

THE FRONT LINE THAT NEVER WAS



(A) X Corps front line outlined in yellow. It did not exist. (Hallion)



(B) Actual U.N. penetration into central and eastern North Korea. (Blair)

On September 30th, 1950, The ROK 3rd Division of the United Nations forces crossed the 38th parallel on the east coast and entered North Korea, followed by amphibious landings of the U.S. Marine's 1st Division at Wonsan and the U.S. Army's 7th Infantry Division 100 miles up the coast at Iwon.

By mid-December, the 5th and 7th Marine Regiments had reached Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri in the Chosin Reservoir area, with the 1st Marines on the road south of the reservoir. Elements of the 7th Division had reached the Yalu at Hyesanjin, and the ROK Capitol and 3rd Divisions had reached inland Kanggi and coastal Chongjin.

These penetrations have been depicted as a solid front from Hagaru through Hyesanjin to Chongjin in histories and on monuments of The Korean War [Chart (A)].

Funny, it never existed.

The ROK Capital Division at Chongjin and the ROK 3rd Division at Kapsan. The 17th and 32nd Regiments of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division were on the road to Hyesanjin. The 7th Marines at Yudam, the 5th Marines at Hagaru, and the 1st Marines holding various enclaves south of Chosin had about another 25,000 troops.

The Taebeck Mountain range, with peaks to 8,000 feet, ran north and south between the 8th Army's ROK II Corps in the west and the 7th Marines in the east. Contrary to the chart (A), there was a 50-mile gap between the 8th Army ROKs and the X Corps Marine units [chart (B)]. One Marine General said, "One could not traverse that land on a Sunday carrying a picnic lunch."

"I believe a winter campaign in the mountains of North Korea is too much to ask of the American soldier or marine, and I doubt the feasibility of supporting troops in this area during the winter providing for the evacuation of the sick and wounded." (Marine Major

General Oliver Smith, commanding the Marine 1st Division, letter of November 15, 1950 to the Marine Commandant in Washington D.C.)

Why and how this non-existent front line was represented as such remains to be discovered. It could have been drawn by a correspondent who merely connected the positions of the farthest U.N. troops, or by someone in MacArthur's staff in Tokyo.



(C) VF-781 F9F-5 (Jack Stiles) over the same North Korean terrain in 1952 (Ives photo)



(D) X Corps terrain looking west from Chongjin to Hyesangjin. The northern border--the Yalu and Tumen rivers--is shown in yellow (Google Earth).

These penetrations into the 150+ mile sector from west of the Chosin Reservoir to Chongjin could not be held and supplied by the troops of the four divisions committed. Especially in winter (for the U.N. sector to the west of Chosin Reservoir, see publications in the bibliography).

The Chinese troops attacked elements of the 7th Marines at Yudam, the 5th Marines at Hagaru, the 1st Marines south of Hagaru, and elements of the 7th Division's 32nd Infantry at Samsu and the 17th Infantry at Hyesanjin on November 25th, 1950.

By the 25th of December, all U.N. Troops had been withdrawn.

The two VF-781 fighters over this territory (C) and the Google depiction (D) show the terrain. I have flown over this country (northeastern Korea) and can verify the inhospitable terrain. I have not been over the terrain of western North Korea, and so cannot verify the terrain covered by the 8th Army troops.

- Lou Ives

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