Chapter Five

CIA and U.S. Army, China and Korea

1948–1952

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I was in Tientsin, trying to reassemble my station personnel, when Mukden finally fell. The confirmation came late in the day, and we soon received a report that Nationalist bombers were attacking Communist forces in the city. It wasn't hard to picture what conditions must have been like, Mukden being swollen with hungry refugees. I remember going outside the American military compound that cold November afternoon to stare at the flaring sunset over the brown inland plains. There was the familiar smell of northern China in the air—coal smoke, horse dung, dust. Geese were honking south again across the coastal marshes. Anonymous clots of refugees in padded tan coats squatted around straw cook fires in nearby fields. The trudging files of troops along the roads looked either very young or very old.

I knew the situation was grave. With Nationalist forces defeated in Manchuria, Mao Tse-tung now had almost a million combat-tested troops free to attack down the narrow coastal invasion route from the north. And Chiang Kai-shek did not really have much to oppose them. He'd squandered his best forces piecemeal in Manchuria. As a military leader he had been guilty of several cardinal sins: He had underestimated his enemy's resources and abilities, and he had overestimated the resolve of his ally, America.

A few days later, I received a call at the compound from the wife of General Wei Li-huang. She and General Wei had gotten out of Mukden just before me. The General, she said, had urgent business to discuss. Could I be in front of the government telegraph office at three that afternoon? It

was an odd request. Normally, I would have driven my jeep to the General's headquarters for an appointment. But these were not normal times. The ramifications of the Manchurian debacle were now being felt. The Nationalist government's elite "New" armies, the cream of their American-trained and -equipped forces, had been destroyed. And relations between Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the American government—particularly with Secretary of State George Marshall—were at a low ebb. For the first time, the Kuomintang had to face the specter of defeat, not just in the northeast, but throughout the vast country. It would not be long before scapegoats wearing generals' stars would be offered up in sacrifice.

I wore a plain GI overcoat devoid of rank or unit patch to my street-corner rendezvous, hoping to blend in with the rear-echelon American Marines still in Tientsin. At exactly three, a Chevrolet sedan with dark curtains on the rear windows slid to a stop and the door opened. Madame Wei was there, stylish as ever. General "One Hundred Victory" Wei sat beside her in a dress uniform, replete with decorations. As I sat down between them, General Wei pulled the side curtains more tightly shut and issued a curt order to his driver.

The chauffeurs of Chinese generals often negotiated crowded streets at full speed, with a blaring horn. But the General's driver proceeded with unusual caution, past the teeming railway market streets, out along the airport road toward the junction of the main route to Peking. I couldn't see much, and the KMT military police along the route certainly couldn't see me. Finally, we pulled onto a dusty farm road and through the gates of a mud-walled compound. The establishment appeared to have been the home of a once prosperous minor landlord; there were the usual granaries, stables, and a large, tile-roofed kitchen. But, judging from the tangles of field telephone wires and radio antennas, the buildings had been taken over by a military headquarters, probably that of at least a corps commander.

We were ushered into the largest room, in which folding tables and map boards had replaced the traditional sleeping mats. A rugged, middle-aged officer with smooth Han features and close-cropped iron-gray hair rose to meet us. He wore a simple military tunic adorned only with the collar tabs of a full general. It was Fu Tso-yi, a legendary Nationalist commander in northern China, a former warlord who had thrown in his lot with Chiang even before the Japanese invasion in the 1930s. General Fu was known to have a huge and loyal following in the mountains of Shanhsi and Ninghsia provinces, the region the Nationalists called the Twelfth War Area. He had come to this isolated headquarters of a subordinate without his usual entourage of staff.

The General greeted us and called for tea. In deference to his American guest, however, his servant also offered a rusty tin of rather petrified pow-

dered coffee, probably a relic of the war. I chose tea. Being a trained intelligence officer, I couldn't help observing that General Fu's situation maps were not draped for my visit. A quick glance showed the disposition of at least six army corps stretching from the coast to positions along the Great Wall in the mountains northwest of Peking. These troops, I knew, had been engaged against Communist guerrilla forces, but had so far avoided the huge meat-grinder battles that had decimated the armies in Manchuria. I was beginning to understand why I had been summoned here.

As in the past, Madame Wei translated smoothly, her English flawless, without a trace of accent. Her husband stood beside her, but seldom spoke in deference to his senior colleague. General Fu walked stiffly to his maps. One of his legs was badly arthritic, a legacy of a lifetime of war and wounds.

"General Wei's surviving forces are regrouping inside my lines, here." He indicated several garrisons along the coast between Chinchou and Tientsin. "More troops have escaped than your newspapers report," the old general added wryly.

I nodded agreement. My intelligence reports indicated whole battalions had escaped from Manchuria through the ineffective Communist encirclement.

"But these forces," General Fu continued, "have not retained all of their American equipment and weapons."

Again, I nodded. The stragglers coming out of Manchuria had abandoned their vehicles, heavy automatic weapons, and artillery. Their vehicles had run out of fuel, and the artillery was worthless without ammunition.

"My own forces," Fu said, turning back to the map, "were never as well equipped as General Wei's." He smiled bleakly, a classic Chinese gesture, the neutral acceptance of impersonal fate. "We relied on Japanese weapons after the surrender. And, of course, we have seized some Soviet equipment from the Reds."

Now General Wei spoke his piece. Between the two commanders, he said, there were at least 400,000 veteran soldiers in the region. They were in garrisons and assembly areas astride the only practical invasion route from Manchuria. Wei went to the map and swept his two open hands back and forth along the coast. "As you know, this area controls the marching route into and from the northeast."

General Fu returned to his desk. "We understand your government's feelings about the Kuomintang," he said bluntly. "President Truman and General Marshall distrust Chiang."

I was about to add the traditional denial usually expected in such discussions, but I realized they were being remarkably blunt by Oriental standards. "Please continue," was all I said.

General Fu noted that Wei Li-huang had briefed him in detail about the

huge supply dumps of surplus American munitions and equipment on Okinawa. "With some of these supplies," he said flatly, "General Wei and I can equip five field armies. We have the men, but we do not have enough guns, trucks, and ammunition." He nodded for me and Wei to sit beside his desk, a subtle conspiratorial gesture.

Wei concisely outlined their plans. They hoped to create a "Third Force," a democratic, anti-Communist option to Chiang's Nationalists. This force, he said, would form an impenetrable buffer between the Communist armies in Manchuria and the KMT forces in the south. They would hold the old capital of Peking, the city of Tientsin, and the port of Taku. With their field armies supplied with modern American equipment, neither the Nationalists nor the Communists could dislodge them. Wei asked me if America's goal in China was still to establish an effective cease-fire in the civil war and to somehow hammer out a coalition government, including the Reds and the KMT.

As far as I knew, this was still the goal of U.S. policy.

"We trust you will inform your government of our offer," General Fu said, rising painfully on his bad leg to say goodbye.

"Yes, sir," I answered, shaking his hand. "I will transmit your message."

By noon the next day I was aboard Admiral Oscar Badger's command ship in Tsingtao harbor. Badger was excited by the prospect of a viable third force in China. He got quick confirmation from MacArthur's Far East Command (FECOM) that the mountain of supplies on Okinawa could be readily transported to northeast China. Badger's secure communications room transmitted my Top Secret cable to CIA headquarters in Washington. I had done all I could to help Generals Fu and Wei.[1] From my discussions with Admiral Badger, I believed their offer represented the only viable option to preventing a complete Communist victory in China. Clearly, America's lack of confidence in Chiang after the Manchurian defeat augured poorly for our support of his government in the inevitable battles to be fought in the south. If General Fu's armies could physically separate the two forces, a partition of China between the three political elements might be possible. It was a desperate alternative. But no one could deny these were desperate times.

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My own orders home arrived soon after the clandestine meeting. Just after New Year's, 1949, I was debriefed at CIA headquarters in the old OSS compound on 25th and E streets. Although the rooms were familiar, the images of that fresh-faced young paratroop lieutenant who had marched down these same halls six years before to face his interview with

General Donovan seemed far removed, like a faded daguerreotype from the Civil War. I'd seen too much betrayal and intrigue, too many mass graves and shell-blasted, smoldering ruins, to ever again view my profession as a straightforward test of courage and dedication. Without question, soldiers still needed these attributes. But I'd learned in the "postwar" world that they weren't sufficient. An officer in my line of work had to combine a certain degree of animal cunning with the traditional military virtues.

As I had feared, General Fu's audacious solution to the China impasse was rejected out of hand by the U.S. government. In fact, I was told, my cable had "sent the State Department into shock." That was the second time in a few weeks I had achieved that dubious distinction.

The first was in early November when I'd cabled from Tsingtao suggesting America send a relief flight to Mukden to reestablish communications with our beleaguered consulate staff under Angus Ward, whom the Communists had placed under house arrest. Ward was a brave and dedicated Foreign Service officer who had experienced communism firsthand when he had served as a political officer under Ambassador William C. Bullitt in Moscow before World War II. Since arriving in Mukden he had often locked horns with his superiors in Nanking and Washington. While they had maintained the naive "agrarian reformer" character of the Chinese Communists, Ward had consistently reported that the Reds were ruthlessly totalitarian in their Manchurian operations. Recalled for consultations in Washington, Ward told me he had confronted an "Alice in Wonderland" situation, in which senior State Department officials consistently *told him* what the situation was in Manchuria, rather than listen to his firsthand reports. The only person who gave him a fair hearing, he said, was Secretary of Defense James Forrestal.

