

= Battle of Chochiwon =

The Battle of Chochiwon was an early engagement between United States and North Korean forces during the Korean War , taking place in the villages of Chonui and Chochiwon in western South Korea on July 10 ? 12 , 1950 . After three days of intense fighting , the battle ended in a North Korean victory .

The United States Army 's 21st Infantry Regiment , 24th Infantry Division was assigned to delay two advancing North Korean People 's Army divisions following communist victories at Osan , Pyongtaek , and Chonan earlier in the month . The regiment deployed along roads and railroads in between the two villages , attempting to slow the advance as much as possible .

Aided by air strikes , U.S. Army units were able to inflict substantial damage on the North Korean armor and other vehicles , but were overwhelmed by North Korean infantry . The two understrength U.S. battalions fought in several engagements over the three @-@ day period and suffered massive losses in personnel and equipment , but were able to delay the North Korean forces for several days , allowing the remainder of the 24th Infantry Division to set up blocking positions along the Kum River near the city of Taejon .

= = Background = =

= = = Outbreak of war = = =

On the night of June 25 , 1950 , 10 divisions of the North Korean People 's Army launched a full @-@ scale invasion on the nation 's neighbor to the south , the Republic of Korea . Advancing with 89 @,@ 000 men in six columns , the North Koreans caught the South Korean Army by surprise , resulting in a disastrous rout for the South Koreans who were disorganized , ill @-@ equipped , and unprepared for war . Numerically superior , North Korean forces destroyed isolated resistance , pushing steadily down the peninsula against the South Koreans who could muster just 38 @,@ 000 men to the front @-@ line to oppose them . The majority of the South Korean forces retreated in the face of the invasion , and by June 28 the North Koreans had captured the capital Seoul , and forced the government and its shattered forces to withdraw further southwards .

Meanwhile , the United Nations Security Council voted to send assistance to the collapsing country and United States President Harry S. Truman subsequently ordered ground troops into the nation . However , U.S. forces in the Far East had been steadily decreasing since the end of World War II , five years earlier . At the time , the closest force was the 24th Infantry Division of the Eighth United States Army , stationed in Japan under the command of William F. Dean . Tellingly , the division was under strength and most of its equipment was antiquated due to reductions in military spending . Yet in spite of these deficiencies the division was ordered into South Korea , tasked with taking the initial " shock " of the North Korean advances until the rest of the Eighth Army could arrive and establish a defense .

= = = Early engagements = = =

The plan was to airlift one battalion of the 24th Infantry Division into South Korea via C @-@ 54 Skymaster transport aircraft and quickly block advancing North Korean forces while the remainder of the division was transported on ships . The 21st Infantry Regiment was identified as the most combat @-@ ready of the 24th Infantry Division 's three regiments , and the 21st Infantry 's 1st Battalion was selected because its commander , Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith , was the most experienced , having commanded a battalion at the Battle of Guadalcanal during World War II . On July 5 , Task Force Smith engaged North Korean forces at the Battle of Osan , delaying over 5 @,@ 000 North Korean infantry for seven hours before being routed and forced back .

During that time , the U.S. 34th Infantry Regiment set up a line between the villages of Pyongtaek and Ansong , 10 miles (16 km) south of Osan , to fight the next delaying action against the

advancing North Korean forces . The 34th Infantry Regiment was similarly unprepared for a fight ; in the ensuing action , most of the regiment withdrew to Chonan without engaging the enemy . The 1st Battalion , left alone against the North Koreans resisted their advance in the brief and disastrous Battle of Pyongtaek . The 34th Infantry was unable to stop North Korean armor . After a 30 @-@ minute fight , the 34th mounted a disorganized retreat in which many soldiers abandoned equipment and retreated without resisting the North Korean forces . The Pyongtaek ? Ansong line was unable to delay the North Korean force significantly or inflict heavy casualties on them .

The regiment subsequently retreated to Chonan , where , the next night the 3rd Battalion was heavily engaged in another delaying action . The 34th Infantry lost its commander , Colonel Robert R. Martin as well as two thirds of its 3rd Battalion 's strength . The exhausted 34th Infantry Regiment retreated to the Kum River , near the 24th Infantry Division 's headquarters . The 24th Infantry Division would make one final delaying action before it would be forced to make its final stand around Taejon , the only major defensible city left before the Pusan Perimeter being established by the Eighth Army .

= = Battle = =

Having pushed back U.S. forces at Osan , Pyongtaek , and Chonan , the North Korean 4th Infantry Division , supported by elements of the 105th Armored Division , continued its advance down the Osan ? Chonan road , up to 12 @,@ 000 men strong under division commander Lee Kwon Mu in two infantry regiments supported by dozens of tanks . Behind it , the North Korean 3rd Infantry Division had yet to engage the American forces .

