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THE EIGHTH ARMY'S MARCH TO HISTORY

Twenty-one Years of War and Peace

They came! They saw! They fought! From New Guinea to Japan, and later, in Korea — they stayed to get the job done in war and peace alike. This is the Eighth United States Army, so aptly called "The Amphibious Eighth" in battle, termed by some the father of "New Japan," and the friend of the Republic of Korea in war and peace — all in twenty-one brief years.

Within this short span, Eighth Army has taken part in the island-hopping assaults of World War II, occupation of Japan, defense of Korea against Communist aggression, assisted in rehabilitating the Republic of Korea after the armistice, and is now guarding Freedom's Frontier.

The history of any military organization usually centers around the unit's exploits during war. No exception in this respect, Eighth Army has a record of many battlefield victories; but two significant facts, however, do make it an exceptional military organization.

One: On occupation duty in Japan following the end of World War II, Eighth Army accomplished the combined physical occupation, economic rehabilitation, and political democratization of a defeated, demoralized, and anti-democratic society.

Two: Following a successful defense of the Republic of Korea, Eighth Army actively participated, as a combat army in the field, in the rehabilitation of the nation. This act stands as unique tribute to the democratic way of life.

The Amphibious Eighth

June 10th is the anniversary of the activation of Eighth Army at Memphis, Tennessee, in 1944. Those who are now members of this command may, or may not, have played a part in the making of its history during the past 21 years. Today, all of us, by virtue of our membership on the team, are shaping the next chapter.

Following activation, the new military force was immediately ordered overseas, arriving at Hollandia, New Guinea, on Sept. 4, 1944. Lt. Gen. Robert L. Eichelberger, who had commanded I Corps in the Southwest Pacific since 1942, was given command of this newest field army.

Four months elapsed before major amphibious operations were undertaken. Immediately, the Eighth Army assumed command of more than 200,000 troops scattered from Morotai Island to Australia, and began preparing for the "Big Show." This was initially the Philippine campaign, and ultimately, the defeat and occupation of Japan. As the Eighth jumped from island to island, fighting its way nearer to Tokyo, it made more than 60 amphibious assaults, to earn the proud title, the "Amphibious Eighth."

The Philippine Campaign

Following strikes at the small islands of Mapia and Asia, the Eighth took Leyte, in the Philippines.

Despite the misnomer of the Leyte campaign as a "mopping up" operation by GHQ, bitter fighting was ahead for Eighth Army troops. General Eichelberger said later:

"Actually, the Japanese Army was still intact. I was told that there were only 6,000 Japanese left on the island. This estimate was in serious error, as subsequent events proved. Soon Japanese began streaming across the Ormoc valley from eastern into western Leyte, well-equipped and apparently well-fed. It took several months of the roughest kind of combat to defeat this army. Between Christmas Day and the end of the campaign we killed more than 27,000 Japanese.

"Many others, evacuated safely by bancas (small boats), reappeared to fight Eighth Army on other islands in later campaigns. I called these singularly alive veteran troops the Ghosts of Leyte. It should also be noted that after the atomic bomb fell, and Japanese troops surrendered en masse on many islands, there were almost none left to surrender on Leyte. As I recall, only four Japanese soldiers presented themselves."

In early 1945, Eighth Army, in support of Sixth Army, struck Luzon in the Philippines, and drove rapidly into Manila. On Feb. 7, General MacArthur said the capital had been restored to Allied hands.

Island After Island Falls to Eighth

During February, March, and April 1945, the Eighth continued to drive through the Pacific. A series of amphibious landings cleared the Verde Island passages and San Bernardino Strait. Simultaneously, five "Victor" operations were launched.

Eighth Army set an all-time record for swift amphibious movement during the "Victor" Operations. There were 52 D-days, between Christmas Day, 1944, and the Japanese surrender in August, 1945. In one 44-day period, these troops conducted 14 major landings and 24 minor landings -- for an average of one landing every day and a half.

There was never a time during this action-packed interlude when some task force of the command was not fighting. Most of the time, even hundreds of miles apart, individual task forces were fighting separate battles.

