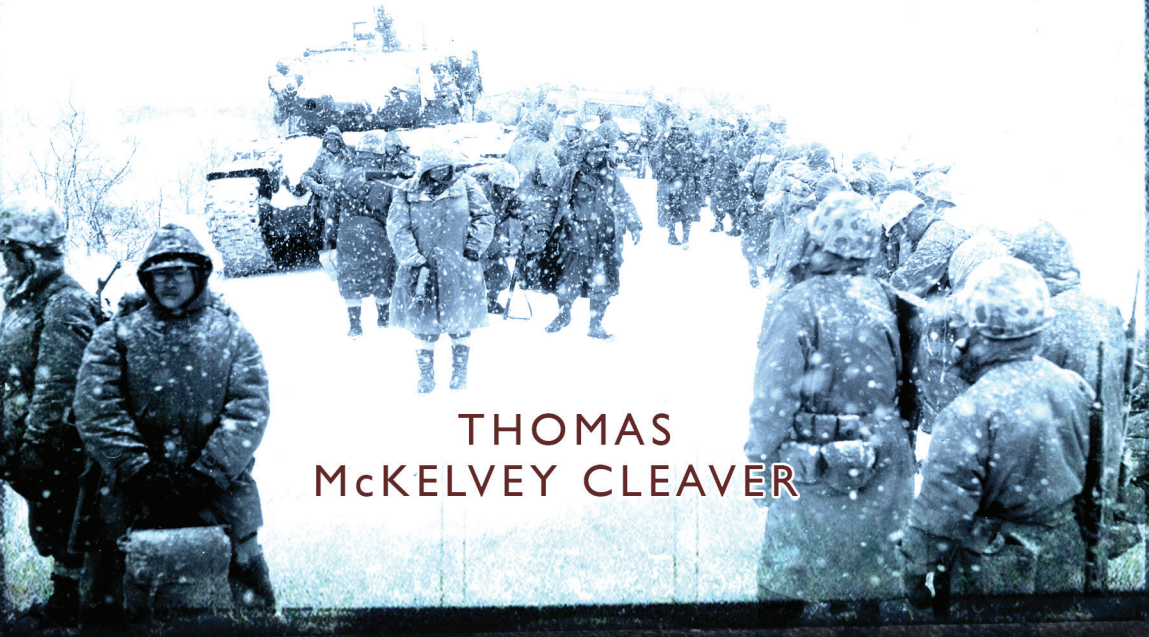
PROLOGUE BY COL. LAWRENCE B. WILKERSON, US ARMY (RET.)

FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF TO SECRETARY OF STATE COLIN POWELL

THE FROZEN CHOSEN

THE 1ST MARINE DIVISION AND THE BATTLE OF THE CHOSIN RESERVOIR



THOMAS McKELVEY CLEAVER

THE FROZEN CHOSEN

OSPREY
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The country around the Chosin Reservoir in winter was never intended for military operations. Even Genghis Khan wouldn't tackle it.

Major General Oliver P. Smith,
Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, 1950

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THOMAS MCKELVEY CLEAVER

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Front cover: (Upper) Tanks of the 1st Marine Division, December 9; (Lower) 1 Marine Division withdraws from Koto-ri, December 8.

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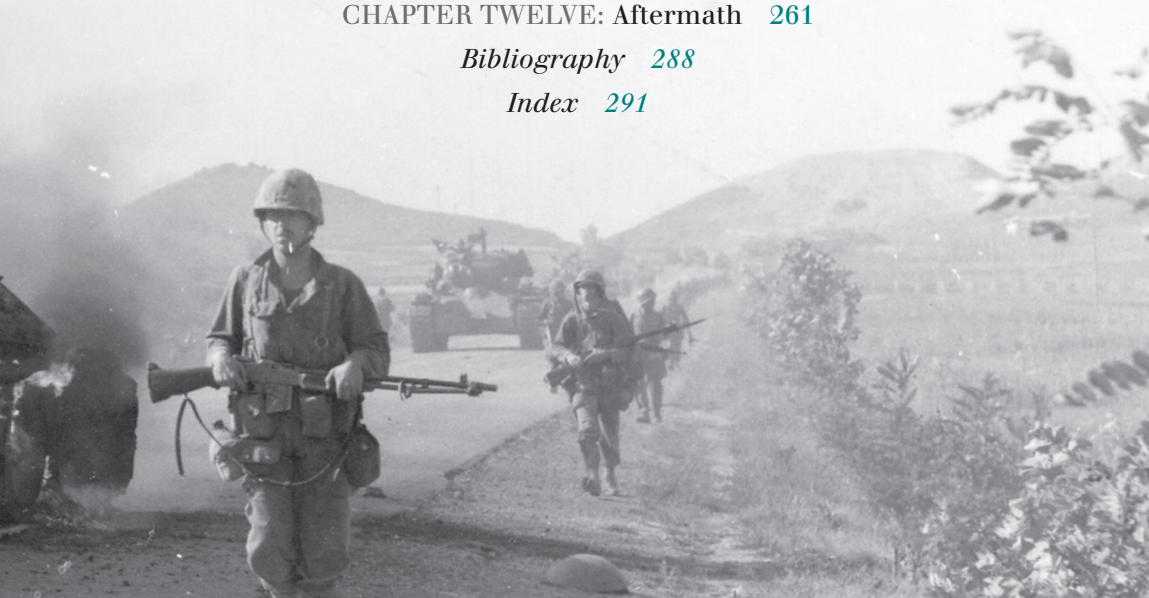

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PROLOGUE

United States Marines are special people.

As an Army soldier, I only suspected this for 27 years – and with occasionally a tinge of jealousy, I must admit. Then in 1993, a man I had come to know fairly well while I worked for General Colin Powell – General Chuck Krulak, then-Commandant of the US Marine Corps – asked me to go to Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia and take over as deputy director of the Marine Corps War College. I did. What happened there, in one sense immediately, taught me a great deal.

