



Operation TOUCHDOWN

Using the Dynamics of Combat Power

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In October 1951, while negotiations for peace in Korea were at a standstill, the United States Army's 2d Infantry Division faced a force of North Korean and Chinese Communist units along the eastern portion of the Kansas Line (Map 1).

After three weeks of offensive operations aimed at removing the enemy from a series of prominent hilltops known as Heartbreak Ridge, the 2d Division initiated and executed Operation TOUCHDOWN. As a result of this operation, the division gained control of Heartbreak Ridge and kept it until the end of the Korean War. Operation TOUCHDOWN succeeded because it combined and successfully integrated pro-

tection, maneuver, firepower, and leadership to deliver maximum combat power against the enemy.

On 30 June 1951, General Matthew B. Ridgway, commander of the United Nations forces in Korea, had invited the Chinese High Command to discuss an armistice. The Chinese accepted, and the town of Kaesong was selected as the site for the first series of talks. In the succeeding months, each side haggled over a number of issues, and talks were suspended several times. In August a new site was established at Panmunjom, and both sides seemed prepared to conduct serious dialogue to end the war.

Despite progress, hostilities continued during the negoti-

tions. General Ridgway, wanting to keep losses to a minimum, prohibited any major offensives. On the other hand, U.N. commanders were directed to retain the initiative by using strong patrols and local attacks designed to seize key terrain that would extend the friendly forces' fields of observation while reducing the enemy's.

With this guidance, General James A. Van Fleet, commander of the U.S. Eighth Army, planned a series of limited offensives designed to give his command a more favorable defensive line by securing key terrain along its front. These offensives, referred to as the Battle of the Ridges, began in August with the 2d Infantry Division's attack of enemy forces on a prominent ridge line called the Punchbowl (because of its odd shape). This attack was followed by a coordinated attack to the west by both the 2d Infantry Division and the U.S. First Marine Division. The objective of this attack became known as Bloody Ridge because of the price paid to win and hold it. After securing this ridge, the Eighth Army focused its attention on the adjacent ridge line—a narrow, rocky, mountain mass running north and south with Hills 931, 894, and 851 dominating the Mundung-ni and Satae-ri valleys—which would soon be known as Heartbreak Ridge (Map 2).

On 8 September 1951 Eighth Army headquarters ordered 10th Corps to seize, "with least practicable delay," Hill 931. The 2d Division received this mission and chose to attack on 13 September. Initial intelligence reports indicated that the enemy would have only one or two battalions on this ridge

line and that they "showed no established and formidable fortifications similar to those on Bloody Ridge." The 2d Division therefore expected light resistance from enemy forces on Heartbreak Ridge.

On 13 September, the division's 23d Infantry Regiment attacked Heartbreak Ridge. By the end of the first day of fighting, the regiment had made little progress while the well-entrenched enemy used artillery and mortars to push the regiment's soldiers off the narrow fingers approaching the ridge line connecting the three hills. By the evening of the 14th, however, the 23d Infantry was poised along the crest of the ridge. The enemy forces counterattacked during the night, but the regiment held its position.

In the days and weeks that followed, in some of the fiercest fighting since the beginning of the war, the members of the 23d Infantry made repeated attempts to gain the crests of the hills. Despite the regiment's limited successes in these attempts, the enemy retained the ridge. On 24 September, the regimental commander, Colonel James Y. Adams reported to Major General Robert N. Young, the new division commander, that he could no longer continue the operation on its current scale. Between 13 and 26 September, the 23d Infantry sustained 948 casualties, and the division was clearly losing the battle for Heartbreak Ridge. General Young knew this and resolved to do something about it.

