

CHAPTER XIII

Advance to the Han

Roundup Preparations

When General Almond received General Ridgway's 30 January question on a X Corps-ROK III Corps operation similar to THUNDERBOLT, he was in the process of extending the X Corps' diversionary effort ordered earlier by Ridgway. Having achieved the Yoju-Wonju-Yongwol line against little opposition, Almond was planning a strong combat reconnaissance fifteen miles above this line. Searching that deep at corps center and right could apply pressure on the North Korean V and II Corps concentrated above Hoengsong and P'yongch'ang. At the same time, the 2d Division, due to move north along the corps left boundary as far as Chip'yong-ni, eight miles east of Yangp'yong, could protect the right flank of the IX Corps as the THUNDERBOLT operation continued.¹

In the recent course of protecting the IX Corps right, a joint motorized patrol from the 2d and 24th Divisions on 29 January had moved north out of the Yoju area on the east side of the Han to a pair of railroad tunnels and a connecting bridge standing east and west athwart a narrow valley four miles south of Chip'yong-ni. Chinese in the high ground overlooking the tunnels quickly cut the patrol's route of withdrawal, forced the group into hasty defenses on the nearest rises of ground, and opened a series of assaults. The Chinese finally backed away after air strikes were called in by the pilot of an observation plane who spotted the ambush and after a motorized company of infantry reinforced the group about 0330 on the 30th. The waylaid patrol had suffered five dead, twenty-nine wounded, and five missing out of a total strength of forty-five.²

At the discovery of Chinese at the twin tunnels General Almond ordered the 2d Division to identify and destroy all enemy units in that area. The 23d Infantry received the assignment. On 31 January Colonel Freeman sent his 3d Battalion and the attached French battalion to the tunnels after placing the 37th Field Artillery Battalion within a thousand yards of the tunnel area in direct support.³

The infantry battalions reached and established a perimeter around the tunnel-bridge complex without sighting enemy forces. But from farther north Colonel Freeman's forces themselves were observed by the 125th Division, 42d Army.

¹ X Corps OI 84 and 86, 28 Jan 51, and OI 87 and 88, 29 Jan 51; X Corps Opn Plan 20, 31 Jan 51; 2d Div Comd Rpt, Nar, Jan 51; 2d Div OI 17, 31 Jan 51.

² X Corps Comd Rpt, Incls for Jan 51, Incl 4; Ltr, Hq, 23d Inf, 13 Mar 51, sub: After Action Report Covering Operations of the 23d Regimental Combat Team During the Period 290630 Jan to 152400 Feb 51.

³ Ibid.

Near dawn on 1 February the 375th and 374th Regiments attacked from the north and northeast, respectively, and after daylight the 373d Regiment assaulted the perimeter from the northwest and southwest. In hard, close-in fighting lasting all day, the defending battalions, relying heavily on artillery fire and on more than eighty air strikes, drew far more blood and finally forced the Chinese to withdraw. Freeman's forces counted 1,300 enemy bodies outside their perimeter and estimated total enemy casualties at 3,600. Their own losses were 45 killed, 207 wounded, and 4 missing.⁴

Judging from the two sharp actions at the twin tunnels, the Chinese were determined to retain control of Chip'yong-ni. They had good reason. The town was so situated that the force occupying it could control movements over Route 2 to the west, over Route 24 to the northeast, over Routes 24 and 24A below town, and thus through the Yangp'yong-Ch'ungju segment of the Han valley stretching to the southeast behind it. Eighth Army possession of Chip'yong-ni, furthermore, would pose a threat of envelopment to enemy forces opposing the I and IX Corps below the Han. For these same reasons General Almond planned to seize Chip'yong-ni and incorporated this plan in his overall recommendations for an operation styled after THUNDERBOLT.⁵

Also behind Almond's proposals were late January intelligence reports of a strong enemy force assembling around Hongch'on, at the intersection of Routes 24 and 29 twenty miles northeast of Chip'yong-ni and fifteen miles north of Hoengsong. This force, apparently part of the North Korean V Corps, could be preparing to advance southwest on Route 24 through Chip'yong-ni, then down the Han valley toward Yaju and Ch'ungju. Or the V Corps might again push forces south on Route 29 through Hoengsong toward Wonju. To spoil either move, Almond considered Hongch'on the proper main objective of a X Corps attack.⁶

To disrupt both the V Corps and II Corps, he outlined a coordinated X Corps-ROK III Corps advance, Operation ROUNDUP. (Map 19) The current corps combat reconnaissance limit, generally the Chip'yong-ni-Hoengsong P'yongch'ang line, was to be the line of departure for ROUNDUP and was to be occupied in a preliminary advance by the 2d Division on the left, the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team in the center, and the 7th Division on the right. This advance would base American units far enough forward to support a thrust at Hongch'on, which Almond planned South Korean forces would make.⁷

