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



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Abstract

The Inchon landing was a strategical masterpiece followed by a ground advance to Seoul so tentative that it largely negated the successful landing. The Inchon-Seoul episode typifies the U.S. style of war fighting in the twentieth century—successful maritime force projection followed by less effective ground campaigning. To illustrate the greater possibilities in the ground advance, the author contrasts the opening days of the Inchon-Seoul operations with those of an analogous German surprise offensive in the Baltic in 1941. The author concludes that the German battle fighting style in mobile war was superior, containing elements of boldness that could be applied to improve U.S. ground warfare today.

THE U.S. armed forces planned and executed a counteroffensive in the opening stages of a major war in 1950 that ranks as one of the bolder surprise offensive operations of the twentieth century. During the Korean War General of the Army Douglas MacArthur and his joint staff created an apparent masterpiece centered on the Inchon landing—a flawless diamond in any tiara of historical military triumphs. Half a century later, Inchon remains largely free of any comprehensive analysis of shortcoming because of its image of pure success. The favorable termination of the operation was so obvious and compelling that few would

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waste time reevaluating so foregone an historical interpretation. Yet historians and lay and professional readers alike can scarcely ignore the glacially slow advance on the South Korean capital of Seoul that followed the capture of Inchon or escape the disquieting feeling that the landing had become an end in itself rather than a means to the end of a quick seizure of Seoul and resulting destruction of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) lying some distance away to the southeast.

The first part of the thesis of this article is that the landing itself was a strategical masterpiece followed by an advance to Seoul in ground battle so slow and measured that it constituted an operational disaster, largely negating the successful landing. The second part of the thesis is that the Inchon episode typifies the U.S. style of war fighting in the twentieth century—successful distant force projection by sea followed by less successful campaigning in the ground theater. The author proposes to support the thesis of relatively slow and halting ground campaigning by the United States—the great maritime projection power of the last century—through the use of historical analogy. The Inchon-Seoul situation will be compared and contrasted with an analogous offensive associated with Germany—the premier ground power of the same century.

The search then is for a useful historical analogy, one that is similar in general situation and reasonably close technologically. The good news is that war fighting in all times and all places has been dominated by factors observed by Clausewitz as comprising a timeless climate of danger, uncertainty, exertion, and chance. The practical challenge is to select a credibly close general situation which includes similarly modern factors of weaponry, transportation, and movement in space and time. One can generalize that Operation Chromite, the Inchon landing and advance to Seoul, was the centerpiece of an audacious U.S. surprise offensive of grand dimension and war-winning potential. An analogous German military situation including swift ground advances that would serve to illustrate the art of the possible in Chromite could well be the northern part of the front in Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1941. Although at first blush this operation may seem to be an unlikely candidate, at second glance a fundamental resemblance appears. One can generalize, for example, that similarly to Chromite, the German border breakthrough and advance to Daugavpils (Dvina, Duenaburg), Latvia, in June 1941 was the centerpiece of an audacious German surprise offensive of grand dimension and war-winning potential.¹

It can be further generalized that the U.S. high command based Chromite and its included Inchon landing on a vast maritime concen-

1. Russel H. S. Stolfi, *Hitler's Panzers East: World War II Reinterpreted* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), chapter 4.

tration of force. U.S. military staffs, especially Marine Corps staffs have become large and unwieldy partly because of the special challenges of embarkation and associated maritime movement and amphibious or port-area landings. Maritime embarkation, with its alleged unique technical complexities, would seem to distance Chromite from Barbarossa, but the Germans faced similar demands. While the U.S. high command embarked and moved combat formations and supplies over a sixty-five-hundred-mile sea route from California to Japan and Korea, the German army general staff embarked and moved larger numbers of troops and more material over rail routes that extended as far as twelve hundred miles. The U.S. embarkation processes were startlingly similar to German rail embarkation with the identical necessity for combat loading of both troops and supplies and the timing of their arrival in target areas. In a word, in the cases of Chromite and Barbarossa, the virtuosity of U.S. staffs in amphibious embarkation was paralleled by the skill of German staffs in rail embarkation.

As concerns the principles of war that were of special importance in the offensives, both the U.S. and German high commands faced one so dominant that neither operation could be conceptualized, let alone proceed in any way, without its virtual guarantee. Following the North Korean surprise offensive against South Korea in June 1950, the NKPA drove the U.S. and South Korean military forces into the southeastern extremity of the Korean peninsula around the city of Pusan. Under United Nations (UN) auspices, General MacArthur made the daring decision to execute an amphibious landing far behind the mass of the NKPA engaged on the Pusan perimeter and, by the threat presented, to force its withdrawal out of South Korea. Faced with the choice of a location for the landing, MacArthur largely personally made one of the boldest decisions in any war of the last century, to land immediately adjacent to Seoul, the political and communications center for all of Korea. A successful landing at Inchon, the port of Seoul, and a subsequent advance to Seoul only twenty miles away would threaten the NKPA with total destruction rather than force a simple, harrowing withdrawal from the south. Local North Korean forces, however, could readily and quickly block the long, narrow, torturous channel approach to Inchon, making it impossible for any landing force to approach the landing areas, let alone seize them. To generalize, failure to achieve surprise at Inchon would negate any possibility of decisive success in Chromite. In the actual event, MacArthur's daring decision to land at so unlikely a location for a major amphibious landing caught the North Korean high command totally off guard and was the dominant factor in the success of the offensive.

