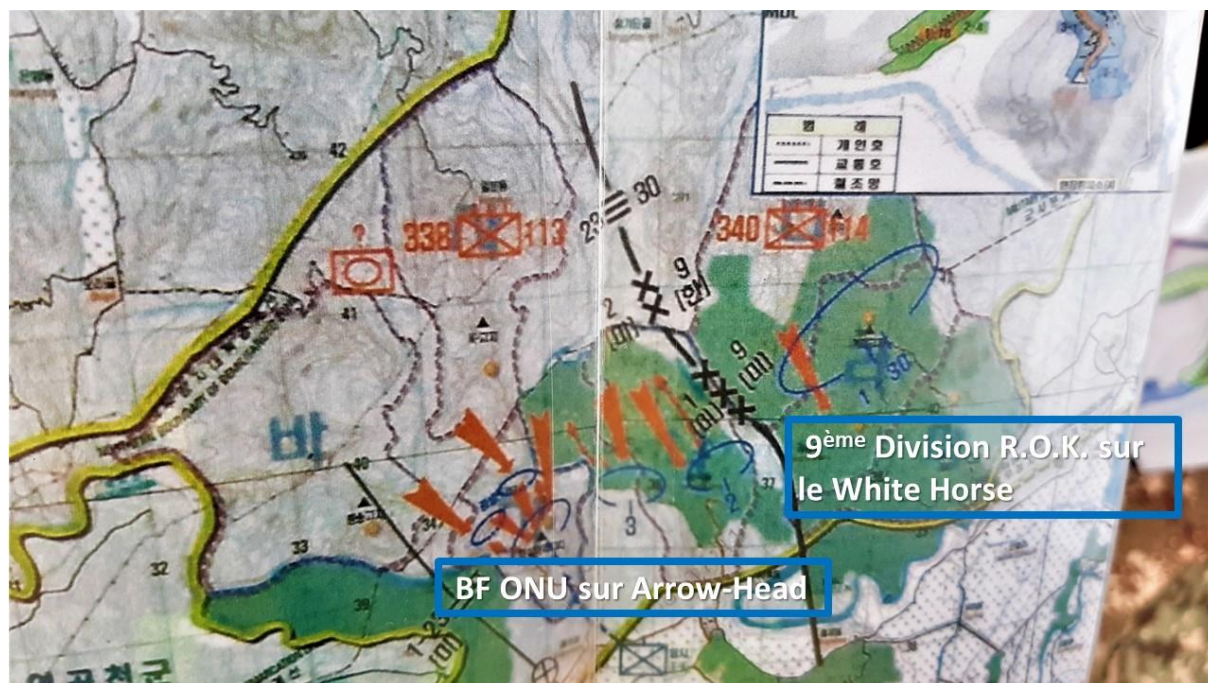


## The Battle of Arrowhead in October 1952

In 1952, the Korean War had definitively ground to a halt on the front lines. The French Battalion of the UN (BF/ONU) spent the first four months of the year in outposts located in the "Iron Triangle and T-BONE" sector, where it engaged in numerous combat operations in the form of raids, reconnaissance patrols, and ambushes. After the fierce fighting on T-BONE with the loss of 21 volunteers killed in action, the battalion was sent at Camp KAPYONG for training and regrouping. The battalion returned to the front line in early October in the Iron Triangle region.

### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The fall of 1952 saw the suspension of the armistice talks at PANMUJON and the resumption of the communist offensive. The Chinese had had plenty of time to prepare for the attack. For this new battle, the enemy had prepared an Assembly Area of troops and ammunition never seen before in Korea.