Now Ward, his small staff, and their families were being held at gunpoint in several buildings in Mukden, incommunicado after Red troops had confiscated his consulate radio. I had proposed dispatching an unarmed American transport plane (with a fighter escort) to Mukden ostensibly to "repair" the consulate's radio equipment. Given the unsettled situation, I had added, a squad of Marine guards would be an appropriate addition to the consulate staff. I knew from my own experience that the Red Chinese at that point had no sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons and appeared reluctant to murder U.S. officials in broad daylight. Such a show of force, I'd argued, would let the Reds know we planned to insist on a minimum level of civilized behavior in their areas of occupation.

Unfortunately, such "aggressive" actions were anathema to the striped-pants set surrounding Secretary Marshall. Ward and his people languished under cruel conditions for many months after the capture of Mukden, and

were only expelled after the State Department kowtowed to Mao. I had learned from several years in Asia that a clear demonstration of force by a powerful entity—be it a military unit or an entire country—was often a necessary counterpart to traditional diplomacy. But Washington was not interested in the opinion of Army majors or dedicated officers like Angus Ward.

I was assigned as the Agency's China desk officer that spring of 1949. From this interesting vantage point, I witnessed the total collapse of the Nationalist forces in the south, their withdrawal down the coast, and the evacuation to Taiwan. Mao Tse-tung had won the civil war. The world's most populous country was now controlled by a ruthless Communist government.

From the perspective of the recently created CIA, this disaster was especially troubling. The Agency had evolved from the wartime OSS and its immediate postwar successors. The China/Burma/India theater of operations had made extensive use of the OSS during the war, but General Douglas MacArthur had rejected General Donovan's every attempt to establish an OSS presence in the Pacific theater. MacArthur's FECOM, based in the Dai Ichi building in Tokyo, was more an imperial court than the headquarters of a military occupation force.

With the defeat of Chiang, the CIA's China stations had been rolled up. The logical course of action would have been to regroup our assets in Japan and to base our Far East operations from this secure rear area. And I can attest that this was exactly what Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter, the CIA director, intended. After all, under the National Defense Act of 1947, the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) was responsible for coordinating *all* intelligence from around the world and presenting it to the President and his cabinet. With China now under Red control, and the Soviet Union fomenting and supporting "anti-imperialist" struggles throughout Asia, Hillenkoetter could hardly be expected to supply serious intelligence on Communist intentions without an adequate Asian base.

But General of the Army Douglas MacArthur rejected with typically disdainful hauteur the DCI's request to reestablish its Asian headquarters in Japan. Hillenkoetter was only a rear admiral, a pay grade that MacArthur viewed as just slightly higher than the MP sergeants in polished helmets he stationed throughout the Dai Ichi building day and night as a kind of centurion guard. MacArthur informed Truman that FECOM's own organic intelligence organization under his trusted aide, Major General Charles Willoughby, was more than sufficient to meet America's requirements. He considered the Agency's officers rank amateurs in Asia and let it be known that he and Willoughby combined decades of Far East experience. Any political or military intelligence President Truman might need, they could

supply. It is interesting to note that MacArthur's stature was elevated so far beyond that of a normal general that he was able to prevail on this vital matter without encountering serious opposition in Washington.[2]

While these matters were being settled in Tokyo and Washington, I was involved in the more pedestrian daily operations of intelligence. The official American policy in China was for our diplomatic and even some of our military offices to hunker down and remain open, as the Nationalist collapse spread south and the Red forces took over cities such as Peking and Shanghai. The Agency, however, was less naively sanguine than the State Department (or the U.S. Army, for that matter). The main CIA station in Shanghai was disbanded and the regular personnel—American, Chinese, and "third country"—evacuated.

But there were some exceptions. The need for so-called stay-behind agents was vital. Once the Communists had overrun the country, it would not be long before our diplomatic missions were completely neutralized. And my section was predicting that Mao's government would unleash a complete clampdown on foreign contacts. Therefore, one of the final acts of the Shanghai station was to recruit what it hoped were reliable agents among Chinese and resident Europeans, including those White Russians stranded there. In the process of this recruitment, however, an especially troubling case was revealed.

While station chief in Mukden, one of my civilian staff had been a young former OSS enlisted man named Hugh Redmond. He was a likable guy, but not terribly effective. I'd put him to work as a positive intelligence case officer, attempting to recruit Mongolian agent networks. But his language skills and general tradecraft were below average. He returned to other duties at the Shanghai station. When I was there just before the fall of China, I learned Hugh had married a White Russian girl and planned to remain in Shanghai, documented as a European businessman, and planned to serve as a stay-behind agent. I immediately went to Barney Fielden, the head of counterespionage, and expressed the view that Hugh was far too well known in Manchuria to survive very long as a stay-behind agent. As often happens in compartmentalized intelligence matters, I was thanked for my information, but not told how it would be used.

In May, I learned that Hugh and his wife had been arrested almost immediately after the Communists took Shanghai. Theirs was one of the first Communist show trials of foreigners. They both received life prison sentences. To me, this was tantamount to a slaughter of innocents. The Agency had simply underestimated the sophistication of the Communist counterespionage capabilities. "Big-nose" foreigners, be they American or European, were too visible in China to escape close scrutiny. It was the height of folly to believe an amiable young amateur like Hugh Redmond, no matter

how dedicated, could function well against a ruthless totalitarian foe that relied heavily on clandestine intelligence and operations.[3]

Equally naive was the U.S. Army's attempt to retain its language school in Peking after the Reds occupied the city. The school was commanded by Colonel Morris E. DePasse, an independent-minded officer who felt confident his long experience in China prepared him for dealing with the Communists. His administrative officer was Captain Homer B. Hinckley, an enormous guy, well over six foot three and weighing around 250 pounds. He was one of the most visible Americans in Peking. I'd had many dealings with Homer during my time in Manchuria. Whenever I needed American Army supplies, such as uniforms or rations, Homer would bypass the red tape and fill my request, making sure the load reached Mukden on the next flight. His connection to my station in Manchuria was no doubt observed by Red intelligence agents. He and the entire school staff were expelled in the spring of 1949.

This pattern was repeated not only with American government and business operations in China, but also with most journalists and other foreign commercial and diplomatic establishments. Mao was sealing China off from foreign observation, even the relatively benign perspective of legitimate business people. The reason for this crackdown became obvious that spring. For almost thirty years, the Chinese Communists had been unable to win what later became known as the "hearts and minds" of the Chinese people, even among the most benighted peasants. When they parlayed their Manchurian military success into an overall victory, the Communists set about systematically to *reeducate* hundreds of millions of their new subjects.

Their chief weapon in this campaign was terror. Even in the smallest village, a cadre of leaders dominated by Communists oversaw the cleansing of the population. The Party's principal enemies were the "landlords," often only peasants who had husbanded family income for generations to buy a small plot of land. Throughout the spring and summer of 1949, and on into the following years, millions of these *exploiters* were murdered in public executions that, for sheer magnitude, rivaled the genocides of the Nazis and Stalin's Soviet Communists.[4] This was the agrarian reform many American diplomats had hailed as such a progressive force.

That spring in Peking, I learned, another trial of foreign spies had taken place, during which a particularly dastardly "German-American" major identified only as Hseng Lo-pu was condemned to death in absentia. *New York Times* reporter Hank Lieberman, who attended the trial, obligingly informed the world that this person was "undoubtedly" U.S. Army Major John K. Singlaub.

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THAT summer I was assigned back to the Regular Army. I could have stayed with the Agency, but I'd already been away from normal postwar Army assignments for almost four years.[5] And, from what I saw of thwarted "Company" operations in the Far East, I could do more for my country as an infantry officer. The Army obviously thought so as well. I was ordered to attend the Advanced Course of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, a kind of graduate course for potential battalion commanders. This is one of the mandatory courses every career officer had to take as a normal activity in the profession of arms. Even though going back to the sweltering classrooms of a southern Army base was anticlimactic after my unusual duties and intrigues in Manchuria, I realized the assignment augured well for my advancement in the Army.

By a strange quirk of fate, one of the first guys I ran into at the Infantry School was none other than the friendly giant, Homer Hinckley, now a major fresh back from Peking. As the course progressed I got a chance to repay Homer's kindness. He had kept us supplied with long johns and space-heater wicks in the numbing Manchurian winters. I labored for hours after classes at night and early in the morning to teach him the fundamentals of map reading. The ability to take advantage of terrain, to move troops safely, avoiding ambush and artillery barrage, was an absolutely basic skill of an infantry officer. This was something every second lieutenant had to learn before he took over a platoon. Somehow, Homer never had. And he wouldn't graduate from the Infantry School until he could master the complexities of contour lines, compass azimuths and variations, and generally use an Army topographic map with the efficiency of a first-class Boy Scout.

It wasn't easy, but, with help from me and other combat infantry veterans, Homer managed.

Most of the officers in the course had seen combat in World War II, and several had been seriously wounded. I became close to three or four men with whom I later served in different parts of the world. Major Harvey Short, for example, was West Point, 1943. He had almost been killed by Japanese artillery in the bitter fighting on Okinawa in 1945. I often saw him gazing with an expression of slightly bemused impatience as the eager young instructors went from blackboard to sand table, proclaiming how a "standard" battalion assault against fortified positions evolved like clockwork from the opening artillery barrage to the final evacuation of wounded. On the bloody ridges of Okinawa, American battalions had hardly "maneuvered," and the Japanese defense was slightly more than *standard.* Combat in those muddy foxholes and shell craters had more in common with Neanderthal warfare than the classrooms of Fort Benning.

But still we listened attentively, asked the proper questions, took notes, and sweated out our exams. Our future as officers depended on good performance here because there was no real war to otherwise test our mettle.

