

Infantry

In Action



PURSUIT

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is an edited version of an article that appeared in the Infantry School Quarterly, July 1952, pages 94-98. The author, who was then a tactics instructor in the Infantry School, had previously served with the 1st

Cavalry Division in Korea as a company commander and a battalion and regimental S-3 in the 7th Cavalry.

“The pursuit starts when the enemy cannot maintain his position and endeavors to escape by retreat.”

This statement, from Field Manual 7-10, accurately describes the situation in Korea along the Nakdong River around 20 September 1950. During the earlier part of the month, United Nations forces began a series of heavy battalion and regimental attacks from the Pusan Perimeter which were coordinated with the Inchon landing. Unable to resist this savage vigor and relentless pressure, the North Koreans were severely mauled and decimated. Between 17 and 24 September, the disorganized enemy was in hasty flight toward the northern escape routes to prevent capture or annihilation.

The 7th Cavalry Regiment's 2d Battalion had bludgeoned and beaten its way through a strong defense line near Waegwan around 17 September. The other battalions of this regiment poured through the hole and began a series of hill and road clearing missions which ended near a village called Tabu-dong.

Here, the 3d Battalion and its attachments became “Task Force Lynch” and started the motorized pursuit of the North Korean units. Moving rapidly, the first day and night this task force destroyed many enemy and captured a great deal of equipment; crossed the Nakdong River and established a bridgehead for the 1st Cavalry Division; and finally reached Sangju, some 36 miles from Tabu-dong.

Enter Company K, 7th Cavalry. From Sangju to Poun—another 36 miles—Company K was to move out on regimental order to continue the pursuit.

About 1030 on 23 September, the company commander received a warning order: “Prepare to move out!” Thirty minutes later, a fragmentary order arrived from battalion: “Report to regiment. You'll move your company to a town called Poun. Unless you encounter strong resistance, keep going and keep us informed. When you get to Poun, give us a situation report. Additional instructions will follow.” Quite brief, but in such a rapidly moving situation mission-type orders were necessary. The company commander was permitted maximum flexibility in the accomplishment of his mission since he was operating at such an extended distance from his parent unit.

After receiving this order, the company commander reported to regimental headquarters for the final briefing. Understandably, he received meager information on road conditions, friendly unit locations, and the enemy. He was given a 1:250,000 map—the only map the company was to have during the operation. A route was designated. Speed was so important that the briefing might be summed up as, “GET ON THE ROAD AND GET MOVING!”

His diminutive task force included one rifle company, one section of tanks, one 75mm recoilless rifle mounted on a jeep, a section of heavy machineguns mounted on jeeps, and an artillery forward observer (Figure 1).

Initially, the company commander's jeep was leading the column. Since there was only one map for the entire unit, he positioned himself where he could control and guide the column. Another factor influencing this decision was the absence of radio communication with the tanks. The com-

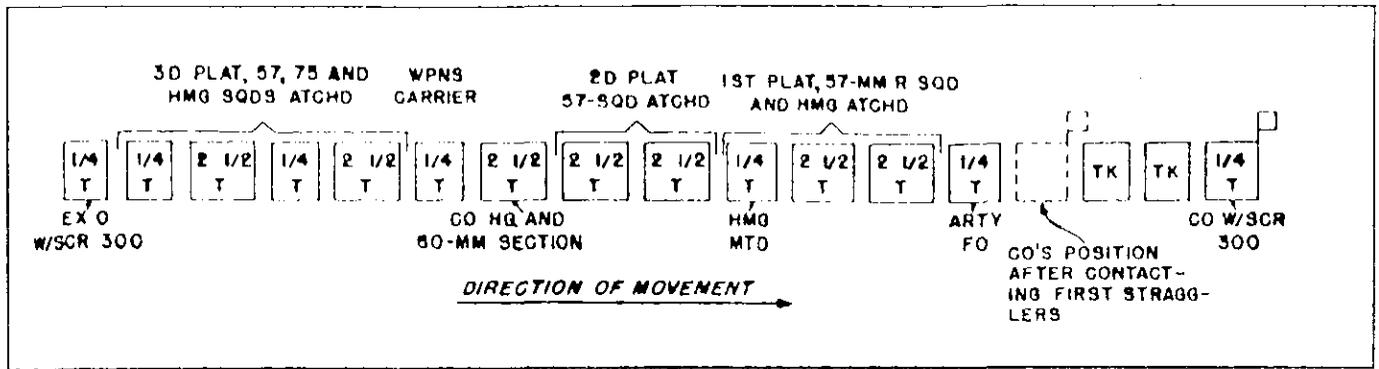


Figure 1. Composition of the task force.

pany commander changed his position after he was certain the tanks knew how fast they were to move and what they were to do in case of doubt.

