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BOB HARBULA ONE OF THE CHOSIN FEW

HONORING THE 6888TH
POSTAL BATTALION

HOW MILKWEED SAVED LIVES IN WWII

EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY:
THE BERLIN WALL GOES UP

VIETNAM GRUNT WRITES HOME, 1968

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Cover: Bob Harbula with Royal Marine Sergeant John W. Whiting, Korea, 1950 (courtesy Bob Harbula)
VBC Magazine is published quarterly by The Veterans Breakfast Club, a 501(c)(3) non-profit that harnesses the power of storytelling in order to connect, educate, heal, and inspire.
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FROM THE DIRECTOR



This year marks the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War. At 10am on July 27, 1953, in the North Korean village of Panmunjom, officials representing the US, North Korean, and Chinese militaries (South Korea refused to sign) penned signatures to the Korean Armistice Agreement, halting a brutal three-year war. It wasn't a peace treaty. It merely ended open hostilities and set a buffer at the 38th Parallel between the two warring halves of Korea. Of all the "forgotten wars" in our history, the Korean War was one of the most remote to Americans back home. Korean War veterans returned in silence, scarcely mentioning their experiences overseas. The irony is that over the next seventy years, North Korea never stopped making headlines. The divided country remains officially at war, and millions of Americans have served in harm's way at the DMZ since 1953. This summer and fall, we want to spotlight these defenders of Korea, past and present, at our in-person programs and on our *VBC Happy Hour*. In this issue of *VBC Magazine*, we feature the story of Marine Bob Harbula, who holds three Presidential Unit Citation ribbons for three large battles he fought over seven months in Korea in 1950-1951. Watch for our *VBC Happy Hour* program with Bob and keep up with all our events and activities at veteransbreakfastclub.org.

Todd

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UPCOMING EVENTS

IN PERSON, FACE-TO-FACE

For the latest event schedule, scan this QR code!



ONLINE EVENTS

VBC events are held every Monday at 7pm ET on Zoom and simulcast to YouTube and Facebook. See schedule and connect at veteransbreakfastclub.org/events



veteransbreakfastclub.org/events

All in-person events begin at 8:30am and include breakfast for \$15pp unless otherwise noted. RSVP to betty@veteransbreakfastclub.org or 412-623-9029.

WEDNESDAY, July 26: Christ Church at Grove Farm (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

THURSDAY, July 27, 6:30-8:30pm: Korean War Armistice Day Program, Heinz History Center (1212 Smallman St, Pittsburgh PA 15222)

WEDNESDAY, August 2: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, 15009)

WEDNESDAY, August 23: Christ Church at Grove Farm (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

TUESDAY, August 29: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park, PA 15102)

FRIDAY, September 8, 10am-12pm, FREE continental breakfast: Beulah Presbyterian Church (2500 McCrady Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15235)

TUESDAY, September 26: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park, PA 15102)

WEDNESDAY, October 4: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, PA 15009)

TUESDAY, October 10: Chartiers Township Community Center (2013 Community Ctr Dr, Houston, PA 15342)

WEDNESDAY, October 25: Christ Church at Grove Farm (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

TUESDAY, October 31: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park, PA 15102)

SATURDAY, November 4: University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg (Hempfield Room, Chambers Hall, Greensburg, PA 15601) \$10 breakfast

FRIDAY, November 17, 10am-12pm, FREE continental breakfast: Beulah Presbyterian Church (2500 McCrady Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15235)

WEDNESDAY, November 29: Christ Church at Grove Farm (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)



NEWS

VIETNAM DONUT DOLLIES FOR CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL



Photo credit: Rose Carlo Gantner

VBC member Richard Sand reports that on May 22, 2023, former Navy pilot Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) introduced House Resolution 8978: "To award a Congressional Gold Medal to members of the Red Cross Supplemental Recreational Activities Overseas (SRAO) program, also known as the 'Donut Dollies,' who served honorably during the Vietnam conflict."

The legislation of the proposed Donut Dollies Congressional Gold Medal Act, reads in part:

"Women were not subject to the Vietnam-era draft, but thousands volunteered. The first American Red Cross Field Directors were sent to South Vietnam in February 1962. The last Red Cross staff members to serve in-country departed in March 1973. Official records indicate that a total of 1,120 women served with the Red Cross in Vietnam during that 11-year period. Of that number, 627 were young women who were part of the organization's Supplemental Recreation Activities Overseas (SRAO) program."

"Military commanders expressed high praise for the Red Cross volunteers, calling the services of the organization 'indispensable' and 'prime factors' in their efforts to maintain the high morale of their men and to look after their welfare."

Richard asks fellow backers of the legislation to contact their members of Congress to register their support.

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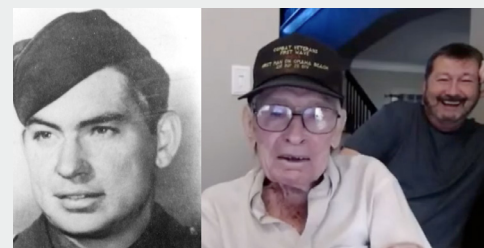
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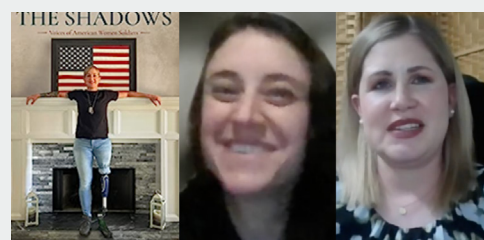
Korean War Navy Veteran Bud Mendenhall



Last Survivor of First Wave Omaha Beach Bill Parker



Rocky Bleier Tells His Story



Women Purple Heart Warriors

FEATURE

BOB HARBULA, CHOSIN SURVIVOR

By Bob Harbula

Ninety-two-year-old Bob Harbula has shared his story at several Veterans Breakfast Club events and in our podcasts over the years. Historian Patrick K. O'Donnell used Bob's combat narrative in his excellent book, Give Me Tomorrow: The Korean War's Greatest Untold Story -- The Epic Stand of the Marines of George Company (Da Capo Press). You can also see Bob in the PBS documentary, The Battle of Chosin. Of Bob's many awards and decorations, the three Presidential Unit Citations earned for separate campaigns over just seven months in Korea remain his most cherished.

Image: Chosin Marines (USMC)

It was 1948, my senior year in high school. I gazed out my classroom window and wondered what I was going to do when I graduated in June.

I didn't want to follow my father and uncles into US Steel's National Tube Works in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, or into one of the other mills that occupied miles of real estate on both sides of the Monongahela River outside Pittsburgh.

I recalled four years earlier, when I saw US Marine and Medal of Honor recipient Mitchell Paige, hero of Guadalcanal, waving from the back of a Ford convertible as he paraded through our hometown. He'd graduated from my school. I knew everything about him. He looked great in his dress blues. I wanted to be just like him.

My older brother John had the same thought. He'd joined the Marine Corps after he'd graduated two years ahead of me. He was already a sergeant. He'd come home on a Thursday and return to base on a Tuesday, every other week. Like Mitchell Paige, he looked great. He also had money in his pocket, a new car, and girlfriends.

