

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Army Regroups

1973–1976



ARMY READINESS REGION VIII was the largest in the country, covering ten states that straddled the Rocky Mountains from the Canadian to the Mexican borders. Although my region covered almost half the United States, it had only a fraction of the country's population. I told my staff we had a region of "high altitude and low multitude."

American combat troops were out of Vietnam, and the draft was abolished. So the sanctuary from combat the reserves and National Guard had offered was no longer needed. This was one ramification of the new volunteer Army that no one had foreseen. Without the pressure of the draft, we were hard pressed to induce skilled men into the reserves. Yet, with the active-duty Army drastically reduced from its high wartime strength, the reserves had to play a greater role in the country's military preparedness.¹

Secretary of Defense Mel Laird's Steadfast Reorganization Plan, which included the creation of Army Readiness Regions, was meant to closely integrate reserve components into the leaner post-Vietnam Army.

Inspecting the region's reserves, I didn't discover any hold-out pockets of the famous Amphibious Brigade, but I did find military government units—bloated with small-town lawyers and politicians—that had no deployment requirement in the Army War Plan. In Nebraska, I even unearthed a prisoner-of-war holding company that served more as a hunting and skeet-shooting lodge for state troopers and county prosecutors than as a bona-fide military organization.

Before the reorganization, each state's National Guard was assigned an active-duty colonel as adviser. These colonels too often saw their assignment

as "OJR," on-the-job retirement. As my deputy, Colonel Arch Carpenter quipped, paraphrasing Churchill: "Never in the history of human conflict have so few been advised by so many." One of the first jobs was to convince these dignified old colonels that they were still on active duty and that they now had a regular army major general very interested in their performance.

Once I had pruned the deadwood among the advisers, I set about cutting the unnecessary reserve units. There were howls of protest from many a small-town courthouse. And no wonder: A county prosecutor in the Dakotas could drift along for years as a reservist, attending annual summer camp and slowly accruing rank. These gentlemen usually retired as full colonels after twenty-five years of "duty," and enjoyed a pension, plus full veterans' benefits.

We implemented the Army's new Command Tenure Limitation Program that broke the senior-officer promotion logjam in the reserves. There were reserve generals who had led Army readiness commands or brigades for fifteen years. This reminded me of the Spanish army. After "finding a home" in the Army, these venerable gentlemen stubbornly refused to just fade away as old soldiers were supposed to do. Henceforth, a senior command in the reserves had a fixed tenure of three years. To complete this process, I chaired the Sixth Army's promotion boards, at which, for the first time, the Army, not local cronies, selected bright younger officers for senior rank.

I had just completed the paperwork abolishing the POW company in Nebraska when General Creighton Abrams, now Army Chief of Staff, visited my Denver headquarters. "Are you sure about this POW outfit, Jack?" he asked, cocking his eye above his ubiquitous cigar. "It could attract a lot of recruits."

"Sir?" I knew he was setting me up for a ribbing.

"Damn right, Jack," he continued. "You've been overseas too long. Don't you watch 'Hogan's Heroes'?"

I had to admit that that was one TV show I normally avoided.

"Well, General," Abrams admonished, seemingly every bit the stern chief, "you've got to stay in touch with the young people. They're the future of the Army."

It's amusing to recall that hair length was a real recruitment obstacle at that time. The generation gap was so wide that most young men were under peer pressure to wear their hair longer than military regulations permitted. Some commanders—veterans of World War II—insisted on truly short "STRAC" hair. In so doing, they were forcing good men from the ranks. The hair crisis in some parts of the country had even reached the point where reservists had purchased expensive wigs. These came in two types: long or short. The long-haired wig permitted a reservist with

short hair to satisfy the requirements of a demanding unit commander on weekend drill and the pressure of his peers during the week. More ingenious, the short-haired wig was worn over tucked-up tresses, allowing a hip young man to convince the drill sergeant he was actually a dedicated reservist.

During my Jedburgh training at Milton Hall, Jacques and Tony swore they wouldn't jump into occupied France with me until I let my short Airborne haircut grow out, and then be trimmed by an SOE chap who fancied himself a suitably French barber. So I passed the word down to my reserve commanders that, within reason, a man's attitude and performance were more important than the length of his hair. "After all," I told my staff, "Alexander the Great looked like a hippie, but he was a hell of a soldier." As an afterthought, I added, "So was Custer."

"Well, General," Arch Carpenter commented, "look what happened to Custer."

"Never mind that, Arch," I said. "This time around the Sioux are in the Montana National Guard."

I made a point of observing training, both to make a personal assessment of unit competence and to demonstrate the Army's concern for readiness. One of my favorite units was a cavalry regiment in the Montana National Guard. They had an Air Cav troop flying Huey helicopter gunships, so I always took the opportunity of racking up flight hours with them.

Their gunnery range southeast of Helena had two parallel hogback ridges above a narrow sagebrush valley where hulks of car and truck bodies were arranged as targets. Single gunships flew the range, south to north, exited left around the western hogback, and returned for another run, protected by the ridge. The unit's young warrant officer pilots were all cocky Vietnam vets, who wore distinctive black Stetsons.

One breezy August afternoon I was asked by the commander if I wanted to fly the course. I'm confident that he expected me to decline his offer, but I accepted immediately. The lanky CW2, whose bird I was about to fly, did not seem enthusiastic about turning over his cockpit to me. And, like most gunship pilots, he was not overly impressed by rank.

"Hey, Larry," he called to a friend about to lift off the armorers' pad, "put my hat on the hood of that pickup in the middle of the valley. With the general shooting the range, that'll be a safe place for it."

His gunship was scheduled for a single-fire rocket run, the most demanding gunnery exercise. But I couldn't back down now that the challenge had been issued. If I missed the target, however, and his hat emerged unscathed, I'd buy the gunship pilots beer that night, and drink mine washing down a mouthful of crow.

To make things more difficult, this run had to be flown at maximum speed,

at an altitude of only about thirty feet, which meant I couldn't link my turns in smooth banks, but had to yaw hard right and left in clumsy lurches and snap-fire each rocket as soon as the target appeared.

My first three rockets missed the battered vehicle hulks, wide right, wide left, and ten yards short. The kid flying in the left seat was almost chewing his mustache to keep from grinning. He could taste the free beer.

"Bad luck, sir," he said. "These flat turns are tricky."

I didn't have time to reply. At a hundred knots the next target was almost on us. Just as I squeezed the weapons button on my cyclic stick, I saw the proud black Stetson on the shredded hood of the old ranch truck. The rocket screamed away with a smoking trail. I watched it, transfixed, as the missile flew with geometrical precision straight at the target. We were off to the left when the rocket exploded, right beneath the grill of the target vehicle. I saw the black Stetson careen through the sunlight above the geyser of smoking clods.

When the hat was recovered, it was a felt sieve with over a hundred shrapnel holes. That night when the gunship pilots bought my beer, I made a point of ordering Lowenbrau, the most expensive brand in the club.

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Two years into my command, the war in Vietnam had entered its final, most critical phase. When Henry Kissinger had finally convinced South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu to accept the 1973 cease-fire agreement, which blatantly favored the North Vietnamese, the White House had also made a solemn promise that America would intervene with its full military might should the Communists attempt to parlay the truce into a new invasion of the South. Nixon assured Thieu that the Communists faced "the most serious consequences" if they broke the truce.² Bolstered by these assurances, Thieu had reluctantly signed a cease-fire agreement that allowed the North Vietnamese to maintain 150,000 regular troops in the South, while requiring the United States to remove the last combat forces still in the country.

The agreement placed no restrictions whatsoever on military assistance to North Vietnam from the Soviet bloc and China. I'd been stunned to read Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reports on massive Soviet- and East Bloc military aid pouring into North Vietnam. As soon as the American Navy had cleared the mines from Haiphong harbor, East Bloc ships were lined up three deep at the docks disgorging massive quantities of military hardware.³

The only shield South Vietnam had against this building Communist offensive was American air power. But Nixon had not foreseen the Watergate debacle or the resurgence of Congress against the "imperial presidency."

