

Pathfinder

NEWS MAGAZINE

Korea: after one year

Success is measured not in what we did but in what communism failed to do

On Saturday, June 24, 1950, at Indiantown Gap, Pa., the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Administration, Lt. Gen. Matthew Bunker Ridgway, reviewed a National Guard unit. He already had been advised that trouble was popping in Korea. Driving back to Washington, Ridgway and his wife Penny stopped for the night at Carlisle Barracks.

At 3 a.m. his aide telephoned. "Sorry to bother you, General," he said, "but that trouble I told you about—it looks like the real thing. We're having another telecon conversation with General MacArthur tomorrow morning at 9." "Thanks," said Ridgway, "I'll be there."

Sunday Headlines. The next morning Americans read in their Sunday papers that Russian-trained North Korean troops had invaded South Korea. In Missouri, President Truman cautioned reporters: "Don't make it alarmist. It could be dangerous, but I hope it isn't."

In Washington 48 hours later, the President ordered U.S. air and naval forces under MacArthur to give "cover and support" to South Korean troops. Five days later, after the United Nations Security Council voted military action against the North Koreans, he sent U.S. troops to Korea.

For most people the big question was: "Is this the beginning of World War III?" Almost a year after the Communist aggression began, the fighting still had not erupted into World War III. But it had cost the U.S. more than 70,000 casualties. What had we accomplished?

Unmasked Conspiracy. "Never," said Ridgway, "have these Communist conspirators given the world a clearer view of the values which they place on human life . . . of the fate that would befall us and other free peoples if they are successful in their purposes. With them there is no compromise and for us there is no choice."

When Ridgway took over the Eighth Army after Lt. Gen. Walton Walker's death in a jeep crash last December, U.S. fighting morale had reached a new low. Ridgway arrived the day after what glum GIs called Black Christmas.

He quickly assured jittery President Syngman Rhee of the Republic of Korea that he was not there to direct the evacuation of Korea. Said Ridgway: "I aim to stay." Later as he warmed up to his task he said: "The job is to kill Chinese. Real estate is here incidental."

Korea: after one year



General Van Fleet. A gift from Ridgway: a high-spirited army.

Inspection Trip. Dressed in his paratrooper outfit complete with hand grenades, he set out to cover as much incidental real estate as he could.

The 56-year-old general was always on the go—by plane, by jeep or on foot. (Once an aide tagged along with the general on the 2½-mile walk from the Pentagon to his home at Fort Myer. When the ordeal was over the aide panted: “He walks like a madman.”)

A “madman” was just what the discouraged U.N. forces needed that bleak winter. Ridgway’s aggressiveness was caught by his troops. One colonel said: “In attack, our men scream like Comanches, give forth with rebel yells and shout much that is unprintable. On defense, it’s much the same story—grim bedlam and whooping it up for the team.”

Ridgway planned his battles on the basis of mechanized forces against masses of troops. When the enemy attacked in large numbers he pulled back his infantry, leaving the slaughter to air and artillery. He always had a fast-moving reserve unit ready to plug a menacing gap. When the enemy withdrew, Ridgway sent out armored task forces to keep him off balance. The tactics paid off in staggering enemy casualties. The total so far: 1,133,140.

According to other generals, however, the most important thing Ridgway brought to Korea was the know-how for supplying troops by air. Most commanders would shudder at the problems involved in parachuting a six-ton truck or a 105 mm. howitzer from a plane.

Korea: after one year

It was no problem for Ridgway: As head of one of the Army's first airborne divisions (82nd) he was a paratroop pioneer; later during World War II he commanded the Army's first Airborne Corps (XVIII) in the European theater.

When he first arrived in Korea, Ridgway found that the light-traveling Chinese could outmaneuver the road-bound Eighth Army by keeping to the hills. Ridgway sent his own troops into the hills and supplied them by air. In one record day, C-119 Flying Boxcars parachuted 246 tons of equipment to mountain-fighting GIs.

In April, when he moved from Korea to Tokyo's Dai Ichi building as MacArthur's successor, Ridgway was able to turn over to Lt. Gen. James Van Fleet a high-spirited army that could go anywhere.

The Lessons. From a strictly military point of view Korea has been a valuable school. One officer explained: "The Army didn't want a war to test its new equipment. But now that we've got one on our hands, it's been a big help." A few things learned from Korea:

- • The U.S. M-46 medium tank, the General Patton, is better than the Russian T-34. Pattons knocked out T-34s at an 18-to-1 ratio.

- • The 3.5 bazooka can do everything expected of it, including knocking out T-34s.

- • The helicopter came of military age over rugged Korea. "In Korea," said an officer, "one 'copter is worth 20 jeeps."

- • You need more than bombs to win a war. It still takes ground troops, adequately equipped and skilfully deployed.

Last week—the 51st of the war in Korea—the U.N. forces overran the Communists' Iron Triangle in Central Korea. This was the build-up area from which the Reds launched two ill-fated spring offensives. Nevertheless, as the conflict entered the last week of its first year with the enemy back-pedaling, the final issue was as much in doubt as it was when the North Koreans stormed across the 38th Parallel on June 25, 1950.

Truce rumors were current last week, and a cease-fire order might come as suddenly and with as little advance notice as the Red attack a year ago. Except for Chinese intervention last fall, the U.N. decision to meet force with force in Korea would have paid off with the whole nation freed from Communist control. But if an armistice came this week, ruined Korea would be as divided as it was a year ago, with the Communists in control north of the 38th Parallel and the

Korea: after one year

U.N. in command to the south.

The natural question then would be: Was our gallant fight really worth the terrible price we had to pay?

Soviet Secrets. Yes, some say, we slowed Russia's timetable for world conquest. The fact is no one outside the Kremlin knows what Russia's timetable is. We didn't know what action Russia would take when we committed troops to Korea; we don't know what moves the Kremlin will make in the future.

We saved face in the Orient by our fight in Korea, says another theory. The fact is that the whole Orient is lost—in the sense that the nations of the Far East have made plain they reserve the right to manage or mismanage their own affairs.

But in the political war against the Reds, Korea's profit-and-loss column (see Balance sheet) comes out in the black. A long-range look at the ledger shows that the men and materials spent to meet the enemy in Korea probably brought the U.S. its most important gain to date over the Communists.

A year ago the Communists set out to grab another country. When the U.N. intervened to save it, more Communists came down to push the U.S. and its allies into the sea. Thanks to a four-star paratrooper and the guts of his men, they have failed—so far—on both counts.

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