After Inch’on and the Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA) breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, the North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) reeled back in shambles, their supply lines cut. On paper, the NKPA had a total of eight corps, thirty divisions, and several brigades, but in reality most were combat ineffective. Many North Korean units had fled north of the Yalu into Manchuria in order to refit and replenish their numbers. Only the IV Corps with one division and two brigades opposed the South Korean I Corps in northeastern Korea, and four cut-off divisions of II Corps and stragglers resorted to guerrilla operations near the 38th Parallel.

With the war appearing won, only the Chinese and Soviet response to the potential Korean unification under a democratic flag worried U.S. policymakers. Communist China was the major concern. Having just defeated the Nationalist Chinese and reunified the mainland, the seasoned Red Army was five million strong. In fact, some of the best soldiers in the Chinese Communist Army were among those “volunteers” who intervened early in the Korean War. When the stream of Chinese “volunteers” became a flood, Allied optimism for a quick end of the war vanished despite much improved capabilities since July 1950.

FOUR MONTHS INTO WAR: THE ALLIED ORDER OF BATTLE: NOVEMBER 1950

Surprised by the North Korean attack on 25 July 1950, the Allies lost no time in building a larger and more capable force to counter the Communist aggression. By 23 November 1950, the Allies had massed 553,000 troops (the majority of whom were American and South Korean); counting 55,000 air force and 75,000 naval personnel. UN members also contributed forces.

On 7 July 1950, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 84, condemning North Korean aggression. Resolution 84 authorized member states to furnish military forces under a U.S.-led UN Command to help restore the balance. Fortunately for the United States, the Soviet Union, a permanent Security Council member with veto power, boycotted the UN because the Republic of China and not the (Communist) People’s Republic of China, held a permanent seat on the Council.

Ground forces came from the United Kingdom (11,186), Turkey (5,051), the Philippines (1,349), Thailand (1,181), Australia (1,002), The Netherlands (636), and India (326). Sweden furnished a civilian medical contingent (168). France contributed an eleven hundred-man battalion that arrived at the end of November. Air forces from the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and South Africa, quickly responded as did naval forces from the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Colombia, and Thailand. From the four divisions committed by August 1950, Washington’s response grew exponentially. All services rushed units into theater to participate in General (GEN) Douglas A. MacArthur’s offensive to free the south from Communist domination. To increase the combat power of the weakened U.S. infantry divisions, South Korea provided as many as 8,300 KATUSAs (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army) to most American divisions.

The Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA), led by Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, and the X Corps, commanded by Major General Edward M. Almond, were the two major U.S. ground combat commands in Korea in late 1950. EUSA had two Corps (I and IX), four divisions (1st Cavalry, and the 2nd, 24th, and 25th Infantry divisions), the separate 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, and an EUSA Ranger company (see Eugene Piasecki’s Eighth Army Rangers: First In Korea). Most of the Republic
In the first months of desperation, many WWII veterans were recalled back to duty to serve in Korea. The author’s grandfather, MSG Chester R. Wilson (left), had served in WWII with the 399th Infantry Regiment, 100th Division before being recalled for service from 1950 to 1951 with the 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division.

The Organization of UNC Ground Forces in Korea was set up on 23 November 1950. The Eighth Army, under EUSA control, included two corps (II and III) with eight divisions (1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th). Several UN contingents also bolstered EUSA, including the 1st Turkish Armed Forces Command, the 27th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade (with Australian and Indian troops attached), the 29th British Independent Brigade Group, the Thai 21st Regimental Combat Team, and the battalion-sized Netherlands Detachment, and the Philippine 10th Battalion Combat Team.

Meanwhile, X Corps, which made the amphibious assault at Inch'on on 15 September 1950, was controlled by the Far East Command (FECOM). X Corps had two U.S. Army infantry divisions (3rd and 7th) and the 1st Marine Division (1st MarDiv), recently brought up to strength with reservists and 2nd Division Marines. The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was absorbed by the

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The U.S. Navy committed a huge force early in the Korean War. Among the nearly two hundred ships that participated in the Wonsan landings were aircraft carriers, such as this one. They carried a range of aircraft, including jets like the F9F Panther. Allied units soon had more firepower, even at the lowest levels. Here, American troops prepare to fire a 75 mm recoilless rifle.

Chief among them were heavier tanks and artillery support. Each infantry division had nearly eighty assigned tanks, either M4A3 Shermans, M26 Pershings, or M46 Pattons, or a combination thereof. All were heavier than the M24 Chaffees the U.S. had when it entered the war. The U.S. divisions had heavier artillery support with the addition of 155 mm and 105 mm howitzers, and infantry regiments used 57 mm and 75 mm recoilless rifles and 4.2 inch, 81 mm, and 60 mm mortars. Because UN forces had air superiority, crew-served anti-aircraft weapons were used against enemy personnel.

