

# PROFESSIONAL FORUM



## KOREA 1951

### 7th Cavalry Attack Against Hill 578

*EDITOR'S NOTE: History has shown us that combined arms operations are the key to success against a well-equipped and determined enemy. Time after time during the Korean War, the combination of infantry, armor, artillery, and close air support enabled United Nations units fighting the North Korean and Chinese forces to overcome stubborn resistance, whether defending or attacking. The fierce fighting by the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division (Infantry) in the mountainous terrain south of Seoul during the second week of February 1951 is an example of just such an operation.*

*The Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) occupying key positions in the*

*division's sector conducted a tenacious defense of terrain consisting of hill-tops, corridors, and cross compartments. They were nevertheless dislodged in close combat with units of the 7th Regiment, a company team of the 8th Cavalry Regiment, and a battalion of the Greek Expeditionary Force (GEF).*

*This article—adapted from Training Bulletin No. 1, Office of the Chief of Army Field Forces, dated 4 February 1952—was submitted by Mr. Edward L. Daily, President of the 7th Cavalry Association, who participated in the assault on Hill 578 as 1st Platoon Leader in Company H, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment.*

to the 3d Battalion. This decision was necessary because of the length of the ridge line that extended north and east from the crest.

Battalion commanders discussed their planned route of approach and the deployment of their units with the regimental operations officer. They were assured that the maximum available firepower would support the operation, that secondary attacks on the part of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, and the 4th Battalion, GEF, would assist in the seizure of the ridge, and that an air preparation on the objective would be requested.

The operation was to begin on 14 February; this would also provide a 24-hour period for softening up the area by artillery and air. It was estimated that movement to the ridge line and the closing of the attacking elements on it would take two and one-half to three hours, even if there were no enemy on the hill.

Both commanders agreed that 0900 was the most desirable H-hour for the attacking infantry battalions. This schedule provided enough time for them to organize and deploy during daylight hours and also enough time after crossing the line of departure to reach the objective and to seize and organize it before dark.

Early in February 1951 in Korea, the 1st Cavalry Division continued its slow advance against stiff enemy resistance. The 7th Cavalry Regiment had the mission to seize Hill 578 in its zone just east of the village of Kyongan-ni. Plans and preparations for this attack were initiated on 12 February, after an unsuccessful attempt to surround the hill and force its capitulation with air and artillery support. The attempt to surround the hill was frustrated by the enemy defenses in depth north of the town of Mugam-ni,

which prevented the 3d Battalion from moving in the rear of the hill (see map).

The 2d and 3d Battalions were to make the main effort, and their commanders met with the regimental and battalion operations officers in the 3d Battalion sector, which offered excellent observation of the enemy position. Both commanders viewed planned objectives and agreed upon zones of responsibility.

The very crest of the hill mass was assigned to the 2d Battalion, and key features north of the crest were assigned

The regimental commander approved the plans, with minor modifications. The regimental operations officer then contacted the division G-3 and advised him of these plans, and a request was made for the following:

- An additional artillery battalion.
- An additional company of tanks.
- A 20-minute air preparation of napalm and 1,000-pound bombs on the crest of the ridge.
- An air-delivered smoke mission on the high ground north of Mugam-ni.
- An air strike every 30 minutes after 0900.

The division G-3 said the division artillery would support the operation and he would check on the possible attachment of the 70th Tank Battalion's

reconnaissance platoon to the regiment. The division air officer forwarded both air requests for approval.

The 1st and 4th Battalions as well as the artillery, heavy mortars, tanks, engineers, and regimental staff were advised of the approved attack plans, and the artillery and heavy mortar companies were instructed to intensify their fires on the night of 12-13 February. The tactical air control party was also briefed, and all available air support was placed on the crest of the ridge line and other known enemy targets on the hill mass.

During the night of 12-13 February, the 77th Field Artillery Battalion, supported by other division artillery units, fired a number of time-on-target concentrations on the objective area. Along

with these concentrations, a series of "Surrender now" broadcasts were made over a loudspeaker system in the 3d Battalion area. An enemy lieutenant colonel who had been captured in the 5th Cavalry Regiment area assisted the regular team in these broadcasts. As a result, three enemy soldiers surrendered on 13 February.

Three final steps were taken in the fire support plan:

- The artillery was to fire one round every five seconds after 0900 to prevent the enemy from reinforcing, moving his reserves, and manning his positions at the tip of the ridge. This fire was to be lifted on request from either of the leading company commanders. An emergency flare signal was established for lifting this fire in the event other communications were out.

