

CHAPTER XV

Defending the Wonju Line

The X Corps Position, 13 February

The Chinese entering Hoengsong made no immediate effort to follow the 2d Division down Route 29. General Almond nevertheless expected the next hard blow to come at the X Corps center and on 13 February ordered General Ruffner to organize strong positions before Wonju. Given the 18th Regiment of the ROK 3d Division as well as the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team by Almond, Ruffner set the airborne unit astride Route 29 two miles above Wonju and put the ROK regiment on its east. Standing to the west of the 187th were the 38th Infantry and the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry. Thus, the 2d Division's defense of Wonju proper ranged from three miles east to eight miles west of town. The remainder of the 9th Infantry, in division reserve, manned two blocking positions southwest of Wonju along the road to Yoju.¹

To the east, the units of the 7th Division on whom Almond counted to deepen the defense in the right half of the corps sector also were well established. The 31st Infantry held positions below P'yongch'ang at the corps east boundary, and the bulk of the 32d Infantry was concentrated in Chech'on. The remnants of the ROK 8th Division, of possible help, remained at Chup'o-ri, west of Chech'on. Available for employment either at corps center or in the east, the bulk of the 17th Infantry of General Ferenbauh's division was assembled in Wonju.²

Almond modified the defense assignments of the ROK 3d and 5th Divisions in the east sector early on the 13th after learning that North Korean forces were following the South Koreans as they withdrew from the Hoengsong area and that both divisions needed reorganizing after their punishment above Hoengsong. Instead of manning a forward line at the X Corps right as Almond had ordered on the 12th, the two divisions were to occupy positions farther south on line with and between the 2d Division at Wonju and the 31st Infantry of the 7th Division near P'yongch'ang. A regiment of the ROK 5th Division was to occupy Malta-ri, five miles above P'yongch'ang, to tie the new X Corps line to the bulging front of the ROK III Corps. (Almond instructed the ROK III Corps also to place a regiment near Malta-ri to strengthen the connection.) The two ROK divisions were still moving toward these new positions at nightfall on the 13th.³

¹ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum and Situation Overlay, 13 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; X Corps OI 105, 13 Feb 51.

² Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum and Situation Overlay, 13 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

³ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 13 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; X Corps OI 105, 13 Feb 51; Rad, X 17751, CG X Corps to Chief KMAG, 122201 Feb 51.

While arranging the deeper withdrawal of the South Koreans, Almond decided also that the 23d Regimental Combat Team should withdraw from its advanced position at Chip'yong-ni on the corps west flank to the Yoju area fifteen miles south. He could move Colonel Freeman's force that far back and still meet his continuing Operation THUNDERBOLT responsibilities of maintaining contact with the IX Corps at Yoju, preventing enemy movements south of the Yoju Wonju line, and making diversionary efforts to the north.⁴

Almond's decision to pull the 23d Regimental Combat Team back to the Yoju stemmed from General Ruffner's insufficient strength to man all of the 2d Division's twenty-mile front between Wonju and Chip'yong-ni. There was, as a result, a twelve-mile gap between the 1st Battalion of the 9th Infantry, the westernmost unit defending Wonju, and the 23d. This gap left Freeman's force isolated and in danger of encirclement. The 2d Division reconnaissance company, sent out earlier to patrol Route 24, the combat team's main supply route, was some six miles south of Chip'yong-ni blocking a pass two miles out on a lateral road branching eastward from Route 24 at the village of Chuam-ni. But although the company thus stood at the midpoint of the gap, it could scarcely be counted on to prevent a strong enemy force from moving behind and trapping the combat team.⁵

Indications that the Chinese would exploit the gap already had appeared, the first on 12 February when the 1st Battalion of the 9th Infantry, then holding Hill 444 four miles east of Chip'yong-ni, received an attack by two Chinese battalions and withdrew to its present position northwest of Wonju. Air observers noted other Chinese movements toward the gap during the morning of the 13th, some toward the 2d Division reconnaissance company east of Chuam-ni. At General Ruffner's direction, Company L of the 9th Infantry reinforced the reconnaissance company around noon, arriving just ahead of an attack from the northeast. When the Chinese pulled away late in the afternoon and moved north in an apparent attempt to encircle the blocking force, Ruffner ordered the two companies west into a new blocking position on Route 24 at Chuam-ni.⁶

⁴ X Corps Rpt, Battle of Chip'yong-ni; Rad, GX-2-2270 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to CG X Corps, 28 Jan 51 (confirms oral instructions of 23 January).

⁵ X Corps Rpt, Battle of Chip'yong-ni; 2d Div POR 519, 13 Feb 51; Testimony Before Eighth Army IG by 1st Lt Vincent W. Lang, 2d Div Rcn Co (hereafter cited as Lang Testimony), 4 Mar 51.

⁶ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 12 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Briefing for CG, 1 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entry 2030, 13 Feb 51; Ltr, Eighth Army IG to CG Eighth Army, 13 Mar 51, sub: Investigation of 2d Infantry Division Incident at Chuam-ni, Korea, with 12 Exhibits; Rad, X 17780, CG X Corps to CG Eighth Army, 12 Feb 51.

The Chinese, now at least within two miles of Route 24, probably would cut the 23d Regimental Combat Team's main supply route. An alternative arterial road, Route 24A, lay nearer the Han, its lower segment resting in the IX Corps sector. But on the 12th Chinese had skirted the Chip'yong-ni position on the west and driven off a 24th Division outpost on the alternate route at Koku-ri, four miles south of Chip'yong-ni. Route 24A was now likely blocked.⁷

General Almond's decision to withdraw the 23d Regimental Combat Team, however, was about to be reversed. At noon on the 13th General MacArthur landed at Suwon airfield for his second visit to Korea since General Ridgway had assumed command of the Eighth Army. Ridgway took the opportunity to check once more with him the fundamental basis of his operations, namely that the acquisition of terrain meant nothing except as it facilitated the destruction of enemy forces and the conservation of his own. MacArthur agreed but added that Ridgway should hold strongly to the line of the Han River.⁸

Holding at the Han was part of MacArthur's latest report to Washington, submitted on 11 February, evaluating what could be achieved in Korea based on the policy of confining the fighting to Korea and on the general belief- with which he now agreed- that UNC forces could withstand all enemy attempts to drive them off the peninsula. "It can be accepted as a basic fact," he reported, "that, unless authority is given to strike enemy bases in Manchuria, our ground forces as presently constituted cannot with safety attempt major operations in North Korea." His long range plan, therefore, was to continue a ground advance until his forces developed the enemy's main line of resistance or determined that no such line existed south of the 38th parallel. Should the latter prove the case, he would request instructions from Washington.⁹

While he now believed that the Chinese could not achieve a decisive victory, he judged that as long as "Manchuria is immune to our attack," they had enough offensive power to force UNC withdrawals. Consequently, his immediate plan was to hold the line of the Han up to the point of a major and decisive engagement. "It is impossible to predict where, once we withdraw from this line, the situation will again stabilize," he reported, "but stabilization will be certain. The capability of the enemy is inversely and geometrically proportionate to his distance from the Yalu."¹⁰

⁷ X Corps Rpt, Battle of Chip'yong-ni; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entry 2200, 12 Feb 51, and Entry 0245, 13 Feb 51; 2d Div POR 519, 13 Feb 51.

