

INCHON LANDING

Story by R. R. Keene

Army General Douglas MacArthur was not overly fond of Marines. Prior to MacArthur's departure from Corregidor, in the Philippines, during the early and dark days of World War II, the general wrote citation recommendations for all the units he left behind, except the Fourth Marine Regiment. The general did so because, he reasoned, the Marines had enough recognition during World War I.

Maybe. But in Korea in 1950, the 70-year-old MacArthur recalled not France in 1918, but his 1943-44 campaign of New Britain and the competence shown by the First Marine Division, especially during amphibious assaults.

Needing to strike a decisive blow that would not only relieve the beleaguered American and South Korean forces hunkered down behind the shrinking Pusan Perimeter, the general needed an end run—a "Hail Mary pass" of warfare—that would send the Communists into defeat and have our "boys" home by Christmas.

"We shall land at Inchon and I shall crush them!" he told his astonished staff. They speculated that he would need a tactical miracle. MacArthur requested the First Marine Division.

It was a bold stroke worthy of MacArthur's genius, and it impressed the Marines.

However, there were some problems. . . .

MacArthur revealed his plan during a meeting at Pearl Harbor, on the eve of our nation's 174th anniversary in July. Later, he made it known that he further intended to have a full division ashore at Inchon, before the close of business, on Friday, September 15, less than two-



Photo by Sgt. John Babyak

Fighting still raged in Seoul when PFC Luther R. Leguire raised the flag over the American Consulate.

and-a-half months away.

Major General Oliver P. Smith's First Marine Division was anything but full. A year earlier, Army Gen Omar N. Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, predicted that "large-scale amphibious operations . . . will never occur again." The American taxpayers, weary of war in general, wanted to believe him, and their representatives, including President Harry S. Truman (also no great fan of Marines), had shrunk the military in general, and the Corps in particular.

From its peak of 485,000 warriors on August 31, 1945, the Marine Corps was stripped to 156,000 by July 1, 1946. By June 1950, when 90,000 men of the North Korean

People's Army (NKPA) overran the 38th parallel, the whole Marine Corps, mustering everyone from the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, totaled less than 75,000.

There was, however, a pool of experienced combat veterans from World War II, scattered in 138 separate units throughout 126 cities nationwide. They were the Marine Corps Reserve who numbered 90,000, and it was from these "minutemen of the 1950s" that Gen Smith would flesh out the ranks of his Division.

The Joint Chiefs told MacArthur that there was no way a division would be ready before November or December. The Marines didn't believe them and, apparently, neither did President Truman when he ob-

tained authorization from Congress to mobilize the entire Organized Marine Corps Reserve and extend current contracts of those in the regular forces.

The Reserves came quickly, albeit reluctantly in many cases. These were men who only recently had gotten over the nightmare of WW II and were now pursuing their individual versions of the American Dream. The Corps quickly and efficiently screened numerous requests for waivers from active duty, disapproving most. They also short-stopped about 500 Marines who had yet to see their 18th birthday.

The rest funneled into Camp Pendleton, Calif., where they became re-acquainted with the equipment of war. Their battle dress was of a different age, consisting of steel-pot helmets with tattered camouflage covers and herringbone utilities, faded blue-gray, with black eagle, globe and anchor over the "USMC" stenciled on the left breast pocket.

Yet, it wasn't any of this by which the Communists would come to know them. Although Army units had been equipped with combat boots for almost a decade, Marines sailing for Korea still laced canvas leggings over boondockers. The obsolete leggings became badges of courage by which the enemy differentiated between soldier and Leatherneck. They were terrified of the "yellow legs."

In an outfit where marksmanship is everything, the standard-issue weapon to the infantryman or "crunchie" was the Garand, M1 Rifle, caliber .30. Encased in a linseed-oiled, walnut or birch stock, this 43.6-inch, nine-and-a-half pound bullet launcher took an eight-round clip, and could easily decimate enemy ranks at 500 or more yards away. Smaller, lighter, and faster, but with less range, stopping power, and accuracy, the carbine was issued to officers and section leaders.

