



U. S. MARINE CORPS

Fifth and Seventh Regiment Marines grimly fight off exhaustion as they pause near Hagaru and make ready to battle their way to the sea.

This is how the First Marine Division battled out of the icy trap at Changjin Reservoir, through masses of fanatic Chinese, bringing their wounded with them. A reporter who saw that nightmare trek describes

The Bloody Trail Back

By MARGUERITE HIGGINS

TOKYO.

THE snow lashed hard at the raw red faces of the marine officers as they stood in the icy waste of enemy-encircled Hagaru plateau. "At daylight," said Lt. Col. Ray Murray, of the 5th Marines, their commander, "we advance to the rear. Those are division orders." Then he added urgently, almost argumentatively, "We are going to come out of this as marines, not as stragglers. We're coming out bringing our wounded and our equipment. We're coming out, I tell you, as marines or not at all."

The men to whom he spoke had just fought five days and five nights to lead their men out of the icy communist trap at Yudam-ni, on the west side of the

Changjin Reservoir. It had been a Korean Valley Forge and worse than anything in marine history. The leathernecks were exhausted and the tension among them was all-pervasive, indescribable. They had the dazed air of men who had accepted death and continued to live after all. They talked in unfinished phrases. They would start, and then suddenly halt as if their thoughts were beyond words.

Despite their ordeal, they took the withdrawal order hard. While Murray spoke, I watched their faces there, as the wind buffeted them in that scenic plateau, a kind of evil Shangri-la. Their expressions were of deeply bruised pride. From Château-Thierry to Guadalcanal, from Eniwetok to Iwo Jima, marines had never fought any way but forward.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marguerite Higgins, famous and pretty war correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune, has won herself an unexcelled reputation for courage and skill in covering the front-line fighting in Korea. This article is an excerpt from her forthcoming book, *War in Korea*, to be published by Doubleday & Co., Inc. —The Editors

Many thousands had died in those strange-sounding places, but never had the marines ceased battling till—in the matter-of-fact language of the corps—the objective was secured.

Sensing the atmosphere, Colonel Murray, somewhat harshly and with emphasis, repeated the words of his division commander, Maj. Gen. O. P. Smith. "This is no retreat. This is an assault in another direction." He continued, "There are more Chinese blocking our path to the sea than there are ahead of us. But we're gonna get out of here. Any officer who doesn't think so will kindly go lame and be evacuated. I don't expect any takers. But remember, you've got to give your men confidence."

And so began the last phase of the epic marine fighting exit from the frigid gray ice fields of the Changjin Reservoir. This terrible trek out of the purple-and-white mountains of Northeastern Korea

cost nearly 5000 dead, wounded or frostbitten marines. It was part of the price America paid for once again underestimating the Soviet-sponsored Oriental and his ruthless determination to push the democratic world out of Asia.

The bloody trail out of what the leathernecks dubbed "Nightmare Alley" taught that even a marine, fully supported by air and equipped with the best weapons of the modern world, cannot fend off masses of howling Chinese soldiers when they outnumber him twenty or thirty to one. Ill-equipped by modern mechanized standards, Chinese pushed the marines back by sheer weight of numbers. We relearned from the Chinese onslaught what we had discovered earlier while fighting North Koreans: that air power and artillery cannot turn the tide of battle when you are vastly outnumbered and when you are fighting against a guerrilla-type warfare in mountainous terrain. Marine close-support planes, striking sometimes within thirty-five feet of front lines, won many skirmishes. But they could not win the day.

"What we needed," said Lt. Col. John Stevens, of La Jolla, California, commander of the first battalion, 5th Marines, "was more men. We found out that you can't fight a halfhearted war against these Asiatics. We have to go either all out or get out."

As I pieced it together there on the plateau and later at marine division headquarters, the full story of the first marine withdrawal in history begins properly about mid-November. It was then that the 1st Marine Division began pushing north from Hamhung on the narrow, winding road leading to the Changjin Reservoir.