Even as Communist tanks were rumbling off the docks in Haiphong, historian Stanley Karnow noted, "Congress now began to disengage America totally from Southeast Asia." By August, Congress had reduced funding for South Vietnam and taken away White House authority to bomb NVA sanctuaries in Cambodia. It was clear that the "serious consequences" the Communists faced in breaking the truce were empty threats.⁴

We had turned our backs on South Vietnam, a loyal ally, at the time of its greatest need. The initial NVA probes of the final 1975 offensive, launched from Cambodian sanctuaries against ARVN positions in Tri Tam and Tay Ninh provinces, were tentative because the NVA leaders were afraid to expose their armor to destruction by American B-52s. But Congress reassured them. On March 12, 1975, a House caucus voted a special resolution against any additional military aid to Vietnam until the next fiscal year. The NVA occupation of the central highlands was completed and the offensive in the old III Corps tactical region began in earnest.⁵

In mid-April, I received a call from a CIA friend. He had been contacted by the Agency station chief in Kuala Lumpur, who was relaying an urgent personal message to me from Colonel Tran Van Ho. Colonel Ho had been the head of South Vietnam's Strategic Technical Directorate. In 1974, he had been assigned as defense attaché in Malaysia but had left his wife, Kim, and two sons behind in Saigon. Ho had learned that his family was on the Communist blood list, slated for execution after Saigon fell. The South Vietnamese government had refused his request to return to Saigon to rescue his family. Because Mrs. Ho was not a U.S. government employee, she was not entitled to evacuation by the Americans.

I immediately sent a message to Major General Homer Smith, the senior military officer remaining in Vietnam, requesting he expedite the evacuation of Colonel Ho's wife and sons. I received no response. The news reports were grim; Saigon was already under artillery attack. Although Mrs. Ho had run a travel agency in Saigon, she didn't have proper connections with the few airlines still operating. Had Colonel Ho been a corrupt ARVN officer, he might have bribed his family's way out of besieged Saigon.

Hearing nothing through American military channels, I contacted the CIA, finally reaching a senior officer at Langley.

"Look," I said bluntly, "there's not much time. You guys owe me a few favors and you sure as hell owe Colonel Ho something, too."

The man explained how difficult things were in Saigon at that moment.

"That's your problem, not mine," I said. "I consider this an absolutely essential matter. Colonel Ho's family won't survive one week after Saigon falls. You've got to get them out."

The official promised to do what he could.

On April 29, 1975, I watched television news coverage of Saigon's fall. Crowds of panicked Vietnamese civilians, many of whom had worked closely with the Americans, overran the American embassy, clamoring all the way to the helipad on the roof, only to be kicked away. The next day, I saw the grim news broadcast of the NVA tanks crashing through the gate of Saigon's Independence Palace. The war was over.

A week passed with no news of Mrs. Ho. I contacted Colonel Ho in Kuala Lumpur. He was shattered by grief. A few days later, I received a telegram from the Red Cross in the Philippines, notifying me that a Vietnamese refugee, Madame Ho, and her two sons were en route to a holding camp on Guam. I sent an urgent message through Navy channels to have the Ho family sent to Camp Pendleton, California, where my sister could meet them, but again there was no response. Another week passed. Then I got a late-night phone call from Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. Mrs. Ho and her sons were safely in America.

I immediately wired them plane tickets to Denver. The next night Mary and I met Mrs. Ho and her boys. They were weary from the long journey, but their spirits were high. While Mary and my daughter Mary Ann made plans to drive them to southern California, I requested the State Department notify the embassy in Kuala Lumpur to grant Colonel Ho an immediate refugee visa to join his family in America. State was not cooperative. "We have no indication Colonel Ho is in harm's way," I was informed by an officious young man in Washington. I went over his head. After another delay, the visa was granted and I wired Colonel Ho an air ticket. He and his family were finally reunited at my sister Anita's home near Los Angeles.

With fluency in four languages, Kim Ho found work at a Beverly Hills travel agency immediately. The family rented a small bungalow and the boys were enrolled in Hollywood High School that September. Colonel Ho became a volunteer worker among the swelling refugee community. Within a few months, he was hired by Los Angeles County as a full-time refugee worker.

As I read reports of thousands of South Vietnamese officials and ARVN prisoners marched off to "reeducation" camps in the malarial swamps of the delta and desolate highland regions, I could take some comfort knowing we had not abandoned a few of our loyal allies. But the final Communist domination of Indochina did not provide much comfort to our other Asian allies. For years American presidents had told the Thais, Filipinos, Malaysians, Nationalist Chinese, and South Koreans that America would stand by them in the face of Communist aggression. But now these allies learned that the word of an American president could be undercut by political intrigues in Congress.

The Asians also recognized that a subtle but unmistakable racism influenced American foreign policy. When Israel, another staunch ally of America, was threatened with extinction in the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, Congress urged the Nixon White House to conduct the most massive military resupply airlift in history. And the White House, with congressional concurrence, even went so far as to place the Strategic Air Command on full alert as a warning to the Soviet Union, which was too actively aiding Israel's enemy, Syria. Had America done as much for South Vietnam in 1975, the country could have survived.

Israel was a culturally European democracy with a predominantly white population. Israel had supporters throughout the Congress. South Vietnam was an Asian country struggling to form a democracy.

The message was not lost on South Korea, America's Asian ally that faced the most immediate Communist military threat. After the Communist takeover in Indochina, the South Koreans began a concerted effort to gain influence in Congress. Unfortunately, this campaign quickly degenerated into illegal lobbying and influence peddling that eventually boomeranged in the scandal the news media named "Koreagate."

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IN THE spring of 1976, the military situation in Korea became more than an abstract matter to me when I was assigned as Chief of Staff of the United Nations Command (UNC) and U.S. Forces, Korea (USFK). The job's third responsibility was Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander of the Eighth Army. Dick Stilwell, now a four-star general, had become the commander in chief of U.N. and American forces in Korea in late 1974.

I had great respect for Stilwell, having served under him in a variety of assignments, beginning in 1951 in the CIA job in Korea, then commanding one of his battalions in the 15th Infantry. Most recently, he had been my commanding officer in the Sixth Army. I was proud that he had selected me to be his chief of staff in Korea.

Mary and I arrived at Kimpo Airport in Seoul on July 1, 1976. Driving from the airport northeast to the U.N. Command headquarters at the Yongson Post, I was impressed by the Seoul skyline. I'd last seen the city in 1973, on a brief visit with Dr. Wilbur. Then, I had been stunned by Seoul's transformation from the shell-pocked ruin I'd known during the Korean War. In the early 1970s Seoul was already a handsome, prosperous capital. Now it was a boomtown. Elevated freeways curved among high-rise banks and hotels. There were towering T-head construction cranes everywhere. On the outskirts new industrial parks were surrounded by workers' apartment blocks, parks, and athletic complexes. The roads were congested with shiny new cars.

But the bustling glitter of Seoul was deceptive. Korea was not at peace. Only twenty-five miles north of the city, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) still divided the Korean peninsula, just as it had since 1953. The “demilitarized” frontier between Communist North Korea and the South marked one of the most heavily fortified regions in the world. The same United Nations Command, led by American officers, still met regularly with the North Koreans at the site of the original cease-fire negotiations known to the world as Panmunjom. As UNC chief of staff, one of the hats I wore was that of the senior allied representative at Panmunjom.

By 1976, the earlier collection of tents and quonset huts had evolved into an elaborate Joint Security Area (JSA), an 800-square-meter trapezoid of neutral territory, replete with permanent meeting rooms and guard outposts. The JSA, and the meeting rooms themselves, were bisected by the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) at the middle of the four-kilometer-wide DMZ frontier. In theory, this was the site of dispassionate professional contact between the two sides, a place where potentially serious confrontational incidents could be defused before they erupted into open conflict along the DMZ. In reality, the JSA itself had become a site of angry confrontation.

