

NEWSLETTER

THE FRIENDS OF

THE SOLDIERS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE MUSEUM



'The Long Reveille' by Ken Howard (Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum)

SPRING 2021

Curtis VC Close



If you happen to be travelling by car on the back roads between Newquay and Perranporth in Cornwall, you might come across the small village of St Newlyn East as my wife and I did a couple of years ago. While we were waiting to emerge from a junction, she drew my attention to an unusual street name opposite, Curtis VC Close. It was a small development of 1960s housing, but I immediately recognised its significance. Cornwall was commemorating one its adopted sons: Lt Philip Curtis VC.

Born in Devonport, Plymouth, in July 1926, Philip Curtis volunteered in 1944 as a private in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry but saw no active service. In 1946 he was given an emergency commission in the DCLI but was attached to the Royal Army Service Corps, serving the Middle East until demobbed in 1948 when he was placed on the reserve list. He married in 1947 and they had a daughter the following year. Sadly, his wife died in 1949. Recalled when the Korean War broke out, he placed his daughter in the guardianship of his mother-in-law and made known his desire to serve in Korea. He sailed for Korea on 17 October, a fortnight after the Glosters. Arriving at Pusan he badgered to get to the front and joined A Company, 1 Platoon, The Glosters on 3 March 1951. He made a favourable impression from the start.

At the Imjin A Company held Castle Hill in the first on-rush of the Chinese attack on the night of 22/23 April but were forced off. The next morning Curtis was ordered to eliminate an enemy machine gun nest near the top of the hill. Leading a small team into the teeth of the withering machine gun fire, he was cut down. Despite the remonstrances of his men, he got up, charged again, only to be killed but not before he had thrown grenades into the nest, silencing it. For his 'gallant and distinguished conduct' he was posthumously awarded the VC.

He is buried in the UN cemetery at Pusan. His daughter, Susan, accompanied by her grandmothers, received her father's medal from Her Majesty the Queen in July 1954.

Tim Brain

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



At the time of writing, we are still not out of 'lockdown', and unfortunately this has meant that the Badminton Horse Trials have been cancelled and the Museum has been closed again. However, the end is now hopefully in sight. If the Government's timetable is achieved, it means we should be completely out of lockdown by 21st June, which in turn will mean that we should be able to hold our Summer Reception. It will mean that we cannot hold it on Friday 18th June, which was our intention, but I am delighted to tell you that Rollo and Jeanie Clifford will make their delightful home and grounds at Frampton Court available to us on Tuesday 22nd June.

Similarly, we intend to hold our annual Chavenage Lecture on Friday 29th October 2021 when Sinclair McKay will speak on 'X and Y: Bletchley and its Listening Stations'.

Both events are subject to the Covid restrictions prevailing at the time, but we shall endeavour to confirm arrangements as soon as we can.

In November last we successfully held our Annual General Meeting using video conferencing, with the result it was better 'attended' and with more contributions from members than is usually the case. One of the outcomes is that we have agreed to review our constitution, adapting it to the circumstances of the mid-decades of the 21st century. We shall be progressing this in the weeks ahead.

Our former longstanding chairman Ralph Stephenson has decided to retire both as a member of the Committee and a Trustee. His contribution has been immense. We look forward to his continuing as a member of the Friends and a contributor to these pages.

It is with sadness that I record since the publication of the autumn edition of the Newsletter the passing of His Honour Judge Gabriel Hutton, a member and former President of the Friends, and a distinguished presiding judge at Gloucester Crown Court.

April 2021 is the 70th anniversary of the battle of the Imjin River. The Korean War is often referred to as 'the forgotten war'. It has never been so in this county. Nor, of course, in the Republic of South Korea, where the stand of the battalion is extensively commemorated. A video message from the South Korean ambassador commemorating the contribution of UK forces, and the Glosters in particular, in the Korean War 1950-53, may be found at <https://sekim206.wixsite.com/2020roknationalday>.

Appropriately, therefore, this edition is dedicated to those who fought in or otherwise contributed to the Gloucestershire Regiment's heroic stand 22-25 April 1951. We are again fortunate to have an article from Rob Dixon, who in the first of two articles, brings a battalion commanding officer's insight to the great battle. There is also news from Tony Ayres of the Imjin 70 events planned for 2021. We look forward a tremendous programme.

Dr Tim Brain OBE QPM

THE REASON WHY

Dr Tim Brain

Traveling by land and (mainly) sea the distance between Colchester and the small Korean village of Solma Ri is about 14,500 miles. Not a journey that many British people would have thought of making in 1950, but that is the one the 1st Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment made. Why?

In the summer of 1950, the battalion together with the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers and the Royal Ulster Rifles constituted the 29th Brigade based at Colchester. The brigade was the contingency reserve, theoretically ready to be deployed to anywhere where it was needed. In late July they received secret orders to prepare for deployment to Korea where the Communist North had invaded the pro-west South. The Brigade would be joined by the Centurion tanks of the King's Royal Irish Hussars, and the 45th Field Regiment and 170th Heavy Mortar Battery Royal Artillery. Within months they would be in a desperate fight against the might of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (CPVA) on the heights above the Imjin River.

The origins of the war that broke out on the Korean peninsula in 1950 can be traced back to the last years of the 19th century. For several centuries Korea had been a kingdom ruling itself, but under the influence of the Chinese empire. From the 1890s, as China declined, Korea came to the interest of the growing powers of Japan and Russia. Defeating both China and Russia in regional wars, Japan formally annexed Korea in 1910. Thirty-five years of ruthless subordination and exploitation followed, only ending in August 1945 with Japan's defeat in World War II.

During the Japanese occupation various groups and individuals kept the idea of Korean independence alive. To do so most nationalists sought exile, either in Shanghai, where a government in exile was established, or to some other sympathetic haven.

One such was Syngman Rhee (1875-1965), a Christian convert, who had lived in America on and off from 1904, where he had obtained a PhD and built-up strong connections in business, politics and academia.¹ Another was Kim Il-sung (1912-94), whose family had fled to China where he became not only a dedicated nationalist but also a committed Communist. He led a guerrilla band against the Japanese in Manchuria, but in 1940 his forces sought sanctuary in the USSR.² He returned to Korea with the advancing Red Army when Russia entered the war against Japan in August 1945.

At the 1943 Cairo Conference the Americans, British and Russians determined that post-war Korea should become independent. At the 1945 Potsdam Conference, taking place before Japan's surrender and just as Russian troops were poised to cross into northern Korean, that independence was confirmed, but it looked like the peninsula would be wholly occupied by Russia troops in the first instance. So, the Americans had to play catch up. Around midnight on 10 August two US colonels back in Washington were given the job of working out how America might forestall complete Soviet occupation. Looking at what may well have been a

¹ Syngman Rhee was born Yi Su-ng-man but westernised his name.