Not that there wasn't fighting in the world. The Greek civil war was still going strong, and the French army was up to its neck in the mud of Indochina. But the advent of nuclear weapons had brought about a tense stalemate between the world's two major military powers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

In Europe, the allies of World War II now faced each other across the tense 400-mile Armistice Line separating their occupation zones, the line Winston Churchill had christened the Iron Curtain. If, or more likely *when*, the balloon went up in Europe, my classmates and I might well command battalions in "standard" infantry battles.

But I couldn't forget what I had seen in Manchuria. The Chinese Communists simply did not employ conventional tactics. They had defeated Chiang's armies by a war of mobility, involving relatively lightly armed small units that foraged for rations, carried their own ammunition and mortars on their backs, and relied on sturdy battalions of peasant porters and ox carts to move their heavier supplies. The Red Chinese had evaded Nationalist air force interdiction by perfecting night movement and attack. They made skillful use of deception tactics and psychological warfare to confuse their enemy. In effect, the Chinese Red Army was a hybrid combination of guerrilla forces and conventional light infantry. What made this combination so devastating was the sheer number of troops.

What we were being taught that winter at Fort Benning might well do some good fighting the Russians. But I couldn't help wonder how these tactics—which were basically what the United States had drilled into Chiang Kai-shek's best "New Armies"—would stand up in a war against Mao Tse-tung.

Another aspect of the U.S. Army's conventional organization that I found troubling was racial segregation. Negro units, as they were then known, made up a fair percentage of the Army. During the war, black support troops, including the resourceful truckers of the Red Ball Express in the ETO, had been vital to the Allied victory. But there had been relatively few black combat units. Many black soldiers elected to stay in the Army after the war, seeing the armed forces as a means of advancement. But with an official policy of racial segregation, the career opportunities for a black officer or NCO were truncated. A kind of sealed, dead-end mentality often took hold among them, by which they maintained a wary truce with their white counterparts, and often with their white officers. Because of the stigma of segregation, their loyalties sometimes followed racial lines, not the traditional chain of command.

As if this was not bad enough from a human perspective, segregation was downright impractical and terribly wasteful of limited resources. For example, every base with Negro units had to maintain "separate-but-equal"

(hardly the latter) facilities such as barracks, mess halls, latrines, hospital wards, service clubs, and so on. From an operational standpoint, black units rarely functioned efficiently during training maneuvers. The all-important bond of human contact between line troops, noncoms, and higher-ranking officers simply wasn't there. Negro units were therefore unjustly castigated as being lazy and inefficient.

I was from southern California and had gone through UCLA with black students, including outstanding young men like Kenny Washington and Jackie Robinson, who broke the segregation barrier in professional sports. Therefore, I had little patience with the military's antiquated racial status quo.

When I voiced my opinion on this during classroom discussions at the Infantry School, however, most of my colleagues parroted the same lame defense of segregation: "You never served with them," they said. "They're just not like us."

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ONE of the many demonstrations at the Infantry School that I'll always remember was the so-called "Mad Minute." Our class was assembled on bleachers behind a battalion defensive position where troops were deployed with a variety of small arms and automatic weapons. As an instructor lectured over an echoing public-address system, the troops began to fire toward the sandy wasteland ahead. First came the M-1 rifles, Browning automatic rifles (BARs), and light machine guns—well supplied with bright tracers—then came heavy machine guns and mortars. The purpose of the exercise was to demonstrate to future battalion commanders the effects of the fire support available to their units. As the crackling small arms and chugging mortars continued, 105mm and 155mm howitzers began firing behind us, their shells rumbling overhead like trolley cars on a bad track. The artillery was joined by 4.2-inch mortars; then came the big 8-inch self-propelled guns. M-26 tanks that had been hidden beneath floppy camouflage nets in a pine woods on our left now cut loose with their 90mm guns. The whiplash crack of these tank weapons shook the bleacher seats. Out ahead, the overgrown approaches to the sandbagged trenches became a chaos of boiling dust and smoke, illuminated by dazzling orange flashes. The instructor announced the addition of "VT," variable-time, airburst artillery rounds, which employed a tiny radar altimeter fuse, set to explode a shower of shrapnel at a predetermined height above the ground. Finally, Air Force F-80 Shooting Star jets roared by, lacing the battalion defenses with rockets and smoky red napalm.

"Gentlemen," the instructor proclaimed, "you have just witnessed the unsurpassed firepower available to an infantry battalion."

I gazed into the churning smoke. Without question, an enemy force advancing across that open ground would have been slaughtered. Unlike many of my colleagues who had served in regular infantry outfits in Europe and the Pacific, I hadn't seen the effects of massed artillery firsthand in France or China. But I quickly recognized that this impressive demonstration represented optimal fire-support efficiency. I decided then and there to learn as much as I could about artillery and air support, particularly the problems of coordination between a battalion headquarters and the artillery and Air Force units assigned to support it. The firing ranges of Fort Benning were a long way from the real world, where I might have to lead a battalion in combat.

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MOST of us began informal maneuvering for assignments in March 1950, when it was clear we'd graduate that summer. I wanted back in the Airborne. But so did a lot of other guys. From a wartime strength of five divisions, our Airborne forces had been reduced to two divisions, the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the 11th at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. That spring, my old Jedburgh friend Mac Austin visited Fort Benning, en route to Bragg where he'd been assigned as a battalion executive officer in the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment. We got together with another ex-OSS officer, Major Dow Grones, whom I had met in Detachment 101 at Bhamo in Burma. Dow was going to the 82nd as well, but to take command of the 3rd Battalion of the 505th Regiment, the only Negro parachute infantry outfit in the Army. Over drinks at the officers' club I kidded him about the assignment, offering to lend him my lecture notes covering the greater efficiency of racially integrated units.

A month later, Dow gave me a chance to test my theories. I was to report to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg following completion of the Infantry School at the end of June 1950. He arranged to have me assigned as his executive officer. When I broke the news to Mary, she chuckled. Being number-two man in a Negro battalion lacked the prestige of regular duties in the 82nd. In effect, I could anticipate two years of worthwhile but officially thankless drudgery in the peacetime Army, as a reward for my outspoken liberal views on race relations.

"One of these days, Jack," she said, shaking her head, "you're going to learn to keep your opinions to yourself."

As things turned out, however, there wasn't much peacetime duty for anyone in the U.S. Army to enjoy for the next three years.

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JUST before a rainy dawn on Sunday, June 25, 1950, almost 100,000 troops of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) swept across the 38th parallel dividing the Communist North from the Republic of Korea. The invasion was opposed by fewer than three, under-strength South Korean divisions. Korea had been administratively partitioned between North and South by the Allies in 1945, so that Soviet forces could accept the Japanese surrender north of that line and U.S. troops to its south.

This arbitrary boundary became the border between a Communist puppet state and a fledgling, U.S.-sponsored democracy during the five years of Cold War that followed. North Korea's government was a dictatorship under Premier Kim Il-Sung, an ex-major in the Soviet army, whom the Russians handpicked as the leader of their client state. The leader of the South was President Syngman Rhee, an elderly, American-trained educator who had organized early resistance to Japanese occupation.

The Soviets invested heavily in the buildup of North Korea's armed forces, equipping the NKPA with tanks and heavy artillery. When the Russian Red Army officially departed North Korea in 1948, it left behind thousands of advisers. Just as important, the Soviet Union continued its massive buildup of war matériel in the North. At the time of the invasion, North Korea's army had grown to 135,000 men, and many of its officer corps had been trained in Soviet military academies and had seen combat under Soviet sponsorship with the Chinese Communist army in Manchuria.[6]

The Republic of Korea's army (ROKA) numbered fewer than 100,000. It was trained, advised, and equipped by the United States. Regular U.S. occupation troops of the 24th Corps had officially withdrawn from Korea in May 1949, leaving behind the U.S. Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea (KMAG), a training cadre and logistical unit of 500 officers and men. South Korean forces had no tanks, little artillery, and few qualified officers. The small KMAG operation was directed from Washington, not FECOM. To communicate with MacArthur's headquarters, they had to route their radio traffic through roundabout relay stations.

The rout of South Korea's forces that began that Sunday morning was one of the most unequal contests in the history of modern warfare.

On June 25, 1950, there existed FECOM contingency plans for the use of U.S. forces in the defense of South Korea. But these plans never anticipated a massive, coordinated surprise assault, spearheaded by modern Soviet-built tanks, across the entire breadth of the 38th parallel.[7] American advisers were really training a paramilitary constabulary to repel minor border skirmishes and guerrilla forays from the North. The Soviets had other goals.[8]

Within forty-eight hours of the Communist invasion, ROK resistance had crumbled. The road lay open for the North Koreans to sweep the peninsula.

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My class graduated from the Infantry School on Saturday, June 24, 1950. The next day, a typically muggy Sunday, I was packing up our quarters near Fort Benning when the baseball game on the radio was interrupted with the news of the invasion. My first reaction was anger, followed by grudging professional admiration. To strike simultaneously with so many divisions was not an easy feat for any army, especially one that had been only recently organized.

My next reaction was frustrated curiosity. Why hadn't American intelligence predicted the invasion? All that spring there had been minor probes and feints by the North Koreans along the 38th parallel. Surely the CIA and FECOM's G-2 (military intelligence) under Major General Willoughby had been on an increased state of alert. But ROK forces had been literally caught in bed in some cases, and trapped inside their ill-defended garrisons in others. There had been a grand total of *one* American military adviser with the ROK troops on the 38th parallel that Sunday morning.[9] It was almost inconceivable that the North Koreans had achieved such total surprise.