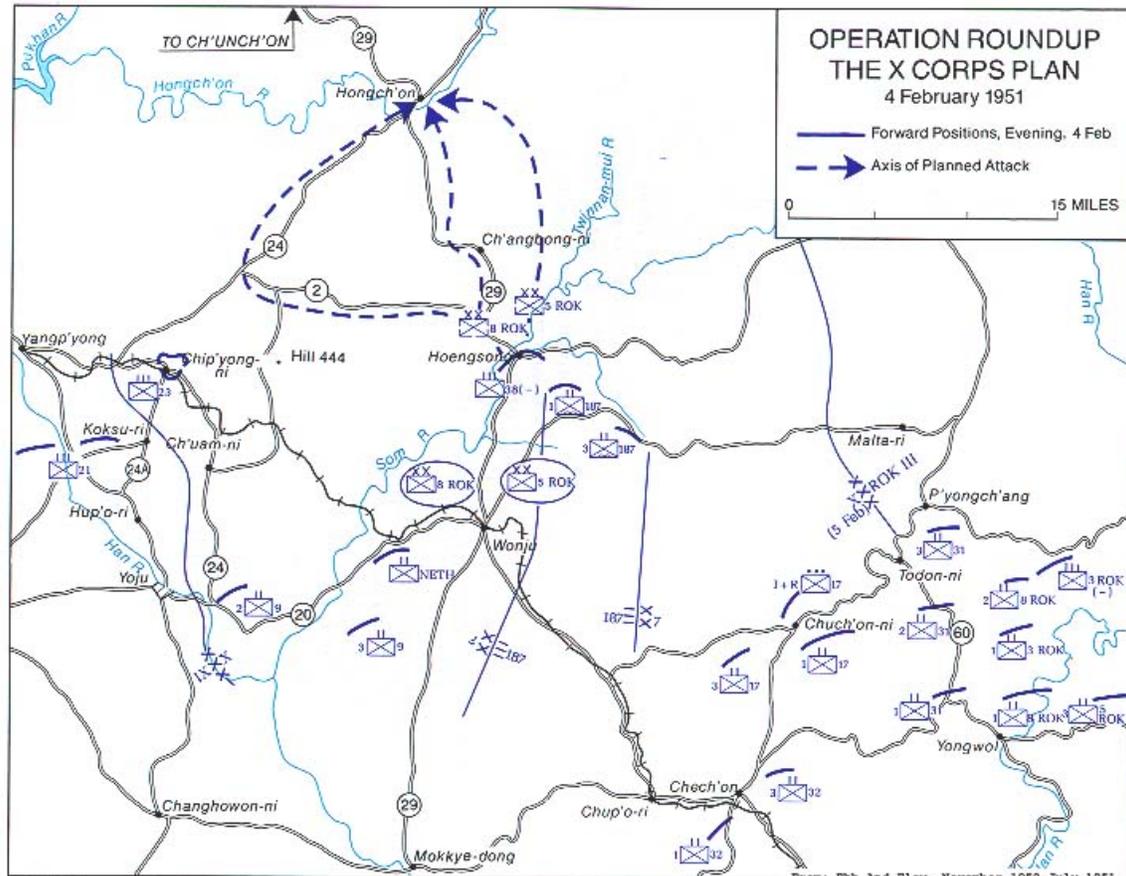
⁴ Ibid.; Ltr, G3 Eighth Army to CG Eighth Army, 3 Feb 51, sub: Results of 23d Infantry and French Battalion Action at 010450 February 1951; Study, Col. Paul Freeman, "Wonju Thru Chip'yong: An Epic of Regimental Combat Team Action in Korea," Apr 51, copy in CMH.

⁵ X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.; X Corps Opn Plan Roundup, 1 Feb 51; X Corps Of 92 and 93, 1 Feb 51.

He proposed a flanking operation against Hongch'on by the ROK 5th and 8th Divisions accompanied by artillery and armor drawn from the American units on the line of departure. From behind the 2d Division on the left, part of the ROK 8th Division was to advance north over Route 29 while the main body moved northwest to cut Route 24 roughly halfway between Chip'yong-ni and



MAP 19

Map 19. Operation ROUNDUP, the X Corps Plan, 4 February 1951

Hongch'on, then turned northeast to hit Hongch'on itself. On the right, the ROK 5th Division was to advance north through the mountains east of Route 29 through part of the area occupied by the North Korean II Corps, then swing west against Hongch'on.⁸

The 2d Division was to appoint one light artillery battalion, a medium battery, an automatic weapons battery, and a motorized infantry battalion to move with and directly support the ROK 8th Division. These units eventually constituted Support Force 21. The 7th Division was to furnish a similar Support Force 7 for the ROK

⁸ X Corps Opn Plan Roundup, 1 Feb 51.

5th Division. In each instance the artillery commander of the American division was to coordinate all artillery fire within his own zone and within the zone of the South Korean division he was supporting.⁹ Later, because control of the South Korean advance was centralized at corps headquarters and did not involve either American division headquarters per se, a question-warranted or not-would arise over who should order the displacement of these support forces.

Five armored teams, each comprising a company of infantry and a platoon of tanks, also were designated, two by the 2d Division, two by the 7th Division, and one by the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team.¹⁰ Only three were used. Teams A and B from the 2d Division were attached to the ROK 8th Division at the outset of the advance; Team E from the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team later opened operations under the control of the corps armored officer.

By 5 February, the date set for opening the Hongch'on strike, General Almond expected the ROK III Corps to have come up even with the X Corps' line of departure. On the 5th the ROK III Corps should start forward through successive phase lines, coordinating each phase of movement with the X Corps' progress, to destroy North Korean II Corps forces in zone and to protect the X Corps' right flank.¹¹

General Ridgway approved Almond's plan on 1 February and made Almond responsible for coordinating the X Corps and ROK III Corps attacks. Ridgway cautioned him, however, that for the remainder of Operation THUNDERBOLT his continuing mission of protecting the IX Corps' right flank would be the X Corps' overriding tactical consideration. The next day Ridgway ordered the ROK I Corps to capture the east coast town of Kangnung in an advance coordinated with the progress of the ROK III Corps.¹²

The X Corps' preliminary advance to the line of departure was largely but not fully effected by the target date. At the corps west flank, the 23d Infantry moved north of the twin tunnels and occupied Chip'yong-ni, surprisingly against no more than token opposition. At corps center, the 38th Infantry, now commanded by Col. John G. Coughlin, occupied Hoengsong, and the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team the ground immediately southeast.¹³ The 7th Division at the

⁹ Ibid., Annex C, X Corps Plan, and Appendix C (Arty) to Annex C; X Corps, Memo for Lt Col Chiles, signed S. H. M., 4 Feb 51, giving the composition of artillery and armored support. Two other support forces, one from each division, were designated but never formed.

¹⁰ X Corps, Memo for Lt Col Chiles, signed S. H. M., 4 Feb 51.

