

## CHAPTER X

# Disaster at the Kum River Line

Continual exercise makes good soldiers because it qualifies them for military duties; by being habituated to pain, they insensibly learn to despise danger. The transition from fatigue to rest enervates them. They compare one state with another, and idleness, that predominate passion of mankind, gains ascendancy over them. They then murmur at every trifling inconvenience, and their souls soften in their emasculated bodies.

MAURICE DE SAXE, *Reveries on the Art of War*

The Kum River is the first large stream south of the Han flowing generally north from its source in the mountains of southwestern Korea. Ten miles east of Taejon, the river in a series of tight loops slants northwest, then bends like an inverted letter U, and 12 miles northwest of the city starts its final southwesterly course to the sea. For 25 miles upstream from its mouth, the Kum River is a broad estuary of the Yellow Sea, from 1 to 2 miles wide. In its semicircle around Taejon, the river constitutes in effect a great moat, much in the same manner as the Naktong River protects Taegu and Pusan farther south and the Chickahominy River guarded Richmond, Virginia, during the American Civil War.

Protected by this water barrier, generally 10 to 15 miles distant, Taejon lies at the western base of the Sobaek Mountains. To the west, the coastal plain stretches northward to Seoul and southwestward to the tip of Korea. But south and southeastward all the way to the

Naktong and on to Pusan lie the broken hills and ridges of the Sobaek Mountains. Through these mountains in a southeasterly course from Taejon passes the main Seoul-Pusan railroad and highway. Secondary roads angle off from Taejon into all of southern Korea. Geographical and communication factors gave Taejon unusual military importance.

The Seoul-Pusan railroad crossed the Kum River 8 air miles due north of Taejon. Nine air miles westward and downstream from the railroad, the main highway crossed the river. The little village of Taep'yong-ni stood there on the southern bank of the Kum 15 air miles northwest of Taejon. At Kongju, 8 air miles farther westward downstream from Taep'yong-ni and 20 air miles northwest of Taejon, another highway crossed the Kum.

Engineers blew the highway bridges across the Kum at Kongju and Taep'yong-ni and the railroad bridge at Sinch'on the night and morning of 12-13

July. On the approaches to Taejon, engineer units placed demolitions on all bridges of small streams tributary to the Kum.<sup>1</sup>

Downstream from Kongju the 24th Reconnaissance Company checked all ferries and destroyed all native flat-bottomed boats it found in a 16-mile stretch below the town. Checking below this point for another twenty miles it came to the south side of the river. In the arc of the river from Kongju eastward to the railroad crossing, General Menoher, the assistant division commander of the 24th Division, then ordered all simliar boats seized and burned.<sup>2</sup>

General Dean and his 24th Division staff had a fairly clear idea of the situation facing them. On 13 July, the division intelligence officer estimated that two enemy divisions at 60 to 80 percent strength with approximately fifty tanks were closing on the 24th Division. Enemy prisoners identified them as the 4th Division following the 34th Infantry and the 3d Division following the 21st Infantry. This indicated a two-pronged attack against Taejon, and perhaps a three-pronged attack if the 2d Division moving south next in line to the east could drive ROK forces out of its way in time to join in the effort.<sup>3</sup>

Behind the moat of the Kum River, General Dean placed his 24th Division troops in a horseshoe-shaped arc in front

of Taejon. The 34th Infantry was on the left, the 19th Infantry on the right, and the 21st Infantry in a reserve defensive blocking position southeast of Taejon. On the extreme left, the 24th Reconnaissance Company in platoon-sized groups watched the principal river crossing sites below Kongju. Thus, the division formed a two-regiment front, each regiment having one battalion on the line and the other in reserve.<sup>4</sup>

The 24th Division was in poor condition for what was certain to be its hardest test yet. In the first week, 1,500 men were missing in action, 1,433 of them from the 21st Regiment. That regiment on 13 July had a strength of about 1,100 men; the 34th Infantry had 2,020 men; and the 19th Infantry, 2,276 men. There were 2,007 men in the division artillery. The consolidated division strength on 14 July was 11,440 men.<sup>5</sup>

Action against the Kum River Line began first on the left (west), in the sector of the 34th Infantry.

From Seoul south the N.K. 4th Division had borne the brunt of the fighting against the 24th Division and was now down to 5,000-6,000 men, little more than half strength. Approximately 20 T34 tanks led the division column, which included 40 to 50 pieces of artillery. Just before midnight of 11 July the 16th Regiment sent out scouts to make a reconnaissance of the Kum, learn the depth and width of the river, and report back before 1000 the next morning. An outpost of the 34th Infantry I&R Platoon

<sup>1</sup> 24th Div WD, G-2 Jnl, entry 406, 101115 Jul 50; 3d Engr (C) Bn WD, 14 Jul 50.

<sup>2</sup> 24th Recon Co WD, 12 Jul 50; ADCOM G-3 Log, 202513 Jul 50; 24th Div G-2 Jnl, entry 778, 131330 Jul 50.

<sup>3</sup> 24th Div WD, Narr Summ, 13 Jul 50; *Ibid.*, G-2 Jnl, entries 681 and 790, 122200 and 131445 Jul 50; EUSAK WD, G-2 Sec, 13 Jul 50.

<sup>4</sup> Ltr and Comments, Wadlington to author, 1 Apr 53 (Wadlington commanded the 34th Infantry at the time); 24th Div WD, Narr Summ, 13 Jul 50.

<sup>5</sup> 24th Div WD, G-3 Jnl, entry 413, 131535 Jul 50; *Ibid.*, G-1 Stf Hist Rpt, 14 Jul 50.

during the night captured one of the scouts, an officer, 600 yards north of the river opposite Kongju. The regiment's mission was the capture of Kongju.<sup>6</sup>

U.N. air attacks on North Korean armor, transport, and foot columns had become by now sufficiently effective so that the enemy no longer placed his tanks, trucks, and long columns of marching men on the main roads in broad daylight. The heavy losses of armor and equipment to air attack in the vicinity of P'yongt'aek, Chonui, and Ch'onan in the period of 7 to 10 July had wrought the change. Now, in approaching the Kum, the enemy generally remained quiet and camouflaged in orchards and buildings during the daytime and moved at night. The North Koreans also used back roads and trails more than in the first two weeks of the invasion, and already by day were storing equipment and supplies in railroad tunnels.<sup>7</sup>

*The N.K. 4th Division Crosses the Kum Below Kongju*

On the high ground around Kongju, astride the Kongju-Nonsan road, the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, was in its defensive positions. On line from left to right were L, I, and K Companies, with the mortars of M Company behind them. The 63d Field Artillery Battalion was about two and a half miles south of the Kum in their support. Three miles far-

ther south, the 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry, was in an assembly area astride the road.<sup>8</sup> (*Map 6*)

Communication between the 3d Battalion units was practically nonexistent. For instance, L Company could communicate with only one of its squads, and it served as a lookout and was equipped with a sound power telephone. The L Company commander, 1st Lt. Archie L. Stith, tried but failed at the 3d Battalion headquarters to obtain a radio that would work. He had communication with the battalion only by messenger. Procurement of live batteries for Signal Corps radios SCR-300's and 536's was almost impossible, communication wire could not be obtained, and that already laid could not be reclaimed.<sup>9</sup>

At 0400 hours 13 July, D Company of the 3d Engineer Combat Battalion blew the steel truss bridge in front of Kongju. A few hours after daybreak an enemy squad walked to the water's edge, 700 yards from a 34th Infantry position across the river, and set up a machine gun. On high ground north of this enemy machine gun squad, a North Korean tank came into view.<sup>10</sup> The men of the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, now had only the water barrier of the Kum between them and the enemy. That after-