² Kim was born Kim Sŏng-ju but took the name Kim Il-sung meaning 'Kim become the sun' in 1935.

Kim's forces quickly started rounding up would-be opposition causing a rapid exit south by such members of the middle classes who could get away. Syngman Rhee quickly moved to fill the political vacuum in the south. Flying from Shanghai he managed to get an interview with MacArthur who then had him flown to Seoul. He was just what the American military were looking for – an anti-Communist with impeccable nationalist credentials, fluent in English and the language of western liberal democracy. He quickly drafted a new constitution.

The Russians looked at first for a united Korea. They even proposed a liberal democrat Lyuh Woon-hyung as a unity candidate. This might seem counter intuitive, but the Russians were confident that northern Communism would prevail across the peninsula given the chance. Their plans were scuppered by the obduracy of Rhee, who could see what was coming, and by Lyuh's assassination by an extreme right-wing nationalist in December 1947.

Rhee's constitution was adopted at a constituent assembly and the United Nations agreed to supervise free elections in May 1948. The North Koreans boycotted them, realising that they stood little chance of winning. Instead, Kim, with Russian support, established the 'Democratic People's Republic of Korea' (DPRK) north of the 38th.

The UN commissioners appointed to supervise the elections in the south duly reported that the outcome had been a fair representation of the process and in December the UN accepted that Rhee's 'Republic of Korea' (ROK) was the only legitimate government in the peninsula.

At this point it might be thought surprising that the Russians withdrew their forces, a process they completed by the end of January 1949. With the Berlin blockade still in full swing, US aid flowing into Germany and Japan, and with the US and western European powers forming NATO, Stalin may have been looking for opportunities to de-escalate tension in non-crucial areas. In March 1949 he turned down a request from Kim to support him in an invasion of the south.



Figure 2: Kim visits Moscow March 1949.

The Russian move provoked the kind of response they were looking for from the Americans. US President Truman was trying to solve multiple problems. In 1947 he had committed America to the defence of 'free peoples' from Communist aggression (the 'Truman Doctrine') but he was trying to do this at a time of extensive defence cuts. By 1949 the US army had shrunk from its wartime high of 8 million to 0.6 million, just 12 divisions. He was at the same time under pressure domestically from the anti-Communist rhetoric of Senator Joe McCarthy and his fellow travellers. With Berlin still blockaded at the beginning of 1949 withdrawing troops from South Korea, where there was no direct US interest, seemed like a good idea.

Truman did not leave Syngman bereft. Economic aid was given, helping him build up his army to 80,000. However, this was built around light infantry capability, without armour or much artillery, in order to deter Syngman from invading the North. The result was that South Korean forces were ill-matched with Kim's, which were now approaching 100,000 and were equipped with over 30 Russian T34 tanks and 100 ground attack Yack aircraft. Nevertheless, the Americans optimistically completed their withdraw by the summer of 1949.

In retrospect the withdrawal could not have been more ill-timed from the perspective of America and her allies the international and regional situations deteriorated rapidly. The Berlin blockade ended successfully for the western powers in the spring of 1949 but by then the Soviet dictator Stalin had completed the installation of Communist regimes across eastern Europe.

At least the US could bask in the security of its nuclear monopoly. Then in August 1949 Russia exploded its first atomic bomb signalling that monopoly was over. For the Americans it got worse in December when the Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong finally defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists, expelling them from the mainland to the island of Formosa (Taiwan). Elsewhere in SE Asia the French in Indo China and the British in Malaya were fighting Communist insurgents.



Figure 3: The key decision-makers 1950, left to right, top to bottom – Kim Il-sung, Joseph Stalin, Syngman Rhee, Mao Zedong, Harry Truman, Dean Acheson, Douglas MacArthur and Clement Attlee.

It was against this background that the Americans sought to bring some stability in east Asia. On 12 January 1950 US Secretary of State Dean Acheson delivered a speech to the National Press Club in Washington DC setting out future US policy in the region. He drew an imaginary line across the sea from Aleutian Islands to the Philippines. In this 'perimeter' American troops were on the ground; here any incursion would be strongly resisted. The French and British would protect their interests in Indo China and Malaya. As for the rest of the Pacific, in the event of an attack in the first instance he expected 'the people attacked to resist it', and after that have recourse to 'the civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations'.



Figure 4: Dean Acheson delivering his National Press Club Speech.

In drawing his line Acheson was not helped, however, by the petulant behaviour of Republican senators who at this point blocked financial aid to Rhee for several weeks. The ostensible reason was that Rhee was using economic aid to repress internal opposition, but the real reason was pique following the Truman Administration's failure to back Chiang Kai-shek when it counted. They eventually gave way, but there were mixed signals coming out of Washington in early 1950.

Later Acheson would be accused of 'carelessly' leaving out any mention of Korea in his January speech. On the contrary, there was nothing careless about what Acheson said. He spelt out exactly what would happen if South Korea or, for that matter Nationalist China, were to be attacked. Local forces were expected to resist in the first instance, then the international community would come to their aid under the auspices of the UN. But his words appeared to offer a window of opportunity to the ambitious Kim.

In the months that followed it might have been thought that the departure of US and Soviet troops would have lessened tension between north and south, but the reverse was true. With neither the north nor south Korean leaders restrained by the presence of their powerful allies Kim fostered insurgency and rebellion south of the 38th, while Syngman's repressed any sign of domestic opposition and border forces infiltrated northwards. Kim's 'Korean People's Army' (KPA) by now exceeded 100,000 with the return of Korean veterans who had fought for Mao in China. However, Syngman's regime was becoming stronger by the day, and Kim realised that if he was to be to gain control of the whole peninsula, he would have to act sooner rather than later.

With this in mind in the spring of 1950 Kim visited Moscow to seek Stalin's permission to launch an invasion of the south. Stalin was still cautious. With the US withdrawal he had gained much of what he sought in Korea without the risk of war, and he was reluctant to change his successful strategy now. He did, however, fear that a US backed Japan might re-enter Korea. This seems far-fetched now, but at the time the Americans were successfully rebuilding Japan as a western ally, and Japan had spent most of the century to date occupying the peninsula. This was also an opportunity to back his protégé Kim. He still took some persuading, but Kim was able to convince him that the risk of US intervention was negligible. Acheson's Press Club speech might have been decisive in tipping Stalin in favour of invasion. Besides Kim reckoned it would take only three weeks to conquer the south; the job would be done and dusted before the understrength American divisions from Japan could intervene.

Stalin gave his blessing. However, he minimised the risks to himself. There would be Soviet diplomatic and materiel support, plus 5,000 military 'advisers', but these last would not go south of the 38th with the KPA. There would be no toe-to-toe US/Soviet confrontation even for such a loyal acolyte as Kim. Kim wisely sought Mao's blessing as well, but it was Stalin's that counted.