He conferred with his staff and flew numerous reconnaissance missions around the ridge complex and, within a few days, had a clear picture of the enemy's strengths. These strengths were the ability to resupply from the west (particularly through the town of Mundung-ni and the Mundung-ni valley); the dogged determination to hold onto Heartbreak Ridge; the ability to reinforce positions in short periods of time; the well-prepared positions on terrain that covered the only avenues of approach in the sector; and the ability to mass mortar and artillery fire on the advancing U.N. soldiers. In addition, Heartbreak Ridge was part of a series of hills and ridges that the North Korean defenders could mutually support with both direct and indirect fires. Clearly, then, the enemy was sitting in a fortress that would subject an attacker to direct and indirect fires from any number of nearby strong-points. When the 23d Infantry made its piecemeal attacks, as it had done for two consecutive weeks, it had proved no match for an enemy force that focused its complete attention on the regiment's soldiers spread out in long columns along the narrow fingers of the ridge.

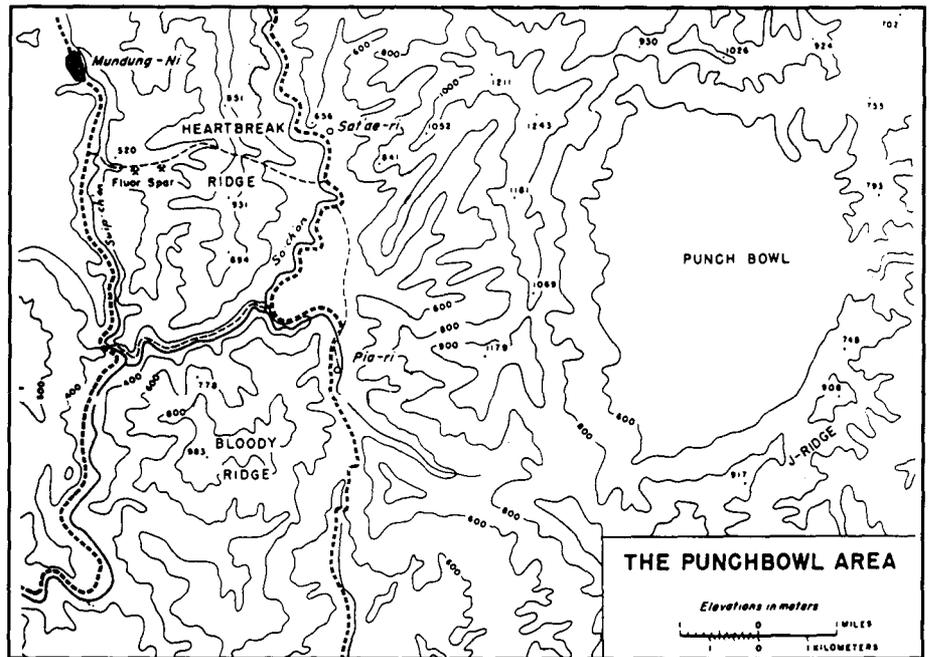
As a result of his detailed study of the ridge and its surrounding area of operations, General Young concluded that the early attacks had failed because of "the piecemeal commitment of elements and the lack of fire support teams." In addition, he noted that 85 percent of the friendly casualties had been from enemy mortar fire and that a concentrated and coordinated attack could disperse the mortars and keep the enemy from reinforcing the point under attack.

On 1 October, General Young issued the operations order for Operation TOUCHDOWN. His plan was based on a combined and coordinated effort by the entire 2d Division (see Map 3):