The immediate lesson came from my new boss, the College's director, Marine Colonel W. R. ("Rick") Donnelly. Rick called me into his office as soon as I arrived, shut the door, told me to sit down, and then told me he was dying. From that moment on, I began to realize I had probably never met a braver man. It's one thing to breast enemy fire – to go "Once more unto the breach…" – to overcome one's fear in a rush of adrenalin or in a deep and frenetic desire to help one's buddies; it's quite another to succumb to an ugly death in the middle of life, no combat, no sounds of the guns, just the creeping, inexorable death that comes from a virulent and incurable cancer. At the end, as Rick had wasted almost completely away before our incredulous eyes, he refused even to let his sixteen-year old son see him. He wanted his son, he said, to remember him as the strong, healthy, vibrant Marine he had been. I understood completely.

A week or so after Rick's funeral, I made a special trip, alone, to Arlington Cemetery, to kneel before his freshly-turned grave and thank him for the brief period he had let me know him. To this day, I still have his office

nameplate, its brilliant red backdrop trimmed in bright yellow, secured in my home. He was a man I shall never forget.

The longer-term lesson was that I came to realize over time that part of this man's demeanor and its underlying character were a product of the US Marine Corps – its ethos, its history, and its incredible cohesiveness. The other Services in general have concluded that the Marines have the best uniforms; what most won't admit, though, is they have the best warriors.

In this book, Thomas McKelvey Cleaver tells a typical story about these warriors, this one in 1950 in the heady days of the massive incursion of China into North Korea at a place identified in the history books as the Chosin Reservoir. It is by no means "typical" in the sense that men throughout history have done similar deeds; they most certainly have not. Perhaps on a dozen or so occasions in the past 5,000 years have men performed in the manner of these Marines in North Korea. This story is "typical" of the United States Marine Corps because of those dozen or so stories, at least a quarter belong to them.

It is not a story of strategic and tactical genius such as that of Alexander; or of the harnessing of new concepts or brilliant maneuvers as did the best of the German commanders in World War II; or of subtlety, creativity and critical thinking such as I think we military professionals imagine in Sun Tzu's armies. Neither is it the fundamental determination of Wellington's men at Waterloo or of Mao Tse Tung's fighters on the Long March; nor Marlborough's brilliant ubiquity at Blenheim or Slim's artful craftiness in Burma.

It's in many ways indefinable; but the reader will recognize it instantly: like the old saw says about pornography, we cannot define it but we know it when we see it.

In this book the reader "sees" a Marine fighting in sock-clad feet in temperatures of twenty-below zero, with Siberian wind-chills pushing the cold far below even that, against seemingly insurmountable odds, all night long. Later, having miraculously survived the battle, he will lose all his toes to frostbite.

The reader sees a unit of 200 men dwindle to 150, then to 100, then to 85, then still lower, and yet maintain unit cohesion, unit integrity, sufficient to repulse a determined and out-numbering enemy again and again and again. All in weather so appallingly cold that even the imagination is incapable of conjuring it. Such actions give full confirmation to the Marines' iron-clad concept of "every man a rifleman." Cooks, supply men, truck drivers – it does not matter – every Marine is taught how to fight, how to use his

weapons, and how to be the ultimate key to survival if necessary, or to be the last man standing or dead. Like the Spartans, they retire from the fray with their shield or on it.

The reader sees Marine pilots taking off from icy carrier decks pitching so violently in 30-knot winds and an abominable sea state that just getting off successfully is the severest challenge, only once off to penetrate fog and ice-filled cloud cover that restricts vision completely until one penetrates it on the way back down to deliver ordnance without which the Marines on the ground might not make it through another day (or night in some cases). I used to consider Army aviation as being close-knit with its infantry – as I was for over a decade an Army aviator, including in the Vietnam conflict, in addition to being an infantry officer – but Army aviation is not comparable to Marine aviation. Marine pilots live and die for their ground-pounding riflemen; they have no other mission, indeed in combat no other reason to exist. The Marine Corps instills this team-ethos deeply.

In this book, the reader sees so many acts of unparalleled courage that from time to time he or she has to unlimber the book, put it aside, and just stare into the near distance, contemplating what it must have been like, knowing full well that there is no way really to know.

Courage, tenacity, even audacity are all inadequate terms.

In contrasts as sharp as the weather around the Reservoir, the reader also comes to grasp just how different these Marines are from those surrounding them – soldiers of the Eighth Army and X Corps, both US and South Korean, and the enemy, in the opening stages of the Korean War mostly North Korean but, later and predominantly, Chinese "volunteers."

Similarly sharp contrasts exist among US and allied commanders, from the very top where an almost God-like figure named Douglas MacArthur reigned in utter disregard of the facts – surrounded by sycophants who kept him well-oiled in that regard – to the bottom where task force, battalion, and company commanders and platoon leaders of all stripes and complexions saved the day.

I had had some experience, vicariously, of one commander of the former category.

X Corps commander, General "Ned" Almond, had come to my somewhat intimate knowledge through the many interviews of African-American soldiers I had conducted during the four years in which General Colin Powell had inspired me to investigate how consistently African-Americans had answered the nation's call to arms, when Powell was the first African-American chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and I was

his speech writer. The purpose of these interviews was to help chronicle the many contributions African-American servicemen had made to the defense of the nation while at the same time being treated as second-class citizens, or worse. "Or worse" included, for example, coming home from World War I battlefields and having their uniforms ripped off their bodies by white men and, as they kicked and fought back against the mob, being summarily hanged from trees, their necks breaking and their life ceasing in the southern-style "I'll--teach-you-boy," lynching.

To a man these soldiers and Marines whom I interviewed detested Almond, either from direct contact with him or from word-of-mouth criticism of him that passed through their ranks. Almond had commanded the almost exclusively African-American 92nd Infantry Division in Italy during World War II. From Luray, Virginia, a graduate of VMI and like most such men at the time a racist, Almond claimed his division's poor performance in Italy was due to its being composed of African-American troops who, in his view, would never make good soldiers and should not be called upon to serve in this way again.

