

1096 DAYS

Al Trotola

FEBRUARY 19, 1951- FEBRUARY 18, 1954



This story was conceived May 20, 2000 at a Regimental reunion on Singer Island, Florida because of a meeting I had with Unsan survivor, Al Stauber. Unsan is to the Eighth Cavalry Regiment what the Little Big Horn is to the Seventh Cavalry Regiment and George Armstrong Custer. A large Chinese force overwhelmed The Third Battalion of the Eighth Cavalry at Unsan, North Korea on Halloween 1950 and they ceased to exist as a unit two days later. Al told me about the battle and of his narrow escapes when we were sitting on lawn chairs and drinking soda at 2:00 am. Suddenly the grass sprinklers popped up from the ground and forced us to take cover under a balcony overhang. It was there that Al asked if I had written down my experiences. I told him I had not. He suggested I do so and said,

“Our numbers are dwindling with each passing day. When we’re gone, there won’t be anyone left to tell what really happened over there.”

Following are my military experiences and the small part I played in the Korean War.

THE BEGINNING

ALABAMA TO ETA JIMA

FEBRUARY 1951- SEPTEMBER 1951

I'm sixteen years old and it's the summer of 1949. I'm living on Buchanan Place in West New York, New Jersey, a small town on the banks of the Hudson River across from New York City. Every weekday during July and August when school is not in session, the town provided free bus service to the Yankee Stadium for township kids. The Yankees then were owned by Dell Webb and Dan Topping, a former husband of actress Lana Turner. The upper deck was usually empty because the team played mostly day games and most working fans couldn't attend the games so the owners opened the upper deck free to kids from the New York metropolitan area. The buses parked in front of the Town Hall on Sixtieth Street with Parks Department employees riding them to maintain order. They provided us with a diamond shaped tag that we hung around our necks on a string for identification and called us Yankee Juniors. I can still hear the screaming chant "We want a hit!" and the sounds of stamping feet coming from the upper deck. I attended two and sometimes three games each week with both my mother and grandmother giving me twenty-five cents for the games. I added money I made from my morning paper route so I could afford to buy sodas, scorecards, hot dogs, ice cream and the one pencil I used the whole season. Then scorecards were just ten cents and pencils were only a nickel.

I rode the buses to the games with neighborhood friends; one being Karnig Poryazian who was a year older than me and lived on the top floor of the same apartment building my parents lived in. Karney, as I called him, was obsessed with the military and said over and over again he wanted to join the Army because he wanted travel and adventure. His father was against him joining the military so he wouldn't sign the enlistment papers.

We lived on the second floor directly above Phillie, an Italian cobbler who came up to my apartment every Friday evening after he closed his shop to play cards. My father, grandfather, uncle and the shoemaker played an Italian card game, "Brischke", for one-dollar buckets of beer and I can still hear them debating over who gets to drink and who stays dry. Next to the shoemaker also on the street level was a tavern with a pizza oven that was directly under my bedroom in the rear of the apartment. Most every night the pizza maker slapping the dough made it difficult for me to get to sleep.

Cool early October evenings replaced the hot summer days and the New York Yankees were on their way to winning the first of five straight World Series. My father bought a blue 1948 Pontiac, a two-door torpedo back with an automatic Hydromatic transmission. Just before Thanksgiving Karney turned eighteen and left for the Army.

After Karney left, I told my father I wanted to join the Air Force and he said, "Finish school, I won't be a party to you quitting." He refused to sign the papers and because I was seventeen I had no choice but to wait. I gave up my paper route and took a job working until two in the morning selling newspapers in taverns. I was making a lot of money but my grades suffered because of the hours I was forced to keep so in December 1949 I had to leave school, upsetting my parents because I was in my senior year. Eventually I was forced to quit the job because of the hours and bounced around from job to job not making any headway. On June 25th North Korea crossed the Thirty-eighth Parallel and the war began so my father suggested I return to school where he reasoned I would be safe because a war was now raging in the Far East. He also said "And the education wouldn't hurt you." In late July I finally agreed with him and went before the West New York Board of Education seeking a reinstatement. A month later my request was approved so in September 1950 I returned to Memorial High School and started my senior year for the second time.

A week later, just before my eighteenth birthday on the twenty-first of September, I learned that Karney died of wounds on September fourth while serving with the Eighth Cavalry Regiment in Korea.

On my eighteenth birthday, my father drove me to the Hudson County draft board in Jersey City so I could register but he didn't know then that I intended to beat the draft by enlisting. I liked airplanes a great deal so the Air Force was the perfect branch of the service for me to be in. During the ride home I told him and I remember him saying "I don't mind you enlisting in the Air Force but I think you should wait until after you graduate."

Karney's death upset me and made me angry. I wanted to strike back at the North Koreans so in November I paid a visit to the Air

Force recruiter on the second floor of the West New Post office. He said the war sparked an increase in Air Force and Navy enlistments because men joined to avoid being drafted into the Army. Both branches were not accepting applications for ninety days, or until early March, leaving only the Army, Marines and Coast Guard with openings. The Marines were out of the question and I wasn't a good swimmer so if I wanted to get into the military there was only one choice remaining, the Army.

In January 1951 I paid a visit to the Army recruiter who was pleased to see me because my enlistment would help him reach his February quota. He told me the 1948 Selective Service Act exempted all soldiers who serve thirty-three consecutive months on active duty from any reserve obligation.

He also said soldiers who enlisted in the Regular Army could choose an overseas assignment in a theater of their choice when they completed basic training. This applied only to the Regular Army so the men who were drafted or called to active duty from the National Guard or Reserves did not have that luxury and went where they were sent. These were good selling points and I almost signed up right then but I decided to wait and give the matter some additional thought. I told the Sergeant I was going home to discuss it with my father and would come back to talk with him.

My dad again expressed disappointment because I was contemplating leaving school before graduation and advised against it. I thought long and hard for a full week but the Army bug had bitten me just like it bit Karney so a week later I quit school for a second time and returned to the recruiting office to fill out the necessary documents. I enlisted for three years and was told to report to the Post Office at 9:00 am on February 19, 1951.

My father thought I wouldn't pass the entrance physical because a routine high school physical two years ago revealed I had a heart murmur that caused my dismissal from the track team. Early on the 19th, I took the number twenty-six bus on Sixty First Street and got off at the Post Office at Fifty Fifth Street and Bergenline Avenue arriving shortly before 9:00 am.

I joined other men who were waiting on the Post Office steps for

the Army bus that would drive them to the Armed Forces Induction Center at Broad and Kinney Streets in Newark for the entrance physical. It was 11:00 a.m. when the bus arrived at Kinney Street so a sergeant handed out lunch vouchers for use at a restaurant directly across Broad Street with orders to return to the center no later than 1:00 p.m.

I reported back on time and shortly thereafter my name was called and I was ushered into a room where I stripped to my underwear and an Army Doctor gave me a thorough half hour going over. My dad figured wrong because I outgrew the heart murmur and passed the physical. I filled out a few forms and took an identification photo before standing shoulder to shoulder with other men waiting to be sworn in.

A Captain entered the room and told us he was about to administer the Military Oath. He ordered us to raise our right hand, repeat after him and say, "I do" when he completed the oath. "But" he said, "Because you are all volunteers you have the option of leaving and going home anytime prior to saying "I do." The Captain looked around but no one left the room so he read the oath and when I said, "I do" I was in the Army now. I was given a green plastic United States Army ID card with serial number, RA 12337394.

The RA stood for Regular Army and the one indicated I was from the First Army area. A sergeant told us we would be driven back to West New York and given an overnight pass and we all should to report back to the Post Office at 9:00 am on the 20th. I called my dad, gave him the news and he said he would pick me up at the post office.

When my dad arrived he said "I'm happy you outgrew the murmur and got what you wanted but unhappy because you quit school to join the Army." My mother did not accept it as calm as my father. When I told her she began to cry so my father consoled her. She stopped when I told her I could avoid going to Korea by volunteering to serve in Europe with the Seventh Army after I finished basic training.

That evening I went to a sweet shop for an ice cream soda and played a pinball machine then stood outside for a spell talking to a

few friends before going early to spend some time with my parents and younger sister. The next morning my mother cried a lot but regained her composure long enough to give me a going away present, a leather travel case with toilet articles. Then I got into the Pontiac and drove my father and myself to the Post Office where the same Army bus was parked at the curb and the same twenty men were waiting and sitting on the steps.

A little after nine o'clock the recruiting sergeant came down from his second floor office and told us to board the bus. My dad walked me to the door and as he shook my hand, he pressed a five-dollar bill into it and said "Here's phone money, now you have no excuse not to call home." Then he gave me a hug and for the first time I saw tears in his eyes. When I returned home almost three years later he said worrying about me caused his ulcers.

It was back to the Kinney Street Induction Center then lunch again at the same restaurant across the street. A Lieutenant checked our names off a roster and then ordered us onto the buses again for a ride to Pennsylvania Station and the train to Fort Dix, New Jersey. All the men on the train were from the tri-state area on New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. The train pulled into Fort Dix late so the Army could only assign us to a barracks and get us to the mess hall for dinner. Saying, "march to the mess hall" would be incorrect because on day one most of us didn't know how to march.

A barracks sergeant welcomed us and said "Tomorrow morning after breakfast you will get a free haircut and be issued uniforms." I looked at my head in the mirror and wondered how I would look bald because the recruits in every Army film I saw had shaved heads. After breakfast we walked to the barbershop where I fully expected all my head hair would be removed.

As the men stood in line waiting to enter the barbershop, they rubbed their heads and said "Goodbye hair" because we thought all of our hair was about to be removed. I expected to see only shaved heads when I made it into the uniform building next door. My turn came and as I sat in the chair, the barber threw an olive drab sheet over me and I felt like a lamb waiting to be sheared. When he asked how I'd like my hair cut I thought he was joking so I responded sarcastically by saying "A trim will do just fine." I

found it hard to believe but that's just what he did. No shaved head or close cut just a fast five-minute trim and then he said, "You're finished."

In the clothing building I was measured and issued a complete set of Army uniforms and told to return to the barracks and remove our civilian clothes and put on the fatigues. I shoved my civilian clothes into the bottom of my Government Issue footlocker and now with the fatigues on, I felt and looked like a soldier.

That evening of my first full day in the Army I went to the service club wearing my fatigues with two other New Jersey men I met on the train. I took a strip of small photos in an instant photo booth and sent one home to my parents the next day. The sepia tone plus the poor quality of the lens and paper combined to produce a picture that was not a good likeness of me.

It was February 21, 1951 and the photos were my first in the Army. To ease their pain I wrote on the margin of the jacket "To Mom & Dad. Don't mind how I look, I'm really fine. Love, Al."

But I lied; I wasn't really fine because adjusting to Army life was very difficult. Sleeping with forty men who talked in their sleep, walked around in the middle of the night, snored or woke up screaming was terrible. Long lines waiting to shave, shower or eat didn't help. It didn't take long before I realized I might have made a mistake so I called my father and told him just that and said "I still have my civilian clothes so I'll put them on and take a bus home." "Don't do anything dumb" he said, "if you leave they'll catch you and put you in jail. Stay put, I'll come down to talk to you Saturday."

Saturday at noon I met my mother, father and an uncle at the visitor center and we went to the Post Exchange for lunch and words. My father said "You signed a contract with the United States and have to keep your end of the bargain. Things will get better as time passes and you'll adjust." My uncle told me not to worry and said, "I know a lot of important people in high places that might be able to get you out." My father wanted to be sure I wouldn't just take off for parts unknown so he said "Go get your civilian clothes later because when we leave this afternoon your clothes go with us."



*First Army Photo
Fort Dix, New Jersey
February 21, 1951*

After a few days of filling out forms, physicals and aptitude tests I found myself on a train speeding towards Camp Rucker, Alabama. Never for one minute did I think anyone my uncle knew could arrange my release from the Army. I realized that as I found myself heading south and looking through the train window at New Jersey as it passed by.

When I arrived at Camp Rucker I was assigned to Item Company of the 136th Infantry Regiment, a unit of the Forty Seventh Infantry Division, Minnesota's National Guard. The officers and non-commissioned officers that formed the Division's cadre were mostly World War Two veterans who joined the Guard to make extra money and now found themselves caught up in another war.

Alabama was covered by weeds, red sand and peanut farms and over populated with venomous snakes, the three most deadly being the Eastern Rattler, the Coral Snake and the infamous Water Moccasin. Mix in a large variety of biting insects that thrived in the warm weather and you have a combination that turned field trips into survival trips. I wasn't happy when I had to attend a venomous snake class and was issued a bite kit in a plastic box with a razor and a thick rubber band. The instructor demonstrated the correct way to use the razor to cut the bite area

and suck out the venom.

He demonstrated the way to cut an X at the bite using the razor then how to suck on the wound to get out some of the venom. If the bite was on an arm or leg he told us to first tie the rubber band between the bite and the heart to slow the blood flow then release it every five minutes.

If you managed to survive the snakes and bugs, you were confronted by the awesome Alabama sun and heat. How anyone could spend an entire day in the sun picking peanuts or cotton amazed me. As hot as the days were, so were the nights cool. So cool in fact many snakes developed the chills and sought warmth by crawling into sleeping bags or shoes right after they were removed and still warm. It was a wise soldier who slept with the sleeping bag zipper drawn tight up against his chin and each morning turned his shoes over before sliding in his feet. After one field trip, my right leg swelled up and became painful because tiny almost invisible insects called chiggers embedded themselves in the spores of the leg. I returned to camp that evening and called home telling my mother of the problem. She said, "Coat your leg with a clear nail polish to suffocate them." Before I reported on sick call, I bought a dozen bottles at the Post Exchange and coated the leg. After the bug's demise and the leg swelling went down, I used a large comb to perform the tedious task of removing the dried polish from my hair.

After six weeks of basic training the Regiment began issuing passes based on a demerit system. Companies were assessed one demerit for each reported case of venereal disease or AWOL, absent without leave. At the conclusion of each weeks training on Friday, the demerits were added up and the company with the fewest was given the most three-day passes. The company in second place got the most weekend passes and the remaining passes were divided up among the other ten companies in the Regiment.

The first week in April found Item Company in the lead. Jack Ebel was one of only five southerners in the company and did his best to derail Item Company's surge to the top. He had a problem adjusting to military life like I did back in Fort Dix and he decided to solve it by just taking off for his home in nearby South Carolina

without stopping for a pass. Men in the company were angry with Ebel because they were counting on getting a three-day or weekend pass after being restricted to the post for six weeks. They nicknamed him "Blackjack" after he went AWOL because his actions dropped the company into a first place tie. We were still awarded dozens of three day passes and I was in line to get one the following weekend. I made friends with two other New Jersey men, Bill Tidwell and Carl Decker, both from Newark, and we agreed to use our passes for a visit to nearby Troy.

Five days after Ebel went AWOL the Military Police escorted him back to the company in handcuffs. Ebel himself told me later that the MP's nabbed him sleeping in his back yard. First Sergeant Hansen was waiting at the orderly room door when the MP's drove up and delivered Jack. He had a very special punishment planned for Ebel so he quickly ordered the whole company to fall out into the area between the barracks to see it. I stood on the barracks steps and watched Hansen hand Ebel a folded newspaper. He told Jack "Dig a three by three by three foot hole and bury the paper. Don't hurt the dirt, pat it gently because we don't want to anger Alabama do we?" When Jack finished burying the paper and patting the dirt, Hansen asked him the date of the paper. Ebel didn't know and couldn't answer so Hansen told him "I forgot the date too. Dig up the paper and tell me." Old Sergeant Hansen was a World War Two vet and a wise old owl. He knew we would remember Ebel digging and sweating in the Alabama sun if we ever planned to go AWOL. Ebel received a Summary Court Martial that amounted to nothing more than a traffic court and a slap on the wrist. He was naturally found guilty but sentenced only to march one hour each evening for seven days with a full pack and rifle instead of enjoying free time. The men in the platoon punished him additionally by sentencing him to a month of silence.

A short time after the Ebel dig the platoon was treated to a GI shower. Private Wilson Pickett, a southern soldier from Georgia, disliked soap and water. His fear of showering, the Alabama heat and his sweat combined to make the barracks smell rotten. Nightly his body odor would float over our bunks like a ghost causing many of us to almost choke. Finally a committee approached Pickett and asked him to take a shower more often. He said he would but never did so they planned to snatch him one evening and bathe him. First they had to clear the plan with Art

Olsen the platoon Sergeant. He said he would not interfere and promised to disappear just before they put the plan into motion. That's all the men wanted to hear because now they had the green light to move forward with their plans.

The next night the men made their move after Sergeant Olsen left for Phoenix City as planned. Just after the lights went out they jumped Pickett, gagged him with a glove then tied his hands and dragged him to the showers in the rear of the barracks. I ran back to watch and cheered with other men as the committee scrubbed Pickett with big stiff bristle brushes using coarse brown bar soap and very hot water. Pickett moaned through the gag as his skin turned pink and some of it fell off in patches. Needless to say from that day forward Private Wilson Pickett smelled sweet like a Georgia Magnolia.

Tidwell, Decker and myself got the three-day passes and were very happy to be leaving the post after almost seven weeks confinement. We showed our passes to the MP's then walked to a hot dog stand just outside the main gate in Dothan. I had a hot dog and a root beer then we crossed the street to the Greyhound bus depot and bought tickets to Troy, Alabama.

It wasn't long after when I was walking around Troy that I noticed the city had little to offer in the way of sightseeing except statues of southern Generals on horseback. There was a General on every corner and when Carl mentioned it I said to him "You don't expect to find statues down here in the south to Lincoln, Grant or Sherman." It was approaching mid-afternoon and the sun was beginning to take its toll on us because we weren't accustomed to the ungodly heat. We saw a restaurant and went in to get a sandwich but mostly for something cold to drink. The waiter came to our table and when he saw that we were in uniform he said "The cook just went home sick and we just ran out of everything cold because of the heat." We felt the heat more inside than outside when the manager appeared and told us we would be better served at "The New York Grill" just down the street. They could tell we were Yankees so they extended fine southern hospitality by refusing to serve us. We took his advice, got up, left and walked down to the "Grill."

Down the street was the New York Grill, a copy of a real New York

grill undoubtedly owned by a transplanted New Yorker. We had no problem getting served there and stayed about two hours eating steak sandwiches and having a few cold Yankee Ballantine beers. We chatted with the waiter, left him a sizable tip and went next door to the Troy Trim Shop, the local barber. After a short wait I got to sit in a chair and the barber asked me how I would like my haircut. I laughed as I thought to myself "Fort Dix all over again." My reply was the same as then, "A trim will do just fine." When he heard my accent he asked where I was from. I said "New Jersey" and watched in the mirror as he turned pink. He was definitely not fond of northerners so I assumed another display of that fine southern hospitality was forthcoming. I decided it was not wise to let someone who dislikes Yankees to stand near me with a scissor or a razor in his hand. I took off the barber sheet, got up from the chair and quickly left the shop with Bill and Carl not far behind.

It appeared every one in Troy disliked northerners and colored people equally. The Civil War ended just eighty-six years ago and the residents of Troy haven't accepted the fact that they lost the war. We hurried back to the New York Grill where, over cool lemonade, we decided to cut our visit short and take the next bus back to the safety of Camp Rucker.

Panama City, Florida was on the Gulf coast about ninety miles south of Camp Rucker. There the Army maintained beach facilities for the use of soldiers stationed in Camp Rucker or other nearby Army installations. We paid five dollars a weekend and received round trip transportation via Army bus, all meals and shared accommodations for two nights with three other men in a cottage with twin beds. The Army supplied bath towels and bed sheets but not beach towels or bathing suits. An Army two and a half ton truck pulled into a crushed rock courtyard between the red brick cottages to serve our meals on stainless steel trays. Our only responsibilities were to take out the trash, make our beds and clean up before we left.

In 1951 only one dirt road ran behind the cottages and parallel to the beach. The area was sparsely populated so there wasn't much to do. There were only a few houses, motels or bars and fewer females around so all we could really do was spend time on the beach day or night. We stocked the small refrigerators we had in the cottages with beer and at night went to the water's edge to

build a bonfire. We toasted marshmallows while reminiscing about home and family and sang songs as we drank the cold bottles of beer. The singing, the beer, the white sand and blue water combined to make us forget we were far from home with the clouds of war hanging over us.

As pleasant as the Panama City area was, the towns around Camp Rucker were just the opposite. Dothan and Phoenix City were sin cities designed to separate a soldier from his money using prostitution, gambling and alcohol as bait. Both towns were rough and tumble with an unsavory reputation so they - plus the bad experiences we had in Troy - were enough to convince Tidwell, Decker and myself to always travel south to Florida.

I was sitting on my footlocker one Saturday afternoon spit shining a pair of my shoes when Sergeant Olsen came up to me and asked, "Are you Regular Army AI?" I replied yes and he told me "The company clerk just tacked up a notice on the bulletin board in front of the orderly room about RA's choosing an overseas assignment. The notice might interest you so go over and check it." I dropped everything and ran right to the notice. It said "Regular Army soldiers who complete basic training can exercise the option of choosing their overseas assignment." That's me, so I went in to see the company clerk and told him I wanted to be assigned to Seventh Army in Europe when I finished basic training. I asked to have my name put on the list and he said, "I'll add your name and if you're approved, you'll get ten days home." I asked when will I know and he replied, "It'll take a week." I couldn't wait until I got home to tell my parents I was going to Europe.

The next day was Sunday, always a quiet day so I planned to just stay close to the barracks and write letters home. I was laying on my bunk and heard yelling and the sound of bouncing dice coming from the far end of the barracks so I walked over to watch the action. A few soldiers were rolling the dice up against a footlocker and seemed to be having a good time so I stood watching for a few minutes before I decided to try my luck. As fast as I could say "Lady Luck" I was on the verge of bankruptcy. For some odd reason the dice hated me and each time I rolled them the numbers added up to losers two or twelve. I dropped out to think and regain my composure then began to side bet only, never touching

the dice and instantly my luck changed. In fifteen short minutes I went from near bankruptcy to solvency and when the game broke up I was the big winner of one hundred dollars. A nice stroke of luck because three days later the company clerk told me my assignment to Europe was approved. I had a ten-day leave coming and the winnings would help me buy a plane ticket to New Jersey.

I packed my bags, bought the ticket to Newark then called my father to arrange a ride. When I arrived home my family was naturally happy to see me for the first time since I left over four months ago. They were a lot happier when I told them I was on my way to the Seventh Army in Europe.

I was home in time to celebrate the July Fourth holiday and strutted around town proudly wearing my uniform and showing it off to everyone I met. It was a great feeling to renew old friendships and visit with relatives but the ten days passed by fast and I soon found myself getting ready for the return flight to Montgomery, Alabama. My parents weren't upset when it came time for me to leave because I was headed for Europe and not Korea so the leaving was easier for them. On the way to the bus, my father said he was saving to buy a house in North Bergen, a neighboring town so the next time I came home I might have a new room with new furniture.

When I returned to Item Company, Sergeant Olsen told me to report immediately to the orderly room. The Company Clerk said "Don't unpack just go to the overseas assignment building and report in." I did as he said and the barracks Corporal there checked my name off a list and told me "Go back to Item Company and turn in your field equipment then round up your belongings and get back here." I turned in my equipment and then reported back to the overseas building carrying everything else. I thought to myself I better unload a lot of junk because I'm not about to carry it all the way to Europe. The barracks sergeant assigned me a bunk and after I made up the bed he came back and handed me a copy of the Regimental furlough orders.

I started to read the multi-page orders and was happy I was granted additional time home but couldn't understand the orders initial paragraph. "The following listed individuals" it said and

named five hundred men, “are granted a seven-day furlough to originate and end in Cincinnati on the date of arrival at the Ohio Rail Terminus.” I asked myself “Why should I have to report back to Cincinnati when the Port of Embarkation for Europe is New York City?” I knocked on the door leading to the barracks sergeant room and he said “Enter.” I did and asked him the same question. He said as far as he knew the unlucky five hundred were assigned to FECOM, the Far East Command, Tokyo, Japan. I told him “The Army can’t do that to me because my enlistment agreement says I can choose an assignment after I complete basic training.” “That” he said, “You’ll have to take up with Major Iverson, the transportation officer.”

I stopped at the Major's office and his Corporal clerk arranged for me to meet the Major. When I met with him, I asked him about Cincinnati and FECOM then reminded him of the sacred pact that existed between me and the United States Army. He said, “I have a copy of the movement order. It says you have been reassigned to FECOM and will travel via military train to the Sixth Army Center at Fort Lawton, Seattle, Washington State.”

He continued by saying “The train will leave Camp Rucker within the week and lay over in Cincinnati allowing you to go home. You must report back to the train in seven days and continue on to Seattle.”

I protested then, reminded the Major again of the agreement I had with the Army. He told me all enlistment agreements were declared void by the Department of Defense because rotation and high casualties in Korea caused a serious manpower shortage in the Far East. I asked him “Does that mean I can declare my enlistment void, pack up and go home, Sir?” I could see that statement didn’t sit well with the Major because he said “If you do, you’ll be rolling the dice and gambling with prison or you might want to reshuffle the deck for a better deal by writing a letter of protest to your congressman.” I didn’t even know who my congressman was and even if I did, I would most likely be in a Korean foxhole before I received a reply.

To make matters even worse, I was almost broke having spent almost all of my pay when I was home. I called my father and told him what was happening and asked him to wire plane ticket

money to the Western Union office in the Cincinnati train station. A couple of days later I was again on a train but this time traveling north to Ohio. It was safe to say that ninety five percent of the men training with the Forty Seventh were from the northeast.

When the train came to a stop in Cincinnati, a khaki flood burst from the train as five hundred men headed to their homes all over the northeast. I wondered how many would not return and where would they hide. I'd take my chances in Korea rather than bring dishonor to my family or myself.

I left the train and had to search for the Western Union office. When I found it I saw an Eastern Airlines agency right next door making it easy for me to purchase a ticket after claiming the money wire. I bought a round trip ticket, Kenton County Airport to Newark, New Jersey because Cincinnati's airport is actually across the Ohio River in Kentucky.

My flight home was fast and smooth and my parents were pleased to see me again but not happy about me heading to the Far East. I talked to my father and asked him "Can I avoid reporting to the train and could I declare my enlistment void because the Army reneged on its promise?" He gave me a short but disappointing answer when he said "No to both questions." He explained by saying "The Army can make changes when they choose to but you can't. If you don't report to the train they can charge you with desertion and put you in prison." I joked and said, "Maybe I should practice bowing."

During the week, I attended a movie in Hoboken with friends and at the candy stand in the theater I met a girl I dated a few times two years ago. She acted like she was very happy to see me so I sat down with her in the lobby and we started talking, eventually missing much of the movie. I was wearing civilian clothes so she was surprised to hear I was in the Army and going overseas. We talked another few minutes then she said she was going back to join her friend and watch the movie. Before leaving she gave me her phone number and asked me to call then said she recently moved to a Park Avenue apartment four blocks from where I lived. We first met at an October 1949 football game in West New York between our high schools, my Memorial of West New York and her A.J. Demarest of Hoboken. I was listening to Mel Allens

description of a Yankee-Brooklyn Dodgers World Series game on a transistor radio when Eleanor asked me what station I had tuned in. I told her and one word led to another and a friendship was born.

I called and she invited me for dinner. I gladly accepted and went to her apartment the night before I was leaving with a small floral bouquet. I really had other things on my mind besides dinner but her mother stayed at home so those plans never had a chance to materialize. Her mother stayed in the next room most of the evening before going to bed so Eleanor and I could only sit and talk the night away. Shortly before sunrise, she made me a cup of coffee and after I drank it, I kissed her good bye and left for home.

Dawn was just breaking as I was walking up the flight of stairs to my apartment. I opened the door and saw my father standing there and all he said was "Hi" so I knew he was angry that I stayed out all night. He thought, and rightly so, that I should have spent some time with my family but time passes so fast and before I knew it the night was gone. I only had time for a fast shower and to eat a small breakfast before I had to take two buses to the airport. I hugged and kissed my parents and sister then apologized to them before I ran down the steps and across Sixtieth Street to the bus stop.

The flight to Kentucky was the same as the flight up, fast and smooth. I took a taxi from the airport to Cincinnati and kept an eye on the meter the whole trip because my funds were low and I didn't want to cheat the driver. When he stopped at the curb in front of the station, I saw that I had enough for the fare and not the tip. I was embarrassed and apologized to the driver so he said, "I'm a World War Two vet and I know where you're going. The ride is on me." "No thank you" I said, "I couldn't accept." Then I reached through the open window and dropped my last ten-dollar bill onto the seat and ran into the station. Inside I put down my bags and looked up at the schedule hanging from the ceiling. I saw that my train was on a sidetrack and was listed as "Military, Washington State. Non-scheduled departure."

I reached the platform and was stopped by two Military Policemen who checked my identification and my name on the train roster. They told me to walk down and check in with the officer in charge

who was also on his way to the Far East and a passenger on the train. He was a Captain and assigned me to a compartment then said, "It's noontime and they just started serving lunch. Go get something to eat." I boarded the train and found my compartment then dropped my bags and went to the dining car. Laying on my bunk I had found a pamphlet saying a meal schedule would be established by cars to avoid crowding. When I walked into the car I looked around and saw only ten men at the tables and all dressed in civilian clothes. I thought to myself "This is crowded?" I asked a waiter who was standing nearby in the doorway "Am I in the right car on the Military Train?" "Yes" he replied so I knew right then that many men decided not to report back and I asked myself "Where can they hide?" Their decision not to return proved to be a Godsend to those of us who did because the dining car was roomier and the service faster so the food stayed warm. I sat next to a window to take advantage of the room and when I finished eating, went out on the platform and asked the Captain how many men had returned so far. He said "Half, but I don't think the rest will make it back before we leave at 1700 hours."

The train pulled out of the station a few minutes after five. The Captain was correct when he assumed that five hundred men would not be back on the train. There was a rush of reporting between three and five in the afternoon and I estimated that an additional one hundred to one hundred twenty five men reported back so almost twenty five percent of the men who left Alabama a week ago were now heading into the hills. In the military a soldier often makes new friends but the Army always managed to find a way to separate them. Bill Tidwell was sent to Alaska, the lucky dog, but I met Carl Decker in the dining car and we were happy to see one another.

The train traveled northwest through Indiana, Illinois and Minnesota then west through North Dakota, Montana and Idaho all the time staying just south of the Canadian border. Seeing the United States through a train window was a great experience. Frequently during the three-day plus trip the train made stops in small towns to take on supplies and when it did, the word of its arrival spread rapidly. As we stretched our legs residents hurried to the train station bringing flowers, newspapers, snacks, soft drinks and all sorts of home baked goodies. They knew it was a troop train and where the men were headed so I guess it

saddened many to see young men going off to war again so soon after the end of World War Two.

One stop in a small Minnesota town whose name I can't remember comes to mind. Decker and I were walking back and forth on the platform trying to stretch our tightened leg muscles when a young and pretty blue-eyed girl approached me. She was blond like most girls in Minnesota, the land of the Vikings. I took basic training with the Forty Seventh Infantry Division, Minnesota's National Guard and they used a Viking helmet as a shoulder insignia. She grabbed my arm then pressed a large brown bag into my hand. Later when I opened it on the train I found a sandwich, an apple, a soda, two home baked cookies and a magazine. Then with tears running down her face, she gave me a hug and kissed me on the cheek. She never said one word to me, just turned and ran off but such a kind gesture like that brought tears to my eyes as I watched her disappear down the platform. I think the loss of a loved one during World War Two caused her tears. I will remember that girl and the tears running down her face as long as I live.

The train ride wasn't just tears and sadness. Decker, a few other men and myself had some laughs and played a lot of cards. I can't recall if I won or lost but it didn't matter because we had to do something to pass the time. One evening a southern soldier played Ozark Mountain tunes on his guitar but Decker and I couldn't sing along because we didn't know the words.

The train pulled directly into Fort Lawton. We stepped right on to the platform and were formed into forty-man platoons. Then after a roster check, we marched about a quarter mile to a large field where we boarded buses for a ride to old World War One barracks that surrounded a football sized field. The barracks were two stories high, constructed of wood with most of the white paint peeling off.

A Corporal addressed us and told us "At 0900 daily you will report below the tower in the center of the field. You'll move to the next field and board buses for the processing center when your division is called." The next morning after breakfast, Decker and I waited and listened beneath the tower as a Sergeant with a bullhorn called out the divisions. After about five minutes of calling, the

bullhorn Sergeant said “If your division wasn’t called report back to the barracks” but before Decker and I could start back, a Corporal grabbed us and assigned us to a detail picking up cigarette butts. While others enjoyed the afternoon off, Decker and I were picking up butts. The next morning we reported under the tower and again the Forty Seventh Division wasn’t called and again the same Corporal nabbed us for the same cigarette butt detail. On day three again our division wasn’t called but we managed to evade the Corporal by hiding behind a row of portable latrines.

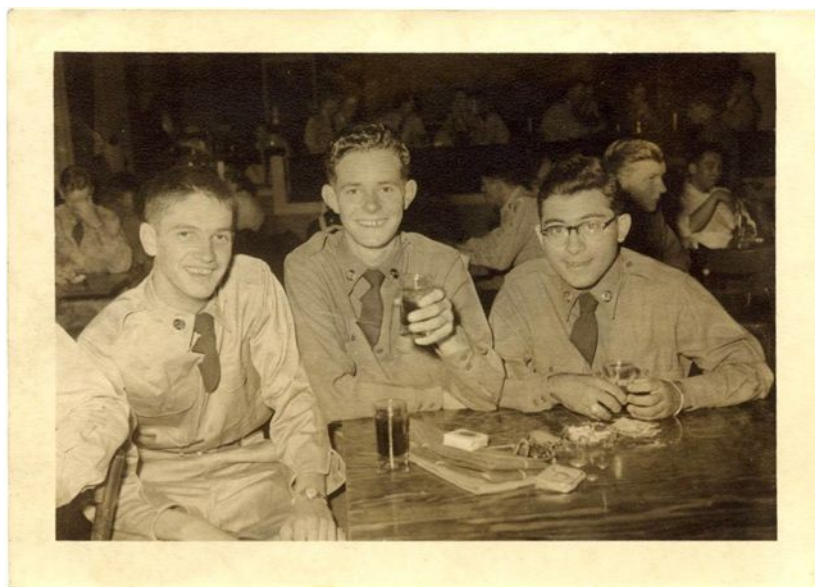
We couldn’t start overseas processing until our records arrived from Alabama so boredom was beginning to set in. The only excitement Decker and I enjoyed was attempting to avoid the cigarette Corporal. Day four was the big day. Carl and I were hiding from the Corporal by crouching low in the shadows behind one of the tower supports when we heard the bullhorn Sergeant call out “Alabama, Forty Seventh Infantry Division.” It was our time to go. We moved over into the next field onto buses again and left for the processing center.

At the processing center soldiers were shuttled between barracks like cattle in a Chicago stockyard but the system was coordinated and ran quite smoothly. Initially on the first day, a Friday, we had our Alabama records, National Life Insurance Policy and next of kin verified, then came a uniform and dog tag check. Monday we were scheduled to undergo a medical exam and receive immunization and booster shots then be assigned to a boat with a movement number. The center shut down for the weekend so we were all issued weekend passes. Carl, two other New Jersey men - Alfred Lewis and William Odum, both from Newark - and myself decided to go into Seattle. We knew nothing about the city so when we got off the bus we hailed a taxi and asked the driver to take us to a place where we could enjoy ourselves.

The driver took one look at us and after seeing how young we were, he said, “Hop in. I’ll take you guys to the Juke Box Dance Hall.” On the way he told us they didn’t serve liquor, just snacks, sandwiches, hot dogs, floats and soft drinks. “No drunks, no problems, but plenty of pretty girls” he said. When he let us out at the curb we couldn’t find the place so he stuck his head out the open window and said, “Right there” pointing to an old rundown building. Then we saw a sign hanging over the entrance. “Girls,

Girls, Girls” it said. “25 cents a dance.” We walked in, paid the one-dollar admission then walked up a flight of stairs to the ballroom. Inside, the place was better looking than it was on the outside; well decorated with an open kitchen, a good dance band and the driver was right when he said “Plenty of pretty girls.” I realized why they didn’t serve liquor when I saw that most of the customers were soldiers under the state's legal drinking age.

We sat at long tables separated from the girls by an expensive looking dark stained and varnished mahogany railing. Dance tickets were priced at twenty-five cents each but we got two as a bonus if we bought five dollars worth at one time. I wasn’t Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly but I managed to enjoy myself half dancing and half walking around the floor holding a few of the pretty dance girls.



*L to R: Al Lewis, Bill Odum and Al Trotola
Juke Box Dance Hall
Seattle, Washington August 1951*

I saw a pretty young girl about my age standing on the opposite side of the railing so I walked over and asked if I could buy her a drink and then dance with her. “Of course” she said so I bought two sodas and we walked back to the table and talked a few minutes with Al and Bill. Then I gave her a ticket and we went out onto the dance floor. I gave her a second ticket and we had another dance but this time she was talkative and said she was from Jersey City, New Jersey. I told her “It’s a small world. I was born there but now I live in West New York.” Then I asked, “What

are you doing here?" "I came to Seattle to marry my boyfriend who is stationed at the Fort." She started to cry as she continued, "We split up a month ago and I found myself alone and stranded. My father passed on about a year ago and my mother is alone and can't afford to help me financially so I have to work here to earn money for a plane ticket home." Tears began to roll down her cheeks so I felt sorry for her and took twenty tickets from my shirt pocket and handed them to her. I didn't know if she was telling the truth or putting on an act but I do know it made me feel good to help her. At 2:00 a.m., when the dance hall closed, our financial situation dictated we return to Fort Lawton because we didn't have enough money left between us to pay for a nights lodging. We had just enough for bus tickets so we rode the bus back to Lawton.

The next day was Sunday and a quiet day. Fort Lawton was like the quiet before the storm, asleep but ready to rumble early Monday morning. I knew we had a full day ahead of us because one of the Sergeants said in two days we'd be on our way.