⁸ Eighth Army SS Rpt, Office of the CG, Feb 51, Incl 13; MS, Ridgway, The Korean War, Issues and Policies, pp. 401-02.

⁹ Rad, C-55315, CINCFE Personal for Gen Taylor, G3, DA, 11 Feb 51.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Ridgway assured MacArthur that he fully intended to keep the I and IX Corps at the Han. Working against Ridgway's intention was an increased likelihood that the Chinese now in and west of Hoengsong would attempt to enter the Han valley and envelop his western forces. A 23d Regimental Combat Team withdrawal from Chip'yong-ni would remove a principal strongpoint blocking Chinese access to the valley. Ridgway therefore wanted Chip'yong-ni held, and so instructed General Almond. Next, in countermove against a possible Chinese sweep through the gap between Chip'yong-ni and Wonju, Ridgway reached for two IX Corps units not engaged at the enemy bridgehead below the Han. He ordered General Moore to move the ROK 6th Division and the British 27th Brigade to Yoju, where they were to pass to X Corps control and be deployed in the gap.¹¹

Chip'yong-ni in the meantime was likely to become an isolated post under siege. Route 24A appeared to be blocked at Koksuri and Route 24 about to be cut at Chuam-ni, and 23d Regimental Combat Team patrols ranging up to three miles beyond Chip'yong-ni through the day reported enemy forces approaching from the north, east, and west. Should Colonel Freeman's force be cut off, Ridgway directed, Almond was to attack north to relieve it.¹²

The West Shoulder, 13-14 February

Chip'yong-ni straddles a stream in the lower end of a small valley hugged on the northeast by a low mountain mass, Pongmi-san, and by the foothills of Mangmi-san, a higher ridge to the south. (Map 23) From a mile out, the peak of Mangmi-san, Hill 397, dominates Chip'yong-ni from the south. Elsewhere, from one to two miles out, Hill 248 dominates from the southwest, 345 from the northwest, 348 from the north, 506 from the northeast, and 319 from the southeast. Colonel Freeman considered the terrain well suited for defense by a force the size of the 23d Regimental Combat Team, which was made up of the 23d Infantry; French battalion; 1st Ranger Company; 37th Field Artillery Battalion; Battery B, 503d Field Artillery Battalion; Battery B, 82d Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion; and Company B, 2d Engineer Combat Battalion. He developed a perimeter based on the Pongmi mass and Mangmi foothills and otherwise tracing lower hills inside the dominating heights. So locating his main position facilitated the organization of defensive fires, construction of obstacles, and resupply. Furthermore, Chinese occupying the distant higher ground around the position

¹¹ MS, Ridgway, *The Korean War, Issues and Policies*, p. 402; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 13 Feb 51; Eighth Army SS Rpt, Office of the CG, Feb 51, Incl 14; Interv, Appleman with Ridgway, 2 Nov 51; Rad, GX2-1414 KGOO, C', Eighth Army to CG IX Corps and CG X Corps, 13 Feb 51 ; Ltr, Gen Almond to Gen Ridgway, 14 Feb 51.

¹² 12 23d Inf AA Rpt, 29 Jan- 15 Feb 51; Rad, GX-2- 1414 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to CG IX Corps and CG X Corps, 13 Feb 51.

would not be able to deliver effective small arms fire on the perimeter but would themselves be vulnerable to the combat team's supporting fires.¹³

Freeman deployed the bulk of the 1st Battalion on the northern arc of the perimeter, the 3d on the east, the 2d on the south, and the French battalion on the west. Company B and the Ranger company were in reserve close behind the 1st Battalion line. Gaps in the perimeter were mined, blocked by barbed wire, or covered by fire. Twin 40s, quad 50s, and regimental tanks were in position to add their direct fire to the defense, prearranged artillery and mortar concentrations ringed the perimeter to the maximum range of the weapons, and a tactical air control party was present to direct air strikes.