But, it was the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), caliber .30, M1918A2, around which four-man fire teams were built. The BAR was awesome in its day, and the man who handled it commanded respect. Usually an expert, the automatic rifleman fired his BAR which, fully loaded with 20-round magazine and bipod, dressed out at 19.4 pounds. Add to this the haversack and pouches for extra magazines, and there is little wonder why BAR men

enjoyed parodying the old British song, "Bless 'em all," with:

*"You push on the change lever, pull back the bolt,
Squeeze on the trigger and my God,
what a jolt!
Cause it kicks like a Model T Ford,
and that is my only reward.
And, when I am dead, some other
— will carry the BAR I adored!"*

For all its heft, it was a weapon that could fire the standard M2 ball cartridge singly, in bursts of three, or fully automatic into a gnat's running lights at more than twice the 500

ment. While made-up of veterans, they would not work together as a unit until they hit Blue Beach on Inchon's southern flank with the ROK 1st Marine Regiment. To the north, Red Beach would belong to two battalions of Lieutenant Colonel Ray Murray's Fifth Marines (3d Battalion assaulted Green Beach on the island of Wolmi-do) who had been part of the First Provisional Marine Brigade shoring up the Pusan Perimeter and inflicting 9,900 casualties on the North Koreans in 34 days. They had pulled off the



USMC photo

In eight hours, 13,000 Marines were ashore at Inchon and attacking toward Kimpo Airfield and Seoul.

yards of effective range stated in the manuals.

In the hands of professionals, these high-powered, all-weather weapons could wreak deadly destruction, and the men who handled them were professionals: veterans of Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, Okinawa and countless other killing fields of the Pacific. Sprinkled like salt among them were legends of the Corps who went back to the Banana Wars and earlier. Augmented by 2,700 members of the Republic of Korea (ROK) 1st Marine Regiment and 2,700 U.S. Army soldiers, the First Marine Division became a melting pot of 25,400 men.

Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller commanded the First Marine Regi-

lines on the night of September 5, back-loaded on the 13th, and sailed through the Tsushima Strait to join other ships of the fleet sailing from the Japanese port of Kobe where the Division docked after leaving California in mid-August. They caught the fringes of Typhoon Kezia which spread misery in the troop compartments, but provided cloud cover for their rendezvous on September 15, off the Korean west coast.

The way to Seoul was through the Yellow Sea port of Inchon, 20 miles to the west and famous for its extreme tidal ranges, second to none in the world. MacArthur had chosen September 15 as D-day because the tidal range at Inchon would reach a high water mark of 31.2 feet, allow-

ing ships and landing craft the best opportunity to navigate through Flying Fish and East Channels and over mud flats which ran for miles when the tide waned. As it was, the amphibian vehicles of the Army and Marines would still not float high enough to drop their ramps. Marines would have to use ladders and grappling hooks to scale the 16-foot walls that diked the city.

Aerial reconnaissance photos showed the North Koreans working on a network of formidable fortifications. How far along they'd progressed or what resistance was in place were unknown variables of war. Nobody expected a cake-walk, but they were also hoping it wouldn't be another Tarawa.

