

CHAPTER XIV

The Battle for Hoengsong

Much along the lines drawn out for General Ridgway by Colonel Fergusson on 10 February, the XIII Army Group commander opened an attack on the night of 11 February toward Hoengsong. In shifting forces eastward he had moved the 66th Army from Kap'yong to Hongch'on, whence one division struck south along Route 29. From start points near Route 24 between Hongch'on and Chip'yong-ni, a division of the 40th Army and one of the 39th Army joined the push on Hoengsong by attacking southeast.¹ In the path of these initial attacks lay the ROK 8th Division. (Map 22)

The ROK 8th Division Destroyed

Moving below Hongch'on astride Route 29, the 198th Division, 66th Army, hit the front of the ROK 21st Regiment about 2030, then sent forces around the regiment's flanks, mainly on the west through the gap between the 21st and the ROK 10th Regiment. While the 198th swung behind the 21st, the 120th Division, 40th Army, penetrated the line of the 10th Regiment, and the 117th Division, 39th Army, pushed through the left flank of the 16th.²

When word of the opening attack reached ROK 8th Division headquarters in Hoengsong, division commander Brig. Gen. Choi Yong Hee ordered the 21st Regiment to make a short withdrawal and instructed Support Team B to move back down Route 29 and join Support Force 21 at Ch'angbong-ni. The armored team reached the artillery force about 2200. Some of the 198th Division forces who had swept around the 21st meanwhile raced down both sides of Route 29, bypassed the American position at Ch'angbong-ni, and blocked the road near a bridge three miles farther south.³

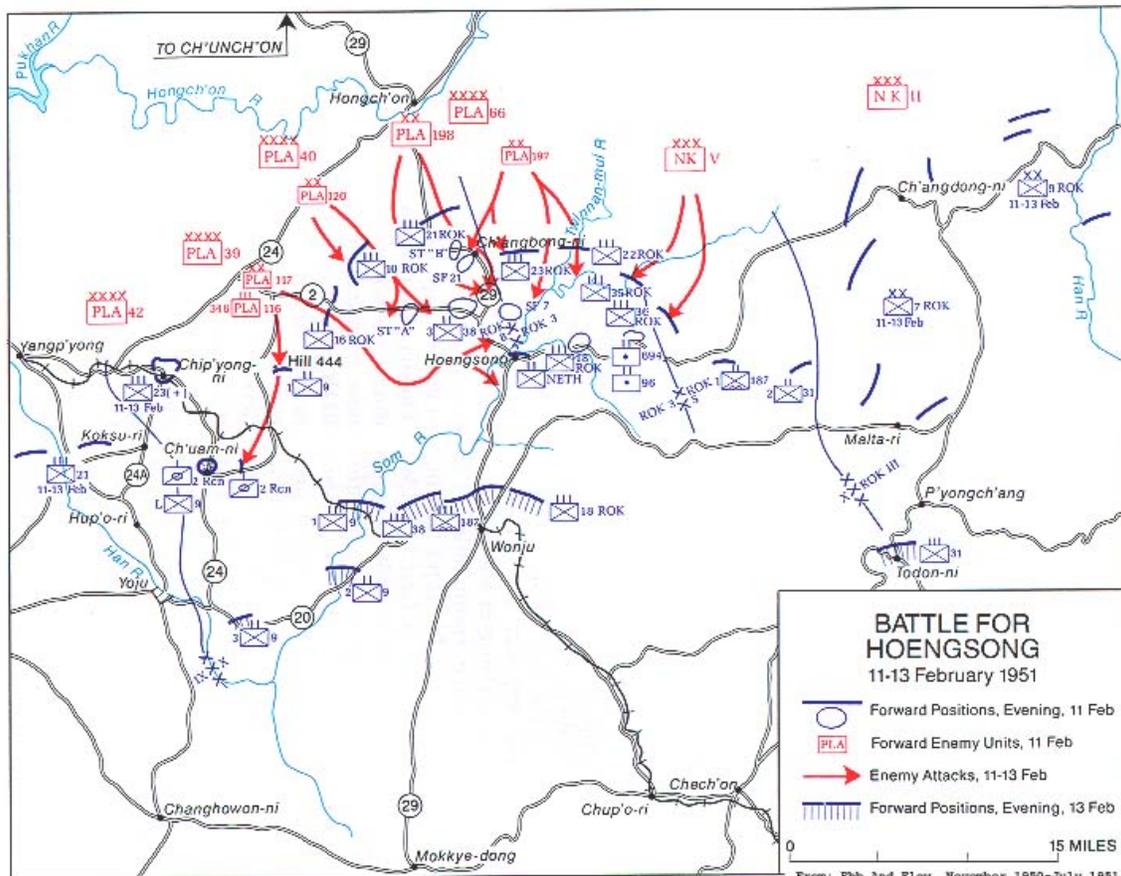
The 120th Division, about the same time, pushed more strength through the ROK 10th Regiment, some troops turning in behind both the 10th and 16th, others striking southeast toward the mountain road leading west from Route 29. Around midnight the latter overran the command posts of the 10th and 16th Regiments

¹ X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong.

² Ibid.; Ltr, CG Eighth Army to CINCFE, 1 Mar 51, sub: Performance of the 5th and 8th ROK Divisions, 11-13 February 1951.

