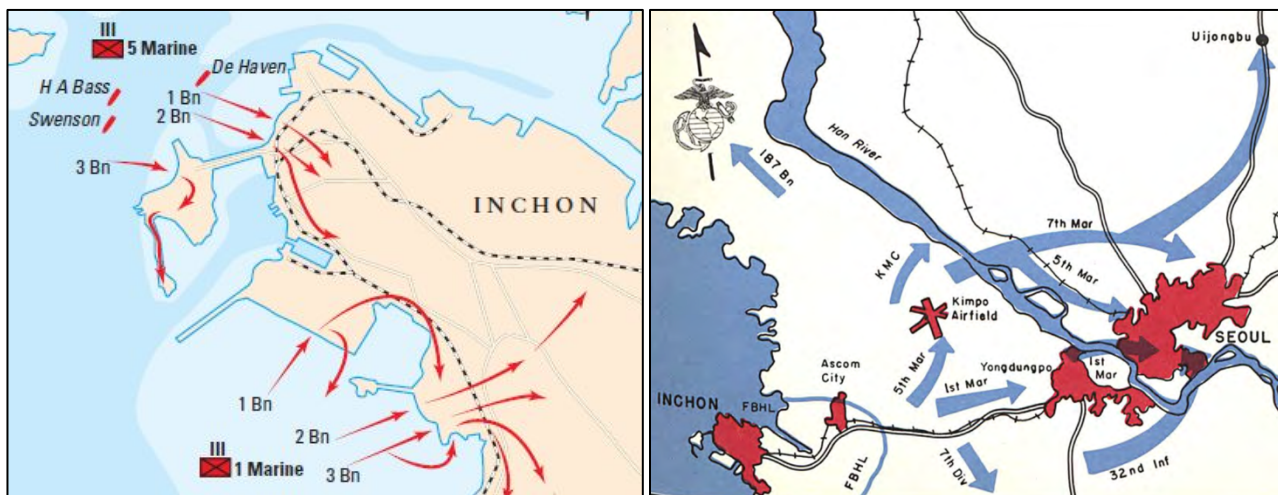


Orders at Inchon 1950

by Brendan B. McBreen

In August 1950, with the U.S. 8th Army trapped in the Pusan Perimeter, General Douglas MacArthur conceived a bold plan for an amphibious envelopment to seize Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. This attack would cut off the enemy at Pusan and trap most of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) inside South Korea. "We shall land at Inchon," said MacArthur, "and I shall crush them."

The 1st Marine Division landed at Inchon, Korea, on 15 September 1950. The 1st and 5th Marine regiments conducted the assault. Follow-on landings were made by the 1st Tank Battalion, 7th Marines, 11th Marines, and the 32d Infantry Regiment, attached to the Marines from the U.S. Army's 7th Infantry Division. The Marines then attacked east.



The Inchon Landing, 15 September 1950.

The Advance to Seoul 15-27 September 1950.

Orders. The 1st Marine Division issued Operation Order 2-50 on 4 September 1950, eleven days before the landing. Written by officers with World War II amphibious experience, the base order was wonderfully concise—just **two pages**—and focused exclusively on the tactical plan. The mission statement and most tasks to subordinate units were **single sentences**. The concept of operations was a **graphic**. Schedules, lists, and other almanac information—Intelligence (11 pages), Communications (8 pages), and the Landing Plan (13 pages)—was all cleanly addressed in separate annexes. No information was repeated or contradicted. This was a professional order written by professional Marines.

The details of the Navy's amphibious operation—lists of ships and units—were issued as a separate "Embarkation Order 1-50." Because the Division had just expanded, instructions for personnel and casualty reporting, pay, equipment, and clothing—essentially a complete Personnel SOP—were issued separately as "Administrative Order 2-50." This again reflected the best practice of not cluttering the tactical plan with SOP details.

There were no phases and no contingencies. General O.P. Smith, the 1st Marine Division CG, addressed only the situation at hand and planned to issue new orders as needed.