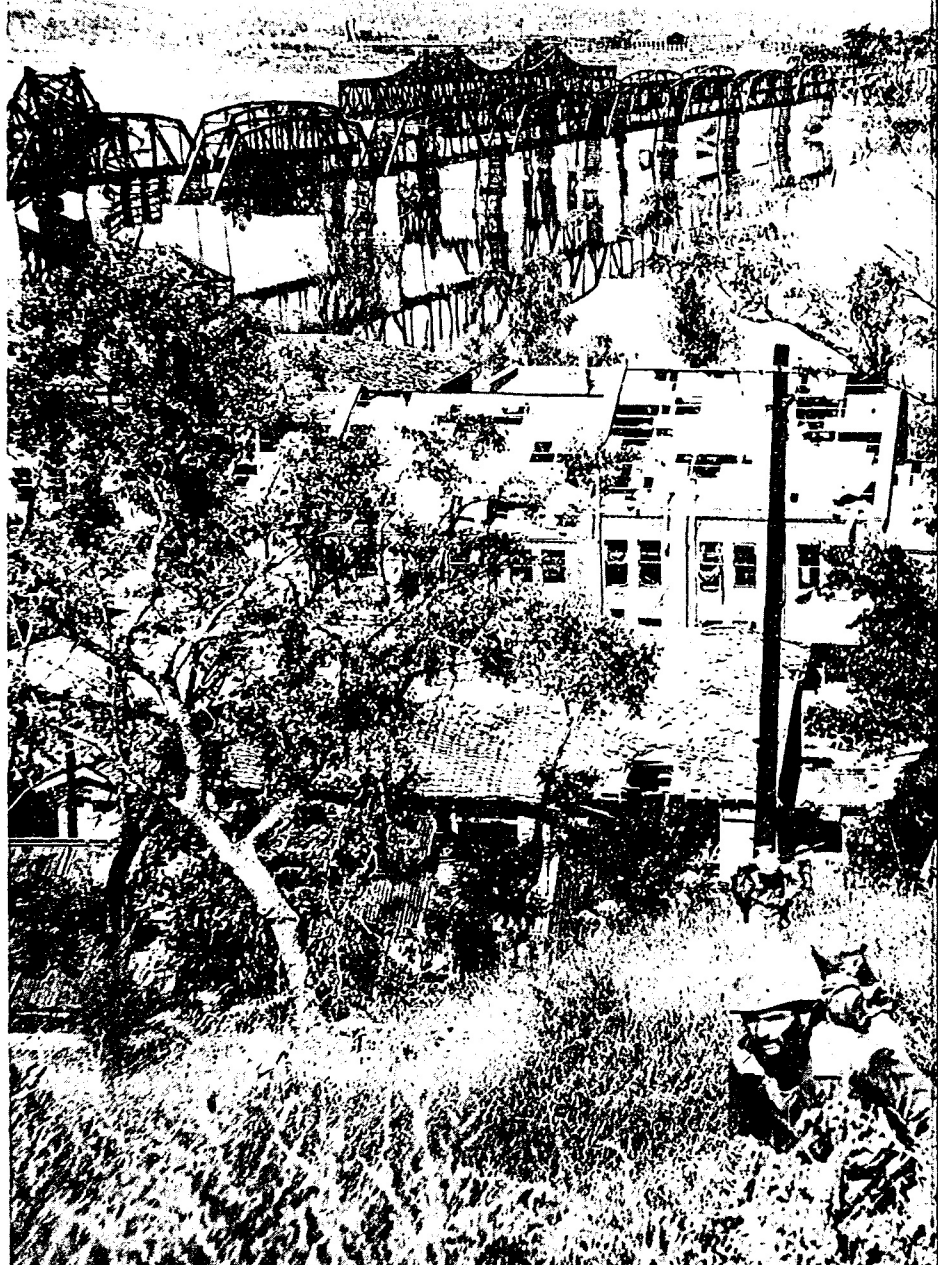
Reveille was played over the ships' loudspeaker systems at 3 a.m. Most Marines were already wide-awake. For some, breakfast consisted of powdered eggs, toast with no butter, and canned apricots. Most were too nervous to eat. The first streaks of dawn broke pink over the massed armada that was Joint Task Force Seven. That's when the shooting started.

The serene Asian calm exploded in an apocalyptic barrage of rockets, bombs and napalm, heralding the first major amphibious assault by Americans since Okinawa, April 1, 1945. This was the assault of Wolmi-do. Inchon would come that afternoon.

Private First Class Doug Koch and other members of "D" Company, Fifth Marines watched from USS *Cavalier*. "Everybody felt this would be the indicator. If Wolmi-do fell easily, it probably meant we would not have too tough a go on Red Beach. . . .

"About 10 o'clock the ship announced. . . resistance was moderate and, best of all, losses were light. This news was greeted by a very loud cheer."

The bombing and air strikes on Inchon and Wolmi-do continued all day. The drone of propellers from carrier-based Vought F4U Corsairs of Marine Fighter Squadron-323 "Death Rattlers" and VMF-214's "Black Sheep" signaled support from the First Marine Aircraft Wing. Sorties flown by these squadrons and the Navy, coupled with 2,845 shells of naval gunfire from warships, so dangerously close to running aground that their crews were prepared to repel boarders, caused "the entire



beach area (on Inchon) to disappear in an enormous cloud of dust and smoke with only the occasional glare of a rocket burst," said Second Lieutenant Frank Muetzel of "A" Company in USS *Henrico*. "It was awesome."

It was heady stuff to be sure, that got Muetzel's "antennae quivering," a feeling not uncommon when live ammunition is issued and rounds go downrange.

PFC Koch nervously checked his

equipment several times over and went over the side, down cargo nets, to the landing craft bouncing in the waves.

At 5:39 p.m., waves of assault vehicles came abreast and churned toward Inchon, disappearing in clouds of ugly smoke that hid the city.

"Red Beach was getting closer," said Koch, "It made me feel very small and insignificant. The noise got louder. We began to take small-arms fire."

Leaving in their wake a destroyed Yongdungpo, members of the 1st MarDiv move out in a frontal assault on Seoul.

