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THE SAMICHON

A final barb in the Hook,
24–27 July 1953

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At 10 pm on 27 July 1953, the Korean War—which had raged for three years, one month and two days—came to an uneasy end. The front line, which had still been active almost until the armistice came into effect, was now silent. The previous three days, however, had seen a battle fought in the Samichon Valley by men of the 1st Commonwealth Division and the US 1st Marine Division against Chinese forces hell bent on securing strategically important high ground and pushing the UN forces back beyond the Imjin River.

The scale of men and matériel committed to this battle was greater than the Australians had experienced at Kapyong, and the shelling by Chinese artillery was greater than experienced by the men at Maryang San. Arrayed against the Chinese was a force that, despite being numerically inferior, had superior artillery strength and coordination. It was also able, depending on the weather, to provide air support, and it had tanks dug in at key locations to provide direct fire support.

The UN and Chinese intelligence arms were highly attuned and knew of troop movements into the front lines. For the soldiers of the United Nations Command, signals intelligence and human intelligence—in the form of information extracted from prisoners and deserters—was vital in being able to detect and prepare for this last offensive of the war.

Gaining the UN positions of the Jamestown Line that dominated the Samichon Valley was the key reason that the Chinese launched this last offensive. Their objectives were to gain a strategic advantage over the UN troops, and possibly open the corridor for an offensive drive on Seoul. Located 48 kilometres north of Seoul, the Samichon Valley is today part of Korea's Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), but in 1953 it was the front line in a very active war. The terrain, like much of Korea, is mountainous, with steep-sided features giving commanding views into the valleys for those who held the high ground. The valley floors, which had been prime rice-producing agricultural land, were fiercely contested battlegrounds in the nightly patrol war as the belligerent parties vied for the upper hand.

For centuries the Samichon Valley has been a traditional invasion route for armies moving north and south. It was no different in the early hours of 25 June 1950 when soldiers of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) crossed the 38th parallel and began their drive on Seoul, starting the war.¹ Over the next 12 months, the Samichon Valley changed hands several times as the war ebbed and flowed. After the Chinese Fifth Phase Offensive ended soon after the Battle of Kapyong in late April 1951, the soldiers of the United Nations Command (UNC) went onto to the offensive in early May. Subsequently, limited offensive actions took place until early October; these saw Chinese and NKPA forces pushed back to a line skewed across the 38th parallel. In October 1951, the United Nations conducted a successful offensive, known as Operation Commando (as recounted in Chapter 10 by Bob Breen, Chapter 11 by Nigel Steel and Chapter 12 by William Purves) in which five infantry divisions, including the 1st Commonwealth Division of I Corps, advanced to, captured, then largely held the Jamestown Line. Part of this new line encompassed the Samichon Valley.

1 R. O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53*, vol. 2: *Combat Operations*, AWM & AGPS, Canberra, 1985, p. 274.

The most dominant feature in the Samichon Valley was Height 146, which became known to the soldiers of the UNC as 'the Hook'. Whoever occupied the Hook was afforded commanding 360-degree views that encompassed the Samichon Valley and back to and beyond the Imjin River. As a result, the Hook was one of the most brutally contested locations in the Korean War. This position quickly gained an evil reputation, and by the end of the war it was said that it was not possible to dig on the Hook without turning up body parts. The stench of death was ever-present.

Six months after Operation Commando, in April 1952 the US 1st Marine Division was transferred from X Corps on the eastern side of Korea to I Corps in the west. The division's new area of responsibility originally stretched from the coast to the Sami'chon (or Sami River) and encompassed the Hook. A series of combat outposts were established forward of the US front line, known as the Main Line of Resistance (MLR), to provide a forward defence buffer.

From early 1952 until the end of the war, the Chinese maintained constant pressure on the UN front line. On the western side of the Korean battlefield, the Samichon Valley was the scene of many hard-fought actions in no man's land, along with numerous attempts by the Chinese to capture the Hook from its defenders. A number of the outposts were either captured or destroyed as the Chinese inexorably closed in on the UNC front line.