Map 1

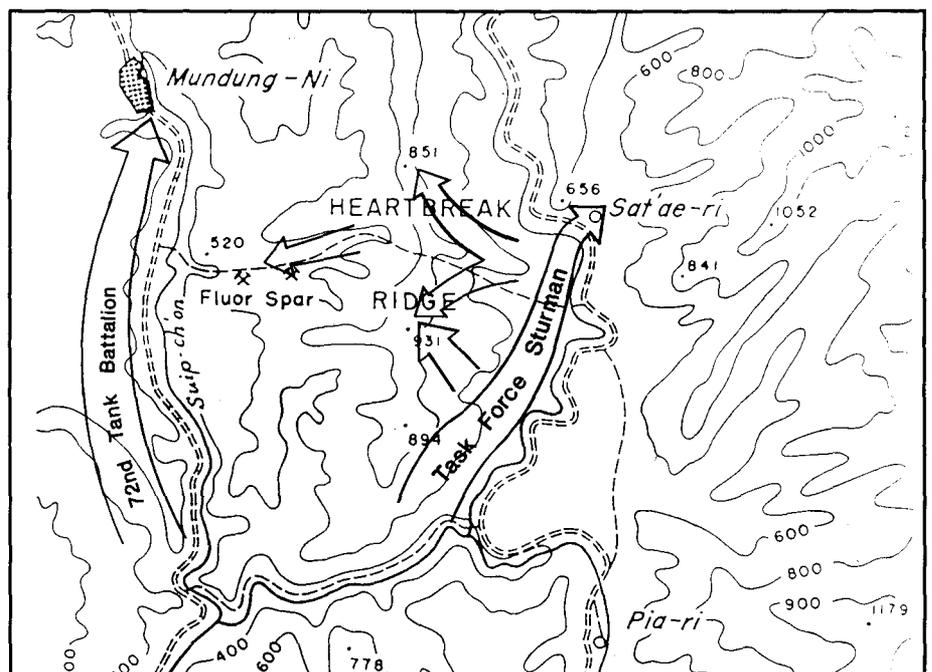
Map 2



- The 9th Infantry Regiment would attack along the division's left boundary to seize Hills 867, 666, 1005, and 1040.
- The 38th Infantry Regiment, located in the center of the division's sector, would attack Hills 485 and 728 and was given an "on call" mission to seize Hills 636, 605, 905, 974, and 841, which formed what was known as Kim Il Sung Ridge. Additionally, the 38th Infantry would provide security for the 72d Tank Battalion, which would make a bold thrust up the Mundung-ni Valley to surprise the enemy force and destroy its ability to resupply and reinforce its soldiers from areas in the north, near the town of Mundung-ni.
- In the east, the 23d Infantry Regiment would seize Hills 931 and 851. To its right, a tank-infantry task force (named Task Force Sturman after its flamboyant leader, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth R. Sturman) would attack up the Satae-ri Valley to support the 23d's attack by disrupting the enemy

- located in the eastern part of the division's area of operations.
- To achieve the desired effects, General Young made sure the following actions were taken before H-hour, scheduled for 2100 on 5 October:
 - Leaders began extensive preparations to establish logistical bases far forward to support the maneuver elements.
 - The 2d Engineer Battalion began the difficult task of preparing the small road that ran north and south in the Mundung-ni Valley to support the maneuver of the 72d Tank Battalion.
 - Each maneuver regiment prepared its direct and indirect fire support plans in great detail and submitted them to the division's operations officer so that all fire support systems would be fully integrated.
 - Finally, General Young made sure the plan was simple and understood at all levels, and he gave commanders the

Map 3



time they needed to prepare for the operation. (The operations order issued on 1 October would not need to be changed until the end of the operation, when the 10th Corps headquarters extended the division's western boundary and added Hill 1220 to its list of objectives.)

The success of Operation TOUCHDOWN began early when a patrol from the 38th Infantry found Hill 485 unoccupied on 4 October. A company moved up and occupied it, giving the 2d Division one of its intermediate objectives before H-hour. On 5 October at 2100, the operation officially began with all the regiments from the 2d Division attacking simultaneously across a broad front while artillery and close air support pounded the enemy positions.

The 38th Infantry quickly seized Hill 728, gaining a position on the southeastern edge of the Mundung-ni Valley. To the right of the 38th Infantry, the 23d Infantry (with an attached French battalion) attacked to seize Hill 931. The 23d, which had been unsuccessful in its attempts to defeat the enemy on this hill during the previous three weeks, now conducted a violent night attack and had secured this formidable objective by 0600 on 6 October.

On 6 October, while the 23d Infantry cleared small pockets of resistance on Hill 931, Task Force Sturman struck toward the village of Satae-ri and engaged an enemy battalion. Surprised by this move, the enemy concentrated artillery, mortar, and antitank fires on the task force, which gave the 23d much-needed relief and allowed its leaders to consolidate and reorganize their forces. At the same time, Task Force Sturman had a successful first day, destroying 35 enemy bunkers before withdrawing to its assembly areas in mid-afternoon. Meanwhile, in the western part of the division's sector, the engineers continued to build and improve the road into the Mundung-ni Valley.

