



Welcome to the Western Front

By Maj Allan C. Bevilacqua, USMC (Ret)

"Cripes, there were mines all over the damn place."

—Cpl Wes Gilliland
"How" Co, 3d Bn, 1st Marines

At 0400 on 25 March 1952, Major General John T. Selden, USMC, Commanding General, First Marine Division, assumed responsibility for carrying out the division's assigned mission: "to organize, occupy and actively defend its sector of Line Jamestown." It would have been understandable had MajGen Selden shaken his head in dismay. Facing him was a task never before thrust upon the commander of a Marine division—to actively defend a front that stretched nearly 35 miles, six times the normal frontage assigned to a division. It was the stuff of which nightmares are made.

Those nightmares began on the division's far left with the Kimpo Peninsula, the long tongue of land bounded by the Yellow Sea and the large island of Kanghwa-do on the west and by the Han River on the north and east. Sticking out like a hitchhiker's thumb, the peninsula was home to a number of critical installations, the most important of which were Kimpo Airfield, the port of Inchon and the sprawling Eighth Army logistics installation known as Ascom (Army Support Command) City.

Beyond these considerations the Kimpo Peninsula posed a serious threat to the 1stMarDiv's left flank. A successful Chinese penetration into the peninsula would turn that flank and with it the left flank of the entire Eighth Army, opening the door to the South Korean capital of Seoul. While the two Chinese armies opposite the 1stMarDiv's sector, the 63d and 65th, had shown no interest in the Kimpo Peninsula, the peninsula's tactical importance was too great for MajGen Selden to ignore. The peninsula would have to be defended.

Unfortunately, the fact that the Kimpo Peninsula would have to be defended did not answer the question of how. To solve that thorny problem, MajGen Selden had to be inventive. In order to provide for the

defense of the peninsula, the Kimpo Provisional Regiment was formed around the nucleus of the 5th Korean Marine Corps (KMC) Battalion, the 1st Armored Amphibian Bn, the 13th Republic of Korea (ROK) Security Bn and one battalion of the 1stMarDiv's reserve regiment. In one sense it was a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul, since the subtraction of one battalion from the division's reserve regiment would detract from the reserve's ability to reinforce or counterattack if needed. The problem of the Kimpo Peninsula quickly demonstrated that MajGen Selden's assets would be thinly stretched.

What would stretch those assets even

Something that would defy any degree of reworking or revising was the matter of the Panmunjom Corridor. Located squarely in the middle of the 1stMarDiv's sector, the corridor led to the village of Panmunjom, the site of the so-called "truce talks," in between friendly and enemy lines. Both the corridor and Panmunjom itself were official no-fire zones that by order of the I Corps commander, Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel, USA, "could not be fired into, out of, or over." The Panmunjom Corridor and the tactical limitations it imposed would be a constant thorn in the 1stMarDiv's side.

A more painful form of thorn didn't take long to make its presence known at the level where war becomes personal—the division's rifle companies. The sector the division had inherited was littered with mines. The ROK First Division that had previously held the sector had made liberal use of mines, but had been less than meticulous in recording or marking their locations.

Mines serve a useful military purpose. Coupled with fire and observation, mines deny the enemy the use of an area. They impede his progress. They protect friendly areas from attack. The enemy must redirect his movement to avoid minefields or slow his march in order to remove them, leaving himself open to friendly counteraction.

To the man on the receiving end, though, mines are nasty things. They can turn a man's foot into strawberry jam, shred his legs or blow him end over end. Rigged with a tripwire, a mine can riddle a man with fragments from head to foot. Bounding mines, such as the "Bouncing Betty," can detonate at waist height, inflicting damage that no amount of medical care can overcome.