John was the "Chief Mess Man" in the Marines Corps. I didn't know what that meant—I figured it was something special—but that's what I wanted to be also.

So, I joined the Marine Corps.

But instead of mess duty, the Marine Corps sent me to Marine Barracks Washington "8th & I," the legendary post in the nation's capital that handles ceremonial duties and security for the President of the United States.

I was in 8th & I for two years and served on the famous Silent Drill Platoon. We weren't allowed to sit in our dress pants.

We guarded President Truman when he went to "Shangri-La," as Camp David was called then.

I talked with the President several times. He was down-to-earth and loved military people. He'd served as an artillery captain in World War I, a highlight of his life. He asked me where I was from and how I liked the Marine Corps.

It's hard to imagine a better assignment for a young Marine. The President's daughter Margaret allowed Marines to use Shangri-La's pool in the afternoons. And, back in DC, we were constantly set up on dates. Officials would call up our Sergeant of the Guard at our guardhouse and say, "We need ten Marines for a party at the YWCA." And, if you wanted to go, you signed up. I ended up having a lot of girlfriends.

On March 1, 1950, the Warner Theatre in downtown Washington, DC, hosted the premiere of a new John Wayne movie, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. The Marines of 8th & I were chosen to serve as ushers for the film's run.

We escorted Congressmen and their families and other dignitaries to their seats.



Bob Harbula 1950 (Bob Harbula)



Bob Harbula at 8th & I (Bob Harbula)

The Warner screened the movie twice a day. I sat through it six times. It got to me. I became hungry for real Marine action. Like Sergeant Stryker or Mitchell Paige. I was sick of twirling my rifle and doing fancy parade ground tricks. I wanted to fight.

I turned to my buddy after a screening and said, "I need a war."

Three months later, I got my wish.

North Korea launched a surprise attack across the 38th Parallel against its non-Communist counterpart to the south on June 25, 1950. President Truman pledged American forces to South Korea's defense.

The Marine Corps called for volunteers. They wanted ten of us from 8th & I. I made sure I was one of those ten.

Word was they were putting together a special Marine Raider battalion. Later, as plans for US intervention evolved, the Pentagon realized it wanted a whole Marine Division on the ground in Korea.

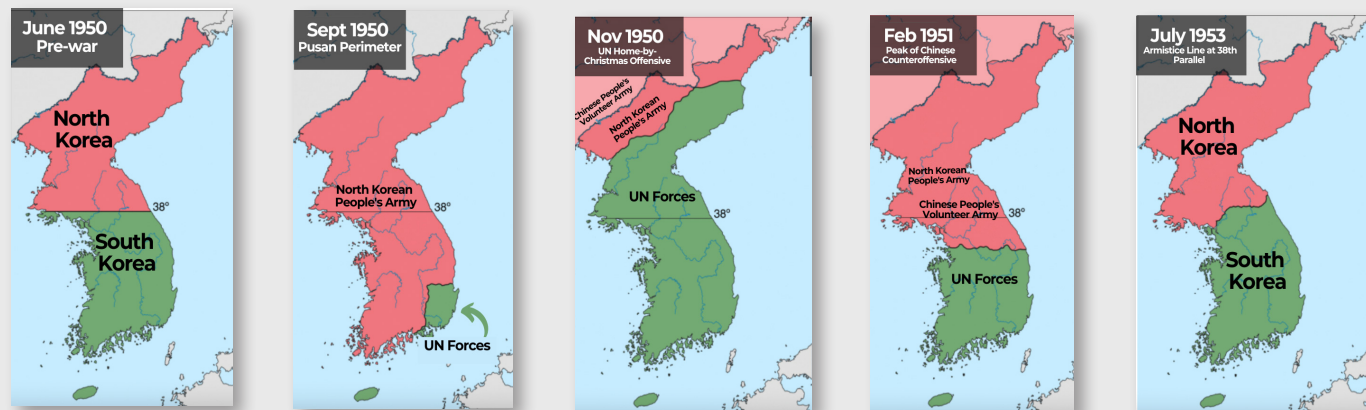
But in 1950, the downsized Marine Corps didn't have any full-strength divisions. The Marine Corps had shrunk ninety-percent in five years. Those remaining were spread out all over the world. They had to strip other units, every duty station, every embassy, of just about everyone to man the 1st Marine Division. Gaps were then filled by Reservists called to active duty by President Truman.

At Camp Pendleton, California, I was assigned to a machine gun squad. I hadn't even laid eyes on a machine gun during my two years in the Marine Corps. That's because they were all packed away in Cosmoline and crated after World War II. Our job was to open the crates and clean the .30-caliber guns off. We had no time to train on the weapons. Training, we were told, would happen aboard ship.

Apart from cleaning weapons, our time was spent walking up and down the hills at Pendleton with full packs. "What is this?" I wondered. "I want to train to fight."

Later, I'd be grateful for that preparation.

We loaded out of San Diego in August. It took us thirteen days to cross the Pacific to Japan. For the first seven days, most of us were seasick and couldn't learn anything. As we recovered, we got to know our Browning M1919 .30-caliber "light" machine gun. We broke it down and put it back together countless times. They'd put us in a pitch dark room with parts spread on the deck and have us assemble the gun by feel—often deliberately leaving parts out.



The Korean War in Five Maps

Our training at Camp Otsu in Japan largely consisted of running up and down hills in full packs as we awaited gear and equipment to arrive. Then, we shifted to the port at Kobe and boarded amphibious Landing Ship, Tanks (LSTs).

By this time, the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) had steamrolled South Korean defenses, pushing them and their US and United Nations allies to the southern tip of the peninsula around the port city of Pusan. Our side was hanging on by their fingernails, one slip away from falling into the Sea of Japan.

Our job, we learned, would be to relieve the pressure by landing up north, just southwest of the capital city of Seoul, at the port city of Inchon. It was supposed to be a surprise, behind enemy lines, and intended to cut off the NKPA's forces besieging the Pusan Perimeter from their northern supply lines.

Once aboard our LST, someone pointed to stacks of two-by-fours. "What are these for, building a house?" I wondered. No, we were told, our job was to make ladders.

There we were, a bunch of combat-ready Marines hammering ladders in the East China Sea.

Inchon, it turned out, wasn't a nice sandy beach. No *Sands of Iwo Jima* for us. Instead, we'd be climbing an urban sea wall.

The tidal range at Inchon is one of the largest in the world. The difference between high tide and low tide is thirty feet, so drastic that boats drop to a mud seabed twice a day. That meant resupply would be difficult, so we had to pack as much food and ammunition as possible. We became human pack mules, loaded with a hundred pounds each, plus a carbine. Our ladders had to be sturdy to handle all the extra weight.

I landed at Inchon as a member of George Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division. Our regimental commander was Colonel Lewis "Chesty" Puller. We came ashore at so-called Blue Beach to the south and received sporadic fire as we landed. It was my first taste of combat.

Corporal Albert Barnes was ahead of me as I climbed my ladder. He was already up top, cutting barbed wire,

when a shot ricocheted and pierced his neck. I watched him die as a corpsman worked on him.

It wasn't like the movie.