The first battle of the Hook began on 26 October 1952 when Chinese forces attacked the US Marines of the 7th Regiment. The Marines were pushed back off the Hook, but soon regained it when they launched a counter-attack. After two days of fighting, the Chinese forces withdrew. Once the Marines regained the Hook, the divisional boundary between the 1st Marine Division and the 1st Commonwealth Division was moved 2 kilometres to the west. As a result, the Commonwealth Division took over responsibility for the ground from the Samichon River to the saddle between Hill 121 and Hill 111 in early November. This slightly compressed the Marines' defensive frontage, which still extended some 55 kilometres from Hill 111 to the west coast of Korea. It was a major undertaking for the Marines who, due to casualties and troop rotations, were already well under the division's nominal strength.

With his division's increased frontage, Major General Michael West, General Officer Commanding (GOC) 1st Commonwealth Division, placed all three of his brigades into the line for the first time. The British 29th Infantry Brigade, already occupying the Commonwealth Division's left sector, took control of the new territory. It was the 1st Battalion, Black Watch, that took over the Hook from the Marines. They faced an uphill struggle to repair positions that had been entirely devastated, but they managed the task just before the next Chinese attack.²

The Chinese wasted no time in trying to dislodge the new occupants. The second battle of the Hook began the evening of 18 November 1952, when several companies of Chinese infantry attacked the Hook, and concluded more than 11 hours later when the Chinese were finally driven off the feature. The Black Watch's forward positions had been overrun, but men holed up in bunkers fought ferociously to deny the Chinese retaining a foothold. Artillery was also called down on the Black Watch's forward positions, which helped dislodge the Chinese and retain the position as part of the UNC front line. The Black Watch suffered 107 casualties—killed, wounded and missing. The Chinese suffered at least 100 dead and around 600 wounded.³

During a second stint on the Hook in April and May 1953, the Black Watch defeated a Chinese attack of company strength on the night of 7/8 May.⁴ The attack lasted less than half an hour, including the 10 minutes of Chinese preparatory artillery fire, during which around a thousand Chinese shells fell on the Hook positions. The following day a Chinese propaganda broadcast 'promised sterner things in the future' for the occupants of the Hook.⁵ Fortunately for the men of the Black Watch, their Korean War was over soon after. The battalion was replaced in the 29th Brigade, but instead of a well-earned break, the Scotsmen were sent to the British Kenya Colony to help quell the Mau Mau uprising.⁶

2 T. Carew, *Korea: The Commonwealth at War*, Cassell, London, 1967, pp. 266–8.

3 Headquarters, Commonwealth Division, G Branch, November 1952, p. 12, AWM373 Class WO281/76.

4 Carew, *Korea*, pp. 272–4.

5 Headquarters, Commonwealth Division, G Branch, January–June 1953, 8 May 1953, p. 593, AWM373 Class WO281/700.

6 Black Watch, 'Post War, 1945–2006', theblackwatch.co.uk/history/.

The 1st Battalion, Duke of Wellington's Regiment (known colloquially as 'the Dukes'), was the next battalion to occupy the Hook. This battalion, forewarned of an impending Chinese attack, again through signals and human intelligence, maintained an alert posture. The only information they lacked was the date of the attack. The Chinese launched their heaviest attack on the Hook on the evening of 28 May. The Chinese infantrymen swiftly gained the front-line positions. Stubborn resistance from small parties of Dukes fighting from bunkers and tunnels—with the Commonwealth Division's artillery support and a counter-attack by the Dukes' reserve company—restored the position and forced the Chinese to withdraw.

Throughout the night the Chinese fired some 10,000 shells onto the Hook and surrounding features. Trenches that had been 10 feet deep in places were now no more than ankle height or had been levelled completely. All of the bunkers had been damaged or destroyed, and the defensive wire had largely ceased to exist. The Dukes suffered 149 casualties, of which 28 were killed. Chinese casualties were estimated to be 250 dead and 800 wounded.⁷ Having failed to capture the Hook by *coup de main*, the Chinese focused their attention on the adjacent bastion known as Boulder City. Throughout June the patrol war in front of the Marines' and Commonwealth lines intensified.