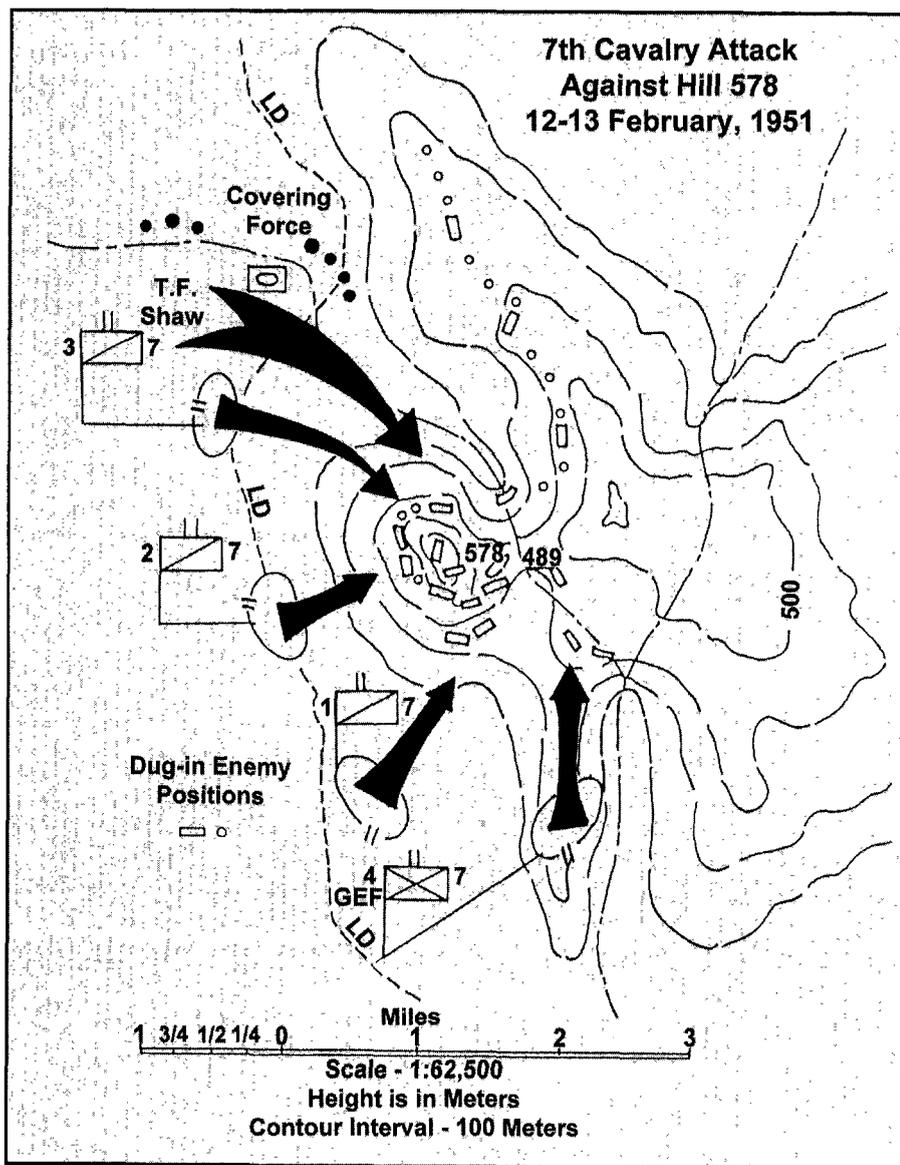
- The 1st and 4th Battalions were to furnish supporting fire on the south and eastern portions of Hill 578, using their own organic mortars.

- Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, had the mission of providing direct supporting fire. Two platoons of tanks were attached to the 2d Battalion for direct fire support of its assaulting units, and one platoon of tanks was attached to the 1st and 3d Battalions for the same purpose.

Further preparation for the operation included the organization of Task Force Shaw, composed initially of the two tank platoons supporting the 2d Battalion; their fires would be masked as the battalion seized its objective. This task force was to move out once the assault units moved into their objective areas and proceed through Mugam-ni to a position in the rear of Hill 578 to direct fire onto the reverse slope.

At the request of the 1st Battalion commander, the original attack plans were modified to provide for the seizure of the piece of ground immediately north of the 1st Battalion's position. This ground, known as the Ice Cream Cone, dominated the 1st Battalion area and was strongly held by the enemy.