Later that year, when I became the senior UNC representative to the Military Armistice Commission, I decided to have some fun needling the senior North Korean, General Han, whom I faced across the negotiation table. He was a political commissar, not a combat soldier. Han had been military attaché in Egypt during the Yom Kippur War and had arranged for North Korean pilots to fly MiG-21s against Israel. Many of those pilots were shot down by U.S.-supplied Sidewinder missiles. He hated America. Eventually President Sadat declared Han *persona non grata* when he was caught spying on the Egyptian military. Whenever Han would raise hell about one of our legitimate exercises, I would pull his chain.

“General Han,” I’d say, “if you had any military service in a combat unit, you’d realize our training exercise is perfectly normal.”

The senior Communist in Panmunjom was not pleased with my observations.

But when I took over as UNC chief of staff that summer, nobody was joking in Panmunjom. The tension in Korea was at a dangerous level. In 1971, the Nixon administration had arbitrarily decided to remove the 7th Infantry Division, one of the two large American combat units stationed in South Korea. The action was part of the Nixon Doctrine, by which America tried to instill military independence in its Asian allies—and save money in the process. This left the 2nd Infantry Division the only major American combat force in Korea. The South Korean government had been stunned because we took this step unilaterally, without consulting them, even though there were still ROK troops in South Vietnam, fighting and dying beside Americans and the ARVN. The next year, North Korea’s Communist dic-

tator, Kim Il-Sung, began an unprecedented buildup of his armed forces.

Following the American pullout from Indochina in 1975, Kim accelerated the enlargement and modernization of his military, and for the first time since the 1950s dramatically shifted his force structure from a defensive posture to preparations for a full-scale invasion of the South.

The discovery of the offensive North Korean buildup entailed one of the most successful intelligence operations in history. The process was not easy. And I arrived in Korea just as the first clear evidence of North Korea's intentions was being revealed. Until the collapse of Vietnam the year before, photo interpreters and analysts at the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) had been preoccupied with satellite and aerial reconnaissance imagery from Indochina. They simply hadn't devoted the resources to properly analyze the thousands of reconnaissance-flight and satellite pictures of North Korea that had stacked up in the archives for years. So, in the mid-1970s, the U.S. intelligence community still accepted the 1970 estimate of a general parity in military forces between North and South Korea. The community assumed that neither side could successfully invade the other. Indeed, it had been this assumption that permitted the withdrawal of the 7th Infantry Division.⁶

But in 1974, civilian analysts noted that North Korea's huge production of steel and concrete was apparently being channeled into unspecified military projects. The next year, the interagency Intelligence Board began to take a closer look at North Korea. John Armstrong, a young civilian who had served with distinction as an infantry officer in Vietnam, was assigned to the Army's Special Research Detachment at the National Security Agency, which manages our reconnaissance satellites. Armstrong was given free rein to dig into the enigma of North Korea's military capabilities and intentions. He scrutinized thousands of satellite and aerial reconnaissance images that had accumulated over the previous five years. Drawing upon his West Point education, Armstrong began his work with a detailed analysis of North Korea's actual strength in tanks and artillery, as well as the deployment of these forces.

What Armstrong discovered was, in his words, "horrifying." North Korean armor forces were a full eighty percent larger than the 1970 estimate. He found a previously undetected armored division with 270 tanks and 100 armored personnel carriers deployed close to the DMZ. Armstrong then applied his rigorous scrutiny to every region of North Korea. Over the next fourteen months, he "nailed down every gun in the country." The overall picture that emerged was shocking. North Korea's military was much larger than earlier estimates indicated. The force structure was weighted toward "heavy" divisions: armor, artillery, and mechanized infantry. And most of these units were massed well forward near the DMZ.

Armstrong's growing team of analysts found evidence that North Korean armor and artillery had been completely modernized. The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) armored force had doubled to 2,000 battle tanks, most of them improved Soviet-design T-62s. The NKPA had 12,400 artillery pieces. In December 1975, Armstrong briefed the UNC staff on these ominous developments. The new estimates showed that most of this artillery had been moved forward and emplaced in heavily fortified mountain positions to fire across the DMZ. A basic principle of analysis held that pushing artillery forward was a preparation for an offensive, while staggering artillery support in depth toward the rear was a good defense. The NKPA had practically stripped the rear of artillery to mass thousands of new guns just north of the DMZ.

In mid-1976, Armstrong briefed General John W. Vessey, Jr., who was scheduled to replace General Richard Stilwell as UNC commander in chief in Seoul.

I read the detailed reports of North Korea's buildup of offensive forces during my first weeks back in Korea. In 1970, American intelligence could identify twenty-one North Korean divisions, each with about 10,000 combat troops. By mid-1976, ongoing analysis produced evidence of *forty-one* North Korean divisions. It was estimated that overall North Korean force levels had almost doubled in four years, and totaled 560,000 regulars in combat units and an incredible 2,350,000 reservists. But these numbers were deceptive. North Korea was a society totally mobilized for war. Whereas many South Korean troops were assigned to support units, almost all of the North Korean forces were in the combat arms. Their transportation and supply services were manned by civilian "volunteers."⁷

From mid-1976 to the spring of 1977, Armstrong's team worked tirelessly to construct an airtight, multi-source estimate of North Korea's new offensively structured military forces. It would not be until eighteen months later, however, that the public learned the shocking truth about the North Korean military.⁸

This buildup completely upset the balance of military power in Korea. The Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) had a total of twenty-two divisions deployed in depth along the DMZ. American ground forces included the 2nd Infantry Division, which was kept in mobile strategic reserve below the DMZ, with one brigade blocking the Munsan-Seoul corridor, the open invasion route to South Korea's capital. The 2nd Infantry Division's "slice" also included artillery, aviation, signal, and logistical-support units shared with the ROK forces. Overall, United Nations military forces in Korea totaled around 600,000, including the logistical support forces. The combat elements of this force represented about one-half of the total. (The U.S. Congress had actually mandated this absolute South Korean force ceiling

of 600,000.) If the new intelligence estimates were accurate, the Communists now outnumbered us two to one. Therefore, the firepower and mechanized mobility of American ground troops had become *the* key component to an effective defense of the South.

When Armstrong's team shifted to North Korean airpower, they discovered that Kim Il-Sung's generals had moved most of their attack aircraft to forward bases. Fighter-bomber squadrons were now hidden in elaborate cave hangars hacked from the granite mountains just north of the DMZ (which accounted for the earlier "missing" steel and concrete). Anti-aircraft missile and radar sites protecting these forward airfields had been hardened with concrete emplacements.

Equally ominous, the NKPA had created the VIIIth Special Corps, a Spetsnaz-type, special-forces unit of 80,000 men. This was an airborne force supported by a new fleet of 250 Soviet-supplied AN-2 paradrop transports, which were also deployed in forward positions. Again, fundamental military principles dictated that such a force was an offensive spearhead, which had no defensive function.

