

## ONE BITTER DEFEAT FOLLOWED ANOTHER

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The hopeless defense of Chonan, a straw-roofed village below Suwon, lasted all day and ended at nightfall in confused and tragic retreat.

It had started early in the morning, when a phalanx of olive-painted north Korean tanks tore through a tissue-like fog and churned to the edge of a railroad embankment that protected the clay hamlet like an embrasure.

There were sharp, deafening blasts as tank guns sheared off rooftops in the village.

A thin handful of Americans, who had burrowed into foxholes into the embankment's reverse slope, were pinned down by a blistering fire. Lt. Col. Robert R. Martin, called "Fighting Bob" by his men, jumped from his hole with a WWII bazooka that had already proven useless in other battles.

"Come on," he shouted, "I'll show you how to stop those \_\_\_\_\_!"

Sgt. Gerard E. Schaffer watched Martin disappear, alone, behind a cluster of houses. Waves of tough, efficient north Korean infantrymen, not the "bandits and partisans" the Americans had expected, advanced behind the tanks and "seemed to multiply as fast as we cut them down."

After dark, as invaders swarmed the town's streets and alleys, the defenders were ordered to pull out.

Schaffer moved down the embankment and pulled at limp bodies, filling his shirt with as many dog tags and wallets as he could recover. It was his job to collect personal effects of casualties. He was chief clerk of S-1 in 34th RGT HQ.

He walked cautiously into the street and behind the houses where he had last seen Martin. "I almost stumbled over something, and looked down," he recalls, "It was the lower half of a man." Fighting Bob Martin had been chopped in two by a tank shell; a sickened Schaffer did his duty and collected his commanding officer's blood spattered belongings."

I can't remember how many of us got out," Schaffer relates, "but it was damned fewer than came in.

We walked down the road, many miles, to Waegwan. It was the next place they'd hit, but what could we do? There was nowhere else to go."

Enemy snipers had moved onto the hilltops over the road. Schaffer has never forgotten how, again and again, there would be a sharp crack, followed by a piercing snap.

Someone "only a few feet away" would stiffen, stare blankly and drop limply to the dirt.

What was he doing here, Schaffer asked himself. A week before, he had been at Camp Mower, which sprawled down a rocky bluff on the west coast of southern Japan and looked more like a mountain resort than a military post.

He had been pulled out of a soft tour of occupation duty, and was told he and the others were going to Korea for what would amount to a brisk little field maneuver.

"They told my outfit," adds SFC Lindy Radcliff, "that we were just going over to tell them to get the hell back over the 38th Parallel and stay there."

That illusion was shattered by the barrage that ripped into a battery of the 63rd Field Arty, to demolish a gun and kill most of its crew.

Four days later, every gun in the battery was wrecked and dead cannoneers, sprawled along the banks of the Kum River, were stripped of the boots and uniforms highly prized by poorly dressed North Koreans.

The loss of Chonan, on July 8, 1950, was the third time the tragedy of defeat had followed the shock of communist aggression. And it was only the beginning of the dark days between July 5 and Sept. 15, and aptly termed by one historian, "the most terrible summer in American military history."

Why? Schaffer and Radcliff, now stationed at the U.S. Army Depot Japan, outside metropolitan Tokyo, gave the verdict of experience. Radcliff recalls

how his battery moved into position along the Kum River, after being pushed out of many small villages with strange names.

Behind the battery, as it dug in, was another village. It was just as small, just as ruined, just as nameless as the others. Now it served as a rest stop for a southbound exodus of refugees who moved right by the guns.

The artillerymen had been told that the passersby who wore white baggy clothes were not of concern, they were elders and aristocrats. It was these who carefully watched every movement the cannoneers made for two days—and who ended their masquerade on the third day by tearing off the robes of yangban to reveal enemy uniforms.

"They were on top of us before we knew what was happening." Radcliff wildly emptied his rifle, "at everything and nothing," and then pulled himself and a deliriously babbling casualty out of the foxhole.

They and a few others, a very few others, managed to limp away from the carnage, as Air Force jets swooped down to blast the battery and destroy anything that might be intact and useful.

Radcliff and his party got back to Taejon, looking more like ragged vagrants than soldiers. A few others in the battery—a very few— had stumbled back by a different route. For all intents and purposes, the decimated weaponless battery had ceased to exist.

Radcliff met Schaffer after Waegwan had fallen. Taejon held out for six days. Radcliff's battery had only two guns that had been rushed up from Pusan and tried to make two do the work of six.

They did their best to make the last North Korean victory a costly one. As the withdrawal began, Schaffer ran after a column of trucks. He rushed for one and grabbed at it. His sleeve caught on the tailgate and he was dragged for 20 yards before hands reached down and pulled him aboard.

He had survived three battles without a scratch—to fall on his rifle and break two ribs as he tumbled into the truck. This gave him a two-day respite

in Japan; then he was rushed back to a front that was becoming tight and solid.

Both Schaffer and Radcliff were on the "stand or die" line on the Naktong River—the one that held until the Inchon landing, when the breakout started and the Americans came out of their holes to attack the enemy.

"We were, good," recalls Radcliff, "after we got the hell slammed out of us and we knew what the score was. There was no stopping us then."

"We were," agrees Schaffer, "but we had to learn the hard way in a tough school. That's why I'm for tough training, particularly in actual fighting units."