

The Way It Was

NAME: John J. Baker

UNIT: 34th Inf., 24th Infantry Division

TIME PERIOD: December 1, 1950

SOURCE: Excerpt from Mr. Baker's manuscript. The book is dedicated to his friend, Harry DeNofio, 27th Inf., 25th Infantry Division

DATE RECEIVED: July 2006



Harry DeNofio

Waiting For Dawn

I think it was Dec. 1, 1950. I woke up in a snow bank at daybreak, cold and hungry. Every bone in my body ached. I was not sure I could get up from where I was lying. But that was the least of my problems; I could hear artillery echoes in the distance in all direction. The question was, "whose artillery?"

A few yards from me were three dead American soldiers, half covered with snow. I turned one of them over; he was lying on his M1 rifle. I picked up his weapon, pulled back the bolt half way. One round was in the chamber and one in the clip. I let the bolt go forward, pulling the trigger twice to make sure the weapon worked. The soldier had two bandoliers full of ammunition tied around his waist. The strings were frozen. I used my bayonet to cut the strings, lifting the dead soldier by his belt off the snow, removing the bandoliers from underneath him. I checked the pockets of his parka; luck was with me, two cans of c-rations. I then felt around his neck for his dog tag chain. I removed the tag from the extension chain. I held the tag in my left hand, made the sign of the cross, read his name out loud, and said "Soldier, rest in peace." Put the tag in my field jacket pocket, then covered the soldier up with his parka. I repeated the same for the other two. Must have plowed through three hours of snow, still picking up dog tags as I went, knowing it would snow again tonight and all those bodies would be covered up and never seen again.

It was three PM. I saw an American; he was vertical! My heart leaped with joy, a live one. He was at port-arms with bayonet, about six hundred yards from me. A shot rang out; saw the American fall backwards into the snow. Dropped down on my left knee, putting the carbine on full automatic. I could see no one. Then out of nowhere, a Chinese soldier running with rifle and bayonet, just yards from the American. Took aim, pulled the trigger. I saw the Chinese soldier fly backwards. Plowing through the snow towards the American, hoping he was still alive.

Got to him, I shouted "why didn't you shoot that bastard?"

He laughed, "out of ammo."

"Oh, been there, myself. Where you hit?"

"Right chest, stuck me left side of my stomach."

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

“Soldier, do you have any morphine shots?”

“No.”

“O.k., put these two morphine units under your left arm pit. They are frozen and have to defrost so they will work.”

“O.K.”

I was applying the medical pad to his right chest when he yelled out “Johnny!! It’s me!! Harry DeNofio.”

I couldn’t see his face. The fur on the top of the parka was covering his helmet and face. Pushing away the fur, sure enough, it was Harry. I laughed, “Harry, what the hell are you doing here?”

“Johnny, didn’t you just shoot that Chinese bastard?”

“Harry, my sister Margie wrote. You were wounded?”

“Yea, September!”

“Harry, why are you still here in Korea?”

“Oh, that. A machine gun bullet went right through my thigh. The doctors shot me full of morphine and penicillin. Hell, Johnny, I was on cloud nine. I was floating for two weeks in the hospital. I sent the Purple Heart medal to mom back home. The doctors at the hospital told me ‘you Italians heal real fast!’”

“Harry!”

“What?”

“The doctor did not pay you a compliment! That was an ethnic slur!”

“I know that, Johnny. It’s been happening all my life!”

“Harry, a Purple Heart should have been your ticket home, you were all doped up on morphine and the doctor tells you, ‘you are healing real fast. Next week you will be back up on the line killing the enemy right?’”

“Johnny, I couldn’t tell the doctor I was scared!”

“Harry, I am scared right here, now. I don’t know where the hell we are.”

“Johnny, what did you hit that Chinese with? You blew him away.”

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

“Oh, carbine 15 rounds, full clip, automatic.”

“Johnny, you said you shot that Chinese with a carbine, but you have an M-1 Rifle with you?”

“That was my last carbine magazine. I picked this M-1 up this morning off of a dead GI, just in case!”

“Oh, O.K. Johnny.”

“Harry, give me one of those morphine units.”

“O.K.”

I gave Harry the morphine shot in the right shoulder, then I cut a mobius strip of material off my parka. Made, a medical sling around his neck and around his arm to keep it in one place. Took my medical pack, applied it to his stomach wound. The blood on his stomach was frozen.

“Harry, do you know where you are?”

“Yeah, North Korea!”

“Point to the south.”

“Johnny, I’m lost.”

“Yeah, me too. Harry, I have to get you to a hospital!”

“Johnny, how many morphine shots do you have?”

“Four in my pocket and one under your left armpit!”

“How long are they good for?”

“Four hours.”

“Johnny, when I go home, I want to prove to the people back home in Cedarville that Italians are good Americans. We’re not afraid to fight!”

“Harry, you don’t have to prove anything; to anyone, anywhere! To hell with them, hold your head up high! Harry, we have two choices. I can pick you up and carry you and hope we run into an American unit or wait until daybreak and see the sun rise. Then I know exactly what direction to go.”

“Johnny, you know the Chinese shoot all prisoners of war?”

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

“Yep”

“So Johnny, let’s not go carrying me into a Chinese ambush, o.k?”

“Harry, we’ll wait till sunrise. You see, Harry, it’s been snowing for four nights and ice fog during the day. I feel we are due for a break.”

“Johnny, I feel great, there’s no pain.”

“That’s the morphine working, Harry. Harry, I’m going over and strip the Chinese of his clothing. Here’s my .45 pistol. It’s cocked, round in the chamber. Safety’s off. Hold it with your left hand, in case of visitors, Chinese type!”

I stripped the Chinese of his padded coat and pants. All he had on his feet was material strips wrapped around and up his legs. He was stiff as a board. I returned to Harry and put the padded pants under him and the padded coat over him. The temperature was minus 30 degrees in the day time. No one knew how cold it was at night. According to China and North Korea International statistics 1950-51, November, December, and January, was the coldest winter in one hundred years. No wonder I could never get warm. I shivered all the time. It was a wet cold, unlike Alaska that has a dry cold. In North Korea it was miserable.

“Johnny, do you think our Moms are burning candles and praying at the church for us?”

“Oh yeah, morning, afternoon, and evening. In fact, the rate our moms are burning candles at the church, they will have to build another candle factory in Rome just to keep up with our mothers’ prayers. And hope our moms don’t wear out their rosary beads. “

Harry laughed, that’s a good one Johnny. That makes me feel good and warm inside.”

Harry and me reminisced about our childhood days, all night while “Waiting for Dawn.” There we were, huddled together in a snow bank trying to stay alive, not knowing what the next 12 hours would bring. Life or death; that would depend on the Chinese. I had one can of C-rations left, 1943, frozen. It would be a long night.

Epilogue from phone conversation with Mr. Baker on 27 July 2006:

When dawn broke, Mr. Baker carried Harry DeNofio until they found some American troops. By that time, Harry had died. Mr. Baker left Harry and the pocketful of dog tags he had collected with a medic. He went on with another unit. He later learned that the medic and his unit had been killed by the Communist Chinese. Harry DeNofio and those who had owned the dog tags that Mr. Baker collected remained classified as MIA, missing in action, because their bodies were not found and there was no record of their deaths. These men were officially listed as “presumed dead” in January, 1954.

The Way It Was

NAME: William T. Boyd; SSG E6 Retired
UNIT: 25th Military Police Company, 25th Infantry Division
TIME PERIOD: 1950-51
SOURCE: 25th Military Police Association
DATE RECEIVED: February 18, 2000

Dave,

This is a short type of resume of my tour in Korea. One more interesting side note is that combat pay was given to most of the units. The mp company drew combat pay for only two months that I was with it June and July 1951. We had a colonel provost marshal that decided we did not deserve the combat pay. When he left his successor decided we did. The commanding general was William Kean. What made this usual was that the commanding general of the 25th Inf. Div who was captured was named dean.

I arrived in Japan in late March 1950 after having served one tour in Germany. I was originally assigned to G CO, 2nd BN 27th Inf. Regt., at Camp Sugimotocho outside Osaka. I transferred on 20 June 1950 to the Military Police Co. there I was assigned as a driver for the Prisoner Chasers at Lightning University (Military Stockade).

When the Korean War broke out on 25 June 1950 the first thing that happened was that all discharges were frozen and everyone was given one more year on their enlistment.

All personnel sent to Korea were volunteers. This was reasoned that as there was no draft all personnel had volunteered to go wherever and whenever the Commander in Chief desired.

In early July we departed from Osaka Japan by rail for a Japanese seaport and loaded on a Japanese coal ship. We arrived in Pusan Korea where for some reason the Korean Stevedores would not unload our ship. We resolved this easily as one of the Platoon SGTs had been Navy and knew how it was done.

After the ship was unloaded we went to Munsan-Ni where we set up in the Pusan Perimeter. While we where there one small plane came over and dropped what determined to be mortar shells. Total casualties one Pig

When the Perimeter was broken the unit moved north to Taejon where we set up POW facility at the Prison. There were several wells providing water at the Korean Prison there. We discovered that the North Korean had used them to put dead civilian in so we no longer used them.

The Division and our company kept moving north and in November we were in reserve and fully believed that we would be in Japan again for Christmas.

The Way It Was

Thanksgiving Day 1950 saw Turkeys being thawed and all preparations being made for a very nice dinner for all. Then we got new orders the Chinese had entered the War and we were going north to help out the Units there.

We moved north to Pyongyang and the Capitol of North Korea and then further north. Then the push was on and we were going south again. A lot of supplies were burned or blown up because Transportation was not available for it.

The MPs provided road patrol and static traffic control. We left these posts only when ordered or just before the front line Infantry got there.

The MP Company also had the forward POW collection point and a small Military Stockade group which stayed mainly at division rear.

We stopped south of Seoul, and wintered there and in the spring started northward again.

In 1950 one platoon of the company was ambushed in I believed Taegu. We had on young mechanic shoot himself in the hand at Munsan-Ni. Thought we had seen the last of him but he came back. Seems he had not broken any bones so when it healed he came back.

We had two brothers in the unit and in the spring of 1951 one drowned in I believe the Han River.

One young fellow accidentally shot himself in the foot and this shot scared the Platoon Sergeant whose unit had been ambushed and he grabbed a Thompson Sub Machine Gun he carried and it went off and shot him in the arm.

One of the things we had to be extremely careful of was the refugees. Most were harmless except for clogging up the only roads. However, they were used by the North Koreans to smuggle weapons and ammo thru the checkpoints especially under babies.

North and South Koreans look alike and unless in uniform it was hard to tell them apart. The use of Republic of Korea (ROK) MPs helped in that for some reason they could pick out a lot of the infiltrators. E.

The road in Korea at the time were mostly dirt that turned to mud in rainy weather and dusty in dry. There were many one way defiles that required MPs at both ends to filter traffic thru.

The company operated between Divisions forward and the front line companies. In late June 1951 or early July 1951 the Company was in Corps Reserve in Uijongbu. My last official duty was escorting a platoon of tanks to the peace site at Pan Munjom. Then I rotated back to the land of the big PX.

No parade no banners any protest. As a matter of fact we were held in Puget Sound while they sent another ship to Korea with bands, Hula Dancers and all the frills.

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

I was the last man to rotate from the unit who had Physical disability after 21 years. Six years ago at 25th MP CO reunion in Des Moines Iowa I met my Platoon Sergeant Bill Yakus and two others from the Unit in Korea.