On 7 October, the 38th Infantry was given four new objectives—Hills 905, 974, 841, and 605—located well to the

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north. Each of these hills provided a commanding position along the western edge of the Mundung-ni Valley. To the west, the 9th Infantry attacked Hills 867 and 1005. Despite heavy enemy resistance along this ridge line, the 9th inched its way toward its final objective and two days later seized Hill 1005 after a bayonet assault. On 8 October a battalion from the regiment seized Hill 666 and continued its attack to the north until it took an unnumbered hilltop on the western edge of the Mundung-ni Valley.

On 9 October, using the 9th Infantry to protect its flank, the 38th Infantry attacked Hill 636 and seized it after two

attempts. This, in turn, provided the foothold the 38th needed to take its follow-on objectives (Hills 905, 605, 841, and 1220). In the east, the 23d was preparing to attack Hill 851 while one of its battalions attacked Hill 520, a small knob from which the enemy controlled the ridge line running to the west of Hill 841. By the morning of 10 October, the enemy on Hill 520 was defeated, and the 23d controlled the western approaches to Hill 851.

Meanwhile, on the division's eastern flank, Task Force Sturman continued to make bold thrusts up the Satae-ri Valley and engage the enemy in the north end of the valley and on the reverse slope of Hill 851.

The decisive point of Operation TOUCHDOWN came on 10 October, when the road to the Mundung-ni Valley was opened for the 72d Tank Battalion. As Colonel Robert Love, commander of the 2d Engineer Battalion, explains:

The armored fist burst through the enemy positions and deep into the valley which served as his supply route. Mundung-ni was entered and by-passed, lead elements of the task force advancing 1200 meters north of the town to place fire on the hills. Another element turned west into the valley behind Hill 841 and was able to strike at the reverse slope of the enemy hills. (From "Engineers in Operation Touchdown," *The Military Engineer*, September-October 1954, page 330.)

In effect, the thrust of the 72d Tank Battalion completely unhinged the enemy's defenses. On its initial thrust up the valley, the battalion destroyed the Fluor Spar Valley mine shaft that housed enemy ammunition and replacements. The tanks arrived north of Mundung-ni, catching the troops of the Chinese Communist Force's 204th Division, 68th Army, as they were replacing the rapidly disintegrating elements of the North Korean 5th Corps. At the end of the first day, the coordinated tank surges in both the west and the east had inflicted hundreds of casualties on North Korean and Chinese forces and completely disrupted their replacement operations.

In the days that followed, the 72d Tank Battalion and Task Force Sturman continued to push northward in their area of operations, moving with little or no enemy resistance, inflicting numerous casualties, and disrupting enemy defenses with their accurate direct fires. To the west, the 38th Infantry fought its way along Kim Il Sung Ridge, while in the east the 23d Infantry continued its efforts to seize Hill 851.

On 12 October both the 38th and 23d Regiments were poised to attack their final objectives (Hills 1220 and 851, respectively). Enemy resistance was stiffening all along the division's front, but the soldiers of the 2d Division were determined. The 23d made its final push on 12 October and by 0630 on the following day had seized the hill. To the west, the 38th Infantry conducted its final attack on 14 October and seized Hill 1220 the following morning. This concluded the 2d Division's role in Operation TOUCHDOWN.

To the soldiers and leaders of the 2d Division, this operation was a resounding success. In all, the division sustained 3,181 casualties while fighting for Heartbreak and Kim Il

Sung Ridges, far fewer than the 4,500 casualties that had been expected in taking Heartbreak Ridge alone. By contrast, the enemy lost 9,547 soldiers on Heartbreak Ridge and close to 11,800 on Kim Il Sung Ridge.