³ X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; Ltr, Lt Col Harold Maixner, CO 3d Bn, 38th Inf, to CO 38th Inf, 15 Feb 51, sub: Summation of Action of 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry, During the Period 11-12 February 1951 (hereafter cited as Maixner Ltr); Ltr, Lt Col William P. Keleher, CO 1st Bn, 38th Inf, to CO 38th Inf, 14 Feb 51, sub: Summation of Action of 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry During the Period 11-12 February 1951 (hereafter cited as Keleher Ltr).

on the mountain road and cut off the ROK 20th and 50th Field Artillery Battalions and Support Team A, also on the road, by establishing strong blocks between the support units and Route 29. Below the 120th, the 117th Division reinforced its frontal attack on the 16th Regiment and deepened its penetration of the regiment's left flank, sending forces eastward through the ground below the mountain road directly toward Hoengsong.⁴



MAP 22
Map 22. Battle for Hoengsong, 11-13 February 1951

By 0100 on 12 February communications were out between ROK 8th Division headquarters and all regiments as well as between each regiment and its subordinates. Boxed between frontal pressure and Chinese to the rear, the three regiments had started to withdraw; but with the main threads of control broken and the better routes of withdrawal blocked, units became separated and divided, and most were surrounded. The rearward move of those not trapped steadily disintegrated into individual efforts to escape.⁵

⁴ X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; Kessler Testimony, 15 Feb 51.

⁵ 5 X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; Ltr, CG Eighth Army to CINCFE, 1 Mar 51, sub: Performance of the 5th and 8th ROK Divisions, 11-12 Feb 51.

Members of the 21st Regiment straggled into the Support Force 21 perimeter at Ch'angbong-ni about 0115. The support force commander, Lt. Col. John W. Keith, Jr., reported the ROK withdrawal to Brig. Gen. Loyal M. Haynes, the 2d Division artillery commander, and asked permission to withdraw a little over three miles to a position he formerly had occupied just above the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry, at the junction of Route 29 and the mountain road leading west. He also requested that General Haynes ask the ROK 8th Division commander to stop the 21st Regiment's withdrawal until Keith got Support Force 21 and Support Team B in march order. Members of Keith's own infantry protection, Lt. Col. William P. Keleher's 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry, were at the time trying to collect the South Koreans and deploy them on the American perimeter, but with little success. Haynes contacted General Choi, but Choi was no longer in communication with the 21st Regiment and was, besides, under the impression that the 21st was making only the short withdrawal he had called for earlier. He did nothing. Haynes meanwhile hesitated to clear Keith's withdrawal without General Ruffner's approval. When he asked the division commander, Ruffner told him to check with the X Corps artillery commander.⁶

Ruffner's deference to corps emphasized the command and control arrangement for which General Ridgway had expressed concern the day before. As a matter of orders, and as an eventual matter of practice in controlling the artillery support forces, unity of command in Operation ROUNDUP was vested in corps headquarters, no lower. The arrangement worked well enough during the advance. But after the Chinese engineered the collapse of the ROK 8th Division, corps control inhibited the American commanders of support forces and of units on the line of departure in reacting rapidly. How much this inhibition assisted the Chinese is moot. Delays and piecemeal movements among the smaller American units nevertheless colored the course of withdrawal operations.

In one instance, Capt. Sherman D. Jones, the commander of Support Team A, scorned any need to get permission to withdraw and fought east over the blocked mountain road toward the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry. He withdrew a little after midnight amid uncontrolled ROK vehicles, guns, and troops and under heavy fire from Chinese small arms, machine guns, rocket launchers, and mortars. The last A team troops to survive the move reached the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry, about dawn. Losses included two tanks. Jones, the tank platoon leader, and five others were wounded, and nearly a hundred fifty men were missing.⁷

⁶ Ltr, Hq 2d Div Arty to CG 2d Div, 16 Feb 51, sub: Responsibility for Losses of Personnel and Equipment of Support Force 21 (hereafter cited as 2d Div Arty Ltr), Incls 1 and 7; Ltr, Maj Warren D. Hodges, S3, 38th Inf, to CG 2d Div, 17 Feb 51, sub: Report on Activities, 12-13 Feb 51 (hereafter cited as Hodges Ltr); Keleher Ltr.

⁷ Ltr, Col Edwin J. Messinger, CO 9th Inf, to CG 2d Div, 16 Feb 51, sub: Report of Investigation, with Incls 1 and 2.

Similarly, few ROK 8th Division troops found their way to safety. Most remained encircled in the mountains and were eventually killed or captured. On 13 February, after straggler lines were set and after General Almond moved the division into corps reserve at Chup'o-ri, west of Chech'on, the division strength stood at 263 officers and slightly over 3,000 men, of whom about half were division service troops. Casualties, either dead or missing, stood at 323 officers (among them the commander and entire staff of the 10th Regiment, the executive officer of the 16th Regiment, seven battalion commanders, and thirty company commanders) and 7,142 men. Division equipment losses included 14 artillery pieces, 5 antitank guns, 68 trucks, 249 radios, 87 mortars, 137 rocket launchers, 164 machine guns, 102 automatic rifles, 2,389 carbines, and 4,096 rifles.⁸

Support Force 21

Earlier, as the ROK 8th Division began to fall back after midnight on 11 February, the 66th Army commander widened his advance below Hongch'on, sending the 197th Division south through the ground five miles east of Route 29 against the ROK 3d Division. In the mold of the attacks along and west of Route 29, infiltrating Chinese attacked the command post of the 23d Regiment and of one battalion of the 22d after engaging the South Koreans with heavy frontal assaults. Before the Chinese could get a trap fully set, the two ROK regiments withdrew to a position about three miles northeast of Hoengsong.⁹

A finger of the 197th, about three hundred men, thrust southwest toward Ch'angbong-ni during the attack and near 0230 on the 12th hit Company A, 38th Infantry, holding the northeast sector of Support Force 21's perimeter. The company stood its ground but remained under fire. Though still waiting for permission to withdraw, Colonel Keith meanwhile began to put his artillery units in march order.¹⁰

Keith received clearance to move back about 0245, an hour and a half after he asked for it- good time considering the route his request and its answer had taken. General Haynes, after General Ruffner instructed him to check with corps,

⁸ 8 X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; Ltr, Office of the IG, KMAG, to IG Eighth Army, 22 Feb 51, sub: Losses Sustained in Action North of Wonju, 11-13 February 1951.