Things moved rapidly. There was no time to process what you saw and little time to rest. We secured the beachhead, then pushed on towards Seoul, twenty miles to the northeast.

We crossed the Han River under sporadic mortar fire in amphibious landings vehicles, the same DUKWs now used in city tours. We dug in for the night on the south bank, preparing for our assault on Seoul.

George Company was the first to enter Seoul. We made our way up Ma Po Boulevard, the capital city's main thoroughfare.

The scene was surreal. American flags festooned the street with a large banner, in English, reading "Welcome, Truman's Police Force!"

"What the hell is this?" we asked.

The North Koreans were taunting us. Headlines back home blazed with President Truman's recent retort to a Congressman who wanted the Marine Corps to be represented on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "For your information," Truman growled, "the Marine Corps is the Navy's police force and as long as I am President that is what it will remain."

Seoul was a modern city with an electrical grid, trolley system, block-sized buildings, and sewers. We hadn't trained for such urban warfare, fighting street-to-street and house-to-house.

We learned on the job. I was nineteen years old and followed the lead of our corporals and sergeants, veterans of World War II. They taught us how to fight.

One of my mentors and role models was First Sergeant Rocco Zullo. He was a veteran of Guadalcanal and prepared us well at Camp Pendleton. In combat, he was inspiring. He wouldn't say, "go take out that machine gun." Instead, he'd say, "Come on, let's take this," and he'd lead from the front.

We did whatever he said. We were more afraid of him than the enemy. He gave us confidence. He made George Company the heroic unit it became.



Our first combat in Seoul was at a railroad trestle that crossed Ma Po. We went under the overpass and into a hail of fire from NKPA machine guns on top of the embankment. Five or six of our squad fell just like that.

Unlike Inchon, Seoul was heavily fortified. Every building, every intersection, had stacks of burlap bags filled with rice or sand with machine or anti-tank guns behind them, mines in front. Burnt-out office buildings harbored North Koreans—often women—armed with Russian burp guns. They'd spray us with fire and then move out and up Ma Po to another hidden perch.

We fought block-by-block. There were two squads of us, one on either side of the street, my machine gun squad staggered behind a rifle squad. With no room to maneuver or flank, we met each bunker and nest head-on, methodically silencing them before moving on.

You can tell Seoul had once been a nice place, lined with mature sycamores, little shops and residences. Now, it was a hellish battlescape with charred churches and blasted stone buildings. On the side of the road, we saw South Korean soldiers, hands bound behind their backs, dead from execution. There were dead women and children, old men, all massacred. Hatred of the enemy seared our hearts and bolstered our fight.

Our 180 members of George Company took on NKPA units many times its size. We destroyed a whole NKPA regiment during one attack. Our casualties mounted, but we helped secure the city for the South Koreans and gained enormous confidence as Marines.

This is when General Douglas MacArthur made the first of several bad decisions. MacArthur had been tapped by Truman to command the whole United Nations war effort in Korea. The landing at Inchon had been MacArthur's masterstroke. But what came after cast a pall on this war-saving operation.

By October, the 1st Marine Division was in a perfect position to cut off enemy soldiers retreating from points further south. The NKPA from the Pusan Perimeter were taking the eastern route north around Seoul, heading back along the coast to their supplies and reinforcements. We should have attacked east to stop them. Instead, MacArthur ordered Marines to leave Seoul and return to Inchon.

MacArthur thought it would be quicker for us to sail around the Korean peninsula to the eastern coast city of Wonsan and head the enemy off from there. By the time we boarded, sailed, and arrived in port, the NKPA was long gone.

That's because Wonsan turned out to be one of the most heavily mined harbors on earth. The North Koreans, the Soviets, and the Chinese had all contributed mines of various types and sizes. We were ten days aboard ship before the harbor had been swept clear enough for us to land. Our LST ran out of food. By the time we entered port on October 26, Bob Hope had already entertained occupying troops with a USO show.

A holiday mood prevailed as the weather shifted swiftly from autumnal to frosty. "Home by Christmas!" was the cry. The enemy was running fast to the China border and the North Korean capital of Pyongyang had been cap-

tured by UN forces.

"The war is very definitely coming to an end shortly," declared MacArthur. "With the closing of that trap there should be an end to organized resistance."

Our battalion's job became securing the Wonsan area by manning a blocking position at Majon-ni, a crossroads town twenty-eight miles west of the port city.

We arrived at the crossroads shivering. Our winter gear, we learned, was just then being unloaded at Wonsan.

On November 3, my .30-caliber machine gun squad was among those assigned to drive back to Wonsan, drop off some NKPA prisoners, and pick up our winter clothes. We watched the POWs closely, almost waiting for them to make a move so we could avenge what we'd seen in Seoul. But they were docile. Cold, hungry, and scared.

We emptied our ten trucks of prisoners at Wonsan and loaded them with parkas, gloves, and snow boots. We rumbled single-file back to Majon-ni on rugged mountain roads.

My squad leader, Sgt. Hurt, rode shotgun in the second truck. I sat on the tailgate of the third truck with two ammo carriers next to me.

We climbed a summit and took a sharp left turn. A large boulder appeared on our left. Two North Koreans then emerged and started firing at us with burp guns. The guys next to me got hit and fell to the road. I didn't get hit but fell with them anyway.

They lay motionless on the road, while I rolled off to a berm.

It was an ambush. The Marines in the trucks behind us stopped, set up a skirmish line and returned fire at about 150-200 NKPA's attacking from the left.

I still had my M1 carbine. Instead of joining the skirmish line, I crawled ahead to see what had happened to Sgt. Hurt in the second truck. We'd become close, and I wanted to help him if I could.

Boulders had blocked the road ahead of our convoy. Five or six Marines lay motionless on the ground near the first three trucks.

The driver of my truck was under our vehicle. I motioned for him to stay put and snuck up to the second truck. In the cab was Sgt. Hurt with a serious shoulder wound. I looked ahead at the first truck. In front of it, about thirty yards ahead, were four NKPA soldiers in the middle of the road.

I returned to my truck which had our .30-cal machine gun sitting on the top of the crates filled with our cold weather gear. I hatched a plan with the drivers of the second and third trucks. I would surprise the soldiers up front with machine gun fire. That would provide cover for the drivers to turn the trucks around on the narrow mountain road.

I grabbed some webbing and wrapped my left hand to protect it from the barrel's heat. Then, I picked up the gun, signaled to the driver to get ready, stood up, and started firing from the hip from the back of the truck.

The first burst hit three of the four NKPA soldiers. Another Marine, PFC Jack Dunne, fired with me from his M1.

"Let's go!" I yelled, and the two trucks started turning around in tandem, heading back down the hill.

The plan, at least in my mind, was to stop where the seven other trucks behind us had set up a skirmish line. But that was not what the drivers did. Instead, they blew right past the stopped convoy, barely squeezing by them on the narrow mountain road with a steep cliff to the left.

We sped down toward the base of the mountain, jogging back and forth in wild turns. As we neared the bottom, an oxcart lumbered slowly toward us. Then, a grenade or satchel charge exploded.

The truck I was riding in swerved violently and tumbled down an embankment. I jumped clear out the back and then ran down the gully to check on the guys in the truck. They were unconscious, but alive.