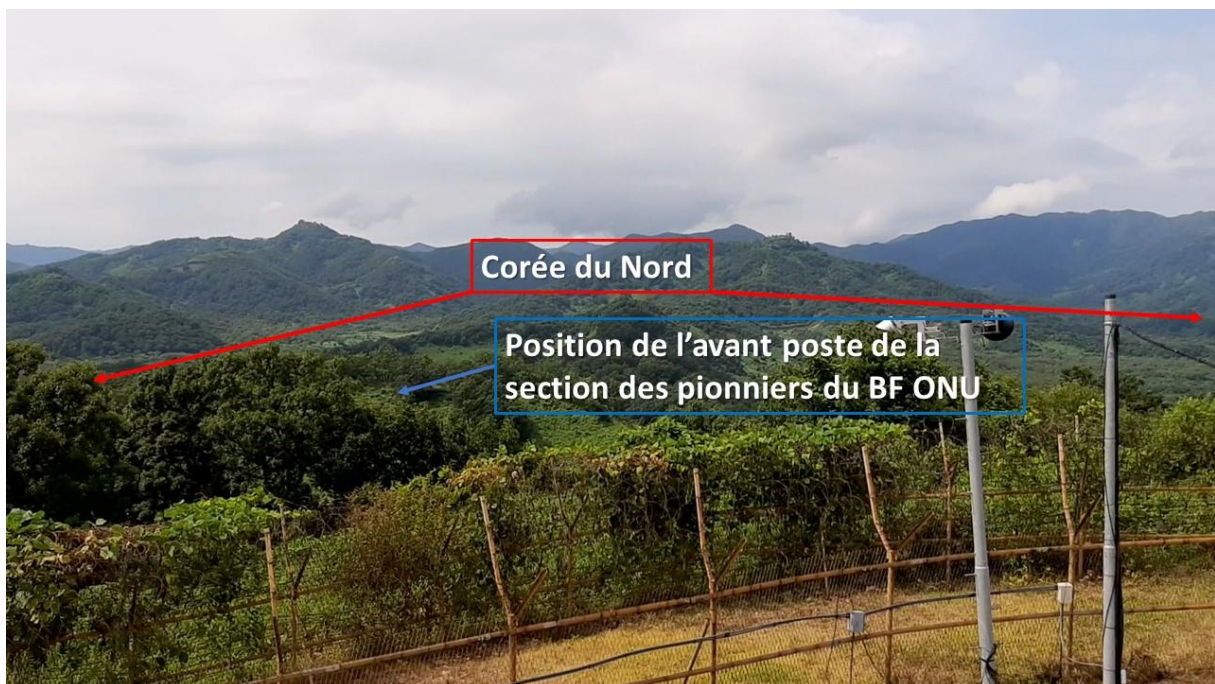
Overlay of the French Battalion (BF ONU) at ARROWHEAD

The French are once again on the front line a few kilometres East of the T-BONE peaks and now occupy the defensive lines of Hill 281, code name ARROWHEAD, within the CHORWON sector, thus denying the enemy access to the plain of the same name, which is the traditional invasion route to Seoul. The defensive line occupied by the The French Battalion (BF ONU) stretches for nearly three kilometres, connecting with the 2nd US Infantry Division (*Indian Head*) on its left and the South Korean 9th Infantry Division on its right, installed on a longer massif facing the enemy and nicknamed the WHITE HORSE. The 1st Company (A Coy) and part of the Support Company (Heavy Support Coy) held Hill 281. The 3rd Company (C Coy) extended the 1st Company (A Coy) up the slopes and into the valley. The 2nd Company (B Coy) held position on a slight rise in the ground at the foot of the White Horse and ensured liaison with the South Korean 9th Infantry Division, the ROK.

Further forward, covering the 1st Company (A Coy), were the forward guard posts. The main one was positioned on the other side of the Yokkok River in a loop shaped like an arrowhead, which explains the code name ARROWHEAD.



If ARROWHEAD Hill 281 were to fall, the Chinese would emerge on the French positions. These are properly organized, except for the outposts, which have not yet been reinforced with blockhouses and barbed wire. The Sector was reputed to be calm ... until now ...