⁹ Eighth Army G3 Jnl, Sum, 12 Feb 51; *ibid.*, Entries 0600 and 1550, 12 Feb 51; X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong, and Incl 4, Action of the 11th ROK FA Battalion.

¹⁰ X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; Ltr, Lt Col Milton G. Norum, Exec Off 38th Inf, to CG 2d Div, 15 Feb 51, sub: Losses of Materiel and Personnel (hereafter cited as Norum Ltr); Keleher Ltr, Ltr, 1st Lt George W. Gardner, CO Co A, 38th Inf, to CO 1st Bn, 38th Inf, 16 Feb 51, sub: Summary of Combat Action of Company "A," 38th Inf Regiment, During 11-12 February 1951 (hereafter cited as Gardner Ltr).

consulted Col. William P. Ennis, Jr., the corps artillery commander, around 0130. Colonel Ennis, in turn, spoke to Col. William J. McCaffrey of the corps chief of staff's office, who asked General Almond himself. Almond approved the withdrawal, and his word passed back from McCaffrey to Ennis to Haynes to Keith. Almond was under the impression, however, perhaps because of the several hands through which Keith's request had passed, that Support Force 21 would withdraw to Hoengsong, not just to a position near the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry.¹¹

Keith started his withdrawal about 0300. Ahead of the main body, two tanks and two squads of infantry from Support Team B moved to secure the bridge three miles south, just above the area to be occupied, unaware that the Chinese had blocked Route 29 near the bridge and that they now had organized additional fire blocks above and below the crossing, the latter actually in the area Keith intended to occupy.¹²

Chinese machine gunners overlooking route 29 from the east harassed the tank-infantry team the moment it started south. The infantry hugged the tanks for protection, as did a group of South Korean troops trying to stay with the American force. A mile down the road, an explosion under the second tank brought 2d Lt. William M. Mace, the platoon leader, out of the turret even as the tank, undamaged, continued to move. Machine gun fire from the left kept Mace from getting back inside, and a grenade, apparently thrown from the ditch on the east side of the road, then blew him off the tank, although without wounding him. His and the leading tank continued down the road, neither crew aware that Mace was no longer with them.¹³

The two tanks gradually outdistanced the infantry that had started with them but moved no more than another mile before the leading tank was hit by a rocket launcher round and ran off the steep edge of the road and overturned. The following tank attempted to pass but was hit in the engine compartment by a grenade or mortar round and capsized off the opposite side of the road. The two crews fled into the hills to the west, then turned south toward the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry.¹⁴

¹¹ Ltr, Brig Gen George C. Stewart, ADC 2d Div, to CG 2d Div, 19 Feb 51, sub: Investigation of Heavy Losses of Material and Personnel in 2d Division Task Force Operating in Support of 8th ROK Division (hereafter cited as Stewart Ltr); Testimony Before Eighth Army IG by Col William P. Ennis, Jr., CG X Corps Arty (hereafter cited as Ennis Testimony), 16 Feb 51; Hodges Ltr; X Corps Arty S3 Jnl, Entry 6, 12 Feb 51.

¹² X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibit C-11; 2d Div Arty Ltr, Incl 1.

¹³ Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibit C-11.

¹⁴ Ibid., Exhibits C-11 and C-12.

To the rear, following the same westward drift to escape fire coming in from left of the road, Lieutenant Mace, the two infantry squads, and a number of South Koreans took cover in the ground on the right. The group moved south after daylight toward the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry, but became scattered during several small skirmishes with Chinese. The survivors, including Mace, finally reached the 3d Battalion near 0930.¹⁵

Behind the scattered tank-infantry team, Colonel Keith's main column received heavy small arms and machine gun fire from the heights east of Route 29 while it formed and stretched out on the road below the support force perimeter. As Battery A of the 503d Field Artillery Battalion, the leading artillery unit, started to get its guns in column, a Chinese raiding party dashed onto the road from the east, captured the battery commander, first sergeant, and several men, and took them back into the hills. Chinese gunners meanwhile concentrated fire on vehicles, damaging many and killing or wounding several drivers.¹⁶

By 0400 the Chinese had stopped Keith's column, actually before it had got a full start. Infantry and artillery troops at the head of the column formed a line facing east along the road and returned fire while to the north Company A, assigned to be rear guard, redeployed facing northwest, north, and northeast. Enemy forces reengaged the company, but with help from the remaining two tanks of Support Team B the rear guard troops kept the Chinese from rolling up the column.¹⁷

Colonel Keith put some artillery pieces back in action near dawn and laid direct fire on the ridges to the east. Colonel Keleher then deployed two rifle companies, one into the heights on each side of the road, while troops on the road shoved disabled vehicles out of the way and rounded up replacements for missing drivers of others. Stubborn resistance slowed Keleher's infantry east of the road, but the support force was moving before 0600.¹⁸

At the tail of the column, Company A backed out of position just after the skies lightened but had to fight a running engagement with Chinese who followed. As the company prepared to move, the commander, 1st Lt. George W. Gardner, sighted three 155-mm. howitzers attached to their M-5 tractors, a full ammunition truck, and several jeeps and trailers, all unattached, in a roadside paddy southwest of his position. Gardner's executive officer located at least one more howitzer, still in firing position. For reasons not clear, Battery A, 503d Field

¹⁵ Ibid., Exhibits C-11, C-14, C-15, and C-16.

¹⁶ 2d Div Arty Ltr, Incls 1 and 7; Keleher Ltr.

¹⁷ Ibid.; Gardner Ltr.

¹⁸ 2d Div Arty Ltr, Incl 7; Keleher Ltr.