The UN allies dominated in airpower. By late June Lieutenant General (LtGen) George E. Stratemeyer, commander of Far East Air Force (FEAF), requested these reinforcements: 164 F-80Cs; 21 F-82s; 22 B-26s; 23 B-29s; 21 C-54s; 64 F-51s; and 15 C-47s. Although insufficient numbers existed in the Air Force inventory, Stratemeyer wanted to “fill up” squadrons under his control with a ten-percent attrition reserve. The main fighter first used in FEAF was the F-80C Shooting Star. Because more WWII-era F-51 Mustangs were available than the F-80Cs, Stratemeyer converted six squadrons back to F-51s. Although slower, the F-51 had longer range, a larger bomb load, and could operate from rough and unimproved Korean airstrips. The next jets to arrive were F-84E Thunderjets and F-86 Sabrejets. Strategic bombing duties were done by B-29 Superfortresses while B-26 Invaders carried the operational load. Cargo was transported by C-54, C-119, C-47, and C-46 aircraft. By August, FEAF was averaging 238 close-air support sorties a day.

The U.S. had developed better medical care of its wounded than it did in WWII. Helicopters became the primary method for the evacuations of critically-wounded soldiers quickly from the battlefront, allowing better and more advanced treatment facilities. For immediate and advanced care, the most seriously wounded were brought to a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH). Each of the four MASHs in Korea had the capacity of 150 beds and were located just close enough to the front to be out of artillery range. By war’s end, only 2.5 percent of all soldiers who reached a care facility died, compared to 4.5 percent in WWII. Helicopters overcame the poor road and rail infrastructure of Korea.

Unfortunately for the UN forces, the poorly developed and war-damaged transportation network greatly hampered the movement of supplies. The Korean rail system had been heavily damaged by allied air attacks early in the war. Trucks had to carry the logistical burden and poor roads and constant use reduced the fleet. It was aerial resupply that enabled UN forces to maintain their pursuit of the retreating NKPA.

The U.S. Navy committed a huge force early in the Korean War. Among the nearly two hundred ships that participated in the Wonsan landings were aircraft carriers, such as this one. They carried a range of aircraft, including jets like the F9F Panther.
The Chinese Communists Enter the Fray

Immense in numbers, the five-million man Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) were primarily a light infantry force composed of ten thousand-man divisions, lacking artillery, tank, or air assets. They relied heavily on mortars for fire support. Their primary offensive tactic was to get close enough to Allied units to overwhelm them with sheer numbers. Possessing a limited logistical capability, the Chinese Army relied on primitive—but effective technology. They used simple communications like bugles, whistles, and flutes. Normally, three divisions comprised an Army [the approximate size of a U.S. Corps]. Up to six Armies would be controlled by an Army Group. Three Army Groups made up a Field Army, the highest organizational level.15

As the UN forces approached the Yalu River in late 1950, Beijing’s response was to intervene militarily. Named the “People’s Volunteer Army” to avoid overt conflict with the United States and United Nations forces, troops infiltrated in large numbers to surprise the allies. Maintaining strict operational security and avoiding aerial detection and attack, they hid by day and marched only at night. They also employed deception by referring to Armies as “units” and divisions as “battalions,” thereby disguising the size of elements.16 In the first contact on 25 October, ROKA soldiers captured some Chinese soldiers.17 Despite facing real evidence, FECOM refused to acknowledge that large, organized CCF units were in Korea, and consistently downsized enemy troop

The use of helicopters, such as this Silkorsky H-6, allowed immediate air evacuation of casualties.

The introduction of Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH) saved countless lives. They allowed critically-wounded soldiers to receive near-immediate care.
Allied airpower destroyed North Korean infrastructure such as bridges. Unfortunately, this hampered the movement of supplies north, and slowed the speed of the allied offensive.

Because the bridges and railroads were destroyed and truck transportation was inadequate, supplies piled up in ports.

The large-scale intervention of Chinese Communist Forces, such as this one guarded by a soldier of the 3rd Ranger Company, surprised American combat commanders.

Endnotes
3 Mossman, Ebb and Flow, 23.
5 Mossman, Ebb and Flow, 26.
8 Rottman, Korean War Order of Battle, 94.
9 Rottman, Korean War Order of Battle, 70.
11 Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea, 70.
12 Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea, 137.
14 Mossman, Ebb and Flow, 44.
15 Rottman, Korean War Order of Battle, 174-176.
16 Appleman, South to the Naktong, 753.
19 Appleman, South to the Naktong,796.
20 Appleman, South to the Naktong, 768.

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