

# Grave and Ever Present Danger

**The CCF Spring Offensives, Part I – April 1951**

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**For Bob Wells, 3<sup>rd</sup> Military Police Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division,  
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*Honorary Borinqueneers*, and for Danny Nieves Webmaster  
of the Borinqueneers Website**



**A Borinqueneer BAR man engages enemy positions during the CCF Spring Offensive.  
April 1951 (National Archives)**

***As I reconstructed the Chinese attack later, it seemed to me that the main thrust had been at the 65<sup>th</sup> and our boundary with the British. I believe that the enemy attack bounced off us, spilled over on both sides of us and then concentrated on the British and the Turks.***

**BRIGADIER GENERAL (RET.) W. W. HARRIS  
analyzing, in retrospect, the CCF Spring Offensive  
*Puerto Rico's Fighting 65<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry (1980)***

## Introduction

Korea, April 1951. It was the worst of places at the worst of times. President Truman had relieved General MacArthur from command of the United Nations Command (UNC) in favor of Lt. Gen. Matthew B. “Matt” Ridgway a mere four months after Ridgway had assumed command of the Eighth Army (EUSAK). Although in sympathy with MacArthur’s views of unlimited war, Ridgway concurred with and abided by the President’s politics against another attempt to conquer North Korea or expand the war beyond the Yalu River. Whatever the outcome might be, it had to be within the peninsula.

The first of two Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) major offensives, in a final attempt to destroy the UNC forces and score a decisive victory in *and for* Korea, would fall under the moonlit night of the twenty-second, with half a million communist troops swarming down on the UNC lines. The U.S., South Korea (ROK), and allies would be as ready as they could be to meet the onslaught.

So would the Borinqueneers of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

Two opposing armies would be in for the largest battle of the Korean War.

### A Mission Vacuum: The Eighth Army Strikes Back

Chinese strategist Sun Tzu very well said it in *The Art of War*: *“Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt. When you plunder a countryside, let the spoil be divided amongst your men; when you capture new territory, cut it up into allotments for the benefit of your troops. Ponder and deliberate before you make a move. He will conquer who has learnt the artifice of deviation. Such is the art of maneuvering.”*

Therein lay the success of the CCF attacks of the previous winter – the simultaneous employment of two of the military genius’ most fundamental principles for the conduct of war: “All warfare is based on deception,” and “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

December 1950 saw the loss of all UNC territorial gains in North Korea. On the west, EUSAK fell below the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel to form a defensive perimeter north and east of Söul. On the east, X Corps withdrew through the port city of Hüngnam to reconstitute and reequip in Pusan. The sudden death of Johnnie Walker seemed to spell disaster on an already “defeated” defeatist EUSAK. Somebody had to do something. That somebody, in the eyes of Army Chief of Staff J. Lawton “Joe” Collins, seemed to be his deputy, Mr. Paratrooper Matthew Bunker Ridgway.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Mr. Paratrooper” is one of the many nicknames the founder and former commander of the converted 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and of the XVIII Airborne Corps was known by. Others include “Wrong-way Ridgway,” “the right way, the wrong way, and the Ridgway,” and “Old Iron Tits.” The latter is in allusion to his custom of wearing a live grenade taped to his right-hand side suspender, and a first aid kit, giving the impression of another grenade, on the left-hand side suspender.

Rushed to Korea overnight and endowed with unprecedented power, the newcomer incorporated Ned Almond's X Corps into EUSAK, bringing its strength up to a formidable 350,000, more than enough troops to do away with the "spinelessness" that had for so long stigmatized Walker's army.<sup>2</sup> Ridgway's coming on stage struck many a skeptic as the ultimate hope of victory in Korea – if there ever was chance for it. For Ridgway himself, retribution was simply a matter of time.

It was New Year's Eve when the CCF renewed its offensive across the Parallel, seeing the UNC's abandonment of Söul on January 4, despite Ridgway's determination to maintain the defensive line above the capital. By then, EUSAK was well on its way to a new rendezvous with destiny. Oddly enough, the CCF did not carry its offensive south of or beyond Söul; moreover, simultaneous North Korean (NKPA) offensives in central and eastern Korea ceased altogether following the capture of the capital. So far the enemy had proven to be prolific in personnel, good in intelligence, and fairly successful in operations; even so, a logistical system that restrained offensive operations to no more than a week, two at most, boded well in Ridgway's plans to regain the offensive. With the blessing of Joe Collins (*"We are going to stay and fight"*) on January 15, Ridgway set off to wage a war of maneuver – "slashing at the enemy when he withdraws and fighting delaying tactics when he attacks."

These changes did nothing but sprout an innate courage that men had not exploited hitherto. The stuff legends are made of soon filled the pages of countless of command reports: battalion-sized bayonet assaults; units employing their every weapon to the maximum; howitzers breaking up waves of onrushing enemy at point-blank range; one-man armies taking on entire enemy units; commanders requesting *and* receiving extra equipment.

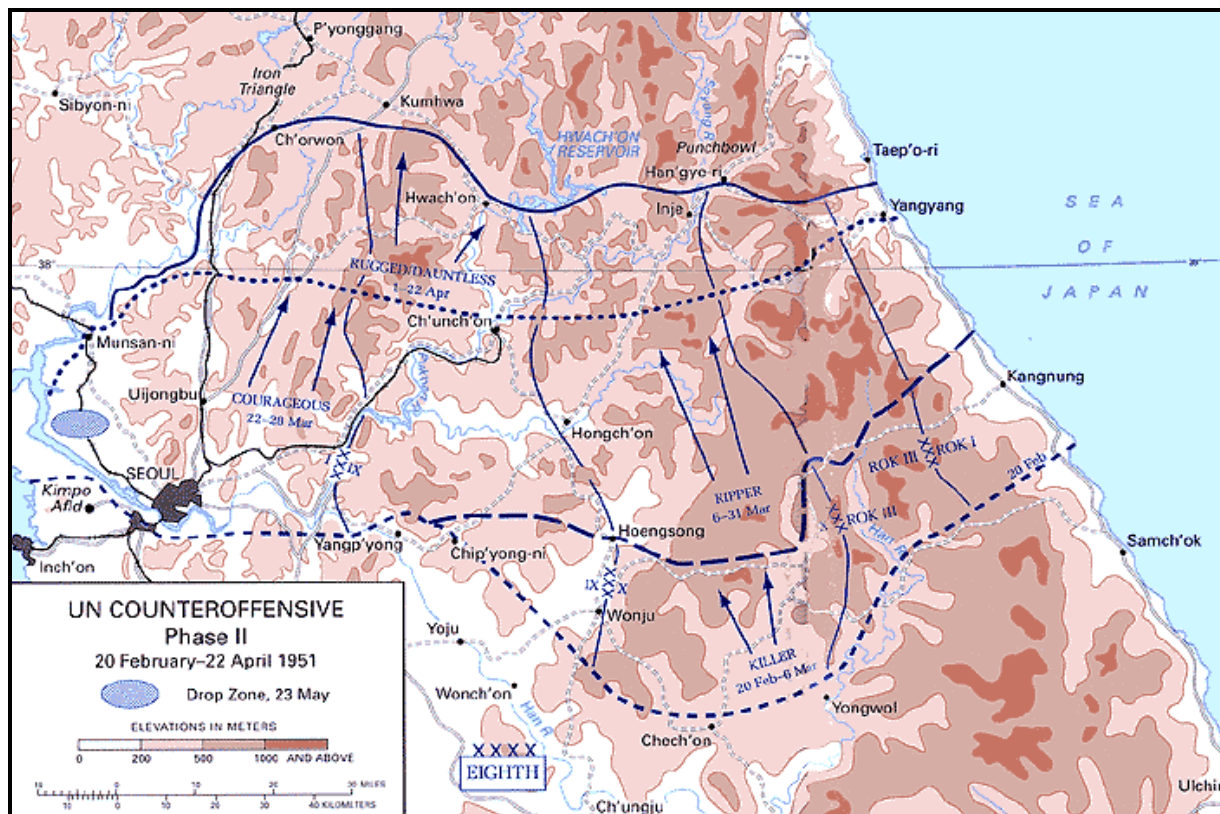
Operations THUNDERBOLT, KILLER, RIPPER, and COURAGEOUS would, in three months of careful and cautious maneuvers, clear South Korea of CCF and NKPA troops, gaining the UNC several air miles of estate, to ultimately bring a total of twelve frontline divisions to or close to the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel by the first day of April.<sup>3</sup> The enemy might have left South Korea, but the buildup of communist troops north of the Parallel augured nothing pleasant for EUSAK. The ominous odds of a major offensive moved Ridgway to attack farther north to secure more defensible positions – a tactic both Truman and MacArthur approved in the face of Mr. Paratrooper's concerns about the instability of Washington's politics. The new operation,