¹¹ X Corps Opn Plan Roundup, 1 Feb 51

¹² Rad, GX-2-118 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to CG X Corps and C/S ROKA, 2 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

¹³ Colonel Peploe, the former commander of the 38th Infantry, had been transferred to IX Corps headquarters, where he became chief of staff and was promoted to brigadier general.

corps right was not yet on the line. Its 17th and 31st Regiments were still approaching over the Chech'on-P'yongch'ang and Yongwol-P'yongch'ang roads. Behind the line traced by these clumps of Americans, the ROK 5th and 8th Divisions were in final assemblies for the Hongch'on attack, one on either side of Route 29.¹⁴

The assault divisions of the ROK III Corps, the ROK 7th and 9th, also were somewhat short of the line of departure on the 5th, yet near enough to satisfy General Almond. The day before, at a corps commanders' conference at Suwon, he notified General Ridgway that he was ready to begin Operation ROUNDUP. Ridgway that day ordered a westward shift of the X Corps ROK III Corps boundary to give the South Koreans more of the territory north of P'yongch'ang. Hence, when ROUNDUP opened at 0800 on the 5th, General Yu's two divisions faced the bulk of the North Korean II Corps while General Almond's two assault units confronted the North Korean V Corps in the Hoengsong-Hongch'on area.¹⁵

Thunderbolt Continued

Amid the ROUNDUP preliminaries, the I and IX Corps to the west continued their THUNDERBOLT advance, pushing infantry and tanks supported by artillery and air strikes-and at the far west by naval gunfire-through isolated but stubborn defenses. (Map 20) The advances, slowed by careful lateral coordination and a full search of the ground, covered two to six of the remaining fifteen miles to the Han. The IX Corps registered the deepest gains as General Moore, now in command, shoved the 1st Cavalry and 24th Divisions up even with General Milburn's 25th and 3d Divisions.¹⁶ The THUNDERBOLT front by 5 February traced a line running east and west through a point not far below Anyang on Route 1.¹⁷

As a result of General Ridgway's 31 January instructions to his G-3 to arrange air attacks to isolate the battlefield south of the Han, the daily army air requests to the Fifth Air Force came second only to close support. The requests called for round-the-clock interdiction with special attention to nighttime operations and with the intensity to prevent enemy forces from moving north or south of the Han. General Partridge worked the army requests into his daytime armed reconnaissance program and stepped up a current night intruder effort along the Han from a point north of Kimpo airfield eastward to a point near Yangp'yong. To

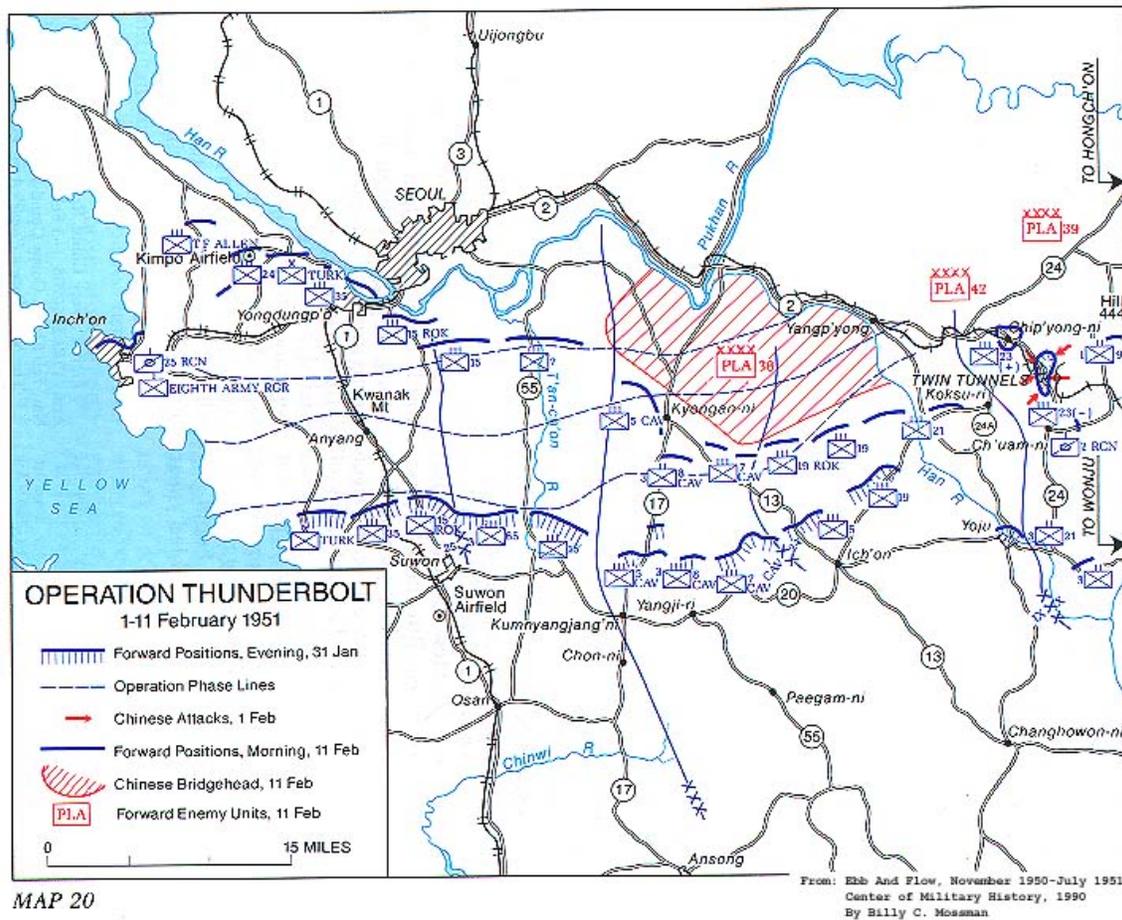
¹⁴ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 1-4 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

¹⁵ Notes of Corps Commanders' Conference, Suwon, 041130 February, 4 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 4 Feb 51.

¹⁶ General Moore took command of the IX Corps on 31 January.

¹⁷ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 1-4 Feb 51; I Corps Comd Rpt, Nat-, Feb 51; IX Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

prevent useless destruction in Seoul, Partridge instructed his pilots not to attack residential areas unless military targets were discovered within them.¹⁸



Map 20. Operation THUNDERBOLT, 1-11 February 1951

Judging from reported results over the first four days of February, the air attacks were something less than intensive. Night intruder sorties totaled fifty five, ranging from six on the 2d to twenty-two on the 3d. Targets reported destroyed or damaged included 50 troops, 1 antiaircraft gun, 14 vehicles, 4 railroad cars, 13 supply installations, and 517 buildings.¹⁹

The air effort had little effect on the gradual retraction of enemy forces from below the Han sensed late in January. The screen in front of the I and IX Corps

¹⁸ Ltrs, Eighth Army G3 Air, signed by Gen Allen, CofS, to CG Fifth Air Force, 1-4 Feb 51; Rad, OPC 676, CG Fifth Air Force to CINCFE et al., 31 Jan 51; Rad, OPC 709, CG Fifth Air Force to CINCFE et al., 1 Feb 51; Rad, OPC 730, CG Fifth Air Force to CINCFE et al., 2 Feb 51; Rad, OPC 753, CG Fifth Air Force to CINCFE et al., 3 Feb 51.

