

# From Changjin to the sea

*Diary of a new chapter  
in American heroism*



**Every man a hero.** Dog-tired Americans nap, some sprawled on road, as Chinese Communist roadblock stalls X Corps' march to the sea.

*For sheer guts in the face of overwhelming odds, the 100-mile march of United States X Corps marines and infantrymen from the Changjin reservoir to the Korean seacoast is one of the greatest exhibitions of mass courage in our history. Trapped by 120,000 Chinese, 25,000 Americans fought their way out of a frozen hell to escape by sea. Here, compiled from the dispatches of newsmen who covered it and the words of the men who fought it, is a diary of the heroic march:*

**Nov. 28**—This is it. Tonight three Red Chinese divisions and a regiment made a surprise attack on two Marine regiments based on the western edge of the frozen Changjin reservoir.

**Nov. 29**—Bitter fighting. We're up against at least five Chinese divisions. The Chinese have blocked the escape roads. Helicopters came in to take out our wounded.

**Nov. 30**—More hot fighting. We're completely cut off. Said Pfc. Richard Bolde of New Paltz, N.Y.: "It was like a mousetrap. The Chinese let us in but they wouldn't let us out." We've killed 4,500 Reds so far.

**Dec. 1**—No letup in the fighting.

**Dec. 2**—Good news for a change. The Marines have fought out of the trap and joined forces with the Seventh Infantry Division at Hagaru. Marine Lt. Col. Ray Murphy told staff officers: "We're gonna get out of there. Any officer here who doesn't think so will kindly go lame and be evacuated, but I don't expect any bites for that offer."

**Dec. 3**—The Chinese pour it on. Their fire is so intense that one of our groups couldn't reach supplies parachuted just across the road. Carrier-based Marine planes are giving us great support and saving thousands of our men. The snow is littered with Chinese corpses.

**Dec. 4**—Thermometers read 27 degrees below zero. More straggler units fight into Hagaru. For the first time "Gooney Birds" [DC-3 cargo carriers] come in to help take out our wounded. Every man is a hero. One Marine medic told a wounded lad: "Do something for me, will you? Say a couple of Hail Marys for us and pray we'll be able to walk out



of here." We can't get out any other way.

**Dec. 5**—Relatively quiet day. B-26 bombers came over to blast the Chinks for the first time. Fred Sparks of the *Chicago Daily News* reporting: "No one here is reaching for a panic strap, not a GI or a general. . . . A boy Marine . . . came to me and said, while a fire fight ranged around us: 'The only thing that bothers me is maybe my family back home is worried.'"

**Dec. 6**—We lost our airstrip at Hagaru today. It was a rollercoaster strip, carved out of a pasture, but it took out more than 1,700 of our wounded. We start to pull out for Koto, ten miles away. But the real objective is the sea, 40 miles by air, but 60 the way we'll have to go over twisting mountain roads, just wide enough in places for a six-wheel truck. The road is sheathed with ice, full of hairpin turns and sheer drops. We'll have to run a gantlet of fire all the way. The Chinese are dug into the mountains and make poor targets from the air.

**Dec. 7**—The anniversary of Pearl Harbor. Blinding snowstorm. The first of our boys reach Koto after one of the bloodiest battles of the Korean war. They came in a caravan, ten miles long, protected by planes. Frostbite is a major enemy. Marguerite Higgins of the *New York Herald Tribune* reporting and quoting Lt. Col. John Stevens of La Jolla, Calif.: "I saw a man take off his boot this morning and the whole bottom of his foot ripped off. These shoe-pacs just aren't cut out for below-zero weather like this. The men's feet sweat in the rubber of the shoes and then the sweat freezes. Then they are done for."

**Dec. 8**—The march to the sea continues but it took a fantastic feat of engineering to keep the columns moving. Three miles down the only road out of Koto a bridge over a hydraulic dam had been dynamited out. The Marines put in an SOS and the Air Force came over with a 16-ton treadway bridge in eight sections and dropped it at the scene. The engineers put it into place in record time and the columns kept rolling.

**Dec. 9**—The Associated Press's Jack Macbeth watches the American column move into Koto. "It was a gruesome sight—wounded men with blood frozen to their skins, their clothes stiff with ice; grotesque dead men lying across trailers and stretchers; live men stumbling along, grimacing from frostbite, using their rifles as crutches. . . . The dead count is high. Two days ago I watched nearly 200 bodies nosed into a single grave by a bulldozer. There was no time for more elaborate arrangements."

**Dec. 10**—On to the sea in vehicles moving bumper to bumper, every one covered with men, "like ants on a sugar lump," as the AP's Stan Swinton put it.

**Dec. 11**—Twenty-five thousand break out of the death snare in Korea's "frozen hell" and reach the coastal plain above the escape port of Hungnam. The rescue fleet begins immediate evacuation as warships and planes lay down a screen of shells and bombs to hold back the pursuing Chinese from a 15-mile beachhead around Hungnam and Hamhung. A lot of



our boys didn't make it. Marine casualties were nearly 7,000, higher than those at Tarawa, bloodiest Marine battle of World War II. What do the men who lived through this heroic retreat think? Sgt. George Burdick of Lakeport, Calif., sums it up best. "We weren't exactly beat; we were just fighting a lost cause against too damned many Chinese."

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## The \$64 question

**How many** atom bombs does Russia have? Last week Kenneth de Courcy, editor of the British publication *Intelligence Digest*, said Russia has a stockpile of 35 and is now producing four a month, but aims to have 300 by the end of 1954. De Courcy's estimate rates attention because he scored a beat in reporting Russia's first atomic explosion.

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