

Battle of Chosin Reservoir

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What

The Battle of Chosin Reservoir, fought between November and December 1950, was a brutal and pivotal engagement during the Korean War, showcasing both the harsh realities of combat and the resilience of U.S. forces. The UN forces had begun to set into action operation "Home by Christmas" which planned to advance past the 38th parallel and towards the northern border of North Korea to unite the peninsula under one flag and country, South Korea. US X Corps made an amphibious landing in the east coast of North Korea, their plan was to advance north and then cut back down south west and conduct a pincer movement in order to destroy the remaining North Korean forces who were locked into conflict with other UN forces. Unbeknownst to the UN forces the Chinese People's Volunteers Force (CPVF) were amassing at the North West border of North Korea with some 350,000 experienced soldiers and one of China's best guerilla warfare officers. Chinese soldiers were at a severe technological disadvantage and ill prepared for the cold weather, with all that in mind their morale was high due to their leadership telling them that American forces were weak minded and soft and could be easily defeated without their superior technology.

During the US X Corps movement north they were met with a man made reservoir named Chosin Reservoir. This precarious location was surrounded by mountains on all sides and the roads consisted of small gravel lanes which made it difficult for movement of troops and vehicles. The US X Corps was a combined branch task force of US Army and Marine units, upon arrival at the reservoir the Marine unit was spread thin across 3 major points on the reservoir Hagaru-ri (the southernmost point), Hudong-ni (eastern side of the reservoir), Yudam-ni (western side of the Reservoir). Marine General Oliver P. Smith was not happy with how thinly his forces were spread and convinced the commanding officer of the US X Corps to allow his forces to consolidate in the Hagaru-ri while Yudam-ni would be occupied by Infantry and Artillery forces. US X Corps later enjoyed a hearty Thanksgiving meal believing that the war

was soon to be won, little did they know a large Chinese force and one of the harshest winters seen in North Korea was advancing on their position.

Chinese forces opened up the conflict by completely enveloping US X Corps forces and cutting off their MSR in the south at Hagaru-ri, and cutting off Marine forces in Yudam-ni by ambushing Marines in Sinhung-ni who were located between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri. Marine forces were outnumbered, isolated and in perilous weather. A Siberian cold front had reached the Chosin Reservoir which led to many complications, plasma, morphine, and batteries would freeze making vehicles and medical equipment unusable. Medics would have to melt morphine in their mouth prior to injection and plasma became unusable after freezing. Troops were unable to dig trenches in the frozen ground and had to use bulldozers or explosives to build defensive positions. In order to assist the Marines in this brutal conflict a combination of Marines and UN forces were sent up through the MSR to Hagaru-ri. At the same time on the eastern coast of North Korea UN forces were decisively defeated, all hopes of taking North Korea had failed and troops at the Chosin Reservoir would have to withdraw.

Marine forces with the help of napalm and artillery would be able to successfully retreat to Hagaru-ri where US X Corps forces were to be airlifted and leave all equipment behind. General Smith refused to leave his equipment behind and instead prepared to evacuate south through the MSR and to the nearest port of a sea evacuation. Chinese forces continued relentless attacks and constantly harassed US X Corps forces by occupying the mountains on either side of the MSR. US X Corps forces would counter these attacks by sending Marines into the mountains to conduct patrols and destroy Chinese ambushes. The main route of escape was a bridge located on the MSR the Chinese forces knew of this bridge and destroyed it effectively halting the US X Corps withdrawal. US X Corps was completely surrounded but with a stroke of ingenuity UN forces dropped bridge parts by parachute down to the stranded US X Corps who while under heavy fire rebuilt the bridge famously using the bodies of the Chinese to stabilize the support beams at the bottom. US X Corps, although surrounded and outnumbered,

caused so many casualties to the Chinese forces that they were forced to allow the US X Corps withdrawal.