In North Korea at the head of X Corps, Almond proved the opposite: that the poor quality of his leadership was the problem. Cleaver gives ample evidence to this effect. For glaring example, as the Marines at the reservoir are being virtually surrounded by tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers, Almond is still demanding that they continue their attack to the Yalu River. He admonishes them not to be afraid of "Chinese laundry men."

Almond makes cameo battlefield appearances several times during the ensuing battles, arriving from his heated airplane or car, pontificating for a few moments, and then retreating to his heated airplane or car and ultimately to his quintessentially safe headquarters. Once he even brings several Silver Stars with him and asks that men be quickly selected upon whose tunics he can pin these high awards for heroism. Two of the men, officers who must listen to their commanding general and obey, are so pinned. When Almond is gone, they pluck off the medals and toss them in the snow in utter disgust.

Poor leadership and an uncanny ability to underestimate the enemy's capabilities are not limited to Almond either. Many readers will already be aware of Douglas MacArthur's grave lack of military leadership in occupied Japan. While concentrating on his role as potentate-in-chief of Japan, he completely neglected his troops. Easy sex, lax work schedules, and almost no training at all characterized post-war service in Japan. Most soldiers could not even shoot well with their basic weapon. When

war broke out on the Korean Peninsula in June 1950, the US Army in Japan was as unprepared as any Army in US history, and that is saying a great deal.

MacArthur's negligence did not stop there. Most readers will be familiar with the five-star general's bellicose and even insubordinate language – language that finally got him relieved by President Truman – but his fundamental failings in understanding his enemies, interpreting his intelligence, and calculating the proper strategy, despite his brilliant counter-stroke at Inchon, sort of beggar the imagination. One has to assume, I feel, that senility was beginning to affect the 70-year old general; certainly an unbridled arrogance and proud nature were. Having reached my own three score and ten years, I can attest personally to the diminution in powers old age often brings.

Truman and Marshall bear some of the blame here, of course, because they tolerated the self-loving and increasingly politically motivated MacArthur for far too long. And despite his Hollywood-like reprisal after World War II, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley, was not noted for his great battlefield talents either. Bradley was the Army general sitting in Spa, Belgium, 200 miles from his forward units, playing a game of bridge when the Germans counterattacked in the Ardennes Forest in December 1944, perpetrating the worst defeat and more casualties on American forces than in any other single World War II battle – and this after Bradley and others had been warned by frontline intelligence about clear signs of a German attack but, in their comfortable ignorance, chose to ignore the intelligence.

The mission creep, as we might say today, that in 1950 infected both Washington and Tokyo, however, stands out as the cruelest blow to the Marines and others on the ground in North Korea who had to endure the numerically astounding Chinese intervention in the war.

Washington's calculations were as lopsidedly wrong in late 1950 with regard to China's understandable fears as they are today with regard to Russia's concerns in Georgia and Ukraine. From 1993 to the present day, the US pushed itself and the NATO alliance closer and closer to Russia's boundaries as if nothing would happen in response. Then, when Moscow did respond, in Georgia, in the Crimea, and then in Ukraine proper, US leaders acted as if they were gravely surprised. Perhaps they – and the leaders in 1950 – were in fact surprised. That would be a strong indictment of their leadership. They should not have been surprised, not at all, and in 1950 many men paid the ultimate price for this negligence.

No, Truman and his secretary of state, Dean Acheson, his secretary of defense, George Marshall, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff do not fare well in this recounting of the Marines' story, if only by indirection. Unlike the deeply pragmatic President George H.W. Bush who in 1991 wisely decided not to "go to Baghdad", Truman and his advisors are eager to "go to the Yalu". And the fledgling United Nations is eager to exceed its own implicit mandate and bless such an enterprise. Thousands of men, on both sides of the conflict, paid with their lives for this hubris; so did thousands of women and children. The strategic result was of course a dividing line between the two Koreas at about the same location as when the rush to the Yalu began. If so many had not paid the bloodprice, the failure would be risible.

In this debacle of American and allied arms – for that is surely what it was (in fact, following the Chinese intervention leaders of all the allied forces were seriously considering abandoning the Peninsula altogether) – the performance of the US Marines around the Chosin Reservoir stands out like a towering volcano rising from a flat desert. This incredible performance, by America's most valiant warriors, is far and away the main story of this book. It is well-told, as such a story should be.

Lawrence B. Wilkerson Col. USA (Ret)
College of William and Mary
December, 2015

INTRODUCTION

I well remember the first time I heard the words "Chosin Reservoir." It was the summer of 1951, the Sunday after my birthday. The occasion was the visit to our home in Denver, Colorado, of Cousin David, who was someone in the wider family of Cleavers, Thomases, McKelveys and Weists I had not heard of before. My father told me Cousin David was "home from Korea." That was a word I had learned over the previous year, having been confused in the summer of 1950 as to whether we were fighting with North Korea against South Korea, as I had declared mistakenly to my best friend, to his laughter before he straightened me out. Then my father said that Cousin David had "been at the Chosin Reservoir." What was that? I wondered.

Cousin David, when he arrived in our living room later that afternoon with his parents, turned out to be not much older than the students at South High School who passed in front of our house during the school year, walking down Louisiana Avenue to the school with the tall bell tower five blocks west, as my friends and I made our way over to Washington Park Elementary, two blocks north of the high school. But there was something about Cousin David (who I would learn in later years was all of 19 at the time) that was different from those teenagers. He seemed somehow older than he looked. At one point in the gathering, I found myself alone with him and I asked, "What's the Chosin Reservoir?" I remember he looked startled for an instant, before he laughed and replied, "Kid, you don't want to know." An aunt came over at that moment and he was gone. But my desire to know "What's the Chosin Reservoir?" has

remained with me for all the years since. I was never able to ask Cousin David any more questions, since he was one of the 33,686 Americans who died on the battlefields of Korea. I have taken every opportunity in the years since to ask anyone I met who was there the answer to my question.