Red Beach. It shows a lot of Marines waiting to climb over the sea wall. One Marine, however, is already on a ladder, his right leg is on the sea wall. . . . That Marine was 'Punchy' Lopez.

"Moments later he took out a North Korean bunker. A second bunker remained. Lopez began to attack it. Before he could throw the grenade he held, he was hit. The grenade dropped to his side. To save the men of his platoon he rolled over on top of it. 'Punchy' won the Medal of Honor right there on the beach. On the dock at Pusan, he couldn't wait to get at the bastards."

There was no time to waste. It was getting dark and the tide was ebbing. Amid heavy small-arms and mortar fire, Marines jumped on the ladders so forcefully that many snapped under the weight, but they poured over the top of the sea wall.

Sergeant Charles Allen of "A" Company scaled the wall under heavy fire from his flank and front. Several Marines were cut down right behind him. Meutzel's platoon broke through a gap in the sea wall, jumped into a trench, and threw grenades at a pill box, causing six bloody North Koreans to surrender.

Eight Marines died in the first 10 minutes of the assault. However, the rest continued to push their way to Inchon's high ground, called Cemetery Hill, and seized the British Consulate, while moving on toward Observatory Hill.

At Blue Beach, nearly three miles southeast, "Able," "Dog," "Charlie" and "Baker" Companies of the First Marines attempted to flank the North Korean garrison and cut off any possibility of retreat.

It had begun to rain, and in the fading light, there was great and deadly confusion. Landing ship tanks, moving toward the beach to discharge their cargo, opened up with 20- and 40-mm. guns, spraying Marine units on the advance. Demolitions set by shore party members to clear holes in the sea wall blew in the midst of Marines. The Navy fired 6,000 rockets in 20 minutes into the city. (The barrage totally demolished the Asahi Brewery, much to the chagrin of Marines who'd been promised a "beer bust to end all beer

busts," if the brewery was taken intact. Not a bottle was left unbroken. Many would never forgive the Navy for this "atrocious.")

The naval and air support, however, took its toll on members of the NKPA's 226th Regiment who started surrendering in numbers. Marines with flamethrowers and 3.5-inch rocket launchers flushed the rest. It had a price. By day's end, 20 Marines had been killed and 187 wounded. Enemy casualties for two days would total 300 KIA and 1,350 wounded.

In eight hours, 13,000 Marines and all their equipment were ashore. MacArthur had been at his tactical best. The Eighth Army at Pusan had launched a counterattack out of the perimeter, and the Marines had stabbed into Inchon, astonishing the North Koreans. Leaving Inchon to the ROK Marines, the First Marine Division was to strike out toward Seoul and thrust beyond, until the back of the NKPA snapped.

The road to Seoul started out easily enough. Captain Sam Jaskilka led "E" Company, Fifth Marines to link up with First Marines, thereby sealing off Inchon. Elements of Fifth Marines, including Koch's company, prepared to peel off to the northeast toward Kimpo Airfield.

Too late, the enemy realized it was spread too thin. In a desperate attempt to slow the Marine advance, it sent Russian T-34 "caviar can" tanks. Gull-winged Corsairs of VMF-214 caught the first tanks with napalm and machine guns. However, before enemy crews were forced to desert their vehicles, they claimed one plane and the life of its pilot, Captain William Sampson.

It was during the morning of the 17th that Marines would exact punishment. PFC Koch and forward elements of his company were awakened by the clanking of tank treads.

"I knew it was too late to run," Koch said. He and the rest pulled ponchos over their heads and lay still while six tanks and 250 Communist infantry moved by and then out of sight around the bend, where they ran into 1stLt "H. J." Smith's "Dog" Company. It turned into a "turkey shoot": 2.36- and 3.5-inch "bazooka" rocket launchers backed the 75-mm. recoilless rifles that were brought to bear, led by Corporal Okey Douglas who closed to within 75 yards before firing his first rocket into the lead tank. He went on to help destroy a second, while other



US Army photo

Vehicles hit the sea wall, dropped their ramps as far as possible, and scaling ladders were thrown into place. Marines flung a barrage of grenades over the wall. At the first sound of explosions, they started up the ladders.

2dLt Tom Gibson of Mortar Company told of fellow Marine, First Lieutenant Baldomero Lopez, a graduate of the Naval Academy and a WW II veteran: "There's this famous photograph of Marines landing on



"Punchy" Lopez, a veteran of WW II and graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, posthumously received the Medal of Honor.