The more I considered the situation, the more difficult it became to accept a complete absence of intelligence information about the Communists' intentions. If they had been able to strike totally without warning, they had pulled off a feat as great as the attack on Pearl Harbor. But I knew from my own work forming intelligence networks in North Korea (the task led by my case officers Scott Miler and John Chrislaw) that the CIA had dispatched dozens of well-trained young agents across the Yalu from Manchuria from 1946 to 1948. Despite the resistance of MacArthur and Major General Willoughby, we had inserted enough dedicated anti-Communists into North Korea with the *specific* mission of invasion early warning that at least one of them would have sounded the alarm. Moreover, the CIA had finally established a small station in South Korea's capital, Seoul, in 1949, when U.S. occupation forces had withdrawn. I'd been on the Agency's China desk when the station was set up, and knew the office to be staffed by reliable officers. In mid-1949, the Korea station had been receiving a good flow of intelligence from these agents. It was not likely they'd all simply dried up before the invasion. If they had, *that* would have been a clear warning in itself.

Over the ensuing years, while serving again with the CIA, on military assignments to Korea, and discussing the issue in detail with men who'd been key members of the civilian and military intelligence establishment at the time, I have managed to unravel the mystery of the great "intelligence failure" of June 1950.[10]

That spring Kim Il-Sung's Communist government had unleashed a virulent propaganda campaign against the South, condemning the elections there and threatening unspecified military action. This campaign had been for public consumption, to eventually mollify fears through hyperbole. Meanwhile, Kim's Soviet-backed army undertook specific steps to prepare for invasion, steps which did, in fact, raise the alarm with American-trained agents in North Korea. These brave young men had done as they were ordered: They'd worked their way into influential positions in the North Korean civil and military administration, including jobs in the transportation system.

By June, several of these agents either had sent specific reports of North Korean preparations or had actually slipped across the 38th parallel and reported to CIA officers in South Korea for debriefing. An important Intelligence Estimate dated June 19, 1950, compiled from "CIA Field Agency reports," described in detail "extensive troop movements," reinforcement of roads north of the border to carry heavy equipment and armor, and repairs to railroad lines leading south, which had been ripped up by the Soviets in 1945. Even more ominously, the Estimate cited agents' reports that civilian traffic had been halted on North Korean railroads linking major military centers with the border. This document concluded that a North Korean invasion was pending, that Kim had positioned his forces to strike whenever he wanted to.[11]

A full five days before the invasion, CIA director Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter had made sure that this Estimate was delivered to the White House and President Truman's key military and foreign policy advisers, including Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley. A summary of the Estimate was also telegraphically dispatched to Generals MacArthur and Willoughby at FECOM in Tokyo.

America's key military and civilian policy-makers had ample evidence of North Korean intentions before the invasion. And this evidence was based on reports by well-trained agents. The logical question is: Why didn't America's leaders react? Why didn't they put North Korea on formal notice that any military action would be met with massive force? Why, at least, didn't American Air Force reconnaissance planes make themselves conspicuous over the only three invasion routes from the tangled mountains of the north?

CIA field officers serving in the Pacific at the time later gave me answers to these questions. They explained that FECOM's G-2, the imperious Major General Charles Willoughby, had reviewed a stream of such reports from the Seoul CIA station that spring and had labeled them all with the negative designation "F-6": Untried Source, Reliability Unknown. In the intelligence profession, an F-6 evaluation was very low, not quite as bad as an E-5—Unreliable Source, Improbable Information—but certainly tainted. Because

U.S. operations in Korea were no longer under the personal command of MacArthur, his chief intelligence officer deigned the reports unworthy of serious consideration. So labeled, this growing stream of information was never taken seriously outside the CIA in Washington. General Bradley, in fact, let it be known in the intelligence community that the increasingly alarming reports from the field were like someone "crying wolf" (which was probably the goal of the North Koreans' shrill propaganda offensive that spring).

But Admiral Hillenkoetter had stuck to his guns. It was not his job to make policy based on intelligence, but rather to provide the policy-makers with the most reliable information available. Hence, his last estimate on June 20 continued to warn that a North Korean invasion was pending.

On Monday, June 26, 1950, of course, speculation about the possible attack and the warnings of our field agents were moot points. Most of the Congress had adjourned, it being an election year. But the Senate Appropriations Committee, chaired by a near-senile Democratic curmudgeon from Tennessee named Kenneth McKeller, was still sitting on the Hill. Republican senator Stiles Bridges (never one to avoid the hot lights of the newsreels or a radio microphone) called for a closed session in which America's key foreign policy and intelligence leaders would be forced to explain why the North Korean surprise attack had caught us flat-footed.

Dean Acheson and Defense Secretary Johnson testified during the morning session. By lunchtime, unnamed senators had leaked the news that the North Korean attack represented a shocking "failure" of American intelligence.

Walter Pforzheimer was Admiral Hillenkoetter's legislative counsel, the man who prepared him for congressional testimony. The Director and Pforzheimer conferred that morning at CIA headquarters, while Acheson and Johnson testified. Secretary Acheson telephoned after his testimony to tell Hillenkoetter he had "done his best" to defend the intelligence community in the face of savage attacks by the outraged senators. Acheson, apparently still defending the Director, had made an appointment for Hillenkoetter to brief President Truman at three that afternoon; unfortunately, the meeting conflicted with the Director's scheduled testimony before the Senate committee.

Admiral Hillenkoetter had been blown out of the water aboard the battleship *West Virginia* at Pearl Harbor, and had been our naval attaché to the Vichy government during the war; he had learned a few things about danger and palace intrigues. He told Pforzheimer to assemble all the agents' reports from North Korea and the latest Intelligence Estimates, which had already been sent to key policy-makers. They drove together to the White House; if Hillenkoetter was delayed very long with the President, Pforzheimer was to continue on to testify on the Hill.

As the Admiral later reported to Pforzheimer, the meeting with President Truman was cordial, brief, and straightforward. Hillenkoetter showed the President the documents he intended to present to the senators. Truman was a bit surprised that the Director still intended to testify. "Admiral," Truman said, "do you really want to go up there?"

"Mr. President," Hillenkoetter answered, hefting the stack of documents, "I believe we have a good story to tell."

Truman gazed at him a moment through his rimless glasses. "I believe you do. Go ahead."

When Hillenkoetter and Pforzheimer reached the committee room they discovered the reason Acheson had tried to stall them at the White House. During his testimony that morning, the Secretary of State had tried to shift the blame for the Korean debacle onto the CIA. This was the true source of the outraged reports on "intelligence failures" that had been already leaked to the press. Hillenkoetter was angry, but maintained his composure as he patiently read from the Estimates and agents' reports, which clearly cited specific evidence of the North Koreans' invasion plans.

At one point, Senator McKeller demanded to know why these Estimates had not been disseminated to the secretaries of State and Defense.

"Senator," Admiral Hillenkoetter stated, "every Estimate was circulated to the key cabinet officials."

McKeller looked skeptical; that very morning, Secretary Acheson had sworn he had received no such warning. McKeller demanded proof. The Director promised to deliver signed receipts, proving these cabinet officers had received the Estimates, including the critical June 20 document containing the specific warnings.

By the end of the closed hearing, the senators, both Democrats and Republicans, understood that the CIA had done its job. They also realized that the "intelligence" failure did not occur among America's intelligence professionals. That afternoon, several senators spoke to the press to affirm their confidence in the Central Intelligence Agency. Stiles Bridges grudgingly allowed that the CIA "was doing a good job," although he had not thought so before the hearing. Republican senator William Knowland of California, who had previously thought the administration had been caught flat-footed, declared, "I am satisfied that the CIA is and was performing its function."[12]

But Senator McKeller was not mollified. He demanded that Walter Pforzheimer appear the next day with the actual signed receipts, showing the Estimates had been received by Acheson and other cabinet members. When Pforzheimer produced these receipts on Tuesday morning, the old senator took one look at them and threw them on the committee room table. "These are forgeries!" he shouted. "Get out of here."

Pforzheimer held his ground, politely indicating that the signatures were authentic.

Senator McKeller examined each signature, comparing the handwriting with other authenticated documents. Still fuming about forgeries, he gradually was forced to acknowledge the validity of the receipts. But he never shared this information with the press.

At least, however, the courageous work of the young Korean agents we had trained in Manchuria had not been completely in vain. They had faced torture and lonely execution to bring us warning of the Communist attack. The CIA had forwarded this warning. Although the politicians had refused to act, on the ground in South Korea, the Agency was better prepared for the invasion than the ROK military.

The official Communist propaganda line, originated in Moscow and parroted by Party organs around the world, held that there had been no invasion at all. Rather, the North Koreans were simply counterattacking the South Korean "Quislings," who had infiltrated north of the 38th parallel to ambush the hapless border guards of the North Korean People's Army. Now the "people's peace movement" had pursued the fascist aggressors south of the 38th parallel, in an effort to punish the "Wall Street puppet regime."[13]

☆ ☆

IN July, I took over as executive officer, 3rd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Fort Bragg was beginning to feel the confusion of another wartime buildup. In an incredible ten-day period, President Truman had committed American military forces to repel the North Korean invasion, the United Nations had voted to support the South Koreans, and the first American Army units had been dispatched to Korea.

But the news from Korea was not good. Within three days, Seoul was overrun. Units from the American 24th Infantry Division were arriving piecemeal in Korea from their occupation duty in Japan. They were lightly armed and clearly no match for the tank-supported NKPA units. By mid-July, some regiments of the 24th Infantry Division had lost half their men, and the combined ROK-U.S. force was being squeezed to the bottom of the peninsula. The light armor of the 1st U.S. Cavalry Division was arriving slowly in the south, and the 25th Infantry Division was en route from Hawaii. But it was uncertain whether the "United Nations" forces under the command of American Army General Walton Walker could hold out against the North Korean juggernaut.