The second truck saw what had happened and stopped to help. They picked me up, and we sped to Regimental Headquarters to report our situation. We spoke directly to our commander, Chesty Puller.

Colonel Puller ordered his first sergeant to get all his men together, cooks and clerks included, and we headed back to the ambush site. The enemy had fled.

Sgt. Hurt and PFC Dunne, unconscious at the base of the ravine, were evacuated to Japan. Out of the fifty men on that mission, nine were dead and fifteen wounded.

I became the new machine gun squad leader. That's how it worked. I was the only one left from my original squad that landed at Inchon, so it was my turn to be in charge.

We lost a lot of people as we fought in Korea. A lot of officers and NCOs. So, PFCs like me become squad leaders, and sergeants become platoon leaders. And then the PFC slots were filled with replacements, fresh from the States.

We received our first draft replacements about a week after the ambush. These guys were Reservists who'd been called up in August, given maybe four weeks of combat training—often, no Boot Camp—and rushed to Korea.

It was near-criminal to put these men into combat without extensive training. My squad was entirely green except for one, Pfc. Joe Rice, who was added from another squad just to give us a bit more experience. It was my job—a grizzled nineteen-year-old combat veteran—to get these recruits ready for what was to come.

This is where the war should have ended, where we thought it would end. The replacements I trained back at Wonsan while we guarded X Corps Headquarters thought they'd never see any action. Thanksgiving approached, and we expected Christmas would find us in a victory parade in San Francisco.

The NKPA had been routed. The Republic of Korea (ROK) forces alone could have wiped out the remnants of it. We had enough manpower and firepower to defend the ninety-mile east-west line from Wonsan to Pyongyang, the high narrow waist of the Korean peninsula.

But MacArthur wanted more. So he pushed the US Eighth Army and ROKs into the danger zone, where the narrow waist opens up like a fan into sprawling mountains near the Chinese border. Fighting there meant manning a 650-mile front with huge gaps between units. It was a recipe for envelopment.

While the western-based Eighth Army approached the Yalu River, which separated Chinese Manchuria from North Korea, we in X Corps sat tight down east, waiting for the great combined offensive that MacArthur expected to finish off Communist forces in Korea.

MacArthur didn't know or didn't acknowledge that almost 400,000 Chinese troops, the so-called People's Volunteer Army (PVA), had already crossed south of the Yalu and were conducting probing attacks to assess enemy capabilities. This small war was about to explode.

The great combined offensive to end the war began on November 25. We were, on that date, still 180 miles south of the Yalu. We'd inched north by ancient train up to the Chigyeong area.

Our route was to take us away from the coastal plain of Chigyeong into the forbidden mountain wastes of the interior, past a man-made lake more than 4,000 feet above sea level we called the Chosin Reservoir.

Even if all went perfectly, our division would still have been stretched out hazardously thin across inhospitable terrain.

There was one road in and out of Chosin, though to call it a "road" is a stretch. It was little more than one narrow lane of gravel in many places, barely wide enough for a car, let alone a military convoy.

Trucks were our immediate problem. We never had enough. It speaks much to Army-Marine Corps relations in 1950 that the Army got twice the number of trucks per capita as we did. That meant while the rest of our 3rd Battalion headed to the mountain village of Hagaru-ri, at the southern tip of the reservoir, my George Company waited around for transportation. We were not only late getting into the mountains, we also couldn't bring many supplies, weapons, or ammunition with us.

I thank God for our 1st Marine Division commander, Major General Oliver P. "O.P." Smith, who understood our precarious situation and did all he could to improve our supply route and keep our division stocked. He was skeptical of MacArthur's cheery predictions of quick victory and worried that Chinese forces were much larger than MacArthur suspected.



Bob Harbula and British Royal Marine Sgt. John W. Whiting after Chosin (Bob Harbula)

His main superior, commander of X Corps, Army Major General Edward M. Almond, was also O.P. Smith's main adversary. Almond was MacArthur's parrot, and he seemed not to care about or understand what we Marines needed to achieve the mission assigned to us.

We finally departed up the mountain on November 28. Our arrival was supposed to bring our 3rd Battalion up to full strength.

We climbed the ancient road in canvas-topped deuce-and-a-halves. A Siberian front had swept in, and each foot above sea level seemed to remove a precious degree Fahrenheit from the air.

It seemed like we were passing into a Lost World, a frozen moonscape like I'd never seen. It was hard to imagine anything living on what appeared to be a terrestrial iceberg.

We made it as far as the village of Koto-ri, about eleven miles south of Hagaru-ri, where the road split to go around the reservoir's western and eastern shores.

Our 2nd Battalion was dug into a defensive position. They told us the Chinese army--not the NKPA--was blocking our way to Hagaru. The rest of our 3rd Battalion was encircled. And north of them, west of the reservoir, were the 5th, 7th, and 11th Marines. Also north, on the eastern side of the Chosin, was the ill-fated US Army 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT) spread across ten miles.

All were stranded, all surrounded.

The 1st Marine Division had walked into a trap. One-hundred-twenty thousand Chinese soldiers had us encircled.

X Corps commander Almond refused to see the obvious. He ordered the 31st RCT to begin its offensive. "We're still attacking and we're going all the way to the Yalu," he exhorted the soldiers. "Don't let a bunch of Chinese laundry-men stop you."

The only thing saving us was that O.P. Smith understood and had anticipated our predicament. He began plotting our breakout, and even provided for the swift construction of an airstrip at Hagaru. But the key was keeping that thin road--our main supply route and exit--open and passable.

We had no idea, at this point, that the US and UN war effort was crumbling across all of North Korea. The Eighth Army was retreating in chaos toward the 38th Parallel. In the face of a gigantic PVA counteroffensive, poorly-trained Army units were fleeing in terror.

In all of Korea, our small unit was the only one fighting north, toward the enemy. Colonel Puller cobbled George Company together with some British Royal Marines, an Army infantry company, and some Marines from Division HQ. We became "Task Force Drysdale," named after the British Colonel in charge.

The Chinese were well embedded on both sides of the road leading to Hagaru. The steep undulations gave them plenty of cover, and they picked us off at will. We called the area "Hell Fire Valley."

The Royal Marines and George Company leapfrogged each other methodically, advancing through the hills bracketing the road. The British secured the first promontory, then we followed up and fought for the next one, Telegraph Hill.

The fighting was murderous. We were outnumbered ten-to-one with no armor, which hadn't arrived up the perilous mountain road yet. It was probably the worst fighting of the war for me. We hid behind small rocks or humps in the road. We could only see muzzle fire from above. I told my guys to shoot back at the flashes.

We might not have taken Telegraph Hill if my friend and role model, Sgt. Zullo, hadn't stood up to fire a 3.5 rocket launcher from a couple hundred yards away. He scored a direct hit on a crucial enemy bunker. Surviving Chinese soldiers stumbled out in shock, shaking their heads.