Operation Order 2-50:

Base order was two pages

Enemy:

"See Annex B (Intelligence)"

Mission was one sentence:

"SEIZE beachhead at Inchon"

CONOPS was a graphic:

"See Operations Overlay"

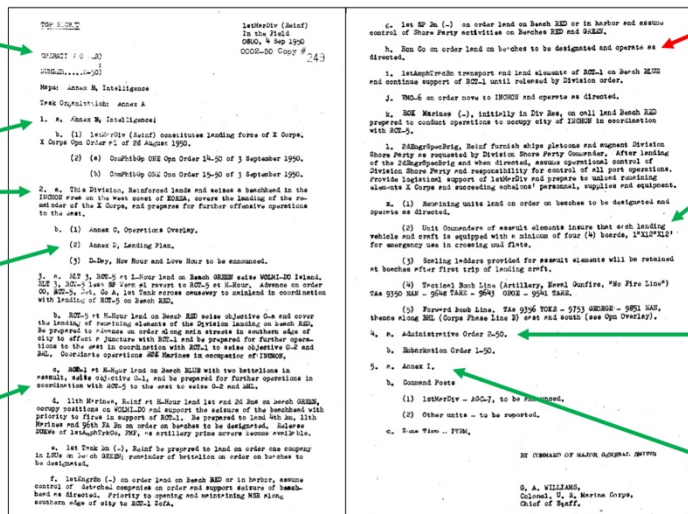
"See Landing Plan"

Tasks were terrain objectives:

"3/5: SEIZE Wolmi-do"

"5th Mar: SEIZE Obj O-A"

"1st Mar: SEIZE Obj O-1"



Reconnaissance was untasked

Coordinating Instructions:
Special equipment and FSCM

Admin and Logistics:
"See Administrative Order 2-50"
"See Embarkation Order 1-50"

Command and Signal:
"See Annex I"

1st Marine Division Operation Order 2-50, 4 Sep 1950.

But there were **problems with this order**—not with the format, but with the philosophy. First and foremost, it **did not mention Seoul**. It did not explain how the Division was supposed to **trap the NKPA**, which was the entire purpose of the operation.

The order focused solely on securing a beachhead at Inchon—as if that was the endstate. General Smith later said that half of the problem was just getting ashore, but that was not the mission, that was just the movement. Tasks to subordinate units were all terrain-based objectives and coordination lines, with no mention of the enemy. The reconnaissance company was not tasked, as if the division assumed that their advance would proceed without any updated reporting on the enemy. These issues were all legacies of Marine island operations in World War II, where the landing *was* the battle.

The Army's X Corps, in their HHQ Operation Order No. 1 (28 Aug 1950) and No. 2 (16 Sep 1950), clearly defined **Seoul** as the objective, with the Corps mission as "**seize and secure Seoul.**" Intelligence summaries issued by X Corps included detailed diagrams of enemy dispositions inside Seoul, but the 1st Marine Division intelligence annex (B) and target appendix (B3) only focused on the few NKPA units near Inchon.

Over the eleven days following the landing, the orders issued by the 1st Marine Division continued to focus on dirt, and not the enemy, and certainly not the objective. See Table 1. Not until the ninth day of the operation did the Division mission say, "**SEIZE SEOUL.**" These daily orders represented a huge time investment of typing, editing, reproduction, and distribution for very little return. Most of the directives simply selected new intermediate objectives and adjusted the associated control measures.

The Army was impatient with the slow advance of the 1st Marine Division toward Seoul. Although Marine officers resented Army complaints, in this case, the Army was right. The daily verbal orders issued by aggressive Marine commanders are not recorded, but these too would only have focused on the terrain objectives that the units were assigned to secure. Battalion orders could not have increased the pace of the Division.

Table 1. 1st Marine Division Operation Orders, September 1950.