In 1940 Adolf Hitler made probably the boldest political-military decision of the twentieth century: to attack the largest and most heavily

armed power on the globe the next year and do so while still at war with another major power. To have any significant chance of success over and above other questions of relative strengths, space, and time, the German army general staff would have to achieve surprise. Given the strength of the Soviet armed forces and the size of the conceptualized area of decisive operations, the attack "made sense," that is, had an acceptable chance of success, only with the attainment of surprise. The fact that Germany and the Soviet Union were interacting within a functioning nonaggression pact made the secret concentration of 157 German divisions in attack positions along the contemporary peaceful frontier almost impossible. The entire military concentration was dominated, therefore, by the challenges to achieve surprise from the highest strategic to the lowest tactical levels, such as the seizure of intact border bridges.² The Germans achieved surprise based on the incredibility of such an attack under the strategic conditions of 1941 and the execution of the greatest set of deceptive measures in the history of warfare against a defensively paranoid Soviet Union. The fundamental resemblance between the two offensives continues thereby with the dominance of surprise and its successful attainment in both cases.

The highest level schemes of maneuver in each offensive also show remarkable similarities. With the achievement of surprise, the U.S. high command anticipated a successful landing followed by the quick seizure of Seoul and the drive into the rear of the NKPA under simultaneous attack by strong U.S. and South Korean forces out of the Pusan perimeter. Notwithstanding the supreme importance of a successful landing, Inchon was the means to the end of the quick seizure of Seoul and a drive through it across the rear of the main concentration of the NKPA. With the achievement of surprise, the German army general staff envisioned an immediate deep breakthrough of the Soviet border defenses in Lithuania followed by the quick seizure of the Daugavpils, Latvia, bridges and advance through the deep rear area of the Soviet Baltic Front. The seizure intact of the two bridges over the great Western Dvina River at Daugavpils would breach the most significant natural barrier to the advance on St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad). Parallel with the Chromite situation, the German breakthrough of the Soviet border defenses was the means to the end of the quick seizure of Daugavpils and the drive to seize the St. Petersburg mobilization space.

Within the framework of the general analysis above, one division each of the attacking forces largely carried the hopes for success of the

2. Russel H. S. Stolfi, "Barbarossa: German Grand Deception, and the Achievement of Strategic and Tactical Surprise Against the Soviet Union, 1940-1941," in Donald C. Daniel and Katherine Herbig, eds., *Strategic Military Deception* (New York: Pergamon, 1982), 195-223.

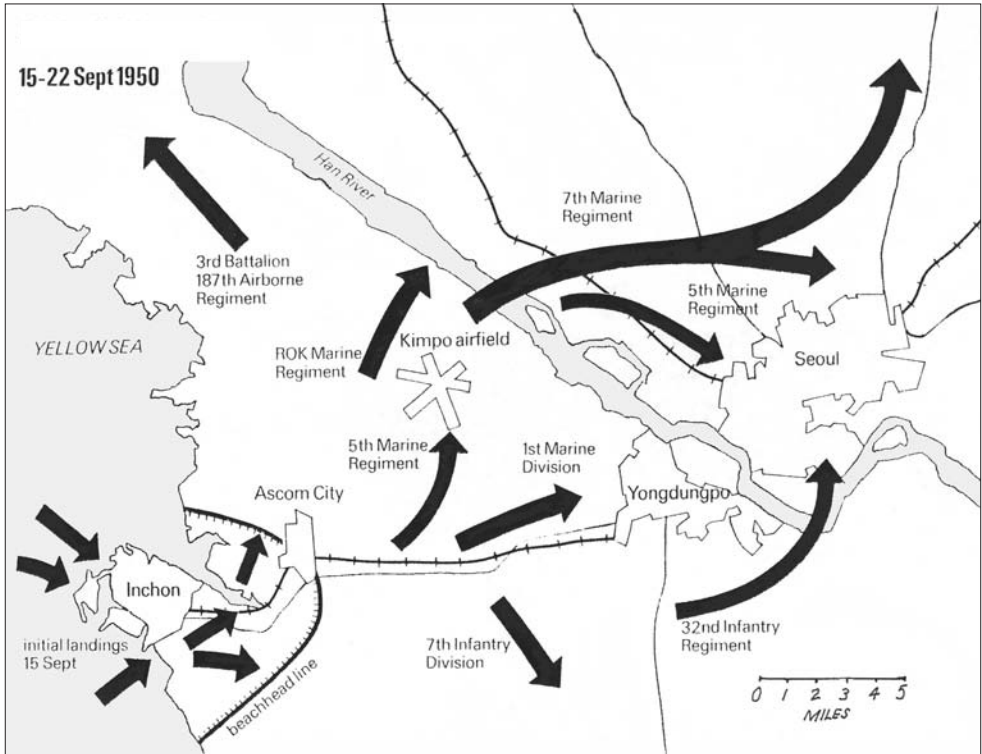
whole business. The U.S. 1st Marine Division seized the Inchon landing areas and led the advance to Seoul. The German 8th Panzer Division accomplished a quick, deep breakthrough of the Soviet Lithuanian border defenses and led the advance entirely across Lithuania to Daugavpils in the adjoining formerly independent state of Latvia. The two divisions fought with significantly different battle fighting styles, the U.S. division exhibiting slower, halting characteristics and the German unit faster moving, more fluid attributes.

The obvious argument that the Marine division's infantry fortress assault character and associated weapons and transportation doomed it to move more slowly to Seoul does not hold in the case of Inchon. The 1st Marine Division was organized to include a tank battalion, amphibious tractor battalion, motor transport (truck) battalion, and a fully motorized artillery regiment. It came close, thus, to being a fully motorized infantry division. It was capable technically of putting together strong motorized battle groups to advance the modest distance to Seoul, but only if it could tactically conceptualize a mobile style of battle fighting.