Following final coordination and the confirmation of H-hour as 0900 on 14 February, it was requested that the 8th



Cavalry Regiment launch an attack against the high ground northwest of Mugam-ni, in conjunction with the 7th Cavalry's effort, to divert enemy fire from the 3d Battalion's north flank. Although the 8th Cavalry was involved in a number of mopping-up operations at this time, the commander agreed to send a company-strength unit, supported by a platoon of tanks, against the high ground.

During the night, it was learned that the enemy was preparing a heavy attack. Although units of the 7th Cavalry were on alert status for most of the night, the enemy actually hit the 8th Cavalry area, and some of its elements were engaged until well after daylight. As a result, the 8th Cavalry could not stage its planned diversionary attack. The regimental plan had to be rearranged, and one section of tanks, formerly supporting the 2d Battalion, plus the tank reconnaissance platoon, was placed in position on the north flank of the 3d Battalion to engage this area by fire during the attack.

The regimental commander and his command group (operations officer, artillery liaison officer, tactical command post heavy mortar liaison officer, tank liaison officer, a number of radiomen, and an additional officer from the S-3 section, plus a journal clerk) moved at 0630 to the regimental observation post (OP), from which the leading elements of the 1st, 2d, and 3d Battalions could be observed. All units and division headquarters were linked by wire and radio.

### **The Attack**

The initial artillery preparation went off as planned, beginning at 0700, over the forward slope of the hill mass, coupled with sporadic intense concentrations on suspected troop positions on the reverse slopes. At about 0820, when the division air officer said no air support would be available, the artillery was asked to continue its preparation up to H - 10. (Napalm would have been extremely effective against concentrations of enemy defenses on the tip of the ridge.)

Elements of Company K crossed the line of departure on time but took nearly 20 minutes to reorganize before continuing up the hill. Division aircraft operating in the area began to report enemy mortar positions and camouflaged supplies, and the artillery took these targets under fire. At 0934, the air OP sighted two enemy soldiers running down the reverse slope of 578, the first indication that the enemy was aware that U.S. regiment's infantry forces had actually jumped off in the attack. By 0940 the tank screening force of one section, plus the tank battalion's reconnaissance platoon, arrived in position on the 3d Battalion's north flank and began to execute its fire mission against known enemy positions on the high ground

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north of Mugam-ni. Aircraft soon reported more enemy soldiers moving on the trail on the reverse slope of 578 at 0942 hours, and this group was taken under fire. At 1005 Company K received sporadic small arms fire, and mortar and small arms fire increased in intensity from this point forward.

It was reported at 1120 that the 1st Battalion had begun its air attack and was receiving heavy mortar, small arms, and automatic weapon fire. Then Company G reported receiving white phosphorus rounds. Since no friendly weapons were firing at this time, it was determined that the rounds were from enemy mortars, and the air OP was directed to determine their location.

As of 1155 Company K's advance was temporarily held up by heavy automatic weapon and small arms fire. Soon, both Companies I and K were receiving extremely heavy mortar fire. A number of reports of enemy recoilless

rifle fire were received, but this fire later proved to be from 2.36-inch rockets being used as antipersonnel weapons.

At 1210 the air OP had located two mortars, which aircraft quickly took under fire. Tanks screening the 3d Battalion's left (north) flank were receiving heavy mortar fire at 1225. At 1325 it was reported that Company K had reached its objective and was receiving heavy small arms and automatic weapon fire. Company L, following in the trace of Company K, dispatched one platoon to the right of K and above the objective area, and this platoon succeeded in getting above and behind the enemy forces defending the area. Suddenly finding themselves surrounded, 14 of the enemy surrendered and the rest were killed.

During this action, there were many situations in which enemy soldiers continued to fight until killed by the attacking infantrymen. At 1340, Army aircraft reported 42 enemy moving east on the road out of Mugam-ni, apparently to reinforce the position in the Hill 578 area, and artillery fire was directed against these troops.

By 1345 both of the attacking companies of the two leading battalions were in assault positions. Company K had already secured its objective, and Company G was within 25 yards of the crest. At this time, the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, and the 4th Battalion, GEF, were ordered to begin their coordinated movement so that neither would be ahead of the other.

At 1400 the air OP reported 15 enemy lying in ambush immediately behind a position on the ridge, within 15 feet of the lead elements of Company G. This message was immediately flashed to Company G, which soon became hotly engaged with these and other enemy infantry. Company troops moving up to the ridge line were met by a shower of grenades from the enemy troops in the area. Machineguns opened up on both flanks, and the leading elements of the 2d Battalion withdrew about 25 yards. Company G battled the enemy along the ridge line using hand grenades and light mortars.

