



# Pro Patria Press



#55

June 2009

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

## REUNIONS



Reunion 2009 is set for August 27-30 at Watertown, New York, commemorating the 31st Infantry Regiment's 93rd Anniversary. Please make your reservations now with the Best Western Carriage House Inn at (315)782-8000 and tell them you're with the 31st Infantry Regiment Association to get their lowest rate. This is the last newsletter before the reunion. Our itinerary is:

Thursday 27 August

- 1000 Morning tour of the Sackett's Harbor battlefield
- 1200 Lunch at the Sackett's Harbor Brewing Company
- 1330 Return to the hotel and socialize with friends at the Hospitality Room
- 1800 Board of Directors Meeting (Board members only)

Friday 28 August

- 1000 Morning with the 4th Battalion at Fort Drum (sporting events, lunch)
- 1400 Squad Air Assault and Live Fire Demonstration on the Range
- 1600 Picnic Dinner with the troops at Remington Pond
- 1800 Return to the hotel and socialize with friends at the Hospitality Room

Saturday 29 August

- 0900 Two optional tours: 2-Hour Boat Tour of the Thousand Islands OR Tour of Bolte Castle in the Thousand Islands
- 1200 Lunch at Alexandra Bay
- 1300 Return to the hotel to prepare for the Banquet
- 1800 Reunion Banquet

Sunday 30 August

- Memorial Ceremony
- Annual General Business Meeting (all members)
- Departure



Other Reunions

**196th Light Infantry Brigade 23-26 July Buffalo, NY**



## COMBAT IN KOREA

*This is the 22nd in our series on combat in Korea. In our previous edition, the regiment had reached Central Korea as part of a UN counteroffensive. The saga continues...*

The Chinese counterattack failed to reckon with the fury of I Company's First Sergeant, Benjamin F. Wilson (photos courtesy of Charles Bielecki). Born at Vashon, Washington in 1922, he enlisted in the Army in the summer of 1940 and was stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He went to OCS in 1942 and was commissioned in the Infantry, but when the war ended, he resigned his commission and went home. His departure was only temporary. The Army suited him infinitely better than Washington's lumber mills and he was back in uniform nine months later. Because the Army was thinning its officer ranks and had no room for an experienced lieutenant, he enlisted as a private. He rose quickly through the ranks to become I Company's First Sergeant by the summer of 1951. As a First Sergeant, he could stay well to the rear if he wished, tending to requisitions for rations and ammunition, submitting daily strength reports, and handling the plethora of administrative details that keep a rifle company functioning. He of course did all of that, but he was also a born fighter who couldn't stay out of the action when his troops were in the thick of it.



His Medal of Honor citation reads: *On June 5, 1951, Company I was committed to attack and secure commanding terrain stubbornly defended by a numerically superior hostile force emplaced in well-fortified positions. When the lead element was pinned down by withering hostile fire, Master Sergeant Wilson dashed forward and, firing his rifle and throwing grenades, neutralized the position and killed 4 enemy soldiers. After the assault platoon moved up, occupied the position, and established a base of fire, Wilson led a bayonet attack that reduced the objective and killed 27 more enemy soldiers. While friendly forces were consolidating the newly won gain, the enemy launched a counterattack and Wilson, realizing the imminent threat of being overrun, made a determined lone-man charge, killing 7 and wounding 2 of the enemy, and routing the remainder in disorder. After the position was organized, he led an assault, carrying to within approximately 15 yards of the final objective when enemy fire halted the advance. He ordered the platoon to withdraw and although painfully wounded in this action, remained to provide covering fire. During an ensuing counterattack, the commanding officer and 1st Platoon Leader became casualties. Unhesitatingly, Wilson charged the enemy ranks and fought valiantly, killing 3 enemy soldiers with his rifle before it was wrested from his hands. He then annihilated 4 others with his entrenching tool. His courageous action enabled his comrades to reorganize and effect an orderly withdrawal. While directing evacuation of the wounded, he suffered a second wound, but elected to remain on the position until assured that all of his men had reached safety.*



Sergeant Francis Monfette, a squad leader from Decatur, Georgia, was badly wounded during the final assault and was lying exposed in the open forward of the trench line when the Chinese counterattacked. A medic tried to reach him and was cut down in the attempt. Another managed to crawl out to him and drag him to safety. He had been hit sixteen times but clung feebly to life until the next morning. For over an hour the fighting swirled around the barren hilltop with the combatants hopelessly intermixed, often fighting at ranges of fifteen to twenty feet and sometimes fighting hand to hand with whatever they could swing or throw when they ran out of ammunition. Charles Bielecki recalls feeling someone push him abruptly from behind. When he turned to see who it was, he found a Chinese soldier's bloody arm and shoulder on the ground behind him, but there was no owner in sight. An artillery or mortar round must have torn the man's arm off and propelled it across the hilltop.