Source: The Korean War Project (1950). *1st Marine Division Records*. www.koreanwar.org

1st MarDiv Operation Order	Date 1950 (D-Day)	Division Mission
2-50	4 Sep (D-11)	"SEIZE a beachhead at INCHON"
3-50	15 Sep (D-Day)	"SEIZE objective O-3"
4-50	15 Sep (D-Day)	"SEIZE force beachhead line"
5-50	16 Sep (D+1)	"SEIZE KIMPO Airfield"
6-50	17 Sep (D+2)	"SEIZE hills (W) of HAN River"
7-50	19 Sep (D+4)	"SEIZE HAN River crossing sites"
8-50	20 Sep (D+5)	"SEIZE HAN River crossing sites"
9-50	23 Sep (D+8)	"SEIZE bridge sites (SW) of SEOUL"
10-50	23 Sep (D+8)	"SEIZE bridge sites (SW) of SEOUL"
11-50	24 Sep (D+9)	"SEIZE SEOUL"
12-50	26 Sep (D+11)	"SEIZE SEOUL"

Operation Order 2-50 failed to identify the primary **objective** and **intent** of the operation, and failed to emphasize that speed was needed to prevent enemy re-deployment, re-organization, and escape. This order shackled the units of the 1st Marine Division to an incremental advance that only seized Seoul *twelve days* after the landing.

– LtCol Brendan McBreen is a battalion commander assigned to Parris Island, South Carolina.



Inchon, Korea, 1950

1stLt Baldomero Lopez leads his platoon, 3rd Platoon, "A" Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines over the seawall at RED Beach on Inchon, 15 September 1950. Minutes after this photograph was taken, 1stLt Lopez was wounded by enemy automatic rifle fire. Unable to throw his grenade, he swept it under his body to protect his men, sacrificing his life. For this selfless act of leadership, 1stLt Lopez was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Sources:

- The Korean War Project (1950). *1st Marine Division Records*. www.koreanwar.org
- Montross, L. and Canzona, N. (1955). *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950–1953: Volume II The Inchon-Seoul Operation*. Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps.
- Stolfi, R. (2004) "A Critique of Pure Success: Inchon Revisited, Revised, and Contrasted." *The Journal of Military History* 68: 505-26.

1st Marine Division

PUSAN

15 Sep 1950

ANNEX A: Task Organization for Operation CHROMITE

1st Marine Division

MajGen Oliver P. SMITH, 57

ADC: BGen Edward A. CRAIG, 54

CoS: Col Gregon A. Williams, 54, DepCoS: Col Edward W. Snedeker, 47

G-1 LtCol Harvey S. Walseth, 39, G-2: Col Bankson T. Holcomb, Jr., 42

G-3: Col Alpha L. Bowser, 40, G-4: Col Francis M McAlister, 45

1st Marines

1/1

2/1

3/1

Col Lewis B. "Chesty" PULLER, 52

LtCol Jack HAWKINS, 34

LtCol Allan SUTTER, 36

LtCol Thomas L. RIDGE, 35

5th Marines

1/5

2/5

3/5

LtCol Raymond I. MURRAY, 37

LtCol George R. NEWTON, 35

LtCol Harold S. ROISE, 34

LtCol Robert D. "Tap" TAPLETT, 32

7th Marines (REIN)

1/7

2/7

3/7

+ "D" Co, 1st CEB

+ "E" Co, 1st Medical Battalion

+ 1st Amphibious Reconnaissance Company

+ 1st Motor Transport Battalion

Col Homer L. LITZENBERG, Jr., 47

LtCol Raymond G. DAVIS, 35

Maj Webb D. "Buzz" SAWYER, 32

LtCol Frederick R. DOWSETT, 39

Capt Byron C. TURNER, 29

LCDR Charles K. HOLLOWAY

Lt Ralph CROSSMAN

LtCol Olin L. BEALL, 52

+ **3rd Battalion, ROK Marine Corps****11th Marines**

1/11 (105mm)

2/11 (105mm)

3/11 (105mm)

4/11 (155mm)