The 3d Battalion was directed to

move elements up the hill (to the south), from which location it could support the 2d Battalion by firing on the reverse slopes. Company K had an extremely difficult time seizing its strongly defended objective, which turned out to be the enemy communications center for the entire hill mass and included the regimental CP, one battalion CP, and several company CPs. The CP area was particularly well defended, and many enemy were killed in this area. It was necessary to pass Company L through Company K to continue the momentum of the attack.

At 1440 Task Force Shaw was ordered to proceed on its mission, and the tanks began moving out of their attack positions. The 4th Battalion, GEF, reported that its lead elements had moved out at 1445. By 1505 they were receiving heavy fire. Instructions were issued for the 4th Battalion to block their forward positions, taking the local enemy positions under fire until the Republic of Korea (ROK) units had seized the dominating ground on the east. Soon, Task Force Shaw found that the road west of Mugam-ni had been mined, but the tanks promptly backed up and blew the mines out of the road with their cannons and proceeded on their mission. The task force shot up the town, but all the enemy supplies, ammunition, and casualties appeared to have been removed.

Leading elements of the task force moved on through the town and several hundred yards beyond the point where the road narrowed to a trail that was impassable for tanks. Several enemy soldiers fired at the tanks with small arms machineguns, and mortars, and the tanks returned the fire. When a round jammed in the chamber of one of the tank guns, a crewman, without hesitation, moved in front of the tank with a rammer to dislodge the jammed shell. He was wounded by mortar fire, which had been falling in and around the tanks. He was placed on the back of one of the tanks and evacuated to the 3d Battalion aid station while the rest of the task force continued engaging the enemy.

Elements of the 1st Battalion were

heavily engaged, and Company B was stopped on the approaches to the objective. The 1st Battalion commander committed elements of Company C around both flanks and pushed his attack successfully in overrunning the objective. Despite the difficult terrain, the unit killed or wounded a considerable number of enemy and captured enemy supplies, and the 1st Battalion objective was secured by 1600.

Meanwhile, the leading elements of the 2d Battalion were maneuvering on top of the ridge, still heavily engaged with the enemy, while Company L continued its move up the slope, followed by Company K under enemy fire. In its attempt to outflank the enemy on the reverse slopes, Company L ran into an

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enemy strong point and was under grenade, machinegun, and mortar fire. By 1730 it was pinned down. Elements of the 2d Battalion continued to maneuver in an attempt to outflank and overrun the enemy position, but the battalion was in an extremely exposed position and taking casualties from mortar fire.

The commander of 3d Battalion, who had moved up the hill to the vicinity of the assault company, reported that his position was not tenable and requested permission to withdraw, reorganize, and begin the attack the next day. Permission was refused, and the commander was directed to take the hill. The 3d Battalion was notified of this order, and Company L was placed under the operational control of the 2d Battalion, pending seizure of the hill and until daylight the next morning.

At 1755 the fighting was still raging on the ridge line, but darkness had set in,

and observation from the OP was not practical. The regimental command group departed for the regimental CP. The commander stopped at the 2d Battalion CP on the way, where he reemphasized the instructions concerning seizure of the ridge and secured a last-minute report on the situation.

Fighting continued throughout the night. The 2d Battalion commander, who had gone to the scene of the action to direct his battalion, maneuvered Company F to the right, but it was pinned down by fire and driven back. He then committed Company E to the left of Company G so as to join Company L, which had reached the crest on the north and was firing into the northeastern portion of the reverse side. It was impossible for Company L to fire into the southeast portion of the hill because of the terrain, which consisted of two half-moon formations on the reverse slope. The enemy's strongest reinforcements were in the southeastern area. Five Chinese machinegun pillbox emplacements on the hill had excellent fields of fire and were able to sweep the entire area with crossfire. Most of the time, from the arrival of Company G until dark, was used in an attempt to maneuver a 75mm recoilless rifle into position to knock out these machineguns. Finally, a flamethrower operator from Company G pushed forward about 1700 and knocked out the position on the extreme northern flank. Although the operator was driven back by enemy fire shortly afterward, his work made possible the later capture of this end of the ridge by the 2d Battalion.

Reports from prisoners captured during the daylight fighting indicated that, as of 2045, about 20 enemy soldiers were manning the topographical crest of the ridge but that the troops in position behind the crest included a battalion plus two platoons. Each time friendly forces succeeded in moving up on the ridge, these enemy reserves successfully counterattacked.

