Honoring Memory: My Motivation for Telling This Story

By Dave Heuring

When I began writing my autobiography about a year ago, one of the first questions I asked myself was why I was born in Lansing, Michigan. My parents had moved there shortly after my father returned from the Korean War. I happened to have his DD-214 discharge document, which listed his unit designation. Out of curiosity, I entered that information into a Google search and was stunned by what I discovered about the so-called "Forgotten War" and, in particular, the harrowing Battle of the Frozen Chosin.

My father rarely spoke about what he endured during those brutal days. Of the few memories he did share, three stand out: the unbearable cold, the relentless enemy attacks that came in waves throughout the night, and the terrifying moment when he pretended to be dead as enemy soldiers poked him with their rifle barrels after his position was overrun.

Driven to learn more, I conducted extensive research on the battle, even retrieving decades-old documents from the National Archives. What I have uncovered has left me both stunned and filled with a resigned sadness for what my father experienced. At the very least, I have compiled an account of my father, Norman Heuring's, traumatic experience at the Battle of the Frozen Chosin to offer him the respect and gratitude he so deeply deserves posthumously.

As you will read, the battle was horrific and ended with the destruction of the task force to which he belonged. My father served in Company K, 3rd Battalion, 31st Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. His company commander, Captain Robert J. Kitz, survived and later wrote a detailed statement describing the ordeal. His account, as well as many other sources, provided me with a deeper understanding of the unimaginable hardships, acts of bravery, and the true sequence of events that unfolded during those desperate days. Unfortunately, serious mistakes made by senior officers at the highest levels of command led to the aftermath being shrouded in secrecy: all records were stamped "secret" and sealed, concealing the true story of what happened during those four days and five nights of desperate fighting.

Of the original 3,200 men in this regimental task force, my dad was one of only 385 able-bodied survivors. Yet, he and the others were unjustly labeled as having abandoned their positions and fled. I believe this accusation weighed heavily on him for the rest of his life. It is deeply regrettable that the truth of what this task force endured only emerged many years later, after historians pieced together an accurate account based on interviews with the survivors and declassified documents from the National Archives.

My father passed away in 1998, never knowing that the world would one day recognize the true significance of his task force's sacrifice. The four-day, five-night stand by the task force played a critical role in holding back the Chinese army, preventing them from closing the only escape route to the port at Hungnam. Without their resistance, the Chinese forces could have cut off and destroyed the surrounded Marines and other American units fighting in the Chosin campaign. It was only many years later, as the full story emerged, that the courage and resilience of these men received the acknowledgment they deserved. I am therefore dedicating this research and retelling of the Battle of the Frozen Chosin to my

dad, Corporal Norman A. Heuring, in honor of his previously unacknowledged but extraordinary courage and sacrifice.

The Origins and Early Course of the Korean War

The Korean War began in the context of post-World War II tensions and the emerging Cold War. After Japan's defeat in 1945, Korea was divided at the 38th parallel: the Soviet Union occupied the north, and the United States the south. This division, intended as a temporary administrative measure, soon became permanent as both sides established rival governments—communist in the North under Kim Il Sung, and anti-communist in the South under Syngman Rhee. Each claimed to be the legitimate government of all Korea, and border clashes became increasingly common.

In January 1950, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson delivered a speech outlining America's "defensive perimeter" in the Pacific, notably omitting South Korea from the areas the United States would automatically defend. Many historians believe this omission contributed to North Korean leader Kim Il Sung's decision to launch an invasion, under the assumption that the United States would not intervene militarily.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea launched a full-scale invasion of South Korea, aiming to reunify the peninsula by force. North Korean forces, well-equipped with Soviet tanks and artillery, quickly overran South Korean positions, capturing Seoul within days. The United Nations, led by the United States, responded by sending military forces to support South Korea. Despite this intervention, by August, South Korean and UN forces were driven back to a small defensive perimeter around the port city of Pusan, where they made a determined stand against further North Korean advances—an area that became known as the Pusan Perimeter.

In September 1950, UN forces launched a bold counteroffensive that dramatically shifted the course of the Korean War. Under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, they executed a daring amphibious landing at Inchon, striking far behind North Korean lines. This surprise operation enabled UN troops to break out from the Pusan Perimeter, swiftly recapture Seoul, and force the North Korean army into a rapid retreat. Following this success, UN and South Korean forces advanced northward, crossing the 38th parallel and pushing deep into North Korea, reaching the Yalu River near the Chinese border by late October. During this advance, key units such as the 1st Marine Division and elements of the 7th Infantry Division moved into the rugged terrain around the Chosin Reservoir, setting the stage for one of the war's most intense and challenging battles.

By late October, UN forces approached the Yalu River, Korea's border with China. General Douglas MacArthur and other U.S. leaders, confident in the rapid progress, assured the public that the war would soon be over—MacArthur even declared that American troops would be "home for Christmas." Despite warnings from Beijing, the advance continued. In late October and early November, Chinese forces entered the war, launching massive attacks against the advancing UN troops. This intervention caught the UN forces by surprise and quickly changed the momentum of the conflict.

In the six months before the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, the Korean War had already seen dramatic reversals: from the near-collapse of South Korea, to a sweeping UN counteroffensive, and then to the sudden and overwhelming entry of Chinese forces. By November 1950, UN troops in northeastern Korea, including those around the Chosin Reservoir, faced a new and far more dangerous enemy in the bitter cold of the Korean winter.

The Battle of the Chosin Reservoir

Strategic Context and Background

In late November 1950, a conclusion to the Korean War appeared to be close at hand. U.S., Republic of Korea (ROK), and various U.N. units had advanced deep into North Korea in an attempt to destroy any remaining North Korean People's Army (NKPA) units and reunite Korea under one government. Some units had even reached the Yalu River, which separated Korea from Communist China.

On 24 November, the Eighth Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, which had been advancing north along the western side of Korea, went on the offensive. On the eastern side, the Army's X Corps was also advancing rapidly towards the Yala River meeting very little resistance from the NKPA. General Douglas MacArthur, commander of all U.N. forces in Korea, hoped this offensive would finally end the war. Yet MacArthur and many on his staff were soon to make one of the worst military intelligence blunders in U.S. Army history. Ignoring reports of contact with Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) troops, MacArthur ordered the Eighth Army and X Corps to push on to the Yalu.

But just as U.N. forces launched what was hoped to be the final offensive, hundreds of thousands of Communist Chinese soldiers had already poured into Korea. On the night of 25 November, one day after Eighth Army began its offensive, the CCF struck Eighth Army with massive numbers of troops. Thousands of Chinese soldiers, armed with burp guns and grenades, with bugles blaring, swarmed the American positions. Several American units were overrun and destroyed. The CCF onslaught took MacArthur and the U.N. forces completely by surprise and almost instantly changed the tide of the war. Soon, Eighth Army was in full headlong retreat southward.

Despite the Chinese Communist Forces' attack on the Eighth Army, X Corps went ahead with its planned offensive on November 27. The strategy was for X Corps to push west toward Mupyong-ni, northeast of Kunu-ri, in an effort to sever Chinese supply lines and potentially encircle the enemy forces confronting the Eighth Army. However, General MacArthur had gravely underestimated both the strength and the scale of the Chinese forces facing X Corps—a critical and ultimately disastrous miscalculation.

The 1st Marine Division, commanded by Major General O.P. Smith, would spearhead the X Corps attack by advancing up the west side of the Chosin Reservoir. Simultaneously, the 7th Infantry Division—led by Task Force MacLean—would advance along the reservoir's east side, while the 3rd Infantry Division protected the Marines' flanks.

For the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT-31) of the 7th Infantry Division, Chinese intervention would prove catastrophic. The unit would be virtually annihilated in the fighting east of the Chosin Reservoir.

This account focuses primarily on RCT-31's ordeal, including the experiences of Company K, 3rd Battalion (3/31)—the unit to which Dad was assigned shortly after his arrival in Korea.

Organization, Force Composition and Command Structure of the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT-31)

The 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT-31), known as the Polar Bear Regiment, was a composite force of approximately 3,200 soldiers that included roughly 700 Republic of Korea (ROK) troops integrated within American units. Drawing its primary strength from the 7th Infantry Division, the regiment combined infantry, artillery, armor, and specialized support elements into a cohesive combat formation designed for sustained operations in the challenging Korean theater.

RCT-31, also known as Task Force MacLean, was led by Colonel Allan D. "Mac" MacLean, a 1930 West Point graduate and commander of the 31st Infantry Regiment. MacLean had previously served as a staff officer in the European Theater during World War II and later commanded the 32nd Infantry in Japan. In early November 1950, he enthusiastically took command of the 31st Infantry—a unit with which he had served in the Philippines earlier in his career.

Lieutenant Colonel Don Faith, commander of the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry (1/32 Infantry), was considered one of the most promising officers in the Army. The son of a retired brigadier general, he had been handpicked from the Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning by then Major General Matthew B. Ridgway to serve as his aide-de-camp. Faith served with Ridgway throughout Europe and jumped with the 82nd Airborne Division on D-Day. In battle, Faith was intense, fearless, aggressive, and unforgiving of error or caution. Following Colonel MacLean's death, Faith assumed command of RCT-31, which then became known as Task Force Faith.

In late November 1950, Task Force MacLean and the rest of the 7th Infantry Division operated as part of the U.S. Army's X Corps under the command of Major General Edward M. Almond. Almond was not only the X Corps commander but also a close confidant and former chief of staff to General Douglas MacArthur. Personally selected by MacArthur to lead X Corps, Almond was deeply trusted for his loyalty and judgment. This close relationship shaped command dynamics and decision-making within X Corps. General Almond also strongly adhered to MacArthur's conviction that China would not enter the conflict, a belief that influenced both strategy and operations during this critical period.

Organizational Challenges and Structural Impact

During the Chosin Reservoir campaign, RCT-31's organizational structure reflected the complex, ad hoc nature of military operations in the rapidly evolving Korean War environment. The task force faced significant challenges from its inception, particularly following a critical reorganization that fundamentally altered its operational effectiveness.

A late-stage order from Major General David G. Barr, commander of the 7th Infantry Division, transferred the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry from RCT-31 to direct X Corps control, tasking it with guarding the division's flanks rather than supporting the main regimental effort. This redeployment created substantial logistical

and tactical difficulties for RCT-31's mission. The loss of this battalion eliminated crucial rear guard support and disrupted the essential triangular support structure required for effective divisional operations. This reorganization left the forward elements dangerously exposed and undermined the tactical coherence that had been central to RCT-31's original design, creating vulnerabilities that would prove costly in the harsh combat conditions of the Chosin Reservoir campaign.

RCT-31 Composition, Organization and Leadership

Regimental Combat Team 31 (RCT-31), also known as Task Force MacLean/Faith, was a composite Army unit hastily assembled on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir. Its mission was to support the 1st Marine Division's advance northward and to guard the right flank against Chinese forces. The unit's composition and organization were shaped by the chaotic and rapidly evolving battlefield situation

Infantry Units

The 2nd Battalion, 31st Infantry (2/31), was officially assigned to RCT-31 and was supposed to be a key part of the task force's combat strength. However, due to logistical delays and the rapid Chinese advance, 2/31 was unable to reach the Chosin Reservoir in time to participate in the main battle. Its absence left RCT-31 critically understrength and missing one of its own infantry battalions, which contributed to the vulnerability of the task force during the Chinese onslaught.

