



An M4 Sherman tank with a dozer blade mounted on the front really came in handy during combat action along the MLR, but the tanks drew fire like magnets. (*Leatherneck* file photo by MSgt H. B. Wells)

# The Raid on Ungok

By Maj Allan C. Bevilacqua, USMC (Ret)

*"Ungok was one damned hostile place! You'd do better to throw a rock at a hornet's nest."*

—Sgt H. B. "Harry the Hawk" Ellett  
1st Bn, 5th Marines

In January 1953, hundreds of thousands of Americans gathered before television sets to view President Dwight D. Eisenhower's inaugural address, the first such presidential address to be televised nationwide. Marilyn Monroe graced the cover of calendars in countless college dorm rooms and Marine Corps wall lockers. Country music legend Hank Williams died, and high school sweethearts gazed dreamily at each other while they listened to Perry Como croon his latest hit, "Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes." On Korea's

Western Front, Marines gazed warily at a lumpy hill mass called Ungok.

Ungok was about the nearest thing to a constant the Korean War had to offer. Men might come and go. The seasons might change. The nature of the war itself might change. Ungok, along with the Chinese who inhabited it, was always there.

Although commonly referred to as a single entity, Ungok was actually a cluster of hills—classified as Hills 31, 31A, 31B and 31C. An important Chinese strongpoint, Ungok and its neighbor, Kumgok (Hill 35A), lay about 1,000 yards north of the First Marine Division's main line of resistance (MLR) on the Jamestown Line.

From their positions on Ungok, Chinese observers could bring controlled in-

direct fires on whatever 1stMarDiv unit happened to be manning that sector of the MLR. Chinese snipers who were hunkered down in the little Korean cemetery on the forward slope of Ungok made life exciting for any Marine in the open during daylight hours. Every foot of ground in that sector was under direct observation, and the Chinese could be expected to react violently to any incursion in the vicinity.

Colonel Lewis W. "Lew" Walt decided to throw the rock at the hornet's nest. As those who knew him best could affirm, there wasn't a passive bone in Walt's body. From Guadalcanal to Cape Gloucester to Peleliu in another war, and to the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam in a war yet to come, Walt was a walking bundle of unrestrained aggressiveness who believed

in hitting the other man before he could hit you.

So when he brought his Fifth Marine Regiment back on line in the 1stMarDiv's right sector on 23 Jan. after a stint in division reserve, it came as no surprise that he came ready to do some serious ruffling of Chinese feathers on Ungok. There was even a name for the undertaking, Operation Clambake. Intensive, detailed planning had begun weeks earlier while the 5th Marines were still in reserve. The Chinese positions on Hills 31 and 31A were the objective of a large-scale raid supported by tanks, artillery and air.

There was no intention of taking and holding Ungok or any portion of it. The job was to reduce the forward portions, Hills 31 and 31A, to rubble and beat the bloody bejabbers out of any Chinese who tried to take exception to it. The Chinese were getting entirely too comfortable on Ungok, and no commander, certainly not Lew Walt, likes to have a comfortable enemy camped on his doorstep.

The raid, scheduled for the early morning hours of Tuesday, 3 Feb., was to be preceded by a strong diversionary attack on three Chinese positions, Red Hill (Hill 33B), Hill 104 and Kungok, that lay to the west of Ungok. The main attack would be the mission of two heavily reinforced platoons from Captain Don H. Blanchard's "Able" Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Jonas M. Platt was designated to coordinate all planning.

That planning, along with the rehearsals that grew from it, was detailed and intense. As LtCol Platt later wrote: "Minute planning to the last detail along with carefully executed rehearsals are basic to success in actions of this type." The raid elements conducted and then critiqued multiple rehearsals. Tank, artillery, mortar and air personnel were given detailed briefings on every aspect of the operation. In addition, they walked the MLR and visually located the targets they would be engaging.

Capt Theodore S. "Ted" Williams, a Grumman F9F Panther jet pilot from LtCol Francis K. Coss' Marine Fighter Squadron 311, was taking his second time-out from a distinguished baseball career to fly as a Marine. Williams, who later became a Baseball Hall of Famer, was an aggressive flyer who could be counted on to bore in at treetop level to put ordnance on target. "Keep your radio antenna down if you don't want to get it clipped off," Williams advised tank commander Staff Sergeant Ken Miller.

