

“SEIZE Hill 118”

Orders Inside 1st Battalion, 5th Marines on 19 September 1950

by Brendan B. McBreen

On 15 September 1950, the 1st Marine Division landed at Inchon, Korea and attacked east to seize the capital city of Seoul. The North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) defended the Inchon-Seoul corridor with multiple infantry battalions reinforced with mortars, tanks, and artillery. After two weeks of fighting, U.S. forces secured Seoul.

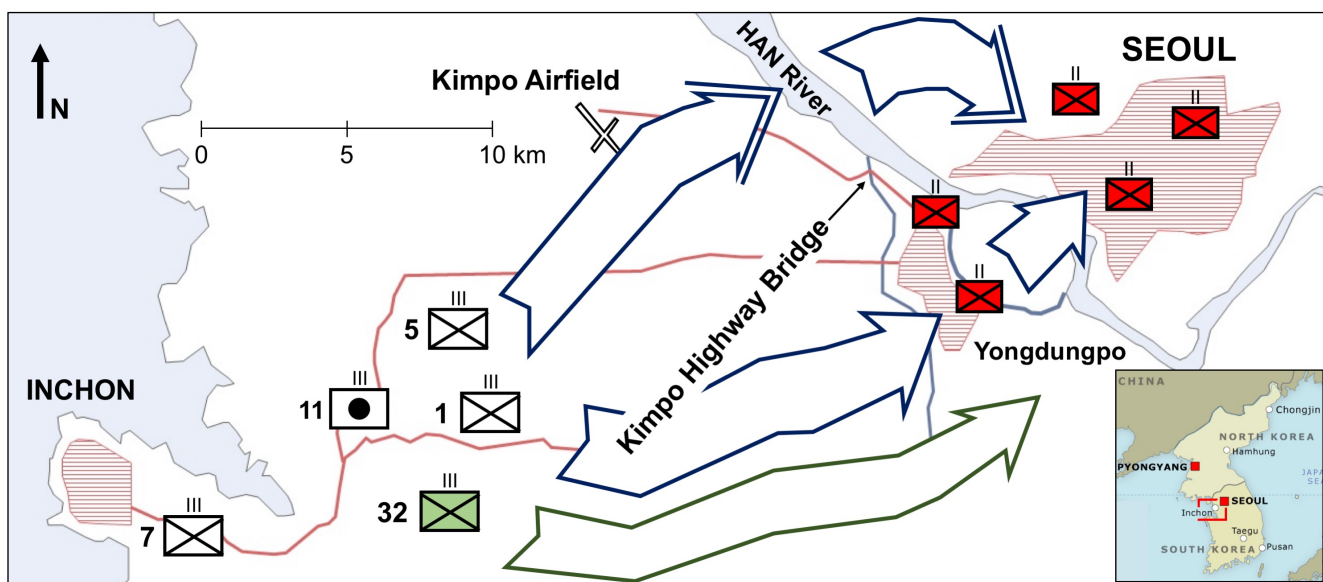


Inchon. 1st Marine Division lands on 15 September 1950.

The 1st Marine Division advanced slowly to Seoul on two axes. The 5th Marine Regiment, the main effort, attacked northeast, seized Kimpo Airfield, crossed the Han River, and entered Seoul from the north.

The 1st Marine Regiment attacked along the Inchon-Seoul Highway, entered the suburb of Yongdungpo, and then crossed the Han into Seoul. The 7th Marine Regiment, landing six days later, followed 5th Marines.

An Army regiment, the 32d Infantry, protected the right (south) flank of the Marines and attacked into the city from the south.



CONOPS. 1st Marine Division Inchon-Seoul concept of operations.