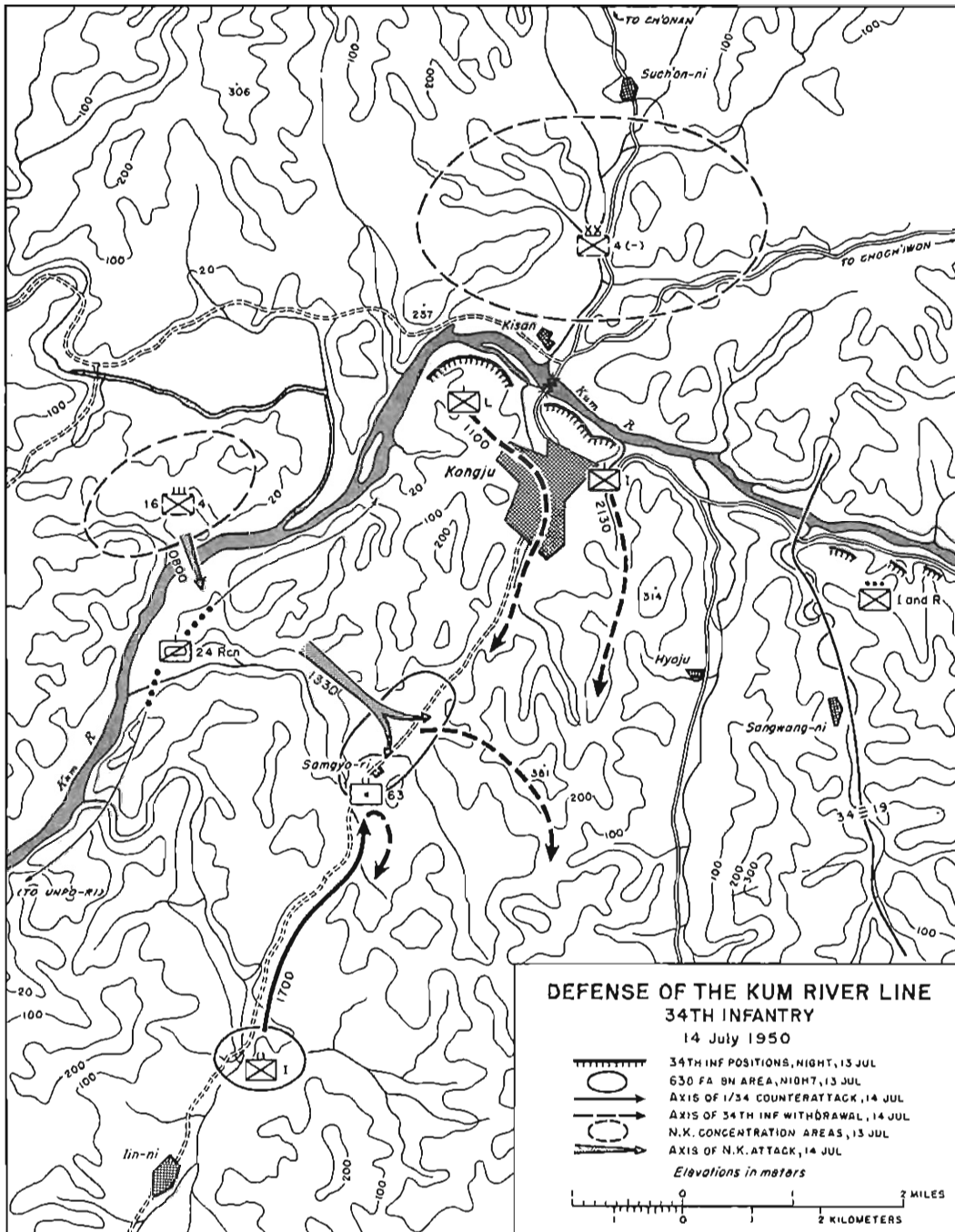
<sup>6</sup> ATIS Res Supp, Issue 2 (Documentary Evidence of N.K. Aggression), Interrog 118; ATIS Res Supp Interrog Rpts, Issue 94 (N.K. 4th Div), p. 46; 24th Div WD, G-2 Sec, PW Interrog file, interrog of 2d Lt Bai Jun Pal, 12 and 13 Jul 50.

<sup>7</sup> EUSAK WD, G-2 Stf Rpt, 13 and 22 Jul 50; 24th Div WD, G-2 PW Interrog File, interrog of Lee Ki Sup, 20 Jul 50.

<sup>8</sup> Interv, Mitchell with MSgt Milo W. Garman (Plat Sgt, 2d Plat, K Co, 34th Inf), 1 Aug 50; Interv, Mitchell with 2d Lt James B. Bryant (Plat Ldr, B Co, 34th Inf), 30 Jul 50; Wadlington Comments; Ltr, Lt Col Harold B. Ayres to author, 3 Oct 52.

<sup>9</sup> Interv, 1st Lt Billy C. Mossman with Stith, 31 Jul 50; Wadlington Comments.

<sup>10</sup> 24th Div WD, 13 Jul 50; 3d Engr (C) Bn Unit WD, 13 Jul 50; Interv, Mitchell with MSgt Wallace A. Wagnebreth (Plat Ldr, L Co, 34th Inf), 31 Jul 50, copy in OCMH.



D. Holmes, Jr.

MAP 6



MOVING SOUTH across the Kum River bridge on 14 July.

noon, the North Koreans began shelling Kongju from across the river.

The command situation for Colonel Wadlington continued to worsen as both the regimental S-2 and S-3 were evacuated because of combat fatigue. Then, that night, K Company, a composite group of about forty men of the 3d Battalion in such mental and physical condition as to render them liabilities in combat, was withdrawn from the Kum River Line with division approval and taken to Taejon for medical disposition.<sup>11</sup>

There were now only two understrength rifle companies of the 34th Infantry in front of Kongju—L Company on the left and I Company on the right of the road on the river hills, with some

mortars of the Heavy Weapons Company behind. These troops knew of no friendly units on their left (west). From the 19th Infantry on their right, Capt. Melicio Montesclaros had visited the I Company position and told the men there was a 2-mile gap between that flank and his outpost position eastward on the regimental boundary.

Shortly after daybreak of the 14th, American troops on the south side of the Kum at Kongju heard enemy tanks in the village across the river. By 0600, enemy flat trajectory weapons, possibly tank guns, were firing into I Company's area. Their target apparently was the mortars back of the rifle company. Simultaneously, enemy shells exploded in air bursts over L Company's position but were too high to do any damage. Soon thereafter, L Company lookouts sent word that enemy soldiers were crossing

<sup>11</sup> Interv, Mitchell with Garman, 1 Aug 50; Wadlington Comments.

the river in two barges, each carrying approximately thirty men, about two miles below them. They estimated that about 500 North Koreans crossed between 0800 and 0930.

The weather was clear after a night of rain. The 63d Field Artillery Battalion sent aloft a liaison plane for aerial observation. This aerial observer reported by radio during the morning that two small boats carrying men were crossing the Kum to the south side and gave the map co-ordinates of the crossing site. Apparently this was part of the same enemy crossing seen by L Company men. The battalion S-3, Maj. Charles T. Barter, decided not to fire on the boats but to wait for larger targets. One platoon of the 155-mm. howitzers of A Battery, 11th Field Artillery Battalion, in position east of Kongju fired briefly on the enemy troops. But Yak fighter planes soon drove away the liaison observation planes, and artillery fire ceased.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after the enemy crossed the river below L Company, Lieutenant Stith, the company commander, unable to find the machine gun and mortar sections supporting the company and with his company coming under increasingly accurate enemy mortar and artillery fire, decided that his position was untenable. He ordered L Company to withdraw. The men left their positions overlooking the Kum shortly before 1100. When Sgt. Wallace A. Wagnebreth, a platoon leader of L Company, reached the positions of the

63d Field Artillery Battalion, he told an unidentified artillery officer of the enemy crossing, but, according to him, the officer paid little attention. Lieutenant Stith, after ordering the withdrawal, went in search of the 3d Battalion headquarters. He finally found it near Nonsan. Learning what had happened, the battalion commander relieved Stith of his command and threatened him with court martial.<sup>13</sup>

#### *The 63d Field Artillery Battalion Overrun*

Three miles south of the river, the 63d Field Artillery Battalion had emplaced its 105-mm. howitzers along a secondary road near the village of Samyo. The road at this point was bordered on either side by scrub-pine-covered hills. From north to south the battery positions were A, Headquarters, B, and Service. The artillery battalion had communication on the morning of the 14th with the 34th Regimental headquarters near Nonsan but none with the infantry units or the artillery forward observers with them on the Kum River Line. The day before, the commanding officer of the 63d Field Artillery Battalion, Lt. Col. Robert H. Dawson, had been evacuated to Taejon because of illness, and Maj. William E. Dressler assumed command of the battalion.

About 1330 an outpost of the artillery battalion reported enemy troops coming up the hill toward them. It received instructions not to fire unless fired upon as the men might be friendly forces. As

<sup>12</sup> Interv, Mossman with Stith, 31 Jul 50; Interv, Mitchell with Wagnebreth, 31 Jul 50; Interv, Mossman with Pfc Doyle L. Wilson, L Co, 34th Inf, 2 Aug 50; Interv, author with Maj Clarence H. Ellis, Jr. (S-3 Sec, 11th FA Bn, Jul 50), 22 Jul 54; Interv, Mossman with SFC Clayton F. Gores (Intel Sgt, Hq Btry, 63d FA Bn), 31 Jul 50.

<sup>13</sup> Intervs, Mossman with Stith, 31 Jul 50, and Wilson, 2 Aug 50; Interv, Mitchell with Wagnebreth, 31 Jul 50.



KUM RIVER BRIDGE EXPLOSION

a result, this group of enemy soldiers overran the machine gun outpost and turned the captured gun on Headquarters Battery.<sup>14</sup> Thus began the attack of the North Korean *16th Regiment* on the 63d Field Artillery Battalion. Enemy reconnaissance obviously had located the support artillery and had bypassed the river line rifle companies to strike at it and the line of communications running to the rear.

Now came enemy mortar fire. The first shell hit Headquarters Battery switchboard and destroyed telephone communication to the other batteries. In rapid succession mortar shells hit among personnel of the medical section, on the command post, and then on the radio truck. With the loss of the radio truck all means of electrical communication

vanished. An ammunition truck was also hit, and exploding shells in it caused further confusion in Headquarters Battery.<sup>15</sup>

Almost simultaneously with the attack on Headquarters Battery came another directed against A Battery, about 250 yards northward. This second force of about a hundred enemy soldiers started running down a hill from the west toward an A Battery outpost "squealing like a bunch of Indians," according to one observer. Some of the artillerymen opened up on them with small arms fire and they retreated back up the hill. Soon, however, this same group of soldiers came down another slope to the road and brought A Battery under fire

<sup>14</sup> Interv, Mitchell with Cpl Lawrence A. Ray (A Btry, 63d FA Bn), 29 Jul 50.