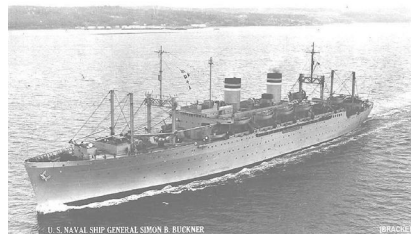
Monday was medical day for four hundred Alabama men who had to undergo physical examinations. Any soldier who failed one would remain stateside until he was medically fit. We lined up, four men side by side and walked into a large building. Once inside we stripped down to our shorts and shoes and doctors asked us a few medical questions then gave us a fast once over, an assembly line exam. After the doctor signed our papers, we dressed except for our shirt and walked into another room where four nurses were waiting to stick up to six needles into us. It wasn't unusual to see men faint but the long needles didn't faze me, I took them in stride. The morning passed rapidly and it wasn't long before we were dismissed for lunch and told to report back to the barracks at 1400 hours. When we did, the barracks Sergeant was waiting with travel facts. He said we were off duty the rest of the day to dump our junk and pack our bags. He told us, "Tomorrow you will fall out at 0900 hours sharp in front of the barracks ready to sail. All Alabama men have been assigned to the USNS General Simon B. Buckner."

At 0900 sharp I was downstairs standing in formation. I looked to my right then to my left and saw almost three hundred fifty men standing in ranks with me. Carl Decker was standing directly in

front of me so I tapped him on his shoulder, laughed and said, “Finally the Alabama boys are on the move. I wonder what will become of us?” Without turning around he said, “Think positive.” A few minutes’ later a dozen olive drab buses pulled up and we started to board.

A half hour later as I was getting off the bus, a Lieutenant stopped me to write a number on my bag with white chalk and as fate would have it he wrote 3321. I’ll never forget it because it’s easy for me to remember, it was the first four digits of my Army serial number reversed.

I stood on the pier as I waited to board and looked up at the big gray troopship, APA 123, christened in 1945 and originally named the Admiral E. W. Eberle, for a former Chief of Naval Operations. She was transferred to the Army in 1946 and renamed the General Simon Bolivar Buckner in honor of the General who was killed on Okinawa in 1945. She could carry four thousand four hundred troops. In 1950 she was again transferred, this time to the U.S. Navy and eventually dismantled in 1999. I thought to myself as I looked up at her “I wonder how many times the Buckner sailed the Pacific and what happened to the men she carried.”



*USNS General Simon Bolivar Buckner
AP 123*

A boarding officer stopped by and told us there was a delay on deck so it would be sometime before we started to board. (Later, after boarding, a sailor told me a soldier passed out and the delay was caused by Navy medics who were administering to him.) The officer said we should take advantage of the delay to visit one of the two red Salvation Army trucks that were parked at the end of the pier to get a sandwich, coffee and a doughnut. The Sergeant in charge of our group was sending men over to the trucks ten at a time and Carl and I got to go with the second ten. I was enjoying the sandwich and coffee when the boarding line started to move

again and a Lieutenant called out “ 3321. Trotola, A.” I yelled “Yes, Sir” and then stepped forward. He checked the number on my duffel bag then found my name on his roster and I started up the side steps not happy about my feet leaving the U.S.A.

A sailor on deck took ten of us at a time deep down into the bowels of the Buckner to huge holds with racks four high, not exactly first class accommodations. I dropped my bag quickly on a bottom bunk to lay claim to it because I didn't want to roll out of a top bunk in the middle of the night if the ship encountered rough weather. Then I sat there for a time so no one could move my bag and take the bunk. A large latrine, "head" in Navy talk, was next to our hold and on the other side there was a big recreation room.

I started talking with a few of the men. We were all from the north and trained with the Forty Seventh Division in Alabama so we had a lot in common and a lot we could talk about. After a time I felt my bunk was safe so I got up and moved next door to the recreation room. There was a pool table off to one side but two soldiers dragged and pushed it into the center of the room and converted it into a dice table. The sound of the bouncing dice drew men to the hold like bears to honey and in a matter of minutes there were ten men crowded around the table. Thousands of dollars would change hands and the yelling and swearing never stopped and neither did the game. It went on non-stop Seattle to Yokohama, naturally not with the same players because they would drop in and out. When word of the big game spread, soldiers and sailors from all over the ship crowded into the recreation room. Not all came to play, some squeezed into the room just to watch so they could say they were at the big game on the Buckner.

About an hour after we boarded, I felt the ship vibrate when her two turbine-electric engines began to turn. With a top speed of twenty knots it would take the Buckner almost eleven days to reach Yokohama. A few of us made our way up to the weather deck to get one last look at the U.S.A. when we felt the Buckner being pushed away from the pier by the tug boats.

Carl and I headed for the stern to get a better view. When I looked back and down I saw a one star Brigadier General standing at attention at the end of the pier. He was saluting the Buckner as

tugs slowly pushed her out into the channel and it would be hours before we cleared Puget Sound and reached the Pacific Ocean.

We were occupied during the trip suffering through classes and taking physical training on deck and spent a lot of time on details picking up trash dropped mostly by the Army. The ship's store sold cigarettes for eighty cents a carton and at that price, there were plenty of butts to pick up.

The Navy held showings of Department of Defense films about Japan and Korea and nightly the ships Special Service would show one of the most recent films to come out of Hollywood.

The Navy made the trip as pleasant as possible but they couldn't do much to help my stomach. The ups and downs and sideways motion of the ship played havoc on my insides causing me to spend quite some time at the railing on the weather deck. Decker and I more than once joined in leaning over the railing to deposit breakfast into the Pacific. The most water time I had prior to this trip was a Sunday sail up the Hudson River with my family on the Day Line Cruise boat to Bear Mountain, Indian Point or West Point.

When the ship crossed the International Dateline, the Navy trapped about a dozen soldiers and tied them to chairs on the deck then they covered their heads with shaving cream and shaved them bald. It was an old Navy custom of initiating soldiers into the realm of Davey Jones Locker after they crossed the Dateline for the first time. Every soldier on board received an eight by ten colored document proving that they crossed the Dateline so they wouldn't have their heads shaved if they made the return trip by boat.

Twelve days after the twin propellers on the Buckner first turned over in Puget Sound, they came to a stop alongside a pier in Yokohama, Japan. When my turn came to disembark, I almost ran down the gangplank because I was so happy to see dry land. The instant my feet made contact with stable soil I lost that sinking feeling that was the cause of my misery the past week and my stomach shifted into a recovery mode. I got aboard an Army bus for the ride to Camp Drake in Tokyo for assignment somewhere in FEACOM. The view through the bus window of the Japanese

countryside, Tokyo Bay and Mount Fuji was truly outstanding. We did no processing at all the first day, just ate supper, settled in our bunks and talked. Decker and I were only two bunks away from each other so he came over to me and said, "Our luck seems to be holding up, we're still together." That was all about to change....

After breakfast the next morning, I was called to the orderly room. The company clerk told me I was one of only one hundred soldiers selected to attend a specialists school on Eta Jima Island near Hiroshima in southern Japan. He went on to say the orders did not specify the type of school, only that I would travel via military rail transportation, Cincinnati déjà vu. When I returned to the barracks and told Carl, he said his orders assigned him to a replacement company in Pusan, Korea. We knew the odds of us remaining together all the way through were slim but we were still disappointed when we learned the party was over.

The next morning Carl and I parted. We both got on the same truck for the same railhead in Camp Drake but there the similarity would end. His train was headed for Sasebo - mine to Eta Jima Island. We both jumped out when the truck stopped, shook hands and went our separate ways never to cross paths again.

It wasn't long until I was headed south over old and creaky narrow gauge tracks. When the train got to a curve I thought it would just fall off the tracks and down the embankment into a rice paddy. During World War Two, the school served as the Imperial Japanese Naval Academy. In early 1946 the island and the school was occupied by the American Military.

In early 1946 hard times fell on the Academy. Neglect was beginning to take its toll but the Army stepped in and rescued the Academy by turning the large white marble buildings into classrooms. From then on it would be known as the Eta Jima Specialists School offering instruction in explosives, supply, cooking and baking, engineering, heavy equipment, radar, radio and record keeping to military personnel.

I was assigned to the radio school where I would receive instruction in the operation and repair of large back radios and wireless and wired field phones in addition to learning the

International Morse Code. The morning of our second day on the island was taken up by history classes telling us about the Academy. After lunch we were excused the remainder of the day to explore the island on our own.



*Eta Jima Specialists School
September 1951*

On day three we started the serious business of learning, and began by attending classes on small wireless field radios commonly known as the Walkie-Talkie. The instruction dealt with ways they malfunctioned and how to make emergency field repairs if they didn't perform. The instructor then went into the wired EE-8 field phones and finally he touched on the larger radios. He said today was a general outline but tomorrow he would begin instruction in Morse code and thought that would be a little more difficult.

"A little more difficult" was an understatement because the Morse code was my undoing. Six hours each day I sat on a hard chair at a long wooden table listening to the constant beeping of the code through a pair of tight fitting earphones. Day after day it was the same until I almost reached the breaking point. I was at wits end. I couldn't take much more but didn't know what to do until finally the decision was made for me. I removed the earphones for a short time to rub my ears but I continued to hear the beeps and when my eyes began blinking rapidly I became frightened. I brought this to the instructor's attention and he immediately dismissed me from the class and suggested I seek medical attention.

I went to the orderly room and told the company clerk what happened so he called the dispensary and received permission for

me to check in. At the Island Naval Hospital, I told a doctor what was happening and after a lengthy eye and ear examination he said he could find nothing physically wrong. He suggested I try another school and he said giving me a letter requesting a transfer for medical reasons might be of help. The letter said in part "No abnormalities were found so there could be no treatment but this hospital strongly suggests Private Trotola be transferred as soon as possible to another school because of an undiagnosed medical condition.

The next morning I returned to the classroom to tell my instructor the doctors at the island hospital could find nothing physically wrong with me. I also told him they gave me a letter addressed to Major Davies, the Dean of Students, suggesting I be transferred on medical grounds. He said, "Return to the dormitory and wait. I'll get you an appointment to see Davies." I had a short wait because that afternoon he called the orderly room and told the clerk to tell me an appointment was set up for 1000 hours tomorrow.

At 1000 sharp the next morning I walked into the Majors office and told his clerk who I was. He led me into an inner office where I sat in front of the Major and told him of my condition; then after handing him the letter, I asked to be transferred to the cooks and bakers school. After reading the letter, he said, "Give me a few days to work on it. Most classes have started and are at capacity so the chances of a transfer now are slim. Give me a day or two to make a few calls then come back."

I went back two days later and he told me "I have bad news. There are no openings anywhere on the island and regulations dictate that I notify the Island Commander you were dismissed from radio school so the Army will reassign you." After a short pause he said "And most likely to Korea."

In the Army a MOS, Military Occupational Specialty, is the military system used to identify a job. My MOS was 1745; light weapons infantry meaning my reassignment in Korea would be to a rifle company. I hoped to change my number by getting into cooking school because cooks enjoyed a longer life expectancy than infantrymen. That number would remain with me my entire Army career and now - over fifty years later - I am proud to have had

MOS 1745.

After two boring days of sitting around and writing letters home, the company clerk stopped by and told me he had orders for me in the orderly room. I followed him back and he gave me the orders assigning me to the Fifteenth Replacement Company in Pusan, Korea. I left Eta Jima the next morning aboard the island ferry to the mainland with two other soldiers who left radar school and like me, were bound for Korea. On the mainland we were met by a sailor driving a one-ton oversized gray Navy jeep who took us to the train station. There I endured a ride no different than any other passenger on the Japanese railway, on a straight back hard uncomfortable seat looking through a small window that refused to open. At the Sasebo rail station, a truck was waiting to take us to Sasebo, the largest American Naval Base in southern Japan and a major port of operations for the United Nations.

KOREA

THE JAMESTOWN LINE

SEPTEMBER 1951 - DECEMBER 1951

At the Sasebo Naval Base I saw more than twenty ships at anchor or alongside piers, everything from the smallest Higgins boats to the largest aircraft carrier. I said to myself "With power like this, what possessed the North Koreans and Chinese to confront us?" We stayed in Sasebo overnight then boarded a miniature troop carrier for the short trip through the Korea Straits to Pusan.

It was September 22, 1951, one day after my nineteenth birthday when I arrived in Pusan. I walked off the boat and saw a dozen Army trucks parked in a line on the pier. Standing at the bottom of the gangplank was a Master Sergeant, also a passenger on the boat, who was checking names off the boat's roster. I showed him my orders and he pointed to two trucks then said, "Get into one of those trucks. They're both going to the First Cavalry." For the first time I heard the division I was being assigned to.

Again I climbed up into the back of an Army truck and because I was the first to get in and the first to sit I was able to choose one of the best seats on the right and nearest the open back. The soldier who climbed up next sat directly across from me and introduced himself so we started to talk. His name was Oakley G. Isaacs, a Washington, D.C. Liquor store owner who was drafted into the Army in February 1951, the same month that I enlisted.

Now Isaacs and I were on the same truck riding off into the unknown. I didn't know then that we were destined to be good friends and share some unforgettable times.

As we passed through the city we endured the smell of raw sewage running at the curb and suffered abuse to our bottoms as the truck bounced on the unpaved washboard streets. I looked out from the truck and saw the city passing by and noticed the damage done to it by the Perimeter fighting a year earlier. The trucks crawled through the overcrowded city because the narrow streets were packed with cars, carts, bicycles and motorcycles. Our trucks came to a stop just short of the northern city limits when we pulled into a compound. A burly red headed Sergeant jumped down and yelled out "Everybody down. This is home." I dropped my bag onto the ground then jumped down and saw that I was in a compound surrounded by a ten-foot high chain link fence topped with razor wire. Inside the compound near the fence there were tall flood light towers making it look more like a prisoner of

war camp than an Army installation.

A huge wood sign with black lettering on a yellow background hung over the front gate and proclaimed, "Welcome to the First Cavalry Division, First in Manila, First in Tokyo and First in Pyongyang."

Not long after we left the trucks, I was standing in formation waiting to march to the mess hall when I saw a few Koreans standing outside the fence and leaning against it. They were holding boxes and bags so I asked a Corporal who was stationed with the Fifteenth Replacement Company what they were doing there. He told me "They're selling jewelry, leather sandals, fruit and oral sex. Each will set you back six thousand Korean Won, one American dollar." Then with a wide grin on his face he said, "I advise you only buy jewelry or sandals. The Koreans fertilize with human waste so eating the fruit could be risky and having oral sex through the fence could be dangerous." He waited a short time for me to ask "Why dangerous?" and when I did he laughed and said "Because, when you're almost there the girl will ask for double what you originally agreed upon. If you don't pay her, she'll bite off more than she can chew." I laughed but I didn't believe that for one minute. To be on the safe side, I bought a piece of jewelry from a little girl, a ring made from a fifty-caliber casing engraved Korea 1951.

After lunch in the mess hall, we marched to a Quonset hut that had rows of wood benches split by an isle that ran down the center of the hut. Facing the benches was a six-foot wooden box that served as a stage and behind it hanging on the wall was a large map of Korea and Japan.

About seventy-five men managed to crowd into the hut talking and smoking when a Captain entered through a side door and a sergeant called us to attention. The Captain hopped onto the box and said "At ease. Smoke if you like. I'm Captain Jenkins of the Fifteenth Replacement Company and I'd like to welcome you to the First Cavalry Division." He continued on by saying that the division was sometimes called the First Team and had a rich and proud tradition dating back to Custer and the Little Big Horn. He used a pointer to indicate on the map where the Division was engaged in combat operations and said, "At this very minute, the

Division is advancing against the Chinese Fifteenth Army just north of the Thirty-eight Parallel. Secrecy prevents me from telling you exactly where they are located. Before you leave here you will be issued new winter gear replacing what you lost in transit or traded for sex.” The Captains last words got a laugh from us but didn’t sit well with the next speaker, Captain Daniela, a Catholic Chaplain.

Chaplain Daniela stepped up onto the box and told us the doors to the chapel never closed and he would make himself available to any soldier of any faith at any time for spiritual guidance. Then he reminded all Catholics that Communion could be had at any time. In closing he said that Captain Jenkins asked him to tell us we were dismissed for the remainder of the day.

Isaacs and I used the off time to get some exercise by walking around the compound talking to anyone who would talk. Most of the men were more than willing to do so even though few if any knew one another. We were happy to strike up a conversation with anyone about anything because we knew we would soon find ourselves in a dangerous position so talking helped keep our minds off what could happen. I stopped soldiers near the fence to ask them where they lived in the states and did they have a wife, children or a girlfriend. Everyone was friendly because there seemed to be camaraderie between the men even though we were for the most part total strangers. Isaacs and I even held a lengthy conversation with a few of the Koreans who were standing outside the fence that could speak English.

That first evening, after dark, the Captain tried to take the edge off by showing “Red River” a 1948 western starring John Wayne, Walter Brennan and Montgomery Clift. The men of the Fifteenth set up benches in an open area for us to sit on and as I watched the movie, my mind wandered back to the drive-in movie in Secaucus, New Jersey that I went to in the forties.

Day two was taken up by medical, eye and dental examinations. I welcomed the examinations because medical attention was not close at hand where I was going. Doctors did not make house calls.

After breakfast on our third day, we marched to supply for a

clothing and equipment issue. We turned in all our clothing and were issued a new wool olive drab uniform shirt and pants that doubled as combat outerwear along with a pair of long johns, a heavy wool horse blanket overcoat, a field jacket, wool sweater and wool gloves, a pile cap, socks and a pair of winter half leather and half rubber shoe packs. Then came the field gear, a cartridge belt and a pair of suspenders to hold it up, entrenching tool, a canteen and cup, a bayonet and scabbard and then last but not least two very important items, a first aid kit and a rifle. Cut into the metal on the top rear of the rifle where the metal meets the stock, were the following words I'll never forget because I read them so many times, "U.S. RIFLE CAL .30 M-1."

I dropped off the equipment on my bunk then went to eat in the mess hall. After lunch we squeezed into the same Quonset hut with the big map where we heard the welcome speech. This time a Korean soldier gave us a talk about Korea, the people and their customs. When his short class ended he told us to go outside then return in fifteen minutes to hear a few parting words from Captain Jenkins. Outside, Isaacs and I had a smoke and talked about the weather turning cool then we discussed the possibility of moving up soon because of the Koreans "parting words" phrase.

We went back inside and in a few minutes Captain Jenkins made an appearance. He stepped onto the box, looked us over then said "Tomorrow morning, you will be moving up to join your regiments. The Eighth Cavalry is in reserve so troopers assigned to the Eighth will get a break. Breakfast tomorrow is at 0500, fall out, saddled up and ready to roll at 0700. Trucks will take you to the train and there you'll be issued a C-ration meal and one bandolier of rifle ammunition but do not load your weapon. Communist sympathizers attacked the train twice and are known to be still operating in the area your train will be traveling through. The defense of the train is the sole responsibility of the Republic of Korea (ROK) troops who operate and ride it so make no offer to assist unless they request it. You may load your rifles only when and if you are asked to help defend the train. You all have been preparing for this time for a long time. I'm not worried, you guys will perform well. You're all excused for the remainder of the day and I'll see you off tomorrow at 0700 hours. God speed and keep you safe."

There were a couple of hours until supper so Isaacs and I took another walk along the compounds fence. I looked at some of the items the Koreans were selling and Isaacs looked at his watch then said, "Time to chow down" so we walked to the mess hall. We were first in line and walked right in.

I left the counter after the cooks filled my tray and took a seat next to Isaacs. The red headed Sergeant sat down next to me. As we were eating, a soldier sitting across from me said today was his twentieth birthday so I said I celebrated a birthday a few days ago. "How old?" he asked and I told him nineteen. The Sergeant pushed a wood match into a roll and slid it in front of me then said, "Happy birthday nineteen, praying for twenty." I responded by saying "Not praying, I will." He said "I took hits in my left arm and leg and spent a month in a Tokyo hospital recovering. Now I'm going back to the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's outfit." Then he rolled up his sleeve revealing a nasty looking foot long scar on his forearm that prevented much of his red hair from growing, probably never to return. I asked why they were sending him back and he told us "Because my wounds weren't life threatening the Army listed me as Wounded In Action by flying missile, returned to Military Control, a round about way of saying you're going back into the line and here I am." I asked him to describe combat and was he scared. He said, "I was scared all the time and I think guys that tell you differently are lying or crazy. You never adjust to it and the closer you get to rotation, the rougher it gets. I have twenty points but I need sixteen more to rotate out of this hell hole so that means another four more months on the line."

This engine is identical to the one that pulled the Pusan Express.



It is #505 built by the Japanese before 1945 and still operating in North Korea.

Then I asked the redhead about the train. “I heard two men talking earlier about a train they called the Pusan Express. Is that the train Captain Jenkins was talking about?” The redhead said, “Yes, it’s a train that you ride up to the line. It’s operated by the South Korean Army but stocked by the U.S. Army so you’ll enjoy the finest creature comforts that money can buy, clean Johns, soft reclining seats, big scenic view windows and a dining car.” He smiled with a wide grin and finished by saying “You’re going to travel in style.” I thought his story was science fiction and hard to believe.

I told Isaacs after supper I was going for a stroll then to the day room to write home. I was moving up close to the line tomorrow morning so I thought I had better get a letter off to my parents. The mess hall, day room and chapel were lined up left to right directly across from my hut. I left the mess hall and turned right towards the fence then followed it around causing me to pass the chapel. As I passed the chapel I saw the open doors, looked in to see the altar bathed in a yellow glow from the candles. I wasn’t a very religious person but I thought now might be a good time to have a chat with God. I went in, kneeled and took a seat in the rear of the chapel in the next to the last pew. I began by asking God to watch over and protect me so nothing could happen to me and my family would be spared untold grief.

Before God and I could continue with our talk, I heard someone sit down behind me and when I turned I saw Chaplain Daniela. He asked, "Can I be of any assistance to you?" I said "No, I just came in to have a talk with God because I was worried." He got up, walked around then sat next to me and put his arm around my shoulder. He said, "God always protects my boys." I thanked him and walked out thinking it's amazing how just a few words from the Chaplain can make you feel so good.

My spirits were high as I left the chapel and almost knocked Isaacs down as he was passing by on his way to the day room. "I was looking for you" he said then asked "Getting some religion?" "Not really" I said "but it never hurts to have a chat with God now and then. Let's go write a letter." We walked together to the day room and when we got there, we saw it was crowded, almost standing room only. Isaacs joked by saying "What the hell are they giving away?" "Nothing" I said, "I guess everyone wants to get a letter off before we go north." In a few minutes we got a table so we sat and started to write. Rarely did I tell my family what was happening or where I was because I knew the censors would cut it out. My father, not remembering I couldn't answer him, wrote asking me what I was saying in my letters because he was getting them with entire sentences cut out.

Writing made me feel closer to home so I wrote often. It also made my parents worry-free. In later months when I went on patrol, I wrote my father the day before saying I'd have to skip writing tomorrow because I was busy. He knew what I meant. In one letter, I told him the Cav was now north of the Thirty-eighth Parallel and for some unknown reason the censors let that slip through. I mostly sent home "fine" letters. I'm fine, the weather is fine, the food is fine and the Army is treating me fine. "Fine" letters were all any family wanted to read, no worry no stress.

It was late September and winter would soon be marching down from Manchuria. A cold wind was blowing and there were a few flurries as I joined the formation at 0650. The chain link fence offered no resistance to the wind so it chilled my bones as I stood there watching the trucks pull into the compound. I stared at them and wondered what would happen to me as I waited for the order to climb into a truck. At 0710 Captain Jenkins came out of the

orderly room and yelled “Okay, let’s board the trucks.” We were wearing heavy clothes and lugging equipment, duffel bags and rifles so we had to boost one another up into the trucks. Captain Jenkins walked from truck to truck wishing the men well and reached up to shake hands with the men who were sitting in the rear near the open back.

The truck motors were idling and sending exhaust smoke up into the frigid early morning air. The front gate opened and the convoy started to move with a crawl then pulled out of the compound and instantly entered the streets of Pusan. Isaacs was sitting across from me just as he was the day we first met after getting off the boat in Pusan. He looked over to me and said “And the journey begins.” The trucks inched through the crowded streets then exited the northern suburbs onto a narrow dirt road that passed through smelly rice paddies. I knew the Korean farmers used human waste as a fertilizer but this was the first time I was in contact with the odor and it made me want to stop breathing. I found that impossible so I did the next best thing by covering my nose with a woolen glove but that didn’t help.

The Korean soldier who gave the class back at the Fifteenth warned us about the odor and said it was unbearable in the summer. “Not so bad in the winter if the paddies freeze over” he said. He also cautioned us against taking water from a stream anywhere near a paddy because of the runoff.

The ride was bumpy and unkind to our bottoms but not to soldiers who were lucky to be sitting on soft duffel bags in the center of the truck. A half-hour into the ride, the trucks stopped alongside a railroad siding and the red headed Sergeant came down the line of trucks yelling “All out!”

We were formed into platoon sized units and marched a short distance around a few storage buildings. I turned the corner of the last building and saw for the first time the famous or should I say “infamous” Pusan Express. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing and didn’t think a more decrepit train existed. The luxury train the red head told us about was nothing more than a dozen ancient box and cattle cars dragged by an old steam locomotive that was most likely left over from the Russian-Japanese War of 1905. On top of each car at the back end was a circular hole cut into the roof

with a wood platform suspended underneath providing a place for South Korean soldiers to stand and fire machine guns. As Isaacs and I were waiting for the order to get on board, two sergeants came by and handed us a box of C-rations and a bandolier of rifle ammunition then told us to get on. We climbed up into a cattle car and were greeted by sawdust on the floor and rows of wet two by four wooden seats prompting one soldier to sing "It's splinter time in the Rockies." The cars were full of bullet holes with large sections of slats shattered by heavy weapons proving that the sympathizers were operating in the area. The holes also made me think the ability of the South Koreans to protect the train left much to be desired. After Isaacs and I sat, he turned to me and said, "Check your ticket to be sure we're in the right coach."

Just before I got on the train, I saw smoke rising from the locomotive so I said to Isaacs "The engines alive, it's smoking." He laughed and at that very moment just to prove I was right, the old engine moaned, groaned and hissed then jerked to a start throwing much of our gear onto the floor and covering it with sawdust. The engine strained as the train began to move but ever so slowly making me realize why it was so vulnerable to attack, the insurgents traveled faster than the train could run. A short time later the old locomotive managed to get up enough steam to pull us through the Korean flat lands. The further north we traveled the more evidence of the war I saw as I peeked through the slats of the car. I saw burned villages and the relics of war, tanks, jeeps, trucks and half-tracks rusting, some overturned but all minus their weapons. What Isaacs and I saw was sometimes impossible to comprehend and definitely not the best of views. We considered ourselves fortunate to be riding in a cattle car because we could look through the slats. The boxcars had solid sides so the men riding in them had only bullet holes to squint through.

Three hours into the journey, the express started to climb and as the hills became higher the engine moved slower until at one point I thought it was going to roll backwards. We moved through another flat area enabling the engine to increase its speed before it had to climb once again.

The five-hour journey mercifully ended when the train came to a screeching halt. I was over two hundred twenty five miles north of Pusan and near the line as I left the train and stood waiting in

formation alongside the tracks. A Master Sergeant standing nearby barked out "The men I call form to my left. You've been assigned to King Company." Isaacs and my name was among the dozen he called so we walked over and stood on his left. He pointed to a truck and said "Climb on. It's going to K Company." The truck drove off taking me on one of the nastiest rides I ever endured over a road that was the bumpiest and had the biggest holes I ever saw. I was thankful the ride was only fifteen minutes because I didn't think my bottom could stand much more pounding. After the truck stopped, we jumped down and stood quietly looking around for a few seconds then I said, "We have arrived. This is the end of the line." Isaacs replied "Yep. This is King Company, Third Battalion of the Eighth Cavalry Regiment."

Another Sergeant came over to where we were standing and said "The following two men, and he called out Isaacs and my name, come with me." As we followed him he said "I'm Sergeant First Class Glenn Flanders, the acting platoon leader of the second platoon. Both of you were assigned to me so I'm putting you into the second squad because they need two men."

The good news was that Isaacs and I were in the same squad and were going to bunk together because Flanders told us to go to supply and pick up sleeping bags and a two-man tent. "Pitch it anywhere in the platoon area" he said pointing to an area, "where you find a space." We searched for a space and realized finding a space was not the problem, level ground was. The company was bivouacked on the side of a hill and the veterans already occupied the best spots so all Isaacs and I could do was rearrange the earth to create a level site. After the digging came the root pulling and swearing. Isaacs tugged, groaned and grimaced then remarked, "Even the roots aren't on the level."

I saw an artillery unit camped on the other side of the road so when I finished with the tent, I walked over to nose around because I wanted to get a closer look at one the big guns. An artilleryman waved to me so I waved back. We started to talk and he told me about the guns then showed me one, a hundred fifty five millimeter piece. We sat down to enjoy a cup of coffee he just brewed and he told me there were twenty guns lined up ready to blast the Chinese then opened up a container to show me one of the rounds. Then he said his unit was placed on alert, meaning he

had to stand by his gun so he thought something was going to happen up on the line very soon.

Captain Leary, the Company Commander, had the platoon leaders tell the new men in their platoons to report to the mess tent at 1000 hours. Flanders told Isaacs and I because we were the only new men to join the second platoon so at 1000 hours we reported as ordered.

The Captain began his talk by welcoming us to King Company and said he didn't get to talk with us last night because we arrived late. "We'll be here in reserve for the next two maybe three days" he said "then move into the line to relieve a Greek company. That's all I can tell you because that's all I know but when I get additional information I'll tell you. We all know that some of you will become casualties but rest assured I will do my best to get you out fast. We'll talk again before we move up. I've asked the cooks to put on some coffee and donuts for you so please enjoy them. You're excused until after lunch when you attend the weapons class" and with that he left the tent. None of us had a desire for donuts after the Captain's casualty speech and coffee could never wash away the bad taste his talk left in my mouth. When we were walking back to the platoon area, I asked Isaacs "What did you think of the Captains welcome speech?" He replied, "I can think of nicer ways to instill confidence than by telling me I may become a casualty. Hell, I knew that before I got off the boat."

After the 1400 hours weapons class, the platoon Sergeants checked weapons. Flanders visited each squad in the second platoon checking the M-1's and Browning Automatic Rifles to be sure they were clean and in good operating condition. When the weapons check was completed it was almost time for us to eat dinner, so Isaacs and I walked together to the mess tent. I asked one of the cooks what the "meal deal" was up on the line and he told me a cook Corporal led a Korean chow train up every morning with a hot breakfast and left a dry ration lunch, then went back with the mess kits. Later in the day they returned with dinner and clean mess kits.

After eating, there wasn't much to do so I decided to write home. Candles were okay on the line inside a large bunker but not in the small two man tents so I thought I had better finish writing before

the light disappeared. It was a dreary day. The light was dim because of fog and a cold drizzle so I was forced to kneel inside the tent using an empty cardboard ration box to write on. I just began the letter, it would be a short standard "fine" letter to my folks, when Isaacs came in and said "The weather is turning sour by the minute so I'll have to stay in here to write a letter when you finish." One of the few good points up here, if any, was the fact that we didn't need stamps. Mail was free. All we did was write, "FREE" where the stamp normally went on the envelope.

In addition to free postage, the United States Government was paying me an additional forty-five dollars for each month I was in a combat zone. The Army called it "Hazardous Duty Pay." At first they were going to pay us fifty dollars a month but the Airborne Forces were outraged because they received fifty dollars a month too but had to jump out of an airplane to get it. They protested, so to appease them, the Army reduced our payment five dollars a month and kept the Airborne happy. Another combat zone benefit was that we were exempt from Social Security and income taxes.

My monthly net pay would soon increase from around eighty dollars to one hundred thirty-five dollars. I later joked and said to Isaacs that we're in the money. "But we can't spend it" he said. "You're right," I told him "so I'm sending it all home except five dollars." He asked why keep only five dollars and I told him "Because I don't want to die broke."

My letter finished, I left the tent and made room for Isaacs to stretch out and write his. The weather was deteriorating fast. It was dark now and the light drizzle turned into a cold rain so I put on my poncho to keep dry. Suddenly the night turned into day when the big guns across the road began to fire and the muzzle flashes lit up the immediate area. More than twenty guns were now firing so they must have added guns during the night.

Someone somewhere up on the line was catching hell because the guns continued to pound away for hours. It wasn't until midnight that they fell silent so few of us, if any, got to sleep. Add the noise from the guns to the Captains scary "casualty" speech and it made sleeping difficult for most of the new men. Flanders passed by sticking his head into the tents after the guns stopped firing to tell us there would be a late breakfast and no reveille

tomorrow. I guess Leary knew the company couldn't function without rest.

I didn't sleep late because Isaacs rolled me out of my bag about 0700. I washed up using my helmet, then we went for breakfast. When we were eating, the artillery guys started playing with their toys again. The soldier I talked with was right when he said something was going to happen on line because the guns were busy the past twenty-four hours. About 1000 hours the guns stopped firing and quiet returned to the hills. The company was scheduled to form in the mess tent at 1400 so that gave me some free time. I crossed the road and saw a mountain of spent brass casings reminding me of the little girl I bought the ring from and I thought her father could make a hundred rings out of one of those casings. The same soldier was there so he waved and I waved back. I asked what was happening and he said, "Don't know but they told me to stand by so some big doings must be going on."

A few minutes before two o'clock, Isaacs and I entered the mess tent and took seats. Next to me was Corporal John Powell, a black soldier in my squad who carried a Browning automatic rifle. He was one of the few black soldiers I saw in the Army, because for the most part, the black and the white soldiers rarely made contact with one another. There were no black soldiers in my Alabama training company. In September 1951 the Army was still segregated even though President Harry Truman signed an executive order three years ago ordering the military to desegregate. Powell was friendly and started to talk and we would eventually become friends.

It was a few minutes after we sat when Captain Leary entered the tent. He stood on one of the bench seats and started by saying there were twelve new men in the company and asked the older men to take care of us until we got our feet wet. He continued by saying "We'll be riding up tomorrow in trucks that will take us within a mile of the line and we'll walk the rest. We are relieving a Greek Company. The second platoon will occupy Hill #347, an outpost position three hundred yards out and just east of Old Baldy. To our east is The Three Sisters Hill. The first and third platoons will be on the Main Line. The platoon sergeants will give you any additional details. I'll be up front in the lead jeep tomorrow morning and I'll see you all then."

Sergeant Larry Hoveland was our squad leader who always relayed the orders from Flanders to us. He told us reveille was be at 0400 hours with breakfast to follow and fall out and be ready to roll at 0700. We were to take only basic essentials up to the line, everything else not military was to be placed in our duffel bags and the bags dropped off alongside the mess tent. Hoveland said, "We got handed a tough job but if anyone can handle it, it's the second platoon. It won't be easy out there on 347 but we can handle it, forty-two strong against a lot of Chinese. Just want to remind you to be sure your duffel bag is tagged." Then Flanders stopped by and asked how Isaacs and I were doing. "Fine" we said and he told us he assigned Powell as our guardian. I told Powell "No offense but I already asked God to be my guardian." He laughed and said, "He might need some help from my BAR."

That evening I put the seventy dollars I had into my wallet with a few photos, my green Army identification card and a Geneva Convention Card. I thought the Geneva card was excess baggage because the North Koreans shot American prisoners and the Chinese treated their prisoners unkind. I put bare essentials into my field jacket pockets, toothpaste, brush, shaving brush and soap, bar soap, comb, a razor plus some writing material then I tied a tag to my duffel bag and put everything else I owned into it.

At 0400 the next morning, Flanders chased us from our sleeping bags by going from tent to tent yelling "Chow time!" I dropped off my duffel at the mess tent and took a place in line but couldn't believe my eyes when I looked at my watch and saw it was only 0415. I couldn't say, "I was up with the birds" because there were no birds here. In fact there were few animals here at all because most left days ago for parts unknown when it became too dangerous and too noisy for them. The animals weren't fond of war either.

After breakfast we were issued two bandoliers of rifle ammunition and four grenades. Powell handed me a third bandolier and said, "Take this. It might come in handy." I climbed up into the back of one of the waiting trucks and sat next to Isaacs. As I sat there waiting for the truck to move, my thoughts moved back to the red headed Sergeant and his remarks about me reaching twenty. I was somewhat apprehensive at this moment in time but I was

determined to get out of my teens alive. I turned and asked Isaacs "What are you thinking?" He replied by saying "I think we're embarking on a once in a lifetime experience I hope to live through, so I'll be able to tell my grandchildren about it. What the hell, they probably won't believe me anyway." I told him "If you don't live you won't have grandchildren so you won't be able to worry about them not believing you."

The trucks were lined up on the road so we walked down and climbed up into them. There were about one hundred eighty men in King Company including three aid men from the Fifteenth Medical Company. One jeep and a dozen trucks would take the company and its equipment up to the line.

Eleanor, the girl from Hoboken, sent a package I received yesterday. As I was sitting in the truck waiting for it to move, I looked down at one of the gifts she sent me, a sterling silver wrist chain engraved with my name and Army serial number. She also sent a small wood matchbox with a tiny bible inside and a note saying be sure to carry the bible and I was always in her prayers. I did as she asked and carried it all the days I was in Korea. We were not a twosome but could have been closer if not for the war. The miles between us eventually had a negative effect on the relationship and it ended by mail a few months later. Isaacs was sitting beside me and took a pack of Lucky Strikes from his pocket and offered me a cigarette. I lit one, then took the matchbox from my field jacket pocket and showed him the bible saying "I got this yesterday from a girl back home." At that moment the convoy started to move and I remember saying to Isaacs "The print is small and impossible to read but we can rub it every day." The matchbox has seen better days but the bible is in fine shape and I still have it.

The convoy started to move out with Leary in a jeep leading the way and the platoon leaders riding in the trucks' cabs alongside the drivers. I told Isaacs "Our butts are going to be abused because Korean roads are famous for bumps and holes." Doug Kahn, a World War Two veteran and a reservist who was called to active duty said, "In a few miles the road will turn ugly. We're on the good part now." We were being tossed around in the back of the truck like bobbing apples in a tub so I wondered how could the road be worse up ahead. Two men were sitting on their thick wool

overcoats in the center of the trucks floor holding down a light thirty-caliber machine gun so it wouldn't be damaged. Things did get rough when we passed through a rocky shallow stream and a dried out rice paddy. From the rear of the truck I saw two tanks laying on the side of the road, both were burned and blasted open like a tuna can and minus a track. One was ours, a rusted M-46 Patton and the other was a North Korean T-34.