My interest in the Korean War was enhanced by my good fortune in meeting ex-President Truman during the summer of my 14th birthday. I had traveled from Denver to Independence, Missouri, to visit my grand-uncle, Jim McKelvey, who had served with Captain Truman in the battery of Missouri National Guard field artillery he had commanded during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in 1918, and who had spent the next 30 years as a political operative for Mr. Truman in Missouri and later in Washington. The second morning I was there, we went out for an early morning walk, and soon came across Mr. Truman on his traditional "morning constitutional." I was introduced, and President Truman asked us to join him. We ended our walk (and I had to work to keep up with him) at his home, where he invited us in for breakfast. I think I am likely the only member of my generation who can say he once ate a breakfast personally cooked for him by a former President of the United States. (For the record, it was fried eggs up, sausage and bacon, and toast with orange marmalade, still my favorite way to start the day.) While he performed the duty of chef, Mr. Truman closely questioned me regarding my knowledge of history, and I was impressed by both the breadth and the depth of his historical grasp. (For the record, I passed the examination.) I have always considered Harry Truman to be America's last republican (small "r" intentional) president, and I freely admit that my account of the events of 1950 takes his side of the argument. I believe any investigator cannot do otherwise when they review the facts.

Historian Marc Bloch wrote, "Misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past." In studying the experience of the United States in the Korean War, the truth of that statement becomes terribly obvious. One can see that the road to involvement in Korea was the direct result of complete ignorance of the history of Korea, combined with a total misunderstanding of the nature of the Communist countries, leading to a failure to understand that they would act in defense of their perceived national interests as would any other country. This failure of understanding is a feature of the policy decisions and strategic choices made by the United States throughout the Cold War and in the years since. The failure to learn the

lessons of the Korean War led inevitably to the Vietnam War, which was also the result of failing to understand the history of Southeast Asia and thus have an accurate understanding of the real nature of the war we so blithely entered, the war I would serve in.

The United States has not won a war since World War II, primarily due to this failure to understand the true nature of the perceived enemy; indeed it can still be seen today in the so-called "War on Terror" that has involved the United States in endless conflict throughout the Middle East, in wars that were and are incapable of being won, at least in ways that Americans understand the word "win."

Americans pride themselves on being people who show their best selves in the worst of circumstances. Thus, the battle of the Chosin Reservoir in 1950 has assumed mythological status in the national memory, given it is the one military event of the past 70 years that wholly and completely fulfills this national mythology. It is my hope that the reader will come to the end of this book with an understanding of how the Chosin Reservoir campaign, which really does fit all the requirements for being considered a mythic event, was the direct result of American failure to understand the past in Korea, which led to misunderstanding of the present in 1950, with all the danger such failure and resultant misunderstanding involved.

The United States Marine Corps, in its official history *The Chosin Campaign*, states:

> Not a mile was easy. The road was narrow and winding. Of dirt and gravel, ox carts had a hard time passing, let alone tanks, trucks and artillery. At times, it seemed to go straight up; at others, straight down. And always around a hairpin curve where a roadblock could be waiting. Breaking out from Yudam-ni to Hungnam cost the United States Marines two hundred men per mile. It was The Corps' finest hour.

Former Marine Private Ernie Gonzales, who at 17 was the youngest Marine in Fox Company in the battle at Toktong Pass, was one of the 240 men who held the pass against the assault of five Chinese battalions to insure escape of the 2nd and 5th Marine Regiments from the reservoir. Twelve years after the battle, he wrote, in an unpublished manuscript that he entrusted to me 25 years ago:

> The fire of patriotism dies quickly. It is cold by the time the band stops playing and the flags are furled and the voices of the cheering multitudes are

> faint in the distance. By the time the rifleman gets to the battlefield, all the fanfare and cheering is forgotten. All that remains is a suspicion that the hysteria of the send-off was manufactured so that the stay-at-homes would buy another bond or give another pint of blood. The men of Fox Company were not kept in the line of fire by patriotism. The men of my company fought and died at Toktong Pass because we were Marines. We did it for each other.

It is that element of sacrifice that elevates Chosin to the level of myth.

Twenty-five years ago, I first thought to tell this story as a motion picture. I began the research to write the screenplay, and had the incredible good fortune to discover that the late Ed McMahon of *The Tonight Show* was a veteran. Ed gave me his support enthusiastically from my first call to his office, most importantly taking me to the Reunion Convention of "The Frozen Chosen," as the survivors call themselves, which was held in 1989 at the Century City Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. With Ed's enthusiastic introduction, I was able over the next year to interview several of the leading survivors, all of whom are now gone.

While there was initial interest in my screenplay about "the Marines' finest hour," that interest quickly waned when I mentioned that a major character in the story was the worst blizzard to come out of Siberia in a century, and that the best place to shoot the movie would be the mountains of the eastern Sierra Nevada, in the dead of winter. Enthusiasm for the project died like a balloon slashed with a Bowie knife.

Everything was reluctantly filed away, but the interview notes and the script itself stayed there in my files, reminding me over the years that there was a story I yearned to tell. Fortunately, during these intervening years, there has been much research published about the Chosin campaign, and the events that led to the outbreak of war in Korea. The US Marine Corps Historical Division has now published online its complete Korean War Project, allowing a researcher to access all reports by all Marine units involved in the entire war from the comfort of one's own office, rather than making a laborious slog through the national archives in Washington, poking through unidentified boxes. Full reports of the actions of Army units involved are also available in similar Army files, as well as the complete combat reports of the carriers and air units of Task Force 77 that supported the battle. The Chinese and Russian governments have now released documentation on cooperation between the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of

Korea regarding the outbreak of war and the Sino-Soviet intervention in the fall of 1950, also online.