Enemy Attempts to Spring Giant Trap

THERE were warning signals even then. "The enemy harassed our supply lines," the division operations officer commented, "and increasingly frequent ambushes showed he was operating in considerable force between our supply base at Hamhung and forward troops at the reservoir. But we believed there was only a division in the area. And they seemed to be yielding to our pressure."

In reality, as Pvt. Richard Bolde, of New Paltz, New York, expressed it, "It was a mousetrap. The Chinese would let us in, but they wouldn't let us out."

On November twenty-fourth the 5th Marines were ordered to cross snowy mountain passes reminiscent of the Tibetan approaches to the storybook Shangri-la and seize the Oriental shanty town of Yudam-ni, on the northwestern side of the reservoir.

The 7th Marine Regiment, then located at Hagaru on the southern tip of the reservoir, was to follow after the 5th. The 1st Marine Regiment was moving into Koto, situated about eight miles below the reservoir at the point where the road drops off the plateau and winds precipitously to the coastal plain below.

It is an open secret in Korea that the marines hold alleged faulty generalship partly responsible for the extent of their entrapment. The marines were part of Major General Almond's 10th Corps and, as such, were subject to Army orders. The marines assert that they had qualms from the first about crossing into Yudam-ni valley. For, according to the marines, by November twenty-fourth there were strong reports of a Chinese build-up in the areas to the south and west of Yudam-ni. That put the enemy on their west flank and to their rear. These reports were borne out by increasingly heavy attacks on their supply lines.

Then, on November twenty-fifth, the great Chinese offensive slashed at the 8th Army, situated west of the marine forward spearheads. The 8th was hurled back many miles and this stripped the marines of protection for their western flank. The strength of the assault on the 8th Army left no doubt that great masses of Chinese must be swarming over the spiny mountain ridges separating the two American forces.

Nonetheless, even after November twenty-fifth, the 10th Corps ordered the marines to keep advancing. The leathernecks did so, though they questioned



"We advance to the rear," said Lt. Col. Ray Murray, commanding the 5th Marines. "We're coming out bringing our wounded and our equipment. We're coming out, I tell you, as marines or not at all."

the wisdom of the move. On November twenty-sixth the 5th Marines seized Yudam-ni, and the next day they began attacking westward, gaining fifteen hundred yards.

Meanwhile Chinese infiltrating back of these spearheads cut the road between Yudam-ni and Hagaru and also between Hagaru and Koto.

Justifying the 10th Corps' order to the marines to keep attacking on November twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh, a spokesman told me, "By sending the marines westward, we hoped to deflect pressure from the Eighth Army."

The marines contended that it was a mistake to extend their outnumbered forces any farther. Two regiments, the marines argued, could not possibly deflect the dozen or more divisions pushing south. The attack out of Yudam-ni was all the more ill-advised, in the marines' opinion, because of the tortuous supply route.

In the early-morning hours of November twenty-eighth, the worst happened. Between six and eight Chinese divisions—estimates range from 80,000 to 120,000 men—struck at the marines, now strung out from Changjin Reservoir back to Koto. The most furious assaults hit the 5th and the 7th, trapped at Yudam-ni, with supply lines already cut. From this moment until they broke out of Yudam-ni, marines

were supplied by air, with big C-119's dropping ammunition and food in gaudy red and yellow chutes. The Chinese tried to develop strong positions to the marine rear, hoping thereby to snap the trap so tight that the marines would never emerge from their death valley.

At four A.M. on November twenty-eighth, the 7th and 5th reported that they were "heavily engaged" and sent out a plea for maximum air support. Finally, without waiting for word from Corps, the marine division commander, at noon on November twenty-eighth, instructed the regiments to cease attacking and hold where they were. The next day—November twenty-ninth—orders came to fight their way back from Yudam-ni to Hagaru.

"Those five days and five nights battling our way out of Nightmare Alley were the worst thing that ever happened to the marines," said Colonel Murray. "The rest (the trip from Hagaru to the coast) was nothing compared to that. Night after night I thought I would never see another dawn."