William T. Boyd, SSG E6 Retired
1511 Barefoot Lane, Caledonia, NY 1423

The Way It Was

NAME: William B. Cutlip, MSGT
UNIT: 89th Tank Battalion, Co. D
TIME PERIOD: June 11-12, 1951
SOURCE: Letter from Mr. Cutlip
DATE RECEIVED: April 10, 2002

After Action Report for Battle of Vicinity of Kumwha, a Korean town from which a strong enemy force was contesting UN Forces in the valley of Chorwon. Enemy forces engaging friendly forces of troops of D Co., 89th Tank battalion, 25 Infantry Division. The Turkish Infantry Brigade of UN command were providing ground support. Chorwon, Kumhwa, and Pyongang composed the so-called "Iron Triangle" lying at each angle.

Reported by acting tank platoon leader 2d Platoon, D. Co., 89th Tank Battalion, 25th Division. William B. Cutlip MSGT E-7

As acting platoon leader patrols were sent out daily to develop contact with enemy forces, I received a briefing on 12 June 1951 that my platoon with attached Turkish Infantry of approximately 25 men were to move toward the town of Kumhwa, lying at the base of a high mountain range.

Briefing my tanks of the objective, the next morning, June 11 or June 12, 1951, we struck out in column with each tank mounted with Turkish Infantry. We closed the town, and when I thought it time I ordered tanks to deploy in line position. Moving, I ordered my platoon to halt, dismount infantry, and then we proceeded forward as a tank-infantry team, employing leaps and bounds, light section covering heavy section, visa versa, until arriving near a perfect embankment surrounding the whole small town of Kumhwa. We still could see only the rooftops. All together I ordered all of my 5 tanks with Turkish Infantry to top the revetment.

We were in the town. I ordered recon by fire, cal. 30 coax and Cal. 50. I ordered the Turkish Infantry to go forward through the edge of town. Tanks were ordered to continue recon, fire beyond and over their heads. Platoon Sergeant Buck Vermilia, on our extreme right, reported small arms fire on and near his tank. The Turkish Infantry returned to the tanks. I reported back on radio the developing action. A wait ensued, then an order was received. Withdraw and return to Company rear.

Small fire was increasing. Using 2 sections of tanks we turned, tittered, and were out of the town. I gathered up the Turkish Infantry and moved back to Company rear area. I was asked to brief the other two tank platoons. In the middle, the Company Commander, D. Co., called me and said I was to report back to Tropic Lighting Forward. The CO provided his jeep and I did what was supposed. At the Headquarters, upon entering I saw a two star general, and my past battalion commander, Col. Welborn Dolvin. Mulling over maps, they took time to meet me, shook hands, and either the general or the colonel pinned the gold 2nd Lieutenant bar on my collar.

I then was ordered to return to my unit.

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

William B. Cutlip 1/LT USARet Army
Commissioned on the Battle field June 13, 1951, Kumhwa

The Way It Was

NAME : Willis Ray England

UNIT: Co. B, 174th Inf.

TIME PERIOD: Korean War, 1953-54

SOURCE: Passed on by Dave Wilson of the 25th MP Co. Association

DATE RECEIVED: Jan. 2001

Arrived in Korea April, 1953. Assigned to Co. B, 17th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division in combat against Chinese near Panmunjon. July 4th, 1953, pulled off front line, sent to Uijongbu to help train a newly arrived Turkish Brigade (they rotated entire brigade, not individuals.) War ended July 27th, 1953, and the Turkish Brigade (training finished) left Uijonbu in September with the 14th Infantry Regiment moving into their place. I then went back to Co. B, 14th Regiment. In late September or early October I was pulled out of the 14th to move up to and take charge of the 25th Infantry Division DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) Police under the command of the 25th Infantry Division Provost Marshal. From that date until late January, 1954, I was the OIC of the DMZ Police. Then, control of the DMZ police reverted to control of an Infantry Regiment. I was retained in the 25th MP Company and sent to Uijongbu to take charge of Det #1 of the 25th MP Company there, where I remained until my rotation to the USA in July. I was giving MP support to my old Infantry Regiment.

The Way It Was

NAME: Thomas E. Flynn, Private

UNIT: Heavy Mortar Company, 21st Regiment, 24th Infantry Division

TIME PERIOD: 2 July 1950-August 1950

SOURCE: Walk in visit by Mr. Flynn. Interview by Adam Elia

DATE RECEIVED:

Member Task Force Smith

Based at Kumamoto

1. How did you learn of being alerted and your reaction?
 - 2-3 days before leaving there was training for invasion defense. Unit was told NKPA would be invading Kyushu. But actually that was to “psych” up soldiers.
2. How were you transported to Korea?
 - Left at 0530 1 July 1950 for Itazuki Air Base to be airlifted. Due to weather, didn’t leave that day. Spent the night at the base and then the next day loaded onto “Barge-like landing craft”. Arrived in Pusan at 1730 2 July 1950.
3. What was your initial impression of Korea?
 - I Didn’t like Korea at all. We came in during period of mass confusion. ROK soldiers were taking off uniforms because they had nothing to fight with against NKPA soldiers.
 - Very hot in Korea. Mosquitos would come at night.
4. When did you enter combat against NKPA forces?
 - We took trains to Taejon on 3 July (didn’t know where we were)
 - The next day we moved to Suwon and dug in. Ordered us back south of Osan.
 - The next morning of 5 July we were hit by 37 T-34s, knocked out 2 with 105mm AP shells (there were only 6 six shells in all of Japan at beginning of war)
 - We retreated to artillery positions, and drove out on their trucks (artillery positions were undamaged by attacks).
 - 8-9 July battle of Chochowan : By that time I was firing a rifle (most equipment was gone)
5. What was the morale of the soldiers?
 - We didn’t think about it at the time; we were too busy fighting to survive to think about morale.
 - We didn’t have the tools to fight a war.
6. What were the circumstances of your wound?
 - I got hit in the ankle 13-15 at Chonan.
 - I was sent to a medical facility at Taejon. They had female nurses there; I saw General Dean there.
 - I was lying on a cot and was told tanks were coming. I got a rifle and tried to fight a delaying action.
7. What was your impression of NKPA soldiers
 - They were well disciplined and they were on a roll.

The Way It Was

NAME: William C. Francis (MSG)

UNIT: 25th Reconnaissance Troop

TIME PERIOD: 1944-45

SOURCE: Accounts previously written by Mr. Francis. After his visit to the museum, he volunteered to share them with us.

DATE RECEIVED: August 2004

The Grenade

I had been on a trip from the forward command post back to the rear echelon headquarters and was returning to the front, driving through some fairly open countryside.

We noticed a soldier walking along the road trying to hitch a ride. My driver stopped, and we picked him up. He was on his way to rejoin his combat unit after being released from the hospital following recovery from mortar shrapnel wounds. We continued along the dusty road until we came to a place where the road cut through a slightly hilly area, and at one cut there were a couple of jeeps parked alongside the trail. Three or four G.I.'s were huddled behind an embankment together with some Filipino peasants. They were obviously taking cover, and we could hear a few shots of rifle fire nearby.

We stopped and asked what was happening. Two of the Filipino's had returned home that morning on an overnight trip to a nearby village. When they started to enter their house, they were surprised to encounter two Japanese soldiers who were inside. The Filipinos ran to the road here and flagged down a U.S. jeep which was driving by. The two soldiers in this jeep approached the house under the cover of some trees and started firing at the windows and walls. The two Japs ran out the opposite side and ran into the cover of a deep natural ditch that water drainage had cut through the area. The Japanese were still there in that ditch at this moment according to the farmer who was telling this story.

We looked over the embankment from the roadway and could see the two G.I.'s who had flushed out the Japs. They were cautiously moving toward the ditch, and they dropped to the ground a couple of times and fired their weapons at the Japs area of refuge. I asked my driver and our hitchhiker if they wanted to go see if we could help out. The driver was eager "Yes, let's go". Our rider wasn't. We could go on if we wanted to, but he was staying here under cover. I guess I shouldn't have lost any respect for him. After all, he had just recovered from front line wounds, and there were others here staying under cover. But I was a little surprised and disappointed, I think.

The driver and I un-shouldered our carbines and "went over the top" – real gung ho. We slowly caught up with the other two who were still advancing across the field towards the ditch. Had the Japs already been hit? Why weren't they showing themselves to surrender, or fighting back, or something? We finally were close enough that one of the others said "I think I can reach that ditch with one of my hand grenades". Shall I toss one? We said "Yes". He pulled the pin and gave it a strong overhand throw. It landed only a little short, rolled into the ditch at the exact spot and

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

exploded with a roar. We waited. No sign or sound from the ditch. We approached again cautiously, then dropped down, crawled to the edge, and looked over. Both Japs were lying on their backs, obviously dead. One of them was holding a grenade in his hand, and apparently had been waiting and ready to throw it at us. His chest looked kind of caved in and bloody. They had both been killed by our grenade. Two of the Filipino peasants now came up and started stripping the bodies of their shoes and leather belts as we turned back to return to our vehicles.

Why is it I still feel kind of ashamed to say that those two young Japanese soldiers lying there staring at me with their glassy, sightless eyes were unarmed except for that one grenade?

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

River Rescue

We were camped on the island of New Caledonia, training and preparing for the invasion of the Japanese-occupied Philippine Islands. On this day we were to conduct a maneuver to demonstrate an attack against an enemy position on the opposite bank of a river, and our maneuver was being observed by the 25th Infantry Division Commanding General.

Safety lines had been fired across the river, and the first line of troops had crossed on small rafts using the pull lines. Now two other G.I.'s and I placed a 30-caliber machine gun on a makeshift raft of logs and brush and started swimming it across. The tide had changed to outgoing, and the river current was now very fast and strong. We lost control, and in trying to save ourselves and the raft we accidentally dumped the machine gun into the river. The other two were able to grab the safety line and pull themselves to safety. I missed both the line and the raft and was being swept downstream, staying afloat, but with some difficulty.

I suddenly heard heavy splashing and turned my head enough to see that my platoon sergeant was trying to swim to my rescue. He had run along the shore, kicked off his boots and dived in, believing that I was about to be swept out to sea and drowned. The strong current and his exertions overpowered him, and now he was nearly exhausted and in danger of drowning. I had been gradually drifting toward the opposite river bank, and I was able to reach up and catch a long, overhanging tree branch. With my other arm I reached back and was just barely able to grab the sergeant's hand before he was swept by. The drowning victim had saved the rescuer! Lines thrown from the shore brought us both back to land.

The troop captain later saw me and said I might be interested in hearing the General's comments about our maneuver. I wasn't sure that I did want to hear it, but I said "Sure". The General said "it was a very interesting demonstration, and it was the very first time he had ever seen a machine gun position set up on the bottom of a river"!

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

Cone of Fire

We were dug in on the beach and had spent our first night ashore on Philippine soil. As he had promised, General MacArthur had returned. The early morning sunrise signaled the Japanese canon in the nearby hills to start their sporadic shelling of our beachhead. Again, they were answered by the guns of the U.S. destroyers which moved in rotation in close to our beach to lay down answering fire against the Jap hillside positions.

Then, as the day was still young, we saw almost in disbelief two Japanese Zero fighter planes approach from the north. This was unexpected enemy action, because the Japanese air force in this part of the war zone had been destroyed – wiped out, we were told. But wing to wing these Zeros's flew toward our mighty invasion fleet in Lingayen Gulf – the largest fleet in the history of the world. As the planes neared they were met by thunderous fire from the antiaircraft guns of our warships. Literally hundreds of guns were firing thousands of rounds of brilliant tracer bullets which formed a spectacular cone of fire in the sky, converging in a point at the two planes. I knew I was about to see two Kamikaze pilots go down in flame from our guns, or else dive their planes into a fiery crash on one or two of our ships.