¹⁹ 19 Eighth Army G3 Jul, G3 Air Briefing Rpts, 2-5 Feb 51; Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

by 5 February was one division stronger after the 114th Division, 38th Army, appeared opposite the 24th Division on the IX Corps right. The addition raised the divisions in contact to seven: the North Korean 8th on the west, the three of the 50th Army in the center, and the three of the 38th Army on the east. Behind the screen, much of the North Korean I Corps' reserve strength remained below the Han, the 47th Division occupying Inch'on, the 17th Division located in the Seoul-Yongdungp'o area. But the XIII Army Group commander had reassembled almost all of his reserves above the river and had shifted the 42d and parts of the 39th and 40th Armies eastward into the area above Yangp'yong and Chip'yong-ni. The 66th Army, whose troops had not moved below the Han, also was east and north of Seoul. As last known, it was assembled near Kap'yong.²⁰

The newest prisoners and documents captured by the I and IX Corps indicated that the enemy units still south of the Han would keep only light forces engaged and would deploy in depth for a leapfrog delaying action pending an enemy offensive around 8 February. The choice of date seemed to be tied either to the opening of the Chinese New Year on the 6th or to the third birthday of the North Korean Army.²¹ The eastward shift of considerable Chinese strength into the territory above Yangp'yong and Chip'yong-ni, as did the earlier engagements at the twin tunnels, pointed to the Han valley below Yangp'yong as the likely main axis of an enemy advance. Heavy enemy vehicular traffic also was sighted from the air, all of it moving south and over half of it moving from the Wonsan area toward Ch'unch'on. This shift could mean that the IX Army Group was rejoining the battle and was sending forces for employment in the central region.²²

The indications that the enemy would employ only light forces and delaying tactics in front of the I and IX Corps provided some assurance that the THUNDERBOLT forces would reach their Han objectives. The enemy concentration to the northeast raised the same danger of envelopment that had partially prompted the Eighth Army's withdrawal to line D a month earlier, but it was possible that General Almond's ROUNDUP advance would spoil the enemy buildup and quite probable that the X Corps could at least protect the IX Corps' right flank.

The I Corps Reaches the Han

At the resumption of THUNDERBOLT on the 5th, the two I Corps assault divisions spearheaded their advance with tanks. General Milburn previously had arranged but had not yet called for the strong armored thrust along the west coast ordered by Ridgway on 31 January. On Milburn's further order, two tank

²⁰ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army PIRs 204-208, 1-5 Feb 51; 1 Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; IX Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

²¹ The North Korean People's Army was officially activated on 8 February 1948.

²² Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army PIRs 204-208, 1-5 Feb 51.

battalions, two infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, and a company of engineers were to assemble under Brig. Gen. Frank A. Allen, Jr., assistant commander of the 1st Cavalry Division. When called, Task Force Allen was to exploit any breakthrough that might occur, especially in the 25th Division's zone, and was particularly to block the lateral Inch'on-Yongdungp'o road and cut off enemy forces located west of Kimpo airfield.²³

Between 5 and 8 February the smaller armored forces ranging ahead of the I Corps' methodical infantry advance were frequently delayed but seldom hurt by numerous minefields located on the curves and shoulders of roads and on bypasses around destroyed bridges. The mines, mostly wooden boxes with five to six pounds of explosives in each, were poorly laid and camouflaged. Most were visible, and mine detectors picked up the metallic igniters of those more deeply buried.²⁴

Gains of one to four miles through the 8th carried the 25th Division on the left within five miles of the Inch'on-Yongdungp'o road and took the forward-most force of the 3d Division at the right within six miles of the Han itself. Beginning on the 6th, Milburn's forces captured troops from the North Korean 47th Division in the area north and northeast of Anyang. By the 8th it appeared that all or part of the North Korean 17th Division had relieved the 47th at Inch'on; that the latter had joined the North Korean 8th Division in holding back the I Corps, taking up positions near the center of the corps zone; and that the bulk of the 50th Army was side slipping to the east.²⁵

The strongest enemy positions facing the I Corps on the 8th lay between Routes 1 and 55 across heights centered on Kwanak Mountain, due south of Seoul, where the North Korean 47th Division had been identified. Since the Kwanak heights were the last defensible ground on the southern approaches to Seoul, their capture could climax the I Corps advance to the Han. General Ridgway emphasized this probability to General Milburn at a meeting of corps commanders on the 8th and urged him to push vigorously against the Kwanak defenses. Earlier, after learning of the 47th Division's entry on line, Ridgway asked Admiral Joy to arrange an amphibious landing demonstration at Inch'on to discourage further strengthening of the enemy screen and perhaps draw off some opposing forces. Joy dispatched ships from Sasebo, Japan, and from Pusan to join those already in Inch'on waters for a demonstration on the 10th.²⁶

²³ I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; 1 Corps Opn Dir 43, 2 Feb 51.

²⁴ I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

²⁵ Ibid.; Conference Notes, Conference Between Eighth Army Commander and Corps Commanders at Tempest Tac, 8 February 1951, copy in CMH.