= = = Airstrikes = = =

By July 7 , the 21st Infantry Regiment had been established at Chochiwon , one of two roads to the Kum River and Taejon . The regiment was ordered to keep the road through the region open so supplies and ammunition could flow through it to the 34th Infantry Regiment on the front lines . The Americans spent several days unloading supplies from locomotives in the village . After blowing up all bridges north of the town , 1st Battalion was established on the Chochiwon road at Chonui , 12 miles (19 km) south of Chonan . Supporting it were one battery of 155 @-@ mm howitzers from the 11th Field Artillery Battalion and A Company of the 78th Heavy Tank Battalion with M24 Chaffee light tanks , as well as B Company of the 3rd Engineer Combat Battalion which was assigned to construct roadblocks and prepare bridges for demolition .

Around mid @-@ afternoon on July 9 , observers with the 1st Battalion , 21st Infantry spotted a column of 200 vehicles led by 11 North Korean T @-@ 34 tanks , subsequently calling for an airstrike . For the next few hours the U.S. Air Force ravaged the North Korean column with repeated bombings and strafing , and by sunset half of the vehicles were destroyed or burning and a large portion of the infantry had also been killed . The next day , a similar airstrike by B @-@ 26 Invaders , F @-@ 80 and F @-@ 82 Twin Mustang aircraft of the Fifth Air Force took place around Pyongtaek , with 38 North Korean tanks , seven half @-@ tracks and 117 other trucks destroyed , in addition to a large number of infantry . Much of the village of Chonui was left burning , although it had already been abandoned by South Korean soldiers and civilians . In addition , the airstrikes caused some of the largest losses of North Korean armor of the war , and were a major blow against the T @-@ 34 tanks which had been so successful during previous encounters .

= = = Fight at Chonui = = =

Meanwhile , the 1st Battalion , 21st Infantry back at Chonui remained understrength . Half of the force had constituted Task Force Smith at Osan . B and C Companies were thus still refitting at Chochiwon , leaving A and D Companies to hold the line with a handful of replacements to fill the extra positions . The battalion numbered around 500 men in total . The 1st Battalion emplaced on hills overlooking the south road of Chonui , northwest of Chochiwon and prepared to meet and delay

the advancing North Korean forces , while the 3rd Battalion emplaced behind it in reserve . Around 0555 on July 10 , the Americans began to detect North Korean movement through the morning fog . Fifteen minutes after daybreak , a whistle blew , immediately followed by small arms fire on the American positions . American forces at first fired indiscriminately into the fog until the regimental commander , Richard W. Stephens , stopped them . At 0700 the 1st Battalion then came under heavy mortar fire , and A Company on the leftmost ridge was assailed with fire from higher ground by North Korean forces of the 4th Infantry Division . The American forces began using 4 @. @ 2 @- @ inch mortars on the North Korean positions in order to prevent them from advancing directly on their positions . Around 0800 the fog began to lift , and the Americans spotted four T @- @ 34 tanks in the village and subsequently called for another airstrike .

North Korean forces , meanwhile , flanked the American positions under cover of fog . The Koreans passed around the Americans ' right flank and attacked the mortar positions in the rear . T @- @ 34 tanks also joined in the fight , and also passed around the American flanks while obscured by the fog . Around 0900 the North Korean forces in Chonui initiated a frontal assault on the 1st Battalion , 21st Infantry 's positions . An observer with the unit called in artillery and pushed back the North Korean infantry inflicting heavy casualties on the assaulting force . By 1100 , the North Korean infantry , supported by several T @- @ 34s , was pressing on A Company 's position , which was undermanned . At 1125 the requested airstrike came in ; American aircraft rocketed the T @- @ 34s to no effect while strafing the Korean forces attacking A Company . The aircraft were able to push back the attack for several minutes before running out of ammunition and being forced to leave . The North Korean troops immediately resumed their assault .

One of A Company 's platoons , under the command of Lieutenant Ray Bixler , faced most of the pressure of the North Korean assault . Tank fire had destroyed the American wire communications to their artillery , which began to fall on their own positions in the belief that they had been overrun with North Koreans , before Stephens was able to call it off . In the meantime , at 1135 Bixler 's platoon was surrounded and destroyed , most of the men of the platoon were killed in their foxholes by the North Korean infantry . Following this , men on the right flank began deserting their positions regardless of Stephens ' efforts to keep them there . Finally at 1205 , Stephens ordered his men to withdraw . American forces had great difficulty retreating through the wet rice paddies , and a disorganized retreat followed as they attempted to pull back . During the retreat , several U.S. aircraft returned and , mistaking the soldiers of the 1st Battalion , 21st Infantry for North Koreans , began to strafe them . The aircraft inflicted no casualties , but the battalion overall had suffered 20 percent casualties with 33 killed and 35 wounded during the engagement , as well as 14 killed in the mortar company .