Yudam-ni was an ideal trap. Steep-sided valleys led to it along a narrow, ice-glazed road. Hugging the ridges, the Chinese had clear targets. During the struggle out of the valley, temperatures dropped way below zero. Guns and vehicles froze. The marines had to chip the ice off (Continued on Page 117)



Our men were outnumbered twenty or thirty to one. More Chinese lay behind them than in front of them. Their trek out of the mountains cost nearly 5000 dead, wounded or frostbitten marines.

THE BLOODY TRAIL BACK

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the mortars to fire them. Carbines jammed. The wounded had to take their chances in the convoy that remained under attack at every point. Murray brought out two wounded men strapped across his radiator. Their hands and legs froze in the terrible cold. Nothing could be done about it.

Riflemen were given the job of clearing the ridges on both sides of the road as the convoy inched forward. Whole platoons were slaughtered.

Private First Class Carroll Brewer, of Des Moines, Iowa, said, "The trouble was, they are so tricky and there are so many of them. They'd let our platoon take the forward slope of a hill and disappear over the other side. Then, in the dark, they'd come charging down on you. It wasn't no *banzai* stuff like the North Koreans. The Chinese'd wait till they were practically in your fox-hole before they'd shoot or throw grenades. They were swarming all over, like flies. Some would shout in English. They learned to yell, 'Medic, Medic,' and trick us into revealing our positions."

Lt. John Theros, of Oakland, California, one-time merchant seaman and more recently forward air observer with the second battalion, 7th Marines, said of Yudam-ni, "It's a hard kind of fighting to explain, except to say that everyone in that valley either came out with a Purple Heart or came within inches of having one. Look at me. My pants legs got two bullet tears and the canteen [which he carried on his hip] is an old sieve. The Chinese headed for the command posts, trying to get the officers and disorganize the men. They liked killin' colonels just as much as killin' privates."

"But the guys you ought to write about," Theros added, "are guys like Captain Hull of our battalion. What a terrific guy! He was a real leader, know what I mean? He was wounded goin' into the valley, but he wouldn't be evacuated out, not him. Captain Hull's company got pushed off the hill they were holding. Captain Hull had never

been pushed off no hill before, and he didn't like it. He had only fifty-nine men left in his company, but he went back up that hill. The guys said they were stompin' over frozen dead gooks all the way up. But they got shoved back again, and this time Captain Hull got hit and we didn't hear nothin' more about him at battalion."

"I thought sure he was done for, and I remember sittin' around during a lull the same night, shootin' the breeze and saying what a terrific guy Captain Hull was. Past tense, you know. An' suddenly the old bastard walks in. He had two more wounds, not too bad—one high up in the chest and one in the shoulder."

"Our regiment had been so badly cut up that we were formin' that evening what we called the 'damnation battalion.' We put all the remnants in it. Platoon leaders without platoons, mortar men without a mortar company, truck drivers without trucks. Well, Hull didn't have no company left to speak of, and damned if he didn't go to the major running damnation battalion and volunteer. Hull told the major, 'I'm not much good at shootin' in this condition, but I can still march, and if you've got any men who want to follow me, I'll lead 'em.' Captain Hull marched out of the valley with the rest of us. You know, I've read or heard somewhere that comrades of battles are supposed to be closer than brothers. I guess it's true, all right. I'd do anything for that Captain Hull, and yet I don't even know his first name."

As the 7th and 5th regiments, operating without benefit of division guidance, battered their way out of Yudam-ni, they came across Fox Company of the 7th, which had been isolated for five days on a hilltop.

"There were seventy-five men left," said Col. Alpha Bowser, division operations officer, "and every one of them was wounded. But the wounded—all except the critical cases—were still shooting, and that's how they saved themselves from annihilation. They used piled-up bodies of dead Chinese as emplacements to protect their fox-holes."

On December third and fourth the ten-mile-long marine caravan, pursuing tactics much like those of the pi-

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A QUARTER CENTURY OF QUALITY

oneers against the Indians, finally broke out of their death valley. When they finally reached the temporary haven of Hagaru plateau with its natural ring of defenses and bulldozed airstrip, the marines were still operating as a unit. They had cracked half a dozen roadblocks, fixed bridges under fire and suffered anguish when, time after time, Chinese swooped into their midst flinging phosphorus hand grenades into truckloads of screaming wounded.