And North Korea had doubled its submarine force to twelve attack boats. This factor was extremely interesting. With the DMZ dividing the Korean peninsula, South Korea was virtually an island. Most of the country's trade and military supplies moved by sea. The function of a submarine is to sink enemy combat ships and supply transports, often through a coastal blockade. Since South Korea had only limited amphibious capability, the North Korean submarines were obviously meant to support a large-scale offensive.⁹

Month by month, as the true size of the North Korean buildup and the evidence of their forward deployment posture became obvious, the U.N. Command was being forced to accept a troubling, seemingly unbelievable conclusion: Kim Il-Sung was poised to invade South Korea.¹⁰ This conclusion made sense when weighed against CIA reports that North Korea was racked by internal problems and economic difficulties. A multibillion-dollar foreign debt was crippling the already stagnant economy. There was a power struggle within the North Korean Communist Party between more moderate elements and hard-liners led by Kim Il-Sung's son and appointed heir, Kim Jong-Il. The military buildup and increased North Korean provocations along the DMZ were obviously intended to divert domestic discontent toward supporting a new patriotic war. As improbable as this might seem to people in the West, intelligence experts judged dictator Kim perfectly capable of such action.¹¹

The discovery of an elaborate tunnel network under the DMZ provided the final proof of North Korea's aggressive intentions. In November 1974, an ROK patrol in the western DMZ noticed steam rising from the ground on the southern side of the MDL in the area of some abandoned rice paddies.

The soldiers dug into the frozen earth and discovered a concealed concrete hatch. They pried it open to reveal a shallow, rectangular, concrete-reinforced tunnel, replete with narrow-gauge railway, which ran beneath the ground straight back into North Korea. As they enlarged the excavation, they came under sniper fire from North Korean army troops across the MDL. Later that day, ROK troops cautiously explored the tunnel. It was cut through relatively soft black soil, reinforced with concrete pillars, and strung with electric lights. A thorough investigation of the tunnel proved it was just large enough (122 centimeters high, 90 centimeters wide, approximately four by three feet) to allow passage of several hundred infiltrators an hour, lying prone on narrow-gauge rail cars.

The initial estimate was that the tunnel was a clever—if somewhat elaborate—conduit for inserting North Korean saboteurs and assassins into the South. Within a few months, however, we learned that the tunnel was part of a far more serious operation.

In March 1975, two North Korean defectors, Kim Pu-Song, an engineer, and Yu Tae-Yon, revealed that they had worked for years on an ambitious system of tunnels beneath the DMZ, which were designed as major invasion routes, not simply ingress paths for agents. The tunneling had begun in 1972, Kim disclosed, only months after America decided to remove our first combat division and shortly after the North Koreans had agreed for the first time to allow “humanitarian” North-South Red Cross meetings on reuniting dispersed families. While these meetings progressed, the North Korean military buildup and tunneling increased. Engineer Kim stated that he had personally seen the construction of nine tunnels, all larger and deeper than the one first discovered.

ROK troops along the DMZ searched for additional tunnels. In the old Iron Triangle sector near Chorwon, Korean infantrymen reported faint rumbling, like distant artillery, which seemed to be coming from directly beneath their positions. Well drills were moved up and a series of bore holes sunk. They struck pay dirt. A full-scale U.N. Command Tunnel Neutralization Team (TNT), led by Korean and combat engineers, went to work on an interception tunnel. Finally, on March 24, 1975, their 800-meter interception tunnel broke through the solid granite into a large North Korean invasion tunnel fifty meters beneath the old Greek battalion lines.¹²

This second tunnel was twice as big as the first. Arc-shaped, with a flat floor, the tunnel stood two meters high and two meters wide. The deep granite needed no concrete reinforcement. The tunnel could provide passage for a full combat division, including their field artillery drawn by prime movers. ROK patrols cautiously probed the tunnel that originated someplace north of the DMZ and was drilled due south across the DMZ for three and a half kilometers. As they worked their way north through a series of hastily

constructed barriers booby-trapped with mines, they encountered a freshly constructed reinforced concrete wall, which effectively halted further northward movement through this particular tunnel.

The TNT efforts were intensified all along the DMZ. Defector Kim had informed the South Korean Defense Ministry that there were probably two such large tunnels dug for each of the ten North Korean infantry divisions then deployed along the immediate northern edge of the DMZ.¹³

The United Nations Command angrily confronted the North Koreans during a regular Military Armistice Commission meeting at Panmunjom. The Communists refused to acknowledge their role in this audacious scheme, even though a banner recovered from one tunnel was emblazoned with the slogan "Down with American Imperialist Aggressors." Either the tunnels were an elaborate smear effort by the imperialists, the North Korean delegate stated, or they were simply abandoned coal mines from the years of the Japanese occupation of Korea. When it was pointed out that coal deposits are never found in granite, the Communists did not respond. The U.N. Command conducted a tunnel press tour in 1976, in which reporters were shown evidence of drilling traces that proceeded from the North toward the South. Since this literally rock-solid evidence could not be faked, the North Korean explanation was exposed as a transparent lie.

(Two more tunnels were eventually found, one in 1978 near the Joint Security Area, and one in 1990 in the eastern Demilitarized Zone.¹⁴)

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I WENT back to the Iron Triangle to inspect the second tunnel soon after returning to Korea. Flying the Huey northeast into those familiar hills was a surprisingly emotional experience. The shantytown corps rear area of the wartime front had been replaced by neat ROK camps of quonset huts and prefab buildings. The roads were well graded and some even paved. Approaching the DMZ the scene appeared almost peaceful. Farming and other civilian activities are still prohibited in the area immediately south of the DMZ. But then I saw the multiple rows of fencing and land mines that mark the southern boundary of the DMZ.

We landed near the old mountaintop artillery Observation Post where I had placed the M-48 tank to eliminate the Chinese artillery OP for the battery that had wounded me. My old battalion command bunkers and the trench line of the MLR had disappeared beneath two decades of scrub brush and low pine. I studied the smooth hump of Outpost Harry, which now marked the exact center of the DMZ, the Military Demarcation Line. The overlapping shell craters and black fougasse scars were also hidden by the new growth of brush and trees. There was nothing to indicate that hundreds

of men had died for that unassuming green hilltop. But I could still see the faces of those brave young soldiers who had died on Outpost Harry.

To the north, the familiar humped mountains of Korea rolled away into the summer haze. Even through powerful ROK artillery-spotter glasses, it was impossible to detect the massed fortifications of the North Korean army. But I had studied the satellite and SR-71 Blackbird reconnaissance photos only that morning. There were at least 50,000 Communist troops poised to advance south in those innocent piney mountains. In the past few months, North Korean troops had increased their provocations along the DMZ—sniping at ROK patrols and placing booby traps in the southern DMZ. At the flashpoint of the Panmunjom Joint Security Area, North Korean guards had stepped up their verbal and physical assaults on the UNC security detachment. Our best intelligence estimate was that the Communists were planning to trigger a major provocation to serve as the rationale for a new invasion, just as they had in 1950.

(Proof of the original June 1950 provocation finally emerged forty years later. A former North Korean ambassador to the Soviet Union, Li San-Cho, now living in exile in Moscow, confirmed to Reuters that Communist dictator Kim Il-Sung consulted with Joseph Stalin before the 1950 invasion, and the two agreed to fabricate a South Korean military incursion as a pretext for the massive, Soviet-backed invasion of the South.¹⁵)

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THE Communists unleashed their provocation with brutal efficiency on the morning of Wednesday, August 18, 1976.

Tension in the JSA neutral zone had been high all summer, with North Korean soldiers screaming obscenities and death threats at American security guards from the U.S. Army Support Group (USASG). The Americans had been trained to ignore these antics and to extract themselves from more serious scuffles, which had escalated from shoving matches to karate assaults on isolated American guards.

Our USASG unit was a company of three composite platoons with both American and ROK officers and enlisted men, based at nearby Camp Kitty Hawk. They were selected for strength, intelligence, and emotional stability. The unit's task was to represent United Nations' interests in the JSA, where the Military Armistice Commission met regularly. Because the North Koreans consistently provoked the U.N. security guards, they had orders to use their .45 handguns only in self-defense during a clearly life-threatening attack.

But our troops also had orders to protect U.N. interests in the JSA, which included the right to maintain guard posts and to freely patrol the area.

