

The Korean War - The Pusan Perimeter

BLUF: On 25 June 1950, the Communist North Korean military forces crossed the border into democratically controlled South Korea. They forced the South Korean Army, along with the United States and the United Kingdom's defense forces, into a defensive pocket in the Korean Peninsula's southeast corner. For six weeks, despite being outnumbered, the democratic forces held the Pusan Perimeter until a successful offensive could be launched at Inchon on 15 September 1950. During the campaign, over 4000 U.S. Marines took part in the defense of Pusan.

GENERAL STORY: The Battle of the Pusan Perimeter was a large-scale battle between United Nations Command and North Korean forces lasting from 4 August to 18 September 1950. It was one of the first major engagements of the Korean War. An army of 140,000 UN and South Korean troops, having been pushed to the brink of defeat, rallied to make a final stand against the invading Korean People's Army (KPA), 98,000 men strong.

Having been repeatedly defeated by the advancing KPA, UN forces were forced back to the "Pusan Perimeter," a 140-mile defensive line around an area on the southeastern tip of South Korea that included the port of Busan. The UN troops, consisting mostly of forces from the Republic of Korea Army (ROK), the United States, and the United Kingdom, mounted a last stand around the perimeter, fighting off repeated KPA attacks for six weeks as they were engaged around the cities of Daegu, Masan, and Pohang and the Nakdong River. The massive KPA assaults were unsuccessful in forcing the UN troops back further from the perimeter, despite two major pushes in August and September.

North Korean troops, hampered by supply shortages and massive losses, continually staged attacks on UN forces in an attempt to penetrate the perimeter and collapse the line. However, the UN forces used the port to amass an overwhelming advantage in troops, equipment, and logistics, and its navy and air forces remained unchallenged by the KPA during the fight. On 18 September, the KPA force collapsed and retreated in defeat after the UN force launched a counterattack at Inchon on 15 September, and the UN forces in the perimeter broke out from the perimeter the following day. The battle would be the furthest the KPA would advance in the war.

MARINE STORY: At the outset of the Korean War on 25 June 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the Marine Corps to ready a 15,000-man division for duty in Korea as a part of the United Nations Command. The Marine Corps began rebuilding the 1st Marine Division to wartime strength, but in the meantime, assembled a 4,725-man force around the 5th Marine Regiment to assist in the war effort as quickly as possible. On 7 July, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was reactivated in California. The regiment landed at Pusan in South Korea on 3 August. Under BGen. Edward A. Craig, the brigade, was supported by Marine Aircraft Group 33 and became a subordinate unit of the Eighth United States Army under LtGen. Walton Walker.

QUESTIONS

1. What event was the immediate cause of the Korean War?
2. What role did U.S. Marines play in the Pusan Perimeter campaign?
3. Why did the North Korean advance fail?

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