It took almost an hour to travel the twenty miles to our jumping off point and when the trucks stopped, my bottom was appreciative. Flanders was up front in the cab so he got out, came back then told us to jump down and line up on both sides of the road. Leary yelled back "Move out" so Flanders put himself on the road in the middle between the two lines.

As we began walking north, I dropped my head back and saw the sun right above me. In a few hours it will drop below the hills and because it is early autumn, when the sun goes down the temperature usually goes with it. I'm dragging a heavy wool overcoat with me now but it won't be long until I become real fond of it. I thought to myself, this is crazy. I took my basic training in an Alabama oven and now a few short weeks later I'm near the Manchurian ice-house. That's a swing now of almost sixty degrees.

Never mind the cold, the hills were awesome. North Korea was one hill after another and each appeared higher than the last. I was nineteen and in relatively good condition but carrying all this equipment uphill was no easy task. We came upon a flat area so Captain Leary brought the company to a halt and passed the word back to take fifteen. I fell to the ground prone on my back with my arms outstretched then took out a cigarette and lit it. I blew smoke rings then watched them rise into the cold air and fade away. Isaacs looked down at me and said "Flanders says only a half mile to go." Hearing that I got a second wind and bounced up only to drop down again when I heard the screech of artillery. Flanders yelled, "Outgoing, stay on your feet." Isaacs grinned and said, "We better learn the difference between incoming and outgoing fast otherwise we'll be bouncing up and down."

Time was up so Flanders yelled back "Off your ass and on your feet, out of the shade and into the heat!" I asked myself, what

heat? We crossed what I thought was the only level ground in North Korea and soon started to climb again. I knew we were almost there so I was trying to hold on and grind out the last few hundred yards when a grenade fell from my suspender. It rolled past Isaacs and back downhill to Doug Kahn who stopped it when he stepped on it. He picked it up and lobbed it back up to me saying "Hold on to this Kid, you might want to throw it at a Chinaman." Doug was up here once before so he knew the area well and he said "That high hill is part of the main line, Hill #347 is on the other side." I heard some yelling as we got near the top because the Greeks were happy to see us, and why not, we were taking their place in the line. As part of its commitment to the United Nations, Greece sent an infantry battalion to Korea and it was attached to the First Cavalry Division. The other platoons dropped off to relieve troops on the main line but the second had to walk out another three hundred yards to 347. On the way out I saw two dead enemy soldiers, my first, covered with lime to speed up decomposition. The poor condition of their uniforms made it impossible to tell if they were North Korean or Chinese but Doug told us a red stripe on a pants leg meant that one was a Chinese officer.

We passed through the wire and walked on a narrow path out to 347. Flanders told us not to stray off the path because there were mines on both sides of it. As soon as we passed the last strand of wire and entered the safe zone where unexploded rounds were cleared, the Greeks left their holes to run down and hug us then shower us with jam, bread and cigarettes. They were overcome by joy and some even had tears running down their faces through the beards.

The second platoon was chosen to defend Hill #347 because it was a combat ready platoon and an experienced platoon was needed to hold such a strategic position. The hill's height made it valuable because it dominated the valley. Hills in Korea were named according to their height using the metric system so Hill #347 was actually three-hundred forty-seven meters high, a shade under eleven hundred feet. Two exceptions were Old Baldy to our west and The Three Sisters to the east, both were named because of their distinctive characteristics. Baldy was named because it was bald and had most of its foliage blasted away by artillery and the Three Sisters was named because it had three humps near

the summit. A year later its name was changed to Pork Chop Hill and it was forever made famous by the 1959 film starring Gregory Peck based on a book by General S.L.A. Marshall.

Flanders set up the second squad in the northeast corner of the hill and put Powell and me together in a large corner bunker overlooking Pork Chop Hill. Powell and his BAR could put up a wall of fire because he had an unobstructed view of the finger that led down into the valley. The Chinese knew that so they would go after him first and because I was close, they would be after me too and I didn't like that. I told Isaacs I had to find a way to get away from that gun.

Baldy was alone to our west with a platoon from Love Company on a hill just south of it. Then came Hill #347 and to our east sat Pork Chop. A platoon from Fox Company, Second Battalion, was sitting on top of it. The three hills formed an Outpost Line of Resistance, OPLR in Army talk, and it was the job of the men on the outposts to stop or at the least slow down any Chinese advance, a difficult task when you have only forty or fifty men.

Our umbilical cord was a heavy-duty weatherproof phone wire that ran from Hill #347 to the company command post along the top of a narrow finger. It had a Double E-8 (EE-8) field phone attached to it on both ends so we had a reliable connection to the main line. Wireless phones, commonly known as walkie-talkies, were used on patrols but they had a limited range and were temperamental so they malfunctioned often.

Mess Corporal Tom Saunders led the chow train up every morning on a narrow path that ran along the top of a finger. At one time the trail was mined but was cleared by the Eighth Engineers, so to prevent the Chinese from just walking up to the outpost, the Greeks set out three grenade booby trapped barbed wire gates along the path. The second platoon inherited the gates so two men armed them at dusk by attaching a wire from a grenade ring to the gate, so opening the gate pulled the pin and caused the grenade to explode. The gates were evenly spaced on the path but they added a fourth unwired gate at the path's lowest point in an attempt to trick the Chinese. A Greek soldier told me "You have to think like a mouse to catch a mouse." Just after daybreak, the grenades were disarmed by removing the wire from the gate then

opening it allowing breakfast and the mail to pass through.

The defensive position the Eighth Army had established and was now holding was called the "Jamestown Line." Our first few days on line were quiet, the silence interrupted only by the sound of a shuffling deck of cards. When the line is quiet men can only turn to letter writing, cleaning weapons and themselves or the most popular past time, playing five-card stud or draw poker. We found ourselves in a situation where money had no value except as a card-playing tool because at any minute of any day we could be killed.

The third day on line I got into a poker game. I had seventy dollars in my wallet and I would be getting paid just five dollars a month from now on so I said, "What the hell, go for it." Betting was abnormally high, ridiculous and crazy to say the least because money had little value up here. I got dealt a few bad hands and in a short time I lost all but one dollar. To avoid being dead broke, and I hated to use that phrase up here, I quit with my last buck in hand. I stood near my bunker and began eating a dry ration lunch when suddenly the Chinese decided to welcome the second platoon to Hill #347.

We were pounded by white phosphorous rounds that enveloped the hill in white smoke making it difficult to breathe so we were forced to take cover inside our bunkers. Then high explosive rounds slammed into the hill with the center of the trench on the west side of the hill taking a direct hit that caused a large section to collapse. In five minutes it was over. I think the Chinese just wanted to tell us they knew we were here.

The next morning the Chinese were at it again. Powell, myself and Isaacs were in the chow line with our mess kits half full of breakfast when artillery began pounding us again. One round hit too close for comfort so we took off for our bunkers, losing our breakfast on the way. One round hit just to my left, collapsed a bunker and buried two men under earth and logs.

The Chinese also pounded the other two outposts and the main line as well, tying down the troops for a half hour. They were welcoming the entire Eighth Regiment, not just the second platoon. Our guns, maybe the same guys I talked to back in

reserve, responded to Chinese artillery and gave them a taste of their own medicine. The incoming and outgoing fire crossed right over our heads so I turned to Powell and yelled over the sound of the explosions, "I'm getting on-the-job training." When the firing finally stopped, we slowly inched our heads out of the bunkers and looked around.

We saw that the mess crew was still on the hill and breakfast survived so Isaacs and Powell and myself ran to the chow cans and helped ourselves to a second breakfast. That morning the meal consisted of scrambled eggs and home fried mashed potatoes both powdered, sausage patties, coffee and a roll. The majority of our meals were put together using powdered ingredients that were mixed in the rear, one exception being meat products. I liked the hot oatmeal but disliked the cold cereal because the milk turned it into a soft mess before it reached us. Eventually the milk was carried up in separate insulated containers allowing us to pour it on the cereal ourselves. A huge breakfast treat was seeing the mail clerk walking behind Saunders in the chow train carrying the mail and copies of the Pacific Stars and Stripes.

In 1951, an Army infantry battalion consisted of five companies, one each headquarters and heavy weapons plus three rifle. Each rifle company had the identical configuration only in much smaller platoon-sized units. Patrols were rotated among the nine rifle platoons so we figured on going through the wire on patrol every nine days but the count could change if the scheduled platoon was not available, leaving another platoon to fill the void. Battalion usually called down two days prior to the patrol so the platoon selected had enough time to plan and prepare for the patrols that came in a variety of sizes, objectives and types but all were extremely dangerous. It is unlikely I'll forget my first patrol because the call came on Columbus Day, October 12, 1951. Captain Leary chose the second platoon, then notified Flanders who called a meeting with the medic and the squad leaders of the three rifle and one weapons platoons. The meeting was held in the platoon bunker, a huge hole burrowed deep into the center of the hill that doubled as storage for emergency dry rations, medical supplies and ammunition.

Hoveland came out of the meeting and told the squad we were

going through the wire on patrol October 14th. He said we had an easy objective because Battalion only wanted us to “snoop around and get our feet wet.” I hoped Battalion didn’t think I was going to jump into a smelly rice paddy.

Hoveland then filled us in on the patrol. He said, “We’ll start out just after sunrise. No hot breakfast, the mess crew will leave us a dry C-ration meal the night before. We’ll move down the finger then swing west towards Baldy for a look. One squad and a machine gun crew from Love Company will come halfway down the hill to support us. If we get into any trouble, they’ll join us and Glenn will call in artillery if we need it. Take as many grenades and as much ammo you think you can carry. This is our first patrol together, lets do a good job.” Then Hoveland told us a Second Lieutenant with new shiny gold bars would soon take over the platoon but he didn’t know when or his name. Flanders was only acting platoon leader since he turned down a field commission to avoid being transferred from friends he made in King Company. Later he told me he thought he made a mistake by refusing it because all his friends were wounded, killed or rotated home.

The second platoon was a good strong unit because it had a mixture of World War Two vets, Regular Army and draftees plus a few reservists. We had three eleven man squads with two Browning Automatic Rifles in each supported by a 3.5 bazooka, a sixty-millimeter mortar crew, two light machine guns, a fifty-caliber machine gun and a medic. We were forty-two strong and would go to forty-three when the Lieutenant arrived.

When dawn broke on the fourteenth, I was a little apprehensive to say the least. I didn’t know what lay ahead, would I see action? Would I get hurt? This was supposed to be a cakewalk, a stroll in the park, Powell said, but anytime you go through the wire you’re in danger. I put four grenades on my suspenders and crossed two bandoliers of rifle ammunition across my chest. Then I took two more bandoliers, broke them down and stuffed ten clips into my field jacket pockets and snapped a couple on my rifle sling. I also carried six twenty round Browning magazines in my belt, so I was going into no-mans land carrying over three hundred rounds of ammunition plus four grenades. I was one hundred, fifty-five pounds and it felt like I was carrying more than that in brass and lead.

At 0700 hours the second platoon started moving through the wire in the northwest corner of the hill and moved quickly onto the finger leading to the valley floor. The 3.5 Bazooka was positioned to stop tanks from moving up this finger and like the path on the opposite side of the hill, this one was also cleared. Red and white metal signs in English and Korean were in the ground warning that the area off the path was not cleared. I think everyone in the platoon was scared except Flanders who led so many of these patrols that he learned to think like a Chinaman. I was lucky to land in his platoon.

The way to the valley floor was wide open when we passed through the last strand of wire because there were no further obstacles. When the platoon reached the bottom, we followed Glenn west to a knoll he called "The Ant Hill" because it was only thirty meters high and we stopped on its far side to establish a defensive perimeter in front of Love Company. When we looked up we saw a squad digging in on a ridge above us ready to come to our aid if we needed it. Flanders was kneeling on a flat rock looking at Baldy through binoculars and talking to a squad leader. Isaacs was leaning against a tree he was taking cover behind and asked if I could see what was going on up front. I couldn't so I told him "No". At that instant six mortar rounds hit around the platoon so I dropped to the ground taking cover next to Isaacs and waited for Flander's next move. There were many times when the radio didn't work but today it was operating fine, so Flanders was able to contact Leary. He walked back to where I was kneeling and I heard him say "We're taking mortars but I can't tell where from. I didn't see any Chinese on Baldy but that that doesn't mean they're not up there. We can get hurt here now so I think it's better if we pulled out and came back another day." Leary knew Flanders had experienced many days in combat and led many patrols so he took his advice and ordered the platoon to withdraw.

Next Glenn radioed Love Company requesting that the squad on the ridge cover our withdrawal then he began pulling us back a squad at a time. Flanders was playing it safe. He was a veteran leader who always expected the unexpected and never gambled with the lives of his men. He possessed the rare skills of a confident and competent leader that had men follow him. The Army doesn't offer field commissions to incompetents.

No patrol in no-mans land was pleasant, going or coming, but this one gave us a nice feeling walking back. It couldn't be counted as a successful undertaking militarily speaking, but it was to us because we were all coming back, there were no casualties. That's what Bob Vaughn told me on the way back when he was walking right behind me carrying his machine gun. His assistant George "Smitty" Smith was following him carrying the tripod and a can of ammunition. Bob was such a great machine gunner that some guys in the platoon said he was the best they ever saw with a light thirty and went so far as to call him an artist. I once told him he'd find it difficult applying those skills to a job in civilian life. He was humming "Whistle While You Work" from Snow White so I turned and asked him why he was so happy. That's when he said "A no casualty patrol makes me happy like the Seven Dwarfs. I have thirty-two points, so in another month I'll be going home."

The Army used a point system, thirty-six and you rotated stateside. Front line troops in Korea received four points per month with those serving further back getting three. Men stationed anywhere else in Korea got two points each month and those in Japan got just one point per month. I had eight points, a lot less than Vaughn meaning I'd have to survive seven more months before I could rotate. In the summer of 1951, the rotation system and battle casualties suddenly caused a severe drop in the combat efficiency of many units forcing the Army to consider rotating entire divisions.

It is mid October now. The days are getting shorter and colder with less daylight. Snow flurries greeted us when we crawled out of our sleeping bags the last few mornings so I thought a heavy snowfall wasn't too far off. I was hoping both sides would decide to sit out the winter and not try to kill each other, but when the Chinese increased their artillery fire I realized that was asking too much. I said to Powell "The Chinks are getting restless. I hope they're not planning to do something stupid like starting a war."

It was near Halloween when the Eighth Army pulled fifty percent of all sleeping bags off the line because a Chinese attack caught a regiment of the British First Commonwealth Division asleep in their bags and inflicted a large number of casualties.

On the valley floor between Hill #347 and Pork Chop, stood a small village that regiment thought the Chinese were using to direct artillery fire against our positions. Battalion ordered a 57-millimeter Recoilless Rifle team out to the outpost to fire white phosphorous rounds down into it and set it on fire. The team came up one morning with Saunders, the mail clerk and the chow train and set up in a trench overlooking the village. The 57 Rifle makes a lot of noise and has a huge black smoke back blast. They began firing just as we were being served so I couldn't eat because I had to use my hands to cover my ears. I watched as they fired round after round down into the village but failed to burn it prompting Isaacs say to me "All they did was disturb breakfast." I said to Isaacs "What worries me is that someone will have to go down there and put the torch to the village." I was right in my thinking because Flanders told Hoveland to take an extra BAR team from each of the other squads, the medic and the second squad down to the village and burn it. I told Isaacs we were a sixteen-man firing squad.

On October 9, 1951, only five days after the last patrol, about half of the second platoon was again going through the wire. Just after sunrise we had an early breakfast then began making final preparations for the patrol by checking our weapons and loading up with ammunition and grenades.

A half-hour later we were walking on the path back towards the main line. At the halfway point we turned left through the wire and moved down through an area that was saturated with unexploded rounds. A recent light snowfall partially covered the duds increasing the danger but we managed to get through the debris field safely. When we reached the bottom we were confronted by a large rice paddy that Hoveland decided to bypass and enter the village from the opposite end. When we got there we came to a shallow but fast moving stream that ran alongside a gully only fifty yards from the village. Hoveland found a narrow point so we were able to jump the stream without getting our feet wet then cautiously moved ahead to the village. It was small, having only twenty grass roofed mud-brick houses straddling an unpaved road. We stopped just short of it and Hoveland told Powell and myself to "Hide in that first house on the right and cover the rear. I'm going in to burn the village and I'll pick you guys up on the way out." With that he took the rest of the squad outside of the village along

the rice paddy side to the other end and began working back to us burning the huts as he went along. Powell and I entered the hut and found the furnishings gone except for a small wood table laying on its side between the two corner windows. The two corner windows provided an excellent view of Hill #347 and Pork Chop. It looked like, to us anyway, that the Chinese were using this hut to spot our positions so regiment was correct in their thinking.

I heard the sound of exploding grenades so I stepped outside to take a look but could only see smoke rising above the huts because the road bent off to the right. The burning huts told me the white phosphorous grenades were doing their jobs. The explosions were getting closer and that told me the squad would soon be back to pick us up so I came inside to tell Powell. At that moment I heard “Whap, Whap, Whap”, the sound of mortars hitting nearby. I looked out and saw more land on the road so I said to Powell “The Chinese have this place zeroed in, let’s get out of here.” He flew out of the hut but headed in the wrong direction away from Hoveland and the squad who were getting out of the village at the opposite end because it was the fastest way out for them. I started running towards the squad and called to Powell who heard me, turned and ran back. Together we ran along the left side of the village towards cover in the gully all the while keeping the huts between us and the road. We traveled no more than fifty yards when three more rounds hit in the center of the road. Powell was tall with long legs and big strides that ate up large chunks of ground so I had to push to keep up.

I laughed because he had an odd and funny way of running. He was in front of me when suddenly the mortars hit again and I saw him grab his right arm and fall to the ground. He yelled “Son of a bitch. Al, I’m hit.” I caught up with him, helped him up and over to a hut then ran back and got the BAR. I said to him “Lucky hit, now you get a Purple Heart and time in Japan with the Geishas.” Yep” he said “and you got the BAR.” Saying that did not make me happy. A piece of shrapnel tore up his right elbow so he said “Better we join up with Hoveland fast so the medic can fix me up.” We joined up with the squad but the medic was working on a man from the first squad who had a serious chest wound so Powell held up his elbow and I tied the dressing from his first aid kit around it.

Flanders called Hoveland and told him he watched through binoculars and to "Get out fast because I called artillery in on the whole damn village." Hoveland had us move away from the village as fast as we could travel and as we leaving I turned around and saw the village and the surrounding area engulfed by an artillery fireball. At the base of Hill #347, a helicopter was waiting to take the wounded back to a MASH unit. I patted Powell on his left arm and grabbed his good hand just before they helped him into the chopper. He waved and yelled over the sound of the rotor, "Good luck, Al."

The next day Hoveland told me I'm getting the BAR plus two stripes to Corporal. In combat there is no time in grade requirement so you can be a private one day and a Master Sergeant the next. I told Hoveland I'd rather not carry it and he said "Flanders said it's yours" so I asked to have Isaacs move in with me because we were good friends and he said "Why not."

In 1948 President Truman signed an Executive Order desegregating the Armed Forces but it took from then until now to implement the order. The Twenty-fourth Infantry Regiment, nicknamed the Deuce Four, was an all Black outfit that was being disbanded and it's troops sent to white units. The very next day a black soldier from the Deuce Four joined the platoon. I smiled from ear to ear when I saw that he was a Corporal so I immediately approached Flanders and told him the new man, and I didn't know his name, had two stripes and should carry the BAR. I told Glenn "He's bigger and stronger and better suited to carry it." I didn't like it because it attracted Chinese and weighed twenty pounds so the further I was away from it the better I liked it. Glenn said I was trying to manipulate him but he agreed to make the switch. I was happy to give up the stripes and get away from the BAR but he put the new Corporal in with me because my corner hole was a BAR position and sent Isaacs back to his previous address.

The new mans name was David Monroe and now he was the BAR man but by moving him into my bunker, Flanders automatically made me his assistant. I was not happy losing Isaacs as a foxhole buddy but sadder yet because I gave up two stripes to get away from the BAR and ended up in the hole with it minus the Corporal stripes and pay that went with them.

Two days after Monroe joined us, the new platoon leader arrived, Second Lieutenant William Cramer and a replacement for the BAR man in the first squad who was wounded on the village patrol. Cramer was an OCS man, Officers Candidate School, a ninety-day wonder they were called and the other man was a Sergeant in the reserves who was called to active duty. The Sergeant, Andrew Norton, had no combat experience, so Flanders was reluctant to place him in a position of command so he gave him the BAR. He told him if there was an opening and he was still alive he could become a squad leader. I remember Flanders saying "And the best way to stay alive is to watch the old guys and do what they do." Some "old guys"; I was just a month past my nineteenth birthday. Now that Flanders dealt safely with Norton, he could keep an eye on Lieutenant Cramer who was inexperienced also, but would soon lead his platoon into no-mans land. Cramer came up at just the right time because an unusually quiet period settled over the line.



*Second Squad, Second Platoon on Hill #347
Standing 2nd left David Monroe, 4th Oakley Isaacs
Kneeling 1st left Oliver Hoveland 3rd Alfred Trotola*

Extended periods of inactivity led to boredom and eventually tension, so in an attempt to defuse the situation Leary ordered the platoons to hold a field fortification day. We were to scour the hill and pick up anything that could strengthen the bunkers and or improve our defenses. Isaacs, Dave Frazier and myself climbed over the trench wall and walked slowly down along the path. Signs proclaimed the path but not the area to its sides as cleared

and safe. About fifty feet down I spotted a few rusted rounds out near the wire off to the right. I pointed to them and said to Isaacs "Do you see what I see?" He looked over then replied, "Yes I see them but I wouldn't chance going out there." I checked the ground carefully for footprints or signs of a mine then gingerly moved out to the wire. I saw that they were three 3.5-inch Bazooka rounds so I knelt down and dragged them out from under the wire then retraced my steps back to the path. Isaacs told me I was a nut and asked, "What the hell are you going to do with them?" I told him "I had to have them because I wanted to set them up as a trap near my hole."

When I returned to my bunker I began making plans for my booby trap. I started by getting a couple of feet of tape from the medic. Men kept the rope they got on packages from home so I traded cigarettes for fifty feet then took the thin wire the Army used to repack damaged dry ration boxes.

Isaacs was curious to find out how I was going to put the booby trap together but I refused to let anyone in on it. Monroe argued that it was only right I tell him because he was in the hole too. They watched as I taped the Bazooka rounds and a white phosphorous grenade together. Then I attached the bomb to the barbed wire post nearest my hole using the thin ration box wire. Finally I tied the cord to the grenade ring then ran it back to our hole. Isaacs and Monroe called a few others to come and watch the unveiling. If the Chinese got up to the last strand of wire, I'd yank the cord that would pull out the ring and cotter pin to start the grenade burning. In a few seconds the extraordinary heat from the phosphorous would eat through the casings of the Bazooka rounds causing a nice explosion. I was proud of the bomb and I named it the "China Express" in honor of the infamous "Pusan Express." In this way I hoped to Bazooka a trainload of Chinamen back to China.

Not long after the bomb was completed and wired up, battalion called Leary to notify him that a patrol was scheduled for Halloween. The second platoon got the call again. Cramer called Glenn and the squad leaders into the command bunker for a meeting and told them he was leading this patrol. After the meeting, Hoveland told us that recently captured Chinese soldiers were from units that just moved into the area, a sign that worried

regiment.

Hoveland then gave us a quick outline of the patrol and told us we would again pass through the village then follow the stream northeast a mile to Pork Chop and to the Chinese positions to spy on them. When we heard that, Isaacs and I looked at each other as if to say "Not good." The Chinese are not going to like the idea of us breathing down their necks so they might try to chase us. Then he said, "Battalion would like us to take one prisoner." When Hoveland said "prisoner" Isaacs whispered in my ear "Not good. That means we have to take them on at close quarters."

On October 31st I loaded myself with as much ammunition as I could carry. I told Monroe "I feel like a deep sea diver weighed down with lead." Ammunition is an important item up on the line because our lives depended on it. After breakfast it was again halfway on the safe path, then I left into the debris field to the bottom and the paddy. We squeezed our nostrils as we moved along the right side of the paddy and stopped when we reached the first huts of the village. Many of the houses in the village were damaged by Chinese mortars and the fires we set the last time we were here. Cramer got word just before we started out that the men on Pork Chop spotted Chinese moving into the village so before going in he sent word back "No burning today" and ordered four BAR teams to clear out the remaining huts.

Cramer was fairly knowledgeable considering that this was his first combat command. He sent Monroe and myself down on the left side of the huts outside the village and another BAR team on the right side the same way, then sent four men straight down the center. Just before we got to the far end of the village, the other BAR team drew fire from the last house on the right. Monroe and I took cover in a hut then looked out to see at least six Chinese soldiers running from the village. The other BAR team and the men in the center returned their fire but the Chinese had a good jump and were long gone. But, they were here and now they know we are here.

Cramer stopped the platoon at the stream and had a talk with Flanders because the Chinese now knew we were snooping around. Glenn used the radio to keep in touch with Fox Company on Pork Chop as we followed the stream north getting closer to the

Chinese with each step. Cramer's problem now was to find a way to conceal forty men in an area with little cover. He got lucky when we came upon a large stand of pine trees that provided ideal cover and a good spot to watch the Chinese. Monroe and I sat down using the soft pine needles as a cushion and seeing that, Isaacs came over and we began to talk. Monroe said he was in an almost identical situation not long ago when the Chinese mortared him, and tree bursts almost got him.

Cramer formed the first and third squads into a defensive perimeter to keep watch so he could snoop so the second squad got a break and just sat and took it easy.

Cramer circled the wagons so to speak by forming the first and third squads into a defensive perimeter with the machine guns facing the Chinese lines. The second squad got a break and just hung out in the middle of the circle ready to fill in anywhere.

We sat there for almost two hours before Flanders came back to the pine trees and told us Cramer was getting ready to withdraw. He grinned and told us when he was looking at the Chinese through the binoculars he spotted one looking back at him through his binoculars. I told Monroe, "Better to look than shoot." Cramer returned with the other squads then we started back along the stream to the paddy and back to Three Four Seven.

November began white, snow that is. I awoke November 1st to find Hill #347 covered by a three inch white blanket. To me it was frozen water because I melted it in my helmet then used it to wash and shave. I got into a snowball fight with the two machine gunners that were below me and off to my right so I told Monroe the packing was great and there wouldn't be a snow shortage because we were sitting on a mountain of it. Then he told me he never saw snow until he arrived in Korea because he lived in Miami but he planned to come north after the war to get a better job. I told him I lived in New Jersey where we usually get more than three inches of snow.

On November 6th battalion called again. "Pick a platoon," they said and Leary picked the second. Each time we went on patrol a platoon from the main line had to come out and occupy Three Four Seven. The squad leaders had their usual meeting in the

bunker and then as he always does, Hoveland came back, sat and smoked with his squad and told us what to expect. He told us Regiments thinking is that the Chinese are cooking up something because they are taking prisoners from newly arrived units. Add this to the increase in artillery and it indicates the Chinese definitely plan to make a move somewhere. Regiment also thinks the Chinese returned to the village and put observers on Baldy so they want us to torch what's left of the village then chase off any observers on Baldy. I didn't mind the village part but moving on Baldy in the daylight worried me because the Chinese could stand in their trenches and pour fire down on us as we're climbing up.

Breakfast on November 8, 1951 was early. Saunders and the chow crew left us a C-ration breakfast and lunch with last night's meal because it was unsafe climbing up through the wire in the dark. It also meant no mail, in or out until the mail clerk comes up again tomorrow. Isaacs stood alongside Monroe and I as we ate and expressed concern over today's patrol so I took the tiny bible from my pocket and said, "Have a rub and say a prayer."

After breakfast we saddled up. I was carrying two hundred rounds of ammunition for Monroe's BAR and myself plus four grenades, a canteen of water, a bayonet, entrenching tool, first aid kit, C-rations and an M-1 rifle plus a cartridge belt, suspenders, steel helmet and heavy winter clothing. On this patrol we were going to wear the newly issued protective vests for the first time that were flat steel slats enclosed vertically in a heavy canvas jacket. It all added up to a lot of weight for me to carry and I wondered if I could function weighed down like a pack mule.

Just after sunrise, Cramer yelled "Okay, let's go" and the second platoon followed him onto the safe path and past the now disarmed booby-trapped gates then through the wire into the debris field. By walking safely through the debris field a number of times, we created a safe path so now we had only to retrace our steps. When we reached the rice paddy, Cramer took us to the right and into the village. Flanders followed in the rear and threw white phosphorous grenades into huts that weren't already burned to the ground because battalion wanted the village flat so the Chinese wouldn't have a place to hide. I was sure the smoke rising from the burning village would alert the Chinese and that concerned me because there was little or no cover available to us

as we crossed the valley floor on the way to Baldy.

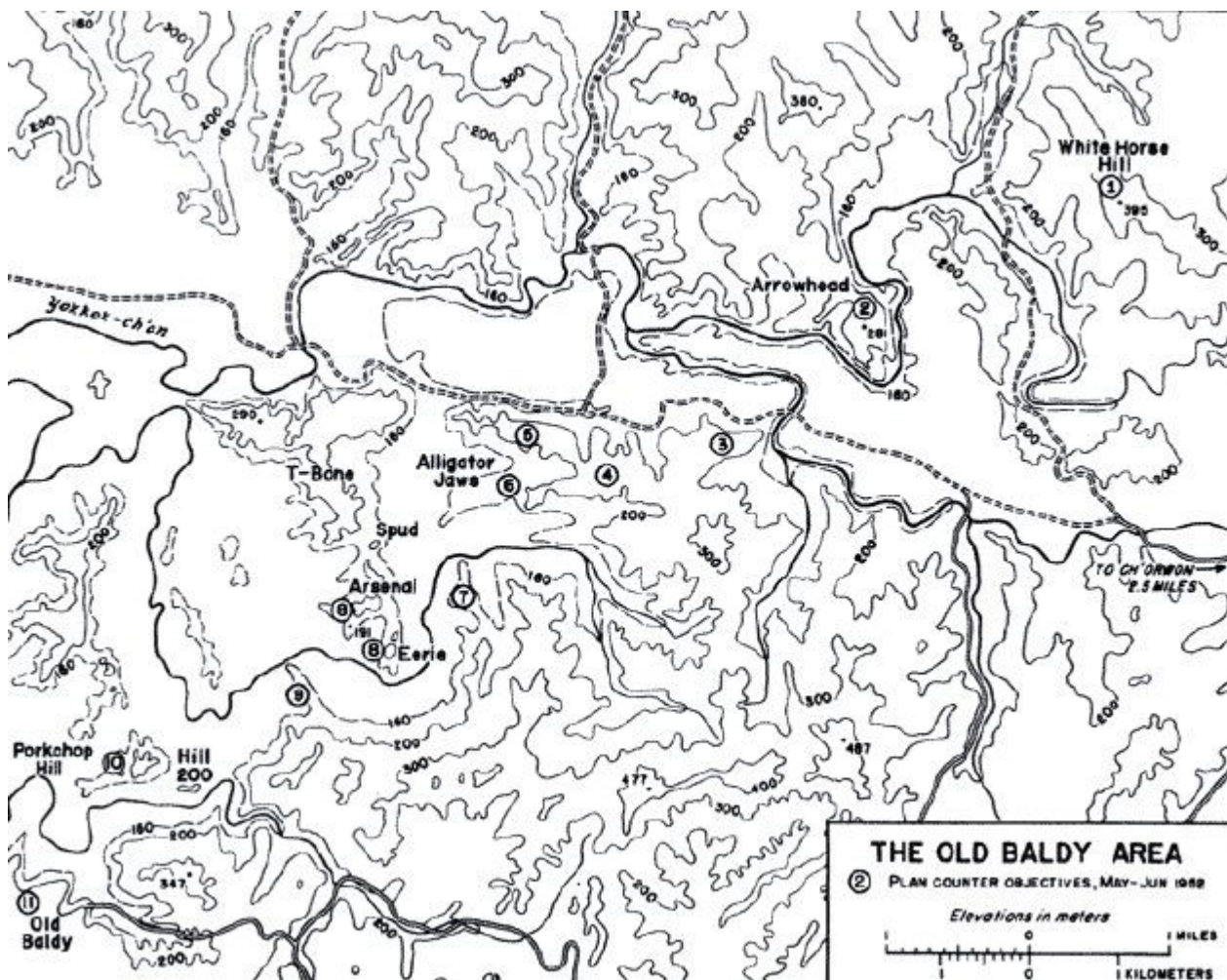
We left the village and were confronted by the stream at its widest point. The other times we passed this way, we never crossed the stream only followed it. Cramer sent men both ways until they found a shallow point then we crossed there using the bedrocks to keep dry. The platoon dropped down into and up out of the gully then came upon the long open valley floor. It was a long way to Baldy so I rubbed the bible and prayed the Chinese wouldn't mortar us out in the open. They were experts with the mortars, real experts. They could drop a round into one of our pockets and they were smart too by using mortars one millimeter larger than ours so any captured rounds would be of no use to us because they wouldn't fit in our smaller sixty-millimeter tubes.

Moving across the valley floor was nerve wracking but uneventful. The Chinese never fired a shot and I never will understand why they didn't when we were in the open. When we reached the base of Baldy, we took cover in a gully so the platoon couldn't be seen by the Chinese if they were at the top. Cramer gave us only ten minutes to eat and smoke. Eating fast was not a problem because I left most of my rations back on the hill taking only a can of meat, crackers, a candy bar and cigarettes. Extra ammunition occupied most of the available space in my vest or field jacket pockets.



Old Baldy - November 1951

Old Baldy



(Map shows relationship to Pork Chop Hill and Hill #347)

Ten minutes later Cramer called out “Let’s go get ‘em” and again we started the climb to the top of Baldy. About a third of the way up we came to another depression this one like a saddle so Cramer halted the platoon, had two machine guns dig in for cover and met with Flanders. After their talk, Flanders came back and said he was staying back with the first squad in reserve and Cramer was taking the second and third squads to the top.

The two squads now advanced in a diamond formation up the saddle and began the climb. I kept thinking this is bad; moving up on the Chinese like this was a big gamble. When we neared the wire, the time was right for the firing to start but nothing happened. Then Cramer spread us out and we were twenty-three abreast with Isaacs to my right and Monroe on my left. I saw a hole in the wire caused by artillery so I headed right for it with Isaacs, Monroe and a few others following me through. I reached the trench, fell

to my knees just short of it then rolled over into it murmuring "Thank God." I was scared. As a nineteen year old I always thought I was immortal and it would always be someone else who got hit. Going through that wire and seeing the top of Baldy changed all that. Suddenly an indescribable feeling came over me when I realized that at any second my life could come to an end. I knelt in the bottom of the trench for a minute or two trying to stop shaking.

Isaacs was kneeling next to me taking deep breaths and holding his rifle across his knees. I remember him saying to me "Cramer said there can't be more than a half dozen observers up here so I like the odds of forty to six in our favor." I slowly inched my head over the lip of the trench and looked up at the top of Baldy. Isaacs asked, "See anything?" "Nothing" I replied and at that instant Hoveland jumped into trench and almost landed on top of me. He immediately told me to move left and check out that part of the trench. I rose to the height of the trench then in a crouch I inched my way around the corner about twenty five yards. I saw two wooden bowls filled with rice laying at the bottom of the trench and immediately knew the Chinese were nearby because I could see that the rice was white and fresh. I picked up a bowl and after feeling that it was still warm, I turned it over to drop out the rice and then started waving it above my head trying to get the Lieutenant's attention. Suddenly, as I was standing waving the bowl over my head, all hell broke loose and I looked up to see about twenty screaming Chinamen running over the top and headed for me. I dropped the bowl and started running back to Hoveland and the squad. When I got there the first thing I said to Isaacs was "There goes your good odds. Somebody goofed because there's more than six Chinamen up here."

The odds were almost even but the Chinese were slowly gaining an edge because they were holding the high ground. When additional Chinese came over the top Cramer decided it was time to pull back to regroup and wait for Flanders and the reserve first squad. He told Monroe, Isaacs and me to drop here and hold them back until he could get himself and the other two squads to cover. He said, "Fire a few rounds then get the hell out." The Chinese, seeing that Cramer was trying to withdraw, started jumping the trench trying to cut him off. When Monroe saw that he immediately sent a burst of fire in their direction forcing them to

take cover then said, "We can't hold them off forever. I'll fire again and you guys take off then cover me." And that's what we did. Monroe fired, I saw one Chinese soldier fall then Isaacs and I took off, stopped, fired, and Monroe came running. Cramer had the two squads in good position when we got there and when Flanders came up with the first squad we were able to hold our own. Suddenly for some unknown reason, they broke off contact and disappeared back over the top. Cramer took full advantage of the Chinese pullout to withdraw the platoon and said "Nothing up there is worth any of our lives." I couldn't agree with him more. Then he told us to get down and form a defensive circle because he was going to play it safe and wait for the Chinese to make the next move.

Ten minutes passed and the Chinese hadn't returned so Cramer asked Flanders what his thoughts were on the next move. Flanders advised him to wait a few more minutes and if they still didn't return, move back to the machine guns. They never returned so Hoveland led the second squad back and Cramer followed with the others. When I reached the saddle I saw that the machine gun squad suffered two casualties. The Chinese usually hit the automatic weapons first and this day was no exception. They must have seen us as we crossed the valley floor so they had plenty of time to draw up a plan to hit both machine guns and the rifle squads at the same time.

Both the wounded were Mexican-Americans from Texas, both were named Ortiz and both were wounded in the legs. The similarity ended there because one was six feet tall and weighed two hundred fifty pounds and the other was six inches shorter and a hundred pounds lighter so we called them Big Ortiz and Little Ortiz. When we started back Flanders said to me "Pass off your rifle and grab a corner of a litter." A man carrying Big Ortiz heard that and asked me to relieve him so I got stuck carrying Big. Carrying him down from the saddle and across the almost level valley floor wasn't hard but climbing up Hill #347 was another story because he weighed a ton. At one point I stumbled and tilted the litter dropping Big Ortiz to the ground.

