

1967

## The Inchon Landing: A Case Study in Amphibious Planning

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### Recommended Citation

Heintz, Robert D. (1967) "The Inchon Landing: A Case Study in Amphibious Planning," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 20 : No. 5 , Article 4.  
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THE INCHON LANDING:  
A CASE STUDY IN AMPHIBIOUS PLANNING

A lecture delivered at the Naval War College  
on 27 February 1967 by

Colonel Robert D. Heinl, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)

One hundred and eighteen years before the Communists invaded South Korea, Karl von Clausewitz wrote: "A swift and vigorous transition to attack--the flashing sword of vengeance--is the most brilliant point of the defensive."

The landing at Inchon in September 1950 is one of the most dramatic such transitions from defense to attack in the annals of war. It is also a story of strategic prescience and unflinching nerve on the part of a high commander and of professional resourcefulness and expertise in the forces which were his instrument. Above all, Inchon is a triumph which

could only have been achieved by maritime power, more precisely, by 20th century American maritime power.

No mode of attack is more distinctively American than a smashing assault from the sea against the flank of an enemy. We have done this so often and so successfully that many, including some in uniform, take the capability of assault landing for granted, and--like one senior participant at Inchon--dismiss the landing as "merely a mechanical operation." I hope, before the end of the hour you will realize that amphibious capability is something we can never take for granted, and which we must ever strive to retain.

On a fall afternoon in 1949 the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after paying compliments to colleagues of the Naval Services, gave the House Armed Services Committee a forecast.

"I predict," said General of the Army Omar Nelson Bradley, "that large-scale amphibious operations will never occur again."

Within less than a year, the 1st Marine Division was fighting its way over the beaches and seawalls of Inchon, a Korean west coast port that few people in Washington knew or cared about in 1949.

Our defense posture that year was less than brilliant. Demobilization had gutted the Armed Forces. "America fought the war like a football game," said General Wedmeyer, "after which the winner leaves the field and celebrates." What remained of the defense establishment was wracked by strategic controversy and inter-Service rivalry. The atom bomb, at the end of a conflict whose iron bombs had conspicuously failed to substantiate Douhet, Trenchard, and Mitchell, seemed to foreshadow an apocalypse in which future war--absolute and total--would be waged by aerial thunderbolts. In corollary, it was asserted, seapower--historically our sword and shield--was through. A sample of the top thinking in the Administration and the Defense Department of those days can be found in a 1949 remark by Louis Johnson, then Secretary of Defense, to Admiral Conolly, distinguished predecessor at this College of Admiral Hayward.

Admiral (said Johnson) the Navy is on its way out . . . There's no reason for having a Navy and Marine Corps. General

Bradley tells me that amphibious operations are a thing of the past. We'll never have any more amphibious operations. That does away with the Marine Corps. And the Air Force can do anything the Navy can do nowadays, so that does away with the Navy.

Amphibious warfare, which General Bradley and many other senior officers decried, was a stepchild in the Navy too. The number of officers passed over while serving in amphibious billets was notorious. Op-343, amphibious warfare's front office in CNO, was (as it still is today), headed only by a captain--in an organization containing 38 flag officers and 335 other captains. Although the Navy had 610 amphibious ships in commission in 1945, only 91 were left four years later. In 1948 the Navy scrapped 510 landing craft and built only one. As far as the Marine Corps was concerned, the Fleet Marine Force--35,000 strong in Forrestal's last year--had already been cut by Louis Johnson to 23,000. For 1950 the Defense Department was planning on an FMF made up of six infantry battalions and eleven aviation squadrons. Naval aviation had just had its first postwar carrier, the *United States*, cancelled by the Defense Secretary, and the Marine Corps was fighting with its back to the wall to avoid being abolished outright or transferred to the Army.

In the Far East, thanks largely to Douglas MacArthur, the position of the United States appeared strong. To be sure, China had fallen. And Korea, like Germany, was divided into two parts, one Communist, one free. Yet there was not much concern over Korea, nor had there been since 1947, when the JCS red-banded a memorandum which read:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that, from the standpoint of military security, the United States has little strategic interest in maintaining the present troops and bases in Korea . . .

Even as this paper was being shuffled about, the In Min Gun, or North Korean Peoples Army--a well-armed Communist force of 14 divisions--was proceeding with careful preparations to conquer South Korea.

You are all, I am sure, familiar with the opening scenario of the Korean war. How, on 25 June 1950, the North Korean Army--as MacArthur later said--"struck