The marines had even brought some Army wounded with them. These were remnants of a 7th Division unit that had been smashed on the eastern side of the reservoir. There had been a grisly scene on the ice where marines dodging vicious enemy fire had sought to rescue terribly wounded soldiers who had spilled onto the reservoir when Chinese attacked their ambulance.

Lt. Col. Olin L. Beal, of McQueeney, Texas, one of the rescuers, said, "There wasn't a man out there that didn't have more than one wound—most of them two or three. I saw a lot of heroes. One dogface with both his legs off came scudding by me pulling himself along with his hands. He wouldn't let me help him. The dogface said, 'There's a guy out there with a belly wound who needs help more than I do.'"

At Hagaru the 7th and 5th joined up with other marine units and with a British Commando unit which had lost 50 per cent of its men.

I arrived at the decrepit clapboard village of Hagaru as the last of the marines filtered through the pass. As our two-motored "gooney bird"—C-47—circled over the icy roller-coaster humps that passed for an airstrip, our pilot pointed to the snow-topped foxholes in the ridges around Hagaru. The foxholes, in easy rifle range of the field, constituted the limits of our defense perimeter. Just beyond, in all directions, there were, as he put it, "gooks, nothin' but gooks." Many of the "gooney birds" operating the remarkable "little lift" that brought out the marine wounded had bullet scars as souvenirs from gooks shooting at them.

Between December third and sixth, 4500 wounded and frostbite cases were flown out of Hagaru strip—vivid statistical evidence of the grimness of the Yudam-ni ordeal. Doc Hering, naval surgeon attached to the division, was at the strip and stern judge of who was sufficiently injured to be flown out. No one could go unless he absolutely had to. For every man able to shoot was needed for the forthcoming fight. Hagaru was only twenty minutes from the coast by air, but it was sixty tortuous, precipitous walking miles. And for the first twenty miles from Hagaru to Koto and then from Koto to the bottom of the plateau at Chinhung-ni, the marines would have to punch through a solid Chinese wall.

When I looked at the survivors there at Hagaru, I wondered if they would have the will to make this final punch. The men were ragged, their faces swollen from the cold and bleeding from the lash of the icy wind. Some marines were without fur hats, their ears blue in the frost. A few walked to the doctor's tent barefooted. They had to. They could not get their frost-bitten feet into their frozen shoeboxes. They were drugged with fatigue, yet unable to shrug off the tension of imminent danger that had kept them going five days and five nights without sleep and often without food. It took at least an hour to thaw out a can of frankfurters and beans. In the fight out of Yudam-ni, there was almost never an hour to spare for such matters.

Colonel Murray was a hollow-eyed relic of the officer whom I had watched lead the 5th Marine assault on Red Beach in the days of the successful Inchon landing. But the driving will was still there. When I entered his tent, he was hard at work on plans for the fight out to Kotori, eight miles away.

Militarily speaking, Colonel Murray told me, the breakout from Yudam-ni had been possible because the Chinese had failed to observe one of the basic principles of war. They had failed to concentrate their forces where they would do the most good.

"If the Chinese had concentrated their troops at the point of exit," Murray said, "we would never have got out of there. But they dispersed their strength by trying to keep us consistently encircled."

At these words, the regimental executive officer, Lt. Col. Joseph Stewart, interjected the calm observation, "If I were running the Chinese show in this area and had the huge number of men they've got, I could easily keep the marines from ever getting out of here."

A successful politician is one who stands for what he thinks the voters will fall for. —T. J. MCINERNEY.

"No," said Murray quickly, "they'll make the same mistake again. They've got to."

And they did. The marine trek from Hagaru to Koto lasted two bloody days. Even as the spearheads of the 7th Regiment reached Koto's bleak haven, the men of the 5th were still at Hagaru, fighting off a furious Chinese night attack aimed at wiping out the rear guard. With dawn the 5th Marines thrust back the Chinese.