The 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry (3/31), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William Reilly, formed the core of RCT-31's infantry strength on the east side of the reservoir. It included Companies K (my father's unit), L, and M. These companies were heavily engaged in the brutal fighting, enduring repeated night assaults by overwhelming Chinese forces. The battalion's defensive positions were constantly under threat, and its soldiers faced extreme cold, dwindling supplies, and mounting casualties. Despite these hardships, 3/31 played a crucial role in holding the line and buying precious time for the withdrawal of other UN forces.

The 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry (1/32), included Companies A, B, and C. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Don C. Faith (who would later assume overall command of RCT-31), 1/32 was detached from RCT-32 and attached to RCT-31 to compensate for the absence of the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry (1/31), which was not present at Chosin. 1/32 was positioned at the northernmost part of the RCT-31 perimeter and bore the brunt of the initial Chinese attacks. The battalion's leadership and determination under fire were vital in delaying the Chinese advance and preventing a complete encirclement of UN forces.

Note: The 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry (1/31) was not part of RCT-31 at the Chosin Reservoir because of the extremely disorganized movement of the 7th Infantry Division's units in the days before the battle. As Regimental Combat Team 31 (RCT-31) was quickly put together to move north and help the Marines, its different battalions and support groups were spread out over a long, rough road from the port of Hungnam all the way to the reservoir. This spread-out situation meant that a complete, full-strength regiment couldn't be brought together in time for the Chinese attack. When RCT-31 was positioned east of the Chosin Reservoir, 1/31 was not with the

main group. Instead, the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry (1/32) was the closest infantry unit available and was attached to RCT-31 to make up for 1/31's absence.

Armored Support

57th Field Artillery Battalion (FAB), which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ray O. Embree commanded the battalion, provided primary fire support through three firing batteries. Batteries A and B operated at full strength, while C Battery remained partially staffed. Each battery was equipped with six 105mm howitzers. The incomplete status of C Battery remains historically unclear, as it was not part of the original contingent that participated in the Inchon landing.

31st Tank Company, commanded by Captain Robert E. Drake (West Point Class of 1944) consisted of 22 tanks providing mobile firepower and direct support. The company had four platoons, each with five M4A4 Sherman tanks armed with 76mm guns, plus two command tanks mounted with 105mm howitzers. Unlike typical Korean War deployments where tank companies operated in dispersed elements, Drake's unit functioned as a complete formation at Chosin, providing concentrated mobility and firepower. The tanks were positioned at the rear of the convoy rather than in their usual reconnaissance role.

Note: This unit was never able to join RCT-31 due to Chinese Communist Party forces controlling Hill 1221.

Specialized Support Units

D Battery, 15th Antiaircraft Artillery (Automatic Weapons) Battalion
Captain James R. McClymont commanded one platoon (minus its 2nd Platoon), which was attached to the 57th Field Artillery Battalion. The battery deployed eight weapon carriers:

- Four M19 full-track gun carriages mounting dual 40mm antiaircraft guns (240 rounds per minute, three-mile range);
- Four M16 half-tracks with quad .50-caliber machine guns (1,800 rounds per minute).

All weapons were mounted on 360-degree turrets, and the battery carried double its standard ammunition load.

Additional Support Elements

- 31st Heavy Mortar Company: Providing indirect fire support
- 31st Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon: Conducting reconnaissance and intelligence gathering operations

The Unconventional Structure of RCT-31

The structure of the task force was shaped more by the urgent demands of the battlefield than by standard organizational doctrine. Although it was designated as RCT-31, the task force operated without

the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry (1/31), which had been detached for other assignments. In its place, the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry (1/32) was attached to fill the gap. The 2nd Battalion, 31st Infantry (2/31) was also absent at the outset, with plans for it and additional support units to join as reinforcements during the operation—reinforcements that ultimately never arrived.

This improvised composition meant that, while the task force retained the RCT-31 name, it was actually a mix of elements from different parent units. This reflected the fluid and unpredictable nature of Korean War operations, where the need to quickly assemble effective combat formations often took precedence over traditional unit structures.

Mission and Deployment

As part of the United Nations Command's final offensive to occupy North Korea and sever enemy supply routes, Marine and Army task forces were organized for a deep push into the country. In the X Corps zone of northeastern Korea, the 1st Marine Division was tasked with advancing northwest from the Chosin Reservoir. To protect the Marines' exposed eastern flank, Major General Edward M. Almond ordered the 7th Infantry Division to provide a regiment-sized force—designated Regimental Combat Team 31 (RCT-31)—with orders to secure the area and advance north toward the Yalu River, the border with China.

Initially, RCT-31 was positioned at the Pujon Reservoir, about 40 miles east of Chosin, with the mission to block enemy movements from the south and east, securing the corridor between the Pujon Reservoir and the Sea of Japan. Later, RCT-31 was ordered to relocate to the east side of Chosin Reservoir, replacing Marine units moving west. However, earlier operations had left 7th Division elements scattered across rugged, mountainous terrain, connected by poor roads. This dispersion prevented the assembly of a full-strength task force and hampered coordination with the Marines. While the original plan might have worked against the weakened North Korean military, the unexpected and massive intervention by Chinese forces—who had crossed the Yalu undetected—rendered it unworkable.

On November 25–26, the lead elements of RCT-31 (Task Force MacLean), including Faith's 1/32 Infantry, began relieving the 5th Marines on Chosin's east side. Due to delays, 1/32 Infantry occupied the forwardmost positions alone, without artillery support, for a full day. The rest of Task Force MacLean arrived on November 27, assembling in three positions along a 10-mile stretch on the reservoir's east side. Colonel MacLean, among the first to arrive, confirmed that the task force would attack north the next day, with Faith's 1/32 Infantry spearheading the advance.

MacLean deployed his forces from north to south: 1/32 Infantry, MacLean's forward command post, the 31st Heavy Mortar Company, 3/31 Infantry, the 57th Field Artillery Battalion (FAB), and the 31st Infantry headquarters with the 31st Tank Company at Hudong-ni. However, the 2/31 Infantry was still lagging behind and had not left Pungsan.

Basic defensive positions were established, but the Americans, not expecting immediate enemy action, did not create a tight perimeter. A critical development occurred when Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) established a roadblock, isolating the 31st Tank Company and creating confusion over command

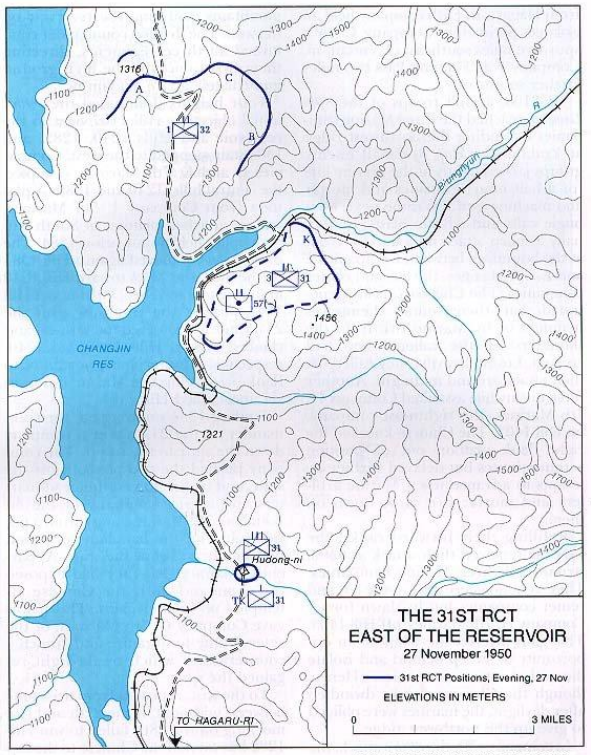
authority. Hill 1221, occupied by the CCF 80th Division, severed RCT-31's headquarters and tanks from the main force—a separation that would have major consequences in the coming battle.

Disadvantages and Challenges

Task Force MacLean faced significant disadvantages compared to the Marines. Many Army soldiers had little combat training, having come from occupation duty in Japan or having been recently activated with minimal preparation. They were ill-equipped for the extreme cold, lacking the insulated winter gear issued to the Marines. Communications were poor; there was no time to lay landlines, and radio contact was unreliable. The scattered units were isolated from each other, from the rest of the 7th Division, and from the Marines at Hagaru-ri.

The Situation on November 27, 1950

On November 25, Colonel Allan D. MacLean's RCT-31 received orders to move east of the Chosin Reservoir to replace the Marines and continue the advance north. The composite force included the 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry (Lt. Col. William Reilly), the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry (Lt. Col. Don C. Faith), and the 57th Field Artillery Battalion (Lt. Col. Ray C. Embree).



MAP 7

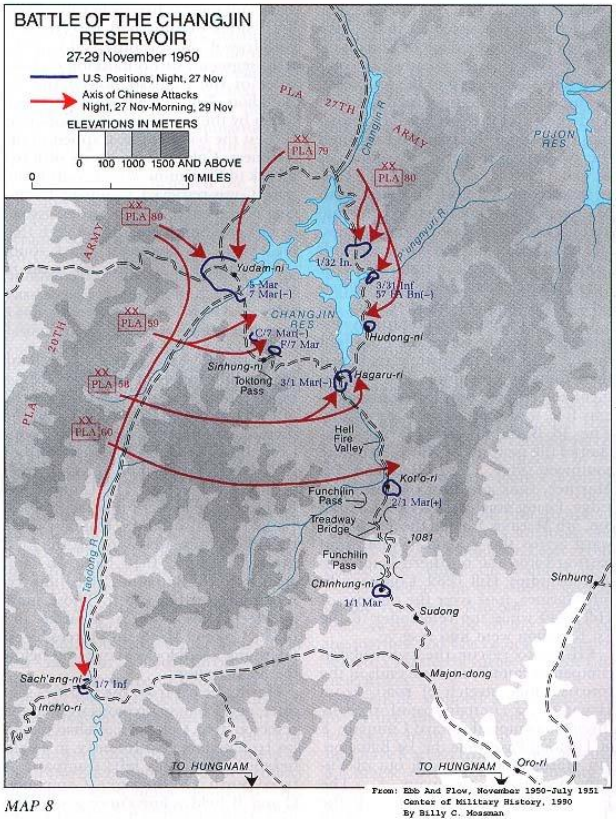
The operation began with Faith's 1/32 Infantry relieving the 5th Marines at the northern tip of the reservoir, allowing the Marines to consolidate on the west side. Logistical delays left 1/32 isolated for 24 hours without artillery support. By November 27, all three main elements—1/32 Infantry, 3/31 Infantry, and the 57th FAB—had established defensive positions, with the regimental command post between the two battalions. The 2/31 Infantry and the 31st Tank Company were still enroute, halted at Hamhung.