Corporal Charlie Houchin, a Fifth Marine Regiment squad leader, remembered one Marine's encounter with a Bouncing Betty in the early days on the Western Front. "The poor guy was practically cut in half. From the chest up and from the hips down he was recognizable. Everything in between was just a mangled mess of meat and blood and guts. He lived for



Sgts Kenneth R. Snyder and Lucien Parent manned a light machine gun at a Marine outpost in Korea in April 1952.

TSGT JACK A. SLOCKBOWER

further was the incredibly long front line that trended off to the east for miles until it reached its junction with the solid rock of the British Commonwealth Division at the Samichon Gang (River). Normal procedure called for the manning of a strong main line of resistance (MLR), with units linked together side by side, and an outpost line of resistance (OPLR) sited on key terrain features forward of that. No matter how MajGen Selden and his Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3 (Operations), Lieutenant Colonel Gordon D. Gayle, juggled the figures they always came out the same. There was too much ground to hold and too few Marines to hold it. The job was going to require a constant reworking and revising that would last for the remainder of the Korean War.



Leathernecks, who were dug in along a meandering trench line, stood by to support machine-gunners of 1st Marines who laid fires on enemy forces. (Photo by TSgt Jack A. Slockbwer)

maybe a minute after we got to him. ... We had to bring him out in two pieces. I never went out on patrol afterwards without thinking about that. When I finally left Korea I wasn't the least damn bit sorry to go." In the 1stMarDiv's first weeks on the Jamestown Line, mines caused 50 percent of the division's casualties.

Mines or no mines the division would carry out its order to "actively" defend its sector of the Jamestown Line. It was not a matter of blindly following orders. Much more than that, it was sound military sense. MajGen Selden had no intention of permitting his division to sit passively in trenches and bunkers while the Chinese roamed the landscape unhindered. Nothing good could come of that.

Immediately upon occupying their positions, the division's forward regiments commenced an aggressive program of combat patrols, mostly at night, with the objective of keeping the Chinese off balance. The Chinese, who had been unnaturally passive while the division moved into position, weren't long in

reacting. As March gave way to April, clashes between friendly and enemy patrols out in the disputed ground became the nightly norm. The sector that had been one of the most somnolent in Korea was fast becoming very "active" indeed.

It soon became evident from their increased probing and patrolling that the Chinese were feeling the Marines out. To the Marines on the outposts and along the MLR, falling back on their fractured Japanese, it was a case of *testo-testo*. The Chinese were seeking to find out what these American Marines were made of. From the Chinese standpoint it was a logical undertaking. The Chinese soldiers who could have testified to the fighting qualities of the 1stMarDiv, those who had opposed the division during the Chosin Reservoir campaign and on the Eastern Front, for the most part were dead. Very few of them were left to testify to much of anything.

Chinese activity increased sharply during the first week of April, beginning

with a strong ground attack against the KMC regiment when a Chinese battalion, supported by a 30-minute artillery preparation, slammed into the South Korean lines. An early penetration was sealed off, and the attack was thrown back. The attack set the stage for an almost nightly series of such forays against the KMC regiment and the 1st and 5th Marines. The Marines struck back viciously, often meeting the attackers forward of the OPLR before they could deploy for attack.

It was during the course of one such attack on the night of 8-9 April that Private First Class Robert E. Beatty, a rifleman serving with "Item" Company, 3d Bn, 5th Marines, distinguished himself. Seeing his platoon leader fall mortally wounded, PFC Beatty, despite suffering painful wounds himself, fought forward into the teeth of the enemy fire to recover the fallen officer's body.

Exhausted and weakened by the loss of blood, Beatty carried his dead platoon leader through a hail of small-arms fire to the lee of a hill where he hid the body



Front-line wounded could be whisked away to waiting medical facilities by an aerial ambulance such as this Bell HTL-4 chopper. (Photo by TSgt Jack A. Slockbower)

in a thicket, then made his way back to friendly lines to seek help. As long as Robert Beatty was alive, a dead Marine would not be left on the battlefield.