To replace the exhausted Dukes, Major General Michael West instituted a divisional move in place. Known as Operation Emperor, the move saw all three brigades of the Commonwealth Division move areas of responsibility. Starting on 9 July, the 28th Brigade moved from the right flank to the left, the 29th Brigade moved from the left flank to the centre, and the Canadian 25th Brigade moved from the centre to the right flank. The operation was successfully carried out and concluded on 12 July.

The US 1st Marine Division had begun returning to the MLR on the morning of 6 July, replacing the US 25th Infantry Division and the attached Turkish Brigade. The 7th Marine Regiment was first to return to the line, their sector encompassing from Boulder City to Hill 111. The Chinese were aware of the handover and tried to take advantage of the situation. Heavy mortar and artillery fire fell on the Marines' front line and the two combat outposts forward of this line, known as Berlin and East Berlin. In the evening, a reinforced Chinese battalion attacked the two outposts and briefly captured East Berlin, but were ejected after fierce fighting.

7 A.J. Barker, *Fortune Favours the Brave: The Hook, Korea, 1953*, Leo Cooper, London, 1974, p. 142.

The 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier John Wilton, was faced with an area of operations divided by the Samichon River, which would lend its name to the forthcoming battle. Wilton gave his two strongest battalions, the 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), and the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), the responsibility for the Hook and surrounding positions. The 1st Battalion, Durham Light Infantry was placed to the right of the river. The 1st Battalion, Royal Fusiliers,⁸ after having already served, albeit briefly, on the Hook to bolster the Dukes, became the reserve battalion.

The first priority for the Australians was the rebuilding of the Hook and surrounding positions. The defensive wire and minefield fences had to be almost entirely rebuilt and, by necessity, all the work had to be conducted at night. It is a testimony to the officers and men of both 2RAR and 3RAR's assault pioneer platoons that, despite the Chinese artillery, the front-line defences were repaired and in good order before the impending Chinese attack. Particularly noteworthy was Lieutenant Patrick Forbes, 2RAR's assault pioneer platoon commander. He and his platoon not only rebuilt a destroyed minefield fence but also traversed that field—which was unmapped—at night and managed to survive the experience, having suffered no casualties as a result.

During the same period, Australian patrols clashed frequently with the Chinese and suffered several casualties. The area of greatest contact was on a feature forward of the Hook known as Green Finger. Unknown to the Australians, the Chinese had established a cave on the reverse slope. Chinese patrols would race from this location to a small hill nearby, while the Australian patrols would also attempt to gain the same feature. The contacts were fierce and often at close range.⁹

From the beginning of July there was a distinct increase in Chinese radio network activity, as new gun batteries were brought into line in preparation for one last offensive. Along with the signals intercepts, and increased net traffic, numerous Chinese soldiers deserted to the Australians and Americans. The intelligence that they provided quite clearly pointed to an imminent offensive. The Chinese had enough artillery and ammunition available for the coming offensive and were not above using an artillery

8 Not to be confused with the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, which left Korea after Maryang San.

9 H.R. Downey, 'The Second Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, Korea, 1953–1954', www.koreanwaronline.com/history/oz/2rar/2rarA.htm.

piece as an over-sized sniper rifle. Private Douglas Cruden of A Company, 3RAR, was killed in such a manner after he was spotted above the skyline in the forward positions. A Chinese 76-millimetre round landed at his feet, killing him instantly.¹⁰

The weather on any battlefield can cause all manner of problems to those conducting operations. July in Korea is normally the wettest month of the year. The country receives up to 60 per cent of its annual rainfall during July, flooding is common, and July 1953 was no exception.¹¹ Heavy monsoonal rains from early to mid-July caused the Imjin River to rise 20 metres, destroying Spoonbill Bridge and closing Teal and Harlequin Bridges and Widgeon Ferry for three days.¹² Road traffic was largely brought to a halt, forcing supplies and ammunition to be transported by six-wheel-drive US Marine amphibious vehicles (DuKWs).¹³ Wounded men were sometimes evacuated on the return journey.