<sup>15</sup> Interv, Mitchell with SFC Leonard J. Smith (Chief Computer, FDC, Hq Btry, 63d FA Bn), 29 Jul 50; 24th Div WD, G-2 Jnl, entry 1056, statement of Lee Kyn Soon.

at 150 yards' range. Mortar fire began to fall on A Battery's position. This fire caused most of the artillerymen to leave their gun positions. Some of them, however, fought courageously; Cpl. Lawrence A. Ray was one of these. Although wounded twice, he continued to operate a BAR and, with a few others, succeeded in holding back enemy soldiers while most of the men in the battery sought to escape. Soon a mortar burst wounded Ray and momentarily knocked him unconscious. Regaining consciousness, he crawled into a ditch where he found fifteen other artillerymen—not one of them carrying a weapon. All of this group escaped south. On the way out they found the body of their battery commander, Capt. Lundel M. Southerland.<sup>16</sup>

Back at Headquarters Battery, enemy machine guns put bands of fire across both the front and the back doors of the building which held the Fire Direction Center. The men caught inside escaped to a dugout, crawled up a ravine, and made their way south toward Service Battery. In the excitement of the moment, apparently no one saw Major Dressler. More than two and a half years later his remains and those of Cpl. Edward L. McCall were found together in a common foxhole at the site.<sup>17</sup>

After overrunning A and Headquarters Batteries, the North Koreans turned on B Battery. An enemy force estimated

at 400 men had it under attack by 1415. They worked to the rear of the battery, set up machine guns, and fired into it. The battery commander, Capt. Anthony F. Stahelski, ordered his two machine guns on the enemy side of his defense perimeter to return the fire. Then enemy mortar shells started falling and hit two 105-mm. howitzers, a radio jeep, and a 2½-ton prime mover. A group of South Korean cavalry rode past the battery and attacked west toward the enemy, but the confusion was so great that no one in the artillery position seemed to know what happened as a result of this intervention. The North Koreans kept B Battery under fire. At 1500 Captain Stahelski gave the battery march order but the men could not get the artillery pieces onto the road which was under fire. The men escaped as best they could.<sup>18</sup>

An hour and a half after the first enemy appeared at the artillery position the entire 63d Field Artillery Battalion, with the exception of Service Battery, had been overrun, losing 10 105-mm. howitzers with their ammunition and from 60 to 80 vehicles. The 5 guns of A Battery fell to the enemy intact. In B Battery, enemy mortar fire destroyed 2 howitzers; artillerymen removed the sights and firing locks from the other 3 before abandoning them.

Meanwhile, Service Battery had received word of the enemy attack and prepared to withdraw at once. A few men from the overrun batteries got back to it and rode its trucks fifteen miles south to Nonsan. Stragglers from the overrun artillery battalion came in to

<sup>16</sup> Intervs, Mossman with Pvt Fred M. Odle (A Btry, 63d FA Bn), 28 Jul 50, and Sgt Leon L. Tucker (Hq Btry, 63d FA Bn), 31 Jul 50; interv, Mitchell with Ray, 29 Jul 50. General Order 55, 7 September 1950, awarded the Distinguished Service Cross to Corporal Ray. EUSAK WD.

<sup>17</sup> Interv, Mitchell with Smith, 29 Jul 50; *Washington Post*, April 9, 1953.

<sup>18</sup> Interv, Mitchell with Pvt William R. Evans, 29 Jul 50; 24th Div WD, G-2 Jnl, entry 1056, 15-19 Jul 50, statement of Capt Stahelski.



the Nonsan area during the night and next morning. Eleven officers and 125 enlisted men of the battalion were missing in action.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear from an order he issued that morning that General Dean did not expect to hold Kongju indefinitely, but he did hope for a series of delaying actions that would prevent the North Koreans from accomplishing an early crossing of the Kum River at Kongju, a quick exploitation of a bridgehead, and an immediate drive on Taejon.<sup>20</sup>

Pursuant to General Dean's orders, Colonel Wadlington, the acting regimental commander, left his headquarters at Ponggong-ni on the main road running south out of Kongju the morning of the 14th to reconnoiter the Nonsan area in anticipation of a possible withdrawal. He was absent from his headquarters until midafternoon.<sup>21</sup> Shortly after his return to the command post, between 1500 and 1600, he learned from an escaped enlisted man who had reached his headquarters that an enemy force had attacked and destroyed the 63d Field Artillery Battalion. Wadlington at once ordered Lt. Col. Harold B. Ayres to launch an attack with the 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry, to rescue the men and equipment in the

artillery area and drive the North Koreans westward. According to Ayres, Wadlington's order brought him his first word of the enemy attack.<sup>22</sup>

The 1st Battalion a little after 1700 moved out northward in a column of companies in attack formation. The three-mile movement northward was without incident until C Company approached within a hundred yards of the overrun artillery position. Then, a few short bursts of enemy machine gun and some carbine fire halted the company. Dusk was at hand. Since his orders were to withdraw if he had not accomplished his mission by dark, Colonel Ayres ordered his battalion to turn back. At its former position, the 1st Battalion loaded into trucks and drove south toward Nonsan.<sup>23</sup>

As soon as the 24th Division received confirmation of the bad news about the 63d Field Artillery Battalion it ordered an air strike for the next morning, 15 July, on the lost equipment—a practice that became standard procedure for destroying heavy American equipment lost or abandoned to enemy in enemy-held territory.<sup>24</sup>

During the day I Company, 34th In-

<sup>19</sup> Interv, Mossman with Tucker, 31 Jul 50; 24th Div WD, 14 July 50. Enemy sources indicate the N.K. 4th Division occupied Kongju by 2200, 14 July, and claim that the 16th Regiment in overrunning the 63d Field Artillery Battalion captured 86 prisoners, 10 105-mm. howitzers, 17 other weapons, 86 vehicles, and a large amount of ammunition. See ATIS Res Supp Interrog Rpts, Issue 94 (N.K. 4th Div), p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> 24th Div WD, G-3 Jnl, entry 457, 141025 Jul 50; Wadlington Comments; Ltr, Maj David A. Bissett, Jr. (Sr Aide to Gen Dean, Jul 50), 14 Jul 52.

<sup>21</sup> Wadlington Comments; Ltr, Wadlington to author, 2 Jun 55.

<sup>22</sup> Wadlington Comments and Ltr to author, 1 Apr 53; Ltr, Ayres to author, 3 Oct 52; Interv, Mossman with Gores, 31 Jul 50; 24th Div WD, G-2 Jnl, entry 1056, 15-19 Jul 50. The communications officer of the 63d Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Lt. Herman W. Starling, however, has stated that about 1400 he went to the 1st Battalion command post and reported that the artillery was under attack and asked for help. Ayres says he has no knowledge of this but that it might have occurred in his absence since he was away from his post command most of the day. He says no one on his staff reported such an incident to him.

<sup>23</sup> Ltr, Ayres to author, 3 Oct 52; Interv, Mitchell with Bryant, 30 Jul 50; Wadlington Comments; 24th Div WD, G-2 Jnl, entry 1056, 15-19 Jul 50.

<sup>24</sup> 24th Div Arty WD, 15 Jul 50; Barth MS, p. 5.

fantry, had stayed in its position on the river line. Enemy mortar fire had fallen in its vicinity until noon. In the early afternoon, artillery from across the river continued the shelling. The acting commander, Lt. Joseph E. Hicks, tried but failed to locate L Company and the 3d Battalion Headquarters. A few men from the Heavy Weapons Company told him that enemy roadblocks were in his rear and that he was cut off. Except for the enemy shelling, all was quiet in I Company during the day. That night at 2130, pursuant to orders he received, Hicks led I Company over the mountains east and southeast of Kongju and rejoined the regiment. The 34th Infantry occupied new positions just east of Nonsan early in the morning of 15 July.<sup>25</sup>

In their first day of attack against it, the North Koreans had widely breached the Kum River Line. Not only was the line breached, but the 19th Infantry's left flank was now completely exposed. The events of 14 July must have made it clear to General Dean that he could not long hold Taejon.

Nevertheless, Dean tried to bolster the morale of the defeated units. After he had received reports of the disaster, he sent a message at 1640 in the afternoon saying, "Hold everything we have until we find where we stand—might not be too bad—may be able to hold—make reconnaissance—may be able to knock those people out and reconsolidate. Am on my way out there now."<sup>26</sup> Informing Colonel Stephens that the 34th Infantry was

in trouble, he ordered him to put the 21st Infantry Regiment in position on selected ground east of Taejon. Something of Dean's future intentions on operations at Taejon was reflected in his comment, "We must coordinate so that the 19th and 34th come out together." General Dean closed his message by asking Stephens to come to his command post that night for a discussion of plans.<sup>27</sup>

Although an aerial observer saw two tanks on the south side of the Kum River southwest of Kongju early in the morning of the 15th, enemy armor did not cross in force that day. Other parts of the 4th Division continued to cross, however, in the Kongju area. Air strikes destroyed some of their boats and strafed their soldiers. By nightfall of 15 July some small groups of North Korean soldiers had pressed south from the river and were in Nonsan.<sup>28</sup>