At Inchon, American Joint Task Force 7 completed two months of planning and movement by successfully landing the two assault regiments of 1st Marine Division during the late afternoon of D-day, 15 September 1950. By midnight, the Marine assault regiments held a secure lodgment ashore. Seoul lay twenty miles away across a well-developed road and rail system. American theater intelligence had estimated that if surprise were achieved, few NKPA troops would be located between Inchon and Seoul. At midnight the road to Seoul lay open. The strength of the U.S. ground forces already ashore along with that of the following Korean Marine, U.S. Army, and Marine combat forces, combined with a weak, surprised enemy and the short distance to Seoul, reveal a fleeting opportunity. At this moment, the words of Major General Oliver P. Smith, the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, highlight the American way in war. The general commented that "half the problem was in getting to Inchon at all," echoing America's war fighting style of distant maritime force projection.³ Here we have America getting to Inchon (brilliantly), seizing Inchon (brilliantly), and then as the following paragraphs will illustrate, more or less incidentally moving on to Seoul, the main objective of the offensive.

On D+1 and D+2, the Marine forces advanced so tentatively that their actions could be likened to continuing to hit the beaches. On those two full days available for the advance to Seoul, 1st Marine Division

3. U.S. Marine Corps, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950–1953*, vol. 2, *The Inchon-Seoul Operations*, by L. Montross and N. A. Canzona (Washington: Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, G-3, Historical Branch, 1954–), 98. Hereinafter referred to as USMC, *Inchon-Seoul* (1954).



Map 1. Inchon to Seoul.

made doctrinaire, halting, phased advances to Ascom City and Kimpo Airfield. (See Map 1.) Faced with weak, uncoordinated opposing forces on D+1, the two assault regiments continued to advance on line rather than put together a deep drive toward Seoul. The division displayed a fixation on coming abreast on phase lines and an inordinate concern over clearing, searching thoroughly, and rooting out minor resistance. The late afternoon events of D+1 illustrate the style of advance in terms of the 5th Marines. Second Battalion, 5th Marines (2/5), moving along the stretch of highway leading to Ascom City, “encountered only sniping, but it was early evening before the two hills [along the road] and surrounding low ground [south of the city] had been thoroughly searched.”⁴ The battalion commander then ordered 2/5 to dig in for the night of D+1 southwest of Ascom in an area devoid of any significant enemy and after having spent the previous daylight hours engaged against incoherent North Korean resistance. The weak enemy of D+1 presented further

4. *Ibid.*, 139.

front collapsing opportunity for deeper daylight and further nighttime advances, opportunity that was missed because of the tentative style of the U.S. ground force.

This critical analysis of the cautious movement on D+1 would not hold much water for the battle at the water's edge on Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, and the other small, fortress-like areas similar to Pelelieu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa that demanded and got miniscule, methodical advances in the Pacific during World War II. Chromite, indeed, demanded the fortress-attack-like surge on D-day exemplified by photographs of Marines with scaling ladders going over the sea wall on Red Beach. The scene was reminiscent of Marines huddling against and clawing their way over the log wall at the water's edge at Betio. Like it or not, however, the strategic *raison d'être* for Chromite was the quick seizure of Seoul and not the indispensable but intermediate step of the Inchon landing.

Mobile offensive operations demand an urgent style of battle fighting that is supremely sensitive to opportunity and time. Unlike the situation a week later around Seoul, when the Marine Corps, Army, and Korean Marines would be engaged in tough battle against a psychologically balanced and numerous enemy, UN forces confronted immediate success on D+2 (17 September). The American way in mobile offensives emerges in the words of the official history: "On Sunday morning, D+2, General Smith was directed as landing force commander, to reestablish civil government in Inchon," a task that tied up Smith personally in consulting Korean officials and issuing proclamations on D+2 and being physically present to make remarks at the city hall on D+3.⁵ One can find little sense of urgency here in the conduct of operations. Theater headquarters had issued orders to the commander of ground forces ashore of no consequence for the developing battle but in strong enough terms that General Smith felt bound to be present personally in a rear area remote even from the slow-moving battle. Greater urgency in the conduct of the advance had been proposed by Major General Edward M. Almond, U.S. Army, commanding X Corps, earlier on 9 September. He had suggested that a battalion of 32d Infantry Regiment, 7th Division, be landed on Green Beach with the mission "to move rapidly down the road to seize the high ground south of Seoul, more than 20 miles inland." The idea had struck General Smith as extremely optimistic.⁶

The story developed thus far shows Chromite as a distant strategic concentration of forces followed by surprise seizure of a beachhead critical for a ground advance to Seoul. Barbarossa similarly comprised a vast strategic concentration of forces followed on the Baltic front by the surprise breakthrough of a fortified frontier critical for a ground advance

5. *Ibid.*, 143.

6. *Ibid.*, 44.

across Lithuania to Daugavpils in Latvia. To effect surprise, the Germans gradually built up their ground and air forces in the east for twelve months. Under cover of an ongoing war with Britain, the army general staff carried out the strategic concentration in four waves, with the first three holding the infantry divisions and masses of material. It moved the panzer divisions with their largely offensive missions and distant objectives only at the last moment in the fourth wave.⁷ Through skill, chance, and the accommodating style of the Soviets, the Germans achieved the same complete surprise in Barbarossa as the Americans had done in Chromite. On 16 June 1941 the 8th Panzer Division, which was the German division analogous to 1st Marine Division in Chromite, was still stationed near Prague five hundred miles by rail from its assault sector on the Lithuanian border. In rail movements analogous to the maritime movement of 1st Marine Division, the panzer division embarkation officer loaded the division on 102 individual trains and delivered it concealed to assembly areas near the border by 1700 on 18 June. By B-day, 22 June, 8th Panzer Division had edged immediately up against the Lithuanian border. To complete the analogy, it now stood poised before Soviet border defenses in a situation parallel to 1st Marine Division at the entrance to the Inchon shipping channel.