At Fort Bragg, the mood was one of excited anticipation, melded with frustration. The 82nd Airborne Division had become the repository of most of America's battle-tested professional paratroop officers and NCOs. We wanted to get into the fight, but we also recognized that repulsing the well-organized Communist aggression in Korea would require a massive buildup

of U.S. forces. The country had virtually turned its back on Asia, lulled by the grandiosity of MacArthur's imperial reign in Tokyo. MacArthur was a five-star general, as was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Omar Bradley. But MacArthur definitely viewed himself as first among equals. Therefore, the important responsibility of defending Asia had fallen exclusively to FECOM.

In Europe, American forces were involved in the integration of the new NATO command. If the country was going to meet the aggression in Korea, the troops would have to come from elsewhere. I was heartened when President Truman ordered the mobilization of Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps reserve and National Guard units. This was not a politically popular move, but it was absolutely vital from both a military and foreign policy standpoint. We couldn't expect U.N. allies to send combat troops if we ourselves were unwilling to make sacrifices.

At meetings of regimental and division staff officers, I learned that the 82nd was scrambling hard to get its component units up to combat strength, to fill the Table of Organization and Equipment, the all-important "TO&E." What was especially frustrating for me was the fact that my battalion, the only Negro paratroop outfit in the U.S. Army, was practically double strength, with almost 1,600 men. This meant we had surpluses of everything, including fairly well-trained personnel. While the other battalions needed 4.2-inch mortar platoons, medics, radio men, and so on, we had them in abundance.

But our soldiers' skins happened to be black. That meant they could not serve alongside their white counterparts, the severity of the national emergency notwithstanding. Never one to passively accept the status quo, I made a real pain of myself in the regiment and division that summer, proposing the transfer of mortar platoons, commo sections, and other specialized troops from the 3rd Battalion for assignment elsewhere in the division. My efforts at unofficial integration were thwarted. At that point, racial segregation was the official policy in the U.S. military, and the law of most southern states, including North Carolina. It would be several more months before President Truman took the politically bold but absolutely logical step of desegregating the armed services.

Meanwhile, we had a battalion to prepare for combat. And that was not an easy job. Our unit was both physically and psychologically separated from the rest of the regiment. I spent a fair amount of my time in the battalion as Summary Court Officer. In that capacity I was subjected to some truly exceptional and innovative stories from black troopers explaining why they were three days late returning from passes. Going AWOL was not considered a normal part of soldiering in this outfit, but trying to outwit the Summary Court Officer was considered a legitimate exercise in creative

expression. Because of segregation, the loyalty of the men ran horizontally along racial lines, not vertically up and down the chain of command. In the past, their white officers had been viewed as aloof and patronizing, more like detached schoolmasters than combat leaders. Major Dow Grones and I set about to change that attitude.

By tradition, Airborne troops are supposed to be tough, and parachute infantry the cream of the lot. But our outfit had gotten fat and sluggish. The other battalions all ran two miles before breakfast. When I joined the battalion, the men were used to trotting a few blocks around the company area after some limited calisthenics, then settling in for a slow, high-calorie mess-hall breakfast. We got them running—not trotting—a full six miles around the entire regimental area every morning. At first, the dropout rate was scandalous. But Dow asked me to take several bright young lieutenants to police up the stragglers. These slackers were assembled each afternoon for a little additional physical training, an exercise which I personally led. The word went out. Either you ran six miles behind Major Grones in the cool of the morning, or you ran six with Major Singlaub in the humid heat of the afternoon.

Within a month, the men were back in what I considered fighting shape. Equally important, they were beginning to take pride in themselves as soldiers. As we ran each morning through the company streets of the white battalions, the men of our outfit now chanted a steady, almost defiant cadence. It was as if they were challenging the rest of the 82nd to be as "Airborne" as they were. This newfound sense of pride spilled over to the serious business of combat training. On night jumps, our five companies landed with few injuries and assembled quickly on the drop zone, a clear indication the individual soldiers were working hard. By September, I was confident that we could lead these men into combat and they would account for themselves well on the battlefield. So much for the myth of the lazy, ineffective black soldier.

But I never got the chance to test them. I was on the rifle range with my troops one blazing September morning when a runner arrived with priority orders. I was to report at once to Fort Benning, Georgia, where the Army had established a new Ranger Training Center.

☆ ☆

THE Rangers have a venerable history in the U.S. Army. Independent companies of scouts and irregulars—practitioners of what we now call unconventional warfare—fought in all of our wars, starting with Rogers' Rangers in the French and Indian Wars.[14] In World War II, the Rangers served with distinction, particularly in the D-Day invasion, where the First Ranger Bat-

talion stormed the formidable cliffs of Pointe du Hoc above Omaha Beach and neutralized the German batteries there. By August of 1950, Eighth Army recognized the need for a long-range patrol capability within the units fighting in Korea. A provisional company was established from volunteers in Eighth Army and another in X Corps. The Army General Staff decided to authorize a small special Ranger company to be assigned to each infantry division. They would act as the division commander's long-range patrollers, serving far behind enemy lines, conducting thorough, reliable reconnaissance missions and, when necessary, disrupting enemy lines of communication. In effect, the new Ranger companies would be a combination of an OSS Operational Group and a World War II Ranger battalion.

So it wasn't surprising that a former Jed like myself was summoned to Fort Benning to join World War II Ranger veterans like Major Bill Bond and Major "Bull" Simons. The commander of the new center, Colonel John Van Houten, gave us considerable latitude. Our job was to establish a training curriculum that would take already well-trained Airborne volunteers and mold them quickly into Ranger companies that would be physically and mentally tough enough to function well behind enemy lines.

The Army General Staff decided that we'd form the Ranger companies with volunteers from regular army Airborne units. That way, a man would be a triple volunteer by the time he arrived, a pretty good indication he was motivated for the job. The training itself relied heavily on Jedburgh and Ranger techniques, with an emphasis on instinctive firing, demolition, infiltration, and clandestine communications. The training cadre not only designed the separate courses, we also went through them ourselves to test their practicality.

I led the advanced Airborne training section, which specialized in low-altitude night drops. By this time, the American Airborne had already adopted British parachute landing techniques, and accidents were relatively rare. My job was to teach men to pinpoint small drop zones at night and to consistently dispatch sticks of jumpers and their equipment into these clearings or islands in the Georgia swamps. I found myself jumping almost every night, testing new equipment and drop techniques. While some of the other guys still considered leaping from an airplane an unusual experience, to me the task became simply part of my job. The guys around me began calling me "Jumping Jack," a nickname that has stuck with me.

One day I had a stick of young Ranger officers aboard an Air Force C-47 for some special jump-master training. The flight crew was new to my unorthodox drop techniques, and I went up to the cockpit to lead the pilot through a dry run across the drop zone. Colonel John Van Houten, who didn't jump very often, was along on this drop to make an administrative pay jump to keep his Airborne qualification active. He had an appointment

the next morning at the Pentagon and was in a hurry to complete the drop and catch his flight to Washington. When I went up forward, he mistakenly assumed the drop was about to begin.

Turning to a young lieutenant named Jonathan Carney, the Colonel said, "Come on, son, tap me out."

He hooked up his static line and shuffled up to the door. Carney being pretty green acted as an impromptu jump master. He tapped the Colonel's helmet and Van Houten stepped into the prop blast.

When I came back from the cockpit I saw he was gone. "Where the hell's Colonel Van Houten?" I shouted over the engine roar.

Carney looked stricken. "He jumped, sir," Carney squawked. "Wasn't he supposed to?"

I shook my head. Colonel Van Houten had jumped with the aircraft flying at almost full throttle, a good 150 knots. He'd be damned lucky if his back wasn't broken by the opening shock. And he'd be equally lucky if his canopy survived intact. I signaled the crew to slow down and jumped myself as we crossed back over the drop zone.

On the ground, I found Major Dan Gallagher looking like he'd just been doused with ice water. "The Colonel's bleeding from his ears and mouth," he said. "He could hardly walk."

Van Houten somehow made it to his sedan, which was waiting to take him to the airport. As he started to leave the drop zone, he saw me running toward his car. The driver stopped and the Colonel rolled down his window and motioned for me to come to him. "Jack," he said, with typical Ranger humor, "let this be a lesson to you. Never leave me alone again in the back of an airplane."

I saluted smartly and rendered a relieved, "No, sir," as he rolled up his window and motioned to the driver to continue the trip to the airport.

☆ ☆

WHILE we were preparing to receive our first Ranger trainees, the situation in Korea shifted dramatically. United Nations forces had stabilized a perimeter around the port of Pusan in the southeast corner of the peninsula, and repelled repeated, savage North Korean attacks. Then, in mid-September, MacArthur unleashed the most brilliant operation of his career, the amphibious assault at Inchon, the port of Seoul. In one fell swoop, MacArthur's X Corps, composed of the Army's 7th Infantry Division and the U.S. Marines 1st Division, went ashore against light enemy opposition.