Each side maintained small observation posts, similar to road checkpoints or police kiosks found elsewhere in Asia. Over the twenty-three years since the fighting had stopped the JSA had become progressively covered with brush and trees. By that August, a forty-foot Normandy poplar near the so-called Bridge of No Return on the southwest side of the JSA had become so bushy that its foliage blocked the view between UNC Checkpoint No. 3 and UNC Observation Post No. 5. American and South Korean security guards surveyed the tree on August 6, and decided to cut it down. When their six-man Korean Service Corps (KSC) work team arrived with saws, however, a large North Korean guard unit intervened, ordering them to leave the tree alone.

The UNC detachment decided the bullying was unacceptable. Lieutenant Colonel Victor S. Vierra developed a plan that would satisfy legitimate security needs without provoking the Communists. On August 18, he dispatched a ten-man security force to guard five KSC workers equipped with axes, ladders, and saws, who planned to trim the poplar's lower branches but leave the tree standing. The unit was commanded by U.S. Army Captain Arthur G. Bonifas and his deputy, First Lieutenant Mark T. Barrett. They were accompanied by the interpreter, ROK Captain Kim Moon-Hwan. As a precaution, a twenty-man Quick Reaction Force was moved up to U.N. Checkpoint No. 2, just inside the JSA, ready to intervene if the tree-cutting detail was harassed by the North Koreans. The work party also placed pick handles in the back of their deuce-and-a-half truck, but following the Armistice Agreement, carried no weapons other than their sidearms.

At 10:30 that morning, the KSC workers set up two ladders and started pruning branches. Five minutes later, a North Korean truck rolled up and disgorged two North Korean officers and nine enlisted men. The senior Communist officer was First Lieutenant Pak Chol, a veteran JSA guard known to have provoked scuffles with UNC personnel in the past. He asked Captain Kim what work was in progress and was told that the KSC team was only pruning branches. Lieutenant Pak muttered, "That is good." In their normally officious manner, the North Koreans began to coach the South Korean workers on the proper method of branch pruning. This was an obvious attempt to usurp the authority of the American officers, so Captain Bonifas told the men to simply get on with their work. Twenty minutes passed, and then, for no reason, Lieutenant Pak marched up to Captain Bonifas and ordered him to halt the trimming.

Bonifas refused, adding that his men would complete their job and leave. Lieutenant Pak shouted that any more branch trimming would bring "serious trouble." Captain Bonifas and Lieutenant Barrett had heard such threats before. They ignored the Communists. Still strutting and shouting, Lieutenant Pak sent away for reinforcements. Ten more Communist guards

arrived by truck, and six more came trotting up from nearby guard posts. There were now almost thirty North Koreans surrounding the thirteen UNC soldiers and five KSC workmen. Lieutenant Pak was screaming now that any additional trimming would mean "death."

The UNC Quick Reaction Force was monitoring the situation by radio and photographing the scene with a telephoto surveillance camera.

Captain Bonifas turned his back on the angry Communist officer to make sure the workers continued the pruning. He did not see Lieutenant Pak remove his watch, wrap it in a handkerchief, and stick it into the pocket of his trousers. Nor did he see the other North Korean officer rolling up the sleeves of his jacket. An American NCO strode forward to warn Captain Bonifas.

At that moment Lieutenant Pak screamed, "*Chookyo!* Kill!"

It was later established that this command was a formal military order, not a spontaneous outburst. The command meant, "Attack the enemy and kill them!"¹⁶

Lieutenant Pak kicked Captain Bonifas in the groin and the American went down, surrounded by three Communists. Suddenly the North Koreans had crowbars, metal pipes, and heavy clubs. Communist soldiers seized the KSC workers' axes and attacked the UNC guards, concentrating on the American officers and NCOs. Captain Bonifas was on the ground, trying to deflect kicks and blows, when a Communist soldier bludgeoned him to death with the blunt head of an ax. First Lieutenant Barrett was chased around the truck and over a low retaining wall, followed by six Communists armed with axes, clubs, and steel pipes.

The North Korean troops had divided into efficient attack teams who scattered the UNC guard formation. Individual Americans were chased and beaten. While at least one Communist guard pinned an American's arms to prevent him using his weapon, the other members of the attack team struck with clubs and steel pipes. The U.N. soldiers depended on their officers to order the use of weapons, but the officers were killed in the first seconds of the attack. Fortunately, one American soldier broke free and was able to drive the UNC truck through the melee, forcing back the Communists, while the KSC workers clambered aboard. The diversion allowed the other UNC guards to help their battered comrades.

By now the Quick Reaction Force had arrived in their own truck, and the North Koreans fled across the bridge into the North Korean part of the DMZ. The whole incident was over in about four minutes. When Lieutenant Barrett was not accounted for, a search was made. His body was found in a shallow ditch just off the road. Like Captain Bonifas, his skull had been crushed by the blunt end of an ax head. The pattern of the Communist attack was now obvious: The American officers had been singled out for

murder and the American NCOs for severe beatings. This was not a spontaneous fracas, but a carefully contrived provocation.¹⁷

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I WAS in a staff meeting at UNC headquarters when I got a call from the Camp Kitty Hawk duty officer. His report was confused, indicating a "fight" had broken out between members of the UNC security guard and the North Koreans. He reported UNC casualties, but no deaths.

I left my office for the War Room, located in a concrete basement next door. As luck would have it, UNC Commander in Chief General Richard Stilwell was in Kyoto, Japan, paying a farewell call on the commander of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, after having just announced his upcoming retirement. Deputy Commander Air Force Lieutenant General John Burns was somewhere over the Yellow Sea getting in his monthly flying time. And the American ambassador to Korea, Richard Sneider, was in the States on home leave. The senior American in Korea was Lieutenant General John H. Cushman, the combined ROK/US I Corps commander. But his headquarters was up at Uijonbu and didn't have access to the UNC staff. So I was the man on the spot.

Within minutes, I received updated messages announcing that Captain Bonifas and Lieutenant Barrett had been murdered, and that several members of the security guard detachment were seriously injured. USASG officers confirmed that the North Korean attack had been carefully coordinated and the brutality focused on American targets. This was the major Communist provocation we'd been expecting.

I called Air Force Major General Don Pittman, the commander of U.S. Air Forces, Korea, and had him dispatch a jet to Japan to fetch General Stilwell. I also told Pittman to get General Burns back ASAP. Then I talked to General Cushman and briefed him on the situation in the JSA as we knew it. I also discussed with him what levels of increased readiness could be taken without an official increase in the defense condition, "DEFCON," the war-fighting readiness status of our forces. The normal DEFCON in Korea was "4," ("5" being the lowest, "1" being "attack imminent,") but I foresaw the possibility that we might be directed by the National Military Command Center in Washington to go to DEFCON-3 within hours. It was important not to run off half-cocked and play into Communist hands by giving them the "aggressive" response they wanted. Increasing the DEFCON level kicked off a lot of telltale activity, including radio traffic and aircraft and vehicle repositioning, which the Communists would surely observe. But we certainly couldn't carry on business as usual with an invasion possible.

When I was sure General Burns was en route to Seoul, I officially activated the War Room, but at a reduced manning level. Both Intelligence (J-2) and Operations (J-3) sent staff to man communications consoles in the underground center. UNC headquarters was no longer just a diffuse collection of offices. It was now a command preparing to go on a war footing.

In the meantime, I had had the communicators track down General Stilwell in Japan. I gave him a situation report as best I could on the nonsecure phone. He agreed with my assessment that the attack was deliberate North Korean policy, not an aberration.

"Sir," I said, "I think you should return to Seoul immediately. I have sent your aircraft to pick you up as soon as you think you can get away. Should I do anything about our DEFCON status? Are there any other instructions?"

Stilwell thought a moment. Our response to the murders had to combine forcefulness with prudence. Obviously, the North Koreans were testing our resolve. This was the middle of an election year, with a self-proclaimed reconciliation candidate, Georgia governor Jimmy Carter, doing well in the polls against President Jerry Ford, whose White House had been powerless when Congress scuttled the Vietnamese. The North Koreans were gambling Ford would not react forcefully now. The next forty-eight hours in Korea could either trigger a war or deter a new Communist invasion.