On B-day for 8th Panzer Division and D-day for 1st Marine Division, both formations scored decisive success. On these initial, analogous days, the two divisions also quickly diverged into American and German styles of conducting ground offensives. With its slowly moving style, the Marine division concentrated on securing a beachhead to a doctrinally imposed phase line (the 0-1 line) and consolidating within it. Although encountering almost negligible resistance on the two main landing beaches, the American division spent most of the hours of darkness in defensive positions facing toward several miles of space largely devoid of any enemy. In contrast, 8th Panzer Division anticipated strong resistance and had a foot-marching infantry regiment attached to lead the initial assault into anticipated field fortifications. Shortly after the *Schwerpunkt* (point of major effort) battle group advanced through the field positions taken by the infantry regiment, it ran into stronger Soviet forces in concrete bunkers behind a one-hundred-meter-wide swath of felled trees. The division faced tactical, and the northern army group strategic, disaster with the halt of the *Schwerpunkt* force.

Similarly to the way General MacArthur had selected 1st Marine Division as the operational instrument to effect the seizure of Seoul and the collapse of the NKPA in South Korea, Colonel General (4-stars) Erich Hoepner, Commander, Panzer Group IV, Army Group North, had approved a subordinate corps commander's plan to use 8th Panzer Divi-

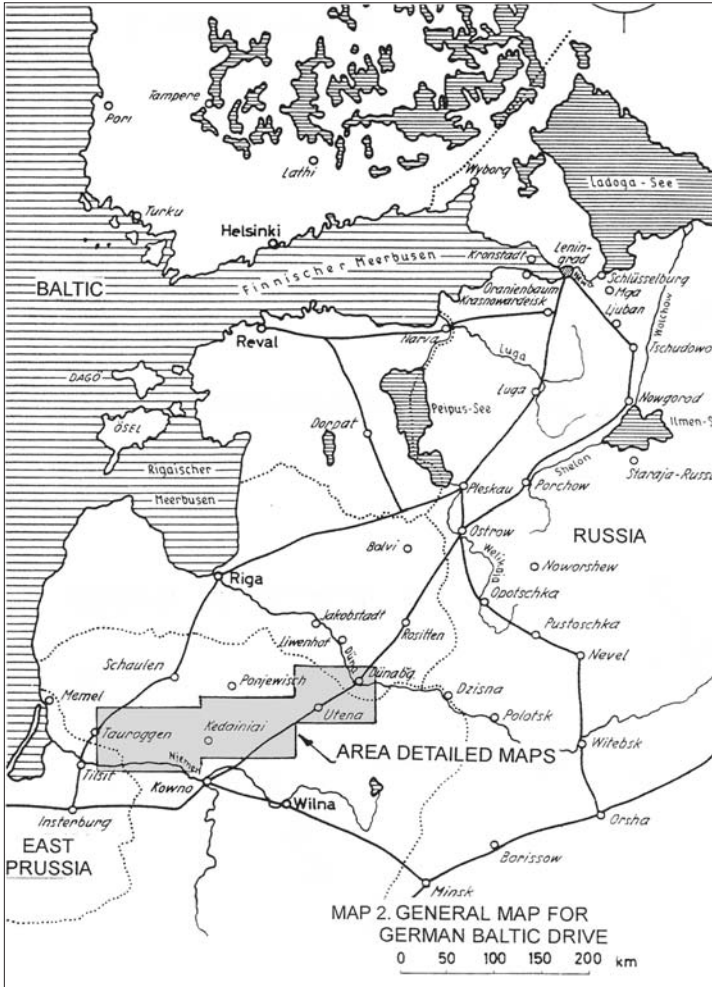
7. Stolfi, "Barbarossa," 209–11.

sion as the operational instrument for the quick seizure of Daugavpils and resulting strategic collapse of the Soviet Baltic Front. The German division commander, Major General (1-star) Erich Brandenberger, according to a candid entry in the division war diary, had developed his plan for the breakthrough of the border defenses based on a “false command estimate of the enemy.”⁸ When hours counted if the Germans were to travel the 190 miles to Daugavpils fast enough to seize it by *coup de main*, the division *Schwerpunkt* battle group was still halted in the Soviet border defenses almost five hours into the attack. At this moment on B-day, the Germans exhibited their tactical prowess in mobile war in what can be characterized as a breakthrough mentality. (See Map 2.)

Earlier on the morning of B-day, the division operations officer had signaled General Brandenberger from the command post that his southern secondary battle group was fluidly advancing through light resistance. Tasked to reach a distant first day’s objective, Brandenberger switched the division *Schwerpunkt* to the advancing force and at 0743 rode over to accompany it east. During the planning for Barbarossa, he and the corps commander, General of Infantry (3-stars) Erich von Manstein, agreed that seizure of the intact bridges at Daugavpils in a *coup de main* would have to take place by the fourth day (B+3) of the campaign. Manstein, accordingly, assigned the city of Ariogala, fifty-five miles from the border, as the objective for B-day. The target was daunting with eighteen bridged rivers and streams to be crossed, unpaved roads clogged with massive German army and Luftwaffe traffic, and probable stubborn Soviet resistance. Brandenberger, nevertheless, riding close to the front of the lead battle group, reached the Dubysa River just west of Ariogala at 1530 on B-day. Meeting tough resistance in spite of his surprise arrival, Brandenberger on the spot ordered the battle group to push across a reconnoitered ford immediately with the accompanying panzer battalion and the armored, three-quarter-track company of the motorized infantry battalion to take the city.