Once safely within friendly lines, Beatty, concealing his wounds, volunteered to guide a recovery party to complete the job of bringing back the dead lieutenant. Stepping forward to lead the party was the 3d Bn's S-2 (Intelligence), Second Lieutenant George W. Alexander Jr.

With PFC Beatty showing the way, 2dLt Alexander led his seven-man party forward through an intense enemy mortar barrage to the site where Beatty had secreted the dead officer's body. As Beatty, wounded three times now, provided covering fire, Alexander lit into the Chinese attempting to block his route, killing three of them. When one of his men was hit, Alexander attacked the Chinese soldier who was attempting to capture him, shooting the enemy soldier in the face at point-blank range.

For three hours Alexander, Beatty and the small group of Item Co Marines fought off every Chinese attempt to thwart their mission, returning to friendly lines as dawn broke. Only after the other wounded member of the party had been treated would Robert Beatty consent to medical treatment himself. Even then he did it his way. Bleeding from three wounds, Beatty walked 3,000 yards to the battalion aid station. For their courageous actions on the night of 8-9 April 1952, 2dLt Alexander and PFC Beatty each would receive the Navy Cross.

By mid-April, actions such as this were the nightly norm. During the hours of darkness the ground all along the 1stMarDiv's front echoed to the ripping crackle of small-arms fire and the heavier cracks of exploding mines, grenades and shells. It was what 2dLt Bernard E. "Mick" Trainor described as "a small taste of what was to become ugly fighting on the Western Front. It was to be an

outpost war of close combat, drenched with mortar and artillery fire that turned the terrain into a moonscape."

It was as well a small-unit war, an affair of squads, platoons and companies, vicious little actions that did not merit much more than a sentence or two in the division's command diary, but which could leave a man no less dead. It was in one of these hotly contested firefights that 2dLt Trainor lost the man who was his trusted subordinate, his mentor and his cherished friend, his platoon sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Harold Wagner.

Wagner, a seasoned veteran of the war in the Pacific, had taken the raw young officer under his wing and taught him the ropes. Sharing the perils that engulf men who face death side by side, a deep bond of comradeship had grown between the old sergeant and the young lieutenant. Long years afterward, following his retirement, LtGen Trainor revisited the places where he had fought as a young