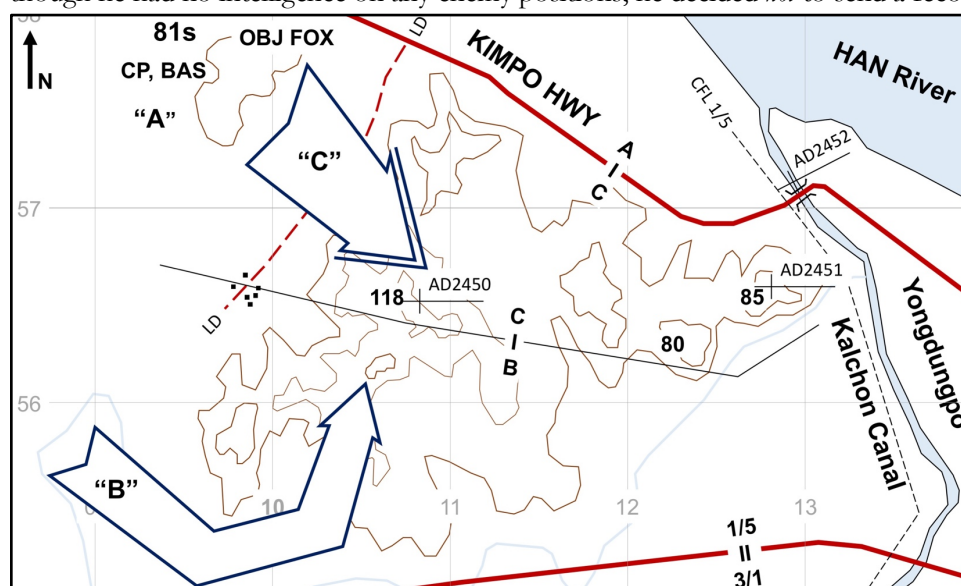
5th Marine Regiment. On the fourth day of combat, 18 September 1950, the 5th Marines prepared to cross the Han River. At 2200, LtCol Raymond **Murray**, the regimental commander, radioed the commander of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines (1/5), LtCol George **Newton**, and passed his orders:

“5th Marines is going to cross the Han River and attack into Seoul. Your 1/5 sector will be turned over to 1st Marines. They need the **Kimpo Highway Bridge**. At 0700 tomorrow, seize Hills 80 and 85 in order to control the Kimpo highway and bridge. This will give 1st Marines an additional crossing site for their attack into Yongdungpo.”



One Hour per Echelon. The time each order was briefed from Regiment to Battalion to Company to Platoon to Squad. Battalion took one hour to plan. Each subordinate then took less than 30 minutes to plan and less than 30 minutes to brief.

Battalion. At 2210, LtCol Newton radioed a warning order to his company commanders and then said, "Meet me at 2315 behind Objective FOX." He then spent almost one hour studying the map and preparing his order. Even though he had no intelligence on any enemy positions, he decided *not* to send a reconnaissance patrol onto Hill 118.



1/5, KIMPO EAF, 18 Sep 50

S: I think scattered EN on Hill 118 are dis-organized. MLCOA is delay.

We have NO recon or imagery. 1stMar needs bridge to YONGDUNGPO.

M: Tomorrow @ 0700, 19 Sep 50, 1/5 SEIZES Hill 118 IOT gain control of KIMPO HWY and bridge access into YONGDUNGPO.

E: CONOPS. (2) Co maneuver: ME frontal ATK. SE flank ATK.

Fires. 1/11 arty and FW prep at 0645. 81s @ OBJ Fox, POF to ME.

"C" ME: SEIZE 118, 80, 85 IOT control bridge into YONGDUNGPO.

"B" + HMG: SEIZE (S) finger of Hill 118 IOT SBF ME.

"A" + Tanks: RES @ OBJ Fox. BPT SEIZE Hills 80 and 85.

Coord: Do NOT destroy bridge. BPT RIP with 1/1 after dark.

O: (N). SEOUL. YONGDUNGPO. HAN RIVER. KALCHON Canal = CFL.

OBJ Fox = Bn COC, BAS, 81s, "A". LD = dirt road to village.

Company sectors: KIMPO HWY. Line from village to Hill 118 to 80.

Bridge = Point TGT AD 2452 (52S CQ 1295 5715)

Hill 118: (N) finger, (S) finger, (E) finger to Hills 80 and 85. LOS.

Hill 118 = Point TGT AD 2450 (52S CQ 1075 5661)

Hill 85 = Point TGT AD 2451 (52S CQ 1285 5658)

"B" probable SBF (52S CQ 1068 5620).

T/O @ 2400:

RES: "A" + Tank Plt

ME: "C", SE: "B" + HMG

81s

A: CASEVAC to BAS @ OBJ Fox.

C: Bn COC @ OBJ Fox until RIP with 1/1.

LtCol Newton sketched a two-company attack on his map board with very few control measures.

The battalion FSC plotted (3) targets, (1) per grid square. He then called these in to 1/11, the 5th Marines' DS battalion.

He scheduled prep fires on Hill 118 for 0645 the following morning.

Since new targets and fire control measures were planned every night, the FSC kept it simple.