It is thus now possible to take my collection of first-person interviews about the battle, and put these stories into a much wider, more complex, and more complete "big picture" of the events of 1950 than previous efforts to tell the story have done. Placing the events at the Chosin Reservoir in this wider context only makes clearer the greatness of this incredible event. This book is that story. The heroism is theirs. Any mistakes are mine.

Thomas McKelvey Cleaver
Los Angeles, California, 2015

CHAPTER ONE

BROTHER'S KEEPER

Snow squalls fell from the dark sky, covering the heaving whitecaps of the slate-gray Sea of Japan. The mountains of North Korea came into view in the distance as the six dark-blue F4U-4 Corsairs of VF-32's Iroquois Flight went "feet dry" north of the port of Hungnam. The rugged pine-covered mountains below were smoothed by snow drifts that might be ten feet deep. The six Corsairs made their way through a line of valleys, looking up at the cloud-shrouded peaks from their altitude of 500 feet over the rugged terrain. As they swept out of the last valley, the clouds broke to show the flat, windswept expanse of the desolate frozen Chosin Reservoir. It was Monday, December 4, 1950.

Iroquois Flight leader Lieutenant Commander Dick Cevoli banked north as they passed the ruined village of Yudam-ni, site of a deadly battle between the 5th and 7th Marine Regiments, 1st Marine Division and the Chinese "volunteers" led by Marshal Peng Dehuai that had only ended that morning as the 5th and 7th Marines successfully made their way through the 11 miles of Toktong Pass to the relative safety of the village of Hagaru-ri, site of division headquarters, a 96-hour battle that had cost the Marines 100 men per mile.

The Navy fliers' job that day was reconnaissance, to locate any of the Chinese forces that had ambushed the Marines at every strongpoint they had held in the reservoir the previous Monday night, November 27.

Cevoli glanced over at his wingman, Lieutenant George Hudson. Beyond were the two Corsairs of the second element, Lieutenant (jg) Bill Koenig and Ensign Ralph McQueen. The third element, composed of

element leader Ensign Jesse Brown and his wingman, Lieutenant (jg) Tom Hudner, were slightly to the rear. As the Corsairs winged their way over another mountain valley on the far side of the reservoir in the Tae Baek Mountains, Bill Koenig dropped beneath Brown's Corsair. Suddenly his voice came over the radio: "Jess, check your fuel status."

Brown glanced down at the gauges to see the fuel needle dropping alarmingly. Ahead, the ridgeline rose above his flight altitude. As he pulled back on the stick and soared over the ridge, he felt the engine stutter, and the rpms dropped sharply. "This is Iroquois One-Three. I'm losing power. I have to put it down. Mayday. Mayday."

As Brown went through the drill of dropping his belly tanks and under-wing ordnance, wingman Tom Hudner pulled close alongside. "Okay, Jesse, I'll walk you through the list. Lock your harness. Open your canopy and lock it." Hudner saw the big bubble canopy on Brown's Corsair slide back. As Brown's nose dropped, Hudner warned, "Watch your airspeed."

The other members of the flight could only watch helplessly as the Corsair dropped toward a bowl-shaped clearing on the side of a mountain. Brown lowered his flaps and set up to crash land. On the mountainside, the shadows of the trees were growing longer in the late afternoon sun.

Hudner winced as he watched the Corsair touch down in a cloud of snow and plow across the field, throwing up a rooster tail of snow behind until it came to an abrupt stop, nearly into the line of trees that bordered the clearing.

The five surviving Corsairs circled as their pilots anxiously watched for a sign of movement from their comrade. Hudner circled lower and spotted smoke wafting from beneath the broken cowling. "Get out, Jesse! Come on!" There was still no movement below. Hudner later recalled, "Somebody was going to have to go down and help. Since nobody else was volunteering, I decided it would have to be me."

Hudner ditched his ordnance and tanks and throttled back. "I'm going in."

"Roger," flight leader Cevoli responded.

All was silence while Hudner set up for a carrier approach at minimum speed, flaps down. Lower... lower... lower...

As he saw the ground coming up fast, Hudner told himself: "This is really stupid, you know?"

"The ground seemed to rush at me as I hit, and then I was out of control, snowplowing across the field and hoping I was going to end up somewhere close to Jesse." With a lurch, the Corsair slammed around 90 degrees and

slewed to a stop. As the cloud of snow settled, Hudner could see he was about 80 yards from Brown's smoking airplane.

Tom Hudner and Jesse Brown couldn't have been more different. Hudner was a graduate of the US Naval Academy, class of 1947, which graduated in 1946 due to World War II. A graduate of Phillips Andover Academy, he had spent the war years at Annapolis, where a fellow midshipman was future President Jimmy Carter. At almost 26 in 1950, he was the oldest of five children of a successful Irish businessman who ran a grocery chain, Hudner's Markets, in Boston. After two years' sea duty, Hudner had entered flight training in 1948 and become a naval aviator a year previously, in late 1949.

Jesse L. Brown Jr., born a sharecropper's son in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in 1926, had traveled a more difficult route into the ranks of naval aviators. Enrolled in the Navy's Aviation Midshipman program after graduating with an NROTC scholarship from Ohio State in 1946, Brown became the first African-American ever to wear the Wings of Gold when he graduated from flight school at Pensacola in 1948. The Navy was at that time perhaps the least socially progressive of all the American armed services, with a career officer corps that was primarily southern in origin. Brown had his job cut out for him to gain acceptance.

Hudner and Brown met when they were assigned to VF-32 in early 1950. The squadron was then flying Grumman F8F-1 Bearcats off the USS *Leyte* (CV-32). Brown was recognized as the best pilot in the squadron, whether all his squadron mates wanted to admit it or not, when he took a wave-off at the last moment, added throttle too rapidly – easy to do in the Bearcat – and survived a torque roll less than 100 feet above the carrier deck. He recovered in full view of everyone and then made a textbook landing, cool as could be.

