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B Company Still in Iraq



The rest of the battalion has returned from Afghanistan and Djibouti but B Company will remain in Iraq until the spring. Help make their Christmas brighter. If you want to send them cards, letters, or care packages, send them to CPT Jacob Kramer, who will pass them on to his men (cannot address "to any soldier"). His address is: CPT Jacob Kramer, B Co 4-31st Inf, Unit # 5L, APO AE 09335.

A Marine's Request

When I returned from Iraq in August, a letter from an anonymous Marine member of the Chosin Few Chapter in San Diego was waiting for me. I replied, asking questions to verify his service, but received no answer. Although I cannot confirm the letter's origin, it seems sincere. It reads in part (the full text will be circulated at our next reunion):

"Dear Karl Lowe, I hope you get this before you leave for the reunion. For 53 years I've wanted to thank the men of the 31st who served in Korea in Nov-Dec 1950 for their heroic actions east of the Chosin Reservoir. Marines, disdainful of the Army, never gave them recognition for this effort. These two battalions stopped two Chinese divisions from overrunning Hagaru-ri at the base of the reservoir, which was the only escape route for the 1st Mar Div. As a Marine, this has always bothered me, for it took us 52 years to get them recognition. We received our medals for the breakout right away. Marine General Smith said the Army did not deserve recognition, so no medals or awards were ever given. The Army is the Army and they went on with their lives, never bothering to dispute this error. Not until historians started questioning who these few Army units were that fought on the east side of the reservoir. Marines never wrote about them, they just wrote about how Marines won the war single-handed. Questions need answers so historians went to Red China to study the Chinese history at the Korean War Museum. There they found the battle of the Changjin Reservoir, how the two battalions of the 7th Infantry Division stopped two Chinese divisions from reaching Hagaru-ri, thus making it possible for us Marines to escape the trap. At your reunion, please have these men stand and be recognized. Thank them not just for me, but for all other Marines who owe them their lives. Thank you my Fraternity Brothers and forgive us."

Korea 1950

Editor's Note: *This edition begins our coverage of the Korean War. Like our coverage of Bataan, what will follow in many editions to come is not pleasant. It is a story of sacrifice, hardship, and epic fear as bugles and yak horns of a determined foe break the stillness of many a night to signal there is much worse to come. My generation fought its war in the sun, the mud, and the rain in Vietnam and experienced the same pensive, endless nights but I will remain forever grateful that we were spared the bitter cold, the artillery bombardments, and the human wave attacks faced by our predecessors in Korea. I can only hope that this humble attempt to capture your experience does justice to what you endured and properly honors your service to the nation. To that end, I am indebted to Glenn Justice, Lloyd Moses, Richard Ecker, George Rasula, Don Mayville, Ed Reeves, William Smith, Ray Vallowe, Charles Bielecki, Lee Miller, and Art Wilson who chronicled their experiences in painstaking detail and the many others, too numerous to mention individually, who took the time to write letters and send pictures, further illuminating*

events that happened over a half century ago. I have borrowed liberally from your experiences because you are our regiment's living legacy. Karl Lowe, Editor *Pro Patria Press*.

When North Korean troops invaded the Republic of Korea on June 25, 1950, the 31st Infantry Regiment at Camp Crawford, Japan, had only four rifle companies of two platoons each and the entire 7th Infantry Division to which it belonged was three rifle platoons short of being able to field even a single TO&E regiment.¹ Of the four divisions stationed in Japan at the time, the 7th was closest to the Soviet Union and was initially intended to continue occupying and protecting Japan while others deployed to Korea. In keeping with that plan, its three infantry regiments, the 17th, 31st, and 32d, were stripped to cadre strength to help fill the three divisions that deployed to Korea in July. Replacements from the US arrived slowly because the Army only had 10 active divisions, all understrength.

In Korea, the situation quickly grew desperate. Better-trained, better-armed, and better-motivated North Koreans inflicted heavy losses on the first American units to arrive from Japan. World War II-era antitank rockets bounced harmlessly off Soviet-supplied T-34 tanks and there were too few troops to keep the North Koreans from streaming around the 24th Infantry Division, the first to arrive, precipitating a series of panicky retreats southward. The 25th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Divisions fared little better, barely clinging to the southeastern corner of Korea by the end of July.

