

# Virginians at War

## Korean War: Inchon Landing, Pusan Breakout

### Transcript

NARRATOR: Virginians have always stood at the crossroads of the fight for freedom. It is a battle in which we all reap the benefits.

After the close of World War II, Korea was divided at the 38th parallel with a communist government supported by China and the Soviet Union to the North, and a democratic government supported by the Western Allies to the South.

On June 25, 1950, less than five years later, the United States found itself again drawn into war. The Korean War, often called the Forgotten War, was the first military action conducted by the United Nations. Twenty-two nations supported the UN Resolution, and moved to defend South Korea from an unprovoked invasion from the North. Spearheaded by US forces, in a country halfway around the world, the Korean War became a study in frustration. Punctuated by weather extremes, geographic hardships, political influences, and fluctuating front lines. The result was 33,741 Americans killed in action, with the enemy being held at the 38th parallel by the signing of an armistice. Today, over 50 years later, the United States still monitors that border.

After the first shot was fired, the invading North Korean forces pushed relentlessly south, squeezing the American and South Korean forces onto the Pusan Peninsula. This created the Pusan Perimeter, a 140 mile long defensive position, and scene of some of the war's fiercest fighting. On September 15, 1950, the Marines led by General Douglas MacArthur landed on the West Coast of South Korea at Inchon Harbor. This masterful invasion led to the recapture of Seoul, the capital of South Korea. Meanwhile to the South, the 8th Army, United Nations, and South Korean troops, led by General Walton H. Walker, broke out of the Pusan Perimeter, attacked Northward, and joined forces with MacArthur to push the North Korean People's Army out of South Korea, and beyond.

## **INCHON LANDING PUSAN BREAKOUT THE INVASION - North Korea Pushes South**

LEWIS: In 1950, July, we got the word that North Korea had invaded South Korea. Papers came out, and we weren't too much concerned because you know, it didn't sound like much. They called it police action.

JONES: The Korean attack on the 25th of June, 1950 was a big surprise, at least to me in the Army. You know, I think to our politicians as well.

JOHNS: By that time in 1950, the UN had entered the picture. Of course, the UN called on all of the nations to provide forces, and the US was at that time...was at peace, and we weren't prepared for...on a wartime footing, began to mobilize.

SMITH: Honestly, I thought they'd done sent me to the end of the world. But it was...I don't know, you get a lot of fears and you wonder what you're getting into. It kind of changes your whole attitude about things. To me, as long as you're over there you stayed scared because you never knew when they was going to....what was coming off or when you was going to get hit or what.

PLEASANT: On the fourth of July morning, all the fireworks started. When you looked down the road, here comes some tanks. And we sat there and counted...37 tanks. They went on, only thing we had was a 75 trying to knock out one, and we never could knock out one. First day at battle, we lost 120 soldiers in my company. There were 120 replacements after the first day. When we got the word to get out of there, we're just lucky we got out of there. It took us 4 days and 4 nights to get back to where the troops were then, sent 400 over there. And, out of that 400 I understand, I think it was only about 16 of that 400 that came out of there.

COOK: At night, in the middle of the night, the American tanks were on the road and the Korean tanks came down and they were confronted, right, one right in front of the other. And evidently they had placed mines behind, that tanks when they backed up, they exploded, blew the track off. And you could hear the guys in the tank saying point blank fire, and one round went right down the muzzle of the North Korean tank and just split it open. They were that close together. It went on about all night.

SMITH: The Koreans, they would, especially during daylight hours, they would pretend they were farmers. Once it got dark, or some of them didn't even wait til it

got dark, by the time your back was turned, that's when they'd hit you. Well they dressed just like the civilians did, and you couldn't tell the difference in them. We didn't know whether they was the enemy or not. I had a good buddy from, he was from Wisconsin, he got blowed up with a landmine. And you know, that's hard to take, watching them boys like that....because they was some good buddies.

### **THE PUSAN PERIMETER - Fight for Survival**

COOK: We moved back to Pusan Perimeter, and we got there about midnight. And we was at an old schoolhouse building, and you could see the ocean behind us, there wasn't anywhere to go. No ships at [], it was kind of a desperate time because you couldn't go anywhere, there wasn't anyone drawing from there. It was hard to get water. We had a little purifying pill that you're supposed to put into water, let it stay a half hour before you drank it. And sometimes we'd get so desperate we would take the pill and drink the water and let it purify in our stomach, and fill our canteen back up again.

BELBUSTI: I couldn't understand why I was shaking because it wasn't really that cold but I was shaking like a leaf, when I was in that ditch. It was...after a little while, I realized why I was shaking. It was because I was scared, not because I was cold.

JONES: It was a very difficult period in the initial days. Very heavy casualties during this time. We went from 800 men battalions to perhaps 300 men. When the 9th Infantry had gone into Korea, it had two white battalions and one black battalion, commanded by a white Lieutenant Colonel and a white Major Executive. All the other officers and men were African-American. As a result of all of the casualties, replacements came in and our Colonel decided this was ridiculous, and from then on there was no such thing as differentiation. White soldiers replaced black, black soldiers replaced white. The whole thing was forgotten, didn't matter, they were soldiers and good ones.