Thanks to the desertion of a North Korean officer, the American high command of the UN forces knew that a Chinese division was going to attack the ARROWHEAD and WHITE HORSE locks on October 6 with the aim of breaking out towards Seoul.



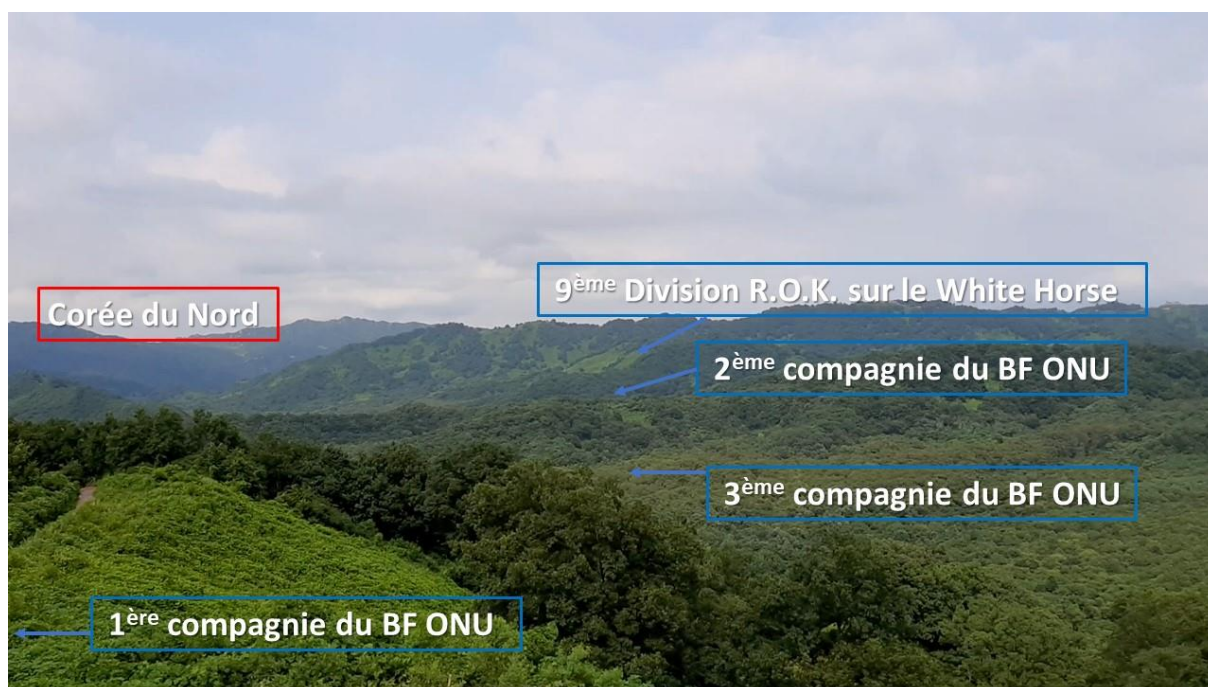


### **ARROWHEAD, October 3, 1952**

During the night, French patrols sought to detect the intentions of an enemy who had clearly adjusted their artillery fire during the day. Concern was growing, but determination remained unwavering. These patrols did not yet confirm the imminence of an attack, but they did detect definite enemy activity.

### **ARROWHEAD, October 4, 1952**

Late into the night, enemy movements were regularly spotted and reported by the outposts of the Pioneer Section.



### **ARROWHEAD, October 6, 1952**

At 6:00 a.m., the Chinese artillery went into action with all its guns, from the 75mm to the 155mm, supplemented by countless rounds of 81mm and 122mm mortars, not to mention the WWII Soviet Katyusha of self-propelled artillery batteries. The shots were terribly effective, as they were perfectly aimed. In 24 hours of bombardment, the French battalion received more than 25,000 shells! This deadly deluge even reached the battalion's rear base, which was located six kilometres from the frontline!