In Japan, the depleted 7th Division began receiving replacements, a combination of green recruits from the US and more seasoned men drawn from the Reserves and troop units all over the United States. The 12th Armored Infantry Battalion from Ft Hood, Texas, for example, deployed almost en masse in mid-July. From Fairfield-Suisun Airfield (later Travis Air Force Base), California, its troops deployed in platoon-size packets to Japan. On arrival, they were sent as individual replacements to different regiments where they were dispersed further among needy companies, losing the cohesion and tactical proficiency they had cultivated for a year or more at Fort Hood. In the US, battalions of the 2d Armored, 3d Infantry, and 11th Airborne Divisions were drawn down to skeletons and some regiments were completely zeroed out.²

In August 1950, 340 replacements arrived in the Far East by air each day, not enough to replace the losses early deploying units had suffered. By August 5, 7858 men had been killed or seriously wounded and only 7711 replacements had arrived. The 2d Infantry Division from Fort Lewis, Washington, the 1st Marine Brigade from Camp Pendleton, California, the 5th Regimental Combat Team from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and the partially-formed 29th Infantry Regiment from Okinawa were hastily sent to plug gaps in the steadily shrinking perimeter protecting Korea's southernmost port, Pusan. Although the 7th Division was closer to Korea than any of those units, it was not as combat-ready.

After being scattered all over Japan to secure the vacated garrisons of divisions that had deployed to Korea, the 7th Division was reassembled for pre-deployment training at Camp Fuji, a dusty firing range near the town of Gotemba, in the shadow of Fujiama, Japan's most famous volcano. The division had only 574 officers and 8200 enlisted men, barely half of its authorized strength. To fill the void, 8307 Koreans were gathered off the streets of South Korean towns, packed

¹ In 1950, an infantry division at wartime strength would have had 3 regiments of 3 battalions each. Each infantry battalion would have had 3 rifle companies of 3 rifle platoons each, totaling 81 rifle platoons. The 7th Division's occupation-era strength was 3 regiments of 2 battalions each. Each battalion had 2 rifle companies with 2 rifle platoons, totaling 24 rifle platoons, less than one third of the division's wartime authorization.

² When the 3d Inf Div deployed to Korea in November, one of its regiments was still empty, causing it to "borrow" an independent regiment stationed in Puerto Rico, which in turn had to "borrow" a battalion from the Panama Canal's defense force to reach full strength.

aboard ships, and shipped off to Japan for “basic training”. They were called KATUSAs, “Korean Augmentation to the US Army”. The 31st Infantry received 1857 of them, roughly half the regiment’s strength. While the numbers must have looked good to planners in Tokyo and Washington, the practical impact was more negative than positive. Most KATUSAs spoke no English, making cooperation difficult at best. They received almost no military training, firing only five rounds from their newly issued Springfield M-1 rifles in Japan, and they had great difficulty adjusting to American food and field sanitation standards. GIs in rifle squads were paired with KATUSAs while heavy weapons elements made their KATUSAs ammunition bearers. Seeing a disaster in the making, Colonel Richard P. Ovenshine, the regimental commander, planned a full program of training for his polyglot outfit, but he would not get the time.

On September 3, Typhoon Kezia roared across southern Japan with winds up to 110 miles an hour, wrecking the port city of Kobe where the 1st Marine Division was staging. The typhoon also wrought havoc at Camp Fuji, scattering squad tents all over the landscape. Warned of the storm’s approach, most men fled to the more substantial private dwellings and public buildings of Gotemba and other nearby villages. In most cases, they were graciously welcomed by Japanese families, but the mix of muddy GI boots and tatami rice mat floors was most unwelcome. In Japan, people take off their footwear before entering a residence. Accompanying heavy rains turned Camp Fuji into a sea of mud, putting an end to the idea of serious training. Three days later, the 7th Division received orders to move by road and train to the port of Yokohama. The last serial reached the port at 6:30 PM on September 7 and was quickly herded onto a waiting ship. Hundreds of the regiment’s newest replacements had not even been assigned to companies yet.