On the night of 14 July, heavy rain drenched the Samichon Valley, causing several bunkers to collapse in the Australian positions. On at least one occasion, a bunker's occupants had to be rescued after becoming trapped.¹⁴ Trenches were turned into something resembling the Western Front in the winter months of the First World War, but in this case conditions were hot and very humid, the other extreme of the front-line misery scale. For the men working on the construction and repair of bunkers, the conditions were hellish.

On 19 July, negotiations for an armistice were concluded at Panmunjom. The date for the signing was set for 27 July. In the evening of 19 July, the Chinese attacked and captured the Berlin and East Berlin outposts from the US Marines. To limit any form of assistance to the Marines, the Chinese shelled the 2RAR Medium Machine Gun (MMG) section on Hill 111 and the battalion positions on the Hook, killing one man and wounding three.¹⁵

10 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, war diary, July 1953, AWM85 4/55 [hereafter 3RAR, war diary], p. 6.

11 'Historical weather for 1953 in Seoul, South Korea', Weather Spark Beta, weatherspark.com/history/33287/1953/Seoul-Seoul-Jikhalsi-South-Korea.

12 L. Ballenger, *The Final Crucible: US Marines in Korea*, vol. 2: 1953, Potomac Books, Washington, DC, 2002, p. 230.

13 Headquarters, 28 British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade, war diary, May–July 1953, AWM85 1/1, p. 83.

14 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, war diary, July 1953, AWM85 3/5 [hereafter 2RAR, war diary], p. 10.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Throughout the day of 24 July, Chinese artillery had been limited to harassing fire on 2RAR's and the Marines' positions. But at 8 pm, with heavy rain falling, the Chinese artillery fire increased to a barrage focused on positions at the Hook, Hills 121 and 111, and a position known as Boulder City. Soon after, the Australian standing patrol on Green Finger called in an artillery strike on a group of 50 Chinese infantrymen who were moving towards the Hook and Hill 121. The New Zealand gunners responded, using variable timing fuses on their shells to create airbursts, and the Chinese attack was driven back with heavy casualties.

Although several more attempts were made by the Chinese over the next few hours to attack the Hook and Hill 121, the New Zealanders' artillery fire was so effective that the attackers did not even get close to the defensive wire. However, they did manage to get spotters into a position between Hills 121 and 111 from where they called accurate fire down onto 2RAR's mortar baseplate position and rear areas.¹⁶ The Chinese shelling caused a number of Australian casualties: 2RAR lost two men killed and several others wounded. One of those killed was Corporal Albert Wells of D Company. Corporal Jack Philpot, on his second tour in Korea, was next to Wells when a shell hit their position. He described the moments immediately after:

'Hey, turn off that bloody tap, what's going on, I can't see!!' I came out of a state of unconsciousness to find that the man next to me had half his head blown off. An enemy shell had scored a direct hit on our trench. The sound of the tap was his life blood pouring out onto the floor of the trench.¹⁷

Even before the Chinese barrage lifted from Hill 111, their infantry, who were believed to have been lying up at the toe of the 'Betty Grable' feature or in the 1.5-metre-high rushes in the paddy fields, charged through their own artillery in an attempt to overrun the Australians and Marines on the hill. They used satchel charges against bunkers and quickly captured the Marines' front-line positions.¹⁸

16 H.R. Downey, 'The Second Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment: Korea, 1953–1954', *Korean War Online*, www.koreanwaronline.com/history/oz/2rar/2rarA.htm.

17 J. Philpot, 'Return to Korea', unpublished manuscript, AWM MSS1447.

18 2RAR, war diary, July 1953, p. 211.

Sergeant Brian Cooper, in charge of the MMG section, organised his men into all-round defence, and kept his two Vickers guns on their intended trajectory covering Hills 121 and 146. He placed a Bren gun facing the Marines' positions, which had now been overrun. Eleven surviving Marines had joined Cooper and his men in their positions and assisted in holding off the Chinese. Several Marines took cover in one of the gun bunkers, and Corporal Ron Walker was heard to say, 'Get out of there, you bastards!' Walker placed the Marines in a firing position between a machine-gun post and the command post, with orders to help defend the position.

