

KOREAN WAR ODYSSEY

A.K.A.

WORLD WAR THREE

COMPILED FROM ORIGINAL
COMBAT ENCOUNTERS AND REPORTS



R. L. WEILER

SPECIAL EDITION

Combat Infantryman Badge

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Combat Infantryman Badge** (CIB) is an award of the United States Army which is presented to those officers, warrant officers and enlisted soldiers, in the grade of Colonel and below, who participate in active ground combat while assigned as a member of an infantry or special forces unit, brigade or smaller size, during any period subsequent to December 6, 1941. It, and the simultaneously created Expert Infantryman Badge were created with the primary goal of recognizing the sacrifices of the infantrymen who were disproportionately likely to be killed or wounded during World War II.

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History

The CIB and EIB were established by Section I, War Department Circular 209, dated October 27, 1943:

The present war has demonstrated the importance of highly proficient, tough, hard and aggressive infantry, which can be obtained only by developing a high degree of individual all-around proficiency on the part of every infantryman. As a means of attaining the high standards desired and to foster esprit de corps in infantry units; the Expert Infantryman and the Combat Infantryman badges are established for infantry personnel.

This circular also stated that, "only one of these badges will be worn at one time" and that "the Combat Infantryman badge is the highest award."

Award of the CIB was officially authorized by an executive order dated November 15, 1943.

By Act of Congress approved on June 10, 1944, all soldiers, except officers, awarded the CIB were entitled to an additional \$10 per month.

Army regulations issued during World War II never prescribed a specific period of time an Infantryman had to serve in combat to be eligible for the CIB.

Combat Infantryman Badge 1



Awarded by United States Army

Type	Badge
Eligibility	An army infantry or special forces soldier
Awarded for	"[P]ersonally present and under hostile fire while serving in an assigned infantry or special forces primary duty, in a unit actively engaged in ground combat with the enemy."
Status	Currently awarded
Last Awarded	Ongoing
Next (higher) Same	Precedence None (Group 1 badges) CIB - CMB - CAB
Next (lower)	(Group 2 badges) EIB - EFMB

**KOREAN WAR ODYSSEY
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WORLD WAR THREE**

R. L. WEILER

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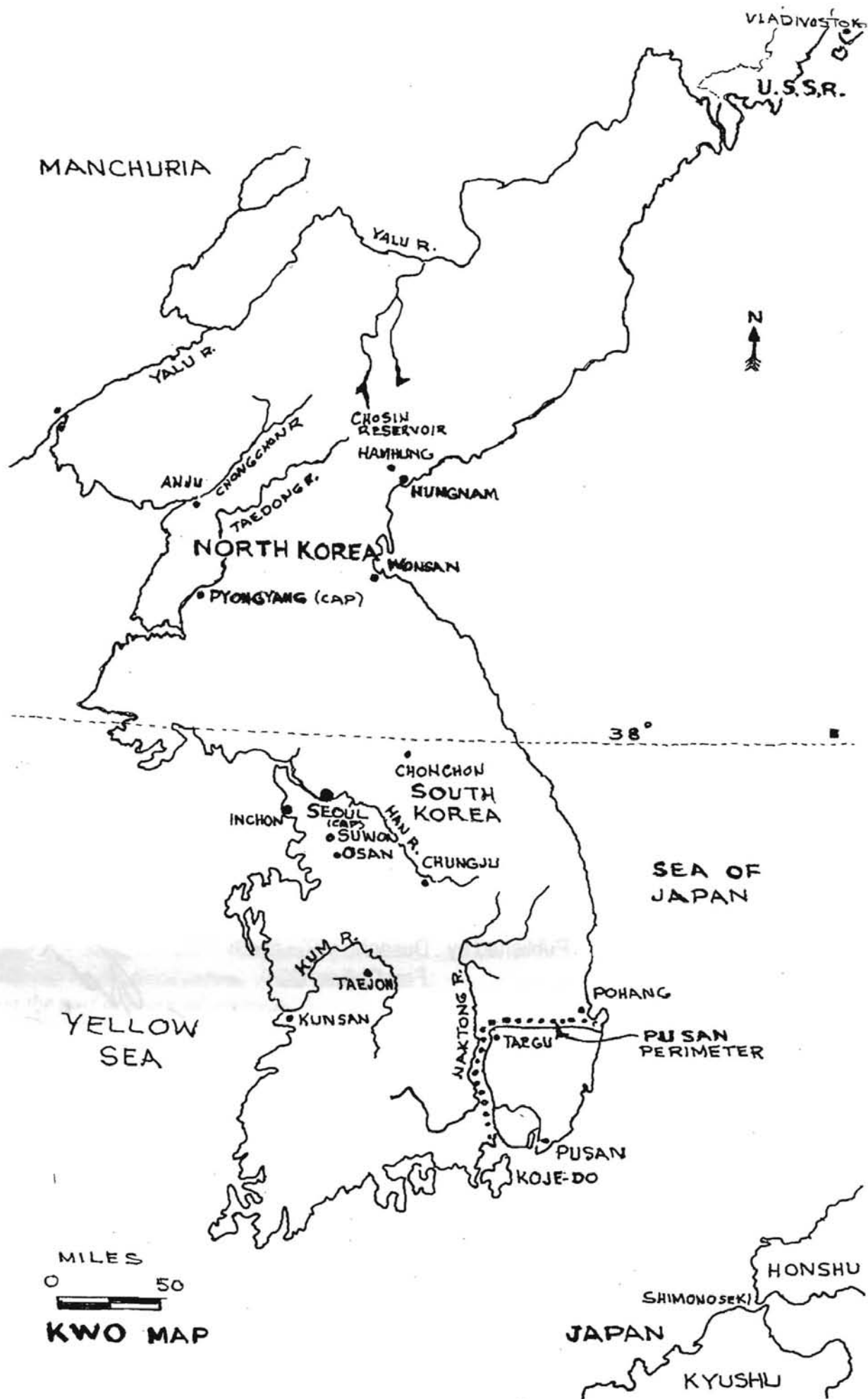
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*To Mom
thanks
R. L. Weiler*

Dusenbury publications use recycled products with a format that minimizes negative impact on the environmental aspects of the industry.



KOREAN WAR ODYSSEY

AKA

WORLD WAR THREE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATIONS

***To
CONTRIBUTORS***

My thanks to the following people who were involved in the war with me and understand why it took fifty years to get the events on paper. The names include current friends and those killed in the first months of the war. I'm sure they are aware more than the living of the eventual outcomes not predicted. They are: A. Bosben, D. Carroll, W. Croak, E. Freeman, J. Hamilton, C. Hurr, C. Keller, F. McManus, M. Peachia, R. Randolph, M. Schmatz, A. Synder Jr, B. Walters, D. Zimmerman.

DEDICATIONS

To my wife, family and friends who encouraged me and helped document the horror of a war so everyone can see the truth.

R. L. Weiler



R.L. WEILER

Mr. Weiler is the primary author of this report. As an Army Scout in the Korean War he located and gathered information about the enemy. Because of the chaotic conditions for the Twenty-fourth Division in the first months, he was involved in many combat situations. These experiences are part of this report. The atrocities on both sides are described as accurately as possible. Taken out of context, they would be criminal, therefore with few exceptions, no full names or location descriptions are given.

This year 2000 is the Fiftieth Anniversary of the start of the war and that is the time it has taken to assemble and write this report. The author is a semi-retired design engineer and teacher from the energy controls field. He now does critical research on permanent safety and environmental solutions. His experience with naval vessels and military aircraft has helped design systems that will remedy any environmental detriment in the world. He is a graduate of Colorado State University and Pennsylvania State University Technical College.

Dusenbury Research
Fort Collins, Colorado

Introduction

This is a soldier's combat report about events during the first eleven months of the Korean War, from June 1950 to May 1951. It describes situations directly involving or witnessed by the author. The first three months of conflict have been considered the most violent in the history of war. The North Koreans were experienced combat soldiers from wars in China. They were fully supported in both supplies and direction by Russia and China. They were dedicated to taking all of Korea in three weeks. They had no regard for the Geneva Convention or the rules of war. If a soldier was captured it was almost certain death sometimes by torture. They had the highest prisoner of war death rate ever recorded.

I was in the Twenty-fourth Division's Nineteenth Regiment I & R Platoon. It had thirty-three men and eleven vehicles. Because of our mobility and fire power the platoon was used at times like Special Forces are today.

This was the first United Nations combined effort. General Dean called it World War Three* from the start (but not officially). It involved most of the countries of the free world against those in the Communist world. By the time of the cease fire, communism was beginning to expire financially so the General was probably right. He was eminently qualified to know because he had been Military Governor of South Korea after World War Two.

The first year of the war included the hottest summer and the coldest winter on record. It was as if nature involved itself in the conflict. Soldiers on all sides plus refugee Koreans died from the intense heat and when the Siberian winter cold arrived, soldiers and refugees froze where they stopped moving, they became statues until the temperature warmed and they dropped to the ground.

Our forces went from being driven back by enormous odds to completely defeating the North Koreans both mentally and physically. We had moving encounters with them in North Korea as we made our way to the Yalu river and the Chinese Manchurian border.

A Korean General stated he didn't know what Hell was like but it had to be better than this war. In just one major battle more shells were fired than in all of World War Two.

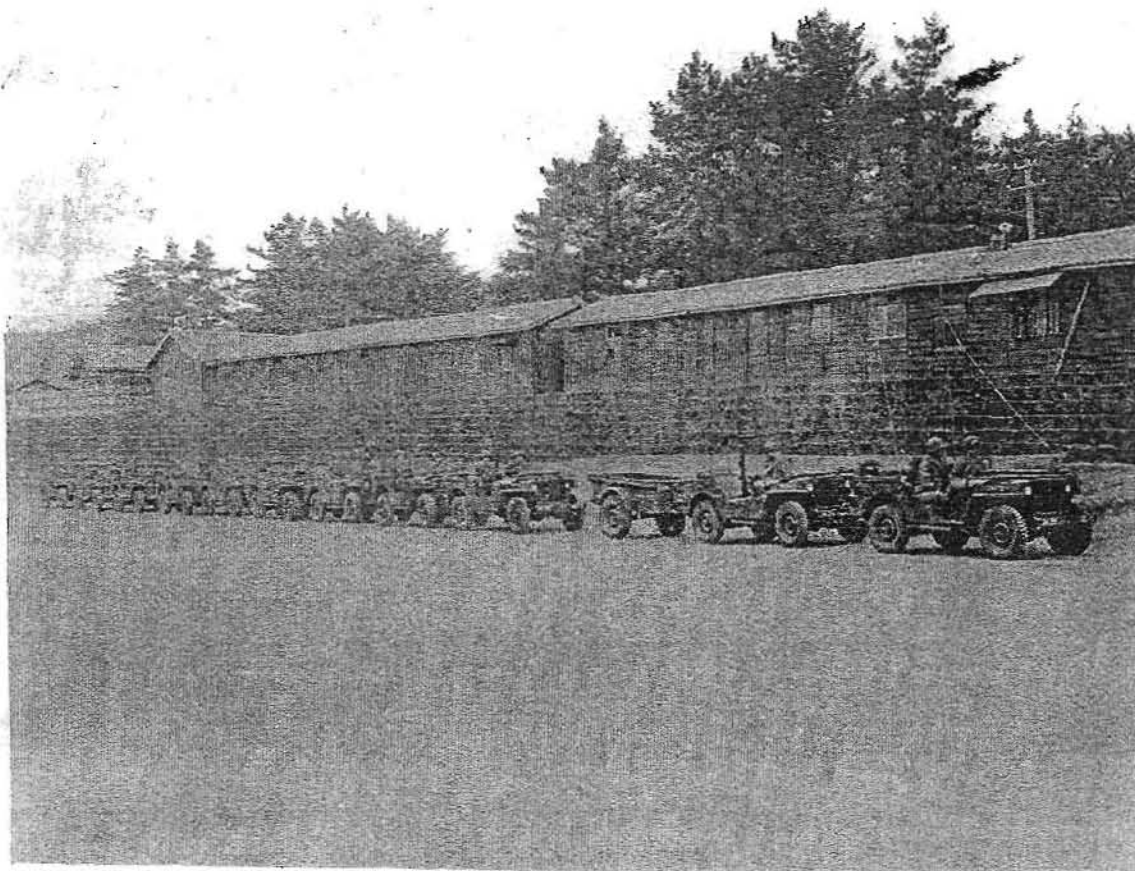
Actual dates, specific locations or descriptions are not normally given in this report because some of the events could raise serious legal questions. For most individuals initials only are given and sometimes no identification is used.

If I had to be in a war this report will show the United States military is best since I have witnessed massive military effort engaged just to retrieve one American Soldier. By contrast, if an enemy commander had suggested such an action to save men, his punishment would have been severe.

There were four major movement campaigns in the first year of the war, the first was pushing the North Koreans back over the Thirty-eighth parallel. The second was invading and occupying North Korea to the Chinese border. The third was being driven back deep into South Korea by the Chinese entry into the war. The fourth was pushing the Chinese out of South Korea in the spring of 1951. The beginning of negotiations for a cease fire started shortly after and I thankfully left the war zone about the same time. The fighting wasn't over but the running war was. The combat action would go on!

*Quote from *United States In the Korean War* by Don Larson

R. L. Weiler



THIS IS THE NINETEENTH REGIMENTAL INTELLIGENCE AND RECONNAISSANCE PLATOON IN 1950 A SHORT TIME BEFORE LEAVING JAPAN TO ENTER THE KOREAN WAR. MANY OF THESE MEN AND VEHICLES WERE LOST IN THE WAR. THE AUTHOR IS IN THE FORTH VEHICLE FROM THE FRONT.

THIS GROUP HAD MORE FIREPOWER THAN MOST ELEMENTS IN THE MILITARY, BECAUSE OF THE ASSIGNMENTS BEHIND ENEMY LINES AND THE NEED TO ESCAPE FROM BAD SITUATIONS. THE MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT ENEMY POSITIONS AND REPORT BACK.

KOREAN WAR ODYSSEY

CHAPTER ONE FIRST ENCOUNTER

When the North Koreans invaded South Korea on the twenty-fifth of June 1950, I was in the final phase of a military school for photo interpretation. The location was at Twenty-fourth Division headquarters in Kokura, Japan. There were personnel from all division intelligence levels attending the school. At that time nobody would have guessed that many of my classmates would soon be dead at the hands of the North Koreans.

The class was discontinued and we returned to our regular units. Mine was the Nineteenth Regiment in Beppu, Japan on the Island of Kyushu. Someone had packed my personal things and put them in storage for what we thought would be a short time. All I had left was my field clothing and equipment plus weapons and a jeep with a machine gun mount. It was dusk when the ships started to move out. I had never seen so much military equipment, weapons and ammunition in one place. No one could have convinced us that all that firepower would be hopelessly inadequate.

The ships were overloaded and riding lower in the water than the designers had intended. This was the main concern we had since we had been misinformed that this was only a minor police action and this was simply a short ride on a ship. *The thought of actual combat had not occurred to us.* We found ourselves hoping that it would last until we arrived. I managed to relax and play cards as if no problem existed.

In contrast, the veterans of previous wars seemed visibly nervous as if they could sense the real danger. During our voyage across the Sea of Japan we encountered a severe storm but because of the extra cargo the ship rode it out fairly well, some vehicles had to be lashed down with additional restraints.

When we arrived in Pusan Harbor the sailors were bragging about how quickly we had made the trip. I found out later that flank speed had been the order.

Our Platoon the first to disembark since our normal assignment was in front of the regiment, this would prove to be an advantage in the near future.

The streets of Pusan were lined with people waving American flags and looking very happy about our being there. We couldn't understand the significance of this until later it became apparent these people knew more about what was happening than we did. It didn't take long for the paved streets of the city to change into hot dusty country roads and a lot of the dust stayed suspended in the air. As we passed through smaller villages we were given the same cheering welcome. The joy on the smiling faces seemed genuine but we learned later that the crowds had North Korean forces intermingled and looking us over to report our strength and position. We stopped at a train yard and put the vehicles on flatcars to be transported north.

Our next stop was the town of Taegu where we spent some time organizing and planning the next move north toward the enemy. Our patrols moved out and hadn't traveled far when we encountered an enemy probe being led by motorcycles. It soon became clear that a motorcycle offered no protection against machine gun fire. We also captured two Russian-made armored cars which turned out to be uncomfortably hot and difficult to drive. I was happy to return to my jeep.

The next day we received our orders to proceed to the Kum River and set up a main line of resistance on the south bank. Our convoy moved north with the dust choking everyone including the cheering occupants of the small villages. Many of the villagers were wearing face masks to deal with the dust but they also helped conceal their identity.

The last major town before the river was Taejon which would soon become critical to us and the entire Twenty-fourth Division. Just north of Taejon the conflict became deadly serious because we saw our first U.S. casualties. Elements of our Twenty-first Regiment had been flown in as Task Force Smith to delay the North Koreans. They had lost many men plus most of their equipment. There were quite a few walking wounded, some without shoes. As they were withdrawing through rice paddies, the mud would hold their shoes as they were moving quickly to duck enemy fire. The enemy had played some horrible tactics against our division, the North Koreans had gathered some South Korean farm families and forced them to go in front of them as they attacked our positions. This scurrilous practice would be their standard when possible.