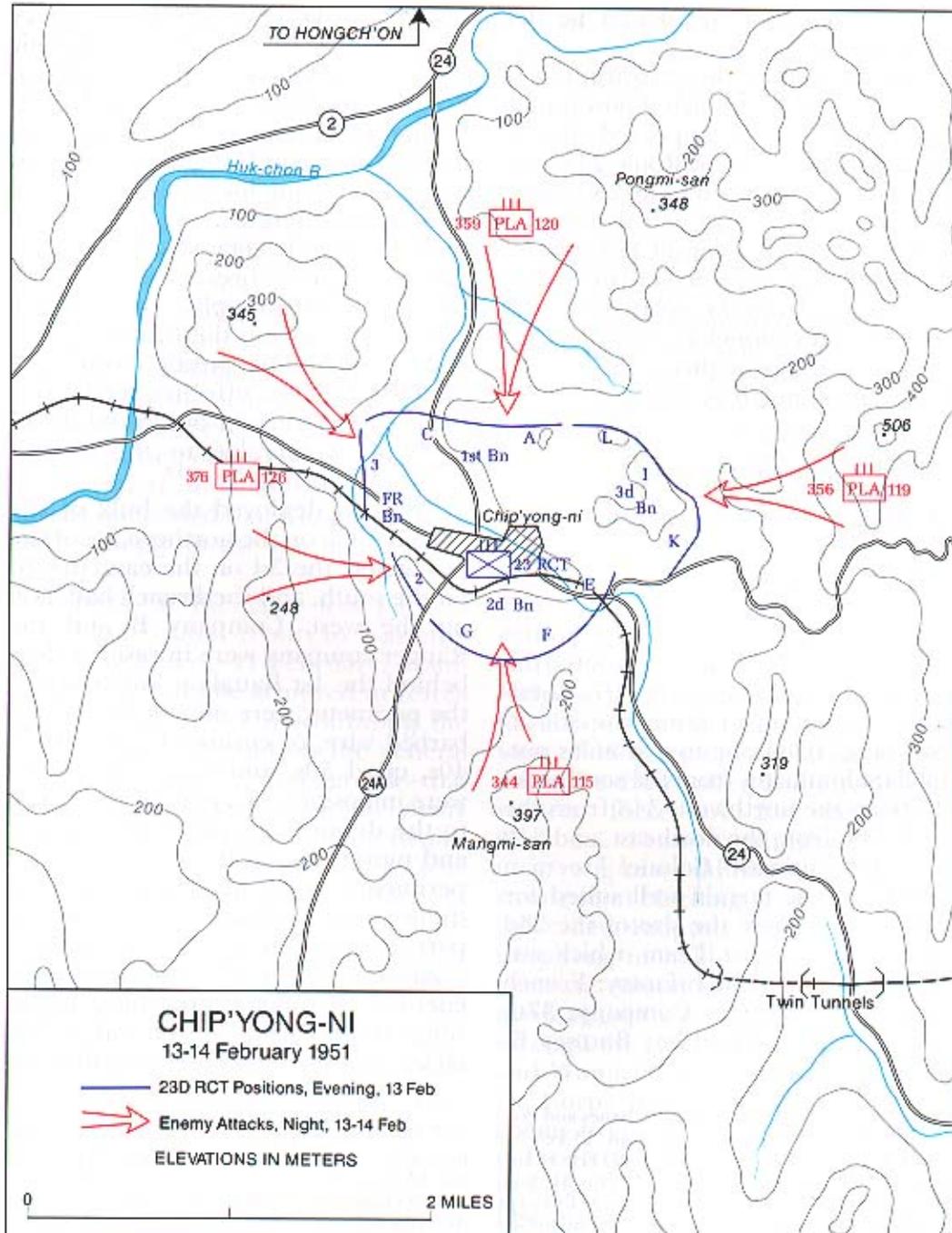
All day on the 13th Freeman kept enemy formations approaching his position under artillery fire and air attacks. Against the probability that the Chinese would attack after dark and the possibility that they would penetrate his position, he meanwhile marked out a second ring of defenses inside his perimeter to be manned at nightfall by Company B of the 2d Engineers and by battalion and regimental headquarters troops. Since his main supply route appeared about to be cut, he requested that a resupply of food, ammunition, and signal and medical items be airdropped on the 14th.

Distance signal flares went up around Chip'yong-ni late in the afternoon and in the evening. After dark, men of the 1st Battalion on the north sighted a line of torches about two miles out and watched the bearers maintain their line despite artillery and mortar fire as they brought the torches south within a half mile of the perimeter. Just after 2200 machine gun and mortar fire struck Company C astride Route 24 in the valley and on the western nose of Pongmisan. Enemy artillery fire joined the bombardment, striking Freeman's heavy mortars, artillery, and regimental command post as well as the outer perimeter. A cacophony of whistle, horn, and bugle blasts preceded an attack on Company C about 2330. The discordant signals later sounded all around the perimeter and were followed by attacks on Company G in the south, at two points in the French sector on the west, and near the center of the 3d Battalion position on the east.

Freeman's tight perimeter prevented the Chinese from fixing a position and flowing around its flanks. Pushing frontal assaults against the wire and through heavy defensive fires, they managed one penetration in the Company G sector but were blunted by reinforcements from Company F and help from the regimental tank company. Following a strong but failing effort against the 3d

¹³ The Chip'yong-ni account is based on the following sources: X Corps Rpt, Battle of Chip'yong-ni; 23d Inf AA Rpt, 29 Jan - 15 Feb 51; Interv, Appleman with Col Paul L. Freeman, 17 Apr 52; Gugeler, *Combat Actions in Korea*, pp. 108-17; Mono, Capt. Edward C. Williamson, "Chip'yong-ni: Defense of South Sector of 23d Regimental Combat Team Perimeter by Company G, 13-15 February 1951," copy in CMH Freeman, "Wonju Thru Chip'yong," p. 24.

Battalion at 0630 and another against the French an hour later, the Chinese withdrew into the dominating heights around Chip'yong-ni.



MAP 23

From: Ebb And Flow, November 1950-July 1951
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 By Billy C. Mossman

Map 23. Chip'yong-ni, 13-14 February 1951

By daybreak on the 14th Colonel Freeman's casualties numbered about a hundred. Freeman himself had suffered a leg wound from a mortar fragment. General Almond had X Corps G-3 Col. John H. Chiles flown into Chip'yong-ni during the morning to take command, but Freeman, though he required hospitalization, refused immediate evacuation and remained in command.¹⁴

High winds and enemy mortar and artillery fire striking the perimeter intermittently through the day inhibited and finally stopped the helicopter evacuation of other casualties. The poor flying weather also delayed close air support. Three flights of fighters eventually arrived after 1430 and in combination with the combat team's mortars and artillery kept Chinese troops digging in on the surrounding high ground under fire. Over a three-hour period starting around 1500, two dozen C-119s of the Far East Air Forces' Combat Cargo Command flying out of Japan dropped the supplies requested by Freeman the day before. The Chinese meanwhile opened no daylight assaults, but captives taken the previous night claimed the attack would be renewed after dark. Four regiments appeared to have sent assault forces against the perimeter during the initial attack. Since these regiments represented four different divisions, the 115th, 119th, 120th, and 126th, and, in turn, three different armies, the 39th, 40th, and 42d, the renewal predicted by the prisoners might be considerably stronger than the first attack.

At Chuam-ni, a regiment of the 116th Division, 39th Army, opened an attack around 0500 on the 14th against the 2d Division reconnaissance company and Company L, 9th Infantry. After about half its troops the day before had attacked the two companies at their blocking position two miles farther east, this regiment apparently swung its full strength around the Chuam-ni perimeter during the night.¹⁵

At midmorning, after suffering considerable losses to small arms, machine gun, and mortar fire and to assaults from almost all directions, the two companies withdrew south over Route 24. Apparently anticipating such a move, the Chinese had set fire blocks along the road below Chuam-ni and had blown a bridge two miles below town. Running the gauntlet and getting around the destroyed crossing cost the two companies several vehicles as well as additional casualties that brought the total to 212, of whom at least 114 were dead.¹⁶

¹⁴ Colonel Chiles served under General Almond as secretary of the General Staff at General Headquarters, Far East Command, and became Almond's G-3 when the X Corps was activated.