When war broke out in Korea in June 1950, *Leyte* was in the Mediterranean. When she returned to the United States for further deployment to Korea, VF-32 traded in its beloved Bearcats for the F4U-4 Corsair, a far more capable fighter-bomber.

Leyte returned to the Mediterranean, transited the Suez Canal, and crossed the Indian Ocean to join the Seventh Fleet in Japan. She arrived just in time to take part in the invasion of Inchon on September 15, 1950. From mid-October, the carrier operated with Task Force 77, providing close air support for the 1st Marine Division during its push up the east coast of the Korean peninsula after United Nations Supreme Commander Douglas MacArthur made the fateful decision to cross the 38th Parallel and "roll back" the Communist North Koreans. By mid-November, *Leyte*

had been on station in the Sea of Japan for five weeks, in what would be a record-breaking tour of 92 days before she returned to Japan on January 19, 1951. Her fliers were among the first to discover that the Chinese warnings about military intervention if UN forces approached the Yalu River, which formed the Chinese–Korean border, were not mere bluster. The airmen had seen the evidence: numerous large units crossing the now-frozen river in late October.

The Marines had arrived at the Chosin Reservoir, in the high country of the Taebek Plateau, during the second week of November. By then, they had encountered fresh enemy troops they were able to definitely identify as Chinese. Despite warnings from both the Marines on the east coast of Korea and the Eighth Army troops on the western side of the peninsula that they were encountering the Chinese Army in combat, Douglas MacArthur not only discounted the reports but stated for the record in a press conference at his Tokyo headquarters that Chinese threats to enter the war were not to be taken seriously, since the Chinese leadership knew that Chinese troops had never been able to stand up against well-trained Western armies. He went further, promising America that "the boys will be home by Christmas," with Korea fully liberated from the Communists.

On Thanksgiving, November 24, 1950 the Marines at Hagaru-ri, Koto-ri, and Yudam-ni, near the Chosin Reservoir, looked forward to MacArthur's promised "hot turkey dinner for every man in Korea." They were disappointed to be served hacked-apart frozen turkeys boiled but still half-frozen in the bitter North Korean cold.

During the early morning hours of November 25, the worst Siberian blizzard in a century swept over the Korean peninsula, dropping temperatures lower than minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit and covering everything with heavy snow. The storm finally ended at dusk on November 27.

At 2200 hours, bugles blared out of the frozen darkness throughout the Chosin Reservoir as the Chinese Ninth Army Group of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA), under the command of Long March veteran General Song Shilun, struck every Marine position from Yudam-ni, on the western shore of the reservoir, south to Koto-ri, near the top of Funchilin Pass. The Ninth Army Group was composed of the 20th, 26th, 27th and 30th Armies: 120,000 hardened veterans of the Chinese civil war organized into 13 divisions. Their orders were: "Wipe out the Marines to the last man."

Aboard *Leyte,* the dawn of November 28 had found the flight deck and aircraft coated with snow. For the next seven days, the pilots of all four

squadrons in Air Group 3 flew multiple sorties in bad sea conditions with blowing snowstorms as they gave close air support to the Marines.

And then there was the recon mission of December 4.

Badly shaken from his crash landing, Hudner climbed out of his Corsair. As he recalled, "The snow was waist-deep, it was colder than I have ever experienced anywhere else, and at first I couldn't move. It took me over thirty minutes to cover the distance to Jesse's airplane, and I was damn near frozen stiff by the time I got there."

Reaching Brown's Corsair, Hudner discovered his friend's legs had been crushed in the crash and it was impossible to pull him out of the cockpit because the fuselage had broken in such a way that he was jammed in the cockpit. The Corsair was still smoking. Hudner piled snow on the cowling to try and stop the flames. Brown slipped in and out of consciousness from loss of blood as Hudner fought to free him.

The sun was going down and it was even colder in the shadows. Hudner ripped at the instrument panel in an unsuccessful attempt to pry Brown loose. Finally, a Marine HO3S-1 helicopter from VMO-6 arrived. Hudner and the pilot, Marine Master Gunnery Sergeant Herbert Valentine (a World War II Corsair ace and Navy Cross recipient) tried to break the plane open with a fire axe. In the last light of day, when he had to go or die of frostbite himself, Hudner realized his friend had frozen to death in the cockpit. The helicopter lifted off in a cloud of snow and disappeared over the peaks to the east, leaving Jesse Brown and his Corsair in the frozen stillness.

In March 1952, Lieutenant (jg) Thomas J. Hudner Jr. became the only member of the United States Navy to be awarded the Medal of Honor during the Korean War, for his willingness to risk his life above and beyond the call of duty in deliberately crash landing to save his friend. His award was one of 14 Medals of Honor awarded for heroism during the Chosin campaign, more than have been awarded for any other American battle.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND TO WAR IN THE LAND OF THE MORNING CALM

The Korean War was entirely accidental on the part of everyone other than Kim Il-Sung, leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. So far as the United States was concerned, it was the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, against the wrong enemy. What began as a civil war between the two major political factions of Korea rapidly changed to an international war fought directly by the United States and by proxy on the part of what was seen as the real opponent, the Soviet Union, which supplied both North Korea and the People's Republic of China with the means to fight, limiting its direct involvement to the provision of air defense in the form of Soviet aircrew "volunteers." Korea was the last international war fought by large military formations on both sides, maneuvering and fighting in the classic manner used by armies for hundreds of years, ending in a stalemate reminiscent of the worst trench warfare of World War I. At the same time, it was the first "limited war," fought under the threat of an ultimate nuclear apocalypse, with both sides convincing themselves that their participation in this war would head off such a confrontation. The result was the spread of the Cold War from Europe to Asia, which would ultimately result in the American war in Vietnam in the following decade.