An aerial umbrella of marine Corsairs and jets protected the head and tail of the column as it wound over the road to Koto. Only the drivers stayed in vehicles. Everyone else walked with weapons at the ready. When Chinese attacked, there was no time for troops to scramble out of jeeps and trucks. So the caravan crawled along.

As anticipated, the bugle-blowing Chinese harassed the column on the sides and rear. They set up roadblocks involving the use of white phosphorus, mortars, machine guns and rifle fire. But this time the casualties were in the low hundreds.

By journalistic good fortune, I was on hand at Koto to meet the marines. The strip at Kotori was too short, initially, to permit landings of the C-47 transports. But the marines, ever determined to get their wounded to safety, solved that by substituting single-engine torpedo bombers and L-5's—small observation planes. I hitched a ride into Kotori in the second seat of a fighter bomber piloted by Capt. Alfred F. McCaleb, Jr., of New Orleans. There were only three torpedo bombers in service that first day. One blew a tire and the other tipped over on the runway, so that left the main burden on McCaleb. I later learned that McCaleb, taking nine wounded per plane load, personally flew out nearly 100. It was the first time in history that fighter bombers were so used.

There was an unmistakable difference in attitude between the marines arriving in Koto and the haggard men

I'd seen at Hagaru. The new attitude was, "If we've gone this far, we're bound to make the rest."

I was deeply impressed with the large number of North Korean refugees who followed the marines and squatted stubbornly in the snowy fields north of Koto. Our presence in Korea had brought their towns destruction and their fellows death. Yet here were nearly 1000 people who insisted on leaving their homes in and about Hagaru and followed after our troops rather than remain and be overrun by the Chinese communists.

Col. Bankson Holcomb, division intelligence officer, told me that townspeople everywhere had been extremely friendly to the marines and had voluntarily pointed out enemy hide-outs. "When we left Hagaru," Colonel Holcomb said, "some of the townspeople actually came to us and asked us to burn their homes so the Chinese would not get them. Of course, we didn't do so. But it's an interesting sidelight on their psychology."

As a propaganda measure, the marines left behind at Hagaru more than 100 Chinese whom they provided with a liberal supply of medicines and bandages. They hoped this would induce them to treat our American soldiers with kindness. Perhaps this policy paid off. In any event, only a few days later the Chinese permitted about a dozen of our own wounded to escape.

There were nearly 300 Chinese prisoners of war in the improvised stockade at Koto. I was eager to talk with them. I wanted to know why it was that they seemed to survive the bitter cold better than we did. The answer was, they didn't. Their feet were black and frostbitten and the gangrenous odor of rotting flesh filled the air.

While I was in the stockade, a wounded Chinese was brought in on a stretcher. His arms were bent at the elbow and his clenched fists were frozen marble-solid, as were his feet. He was out of his head and groaning rhythmically.

A wizened Chinese corporal—a one-time sergeant in Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army—plucked at my sleeve and pointed to the groaning Chinaman as he said through my interpreter, "That is why we surrender."

The Chinese captured on the northeastern front generally wore only tennis shoes and several pairs of socks. This, of course, was scant protection against the cold. Despite the inadequacy of their footgear, the rest of their uniform—quilted jacket and pants—appeared to keep them very warm.

The Chinese who surrendered to us—at least 200 came voluntarily into camp—were of course the weakest link in the communist enemy command. Significantly, none ranked higher than corporal, and they all reported that their officers were fanatic communists. I asked through my interpreter, Lt. Paul Y. Kim, one-time Hong Kong businessman, if any wanted to go back to present-day China. They chorused and gesticulated, "No." The corporal—the oldest of the group and its self-appointed spokesman—recited reasons that have become painfully familiar. The cumulative effect of what the POW's said reminded me very much of my interviews in Germany with Red Army escapees from the Soviet Union.

"We were poor under Chiang," the prisoners would say, "but now we are both poor and have no liberty. The communists do not let us move freely from village to village. Many are arrested. The country is mobilizing for

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war. We do not wish to fight for the communists."