²⁶ Ibid.; Rad, GX-2-621 KG00, CG Eighth Army to CINCFE, 6 Feb 51; Rad, GX-2-699 KG00, CG Eighth Army to CTG 95.1, 7 Feb 51; Rad, MCN 32110, COMNAVFE to CTF 90 and CTF 95,

Snow and low-hanging clouds shut down air operations on the 9th but had little ill effect on the I Corps. The 25th Division captured Kwanak Mountain and, west of Route 1, advanced its infantry line within two miles of the Inch'on-Yongdungp'o road. Armored forces from the division reconnoitered farther west and north within sight of Inch'on and Yongdungp'o. On the corps right, the 3d Division moved two to three miles north, and a small armored column, Task Force Meyer, spurred up Route 55 to become the first corps troops on the Han. Minefields harassed the advance, but assault forces otherwise consistently reported "no resistance."²⁷

General Milburn judged that the 50th Army forces previously in the 3d Division's zone had withdrawn above the Han or out of the I Corps zone to the east. The North Korean 8th and 47th Divisions, on the other hand, might have moved northwest to join the North Korean 17th Division just above the Inch'onYongdungp'o road to defend the Kimpo peninsula. As part of a plan to spoil any such effort, Milburn on the night of the 9th called for Task Force Allen to assemble behind the 25th Division. The division was to seize the Inch'on-Yongdungp'o road by noon on the 10th, and Task Force Allen was then to advance above the road in multiple columns to clear the Kimpo peninsula.²⁸

The landing demonstration at Inch'on scheduled for the 10th now seemed apt to hinder rather than ease the I Corps advance. The 25th Division armored force that had looked at Inch'on during the day had seen no enemy activity. The enemy's abrupt withdrawal apparently had included the Inch'on garrison. Since a simulated landing might prompt the North Koreans to reoccupy Inch'on and in turn make the port more difficult for the 25th Division to capture, the amphibious feint was canceled. The naval force assembled off Inch'on, however, did plan to investigate the port on the 10th using a small party of ROK marines acquired from an offshore security force on Tokchok-to, an island thirty miles southwest of Inch'on.²⁹

Snow showers through the morning of the 10th again canceled most of the I Corps' air support, but again with no ill effect. A total absence of resistance except for more antitank mines allowed the 25th Division to seize the Inch'on-

6 Feb 51; Rad, MCN 32674, COMNAVFE to CINCFE, 7 Feb 51; Rad, MCN 32587, COMNAVFE to COMSEVENFLT, 7 Feb 51; Field, United States Naval Operations, Korea, p. 324.

²⁷ Eighth Army G3 Air Briefing Rpt, 10 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 9 Feb 51; I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

²⁸ I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; I Corps Opn Dir 44 (Operation PACEMAKER), 9 Feb 51.

²⁹ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 10 Feb 51; I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Rad, MCN 34233, CTF 95 to CTG 95.1, 9 Feb 51; Rad, MCN 34279, CTE 95.14 to CTG 95.1, 9 Feb 51; Rad, MCN 34332, CTG 95.1 to CTE 95.14, 9 Feb 51.

Yongdungp'o road an hour ahead of schedule. Under clearing skies, Task Force Allen moved into the Kimpo peninsula in two columns promptly at noon. The column on the east aimed first for Kimpo airfield due north, then for the road leading northwest along the lower bank of the Han. The column on the west pushed up the center of the peninsula. The east force occupied the airfield without a contest in midafternoon, and by nightfall both columns were well up the peninsula, eight miles above the Inch'on-Yongdungp'o road. One machine gun position, a short fire fight with the tail of an enemy column withdrawing across the frozen Han, twelve stragglers captured, and a little long range fire were the only evidences of the North Korean I Corps.³⁰

Behind Task Force Allen the 24th, 35th, and attached ROK 15th Regiments of the 25th Division moved to the Han between Kimpo airfield and the edge of Yongdungp'o. In the only brush with enemy forces, a South Korean patrol that moved across the ice into the lower edge of Seoul was chased back by small arms fire. On the corps right, the 15th and 7th Infantry Regiments of the 3d Division joined Task Force Meyer at the Han, moving onto the high ground between Yongdungp'o and Route 55. The only contact was an exchange of fire with enemy forces in position on the north bank of the river.³¹

On the opposite corps flank, the 25th Division's reconnaissance company and the Eighth Army Ranger company had moved westward onto the cape holding Inch'on in company with Task Force Allen's noontime advance above the Inch'on-Yongdungp'o road. Neither the Rangers, moving along the southern shore of the cape, nor the reconnaissance troops, heading directly for Inch'on, met resistance. The reconnaissance company entered the city at 1700, almost simultaneously with eighty ROK marines sent ashore in three small powerboats by Task Force 95. As suspected, the North Korean garrison was gone.³²

The Rangers found a small spot of resistance on the 11th on a ridge a mile south of Inch'on. The Rangers and some of the reconnaissance troops eliminated it early in the afternoon. Task Force Allen meanwhile resumed clearing the Kimpo peninsula on the morning of the 11th, its troops in the van reaching the tip before noon. Immediately after General Allen reported the peninsula clear, General Milburn dissolved the task force and returned its components to their parent units now consolidating along the Han.³³

³⁰ I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Air Briefing Rpt, 11 Feb 51.

³¹ I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

³² Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entries 1600 and 1850, 10 Feb 51; Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Field, United States Naval Operations, Korea, p. 324.

³³ I Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

The IX Corps Finds a Bridgehead

IX Corps gains from 5 through 8 February were slow and short. The resistance emulated that encountered by the I Corps, but the terrain was much rougher. Methodical coverage of the ground consumed considerable time. As of the 8th, General Moore nevertheless believed his corps could reach the Han in a reasonable length of time.³⁴

Under a wet sky on the 9th, Moore's forces met decidedly stiffer resistance, including counterattacks that forced some corps units into short withdrawals. In sharp contrast to the virtual disappearance of enemy forces before the I Corps on that date, the Chinese opposite the IX Corps apparently planned to retain a bridgehead below the Han. The bridgehead area as defined by Moore's forces on the 9th and 10th was about fifteen miles wide, its west anchor located on the Han nine miles north of Kyongan-ni, its east anchor on the river four miles below Yangp'yong. The U-shaped forward edge dipped four to seven miles below the Han across a string of prominent heights between those points.³⁵

By holding this position the Chinese could prevent IX Corps observation of the Yangp'yong area, already recognized as the possible starting point of an enemy attack down the Han valley. This theory gained support on the 10th when in clearing afternoon weather air observers sighted large numbers of enemy troops moving east on Route 2 along the north bank of the Han immediately behind the bridgehead area.³⁶

Operation Roundup

As THUNDERBOLT forces came up to the Han on the 10th, General Almond's ROUNDUP operation was in its sixth day. Although the advance started in the THUNDERBOLT pattern, the harsh mountains ahead of the X Corps and ROK III Corps inhibited a complete ground search such as the I and IX Corps were making. In the X Corps zone, the ROK 5th and 8th Divisions advanced in multiple columns astride the best roads, tracks, or trails permitting passage through the convoluted ground. The ROK troops climbed the higher ridges only when necessary to reduce an enemy position. The main routes for the ROK 8th were Route 29 and a mountain road-actually a poor stretch of Route 2- reaching west from Route 29 at a point three miles above Hoengsong. (Map 21) The ROK 5th's principal paths followed the upstream traces of two small rivers east of Route 29. Physical contact between columns was rare, especially in the ROK 8th Division zone where the columns diverged as they proceeded north and northwest.

