Activated on 20 November 1950, the 8th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne) with the 3rd, 5th and 6th Companies began the second training cycle conducted by the Ranger Training Center at Fort Benning, Georgia. On 13 January 1951, the 3rd, 5th and 8th companies were sent to Camp Carson, Colorado for an additional three weeks of cold-weather and mountain training before leaving for Korea. After a few days at Camp Stoneman, California, the three Ranger companies departed for Korea on 5 March 1951. Landing at Inch’on 31 March 1951, the Ranger companies were independently attached to different American infantry divisions. The 8th Ranger Company went to the 24th Infantry Division (24th ID) located in central South Korea. Commanded by Captain (CPT) James A. Herbert, the 8th did not have long to wait for action.

On 3 April 1951, General Matthew B. Ridgway, the new Eighth Army (EUSA) commander, launched Operation RUGGED to push Communist forces north of the Imjin River. The 8th Ranger Company led the 24th ID attack. They would suffer the fate common to all Ranger units in Korea. Tasked to hold key terrain, they suffered major losses because their foxhole strength was one-half that of a 1951-era infantry company. Also, since they were well-disciplined, they were often used to resolve potentially desperate situations and plug gaps.

Initially, Operation RUGGED made great progress. In classic fashion, the 8th Ranger Company patrolling forward of 24th ID units, found and eliminated enemy positions and facilitated the rapid crossing of the Yongp’yong River. By 22 April 1951, the 24th ID had reached the Hant’an River before nightfall. As they prepared to continue the offensive in the morning, approximately 350,000 Communist troops (twenty-one Chinese and nine North Korean divisions) counter-attacked. The speed and magnitude of the Communist Spring Offensive forced the outnumbered U.S. I and IX Corps to conduct a series of withdrawals through successive delaying positions before finally establishing a defensive line a few miles north of Seoul. During the withdrawals, UN forces inflicted significant casualties with artillery and air strikes.

While the Americans held their ground in the initial stages of the Communist attack, the 6th Republic of Korea (ROK) Division, positioned between the 24th ID and the 1st Marine Division, received the main attack. At 0250 hours on 23 April 1951, hit hard by the Chinese 60th Division in the Namdae River valley south of Kumhwa, the ROK infantry regiments disintegrated, abandoning weapons, vehicles, and equipment as they turned into a fleeing mob. Their sudden retreat created an almost twenty-one mile wide “U” shaped penetration in the UN lines. This put the 24th ID and the entire Eighth Army in jeopardy of being shattered by Communist forces. Having lost communication with the ROK 6th Division, MG Blackshear M. Bryan, ordered the Rangers to screen the division’s exposed right flank with patrols to provide early warning of any approaching Chinese. In the meantime, MG Bryan also moved 24th
The men carried their combat packs, two days rations, bedrolls, mountain bags, and four to six grenades. The riflemen had three or four bandoliers of ammunition. (Illustration by Mariano Santillan)

ID forces to protect this flank. The 1st Marine Division scrambled to guard its unprotected left flank. The 27th British Commonwealth Brigade and the U.S. 5th Cavalry Regiment were rushed in to blunt the Chinese onslaught.6

As the situation worsened, on 23 April 1951, the Rangers assembled at the 24th ID’s command post at 1600 hours. They were ordered to occupy Hill 1168 and make contact with the ROK unit on the Ranger’s right flank by midnight.7 It was a mission impossible since the Rangers would have to cross Hills 628 and 1010 to reach Hill 1168, and they were carrying heavier-than-normal packs. First Sergeant Charles R. Craig, Jr. said “The Rangers were prepared for a fight and had put two days rations and mountain sleeping bags in each combat pack. Each riflemen carried four bandoliers of ammunition with forty-eight rounds per bandolier, and four to six fragmentation grenades, although some carried as many as twelve.”8 After traveling by truck, to the base of Hill 628, the 8th Rangers began climbing its forward slope. Leading the eighty-nine “Black Devils” was CPT Herbert with a small headquarters element. The First, Third, and Second Platoons followed behind in order. First Lieutenant (ILT) Alfred J. Giacherine, the company executive officer was at the rear of the column.9

When they reached the top of Hill 628 about 0330 hours on 24 April, the Rangers halted, established a perimeter defense, and dug in. At daybreak, CPT Herbert dispatched small patrols to locate the nearest friendly forces. After meeting a ten-man patrol from L Company, 21st Infantry Regiment and getting a general idea where the American units were, the Rangers left Hill 628. By 1800 hours they were atop Hill 1010. From there, CPT Herbert sent a patrol led by Master Sergeant (MSG) Phillip D. Moore, the First Platoon Sergeant, to recon Hill 1168 which was still three-thousand meters away. They soon returned to report that the Chinese were about a kilometer away. Corporal (CPL) Robert W. Black commented: “From my position on the hill (Hill
CPL Robert W. Black volunteered for the Rangers while serving in the 82nd Airborne Division. Assigned to the 8th Ranger Company on 20 November 1950 as a Browning Automatic Rifleman in Third Platoon, he was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame in 1995.

1LT Berkeley J. Strong was a WW II veteran who became the third platoon leader. Wounded along with CPT Herbert, he remained in the Army and served in Vietnam as an advisor to the Vietnamese Army. He became a member of the Ranger Hall of Fame in 1996.

Rangers were all that stood in the way of preventing the destruction of that regiment, CPT Herbert and 1LT Berkeley J. Strong, Third Platoon leader, preemptively attacked the Chinese with the two lead platoons. Meanwhile, 1LT Giacherine and MSG Gayal H. Ellis, Second platoon sergeant, deployed his unit to protect the company's rear when CPT Herbert radioed that the company was going to have to fight its way through the Chinese.

When the 8th Rangers charged forward, Chinese small arms and automatic weapons fire erupted from the right. Skirting around the northwest slope of the hill, 1LT Giacherine did not see any supporting base of fire; every man fired as he pleased. MSG Gayal H. Ellis, Second platoon sergeant, deployed his unit to protect the company's rear when CPT Herbert radioed that the company was going to have to fight its way through the Chinese.

With his rear protected, 1LT Giacherine used MSGs Cox and Ellis and Sergeant First Class (SFC) McNeely
The M46 Patton tank was the type assigned to the 6th Tank Battalion, 24th ID that evacuated sixty-five 8th Company Rangers on 25 April 1951. By the end of the war, the M46 was the Army’s primary medium battle tank and had replaced the M24, M26, and M4A3E8.