At this moment, the division commander and lead battle group lay thirty-seven miles east of the other two-thirds of the division still engaged in stiff combat near the German border. Only one other German division could provide protection for the left flank of the battle group, and by midnight on B-day this adjacent 290th Infantry Division was thirty-eight miles west. Such was the German breakthrough style that the corps commander himself rode into Ariogala at 1730 and, standing in a city street, gave Brandenberger oral orders to concentrate every

8. Frame (Fr.) 000641, Roll 483, Microcopy T-315, 8. *Panzer Division, Ia, Kriegstagebuch, Feldzug im Osten 1941, 13.6–20.7.41*, Records German Field Commands, Divisions, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter referred to as Roll 483, T-315, NARA).



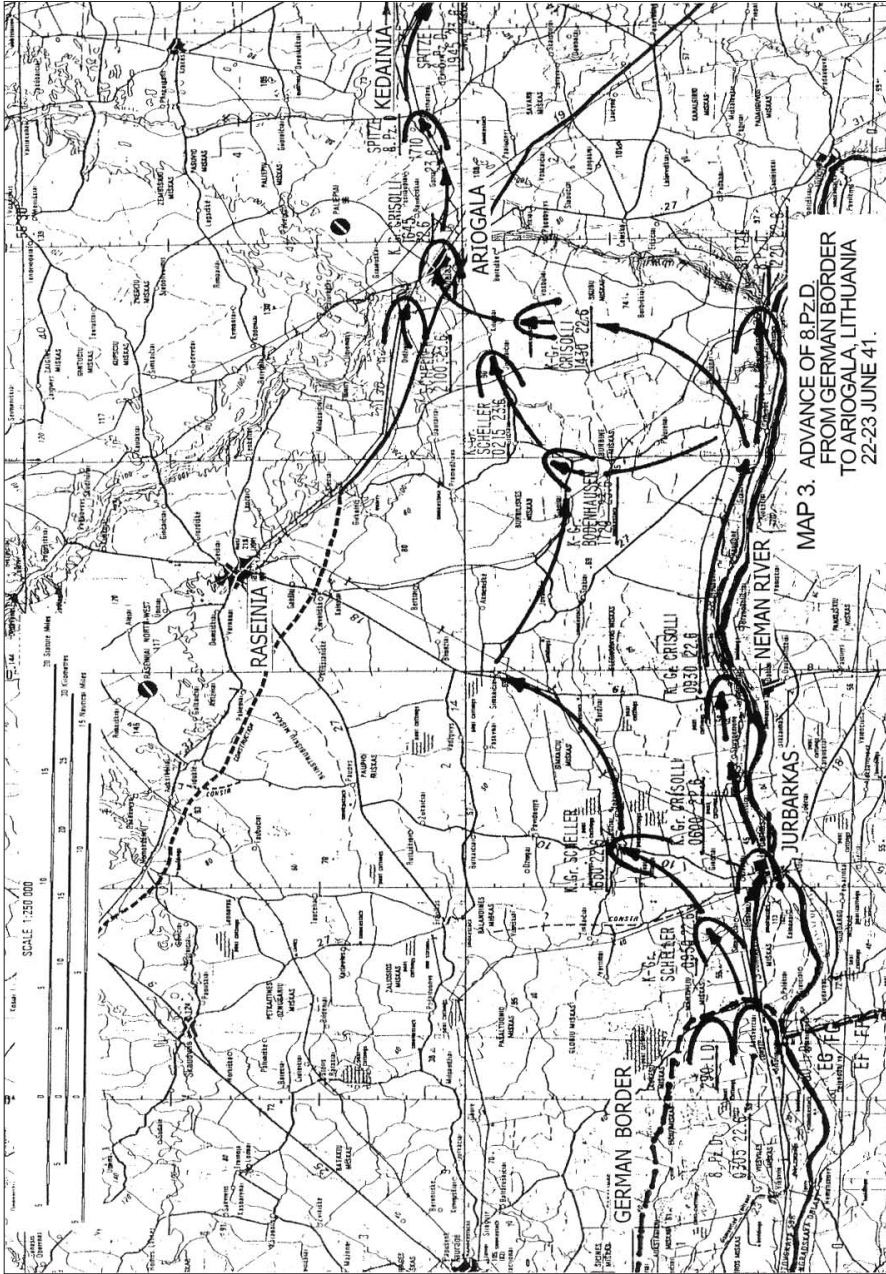
combat unit of the division there by midnight and advance on the Soviet air base at Kedainia thirty-three miles east. To execute the order, the division commander began to pull forward the two battle groups that were just finishing the border combat. Simultaneously, at Ariogala, he put together a new advanced detachment and ordered it east. Seven miles down the road at yet another river crossing site, it met “strong resistance,” words from the division war diary meaning combat with a sizeable Soviet infantry formation supported by tanks and artillery.⁹ There, at 2300, B-day, Brandenberger halted to concentrate the division.

9. Fr. 000464, *ibid.*

Although tasked to take Seoul, 1st Marine Division found it difficult to break out of its World War II mold of securing beachheads. With a Pacific island fortress assault mentality, the veteran division planners concentrated on securing a challenging but probably lightly held beach. The division had to be filled out with reservists from around the nation, embarked, and transported across the Pacific. Combined with an impending, immovable D-day, these factors gave the planners time to do little more than what was familiar from the Pacific war. As a result, the United States–UN offensive has been misleadingly generalized as an Inchon landing rather than, more appropriately, an encirclement and destruction of the NKPA in South Korea. The U.S. commanders at theater, corps, and division made no plans for a *coup de main* at Seoul that would immediately block communications between North Korea and the NKPA in the south. The situation was both tragic and unique because the theater commander had selected a landing site so unlikely that little initial resistance could be expected and yet so close to Seoul that it could be taken by a modest-sized motorized force exploiting the same surprise that made the landing possible in the first place. What a motorized reinforced infantry battalion could have done on D+1, that is, physically block communications through Seoul, two divisions were needed to accomplish for the same stakes but in a battle beginning a week later and lasting four additional casualty-filled days.