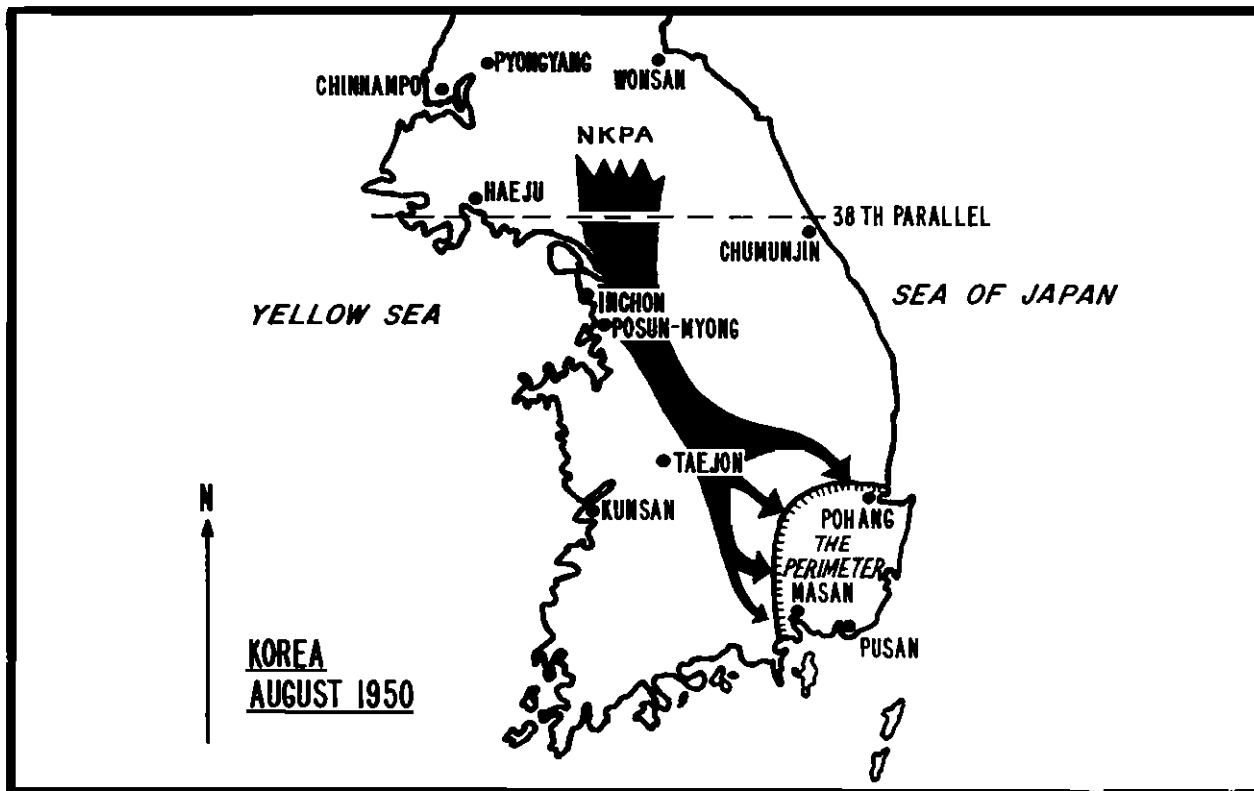
like a cobra." How the South Koreans reeled backward, and how American troops from Japan reeled backward, too. By mid-August the U.N. forces--South Korean, U.S. Army, British, and an undefeated brigade of U.S. Marines--were penned in a small perimeter around Pusan. (See Figure 1.) Here the bulk of the Communist forces were heavily concentrated far south, intent on pushing the U.N. defenders off the peninsula. Since the 7th Fleet controlled the sea, enemy supply lines ran by land down the length of Korea with Seoul as the focal point of their communications. The Communist spearhead was sharp and strong, but their flanks and rear were totally exposed.

On July 4th--no day for celebration in the Far East, when a weak battalion was all we could get to Korea--Douglas MacArthur had already made up his mind as to how the Communists would be defeated. On that day MacArthur called a conference in Tokyo to consider a seaborne attack against the North Korean communications. What he had in mind was to land the 1st Cavalry Division at the Korean west coast port of Inchon (though there might be other places, such as Chinnampo, Kunsan, or Chumunjin) to seize Seoul, cut the enemy communications, and, as he repeated, "hammer and destroy the North Koreans." Anticipating the requirements for this operation, he had already radioed Washington for amphibious troops.

Although MacArthur had no amphibious troops in July, he had an amphibious force. Early in 1950--alone among the Army's senior commanders in his belief in amphibious warfare--MacArthur had borrowed from the Pacific Fleet a tiny training force: 1 AGC, 1 APA, 1 AKA, 1 LST, and a fleet tug. Besides the ships there was a 57-man group of Marines from Landing Force Training Center, Pacific, Coronado, and a Tactical Air Control Squadron, and--most important--the staff of Amphibious Group 1. The Amphibious 1 Group Commander, James H. Doyle, had been Kelly Turner's operations officer in the Central Pacific and was one of the few flag officers then in the Navy with genuine enthusiasm for, and deep professional grasp of, amphibious operations. Doyle was conducting a training exercise in Tokyo Bay when the North Koreans attacked in June and, of course, became the 7th Fleet's amphibious commander from that moment on.

Doyle, his people, and the Marines were only a nucleus, but their skills and experience gave MacArthur what he urgently needed, and needed without

Figure 1.



delay. It was only because of Doyle that MacArthur could start planning an amphibious assault in early July, when the roof was still falling in.

As we now know, events moved too fast to land the 1st Cavalry Division at Inchon. Every single soldier was needed to slow up the Communists in central Korea. We also now know that, although he kept an open mind as to possible landings elsewhere (Kunsan, particularly), MacArthur from the first thought of his objective as Inchon, and he never deviated from his original concept during the weeks of retreat and disaster that lay ahead.

The reasons why MacArthur kept thinking about Inchon are evident. (See Figure 2.) Inchon is the seaport of Seoul, Korea's ancient capital and first city. Seoul is the most important communications center in Korea. The excellent railroad net left by the Japanese fans north and south from Seoul, as do the less excellent highways. The national telephone and telegraph systems radiate from Seoul. Kimpo, Korea's largest and best airport then and now, lies between Inchon and Seoul. Inchon, in effect, is to Seoul what Piraeus was to Athens.

If as a strategic objective Inchon was all advantage, from the tactical viewpoint it was exactly the reverse.

Inchon is of about the same size and general attractiveness as Jersey City. The tidal range at Inchon is 32 feet, a range which is only greatly exceeded by the Bay of Fundy. Tidal currents in the approach channels rarely drop below three knots and, in the main ship channel, may reach seven to eight knots, close to the speed of an LCVP. Inchon's approach channel, the Salee River, is a tortuous dead end street with virtually no room for turning or maneuver. At many points one sunken or disabled ship would block the channel from below and pen in anything above. Despite the currents Inchon's waters are eminently minable and are commanded at several places by heights or islands well suited for batteries that could shoot minesweepers out of the water.

