

= Battle of P 'ohang @-@ dong =

The Battle of P 'ohang @-@ dong was an engagement between United Nations and North Korean forces early in the Korean War , with fighting continuing from 5 ? 20 August 1950 around the town of P 'ohang @-@ dong , South Korea . It was a part of the Battle of Pusan Perimeter , and was one of several large engagements fought simultaneously . The battle ended in a victory for the United Nations after their forces were able to drive off an attempted offensive by three North Korean divisions in the mountainous eastern coast of the country .

Forces of the South Korean Republic of Korea Army , supported by the United States Navy and United States Air Force , defended the eastern coast of the country as a part of the Pusan Perimeter . When several divisions of the North Korean People 's Army crossed through mountainous terrain to push the UN forces back , a complicated battle ensued in the rugged terrain around P 'ohang @-@ dong , which contained the vital supply line to the main UN force at Taegu .

Over two weeks , North Korean and South Korean ground units fought in several bloody back @-@ and @-@ forth battles , taking and retaking ground in which neither was able to gain the upper hand . Finally , following the breakdown of the North Korean supply lines and amidst mounting casualties , the exhausted North Korean troops were forced to retreat .

The battle was a turning point in the war for North Korean forces , which had seen previous victories owing to superior numbers and equipment , with the distances and demands exacted on them at P 'ohang @-@ dong rendering their supply lines untenable .

= = Background = =

= = = Outbreak of war = = =

Following the invasion of the Republic of Korea ( South Korea ) by its northern neighbor , the Democratic People 's Republic of Korea ( North Korea ) and the subsequent outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950 , the United Nations decided to enter the conflict on behalf of South Korea . The United States ? a member of the UN ? subsequently committed ground forces to the Korean peninsula with the goal of fighting back the North Korean invasion and to prevent South Korea from collapsing . However , U.S. forces in the Far East had been steadily decreasing since the end of World War II , five years earlier , and at the time the closest forces were the 24th Infantry Division , headquartered in Japan .

Advance elements of the 24th Infantry were badly defeated in the Battle of Osan on 5 July , the first encounter between American and North Korean forces . For the first month after the defeat of Task Force Smith , 24th Infantry was repeatedly defeated and forced south by superior North Korean numbers and equipment . The regiments of the 24th Infantry were systematically pushed south in engagements around Chochiwon , Chonan , and Pyongtaek . The 24th made a final stand in the Battle of Taejon , where it was almost completely destroyed but delayed North Korean forces until July 20 . By that time , the 8th Army 's force of combat troops were roughly equal to North Korean forces attacking the region , with new UN units arriving every day .

While the 24th Infantry Division was fighting on the Korean western front , the 5th and 12th North Korean Infantry Divisions advanced steadily on the eastern front . The North Korean army , 89 @,@ 000 men strong , had advanced into South Korea in six columns , catching the Republic of Korea Army by surprise , resulting in a complete rout . The smaller South Korean army suffered from widespread lack of organization and equipment , and it was unprepared for war . Numerically superior , North Korean forces destroyed isolated resistance from the 38 @,@ 000 South Korean soldiers on the front before it began moving steadily south .

= = = North Korean advance = = =

With Taejon captured , North Korean forces began surrounding the Pusan Perimeter from all sides

in an attempt to envelop it . The 4th and 6th North Korean Infantry Divisions advanced south in a wide flanking maneuver . The two divisions attempted to envelop the UN ? s left flank , but became extremely spread out in the process . At the same time , the NK 5th and 12th Division pressured the South Koreans on the right flank . They advanced on UN positions with armor and superior numbers , repeatedly defeating U.S. and South Korean forces and forcing them further south . On 21 July , the NK 12th Division was ordered by the II North Korean Corps to capture P 'ohang @-@ dong by 26 July .

Though it was steadily pushed back , South Korean forces on the right flank increased their resistance further south hoping to delay North Korean units as much as possible . North and South Korean units sparred for control of several cities , inflicting heavy casualties on one another . The Republic of Korea Army forces defended Yongdok fiercely before being forced back . They also performed well in the Battle of Andong , forcing the NK 12th Division to delay their attacks on P 'ohang @-@ dong until the early August . The South Korean forces had also undergone significant reorganizations , and after receiving a large number of recruits by 26 July , the South Korean Army had reached an effective strength of 85 @,@ 871 men .