Meanwhile, at ARROWHEAD, everyone anxiously awaited the seemingly imminent enemy assault. The enemy's chosen breaking point in the front line was, without a doubt, the positions held by the French. It was therefore essential to hold this point, the most sensitive part of ARROWHEAD's Defence Sector. The Chinese opened the floodgates of the Yokkok River reservoir, isolating the 1st Company's (A Coy) positions, making it difficult to rescue them. In the front lines, in the outposts, the Pioneers were about to experience the first shock in all its violence.

### **The Battle of Arrowhead has just begun.**

At 7:10 p.m., the two outposts held by the Pioneers, Lieutenant PERRON's on the left and Master Sergeant GAVRILOFF's on the right, are overwhelmed by waves of Chinese assault. Lieutenant PERRON requests artillery fire on his position. At 7:29 p.m., Colonel BORREIL, commanding the BF/ONU, requests artillery support from the commander of the 23rd American Infantry Regiment (RCT), to which the battalion is attached, to relieve the Pioneers' positions. A few minutes later, this pathetic exchange takes place over the radio: *"Colonel to Pioneers - We are opening powerful artillery support and infantry fire in front of and behind your positions to isolate your attackers. Hold your ground at all costs."* Master Sergeant GAVRILOFF replies: *"Don't worry, Sir, we'll hold out. Over."* This will be the last radio message from the Pioneer Section, whose left-wing group has already been unresponsive for the last ten minutes. Master Sergeant Roland GAVRILOFF falls at the head of his men in a violent hand-to-hand

combat and knife fight. The Pioneer Section is wiped out for the second time while attempting to protect the 1st Company (A Coy) with a delaying action. This feat of arms will earn the Pioneer Section its second French Army Commendation.

Now, night had fallen and the battle raged. The Chinese surged towards Hill 281, where Lieutenant POUPARD still held out and called for reinforcements. Despite this deluge of iron and fire, and under his own barrage, the Chinese mounted an assault on the 1st Company (A Coy) and elements of the support company. On the right, the 2nd Company (B Coy), which included ROK soldiers in its ranks, was also seriously threatened, as was the 3rd Company (C Coy). It was hell! The BF/ONU was facing a Chinese regiment.

At the foot of the WHITE HORSE," Lieutenant Claude BARRÈS, grandson of the writer Maurice BARRÈS, who commanded the 2nd Company (B coy), fought like all his men and witnessed a mind-blowing situation. The Chinese resembled a marching anthill, and the sound of the bugle was sinister. During the night, reinforcements even arrived from the rear base where those of the Reinforcement Detachment NMR 5 were preparing to leave Korea. The battle lasted all night, and in the battered trenches, platoons, squads, and isolated individuals all fiercely defended their positions.

#### **ARROWHEAD, October 7 and 8, 1952**

At dawn, the ROK, who had counterattacked hand-to-hand, finally managed to reestablish the main line. The enemy assault had failed, and the Chinese were now visible, many trapped in the barbed wire. The carnage unfolded, wrought by all the defenders' automatic weapons. On the slopes of Hill 281 and the peaks where the Pioneers were located alone, more than 600 Chinese corpses were counted. At the battlefield level, enemy losses were enormous. In the morning, Lieutenant TAINGUY of the 1st Company (A Coy) planted the immense red flag, originally intended to fly over Hill 281, in front of Colonel BORREIL's command post. Over the following days, individual and crew-served weapons captured from the enemy would pile up around this emblem. But for now, the fighters are turning into stretcher-bearers and gravediggers.

#### **ARROWHEAD, October 9, 1952**

A second red flag, with a broken pole, was added to the trophies. It was torn down by the surviving pioneers under the command of Lieutenant ROGER, on the ridge where the Chinese had planted it as a sign of victory.