³⁴ Conference Notes, Conf Between Eighth Army Commander and Corps Commanders at Tempest Tac, 8 Feb 51.

³⁵ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; IX Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

³⁶ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 10 Feb 51; IX Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

After three days Almond perceived that the attack on Hongch'on was as much a battle against terrain as against enemy opposition. Resistance did stiffen after an easy opening day, but the defending forces stayed to the tops of hills and allowed the South Koreans to bring down heavy artillery concentrations and to maneuver around them. The ROK assault forces, in Almond's estimation, had gained confidence over the three days, substantially from the presence and support of the American artillery and tanks. As of the 8th the success of the advance thus appeared largely to depend on overcoming terrain limitations on infantry maneuver, tank movement, and artillery forward displacement.³⁷

Against the combination of enemy hilltop defenses and difficult terrain, the two ROK divisions by 8 February had moved three to six miles northwest, north, and northeast of Hoengsong. Almond decided on the 8th that the ROK 8th Division's main effort to envelop Hongch'on from the west could be eased by committing another division. Currently, one of the 8th Division's regiments was moving north astride Route 29 while the other two were pushing through rough ridges to the northwest to cut Route 24. If Almond set another force in the center to move up Route 29, the ROK 8th could make its enveloping move in full strength.³⁸

Almond mistrusted his own reserve division, the ROK 2d, still weak from losses in the Chinese New Year's offensive. He chose not to reduce the strength of the 2d or 7th Division defenses along the line of departure, and he could not use the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. On 4 February General Ridgway had notified him that the airborne troops were scheduled to be taken off the line and that he was not to give them an offensive role.³⁹

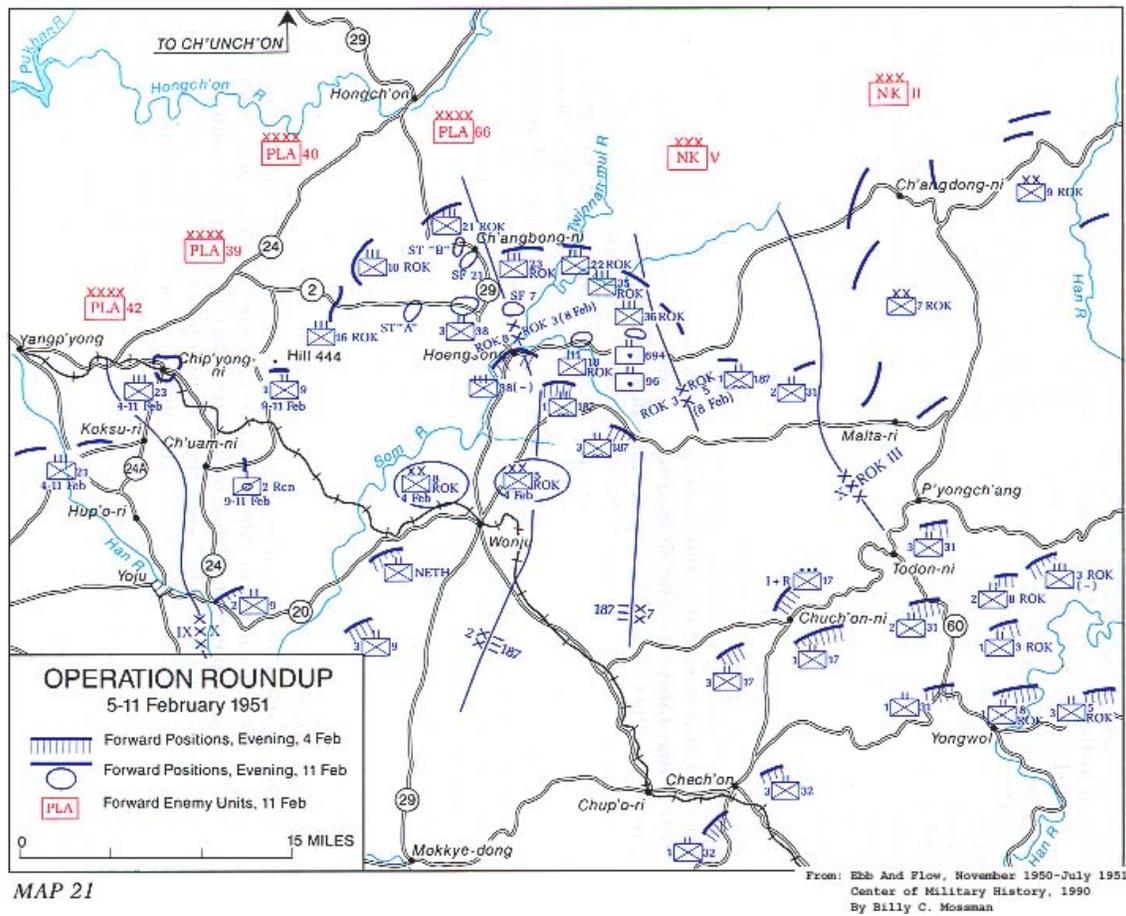
On the 8th Almond asked Ridgway for the ROK 3d Division, then in ROK III Corps reserve. Ridgway hesitated to take General Yu's only reserve. On the other hand, Yu's assault divisions were reporting good progress through light to moderate resistance. Moving astride Route 60 from P'yongch'ang toward Ch'angdong-ni, seventeen miles to the north, the ROK 7th had advanced one regiment within three miles of the latter town. On the corps right, the ROK 9th had moved above Chong-son through the upper Han valley for almost twenty miles. Since Yu could get help from the U.S. 7th Division, whose 31st Regiment was now following the ROK 7th Division above P'yongch'ang, Ridgway agreed to the transfer of the ROK 3d for the duration of Operation ROUNDUP, and Almond

³⁷ X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Conference Notes, Conf Between Eighth Army Commander and Corps Commanders at Tempest Tac, 8 Feb 51.