The KPA massed southwards in the first weeks of June 1950. The official story was ‘military exercises’, a familiar Cold War cover. Did the Americans know they were there? They did. A CIA report of 19 June 1950 clearly identified KPA movements, but bereft of human and signals intelligence, the report offered no view on the timing of any attack.

Thus, the ROK, the Americans and the world were taken completely by surprise when the KPA rolled across the 38th in the early hours of 25 June. As a cover story the North alleged a ROK incursion provoked their retaliation. While theoretically possible it is unlikely, and in any case the DPRK response was massive and disproportionate. The cables crackled between Washington and Seoul in the hours that followed. Rhee appealed for help; the Americans did exactly what they said they would do. They took it to the United Nations.

The UN was only five years old and the iconic building on New York’s lower east side was not yet its home. Instead, it was meeting at the previous headquarters of the Sperry Gyroscope Company in Lake Success, New York State. The Security Council convened on the afternoon



Figure 5: UN Security Council vote on Korea 25 June 1950. Note the empty Soviet chair to the left of centre.

of Sunday 25 June when the US moved resolution No 82 calling on North Korean forces to withdraw and for member states to ‘render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution’. It was passed with seven votes for and three abstentions. The Russians could have vetoed it but did not; they were absent, having boycotted the Council since January in protest at the US refusal to recognise Mao’s regime as the new legitimate government of China.

On the strength of the UN resolution President Truman authorised the deployment of US forces to Korea on 26 June. He did not seek Congressional approval. On the 27th the Security Council passed two further resolutions. No 83 called upon member states to ‘furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area’; No 84, recommended that all states rendering military assistance put their forces under US command. The US might have been caught napping on the 25th but it had regained the diplomatic initiative by the 27th. Kim and Stalin had miscalculated.

Truman made the troop deployments under presidential authority, justifying his not seeking congressional approval on the wafer-thin grounds that this was not war but ‘a police action’. MacArthur immediately put together a scratch ground force and deployed naval and air assets in support of the ROK army. More units from the under strength and under prepared US 8th Army in Japan would follow over the next days and weeks.

In Britain Labour prime minister Clement Attlee responded cautiously. On 27 June the British cabinet met. Some members were not entirely sure where Korea was; ‘between China and Japan’ an official helpfully explained. Nevertheless, the Cabinet agreed to support the UN and

examine what military assistance might be offered. No commitment was made at that point, but as the meeting broke up the cabinet secretary observed to Attlee, 'Korea is only a distant obligation, prime minister.' Attlee replied, 'Distant – yes, but nonetheless an obligation.'

On 28th Attlee announced to Parliament British support for the UN resolution and the deployment, in coordination with the US 7th Fleet, of a substantial Royal Navy squadron already stationed in Japan as a component of the British Commonwealth Zone of Occupation forces. No decision was yet made about ground troops. Churchill for the Conservatives and Clement Davies for the Liberals backed the government line.

Subsequently the situation on the ground for the US/ROK deteriorated rapidly and for a while it looked like Kim's three-week prediction would come true. By the end of July US/ROK forces were forced into a pocket around the south eastern port of Pusan.

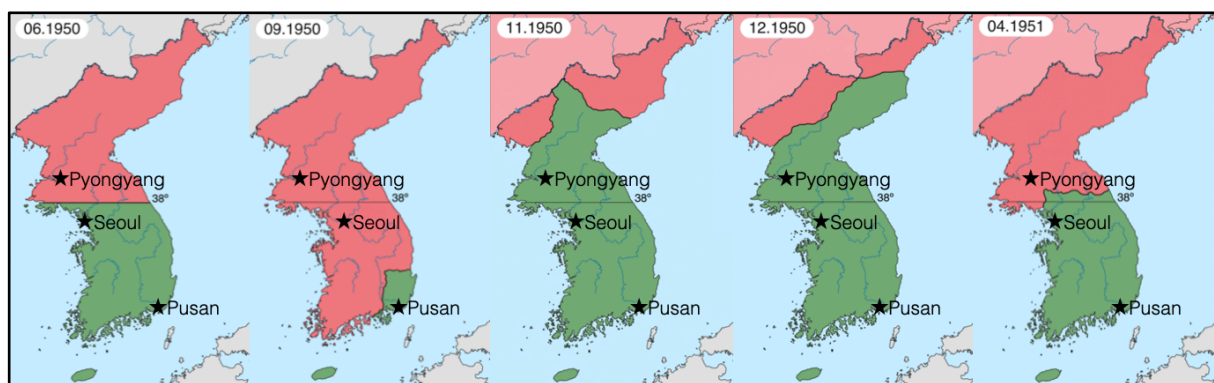


Figure 6: The fluctuating front June 1950-April 1951.

At this point the Attlee government decided it had to deploy ground forces. At first sight this might seem because the US/ROK were in such dire straits, but this was a coincidence. Cabinet records show that demonstrating solidarity with the US was uppermost in government thinking. A formal request for ground troops had been received from the UN on 16 July and the British ambassador to Washington reported that the Americans were expecting a positive response. This created a delicate balancing act for the Attlee government. Britain had numerous ground force commitments around the world, including Germany, the Middle East, and, highly important in this context, Malaya, while also simultaneously at home implementing the National Health Service. On the other hand, Britain was in hock to the US to the tune of \$3.75 billion. Realpolitik won out.

The Chiefs of Staff concluded that it was militarily 'unsound' to divert troops needed in Malaya and Hong Kong to Korea but recognised the overriding political necessity of doing something. The Cabinet Defence Committee, effectively Attlee's war cabinet, recommended that 'a Brigade Group' under US command be sent to Korea. The Cabinet agreed. On 27 July the Minister of Defence, Emanuel Shinwell, told the House of Commons that a 'self-contained land force', comprising infantry, armour artillery, engineers and administration, would be sent to Korea. MPs received the news as 'a matter of course'. The following evening Attlee broadcast to the nation. His message was stark: 'Make no mistake about it, the evil forces which are now attacking South Korea are part of a world-wide conspiracy against the way of life of the free democracies.'

The 29th Brigade was mobilised, but it would not be the first British troops to arrive in Korea. In August the military situation deteriorated to such a degree that despite the earlier misgivings two battalions, the Middlesex and the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, were despatched from Hong Kong to join with an Australian battalion from Japan, to form the 27th British Commonwealth Brigade. Responding to a request for amphibious capability, a Royal Marine Commando was also flown out. By 30 August the two British infantry battalions had landed at Pusan and would soon be joining the UN counterattack. By 1 October UN forces, including the 27th Brigade, were crossing the 38th Parallel. The 29th Brigade, on the other hand, was just beginning its departure from Britain.

