



Pro Patria Press

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Newsletter of the 31st Infantry Regiment Association

News From the 4th Battalion



On 1 July, 4/31st Infantry returned to Ft Drum after 14 months in Iraq. On their return, LTC John Spiszer departed for the Naval War College at Newport, RI and was replaced as commander of the 4th Battalion by LTC Mike Infanti.

Specialist Brandon Burke, a Medic from Headquarters Company, who lost his leg after being hit by a mortar round at Abu Ghraib, remains hospitalized at Brooke Army Medical Center where he faces a long recovery. Please send him a card or letter at Ward 4 West, 3851 Roger Brooke Drive, Ft Sam Houston TX 78234.

Reunion 2005

Columbus, GA was our most successful reunion ever. 262 participated, over half from the Vietnam-era 6th Battalion, thanks mainly to the extraordinary efforts of Jerry White, former Platoon Sergeant of the 3rd Platoon, D Company. Special thanks to Sam Wetzel and the owners and staff of the Hilton Garden Inn for making this such a spectacular event. The setting on a scenic wooded lake couldn't have been better. Our thanks also to members of the 4th Battalion who brought the Shanghai Bowl and provided the honor guard for our memorial ceremony and banquet. They included Captain **Greg Darling**, Sergeant Major **Elroy Souvenir**, Staff Sergeants **Chris Matthews**, **Terry Watson**, and **Matt Ramsey**, Sergeant **Mike Haeseker**, Specialists **Bill Scott** and Ryan Kruser, and PFC Bryan Sarazin.

New officers were elected at our business meeting. Our new commander is **Vin Zike**, who served as a Sergeant with 3rd Platoon, D Company 6th Battalion in Vietnam in 1968-69 and was subsequently commissioned and retired as a colonel. Other officers include Vice Commander: **Bill Dolphin** (C Co, Korea 1952-53), Membership Chairman: **Jack Considine** (B Co, Korea 1951-52), Treasurer: **John Cornelson** (CDR 1st Bn, Korea 1982-83), Senior Director: **Karl Lowe** (D Co 6th Bn, Vietnam 1970), and the Regional Directors: Northeast: **Ed Bettis** (G Co, Korea 1950-51), Mid-Atlantic: **Bill Owen** (C Co 6th Bn, Vietnam 1968-69), Southeast: **Noah Halfacre** (E Co 6th Bn 1970), Great Lakes: **Don Deem** (B Co, Korea 1952-53), Central: **Jerry Carlson** (CDR 6th Bn 1969-70), and Western: **Houston Turner** (G Co, Bataan 1941-42). In addition, **Kathleen Wazny** (daughter of William Amen HHC 3rd Bn, Korea 1950) was appointed Secretary. Jerry Carlson (Commander), Jerry Lauer (Senior Director), and Bob Christman (Treasurer) stepped down from positions they held for four years. We're grateful for their long, faithful, and able service to the association.

From Our New commander

Polar Bears, Accepting the position of 31st Regiment Association Commander is both an uplifting and a humbling experience. I am truly honored that this organization has tapped me for this position. I was surprised, to say the least. There are so many great leaders who have worn our crest. I can only hope to represent the great and many soldiers of this Association with the same honor you have bestowed on me. I will not be a passive leader. I have already started setting goals for my time in the position and I intend to be a very active and visible member of the Association.

My promise is to have a full “open door”, open communications relationship with all members. Teams accomplish more than individuals! To that end, my phone number is 845 856-7703. My email address is vzike@challengecoin.com. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have suggestions, concerns, or issues that should be addressed by the Association. My main goal comes directly from the lesson Jerry White taught us this past year. I will focus my attention on bringing as many Polar Bears into the Association as I can. This reunion was a powerful experience for me. It wasn't the war stories, the music, the beer, or any relived moments. The reunion was about the iron clad brotherhoods forged in uniform that defined who we are today. Many of you, like me, said you almost did not come to the reunion. Yet by Sunday, we were all glad we had not missed this event. Many others did not attend this year so we need to reach out and bring them in. I was awed to be in the presence of the Bataan Polar Bears. I was amazed to see the Shanghai Bowl. I was equally awed by the presentation on the Chosin Reservoir Battle and to shake the hand of two humble Distinguished Service Cross recipients. I was also moved by the loyalty and bonds of friendship extended by peacetime Polar Bears. We need to bring more of these brothers into our organization. They too stood ready to do what we did in war. My wife, Jackie, has taken on the task of organizing the reunion next year in Syracuse. She is a retired major, and knows how to plan a mission. I think you will all be very pleased with what she is putting together. Thank you again for your confidence. Pro Patria, Vin Zike

Reunion 2006



Our regiment's 90th Anniversary Reunion will be 3-5 August 2006 at the Genesee Grande Hotel in Syracuse, NY, bringing us back to the 4th Battalion's neighborhood so we can share our celebration with today's Polar Bears. Make your reservations by calling (1-800-365-4663) or online at www.geneseegrande.com or www.theparkviewhotel.com.

These two hotels are close together in the heart of Syracuse with shuttle service between them. They also provide shuttle service to and from the airport. Remember to tell them you're with the 31st Infantry Regiment Reunion. More details will follow in our coming newsletters but this is one you won't want to miss.

Follow-on reunions are planned for San Antonio (Coordinator: Bill Burns) in 2007 and Memphis (Coordinator: Clark Washington) in 2008. They will need help in making those events as outstanding as Columbus was this year, so if you live near one of those towns, please send Vin Zike your contact information by e-mailing him at vzike@challengecoin.com.

North Korea 1950

This is the seventh in our series on combat in Korea. In the previous edition, the 3rd Battalion's rifle companies had just taken up positions around the Pungyuri Inlet on the Chosin Reservoir's east side. Attacks on the 31st RCT were like those that also hit the Marines at Yudam-ni that night. Small teams of Chinese scouts crawled stealthily across the frozen snow, trying to identify gaps they could exploit. Once they found them, they led assault formations forward to the nearest covered and concealed position to await the attack signal. Around 2:00 AM, the sounds of bugles and yak horns, followed by the crunching sound of

thousands of feet running up snow-custed ravines alerted men on the perimeter. To some who had been sleeping, reality did not set in until it was almost too late. The shooting had barely begun before the first wave of Chinese began setting off trip flares perhaps a hundred yards from the forward line. The Chinese chanted in grunting tones as they struggled uphill in ragged formations. Sergeant Bill G. Rowland of I Company described the attack. "They came in from our rear and from both sides. The third wave had machine guns to cover the assault troops of the first and second waves. When they came in it was hard to keep them out of our holes." PFC Lewis Shannon of I Company's 3d Platoon recalled, "They came running in mass, spread only a few yards apart, yelling and screaming, "GI surrender," making noise with bugles and whistles, and running over their own dead and wounded until they were killed.

Muzzle flashes blinked in the darkness on both sides, thudding bullets into frozen snow and bodies at random. Urgent cries for medics were drowned out by the deafening cacophony of an increasingly intense firefight. Gloved hands were obstacles when trying to replace an ammunition clip in an M-1 rifle. The clip, holding eight rounds of .30 caliber ammunition, is inserted into the top of the rifle's chamber with a man's thumb, hoping he can be quick enough to get it out of the way of the bolt slamming forward when the clip is seated, an awkward motion, even in a warm place in broad daylight. Shaking from cold and fear in the dark, performing that act often cost men too much time when there was none to spare. Stomach-knotting panic sets in when an enemy soldier is about to shoot as you clumsily fumble with an empty weapon in a narrow two-man foxhole with a wounded or dead buddy slumped against you. That was the last thing some riflemen in I and K Companies would experience in their much too short lives.

Incrementally, 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifles, 81mm and 107mm mortars, and 105mm howitzers added their weight to the rattle of rifle and automatic weapons fire from the line companies. The momentum of the Chinese assault quickly made any form of indirect fire impractical. Urged on by blaring bugles, shepherd's horns, and whistles, Chinese troops surged through the forward companies in waves. Some exchanged fire at close range with GIs and KATUSAs or threw grenades into their foxholes, but most just streamed around them, headed for the reservoir without firing a shot or slowing down. About 20 yards behind the first wave came another and yet another behind that. Hundreds of Chinese went down, but the weight of their numbers, concentrated where they could minimize the distance they had to travel over open ground to breach the thin American line, proved overwhelming.

