



Pro Patria Press

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Newsletter of the 31st Infantry Regiment Association

4-31st Infantry Soldiers Killed in Helicopter Crash at Ft Drum



On March 11, a helicopter crash took the lives of 7 soldiers from C Company 4th Battalion 31st Infantry and 4 helicopter crewmen from the 10th Aviation Brigade. Two other members of C Company, Specialists Dimitri Petrov, 24, of Brooklyn, NY and Edwin A Mejia, 20 of Houston, TX survived the crash and are recovering from their injuries. The UH-60 "Blackhawk" helicopter was part of a flight of three aircraft conducting air mobility familiarization training when it crashed at low altitude. C Company returned from Afghanistan in March 2002 after participating in Operation ANACONDA and was recently alerted for another overseas deployment. On March 14, 2500 people gathered at a solemn memorial ceremony at Ft Drum to honor the dead, an exceptional group of young soldiers, who include:



SSG Brian Pavlich, 25, of Port Jervis, NY. Brian's grandfather fought at Omaha Beach in WWII, his father fought in Vietnam, and Brian served in Bosnia. He wanted all his life to fly helicopters, like the one that took his life. Shortly before his death, he was accepted for flight training and Warrant Officer Candidate School. He and his elementary school sweetheart, Heather, had just bought a house near Ft Drum in February.



SGT John Eichenlaub, Jr, 24, of South Williamsport, PA. A former Army National Guardsman, John was C Company's Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Defense NCO, a position that called for intelligence and the trust of his commander. He had both in spades. He leaves behind his wife, Amanda and his son, John.



SGT Joshua Harapko, 23, of Peoria, AZ. Josh was pulled out of Special Forces training to deploy with his unit to Afghanistan last year. He was a go-getter who adopted a horse while in high school and graduated at the top of his Project Challenge Class in Arizona. His sister is also in the Army, training to become a helicopter pilot at Ft Rucker.



PFC Shawn Alan Mayerscik, 22, of Oil City, PA. An all-American boy, Shawn wanted to be a soldier since he was 15. He graduated from the 75th Ranger Regiment's Indoctrination Course at Ft Benning and served in Afghanistan with the 2d Battalion 75th Ranger Regiment. His leaders in the 4-31st were trying to get him an Army "Green to Gold" college scholarship at the time of his death. Next to his picture in his high school annual is the quote: "A coward dies a thousand deaths, a soldier dies but once".



PFC Tommy Chance Young, 20, Knoxville, TN. Tommy was a member of South Doyle High School's ROTC detachment for four years and returned there to talk to talk about his experiences in Afghanistan last year. He was a respected natural leader who earned respect for his quick, clear decision-making.



PFC Stryder Stoutenberg, 18, Missoula, MT. Stryder had a rough upbringing in foster care since age 3, but made the best of a bad situation and became a soldier, something he wanted to do since junior high. He scored in the 97th percentile on his Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery and was gifted in math and science.



PFC Andrew D. Stevens, 20, Rockingham, NH. Andy was a quiet kid who seemed to get along well with everyone. He was the youngest of 3 children and wanted to become a pilot. Before joining the 4-31st, he served a year in Korea and had already earned the Expert Infantryman's Badge. His sister is an Air Force linguist in Japan and his brother is a B-1 bomber pilot.

The 4th Battalion will erect a memorial to its comrades in the battalion area. Association members please join me in contributing to the memorial by writing a check to the *4-31 IN Soldiers Memorial* and sending it to CPT Jason Warner, S-2 4-31st Infantry, Ft Drum, NY 13603.

Looking Back

This is the eleventh in our series on the regiment's Bataan-era history. Our January issue described the regiment's withdrawal from Abucay Hacienda. As we pick up the story, the regiment is covering II Corps' withdrawal from Abucay.

On January 24, the 31st Infantry covered the rest of II Corps as it abandoned the main line of resistance near Abucay. A provisional tank group consisting of two National Guard tank battalions and a battalion of 75mm self-propelled howitzers assisted them. As the covering force began withdrawing at midnight on January 25, the Japanese attacked, shouting "Samurai". The infantry fought a brief delaying action before falling in behind a waiting screen of tanks and self-propelled howitzers that remained undetected by the enemy. When the infantry was safely behind them, the tanks and howitzers opened fire at close range, firing straight down trails densely packed with Japanese troops. The engagement threw the Japanese into a chaotic retreat, leaving hundreds dead or dying on the trails behind them.