It is a sobering thought that if the UN forces had then halted on the 38th Parallel the Imjin battle might never have happened, or at least not in the way that it did. However, UN forces, with the approval of the governments in Washington and London, advanced into North Korea intending to destroy the KPA. By November UN forces had advanced to the Manchurian border, provoking Mao's intervention. In the 'Great Bug Out' Chinese regulars swept the UN forces back to the 38th. With that it was inevitable that the 29th Brigade would be deployed to the front, setting in train the series of military events that would lead to the Glosters holding those lonely hillsides above the Imjin from 22-25 April 1951.

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THE GLOSTERS IN KOREA – Part I

Rob Dixon

This account covers the story of 1st Battalion, The Gloucestershire Regiment, in Korea from the time they were warned for deployment in 1950 until the end of the battle of the Imjin River. The story of the aftermath, captivity and return home will be told in Part II, in the Autumn 2021 edition of the Newsletter.

Mobilisation

In the face of the North Korean invasion, the South Korean Army and the scratch US forces sent from Japan to support them collapsed, retreating to a pocket around the port of Pusan. The British government agreed to send a 'Brigade Group' to Korea, and on 29 July 1950 Brigadier Tom Brodie was ordered to mobilise his 29th Independent Infantry Brigade, based in Colchester, for active service in Korea. The Brigade consisted of the Glosters, the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (RNF) and the Royal Ulster Rifles (RUR), supported by the Centurion tanks of the 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars (KRIH), the 25-pounders of 45th Field Regiment Royal Artillery (RA), and the 4.2-inch mortars of the 170th Independent Mortar Battery RA.



Figure1: Lt Col James Carne VC
DSO

The Glosters Commanding Officer (CO) was Lt Col James Carne (affectionately known by all ranks as 'Fred'). He had assumed command in December 1949, having commanded a battalion of The King's African Rifles in Burma in World War Two. He was a phlegmatic man of few words, but he had seen it all before and was completely unflappable. His soldiers learned to have total confidence in him. Carne was watching the Battalion cricket team play when the Adjutant, Captain Tony Farrar-Hockley, interrupted him with the secret orders that the 29th Brigade was warned to join the UN Force in Korea. 'Well not entirely unexpected. I'll come back to the office', was his response.

At the time all battalions in UK had been reduced down to 3 Rifle companies and were not up to war establishment. National Service had been brought in after the war, but to serve on active service these men had to be volunteers and over 18 unless war had been declared. The government called up the Reservists.

The Reservists arrived somewhat bewildered and some resentful: after all they were veterans from WW2, and many felt they had done their bit. However, they soon knuckled down and formed the backbone of the battalion. By the time the Glosters embarked for Korea the approximate breakdown of manpower was one third Regulars, one third Reservists and one third National Service. Carne, supported by his right-hand man Farrar-Hockley, welded them into shape on Stanford Training Area in Norfolk with a month's gruelling exercise. The Regimental Sergeant Major Jack Hobbs, who had been a prisoner in WW2, was afterwards recognised as one of a handful of truly great RSMs. It was some team!

It is worth noting that many of these reinforcements came from different regiments which made the Glosters both a national and a county regiment, if that is not an oxymoron. The Regiment's culture absorbed them and when it was all over every survivor was proud to call

themselves a Gloster no matter where they originated from, a tribute to the old regimental system. Afterwards when the results of the Korean War were analysed, it came to be realised that this combination of WW2 veterans, reservists and rapidly trained National Servicemen meant that was probably the most experienced brigade the British Army had ever sent to war.



Figure 2: Glosters in Korea Nov 1950-April 1951.

Deployment

The 29th Brigade departed at the beginning of October. By the time it arrived in mid-November the strategic situation had completely transformed. The UN Supreme Commander General MacArthur, in a masterstroke, had launched a sea invasion behind enemy lines at Inchon, near the 38th Parallel, and with complete domination of air and sea, UN forces broke out from Pusan. The overextended North Korean Army fell back. By 1 October UN forces crossed the 38th Parallel and by the end of the month had reached the border with China at the Yalu River. Allegedly some US forces actually crossed into China. China could not tolerate US forces in its hinterland, but its leader Mao Zedong was still cagey about confronting the US directly so sent 'volunteers' to assist the North Koreans.

On 9th November, the Glosters arrived in Pusan on the Empire Windrush, having travelled via Aden, Columbo, and Singapore. On the 11th the Battalion set off by train from Pusan to Suwon in freezing cold conditions, spending 5 days in unheated waggons. Survival was as much about defence against the elements as fighting the enemy. British Army winter clothing was

non-existent. They moved further North to Kaesong, guarding bridges on the Imjin River and carrying out anti-guerrilla patrols around Sibyon'ni. In a dawn raid on 24 November, on the village of Kwangungsong, C Company (Coy) suffered the first casualties of 2 killed and 8 wounded but accounted for two dozen of the enemy.

On the 30 November the Glosters moved again by train north to a halt just south of Pyongyang, then by US Army 2½-ton trucks north up to the Taedong River.

Withdrawal from North Korea

On 1 December Mao's Chinese Peoples' Volunteer Army (CPVA) launched its full-scale counterattack across the Yalu River, forcing a UN withdrawal, which for some elements turned into an ignominious headlong retreat, witnessed by the Glosters in their position just north of Pyongyang.

On 5 December, the last of 1 (US) Corps having passed through them, 29th Brigade, now the rearguard, started its own orderly withdrawal. Last out from Pyongyang was 3 Platoon of Glosters A Coy, and Bn Tactical (Tac) HQ under Carne, who had stayed to the bitter end to ensure all his men were accounted for. Each Gloster company was allowed 2 hours to take what they wanted from US stores. They came back with fur-lined parkas, warm caps, blankets, and woolly boots, tentage and one of the great luxuries, considering it was still rationed in UK: sugar by the sack load.

On 11 December, the Glosters crossed back south over the 38th Parallel only 17 days after crossing it going north. The Glosters spent Christmas dug in on the North West suburbs of Seoul. All companies held their own Christmas parties 'augmented' by locally sourced produce. In Support (S) Coy a brilliant children's party was organised by Capt Sam Weller and CSM Baker.

On New Year's Day, 1951 the next Chinese attack started. A South Korean Division gave way on the left of the UN line. 29th Brigade were next in action. Brigade orders were to delay the enemy rather than to hold them. Overwhelming Chinese numbers soon told and despite solid fighting by the RUR and RNF they were ordered back through the Glosters' position. The Glosters then had to carry out the most difficult battle manoeuvre: a night withdrawal in contact with the enemy. With tight discipline and some anxious moments, it was accomplished and the Brigade broke clean. They retired 70 miles south behind the Han River until they reached a defensible position at Pyongtaek, 40 miles south of Seoul, where they dug in. But no new Chinese attack came: just streams of pathetic refugees. A Coy found a crowd too weak having crossed the river Han to climb out up the steep exit bank, so they became a rescue party. Capt Bill Hickie the Medical Officer inspected the children and did what he could before sending them on their way.