About five miles out of Sangju, the first "Situation and Requirement" confronted the company commander (see Figure 2). He came upon a large crater in the road with a bank on the right and a sheer drop on the left that prevented any thought of bypassing it. A mediocre repair job had enabled rear-guard North Korean units to cross, but a few logs could never hold our trucks, much less the two tanks.

PIONEER WORK

Solution: the men were ordered to dismount and begin pioneer work to bolster the existing repairs. Stones, logs, and dirt increased the load-bearing capacity of the repair sufficiently for the trucks to cross. As the first tank rolled over the bad spot it nearly obliterated the company's repair efforts; the second tank almost rolled over the side as the road gave way beneath the tracks, but it finally made its way to firm ground: The company had crossed.

The men climbed back into the trucks and the column moved on. At the next wide place in the road, the lead tank passed the trucks and resumed its former place in the task force. Regiment was informed by radio of this obstacle and engineer assistance was requested to insure a rapid follow-up by the rest of the battalion.

The company commander realized that mobility and rapid movement were his security. For this reason, no attempt was made to check each defile, village, hill mass, or fold in the ground. No flank security was put out. However, a distance of 200 to 250 yards between vehicles was maintained to prevent a successful ambush of more than one vehicle. Of course, while moving through mountains this distance was reduced. It was hoped that this formation would deceive any enemy encountered as to the exact length and composition of the column.

Another security plan—signalled by firing a white star cluster—was the pre-arranged deployment that placed the platoons and attachments on either the right or the left of the road. Other alert measures—air guards and sectors of observation for each truck, tactical grouping, weapons and ammunition ready for action—were included in the security plan. Even while passing through mountain roads, secu-

rity measures were limited to infrequent halts and quick visual reconnaissance.

The second "Situation and Requirement" confronted the company commander a few miles beyond the cratered road: Engine trouble halted one of the tanks. Should the company commander halt the entire column and wait until the tank was repaired?

When the tank section leader reported that the repair time would be about 20 minutes, the commander decided that the tank could catch up. There was still considerable territory to cover and time was precious; there wasn't too much daylight left; the route was easy to follow and could be marked at the critical spots. One squad of infantrymen stayed with the tank for security.

The tank rejoined the column several miles beyond the breakdown point.

Sixteen miles from Sangju, the company contacted the first enemy straggler column. The North Koreans were spotted just as the tanks turned into a wide valley on a straight road. The range was about 600 yards. The North Koreans evidently thought that the column was friendly, for they made no effort to get off the road and practically ignored the tanks until a round of HE landed in their midst. The company commander ordered the tanks forward, and they moved down the road, firing at the enemy column. The company commander then ordered a platoon to dismount and to follow and assist the tanks (since the exact strength and capabilities of the enemy were not known). The enemy, taken by complete surprise, fled into the rice paddies and scrambled up into the hills. Three were captured and several were killed. The rifle platoon cleared the rice paddies on the sides of the road.

ADVANCE

Once the road was clear, the troops got back on the trucks and the advance continued. Several other straggler columns were encountered and similar actions took place, except that it was not necessary to dismount the infantrymen. (Admittedly, the company was fortunate—several days later, units using the same route were ambushed and delayed by small North Korean units retreating from the south.)

Upon arrival at Poun, about 1730, dust clouds from enemy vehicles could be seen several thousand yards to the