"C" Battery, 1st 4.5 Rocket Battalion, FMF

Col James H. BROWER, 42

LtCol Merritt ADELHAN

Maj Francis F. "Fox" PARRY, 32

Maj William McREYNOLDS, 31

1stLt Eugene A. BUSHE

1st Tank Battalion**1st Combat Engineer Battalion****1st Amphibious Tractor Battalion****1st Armored Amphibian Tractor Battalion****7th Motor Transport Battalion**

LtCol Harry T. MILNE, 33

LtCol John H. PARTRIDGE, 44

LtCol Erwin F. WANN

LtCol Francis K. COOPER

H&S Battalion, 1st Shore Party Bn, 1st Signal Bn, 1st MP Co

1st Service Support Group, 1st Ordnance Bn, 1st Service Bn, 1st Medical Bn

The leaders of the 1st Marine Division had extensive warfighting experience during World War II. Many of them had been promoted rapidly based on their outstanding performance in combat. Note the ages of the battalion commanders. LtCol Robert Taplett, CO of the lead assault battalion, 3/5, had just 10 years time-in-service at Inchon. LtCol Ray Murray was fifteen years younger than his fellow regimental commander, Colonel Chesty Puller. What were the benefits of young commanders? What were the drawbacks of a huge division staff of older colonels and generals?

A synopsis of:

“A Critique of Pure Success: Inchon Revisited, Revised, and Contrasted”

Russell H.S. Stolfi

The Journal of Military History 68 (April 2004): 505-26

The 1950 Inchon landing was a strategic masterpiece followed by an advance to Seoul so tentative that it almost negated the successful landing. Inchon-Seoul typifies the U.S. style of warfighting: successful maritime force projection followed by less effective ground campaigning. To illustrate the greater possibilities of a ground advance, the author contrasts Inchon-Seoul with that of a German divisional advance in 1941. The author concludes that the German battle fighting style was superior, containing elements of boldness that could be applied to U.S. ground warfare today.

1. Although **tasked to take Seoul**, 1stMarDiv found it difficult to break out of its World War II mission of securing beachheads. The Inchon landing became an end in itself, not the means to an end: rapid seizure of Seoul IOT encircle NKPA forces to the south. 1stMarDiv CG, General O.P. Smith said, “Half the problem was in getting to Inchon at all.”
 - a. Marine Corps staffs were large and unwieldy due to the challenges of amphibious embarkation. Two months of planning put two regiments ashore on D-Day: 15 September 1950. Seoul was 20 miles away. Few NKPA lay between Inchon and Seoul.
 - b. **What a battalion could have done on D+1**, block communications through Seoul, **two divisions were needed to accomplish a week later**. Movement was tentative, doctrinaire, and halting: a phased advance against a weak and uncoordinated enemy. 1stMarDiv focused on coming abreast on phase lines and rooting out minor resistance. Little reconnaissance was done. The division did not move at night, but dug in facing areas empty of any enemy.
2. In June 1940, the German 8th Panzer Division deployed 500 kilometers to the Russian border on 102 separate trains. A single division embarkation officer supervised this deployment.
 - a. On B-Day, 8th Division crossed the Russian border. When the division main effort was stopped for five hours by strong Russian resistance, the CG, General Brandenberger, 49, **switched his main effort, issued new orders, and led that battle group** around the enemy.
 - b. Since 8th Division’s objective was Daugavpils, 190 miles distant, their B-Day goal was Ariogala, 55 miles inland. Sixteen rivers had to be crossed. Brandenberger, riding with the lead battle group, reached Ariogala by 1530, and **verbally ordered his lead battalions into battle**. The remaining two-thirds of the division were 37 miles back, fighting the Russians.
 - c. That evening, the corps commander, General Van Manstein, rode into Ariogala and **verbally ordered 8th Division to seize a new objective, the Kedainia airbase, 33 miles east**. Brandenberger ordered all rear units to break contact and consolidate at Ariogala. He then **task-organized a new battle group and verbally ordered it east immediately**. Between 2300 and 0215, all units consolidated in full darkness on Ariogala.

