert Easterling recalls that soon before receiving orders to Boulder City, his platoon had received its beer ration. He states, "We had just got it in the creek, sat it in the cold water. They called us and said stand by to fall out, light marching pack and a small supply of ammo. We had to leave all that beer…made somebody happy."[86] Others would not be so happy. James Everson, a sergeant with George Company's machine gun section had heard the

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[82] Command Diary, 1st Battalion 5th Marines, July 1953; Command Diary, 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, July 1953; Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953.
[83] Pat Meid & James Yingling, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea Volume V*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pg. 364-365; Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[84] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, July 1953.
[85] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[86] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.

rumors about what was happening at the front and had a grim premonition of what was to come when he noticed that "the regimental chaplain was there to give us general absolution. Now we had good reason to be nervous."[87] Upon arrival on Boulder City, Claude Wirt noticed that the Marines being replaced were shell shocked, stating that "just any little thing they would jump."[88] The Marines of 3/7 had good reason to be jumpy after what they had recently endured. Wirt and his fellow Marines of George Company 3/1 would soon know for themselves why the 3/7 Marines behaved this way.

The outpost on Boulder City consisted primarily of a trench that had been cut into the hillside below the crest. The Marines had individual fighting positions carved into this trench. The only overhead protection that was provided was in two locations on the reverse slope. Here were the company command post and aid bunkers. During the following nights, the aid bunker would exceed its maximum capacity.

To the northeast was Hill 111, now occupied by How Company, 3/1. Further to the northeast was the Hook, a hill bitterly fought over by George Company several months earlier. To the north was a few hundred yards of low ground that had been partially flooded by recent heavy rains. To the west were positions occupied by elements of the 1st, 7th, and 5th Marine Regiments. Boulder

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[87] Jim Byrne & Gerard Pendas Jr., eds., *Bloody George, Vol. 4, Western Front Korea, 1952-53*, (George 3/1 Association, 1991), pg 32.
[88] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.

City, together with these positions and Hill 111, formed a mutually supportive defensive arrangement.

This arrangement did, however, have a weakness that would be exploited during the Chinese attack. This was the result of the Chinese capture and occupation of outposts Berlin and East Berlin, which lay directly to the north. From these captured outposts, the Chinese massed forces and attacked along two primary avenues of approach. One would be directed against the western flank of Boulder City while the other would attack the eastern flank.

In addition to these weaknesses, there was another section of the hill that presented a constant danger to the Marines. On the forward slope facing the Chinese position was a section where solid rock prevented a trench from being dug. This section had been nicknamed “76 Alley” because the Chinese had registered a 76mm recoilless rifle on this location and were constantly on watch for anyone attempting to cross. Lieutenant Robert Werckle, a platoon commander in George Company, would learn the accuracy of this weapon as he tried to sprint across this area on his way to the company command post on the 23rd.

Although wounded, Werckle faired much better than his fellow officers of George Company. This early injury would take him out of action before the main battle.[89] Some of these officers would have an extremely short tenure with George Company. Lieutenant Robert Herlihy, who had joined George Company

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[89] Unit Diary # 143-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 24 July 1953; Unit Diary # 148-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 30 July 1953.

on July 11th, would be killed on Boulder City only two weeks later.[90] Another platoon commander, Lieutenant John Leonhart, would be among the first killed on Boulder City, while trying to repair a damaged mortar tube.[91] Leonhart had joined George Company only days before Herlihy.[92] In addition to Werckle, Herlihy, and Leonhart, George Company's commanding and executive officers would be wounded and Lieutenant Robert Flieschner would be wounded twice during the action on Boulder City.[93]

From the initial Marine occupation of Boulder City by 3/7, those in command would quickly be taken out of commission. The first would be the company commander of George Company 3/7, Captain Hall. When Hall was wounded on the morning of the 23rd, command would pass briefly to Hall's executive officer and then, by way of seniority, to First Lieutenant Oral Swigart, the company commander of George Company 3/1. Early during the initial assault, Swigart was rendered temporarily unconscious by an artillery round which landed close to his position.[94]

Following Swigart was Captain Louis Sartor, the Commanding Officer of Item Company, 3/1, which reinforced George Company shortly after midnight on

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[90] Unit Diary # 135-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 11 July 1953; Unit Diary # 145-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 26 July 1953.
[91] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 2.
[92] Unit Diary # 134-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 8 July 1953, Unit Diary # 144-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 25 July 1953.
[93] Unit Diary # 144-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 25 July 1953; Unit Diary # 146-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 27 July 1953; Unit Diary # 147-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 28 July 1953.
[94] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 1; Navy Cross Citation, First Lieutenant Oral R. Swigart Jr., Board of Awards: Serial 460 (August 3, 1954).

the morning of the 25th.[95] Before reinforcing George Company on Boulder City, Sartor's Item Company had suffered heavy casualties when the Chinese intercepted a radio message and concentrated artillery and mortar fires on the approaches to Boulder City.[96] Captain Sartor, too, would be wounded by artillery on Boulder City.

At 1100 on the 25th, Major Thurston, the Operations Officer for 3/1, assumed command of Boulder City and "commenced reorganization of George and Item companies, into (4) platoons."[97] Major Thurston would suffer an amputation of his right arm and command of the hill would then pass to Major John Canton, the battalion Intelligence Officer. Canton would be in command of Boulder City when the final Chinese assault was repulsed. At this time, Canton was wounded and command of Boulder City passed to the Commanding Officer of Dog Company, 2nd Battalion 7th Marines, which had been placed under the operational control of 3/1 in order to reinforce Boulder City. Dog Company would oversee the hill for the final hours of the war.

The Chinese artillery raining down on Boulder City was relentless and caused a large number of the company's casualties. John Comp recalls that "Boulder City was just like the end of the world happened."[98] The 1st Marine Regiment later noted that Chinese artillery began impacting Boulder City at 0900 on the 24th. This sporadic fire would increase to a rate of 3 to 5 rounds per

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[95] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953, pg 7.
[96] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marine, July 1953, pg 6.
[97] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953, pg 7.
[98] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.

minute by 1030 and "By 1500, it became apparent that the enemy was registering mortars and arty of all calibers on Hill 119, and that an attack that night was imminent."[99] Chinese artillery continued shelling Boulder City well into the evening and also targeted the protective barbed wire around the outpost. Soon thereafter, Chinese ground forces were seen massing for an attack and by "1915 [artillery] was falling on the position at an estimated rate of 5 to 10 [rounds] per minute."[100]

The Chinese ground assault began at 2050 with a diversionary attack against Hill 111, while a company sized element attacked the western flank of Boulder City.[101] During this time on the western flank, an artillery round killed Private Herbert Bazley and wounded Robert Easterling. A piece of shrapnel tore through Bazley's neck, killing him instantly and penetrating Easterling's skin under his flak jacket. He remarked that, "If I hadn't had that on it [would have] probably went plum through me" but that "it was too hot to leave, they were everywhere"[102] John Comp recalls the relentlessness of the combined infantry and artillery assault, stating that,

> When they started bombarding us…they don't let up and charge, they charge while they're bombarding…we were told that you had to start firing, just hold down a minute and get up and start firing even if the shells were coming in, because they were coming.[103]

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[99] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 2.
[100] Ibid.
[101] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 2.
[102] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[103] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.

Although this attack would be briefly repulsed with the assistance of tanks and mortars positioned on Boulder City, it would be costly to the defenders and would be followed almost immediately by an attack twice its size. During this initial attack, Lieutenant Leonhart was among those killed and "four machine guns and two 60mm Mortars were knocked out of action."[104] The loss of these weapons in the defense of the hill would be costly in the coming moments.