Eighth Army fought on Leyte, on Luzon, on Palawan and Zamboanga peninsula; on Panay and Bohol and Negros; on Mindanao, Mindoro, and Marinduque; on Cebu and Capul and Samar and a score of smaller islands which, now, are remembered by most GIs only as "faraway places with strange-sounding names." These separate battles--though sometimes bewildering to the troops themselves--were all pieces in the gigantic jigsaw puzzle that was the Philippines operations.

The "Amphibious Eighth" assumed control of the Philippine Archipelago on July 1, 1945. At that time it was directed to take over the entire Luzon operation, freeing the Sixth Army for operations elsewhere in the Pacific.

By August 15, 1945, enemy resistance in the Philippines was declared at an end. Now final preparations for invasion of the Japanese mainland were undertaken. In the first seven months of the year, Eighth Army not only performed the tactical mission of clearing the southern portion of the Philippine Archipelago and mopping up pockets of enemy resistance on Luzon; but it also set up bases on Leyte which re-equipped and resupplied major units for the Luzon and Okinawa campaigns.

Operation Coronet

Eighth Army was preparing for Operation Coronet, in which it was to make the main assault against the Tokyo plain, when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. With the bombing of Nagasaki and the subsequent surrender of the Japanese, Eighth Army's mission was changed -- from one of assault to one of occupation.

Occupation and Rehabilitation of Japan

Eighth Army's new mission was as momentous as any it had ever faced. Now a fighting force was to discard amphibious tractors for the occupation, rehabilitation, and political democratization of Japan.

Faced with this task, first elements of Eighth Army landed peacefully at Atsugi Airdrome on Aug. 30, 1945. Initially, its occupation area covered the northern part of the island of Honshu, including the Tokyo area, as well as the island of Hokkaido. Sixth Army occupied the rest of Japan. However, on Jan. 1, 1946, Eighth Army assumed responsibility for all the ground occupation in Japan.

Disarm Four Million Japanese

During this occupation, Eighth Army--with the help of the Japanese themselves--disarmed four million armed men of the Japanese Army and Navy in the home islands. Shortly afterward a giant repatriation program began to return home more than six and one-half million Japanese who were overseas at the end of the war. Under the Eighth's direction, a million displaced Koreans, Ryukyuans and Chinese who served as slave labor were sent home.

Next came destruction of Japan's war potential, including 100,000 airplanes, 3,000 tanks, 90,000 field pieces, 3,000,000 items of small arms, and 1,000,000 tons of explosives. Then came the trial of war criminals. These tasks were the immediate ones; but the task of guiding the Japanese into peaceful pursuits and familiarizing them with democratic life would not wait for the completion of the disarmament and punishment programs. All of these had to be started simultaneously; indeed, the great and important undertaking of creating a democratic Japan began with the arrival of that first planeload of American soldiers.

Eighth Army established vast numbers of American soldiers in Japan without provoking combat; provided housing, clothing, and recreation for them; and erected thousands of houses for the "dependents to come."

By 1948, the program was far enough advanced to permit Eighth Army to foster a local autonomy program designed to place responsibility for government in the hands of the people.

Economic rehabilitation also progressed rapidly. An export-import program began during the second year of occupation. In addition, land reform measures were effected, breaking up the giant land holdings, and giving tenant farmers a chance to purchase the land they cultivated. Under steady care and surveillance, Japanese industry began to revive.

Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker assumed command of Eighth Army on Sept. 3, 1948. In 1949, the last full year of Eighth Army's occupation of Japan, Japanese national recovery was well advanced.

Peacetime Military Duties

Rapid progress in the Japanese recovery program permitted the Eighth Army to gradually curtail occupational responsibilities and begin normal peacetime military duties. In April 1949, despite acute shortages of personnel and limited training areas, a Combat Effectiveness Program began at squad level. Training developed to a point where units were conducting battalion and regimental exercises at the time US troops were ordered to Korea.

