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EAGO-MH

FAMOUS KOREAN WAR BATTLE SITES IN SOUTH KOREA
(in chronological order)

1. Task Force Smith at Osan, 5 July 1950. Unit: Battalion combat team from 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division.

Task Force Smith, comprised of elements of the 24th Division's 21st Regiment, then based in Japan, was the first American unit to fight in Korea. The initial 406 members of Task Force Smith arrived at Pusan by air on 1 July 1950 and were rushed north by train and truck. On 4 July they were joined at Pyongtaek by 134 men of their division's 52d Field Artillery Battalion which had crossed from Japan on an LST. Near Osan, on the rainy morning of 5 July, the infantry and artillery contingents of Task Force Smith engaged 33 Soviet-made T34 tanks and a regiment of North Korean infantry in a bloody six-hour battle. Though hopelessly outnumbered, they acquitted themselves nobly and, before withdrawing to Taejon, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. The 540-man American Task Force suffered 150 casualties in dead, wounded and missing. Today, on a tree-covered hilltop at Chukmi-Ryung, near Osan, stands an obelisk commemorating the battle at Osan. The monument was erected in 1954 by the 24th Infantry Division, then based in Korea.

2. Taejon Defense, July 1950. Unit: 24th US Infantry Division.

After Task Force Smith had fought its way out of impending encirclement near Osan, the 24th Division fought successive holding actions at Chonan, Chonui and Chochiwon and south across the Kum River to the important town of Taejon. It was a natural location for a determined stand by US troops since it is an important communications center and is at the head of a highway and double-tracked railroad which twists through the mountains to Pusan, 125 miles to the southeast. To protect Taejon, the thinning ranks of the 24th Division were deployed between the town and the Kum River. Engineers blew the bridge crossing the Kum but, unfortunately, the waters of the river subsided and the enemy was able to ford the river at several places. On 13 July, before the battle for Taejon began, LTG Walton H. Walker, CG of the Eighth Army, had assumed command of all ground forces in Korea. He wanted to hold Taejon, but once the Communists forded the shallow Kum, the fate of the city was decided. Nevertheless, the battle for Taejon was bitter. There were neither weapons nor troops enough to hold the Communists. In the west, probing attacks were launched by the enemy up and down the Kum and he established footholds across the river at Samgyo-ri and Kongju. After the Communists forded the Kum they

Task Force Smith at Osan
5 July 1950

> If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself, but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.
>
> --SUN TZU, The Art of War

Task Force Smith, comprised of elements of the 24th Division's 21st Regiment, then based in Japan, was the first American unit to fight in Korea. The initial 406 members of Task Force Smith arrived at Pusan by air on 1 July 1950 and were rushed north by train and truck. On 4 July they were joined at Pyongtaek by 134 men of their division's 52d Field Artillery Battalion which had crossed from Japan on an LST.

A little after midnight on 5 July the infantry and artillery of the Task Force moved out of Pyongtaek. Their leader, LTC Charles B. Smith had to commandeer Korean trucks and miscellaneous vehicles to mount his men. The native Korean drivers deserted when they found that the vehicles were going north. American soldiers took over in the driver's seats. BG George B. Barth, Acting Commanding General of the 24th Division Artillery, and Colonel Smith followed the task force northward. On the way, General Barth tried to halt the ROK demolition preparations by telling the engineer groups that he planned to use the bridges. At one bridge, after talk failed to influence the ROK engineers, Barth threw the boxes of dynamite into the river. It was only twelve miles to Osan, but it took two and a half hours to get there because ROK soldiers and civilians fleeing south filled the road and driving was under blackout conditions.

About 0300 on 5 July, the delaying force reached the position which Smith had previously selected. The infantry units started setting up weapons and digging in at the predesignated places. LTC Miller O. Perry, 52d FA Battalion commander, moved his guns into the positions behind the infantry that he had selected the previous afternoon. All units were in place, but not completely dug in, before daylight.