At 2100 the Chinese attacked with renewed intensity against the western flank of the position. Easterling describes the chaos of this attack, in which he was wounded again:

> Rounds going off everywhere. Machine guns going off, burp guns, browning automatics, grenades….I'm sure our artillery got as many of them as they could carry back. I got it with a burp gun, face, hands, shoulder. It was pretty thick around there then. They were all over the hillside. But somebody held on.[105]

The 1st Marine Regiment report on Boulder City states that during this renewed attack Easterling's squad "held its position in the line until it was completely annihilated by a numerically far superior enemy force."[106]

Elsewhere on the hill, similar situations were being presented to the Marines of George Company. The Chinese infantry had penetrated several portions of the trench line and as the Marines "manned their fighting positions, they had no way of knowing if they were fighting alone or if the line was holding. The battle was now between two or three Marines and small bands of Chinese

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[104] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 2.
[105] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[106] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 3.

soldiers."[107] Claude Wirt explains that during this period, control of the trench became a back-and-forth exchange: "Finally they overrun us…we'd take it back…they'd overrun us…them was good brave soldiers there."[108] Recalling the action for which he would later receive the Silver Star, Wirt says,

> Me and Sergeant Butler was going back, they said they had broken through the lines over there…we started back through there, kinda like a little tunnel and we started back through there and just hit everything up that come through….Everything that we met. We went over there to get a friend of ours, and everything we came in contact with on the way over there we dropped them….Some of them had even gotten behind us, they had run clean over us….I didn't really know I was shot for a long time. It was almost day when I found out I was shot. There was blood everywhere, but I couldn't figure out where it was coming from. My boot, every time I walked…sounded like I had gotten in some water…that's when I found out I had a hole in my leg.[109]

Richard Johnson, a member of a .30 caliber machine gun team, remembered that in this situation "We couldn't go any place, so we made up our minds that we would either hold or die. I guess we all figured we would die. I know I wasn't scared anymore."[110] One member of Johnson's three man machine gun team would be killed during the night while he, Carl "Dutch" Bartholomew, and Hospitalman Third Class Joseph Binic would be among the last Americans taken as prisoners of war. Although all would later be repatriated, Bartholomew and Johnson had both been seriously wounded by grenades before they were captured. Still, this could have been much worse for these men:

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[107] Jim Byrne & Gerard Pendas Jr., eds., *Bloody George, Vol. 4, Western Front Korea, 1952-53*, (George 3/1 Association, 1991), pg 34.
[108] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[109] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.
[110] Jim Byrne & Gerard Pendas Jr., eds., *Bloody George, Vol. 4, Western Front Korea, 1952-53*, (George 3/1 Association, 1991), pg 36.

Johnson remembers that a Chinese officer prevented him from being executed upon his capture.[111]

Some of the men would fight with other Marines by their side while others would be alone. Unaware of who now held the hill, Easterling explains, after he was wounded the second time

> I passed out for a while, for an hour or two and quit bleeding. After a while it got daylight and there wasn't anybody around and I started crawling back towards the 5th Marines. Bayonet is all I had left…I had been shot through the mouth, through the neck, through the shoulder and hands, and I had a hard time crawling…And I wanted a drink of water awful bad.[112]

Easterling would get a drink of water, but only after crawling nearly half a mile to a known friendly position. This trek would take him through, among other things, a minefield in the uncontrolled no man's land. He would eventually be spotted by a Marine machine gun team that would provide supporting fire to the lone Marine. After he got within a short distance of this position, Marines came out with a stretcher and he was promptly taken off the battlefield.

The first night of this battle was a costly one for American and Chinese infantrymen alike but the fighting would continue until early morning on the 27th. As stated by the 1st Marine Regiment's report, it was a dire situation for the remaining George Company Marines:

> By midnight, the forward portion, and left and right flanks of the perimeter had been pushed back to the reverse slope of the hill by the enemy who gained the high ground by constant influx of reinforcements from

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[111] Ibid.
[112] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.

> "BERLIN" and "EAST BERLIN." Only a never-say-die resistance was keeping the enemy from seizing the remainder of the position.[113]

Captain Sartor's Item Company arrived to reinforce George Company shortly before 0100 on the 25th. This brought some help to the beleaguered Marines, but Item Company had itself suffered 35 casualties, killed and wounded, on its approach.[114]

Given the severity of the action on Boulder City, 3/7, which still had operational control of the area, drafted an order at 0300 on the 25th to counterattack.[115] The objective was to attack and seize Berlin and East Berlin. This order was a refreshed version of a counterattack order that had been published on 20 July and, like the previous order, it was not executed. Higher headquarters realized that by this point in the war, these actions had reached the point of diminished returns. The human toll that would have to be paid for such an attack would be too much for too little. So, it was accepted that, as Lieutenant Swigart had earlier told his Marines, others accepted that "Gentlemen, we have been ordered to reinforce Boulder City and hold it at all costs."[116]

Doing so would exact a horrible toll. The casualty figures for 3rd Battalion 1st Marines for July 1953 are a testament to the brutality of this battle and of the final month of the war. In total, the battalion had 58 killed in action (KIA), and an

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[113] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 4.
[114] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 3-4.
[115] Operation Order 24-53, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, 25 July 1953.
[116] Jim Byrne & Gerard Pendas Jr., eds., *Bloody George, Vol. 4, Western Front Korea, 1952-53*, (George 3/1 Association, 1991), pg 36.

additional 3 who died of wounds (DOW).[117] The casualties of this battalion in the final month of the war stand in stark contrast to those of other battalions in the 1st Marine Regiment. The 1st Marine Regiment Medical Summary shows that of the 594 total battle casualties sustained throughout the regiment during the month, 506 were from 3rd Battalion.[118] This record illustrates that 3rd Battalion had a total of 444 wounded in action (WIA), with 339 of those requiring evacuation. Comparatively, 2nd Battalion had 7 Marines KIA and 61 evacuated while 1st Battalion totals were 1 KIA and 3 evacuated.

A greater testament to the brutality of Boulder City is the toll of Marines of 3rd Battalion killed in July 1953, 36 were from George Company during 24-26 July, most on the first night of the battle. These 36 died during the main attack on the outpost but the total number of George Company Marines killed on Boulder City was 37. Private First Class Timothy Gilmore was killed shortly after his arrival on the outpost on 23 July.[119] George Company's Unit Diary shows that on the first night alone there were 62 Marines known to be wounded.[120] The company, which began the day with 209 Marines on its rolls, had 30% of its force incapacitated in the first few hours. As George Company departed Boulder City on the 26th, they did so "having suffered approximately 50% casualties during their stay on Hill 119."[121]

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[117] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, July, 1953, pg 2.
[118] Command Diary Medical Summary, 1st Marine Regiment, July, 1953.
[119] Unit Diary # 143-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 24 July 1953.
[120] Unit Diary # 144-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 25 July 1953.
[121] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953, pg 6.

When George Company departed Boulder City, the Marines did not stay away long. As of 27 July, there remained 24 Marines of the company missing in action (MIA) or otherwise unaccounted for.[122] George Company would return to find these men. John Comp remembers in painful detail that after the Armistice went into effect,

> That night we just slept up on the hill and then the next morning we went over to Boulder City and we went and looked, dug up any bodies that we could. You could tell because it was July, it was hot. The stench was unbearable. And the Chinese were there and they were taking their bodies off also. I went up there, and one of my good buddies, he was killed. It's pretty tough when you see that.[123]

Despite the best efforts of the Marines to locate their fallen comrades, not all of the Marines would be found. The repatriation of some would take years to accomplish. Of those killed on the western flank of Boulder City the Marine Corps would ultimately find, identify, and return their remains Edward Anderson, Joaquin Armenta, Herbert Bazley, Theodore Binette, Harlan Cockerham, John Cupryna, and Eugene Dodge.[124] Others, however, have yet to be located. The remains of Robert Barnhart, Edward Boglin, James Cook, George Debaun, and Paul Dixon still remain unaccounted for. A year after Boulder City they were presumed dead and in January 1956 an investigative board of officers found their

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[122] Unit Diary # 146-53, George Company 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 27 July 1953.
[123] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[124] USMC Casualty Reports: Edward Anderson, Joaquin Armenta, Herbert Bazley, Theodore Binette, Harlan Cockerham, John Cupryna, Eugene Dodge.

remains to be unrecoverable.[125] For these men, the battle of Boulder City has yet to end.[126]

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[125] USMC Casualty Reports: Robert Barnhart, Edward Boglin, James Cook, George Debaun, Paul Dixon.
[126] The Department of Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) maintains data on all US service members that are unaccounted for and conducts recovery missions when evidence suggests possible recovery. In 2011, DPMO recovered and identified 89 service members, including 39 from the Korean War. In addition to the George Company Marines that remain unaccounted for from Boulder City, two additional Marines, James Gilchrist and Carl Linquist, remain missing from the same action on nearby Hill 111.

CHAPTER 5
OPERATIONAL

Although July 1953 would ultimately be a horrific month in terms of casualties for the 1st Marine Division, it did not begin that way. With the exception of the artillery regiment, 11th Marines, the division had spent nearly two months in Corps Reserve where many of the Marines "thought we were finished in Korea."[127] Given the atmosphere of life in Corps Reserve, the Marines had good reason to think that the war was coming to an end. This atmosphere was punctuated by celebrations of Independence Day. The Marines spent the day having field meets, playing baseball, and hosting drill competitions and some were able to drink their beer ration.[128] These celebrations would prove to be short lived. Within a matter of days, elements of the division were headed back to the front following the loss of several positions previously held by the Marines. These losses necessitated the return of the division to the combat zone, where it would remain until the war ended.