= = = Eastern corridor = = =

Along the South Korean front of the perimeter , on the eastern corridor , the terrain made moving through the area incredibly difficult . A major road ran from Taegu 50 mi ( 80 km ) east , to P ? ohang @-@ dong on Korea 's east coast . The only major north @-@ south road intersecting this line moves south from Andong through Yongch 'on , midway between Taegu and P 'ohang @-@ dong .

The only other natural entry through the line lies at the town of An 'gang @-@ ni , 12 mi ( 19 km ) west of P 'ohang @-@ dong , which is situated near a valley through the natural rugged terrain to the major rail hub of Kyongju , which was a staging area for moving supplies to Taegu . General Walton Walker ? commanding the 8th Army ? chose not to heavily reinforce the area as he felt the terrain made meaningful attack impossible , preferring to respond to attack with reinforcements from the transportation routes and air cover from Yonil Airfield , which was south of P 'ohang @-@ dong .

With the exception of the valley between Taegu and P 'ohong @-@ dong , the terrain along the line was extremely rough and mountainous thanks to the Taebaek Mountains which ran from north to south down Korea 's east coast . Northeast of P 'ohong @-@ dong along the South Korean line the terrain was especially treacherous , and movement in the region was extremely difficult . Thus , the UN established the northern line of the Pusan Perimeter using the terrain as a natural defense . However the rough terrain also made communication difficult , particularly for the South Korean forces .

= = Prelude = =

The Republic of Korea Army ? a force of 58 @,@ 000 ? was organized into two corps and five divisions along the line ; from east to west , ROK I Corps controlled the 8th Infantry Division and Capital Divisions , while the ROK II Corps controlled the 1st Division and 6th Infantry Division . A reconstituted ROK 3rd Division was placed under direct ROK Army control . Morale among the UN units was low due to the large number of defeats at that point in the war . The South Korean Army had lost an estimated 70 @,@ 000 men up to that point in the war .

At the same time , forces of the U.S. 5th Air Force provided 45 P @-@ 51 Mustang fighters to provide cover from Yongil Airfield , and the U.S. Navy provided several ships to provide support by sea . Evacuation of wounded and surrounded troops was carried out by the aircraft carriers USS Valley Forge and Philippine Sea . The heavy cruisers USS Helena and Toledo also provided fire support for troops operating in the town .

The North Korean People 's Army forces were organized into a mechanized combined arms force of ten divisions , originally numbering some 90 @,@ 000 well @-@ trained and well @-@ equipped

troops in July , with hundreds of T @-@ 34 Tanks . However , defensive actions by U.S. and South Korean forces had delayed the North Koreans significantly in their invasion of South Korea , costing them 58 @,@ 000 of their troops and a large number of tanks . In order to recoup these losses , the North Koreans had to rely on less experienced replacements and conscripts , many of whom had been taken from the conquered regions of South Korea .

The North Korean forces suffered a shortage of men and equipment ; their divisions were far understrength . Opposing the South Koreans , from west to east , were the 8th , 12th , and 5th Divisions and the 766th Independent Infantry Regiment . On 5 August , the NK 8th Division was estimated to have 8 @,@ 000 men , the NK 5th Division had 6 @,@ 000 men , the NK 12th Division had 6 @,@ 000 men and the 766th Independent Regiment had 1 @,@ 500 men , giving these units a total strength of at least 21 @,@ 500 .

= = Battle = =

In early August , the three North Korean divisions mounted offensives against the three passes through the South Koreans ' line . The NK 8th Division attacked Yongch 'on , the NK 12th Division attacked P 'ohang @-@ dong and NK 5th Division , in conjunction with the 766th Independent Infantry Regiment , attacked toward An 'gang @-@ ni at Kigye , 6 mi ( 9 @.@ 7 km ) north of the town . The South Korean forces had far less training and were poorly equipped , and so they presented the weakest line on the Pusan Perimeter . The North Koreans knew they could be most successful there .

= = = Opening moves = = =

The NK 8th Division 's attack stalled almost immediately . The division drove for Yongch 'on from Uiseong . However , the attack failed to reach the Taegu @-@ P 'ohang corridor after being surprised and outflanked by the ROK 8th Division . NK 8th Division 's 3rd Regiment was nearly destroyed by South Korean forces immediately , forcing its 2nd Regiment to attempt to relieve it , resulting in at least 700 casualties for the 2nd Regiment . At least six tanks were also destroyed by U.S. Air Force F @-@ 51 Mustangs and mines .

