

Chapter 14

THE BLOODIEST YEAR—1953

THE YEAR DAWNS

On January 25, 1953, Company E, supported by air strikes and artillery, raided T-Bone Hill, but was repelled. The 17th Infantry relieved the regiment on line the next day. On February 27, the 31st Infantry returned to the line, relieving the 32d Infantry. The Chinese launched a series of five attacks against the 7th Division line, driving the Columbian Battalion off of Old Baldy on March 23. For the next two days, the 31st Infantry counterattacked, but could not regain the position. Sergeant Buddy G. Jenkins of A Company was on adjacent Westview OP the night the Chinese took Old Baldy. His company was being replaced by the Columbians when the attack came. Amid total confusion, A Company managed to regroup and counterattack against a Chinese unit heading toward Pork Chop Hill.

Chinese attacks resumed on April 16, trying for three days to throw the 31st Infantry off of Pork Chop Hill, a place immortalized in a movie of the same name starring Gregory Peck as Lieutenant Joe Clemons. Clemons earned the Distinguished Service Cross in that action, leading the men of K Company to Herculean exertions in see-saw fighting to retake lost portions of the hill. The hill was originally defended by E Company, commanded by First Lieutenant Thomas V. Harrold. When the Chinese overran sections of the position, they were driven out in fighting at close quarters. Rifle butts, entrenching tools, and even bare hands came into play as men struggling to stay alive fought each other to the death. Companies K and L were thrown into the fight to regain control of lost portions of E Company's trench line. What follows is a paraphrased version of S.L. A. Marshall's account of K Company's role in the operation. Marshall was at the time an Operations Analyst for the Eighth Army.

Regiment knew little of what had occurred on Pork Chop Hill. They and 2d Battalion only knew that E Company's trench line had been overrun. What little information they had came from Lieutenant Harrold who had been unable to leave his bunker. Regiment recognized that the Chinese on the hill might soon be reinforced through the valley. K Company, less its detached weapons platoon, numbered 135 men commanded by Lieutenant Joseph G. Clemons, Jr. The men had spent a quiet night in a reserve position behind Hill 347. They had a late meal and a few hours sleep. At 0330, Clemons was ordered to move the company to an attack position behind Hill 200, just south of Pork Chop. The trucks were already on their way but K Company was ready when the convoy arrived. The men were loaded down with ammunition. Each rifleman had a full clip loaded, all ammo pouches full, and carried an extra bandolier. Each rifleman also carried three or more grenades. The six BARs in each platoon had twelve magazines per weapon. Each light machinegun crew carried five boxes of ammo. As

recommended by Lieutenant Harrold, each platoon brought a flamethrower and a 3.5-inch rocket launcher.

When King unloaded from the trucks behind Hill 200, Lieutenant Colonel John N. Davis, the 3d Battalion Commander, was waiting with instructions. He suggested that Lieutenant Clemons attack Pork Chop's rear slope with two platoons abreast and one in reserve. The situation on the summit was not briefed to Clemons because Davis did not know what was up there. Clemons was left with the impression that the Chinese held the hill and his own men could fire without constraint. While K Company assaulted the rear, two platoons of L Company would attack up a ridge on Pork Chop's right side. This risked a cross-fire at the point where the converging forces would be in greatest danger from the Chinese.

American variable time fuzed artillery fire was blasting the top of the hill. Davis told Clemons, "Tell me when you're ready to go and I'll have it lifted." Clemons got his platoon leaders together and said, "Hit the hill hard and get to the top as fast as you can go. Success depends on speed. We must close before daylight." They moved out with 2d Platoon on the right, 1st on the left, and 3d in reserve. The lead platoons walked in column for 400 yards down the road to the assault line at the foot of Pork Chop. From there, it was only 170 yards to the nearest fighting bunkers but the trek uphill was very steep, the slope was rocky and cratered, and it was the darkest hour of the night.