That day, X Corps and Marine units launched their offensive, but the Marines quickly encountered strong Chinese resistance and suffered heavy casualties. Late on November 27, MacLean's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon was ambushed by Chinese troops, an ominous sign that went unheeded. MacLean finalized plans for the next day's attack, unaware of the massive Chinese force assembling nearby.

On the west side, three CCF divisions prepared to attack the Marines, while two divisions (the 80th and 81st) targeted the dispersed RCT-31 on the east. MacLean's task force had advanced into a developing trap. Conflicting reports about enemy strength and activity created confusion, but by nightfall,

intelligence from captured Chinese prisoners confirmed that the Chinese aimed to cut the American supply route.

Chinese forces fortified Hill 1221, cutting off the rear supply route and isolating the tank company at Hudong-ni. Had the Chinese attacked during the Army's vulnerable delay, both Army and Marine units could have been caught unprepared. The 31st Tank Force was unable to break through. RCT-31 was effectively surrounded by Chinese divisions controlling the high ground.



MAP 8

By nightfall on November 27, the focus shifted to defense. The delayed Marine withdrawal prevented MacLean from repositioning his units, further complicating the situation. The Chinese roadblock south of the 57th FAB isolated the 31st Tank Force, MacLean's rear command post, and vital supplies at Hudong-ni—setting the stage for the fierce battles to come.

Initial Chinese Attacks: Night of 27-28 November

During the night of November 27, powerful Chinese forces—having infiltrated the area undetected—launched a devastating surprise attack against both the task force elements and the Marines. As darkness fell and temperatures plunged to zero degrees, Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) divisions struck with precision. Two divisions assaulted the 5th and 7th Marines on the west side of the reservoir, while a third severed the critical road between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri. Meanwhile, elements of another division targeted RCT-31.

East of the Chosin Reservoir, chaos reigned as well. In the early evening, the CCF 80th and 81st Divisions encircled the unsuspecting units of Task Force MacLean. Around 2200 hours, the two divisions launched a ferocious attack under the cover of darkness, with Chinese soldiers blowing bugles and screaming wildly to sow confusion and fear. Isolated and cut off from one another, the American units fought desperately for survival. The enemy began probing their defenses, first striking Faith's 1/32 Infantry along the northern perimeter. They attacked in waves with each onslaught getting closer to the perimeter.

Marine Captain Edward P. Stamford, serving as a forward air controller with the task force, assumed command of Company A after its commander was killed. He also coordinated Marine airstrikes, which, together with the efforts of the 1/32 Infantry, inflicted heavy casualties on the attacking CCF troops. Despite this resistance, the 1/32 battalion suffered over a hundred casualties during the first night, with 100 men killed.

At 0030 on November 28, the Chinese launched a coordinated assault that broke through Company B's outposts. Personnel from the command post mounted a successful counterattack, restoring their position. However, Company A on the left flank was completely overrun before being retaken in a subsequent counterattack.

The assault raged on through the night and into the morning, with the Chinese focusing their attacks on Company C's left flank. Only a determined counterattack, supported by an airstrike, finally forced the enemy to withdraw by 1600 hours. By then, the battalion had suffered approximately 100 casualties, while enemy losses were estimated between 600 and 1,000.

Several miles south, the situation was similar. The CCF struck the 3/31 Infantry and two batteries of the 57th Field Artillery Battalion (FAB), overrunning much of their perimeter. Again, the CCF attacked in waves until at 0130, a heavy assault broke through the positions of Companies K and L, forcing Company K to fall back to Battery A of the 57th Field Artillery Battalion. Company L was completely decimated. The artillery battery eventually exhausted its ammunition and was also compelled to withdraw, but the combined units held out until daylight, when the enemy finally pulled back. The battalion sustained heavy losses, including the wounding of both Lieutenant Colonel Reilly and Lieutenant Colonel Embree. Later, Battery A managed to recapture its abandoned guns.

Most of the senior officers were killed or wounded. The battle had raged on throughout the night, with the CCF finally withdrawing at dawn for fear of American air attacks. Like the 1/32, the 3/31 and 57th FAB suffered heavy casualties and one of the antiaircraft vehicles was destroyed. Furthermore, the 31stmedical company was wiped out.

Back at the 31st rear command post in Hudong-ni, Brigadier General Hodes heard heavy gunfire to the north and immediately ascertained something was wrong. He quickly ordered Captain Robert E. Drake to take two platoons of the 31st Tank Company forward to the 3/31 and 1/32 perimeters. Drake's rescue column, however, soon ran into trouble at Hill 1221. Some tanks skidded out of control on the icy road, while others became hopelessly stuck in mud. The column was then attacked by CCF troops with captured American bazookas. Two tanks were knocked out and a wild fight ensued as Chinese swarmed the tanks and attempted to open the hatches. Two more tanks became mired and had to be abandoned. Drake ordered his remaining twelve tanks back to Hudong-ni. Once the tanks returned, Hodes quickly realized Task Force MacLean was in serious trouble. He took one of the tanks and rode to Hagaru-ri to get help.

Almond's Visit and Misjudgment: 28 November

November 28 brought continued deterioration of the tactical situation. The 57th Field Artillery became aware that its forward batteries had been overrun and were unable to respond to fire missions, while HQ Battery remained unattacked until daybreak. As dawn broke, the Chinese had seized the highest points on two ridge lines, significantly weakening the defense and enabling them to direct fire into the command post, which was forced to relocate. The right flank lost ground while the left flank's mortar position was overrun, severing vital communications links.

Lieutenant Colonel Faith learned that the artillery was under attack and unable to provide the crucial fire support his forces desperately needed. Morning fog and bitter cold complicated an already dire situation, with wounded men suffering in freezing conditions as supplies ran dangerously low. At 1000 hours, farther south, the 31st Tank Company, supported by infantry, attempted for the second time to open a route north from Hudong-ni but encountered fierce enemy resistance and was forced to withdraw after losing four tanks. The 2nd Battalion, 31st Infantry (2/31) received orders to proceed north and rejoin the RCT-31 east of the reservoir but would be stymied in this effort. They were never be able to join the battle.

In a surreal moment amid the chaos, Major General Almond arrived at the 1/32's command post that morning, accompanied by his aide, First Lieutenant Alexander Haig, to assess the dire situation. Almond conferred with Colonels MacLean and Faith. Despite overwhelming evidence of massive Chinese intervention, Almond exhorted the soldiers to begin the offensive. Seemingly oblivious to the gravity of the crisis, he insisted that Task Force MacLean press on, declaring, "The enemy who is delaying you for the moment is nothing more than remnants of Chinese divisions fleeing north," and, "We're still attacking and we're going all the way to the Yalu. Don't let a bunch of Chinese laundrymen stop you." Convinced that RCT-31 was strong enough to proceed, Almond then flew back to Hagaru-ri, confident his forces could handle whatever "remnants" of CCF troops remained in their path.

Before departing, Almond awarded Lieutenant Colonel Faith the Silver Star for gallantry. Yet, the gesture rang hollow, as he offered no relief from the desperate circumstances and continued to insist on an attack. Disillusioned and frustrated by his commander's lack of understanding, Faith tossed the Silver Star into the snow after Almond's departure.

Almond could not have been more mistaken. The so-called "remnants" were, in reality, tens of thousands of fresh, well-coordinated Chinese troops who had already encircled much of the task force. Almond's dismissive attitude and failure to grasp the scale of the Chinese intervention left Task Force MacLean/Faith (RCT-31) dangerously exposed and woefully unprepared for the onslaught that had already begun. The consequences of this misjudgment were devastating: the task force would be surrounded, cut off from support, and subjected to relentless attacks in brutal winter conditions—leading to catastrophic losses and one of the most harrowing ordeals in American military history.

Despite the dire situation, MacLean made no objection to Almond's order, even though the task force was in no position to attack. Throughout the day, large numbers of Chinese troops were observed moving south along the hills east of the task force's position, yet U.S. officers remained steadfast in their assessment. Both Almond and MacLean would later be criticized for their failures of command east of Chosin: Almond for never fully appreciating the enemy's strength, and MacLean for failing to convey the true gravity of his unit's predicament. MacLean still expected reinforcements—his second infantry battalion (2/31), the Tank Force, and additional support units—but those reinforcements would never arrive.

Unknown to MacLean, the PLA 80th Division, reinforced with the 242nd Regiment from the 81st Division (both from the elite PLA 27th Corps) with at least 14,000 soldiers, had completely surrounded the task

force, cutting it off from the south with a strong roadblock established a few miles north of the Marine base at Hagaru-ri. When the expected tank company reached the south end of the reservoir and moved north past Hagaru-ri, it was stopped by the Chinese roadblock, losing four tanks to enemy fire. A second attempt the next day, with scratch infantry support from headquarters and service troops of the 31st Infantry and 57th Field Artillery, was also beaten back. This force returned to Hudong-ni, about four miles (6.5 km) south of RCT-31 where it would remain throughout the battle.

The Marines on the west side, surrounded and under heavy attack themselves, were unable to assist the Army relief effort on the east side. MacLean's expected infantry battalion (2/31) never reached the Chosin area at all. MacLean was unaware of this situation and for some reason made no effort to establish communications with higher headquarters using Captain Stamford's radio to report his situation.

Second Night Attack: 28-29 November

At around midnight on 29 November, the CCF 80th Division attacked Task Force MacLean once again. The fighting was savage, often hand to hand. Chinese prisoners indicated involvement of the 80th Division and elements of the 81st Division. The Chinese attacked with North Korean tanks and self-propelled guns, which were destroyed by air strikes and infantry weapons. The enemy renewed their attacks on the 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry (3/31), achieving several penetrations that were repelled through determined counterattacks. For twelve hours beginning around 1800 on the 28th, Chinese jabbed the lower perimeter but made no lasting penetrations. High casualties in Companies K and L, however, forced the two units to combine. By 0600 on November 29, the enemy had withdrawn, but ammunition and supplies had reached critically low levels. Throughout these harrowing days, the isolated units faced mounting casualties, depleted leadership, brutal freezing weather, and dwindling supplies. The chain of command was severely tested as officers and non-commissioned officers were lost, forcing rapid reassignment of leadership roles among the survivors.

The defenders found themselves completely cut off, with no possibility of resupply except through dangerous airdrops. Water supplies froze solid in the extreme cold, food was limited to frozen C-rations, and morale plummeted as the tactical situation grew increasingly desperate. The Battle of the Chosin Reservoir had become a fight for survival against overwhelming odds in one of the most hostile environments imaginable, testing the limits of human endurance and military resolve.

Weather conditions deteriorated rapidly with temperatures plunging to -30 degrees F (-34 C) and heavy snow falling, impeding mobility and causing several men to freeze to death in their foxholes. At around 0200, MacLean, still in the 1/32 perimeter, ordered the battalion to withdraw south in the darkness to the 3/31's perimeter, taking all weapons and wounded with them. The move was to be a temporary one to consolidate forces before attacking, as ordered by Almond, the following day.

After disabling and abandoning several vehicles and loading the wounded into trucks, MacLean, Faith, and the 1/32 began moving south at 0500. Darkness and falling snow made the maneuver difficult, but fortunately, the CCF did not attack. Along the way, the task force gathered up the 31st Heavy Mortar

Company, which was located halfway between the 1/32 and 3/31 and had supported the two battalions during the previous two nights of CCF attacks.