But, in truth, we were as good as dead on the road without tanks. The Chinese used roadblocks of trees, rocks, and barrels filled with gravel to stop and dissect us. They chopped our column to pieces. Half our vehicles were destroyed. Our task force lost integrity. Two-thirds of the convoy, the rear two-thirds, were stopped: killed, wounded, captured, turned around. George Company was part of the one-third keeping up the fight. But, without armor, we'd never get to Hagaru.

Our tanks, twenty-nine total, were slowly making their way up the mountain road. By 1100 hours, they'd arrived at Koto-ri for refueling. By then, my squad had been whittled down to half the size we'd started with. We held on until 1600 hours, when darkness started to fall, and the first tanks rumbled into view behind us.

I'd never seen such a beautiful sight. Finally, we thought, enough firepower to break through to Hagaru. We scrambled aboard the behemoths and rode them like chariots. We paid back our tankers by preventing Chinese soldiers with satchel charges from sneaking up close and blowing the tanks up. We kept them at bay with our machine guns and rifles.

The landscape was now draped in pitch-black darkness as we reached a crest in the road. Up ahead, we saw a strange light, like a star had fallen from the sky and landed on the ground, still burning.

"What the hell is that?" we wondered.

Soon, it became clear. Our Star of Hagaru was a field of floodlights used in constructing the Hagaru airstrip.

My fellow squad member Joe Rice turned to me and said, "we're gonna make it."



Road to Chosin (NARA)



"Thanks to the tanks," I replied.

Hagaru came into view. We approached some tents belonging to the 10th Engineer Battalion. What looked like American soldiers emerged and opened fire. They were Chinese dressed in captured helmets and parkas.

Only a third of our task force made it to Hagaru-ri. Another third were killed and wounded. The rest were either captured or made it back to Koto-ri.

One of the last casualties before we entered Hagaru was Sgt. Zullo. He'd been hit in the wrist and abdomen while manning a .50-caliber machine gun. A Navy Corpsman glanced at the wound and ordered he be taken to the temporary morgue, the "dead tent."

Losing Sgt. Zullo was tough. He was the heart and soul of our company.

Imagine my shock when, in the 1990s, I saw Sgt. Zullo at a George Company reunion.

He told us that he coughed in the dead tent, and the Corpsman retrieved him. The subzero temperatures had caused the wound to freeze and his blood to congeal. Otherwise, he would have bled to death.

There was no rest at Hagaru. No showers, warm cots, or hot food either. Instead, I was called into a meeting of squad leaders and ordered to assault East Hill where a division of the PVA was staging for an assault on our base camp.

The exhaustion we felt is hard to describe. We'd been through thirteen hours of constant combat, where one step is the equivalent of three.

But, up the hill we trudged at 0800 hours on November 30. The path was a sheet of ice, so slick we had to chop our way up using our entrenching tools and bayonets. It was literally two steps forward, one slip back.

Three quarters of the way up the hill, anti-personnel shells began exploding above us. The airbursts sent shrapnel flying into our ranks. A big piece hit Joe Rice in the back of his head. He died in my arms.

Dusk fell, and the Chinese attacked, charging downhill. We'd prepared for this. We weren't able to dig foxholes because of the frozen ground. What little cover we had was from the bodies of dead Chinese we piled around us. We set up our machine guns and waited.

The attack came almost as a blessing, not only to break the tension but to get our blood flowing. Temperatures had dipped to thirty degrees below zero.

The PVA soldiers ran screaming, bugles blaring, cymbals clanging, whistles crying, and flares bursting in bright colors.

As the enemy neared, I gave the order to fire. I squeezed the trigger on my light .30. Nothing. The infantryman's worst fear. My weapon was frozen.

The Chinese penetrated the perimeter.

"Grenades!" I yelled.

The small explosions bought us only a few moments. There were just too many of them.

In fact, there were more enemy men than there were

enemy weapons. The first wave was armed. The second wasn't. These later Chinese picked up the weapons of their downed comrades to continue the fight. Those who turned and ran back were often shot by a third wave of armed Chinese, who were also shooting at us.

I drew my .45 pistol and emptied the clip. Every round must have landed. There were that many bodies coming at us. I then took off my helmet off and swung wildly. I heard some noses break and skulls crack.

An officer cried behind me to pull back and reform our line.

I dropped into a shell hole to reload my pistol. Four motionless Marines were sprawled out in the hole. I assumed they were dead. But one quiet voice cut through the chaos.

"Bob, don't leave me."

I looked down and saw Cpl. Dick Haller with his eyes open. He was first platoon's other machine gun squad leader. His weapon was also out of action. He'd been shot in both legs.

I grabbed Haller by the hood of his parka and headed for the reverse slope, firing my .45 as I stumbled. We reached the slope and some Chinese appeared. I threw my empty pistol at them and screamed, "Shoot, you bastards!"

I have no idea if they fired or if they were even armed. As I dragged Haller downhill, a sharp pain suddenly radiated up my leg. I blacked out from the pain. Then, I came to and continued dragging Haller by the hood.

At the bottom of the hill, I saw Pfc. Jim Feemster with a jeep.

"Get us to sickbay!" I yelled as I loaded Haller in the back. We made the quick drive to the tent, and just as we exited the jeep a bullet slammed Feemster in the right thigh. I delivered the two wounded Marines to sick bay.

As I hobbled toward the exit, a Navy surgeon ordered me to stop and remove my shoepac. The knot in the back of my heel told the story: a ruptured Achilles tendon.

"You're out of action," he said. "You'll have to be evacuated."

"I can't leave, sir. My men need me."

"Too bad," he retorted. "They're going to have to do without you, boy."

Then, the surgeon turned to an aid. "Tag him for air evac."

Five days later, what was left of George Company—"Bloody George"—were relieved by the 5th Marines.

I rejoined Bloody George near Masan, South Korea, in January 1951 after four weeks of therapy in Japan. The men greeted me with joy. They'd all heard I was Missing in Action. That's what my parents had heard also, through a somber telegram delivered to the house.

Mail from home caught up with me. There was a letter from my brother John. I opened it.

"Dear Bob," it began, "Why didn't you tell me you were a hero?"

It turns out, John had been driving from Camp LeJeune back home to Pittsburgh and had picked up a Marine hitchhiker on crutches. They got to talking. The hitchhiker was Dick Haller. My family now knew my story.

George Company was a mostly new unit. Only sixty-seven of the original 255 men who'd landed with me at Inchon were still there. I began greeting the 170 or so replacements.

We were soon back in combat, fighting the PVA well below the 38th Parallel in South Korea. More hill fights, more hand-to-hand, more death and horror. How I survived, I'll never know. At one point, each man in Bloody George dug forty-five foxholes in forty-five days. That's a month-and-a-half without bathing, brushing your teeth, or changing clothes.

There were many close calls. Several in my squad died from friendly fire. One was a 105mm shells that exploded in our midst. It knocked me out, face down. I came to covered in blood and gore. "This is it," I thought.

But I could move my legs. I could move my arms. I wiggled my fingers. I looked back and saw a pair of boots with feet in them. That's all that was left. Why him and not me?

I left Korea in June 1951 on a slow ship back to the States. Once aboard, I was told I owed the Marine Corps one more year. Truman had extended all of us.