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<sup>2</sup> Up until Ridgway's arrival, Douglas MacArthur had directed every major tactical phase of the ground combat in Korea. Possibly foreseeing his eventual fall from grace, MacArthur blessed Ridgway with an unheard of "The Eighth Army is yours," thus relinquishing overall control. Moreover, whether foreseeing a possible clash between his right-hand man Ned Almond and Ridgway, MacArthur gave Almond the choice of returning to his Chief of Staff office in Tokyo or remaining as commanding general of X Corps within EUSAK. Whatever reasons he had, Almond elected the latter choice, yet retaining his office, which he would eventually lose to Doyle Hickey when Ridgway assumed command of the UNC.

<sup>3</sup> THUNDERBOLT (Jan. 25–Feb. 20) marked the end of a series of tactical withdrawals. KILLER (Feb. 21–March 6) sought the destruction of communist forces east of the Han River and south of Line ARIZONA, which ran eastward from Chip'yöng-ni, across IX and X corps fronts, to the boundary of X Corps and ROKA III Corps. A continuation of KILLER, but along the entire line, RIPPER (March 6–31) had a twofold purpose: the infliction of maximum casualties on the communists and the retake of Söul. Described by Ridgway as a "qualified success," COURAGEOUS (March 22–31) supplemented RIPPER in trapping and destroying NKPA troops south of the Imjin, and in bringing I Corps in line with the rest of EUSAK along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. (See Map)

RUGGED, moved from the fifth to the third of the month, proceeded in a general advance from positions across the peninsula.<sup>4</sup> Specifically designed to secure KANSAS Line, RUGGED aimed to the destruction of communist forces assembling in a rather triangular-shaped valley deep in the mountains of Ch'ŏrwŏn, Kŭmhwa and P'yŏnggang, otherwise known as the Iron Triangle. This triangle of death served as the nerve of the communists' logistical and communications route.



**The Eighth Army Strikes Back.**

**Source: *The Korean War: Restoring the Balance* (Center of Military History)  
 [Note that the month in the legend, “Drop Zone, 23 May” should read “March.”]**

On high ground, the line began at the junction of the Han and Imjin rivers and ran northeastward and eastward 115 miles to Yangyang. Once KANSAS was attained, Ridgway intended to drive another 20 miles further north and establish a similar line named WYOMING. From these positions he intended to maintain contact with communist forces through heavily armed patrols. Should the communists counterattack, as he expected, EUSAK was resist along WYOMING and, while causing the maximum amount of casualties and disruption to the enemy, fall back if and when necessary to KANSAS Line, where the battle would be fought.

<sup>4</sup> These positions, from left to right, were respectively manned by the U.S. I, IX, and X corps, and the ROKA III and I corps. (See Map)

## Grave and Ever Present Danger

An ocean apart, the thirty-third President of the United States, Harry S Truman, liked and disliked by an equal share of Americans, found his brooding moments engineering his own highway to China. Should Ridgway achieve his goal, Truman would have at least secured the theoretical ceasefire line that Douglas MacArthur had deliberately revealed (in anticipation of Truman's actions) to be the site for the truce talks. He had decided to sack MacArthur weeks earlier, but had opted to wait until the five-star put his foot in his mouth again, hopefully, in public so the decision did not appear unjust in the public's eye.

Misguided or otherwise acting independently as accustomed to for believing his judgment superior to those around him, "Dugout" MacArthur was convinced that his mission in the Far East was to destroy the enemy and to reunite the two Koreas *by all means*. Although very much in agreement with Ridgway's "meat grinder" operations, the CINCUNC did not see them compelling the communists to surrender soon enough. Yet arbitrarily, the five-star disagreed with Ridgway's plan to consolidate the U.N. forces on WYOMING Line. MacArthur was conscious, however, that this apparent lack of progress was not Ridgway's fault, but nominally Truman's; and *it* frustrated him. All along, the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been denying not only him, but democracy everywhere, a definite victory in Korea. Fighting a politician's war would get no one anywhere. That was what he essentially communicated to Republican Congressman Joe Martin in a letter dated March 20. In it, the five-star proposed a "No Substitute for Victory" crusade meant to carry the war into Manchuria, bombing sanctuary CCF bases there, and possibly utilizing Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist troops in Formosa (nowadays Taiwan) as invasion troops.<sup>5</sup>

Logically, his outrageous views appalled the Truman Administration. Yet his condemnation was not his radical thinking, but his brazen criticism on Old Harry's policies ... *publicly*. Truman relieved the top general on April 11, Söul time, nominally for insubordination. (In the end, MacArthur's dismissal raised a martyr from a prophet, and brought forth the kiss of death to Truman's hopeless 1952 Presidential Campaign.)

The launch of Operation DAUNTLESS (the advance to WYOMING) that very day in a way coincided with a three-way change of command masterminded in Washington. Ridgway, respected, charismatic and uncontroversial, became the first and only choice to assume command of the Far East Command and the UNC. On the other hand, the ultimate choice for the command of EUSAK fell on a rather quiet but able West Point athlete and intellectual Lt. Gen. James Alward Van Fleet, whom Ridgway did not see as the most capable man for the job. Following the change of command ceremony on April 14, the two met privately, the new CINCUNC making it clear to the newcomer of his intentions of keeping a "tight rein" on

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<sup>5</sup> Early in the war, exiled *Kuomintang* (Nationalist Party) leader Chiang Kai-shek had offered to put 100,000 troops at the service of the UNC as a way of getting back at his nemesis, Red China's Premier Mao Tse-Tung. MacArthur welcomed the offer gladly, only to have it rejected by an outraged Truman Administration and receive in turn a severe reprimand from the President.