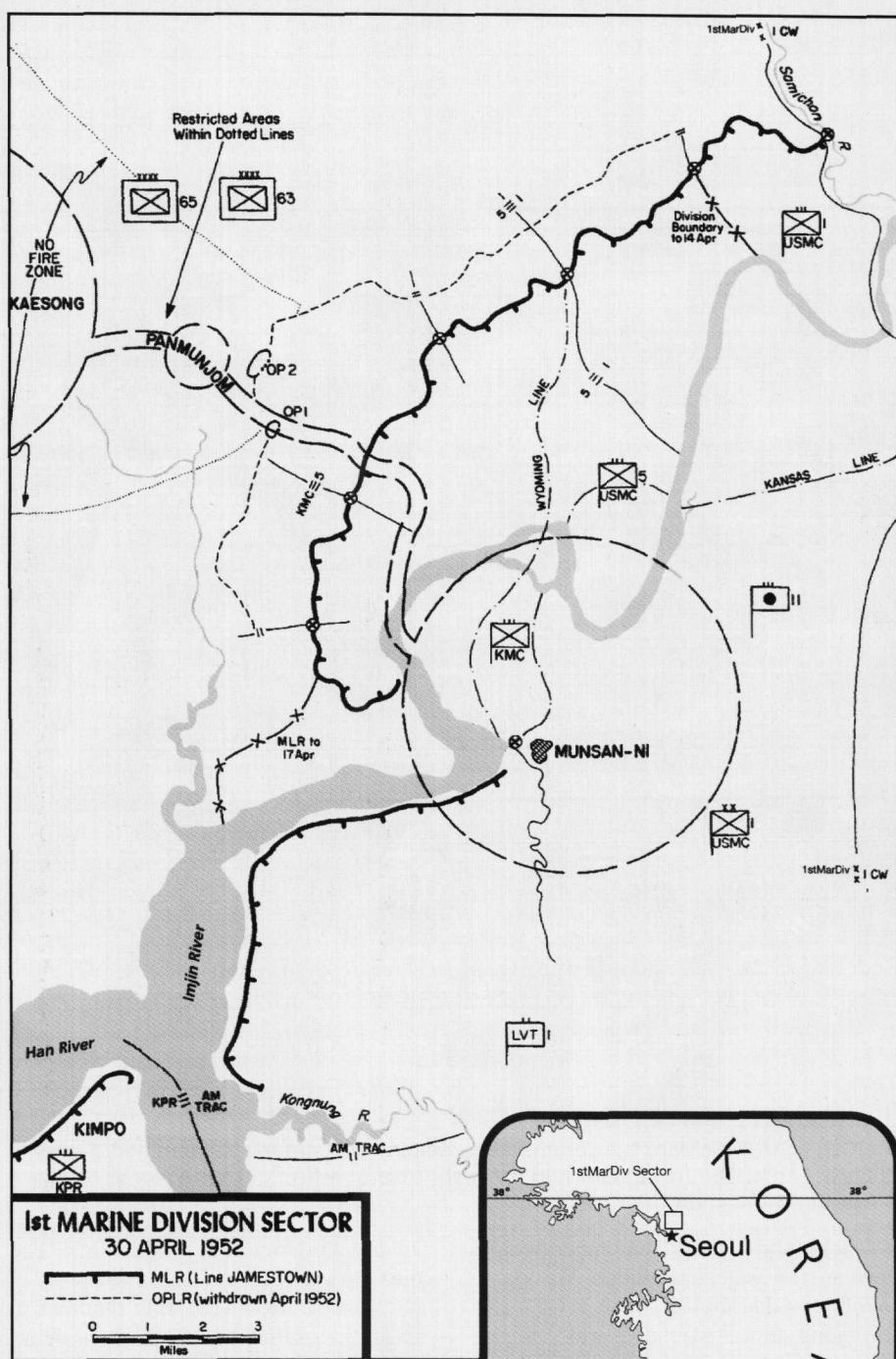
man. On the spot where Harold Wagner had fallen in a blaze of gunfire, LtGen Trainor knew once again the pangs of loss and sorrow he had felt on that long-ago day when he closed Wagner's sightless eyes and bid his friend a last farewell.

The Western Front was indeed going to be one of "close combat." This was vividly illustrated on the night of 15-16 April when the Chinese attempted to eliminate the Marine defenders of a very ordinary 400-foot hill known as Outpost Three (OP-3). Located well forward of the MLR and close to the bothersome Panmunjom Corridor, OP-3 was frequently used as a patrol base. At the end of the second week in April it was defended by a reinforced platoon, the 2d Platoon of Captain Charles C. Matthews' Easy/2/5. In the fighting that followed, that small band of 80 Marines would collect a Medal of Honor, three Navy Crosses, a Silver Star and 36 Purple Hearts.

It all began routinely enough when OP-3 received several rounds of 76 mm artillery fire in midafternoon. There were no casualties among the Marines of the platoon. Later, as dusk began to fall, the hill was the target of four rounds of 120 mm mortar fire. This time one Marine was wounded. No one thought much of it. From time to time during the preceding days the Chinese had dropped a shell or two on or near the Marine positions on the hill. It was just the Chinese way of keeping things from getting dull. At least that was the thinking of the Marines manning the defenses of OP-3. In all the actions thus far the Chinese had never backed up their ground troops with supporting arms. Unknown to the Marines though, this time the Chinese were playing for keeps. The seemingly commonplace Chinese activity was actually registration for the supporting fires of a major attack.