Major Digby Grist now took over as Battalion Second in Command (2i/c_) and handed over S Coy to Sam Weller. When Grist reported to the Adjutant at Battalion Headquarters (Bn HQ) Tony Farrar-Hockley warned that Carne was not a man that needed any small talk.

Battle for Hill 327

During 1-7 February 29th Brigade reorganised to become part of Operation Thunderbolt under command of US 1 Corps, whose mission was to drive the Chinese north of the Han River. It started with sorties from the Pyongtaek area to test Chinese defences and gain intelligence. On

11 February the Glosters advanced to Pabalmak where they saw off overnight Chinese attacks. The next day the Battalion moved forward 3,000 yards and dug in facing Hill 327, where the Chinese had had time to prepare excellent defence positions by tunnelling into the forward face of the hill which was extremely steep and well protected with scrub and boulders. Carne received his orders to take the hill on 13 February. At 1030 hours on the 16th the Glosters crossed the start line, well supported by the US 5th Air Force, the Centurion tanks of the KRIH, and the 4.2-inch mortars of C Troop 170 Battery RA and the 25 pounders of 70 Battery RA. The Glosters scrambled up the steeps often on hands and knees. D Coy was on the left under Major Wood and C Coy on the right under Major Charles Walwyn. They made their way in columns up to the 200-metre contour from which the final assault was to be made.

The Americans, attacking on their right, made slower progress which enabled the Chinese to fire into C Coy's flank. Fanned out into attacking formation, the Glosters climbed forward towards the summit. The Chinese had held their fire but now suddenly opened up. Charles Walwyn, Officer Commanding (OC) C Coy, was badly wounded and Lt Ware, a National Service officer, temporarily took over with distinction, until the arrival of the Company 2i/c Capt Reg Mardell, an inveterate warrior. He stormed up, gripped the situation and was consequently was awarded the MC for his leadership in securing the objective.

The fighting had been hand to hand, grenades and bayonets, a real test of infantry training. Carne was in the thick of it, directing his companies. Bunkers had to be cleared one by one, many Chinese choosing to die rather than surrender, but the better trained Glosters prevailed. The advance continued along the ridge with B Coy, Maj Harding, passing through to take the lead. The Chinese were now just putting up sporadic resistance as they retreated and by the 18 February the Battalion had advanced 6,000 yards.

The third day brought them to the end of the ridge looking down on the Han River. Job done, they then moved into reserve.

Hill 327 was the Glosters first serious all-out action. A battalion attack in which 10 men were killed and 29 wounded. Col Carne was subsequently awarded the DSO for this action, a model of a battalion attack and how to fight through the objective.

Advance to the Imjin

On 15 March Seoul was retaken by UN forces. There was no time to celebrate Back Badge Day on the 21 March but on this propitious day they moved towards the Imjin River which was to rival the Battle of Alexandria in Glosters history. First stop was covering the rear of US 3rd Division at Uijongbu. Then in early April they moved forward to the hills overlooking the Imjin River.

There was now an interlude while the next steps were considered, which allowed time for the active battalions to absorb reinforcements.

The Battle of the Imjin River

The Imjin position was meant to be just a springboard before going forward to establish Ridgeway's Kansas line further north. It was not originally meant to be a serious defensive position, so no defence stores had been brought up. A major defensive battle was not expected there. However, the lull of activity by the Chinese and the lack of hard intelligence as to their

intentions seems to have led to some complacency in higher headquarters preparedness. As Grist recalled:

We were back at our old position on the left of the Brigade front again, with the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers on our right, the Belgian battalion, which had joined the brigade, over the river to give early warning of Chinese intentions, and the Royal Ulster Rifles in reserve. On our left was a weak South Korean division and that was the lot; everyone else in the United Nations forces was to our right or behind us. But the gaps between units were huge and this was largely dictated by the mountainous nature of the terrain. Between us and the Fusiliers was a high indefensible mountain called Kamak-san; my road link with battalion headquarters was a rocky track, dusty in the dry and slippery in the wet, but always rocky and four miles long.¹

The rocky track mentioned in Grist's memoir above was one of the ancient routes to Seoul so was well known to the North Koreans. The frontage the Glosters were asked to hold would have caused disbelief on a staff college exercise, particularly with the weapons of the day and the lack of direct sight between companies. There was a gap of 3 miles to the ROK Division on their left and 2 miles to the nearest RNF company position on the right.

Colonel Carne sited his companies with A Coy under Maj Angier left forward on Castle Hill, a high point overlooking the Imjin, just west of the village of Choksong. It had an observation bunker which had been prepared for US General Van Fleet to use if needed. D Coy (Maj Wood) was on the hill feature south east of the village. B Coy (Maj Harding) guarded the right flank approaches somewhat to the east. C Coy (Maj Mitchell) lay in reserve on the high ground above Bn HQ. This was directly above the point where the road running south to Seoul entered the hills and was guarded by the Drums platoon. The total frontage was 7 miles with a depth of 5 miles. The Assault Pioneers occupied the steep height to the west of the valley on Hill 235, later to become known as Gloster Hill.

On 20th April Bn 2i/c Digby Grist with 2 Gloster Companies went under command of Col Guy Lowther of the 8th Hussars for an 'armoured swan' across the Imjin to see if they could dig out the Chinese. They went forward for 12 miles beyond the river but there was not a trace of the enemy, so they were recalled. A day later everything changed.

April 21: First Contact

A listening post consisting of Corporal Cooke, Drummer Eagles and Private Hunter was established by the CO at last light on Gloster Crossing (Point H on map, figure 4). They were connected by field telephone back to Bn HQ (marked BN on the maps). The clear frosty night gave good visibility across to the north bank about 150 yards away. At about 2200 Eagles spotted movement and reported back that 14 enemy were entering the ford. Flares were put up to give a better view, the three men opened fire and 3 dead Chinese floated downstream, 4 more wounded were pulled back to safety by their comrades. The patrol spent a nervous night but there was no more action.

22 April

Lt Guy Temple was sent with a strong patrol to watch this ford crossing again. Around 2,200 the Chinese started to wade across the ford, now named 'Gloster Crossing'. First in their tens then hundreds then thousands. The patrol engaged them with everything they had and the accurate Final Defensive Fire (FDF) from the Mortars of 170 Battery and the 25 pounders of

¹ Grist, *Remembered with Advantage*.

45 Field Regiment were most effective and enabled Temple to withdraw without casualties and report back.

23 April



Figure3: Lt Philip Curtis VC.