This fighting was so heavy that the NK 8th Division was forced to hold its ground a week before trying to advance . When it finally broke out , it was only able to advance briefly before it was stalled again by South Korean resistance . The division was forced to halt a second time to wait for reinforcements . However the other two attacks were more successful , catching the UN forces by surprise . The North Koreans quickly pushed South Korean forces back .

East of the NK and ROK 8th Divisions , the NK 12th Division crossed the Naktong River at Andong , moving through the mountains in small groups to reach P 'ohang @-@ dong . The division was far under strength and at least one of its artillery batteries had to send its guns back north because it had no ammunition for them . UN planners had not anticipated that the 12th Division would be able to do this effectively , and thus was unprepared when its forces infiltrated the region so heavily .

On 9 August , troops from the ROK 25th Regiment , Capitol Division probed through the mountains from Kigye to establish contact with the ROK 3rd Division south of Yongdok . It advanced 2 @.@ 5 mi ( 4 @.@ 0 km ) north before encountering fierce North Korean resistance , which pushed it almost 5 mi ( 8 @.@ 0 km ) south . It was apparent to the UN forces that the ROK 3rd Division was being outflanked . It held the road 20 mi ( 32 km ) north of P 'ohang @-@ dong but there were no defenses inland in the mountains and North Korean units had penetrated there .

In the meantime , the ROK 3rd Division was heavily engaged with the NK 5th Division along the coastal road to P 'ohang @-@ dong . The divisions clashes centered on the town of Yongdok , with each side capturing and recapturing the town several times . On 5 August , the North Koreans launched their attack , again taking the town from the South Korean forces and pushing them south . At 19 : 30 on 6 August , the South Koreans launched a counteroffensive to retake the hill .

U.S. aircraft and ships pounded the town with rockets , napalm and shells before South Korean troops from the 22nd and 23rd regiments swarmed the town . However , NK 5th Division forces were

able to infiltrate the coastal road south of Yongdok at Hunghae . This effectively surrounded the ROK 3rd Division , trapping it several miles above P 'ohang @-@ dong . The NK 766th Independent Regiment advanced around the ROK 3rd Division and took the area around P 'ohang @-@ dong .

Due to severe manpower shortages , ROK commanders had assigned a company of student soldiers to defend P 'ohang @-@ dong Girl 's Middle School to delay the NKPA advance into the town . On August 11 , the squad held their ground and confronted more numerous NK forces . Out of initial 71 squad members 48 died in the 11 @-@ hour @-@ long battle . This part of the battle is depicted in the movie 71 : Into the Fire .

= = = UN counteroffensive = = =

On 10 August , the 8th Army organized Task Force P 'ohang , consisting of the ROK 17th , 25th , and 26th Regiments as well as the ROK 1st Anti @-@ Guerrilla Battalion , Marine Battalion and a battery from the U.S. 18th Field Artillery Battalion . The task force was given the mission to clear out North Korean forces in the mountainous region . At the same time , the 8th Army formed Task Force Bradley , consisting of elements of the U.S. 8th Infantry Regiment , 2nd Infantry Division under the command of Brigadier General Joseph S. Bradley , the 2nd Division 's assistant commander . Task Force Bradley was tasked with defending P 'ohang @-@ dong from the North Korean 766th Independent Regiment which was infiltrating the town .

On 11 August , Task Force Bradley struck out from Yongil Airfield to counterattack the North Korean forces around P 'ohang @-@ dong while Task Force P 'ohang attacked from An 'gang @-@ ni area . Both forces immediately met resistance from North Korean forces . By that time , the North Korean forces had captured P 'ohang @-@ dong . What followed was a complicated series of fights through the large region around P 'ohang @-@ dong and An 'gang @-@ ni as South Korean ground forces , aided by U.S. air forces engaged groups of North Korean forces operation all around the vicinity .

The NK 12th Division was operating in the valley west of P 'ohang @-@ dong and was able to push back Task Force P 'ohang and the ROK Capital Division . At the same time , the NK 766th Infantry Regiment and elements of the NK 5th Division fought Task Force Bradley at and south of P 'ohang @-@ dong . U.S. naval fire was able to drive NK troops from the town , but it became a bitterly contested no man 's land as fighting moved to the hills around the town .