Of beaches, in the common usage of the word, Inchon has none. In the *Joint Dictionary's* definition of a beach ("... that portion of the shoreline designated for landing of a tactical formation") Inchon in 1950 had certain stretches of moles,

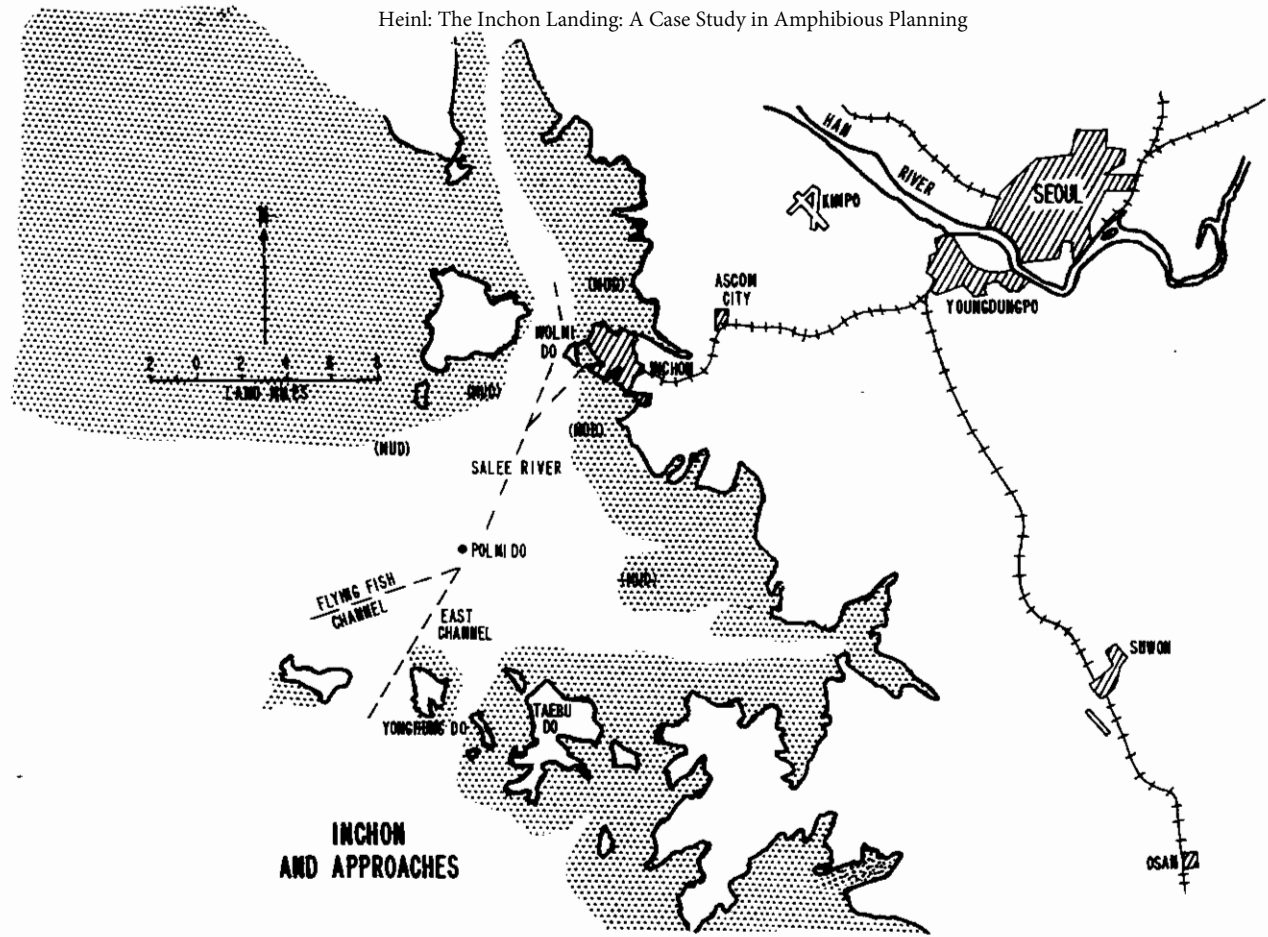


Figure 2.



breakwaters, and seawalls which Admiral Doyle's planners considered least objectionable. Beach exits were mainly the go-downs, railroad yards, and factories of a congested Oriental city.

Taking into consideration the underwater gradients approaching these so-called beaches, a tidal height of 23 feet is required to get LCVP's and LCM's ashore, while 29 feet is needed for LST's. Tidal heights of this magnitude prevail at Inchon only once a month for about three to four days.

Later on General Almond, of whom we shall hear more, said Inchon was "the worst possible place where we could bring in an amphibious assault." But because it was the worst possible place it was also, in a sense, the best possible. There is an ancient Chinese apothegm that "the wise general is one able to turn disadvantage to his own advantage."

Besides the physical obstacles to a landing at Inchon, there were two other obstacles which, if anything, would have seemed to anyone but MacArthur and Admiral Doyle even more forbidding. One was to find the forces--landing forces and assault shipping--capable of executing such a near-impossible landing. The other was to convince a large and exalted body of doubters that an amphibious attack, even if practicable, was the correct counterblow to the Communist invasion and that Inchon was the place. At this time, for example, a strategy being enthusiastically urged on the JCS, as well as any correspondent who would listen, was that we should progressively bomb the communications and principal cities of North Korea, and that by the time this program reached the outskirts of Pyongyang the Communists would sit down and negotiate.

Finding qualified amphibious troops presented grave difficulties, because the only such we had in 1950 were Marines, and the last thing anybody in the Pentagon or White House of those days wanted to see was another exhibition of Marine headline-hunting and publicity--such as a victory. Besides, there were not very many Marines. Louis Johnson had seen to that.