Artillery Battalion, to whom the weapons and vehicles belonged, had withdrawn with only one tube.¹⁹

Gardner had no men who could drive the tractors and had neither time nor explosives to destroy them or the howitzers. Company A fought briefly from the artillery position, Gardner's men using the machine guns mounted on the artillery vehicles until the ammunition was gone, then left the wealth of weapons, artillery ammunition, and vehicles to the Chinese.²⁰

Gardner found the fifth weapon of Battery A, 503d Field Artillery Battalion, on the road where Lieutenant Mace's two tanks had been knocked out and where the main body of the support force also had come under heavy mortar and machine gun fire. Among several vehicles disabled by the fire was the tractor pulling the 155-mm. howitzer. Gardner's men had to manhandle the abandoned gun off the road to permit the two tanks with them to pass.²¹

The support force received more fire at the bridge, another mile south, and in the area just below the crossing where Colonel Keith had intended to redeploy. As Keith's column pushed through each fire block, Chinese closed in on the road behind it and pressed hard against Gardner's rear guard. Keith, judging it impossible to establish positions as planned after coming under fire below the bridge, moved on to join the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry, not far beyond, and got the tail of the column inside the 3d Battalion perimeter about 1000. No careful muster was made after entering, but support force casualties so far appeared to exceed four hundred. Company A had suffered the highest rate, losing two officers and around a hundred ten men in its rearguard action. Keith, after discovering that five 155-mm. howitzers and one 105-mm. howitzer had been left behind, relayed a request to division for air strikes on the weapons.²²

From the Road Junction to Hoengsong

The 3d Battalion, by the time Support Force 21 arrived, had been under fire and periodic assaults from the north and northwest for some five hours. After clearing with regimental commander Coughlin at his headquarters in Hoengsong

¹⁹ Gardner Ltr; Ltr, Lt Col William P. Keleher, CO 1st Bn, 38th Inf, to CO 38th Inf, 15 Feb 51, sub: Supplement to Summation of Action of the 1st Bn, 38th Inf, During the Period 11-12 February 1951. Gardner's executive officer actually reported finding two howitzers. Since Battery A, 503d Field Artillery Battalion, had only five pieces and had taken one south, the count between Gardner and his executive officer was off by one. The 15th Field Artillery Battalion later reported the loss of one 105-mm. howitzer during the withdrawal from Ch'angbong-ni. Perhaps this weapon was one of those reported by Gardner's executive officer.

²⁰ Gardner Ltr.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.; 2d Div G3 Jnl, Entry 57, 12 Feb 51.

(although Coughlin really had no authority over Support Force 21), 3d Battalion commander Lt. Col. Harold Maixner deployed Keith's artillery and Keleher's infantry to strengthen the perimeter against the assaults, which were growing stronger. Withdrawing the combined force to Hoengsong was a logical alternative except that the 3d Battalion remained under X Corps orders to hold the Route 29-mountain road junction.²³

A second situation now complicated a withdrawal to Hoengsong. By the time Keith and Keleher joined Maixner, those forces of the 117th Division moving east below the mountain road reached Route 29 and blocked it between Hoengsong and the road junction three miles north. Colonel Coughlin discovered the new block when in response to a request from division artillery he sent the 38th's headquarters security platoon and a platoon from the regimental tank company north out of Hoengsong to help Support Force 21 get through the blocks below Ch'angbong-ni. The two platoons ran into the Chinese position a mile above Hoengsong and withdrew after losing a tank and half the infantry. Coughlin placed mortar and artillery fire on the enemy position and called in air strikes, the first reaching the target around 1030. He also asked for the return of the 2d Battalion from division reserve in Wonju with a view to sending it forward to clear the road, but General Ruffner chose not to release it.²⁴

Ruffner, at the same time, advised Coughlin to be ready to assume control of Support Force 21 and get it back to Hoengsong. Coughlin recommended that the 3d Battalion also return whenever he received word to withdraw the support force, but his bid was futile. Denied use of the 2d and 3d Battalions, Coughlin faced the prospect of pulling the support force through the intervening roadblock without being able to do much more than he already had done to help. While he might have used the attached Netherlands battalion, currently deployed along the northern limits of Hoengsong, it was the main security force for the headquarters and artillery installations in and below town. In any case, Coughlin, was under the impression that changes in the Netherlands' assignment could come only from corps.²⁵

Around 1100 2d Division headquarters received instructions from General Almond to reconstitute the 38th as a regimental combat team with the 2d and 3d Battalions remaining in place until further orders. Almond lifted the restriction on the 2d Battalion not long after, but General Ruffner then took direct control of the unit. He alerted the battalion to be prepared to block a Chinese force, apparently from the 117th Division, observed earlier two miles southwest of Hoengsong. In transmitting Almond's reconstitution order to the forces at the road junction,

²³ Maixner Ltr; Hodges Ltr.

²⁴ X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong, and Ind 8, After Action Interview, 38th RCT; X Corps Arty S3 Jnl, Entry 11, 12 Feb 51; 2d Div G3 Jnl, Entry 28, 12 Feb 51; Norum Ltr.

²⁵ 2d Div G3 Jnl, Entry 49, 12 Feb 51; 2d Div Arty Ltr, Incl 1.

Ruffner directed Support Force 21 to withdraw to Hoengsong. Colonel Coughlin was to control the withdrawal, but with his use of the 2d and 3d Battalions still restricted, he was too weak to help the support force.²⁶

General Almond meanwhile learned of his misconception about Colonel Keith's movement when he asked his artillery officer, Colonel Ennis, for the current locations of both Support Force 21 and Support Force 7. The latter, Ennis reported, was three miles north of Hoengsong and a mile and a half east of Route 29 in the initial position taken to support the ROK 3d Division. Unaware that General Ruffner had just ordered Keith to continue his withdrawal, Ennis explained that Keith's force had joined the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry. Almond ordered both support forces to withdraw to Hoengsong immediately, fighting their way out if necessary. Ennis relayed the order through artillery channels around noon.²⁷