*The **Situation** was LtCol Newton's best estimate of enemy preparations.*

*He added the entire Hill 118 complex to the **Mission** statement, not just Hills 80 and 85.*

*The **CONOPS** was explained in detail on his map board. The FSC outlined the **Fire Support Plan**.*

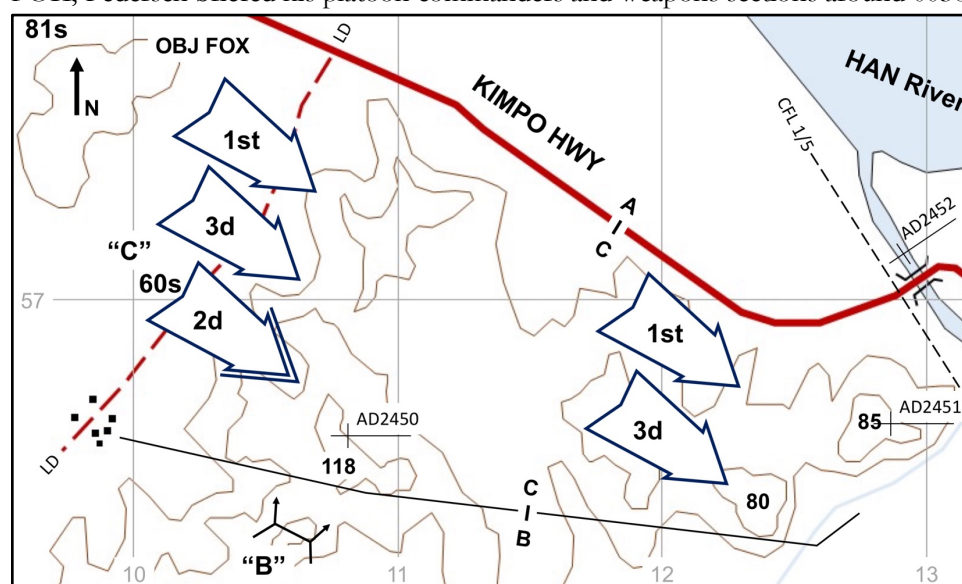
*The CO made sure the company commanders clearly understood their **Tasks and Coordinating Instructions**.*

*Before the order, LtCol Newton conducted the **Orientation** on his map board. Company commanders and the 81s platoon commander recorded the target grids in their notebooks.*

*The CO's **Task Organization** attached tanks to the reserve. He attached the heavy machine guns to "B" Company, the supporting effort. 81s worked directly for the battalion.*

After LtCol Newton finished his order and answered questions, his company commanders returned to their units at 2400.

Company. At midnight on the 18th, Lieutenant Poul **Pedersen**, the CO of “C” Company, took twenty minutes to convert his notes into a company order in his notebook. From his company defensive position on the hill at Objective FOX, Pedersen briefed his platoon commanders and weapons sections around 0030.



Pedersen sketched a frontal attack on Hill 118, saving his strongest platoon, 1st, for Hill 85.

He added no phases for the follow-on attack on Hills 80 and 85, and no additional control measures

C/1/5, KIMPO EAF, 18 Sep 50

S: I think EN on Hill 118 is disorganized. MLCOA is withdrawal. We have NO information on positions. Bn seizes 118. ME is “C”. SE is “B”.

M: Tomorrow @ 0700, 19 Sep 50, “C” SEIZES Hill 118, 80, and 85 IOT gain control of HWY and bridge access into YONGDUNGPO.

E: CONOPS. Frontal ATK, echelon (L), up the (N) finger of Hill 118. Fires. 1/11 and FW fires @ 0645. Use 81s, 60s against EN crew-served.

2d+ (ME): SEIZE Hill 118 IOT control bridge into YONGDUNGPO.

3d: Support 2d and then SEIZE Hill 80 IOT control HWY and bridge.

1st: Support 2d and then SEIZE Hill 85 IOT control HWY and bridge.

Coord: Co CP and 60s with 2d (ME). OOM-2d+, CP, 60s, 3d, 1st.

O: (N). SEOUL. YONGDUNGPO. HAN RIVER. KALCHON canal = CFL. KIMPO HWY. Bridge = Point TGT AD 2452 (52S CQ 1295 5715) Sector boundaries: KIMPO HWY. Village to Hill 118 to Hill 80. Hill 118 = Point TGT AD 2450 (52S CQ 1075 5661) Hill 85 = Point TGT AD 2451 (52S CQ 1285 5658) “B” probable SBF (52S CQ 1068 5620). LD = dirt road.