#### *The N.K. 3d Division Crosses the Kum Against the 19th Infantry*

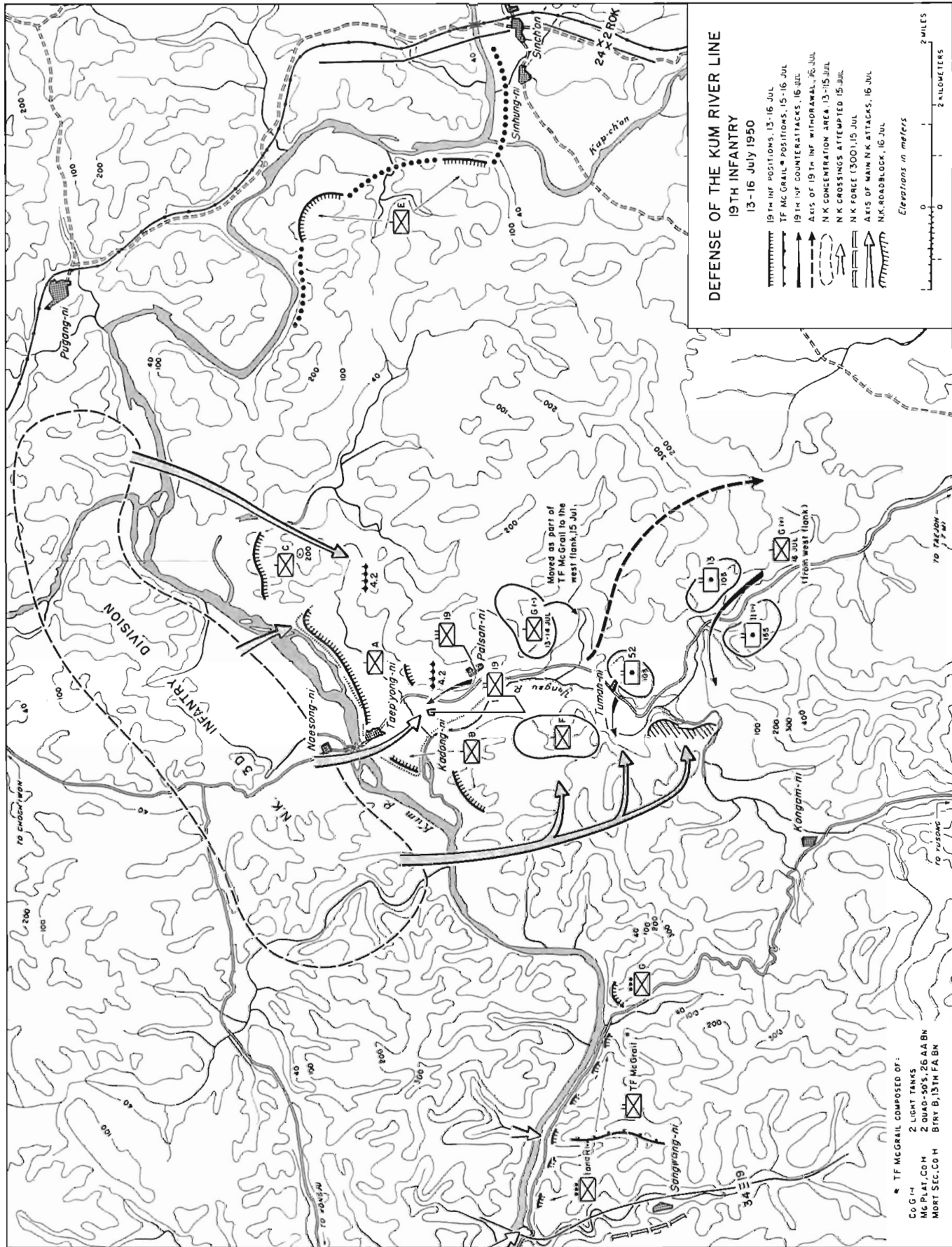
The third and last regiment of the 24th Division, the 19th Infantry, commanded by Col. Guy S. Meloy, Jr., began to arrive in Korea on 4 July. Nearly ninety years earlier the 19th Infantry Regiment had won the sobriquet, "The Rock of Chickamauga," in a memorable stand in one of the bloodiest of Civil War battles. Now, on 11 and 12 July General Dean moved the 1950 version of the regiment to Taejon as he concentrated the 24th Division there for the defense of the city. Before dark of the

<sup>25</sup> Wadlington Comments; Interv, Mitchell with Sgt Justin B. Fleming (2d Plac, I Co, 34th Inf), 1 Aug 50.

<sup>26</sup> 24th Div WD, G-3 Jnl, entry 495, 141830 Jul 50.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, entry 487, 141640 Jul 50; Ltr, Stephens to author, 17 Apr 52.

<sup>28</sup> 24th Div WD, G-2 Jnl, entry 936, 150830 Jul 50; *Ibid.*, G-3 Jnl, entry 562, 151945 Jul 50; *Ibid.*, Narr Summ, 25 Jun-22 Jul 50.



**DEFENSE OF THE KUM RIVER LINE**  
**19TH INFANTRY**  
**13-16 July 1950**

- 19TH INF POSITIONS, 13-16 JUL
- TF McGRAIL POSITIONS, 15-16 JUL
- 19TH INF COUNTERATTACKS, 16 JUL
- AXIS OF 19TH INF WITHDRAWAL, 16 JUL
- NK CONCENTRATION AREA, 13-15 JUL
- NK CROSSINGS ATTEMPTED, 15 JUL
- NK FORCE (300), 15 JUL
- AXIS OF MAIN NK ATTACKS, 16 JUL
- NK ROADBLOCK, 16 JUL



TF McGRAIL COMPOSED OF:  
 CO G 14  
 2 LIGHT TANKS  
 MG PLAT. CO H  
 2 QUAD-50'S, 26 AA BN  
 MORT SEC. CO H  
 BTRY B, 13TH FA BN

12th, the 19th Infantry was in position to relieve the 21st Infantry Regiment on the south bank of the Kum, but the formal relief and transfer of responsibility for the regimental sector did not take place until 0930 the next day. Fourteen years earlier General Dean had served as captain in the regiment in Hawaii.<sup>29</sup>

The 19th Infantry's zone of responsibility was a wide one, extending from high ground just east of the railroad bridge, 8 miles due north of Taejon, westward along the river to within 3 miles of Kongju. This was an airline distance of 15 miles or a river distance of almost 30 miles because of the stream's numerous deep folds. Necessarily, there were wide gaps between some of the units in disposing a regiment—a 2-battalion regiment at that—over this distance. The main regimental position was astride the Seoul-Pusan highway where it crossed the Kum River at Taep'yong-ni, about midway of the regimental sector. (*Map 7*)

Engineer demolition troops had blown, but only partially destroyed, the highway bridge over the Kum at 2100, 12 July. The next morning they dynamited it again, and this time two spans dropped into the water. On the 15th, engineers destroyed the railroad bridge upstream at Sinch'on.<sup>30</sup>

At Taep'yong-ni the Kum River in mid-July 1950 was 200 to 300 yards wide, its banks 4 to 8 feet high, water 6 to 15 feet deep, and current 3 to 6 miles an hour. Sandbars ran out into the streambed at almost every bend and the chan-

nel shifted back and forth from the center to the sides. The river, now swollen by rains, could be waded at many points when its waters fell.

On the regimental right, the railroad bridge lay just within the ROK Army zone of responsibility. A mile and a half west of the railroad bridge a large tributary, the Kap-ch'on, empties into the Kum. On high ground west of the railroad and the mouth of the Kap-ch'on, E Company in platoon-sized units held defensive positions commanding the Kum River railroad crossing site. West of E Company there was an entirely undefended 2-mile gap. Beyond this gap C Company occupied three northern fingers of strategically located Hill 200 three miles east of Taep'yong-ni.<sup>31</sup> Downstream from C Company there was a 1,000-yard gap to where A Company's position began behind a big dike along the bank of the Kum. The A Company sector extended westward beyond the Seoul-Pusan highway at Taep'yong-ni. One platoon of A Company was on 500-foot high hills a mile south of the Taep'yong-ni dike and paddy ground.

West of the highway, the 1st Platoon of B Company joined A Company behind the dike, while the rest of the company was on high ground which came down close to the river. West of B Company for a distance of five air miles to the regimental boundary there was little protection. One platoon of G Company manned an outpost two miles away. The I&R Platoon of about seventy men, together with a platoon of engineers and a battery of artillery, all under the com-

<sup>29</sup> 21st Inf WD, 13 Jul 50; 19th Inf WD, 13 Jul 50.

<sup>30</sup> Interv. Mitchell with Col Meloy, 30 Jul 50. Standard practice was to blow the spans adjacent to the friendly side of a stream.

<sup>31</sup> There were two 600-foot high hills (Hills 200) in the 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry, zone. The second is close to the highway and just east of the village of Palsan.



DIKE POSITION in Taep'yong-ni area. The BAR man is from the 19th Regiment.

mand of Capt. Melicio Montesclaros, covered the last three miles of the regimental sector in the direction of Kongju.

The command post of Lt. Col. Otho T. Winstead, commander of the 1st Battalion, was at the village of Kadong, about a mile south of the Kum on the main highway. Colonel Meloy's regimental command post was at the village of Palsan, about a mile farther to the rear on the highway.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>The positions given for the 19th Infantry at the Kum River are based on 19th Inf WD, 13 Jul 50; Ltr, Brig Gen Guy S. Meloy, Jr., to author, 6 Jul 52; Notes and overlays of 19th Inf position 14-16 Jul 50 prepared by Lt Col Edward O. Logan (S-3, 19th Inf, at Kum River) for author, Jun 52; Interv, author with Maj Melicio Montesclaros, 20 Aug 52; Intervs, Capt Martin Blumenson with 2d Lt Charles C. Early (Plat Ldr, 3d Plat, B Co, 19th Inf), 26 Aug 51, with 2d Lt Augustus B. Orr (Plat Ldr, C Co, 19th Inf), 26 Aug 51, and with Capt Elliot C. Cutler, Jr. (CO Hv Mort Co, 19th Inf at Kum River), 27 Aug. 51.

The 2d Battalion with two of its rifle companies was in reserve back of the 1st Battalion. Behind A Company, east of the highway, were two platoons of G Company; behind B Company, west of the highway, was F Company. The 4.2-inch mortars of the Heavy Mortar Company were east of the highway.