Our men were reluctant to fire on civilians so they waited too long to open fire which only made it worse, now the farm families

who only had rakes and shovels could be seen clearly and the enemy was directly behind them firing at our men and killing some. Finally it was necessary to open fire or be captured without a shot so the machine guns opened up on the crowd. Our men could now see facial expressions as the tracers indicated the hits, the civilians stumbled and fell, some backwards from the force. As the enemy kept forcing them on, they could be seen crying. So were some of our gunners. After the civilians were decimated and some of ours were badly shot up or killed, the enemy pulled back at least long enough for our men to do likewise. Our soldiers were not prepared for this type of warfare. Some would not recover mentally from this first encounter with so vile an enemy.

It occurred to us that if President Truman had seen the behavior of the North Koreans, he would have launched an all out attack against their country by air and even might not be ruled out. But the truth would be diluted and reduced to some military terms. As the war progressed it became obvious that a dedicated bombing strategy against North Korean cities would have saved many lives on our side, as it played out, our lives and the South Koreans lives were being traded for the lives of North Korean civilians who would have been killed if intense air raids were conducted. Another factor is that Russia would not have been financially ruined if the war had ended in a short period of time.

And so it became necessary for the ground soldiers to doggedly keep fighting with their hands tied and no end in sight except death.

Even this terrible look at reality did not shake our confidence, we thought it was manageable, after all, hadn't we just defeated three of the most powerful nations on earth? When we arrived at the Kum River artillery could be heard firing north across the river. The river was similar to the one I had grown up with in Pennsylvania and I felt better somehow. Our own artillery started setting up their guns in a small grove of fruit trees near the river. Our platoon continued driving along the south side of the river dropping off small groups of men to dig in and prevent the North Koreans from crossing from the north side. Our locations were very far apart since we did not have enough men to do the job right. General Dean met us on the road and after a brief discussion he wished us luck and drove on. I noticed that he made no effort to hide the fact that he was a general, there were two stars on his helmet and a jeep plate. He proved to be very courageous a short time later by taking on Russian T-34 tanks with a 3.5 inch Bazooka.

My squad was the last position so we climbed to a tree covered area about two hundred feet above the river. It gave us a commanding view of the sector we needed to protect. One of the veterans showed us how to bend up a can to make a gasoline stove and have some hot food. It soon became necessary to find additional water and I was elected to find it. It wasn't difficult since I just followed a small stream to the main source. It was a deep cave with a pool of clear cold water at the entrance. I filled the canteens and was thinking of looking deeper into the cave when I heard oriental talking coming from that area. I decided to leave quickly and it was the right thing since we later learned the North Koreans had been infiltrating small groups of men to observe and report back by radio. It could have been a bad situation.

When I returned to our position with the water there was a new weapon in the form of a machine gun because it was likely the enemy would be hitting our forward post first. This was not a comfort, but we were still not concerned because no experience was guiding our thoughts. It was beginning to get dark so we started guard rotation for the night. There was no moonlight to help us see the developments that were to multiply our problems by morning.

As daylight reappeared a mist from the river prevented us from seeing for more than a few yards. It took another hour for the fog to clear enough to actually see barges crossing the river about seven hundred yards from our position. They were loaded with enemy soldiers.

We commenced firing on the closest barge and men started falling or jumping into the river. Tracers from the gun made it easy to blast holes in the barges, sinking them.

The second barge had no chance to sink since it exploded when the tracers hit. It did not look as if anyone escaped. I remember thinking how mad those guys must be for us breaking up their boating trip. Definitely the thinking of a green soldier but it was the first time I had fired on real people. Training had not prepared us for the confused feelings. Now things were getting more intense. A few more minutes and all the barge people had disappeared from sight.

A critical problem now existed since during the night the barges had transported a large portion of the enemy forces to our side of the river and we were completely surrounded. We had only stopped a small number from crossing.

Firing on the barges would be one of the few incidents in this war where we were fairly certain of what was happening. We did not know that the regiment that was supposed to be on our left flank had retreated as soon as the enemy showed. Their Commander was replaced later but if they pulled the same thing, using civilians as shields, I can understand why they bugged. Now it was time to move down from our lofty perch and our lieutenant assigned two of us to a forward position just thirty feet above the water and without the machine gun. We had rifles, grenades, some rations and a small foxhole someone had kindly

dug and then left. I started getting the feeling we were being sacrificed since the noise we would make when attacked would alert the others down the river. In fact there was something much worse ahead for us.

We started to enlarge the hole that in the next few hours would save us from a terrible deadly outcome. My companion, A Corporal G.S., was more trusting than me and seemed content with our lot. He was from Kentucky and mentioned that it was the first time people like myself from the north would be fighting for the south.

We did not know that from our position on the river the enemy was all around us and that the regiment that was supposed to be with us had pulled out when the North Koreans started to cross in that area. We were alone.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HELL HOLE

We had moved into our hole on the knoll at about 0900. Our position was the closest to enemy forces but none could be seen. The two of us were happy that it seemed quite peaceful on the river. It was a nice sunny Saturday morning in the middle of July but in my view this was no way to spend it. A lone F-80 Shooting Star jet fighter plane was cruising the river so low that the pilot was visible and we could wave at him. He dipped his wing at us. We were happy not to be a potential target since he was loaded with Napalm. I remember thinking how nice it would be to be with him and heading back for Japan. We decided to break open some rations which must have been some type of signal for someone to start shooting. I had just opened a can when a high pitched scream of a mortar shell interrupted the quiet. It hit very close to our hole and sprayed us with dirt and rock. We had now been fired on for the first time in this war, but from a surprising source.

The shells started coming in at about one minute intervals. The first shell had wiped out my can of rations so with very bad timing I tried to reach out of the hole for another can but an explosion knocked the can out of my hand and broke my watch. It was getting too busy to stay in that hole so the decision was to fall back, unfortunately, we were compelled to stay by fierce automatic fire. The bullets were being delivered from a machine gun in the direction occupied by our regiment. The gunner was on the river road along with other soldiers about five hundred yards to our rear. I was almost positive it was our people but at that distance it is not easy to identify objects. That inability turned out to be the exact problem, our own squad leader was firing on us because the outpost directly behind us had been overrun and they thought we must certainly be dead and that what they seeing was enemy soldiers. It had already become common knowledge that the North Koreans were killing our soldiers and wearing their uniforms to avoid the deadlier fire of the jets. It was a dangerous trade off for them since their own people might target them or if captured they could be shot as spies. We started waving but every time we stuck our heads up the gunner would crouch down to fire. As we ducked bullets hit the dirt outside the hole or zipped over the top. The mortar fire had slowed a bit and that was a blessing since we were sure one of those shells would eventually find our hole. After many times at waving and ducking we finally got a wave back and a signal to come down the river road.

We were slow getting out of the hole because it had saved our lives many times that day and we still couldn't be sure the gunner was friendly. After all he had been trying to kill us for some time and this makes an impression on a person. We cautiously made our way to the river road expecting a bullet from any direction. We had gone about two hundred yards when we spotted two of our own men that had been wounded, Corporal H.O. was trying to carry the more seriously injured PFC A. P. on his back but had lost his sense of direction and was turning back toward the enemy forces. I suggested a different way and fortunately it was right. These friends of ours were covered with blood and they were our first encounter with combat casualties. We assisted in carrying a little but they were delirious with pain I felt helpless. They didn't seem to recognize us even though we were in the same platoon.. An additional three hundred yards took us to our own lines and I was glad to see a medic to help the wounded we had guided in. A little farther down the river road we located the people who had been firing at us, a complaint was unkindly registered to a Sargent M.C. who had been hand holding the mortar tube aimed at us. I was glad he was a poor shot! I thought that was the end of our troubles but they were only starting, we moved back to a critical bridge and spent the night there, exchanging gunfire with advanced enemy patrols. It wasn't possible to sleep much anyway since our own artillery had targets that caused the big guns to fire throughout the night. By morning enemy tanks were only a few miles down the river road. My best friend PFC L. B. was ordered to take his jeep by himself and radio back their exact position. As he rounded a curve in the road a Russian T-34 tank was only a short distance away. He had no chance to escape as the tank fired a shell, destroying the jeep and him. This was all observed by one of our foot patrols so I had to question the wisdom of sending a jeep at all. That was our platoons first fatality. The tank had pushed the wreckage into the river and kept coming so his body was most likely never recovered. I was not getting scared as much as I was angry and distrustful. I was also losing hope that anyone knew what they were doing. No weapon was available that could disable a T-34 except from the air using napalm, rocket or cannon fire. There were supposed to be 3.5 bazookas that could do the job but we had none. By Sunday afternoon the enemy had taken our first battery of artillery and were turning the big guns on us. An obvious decision was made to pull back with one big exception: me. I was to stay and blow the main bridge that we had been holding as soon as the first enemy tanks were on it. Then I could leave the area... if possible! My assignments starting to disturb me greatly. Even though my squad leader had

apologized for trying to kill me, my background of experience kept me watchful for signs of negative intent from our own forces. I watched our vehicles start to leave the vicinity of the bridge as I proceeded down an embankment to where the engineers had left a crank generator wired to the explosives on the bridge. The area was thick with brush and trees so maybe there was a chance for me to escape. I knew that enemy infantry with the tanks would be the problem for me. I tried to conceal myself as much as possible and still see the bridge. I also considered that the lead tank was probably the same tank that killed my friend so that added a touch of personal vengeance. What happened next remains a mystery to this day and has no satisfactory explanation unless some spiritual element is introduced. As the last of our vehicles were leaving, I started hearing the engine noise of the enemy tanks approaching the bridge. I also heard someone coming from the enemy side through the brush. Thinking it might be North Korean infantry, I readied my weapon. What appeared was a Major with engineer brass wearing a class "A" parade uniform. I was so happy it was not the enemy I forgot about the type of uniform he was wearing. He said "hold your fire. I'm taking over for you, jump on one of those last vehicles out of here and I'll blow the bridge!" I said "your welcome to it sir, but how will you get out?" He told me in a very positive voice "Don't worry I'll be fine, get going fast!" this fellow actually resembled Gregory Peck as if he had just came off a movie set so I left more confused than ever.

I scrambled up the hill just in time to catch the last quad-50 half track as it was leaving. It was covered with men from the nineteenth hanging on anyway they could, I found a small ledge and grabbed an arm to stay on, bullets were hitting the road near the vehicle but it was already picking up speed. I looked back in time to see the bridge explode with the first two tanks on it. They tumbled into the ravine along with some other men and equipment, the Major had done his job well, I never saw him again. Until the bridge blew I had thought he might be a Russian dressed as an American officer but that was pushing my distrust really far. We traveled south toward Taejon. A few miles later the half track caught up to my reconn. platoon and I retrieved my own assigned jeep.

A few miles from Taejon we stopped and set up a main line of resistance in a long straight embankment that had been built to maintain the water in neighboring rice paddies. It appeared to be a last stand defense with fixed bayonets. Several more hours passed and the word came to move south again into the town of Taejon. Our jets and the blown bridge had slowed the enemy forces and given us time to regroup, that is what was left of us.

At Taejon airport we assembled in a seventy five foot circle on the runway with the Division Command Post in the center. For the moment there were 200 of us, the remainder of an entire Division of 8,000 men. The last DC-3 was set on fire because it needed a part and the enemy wasn't going to get it for their own use so everything had a final look about it. Again we fixed bayonets for another last stand and settled in for the night.

I had survived two suicidal assignments in as many days, but at least I had more people around for this next one. During the night there were exchanges of gunfire with enemy probe patrols. We had to be cautious about firing at night because of our own men trying to return since they had been cut off by the enemy. It was a dangerous mix which in a war causes a lot of casualties. Confusion is the element that makes war stupid. I couldn't help thinking about "They Died With Their Boots On" It was a movie about Custer at the Little Big Horn instead of an air strip in Korea. We learned later that the enemy odds against us were worse than what Custer faced. All we could do was wait for the attack, it was dark now and the only light was from the plane burning on the runway about two hundred yards away. It would be a long night. I managed to find some rations and thought it might be my very last meal. Everyone had a serious expression, but still managed to joke a little. There was some artillery fire to the North that helped keep us awake. About three in the morning the fire went out and it became very dark. When the first daylight arrived, the tension mounted. This was the most likely time for an all out attack during which we would certainly perish. For some reason never fully explained the enemy had stopped about five miles from Taejon. It could be they were out of fuel because of the constant pounding from our Air Force on their delivery vehicles. Their stopping short of Taejon saved our lives because this day was clear and our jets would pay them many visits with Napalm, Rockets and Cannon.

Unfortunately the North Koreans had devastated all three of our regiments, some personnel were scattered in the hills after being cut off by a fast moving enemy force. So with the possibility of living a while longer came new assignments. My platoon was to lead what was left of our regiment south to Taegu during the day because by night the enemy would occupy Taejon. That morning we had our only casualty. On the airfield two of our men, best buddies, sat down to eat their rations. One had not cleared his rifle from the long night, the piece discharged, killing his buddy on the spot. The result was that we lost two more good men because the shooter suffered a breakdown and had to be shipped out. It was a lesson for the rest of us that there is no such thing as a safe gun.

By late morning we had a convoy assembled and started for Taegu. We thought we were out of danger but this was completely wrong again because of a thing called road blocks. As our convoy headed south it raised huge clouds of dust so that

everyone knew exactly where we were. We didn't know that a regiment of North Korean regulars had moved into the hills surrounding a narrow pass that our convoy had to travel through. They were well equipped with both heavy and light weapons. They were in a perfect position to destroy any vehicles traveling that road. This would be one of those rare times when being in front as scout vehicles would actually be safer. In the convoy behind us were regular infantry trucks, cooks, clerks and a command vehicle in the rear. Our scout vehicles made it peacefully through the pass when hellish fire started raining down on the remainder of the column. The fire was constant and relentless, I accelerated my vehicle to get it behind a tree for cover. I worked my way back on foot to a point where I could see some of what was happening. The convoy vehicles were being blasted apart by automatic weapons and anti-tank cannon. Some of the men jumped out of the trucks only to be cut down after they fired back for a few seconds. Many of these were not combat troops but cooks, mechanics and typists plus most were my friends. Enemy soldiers were working their way from the high ground toward the road but would have to wait until the fire storm stopped before getting to our men. There wasn't much we could do since it was out of the range of our personal weapons and there was a chance of hitting our own people on the road if we used mortars. It was a case where our jets could not fire for the same reasons. While it was probably futile, out of pure frustration we fired on the hills where the trouble came from with no defined targets.

Finally it became quiet except for an occasional scream which we knew was the enemy bayonets finishing off our wounded. A few trucks and jeeps were all that was left of the convoy. The enemy would regroup and try for us next so we pulled out and headed south again.

Traveling south at first was a relief except we were concerned about another road block and there was one other very large problem: our air force suspected that vehicles traveling south in our vicinity were enemy, so it soon became evident that we needed to practice our waving techniques again. A jet will give no warning because of the high speed, you won't hear it coming until it is too late. Fortunately the first air to spot us were Mustangs that flew slower and recognized us. However, before they knew who we were, they fired some bursts close to us. Once they knew we were Americans the Mustangs proceeded to the road block to drop their load of napalm and rockets.

We continued on to a school house on the outskirts of Taegu with the enemy not far behind. The school house was one of our command centers and already packing to head south. It became our mission to set up a defense perimeter and help hold Taegu as long as possible. The big problem was there were too few of us to do the job so once again we had scattered outposts and had to patrol the long gaps between them by jeep. The air force could slow the enemy during the day but at night there was little to stop them.

The North Koreans had an agenda and we had ruined it. They had planned to take all of Korea by now and we had prevented that happening. They were well trained experienced soldiers, brutally dedicated to their objectives. Their treatment of prisoners was unprecedented in military history. Not just isolated emotional or crazy incidents, but they routinely held groups for torture. Our captured people were buried up to their waists in dirt while the enemy took turns beating them to death. They urinated on their heads, laughing as they played their game of domination. As we learned about this type of treatment, it made us harder, more callous, beyond normal war. This hardness would serve us in later encounters.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HORROR PATROLS

We had suffered enormous losses of men and equipment. Our Platoon Leader lieutenant J. R. was last seen in hand to hand combat with the North Koreans using bayonets. The report said he was killed by overwhelming numbers of enemy. He was the best officer I had known in the Army and was a West Point graduate. Our Commanding General William F. Dean was missing and had been last seen in Taejon facing a Russian T-34 tank with only a Bazooka. Every Regimental Commander had been killed, wounded or captured. Even our chaplains who had stayed behind with wounded had been brutally slain by the North Koreans by bayoneting them.

All of the carnage both seen and heard had surprisingly little affect on our dispositions. We were becoming harder every day. I learned later it is one of the ways the brain adjusts to adverse conditions. It wasn't that we didn't care, we simply focused on the immediate problems and kept going. It turned out that our assignments would soon range from difficult to impossible with the latter meaning we would probably be dead.

Our first patrol was north of Taegu, we left the comfort of the school house at night and drove north a few miles by road before stopping and parking the vehicles. We headed on foot up a grassy slope to make contact with elements of our twenty-first regiment. We spotted a large patrol farther north and judged it to be enemy looking for people like us. It was a correct call and since we were completely outnumbered the best thing to do was stay concealed in the tall grass. When we stopped moving another problem was noticed. A buzzing and I felt something sting my wrist then my neck. It was getting difficult to remain still. I raised my hand and passed it slowly through the air above grass. My hand filled with flying insects one or more of which must have been the female anopheles mosquito. A short time later some of us on that patrol came down with Malaria.