More importantly for the United States, the Korean War happened as the result of a faulty analysis of the enemy, one that would affect US decision-making and policies throughout the Cold War. That faulty analysis was the belief that Communism was monolithic and centrally

controlled, and all Communist-ruled countries were puppets of the Soviet Union, unable to act without Soviet direction and approval. That individual states ruled by Communists might also have their own national policies and strategies that were the result of national experience, in which traditional national interests would be controlling factors, was declared impossible under the Communist system according to American policymakers from the outset of what became the Cold War. To an extent, this was based on knowledge of the operation of the Comintern before World War II, where Communist parties outside the Soviet Union were subject to political domination and control by the USSR, with dissidents expelled for failure to conform to the USSR party line, regardless of the negative influence of the pro-USSR party line on the national fortunes of any member party. It was thus a given for US analysts and policymakers that such control would continue when any of these Communist parties took power in their respective countries. Thus, the very idea that North Korean objectives might be the result of a 100-year struggle for national independence, separate to and even in opposition to decisions and policies of the USSR, was considered impossible.

This view of Communism as a monolithic enemy would be responsible for every mistake made by US decision-makers throughout the 44 years of the Cold War. The American failure to understand the true situation, i.e., that "Communism" as practiced in the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or any other nation ruled by a Communist party, was in practice no different from traditional national politics, so far as perceived national interests were concerned, put blinders on American decision-makers which resulted in political and military interventions around the world that did not in the long run serve the national interests of the United States. As with the Soviets, "dissidents" to this worldview were sidelined and marginalized by those who believed the "common wisdom," despite these dissident views being demonstrated by events over time to be more realistic. It is said that, in war, what you don't know can kill you. This was certainly true of the United States in 1950, when what was not known or understood about the enemy created the greatest military reverse suffered by American forces in the history of the country. From the outset of American involvement with Korea, the failure to understand Korean history and the influence of that history on contemporary events led inexorably to the events of 1950.

In truth, from the time of the Russian Revolution, there were always two "Communisms" at work in international politics. The first was

"Communism" as defined by the Soviet Union following the success of the revolution. Through the design of Lenin in creating a system of "democratic centralism" in which a policy would be the result of internal debate and would be unquestioned once decided, and under the rule of Josef Stalin, which led to the totalitarian system known as "Stalinism," the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, and in the countries of Eastern Europe following the end of World War II were highly centralized, disciplined organizations in which the views and interests of the Soviet Union were paramount and controlling. This was the "Communism" the United States opposed in Europe after the war as what became known as the Cold War took hold of international relations in postwar Europe.

The other "Communism" had more to do with anti-colonialism, and it was here that countries which became "Communist" were more likely to follow their ancient national interests as they became independent of the Western imperial powers. Many of the leaders of these movements embraced "Communism" because of the anti-colonial policies of the Soviet Union, and their own inability to convince any of the Western imperial powers to voluntarily give up their empires and grant national independence to their colonies. The leaders of these movements gravitated toward the Soviet Union for political and material support of their struggles, and in the process adopted the ideology of Communism, though it was a Communism that was in accord with their national struggle. Two good examples of this are seen in the careers of Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh. Both were essentially nationalists. Ho Chi Minh had attended the Paris Peace Conference at Versailles in 1919, in hopes of obtaining support from President Woodrow Wilson to prevail on France to grant independence to Vietnam in accordance with Wilson's Fourteen Points. When he was ignored by the West, he turned to the one political power that would provide any support, the Soviet Union. His adoption of Communism came through his involvement with the French Communist Party that had grown out of the French Socialist Party with which he had been associated when he emigrated to France as a young man. The Communism that would arise in Indochina was an expression of Vietnamese nationalism. Mao Zedong was born the son of a wealthy farmer in Shaoshan, Hunan, who adopted a Chinese nationalist and anti-imperialist outlook in early life which was particularly influenced by the events of the revolution of 1911 that led to the fall of the Manchu Dynasty, and his experience as a university student in the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which was a nationalist movement that developed in opposition

to increasing Japanese influence in China after the Japanese took over the former German-dominated territories of China during World War I. Mao converted to Marxism-Leninism while in university following the Russian Revolution. Throughout his career, however, he always perceived "Communism" through the prism of Chinese nationalism, which became most notable following the split with the Soviet Union over the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle in 1959.

This was a "Communism" that American authorities did not recognize or understand. This lack of understanding that Communism in the colonized countries was not the kind of Soviet-style Communism that had been externally imposed as the result of Soviet victory in eastern Europe, and was not monolithically subservient to Soviet political control because these were genuinely independent countries founded by genuinely independent movements and not Soviet satellites completely dependent on Soviet support for their existence, would have profound influence on the events of 1950.

As will be seen, Kim Il-Sung, leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, was more in the mold of the Eastern European Communist leaders, installed in power by the occupation authority of the Red Army in the postwar period. Yet, when it came to the national aspirations of post-colonial Korea, even this hardline Stalinist saw himself as a nationalist first and a "Communist" second.

Korea had been ruled by the Joseon Dynasty from 1392 until 1910. After two Japanese invasions during the first half of the 16th century, internal power struggles within the dynasty and peasant rebellions began in the late 16th century. The Korean monarchy sought military support from China, which became increasingly important in maintaining rule. Because of this, the dynasty developed and maintained a strict isolationist policy to all countries except China, which resulted in it being known as The Hermit Kingdom. By the mid-19th century, China was in no position to protect Korea, being unable to protect itself from foreign intervention.