³⁸ X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

³⁹ Ibid.; Eighth Army SS Rpt, Office of the CG, Feb 51, Incl 4.

instructed the division to be in position for an advance above Hoengsong on the morning of the 11th.⁴⁰



Map 21. Operation ROUNDUP, 5-11 February 1951

While Almond was arranging to assist the ROK 8th Division's northwestward swing, a greater problem arose east of Route 29. On 7 February the ROK 5th Division, then advancing with two regiments forward, had encountered a North Korean force estimated at four thousand. The division commander planned to eliminate the enemy group on the 8th by bringing up his reserve regiment on the left for an attack to the east concurrent with attacks to the north and west by the center and right regiments. But his plan was spoiled when the right regiment, the ROK 27th, was hit on the 8th by hard North Korean attacks from the northwest

⁴⁰ X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Conference Notes, Conf Between Eighth Army Commander and Corps Commanders at Tempest Tac, 8 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 7 Feb 51; X Corps OI 99, 8 Feb 51.

and northeast. One battalion was scattered, and the remainder of the regiment was forced to withdraw.⁴¹

The regiment continued to receive attacks until the early morning hours of the 9th when the North Koreans pulled away to the northwest. The alarming note was that some or all of these forces had come out of the ROK III Corps zone. The North Korean II Corps apparently was shifting forces westward to join the V Corps in opposing the X Corps.⁴²

General Almond was obliged to prevent further incursion on his right if the envelopment of Hongch'on was to succeed. On the 10th he directed the ROK 5th Division to advance and establish blocking positions facing northeast near the corps boundary generally on the ground held by the ROK 27th Regiment when it was attacked, some thirteen miles northeast of Hoengsong. Along with this move, he ordered the U.S. 7th Division to send a battalion northwest out of the area above P'yongch'ang toward a ground objective sixteen miles due east of Hoengsong. This advance, he intended, would drive enemy forces located near the corps boundary into the path of the ROK 5th Division's attack. Almond also ordered a battalion of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team to move into position nine miles east of Hoengsong to deepen the east flank blocking effort at the right rear of the ROK 5th Division.⁴³

The ROK 3d Division, assembling just east of Hoengsong, was now to become the right arm of the maneuver against Hongch'on. Behind the protection of the ROK 5th Division to the east, the ROK 3d was to move north in two columns through the heights east of Route 29 to a point due east of Hongch'on. There the right column was to face east in blocking positions while the left column turned west toward the town. Both moves, the ROK 5th Division's blocking effort at the right and the ROK 3d's attack to the north, were to begin at noon on the 11th.⁴⁴

Support Force 7 was now to support the ROK 3d Division. General Almond directed the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team to place its 674th Field Artillery Battalion in direct support of the ROK 5th Division and ordered the 96th Field Artillery Battalion, a corps unit previously assigned to reinforce the fires of Support Force 7, to switch its reinforcement to the 674th.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 7 and 8 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Briefing for CG, 8 Feb 51.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 8, 9, and 10 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Entry 1305, 11 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Briefing for CG, 11 Feb 51; X Corps OI 101 and 102, 10 Feb 51.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ 45 X Corps OI 100, 9 Feb 51, and 01101, 10 Feb 51, Annex B (Arty).

Meanwhile, amid the adjustments in the X Corps zone between 8 and 11 February, the ROK III Corps continued to gain ground. The ROK 7th Division fought through Ch'angdong-ni and by evening of the 11th was echeloned left in regimental positions oriented north and northwest from three miles above Ch'angdong-ni to seven miles below town. On the corps right, the ROK 9th Division pushed nine more miles up the Han valley, making contact with the ROK I Corps' Capital Division in the high peaks rising east of the Han. Resistance was light on the 8th and 9th but stiffened over the next two days when General Yu's forces ran into parts of the North Korean 31st Division. Obviously, not all of the II Corps had shifted west into the X Corps zone.⁴⁶

The ROK I Corps, moving up the east coast under General Ridgway's 2 February order to seize Kangnung, more than achieved its objective. With naval gunfire support from the Task Force 95 contingent in the Sea of Japan, and against fainthearted opposition by the 69th Brigade, a unit of the North Korean III Corps that disappeared altogether on the 8th, the Capital Division advanced in consistently long and rapid strides. In the Taebaek heights rising west of the coastal road, one regiment by evening of the 11th held positions five miles above Route 20, which meandered west and southwest out of Kangnung to Wonju. The remainder of the division moving over the coastal road occupied Kangnung, then Chumunjin eleven miles farther north and at nightfall on the 11th had forces in position three miles above the latter town.⁴⁷

Gains in the X Corps zone remained much shorter. East of Route 29, the ROK 3d Division by dark on 11 February advanced through light opposition to positions five miles above Hoengsong. Next east, the ROK 5th Division reoriented and moved through moderate resistance within four miles of its east flank blocking positions. The 1st Battalion, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, meanwhile went into the position designed to place it at the right rear of the ROK 5th Division; from the P'yongch'ang area the 2d Battalion, 31st Infantry, easily seized its terrain objective to the northwest in the effort to drive North Korean forces into the ROK 5th Division's path. The South Koreans, however, were yet some distance from their objectives.⁴⁸

On and west of Route 29, the ROK 8th Division found lighter resistance, enemy forces tending to withdraw before actually obliged to do so. By nightfall on the

⁴⁶ Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 8, 9, 10, and 11 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Briefing for CG, 9, 10, 11, and 12 Feb 51.

⁴⁷ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 11 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Briefing for CG, 12 Feb 51.

⁴⁸ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 9, 10, and 11 Feb 51; Eighth Army PORs 638, 639, and 640, 10 Feb 51, and PORs 641, 642, and 643, 11 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Briefing for CG, 10 and 11 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Entry 2115, 11 Feb 51.