The enemy patrol had passed without spotting us so we continued on to the contact outpost. An exchange of passwords and general information about the enemy patrol enabled us to start back through the hills to our vehicles. It was near midnight when we returned to the schoolhouse but it really felt good to get inside away from insects.

Early the next morning, motor pool mechanics began installing vertical cutter bars on the front bumpers of jeeps. It seems the enemy was putting up fine wires at occupant head level in an attempt to eliminate some opposition by head removal. I had to wonder why they had us remove all the windshields since it appeared they provided the same protection. Anyway I wasn't severely questioning orders at that point but I would at future times.

By noon the next day our wire busters were finished and we were assigned our next patrol. We were to join up with two medium Tanks to patrol a stretch of road that was not protected by our forces. The patrol started at 1300 hours in clear weather. As we traveled through a wooded area, the lead tank stopped and fired its cannon at a target not in our view. The shell hit a Russian T-34 tank that had been coming at us head on. The T-34 stopped but not because of damage, it returned fire and destroyed the lead Sherman, no one escaped the explosion and fire. We called for air support and in a short time of exchanging machine gun fire a flight of F-80 jets hit the tank with napalm. It was so close the heat sucked the breath away. One of the North Korean tank operators tried to crawl out of the hatch but was frozen in place and turned black from the heat.

We had located the enemy as requested and now turned around to head south again. The air force kept up the fight against whatever enemy had been behind the T-34. Personally I was happy to get the hell out of there. At that point in time who would think that our situation could get worse but it would.

The next day I was assigned an errand involving headquarters at Taegu. When I arrived at the main office everyone was packed and ready to head south any moment including my contact person. After I delivered the latest combat information he told me not to get too comfortable in the schoolhouse because things were falling apart fast. Taegu had already been shelled heavily with parts of the town leveled and smoking. Before heading north I decided to look the town over quickly so I aimed the jeep at the part of town that wasn't smoking. I was surprised to find some shops still trying to stay open but pottery was not of interest. I stopped to let a Tank pass when a Korean boy about fourteen years old jumped into my jeep. He was dirty, ragged and looked beat. He spoke understandable broken English. He said he wanted to be my interpreter in exchange for food. I decided to take him back north to the schoolhouse. The other men in the platoon saw nothing wrong with the idea of a mascot and interpreter so they helped me clean him up and get a change of clothes. He proved his worth in the next few days because we took him with us on patrol and he cleared up some mysteries just by interpreting for us. He knew the terrain in this area better than his years of age would suggest.

He also had a sense of what concerned us and did his utmost to remedy problems before they occurred. His name was Kim but it seemed like everyone was named Kim so we called him Moon. We liked having him around.

After returning from a long dusty and hot patrol everyone was hungrier than usual. I parked the jeep near the mess tent and picked up two trays to bring back and have chow near the vehicles. I was only gone a short time but when I returned Moon was gone and there was a squad of South Korean soldiers near the jeep. I asked one that spoke English to me if he had seen the boy. He said they had talked to him and decided he was a spy so they pointed to a grove of trees close by and said they had taken him there and shot him in the head. I told them they were crazy but they just laughed and walked away. I went over to where they said and there he was very still with his head in a pool of blood. I had to make an observation that the cruelty of the Korean race was beyond comprehension, this would evidence itself again and again in the near future. I returned to the jeep to start the next patrol. I continued on, but with a confused sense of loss and doubt.

It was late July and the rains became part of the problem. Those deep dusty roads turned into muddy rivers that required four-wheel drive constantly and an occasional tow. One morning we were ordered to reconnoiter a valley ten miles to our north. The area was part of a bulge in the line and the North Koreans had tried to move through the valley by road the previous night. The enemy thought that because of the rain and extreme darkness they could bring a large convoy down the valley road at night without problems. They were wrong! The valley had been zeroed in earlier by our heaviest artillery batteries. When the forward observers sensed the movement, the order to sustain fire was given and the convoy became part of history. When we pulled into the area it was still raining and the carnage was hard to believe. North Korean equipment and soldiers were piled up everywhere along the valley road. At times bodies and parts were three deep. Many of the dead had been badly burned by White Phosphorus and some had fallen to pieces in the mud. One dead soldier was lying across the road and our vehicle tires had cut him into three pieces. He was facing up and we just continued to roll over him. His forehead, torso and feet were whole but his neck and shins were crushed into the road. *He resembled some kind of grotesque cartoon.* The engineers were trying to repair the road where our shells had made craters but there was no natural material available for fill, so they used enemy bodies, since it was the most abundant material at hand. As my vehicle rolled over these holes of mud, flesh and bone, I could hear and see bones snapping and limbs moving up from the mud. It was numbing. The hardness we had developed earlier helped us cope with the situation.

A definite hatred for the enemy was firmly in place. The friends and commanders that had been brutally killed created a resolve in most of us and hate was a key to mental maintenance. It was about then that we started calling the North Koreans "Gooks". It seemed to help a little since now we were not killing people, just Gooks. We managed to pass through this valley of death which followed a direction back to the south. The danger was very high here because a well-armed squad of enemy could have wiped us out since no tanks were with us and enemy forces were very close. Our new platoon leader Lieutenant B.P. stopped often to check our position at every intersection. I appreciated his care because one wrong turn and we were dead. Our patrol arrived at the schoolhouse just as the sun was setting. The mission was critiqued and the enemy dead was estimated at 1500 and forty vehicles destroyed. They had been decimated by the big guns.

Our patrols were getting longer with occasional exchanges of fire. We were ordered not to have actual firefights except to escape if we were trapped. Sometimes, when we encountered stray North Korean elements, they forgot that they were not supposed to fire on reconnaissance patrols since we were looking for them. It was raining very hard one afternoon and we were driving back to our base when we saw the best thing in a long time coming right up the road and passing us. They were vehicles from the Twenty-fifth Division. What a beautiful sight! At last there would be relief for the 24th Division. It now appeared we hadn't been left there to perish, as some had suggested. This was the first time we had cause for celebration, but it had to be cut short. In the morning our patrol would take us into an area of heavy enemy activity. The weather had turned sunny so we had air support if we got into trouble. The patrol started northwest to cover a gap between us and the Seventh Calvary Regiment's Recon Platoon. Moving slowly and cautiously on the road turned into a problem because many dead enemy soldiers had been in the sun for sometime and the odor of rotting bodies was heavy in the air. We stopped beside the largest pile of bodies while the lieutenant checked our position. Our Platoon Sergeant was riding with me and I was already thinking that he was cracking up. My guess was confirmed when he asked me to search the smelly bodies because they looked suspicious. Actually it was our job to search the enemy bodies for information they might have on them, but usually we found nothing more than money, pictures, pens and such. These bodies seemed ready to blow up because of the putrid gasses that made them twice normal size so I was very careful not to jostle them. To my great relief the patrol moved on to our contact point where we found the Seventh Calvary Platoon beside a stream. They had encountered no enemy that day. One of my classmates from the

class in Kokura Japan was in the Seventh and when I talked to him I learned sad news. The best friend I had in the class had been killed a week earlier. He had been on a patrol and was shot in the forehead. He died instantly. The irony is that he had the highest grade ever recorded at the Special Intelligence School in Japan. War is definitely stupid. During the first days of August we were ordered away from our schoolhouse headquarters near Taegu to a position on the south side of the Nakdong river. On the way we were to police the roads which were filled with a constant flow of refugees heading south no known enemy were encountered. It was almost sundown when we pulled up to a tributary of the Nakdong. The water was shallow and clean, all of us needed to bathe so we undressed and started to clean up in the stream. As it became dark, we wanted to stay in the water. It was the best time for us in a long while. Suddenly we heard a twin engine plane approaching, it was not one of ours and I saw flashes of fire coming from the wings. I went as flat as I could in the water as water spouts came up from the water where the bullets hit a few yards past us. The plane continued on and didn't return. No one was hit, but we left our recreation area in a hasty manner. We never did identify the plane. We figured it was a form of what was called "Bed Check Charlie". We set up camp a few miles from the strafing.

The next day broke heat records and the roads were dusty again when we arrived at the Nineteenth Regiments forward command post. The Nakdong is a large river and it was necessary to blow every bridge. This would be our last stand before the port city of Pusan. The North Koreans were still determined to take the city shortly but as they moved farther south their supply lines grew longer and our planes had more opportunities to devastate their convoys.

We had parked our vehicles and were on foot into the hills overlooking the Nakdong river. The 1st Marines had pushed back an attack on the hill the night before, it seemed to us that dead bodies were everywhere. We were to hold a 1,000 yard section of this sector as the Marines had moved off to another hot spot. When we saw movement across the river we fired machine guns and mortar to let them know it would not be easy but we were only one platoon. I watched the battleship Missouri blowing hell out of some distant target. The huge sixteen inch shells would be bright for most of their journey finally exploding behind the hills across the river. We stayed there a few days, always with the smell of rotting bodies, it was unusually hot and dry, water was running low, but the idea of getting water from the river was discarded because it was a long way down a steep slope exposed to enemy fire. We were very happy when a rifle company moved in to relieve us. It was noticed that our 33 men were replaced by two hundred! Back at our vehicles we had enough water but the heat was unbearable.

CHAPTER FOUR

BLOOD BATH

The enemy was hitting the Pusan perimeter at various points along the Nakdong River. Our platoon was used to investigate areas not covered by others and secure positions where a major battle had just taken place until regular line troops moved in to relieve us.

This day we were ordered to patrol a road paralleling the perimeter. We drove to a Nakdong feeder stream that still had a usable bridge. The road went on into a wooded area that looked inviting in the searing summer heat. The lieutenant used the shade to check our position and we were about to move on when the Twenty-fourth Division Recon Company pulled up and told us to stay put, they were taking over. They were abrupt, remarking crudely about our platoon not being able to handle the situation. Unfortunately for them, it turned out later they couldn't handle it either. We swallowed our pride and wished them well as they sped off into the problem area. We returned to the shade and started a nice break where we were.

Less than an hour had passed when we heard vehicles returning at high speed. This time the only people who could move were the drivers; everyone else was badly wounded or dead. There was blood on every vehicle, some of the men had limbs missing with no way to stop the bleeding until a medic got to them. Their medic had been killed, so ours was elected to take care of the wounded until we could get an ambulance or chopper. They unloaded the vehicles and went back for more wounded, they had been hit hard by a large element of the enemy and were blown to hell. One of the wounded was laid on his back close to me. He had several large holes in his chest that were bubbling every time he breathed. He was awake and started talking to me. He said, "How bad is it, am I going to make it? I told him," it doesn't look too bad. I think you'll be okay. I felt like shit. Our medic came over and gave him a shot of something. The medic looked at me and shook his head. I felt like shit again, I gave the dying man a cigarette and we started talking just like it was Saturday night and we were out on the town.

These guys had taken our place and now most of them were dead, it could have been us in pieces if they had arrived later or if they had not pushed us aside. The medivacs arrived and picked up the wounded, the dead would remain for graves registration. We watched as a flight of jets came in and napalmed the wooded area where the action had taken place. When the jets were gone, our artillery pounded the same area for an hour. We didn't go back into the area since it was close to sunset and a bad deal for combat. We returned to the forward command post and settled in for the night.

The next morning I woke up with a raging fever and had to spend three days in a regimental forward hospital. Being treated for Malaria. It really hits hard and keeps on hitting. I was still wobbly when I hitched a ride back to my outfit. Everyone thought I had a ticket home but no such luck.

There was a day when we had just returned from a long hot morning patrol. I had just found some shade and opened some rations when some trucks and trailers pulled in next to us. I recognized a friend from Graves Registration. The vehicles were loaded with dead American soldiers in mattress covers, the smell of rotting flesh was everywhere, so much for eating. I went over to the first truck and started talking to the driver. He pointed out a large bloody bag and mentioned it was someone I knew. He told me it was Big Jim. He had been killed the day before in a bizarre manner.

I had known Jim from two years before in Fort Dix, New Jersey. I had been Cadre with my own platoon of Draftees. Jim was assigned to my platoon as assistant Cadre. He was the tallest soldier there, almost seven feet. His hands were twice the size of average and he was exceptionally strong. A truck driver draftee was going to swing at me when Big Jim hit him and knocked him completely through a barracks partition. I had no trouble after that ruckus. Big Jim lisped when he talked, he was not handsome, and he was homosexual. He had a young friend in the company, but I never learned who, it was no concern of mine as long as it didn't interfere with training the Draftees. Big Jim and I processed the recruits for eight weeks of basic training and

then went our separate ways. I never saw him again until I was looking at the bloody bag containing his remains. My friend invited me to open the bag, but I declined. One thing I had been spared so far was seeing any of my acquaintances killed or even their dead bodies. I thought it was better kept that way. My friend proceeded to tell me how Jim died. The North Koreans had his Company pinned down with machine gun fire. They were picking off guys when they tried to move and one of the dead was Big Jim's Friend. Big Jim lost his temper, he picked up a Browning Automatic Rifle and started charging up the hill toward enemy position. The machine gun crew spotted the giant running at them and aimed their fire at Big Jim. Bullets and tracers were hitting him but he wasn't stopping. About ten yards from the gun it stopped firing and the crew tried to leave but Big Jim raked them with his gun until it was empty. Then, using the BAR, he beat them beyond recognition and then fell dead. The medics who checked him said he had at least ten fatal wounds. He must have been running on adrenaline because he was technically dead long before dropping.

The removal of that enemy position was important Jim should have gotten a medal, but it would probably be difficult to write up. The sight of a apparently indestructible giant must have had a profound affect on enemy soldiers who witnessed the scene. It certainly did not help enemy morale, since the remaining enemy in that area appeared to withdraw. I learned that Jim had also helped the Interrogation of Prisoner of War Team at times. When they had a stubborn enemy prisoner they would call him in and tell the prisoner that if he didn't cooperate he would have to spend some time alone with Big Jim. It usually worked, he was a monster to the mostly short Koreans and they would tell IPW all they knew. We had lost a valuable person who helped save American lives. What his sexual preferences were had no importance to most of the combat soldiers that I knew. The Graves Registration trucks moved out to deliver their bloody cargo to a processing center.

The next day our entire platoon went to an eastern sector of the Pusan perimeter. It was now the third week in August, and the enemy was frantically attacking to break through to Pusan. We received word during the patrol that a small detachment of U.S. Marines was trapped by a large element of North Koreans and we were the closest help with enough fire power to break them out. We drove as fast as we could to a location near the marines. We had to park the vehicles and pack our weapons up a steep hill to a ridge overlooking a wooded valley. Bullets started breaking tree branches around us as we reached the top. Taking cover, we tried to see the source of the firing. Nothing was visible, neither the Marines or the enemy. Another burst of machine gun fire snapped through the trees and we could see a little smoke from the opposite ridge overlooking the valley the marines were supposed to be in. It was within our fifty caliber range so we raked the ridge with the machine gun. A wounded marine had heard our firing and crawled over to our position. While our medic treated him he told us that he had been hit first and started to crawl back, he pointed to the area his buddies were in. This made us feel much better because there is always doubt about where you are placing fire. The smoke we saw and fired at could have been the marines, Now we knew what to do. The fifty wasn't the answer but the Air Force was. We requested an air strike on the opposite ridge with napalm! A few minutes passed and we expected Jets but what came in were P-51 Mustangs from Australia. They made a strafing run first and requested confirmation on the target area. As far as we could see they were right on. They said, "Righto, Yanks", and dropped the Napalm. The enemy ridge was on fire but they kept strafing because they could see the enemy troops running to escape the fire. One of the Mustangs suddenly went into a dive and hit the ground, there was no chute and the plane didn't look damaged. The conclusion was that the pilot was hit by ground fire and simply slumped over the stick. They had come in with the sun behind them but the slower moving prop planes were a better target than the jets. The other Australian planes had exhausted their ammo so they left the area. Almost without a break a flight of F-80's hit the same ridge with more Napalm, Rockets and cannon fire. The smoke was thick and from the chatter on the radio, the trapped Marines were working their way out since the enemy had much bigger problems

I never lost my appreciation of the fact that U.S. forces would put forth an immense effort just to rescue a few soldiers. At any time I could be the one needing such help. On the other side, we had seen the North Koreans sacrifice great numbers of their men because they didn't want to delay what they were doing. Sometimes even shooting their own wounded or trapped men to keep them from talking. It was a hardness none of us fully understood and I'm sure it didn't help their recruiting activities. Anyway, all the Marines made it out except for two that had been killed initially.

CHAPTER FIVE

ALONE WITH THE ENEMY

It was the last days of August when my unit moved to the central portion of the Pusan perimeter. The days remained very hot but the nights were cold. We had been assigned to the Marines and arrived at a valley location just as a major battle was ending. As the shooting subsided the Marines moved on to the North and we took their place in that valley. We were to secure the area until replaced by regular line companies. Our group consisted of only nine men and three jeeps but the Platoon leader was with us and very nervous. He knew the enemy was all around us. We walked to the top of a tree lined ridge and heard firing to the north. The entire area was covered with dead enemy bodies just killed that day, the Marine dead were buried in shallow graves with their boots sticking out and their helmet where their head would be. It was for Graves Registration when they caught up.