By the time the 2d Platoon reached the lower side of the five-layered concertina wire that circled the hill, SFC Walter Kuzmick felt that the too-brisk start had been a mistake. His legs felt like rubber. His men, panting hard, tugged at rocks and shrubs to assist them up the slope. The more heavily burdened men straggled, separating the heavier weapons from the riflemen they were intended to support. Despite his sense of foreboding, Kuzmick yelled, "Keep going! Make it Snappy!" The men in front found gaps in the wire barricade cut by shellfire. They slipped through, following Kuzmick onto the hill. In the dark he didn't notice that the heavy weapons carriers had quit moving, dropped their burdens, and lay down next to the wire. For the next hour, he would be too busy to notice their absence.

Enemy artillery and mortars responded to the attack but dropped harmlessly into the valley, nearly 100 yards behind the line of departure. Because the barbed wire confronting the 1st Platoon was still intact, men lay across the bands, allowing others to use them as a bridge. Though the company completed the climb without incident so far, it had taken them 29 minutes to travel the 170 yards from the assault line to the top. Chinese artillery hit them immediately when they topped the rise. They fired for 10 minutes, then lifted for 10 minutes, a routine they continued throughout the fight.

The first man to enter the bunker line, Corporal William H. Bridges, saw two Chinese rise from among the rocks and fire directly down at 1st Platoon with submachineguns. He yelled a warning and dove into the trench. The burst cut down five men behind him. Private Rudolph Gordon reached the trench at almost the same moment. Turning left, the two men headed for the second bunker down the line. Three

grenades came at him from behind its far wall. They all fell short. Gordon and Bridges grenaded back. Protected by the bunker, the Chinese grenadiers made poor targets, exposing their heads and shoulders just long enough to heave a grenade.

As more 1st Platoon men reached the trench, two squads tried to form up on either side of the first bunker, though in the narrow trench they were vulnerable. To protect the platoon, Corporal Arsenio Correa jumped onto the parapet with his light machinegun and fired two boxes of ammo at the bunker door, only 25 yards away. Enemy grenadiers focused their attention on him, but he was safely beyond their range. Taking advantage of the diversion, SFC Lewis J. Hankey, Corporal Wilfred Volk, and Private Pak Song crawled along the parapet to within 5 yards of the bunker. From there, they threw ten grenades over the wall and the Chinese answered with their own. The attack silenced the Chinese, but in the exchange, Pak was hit in the head by the same explosion that shattered Hankey's leg. Volk treated them where they fell and then helped them to safety behind the bunker while he rejoined the fight.

Kuzmick's men encountered their first fire as they neared the chow bunker, some yards downhill from the main trench. Fortunately, the fire was high and did no harm. On reaching the main trench, Kuzmick kept his squads moving abreast, intending to mop up the ditch while securing the ground on both sides as he swept toward the former E Company Command Post. He took the precaution because it was still dark and he worried that if he moved his troops in column in the trench the Chinese might come in behind them and cut them off.

On the outer wing, Sergeant Rollin Johnson's squad became strung out as some men sought cover to escape the fire sweeping across the slope. Lieutenant Robert S. Cook accompanied Johnson to help control the maneuver toward the CP. Walking along the rampart with Private Edgar P. Bordelon, he got some distance ahead. At the first bunker, he encountered one of E Company's KATUSAs who had survived the night by hugging the sandbag revetment. The three advanced another 15 yards to a point where Cook could see the CP bunker's door. He saw no activity. Bordelon fired a few rounds at it with his carbine. A voice from inside pleaded, "Hold your fire! We're GIs." Wanting to see more, Cook did not instantly warn the skirmishers behind him that there might be GIs in the bunkers ahead.

Meanwhile, Sergeant Norbert Huffman's squad was still struggling up the hill. The slope was an obstacle course of rock outcroppings and shell craters. Here and there were smoke-blackened tree stumps that looked like sitting men in the half-light. Kuzmick tried to regulate the advance of his center with the flankers, but it was impossible. Huffman got to within 12 yards of the rear of the CP bunker without ever seeing it. There was a prone Chinese with a light machinegun on the bunker roof. Huffman was still crawling forward when a cluster of five or six grenades, thrown from the far side of the bunker, landed on and around him. One blew off his right hand and fragments penetrated his skull, neck, and chest. As he lay wounded, the machinegunner fired a quick burst at him."