The prescience of Almond's order to Support Force 7 became clear in the afternoon. Earlier, sometime around 0900, the ROK 3d Division had tried to advance against the 197th Division but moved only a short distance before being hit hard by the Chinese unit. By 1300 both forward regiments of the ROK 3d were under attack, one surrounded. Both began to fight back toward Hoengsong. To the ROK 3d's right, the ROK 5th Division also started northeast during the morning toward its objectives near the corps boundary. But the assault regiments ran into hard counterattacks by the North Korean V Corps, which now appeared to be joining the advance on Hoengsong, and by early afternoon were withdrawing to escape being enveloped. With both ROK divisions falling back east of Route 29, their supporting artillery potentially faced a situation similar to that of Support Force 21.²⁸

Lt. Col. Barney D. White, the Support Force 7 commander, decided against withdrawing over the route he had used to reach his current position since it led west to the bridge on Route 29 where Keith's forces had come under fire. White had sent a reconnaissance party west to investigate, and it had been ambushed even before it reached the bridge. He notified corps headquarters that he would move due east to the Twinnan-mul River, which flowed southwest past the northern edge of Hoengsong, then follow a primitive road through the Twinnan-mul valley. The little-used road was ice coated and in poor shape, but White had engineers who could make hasty repairs. With no interference from the enemy,

²⁶ X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; 2d Div 63 Jul, Entries 59, 67, 71, and 74, 12 Feb 51.

²⁷ Ennis Testimony, 16 Feb 51.

²⁸ Eighth Army Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 12 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; X Corps PIR 139, 12 Feb 51; 2d Div G3 Jul, 12 Feb 51; 2d Div G2 Jnl, 12 Feb 51.

White got his column started at 1500 and pulled out his rear guard about two hours later.²⁹

At the same time, the 674th and 96th Field Artillery Battalions, which had been supporting the ROK 5th Division from positions six miles east of Hoengsong, moved to new firing positions four miles south. At the time, General Bowen, the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team commander and coordinator of these two artillery battalions, expected the ROK 5th Division to make a stand above the new artillery positions in defense of Hoengsong. The 1st Battalion of the combat team, which earlier had taken a blocking position below the ROK 5th, moved back with the artillery units.³⁰

Colonel Keith meanwhile led Support Force 21 south from the road junction just before noon, two companies of Colonel Keleher's infantry moving through the high ground on both sides of Route 29 to protect the motor column and remaining foot troops on the road. Both Support Team A and Support Team B remained with Colonel Maixner to help defend the perimeter which was still under assault. Mortar and artillery fire and air strikes arranged by Colonel Coughlin pounded the ridges ahead of the support force, but Keleher's men almost immediately ran into strong resistance and lost momentum after a mile. Keleher committed the remainder of his battalion, but it was not enough to revitalize his attack.³¹

About the time Keleher's attack stalled, word reached Colonel Coughlin that the 18th Regiment, ROK 3d Division, assembled about three miles east of Hoengsong, would send a battalion north astride Route 29 at 1400 to help open the road. General Almond had ordered this attack shortly after instructing the artillery support forces to withdraw. Support Team E (Company G, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, and a platoon from the 72d Tank Battalion), also assembled nearby, was to accompany the South Koreans. The assistant commander of the ROK 3d Division was to head the force, but Almond assigned the corps armored officer, Lt. Col. Jack F. Wilhm, to coordinate the organization and opening of the infantry-armor advance. Coughlin had no part in it at all.³²

The South Korean battalion was late getting started, then advanced only a half mile north of Hoengsong onto the first hills above the Twinnan-mul. Support Team E moved only as far as the river's lower bank. Observing the short

²⁹ Interv, Eighth Army IG with Lt Col Barney D. White, CO 49th FA Bn and SF 7; 49th FA Bn Unit Rpt no. 134, 12 Feb 51.

³⁰ X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong.

³¹ Keleher Ltr; Hodges Ltr; Norum Ltr.

³² Interv, Eighth Army IG with Lt Col Jack F. Wilhm, Actg Armored Off, X Corps; Norum Ltr; Hodges Ltr; Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibit C-1.

advance and halt, Coughlin's operations officer, Maj. Warren D. Hodges, sought out the South Korean commander and argued for continuing the advance. The ROK officer refused. His orders, he insisted, were to take the hills he now occupied and hold them only until dark. His one concession was that he would remain in position until the forces withdrawing from the road junction passed through.³³

Coughlin did not have the authority to order the South Korean-American force farther up Route 29, but he had finally regained his 3d Battalion to assist the withdrawal from the road junction. General Almond released the battalion from its blocking assignment at 1430.³⁴

Just before releasing the battalion Almond had discussed corps operations with General Ridgway, who flew into Almond's Wonju headquarters a little past noon. Almond announced that he now planned to give up Hoengsong and defend Wonju. His formal order issued late in the day called for the 2d Division, with the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team attached, to defend a long line which from an anchor on the west at Chip'yong-ni stretched out to the southeast and east, passing two miles north of Wonju and continuing nine miles beyond the town. In the right portion of the corps sector, the ROK 3d and 5th Divisions were to stand between Route 29 and the corps east boundary some seven miles farther north. Placing the South Koreans on this forward line would tie the X Corps to the left of the ROK III Corps, whose line now bulged out to the north far beyond the X Corps front. To back up the South Koreans and secure the corps east flank in depth, the 31st Infantry of General Ferenbaugh's 7th Division was to occupy positions at Todon-ni, a road junction four miles below P'yongch'ang. Ferenbaugh's 32d Infantry, still holding positions between Chech'on and Yongwol, would lend further depth, and the 17th Infantry, now scheduled to assemble in corps reserve near Wonju, could be committed to help.³⁵

To improve control, Almond during his talk with Ridgway requested that the ROK I Corps headquarters be attached to the X Corps to take charge of the ROK 3d and 5th Divisions. General Kim and his staff, by virtue of past service under Almond in northeastern Korea, were experienced in joint operations and were well acquainted with the X Corps staff. Ridgway approved. He arranged to have General Kim and a partial staff flown into the X Corps sector on the 13th and to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Stewart Ltr.

