

Pathfinder

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Damp war. Red pressure takes toll as rain turns dust into mud.

Korea: Elastic Line

The United Nations defense "line" in Korea was more like a rubber band. It gave with Red punches, then snapped back. But last week the strain on the elastic was terrific.

North Korea's Communists had been beaten each time they threw a haymaker at a single point on the rim of the beach-head "box." Neat shifting by the outnumbered defenders met and tossed back each of the blows—first along the southern coast toward Pusan, next in the northeast against the secondary port of Pohang, and again across the Nakdong River near Taegu. Then came a lull when headlines told of the increasing confidence of U.S. troops—and a big build-up behind the Red-held hills.

As September moved along, Marshal Choi Yung Kun, the North Korean commander, began to use new tactics. He launched heavy drives along the entire 120-mile front to keep the U.S. from juggling its units. Feints in the northeast toward Pohang and along the southern front drew the tired First Marines and the 24th Division back into the line after only a few days of rest in rear areas. The newly arrived British brigade was hurriedly committed.

City Under Fire. But Choi's Sunday punch smacked the hinge north of Taegu, held by South Koreans—who had been fighting continuously for two months—and by the U.S. First Cavalry. Fifty thousand men on a 50-mile front carved out huge dents and Red artillery got close enough to shell the outskirts of the city. The situation was described as "fluid" and "confusing."

As one U.S. officer put it: "We hold a hill up there, they hold one back here. They've got a road block behind us, we've got one back of them. Who's surrounding who?"

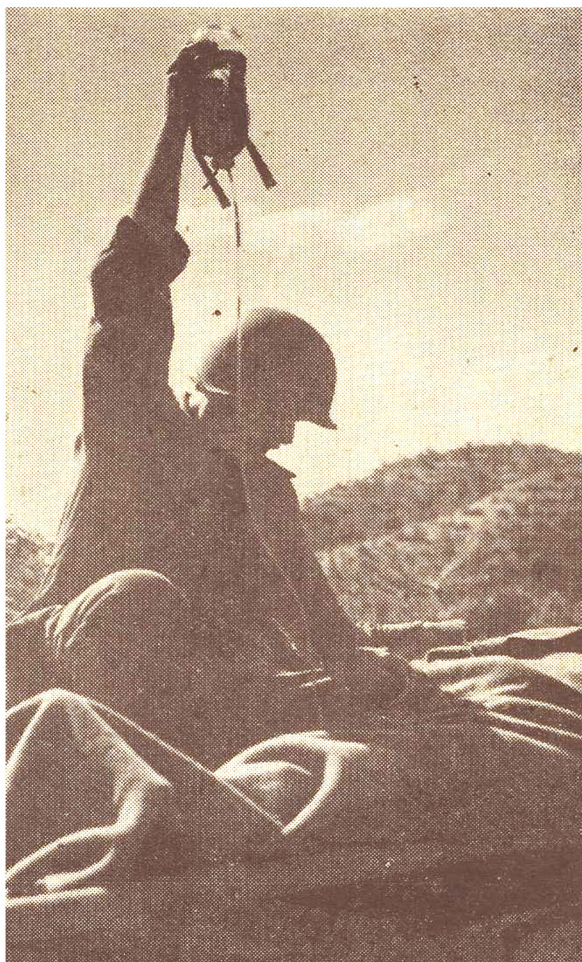
Elastic Line

By Monday the elastic began to snap back. South Koreans regained six miles in one of their greatest victories of the war—one a U.S. Eighth Army spokesman called a “rout” of the enemy. The rain which had turned Korea’s dust into clogging mire let up, and the United Nations’ air superiority turned out in force.

Slowing Down. One Allied air attack sent Red troops fleeing back toward the Naktong after they had pushed 4½ miles east of the river toward the Taegu-Pusan railroad. A gap in Taegu’s eastern defenses was sealed off. On the whole, Choi’s big blow seemed to have run out of steam.

Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker, U.S. commander in Korea, said that “we are not in too much danger.” President Syngman Rhee of the Korean Republic hopefully predicted that the Communists would be on the run by rice-harvesting time in October.

Rhee might have been doing a bit of wishful thinking. Feeding the 2 million refugees squeezed into the U.N. beach-head would be a problem if the rice crop remained in Communist hands. And Intelligence reported what appeared to be another Red build-up behind its new positions.



Sunset. Shadows fall on a wounded G.I. receiving blood plasma.