The Battle of ARROWHEAD would last four more days, in the form of raids and artillery fires, but it was already won. Proud of its achievement, the French battalion went into reserve; it returned to its rear base in the KAPYONG camp to recondition.

The resistance of the BF/UN on its positions was epic. The battalion suffered the loss of 47 volunteers and had 144 wounded with 3 missing in action and 2 POWs by the Chinese. The Battle of ARROWHEAD confirmed the importance of sacrifice, as the fighting had left its mark. In his letter to his parents after the battle, Lieutenant BARRÈS (a former cadet of the Free French and a parachute officer in Arnhem) summed up the harshness of the fighting in a few words: *"I have seen nothing like it. What a mess, and*

*it's not pretty. Pieces of men that we receive or that we find, brains lying on the ground. For the first time, I saw courageous men, dragging themselves on their knees, begging for mercy. The Chinese losses must be something unimaginable. It's a way of fighting that you have to see to believe it. My men can't take it anymore, we're on edge, and I consider myself being strong enough..."*

#### MORTS POUR LA FRANCE À ARROW-HEAD

2° classe ANGENOT Michel  
 2° classe ASKEUR Messaoud  
 2° classe BARRES Gaston  
 Sergent BERRE François  
 Caporal BONNAUD Henri  
 Caporal chef BONNEVILLE Jean Marcel  
 2° classe BOUKHETACHE Smaïn  
 1° classe BOUYOL Vincent  
 2° classe BOUZERIBA Khamis  
 1° classe COLLEMANT Philippe  
 2° classe DAUFRENE Pierre  
 Adjudant Chef DAYEZ Aimé  
 Caporal chef DECHARNE Louis  
 Sous lieutenant DECKER Yves  
 Caporal chef DUFFIEUX Henri  
 2° classe DUFOUR Jean  
 Caporal DURAND Georges  
 2° classe DURAND Paul  
 Sergent chef FIAT Pierre  
 2° classe FLEURY René  
 2° classe GARNIER Bernard  
 Adjudant GAVRILOFF Roland

Caporal HEURTIER Jean  
 Caporal chef ISAULE Abel  
 2° classe LABOURE Pierre  
 Sergent LAGAREC Joseph  
 Caporal chef LAMPERTI Paul  
 2° classe LANGLOIS Georges  
 2° classe LECA Xavier  
 1° classe LECLERC Claude  
 1° classe LEMARIE Jean Charles  
 2° classe LEROY Jean Louis  
 2° classe LESPINE Roger  
 1° classe LLERES Albert  
 2° classe MAKSYMINK Jean  
 Sergent MARGERIE André  
 1° classe MENASRIA Mohamed  
 1° classe MENETRIER Claude  
 Caporal MOALIC Yves  
 1° classe MONOT Gérard  
 1° classe MORERE dit BARRAIL Jean  
 Caporal chef PERRIN Rémy  
 Sergent RIGHI Giovanni  
 Caporal chef ROCHER Georges

Caporal SEMBDNER Bernard  
 1° classe SERMAGE Hubert  
 1° classe SERVAT Emmanuel  
 Sergent UGUEN Marcel  
 Caporal chef VILVAUX Jean

#### ROK

1° classe CHAE Joo-Bum  
 Caporal chef UM Ho-Jeun  
 1° classe UM Joo-Bok  
 1° classe YOO Woon-Jang