The Chinese POW's were far too ignorant to have ever heard of Titoism, but they had very clear ideas of their country's relationship to Russia.

"The Russians," said the aged corporal, with a distressed sweep of his hands, "are everywhere now in China, especially at the airfields. It is they who decide."

It was now December seventh—cold, sunny, but memorable because the racing winds were letting up. The canyon-edge road that lay ahead was the steepest and narrowest part of the journey. It dropped 3500 feet in the ten miles to Chinhung-ni, the village at the bottom of the mountains that marked the beginning of the coastal plain. Chinhung-ni was the doorway to safety.

At General Smith's tent a new crisis had arisen. It appeared that one and maybe two bridges on the mountain road had been blown. Unless the bridges were repaired, the marines would have to abandon all their equipment and fight their way across the mountains as scattered units. This they would not do. Yet every day lost meant more Chinese between them and the sea.

The problem was solved by the world's first air drop of a bridge. Eight spans of a treadway bridge hurtled out of the big bellies of flying boxcars to waiting marine engineers at Koto. Despite the attached parachutes, the heavy steel spans dug hard into the ground. But they were undamaged. Still remaining was the tactical problem of bringing the caravan, now swollen with the additional marine and 7th Division forces, out of the mountains with the least number of casualties.

The 7th Regiment was to be the spearhead. This regiment was ordered to proceed before dawn to seize key ridges overlooking the canyon road between Koto and the bottom of the mountain. From the south, the first battalion of the 1st Marines would fight north, taking the high ground dominating the latter half of the steep road. The Army's Task Force Dog would guard the road from Chinhung-ni to the coast, making possible a speedy marine exit once they reached flat roads. A thick air cover was called for the next day to help the marines fight for the ridges.

But it never came. For on December eighth a thick mixture of fog and snow flurries masked Koto and the jagged peaks surrounding it. One C-47 probed miraculously through snow to land on the field that bulldozers had lengthened overnight. But that was all. The familiar drone of planes was strangely absent and a glacial, primeval silence settled over the hundreds of tents dotting the Koto plain.

It was with agonizing suspense that division officers waited for word from their troops attacking the critical ridges without air cover. The Chinese fought hard and it was not till late in the day that the initial objectives were reported secured. Actually, those ridges were never totally secure and battles raged on them the entire time that the caravan rolled by on the road below. But those skirmishes kept the Chinese occupied and apparently prevented them from making a major attack on that caravan, whose slow motion and length made it a perfect target.

Luck was with the marines. The fog cleared overnight and fleets of marine Corsairs swooped and dived low to protect the fighting marine engineers as they pressed forward to build their

bridge. The Chinese harassed them with small-arms and mortar fire, but they kept on with the crucial job that meant success or failure.

At Koto numbed marines made automatic preparations for the final exit. Tents were dismantled, stoves piled on trucks, time bombs set in the huge dump of ammunition that had to be left behind.

The two-motored C-47's were scooting in swiftly and regularly, and by midafternoon all the wounded were out. But there was not time enough for aerial evacuation of the dead. Three mass graves were dynamited out of the frozen earth at Koto. Then, by the hundreds, they were buried. The marines were wrapped in their ponchos. Some British Commandos still wore their berets. They were laid beside men of the 7th Infantry Division in a kind of final fraternity. The chaplain spoke the psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd," but the tobogganing wind swept away his words, and the tiny audience—two privates of the graves-registration division, a few reporters and several officers—could not hear. A big bulldozer nosed frozen dirt and boulders over the graves. At the first grave there were only thirty bodies, and small wooden crosses were put up inscribed with name, rank and outfit. But the two other mass graves were marked by single red-and-white wooden poles.

"We paced off the spot and drew a map, in case we should ever come back," said the graves-registration officer.

At about noon I was in the command-post tent when a marine major burst open the flimsy wooden door and in excited tones informed General Smith, "The bridge will be ready at two, sir! We can start rolling!"

The road to safety was ready and the camp snapped into activity. The lead of the convoy formed up. It was so long that according to estimates it would extend nearly twenty miles and take almost twenty-four hours to pass any given point.

