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The Korean War, 70 Years Ago, The Public Opinion, Chambersburg, PA

Korean War Weekly Front Pages

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Were the Reds withdrawing?



At the start of the week, four powerful Allied columns looking for a fight thrust deep into Communist territory, but Reds on the western front didn't answer the challenge. The columns ranged across a 50-mile span of the front and pushed to within 24 miles of enemy-held Seoul. Termed officially a "reconnaissance in considerable force," the scouting patrols were charged with taking Red prisoners and obtaining information on Communist troop buildups. US intelligence officers said the apparent absence of Red troops in force south of the Han River, which twists around Seoul, may mean the Chinese had made a large-scale withdrawal to the north. There was speculation that the Chinese were awaiting political developments in the UN, meanwhile using North Koreans to patrol the no-man's land into which UN patrols had been poking all week.

On the central front, Allied forces retook Wonju airstrip and nearby Hill 233 after a three-hour fight. Wonju was the road and rail gate to the heart of South Korea. On Tuesday, Allied combat teams reoccupied Wonju. They also seized nearby Hill 273, ousting a force of nearly 100 Communists with an artillery barrage. Thirty-one miles southeast, Allied forces were battling Reds in Yongwol, and heavy fighting raged south of Tanyang. Mid-week Allied troops had slashed more than ten miles beyond Wonju on the central front and to the southeast and had recaptured the key mountain town of Yongwol. It was the farthest northward advance by any UN force since Seoul was abandoned. By the end of the week, elements of two American corps had struck northward to within 15 miles of the capital, against spotty to minor Red opposition. US naval guns pounded the harbor at Inchon, and Navy, Marine and Air Force planes struck at the whole Seoul area. Inchon was also raided by South Korean sailors for four hours.

American Thunderjets shot down four Russian-made MIG-15s in history's biggest jet air battle. The F-84s also scored one probable kill and damaged four more of the Russian craft with the back-swept wings. All American planes returned safely; not a single bullet hole was found in the Thunderjets. Further skirmishes took place mid-week, including one where between 16 and 20 MIGs flashed across the Yalu River and attacked more F-84s. Several of the MIGs were damaged.

The UN was studying Peiping's [Beijing's] statement that a Korean cease-fire could be arranged at the first meeting of a proposed conference on major Far Eastern problems. This would also include steps for withdrawal of all foreign troops, including Chinese, from Korea and withdrawal of the US Seventh Fleet from the Formosa [Taiwan] Straits. In addition, "the legitimate status of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations must be ensured." The US delegate termed the declaration "a transparent effort to divide the free world and to...postpone, delay, procrastinate." In turn, the Prime Minister of India bristled at the US position, speaking out in favor of the conference.

Western diplomats concluded that wide differences between Russia and the West over a proposed four-power conference had not been narrowed any by US, British and French notes sent to the Soviets this week. The notes reiterated the West's stand that any such meeting must include, in addition to talks over Germany's future, "all problems likely to threaten world peace."

(Photo courtesy newspapers.com, Chambersburg Public Opinion)