- d. 1stMarDiv, facing little resistance on either regimental beach on D-Day, consolidated on the doctrinally-imposed O-1 line surrounding the Inchon beaches, and dug in for the night.
3. On B+1, 8th Division advanced east. At 0930, Brandenberger stopped the division and issued orders deploying units to face a Russian tank counterattack reported by aerial reconnaissance.
 - a. When the Russian tanks attacked in a different direction, 8th Division moved out at 1900, again with the CG in the lead battle group. It fought a two-hour battle, moved continuously through the darkness, and seized Kedainia at 0340.
 - b. 1stMarDiv drove five miles on D+1 and dug in for the night.
4. On B+2 through B+4, 8th Division pushed on and seized Daugavpils. On B+2, it had fought off four Russian counterattacks, each supported with tanks and artillery.
 - a. 8th Division battle groups had moved continuously on unpaved roads for 190 miles. Thirty-six water obstacles were forded or bridged. The closest German division on either flank was 32 miles away. A sister division, the 7th, moved from 1030 to 2300 on B+3, advancing 135 miles in a single day[!]
 - b. On D+2 through D+4, 1stMarDiv inched forward from the O-A to O-1 to O-2 phase lines. It seized Kimpo airfield on D+2, methodically reducing pockets of enemy resistance. The division spent days discussing, planning, issuing orders, and then crossing the Han river. 1stMarDiv took six days to advance 12 miles against minor enemy resistance. NKPA forces converged on Seoul, regained their balance, and prepared a strong defense of the city.
5. Operation Chromite (Inchon-Seoul) and Operations Barbarossa (Russia) were two of the boldest surprise offensives of the twentieth century. After B and D-Days, however, the two ground forces dramatically diverged in rates of advance and battle fighting style. The attack on Seoul, the primary objective only 20 miles from Inchon, did not begin until D+10. Force ratios, enemy capabilities, casualties, terrain, roads, weather – all were far worse for the Germans in Russia than for the Americans at Inchon.
6. Marine Corps operations were characterized by mandatory halts for the night, defensive perimeters with all units abreast, a constant concern for flanks, inordinate attention to rooting out small pockets of resistance, and an absence of effective ground reconnaissance. The location of the CG in the division command post reflected an island beachhead warfighting style and little sense of urgency.
 - a. Large staffs worked as planning bureaucracies. The staff planned the travel of the division to a beachhead, but not the maneuver out of it. On D+2, the staff prepared, and the G-2, G-3 and General Smith presented, a formal brief to General MacArthur in the division CP.
 - b. General Smith sat in his division CP editing written orders each night from D+1 through D+4, the most important days of the campaign. These written orders, specifying short-range objectives and night defensive perimeters, actually prevented the advance to Seoul.

7. The Germans moved swiftly, using verbal orders, and demanded continuous unrestricted advances for four days to an objective 190 miles distant. General Brandenberger rode through the darkness with his lead battle groups and issued verbal orders to keep the division moving. “Strong nerves” was what the Germans called the command quality that pushed units to exploit fleeting opportunities in the face of great risk. The German style of offensive battle:
- Positioned key leaders far forward where they could see the situation.
 - Required short, verbal orders, delivered on-scene by commanders to commanders.
 - Trusted competent operations officers, leading small, modestly ranked but capable staffs, to coordinate continuous operations.
 - Required twenty-four hour movement.
 - Demanded vigorous combat reconnaissance.
 - Fielded task-organized battle groups that could be quickly re-organized and re-tasked.

*The 1st Marine Division, formed in 1941, was only nine years old in 1950. The Marine Corps had no division experience prior to 1941. During World War II, some U.S. Army officers complained that the Marine Corps was not qualified to conduct large-unit operations. The reason that Marine officers in Korea had no experience with mobile division penetrations is that their three-year WWII experiences were almost exclusively island assaults, where the landing **was** the battle. How does an military organization prepare its officers for future operations that differ significantly from its historical experience?*

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