Analysis

The 2d Division succeeded in Operation TOUCHDOWN because commanders at all levels successfully integrated protection, maneuver, firepower, and leadership. These elements were skillfully combined into a sound plan that was flexibly but forcefully executed to generate superior combat power against a well-entrenched enemy force.

Protection. During the operation, commanders were well aware of the imperatives of protection: conserve the fighting force through security, dispersal, cover and concealment, deception, suppression of enemy weapons, and mobility (as well as keeping soldiers healthy and maintaining their fighting morale). This awareness is evident in the earliest stages of the operation—specifically, five days before H-hour when the 9th and the 23d Infantry Regiments were pulled off the front lines. (Meanwhile, most of the 38th Infantry units were also pulled back, leaving only one battalion to guard the division's front.)

While the units were in the rear, the soldiers conducted equipment refit, and fresh troops were brought in to replace battle losses. Leaders planned their portion of the operation in great detail and tirelessly rehearsed their soldiers. The 23d Infantry, which was to conduct the difficult night attack on Hill 931, practiced and rehearsed its operation day and night on terrain similar to Heartbreak Ridge. Lieutenant Colonel Virgil E. Craven, a battalion commander in the 23d, said, *Each man knew who was to be in front of him, who behind. Whatever it may do in other places, familiarity bred confidence on the hillsides of Korea* ("Operation Touchdown Won Heartbreak Ridge," *Combat Forces Journal*, December 1953, page 28). In addition to this training, the soldiers in each regiment were allowed time to rest and prepare themselves psychologically for the final push. When H-hour came, the soldiers of the 2d Division were ready for combat.

Protection was also inherent in the operational plan developed by General Young. Operation TOUCHDOWN called for the simultaneous attack of specific objectives, executed across a broad front. This kind of attack did not allow the enemy to reinforce any particular point in his lines, or to concentrate his deadly mortar and artillery fire at any specific point as he had done previously. The tank thrusts up the Mundung-ni and Satae-ri Valleys drew a significant amount of enemy artillery and direct fire away from the attacking soldiers, and the tanks' direct fire was used effectively against the bunkers on the forward slopes of the enemy-held ridges.

The careful management of both direct and indirect fire support plans also protected friendly soldiers. General Young's requirement that each regiment submit its fire support plan ensured the best possible synchronization. And this synchronization contributed to the devastating suppressive fire that was concentrated across the division's front throughout the operation.

Maneuver. In the restrictive terrain that made up the division's area of operations, maneuvering to achieve an advantage was difficult. The infantry soldiers were forced to attack along narrow ridge lines, often in single file. This meant that friendly forces found it difficult to mass their fires at the critical point in the attack, while the enemy could move quickly to mass his combat power against the attacker.

Realizing this difficulty when he began developing the plan, General Young used the most obvious solution— increase the number of artillery pieces supporting the operation. When TOUCHDOWN began, every indirect fire asset

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in the division supported the maneuver elements. These weapons fired around the clock to support offensive operations and, by the end of the operation, had fired nearly 500,000 rounds.

The division also achieved maneuver through the methodical and systematic movement of combat units along mutually supporting ridge lines. Specifically, the division headquarters closely monitored the location of friendly units and "leapfrogged" their movements so that a unit would control a commanding piece of terrain and protect the exposed flanks of the maneuvering unit. This was one of the key factors in the operation's success and was most evident on 9 October when the 38th Regiment used the 9th to protect its left flank as it moved to seize Hill 636.

The last and most audacious of the plans to achieve an advantage through maneuver was the thrust of the 72d Tank Battalion into the Mundung-ni Valley. When the battalion entered the battle on 10 October, enemy soldiers were caught completely off guard and the tanks killed hundreds of them on that first day. The battalion's primary focus was the town of Mundung-ni because of its logistical and psychological importance to the enemy holding the ridges to its west and east. The tankers succeeded in completely disrupting enemy operations in and around this town. In addition, the tanks, which moved unimpeded throughout the enemy rear area until the operation ended on 15 October, also disrupted and effectively stopped enemy replacement operations.