By the end of September, they had recaptured Seoul and were cutting across the narrow waist of the Korean peninsula. The Eighth Army under General Walker broke out of the Pusan perimeter and drove north to link

up with X Corps. Now the NKPA divisions that had routed the ROK and American forces in July were themselves routed. By October, the situation on the battlefield was completely reversed. North Korean forces had been shattered and were retreating in total disarray as U.N. units pushed far north of the 38th parallel. America drew on its battlefield success to shepherd a resolution through the General Assembly that vaguely endorsed American-led U.N. military action north of the parallel, what was called "all appropriate steps" to create stability throughout the country, which would lead to a unified government elected under U.N. auspices.[15]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff under General Bradley (with the strong support of General George Marshall, who had replaced Louis Johnson as secretary of defense) cautioned MacArthur to avoid provoking intervention by either the Soviet Union or the Chinese Communists as U.N. forces drove north, pursuing the shattered NKPA. Despite his serene bravado, MacArthur was known to be initially concerned about such intervention. But as no Chinese or Soviet advisers were killed or captured, his confidence grew daily.[16]

MacArthur was an audacious strategist. Rather than pursue a mundane land advance up the mountainous peninsula, he packed up the X Corps once again aboard Navy transports and staged another massive amphibious landing, this one halfway up North Korea's east coast at Wonsan. The landing, however, did not go smoothly. Soviet submarines had sown the harbor thick with mines and it took two weeks to clear them. While the 1st Marine Division's invasion flotilla was stalled at sea, the ROK 3rd and Capital Divisions beat the Americans to Wonsan and were already many miles farther north when the Marines landed. "Even Bob Hope was there before them," military historian Max Hastings notes ironically. To their profound chagrin, "by a stroke that entered Marine legend, the entertainer staged a USO show in Wonsan the night before the division stormed ashore to take position."[17]

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur was apparently not amused.

A more ominous aspect of this operation was the splitting of the U.N. command into two unequal halves. The Eighth Army under General Walker became the junior partner in the drive north. X Corps commander Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond retained his position as MacArthur's FECOM chief of staff, an unorthodox arrangement to say the least. With this inside track to FECOM, Almond siphoned off the lion's share of men and matériel, leaving Walker's Eighth Army somewhat of an orphan.

Worse, Walker allowed the professional standards of some units to deteriorate on the march north toward the Yalu. Because there was little resistance from the NKPA, he and his subordinates (down to company level in some cases) made the fatal mistake of assuming the war was over. His principal ground-combat forces, the U.S. 2nd and 25th Infantry Divisions

and the 1st Cavalry Division, were loaded with green replacements. The offensive up North Korea's west coast acquired a slapdash character. MacArthur himself did not help matters much in mid-October, when he announced that victory was at hand and that the men would be home by Christmas. It's hard to get a tired GI (especially a teenage kid new to combat) to dig in properly on a frozen ridge or to hump that heavy extra case of machine-gun ammunition up a steep Korean mountain if his Supreme Commander has proclaimed the fighting will be over in eight weeks.

Major General Charles Willoughby issued a detailed intelligence report in Tokyo on October 14, concerning the delicate question of possible Soviet or Communist Chinese intervention in support of their North Korean ally. He concluded that the Soviets would have already intervened if they intended to prop up the NKPA. As for Chinese Communist forces (CCF), Willoughby dismissed Chinese threats to enter North Korea as "diplomatic blackmail." He did note, however, that the Chinese had at least nine field armies with thirty-eight divisions garrisoned in Manchuria and that twenty-four of these divisions were poised along the Yalu River in a position to intervene. Nevertheless, he judged this Communist order of battle to be mere posturing.[18]

But within six weeks, the American military would succumb to another surprise hammer blow; this one would make the North Korean invasion seem like a Scout jamboree in comparison.

☆ ☆

I FLEW out to Korea the last week of November 1950 to confer with the division staffs of the Eighth Army and X Corps on the addition of Ranger companies to their units. When I arrived in Tokyo the mood was still euphoric. Advanced American units, I learned, were already dug in on the banks of the frozen Yalu River and MacArthur's final offensive was about to begin. But, as I went about my job, briefing FECOM staff officers on the planned deployment of Ranger units in Korea, disturbing reports began to circulate in FECOM about large-scale fighting both in the Eighth Army's area of operations and in the frozen mountains of the east coast where the X Corps was supposedly advancing unopposed toward the Chinese and Soviet borders.

By November 30, when I flew from Tokyo to X Corps headquarters at Hamhung, the rumors of a massive Chinese intervention had been confirmed. The Eighth Army's 2nd Infantry Division and a regiment of the 1st Cavalry had been overwhelmed along the Chongchon River in the west. In what became known as the Battle of Kunu-ri, the 2nd Division was smashed into small units by massively superior Chinese forces; in turn, either these units were cut off in the roadless wilderness of mountains and destroyed, or they were captured intact.[19] The survivors of the 2nd Division retreated

in a disarray that rivaled the NKPA debacle of three months earlier. Other elements of the Eighth Army, whether in contact with the Chinese or not, were ordered to execute a withdrawal to the south to preserve the integrity of the Army.

I was saddened to learn that my good friend Homer Hinckley had been one of the casualties of this unequal meeting engagement. Homer's battalion had been strung out along the river when they were overrun by several Chinese regiments. Attempting to extract his headquarters company, he had stumbled into an enemy ambush and his entire headquarters unit was killed or captured. Homer was now listed as missing in action, a probable prisoner of the Chinese. I couldn't help wondering if Homer's notoriously bad map skills somehow led to his capture. I was worried because Homer's distinctive size was bound to be noticed, and with this attention his background in Peking would undoubtedly be revealed. The Chinese probably had him on their list of "spies," and this might well seal his fate in captivity.

The CCF attacks in the west were carried out by the Chinese 13th Army Group, which followed the classic tactics of its veteran leader, my old nemesis from Manchuria, General Lin Piao. The Chinese forces moved easily across the mountain wilderness, carrying what they needed on their backs. They marched at night to avoid American air attack. And they also attacked at night, usually before the American troops had a chance to properly dig in.

Intelligence reports of the Chinese offensive I read in Hamhung bordered on the unbelievable. Surviving GIs spoke of "human wave" attacks in which thousands of Chinese infantrymen in tan padded uniforms trotted doggedly up the snowy slopes, encouraged by blaring bugles. In some cases, American units were overrun when the GIs had simply expended all their ammunition killing Chinese who just kept advancing through the frozen night in the garish light of red signal flares. Some elements of the Eighth Army were surprised and defeated by the CCF, but the majority of the American troops were terribly confused by their sudden orders to execute a deep withdrawal to terrain south of Seoul. One day their commander promised them they'd be home by Christmas, and his lofty chief of intelligence dismissed rumors of Chinese intervention as propaganda. The next day the admitted presence of a vastly superior Chinese force caused all of the United Nations forces to abandon much of the territory they had recently seized from the North Koreans. In the first weeks of December, as the harsh Korean winter swept down from Siberia, the Eighth Army was able to avoid the enveloping maneuvers of the Chinese by a series of major withdrawals. The CCF never repeated the hammer blows of Kunu-ri because the Eighth Army was falling back on its supply lines, while the Chinese were stretching theirs to the limit; also, Chinese lines of communication were subjected to increasing attack by the U.S. Fifth Air Force.

On the eastern side of Korea's central mountain spine, the Chinese struck

with equal savagery. However, geography and the nature of the American X Corps push north influenced a different outcome to this collision of the two armies. The 7th Division had been advancing on a broad front through valleys toward the Yalu. Most of these small units were separated from each other by steep ridges when the Chinese struck. Cut off from reinforcements and supplies, the American units fought desperate actions, often in the frigid darkness. When possible, battered battalions of the 7th Division coalesced into improvised task forces. One of the best known of these was Task Force Faith, composed of remnants of the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry and the 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry, and commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Don Faith. We had been tent mates in a parachute regiment in 1943.

In the steep, almost roadless mountains around the frozen Chosin Reservoir (also known as the Changjin Reservoir), Don Faith's unit faced its most severe test and performed heroically. Already personally decorated by General Almond with a Silver Star, Colonel Faith led his forces in a desperate and skillful defense against an overwhelming Chinese division-strength attack. The unit suffered grave casualties as they broke out of the Chinese encirclement and fought their way toward larger units of the 1st Marine Division. Although less well publicized than subsequent Marine actions around the Reservoir, the conduct of Task Force Faith was exemplary. Despite horrendous cold, lack of food, and depleted ammunition, Faith's troops inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, and in effect, blunted a major Chinese attack. Don Faith was mortally wounded in the action and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.[20]

On the west side of the Reservoir, the 1st Marine Division under Major General O. P. Smith had not become as widely separated as the Army. In fact, Smith had argued with General Almond about over-extending the Marine division along the axis of advance. So the Marines were better prepared to meet the Chinese onslaught. But they still had to fight their way out of encirclement, moving down a single unpaved mountain track, between dominating snowy ridges. And on this high ground, the Chinese deployed no fewer than seven infantry divisions (almost 90,000 soldiers) to oppose their withdrawal. As General Smith told correspondents who flew into his surrounded headquarters at Hagaru at the bottom of the Reservoir, "Gentlemen, we are not retreating. We are merely advancing in another direction."[21]

X Corps headquarters was a sprawl of snowy tents around the old Japanese airfield on the edge of Hamhung. The town stood on a narrow coastal plain dominated by steep snowy mountains inland; the frigid Sea of Japan was a few miles east where the small fishing harbor of Hungnam had been designated the evacuation port for the beleaguered X Corps. I knew several of the Corps' staff officers, working for Lieutenant Colonel Jack Chiles, chief

of operations; Major Salve Matheson, an ROTC colleague from UCLA; and my very close friend from Fort Benning, Major Harvey Short. The mood at Corps headquarters was serious, but not defeatist. Major Harvey Short told me one frozen afternoon as we watched C-47s disgorging frost-bitten and wounded Marines, "This is a new war. And we better get damn serious about it if we're going to win."[22]

I was one of the few American officers in Korea who had seen CCF tactics firsthand. I knew the enemy could be defeated if we fought him with flexibility and resolve. The Chinese moved at night in small units; they were thus vulnerable to ambush. Their mass-infantry attacks could be broken up with well-placed artillery support. The Marines had already changed their tactics to match the enemy's. But American forces in general still had many lessons to learn.