I had been asked by a company of the 5th Marines, with whom I had made the amphibious landing at Inchon, to walk out with them. But General Smith intervened. I have found, in my career as a female war correspondent, that it is always the higher-ups who cause the difficulties. From regiment on down, you are treated without discrimination. General Smith disapproves of female correspondents. Such an attitude makes it tough when you are trying to do an honest front-line job of reporting, on an equal basis with men. General Smith insisted that the walkout was too dangerous for me.

But I walked down the mountain anyway—at least a good half the way. It was a reverse hike. I flew out of Koto to Hanchung and from there took a weapons carrier to the bottom of the mountain. Then I hiked up the mountain about five miles and back down. It was tough on the feet, but worth every blister to be with those marines as they emerged at last to safety.

It was a fight all the way. And the frost and wind howling through the narrow pass were almost as deadly as the enemy. Bumper to bumper, trucks, guns, half-tracks, bulldozers slipped and scraped down the mountain at three miles an hour. Half a dozen vehicles skidded and went careening down the sheer drop to the right of the road.

Mortars lobbed shells and sometimes the convoy had to stop for hours while frantic engineers filled the holes in the road. Marines, who were draped over everything from trucks to guns, had to

struggle to keep their circulation going during these pauses.

Once the convoy had to stop to accept the surrender of Chinese soldiers. Maj. Welo D. Sawyer, of Toledo, who led the advance guard, said, "At dawn they just popped out of their holes and came over and handed us their guns. It was very strange. They were in miserable shape. Maybe they had had enough too."

The marines were so exhausted that they did not even bother to take cover at sporadic machine-gun and rifle fire. When someone was killed, they would wearily, matter-of-factly, go pick up the body, wrap it in a poncho and place it in the nearest truck.

Lead elements of the convoy plunged out of the shivering nightmare of the Changjin Reservoir trap about two A.M. on Sunday, December tenth. From then on, the convoy, despite several bad ambushes, flowed intermittently. Late that night the bulk of the marines were safely in Hanchung, deep in a sleep of exhaustion—the first sleep in two weeks free of the sound of guns.

The last tanks cleared Koto at six P.M. on Sunday. A few minutes later the time bomb exploded in the ammunition dump. Orange and gray bursts of flame billowed Bilinlike into the dusk, casting distorted shadows on the white peaks of the plateau—a spectacular epilogue to the marine adventure. Col. "Chesty" Puller's 1st Marine rear guard took one last bloodletting in a vicious attack at Sudong, only a few miles north of Hanchung. But they beat this one back too. Many of the marines that first morning were too dazed by exhaustion to comprehend that their ordeal was at last over.

Back at the bottom of the mountain I hitched a ride with Lieutenant Theros, the forward air observer.

"We've really got it made now," he said. "I can tell you how the guys feel. It's not havin' to look for a place to hide. It's bein' able to sleep without feelin' guilty. It's bein' able to eat something warm. It's not havin' to spend most of your time just tryin' to keep from freezin' to death. We left a lot of dead marines up there, but you just can't help bein' excited for yourself, and glad that you're out."

Theros, like all the marines, was highly sensitive about the retreat. "You know, ma'am," he said, "we would gladly have accepted death to attain our objective, but it was just so impossible. There were so many of them."

The marines came to Hanchung in good order, bringing their equipment and their wounded. The fighting exit had been planned and executed with the same methodical precision that characterized their offensives. By prodding their men and never pausing on the long trail from Yudam-ni to Hanchung, they won the race against the Chinese divisions flocking across the mountains, seeking to push deep behind them into the coastal plain and cut off the latter part of the escape road.

As they boarded the transports in Hungnam harbor that were to take them to new objectives, the places for which they had fought so hard—Yudam-ni, Hagaru, Koto, Chinhung-ni—were already swarming with Chinese. But as far as the reputation of the United States marines was concerned, it did not matter. With their epic advance to the rear, "the leathernecks' reputation as fighting men remained fully secured."

Just as Colonel Murray promised, they had "come out like marines."

THE END