³⁵ Staff Sec Rpt, Office of the CG Eighth Army, Feb 51, Incl 12; Eighth Army G3 Jul, Sum, 12 Feb 51; *ibid.*, Entries 1416 and 1605, 12 Feb 51; X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; X Corps OI 104 (confirms oral instructions), 12 Feb 51.

have Kim's remaining staff follow by truck. The ROK Capital Division, in the meantime, was to pass to ROK III Corps control.³⁶

Colonel Coughlin, after receiving word of the 3d Battalion's release about 1600, instructed Colonel Maixner and Colonel Keleher to drive through the roadblock with the 1st Battalion attacking on the east side of the road, the 3d Battalion on the west, and the motor column between them. Maixner disengaged at the road junction and joined Keleher in the attack by 1800. The two battalions were able to move, but only at a costly creep. Chinese mortar, machine gun, and small arms fire meanwhile continued to punish the motor column. Coughlin's inability to assist with an attack north out of Hoengsong was clearly enfeebling the withdrawal.³⁷

A little after 1800 Colonel Wilhm, the corps armored officer, came into the 38th Infantry command post to notify Coughlin to take charge of all American troops in the Hoengsong area. Wilhm had got this word from corps when he called his headquarters to report the short South Korean advance above Hoengsong. The restriction to American forces prevented Coughlin from using the South Korean battalion to help his withdrawing forces, but he at least could employ Support Team E. He placed his regimental tank company commander in charge of the support team and ordered him to link up with the forces coming from the north. The tank company commander, spearheading with two of his own tanks, started the tank-infantry team up Route 29 within minutes.³⁸

Around 1900 Coughlin discovered troops of Support Force 7 to be moving through Hoengsong. Lt. Col. Baker, commanding the 2d Battalion, 17th Infantry, was directing his foot troops and the leading serial of artillery into an assembly southeast of town. Up to this moment, Coughlin had not known of Support Force 7's withdrawal through the Twinnan-mul valley, which had been worked out with corps through artillery channels. He had believed Colonel White's force to be somewhere behind his own on Route 29.³⁹

Under the corps order placing him in charge of American troops in Hoengsong, Coughlin now could use Support Force 7 to help the forces withdrawing over Route 29. He notified Colonel Baker (who was unaware of the new command arrangement until Coughlin told him) that the support force artillery should withdraw to Wonju but that Baker's infantry battalion would be sent north to help clear Route 29. Baker left Coughlin to give these instructions to Colonel White,

³⁶ X Corps Comd Rpt, Nar, Feb 51; Rad, GX-1-1287 KG, CG Eighth Army to C/S ROKA and CG X Corps, 12 Feb 51.

³⁷ Maixner Ltr; Keleher Ltr; Norum Ltr.

³⁸ Interv, Eighth Army IG with Wilhm; Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibit C-1.

³⁹ Ibid.; 49th FA Bn Unit Rpt no. 135, 13 Feb 51.

still northeast of town with the remainder of Support Force 7, and then to return to Coughlin's command post for further word on the attack north.⁴⁰

When Baker radioed Coughlin's instructions to Colonel White, he learned that a 155-mm. howitzer and its tractor had slipped off the road about a mile northeast of Hoengsong where the road was little more than an icy ledge in a steep ridge bordering the Twinnanmul. Considerable road work was needed at that point before the remainder of the motor column could continue.⁴¹

The ROK 3d and 5th Divisions, the latter being followed by forces of the North Korean V Corps, meanwhile were passing south through the area east of Hoengsong en route to their newly assigned defense line. Ahead of the South Koreans, General Bowen was pulling his infantry battalions and the 674th and 96th Field Artillery Battalions back to Wonju. A KMAG officer with the South Koreans passing nearest Hoengsong informed Colonel Baker that the enemy forces following the ROK 5th Division had cut the lateral road stretching eastward from Hoengsong which the leading troops of Support Force 7 had used to reach their assembly southeast of town. Although the cut was beyond the support force assembly, Baker began to pull the leading troops and trucks back into Hoengsong and reassemble them along Route 29 south of town. He was still shifting forces around 2200 when the remainder of Support Force 7 began to arrive from the northeast, and he had yet to return to Colonel Coughlin's command post for his attack order.⁴²

At that late hour an attack up Route 29 by Baker did not appear necessary. Suffering moderate casualties and losing one tank, Support Team E had fought forward for about a mile and a half and joined Coughlin's forces coming south around 2100. After the E team tanks turned around and took the lead, the combined force, though still receiving heavy fire from left and right and still obliged to attack Chinese positions bordering the road, was able to move south at a steady pace. By the time the force reached the position taken by the ROK battalion a half mile above Hoengsong, the South Koreans already had withdrawn to rejoin their division. But this premature departure seemed of no consequence. Before 2200 the long column began to pass behind the Netherlands battalion positions along the upper edge of Hoengsong.⁴³

Colonel Coughlin intended that the forces coming in from the north continue through Hoengsong, reorganize in an assembly area three miles south of town,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ennis Testimony, 16 Feb 51; 49th FA Bn Unit Rpt no. 134, 12 Feb 51, and no. 135, 13 Feb 51.

⁴² X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; 49th FA Bn Unit Rpt no. 135, 13 Feb 51; Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibit C-1.