Despite many handicaps, approximately 75 percent of all the tactical units had completed battalion level training by April 1950. In February 1950, General J. Lawton Collins, then Army Chief of Staff, inspected Eighth Army troops in Japan. Satisfied with what he found, Collins told a congressional committee shortly afterward: "In a few months they will be ready..."

Korea Invaded by Communists

It was a very few months indeed before these same troops were forced into readiness-- and the Korean War.

In the early morning of June 25, 1950, the North Korean Peoples Army struck across the 38th parallel, and knifed down the historic invasion route to Seoul, in a vicious, unprovoked attack. Within hours plans were in operation to provide ammunition and supplies for the Republic of Korea Army.

- Five days later, Task Force Smith, which was composed of elements of the 24th Division, was transported by air from Japan to Pusan.

Rushing north to Osan by train, truck and foot, Task Force Smith met the enemy in ground combat within days of arriving in Korea. Hopelessly outnumbered, the American forces tood fast. After gallantly holding the invaders off for some six hours, their ammunition spent, and supplies cut off, they were forced to withdraw to Taejon.

More Troops Needed to Strength ROK Forces

Meanwhile, other American troops were arriving in Korea. By July 5, a large part of the 24th Division had landed at Pusan. And by July 6, the entire division had completed the movement, with the exception of an engineer battalion left in Japan to expedite the shipment of ammunition and supplies. Maj. Gen. William Dean commanded the force, which was designated USA Forces in Korea.

The 24th Division had been given the mission "to assist and stabilize the situation and re-establish the boundary on the 38th parallel." It was quickly realized they could not accomplish the task alone, and that the mission would have to be changed.

The power of the enemy's thrust shocked both American and Korean defenders into a grim respect. It was immediately apparent it would take more than one US division to strengthen ROK forces sufficiently to stop the North Koreans and drive them out of South Korea. At the same time, the vital necessity of holding the port of Pusan, and the supply lines out of there, was painfully evident. So the 24th, establishing its forward headquarters at Taejon, assumed the new mission of delaying the enemy along the Pusan-Taegu-Kunchon-Taejon-Chonan axis until further help could arrive, falling back only when withdrawal was the alternative to disaster.

Despite arrival of the 25th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Division, on July 18-19, and their immediate commitment to the fighting, the area of South Korea shrank to defenses around Pusan as the entire UN line bent under the mechanized power of the North Korean Forces which pressed against American and ROK perimeters.

Fight and withdraw! Fight and withdraw! These were tactics now being employed by the Eighth Army. Time was strength, and by withdrawing strategically, troops of the Eighth Army were able to deny the enemy the speed he needed to gain Pusan.

"We Are Going to Hold"

The invader voiced his intentions of driving the defenders into the sea; and the sea was not far away. But General Walker, who on July 17 assumed command of all ROK forces and accepted the flag of the United Nations, made clear the intention of Eighth Army and the United Nations to stay. Said he: "There will be no Dunkirk. There will be no Bataan. A retreat to Pusan would be one of the greatest butcheries in history...I want everyone to understand that we are going to hold."

Thus the first full month of battle ended. In the days of bitter fighting to come, Eighth Army's holding operation around the perimeter guarding Pusan would prove one of the most important in the annals of the American Army.

The Push North

In what is now considered one of the most outstanding amphibious operations in military history, Eighth Army's X Corps landed at Inchon on Sept. 15, 1950. The 261-vessel armada, with its invasion personnel, came in at floodtide. X Corps' 7th Division and 1st Marine Division troops stormed ashore to begin a thrust into the heart of enemy territory. That assault was the signal for Eighth Army to attack and break the bonds that held it within the Pusan Perimeter. Enemy defenses crumbled. In an historic advance, units of the 1st Cavalry Division soon made contact with a regiment of the 7th Infantry Division in the vicinity of Osan.

Meanwhile, on Sept. 25, X Corps' units liberated Seoul, the capital of the Republic. Three days later, General MacArthur formally restored the city to President Syngman Rhee. On the same day, the 24th Division captured Taejon. Victory now seemed in sight.