T/O @ 2400:

1st, 3d Platoons

ME: 2d + MG + ASLT

60s DS to 2nd Platoon ME

A: CASEVAC to BAS @ OBJ FOX.

C: SOP signals for “shift fire” with “B” SBF. Comms with “B” SBF on “C” Co Tac net.

*Pedersen’s **Situation** reflected the scarce information that battalion had about the enemy on Hill 118.*

*His **Mission** statement was almost a word-for-word copy of his task from battalion.*

*He explained his **CONOPS**, the **Fire Support Plan**, and the “B” Company SBF role.*

*Each platoon commander briefed back their assigned **Tasks**.*

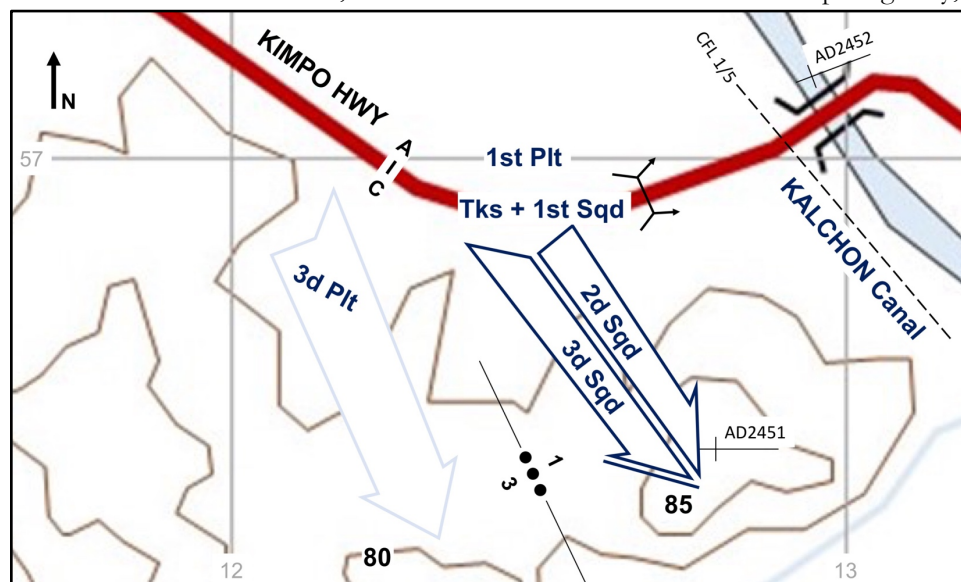
*Before the order, Pedersen’s **Orientation** included the company sector and the target grids.*

*For **Task Organization**, he attached his machineguns and assault section to the 2d Platoon main effort.*

The platoon commanders returned to their platoons after 0100.

The planned attack never happened. At 0615, the NKPA attacked “C” Company. Pedersen’s Marines, supported by 81s, repelled this attack.

Platoon. At noon on the 19th, Lieutenant Robert **Corbet**, 1st Platoon, C/1/5, issued a new order for a new 1400 platoon attack. Because "C" Company had been attacked that morning at Objective FOX, "B" Company had taken Hill 118. Now this afternoon, Corbet would seize Hill 85 from the Kimpo highway, supported by a platoon of tanks.



Lt Corbet sketched his new attack plan on a cardboard ration box.

To focus his Marines on the details of Hill 85, he did not draw the route from Objective FOX down the Kimpo Highway.

A new sector boundary was added between 1st and 3d Platoons.

1st Platoon, C/1/5, KIMPO EAF, 19 Sep 50

S: EN on 80 was hit by 1/11. I think 85 is under observation MLCOA is fire from YONGDUNGPO. "B" took 118. "C" takes 80, 85. 1st is ME.

M: @ 1400, 1st Platoon SEIZES Hill 85 IOT control bridge access into YONGDUNGPO.

E: CONOPS. Tanks CLEAR KIMPO HWY (E). 1st Plt ATKs on-line. Fires. No prep. 81s POF to "C". 60s POF to 1st Platoon.

Tanks+1st Sqd: CLEAR HWY (E). COVER bridge IOT enable ATK.

2d Sqd: SEIZE Hill 85 IOT control bridge access into town.

3d Sqd (ME): SEIZE Hill 85 IOT control bridge access into town.

Coord: All hands ride tanks. Dismount point 500 meters from bridge.

PltCdr, FAC, FO with 3rd Sqd. BPT dig in with Co MG and 60s.