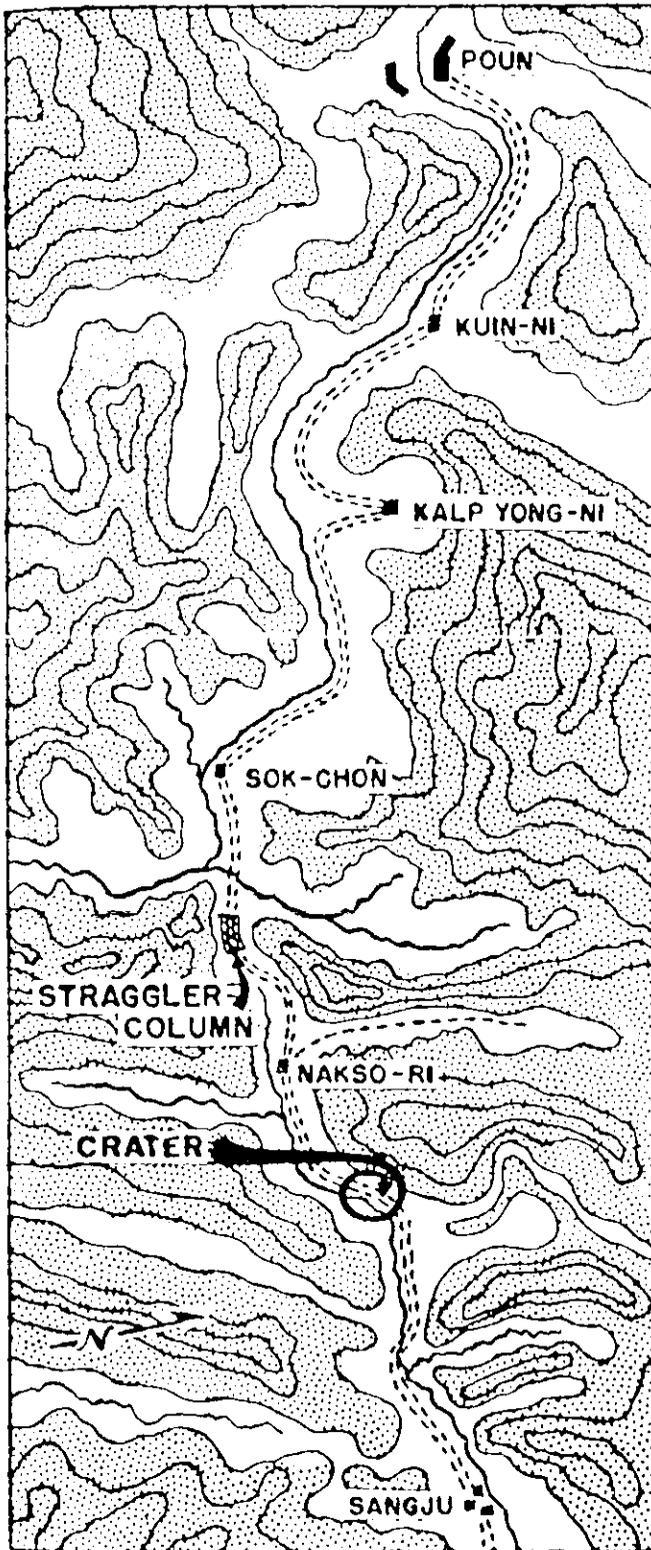


Figure 2. Strip map of the route taken by Company K in its pursuit. The distance from Sangju to Poun is 36 miles.

north. Although most of the enemy had left town just ahead of our entry, stragglers in white retreat clothing were passing through the town and filing along the little hills and ridges surrounding it. Tank and infantry patrols picked up

many of these stragglers while clearing the town. Local civilians reported that the main body of North Koreans had left Poun about 1700.

Just as the company was securing the town, a friendly light plane came in low to check the company's identity. The platoons displayed air panels, and the plane headed home to report. Since the company had out-run radio communications after the first five miles and scheduled light-air cover had not materialized, this was the only communication Company K had with a friendly unit that day.

After dark, all roads leading into the city were blocked. About midnight, the heavy machineguns attached to the first platoon began their staccato fire: A jeep carrying five North Koreans had driven up to within 20 yards of the platoon's position. One of the communists was wounded and captured, the others escaped, and one serviceable jeep was added to the company's transportation.

REVIEW

About 0200, three North Korean officers from the 3d NK Division drove into one of the second platoon's positions. An alert sentry captured the officers, their jeep, and a sizeable payroll. The rest of the night was quiet, except for the revelry of the local populace.

The rest of the 3d Battalion moved into Poun about noon the next day.

Looking back, certain facts are worthy of review. For example, the lack of time to plan and prepare this operation and the need for speed resulted in the sacrifice of some rather important details: No rations were taken by the company, no extra gasoline was provided for the tanks in case it became necessary to return to the starting point.

A section of tanks was not adequate; a tank platoon would have been more effective, but a gasoline shortage prevented this. Had a platoon been provided, one section could have been placed at the head of the column with the other either midway back or at the tail.

Communications were woefully inadequate. Had the planned air cover materialized, communications with the parent unit could have been maintained.

On this mission, Company K and its attachments captured 44 prisoners, including three officers, killed 18 enemy soldiers, and wounded an unknown number. The town of Poun was secured for use as the supply and operational base for the final phase of the pursuit, which ended when the 7th Cavalry Regiment met elements of the 7th Division near Osan. No casualties were sustained by the company or its attachments, and there were no losses of vehicles or equipment.

For the pursuit from Tabu-dong to Osan, of which the dash from Sangju to Poun was an important part, the 3d Battalion received the Distinguished Unit Citation.