Cook had just jumped to the rampart, waving his arms toward Kuzmick's men and yelling, "Come on! Keep moving! We've got it made!" He still said nothing of the Americans in the CP. Near the bunker where Cook had found the KATUSA, a Chinese crawling along the rampart heaved a grenade. Another came from behind the CP. The two grenades exploded simultaneously between Cook and the KATUSA, shattering one of Cook's legs and hitting the Korean in the stomach and groin. Before anyone could fire, five Chinese jumped from behind the bunker and into the trench, disappearing among the debris. Private Thomas M. Dugan stopped to put a tourniquet on Huffman's stump. Seeing that he was unconscious and bleeding from numerous wounds, Dugan carried him back to the chow bunker where he could be treated by medics and evacuated to safety.

The men measured up to some tough standards. Although exhausted from their ascent up the slope, they had pressed on through an artillery barrage, advancing without hesitation to overrun a succession of enemy-held positions. Although nothing in their training could prepare them for what they encountered, they responded like professionals. No one had them that they would get within 20 feet of the enemy and still not see him.

Kuzmick dashed toward the CP bunker door, intending to grenade it. Just as he neared the door, Lieutenant Attridge of E Company looked out. His head was bandaged and his arm was cocked to throw a grenade. The sight of Attridge stopped Kuzmick cold. Clemons, right on his heels, was so astonished he just gaped. They had not been told about the any E Company wounded in the CP bunker. They thought E Company had been wiped out and they would find no live friends on the hill. Before a word was spoken, three rounds of artillery landed among them. Their source was never determined. Because the Chinese fire had lifted a few minutes before, the men concluded they were "shorts" from their own supporting batteries. One round exploded in the bunker door, giving Attridge his second head wound. The others fell about 25 yards behind Kuzmick, wounding three of his Koreans."

Until then the flankers had kept pressing despite their weariness. But the impression that their own guns had fired on them had a greater impact on their morale than the wounding of Cook and Huffman. Shock stopped their momentum in the worst possible moment. Kuzmick's men lay inert, bewildered and listless. For several minutes no one made an attempt to do anything. The flank as a whole never got going again. "In war, a resolute soul can bind the excited minds of many men in a kind of bloody mesmerism. One small accident can in a twinkling, snap that chain of force."

"Private Samuel K. Maxwell went alone into the CP bunker. There were five wounded men inside, one missing a leg. Attridge was still conscious. Lieutenant Harrold told Maxwell to return to the fight. He would look after his own men. The sun was edging over the horizon, bathing the scene in daylight's first rays. Private George Atkins, from the 2d Platoon's rear guard, brought news to Clemons. From a high knob, he had looked westward and had seen many Chinese moving toward the hill from the direction of Princeton OP. Clemons called on the radio. "Would the artillery plaster Princeton OP

and drop a curtain of fire in the valley between Pork Chop and Hakkasol to choke off reinforcement? The answer was yes, but the requested fire never came.”

A few of Kuzmick’s men started moving down the trench. Before they could pass the CP bunker, they were stopped by automatic weapons fire coming from downhill on their right. The fire was from L Company, attacking up the ridge. Kuzmick’s men tried to signal L Company to shut it off, but the fire was too intense to allow anyone to stand exposed. It subsided only after the Chinese bled L Company into silence. At this point, K Company lost all group initiative. Any energy that remained was channeled into personal effort. The attack carried on only where resolute individuals engaged in widely separated and almost unrelated actions.