USMC photo

Members of 5th Marines, led by 1stLt Baldomero Lopez, went over the top of the Inchon sea wall. Lopez died minutes later, after throwing himself on a grenade.

Marines opened up with rifles, machine guns and BARs, killing 200 enemy in a matter of seconds.

About the same time, on the outskirts of Sosa-ri, PFC Walter Monegan of First Marines took on six tanks with his 3.5 launcher.

He waited until the lead tank was within 50 yards before firing. When it blew, the hatch opened. Monegan grabbed his carbine and killed an escaping crewman. Monegan's assistant gunner reloaded the launcher. Monegan fired a second rocket, stopping the second tank. This gave the rest of his unit time to sight in on the remaining armor, eventually destroying all six T-34s.

Timing is everything. Right afterward, Gen MacArthur arrived on an inspection tour. Seeing the hulks of destroyed enemy armor, he remarked, "You damned Marines always manage to stage everything to your advantage, even a visit by the general!"

Koch, watching it all from a hill while eating his C-rations, didn't know "whether to throw the general a salute or what." However, he did notice, after the general left, a kid from a village "jabbering" to one of the interpreters. "The interpreter went

over to a lieutenant. . . . The two of them climbed down the hill to the road to where Gen MacArthur had stood, and the interpreter hollered into a culvert. A moment later, seven armed North Koreans came out, their hands on their heads." They had been there since the battle ended.

MacArthur may have been lucky. However, luck ran out for Frank Muetzel the next morning: "A Russian machine gun tore off the calf of my right leg and then hit and killed Cpl Tom Callison." 2dLt Muetzel, who had asked Headquarters Marine Corps for orders to Korea, lost his right leg.

While there were particularly bitter pockets of resistance, the way to Kimpo and Seoul was relatively open. Five days after landing, Kimpo, its airdrome and Russian fighter aircraft belonged to Fifth Marines, with Capt Jaskilka's "Easy" Company leading the way.

On the morning of September 20, the First Marine Division hit the banks of the Han River and the outskirts of Yongdungpo. (Yongdungpo is to Seoul, what Jersey is to the Big Apple—a large industrial suburb.)

Communist leaders realized that

if Yongdungpo was lost, Seoul also would fall. They sent a regiment across the Han River to counter-attack Puller's First Marines in the early morning darkness.

The enemy came with mortar fire and T-34 tanks. PFC Monegan and two others ran to meet the attack with their rocket launchers. Monegan missed the first tank as the column of four closed to less than 100 yards. He put a round directly into the third one. Reloaded, he scored a direct hit on another as small-arms fire from both sides hosed the area.

"Marine mortars and antitank weapons entered the battle," said Staff Sergeant Lee Bergee of "E" Company. "Enemy infantrymen sought shelter. The bazooka teams closed in for the kill. . . . I saw one Marine (Monegan) step into the open fire. The man was hit instantly by a machine gun burst. His round however, found its mark."

The enemy made an assault to break out of the firefight. Lt Howard Foor responded, telling his Marines, "Okay, you Leathernecks, fix bayonets and start sticking the bastards!" In bloody hand-to-hand fighting, the Marines killed more than 300 of the enemy. In the process PFC

Monegan died from his wounds. He would be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

The battle for Yongdungpo turned into a fight of supporting arms. Artillery, air strikes and rockets blanketed every suspected concentration of enemy troops. One battalion of the 11th Marine Regiment, which had recently joined the Division, expended 1,656 howitzer rounds in duels with North Korean mortars, tanks and field pieces.

However, it was still the individual infantrymen who made the difference. Capt Robert Barrow's "A" Company, First Marines, pried their way into the city. That night, his unit stumbled onto North Koreans who were massing for an assault. So close he could hear an officer haranguing his troops for the assault, Corporal Billy Webb crawled into position so he could see around the building separating the two forces. He then sighted in on the officer, whom he could see standing on a small rostrum, and dropped him with one round. Hearing the shot, Barrow yelled, "What the hell happened?" Webb yelled back, "Captain, that poor bastard just talked himself to death!"

Death stalked PFC Doug Koch who'd just been made squad leader and was leading his men up a hill. "All of a sudden, I felt like I got kicked in the hip by a horse." Initially feeling no pain, he waived off his platoon as they moved out to engage the enemy. It turned out to be a big mistake. Alone, in the open, he treated his wound, when he was shot again. Another slug went through his jacket. He looked up, and a round hit the dirt in front of his nose. Help was not able to get to him until several hours later when the enemy were driven-off. A shot of morphine eased his pain. When he awoke, he was on a stretcher out of battle, and eventually was home. He never saw who shot him.