Typical of the latest arrivals was 19 year-old Private Don Monterosso. Don enlisted in March 1950 and took basic training with the newly-activated 7th Armored Division at Camp Roberts, California—away from Michigan for the first time in his life and desperately homesick. Basic and advanced individual training was 16 weeks of dismounted drill, physical conditioning, military courtesy, and “don’t worry about all that combat stuff, you’ll get that in your permanent unit”. What later saved Don’s life, though, was the 70 hours he spent firing a Garand M1 rifle at targets ranging out to 550 yards. When the Korean War began, Don was enroute to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, but he didn’t get to stay very long. In early September, he left McChord Field, Washington on a Dakota C-47 transport to Haneda Air Base near Tokyo, stopping in Alaska enroute. At the Far East Command’s Transfer Point at Camp Zama, he was assigned to the 7th Infantry Division. The next day he was given a set of the division’s “hourglass” shoulder patches and herded onto a train to Yokohama. There, he was promptly hustled aboard the USNS *Buckner* with hundreds of similarly bewildered newcomers.

Despite the rush, the division’s troopships would stay at anchor for another three days while tanks, trucks, howitzers, communication vans, and heavy engineer equipment were loaded onto cargo ships and Navy LSTs. The 7th Division’s ships departed Yokohama at 5:15 AM on September 10, joining the 1st Marine Division and other units of the hastily formed X Corps at a rendezvous point off the Japanese island of Kyushu. The convoy included 261 ships from seven countries. Many of the cargo ships’ crewmen were former members of the Imperial Japanese Navy who had been fighting Americans just five years earlier. At sea, men became violently ill, overworking sanitation facilities and turning overcrowded troop compartments into slimy,

stinking hell holes. Don Monterosso curled up under his poncho in a gun bucket³ on the deck, preferring the rain and salt spray to the stench below.

Unit commanders opened Top Secret orders once the ships were underway, informing them that Inchon was their destination. The 1st Marine Division would go ashore on September 15. The 7th Infantry Division would follow, landing just south of the port. On September 15, Don Monterosso was assigned to A Company, but he didn't know anyone in the unit and couldn't understand his KATUSA partner. After a rough journey in the typhoon's wake, ships dropped anchor ten miles from Inchon at 11:30 AM on September 16. Outside the harbor, the battleship USS Missouri, five cruisers, and six destroyers were pounding enemy positions deeper inland.

The day before, elements of the 1st Marine Division had taken Wolmi-do, an island dominating Inchon's narrow shipping channel. Now they were assaulting the sea wall at the port. Ships could not enter the tidal harbor without getting stuck and there were no landing craft to take the 7th Division ashore since they were still in use by the 1st Marine Division. Tides at Inchon can fall as much as 32 feet in 12 hours, leaving only mud flats in their wake. The only time troops could land was a two-hour period before high tide and a similar period after high tide. On September 18, the 32d Infantry became the first of the 7th Division's regiments to go ashore, establishing blocking positions astride Seoul's southern approaches. Finally, at 8:45 PM on September 19, landing craft came alongside the 31st Infantry's transports and began taking troops ashore. Arriving after dark, the regiment spent its first night ashore camped on a local high school's sports field.

The next morning, the 31st Infantry, less its 3d Battalion, established hasty defensive positions south of Seoul. Its mission was to stop North Koreans from getting into Seoul from the south. The 3d Battalion remained in reserve near Inchon. As any unit tends to be when it first enters combat, the 31st was jittery. Many men went ashore not knowing a single person in their unit. Mixing green, jittery troops with lethal weapons often leads to fatal accidents. Private Paul H. Nielson of K Company became one of the regiment's first fatalities in Korea when he failed to heed a sentry's warning and was shot by one of his comrades. On the morning of September 21, the 7th Reconnaissance Company and 73d Tank Battalion led the advance to Suwon Airfield, with two battalions of the 31st Infantry right behind them. After fighting several minor skirmishes along the route, the force reached the airfield at around 4:00 PM.