Preceding the fight for Boulder City, the area had been heavily contested by UN and Chinese forces. Two months earlier in this same area, the 1st Marine Division had been relieved by the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Division, which was supported by the Turkish Armed Forces Command (TAFC). In the time that the 25th Division had controlled this sector of the MLR, it had seen heavy fighting and

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[127] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[128] Command Diary, 1st Battalion 5th Marines, July 1953; Command Diary, 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, July 1953; Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953.

a number of critical outposts had passed to Chinese control. Marine historians Pat Meid and James Yingling note that

> No one needed to remind the 1st Marine Division that the territory it was moving back into was not the same—with respect to defense posts in the right regimental sector—that it had left two months earlier. Three of its six outposts there (Carson, Elko, Vegas) had fallen to the enemy in the late May battle, despite formidable resistance of the defending Turks. Outpost Ava remained at the far western end of the line, with the Berlin-East Berlin complex in the right battalion area. Some 6,750 yards of intervening MLR—more than four miles—lay in between, bereft of any protective outposts to screen and alert the defending line companies to sudden enemy assaults. The Marines were thus returning to a main line of resistance considerably weakened in its right regimental sector.[129]

The operational situation that the 1st Marine Division was entering in this sector of the MLR was indeed dire. As elements of the division returned to the MLR from Corps Reserve in early July, they did so knowing that recent Chinese victories had bolstered the enemy's morale. The capture of these critical outposts made even more dangerous the Chinese capability to launch large and effective limited objective attacks. The intelligence estimate for the 7th Marines, the regiment that would occupy the severely weakened right sector, states that "enemy combat efficiency is considered excellent. Morale is good….Maximum utilization is made of all aspects of terrain appreciation."[130] There was little doubt among the Marines returning to the line that the Chinese would seek to capitalize on these recent gains.

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[129] Pat Meid & James Yingling, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea Volume V*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pg. 364-365.
[130] Appendix 1 to Annex Able to Operation Plan 37, Intelligence Estimate, 7th Marine Regiment, 3 July 1953.

They would do so first in a coordinated effort against two small platoon sized positions, Berlin and East Berlin. Together, these outposts formed what was known as the Berlin Gate. The attack on the Berlin outposts commenced as 2/7 was relieving the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the TAFC. The 2/7 battalion commander would later note that initially "we were in great shape with both Marines and Turks fighting side by side in some instances."[131] From 7-9 July, the Chinese would launch repeated attacks of company and battalion strength against these outposts and eventually gained control of East Berlin. Multiple reinforcements were sent to Berlin and a counter attack was initiated to dislodge the Chinese on East Berlin.[132] The three days of fighting over these positions took a heavy toll on both forces. The 7th Marines estimated that the Chinese lost 200 soldiers KIA during the fighting of 8-9 July and that "friendly casualties were nine KIAs, 126 WIA-E, 14 WIA-NE, and 12 MIAs."[133] This was a brutal fight in which the full use of the Regimental Reserve was required. In the chronology of events for the month, 3/7 notes that at one point "Practically the entire battalion, including all but essential personnel from Headquarters and Service Company, was committed on the MLR between 7-10 July to reinforce the 2nd Battalion (Reinf), 7th Marines."[134]

In light of the casualties sustained by 2/7 in defending the Berlin outposts, 3/7 assumed responsibility for their defense. After a lull in fighting, the Chinese

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[131] Colonel Alexander D Cereghino ltr to Dir, MCHist, HQMC, 19 June 1970.
[132] Command Diary, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, July 1953, pgs 3-5.
[133] Command Diary, 7th Marine Regiment, July 1953, pg 3.
[134] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, July 1953, pg 1.

attacked Berlin and East Berlin with renewed intensity. The 3/7 Command Diary states that

> During the period of 14-19 July the enemy situation can be classified as quiet….On the night of 19 July, however, the situation changed radically. After slowly building up his forces during the preceding weeks, the enemy launched a very heavy attack on COP's EAST BERLIN and BERLIN. It is estimated, conservatively, that the enemy employed one (1) reinforced battalion to make the assault and another to hold the ground that he had captured. COP's EAST BERLIN and BERLIN were lost at 0146, 20 July 1953.[135]

The two positions were defended by Marines from Item Company 3/7, with 37 on East Berlin and 44 on Berlin.[136] These small elements would bear the force of a reinforced Chinese battalion and would suffer greatly. Although reinforcements would be sent to assist the beleaguered outposts, it would be to no avail. The 3/7 casualty toll for defending the Berlins would ultimately be "six KIAs, 86 WIA-E, 32 WIA-NE, and 56 MIAs."[137]

The commitment of such an overwhelming force to capture these positions illustrated their operational importance to the Chinese. For the Marines, the loss of Berlin and East Berlin were seen to signal Chinese intentions because these positions provided a logical point from which to launch additional attacks. Given the situation presented with the loss of the Berlins, "it now appeared that the Chinese might continue their thrust and attempt to seize Hill 119 (directly south of

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[135] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, July 1953, pgs 1-2.
[136] Pat Meid & James Yingling, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea Volume V*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pg. 377.
[137] Command Diary, 7th Marine Regiment, July 1953, pg 4; Of the 56 3/7 Marines reported missing as a result of fighting for control of Berlin and East Berlin, 22 remain unaccounted for today. Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, Report for United States Marine Corps UnAccounted For, 28 October 2011.

Berlin and East Berlin)."[138] The loss of these positions provided a grim premonition of what would occur days later on Boulder City.

The Chinese tactics used to capture these outposts were identical to those used against 3/1 on Boulder City. The attacks began with a massive artillery bombardment followed by waves of infantry attacking en masse. However, the tactics used to defend Boulder City were significantly different than those used for the Berlins. Borrowing from the nearby British Commonwealth Division, the linear defense that had been previously utilized was scrapped in favor of a defense in depth. With this, units occupied positions that were mutually supportive so that greater resistance could be applied against an attack.

As the reorganization of the defense was in progress, the loss of the Berlins was written off by commanders of the 1st Marine Division and I Corps. An operation order had been drafted by 3rd Battalion 7th Marines to retake the Berlin outposts recently lost to the Chinese. This attack, however, "was cancelled pursuant to orders received from higher authority."[139] The I Corps commander, General Bruce Clarke, would later justify this order by stating, "holding poor real estate for sentimental reasons is a poor excuse for undue casualties."[140]

The task organization outlined for this counterattack shows that the attack was to be conducted primarily by two rifle companies from 2/7 which were under the control of 3/7. Easy and Dog Companies from 2/7 were tasked with attacking

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[138] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 1.
[139] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, July, 1953, pg 2.
[140] General Bruce C. Clarke, USA, ltr to Dir, MCHist, HQMC, 20 May 1970.

in column in order to seize and defend the Berlin and East Berlin outposts respectively.[141] Once the decision had been made not to retake the lost Berlin outposts, the new mission outlined for 3/7, minus its George Company, was to "withdraws left flank as directed, assumes operational control of Dog and Easy Company, 7th Marines and defends COP Boulder City with Dog Company."[142] Now that the Berlin Gate previously controlled by the Berlin and East Berlin outposts had been compromised, the defense of Boulder City became of utmost importance. Boulder City was now the key defensive position and it was to be held at all costs.

The next operational plan drafted by 3/7 on 23 July reflected the change of Divisional Reserve. The 7th Marines would be relieved in place by 1st Marines, and the 7th Marine Regiment would assume "missions of the Division Reserve Regiment," which included security of the Libby Bridge, for which George Company 3/7 would be responsible.[143] This plan made a significant assumption that the "tactical situation remains relatively unchanged" but that assumption proved to be false.[144] As 3/7's monthly Command Diary states, "After a three day lull, the CCF resumed their heavy attacks upon the 3d Battalion (Reinf) sector on the night of 24 July. The attacks were directed against the BERLIN COMPLEX (Hill #119) and Hill #111."[145]

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[141] Operation Order 20-53, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, 20 July 1953.
[142] Operation Order 21-53, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, 21 July 1953.
[143] Operation Order 22-53, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, 23 July 1953.
[144] Operation Order 22-53, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, 23 July 1953.
[145] Command Diary, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, July, 1953, pg2.