¹⁵ The Chuam-ni account is based on Williamson, "Chip'yong-ni"; Ltr, Eighth Army IG to CG Eighth Army, 13 Mar 51, sub: Investigation of 2d Infantry Division Incident at Chuam-ni, Korea; Rad, X 17826, CG X Corps to CG Eighth Army, 16 Feb 51.

¹⁶ The Chuam-ni episode led to a report by a Canadian Press correspondent that "68 soldiers were slaughtered in a village they had captured because they posted only a single sentry and then went to sleep." The report drew a sharp question from Washington and prompted an

Along the northwestern portion of the Wonju defenses, just inside the corner position of the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry, Chinese coming out of the Hoengsong area meanwhile hit the 38th Infantry. (Map 24) The assaults forced a short withdrawal by the attached Netherlands battalion on the 38th's left and penetrated the 3d Battalion on the regimental right, but counterattacks restored the lost ground before noon.¹⁷

Captives identified the force moving on Wonju to be in division strength and to comprise two regiments of the 120th Division and one of the 117th. The bulk of this force was sighted from the air moving in several columns across the Som River northwest of Wonju. Taken and kept under air and massed artillery attack, the Chinese at first ignored losses and continued toward Wonju. But as casualties mounted the Chinese faltered, and most turned southwest before reaching the Wonju defenses. By 1500 the air strikes and artillery fire stopped the enemy movement altogether.¹⁸

Chinese losses at Chip'yong-ni, Chuam-ni and Wonju between midnight on the 13th and nightfall on the 14th appeared heavy. Six hundred forty-eight bodies were counted; the estimate of additional casualties was thirty-two hundred killed and twenty five hundred wounded. But in view of nearby Chinese reserves, the XIII Army Group commander might continue an advance on the twenty-mile front between Chip'yong-ni and Wonju with no delay for regroupment and in even greater strength. Considering the Chinese failure at Chip'yong-ni and Wonju and numerous air sightings of Chinese troops between the two X Corps strong points, the enemy commander might also center his principal thrust and aim it at the junction of the Han and Som rivers seven miles below Yoju.¹⁹

Ameliorating the X Corps' stance- or lack of one- between Chip'yong-ni and Wonju, the British 27th Brigade and ROK 6th Division were now en route to positions in the gap. The British unit crossed the Han over a pontoon bridge near Yoju around 0600 on the 14th and passed from IX Corps to X Corps control. General Almond attached the brigade to the 2d Division, and General Ruffner ordered it to occupy the upper segment of the gap adjacent to Chip'yong-ni. Behind the British, the ROK 6th Division crossed the Han and passed to X Corps and 2d Division control at 1100. Ruffner directed it into the lower section of the

investigation by the Eighth Army inspector general. The implied charge of negligence proved unfounded.

¹⁷ Eighth Army PORs 650, 651, and 652, 14 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Briefing for CG, 15 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entries 0415, 0730, and 0830, 14 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; X Corps PIR 141, 14 Feb 51.

¹⁸ Rad, X 17826, CG X Corps to CG Eighth Army, 16 Feb 51; X Corps PIR 141, 14 Feb 51.

¹⁹ X Corps PIR 141, 14 Feb 51.

would give the ROK III Corps instructions for holding its portion of the east shoulder. Almond was to hold fast elsewhere, subject to the standing, overriding requirement that units be maintained intact.²¹

As Ridgway and Almond met, Chinese forces stood across Route 24 in and below Chuam-ni and the 2d Division reconnaissance company and Company L of the 9th Infantry were fighting their way south. It was also clear by then that the Chinese, as suspected, had cut Route 24A; a 24th Division patrol reinvestigating Koksuri ran into Chinese. With both roads to Chip'yong-ni interdicted, the 23d Regimental Combat Team was isolated. Ridgway instructed Almond to give priority to opening Route 24 since holding the western shoulder required an anchor at Chip'yong-ni.²²

The British 27th Brigade consequently received orders to open the 23d Regimental Combat Team's main supply route before moving into position in the gap. Continuing north, the British met the 2d Division reconnaissance company and Company L, 9th Infantry, about five miles south of Chuam-ni. North of that point, the brigade could push only slowly through Chinese rimming the road; the 27th stopped for the night over a mile short of Chuam-ni and some seven miles short of Chip'yong-ni.²³

After meeting with Almond, Ridgway briefed the IX Corps commander on the concept of holding the shoulders of the enemy penetration in the X Corps sector and opening Route 24 to Chip'yong-ni. Two days earlier General Moore had assembled the 5th Cavalry at Changhwon-ni, the site of IX Corps headquarters twelve miles below Yoju, in case it became necessary to counterattack enemy forces east of the Han. In light of the priority Ridgway had given to opening the 23d Regimental Combat Team's supply road, Moore developed a plan for using the 5th Cavalry to clear Route 24A into Chip'yong-ni. Moore's plan called for the 5th Cavalry, two companies of tanks, two artillery battalions, and a platoon of engineers to clear 24A and to set up at Koksuri a base of operations from which to keep the road open.²⁴

Late in the afternoon, after learning that the British 27th Brigade was advancing very slowly up Route 24, Moore ordered Col. Marcel G. Crombez, commander of

²¹ Eighth Army SS Rpt, Office of the CG, Feb 51, Incl 14; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 14 Feb 51; Rad, GX-2-1513 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to CG X Corps, 14 Feb 51; Rad, GX-2-1469 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to C/S ROKA and CG X Corps, 14 Feb 51.

²² Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 14 Feb 51; Eighth Army POR 652, 14 Feb 51; Eighth Army SS Rpt, Office of the CG, Feb 51, Incl 14.

²³ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 14 Feb 51; Eighth Army POR 652, 14 Feb 51.