During the early hours of the morning A Coy came under heavy and continuous Chinese wave attack. The Chinese had also used another ford to the west of the one held initially by Lt Temple to infiltrate out of sight between the Glosters and the ROK Division. The platoon occupying the bunker position was forced to retire. Lt Curtis was ordered to retake it with his platoon. Curtis was wounded in his initial attack but having pushed the medic tending him aside, ordered his platoon to give him covering fire, charged towards the bunker himself and as he was scythed down by the Chinese machine gun in the bunker, he managed to throw his grenade which killed all inside. He was awarded the VC posthumously. During this counterattack Major Angier, the Company Commander was also killed as he directed operations. A Coy was ordered to withdraw.

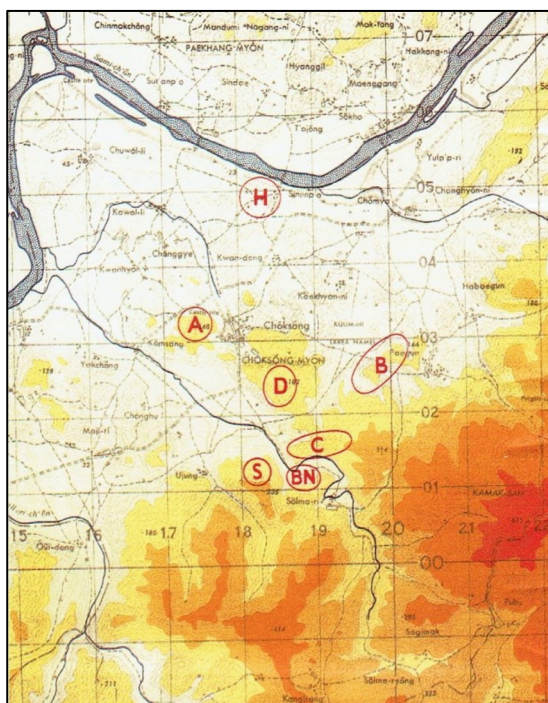


Figure 4: Night of 22/23 April.²

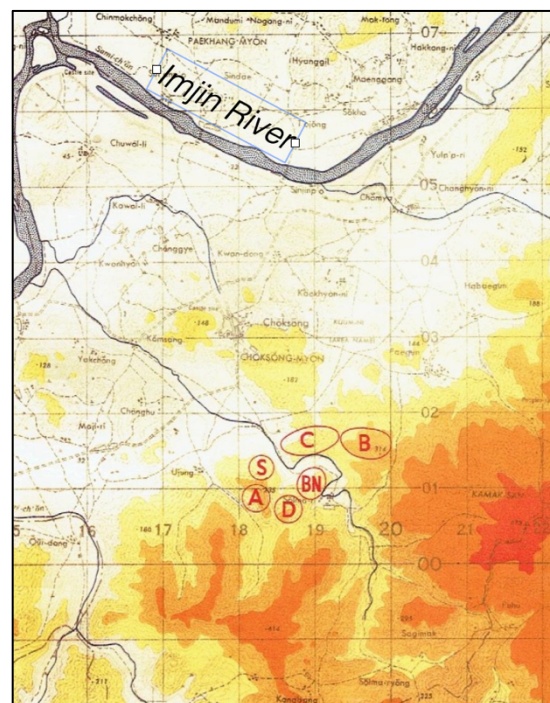


Figure 5: 2nd day position, evening 23 April.

B and D Companies also received their major attack in the early hours. The Chinese attack was developing along the complete 29 Brigade Front. The RNF held out as long as they could until ordered to withdraw their forward companies. This exposed Gloster B & C Companies even more as they were already under attack from their east flank. By holding out as long as they did

² When viewing these maps, it should be remembered that most of the fighting occurred at night due to the Chinese laying low during the day to hide from UN air forces.

the forward companies had blunted the Chinese attack. That night the attacks recommenced and with casualties mounting the positions of the forward companies were becoming untenable. Col Carne took the decision to concentrate the remains of his battalion around Hill 235.

The attack on D Coy started in earnest around 0230 hours and there was hard fighting throughout the dark hours as the Coy repulsed several waves while taking casualties at the same time. Mortar fire support was vital in this period as was support from the Vickers machine guns of the Medium Machine Gun (MMG) platoon. As dawn broke a fighting withdrawal was carried out, platoon leapfrogging through platoon to fall back higher up the hill behind them. By 0700 11 Platoon under Lt Whatmore was virtually out of ammunition and as it would not be able to stave off another concerted Chinese attack Whatmore organised the remains of his platoon to withdraw back through 12 Platoon and take up a position higher up the hill behind. They were given covering fire by the Vickers MMG section. Whatmore noticed that only one of the detachments Vickers guns was in action as the other had received a direct hit. At 0830 having covered the withdrawal of A and B companies as they scrambled back to Hill 235, D Coy was ordered to make its own way back. This was possible by day as the Chinese had to lay low so as not to expose themselves to air attack.

24 April

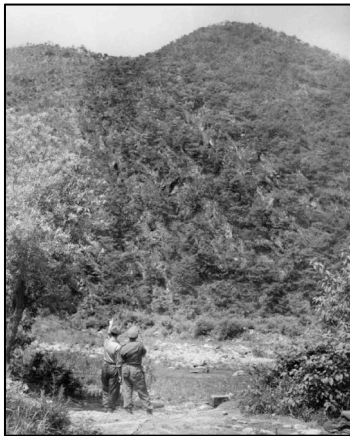


Figure 6: Gloster Hill five weeks after the battle.

During the early hours the companies scrambled their way back to an even tighter perimeter around the summit of Hill 235 to be known forever afterwards as Gloster Hill.

At 0900 a rescue attempt comprised of F Echelon Glosters, some Centurions tanks of 8th Hussars and Filipino light tanks tried to break through down the pass that led to the Glosters cut off position. The leading Filipino tank was hit and completely blocked the road which was now under fire. The remainder had to turn back. The Glosters were now completely cut off and surrounded. At first light Colonel Carne made his rounds of the position adjusting his Companies as necessary. He surprised a Chinese infiltration party and with his escort of 2 regimental policeman and his driver he shot them away leaving 2 dead.

When he got back to his Tac HQ the adjutant asked him what the shooting had been about 'Oh, just shooting away some Chinese', Carne replied.

Back at A Echelon John Watkin-Williams OC HQ Coy and a contingent of sappers organised a resupply of desperately needed radio batteries and ammunition to be air dropped. Unfortunately, the Glosters position by this time was so tight that the drop fell into Chinese hands.

Throughout this time the 25 pounders of 45 Field Regiment RA, commanded by Maj Maris Young, along with the heavy mortars of 170 Troop were supporting the Battalion with untiring relentlessness. They were exhausted but carried on supporting not only the Glosters but the rest of the brigade as well, which was managing to extricate themselves from the battle and eventually break clean back to UN lines. Grist sent the remainder of F Echelon to the gun positions to give them infantry protection, at least it gave his men something to do and take their minds off the disaster that was befalling their comrades at Solma-Ri.