"Okay, Jack," General Stilwell finally answered. "Make sure you keep our higher headquarters, the ROK, and the U.N. allies informed of the situation. Request a MAC meeting for tomorrow, get the units ready for an increase in DEFCON, and have the staff stand by for an all-nighter."

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WHILE I was busy organizing headquarters staff for the late-night conference to prepare the Operations Plan (OPLAN) of our response, I got a call from the American embassy. The Political Section had just received news on the motives for the North Korean attack. North Korea had sent a large delegation to the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This was the first such meeting since the fall of Vietnam and the North Korean Communists were eager to gain support for their ongoing effort to force a U.S. troop withdrawal from Korea. That afternoon, less than four hours after the murders in the JSA, the chief North Korean delegate, Kim Jong-Il, the dictator's son, addressed the conference. He distributed a document describing the incident as an unprovoked attack on North Korean guards, led by American officers. He then introduced a resolution asking the conference to condemn that day's grave U.S. provocation and calling on participants to endorse both the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea

and the dissolution of the United Nations Command. Seconded by such *nonaligned* stalwarts as Cuba, the resolution passed.¹⁸

This was clear confirmation that the murders had been part of a carefully planned campaign designed to force American troops out of Korea.

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I BRIEFED General Stilwell in his sedan en route to his office from the airport. We discussed what he called three possible "military school solution" options to the North Korean provocation. The first was doing nothing. The second, a massive military punitive raid, he scornfully dismissed as "starting World War III." The third option was doing something "meaningful," which he said would have to be our course of action.

That night General Stilwell met with his senior officers to begin work on the OPLAN. As chief of staff I was responsible for coordinating all the hundreds of details of the plan. So I listened intently as Stilwell spoke. He directed the senior UNC Military Armistice member, Rear Admiral Mark P. Frudden, to deliver a firm protest letter from Stilwell to Kim Il-Sung at the next day's scheduled MAC meeting. Then we got to work on the preliminary plan, which had as its key objective the removal of the poplar tree in the JSA. This was a deceptively simple goal. But within it, the operation would contain all the elements necessary to forcefully reassert UNC rights in the DMZ while simultaneously intimidating the North Koreans.¹⁹

We had to focus our response on the JSA itself, while also signaling the North Korean Communists that such aggression had truly serious consequences. In short, we had to punish them for their action and also demonstrate American and South Korean resolve in order to discourage future incidents.

And the UNC response to the murders had to be extremely focused, so as not to trigger any North Korean spoiling attack across the DMZ. Thus we planned our reaction on two levels: resasserting UNC rights in the Joint Security Area, and massing American air, ground, and sea power to remind the North Koreans of the nature of their opponent.

However the plan evolves, Stilwell added, "that damned tree must come down!" The poplar had become a symbol of authority in the JSA. We had allowed the North Koreans to bully us into not felling the tree earlier, and they had obviously construed this as a sign of weakness. Now we were going to go into the JSA and cut it down, employing a force large enough to intimidate the Communists. Stilwell's plan displayed the subtlety of an old Asia hand. He realized the poplar had no intrinsic value, but that our destroying the disputed tree would mean a great loss of face to the North Koreans. He also understood the massing of overwhelming American fire-

power on and around the Korean peninsula would be even more psychologically devastating. The Communists had hoped for either craven inaction or brash overreaction on our part. Instead, they were about to learn a lesson in the controlled application of military power from one of the world's master practitioners.

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THE next morning we received the JCS order to increase the alert level of American forces in Korea to DEFCON-3. This was the first increase in the DEFCON due to the local situation since the 1953 armistice. Thirty minutes later, the ROK Minister of National Defense issued a similar order for all South Korean forces. The American Armed Forces Korea Radio and Television Network began a public recall of all U.S. personnel on pass and leave.

High-altitude supersonic SR-71 reconnaissance flights were stepped up, with the Blackbirds screaming east and west, miles above the DMZ, their cameras and sensors recording frantic military preparations deep inside North Korea. A valuable benefit of these recon flights was the "illumination" of anti-aircraft tracking radar in North Korea. The SR-71s' sensors recorded the exact coordinates of these radars. We then ordered our long-range Nike-Hercules missile batteries switched to their ground-to-ground mode, with conventional warheads targeted on the enemy radar sites. Had the North Koreans been foolish enough to fling a missile at the Blackbirds, they would have found their fire-control radars destroyed only minutes later.

Air Force Major General Don Pittman reported by mid-morning that flights of RF-4D reconnaissance aircraft and Wild Weasel air-defense suppression jets were arriving at our Korean air bases at Osan, Kunsan, and Taegu at regular intervals from Japan and the Philippines. The flight plans of these squadrons brought them within the range of North Korean radar. We had begun a war of nerves and proceeded to ratchet up the tension. Nuclear-capable F-111 strategic bombers were en route nonstop from Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho. As I watched the bright plastic aircraft symbols concentrate on our situation plotting chart in the War Room that afternoon, I could imagine the emotions of my Communist counterpart in the North. By now he had to realize that his country risked annihilation from one of the greatest concentrations of destructive force ever assembled in the region.

I checked with our ground commanders to be certain that the DEFCON-3 preparations were moving forward. Lieutenant General Cushman and Major General Morris Brady assured me that his 2nd Infantry Division and the First ROK Army troops were proceeding to their outpost positions along the DMZ. Nuclear and conventional artillery and missiles of various calibers

were carried forward by road and helicopter to prepared concrete bunkers. Listening posts just south of the DMZ were activated and reconnaissance patrols were mounted.

Previous readiness exercises had practiced an increase in DEFCON, including simulated ammunition movement. But we now used many more vehicles and troops than in any past exercise. The evidence of the UNC military activity was obvious. Convoys of trucks and armored personnel carriers moved steadily north. Cargo helicopters shuttled back and forth, carrying nets and pallets of munitions. A quick scan of the tactical radio net produced a multi-band cacophony of Korean and American voices. This was obviously not a training exercise. To the North Koreans, the UNC activity must have seemed ominous. That was our intention.

By the night of August 19, we had formal confirmation that North Korean forces were on a "wartime posture" all across their country. Moreover, our J-2 reported that the North Korean alert was "reactive, urgent and defensive in character," indicative of a "genuine apprehension over possible UNC retaliatory military actions."²⁰ This was exactly the result we had hoped to achieve. Our massive show of force had undercut previous North Korean offensive preparations and forced their military back to a defensive posture.

In the War Room, we now had multiple secure-voice and teletype links directly to the National Command Authority in the Pentagon. But General Stilwell was too savvy to prematurely bring these senior officials directly into our planning process. Every general officer in the War Room had served in Vietnam and was familiar with the regrettable tendency of civilian "field marshals" on the other side of the planet to act as local commanders via satellite telephone. Before actually implementing our plan, of course, we had to obtain formal authorization from Washington. But the longer the Pentagon had to scrutinize our OPLAN, the more likely they would want to second-guess us.

Now I joined a small group of senior officers in General Stilwell's office to complete our detailed OPLAN. We had to demonstrate to the North Koreans that the UNC, under American leadership, would not tolerate any erosion of its rights in the JSA or along the DMZ. Therefore, the task force we would deploy to cut down the poplar would also destroy two illegal swing-pipe road barriers the North Koreans had erected in the JSA in 1965. The composition of our task force would also demonstrate allied resolve and be equally balanced between American and ROK troops. But it certainly would not rise to the Communists' bait by breaking Armistice Agreement rules on actually introducing heavy firepower into the JSA. One of the most important staff officers in General Stilwell's planning group was Colonel Zane Finkelstein, the Staff Judge Advocate. He knew more about the content and the intent of the Military Armistice Agreement than

any American I have ever known. More important was the fact that Colonel Finkelstein had the intellect and integrity to think positively about what was best for his country rather than what was safest for his career. His input was essential.