At 2330 the 2d Battalion reported that Company E, which had been committed on the left flank of Company G, had

finally overrun the top of the ridge on the extreme northern portion of the position and had destroyed two machinegun nests. Three additional machineguns still in position were pinning down both Companies E and L, which were not yet in physical contact with each other. When it was suggested that marching fire be used, the reply was, "There is no room to march."

At 0255 on 15 February, enemy resistance was slackening and another attempt was made to push over the ridge. The lead companies were using 60mm mortars effectively against the enemy. One of these companies, Company L, fired 300 rounds from one mortar. Company F continued to maneuver to the right flank to get behind the enemy, while Company E held onto the high ground it had gained. Between 0400 and 0600 the 2d Battalion again assaulted the enemy positions and was, in turn, hit by a counterattack of about 50 enemy troops in a desperate attempt to drive the Americans off the position before daylight. This counterattack was unsuccessful, however, and proved to be the enemy's last effort.

When the counterattack was first reported, air support was urgently requested from division, and the fighter aircraft that soon began arriving were directed against the rear slope of the hill. By 0725 it was reported that Company E had seized an additional portion of the ridge and that this portion was now held in strength.

Task Force Shaw was ordered to move out at 0735 to exploit the hill's reverse slope. The 4th Battalion, GEF, was ordered to move to an assembly area in the vicinity of the 3d Battalion CP and to be prepared to relieve the 2d Battalion after seizure of the objective. The air controller reported that a number of enemy were withdrawing as of 0845, and the Task force was directed to take them under fire.

By 0900 the 2d Battalion reported the enemy soldiers were in flight and the ridge line had finally been seized in hand-to-hand combat. All companies of the 2d Battalion and Company L orga-

nized perimeters on the ridge line and immediately sent patrols to mop up the general area and the approaches. The 1st Battalion was directed to send a patrol up from the south to the crest of 578, and this completed the capture of the hill mass.

### **Enemy Organization of the Position**

The enemy organization of the area placed the CCF 2d Battalion, 336th Regiment, on the west and north slopes and on the peak proper. The regiment's 1st Battalion, reinforced by units from the 342d Regiment, occupied the south and east slopes and covered the saddle between Hills 578 and 489. (The regiment's 3d Battalion had been annihilated on Hill 202.) Since all of these units

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had suffered a large number of casualties in previous fighting, the total strength holding the hill was no more than 700.

As the attack proceeded, it developed that the objective of the 3d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, was the location of the CP for the 2d Battalion, 336th Regiment. The CCF defended this position with small arms, automatic weapons, grenades, and mortars until it was apparent that it was about to be overrun. At this time, CCF officers passed more grenades to their men, instructing them to hold the line, while the units prepared to withdraw to the peak. In the middle of this move, they were caught in the open and an undetermined number of them were shot down by 7th Cavalry machinegun fire. The remaining defenders of the position

resisted until their ammunition was expended and they were killed or captured. What was left of the 3d Battalion, 336th Regiment, had organized the peak of the hill with five machineguns in mutually supporting positions. These guns, well dug-in and camouflaged, were positioned to cover the ridge line approaches to the hill from the west, south, and north. The regiment's advance overran two of these guns on the western slope but was quickly repulsed and the positions remained. The enemy then resisted all attempts to advance through the cross fire from these weapons and from mortars, small arms, and hand grenades.

### **Evaluation**

The operation demonstrated that when the chips are down against determined resistance, and when our troops are within assaulting distance and the supporting fires are lifted, the objective must be taken by prompt, aggressive assault, using marching fire, hand-to-hand fighting, and the determination and fortitude of the infantry. Unless our troops have the courage to move in and finish them off, a small group of tenacious enemy can hold mountain ridges such as these against forces many times stronger.

If we can train our soldiers to move in closer under their supporting fire and to assault quickly in that critical moment when the fires are lifted, we will have greater success and fewer casualties. Any delay after fires are lifted will tend to increase our casualties.

Along with proper employment of supporting fires, the operation also provided an excellent example of the full use of infantry weapons. Grenades, mortars, recoilless rifles, flame throwers, machineguns, and individual weapons all played an important part in seizing the 7th Cavalry Regiment's objectives.

Division aircraft were extremely valuable in bringing enemy positions under the fire of supporting arms, and in pointing out enemy troop locations to our assaulting infantry.