In contrast, around midnight on B-day, now fifty-five miles into Soviet Russia, 8th Panzer Division headquarters labored in darkness to concentrate the division at Ariogala. Earlier at 1650, the original *Schwerpunkt* battle groups had disengaged from the border combat and by 0215, B+1, in full darkness had reached Ariogala. The battle groups had moved forward through enemy stragglers across sixteen bridges and fords and had been halted only by corps traffic control officers who ordered them off the road for two hours. As daylight arrived, the division had pulled together its combat elements and enough fuel and ammunition columns to advance east, still with no friendly forces on its flanks. The play of chance in great offensives is illustrated by the remainder of B+1, beginning with the panzer corps alert at 0930 that its organic reconnaissance aircraft had observed Soviet motorized columns several miles long and containing “300 to 400 tanks” heading west, apparently against 8th Panzer Division, to regain the big bridge over the Dubysa near Ariogala.¹⁰ Brandenberger deployed the division for defense, but the Soviet force during several tense hours veered north and late in the afternoon engaged instead the thirty-five-mile-distant 6th Panzer Division around Raseinia. (See Map 3.)

10. Fr. 000650, *ibid.*



MAP 3. ADVANCE OF 8. PzD.
FROM GERMAN BORDER
TO ARIOGALA, LITHUANIA
22-23 JUNE 41.

At this juncture, the German general commanding Panzer Group IV faced a campaign-level decision of whether to turn around 8th Panzer Division to help fight off the strong armored enemy or to head for St. Petersburg. Hoepner vacillated for several hours but then with impressive operational nerve at approximately 1800, B+1, ordered Manstein and Brandenberger to continue the drive through Daugavpils to St. Petersburg. The division had been frozen in its forward position for twenty-six hours, but at 1900, B+1, the lead battle group began to advance east. Moving continuously through darkness, it would seize Kedainia at 0340, B+2, while thirty-two miles distant from the closest German formations on either flank.

Analogously, by midnight on D+1, 1st Marine Division had driven five miles from the Inchon beaches and been ordered to dig in for the night. The next day, D+2, the division would take Kimpo Airfield at a relaxed pace characterized by the following deceptively reasonable official account: "Marching northwards through the outskirts [of Ascom City], Easy Company of [the spearhead] 2/5 was repeatedly held up by small pockets of resistance among the dwellings along each side of the road. Captain Samuel Jaskilka's veteran infantry reduced the positions methodically but the whole morning was used up in the process."¹¹ Moving slowly as if across a small fortress island, the Marines reduced all pockets of resistance, thus giving opportunity to the enemy command defending Seoul to begin to regain its balance and gather forces for a strong defense of the city. In epic contrast in Barbarossa, the 7th Panzer Division, advancing south of Brandenberger's 8th Panzer Division toward Moscow, made an extraordinary drive with similar weapons, vehicles, and road conditions that illustrates a different battle style. From 1030 to 2300 on B+3, the division advanced 135 miles (!) through the rear area of the Soviet group of armies defending the way to Moscow among enemy supply columns and strong combat forces moving west. The division war diary gives a brief sketch of the style of advance. As a division column passed through the main street of a Russian city and received significant fire, its commander would drop off a designated battle troop to break up the enemy force, remount its vehicles, and catch up with the still advancing column.¹²

The 1st Marine Division would inch forward on D+2 to take Kimpo Airfield while keeping on line for the advance to Seoul. To get at that city from Inchon, the division would have to cross the Han River, but it gave

11. USMC, *Inchon-Seoul* (1954), 155.

12. Fr. 000890, Roll 407, Microcopy T-315, 7. *Panzer Division, Ia, Tagesmeldungen, 20. Juni–10. Juli 1941, Schuetzen-Regiment 6, Abt. Ia, 27. 6. 41, Morgenmeldungen fuer die Zeit vom 25.6.41, 0900 Uhr bis 27.6.41, 0100 Uhr*, Records German Field Commands, Divisions, NARA.

little serious thought to the surprise seizure of existing bridges. Such a possibility was terra incognita for both the division and corps headquarters. Even the crossing that succeeded on D+5, 20 September 1950, near Haenju, was treated as a masterpiece of action. The official account, however, shows little urgency and much bureaucratically styled discussion, as for example: "Late in the afternoon [of D+3], both Corps and Division issued orders . . . for crossing the Han." Then, "General Smith asked for a conference the next morning [D+4] with General Almond. He informed the Xth Corps commander that he and his staff had given considerable thought to the question of a crossing site."¹³ The commander also discussed bridging material and recorded the astounding fact that corps and division did not have enough "to cross such a wide stream."¹⁴ After landing with forces from the United States and Japan to conduct a ground offensive to take Seoul, the American ground forces would take six days to move twelve miles to a crossing site on the Han and find themselves without enough bridging material to cross and with no serious concept for taking an existing Korean structure by surprise.