In seeking the most favorable place to pass through the ridge, the railroad bent eastward away from the highway until it was almost a mile distant. There the railroad split into two single-track lines and passed over low ground between hills of the ridge line. On his left flank Colonel Smith placed one platoon of B Company on the high knob immediately west of the highway; east of the road were B Company's

other two rifle platoons. Beyond them eastward to the railroad tracks were two platoons of C Company. This company's third platoon occupied a finger ridge running south, forming a refused right flank along the west side of the railroad track. Just east of the highway B Company emplaced one 75-mm recoilless rifle; C Company emplaced the other 75-mm recoilless rifle just west of the railroad. Colonel Smith placed the 4.2-inch mortars on the reverse, or south slope, of the ridge about 400 yards behind the center of B Company's position. The infantry line formed a 1-mile front, not counting the refused right flank along the railroad track. The highway, likely to be the critical axis of enemy advance, passed through the shallow saddle at the infantry position and then zigzagged gently downgrade northward around several knoblike spurs to low ground a little more than a mile away. There it crossed to the east side of the railroad track and continued on over semilevel ground to Suwon.

Two thousand yards behind the infantry, Colonel Perry pulled four 105-mm howitzers 150 yards to the left (west) off the highway over a small trail that only jeeps could travel. Two jeeps in tandem pulled the guns into place. Near a cluster of houses with rice paddies in front and low hills back of them, the men arranged the guns in battery position. Perry emplaced the fifth howitzer as an antitank gun on the west side of the road about halfway between the main battery position and the infantry. From there it could place direct fire on the highway where it passed through the saddle and the infantry positions.

Volunteers from the artillery Headquarters and Service Batteries made up four .50-caliber machine gun and four 2.36-inch bazooka teams and joined the infantry in their position.

The infantry parked most of their miscellaneous trucks and jeeps along the road just south of the saddle. The artillerymen left their trucks concealed in yards and sheds and behind Korean houses along the road just north of Osan. There were about 1,200 rounds of artillery ammunition at the battery position and in two trucks parked inside a walled enclosure nearby. One or two truckloads more were in the vehicles parked among the houses just north of Osan. Nearly all this ammunition was high explosive (HE); only 6 rounds were high explosive antitank (HEAT), and all of it was taken to the forward gun. When the 52d Field Artillery was loading out at Sasebo, Japan, the battalion ammunition officer drew all the HEAT ammunition available there--only 18 rounds. He issued 6 rounds to A Battery, now on the point of engaging in the first battle between American artillery and the Russian-built T34 tanks.

At the Osan position as rainy 5 July dawned were 540 Americans: 389 enlisted men and 17 officers among the infantry and 125 enlisted men and 9 officers among the artillerymen. When first light came,

the infantry test-fired their weapons and the artillerymen registered their guns. Then they ate their C ration breakfasts.

In spite of the rain Smith could see almost to Suwon. He first saw movement on the road in the distance near Suwon a little after 0700. In about half an hour a tank column, now easily discernible, approached the waiting Americans. In this first group there were eight tanks. About 0800 the men back in the artillery position received a call from the forward observer with the infantry for a fire mission.

At 0816 the first American artillery fire of the Korean War hurtled through the air toward the North Korean tanks. The number two howitzer fired the first two rounds, and the other pieces then joined in the firing. The artillery took the tanks under fire at a range of approximately 4,000 yards, about 2,000 yards in front of the American infantry. The forward observer quickly adjusted the fire and shells began landing among the tanks. But the watching infantrymen saw the tanks keep on coming, undeterred by the exploding artillery shells.

To conserve ammunition Colonel Smith issued orders that the 75-mm recoilless rifle covering the highway should withhold fire until the tanks closed to 700 yards. The tanks stayed in column, displayed little caution, and did not leave the road. The commander of the enemy tank column may have thought he had encountered only another minor ROK delaying position.

General Barth had gone back to the artillery just before the enemy came into view and did not know when he arrived there that an enemy force was approaching. After receiving reports from the forward observer that the artillery fire was ineffective against the tanks, he started back to alert the 1st Battalion of the 34th Infantry, whose arrival he expected at Pyongtaek during the night, against a probable breakthrough of the enemy tanks.

