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Company K in the Defense Vicinity Chipo-ri
18-23 April 51

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Introduction

April 51, found the U.S. Eight Army moving northward all across the Korean peninsula engaged in "Operation Killer." This drive, whose principle aim was to inflict casualties upon the enemy, continued with marked success, until the Chinese countered with their spring offensive.

This document deals with a company size unit of the U.S. Eight Army, and its operations against the Chinese for the period 18 April 51, to include the night of 22 April 51, when the Chinese launched an offensive and over-ran the company's position.

Discussion

The 3d Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment had been in reserve for almost two weeks. Replacements had filled the companies to approximately full strength. The food was good and morale was high. The men had been allowed three days complete rest after coming down off the line; and, then, training had begun. All this came to an end on 10 April 51. The battalion went back into the line, taking over the positions of a unit of the 5th Infantry Regiment. On 11 April 51, the battalion jumped in the attack.

The 19th Infantry, with the 3d Battalion as its left unit

attacked north toward Kumwha. The regiment attacked over the high ground just east of the valley that ran southwest from Kumwha toward Seoul. In the 3d Battalion zone, no enemy contact was made, until late afternoon when the lead elements of Company K were taken under fire as they moved across a cross compartment. Enemy resistance was moderate to heavy for the next three days as the 3d Battalion fought to establish a foothold on the other side of the cross compartment. Then on the fourth day, enemy resistance melted, and all battalion objectives were secured with comparative ease. The battalion was relieved for two days, and, then, on 18 April 51, was committed again east of the town

of Chipo-ri.

Rain and thick fog ushered in the morning of 19 April 51. Company K had been assigned the mission of seizing Objective 1, Hill 795, and, then, on, order, to seize Objective 2, vicinity Hill 582.[1] Hill 795 was extremely rocky with steep, narrow fingers leading up to its crest. It was fairly heavily wooded at its base, but as the summit was approached, all vegetation disappeared and was replaced by large boulders.

Company K attacked at daylight, moving up a finger leading to Objective 1 from the west. The leading elements of the company were taken under enemy fire as they

(1). See Map A, Appendix, p. 32.

split into two fingers some 800 yards from Hill 795, with the left finger turning almost west and running to Hill 582, and, then, turning north again and gradually descending into a cross compartment. The right finger extended to the north and led into the same cross compartment.

The fog, by this time, was so dense that visibility was limited to some twenty feet. Control was very difficult, and, in my opinion, it was very fortunate that the unit did not run into any strong resistance, for it would have been impossible to use either artillery or mortars, at all, and the recoilless 57's at only point blank range. The company moved slowly down the ridge meeting no resistance, initially. Sporadic fire was received as

approached the summit. The fog, at this time, was of a variable intensity, being thick as soup one minute to just slightly hazy the next minute. The company deployed and continued its advance up the hill. An estimated under-strength enemy platoon slowed the company's advance for a short while, but withdrew with an undetermined number of casualties as the attack was pushed. Casualties in the company were five slightly wounded. The hill was cleared and secured by 11:00, and Battalion was so notified.

At 12:15 Company K received orders from Battalion to attack and capture Objective 2. The best route of approach to the objective from Hill 795 lay in following a ridge which led off Hill 795 in a northerly direction. This ridge

the company neared the fork in the ridge. The 2d Platoon, with bayonets fixed, deployed and moved forward, but no contact with the enemy was made, and the firing ceased. The company continued to move down the ridge toward Objective 2, against no enemy resistance, and secured the objective with elements sweeping the area some two hundred yards down the finger beyond it. At 15:30, Battalion was informed that the objective was secure, and that elements of the company were located beyond the objective. Battalion ordered the company to hold its present position for the night and that it would tie in with elements of Company L, which would occupy Hill 795.