The fall jarred Big's wound and it started to bleed again so Cramer stopped the column on the slope of Three Four Seven giving the medic time to work on him and also giving the platoon a chance to

rest and smoke. The medic worked on Bigs wound for ten minutes before he managed to stop the bleeding and during that time I kept thinking that I was responsible for the fall and the reopening of his wound. Flanders seeing that I was tired and a little depressed replaced me on the litter when the platoon started moving again. I caught up to Bigs litter and said, "I'm sorry, Big." He smiled and looked up at me, then in his Mexican accent he said "Izz okay." When we got back to the outpost, a helicopter was waiting to take the Ortiz boys back to the field hospital.

The next day, Hoveland held a squad meeting at the corner of the hill near my bunker and said, "I have something that's almost unbelievable to tell you guys." He paused for a second then told us that when we were engaged with the Chinese yesterday on Baldy, Flanders called Captain Leary and requested he fire the fifty-caliber machine gun in support of the platoon. "Amazingly" he continued, "Leary refused, and I don't know why." I heard nothing further about the incident until two days later when I was talking to the mail clerk at breakfast. He told me Leary was relieved and transferred.

I told Flanders the mail clerk said the Captain was transferred and asked him if it was true. He said it was and then proceeded to tell me how it came about. Regiment was upset when Leary refused to fire the fifty-caliber machine gun, and said his actions endangered the lives of an entire platoon. His defense was he didn't want to reveal its position, but Regiment said the Chinese knew where it was before he finished digging it in. Captain Leary was a Quartermaster officer who was not schooled in infantry tactics and was forced into a combat command due to the shortage of infantry officers. Leary was not an infantry officer but you don't have to be a genius to know when men are in trouble and could use help.

A few days later when I saw the mail clerk again I started talking to him because he was back in the rear and had access to the latest news and rumors. He said a pal at regiment said an infantry Captain who received a field commission in World War Two would soon be taking command of the Company. I told Monroe about the new infantry Captain and how I thought experienced infantry officers usually increased life expectancy on the line. Monroe said to me "That's just what I need now, increased life expectancy

because I have thirty points and counting. I hope to rotate in six weeks and wouldn't want to get hit now that I'm close to going home."

Hoveland told the squad Marine F4U Corsairs were going to burn the spotters on Baldy tomorrow morning. He didn't know if they were flying off a carrier on station in the Sea of Japan or coming from an airfield in the south. He did say that Regiment requested the strike because an increase in Chinese artillery indicated their observers are still active on Baldy. He told us to put out the air panels after supper tonight. The panels, made of thin fluorescent orange plastic, were stored in the platoon bunker along with the ammunition and C-rations and were thirty feet long by a yard wide. We put them across the top of the hill crossing them to form a big "X" so the pilots would recognize us as a friendly hill.

At sunrise, before the chow train came up, we were treated to a front row seat at the fireworks. Six of the World War Two propeller planes came from the east out of the sun and struck Baldy with a vengeance. They were slower than the jets so sometimes better suited for napalm attacks or close ground support. Isaacs and I crouched low in the trench with our heads just over the top enjoying a perfect view of the planes napalming Baldy. The Chinese were dug in deep so they probably heard but never saw the planes and suffered few if any casualties. The strike was designed to serve notice that the Eighth Regiment would not tolerate their presence on Old Baldy.

The strike on Baldy and the second platoons torching of the village made daylight observation by the Chinese difficult and other possibilities might prove to be too expensive. Our outpost, Hill #347, was one of the highest hills in the Sokkogae area. It dominated the valley and the Chinese would be happy to sit on top of it and look down on the other hills. It was flanked on either side by strong outposts so the Chinese were faced with the difficult task of having to take three hills to hold one. Flanders thought the Chinese would attack Love Company and Fox Company and if they fell, we would be next. Taking the outposts would threaten the main line and the supply route from Seoul. Flanders said, "It sounds crazy but they are crazy." During the next few days Chinese artillery against our positions increased but they gave no indication where, when or if they would attack.

During one barrage, a round hit a bunker on the other side of the hill burying two men who were not wounded seriously and eventually dug out. Another round hit the corner of our bunker forcing Monroe and I to work overtime to make repairs. Chinese artillery was turning the remaining trees on the hill into splinters so large tree limbs to strengthen the bunkers were hard to come by. We were forced to reuse some of the battered tree limbs and then began filling sandbags to place on the roof and along the sides.

I filled the sandbags with dirt I removed from the bunkers interior walls so I was enlarging the room at the same time I was filling the bags. The room size was ten feet by ten feet by six feet high and growing larger. During one excavation session, I found it difficult to pull my entrenching shovel out of the wall. After a couple of tough tugs I managed to free it but when it came out of the wall it had a skull attached to it. I scraped dirt from the wall and found wax coated cardboard ration boxes; tree parts and layers of dirt were holding a skeleton in place. Uniform parts indicated that it was most likely the bones of a Chinese soldier. When I scraped away dirt to the right and left I discovered additional skeletons so I returned the skull back to its skeleton, re-covered it and searched for a bone free area. The Greeks or whoever occupied Hill #347 in the past killed so many Chinese that they ran out of burial space and buried them in the walls in an upright position.

The line went into a slow mode after the near disaster on Baldy and we thought it was because of the peace talks at Panmunjon. Isaacs said "Maybe both side decided to stop killing each other." We were ordered to close latrines and police the line picking up empty ration cans and spent cartridge casings on our side of the wire. Danger was a constant companion because unexploded ordinance could be found on both sides of the wire.

The latrine detail was always a smelly and nasty job. With forty-four men on the hill they filled up fast and had to be closed and identified. We shut the latrines down by throwing in trash then filling them with dirt and identifying them with a sign marking the location and the closing date. One old trooper told me he once dropped a dead Chinese soldier into one to fast close it. I doubted the story but could never find out if it was true or not.



*Al Trotola and Bob Vaughn
Cleaning the light .30 on Hill #347.*

The trench circled the hill below the summit along an imaginary line that was called the Military Crest. It was at its narrowest point just outside my bunker at the corner of the hill as it turned to the left and up on a slight incline. Men walking by sometimes turned sideways because the trench was so narrow but still rubbed against the side knocking dirt loose. When a cold rain fell or the sun melted the snow, the corner turned into a mud hole and passing it covered our field jackets and pants with mud that caked when it dried. One day I turned the corner on my way to help Bob Vaughn clean his machine gun and hit the side of the trench knocking some dirt loose. I saw what looked like the toe of a sneaker sticking out. I scraped away more dirt and saw that it was a sneaker and attached to the foot of a dead soldier, most likely Chinese and buried there by the same people who buried the bodies in my bunker wall. I immediately called Isaacs and Monroe to come and look.

Isaacs asked what I was going to do with it. I told him I was going to treat the foot with its due military respect by constructing a fence around it to protect it from further abuse. Monroe thought I was insane and said "You build the fence and I'll supply foot powder." "Foot powder?" I asked and he replied, "Yep, I'll remove the sneaker and the leggings, wash him and put powder on." Now I thought he was insane. I built a fence using small tree limbs and Monroe did what he said he would do then the men began patting the foot for good luck as they turned the corner.

The quiet on the line continued so a few officers took the opportunity to pay us a visit. Usually high-ranking officers avoided

inspecting outposts preferring to play it safe on the main line or even back further because they considered outposts a high risk. On this particular day, a young full Colonel and a Captain came out to Hill #347. The Colonel walked in the trench and stopped in front of my hole asking me was the food okay and how long have I had been out here. I told him "The food is excellent, Sir and I've been out here six weeks." He asked if I showered during all that time and I replied "No Sir." He said he would see about showers then started on his way but suddenly stopped and stared at the foot. He put his hands behind his back, bent over to get a closer look then asked, "Is that what I think it is, soldier?"

I told the Colonel "Yes Sir, it's a foot" and he asked me who did it belong to. "A Chinese soldier" I replied and he said, "Your actions are in poor taste and not indicative of our way of thinking. Cover it immediately." As the Captain walked by he looked at the foot and I saw a grin on his face.

That evening Lieutenant Cramer said every man in the platoon would march back tomorrow and take showers, no exceptions and then he said "A Division ruling requires us to shower every thirty days whether we need one or not and we're overdue." Undoubtedly the Colonel had something to do with that. After breakfast the next morning, two squads of the first platoon came from the main line to occupy the outpost so we could walk back to the showers. It was a tough two miles over hills back to the shower point but easier walking than when we first came up because we were carrying less. When I started down from the top of the final hill I saw the shower tents, three of them sitting on a flat plain next to a stream. Nearby there was a Red Cross truck and a Salvation Army truck that were parked side by side. As I walked by I saw a pretty girl handing out something from the side of the Red Cross truck so I said to Monroe "I'm coming back after I shower." We stacked our rifles and put our belts on the ground outside the first tent then went in and removed our clothes and dropped them into a large wooden receptacle in the corner.

The clothes in the box were filthy and smelled so I knew they would be burned. We moved on through the tent picking up washcloths and bars of soap from a table then went into a second tent. There the shower water was pumped in from the stream, filtered, purified and heated. There were a dozen showerheads so

we moved along, showered and went into the third tent where we picked up towels and dried off. Two potbelly stoves heated the last tent because of the cold outside temperature and many soldiers still have souvenir scars on their butts caused by getting too close to one of the stoves. On the opposite side of the room there were stacks of clothes sorted by size and after dressing it was out into the cold again.

Outside I joined up with Isaacs and Monroe then walked over to the Red Cross truck. When we got there the pretty girl handed me writing paper and envelopes and we began talking. She said she lived in Jersey City, New Jersey. I told her that was the town where I was born and then asked why she was here. She said, "I just had to do something to help you guys." I asked what her boyfriend thought about her being here and she told me she didn't have one so I said, "I can't picture a pretty girl like you not having a beau." She was about my age and very pretty but because of where I was and the job I had I thought it wise not to get better acquainted.

After saying goodbye to the Red Cross girl we walked over to the Salvation Army truck where another young lady gave us coffee in a small paper cup and a donut. We were standing alongside the truck drinking the coffee and waiting for the rest of the platoon to finish showering when the Lieutenant stopped for coffee. I heard cheering coming from behind a nearby hill so I asked Cramer did he know what all that noise was about. He said, "It's the Debbie Reynolds USO show. It's been on for some time and about over but if you hurry you might get to see the end." We ran over and did get to see the final act and Isaacs had a chance to use his camera to take a few black and white pictures. Isaacs used the same camera to take dozens of photographs using film that was sent to him from home. Most of the photos on these pages were taken by Isaacs using that camera.

After the show the platoon formed ranks in the tent area for the walk back to Hill #347 and what seemed like another world. In spite of the cold, we worked up a sweat walking back because the climb was mostly uphill and we were wearing heavy clothing. Monroe, Isaacs and I were in a line walking back with Isaacs directly in front of me so I said to him "I hope I make it back next month to take another shower." He turned and said, "You don't

care about clean, you just want to see the pretty Red Cross girl again.”

The very next day I wrote a letter to my parents using the paper and envelope the Red Cross girl gave me. I knew I had a patrol coming up soon so I put in the letter that the line was quiet and I would be busy reinforcing the bunker so I might skip writing. He knew exactly what I meant and knew I couldn't say much more because of the censors. When the letter arrived in West New York my father was stunned. I never gave the small red crosses on top of the paper or on the back of the envelope a second thought, but my father took that as a sign that I was wounded and in a hospital. It took about ten days for an exchange of letters to reassure him that I was fine.

The line remained strangely quiet with almost no artillery fire, just an occasional round to let the other side know there was a war on. That was to our liking but we all knew it couldn't last much longer. During the lull, the Chinese increased their probing of our lines leading Regiment to believe they were planning something. We were active during the daylight hours because of our superior firepower and air supremacy that forced the Chinese to move at night under the cover of darkness. Each night they sent patrols out that probed our lines by creeping up to the wire then using a forked tree limb to hold up the lower strand. They crawled under then inched close to our holes and lay there quietly listening to pick up pieces of information.

More than the usual number of sneaker tracks and their location in the snow told us the Chinese were getting too inquisitive. Something had to be done to combat the intrusions so we constructed an ingenious alarm system that was in use on the line. We put small rocks into empty metal ration cans then hung them on the wire. If the Chinese hit the wire when they crawled under, the cans would shake and rattle the rocks setting off the alarm. The Chinese soon reduced the number of probes when they became aware of the cans because they couldn't see where they were hanging in the dark.

The system had one major flaw, wind. Windy nights caused the cans to swing and rattle but we couldn't tell if the Chinese were out there because of the darkness. Off to my right and slightly below

my hole was a machine gun position manned by Harvey Blackcoon, a Native American and Emilio Sanchez, a Mexican-American. One-night strong wind gusts wreaked havoc with the cans leading Sanchez to think the Chinese were sneaking up on him. Both he and Blackcoon experienced a lot of combat together so they were understandably nervous and began firing into the darkness. Other men on the hill, myself included, followed their lead and began firing into the night and only stopped when Cramer went hole to hole yelling for us to stop firing. When the Lieutenant found out what happened he became furious.

The next morning Lieutenant Cramer called the company command post asking to speak to the acting company commander. The company clerk told him a new Captain got in late last night when the firing was going on. Cramer told the Captain what happened then asked that he send an EE-8 field phone to the outpost in the morning with the chow train. After his talk with the Captain, Cramer held a meeting with the squad leaders who relayed the news to us. The new Captains name was Louis J. Duet, a World War Two infantry veteran from New Orleans who received a field commission. The other news was that the second platoon was going out on patrol again in two days on November 16th.

The next morning when the double E-8 phone came up, Cramer had Flanders put it near the wire in front of Blackcoon and Sanchez then run a line back to their hole. The Lieutenant told them "Listen on the phone and don't fire that damn gun unless you hear somebody talking Chinese." The rest of the day we made preparations for tomorrow's patrol, I cleaned my rifle and attended the squad meeting. Hoveland said, "We're going down to the village again because the Chinese are setting up shop in the rubble and spotting the line. Regiment wants us to clear it once and for all and says we should blast anything still standing into small pieces using hand grenades."

Hoveland said Regiment's orders were to "Neutralize the village then proceed to a point southwest of the Three Sisters (aka Pork Chop Hill) and observe enemy activity. He told us Regiment wanted us to maneuver near the Chinese lines then fake moving in close to draw them out of the trenches. They wanted a prisoner for interrogation to learn if new units had recently moved into the

area. Two squads from Fox Company, Second Battalion, were going to move down from the main line to guard our rear and act as a backup if we got into trouble. To hold down casualties, Regiment advised against a prolonged engagement. I agreed with them on that last point.

We finished weighing ourselves down with ammunition then took the same route we've taken many times before, half way along the path then left through the wire and debris field to the village below. Lieutenant Cramer was called back for an officers meeting with Captain Duet so Flanders was up front leading this patrol. He took us along the right side of the paddy then moved along to the left side of the village. We found that two small huts and three foundations remained standing when we entered the village. Flanders told Monroe and me to clear the hut on the left and sent the other BAR team to take care of the one on the right. He said, "I'm moving through and I'll blow the foundations. Torch these huts and meet me at the stream."

We cautiously approached the hut and saw that it still had two walls and part of the roof in place. The front door was blown away so Monroe looked in and prepared to drop in a white phosphorous grenade to finish the job of burning it. I had moved around to the side and was looking through a window opening where the glass was also blown away and saw a milk cow standing in a corner. I immediately yelled to Monroe "Don't drop it!" then ran back to the front. After Monroe replaced the grenade pin we went inside and were shocked when we saw three Korean civilians kneeling and hiding behind the cow, an old couple and a young boy. I motioned for them to go outside then led them away towards Flanders so Monroe could pull out the pin again and torch the hut.

Ed Jago, a member of the third squad, saw me escorting the Koreans and yelled "They could be spotters, why didn't you shoot them?" I told him they were civilians and he said, "Clothes mean nothing." I ignored him and continued on to Flanders who said Monroe and I played it right then he told another man to take them back for interrogation. I asked Flanders what he intended to do with the cow and he smiled and asked me "Should I send it back or shoot it?" I told him "It would be better to strap the machine guns and ammunition to it." Flanders said, "She's too slow. I'll send her back."

I sat and waited for the rest of the platoon to join me at the stream and as I did I reached for my canteen to get a drink. Then I remembered I failed to fill it with water this morning so I cracked the streams thin ice cover with my rifle butt. I filled the canteen with the cold stream water then dropped in two water purification tablets, shook it and took a drink. Isaacs saw me and said, "You should know better. Runoff, remember?" I told him "I dropped in two water pills so that should do the trick."

When the platoon joined up together again, Flanders called our Fox Company backup and told them we were on the move. Then we turned left into the valley then swung north towards the Chinese. Flanders wanted to draw a few out by getting in close and maybe "snatch one" as he put it, but the Chinese wouldn't take the bait and leave the safety of their trenches. They remained hidden and almost invisible even when the platoon moved in close as if they knew our objective was to take a prisoner. Flanders sent the first squad in close and they drew small arms fire so they were forced to pull back and then we started to take mortars so Flanders ordered the platoon to withdraw fast. He later said, "The Chinese had no desire to come out and play today." The patrol failed in its objective to take a prisoner but on the brighter side there weren't any casualties.

The next day, tragedy struck the second platoon. Recent artillery attacks left some areas of the hill in disarray so Cramer told the platoon to scour the hill for reconstruction material. I told Isaacs "There's nothing left out there except dirt and small rocks that used to be big rocks." He laughed and said, "We'll just have to range out further, maybe to Baldy." Then he, I and Dave Frazier from the third squad started to walk down the finger where I found the Bazooka rounds. Dave was walking about twenty-five yards in front of me when he suddenly left the path and stepped on an undiscovered bouncing Betty mine. The explosion momentarily stunned me and I fell to the ground. When I looked up I saw Dave on the ground in a fetal position with a puff of black smoke rising above him. The mine shot up three feet from the ground and threw out hundreds of small metal balls that ripped into his midsection. I ran to his side but there was nothing I could do for him. When the medic arrived on the scene I stepped aside so he could treat Dave but he immediately looked up at me and shook

his head “No”. Cramer then ordered us back up the hill to safety. A helicopter soon arrived to fly Dave to a field hospital and when I was walking back I stopped to watch it lift off. The next morning after breakfast, Hoveland told the squad Dave died in the air on the way back. He was from Salt Lake City and only twenty years old.

Thanksgiving was only four days off so my thoughts were back home being surrounded by my family at a turkey dinner. I guess all of us here had the same thoughts. The Chinese didn't recognize the holiday but they were providing fireworks to help us celebrate. They increased their artillery fire on November 18th, the day after Dave stepped on the mine and continued it sporadically for the next two days. They seemed to know our meal schedule because each time we sat to eat they fired smoke rounds in then zeroed in on the smoke to hit us with high explosive (HE) rounds. We found more tracks than usual in the snow and on one occasion they got careless and left behind the forked stick they used to prop up the wire. The increase in artillery and the nighttime probes worried Regiment because it all pointed to a Chinese attack somewhere in our area. When prisoners taken by a Second Battalion patrol revealed they were from two new units in the area, Regiment put the entire line on alert.

Cramer told us to check the booby traps and for holes in the wire and strengthen the bunkers wherever possible. He moved the machine guns to throw off the Chinese because they knew where the guns were positioned. Cramer thought if they attacked it would be against Hill #347 because it dominated the valley and its height made it a valuable piece of real estate.

Flanders did not agree with Cramer because he reasoned that if they took our hill they'd be flanked by two outposts and unable to maneuver. He thought they would attack a flank first and his guess was the Three Sisters.

I double checked the pull cord on the China Express and filled more sand bags and kept thinking to myself “Is the world aware of or does it even care about what's going on here?” I went to Isaacs bunker and said to him “If something bad should happen to one of us, I hope we're not wasted.” Isaacs said, “Take out the bible and we'll rub it. God will work things out.” I laughed and told him

“You’d make a good Chaplain like Daniela back at the Fifteenth. If you get out of this Army alive, sell your liquor store and buy a collar.”

In reality, we were all concerned because we found ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. I realized I could blame no one but myself for the predicament I was in because I enlisted. Isaacs and I almost rubbed the print off the wooden matchbox that held the bible because we figured with Gods help and a fair amount of luck we could see this through. Cramer told Flanders to take ammunition from the center bunker and give each man an extra bandolier then asked the Captain to send out additional ammunition for the fifty-caliber machine gun and mortar and more medical supplies.

After breakfast on the 21st, I went to chat with Vaughn. From his bunker there was a good view of the Chinese positions so I borrowed his binoculars and watched as a platoon from Love Company slowly made its way up Old Baldy. New snow covered the area during the night so their olive drab uniforms standing out against the white background made them easy to follow. Third Battalion patrols climbed the hill daily trying to keep the Chinese off balance and off Baldy. The platoon made it to the trenches without difficulty then went right and circled the hill before reappearing on the he left side. Then they moved out of the trenches and down through the saddle to the valley floor. When I didn’t hear small arms fire I assumed no contact was made and the Chinese were not on the hill. Vaughn asked did I see anything and I said “Nothing much, just following a platoon on Baldy and everything seems to be quiet.”

When I returned to my bunker, Monroe took the opportunity to go inside and read a letter he got this morning from home. At night we used small candles to read or write and covered the door with a poncho to prevent light from escaping. When he finished reading his letter, Monroe came out and said “I’m troubled because all the ingredients the Chinese like for an attack are in place, low clouds, a light snow, no moon and poor visibility.”

I didn’t have a watch but I knew my four-hour guard shift was coming to an end so I pulled aside the poncho and looked into the bunker. I saw that Monroe was awake and just laying there

snuggled up against the cold inside the sleeping bag so I asked him the time. He lit a cigarette then used its glow to look at his watch. "Almost 2200, I'll be right out" he said. The Chinese caught soldiers of the British First Commonwealth Division in their bags and killed many so Regiment ordered half of all sleeping bags removed from the line. The bag Monroe and I shared was never cold during the night because when one of us got out, the other crawled in.

Monroe came out of the bunker and when he knelt to tie his laces I told him his ingredients talk made me decide to play it safe by not removing my shoes when I crawled into the bag. My reasoning was that should the Chinese attack I wouldn't have to look for my shoes or tie the laces and I could move fast.

I just closed my eyes and was getting comfortable in the bag when at 2230 hours the first enemy rounds slammed into the outpost. They shook the hill causing dirt to fall from the ceiling of the bunker onto the sleeping bag so I unzipped the bag and hurried out. I stood alongside Monroe and we both looked out to see artillery flashes lighting up the entire valley.

I asked Monroe "Can you see where they're hitting?" We could just about hear ourselves talking because of the exploding artillery rounds but I managed to hear Monroe say, "It looks like the Three Sisters." The rumble was deafening and I thought my eardrums would soon burst. Flanders and Cramer were moving from hole to hole asking, "How you guys holding up?" I turned and yelled back "Okay, here Sir" but I really wasn't, I was shaking. The artillery continued against the whole line except Pork Chop until 0030 hours, thirty minutes past midnight on Thanksgiving November 22, 1951. The Three Sisters was their initial objective just like Flanders had predicted. The artillery slowed but one round found its way to a spot about twenty-five yards from where Monroe and I were standing. The flash and the thunderous bang that followed covered us with dirt and tree parts scaring the hell out of us both. We were lucky not to get hurt or even worse killed. I heard firing coming from both machine gun positions and our mortar but when I looked out towards the barbed wire I saw nothing. I saw the flamethrower belching fire when I looked across the valley so I knew the Chinese were attacking Pork Chop. It was darkened and partially obscured by the smoke and poor weather conditions but

flares illuminated it and as the wind increased and gusts blew holes in the smoke I could see tracers bouncing off the hill.



*Three Sisters Outpost aka Pork Chop Hill.
As seen from Hill #347.
October 1951*

Occasionally the wind reversed itself and blew our way preventing us from seeing Pork Chop but it carried the sound of the small arms fire with it. About 0200 hours, the artillery and flares stopped and once again the valley was dark and silent leading me to believe the Chinese had taken Pork Chop. Fifteen minutes later Chinese artillery again began pounding Hill #347 and Love Company's outpost and they renewed their attack against Pork Chop. Division artillery was responding to their artillery but Monroe and I thought some of the rounds were falling short so the hill was getting rocked double.

When the flamethrower ceased to function and the last machine gun fell silent I knew the end was near. At 0330 hours the Chinese crushed the defenders on the Three Sisters with an overwhelming two-pronged attack. Pork Chop Hill and the forty-four on it were lost. Monroe and I stood in the hole stunned. We both wanted to help Fox Company but we couldn't, we were just too far away. My mind went blank during those horrible minutes after the fall of Pork Chop and I can honestly say that since that moment I have never been so frightened or have I ever had such a helpless feeling. Now less than ninety men on two outposts stood in the path of the Chinese and if we couldn't put the brakes on their express they might steam through the main line and cut the supply route from Seoul.

The strong defense put up by First Lieutenant James L. Stone and his Fox Company platoon disrupted the Chinese timetable and

delayed them so that they had taken only one hill out of three. Should they encounter further delays they would run out of time because daylight was approaching and they chanced being caught in the open by Navy jets flying off a carrier on station in the Sea of Japan. The Chinese were enjoying a hollow victory because they suffered a large number of casualties but were capable of returning at any time so Cramer again went hole to hole warning us to be prepared. Division estimated that two thousand artillery rounds hit Love and King Companies' outposts and three thousand fell on Pork Chop. There was so much unexploded ordinance laying on the hill that the mess crew wouldn't be up until the area was cleared forcing us to live on dry rations.

For his actions that night Lieutenant Stone was awarded the United States highest medal for bravery, the Congressional Medal of Honor. The citation reads: "Near Sokkogae, Korea, 21 and 22 November 1951. 1st Lt. Stone distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and indomitable courage above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy." To prevent his captors from doing him harm, the award was kept secret until after his release and made public in General Order 82, dated 20 October 1953.

Daylight on the 22nd allowed us to assess the damage to Hill #347. Every bunker was damaged but because the majority of us were in our holes and not the bunkers, there were only two minor casualties. They were both inside a bunker that had the fighting position inside when it took a close hit and collapsed burying both of them under dirt and tree limbs. Eventually they were both dug out. Our bunker took a hit near the corner and had to be repaired soon because the damage would allow snow or rain to enter or light to escape through a hole in the roof. The repairs would be difficult because the constant artillery fire converted the tress on Hill #347 into splinters so tree parts for the repairs would be hard to come by. Daylight revealed that only one tree was left standing on the hill so Isaacs took a photograph.

Repairs would have to wait until another day because Hoveland held a squad meeting and told us we were going on patrol along with two other platoons. I didn't agree with Regiment sending tired men, who had been up most of the night, on patrol. I asked myself if we meet up with the Chinese force that attacked last

night, what chance do we have? I asked Hoveland the exact same question and he said, "Regiment suggests we avoid a fight and just find out where they went. This will be a reconnaissance in force with one platoon from both Love and Fox companies joining in."

Cramer came by and said "It's going to be a 10:00 am start, a late start means a late return but a turkey dinner and all the trimmings will be waiting for us when we return." It appeared I was going to spend Thanksgiving Day chasing Chinese in North Korea. At 1000 hours the second platoon saddled up and loaded down then made its way down the finger on the west side of the hill. We walked along the so-called safe path where Dave stepped on the mine then moved through the wire. As we made our way down the finger, I looked west and saw a platoon from Love Company making its way through the wire on their hill. I assumed the platoon from Fox Company was doing the same to the east. We had to be doubly cautious because there were many unexploded rounds laying on the ground meaning that the bomb unit from the Eighth Engineers will have their hands full clearing the outposts, a job I didn't envy. If the three platoons joined on the valley floor we would total one hundred thirty men so I kept thinking to myself "safety in numbers". That made me feel somewhat at ease but when we reached the gully, I saw that the three platoons were not joining up but going their separate ways.

Cramer led us into the gully and we crouched low as we followed it around to a spot near Pork Chop. There Monroe, Isaacs and I looked up at the hill in silence as we thought about the dead American soldiers up there.

I could see large dark areas that were scorched in the snow and smoke that was still rising from fires caused by the flamethrower. The scars of the battle were highly visible in the snow. I saw a platoon making its way out from the main line to reoccupy the hill and to take care of the dead or tend to anyone that might be alive. I doubted if there was anyone up there still alive. I did think some men might have survived when I saw a helicopter land near the summit leading me to believe it was there to take the wounded back but Isaacs said, "They're just flying back the dead."

We headed northwest towards the Chinese positions and after a

half-mile or so we saw footprints and cart tracks in the snow. We followed the tracks for a hundred yards until we came upon six dead Chinese soldiers recently dropped there, most likely victims of Lieutenant Stone's platoon last night. Flanders had Isaacs and I search the bodies and told us to remove everything except identification. He dropped it all into a plastic ration bag and we started again. Another hundred yards and another six dead soldiers. It began to look like Lieutenant Stone and his platoon did a number on the Chinese and I wondered how many we would find up ahead. Suddenly we drew small arms fire. The men up front returned the fire but Cramer pulled us back because he didn't know the size of their force.

The Chinese retrieved their dead like the American Army and carried off the bodies but often discarded them in the hills, thus hiding the number of casualties from the United Nation forces. Their soldiers had little or no identification, so there must be tens of thousands of unknowns buried in the hills of Korea.

Just as Cramer promised, our turkey dinner was waiting for us when we got back to the hill. The mess crew surprised us by chancing coming up to serve our meal, but now they would have to stay overnight because it was treacherous going back down in the dark. They'd have to double up and try to keep warm without a sleeping bag. For some reason, they didn't bring up steamed clean mess kits so they served our Thanksgiving dinner in the dark pressed into a canteen cup. Monroe had the first guard, so he ate his turkey standing in the hole. I had mine inside the bunker by the light of our small candle but because I didn't have utensils, I removed my wool gloves to eat. My hands got cold so I passed my fingertips over the flame a few times to warm them up and when I found the meal cold too, I stuck the turkey on the end of my bayonet and passed it over the flame to warm it. Monroe pulled aside the poncho, looked in and asked "How ya' doing?" I replied, "How am I doing? The turkey is cold, I'm cold and this whole damn country is cold."

After the Thanksgiving loss of Pork Chop Hill, Monroe and I decided a time might come when we'll need a lot of grenades in a hurry. We decided to cut a shelf into the wall of our hole then line the bottom with wax coated ration box cardboard to stockpile grenades so they'd be easily accessible in time of need. The

fragmentation grenades had pins that when pulled out allowed a safety lever or spoon to fly off causing it to explode in just under five seconds. The pins were similar to ordinary household cotter pins and were attached to a ring. They were hard to pull out so to make the pins slide out easier, I squeezed together their butterfly ends. In Hollywood films, the actors were shown pulling out the pins using their mouth but in real life this could lead to the loss of teeth.

One night I was on guard in the hole and leaning up against the wall looking out into the darkness. Suddenly I heard a “ping” and felt something hit against my field jacket and realized immediately that it was the grenade safety lever. A pin slipped out and a live grenade was now up against my stomach and I couldn’t find the pin in the dark. I called Monroe and when he came out of the bunker I told him what happened. He felt around in the dark but couldn’t find it so I ran my hand along the shelf and got lucky. I felt the pin lying on the cardboard, picked it up and gingerly replaced it.

The next morning Monroe and I spread apart the cotter pins back to their original configuration. I told Monroe in the future if we ever decided to make the pins come out easier we should coat them with gun oil.

The last few days of November were really the quiet after the storm so when the line fell silent again the card playing picked up. I was paid five dollars a month so I was always low on cash and never joined a game. The quiet brought the mail clerk out of hibernation and one morning he appeared on line with the mail, copies of the Stars and Stripes and a juicy rumor. He told us he heard at Regimental Mail that two divisions were rotating back to Japan, the Twenty Fourth Infantry and the First Cavalry. December was just around the corner and wouldn’t that be a fantastic Christmas present for us, however I didn’t take much stock in latrine type rumors because the odds of disappointment were great. Many of us had our spirits bolstered by the mail clerk’s rumor but the bubble busted when we found out we were going out on patrol again November 29th. I thought to myself if that rumor was true, I hope my luck holds out a little longer because I didn’t want to get hurt now.

The 29th dawned a dismal day. It was unusually warm - almost to the point where we were sweating but we really enjoyed the balmy temperature.

The above normal air temperature mixed with the colder snow to create a fog that hung close to the ground. This resulted in poor visibility that was bound to help us on the patrol. Hoveland gathered the second squad at the corner next to my bunker and told us the patrol today should be "a cake walk" as he put it. Then he told us "It looks like the Chinese might have chosen to sit out the winter. If that's true, Regiment wants to let them know we're still awake so we'll just walk across the valley floor, let them see us but all the time keeping out of range." Air attacks didn't concern us because the North Koreans and Chinese didn't have an air force to worry us. We were usually able to move safely in the daylight as long as we stayed out of range of their mortars.

Cramer took us down the left side through the wire that was damaged by last week's artillery. It was easier getting through it now because holes in it allowed us to walk through but because new wire wasn't sent up, no one had gotten around to repairing it. Our objective was a low bush covered hill only fifty meters high sitting between Love Company's outpost and Baldy. Flanders called it the Ant Hill and said it was just "A worthless piece of real estate because anyone holding the higher surrounding hills could look down upon on it making concealment impossible."

Love Company radioed Flanders and told him they spotted a Chinese patrol on the Ant Hill this morning but hasn't been seen since. Knowing that, Cramer now had to assume the Chinese were still up there so he was forced to maneuver with caution. He and Flanders put their heads together and contemplated bypassing Hill Fifty but decided to move on it, because if we let the Chinese sit there, they'd be a thorn in the side of Love Company.

Cramer sent the first and third squads up the Ant Hill, so I finally got a break and sat back in reserve with the second squad. Cramer positioned the machine guns and then we sat and watched Flanders take the two squads up. When they were half way up, Love Company called Cramer and said about ten Chinese were seen running down the far side of the hill. Flanders also got the word on his radio so he just nosed around at the top for a short

time, then moved back down to where we were set up. Cramer said "Pack up the guns and let's go back. Our days work is over." It appeared to me that he was thinking about Japan and didn't want to get himself or anyone else hurt. It was late in the afternoon and the fog had vanished but the setting sun was taking the temperature down with it; ending the balmy spring weather we enjoyed and reminding us that December was only a day away. We all got back to the hill safely to close out November on a happy note.

December's frigid winds created intolerable living conditions for the troops on the line by freezing the mud into a concrete like mass. Any rise in the temperature softened the mud and it stuck to our clothing as we moved about in the trenches. The interior of the bunker managed to remain slightly warmer than the outside air because of the tiny amount of heat generated by our small birthday candle. To protect us against the cold, the Army issued us long johns, a pair of wool pants, a wool shirt and sweater, a pair of field pants, jacket, pile cap, insulated boots with four pairs of socks and, last but not least, a World War Two olive drab wool horse blanket overcoat with brass buttons.

Japan talk was the norm the first few days in December. We eagerly awaited the mail clerk's appearance on the line because he was privy to all the latest rumors at Regimental Headquarters when he picked up the mail. Other than the Pacific Stars and Stripes, he was our only contact with the rest of the world. Sometime around the 2nd or 3rd of December he came up with Saunders so we all crowded around him to listen to what he had to say. Sporting a wide grin he said "Now listen up you guys, I got this from a guy who got it from the Colonel's driver and I'm passing it on to you in strict confidence. Two National Guard Divisions will be coming from Japan to relieve the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Division and us later this month."

Things began to look up for us - giving us a ray of hope. It was an awesome feeling to live under the threat of death twenty-four hours of each day, and I remembered what the redheaded Sergeant told me in Pusan, "You never get used to it." How true that is. Japan now seemed like it might just happen, the line was engulfed with an eerie silence and the temperature was rising taking our spirits up with it.

The silence on the line made me happy but it drove Isaacs crazy and worried him into a frazzle because he hated silence. He told me "I can't live in quiet because I'm from noisy Washington, D.C." No action was being taken by either side and there were no artillery or mortars coming in for three days. Isaacs couldn't take much more and finally said "What do you think about throwing a few rocks close to the EE-8 phone? I know that'll scare Sanchez and Blackoon into firing the machine gun." I told him "That will put zip into the line but if we get caught Cramer will skin us alive." "Let's do it" he said, so we collected fist sized rocks and later that evening he came to my hole and we began throwing the rocks at the phone. Monroe said we were insane. Sure enough, after a few rocks Sanchez fired the machine gun and threw a few grenades. The mortar crew fired off a couple of flares and then the rest of the hill began to fire at the moving shadows caused by the flares.

Even Love Company sent up a few flares thinking that the Chinese were attacking. Tracers bounced off the hills into the night causing some of the main line searchlights to be turned on. Flanders and Cramer ran from hole to hole yelling to everyone to cease-fire. When the flares burned out and the searchlights were turned off the shooting stopped and the hills once again became silent. It wasn't long before Regiment called the companies asking what was happening up on the line. When the Colonel heard it was a false alarm again he became furious and told all company commanders the wasting of ammunition was unacceptable. "The next time the men on the line start firing there better be a lot of bodies to count or heads will roll." Cramer tried to find out from Sanchez what happened but all Sanchez could say was "I heard noises so I played it safe and fired." Cramer got angry and I heard him say, "I told you guys not to fire that damn gun unless you heard someone talking Chinese. I'd keep that in mind in the future." Isaacs and I swore Monroe to secrecy so our heads wouldn't roll.

The Captain got orders the next day for a patrol on December 8, 1951. Hoveland told us the second platoon got the call again and "This is going to be a rough one. We have to work our way in close, because Regiment wants us to blow holes in their wire so that means we're going to be drawing fire."

When I heard Hoveland say that, I cringed and told Isaacs "Regiment will get us all killed and we'll never get to see Japan." Isaacs said Flanders would be happy to get in close because he wanted to shoot a Chinese soldier after one shot him in the face a few months back. Flanders might be happy, but I wasn't, and especially not at the prospect of getting shot. I also wasn't happy about Regiments "holes in the wire" plan, because it could mean they wanted us to create a path through the wire for a winter cavalry charge. I hoped that wasn't the case because Isaacs and I had plans for fun in Japan.

When December eighth arrived, I loaded up with as much ammunition as I could carry, because I thought for sure I'd be on a hot patrol on a cold day. I felt like a deep-sea diver weighed down with lead ballast. I was sure the Chinese wouldn't take kindly to us getting in close and destroying their wire, and the extra ammunition would come in handy so I stuffed clips into every pocket. I was carrying close to three hundred rounds including four twenty round BAR magazines. Cramer and Flanders led us back along the safe path as they had done many times before but this time the walking was treacherous. Six inches of new snow covered unexploded rounds left over from the Thanksgiving barrage, so nowhere outside of the trenches was safe. We took some comfort in knowing that the duds didn't always explode.