With little else to do, I started running a blackjack game in the ship's hold. My luck in surviving Korea was compounded by a series of winning hands. I made much more aboard ship than a year's worth of my \$82-a-month Marine Corps pay. I used the cash to buy a brand new 1951 Oldsmobile 88.

Like my brother in 1948, I was now a Marine with a shiny car.

Back home, no one had heard of Chosin, and few wanted to talk about the war. I never spoke about it. I never saw another member of George Company for forty years. It was all like a distant nightmare, a great adventure, but as far as I knew, I was the only one who remembered it.

Even World War II veterans failed to welcome us. The VFW turned us away because we hadn't fought a war, but a UN "police action." Some VA hospitals denied Korean War veterans access because Congress hadn't approved an official war declaration.

I was twenty-one years old when I got my discharge from the Marine Corps. I thought I'd make a good security guard, so I applied for a job at a new Westinghouse military research and development facility in my hometown, the Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory.

"You're not old enough," said the personnel director. "Come back when you're twenty-five."



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THE MYTH OF THE TOOTSIE ROLL AIRDROP AT CHOSIN

by Todd DePastino

The story about the accidental Tootsie Roll airdrop at the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir ranks among the greatest in American military lore.

But it probably isn't true.

Legend has it that during the desperate fight at Chosin, Marines ran out of 60mm mortars, useful for delivering high, arching fire over the ridgelines at Chinese forces. With their supply depleted, Marines radioed for airdrop resupply using the code word for 60mm mortars: TOOTSIE ROLLS.

The US Air Force operator at the other end of the radio didn't have the Marines' code sheets. He assumed that TOOTSIE ROLLS meant, well, the chocolate-flavored taffy issued with C-rations.

So, the order went out to the Air Force Combat Cargo Command to load its C-119s Flying Boxcars in Japan with pallets of chewy candy and parachute them down to the ground troops fighting in frozen North Korea.

At first bewildered by the delivery, the story goes, the Marines came to see the Tootsie Rolls as a godsend. With C-rations frozen, the candy could be thawed easily in armpits and then popped into mouths to stave off hunger and provide a quick dose of energy. The enterprising Marines also found that warm Tootsie Rolls could be molded to plug bullet holes in fuel tanks and radiators. The 30-below-zero temperatures ensured the candy putty patches would refreeze and hold.

Part of the story is true. Some of the earliest accounts of Chosin contain references to an odd superabundance of Tootsie Rolls. 1st Marine Division veteran Edward M. Szymciak recalled, "Tootsie Rolls were our main diet while fighting our way out of the Reservoir. You can bet there were literally thousands of Tootsie Roll wrappers scattered over North Korea."

Most Marines disdained Tootsie Rolls, both during the war and afterwards. Many considered them subpar confections fit only for children. A few Marines went on record during the 1980s as saying they would never touch Tootsie Rolls again after having eaten so many during Chosin.

But why so many Tootsie Rolls at Chosin to begin with?

The answer is two-fold.

First, during World War II, this penny-candy was marketed to adults as energy food. "Grown-ups who want to be more like tireless youngsters," read one ad, "should do what kids do—eat plenty of chewy chocolatey Tootsie Rolls . . . packed with energy." The military added Tootsie

Rolls to rations because they wouldn't melt in the heat. One WWII ad featured a Marine who'd just stolen a Tootsie Roll from a child. "Rich is DEXTROSE for quick food-energy," claims the ad.

So, wherever Marines went in the 1950s, plenty of Tootsie Rolls followed.

That included Hagaru-ri, just south of the Chosin Reservoir, where the Marine Corps had expected to establish a rear base. Before their encirclement by the Chinese, Marines in the Post Exchange Section had trucked in tons of merchandise to sell at the PX when the shooting in the area stopped. Those shipments included a lot of candy, especially Tootsie Rolls.

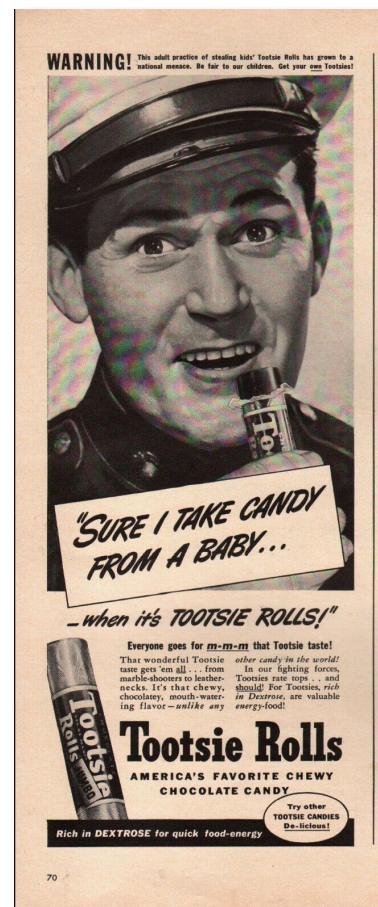
But the shooting didn't stop, and the Marines at Hagaru had to plot their evacuation. The plan was to load everything of value aboard trucks for the return trip to the coast. There would be no room on the vehicles for the Tootsie Rolls and other retail stock designated for the never-to-be-realized PX at Hagaru.

So, General O.P. Smith gave the order to distribute the supply (worth \$13,547.80, according to official Marine Corps history first published in 1957) free-of-charge to the Marines at Chosin.

That accounts for the Tootsie Roll dump Chosin survivors all remember so vividly. And, sure enough, some used the candy to plug leaky radiators.

But while there were indeed airdrops of badly needed 60mm mortars and other supplies, mostly ammunition, Tootsie Rolls weren't delivered by air.

The truth about the Tootsie Rolls at Chosin is more prosaic than the legend. But, at least it relieves the Air Force of one embarrassing radio operator whose failure to deliver was only redeemed by Marine Corps ingenuity.



Survivors in Allach, a sub-camp of Dachau, greet arriving U.S. troops./
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Wikimedia commons)

RETIRED BELGIAN ARMY COLONEL PAYS TRIBUTE TO US SERVICE MEMBERS, THEN AND NOW

On our March 6 VBC Happy Hour with Purple Heart Women Warriors, retired Belgian Army colonel, Roger Housen, spoke about why he and Duke Leopold of Arenberg of Belgium supported publication of Out of the Shadows: Voices of American Women Soldiers, written by Vietnam Marine veteran Ron Farina. Several people requested written copies of Roger's comments. He kindly obliged by sending the transcript of his remarks.

Good evening to you all from Belgium. (For your information, it's now 1 AM in the morning at this side of the Atlantic.)

Please allow me to explain briefly the Duke of Arenberg's, as well as my own involvement in the book project 'Out Of The Shadows'.

During World War II, Duke Leopold's mother and her family survived three Nazi concentration camps and were rescued by American troops. More than sixty years later in San Antonio, TX, the Duke met American colonel Al Metts to express his gratitude for what he had done in May 1945 as a young lieutenant, fighting for others in a European war and liberating the Duke's mother.

At the end of the war, Duke Leopold's father was expecting a sure death in a Gestapo prison when the arrival of American troops allowed him to escape just before being shot, hanged or beheaded.