At about 0130 on January 25, the 31st Infantry's last elements to withdraw reached the barrio of Wawa on Manila Bay. Men quickly fell into an exhausted sleep. At 0400 they were awakened for their first hot meal in two days – still half rations. There would be no more sleep that day because the regiment was again the covering force for II Corps. Fortunately, the Japanese were so exhausted and depleted that they could not pursue the dispirited units that came off the Abucay Line. By evening it became clear that a covering force was no longer needed and the 31st was ordered to withdraw to a bivouac area two kilometers west of Limay.

From January 28 to February 1, the regiment got a sorely needed rest. The time was spent cleaning equipment and searching for food since rations supplied by the Army were insufficient to keep men functioning in the tropical heat. The entire Bataan Force was feeling the effects of gradual starvation, having been on half rations since the end of December 1941. Moreover, medicine was running out and Bataan's tropical jungle, with its plethora of diseases and unsanitary living conditions was taking its toll. Malaria and dysentery became particularly rampant.

On February 5, amid a sporadic enemy barrage, a howitzer shell hit the 3d Battalion Command Post, wounding Captains Donald G. Thompson of L Company and Richard Roshe of I Company. At dusk on February 5, the regiment moved by truck to assembly areas on the Alangan and Lamao Rivers. The 1st and 2d Battalions were posted just over a mile west of the main highway's crossing of the Alangan River. The Regimental Headquarters and 3d Battalion were about a mile and a half west of Lamao, near II Corps Headquarters. The regiment would stay in

those positions until April 3. On March 1, Colonel Charles L. Steel departed the regiment to become chief of Staff of II Corps. He was succeeded by Lieutenant Colonel Jasper E. Brady. Major Marshall Hurt, who had been the Regimental Adjutant, replaced Brady as 3d Battalion Commander. On March 27, Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Q. Marron took command of the 2d Battalion, replacing Major Lloyd C. Moffit, who remained with the battalion as Marron's executive officer.

In early March, replacements from the Army Air Corps' 7th Chemical Company, the 808th MP Company and the Philippine Department's Quartermaster Section joined the 31st. What the better-fed replacements found shocked them. Veterans of the 31st were emaciated, covered with jungle sores, and most were sick with serious diseases. Their khaki uniforms had become little more than filthy sweat-soaked rags. Rations had declined to eight ounces of rice and one can of fish per day. To make matters worse, moist rice quickly molded in the tropical heat, making diarrhea rampant. All carabao (water buffalo) on Bataan had already been butchered and eaten, as had the Quartermaster's pack mules, the 26th Cavalry Regiment's horses, and General Wainwright's horse. Men constantly foraged for edible roots and herbs, snails, snakes, monkeys, bananas, wild pigs, and stray chickens, but with over 70,000 American and Filipino soldiers on Bataan, the jungle was nearly picked clean of edible material. Although there were eleven cases of C-rations on each company's mess truck, they were reserved for "emergency" use only and it was a court martial offense to open them without authorization from Philippine Department Headquarters. Everyone grew weaker by the day and by April, the 31st Infantry Regiment mustered less than a full strength battalion of men able to walk unassisted. How bad would it have to get before someone in authority decided to declare the situation an emergency?

Farewell to a Past Commander



Homer Wright, Commander of our Association from 1995-97, died on February 1, 2003. Homer earned 2 Silver Stars and 4 Bronze Stars in 2 wars. He was a member of the Citadel's "Lost Class" that resigned en masse in 1944 to enlist in the Army. Commissioned through OCS, he served with the 6th Armored Division in World War II where he earned his first Silver Star for single-handedly manning a 60mm mortar under enemy fire and putting a round right in the hatch of a German tank. Following in the footsteps of his father, Colonel Robert Wright, who commanded B Company 31st Infantry in Manila and Shanghai, Homer commanded K Company of the regiment. He earned his second Silver Star while leading an attack on a hill in central Korea in 1951. He single-handedly eliminated a machinegun that had his company pinned down and then led his men by example to take the hill. After retiring from the Army in 1964, Homer earned an MA degree at Trinity University, taught school in Connecticut, and traveled extensively in the Middle East to develop material for lectures on biblical and ancient history. He is interred with his father at Arlington National Cemetery.