American involvement with Korean affairs began in 1866, when the American merchantman *General Sherman* was destroyed in the Taedong River below Pyongyang and its crew massacred. Report of this tragedy resulted in the dispatch of a ship of the Asiatic Squadron, the USS *Wachusett*, under Commander Robert W. Shufeldt. Shufeldt's mission proved fruitless, but the incident led ultimately to a proposal in 1871 by Rear Admiral John Rodgers, commander of the Asiatic Squadron,

that a naval expedition, modeled on that of Commodore Perry that had "opened Japan," be turned loose on Korea. The American minister to China was ordered to carry out the negotiation in cooperation with Admiral Rodgers. A force was assembled at Nagasaki with the objective of obtaining a treaty of commerce with the Korean government, and on May 30, 1871 five United States ships of war dropped anchor off the mouth of the Han River. Receiving no communication from the Koreans, the port of Inchon was invaded on June 10, with landing parties of US Marines and sailors from the ships overrunning the initial objectives without difficulty. The Koreans in the forts defending the port fought back, and the landing force was unable to advance toward the capital of Seoul, which was beyond the range of supporting naval gunfire. Though Rodgers had the power to capture the forts, it was obvious that doing so would not result in the Koreans acknowledging the American desire for a treaty. On June 3, 1871, honor having been satisfied, the Americans returned to their ships and the fleet returned to Japan without achieving its objective.

With the dynasty unwilling to modernize on terms the country could control, Korea was forcibly opened to international relations by a Japanese military force sent to "establish a treaty of friendship and commerce," which the defeated Koreans signed on February 26, 1876, opening their ports and granting Japanese citizens extraterritorial status. The Chinese advised the Koreans to establish relations with a Western power to balance the Japanese and suggested the United States, which alone among Western powers had shown no territorial desires in Asia. In 1880 now-Commodore Shufeldt returned aboard the USS *Ticonderoga* with authority to negotiate a treaty, though communication with the Koreans was unproductive. In July 1880 an offer of assistance was received from the Chinese viceroy Li Hung-Chang. With China and Japan currently at odds, Li wanted American aid in developing his navy. In exchange for such technical assistance, he promised to forward negotiations with Korea. Shufeldt proceeded to China, where advice and advisors were provided by the Chinese, and talks with Li commenced. A treaty of "amity and commerce" was finally signed between Korea and the United States on May 22, 1882.

The Japanese, enraged by this "American interference," took even greater interest in internal Korean politics, while Great Britain became interested in Korean politics out of a desire to limit Russian influence in the region, while the Russians countered the rise of Japan by further

developing their Pacific port at Vladivostok. This opening of Korea also saw the arrival of American Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries, who were the first direct involvement of the United States with the country. By 1893, Korea had signed treaties with every major European power.

Japan destroyed the last influence of China over Korea through their victory in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1893–94. Following that Chinese defeat, an internal coup within the Korean monarchy led to a brief period of independence and reform known as the Korean Empire, which lasted from 1897 until 1910. Russia and Japan competed intensively during this period for influence in the country.

Following the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, Japan made Korea a protectorate through the Eulsa Treaty in 1905. Armed resistance to Japan came from an alliance of Confucian scholars and government leaders, Christians, traditional bandits and peasants, with the guerrilla army reaching a peak of 70,000 in 1908. The Japanese occupiers broke this resistance through full-on repression, with thousands of executions and imprisonments. Full annexation came on August 22, 1910 with the Japan–Korea Annexation Treaty in which the Korean emperor signed away his sovereignty. For the next 35 years, Japan pursued a policy of dominating Korea, which was considered part of the Japanese Empire as an industrialized colony along with Taiwan, in what eventually became the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

In 1937, a deliberate policy of Japanese cultural assimilation was adopted by the Governor-General, General Jiro Minami. Use of the Korean language and study of Korean history, language, literature and culture was banned and replaced by the mandatory use and study of their Japanese counterparts. In 1939, the 23.5 million Koreans were required to adopt Japanese names under the "So-shi-kaimei" policy.

Many Korean nationalists fled the country after 1910. Korean resistance to Japanese domination became open in the widespread nonviolent March 1st Movement of 1919, which saw the foundation of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea that year with the support of the nationalist Kuomintang Party in China. Exiled Korean nationalists became active in Manchuria, China and Siberia, in a struggle that would see the leading figures from these exiled organizations become important political players in Korea following World War II.

The Provisional Government failed to achieve international recognition and failed to unite Korean nationalist groups, as the political struggle divided between the Provisional Government's American-based founding

President Syngman Rhee, and his followers, and Koreans still resident in Korea or in exile outside the United States.

Korean nationalists took part in the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1919, which led to the founding of the Korean Communist Party in the early 1920s. Domestically, Korean Communists with the support of the Comintern and the Chinese Communists became the primary agents of domestic opposition to Japanese rule for the next twenty years.

In 1939, Koreans were conscripted for work in Japanese war industries in Japan, and for service in the Imperial Japanese Army, with some 2.3 million Koreans serving in the Army and over 750,000 being sent to Japan for war work. During World War II, Koreans fought on both sides, with Koreans in the Imperial Japanese Army holding low-level positions, while a Korean army backed by Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang and led by Yi Pom-Sok fought in the Burma campaign. A Korean Communist guerrilla movement fought the Japanese in Korea and Manchuria, while a substantial number of Korean Communists fought as soldiers in Mao Zedong's Red Army in Northern China.

All of this history and political activity was largely unknown in the United States, particularly at the higher levels of government. In November 1943, the Republic of China, Great Britain and the United States declared at the Cairo Conference that "in due course Korea shall become free and independent." The Tehran Conference saw Soviet leader Josef Stalin commit the USSR to enter the Pacific War after the successful conclusion of the war in Europe. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Soviets committed to an invasion of Manchuria 90 days after the surrender of Germany. The agreement at Yalta foresaw a "government of national unity" being formed to control the whole peninsula, with both Soviet and United States occupation forces leaving afterwards. This initially was in line with the policy advocated before his death by President Franklin Roosevelt, who wished to see an end to empires in Asia, with a committee of Great Powers – the United States, China and the Soviet Union – awarded "trusteeship" over the former Asian empires of Japan, Great Britain, France and the Netherlands. During the "trusteeship" the dependent people of these countries would be "prepared and educated" for self-government. This concept found no support from the other Allies, including China and the Soviet Union, all of whom were following their own national interests.

As early as 1943, Far Eastern analysts in the State Department had expressed fear over Soviet objectives in the Far East once they entered the Pacific War, writing that: