

Pro Patria Press

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Newsletter of the 31st Infantry Regiment Association
Karl Lowe, Editor

Reunion 2008

Celebrating our Regiment's ninety-second anniversary, our next reunion will be held August 21-24 2008 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, San Pedro, California. Our reunion coordinator is Louis Dominguez (C/6-31st Infantry-1967-69). Lou has already done a great job in planning ahead and coordinating the event with the city but there is lots more to do. If you live in the greater Los Angeles area, please call him (310-547-4145 or 310-780-5359 or email louisca5@sbcglobal.net and offer your help. Organizing a reunion is hard work and doing it alone is harder still so don't just "let George do it", join Lou in making this event a great time in the warm California sun.

North Korea 1950

This is the seventeenth in our series on combat in Korea. In our previous edition, the provisional battalion's CP was ambushed during the withdrawal from Hagaru-ri to Koto-ri. The saga continues...

The Provisional Battalion reached the Marine perimeter at Koto-ri at 6:30 AM on December 8 after an all night march in the bitter cold. Over half of their number had fought for 4 days and 5 nights at the Chosin perimeter, escaped across the ice to Hagaru-ri under harrowing conditions, helped the Marines withstand another 5 days and nights of attacks at Hagaru-ri, and then fought their way out to Koto-ri.¹ There they were welcomed by the 2nd Battalion 31st Infantry, which had warming tents set up inside the perimeter. Bone weary, men of the Provisional Battalion found the warmest spots available and were soon asleep. Their slumber was not to last very long, however. At 1530, they were ordered to attack two hills northwest of Koto-ri and to hold the road open against enemy attacks. Considerable reorganization was required because of the number of casualties sustained between Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri. Only two companies could be assembled from the survivors. Both objectives were secured against light opposition. The Provisional Battalion held the hills until rear elements of 1st Marine Division's column halted.

At 7 AM on December 9, the attack resumed. The 31st Infantry's first two objectives overlooking the Funchilin Pass were quickly secured against light opposition but an intense snowstorm began during the attack and the temperature dropped 10 degrees, reaching 20° below zero. At 10 AM, the unit dug in on hills overlooking the evacuation route and remained there until the morning of December 10. At 7 AM on December 10, the attack continued, linking up with reconnaissance elements of the US 3rd Infantry Division near Chinhung-ni. There, the men loaded aboard trucks and continued south to Hamhung where it arrived just before noon the next day. The Provisional Battalion was dissolved and its survivors were reunited with their parent units. The 3rd Battalion 31st Infantry had only 1 officer and 47 enlisted men and around 40 KATUSAs left.

¹ The dead at Koto-ri 8 December 1950. Soldiers were buried in a mass grave here.

Official casualty figures for the 31st Infantry Regiment show that 496 of its American members and an unknown number of their KATUSA comrades were killed in action or died after being captured in North Korea between November 8 and December 12, 1950. Around 1180 American and KATUSA soldiers were killed or missing during the Chosin Reservoir campaign between November 27 and December 2, 1950. Most were buried near where they fell. Almost twice that number were wounded or suffered frost injuries so severe that they had to be evacuated to Japan or the US after fighting their way out of that frozen hell.

On December 15, the 31st Infantry's survivors departed Hungnam by sea, arriving at Pusan four days later. Behind them, engineers rigged the docks and important buildings with tons of explosives. Forlorn North Korean refugees crowded into the dock area to get aboard the departing American ships. Many were Christians, desperate to get away from the advancing Chinese. Although more than 100,000 were evacuated, thousands probably perished when engineers set off the charges as the last landing craft departed on Christmas Eve.

Commanders of the 4th Battalion

Since the 4th Battalion was reactivated at Ft Drum in 1996 as part of the 10th Mountain Division, seven men have commanded the 4th Battalion. Here's who they are and where they are now, as best we know it.

Harry Scott (1996) was commanding the 3rd Battalion 14th Infantry at Ft Drum when it was re-flagged as the 4th Battalion 31st Infantry in April 1996. He is now a colonel, teaching at the US Military Academy at West Point.

Bryan Stephens (1996-98) hosted our first reunion with the Battalion at Ft Drum in 1998. He is now a colonel whose last known assignment was with the US training mission in Iraq.

Don Philips (1998-2000) led the battalion during its first overseas deployment since Vietnam, a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. Promoted to colonel, he subsequently commanded a brigade at Ft Lewis and is now Executive Officer to the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness at the Pentagon.