The 8th Panzer Division faced an analogous situation in its attempt to take a large city north of a big river at the beginning of a surprise offensive. In contrast to the relaxed American drive to the Han and its crossing, the German commander generated an urgent drive that culminated in the intact seizure of the road and rail bridges at Daugavpils. The advanced elements of the panzer division would arrive just out of sight of the bridges at 0530, B+4. To keep the drive going, the division commander had moved his battle groups continuously day and night from late B+1 toward a city 190 miles from the German border. Even a modest delay at any one of the thirty-six significant streams to be crossed from the German border to Daugavpils could have been fatal to the drive. The division, accordingly, marched bridging columns with the forward battle groups and assigned flak specifically to secure crossing sites from air attack. To maintain high tempo, the division had attached to it two teams of special operations troops for the surprise seizure of the larger bridges along the route and the master coup sought for Daugavpils. The teams included personnel who spoke Lithuanian, Latvian, or Russian and were dressed in captured enemy uniforms, armed with both Soviet and German weapons, and mounted on captured Soviet vehicles.

The teams scored their first success with the intact seizure of the two bridges over the Mituva River at Jurbarkas, seven miles from the border at 0600, B-day. Four days later at 0600, B+4, two teams at the front of the division's tank regiment moved out from forest concealment 1.6 miles southeast of the Daugavpils bridges and boldly approached them.

13. USMC, *Inchon-Seoul* (1954), 183.

14. *Ibid.*, 184.

At the road bridge, one Soviet-like team moved in and among the real Soviet troops on the south bank and “shot them down.”¹⁵ The column then moved across the bridge to take a tiny lodgment and defuze the bridge demolitions. Immediately after the shooting began, the panzer regimental commander, personally accompanying his lead panzer battalion, crossed the intervening terrain and drove across the intact bridge into the city. A second tank battalion followed, accompanied by motorized infantry, artillery, and antitank guns. The Soviets reacted vigorously with local ground forces and low-level air attack but were unable either to regain or to destroy the bridges. (See Map 5.)

The Germans made the successful drive to Daugavpils with no friendly forces on the flanks of a division advancing in an interrupted column along approximately forty miles of unpaved road at any moment in time. What command quality allowed the Germans to develop so high a tempo of operations and sustain it logistically? Veterans of the deep 1939–42 advances use the words “strong nerves” to define the leadership quality. To create an uninterrupted advance and exploit fleeting opportunity, the commander required strong nerves to fight off the inherent paralysis of decision making in war. The factors that comprise the climate of war, especially danger, uncertainty, and chance, conspire to immobilize commanders. Brandenberger exemplified strong nerves. As the chaos of mobile combat and distant resupply enveloped him and his staff, he neither halted nor slowed the advance of 8th Panzer Division.

Witness the chaos. After the great tank scare, the division advanced detachment followed by the lead battle group moved out again towards Kedainia at 1750, B+1. (See Maps 3 and 4.) It signaled at 1945 that it was in combat with a strong enemy but after a two-hour battle, radioed that it intended to advance through darkness into the streets of Kedainia and arrive there by 0200, B+2. The advanced detachment arrived on schedule and the trailing lead battle group rode through it to take the bridge there intact and report the city secured by 0340, B+2. Simultaneously, a ground reconnaissance detachment reported a strong Soviet tank force five miles north of the city. Brandenberger, nevertheless, riding with the lead battle group, ordered it toward the city of Seta eleven miles east and took the bridge there intact at 0743, B+2. Shortly afterward, a strong Soviet force attacked Seta from the east, then at 0900 another strong enemy force attacked Seta from the south, and at 1100 yet another strong force attacked the battle groups and division command post back at Kedainia from the north. Each of these Soviet attacking formations held tanks and infantry with artillery support. Undeterred, the division commander in the lead and his operations officer in the command post near Kedainia not only repulsed the attacks, destroying fifteen Soviet

15. Fr. 00671, Roll 483, T-315, USNA.

tanks in the battle south of Seta alone, but pushed forward the lead battle group another twenty miles to take the large city of Ukmerge at 1650.

But the test of nerves was not over. Two hours later at 1905, B+2, the division commander, still with the leading battle group, signaled the division command post that he was under attack by a strong Soviet tank and motorized infantry force advancing from the direction of the German border. The Soviets were able to make this startling attack because the other division battle groups now lay thirty miles west near Kedainia. Brandenberger had reached Ukmerge with an advancing mobile offensive perimeter surrounded on all sides by Soviet-held country. After a two-and-one-half hour battle directed west, Brandenberger destroyed the attacker, turned east again, and by midnight, B+2, took intact yet another bridge, this time six miles northeast of Ukmerge. Then, from midnight through 0330, B+3, 25 June, in complete darkness, the division commander directed the refueling, remunitioning, and reorganization of the freshly concentrated two battle groups in order to set off now on two axes of advance toward Daugavpils. During the preceding drive, the division commander displayed nerves so strong, comprising a battle fighting style so fluid, and with a unit so like an operational perpetual motion machine that the style and the organization should be studied as historical models for emulation. It is not well known that the present Israeli Army as it was created between 1956 and 1967 modeled its battle fighting style on that of the German Army of 1939–45. The newly developing army was free to emulate any style in the world to master the elemental challenge of Israeli political survival. It is a telling commentary on German virtuosity in battle that in the shadow of the holocaust, the Israeli Army chose the recent German style.¹⁶

During the analogous time of D+1 through D+3, 1st Marine Division advanced at a slower pace. The division established O-A, O-1, O-2, and force beachhead lines and a surfeit of short-range, intermediate objectives, including Ascom City and Kimpo Airfield. These control devices have seemed so correct and professional that they have come to be regarded as a natural order of things. It is not so much that phase lines and intermediate objectives have been little challenged as it is that they have seemed so necessary and natural that challenge cannot even be formulated. The halting of movement during the night, the incessant establishment of night defensive perimeters, the absence of effective ground reconnaissance, and the location of the leader in the center of a “small city”¹⁷ called the division command post, all reflect combat in an island

