

A synopsis of:

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

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Inchon, Korea, 1950

1stLt Baldomero Lopez leads his platoon, 3rd Platoon, “A” Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines over the seawall at 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.

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, an 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 divisions prior to that. 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 had no experience with mobile division penetrations is that their three-year WWII experience was almost exclusively island assaults. How does an army prepare its officers for future operations that may differ significantly from its historical experience?

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

Col Lewis B. "Chesty" PULLER, 52

1/1, 2/1, 3/1

5th Marines

LtCol Raymond I. MURRAY, 37

1/5

LtCol George R. NEWTON, 35

2/5

LtCol Harold S. ROISE, 34

3/5

LtCol Robert P. "Tap" TAPLETT, 32

7th Marines (REIN)

Col Homer L. LITZENBERG, Jr., 47

1/7

OpsO Maj Henry J. WOESSNER, 30

2/7

LtCol Raymond G. DAVIS, 35

3/7

Maj Webb D. "Buzz" SAWYER, 32

+ "D" Co, 1st CEB

Capt Byron C. TURNER

+ "E" Co, 1st Medical Battalion

LCmdr Charles K. HOLLOWAY

+ 1st Amphibious Reconnaissance Company

Lt Ralph CROSSMAN

+ 1st Motor Transport Battalion

LtCol Olin L. BEALL

+ 3rd Battalion, ROK Marine Corps

11th Marines

Col James H. BROWER, 42

1/11 (105mm)

2/11 (105mm)

3/11 (105mm)

Maj Francis F. "Fox" PARRY, 32

4/11 (155mm)

"C" Battery, 1st 4.5 Rocket Battalion

1st Tank Battalion

1st Combat Engineer Battalion

LtCol John H. PARTRIDGE, 44

1st Amphibious Tractor Battalion

1st Armored Amphibian Tractor Battalion

7th Motor Transport Battalion

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

1st Service Support Group, 1st Ordnance Bn, 1st Service 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, Col Chesty Puller. What are the benefits of young commanders? What are the drawbacks? What does Russell Stolfi's critique mean when viewed against the youth and vigor of the battalion commanders? Against the age of the CG?