The fight took down a high percentage of leaders. Around the same time Lieutenant Smock was hit, Lieutenant Tally J. “Bugs” Sheppard, I Company’s 1st Platoon Leader, was killed by automatic weapons fire. Sheppard was popular with his men and his loss was sorely felt. He was a small town boy from Lucas County, Ohio, near Toledo, who helped his family run a general merchandise store. He talked endlessly about going back there when his tour of duty ended. Like thirteen other members of the 3d Battalion, his future ended on a hot, barren hillside in central Korea that day. Platoon Sergeant Bill Rowland kept his 2nd Platoon together, keeping his men from bunching up, shifting the fires of key weapons, directing the redistribution of ammunition, directing the evacuation of casualties, and the myriad of other things an experienced infantry NCO does instinctively in combat. He was a rock on whom all could rely.

The rock of rocks, First Sergeant Ben Wilson, was being carried down the hill on a stretcher as the battle neared its climax. When his stretcher-bearers set him down to rest, Wilson, in obvious pain, arose from the stretcher and trudged back up the hill without a word. No one could tell him he did not belong there. Everyone understood that he would rather stay with his company than suffer the indignity of being carried to an aid station.



### **The 4th BATTALION 1965-1971**

*This is the 3rd in the series on the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, addressing its deployment to Vietnam. It is a series in the newsletter like those that covered combat in Siberia, Bataan, and Korea in earlier editions.*

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s first mission was Operation Fireball, conducted from September 8-14, moving by air to Dau Tieng to provide local security for national elections. On September 14, the battalion participated in Operation Attleboro, a search operation in the Viet Cong’s (VC) War Zone C. Like other 196<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade operations to follow, Operation Attleboro was named after a town near Fort Devens, where the brigade had been formed.

September 18: 4-31<sup>st</sup> Infantry flew in the rain from Tay Ninh to establish a fire support base north of Dau Tieng. Things remained quiet until just after midnight. Sniper fire erupted in C Company’s sector, followed by a mortar attack on the battalion CP. Captain John M. Harrington, the Battalion S-4, and his radio operator, SP4 Manzie Glover, Jr., were killed and 16 others were wounded. The following morning, the battalion marched a few kilometers farther north to secure an area where the 175<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company cleared the jungle for another fire support base. Rain continued throughout the day, turning the area into a quagmire. As daylight faded, small arms and mortar fire struck around and within the perimeter, wounding another man. Over the next several days, C Company and then B Company engaged in a series of stiff firefights with the Viet Cong, losing three men killed and twenty wounded.

October 6: The battalion returned to the field after a brief stand-down at Tay Ninh. Around noon, C Company found a series of tunnels. Soon after, B Company found a huge rice cache and an array of farm implements in an area where no civilians lived. With the rain beating on steel helmets, ponchos, and weapons, soldiers searched along trails that showed signs of heavy and recent use. The enemy could not be far. A Company was the first to make contact, engaging in a brief firefight that resulted in two men being wounded but the enemy paid too. Blood trails, several discarded weapons, and a bundle of documents were found. Two days later, D Company found another rice cache and A Company engaged a VC patrol, losing two men wounded and killing three of the enemy.

October 11: C Company’s commander, First Lieutenant Franklin S. Pearce, and two of his men were wounded and evacuated from the field. Pearce, a well-respected commander, lost his leg. Firefights erupted throughout the night. In some cases, the enemy got close enough to throw grenades into the perimeter. A, C, and D Companies each found blood trails the next morning but no bodies or weapons. The next day, air strikes were called in on suspected enemy locations before the Polar Bears were flown back to Tay Ninh.

*Note:*

*If you can receive your newsletter by email, please email your address to:*  
[Quartermaster@31stinfantry.org](mailto:Quartermaster@31stinfantry.org)

*By reducing the number of ‘hardcopy’ newsletters, we can save money and save resources. Every bit helps!*



October 18: The battalion flew back to Dau Tieng to guard the base. Martha Raye, an actress who made her debut before World War II, visited Dau Tieng as part of a USO tour. Lieutenant Colonel Lynch declared her an honorary Polar Bear and presented her a set of regimental crests. That night, B Company killed one enemy soldier and the following morning found a VC hospital complex with 27 structures above and below ground, stocked with medical supplies, clothing, more than 12 tons of rice, salt, canned milk, and peanuts. That same day, 2-1<sup>st</sup> Infantry ran into the southern edge of what was later discovered to be the VC 9<sup>th</sup> Division's base camp near the Saigon River.