When the enemy tank column approached within 700 yards of the infantry position, the two recoilless rifles took it under fire. They scored direct hits, but apparently did not damage the tanks which, firing their 85-mm cannon and 7.62-mm machine guns, rumbled on up the incline toward the saddle. When they were almost abreast of the infantry position, the lead tanks came under 2.36-inch bazooka fire. Operating a rocket launcher from the ditch along the east side of the road, 2d Lt. Ollie D. Connor, fired 22 rockets at approximately 15 yards' range against the rear of the tanks where their armor was weakest. Whether they were effective is doubtful. The two lead tanks, however, were stopped just through the pass when they came under direct fire of the single 105-mm howitzer using HEAT ammunition. Very likely these artillery shells stopped the two tanks, although the barrage of close-range bazooka rockets may have damaged their tracks.

The two damaged tanks pulled off to the side of the road, clearing the way for those following. One of the two caught fire and burned. Two men emerged from its turret with their hands up. A third jumped out with a burp gun in his hands and fired directly into a machine gun position, killing the assistant gunner. This unidentified machine gunner* probably was the first American ground soldier killed in action in Korea. American fire killed the three North Koreans. The six rounds of HEAT ammunition at the forward gun were soon expended, leaving only the HE shells which richocheted off the tanks. The third tank through the pass knocked out the forward gun and wounded one of its crew members.

The tanks did not stop to engage the infantry; they merely fired on them as they came through. Following the first group of 8 tanks came others at short intervals, usually in groups of 4. These, too, went unhesitatingly through the infantry position and on down the road toward the artillery position. In all, there were 33 tanks in the column. The last passed through the infantry position by 0900, about an hour after the lead tanks had reached the saddle. In this hour, tank fire had killed or wounded approximately 20 men in Smith's position.

Earlier in the morning it was supposed to have been no more than an academic question as to what would happen if tanks came through the infantry to the artillery position. Someone in the artillery had raised this point to be answered by the infantry, "Don't worry, they will never get back to you." One of the artillerymen later expressed the prevailing opinion by saying, "Everyone thought the enemy would turn around and go back when they found out who was fighting." Word now came to the artillerymen from the forward observer that tanks were through the infantry and to be ready for them.

The first tanks cut up the telephone wire strung along the road from the artillery to the infantry and destroyed this communication. The radios were wet and functioning badly; now only the jeep radio worked. Communication with the infantry after 0900 was spotty at best, and, about 1100, it ceased altogether.

The tanks came on toward the artillery pieces, which kept them under fire but could not stop them. About 500 yards from the battery, the tanks stopped behind a little hill seeking protection from direct fire. Then, one at a time, they came down the road with a rush, hatches closed, making a run to get past the battery position. Some fired their 85-mm cannon, others only their machine guns. Their aim was haphazard in most cases for the enemy tankers had not located the gun positions. Some of the tank guns even pointed toward the opposite side of the road. Only one tank stopped momentarily at the little trail where the howitzers had pulled off the main road as though it

*Survivors of Task Force Smith believe he was PFC Kenneth Shadrock, killed in action at about 0830, 5 July 1950.

meant to try to overrun the battery which its crew evidently had located. Fortunately, however, it did not leave the road but instead, after a moment, continued on toward Osan. The 105-mm howitzers fired at ranges of 150-300 yards as the tanks went by, but the shells only jarred the tanks and bounced off. Altogether, the tanks did not average more than one round each in return fire.

Three bazooka teams from the artillery had posted themselves near the road before the tanks appeared. When word came that the tanks were through the infantry, two more bazooka teams, one led by Colonel Perry and the other by Sgt. Edwin A. Eversole, started to move into position. The first tank caught both Perry and Eversole in the rice paddy between the howitzers and the highway. When Eversol's first bazooka round bounced off the turret of the tank, he said that tank suddenly looked to him "as big as a battleship." This tank fired its 85-mm cannon, cutting down a telephone pole which fell harmlessly over Eversole who had flung himself down into a paddy drainage ditch. A 105-mm shell hit the tracks of the third tank and stopped it. The other tanks in this group went on through. The four American howitzers remained undamaged.

After these tanks had passed out of sight, Colonel Perry took an interpreter and worked his way up close to the immobilized enemy tank. Through the interpreter, he called on the crew to come out and surrender. There was no response. Perry then ordered the howitzers to destroy the tank. After three rounds had hit the tank, two men jumped out of it and took cover in a culvert. Perry sent a squad forward and it killed the two North Koreans.