The 3/7 operation order for the 23rd laid out the timeline for the relief of positions under the control of the battalion. With regard to Boulder City, George Company 3/7 was to be relieved by George Company 3/1 no later than 0430 on the 24th.[146] Of significant note in this order was the comment made regarding transfer of control of these positions. In the coordinating instructions, the order stated, "Command of Company sectors will change when major portion of incoming unit is in position and when mutually agreeable between unit commanders."[147]

Evidence suggests that the relief of Boulder City had been completed well ahead of the established timeline.[148] This is significant because it explains the series of events which resulted in George Company 3/1 bearing the brunt of the Chinese attack instead of George Company 3/7. By the time of this attack, George Company 3/1 had occupied Boulder City while George Company 3/7 began to assume responsibility for guarding the Libby Bridge. This series of events forever changed the course of life for hundreds of Marines. For the men of George Company 3/7, it meant that their war was effectively over and that they would spend the final days of the Korean War in Division Reserve. However, for the men of George Company 3/1, it meant that they would have to fight for their lives to see the war's end.

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[146] Operation Order 22-53, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, 23 July 1953.
[147] Operation Order 22-53, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, 23 July 1953.
[148] 1st Marine Regiment, Special Action Report (SAR) "Berlins" 8 August 1953, pg 2.

The fact that it was George Company 3/1 occupying Boulder City on the evening of the 24th was the result of calculated actions on the part of the 3/1's battalion leadership that were in concert with standard operating procedures for conducting a relief. In advance of the 1st Marines Regimental Order 19-53, the leadership of 3/1 had already began executing their assigned task of relieving 3/7.[149] Before the order was officially published on the 22nd, the reconnaissance party from 3/1 departed on the 21st from their camp in Division Reserve and proceeded to the 3/7 Command Post in order to begin the relief in place.[150] All of the battalion's companies sent an advance party, and this first echelon of relief consisted of 1 officer and 15 enlisted Marines from George Company.[151] George Company's initial reconnaissance party was followed the next day by an additional 1 officer and 49 enlisted on the 22nd, with the remainder of the company following on the 23rd.[152] As a company, George Company 3/1 came under the operational control of 3/7 at 1945 and assumed responsibility for Boulder City at 2145 on the 23rd.[153]

The task of guiding the Marines of 3/1 to their new positions fell to First Lieutenant Richard "Dick" Guidera. Lieutenant Guidera had a reputation as a seasoned combat officer and was one of the most respected officers in the battalion. Since arriving in Korea in November 1952, Guidera had spent most of

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[149] Command Diary, 1st Marine Regiment, July 1953, pg 6; Operation Order 19-53, 1st Marine Regiment, 22 July 1953; Operation Order 19-53 Change 1, 1st Marine Regiment, 22 July 1953.
[150] Command Diary, 1st Marine Regiment, July 1953, pg 6; Command Diary, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, July 1953, pg4.
[151] Command Diary, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, July 1953, pg4.
[152] Command Diary, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, July 1953, pg5.
[153] Ibid.

his time commanding George Company's 3rd platoon. In April of 1953, he became George Company's Executive Officer and had briefly commanded George Company until 8 July, when he was replaced by First Lieutenant Oral Swigart.[154] After relinquishing command of the company, Guidera was transferred to Headquarters and Service Company, where he was placed as the chief instructor responsible for training all replacement personnel for 3/1.[155]

Guidera had been chosen to lead the advance elements into position because he had spent a considerable amount of time in this area and was familiar with the landscape.[156] Guidera, like many of the veterans of George Company, had conducted combat operations in this area. For many, the outposts in the immediate area were of bitter significance to them. Guidera was no exception. He had lost Marines whom he considered friends while defending these positions.

Among these was Guidera's platoon sergeant and close personal friend, Technical Sergeant Walter Borawski. Borawski died in January 1953 from wounds received in a nighttime raid for which he would be posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.[157] The two had formed a friendship while training in Camp Pendleton and that night Guidera helped carry his friend to Hill 111, where he would die. This part of the Main Line of Resistance already held bitter

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[154] Unit Diary # 134-53, George Company, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, 8 July 1953.
[155] Unit Diary # 142-53, Headquarters and Service Company, 3d Battalion 1st Marines, 9 July 1953; Battalion Training Order 32-53, 3d Battalion 1st Marines, July 1953.
[156] Jim Byrne & Gerard Pendas Jr., eds., *Bloody George, Vol. 4, Western Front Korea, 1952-53*, (George 3/1 Association, 1991), pg31.
[157] Ibid, pg 22.

memories for Guidera and more would form as a result of what transpired on Boulder City.

Lieutenant Guidera's reputation and experience earned him the honor of being the 1st Marine Division's representative at the signing of the Armistice at Panmunjom. The event was one of high emotion for Guidera, who recalls that,

> The ceremonial detail, which was originally an honor for me, nearly had tragic consequences. I was one of three fully armed and loaded men from our side who were allowed inside the Peace Pagoda when Nam Il, the number two man in North Korea, walked in to sign the truce. I literally fought myself from walking right up to him and shooting him for the hurt and death he and his side had caused on both sides within the last two days. Frankly, I was not a good choice to be armed and inside the Peace Pagoda with a man, a signatory to the Armistice, who I truly wanted to kill.[158]

Having spent the previous nine months fighting alongside the Marines of George Company and knowing what they had endured on Boulder City, Guidera wanted to end the war in their company. With the official end of the war still hours away, Guidera returned immediately to the 3/1 area because "I wanted to be with my Marines when it ended."[159] He made it in time to spend the final minutes of the war with them. A photo captured by *Life* photographer Michael Rougier shows a grinning Guidera with just 45 minutes left in the war.[160]

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[158] Jim Byrne & Gerard Pendas Jr., eds., *Bloody George, Vol. 4, Western Front Korea, 1952-53*, (George 3/1 Association, 1991), pg 41.
[159] Ibid, pg 41.
[160] Rougier, Michael and Miki, Jun, "How the Truce Came to Korea," *Life*, Vol.35, No.6, 10 August 1953, pg 16.

CHAPTER 6
STRATEGIC

Because the strategic level of war deals with political objectives, understanding the strategic context of this action requires appreciation of a myriad of political factors concerning the Korean War belligerents. Comprehension of these interrelated issues will demonstrate that the action at Boulder City was not coincidental. In fact, understanding these issues will not only illuminate the reasoning behind combat operations in the final days and weeks of the of the Korean War, but it will also illustrate that the way the Korean War ended was the direct result of strategic reasoning.

It must first be accepted that, from a strategic perspective, the Korean War had been in the process of ending for several months before the Armistice was signed on 27 July 1953. The fact that the war had stalemated on the ground through military means provided additional motivation for political leaders to find a political solution. As such, a number of strategic factors point to the fact that all belligerents had grown weary of war and were eager to find an honorable exit from the conflict.

Chronologically, the first strategic issue to be considered is the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower as President of the United States. Eisenhower's presidential campaign included the promise that he would extricate the US from the Korean War.[161] Early in Eisenhower's administration, finding a way out of

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[161] Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953*, (New York, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008), pg. 325-349.

Korea became of the utmost priority to the point that the administration seriously considered the use of nuclear weapons.[162] This was not the first such suggestion. The realities of a stalemated conflict had prompted military leaders to suggest the use of these weapons in October 1952, although that course of action had been prohibited by the Truman administration.[163]

The threat of expanding the war to include the possible use of nuclear weapons prompted all parties concerned to reevaluate their participation in the conflict. Expansion of the war, which would likely draw in the Soviet Union, was unacceptable on all fronts. Preventing such an expansion and ending the war was of the utmost priority. However, as Eisenhower sought to disentangle the United States from the war, he stressed that it must not be done haphazardly. Over the coming months his administration would seek a political solution that satisfied not only the communists but also the US public and leadership.

The political atmosphere surrounding US involvement in Korea had changed significantly since the war began in 1950. The Eisenhower administration recognized that faltering public support for the war would require change in the way in which negotiations were conducted. The American public was simply tired of the war and was ready to move on. As noted by Stephen Casey, "polls demonstrated that a plurality of 48 percent would consider a truce

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[162] United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Vol. XV, Korea,* part 1, pg 839.
[163] Barton J. Bernstein, "New Light on the Korean War," *The International History Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Apr. 1981), pp 256-277.

along the present battle line to be a success, while 69 percent now approved of an armistice that left Korea divided."[164]

Demonstrating the disconnect between the American and Chinese governments present at the time, it must be noted that as the Eisenhower administration discussed how to bring about the end of the war without expansion a radically different interpretation of his election was held by Chinese officials. The Chinese government saw Eisenhower's election as a signal of a pending escalation.