October 26 and 27: A and B Companies engaged in firefights that killed 9 VC and captured 4 others. There were no US losses.<sup>1</sup> Signs of enemy presence were everywhere, including sampans, construction materials, tunnels, and documents. With the element of surprise gone, the brigade reassembled at Dau Tieng and prepared to attack in force. At that critical juncture, Colonel Conaty was reassigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.



### **The 6th BATTALION 1967-1970**

*This is the 3rd in a series on the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, addressing its deployment to Vietnam. This, like the articles on Korea and the 4th Battalion, will be a continuing series in the newsletter.*

The 6-31st suffered its first combat losses on a reconnaissance operation near Bearcat Base. After traveling in column through dense jungle for several hours, C Company's commander, Captain Bill Owen, directed Lieutenant Kerry May's 1st Platoon to relieve Lieutenant Ron Belloli's 2nd Platoon as the lead element. Soon after the column started moving again, PFC Donald R. Hanna (21), a machine gunner, stepped across a log and was hit in the face by blast and fragmentation from a large Claymore-like<sup>2</sup> mine, killing him instantly. Specialist Larry Hathaway recalls: "One large piece of shrapnel flew down the trail and cut my grenade in half. Fortunately, the part with the fragmentation fell off and only the primer and a little C-4 exploded. The blast knocked me down and destroyed three magazines of ammunition I wore in a bandolier around my neck."

Knowing there were probably casualties, PFC Bill Rauber (19), the platoon's medic, ran forward with Platoon Sergeant Florentino Rivera-Sanchez, to aid the wounded. Rauber almost reached Hanna when a second blast

<sup>1</sup> Unit History, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry, September 1965 to April 1967, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Bks, PA.

<sup>2</sup> A Claymore mine is convex to focus its blast effect and propel thousands of small metal pellets in a scythe-like arc like the Scottish broadsword after which it is named. It is detonated remotely. The VC's crude metal Claymores were many times larger and more powerful than the US plastic version.

blew him off his feet, killing him instantly. Eight others were wounded.<sup>3</sup> Sergeant Al Olsen, a squad leader just behind the lead platoon, recalls seeing VC running from the area, but people ahead of him were either too dazed by the explosions to fire or were unable to do so without hitting their own people.

The 2nd Platoon sprayed the left side of the trail with automatic weapons fire and moved into the jungle, passing through a clearing where clothes had been left to dry. Ron Belloli recalls thinking “Our first contact with the enemy and all we capture is his underwear.” They also found a “spider hole”<sup>4</sup> and wires leading to more unexploded claymores. Captain Owen wanted to stay at the site to probe it further but a nest of venomous pit vipers agitated by the explosions deterred further searching. After moving the company a safe distance back down the trail, Owen brought artillery down on the site. C Company had to carry its dead and the most seriously wounded on poncho litters for nearly an hour until they reached a place where casualties could be winched up through the trees to a helicopter. It was near dusk before Lieutenant Dave Wilson, the company executive officer, could organize the evacuation. Before all the wounded and dead could be extracted, the jungle penetrator on the second medevac helicopter had to be jettisoned when it became snagged in the trees. It was getting too dark to attempt another evacuation.



The company carried the remaining wounded and the dead for several more hours until reaching a place they could set up a defensive perimeter for the night. Among the wounded they carried was Specialist Don Chikuma, suffering painfully from a belly wound. Chikuma repeatedly asked for water but Specialist Huie S. Orsborn, C Company’s senior medic, wouldn’t give him any for fear of killing him, so he sat up all night to comfort him. The company’s sense of loss and foreboding, reinforced by grim evidence of jungle warfare’s risks, took a toll on morale. Al Olsen recalls: “The long night that followed the ambush was one of the scariest experiences of the war for me. Thick undergrowth, the event that had just happened, and lots of noises (way too much noise made by our company, as we were moving too fast to be quiet). I remember the column stopping for the night and establishing defensive positions right along the trail where we were. I don’t recall much of a perimeter or a clearing. Other than nobody getting any sleep, the night passed without incident.”