Clemons faced a dilemma. The harder he pressed the right forward, the greater his disorganization. Supply remained unassured, his channels of communication to the outside were narrowing, and his heavy weapons carriers were shirking the fight. He did not have enough able-bodied men to take the hill by storm, but had too many to plead fatal weakness. Those who continued fighting were dangerously dispersed. To withdraw them and regroup would yield hard-won ground to the enemy. It was time to get his house in order, but answers weren’t coming very readily. With his Executive Officer, Lieutenant Tsugi Ohashi, he went back to the chow bunker to consider his next move.

On the right of Pork Chop, Sergeant Johnson, joined by Sergeant Robert E. Hoffman, continued to move straight down the trench. They soon reached a bunker where two men from E Company’s 3d Platoon had survived the night by playing possum. At dawn three Chinese had discovered them and began to grenade their hiding place. Having snatched a few hours sleep, the men decided to fight back, although between them they had only one helmet and a dirty carbine that wouldn’t fire automatic. They took 15-minute turns at the fire post, one man operating as a sniper while the other stayed down. Their initiative was just enough to keep the Chinese from rushing them.

One of the men motioned to Hoffman and Johnson to move on down the trench to take the Chinese from the flank while he held their attention from the front. By then, several other men had reached the spot. Before Johnson could start his move, seven artillery rounds exploded along the embankment. One silenced the Chinese, but another landed among the Americans. Corporal Robert Rosserelli was an arm’s length from Johnson when the first round struck. The explosion sat him down hard on his buttocks and the shock was so violent that he just sat there stunned, certain that his behind had been blown away. Because the trench was partly covered and filled with debris, he temporarily lost sight of Johnson.

Then he heard Johnson say calmly, “Well I’ll be damned, I’m wounded.” As Johnson stood up, the shoulder of his field jacket was already blood soaked. Despite what must have been a very painful wound, he called out in a booming voice, “Hoffman, its time for you to take over.” For the next 20 minutes Hoffman could hear him belaboring stragglers farther down the trench. “Damn you, get up there and help Hoffman.”

Almost coincidentally, the first flamethrower reached Lieutenant Clemons as Johnson disappeared across the slope. Its operator, PFC William W. Sykes, was given a squad to run interference for him as he advanced toward a bunker 50 yards away on the left side of the hill. Approximately a dozen Chinese were nesting there, some inside and others behind sandbag revetments. The squad moved forward cautiously, spread over both embankments. As they came within throwing distance of the bunker, a shower of grenades landed among them, wounding every member of the squad. The Chinese had quit the bunker, regrouped on higher ground, and grenaded the squad from the flank. Not seeing how it had happened, Sykes continued right down the trench with his flamethrower and flamed the bunker's doorway for a full 30 seconds. As the doorframe caught fire, a grenade landed in the trench, shooting fragments into Sykes' buttocks. He couldn't make his legs move. PFC James Freley helped him from the hill, surprised that Sykes had made his run, gotten hit, and retired without uttering a sound.

Clemons made a rough guess that he had lost at least half of his men. Most had been knocked out by hand grenades or artillery. Apart from the worrisome noise of the enemy's burp guns, they had done little damage. Clemons worried that his men were about out of ammunition, though fanned out as they were, he could only guess. He decided that it was time to bring his reserve platoon into the fight.

Two enemy-occupied bunkers, on opposite sides of the trench and 40 feet apart, had stalled the advance on the right side of the hill. Burp gun fire laced the ditch, the gunners operating from behind bunker walls, grenadiers covering the embankments. Sergeant Hoffman looked at his watch. It was 0745. The company had been on the hill approximately two hours. Its attack had not yet carried more than 200 yards. It was clear to Hoffman that the company was already beyond the point of exhaustion. Some riflemen were dragging their weapons as if too spent to carry them. Others sat in the trench staring vacantly. When NCOs tried to direct them, their words were slurred, as if uttered by sleep walkers.