The Duke wouldn't be living today without American intervention and he doesn't forget. American service members have his eternal gratitude.

As for myself, as a little boy, I heard my grandparents hundreds of times tell incredible stories about the Second World War. How their region in Belgium was liberated by American and British soldiers. How they put an end to their constant hunger and latent fear. How, after four long years of uncertainty, their lives finally regained hope and perspective. How American service members not only brought with them food and freedom, but also new styles of music, canned beef, fruit drinks and chewing gum. And how the Marshall plan helped Belgium get back on its feet economically.

It was then that I decided I would take up the gun. Out of respect and gratitude for the American service members who came to liberate us. From the awareness that, sometimes, only a gun stands between good and evil. A gun. Not to shoot. Not to kill. Not to destroy. But to stop those who would do evil. To protect the vulnerable, to defend democratic values, to stand up for the freedom we have and we want to protect.

Where do the US get such exceptional men and women, willing to sacrifice everything - even their lives, Duke



Roger Housen,
Colonel (retd.) Belgian Army

Leopold and I often ask ourselves? Where do those qualities of the good and noble arise in America to produce such an embodiment of our most precious qualities of sacrifice, loyalty, bravery and patriotism?

We think that it is at the dinner tables, church pews, classrooms and firesides of middle-America that those latent qualities - your qualities - are forged. It is the distillation of those qualities in the cauldron of war which makes you so different from the rest of us, so much the best part of us. We are shamed by your sacrifice, by your fierce loyalties, by your stoic acceptance of unimaginable hardship.

So you serve, and endure, and persevere and suffer - nameless and invisible to the wider world whose safety is your constant gift. Indifferent to public praise and private fortune, you carry the banner of civilization to foreign shores, and there, on some wind-swept, boulder-strewn parapet on the edge of chaos and barbarism, you plant that banner. Standing there, you turn and call to us in words that echo down through the ages - "Sleep soundly," you say, "Sleep soundly because no one will hurt you tonight."

We in Belgium know how lucky we are to sleep beneath the blanket of freedom and security America's brave men and women in the military provide, and we are grateful every day that you have the fortitude and dedication to give so much to make that happen.

Dear sisters-in-arms, you have given up so much for your country and you have made so huge efforts to preserve our Western way of life. That is something that cannot be repaid. What makes you all so great is that you give so much and do not expect anything back.

Thank you for your bravery, strength, hard work, commitment, dedication and willingness to do the hard things that are required of you day in and day out. You've often given up everything to fight for your beloved ones, that is something we don't take lightly. So, thank you for everything that you do.

Thank you, American soldier. Thank you, American veteran.

Roger Housen, Colonel (retd.) Belgian Army



HOW COLLECTING MILKWEED SAVED LIVES IN WORLD WAR II

FEATURE

by Bob Podurgiel

Common Milkweed seed pods are about 4 inches long, inflated looking and covered in little bumpy projections. They are green initially, turning brown as they mature. They split open revealing 50-100 seeds each with a white, fluffy coma ("parachute") that allows wind dispersal (National Park Service)

On warm summer days, grade school student John Oyler liked to pick blackberries growing profusely on the hillsides along Washington Pike in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania, but throughout World War II he searched for another plant on those same hillsides, this time as part of his contribution to the war effort.

"We collected milkweed seed pods in onion sacks, then hung them along fences to dry. Later they would be washed and the military would collect the pods. The entire grade school would collect milkweed. We were scared stiff. Everybody wanted to do what we could to help the war effort," he said.

Bridgeville wasn't the only town where young people searched for milkweed during the war.

Third-grade-student, Clyde Seigler, along with his younger brother Ralph, in first grade at the time, scoured the countryside of Brooke County, in the Northern West Virginia Panhandle, looking for milkweed during the late summer and early fall when the seed pods ripened.

They knew exactly where to look.

"Milkweed grew all through the hayfields. Farmers didn't like it because the cows couldn't eat it," Clyde Seigler said.

Not only did the farmers not like milkweed, the US Department of Agriculture had classified the plant as a "noxious weed." Farmers burned it, yanked it out of the ground, or plowed it under in the spring.

All of that was about to change.

Soon after the Japanese launched their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, they unleashed a lightning offensive to capture the resources of the Dutch East Indies, present day Indonesia. The Japanese Imperial Army and Navy quickly overwhelmed a hastily gathered defense force of Dutch, English, and Australian troops, supported by an artillery regiment from Texas.

The Japanese were after the abundant resources on the islands of the Dutch East Indies, many of them rich in oil, rubber, and kapok. While most people are familiar with the strategic importance of rubber and oil, kapok in 1941 was just as vital.

Harvested from the seed pods of the ceiba tree growing on the island of Java, kapok was a buoyant, cotton-like fiber used by almost every nation to fill the life jackets of airmen and sailors.

American Servicemen Are Drowning

With the supply of kapok cut off by the Japanese, the U.S. War Department desperately needed a substitute. Much of the war would be fought over and in the waters of the Pacific, ranging from the icy waters off the coast

of Alaska, where Americans fought the Japanese in the Aleutian Islands, to the tropical waters of the Coral Sea in the South Pacific.

Americans fighting in the European Theatre of Operations in the early part of the war faced a similar, perhaps even more drastic problem.

German U-boat commanders called 1942 the "happy time." Lurking off the Atlantic coast of the United States, U-boats sank 232 ships, killing 5,000 seamen and passengers in their relentless assault on American shipping.

Armed with deadly torpedoes that could break the keel of a ship and send a freighter or oil tanker to the bottom of the sea in a matter of minutes, the U-boats threatened to strangle the flow of supplies from America to England, vital to keeping the British in the war.

Things weren't much better for the air crews of the American 8th Air Force, flying bomber missions in B-17s over Nazi-occupied Europe. Often they had to fly from England over the icy waters of the North Sea on missions to Europe then return over those same waters after the bombing mission, often in planes heavily damaged by German flak and fighter attacks. Many planes didn't make it back to England, ditching in the frigid water.

Casualties in those early days of the war among our bomber crews from drowning were severely hampering our ability to wage the air war over Europe.

The chances of an American flier surviving a crash into the waters of the North Sea or North Atlantic were only about six percent in

1942 through the first half of 1943, a U.S. Air Force Air/Sea Rescue study released after the war found.

The answer to America's pressing need to save our sailors and airmen from drowning came from an enterprising physician and inventor from Chicago named Boris Berkman, and he would rely on school-age children in the United States and Canada to make his plan work.

Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Dr. Berkman advocated for the many products to be made from milkweed, ranging from pressboard and insulation to surgical dressing. In 1939, he filed a patent application for a milkweed gin to process the plant.

When the call went out from the War Department in 1942 for a kapok substitute, Dr. Berkman believed the floss from inside the milkweed seed pods could not only replace kapok, but would work even better as a filler for life preservers and flight jackets.

After contacting the Navy, he launched a series of tests with Navy personnel on milkweed floss to prove his theory.