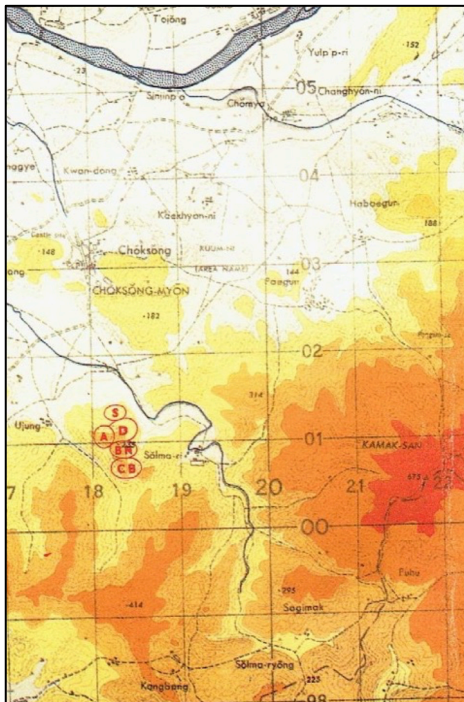


Figure 7: 3rd day position, 24 April.

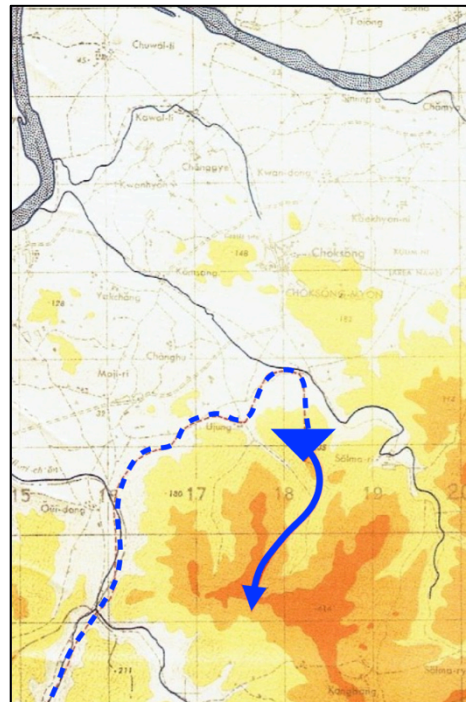


Figure 8: 4th day position, 25 April.

25 April

Back on Hill 235 Colonel Carne drew in his remaining 350 fit-to-fight men even tighter. During the early hours around 0200 the attacks continued but the Glosters held firm and could not be dislodged from the Hill. As dawn broke, they could hear the Chinese bugles gathering for another attack in the valleys around. Carne said to his adjutant, 'It will be a long time before I want to hear a cavalry trumpet again' Captain Farrar-Hockley asked Drum Major Buss if he had his bugle with him. Buss found one being carried by Drummer Eagles and asked the Adjutant what calls to play. 'Everything except Retreat' was the reply. Buss warmed up his lips and then played all the calls ending with the Long Reveille: he was renowned for his beautiful clear ringing tone.³ It was cheered to the echo by the occupants of Gloster Hill and silenced the Chinese for a while.

But it could not stop the final Chinese attack which forced A Coy back, only the continuing support from the artillery interspersed with air strikes gave the Glosters some respite.

Grist, now at 29 Brigade HQ, relayed Brigadier Brodie's message to Col Carne that the Glosters' job was done. The remainder of the Brigade had broken clean. The Glosters and 170 troop were to attempt to break out and make their way back to UN lines. This was the last time that there was radio contact before the batteries ran out. Carne called in his company commanders and told them to get their companies out as best they could. The wounded would have to be left behind, but the Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) Capt Bill Hickey, his medical orderlies and Padre Sam Davies volunteered to stay with them.

OC D Coy Mike Harvey decided to break out in the direction from which the Chinese had attacked believing this would be the least expected direction. He led out 92 men including Capt Bob Martin and part of his machine gun platoon. They moved north. initially down the

³ See front cover for Ken Howard's depiction of this iconic moment in the battle.

spur of Gloster Hill and then turned West. They saw no Chinese but as they turned south, they were spotted and had to split up and fight their way through feeling like the targets in a shooting gallery, with the enemy in the hills above them. It was a hair-raising day; 46 of Mike Harvey's party made it back to UN lines despite being fired on briefly by an American tank troop who quickly realised their mistake and then gave them a lift back to safety. A few hours later a further 6 of the MMG platoon under Capt Bob Martin turned up, they had taken a slightly different route.

A trickle more made it back to UN lines in the next few days, but the rest were steadily rounded up and without ammunition, water, rations and thoroughly exhausted were forced to surrender. Over two months they were marched back to within 40 miles of the Chinese border to the village of Chongsung which was taken over as a Prisoner of War (POW) camp. The stand had not been in vain. 29th Brigade had been attacked by six Chinese Divisions, about 60,000 men. The Glosters were holding the old route to Seoul through the hills and received the full force of the 63rd Chinese Peoples' Volunteer Army. That army took 11,000 casualties in the 4-day battle and did not achieve their objective in securing that route for logistic supply on the first day. For 4 days the route was dominated by the artillery forward observation officers from 70 Field Battery RA embedded with The Glosters, the 4.2inch mortars of 170 Battery RA under command, and the mortars, MMGs and riflemen of The Glosters. Logistic resupply was always the Achilles heel of the Chinese and the delay caused their attack on Seoul to falter. The remainder of 29th Brigade and supporting UN forces had had time to regroup on the Han River and halt that advance for ever.