But it didn't happen! They flew on straight across the bay over the fleet with no dodging nor any diversionary tactics at all – just straight ahead as if it were a peaceful flight and they didn't see any ships there. And that great cone of fire continued to trace their course across the sky. It was almost as if there were some magical shields protecting them. They soon disappeared unharmed over the distant horizon. It is to describe that massive display of naval firepower that was totally frustrated in its attempt to down those enemy planes. I have never seen anything else like it.

At a later time and place I was to be reminded of these two Japanese Zero's and I was to wonder if I was encountering the same mysterious planes under even stranger circumstances. And that is another story.

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

The Ambush

On one of my periodic “leaves” from the Division’s forward command post to visit my old outfit, the 25th Reconnaissance Troop, I found that my former platoon was out in “no-man’s land” manning an outpost to block the Old Spanish Trail. The Filipino guerillas that had held this position were being withdrawn now that there was artillery support to cover our smaller force there. This trail was in the hilly, forested plains on the right flank of our Division’s advance through the Carabello Mountains. About a thousand Jap troops were scattered through this area of forested valley interspersed with rice fields. They had been making periodic heavy attacks on our outpost prior to our artillery support.

On the morning of this visit to the Troop’s base camp there was a radio request to send a patrol to evacuate a G.I. from the outpost. He was sick and needed medical attention. This was my chance for a patrol and to visit friends in my old platoon, so five of us set out in one machine gun jeep and a halftrack carrier up the several miles of narrow dirt jeep trail. I rode in the lead jeep driven by Romeo, a young Hispanic, with Smitty, a full blooded American Indian buck sergeant at the machine gun. Two new, somewhat green G.I.’s came along behind us with the half-track. After a few miles, we met an army truck coming down the trail toward us driven by a Filipino sergeant with a Filipino Lieutenant on the passenger side. They hailed us down – were nervous and excited. They asked if we had heard the explosion and weapons firing up ahead, which we hadn’t over the noise of our engines. Their lead jeep with two American G.I.’s had been ambushed, and they didn’t know what had happened to them. They had been on their way to our outpost to evacuate the few remaining Filipino troops, but they were now retreating because they believed we were cut off by a Jap patrol. I told them we would escort them on up to our trail block, but they refused. We drove on around a curve and down through a forested gully across a small stream. As we came up the rise we saw the ambushed jeep and a GI helmet liner with a bullet hole through it. No sight or sound of anyone around. There was jagged hole through the rear floorboard of the jeep, and the front seats had been riddled with shrapnel and maybe bullets. The young GI driving our half-track said we ought to go back and get reinforcements. Though I was just a visiting “hitchhiker”, Smitty deferred to my rank as Master Sergeant, and I said that we had to go on. I told him that if he would drive the damaged jeep out of our way that I would take the point and scout our way on up the trail. (I would rather take the point than risk the possibility of a booby trap or a land mine in the trail).

I moved up into the brush and sneaked on ahead. The jeep and half-track then followed trees to one side about fifty yards or so behind. I was very tense and alert, knowing the Japs had to be somewhere nearby. I could have heard a pin drop, I’m sure. I became somewhat aware that I was continuously licking and biting my lower lip. (The lip was raw and sore for several days afterwards). After probably about a quarter of a mile of making my way through the trees and brush, I dropped back onto the trail and could see behind that Sergeant Smith had Romeo following me and covering me with his M-1 riffle. Smitty was now driving our jeep further back behind Romeo.

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

Further along the trail I suddenly heard something in the brush down alongside a small river that ran through a little valley on our immediate left. Someone was obviously moving through the brush up the bank toward us. I waved the jeep forward. I threw myself across the hood of the vehicle and trained my carbine at the point of the sounds. The others also took cover and took aim. Suddenly, a wild-faced, hatless, bedraggled GI burst out of the brush with his hands in the air, looking straight down the barrel of my gun. He stood there in a state of shock, and I said “Are you OK”? He still didn’t say anything – he just turned around with his hands still in the air. His back was a bloody mess. We led him back to the half-track and laid him face down on the bed of the vehicle. He told us that the Japs were still chasing him when he heard our jeep on the trail and made his final run up the bank for safety. He didn’t know where his buddy was. They had each run in opposite direction when their jeep had been ambushed.

I went on further up the trail to take up the point again, and we continued forward. It was nervous time again – more lip biting. Not too much further along I suddenly caught sight of something across the fields off to my right. Almost at once I could make out that I was another hatless GI running down the side of a forested hill, waving his arms and turning to look behind as he tore through the trees and brush. Instinctively, without saying anything or without even thinking, I just broke into a run toward him across the field of dried up rice paddies. When we met, as he broke into the open, he just kept on running motioning me to follow him. When we reached the trail and the cover of our vehicles and their weapons he said to me, “Didn’t you hear them shooting at us”? I don’t think I had heard any shots over the sound of our engines. Our new hitchhiker said that he wasn’t hurt, and we sent him on back to the half-track with his buddy. Just before we started out again, our half-track gunner shouted up to us, “This guy has got a big bullet hole in his hip”! (And he had just told me in his state of shock that he hadn’t been hurt). I said “patch him up and keep him down”.

I took up point again, and we eventually reached the outpost without further event, but with the continued tension. We quickly reported in to the dug-in position on the hill, got their medical case down to our half-track, and started back. I insisted on taking the point again, though I now felt very tired from the continued strain. I still felt better at the point rather than trusting any of the other four to take it. We didn’t know that the outpost had radioed back to base camp to report that we had encountered a Jap ambush and were returning with casualties. When we finally reached again the location of the ambush, I sneak carefully through the gulley, across the stream, and up the other side. I heard engines, and as I topped the rise there was a relief patrol coming down the trail to meet us. It was a relief – and a surprise. When my little band caught up, we transferred the sick and wounded onto a medical stretcher jeep, and they returned on back to the base camp and to a hospital unit somewhere in the rear.

The relief patrol now prepared to make a combat sweep up the trail, and I stayed with them. I guess I was determined, having come this far, to see this adventure through to the day’s end.

The platoon sergeant of the patrol (a good friend) was now in charge, and I was just another one of the troops that fanned out across the valley to hunt down the Japs that were harassing our supply line to the outpost. I was surprised that I suddenly felt very scared. I guess now that I was no longer preoccupied with the leadership responsibility, the thoughts of what might have

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

happened or might happen, descended on me. But the Japs apparently ran from our sweep up the valley, and we didn't make further contact.

About a month later I happened to encounter the "bloody-back" GI now recovered, walking into camp at the Division forward command post. I said "Hi", and asked him if he remembered ever seeing me before. He shook my hand, laughed, and said "I sure do. You're the guy that saved us from the Japs. We were goners! We continued hurriedly on our separate ways. I was glad he remembered me. I never saw him again, and never did know his name – nor he mine.

The Way It Was

The Sniper

The day following the ambush on the Old Spanish trail and our rescue of the two wounded GI's, I went again on another patrol up that trail to take some provisions and radio equipment up to the Reconnaissance Troop's outpost position. There were four of us with a jeep, and we were very conscious of the previous day's excitement here and keeping a sharp lookout. At one point as we drove along the trail beside the small river, we spotted a couple of Japs on the hillside just across that river. We stopped and took cover behind the jeep and tried to lay rifle fire on them. But they scrambled quickly over the crest of the ridge without trying to engage us, so we moved on.

When we reached the end of the trail at the position of the outpost, we parked the jeep on a rocky flat clearing near the wooded areas at the base of the hill where our platoon was dug in. We climbed the hill maybe a quarter of a mile or so to the platoon encampment and delivered the equipment. We visited with our people for a while and watched one of our patrols making a probe to the west of the outpost. As they reached the crest of a distant hilltop we saw them suddenly hit the ground and start firing at the Japanese patrol across a ravine. The fire fight continued several minutes, and then our people withdrew and started back. We counted, and could tell that all the eight-man squad was accounted for. As they withdrew, our forward artillery observer called down howitzer fire on the Jap position. It was really impressive to see the accuracy of the artillery which was firing blind clear from the other side of Carabello mountain range, and being sighted only by our spotter and his map coordinates over his radio. The only casualty on our side from that patrol – one of our guys burned his hand on the overheated barrel of his Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) from the intense rate of firing when they contacted the Japs. They did say that they scored some hits during the skirmish.

Three of us started back to our jeep to wait for our Lieutenant and to return to our base camp. When we got to the jeep we heard rifle shot from somewhere, and a whining bullet ricocheted from the rocks near our feet. Then there was another shot which whined past our ears. We scrambled for cover behind and underneath the jeep while several more shots came right at us. When the shots stopped, apparently for the sniper to reload, the Lieutenant came running down the hillside, we jumped in the jeep and raced out of there back down the trail, and out of range of the sniper.

A few days later, after returning to the Division forward command post from my visit to the troop, I met one of the GI's from the Troop who asked me if I had ever met the new Lieutenant who had recently joined the Reconnaissance Troop. I hadn't. Then I was told a strange story about the new Lieutenant. When he had been assigned to the Troop a few weeks earlier he had made no secret of his displeasure with that assignment. He complained bitterly about being to "a suicide outfit", appeared very depressed and seemed to have a generally negative, fatalistic attitude.

On the day after I had been fired on by the sniper, this young Lieutenant was sent on a mission to take a tour of duty at the outpost blocking the Old Spanish Trail. When his jeep arrived at the end of the trail -at the same place where we had parked our jeep the day before, the sniper opened fire again. The Lieutenant was hit and killed!

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

Deadly premonition? or Self-fulfilling Prophecy?

Postscript: Our recounting this story I was surprised to realize that I could still remember that officer's name. His name was Lieutenant Blue. Apparently I was so impressed by this strange event where this man had almost seemed to predict his own death, which has then occurred at the hands of "my sniper" – so impressed that his name could be recalled after forty years, even though I had never met him and had only heard his name that one time.

The Way It Was

NAME : PFC Walter C. Hackenberg

UNIT: 35th Infantry

TIME PERIOD: Korean War

SOURCE: Part of a packet sent by Mr. James Rudy, who researched Walter's life and death

DATE RECEIVED:

On April 25, 1951, Walter Clare Hackenberg was listed as Missing in Action in South Korea where he was assigned to Co. F, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. Later it was learned that he was taken captive as a Prisoner of War and was being held in North Korea. PFC Hackenberg died of dysentery in POW Camp 2 on Sept. 9, 1951. In December 1999, Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (CILHI) recovered the remains of Walter Hackenberg, confirmed by DNA samples obtained from his surviving sisters. Hackenberg's remains were interred in the Zion United Methodist Cemetery in Middleburg, Pennsylvania, on

The following article was published in the local newspaper in November, 1951.

“Missing Area GI Sends Word he's Captive of Reds”

Pfc. Walter C. Hackenberg, R.D. 1, Writes to parents from North Korean prison camp after seven months.

Pfc. Walter C. Hackenberg, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hackenberg, Middleburg, R.D. 1, Kissimmee, who was reported missing in action in Korea since Wednesday, April 25, is being held prisoner of the Chinese in North Korea, it was revealed in a letter received from him by his parents this week.

Pfc. Hackenberg was attached to the 25th Infantry Division. He was sent overseas during the early part of May. He was only in action one day. His parents received a telegram Monday, May 14, advising them that he was missing. Since then they have not had any word from the Army.

Monday they received a letter from Pfc. Hackenberg which bore the date Sept. 3. It was postmarked Peking, China, Prisoner of War Camp No. 3, North Korea. Pfc. Hackenberg addressed it to his father, mother, and family. The letter in part is as follows:

“Just a few lines to let you know I am fine and hope you are the same. I am a prisoner, as I guess you know I am. I have no scratches on me. I sure missed the strawberry season and now it's almost peach picking time. I dream about home every night. I am being used very nice. I get all I want to eat. We get pork, chicken, and milk every day. I hope the people all see peace at home, which I know you are as anxious to hear as we are. That is all we talk about, besides ice cream and good home cooked meals. You are going to have a long visitor when I get there.