The company dug in with all three platoons on line; the 1st Platoon ex-

tended down the ridgeline beyond the objective; the 2d Platoon employed in the center; and the 3d Platoon extended back up the finger leading to Hill 795. The 4th Platoon was centrally located on the reverse slope behind the 2d Platoon. A listening post was established on the next knob of the finger running northwest. This post was manned by four men of the 1st Platoon. The company was put on 50 per cent alert and settled down for the night. The fog had remained ever present during the afternoon, making the job of placing crew-served weapons in good firing positions a very difficult one, indeed.

Battalion ordered the company to attack in the morning to clear the remainder of the finger running down to the cross compartment. It was planned

to attack at 20 07:00 April 51. The night passed without incident.

The morning of 20 April 51, was again ushered in by a thick fog. The company arose at 06:00 and preparations for continuation of the attack were accomplished. Rations were taken out to the listening post, and the men were told to stay in position and fall into the 1ST Platoon as it passed through their position. Firing was heard from the vicinity of the listening post at 06:30, and, at the same time, the fog lifted slightly, although it was still rather hazy. A squad leader from the 1ST Platoon started out toward the listening post after repeated calls on the sound powered phone to the listening post had not been answered. The squad leader ran back to the 1ST Platoon positions shortly then-

after, reporting that he had observed Chinese all over the knob upon which the listening post was located.

Automatic weapons, small arms, and some 50 mm. mortars now began to fall in the company perimeter. The 2d Platoon was quickly alerted and moved into position next to the 1st Platoon on the forward slope of the ridge line beyond the objective. The 3d Platoon was spread out to cover the gap left by the removal of the 2d Platoon. An extremely heavy volume of fire was now being received in the 1st and 2d platoon areas and both platoons were heavily engaged. The fog chose this moment to lift, exposing the Chinese moving up the ridge line toward the company's position.

The improved observation now made possible the accurate placement

of the fires of both high angle and direct fire weapons upon the enemy. Artillery, 4.2 mortars, 81 mm. mortars, 60 mm. mortars, 75 mm., and 57 mm. recoilless weapon fire were now brought to bear on the enemy with great accuracy and devastating effect. The Chinese became disorganized under the blanket of fire which was being laid down upon them, and began to attempt to disengage. The 1st Platoon, immediately, began to move out the ridge line maintaining contact. The Chinese, at first, attempted to evacuate both their dead and their wounded, but the blanket of fire placed upon them plus the forward movement of elements of Company K forced them to leave their dead scattered over the ridge line and evacuated only their wounded. Groups of Chinese were observed

moving down the ridge line, while other groups moved down off the ridge line into the draw to the east. The positions of the 3d Platoon overlooked the draw to the east of the ridge, and, now, down into this draw at a range of approximately 1200 yards, streamed lines of Chinese; many of them walking wounded and many others being carried. Machine gun and 57 mm. recoilless rifle fire was placed on these groups with excellent results. All supporting weapons were used with devastating effect on the retreating Chinese. By 1500, the Chinese had broken contact completely and had withdrawn to the north.

Company K moved further down the finger and organized a temporary defensive position. Within this defensive position, one hundred and two

Chinese bodies were counted and buried. Inspection of these bodies prior to burial disclosed that over 50 per cent of the deaths were inflicted by shell fragments; further attesting to the important role played by the supporting weapons. "It was evident that the massed fires of the supporting weapons, particularly the artillery and heavy mortars, were deciding factors in the defeat of the Chinese in this action."(2) It was estimated that a Chinese infantry battalion was decimated during this engagement.

Orders were received from Battalion to organize and hold the positions the company now occupied, and be prepared to attack and seize, on order.

(2) Stein, Herman, Capt. Infantry, Fort Benning Georgia.

Objective 3,[3] a high piece of ground just north of the cross compartment to the company's front.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in digging-in, putting automatic weapons into place, and the registering of defensive fires. The night, once again, passed without incident.

The 21 April 51, was a bright warm day. The 2d Platoon was sent on a patrol to a small knob just south of the cross compartment. The platoon reached its objective without event and set up positions on the knob to observe the valley and the high ground to its north. Little activity was observed, and the platoon withdrew to a new defensive position.[4]

(3). See Map B, Appendix p. 33.
(4) See Map B. Appendix p. 33.