While this was going on, Master



Above: The shell-pocked ridges, totally void of trees, reflected the intensity of the Chinese and North Korean mortar and artillery fire. (Leatherneck file photo by MSgt H. B. Wells)



Right: Trench lines, although tough to dig, offered much-valued protection from the furious enemy onslaughts.

Sergeant Charles J. "Tiny" Rhoades led his Headquarters Co, 1st Tank Bn, Reconnaissance Section in nightly forays out in front of the MLR to lay out tank assault routes. Accompanying Rhoades were combat engineer mine clearance teams from LtCol Francis W. Augustine's 1st Engineer Bn. Under the very noses of the Chinese, the tankers and engineers went about the business of setting the stage. Sadly, on the very last night of those preparations, Tiny Rhoades fell victim to

a Chinese ambush. He died of the wounds he received, never knowing that his leadership in the accomplishment of a highly important and dangerous mission would bring him the Silver Star.

An even more dangerous mission awaited Tiny Rhoades' fellow tankers of Capt Clyde Hunter's Able Co, 1st Tank Bn. They would be the backbone of the diversionary attack, and they would be doing it without infantry support because there was none available. The best that

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USMC J. GROSS COMBAT CORRESPONDENT COLLECTION

**VMF-115 F9F-5 Panther jets, loaded for bear, were a welcome sight to the Marines. The Marine forward air controllers attached to the units up front knew how to request the steel on target, and the Marine pilots knew how to deliver it.**

could be managed was preplanned artillery VT (variable time) air bursts to beat down the anticipated Chinese anti-tank teams. Despite the very real peril, five members of the company extended their tours in Korea in order to take part in the operation.

There was snow on the ground and the thermometer stood at 3 degrees below zero as the first faint streaks of dawn etched the eastern sky on 3 Feb. At the designated time, the five tanks of First Lieutenant Albert R. Bowman's 1st Platoon rolled out to Red Hill. The Chinese reacted with a furious hail of artillery and mortar fire. Immediately, one tank was hit and began to burn, but it continued to churn through the frozen mud, the fire snuffed out by the tank's extinguisher system.

As 1stLt Bowman's tanks lashed back at the Chinese trenches and bunkers on Red Hill with high velocity, 90 mm high explosive rounds, 1stLt James B. McMath led his 2d Plt forward. Close on their heels the 3d Plt, scheduled to conduct a feint against Hill 104, ran into an unanticipated and very serious problem.

As each of the platoon's tanks crested an unseen high paddy dike and tilted down the backside, it slammed head on, main gun first, into yet another dike. The shock of the impact disabled each tank's elevation gear.

The loss of the 3d Plt left 1stLt Michael McAdams' four flame tanks out on a limb. The 3d Plt was scheduled to provide covering fire for the flame tanks as they burned out the Chinese positions on Kungok. McAdams, who had performed with such distinction in a similar role during a raid on Hill 104 a few short weeks earlier, was on his own. He directed his tank commanders to dismount and go forward on foot to pick a path through the paddy dikes. Then he did the same.

A bad situation was about to get worse. If the diversionary attack was designed to draw the attention of the Chinese, it was succeeding beyond the most optimistic estimates. With only the covering fire of the two gun tanks of SSgt Don Paules' section from the 2d Plt, the flame tanks ground forward up the slope of Kungok in a blizzard of Chinese rocket and anti-tank fire. Chinese infantry swarmed

around the four flame tanks even as they unleashed blazing streams of napalm on the Chinese trenches.

For every Chinese who fell, there seemed to be three more to take his place. One of them fired an antitank rocket directly into the turret of McAdams' tank F-31, killing him instantly. Michael McAdams, a short-timer due to rotate Stateside soon, left a wife and three sons, the youngest an infant of 6 months who would never know his father.

The same round that killed 1stLt McAdams nearly severed the left arm of loader Corporal Marvin Dennis. With his left arm hanging by shreds, Dennis stood upright and exposed in the loader's hatch, using his .45-caliber pistol to methodically shoot down the Chinese who tried to clamber aboard the tank. With its load of jellied gasoline expended, tank F-31 began backing down the hill, its driver, Cpl Charles Craig, wiping blood from a gushing head wound out of his eyes, while Dennis kept banging away with his pistol. For his one-man stand Marvin Dennis would receive the Silver Star.