²⁴ Eighth Army SS Rpt, Office of the CG, Feb 51, Incl 14; IX Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; IX Corps POR 427, 14 Feb 51; Mono, 1st Lt. Martin Blumenson, "Task Force Crombez," copy in CMH.

the 5th Cavalry, to move the attack force immediately. Moore meanwhile coordinated the movement of ambulances and loaded supply trucks, most of them from the 2d Division, so they could follow Colonel Crombez' column into Chip'yong-ni. Crombez got his units across the Han and onto Route 24A before midnight but was forced to halt at Hup'o-ri, more than eight miles below Chip'yong-ni, while his troops built a bypass around a demolished bridge. This development destined the 23d Regimental Combat Team to remain isolated at least through the remainder of the night.²⁵

The East Shoulder, 14-18 February

Amid the attempts to fill and hold the Chip'yong-ni-Wonju line on the west, stabilizing the east shoulder in both the X Corps and ROK III Corps sectors was proving another problem. The ROK 3d and 5th Divisions, ordered by General Almond on the 13th to withdraw into positions between Wonju and P'yongch'ang, continued to withdraw on the 14th somewhat below that line. North Korean V Corps forces caught up with both divisions during the afternoon of the 14th and briefly engaged each. The ROK 3d, missing its 18th Regiment and otherwise hurt by casualties, nevertheless managed to put up fair defenses slightly southeast of Wonju and twelve miles above Chech'on. But the ROK 5th, next east, became even more disorganized as it withdrew and at dark on the 14th was still assembling around Chuch'on-ni, ten miles above Chech'on. Its artillery was intact, but it had lost half its other crew-served weapons and could muster only the equivalent of four infantry battalions. This left the division scarcely fit to establish defenses before Chech'on, let alone send a regiment northeast to Malta-ri, as Almond had directed, to help tie the X Corps line to the extended position of the ROK III Corps.²⁶

Left with a twenty-mile west flank neither tied to the X Corps nor solidly manned, and feeling some pressure on this flank from North Korean II Corps forces, especially at Malta-ri, General Yu ordered the ROK 7th and 9th Divisions at the left and center of the ROK III Corps sector to withdraw near noon on the 14th. The ROK 7th moved toward positions adjacent to General Ferenbaugh's 31st Infantry below P'yongch'ang, the ROK 9th toward positions at the ROK 7th's right.²⁷

General Ridgway earlier had recognized that the enemy attacks in the X Corps sector and the X Corps withdrawals might compel some adjustment of the ROK

²⁵ Blumenson, "Task Force Crombez."

²⁶ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entries 1947 and 2045, 14 Feb 51; *ibid.*, Sum, 14 and 15 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Briefing for CG, 16 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Hq, FEC, History of the North Korean Army, 31 Jul 52.

²⁷ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entries 1430, 1432, 1931, and 2045, 14 Feb 51; *ibid.*, Sum, 14 Feb 51; Eighth Army POR 652, 14 Feb 51; Hq, FEC, History of the North Korean Army, 31 Jul 52.

III Corps position. Preempting to a degree the authority he had given General Almond to coordinate ROK III Corps movements during Operation ROUNDUP, Ridgway on the 12th permitted General Yu to halt the ROK III Corps advance pending the outcome of the attack against Almond's forces. On the 13th, after the X Corps had pulled back some fifteen miles, he authorized Yu to withdraw his three divisions into defenses along a general southwest-northeast line between P'yongch'ang and Kangnung on the coast. But he intended that Yu withdraw only as a result of enemy pressure and then only in a well-fought delaying action, whereas Yu's order on the 14th appeared to be an unnecessary surrender of east shoulder territory.²⁸

To prevent future ROK withdrawals that did not punish and delay enemy forces, Ridgway directed the KMAG chief, General Farrell, to make a habit of posting himself with major ROK units when they were withdrawing and to insure personally that they stayed in contact. In response to the latest ROK III Corps move, he flashed a reminder to Yu on the 15th that any general withdrawal not forced by enemy pressure violated standing instructions. Yu received the admonition in time to hold the bulk of the ROK 9th Division generally in its original position. But the ROK 7th Division and 30th Regiment of the ROK 9th had completed their withdrawals, the regiments of the ROK 7th standing along Route 60 from a point six miles above Yongwol north to P'yongch'ang, the 30th Regiment extending the line to the northeast. Since North Korean II Corps forces from the 9th and 27th Divisions were then approaching P'yongch'ang from the northwest, Yu attached the 30th Regiment to the ROK 7th Division and left the force where it was.²⁹

The ostensible aim of the North Koreans moving on P'yongch'ang was to drive Yu's forces out of the town and back from Route 60, thereby opening the road for a strike south against Yongwol. From late afternoon on 15 February through early morning on the 18th, the 9th and 27th Divisions launched repeated company and battalion assaults, seized P'yongch'ang itself, and, in their best effort, drove down Route 60 within eight miles of Yongwol. On the 16th, after it was clear that Yu would not be able to return the ROK 7th Division and 30th Regiment to their former positions to the north, General Ridgway allowed him to pull the remaining ROK III Corps units to the P'yongch'ang-Kangnung line and gave him specific instructions to stand fast in the P'yongch'ang area and hold the North Koreans out of Yongwol. Yu consequently placed a second regiment in the P'yongch'ang area as he brought the rest of his forces south. The North Korean units, still worn from previous operations, could not sustain their drive against the strong South Korean position, lost most of their gains to ROK counterattacks,

²⁸ Rad, GX-2-1311 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to C/S ROKA, 12 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 13 and 14 Feb 51; Rad, GX-2-1551 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to C/S ROKA, 15 Feb 51.

²⁹ Eighth Army SS Rpt, Office of the CG, Feb 51, Incl 14; Rad, GX-21551 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to C/S ROKA, 15 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 15 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Briefing for CG, 16 Feb 51; Hq, FEC, History of the North Korean Army, 31 Jul 52.

and finally withdrew. By evening of the 18th Yu's line units were reporting no contact.³⁰

In the adjacent X Corps sector North Korean V Corps forces pushed toward Chech'on on 15 February, hitting hard at the 22d Regiment in the right half of the ROK 3d Division's sector. The regiment gave way some on the east but with fire support from 7th Division artillery near Chech'on otherwise stood its ground. With no serious results, a few North Koreans reached Chuch'on-ni to the southeast and briefly fired on the ROK 5th Division, which was still assembling straggling forces and feebly attempting to establish defenses centered on the town.³¹

Under the arrangements made on 12 February by General Almond and General Ridgway, the ROK I Corps headquarters took control of the ROK 3d, 5th, and 8th Divisions at 1400 on the 15th. Almond directed General Kim, the ROK I Corps commander, to defend the Wonju-P'yongch'ang line, a large order given the debilitated condition of the ROK 5th and 8th Divisions and the presence of North Korean forces below that line. Because of the current threat to Chech'on, Kim's initial act was to form a provisional battalion from remnants of the ROK 8th Division as corps reserve, which he assembled north of Chup'o-ri behind a two-mile gap between the two forward divisions.³²

Additional V Corps forces from the 6th, 7th, and 12th Divisions meanwhile massed in front of the ROK I Corps and early on the 16th opened strong assaults against both forward divisions. The ROK 3d Division, after the 22d Regiment on the right lost some ground, contained the attack in its sector; but the ROK 5th Division, having been able to organize only fragile positions at Chuch'on-ni, withdrew after North Koreans penetrated the 36th Regiment on the division left.