To the west of the ridge upon which Company K was located, was a wide draw running, generally, north and south; and beyond this draw Company I was dug in on high ground. Toward the north end of this draw, was a small hill which controlled the draw, and, upon this hill, the 2d Platoon dug in and prepared its position. The 1st Platoon was placed in positions covering the north half of the company's positions; and the 3d Platoon covered the south half of the positions. The 4th Platoon and Company Headquarters were set up in the center of the company perimeter. Meantime, the 5th Infantry had assumed control of Hill 795, and had placed one company extending from Hill 795, down the ridge line and tied in

with the rearmost elements of the 3d Platoon of Company K.

On 22 April 51, the 3d Platoon was sent out on patrol to the same knob that the 2d Platoon had occupied with no resistance on the previous day. The 3d Platoon ran into an entirely different reception. An estimated Chinese platoon had occupied the knob during the night and stubbornly resisted all initial efforts to push it off its positions. Artillery and mortar pounded the knob, and the 3d Platoon, following the supporting fires up the sides of the knob, dislodged the enemy. The 3d Platoon, then, oranized its position on the knob, and observed the valley and high ground to the north.

Observation of the high ground to the north of the valley, now, be-

gan to pick up enemy activity. This activity steadily increased, until movement could be picked up along all the high ground. Artillery was called for but was not given, due to an air strike taking place further west in the Ipumuda Valley. No artillery was placed on the enemy movement for approximately one hour and a half, due to the air strike. "This, definitely, assisted the enemy in moving up troops and weapons." (5)

The 3d Platoon was withdrawn from the knob by 15:00 hours and returned to its platoon defense area. Hot coffee and sandwiches were brought up to the company's position and served to raise morale and relax

(5) Stein, German, Capt. Infantry, Fort Benning, Georgia.

the men.

Just at dusk, six replacements were brought up to the company. It was too dark to see their faces but their names were taking by the acting 1ST sargeant, and they were assigned to the 1ST Platoon, which had been the heaviest hit as to casualties. These men were never seen in daylight by any member of the company; they perished during the long night that was to come. At this time, word was sent down from Battalion that an attack was expected during the night. This information was, immediately, relayed to all platoons.

Enemy artillery began to fall on Company K positions at 19:15. Platoon leader of the 1ST Platoon, next, reported that his listening post had

picked up movement to its front and was firing along the ridge to its front. At 1930, the storm broke. Platoon leader of the 1st Platoon reported that he had gone forward to check on his listening post after not being able to raise them by sound power phone. He never got to the listening post, but was forced to return because the Chinese had already overrun it. By this time, all close-in defensive fires in the 1st and 2d platoon areas were being laid down.

The platoon leader of the 2d Platoon reported that he was placing fire on enemy moving in the valley on both sides of his position. A few minutes later, when contact with the 2d Platoon was attempted, it could not be raised either by

telephone or radio. At 2000, the platoon leader of the 1st Platoon reported that he was over run, and he was ordered to pull out the remnants of his platoon back up the ridge line into positions which were being manned by the 3d Platoon. Shortly, thereafter, the remainder of the 1st Platoon fell back through the positions of the 3d Platoon which had been bolstered by all extra men from Company Headquarters and the 4th Platoon. The Chinese hit the 3d Platoon positions as the last men of the 1st Platoon pulled through them.

The positions of the 3d Platoon held, and the Company Commander pulled the 60 mm. mortars and what was left of the 1st Platoon back to the next knob on the ridge

line, and started organizing a defense. By this time, the positions of the 3d Platoon were being hit by Chinese coming up the ridge line, and, also, by large elements enveloping from the draw on the other side of the ridge line. The Chinese hitting the 3d Platoon positions came in waves, armed with hand grenades only, and were supported by a tremendous volume of automatic weapons fire and mortar fire. The automatic weapons were, also, firing so low and so close to their troops that their leading elements suffered considerable casualties from their own fires. The Chinese were blowing bugles, whistles, and shouting as they attacked in an effort to demoralize the men of Company K.