Some Chinese units undoubtedly melted away under the intense fire, but so did parts of I and K Companies. One by one, foxholes fell silent. Their inhabitants were either dead, too badly wounded to continue fighting, or too alone and terrified to risk exposing themselves. M Company's 75mm recoilless rifles and .50 caliber machineguns, attached to I and K Companies, suffered the same fate as the companies they supported and were temporarily lost during the fight. PFC Milton Margan's recollection typifies a situation unfolding all along the ridge. "Sergeant Tony Mandino was killed in a fox hole with me. PFC Gordon Lee, the mail clerk, and PFC Dominick Cataldo were in the same hole. Lee was wounded but somehow made it home, but I never saw Cataldo again¹."

In places, survivors slipped out of their holes and ran down the back side of the ridge alongside the Chinese, hoping they would not be recognized by the enemy or shot down by their own troops as they approached units nearer the inlet. Among them were PFC Ed Reeves and his KATUSA partner, Bak Ho Yah of K Company's 3d Platoon. Foxholes on both sides of them on higher ground were overrun by the enemy, leaving Reeves and Bak exposed on three sides. Seeing the futility of staying in place, they rolled out of the back of their foxhole and ran toward the

¹ Dominick Cataldo, Jr was wounded but made it to the regimental aid station. He died on 1 December when the convoy carrying the wounded was ambushed at Hill 1221 during the withdrawal.

reservoir. Bursts of American automatic weapons fire laced the fields around them as they ran, forcing them to take cover several times, while trying to stay at least a few yards away from clusters of fast-moving Chinese. After what seemed an eternity of playing cat and mouse with the enemy and periodically taking cover from long sweeping arcs of American machinegun fire, they came close enough to one of the many “rings of fire” to recognize American voices over the din. Their shouts of “GIs comin’ in” were met by “hold your fire GIs are coming in”. They reached Captain Earle H. Jordan Jr.’s M Company CP, but trouble was still all around them. Jordan’s men were locked in a struggle for survival as waves of Chinese charged down the slope to their front and both flanks. Many had already passed M Company and were attacking the artillery in the valley below.

When he saw his 3rd Platoon being overrun, Captain Robert J. Kitz, K Company’s Commander, pulled his CP out of the attack’s path. He reached A Battery’s positions in the valley just ahead of the Chinese. Others in K Company who saw their CP leaving joined the retreat. Much of K Company’s line quickly unraveled, leaving I Company alone on the ridge. When Captain Harold L. Hodge, commanding A Battery, 57th FA, was informed that the infantry was pulling out in front of him, he ordered his howitzers leveled at the ridge to hit the Chinese with direct fire. Because artillery rounds were exploding among K and M Companies’ survivors, his fire had to be lifted and his cannoneers instantly became infantrymen. The left side of the 3d Battalion’s line had collapsed. On the right, Captain Auburn “Pop” Marr’s I Company was also penetrated but most of his line held on all night. His company journal reported only two men killed that night, but there were substantial numbers of wounded.

M Company’s CP and the 81mm Mortar Platoon were arrayed around an adobe and thatch farm house situated in a shallow wash behind I Company. Although most men in that position were killed or wounded during the night, often in hand-to-hand combat, the position held. PFC Ed Reeves and KATUSA Bak Ho Yah, who joined the defenders after pulling out of K Company’s line, were posted along a fence when two large caliber shells slammed into it in quick succession, showering the defenders with splinters, shards of hot steel, and clods of flying dirt. They were probably 105mm shells fired by Captain Hodge’s A Battery 57th Artillery. Reeves and Bak saved their lives by running to where the first round hit. They dropped to the ground just in time to see a third round strike right where they had been lying. Men in the forward areas were in as much danger from the fire of American units situated nearer the reservoir as from the Chinese swarming around them. Reeves recalls Captain James W. Conner, the 3d Battalion’s Chaplain, walking calmly through it all, talking to the position’s defenders and giving each man a swig of whiskey. Since all water was frozen, whiskey was the only liquid available.

Farther back, clusters of Chinese picked their way across 500 yards of open ground to reach A Battery. Knowing they were among their enemy, the Chinese shot at or grenaded everything that moved, and some that didn’t. Americans, on the other hand, could not as easily distinguish friend from foe among the shadowy figures running through their area. The problem was aggravated by the fact that most Americans could not distinguish between Chinese voices and those of their own KATUSAs. Ray Vallowe of the 57th Artillery recalls: “In South Korea we had been told about North Koreans infiltrating our lines wearing American uniforms obtained from captured or killed American soldiers. Just having KATUSA’s in our area wearing our uniforms made us jittery.” Several tents and vehicles were set ablaze in the intense exchange of fire, illuminating their immediate vicinity and the furtive movements of men from both sides struggling to avoid being shot. In a scene from hell, shadows shot at shadows.