But the job was not yet half done. The Chinese still held two thirds of the trench line, including all of the covered parts of the trench. The artillery had made it easier for the remnants of the two sides to hold their positions. The collapse of a great part of the trench made any sighting along it impossible. Bunker doorframes had broken under the weight of artillery hitting sandbagged roofs. Timbers that had supported the near end of the covered trench were splintered and fallen, closing the trench to observation and giving cover to its defenders. From within the ruins, grenades were hurled at the Americans in surprising numbers, and incessant burp gun fire on both sides of the hill kept them pinned to defilades churned up by the night's shelling.

Feeling that his men were stretched to the breaking point, Clemons saw no choice but to mark time while waiting for help. He was no longer in touch with the outside. The artillery had cut his field telephone wire and his five radios had been knocked out one-by-one. Three of the operators had been hit and evacuated. From the chow bunker, where the wounded were taken back to Hill 200, a half-track was shuttling out the worst cases.

Its predecessor had been hit by a mortar round that killed the driver and re-wounded two passengers. From Hill 200, casualties were moved onward by litter jeep and helicopter.

L Company, which had fought its way up the right side of the hill, was about to bolster K Company's ranks, but not much. It had started up the ridge with two platoons, totaling 62 men under the command of Lieutenant Forrest J. Crittenden. When Crittenden was wounded, Lieutenant Homer F. Bechtel promptly took command, but was soon struck down by an enemy hand grenade. When Lieutenant Arthur A. Marshall brought the survivors to join K Company, only 12 remained and they were reduced to 10 by a burst of machinegun fire before they reached the trench.

As the fight slackened around 0800, men on both sides left the trench to seek better positions on the slopes. The smell of death below was overpowering in places. Above, shell holes and large rocks offered a measure of safety. This scrambling brought the two sides closer together, but there was no upsurge in fighting. Both sides were spent. Exhausted, out of water and short of ammunition, men conserved whatever energy and firepower they had left. The weather was cool and clear, one of the season's better days.

At 0814, two squads from G company 17th Infantry arrived to reinforce K Company. Until then, Clemons did not know that any part of that regiment was anywhere near. As Clemons sent the squads to reinforce the hill's left side, a voice from behind him inquired, "Could you tell me the situation?" Clemons turned to see his brother-in-law, Lieutenant Walter B. Russell, who he thought was still in the States. He shouted in amazement, "What the hell are you doing here?"

Russell, commanding G Company of the 17th, explained that his orders were to assist K and L Companies in mopping up on the hill and then to get back down as soon as possible. Clemons suddenly realized the gulf of comprehension separating his command from higher headquarters. He had only 35 men left from K Company, 10 from L Company and 12 frightened and lightly wounded survivors of E Company who had been rescued from various bunkers. Lieutenant Harrold had already left the hill with the more seriously wounded survivors. Clemons knew the force he had left was incapable of further offensive action and doubted that it could defend very long either.

Suddenly, Chinese artillery and mortars again swept across the slope, joined by and intense barrage of automatic weapons fire. The Chinese had also been reinforced and were getting ready for another push. Lieutenant Marshall with L Company's 10 men and Lieutenant Ess, with the two squads from G Company of the 17th Infantry took over the left sector. Lieutenant Russell brought the rest of G Company up on the right. Clemons and Ohashi regrouped K Company to hold the center. Throughout the day, the fight continued and the casualties continued to mount.

By late afternoon, only 25 men remained unwounded in K and L Companies together. With Ohashi and Kuzmick, Clemons positioned the survivors in a tight group around the highest point they held on the hill. He then returned to his CP with a runner

and a radio they had salvaged and called Lieutenant Colonel Davis at around 1640. He reported, "We have about 20 men left. There is no fight left in this company. If we can't be relieved, we should be withdrawn." Brigadier General Arthur Trudeau, the Assistant Division Commander, was with Davis when the call came in. He would have to come up with reinforcements quick and get them up the hill before nightfall. He did, relieving the depleted remnant of K Company just after dark. Pork Chop continued to be held, preventing the Chinese from breaking through anywhere along the 7th Division's line despite 15,000 rounds of artillery and repeated assaults.