Yongdungpo was leveled. Seoul was next. The name "Seoul" is a Korean word meaning "capital." Established 100 years before Columbus ever saw the New World, it was the seat of the Yi Dynasty which ruled until 1910. By 1950, it numbered 2 million people, some of whom were recent interlopers of the North Korean People's Army.

The First Marine Division was ordered by the Army commander, X Corps, to make a frontal assault on the city. The order came while Gen

Smith's Marines were under counter-attack in several areas, one of the bloodiest fights being waged north of the city.

Second Battalion, Fifth Marines had run into a hornet's nest on the morning of September 24. "Dog" Company took the brunt of it. In a day-long slaughter of epic proportions, "D" Company suffered 36 killed, including its commander, Lt "H. J." Smith, 116 medically evacuated, and 26 walking wounded. Only a handful of the 206 Marines who had entered the fray remained. The battalion, however, counted more than 1,500 enemy dead by nightfall. At dawn, the Marines would counter.

Joined, after Inchon, by Colonel Homer L. Litzenberg's Seventh Marines, three Marine infantry regiments would pour into Seoul during two days of bloody fighting.

Again, it was the individual Marine, backed by tanks, who did the dirty work.

"It seemed that every building in Seoul housed an enemy sniper," said SSgt Bergee. "We cleaned out doorways and rooftops; we went from street to street, house to house. . . . We knocked holes in walls and tossed grenades through the openings."

The city was full of panicky civilians caught in cross fires they were running to avoid. There were so many, that in some cases, they became human barricades. While Marines didn't know who to trust, there were many civilian acts of compassion.

"For a people who could, at times, be so cruel and crude, there were times when they could be very gentle," said PFC Jack Wright of Fifth Marines. "They helped us carry our wounded."

PFC Joseph Saluzzi and SSgt John O'Neil of Seventh Marines were wounded and trapped in cross fire and artillery bombardment for several hours. O'Neil died of his wounds. Saluzzi, however, recalled staring in disbelief as four Korean boys ran out, gently placed him on a mat, and carried him back to his lines.

Lines became confused. Artillery and mortars pumped 30,000 rounds into Seoul. Riflemen with BARs, pistols and grenades made up the main line of resistance as they crouched behind M26 tanks. On the forward line, PFCs Stanley Christianson and Alfred Walsh spotted the enemy approaching.

"There must be a hundred of 'em," Christianson told Walsh. "Get back and warn the outfit—I'll hold them off." Christianson did, and died doing it. He, too, earned the Medal of Honor.

PFC Wright realized why buildings should be taken from the top, down. "We made one mistake; we started from the bottom and worked up. The North Koreans on the upper floor were trapped. If you ever saw a man fight, it's when he's trapped. We had one hell of a fight on our hands."

Wright fought at what later became known as "Blood and Bones" corner. It was an intersection situated in such a way that only one rifleman could fire from the corner. "At first it didn't seem different. It was when a team tried to cross that all hell broke loose. As soon as one rifleman went down, another Marine moved up and took his place. That's the way it continued."

Wright and another Marine climbed to a second-story window. "He nailed 'em on one block, I nailed 'em on another." It was a small enough victory for the price. Wright continued, "The fire team who tried to cross 'Blood and Bones' corner was wiped out except for the squad leader. Afterward, he was depressed and guilt-ridden. No one could convince him that it wasn't his fault, which it wasn't."

The fight continued, house to house, door to door, until October. The First Marine Division suffered 1,064 casualties in Seoul; Murray's Fifth Marines lost 177 men; 92 were killed in Pullers' First Regiment; and Litzenberg's Marines saw 72 die. The Division had suffered 2,430 casualties since Inchon. However, they inflicted 13,666 casualties on the North Koreans and captured 6,490.

Puller's First Marines signaled the beginning of the end at Seoul when they raised the Stars and Stripes over the American Embassy. It caused an Army staff officer to growl, "Ever since that flag-raising picture on Iwo Jima, I'm convinced a Marine would rather carry a flag into battle than a weapon."

Puller, a member of the Division that had turned Korea from a disastrous rout into a stunning victory for MacArthur, replied: "Not a bad idea. A man with a flag in his pack and the desire to put it on an enemy strong point isn't likely to bug out."