Artillery supporting the 19th Infantry consisted of A and B Batteries, 52d Field Artillery Battalion; A and B Batteries of the 11th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. howitzers); and two batteries of the 13th Field Artillery Battalion. Lt. Col. Charles W. Stratton, commanding officer of the 13th Field Artillery Battalion, coordinated their firing. The 52d Field Artillery Battalion, in position along the main highway at the village of Tuman-ni, about three miles south of the Kum, was farthest forward. Behind it two

miles farther south were the 11th and the 13th Field Artillery Battalions.<sup>33</sup>

The larger parts of the 26th Antiaircraft Artillery (Automatic Weapons) Battalion and of A Company, 78th Heavy Tank Battalion (light M24 tanks), were at Taejon.

Aerial strikes on the 14th failed to prevent the build-up of enemy armor on the north side of the Kum opposite Taep'yong-ni. Tanks moved up and dug in on the north bank for direct fire support of a crossing effort. Their fire started falling on the south bank of the Kum in the 19th Infantry's zone at 1300, 14 July. Late in the day an aerial observer reported seeing eleven enemy tanks dug in, camouflaged, and firing as artillery. There were some minor attempted enemy crossings during the day but no major effort. None succeeded.<sup>34</sup>

The afternoon brought the bad news concerning the left flank—the collapse of the 34th Infantry at Kongju.

The next morning, at 0700, Colonel Meloy received word from his extreme left flank that North Koreans were starting to cross there. An aerial strike and the I&R Platoon's machine gun fire repelled this crossing attempt. But soon thereafter enemy troops that had crossed lower down in the 34th Infantry sector briefly engaged the Reconnaissance Platoon when it tried to establish contact with the 34th Infantry.<sup>35</sup>

These events on his exposed left flank

caused Colonel Meloy to reinforce the small force there with the remainder of G Company, 1 machine gun platoon and a section of 81-mm. mortars from H Company, 2 light tanks, and 2 quad-50's of the 26th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion—in all, two thirds of his reserve. Lt. Col. Thomas M. McGrail, commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, accompanied these troops to the left flank. Meloy now had only F Company in reserve behind the 1st Battalion in the main battle position.<sup>36</sup>

The morning of 15 July, Colonel Stephens at 0600 started his 21st Infantry Regiment from the Taejon airstrip for Okch'on, ten miles east of the city on the main Seoul-Pusan highway. This organization was now only a shadow of a regiment. Its 1st Battalion had a strength of 517 men. The 132 men of the 3d Battalion were organized into K and M Companies and attached to the 1st Battalion. A separate provisional group numbered 466 men. As already noted, the regiment so organized numbered little more than 1,100 men of all ranks.<sup>37</sup>

General Dean had ordered the move to the Okch'on position. He feared there might be a North Korean penetration through ROK Army forces east of Taejon, and he wanted the 21st Infantry deployed on the high hills astride the

<sup>33</sup> Overlay, Logan for author, Jun 52; Ltr and sketch map, Col Perry (CO 52d FA Bn at Kum River) for author, 8 Jun 52.

<sup>34</sup> 24th Div WD, G-2 Jnl, entry 913, 142105 Jul 50; 19th Inf WD, 14 Jul 50.

<sup>35</sup> Ltr, Meloy to author, 4 Dec 52; Overlay, Logan for author, Jun 52.

<sup>36</sup> Ltr, Meloy to author, 29 May 52; Ltr, Capt Michael Barszcz (CO G Co, 19th Inf) to author, 3 Jul 52; Notes and overlay, Logan for author, Jun 52; 19th Inf WD, 14-15 Jul 50; 24th Div WD, 15 Jul 50; EUSAK WD, G-3 Sec, Msg at 151700 Jul 50.

<sup>37</sup> 21st Inf WD, 29 Jun-22 Jul 50 and Incl II, Activities Rpt 1st Bn; 24th Div WD, G-3 Jnl, entry 408, 131440 Jul 50; Ltr, Gen Stephens to author, 17 Apr 52.

highway in that vicinity to protect the rear of the 24th Division. The regiment went into position five miles east of Taejon, beyond the railroad and highway tunnels, with the command post in Okch'on. From its new position the 21st Infantry also controlled a road running south from a Kum River ferry site to the highway. One battery of the 11th Field Artillery Battalion accompanied the 21st Infantry. A company of attached engineer troops prepared the tunnels and bridges east of Taejon for demolition.<sup>38</sup>

As evening of 15 July approached, Colonel Meloy alerted all units in battle positions for an enemy night crossing. Supporting mortars and artillery fired on the enemy-held villages across the river. This and air strikes during the evening set the flimsy Korean wood-adobe-straw huts on fire and illuminated the river front with a reddish glow.

Enemy sources indicate that all day the N.K. 3d Division had made preparations for an attack on the river line, and that repeated air attacks seriously hampered the movement of its heavy equipment and instilled fear in the minds of its soldiers. Political officers tried to raise the lowering morale of the troops by promising them a long rest after the capture of Taejon and by saying that when the city fell the Americans would surrender.<sup>39</sup>

Just before dusk, 2d Lt. Charles C. Early, platoon leader of the 3d Platoon, B Company, from his position above the Kum, saw an enemy T34 tank come

around a bend in the highway across the river. While he telephoned this information to his company commander, he counted eight more tanks making the turn in the road. He could see them distinctly with the naked eye at a distance of about two miles. Three of the tanks pulled off the road, swung their turrets, and fired on Early's position. Most of their rounds passed overhead. Enemy artillery began firing at the same time. The 1st Battalion had called for an air strike when the enemy tanks opened fire, and now two planes appeared. When the planes arrived over the river all the tanks except one took cover in a wooded area. The strike left the exposed tank burning on the road. The two planes stayed over the area until dark. Upon their departure, enemy infantry in trucks moved to the river's edge.<sup>40</sup>

Small groups of enemy soldiers tested the American river defenses by wading into the river; others rushed out to the end of the blown bridge, jumped into the water, and began swimming across. Recoiless rifle and machine gun fire of the Heavy Weapons Company inflicted heavy casualties on this crossing attempt at and near the bridge, but some of the North Koreans got across under cover of tank fire.

Upstream in front of Hill 200 another enemy crossing attempt was under way in front of C Company. The combined fire from all company weapons supported by that from part of the Heavy Weapons Company repelled this attack and two more that followed after short intervals.

<sup>38</sup> Ltr, Stephens to author, 17 Apr 52; Ltr, Perry to author, 8 Jun 52; 21st Inf WD, 15-16 Jul 50.

<sup>39</sup> ATIS Res Supp Interrog Rpts, Issue 96 (N.K. 3d Div), p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> Ltr, Meloy to author, 30 Dec 52; Intervs, Blumenson with Early, 26 Aug 51, and Orr, 26 Aug 51; 19th Inf WD, 15 Jul 50.

Some rounds falling short from friendly 81-mm. mortars knocked out two of the company's 60-mm. mortars and broke the base plate of the remaining one. Corporal Tabor improvised a base plate and, holding the tube in his hand, fired an estimated 300 rounds.

With his first river crossing attacks repulsed, the enemy made ready his major effort. At 0300 Sunday, 16 July, an enemy plane flew over the Kum and dropped a flare. It was the signal for a co-ordinated attack. The intensity of the fire that now came from enemy guns on the north bank of the river was as great, General Meloy has said, as anything he experienced in Europe in World War II. Under cover of this intense fire the North Koreans used boats and rafts, or waded and swam, and in every possible way tried to cross the river. American artillery, mortar, and supporting weapons fire met this attack.<sup>41</sup>

Representative of the accidents that weigh heavily in the outcome of most battles was one that now occurred. One of the 155-mm. howitzers of the 11th Field Artillery Battalion had been assigned to fire flares over the river position on call. At the most critical time of the enemy crossing, the 1st Battalion through the regiment requested a slight shift of the flare area. Normally this would have taken only a few minutes to execute. But the artillery personnel misunderstood the request and laid the howitzer on an azimuth that required

moving the trails of the piece. As a result of this mishap there were no flares for a considerable period of time. Colonel Winstead, the 1st Battalion commander, said that mishap and the resulting lack of flares hurt his men more than anything else in their losing the south bank of the river.<sup>42</sup>

Enemy troops succeeded in crossing the river at 0400 in front of the gap between C and E Companies on the regimental right and struck the 1st Platoon of C Company for the fourth time that night. In the midst of this attack, Lt. Henry T. McGill called Lt. Thomas A. Maher, the 1st Platoon leader, to learn how things were going. Maher answered, "We're doing fine." Thirty seconds later he was dead with a burp gun bullet in his head. North Koreans in this fourth assault succeeded in overrunning the platoon position. The platoon sergeant brought out only about a dozen men. C Company consolidated its remaining strength on the middle finger of Hill 200 and held fast. But the North Koreans now had a covered route around the east end of the 1st Battalion position. They exploited it in the next few hours by extensive infiltration to the rear and in attacks on the heavy mortar position and various observation and command posts.<sup>43</sup>

Simultaneously with this crossing at the right of the main regimental position, another was taking place below and on the left flank of the main battle position. This one lasted longer and apparently was the largest of all. At daybreak,

<sup>41</sup> Ltr. Meloy to author, 29 May 52; 19th Inf WD, 16 Jul 50; 13th FA Bn WD, 16 Jul 50. The journal of the 19th Infantry was lost in action on the 16th. The summary of events in the regimental war diary for 16 July was compiled later from memory by the regimental staff.

<sup>42</sup> Notes. Logan for author, Jun 52, quoting his conversation with Winstead on 16 Jul 50.