⁴³ Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibit C-1; Norum Ltr; Hodges Ltr; Maixner Ltr.

then proceed to the new defense line at Wonju. Support Force 7 was to do likewise as it came in from the northeast. Coughlin's own headquarters and remaining troops, except for the Netherlands battalion and part of the regimental tank company, were already on the way out of Hoengsong. The Netherlands battalion was to continue covering the passage of the withdrawing forces, then act as rear guard en route to Wonju. The regimental tankers were assembled just below town, prepared to attack any roadblock the Chinese might establish between Hoengsong and Wonju.⁴⁴

Coughlin's plan was interrupted not long after the leading units coming down Route 29 entered Hoengsong, when Chinese forces attacked all along the line of the Netherlands battalion and soon afterward began to press hard from the flanks and rear on the withdrawing column still strung out on Route 29. Had the ROK battalion not withdrawn ahead of schedule, it now would have been of considerable help.⁴⁵

One of the first enemy jabs at the Dutch penetrated their line and reached the battalion command post. Lt. Col. M. P. A. den Ouden, the battalion commander, led headquarters troops in a successful attack to eliminate the penetration but was killed by a grenade. Members of Colonel den Ouden's staff also were killed or wounded. Despite these grave losses at battalion headquarters, the Dutch line companies held at the edge of town while Support Force 7 scurried toward town from the northeast and Coughlin's other forces struggled to get in over Route 29.⁴⁶

Support Force 7 received small arms, machine gun, and mortar fire as Colonel White led it out of the Twinnan-mul valley, and considerable confusion occurred inside Hoengsong as White's column merged with the vehicles Colonel Baker was moving through town. But Baker pushed part of his infantry back toward White to help keep enemy forces away from White's flanks, and artillerymen at White's rear managed to ward off enemy troops attempting to roll up the column. These efforts and excellent covering fire from the Dutch kept losses low and allowed Support Force 7 to pass behind the Netherlands battalion by 2330.⁴⁷

Baker's battalion helped cover Hoengsong for another hour while Colonel White started the artillery units down Route 29 toward Wonju. Baker's troops then

⁴⁴ Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibit C-1; Hodges Ltr.

⁴⁵ Norum Ltr; Maixner Ltr.

⁴⁶ X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; Norum Ltr; Ltr, Gen M. B. Ridgway to Mrs. M. P. A. den Ouden, 20 Mar 51, copy in CMH.

⁴⁷ Ltr, Lt Col Barney D. White, CO 49th FA Bn and SF 7, to CG 2d Div, 17 Feb 51, sub: Evacuation of 49th Field Artillery Battalion From Osan-ni, Korea; 49th FA Bn Unit Rpt no. 135, 13 Feb 51.

mounted their own trucks to bring up the support force rear. Part of the artillery reached Wonju without further trouble, but as this segment passed a point about a mile and a half below Hoengsong, Chinese forces crowded in on the road from the west and opened fire. Some twenty vehicles ran the gauntlet before the fire grew too heavy to risk. Colonel Baker, bringing up infantry and some of Coughlin's tanks from the rear, attacked and destroyed the enemy position, allowing the support force to move on to Wonju with no further encounter. Support Force 7 casualties suffered above and below Hoengsong totaled 12 killed, 125 wounded, and 53 missing. The major equipment losses were 35 vehicles, the 155-mm. howitzer that slipped off the road, and an M-16 anti-aircraft weapon that threw a track above Hoengsong.⁴⁸

Colonel Coughlin's column coming toward Hoengsong on Route 29 was less fortunate. Behind those forces leading the column into Hoengsong, a mortar round struck a 2-ton truck towing a 105-mm. howitzer, and the two jackknifed across the road. The occupants of the truck were either killed or scattered, and an alert Chinese machine gunner opened sustained fire on the cab to prevent anyone from trying to reach and restart the vehicle. The one chance of pushing the wreckage off the road evaporated when Lieutenant Mace's two tanks, the only ones not already in Hoengsong, merely moved around the obstruction through a bordering rice paddy and went into town. High paddy dikes made it impossible for the trucks, many of them pulling howitzers, to bypass the wreckage as the tanks had done. Enemy forces meanwhile began to squeeze the column from the flanks and rear.⁴⁹

The troops caught behind the obstruction had no alternative except to abandon vehicles and guns and move south on foot. Many did not reach safety, among them Colonel Keith. Those able to escape, as they neared Hoengsong and discovered the Netherlands battalion engaged, drifted west to get away from the fire fight, by-passed Hoengsong, then returned to Route 29 below town. After reorganizing behind the cover of the Netherlands battalion, they moved on to Wonju. The Dutch broke contact and followed just before 0100. Chinese flooded Hoengsong after the Dutch withdrawal but made no motion to pursue, and since Colonel Baker already had eliminated the only enemy position south of town, Coughlin's forces reached Wonju with no further contest.⁵⁰

The Costs

Given the conditions of the enemy attack and the corps withdrawal, a breakdown of X Corps casualties into categories of killed, wounded, and missing was not

⁴⁸ 49th FA Bn Unit Rpt no. 135, 13 Feb 51; Interv, Eighth Army IG with White.

⁴⁹ Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibits C-7, C-10, C-11, and C-12; Maixner Ltr; Keleher Ltr.

⁵⁰ X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; 2d Div G3 Jul, Entries 7 and 17, 13 Feb 51; Norum Ltr; Stewart Ltr, Incl 2, Exhibits C-7, C-10, and C11.

possible for some units, especially the ROK 8th Division, and hardly certifiable for any. Total casualties suffered between nightfall on 11 February and daylight on the 13th were around 11,800- 9,800 South Koreans, 1,900 Americans, and 100 Dutch.⁵¹ (Table 4)

The equipment toll was correspondingly heavy. Major items lost by the ROK 3d, 5th, and 8th Divisions, mostly by the last, included 14 105-mm. howitzers, 901 other crew-served weapons, 390 radios, and 88 vehicles. American units and the Netherlands battalion lost 14 105-mm. howitzers, 6 155-mm. howitzers, 277 other crew-served weapons, 6 tanks, 195 radios, and 280 vehicles.⁵²

TABLE 4
LOSSES BY MAJOR UNIT
11-13 FEBRUARY 1951

ROK	
Unit	Total
3d Division	1,238
5th Division	1,141
8th Division	7,465
Total ROK casualties	9,844
U.S. and U.N.	
Unit	Total
2d Division (includes 38th Infantry, artillery with Support Force 21 tanks with Support Team B, Netherlands battalion, and Support Team A)	1,769
7th Division (Support Force 7)	190
187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team (includes Support Team E, 674th Field Artillery Battalion, and 96th Field Artillery Battalion)	59
Total U.S. and U.N. casualties	2,018
Total casualties	11,862

⁵¹ Figures compiled from X Corps Rpt, The Battle of Hoengsong; Ltr, Eighth Army IG to CG Eighth Army, 12 Mar 51, sub: Report of Investigation Concerning the Loss of Equipment by X Corps; Lt Col Eugene Wolfe, Asst IG Eighth Army, Tabulation of Personnel Losses Suffered by X Corps Units, 11-13 February 1951; Memo, X Corps G1 to CG X Corps, 13 Feb 51, sub: Casualties, 11-13 February 1951; Rad, X 17780, CG X Corps to CG Eighth Army, 13 Feb 51.

⁵² Lt Col Eugene Wolfe, Asst IG Eighth Army, Tabulation of Major Items of Equipment Lost by X Corps Units, 11-13 February 1951.

General Ridgway initially considered these high equipment losses evidence of weak leadership. "While there is nothing sacrosanct about a piece of artillery, compared to the loss of the lives of men," he wrote General Almond on the 13th, "I don't expect to hear again of such loss as reported to me this morning of five 155 Hows of Battery A, 503rd. It is prima facie indication of faulty leadership of serious import in some echelon."⁵³ On the following day he instructed his inspector general to investigate all "the circumstances attending the loss by X Corps of artillery pieces and other major items of equipment on or about 12 February 1951."⁵⁴

Almond was equally disturbed by the heavy loss of equipment, especially the loss of fourteen howitzers by the 15th Field Artillery Battalion and five by the 503d, and by what he considered excessive personnel casualties among all 2d Division units that had supported the ROK 8th Division. Late on the 13th he directed General Ruffner to investigate and report the underlying reasons. He was particularly critical of Support Force 21's halt at the road junction position of the 3d Battalion, 38th Infantry, believing that losses would have been fewer had the support force continued directly to Hoengsong. He took this preliminary view from an impression that Support Force 7, on the other hand, had withdrawn immediately after being ordered back and that this prompt move accounted for its lighter losses. Pending receipt of Ruffner's report, Almond presumed that "aggressive leadership on the part of commanders concerned was lacking."⁵⁵

If in softer terms, he repeated much the same view on the 14th when he replied to General Ridgway's note of admonition. Without being specific, but obviously referring to Support Force 21, he told Ridgway that "in only one instance, now under investigation, have I found loss of U.S. equipment due to faulty leadership, and all the facts on this are not evident yet."⁵⁶

Recalling Ridgway's earlier concern for ROUNDUP control arrangements, Almond assured him that "the operation, as conceived and coordinated, included the protection of the U.S. artillery units involved and was, in my opinion, all that could be desired. It worked out as planned except for 2 battalions of infantry and 1 of artillery which became enmeshed in the onslaught of Chinese who poured through the ROK formations. There has never been any loss of control of the major units."⁵⁷

⁵³ Ltr, Gen Ridgway to Gen Almond, 13 Feb 51, copy in CMH.

⁵⁴ Memo, Office of the CG Eighth Army for The Inspector General, Headquarters, Eighth Army, 14 Feb 51.

⁵⁵ Rad, X 17778, CG X Corps to CG 2d Div, 132321 Feb 51.

⁵⁶ Ltr, Gen Almond to Gen Ridgway, 14 Feb 51, copy in CMH.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The 2d Division report, rendered five days later, absolved Support Force 21 of any command deficiency. General Stewart, the assistant division commander who conducted the inquiry for General Ruffner, concluded that there had been only "strong, courageous, and aggressive" leadership at all levels. Support force commander Colonel Keith had withdrawn from Ch'angbong-ni as soon as cleared to do so, had not yet received orders to proceed to Hoengsong when he stopped and joined the 3d Battalion of the 38th Infantry, and had made every effort to reach Hoengsong as soon as such orders reached him. The cause of the losses in equipment and personnel among 2d Division units, General Stewart testified, was the sudden and complete defeat of the ROK 8th Division with little or no warning to the 2d Division forces. He recommended that there be no similar intermingling of U.S. and South Korean units in the future.⁵⁸

The Army investigation confirmed Stewart's findings. All losses, in both men and materiel, stemmed from "the surprise and overwhelming attack of at least four CCF Divisions and two NK Divisions . . . against numerically inferior and widely spread forces of the 8th and 3d ROK Divisions." In chain reaction, the rapid disintegration of the ROK 8th Division "exposed the left flank of the [X Corps] salient and permitted the enemy forces in strength to advance rapidly to positions in the rear and along the MSR, thus blocking the only route of withdrawal for the tanks, artillery and motor elements caught north and west of Hoengsong." In this unexpected situation, "there [were] insufficient US or other UN forces available to the X Corps Commander or the 2d U.S. Infantry Division Commander to form a task force of sufficient strength to defeat the enemy's efforts and to break . . . the roadblocks that delayed the withdrawal of the friendly units located north." Hence, the heavy toll was a result of enemy action and not attributable to the "fault, neglect, incompetence, acts or omissions of the U.S. Commanding Officers concerned."⁵⁹

Ridgway accepted this explanation but did not withdraw a warning he had issued on the 14th. The "loss or abandonment to enemy of arms and equipment in usable condition," he notified all corps commanders and the KMAG chief, General Farrell, "is a grave offense against every member of this command. I shall hereafter deal severely with commanders found responsible and shall expect you to do likewise."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Stewart Ltr.

⁵⁹ Ltr, Eighth Army IG to CG Eighth Army, 12 Mar 51, sub: Report of Investigation Concerning the Loss of Equipment by X Corps.

⁶⁰ Check Slip, Eighth Army Chief of Staff to IG, 22 Mar 51, sub: Investigation Concerning the Loss of Equipment by X Corps; Rad, GX TAC 7 KCG, CG Eighth Army to CG I Corps, IX Corps, X Corps, and KMAG, 14 Feb 51.