“A lot of boys received letters from home but I was not lucky enough. I hope to see you all by Christmas. Will you leave Emma know I am a prisoner? I am fine. Don't forget to write and don't worry about me because I am fine except I am anxious to get home. So keep prying for

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

peace and don't worry. I now I will see you soon. So till we meet again, good luck and may God bless you all."

Pfc. Hackenberg entered the service in November, 1950, several weeks after marrying Emma Houtz, of Beavertown, R.D. 1. He was employed in several area factories and farmed. He attended Hassinger's Grammar School. He has eight sisters and two half-brothers.

The Way It Was

NAME : Jae Hyo Lee

UNIT: 25th Reconnaissance Company

TIME PERIOD: Korea, July 1950 – May 1951

SOURCE: Letter from Mr. Lee to the Division

DATE RECEIVED: February 19, 1998

Dear Sir,

Whenever I think of Korean War, I recall the Thunderbolt emblem of the 25th U.S. Infantry Division. I am proud of this emblem. I had a chance to serve at 25th Reconnaissance Company, the most brave company in your Division, as an interpreter during the period of July 1950 to May 1951.

It is a story of almost fifty years ago, but I can vividly remember the young faces of soldiers not so much older than my age (at that time I was 22 years old,) and of company commanders, platoon leaders and sergeants of the company of that time, though I can not remember exactly their names. All of them were fearless, brave, kind and cheerful. They were always proud to serve at the company. They came back again to the company after discharging from hospital having incurred of wound. They told me that they volunteered to come back again to the company despite they were suggested to transfer to another safer unit. They had the strong pride of serving at the company.

Having passed the interpreter test and waiting for assignment, a fierce looking American soldier of five stripes at his left arm and wearing yellow mustache appeared before us and shot his pistol into the air and said “Whoever brave enough to fight against North Korean soldiers, get on my jeep!” I jumped on his jeep. Later, I knew he was one of the staff sergeants of the 25th Reconnaissance Company. At first I did not know what this company is doing, but only I thought it may be one of fighting units. The company was staying at the sea side of suburbs on Masan city (20 miles west of Pusan.) The company seemed to be very calm and quiet. However, every early morning I saw five, six jeeps and sometimes light tanks were going out from the company station and came back in the evening but with reduced numbers. Later I knew these reduced numbers were either killed, wounded, or missed. By and by I became to know this company is carrying out very important and dangerous missions. I came to experience myself of such dangerous missions. We always had to fight against unseen enemy. My duty at the company was similar to that of the scouts of western cavalry fighting against Indians. Of course, I was armed with M-1 rifle and hand grenades.

I had to accompany to the company commander, platoon leaders or sometimes squad leaders. I had to abreast with these leaders at the most front line to translate and communicate their commands to Korean Augmentations to US Army (KATUSA.) Therefore, I was always exposed to the unseen enemy. Around middle of August 1950 one company size of Korean recruit soldiers (KATUSA) was attached to the Company. They had little regular training, so the company had to train them and lead them at the front line. Because of the barrier of languages

The Way It Was

and different customs there had happened many comedies, tragedies, and unnecessary misunderstandings between American soldiers and Korean soldiers.

So far as I can remember, your Division Headquarters at that time stationed at an elementary school in Masan City. Around the end of September your Division began to general march to north. I got wounded at Jinjoo City (40 miles west of Pusan) when crossing across Nam River. A bullet hit me on my right side neck tendon and passed it through. Later, I found it was a sniper's bullet of enemy to me. At here, the company commander was seriously wounded by an anti-tank mine while he was commanding the river-crossing operation near at the entrance road to bridge. After discharging from the hospital (around half a month later) I joined again to the company at Suwon City (20 miles south of Seoul) where a logistics depot was located. Then I joined in the guerrilla campaign till November.

Around the middle of November we marched to North Korea up to Gunwoori. I recall that the winter was very cold. The machine gun we mounted on the ground at night was frozen up and could not operate it. At there we were surrounded by North Korean and Chinese soldiers and had to withdraw to south. At this time I lost several good American friends of mine. We withdrew so far to Cheonan (50 miles south of Seoul,) and from there we resumed again to march to north little by little. We had close fightings almost every day, and gradually moved forward up to Uijungboo (20 miles north of Seoul.) From there our fighting became stalemate. Around May 1951 I left the company to return to my school teaching job. Later I joined to ROK (Republic of Korea) Army.

The above is my brief campaign history with the 25th Recon Company. During this period I saw not a small number of our comrade-in-arms were killed, wounded or missed. Most of them were youngsters of their blossom ages. Especially I found several times that your young second lieutenants went out for patrol in the morning and came back covered with pancho in the evening.

Since many years have elapsed and my memories having faded away I can not know the exact date of actions and the involved names, but I can remember their faces.

May God bless the 25th US Infantry Division and all of its members!

Sincerely yours,

Jae Hyo Lee

The Way It Was

NAME: Dick Moffatt

UNIT: 25th Mechanized Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop

TIME PERIOD: Japan Occupation, 1946-47

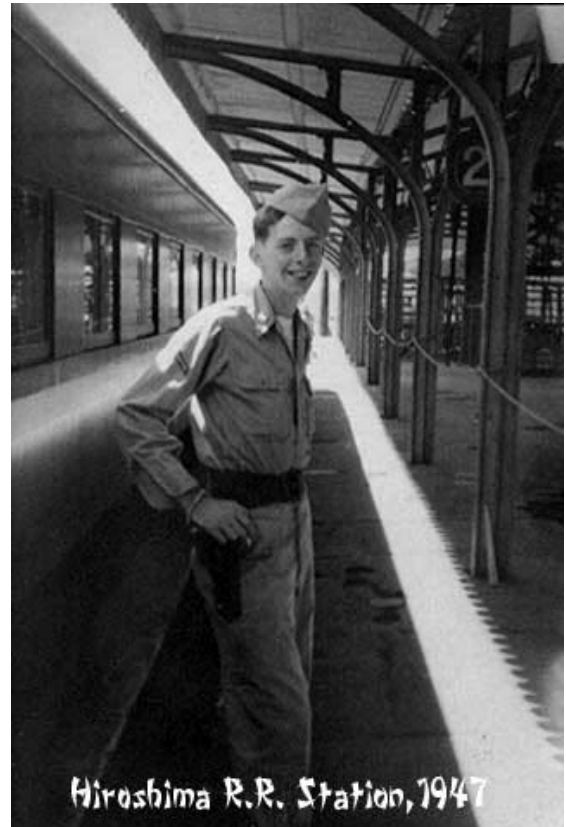
SOURCE: Sent by Mr. Moffatt after the 2001 25th Division Association visit to the museum

DATE RECEIVED: 2 February 2004

On a hot day in August of 1947, four young soldiers climbed aboard a rickety, over-crowded trolley car near the railway yards of Hiroshima, Japan. The civilians politely made room for the two American GIs and the two Australian Aussies who clung to the handles of the boarding steps. The men were undismayed by their precarious perch, being very young and therefore thinking themselves immortal. Their Japanese hosts laughed with them about the ride and condition of the car and tracks, even though neither group spoke much of the others language. You did not have to be a skilled linguist to know what the babble was about.

Shortly, the swaying, rattling car approached the first river they must cross to reach the city center. The mob quieted, and smiles turned to frowns of concern. The soldiers did not understand at first, then saw that the bridge had been badly damaged and was missing many wooden cross ties; enough to destabilize the twisted steel rails. As the trolley slowed and crept out onto the damaged bridge high above the river, the overloaded car began to heel over alarmingly. The crowd tightened their holds and a collective "ohhh" swelled to a frightened chorus until the car slowly righted itself to the "ahhh" of relief. A few nervous chuckles and low excited murmurs of easement replaced fear. Not for long, now the car, in the center of the span, began to heel even more to the opposite side. This time there was simply a shared gasp as the crew brought the car to a halt and shouted instructions to the passengers. As many as who could shifted toward the high side of the creaking, groaning car and ever so slowly the car righted itself and resumed its tortured trip to the far side of the river. There were many grins of gratitude, as if to signify a small triumph over the fortunes of war. The soldiers, a bit pale from the ordeal, were included in the celebration, and quickly joined in with typical new-world enthusiasm.

As the passengers disembarked at their individual stops, much bowing and vocalizing indicated that another day was finished safely. The soldiers' journey continued to near the end of the line and they stepped off into an eerily empty part of this devastated city. They said their "good-byes" and thanks to the solemn trolley crew and turned to find themselves totally alone in front of the famous building over which the first atomic bomb had exploded on a military target. The building, its skeletal steel dome exposed and the rubble of the city stretching around it for 360 degrees, was a stark reminder of what had been done here in an effort to end the war. They stood



The Way It Was

The Way It Was

staring wide-eyed, slack jawed and speechless in their horror, unable to put into words their numbed feelings of revulsion and pity. "My God" was the first utterance, and three hushed, reverent "Amen's" followed.

In a few minutes movement returned to their limbs and reality to their minds. They grinned sheepishly at one another and then began excitedly exchanging comments on the destruction, the absence of any sign of the city's inhabitants, and the silence -- a void in an otherwise noisy world. Even the air was still and no bird songs reached them. No ordinary city animals: dogs, cats or even rats moved about. It was, for the moment, the end of a world. The young soldiers wandered about peering into empty spaces, climbing over the rubble and scrambling amidst the heaps of brick, stone, and charred wood looking for a souvenir to take home. There was nothing left in this open tomb except the ghosts of innocent victims of war.

One of the Americans meandered off down the dusty street, accidentally separating himself from his companions. As he strolled along, lost in thought, he realized he could no longer see any other human being. It was startling, and he stopped in confusion, not quite sure what had happened. He did not want to call out fearing he would be thought of as scared, but feeling that chill up the spine that told him that he was. Just like the first time he'd fired his M-1. As he turned slowly to orient himself, he spied a figure trudging down the street toward him. Although the figure was many yards away, the soldier knew it was not one of his friends. The way the person slouched and sort of shuffled along led him to think that the person was Japanese-- probably an old man from the size of him.

When the person was only a few yards away, he stopped, raised his head tiredly, and gazed for a long moment at the soldier, not quite sure what he was seeing. He grunted and shuffled even closer, raised his wrinkled and grizzled head and peered with dark intense eyes up into the young unlined face of one of the conquerors of his country. Then, as he remembered his manners, he hissed, bowed low and murmured, "Konichiwa," in a low quivering voice. He straightened up and his face lit up in surprise and pleasure when the youngster replied to his greeting in Japanese and with a fine accent, and with a bow nearly as low as the old man's. The soldier had an ear for music and the subtleties of the spoken language, and a love for the beauty of Japanese social customs. "Herro," the old man continued with another slight bow. "I am good to see you," he said in a quiet, surprisingly young sounding voice. He grinned up at the lad and waited- politely for a response. After an awkward moment the American smiled widely and put out his hand and blurted out, "How do you do, Mister, ah, it's nice to meet you," and nodded his own head to indicate respect, and extended his hand even further to urge the man to take it. After a moment hesitation, the man smiled, nodded with a friendly "ahh," in understanding of this American custom of shaking hands. He took the young man's hand in both of his own, shifting a cloth bag slung by a strap from his right shoulder. He spoke rapidly and seriously as he clung to the soldier's hand, and then realizing he was holding on too long, he apologized, bowed low, and backed away a proper distance. Just then the GI's companions appeared from around a high mound of rubble and joined the tableau in a respectful semicircle. The old man became excited and with many smiles, nods and hand signals he began his story in broken English and patiently slow Japanese. As his tale unfolded, the audience translated among themselves.