We left the path at the mid-point again, then passed through the debris field - all the time staying on the snow-covered trail. I stumbled on a rock and for one second I thought it might have been a dud, but luckily for me, it wasn't so I kept walking - stepping into the mans footprints directly in front of me. The whole platoon used the same method and by the grace of God we all made it down to the rice paddy safely.

The platoon followed Lieutenant Cramer towards the gully along the left side of the paddy, completely avoiding the village that now had burned to the ground. A few huts were still smoldering because of the dampness in their grass roofs and sending white smoke spiraling skyward. We crouched low as we entered the gully, but found it difficult walking in places because some snow drifts were a foot deep. We left the gully and crossed the stream at a narrow point, then moved northeast past Pork Chop, but were

confronted by a long stretch of flat ground with no cover until we got to a bush-covered small rise. We followed Cramer across the open area in ten-yard intervals to avoid multiple casualties in case we were mortared. I was positive they saw us, because we were highly visible against the snow-white background in our dark olive drab uniforms. I saw the multiple strands of their wire when we reached the rise and wondered how close the Chinese would allow us to get.

The platoon took cover on the rise behind a row of knee-high treeless bushes and weeds while Cramer checked the wire and the Chinese positions. The Lieutenant spotted a depression and decided that would be a good spot to cut the wire because the Chinese couldn't get a clear shot at the platoon. He told Flanders to take the first and third squads up into the depression, cut the wire on both sides and get out fast. Monroe and I caught a break again by sitting back in reserve and watching the squads move up.

They made it up to the first row of wire alright, but just as they were cutting the wire, a dozen or more Chinese appeared suddenly in the center of the depression and began firing and throwing grenades. The two squads returned the fire but just as Cramer was about to commit the second squad, mortars began to fall all around us. He got Flanders attention and signaled him to pull his squads back so the three squads could join up and withdraw back to the rise. We set up a defensive line there so the Chinese couldn't hit catch us by surprise and hit us as we were going back. Cramer called the Captain to request artillery support, then as soon as he heard it coming in, he yelled to the platoon "Let's get our tails outta here." It appeared Cramer had Japan on his mind and didn't want to get anyone hurt this close to going out. His statement and actions this day gave me good vibes about going to Japan.

When we got back to the hill my vibes proved right. Men of the first platoon told us the regiment was moving into reserve somewhere below the Thirty-eighth Parallel in South Korea. No one knew if it had anything to do with going to Japan, so I told Isaacs "Ask the mail clerk, he'll know." Two days later Cramer called a squad leaders meeting that usually meant "patrol" but we had just came off one, so it had to be something else. Hoveland came out of the meeting grinning ear to ear and told us that on

December 20th, elements of the Third Infantry Division would take our place in the line. The mail clerk was right, The First Cavalry and the Twenty-fourth Infantry Division were going back to Japan, relieved by two National Guard Divisions; the Fortieth from California and the Forty-fifth from Oklahoma both coming from Japan. Isaacs was all smiles too and said, "All we have to do is stay alive ten days." Monroe would be counting days too but his counting was to go stateside. He had thirty-four points and needed just two more so Isaacs and I figured he would be leaving around Christmas. I said to him "Dave, you couldn't ask for a better Christmas present."

We were due for one more patrol before we left, on December 16th, but Cramer said Division decided to cancel all patrol activity because they could find "No valid reason to put any troopers in harms way."

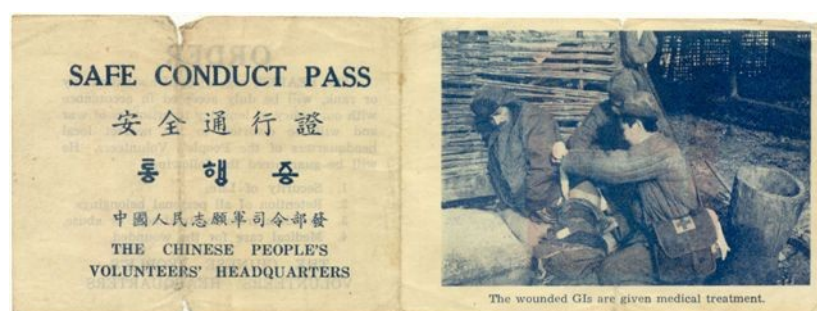
I was getting edgy like everyone else in the Eighth Regiment, thinking a stray round could end it all, but the weather and the Chinese cooperated. A six-inch snowfall blanketed the area and they probably decided to hibernate. Tanks and half-tracks were almost useless in the hilly terrain and deep snow made it difficult for the infantry to move about.

As the time to leave drew near, Hoveland filled us in with additional information. "The Third Infantry Division will relieve us early on the 20th and we'll remain in reserve about eight days until December 29th when the Regiment will begin withdrawing through Inchon. The last unit of the First Cavalry to leave Korea will be the Third Battalion on December 30, 1951."

The two divisions coming in were understrength so each company in the Division was required to choose twenty-five men to stay behind and join them as replacements, almost six hundred men. I reasoned with Isaacs that if the Division went by points we'd have a fifty-fifty chance. Each company had five platoons, three rifle, one heavy weapons and one headquarters, so each had to choose five men to leave behind. Cramer and Flanders put their heads together and came up with five men they didn't like, Isaacs and I were not among them and Monroe was safe at home because he was going home. Isaacs jumped with joy and began singing "Look out Japan, here we come."

Many men buried equipment rather than carry it off the line. Rifles and ammunition were not among the items buried because they were too valuable, but everything else was fair game for the shovel. In a combat zone, lost, damaged or destroyed equipment is considered to be a combat loss and not chargeable. I buried my armored vest rather than lug that steel monster off the line and miles back to the trucks. A week ago, the Chinese dropped safe conduct passes on us so Monroe collected some and buried a few in the wall with the skeletons, his way of saying "Good bye." They guaranteed humane treatment and medical care but I didn't believe a word of it. I also picked up passes (scan of one reproduced below).

As luck would have it, the early morning sky on December 20, 1951 was overcast and completely obscured the moon. It was pitch black, a great night for sneaking off the line. If the Chinese knew the switch was on, I'm sure they would have fired artillery to catch us in the confusion of moving in and out in the dark. As it was, everything was going well and about 0215 hours I saw my first soldier with the blue and white striped Third Division patch. I could have yelled with joy but I didn't and just shook his hand and said "Thanks buddy, and good luck." Then I turned and started to walk off Hill #347 into the darkness right behind Monroe and Isaacs.



*Safe Conduct Pass
December 1951*

Reverse Safe Conduct Pass



December 1951

The path from the outpost ran along the top of the finger then dropped slightly before rising to the main line. I passed through the now disarmed gates and started the climb, then turned to take a last look at Hill #347 but I only saw the hills outline against the dark - almost black - night sky. Then I slowly walked through more barbed wire up into the trenches where I had to turn sideways as I passed soldiers of the Third Division. I shook hands with only a few men because it was hard to see their hands in the dark, so to most I only said “Good luck” and kept right on walking.

The sky was just beginning to lighten, as the sun got ready to make an appearance on this beautiful cold and crisp December day. It was beautiful for me because a worry load was lifted from my shoulders, making me feel like I was given a new lease on life. I no longer had to worry about a setting sun and darkness, or if the Chinese were coming. The sun was up when we arrived at a crossroads where there were dozens of two-and-a-half ton trucks waiting for us. We climbed aboard by squads and platoons, and a half hour of bumps later we saw “Crossing the 38th Parallel” signs as we passed into South Korea. The trucks tossed us around and the ride was uncomfortable as usual, but we were a happy lot, so no one complained. Only smiling faces could be seen when the trucks reached the reserve area just before noon.

When the trucks arrived at the reserve area, I was about thirty-five miles south of Hill #347 and Sokkogae, North Korea. There were rows of large tents that would be home to me for the next ten days and a definite improvement over the hole in the ground I was accustomed to. It was hard to believe I would soon be able to shower daily, sleep in a warm tent, change clothes often and eat three fresh hot cooked meals daily. We formed up on the road after leaving the trucks and Flanders said, “The cooks are waiting for us. Let’s eat.” Then he led us to the tent for a specially

prepared lunch.

Each tent accommodated an entire platoon, so after we were assigned a tent and bunks, Cramer came in to tell us nothing else was scheduled for the rest of the day. "Tomorrow" he said, "we get to shower and change into clean clothes." The tents were set on a wood platform with sides that could be rolled up for ventilation. Tents were set aside for the latrine and showers so for the first time in months we were able to enjoy some privacy, and each company had one tent designated as a day room, so we'd have a place to read, write letters or just talk. It was stocked with pocket books, the latest stateside magazines, the Stars and Stripes and writing materials provided by the Red Cross and Salvation Army, who did everything possible to make the reserve area feel like home. It appeared civilization was just around the corner.

The showers were constructed like the showers where I met the Jersey City Red Cross girl back in November. Cold water was taken from a nearby stream, heated, cleansed then pumped into the shower tent. Here in reserve there was one tent, not three, so only six men could shower at the same time, then dry off and pick up clothes at the other end of the tent. It was great to be able to shower and change clothes daily but the best thing about it all was that I didn't have to walk back up to the line when I finished.

We attended a few infantry tactics and weapons classes and spent time cleaning our rifles and machine guns. Other times we took physical training, jogging and push-ups but we got a lucky break when six inches of snow hit the area bringing outdoor training to a standstill; then our exercise was directed at snow removal. Mess hall time was a treat because I talked to men I had never met, because with almost two hundred men in a rifle company, it was almost impossible to know everyone. I jumped on every opportunity to talk and make new friends.

Cramer gave us details about the sailing and the island of Hokkaido. He said it was Japan's northernmost island, the fourth largest and very cold with lots of snow. He also said we'd leave from Inchon on December 30th and steam into Otaru on Hokkaido's west coast on January 2, 1952.

Our second full day in reserve, December 22nd was a memorable

one. Monroe was happy because he got the word he was going home and both Isaacs and I were happy for him too but sad to see him go. We watched as he shoved his belongings into a duffel bag and made preparations to leave the next morning. The Army was flying a group of men who were rotating from a nearby airfield to Tachikawa Air Force base in Tokyo. In fact, men stationed at that field caused a major disturbance later that afternoon. Isaacs and I were talking just outside our tent when we heard yelling coming from the first platoon tent. We walked down to investigate and as we reached the tent, two Air Force men came rolling out of it. They bounced up and took off and when we went inside the men told us they were guys stationed at the airfield's radar station. They were trying to hustle them by charging twenty dollars for a pint of whiskey and they didn't take kindly to being gouged by our own people. They jostled them a bit then booted them out of the tent.

The next morning after breakfast the time came to say good-bye to Monroe. Isaacs and I walked him to the jeep that would drive him to the airfield and the three of us didn't say too much. Good-byes in the infantry are tough because bonds that aren't forgotten develop between men who experience combat together. Monroe was a good soldier and a good man.

Before Monroe got into the jeep, he reached out to shake my hand so I took his. He pulled me in towards him then grabbed me with both arms and patted me on the back. I handed him my phone number and he said, "If I ever get up north, I'll call you. Good bye, old buddy." When he shook Isaac's hand I guess the goodbye became too much for him because I saw a tear in his eye when he hopped into the jeep. Even big men sometimes cry.

Two days later it was Christmas Eve, my first away from home and for Isaacs too. Not being with our family was a downer but I thought how awful it must be to spend this night up on the line in a hole in the ground. Christmas Day was an off day to all except to those who had to walk guard duty, the cooks, kitchen police and Headquarters personnel needed to keep the company functioning. I spent my day walking around the area, talking or writing home to my folks.

The cooks prepared a special holiday turkey dinner for us and

would have preferred we eat and leave fast because the entire company couldn't fit in the mess tent at one time. We ate slowly because that allowed us to spend more time talking and getting acquainted. That night I distinctly remember sitting on the end of my cot and asking Isaacs "Christmas is over. I wonder where we'll be the next one and what 1952 has planned for us"

The next three days were spent preparing for what Isaacs and I called "Japan Day", the 30th of December. The entire reserve area would have to be spruced up so the men who come in behind us will find it as we did. The kitchen equipment had to be cleaned and shined, the shower tent rinsed out and the platoon tents swept clean. An old Korean gentleman sporting a long white beard was under contract with the Army to remove the waste contents in the barrels under the latrine tent. He collected it in buckets then spread it over the rice paddies and fields so we called him "Honey Bucket Sam." He would attend to that chore after we pulled out.

Breakfast as usual was early on moving day, similar to patrol days up north. After a real fine breakfast, we loaded once again into the back of an Army truck. The reserve area was twenty miles south of the 38th Parallel in South Korea and fifty miles from the Inchon and the Yellow Sea. Flanders told us we'd travel southwest and pass through Seoul on our way to Inchon. To this point, our luck regarding the weather was holding up but on this day it took a downward turn. Conditions deteriorated fast soon after the convoy began moving when light snow began to fall then turned heavy. When it finally stopped, the damage had been done and we were forced to endure a bumpy ride over snow-covered roads in below freezing temperatures.

An hour later the trucks rolled into Seoul, South Korea's capital and I saw the damage that was left from the seesaw battles for the city. Many of its buildings needing to be repaired or demolished and rebuilt. Flanders was riding in the back with us and said "When we leave Seoul we'll be only one hour from Inchon" but icy roads slowed the convoy and it took more than an hour to travel the forty miles between cities. Once there I saw that the war played no favorites and Inchon was heavily damaged like Seoul and Pusan.

The trucks drove through Inchon to the harbor area and stopped

next to a corrugated metal building that ran the length of a long pier. We left the trucks and stood on the pier in the path of an icy wind that was blowing in from the harbor against our faces. It was getting very cold so I said to Isaacs, "It feels like the temperature is dropping a degree a minute." He said, "When I talk my words freeze solid as they leave my mouth and fall to the ground in a heap." Not really, but it was cold. Flanders said he was talking to a Navy petty officer who told him, "The temperature on my ship dropped to twenty degrees but that was out in the harbor on the colder water." The pier was heavily damaged during the September 1950 invasion and to make matters worse, the top was repaired using large one-inch thick steel plates that acted as conductors and sent the cold upward through our boots and into our body.

The men were trying anything and everything to generate heat. Some jumped up and down, others walked in circles and a few at the land end of the pier started a fire with wood they ripped up from the deck. Captain Duet immediately walked back and ordered them to put out the fire. Isaacs and I walked a bit but couldn't go too far from the platoon and eventually just sat on our duffel bags with our rifles lying across our knees.

We continued to freeze and wait for a Higgins boat to shuttle us out to the Navy transports at anchor in the harbor. The boat was the World War Two brainchild of Andrew J. Higgins and it was his New Orleans Company, Higgins Industries that produced twenty thousand for the U.S. military. It was made entirely of wood and solved the problem of moving a thirty-six-man platoon from the transports to the beach. General Dwight Eisenhower wrote in his book "Higgins boats are the reason we won World War Two."

It was well over an hour before a boat finally pulled alongside and the second platoon climbed aboard, so, true to Army reputation, it was hurry up and wait. We were reduced to thirty-three men now so we easily fit into the Higgins boat. The ride out was a choppy one and I was sprayed with icy bay water but I didn't mind because it was better than freezing on the pier and I was thinking about the warm Navy transport I was seeing dead ahead.

The Navy knew we were cold so they welcomed us aboard with hot coffee and then almost immediately a Navy seaman led us out

of the cold to our quarters below. We were happy to be warm once again and pleased by the warmth of the crew. After Cramer assigned us to a bunk, we followed a Petty Officer to the galley for lunch. It wasn't a large ship like the Buckner but it was big enough to hold the thousand men of the Third Battalion.

There was a large recreation area next to our quarters similar to the layout on the Buckner but a dice game didn't start up. Many of us were tired due to the hard day we put in, and went to sleep early - not waking up even when the ship sailed out of Inchon Harbor. The next morning, after we showered and had a hearty breakfast, Cramer gathered the platoon around our bunks and again said we were headed to Hokkaido and "It's cold there with lots of snow so you guys will feel right at home." He also said there are three camps on the island and one regiment of the Division would move into each, the Fifth into Chitose One, the Seventh into Crawford and we in the Eighth into Camp Chitose Two. We would soon be part of the Army of Occupation, so after dinner the Navy rotated a showing of a War Department film about Japan to each Battalion. The film dealt with the people and their customs and stressed the fact that we were really ambassadors of friendship.

After the Japan film, Isaacs, myself, Bill Masci and Leroy Herr (two other members of the platoon), gathered around a large rectangular table in the center of the recreation hold. It was December 31, 1951, New Years Eve, so we began talking about home and family. Each of us had a story to tell so when my turn came, I told of my grandfather. I said he immigrated from Italy before the turn of the century and was employed as a machinist at the Ford Motor Company's Edgewater, New Jersey plant. He heard of a request by Henry Ford for someone to repair the engine on the family yacht so he stepped forward and rebuilt the engine. Henry Ford was forever indebted to him. He was a mechanical genius so no one in the family ever discarded an item if it didn't work. He could make, repair or rebuild anything. He made a large steel whistle and on New Years Eve he would attach it to the reverse end of a vacuum cleaner then turn it on. The resulting screech was heard all over Bergen County. His son was in France with the Army when Germany surrendered and he was so happy that he turned on his whistle. He let it go a long time until a policeman arrived at his door and said "Enough Frank."

Isaacs was the co-owner of a Washington D.C. liquor store and he somehow got his hands on a pint bottle of Johnny Walker Black scotch. A sailor sitting at the table saw the bottle, got up and said, "I'll be right back."

I asked Isaacs how he managed to come by the scotch and he told me "I traded a safe conduct pass to a sailor for the bottle. I picked them up after the Chinese dropped them to keep as souvenirs and thought they'd come in handy some day as trading material."

The sailor returned with ice, paper cups, potato chips and peanuts and suddenly we had the beginnings of a party. Three more sailors entered the room and asked if they could join us. When we saw that one was carrying a dozen bottles of Nippon Beer and the other had a handful of Cuban cigars we welcomed them with open arms. The third sailor brought along a guitar and started to play a few mountain songs I didn't know so I asked him if he could play something a little more Yankee. He said, "Thar ain't no Yankee songs down where ah comes frum." I asked, "Where was that?" and he said "Alabama" and I said to myself "Small world, don't knock Alabama." The other sailor took a harmonica from his shirt pocket and began to play "Garry Owen", Custer's Seventh Cavalry Regimental song. I told him "Now that's a fine Yankee tune." As midnight approached, he started to play Auld Lang Syne and when the Alabama sailor joined in with his guitar I saw that there wasn't a dry eye in the room. It was a short party, a fun party with a great bunch of guys that I was lucky to be part of and one that I will never forget.

CHITOSE TWO

JANUARY 1952 - OCTOBER 1952

When the ship left Inchon, it sailed south on the Yellow Sea, following the west coast of Korea, then turned east, passing through the Korea Straits just south of Pusan. Now it's turning north into the Sea of Japan and will sail close to the west coast of Honshu as it makes its way to Hokkaido.

I was below deck all of last night breathing nothing but smoke filled air, so the minute I finished breakfast, I went topside. The air up on deck was cold, making my lungs feel good the minute the air reached them. I leaned far over the railing to allow a fine spray of cold seawater to hit my face, and looked down at the water below thinking of the ferry I took so many times across the Hudson River to New York City. At that moment, Isaacs came up on deck, walked over to the railing and said "Happy New Year." "I almost forgot today was January 1st" I said and then wished him a Happy New Year too. He said, "Lets go to the other side and see Japan" so I followed him and looked at the Japanese mainland again.

The Eighth Regiment disembarked at Otaru on January 2, 1952. We again climbed into two-and-a-half ton Army trucks that were parked alongside a warehouse with a peaked metal roof that allowed the snow to easily slide off. It was cold on the Yellow Sea, but Hokkaido didn't feel any colder. However, I found it hard to believe the amount of snow I saw on the ground.

When the trucks were driving through the Hokkaido countryside I looked from the back and saw mountains of snow. The snow banks, created when the plows pushed the snow to the side of the road, were in some areas higher than the trucks. I lived in New Jersey and witnessed some big snowfalls, but I never saw snow piled as high as this. Flanders was right when he told us there would be a lot of snow here, but he understated the facts and I later learned that the annual snowfall on Hokkaido is one hundred inches. The roads were plowed clean and it wasn't long before the trucks were rolling through the town of Chitose and into the post.

In Camp Chitose Two I got to see a Quonset hut for the first time. It looked like a metal barrel that was sawed in half and put down round side up on a concrete slab. The huts could accommodate one platoon with two squad rooms in the front plus a shower and latrine in the rear and was kept warm in the cold weather by

diesel-fired space heaters. During those first cold months of 1952, the heaters caused us a lot of grief. They frequently broke down because of their age or had to be constantly fed, often in middle of the night like a baby. The oil was stored in metal drums that were placed horizontally on wood supports behind the huts. Going out to fill the cans in the middle of a cold night did not make the man who had the detail happy.



*Quonset Hut at Chitose Two
Hokkaido, Japan
February 1952*

It took two days to settle in and get accustomed to our new home. At roll call on the third morning, I looked around and saw less than half of the company standing in formation. I turned to Isaacs and asked him “Where is everybody?” Isaacs had no idea but Brad Farber, who was standing next to Isaacs, said he saw a large group of guys jumping the fence last night after supper. Then information began to trickle in. More than half of the Eighth Regiment went over, under or through the fence last night to visit with the girls of Chitose. Probably the same was true for the Fifth Cavalry as well. The move to Japan was top secret but when thousands of girls learned that the First Cavalry Division was headed north to Hokkaido they too headed north to join the Cavalry. They came by train, bus and plane with visions of thousand Yen notes dancing in their heads and quadrupled the population of Chitose in a few weeks.

The commanding Colonels of the Fifth and Eighth Regiments were initially stymied, but finally came up with a plan to bring the situation under control by declaring a three-day amnesty period. Soldiers that returned to their units during the amnesty would have no questions asked and receive no punishment. The amnesty deal spread quickly among the men who were celebrating as far away as Sapporo and in three days most of them returned.

A day after the amnesty ended, Captain Duet assembled the company in the Quonset hut that served as the mess hall. He stepped on a chair and then onto a table and looked over the company. "First" he said, "I want to thank you guys for a job well done. I didn't get to meet many of you until recently, but we have the opportunity now to get better acquainted. Our mission here is the defense of Hokkaido and we must be vigilant because Soviet MIG-15's are based only minutes away on Sakhalin Island." Then he grinned and said "Those of you who are going home will be disappointed to learn that you won't be here to take ski and snowshoe training." Everyone in the mess hall gave out a big laugh and then he ended by saying a training schedule would be posted on each platoons bulletin board. He jumped from the table and started walking out but stopped when he saw me and said "Al, come to my office. I have a job for you." "Yes Sir" I said, then followed him to the orderly room. I was surprised that he knew my name.

In his office he said "The Company will soon begin a rigorous winter training schedule on skis and snowshoes, so we'll need quite a few racks for storage. Take Ledbetter and build racks in the vacant Quonset hut and give me a progress report once a week." I asked why he chose me and he said, "Because I know you'll do a good job and it's sort of a payback for Korea."

The Captain chose Ledbetter because he was a carpenter by trade but even though he said "Payback for Korea" I still couldn't quite figure why he chose me for such an easy job. Building the racks meant that we wouldn't have to endure winter training hardships in the field, so I said to Ledbetter "We better take advantage of our good fortune and delay this job so we can remain hibernated until the snow melts." So I reported back to the Captain with a variety of excuses why the job wasn't progressing like it should, the electricity went off so we couldn't use the power saw, we ran out of nails or the lumber wasn't delivered on time. We built slow and laid low in three Quonset huts, the rack hut, the day room and the mess hall. The company suffered in the cold but we kept warm spending more time in the mess hall drinking coffee than we did driving nails. Ledbetter and I never went into the field during February 1952. We came close to going out once when the whole Regiment went out but the Captain told us to stay back as caretakers.

Thinking of new excuses was becoming difficult so we both realized the time had come to finish the job. Early in March I was forced to inform Captain Duet that we completed the racks so he reassigned us back into the second platoon. When we started the job back in January we never left the platoon physically, just on paper, so we didn't have to move anything back.

I always assumed Powell would someday return to the Company, but learned in a short letter I received from him, postmarked Fort Riley, Kansas that he would not. He wrote "I convalesced in a Navy hospital and enjoyed the Geishas just like you said I would. My arm is fine, I'm fine and thanks again for the help in the village. I continued to accumulate four points each month in the hospital, so when I reached thirty-six, the Army sent me home." He closed by wishing me good luck and asked me to write.

Events that took place in March always made me remember it as a memorable month. First a devastating earthquake struck Hokkaido and northern Honshu on Thursday March 6, 1952. I was sitting on the end of my bed reading the Stars and Stripes when it struck knocking me onto the floor and Isaacs - who was standing nearby - to one knee. We got up and ran to an area between the two squad rooms where the doorway gave us some protection and stood against the wall. We knew what precautions to take because we attended classes telling us what to do if an earthquake struck. The concrete floor developed cracks that crossed back and forth the width of the hut and a couple of the side windows popped out. A few sections of the heater chimney pipes that ran up through the roof came apart and black smoke began to fill the hut forcing everyone inside to make a quick exit.

Digging or burying anything in the volcanic ash on Hokkaido posed too many problems so the Army used overhead pipes to deliver all utilities. Electric and water, both hot and cold, ran through insulated pipes so when the earthquake hit, many of the pipes split. When I ran out of the Quonset hut I saw a steam cloud rising from hot water that was gushing from a split pipe and electric wires cracking in the air like July Fourth sparklers. For the next two days we were reminded of Korea when the company was without water or electricity and had to make due with trucked in water and candles.

Twenty-two people were killed by the quake that was felt throughout our island and northern Honshu (the largest Japanese island just to the south of Hokkaido). Kushiro is a small town about one hundred twenty miles east of Chitose, and was heavily damaged by the quake, so The First Cavalry sent a medical relief train with doctors, nurses and supplies to aid the residents.

Near Chitose was an orphanage run by a small Catholic Order that relied heavily on donations but few of its little residents were true orphans. Most were children of Japanese mothers and American fathers, a by-product of the seven-year occupation. When news that the orphanage was damaged reached the men of King Company, they immediately came to the Sisters' aid by donating time and money to make the necessary repairs.

Because most of the children were fathered by American soldiers, we felt obligated to care for them. The Company secured permission to hold an auction of items native to Hokkaido in the Service Club. We donated funds to purchase the items in Chitose, then held a raffle and donation drive at the auction. The men of the Regiment opened their hearts and wallets and we took in over five hundred dollars, a large sum of money in 1952 Japan. We used some of the money to purchase supplies at the Post Exchange and the Captain allowed us to use a company truck to deliver them to the orphanage.

Behind the Quonset huts where the oil barrels were stored there was a fifty-foot wide strip of land that was dotted with small bushes. It served as a buffer between the Third Battalion area and a small airstrip that was used by light Army planes. A committee of the men approached the Captain and asked him to use the left over money to build a play area for the orphans on the strip. Captain Duet said he would need approval from Battalion who probably would have to get approval from Regiment so it would take a few weeks. He said "Draw up some plans so I can see what it'll look like and I'll take it to Battalion." Occasionally the Sisters and the children joined the Company for Sunday brunch so we thought it would be nice if the kids had a little playground with swings and seesaws to play in when they visited.

Not too long after March, event two took place. I was standing

alongside a space heater talking to Isaacs when I felt pain in my rectum. Then I felt movement back there and I couldn't figure out what was going on so I excused myself and went into the latrine. I took down my pants and sat on the toilet then felt an object sliding out so I rose up and looked down. It was long and pink and for one split second I thought I had passed a part of my intestine. I panicked, flushed it and ran to the orderly room asking to go to the hospital. The company clerk saw I was distraught and immediately arranged for me to be transported to the hospital.

A Doctor saw me at the emergency admission room and asked what my problem was. When I told him he said, "You most likely passed a worm" and asked if I drank any unprotected water in the last six months. I said "I took and drank water from a Korean stream in November but I used tablets to purify it." "You didn't let the pills do their work so that guy was growing inside of you for four months." Then he told me "There may still be a friend inside you so I'm going to prescribe very big pills. Eat small amounts three times a day and take a pill each time you do. The lack of food will force the worm to nibble on the giant pill and cause his demise." I starved for three days and almost choked swallowing that large pill but I never saw a friend.

March event three was an act of God. Up until the last week of the month Hokkaido had received seven feet of snow, more than a foot below its normal snowfall. On the first day of spring, God brought Hokkaido to its average annual snowfall total of one hundred inches by burying Hokkaido under sixteen inches of snow. Drifts covered the oil drums and piled high enough along the sides of the Quonset huts to cover some of the windows. The snow also caused concern at headquarters that the weight of it would bring down the overhead utility lines. Japanese workers who staffed the camp couldn't get to work so most post facilities never opened their doors. Without heavy truck plows, half-tracks, weasels and winter equipment such as skis and snowshoes, the Regiment would have been immobilized. It's still cold on Hokkaido during March and with so much snow on the ground it would take a month of normal temperatures or a heat spell for it to go away.

Regiment was pleased with the snowstorm though because it brought about ideal winter training conditions and it wasn't long before they came up with a winter spectacular. They developed a

plan for a hypothetical hot war with our cold war enemies, the Soviets. The “war” began with an invasion along Hokkaido’s west coast at Otaru. In response, Regiment sent two Companies, King and Love, north in a convoy lead by truck plows to assess the situation.

It took two hours to travel the forty miles between Chitose and Otaru. When we got there, each company set up a defensive perimeter and sent out patrols. Regiment was playing war games and having fun, but the snow and bitter cold created hardships for the men. Isaacs and I shoveled out an area, then set up our two-man tent and I said, “This reminds me of the time we set up that tent on the side of the hill but this is better than Korea.” “Better?” Isaacs asked, then said, “ I don’t think so, Korea wasn’t this cold.” I told him “True, but nobody here is trying to kill us.” After three frigid days of war games, the Regiment returned to Chitose Two and its warm space heaters.

April was approaching and once again God made his presence felt. Captain Duet informed us that Battalion and Regiment both whole-heartedly approved the plan to build a play area for the orphanage and here’s where God stepped in, he turned the cold into warmth overnight. An unusual April warm spell melted most of the snow allowing construction on the play area to begin. Almost every man, including the officers, pitched in and in less than two weeks the playground was completed. Captain Duet extended an invitation to the Sisters asking them to bring the children for brunch and to enjoy the playground. On a pleasant Sunday morning, the children escorted by the Sisters and two Japanese ladies paid King Company a visit.



Playground Behind Company K

Camp Chitose Two

On Saturday afternoons most of us traveled into Chitose to unwind. A local bus company provided a mini-bus service, but a fun way to get into town was in a covered rickshaw on a three-wheeled bicycle. It was heated by a coffee can full of hot charcoal and powered by an elderly Japanese man who charged one hundred Yen for the ride, twenty-eight cents American.

Chitose was in the farming and charcoal-making region of Hokkaido and was surrounded by two Regiments of the First Cavalry Division. The town sounded, looked and operated like the honky-tonk towns of the old American west. It had unpaved streets with Nippon Beer and Saki wine flowing in the bars like water. Prostitution, gambling and drugs flourished along with the bars. More than two thousand prostitutes crammed into tiny Chitose to accommodate the two Regiments of almost seven thousand men. With so many prostitutes working the town, the price of love dipped to only seven hundred Yen, less than two dollars or a carton of cigarettes that cost a dollar at the Post Exchange.

Just outside the main gate was Minabes, an American style restaurant and bar that specialized in burgers, steaks, spaghetti and American big band music from the 1940's. Minabes stateside atmosphere made it a hot spot for the troopers of both regiments so Isaacs and I made it a priority stop.

It was at Minabes one Saturday that I met Nikko, a pretty Japanese girl who worked there as a waitress. She had western features and didn't look Asian, so I guess that's why I was first attracted to her. She was small; she stood only five feet tall, so I nicknamed her "Skoshee" a Japanese word that translated into small in English. I gave her a few large tips to impress her so she became friendly and we began talking. One thing led to another and we began dating, then more frequent dating, and finally as a twosome. Many soldiers preferred to have one steady girlfriend, thus avoiding streetwalkers and disease. They often established an apartment in Chitose with the soldier occasionally coming in the evening but they would usually spend the weekend together. Expenses were shared but often the soldier paid the majority of the bills, food, rent and utilities. GI's had a special name for these

girls, "Mama-san." The Mama-san took care of all household chores, often doing the soldiers laundry and provided him with the niceties of life. I made such an offer to Nikko but she said "I must refuse because my father is ill and I am helping my mother care for him." We continued dating and shared many good times together but I found myself getting to like her too much. When she mentioned marriage, I panicked. Taking on a Japanese wife was not what I wanted, so I decided our close relationship had to end.

I'm sure my parents would have been happy knowing that I reached that decision, because I didn't think they would take kindly to me bringing home a live Japanese doll. I always talked to Nikko when Isaacs and I went to Minabes, but one Saturday when we stopped for dinner, she wasn't there. I asked where she was and a waitress said her father died, so she went back home to Honshu with her mother. While we were eating, Isaacs told me he was happy I stopped seeing Nikko, because he thought she was just another girl trying to parlay love into American citizenship.

During the occupation the American military was exempt from arrest by the Japanese unless they were accompanied by our Military Police. This upset some Japanese because it allowed Americans to escape justice if they could avoid arrest. That would all end in May 1952 when the Peace Treaty was signed officially ending World War Two and changing the status of the American military from occupiers to guests. From then on, Japanese Police could arrest any American for any infraction without our Military Police.

After the treaty signing the Japanese Police went on an arrest frenzy. Hokkaido was a poor farming region with little money, so many towns were on the verge of bankruptcy. To avoid financial disaster, the Mayors devised a devious plan to bolster the town treasuries by arresting American soldiers.

The Mayors instructed their police to arrest any American soldier that committed the slightest infraction. Some of the charges were ridiculous, like walking too slow on a public sidewalk or sitting too long on a park bench. The men were handcuffed then dragged into a municipal court in front of a phony magistrate who fined them huge amounts, sometimes as high as one hundred eight thousand Yen or three hundred American dollars. The men were

searched and if they had an amount close to the fine in their possession the police took the money, considered the fine paid and gave them a receipt before releasing them. That fell just short of robbery. Soldiers who didn't have enough money to pay the fine were jailed but the Japanese failed to notify the American military. Conditions in some of the Japanese jails were abominable to say the least. When the soldiers failed to report for roll call, the Army, not knowing their whereabouts, could only list them as Absent Without Leave. When more soldiers turned up missing, the Army realized what was taking place and contacted the nearby towns, demanding that the soldiers be released immediately. After a heated meeting between the two Regimental Commanders and the Japanese authorities, the Mayors agreed to stop their present practice of arrests and notify the US Army within twenty-four hours when an American soldier was apprehended and detained.

Hokkaido was warming up now that the middle of May was here, so on Saturdays when we were broke and couldn't go to town, we got together and played softball. One Saturday we played a team from the Fifth Cavalry. During the game Sergeant Manuel Chavez and Private Jimmy Borders got into a heated argument over a Japanese girl they were both seeing. Neither was in the game, but both were in the second platoon of King Company. A fistfight almost ensued but a Lieutenant from the Fifth Cavalry prevented it from taking place. We won the game 15-11 and after the game we went for hot dogs and beers at the Enlisted Mens' Club with the losers paying.

The following Saturday, Isaacs and I took the rickshaw into Chitose for dinner at Manabes. Not long after we sat down to eat, Jimmy Borders walked in with his Japanese girlfriend. After seeing us, he walked to our table and introduced the girl, then they sat at another table for dinner. Isaacs and I finished dinner and went to a small bar that was a hangout for troopers of King Company, where we passed the night away drinking and having a good time before taking the mini-bus back to camp at 2300 hours.

The next morning, a Sunday, I learned that Borders and Chavez were involved in a nasty scuffle outside Manabes not long after Isaacs and I left. The soldier who witnessed the fight told me Jimmy got the better of Chavez.

The exchange rate was three hundred sixty yen to the dollar with a one hundred dollar limit so if anyone needed more they had to ask other soldiers to exchange for them. There were only three places to exchange yen, on post at the Service Club and the Post Exchange or in town at the Enlisted Mans Club. The yen cages on post closed at 2100 hours but in Chitose they remained open until midnight. If a soldier exhausted his yen supply after the cages in town closed, he had to pay a visit to Chitose's Black Market Street and deal with the Japanese moneychangers. The Army paid us in Military Payment Certificates, a script we called MPCs. Few, if any of the local businesses accepted script as payment because it was illegal for a Japanese National to possess more than one hundred dollars in script. The Army sometimes changed the color of the MPCs, making the previous issue worthless and bankrupting many of the moneychangers. The Japanese gave three hundred yen to the dollar forcing soldiers to take a seventeen percent loss if they wanted more yen. It happened to me one time when I found I was yen short and had to trade twenty dollars in script for seventeen dollars in Yen. That transaction did not sit well with me so I kept trying to find a way to get even with the moneychangers. After days of heavy thinking, I finally came up with an idea to get even and make money at the same time.



*A Military Payment Certificate
1952*

One day I told Isaacs we had to find a place so we could talk privately and discuss a plan I came up with. He suggested the Service Club darkroom so he gathered up a few old Korean negatives and we went to the club to print pictures. As he was swishing and printing in the dark, I laid out my plan. I said, "The moneychangers are making the money. What do you think about undercutting them by offering three hundred twenty five Yen to a dollar? We'd still be making ten percent on every transaction and would be doing our patriotic duty by reducing the Japanese moneychangers profit." He said, "Let me give it some thought" so when he finished printing he suggested we go to the post Enlisted Mans Club for a few drinks. His was worried about getting

arrested because the Japanese and our Military Police occasionally rounded up the moneychangers. I told him "They'll see we're in the Army and think we're there to get Yen so when we see them coming we'll just fold our money and walk away. This Friday coming is May 30th, Memorial Day and a good time to launch a new business." Some drinks later Isaacs and I agreed to begin with a hundred dollars in Yen each, seventy two thousand, on Black Market Street this coming holiday weekend. Thursday night we went to the Service Club to get trading Yen and as we stood waiting in line Issacs busted out laughing and said "That patriotic duty bit was a real gem."

Late Friday afternoon, Isaacs and I took the mini-bus into Chitose and had a steak dinner at Manabes then walked to the Chitose Bar where most of the King Company men frequented. The owner hand painted the crest of the Eighth Cavalry Regiment and its motto "Honor and Courage" over the bar. About 2345 hours we left and headed for Black Market Street and started to trade Yen shocking the moneychangers who never before had American soldiers as competitors. We realized a ten-dollar profit that covered dinner and drinks by trading the two hundred dollars worth of Yen in less than an hour so Isaacs and I decided to double up the next weekend and come into Chitose with one hundred forty four thousand Yen. I told Isaacs "If we keep doubling up, the growing pile of Yen will have to be hidden somehow."

Sunday June 1, 1952 was a quiet day. Isaacs and I were sitting near the play area planning our next weekends trading when we heard a few yells from out front in the company area. We walked around to see what all the ruckus was about and one of the Sergeants told us that Borders was holding Sergeant Chavez hostage in one of the squad rooms. Ever since Jimmy took advantage of Chavez in last months fight, Chavez hounded him and put him on every dirty detail he could find. I guess he pushed Jimmy a little too far. Minutes after we got out front, eight military policemen arrived in two cars.

With guns drawn, the Military Police surrounded the Quonset hut. The hut had only one door but three-dozen windows that provided Borders with a place to shoot or escape. I learned later that Jimmy etched Chavez's name onto a .30 caliber round then

loaded it into the M-1 rifle he was using to hold him hostage. The MP's cleared the area around the hut but I stood close enough to see and hear them negotiating with Borders through a squad room window. Ten minutes later I saw three MP's enter the hut and shortly thereafter they emerged with a shaken but unhurt Chavez. Then they came out and put Jimmy in one of the cars before taking him away in handcuffs.

One evening during the week I stopped at the Service Club to relax and write a letter home to my folks. In the lobby an a-frame was holding a large photo of a beautiful old hotel. I read below that that it was operated by Special Services exclusively for the use of American Military personnel. I told Isaacs and he said he'd like to go there and asked me to check it out. A few days later I went back to the Club and stopped in the Special Services office to ask about the hotel. I learned it was the Hotel Shizura in Numazu, a sleepy fishing village on picturesque Suragu Bay eighty six miles south of Tokyo. Ed Bialy, in my platoon, told me Air Force shuttles left Sapporo for Tokyo twice daily and accepted American military personnel as passengers.

The clerk in the Special Service office gave me a brochure that said the Shizura Hotel was used exclusively by the Japanese Imperial Navy as a rest hotel during World War Two. The U.S. Army took control of it in 1945 and assigned it to Special Services that's operated it ever since as a vacation spot. The clerk advised we thumb a ride on one of the two daily shuttles to Tokyo then take the train to Numazu. He said the planes shuttled mail and supplies between Tokyo and Hokkaido and made stops at two small airfields along the way. They also flew military personnel on a space available basis and cautioned us that "Some soldiers were bumped off by officers seeking rides when the plane made a stop at one of the airfields."

The Shizuura Hotel



Numazu, Japan

Isaacs and I requested and received approval for a seven-day furlough to begin on June 22, 1952. On that day without having breakfast we rode an early bus to Sapporo then took a taxi to the airfield. We found our way to the operations building and ask the officer behind the desk if he had seats on a shuttle flight. "Yes" he said, "I have two spaces on the ten o'clock flight. Do you want them?" We said "Yes" so he gave us the seats then warned us we could be bumped by an officer and left stranded on a deserted Japanese airfield. "Rank has its privileges," he said. Isaacs and I had little choice so at 0930 we boarded the plane and headed south to Numazu via Tokyo.

The plane was scheduled to make two stops so we calculated it would take about four hours to fly the five hundred miles to Tokyo putting us down at Tachikawa Air Force Base about two o'clock in the afternoon. I turned to look out a window as we were taking off after the second stop and saw oil streaming back from an engine over a wing. I brought it to the attention of a crew member that casually said not to worry because "that old boy acts up every now and then." Isaacs told him "You guys better forget changing the oil and change the engine instead."

We survived a leaking engine and the threat of being bumped off the flight to arrive on time. The military C-47 Dakota, civilian DC-3, touched down exactly at 1400 hours. We discovered the train

station was near the field but carrying the bags forced us to take a taxi. When we arrived at the station we paid four hundred yen, \$1.11 American, for a coach class train ticket and two hours later were in Numazu on our way to the Shizuura. The hotel was traditional Japanese with wood floors; dark wood walls and quaint sliding paper doors. For eight hundred Yen a day we shared a room with a private bath and a Jacuzzi, got three hot meals and maid service with a bed turn down. Not bad for a bit over a dollar a day. Our Japanese maid earned one thousand six hundred Yen a month, \$4.45 American.

Breakfast the next morning was in the second floor dining room and was cooked to order. When we finished, we took a stroll along the shore of Suragu Bay and watched a fisherman repair his net. Further along the beach we sat on an overturned rowboat and watched as another fisherman chipped barnacles from his beached boat and off in the distance we could see snow capped Mt. Fuji. In the afternoon we boarded a small boat and cruised by a concrete bunker that housed big shore guns during World War Two.

The third day I talked Isaacs into a bicycle tour of Numazu. He was moving slow in the room so I went across the street and into a small shop to ask about bike rentals. As I was standing in the front of the open front shop, I saw a small boy, about five or six years old, walking by on the gravel street without shoes. It tugged at my heart to see that so I walked out and took him by the hand into the shop and bought him a pair of rubber sneakers for a dollar's worth of Yen. He smiled, bowed then ran away. Isaacs finally came out so we rented bicycles and spent the afternoon peddling around town.

Some evenings after dinner, a Special Services lady First Lieutenant sponsored dances with young Japanese girls in a large room that was next to the dining room. They held card games in the same room and often lined it with rows of benches to hold showings of first run Hollywood films.

The next day Isaacs was again dragging his heels. I told him he was acting like he was a hundred years old and said I'd meet him in front of the hotel. I was standing under the hotels front archway trying to come up with a plan for the day when the little boy I

bought sneakers came up close to me and began staring. Isaacs showed up and asked, "Is this the boy you told me about?" "Yes" I said, "but I don't know what he wants." The boy took my hand and tugged on it so Isaacs said, "He wants you to follow him." I freed my hand from his grip and motioned for him to go ahead. We followed him a short distance then turned left into a narrow street and stopped at a small house that was having an upper floor added.

The boy approached the front door, the father opened it and bowed to us and said "Welcome, American soldiers." Both he and his wife who we met when we entered spoke good English, in fact she taught English at the local high school. The father was self-employed. The mother invited us to stay for dinner because she and her husband wanted to repay us for being so kind to their son. I asked, "How old is the boy?" and she said, "Four and we also have a six year old daughter."

We sat Japanese style with our legs crossed on a yellow straw mat as the wife served a meal of fresh caught fish and greens from their garden.

After dinner the father led us to the living room where he served saki rice wine in a small hand painted porcelain cup. He brought out his Army album and showed us photographs of the time when he was in the Japanese Army saying he recognized our shoulder patch because he fought against our division on Leyte in 1944. He came to a page that had a picture of his squad and said four of the men in the photo were killed late in 1944. Tears filled his eyes as he remembered. Soldiers in all Armies in all wars always mourn the loss of friends.

The mood of the evening turned from sad to glad when their little daughter appeared in a hula skirt made from white nylon parachute cord and danced to traditional Japanese tunes played on a crank wound record player. She was cutest Japanese doll I ever saw and the highlight of the evening; in fact she was the highlight of the trip. When she was finished dancing, the father asked us to follow him upstairs because he wanted us to see the new construction. He told us it was going to be a three-bedroom addition. Then we both realized his self-employment was as an owner of a brothel. He said "You may have any girl without charge

“ but Isaacs and I were embarrassed and couldn't accept because of the mother so he bowed and told us to return and accept his offer. “Dozo” he said that translated into please in English.

It was not illegal in Japan to own a brothel or practice prostitution. It was a respected and thriving business but highly scrutinized and regulated by the civilian authorities. The brothels were subject to monthly inspections and were required to display certificates of cleanliness. The same held true for the girls. They were obligated to undergo a monthly physical performed by a medical doctor and display the inspection dates and the signature of the doctor on a card pinned to an outer garment. Most girls displayed the card, that soldiers dubbed “VD cards”, on a chain around their neck.

It was becoming late and time for the children's bedtime so Isaacs and I decided to leave. The mother asked us back but we told her that would be impossible because Chitose was six hundred miles to the north. We shook hands then the parents bowed and I said good-bye to the boy. I had to hug their little Japanese doll daughter before I left so I picked her up, hugged and kissed her then put her down and walked away.

The next couple of days were spent walking on the beach, bicycling and shopping. I stopped in a small shop at the edge of town and purchased hand carved ivory figurines to send home to my parents. In the shop we met two Japanese girls and after striking up a conversation with them, I invited both to join us for dinner at the hotel and surprisingly they accepted.

It was our last night at the Shizuura, so having the young ladies for dinner was a perfect way to end the trip. Their English was impeccable, most likely taught in high school by the little boys mother and they were both pretty and pleasant.

The Numazu visit passed quickly and before we realized it we were on the train going to Tokyo. At the sprawling Tachikawa Air Force base we got lucky again. There were two spaces available on the afternoon shuttle at 1600 hours giving us four hours until flight time so we stopped in the mess hall to get an Air Force lunch. The mess hall was in a large hanger and had to be because it serviced thousands of men daily flying in and out of Japan. As we were eating, a soldier sitting next to me asked were

we flying home. I said, "No, we're on our way back to Hokkaido." "Not today" he said 'an Air Force C-120 transport went down a few minutes ago at the end of the runway as it was taking off. The Air Force suspected sabotage so they shut down the field.'" I turned to Isaacs and said "One of us better call Hokkaido to tell them we can't get a flight otherwise we'll be listed as AWOL." After lunch we went to the operations building and a Sergeant gave us permission to use the phone. I called the company and Captain Duet said not to worry because he would have us listed as TDY, temporary duty, until we returned.

We were billeted two days in another huge hanger with hundreds of soldiers and airmen who were also grounded by the accident. We slept in double bunks and had to store our belongings under the bottom bunk. Any longer and we would run into a major problem - clean uniforms, since we hadn't foreseen an accident and a closed airfield, we didn't pack extra. On July 3rd the airfield was cleared and reopened, and this time we were able to get space on the morning C-47 back to Hokkaido.

Isaacs and I were both disappointed to learn that when we were away Glen Flanders left for home and we didn't get the chance to say goodbye. Many Korean veterans were approaching the magic thirty six-point plateau and would be going home, so I'd be losing friends. My point total had only reached seventeen so I had a ways to go.

Just after the 4th, the Army lawyer that was representing Jimmy Borders approached me and asked if I would be a character witness for Jimmy at his sentencing. I said to him "Sure, but I didn't know there was a trial." He told me "Borders pleaded guilty at the arraignment so there was no trial." So on Thursday, July 10, 1952 one week after I returned from Numazu, I appeared at the hearing as a character witness on Borders behalf. Outside the hut as I was about to go in Jimmy saw me and walked over to where I was standing.

Borders said to me "Al, don't be kind to me in your testimony. Paint me black. I've had it, I just can't take the Army anymore and I want to go back to my family and farm in North Carolina." Jimmy was a World War Two veteran who rose to the rank of Master Sergeant but was busted a few times and now was a Private E-2,

one click above the bottom. Inside on the stand I lied and said I saw Jimmy using drugs out behind the oil drums and in the latrine. A couple of other soldiers helped out too by telling a few lies. He was sentenced to a Dishonorable Discharge, six months in the stockade and the forfeiture of all pay and allowances. They couldn't reduce his rank any lower than E-2, so he escaped the "reduction to lowest rank" sentence. I saw him when he was led out of the Quonset hut in handcuffs. He saw me and made an attempt to walk over to thank me but the Military Policeman who was holding his cuffs yanked him back. When I saw that, I thought to myself, what a lousy way to treat a man who fought for his country in two wars. Jimmy served in the Army since he was drafted in 1940 and I think he had had his fill. He got what he wanted, to get out, even though it was by other than honorable means. I received a letter from ex-trooper James G. Borders in January 1953 wishing me happy holidays and thanking me for my help. It had a North Carolina postmark, Jimmy made it back home to his farm.

Isaacs asked if I intended to do business on the coming weekend and I told him "Sure, why not?" so Thursday afternoon we turned two hundred dollars into Yen, then asked other soldiers to get us an additional two hundred. Friday night we went into town and dealt away the Yen realizing a profit of forty dollars, more than replacing the cost of dinner at Manabes and the drinks at the Chitose Bar. As we were riding back to camp on the bus, Isaacs told me "I saw angry looks on the faces of the moneychangers tonight because we are in competition with them and their profits are dwindling. The situation could turn ugly if their profits continue to shrink."

That Sunday I spent much of the afternoon alone in the day room writing home and trying to solve the money changer problem. A few cokes and a pack of cigarettes later I suddenly came up with an idea I thought was quite brilliant and couldn't wait to tell Isaacs about it. I caught up with him in the mess hall and told him I had an idea and said "After we finish eating we'll go to the club and I'll tell you about it."

After dinner we took a slow walk to the Enlisted Mans Club and on the way I explained my plan to Isaacs "The moneychangers are scared" I said "when they hold large amounts of MPC's so lets

take it off their hands by offering them twenty dollar greenbacks for twenty one dollars in script.”

Isaacs asked, “Where do we get the twenties?” “From our fathers” I said. “We’ll send them money orders and have them send us back twenty dollar bills. We don’t have to worry about censors checking our mail here in Japan.” Isaacs agreed the plan would work so I wrote my dad asking him to withdraw money from my bank account and send me five new twenties in between the pages of two separate letters. Isaacs did the same and in ten days we were fully funded so we put our plan into operation. The Japanese were relieved because they could unload their holdings for a five percent fee then legally exchange the greenback twenties for Yen at any Japanese bank. Isaacs and I were making ten percent trading with the GI’s and five percent trading with the Japanese.

All went well until one Saturday when Isaacs came down with a sour stomach and just wanted to lie motionless on his bunk. I saw him flat on his back sporting a face without color and knew he wasn’t going into Chitose, so I found Ledbetter and we went to see a movie at the post theater. I returned to find Isaacs’s condition improved so I sat on the edge of his bunk talking for a few minutes. When I decided to go to sleep I suddenly remembered I had ten twenty-dollar bills and seventy two thousand in Yen in my pockets and it would be unwise to put it in my footlocker.

Leaving money or valuables within easy reach would be too great of a temptation for many soldiers who had little in civilian life. I lost watches, belt buckles and much more that way, so I put the money inside my pillowcase. When I slept my head would rest on it and keep it safe.

Isaacs felt much better the next morning so after we finished taking a shower, we walked together to the mess hall. One of the soldiers that knew we were dealing sat down next to me and said, “You guys were fortunate not to be in town last night.” “Why” I asked. “Because” he said “the Military and Chitose Police raided Black Market Street and arrested all the dealers.” Boy was he ever right, Isaacs and I were lucky, so we decided to count our blessings and quietly went out of business.

The Far East Command in Tokyo (FECOM) often changed the color or design of the Military Payment Certificates without warning making the previous issue worthless. We weren't troubled by currency changes because we were able to turn in the old for the new but the Japanese moneychangers didn't have that luxury. When they realized the script they were holding had become worthless they often sold it to GI's at prices as low as fifty cents on the dollar. After one middle of the night color change, I went into town and bought four hundred dollars in MPC's for two hundred dollars worth of Yen.

I then exchanged the old for the new, half in town and the other half on post and realized a two hundred dollar profit overnight. I heard rumors that a Chitose man hung himself in the garage under his home after a color change. He was most likely a small time money changer who couldn't afford the losses associated with the business.

Not far from Chitose was the town of Norboribetsu, famous for it's hot springs and Jigokudani or Hell Valley, a collection of steam vents and hot sulfurous streams that reached temperatures of over one hundred twenty degrees Fahrenheit. Isaacs, Tom De Nero and myself decided to spend a long weekend there so we applied for a three-day pass. The hotel was open to anyone, but catered mostly to the American military. A Special Services lady Lieutenant was on duty evenings to supervise film presentations, card nights and bingo, and each Saturday the hotel invited local Japanese females to a dance highlighted by American music and a variety of entertainment.

The Noboribetsu Hotel had no ties with the U.S. Military other than providing office space to a Special Service officer. The hotel only accepted Japanese Yen as payment but to accommodate the American Military, they converted Military Payment Certificates into Yen at the front desk only three hours each morning beginning at nine o'clock.

The hotel was only one of a handful of Japanese locations allowed to possess more than one hundred dollars in certificates. A U.S. Army officer arrived monthly to replace the Military Payment Certificates with Yen.

A luxurious second floor dining room was located next to our room with an omelet station in one corner. During breakfast on Saturday, our first morning there, the Lieutenant walked to our table and told us there was an overnight color change to the MPCs, "The second in a month apparently to catch the Japanese off guard" she said and told us if we had to convert any script into Yen she'd do it for us in her office on the third floor. When we heard shouts and yelling coming from the outside behind the hotel Isaacs got up and walked to a rear window. He looked out then returned saying he saw a crowd of people but could see nothing else so I asked our waiter if he knew what happened. He told us "Someone jumped or fell from the roof."

After we finished eating breakfast, we went downstairs and walked to the back of the hotel. Many people were still standing around so I asked a policeman what happened and he said he thought it was an apparent suicide. The man, now covered by a sheet, jumped from the roof onto large jagged rocks that were placed behind the hotel to prevent rising river waters from reaching the foundation. He was without question a money changer.

Tuesday morning as we were checking out, the lady Lieutenant came to say good-bye and told us another Japanese man just committed suicide by jumping from the pedestrian bridge that passed high over the Jigokudani. She said he walked onto the steel bridge, removed his clothing and placed it in a neat pile on the walk of the bridge then jumped to his death. He also landed on jagged rocks but these were in the hot sulfurous stream that flowed beneath the bridge. Some days later, back in camp, I read an article in the Division paper saying that a Chitose man shot and killed himself inside the vault of a local bank. When bank officials opened his safety box they found over three thousand dollars in Military Payment Certificates, now worthless due the color change. The second change following so close behind the first caught the Japanese moneychangers off guard and had a devastating effect.

A new regimental program took effect in the middle of July 1952, amphibious training, and it spawned dozens of rumors. The one I disliked the most was that the Eighth Cavalry Regiment would lead an invasion of North Korea. Thinking about returning to Korea frightened me and turned my stomach, but thoughts of returning in a landing craft gave me nightmares. We started the training by

climbing up and down thick hemp ropes hanging from tall wooden towers that simulated the sides of troop ships.

We practiced on the ropes in full combat gear, minus the ammunition, to get accustomed to the weight. Up and down we climbed hour after hour under the hot August sun. I said to Isaacs "I didn't know the temperature reached this high on Hokkaido." The combination of the intense heat and going up and down the ropes wore us out, so at the end of the day we just wanted to lie quietly on our beds. When we completed the training phase in Chitose, the plan was to rotate battalions to Hokkaido's southern coast for sea training on Higgins boats and a troopship. The Third Battalion was the first to leave for the tent city at Muroran. When I saw a Higgins boat again, I was reminded of that icy ride across Inchon Harbor on December 30, 1951 and now eight months later it appeared I might taking one back to Korea. After we lowered down the ropes into the landing craft at the end of each day, the boats circled off shore then lined up before heading into the beach. After we hit the beaches, we loaded onto trucks and left for the tent city.

The training intensified when we returned to Chitose, and took on a serious atmosphere when medics from the Fifteenth Medical Company, one for each of the three rifle platoons, began training with the company. Their arrival spawned dozens of new rumors and invasion soon became the topic of choice any time troopers gathered to talk.

September rolled in and a sergeant from battalion arrived to stencil our name, rank, serial number and company on each footlocker leading us to think the invasion was just a click away. He said "Your lockers will be stored in a secure location pending your return." I really wanted to ask him "Return from where?" Then I remembered the red headed sergeant in Pusan and what he said about praying for twenty. My twentieth birthday would be here in a few weeks and I was praying I'd be alive to enjoy it.

Captain Duet called me to his office and told me he was required to send one man to the Gifu Chemical, Biological and Radiological School on Honshu about seven hundred miles south of Chitose. He chose me and said, "When you graduate you'll be the Company instructor." I traveled by train to Gifu and graduated

after a two-week course on September 27, 1952 then returned to Chitose the following day one week after my birthday. I fooled the red head, I made twenty.

When I returned to the company there was little time for CBR warfare classes, because all our energy and time was devoted to making preparations for a movement into the unknown. One trooper signed out a map of Korea at the post library and spread it out on the Quonset hut floor so we gathered around looking for possible invasion sites.

The next evening I was in the day room writing a letter home to tell my folks I was now back on Hokkaido. Charlie Land and Howard Ledbetter came into the hut and asked to sit. I didn't have any objections and said, "Be my guest". They began talking and Charlie Land suggested we throw ourselves a sailing away party. I asked "Why a sailing away party?" and Land said, "Because the current training schedule indicates we're going to Korea so lets have a good time. I know a Japanese girl that works at the Post Exchange and could ask if she has friends who'll join us." Ledbetter and I both thought that was a great idea and told him to go ahead and ask.

Two days later Charlie told me he arranged the party for this coming Saturday, October 4th at 1700 hours in the Enlisted Mens Club. His friend and two other girls agreed to meet him at the main gate a half hour before so he could sign them on. Regiment ordered that Japanese Nationals who seek admission to Camp Chitose without a U.S. Army worker identification card had to register at the front gate with the Military Police. They must also be sponsored and signed on by an American soldier. Charlie said only one of the girls worked on the post and had a worker ID card.

Saturday morning in the mess hall, Land, Ledbetter, Isaacs and myself sat at the same table for breakfast and began discussing the evening's party.

Isaacs was hurt because I didn't invite him to the party but felt better when I told him Land was running it and he could only get three girls.

As I was leaving the mess hall, Sergeant Chavez called me to give

me some bad news. He said, "A trooper scheduled for guard duty this afternoon has been hospitalized and you've been chosen to replace him. Report to the Battalion guard officer at 1500 hours." I told Chavez "I'm going to a party this evening" and he said, "It wasn't my doing, Sergeant Hoveland chose you." I was disappointed to say the least. I met Land later and suggested he invite Isaacs in my place but he said when Chavez told him I was placed on the guard roster he asked Neil Hayakawa to fill in.

I reported to the guard hut at 1500 hours sharp. As I was cleaning my rifle, I tried to come up with a way to escape guard duty, but no matter how hard I tried I couldn't think of one. My only salvation was to drop the rifle on the inspecting officer. The guard detail forms two ranks and the Officer of the Guard walks in between, randomly snatching rifles for inspection. If a soldier manages to release it fast causing the officer to drop it, he is excused from guard duty. I watched the officer closely as he was inspecting and saw that he usually blinked twice just before reaching for one so when he got to me, I let go of my rifle fast on the first blink and he missed it.

It was almost 1630 hours when I left the guard hut, just about the time Land was meeting the girls at the gate. I went back to my hut to wash and change uniforms then walked to the club. When I got there Ledbetter, Land and Hayakawa were sitting at a table with the girls and I saw Isaacs sitting at a table in front of the bandstand with two friends from Love Company. I waved to him then pulled a chair to Land's table and sat next to the girls. I treated myself a beer, Land introduced me to the girls and a little later I got up and walked to Isaacs table. There I spent the rest of the evening enjoying a few laughs, some good food and a slow dance with a Japanese girl. At 2130 hours, 9:30 pm civilian time, Isaacs and I decided to leave. On the way out we passed Land's table so we stopped to say good night and I saw that Land had consumed a large amount of alcohol. When he said he would escort the girls to the gate to sign them out I didn't think that was wise and told him so. I suggested Ledbetter take the girls but Land disagreed, so to avoid an argument, I hurriedly said good night and left with Isaacs. As we were walking back to our Quonset hut Isaacs said, "I agree with you. Land can't stand without wobbling let alone walk." I told Isaacs "The other two guys were at the table and could plainly see that Land had too much to

drink, so one of them should have stepped forward to take the girls to sign out.”

My greatest fear was realized the next morning at roll call when I looked around and didn't see Charlie Land. I looked over at Isaacs and whispered, “Did you see Land?” He shook his head no and shrugged his shoulders. After we were dismissed and as we were walking to the mess hut, I saw Ledbetter and asked if he knew where Land was. “No” he said “and his bunk wasn't slept in. The last time I saw him was at 2200 hours when he left with the girls.” I told Ledbetter “That was a big mistake, either you or Neil should have escorted the girls.”

When we were having breakfast, Sergeant Hoveland came to the table and said, “Al, Land is on the orderly phone and he asked to speak to you.” I knew then that something had gone wrong. When I got to the phone I asked him “Where are you and what happened?” He said “There was a problem last night, so the Military Police took me into custody. They want to know who was at the table with me last night. What should I do?” “Tell them” I said, “you don't have much of a choice.” Back at the mess hall, Hoveland told Ledbetter, Hayakawa and myself not to leave the company area because the Military Police were on their way to question us. A short time later the Military Police and an investigator with the Army's Criminal Investigation Division (CID) drove up in an Army sedan with Land in a rear seat.

The three of us were sitting on our footlockers inside the hut when an MP entered and told us to report to the Captain's office immediately. When we got there Land and a second MP were sitting in a parked car in front of the office and left the car when they saw us coming. They joined us and we went into the Captains office. Captain Duet said, “Serious charges could be filed because of an incident that occurred last night. Privates Hayakawa and Land will be held because of a rape and robbery accusation.” Then the CID Lieutenant said, “Land and Hayakawa are under barracks arrest. You other two are being detained as witnesses and are not to leave the Company area.”

When we returned to the hut, I talked to Land in person for the first time since saying good-bye last night. He said “I was walking with the girls and almost reached the front gate when I got dizzy,

stumbled and fell into a drainage ditch. The MP's on a regular jeep patrol found the girls and they said I fell into a ditch, so they searched and found me." I asked Land what happened to the girls?" and he said, "The Military Police say the girls were molested and robbed after wandering around lost in the dark." The four of us just sat there on our lockers wondering what the future had in store for us when we heard a ruckus coming from outside. I opened the door and asked a trooper who was running by "What's going on?"

The commotion outside was due to men rushing about trying to tie up loose ends because the Eighth Cavalry Regiment was just placed on alert. The three battalions could possibly move out at any minute and it appeared the invasion was on, so we started rounding up our belongings even though we didn't know our status. We were ordered to stay put and the rest of the day passed quietly but the rumble of engines woke me up early. I made it out of the hut in time to see the Company boarding trucks and ran around searching a few of them before I found Isaacs. I reached up and managed to shake his hand just as the truck was pulling away and yelled, "Be careful, I won't be there to take care of you." It was 0400 hours.

Ledbetter and I went for breakfast in the now almost deserted mess hall, but Neil and Charlie were served in the hut on mess kits because they were confined to quarters. Two companies from the Fifth Cavalry Regiment moved in during the night from Chitose One to staff Chitose Two. An MP arrived later and said the CID was getting a statement from the girls in the hospital and would be here to talk with us tomorrow. Later that same day a Chaplain came to see us and I said to him "I know for sure Ledbetter and I had nothing to do with this. I also know Land and Hayakawa very well and doubt they had anything to do with this either."

After the Chaplain left we discussed the problem at hand and happily agreed the situation was responsible for us escaping the invasion. For Land and Hayakawa, one problem was just as bad as the other.

The next morning the Chaplain returned with the Military Police and the CID Lieutenant. Land and Hayakawa were led to the Captains office by the CID officer but the Chaplain and the MP's

sat with Ledbetter and myself in the Quonset hut. They told us the girls claimed an Asian male attacked them so the authorities were holding Hayakawa because he was a Hawaiian of Japanese descent. They also said "The girls are in a state of confusion." I asked, "If the girls are confused why not question them again?" The MP's said that was their plan for tomorrow when they returned to the hospital.

I told the MP's I spent the entire evening with three friends at a table in front of the bandstand but no one could verify that because they left on trucks early this morning. Ledbetter said he saw me at the bandstand table before he left about at 2200 hours. He stopped outside to be sure Land was okay, then after Hayakawa went back inside, he walked directly to the hut. I verified that Ledbetter was in the hut at 2230 hours talking to Isaacs and me. Soon after the CID Lieutenant returned with Land and Hayakawa then left with the Chaplain and the MP's.

On the third day, the CID Lieutenant returned to our Quonset hut and said, "The Criminal Investigation Division has decided not to press charges against Privates Land and Hayakawa. Restrictions on the four of you have been lifted so you once again have the freedom of the post." Land asked the Lieutenant why and he said, "Further questioning showed that the attackers were Asian males wearing tan work boots and employed by the U.S. Army. The Japanese Police investigated further and have two men in custody."

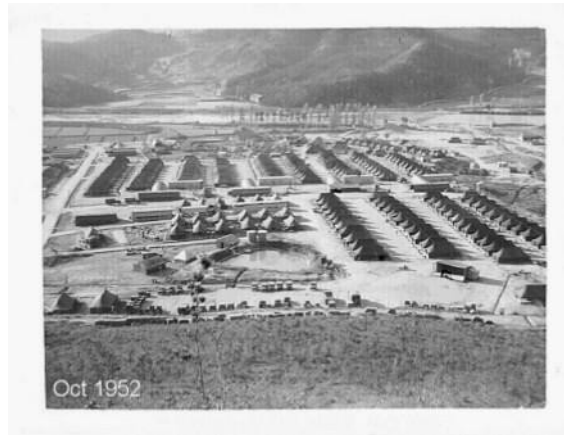
The next day we reported to our old Battalion Headquarters where a Fifth Cavalry Major handed us orders to Sasebo with train tickets attached. We were to fly the shuttle to Tokyo then take a train to Sasebo for the short trip through the Korea Straits to Pusan. We asked the Major if he knew where the Regiment was and he said, "No, your guess is as good as mine."

The next morning I was aboard the shuttle bound for Tokyo but this time it wasn't a pleasure trip, I was going back to Korea. I need not worry about getting bumped by an officer because I was occupying high priority space. We landed at Tachikawa Air Force Base and then walked the short distance to the train station where I bought a newspaper printed in English. I could only guess how Isaacs and the rest of the guys were doing because there was no

mention of an invasion anywhere in the newspaper.

CAMP TONGNAE

OCTOBER 1952 - DECEMBER 1952



*Camp Tongnae
Northeast of Pusan, Korea
October 1952*

The troopship to Pusan was a small boat, about one hundred fifty feet in length, the size of a large fishing boat. The boats size prevented it from handling the choppy waters of the Korea Strait and many of us found our stomachs rolling with the boat, mine included. Few of the men on board were second timers like I was, so most were making their first trip to Korea, including Land, Ledbetter and Hayakawa. Another man who was on his return trip was a Second Lieutenant that attended the CBR School at Gifu as I did in September. He was rejoining the Regiment after graduating and told us it was at Camp Tongnae near the town by the same name ten miles northeast of Pusan.

After a tug nudged the boat against a long wood pier, I looked down and saw an Army mini-bus. I prayed it was there for me because I would be unhappy getting abused in the rear of a truck on a bumpy road to Tongnae. My prayers were answered when I heard the Lieutenant say "Pick up your bags and butts and climb aboard the bus." It inched its way through Pusan and I saw from the window that nothing had changed, it was the same dirty and congested city I passed through a year ago. The bus entered the suburbs then drove north on a highway parallel to the Pusan Express tracks. A few miles later it came to a fork in the road and turned northeast towards Tongnae.

The bus passed under Camp Tongnaes archway then came to a stop in front of Battalion Headquarters. We followed the Lieutenant off the bus and he told us "Wait here for me so I can

bring our orders inside.” Minutes later he was out and led us to King Company's orderly room then continued on to Item Company as Land, Ledbetter, Hayakawa and myself went into the tent. We reported to Captain Duet who was happy to see us once again and shook our hands before giving us directions to our platoons tent.

When we entered the second platoon tent, most of the men came right over to us to shake hands. Isaacs gave me a hug then rigorously shook my hand and asked, “What happened back in Chitose?” I told him “All charges were dropped when it was discovered that two Japanese workers robbed the girls. But never mind us, what did you guys do.” He said the Regiment boarded transports at Otaru before joining a Navy task force off the coast of Honshu then steamed west across the Sea of Japan to the east coast of North Korea. Destroyers then blasted the beaches in preparations for an invasion as the Regiment lowered into Higgins boats and headed to shore. Isaacs said “I really thought I would buy the farm but the boats made a rapid U-turn and brought us back to the transports.” Chavez said, “I was scared too but never happier then when I saw my landing craft turning back.”

Isaacs then told us two destroyers went in close and raked the beach with their forty-millimeter guns before turning south with the rest of the task force towards Pusan. The plan was code named “Operation Decoy” and was designed to draw the Chinese and North Koreans out into the open so our planes could attack them. It all fell apart because they refused to take the bait and remained holed up waiting for the troops to come ashore. “We disembarked at Pusan and here we are,” he said.

Camp Tongnae was a tent city not far from the main highway between Pusan and Seoul with tents large enough to easily accommodate a standard rifle platoon of thirty-seven men. We had an extra BAR team in each of the three rifle squads so we had to squeeze an additional six men into the tents. The Chitose Quonset huts were set on a concrete slab but here at Tongnae the tents were set up on a foot high wooden platform. Each company had seven tents and had to share tents for the latrine and shower. We had small heaters and slept on uncomfortable canvas cots. We nailed hooks into the wood supports for clothes hangers and kept a small floor locker under our cots. The tent sides could be

rolled up for ventilation allowing men to see in or out and when it rained, the walking space (street) between the rows of tents turned into ankle deep mud because of the lack of pavement.

The second day I was there the Captain assembled the company in the mess tent. It was an oversized tent but some men still couldn't get in so the sides were rolled up allowing the men to stand outside and hear the Captain. He stood on a mess table so everyone could hear what he had to say. "Our mission here" he said "is to protect installations and facilities in and around Pusan, namely the Pusan Compound, the food and rice warehouses and the petroleum, oil, and lubrication (POL) center. We might also be called upon from time to time to guard prisoners of war." He paused for a few seconds then said, "Let me elaborate on the prison issue. I wagered a case of scotch with the previous guard commander that we would not allow a prisoner to escape. If a King Company trooper shoots one attempting to escape, I'll see to it that he gets a three-day pass. If he shoots one on the wire I'll throw in a bottle of his choice." He paused again to look around then continued, "Shooting a prisoner and then placing him in or on the wire is unacceptable and I will consider that cheating so no bottle or pass will be awarded." With that almost all in attendance gave out with a big laugh. The prisoners were fed, clothed and treated extremely well and in accordance with the rules of the Geneva Convention. Only one North Korean POW attempted an escape and he was unsuccessful and caught almost immediately.

The camp was a mile from our tents on the same road and held both North Korean and Chinese prisoners of war. It was surrounded by a twin ten-foot heavy link fence with rolled barbed wire in between and topped by razor wire. Early each morning the prisoners left the camp stuffed standing in an open top trailer for a hospital construction site escorted by Republic of Korea soldiers in jeeps mounting thirty caliber machine guns. At the same time they left the camp, most platoons were usually out jogging in tee shirts and our paths crossed on the narrow dirt road. When they did, the prisoners yelled obscenities in Chinese or Korean and spit down on us from the truck. We were humiliated more than once so we took matters into our own hands by picking up egg sized rocks from the side of the road and held them in our hands as we jogged. One chilly morning as the trucks slowly drove past us in the opposite direction, the prisoners spit on us so we showered

them with the rocks and needless to say from that point on the abuse stopped.

Many of the Chinese prisoners opposed repatriation and that angered the hard line Communist North Koreans who favored it. The two factions confronted each other because of their different political views and fighting erupted between them often. The Military Police and troopers of the Eighth Regiment were called upon more than once to restore order.

The Pusan Compound was a huge U.S. Army facility surrounded by a high wall that occupied a large area of the city near the water. Inside it was headquarters for personnel, training and supply, the Salvation Army and the Red Cross, a food distribution center, the Eighth Army Post Office, a movie theater, mess hall, the Pusan Motor Pool, a Service Club and Enlisted Mens club, a large Post Exchange and a hospital. The compound workers were predominantly South Korean and like the chow crew on the line, they were draft exempt when employed by the U.S. Army. I heard of one worker who was caught taking cigarettes from opened C-rations, discharged and almost immediately drafted into the Republic of Korea Army. I never understood why a worker would chance getting caught stealing from the U.S. Army and lose his draft exemption. Until 1953 the Korean Army was not a desirable place to be because it was corrupt and had a high casualty rate.

The first assignment for King Company went to the second platoon. We were ordered to check worker identification cards at the front gate and patrol the compounds perimeter. Lieutenant Cramer handed me the job of checking ID cards and said there was a back up jeep and four troopers with a machine gun parked out of sight around the corner. "If you need any help, just holler" he said. I told him "Don't worry, Sir. If I need help, I'll call".

At the main gate Isaacs and I joined an unarmed civilian guard and an ROK soldier who were checking cards. Directly across from the main gate, separated from the Compound by a wide dirt street was "Little Chicago", a notorious area of the city. It was inhabited and controlled by North Korean sympathizers, thieves and draft dodgers so it was declared off limits to all American military personnel and a fireman's nightmare because it was a collection of old dilapidated dry wooden houses stacked close to

each other making them prone to fire.

For some unknown reason the line of workers waiting to pass through the gate came to a complete halt. I told Isaacs and the two Korean guards I was going out to check cards and hopefully get the line moving again. As I was checking the card of an old man I saw two suspicious Korean men exit Little Chicago and walk rapidly across the street towards the rear of the line. They stopped next to a young Korean girl so I walked up to them and heard one say in poor English "Bad you work for Americans Army, you get hurt." I moved closer and ordered them to back off but neither would move, in fact the taller of the two grabbed the girl's arm frightening her more and causing another girl to leave the line. I had no choice but to step in between and use the butt end of my rifle to push him away.

The other Korean moved to my side forcing me to back up to keep an eye on him. They continued to stare and dare waiting for my next move so I shoved the muzzle end of my rifle, with the bayonet attached, against the tall ones stomach. I thought the bayonets point would convince him to retreat but it didn't so I pushed the safety off making the rifle ready to fire. He looked straight into my eyes then down at the bayonet and said "Shoot. I not afraid." He was either very brave or very stupid because at that moment he was only a heartbeat away from joining his ancestors. Isaacs alerted the back up jeep as the ROK soldier came to my aid and stood beside me with his forty five-caliber pistol drawn.

The area by this time was cleared of workers; even the girl had passed through the gate. The fact that two weapons were pointed at them made no difference because they still refused to leave but the jeeps arrival convinced them otherwise. It came speeding around the corner almost on two wheels and stopped just behind me. The soldier manning the machine gun jumped up and pulled back twice on the bolt handle resulting in a clinking sound as the bolt sent a round into the chamber. After hearing the sound of the bolt and seeing the business end of the machine gun pointed at them, they slowly walked backwards across the street and disappeared into Little Chicago.

For a few tense minutes we were eyeball to eyeball. He blinked and I was relieved. I didn't know then and still don't know now, at

the time of this writing fifty-two years after the event took place, if I could have fired at such a close range looking directly into his eyes.

The war caused shortages for the civilian population and created an army of small thieves, the children. They traveled the streets day and night constantly looking for something to steal and were masters at deception. A favorite scheme was offering a soldier forty dollars for a watch costing less than ten dollars in the Post Exchange. The tiny street urchin produced MPC notes and most men jumped at the chance to more than double their money. The little thief then deftly switched the bills to a five-dollar note wrapped around pieces of paper as the soldier was removing his watch. The soldier soon realized he'd been swindled as the thief disappeared from view.

A favorite way for the little gangsters to extort money was to hold a soldier hostage when they shined his shoes. They promised the best shine in the Far East for one thousand Won, seventeen cents American but after they finished the first shoe they asked for an additional five thousand Won to bring the cost of the shine to one dollar. If the soldier refused, they threw black shoe dye on his uniform.

Other children went into more or less legitimate businesses like the black market. They sold American products and items they stole or bought from someone who stole it on almost every street corner in Pusan. Watches and American cigarettes and perfumes were popular items sold on the Black Market usually from the flat back of a three wheeled scooter that made easy escapes possible. Many girls, some not yet teenagers, turned to prostitution to feed their families, and entertained United Nation soldiers for a carton of cigarettes that sold for a dollar at the Post Exchange. Most children were not dishonest or disreputable and held legitimate jobs such as tour guides or delivery persons.

In early November over a hundred troopers in the Regiment rotated home, among them were a dozen from King Company, including Lieutenant Cramer and Sergeants Hoveland, Chavez and Hardy. The mass exodus left the Regiment's combat efficiency in peril but it was brought up to standards by transferring in a few men from each combat unit stationed around Pusan.

Second Lieutenant Jim Ramey and Master Sergeant Sam Finley were two of the men who joined King Company. Lieutenant Ramey recently completed a three-month course at the Officers Candidate School to become a “ninety day wonder” and Sergeant Finley was a hard boiled World War Two veteran.

The Captain asked the company clerk to tell me to report to him in his office. In his office the Captain asked if I had a quarter ton license to drive a jeep and when I told him I didn't he said “Go test for one at the Battalion Motor Pool. I'll have Kite call to make an appointment for you.” Kite was Corporal Carroll J. Kite, from Silver Springs, Maryland, and the company clerk.

Only two days later Kite told me to report to the motor pool the next day. When I got there I was surprised to see Corporal Tom Whitten. He and I both came to Korea the first time from Eta Jima on the little Sasebo boat in September 1951 when he was a Private. Now he supervised driver tests at the motor pool. He recognized me and after we shook hands we talked for a spell and he assured me the jeep test was nothing, “Like driving a small car,” he said. I passed the test and after he finished processing the license he took me aside and whispered, “If you ever need a fill up just look me up and I'll fix you up.” I laughed and said “Thanks.”

I now had transportation with an unlimited supply of gasoline to drive around the surrounding area or into Pusan. That met with Isaacs's approval because he liked to shop for souvenirs and said, “I promised a lot of people a lot of junk”. We enjoyed shopping in Pusan because there it was possible to meet United Nation soldiers from countries all over the world.

One Saturday afternoon I asked Isaacs to ride shotgun for me because I didn't like going into Pusan alone and leaving the jeep unattended. I was told a driver took an officer to the Pusan Compound and as the officer was tending to Army business, he drove to the shopping district to buy his wife a present. When he left the shop after only a few minutes, he saw his jeep up on four wooden blocks minus the rims and tires. Also gone was the spare tire, canvas roof, seats, mirrors and a full five-gallon can of gasoline. They would have stolen the whole jeep but he kept the key in his pocket. That's what I didn't want to happen, so that's

why I asked Isaacs to accompany me.

He accepted my invitation and as we were driving along a back road, I passed two young Korean girls riding a flat back cart being pulled by two oxen. They smiled as we passed so Isaacs yelled "They're pretty, pull over." I stopped and he jumped out, ran back and started talking to them. A minute later I walked back. Isaacs was right, they were pretty. I started talking to them too but their English was poor and we couldn't communicate. Then the odor reached our nostrils and I realized the four barrels on the back of the cart contained human waste they just collected and were about to spread on the rice paddies. The ladies were "honey bucket" girls so we performed a quick about face and retreated to the safety of the jeep then drove off.

Isaacs and I couldn't have driven all over the Pusan and Tongnae area without Whittens help. When I went to him for a fill up he pumped all the gas I asked for, then gave me a second five-gallon can of gas and juggled the figures to hide it. In return, Isaacs and I kept him supplied with cigars and beer we bought at the Post Exchange.

The camp was surrounded by dozens of small hills; all less than two hundred meters in height but hiding in them were insurgents who wanted to overthrow Sigmund Rhee, the President of South Korea. They're immediate goal was to establish a Communist regime in the south with an ultimate goal of uniting Korea. To combat this threat, Regiment ordered all companies to send squad sized patrols into the hills to round up unfriendly people.

One incident changed the situation from bad to worse. A patrol from Item Company was ambushed as it was returning to camp by a large force. Regiment now recommended that two outposts of two squads each, twenty three men, be established on the highest hills near Camp Tongnae to spot any insurgent activity. Patrols or the outposts did not fall under a rotation system like the one we used on the line. Battalion ordered King Company to man the outposts during daylight hours so Captain Duet set up a rotation between the three rifle platoons starting the first day with the first platoon.

On the second day it was our turn. There were two hills to the

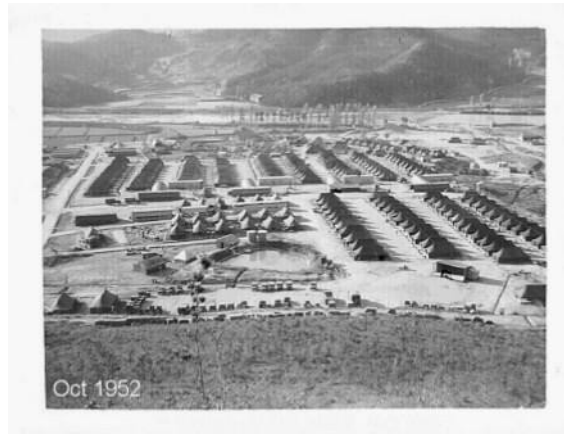
north of the camp about two hundred meters in height but one was higher than the other. Lieutenant Ramey took two squads and climbed to the top of the left hill and Sergeant Finley led two squads up the other hill, the higher of the two and kept in contact with each other by using wireless field phones. The Captain told Ramey "Set up defensive positions at the top then have the men collect rocks and lay out a First Cavalry patch on the side of the hill." After we set up the perimeter we gathered the rocks for the patch and Ramey said, "Tomorrow the third platoon will come up and paint the patch yellow and black." Yellow and black were the colors on the Cavalry patch.

Ramey and the squad leaders scanned the hills through binoculars but saw nothing so about 1500 hours he radioed the company and gave Captain Duet a situation report. The Captain told him a patrol from Love Company just returned to the camp and ordered Ramey to evacuate both hills. Ramey then called Sergeant Finley and told him to withdraw but Finley had already given the order. The fact that Finley acted without first getting permission from him angered Ramey because as the platoon leader in command it was his duty to give the order. From that clash of wills a tug of war for control of the platoon existed between the two and I saw a disaster in the making.

Trucks bringing food and rice into Pusan were constantly set upon by the starving Koreans because they were forced to drive slowly through the crowded streets so they were easy prey for the thieves who followed behind. Their favorite method of stealing rice was to cut open the bags then follow slowly behind the truck catching the falling rice in a pail.

Two weather beaten wooden structures near the Compound were used to house food and rice. Rice was an Asian favorite so the warehouse was broken into often resulting in the disappearance of many twenty-pound bags. The missing glass in a second story loft window didn't help matters because it was an invitation to gain easy entry and steal. The Captain had the glass replaced and eventually had bars installed to prevent entry so they kicked in a side door to get in. Captain Duet had all the doors reinforced and pick-proof locks installed but that only kept out the Koreans for a short period of time. One thief crashed his three-wheeled truck through the double front doors and before the guards could

respond to the break in he had his truck loaded with bags of rice and escaped. The rice he drove off with was United Nations rice intended for free distribution to the Korean people. I couldn't understand stealing something you can get free until I realized they needed rice in large quantities to sell on the black market.



*Patrolling the hills
Surrounding Camp Tongnae*



*Driving the guard jeep
At the Rice Warehouse*

The truck crash in was the last straw for Captain Duet and made him now, more than ever, determined to reduce thievery in King Company's area of jurisdiction. He had Finley set up a barbed wire barricade in front of the warehouse then replaced the double doors with a heavier and stronger one. He assigned Lieutenant Ramey the task of protecting the rice warehouse and instructed him to have a guard posted inside from dusk until dawn daily. He also told Ramey "No rice is to leave that warehouse unless I say

so.”

Isaacs and I were enjoying coffee during breakfast one morning when Lieutenant Ramey came to our table and said “Al, when you’re finished I’d like to talk to you back at the tent.” I said “Yes, sir” so when I was finished I went directly to the tent to see what he wanted to talk to me about. He said “Beginning tomorrow we’re posting guards in the rice warehouse overnight. You’ll be off duty all day tomorrow so sleep late and rest. Permission was granted to the mess hall to feed you anytime so eat when you like and report to me in the orderly room at 1600 hours with your rifle and a blanket.”

I found it difficult to sleep late because of noises made by the men as they readied themselves for roll call. Sleeping during the day was almost impossible because the tent sides were rolled up allowing light and outside noises to enter so at 1430 hours I went to the mess tent for an early supper.

At exactly four o’clock, with my rifle and blanket, I reported to the Lieutenant in the orderly room as ordered. He told me “Get the company jeep then come back for me. We’re going to the rice warehouse.” When we arrived at the warehouse, Ramey led me inside and handed me a bandolier of ammunition for my M-1. He told me “Load one clip into your rifle and keep the others handy” then said to follow him up a partially rotted wooden stairway to the second story loft. He stopped and said “Drop your blanket here then lie on it but stay awake with your eyes glued to the floor below. If you see someone down there shoot him. You’re the only one authorized to be in this warehouse tonight.” I asked, “Sir, do you really mean shoot him?” He replied, “Yes, shoot him.” Then he turned around, went down the stairs, walked out and left me alone in the dark. I spread the blanket out over the straw, clicked the safety to on, loaded my rifle and laid down.

Minutes after Lieutenant Ramey left, I heard the creaking noise of a bending floorboard come from the lower floor. I looked down but couldn’t see anything because of the dim light but when I heard the creaking again I pushed the safety to off and strained my eyes trying to see the reason for the noise. I saw a dark shadow that appeared human slowly moving across the dimly lit floor and remembered the Lieutenant saying, “Yes, shoot him”

It was impossible to take aim because of the lack of light and I knew I wouldn't be able to get off a good shot so I hesitated. The delay proved to be a Godsend. The object moved to the center of the floor where moonlight coming through the loft window allowed me to identify it as human. I saw light bouncing off a shiny object so I aimed at it then suddenly realized the light was reflecting from one of the gold Second Lieutenant bars on Rameys field jacket. I lowered my rifle and clicked the safety back on as he climbed the stairs and said "I came back to remind you to use extreme caution should you see movement inside the building." That was a foolish thing to do, tell me to shoot anyone I see then sneak back in. He was lucky he was alive and I was lucky I didn't fire because now I wouldn't have to explain why I shot my platoon leader. I never told him how close he came to being shot. Not far from the ice warehouse was another complex with a railroad siding that was surrounded by an eight-foot chain link fence and tall light towers that turned the night into day. Next to the siding was a corrugated gray metal building that stored dry C-rations and a small shack to re-pack opened cartons. There were also twenty other large buildings inside the complex that stored hard goods, everything from shovels to sleeping bags, all highly desirable by Korean thieves.

A Korean, usually a lightweight teenager, vaulted the fence to short circuit the transformer or light cables and throw the complex into darkness. His accomplices then draped thick blankets over the razor wire to scale the fence. The only place the light cables were above ground and visible was where they fed into the transformer next to the re-pack shack alongside the dry ration building. Korean workers cut open the C-rations and stole candy and cigarettes so they had to be resealed in the re-pack shack. To stop them from knocking out the lights, we used the shack as guard headquarters and kept warm inside next to a potbelly stove with a never-ending supply of free cigarettes. The lights were harder to knock out now so one thief cut a hole in the fence and drove a three-wheeled scooter into the complex. The fence was not alarmed so he had time to gather dozens of sleeping bags before the guards arrived. The nylon and wool olive drab bags were a favorite target of thieves who removed the half zippers and sold them to tailors who sewed them into dress and field jackets.

One cold night Isaacs and I were on duty in the dry ration area. We often stepped inside the shack to keep warm especially in between rounds. Isaacs was leaning back in a chair next to the stove and I was standing at a window looking out when suddenly the shack and the complex went dark.

I grabbed my rifle and on the way out I asked, "Damn, how in hell did they do it?" - Isaacs said, "Don't bother to go out. It's black out there so you won't see a thing." He was right but a little light came from boats docked nearby allowing me to see the outline of loaded boxcars sitting on a siding waiting to go north. When I saw a shadowy figure moving behind the cars I yelled "Chung-gee", halt in Korean. The shadow kept moving so again I yelled "Chung-gee". Isaacs heard my yells so he came out as I was raising my rifle and asked "You going to shoot?" "Yep" I said and fired a full clip of eight rounds. Isaacs went back inside to look for a flashlight but before he could find one, the lights returned so he came out and we walked over to the siding. We didn't find a body, dead or alive but the corner of one boxcar had eight holes in a tight group.

The train tracks ran through the complex and ended on a long pier in the petroleum, oil and lubrication area we called the POL dump. It was late November and getting colder daily, but one day the temperature climbed to fifty degrees. The unseasonably warm air mixed with the cold bay water to create a dense fog that hung a foot off the ground dropping visibility to less than fifty feet. Later that day, I started a guard shift at the POL dump with Corporal Ned Washington, a black machine gunner in the fourth squad.

Because Ned was a machine gunner, he had a side arm, a forty-five-caliber model 1911A-1 pistol so he didn't have to carry a nine-pound M-1 rifle. We started our shift by walking out to the end of a pier for a smoke. Once there we decided to stand awhile, look into the fog and talk before walking back to the other end of the pier. We saw a little water and a lot of fog so after ten minutes we decided to walk back, but just as we started to leave, we heard the clanking sound of rowing oars. Ned walked to the edge of the dock trying to see where the noise was coming from. Then out of the fog appeared a small boat rowed by two Korean men with a fifty-five gallon drum of fuel oil lying on its side in the bottom. Lowering a drum off a dock into a small boat was no easy task

when you take into account its weight.

Ned trained his flashlight on the boat and I yelled the magic word “Chung-gee” but they didn’t chung-gee instead they rowed faster trying to make their escape. I told Ned “Maybe they’re not Korean and they don’t understand” but he said “One more time” and yelled out “Chung-gee” again. They didn’t stop rowing so Ned pulled out his pistol and fired two shots into the boat. Then the boat stopped and came back to the edge of the pier where I saw one of the men draped over the barrel. It took all three of us to lift the injured Korean onto the dock then I ran to the shack to call for medical aid.

The man died the next day and a week later I learned his family asked that criminal charges be filed against Ned and he be tried in a Korean court. The Army denied the request saying Ned was obeying an order to protect military property and transferred him to the Fifth Cavalry on Hokkaido.

Shortly after Ned was transferred, Isaacs and I were leaving the mess tent after having breakfast when Captain Duet called to me and asked me to come back into the tent and join him for a cup of coffee. Naturally you do what the Captain asks, so I went back inside and sat down next to him. “Al” he said “Carter the mail clerk will be leaving for home next month. How would you like to be mail clerk?” “Wow” I thought to myself, that’s one of the top jobs in the Army, because as soon as a soldier is appointed mail clerk, he is automatically excused from all other duties. That means no training or classes and most important, no Kitchen Police duties. The Captain said he’d cut an order naming me the assistant and when Carter leaves I’ll get the job. The Captain also asked me if I my jeep license was up to date and I said it was. Then he said “The Regiment will eventually return to Japan and when it does I’d like you to be my driver and take my wife shopping and the kids to school on bad weather days. Fine, that’s settled. Effective immediately, your transferred back into the Headquarters Platoon, this time to stay.”

The insurgents were getting restless and began promoting Communist meetings in the street separating Little Chicago and the Pusan Compound. The demonstrations intimidated the workers and absenteeism soared. In an attempt to assure the

workers that they were safe, Regiment ordered guards be posted at all the gates. The second platoon got the call again and because the Captain failed to make my transfer official and I didn't physically leave I was technically still in the platoon. Wherever the platoon went I went and on this day I again found myself standing in front of the main gate where I had the confrontation with the two Koreans.

Yesterday, protesters sat and blocked the main gate and were dragged away while others set fires along the fence before clashing with the unarmed civilian guards. Today the second platoon was here and we were armed. I was posted at the main gate with the second squad, the first was inside the gate behind a barricade of barrels filled with water and the third was around the corner in three jeeps with each one mounting a light thirty machine gun.

Just before the noon whistle, a dozen protesters left Little Chicago and started walking across the street towards the main gate carrying signs. I was talking to the Korean civilian guard with my back turned to the street and didn't see them but Isaacs alerted me by yelling, "Here they come."

I turned and saw them coming carrying red and green signs printed in Korean and English condemning the United States and the United Nations. They hesitated in the middle of the street to chant Communist slogans and sing a few songs then edged closer and began throwing large firecrackers forcing Isaacs and me to jump to avoid some close ones. The third squad heard the firecrackers and responded immediately by speeding around the corner and U-turned the jeeps to form a line behind us. They pointed the machine guns at the protesters and convinced them to back off across the street into Little Chicago thus my last day in the platoon ended peaceably.

During the last week in November rumors seemed to sprout from the cracks in the tent's wood floor. Carter the mail clerk got into the act again. He said one day when he was dropping off the mail that his friend who knew the Colonel's driver who had overheard the Colonel say the Seventh Regiment was going to replace the Eighth and we were going back to Hokkaido. Sounded good because I remembered the Captain saying, "eventually return to

Japan". Isaacs asked me "What in hell are we going to do when the mail clerk goes home? He's the three monkeys rolled into one because he knows all, sees all and says all." I told Isaacs "Have no fear. Captain Duet is giving me the mail job when Carter goes home then I'll be in charge of the latrine rumors."

The day after Thanksgiving, the company clerk nailed a notice onto the company bulletin board in front of the orderly room tent. Word of its existence spread through the company like wildfire and in minutes there were twenty men pushing and shoving trying to get in close enough to read it. In part it said "Headquarters, FECOM, Tokyo. November 28, 1952. The Eighth Cavalry Regiment will make preparations for redeployment to Camp Crawford, Hokkaido, Japan". That was good news but reading further some bad news appeared for some of the men. It said, "Men with less than twenty rotation points and all equipment except small arms and related pieces will remain in Korea." The news wasn't all bad for Isaacs, myself or my other friends because we accumulated enough points to avoid being left behind. It was the newer men who recently joined the Regiment that had to worry.

Isaacs asked me "Now that we're returning to Hokkaido, have you given any thought to going back into business?" I never hesitated and told him "Not really. We're going home next near so I think we should play it safe." Isaacs was drafted for two years and his time was up in mid February so we both knew he would leave for home in January. The thought of him leaving did not make me happy, because we've been great friends since we met on the truck after we got off the Sasebo boat in September 1951.

The next day, another notice went up on the board and the minute we knew of it, Isaacs and I went to read it. It listed the date of deployment as December 17, 1952. Isaacs and I were standing in front of the bulletin board reading the notice when First Lieutenant Julio Serafino, the new Executive Officer, saw us. He asked me to step in then told Isaacs he'd see him next.

He said to me "Looking at your file, I see that you have twenty-six rotation points, well over the twenty needed to go back to Hokkaido with the Regiment." That was no surprise because I'd been counting points a long time and knew exactly how many I

had. The Lieutenant looked down at my file then up at me and said "I've been told to ask men who have over twenty if they would volunteer to remain in Korea because the Army needs replacements. Would you consider it?" I told him "Lieutenant, the thought never entered my mind." Then he said with the twenty six points I have, it would take ten months duty in Japan at one point a month for me to rotate. He stressed that if I volunteer as an infantry replacement I would get four points a month and be on my way home in just ten weeks. I stood in front of him amazed and almost in shock as I asked myself "Does this fool really think I'm going to volunteer to go back up there again?" Finally I said "Sir, in just ten weeks I could be on my way home in an aluminum box."

Lieutenant Serafino was stunned when I said "in an aluminum box" and said, "I understand. You're dismissed." I saluted him, turned and left. Outside Isaacs was waiting to go in and I said to him "Wait until you hear what that fool inside is going to ask of you." I don't think the Lieutenant had much success trying to convince anyone to volunteer.

Now that the word was official, the process of sending men under the minimum out to other units began. King Company was leaving twenty men behind in Korea, ten percent of the Company, and I said goodbye to the men I befriended, but it was tough doing so, because I knew some of those guys were not going to make it back home. The rest of us started collecting our gear and dropping off items that were staying behind. The machine guns, heavy weapons, jeeps, trucks and mortars would stay so the Army wouldn't have to ship them. We squeezed the majority of clothing and some personal belongings into duffel bags, then put the bags on trucks that would take them to the Pusan waterfront.

We were happy because we would be in Japan to enjoy Christmas in pleasant surroundings and better living conditions. I had never seen the barracks at Camp Crawford so I had no idea what they looked like but I was told they were made of brick and had better heating units.

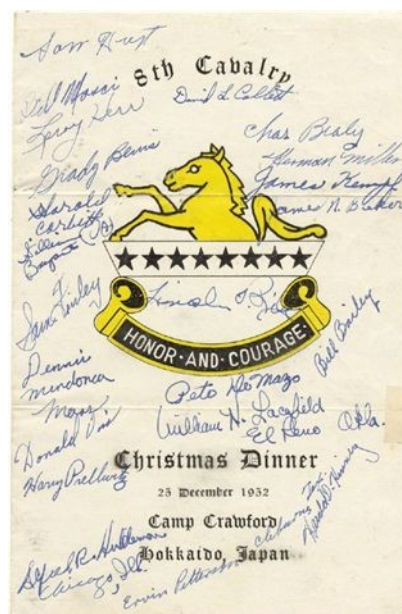
On December 15th, trucks carrying men from the Eighth Engineer Battalion rolled into Camp Tongnae bringing men who would refurbish and repair the water point and showers in preparation for the next occupants of the camp. That same day another notice

was tacked onto the bulletin board listing the order of departure as the first, second and then the third battalion. For the next two days we did nothing but write letters, take physical training, clean rifles and eat. The showers were shut down for repairs on the sixteenth so we couldn't take a shower until we got aboard the boat. It was late in the afternoon on Wednesday, December 17, 1952 when I left Korea for the last time and I was not unhappy. The possibility of me returning was slim and that made me happy. As Isaacs and I stood at the rail and watched Korea fade in the distance, I remember him looking at me and saying "The party's over."

We traveled the identical route we did a year earlier, east through the Korea Strait then north in the Sea of Japan to Otaru. On December 20th, the Eighth Regiment arrived at Otaru and was welcomed back to Hokkaido on an overcast and damp day punctuated by a light snowfall. We threw our duffel bags into the middle of the truck, climbed up and got close to each other to keep warm, then bounced over the frozen road to Camp Crawford.

CAMP CRAWFORD
DECEMBER 1952 - OCTOBER 1953

It was early afternoon on the 20th when the trucks passed through the main gate at Camp Crawford but to me it was just like Christmas. My first look at the camp told me living conditions were going to be better here than at Chitose and Tongnae combined. The one-story buildings were four steps above ground and well constructed of red brick with heavy shingle roofs. A newer automatically fired heating unit that forced hot air up through vents in the floor was under the barracks eliminating the need to go into the cold for fuel oil as we did in Chitose. Five days later Christmas arrived, the one and only I would celebrate in Japan. To welcome the Eighth Regiment back and in honor of the season, printed souvenir Christmas dinner menus were given to each trooper. I passed mine around the mess hall to be autographed by members of King Company and I still have it, perfectly preserved. On the post there was a service club with a darkroom and a wood and metal shop, the Mosely Theater that presented first run Hollywood films and a sports complex consisting of a large field for football and baseball plus a field house for indoor sports. There were also clubs for officers and enlisted men. The post was also home to Division Headquarters and the Army's Far East Network that broadcast American music around the clock so I often put a small transistor radio near my pillow and listened to the station at bedtime.



*Christmas Dinner Menu
December 25, 1952*



*King Company Area
Camp Crawford, Hokkaido*

Six days later New Year's Eve arrived and because my transfer back to the headquarters platoon was completed prior to leaving Korea, I had to go back to the second platoon to see Isaacs. 1953 would be a good year for us both because we'd be going home so we joined up with a few mutual friends and went to the Enlisted Men's Club to celebrate. The club hired a Japanese dance band to entertain and invited local girls so a good time was had by all. When midnight arrived Issacs and I touched glasses then shook hands and he reminded me "A lot of water has passed under the bridge since we last toasted a New Year in the belly of that boat on the Yellow Sea."

Two weeks later Isaacs got the word. He was going home along with two other old friends, Bill Mackie and Al Carter the mail clerk. I had mixed feelings when I heard the news, happy that Isaacs was going home and I'd soon be the new company mail clerk, but sad to see good friends leave. Late in January they both left. We shook hands before saying goodbye and he made me promise to drive to DC and look him up but I never did and still regret I didn't. Two weeks later on February 9, 1953, Captain Duet issued an order appointing me company mail clerk and changing my Army life forever. He also assigned me the job of day-room orderly because the mail room was in the rear and he assumed I'd spend most of my day there.

The snack bar was centered in the rear of the day room between two small rooms with each having a side window. Akiro, a Japanese civilian, tailored for the men of the company in the room to the left and I used the other as the mail room. The only door leading to the three rooms led into Akiro's tailor shop so I was forced to walk through his shop and the snack bar to reach my mail room. This caused us to meet often and because he mastered the English language we were able to communicate and became friends. He also mastered ping-pong and was a wiz at the game so I asked him to give me instructions. He taught me so well that I occasionally beat my mentor. The day room was normally the gathering place of a company so I spent many hours there writing letters or playing ping-pong and cards.

I was responsible for the cleanliness of the day room as well as being in complete charge of the snack bar, handling the purchasing and the funds. When I was in my office, I took care of the sales if I wasn't performing my mail duties, but in the evening the snack bar operated on an honor system. I gave the profits to the Captain at the end of each month and he put it into an account called the "Company Fund". Army regulations stipulated that the fund could only be used to aid soldiers of the company but it did allow for limited dollar amount donations to reputable charities like the Red Cross.

The Captain summoned me to his office and told me to close the door behind me, then said "Keep both yourself and the jeep available to drive my wife to the Post Exchange and my children to school on bad weather days."

I was awarded a Combat Infantryman's Badge for my Korean service but it was annoying having to move it from one shirt to another. I bought a dozen embroidered cloth badges at the Post Exchange and planned to have Akiro sew them over the left pocket of my shirts and fatigues. I also wanted him to sew permanent creases on my pants and zippers into my jackets but tailoring is expensive so I had to come up with a plan to soften his charges. I reasoned he would lower his charges if I convinced him I had his interests at heart. He recently assumed the tailoring concession and was waiting for the Army to set a rent schedule, but Regiment decided against charging rent. I learned of Regiments decision and told Akiro in strict confidence that I

recently completed negotiations with the Army in his behalf and that I had obtained a two-year rent-free lease for him. Naturally it wasn't true, but he believed me and was overcome with joy and went out of his way to show me how grateful he was. He pressed, made repairs and tailored my uniforms without charge and bowed each time I entered the day room. I eventually asked him to refrain from bowing because it embarrassed me. He rode to work daily on an old Japanese bicycle and once said to me "If you so desire, you may ride the bicycle whenever you choose." And many times I did just that by peddling the bicycle to the Post Exchange or Service Club.

In a rifle company, the mail clerk's job is a prestige position because mail is a direct link to home, family and friends, an important item and it was about to make me into an important person. The fact that I was part of Headquarters Platoon was not a drawback either, because I became friends with the cooks and supply personnel. The cooks in turn were friends of the mail clerk so I no longer waited in line to eat but just walked into the mess hall through a side door and sat at the cooks private table, where they served my meals to order. In return, the cooks received fast first class mail delivery so they gave me a mug imprinted with the words "First Class Male" making me the only trooper who didn't drink coffee from a white GI cup.

The supply clerk's name was R.J. Quatro from Rochester, New York, a graduate of Cornell University and a Chiropractor in civilian life. In 1953 the Army did not recognize Chiropractors as doctors so he was an enlisted man and not a Commissioned Officer. In return for prompt hand delivered mail, Quatro took care of all my uniform needs by replacing an item at the first sign of wear so I had a never-ending supply of new uniforms. A serious problem arose when I went to Akiro once too often to take advantage of his free tailoring. I [then] gave him a carton of cigarettes monthly to compensate for his lost income so he was relaxed and happy as he smoked and sewed.

I delivered the officers mail to the orderly room at the same time I brought Kite, the company clerk his. In return Kite delivered a weekend pass to my office when I had one coming. I delivered mail for the platoons bundle style by tying it together and throwing it through the door onto the floor after yelling "mail call." I never

called out names like you see in the Hollywood films.

I drove to Regimental Headquarters every morning after breakfast to take the outgoing and pick up the incoming mail. I met other mail clerks and exchanged rumors but in early March the rumor mill shut down so there was a shortage of rumors. I met a clerk, also from New Jersey so we began talking and I told him I heard of an Army policy that permitted discharges in Japan. I asked if it was true and did he know anything about it. He told me "The Army will discharge in Japan and pay something like a nickel a mile to the post nearest the soldiers home but the Japanese government requires you have visible means of support. You need a job because they don't want any destitute ex-soldiers running around in their country." He suggested I visit any large city and apply for work and asked me when I was going home. I told him October and he said "I'd take some time off during the summer to find myself a job if that's what you want." Those were my plans exactly.

I was authorized to drive the jeep anywhere on post, but, as was the case in Korea, I needed a gasoline source. Corporal Tom Whitten, who I "looked up for fill-ups" in Korea, went home, so my replacement gas man would be another Tom, Sergeant Tom De Nero also from New Jersey and a member of the headquarters platoon. I approached Tom and offered to hand deliver his mail at the pump for a few extra gallons of gas. "No problem with that" he said "just bring my mail to the pump and I'll fill up your tank when I'm reading it." So like Whitten, he pumped extra gas, then juggled the figures to hide the gallons. The Captain was happy the tank was always full in the jeep to drive his family, and never questioned how I came by it. The Army didn't approve of providing vehicles for dependent transportation, and had either of the Battalion or Regimental Commanders been aware of it, they would have put an end to the practice. They never found out, so I continued getting extra gas and joy riding around Camp Crawford.

It was March now and spring was just around the corner, but spring always arrived late this far north. The calendar said spring but Hokkaido said winter because it was chilly and the snow refused to melt and go away. When many Korean veterans made their point in March and left for home, the combat efficiency of the company dropped critically low.

Suddenly I felt alone and lonely, as I did the first few days I was in the Army. Many of my friends were gone and many more would soon go. If the present trend were to continue, I could be the last Korean veteran left in King Company. With the threat of Communism looming ever larger over Korea and Southeast Asia, the defense of Hokkaido and northern Japan took on an even greater importance so the Army took immediate steps to rebuild the First Cavalry Division by sending in a thousand replacements.

I saw new faces in the mess hall daily and had to introduce myself as the mail clerk and get their names and platoons, so I knew where to drop the mail. The rapid turnover of men wrecked havoc on my mail roster I kept in the office forcing me to constantly update it. Some mornings I sat drinking coffee at the cook's table and looked around to see half a mess hall of men I didn't know and thought, "Where have the ghosts of King Company gone?" One morning I was battling my memories when Sergeant Sam Finley asked if he could join me. "Why not" I replied so he sat and we began to talk. I remember it well because it was February 19, 1953 and I told him I was in the Army two years today. He told me "I'm in ten years, I was drafted in 1942. I went ashore in the second wave at Normandy and went all the way to Germany before I got hit. This is my second and I hope my last war."

Lieutenant Ramey saw Sam and myself at the table and walked over to say good morning. Finley angrily said to him "What in hell does a dumb Second Lieutenant know about a good morning?" Finley and the Lieutenant disliked one another ever since their disagreement in Tongnae. Finley was a tough old sergeant cast in the old Army mold with his own ideas of how to lead a rifle platoon that didn't agree with the teachings of OCS. Ramey told him "We'll discuss this further in the privacy of your room."

A few days later the Lieutenant came into the barracks and knocked on Finley's squad room door. He went in and minutes later I heard yelling and cursing come from the room then Ramey stormed out and slammed the door behind him. Undoubtedly "discussing this further" did not go well. I realized then they were on a collision course and a confrontation between the two was unavoidable and just a matter of time.

I was correct in my thinking because a few days later on a Sunday morning, I was having breakfast and saw the Lieutenant moving in the line being served. His tray was half filled when he stopped and began talking to one of the servers. Just then Sergeant Sam came into the mess hall and saw Ramey so he walked over to him and exploded. He began cursing him out then slapped the tray from his hands sending it and the food to the floor.

Next he picked up a chair, raised it above his head and threw it over the counter. It struck two coffee urns splashing hot coffee over the cooks. At this point in time the mess hall began to clear out. Ramey stood there trying to figure out how to stop Finley but I could see there was no way to stop him short of shooting him. Next Finley picked up another chair and threw it through a window then jumped the counter and started throwing loaves of bread at anyone still in the mess hall. When he threw one at me, I ducked then saw an opening and escaped through the side door.

When I got outside, I saw quite a few men milling around because the word spread that a madman was destroying the mess hall. A very short time later, two jeeps with eight Military Policemen arrived and cleared the area. Two of the MPs talked to Finley through the smashed out window until he gave them permission to come inside. A few minutes later they walked out of the mess hall with a calm Sergeant Finley in tow and handcuffed him to one of the jeeps. Then they drove off and I never saw Sergeant Sam again. Some said it was drugs but I think two wars was one too many for him.

It was April now and the spring flowers were pushing up through the ground around Division Headquarters. The last of the snow had melted and ran off into the drainage ditches and I began thinking "warm months ahead."

I had about six months left on Hokkaido and what should have been a happy time turned sad when the Captain told me he and his family would be going home at the end of the month. When the day he was leaving arrived, I drove the jeep to his house thinking I could help him carry out the luggage but when I got there he had most of it already at the curb. He called me into the house and I looked around remembering the times I had coffee with his wife and played with the children. He said to me "I know it's early

but let's have a drink." I said to him "Yes, Sir. It is early and I'm not a drinking man, but I'd be honored to have one with you." He poured a little Johnny Walker into two small glasses and handed me one. Then he raised his glass, touched mine and said, "Let us never forget" and down went the whiskey. He picked up a last small bag, then he led me, his wife and kids out to the curb, where we waited for the mini-bus. I thanked him for being a good man and a good officer and again he said "Payback for Korea." I looked down at the children then knelt along side them and gave each one a long hug and a kiss on the forehead. His wife stepped forward and also gave me a long hug and a kiss on my cheek and with watery eyes she said, "I'm going to miss you." At that moment the bus pulled up and I helped the driver put their luggage on then walked the kids to the bus holding a hand one on either side of me.

The driver got back behind the wheel, then the Captain followed his wife up the steps and onto the bus. He turned to me and said, "Take care of yourself, Al and good luck." I saluted him and he looked down at me from the top step, returned my salute then the door closed and the bus drove off. I choked up a little because goodbyes can be tough.

New men were joining King Company almost daily throwing my mail roster into chaos. Typing a new roster daily in the orderly room was driving Kite, the company clerk, crazy so I thought creating a second and temporary roster would solve the problem, then I could combine both rosters when the replacements slowed down. Three men who joined the company at this time and would have an effect on me, were Private Allan Taskler, First Lieutenant Kenneth G. Cassels and Second Lieutenant Winfield A. Holt. Taskler was a supply clerk and joined headquarters platoon. Lieutenant Cassels replaced Captain Duet as the new Company Commander and Lieutenant Holt was named the Mail Officer so he became my immediate superior.

Taskler, Quatro and myself became good friends and we often went to Sapporo together on weekends. One place we stopped at often was Akiros (no relation to the company tailor), bar and grill. It was a GI gathering place because they employed contest-winning beautiful Japanese waitresses.

Most all the waitresses employed at Akiros had Caucasian features. Not only did they serve food and drinks, they served as magnets to draw in American soldiers. Allan was attracted to a pretty waitresses named Samura but we all called her Sam for short. She reminded me of Nikko, the waitress in Chitose because she too was tiny with Caucasian features. I was attracted to Nikko but my circumstances were quite different than Tasklers. I was not married but Allan was with a wife and a little girl back in Cleveland. Allan and Sam were constant companions and eventually they took an apartment in town forcing Quatro and I to visit Akiros without him. He talked nightly of her and when he began talking marriage, Quatro and I thought his mind was going. I met Allan one evening in the Enlisted Men's Club and when we were having a beer, I told him "Allan, having two wives on two continents will eventually catch up with you. What will you do with your family back in Cleveland?" He didn't have an answer so I offered him advice the same as Isaacs offered me a year earlier in Chitose. I said "Date but don't marry." Allan said he would give it some serious thought during the last week of the month before the rent was due May 1st. A few days later Allan told Quatro and myself he decided to move out of the apartment before the rent was due. He said "I was lonely and missed my family so I wasn't thinking straight."

Lieutenant Holt was a West Point graduate and the son of a three star Lieutenant General. He was over six feet tall, thin and stood erect as if he had a rail strapped to his back. He was spit and polish and looked exactly like a Regular Army West Point Officer should. He was the mail officer, so he stopped in the day room often to inspect the mail room and play cards with me. We got to know each other well considering the difference in rank because when we played cards we talked quite a bit.

At West Point he was schooled in the art of war, so he was naturally disappointed to find he was serving peacefully in Japan. He sent letters twice a month to Division requesting he be transferred to a combat unit in Korea so he could be awarded a Combat Infantry Badge all infantry officers needed for advancement. He asked me about the war in Korea and always wanted to hear tales about it, so when we played gin rummy, and that was often, I had to tell him war stories and often exaggerated to keep him happy. When my memory bank was exhausted I

invented situations to please him but became fearful because I had to remember what I said to avoid being caught in a lie. He was devastated thinking he lost his chance for combat when the shooting stopped in Korea. Lieutenant Holt was a fine man and a fine officer and I'm sure he found his war a dozen years later in Vietnam.

Kite, the company clerk, Quatro the supply clerk, De Nero the motor pool sergeant and I developed a close friendship. At times we pretended to be company executives and addressed one another using our first two initials so I was AF, Kite CJ, Quatro RJ and De Nero TD. Often we partied until midnight with the cooks, Neil Hayakawa and two other Hawaiians in the mess hall. The Hawaiians were the life of the parties because Neil played the Ukulele, another the harmonica and the third Hawaiian cooked authentic island dishes. The cooks supplied the food that was unknowingly donated by the U.S. Army. I really liked one dish of baked fish and sautéed peppers, onions, tomatoes, scallions and cabbage in an olive oil then poured over wild rice. We took turns sneaking Sake wine into the mess hall and occasionally an officer joined the party with after dinner pastries.

One evening in the day room, the four of us were playing pinochle and I told them about the 1952 trip to Numazu with Isaacs. After hearing about it they asked if I would return with them and suggested more time be spent sightseeing in Tokyo, something Isaacs and I didn't do. A few days later I stopped in the club and asked the Special Service clerk about hotel availability. He told me American servicemen recently discovered beautiful Suragu Bay with its view of Mount Fuji, so rooms were at a premium.

I asked him to check room availability near the end of June and the hotel said there were only three rooms available at that time. He advised I book the two rooms I needed so I told him "Book 'em" reasoning that if the date wasn't agreeable to the others, we could always cancel. He also told me the rate went up from four hundred Yen per day to five hundred forty, an increase of thirty nine cents but still a steal at a dollar and a half a day for a room, maid service and three meals.

I returned with the information and when I told the others they agreed so we each requested an eight-day leave to start on June

21, 1953. I said the first time I went, I flew the shuttle but getting four seats on it this time might pose a problem. We decided to take the overnight train to Tokyo planning to stay three days in both Tokyo and Numazu. On the 21st we took the train to Tokyo and it was then we realized we bought tickets on a recliner and not a sleeper. After a noisy uncomfortable night rattling on the narrow gauge Japanese tracks we arrived in Tokyo and spent two full days visiting the Dai-Ichi Building, General Mac Arthur's occupation headquarters, the Imperial Palace, and shopped for souvenirs in the Post Exchange and along the Ginza, Japan's Fifth Avenue. In the evening we dined and then danced with pretty American hostesses at the Tokyo United Service Organization.

Early on the third day we were back on the train for a two-hour trip to Numazu. We completed our check-in at noon and went right to the dining room for lunch. There I couldn't help telling them about the little boy, the shower shoes and his parents that owned a brothel. Kite made a joke and asked "Don't you want to go back for the free ride?" They asked me to take them to the house to meet the family and the boy so I agreed to take them the next day.

The next morning after breakfast and a walk on the beach, we started out down the main street to find the house where the boy lived. The streets all looked the same until we arrived at one with a bookshop on a corner. I recognized the shop, then turned into the street, but found a vacant lot where the house was a year before. I asked a neighbor what happened to the house and the people who lived in it and he said "A kerosene heater fire destroyed it this past winter so the family moved." He didn't know where but I was happy when he said no one was injured in the fire.

The next day we rented bicycles at the same shop I did a year earlier and headed to the shops in the town center. To get there we had to cross a steel bridge that spanned a stream, and once on it, we stopped a man walking on the bridge and asked him to take a picture of the four of us together.

[Something missing?.....]

The Air Force, fearing sabotage and pending an inquiry, immediately shut down the field forcing us to call Hokkaido and tell King Company we were stranded. Lieutenant Cassels knew about the accident and gave us an emergency extension without

charging us the time. We spent two days in the hanger with hundreds of other stranded men and were beginning to run out of clean clothes when the Air Force reopened the field after finding no evidence of sabotage. The unfortunate accident gave us extra time to tour Tokyo, but on day three we were on board the shuttle flying to Hokkaido.

[An accident on both trips? A mix-up??]

The coming of July meant I was now in the countdown mode of my military service, four months left in Japan and seven and a half left in the Army. I had to come to a decision about getting discharged in Japan so I paid a visit to my friend in Regiment when I was picking up the mail and asked him to give me all the facts. He told me "Nothing has changed, you still need a job to stay here." I went back to Kite and applied for a five-day leave that would allow me three days in Tokyo to find employment.

I scheduled my trip for Saturday, August 1st because we got paid on July 31st, the last day of the month. After landing at Tachikawa, I took a taxi from the field to downtown Tokyo and just about lived in the business district for three days while I made my rounds applying at large companies.

I applied for employment at the offices of large American companies, Gulf Oil, Texaco, ESSO, Remington-Rand, Underwood and Pan-American Airlines. I also tried a handful of Japanese companies, but none could use the services of an American rifleman - nevertheless, I managed to see sections of Tokyo that I never knew existed. I was unsuccessful in my job search and climbed aboard the shuttle a fifth time for the return flight to Hokkaido.

August sped by and before I realized it, September was here and I was celebrating my twenty-first birthday on the twenty-first at the Enlisted Mens Club with De Nero, Quatro and Kite. When the cool October winds arrived I constantly thought about going home. I watched a long time as so many others left and now my turn was just over the horizon. I remember the day when I got the news, because a cold rain was falling on Camp Crawford so Lieutenant Holt and I were keeping warm and dry in the day room playing gin rummy. Kite came into the day room and sat at the table with a smile on his face and said "Al, I've got some good news for you." I

knew right away it was rotation. Kite continued, "I just got the October list and your name is on it. You're going home." When Lieutenant Holt heard that he kicked his chair back and rose up, snapped to attention and saluted me. I was stunned because an officer, especially a West Point officer, never saluted me before.

Lieutenant Holt said "Good luck Al, I'm happy for you but sad to hear you're going to leave us. It was an honor to serve with you and a pleasure playing gin with you, even though you did win most of the games."

Kite told me I was scheduled to leave October 31st, Halloween. On the day before, Lieutenant Cassels summoned me to his orderly room office and handed me a Letter of Commendation from the Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Smoot. He also gave me his endorsement to the Colonels letter and added "Good-bye and thank you for a job well done" and then he shook my hand, something we wouldn't do again for fifty years.

In early 2003 an Army friend e-mailed me saying that the Lieutenant retired as a Colonel and gave me his phone number and address in Florida. After a few phone calls I flew to Florida and we met on March 25, 2003 at his home on the shore of beautiful Lake Kerr in the Ocala National Forest. We shook hands again after almost a half-century. He took me out for a ride on his pontoon boat and as we skimmed over the crystal clear waters of the lake he told me during the Cuban Missile Crisis he was assigned the task of planning an invasion of Cuba. Army divisions were ordered to Florida for the invasion but the situation defused and the plans were never carried out. He also told me he was wounded during his second Vietnam tour in 1969 as he led a battalion of the First Infantry Division. He retired in 1978 after a thirty-four year military career. Quite a list of accomplishments for a man who was a corporal in the Army Air Corps at the end of World War Two.

On October thirtieth, hamburgers, hot dogs, beer and sodas were ten cents each at the Enlisted Men's Club prompting Quatro, Kite and De Nero to pay for my going home party. A Sapporo group played big band music of the forties and two Japanese ladies danced wearing hula skirts made with a white nylon like cord reminding me of the little Numazu girl that danced for Isaacs and

me in the summer of '52. With such good prices we partied until closing and were escorted to the door singing and weaving but we managed to find our way back to our headquarters platoon barracks. Other soldiers joined in the festivities during the evening so the final bill came in at fifteen dollars. I removed my tie, shoes and socks but never bothered to take off the rest of my uniform and then just fell back on my bunk and went to sleep. During my time in the Army this was the only time I had too much to drink. The next thing I remembered was waking to reveille feeling rinsed out so I removed the remainder of my uniform then jumped into the shower before heading to the mess hall. Today was getaway day, October 31, 1953.



*Last Army Photograph
Sapporo, Japan - October 1953*

The cooks rustled up a special breakfast my last morning in King Company of hotcakes, eggs, sausage, potatoes, a buttered roll with coffee. Ledbetter had a wide grin on his face when he came over to shake my hand and say good-bye, and why not, he was getting the mail clerk's job. When I finished eating, I went back into the barracks, brushed my teeth, squeezed a last few items into the duffel bag, put the lock on it then walked out of the barracks. De Nero was waiting out front in the jeep to take me to the bus at Division Headquarters. Quatro picked up my bag, threw it on the back seat of the jeep then slapped me on the back. Kite shook my hand and they both said little except "Good bye and good luck." Then De Nero drove off and I realized the chances of

me meeting those two guys again were slim and my twenty-five months in King Company had just ended unceremoniously.

When Tom stopped the jeep at Division headquarters I saw forty men sitting on or standing next to their duffel bags waiting for the bus to arrive. He took my bag from the jeep, dropped it on the ground then shook my hand and said "Good luck. We should get together stateside and have a drink." I said "Sounds great. Look me up." Tom lived just thirty minutes from me but we never did look one another up. When Tom drove away, I sat on my duffel bag, lit a cigarette and asked myself "Gee, am I really going home?"

When the bus arrived we got on board and found seats for ourselves and space for the bags. Everyone on board started to clap as the bus pulled away from the curb and headed to Sapporo Field. This flight would be my sixth and final one on the shuttle but this time I wasn't too concerned about being bumped because I was flying as a class "A" passenger, rotation.

As the bus passed through the main gate, the Military Police saluted it because they recognized it as the "rotation bus" and knew we were going home. When the MPs saluted, I closed my eyes for a minute and saw myself riding north on the Pusan Express with the burly red headed sergeant. I saw Isaacs, Monroe and myself running down Baldy and the puff of smoke when Dave Frazer stepped on the mine and I saw myself running out of the village with Powell when he was wounded. And I shuddered as I remembered that Thanksgiving when we lost Pork Chop Hill and forty-four men. I saw again the confrontation with the boys from Little Chicago at the Pusan Compound and remembered the night I almost shot and killed Lieutenant Ramey. I saw Flanders one more time with Lieutenant Cramer, and Sergeant Sam, Jimmy Borders, Sergeant Chavez and Captain Duet. Suddenly the bus hit a hole in the road and I bounced around and opened my eyes and they were gone, I couldn't see them anymore.

The C-47 was not a large plane, so the cargo, forty men and their bags left little room to move around. Two stops for mail and three hours later we touched down at Tachikawa Air Force Base where another bus was waiting to take us to Camp Drake. Once at

Drake we were assigned to a barracks and a Corporal showed us to our bunks. He was very fat and old and looked more like one of the Seven Dwarfs than a soldier but he was the barracks boss, so we did what he ordered. He said "At 1000 hours tomorrow morning you will put your ponchos on the ground in front of the barracks and place your belongings on top. You will then stand at ease behind the ponchos for a shake down inspection by the First Sergeant."

The inspection was going to cause a problem, because in the Korean reserve area I found a rusted Chinese burp gun and knew I wouldn't be able to get it out. I dropped it into a jeep trailer with other contraband weapons but managed to sneak out the round magazine that held the ammunition and kept it hidden two years. I knew it would soon be discovered so I took out six rounds of ammunition and put them in the center of a carton of Camels. I put the drum and the carton on top of my belongings so when the Sergeant came by with his wooden swagger stick, he just tapped the drum and said "This stays". He never looked inside the carton so I still have the ammo.

After the inspection, the fat Corporal strutted into the barracks again and said, "There will be one last inspection tomorrow at 1000 hours. This time you will stand at attention in your Class "A" uniform along side your bunks for the Captain." He said the Captain was concerned with barracks appearance and condition so the inspection was just a formality. At 1000 hours the Corporal led the Captain into the barracks and yelled "Tench-hut" then they almost ran down the center of the barracks before exiting through a rear door. The inspection was over in seconds.

Next the barracks Sergeant came in and said, "Tomorrow will be your last day in Drake. You'll have your documents checked and your stateside destination verified and then get a boarding tag. Don't lose the tag, if you do you'll swim home so hang it on your belt and write the number in white chalk on your duffel bag. Buses will take you to the Camp Drake railhead where you'll board the train to the Yokohama waterfront and your ship, the USNS Henry B. Freeman. Good luck and have a smooth trip home." During the document check at the Personnel Office a Lieutenant told me my orders were changed from rotation to termination of service because "Our calculations indicate that you will arrive stateside

with less than ninety days of service remaining therefore you are eligible for an early release.”



*USNS Henry Blanchard Freeman
AP 143*

The Lieutenant said I would be discharged at Camp Kilmer in New Brunswick, New Jersey only thirty miles from my home. Next I went into the adjoining building and waited in a long line before getting my numbered boarding tag, number one thousand five hundred ninety one, not difficult to remember because it was the numbers of the year I enlisted.

At 1500 hours when we were dismissed for the day, I was so happy about the prospect of an early discharge that I decided to share the news with my mom and dad. At the Post Exchange phone bank I learned that the cost of a phone call from Tokyo to New Jersey was nine dollars a minute. I thought to myself “I better talk fast.” I failed a number of times to make a connection so I decided to put the good news in a letter they’d get before I could call again from the states. The last morning at Drake, we formed ranks outside the barracks and everywhere I looked I saw the olive drab uniforms of the two thousand men waiting to board the fifty buses that would take them to the railhead. Forty-five minutes later the train was on the pier stopping alongside the Freeman. I left the train and as I stood there looking up at the Freeman, I wondered if a General would be on the pier to salute me and welcome me home as one did when I left Seattle two years earlier

THE LAST HURRAH
NOVEMBER 1953 - FEBRUARY 1954

The Freeman accommodated three thousand troops at speeds up to seventeen knots but was smaller than the Buckner. If boarding was by tag numbers I would be standing waiting in line for some time but it went well so my turn came sooner than I expected when an officer called my number. I said "Yo" then walked up into the ship and down to a hold near the waterline adjoining a recreation room and pool table like on the Buckner. Men again started a dice game on the pool table the minute the ship was being guided away from the pier by the tugs and I assumed this game would last as long as the one coming over. I saw an urn in the room so I walked in to get a cup of coffee and asked a sailor writing a letter if he knew the ships destination. He replied, "We're going to Seattle". His reply disappointed me because I wanted to sail into San Francisco Bay under the Golden Gate Bridge but I thought to myself "Well, at least you're going home."

On the way to breakfast in the galley the first morning, I picked up a copy of the ship's newspaper The Freeman Press. I laughed when I read an article on page one reminding us that in the States we need not remove our shoes when we entered a house or bow when we met someone. It cautioned us not to call our girlfriends or wives "Moose-eh-mae" [*musume*], slang for a Japanese female who was a soldiers live in companion and lover [*wrong*].

An officer came into our hold each morning looking for men to put on work details. There was little to do on board except exercise on deck or roll dice so there were times when the work was welcome. I escaped most details because I was a Corporal but when the Lieutenant ran out of lower grades he came looking for the low non-commissioned officers like me. I avoided the Lieutenant like I avoided that bullhorn sergeant in Seattle by keeping one jump ahead of him moving from hold to hold.

Most evenings the ship's entertainment committee presented a first run Hollywood film or held card games and twice sponsored a dance that was attended by ladies that were on board - military dependents - Red Cross or civilian government workers. I went to one dance with two soldiers I met on board and had a few beers and danced with one lady while listening to some sailors try their hand at music making, something they weren't very good at. I met and talked to a Red Cross girl that reminded me of the pretty Jersey City girl I met at the shower point in Korea almost two

years ago. It made me think “It would be great if she was going home on the Freeman too.”

The weather cooperated by being calm so it didn't anger the Pacific allowing the Freeman to smoothly sail over the waves and pick up time.

I was having periods of anxiety as the Freeman neared the mainland; in fact I think everyone on board was having the same problem. Sleeping the night before the ship was scheduled to arrive was difficult and I found myself tossing and turning in my bunk. I was half awake and kept hearing the dice rattling in the recreation room. Finally at 0200 hours I got up and went into the room to watch the game. It was alive and loud, ongoing and never ending and it had never stopped once since the boat left Yokohama. It was quiet now, because of the hour, so there were only four soldiers and a sailor in the game but there were about a dozen spectators standing around the table. I assumed they also found it difficult to get to sleep. A sailor came in and seeing this, made a fresh urn of coffee.

I returned to my bunk but I still found it impossible to fall asleep. It was 0400 hours, eight hours before the ship was due to arrive at the dock but only two hours before the first mainland lights would come into view. I continued to toss and turn unable to sleep until I finally had to get up so I took a shower, put on a Class “A” uniform and decided to go up on deck to get a spot close to the bow to see the lights. When I reached the deck I saw twenty-five other men with the same thoughts up at the bow looking into the darkness for the first glitter of the Puget Sound lights.

Everyone on deck clapped hands and gave out with loud cheers when the Canadian lights of Puget Sound first flickered into view on the port side. The Freeman was now steaming east into Puget Sound forcing me to squint as I looked into the sun rising over a distant mountain range. It presented a sight to behold prompting me to say to a soldier standing beside me “God really blessed America” and he replied, “He sure did.” Eventually the ship would turn south and take another six hours before it docked in Seattle.

As the tugs maneuvered the Freeman into its berth, I saw a large sign hanging from the end of the pier printed in red, white and blue

lettering that said “Welcome Home to the Best Damn Fighting Men in the World.” The sign made me feel proud. I stood at the railing watching the tugs do their work then went to the port side to look for the General but he didn’t show up. I thought he’d surely be there to welcome me home but he wasn’t so I unceremoniously walked down the gangplank and for the first time in over two years I was standing on American soil.

A long double line of Army buses waited on the pier to take the over three-thousand soldiers and dependents to Fort Lawton. The buses arrived at Fort Lawton and discharged us in a parking lot adjacent to a giant mess building filled with more than two hundred tables and thousands of chairs.

In the front of the mess hall over the serving area hung a banner that said “Thanks Vets. Ask and it’s yours.” Depending on the time of day, the cooks had a tremendous variety of food to serve. Some of the men lived in the Seattle area so their wives or family members joined them for a meal and were charged inexpensive military prices.

After lunch, we were divided up into two hundred man companies and bussed to a group of World War Two barracks similar to the two story white barracks at Camp Rucker, Alabama. An old Sixth Army Sergeant led us up a flight of stairs to our bunks and said, “Grab any bunk, your blanket and linens are on it. Make your bed, supper is at 1700, breakfast at 0500. Early start tomorrow and a long day. Get some rest. In two days you’ll be out of here and on your way home.”

After breakfast, Old Sarge came into the barracks and herded us off to supply so we could be issued wool winter OD uniforms. It’s cold and rainy in the Pacific Northwest during the fall, and summer uniforms just didn’t fit the bill. Issuing uniforms to almost two hundred men took all morning so Old Sarge led us back to the barracks and told us to “Knock off for lunch and be back here at 1400 hours.” I rushed eating my meal so I could get to the Post Exchange phone bank and tell my folks I’d be home soon.

I called my folks but the line was busy. A second attempt at calling was also unsuccessful so I was forced to give up the phone because other soldiers were waiting in line to place a call.

At 1400 hours we marched to personnel for a final records check and there I received some unwelcome news. I was informed that the officer in Camp Drake who changed my original orders miscalculated the ships date of arrival. A personnel Captain told me "Instead of arriving with less than ninety days of service remaining, the Freeman took advantage of the good weather and made great time crossing the Pacific. The error by the Camp Drake officer and the good weather combined to get you into Seattle at noon on your ninety first day therefore you are twelve hours over the cut off and not eligible for early release. Your orders will revert back to rotation so you will have to serve the full three years." "My God" I thought to myself, "for a lousy twelve hours they're going to hold me in for three months."

Later that afternoon just before dinner, I went back to the phones at the Post Exchange and this time I got through. My dad answered and he was just as happy to hear my voice, as I was his. I told him about not getting discharged and said it really meant nothing because I would be out in ninety days. Then my mom got on the phone and she did more crying then talking.

I told my mom not to cry and she said "They're tears of joy. I can't wait until you get home." I said I'd call again the first chance I get after I arrived in New Jersey.

The next morning after breakfast, Old Sarge took us to see the travel agent. Not a real travel agent but an officer, in this case a Lieutenant Brice, who was in charge of travel and assigning men to the military post closest to their home. Men who lived in the Pacific Northwest traveled by a private bus company, those living greater distances from Fort Lawton went by train but the men who lived east of the Mississippi flew on chartered commercial planes. Old Sarge called out a hundred names then escorted us into a large room where the Lieutenant said "Okay, now we have a planeload so at 0700 tomorrow you'll board an Eastern Airlines charter. It will make a refueling stop in Louisville then arrive in Newark at 2100. Buses will be waiting to take you to Camp Kilmer where you'll be furloughed or discharged."

After an early reveille and breakfast, I rounded up my belongings and boarded a bus that took me to the airport where I got on a four

engine triple-tailed Lockheed Constellation. At 0730 hours on November 22, 1953, two years to the day when we lost Pork Chop Hill, the big propeller plane left Washington State on a flight I often thought I would never be on.

The female stewardesses treated the passengers, who were almost all returning Korean veterans, first class, providing us with almost anything we requested. For a second breakfast I asked for and received coffee, juice and an over easy egg sandwich on rye toast with two slices of bacon. I'll never forget the meal or the pretty young lady who served it.

When the plane landed in Louisville, we had a few minutes to stretch our legs so I ran into the terminal and called home. My dad answered and I told him I was in Kentucky so he said, "You're getting closer." My mother was out shopping and I didn't get a chance to talk to her so I hung up after telling him I'd call again from Camp Kilmer. It was a happy flight and the closer we got to New Jersey the happier it became because most everyone on board came from the New York City area. When the plane left Louisville on the final leg of its journey many on board began singing patriotic songs. It approached Newark Airport in the dark and banked over the uncompleted Garden State Parkway allowing me to see the headlights of the cars driving on the completed sections. As the plane entered its final approach I looked through the window and saw the lights of New York City then the George Washington Bridge and the Statue of Liberty. Just shortly before 10:00 pm the wheels touched down and I was home.

We had to make our way through the main terminal that was almost deserted because of the hour to reach the buses that were parked out front. People who were on benches napping, reading or just sitting looked up to see a hundred soldiers walking through the terminal. One man called out "Welcome home, Soldiers" and another got up and ran over to me to shake my hand as I walked by. There were three buses waiting for us at the curb so we boarded them and one hour later, we were passing the Military Police at Camp Kilmer's main gate in New Brunswick. A sergeant took thirty-three of us into a barracks and because it was early morning, he said, "You can all sleep late because reveille has been canceled due to the hour. Breakfast is served until 0700 hours and lunch is between 1130 and 1330. You are off duty until

1430 hours at which time I will take you to personnel.” I rolled my duffel bag under the bed, made it, took off my clothes and went to sleep.

I missed breakfast that morning because I slept until 0800 so I went with two other soldiers to eat a breakfast at the Post Exchange. While I was there I called home. My mother answered so I told her I was in New Jersey and I'd call again later that evening making her happy. After a light lunch, I returned to the barracks and waited for the sergeant who arrived late at 1500 hours to march us to personnel where again I was the recipient of bad news.

It was 1600 hours before I was able to speak with an officer in the personnel office who said I would receive a forty-five day leave effective November 25th, the day before Thanksgiving. The Lieutenant gave me bad news when he said I couldn't be paid until Monday the 30th because finance was closed for inventory and the Thanksgiving holiday. I found myself in a dilemma because I was broke and had no way to get home so I was forced to call my father to tell him what was happening down here, New Brunswick being south of North Bergen where my parents bought a home a year ago. I told him “I have a long leave starting Wednesday but I'm broke and can't be paid because finance is closed and I don't want to wait until they reopen.” My dad said, “I'll be there with your uncle Wednesday morning to pick you up. If you need money I'll lend it to you.” Great, I thought to myself, that's just what I had in mind. I told him to stop for a pass at the main gate then meet me at the Visitor Center lot next to the Post Exchange at 10:00 am.

Wednesday November 25, 1953 was a red-letter day for me. After breakfast I folded my mattress, straightened out my belongings and locked my foot and wall lockers. Shortly after 0900 hours I picked up my two bags and started walking slowly towards the Visitor Center parking lot.

It was 0930 when I reached the parking lot and spotted my dad's blue Pontiac. I immediately dropped my bags and hurried to the car to wrap my arms around my mother and father then hug my little sister who wasn't little any more because she grew up while I was away and would soon be sixteen. My uncle shook my hand

then we got into the car and he drove to the main gate where the Military Police stopped the car to check my orders. Then they waved us on and in minutes we were traveling north on US Highway 1. I didn't have to report back to Camp Kilmer until January 8, 1954.

It was a happy ride home to North Bergen. When we got there I saw the house my family bought for \$17,500.00 all decked out in American flags and red, white and blue balloons. A large banner saying "Welcome Home" hung from the second floor reminding me of the one on the pier in Seattle. As we got out of the car my dad pointed to an upstairs window and said "That's your room and your mom and I bought you a new bedroom set."

The next day was Thanksgiving and most of my family gathered at my house to celebrate the holiday. My grandfather stopped by and talked to me about getting a job at the Edgewater, New Jersey Ford plant where he was a first class machinist. He was an acquaintance of Henry Ford and he enjoyed a great deal of influence at the plant and could easily get me hired.

I told my grandfather working was not high on my list of priorities. I also said the three hundred dollars mustering out pay I'd receive when I was discharged would allow me to avoid work for three months. The Army paid it in three payments, the first when I got out and the others were mailed to me over the next two months. The mustering out pay was a lot of money in 1954 at a time when the Ford Motor Company was paying its employees two dollars an hour. I just wanted to sit back, relax and watch the world as it passed me by.

I sent home two thousand dollars from my Army and combat pay and the money I made dealing in Japan. Now it was time to spend some and my first order of business was to find transportation, I needed a car. I saw one I liked on a used car lot and after having it checked by my father's mechanic, I bought it for three hundred dollars. It was a gray 1946 Plymouth four door sedan with the shift on the column. I also needed new clothes so I went into an Armenian tailor shop around the corner from my house. He had a sign in the window saying he sold new shirts and pants and like Akiro the tailor did for me in Camp Crawford, he tailored them free of charge. Shirts were four dollars and pants six so I bought a half

dozen of each and paid them off on a payment plan usually three or four dollars a week.

I was enjoying breakfast with my father one morning when I read an article in the morning paper saying President Eisenhower asked Congress to increase financial aid to France. The article also said the President was thinking about sending military advisers to assist the French in Vietnam, because they were having problems with Ho Chi Minh. I disagreed with the Presidents Southeast Asia policy because I was against getting involved in another Asian land war.

On the same page was an article about Army recruiters on Whitehall Street near the Battery in New York City. The article stated that most of the recruiters were combat veterans of World War Two or Korea and singled out a Captain, one Louis J. Duet from New Orleans, Louisiana. I told my father "My Company Commander in Korea was a Captain Louis J. Duet. I wonder, could this be him?" My father said "How many Captains can there be in the Army with a name like Louis J. Duet. Call Whitehall Street and find out." I dialed information and then the recruiting office and finally was connected to the Captain's office. When he answered I asked if he was the Commanding Officer of King Company, Eighth Cavalry in Korea. When he replied "Yes" I said, "This is Al Trotola, the company mail clerk." He was surprised, to say the least, but happy that I called and asked, "Where are you calling from?"

I told the Captain I was calling from North Bergen, New Jersey and he said "I live in Ridgewood, how far is that from you?" When I said I was just a half hour away from him, he was glad and invited me to pay him a visit. Following the directions he gave me over the phone, I found his house on a quiet tree-lined street the following Sunday afternoon. When I stopped the car in front of the house he opened the door and walked out to meet me, so he must have been waiting for me to arrive. We shook hands and went into the house and the first thing I noticed was the kids grew tall since I last saw them eighteen months ago. His wife appeared from the kitchen and put out a table full of soft drinks and snacks then gave me a hug. The Captain and I naturally started to talk Army and about Korea and during the talk I referred to him as "Sir". We were both wearing civilian clothes but still in the Army

and he said to me “You can cut the Sir here.” I find that hard to do, just like I find it difficult to call Colonel Cassels in Florida by his first name Ken as his wife always suggests.

We relived Korea, Camp Tongnae and Japan and before we realized it we had talked away the entire afternoon and it was time for me to leave. I got up, shook his children’s hands because they’d grown too big to hug them, kissed his wife on her cheek and we started walking towards the front door.

Suddenly he stopped, turned around and walked back into the den. A minute later he returned with a bottle of his favorite scotch, Johnny Walker Black and handed it to me saying, “Have a few on me.” On the way out to the car he told me “It was good to see you again.” I said “And it was great seeing you again, Sir.” We shook hands then I stepped back and saluted him one last time, got into my car and drove off, never to see him again.

Christmas came and passed and the bottle went with me to a party at a friend’s house on New Years Eve. A week later I was getting ready to report back to Camp Kilmer. On January 8, 1954, I said good-bye to my parents but it was sort of a happy good-bye because I’d be back home in six weeks. The Military Police held me at the main gate because I didn’t have a Class A sticker on the bumper of my car. They asked to see my Army ID and leave papers then directed me to First Army Headquarters so I could report in for duty. I was assigned a barracks and told to report immediately to the First Sergeant in the orderly room. When I did, he told me to “Get squared away, have something to eat, then take the rest of the day off and report back to me right after breakfast in the morning.” I located my barracks and because it was almost empty, I had a choice of bunks so I was able to choose one close to the door. I was back in the Army again.

The next morning I reported as ordered to the First Sergeant. What he told me I found unbelievable. He said “You have been designated to receive training in the operation and maintenance of heating units so you will report tomorrow morning at 0900 hours to the Engineer Detachment. I asked if he had the right man because I had such little time to serve and he growled, “If your name is Trotola I have the right man.” He told me when I received my Engineer ID card I would be the Non-Com in charge of the

detail that kept the fires burning in the WAC area so as he put it “the lady soldiers buns and boobs will be toasty warm.”

So I went to class learning how to shovel coal and bank fires to keep them burning properly. Ten days later on January 20, 1954, with less than a month to serve, I passed the fireman test and was issued an ID card with the Engineer red castle symbol and became a fireman authorized to start fires. I reported for duty at the WAC headquarters where a lady Captain told me I would soon receive a schedule listing my days and hours. She told me “It’s your duty to check the boilers hourly making sure the fires are burning then sign the inspection book in the orderly room.” Like the good soldier I was, I followed her orders but the company clerk asked me “Why are you signing the book hourly? Sign it once eight times and go home like the others did.”

“Nobody” the company clerk said “stays here the entire eight hours.” I asked him what will happen if the lady Captain checks on me and he said, “Just give me two dollars a shift and I’ll cover for you. You don’t need to worry because the men will do their job and keep the fires burning.” I thought to myself “He’s got a good thing going covering for everyone and collecting an extra forty to eighty dollars a month.” So I paid him the ten dollars a week and spent more time home than at Kilmer prompting my father to ask me “Aren’t you worried the Army might want you for something?” I told him I gave the clerk our phone number just in case.

One Saturday, I was about to leave for home when I discovered that someone had taken a polished silver Combat Infantryman Badge from my Ike jacket. I was heartbroken because my uncle sent it to me two years ago so it had sentimental value. I spent more than an hour looking for the thief but was unsuccessful. I was speeding on US 1 North trying to make up lost time when a state Motor Vehicle Inspector pulled me over. He saw I was in uniform so he only cautioned me to take it easy and said “Soldiers die in car accidents too”. As I neared home I heard a clicking sound coming from the rear of my car so I drove to a friends garage where his mechanic told me it sounded like a tooth had broken off one of the gears in the transmission.

I walked the thirteen blocks to my house and told my father. He said “Take the Pontiac back to Kilmer. Fred will have your car

repaired when you return.” I was driving south on US 1 early Monday morning thinking about what I would do when I was discharged and wasn’t paying attention to the speedometer. Again I was stopped by the same State Inspector but he failed to recognize me because I was driving a Pontiac and wearing civilian clothes. When he saw my uniform on a hanger he said, “I see you’re in the Army. Slow it down. Soldiers die in car accidents too.” He probably never gave a ticket to anyone in the military. On my next trip home repairs were completed on the Plymouth so I had my car back.

February rolled in and now I was happy because I only had days to go. The Sunday before discharge day was Valentines Day so that Saturday I drove home with a box of candy I bought at the Post Exchange for my mom. My father asked me if I should be home so close to the end and I told him I was leaving early Monday and should have sufficient time to process out. I left home Monday at 4:00 am and drove straight to the mess hall. When I was having breakfast, an MP walked in and asked, “Has anyone here seen a Corporal Trotola. I yelled out “Yo, I’m Trotola”. He sat down beside me and said “I’ll have coffee with you then follow me when you’re finished.”

When I finished, we left the mess hall and joined another MP who was waiting outside in a jeep. I asked them if there was a problem and one said “No problem, they just want to talk to you before you start processing.” Then they drove me around the athletic field to a barracks and told me to go in. Inside, I saw an empty barracks except for a long table at the far end. Sitting behind the table were five male field grade officers, Major or above, and a lady Colonel. The lady officer invited me to come closer and sit on a chair in front of the table facing them. After looking them over, I knew they were going to make an attempt at convincing me to re-enlist. A Major rose from his seat and slowly walked from behind the table and with his hands behind his back he stood directly in front of me. “Corporal” he said “the Army is not happy when it loses its combat veterans, so we’re here trying to prevent that. You know the benefits you’re entitled to if you re-enlist, but on top of those, we can waive the time in grade requirement to give you an immediate two stripe promotion to Staff Sergeant.” Then the lady Colonel stood up and it was her chance to pitch. She threw three strikes, or should I say curve balls by saying the Army would assign me to

a recruiting position in New Jersey for one year, then allow me to choose an overseas assignment and give me a three hundred sixty dollar bonus if I re-enlisted for six years.

Then she told me to take a break and go outside for a smoke to give it some thought. I went outside, lit up a cigarette and looked around at the barracks and across the athletic field. Like the American Indian, I couldn't forget the broken promises, and in my case, Alabama when the Army changed my orders and sent me to the Far East. I couldn't trust them and I just knew President Eisenhower would send me to Vietnam as an adviser so I decided to take the money and run, in this case my mustering out pay. I went back inside and declined their kind offer. A Lieutenant Colonel walked around to where I was sitting so I stood up and snapped to attention. He reached out to shake my hand and said "Good luck and thank you." I saluted him, did an about face and walked out of the building. The next day I signed forms but otherwise did little in the way of processing. I took a last walk through the WAC area and met the lady Captain. I gave her a salute and we talked for a short time before she wished me well, then I said "Thank you, Ma'am" and went on my way.

My last full day in the Army was February 17th. I went to personnel at 1000 hours to sign my DD-214, then at 1400 I reported to the medical department where I was given a chest x-ray and a final physical. The Army wanted to have a record of my good health in the event I filed future claims.

The final day was finally here. The mess hall this last morning was filled with smiling faces, loud chatter and laughter because almost everyone was due to be discharged in the near future. A graying Master Sergeant sat at the table and told me and the others that he was retiring today, after thirty years in the Army. I saw he had a First Cavalry patch on his right shoulder showing that he served with the division at one time so I told him I was with the division in Korea. Then he made a joke and said "I was with them in 1924 when we had horses and in the Philippines in 1944 after we ate them."

After enjoying my last Army meal, the Master Sergeant marched me and six other men who were getting discharged to the Personnel building. Once inside I stood in front of a rectangular

table where a WAC Lieutenant and a Major were sitting. I saluted and the Major said "Stand at ease" so I stood and watched as the lady Lieutenant signed my DD-214 and he put his signature on my discharge. Then he placed both documents inside a large manila envelope, rose from his seat, handed me the envelope and said "The United States of America thanks you for a job well done. Good luck."

I glanced up at a large octagon shaped clock with an Army decal that was hanging on the wall behind the table and saw it was exactly 1000 hours on February 18, 1954, and without any fanfare, I was a civilian once again.

I left the personnel building and slowly walked back to my barracks to pick up my duffel bag and be sure I was leaving nothing behind. A few men who were still processing out were in the barracks and shook my hand. I left the barracks and walked to the parking lot where I put my bag into the trunk of my car, then took off my Ike jacket and tie and threw them onto the rear seat. It was 10:30 am on a cold February day when I started the car to generate some heat. I picked up the manila envelope to look at my papers and sat there a few minutes allowing the car to warm up. I found it hard to believe three years had passed since I took the oath at the Armed Forces Induction Center on Kinney Street in Newark. I took a last fond look at Camp Kilmer then put the car in gear and pulled out of the lot.

The Military Police at the front gate saw the Class A sticker on the bumper but stopped me when they noticed I wasn't wearing a jacket or tie. "You're out of uniform soldier," one said. I pulled out my discharge and showed it to him and he saluted me and said, "Pass through and good luck."

The events I witnessed and the memories I have are priceless. 1952 was a leap year so I had to serve one extra day and that's why I was a soldier.

"ONE THOUSAND NINETY SIX DAYS"

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