Completed Chapters

To date, my writing of the regiment's history is completed through 1951 but I need much more detail concerning the events of 1951 and beyond. Chapters to follow (some partially written) include: Chapter 13—Central Korea 1952-53, Chapter 14—Korean War's End 1953, Chapter 15—Post-War Korea 1953-1987, Chapter 16—4th Battalion in Vietnam 1966-67, Chapter 17—4th Battalion in Vietnam 1968-71, Chapter 18—6th Battalion in Vietnam 1968-70, Chapter 19—Service in the US 1958-1992, Chapter 20—Service with the 10th Mountain Division 1996-Present, and Chapter 21—the 31st Infantry Regiment Association. *I need your help in completing these chapters to the same level of detail as in the first 12. Send me your story!*

Former Polar Bear earns Bronze Star in Iraq

First Sergeant **Gary Corbett**, who served as Artillery Recon Sergeant with C Company 6th Battalion 31st Infantry in Vietnam in 1970 was recently awarded the Bronze Star for Valor while serving as First Sergeant of the 442d MP Company in Iraq. Gary's company is attached to the

³ Attack transports, all built during World War II, mounted a variety of anti-aircraft weapons, ranging from .50 calibers to 40mm automatic guns. All were mounted in large circular steel "tubs" protecting their crews from shrapnel and smaller ordnance.

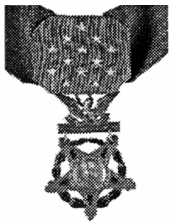
101st Airborne Division at Mosul in northern Iraq. He is expected to return to the US in March 2004 so please join me in sending him Christmas greetings. His address is 1SG Gary Corbett, 442d MP Co, 716th MP Bn, APO AE 09357.

Another of our 6-31st Infantry colleagues serving in Iraq is **Tom “Doc” Miller**, who served as a medic with the 2d Platoon of D Company in Vietnam and Cambodia. Tom is working with a civilian organization to help rebuild Iraq’s infrastructure at Kirkuk in northeastern Iraq. He is not far from where Gary Corbett is serving but the roads between them are not safe at any speed. We wish them both God’s protection and a safe return as they serve their country once again.

New Book

Another of our comrades has published a book about his service in the 31st Infantry. 40 years ago, Lee H. Miller, who served as a platoon leader with I Company in Korea in 1951-52 wrote a book-length manuscript about his experiences entitled “**Korea’s Sleeping Ghosts**”. While the names of participants have been changed, the people are real and so are the events. The manuscript was never published during his lifetime but two years after his death, his wife passed the manuscript to his son, Keith Miller, who had it published this year. You can get a copy (paperback \$14.95 ISBN 1-932205-52-7) by contacting Word Association Publishers, 205 5th Ave, Tarentum, PA 15084 or www.wordassociation.com or contacting Keith Miller 4624 Bayspring Ln, Raleigh, NC 27613 or email glackenvonbur@yahoo.com. In a future edition of the newsletter look for information on Joe Johnson’s book on his experiences as an underage soldier at Bataan. The book is called “Baby of Bataan” and should be published early next year. I’ve read the manuscript and it is movie quality.

Taps



It is with great sorrow that I report the death of COL (Ret) Ed Schowalter. Ed was the last of our regiment’s living Medal of Honor winners. He was a native of New Orleans, graduated from Virginia Military Institute, and joined the 31st Infantry in Korea in 1952. Later, he served twice in Vietnam where he earned the Silver Star. He retired as a colonel and was a member of the 31st Infantry Regiment Association since 1997. His Medal of Honor citation, reported previously in the February 1998 edition of the Pro Patria Press, reads: *1st Lt Schowalter, commanding Company A, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and indomitable courage above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy. Committed to attack and occupy a key approach to his battalion’s objective, the 1st platoon of his company came under vicious small arms, grenade, and mortar fire within 50 yards of the enemy held strongpoint, halting the advance and inflicting several casualties. The 2d Platoon moved up in support, and although wounded, Lt Schowalter spearheaded the assault. Nearing the objective he was severely wounded by a grenade but, refusing medical aid, he led his men into the trenches and began routing the enemy from their bunkers with grenades. Suddenly a burst of fire from a hidden cove off the trench wounded him again. Although suffering from his wounds, he refused to relinquish command and continued directing and encouraging his company until the objective was secured. Lt Schowalter’s unflinching courage, extraordinary heroism, and inspirational leadership reflect the highest credit upon himself, and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service.*