I felt a little useless, trying to brief officers about the future deployment of Ranger companies when they were naturally preoccupied with extracting their forces from Chinese encirclement in the icy mountains. Then a situation came up where my talents were suddenly put to good use. The Communists had destroyed one of the key bridges spanning a critical gap on the single road of the Marine retreat route south of Koto-ri. Unless that bridge was replaced, the 1st Marine Division would be forced to abandon its tanks, trucks, heavy weapons and supplies, and some of its wounded to the Chinese forces who were in close pursuit. There were Treadway bridge sections available to span the gap, but we just couldn't put them on semi-trailers and drive them through the Chinese encirclement to make the repair.

It was decided an air drop was required. But there were few qualified heavy-drop officers in Hamhung. So I was tapped to reconnoiter the job. I had been working on the problem of dropping large rubber boats and bridging equipment to Ranger units, and I understood the complexities of finding a decent drop zone in mountainous terrain. Early one absolutely bone-chilling December morning, I flew up to the invasion route on an L-19, the metal-skinned version of the reliable old L-5s I'd used in Manchuria. The mountains of Korea's northeast coast were frightening, there's no other word for it. Snowy razor-back ridges and steep, icy gorges rose and tumbled in all directions. The only "road" was a narrow dirt track that zigzagged painfully through the high country, an absolutely perfect ambush route. Judging from the black smears of burnt-out tanks and trucks, the Chinese were using the terrain to good advantage. We found the gap easily enough, and noted the American foxholes scraped into the surrounding ridge line.

As we circled the American positions, I noticed an unusual feature of this campaign. Only a few yards behind some foxholes and machine-gun pits the Marines had hacked shallow depressions in the snow and erected warming tents. Black smoke spiraled from these tents' chimneys. It was as if the

troops were fighting two equally deadly foes: the Chinese and the Korean winter. Elsewhere on the ridge, I saw small groups of Marines huddled around outdoor fires, like hobos.

Swooping low beneath the hills, I plotted the approach route for the drop aircraft, and noted the clearance to the pass ahead. The country around the gap was too steep for an airdrop, so we hopped over a snowy ridge and flew across a narrow plateau. The frozen, shell-torn village of Koto-ri was bordered by fields into which the Marines had scraped a landing strip. That would have to be the drop zone. It was not as close to the bridge site as desired, but the Marines' engineers had the trucks to move the bridge sections forward. This was not peacetime and everybody had to take their chances if X Corps was going to pull off this withdrawal.

We flew north up the valley to view the entire column. The Marines were in good formation, despite the almost constant Chinese harassment. At the very end of the column, Marine MPs kept a half-mile interval between the U.S. forces and a ragtag band of civilian refugees. Seen from the air, it was hard to tell the difference between the frozen troops and the frozen, starving refugees.

We turned back toward the coast. Dropping down off the icy mountains, we flew over the newly dug positions of an American relief column. This was Task Force Meade, from the 3rd Infantry Division. They had tanks and artillery dug in to guard the final third of the retreat route. If the Marines could make it across that bridge, they could fall back in good order.

When I got back to Hamhung, the shiny, twin-boomed C-119 Flying Boxcars had arrived from Japan. I helped the parachute riggers with the heavy cargo chutes on the icy metal bridge spans. The young Air Force crew seemed nervous, but grimly determined. They asked me all the right questions and I helped them plot their optimum route in for the drop. Finally, the captain of the lead plane said what was on everybody's mind. "Is there any flak up there, Major?"

I shook my head. "I never saw any." There was no sense painting too rosy a picture, however. "But that doesn't mean there won't be when you get there."

The young man nodded somberly. "Oh well," was all he said. "Let's get this show on the road."

That afternoon, the brave young Air Force crews dodged Chinese antiaircraft fire to drop the spans. The road was bridged again, and the 1st Marines were able to execute an orderly withdrawal of their men and matériel, thanks to the combined and coordinated efforts of the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Army.

I flew out of Hamhung the same afternoon and landed in Seoul a few hours later. The South Korean capital was in a state of panic, the roads

clogged with refugees heading south. For the second time in six months, Seoul was about to be overrun by a Communist army. There were thousands of civilians fleeing the Chinese advance. I'd seen similar pathetic groups streaming down from the mountains toward Hungnam. The United Nations command had announced that any anti-Communist civilians seeking refuge in the South would be welcome. It was a magnanimous gesture, but as an experienced intelligence officer, I couldn't help but note that our Western compassion had the practical effect of stripping North Korea of potential resistance forces.

At a camp outside Seoul near Kimpo Airport, I found a group of American soldiers who were anything but defeated. They were members of the Eighth Army's Provisional Ranger Company. For several months they had fought in small teams in the Korean mountains. They were lean, tough, and, I noted, literally bloodied. One of their officers, Lieutenant Ralph Puckett, had been hit in the foot a few days before but refused evacuation. The Rangers spoke of ambushing Chinese headquarters' units, of observing primitive CCF field radio stations, and of eavesdropping on enemy bivouacs a few feet from the Chinese foxholes. Their confident attitude reminded me of the young Jedburghs I'd served with in England.

One of their best officers was a lieutenant named John Paul Vann. He had led small reconnaissance patrols deep into the mountains of North Korea, hiking by night—sometimes close beside Chinese columns—and hiding by day. They had lived off the land and depended on no one for logistical support. Vann had the unmistakable self-confidence and aggressive determination of a born soldier.

"Sir," he said, "if we get enough Rangers out here, we can beat these bastards at their own game."

☆ ☆

Over the next six months, I worked practically nonstop at Fort Benning training Ranger companies. In Korea, the bloody seesaw fighting continued. General Walker was killed in a truck accident north of Seoul. The city again fell to the Communists on January 4, 1951. General Matthew Ridgway, one of America's distinguished Airborne leaders of World War II, took over the Eighth Army. The U.N. front was stabilized about sixty miles south of Seoul. Ridgway worked wonders with the Eighth Army. By the end of January 1951 the U.N. forces were on the offensive again. Seoul was recaptured in March.

But the biggest event of that spring was political, not military. President Harry Truman relieved General Douglas MacArthur on April 11. Ridgway was named to replace him at FECOM and General James Van Fleet took

over the Eighth Army. Relieving MacArthur was an unfortunate necessity, tinged with anticlimax. In reality, his career had ended with the surprise Chinese intervention in North Korea. By April, MacArthur had lost touch with reality. The stated goals of American policy in Korea were to stabilize the military situation and rebuild the South. A soldier's job, whether he be a buck private or a five-star general like MacArthur, is to implement the legitimate orders of duly elected civilian authority.

MacArthur defied those orders. He tried to bypass the chain of command through allies in Congress. His goal, he said, was the defeat of Communist China. To accomplish this task, he called for air and ground attacks against the Chinese mainland, some of which would employ Nationalist forces from Taiwan. He also campaigned for the destruction of the bridges across the Yalu River and the Chinese airfields in southern Manchuria. This latter tactic made considerable sense. But MacArthur's erratic campaign of press conferences that spring demonstrated he was more interested in personal aggrandizement than strategy. He remained true to character to the very end. He had gambled and he had lost.

By that summer, Ridgway and Van Fleet's troops had repulsed a major Chinese counteroffensive and pushed the enemy back north of the 38th parallel. With the CCF in retreat, the Soviet Union finally proposed U.N.-sponsored truce talks. The preliminary cease-fire discussions began near the town of Kaesong, not far from the 38th parallel. American forces continued the offensive. Some of their fiercest battles were in the central mountains at Heartbreak and Bloody ridges. The battle lines now became static and a stalemate ensued. Three American and four ROK army corps were dug into the mountains above the old 38th-parallel border in the east, and just below it in the west. Five Chinese army groups faced them in similar positions on slightly higher ground to the north.

The trench lines, sandbagged outposts, and bunkers, supported by massed heavy artillery on both sides, were a throwback to the Western Front of World War I. America had accepted a strange new concept: limited war.

The truce talks had now become a complex political and propaganda show, a classic confrontation between dogmatic Asian communism and an uneasy alliance of Western forces. Predictably, the thorniest issue was not real estate, but ideology, and that intangible Oriental attribute we often simplistically disparage as "loss of face."

We had tens of thousands of North Korean and Chinese prisoners cooped up in POW compounds in the South, principally on the island of Koje-do, near Pusan. The Communists had several thousand U.N. POWs. Before the Chinese would accept any permanent cease-fire, they insisted that *all* prisoners be exchanged. But we knew many North Korean and Chinese prisoners were involuntary conscripts who, given the choice, would prefer

to remain in the South. The issue of involuntary repatriation of prisoners became the proximate cause for the chronic failure of the peace talks. But the reality was a test of will. We could not return these hapless pawns to the Communists against their will. The Chinese and North Koreans could not publicly acknowledge that any of their soldiers preferred capitalist enslavement to the bountiful life in the People's Republics.

While the truce talks ground on, the war in the hills continued. Young American, British, French, Greek, and Turkish soldiers died every day. So did young Koreans and Chinese.

☆ ☆

In December 1951 I was called to CIA headquarters in Washington. The Agency wanted my services again. I was interviewed by two Army colonels, Bill Depuy and Richard Stilwell. They didn't mince words. The U.S. government had decided to step up pressure on the Chinese Communists by supporting guerrilla movements on the mainland of China, especially along the lines of communication to the CCF forces in Korea. It would be a clandestine operation run out of the large new CIA station in Japan, and supported by a fleet of transport aircraft and surface vessels. They said I was an Army officer with some background in this type of operation. They emphasized that the Army was willing for me to take the job.

I thought about it. Another Agency assignment would put me even farther from the mainstream of the U.S. Army than I already was by training Rangers. What I wanted instead was a combat command, an infantry battalion in one of the U.S. divisions facing the Chinese.