By dint of tooth pulling, MacArthur had obtained a Marine brigade in early July for service in the Pusan perimeter. It says much for the climate of the times that the decision even to let Marines into the war--when our other ground forces were being drubbed

the length of Korea--had to be personally approved by President Truman. To assemble a war strength division of Marines from the Corps which numbered less than 70,000 would require mobilization of the Reserve. It would require transfer of practically the entire Atlantic Fleet Marine Force to the Pacific. It would require the reactivation, organization, and mount-out, within days, of new regiments and new battalions made up of reservists, Navy Yard guards, and school troops. This tremendous feat of planning and sheer will would be worth an entire lecture in itself. The two men, above all, who made it succeed were Lieutenant General Shepherd, commanding Fleet Marine Force Pacific (a trusted friend of MacArthur's), and General Cates, Commandant of the Marine Corps, whose nerve, optimism, and powerful personality (backed by a sympathetic House Armed Services Committee in the clinches) brushed all aside. The Reserve was called up on 19 July. The 1st Marine Division sailed from San Diego on 12 August. Not quite all the division sailed from San Diego, however. One Battalion Landing Team happened to be in the Mediterranean with the 6th Fleet, so they sailed from Crete via Suez. And, of course, one-third of the division which was to land at Inchon (the Marine brigade MacArthur had obtained earlier) was fighting in the Pusan perimeter.

Few military operations in history have been as strenuously opposed as Inchon. Aside from the general conviction in the Army and Air Force that amphibious operations were passé, we must remember that our defenses were stretched perilously thin and that any commitment of forces to Korea only heightened our exposure elsewhere--for example, what would we use if the Russians decided to cross the Rhine? In July, General Collins, the Army Chief of Staff, told MacArthur he would have to fight the war with forces already in the Far East. "Joe, you'll have to change your mind" was all the reply Collins got.

During July 1950, MacArthur sent five messages to the JCS, each one hammering out his requirement for amphibious troops--but nowhere, cagily, did he spell out his plan to employ these forces at that "worst possible place."

Under intense pressure, the JCS finally acceded to the requests for forces but still wanted to find out how MacArthur intended to use them. The upshot of this understandable curiosity was that Forrest Sherman, the CNO, and General Collins were sent to

Tokyo in August for what, in effect, was a showdown with MacArthur. In preparation for this conference, indeed for the forthcoming operation, Admiral Doyle had prepared detailed studies on Inchon as an objective, and the results were anything but encouraging. General Almond, MacArthur's chief of staff, had cautioned Doyle not to bring up this kind of thing, that the General just wasn't interested in details. Doyle simply looked Almond in the eye and said, "He must be made aware of the details." So it was finally arranged that Doyle and his staff would present their findings to MacArthur at the same time as the latter presented his plan to Sherman and Collins.

On 23 August, late in the afternoon, the Amphibious Group 1 staff gave MacArthur 80 minutes of details--intelligence, aerology, beaches, tides, currents, channels, communications, pontoonry, landing craft, ship-to-shore movement, gunfire support, and air support. Then Doyle stood up and gave the broad picture: "The best I can say is that Inchon is not impossible."

For more than an hour, MacArthur let the visitors talk themselves out. Then he stood up and gave a completely extemporaneous exposition of his strategy. "The amphibious landing is the most powerful tool we have," he said. Perhaps, he went on, he had more confidence in the Navy than the Navy had in itself. "I realize that Inchon is a 5,000-to-1 gamble, but I am used to such gambles . . . We shall land at Inchon and I shall crush them!" he ended.

The JCS delegation didn't exactly go home rejoicing, but when they reached Washington they sent MacArthur tepid approval of what he proposed.

On the same day that MacArthur spellbound Sherman and Collins, the forward echelon of 1st Marine Division headquarters reached Tokyo by air. Now that Inchon had a landing force commander, planning would commence in earnest, especially with such a commander as Oliver P. Smith.

Gen. O.P. Smith was an unusual officer. By temperament, he was (and is) a mild, kindly, ascetic thinker and teacher, a practicing Christian who smoked only a pipe and drank sparingly. But O.P. Smith was also a graduate of Benning, of France's Ecole Superieure de Guerre, of New Britain, Peleliu, and Okinawa and, until a few weeks earlier, General

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Cates' Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps-- which possibly reveals more about the man than his externals suggest.

"One of MacArthur's greatest attributes," said Admiral Struble, then Commander 7th Fleet and soon to command the forthcoming operation, "was to get going, and to hit quick." MacArthur announced his intention to strike at Inchon in CINCFE OpPlan 100-B, code named Chromite, on 12 August 1950.

MacArthur's "as soon as possible" meant 15 September 1950. High tide that day would put maximum high water over Inchon's mud flats, a tidal height of 31.2 feet. Twelve days later, on the 27th, there would be 27 feet (two feet short of what the LST's needed). Not until 11 October would there again be 30 feet of water. September 15th was, therefore, not only the earliest possible date but the best too. This left 23 days between arrival of the landing force commander in Tokyo and the target date for the operation. It left no time whatsoever for rehearsals. You will see that the normal planning cycle for such an operation calls for a minimum of 90 days.

From here on, as we talk about the planning, remember that every tick of the clock brings us nearer to September 15th.

Accumulation of intelligence should have proved no problem. Inchon had been used by the U.S. Army for years after World War II, but information of even the most elementary kind was lacking. The Japanese and American tide tables for Inchon differed appreciably, and nobody could say which was correct. Would the mud flats support infantry or vehicles at low water? How high were the seawalls at various stages of the tide? And so on.