Within a very short time, the 3d Platoon positions became untenable as Chinese were coming in on both flanks, and, from sheer mass impetus, had broken the lines in several places. This was reported to the Company Commander, and the 3d Platoon was ordered to withdraw to the positions which the remnants of the 1st Platoon had prepared. Control was, now, becoming very difficult, but the withdrawal was executed in fairly good order, and the 3d Platoon, as it withdrew within the lines of the 1st Platoon, went into firing positions on the line. Several men who would not leave their foxholes on top of the ridge, presumably because of the heavy volume of machine gun fire, were observed

to be bayonetted in their holes.

At this time, the 2d Platoon, with whom all contact had been lost for hours, moved into the company's positions. They had been forced off their positions and had withdrawn up the draw just west of the company's positions. No communications, whatsoever, were left in the company by this time, and ammunition was almost completely gone. By 2330, the Chinese had overrun the company's positions and hand-to-hand combat was taking place. The remnants of the company began to withdraw through the unit of the 5th Infantry to its rear, closely pursued by the enemy. It was, now, discovered that the enemy had cut the ridge line run-

ning down from Hill 795, and the company was cut off.

The remainder of the company was gathered together and moved down off the ridge line into a draw to the east. Organization and control were, practically, nil, due to the fact that elements of the company from the 5th Infantry were mixed in with Company K.

The remainder of the night was spent in attempting to get back to friendly lines. Groups of Chinese, numbering from twelve to forty men, were observed moving along the high ground and ridge lines. These groups, apparently, were not well organized, and each was moving in a different direction. They were, also, lighting small

fires on the hill sides, and, in several instances, fired flares which looked very much like Roman candles. There was no organized pursuit of the elements of Company K and the company from the 5th Infantry Regiment.

Just at daylight on 23 April 51, the elements of Company K and the company from the 5th Infantry moved into a valley and made contact with the tank company of the 5th Infantry Regiment, which was covering the withdrawal of the other elements of the 5th Infantry.

The wounded were loaded on the tanks, and the remnants of Company K followed the tanks back to the safety of friendly lines. Company K had

left, approximately, fifty-five per cent of its personnel on its positions. "It had inflicted, approximately, nine hundred casualties on the enemy during the period 18 - 22 April 51."(6)

(6) General Order No. 41, Department of the Army, 21 April 52, p. 1. private copy.

Conclusions

The defense of a ridge line running perpendicular to the main line of resistance is impossible against a determined enemy. Both flanks, as well as, the front of the company were exposed to the enemy. In this situation, the front lines should have been pushed up to the edge of the cross compartment, so that fires could be properly tied-in and coördinated; or Company K should have been pulled back to higher ground, at a point where either a physical tying-in of units could have been accomplished, or, if not, that, at least, the fires could have been tied-in.