At 2330 on 15 April a green star cluster burst over Hill 67, a Chinese strong point some 1,900 yards to the west of OP-3. A thunderous torrent of 76 mm and 120 mm shells immediately fell upon the defenders of OP-3. The hilltop erupted in a volcanic upheaval of lurid red explosions that lit up the night sky and set the ground to shaking. The Marines of Easy Two could only hunker down in their fighting holes, caught up in the roaring vortex of sound, each man hoping it wasn't his turn just yet.

As any combat veteran can attest, there is no feeling of helplessness so complete as that which accompanies being under constant, roaring shellfire, unable to strike back. Time can stand still, and it did then, as the incoming fire seemed to last



for hours. Actually, the Chinese preparatory fires, as intense as they were, lasted only 20 minutes before another green star cluster above Hill 67 brought an eerie, ear-ringing silence down over OP-3. Five minutes later the fires shifted to the west, and two Chinese battalions threw themselves at OP-3.

One of the Marines standing to meet them was Sergeant Kenneth O'Farrell. Today Ken O'Farrell is retired from 30 years in law enforcement as a police officer in his hometown of Long Beach, Calif., and as a Special Agent with the California Department of Justice. When the Chinese barrage descended upon OP-3, he was section leader of Easy Co's machine guns. It was his habit to spend

a night with one or another of his squads that had been attached to the company's rifle platoons.

"As usual, my timing was bad," O'Farrell reminisced years later, "and I was on OP-3 during the night of 15-16 April. That night we were hit with the most incoming I had ever seen. We were constantly shelled for what seemed like an hour and a half. Then the Chinese hit us with a couple of reinforced battalions.



MSGT JAMES GALLOWAY

MajGen John T. Selden, the commanding general of 1stMarDiv, examined a smiling PFC's M1 rifle. The front sight had been shot off in a firefight with North Koreans. Better the sight than the PFC.

We held, and I don't remember seeing anyone who wasn't wounded. We lost a lot of guys that night."

Among those wounded was one of O'Farrell's machine-gunners, Cpl Duane E. Dewey. With one leg ripped by a grenade blast, Dewey was one of several wounded being treated by a corpsman when another Chinese grenade landed in the midst of the group. Knocking the corpsman to the ground, Dewey rolled atop the sputtering grenade, shouting, "I've got it in my hip pocket, Doc!"

Dewey, a retired small-business owner from Iron, Mich., remembered it this way: "I couldn't throw it beyond my people. I thought if I could get it behind my wallet, it would be smothered." The blast that "felt like a mule kicked me" fractured Dewey's hip and tore a deep gash in his side, putting him in hospitals for months. Upon presenting Dewey with the Medal of Honor at a White House ceremony on 12 March 1953, President

Dwight D. Eisenhower told him, "You must have a body of steel."

Dewey wasn't the only member of the machine-gun squad out of action. More and more members of the squad fell wounded, leaving only squad leader Sgt Arthur G. "Artie" Barbosa and one other man unscathed. Taking over the gun himself, Barbosa, with the fierce, battling instincts that had made him a standout Marine Corps boxer, poured fire into the attacking Chinese ranks, stacking them body upon body. Skillfully moving his lone gun from position to position, organizing the resistance of the Marines around him and standing like a rock, Artie Barbosa chopped the Chinese to bits with devastating fire.

Beyond inflicting horrendous casualties upon the Chinese, Barbosa's actions were inspirational to his fellow Marines. From his home in Florida, Easy Co veteran Edgar "Bart" Dauberman remembered Barbosa on that fire-swept hill long

ago. "His action is still in my mind today. He was unbelievable. He was a giant of a Marine." Apparently the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the Secretary of the Navy thought likewise. For his epic stand on OP-3, Barbosa was awarded the Navy Cross.