Death of Colonel MacLean: 29 November

By dawn, the battalion reached the 3/31 perimeter, only to find it under heavy enemy attack. Without communications, attempting to enter the perimeter would be extremely hazardous. Furthermore, the Chinese had created a roadblock at a bridge on the road leading into the perimeter.

Lieutenant Colonel Faith led a party of men that successfully drove the CCF off the bridge and cleared the block. MacLean then came forward in his jeep. He spotted a column of troops whom he believed was his overdue 2/31 battalion. The troops within the 3/31 perimeter, however, began firing on the column, much to the dismay of MacLean. The troops were actually Chinese. MacLean, still believing they were American, ran towards them, shouting, "Those are my boys." He dashed out onto the frozen reservoir towards the perimeter, attempting to stop what he believed was friendly fire.

During this consolidation, MacLean saw what he thought were his long-awaited reinforcements, but as he approached them, they turned out to be Chinese. Suddenly, CCF troops concealed near the bridge fired on MacLean, hitting him several times. MacLean's men watched in horror as an enemy soldier grabbed him and dragged him into the brush. MacLean died four days later in Chinese captivity. He was the second and final American regimental commander to die in Korea.

Unfortunately, there was no time to attempt a rescue of MacLean. Faith had to focus on getting his men into the 3/31 perimeter. With the men crossing the frozen stream on foot and the vehicles with the wounded dashing across the bridge, most of the column made it into the perimeter. At that moment, with the capture and subsequent death of Colonel MacLean, RCT-31 known as Task Force MacLean became Task Force Faith.

Faith Takes Command and Consolidation

Once inside the perimeter, Lieutenant Colonel Faith surveyed the carnage. Hundreds of American and CCF dead littered the ground. The 3/31 had suffered over 300 casualties and its L Company had ceased to exist. With MacLean gone, Lieutenant Colonel Faith now took command and did his best to strengthen the perimeter, consolidating the task force into one defensive position as the Chinese intensified their attacks.

Marine air controller Captain Stamford also called in for Marine close air support and an airdrop for desperately needed supplies, especially 40mm and .50 caliber ammunition. Faith then sent out search parties to look for MacLean, with no luck. MacLean was declared missing, but later, an American POW stated that MacLean died of wounds on his fourth day of captivity and was buried by fellow POWs.

On the morning of November 29, Drake’s 31st Tank Company made another determined attempt to reach the 3/31 perimeter, but was forced to retreat to Hudong-ni after encountering well-entrenched Chinese forces on Hill 1221. After this failed effort, the Tank Company received orders to withdraw and reposition with the Marines to help defend the area around Hagaru-ri. Unaware of this redeployment,

Faith would later attempt to break through the roadblocks at Hill 1221, mistakenly believing that the Tank Company was still positioned on the far side and available to provide support.

Air Support Operations

The withdrawal of 1/32 was carried out under the protective cover of Marine and Navy aircraft. The PLA 27th Corps had committed the 241st Regiment from the 81st Division to the area, and as thousands of enemy troops moved south, they became prime targets for the relentless air strikes. Captain Stamford expertly coordinated both supply drops from cargo planes and close air support missions, filling the sky with transport aircraft, parachutes, and F4U Corsairs. However, these aircraft could only operate during daylight hours, which partly explains why Chinese forces often seized territory at night but then withdrew to previous positions during the day to avoid devastating air attacks.

Each night of battle, however, further depleted RCT-31's strength and numbers. It was a nightmare—exhausted, freezing soldiers faced wave after wave of enemy assaults in the darkness, with little rest and ever-dwindling supplies. The constant threat of being overrun, the bitter cold, and mounting casualties created an atmosphere of unrelenting fear and desperation. For those who endured it, the ordeal became a true test of survival against impossible odds, leaving scars—both physical and emotional—that would last a lifetime.

Finally, 1/32 joined the casualty-ridden 3/31 after 40 Marine aircraft delivered 225 rockets, 18 napalm tanks, 10 500-lb bombs, and 29 fragmentation bombs from early morning until 1705. During subsequent fighting, Stamford directed 38 sorties in one day, with Marine planes attacking Chinese positions from 0645 until 1830, dropping 21 napalm tanks, 16 500-lb bombs, 21 fragmentation bombs, and firing 190 rockets.

For the remainder of 29 November, the newly designated Task Force Faith remained in position. With nearly 500 wounded, the force was in no position to carry out the attack ordered by Almond. Yet, Faith had no authority to order a withdrawal. The situation was helped somewhat by Marine close air support and an airdrop of supplies, although the drop lacked 40mm and .50 caliber ammunition. A Marine helicopter also flew out some of the most seriously wounded. Task Force Faith's situation, however, remained desperate, particularly since it still had not established communications with the Marines or the 7th Infantry Division headquarters.

With expert coordination by Captain Stamford and critical Marine Corps air support, RCT-31 fought off heavy assaults by the PLA 80th and 81st divisions for several days, inflicting severe losses on communist forces who left hundreds of bodies in the snow around the Army position.

On the morning of November 30, 1950, the surrounded Army units east of the Chosin Reservoir received what would prove to be their final airdrop of supplies. Despite this delivery, critical shortages of ammunition and provisions persisted. Major General Barr, commanding general of the 7th Division, made a personal visit to the embattled perimeter—his presence underscoring the gravity of the situation. At 0800 hours, all 7th Division units in the Chosin area were placed under the operational control of the 1st Marine Division, consolidating command structure in the face of relentless Chinese attacks.

Meanwhile, at Hudong-ni to the south, enemy forces continued to mass around the rear command post, launching probing attacks throughout the morning. By 1100 hours, orders came for these units to withdraw to Hagaru-ri. The 31st Tank Company led the column and provided covering fire as the formation moved out, fighting a determined rear-guard action against pursuing Chinese forces. By 1730 hours, the group had successfully reached Hagaru-ri, where they immediately established defensive positions and prepared for the inevitable next assault.

Orders to Withdraw: 30 November

Major General Dave Barr, commander of the 7th Infantry Division, flew in by helicopter to bring Faith more bad news. All the units of X Corps, including Task Force Faith, now under operational command of the Marines, were to withdraw. The Marines would provide Faith with air support, but other than that, the men would be on their own. To make matters worse, the task force was burdened with wounded, which would make their withdrawal even more difficult. Furthermore, the 31st command post, the 31st Tank Company, and the headquarters battery of the 57th FAB had evacuated Hudong-ni for Hagaru-ri, further isolating Task Force Faith. At about 2000 hours on 30 November, the CCF launched another attack. While killing large numbers of Chinese, Task Force Faith suffered another 100 casualties. Faith soon concluded his force could not survive another major attack.

By the end of November 30, the tactical situation had become critical beyond measure. The men of Task Force Faith and their Marine allies faced overwhelming enemy numerical superiority, sub-zero temperatures that threatened life itself, and the stark certainty that no significant reinforcement was forthcoming. Yet they continued to hold their positions with unwavering determination, prepared to contest every inch of frozen ground, drawing upon reserves of courage and endurance that few had known they possessed until tested by this ultimate crucible of combat.

As darkness enveloped the battlefield on November 30, the Chinese renewed their attacks with unprecedented intensity, now supported by heavy mortars and light artillery. Wave after wave of enemy soldiers hurled themselves against the perimeter throughout the long, bitter night. The defenders responded with devastating machine gun fire and artillery pieces firing at point-blank range, inflicting catastrophic losses on the attackers. Only a handful of Chinese soldiers managed to breach the defensive lines, and those who did were quickly eliminated by reserve forces. By dawn, the Chinese had withdrawn from the immediate perimeter area, though they continued to harass the defenders with sporadic fire that caused additional casualties.

Simultaneously, 2nd Battalion, 31st Infantry (2/31), which was originally supposed to join RCT-31 and was operating from Majon-dong, received orders to move north and reinforce the embattled RCT-31. The battalion departed at 2300 hours but was ambushed just two miles south of Koto-ri at 0100 on December 1. Despite fierce fighting in the ambush, companies K and G, along with part of H Company and the battalion command group, managed to fight their way through to Koto-ri by 0245 hours. The remaining elements broke through by 0900. Upon arrival, the battalion was immediately placed under the operational control of the 1st Marine Regiment and assumed responsibility for all Army units in the

Koto-ri area, quickly establishing defensive positions against continued Chinese attacks. It would however not be possible for 2/31 to rejoin RCT-31 since it was now required to defend Koto-ri.

On the east side of the reservoir, Task Force Faith—the remnants of the 31st RCT after three nights of battle—continued to maintain their precarious positions under the overall operational control of Marine General Smith. Rumors of relief circulated among the troops, but hope gradually faded as the harsh reality of isolation and dwindling resources became undeniable. The battlefield landscape had become a grim tableau of destruction: burned-out vehicles scattered across the frozen ground, fallen soldiers preserved in place by the brutal cold, and the twisted wreckage of shattered military units.

Despite the overwhelming bleakness of their situation, individual soldiers found fleeting moments of humor and camaraderie, drawing strength from memories of home and shared experiences of past hardships. Many of these young men were barely in their twenties, their characters forged by the Great Depression and World War II, now facing the harshest winter conditions Korea could inflict. Mail from home, delivered just days before the battle intensified, became both a source of comfort and a cruel reminder of what hung in the balance—letters that some would never have the chance to answer, photographs that would eventually be returned to grieving families.

A single helicopter managed to evacuate a handful of the most critically wounded, including Lieutenant Colonel Embree, but hopes for a sustained airlift operation were quickly dashed. Only one additional helicopter would land during this period, bringing General Barr for his visit. When the general departed, witnesses reported seeing tears in his eyes—an unspoken acknowledgment of the grim prospects facing those left behind. The final airdrop of supplies had come and gone; the men understood they were now truly isolated and dependent on their own resources.

The Breakout Attempt: 1 December

By December 1, 1950, the Americans were running critically low on ammunition, with over half their number killed or wounded, including a devastating proportion of key leaders. Realizing he was surrounded and greatly outnumbered, Lieutenant Colonel Don Faith decided to attempt a desperate breakout to the south toward Marine lines at Hagaru-ri. At 1100 hours, he received orders from the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division that would seal their fate: attempt the breakout south.

Faith summoned his remaining officers and ordered preparations for departure at 1300 hours. The situation was so desperate that only minimum equipment and sufficient vehicles to carry the 600 wounded were retained, freeing more soldiers to fight as infantry. All other equipment was systematically destroyed in place, including the artillery's howitzers after they fired their last rounds. Gasoline was siphoned from immobilized vehicles to fuel those still operational.

The Column Formation and Initial Movement

The formation was led by the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry (now commanded by Major Crosby P. Miller after the original commander became a casualty), followed by the 57th Field Artillery Battalion, the Heavy Mortar Company of the 31st Infantry, and the 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry bringing up the rear. Battery D of

the 15th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion interspersed its .50-caliber and 40mm guns throughout the convoy for additional firepower, despite the fact that ammunition for the 40mm guns had previously been air-dropped into enemy territory, leaving the unit with virtually no ammo.