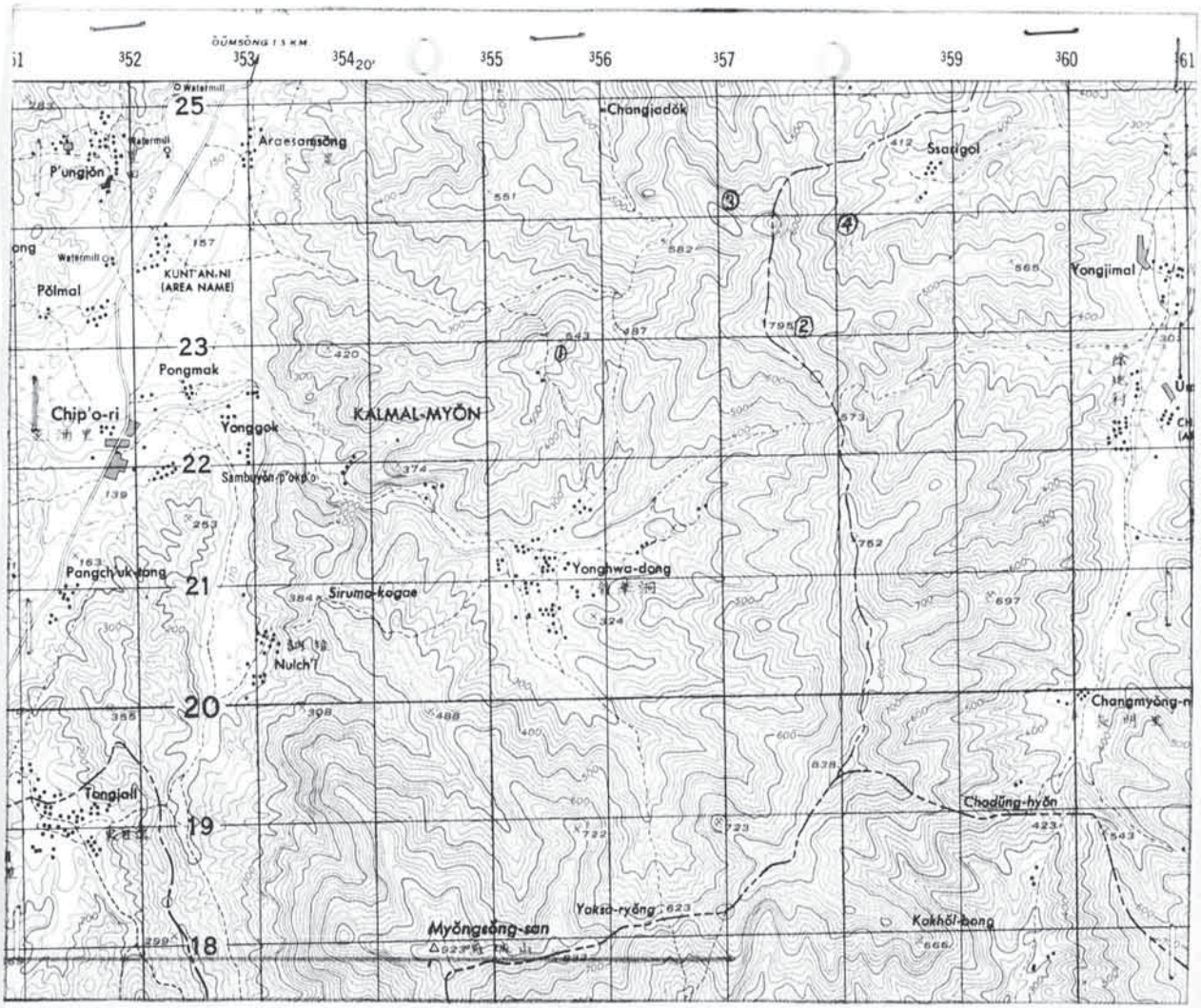
Supporting weapons, particularly

artillery and heavy mortar, if available in sufficient number and employed properly, can dominate the battle field. Proper use of these weapons is the equalizer between our manpower and the hordes of the enemy.

A more workable solution to the coördination between air and artillery must be effected. Use of artillery was denied to Company K for over an hour and a half, due to an air strike taking place in another battalion zone. A solution to this would be to utilize the artillery forward observers to control air strikes.

The Chinese, immediately after they succeeded in penetrating our lines, are unorganized. They collect

in small groups and stick to the high ground. They make little or no effort to annilate any remnants of our forces that may still be in the area. A rapid counterattack on the part of our forces at this time ~~would~~, in my opinion, would meet with a great deal of success.