<sup>43</sup> Interv. Blumenson with Orr, 26 Aug 51.



men in B Company saw an estimated 300 to 400 North Korean soldiers on high ground southwest of them—already safely across the river. And they saw that crossings were still in progress downstream at a ferry site. Enemy soldiers, 25 to 30 at a time, were wading into the river holding their weapons and supplies on their heads, and plunging into neck-deep water.<sup>44</sup>

From his observation post, Colonel Meloy could see the crossing area to the left but few details of the enemy movement. Already B Company had called in artillery fire on the enemy crossing force and Colonel Meloy did likewise through his artillery liaison officer. Capt. Monroe Anderson of B Company noticed that while some of the enemy moved on south after crossing the river, most of them remained in the hills camouflaged as shrubs and small trees. Lieutenant Early, fearing an attack on his rear by this crossing force, left his 3d Platoon and moved back to a better observation point. There for an hour he watched enemy soldiers bypass B Company, moving south.<sup>45</sup>

By this time it seemed that the North Koreans were crossing everywhere in front of the regiment. As early as 0630 Colonel Winstead had reported to the regiment that his command post and the Heavy Mortar Company were under attack and that the center of his battalion was falling back. The enemy troops making this attack had crossed the river by the partly destroyed bridge and by swimming and wading. They made deep penetrations and about 0800 overran part of the positions of A Company and the right hand platoon of B Company be-

hind the dike. They then continued on south across the flat paddies and seized the high ground at Kadong-ni. Lt. John A. English, Weapons Platoon leader with B Company, seeing what had happened to the one platoon of B Company along the dike, ran down from his hill position, flipped off his helmet, swam the small stream that empties into the Kum at this point, and led out fourteen survivors.<sup>46</sup>

This enemy penetration through the center of the regimental position to the 1st Battalion command post had to be thrown back if the 19th Infantry was to hold its position. Colonel Meloy and Colonel Winstead immediately set about organizing a counterattack force from the 1st Battalion Headquarters and the Regimental Headquarters Companies, consisting of all officers present, cooks, drivers, mechanics, clerks, and the security platoon. Colonel Meloy brought up a tank and a quad-50 antiaircraft artillery half-track to help in the counterattack. This counterattack force engaged the North Koreans and drove them from the high ground at Kadong-ni by 0900. Some of the enemy ran to the river and crossed back to the north side. In leading this attack, Maj. John M. Cook, the 1st Battalion Executive Officer, and Capt. Alan Hackett, the Battalion S-1, lost their lives.<sup>47</sup>

Colonel Meloy reported to General Dean that he had thrown back the North

<sup>44</sup> Ltrs, Meloy to author, 4, 30 Dec 52; Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Ltr, Meloy to author, 29 May 52.

<sup>45</sup> Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Ltr, Meloy to author, 29 May 52; Interv, Mitchell with Meloy, 30 Jul 50; Intervs, Blumenson with Early, 26 Aug 51, and Cutler, 27 Aug 51; 24th Div WD, G-3 Jnl, entry 583, 160730, Jul 50.

<sup>46</sup> Interv, Blumenson with Early, 26 Aug 51.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; Ltrs, Meloy to author, 4, 30 Dec 52.

Koreans, that he thought the situation was under control, and that he could hold on until dark as he, General Dean, had requested. It was understood that after dark the 19th Infantry would fall back from the river to a delaying position closer to Taejon.<sup>48</sup>

*Roadblock Behind the 19th Infantry*

But events were not in reality as favorable as they had appeared to Colonel Meloy when he made his report to General Dean. Colonel Winstead, the 1st Battalion commander, soon reported to Colonel Meloy that while he thought he could hold the river line to his front he had no forces to deal with the enemy in his rear. Fire from infiltrated enemy troops behind the main line was falling on many points of the battalion position and on the main supply road. Then came word that an enemy force had established a roadblock three miles to the rear on the main highway. Stopped by enemy fire while on his way forward with a resupply of ammunition for the 1st Battalion, 2d Lt. Robert E. Nash telephoned the news to Colonel Meloy who ordered him to go back, find Colonel McGrail, 2d Battalion commander, and instruct him to bring up G and H Companies to break the roadblock. Almost simultaneously with this news Colonel Meloy received word from Colonel Stratton that he was engaged with the enemy at the artillery positions.<sup>49</sup>

All morning the hard-pressed men of the 19th Infantry had wondered what

had happened to their air support. When the last two planes left the Kum River at dark the night before they had promised that air support would be on hand the next morning at first light. Thus far only six planes, hours after daylight, had made their appearance over the front. Now the regiment sent back an urgent call for an air strike on the enemy roadblock force.

Scattered, spasmodic firing was still going on in the center when Colonel Meloy and his S-3, Maj. Edward O. Logan, left the regimental command post about an hour before noon to check the situation at the roadblock and to select a delaying position farther back. Before leaving the Kum River, Meloy gave instructions to Colonel Winstead concerning withdrawal of the troops after dark.<sup>50</sup>

The enemy soldiers who established the roadblock behind the regiment had crossed the Kum below B Company west of the highway. They bypassed B and F Companies, the latter the regiment's reserve force. Only enough enemy soldiers to pin it down turned off and engaged F Company. During the morning many reports had come into the regimental command post from F Company that enemy troops were moving south past its position. Once past F Company, the enemy flanking force turned east toward the highway.<sup>51</sup>

About 1000, Colonel Perry, commanding officer of the 52d Field Artillery Battalion, from his command post near Tuman-ni three miles south of the Kum River, saw a long string of enemy soldiers in white clothing pass over a moun-

<sup>48</sup> Ltrs, Meloy to author, 29 May, 20 Aug, and 30 Dec 52.

<sup>49</sup> 19th Inf WD, Summ, 16 Jul 50; 52d FA Bn WD, 16 Jul 50; 24th Div WD, G-3 Jnl, entry 160910 Jul 50; Ltr, Meloy to author, 30 Dec 52.

<sup>50</sup> Ltrs, Meloy to author, 29 May, 20 Aug, and 30 Dec 52.

<sup>51</sup> Notes and overlay, Logan for author, Jun 52.

tain ridge two miles westward and disappear southward over another ridge. He ordered A Battery to place fire on this column, and informed the 13th Field Artillery Battalion below him that an enemy force was approaching it. A part of this enemy force, wearing regulation North Korean uniforms, turned off toward the 52d Field Artillery Battalion and headed for B Battery.

Men in B Battery hastily turned two or three of their howitzers around and delivered direct fire at the North Koreans. The North Koreans set up mortars and fired into B Battery position. One of their first rounds killed the battery commander and his first sergeant. Other rounds wounded five of the six chiefs of sections. The battery executive, 1st Lt. William H. Steele, immediately assumed command and organized a determined defense of the position. Meanwhile, Colonel Perry at his command post just south of B Battery assembled a small attack force of wire, medical, and fire direction personnel not on duty, and some 19th Infantry soldiers who were in his vicinity. He led this group out against the flank of the North Koreans, directing artillery fire by radio as he closed with them. The combined fire from B Battery, Colonel Perry's group, and the directed artillery fire repelled this enemy attack. The North Koreans turned and went southward into the hills.<sup>52</sup>

Before noon the enemy force again turned east to the highway about 800

yards south of the 52d Field Artillery position. There it opened fire on and halted some jeeps with trailers going south for ammunition resupply. Other vehicles piled up behind the jeeps. This was the beginning of the roadblock, and this was when Colonel Meloy received the telephone message about it. South of the roadblock the 11th and 13th Field Artillery Battalions came under long-range, ineffective small arms fire. The artillery continued firing on the Kum River crossing areas, even though the 13th Field Artillery Battalion Fire Direction Center, co-ordinating the firing, had lost all communication about 1100 with its forward observers and liaison officers at the infantry positions.<sup>53</sup>

The North Korean roadblock, a short distance below the village of Tuman where the highway made a sharp bend going south, closed the only exit from the main battle position of the 19th Infantry. At this point a narrow pass was formed by a steep 40-foot embankment which dropped off on the west side of the road to a small stream, the Yongsu River, and a steep hillside that came down to the road on the other side. There was no space for a vehicular bypass on either side of the road. South of this point for approximately four miles high hills approached and flanked the highway on the west. As the day wore on, the enemy built up his roadblock force and extended it southward into these hills.

When Colonel Meloy and Major Logan arrived at the roadblock they found conditions unsatisfactory. Small groups

<sup>52</sup> Ltr, Col Perry to author, 8 Jun 52; Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Ltr, Meloy to author, 30 Dec 52; 52d FA Bn WD, 16 Jul 50; 13th FA Bn WD, 16 Jul 50. General Order 120, 5 September 1950, 24th Division, awarded the Silver Star to Lieutenant Steele for action on 16 July.

<sup>53</sup> Ltr, Perry to author, 8 Jun 52; Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52, quoting Maj Leon B. Cheek, S-3, 13th FA Bn; Interv, Blumenson with Lt Nash (S-4, 2d Bn, 19th Inf), 1 Aug 51.

of soldiers, entirely disorganized and apathetic, were returning some fire in the general direction of the unseen enemy. While trying to organize a group to attack the enemy on the high ground overlooking the road Colonel Meloy was wounded. He now gave to Colonel Winstead command of all troops along the Kum River.