By dint of furious search, the planners found an Army warrant officer at Yokohama who had operated Transportation Corps boats all around Inchon harbor, and this man promptly joined Admiral Doyle's staff. Aerial photographs were needed, but Far East Air Forces had no suitable photo planes. The only aircraft in the theater capable of taking the pictures which would reveal the characteristics of the seawalls were two Marine F4U's and a photo detachment aboard one of the carriers. Flying up to 13 sorties a day with only two airplanes, this detachment completed its assignment in four days and turned over

the results to a special photo interpretation team flown straight to Japan from Dayton, Ohio. And plans were set afoot to verify all information by the surest means of all--personal reconnaissance.

But there was one item of intelligence which no one knew or could know, at least then. In early August, Naval Mine Depot, Vladivostok, had sent training teams and several trainloads of assorted mines to Chinnampo and Wonsan. Four thousand of these mines were being distributed from Chinnampo to Inchon, Kunsan, and Mokpo. If undertaken quickly enough, minelaying was something that could take Inchon out of play completely. What the odds on this might be nobody could calculate, but it meant that the sooner MacArthur could collect his forces and strike, the more favorable the odds would be.

I have spoken of the influence of the tides on selection of D-day as 15 September. That day, however, the tidal timing could hardly have been worse. Morning high tide on the 15th came just 45 minutes after sunrise. The next high tide would not come until 27 minutes after sunset. The morning tide would be many hours too soon for the underpowered, single-screw APA's and AKA's, without modern navigational radar in those days, to make a daylight approach up Flying Fish Channel to Inchon. On the other hand, 27 minutes after sunset isn't ordinarily considered the best time for a landing either.

The nub of this problem was how to land a Marine division on two separated tides, one so early that normal assault shipping couldn't make it up the approach channels, the other so late that landings would have to be conducted by twilight and darkness.

Paradoxically, a third problem helped solve the other two. (See Figure 3.)

The island of Wolmi Do is the tactical key to Inchon. Its peak commands the entire harbor and city. No soldier in his right mind would consider landing at Inchon without having control of Wolmi Do.

General Smith's planners therefore concluded that Wolmi Do--which had to be secured initially--should be taken on the morning tide, and that the main landings at Inchon proper could then proceed in the evening. In this way, by solving the Wolmi Do problem

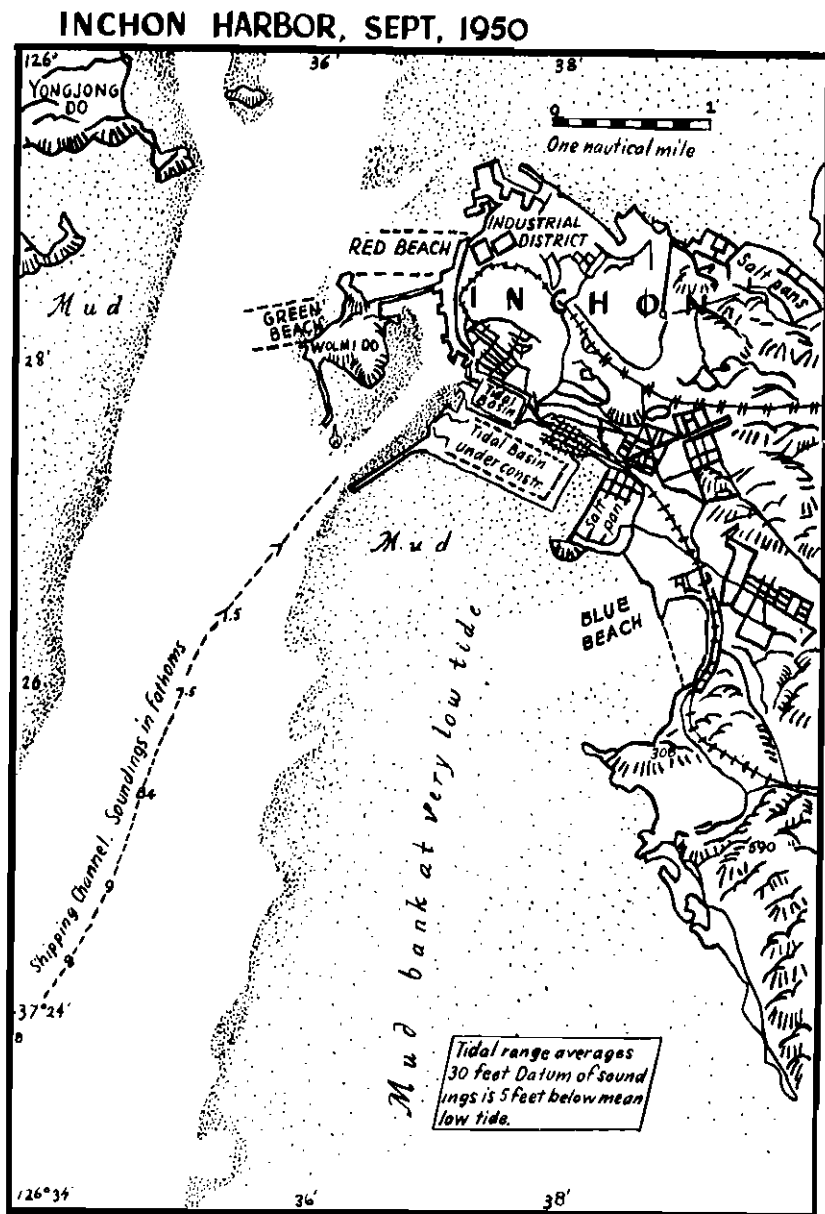


Figure 3.

separately, the Inchon landings could be simplified and streamlined.