To Cross the 38th Parallel or Not?

This was the prelude to a new phase of the Korean War. Prior to the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, problems confronting UN forces had been purely military in nature. With the disintegration of North Korean military power and the advance of Eighth Army to the 38th parallel, political factors began to assume increasing significance.

As elements of Eighth Army pushed northward all along the front, it was not known if UN forces would cross the 38th parallel. Then, on Oct. 3, 1950, General MacArthur announced ROK troops were already in North Korea.

By the end of October, shattered remnants of the North Korean Army were forced into a small area in the northwestern part of Korea. Some elements of the 7th Division had even reached the Yalu river, the boundary between Korea and Manchuria.

Intervention by Chinese

On Nov. 2, units north of the Chungchon River were hit hard by enemy forces, including large numbers of Chinese. These UN units were forced to withdraw to the Chungchon River line and reorganize.

Twenty-three days later, on Nov. 25, the enemy struck a massive blow along the Eighth Army's right flank. A concentration of Communist Chinese forces (CCF), hitherto skillfully concealed, effected a penetration which threatened the flank. Some US, Turkish, and British units held the flank, while the remaining forces withdrew to establish a defensive line just south of the 38th Parallel.

As the line above Seoul was being formed, General Walker, who had commanded the Eighth Army since 1948, was killed in a jeep-truck accident, and Lt. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway assumed command. At this time the Eighth Army included contingents from eleven nations; the United States, Republic of Korea, Australia, Canada, France, Greece, The Netherlands, Philippines, Thailand, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

Seoul Falls to The Enemy Once Again

On New Year's eve, the enemy's long-awaited general offensive began and breakthroughs became widespread. General Ridgway ordered a further withdrawal to a line which ran along the south bank of the Han River to Yangpyong, where it veered northeast to Hongchon, and then turned east to the sea near Chumunjin. As the Eighth Army fought heroic delaying actions, evacuation of Seoul was undertaken. By Jan. 4, 1951, when the city fell to enemy forces, tons of supplies and millions of refugees had been routed to areas in the south.

The enemy was quick to capitalize on his advance; and despite gallant fighting by the Eighth Army, it was forced once again to fall back, fighting every foot of the way. As had been expected, the enemy drive bogged down at a point south of Osan when their supply lines collapsed.

Near the end of January, General Ridgway was certain the enemy offensive was spent. The time to strike back had arrived; and Eighth Army began its second drive up the peninsula. The enemy gave ground slowly, defending each strong point until forced to withdraw.

The Iron Triangle

At this point in the fighting, the enemy was forced back into the Chorwon-Kumwha-Pyongyang area, north of the 38th parallel. The area was popularly called the Iron Triangle. Lt. Gen. James A. Van Fleet took over from General Ridgway on April 14, 1951, Eighth Army threatened Chorwon and Kumwha with pressure that increased hourly.

To protect these vital areas, the Communists jumped off in their CCF Spring Offensive. On May 16 the front exploded. Following a short breather, the enemy renewed their attack against Eighth Army with fresh vigor. Heavy fighting occurred in the central and eastern sectors. Van Fleet exacted tremendous enemy losses in lives and materiel in exchange for time and space as he slowly withdrew his forces.

In six days the Communists penetrated deep into South Korea. As their supply lines became overextended, and due to the tenacity of UN Forces, the drive came to a standstill. This result justified Van Fleet's delaying tactics when Eighth Army dropped its defensive role and struck back fiercely at a quickly withdrawing enemy. By now U.S. elements of Eighth Army had grown to ten major combat units. In action were five Army Infantry divisions: the 24th, 25th, 2d, 7th and 3d; the Army's 1st Cavalry Division, 5th Regimental

Combat Team and 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, and the 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Provisional Brigade.

Enemy Driven Back

By the second week in June, Eighth Army's advance progressed well to the north; and units were in virtually the same positions they had occupied in April. The enemy continued to withdraw and was now well in the rear of the jump-off positions from which he had started his attack.