In particular, Eisenhower's command of the amphibious campaign at Normandy during World War II was of great concern to Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung. This fact, coupled with the success of the Inchon landing in 1950, played a key role in how the Chinese viewed their defense. Eisenhower's trip to Korea as the President-elect in December 1952 suggested to the Chinese that "the visit of Eisenhower with his top military advisors, including the new secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, could be a prelude to a full-scale offensive."[165] Soon, Mao Tse-tung sent a telegram to his commanders warning them to prepare for defense because "the enemy has already decided and is actively preparing to take amphibious

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[164] Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953*, pg. 355.
[165] Yang Dezhi, *Weile Heping* [For the sake of peace], (Beijing: Long March Press, 1987), pg. 173. From: Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 234.

attack."[166] Although such an operation never materialized, these commanders prepared for it as if it was inevitable.

Another strategic factor that is of great significance is the death of Josef Stalin on 5 March 1953. Stalin had been a driving force in escalation of hostilities on the peninsula. His role in exacerbating the conflict cannot be overstated, although the full extent of his involvement was not known at the time. A communiqué between Stalin and Mao illustrates this involvement and demonstrates that Stalin sought to conduct a proxy war with the United States in the hope of being better prepared for future conflict. According to Stalin, a military engagement against the US without direct involvement of Soviet ground combat forces "gives the possibility to the Chinese troops to study contemporary warfare on the field of battle and in the second place shakes up the Truman regime in America and harms the military prestige of the Anglo-American troops."[167]

The role of Josef Stalin in exacerbating the Korean War in the interests of Soviet foreign policy is cited by some Cold War historians who say that Stalin favored a protracted war in Korea in order to divert American attention from Europe. As noted by John Gaddis, the death of Stalin left his successors to deal with the strain of supporting Soviet foreign policy in Korea. However, with Stalin dead, they were no longer obliged to heed his insistence on further support of the war. By describing the dominating role for Stalin in this conflict, Gaddis suggests

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[166] Telegram, Mao to Deng Hua, December 9, 1952, Mao's Manuscripts, 3:632. From: Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 235.
[167] Stalin to Mao, June 5, 1951, Cold War International History Project Bulletin, #6-7, (Winter, 1995/96), 59. From: John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2005), pg. 60.

that the Chinese and North Koreans were waging war reluctantly by this time. He writes that, "Exhausted by the war, the Chinese and North Koreans were ready to end it all by the fall of 1952, but Stalin insisted that they continue fighting. Only after Stalin's death did his successors approve a cease-fire."[168]

The problem which Stalin's successors now faced was a result of the Soviet Union advising, training, and equipping forces in Korea with modern technologies such as the MiG-15 fighter aircraft. As illustrated by Matthew Aid, this support, particularly the support of Chinese air forces, placed a significant strain on the Soviets in the closing months of the war. By examining the role of American communications intelligence, specifically signals intelligence (SIGINT) during the Korean War, Aid shows how the air war became asymmetrical, with the US dominating the skies over North Korea. The data he provides are useful when examined in context of Soviet support for the war. Aid notes that as advances were made in American SIGINT capability "Between October 1952 and July 1953, American fighters shot down 345 MiG-15 fighters for the loss of only 18 F-86 Sabre jets…during the months of May and June 1953…133 MiG-15s were shot down for the loss of only one American F-86 Sabre fighter."[169]

This account, although it does not deal directly with the ground combat operations leading up to the Armistice, provides a means to interpret post-Stalin Soviet perceptions of the war. The loss of these Soviet aircraft that Aid describes

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[168] John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2005), pg. 60
[169] Matthew M Aid, "American Comint in the Korean War (Part II): From the Chinese Intervention to the Armistice," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Spring 2000), pp 14-49.

does not, by itself, signify that the end of the war was near. However, the loss of these valuable technological assets in such staggering numbers likely weighed heavily on Soviet policymakers, providing the needed justification for the Soviet Union to extricate itself from the war.

Another strategic factor that must be considered is the fact that a protracted, immobile, positional war is not the type of conflict that Chinese leaders thought to be in their best interests. This had been a concern of the Chinese prior to their entrance in the war in 1950, as illustrated by a telegram from Mao to Stalin in which Mao states, "The most unfavorable situation, we hold, would result from the inability of the Chinese troops to annihilate American troops in Korea and the involvement of the two countries' troops in a stalemate."[170] The attrition intensive trench warfare being fought in Korea was inconsistent with Chinese military doctrine because the belief was that

> Our strategy should be to employ our main forces to operate over an extended and fluid front. To achieve success, the Chinese troops must conduct their warfare with a high degree of mobility on extensive battlefields, making swift advances and withdrawals, swift concentrations and dispersals. This means large-scale mobile warfare, and not positional warfare depending exclusively on defense works with deep trenches, high fortresses, and successive rows of defensive positions.[171]

Despite the stated preference of Chinese military doctrine, an immobile, positional war had been in effect for some time, largely because "Early in 1951, the United States shifted its political objective from retaking North Korea to

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[170] Mao Telegram to Stalin re the Decision to Send Troops to Korea 2 October 1950.
[171] Mao Tse-tung, "On Protracted War" (May 1938), *Selected Works II,* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), pg 119-120.

inflicting enough pain upon the communist forces to bring them to the negotiating table."[172] In turn, this transformed the dominant method of warfare in Korea from a maneuver intensive to an attrition intensive war. As attrition became the dominant method of warfare, it created an imbalance between the technological advantages of the United Nations forces and the manpower availability of the Chinese. What ensued from this imbalance was a situation in which success of military engagements became measured in terms of numbers killed.

It should be noted that observation of Chinese ground combat operations illustrates that, despite transition to an immobile war, the Chinese effectively incorporated remaining aspects of their doctrine into how they fought in Korea. Examples of operations during their early involvement in the war in comparison with those of the final month of the war illustrate that their tactics for achieving success were one and the same. Comparison of large scale operations such as the Chosin Reservoir campaign in 1950 to Chinese combat operations conducted in July 1953 illustrate that their aim was to

> In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force (two, three, four, and sometimes five or six times the enemy's strength), encircle the enemy forces completely, strive to wipe them out thoroughly, and do not let any escape from the net. In special circumstances, use the method of dealing crushing blows to the enemy, that is, concentrate all our strength to make a frontal attack and also to attack one or both of his flanks, with the aim of wiping out one part and routing another so that our army can swiftly move its troops to smash other enemy forces. Strive to avoid battles of attrition in which we lose more than we gain or only break even. In this way, although we are inferior as a whole…we are absolutely superior in every

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[172] Scott Sigmund Gartner & Marissa Edson Myers, "Body Counts and "Success" in the Vietnam and Korean Wars," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (Winter 1995), pp 377-395.

> part and every specific campaign, and this ensures victory in the campaign.[173]

Although able to incorporate aspects of their doctrine into their conduct of ground operations, the positional warfare in Korea still placed the Chinese military in a highly untenable situation. On numerous occasions throughout the war, Chinese military leaders would seek to improve this situation in order to fight large scale operations more consistent with their doctrinal approach to warfare. However, the general situation was further deteriorated by the US dominance of the skies over North Korea. This prevented the Chinese from massing large forces and frustrated logistical efforts to maintain the forces already committed.[174]

These conditions, when combined with waning Soviet support after Stalin, severely weakened the Chinese position and provided motivation for discontinuing the war. This was in part because of the way in which the army was viewed in relation to the state. Writings of Mao Tse-tung indicate that the strength of the army and that of the state were one and the same. He writes that,

> Every Communist must grasp the truth, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Our principle is that the Party commands the gun and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party. Yet, having guns, we can create Party organizations…. We can also create cadres, create schools, create culture, create mass movements. Everything in Yenan has been created by having guns. All things grow out of the barrel of a gun. According to the Marxist theory of state, the army is the chief component

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[173] Mao Tse-tung, "The Present Situation and Our Tasks" (December 1947), *Selected Works IV*, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1961), pg 161-162.
[174] Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 186.

> of state power. Whoever wants to seize and retain state power must have a strong army.[175]

With a severely weakened army on the Korean front, the Chinese altered their political objectives from restoring the balance in Korea to ensuring the survival of the state. Such survival became questionable as the Chinese position in Korea weakened.

Evidence exists to demonstrate that American, Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean interests all favored the cessation of hostilities on the Korean peninsula and that all these parties sought to end the war as quickly as possible. There was, however, one strategic participant that favored a continuation of the war in order to achieve the reunification of Korea. The South Korean president, Syngman Rhee, resented the possibility that a negotiated truce may leave the Korean peninsula divided. His resistance to negotiations along such lines proved to be formidable and unquestionably resulted in the continuation of the war.