Our lieutenant decided to spend the night on the ridge but he said to me in a strained voice, "Weiler, go back down and guard the jeeps, search some of the enemy bodies for information and if anything bothers you during the night, fire two shots in the air and head back to our people in one of the jeeps, guide them back here in the morning" I didn't think much about it then because it was late afternoon and still the light of day. I returned to the jeeps and the piles of dead bodies, they varied in appearance, some were missing body parts or covered with blood but others looked as if they were just sleeping. These caused me concern about spending the night alone with them. I tried to figure out how the marines made the determination they were all dead, there were so many and everyone had hurried out of here. I had to accept it as my lot for the next ten hours. I proceeded to search the ones that were on top but all I found was some Korean money and Russian pictures, at least they didn't smell bad yet, but tomorrow they would begin to stink badly by noon.

There wasn't much to pass the time with nobody for company, I thought about cleaning my rifle, but remembered that it was the only protection I had except for the jeep mounted machine guns. To get away from the dead for a few minutes I decided to walk up to a grassy knoll just southwest of where the others were spending the night. As I reached the crest of the small hill I heard artillery shells coming, I hit the ground fast. They passed a few feet above me, so close I felt the air blast hit my clothes. Two 105 shells hit the opposite side of the valley. I couldn't believe anyone would fire that big a gun at a lone soldier. It was unsettling, so I headed back for the jeeps and the bodies.

It was starting to get dark and I suddenly realized this was not going to be a fun night. This was the first time I was alone in this war. If just one other person had been there it would make an enormous difference, even if you didn't like them. As it became darker and colder I could hear sounds coming from the area with the bodies, it was only twenty to thirty feet away. I had helped morticians in my home town with dead bodies, it was the best pay at the time, but the dead make strange sounds sometimes and they were doing it tonight. Out gassing as the temperature changed, reflex muscle movements especially with a violent death, sometimes part of a word could be heard but since it was Korean all I heard was a mumble. Then it became nearly completely dark, a clear night but no Moon, just starlight. I started the jeep and aimed it for the road and direction I'd go in when necessary. I left it in low gear so all I had to do was start it, leave out the clutch and be gone. I pushed the action on my M1 back to throw a shell in the chamber and for the first time deliberately left the safety off.

I don't know if some of the dead were pretending or some soldiers had found a hiding place during the battle the day before, but I could see the vague outline of crouched forms slowly coming up on the back of the jeep, gravel was crunching and the back of the jeep moved downward. I saw an outline of a figure trying to get in, he was directly in line with my rifle lying between the seats, I found the trigger and fired twice, he yelled something and fell back as I started the jeep and left as fast as possible, I even broke the rules and put on the headlights until I was sure no one could catch up, only then did I go back to the mandatory blackout lights. I had fired the two shots as ordered because something had bothered me, actually scared hell out of

me. My troubles weren't over because as I approached the intersection that would let me turn south a machine gun fired tracers over my head. I braked hard and then I heard someone yell "halt, give the password". The lieutenant had given us the password but I was too excited to remember. The Marines were guarding this intersection and they had heard the shots and me coming from enemy held territory, they were almost as nervous as me. I told them I knew it but I couldn't remember so they were kind enough to give me the sign and then I will never forget that one it was bantam- weight. They left me pass and I headed in my favorite direction, south.

I had only traveled about a hundred yards when two helmeted figures yelled that they wanted a ride back to the forward Command Post which is where I was headed. I stopped and they got in the jeep, I was grateful for any company after the recent incident. I was still suspicious because when I saw their profile as another vehicle passed, it looked oriental.

They could be possible enemy infiltrators but I was too tired to care. When we arrived at the Post I found a place to park and curled up with whoever these guys were for some sleep.

I woke up with sunshine in my eyes, my passengers were still asleep, then I saw who they were, they were black soldiers who had been cut off from the twenty-fourth regiment and needed to find some help. I had worries about the night before. I had never said "halt" or any of the standard procedure actions that a guard is supposed to implement. It was possible that the Lieutenant had sent someone to give me company and I had shot him. I was suddenly interested in getting back to the piles of bodies.

It didn't take me long to find the rest of our platoon. I told the Platoon Sergeant what had happened and he ordered me to go back to the intersection and wait for the rest of the platoon, then guide them to the hill. I requested a volunteer to go with me and he left one of my old buddies go along. We had some quick chow and headed back to the intersection. I was still tired from not much sleep and there was other traffic on the road so we missed the intersection and kept right on going north. The road was full of artillery craters and we had to slow down. I didn't remember it being this bad before, about two miles of this roughness and we started to see the huge Russian mortars camouflaged and aimed south. A bit further and we were frozen in terror. Everything was well concealed and there was a Russian command jeep, it was backed into a house in a small village, I looked at Corporal L. T. and we both knew we were in an enemy command Post. We were wearing goggles for the dust and bundled up for the cold, I think if it had been warmer we would not have escaped.

Once again I found out what a jeep could do, We expected to get a shell up our rear any second. The craters we had slowed for on the way in we flew over on the way out. Now the intersection was on our right and easy to see. We arrived just as our platoon did so we could guide them back to the hill from the night before. I was happy to see a Korean Soldier dead on the ground behind my wheel marks were the tires had dug in when I left, Our medic looked at him and said he had died of a bullet hole in the chest from close range. There was a sharp bayonet near the body. I think it had been intended for my back the night before. They might have intended to take the jeeps and head north, they would have ran into the marine road block as I did. I felt better about not using our the "halt" protocol and just firing at a dim object. The other enemy dead were still there. The guy on the ground might have been the only one, but I still thought I saw more, it was too dark to tell the night before. I told our air coordinator about the location of the enemy command post. He called for an air strike. He said we had been trying to locate it but it was too well concealed so our mistake paid off. Much later I found out that a Chinese observer had been there on assignment from Mao himself. The man was a Colonel in the Chinese Army and that strike nearly killed him and did kill the North Koreans he was working with. His ordeal to get back to China was documented later in a Chinese history book.

When we made it to the top of the hill and talked to the Lieutenant he mentioned that after the two shots they couldn't sleep and they heard movements all night. I told them at least they weren't alone like I had been.

It was the first week of September and the perimeter battles were intense. Our patrols reached across longer distances than before. I started thinking we were the only reconnaissance platoon left in Korea. One morning we were crossing a wide flat green valley. It was pleasant to look for a long distance and not see any bodies or destroyed vehicles, no craters in the road, it could have been anywhere in the world. As our patrol continued on a column of tanks were spotted heading toward us on the same road. The road curved to the right so we could see the tank profiles and they looked exactly like Russian T-34's! They were traveling fast and I turned the jeep around as fast as possible. I was about to check out the jeeps acceleration again because I was expecting a shell to hit the jeep any second. I heard a yell that the soldiers are waving at us.

The tanks were ours and the U.S. answer to the T-34's and that they did. This Armor had a ninety millimeter cannon that was gyro stabilized and could handle the Russians before breakfast. They were called appropriately "Patton's" and we felt good about them joining our patrols. The tank detachment followed us back to the forward Command Post. From that moment on, our platoon and the tanks were nearly inseparable.

Later that week we camped in a nice grove of trees, it could have been a picnic ground with no gunfire that morning. It started to rain and we had to use our ponchos for shelter since our tent equipment disappeared early in the war.

The next morning was quiet until one shot was fired and a Major at the Post dropped dead from the head injury. It didn't look possible for an enemy sniper to have done it since there was no high ground within rifle range. We thought it was part of some internal conflict, but the enemy was blamed and he was a KIA.

A day later we were still in the same nice area when another strange thing happened. It involved a Sergeant R. R. R. who behaved differently than other soldiers. We had been taking turns patrolling between the Turkish and British Regiments. The enemy had developed great respect for both of these groups because of their extraordinary fighting spirit. That's why the duty seemed almost safe by comparison.

One morning Sergeant R.R.R. approached me with an idea that was a first since we entered combat. He almost insisted on taking my patrol that day. I was reading a Mickey Spillane novel and said fine. He thanked me and his men instead of mine took three jeeps and left. Later that day, only one jeep returned with six men. There had been nine men in three jeeps!

They had encountered a stray North Korean anti-tank crew that destroyed the first jeep completely and killed everyone riding in it! The gun crew hit the second jeep but the men had already dismounted and were shooting back. They were outgunned so the three jumped in the last jeep and headed back to the Post. An air strike was called in and finished the enemy crew. I was questioned as to why the patrol switch was made but all I could say was the Sergeant requested the change. They made me feel like I had planned it somehow. I tried to explain that the Sergeant had been an anomaly, he would go north at night alone with a knife to kill the enemy! It seemed as if he had a death wish and I was one of the few people in our platoon he even cared about talking to. It didn't matter, I still knew very little about him.

For some unexplained reason it appears that he saved my life deliberately. I felt grateful but very puzzled. I also felt badly because one of the people killed with him was a friend of mine who was due for discharge the same day the War started. All discharges were canceled and military tours of duty extended. The last time I saw the Sergeant he had half a smile and a strange look in his eyes, as if he knew what was going to happen.

Anyway I took the Sergeant's patrol the next day over the same road. The jeeps were just pieces of metal, an anti-tank gun really does a job on a little jeep, I think it is like shooting a mouse with a forty-five caliber pistol.

One good thing came out of this, we had taken along the new tanks and nobody bothered us. It wouldn't have been so one-sided if they had. The North Koreans were trying everything to break through the perimeter. Their supply lines were almost gone because of air strikes, some of them were out of food and ammunition. I confess it didn't hurt my feelings a bit. They were now eleven weeks behind on their original four day schedule to take Pusan.

They forced Korean refugees to march with them and dressed in white civilian clothing themselves. They concealed their weapons until well into our lines. Then they would begin shooting and throwing grenades in an effort to break through and secure the road for their vehicles. It caught some of our men by surprise and we lost some lives until we became aware of their non-military and illegal strategy.

One morning while on patrol we came on a large group of dead and wounded Koreans. It was a bloody mess! The military that was present told us that the night before, hundreds of refugees insisted on moving south through our lines. The detachment knew it was a mixture again. The Koreans pleaded with our Military Police to let them through. They were denied passage but kept pressing on. They were ordered to halt and kept on going. A burst of tracer fire from a machine gun went over them and they still pressed on. A mortar crew dropped a shell on the road in front of them, some were hit by shrapnel and had to stop. The North Korean soldiers among them were pushing them forward, as it became obvious they would not stop, the machine gun raked the crowd. Those that could, stepped over the fallen ones and kept coming.

A weapon that would stop them was against the Geneva convention to use on ground troops. It was an AA battery with automatic multiple cannon and proximity fuses. This meant devastating air bursts with lethal results. One more time the order was given to stop but the movement was faster. The gun battery was ordered to fire, it was point blank into the crowd. The guns followed the road back through the column. They stopped moving, not prepared for such chaos, only a very few members were not hit and a great number were killed. There were old men and women mixed in the group. The young men had North Korean uniforms and weapons under their white clothes. What was left of the column crouched by the road to tend their wounds. In the morning armed medics with escorts went into the bloody mess to see how they could help. Some of the enemy soldiers were surrendering in a sea of bloody white clothing and stiffening bodies. The Ack Ack had done its job.



Money and picture found on North Korean Bodies when searched for information, this might be the closest they had to a pin-up

CHAPTER SIX

PURSUE AND DESTROY

It was the middle of September and for the last week or so we could faintly hear our B-29's making a large number of missions to the north. I had a friend on one of them who was shooting down YAK fighters that came up to meet them. We had heard that the bomber crews if shot down and captured were tortured and their legs cut off at the knees. The North Koreans then left them to bleed to death.

This did not surprise us, our experience in their cruelty was similar. The increase in missions was to soften the enemy positions for the secret upcoming invasion at Inchon.

While we were expecting to be pushed into the ocean any day, this war was about to take a complete turn for the first time in our favor.

The North Korean propaganda broadcaster in Seoul was getting more frantic in her messages to us. We called her Seoul City Sue and we listened because she played popular American music plus occasional real news. Now she would say, "unless you Americans surrender immediately you will be punished severely beyond your comprehension!". We had no doubts about their ability to carry out those threats but we had a feeling their days of capturing us were numbered in single digits.

It was the third week in September and our orders changed, we were to start patrolling north and take all of our gear along. No returning to base as usual. It was unsettling at first but our heavy tanks were some comfort. They made a serious looking armored column. In the morning we would mount up and head north on the same road used to escape two months before.

The order was to "break out of the Pusan Perimeter, then pursue and destroy the North Koreans at all points as rapidly as possible" we were only to stop when pockets of resistance were encountered.

We had never heard such a military order like this one, nobody had, not even the old veterans who were with us. So we headed out to cross the Nakdong River not knowing what to expect. On our left was a Turkish Battalion, it was sure that the North Koreans would not be a problem there. For some reason the Koreans did not fear death as much as mutilation afterward and the Turks would cut pieces off bodies and wear them around their necks like jewelry, mostly ears but no parts were exempt. It was said of standing toe to toe with a Turkish combat soldier, he could have your head off before you could draw and fire a pistol. They carried big knives and loved to use them.

We did not know about our right flank, it had been British Grenadiers but things were moving so fast there wasn't time to make physical contact.

The column started moving north and nothing happened for a number of miles, huge clouds of dust were coming up from the road. The tanks kicked up a lot of dirt so we fell back a distance to be able to breath. The Inmun Gun were firing at us sporadically but our return fire was ruthless and devastating beyond need. Some of these elements could have been Guerilla's that had sided with the North and had not heard about our plan to wipe them out. Enemy soldiers were beginning to surrender, many were wounded, some were dying.

At one point we were diverted to assist engineers who were building a bridge and being harassed by a cannon in a cave and on rails to provide cover and concealment from air strikes. Our job was to locate it and knock it out if possible. When we arrived at the bridge it wasn't long before the cannon fired and continued to fire about every ten minutes. Working back along the trajectory based on sound and impact we had a fair idea of the location. It was necessary to watch for another half hour to finally see the smoke and determine coordinates. The tanks stayed behind but our air contact was with us. He called for an air strike into the cave opening. It only took a few minutes for a flight of sabers to show and fire rockets first then Napalm and cannon at the problem. It looked as if the entire area was burning when they left. We waited three hours and no additional shelling took place. That was enough time for the engineers to finish the job. We headed back to the main road to Taejon.

It felt better to have the tanks with us again. As we went through a wooded pass on our way north bullets started hitting the tank in front from a hill to the right. Our column stopped and another air strike was on the way.

This time we were very close to the target area. As the jets came in a Napalm bomb struck closer than I've been to that kind of heat, it sucked the air out of my lungs and actually caused pain for several seconds. I could understand the fear the enemy had of Napalm. We waited a bit longer and I heated up a can of rations on the lead tanks exhaust pipe. It was handy for that operation. After some extensive firing at the hill we decided to move on toward Taejon.

Some miles farther north we passed through the same area where the enemy road block had devastated our convoy heading south about two months before. Parts of our convoy vehicles were still in the ditches along the road so we knew exactly where so many of our friends had died. We stopped when we spotted two of our men who had survived the ambush and hid in the hills for two months. One of them was our Company Mess Sargent. They were very happy to see us. We had no time to celebrate so we continued to roll north. As we approached Taejon there were fires burning, it was hard to tell if our bombs were the cause or the enemy deliberately set the fires. The tank that General Dean had knocked out was still in the street along with others that our air had hit after we left the area. We stopped the convoy long enough to investigate one tank that had backed into a house. The driver was still sitting in the tank. It looked as if a single round from a plane had gone in just over the track and into him, he was cut nearly in half.

Our inspection of Taejon ended without incident and we proceeded north again at about thirty miles an hour. It was hard to believe that resistance was not heavy. If we detected movement in the surrounding hills our guns fired for a while without well defined targets. I'm not sure it did any good, but the noise made us feel better. The entire time we all expected to get a bullet in the head any second.

It became necessary to stop for a time north of Taejon in order for supplies and replacements to catch up to our fast progress into enemy territory. We did so with some relief of tension. A small village made a good place to pull in. The nights were beginning to get very cold so finding a house to stay in was a priority. The village was still afire in places either from the enemy retreat or our air strikes. The houses that remained were not occupied since the towns people were not ready to come back. We did not know how to heat these houses with the under floor flu system. We built too much fire and during the night the straw floor mats started smoking along with our sleeping bags. If that system was regulated properly it made a great heating arrangement. The same heat they cooked with went under the floors which were clay and held it most of the night.

The next day we received our replacements and supplies with one a surprise, The PFC A.P. that had been badly wounded on the Kum River had requested a transfer back to our front line unit. When we found out why it was disturbing but solved some mysteries. It seems that when his wounds had healed he was assigned to the Army Post Office in Pusan. He told us that some of his superiors there were pilfering the front line soldiers packages and selling the good stuff on the Black Market. It made him sick and he requested returning to his old outfit. Now we understood why packages were all torn up when we finally got them. We thought briefly about sending back a special patrol to put some holes in their operation but gave it up since there was more pressing activity.