It seems the man had been in another city on business that fateful day of August 6, 1945. Hearing of the destruction in Hiroshima and fearing for his family, he hurried home. Due to the terrible destruction, and the cordon of troops sealing off Hiroshima, it was not until August 9th that he

The Way It Was

was able to reach his home. He found nothing but flattened, smoking ruin and was not even sure where his home had been. With the help of neighbors and city officials he was able to identify the rubble that had once been his house and gardens. His family was presumed dead and all his possessions were ashes. He spent an entire day going through the wreckage of his home. Aside from a few metal buttons and a nearly melted hibachi, his life was gone. But there were two ordinary nice bowls buried in fine ash, miraculously intact. He reached into his bag and drew out one of the bowls and handed it with tears welling up in his eyes to the American soldier who took it reverently in his hands. The man reached back into his bag and brought out the other bowl, which he handed to one of the Australians. He then pointed with shaking brown fingers at the black semicircular scars on the outside and inside of the bowls. With broken English and hand gestures the story unfolded about these two rice bowls with the heat scars of the Hiroshima blast indelibly etched on their sides. He wished us to have them so that we might carry his story and his plea that the two rice bowls, scorched survivors of the bomb that ended the war would remind everyone we told that the price of war is far too costly for mankind to pay. We promised we would do this, and he then said good bye and shuffled away down the dusty street.



I was one of those soldiers. I was the American who took one of the bowls. It is in my closet as I sit at my computer typing this. I have carried that man's message in my heart and have told his story and repeated his plea often. I don't think I have done near enough, but the rice bowl still bears witness to the tragedy of Hiroshima and perhaps this story will carry the message long after I am gone. I surely hope so.

The Way It Was

NAME: Ed Ryan

UNIT: 10th Engineers Topographic Battalion

TIME PERIOD: 1945

SOURCE: Summation of information from his brother Bill Ryan's Journal, who was also in this unit.

DATE RECEIVED: 27 April 2005

Arrived in Honolulu about 10 A.M. on Saturday January 5, 1945, on the ship Matsonia. We were immediately convoyed to Schofield Barracks where we set up in E Barracks. The battalion's first real task was to organize our working plant. This was to be in the Kunia Underground. The building was composed of three floors underground which were entered by means of a one-eighth mile tunnel. Since all of our work carried a Top Secret designation, it was made very plain to us "that we were expendable, but our equipment WAS NOT." In a few days, the plant was set up for operation. This involved readying several tons of equipment including booths for Multiplex machines, drafting equipment, printing presses, a photo lab, and countless other operations necessary for the construction of accurate topographic maps. The writer of this current document worked in a darkened booth as a Multiplex operator.

When the plant was in operation, B Company of the 30th Engineers did the actual map making, whereas C Company did the printing of the maps. H and S Company provided headquarters and services such as a motor pool, map-making supplies, and a host of other duties.

Much of the time in 1945, the 30th Engineers plant operated three shifts- a Day shift, a Swing shift, and a Graveyard shift. Three shifts were rather necessary because we were kept so busy mapping the Japanese Islands.

On rare occasions when some free time was available, these are some of the events the battalion saw and appreciated as well as some of the eating places visited, at or near Schofield Barracks:

Ray Anthony and the Dolphins played at the bowl in a "Battle of the Bands" on Sunday March 25, 1945. The other bands were the Navy Hellcats and the Air Corps Band. The judges were well-known Art Jarrett and Orrin Tucker.

On Tuesday April 3, 1945, screen star Boris Karloff came for dinner at the plant.

On Sunday May 13, 1945 we saw the Ray Anthony Show in the bowl.

On Sunday July 15, 1945 we saw the Jack Carson show in the bowl with pin-up girl Chili Williams.

We heard the Modernaires at the bowl while they practiced for a radio program.

The shrimp salads (50cents)(huge) were commonly consumed in Wahiawa by guys from the 30th Engineers.

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

It was very popular among members of the 30th Engineers to leave the post and eat meals at Kemoo's.

All members of the 30th Engineers—B and C Companies and H and S Company—had terminated their stay in Hawaii by the end of January, 1946.

The Way It Was

NAME : Charles Scott

UNIT: Co. C, 35th Infantry Regiment

TIME PERIOD: 3 February 1951

SOURCE: Letter received from Mr. Scott

DATE RECEIVED: 31 January 2002

Day 224- Saturday, 3 February 1951

As the day began to dawn over the frost covered landscape, revealing the frozen stubble from last fall's rice harvest, the First Platoon of "C" Company, 35th Infantry Regiment was slowly coming to life. Just before dark last night, our platoon got the order to attack Hill 431- a horseshoe shaped hill with the closed end facing south. The hill, covered with patches of snow, is steep and rugged; the enemy has fortified the hill with bunkers and connecting trenches. We have had very little information from intelligence reports, line crossers, or prisoners as to the disposition of the Chinese Communist Forces Fiftieth Army out in front of us.

We have advanced about forty miles since jumping off on the attack up Highway One on January 20th. Since leaving Chonan, we have taken Pyong-taek, Osan-Ni, the walled city of Suwon and now Anyang is just beyond Hill 431. We still have about twelve miles to our final objective; the Seoul-Inchon highway and the City of Yongdung-po on the south bank of the Han River across from Seoul, the capitol of South Korea. So far, our attack north has been executed against light opposition. Evidently some of the slack has been taken out of our advance as the Turks and a company from our Third Battalion were unable to take and hold Hill 431. Any ground taken was vigorously contested and followed by swift enemy counter -attacks.

As I gave my foxhole buddy a shake, he awakened once again to what life is really like in the regular Army. Reluctantly, he began to show signs of life and asked if it was his turn to go on guard. We slipped on our earthly possessions of pack, cartridge belt, grenades, canteen, entrenching tool and first aid kit. I slung my BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) over my shoulder and we stumbled over the frozen ground through the semi-darkness to eat our breakfast alongside a paddy dike near the road.

I asked Vernon Whorley, a new replacement, where he was from. He said he was born in Kegley, West Virginia, and attended Matoka High School. He was surprised to learn that I was from Athens, West Virginia. We were surprised that we were both the same age (19) and knew some of the same students from each school who attended the Mercer County Vocational School at Glenwood Park.

He asked how long I had been in Korea. I replied that I joined the First Platoon in the Pusan Perimeter as its first replacement on August 7th at "The Notch," a road cut in the mountain pass. I added that I was wounded by a hand grenade while taking a hill on the 27th of September. When I was discharged from Tokyo Army Hospital, I rejoined the First Platoon in the last days of November at Kunu-Ri in North Korea. He said that he and his twin brother joined the army on the 7th of August and took their basic training at Fort Knox.

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

As we were moving out to take Hill 431, we were informed that two carrier based Navy Corsairs would arrive about noon to give us air support, if needed. We crossed the wide valley on the rice paddy dikes that crisscrossed the frozen rice fields to the base of the finger ridge leading up to the top of Hill 431. The climb was gentle in the beginning but became steep and tedious up the snow covered ridge. The BAR weighs nineteen pounds and four ounces, twice that of an M1 rifle and a lot more cumbersome to carry. When we were about four hundred yards from the top, we stopped to wait for the two navy Corsairs. Though the air was cold and crisp, we were wet with sweat. While we waited for the Corsairs, some of us ate our noon meal of C-rations to lighten our load. We enjoyed the faint warm rays of the sun when it pierced through the broken clouds. From our position, we had a beautiful view of the valley below. In the far distance one could hear the rattle of small arms, tank and artillery fire as the ROK (Republic of Korea) outfit was attacking a hill to the right of the road. I finished my C-rations with a pack of cherry Kool-Aid which I sprinkled on the snow, using my spoon to scoop it up for dessert. We had just licked our spoons and returned them to our field jacket pockets when the two Navy Corsairs arrived and circled overhead.

The arrival of the Navy Corsairs was the signal to commence our assault on Hill 431. We resumed our tedious trek up the treacherous ridge, the two scouts well in advance of the platoon. I didn't envy the two scouts having served in that position when we broke out of the Pusan Perimeter.

All of a sudden, there were two loud explosions that shook the earth under our feet accompanied by the dull thud and whine of machine gun bullets hitting the ground and ricocheting off the rocks. At first, I thought the enemy had opened up with small arms and mortar fire to check our assault, when the loud deafening roar of the corsair pulled up from his strafing run. We all looked for available cover but there was none as our platoon sergeant struggled to pull the air panel from a GI's pack straps with his left hand while waving the second Corsair off with his right hand but to no avail. The second Corsair gave us the same amount of ordinance before pulling up so low that we could feel the prop wash of the Corsair. The first pilot had banked sharply and was coming in for another strafing run. When he saw our air panel, he rocked the Corsair back and forth indicating he was sorry.

I am glad they were not P-51 Mustangs or the Air Force loaded with Napalm that strafed us. The P-51 is the most effective aircraft for close combat support. A quick check was made and to our surprise, no one was wounded- makes one wonder just how effective air strikes are.

As the scouts neared the top of Hill 431, the enemy opened up with small arms fire. The platoon went into action, quickly pinning the enemy down. At closer range, they began to lob grenades (potato mashers) down the hill but these were ducked or sidestepped as they tumbled down the hill exploding harmlessly behind us. Each time a grenade was thrown, Gerald Deeter would take off his pile cap, bow slightly, announce "grenade" and then return his pile cap in a very casual manner. Gerald was so close to the enemy trench that the enemy could have handed him a grenade. A young enemy soldier jumped up out of the trench with his hands up and ran in among us. I was surprised he was not shot; his timing was perfect.

The Way It Was

The Way It Was

Our platoon leader directed four of us (Tadashi, Hank, Vernon and me) to move to the left, inside the horseshoe and assault the enemy position from the flank. As the four of us moved around the hill, a rifle cracked inside the curve of the horseshoe. The spent round found its intended mark with a dull thud as it hit Vernon in the chest. Vernon went down without a whimper, sliding down the hill leaving a bright trail of glistening blood in the snow. His body came to rest against a rock on a patch of ground where the snow had melted, about thirty feet below me. We took what cover we could find; I shouted for the medic and swept the ridge in the direction of the enemy sharpshooter with my BAR. The medic did not hesitate to risk his own life in rushing to Vernon, our first casualty. After examining Vernon, he dashed back around the hill to safety. Minutes later an attached South Korean stood up where he thought it was safe. I shouted “abunai” (danger, look out) in Japanese as the rifle cracked and he took a hit in the chest and died a few minutes later as the medic and two other attached Koreans tried to save him as he drowned in his own blood. Our objective had been achieved but not before the sharpshooter had shot dead four men, narrowly missing the fifth.

The valley had filled with darkness, but hill 431 was still receiving the last of the sun’s warm glow. A defense perimeter was being formed for the night when an order came over the radio for us to withdraw and join the company. Three of us were assigned to stay and cover the platoon’s withdrawal. The platoon started down the hillside dragging the four dead men assisted by the POW. About an hour later a shot was fired by our platoon sergeant to signal our withdrawal. We fired several rounds into the horseshoe and made our way down the slippery slope to join the platoon. At the base of the finger ridge we were met by Grave Registration who had brought stretchers to transport our dead.