KMAG advisors with the 5th Division and ROK I Corps headquarters notified General Almond that the division's units were not being hit especially hard but were being outmaneuvered and in the process were disintegrating. Before the North Korean attack diminished in the evening, the division had fallen back five miles and, in the judgment of the KMAG advisors, was no longer to be counted as an effective force.³³

³⁰ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 15-18 Feb 51; Rad, GX-2-1703 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to C/S ROKA and CG X Corps, 16 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Briefing for CG, 19 Feb 51; Hq, FEC, History of the North Korean Army, 31 Jul 52.

³¹ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entries 1050, 1900, and 2330, 15 Feb 51; *ibid.*, Sum, 15 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

³² Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entry 1720, 15 Feb 51; X Corps OI 112, 15 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Briefing for CG, 16 Feb 51.

³³ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entries 0230, 1000, 1710, 1905, and 2340, 16 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 16 Feb. 51; Eighth Army G3 Briefing for CG, 17 Feb 51.

To ease the danger to Chech'on, only five miles behind the ROK 5th Division, Almond directed General Ferenbaugh's U.S. 7th Division to move the 31st Infantry from the P'yongch'ang area, where the ROK 7th Division was holding its own, to a position behind the ROK 5th. While the enemy threat remained potentially serious, the 31st Regiment in its new position and the 32d Infantry in and around Chech'on itself considerably increased Almond's chances of holding the North Koreans out of the town and off the main X Corps supply route. Further improving the defense of Chech'on, the tail end battalion of the 17th Infantry, which had been moving up Route 29 to the regimental assembly at Wonju, halted along the road behind the ROK 3d Division. In addition, General Kim shaped another provisional battalion from ROK 8th Division remnants and started it forward to assemble with the one he had formed the day before below the gap between the two forward divisions. That gap had opened to three miles when the ROK 5th withdrew.³⁴

An even wider gap of about seven miles had opened between the right of the ROK 5th Division and the nearest ROK III Corps position to the northeast. Although General Yu's left flank forces were handling the North Korean II Corps units attempting to push down Route 60 into Yongwol, the gap offered the North Koreans opposite the ROK 5th Division an opportunity to sweep around Yu's flank. Yu, his leftmost forces well occupied and anyway obliged by General Ridgway's orders of the 16th to stand fast in the P'yongch'ang area, could do nothing about filling the gap; neither could any of the weak ROK divisions in the X Corps sector. Ridgway on 17 February consequently directed Almond to push American troops northeast to clear out the North Koreans and establish firm contact with the ROK III Corps.³⁵

As Ridgway acted to cover the gap between corps, it began to appear that the hard assaults on the ROK 3d and 5th Divisions on the 16th had spent the North Korean V Corps. Infiltration and assaults harassed both South Korean divisions on the 17th and 18th but failed to yield any permanent gain, and on the 18th even the weak ROK 5th Division was able to make one short advance. As contact diminished on the 18th, a battalion from the 31st Infantry patrolled five miles ahead of ROK lines before encountering a North Korean position. The North Koreans may have backed off only to reorganize for new attacks; but in light of what had taken place in the meantime along the X Corps' west shoulder, their move was more likely part of a general withdrawal.³⁶

³⁴ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entries 1000 and 2340, 16 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 16 Feb 51.

³⁵ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 17 Feb 51; Rad, GX-2-1767 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to CG X Corps, 17 Feb 51.

³⁶ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 17 and 18 Feb 51.

Chip'yong-ni and Task Force Crombez

Though General Almond, expecting a strong Chinese strike south of the Hoengsong, had emphasized the defense of Wonju, enemy forces made no concerted effort to seize the town after failing to do so on the 14th. Local skirmishes occurred along the Wonju front on the 15th, but on the 16th contact lightened and faded out.³⁷

To the northwest, the ROK 6th Division and the British 27th Brigade also encountered diminishing resistance in the area between Wonju and Chip'yong-ni. On the 15th South Korean patrols went out from positions the division had reached the night before and reported only light contact. On the 16th the two leading regiments advanced with no contact within one to three miles of their assigned fronts. The British, while advancing in column up Route 24 toward Chip'yong-ni, were held up by an enemy battalion on the 15th, then found resistance almost nonexistent the next day. Moving with intentional slowness nevertheless, the brigade had not reached Chuam-ni by dark on the 16th.³⁸

The XIII Army Group commander clearly had chosen not to push southwest in strength through the gap but to concentrate on eliminating the Chip'yong-ni position. His forces around the 23d Regimental Combat Team reopened their attack with mortar fire after dark on the 14th. Near midnight both mortars and artillery began an hour-long barrage on the regimental command post and other installations inside the perimeter, and a hard assault off Hill 397 to the south struck Company G. Assaults next hit Companies A and C on the north, then Companies I and K on the east. Sharp, close fighting in the 1st and 3d Battalion sectors abated around 0400 with no more than the temporary loss of one position by Company I and ceased altogether about daylight. But in the south, where the Chinese had decided to make their main effort, persistent pressure slowly carried enemy troops through the Company G area.³⁹

Weak counterattacks by artillerymen from Battery B, 503d Field Artillery Battalion, whose 155-mm. howitzers were in position close behind Company G, and by a squad drawn from Company F on line to the east failed to restore the breaks in the Company G line. Around 0300 the company surrendered the rest of its position and withdraw to a rise just behind the 503d's howitzers. The artillerymen followed suit, as did tankers and antiaircraft gunners, and joined a continuing

³⁷ X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 15 and 16 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Briefing for CG, 16 Feb 51.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The remainder of this section is based on the following sources: X Corps Rpt, Battle of Chip'yong-ni; 23d Inf AA Rpt, 29 Jan-15 Feb 51; Gugeler, *Combat Actions in Korea*, pp. 117-42; Williamson, "Chip'yong-ni"; Blumenson, "Task Force Crombez"; Ltr, Lt Col James W. Edwards to Col Paul L. Freeman, 7 May 51, copy in CMH

exchange of fire with Chinese holding the original Company G position. The defensive fire discouraged the Chinese from advancing on the artillery pieces, which rested in a hollow between the two firing lines.