O: (N). HAN RIVER. KALCHON Canal. YONGDUNGPO.
KIMPO HWY. Bridge = Point TGT AD 2452 (52S CQ 1295 5715)
Hill 85 = Point TGT AD 2451 (52S CQ 1285 5658)
Hill 80 (3rd Plt OBJ). Company sectors. Platoon sectors.

T/O @ 1300:

Tank Plt + 1st Squad
2d Squad + ASLT Tm
ME: 3d Squad + MG Tm

A: CASEVAC - Bn Vehicle on KIMPO HWY back to BAS @ OBJ FOX.

C: Tanks on Platoon Tac net.

*Corbet's **Situation** stated that enemy had been seen in the vicinity this morning. "B" Company on Hill 118 had called for fire on enemy soldiers on Hill 80 and the bridge.*

*His **Mission** was the same as his mission last night at 0130, but the **CONOPS** with the tanks was new.*

*The **Coordinating Instructions** stated that Company weapons would be part of the Platoon's defensive position later.*

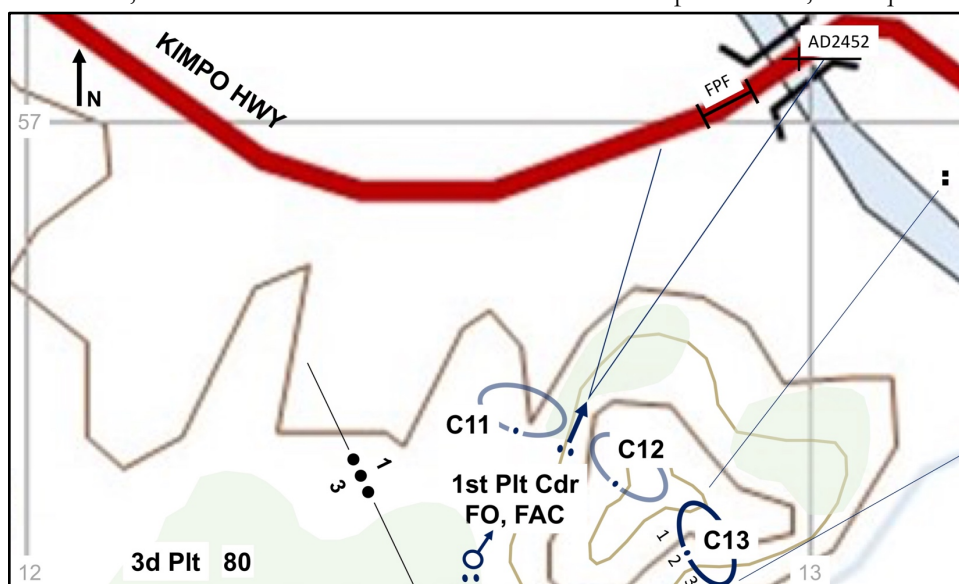
*Before the order, Corbet's **Orientation** reviewed the same grids he had issued last night at 0130.*

*For **Task Organization**, he attached 1st Squad to protect the Tank Platoon.*

***Command and Signal** put the attached tanks on the Platoon tactical net.*

Finishing his order before 1300, Lt Corbet and his Marines waited at Objective FOX for the tanks to arrive.

Squad. At 1300, Sergeant Velez issued his order to his 3d Squad (reinforced): “At 1400, we seize Hill 85 in order to control the bridge into town. We’re the main effort up the right side of the hill. Machineguns, follow in trace.” Two hours later, when the entire 1st Platoon had reached the top of Hill 85, 3rd Squad was assigned the rightmost sector.



Sergeant Velez, standing on Hill 85, oriented his Marines by pointing out the actual terrain and positions.

C13, Hill 85, 19 Sep 50

S: I think EN MLCOA is CATK across bridge after dark. 1st Platoon holds Hill 85 IOT control bridge. MG are ME. 3d Platoon holds Hill 80.

M: C13 DEF platoon's right (E) sector IOT protect unit from EN flank ATK across canal.

E: CONOPS. (L to R) Tms 1, 2, and 3, staggered and entrenched. NO alternate position. Sector is double warehouse to stream-canal junction.

Fires. 81s POF to "C". 60s POF to 1st Plt. FPF in front of bridge.

1 Tm (ME): DEF in sector IOT protect Plt from flank ATK.

2 Tm: DEF in sector IOT protect Plt from flank ATK.

3 Tm: DEF in sector IOT protect Plt from flank ATK.

Coord: NO OP. No patrol. BPT move (NW) after dark if RIP by 1/1.

O: (N). KIMPO HWY. KALCHON canal.