Every operation needs a name and General Stilwell's was appropriate: Operation PAUL BUNYAN. The key elements were surprise, speed of execution and withdrawal, and avoidance of direct engagement with North Korean troops. Our forces would include soldiers from the 2nd Infantry Division, as well as ROK Special Forces and Recon troopers of the 1st ROK Division. Altogether, a force of 813 men would be involved. Task Force VIERRA (named for Lieutenant Colonel Victor Vierra, commander of the USASG) would conduct the actual tree cutting. The unit would include sixty American and ROK guards, divided in two platoons, armed with sidearms and pickax handles. The ROK men were Special Forces; each man was a Black Belt in Tae Kwon Do. They would guard two eight-man engineer teams who would actually cut down the tree with chain saws. A truck-borne ROK reconnaissance company, armed with M-16 rifles, mortars, and machine guns, would be prominently deployed just outside the JSA: crack South Korean troops defending their own soil. They would be beefed up with American tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) anti-tank-missile teams.

Vierra's troops were backed up by other elements of the division, including a reinforced composite rifle company from the 9th Infantry Regiment, which would be orbiting aboard twenty Huey helicopters a few hundred meters south of the DMZ, supported by twelve AH-1G Cobra gunships. Tank-busting F-4 Phantoms would be prowling at a slightly higher orbit. F-111 medium strategic bombers would orbit still higher, and be clearly visible to North Korean radar.

To complete the demonstration of firepower, three batteries of American 105mm howitzers were to be moved across the Freedom Bridge north of the Imjin River. Another three batteries of ROK heavy artillery would be positioned just south of the river in clear view of North Korean positions. The gunners, Stilwell said, would have "rounds in the tube and hands on the lanyards."

Operation PAUL BUNYAN was scheduled to begin at exactly 0700, the morning of Saturday, August 21, 1976.

At that precise moment, a massive flight of B-52 bombers from Guam would be moving ominously north up the Yellow Sea on a vector directly to the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. In the Sea of Japan, Task Force 77.4's aircraft carrier, U.S.S. *Midway*, would launch forty combat aircraft that would vector north above international waters.

As chief of staff, I supervised the writing of this OPLAN, which soon

became a thick document, replete with detailed schedules of troop and aircraft movements. General Stilwell composed the actual transmission message to the Pentagon. He told the Pentagon this was the plan we intended to implement; he did *not* ask for their comments or suggestions, but instead made it clear that PAUL BUNYAN was a carefully coordinated operation that did not lend itself to remote-control fine-tuning from Washington. All he wanted was approval to execute the plan.

We didn't submit the detailed OPLAN to the National Command Authority until almost midnight of Thursday, August 19, which was Thursday morning in Washington.

After a quick dinner at home, I returned to the War Room Friday night. My station was at the command table, next to General Stilwell, who was away from the headquarters giving final instructions and inspiring confidence in the hearts of the U.S. and ROK soldiers and airmen who were about to face the Communist enemy eyeball-to-eyeball. The senior staff assembled at midnight to monitor the assembly of the PAUL BUNYAN task force and supporting units. We couldn't proceed with the operation, of course, until approval came from Washington. But in anticipation of Pentagon authorization, we took certain unorthodox, but vital, actions concerning communications.

Stilwell's deputy, Lieutenant General John Burns, had been the Seventh Air Force commander in Thailand during the ill-fated *Mayaguez* hijacking the year before. After the civilian ship was seized by Cambodian Communists in the Gulf of Siam, the rescue attempt had been micro-managed from Washington. At one point, Air Force fighter-bomber pilots orbiting the island where the *Mayaguez* crew was held by the Khmer Rouge were startled to hear the distinctive, Mittel-Europa murmur of Henry Kissinger in their earphones. The White House had used a command override channel to deal directly with the operation's air support. In so doing, Kissinger bypassed the entire local command structure and fouled up the operation. General Burns had been about to order the Marine helicopters not to land on an island held by the Khmer Rouge, but his radio channel to the operational aircraft was blocked by the Flash Override from Washington. The Marines landed and suffered heavy casualties. We were determined this would not happen to us.

General Stilwell routed the only secure phone lines to the Pentagon and CINCPAC in Hawaii directly to his desk in the War Room. He directed me to make sure the lines terminated there. To be certain Washington could not bypass this headquarters, we left the phone receivers off the hook, in the "open" position. To "hang up," we simply shoved a disposable Styrofoam coffee cup over the receiver mouthpieces.

To double-check this system, I called in the UNC Communications Officer

(J-6), Colonel James L. Young. "Colonel," I said sternly, "your entire future in the U.S. Army depends on how carefully you follow the orders I'm about to give you."

"Yes, sir," the J-6 said. I had his attention.

"Under absolutely no circumstances whatsoever," I continued, "will you allow any direct communication from a higher headquarters to bypass this room and contact the corps, division, or the task force itself."

The man nervously licked his lips, grasping that he was about to be squeezed between the rock of my authority and the hard place of the Pentagon. "Yes, sir."

"I don't care if the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or President Ford himself is on the line." I had to give the Colonel some ammunition. In a situation this tense, it would be disastrous if the Pentagon War Room or the White House itself began issuing and then countermanding orders to American and Korean ground and air units. "Tell them our communications system out here is incompatible with theirs. Tell them they've got a four channel and we've got a two channel . . . whatever. Just don't allow any contact with our field forces other than from this headquarters."

The Colonel departed quickly to relay my orders to his staff.

At 2345 hours Friday night, fifteen minutes before the deadline established by General Stilwell, we received authorization to implement PAUL BUNYAN. The OPLAN became an Operational Order. Admiral James Holloway, the acting chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had done an absolutely brilliant job of "selling" General Stilwell's plan to the Washington leadership without the typical nit-picking modifications and changes.

Less than thirty minutes later, the J-6 returned. He had received the first message from the Pentagon requesting direct communication with our task force commander, now assembling his forces below the DMZ.

"I told them the systems were incompatible," the Colonel explained, "but I assured them that you could probably answer any questions about what was going on in the command."

Soon he received another Washington query directed to the task force commander at Camp Kitty Hawk. "They want to know how old the tree is," the J-6 said, shaking his head.

"That's none of their damn business," I snapped.²¹

Twenty-five minutes later the Colonel returned. Now the Pentagon lieutenant general in charge of worldwide military communications was personally demanding the J-6 open channels to the task force. "I told the General to talk to you, sir," the Colonel said. "He was not exactly pleased."

"Don't worry, Colonel," I said, "I'm your rating officer, not him."

Less than fifteen minutes after that, the J-6 received another call, this one directly from the senior civilian engineer who had designed the secure-voice

communications system. He had all kinds of good advice on how to link the supposedly incompatible channels. But the J-6 held his ground.

At around 0400, Ambassador Dick Sneider appeared in the War Room, having flown for almost twenty-four hours from the States. He took my chair beside Stilwell, and I moved down the table. General Stilwell was on the phone to Morris Brady, the task force commander. The Ambassador reached up to take the phone from Stilwell's hand, obviously eager to speak to Brady himself. I saw the muscles in Stilwell's arm clench, then go rigid. The harder Sneider tugged, the more firmly Stilwell gripped the phone. Finally, the General won this ludicrous tug-of-war with the Ambassador.

Stilwell replaced the receiver and smiled at the Ambassador. "Dick," Stilwell said, "was there something you wanted me to ask General Brady?"

Sneider was visibly ruffled. "Well," he muttered, "the *President* asked me to be his personal representative in this operation. And I . . ."

"Certainly," Stilwell said, still smiling. "I'll be happy to relay any of the President's questions to *my* field commanders."

The Ambassador got the message.