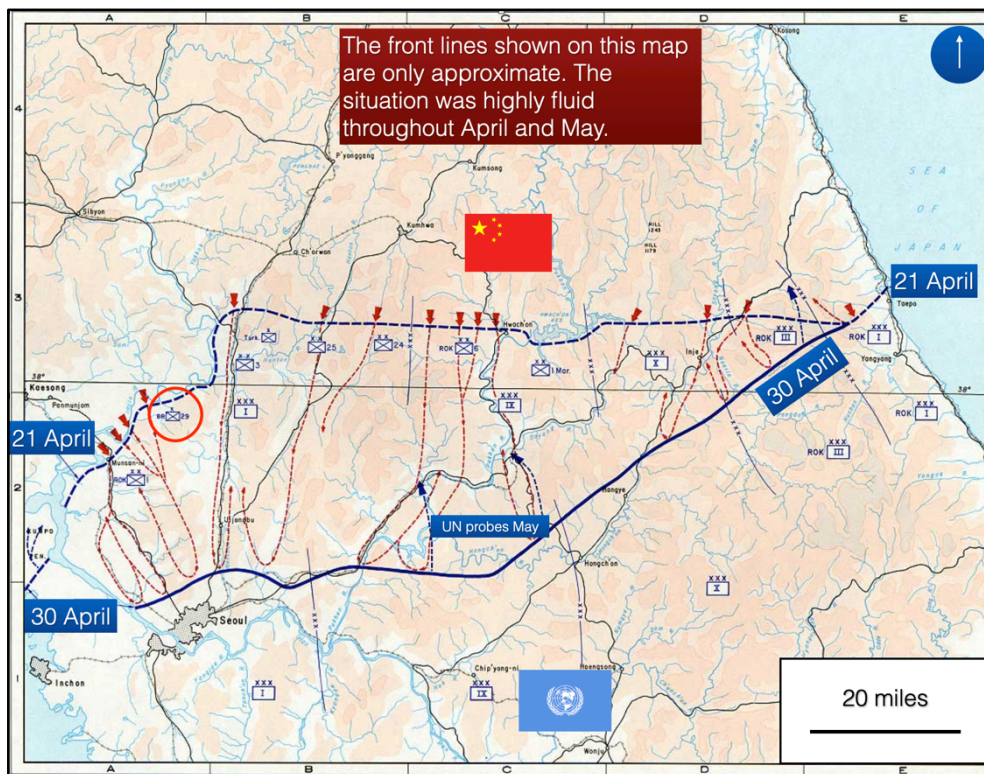


Figure 9: Frontlines 1 April to 30 May 1951. The 29th Brigade position prior to Chinese offensive circled. In the counter offensive that followed in June the UN was able to regain the ground lost, including the 29th Bde's position at the Imjin.

Gloster casualties were 58 dead, 111 wounded, 30 more died in captivity. The remainder prisoners of war for at least 2 years. The story of that heroic captivity and how the Battalion, against the odds, reformed in the days and weeks after the Imjin will be told in Part II, to follow in the autumn edition of the Newsletter.

<p>Imjin River Battle casualties for the Glosters' Battle Group: 63 killed in action 31 died in captivity 114 wounded 63 escaped the battle area 530 went into captivity</p>	<p>Honours and Awards: Victoria Cross (VC) 2 Distinguished Service Order (DSO) 2 Member of the British Empire (MBE) 1 Military Cross (MC) 4 Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) 2 Military Medal (MM) 10 British Empire Medal (BEM) 3 Mention in Despatches (MID) 49</p>
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Harding memoirs
Temple memoirs



Figure 10: Roll call of the survivors.



Gloucestershire Imjin 70 Co-ordination Group

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70th Anniversary of the Imjin River Programme

This year is the 70th anniversary of the Battle of the Imjin River (22-25 Apr 1951). This battle was fought by the Gloucestershire Regiment (now RIFLES) within 29 Brigade as part of the UN Force led by the US. It was a major turning point for the Korean War (1950-53). We want to ensure that we fully optimise this anniversary for people, organisations and businesses around Gloucestershire.

From initial discussions between major stakeholders within the county, including the City Council, The Rifles and the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum it was felt that it was important for there to be a central co-ordinating body to ensure that all people, organisations and businesses that wanted to be involved have a forum to share and co-ordinate their efforts. Hence the formation of the **Gloucestershire Imjin 70 Co-ordination Group**.

The Aim of the Group

The Aim of the Group is to promote, co-ordinate and support events across Gloucestershire that commemorate the anniversary of the Battle of the Imjin River.

The Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire, Mr Edward Gillespie OBE, is the President of the Group which consists of a team that reflect military, history, cultural and educational aspects of the County.

The anniversary of the Battle is 22-25 April, but the events will run from April until Remembrance Day with **the main events taking place in and around August and September** in the hope that we are past the worst of the current COVID situation.

Imjin 70 Programme – Notes for Your Diary!

The original intention was for a series of events throughout the summer, however, after taking advise from the City Council it was decided to focus fewer events into the second half of the summer. Please see the table following for details.

We look forward to seeing you at these events throughout 2021. Please pass this information to anyone who may be interested. For further details, particularly nearer the time of events please go to: <https://soldiersofglos.com/imjin-70/>

Best Wishes

Lt Col Tony Ayres
Chairman
Imjin 70 Group

Date (2021)	IMJIN 70 EVENTS
Sun 25 Apr	<p>Private Commemoration Service streamed live from Gloucester Cathedral. The link to watch the Service live is:</p> <p>https://www.gloucestercathedral.org.uk/worship/services/special-services/a-service-for-the-70th-anniversary-of-the-battle-of-the-imjin-.php</p>
<p>3 Jul at 18:00 hrs</p> <p>31 Jul at 18:00 hrs</p>	<p>Long Room Talks: ‘The Korean War’</p> <p>To mark the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of the Imjin River, Lt Col Rob Dixon OBE will be giving two talks in The Museum Long Room about the Gloucestershire Regiment’s involvement.</p> <p>‘From Pusan to The Imjin via Pyongyang with The Glosters’ This will cover the origins of the war, the UN advance to the Chinese border, the Battle for Hill 327 and the advance to the Imjin position.</p> <p>‘The Battle of the Imjin River and its Aftermath’ This will cover the Battle, the Reformation of the Glosters and the Prisoners of War.</p> <p>Following each Talk the Long Room Bar will be open to ensure an entertaining evening.</p> <p>Tickets £12 each (£8 for Friends of SOGM and Museum Members)</p> <p>There will be limited seating so apply early for tickets to enquiries@sogm.co.uk</p>
28 Aug	Imjin Village at Gloucester Docks (Part of ‘Gloucester Goes Retro’ City wide event.) A mixture of historic and cultural stalls and events for the family.
17-19 Sep	A presentation as part of Gloucester History Festival on The Battle of the Imjin River / Korea (provisional)
25 Sep	Civic Reception for Mayor of Paju / S Korean Representatives by the Mayor of Gloucester. Late morning, including lunch.
26 Sep	The Rifles Commemoration and Education Service at Gloucester cathedral followed by a parade through the streets of Gloucester.
14 Nov	Ex Glosters to march at the Cenotaph in London to honour our comrades who fought and died in the Korean War (To Be Finalised)

FRIENDS OF THE SOLDIERS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE MUSEUM

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

(subject to Covid-19 restrictions permitting)

Summer Reception

Tuesday 22nd June 2021, from 6.30pm

Frampton Court

(Please note change of date)

Chavenage Lecture

Friday 29th October 2021, 6.45pm

Chavenage House, Tetbury

Lecturer: Sinclair McKay

'X and Y: Bletchley and its Listening Stations'

MUSEUM FORTHCOMING EVENTS

There are plans to arrange Long Room Talks in November 2021 to mark the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Bir El Gubi, in North Africa where the tanks of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars faced a formidable German force and were effectively outgunned. Further information will be provided by email.

Calling all budding authors...

We welcome articles from members and our associates on subjects related to the Museum, the military life of Gloucestershire, and more general aspects of military history. Please contact the Editor, Dr Tim Brain on timothy.brain@btinternet.com who will be very pleased to offer advice.