So what

The Battle of Chosin Reservoir is a masterclass in decisive leadership, tactical retreat, and the importance of proper equipment. General Oliver P. Smith's leadership was key to the successful withdrawal of the US X Corps. General Smith displays the important lesson of the importance of not blindly following orders. Upon first occupation of their positions at Chosin Reservoir General Smith's Marines were spread thin between all battle positions at the reservoir. General Smith contested this and fought to get his marines back to the southernmost position. He then used this time to build an airfield and reinforce their southernmost position. Because of this decision US X Corps was able to have a well defended point on the MSR which allowed them to receive vital reinforcements and supplies. General Smith's no lose attitude also bolstered the morale of his troops, when retreating he famously said "Retreat, hell! We're just attacking in another direction," upholding the famous can't lose marine attitude. When told to leave his equipment behind once again General Smith refused and opted for a ground retreat which successfully led to him returning home with his equipment. Although you are given an order you can always take the opportunity to suggest a better idea and that is something that General Smith displayed on multiple occasions. His decisive leadership saved countless lives and millions of dollars of military equipment.

The tactical withdrawal was executed in such a way that US X Corps forces took very little while delivering a massive blow to Chinese forces. Even though Marines were badly outnumbered and surrounded they utilized well planned ambushes and attacks at decisive Chinese positions to allow marines to breakthrough to the southernmost positions. A key example of this was when Marine forces in Sinhung-ni assaulted a Chinese held hilltop from the rear, pinching them between the main forces in Sun Hung-ni and themselves. These Marines

often came within 30 meters of Chinese forces before engaging and destroying them. Because of these well planned attacks Marines trapped in Yudam-ni were able withdrawal south and back to Hagaru-ri

This battle also highlighted the importance of proper equipment and overwhelming firepower. The debilitating -30 to -40 degree temperature caused massive non-combat casualties to both sides but mainly the Chinese. The Chinese soldiers were extremely ill equipped which led to an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 cold weather casualties and although Marines and US X Corps forces were better equipped we still lost up to 7,000 troops to the weather. Not only is cold weather gear important but also weaponry, because Chinese forces brought nothing but light arms and mortars Marine forces were able to disproportionately kill Chinese forces. This was because Marine forces were backed with air support, heavy artillery, and armored vehicles allowed for Marines to successfully defend against overwhelming forces.

Now what

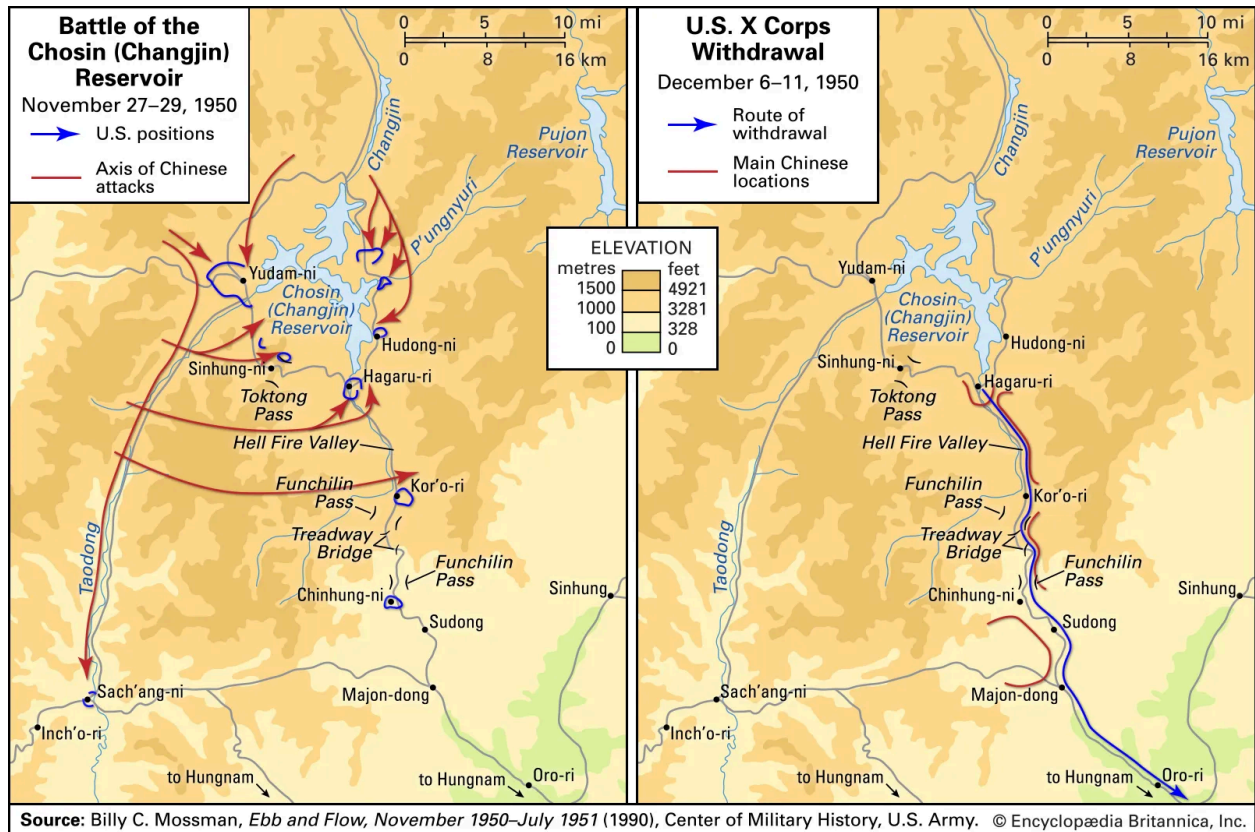
The Battle of Chosin Reservoir is a crucial battle to learn from for our current military preparation. As of now China is the enemy we have been preparing to go to war with. From this battle we can learn the Chinese mindset and tactics. Of course times have changed and so has their military but key identities will remain true of militaries. The Chinese forces at Chosin Reservoir were ill equipped but relied upon their overwhelming numbers. This would most likely be the case in an all out conflict with the Chinese today. The Chinese population is the second largest population in the world, this means that in a total war conflict with China we would more than likely be outnumbered. So we can learn from Chosin Reservoir and focus on superior tactics, weaponry, and gear in order to defeat the Chinese. We can also take note of the fact of false intel given to Chinese troops, Chinese troops were told that American troops while more advanced would be weak minded and frail when confronted. This gave the Chinese troops a false sense of superiority which ultimately led to them taking massive amounts of casualties. We