Major Logan established communication with General Dean about 1300. He told him that Meloy had been wounded, that Winstead was in command, and that the regimental situation was bad. Dean replied that he was assembling a force to try to break the roadblock but that probably it would be about 1530 before it could arrive at the scene. He ordered the regiment to withdraw at once, getting its personnel and equipment out to the greatest possible extent. Soon after this conversation, enemy fire struck and destroyed the regimental radio truck, and there was no further communication with the division. Colonel Winstead ordered Major Logan to try to reduce the roadblock and get someone through to establish contact with the relief force expected from the south. Winstead then started back to his 1st Battalion along the river. Shortly after 1330 he ordered it to withdraw. In returning to the Kum, Winstead went to his death.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ltrs, Meloy to author, 29 May, 7 Jul, 4 Dec, and 30 Dec 52; Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; 24th Div WD, G-2 Jnl, entry 1031, 161900 Jul 50. The message in the G-2 Journal reporting Logan's conversation with General Dean reads, "Colonel Meloy hit in calf of leg. Winstead in command. Vehicles badly jammed. Baker Battery is no more [apparently referring to B Battery, 52d Field Artillery Battalion, but in error]. Will fight them and occupy position in rear. Both sides of road. Vehicles jammed. Taking a pounding in front. Air Force does not seem able to find or silence tanks."

During the previous night the weather had cleared from overcast to bright starlight, and now, as the sun climbed past its zenith, the temperature reached 100 degrees. Only foot soldiers who have labored up the steep Korean slopes in midsummer can know how quickly exhaustion overcomes the body unless it is inured to such conditions by training and experience. As this was the initial experience of the 19th Infantry in Korean combat the men lacked the physical stamina demanded by the harsh terrain and the humid, furnacelike weather. And for three days and nights past they had had little rest. This torrid midsummer Korean day, growing light at 0500 and staying light until 2100, seemed to these weary men an unending day of battle.

When the 1st Battalion began to withdraw, some of the units were still in their original positions, while others were in secondary positions to which enemy action had driven them. In the withdrawal from Hill 200 on the battalion right, officers of C Company had trouble in getting the men to leave their foxholes. Incoming mortar fire pinned them down. Cpl. Jack Arawaka, a machine gunner, at this time had his gun blow up in his face. Deafened, nearly blind, and otherwise wounded from the explosion, he picked up a BAR and continued fighting. Arawaka did not follow the company off the hill.

As 2d Lt. Augustus B. Orr led a part of the company along the base of the hill toward the highway he came upon a number of North Korean soldiers lying in rice paddy ditches and partly covered with water. They appeared to be dead. Suddenly, Orr saw one of them who was clutching a grenade send air bubbles into the water and open his eyes. Orr shot

him at once. He and his men now discovered that the other North Koreans were only feigning death and they killed them on the spot.<sup>55</sup>

When C Company reached the highway they saw the last of A and B Companies disappearing south along it. Enemy troops were starting forward from the vicinity of the bridge. But when they saw C Company approaching from their flank, they ran back. Upon reaching the highway, C Company turned south on it but soon came under enemy fire from the hill east of Palsan-ni. An estimated six enemy machine guns fired on the company and scattered it. Individuals and small groups from the company made their way south as best they could. Some of those who escaped saw wounded men lying in the roadside ditches with medical aid men heroically staying behind administering to their needs. On the west side of the highway, F Company was still in position covering the withdrawal of B Company. At the time of the withdrawal of the 1st Battalion, F Company was under fire from its left front, left flank, and the left rear.<sup>56</sup>

As elements of the withdrawing 1st Battalion came up to the roadblock, officers attempted to organize attacks against the enemy automatic weapons firing from the high ground a few hundred yards to the west. One such force had started climbing toward the enemy positions when a flight of four friendly F-51's came in and attacked the hill. This disrupted their efforts completely and caused the men to drop back off the slope in a disorganized condition. Other

attempts were made to organize parties from drivers, mechanics, artillerymen, and miscellaneous personnel to go up the hill—all to no avail. Two light tanks at the roadblock fired in the general direction of the enemy. But since the North Koreans used smokeless powder ammunition, the tankers could not locate the enemy guns and their fire was ineffective. Lt. Lloyd D. Smith, platoon leader of the 81-mm. mortar platoon, D Company, was one of the officers Major Logan ordered to attack and destroy the enemy machine guns. He and another platoon leader, with about fifty men, started climbing toward the high ground. After going several hundred feet, Smith found that only one man was still with him. They both returned to the highway. Men crowded the roadside ditches seeking protection from the enemy fire directed at the vehicles.<sup>57</sup>

Several times men pushed vehicles blocking the road out of the way, but each time traffic started to move enemy machine guns opened up causing more driver casualties and creating the vehicle block all over again. Strafing by fighter planes seemed unable to reduce this enemy automatic fire of three or four machine guns. Ordered to attack south against the enemy roadblock force, F Company, still in its original reserve position, was unable to do so, being virtually surrounded and under heavy attack.

About 1430, Major Logan placed Capt. Edgar R. Fenstermacher, Assistant S-3, in command at the roadblock, and taking twenty men he circled eastward and then southward trying to determine

<sup>55</sup> Interv, Blumenson with Orr, 26 Aug 51.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*; Ltr, Meloy to author, 4 Dec 52, citing comments provided him by Capt Anderson, CO, B Co.

<sup>57</sup> Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Interv, Blumenson with Lt Smith (D Co, 19th Inf), 25 Aug 51.

the extent of the roadblock and to find a bypass. Approximately two hours later, he and his group walked into the positions of the 13th Field Artillery Battalion which had started to displace southward. A few minutes later Logan met General Dean. With the general were two light tanks and four antiaircraft artillery vehicles, two of them mounting quad .50-caliber machine guns and the other two mounting dual 40-mm. guns.<sup>59</sup>

In carrying out Meloy's instructions and going back down the road to find Colonel McGrail and bring G and H Companies to break the roadblock, Nash ran a gantlet of enemy fire. His jeep was wrecked by enemy fire, but he escaped on foot to the 13th Field Artillery Battalion position. There he borrowed a jeep and drove to McGrail's command post at Sangwang-ni on the regimental extreme left flank near Kongju. After delivering Meloy's orders, Nash drove back to Taejon airstrip to find trucks to transport the troops. It took personal intercession and an order from the assistant division commander, General Menoher, before the trucks went to pick up G Company. Meanwhile, two tanks and the anti-aircraft vehicles started for the roadblock position. Colonel McGrail went on ahead and waited at the 13th Field Artillery Battalion headquarters for the armored vehicles to arrive. They had just arrived when Logan met General Dean.<sup>60</sup>

Logan told General Dean of the situation at the roadblock and offered to

lead the armored vehicles to break the block. Dean said that Colonel McGrail would lead the force and that he, Logan, should continue on south and form a new position just west of Taejon airfield. While Logan stood at the roadside talking with General Dean, a small group of five jeeps came racing toward them. Lt. Col. Homer B. Chandler, the 19th Infantry Executive Officer, rode in the lead jeep. He had led four jeeps loaded with wounded through the roadblock. Every one of the wounded had been hit again one or more times by enemy fire during their wild ride.<sup>60</sup>

McGrail now started up the road with the relief force. One light tank led, followed by the four antiaircraft vehicles loaded with soldiers; the second light tank brought up the rear. About one mile north of the former position of the 13th Field Artillery Battalion, enemy heavy machine gun and light antitank fire ripped into the column just after it rounded a bend and came onto a straight stretch of the road. Two vehicles stopped and returned the enemy fire. Most of the infantry in the antiaircraft vehicles jumped out and scrambled for the roadside ditches. As McGrail went into a ditch he noticed Colonel Meloy's and Major Logan's wrecked jeeps nearby. Enemy fire destroyed the four antiaircraft vehicles. After expending their ammunition, the tanks about 1600 turned around and headed back down the road. McGrail crawled back along the roadside ditch and eventually got out of enemy fire. The personnel in the four antiaircraft vehicles suffered an estimated 90 percent casualties. The location of the wrecked

<sup>59</sup> Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Interv, author with Col Thomas M. McGrail, 24 Oct 52.

<sup>60</sup> Interv, Blumenson with Nash, 1 Aug 51; Interv, author with McGrail, 24 Oct 52.

<sup>60</sup> Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Interv, author with McGrail, 24 Oct 52.

Meloy and Logan jeeps would indicate that McGrail's relief force came within 300 to 400 yards of the regimental column piled up behind the roadblock around the next turn of the road.<sup>61</sup>

Back near Kongju on the regimental west flank, G Company came off its hill positions and waited for trucks to transport it to the roadblock area. Elements of H Company went on ahead in their own transportation. Captain Montesclaros stayed with the I&R Platoon, and it and the engineers blew craters in the road. They were the last to leave. At Yusong General Menoher met Capt. Michael Barszcz, commanding officer of G Company, when the company arrived there from the west flank. Fearing that enemy tanks were approaching, Menoher ordered him to deploy his men along the river bank in the town.

Later Barszcz received orders to lead his company forward to attack the enemy-held roadblock. On the way, Barszcz met a small convoy of vehicles led by a 2½-ton truck. A Military Police officer riding the front fender of the truck yelled, "Tanks, Tanks!" as it hurtled past. Barszcz ordered his driver to turn the jeep across the road to block it and the G Company men scrambled off their vehicles into the ditches. But there were no enemy tanks, and, after a few minutes, Barszcz had G Company on the road again, this time on foot. Some distance ahead, he met General Dean who ordered him to make contact with the enemy and try to break the roadblock.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*; 19th Inf WD, 16 Jul 50; 78th Hv Tk Bn, A Co, WD, 16 Jul 50.

<sup>62</sup> Ltr, Barszcz to author, 3 Jul 52; Interv, author with Montesclaros, 20 Aug 52. Interv, Blumenson with 2d Lt Robert L. Herbert (Plat Ldr, 2d Plat, G Co, 19th Inf), 20 Aug 51.