At 1300 hours on December 1, the column began its movement south with a twin 40mm gun vehicle leading the way. Faith kept the column compact, taking only twenty-two vehicles to carry the wounded. The lead battalion moved one rifle company down the road while the other two provided flank security over the high ground east of the road. Marine F4U Corsairs and Navy F7F twin-engine fighters provided crucial close air support, strafing and bombing Chinese positions as the encumbered American column made its way down the gravel road on the east side of Chosin Reservoir.

Friendly Fire and Early Setbacks

Almost immediately, the column came under withering small arms and automatic weapons fire from concealed Chinese positions. The situation worsened dramatically when four Marine pilots miscalculated their napalm runs and struck the leading American troops instead of Chinese positions. Several soldiers burned to death in the flames, and the front companies became disorganized while scattering to escape their own air support. This friendly fire incident had a profoundly demoralizing effect on the entire task force. After Colonel Faith steadied his forces, the column pushed past small groups of Chinese until midafternoon, when they encountered a destroyed bridge two miles south of their starting point. After constructing a crude bypass, a halftrack towed each truck across under intermittent small arms fire. By late afternoon, the last vehicle had crossed the stream. The napalm incident, constant enemy fire, and delay at the bridge began testing Faith's ability to maintain control of his increasingly fragmented column.

Hill 1221 Block and Assault

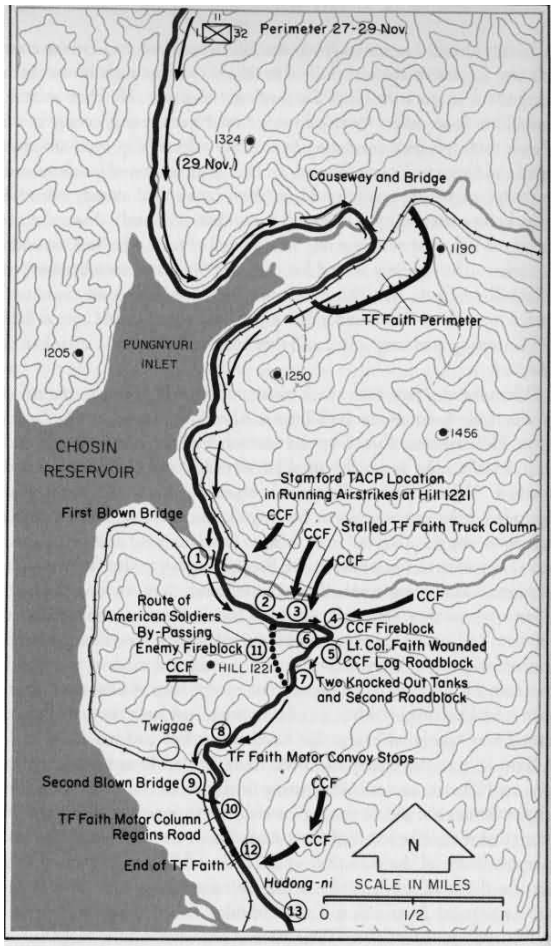
Just below the bridge, the road climbed into the lower slopes of Hill 1221 before making a hairpin turn and descending southwest. As the column moved through this vulnerable terrain, intense small arms and machine gun fire from Chinese positions struck both head-on and from the flanks, damaging trucks and halting the entire convoy.

Faith realized that Hill 1221 dominated the surrounding area and that the Chinese 242nd Regiment had established a formidable defensive position there, along with roadblocks below. There was only one way to break through: take the hill. He gathered his remaining men, including wounded soldiers who could still hold rifles, and when two Republic of Korea soldiers refused to fight, Faith shot them dead with his pistol.

In a desperate charge, several hundred men—including many of the wounded who preferred to die attacking rather than waiting helplessly in trucks—rushed up Hill 1221. Despite heavy casualties, they drove the Chinese forces off most of the hill. However, many successful attackers continued over the hill's crest and down the other side instead of returning to the column, venturing onto the frozen reservoir and walking toward Hagaru-ri on their own.

Faith personally led subsequent assaults on the remaining roadblocks but was severely wounded by enemy grenade fragments during the attack. Major Robert E. Jones, the intelligence officer (S-2) of the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry, took charge of what remained of the column.

As darkness fell, ending protective Marine air cover, Chinese infantry assaults grew bolder. The dispersion of troops during the Hill 1221 assault, combined with mounting casualties that included leaders from platoon to task force level, had nearly completed the task force's disintegration. Besides the seriously wounded, Jones commanded no more than 200 effective soldiers. The others had wandered off in small groups toward the reservoir or down the road to find their own ways south.



MAP II. Step-by-step sequence of Task Force Faith's breakout attempt.

Almost all trucks had flat tires, and several were beyond repair. Jones managed to get about fifteen vehicles running—insufficient to carry all casualties. He made the agonizing decision to leave guards with wounded soldiers for whom there was no truck space and continue south, hoping Marines at Hagaru-ri could somehow retrieve the abandoned men.

The Final Roadblocks and Task Force Disintegration

Beyond the hairpin turn, two burned-out tanks from earlier 31st Infantry operations partially blocked the road, slowing the column as trucks squeezed past. The convoy moved without major incident until 2100 hours, when it reached Hudong-ni, halfway to Hagaru-ri. Here, Chinese fire from within the village applied the final blow to the withdrawing column.

The trucks could not go forward any more during the final breakout at Hill 1221 because the Chinese forces (CCF) had established a strong defensive position on the hill and a roadblock beneath it that blocked the only route of retreat. The Chinese held the high ground on both sides of the road, and as the American column approached, they came under intense small arms and mortar fire. Many truck drivers were killed or wounded, and the vehicles became easy targets, especially with wounded soldiers inside. The terrain forced the trucks to bunch up and become trapped in the kill zone. Some trucks also broke through the ice trying to cross a frozen stream and had to be abandoned.

With the road blocked, enemy fire pouring in from above, and no way to move the trucks forward, the column’s organization collapsed. Survivors fled on foot, leaving vehicles and wounded behind, as there was no longer any way to continue the breakout by road. In the words of one major, "After Hill 1221, there was no organization left."

Major Jones and about half the able-bodied and walking wounded left the road to follow a narrow-gauge rail line near the reservoir shore. Machine gun fire soon forced most of them onto the reservoir ice. On the road, an artillery officer led seventy men into Hudong-ni but was repulsed. The remaining troops with the trucks initially stood fast, then elected to run their vehicles through the village.

Chinese fire killed the drivers of the first three trucks and raked the remaining troops and vehicles. Everyone who could scattered, most heading for the reservoir. By midnight, only the dead and seriously wounded remained at Hudong-ni. Among them was Lieutenant Colonel Faith, who died of his wounds in the cab of a two-ton truck.

Aftermath, Survivors and Impact

With unit leadership dead or missing and military organization completely dissolved, each surviving soldier faced a fundamental choice: when and how to attempt the final, perilous journey to safety at Hagaru-ri. Some chose to wait for daylight, hoping friendly air support might provide protection during their movement. Others risked the dangerous nighttime crossing of the frozen reservoir, gambling that darkness would conceal them from enemy observation. A fortunate few found temporary refuge in Korean villages, where sympathetic civilians offered what limited assistance they could.

The Rescue Operations

During the night of December 1-2, 1950, survivors of RCT-31 began reaching Marine lines at Hagaru-ri. Most straggled in over the next three days, nearly all crossing the frozen reservoir on foot. The Chinese appeared to consider those who reached the ice as effectively out of the fight and largely left them unmolested. At Hudong-ni, Chinese forces even administered aid to some wounded Americans before releasing them.

Lieutenant Colonel Olin L. Beall, commanding the 1st Marine Division's Motor Transport Battalion, led a daring rescue mission across the frozen reservoir by jeep, recovering over 300 soldiers—many suffering from wounds, frostbite, and shock. Additional Marine patrols rescued several hundred more the following day. A company-sized task force of Army troops and tanks attempted to advance up the road toward Hudong-ni but turned back after encountering strong Chinese resistance.

Casualty Assessment

The human cost of Task Force Faith's destruction was staggering. Of approximately 2,500 U.S. troops originally encircled north of the Chinese roadblock, roughly 1,500 ultimately reached friendly lines. However, only about 1,050 made it to Hagaru-ri, and of those, just 385 were classified as fit for continued combat duty. The remainder were wounded, frostbitten, or in a state of physical and psychological collapse.

Over 1,000 soldiers of Task Force Faith were killed in action or died in captivity—representing nearly 40 percent of the task force's original strength. This catastrophic loss made RCT-31 one of the most severely mauled units in U.S. military history.

Reorganization and Continued Service

Following the destruction of Task Force Faith, the 385 able-bodied survivors were rapidly reorganized with other 7th Infantry Division elements to form Provisional Battalion 31/7, which was then attached to the 7th Marines. This improvised unit combined soldiers who had fought east of Chosin Reservoir with others from Hudong-ni and Hagaru-ri.

The provisional battalion was organized into two composite battalions, each containing three rifle companies. The 3rd Battalion of the 31st Infantry (3/31), commanded by Major Carl Witte, consisted of Companies I, K, and L. The 1st Battalion of the 32nd Infantry (1/32), under Major Robert Jones, included Companies A, B, and C. Lieutenant Colonel Berry K. Anderson assumed overall command of the provisional unit. Additionally, the 31st Infantry Regiment's Tank Company, which had been previously stationed at Hudong-ni and withdrawn on November 30, was attached to the 5th Marines to serve as rear guard during the Marine breakout that began on December 6.

The Fighting Withdrawal

During the 1st Marine Division's withdrawal to Hungnam, the 31/7 fought alongside the Marines, helping to secure the route and protect the column as it moved south. Despite facing continued enemy attacks and severe winter conditions, the battalion demonstrated remarkable resilience and combat effectiveness throughout the withdrawal.

The unit's performance during this phase proved that despite their devastating ordeal at the Chosin Reservoir, these soldiers retained their fighting spirit and professional competence. Their successful integration into Marine units and continued effective service during the withdrawal demonstrated the enduring quality of American military training and leadership, even after experiencing one of the most challenging battles in U.S. military history.

Evacuation and Reconstitution

Upon reaching the port of Hungnam, the survivors were evacuated by sea along with the rest of the U.N. forces during the final phase of the Hungnam Evacuation in December 1950. Most of the wounded and frostbitten soldiers from the 31/7 were transported to hospitals in Japan for treatment and recovery.

The remnants of the 7th Infantry Division, including personnel from the provisional battalion, were subsequently reconstituted and returned to combat operations in Korea in early 1951. The division was rebuilt with replacement personnel and equipment, resuming offensive operations and participating in actions such as the advance toward Pyongchang and by May 1951 crossing the 38th Parallel as part of the Eighth Army's renewed campaigns.

Task Force Faith: Legacy, Organization, and Historical Truth

By nightfall on December 1, Task Force Faith had effectively ceased to exist as a coherent military unit. Only a handful of the original 210 trucks remained operational; the majority had been destroyed by enemy fire or abandoned. Survivors, physically and emotionally exhausted, followed scattered tracks in

the snow toward Hagaru-ri. Those crossing the reservoir found themselves exposed on the moonlit ice to both enemy sniper fire and sub-zero temperatures. The Chinese forces, having accomplished their primary objective of destroying Task Force Faith as an effective fighting unit, did not pursue the scattered survivors with typical aggressive tactics. This restraint likely resulted from their own heavy casualties and depleted ammunition supplies after days of continuous combat.