During this little action, small arms fire hit Colonel Perry in the right leg. Refusing to be evacuated, he hobbled around or sat against the base of a tree giving orders and instructions in preparation for the appearance of more tanks.

In about ten minutes the second wave of tanks followed the last of the first group. This time there were more--"a string of them," as one man expressed it. They came in ones, twos, and threes, close together with no apparent interval or organization.

When the second wave of tanks came into view, some of the howitzer crew members started to "take off." As one present said, the men were "shy about helping." The officers had to drag the ammunition up and load the pieces themselves. The senior noncommissioned officers fired the pieces. The momentary panic soon passed and, with the good example and strong leadership of Colonel Perry and 1st Lt Dwain L. Scott before them, the men returned to their positions. Many of the second group of tanks did not fire on the artillery at all. Again, the 105-mm howitzers did, however, hit another in its tracks, disabling it in front of the artillery position. Some of the tanks had one or

two infantrymen on their decks. Artillery fire blew off or killed most of them; some lay limply dead as the tanks went by; others slowly jolted off onto the road. Enemy tank fire caused a building to burn near the battery position and a nearby dump of about 300 rounds of artillery shells began to explode. The last of the tanks passed the artillery position by 1015. These tanks were from the 107th Tank Regiment of the 105th Armored Division, in support of the North Korean 4th Division.

Colonel Perry estimates that his four howitzers fired an average of 4 to 6 rounds at each of the tanks, and that they averaged perhaps 1 round each in return. After the last tank was out of sight, rumbling on toward Osan, the score stood as follows: the forward 105-mm howitzer, and 2.36-inch bazookas fired from the infantry position, had knocked out and left burning 1 tank and damaged another so that it could not move; the artillery had stopped 2 more in front of the battery position, while three others though damaged had managed to limp out of range toward Osan. This made 4 tanks destroyed or immobilized and 3 others slightly damaged but serviceable out of a total of 33.

For their part, the tanks had destroyed the forward 105-mm howitzer and wounded one of its crew members, had killed or wounded an estimated 20 infantrymen, and had destroyed all the parked vehicles behind the infantry position. At the main battery position the tanks had slightly damaged one of the four guns by a near miss. Only Colonel Perry and another man were wounded at the battery position.

Task Force Smith was not able to use any antitank mines--one of the most effective methods of defense against tanks--as there were none in Korea at the time. Colonel Perry was of the opinion that a few well-placed antitank mines would have stopped the entire armored column in the road.

After the last of the tank column had passed through the infantry position and the artillery and tank fire back toward Osan had subsided, the American position became quiet again. There was no movement of any kind discernible on the road ahead toward Suwon. But Smith knew that he must expect enemy infantry soon. In the steady rain that continued throughout the morning, the men deepened their foxholes and otherwise improved their positions.

Perhaps an hour after the enemy tank column had moved through, Colonel Smith, from his observation post, saw movement on the road far away, near Suwon. This slowly became discernible as a long column of trucks and foot soldiers. Smith estimated the column to be about six miles long. It took an hour for the head of the column to reach a point 1,000 yards in front of the American infantry. There were three tanks in front, followed by a long line of trucks, and, behind these,

several miles of marching infantry. There could be no doubt about it, this was a major force of the North Korean Army pushing south--the 16th and 18th Regiments of the NK 4th Division, as learned later.

Whether the enemy column knew that American ground troops had arrived in Korea and were present in the battle area is unknown. Later, Sr. Col. Lee Hak Ku, in early July operations officer of the NK II Corps, said he had no idea that the United States would intervene in the war, that nothing had been said about possible US intervention, and that he believed it came as a surprise to North Korean authorities.

With battle against a greatly superior number of enemy troops only a matter of minutes away, the apprehensions of the American infantry watching the approaching procession can well be imagined. General MacArthur later referred to his commitment of a handful of American ground troops as "that arrogant display of strength" which he hoped would fool the enemy into thinking that a much larger force was at hand.