Those who routinely worked with Rhee, branded his behavior in trying to railroad negotiations as "The Rhee Act." Such intolerance for negotiation on the part of Rhee had been well known to American diplomats for some time, since there had been a change of strategy away from reunification. From this moment forward, Rhee had persistently opposed an armistice. Although he came across as mildly comical to some diplomats, there was recognition that Rhee's outspoken insistence that the United Nations Command (UNC) should continue

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[175] Mao Tse-tung, "Problems of War and Strategy" (November 1938), *Selected Works II,* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965) pg. 224-225.

the war effort until the peninsula was reunified was no laughing matter. His statements drew on popular support from the South Korean people and became a persistent thorn in the side of negotiators.

Rhee routinely equated an armistice with communist forces to appeasement and deplored the thought that communist forces would remain on the peninsula. [176] Among many of Rhee's threats was that if the UNC came to an agreement with the communists, he would remove the Republic of Korea (ROK) military from UNC command and continue the fight, alone if need be. Rhee expressed this to General Mark Clark, commander of UN forces in Korea, stating, "The Republic of Korea Army will fight on, if it means a suicide, and I will lead them."[177] Such statements were written off as "The Rhee Act;" and few believed that Rhee was actually capable of making good on such a promise. In his biography of Rhee, Richard Allen notes that

> In Panmunjom, the rumbling from Seoul had gone largely unnoticed. If anything, the Communists must have been secretly pleased at Rhee's statements characterizing any armistice as a Communist victory. Neither the Communists nor the world at large felt that Rhee, on his own, could successfully obstruct an armistice.[178]

Although few thought Rhee could reunify Korea on his own, there was recognition that the UNC must be prepared to deal with the repercussions of Rhee's often erratic behavior. This was especially true with regard to his stalwart

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[176] Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man behind the Myth*, (New York, New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1955), pg 309-310.
[177] Mark W. Clark, *From the Danube to the Yalu,* (New York, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), pg. 275.
[178] Richard Allen, *Korea's Syngman Rhee: An Unauthorized Portrait*, (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E Tuttle Company, 1960), pg. 161.

opposition to an armistice. The UNC preparation to confront Rhee came in the form of a contingency plan codenamed Ever Ready. This operation, originally outlined by the Eighth US Army in early May 1953, called for a military overthrow of Rhee by UN forces in the event that he interfered with an otherwise successful armistice.[179] Ever Ready set three basic conditions for its execution: (1) ROK forces were not responsive to UNC directives; (2) ROK military and government pursued an independent course of action; or (3) ROK forces are hostile to UNC troops.[180]

On 8 June 1953, eighteen months of negotiation on the provisions of Article III of the Armistice (arrangements on prisoners of war), concluded successfully and an agreement was signed between UN and communist negotiators. This agreement, shortly following other agreements reached on 25 May, signaled that the war would soon be over. The final agreement was seemingly in sight but this most recent agreement had been reached without the involvement of ROK negotiators, who had boycotted the peace talks since the 25 May.

On the evening of 8 June, after a meeting with Rhee, General Mark Clark drafted a telegram to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in which he discussed Rhee's discontent with the new agreement. In this, Clark outlined the threats posed by Rhee, including his insistence that the ROK military would unilaterally continue to

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[179] United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Vol. XV, Korea,* part 2, pg 1153.
[180] Ibid.

combat communist forces on the peninsula. Rhee did, however, agree that he would take no unilateral action without first consulting Clark. Regardless of this assurance from Rhee, Clark's next telegram put his subordinate commanders on alert that they were to be prepared to execute Ever Ready "only upon my personal order."[181]

On the afternoon of 9 June, Clark sent an additional telegram in which he stated the prospects for the final armistice agreement being signed:

> The resolution of the POW issue will now make signing of the armistice agreement possible in the near future and possibly as early as 18 June. In order to prevent needless loss of lives I intend to press for early signing, and [accept] the risks involved in not having the neutral agencies ready to move into place at the time of cease fire.[182]

Although eager to sign a final agreement to end the war, Clark recognized that Rhee could still create significant obstacles. Clark expressed concern over Rhee's most recent threat to not permit a neutral force from India entry into South Korea so that it could oversee the repatriation of POWs. This threat was one among many concerns that Clark faced in the days preceding the proposed signing date of 18 June.

Despite continued attempts made to prevent Rhee's interference with the peace settlement, the Armistice would not be signed on 18 June. This fact is the direct result of a unilateral action taken by the South Korean president.[183] In the late evening hours of 18 June, Rhee quietly sanctioned the immediate release of

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[181] Ibid.
[182] United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Vol. XV, Korea,* part 2, pg 1157.
[183] Allan R. Millett, *The Korean War*, (Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, 2007), pg. 92.

over 27,000 communist prisoners of war. ROK forces responsible for holding these prisoners opened the gates of the prison camps, allowing nearly all to escape. US Army Sergeant Tim Maddox, on duty at one of the detention facilities, recalls that shortly after midnight on the 18th "the gate was wide open…and the North Korean prisoners were running out on the double, carrying their ditty bags. I ran over to one of the ROK noncoms—they were just standing, watching—and asked what the hell was happening. He just shrugged and smiled."[184] The action that Maddox witnessed had been carefully planned and orchestrated by the ROK government. And, although the UNC had no advance notice of this plan, it would feel the swift and violent repercussions that soon followed.

Because the repatriation of prisoners of war had been a major topic of debate in negotiation, Rhee's decision to release those under his control prompted anger that reached to the highest levels of the Chinese government. It did not take long for the communists to hear what had transpired at POW camps across South Korea. The action caused uproar among communist leaders and the tone of their discourse immediately shifted from preparing to sign the Armistice to preparing for an offensive.

When Marshal Peng Dehuai, commander of Chinese forces in Korea, learned of the orchestrated escape, he was on his way to Panmunjom to sign the Armistice. Delayed in Pyongyang, he was informed by North Korean officials that

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[184] Joseph C Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War*, (New York, New York: Times Books, 1982), pg 639.

the ROK had "forcibly seized 27,000 North Korean POWs and dispatched them to the front lines."[185] Major General Chai Chengwen, a member of Peng's CPV staff operating in Korea, argues that Rhee's release of these prisoners signaled that Rhee hated peace. He states that after consulting with his staff Peng contacted Mao to discuss retaliatory options, noting that Peng believed "if Rhee were to be let go without a military punishment, he would cause more troubles and further delay the truce agreement."[186]Another account of this incident reports that "Peng drafted a telegram at Pyongyang and sent it to Mao [Tse-tung]. Peng suggested postponing the date for signing the truce in order to have time to punish Rhee and to inflict 15,000 more casualties on his troops. Mao agreed that signing the truce must be postponed. The right time to sign depended on the development of the situation. It was extremely necessary to eliminate at least 10,000 more of Rhee's troops."[187] General Yang Dezhi says that Mao responded, "When [we will] sign it all depends...but it is quite necessary to eliminate ten thousand more South Koreans before going to sign the truce agreement."[188]

Rhee's release of these prisoners had been interpreted correctly by the Chinese as an attempt to undermine the Armistice. Mao soon sent a telegram to Peng and other Chinese People's Volunteer (CPV) commanders in which he

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[185] Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 243.
[186] Xiaobing Li, et al, *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), pg. 229.
[187] Xiaobing Li, et al, *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), pg. 229.
[188] Yang Dezhi, *Weile Heping* [For the sake of peace], (Beijing: Long March Press, 1987), pg. 307-8. From: Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 243.

stated "we must take another major [military] action to pressure the enemy side to assure that this type of incident won't happen again."[189] Because it had been the South Koreans who had been responsible for this action, the retaliation would be directed primarily at their forces, namely the ROK Capital divisions. CPV commanders immediately modified a planned counterattack which had been previously scrapped after concessions were reached on the POW issue on 25 May.

Following nearly a week of preparation, the renewed CPV offensive commenced on 25 June, focusing first on an area known as the Kumsong Salient. Here the CPV had dramatic successes resulting in the near destruction of the of the 6th, 8th, and 3rd ROK Capital divisions within the first 24 hours.[190] The scale of this offensive was unlike that of any other seen during the war. As it commenced, it did so over a front that was over 200 kilometers wide, hitting ROK forces in the east and American forces in the west.[191] The manner in which Chinese commanders prepared and executed this operation is of the utmost significance. Historian Shu Guang Zhang's description of the CPV battle plan bears remarkable similarity to how it was executed on the ground. He writes that,

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[189] Telegram, Mao to CPV Command, June 19, 1953. From: Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 243.
[190] Xiaobing Li, et al, *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), pg. 229; Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 243.
[191] Xiaobing Li, et al, *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), pg. 230; Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 241.