Casualties and Impact

RCT-31 remains the largest American unit destroyed in combat during the Korean War. Colonel Allan D. MacLean became the highest-ranking U.S. officer killed in action during the conflict. The human cost was staggering—frostbite, exhaustion, and psychological trauma compounded battlefield wounds. Many survivors required immediate evacuation to hospitals in Japan for long-term recovery.

Chinese losses were equally devastating. Though precise figures remain unknown, both the 80th and 81st Divisions of the People's Volunteer Army sustained such heavy casualties that neither appeared on the battlefield again until April 1951. Chinese sources claim 4,300 killed or seriously wounded, not counting those who froze to death due to inadequate winter clothing.

Despite its destruction, RCT-31's stand had far-reaching consequences. The unit's resistance disrupted Chinese momentum and bought critical time for U.S. and UN forces to consolidate and withdraw. By February 1951, reconstituted elements of the 7th Infantry Division—including Task Force Faith survivors—had returned to the front lines.

Mission Accomplishment and Strategic Value

For decades, RCT-31's story remained largely overlooked, with many perceiving the task force's collapse as shameful for the U.S. Army. However, deeper examination reveals that RCT-31 accomplished key aspects of its mission. For five days, the task force successfully guarded the right flank of the 1st Marine Division, protecting it from Chinese attacks.

Historians now largely agree that this effort prevented the Chinese 80th and 81st Divisions from seizing Hagaru-ri—a critical Marine base and airstrip—before Marine units could concentrate sufficient defensive forces. RCT-31's presence may well have prevented the encirclement and annihilation of the Marines, while the task force's actions resulted in the effective destruction of the Chinese 80th Division.

Historical Misrepresentation and Vindication

For fifty years following Chosin, RCT-31's performance was consistently mischaracterized by military leaders and historians. High-ranking officers, including 1st Marine Division commander General O.P. Smith and senior Navy chaplains, interpreted the arrival of weaponless survivors as evidence of cowardice and unit collapse. General Smith's dismissive reference to them as "Army jokers" exemplified this unfair assessment.

This harsh judgment ignored the brutal reality of RCT-31's situation. The Chinese Communist Forces had deliberately targeted American heavy weapons, vehicles, and equipment rather than focusing on

capturing personnel. Their tactical priority was destroying combat capability, not taking prisoners. Soldiers who survived the destruction of their positions were forced to escape on foot—more than half carrying wounds—after exhausting their ammunition in fierce fighting.

The Chinese approach reflected their recent civil war experience rather than conventional international warfare practices. CCF officers and soldiers, accustomed to fighting Chinese Nationalist forces who often surrendered voluntarily, applied similar expectations to American troops. They frequently allowed U.S. soldiers to abandon weapons and withdraw once organized resistance ceased, treating them as effectively defeated rather than prisoners to be captured.

The weaponless condition of RCT-31 survivors reaching Marine lines became a source of undeserved criticism. These soldiers were condemned for discarding weapons despite having fought until their ammunition was completely exhausted. The judgment failed to recognize that retaining empty weapons during a desperate escape across frozen terrain served no tactical purpose and potentially hindered survival.

Official Secrecy and Suppression

Following the battle, all records and personal statements were classified as secret in an effort to conceal the full truth of the Chosin disaster. This secrecy extended beyond simple classification—it was part of a broader attempt by senior military officers to obscure the extent of the disaster and controversial decisions that led to massive losses at the reservoir.

Key Army documents, especially those detailing the rapid and fatal redeployment of RCT-31, were classified as "Secret" and withheld from public scrutiny for decades. These documents contained critical information about orders and operational failures that contributed to the encirclement and near-destruction of American forces.

The silence was both bureaucratic and personal. Survivors returned home to a society eager to move past war, often finding little understanding or acknowledgment of their ordeal. Many veterans bore physical and emotional scars in isolation, their stories largely unspoken for years. The Korean War became known as "the forgotten war," and the heroism and suffering at Chosin remained largely unrecognized outside military circles.

Historians and veterans have argued that this information suppression was motivated by a desire to shift blame away from higher command. Rather than confronting flawed orders and intelligence failures that contributed to the crisis, responsibility was subtly redirected onto those trapped at Chosin. The upper command's refusal to speak openly about decisions leading to the disaster has been described as an attempt to preserve reputations at the expense of truth and accountability.

Historical Vindication

Eventually, the release of Chinese military documents and scholarly research—including work by Marine Corps Major Patrick Parrott and historian Roy Appleman—reshaped the narrative. Chinese records

confirmed that RCT-31 was vastly outnumbered and under-resourced, and that its actions significantly diverted pressure from the Marines, enabling an orderly withdrawal.

It took decades for many records to be declassified and for the full Chosin story to emerge. Only after the release of thousands of pages of Marine Corps records and personal testimonies did the public begin to grasp the scale of the ordeal and the extraordinary resilience shown by the "Chosin Few."

Legacy and Recognition

Lieutenant Colonel Don Faith was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his extraordinary leadership during the desperate breakout attempt. His citation recognized not only his personal courage but also his efforts to maintain unit cohesion under impossible circumstances.

The destruction of Task Force Faith represented more than a tactical defeat—it became a symbol of both the human cost of the Korean War and the resilience of American soldiers under extreme duress. The battle highlighted the critical importance of inter-service cooperation, as Army units found themselves entirely dependent on Marine and Air Force aircraft for survival. This dependence generated both tension and profound gratitude among ground forces, ultimately strengthening joint operations doctrine for future conflicts.

Today, the battle is recognized as one of the most harrowing episodes in Korean War history. The brave soldiers of Task Force Faith fought and died not just against overwhelming enemy forces and brutal weather conditions, but within a command structure fractured by rapidly changing tactical situations. Their sacrifice stands as a monument to individual courage and unit cohesion in the face of systemic challenges often beyond their control, embodying the finest traditions of American military service under the most adverse conditions imaginable.

Company K, 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment: Historical Context and Unit Assignment

As discussed in the opening section, our father survived the Frozen Chosin ordeal. In this final section, I examine his immediate unit in greater detail—Company K, 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, under the command of Captain Robert Kitz.

Company K served as an integral component of the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT-31), which was also known first as Task Force MacLean and then as Task Force Faith. Positioned on the eastern shore of the Chosin Reservoir, the battalion faced the dual mission of advancing northward toward the Yalu River while simultaneously protecting the exposed eastern flank of the 1st Marine Division. This strategic positioning would place them directly in the path of the Chinese Army's massive counteroffensive, making Company K and its sister units among the first to encounter the full force of Chinese intervention in the Korean conflict.

The east side of the reservoir presented unique strategic and environmental challenges. RCT-31 was spread thin across a single narrow road network, with units often separated by miles of rugged, mountainous terrain. Temperatures plunged below zero, creating a logistical and operational nightmare that compounded the dangers of an already risky deployment.

This positioning reflected a broader misjudgment by UN forces, which underestimated the strength and intentions of the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF). Although I've requested Dad's military records to help determine exactly when he entered the battle zone, given his activation date, travel to the west coast, and then a six-week trip on a ship to Korea, he likely joined the RCT 31st about the same time it began its move to the east side of the Chosin Reservoir on November 25th. After relocating, Company K and its sister units were not fully concentrated or dug in when the Chinese struck, leaving them vulnerable to what would become a devastating assault during the night of November 27, 1950. The CCF's 80th and 81st Division consisting of 14,000 troops launched a coordinated surprise attack under cover of darkness. Utilizing massed infantry assaults accompanied by bugles, whistles, and psychological warfare tactics, the enemy overwhelmed forward positions.

Company K, along with the rest of the units of the 3rd Battalion, was suddenly thrust into a desperate battle for survival. Dispersed formations, freezing weather, and the shock of the assault combined to create a crisis that tested every ounce of training, discipline, and leadership the unit possessed. Despite the chaos, Company K responded as best it could against the waves of attackers. Soldiers manned defensive positions from hastily dug fox holes, organized fields of fire, and tried to maintain communication under continuous enemy pressure.

Captain Robert J. Kitz, commanding Company K of the 31st Infantry Regiment during the infamous Battle of Chosin Reservoir in late 1950, played a pivotal role in maintaining unit cohesion and morale under some of the most harrowing conditions faced by U.S. forces in the Korean War. As his company endured relentless attacks by overwhelming Chinese forces, Captain Kitz was tasked not only with coordinating defensive tactics but also with adapting to rapidly shifting battlefield realities. As junior leaders fell to enemy fire, he repeatedly filled gaps in the chain of command, ensuring that his men continued to function as a unified fighting force.

One of Captain Kitz's greatest challenges was sustaining his company with ever-dwindling resources. Food, ammunition, and medical supplies were critically scarce. The subzero temperatures at Chosin were so severe that weapons and vehicles frequently froze, adding another layer of hardship to an already desperate situation. Despite these obstacles, Kitz's leadership helped his men improvise and persevere.

When dawn finally broke after each night of near-constant combat, Captain Kitz's priorities shifted to the evacuation of the wounded and the preservation of his men's lives and spirits. Even as Company K was repeatedly overrun and forced to conduct fighting withdrawals, junior leaders—taking cues from Kitz's example—rose to the occasion, ensuring the company held its ground with ingenuity and grit.

After four nights of continuous attacks, Company K's static defense became unsustainable. Ammunition was running low and the number of casualties was growing. On December 1, 1950, as part of the larger breakout attempt toward Hagaru-ri, Captain Kitz's company faced a desperate march through deep snow and hostile territory. As the rear guard, Kitz was responsible for coordinating Company K's movement with other units, maintaining combat effectiveness under constant threat of ambush and attack. The breakout was a grueling running battle, marked by chaos, broken-down vehicles, and unrelenting enemy pressure.

During the breakout, the convoy came to a devastating halt as enemy fire intensified and vehicles became trapped in the snow and ice. In that moment of crisis, each soldier faced an impossible choice that would define the rest of his life: stay with the disabled convoy and almost certainly die defending it, or abandon their positions and equipment to flee on foot through the frozen wilderness. It was a decision no man should ever have to make—between certain death and the slim chance of survival that meant leaving fallen comrades behind, carrying the weight of that decision for the rest of their lives. There was no right answer, only the brutal mathematics of survival in a situation where heroism and self-preservation became indistinguishable.

Following the harrowing retreat to Hungnam Harbor, the remnants of Company K were reconstituted as part of the massive rebuilding effort for the 31st Infantry Regiment, which had been virtually destroyed at Chosin. The regiment emerged from the frozen hell transformed, its new structure incorporating hard-won lessons about cold-weather warfare, the critical importance of unit concentration, and the life-or-death necessity of reliable communication in extreme conditions.