When the convoy of enemy trucks was about 1,000 yards away, Colonel Smith, to use his own words, "threw the book at them." Mortar shells landed among the trucks and .50-caliber machine gun bullets swept the column. Trucks burst into flames. Men were blown into the air; others sprang from their vehicles and jumped into ditches alongside the road. The three tanks moved to within 200-300 yards of the American positions and began raking the ridge line with cannon and machine gun fire. Behind the burning vehicles an estimated 1,000 enemy infantry detrucked and started to deploy. Behind them other truckloads of infantry stopped and waited. It was now about 1145.

The enemy infantry began moving up the finger ridge along the east side of the road. There, some of them set up a base of fire while others fanned out to either side in a double enveloping movement. The American fire broke up all efforts of the enemy infantry to advance frontally. Strange though it was, the North Koreans made no strong effort to attack the flanks; they seemed bent on getting around rather than closing on them. Within an hour, about 1230, the enemy appeared in force on the high hill to the west of the highway overlooking and dominating the knob on that side held by a platoon of B Company. Smith, observing this, withdrew the platoon to the east side of the road. Maj. Floyd Martin, executive officer of the 1st Battalion, meanwhile supervised the carrying of available ammunition stocks to a central and protected area back of the battalion command post. The 4.2-inch mortars were moved up closer, and otherwise the men achieved a tighter defense perimeter on the highest ground east of the road. In the exchange of fire that went on an increasing amount of enemy mortar and artillery fire fell on the American position. Enemy machine guns on hills overlooking the right flank now also began firing on Smith's men.

Earlier, Colonel Perry had twice sent wire parties to repair the communications wire between the artillery and the infantry, but both had returned saying they had been fired upon. At 1300 Perry sent a third group led by his Assistant S-3. This time he ordered the men to put in a new line across the paddies east of the road and to avoid the area where the earlier parties said they had received fire.

About 1430, Colonel Smith decided that if any of his command was to get out, the time to move was at hand. Large numbers of the enemy were now on both flanks and moving toward his rear; a huge enemy reserve waited in front of him along the road stretching back toward Suwon; and his small arms ammunition was nearly gone. A large enemy tank force was already in his rear. He had no communications, not even with Colonel Perry's artillery a mile behind him, and he could hope for no reinforcements. Perry's artillery had fired on the enemy infantry as long as the fire direction communication functioned properly, but this too had failed soon after the infantry fight began. The weather prevented friendly air from arriving at the scene. Had it been present it could have worked havoc with the enemy-clogged road.

Smith planned to withdraw his men by leapfrogging units off the ridge, each jump of the withdrawal covered by protecting fire of the next unit ahead. The selected route of withdrawal was toward Osan down the finger ridge on the right flank, just west of the railroad track. First off the hill was C Company, followed by the medics, then battalion headquarters, and, finally, B Company, except its 2d Platoon which never received the withdrawal order. A platoon messenger returned from the company command post and reported to 2d Lt. Carl F. Bernard that there was no one at the command post and that the platoon was the only group left in position. After confirming this report Bernard tried to withdraw his men. At the time of the withdrawal the men carried only small arms and each averaged two or three clips of ammunition. They abandoned all crew-served weapons--recoilless rifles, mortars, and machine guns. They had no alternative but to leave behind all the dead and about 25 to 30 wounded litter cases. A medical sergeant, whose name unfortunately has not been determined, voluntarily remained with the latter. The slightly wounded moved out with the main units, but when enemy fire dispersed some of the groups many of the wounded dropped behind and were seen no more.

Task Force Smith suffered its heaviest casualties in the withdrawal. Some of the enemy machine gun fire was at close quarters. The captain and pitcher of the regimental baseball team, 1st Lt. Raymond "Bodie" Adams, used his pitching arm to win the greatest victory of his career when he threw a grenade forty yards into an enemy machine gun position, destroying the gun and killing the crew. This particular gun had caused heavy casualties.

About the time B Company, the initial covering unit, was ready to withdraw, Colonel Smith left the hill, slanted off to the railroad track and followed it south to a point opposite the artillery position. From there he struck off west through the rice paddies to find Colonel Perry and tell him the infantry was leaving. While crossing the rice paddies Smith met Perry's wire party and together they hurried to Perry's artillery battery. Smith had assumed that the enemy tanks had destroyed all the artillery pieces and had made casualties of most of the men. His surprise was complete when he found that all the guns at this battery position were operable and that only Colonel Perry and another man were wounded. Enemy infantry had not yet appeared at the artillery position.