"Jack," Bill Depuy said, "you take this job and we'll make sure you get your battalion. The war's not going anywhere."

I arrived back in Korea just after New Year's, 1952. Colonel Depuy was right. The war certainly showed no signs of winding down. The cease-fire talks were sporadic and vitriolic, still stalled over the thorny issue of prisoner repatriation. My first duty station was the old CIA headquarters at Tongnae, a sprawling compound in a spa village outside Pusan. The Agency's chief of station was Ben Vandervoort, a burly former battalion commander from the 82nd Airborne (later played rather convincingly by none other than John Wayne in the film *The Longest Day*). Ben had lost an eye fighting in Holland and had retired from the Army. In Korea, however, he went under U.S. Army cover, with the rank of colonel.

CIA operations had their own bland cover—Joint Advisory Commission, Korea ("JACK"). Soon after I arrived, the outfit moved back north to the new station in the renovated Traymore Hotel in Seoul. I quickly discovered that our archrival for personnel, funding, air support, and, above all, mission

authorization was a hodgepodge intelligence operation managed by FECOM called Combined Command for Reconnaissance Activities, Korea (CCRAK), pronounced "sea-crack."[23]

Fairly early on, I also discovered that the Agency's plan to undercut the determination of the Chinese high command through a guerrilla offensive on the mainland was anything but an established policy. While the operation was pending, I became the CIA deputy station chief in Korea with the mission of deploying military intelligence, espionage, and resistance agents in North Korea. I found myself the deputy in a command which had several lieutenant colonels even though I was still a major, a bureaucratic hurdle that was overcome by officially tagging my position with the title "By Direction of the President."

We were near the end of the second year of the war and the Agency's operations had matured. JACK had a network of covert intelligence bases on offshore islands stretching up the west coast of North Korea, which were supported by a small flotilla of fast, heavily armed patrol boats. We also maintained a base on Yo-do Island at the mouth of Wonsan harbor. Our main mission was to collect military intelligence by dispatching Korean agents north, by either parachute drop or sea insertion from our island bases.[24]

There was no shortage of brave young Koreans with family ties to the North. We recruited many of them from the refugees who had volunteered for service in the ROK forces. The problem was not with them, but with the actual conditions in Communist North Korea. Our open invitation to every potential anti-Communist refugee to accompany the retreating U.N. forces the year before had literally stripped North Korea of potential resistance networks. An agent could not function well without such support. In World War II, our best successes had been in Nazi-occupied countries where the bulk of the population chafed under the yoke of an oppressive enemy force. There were plenty of anti-Communists in Korea; unfortunately, we'd invited almost every one of them to live in the South.

Nevertheless, we managed to insert a few successful small teams who still had family connections in the North and were able to deliver reliable intelligence on enemy troop movements. But we were never able to establish anything approaching a true Maquis-type resistance network.

CCRAK's work overlapped ours. Their biggest operation was in Hwanghae Province, along the coast northwest of Seoul, where the battle lines divided a traditionally united population of fishing villages. The people there had established armed resistance to Kim Il-Sung's Communist regime even before the North Korean invasion of June 1950. So it wasn't difficult to exploit the situation by adding a few American advisers and pouring in arms and equipment. But such grass-roots "partisan" resistance never spread

elsewhere in North Korea. The main thrust of CCRAK's operations, therefore, became small-scale sabotage raids, most launched from secret bases on the west coast's scattered islands and wild peninsulas.[25]

One of the biggest obstacles I faced was the Pentagon's prohibition on using American unconventional-warfare troops in North Korea. The Pentagon was worried that these units might be captured, broken by physical and psychological torture—the new term for this was "brainwashing"—and turned against us for propaganda purposes. I certainly could have made good use of the Ranger companies we'd worked so hard to train at Fort Benning. Unfortunately, they were not available. As I'd feared, the traditional division commanders to whom we'd assigned these companies had a deep distrust for Special Operations and no appreciation for its potential. The Ranger companies were terribly misused, and many good soldiers were killed or wounded serving as assault troops, after the line was stabilized, rather than as Special Operations forces. The survivors were assigned to the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team in Japan, a kind of fire brigade held in reserve for combat emergencies.[26]

One of my most successful, and hitherto unpublicized, operations in Korea involved a tough Air Force master sergeant who ran a converted wooden junk out of our bases on the west coast islands. He lived with his crew, had a Korean "wife," and was bound and determined to raise hell with the enemy. The sergeant had learned from Korean seamen that there was a marine telephone-telegraph cable connecting the Shantung Peninsula in mainland China with Dairen in Manchuria. He realized this had to be one of the main telecomm links between CCF in Korea and Peking. The Yellow Sea is generally shallow; the sergeant was enterprising. Early one May morning, his trailing grapples fetched up the thick, weedy cable. While the barnacles popped from the cable to crunch beneath his boots on the swaying deck, the sergeant wielded a fire ax, whacking out a three-foot length of cable. He then ran to the wheelhouse, called for maximum speed, and hightailed it back across the Yellow Sea.

When I reported this, CIA headquarters was furious I'd unleashed an operation with potentially serious international ramifications. But the National Security Agency code busters who were my neighbors in Seoul were delighted. The CCF, deprived of a secure surface telecomm cable, had been forced to use radio teletype. Within weeks, our crypto specialists had busted the Chinese code and were reading their operational traffic. This gave us a definite advantage during the protracted bargaining of the later cease-fire negotiations. The Chinese negotiators had to report daily to Peking and follow the orders of the CCF high command there. With the cable knocked out, our intelligence was able to eavesdrop on this sensitive enemy communication.

Most of our naval operations were on the east coast, where we'd often land raiding parties ashore to ambush trains and truck convoys. I flew into Yo-do Island several times to brief our Korean crews on these missions. They were a cheerful lot, well pleased to be killing Chinese, who had been their masters for centuries before the Japanese occupation. Being up on an advanced base, within enemy artillery range, reminded me I was a soldier. But one of the immutable imperatives of war in Asia was that Westerners could never simply disappear behind enemy lines into the civilian population as we had in Nazi-occupied Europe.

Because I could not actually lead my agents in combat, I decided I would do my damnedest to make sure they were at least inserted correctly. The Chinese were well aware of our airdrop operations in the North and had long before learned to recognize a low-flying transport with an open door as a sign of an agent drop. Parachuting being my specialty, I set about to correct this problem. American B-26 light bombers prowled the skies of North Korea every night, and were hardly viewed as unusual. But we had never dropped agents from them.

JACK acquired a couple of B-26s and I personally modified them for agent drops. The key was to rig the bomb bay as a jump platform. I took care of this by installing a couple of parallel planks about three feet apart. On the first test jump near our training drop zone on the Han River sandbanks, I told the pilot to keep his airspeed close to normal for level flight. I crouched in the bomb bay facing aft, one boot on either plank. When the clamshell doors gaped open beneath me, I simply snapped my feet together, arms at my sides, assuming the same position I'd used jumping from Stirlings as a Jedburgh. Unfortunately, the American chutes did not open as gently as their British equivalents under these conditions. The opening shock that day damn near knocked my molars loose. But I proved we could use bombers for agent drops.

I still wasn't satisfied, however. Too many of our people were being caught near the drop zone. North Korea was so crowded with well-dispersed enemy forces that the sound of any low-flying aircraft raised an alarm. There was a way around this problem too: free-fall drops. I tested this system several times. Captain Skip Sadler, my Airborne specialist, rigged me a ripcord chute with a backpack and reserve. We took the door off an L-19, and I had the pilot climb to 8,000 feet above the drop zone. This was years before the advent of skydiving, so I had no concept of stable free-fall positions. I simply used some old high school physics formulas for an "object in free fall" and calculated the number of seconds I could wait before safely pulling the ripcord relatively close to the ground.

When I tumbled out the open door of the L-19, the cold blue horizon seemed to tumble with me. I found myself staring *up* at the muddy sandbanks

that rocked gently back and forth. I was upside down. Slowly, the horizon slid back above me and I was seated on a springy, invisible column of air, watching the river rise toward me. Given this spectacular visual display, I had forgotten to count my seconds. But I knew that objects on the ground came into sharp focus within a thousand feet. So I watched a vehicle on the road resolve from a blurred speck to a child's toy, to an actual U.S. Army jeep with a clear white star stenciled on the hood. I pulled the ripcord. The chute twanged open, and I checked the pleasant white canopy. My feet hit the sand.

Skip Sadler came pounding across the puddles toward me. "God, Jack!" he shouted. "Why'd you wait so long?"

"Well," I replied, "I got here, didn't I?"

Neither of us realized it, of course, but we'd just invented the concept of "high altitude–low opening" (HALO) parachute drops, now the principal means of inserting special warfare teams deep behind enemy lines.[27]

☆ ☆

In December 1952, I got a call from Colonel Richard G. Stilwell, the officer who'd recruited me back into the CIA.[28] He now commanded the 15th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Division, serving in IX Corps in the center of the U.N. command front, the region called the Iron Triangle.

"Jack," he said, "you still want that battalion, or have you found a home with the gumshoes?"

Several times in the past months I had made inquiries about getting a combat command. But the Agency was against the idea. They cited the death sentence handed down by the espionage court in Peking in 1949, as well as the sensitive nature of my present work. Exposing myself to possible capture on the front lines, they said, put me at an unfair risk. But risk is part of a soldier's daily life; it comes with the uniform and those pretty ribbons they put on your chest. Now Stilwell, who had gone from his own Agency assignment to commanding a frontline regiment, was offering me a job.

"I'd still like that battalion, sir."

"Pack your bags," he said. "I've got an outfit that certainly needs a good commanding officer."

I was on my way to the shooting war.