Korea 1:50,000

CHIPO-RI

Sheet 6628 II
AMS Series L751

Scale 1:50,000

1 ½ 0 1 2 3 Miles

1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 Meters

1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 Yards

CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 METERS WITH SUPPLEMENTARY CONTOURS AT 10 METER INTERVALS

ELEVATIONS ARE BASED ON MEAN SEA LEVEL

TRANSVERSE MERCATOR PROJECTION

GN

5°45'

1°00'

MAP A

Legend

① Location of Company K prior to the attack of objective 1

② Objective 1

③ Objective 2

④ Draw into which Company K moved as it broke contact with the enemy on the Night of 22 April 52

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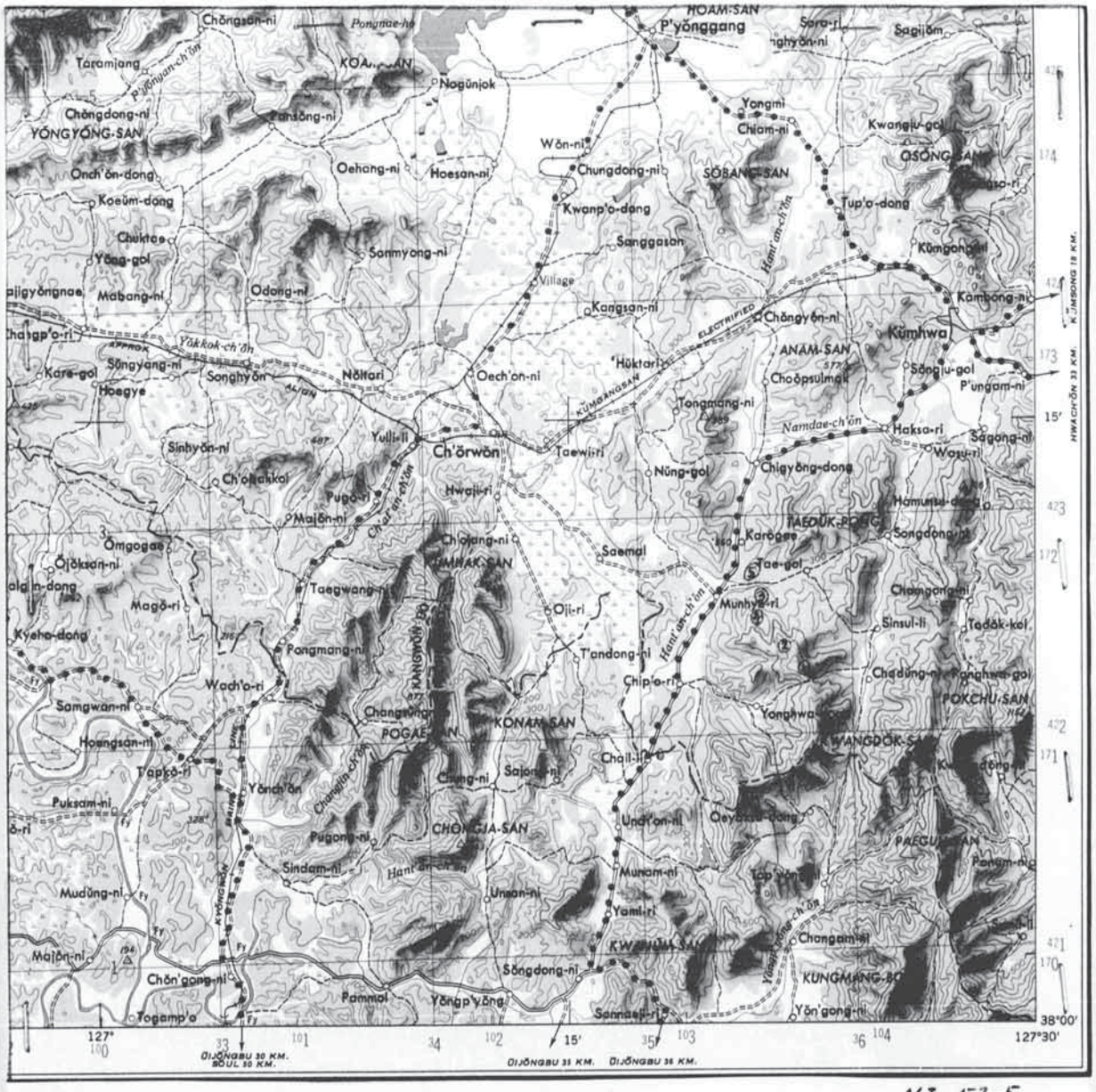
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