About six miles north of Yusong and two miles south of Tuman-ni, G Company came under long-range enemy fire. Barszcz received orders to advance along high ground on the left of the road. He was told that enemy troops were on the hill half a mile ahead and to the left. While climbing the hill the company suffered several casualties from enemy fire. They dug in on top at dusk. A short time later a runner brought word for them to come down to the road and withdraw. That ended the effort of the 19th Infantry and the 24th Division to break the roadblock behind the regiment.<sup>63</sup>

Efforts to break the enemy roadblock at both its northern and southern extremities disclosed that it covered about a mile and a half of road. The enemy soldiers imposing it were on a Y-shaped hill mass whose two prongs dropped steeply to the Yongsu River at their eastern bases and overlooked the Seoul-Pusan highway.

Behind the roadblock, the trapped men had waited during the afternoon. They could not see either of the two attempts to reach them from the south because of a finger ridge cutting off their view. Not all the troops along the river line, however, came to the roadblock; many groups scattered into the hills and moved off singly or in small units south and east toward Taejon.

About 1800, several staff officers decided that they would place Colonel Meloy in the last tank and run it through the roadblock. The tank made four efforts before it succeeded in pushing aside the pile of smoldering 2½-ton trucks

<sup>63</sup> Ltr, Barszcz to author, 3 Jul 52; Interv, Blumenson with Herbert, 20 Aug 51.

and other equipment blocking the road. Then it rumbled southward. About twenty vehicles followed the tank through the roadblock, including a truck towing a 105-mm. howitzer of the 52d Field Artillery Battalion, before enemy fire closed the road again and for the last time. A few miles south of the roadblock the tank stopped because of mechanical failure. There Captain Barszcz and G Company, withdrawing toward Yusong, came upon it and Colonel Meloy. No one had been able to stop any of the vehicles for help that had followed the tank through the roadblock. Instead, they sped past the disabled tank. The tank commander, Lt. J. N. Roush, upon Colonel Meloy's orders, dropped a thermite grenade into the tank and destroyed it. Eventually, an officer returned with a commandeered truck and took Colonel Meloy and other wounded men to Yusong.<sup>64</sup>

About an hour after the tank carrying Colonel Meloy had broken through the roadblock, Captain Fenstermacher, acting under his authority from Major Logan, ordered all personnel to prepare for cross-country movement. The critically wounded and those unable to walk were placed on litters. There were an estimated 500 men and approximately 100 vehicles at the roadblock at this time. Captain Fenstermacher and others poured gasoline on the vehicles and then set them afire. While so engaged, Captain Fenstermacher was shot through the neck. About 2100 the last of the men at

the roadblock moved eastward into the hills.<sup>65</sup>

One group of infantrymen, artillerymen, engineers, and medical and headquarters troops, numbering approximately 100 men, climbed the mountain east of the road. They took with them about 30 wounded, including several litter cases. About 40 men of this group were detailed to serve as litter bearers but many of them disappeared while making the ascent. On top of the mountain the men still with the seriously wounded decided they could take them no farther. Chaplain Herman G. Felhoelter remained behind with the wounded. When a party of North Koreans could be heard approaching, at the Chaplain's urging, Capt. Linton J. Buttrey, the medical officer, escaped, though seriously wounded in doing so. From a distance, 1st Sgt James W. R. Haskins of Headquarters Company saw through his binoculars a group of what appeared to be young North Korean soldiers murder the wounded men and the valiant chaplain as the latter prayed over them.<sup>66</sup>

All night long and into the next day, 17 July, stragglers and those who had escaped through the hills filtered into Yusong and Taejon. Only two rifle companies of the 19th Infantry were relatively intact—G and E Companies. On the eastern flank near the railroad bridge, E Company was not engaged

<sup>64</sup> Ltrs, Meloy to author, 20 Aug and 30 Dec 52; Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Inters, Blumenson with Early, 26 Aug 51 and Herbert, 20 Aug 51; 52d FA Bn WD, 16 Jul 50; 13th FA Bn WD, 16 Jul 50; Inters, author with Huckabay and Eversole, 52d FA Bn, 4 Aug 51.

<sup>65</sup> Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Ltr, Meloy to author, 4 Dec 52 (both Meloy and Logan quote information from Fenstermacher on the departure from the roadblock); Interv, Blumenson with Early, 26 Aug 51; 19th Inf WD, 16 Jul 50.

<sup>66</sup> Interv, Blumenson with Early, 26 Aug 51; Ltr, Meloy to author, quoting Fenstermacher, 4 Dec 52; Notes, Logan to author, Jun 52; *New York Herald Tribune*, July 19, 1950.



during the Kum River battle and that night received orders to withdraw.

When Captain Barszcz encountered Colonel Meloy at the stalled tank the latter had ordered him to dig in across the road at the first good defensive terrain he could find. Barszcz selected positions at Yusong. There G Company dug in and occupied the most advanced organized defense position of the U.S. 24th Division beyond Taejon on the morning of 17 July.<sup>67</sup>

The North Korean 3d Division fought the battle of the Kum River on 16 July without tanks south of the river. Most of the American light tanks in the action gave a mixed performance. At the roadblock on one occasion, when Major Logan ordered two tanks to go around a bend in the road and fire on the enemy machine gun positions in an attempt to silence them while the regimental column ran through the block, the tankers refused to do so unless accompanied by infantry. Later these tanks escaped through the roadblock without orders. An artillery officer meeting General Dean at the south end of the roadblock asked him if there was anything he could do. Dean replied, "No, thank you," and then with a wry smile the general added, "unless you can help me give these tankers a little courage."<sup>68</sup>

The 19th Infantry regimental headquarters and the 1st Battalion lost nearly all their vehicles and heavy equipment north of the roadblock. The 52d Field Artillery Battalion lost 8 105-mm. howitzers and most of its equipment; it

brought out only 1 howitzer and 3 vehicles. The 13th and 11th Field Artillery Battalions, two miles south of the 52d, withdrew in the late afternoon to the Taejon airstrip without loss of either weapons or vehicles.<sup>69</sup>

The battle of the Kum on 16 July was a black day for the 19th Infantry Regiment. Of the approximately 900 men in position along the river only 434 reported for duty in the Taejon area the next day. A count disclosed that of the 34 officers in the regimental Headquarters, Service, Medical, and Heavy Mortar Companies, and the 1st Battalion, 17 were killed or missing in action. Of these, 13 later were confirmed as killed in action. All the rifle companies of the 1st Battalion suffered heavy casualties, but the greatest was in C Company, which had total casualties of 122 men out of 171. The regimental headquarters lost 57 of 191 men. The 1st Battalion lost 338 out of 785 men, or 43 percent, the 2d Battalion, 86 out of 777 men; the 52d Field Artillery Battalion had 55 casualties out of 393 men, or 14 percent. The total loss of the regiment and all attached and artillery units engaged in the action was 650 out of 3,401, or 19 percent.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Ltr, Col Perry to author, 6 Nov 52; 52d FA Bn WD, 16 Jul 50; 13th FA Bn WD, 16 Jul 50; Interv, author with Maj Jack J. Kron (Ex Off, 13th FA Bn), 4 Aug 51. The 11th Field Artillery Battalion on 14 July received a third firing battery, thus becoming the first U.S. artillery battalion in action in the Korean War to have the full complement of three firing batteries. Interv, author with Check, 5 Aug 51; 19th Inf WD, 16 Jul 50.

<sup>70</sup> Table, Confirmed KIA as of August 1, 1951, 19th Infantry, for 16 Jul 50, copy supplied author by Gen Meloy; Intervs, Blumenson with Early and Orr, 26 Aug 51; The Rand Corporation, Dr. J. O'Sullivan, Statistical Study of Casualties 19th Infantry at Battle of Taep'yong-ni, 16 July 1950.

<sup>68</sup> Ltr, Barszcz to author, 3 Jul 52.

<sup>69</sup> Ltr, Meloy to author, 29 May 52; Notes, Logan for author, Jun 52; Interv, author with Maj Leon B. Check, 5 Aug 51.

During 17 July, B Company of the 34th Infantry relieved G Company, 19th Infantry, in the latter's position at Yulsong, five miles northwest of Taejon. The 19th Infantry that afternoon moved to Yongdong, twenty-five air miles southeast of Taejon, to re-equip.<sup>21</sup>

In the battle of the Kum River on 16 July one sees the result of a defending force lacking an adequate reserve to deal with enemy penetrations and flank movement. Colonel Meloy never faltered in his belief that if he had not had to send two-thirds of his reserve to the left flank after the collapse of the 34th Infantry at Kongju, he could have prevented the North Koreans from establishing their roadblock or could have reduced it by attack from high ground. The regiment did repel, or by counterattack drive out,

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<sup>21</sup> 19th Inf WD, 17 Jul 50; 24th Div WD, G-4 Summ, 17-18 Jul 50.

all frontal attacks and major penetrations of its river positions except that through C Company on Hill 200. But it showed no ability to organize counterattacks with available forces once the roadblock had been established. By noon, demoralization had set in among the troops, many of whom were near exhaustion from the blazing sun and the long hours of tension and combat. They simply refused to climb the hills to attack the enemy's automatic weapons positions.

The N.K. 3d Division, for its part, pressed home an attack which aimed to pin down the 19th Infantry by frontal attack while it carried out a double envelopment of the flanks. The envelopment of the American left flank resulted in the fatal roadblock three miles below the Kum on the main supply road. This North Korean method of attack had characterized most other earlier actions and it seldom varied in later ones.