Private Dan Mudford and Corporal Doug 'Kipper' Franklin were wounded during the Chinese assault. Mudford had dirt and sand blasted into his face and eyes and was temporarily deafened by an explosion. He was taken to the Marines' aid post by Walker.¹⁹ Franklin was shot in his left upper arm as he defended the Australian positions when the Chinese attempted to overrun them. He was thrown back into the trench, blood spurting from a severed artery. After being stabilised, he took himself to the Marine aid post at the rear of Hill 111. Here he joined Mudford, and his wound was assessed and treated by a Marine corpsman. There were also a dozen wounded Marines in the aid post, all requiring evacuation.²⁰

The mode of evacuation arrived in the most unlikely form. Corporal Les Pye, a New Zealander on secondment to the 1st Battalion, Royal Tank Regiment, arrived as crew commander of a Centurion MKI tank, which had been converted from a gun tank to an ammunition carrier/recovery vehicle, known as 'the Tug'. The vehicle's turret had been removed and two steel doors welded in place. A crew commander's structure had been added, to which a Browning .30-calibre machine gun had been mounted as a defensive weapon. Pye recalled the heavy incoming fire and the curses of his driver as hot brass flew into his compartment from the .30 calibre as Pye test-fired the weapon.²¹ The Australian and Marine wounded were evacuated through 2RAR's Regimental Aid Post to the Indian Field Ambulance and on to the Norwegian Mobile Army Surgical Hospital.

19 R. Walker, 'Last days on the "Hook"—1953', in *Korea Remembered: The RAN, ARA and RAAF in the Korean War of 1950–1953*, ed. M. Pears and F. Kirkland, Doctrine Wing, Combined Arms Training and Development Centre, Georges Heights, NSW, 1998, pp. 159–63.

20 D.G. Franklin, letter to Olwyn Green, Papers of Charles and Olwyn Green, AWM PR0466, 6/32.

21 L. Pye, email to author, 3 July 2014; D.G. Franklin, letter to Olwyn Green, Papers of Charles and Olwyn Green, AWM PR0466, 6/32.

As the fighting intensified, Chinese porters were observed bringing up supplies of small arms, grenades and other matériel, making it obvious to those on Hill 111 that the Chinese intended to take and hold the position. In the nearby Contact Bunker, located between C Company's positions on Hill 121 and the MMG Section on Hill 111, Lance Corporal Ken Crockford noticed Chinese troops in front of his position. He and his section engaged them, forcing the Chinese to retire after a short firefight. With the situation on Hill 111 becoming dire, Cooper called a 'box me in' barrage onto his position.²² The New Zealand gunners—again with their excellent gunnery and the deadly variable timing fuses on their shells—stopped the Chinese attack in its tracks. For the remainder of the night, Cooper and his men fought off repeated Chinese attempts to overrun his position, but just before sunrise the attacks ceased.²³

The night had been desperate for the Marines on Boulder City. The initial Chinese barrage devastated the defensive wire and minefields and destroyed much of the Marines' trenches, bunkers and fighting positions. As at Hill 111, the Chinese attacked through their own barrage in what seemed to be overwhelming numbers.²⁴

The Marines' artillery, ably supported by batteries from the US Army's 25th Infantry Division, the Turkish Brigade and the 1st Commonwealth Division (especially the 16th Field Regiment, Royal New Zealand Artillery) pounded Chinese forming-up points and their attack routes, but the situation was still dire for the Marines. During the night they were forced off the forward slope in a bitter hand-to-hand struggle in which platoons, fire teams and lone Marines fought to hold on to their positions. Others, cut off, simply played dead until they could make their way back to friendly positions. During the first night of the battle, more than 3,000 Chinese troops had assaulted the Main Line of Resistance between the Hook and Boulder City.

As dawn on 25 July broke, the Australians and Americans on the front line took stock. The positions on the Hook had not been directly attacked, although there had been casualties to the patrol on Green Finger and in the C and D Company positions of 2RAR. Chinese forces had taken the forward trenches to the west of Hill 111—what was left of them. Some

22 Brian Charles Cooper, interview with author, 3 November 2014.

23 Ibid.

24 P. Meid and J.M. Yingling, *US Marine Operations in Korea, 1950–1953*, vol. 5: *Operations in West Korea*, Historical Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 1972, p. 385.