Upon receiving Smith's order to withdraw, the artillerymen immediately made ready to go. They removed the sights and breech locks from the guns and carried them and the aiming circles to their vehicles. Smith, Perry, and the artillerymen walked back to the outskirts of Osan where they found the artillery trucks as they had left them, only a few being slightly damaged by tank and machine gun fire.

Perry and Smith planned to take a road at the south edge of Osan to Ansong, assuming that the enemy tanks had gone down the main road toward Pyongtaek. Rounding a bend in the road near the southern edge of the town, but short of the Ansong road, Smith and Perry in the lead vehicle came suddenly upon three enemy tanks halted just ahead of them. Some or all of the tank crew members were standing about smoking cigarettes. The little column of vehicles turned around quickly, and, without a shot being fired, drove back to the north edge of Osan. There they turned into a small dirt road that led eastward, hoping that it would get them to Ansong.

The column soon came upon groups of infantry from Smith's battalion struggling over the hills and through the rice paddies. Some of the men had taken off their shoes in the rice paddies, others were without head covering of any kind, while some had their shirts off. The trucks stopped and waited while several of these groups came up and climbed on them. About 100 infantrymen joined them in this way. Then, the vehicles continued on unmolested, arriving at Ansong after dark.

There was no pursuit. The North Korean infantry occupied the vacated positions, and busied themselves in gathering trophies, apparently content to have driven off the enemy force.

The next morning, 6 July, Colonel Smith and his party went on to Chonan. Upon arrival there a count revealed that he had 185 men. Subsequently, Capt. Richard Dashmer, C Company commander, came in with 65 men, increasing the total to 250. There were about 150 men killed, wounded, or missing from Colonel Smith's infantry force when he took a

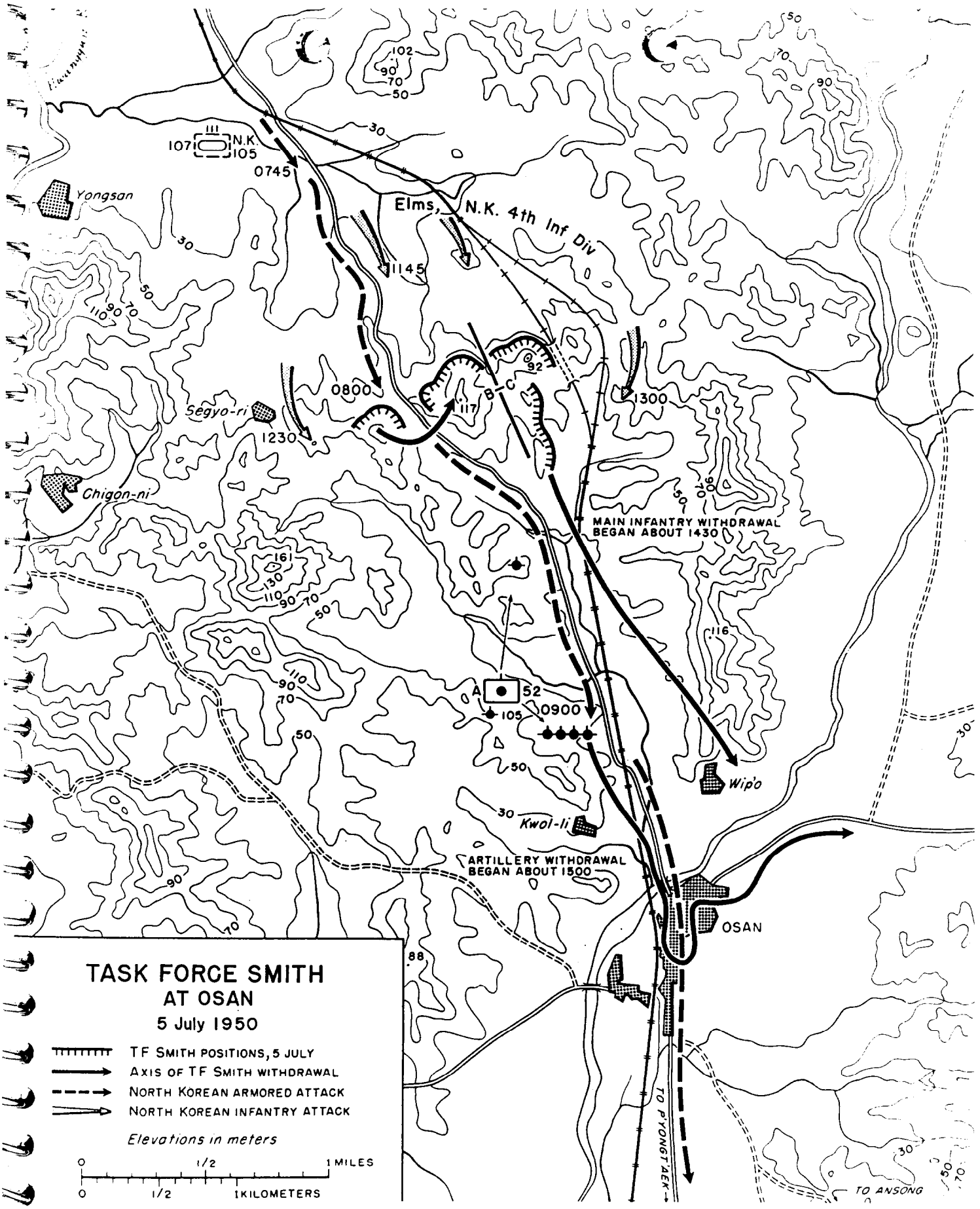
second count later in the day. The greatest loss was in B Company. Survivors straggled in to American lines at Pyongtaek, Chonan, Taejon, and other points in southern Korea during the next several days. Lieutenant Bernard and 12 men of the reserve platoon of B Company reached Chonan two days after the Osan fight. Five times he and his men had encountered North Korean roadblocks. They arrived at Chonan only half an hour ahead of the enemy. A few men walked all the way from Osan to the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan. One man eventually arrived at Pusan on a Korean sampan from the west coast.

