Task Force Smith

1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment

5 July 1950
Situation – June 1950

• 25 June: North Korea invades South Korea
• North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) overruns South Korean capital of Seoul
• President Truman decides U.S. will intervene
• MacArthur, with (4) understrength divisions in Japan, orders 24th Division to Korea
• During July, unprepared U.S. units suffer series of tactical disasters
U.S. Forces – July 1950

USAFE

8th Army

Gen Douglas MacArthur

Gen Walton “Johnnie” Walker

24th Infantry Division

MajGen William F. Dean

ME: Move to contact NKPA (S) of Seoul IOT delay EN advance (S)

21st Infantry Regiment

Col Richard W. “Dick” Stephens

LtCol Charles B. “Brad” Smith

ME: Block vic Osan IOT delay NKPA advance

3/21

3/34

34th Infantry Regiment

Col Jay B. Lovless

LtCol Harold B. “Red” Ayres

LtCol David H. Smith
Task Force Smith Annex A

1st Battalion, 21st Infantry (REIN)       LtCol Charles B. “Brad” Smith

Co ‘B’ : (3) Platoons, (3) 2.36in Bazooka Teams, (2) 60mm Mortars
Co ‘C’ : (3) Platoons, (3) 2.36in Bazooka Teams, (2) 60mm Mortars

Mortar Plat (-) : (2) 4.2in Mortars
Recoilless Rifle Plat (-) : (2) 75mm Recoilless Rifles

HQ Co (-)
Det, 52nd FA Bn : FOs, LnO, (4) 2.36in Bazooka Tms, (4) .50 cal HMG

52nd Field Artillery Battalion (-) : (73) Vehicles       LtCol Miller O. Perry
Btry ‘A’ (-): (5) 105mm guns
H&S Btry (-)
North Korean People’s Army (NKPA)

4th NKPA Division (REIN)
  16th Infantry Regiment
  18th Infantry Regiment

+ 107th Tank Regiment, 105th Arm Div
  ~33 T-34 Tanks

5th Infantry Regiment [In Suwon]
Preparation Timeline: July 1950

- 30 Jun 1/21 alerted at Camp Wood, Kumamoto, Kyushu, Japan
- 1 July 0805 1/21 stages at APOE Itazuke, Kyushu, Japan
  (10) C-54 sorties move 1/21 from Japan to Korea
  1500 406 Soldiers of 1/21 assembled at Pusan, Korea
  2000 1/21 entrained, departs Pusan for Taejon
- 2 July 0800 1/21 arrives Taejon
  Smith’s officers conduct leader’s recon
  Smith selects blocking position on Osan – Suwon road
  1900 1/21 entrained, departs Taejon for P’yongtaek and Ansong
- 3 July 1/21 entrenched at Pyongtaek and Ansong, then new orders
- 4 July 1/21 assembles at Pyongtaek
  52nd FA Bn attached
  Smith and Perry conduct second leader’s recon

Note leader’s recon efforts. Note potential for exhaustion.
Map Recon

- Osan – Suwon Road
- See OSAN, 3120 II, L754, Edition 2-KAMC LimDis, NIMA 02-00
- Map Recon versus Leader’s Recon
Task Force Smith Position straddling the Osan-Suwon road.
Battle Timeline: 5 July 1950
Rainy, Overcast Morning

- 0030  Task Force Smith departs Pyongtaek by truck
- 0300  Task Force Smith arrives at Hill 116, occupies marked positions
- 0600  Weapons test-fired, artillery targets registered

- 0730   (8) T-34 Tanks spotted, (25) more tanks in trace
- 0816   U.S. artillery barrage. No damage to NKPA tanks. No CAS.  
  At 700 yards, recoilless rifles fire. Hits cause no damage to tanks.  
  At 15 yards, bazookas fire from drainage ditch alongside road  
  Lt Connors fires (22) rockets. Two tanks damaged.

- 0900   (6) Tanks pass through blocking position, shoot up parked vehicles
- 0930   Remaining tanks pass through blocking position, (20) U.S. casualties  
  Arty kills (2) tanks with direct fire HEAT, (1) tube destroyed  
  (29) NKPA tanks move south toward Osan
Road Leading to Suwon is visible for eight miles from the Task Force Smith position.
Battle Timeline: 5 July 1950

- 1100  NKPA column, estimated 6 miles long, approaches: (3) Tanks, line of trucks and miles of marching infantry
- 1130  “Fire!” U.S. Mortars and .50 cal MG rake trucks
  No communications with artillery
- 1145  (~1000) NKPA infantry deploy on both sides of road
  NKPA advances with double envelopment
- 1230  NKPA flanks west, EN mortars and artillery range Hill 116
  Smith withdraws left Platoon, consolidates position
- 1430  Ammo low, NKPA MG firing from both flanks
  Smith decides to withdraw
  Co ‘C’ withdraws through fields. Withdrawal leads to panic
  Wounded left behind, Lt Bernard left behind, attachments left

- 6 July  LtCol Smith musters 185 men of 540 at Hill 116
- July  Stragglers return. Total loss to Task Force Smith is 35%
Task Force Smith Issues

- Air Transport limitations: Ships carry remaining (2) companies, weapons, arty, trucks, ammo, food
- No CAS, No CAS radios, No CAS procedures
- 2.36in Bazooka ineffective versus T-34
- Arty HE versus HEAT
- Old mortar ammo for 4.2in Mortar
- No mines
- No comm with HHQ, no reinforcements, no resupply, no supporting units, no CATK
- Effects of counter-orders and exhaustion
- Heaviest casualties during withdrawal
Anti-Mech Defense Techniques

• Leader’s Recon is critical
• EN artillery threat affects defensive positions
• Defilade positions, supplementary positions
• Weaponeering: MG, Arty, AT vs Tanks & Infantry
• Artillery: AT positions, rounds, mission
  – .50 cal HMG and AT rockets augment position
• Obstacle plan: mines and dummy mines
• Withdrawal plan
• Casualty evacuation plan
USMC Today

• FWCAS and RWCAS
• AAV, LAV, M1A1
• Artillery: AT, smoke, mines
• Battalion: TOW, Mk19, M2, Javelin
• Engineers: Obstacles, mines
• Rifle Company: SMAW, AT-4
References

• *The Forgotten War*, by Clay Blair, 1987
• *United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu, June – November 1950*, by Roy E. Appleman, 1960
• *The Korean War*, by Max Hastings, 1987