In May 1953, the 31st Infantry held the left of the 7th Division line, releasing the Columbian Battalion to division control. Constant patrols kept the line active. In June, Outposts Dale and Pork Chop came under renewed enemy pressure, but managed to hold. The Chinese were trying to capture positions that would give them observation vantage points dominating the critical Chorwon Valley. The valley was critical to both sides. For the Chinese and North Koreans, it represented a possible UN invasion corridor opening the way to Wonsan and Pyongyang. For the UN, it represented a Chinese invasion corridor pointed southwest that could isolate Seoul. Neither side could afford to yield high ground since the peace talks at Panmunjom would likely end soon.

From June 10 to June 18, the fight for positional advantage centered on a shell-blasted outpost named Harry. Harry was just another bunker and trench complex atop a barren 1200-foot hill among the many in central Korea, but its importance was greatly disproportionate to the hill's size. Harry controlled access to the strategic Hang San-ni Valley's northern entrance. If Harry had been lost, the peace process might have changed at Panmunjom because its capture would have given the Chinese a salient pointed toward Seoul, unhinging the UN line. To prevent that from happening, the 31st Infantry Regiment rotated one or two companies to OP Harry each night in a "hold at all costs" mission. To provide some perspective, 1200 feet is twice the height of the Washington Monument, a healthy trek for the riflemen who slogged up and down the steep slope in the darkness to avoid letting the Chinese know when companies were being rotated.

Harry was only 350 yards from Chinese positions atop higher ground on a series of ridges called Star Hill. The Greek Battalion that had held the outpost before being relieved by the 31st called Harry "The Death Place" because it was regularly blasted by Chinese mortars and artillery whose observers could see every move made by GIs in the OP. Captain John Holdorf, Commander of E company at the time, remembers Harry as "*a barren, scorched, and forbidding looking place that had death written all over it.*"

On July 6, the Chinese came across the valley again in a coordinated attack against Pork Chop Hill. They penetrated the position repeatedly in five days of bitter fighting, but the 31st held on. By the fifth day of fighting, both sides held portions of the hill and neither could dislodge the other. On July 10, all UN forces were ordered to withdraw from the position, ceding to the Chinese the most bitterly contested piece of real estate in central Korea.

The last action of the war for the Polar Bears came on 26-27 July 1953 at Observation Points (OPs) Westview and Dale overlooking the Chorwon Valley. The OPs were held respectively by K and I Companies of the 31st Infantry. Westview is a low, bald knob connected to Old Baldy by a saddle ridge.¹ It was only large enough to accommodate a platoon but the Chinese were determined to take it. They came charging up the hill three nights before the ceasefire, lugging huge boxes of ammo and rations, giving every indication that they intended to take the hill and keep it. Pouring wave after wave up the hill, they took half of the hill, but L Company counterattacked, driving them back down the trench line in close quarters combat with grenades, small arms, and occasionally rifle butts. When their grip on the last section of trench was broken, the survivors scurried across the barren 200-yard long saddle back to the safety of Chinese lines on Old Baldy. There, they were chopped to pieces by artillery. For the next two nights, they probed Westview again and again, losing more men in the process. On Monday night, the defenders, some of whom had hardly slept for four days, felt sure the Chinese would come again to try to retrieve the bodies of their dead. At 9:45 PM, the order came to cease all firing. A minute later, an outguard warned, "They're coming, the Chinks are coming down." No one fired. Weapons that would have been used without hesitation any night before were silent. There was no shouting, no jubilation, only a few muttered prayers and handshakes between men who had seen too many men carried from the battlefield. Suddenly there was peace.

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¹ *VFW Magazine*, August 2000. The attack on OP Westview and Dale was the last battle of the Korean War, not just for the 31st Infantry, but for any unit.