My assistant BAR man went with some others into the village in search of straw and rice bags to line the inside of our foxhole. We joined the company and took our assigned positions. I started digging our foxhole, the sound of digging continued well into the night. We had cold C-rations brought to us. My foxhole buddy put his C-ration inside his clothing to thaw them with his body heat and went to sleep. As my foxhole buddy slept, I sat in our hole, taking my two hour turn at guard watching, listening, looking at the night sky for the Big Dipper to point me to the North Star so I could get my bearings in case we had to move, eating my C-rations, thawing each bite in my mouth, a bite at a time, pondering today’s action on Hill 431, the air strike, the four men killed in action and amazed that no one was wounded. I thought of something I had read or heard, that “no man has tasted the full flavor of life until he has known poverty, love and war.” I have no way of knowing if Vernon experienced poverty or love, but I do know that he had experienced war, though briefly, but fully, giving his life as the supreme sacrifice.

From the south bank of the Han River in Yongdung-po, I wrote a letter to my sister Margaret Ann Scott on February 15th. “We have a boy in our squad who lives about three miles from Princeton on the Beckley Road. He went to school at Matoka. We knew some of the same boys at Glenwood Park Vocational School. He was killed while taking a hill about a week ago.”

The Way It Was

NAME: W.L. (Lefty) Stone

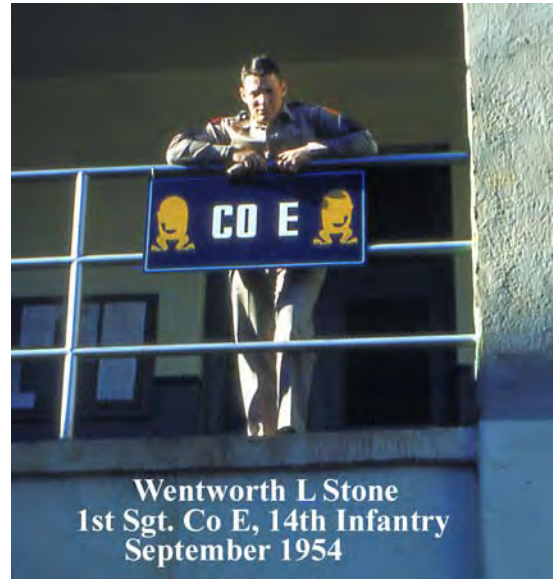
UNIT: 1/14th Inf.

TIME PERIOD: 1954

SOURCE: Letter from Mr. Stone

DATE RECEIVED: July 26, 2006

In September, 1954 I was a 1st Sgt. with George Company of the 17th Infantry Regiment of the 7th Infantry Division. The 17th, (White Buffalos) were manning positions along the Demilitarized Zone in Korea. A levy came down for troops from the 7th Division to fill up the 25th Division which was being relocated from Korea to Schofield Barracks in the Territory of Hawaii.



Along with a hundred other men from various units in the 7th Division, I reported to Camp North Star which was located close to the MSR (Main Supply Route) near the 38th Parallel and the town of Uijongbu. I processed in and was assigned to Easy Company of the 14th Infantry Regiment (Golden Dragons) as its 1st Sgt.

Despite the acquisition of men from other units, the division's personnel strength was low. During the war, rifle squads of nine men were usually made up of four or five US soldiers and the remainder was made up of KATUSA riflemen. They were Korean soldiers Attached to the US Army. Obviously, those soldiers were not going to Hawaii with the 25th. Soldiers arriving in Korea in September, 1954 were going to divisions that were to remain on the DMZ and not to the 25th, since it was heading for Hawaii. Normal attrition of personnel leaving the service, particularly two year draftees, was further reducing troop strength.

When I reported in on the 9th of September, the division was close to the date that they would embark. Camp North Star was just a staging area with no tactical mission. The men were mostly marking time waiting for the troopships to arrive at Inchon that would transport them to Hawaii.

Leaving Korea

I don't have the actual date of our departure, but I believe it was around the 17th of September, 1954.

An advanced party was sent to secure the railhead dock area at Inchon. It was to prevent looting when large numbers of troops and equipment would board transports that would take them to Hawaii.

The Way It Was

Another party had already been sent to Schofield and was getting the living quarters and mess halls ready for the arrival of the division.

It was still dark when we left Camp North Star. We mounted trucks and were taken to a railhead where we boarded train cars and proceeded to a dock at Inchon Harbor. Each soldier had his weapon, his steel helmet and a duffel bag carrying all of his worldly possessions. American Red Cross “doughnut dollies” provided coffee and doughnuts for the troops as we waited for our units to be called.



When our time came, we filled up landing craft and were taken out to troopships where we climbed steep staircases up to the deck of the MSTS (Military Sea Transport Service) General Muir. The ship could carry 3,343 troops and I think that we might have filled all the berths.

The Journey

Troops were assigned to compartments in the belly of the ship and would remain below deck for the major part of the trip. The compartments were crowded and hot. Salt water showers were possible if you wanted to stand in long lines. There was little to do other than try to sleep, play card games and eat.

Troops spent a good portion of the day standing in lines to get into the rather small mess halls. They ate standing up at metal tables. Railings were secured around the edges of the table to prevent trays of food from sliding off the table as the ship lurched and rolled along. Not too long after finishing a meal, it was time to get into line for the next one.

It was not uncommon to see men lose their lunch because of sea sickness. Once one man would start, the smell would trigger other men and the malady would spread. It was not always pleasant in the deepest holds on the ship.

Once a day, NCOs were put in charge of bringing a compartment of soldiers up the stair wells and onto the deck so that they could get some fresh air and stretch their legs. Even if it were raining, the troops would be eager to go on deck to escape the boredom and cramped living quarters.

At times, pods of porpoises rode the wake of the ship or passed alongside the Muir and put on a show for the men. Whales were also seen flashing their flukes as they surfaced and then dove into the choppy waves, sometimes quite close to the ship.

The Way It Was

After a brief respite from life below decks, the men would descend the stair wells to their quarters and another compartment of men would be brought topside.

Senior NCOs fared somewhat better. I was in a small ten man room one deck down with nine other company First Sergeants. We spent most of our daylight hours making sure that the troops were cycled between the compartments and the main deck for exercise and fresh air.

Arriving in Hawaii

Ten days after leaving Korea, the Muir arrived off the coast of Oahu. It was nighttime and we anchored offshore within sight of the lights of Honolulu and Waikiki. We were told that a welcoming ceremony was planned for us and we couldn't dock until morning.

The next morning, when the greeters onshore were ready to receive us, we headed for the Port of Honolulu. Fireboats shot arches of water into and tugboats tooted their horns as we neared land. Some of the tugs then guided us into the Kapalama Basin and then jostled us into position between piers 39 and 40.



On the port side, Pier 40 was crowded with Army buses and cattle cars. Hula girls and a small ukulele band performed for us along the edge of the pier. On the starboard side, families, civilian women, and local girls lined balconies on Pier 39 holding armloads of colored leis and an Army band on the dock serenaded us.

The ship tied up to pier 39 and we began to disembark. As each man stepped ashore carrying his duffel bag and weapon, a lei would be draped over his head. They then proceeded to an open area where NCOs separated them by company. After ten days at sea, just standing around in the sun waiting for a bus was a treat.

As buses arrived they were filled with men that would be dropped off at a particular quadrangle. Units from the 14th Infantry Regiment would end up in Quad E.

The advance party had everything ready for us. We were issued bedding, assigned a living area and had a sit down meal in the mess hall. After standing up to eat aboard ship for 10 days, this was also a treat.

We settled in and began garrison duty in Quad E.

A Soldier's Story



By
Warren H. Schuster
October 2014



Preface

It has taken sixty some years for me to write about my war experience. It is not an easy task. My family should know what I experienced in combat. I hope they will pass my story on to their children. War is brutal and the memories crop up at the most inappropriate times. I can readily sympathize with the returning combat veteran who has trouble adjusting to civilian life. As I write this, I can smell gunpowder, smell death in the air and almost feel the ground shaking. Fear is an ever-present companion in war. I survived only because God was watching over me. I also had family praying for me. I am convinced there are no atheists in a foxhole.

We have a responsibility as a nation to honor those men and women who sacrifice so much to protect the freedoms we enjoy. The future of America is dependent upon how well we provide for the welfare of our veterans. Our first president, George Washington, said it very well when he said, "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation." Since my wounds require frequent medical attention, I am forever grateful to a nation that truly cares about its veterans. I am proud to be an American.

A Soldier's Story
By
Warren H. Schuster, Pvt., US Army, Retired
I Company, 3rd Battalion,
35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division

My Last Battle

Introduction

The mission objective for Item Company, 3rd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, United States Army, was to secure and hold Hills 682 and 717. Securing these hills would allow us to monitor enemy troop movement in the area. These hills are located northeast of Chorwon, Korea in what now is known as the Iron Triangle. The mission did not seem difficult--after all this is what the 25th had been trained to do. What was not anticipated by the men of the 25th was the tenacity of the enemy and the problems which ensued from a radio equipment failure. Together these two factors assured the failure of the mission. As Item Company was ordered into the operation, I doubt that any of us had the slightest hint of what was about to happen.

The US Army's official description of the battle helps to define the situation in which we found ourselves.

US Army's Official Description

The battle is described in the following Presidential Unit Citation presented to Item and Love Companies for extraordinary heroism. The citation reads as follows:

Companies I and L, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, and the following attached units: Heavy Machine Gun Platoon, Company M, 35th Infantry Regiment, 75-mm Recoilless Rifle Platoon, Company M, 35th Infantry Regiment, are cited for outstanding performance of duty and extraordinary heroism in action against the enemy in the vicinity of Tangwon-ni Korea, during the period 6 to 8 September 1951. On the afternoon of 6 September, Companies I and L and attached units joined in the defense of Hills 682 and 717. As the friendly forces consolidated their defensive positions, they were subjected to a heavy mortar and artillery barrage. The barrage could not be returned because of a communications failure between the forward observation team and the supporting friendly artillery. At 0015[12:15am] hours on the 7 September, the tempo of the hostile fire increased, with approximately 1,000 shells landing on the friendly emplacements during a 35-minute period. With the artillery barrage lifted, an enemy force estimated at two reinforced enemy regiments and supported by mortar and automatic-weapons fire, launched a fanatical attack against the perimeters of Companies I and L. Throughout a 6-hour period, the fiercely determined enemy troops hurled themselves again and again at friendly positions but were repulsed by the valiant units defending the two hills. As the hostile forces were working their way behind the friendly defenses, both companies discovered that their supply of ammunition was almost exhausted and realizing that it would be suicidal to remain in their present positions because supplies and ammunition could not be brought to them through the encircling enemy, Companies I and L and attached units consolidated forces in an attempt to fight their way

back to friendly lines. Constantly under attack, the friendly forces gathered all of their wounded and began to battle savagely in order to break out of the enemy entrapment. Despite numerically superior hostile troops, who continuously harassed the friendly forces from all sides, Companies I and L and the attached units expending their remaining ammunition with deadly accuracy, successfully fought their way back to the friendly lines. In the entire engagement, an estimated 600 enemy troops were killed or wounded. Companies I and L and the attached units displayed such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in carrying out their assignment under difficult and hazardous conditions as to set them apart and above other units participating in the campaign. The extraordinary heroism and steadfast devotion to duty displayed by the members of Companies I and L 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, reflect great credit on themselves and are in keeping with the finest traditions of the military service. (1)

My Personal Experience

The strength and resolve of American soldiers in combat comes from love of God, country and family. I know this is what gave me the strength to face combat. But I am getting ahead of my story. Let me tell the story as it happened in Korea more than half a century ago.

Orders came this afternoon indicating that early tomorrow morning Item Company (2) is to move-out and secure Hills 682 and 717 and hold until relieved. What a bummer I thought, the least they could do is give us a specific time frame, but this is typical Army procedure. I found out later that we are to rotate with another company every 3 days. This time we will replace Love Company.