### Websites

Please check out our website and sign our guest book at [www.31stinfantry.org](http://www.31stinfantry.org) See related sites:

- 4<sup>th</sup> Bn 31<sup>st</sup> Inf: <http://www.drum.army.mil/sites/tenants/division/2BCT/4-31INF/>
- 6<sup>th</sup> Bn 31<sup>st</sup> Inf: [www.6thofthe31st.com](http://www.6thofthe31st.com) and [www.vietnam6bn31inf.com](http://www.vietnam6bn31inf.com)
- 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division: [www.7th-inf-div-assn.com](http://www.7th-inf-div-assn.com).
- 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division: [www.9thinfdivsociety.org](http://www.9thinfdivsociety.org).
- 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division: [www.americal.org](http://www.americal.org) and 196<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade: [www.196th.org](http://www.196th.org).
- Karen Smith’s tribute to the 31<sup>st</sup> Inf: <http://31rct.tripod.com/>
- Debbie McCabe’s veteran’s search site [www.how-to-find-your-military-buddy.com](http://www.how-to-find-your-military-buddy.com)

### Officers of the Association

Elections for a new slate of officers will be held at our next reunion. Charlie Tapp heads the nomination committee. If you are interested in running for office, write him at 215 Waterford Dr, Inman, SC 29349-0705, call him at 864-473-1999, or email him at [charlietapp@alltel.net](mailto:charlietapp@alltel.net) or [charlie@cctrucking.com](mailto:charlie@cctrucking.com). Current serving officers are:

**Commander: Ron Corson**

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3620 Bridgewater Dr, Williamsburg VA 23188 ph 757-253-1311

**Vice Commander/Quartermaster: Vin Zike**

[vzike@challengecoin.com](mailto:vzike@challengecoin.com)

<sup>3</sup> 2LT Kerry S May, SFC Florentino Rivera-Sanchez, SSG George E Schroeder, SP4 Donald I. Chikuma, SP4 Stanley C. Krosky, SP4 Thomas A. Northey, SP4 Gary H. Terrell, and SP4 Lawrence F. Hathaway. SSG Schroeder (25) died of his wounds on May 16.

<sup>4</sup> “Spider hole” is GI slang for the narrow foxholes dug by the Viet Cong.

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7000 Maynard Ave, West Hills, CA 91307 ph 818-347-5462

[lucky31st@juno.com](mailto:lucky31st@juno.com)

**TAPS**



We've again lost many good friends and comrades, as the list below shows. Among them was **COL (Ret) Charles Underwood**, the last surviving officer to serve with the 31st Infantry in the Philippines before World War II. He joined the regiment as a 2LT but was

soon reassigned to the MPs, with which he served at Bataan. Also among our losses are two authors. **Ed Treski**, who earned a battlefield commission at Bataan in 1942, was the last surviving officer to have served with the regiment in combat during WWII. **Don Foltz**, is a former member and Speaker of the House of the Indiana legislature and a past president of the 7th Infantry Division Association. **Glenn Justice**, a regular at our reunions for decades, wrote "*Fightin' George, Infantry*", the saga of his life as a soldier from 1949-1951. Last but not least was **Keith Nolan**, who never served in the Army but studied at the University of Missouri under Dr John Bayer, former FO with D/6-31st Infantry in Vietnam. John inspired Keith to write about a war that ended when he was just 7. He wrote 11 books about Vietnam, including three that featured our 4th and 6th Battalions. They included *Death Valley*, about the 4th Battalion in the Que Son Valley, *Into Cambodia*, that included several chapters about the 6th Battalion in Cambodia in 1970, and *House-to-House*, in which the 6th Battalion's actions around Saigon's southern rim in 1968 is prominent. Keith, just 44, died of lung cancer in St Louis.

<b>Michael J Cusato</b>	PFC, E Co, Korea, 1953	St James, NY
<b>LTC (R) Joseph A Dyer</b>	CPT, D Co, Korea, 1953-54	Roanoke, VA
<b>Donald E Foltz</b>	2LT, I Co, Korea, 1951-52	Clinton, IN
<b>William J Hauck</b>	PFC, I Co, Korea, 1946-49	Rockland, ME
<b>Glenn M Justice</b>	CPL, G Co, Korea, 1950-51	Bainbridge, GA
<b>Keith W Nolan</b>	Friend of the Regiment	St Louis, MO
<b>Paul L Osmolinski</b>	SGT, A Co, Korea, 1952	York, PA
<b>Hugh W Robbins</b>	MAJ, S-1, Korea, 1950-51	Rockport, TX
<b>John Suardini</b>	SGT, B Co, Korea, 1951	Scottsdale, AZ
<b>Robert J Thrush</b>	SFC, HHC 2nd Bn, Korea, 1948-51	Overseas
<b>Edward S Treski</b>	LT, I Co, Bataan, 1941-42	Columbia, SC
<b>COL (R) Charles Underwood</b>	LT, AT Co, Bataan, 1941-42	San Antonio, TX

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<b>rank when retired</b>			<b>Highest award earned</b>
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