But how could the Wolmi Do landing force--a BLT --get to its transport area in time for the morning flood just after sunrise? The usual shipping--APA's, AKA's, and LST's--were out of the question. Admiral Doyle's chief of staff, Capt. Norman Sears, found the answer. He proposed that the entire BLT be embarked in APD's and one LSD, all of which were adequately powered, maneuverable, and equipped with suitable navigational gear for the night approach. Then, to prove he really had faith in his idea, Sears persuaded Admiral Doyle to let him command this Wolmi Do advance attack group.

After morning high tide receded during the day, the Marines on Wolmi Do, although physically cut off, would be in a strong defensive position and, of course, under the guns and air support--ours, that is--of the Fleet. In the very late afternoon the remainder of the Division would land in assault over two widely separated beaches.

Besides the obstacles of intelligence collection, of the tides of the approach, and of the capture of Wolmi Do, certain others remained before the Inchon plan could be firmed up.

You will remember that one-third of the Marine division--what we would today call a Marine expeditionary brigade or MEB built around the 5th Marines and Marine Air Group 33--was at this time fighting away in the Pusan perimeter. General Walker, commanding the 8th Army down there was, to say the least, unenthusiastic over losing his Marine brigade and had gone so far as to say he would not be responsible for holding the perimeter if the Marines were taken away. General Almond--who knew little or nothing about landing operations--sympathized with Walker and tried to persuade General Smith to go into Inchon without the 5th Marines. He even offered to substitute an Army regiment without amphibious training, containing 40 percent Korean civilian levies, and saw no reason why such a formation wouldn't be acceptable for an assault landing two weeks later. However, after another showdown conference--this time with the naval commanders and Generals Smith and Shepherd--Almond and Walker yielded when General MacArthur ordered that the 5th Marines be released anyway.

At length--you may have been wondering when--we can come to the final obstacle of all: the enemy. What, in August 1950, were the enemy capabilities and forces?

Aside from mining Inchon out of the game, the Communists could heavily reinforce the Inchon-Seoul area. They could intensify fortification activities sufficiently to unbalance the equation which MacArthur had set up. Russian aviation or submarines could intervene. With or without Russian support, Chinese ground forces could enter the war (although, if they did, MacArthur predicted that the Air Force would "turn the Yalu River into the bloodiest stream in all history").

While the intelligence estimates somewhat underestimated the strength of the Inchon-Seoul forces at 5,000-10,000 in all, Inchon itself was not strongly held, thus indicating that the North Koreans tended to agree with General Almond's view of Inchon as "the worst possible place." The garrison of Inchon consisted of two battalions of the West Coast Regiment (infantry) and two harbor defense batteries of a coast artillery regiment manning 76mm. and 106mm. guns. Engineers had plans for eventual fortification of Inchon, Russian land mines were being laid, and, as you have seen, harbor defense minefields were eventually planned.

The plan for Operation Chromite contained the following missions (See Figure 2.):

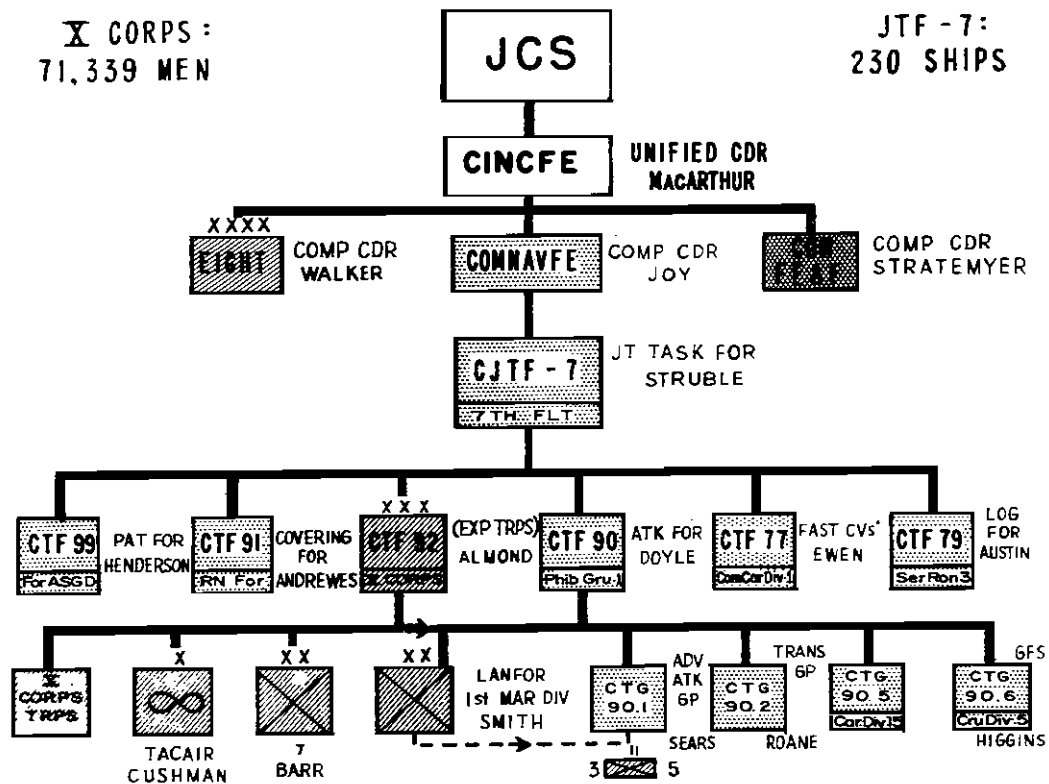
1. Seize the port of Inchon and capture a force beachhead line.
2. Advance rapidly and seize Kimpo airfield.
3. Cross the Han River.
4. Seize and occupy Seoul.
5. Occupy blocking positions north, northeast, and east of Seoul.
6. Using forces in the Inchon-Seoul area as an anvil, crush the Communist army with a stroke from the south by the 8th Army.

The forces and command structure for this operation--projected as for D-day--are shown in Figure 4.