= = = American counterattack = = =

As 1st Battalion retreated , Stephens ordered 3rd Battalion to counterattack the North Koreans on the ridge to regain the position . The American attack was aggressive and 3rd Battalion was able to regain most of the ground , rescuing 10 Americans captured in the first attack in the process . During the attack , the 3rd Battalion uncovered evidence of North Korean war crimes ; six men from 1st Battalion 's heavy mortar company were discovered executed , with their hands tied behind their backs . Several M24 Chaffee light tanks , newly arrived from Pusan , were brought in 3rd Battalion 's assault , the first use of U.S. armor in the war . The M24s disabled a T @- @ 34 while suffering two destroyed throughout the day . During this time , the North Korean 4th Division pressed on south , bypassing Chonui to the west . Following it was the North Korean 3rd Infantry Division , one day behind , granting the Americans time to rest and prepare new defenses . The 3rd Battalion held the position until just before 2400 , when it withdrew to its previous position with most of the equipment that had been lost by 1st Battalion earlier in the day . At that position , the men discovered North Korean forces occupying its old foxholes , and K Company engaged in a one @- @ hour firefight to drive them off . Meanwhile , 1st Battalion withdrew south to new blocking positions 2 miles (3 @. @ 2 km) outside of Chochiwon .

At 0630 on July 11 , four T @- @ 34s advanced on 3rd Battalion 's position , passing through a

minefield without suffering any casualties . Following the tanks , about 1 @, @ 000 North Korean infantry of the North Korean 3rd Infantry Division conducted a double envelopment of the battalion , setting up roadblocks in its rear to prevent resupply and evacuation of wounded . Simultaneously , heavy mortar fire struck the battalion 's command post , destroying its communications center and ammunition stocks , and inflicting heavy casualties . American forward observers were unable to communicate with the artillery due to the lack of communications equipment . The attack by the North Koreans was well coordinated , and it is likely that North Korean forces driven from the position in the night had been able to gather intelligence about the battalion 's position . In the ensuing fight , American forces were overwhelmed again , fighting in desperate hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat .

North Korean machine guns continued to assault the American lines , and Americans who had expended their ammunition were forced to use their weapons as clubs . Of 667 men in 3rd Battalion , over 60 percent became casualties , including the battalion commander , Lieutenant Colonel Carl Jensen , and much of the battalion staff . Shattered , 3rd Battalion was forced to withdraw in small groups , many of its soldiers already captured or forced to escape on foot through the countryside back to American lines . Most of the retreating men were also captured . Remaining soldiers formed a provisional company of 150 for the retreat . In total 90 percent of the battalion 's equipment , including weapons and helmets , was lost . Another four of the M24 tanks were also destroyed without disabling any of the North Korean T34s .

= = = Chochiwon falls = = =

Under Smith , 1st Battalion emplaced on hills overlooking the road into Chochiwon , resting the night of July 11 with no contact from the North Koreans until the next day . Just after dawn on July 12 , the American battalion first encountered North Korean patrols followed by an attack on their left flank by a North Korean force estimated as battalion sized at 0930 . Soon afterward , some 2 @, @ 000 North Koreans began a direct assault on 1st Battalion 's position , supported by heavy artillery . Stephens decided the understrength battalion , with its large percentage of replacements , could not hold its position long and ordered it to withdraw . Smith subsequently moved the battalion from the line one company at a time and the retreat was orderly . By nightfall , the entire regiment had moved by truck to a blocking position at Taepyong @-@ ni , across the Kum River close to Taejon . In the meantime , U.S. forces on the westerly Kongju road fought a series of minor engagements to delay North Korean forces traveling down that road before retreating across the Kum river .

= = Aftermath = =

The U.S. 21st Infantry Regiment suffered 228 killed , 61 wounded , 215 captured , and 27 missing in the battle ; a total of 531 casualties . Of those , 130 of the captured and 20 of the missing died . Additionally , 23 other American units engaged in the region suffered 31 killed , 79 wounded , 15 captured and 9 missing ; in total a further 134 casualties . This brought the total number of casualties for the three @-@ day period to 665 and made Chochiwon the bloodiest battle for American forces yet in the conflict ; greater than the casualty counts at Osan , Pyongtaek and Chonan combined . The loss of materiel was also great with the 21st Infantry Regiment losing enough equipment and materiel to outfit two rifle battalions , and enough clothing to equip 975 men . Against these losses North Korean casualties could not be estimated due to a lack of communication among fighting units , which limited the value of American signals intelligence .

Despite these losses the U.S. 21st Infantry Regiment was praised for its efforts to defend Chochiwon and Chonui . Roy Appleman , a historian for the U.S. Army called it " the most impressive performance yet of American troops in Korea . " Indeed , the regiment was able to successfully delay North Korean forces for three days in the fighting , despite suffering heavily in casualties and equipment losses , and in doing so the action bought enough time for the rest of the 24th Infantry Division to set up defenses around Taejon . The 21st Infantry Regiment subsequently joined the 34th Infantry Regiment and the 19th Infantry Regiment in setting up positions along the

Kum River near Taejon , and the entire 24th Infantry Division would make its stand there during the Battle of Taejon over the next week . In that fight , the division would be overrun and forced to retreat again . However , the delaying actions of the division would give the U.S. forces in Pusan time to set up the Pusan Perimeter , where the North Korean and UN forces would fight for several months in the Battle of Pusan Perimeter , eventually defeating the North Korean Army .