= = = UN forces pull back = = =

By 13 August , North Korean troops were operating in the mountains west and southwest of Yongil Airfield . U.S. Air Force commanders ' wary of enemy attack ' evacuated the 45 P @-@ 51s of the 39th and 40th Fighter Squadron from the airstrip , against complaints of General MacArthur . However , the airstrip remained under the protection of UN ground forces and never came under direct North Korean fire . The squadrons were moved to Tsuiki on the island of Kyushu , Japan .

As the battles at P 'ohang @-@ dong raged to the south , the ROK 3rd Division faced increasing pressure from the NK 5th Division . North Korean officers from the division continued to attack the ROK unit hoping it would collapse , and the North Korean troops were able to slowly erode at the South Korean division 's defenses , forcing it into a smaller and smaller pocket . The ROK division was forced further south to the village of Changsa @-@ dong , where U.S. Navy planners began preparations to evacuate the division by LSTs and DUKWs .

The division would sail 20 miles ( 32 km ) south to Yongil bay to join the other UN forces in a coordinated attack to push the North Koreans out of the region . This evacuation was carried out on the night of 16 August under heavy support from the U.S. Navy . In all , 9 @,@ 000 men of the division were evacuated south , as well as 1 @,@ 200 national police and 1 @,@ 000 laborers . Now at the height of their advance , the North Korean divisions had pushed the line to within 12 mi ( 19 km ) of Taegu .

= = = North Korean defeat = = =

By 14 August , large forces from the NK 5th and 12th Divisions , as well as the 766th Independent Regiment were focused entirely on taking P 'ohang @-@ dong . However they were unable to hold it because of U.S. air superiority and naval bombardment on the town . More importantly , the supply chain had completely broken down for the division , and more food , ammunition and supplies were not available . Captured North Korean prisoners claimed the units received no food after 12 August and had been so exhausted that they were completely unable to fight . Opposing them , the ROK Capital Division and Task forces P 'ohang and Bradley which had joined forces to prepare for a final offensive to push the North Koreans out of the region .

UN forces began their final counteroffensive against the stalled North Korean forces on 15 August . Intense fighting around P 'ohang @-@ dong ensued for several days as each side suffered large numbers of casualties in back @-@ and @-@ forth battles . By 17 August , UN forces were able to push North Korean troops out of the Kyongju corridor and An 'gang @-@ ni , putting the supply road to Taegu out of immediate danger . The NK 766th Independent Regiment ? now down to 1 @,@ 500 men ? was forced to withdraw north to prevent being surrounded .

The NK 12th Division , also down to just 1 @,@ 500 , evacuated P 'ohang @-@ dong after this , having been exhausted from heavy casualties . The two units merged and received replacements , with the NK 12th Division re @-@ forming with 5 @,@ 000 men . By 19 August the North Korean forces had completely withdrawn from the offensive and retreated into the mountains . Troops of the ROK Capital Division advanced to 2 mi ( 3 @.@ 2 km ) north of Kigye , while the ROK 3rd Division retook P 'ohang @-@ dong and advanced north of the town the next day . The ROK line had been pushed back several miles , but it had managed to repel the North Koreans .

= = Aftermath = =

The fight at P 'ohang @-@ dong was the final breaking point for North Korean units already on the verge of exhaustion from continuous combat . North Korean supply lines were overextended to the point of breaking down , causing a collapse in resupply that is seen as a primary factor in turning the tide of the battle . Moreover , U.S. air superiority was also crucial to the engagement , since repeated bombing runs by U.S. aircraft prevented North Korean ground forces from reaching and holding their objectives .

Poor organization among both North and South Korean units made it extremely difficult to estimate total casualties for both sides . Several units were completely destroyed in the fighting , making precise casualty counting difficult . A memo from the South Korean army claimed 3 @,@ 800 North Korean killed and 181 captured in the P 'ohang area from 17 August onward . However , casualty numbers are likely far higher . The NK 12th Division alone likely suffered at least 4 @,@ 500 casualties on top of that number , reporting a strength of 6 @,@ 000 on 5 August and only 1 @,@ 500 on 17 August .