WOOD: General Walker fought on the Pusan Perimeter, Pusan is down on the coast where the ships came in. The division commander, he gave to me a message that said "all men will hold the position they now occupy, for the honor of the country and the division." We were hold on by our teeth. But I lost many dear friends in that fight, I say I lost my whole platoon, it was destroyed, it just...everyone was fighting for their lives.

CUTHRELL: The first impression I got that I was in trouble was...the Sergeant, he says, there were only outnumbered six to one. "Well that's about even." And right then I knew that I didn't really want to be here, so....we spent about four weeks at the Pusan Perimeter, and lots was going on, we would be cut off for two or three days at a time. There'd be as much fighting in the rear as there would be in the front. We were at a place called Battle Mount, and that changed hands 13 times in 14 days. When MacArthur was planning on invading Inchon, they pulled the Marines out so we had to spread out even further, and sometimes there'd be 300 yards between units, between squads. Because the line was so thin and we didn't have enough people. Nobody even thought about retreating, after General Walker says this is for [], this will be no Dunkirk. We're going to stay right here.

### **INCHON LANDING - The Retaking of Seoul**

ADKINS: We landed in Inchon, September 1950. That was, that was the one MacArthur had to really fight to get, because all of the people, I think Joint Chiefs of Staff and all them, they were against it and said it couldn't be done.

GOOD: The Inchon landing was probably the smartest thing MacArthur ever did. I landed in Inchon and went in with the 7th Marines.

TROWBRIDGE: We landed, we had to wait til the evening when the tide was high. They have a 30 foot tide over there, and so we landed on LVTs, which is Landing Vehicle Tracked, but we went over to a seawall, then we had to put ladders up to climb up over the seawall, then get up on the land. And there was considerable fighting because you could hear the bullets zinging, you know. And that put a little fear in you right then. And the next morning we looked out on the Inchon area and there was no water. It was a big mud flat, and like ships, LST was just sitting on the mud out there. It was just...unreal. Unreal.

HAYS: Then we moved quickly because the fighting was quite severe in that area. They needed to take care of our patients, so we set up a hospital in a school, took over a school. And we shortly then thereafter were taking care of patients, not just American patients, but all the UN patients.

TROWBRIDGE: We worked the high ground then headed towards Seoul, then on the third day, on the 18th, we came under heavy mortar fire. We had a lot of guys, in fact I got wounded that day, that was the day before my 19th birthday. We lost probably about 10 guys from just our platoon. But Chesty Puller, who was our

regimental commander, he was there to greet me and he gave me the Purple Heart. I mean he was the type, he was a marine's marine, and he did stay in touch with the peons. At that time, he was a bird colonel, but yeah he was a pretty good guy, and as a matter of fact he lived in Saluda, Virginia.

GOOD: We went in the left side, the 7th did, the edge of Seoul, the edge of Seoul, and we was supposed to cut off the retreat of North Koreans going north.

### **PUSAN BREAKOUT - The Push North**

POWERS: We were really on the verge of [] out in the ocean. Inchon Landing, that did the trick. So then Inchon Landing way up here, and they were going to go across and cut all these off down here, right through Seoul, that way. So the enemy heard that, that's when they broke and run back North. So it just...chasing them from them on, that's when they broke out of Pusan Perimeter.

ADKINS: After the Inchon landing, the North Koreans...they were running so fast then about trying to get back to North Korea that where we were supposed to land in North Korea, troops, the troops on the ground has already passed where we were supposed to land. So we had to sit out there for several days, and finally took us back into port for what reason? I guess for supplies or something. So we'd sit out there so long in the bay, that I know every day for lunch they'd give us green pea soup and graham crackers. So to this day I hate green pea soup, I can't stand it.

CUTHRELL: And then we broke out of the Pusan Perimeter, everyone was on the attack after that. And we chased them, we chased the North Koreans a pretty good ways.

GOOD: There was a big flat rock there, and Bob Davis and myself, we decided we'd spend a night up on that rock, it was nice and warm from the sun during the day. So we laid our sleeping bags out on that rock, and about two o'clock in the morning we woke up, limbs coming off of trees, mortars coming in from every direction. So we came off of that rock and we were trapped for three days right there, that was the first contact we had with the Chinese.

WOOD: We were then 75 miles from the Manchurian border, the Eighth Army was the 25th Division, the 2nd Division, the 1st Cav, those units were moving over to the, on the west side of the peninsula. And the Marines were moving on the left side, on the right side, we were on the left side moving forward. And we got, as they

say, within about 75 miles from the Manchurian border when all of a sudden, the rumors had been that there were a few Chinese volunteers had come in. So those few volunteers turned out to be two field armies of 400,000 Chinese troops. 400,000 Chinese troops. It was unbelievable. Just unbelievable.

NARRATOR: When the Chinese crossed the Yalu River in force, joining the North Koreans, it tilted the balance of power and set the stage for one of America's most challenging times on the battlefields of Korea.

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