Chinese troops had holed up in bunkers, including one near the MMG section. This was discovered when Ron Walker and Private Cranston conducted a reconnaissance into the Marines' communication trench to the west of the Australian positions. On approaching a bunker, Walker and Cranston were greeted by a Chinese grenade. The shrapnel from the resulting explosion wounded Cranston in the buttocks, but he remained on duty. The Chinese soldier refused to surrender, and Cooper ordered grenades thrown into the bunker, killing the Chinese soldier.

The Marines went to work clearing Chinese infantry out of their positions to the left of Hill 111 and on Boulder City. It took most of the day to reclaim their positions, which had further deteriorated through the Marines' use of a 3.5-inch rocket launcher borrowed from Cooper's position, as well as flame throwers and fire support from their M-46 Patton tanks used to clear the area.

While the fighting to reclaim the Marines' positions went on, Chinese stretcher parties approached the Marines' and Australian positions to collect their wounded and dead. These stretcher parties were left alone as they were non-combatants. However, those Chinese carrying weapons and moving about were engaged.²⁵ Ron Walker recalled sitting outside his dugout, watching Marine bodies being stretchered to the rear and feeling quite upset by it.²⁶ The now-depleted MMG section was relieved that afternoon by another section from 2RAR's MMG Platoon.²⁷

Throughout the day, the Chinese kept up sporadic artillery fire on Australian and American positions. Once again, as evening fell the artillery fire intensified to a barrage, and Chinese forces once more advanced to attack. The US and Commonwealth artillery again opened fire on Chinese form-up points and attacking waves of infantry as they stormed forward to attack Hill 111 and Boulder City.²⁸ The Chinese forces again quickly gained the Marines' front lines and surrounded the Australian position on Hill 111. Lance Corporal Ken Crockford's position was also surrounded, and Chinese infantry were engaged in hand-to-hand fighting in the trenches and bunkers, which lasted well over an hour. Crockford,

25 Cooper, interview.

26 Walker, 'Last days on the "Hook"—1953', pp. 162–3.

27 Cooper, interview.

28 2RAR, war diary, p. 31.

like Cooper the night before, was forced to call artillery onto his position to avoid being overrun. The New Zealand gunners again responded, and the Chinese attack through the gap to Hill 121 was stopped.²⁹

Fighting still raged on around Hill 111, where five men of the replacement MMG section were wounded during the night.³⁰ Chinese troops attacked in greater numbers than on the previous night, and again the artillery of the 1st Commonwealth Division, the US Marines and the US Army proved decisive. As on the day before, the Marines spent much of 26 July reclaiming their forward positions.³¹ The Chinese attacked Boulder City and Hill 111 again that evening. These attacks were not driven home with the intensity of the previous two nights, and the Chinese forces were easily repulsed.

Just after midnight Chinese forces again attacked the Marines on Boulder City. Judging from the after-action reports in the 1st Battalion 7th Regiment's war diary, this attack was of company size and did not appear to the defenders to have been driven home with any great enthusiasm. The Marines, however, held nothing back. With artillery and tank support, they inflicted heavy casualties on the Chinese, who were forced to withdraw.³²

The last infantry actions of the war occurred later in the morning when platoon-sized Chinese forces attacked Boulder City and Hill 111, in what were thought to be covering actions to allow their stretcher-bearers to retrieve wounded comrades.³³ During these actions the Chinese suffered further casualties. The fighting continued as the armistice was being signed a little over 8 kilometres away at Panmunjom by US and North Korean delegates, who could no doubt hear the fighting still going on.

Although Hill 111 had come under attack again, the Australians suffered no further combat casualties. The only casualty listed in 2RAR's war diary that morning was a member of the MMG section on Hill 111 who had been shot and wounded by a Marine when he was caught 'souveniring' items from Marines' packs. The man survived his wounds and, after some time recovering in Japan, was flown home to Australia.³⁴

29 O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, p. 281.

30 2RAR, war diary, p. 34.