I had noticed that on patrol without tanks, my vehicle would be allowed to pass and the enemy would fire on the next one in the column. I finally came to a conclusion that it had nothing to do with me, but the American born Japanese riding with me! All the Koreans south or north both hated and feared any Japanese, not knowing these Japanese were true Americans they evidently thought It was all over as it would have been if the Japanese Army were really there. People claim that no Korean would have been left alive and of course that is why it never happened.

While staying night s in little towns on the way to Seoul we made use of the fresh vegetables in the always present gardens, at least the ones that hadn't been cooked by Napalm. With the help of a stray chicken we came up with some decent tasting food to supplement the combat rations.

Then on a fairly nice day in late September we reached the outskirts of Seoul. We actually had a paved road under our tires for the first time in a long while. Refugee Koreans were lining the road heading for the city. Nice looking girls with baskets on their heads were walking along beside us. Old men with huge loads of material on "A frames" were keeping up, it was amazing how much they could carry. We started feeling more like victors.

Our forces had captured Seoul City Sue and she told of being forced to cooperate with the North Koreans but she went on trial and got a harsh sentence anyway.

Seoul was still burning in places when we stopped inside the city. It was getting dark and since almost everything in sight was burnt black there was almost no light reflected. It was so depressing myself and another soldier volunteered to go on a foot patrol. It was so totally dark that we had to stay close or be separated. It was like being in a cow's belly since no other lights were visible and no people existed anywhere. We returned to our camp for the night.

CHAPTER SEVEN

VILE TOWN

The next day we moved to the Han River north of Seoul. Some time was spent helping make the area secure, if the city streets were too cluttered with debris our tanks would simply make their own roads through the blocks and we followed. By mid afternoon we received orders to cross the Han and proceed north, collecting prisoners on the way.

Our advance was so fast we not only captured prisoners, but we had to keep them with us because it would be a day before the regular prisoner processors would catch up.

Our armored column made it to a fair size town by nightfall, it appeared the enemy had not destroyed it like the others for some unknown reason. It was possible our extra speed made it necessary for them to leave too quickly. The cold was starting to cut into us and the shelter chosen was a schoolhouse. It had very hard floors and our prisoners would sleep inside with us. I had one on each side of me and my rifle tucked slightly under. It was not a comfortable position.

My Japanese companions had a great influence on the prisoners behavior just by being present. The fear they generated nearly guaranteed that no trouble would occur. I remember thinking that there could be a stupid or crazy prisoner capable of anything so it was a light sleep.

I was wakened at daybreak when someone grabbed my foot and shook it. It was a member of my squad with one of our South Korean Army Soldier's. They wanted to talk to me outside. Since it was daylight the Japanese indicated it was OK for me to leave the prisoners, they would keep watch.

The conversation concerned South Korean women who had collaborated with the North Korean Army as Concubines and had been sentenced by the town to be shot later that day. The question the South Korean guard was asking in effect was if we wanted to play with them until they were executed.

If someone had asked me earlier if I could do this type of thing I would have said, "of course"! The Nazi's did similar things in the forties so why not. Still thinking a bit that way, six of us went with the guard to a large barn. There were about fifty people in the barn scheduled to be shot that day. Several of these were nice looking young girls who were crying as they sat on the dirt floor. The town had only been taken a matter of hours before so the trials must have been swift. There were older people also but some of those just looked angry. It was the crying and the finality of the situation that got to me. I could not deal with that activity which surprised me. Three of the six of us elected to leave and the others took the guard up on the idea. He pointed to a bridge about two hundred yards away and told the guys to take the girls they selected under it, but a guard would have to accompany the group to prevent escapes. I thought about taking one and letting her go, but there was a language barrier so the three of us left somewhat depressed. Later we found out that they wouldn't be executing one of the girls because the guy that picked her had beaten her to death. We learned it was a legitimate option offered by the guards. We remained depressed for some time. Korean life was cheap.

I was fairly sure that I knew which one of our guys killed the girl but it didn't matter in this case. The right people caught up with us and took the prisoners off our hands. That left us free to continue north in the morning. Just before dusk we heard the execution guns near the bridge and a few screams, then it was quiet. We didn't sleep well that night.

The next morning our armored column started north again. This time the North Koreans that were surrendering were dressed in white civilian clothes. I think they were hoping to mingle with the true refugees who were walking north, I'm sure some got away with it. There were so many nobody cared a great deal if they didn't have weapons.

At one point there was so much congestion that our column had to stop for quite awhile. We watched a very pregnant refugee go into some bushes for about forty-five minutes, she came out with a new baby and started walking north again. These people were capable of surprises all the time.

The main elements of the North Korean armies were heading north across the Thirty-eighth parallel as fast as possible but our planes were chopping them up badly. That is when some decided to discharge themselves and become civilians. Their abandoned and destroyed vehicles were everywhere along both sides of the road.

It was late afternoon when we pulled into a small village in the hills and found a building that was still standing. It turned into a bad spot to stay if we wanted a good nights sleep. About 0200 hours we awakened to huge explosions and flashes of light. The building shook and we started looking for other cover. We discovered that a Rocket Launching Battery had moved in next to our building and had enemy targets. The firing continued until dawn.

The next day we had a short patrol and acquired more prisoners. During the patrol we searched a town that had a Brewery. Some of the men went into the Brewery and found some green beer and a whiskey called "Wahrang" They managed to bring some of this questionable liquid back to our base. Later that day it caused us a problem. An American Indian was in our platoon and became very drunk. He picked up a Browning Automatic Rifle and threatened to kill all of us. He said, "you are all my enemies!" and I couldn't help noticing that the weapon was pointed directly at me most of the time. Someone grabbed the rifle from behind and he became instantly docile. He was encouraged to get some sleep and not drink anymore. I was just happy not to be killed by an Indian in Korea, it didn't seem right.

It was the first week of October and we were very close to the Thirty-Eighth Parallel. We thought the war was nearly over since the enemy had been sent home defeated. We could see North Korea from our base and no sign of enemy. By our reasoning we should be back in Japan shortly. It had taken three and one half months to ruin the Russian-Korean plan completely. Every day it was getting colder and we certainly had no desire to go farther north.

Even after the next orders were given we still hoped for Japan, but it was not to be. Our mission was to attack North Korea the next day!

Extra ammunition and weapons were loaded, now our supply lines were longer so combat rations would be it for a while. It was early morning when we started rolling north again. I was reassured by our heavy tanks, but as always my vehicle was directly behind the lead tank. There was more dust but I liked having a tank in front of me and it gave me a place to heat rations.

We crossed the Thirty-eighth an hour past dawn. It was going to be a nice day and that meant air support was available. Whenever firing or movement was detected in the hills on either side, our column returned fire relentlessly only stopping to reload or let the machine guns cool. Someone had put up a "WELCOME TO NORTH KOREA" sign as we crossed the line but I don't think everyone was in agreement. Still many enemy soldiers were surrendering under the withering fire.

Our column caught up with an enemy truck filled with soldiers so we went a little faster and at about three hundred yards our lead tank put a cannon shell right into the bed of the truck. The soldiers flew in every direction, most of them were dead or badly hurt. The live ones became prisoners and patients and the lead tank pushed what was left of the truck off the road. I developed great respect for the tanks stabilized cannon. Even though the tank was moving up and down the cannon remained level.

The next town was small enough to clear quickly and pull over for the night. Our planes had bombed and strafed just before we got there so fires were burning all over the village.

Our lieutenant had been hit slightly and added to his extreme nervousness he was transferred to a rear echelon position. None of us thought he should ever be assigned to a combat field command.

One of our new Sergeants had been selected to receive a battlefield commission as a second lieutenant and was taking over the Platoon. It only took a short time for us to wish we had our other lieutenant and we would wish it over and over again. The guy was totally crazy and proved it daily. Our lives just took an extreme turn for the worse and there was nothing we could do about it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MAXIMUM VENGEANCE

We continued north through numerous towns gathering prisoners all the way until the lines of captured North Koreans stretched for miles along both sides of the road. Twin engine A-26 Marauder bombers would fly about a hundred feet directly above us. They were strafing the towns just ahead while preparing to drop Napalm as they passed over. Their empty shell casings were hitting us so I had to drive leaning over the wheel with both hands at six o'clock. Those casings really injured knuckles. It was one of those times I was happy to be wearing a steel helmet. The towns were burning when we drove in and stopped. At times we had to dismount and search the buildings on foot. One of these buildings was suspect so I and the Japanese sergeant I was with started into a courtyard in the back. I decided to enter the building, but it was nearly the last thing I ever did. There wasn't much light inside so I couldn't see anything clearly. Suddenly I heard the deafening sound of a BAR behind me and a North Korean Soldier dropped out of a bamboo curtain on top of his own Burp Gun. The Japanese Sergeant with me had shot him dead. Then we both saw feet behind another curtain and fired again. This time for some reason we didn't hit him but he came out, looked at his dead friend and started uncontrolled shaking. The sergeant told me to take him out to the column and put him in the growing line. On the way the Sergeant went to check on a bunker in the courtyard and tossed in a White Phosphorus grenade. There was much screaming from the bunker. WP is terrible stuff. When it gets on someone, it just keeps burning with intense heat. He stayed to see if anyone came out and I proceeded to deliver the prisoner. He was tall for a Korean and wore civilian clothes, we had checked the closet he had hid in and saw the North Korean uniform. As we came to a corner of the building he turned and grabbed the barrel of my rifle. I pushed the weapon hard and he fell back but he came again and I had to get rougher. My Japanese companion would have shot him but I could see the guy was out of his mind with fear. After a lot of coaxing and threatening I got him to the tanks. He seemed to relax for a minute but then he started running across an open field. We yelled to halt quite a few times and then a fifty caliber opened up on him and he was history. I felt badly because I had worked so hard to save him for nothing.

This type of activity became the norm for the next few days. Another group headed west to a remote village that claimed to have a few prisoners of their own. A North Korean community that had taken their own Army's soldiers prisoner? Some of us wondered.

It was about twenty miles to the village that had the prisoners. When the patrol arrived the villagers greeted them and seemed happy they were there. Some of them could speak English and explained what had happened. The North Korean detachment stationed there was getting ready to retreat when some of them started on a rampage and began killing villagers. They pointed to a pregnant woman's body that had been bayoneted along with several small children and some old men. The villagers attacked the soldiers with clubs and then with the guns they had taken from them. These people were still very angry and told the patrol that nine soldiers that had committed the killings were being held in a special area. The villagers had sentenced them to be beaten to death and wanted permission to carry it out. The other prisoners would be turned over to the patrol to take back and no questions would be asked. The only condition the patrol demanded was to stay and watch the execution, then to examine the bodies to be sure they wouldn't return to fight.

Without very much formality the men were stripped to their underwear and forced one at a time into a courtyard with people surrounding them. The first to strike was a woman, a relative of the slain pregnant girl. She had a large piece of wood about the size of a baseball bat. She hit him squarely on the right eye, as he looked in another direction. The woman returned to the crowd. Another villager came out and stabbed him with a knife in the arm, more blood flowed. They had told the patrol that a slow death was preferred. It took an hour to finish the first one. It took six hours of the same brutality to kill the other eight. A medic confirmed that each one was dead. Afterwards the patrol gathered up the rest of the prisoners and started back for the column, feeling a bit guilty. It was fairly certain that what they had just done was illegal.

When told about the incident some of us tried to justify this level of vengeance. All we could come up with was that it might be the only way to achieve a degree of inner calm again.

It was now mid October and North Korea was becoming bitter cold fast. Our supply lines were stretched and one of the things in short supply was antifreeze. Every evening we had to drain the vehicles coolant at night and start them at regular intervals during the night so the remaining fluids wouldn't freeze. It was a painful process.

The North Koreans were putting up more resistance as we drew closer to their Capital City of Pyongyang. It was not going to be easy to push farther north.

One morning we received orders to patrol an area west of our main spearhead. One of our new sergeants who was a henchman for our new lieutenant was going to lead the patrol. I had thought he was mentally deficient and he would soon prove me right this day.

The patrol route took us into a steep hill area that led to a large mountain range. It was suspected to be an enemy stronghold and we were supposed to locate them. As we proceeded up the steep road we gained a better view of the area. As usual I was in the point jeep and the road just ahead had been partially blown away to the point where I thought it was impassable and refused to go any further. The new sergeant called me some derogatory names and told me to get out and he would drive over the bad spot. I told him to go ahead but do it alone, we would walk. He made it about halfway and the jeep wheels slipped off the edge. It started rolling over and over a half dozen times. It seemed like slow motion but it gradually picked up speed throwing up dirt each time it came down until it stopped upside down in a ravine. We all thought the sergeant had been killed but a hand started groping from under the jeep. The fifty- caliber machine gun on the jeep had prevented his being crushed. We retrieved the sergeant and the gun but there was no way to get the jeep out so we turned around and returned in other vehicles. The sergeant was bruised some but probably didn't learn much from the experience. I remember he never talked to me much after that and neither did his buddy, the lieutenant.

I had lost my vehicle in that mishap, but it didn't take long to get another. It think it was Air Force, they called it midnight requisition and by morning the blue color was painted over and had our numbers on it. It took another day to remount the machine gun and my bonus was antifreeze and a windshield. It was nice to have rich neighbors.

The new vehicle also came with a trailer which I had mixed feelings about. It was nice for hauling extra weapons and supplies but if fired on it was much harder to turn around if you were fired on.

A day later, another patrol, but this time it was with our main column heading north again. Another replacement sergeant was riding with me as we started out without our customary armor. This sergeant was an American born Korean and he had a personal problem. He had an intense hatred of all Koreans, South or North! It only took him a short time to demonstrate his feelings. We hadn't traveled very far when he insisted on driving the vehicle. I saw no reason to argue, so he took over. The South Korean Army was marching along with us and just on the road edge to our right. Suddenly the sergeant accelerated the vehicle and swerved to hit into the friendly column! The soldiers jumped out of the way, he just returned to the road and kept driving with a smile on his face, it seemed to satisfy him somehow. I was lost for something to say, at first I thought he had spotted a North Korean infiltrator. I found out later that the South Koreans had killed his family. How could I be so lucky to get two crazy sergeants in as many days. I would never be able to relax around either one of them.

CHAPTER NINE

SUICIDE PROBE

We continued our push toward Pyongyang and the resistance was mixed. I filled the trailer with enemy weapons of all types. Russian rifles, German Mausers, and British machine guns. The most interesting was the Russian Burp Gun, which looked like something from the roaring twenties. It was a medium caliber drum fed automatic with air cooling. I found one that looked to be higher quality than the rest, (some of them were really rough manufactured). I decided to make it my personal weapon for close encounters. I took several ammo drums and went off to a hill to practice.

I found a place to fire and set up a few ration cans. I was about fifty feet away and left a few bursts go, the cans danced, the gun was accurate at that range. I set them up again and held the trigger for a longer burst. One of the cartridges ruptured and a piece flew past my ear. It made me so angry that I smashed the gun against a rock and threw some of the parts into a deep ravine. I took the drums back to the trailer and returned to my own rifle.

The next major stop the column made I traded all the weapons for extra rations. Money was useless in Korea but trading still worked.

The next patrol took us to the edge of a large valley. There had been enemy fire from the other side of the valley about two thousand yards away. We were adjacent to the front lines and a little forward. There were dead American soldiers lying on the road as it starting sloping down into the valley. It made me very happy to stay back and keep my head down. No such luck, the lieutenant chose me and his other hated one to probe the valley as a two man patrol! His driver kidded with me about this being a suicide mission and we wouldn't be coming back. I joked back about what a Sergeant had told me, that when it gets too rough for everyone else, it will be just about right for me. I was actually trying to cover up the icy feeling in my stomach.

We moved out slowly down the road, past the dead Americans. I noticed one of them was lying face up and he looked a little like me. It was common to find this occurring since many of us were the same age. I was glad to get past them even though it put us closer to the enemy.

We left the road and moved down through a cluster of thatched roof huts. We stayed on an established path that went through the fields. About fifteen hundred yards out we saw movement in the brush just ahead. Someone fired and all hell broke loose. We fired for cover as we made our way back faster than we had came.

Then a major problem developed for us. Something that scouts run into often. Some of our line didn't know we were out there and thought we were enemy, since we were closer to them. A half track vehicle with quad fifties had pulled up on the road and started firing at us. They are pure hell when coming at you. I spotted a rock storage bin of some kind that was full of large spiders and their webs. I didn't like spiders but we both dove for the cover anyway. The bullets hit the rocks and made my ears ring and the spiders jumped about too. The guns stopped for a minute and we started waving again just like at the Kum River. They started firing again so we ducked in with the spiders again. Then one of our heavy tanks pulled up past the fifties and the big ninety cannon cranked around until we were looking down the barrel. Our rock barrier had no chance against that. I stood completely up and waved expecting to get some fifty caliber in the chest, I guess I quit caring and was tired of playing this game with the spiders. Presenting a perfect target must have convinced them we were Americans because they finally waved us in. We traveled the distance in record time I am sure.

I tried to locate my friend who said we wouldn't be coming back to show him he was wrong, but almost right. I would never get the chance. He had been shot in the back while we were down in the valley of death. The medics told me he would be a paraplegic because the bullet hit his spine. I had thought he was fairly safe but not in war, nobody is!