What was planned as a diversionary attack was fast turning into a knock-down-drag-out barroom brawl. Chinese were swarming from trenches and bunkers to attack the unprotected tanks with rifle grenades, explosive charges and rocket launchers. From a recessed position on Kungok, a high-velocity, antitank gun

**Stunned by the reversal on Hills 31 and 31A, and realizing that they had been duped, the Chinese wasted no time in reacting. Reinforcements were rushed forward quickly.**



was barking. There were Chinese all over the landscape, seemingly firing in every direction.

SSgt Ken Miller, the same man whom Ted Williams had jokingly advised to keep his radio antenna lowered, saw a Chinese antitank team going into action close enough to distinguish their individual features. The gunner was using a captured American 3.5-inch rocket launcher. Miller could see plainly the inscription "US ARMY" on the side of the tube. He directed his gunner to flame the team, and a long red tongue of burning napalm engulfed the luckless Chinese soldiers. There was a deafening explosion as the high-explosive, antitank rocket cooked off in its tube.

Going to the aid of 1stLt McAdams' disabled tank, Cpl Elmer R. Betts brought the wounded Craig and Dennis to the safety of his own tank. Then, with the aid of Cpl Thomas E. Clawson, Betts succeeded in getting the disabled tank running and backed it down the hill as the Chinese attempted to finish off the wounded vehicle. For his selfless and courageous action in total disregard for his own safety Elmer Betts would receive the Navy Cross. Thomas Clawson would receive the Silver Star.

If the tankers had in fact run into a hornet's nest on the slopes of Kumgok they had nonetheless been successful. The Chinese had taken the bait. At 0810, supported by a blazing volley of fire from the MLR, the two Able/1/5 platoons of the assault force sprinted across the shallow valley and up the side of Ungok. The 90 mm guns of two platoons of tanks, the 75 mm recoilless rifles of the regimental antitank company, and all six heavy machine guns from Weapons/1/5 laid down direct fire on the Chinese positions on Hills 31 and 31A. Howitzers of the 11th Marines and the 5th Marines' own 4.2-inch mortars shrouded Chinese observation posts in smoke.

With only a relative few casualties, the Marines were atop Ungok, blasting and burning their way through trench lines, bunkers and caves. Even so, there were Chinese willing to fight. One strongpoint in particular managed to hold up the attack on Hill 31 with a withering hail of grenades and machine-gun fire, most of it coming from a particularly well-sited bunker.

The wall of fire was met head-on by a determined squad leader, Private First Class John B. Elwell. He took up an exposed position to direct the fires of his men, then single-handedly attacked the bunker with carbine fire and grenades. The Chinese who weren't killed, fled.

And the attack rolled forward. Minutes later, leading his squad into the main Chinese trench line, John Elwell was struck and mortally wounded by fragments from a near-direct hit by an 82 mm mortar. He was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.

Courage of a like degree was exhibited by 1stLt David K. Fauser. Advancing into the teeth of increasingly stiff Chinese resistance, he suffered multiple fragmentation wounds from the full force of a Chinese grenade. Waving off medical aid, Fauser continued to lead his platoon forward, enveloping a key bunker, using grenades and directing his attached rocket launcher and demolitions teams to wipe out the bunker's occupants.

Continuing to move forward, he was wounded a second time while leading a flamethrower team against a Chinese strongpoint, once again ignoring his wounds to personally shoot three Chinese with his .45-cal. pistol. Before it was all over Fauser would be wounded yet again. Once more he refused medical attention to continue on with his men.

Like the indomitable John Elwell, 1stLt David K. Fauser would be awarded the Navy Cross. Despite three serious wounds, he would live to tell about it.

Stunned by the reversal on Hills 31 and 31A, and realizing that they had been duped, the Chinese wasted no time in reacting. Reinforcements were rushed forward quickly and thrown against the Able Co Marines on the twin hills. A roar of gunfire and exploding shells rolled down the slopes of Ungok as the Chinese threw determined counterattacks at the Marines who were still rooting out the last of the original defenders.