know today that China is still a massive disinformation state where its citizens are completely lied to on a daily basis. We can be almost certain that while in conflict with Chinese troops they will be fed false information about the war as a whole or specific conflicts. While this can work to our advantage it will also most likely mean that Chinese troops would often be in high morale due to the fact that their leadership will lie to them about the conditions of the war.

Not only is it a learning lesson for how the Chinese military operates but it's also a lesson of the importance of properly outfitted and properly equipped soldiers. The only reason we were able to successfully withdraw without massive casualties is because of our superior equipment. The use of air assets, armored vehicles, and artillery were critical to the success of this withdrawal. This battle highlighted the importance of military investment, our battlefield is constantly changing and evolving, the Chinese military refused to resort to at the time modern battlefield tactics and relied upon simply having more manpower than the US X Corps. This applies to modern day as we have seen the battlefield change drastically especially in the Ukraine and Russia conflict where we see a rise in the prevalence of cheaply manufactured drones. If we refuse to adapt to the modern battlefield our forces could suffer massive casualties in a future conflict. We also learned the importance of properly outfitted soldiers, at Chosin Reservoir there were massive casualties due to cold weather. This highlights the importance of training our soldiers in many different environments and creating specific equipment for every type of biome. Environments can vary from jungles, deserts, mountains, and freezing temps. We need to have equipment prepared for soldiers to fight in every type of environment.

Most importantly the Battle of Chosin Reservoir is a perfect example of an effective tactical withdrawal. General Smith was given the easy way out to remove his soldiers by air and abandon his equipment, but knowing that losing this equipment to the enemy would be devastating he refused and opted for a more difficult ground retreat. This is a very pertinent conversation for today's time especially when we look at the withdrawal from Afghanistan. We did exactly what General Smith refused to do, abandon equipment. Because of our hasty

withdrawal and abandonment of our equipment we have now equipped a major terrorist organization with some of the best weaponry and vehicles the world has to offer. The battle of Chosin Reservoir shows that the easiest withdrawal is not always the best and that maintaining our weapons and equipment should be the priority when withdrawing from an area of interest.



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