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From: George Allison [mailto:georgea3rd@insightbb.com]

Sent: Thursday, August 05, 2004 11:41 PM

To: Karl

Subject: 31st Regiment History

Hi Karl --

We haven't met. But, I've been reading some of the history of the Regiment in the newsletter. It's a big job and an important one. You deserve a lot of credit for undertaking it. I have been writing a bit about the 31st, mostly to do with the actual day of the Korean Truce. I got into that a few years ago when I noted the end of the war, went through the local paper from one end to the other and found no mention.

So, when the 50th anniversary of the Truce neared, I talked to a few folks at the newspaper about it, was greeted mostly with disinterest and some vague plans about maybe talking to a few veterans. So, I finally sat down and wrote what had been on my mind for a number of years. Then, I asked for a meeting with the publisher and the editor. Since I used to run the Chamber of Commerce here, they did agree to sit down with me.

In the story is Joe Farris, of Vincennes, IN, whom I think is a real hero. I think his bronze star (v) should have been silver, maybe even more. I knew Joe Clemens and, while I think his DSC is well-earned, I don't think he did more than Farris did over time. I remember sitting on another hill watching Farris' defense of Dale Outpost. It was a horrific scene. Anyone who could reach it from anyplace on the line was pouring fire unto the forward slope. At the time, I didn't even know Farris was in the Regiment, much less on Dale. That was probably about March or early April, 1953.

The other in the story is Don Foltz, whom you probably know as the former head of the 7th Inf. Div. association. I had met Don in Korea when he went through Regiment on his way to the 32nd.

I drafted these stories, then got together with them to check the accuracy. It's as close to the actual facts as our memories will let us get.

Anyway, our paper printed it. Front page. Full spread. They also promised to put it on the wire - AP & Indiana Press Association -- so I didn't send it anyplace else. Well, they put it on their own Indiana wire only. So, this year, I rewrote it for Farris' local paper and for Foltz's local paper. Foltz's paper published it in its entirety, plus some side bar info I sent them. Joe Farris was once more ignored.

Actual tear sheets are hard to come by. (I had requested a whole bunch; I got two.) So I had some Xerox copies made. I have sent them to you via snail mail. I also have digital files, and if you want them I can e-mail them to you in either Microsoft Word or Word Perfect format.

So, that's the long part of a short story. I'd be interested in your reaction.

George

Dear Karl

I have been a member of the 31st for quite some time and enjoy reading the newsletter when it arrives.

I see by your last letter that you might be looking for any item of interest.

I arrived in Korea in September of 1952 and was assigned to the first platoon of the heavy mortar co. of the 31st Inf. Reg. I had just turned 19 and was quite apprehensive. Our platoon was stationed behind a very small hill just in front of old Papasan. God, was I green! I had no idea what a fire mission was but found out in a real hurry. Of course we moved from time to time and our last position was just in front of the General's bunker. From there we fired at Baldy and a few other places.

I firmly believe to this day that the 4.2 was the most effective weapon in Korea.

The guns we had were rather old but could fire about 5000 yards. But in May of 1953, we were issued the brand new mortars that had a range of over 8500 yards!

Obviously we started to hit targets that were out of range for our old weapons as well as the artillery. Prior to their arrival our squad consisted of 4 men: myself, a gunner, an assistant gunner and one ammo bearer. (should be nine) When the new guns arrived the higher-ups told us to leave the old guns operable as well as the new ones. Thank God they gave us quite a few replacements and found myself in charge of 12 men to man both guns. I wasn't there much longer as I rotated back to the states in early June. When the enemy finally found out that I had gone home they decided to call a cease fire since there wasn't any use fighting any more. Oh well.

I returned to Korea on a revisit program in September of 2002 and also did the side trip to China. People asked me if I found Korea different than when I was there. Actually, I spent the entire 9 months on line and didn't even take R&R. The only time I saw Seoul was from the back of a duece and a half on my way to Incheon to go home.

I have been in touch with one of my buddies for the past couple of years and hope to get to meet with him one of these days. Our platoon leader when I left was a Lt. Siebenthaler (sp?) I often wonder if he ever joined the Assn?

Hope to meet you one of these days. Keep up the good work. Sincerely

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