**X CORPS :**  
71,339 MEN

**JTF - 7:**  
230 SHIPS



**MAJOR FORCES AND COMMAND RELATIONS  
D-DAY OPERATION "CHROMITE"**

Figure 4.

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To execute the Inchon operation, General MacArthur, a unified commander, created a joint task force--Joint Task Force 7, a false face for the 7th Fleet headquarters and its commander, Vice Adm. Arthur D. Struble. The troop component of JTF-7 ("expeditionary troops" as it would have been entitled in the Navy/Marine doctrine of the day) was X Corps, commanded by General Almond, who at the same time kept his original hat as MacArthur's chief of staff. But this headquarters had no amphibious capability or function. X Corps would only enter the picture in its own right when the battle ceased to be amphibious. Its headquarters was embarked in an MSTs transport without communications; its commander, Almond, did not even accompany Admiral Struble aboard the force flagship, *Rochester*. As a whole, X Corps was one of few serious mistakes in the plan.

To get around the amphibious impotence of X Corps, jointure of command did not take place until one level lower--that of the attack force under Admiral Doyle, and the landing force under General Smith. Correspondingly, there was one further juncture of command below Doyle and Smith--that of the advance attack group under Captain Sears, and his landing group, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. The remainder of the picture presented no novelties, either in forces or organization, except one. That was that the Tactical Air Command, X Corps, (another false face designation, this the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing) was placed directly under command of the supported unit. Considering the haste with which it had to be organized, Struble's force was an impressive one: 71,339 officers and men in assault or followup landings; and 230 ships from 7 navies, plus MSTs, and even 34 Japanese LST's, one commanded by a former battleship captain. In passing, you may note that although Chromite was to be executed by a joint task force, there was no Air Force participation: the inconvenient remoteness of the objective area from shore bases left aircraft carriers as the only means of providing efficient air support.

The pre-D-day operations--settled only after heated debate--consisted of an extensive program of diversionary strikes against Chinnampo, Ongjio, and Kunsan, and then two days of naval and air bombardment at Inchon, the latter especially planned, by exposure of thinskinned destroyers at short range, to tempt enemy shore batteries into opening fire. The principal points at issue centered over Air Force

participation and the duration of pre-D-day bombardment. Admiral Struble--whose experience had been in Europe and the Southwest Pacific--favored only one day and a light bombardment. Doyle and Smith, thinking in terms of the Central Pacific, wanted five days of everything that could shoot and fly. Under considerable pressure, Admiral Struble finally assented to two days.

The landing plan called for initial seizure of Wolmi Do on the morning tide over Green Beach. (See Figure 5.) In the late afternoon, making the main effort, the 5th Marines in LCVP's would land over Red Beach and seize Observatory Hill, high ground which dominates Inchon town. Since the capacity of Red Beach was barely enough for one regiment, the 1st Marines were to land in amtracs over Blue Beach. An added advantage of the Blue Beach landing was that it would put the 1st Regiment directly on the flank of any enemy counterattack from Seoul as well as sealing off Inchon from the south. The two regiments would link up next morning. Considering the limited daylight available, the initial beachhead lines shown here represent a very respectable bite.

The limited duration of high water posed still another problem; the only time when LST's could beach was on the heels of the assault waves while the front lines were only a block or so inland. Admiral Doyle nevertheless elected to take the risk, as well as the major complication of bringing in eight LST's onto Red Beach (only one of whose skippers had ever beached or retracted his ship previously) at H+30 minutes. Only if these ships got in--to remain stranded until morning high water--could the landing force get the logistics required to maintain it on the beach.

Fire support would come from two CA's and two CL's, the latter British, 8 DD's, and 4 LSMR's. Two Marine squadrons, based on CVE's, would provide the bulk of the close air support, backed up by Navy AD's from the fast carriers. It was hoped that some of the Marine artillery could be gotten ashore onto Wolmi Do in time to support the main landings.

As described, I am afraid I have made this plan sound rather matter-of-fact. However, to work up such a plan--or any plan--within such a compressed time frame was a virtuoso performance. As in the case of Guadalcanal the subordinate echelons, instead of responding to directives and plans from higher