Skimming in above their brother Marines on the ground, the howling Panther jets savaged the Chinese with bombs and napalm, turning the Chinese approach routes into a charnel house. Then they went back to rip the Chinese ranks with 20 mm gunfire and rockets. Desperate to oust the Able Co Marines from their foothold, advancing over the bodies of their fallen comrades, the Chinese came on stubbornly.

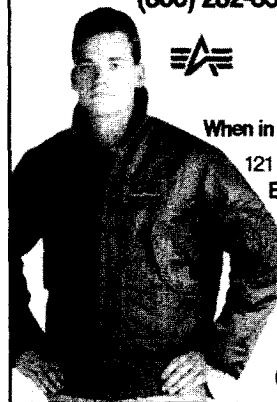
One of them shot Ted Williams' F9F full of holes, blowing out his hydraulics and filling the cockpit with smoke. With his aircraft shuddering and shaking as though it were about to come apart, and with one wheel gone, Williams kept the ship in the air long enough to reach a divert field and set down in a shower of sparks. Once at a safe distance from the burning jet, Williams slammed his flight helmet to the ground. "Was I mad!" he later related. "I'd been scared, but now I

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was mad, mad at the whole damned world."

As they had done so many times before, the Chinese were attempting to tilt the scales by feeding in more and more bodies. It was beginning to work. Slowly but surely more Chinese were boiling forward up the slopes of Ungok. Captain Blanchard, the Able Co commander, sent forward his remaining platoon. That was 2dLt Raymond G. Murphy's 3d Plt, originally scheduled as a reserve and evacuation element.

The Chinese were throwing their second counterattack at Ungok as Murphy's platoon arrived on the scene, and almost immediately he was painfully wounded by mortar fragments. Blood seeped from the multiple lacerations that speckled his entire left side. Murphy shrugged it off. There was work to be done.

Continuing forward, Murphy led his Marines through a blistering storm of automatic weapons fire, exploding grenades and mortar rounds. When he was not directing the fire and maneuver of

his platoon, he was braving intense enemy fire to assist in locating wounded Marines and personally carrying several of them to safety. When aggressive Chinese attempted to interfere, he shot them dead with his pistol. One of his squad leaders would later say, "It would be impossible to know how many trips Murphy made under enemy fire to pull guys to safety."

Murphy was all over the battlefield, always in the critical place at the critical time. At one point he observed a Chinese machine-gun crew pouring accurate fire at wounded Marines who were making their way back to the MLR. Bounding from cover to cover until he had reached a vantage point, Murphy killed the entire machine-gun crew with his carbine and pistol.

As the raid force, its mission accomplished, began its planned withdrawal, Murphy once again was in the thick of things, making certain that all Marines were accounted for and organizing the force for an orderly movement back to

the MLR. With all the wounded evacuated and the raid force beginning to disengage, Murphy, with a Browning Automatic Rifle, remained behind to pour deadly accurate fire into yet a third Chinese counterattack. Nobody chased Raymond Murphy from Ungok. He went back purposefully, at his own pace, shooting down any Chinese who appeared.

Even after reaching the base of the hill, the intrepid lieutenant wasn't quite finished. Murphy led a search party back up Ungok to make certain that no Marines had been left behind, personally carrying back the body of one member of a machine-gun team who had fallen in the assault.

Murphy returned to the MLR carrying one end of a stretcher that bore a seriously wounded Marine. A hot fragment from a Chinese mortar round ripped into his right hand. He did not release his grip on the stretcher. At a White House ceremony on 27 Oct. 1953, 2dLt Raymond G. Murphy received the Medal of Honor from President Eisenhower.

When the Able Co Marines withdrew from Ungok, they came back in good order, bringing with them their dead and wounded. They left behind a thoroughly blasted and burned pile of rubble and nearly 400 dead Chinese. Another day in Korea had begun.

*Editor's note: Maj Bevilacqua, a former enlisted Marine and later an instructor at Amphibious Warfare School and Command and Staff College, served in the Korean and Vietnam wars. He is a frequent contributor to Leatherneck and has been writing a continuing series of Korean War articles to commemorate the 50th anniversary of that war.*



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**Second Lt Raymond G. Murphy was the 39th Marine awarded the Medal of Honor for heroic actions during the Korean War.**

**"It would be impossible to know how many trips Murphy made under enemy fire to pull guys to safety."**