The reconstituted Company K bore little resemblance to the unit that had first deployed to the reservoir's eastern shore. New faces filled the ranks where previous comrades once stood, but the survivors carried something invaluable forward—the institutional memory of what they had endured and overcome. They became the living bridge between the company that had been shattered on the frozen hills and the unit that would continue to serve with distinction throughout the remainder of the Korean War.

In subsequent engagements, Company K carried forward the experience and lessons learned from those difficult December days. The survivors who remained with the unit brought valuable combat knowledge and a sense of continuity that helped maintain the company's effectiveness. They continued to serve their mission while honoring the memory of those who had been lost during the fighting east of the Chosin Reservoir.

Personal Statement of Captain Robert J. Kitz

The following is a seven-page personal statement from Dad's company commander, retrieved from the National Archives, detailing what Company K encountered during the five-day battle.

My name is Robert J. Kitz. My rank is Captain, and my serial number is 1287898. I am the Company Commander of Company A, 3rd Battalion 31st Regimental Infantry. I was present as commander of Company ”K” on the night of 27 November 1950. We arrived at the Chosin Reservoir at approximately 1600 hours on that date. When we arrived, our areas were assigned to us by the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Couch. My area was, as I recall, a section of the perimeter defending from the east. It was a small valley that led into Chosin Reservoir, which was several miles east of our position.

The disposition of my troops was as follows: About two miles up the trail to the east, I had two squads of the 1st Platoon commanded by Lt. McFarland. On the ridge, I had my 3rd Platoon. Further down the ridge, tied in with the 3rd Platoon, was the 2nd Platoon. The 2nd Platoon tied in with "I" Company. My weapons squad was at the base of the ridge with one machine gun, and I had a section of machine guns from

Company I in the draw, covering the draw. This section of machine guns from "I" Company was commanded by Lt. Schmit. To the north of the machine guns, "I" Company was tied in with my company, occupying the ridge high ground.

In order to better portray the disposition of the company, I should state where my 4th Platoon was and where my command post was located. The 4th Platoon was in the draw with its mortars and 57s behind the machine gun section, approximately 200 yards away. My command post (CP) was in a hole behind some houses, farther behind the 4th Platoon, approximately 50 to 75 yards, on slightly higher ground than the 4th Platoon. My kitchen was set up alongside the command post, and I had erected a pyramidal tent and prepared to feed them early chow the next morning because we had been ordered to move out the following morning and attack to the north.

At approximately 1900 hours of the 27th, I went to the 3/31 Battalion CP, which was located in some houses about 150 to 200 yards north of my command post on the low ground and received an order from Colonel Riley. The order stated that we would attack to the north the following morning. My company was to attack along the ridge line, while Company I was to move north along the road, with Company L as the reserve company. I Company would be supported by my company's machine guns. When the order was given, Colonel Riley stated that it was his desire to move out early the next morning. However, he had not received clearance from Task Force Commander Colonel McLean. We were not to move out until he called us and told us that Colonel McLean had approved his plan.

At about 1930 or 2000, Colonel McLean came to the Battalion CP. He told Colonel Riley that he could not move the next morning, but should wait until the morning of the day after (29 November) before executing his plans. In the meantime, there was a report of 400 to 600 enemy located in a town about six or eight miles to the northeast of our position. We were ordered to send a strong patrol there the following morning. I asked Lt. McFarland and his two guards to take the patrol, and Colonel Riley approved the request.

A staff officer told me that a platoon of tanks would come in the following morning and accompany Lt. McFarland, so we had a patrol set up. I called McFarland and zeroed him in. Captain O'Neal was to command the patrol, and then I returned to the CP. I called the platoon leaders together, gave them the order, and informed them that we would move out only if the order was to be put into effect the following day. Otherwise, we would just hold off until the next day, and in all probability, we would spend at least one more day where we were.

The platoon leaders returned to their platoons, and I prepared to hit the sack for the night. I got into my hole. The cooks were preparing chow for the following morning. At approximately 2200 hours, I received a call from Battalion—a flash red alert. I contacted the platoons and informed them. I got in touch with Lt. McFarland and his roadblock, which was about 2 or 2½ miles out from our position, and told him. I told everyone to double their guards for the night, which was done.

About one o'clock in the morning (28/0100), I heard some firing and called Lt. McFarland to ask if he knew who was firing. He informed me that it was someone behind his positions. Between 0130 and 0200 in the morning, there was a considerable amount of firing just about where my machine gun section was

set up. I did not know exactly what was going on, but I am sure there was a lot of shooting. Perhaps someone had gotten trigger-happy. I put my shoes back on and got out to check, and about that time I heard a lot of shooting up close, and it was coming in.

The cooks, of course, got up and ran out of the tents, and quite a few of the ROKs working in the kitchen ran out and started to run. So, I ran about 50 yards back and stopped them. About this time, a lot of people came over the rise, and there were a lot of ROKs, and they were running also. I assumed they were ROKs from the 4th Platoon because they were the only ones around. I could recognize them as ROKs. I attempted to stop them and finally did. I was about 100 yards from my hole at this time. I tried to get them to fire back, but by this time, the situation had become so confused that I couldn't tell who were ROKs and who were Chinese. There was also a lot of firing, and there were Chinese coming at us. So, then the 4th Platoon pulled back to where I was. They asked me what I was going to do. I told them there was only one thing left to do—we couldn't stay out in the open field near the lake. I said we would pull back to the lake where we would have a better position.

In the meantime, the 57th Battery opened fire on us, so we were caught in crossfire. I got my people back with the assistance of Lt. Sicafus of the Artillery and stopped the Battery from firing on us.

We got into "A" Battery's defensive positions, and shortly afterward the cooks followed us in. There was quite a firefight in there, and I sent Sergeant Kaputo and Sergeant Payne, instructing them to put the 4th Platoon and what we had of the cooks on the high ground to the north so that we could better with stand any assault by the Gooks. And I found the second platoon of "I" Company's CP and got Lt. Beach alerted and told him what had happened.

After finding where "I" Company's CP was—which was in Battery "B" of the 57th FAB's perimeter—I got in there, and by the time I found it, the Gooks had overrun Battery "A". Battery "A" came back into "B" Battery's positions and brought my men with them. "Battery B" had a pretty fair defense perimeter, and we just took our men and put them in the perimeter with "B" Battery and held out there.

While this was going on, of course, time passed, and we had about an hour to sweat before daylight. When daylight came, the Gooks pulled back and, except for an occasional sniper, they had more or less withdrawn. Well, we did not know what had happened to the rest of the outfit. We didn't know whether the CP had been overrun or whether they had all been killed in the CP there. Not knowing what else to do, I assumed that since I was the senior captain, I took over and sent two of the vehicles of the 15th AAA and a platoon from Company "I" and a patrol out toward the Battalion CP. We had two ammunition trucks back there, and they were able to salvage what they could. I decided to establish a defensive perimeter around Battery "B".

We got up to the Battalion CP and found the battalion, and although there had been some fighting, they were still in operation. My platoon up on the hill and one of "I" Company's platoons up on the hill had been overrun. They had stayed up there. If the Gooks hadn't overrun them, they would have come back down to the Battalion CP across the high ground. So, we saw Colonel Riley, who had been shot, and quite a few people around there had been wounded, and our orders then were to tighten up our perimeter.

We couldn't occupy all the high ground because of the distance involved, and our entire perimeter was then placed on the low ground of the valley. It was at this time that the Gooks started throwing mortars at us. We dug in our positions and stayed there that night (27–28 Nov), and this second night (28–29 Nov) since this thing started. It wasn't even dark yet. I didn't have time to dig my new hole when that started. When they came in, they took a machine gun right on the perimeter, so I didn't have any communications by that time. They knocked out my commo, and I only had 60 men left in the company.

So, I went back to "L" Company's CP, which was about 30 yards behind mine, and got a captain to help get those 60 soldiers out on it. Then I went back about 20 yards to the 81mm platoon and got them to throw 81mm fire on the position. The .50 calibers had been in. Around that time, the 40mms had opened up on the house that had been near my CP and started a fire on it. They hit the white phosphorus bombs I had and started quite a conflagration. I was only about 50 yards from it at the time. The 40mms did a hell of a fine job. 1 could see that They killed quite a few Gooks around the house by the light of the fire. They hit us every place you could think of. It was here and there and all over the perimeter. And, of course, they threw a lot of mortars and stuff in on us. That went on all night. They penetrated in some places, but all in all we held pretty good. The ones that got in were knocked off. They made an effort to knock out the triple-A (anti-aircraft artillery) vehicles; they were not successful in that. They got up to the artillery pieces, and my men stood by their guns, killing some. They stacked up quite a few there, and a few did get in, but they didn't do much damage. Our casualties weren't as heavy as the night before.

The following morning (29 Nov), we were told the 32nd was withdrawing just north of us and would be coming in as they were pulling back to our positions. We were told the 32nd was going to come in and withdraw to our positions, which was alright with us because we felt that the more people we had, the merrier it would be. That would give us two battalions with our two batteries of artillery. We were also told that the tanks were going to come up and give us some assistance, which was what we were all looking forward to, feeling that any tanks we had could be used as a mobile reserve in the perimeter. At that time, the Gooks hadn't shown anything that would even begin to hurt a tank.

However, it was either the second or third morning—I think it was the third morning (29 Nov)—the 32nd joined us, and they came across the road. You couldn't use the bridge because the Gooks had it covered by fire. They came across the ice. I guess this was the day that Colonel MacLean got it. Anyhow, the 32nd came into our position and took over a part of the perimeter. This was the third night, I believe, and things were fairly quiet the third night (29 Nov-30 Nov).

It seemed that the Gooks had decided to reorganize. The next day (30 Nov), we got a little small arms fire from them and a few mortar rounds thrown in. But it was the next night (30 Nov-1 Dec) that all hell broke loose—the attack started. It began early in the evening and kept on going all night. There were plenty of mortars: 120s, big ones, small ones, middle-sized ones, and medium-sized ones. We even had some artillery on the thing, and our artillery battery was almost out of ammunition, so it couldn't fire as much as we would have liked. The .50s were short of ammunition, and the 40mms were short of ammunition. People who fired M-1s had to conserve ammunition at this time. We just didn't have what we needed. Hand grenades were short. We needed a lot of things and couldn't get them.

That fourth night (30 Nov-1 Dec), the attack lasted all night. They threw a lot of mortars at us. It kept on going until the morning, and this time, instead of withdrawing in the morning as they had been doing, they stayed right down there in the low ground with us, stayed right down there in the perimeter, and we were getting a lot of grazing fire. We has a lot of our people get hit too at that time. Our Aid Station was in tough shape. We got a lot of wounded—I don't know how many, but a hell of a lot.

About 11 o'clock (01/1100), I was told that we were going to withdraw with support of Marine air strikes. So, we prepared for the withdrawal. There wasn't a hell of a lot we could do to prepare for it. We took what equipment we had. What we couldn't take, we put in holes and started to burn it. Destroyed what we could, and when the planes finally got overhead, we started to withdraw. The Gooks were right down about 50 to 75 yards from the perimeter, shooting into us as we were pulling out. As a result, the withdrawal was a little bit disorganized, as it was awfully hard to form units under that fire. As soon as we got out of our positions, the CCF just started moving right in, and my people in the rear who were fighting the delaying action were driven right out of their positions.