Steve Townsend (2000-02) led the battalion, less B Company, to Uzbekistan shortly after 9-11 and then into Afghanistan, where it participated in fighting in the Shah-i-kot Valley during Operation Anaconda. After commanding the 3rd Brigade 2nd Infantry Division in Iraq last year, Steve became Executive Officer to the Commander, US Central Command in Tampa. General Dave Petraeus will be fortunate to have this outstanding Polar Bear at his side when he takes command of CENTCOM this summer.

John Spiszer (2002-2005) led the battalion longer than any of his contemporaries, leading it during its split tour in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Djibouti and then returning to Iraq with the entire battalion just six months later. John is now a colonel commanding the 3rd Brigade 1st Infantry Division at Ft Hood and is preparing to take that brigade back to Iraq.

Mike Infanti (2005-2007), perhaps the oldest battalion commander in the Army at the time, took the battalion to Iraq on its third tour, returning in November 2007 after 15 months of hard fighting during the surge. Under his leadership, the battalion suffered 14 killed in action and 2 missing but cleaned out the Sunni insurgent stronghold formerly known as the "Triangle of Death" southwest of Baghdad. Mike was wounded several times during that tour.

Richard Greene (2007-) took command of the battalion in December of last year and will take it to West Point this summer to support cadet training at the Military Academy.

Bill Dolphin

It is with deep sadness that we report the death of William D “Bill” Dolphin, past Vice Commander and Quartermaster of the 31st Infantry Regiment Association. Bill and his wife, Janet, were among the small group of our members who have attended nearly every reunion since joining the association in 1999.

Bill was a sergeant with C Company in Korea and earned the Silver Star at Triangle Hill in October 1952. His courage under fire and selfless actions to protect wounded comrades enabled others to come out of that hellish place alive. Bill was seriously wounded in that fight and came off the hill on a litter after repelling the Chinese. He was evacuated to the regimental aid station and after a bumpy, miserable ambulance ride to Seoul, he was put aboard a medevac flight to a hospital in Japan. Despite their best efforts, doctors could not save his shattered leg, which they had to amputate below the knee. You would never have known it, but Bill wore a prosthesis that he jokingly called his “hollow leg”.

When our original Quartermaster became unable to continue the task he had assumed, Bill stepped in, got the books in order, canvassed the membership on what items were desired, contacted prospective vendors, expanded our inventory, and developed an efficient method of delivery that generally got people what they asked for within a week. At Pittsburgh in 2002, Bill agreed to run for Vice Commander and was elected overwhelmingly. His humor, can do attitude, and sense of organization kept a steady hand behind the scenes. Last year, knowing that he was getting ill, Bill asked to step down from both his Quartermaster and Vice Commander roles, handing both to Vin Zike who continues in Bill’s tradition.

At home in Ocala, Bill fell and broke his hip last week. The damage was severe, requiring emergency surgery from which he was unable to recover. He died on Friday, April 25 and will be buried on Wednesday, April 30 at his family’s burial plot in Suffern, New York. Bill, we’ll miss you, old soldier, sleep well and keep the pearly gates well guarded for those of us who will someday come knocking in hopes of another great reunion.

Taps

William D Dolphin	C Co (CPL, 1952, Korea)	Ocala, FL
Ronald C Feldkamp	Hvy Mort Co (SGT, 1951-52, Korea)	Tucson, AZ
Bruce Reed	D/6 th Bn (SP4, 1969, Vietnam)	Unknown
George Small	F Co (2LT, 1942, Bataan)	Reno, NV
Richard H Snyder	C Co (CPL, 1950 – 1951, Korea)	Franklin, IN

Websites

Please check out our website and sign our guest book at www.31stinfantry.org

Related sites include:

- 4th Bn 31st Inf: <http://www.drum.army.mil/sites/tenants/division/2BCT/4-31INF/>
- 6th Bn 31st Inf: www.6thofthe31st.com and www.vietnam6bn31inf.com
- 7th Infantry Division: www.7th-inf-div-assn.com.
- 9th Infantry Division: www.9thinfdivsociety.org.
- 23rd Infantry “Americal” Division: www.americal.org.
- 196th Light Infantry Brigade: www.196th.org.
- Karen Smith’s tribute to the 31st Inf: <http://31rct.tripod.com/>