> The primary target, in their view, should be those US/UN positions with strong defense works and favorable defensive ground so that after they were seized, the CPV troops could hold off the enemy's counterattack and decimate its forces in the process. For those US/UN positions that had no strong defense works or were unsuitable for defense, the commanders directed the troops to storm and capture them, quickly withdraw to safety, and then prepare to storm them again before the enemy forces reestablished a firm foothold. The main goal was to annihilate the enemy strength through seesaw battles. In line with these instructions, the attacking units selected fifty-six US/UN positions mostly manned at platoon or company strength. Each CPV unit conducted reconnaissance to learn the specific conditions at these US/UN outposts.[192]

As it had been planned previously, the CPV divided the operation into three phases. Each was characterized by ten days of intense ground combat followed immediately by a week of preparation of defensive works for an assumed counterattack.[193] The weather, a consistent factor in military operations, aided the CPV execution of this operation despite what would have otherwise been unfavorable conditions. The torrential rains of July 1953 assisted in the execution of these phases in that they provided the opportunity for ground forces to rest while severely limiting the likelihood of counterattack due to severely limited battlefield mobility.[194]

The Chinese recognized that, as far as the political arena was concerned, "it was a favorable moment for China and North Korea to deliver a heavy blow to Rhee as retaliation."[195] The strategic message of retaliation that the Chinese intended to send with this renewed offensive campaign was clearly received by

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[192] Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 241-242.
[193] Ibid, pg. 241.
[194] Ibid, pg 241; Command Diary, 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, July 1953, Annex Able (Intelligence), pg. 6.
[195] Xiaobing Li, et al, *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), pg. 229-230.

Rhee in the coming weeks. General Yang Dezhi states that "[we] just wanted to impress the enemy with the 'iron' facts that we were capable—not afraid—of fighting the war [through to the end]."[196] The quality and professionalism of the ROK military came into serious question as Chinese forces began to decimate entire ROK divisions, and Rhee soon began to consider the consequences of unilateral action. If the message sent by the CPV had not been clear enough, American leadership ensured that Rhee had a thorough understanding that such action was unacceptable. President Eisenhower became personally involved with Rhee, and the message of his administration was that should Rhee continue such actions he could no longer count on support from the United States. It was a message that Rhee would be repeatedly reminded of, even well past the Armistice.[197]

Chinese leaders understood that Rhee had undertaken his action without the counsel of US or UN advisors. However, as the offensive made headway, the Chinese sought assurances that all parties did, in fact, seek the war's end. CPV leaders requested assurance from General Clark on two basic questions that centered on their willingness to agree to the Armistice, but highlighted concerns that it would not be honored by the South Koreans.

The first concern raised by the Chinese was whether if the Armistice was signed but subsequently broken unilaterally by ROK forces, the UN would

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[196] Yang Dezhi, *Weile Heping* [For the sake of peace], (Beijing: Long March Press, 1987), pg. 202. From: Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 241.
[197] United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Vol. XV, Korea,* part 2, pg 1200 -1600.

maintain the Armistice. The second was whether, should the Armistice be broken by the South Koreans, the UN provide support to ROK military forces. Clark responded that the UN would abide by the terms of the Armistice, and that if it was unilaterally broken by South Korea the UN would not support ROK troops. This response prompted Chinese officials to return to the negotiating table.

Clark writes that as the Korean War came to an end,

> There is no doubt in my mind that one of the principle reasons, if not the only reason, for the Communist offensive was to give the ROKs a "bloody nose" and to show them and the world that "puk chin"—"go north"—was easier said than done….By July 19 the Reds decided they had gained as much as they could from their final offensive and that day they announced they were "prepared to conclude" discussions on the Armistice.[198]

Within a matter of days, the Armistice would be ready to sign in Panmunjom. However, typical of how negotiations had proceeded in previous years, there was additional delay. Before the Armistice was to be signed, the belligerents had to come to final agreement on the mechanics of where, when, and how the event would take place and who would participate. These details included topics as seemingly minor as to how the walls were painted in the Armistice hall and what media outlets would be present to relay the story to the world.

Once these topics were settled, it was time for the Armistice to be signed. At 10 a.m. on 27 July 1953, General Nam Il of North Korea and General Mark Harrison, signing for the UN, sat at a large wooden table in the Armistice hall at Panmunjom. For the next several minutes they sat before a crowd of nearly 300,

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[198] Mark W. Clark, *From the Danube to the Yalu,* (New York, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), pg. 291-292.

signing several copies of the agreement. Once this task was complete they exited, each without speaking a word. From Panmunjom, the signed agreements were sent to the headquarters of Generals Peng Dehuai and Mark Clark for their signatures. Clark writes, “Only after I’d written ‘Mark W. Clark, Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command’ eighteen times with the pens the Parker company had sent me for the occasion did I get that ‘It’s over’ sensation.”[199] At 10:00 that night, the fighting officially ended.

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[199] Ibid, pg. 296.

CHAPTER 7
POST WAR

The message being sent to President Rhee was endured by nearly all units manning the Main Line of Resistance (MLR). The Chinese were eager to demonstrate their capability to continue the war, while they quietly hoped that it would soon end. The Chinese made assurances to units on the front that the fighting witnessed in the previous weeks had been only a preview of their capability. They insisted that, should the Armistice not be signed, they would demonstrate their full capability. This is evidenced in the sector controlled by 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, where a Chinese propaganda message, complete with popular American music, was played on the evening of July 26th. The message stated, "If truce is not signed tomorrow there will be an all out war."[200] For the Marines of 2/5 it had been a relatively quiet day in comparison to others on the line. The battalion received only 17 rounds of incoming enemy mortar fire. The following day, when the truce was signed, the battalion received sporadic incoming mortar and artillery fire until the Armistice went into effect at 10:00 p.m.

As 2/5 was listening to the propaganda message, elsewhere on the front there was still fighting and dying. There was no need to remind the Marines of George Company that there would be an all out war; for the past three nights they had lived it. The Chinese would mount a final attack on Boulder City the

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[200] Command Diary, 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, July 1953, pg 7.

night of the 26 July, the final skirmish for the hill ended just before 0100 on 27 July. By this point, numerous reinforcements had been sent to the hill to ensure that it remained in Marine control. Although there was no further ground contact, mortars and artillery remained a persistent threat until the final moments of the war. John Comp recalls that,

> About a minute before the Armistice was to take effect they fired a shell…it made such an ungodly noise going over…the last shell of the war. Then everything went quiet…The next morning we went over to Boulder City and we began looking for the remains of our brother Marines.[201]

The signing of the Armistice marked the beginning of a rapid, phased withdrawal from the newly established demilitarized zone. On the morning of July 28th, American and Chinese combatants would return to Boulder City to collect their dead. After more than three years of fighting, this first day of Armistice would be a horrible testament to the brutality of war. Among those coming to witness the aftermath of Boulder City would be a host of battalion, regimental, commanders as well as the Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division.

In the days that followed, General Mark Clark made visits to numerous battlefields on the front. At one point he gave a speech recognizing that the Armistice meant there was still a long road ahead. Soon, he departed Korea for his son's wedding in the United States.[202] His 24 years in uniform came to an end that year as he retired from the Army. In retirement Clark relocated to Charleston,

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[201] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[202] Mark W. Clark, *From the Danube to the Yalu,* (New York, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), pg. 296-297.

South Carolina, where he served as president of the Citadel until 1966. It is at the Citadel where he was buried in 1984.

Marshal Peng Dehuai, the architect of the final Chinese offensive, returned to China as a national hero. In spring 1954 he was promoted to the position of Minister of Defense. In this capacity he pushed for professionalization of the Chinese military over political indoctrination.[203] Within a matter of years Peng fell from Mao's graces and his distinction as a national hero was greatly diminished. Accused by Mao of making "unprincipled factional activity," Peng was demoted from his position. In 1966 he was jailed and repeatedly beaten. This treatment was far removed from the personal attention he had received from Mao years earlier.[204] In 1978 Peng was exonerated of all charges against him and his status within the party was restored. Unfortunately for Peng, he did not witness this moment, for he died in 1974.[205]

The South Korean President Syngman Rhee continued his tumultuous relationship with the United States. His presidency was characterized by controversy until the end. As he had ordered the release of communist POWs in June 1953, he had a letter delivered to President Eisenhower informing him of this decision. Although it was received too late for Eisenhower to act, it prompted

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[203] Xiaobing Li, et al, *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), pg. 30-31; Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 258-261.
[204] Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pg. 204.
[205] Ibid.

an almost immediate meeting of the president's National Security Council.[206] Discussion in the weeks that followed considered whether Rhee should be removed from power as planned in Ever Ready or allowed to retain power.[207] Rhee stayed in power and succeeded in arranging a mutual security agreement with the US. In 1960, mass protest over disputed elections resulted in Rhee's exile to Hawaii, where he died in 1965.