11th the 21st Regiment stood astride Route 29 nine miles north of Hoengsong. To the west, the 10th and then the 16th Regiments held positions ten miles northwest of Hoengsong along the crest of the mountains between Hoengsong and Route 24. A three-mile gap separated the 21st and 10th Regiments, and about a mile of open space stood between the 10th and 16th.⁴⁹

Two miles behind the 21st, the tanks and infantry of Support Team B, which had been attached to the ROK regiment, were assembled along Route 29. Another mile down the road, the infantry and artillery of Support Force 21 occupied positions near the town of Ch'angbongni. Below Support Force 21, the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry, on General Almond's order had moved up from Hoengsong into a blocking position at the junction of Route 29 and the mountain road leading west. Support Team A, whose tanks and infantry were attached to the 16th Regiment, was two miles farther out on the mountain road. Still farther out, between Support Team A and the front of the 16th, which lay across the mountain road, were the ROK 20th and 50th Field Artillery Battalions and the command posts of both the 10th and 16th Regiments.⁵⁰

The nearest of the 2d Division defenses around Chip'yong-ni now stood four miles southwest of the 16th Regiment. After securing Chip'yong-ni before the opening of Operation ROUNDUP, the 23d Infantry had established a perimeter around the town, and Colonel Freeman had run patrols east, west, and north. The patrol encounters with enemy forces were mostly minor, but by 9 February one particularly strong position was discovered on Hill 444 some four miles east of Chip'yong-ni. On the 9th Freeman sent a battalion east, and the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry, came north from the Yoju area to reduce the enemy strongpoint. The latter battalion occupied the height on the 11th and thus held the 2d Division position closest to the ROK 8th Division.⁵¹

The Newest Army Estimate

Given continued reports of eastward Chinese shifts and taking them as clear signs of an imminent enemy offensive in the west central region, General Ridgway late on the 11th instructed General Almond to patrol but not to attempt further advances toward Route 24 in either the 2d Division or ROK 8th Division zones until the IX Corps had reduced the enemy's Han bridgehead below Yangp'yong. To move forward while the IX Corps was still held up could isolate

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ X Corps Comd Rpt, Feb 51, Book of Inclosures, Ind 2, The Battle of Hoengsong; Ltr, Col Edwin J. Messinger, CO 9th Inf, to CG 2d Div, 16 Feb 51, sub: Report of Investigation, with Incls 1 and 2; Testimony Before the Eighth Army IG by Maj George Kessler, KMAG Advisor to G1 and G4, ROK 8th Div, hereafter cited as Kessler Testimony (with overlays), 15 Feb 51.

⁵¹ Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 11 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Feb 51, Book of Inclosures, Incl 1, Battle of Chip'yong-ni.

and overextend Almond's leftmost units in the area where the 39th, 40th, 42d, and 66th Armies were obviously massing.⁵²

In view of an imminent enemy attack, Ridgway also expressed concern over Almond's complex organization for battle in Operation ROUNDUP, referring to the intertwined command and control arrangements among corps headquarters, the ROK assault units, the American support forces, and the latter's' parent units on the line of departure. Ridgway was not sure that these measures would provide the tight control needed to prevent a confused intermingling of units during an enemy attack.⁵³

At the time Ridgway called Almond's leftmost units to a halt, he had in hand one of the better intelligence estimates prepared by his headquarters since he assumed command. Always seeking to improve intelligence, he had directed the preparation of this analysis, stipulating that it contain a survey of enemy strategic capabilities as well as tactical courses of action.⁵⁴

Stimulating Ridgway's unusual demand for a strategic estimate at field army level was the yet unexplained lull in Chinese offensive operations that had set in on 4 January after the Eighth Army gave up Seoul and that now had lasted a month. The question was whether the lull represented a changing strategy, from one of destroying UNC forces to one of containing them, or was merely the result of logistical problems. (North Korean influence in shaping enemy strategy obviously was discounted.)⁵⁵

Col. Robert G. Fergusson, the acting G-2 who prepared the estimate, told Ridgway that the long lull was purely the consequence of Chinese resupply, transportation, and reinforcement difficulties. The slogan repeatedly given in statements by Chinese government officials continued to be to drive UNC forces out of Korea. Fergusson predicted that once the logistical problems were sufficiently relieved-and that time appeared to be near-the campaign to push the United Nation Command off the peninsula would be resumed with full acceptance of any further heavy personnel losses and supply problems that might occur.⁵⁶

⁵² Rad, GX-2-1214 KGOO, CG Eighth Army to CG X Corps, 11 Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 11 Feb 51.

⁵³ Rad, G-2-1174, CG Eighth Army to CG X Corps, 11 Feb 51.

⁵⁴ On 1 February Ridgway personally told President Rhee that both U.S. and ROK intelligence were inadequate and asked Rhee to take all possible steps to improve the ROK product. See Eighth Army SS Rpt, Office of the CG, Feb 51, Nar and Incl 1. See also Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51.

⁵⁵ Eighth Army G2, Estimate of Enemy Situation, 10 Feb 51.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The concentration of Chinese forces, Fergusson pointed out, was in the area bordered on the northwest by the Pukhan River and on the southeast by Route 24 between Yangp'yong and Hongch'on. From southwest to northeast, the concentration included the 42d, 39th, 40th, and 66th Armies, whose total strength was around 110,000. He was not sure that all of these units had completed their shifts to the west central region.⁵⁷ But with the enemy mass centering there, the most likely paths of the next enemy advance were down the Han valley toward Yoju and down Route 29 toward Wonju, with both paths then turning toward the same deep objective, Ch'ungju. The advance might include deep sweeps to the southwest to envelop the I and IX Corps.⁵⁸

Because the enemy's problem of resupply would progressively worsen as supply lines lengthened during an advance, Fergusson judged that a sustained Chinese drive was unlikely. More probable was a series of shallow enveloping maneuvers interspersed with halts for reorganization and resupply. He believed that the Chinese would not open an offensive until major units of IX Army Group moved down from the Wonsan area within reinforcing range. These, he estimated, could reach the central region no sooner than 15 February.⁵⁹

Fergusson was wrong in considering the arrival of IX Army Group units as a necessary condition and so was in error on the nearest date of a Chinese attack. But in measuring all other probabilities, he came remarkably close.

⁵⁷ It was on the 10th that air observers sighted eastward troop movements behind the enemy bridgehead in the IX Corps zone.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.