The leaders of Operation TOUCHDOWN gained a positional advantage over the North Korean and Chinese forces through the extensive use of artillery, the bounding of units along key terrain to mutually support each other, and the violent thrusts of the 72d Tank Battalion up the valley.

Firepower. Once again, the immediate and obvious solution to the need for maximum firepower was the employment

of the division's artillery assets. The only stumbling block to this approach was that the tenuous supply lines could not support the volume of ammunition and other supplies required for an operation of this size. The division G-4 solved this problem by establishing forward ammunition supply points.

On 5 October the division had stockpiled 33,900 rounds of 105mm ammunition and 11,760 rounds of 155mm. With everything in place, the division had a 105mm artillery battalion in direct support of each infantry regiment and a 155mm battalion in general support of the entire division. In addition, the division artillery commander succeeded in having a bomber sent over from Japan and getting allocations for half of the corps' air assets in the theater.

On 4 October alone, the division's artillery fired 7,100 rounds and directed 45 air strikes. This type of artillery and close air support continued to pound objectives throughout the operation and was the key reason the enemy sustained so many casualties on both ridges.

The tanks in both Task Force Sturman and the 72d Tank Battalion also contributed greatly to the element of firepower. From 6 to 13 October, the task force's tanks fired their 76mm main guns at enemy bunkers on the forward slopes of Hills 931, 851, 656, and 811. On their first day, Task Force Sturman's tanks destroyed 35 enemy bunkers and five known machinegun positions. When the 72d entered the battle in the western part of the division's sector, it had an immediate and lasting effect on the enemy as it blasted the enemy resupply points in the Fluor Spar Valley mine area, rendering it ineffective for further use. Also, the 72d took up positions from which the tanks could engage the enemy on Hill 905 in support of the 38th Regiment's attack of this objective.

For the foot soldiers, the most important factor in firepower may have been the formation of support and assault teams for use in the narrow and rocky terrain. These teams evolved because of the difficulty in establishing large support positions for an attack (by an element of any size) on well-prepared enemy positions. The concept, used extensively by soldiers in the 23d and 38th Infantry Regiments, called for small support teams—equipped with machineguns, 60mm mortars, and 57mm recoilless rifles—to support the assault teams—carrying only small arms and flame throwers—as they moved from point to point in a methodical reduction of the enemy's bunkers until the objective was secure. This method of massing firepower at the critical point of the attack

proved effective in defeating the entrenched Chinese and North Korean forces during the operation.

Leadership. From the division commander down to the lowest levels, there were several indications of strong and informed leadership:

First and foremost was extensive planning at all levels, from the first leaders reconnaissance to the submission of detailed fire support plans to the division operations officer. General Young demanded detail, and this requirement filtered down to the leaders at all levels.

Next, when the plan was issued, it was simple with clearly defined objectives that allowed commanders the freedom to carry out their assignments. This simplicity in planning and execution eliminated distractions and allowed leaders and soldiers alike to focus on the mission at hand.

The most important quality of leadership exhibited during the operation may have been the patience of General Young: He was patient in allowing the regiments to prepare for their offensive operations instead of rushing headlong into the attack. He was patient in giving his subordinate leaders time to plan, rehearse, refit, and rest their soldiers for the final push. And he was patient in ensuring that the attacks were systematic, methodical, and mutually supporting. Thus he ensured that objectives were effectively isolated as the units took on the arduous task of removing well-entrenched enemy soldiers from their strongpoints.

After nearly 30 days of fighting, Heartbreak Ridge was taken because of the success of Operation TOUCHDOWN. And this operation was a success because the leaders involved in its planning and execution understood and effectively integrated maneuver, firepower, protection, and leadership. This successful integration made the most of the effects of combat power on the North Korean and Chinese forces and, despite their advantages of position and number, led to their defeat.

Captain Ernst H. Weyand, III, now in the U.S. Army Reserve in Hawaii, is a graduate of the United States Military Academy. He dedicates this article to the memory of his father, Sergeant Ernst H. Weyand, Jr., who fought in the Battle of Heartbreak Ridge as a member of the 23d Infantry Regiment's antitank and mine platoon.