As the guns fell silent on Boulder City, the Marines of George Company had already begun to go their separate ways. Those severely wounded, such as Claude Wirt, Robert Easterling, and many others were aboard a hospital ship beginning the journey back to the United States for continued medical treatment when the Armistice was signed. Many spent several months receiving treatment for their wounds, although many would never heal. Whatever physical ability may have returned to these men, many were left dealing with the psychological effects of the war. Claude Wirt attests,

> I can't sleep, I wake up fighting and kicking, thinking I'm still there. Sometimes, it's all I can see…I don't think a man ever get straight from actual combat…I don't believe you ever get straight, because you lose so many friends. You lose guys that you would go to the devil for…I had a lot of good friends. You know I was kinda glad I got there, and I hated it too after. You get out there, you fight and you kill guys…They just like you…he never done nothing to you…It was just a killing ground.[208]

Upon his discharge from the Marine Corps, Wirt returned to Memphis where he worked as a teamster and began a family. The true measure of his

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[206] United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Vol. XV, Korea,* part 2, pg 1200.
[207] Ibid, 1183-1245.
[208] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee.

success can be seen in his descendants. The family patriarch retained the work ethic instilled in him by his father, who did not miss a day of work in forty years of service to a Memphis company. The Silver Star recipient spoke only to his wife of his experiences in Korea, but the example he set for his family is clear. Although Wirt had only a 6th grade education, all of his grandchildren are college graduates.

Robert Easterling spent eighteen months and endured countless surgeries at Bethesda Medical Center. His injuries ultimately resulted in his medical retirement from the Marine Corps as a Sergeant, despite his desire to make a career of the Marines.[209] While at Bethesda, he underwent an innovative bone graft to replace the jaw that had been destroyed when he was shot in the face. This required him to be on a liquid diet with his jaw wired shut. During this time, his diet consisted primarily of milk shakes, which he enjoyed at first. However, more than thirty years passed after his release from Bethesda before he would drink another.

The gunshot wounds to Easterling's hands also required rehabilitation while at Bethesda. The most beneficial method for this came by way of a Navy Chief Petty Officer who allowed him entry to the Chiefs' Mess to play billiards for an hour each day on the condition that he did not tell anyone. Regaining some dexterity to his hands, Easterling became a carpenter when he was retired from the Marines. It was a job for which the Marine Corps had trained him but that he

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[209] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.

had rarely performed while in Korea. Returning to his hometown of Coeburn, Virginia, Easterling became a well known member of the community, where he "worked on just about every house in Wise County."[210]

John Comp remained in Korea for several months before being reassigned to an aviation unit in North Carolina. Being an infantryman, Comp felt he was somewhat out of place, stating, "I didn't know diddly about the airwing….I was all infantry."[211] But Comp would ultimately have a career in aviation support, helping to design bomb racks for the Navy. After a successful career, he retired to Florida, where the cold winters of New Jersey would never again remind him of the harsh winter he spent in Korea.

The officers of George Company went on to live productive lives as well. Richard Guidera spent a total of eight years in the Marine Corps. When he returned to civilian life, the Harvard graduate became a real estate developer for an upstart company that is now known around the world as Target.[212] Although Bob Werckle had been drafted to play professional football for the Detroit Lions in the 1952 draft, his career in football was over once he left Vanderbilt University and entered the Marine Corps. In 1999, the former All-American tackle was recognized by the Southeastern Conference (SEC) as one of the legends of the SEC. Both men died in 2005.

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[210] Author interview with Robert Easterling, 31 October 2011, Coeburn, Virginia.
[211] Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.
[212] Obituary, Richard T. Guidera, David Lee Funeral Homes, Wayzata, Minnesota, 11 May 2005.

John Canton, the battalion Intelligence Officer who ultimately assumed command of Boulder City, retired from the Marine Corps as a Colonel. Before doing so, he spent a considerable amount of time stationed in his childhood home of Morocco. Canton's familiarity with the nation resulted in his assignment there as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1960. There, he commanded a detachment of 200 Marines at the Marine Barracks, Morocco and served as a political advisor to the Commander, US Naval Activities, Morocco.[213] In this capacity he traveled to the White House with King Hassan II in1961 to serve as liaison between the King and President Kennedy. Later in his tour, he advised the Moroccans in their 1963 war with Algeria and was subsequently awarded the Ouissam Alaouite, one of the highest honors awarded by the King of Morocco. At the end of his tour in 1964, Lieutenant Colonel Canton was personally awarded the Legion of Merit in a surprise ceremony orchestrated by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace Greene Jr.

Canton retired from the Marine Corps in 1971, after completing assignments at Marine Corps Headquarters and in Vietnam. Following his retirement, he joined his son in the creation of a consulting firm in Morocco. He worked in this firm, advising defense contractors, until retiring again in 1984. Canton ultimately settled in Florida, where he died as a result of Alzheimer's complications in 2005. His death marked the end of the final battle for a man

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[213] Jeremiah O'Leary, "Diplomat" *Leatherneck* (pre-1998), Vol. 49, No. 1, January 1965, pg 52.

described as “a Marine’s Marine,” and he was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.[214]

Funeral honors were not all that were awarded to the Marines of George Company. The ferocity of the battle was recognized in the form of valor awards distributed to those who had fought. Within George Company alone, the three nights of combat produced no less than one Navy Cross, eleven Silver Stars, as well as a plethora of Bronze Stars, a quantity of high level awards for a single action unmatched under modern standards of recognizing combat valor.

For his actions as commanding officer of George Company on the night of 24-25 July, Lieutenant Swigart was awarded the Navy Cross. His citation reads in part,

> Although painfully wounded and rendered unconscious when the position was subjected to an intense mortar and artillery barrage which was followed by an attack by an overwhelming enemy force…quickly reassumed command of his unit when he regained consciousness, alerted his platoon commanders of the impending attack and, after repelling the enemy, immediately prepared for another encounter. Through his remarkable leadership, a second vicious enemy attack on his position was also repulsed. Despite his painful wounds, he continued to supervise operations throughout the night and constantly exposed himself to intense enemy artillery, mortar and small-arms fire in order to direct his men effectively….By his inspiring leadership, marked fortitude and courageous initiative, Captain Swigart contributed in large measure to the successful defense of his position and to the accomplishment of the battalion's mission.[215]

Swigart’s command successors were recognized as well. Captain Sartor and Major Thurston receives Silver Stars. Sartor’s citation reads,

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[214] Jack Williams, Colonel John S Canton; Marine Was Well-Spoken Man of the World, Oct 27 2005, San Diego Union Tribune.
[215] Navy Cross Citation, First Lieutenant Oral R. Swigart Jr., Board of Awards: Serial 460 (August 3, 1954).

> Having been ordered to reinforce another company which was engaged in close combat with a numerically superior enemy force far forward of the main line of resistance, he led his company over an unfamiliar route through a devastating barrage of enemy mortar and artillery fire to the objective. Despite numerous casualties and painful personal wounds, he arrived with his unit in time to attack, break the enemy assault and regain control of the vital position. [216]

A number of the enlisted Marines were recognized for valor as well. Although the men would rarely speak of their actions or awards, Claude Wirt was awarded the Silver Star while John Comp and Robert Easterling would be among those to receive Bronze Stars with the Combat Distinguishing Device.

Despite the brutal combat that they endured and injuries that have affected many of them their entire lives, the Marines of George Company would have it no other way. Although saddened by the loss of their fellow Marines, these men are proud of their service and would not hesitate to return to the trenches of Korea if their country called. Claude Wirt attests that "If I had it to do all over again, I would go the same way I went," while John Comp asserts, "The camaraderie I have with my fellow Marines and the friendships I made, it was worth it all."[217]

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[216] Silver Star Citation, Captain Louis J Sartor.
[217] Author interview with Claude Wirt, 5 October 2011, Memphis, Tennessee; Author interview with John Comp, 9 November 2010, Woodbridge, Virginia.

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Vita

Joseph William Easterling was born in Roanoke, Virginia. He enlisted the US Marine Corps in 1997 and became a commissioned officer in 2005 after receiving his Bachelor's degree in Political Science at the University of North Florida.