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Just before dawn, I received confirmation that all the units were at their lines of departure. I got up and went to the end of the room where I could be alone to say a prayer. It was my estimate, shared by many of the staff, that the operation stood a fifty-fifty chance of starting a war. In less than an hour, several hundred thousand men might very well be fighting and dying in those steep, blood-soaked mountains.

If the murderous North Korean assault on our forces had been part of an elaborate plot to trigger an American military response, which in turn would provoke a North Korean invasion, we might be teetering on the brink of a holocaust. If North Korea unleashed a massive armored assault against Seoul, we would have no choice but to request authorization for the first use of nuclear weapons since World War II. But there was no backing down now.

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At 0648, the large task force truck convoy left Camp Kitty Hawk and rolled toward the Joint Security Area. Near the head of the column was a jeep carrying an American major. As the trucks rumbled past Checkpoint No. 2 on the southern edge of the JSA, the Major's jeep, which had pulled out of the convoy just before entering the JSA, sped to the nearby quarters of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission, where Swiss Major General

Claude Van Muyden and Swedish Major General Lage Wernstedt were billeted. The Major presented my compliments to the European generals and informed them that the operation, which was currently under way, was limited in scope and that the actual task force in the JSA was armed with only pistols and pickax handles. The task force would simply cut down the poplar tree, remove two illegally constructed barriers, and then withdraw. He asked the neutral officers to so inform their Polish and Czech counterparts located a few hundred meters away just north of the JSA in North Korean territory. The generals were furious that I had not informed them in advance of the operation. Some weeks later, however, they admitted that it was best for their credibility as neutral observers that they did not know about PAUL BUNYAN in advance.

The lead elements of the task force convoy roared into the JSA just as twenty troop-carrier Hueys and their hovering gunship escorts clattered over the southern horizon and swung into their orbit north of the Imjin River. While one joint U.S.-ROK security platoon formed a cordon around the poplar tree, the other platoon's truck drove to the east end of the Bridge of No Return to block the North Koreans' most obvious reinforcement route.

Surprise was complete. The few North Koreans at their guard billet scurried around, then retreated north of the JSA. Our engineers' chain saws were already slashing into the tree trunk. Now an ROK Special Forces unit double-timed into the security zone and secured the road junction that was the other possible North Korean reinforcement route. Moments later, our second engineer team rolled up to the North Korean pipe barrier and ripped it from the ground with a tow chain attached to their truck frame. The second barrier was quickly removed in the same way.

By now, the North Korean security guards were dashing around and shouting into their field telephones. They grew noticeably quiet as the heavily armed ROK reconnaissance company deployed along the low ridge just south of the JSA. From the North Koreans' viewpoint, the picture must have been ominous: sixty American and South Korean security guards carrying pickax handles in the front rank, supported by the ROK recon unit armed for bear, who were in turn covered by a full company of American troops in orbiting helicopters with gunship escort.

Ten minutes later, as the felled poplar trunk was on the ground being sawed into smaller sections, a makeshift North Korean convoy, including a bus, two trucks, and a clanking East German sedan, sped toward the JSA along the main road from the north, which was built on a riverside dike. When the lead driver spotted the ranks of Korean and American troops, he stopped. One hundred and fifty North Korean soldiers, carrying AK-47s, scurried from the convoy and took cover beside the dike. The Communist officers appeared uncertain whether to proceed, hold their ground, or re-

treat. Our local commander sensed this confusion and ordered A Company, 2/9th Infantry, forward by truck. These troops, in full battle gear, piled from their vehicles and deployed along the road within easy small-arms range of the North Koreans. The enemy company remained hidden and withdrew later in the day.

By 0745, the remains of the poplar tree were loaded aboard the trucks and the task force began its withdrawal. The pullback was carefully coordinated not to expose any isolated UNC troops to sudden North Korean foray. At 0830, all the units were south of the DMZ and rolling toward Camp Kitty Hawk, escorted by Cobra gunships. The normal United Nations security platoon had taken their post within the JSA. North Korean guards cautiously ventured forward to examine the tree stump and the shattered ruins of their illegal roadblocks.

The only serious incident that morning occurred at 1015, when General Brady's Command and Control helicopter was hit by North Korean automatic-weapon fire as the helicopter hovered just south of the JSA. The fire stopped abruptly when six Cobras banked line-abreast and swung into firing position, their twinkling laser sights directly on the enemy gun position. As a reminder to the Communists what kind of force they faced, we kept our heavily armed infantry along the southern ridge until well into the afternoon.

We heard nothing from the North Koreans until noon, when they requested an impromptu meeting of the Military Armistice Commission. The senior North Korean army officer glumly read a message from his Supreme Commander, Kim Il-Sung. The Communist dictator expressed "regret" over the August 18 incident and hoped that both sides would make efforts to prevent similar unfortunate outbreaks. This was the first time in the twenty-three-year history of the Armistice Commission that the North Koreans had acknowledged even partial responsibility for violence along the DMZ.

Over the next several days, satellite and aerial reconnaissance revealed that the North Koreans were still on a defensive posture. Slowly they reduced the high-level alert, still obviously wary of American forces in the region. We scaled back at the same pace, again reminding the Communists of the size and flexibility of our ground, air, and naval forces. In early September, the Communists agreed to remove their remaining guard posts from the southern sector of the JSA. We then extracted a further concession by requiring they construct their own bridge into the neutral zone.

In the JSA, the net result of the operation was the physical separation of the UNC and North Korean guards. We were careful to coordinate our negotiations with military operations. The slow reduction of augmented naval and air forces followed each North Korean concession. On September

8, when the North Koreans agreed to virtually all of our demands, the JCS gave the order to reduce alert level back to DEFCON-4, and the U.S.S. *Midway* departed Korean waters for Japan.

Operation PAUL BUNYAN was a valuable reminder that North Korea's ruthless and increasingly desperate Communist leaders could be effectively dealt with only from a position of strength. They viewed our earlier reconciliation attempts as weakness to be further exploited. The only reason Kim Il-Sung finally backed down was that we made him understand the danger he faced. Despite our retreat from Southeast Asia, America stood solidly beside our South Korean ally.

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THE events in Korea were the first serious test of the volunteer Army. Overall, the troops performed with a high level of professionalism. But there were some notable exceptions. As soon as we increased alert status to DEFCON-3, my personnel officer reported that hundreds of Department of Army civilians who—in an austerity measure—had replaced soldiers in maintenance and supply depots began requesting immediate transportation out of Korea. Like the rest of us they were afraid a war was imminent. But unlike soldiers, they couldn't be ordered to stay. "Colonel," I told the personnel officer, "you will not spend a single U.S. government dollar on plane tickets for these people. If they want to go so badly, they can pay for the trip themselves."

Civilian workers were not my main worry, however. We had a high proportion of women enlisted personnel among the American support units. In several cases, otherwise exemplary NCOs went AWOL during the first hours of the alert, trying to locate their soldier wives or girlfriends and take them to safe areas in the rear.

Although no dependents were allowed in combat units and in the forward division areas, many of our women soldiers in rear areas had small children. Some soldier mothers were married to other GIs; some were divorced; and some had simply never bothered to marry. They normally left their children in the care of Korean women during the duty day.

But DEFCON-3 was hardly normal duty. Some support units were deployed well forward, close to the DMZ. All troops had to report in full combat gear, draw weapons and C-rations, and be prepared for twenty-four-hour duty for the duration of the alert.

At a meeting I held with command sergeants major after the crisis, I was given many troubling reports. A few women soldiers had requested immediate transfers to the rear as soon as the alert was declared. Others showed up in formation wearing helmets and flak jackets and carrying babies.

One tough old black sergeant major with a chestful of combat decorations shook his head sadly as he told his story.

"Sir," he said, "I saw a sergeant and his wife standing in formation *each* holding on to a little kid." He seemed more bewildered than angry. "That's just not a good way to go to war, sir."

I had to agree.