16. Colonel Mandi Meron, Chief of Staff, Israeli Armored Force, discussion with the author, Negev Desert, October 1968.

17. Major General Ernest Cheatham, USMC, Commander, First Marine Division, discussion with the author, Camp Pendleton, California, February 1984. The words

beachhead. Recognizing this historical condition, one can see large staff planning bureaucracies rather than trim general staffs: the staff becomes an instrument to plan the travel of a division to a beachhead rather than maneuver a division out of it. In so constrained a battlefield, the division commander can direct his fight from a large, immobile headquarters heavy with extraneous planners. Marine Corps doctrine with its equivocal axiom on the location of the leader in combat—the leader shall position himself where he can best control his forces—reflects the Marine Corps as prisoner of this historical condition. German doctrine was less equivocal. It demanded that the leader be as far forward as possible “because in war the leader must see for himself.”¹⁸ The contrasting end result: General Smith would fix himself in a large command post and edit written orders for continuation of the battle the next morning out of night defensive positions while General Brandenberger would ride through the dark of night close to the front of his lead battle group and issue oral orders to keep the division moving.

For the commanders of Marine division, Army corps, and Theater, the evening of D+1, 16 September 1950, and the following two days were most crucial for a timely advance to Seoul. The day before, their headquarters had been fully occupied getting their forces ashore, but on the following 16, 17, and 18 September, the division and corps commanders and MacArthur himself had the tactical opportunity and a strategic imperative to get to Seoul fast. Those leaders, however, committed themselves to battle fighting quiescence as shown in the official account of activity that again seems to be natural, pertinent, and necessary to reach Seoul: “On the evening of D plus 1, General Smith had issued Opn 05-50, directing the 1st and 5th Marines to attack toward corps phase line CC the next morning.”¹⁹ There is little action in this scene and much writing of orders for two regiments frozen in position for an entire night. In essence, General Smith has issued a written order not to exploit the opportunity offered by a weak and confused enemy to drive through the night to Seoul, but rather to wait to advance the next morning to an intermediate phase line.

The official account continues on to describe the happenings of the next morning, D+2, in the following also seemingly natural and obvious actions: “That morning [D+2] C in FE [Commander in Chief Far East] [MacArthur] had been met by General Smith at Yellow Beach and wel-

are General Cheatham’s. The context was his statement generally: How can I consider that I have a mobile division when my command post is the size of a small city?

18. Comments of the division commander, Generalmajor Gustav von Vaerst, Fr. 000250, Roll 664, Microcopy T-313, *15. Panzer Division, Anlage zum Taetigkeitsbericht, Kommando, 15. Pz. Div., Anhaeltspunkte fuer die Motorisierte Gefechtsausbildung*, Records German Field Commands, Divisions, NARA.

19. USMC, *Inchon-Seoul* (1954), 153.

came to the 1st Marine Division command post. . . . There the Commander in Chief was briefed by the Division G-2 and G-3 on the military situation.”²⁰ The question begs that since the Marine division was now conducting an offensive eastward, why was not the division commander leading it toward Seoul and why was not the theater commander pressing him forward? It is a telling commentary on American battle fighting style that General Smith had determined that the best position for him to control the battle in the drive to Seoul was by being present to greet General MacArthur back on the beach and conduct him to a prepared, bureaucratically styled briefing presented by two subordinate division staff officers with him in attendance.

In summary, Chromite and Barbarossa comprise two of the boldest surprise offensives of the twentieth century. Their vast dimensions allow one to generalize that they typify each the American and German way in war. The two operations were fundamentally analogous historical happenings that not only allow one to establish each country’s way in war but also to contrast their ground battle fighting styles. The article presents the concentration of forces and the first four days of ground combat, analyzing the advances of two analogously tasked American and German divisions. Based on empirical historical data, the article shows that both Americans and Germans were brilliantly successful in the surprise concentration of forces up against enemy territory, the Americans by sea and the Germans by land. The same hard historical data show similar success on the first day of ground combat, the Americans seizing a bridgehead ashore and the Germans penetrating deeply into Soviet-occupied Lithuania. After D- and B-days, however, the two ground forces dramatically diverged in rates of advance and battle fighting style.

The American ground force moved slowly to the drumbeat of cautious, restrictive written orders that limited daily advances to distances so small that it took eleven days to begin the attack into Seoul, which lay only 20 road miles distant from Inchon. The German ground force moved swiftly using oral orders that demanded continuous, unrestricted advance toward a target city reckoned to be four days away although 190 miles distant. It would be tempting to obfuscate here in defense of the American force by bringing out the usual suspects to explain the staggering contrast in rate of advance. Such an explanation would cite the factors of force ratios, attacker’s casualties, defender’s posture, terrain, road net, weather, nightfall, and duration of operation to account for differences in performance by suggesting that the American force faced greater challenges. A glance at the factors shows that the challenges were similar and therefore cannot account for the difference in performance. The swifter German rate of advance was based on a contrasting German

20. Ibid.

style of offensive battle highlighted by a leader positioned as far forward as possible; a dominant operations officer heading a small, modestly ranked general staff, each issuing oral or short written orders; movement twenty-four hours a day; constantly reorganizing battle groups; and vigorous combat reconnaissance. The above elements of style that characterized German mobile war call for scrutiny for application to present U.S. ground force operations. The point is not to make 1941 Germans out of twenty-first century Americans but to improve U.S. capabilities to cope with uncertainty and chance in war, as it were, to ride through the rugged and uneven landscape of war rather than attempt to level it.²¹

21. R. H. S. Stolfi, *German Panzers on the Offensive: Russian Front, North Africa, 1941–1942* (Atglen, Pa., and Surrey, England: Schiffer Publishing, 2003), 213.