Lt. Col. James W. Edwards, the 2d Battalion commander, organized a stronger counterattack, reinforcing Company G with a platoon of Company F, the total of his own reserve, and a platoon of Rangers obtained from regiment. Attacking around 0400, the composite force regained part of the lost ground but then was driven back and heavy casualties. By daylight Company G occupied positions on a low ridge a quarter mile behind the former Company G position, as did members of Battery B, 503d Field Artillery Battalion. The battery's guns remained near the center of the quarter mile no man's land. Immediately west of Company G, French troops, who had attempted unsuccessfully to assist the counterattack, also pulled back to refuse the French battalion's left flank.

Colonel Freeman, who remained at Chip'yong-ni and in command until finally evacuated at midmorning on the 15th, released Company B and the remainder of the Ranger company around 0800 for a stronger effort. This release committed all available troops save the company of engineers, although by that hour action elsewhere on the perimeter had ceased. At 1000, behind a mortar barrage and supported by fire from tanks and anti-aircraft weapons, Company B tried to retake the Company G position alone but was kept off the crest by fire from Chinese on the southern slopes where the preliminary and supporting fires had chased them.

Air strikes requested by Colonel Edwards during the morning began somewhat tardily at noon. Edwards meanwhile ordered tanks accompanied by Rangers south on Route 24A beyond the attack objective so the tank gunners could fire east onto the southern slopes. After mines previously placed on the road were removed and several Chinese armed with rocket launchers killed or driven off, Edwards' tanks reached a point on the road from where they could hit the Chinese. About 1630, as the tank fire in combination with artillery fire and air strikes began to break up the Chinese position, Company B regained the rest of the objective. Almost at the same time, the head of a tank column came into view on Route 24A to the south. After a moment of surprise, Edwards' men realized the tanks were part of the 5th Cavalry relief force which had started toward Chip'yong-ni the day before.

Colonel Crombez had renewed his advance up Route 24A at 0700 on the 15th, about an hour after his engineers completed the bypass around the destroyed bridge at Hup'ori. The 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, and two platoons of tanks in the lead first encountered resistance about two miles below Koksuri where Chinese had dug in on Hill 152 bordering Route 24A on the east. Crombez deployed the 1st Battalion against 152 and sent the 2d Battalion up Hill 143 edging the road on the west just opposite. Hill 143 fell easily, but the 1st Battalion cleared the 152 mass only in midafternoon.

Suspecting that the remainder of the road north would be just as stoutly defended, Crombez doubted an infantry attack could carry to Chip'yong-ni by dark but believed an armored task force could. For the armored thrust he assembled twenty-three tanks, which included all of Company D, 6th Tank Battalion, and a platoon of Company A, 70th Tank Battalion. Needing infantry protection for the armor but having no armored personnel carriers, he instructed the hundred sixty members of Company L, 5th Cavalry, to ride the tanks. As agreed between the Company L commander and the commander of the tanks, the infantrymen were to dismount and deploy to protect the tanks during any halt and were to remount on signal from the tankers when the column was ready to proceed. Four members of the engineer company with Crombez also were to ride a tank near the head of the column to lift any mines on the road.

At midafternoon, as Crombez completed preparations for the armored thrust, not all the supply trucks and ambulances scheduled to follow the 5th Cavalry into Chip'yong-ni had reached the regiment's location. Doubting anyway that wheeled vehicles could safely accompany the tank column, Crombez decided to call the supply train forward after he had opened the road. The new 23d Regimental Combat Team commander, Colonel Chiles, whom Crombez contacted by radio before leading the task force forward, did not object. Since the 23d at the time was having trouble reestablishing the Company G positions on the south, Chiles wanted Crombez to come, "trains or no trains."

Ahead of Task Force Crombez' departure from behind the 1st and 2d Battalions at 1545, artillery fire and air strikes pounded the hills bordering Koksuri. Lest the infantry aboard the tanks be hit, Crombez sacrificed any further supporting artillery fire on the high ground edging Route 24A.

Despite the heavy preliminary fire, a strong Chinese force remained on the Koksuri heights and twice forced Crombez' column to halt, once as the lead tank approached the town, again just after the task force passed through. No tanks were lost in heavy exchanges of fire during the halts, but Crombez lost about ninety of his infantrymen who, according to plan, dismounted at each stop. Some were hit in the firefight; the bulk simply were stranded when Crombez, believing the success of his task force depended on keeping the tanks moving, ordered his column forward and the tankers responded without allowing time for all members of Company L to remount. The able bodied cavalymen left behind returned south to the regimental line, most of them moving through the ground west of Route 24A where resistance had been lightest. Men in a 2-ton truck, dispatched by the 3d Battalion commander on his own volition to trail the task force (Colonel Crombez had made no provision for evacuating casualties), picked up some of the wounded. Others were recovered later by tankers of Company A, 70th Tank Battalion, not taking part in the thrust toward Chip'yong-ni.

Proceeding above Koksuri with fewer than seventy infantrymen aboard, Crombez' column received almost constant but lighter fire as far as a cut through

the western slopes of Hill 397 a mile below Chip'yong-ni. To that point no tank had been damaged, but more infantrymen were lost, some shot off the tanks, a few pushed off as tank gunners swung turrets and tubes to return fire, others stranded as before after brief halts.

Heavy small arms and mortar fire struck the column as it reached the road cut; as the tanks started through, Chinese atop the steep embankments on either side fired rocket launchers and threw down satchel charges. A rocket that struck the turret of the lead tank wounded the gunner and loader, and the road wheels of the second tank were damaged, but both got through. The third tank was not touched, but the fourth, carrying Capt. Johnnie M. Hiers, commanding Company D of the 6th Tank Battalion, took a turret hit from a rocket, apparently a 3.5-inch round, that penetrated and exploded ammunition in the racks. The men in the fighting compartment, including Captain Hiers, were killed, and the tank caught fire. The driver, though severely burned, raced the tank through the cut and off the road so as not to block the remainder of the column.