31 Meid and Yingling, *Operations in West Korea*, pp. 388–91.

32 Ballenger, *The Final Crucible*, p 257.

33 Cooper, interview.

34 2RAR, war diary.

During the day, the Australians and Americans took fire from Chinese artillery but received no further casualties. The New Zealanders fired a number of rounds of counter-battery fire throughout the day, and the Americans fired as many mortar, artillery, tank and small-arms rounds as they could at the Chinese positions.³⁵ At 10 pm the front lines fell silent as the armistice took effect.

The sounds of war had been a continuous presence for those on the front line. For many, the silence that descended on the battlefield seemed ominous. Still expecting an attack to materialise, they ensured that weapon pits remained occupied, and a watch was kept on the Chinese. As dawn broke on 28 July, the men on the Hook wondered whether the war really was over and whether the Chinese would respect the ceasefire. The ceasefire held, and over the next three days both sides dismantled their front-line defences and withdrew the required distance (2 kilometres each), thereby creating the DMZ, which is still extant at the time of writing.

During the Battle of the Samichon, leading up to ceasefire, 2RAR suffered five men killed and 24 wounded, two of whom died from their wounds. The US Marines suffered 43 men killed and 316 wounded. The Chinese casualty figures will likely never be known, but witnesses who saw the situation forward of the Australian positions on 28 July, such as Brigadier (later General Sir) John Wilton and Captain (later Major General) David Butler, estimated that 2,000–3,000 had been killed and up to 10,000 wounded.³⁶ Wilton's oft-quoted letter paints a vivid picture: 'the floor of the valley between the Hook and the Chinese positions was almost covered with dead Chinese ... on the immediate approaches to 2RAR the bodies literally carpeted the ground sometimes two deep ... It was a terrible sight which I will never forget.'³⁷ Since arriving on the Hook, 3RAR had suffered two men killed, including a member of the Korean Service Corps, and two wounded. 2RAR had suffered nine men killed or died of wounds and had 31 men wounded. The Marines had, over a similar period, suffered considerably greater casualties, with 181 killed and 1,430 wounded.

35 Meid and Yingling, *Operations in West Korea*, pp. 396–7; '11th Marine Regiment—Command Diary—July 1953', www.koreanwar2.org/kwp2/usmc/089/m089_cd24_1953_07_2479.pdf, p. 25.

36 Wilton quoted in O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, p. 282; Major General David Matheson Butler (ret'd) quoted in D. Horner, *Strategic Command: General Sir John Wilton and Australia's Asian Wars*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2005, p. 157.

37 Wilton quoted in O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, p. 282.

Had the Hook or Boulder City fallen into Chinese hands, the consequences for the UNC forces on the Jamestown Line might well have been dire. Major General West believed that a withdrawal of 4,000 yards (3.7 kilometres) would have been necessary. Senior UN commanders also believed that had the Chinese achieved their objectives, they could have forced a renegotiation of the armistice agreement or, failing that, launched a new offensive towards Seoul.

Although the Chinese sent an elite division, supported by an increased strength in artillery and mortars, they were unable to effect a breakthrough of the Marines' or the Australian positions. Despite having the numbers in infantry, the Chinese lacked several key elements that the Australians and Marines possessed.

Over the two main nights of the battle, the Chinese infantry faced well-coordinated artillery, mortar and rocket fire; tanks, providing direct fire support; and, after the first night, when the weather cleared, air support, which delivered bombs, rockets and napalm onto the Chinese attackers. But it was the men in the trenches who had fought tenaciously, often in hand-to-hand actions that prevented the Chinese from gaining an enduring hold on the Hook, which they could have further exploited.

The Battle of the Samichon River ranks as one of the heaviest actions to which Australian soldiers were exposed during the Korean War. The scale of Chinese artillery arrayed against the men of 2RAR and 3RAR was greater than that experienced at Maryang San, but the combined-arms might of the US and Commonwealth forces was brought to bear in greater strength than at Kapyong. The coordination and support between allied nations proved decisive in bringing the Korean War to an end on the battlefield and keeping the corridor to Seoul safely closed.

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