The absolute failure of the Communist's spring offensive had shown clearly the Chinese and North Korean forces did not have sufficient power to mount an offensive which would defeat the United Nations forces. The best they could hope to achieve was a stalemate.

However, the enemy gave no sign of relinquishing his position in Korea, despite costly defeats and loss of ground. They made a massive effort to maintain supplies in rear areas, and their screening forces fought with characteristic tenacity. Prisoners reported preparations were being made for yet another attempt to drive UN forces from Korea.

Communists Turn to Politics

By July 8, 1951, Chorwon and Kumwha were in the hands of Eighth Army and armored task forces had entered Pyonggang. Although the enemy was still far from beaten, he continued to take a thorough drubbing at the hands of Eighth Army's veterans. The Communist high command apparently found military action unprofitable and turned to the field of politics to achieve a respite.

In a UN-sponsored radio broadcast, Jacob Malik, Russia's representative to the UN, hinted the Communists might be ready to discuss a cease-fire in Korea. After an exchange of messages between General Ridgway and commanders of the North Korean and CCF armies in Korea, the first of a long series of peace talks was convened at Kaesong on July 10, 1951.

Korea: Position Warfare

For two frustrating years, truce talks took place. During this time many of the historic battles in the Korean War took place as each side attempted to take and hold key terrain features. Among these were Old Baldy, Heartbreak Ridge, Punchbowl, Bloody Nose Ridge, and Pork Chop Hill. Two more U.S. Infantry divisions were to see action in this period. The 45th arrived in Korea Dec. 10, 1951, and the 40th on Jan. 22, 1952.

In February 1953, General Maxwell D. Taylor assumed command of Eighth Army. About this time the truce talks took a hopeful turn. Late in April, Operation Little Switch took place, and sick and wounded prisoners of both sides were exchanged. Agreement was finally reached; and fighting stopped at 2200 hours on July 27, 1953.

The Armistice

Following the armistice, General Taylor said, "it is just a suspension of hostilities—an interruption of the shooting. It may or may not be preparatory to a permanent peace; in itself, it does not end the war. It is simply an agreement between military commanders to stop all hostile acts pending a peaceful political settlement."

With the signing of the armistice, Eighth Army began its policy of "watch-and prepare." Now, almost 13 years later, we still maintain this policy. The Communists have thwarted every attempt on the part of the United Nations to arrive at a just, peaceful settlement of the Korean question. Meetings of the Military Armistice Commission, established by the armistice so violations of the agreement could be reported by each side, have been the scene of countless Red attempts to unleash propaganda barrages. The Communists have not indicated they are sincere in their stated intention to negotiate a lasting peace for Korea.

Today, patrols still keep the truce line under constant surveillance. Intelligence continues a steady watch on internal developments in North Korea and Red China. Unceasing training and maneuvers have kept ROK troops and the UN Command in a constant state of combat readiness. All this is part of the truce which is known today as The Longest Armistice.

Tri-Fold Mission

Three important missions have faced Eighth Army since the signing of the armistice:

- (1) Unceasing, round-the-clock vigilance against the possibility of renewed Communist aggression.
- (2) Streamlining of administrative and logistic functions and facilities to effect maximum efficiency at minimum cost.
- (3) Assistance in rebuilding the Republic of Korea's war-shattered economy and her armed forces.

This last mission is one which added the second humanitarian chapter to the history of Eighth Army.

Soldiers of Eighth Army fought side by side with ROK forces in repelling the Communist aggressor. Shortly after the armistice, American soldiers again joined with the people of ROK in repelling other, even more vicious aggressors; chaos, starvation, and disease.

Today, the Eighth U.S. Army and ROK forces still stand side-by-side as members of the United Nations Command. At the present time there are nine major subordinate commands under EUSA: I Corps (Group), 2nd Infantry Division, 7th Infantry Division, 4th U.S. Army Missile Command, 38th Artillery Brigade, EUSA Support Command, EUSA Depot Command, U.S. Army Advisory Group, Korea (KMAG), and EUSA Special Troops.