As each of the following tanks rammed into the cut, crews of tanks still to enter and of those already through delivered heavy cannon fire on the embankments. They dampened enemy fire enough to permit all remaining tanks to pass safely. The Chinese, however, further thinned the infantry riding the tanks, and the 2½ ton truck at the tail of the column, its driver wounded and one of its tires flat, rolled to a stop in the cut. Most of the wounded who had been riding the truck hobbled through the cut and got aboard one of the last tanks.

The leading forces of Task Force Crombez and the 23d Regimental Combat Team tankers earlier sent south on Route 24A by Colonel Edwards sighted each other as the task force reached the north side of the cut. In the mutual moment of surprise before recognition—a result of not being in radio contact with each other—the commander of Crombez' second tank began calling out an order to fire on the armor up the road. The Chinese on the upper slopes of Hill 397 to the east, already loosened from their position by Edwards' counterattack and demoralized by the appearance of Crombez' column, meanwhile began to run. Edwards had never seen "a sight like that and never expect to see another like it. There were more targets than we had weapons."

After helping Edwards clean the Chinese from the slopes east of the road with high explosive fire from the 90 mm. guns, Crombez led his column inside the 23d Regimental Combat Team perimeter about 1715. In covering the six miles from below Koksuri into Chip'yong-ni the task force had had three tanks and the 2½-ton truck damaged. Casualties among the armored troops were three killed and four wounded. Still with Crombez were all four engineers but just twenty-three members of Company L, many of them wounded. Altogether, the rifle company lost twelve killed, forty wounded, and nineteen missing—almost half its strength.

Because so little daylight remained, Crombez elected to remain in Chip'yong-ni overnight. He also considered it advisable to hold the supply trucks and ambulances below Koksuri until after he made the return trip and rechecked the road. Air observers meanwhile reported the Chinese to be moving away from Chip'yong-ni not only from the slopes of Hill 397 in the south but from all around the perimeter. Colonel Chiles nevertheless anticipated an attack during the night. Against this possibility, Crombez placed some of his tanks on the perimeter, most of them on the north and northwest to help cover the valley approaches to Chip'yong-ni.

Small arms and mortar ammunition meanwhile had become scarce commodities at the perimeter. The two dozen airdrops on the 14th and thirty air deliveries during the morning of the 15th contained mostly artillery rounds. In Colonel Edwards' battalion, which had had the hardest fight, men searched trailers and truck glove compartments to get two clips to each rifleman. None of Edwards' rifle companies had more than six rounds of 60-mm. mortar ammunition, and only thirty rounds remained for the 81-mm. mortars. Emergency nighttime airdrops on zones outlined by truck headlights finally replenished the smaller ammunition types between 2130 and midnight. The light guiding the cargo planes attracted some enemy small arms and mortar fire, which made retrieving the ammunition packages hazardous. This fire proved to be the extent of further Chinese action. As reported earlier by air observers, the Chinese were hurriedly leaving Chip'yong-ni. Verification came from patrols moving outside the perimeter after daylight on the 16th.

Casualties inflicted on the Chinese by the 23d Regimental Combat Team, counted and estimated, totaled 4,946. Colonel Crombez judged that his task force inflicted over 500 more. The perimeter troops also captured 79 Chinese who at interrogation identified five divisions from the 39th, 40th, and 42d Armies as having taken part in the attacks. The attack force itself, however, appeared to have been no more than six regiments, one each from the 115th, 116th, 119th, and 120th Divisions and two from the 126th Division. These six had not attacked in concert, nor had any of them thrown a full strength assault against the perimeter. Almost all attacks had been made by company-size forces, some followed by a succession of attacks of the same size in the same or nearby places. This kind of successive small unit assault had permitted the Chinese to invest the Company G position on the southern arc of the perimeter.

The remaining regiment of the 126th Division had opposed Colonel Crombez' forces at Koksuri and along the road north. The 1st and 2d Battalions of the 5th Cavalry, after a quiet night on Hills 143 and 152 below Koksuri, advanced close to the lower edge of town during a snowstorm on the morning of the 16th, picking up Chinese stragglers who identified their regiment and reported that it had withdrawn hastily during the night. Colonel Crombez confirmed the enemy withdrawal during his return trip, which he delayed until the snowstorm lifted

around noon. He found the borders of Route 24A from Chip'yong-ni to Koksuri free of Chinese.

After returning to Koksuri with Crombez, Capt. John C. Barrett, commanding Company L, went back north over the road by jeep in search of any wounded members of his company who might still be lying along the route. He located four between Koksuri and the road cut below Chip'yong-ni. Behind Barrett, Capt. Keith M. Stewart, assistant S3 of the 5th Cavalry, led the supply trucks and ambulances forward. Moving with thirteen tanks, a platoon of infantry, and a wrecker in his column, Stewart caught up with Barrett at the road cut in midafternoon and took aboard the casualties the latter had recovered. Stewart found another wounded man from Company L beyond the cut. The wrecker meanwhile towed in the truck and tank that had been damaged at the cut.

Colonel Chiles, having been fairly resupplied with ammunition by airdrop, was not so anxious for the arrival of Stewart's supply trucks as he was for the ambulances. Casualties in the 23d Regimental Combat Team now totaled 52 killed, 259 wounded, and 42 missing. Chiles had been able to evacuate only a few of the wounded by helicopter after daybreak on the 16th before fog and snow grounded the aircraft. He was now able to load all remaining wounded on a few emptied supply trucks as well as the ambulances, and Stewart delivered them to the 5th Cavalry clearing station at Koksuri before dark.

A Turning Point

As the battle of Chip'yong-ni climaxed, General Ridgway felt that the Eighth Army had reached a turning point, that it had substantially regained the confidence lost during the distressing withdrawals of December and early January. In his judgment, the successful defense of Chip'yong-ni by an isolated combat team without grievous losses against a force far superior in strength symbolized the revitalization. Task Force Crombez, in its relief role, epitomized the offensive spirit. Although being forced to place infantry aboard the tanks had proved costly, Ridgway judged Colonel Crombez' decision to advance with armor when his infantry moved too slowly to be one of the best local decisions of the war. With renewed spirit, as evidenced at Chip'yong-ni, Ridgway considered his forces quite capable of further offensive operations, which he immediately proceeded to design.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Interv, Appleman with Ridgway, 2 Nov 51.