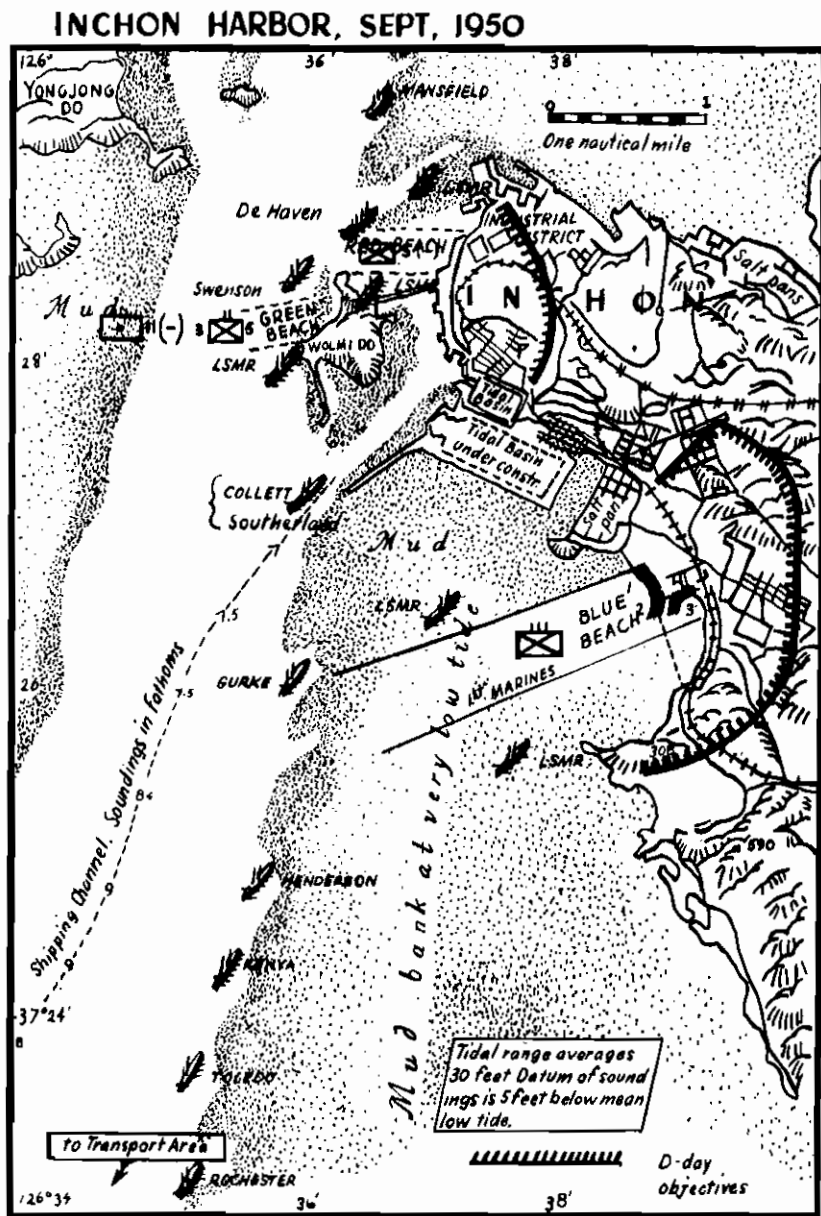


Figure 5.

headquarters, anticipated and almost completely dominated the plans on higher levels. General Smith issued his Inchon order on 27 August. On the next higher echelon Almond didn't issue his order (in theory the basic directive for landing forces) until three days later--and only after a copy of the Marines' order had been sent to X Corps to keep them straight. The final version of Admiral Doyle's numerous drafts didn't get formal promulgation until 3 September, while that of Admiral Struble, the overall commander, came out even later. Struble wasn't even aware of the forthcoming operation until 23 August and didn't get to Tokyo with his staff until 25 August.

The planning problems of the 1st Marine Division deserve special note. General Smith's staff was never assembled in one place at the same time until after the landing. Part of it served as the Marine brigade staff in the perimeter and had to conduct unrelated, hard-fought operations while moonlighting on plans for Inchon. Another part flew with General Smith direct from Camp Pendleton to Japan, while the remainder, of necessity, had to accompany the main body of the division (and most of this last echelon had to stay in Kobe to run the loading and embarkation).

In the journal which he faithfully kept through World War II and Korea, General Smith concluded his entry for 15 September with one sentence: "Operations have gone about as planned." Since this lecture is concerned mainly with the planning process for Operation Chromite, we can let General Smith's note tell the story. Naturally, no battle really goes that smoothly--wasn't it Moltke who said: "No plan ever survives contact with the enemy"?--and Inchon was no exception. Largely speaking, however, what Admiral Doyle and General Smith worked out succeeded quite remarkably. The D-day operations were completed on schedule, with all objectives taken, at a cost of 21 killed and 175 wounded. Twelve days later, after heavy fighting in and for Seoul, the capital was reconquered, and, as MacArthur had predicted from beginning to end, the North Korean Army was destroyed. The In Min Gun had been hit so hard and so quickly from the sea that it was incapable of reaction or resistance until too late.

What are the lessons and conclusions we can draw from Inchon?

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Three, I think, stand out.

1. An operation of this magnitude and unique complexity could never have been accomplished without fully qualified professional amphibious and landing forces in-being. The know-how and cumulative experience of Doyle's amphibs and Smith's Marines were what made the operation possible.

2. Despite ill-considered remarks that Inchon was a gamble where you had to throw the book away, nothing could be further from the truth. Only because we had a "book"--the well-formulated, well-tested, commonly used and understood doctrines of the USF series (ancestors of NWP-22(A) and the NWIP's)--could the Inchon plans be prepared in viable form, under conditions of unbelievable haste, inability to coordinate, and physical separation of staffs and commanders.

3. Inchon was a triumph of seapower in all its manifestations: black-shoe, brown-shoe, and Marines. Only great maritime power--only American maritime power in mid-20th century--could have completely upset this awkward war in a remote place and done so within a matter of days.

Thomas More Molyneux, who in 1759 wrote one of the earliest complete works on amphibious warfare, might well have been thinking of Inchon when he said:

A Military, Naval, Littoral War, when wisely prepared and discreetly conducted, is a terrible Sort of War. Happy for that People who are Sovereigns enough of the Sea to put it into Execution! For it comes like thunder and lightning to some unprepared Part of the World.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Colonel Robert D. Heinl, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.), was educated at Yale University and various U.S. Marine Corps schools.

Colonel Heinl was at Pearl Harbor in 1941; he participated in the campaigns of the South Pacific during World War II; he was a member of the U.S. Occupation Forces in Japan and North China subsequent to World War II; he has served as Director, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico; and he served with the 1st Marine Division in Korea.

From 1958 to 1963 Colonel Heinl was Chief of the U.S. Naval Mission, Haiti. Since that time he has been a free-lance politico-military writer and academic lecturer, who has served as correspondent in Santo Domingo, Vietnam, and at the Arab-Israeli frontier.

Colonel Heinl's published works include *Soldiers of the Sea; A Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations; The Defense of Wake; and The Marshalls*. He is a coauthor of the *Marine Officer's Guide* and has published numerous magazine articles, including "Special Trust and Confidence," which appeared in *Naval Institute Proceedings*, May 1956.