So, the 1/32nd which was to lead out, got on the road, and they weren't out 50 to 75 yards when they got hit from everywhere. They put up a firefight. The aircraft were supporting them, and I know that one of them dropped a napalm bomb on them and the enemy—they were so close together.

Anyhow, we got going (01/1300 Dec), got the column moving, and from then on it was a matter of moving, and every time you hit a nose in the road, the enemy was shooting at you. So, we used the ice to move out on. The ice broke through in a couple of places—people fell in the water. Some got out and some didn't. I broke in the water and was lucky to get out. The vehicles moving along the road were being shot at. After we got to the place where the big roadblock was—I'm not sure how far it was, but it was about three miles from our position—the terrain was ideal for a roadblock. There was a hairpin curve, a big nose, and a long ridge we had to go around. I was under the impression that our friendly forces were right on the other side of that ridge. Most everyone else thought so, I think, but we didn't realize that we had to go all the way back to Hagaru-ri to see friendly forces.

So, the vehicles got caught on the road on the side of this hill. We couldn't move because of this roadblock. The enemy was on top shooting down, and the enemy was at the bottom shooting up, and we were caught in the middle. The vehicles were caught. The wounded were in the vehicles, and a lot of lead was flying.

The men were hard to handle. You couldn't get them to move. Maybe it was the four days they had been caught under fire that caused it, but you couldn't control them. You couldn't organize them because of the difficulty of moving across the open areas where the enemy was laying down fire. The men just wouldn't function as soldiers should. They didn't go up to the high ground. They were tired and wanted to huddle together, thinking there was more protection in numbers, and very few of them would listen to reason. They just looked at you when you tried to get them to move. They thought that standing by the trucks was the only way to avoid getting hit from the firing, when actually it was the one place that most of the fire was being directed.

Anyhow, myself, Lt. Bore, Lt. Bernard, and a couple or three other officers from the Artillery all grabbed small groups of men that were available and pushed them up this hill. There were quite a few enemy up the hill. We banzai-charged the hill, the ridge, and took it, knocking out the roadblocks along the way. I think there were three of them. We crossed the ridge and sent someone back to haul the rest of them up and get the vehicles moving.

By this time, it was almost dark (01/1800 Dec). Even with the roadblocks removed, there were a lot of enemy at the foot of the hill. The convoy of trucks was surrounded and trapped, so the only thing left to do was to take off across country, which we did. I noticed that some of the wounded got out and were coming along with us. We couldn't carry the others because the enemy was right behind us. The trucks couldn't move. I sent two men back to tell the trucks to come around that bend and follow us through. They never did come, so we struck out across the lake. I had almost 210 men with me. We got into the Marine area around midnight (01/2400 Dec) and spent a couple of days there.

Then I made the run from Hagaru-ri to Koto-ri with them. In fact, it was a regimental combat team with two battalions, which I think was effective up to a certain point. We didn't have any automatic weapons or communication or anything. We had plenty of ROKs who were completely worthless. You couldn't get them to shoot. The only time you could find them was when there was something to eat around. They would run the first time a shot was fired. They would fall asleep in their holes while the Chinese were about 50 yards from the perimeter. They slept right in the holes—they weren't worth a thing to us. Also, a lot of our men got killed because of the ROKs, trying to push them. In my opinion, many of our casualties were caused by the failure of the ROKs to function as we expected them to.

Our communications within the battalion weren't too much of a problem because we were so close together. We had wire laid in, but most of our communications were taken care of by a runner. It was just a short distance. We did not have much of a problem with communication there.

Our BARs (M-1 Browning Automatic Rifle) were not worth much. Of nine BARs in the company, I did not have one that would fire automatically. The machine guns were alright. One of the answers for the machine gun is to fire it periodically in cold weather and keep them loosened up, but the BARs didn't fire except as single shot. The most serious shortage, of course, was the shortage of grenades. The enemy had plenty of them. The tactics they used: they would crawl up at night and lay there for almost two hours waiting until they made a charge. And when they made the charge, they were too close to us—you couldn't do anything about it. They were right up to you before you knew it. They were pretty good night fighters. They were able to get so close by just the excellent manner in which they moved. Of course, they had plenty of cover, and when they got up close, what they would do is, about 150 of them would hit the spot, probably hit four or five men. The four or five just couldn't stop them. I had one sergeant, I recall, who stacked up 20 around his hole just with his M-1 rifle, but they finally got him.

It was awfully hard to determine anything about the CCP leadership. It must have been good because they were able to function effectively. However, you couldn't distinguish their leaders from the others because you very seldom saw them. You never saw them until they were dead. We killed a lot of them. In this one draw, we must have had 300 of them stacked up. We had our 57s zeroed in. Our 57s had high

explosive anti-tank ammunition, which is not desirable in a case like this. What we had to do was shoot it against the ground so it would detonate. Our high explosives—we never got. We had about 20 rounds of that, and the rest was all anti-tank.

Our winter clothing was alright; you didn't freeze to death, although it was extremely cold. As to the frozen feet, everyone's feet froze to a certain extent, but we couldn't change our socks as often as we should. And even if you did, you couldn't light fires to warm up. It was just impossible to have fires—they just drew mortar fire. So, you just changed socks one day, and the next day those socks dried out, and maybe they didn't. We had plenty of socks but no way to dry them out. We didn't have any fires.

It was pretty hard for the CCF to miss with their mortar fire, but I don't think they inflicted too many casualties by mortar fire. I think their small arms fire was very inaccurate. They just threw so much of it that it was impossible not to hit somebody. What surprised me in the inaccuracy of it was that when we crossed these open spaces, they were covered by fire. I lay out in the lake for four minutes, and they were shooting at me all that time, and they only hit me once in the arm—just nicked me. But it amazed me that they didn't hit fatally as I was sitting in the water. It was very cold. I couldn't move. When I got out of that, of course, it was just a lucky break. A lot of people didn't get out of it.

In some cases, the NCO leadership of our men was excellent. In other cases, it was not so good. I had some fine NCOs, and they did well. But the NCOs also had to prod the ROKs along, and as I said before, many of our casualties were because of the ROKs' failings. A man had to expose himself to get the ROKs to move. In fact, I had to shoot at them, behind them, to keep them going. What I tried to do, in a column, was to take the high ground that wasn't occupied by the enemy, but you couldn't get the ROKs to go up the high ground. They were tired and just looked at you. They all had some excuse—they had sore feet, a broken weapon, or they didn't have any ammunition. We used the ROKs as soldiers; that was the only way we could use them. We were planning on using them as soldiers, so we did. But we spent all of our time trying to control them and trying to get them to function as soldiers.

Closing Thoughts About Dad's Korean War Experience

War really is hell, and what Dad went through was horrific and terrifying beyond imagination. The Korean War, often called the "Forgotten War," was anything but forgettable for the men who fought in its brutal conditions. Dad's experience at the Frozen Chosin represents one of the most harrowing chapters in American military history, where temperatures plummeted to minus 35 degrees Fahrenheit and Chinese forces surrounded and attacked our troops in overwhelming numbers.

As one of only 385 able-bodied survivors from what became known as the "Frozen Chosin" battle, Dad witnessed firsthand the devastating toll of modern warfare. The psychological weight of survival, knowing that so many others didn't make it home, must have been enormous. Survivor's guilt—a common and deeply painful experience among combat veterans—likely haunted him long after the guns fell silent.

The images of fallen comrades, the deafening sounds of battle, and the bone-chilling cold of that Korean winter would have been seared into his memory forever. The Chosin Reservoir campaign was not only a

test of military skill but also of sheer human endurance, as temperatures plunged to -30°F and frostbite claimed nearly as many casualties as enemy fire.

While the term PTSD wasn't known or widely recognized at the time, there is little doubt that Dad, like so many others who endured the crucible of Chosin, was deeply traumatized by the ordeal. The invisible wounds of war—anxiety, nightmares, and the relentless replaying of traumatic memories—would have accompanied him long after he returned home. His survival was an extraordinary feat, but it came at a profound emotional cost that shaped the rest of his life.

After the miraculous fighting withdrawal to Hungnam Harbor and the subsequent evacuation to the south, Dad's ordeal was far from over. The reconstitution of his unit as RCT-31/7 meant returning to the front lines, carrying the weight of recent trauma while facing new dangers. The resilience required to continue fighting after such devastation speaks to an inner strength that many of us can barely comprehend.

The long march back to the 38th Parallel represented months of additional combat, uncertainty, and loss. Each day brought new challenges, new threats, and the constant awareness that survival was never guaranteed. The physical demands of warfare in Korea's harsh terrain and climate were matched only by the mental fortitude required to keep going when hope seemed lost.

Dad's discharge on August 30, 1951, after nine months and six days in the Korean theater, marked the end of his military service but likely not the end of his war. Many Korean War veterans returned home to a country that had already moved on, with little recognition or understanding of what they had endured. The psychological wounds of war often proved as lasting as any physical injury, and the transition back to civilian life presented its own set of challenges.

For decades after the war, the Army units that fought at Frozen Chosin faced an additional burden beyond their physical and psychological wounds: they were unjustly branded as cowards who had fled in the face of the enemy. This cruel mischaracterization added insult to the grievous injuries these brave men had already endured. The truth about their heroic stand against overwhelming odds, their strategic fighting withdrawal that saved countless lives, and their crucial role in allowing the Marine evacuation at Hungnam Harbor was buried beneath layers of military politics and incomplete historical accounts.

Only in recent years has the full truth about the Army's role at Frozen Chosin begun to emerge. Modern historians and military analysts have finally recognized that these soldiers didn't retreat in cowardice—they conducted one of the most remarkable fighting withdrawals in military history, holding off vastly superior Chinese forces while protecting the eastern flank of the UN withdrawal. Their sacrifice and tactical brilliance enabled the successful evacuation of not just military personnel, but also thousands of North Korean refugees who would have faced certain death.

The fact that Dad survived the Frozen Chosin and continued to serve with distinction until his discharge speaks to the extraordinary character of his generation. These men faced unimaginable hardships with courage and determination, often at great personal cost. They bore not only the physical and psychological wounds of battle, but also the unjust shame of being misunderstood and maligned by their

own country. Their sacrifices helped preserve freedom and democracy, even as they paid a price that would echo through the rest of their lives—a price that included decades of undeserved dishonor.

In reflecting on Dad's experience, we must remember that behind every military statistic and historical account stands a human being who faced fear, pain, and loss with remarkable bravery. His story is not just one of survival, but of service, sacrifice, and the enduring strength of the human spirit in the face of unthinkable adversity.

The Korean War may be called "forgotten," but Dad's service and the service of his fellow veterans should never be forgotten. Their legacy lives on in the freedom we enjoy today and in the notable example they set for future generations about duty, honor, and the true cost of liberty.

I have written this story not just to honor Dad's memory, but to ensure that my children and their children's children will always know the extraordinary man whose courage and sacrifice helped shape the world they inherited. In a time when heroes are often fictional, they should know that a real hero in their family heritage walked among us—one who faced the unimaginable with quiet dignity and never spoke of his own bravery. This is their grandfather's story, their great-grandfather's legacy.