Bridge = Point TGT AD 2452 (52S CQ 1295 5715)
60s FPF (90 x 30 m) (52S CQ 1290 5706).

Hill 85 reverse slope positions provide defilade from EN in town to (E).

Positions (L to R): 60s, Lt-FO-FAC, 1st Sqd, MG, 2d Sqd.

3rd Sqd on forward slope facing town, in defilade from EN on bridge.

3rd Platoon on Hill 80 to our (W). Tank Plt now detached from Co.

Squad T/O: NO attachments. MG Tm is back with section.

A: CASEVAC - Bn vehicle on HWY back to BAS @ OBJ Fox.
Ammunition and chow resupply ~1900.

C: FPF brevity code: "FPF".

*Velez stated the **Situation**, focusing on a possible enemy counterattack.*

*The purpose of his Squad's defensive **Mission** was to protect the right flank of the platoon.*

*His **CONOPS** assigned each team the entire squad sector from the double warehouse to the stream-canal junction.*

*Before his order, Sergeant Velez gave his **Orientation** while standing on the actual terrain and pointing out landmarks and the positions that the platoon commander had assigned.*

*Because the machinegun team had returned to the Company section, the **Task Organization** was simple.*

Sergeant Velez ended his order with, "I'll inspect your sectors and fighting positions in two hours after I draw our fire plan sketch."

Notes on Orders Inside 1st Battalion, 5th Marines on 19 September 1950

Between 2200 on 18 September 1950 and 1400 the next day—sixteen hours—the unit leaders of 1/5, from squad, to platoon, to company, to battalion, all issued multiple verbal orders. They made decisions, issued orders, and led their Marines—fighting, moving, rearming, communicating, and sleeping—like they did every day for fourteen days.

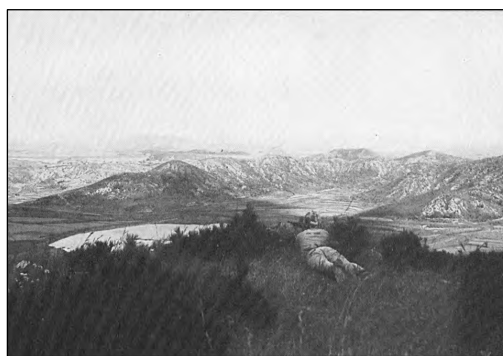
There was no Marine Corps Planning Process. Every unit leader, usually at night while their unit dug in, spent less than *one hour* planning and issuing orders for the next day. There was nothing unusual about this. The workaday leader skills of making an estimate, arranging a reconnaissance, making a decision, organizing for combat, preparing an order, and then issuing an order were learned skills—processes that could be taught and practiced.

As shown by 1/5, continuous changes to the situation, unexpected enemy actions, revisions from higher headquarters, and limited preparation times forced Marine leaders in Korea to shorten the orders process to its essential minimums: **One hour per echelon**, four hours total from battalion to company to platoon, to squad.

When “C” Company was attacked at dawn, that day’s planned operation was cancelled. How much of their previous night’s planning time was wasted? Just two or three hours. Not much. When “B” Company was ordered to seize Hill 118 instead, the unit was already on the move. How much time did the Company Commander need to issue an updated order? Less than thirty minutes. Not much.



1/5. LtCol George Newton (L), with company commanders.



Marine OP overlooking the Han River north of Seoul.

Ten days before the Inchon landing, the 1st Marine Division typed and issued OPORD 2-50. Every unit of the Division then spent more than a week planning and preparing for the first 24 hours of combat. This was the orders process, a legacy of World War II amphibious planning, that was taught by Marine Corps schools.

But the orders process in combat was demonstrated by the front-line leaders inside the battalions. Well forward, these commanders issued clear, concise, and direct orders on the actual terrain where they were fighting. LtCol Newton, with 1/5, had insufficient radios for a full CP, so he advanced each day with his leading company, where he could observe, orient, decide, and act. Another Marine commander, pointing to his map, explained, “That’s my CP!”



B/1/5 CO Captain Ike Fenton.



Marine fire team on a hill west of Seoul.

References

- Newton, George. *Special Action Report*. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 7 Oct 1950.
- Montross and Canzona. *The Inchon-Seoul Operation: U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953*. Washington, DC: 1955.
- Heinl. *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*. Mount Pleasant, SC: Nautical & Aviation Publishing, 1979.
- Stolfi. “A Critique of Pure Success: Inchon Revisited, Revised, and Contrasted.” *Journal of Military History*, April 2004.