Meanwhile the Seventh Calvary, the same one that Custer had, was ordered to take the North Korean Capital of Pyongyang and we were to follow them in with our usual armor. The main enemy forces had already left the city, but left behind a delaying element that was not large or dedicated but still deadly. They inflicted some losses on the Seventh, among them a seventeen year old boy from my home town. For him the loss was maximum.

We followed the Seventh Calvary into Pyongyang where snipers and a few holdouts were firing but most were anxious to surrender. Our Regiment continued on north of the city about ten miles. We established our command center near a small stream. It would have been pleasant except it was becoming very cold. The Siberian winter was hitting us full force.

A few days in that spot was a welcome relief because supplies started catching up including antifreeze. The third day we heard something unbelievable, the Bob Hope Show was coming to Pyongyang. Anyone who found transportation and had the time off could go to the show. A few of us from the platoon jumped on a supply truck and headed for the Capital. As the truck passed through the streets a jeep turned onto the street directly in front of us. One of the passengers was Bob Hope! I had to admire anyone who would be the center of focus in a city that still had snipers firing at anything they thought was important.

Our truck arrived at the show and there were already a large group of military including Naval, Marines, Air force and Army. Even South Korean soldiers were there in smaller numbers. I spotted my friend from graves registration in another truck and he explained that the only chance he had to see the show was to bring the dead American soldiers in the truck with him. I was grateful it was cold since he wasn't far from our truck. Neither of us could figure if any regulation was being broken.

The show was good and well received. It included Marilyn Maxwell and Les Brown with his band. It was punctuated with gunfire at times which Bob Hope used to augment the fun. When we returned to our area that night I learned that Ms. Maxwell's tent was close to our Regimental Headquarters. There were two guards posted at every extra tent that night.

During the night an enemy plane we called Bed Check Charley came over and dropped some explosives. I'm sure he bothered the show people more than us.

Our orders were to continue blazing a way north the next morning. We tried desperately to figure a way to leave for the States with the show but couldn't come up with a thing. So in the morning we headed north into the extreme cold. We seldom stopped without lighting a fire even if it was just harvested rice sheaves. They would burn and the popped rice was small but good to eat. We traveled north until sundown without drawing any serious enemy fire. Houses were our best shield against the cold and of course in our efforts to stay warm the grass mats were scorched every time. The next day we were ordered to stay where we were. One of the guys found a cow in a stable. It didn't take long to make a change in the destiny of the cow. A bullet in the head and the cow was being dismantled with every piece of cutlery available. A large barbecue was happening on the spot. The meat was good but the cuts were not professional and the cow looked as if it had been hit with a dozen grenades, not a pretty sight.

There was concern about our present location being too far ahead of the main body of troops. We could see for a mile in every direction, there was no sign of enemy. The thinking was based on information about large numbers of Chinese Army troops crossing the Yalu River into Korea. The hope was that it was wrong because it would mean this had been another hollow victory.

We test fired our weapons at the surrounding hills just in case there might be something hiding out of sight, there was no fire returned. It was more relaxed after that. Outside the house I was in there was a large cement tub with a place to build a fire beneath the tub. I decided to take a bath in the thing. I put in the water and started what amounted to more fire than it needed. I wasn't in the water very long when it became too hot for anything not being cooked. It was necessary to leave the water quickly and resume other activities. I had some minor burns that irritated for about a week.

Finally the cow was gone so we left the area and headed north to the Yalu. This is what General MacArthur wanted, to occupy all of Korea. The intense cold caught up with me and I developed a case of bronchitis. It put me in Regimental Forward Hospital for several days. I was hoping to go home but the antibiotics did the job and back to the front I went. I was tired of winning wars and starting new ones and the Chinese sounded like another new one.

It was nearing Thanksgiving when General MacArthur said we would be home for Christmas. That made us feel a little better for a while as we pushed north toward Manchuria.

On Thanksgiving a Senator came to eat with us and we would have had hot turkey except we had been on patrol and returned late to cold turkey and potatoes but it was still better than combat rations.

CHAPTER TEN

THE CHINESE ATTACK

The day after Thanksgiving we formed up a large convoy with a full Tank Brigade to accompany us. Again, I was behind the lead tank on the final thrust to the Yalu River and Manchuria. We mistakenly thought the war was finished and we were going home shortly. The threat was no longer so large.

When we arrived at the Yalu, it was impressive. The widest river I had seen in Korea. It was also frozen over. We studied a village directly across the river through our field glasses. We saw no signs of enemy, but a great number of young pretty girls were hurrying about in the village. My friend Corporal L.T. and I discussed the possibilities and decided to be a two man patrol into Manchuria..

I talked to the tank Commander and he cranked all the guns on the village to cover us for the patrol, after all, if we could set up some kind of a party in China more guys could cross over and join us.

On river ice there is no cover or concealment, Two things essential to living through a shooting situation. If shooting should start, we were dead. The thinking was that we had won two wars and fun should happen again.

Our trek across the ice was nearly a mile during which we strained to see what was happening in the village. As we approached a point where we could see clearly it became apparent that the only occupants were old men and old women. We walked around the center of the village for about ten minutes with the people giving us nervous glances and then going back to their activities. Finally we started back across the ice, our dreams of a party shattered.

If we had known how many guns were pointing at us during our little trip we would have ran all the way. The next day Mongolian cavalry would be crossing near that same point by the thousands. The pretty girls we saw were Chinese Army nurses and support personnel gathering supplies for the next days attack. We moved south of the Yalu for the night and that saved our lives. The next morning was hectic because the Chinese Armies were crossing in large numbers nearly everywhere on the Yalu. We felt both foolish and lucky for not being part of the river ice. At first we thought perhaps our two man invasion of China had caused the attack, but the fact was the Chinese had been fighting us since we crossed the thirty-eighth parallel nearly a month before. Also the South Koreans had bombed the Chinese Town of Andong.

The first elements to cross in our area were the Mongolian cavalry on horseback, they carried large swords and burp guns but were no match for machine gun fire. The Mongols fell like wheat in a reaper so it didn't take long for the Chinese to change tactics. They were highly intelligent and well trained soldiers. Their courage was awesome.

They reached the hill areas south of the Yalu and proceeded to surround and cut us off. Our convoy headed south at a fairly fast pace. At least we could shoot our way through partially set up road blocks. The Chinese had acquired many North Korean Soldiers that had been retreating from us. They joined the Chinese as advisors and reinforcements but I don't think they liked each other. The combined enemy was relentless in their efforts to drive us south.

We could see our "home for Christmas" hopes evaporating with our third Korean War starting with China. Now it became our turn to destroy things as we withdrew so the enemy couldn't use them. Or as some said, "advancing in the opposite direction".

To a man our thoughts were the same, We had already won two major wars in five months! Why can't we go home? The answer was of course, The Chinese!

A million dollar communications truck was mired in mud and we couldn't get it out so we had to blow it up. In Pyongyang we had to destroy huge stockpiles of supplies that had just been delivered.

Ten miles south of Pyongyang we finally stopped to rest in a village that had a special house we stayed in for the night. The house had things in it not common to Korean standards. It had fine teak furniture and other exotic items. Our orders were to burn everything as we left so the beautiful furniture went on our fire in the yard. It was the first week in December and bitter cold from Siberia was worsening.

I found a trunk with theatrical robes and wigs. I thought it would be fun to put on a robe and a female wig with long black hair. When I walked out in the yard I soon removed them. The look in some of the eyes around the fire was one I hadn't seen before and I didn't like it. They had been deprived of anything female too long and I wasn't sure what might happen. I threw the garments on the fire along with the trunk and all the contents.

The Chinese were closing fast so the next day we set fire to the village and headed south again. The Chinese were overrunning some of our artillery and the men had to lower the guns to horizontal firing because the enemy was so close. This happened too often in this war.

We stopped in another village far enough South to spend the night in relative peace. Refugees and South Korean soldiers were on the road in numbers again. I found a house that wasn't being used and commenced to bed down for the night. My guard time wasn't until almost daylight. I was nearly asleep when our mean American born Korean Sergeant came in and asked me to go with him in my Jeep. I told him I was too tired, he could take the Jeep and go. I heard the jeep start and leave. I figured he wanted to torment some more South Korean soldiers. He was truly hateful to his own kind. It made him a bit different, I liked him but kept my distance and a weapon handy. I was glad I hadn't driven him and went to sleep.

I woke for my guard duty and went outside. My jeep was still missing! I asked the on duty guard if he had heard anything about the sergeant. He told me the Military Police had visited and said the sergeant had turned the jeep around on the road and hit an anti-tank mine! It destroyed the jeep and blew the sergeants legs off. I hated to hear of that happening to anyone but knowing what I did about his hatred, it seemed inevitable.

Now it was time for the Air Force to donate another vehicle to the Army in the middle of the night. I don't know who procured these things but they picked up a really nice one and by the next day it had Army colors and numbers. It also had a windshield and a top with a heater. The Lieutenant took it and I got his open Jeep. Thanks a lot!

As soon as the vehicles were loaded we set the village on fire and headed south again, it was sad but on the way an old man was working to throw water on his house that was burning and someone handed him a helmet full of gasoline. He didn't notice and threw the contents on the fire. The house was history. With orders to burn we couldn't help him except to burn it.

The Chinese were great mountain soldiers, they could quickly place a large number of men just to stop a small number of UN soldiers. Our fast withdrawal was MacArthur's plan to stretch the enemies supply lines and make them vulnerable to air strikes or ground action. As the lines grew longer the enemy was deprived of food, ammunition and medical supplies.

The armchair General bureaucrats in Washington argued that he withdrew because of fear of the Chinese. If fear of annihilation is a bad thing, as soldiers we would like all our commanders to have it anyway! If the Washington wonder boys would spend just five minutes with the Chinese Armies coming to kill them, they would change their self focused little minds forever. Possibly even allow the bombing of supply points in Manchuria so we wouldn't need to withdraw.

It was mid December now and we had been ordered to take a patrol north. It appeared that we were going to drive right into the Chinese which we did. It was a Chinese supply convoy that had been wiped out by an air strike and some ground fire. The fields on both sides of the road for a mile were littered with dead Chinese and military equipment. It looked as if some had escaped the fire but froze in the field where they took cover. One dead Chinese was a beautiful female officer with features to match any U.S. beauty. Her eyes were closed and she was sitting up against some other bodies. I wondered how the Chinese could stay focused with creatures like that within their ranks. We stopped long enough to search through the supplies. I found some very colorful down filled silk vests that I started wearing under my field jacket and it made a big difference in keeping warm. We also checked for anyone that might be still alive. This time even I could tell there was no life because it was twenty below zero. I found a picture of Chairman Mao the Chinese leader. I kept the picture, I wanted anything that would confuse the enemy if I was captured. We also picked up weapons and ammunition that was lying about. I only wanted them because I could get extra rations for them.

Our patrol continued on past the carnage and found another road back to Regimental Forward. A message arrived that our top Commander General Walker had been killed in a Jeep accident. We also heard that his driver had been General Patton's driver in Europe. General Ridgeway was to replace him.

At 0300 the next morning our outposts were being overrun and we had to quickly head south again!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

OUR LIEUTENANT CUSTER

It was Christmas week and we were not home as once promised. We were located in a village near the Thirty-eighth Parallel. There were small houses for everyone to stay in and I had traded enemy guns for extra rations and other necessities. It was actually the best situation we had been in for a while.

We had a sort of neighbor, a mentally ill lady, she might have been shell shocked. Every day she would come out of her own little house into a courtyard and build a fire while paying no attention to anyone. She would cook a chicken live by holding it over the fire and pulling the feathers off after they burned. Sometimes she would squat and relieve herself and wipe on anything handy, even light bulbs. We heard that one night some people cleaned her up and played with her for an evening. They must have been really desperate.

I had received a package from home so I was sharing the goodies with my companions when the news came that the Lieutenant had volunteered us for an assignment. We were to be issued white suits and parachutes. A plane would fly us over the general area known to have more than a million Chinese regulars. They were massing for an all out attack to finish pushing us out of North Korea. Eighth Army Headquarters knew how many but not precisely where. Our job was to pinpoint their locations for air strikes and artillery until they caught up with us. It really didn't sound like anything I was personally interested in doing. Most of the men in the Platoon agreed with me since we had no jump experience.

I started thinking of a transfer just to get away from this crazy officer. He was definitely a "ride to the sound of the guns" type and we didn't need the extra chances at being killed or captured. Although if I was captured, The Chinese were a far better choice than the North Koreans. The things we heard were that the Chinese insisted on treating prisoners properly and had even killed some North Korean Soldiers for not complying.

The next day we went to supply for the chutes and suits and they told us no way. What? Now we're jumping without chutes! That wasn't the problem. The Lieutenant was at Regimental Headquarters catching hell for the idea. It seems a Colonel from a nearby Ranger Battalion had heard about the operation and really got mad. That was not our job and his Rangers had been trained extensively for that type of mission. I agreed with The Ranger Commander completely and my pleased look irritated the Lieutenant and his cohorts. He would retaliate against me very soon I was certain.

The Rangers that took our mission didn't fare too well, most of them never returned. I would estimate that none of us would have returned.

It was the first week in January 1951 when the Chinese attacked in huge numbers. They suffered enormous losses but they had plenty of men left so they could afford the penalty. They recaptured Seoul and so the dream we had of them stopping at the border evaporated. So did our last hope of returning home. The only way out was feet first or in a body bag.

It now became a daily routine to patrol gaps in the lines again. We had to make contact with all the United Nations forces at different times. One patrol required us to connect with a Turkish Brigade. They were fierce fighters with knives or guns. They would be buried permanently where they dropped in battle. It was a great honor for them. As we approached their outpost, the tension grew since the language was a barrier. Some of them could speak English and waved us in after a short exchange of greetings. They invited us to join them at their fire and have some food. We shared the fire and some tea but declined the food. It was not familiar to us. Actually the Turkish Soldiers had the highest survival rate in Korea as prisoners of war because they could eat almost anything. Even in winter they would dig through the snow and find growing things underneath that they could eat. Others would starve in the same situation.

If the Chinese knew where the Turkish positions were they would try to go around. They didn't want to be carved up any less than the North Koreans.

Another of our patrol destinations was a South Korean Regiment lead by the meanest Commander in Korea, He was called Tiger Kim and the enemy made every effort to avoid his position also. If any of his officers suggested retreat, he was summarily shot in the head by Kim himself. We watched his men being trained one day and the drill instructor showed his displeasure by hitting one of the trainers in the head with a rifle butt, hard! The fellow didn't get up for quite a while, it is possible he might have died from the blow.

Tiger Kim's men were not as hospitable as our other connects. There were no invitations to hang around for a while so we stayed only long enough to radio headquarters.

With two very fierce forces on either side of our patrol, the chances were greater than normal we would run into Chinese elements during the patrol. We had information that the Chinese had lost four Divisions in the last three days. That's about fifty thousand men but they had plenty more.

What had improved many fold is the Chinese were not kill happy with captured and wounded like the North Koreans. They even bandaged our wounded and left them rations so they could survive until found, depending on the situation. They had even left a few of our soldiers return to our lines as a gesture. It's impossible to tell if this was a true act of kindness or an effort to soften our resolve. It did render capture a less unpleasant possibility.

Now it was late January and our patrols were becoming lengthy again, for some reason Eighth Army never had enough people to make a solid Main Line of Resistance. That's all we had known since we arrived in Korea. We were slowly beginning to move North again toward Seoul. It looked as if we might be winning another war! Not that it would do us any good personally.

I was still having trouble when I saw the F-86 Sabrejets since they resembled the Russian MIG. We never knew what we would get when we called for an air strike.

This day our artillery was pounding the hills on both sides of a pass we had to drive through. I had never seen such fire power on one piece of real estate. The entire mountain was continuous explosions and fire. It wasn't hard for our planes to find it and also pound hell out of it.

Both the Koreans and the Chinese are prodigious diggers. They built veritable castles underground that offered protection against most weapons. The exceptions were someone going in with a flame thrower or the one thousand pound bombs from the B-29 flights. The latter would cause collapse in the underground areas. I'm sure many were buried alive and never recovered.

This time, after the softening up, it became our mission to climb the mountain and mop up the bunkers. We had the tanks cover us while twenty of us went up into the enemy held area. The Lieutenant had a hopeful look about him that we would not return. His face had been torn up a few days earlier. We had been issued one of the first 105 recoilless rifles mounted on a Jeep. He had stood directly behind it and commanded a test firing. The back blast had left him bloody on his face. Worse than that he caught me laughing about it. The rest of the platoon was amused also but he noticed me.

This situation certainly looked fatal to all of us as we started climbing the burning mountain. As we approached the top we had to step over many dead Chinese bodies and parts. Some looked as if they had simply frozen in the sub zero temperatures. There was nothing left on the hill that would burn, every piece of wood or vegetation had been pulverized along with equipment. The B-29 bomb craters were the extra deep holes and we tried to avoid them. We found no sign of any life. Once again it was simple to determine the dead due to the extreme cold. I thought about what a horrible stench this hill would have if it were summer.

We returned to the convoy and proceeded through the pass. This was the most distance north we had covered for some time. It felt good somehow to be advancing again.

Unfortunately, it was getting dark and our day had just begun!

CHAPTER TWELVE

A TERRIBLE ORDER

Our Lieutenant was determined to reach the next main objective before another group traveling a different road. The Chinese would be waiting at road-blocks. Our convoy kept moving slowly north though the disappearing light. We had hoped to stop before dark but now our Commander was behaving like General Patton, trying to make a game out of deadly situations. After it grew dark the only light was from vehicle black out lights which was close to none. The convoy stopped at times and shut off engines to listen for the enemy. At about 2100 hours a runner came to my jeep and told me the Lieutenant wanted me to go fifty feet in front of the lead tank to act as point man for the column. They had heard enemy vehicles and thought it was an excellent chance for me to be killed I guess. Another driver took over my Jeep and I proceeded to go out in front. There wasn't enough light to see the tank clearly. I became concerned about being run over by the lead tank. We were going up a hill, I could tell that much. I couldn't even see the edge of the road.

Suddenly, my knee hit something in the road, it was a vehicle. I felt the front of it and knew it was a truck. It had letters on it that resembled GMC but not quite. I felt the hood and it was warm. It had just been shut down because it was close to zero temperature. I carefully went back to the lead tank and told them about the truck. We still had no idea where the occupants of the truck were. The Tank Commander told me to go to the side of the road while they fired point blank at the truck. Large pieces of burning metal was flying in every direction and the truck was on fire. At least we could see for a little while. The tank moved ahead and pushed the truck out of the way. I went back to my jeep and more or less told them along with a few choice words that I won't be out in front anymore at night. No normal commander would ask anyone to do such a crazy job, only ours with his hidden agenda. I had injured my knee walking into the bumper of the truck, so I was limping. A British Bren gun was firing in the distance. Apparently the truck had reached the top of the hill and heard us coming. The Chinese had left the area, fortunately for me. I was prepared to disobey a direct order in combat or worse but no way was I getting in front of the tanks again. No matter, the next opportunity I would ask for a transfer out of the Platoon.

Through the rest of the night I reinforced my decision to transfer by remembering things the Lieutenant had done. Not just to me but to others, for example, when we were near the Yalu River in North Korea he stopped an old man in a village and when the old guy couldn't answer his questions he put a rock in his glove and beat him viciously about the head until the man fell to the ground bleeding. We think he died, there was a lot of blood. The Lieutenant just drove off. Another incident was when we were preparing to move out of an area we noticed a man in civilian clothes about five hundred yards out walking toward us and waving. Most of us thought it could be an American Soldier trying to get back to our lines. The Lieutenant told one of his cohorts, "shoot the son of a bitch and let's get out of here"! The sergeant took careful aim and fired, the man went to his knees, the sergeant fired again and the man went over backwards. We started the vehicles and left. Both of these occasions shocked most of the Platoon members.

We found a village to stay in after a very tough night. After some sleep I headed for the Platoon Sergeant and requested a transfer to a regular front line rifle company. I knew a request for a transfer to Japan would never work. The Sergeant was a good guy and reminded me that I was heading for a big bad change in life style. Like walking instead of riding, having only what I could carry instead of a Jeep full of supplies. No more personal sleeping bags which would become what I missed the most.. He mentioned that he never had heard of anyone requesting this type of transfer in the middle of a war and during one of the coldest winters on record. I told him I had personal reasons that were uncorrectable except by transfer. I had to admit that I had butterflies about a different activity.

The Sergeant took the request to the Lieutenant who didn't smile as I expected but just nodded in approval. The Lieutenant tried to get me one more time. I had requested A Company which had the lowest casualty rate in the regiment but he sent me to Charlie Company which had the highest. Actually, it turned out he did me a favor.

When the transfer was approved I said my parting comments to all the friends I had been through so much with, they all thought I was headed for certain death but I had stopped caring at this point, I just had to get away or do something I would regret. It is not easy to leave a measure of friends and comfort but this action would stand behind me in other situations throughout my life.

I reported to Charlie Company in the middle of February, The Chinese still had Seoul and we were trying to get it back. By this time there were Draftees, reservists, ROKs and a few regulars, I didn't know anyone. I was assigned to First Squad, Third Platoon. I started talking to people and making friends. This happens fast in combat. No one knows which day might be their last and friendships are not restricted by social stratification. Everyone has the same problem, staying alive. Money has no value in the combat zone so wealth means nothing for the moment.

We had orders to move out and attack an enemy held hill in the morning. I managed to find a sleeping bag and with a poncho made a type of shelter. It was below zero. It was going to be hard sleeping on the ground constantly, but somehow I felt safer. It was nice to have officers who had no desire to see you dead.

In the morning we barely had time for any breakfast. We drew extra ammunition and started walking single file up a winding trail through the hills. Our objective was a hill on the other side of a farming valley. We formed a staggered line and started crossing an open field. This was the first time I was attacking an enemy position and I knew they would not hold their fire as they might for scouting patrols. Doing this type of advancing reminded me of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War. Just walking into enemy fire! I pictured clearly a bullet entering my head and leaving out the back but the strange thing was I had stopped caring because at least I would be out of here, even death has advantages.

I wondered why there were no air strikes or artillery softening up the hill but it was very quiet. Nobody was talking, just boots crunching on the frozen ground. It took almost an hour to slowly cross the open valley. When we reached the trees everyone felt better, at least we had some cover and concealment again. Climbing the hill didn't take as long as crossing the valley. When we reached the top there was evidence that the Chinese had been there in force recently, but they left for some reason not known to us.

We remained on the hill for the night. I had pocketed some charcoal from a kiln and when the sun went down, I fired up the fuel under a poncho. We had no sleeping bags since they wanted us to stay awake. The bitter cold would make the night very long and unpleasant. Under the poncho with the charcoal I could read and write if I got down close to it. It also kept the temperature more bearable. During the small hours of the morning my charcoal ran out so the only warm friends I had left were cigarettes. I was very happy I smoked since it took the edge off the worry and discomfort. Later I learned that cigars would have been better and warmer plus if smoked correctly, wouldn't harm anyone's health.

The next morning we moved out and traveled the high ridges. It was very slippery from snow and ice in some places. One lucky fellow slipped and fell about twenty feet. He had a beautiful compound fracture of his leg. He would be excused for quite a while, probably go back to Japan, maybe home. I envied him for his misfortune.

After walking most of the day I noticed my feet felt strange. When I had a chance I pulled off my shoe packs and my feet were all bubbles on the bottom. The shoe packs had worked great riding in a Jeep, but not for long marches like this. We stopped for the night and I found some regular combat boots that fit. They really felt good and the feet started to recover right away.

This night they managed to get some sleeping bags but only one for each two men, it guaranteed one person would be awake since the extreme cold prevented any sleeping without the bag. During the night an enemy patrol hit one of our outposts and wiped them out so the entire line was awake after that.

Another night of this type of action and they pulled us off the line and into reserve. The orders came to train everyone in bayonet and hand to hand combat. As soon as the classes started I knew I wasn't interested in this type of close combat. Basic Training had covered some of this, but this was for real and much more extensive. We learned at least ten ways to kill someone with a rifle, without firing it. I acquired all the necessary practice and was pronounced adequate in hand to hand but definitely not looking forward to it at all. I had heard of the bad results of tougher people than me who had engaged the Chinese directly. The Oriental people had invented this type of combat and were experts on delivering lethal blows, even without weapons. Late one afternoon they gave me an answer to my situation. There was a position open in the platoon that nobody wanted since the life expectancy in combat was two minutes. It was for a Machine Gunner. It was one of the rare times in Korea that I volunteered to do something dangerous. I knew a bayonet did not fit it and the gun was mostly a defensive weapon used to cover attacks. They were happy to give me the squad. Then I was introduced to my new personal weapon, a forty-five automatic pistol. I remember hitting the ground in front of my feet with that gun in Basic training, so I knew I had to get a lot of practice, fast, before we returned to action.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MACHINE GUN HELL

I wanted some practice with the new guns before we returned to action. I drew extra ammunition from supply and headed for a canyon by myself. I didn't want anyone to see how terrible a shot I was. That was in the morning. By late afternoon I was tired and sore from all the shooting but satisfied that I could hit a rock the size of a mans head three out of four times from any angle at fifty feet with the forty-five. The machine gun had tracers that could be followed to the target. I could have practiced more but it would have to do, since we were moving out again in the morning.

This march would take us far up into the mountains to the point where no towns or even cultivated fields were visible in any direction. Just more mountains! This meant that supplies would not be available as they had been. In fact we hadn't received any rations for a day and all I had left were cocoa discs from the combat rations. You were supposed to make hot chocolate by letting them dissolve in hot water but they didn't crush in pockets and they could sustain a person for a while just by nibbling on them.

We had been walking all day, it was late afternoon as we reached the top of a long tree covered ridge. I heard the snip-snip of tree limbs being hit by bullets. I motioned for everyone to get down and we crawled to the reverse slope. I was trying to see where the fire was coming from. There was a grassy ridge across the valley about four hundred yards to the north west. I saw some puffs of smoke coming from the tall grass. The grass was dry from the wind and no moisture. I opened an ammo box and fed a belt into the ugly forty pound thing I'd been carrying on my back all day. This weapon was weird looking, it had a stock and a flash shield which made it almost as long as my height. I pushed a shell into the chamber and started firing at the grass where the smoke had been. To my happy surprise the tracers started a grass fire and the wind fanned it into a really hot fire. I saw two enemy get and run so I followed them with the tracers, they went down fast. Then I poured the tracers into where they fell and started another fire. I was beginning to like this ugly gun that could start fires at long distances. It was almost enjoyable to be able to trade ten bullets for every one they sent and burn them out at the same time. The feelings I had would seem unwholesome to most people but when someone shoots at people who are tired, cold, dirty, hungry and already mad about being in a fight that had no meaning at the time except to stay alive, they might expect dedicated and total retaliation. By the time the sun went down the grassy hill was black and quiet. Unfortunately we were ordered to stay put and that meant the enemy would be coming to knock out the machine gun that had ruined their day.

It was cloudy and no moon was there to help us see. Our artillery bounced search lights off the low clouds and that helped a little. The artillery was also dropping shells right in front of us all through the night. We worried about short rounds, especially what we called Willie Peter which sprayed out burning phosphorus and was mean stuff if it contacted flesh. I could make out shadowy figures moving about forty yards out. I checked if we had any patrols in that area. We didn't so I opened fire at the suspected movements. It was fairly close range and the movement stopped. It's easy for your eyes to play tricks but firing the gun and pulling my poncho over it helped keep us warm. It was below zero temperature again. Early that morning we had passed a group of refugees who had frozen to death right where they had stopped. Some were sitting and others were standing but they were all quite dead. I had no desire to join them and we had no sleeping bags at all because we were too far up in the hills.

We had a case of fragmentation grenades so as the vague figures got within twenty yards we lobbed grenades at them. I was never sure if we hit anything but it made us feel better that there was nothing in that spot. They were close because an enemy grenade landed on top of the fellow in a hole next to me. The medics said it was a potato masher like the Germans used in the war. They said he would survive, he was a nice guy and I didn't like him getting hit.

After firing at shadows all night, when daylight came it became obvious that we had held back a major attack. Within thirty yards of the gun there were arms sticking up as if reaching for another breath of air. The enemy was diligent about retrieving as many dead along with wounded as they possibly could. Even so there were over a hundred in front of our small line, some had been hit by artillery during the night but most were in front of the ugly gun.

Probably because the gun was a primary focus of their attack. Anyway, nobody complained about me keeping them up all night with machine gun fire. In fact they seemed to have a grateful look in their eyes. I felt like the night had been successful by military standards. Two of our men returned from an all night patrol. There had been four but two were killed when they ran into a Chinese patrol. The enemy patrol spent the night searching. They had a good hiding place if they could keep from falling asleep. They decided to pull the pin on a hand grenade and take turns holding the handle down for most of the night. If they fell asleep the enemy wouldn't find much anyway. Before daylight the Chinese had quit looking for them so they made their way back to our lines. It was a drastic measure but it worked for them.

Now it was our second day on this ridge. We sent out patrols and exchanged fire all starting fairly early in the morning. Just after noon the Chinese appeared to be attacking so we called in more artillery and an air strike. The first planes were Marine Corsairs. We had colored panels out so they would miss the ridge and hit the forward slope that the Chinese were climbing. The frightening part was that as the planes were making their final approach we were looking right down their gun barrels. When they started firing the noise was deafening. It wouldn't have been any worse if we were the target. It was devastating to the attacking forces because they broke it off. I heard much later that one of the pilots of the Corsairs was Ed McMahon, Johnny Carson's announcer in later years. All of this gave me new respect for what they called "close air support"! It was beginning to get too dark for air so the artillery fire increased and we knew it was going to be another long night.

As it became dark again the searchlights went on again and the routine resumed. I was averaging six boxes of ammunition for the ugly gun in every twenty-four hours. As the movement in front became more active I fired longer bursts. I overdid it to the point the gun heated up and quit firing while the enemy kept coming, not a good situation! Since this was the hottest spot on the line the men brought me another gun from a quiet flank. I couldn't quite grasp how anything could overheat in subzero weather. I started using the second machine gun but didn't like it as well so as soon as mine cooled I started using it again. It really got busy and I would alternate to be sure neither gun overheated.

I stopped firing for about twenty minutes to have a cigarette and eat my last chunk of chocolate. I saw a mans shape moving toward me. At first I thought it was our Platoon Leader checking the line to keep everyone alert. I fired some quick bursts at some moving shadows out in front as I kept watching the figure. Then I saw blue sparks coming from two points about the figures chest area and my hands stung like hell. My assistant gunner didn't see what was happening right away. I drew the forty-five automatic and had to point it near my assistants face. I fired three times and the figure dropped to the ground. It dawned on me that had my gun been conventional length I would have been riddled with bullets. The thought shook me so much that I picked up the ugly gun and poured tracers into the guy until his down filled clothing caught fire. Only then was I sure he wouldn't be getting up and trying again. A bit of a cowardly act I suppose.

For some reason things became quieter the remainder of the night. In the morning I saw what was left of him. He had been carrying two German Mauser automatic broom handle pistols which were the cause of the flashes and my stung hands. Also he had two very large grenades probably as a back up to knock out my gun. He had made it to within twenty feet! All of the carnage visible made me think of the commandment instilled in most American men, "THOU SHALT NOT KILL". I really believe the Chinese had no such order to attempt following. I also thought that this reluctance to kill might account for one of the great mysteries of combat casualties. The nicest guys seem to get killed the most. In my case, as the number of enemy dead increased I felt better in a strange way but still guilty and waiting for my punishment for breaking the commandment.. There were times when I felt as if it was personal between me and the enemy soldiers.

Still I was disgusted with the entire picture, and delivering finality to a large group of individuals who were trying to kill you was accompanied by a satisfaction that was bordering on evil.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MISTAKEN VALUES

It was our third day on this ridge and the action continued. The Company Commander decided that because of our success defending the position we should attack and take the next hill. Also, because the body count was so high in front of my ugly gun, I should take the machine gun squad along with them. I tried to explain that nobody knows who actually killed the soldiers in front of the gun. The entire line was firing and I could only account for the one that had nearly killed me. The reason so many were in front of the gun is that the gun was their primary objective, to silence the gun. Logic didn't apply here as usual, in their minds they wanted someone like, Audie Murphy or Sergeant York. I was in trouble! I told them machine guns are not designed to charge hills, they cover the attack. Nothing worked, so I had to unpack a belt and carry the shiny thing over my shoulder. Ammo bearers and my assistant gunner came along but we had to separate.

The attack started with an artillery barrage on the opposite hill, it was starting to snow a little as we made our way down through the enemy bodies. At least it was too cold for decomposing smells to be present. The hill became very steep and covered with deep leaves. Everyone started sliding through the leaves. I tried to stay close to the ground to slow myself down but the gun kept dragging me along. Suddenly there was a loud crack and everything went black. My right eye was hit by something and I put my hand on it and lost my hold on the gun and the hill. I rolled down the hill and stopped behind a large bush, the gun had slid down right behind me and poked me in the leg as if it was trying to stay with me. The guy closest to me thought I had been killed with a shot to the head. He was surprised to see me move again. He said it was a sniper and pointed to a general area where it came from. The sniper probably spotted the shiny ammo belt and thought he had finished me. I kept watching the suspect area. It was covered with pine trees. Finally, I saw some movement of the trees that wasn't the wind and I nearly emptied the belt into that vicinity. The movement stopped. The word came to call off the attack. Our platoon leader had been killed along with some others and they wanted everyone to pull back. Going back up that leaf covered slope was the most difficult thing I had ever done. The heavy gun would not allow me to travel up hill through deep leaves. I yelled for help and my assistant gunner came back down to give me a hand. He was a small fellow from Brooklyn and very reliable. We finally made it back to the top of the ridge without getting shot again. Others weren't so lucky, we had lost six men. I was still grumbling about using the machine gun to attack. I borrowed a metal mirror to look at my right eye, I was having trouble seeing clearly. I had a huge black eye. The medics looked at it and put a patch over it but it still hurt like hell. My head had been close to the ground as the bullet hit and it threw frozen dirt and rock right into my eye.

Someone must have listened to my complaint or else they figured I was slightly wounded but that afternoon they launched another attack and I provided cover fire. This attack was further to the right of where we had been that morning. One of the Sergeants directed me to fire into an area that I thought our own men were in. I told him, so but he said they hadn't made it that far and were under heavy fire from the enemy. I fired into that area without having any specific target. About twenty minutes later the wounded were being carried along our narrow ridge and over my gun. One young kid I remembered from the chow line was smiling and leaving a trail of blood as they carried him over my gun. He had been happy every time I had seen him. The medics told me later he didn't make it. I had lingering doubts about whether my cover fire had hit him. The doubts would be with me forever.

That night we had the same kind of action, exchanging fire with shadows and trying to keep from freezing. By morning a cold icy fog had moved in and the Chinese had massed a major force and we had no air to help stop them. A new lieutenant asked me what to do and unlike Custer I said, "get the hell out of here,!" There was one big problem for me, I had to cover the retreat, I would be the last one to leave. I moved to the right side of the ridge which had a better field of fire and kept one box of ammunition. As the company started moving out, I left the enemy know the ugly gun was still waiting. They were having trouble coming up the hill. The deep leaves were a problem for the Chinese also and they were milling around trying to get traction. As

traction. As our men disappeared into the trees I remembered a dream I had when I was very small. I was helping bring in groceries on the second floor of a house. I was the last one up the stairs. Everyone made it, but the banister closed in and I was trapped. I looked back down the stairs and there was something spinning around at the landing. I took a can and threw it at whatever it was. It came up the stairs and opened a huge black mouth to devour me. I felt nearly the same level of fright at being last again with something coming up the hill.

To my surprise our platoon sergeant was coming back down the ridge to help me. He even went to my right which put him closer to the enemy. He had always been very nervous. He had a family and wanted to go home. I didn't know it then but I was about to send him home.

I kept slowing the enemies progress with bursts of fire but they kept on coming, I heard their response as bullets hitting the forward slope, there was no stopping them this time especially with the icy fog and no air support. Even artillery couldn't help much. Finally the sergeant said, "let's make a run for it", and I agreed. I fired a long burst, took out the belt and closed the ammo box. Then I made a bad mistake, I put the gun on my right shoulder and started running along the reverse slope with the sergeant right behind me. My left foot slipped on some fresh snow and I started to fall, my right hand tightened on the gun and was no trigger housing. The gun fired because I had not cleared the chamber, I heard the Sergeant scream and I reluctantly looked back to see blood coming from the left side of his head. He said a few curse words and put a cloth over it to stop the bleeding. We had no time to do much of anything, we caught up with some medics and they started working on the Sergeant, I told him I was sorry and left. I had shot a piece of his ear off. I hated thinking about it, just a fractional difference and he would have been dead. I heard later that he was declared disabled for combat duty and sent home. The men in my platoon knew about it but said nothing. Some of them were happy he got to go home and thought I had done it on purpose. I felt really lousy because he had come back to help me out. About three weeks later the sergeant that replaced him was killed and I felt better about the incident and even envied him a little, like the guy who fell off the cliff and broke his leg badly.

I had become so callous and disgusted that I could bury the guilt from that incident without a lot of effort. Anyway the fog lifted and the air strikes began again. The large number of enemy that had chased us from the ridge was decimated and withdrew even farther north than where we had battled with them for days.

We moved north behind them through high rugged country making it impossible for supplies to reach us except by air drops. The temperature kept dropping every night. We were pursuing the enemy back to the Thirty-eighth parallel again. It was going to be another, "OK we won the war, can we go home now?" Actually there were rumors of a thing starting called rotation back to the states. I had been there a long time so I had the first little hope since I set foot in Korea. Our ammunition, food and water were becoming scarce. We basically had what we could carry. As we climbed one of the largest mountains I had seen in Korea we started receiving enemy fire from a barren ridge to our northwest. We returned fire and kept climbing to a point where we could look straight across at the enemy positions. We were ordered not to fire unless they attacked because our ammo was running out. There were also patches of fog that restricted air support. We were very low on everything, especially food, so it was disturbing to watch the enemy with stacks of rice balls and other food delivered to the their soldiers by young girls, while we did without.

The sound of a multi-engine plane approaching gave us hope of an airdrop of food, ammo and sleeping bags. Our joy disappeared quickly when we saw Chinese markings on the plane. It was a loud speaker plane with a girls voice on board telling us to surrender and join their cause. They knew we were hungry and cold and mentioned that we would be well fed and warm in their care. It was obvious that they were more capable than us in these areas. They enemy had down filled clothing and I was still wearing some of it underneath my field jacket. We had been informed that much of the cold weather gear shipped to us had been sold on the black market in Pusan. Some of us had discussed going to Pusan with our weapons and showing them why they shouldn't do that to front line soldiers. I asked for permission to shoot down the slow moving speaker plane but the answer was, no firing unless they attack. I know it would have been easy with tracers and the low and slow flying.

The area started getting dark. Any sunlight was diminishing and the cold was brutal. It was going to be a most difficult night when some of our men would die a pleasant non-combat death.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FROZEN SOLDIERS

This was the strangest position I had seen in Korea. We were on two opposed cliffs about six hundred yards apart. Our cliff was only slightly higher than the enemies. Even stranger was the order not to fire even though we had targets. They didn't seem interested in firing at us either. It could have been the extreme cold that made commanders reluctant to engage.

A friend of mine took out a patrol to bring back water and possibly some food. They ran into an enemy patrol and his men were killed, they started to take him prisoner. He carried an M2 Carbine, as he started to put down the weapon, he hit the trigger on full automatic and killed them. He was normally our communications person. We thought that was great for a specialist. He learned this special action because the enemy usually cut the phone lines and then waited for linemen to show.

Our next orders were really hard to take. We were to dig all night just to keep from freezing. There would be no fires of any kind. Someone said the temperature was supposed to reach thirty below zero. I saw fires on the enemy cliff plus they had warmer clothing. We started digging and talking, to break the monotony. Someone mentioned that since killing was beginning to seem normal like breakfast, we might qualify to be mafia hit men when we get out. Another guy suggested we form a group we could call "Korean Take Out". We would function as a cleansing agent against greedy dishonest people like the ones that sold our cold weather supplies in Pusan and eliminate them. Also other types of abusive individuals who might have convinced themselves that they were better than others. In a few hours we had quite a list of undesirables in the world. I don't know if any followed through on that plan but it would explain some mystery killings over the years since Korea.

The time passed very slowly and some time after midnight we started dozing off. It is very dangerous to fall asleep at these low temperatures. Trying to take turns staying awake was not working. After a few more hours we were very tired and disgusted because we could still see the Chinese fires on the opposite cliff.

By the time the daylight was available I wasn't. I could see fairly good but I had no ability to move, but I felt very good. It was like being in a large feather bed. I seemed to be floating without any sensations at all. I could still think a little but really didn't care much one way or the other. A medic came to look at me and yelled for some help. Some guys stood me up and dragged me to a fire that had finally been allowed. They forced me to start walking which was really hard. About thirty minutes later I started to get feeling back. That feeling became intense pain. My fingers, ears and toes swelled up and turned red. There was constant pain but that was better than ten other soldiers who froze to death that night. The medic told me that if I hadn't been wearing the down filled Chinese clothing under my uniform, I would also be dead. The medics told me to check with them if anything started turning black, otherwise I was fit for duty. Now we had lost men without a shot being fired. Mother Nature and the rat heads in Pusan got them. I learned that some of the primitive peoples are right in choosing freezing as the best death.

I was having trouble handling the ugly gun. When I put any pressure on my fingers the pain was intense if I touched certain areas. I learned where they were and tried to avoid them. Fortunately the order came to pull out and go into reserve. Before we left the cliff an air strike was called and we watched the other cliff burn with Napalm. There is nothing better than watching that kind of power delivered to a major enemy.

Now we would get a break and be supplied with everything including personnel and better morale. Even at our low point, the Army seemed to know about what we needed to get some energy back.

As we received our replacements in reserve, the platoon gained a new Sergeant and a Lieutenant. I don't know where they found the officer but I think he was the most ignorant soldier in the military. He seemed bent on establishing his "authority" by irritating his men to the maximum. I wanted to tell him to back off because these men had each killed more people than he personally knows, but I kept quiet. One of his first orders was that every one should dry shave even though we were next to a small stream. My beard was not prominent like many of the others. And my attitude was "go to hell" without actually saying it. Anyway, it looked like a great opportunity to disobey a valueless stupid direct order and be sent back for a court martial. A short time later I saw two of the men who complied with the order approaching me and indicating they wanted to talk.

They said, "Weiler, you shot our Sergeant so we figure you can kill the new officer before morning. We don't want to chance going back into action with this idiot!" I told them, "The Sergeant was an accident and this guy might do fine in combat". They were really mad, their faces covered with small chunks of toilet paper for the cuts from dry shaving. Anyway I finally convinced them that I had no desire to kill anyone in cold blood from ambush. I thought I had talked them out of harming the officer so I went with a couple of other guys to see a movie set up for us. It was Abbott and Costello in "Foreign Legion". I finally had a night to sleep without guard duty. My black eye and being frozen might have given me an extra break.

When I woke in the morning the first thing I heard was that a sniper had killed our new Lieutenant sometime after daylight. The trouble with that was according to some of my friends, most of the men thought that I had done it. Nothing was done about it and the officer was just another KIA. The men's cut faces testified to the officers stupidity.

So another officer took over, this one was much better. He was a very competent black Lieutenant and I appreciated his leadership. I had a feeling he would not make me attack with a hand carried belt fed machine gun.

Another replacement was a Staff Sergeant who took over my machine gun squad. He was good but a heavy drinker. Extremely intelligent except when drinking. He had been drinking too much one night in the States and woke up married to a woman he didn't know. From then on she received part of his paycheck every month. He confirmed what I already knew about drinking, it was dumb. I usually traded my whiskey ration for his candy ration. We became good friends in a short time something I was reluctant to do in combat, people died too quickly. This was the exception.

The order came to head back for the mountains with about thirty percent replacements. Some of these were national guard and some draftees. Charlie Company had the highest casualties because our permanent assignment seemed to be the most forward position possible.

I was becoming aware that many of the men thought the Lieutenants killer was me, including my assistant gunner! I could understand their false beliefs a little. I had a ruthless reputation where the ugly gun was concerned. The entire situation was exaggerated to the point where I was receiving undeserved notice. No one directly accused me of anything so it did not become a huge problem for me.

Our new orders were to head back north through the mountains. It was morning when we started and I thought we had been on the highest mountains in Korea but we managed to find higher and more rugged mountains to scale. Snipers were a constant menace and our Company Commander was badly wounded. At the end of the first day we stopped near a Korean Cemetery. No matter how high or remote the area, you might find burial grounds in Korea. They were large well cared for mounds covered with grass. It was my favorite place to sleep. The four foot high mounds offered protection from enemy fire and the wind. Some of the guys were reluctant to join me and the same type superstition could keep visits down from the enemy.

Another days march took us to the really high country and very close to the Thirty-eighth Parallel. Once again the enemy could be seen at times. They were about six hundred yards away across a deep valley with a dense mixture of trees. We heard again that Seoul had been retaken and was in United Nations hands. It looked as if the moving war was over. There would still be huge battles but the line had been established. There were also rumors of a cease fire.

We settled in on the mountain, the Chinese speaker plane came by again so we waved hello to the pilot. We were hoping the Chinese would drop us some food as a good will gesture, our supplies were getting low again. They had been trying to get us hot food brought up by old Korean men in their eighties and nineties. These old guys were amazing and had tremendous stamina, but the snipers were getting some of them and they would turn back with our chow. The Chinese attacked mornings because they thought we were having breakfast and it would slow down our response. Their mistake was that we didn't have any food so we were not only alert, but very irritated. One of the enemy prisoners was making a complaint about this. In a short time the prisoners would be even more irritated because we had no food for them either.

We could see a group of small houses in the valley below. It looked as if they were a launch point for the breakfast attacks. We sent out a patrol for water and possibly food. The patrol included a friend of mine who was a tough quick tempered guy. He would sometimes hit someone without warning just for disagreeing with him. He was point man on patrol when they encountered an enemy patrol. The enemy fired and hit my friend five times diagonally across the chest. He did not go down, he returned fire and killed some of the men in the enemy patrol. I can only wonder what the enemy observing this exchange must have thought. In any case it didn't improve their morale. My friend then proceeded to walk back up the hill and found a medic before he passed out from loss of blood. He made it back to civilian life but one bullet could not be removed. So we wouldn't have to risk another patrol I mentioned that I could probably start the village thatched roof material on fire with tracers, they brought over another machine gun in case mine overheated. One of the buildings had smoke curling up from the chimney. I found a thick spot in the thatch and kept the tracers pouring into the area. A small flame started and in a short time it was an inferno. No one came out so the bullets might have accidentally hit the occupants. I tried another and men with rifles came out.

It didn't take long to ignite the rest of the buildings, the flames had jumped over to some of them. It was like setting fire to a wasp nest except I was four hundred yards away. I was sure we would be hearing from the burned out soldiers very soon. The night would be long and filled with constant enemy probes. We were expecting a full Chinese attack with waves of soldiers and bugles blowing. The probes were more treacherous since there was only quiet and sporadic fire when something moved.

In the morning our first patrol had not made it to bring back water and some of us were completely out. I asked who needed water and three guys said they would give a weeks pay for a canteen full. I took their canteens, borrowed a carbine and headed down the hill that was basically enemy territory. I avoided the village and went far to the west where I had seen some water glinting through the trees. When I reached the bottom I stopped and listened for both water and enemy. Walking a short distance north across the valley I found the stream. Not very large but clear and adequate. I started filling the canteens and then washed up a bit. I could smell something cooking. Being hungry I couldn't resist following the smell and just a little upstream there was a small isolated hut the smells were coming from. I took the safety off the carbine and unsnapped my forty-five. The door was slightly open and there were three oriental men sitting in their underwear. They saw me and motioned to come in. Their guns were stacked in a corner and a tarp was covering what appeared to be their uniforms. I could see a corner of something tan under the tarp. That was the color of the North Korean or Chinese uniforms. They must have seen the hungry look on my face because they invited me to share their huge bowl of rice they had just cooked. They used hand motions to extend the offer. They were eating with their hands and leaving black streaks in the rice each time they scooped some up. I walked over and scooped up some while trying to miss the black areas. It tasted great, nothing but rice but was really good. I took a few more scoops and tried to indicate thanks then carefully backed out of the hut. I expected them to scramble for their guns and come out shooting but they never did. I actually went up the hill faster than I had descended. I remembered how tricky it was approaching any military defense from the enemy side since the time I spent as a scout. Fortunately, I came back at the same point I had left. I delivered the water and discovered that the old Korean men had made it with chow, ammo, water and cigarettes. My trouble was, that the enemy rice had filled me up and I wasn't hungry. I took what I could for later anyway. I didn't tell anyone that I had lunch with the enemy. It just didn't seem right.

I heard that another patrol had been sent out to locate enemy strong points. Out of ten men, two returned with a real horror story. It seems that on a high plateau, they were captured by an isolated group of North Korean regulars. The enemy commander decided to execute them by decapitation. The men were forced to form a line and kneel down for the operation. As the carnage started, one of the enemy guards offered cigarettes to the condemned soldiers. The commander had him shot by his own men, just for showing kindness. The last two men in the fatal line whispered to each other about jumping off a high cliff behind them. One of the men hit the last guard hard in the throat with his fist and as the guard fell they ran as fast as possible off the edge and into whatever seemed a better choice of deaths. Their speed carried them far enough to miss some rocks and land in a area of dense vegetation. It broke their fall, their gamble had worked. They were hurt but made it back to our lines.

As it became dark we felt privileged because they had delivered an arctic sleeping bag, one for each two men. I actually kept my pistol in my hand and loaded when in the bag. All I had to do was quietly pull back the hammer. A few of our men had been bayoneted while in their bags.

It looked like we would have many long cold nights with regular visitors, and so it goes.....



Author with BAR in a small village in North Korea and after returning to States.



Author on right with part of machine gun crew digging in gun emplacement.



The "UGLY GUN"

The American M1919A6 light machine-gun.

EPILOGUE

By April 1951 the main line of resistance had stabilized and cease-fire talks were scheduled to begin. Our military started a troop rotation plan to send soldiers back to the States for assignment there. For the first time since June 1950, there was a way to go home other than being killed or wounded. It meant that soldiers in each unit that had been there the longest would be offered a choice of staying or returning home.

The second week in April our Company Commander informed me that I was the only soldier in the Charlie Company that had been in Korea since the war started. He offered me some choices to consider. I could accept a battlefield commission and take over the platoon I was in, or return to the States with his and the Regimental Commander's recommendation for West Point Military Academy. I had no reason to doubt them, they had previously submitted my name for a Silver Star Medal and enlisted promotion. I chose West Point as the best path at that time.

I returned to our defense perimeter and turned over the ugly gun and forty-five pistol to my assistant gunner. I spent some time saying goodbye to other people and left the area. The new machine gunner would be back in the States before me. The next day our regiment attacked a huge Chinese force and he was wounded in the arm, disabling him for combat duty. He was just one of many casualties.

I never pursued The West Point idea because the rumors that followed me expanded my roll in the shootings of people in authority. While no official charges or records were presented, it was definitely not a positive situation for any military career.

I was honorably discharged at the end of my regular extended enlistment in April 1952 with no invitations to re-enlist. The Korean War was still going strong with heavy fighting on established positions, but my personal involvement was over.

R. L. Weiler