#### DISPARUS

2° classe MASSIN Joseph  
 Sergent POUS Claude  
 1° classe VASSORT Roland

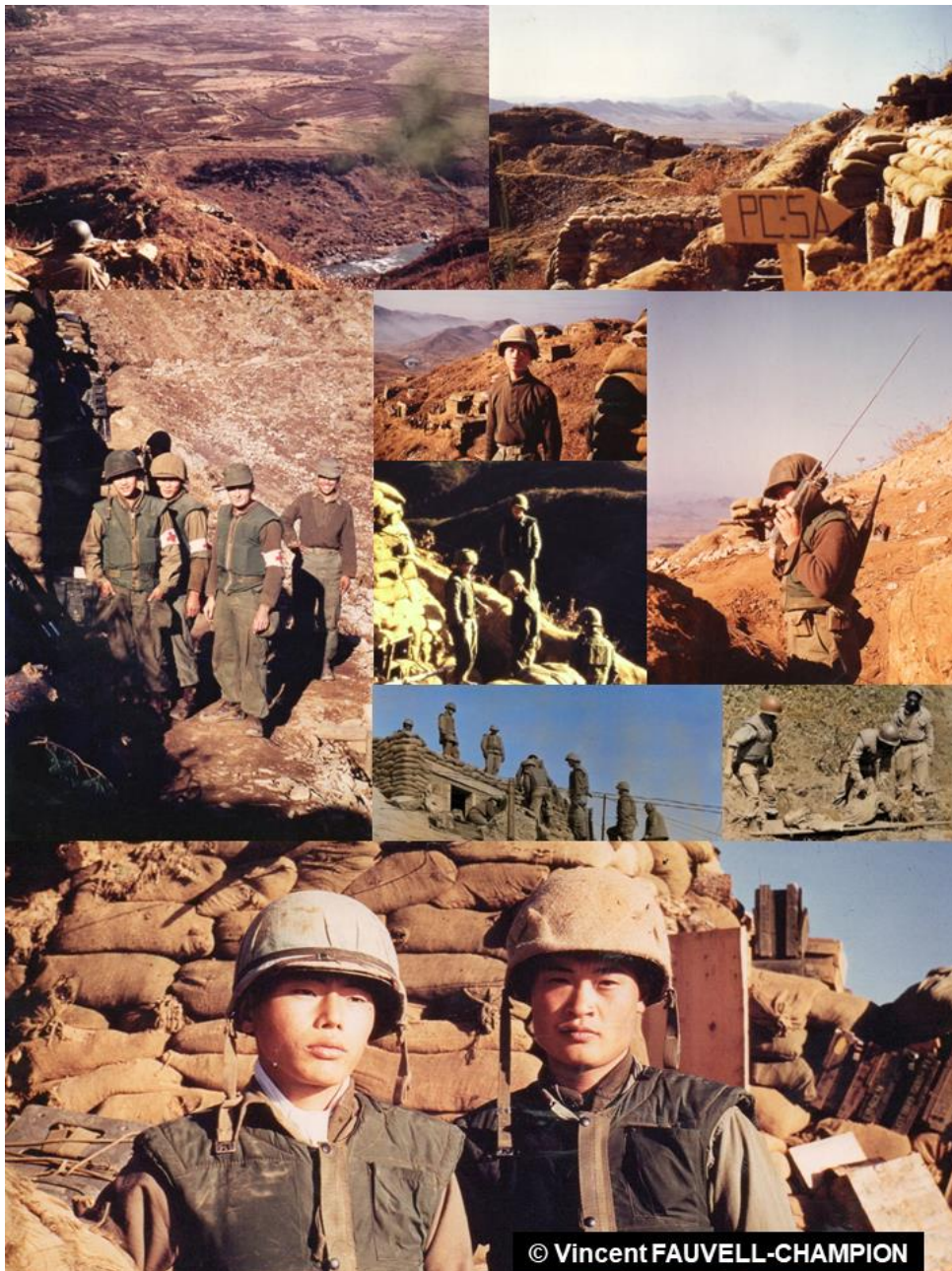
#### PRISONNIERS

Sergent BESAMAT André  
 Caporal RIBES Henri

Compiled and written by Vincent Fauvell-Champion

Photos by Vincent Fauvell-Champion





ARROWHEAD after the battle in the 2nd Company (B Coy) Sector

We invite you to watch a Show on YouTube :

The Megaphones of Arrowhead 화살머리로부터 온 소리

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmVWYB3aHpg>