The morning came early for us today. The night air is cool and crisp. I thought I detected a touch of winter in the air. It brought back memories of northern Wisconsin, fall weather, and home. Since I have been with 3rd squad, 3rd platoon of Item Company I have seen an indescribable amount of death and destruction as a result of firefights between us and the Chinese 26th Infantry Division. Our units are out on patrol and in firefights almost every day. Getting your personal duties done along with breakfast in the dark is an art in itself; an art learned very quickly in the Army, especially in a combat zone. The chaplain calls a quick religious service, which I readily attend, along with many others. I can't say at this time I am the most religious person in the outfit but it gives me peace of mind. As yet unbeknownst to me, I am about to be in most earnest need for Divine help. We are now ready to move out.

As dawn approaches on the 6th of September 1951 Item Company moves out accompanied by an M46 Patton tank. We are on our way to secure Hills 682 and 717. We form a single line stretching for more than a half mile. We are not so vulnerable to attack in this formation. Hills in Korea are identified and numbered by their elevation in yards. Our objectives are seven miles north of the 38th parallel and overlook major road and railroad junctions in North Korea. The area will become known as the Iron Triangle. Obviously our presence makes the enemy very nervous. The dirt road to our destination is littered with a dozen or more bodies of dead enemy soldiers. The smell of death is in the air. Our troops will not remove the bodies because the Chinese have a habit of booby-trapping the bodies of their own men. The enemy, it seems, places little value on human life. Within the hour we are at a ford in the river. After crossing the river I stop and empty my water-filled boots and put on dry socks. I put the wet ones inside my shirt so that I will later have dry socks, if needed. The

trail to the crest of the hill is narrow, winding and arduous. I am thankful for a cool, overcast day. There are no rain clouds in the sky today. I wonder if I could predict the weather here like I do at home. We use, as is the custom, Korean civilians to carry a lot of our equipment and especially ammunition. Some Koreans carried large A-frames loaded with everything from water to barbed wire. The barbed wire is to help secure our perimeter. Besides my own equipment, an M1 rifle and ammo, this time I am carrying extra ammo for the squad's B.A.R.(3) all of which make a total weight of over 85 lbs. The climb takes about two hours. These two hills have a narrow saddle between them. Item Company, my company, secured Hill 717. Love Company is already on Hill 682. It is now late afternoon and we settle in.

"Settling in" for me means packing into my bunker which is a foxhole with a few logs over the top, as much ammo, grenades, rations and personal items as space will allow. The most important personal item is a metal ammo box to urinate or "whatever" into. It is much safer to stay in the bunker at night and use a can because you can easily fall into the slit trench filled with that "whatever" in the dark. Besides, most anytime you are outside the bunker, you can easily get yourself killed. As usual, I am assigned a forward position, a position that later will prove to be in the exact line of attack by the enemy.

It is now late evening and time for hash and hot chocolate; and all done on flameless canned heat. I have not eaten since breakfast. I get out my faithful P-38 can opener. This little gadget is as necessary as your rifle. It's called a P-38 because it takes 38 strokes to open a can of C-rations. Only the army will design a tool that opens C-ration cans, and is used as a knife, a screwdriver, and almost anything else you can think of and yet small enough to be carried with your dog tags. I will not eat again for four days. The weather is still overcast. I am thankful for this and especially for no rain. Nothing is more miserable than rain or snow when you are out in the field.

Unknown to any of us, the forward observers have a broken radio and cannot communicate with the company or call in artillery fire, if needed. The observers positioned out in front cannot warn us of the massing of two Chinese regiments. (4) This will prove deadly.

The ensuing battle, which starts with an enemy bombardment in early evening, comes as a complete surprise. The noise and concussions caused by the explosions seem to rupture my eardrums and my head seems to nearly explode. At times I feel as if I will pass-out. This is really the first time I have been under such concentrated heavy artillery and mortar fire for such an extended length of time. When the bombardment subsides the Chinese begin to mass for an attack. I had never seen so many troops all in one place ready to do only one thing, kill us. I can see them coming right at my position. "I will get you before you get me," is my thought. And this I do, time after time as the enemy comes up that draw yelling and screaming toward me. I begin to feel sorry for these men. Supporting fire on both sides of me help hold the enemy at bay. The situation is getting tense as the supporting fire is ceasing. I assume the men providing my supporting fire are wounded or dead. I cannot immediately help them because of the over-whelming number of enemy troops and heavy fire. I feel badly for my fellow soldiers, since they were new replacements. I am beginning to wonder why we are not receiving artillery fire support.

I am running low on ammo and will soon need to make a run for the ammo bunker. The bunker is some hundred yards away. I make ammo runs numerous times and always under heavy fire. I wish I could carry more each trip than the two boxes of .30-caliber M1

ammunition and several hand-grenades. I wonder how many times I can do this with out getting hit.

To communicate, the enemy uses bugles and horns during the day and fireworks at night. The fireworks display at night is very unnerving. The fireworks display, which I did not make any sense out of, is as spectacular as any July 4th event at home. The display is spectacular against the black night sky I thought, but it can only mean that the enemy is about to attack again. The Chinese like to attack at night and are very good at it. The Chinese battle plan of attacking, falling back and attacking again continues all night the 6th and all day and night the 7th. The bombardment intensifies dramatically around midnight on the 7th. It is now sometime after midnight, but I am too busy fighting to pay close attention to time. I am hit on the left side of my head. I go down bleeding profusely; fighting to stay conscious. I can feel that part of my skull is torn away, just above my ear. I am thankful I had my steel pot (5) on. I know only God can help me now. I begin praying, then I pass out. As I awake, I realize that it is daylight. Surprisingly, I am not cold and for a moment I wonder if I'm still alive. Suddenly, the medics are lifting me on to a stretcher. I am carried part way down the hill by two Korean civilians under continuous fire. Again I pass out, coming to I find myself all alone and without any weapons. The two Korean civilians carrying me abandoned me rather than face another attack. Why I am not killed as I lay here, I do not know. Maybe the Chinese think I am already dead. The bleeding seems to have almost stopped now, perhaps because of the cold air. As long as I don't touch or bump the wounds, I think I will be OK. Someone is watching over me. I gather enough strength to get up and hide until dark in some brush and rocks well off the trail. I pull the stretcher with me so as not to draw attention, to me. I am afraid that a Chinese patrol might come by at any time, and darkness is still an hour or so away. Before it gets dark, I have enough of my senses to take a mental note of the location of the trail down the east side of the hill.

When darkness comes I began to make my way down the hill. I am so tired and exhausted but if I quit moving, then I am as good as dead. I pray. There is a creek along side of the trail and this assured me that I am on the correct trail and moving in the right direction. I even drank the water, since I have no food or water with me. This is not a very smart thing to do since the Koreans put human waste on their land that finds its way into the rivers and creeks. But my thirst and fatigue cloud my judgment. I wish I had my fatigue jacket with me but it must be back on the hill. It is getting cold and it won't be many days and this creek will be frozen. The Chinese, of course, are now all around the hill since my company has been ordered to withdraw south to Hill 528. I am crawling through enemy lines. I am so close to the enemy that I could hear them talking, almost in a whisper, to each other. I expect to be shot at any moment. However, they are probably just as scared of me as I am of them. They do not know, of course, that I have no weapons. They also may not have wanted to give their position away by firing at me. I am so thankful for a moonless night. Somebody, I thought, is watching over me. I keep moving as the night goes on, fearful that if I stop to rest, I will not be able to get going again. All this time I am crawling on my stomach, never daring to stand up and walk for fear an enemy patrol will spot me. I think about hiding in a Korean straw-roof hut in a place called Tangwon-ni, but decided not to because that would be the first place an enemy patrol will look. I enter a hut and can see the Buddha statue that is part of every Korean home. I figure I need more help than Buddha can give me. I notice also how clean the dirt floor is. The Korean family must have swept the floor before leaving. What a waste of time, I thought. This hut will not be standing very long; if we don't destroy it with artillery fire the Chinese will surely burn it. Finally, I felt I am getting close enough to

friendly units that I can get up and walk. It is senseless to crawl since there isn't enough cover to hide in.

In late afternoon I see a US Army column moving ahead of me. What a sight! I am thankful again for unlimited visibility that day. Somehow I get their attention and they come back with a M46 Patton tank to get me. This is the best ride I've ever had. Why they are in this area and how they saw me at this great distance is a mystery. Someone is watching over me. The medics take me to a staging area and place me in an ambulance with other wounded. I am told we are the last of the wounded. Some of our dead are already on trucks to be moved. It is heart rendering to see dozens of bodies stacked on these trucks. I get sick to my stomach; it must have been shock setting in. Finally, after a short ride and just before dark, we arrive at a helicopter pad. Strapped in a bubble on the outside of an H-5 helicopter, I am flown to a MASH unit. (6) My most serious wound is a head injury resulting from shrapnel from enemy artillery and mortar fire. I spent the next ten months in military hospitals recuperating from my wounds. Upon arriving in the states, I am sent to Percy Jones Army Hospital, Battle Creek, Michigan, which specializes in neurosurgery. Because of the seriousness of the injuries I am discharged with a disability and eventually retired from service with full veterans benefits. Upon separation from the service, I enrolled in college under the GI Bill and graduated with a teaching degree. I retired from teaching after 33 years in the profession.

Conclusion

Our casualties for this combat action were 46 killed, 130 wounded and 36 missing. (7) The enemy casualties based on the bodies found later were 117 killed on Hill 717 and 250 killed on Hill 682 while many more were wounded or killed in the area. The Presidential Unit Citation indicates that a total of 600 enemy soldiers were killed or wounded in this action.

My military awards for serving in the Korean War are the Purple Heart, Presidential Unit Citation, Korean Service Medal/w one battle star, National Defense Medal, United Nations Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Korean War Service Medal, Expert/Sharpshooter Badge and the Combat Infantry Badge. Among awards issued to me for combat service are three special awards the Purple Heart, Presidential Unit Citation and Combat Infantry Badge.

The Army also issued special commendations for action on Hills 682 and 717. The following message is from Army Commander, General James A. Van Fleet: To the officers and men of Company I and L, Heavy Machine Gun Platoon Company M, and Seventy-five Recoilless Rifle Platoon of Company M, 35th Infantry: I take pleasure and pride in congratulating you upon the occasion of the award of the Distinguished Unit Citation for your gallant defense of Hills 682 and 717 on 6 September 1951. Despite the exceptionally severe pressure and almost hopeless encirclement your courage and unremitting determination deserves the nations gratitude and honor. You possess my admiration.

A message from Major General Ira P. Swift, US Army Commanding reads: I wish also to extend my congratulations to each and every individual who participated in the heroic action, which merited this coveted award.

Notes

- (1) General Orders 968, Headquarters, Eighth United States Army, Korea, 6 December 1951.
- (2) A US Rifle Company consists of 195 enlisted men plus 6 officers.
- (3) Browning automatic rifle.
- (4) Chinese regiment is 3000 troops.
- (5) Helmet
- (6) Mobile Army Surgical Hospital.
- (7) The Korean War: An Oral History. Uncertain Victory. Volume 2, pg 293.

Selected References

Distinguished Unit Citation. General Orders 968, Headquarters Eighth United States Army, Korea, 6 December 1951. [Excerpts from General Order No. 35, Department of the Army, Washington 25, D.C., April 1952]

History of United Nations Forces in Korea. 6 volumes. Korea: Ministry of National Defense Republic of Korea. 1976. [Volume 5, pages 164 – 168 describes battle for Hills 682 and 717].

Knox, Donald with additional text by Coppel, Alfred. The Korean War: An Oral History. Volume 2, Uncertain Victory. New York: Harcourt, Inc. 1988. [Pages 282-293, describes the battle for Hills 682 and 717].