None of the five officers and 10 enlisted men of the artillery forward observer, liaison, machine gun, and bazooka group with the infantry ever came back. On 7 July five officers and 26 enlisted men from the artillery were still missing.

The N. K. 4th Division and attached units apparently lost approximately 42 killed and 85 wounded at Osan on 5 July. A diary taken from a dead North Korean soldier some days later carried this entry about Osan: "5 Jul 50...we saw vehicles and American PWs. We also saw some American dead. We found four of our destroyed tanks. Near Osan there was a great battle."

For their valiant holding action which delayed the enemy advance for six precious hours, representatives of Task Force Smith, including LTC (later BG) Charles B. Smith, a 34-year-old West Pointer from New Jersey, were later honored by President Truman at a special ceremony held in Washington, D. C.

Today, on a tree-covered hilltop at Chukmi-Ryung, near Osan, stands an obelisk commemorating the battle at Osan. The monument was erected in 1954 by the 24th Infantry Division, then based in Korea. The bilingual inscription on the plaque commemorates the spot where the first American ground unit--the vanguard of the UNC--did battle in Korea against the Communists.


TASK FORCE SMITH
AT OSAN
5 July 1950
TF SMITH POSITIONS, 5 JULY
AXIS OF TF SMITH WITHDRAWAL
NORTH KOREAN ARMORED ATTACK
NORTH KOREAN INFANTRY ATTACK
Elevations in meters
0 1/2 1 MILES
0 1/2 1 KILOMETERS
Yongsan
Chigon-ni
Segyo-ri
Kwol-li
Wip'o
OSAN
Elms, N.K. 4th Inf Div
N.K.
107
111
105
0745
0800
1230
1145
1300
0900
117
92
B-C
A
52
105
161
116
88
MAIN INFANTRY WITHDRAWAL
BEGAN ABOUT 1430
ARTILLERY WITHDRAWAL
BEGAN ABOUT 1500
TO P'YONGTAEK
TO ANSONG

R[illegible] LEADING TO SUWON *is visible for eight miles from the Task Force Smith position*

TASK FORCE SMITH POSITION *straddling the Osan-Suwon road.*