EUSAK.<sup>6</sup> Ridgway justified this dictatorial approach on grounds of deep concern after MacArthur's relief. In his first preliminary "directive," which he entitled "Prevention of World War III" and issued at about the same time MacArthur addressed the joint session of Congress on the nineteenth, Mr. Paratrooper advised his senior air, naval, and ground commanders that "the grave and ever present danger of an extension of current hostilities in Korea [placed] a heavy responsibility upon all echelons of [the] command, but particularly upon those capable of offensive actions."

Unarguably, Van Fleet could not have arrived at a better time. The scenario before him was very likely to be the one just preceding the end of the war. The events prior to and following his arrival had succeeded themselves at machine-gun speed, hardly leaving him time to absorb their complexity; but boded well in his eyes.<sup>7</sup> The very day he assumed command of EUSAK, KANSAS Line was a well-established and fortified transpeninsular front at the ready to repel any enemy counterattack.

The panorama across I Corps' 40-mile western front of KANSAS was one of a rather extraordinary ethnic composition. Three divisions – one South Korean (1<sup>st</sup>) and two U.S. (3<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>) – formed a multinational force unlike any other seen before or afterward, for that matter, in the Korean War. Line abreast, it picked up at the mouth of the Imjin on the west coast, stretching 15 miles upstream to the river's bend at Korangp'ö-ri, then eastward in a roughly straight line deep into the mountains of central Korea. First in line was the ROKA 1<sup>st</sup> Division, sitting astride Route 1, the main road connecting the capital of Söul and the township of Munsan. The division was regarded as the most reliable South Korean formation of the time.

Next in line stood the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's British 29<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Brigade, bracketing the Imjin and Hant'an rivers within its 14-mile stretch from Korangp'ö-ri to the adjacencies of Route 33, a.k.a. the Ŭijöngbu Corridor. The "corridor," a major highway connecting Söul with Ch'örwön, was an ancient invasion route used several times over the course of the war.<sup>8</sup> The second UNC ground combat unit to join the effort, the 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade was comprised by three impressive and well-disciplined battalions: the 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Such was Ridgway's intention all along, as he anticipated upon relinquishing his command: "This is not goodbye in any sense of the word because I am still very much a part of this team" ("New SCAP," *Time*, April 23, 1951). Yet, despite his reservations, he vowed to Van Fleet he would not "get in your hair, Van," (Ibid). Van Fleet would prove to be a superb commander – friendly, concerned, and down-to-earth – in his first week of tenure alone, what, coupled with the optimal disposition of the UNC forces across Korea in the event truce talks began, would turn out for the best in improving the relationship between the two generals. Just as MacArthur had when Ridgway came on board, Ridgway eventually condescended to let Van Fleet run the show whatever way the EUSAK commander deemed necessary.

<sup>7</sup> After reaching KANSAS Line on April 9, the I and IX corps, with the ROKA I Corps operating on the east coast, proceeded to attack Ch'örwön with the intent of seizing UTAH Line, an outward bulge of KANSAS, to be in position to strike the Iron Triangle. At the same time, X Corps and the ROKA III Corps proceeded likewise on the central part of the peninsula. Enemy response was almost simultaneous across the front, with the IX Corps area receiving the brunt as the communists opened the sluice gates of the Hwach'ön Reservoir and flooded that corps' side of the line. The flood did not cause the loss of personnel, but it did wash off bridges and vehicles, and disrupted operations for days. On the other hand, nature itself seemed to have it its way as well, with a sudden hailstorm hitting the peninsula concurrently with MacArthur's swift dismissal. A new legend was forged around an already legendary figure. Perhaps MacArthur himself was indeed *a* god, after all, many a soldier reckoned.

<sup>8</sup> During the June 1950 invasion; during MacArthur's advance north following the Inch'ön landing; during the UNC's retreat following the CCF intervention; and during the UNC offensive, retreat, and final advance.

Gloucestershire (a.k.a. “Glostors”), the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (a.k.a. RNF or “Fusiliers”), and the Royal Ulsters Rifles (a.k.a. RUR or “Ulsters”); plus an attached 900-man Belgian-Luxembourg battalion, the 1<sup>st</sup> Belgian, collectively known as the BELUX. The 29<sup>th</sup> was commanded by an energetic infantryman veteran of the World War II Burma-India campaigns: Brigadier Thomas Brodie.



**Col. William Harris and Lt. Col. Dionisio Ojeda,  
CO 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, PEFTOK.  
Undated photo, probably early 1951 (Harris' collection)**

The Puerto Rican Regiment and its attached Filipino 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, working together for the second time around, occupied the northern sectors of Route 33. The third UNC ground combat unit to join the war after the Americans and the British, the 10<sup>th</sup> (Motorized) Infantry Battalion of the Philippines Expeditionary Force to Korea (hereafter PEFTOK) was the first of five 1,500-strong battalion combat teams (BCTs) to serve in Korea between 1950 and 1955.<sup>9</sup> Down to 900 men after close to two months of non-stop

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<sup>9</sup> Each PEFTOK increment consisted of three infantry companies backed by one battery of 155-mm “Long Toms” howitzers. The pioneering 10<sup>th</sup> was the exception, as it included one Sherman tank company and one motorized reconnaissance company. Commanded by Lt. Col. Mariano Azurin, the 10<sup>th</sup> arrived in Korea during the third week of September 1950 – preceding the 65<sup>th</sup> by a mere five days – and was suitably employed during the Pusan Perimeter breakout operations until the IX Corps commanding general at the time attached the battalion to the newcomer 65<sup>th</sup> under the mistaken assumption that Filipinos spoke Spanish. The language problem was dealt with comparative ease, as opposed to the tactical and personal problems. Filipinos enjoyed an enviable fame as guerrilla fighters, but their regular soldiering was unorthodox and unpractical to the U.S., requiring that the 10<sup>th</sup> be retrained virtually from scratch. The personal “problem” lay in the battalion commander, whom Bill Harris described as “much of a protester than a doer.” (While Harris is parsimonious in justifying his sacking Azurin, other sources pinpoint the discordant note as a matter of supply omission during the previous winter, when, understandably upset because his men lacked heavy winter gear whereas the regimental team his battalion supported at the time had received it, Azurin protested forcefully at division level, thus straining relations with the RCT commander.) Under the able and aggressive leadership of Lt. Col. Dionisio Ojeda, handpicked by Harris, the 10<sup>th</sup> lived up to the sobriquet of “Fighting Filipinos.”

fighting, the exhausted but otherwise high-spirited Filipinos were the northernmost of all UNC troops, trailed only by 2/65, now commanded by Lt. Col. Laurence A. Johnson.<sup>10</sup>

On the 25<sup>th</sup> Division sector were the attached Turkish 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, and the 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments. The Turkish Brigade was commanded by Tahsin Yazici, a World War I veteran who fought the British Empire at Gallipoli; and who, strangely, was on leave in Tokyo at the time his men occupied the right side of the boundary with the “Tropic Lightning” Division’s black 24<sup>th</sup> RCT.

Enemy resistance weakened in both division zones on April 17, as the Far East Air Force (FEAF) commenced all-out air assaults on CCF airfields in North Korea.

### Route 33: Highway to the Danger Zone

Commanded by a congenial three-star named Frank W. “Shrimp” Milburn, formerly commanding general of the IX Corps during the Naktong Bulge operations, I Corps would be the third and final corps assignment of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment during its three-year participation in Korea.<sup>11</sup> Under Milburn’s competent leadership, the Puerto Ricans had not only continued to vest themselves in glory, but had been duly recognized by top-of-the-crop stars like Ridgway, Collins, and MacArthur along the way. In the first three months of 1951, the gallant regiment had spearheaded almost every single corps operation. (In early February, its 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> battalions had conducted the last battalion-sized bayonet assault in U.S. military, leading to the capture of P’ajang-ni, a fortified hilly sector north of Sōul. By midmonth, the regiment had become the first UNC unit to reach and cross the Han River, thus opening the way for the rest of the Command. By mid-March, it had become the first element to re-cross the Han in the UNC’s final drive north.) Accolades arrived in various ways: from Matthew Ridgway’s frequent visits, more than to any other unit; to Douglas MacArthur’s rare, “*Give me Puerto Rican soldiers like those of the 65<sup>th</sup> and I will invade China.*”<sup>12</sup>

The March crossing of the Han had been an event Shrimp Milburn had long been preparing for.<sup>13</sup> By March 23, Ridgway had already dropped the amazing 187<sup>th</sup> Airborne RCT on the halfway point between Sōul and Munsan-ni in order to cut off the retreat of the CCF. “Plan B” had called for the Borinqueneers to relieve Ridgway’s favorite troops should the paratroopers run into trouble; but all the 65<sup>th</sup> found when linking up with the 187<sup>th</sup> north of Ŭijōngbu four days later was the dust of the ever retreating enemy, who

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<sup>10</sup> Herman Dammer had rotated out during March as part of the newly implemented rotation draft.

<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding having served with the IX Corps before, the 65<sup>th</sup> had not served under Milburn until now.

<sup>12</sup> The accolade is attributed to the former CINCUNC, the place and time never been disclosed despite the assertions of many a 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment veteran.

<sup>13</sup> Following an uneventful crossing, the 65<sup>th</sup> proceeded to skirt Sōul before moving on to occupy LINCOLN (a.k.a. GOLDEN) Line just north of the city. A publicity strategy brainstormed in Washington had seen to it that this part of Operation COURAGEOUS include a city crossing after South Korea’s President Syngman Rhee complained that Ridgway had “ignored” the capital all along.



finally staged a brief holding action along the high banks of the Imjin-Hant'an junction. This time around, the mission of making the initial crossing fell on the British 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade; nevertheless, all attempts were frustrated by the well positioned enemy. The British lost many men before Milburn sent in his corps' "Fire Brigade." Harris recognized that the failure of the British to cross the Imjin "should not in any way reflect upon [their] bravery, courage, and determination." Actually, the Puerto Rican solution "was no different from what the British had employed," as far as tactics and strategies was concerned; but the entire operation proved successful "for no other reason than that the Puerto Ricans were determined that they would not let the Chinese stop them." (Harris actually saw men swimming across, striking out on their own, not content to wait for the rafts to deliver their cargo and return.)

The enemy's withdrawal opened the path all the way to the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The question in early April was whether to cross it again.



**Borinqueneers on their way to reinforce their regiment on the front.  
Somewhere in North Korea, circa Spring 1951 (US Army Photo)**

The month had started off with little offensive action by the CCF as the 65<sup>th</sup> RCT, joining the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> divisions, led the assault that culminated in the relatively uneventful occupation of KANSAS Line. Hence, actions had amounted to heavy patrolling, although the offensive had been slow and methodical, tightly controlled by phases. Further attacks around the second week led to the occupation of UTAH Line before reverting to corps reserve astride the newly conquered stretch of Route 33. Timing could not have been righter, as rugged ground and heavy rains later hampered operations along the front.

It was during this reserve that the 65<sup>th</sup> bade farewell to the first group of comrades rotating out. Unbeknownst to many, Governor Luis Muñoz Marín would have wished to have the entire regiment rotate out of Korea while being replaced by a brand-new regiment from the Puerto Rico National Guard.<sup>14</sup> (The

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<sup>14</sup> The Governor first expressed his opposition to individual rotation in a letter to then-Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman (April 9, 1951). [Note that nearly a month before the regiment's alert for movement and order to war strength (August 11, 1950), Muñoz Marín had also stated his intent to raise an 18,000-strong division comprised by the very 65<sup>th</sup>, and the two National Guard infantry regiments 295<sup>th</sup> and 296<sup>th</sup>. (See Letter to Chapman, dated July 18, 1950.) Whilst the 295<sup>th</sup> was not federalized and was instead employed as a local caretaker, its sister 296<sup>th</sup> became the main source of replacements for the 65<sup>th</sup> in Korea.] In the Governor's eyes, the employment of a cohesive unit would have eased the rigors of the transition. The individual rotation program would prove disastrous.

first Borinqueneers to return home were to arrive on May 23, a date the Governor was to proclaim festive in their honor.)

Somewhat stiffer resistance beginning on April 19 found the regiment back on the line, this time Charlie/65 tasked with the mission of capturing three enemy-held hills in the vicinity of Yöñch'ön, north of UTAH. The company captured its first objective easily due to the light resistance the enemy offered. The capture of Hill 206 fell on 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, 30-year-old Sgt. Modesto Cartagena's. The CCF defended the second hill with a vicious barrage of mortar and machine gun fire, taking its toll on the surprised Borinqueneers.

"I crawled next to the lieutenant," Cartagena reminisces half a century later, "to ask him what we were going to do and he said to me, 'I don't know anything.'" Taking charge of the situation, the man from Cayey led 11 men around the base of the hill, in the process losing one as KIA, another as WIA, and his own rifle to an enemy bullet; yet Cartagena did not abandon his mission. He continued his climb, damaged rifle in hand. "When I reached the Chinese trench, I realized that I was alone. Everyone else was wounded." The man continued, repeatedly catching enemy grenades thrown at him and hurling them back, thus destroying four dugouts before being hit and seriously wounded by grenades. Cartagena remembers that third grenade to be the worst – it had hit him between the legs. "Yet I kept on fighting because I was fixated on that hill."<sup>15</sup> The CCF withdrew, leaving 25 dead behind.

On the third hill, automatic rifleman Fabián Nieves Laguer likewise charged enemy dugouts, clearing them of opposition and enabling his decimated squad to advance. Before long, hostile fire intensified and forced the brave Borinqueneers to withdraw to more tenable positions. In the process, the corporal observed three wounded comrades lying directly in the path of the onrushing CCF and, with complete disregard for his personal safety, made three separate trips across the fire-swept terrain to carry the stricken soldiers to safety. After successfully evacuating his comrades, Nieves Laguer returned to his original position, and manned his weapon, delivering effective fire support to cover the withdrawal and subsequent reorganization of his unit. The ensuing counterattack freed the hill.

The actions of these two valiant men garnered the regiment its respective second and third awards of the coveted Distinguished Service Cross.<sup>16</sup> Strategically speaking, it also stretched the western front of I Corps within 30 miles of the Imjin, from its mouth northeastward to a point on Route 33 ten miles below Ch'örwön. Pleased with the progress so far, Van Fleet ordered a 48-hour halt prior to resuming advances toward WYOMING Line.

## Countdown to Armageddon

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<sup>15</sup> Interviewed by *El Nuevo Día* during the homage ceremony celebrated in Washington, D.C. on September 20, 2000. The retired Sfc. was duly recognized by then-Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera.

<sup>16</sup> Eyewitnesses claim that Cartagena's actions rightfully rate him the Medal of Honor, yet a matter of language – some decry *racism* – has prevented its nomination for and further award of. Cartagena is regarded as the most decorated Borinqueneer.

Red China's Premier Mao Tse-Tung was positive that his impending offensive would bring a definite communist victory in Korea. There would be no peace talks. *Humbug!* He counted on all the fundamentals for victory. Firstly, he had more trained and skilled fighting men (three new CCF army groups comprising 27 divisions), plus ancillary engineer and artillery forces; secondly, an optimal supply and distribution system, particularly for food and ammunition (the Iron Triangle); and, thirdly, above all, better weapons (Russian-made): automatic rifles for the infantry, and lots of artillery and anti-aircraft guns).



**Chinese Communist Forces move up for the attack.  
Spring 1951 (National Archives)**

Supreme Commander of the "Volunteer" Forces General P'eng Te-huai issued specific orders to his field commanders on the nineteenth.<sup>17</sup> The main attack in the west and central sectors would be directed against the UNC troops manning the front; and once these units had been annihilated, the next blow would fall on the neighboring U.S. 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> divisions. The attack on these sectors aimed to open the Ŭijŏngbu Corridor, recapture Sŏul, and drive the UNC into the sea. Simultaneous attacks (CCF and reformed NKPA units) would fall on the east central and eastern sectors with the end opening the way to Taegu.

The troops to open the assault were in good physical shape, with all required inoculations up to date. They would dress winter uniforms on top of summers, while wearing leather shoes or boots, as opposed to those frostbite-spelling canvas shoes worn during the past winter campaign. Rations would amount to individual five-day supplies. Regarding tactics to be employed, they would proceed with their accustomed form of attack. The communists' basic form of fighting unit was the regiment consisting of three battalions. One battalion launched the initial attack, using one company as the assault force while

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<sup>17</sup> P'eng designated the twenty-second as the H-Hour for his offensive under the misconception that the UNC would be reinforced by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces.

keeping two in reserve. Each platoon in a company probed for weak spots and, on finding one, immediately infiltrated the enemy position to permit the attack to build up to regimental level. Bugle calls, trumpets, whistles, hissing, or tapping rifle butts accounted for the communication system between units and individuals.

Ridgway's visit to Korea on the twenty-first coincided with I Corps' advance to WYOMING Line; and Lt. Gen. William M. "Bill" Hoge's IX Corps' advance in the EUSAK center from KANSAS Line to QUANTICO Line, above the Hwach'ŏn Reservoir. This step would provoke the expected CCF counterattack.

The CINCUNC decreed that for the time being there should be no advance beyond lines WYOMING and QUANTICO; but Van Fleet deemed that perhaps later in the summer, depending on enemy moves, the weather, and other factors, it might prove profitable to advance EUSAK's right flank as north as Wŏnsan. Ridgway's blessing was subject to two limitations:

- 1) That any advances beyond those lines would be on his orders only; and that
- 2) Under no circumstances would any of Van Fleet's forces cross the Manchurian border.

Despite his vow to "stay out of Van's hair," Mr. Paratrooper simply seemed to have a hard time letting go of his EUSAK; ironic, for a man who had always disagreed with MacArthur's visits to Korea during critical times. Van Fleet was not happy with his superior's decision. Even though the highly reliable FEAFF had claimed that its daily attacks on CCF airfields in North Korea had achieved success, Van remained skeptical. He conceded that runways had been cratered, control facilities knocked out, and many aircraft destroyed on the ground or driven back into Manchuria; but he had knowledge of operations deep within the Iron Triangle aimed to restore the communists' effectiveness. Those very runways were being filled in at night, while other ground movements were being conducted in broad daylight under dense smokescreens.

### *"Watch Out! Tonight's the Night!"*

Daily patrols across the Imjin with the aim of seeking out the enemy failed to produce hard evidence until the morning of the twenty-second, when the Turks captured a most cooperative CCF officer who confessed to an impending major offensive that very night. Hence, "*Watch out! Tonight's the night!*" became the warning order of the day.

This certainty spelled utter discomfort, particularly along the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's front, which Robert "Shorty" Soule regarded too huge to cover. That is not to mention it was also the most formidable side of the corps. For one, the juncture point between the British Brigade and the Puerto Rican RCT on the Imjin turned abruptly north at a point where it was joined by a tributary of the Hant'an, flowing from the east. That bend in his line raised a serious tactical problem. Soule, recognizing the feasibility of an effective CCF attack through that spot, resolved to place his reliable 7<sup>th</sup> RCT – his very favorite – in divisional reserve close at hand. Likewise, Brigadier Brodie placed his BELUX Battalion at the junction across the Imjin in order to cover possible fording places.

Another worry of Soule's had to do with flanks. Everywhere. Suppose, for instance, that his westernmost element, the ROKA 1<sup>st</sup> Division, yielded under heavy pressure and gapped the front. ROKA troops – even the most hardened ones – were known to bug out when the going was tough. That part of Route 33 on the shoulder of UTAH Line was what Soule regarded as his main axis of communications. Inasmuch as he trusted his arrangement of units there, he could not help to preoccupy as he considered the British front along the Imjin between Korangp'ŏ-ri and Route 33 to be particularly vulnerable, should the enemy breach the ROKA division. This was not only because the line was long and thin with gaps between defensive positions, but because it lay alongside and at no great distance from Route 33.

The Borinqueneers and the PEFTOK occupied the right half of the line, with Laurence Johnson's 2/65 and Edward Allen's 3/65 facing northwest and west along the Imjin, and the Filipinos on the outside flank crossways Route 33. Howard St. Clair's 1/65 was located along Route 33, just above the Hant'an, in regimental reserve. An incursion through that point could easily cut off Route 33 and imperil those battalions north of the cut. With the 15<sup>th</sup> RCT in corps reserve in the capital, Soule clustered what reserves he had behind the Imjin east of the BELUX; then set 2/7 and the 64<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion just above the Hant'an, principally to thicken the central position; and the remainder of the 7<sup>th</sup> RCT below the Hant'an for possible employment either north in the 65<sup>th</sup> RCT sector or west in the British sector.

Finally, the Turkish sector exhibited some weaknesses as well. The left of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division, where enemy delaying forces had held up the Turks along Route 33 days before, lagged, making the front a gaping one, manned for the most part in a series of separated battalion strong points.

The CCF began its first phase of the onslaught at 6:00 p.m., with a "softening" artillery bombardment that lasted four hours. The "official" CCF Spring Offensive began at 10:00 p.m., when half a million fanatic communist troops streaming across the entire front under a smoke-hazed full moon. Bugles, horns, and flares preceded the nine field armies: six striking I Corps' front; and three striking IX Corps'. The NKPA launched a limited supporting offensive on the east end of the front.

### Breakwater: Hell Breaks Loose

As feared, the CCF overran the Turkish Brigade almost immediately, exposing the PEFTOK's right. Companies Easy and Fox of 2/65, holding the Filipinos' left, staggered under the assault and withdrew fighting even as Allen's 3/65 was able to hold in place. The CCF continued to put heavy pressure on the entire line. St. Clair's 1/65 held until 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., about the time when Bill Harris' regimental command post came under heavy artillery fire and was forced to withdraw. To the eagle, it seemed as "though the enemy had laid hands on our defensive plans." The answer dawned on Harris shortly after moving, when learning that the Turks had fallen back some ten or 12 miles. It proved him right in his personal opinion that the "Sons of Atatürk" were good on offensive (as they had proven during their impressive bayonet assault at Kimyongyang in January), but "were hard to find" on defensive.

Through the remainder of the night, the CCF failed to reinforce their attacks beyond replacing losses, making no significant gains, thanks to the unflappable performance of the Puerto Ricans and the Filipinos. The attacks subsided only after a Filipino counteroffensive at first light recovered some of the ground lost in the initial assaults.

On the west, the ROKA 1<sup>st</sup> Division met such an unstoppable force that it had to pull back with no chance to consolidate. Wave after wave, the Chinese forded the Imjin and spread like wild fire across the ROKA sector, smashing into the British positions at Solma-ri. Although initially repulsed at the hands of the Glosters, the CCF forced a crossing at Korangp'ö-ri, driving hard inland, to finally surround the Glosters and outflank the other battalions, which were forced back to escape encirclement. Had the Turks not withdrawn and uncovered the 65<sup>th</sup>'s right flank, the British would have stood a chance against the onslaught.

Under Soule's plan for extricating his rightmost forces, the 7<sup>th</sup> RCT was to occupy the division's eastern sector. Protected on the west by the BELUX, the 65<sup>th</sup> was to leapfrog off UTAH Line, pass through the 7<sup>th</sup> via Route 33, and assemble in division reserve near Route 33's junction with Route 11. Exactly how the Belgians would then get out of the Imjin angle remained to be determined.

Soule's assistant division commander Brig. Gen. Armistead Mead visited Tom Brodie's command post shortly before 10:00 a.m. The British brigadier expressed concern about the number of Chinese reported to be making their way to cut the Brigade's only escape: Route 11. Mead immediately telephoned his boss, who agreed to commit the PEFTOK to the British sector. The only problem was that no one knew when the Filipinos would be available, for they had to reconsolidate. In considering ways to extricate the BELUX, Brodie proposed that the battalion destroy its vehicles and withdraw east across the river; but Soule believed that the bridge area could be opened for the vehicles by attacking from the south.

The Borinqueneer battalions began bounding off UTAH Line about noon, moving easily as the enemy made no attempt to follow.<sup>18</sup> Except for the tanks supporting the BELUX, the division reserves stationed earlier above the Hant'an dropped below the river during the 65<sup>th</sup>'s withdrawal. In the meantime the BELUX, held its ground above the Imjin angle thanks to air strikes and artillery and tank fire. Bringing up the regimental rear, 3/65, reinforced by the division's 3<sup>rd</sup> Reconnaissance Company and the 64<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, occupied a position blocking Route 33 just above the Hant'an, a position to be held until the BELUX had withdrawn.

It was about 2:00 p.m. when Soule ordered 1/7 to make the attack. He then instructed the reconsolidated PEFTOK, then leading the Borinqueneers off UTAH, to join the British and take over the mission of occupying a position in the gap between the Fusiliers and the encircled Glosters. The BELUX managed to slip across the CCF lines on their right flank and withdraw, trailed by 3/65, the 64<sup>th</sup> Tanks, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Company. Allen's 3/65 joined the 7<sup>th</sup> RCT on KANSAS Line, and the tankers and the Recon

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<sup>18</sup> The CCF, intent on resupplying its troops while avoiding unnecessary exposure to the UNC lest find itself on the receiving end of the air strikes, did not interfere with the move.

troops assembled close to the division headquarters near the junction of routes 33 and 11. With considerable difficulty, 1/7 returned to its regimental sector on KANSAS Line, and went into reserve.



**The Borinqueneers withdraw to UTAH Line.  
April 1951 (National Archives)**

After all in a day's work, the PEFTOK reached the British headquarters area along Route 11 about 10:00 p.m., too late, Tom Brodie decided, for it to attempt to plug the gap between the Fusiliers and the Glosters. The Filipinos, nevertheless, fought to within 1,600 yards of the trapped Glosters, the closest approach by any of the UNC units involved in the rescue attempt; but the stubborn enemy stood firm, as if unfavorable terrain allowing no room for further maneuvers added no further insult to injury.

### The Glosters Have It

The Glosters were outnumbered eight to one, and trapped on every side by waves of CCF; but when Brodie reported this state of affairs to Soule, he did so with classic British understatement: "Things are a bit sticky, sir," which Soule interpreted as, "We're having a bit of rough and tumble but we're holding the line"; hence his decision to postpone any reinforcements or withdrawal. With no extra support promised, the Glosters had fallen back to a hill overlooking the Imjin, where they made their stand.

At about 2:00 a.m. April 25, probably "loaded" on something, Shorty Soule telephoned Bill Harris and ordered him to go over the British position and see if Brodie could need some help in extricating the Glosters. Harris reminded Soule, matter-of-factly, that everything the 65<sup>th</sup> had was already engaged, and that as they spoke the regiment was "fighting for our lives." The unwavering two-star insisted that Harris comply.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A brilliant man, Soule was known to be a heavy drinker prone to issue "crazy" orders in the middle of the night.



**Brigadier Tom Brodie (right), CO British 29<sup>th</sup> Independent Brigade, here briefing J. Lawton Collins during the Army Chief of Staff's visit to Korea. January 1951 (National Archives)**

A short drive put Harris at the British makeshift command post (a mess tent) at daybreak. The scene the eagle found was a harrowing one in which the CP was “actually being hit by rifle bullets, and the entire area was being bombarded with heavy mortars.” Harris, who had brought along with him his artillery and air liaison officers and his tank company commander, walked into a staff meeting in progress. Brodie welcomed the visitors and offered them tea in a gentlemanly, if not nonchalant, gesture before telling them with undisguised anger that he did not know what good they could do now that the Glosters had been cut off, Soule *knowingly*. He was not angry at Harris, of course, but at Soule, whom the brigadier had been warning for the previous 36 hours or so that if the division commander did not authorize the Glosters to draw they were going to be cut off. Soule said he would keep a good watch on the situation and that he would authorize the withdrawal if and when it became serious. After a short discussion, the consensus was that there was little the 65<sup>th</sup> could do to help under the circumstances; however, Harris agreed to send whatever elements of one tank platoon he had available. At 6:00 a.m. Brodie ordered the Glosters to attempt to break out.

Coincidentally, Armistead Mead walked in the CP, expressing surprise that the relief was not already underway. Harris, using tact the best he could, considering the situation, told the newcomer that Brodie and he were in full accord, and that if he were left alone he was sure they could handle it. Mead's abrupt reply was one exhort to Harris “to get the show on the road.”

The would-be rescue mission, aptly dubbed Harris Force, started off on a bad leg, with only four medium tanks, the supporting forward observer left behind during the confusion, and the tankers firing off all their ammo before achieving anything. Just as the Filipinos had the day before, Harris found the defile was too narrow for anything but light vehicles. He then arranged for a second tank platoon, but an intervening British officer recalled it, claiming it was pointless. The Glosters, formed in 1694 and



decorated with 44 battle streamers along its proud existence, had been annihilated. It had fought to the last bullet against three CCF divisions.<sup>20</sup>

Succinct and poignant, Brodie's six-o'clock entry in his log for April 25 said it all:

*"Nobody but the Glosters could have done it."*



**Elements of King/65 defend their gains north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel.  
Spring 1951 (National Archives)**

Fearing that an ensuing formal investigation would find him to be the “fall guy” for insisting on the use of a “crippled” force whose unavailability contributed to the annihilation of the now “Glorious” Glosters, Harris immediately tasked his executive officer, George Childs, with gathering testimony from the men of the regiment. Harris justified his motion with the reasoning that he would have done just that had he been in their position. Although his leadership as battlefield commander had been questioned by at least one of his battalion commanders, there is no certainty of whether or not Harris was aware of it.<sup>21</sup> Harris’ “unorthodox” leadership style might have to do with his ingrained belief that a commander’s place was that one permitting him to be in constant communication with subordinate elements, and not on the immediate battlefield. A former operations officer during World War II and chief of staff of the 17<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division during the postwar years, Harris was actually a clever and cautious strategist who, while conceding that a commander’s presence on the battlefield was sometimes necessary for reasons

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<sup>20</sup> When the Glosters tried to withdraw, it was already too late for them. They had held the line for four days, mostly without sleep, holding off 30,000 CCF troops, and killing 10,000. More than 500 Glosters would be captured, to spend years in communist POW camps; 59 would be killed or missing; and only would 39 escape. Two soldiers would be awarded Victoria crosses for bravery; one of them posthumously.

<sup>21</sup> Historian Clay Blair has been the first to bring up the issue of Harris’ deficiencies as battlefield commander according to “at least one of his battalion commanders”; yet identifies his sources as “various author interviews with 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry personnel,” thus denying us the identity of the dissenting commander” (*The Forgotten War*, pp. 608, 1048). “Desktop officers were unworthy of command” was an unwritten aphorism in a war in which a unit’s worth was measured by the amount of participation in situ of unit commanders, particularly those holding field grade ranks.

other than to boost morale among troops, believed that its general practice generally accomplished nothing. If anything else, it risked mission accomplishment.<sup>22</sup>

War correspondent for the newspaper *El Mundo* Eliseo Combas Guerra recalls another facet of Harris' leadership. The colonel that Mr. Combas Guerra met and immortalized in his articles mostly written from the lines, "was so much identified with the Puerto Rican soldiers, that he was not one of those officers who limited themselves to give the corresponding orders in accordance with the strategy, but that in these occasions, in order to instill courage into his soldiers and boost their morale, marched alongside them to the very front, despite being subjected to the withering fire of machine guns, artillery, and small arms.<sup>23</sup>

Harris' memoir *Puerto Rico's Fighting 65<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry* (1980) is by far the only testimony of a Borinqueneer commander who revisits and profiles his combat role in a candid, modest, "warts and all" approach that condescends to come clean on mistakes and faults incurred in front of subordinates. While volunteering very little of his relationship with his subordinates – other than one of utmost confidence and gratitude – Harris admits to some initial reservations with Johnson, whom he had not known until 1951, but soon learned to trust. The absence of further public testimonies from St. Clair, Dammer, Allen, Johnson, or any other regimental members makes it impossible to identify the who's and why's.<sup>24</sup>

In the end, Childs' investigation found neither Harris nor his regiment at fault in any way.

### When the Going Gets Tough ...

UNC lines had held relatively firm during the first days of the CCF Spring Offensive. That is except in the IX Corps central sector, where several ROKA units were routed. With the line broken, Van Fleet ordered his two westernmost corps to withdraw to KANSAS Line as planned, that is, through a series of delaying positions. Milburn's I Corps withdrew to Ŭijŏngbu whereas Bill Hoge's IX Corps withdrew to the

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<sup>22</sup> Some harrowing examples proving Harris' point: Col. Robert Martin, CO 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, killed by a tank after a mere 14 hours on the job (July 1950); Maj. Gen. William Dean, CG 24<sup>th</sup> Division, left behind, lost, and eventually found and turned over to the enemy (August 1950); Col. Allan MacLean, CO Task Force MacLean, captured and presumably killed by the enemy, and Lt. Col. Donald Faith, CO Task Force Faith, KIA (both during December 1950); Lt. Col. Ralph Monclar, CO French Battalion, KIA during the Battle of Ch'ipyŏng-ni (February 1951); Lt. Col. Marinus Den Ouden, CO Dutch Battalion, killed by CCF soldiers posing as South Korean soldiers (March 1951).

<sup>23</sup> Eliseo Combas Guerra, "*Ex Comandante del 65 General William Harris se retira*" [Spanish: "Former Commander of the 65<sup>th</sup> General William Harris retires"], originally published by *El Mundo* in April 1960, and later reproduced in José Norat Martínez's nostalgic *Historia del Regimiento 65 de Infantería* [Spanish: *History of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment*], (1960).

<sup>24</sup> Due to time constraints, the author of this article can only venture to play "*Whodunit*" until a possible future revision shed more light on the issue. The author's last two suspects: St. Clair, known to have been a gruff and extroverted soldier; and the quieter Dammer, whose Ranger exploits are legendary. Both men rose to "full" colonel and commanded regiments before retiring, a testimony both to their own leadership and to Harris'. Bill Harris himself rose to brigadier general and went to serve in the personnel division of the Pentagon before retiring in 1960. (Of course, this is a personal opinion. For the serious scholar, Mr. Blair's interviews may be obtained from the National Archives, "The Clay and Joan Blair Collection.")

Hongch'on River under heavy rains. On April 27, the CCF cut the Söul–Ch'unch'ön road, shifting their efforts against the capital, outflanking Ŭijöngbu, and forcing the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Division to pull back to LINCOLN Line, four miles north of Söul. There it started the fortification of the city while other troops of the corps moved back. It had been decided that the 65<sup>th</sup> would not let the CCF push them back across the Han.<sup>25</sup>

For the better part of the next two days, the 65<sup>th</sup> continued to engage in some pretty heavy action. The timing of its battalion withdrawals became highly important to ensure that they did not leave one of them hanging out ... and running the same fate of the Glosters. Initially, 1/65 and 3/65 were the hardest hit, at one point taking an actual bayonet charge by combined forces of Baker and King companies before their respective battalions could continue their moves.

Yet it was 2/65 the one to receive the hardest share. In one engagement, the regimental Heavy Mortar Company and the 2/65 command post were completely surrounded by the CCF; but when it came to demonstrate their bravado, the Borinqueneers spared no expenses. Pfc. Efraín Sierra Rivera, a mortar man, was on duty at the makeshift CP (a house) at the time. When realizing that the CP was in danger, he alerted the men in the vicinity, enabling them to move to safety. Then he returned to his post to continue relaying information by telephone to his superiors. At one time the enemy threw two grenades into the CP, but the private refused to abandon it even when ordered to do so. He remained until the house was hit by enemy mortar shells and was set afire. In the end, the attack was so fierce and organized that the company had to abandon all of its mortars.

Simultaneously, Laurence Johnson, in an inspiring display of utter calm and resoluteness, called for artillery support, which he adjusted with devastating effect upon the confusion of CCF troops. Shells exploded within 25 yards of the CP, but that did not keep the colonel from forming a relief force from all available personnel within the area and, while repeatedly exposing himself to the withering fire, distributing it along an improvised defense line. Throughout the night-long engagement, Johnson, his job far from over, continued to reorganize and shift his forces to meet new threats, continually supervising the resupply of ammunition and assisting the evacuation of the wounded. His resourceful presence enabled the battalion to repel and break away the enemy attack, and recover all except one mortar.<sup>26</sup>

### A Breath of Relief

As the 65<sup>th</sup> pulled back and beat off the constant enemy pressure, the Puerto Ricans were finally able to reorganize their ground positions and hold in one position long enough to organize the next stop to the rear. These holding positions were given them in not only the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division sector, but in the others as well. For example, they were directed to provide two battalions to help the 25<sup>th</sup> Division extract

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<sup>25</sup> The 65<sup>th</sup> had already sent troops ahead of the regiment to start on the fortification of Söul.

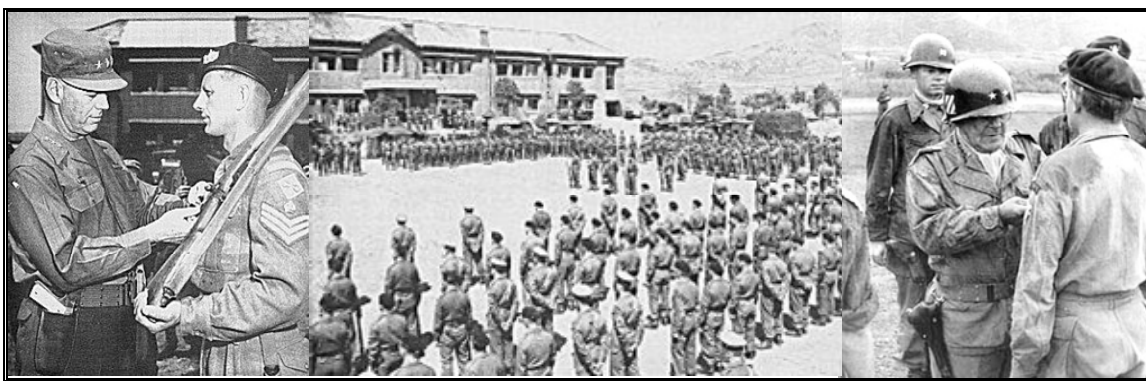
<sup>26</sup> Both Johnson and Sierra Rivera received the Bronze Star.

themselves from the CCF hordes. At another time they were ordered into a blocking position behind the British Brigade, and so it went, on back to Söul. When they finally arrived at the outskirts of the capital, extensive defensive emplacements had been set up there. Harris' own likening these fortifications to those constructed during PORTREX on Vieques speaks high enough of their quality.

By April 28, the entire I Corps occupied LINCOLN Line. The CCF still made two additional attempts to penetrate the line, but was repelled. The morning after found the CCF drive all but halted, as James Van Fleet established a new line, designated NO NAME after its actual lack of one, extending from north of Söul to Sabang-ni, and thence northeast across the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel to Taep'o-ri on the east coast. Given that major enemy attack had been in the west, Van Fleet reshuffled his units to put more American divisions there. He did not doubt that the CCF was regrouping for another assault on the capital. Intelligence had suggested long before the offensive began General P'eng's goal to capture Söul and deliver it to Chairman Mao by the first of May.

The thirtieth of April dawned over the transpeninsular line with a lull that suggested nothing short of an impending enemy attack. The weather was fair and propitious for combat, and morale was high; but, disappointingly for the bloodthirsty UNC, the CCF did not condescend to receive another lick. In fact, it had withdrawn beyond U.N. artillery range into the mountains of the Ŭijöngbu Corridor to patch up some wounds and plan other strategies.

The CCF Spring Offensive of April 1951, the largest single battle of the Korean War, saw the UNC suffering reverses like never before. Strategically, it lost 35 miles of hard-fought-for estate. No one found pride in the withdrawal, which at times proved routed. Personnel-wise, the command sustained 7,000 casualties; the loss of the Gloucester Battalion its greatest loss. In equipment, it lost 40 howitzers, another significant loss.



**Mini-collage: EUSAK's CG Lt. Gen. James A. Van Fleet pins the Presidential Unit Citation on a Gloucester sergeant major during a ceremony honoring the "surviving Glosters." To the right, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's CG Maj. Gen. Shorty Soule recognizes the BELUX. Late April 1951 (National Archives)**

Yet in reality, the often misunderstood battle was a magnificent victory for EUSAK. By inflicting over 70,000 casualties on the communists, Van Fleet had stopped the enemy short of Söul, denying him his intended goal. Even more, the battle must have caused grave concern in Red China. The message was

clear; whether Chairman Mao got it was another matter. In order to root the UNC out of Korea, he would have to amass a prohibitive commitment. The cards for a truce talk were on his table.

The last day of April saw, among other things, the award of the Presidential Unit Citation to the surviving Glosters for the “most outstanding example of unit bravery in modern warfare.” It also met Van Fleet’s wish to improve his defenses along NO NAME Line and eventually launch a new offensive to carry EUSAK back to KANSAS Line. In the heart of Sŏul, the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment enjoyed a well deserved reserve. The newly implemented rotation draft had impacted the regiment with 346 noncommissioned officers and enlisted men, and 26 officers; but of the 4,047 replacements the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division received, almost 2,400 of those were Puerto Ricans fresh out of Camp Tortuguero’s Replacement Training Center. By the end of April, the 65<sup>th</sup> had an excess of 1,400. It was, as it had been since its arrival in Korea, nominally one of the best prepared regiments in the theater, strength-wise.

The first draft should have been leaving Sasebo (Japan) by now, or in the middle of the ocean.

### P.S.: The Tough Gets Going

The Borinqueneer reserve was short-lived.

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*Inasmuch as the story told in this article draws from the sources listed below, it does not represent the official version of the Department of Defense or the United States Army. The contents of the article and the history it relates are solely the author's opinion. Furthermore, he assumes total responsibility for mistakes and/or inaccuracies incurred.*

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