Searching

William C Blynn (12900 Lake Ave #314, Lakewood OH 44107) is looking for buddies who served with him during the assault on Triangle Hill in October 1952. He was in a bunker that took a direct hit from a mortar. He was hit in the head by shrapnel but never received the Purple Heart he was due. On return to duty, he served with 7th Division Headquarters Security platoon and Honor Guard.

Ed Miller (606 East Third St., Altamont, MO 64620 660-749-5775 [eddieemiller@yahoo.com]) is looking for anyone who knew his brother, **SFC James M. Bobo**, Platoon Sergeant of 1st Platoon G Company in Korea in 1950-51.

New Members

Our association grows through the efforts of its members. Please do your part by helping to bring in those who served with you. Thanks to Jerry White of D/6-31st Inf (Vietnam 1969) we have contact information for over 300 prospective new members, many of whom plan to be at this year's reunion. We're very pleased to welcome the following new members:

New Members

John R Arbogast, Jr	E Co (LT, Korea 1952-53)	Hamilton, OH
John Brennan	Son of COL John J Brennan, 3 rd Bn, Bataan)	Daly City, CA
William H. Broms	HQ Co (2LT, Korea 1946-47)	Niles IL
John L. Cotter	D/6 th Bn (SGT, Vietnam 1968-69)	Middleton WI
Byron G Dixon	D/6 th Bn (LT, FO, Vietnam 1969-70)	Gray, GA
Paul A. Edwards	C/4 th Bn (PFC, Vietnam 1967-68)	Staffordsville KY
Virgil W. Havens	D/6 th Bn (SGT, Vietnam 68-69)	Beaumont TX
Harry Levitt	1st Bn Med Det (CPT, Manila 1940-41)	Los Angeles, CA
John D. Lewis	HHC/4 th Bn (LTC, Ft Sill 73-77)	Fayetteville NC
John E Lock	B & K Cos (SGT, Korea 1950-51)	Tallassee, AL
Frank J. Maurer	B/4 th Bn (1LT, Vietnam 1968)	Highlands Ranch, CO
Harvey R Mize	D/6 th Bn (LT, Vietnam 1970)	Dickson, TN
Robert A Morris	B/5 th Bn (SGT, Ft Benning 1966-67)	Tigaro OR
Rodger L. Owery	D/6 th Bn (SP4, Vietnam 1967-68)	Phoenix AZ
David E. Orris	D/6 th Bn (SGT, Vietnam 1967-68)	Jamestown OH
William K Rapp	E/4 th Bn (LT, Rcn Plt, Vietnam 1969-70)	Summit, NJ
Winfred Simpkins	K Co (PVT, Korea 1952)	Port Richey FL
Roy E. Spicer	A, E/6 th Bn (SGT, Vietnam 1969)	Bowie MD
Richard A. Stephenson	C/6 th Bn (SP4, Rcn Plt, Vietnam 1969)	Winter Haven FL
Joseph E Stull	HHC/6 th Bn (LTC Bn Cdr, Ft Irwin 1982-84)	Olney, MD
Charles E. Tapp	D/6 th Bn (SSG, Vietnam 1970)	Inman, SC
Edward Taylor	D/6 th Bn (SGT, Vietnam 1968-69)	LeRaysville, PA
Allen M. Warnecke	D/6 th Bn (SGT, Vietnam 1968-69)	Iron Ridge, WI
Carl Woody	D/6 th Bn (1LT, Vietnam 1968-69)	Manteo NC



Taps

We're sad to report the following members' deaths:

Dulce M Bartlett	Widow of SSG Charles Bartlett (Korea 1946-47)	Klamath Falls, OR
Herman B Castillo	H Co (PFC, Bataan 1941-42)	Clawson, MI
Michael Gilewitch	D Co (SGT, Bataan 1941-42)	El Paso, TX
Otis Lee, Jr	D Co 6 th Bn (SP4, Vietnam 1968-69)	Darlington, SC
Morris F Lewis	K Co (SGT, Philippines 1940-45)	Leavenworth, KS