Appendices

Map of the Iron Triangle area showing village of Tangwon-Ni and hills 717 and 682.

Map of Korea

Article published in the February, 2012 VFW magazine describing the battle in which I was wounded and earned the prestigious Presidential Unit Citation.

Biography

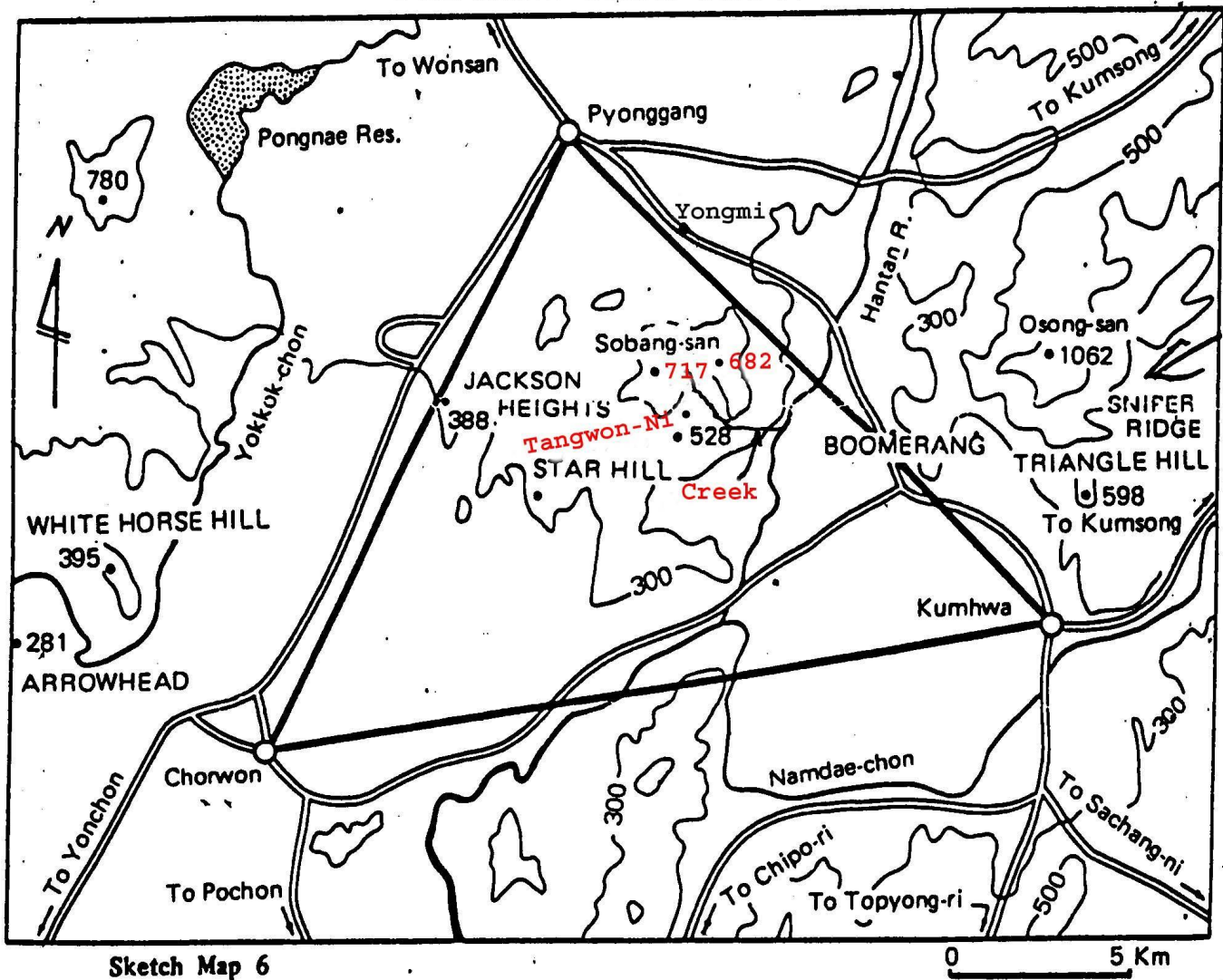
I was born in Oshkosh Wisconsin and grew up on the east side near Lake Winnebago. I attended Oshkosh public schools and graduated from the old Oshkosh High School on Algoma Boulevard in January 1950, the last mid-year graduating class.

After graduation I worked for the Buckstaff Company and Wisconsin Axle. In early 1951 I volunteered for the draft. By August of that year I found myself in Korea in some of the heaviest fighting of the war. I was wounded on September 7, 1951 on hill 717. I spent the next 10 months in army hospitals recovering from my wounds. Upon discharge from the service, I returned to Oshkosh. I enrolled in college graduating with a teaching degree. I taught in Wisconsin public schools for 11 years before moving to Illinois to take a teaching position and eventually serving as curriculum coordinator for the Freeport School District.

I am now retired, after 33 years in the profession. I presently live in Freeport, Illinois with my family.

This map shows the Iron Triangle, which is located about 50 miles northeast of Seoul, South Korea. The cities of Chorwon and Kumhwa, the base of the triangle, are in South Korea while P'yonggang is in North Korea. The Demilitarized Zone [DMZ] passes through the center of the Iron Triangle. Hills 717 and 682 are in this area

THE IRON TRIANGLE AREA



TACKLING TANGWON-NI

BY RICHARD E. ECKER



For three days in early September 1951, elements of the 3rd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Division, engaged in one of the Korean War's deadliest battles. It earned participants the prestigious Presidential Unit Citation.



U.S. ARMY PHOTO COURTESY D.M. GIANGRECO: WAR IN KOREA

By the first of September 1951, battle lines in Korea had begun to firm up as peace talks became more likely. Units of the U.S. 25th Infantry Division were digging in along the southern leg of the "Iron Triangle," a sector in central Korea bounded by three once-prominent North Korean cities: Kumhwa, Chorwon and Pyonggang.

While these Main Line of Resistance (MLR) positions were being developed

by the main body of the division, the 35th Infantry Regiment was held in reserve. It engaged in training exercises south of the MLR. One of its battalions maintained a patrol base on hills 717 and 682, some 5,000 yards forward of the MLR, in the vicinity of Tangwon-ni.

These two hills, separated by about 1,800 yards, dominated a complex of ridges and spurs that encompassed almost three square miles overlooking the valley leading to Pyonggang to the north.

The 35th Infantry *Command Report* for that month described the terrain: "Viewed overall, the ridge complex 717-682 forms a natural redoubt with relatively easy communication to the south and is difficult to attack from any other direction."

For almost a month, patrol duty on the complex had been the responsibility of a single company supplemented by some heavy weapons sections. Their reports to regimental operations had been routinely uneventful throughout that period. However, on Sept. 6, as I Company was in the process of replacing L Company

ABOVE: South of Pyonggang in the Iron Triangle, Hill 717 was the scene of a fierce battle in September 1951. The GIs pictured belong to a unit other than the one that fought there when this action occurred.

on the patrol base, it was subjected to withering artillery and mortar fire from the Chinese.

RED FLARES AND BUGLES

Then, all hell broke loose, as described by Cpl. Melvin Granos, a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) man with L Company on Hill 682. "After the artillery barrage there was a moment of silence and then came the red flares, the bugles and the taunting voices in front of us and then the attack," he recalled.

The complex was being assaulted in force by elements of the Chinese Communist Force 233rd Regiment. "The strange thing was, they hit us from the south," said Lt. Paul Fleming, L Company's 3rd Platoon leader on Hill 682.

For six hours, the Chinese hurled themselves at the perimeters, only to be repeatedly repulsed. Ultimately, the two companies and attached Heavy Machine Gun and 75mm Recoilless Rifle platoons of M Company expended their ammo and fought their way back to friendly lines. But not before inflicting 600 dead and wounded on the Communists.

Clearly, the Chinese had made the same assessment of the terrain as the one reflected in the command report. The patrol base had been occupied by the 35th Infantry for almost a month, and reconnaissance patrols had been sent out daily. Yet Chinese forces managed to avoid detection while they took up positions between it and the MLR.

According to Fleming, over the several weeks that the 3rd Battalion had occupied the patrol base, companies had rotated on and off the hills every five days or so. Each time they carried more ammunition to be stored there. As it turned out, they needed every round—and could have used more.

AMMO DEPLETED

Describing the early morning hours of Sept. 7, Fleming recalled: "We had three light machine guns from the 4th Platoon. By morning, we had burned out the barrels of all of them. We were down to nothing in the way of ammunition."

Those were the kinds of stories that were happening all across the patrol base that night and into the next day, as the defenders valiantly fought off repeat-



COURTESY KEVIN WOLFF

Pvt. Kevin Wolff, a Browning automatic rifleman of L Company, survived the ordeal of Tangwon-ni only to be wounded in October 1951.

ed assaults. Among the many accounts of heroism that could be related from that battle is the one that earned Pvt. Billie G. Kanell of I Company a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Standing his ground under heavy fire, Kanell jumped on a grenade, absorbing its full blast. Incredibly, when a second grenade was thrown into his emplacement, he rolled over toward it, shielding his fellow soldiers from death.

Efforts to air-drop ammunition failed because the surrounding terrain was nothing but sharp spurs and steep draws. So the beleaguered defenders were finally forced to abandon the hills. The withdrawal, however, was anything but orderly. As Fleming remembered, "It was just chaos. People were peeling off the side of the mountain, trying to catch up with anybody."

With multitudes of Chinese between them and the MLR, and dozens of wounded to evacuate, their trials were just beginning. Among the strategic positions the Chinese had occupied prior to the attack was Hill 432, 3,000 yards south of the 717-682 axis. This hill had a commanding view of the valleys behind the patrol base. Thus making evacuation of the complex a nightmare and counter-attack from the south a major challenge.

EVACUATION NIGHTMARE

Small groups of GIs—many with walking wounded assisting the more seriously injured—inched their way south through the rugged terrain of the complex.

Pfc. John Randolph, a walking-wounded mortarman with L Company, described the trip down the mountain:

"We had to go very slow because Chinese were all around us. It took a couple of days. We had to carry some of the people between two of us."

Pvt. Kevin Wolff, a BAR man with L Company, recalled his circular route to the MLR. "We had to dodge Chinese patrols and were without food or water, finally crossing into a sector of the line held by the Turkish brigade. It took us from midnight Thursday to Saturday noon to make the front," he said.

"When we regrouped, there was an average of two and three to a squad where there had been 10 and 12 when we had left for the outposts a week before."

The Presidential Unit Citation for the 35th attests to its courage: "Companies I and L and attached units displayed such gallantry, determination and *esprit de corps* in carrying out their assignment under difficult and hazardous conditions as to set them apart and above other units participating in the campaign."

Meanwhile, efforts to recapture the complex continued for the next several days. It was ultimately successful, but it required the commitment of the entire regiment—and it cost a number of additional casualties as a result of friendly fire.

Among friendly-fire casualties during the battle were those incurred at Hill 717. While located on Hill 682 with L Company, Pvt. Roger G. Spindler observed: "To my horror, a Marine F4U Corsair fighter came in from the west and dropped its napalm short of its mark on the U.S. soldiers getting ready to retake 717 instead of hitting the hill."

In the end, the total price for the six-day battle was 88 killed (including 16 missing and never recovered), 217 wounded and 15 captured (later returned). It was among the deadliest battles of the Korean War, yet Tangwon-ni rarely rates mention in the war's history. ☪

E-MAIL magazine@vfw.org

RICHARD E. ECKER is a veteran of the 31st Inf. Regt., 7th Div., serving in Korea in 1952-53. He is author of *Korean Battle Chronology* (2005).