The Chinese were coming in waves, flinging grenades, firing wildly with automatic weapons, determined to overwhelm the small force of Marines clinging to their shell-blasted positions on OP-3. The Chinese had attacked frontally initially, scrambling up the hillside in the face of determined Marine resistance. Eventually, through sheer weight of numbers, the attack lapped about the sides of the hill until the Marines of Easy Two were packed into a tight perimeter, confronted by swarms of Chinese coming at them from every direction. The attackers were met by the cold, fighting fury of men who refused to be beaten.

Two of those men were exceptional staff noncommissioned officers, GySgt Quinton T. Barlow and GySgt Stanley J. "Stan" Wawrzyniak. Either one was a bit more than the Chinese had bargained for. With the platoon leader down, GySgt Barlow took command, resolutely organizing the defense, directing fire, constantly ranging the firing line to the point of greatest danger in complete disregard for his personal safety. It was Marine leadership at its finest: resolute, stalwart and indomitable, a magnificent display of courage and character in the face of overwhelming numbers.

No less heroic than Barlow was Wawrzyniak, the company gunnery sergeant who had volunteered to accompany Easy Two that night. As the fighting became hand to hand, Marines and Chinese battling each other with bayonets, knives, entrenching tools and bare fists, a portion of the hill's defenders were cut off from the main perimeter. Amid a blazing inferno of fire, Stan Wawrzyniak, a natural-born battler utterly without fear, repeatedly fought his way through the attacking Chinese to lead small groups of cut-off Marines back to the defensive perimeter. Confronted by Chinese each time, he killed them in hand-to-hand fighting. Although painfully wounded, he refused medical treatment and organized his own sector of the perimeter, placing deadly fires on the attackers.

Barlow and Wawrzyniak each would receive the Navy Cross. For Stan Wawrzyniak it would be his second award of the naval service's second highest award for valor in six months.

For more than three hours the fighting raged without letup atop OP-3. Each Chinese onslaught was met by furious

resistance, the outnumbered Marines of Easy Two fighting like men possessed. The Chinese threw assault after assault at them, hammering the Marine lines with small-arms and automatic-weapons fire, grenades, Bangalore torpedoes and shoulder-fired 57 mm recoilless rifles. Marines fell with wounds, rose and returned to the firing line, unwilling to seek shelter while their brother Marines faced the enemy alone. It was Chinese manpower against Marine resolve.

One of those resolute Marines was GySgt James A. Harrington, the section leader of the two attached squads of heavy machine guns from Weapons Co. Moving his guns from one threatened portion of the perimeter to another, placing scything fires on the ranks of charging Chinese, GySgt Harrington ignored the hostile fire, a leader who did his leading from up front. For his steadfast and courageous actions James Harrington would receive the Silver Star.

Suddenly, at 0315 in the early morning hours of 16 April, it was over. The Chinese had thrown everything they had at the small band of defenders on OP-3 only to find that it wasn't enough. Well to the rear of OP-3, friendly intelligence specialists intercepted a Chinese radio message directing the attacking force to withdraw. Every available gun of the division's artillery regiment, 11th Marines, immediately plastered the known escape routes with volley after volley of high-explosive shells, helping the withdrawing Chinese on their way. After a night of carnage OP-3 fell silent.

A sadly forgotten chapter in the "Forgotten War," the defense of OP-3 ranks among the epics of courage pitted against overwhelming numbers. The defenders of OP-3 had stood firm against an enemy force that outnumbered them by almost 20 to one. In doing so they had seen fully half of their number fall dead or wounded. Small wonder then, that the veterans of that night in Korea still think back to that time 50 years ago this month when a "band of brothers" lent new meaning to the old, original refrain of "The Marines' Hymn":

"Admiration of the nation,
We're the finest ever seen,
And we glory in the title
Of United States Marine."

Editor's note: Maj Bevilacqua, a frequent contributor to Leatherneck, is a former enlisted Marine who served in the Korean and Vietnam wars. Later in his career, he was an instructor at Amphibious Warfare School and Command and Staff College, Quantico, Va.



The Marine Corps Brooch

by Ann Hand



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