Newspaper clipping of Pittsburgh children protecting milkweed plants (Courtesy of the Senator John Heinz History Center)

Common milkweed seeds form in pods that look like little green bananas. When the seed pods crack open in the fall or late summer, depending on weather conditions, the seeds drift on the wind attached to silky white threads called floss. The floss acted like a tiny parachute to keep the seeds aloft drifting on the breeze. If the seeds landed on soil exposed to full sun, a new plant would emerge the next year.

Never grown as a commercial crop, common milkweed flourished in ditches, along roads and railways, and in farmer's fields, anywhere where there was a bare patch of soil and plenty of sunlight.

Dr. Berkman contacted the Navy, and with the cooperation of Navy personnel, he conducted a series of tests on milkweed to prove his theory that it could work as fill for life preservers and flight vests.

The tests found one pound of milkweed floss was as warm as wool, but six times as light, and it was six times as buoyant as cork. A life jacket filled with floss could keep a 150-pound man afloat for more than 40 hours. Twenty pounds of floss was required to make one life jacket to save a sailor or aviator from drowning.

He presented his findings to a congressional agriculture committee in March 1942. Soon afterward, the government removed milkweed's classification as a "noxious weed" and changed it to a "strategic wartime material." The race was now on to collect as much milkweed as possible when the seed pods matured in the late summer and early fall of 1942.

The Harvest Begins

Dr. Berkman set up a processing plant for milkweed in the tiny town of Petoskey, Michigan, using the design for the milkweed gin he had received a patent for in 1939 to separate the floss from seeds in the milkweed pods.

How to collect the seed pods, however, containing the precious silky floss presented a challenge. While milkweed grew throughout the Appalachian Mountains region and into Ohio, Michigan, and Southern Canada, it couldn't be harvested with traditional agricultural methods using tractors. The plant seemed to grow at random, like blackberries, a patch here and there.

Dr. Berkman huddled with military officials, and they decided to reach out to American school children, Boy and Girl Scout troops, and community groups throughout the country, but American school children would make up the bulk of the collection force.

Rear Admiral E.L. Cochrane, chief of the Navy's Bureau of Ships, urged citizens "who want to contribute directly to victory and save the lives of American fighting men" to collect milkweed.

The government came up with the slogan, "Two bags (of milkweed pods) save one life."

Newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* publicized the need for milkweed, and even launched a "milkweed drive," offering \$500 in prizes. An ad in the paper asked young people to become members of the *Sun-Telegraph* Junior Victory Army, who when they signed the pledge, would promise "that all of the precious milkweed in my neighborhood is not destroyed and that it is harvested at the proper time. I do this as my help in keeping the production of life jackets for our fighting men at top peak."

Hundreds of children signed the pledge. They were joined by a veritable army of young people searching for milkweed East of the Mississippi River and by children in Canada's Ontario and Quebec. During the war, children such as Clyde Seigler collected enough floss to fill more than 1.2 million life vests for America's fighting men and women, saving thousands of lives.

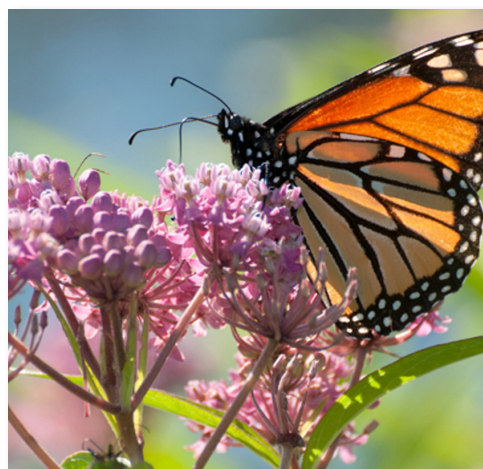
Western Pennsylvania, like West Virginia, proved a good region for harvesting milkweed. Not only was the city of Pittsburgh surrounded by farm fields and sunny hillsides where milkweed thrived, but the hardy plant also grew in vacant lots and along roadsides in the industrial heart of the city and the Monongahela River Valley.

The Navy initially requested 200,000 pounds of milkweed floss in 1942, then ordered another 100,000 pounds. Demand for floss would increase exponentially. In 1943, the Navy alone ordered 1.5 million pounds of floss, meaning the children and volunteers faced the difficult task of collecting 30 million pounds of milkweed pods.

They Were Just Glad to Help

Thanks to the efforts of youngsters like John Oyler and Clyde and Ralph Seigler, the country was able to meet the growing demand for milkweed by the military throughout the war. After the war, synthetic fibers were developed that would replace the need for milkweed floss.

There was so much need for the milkweed floss the government during the war began to pay a bounty for the pods. The going rate was twenty-cents a bag.



Top: Milkweed seed pod and floss.
Bottom: Mature Monarch butterfly feeding on milkweed nectar (Jennifer Prince CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph clipping courtesy of the Senator John Heinz History Center.

Clyde Seigler said he didn't take any money for the seed pods he and his brother Ralph collected.

"It was just a good thing to do. Everyone wanted to help the war effort. It was a serious time," he said.

He remembers farmers contributing to scrap metal drives by pulling rusty tractors out of fields – the same fields where milkweed flourished.

Today Clyde still has a connection to milkweed.

Upon learning last year that the beautiful orange and black butterfly he would often see on his walks in the countryside of West Virginia was endangered, he decided to plant the former "noxious weed" on property he owns in Clinton, Pennsylvania. His brother Ralph does the same thing on his property in nearby Oakdale.

Turns out the plant they once harvested to save the lives of American flyers and sailors also is vital to the lives of monarch butterflies. They lay their eggs on the plant, and its leaves are the caterpillars' only source of nourishment before they build a chrysalis and emerge as new butterflies.

Milkweed flowers also supply nectar to fuel the mature monarchs on their yearly migration from the mountains of Central Mexico through the United States into Canada in the summer, then back again to Mexico in the late summer and early fall.

Each year, monarchs fly upwards of 3,000 miles in the longest yearly migration of an insect species in the world. It takes five generations of monarchs to complete the full cycle of the migration from Mexico to Canada and back again.

Both Clyde and Ralph Seigler, now in their 80s, saw collecting milkweed pods as part of their patriotic duty to help the country and save the lives of airmen and sailors during a time of war. Today they are still saving flyers, but of a different sort – the monarch butterfly.

Bob Podurgiel is a freelance writer who lives in Carnegie, Pennsylvania. His father Walter Podurgiel served with the 30th Infantry Division in World War II, fighting in France, Belgium and Germany. Parts of this story appeared previously in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette goodness section in October, 2022.

FINAL SALUTE

TO THOSE WHO RECENTLY PASSED, WE SALUTE YOU.



Angelo Vento, WWII, Navy

Umberto Cerminara
Cold War, Marines

Ken Enscoe
Cold War Army

Edward J. Morrison
Vietnam, Army

Robert Ramming
Vietnam, Army

Angelo Vento
WWII, Navy

Lt. Col Carl J. Walpusk
Korean War and WWII, Army



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FEATURE

PART OF THE CHANGE: ELIZABETH ANNE HELM-FRAZIER, MASTER SERGEANT

Above background: Members of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion take part in a parade ceremony in honor of Joan d'Arc at the marketplace where she was burned at the stake (Wikimedia Commons). Right foreground: Elizabeth at Basic Training graduation, 1981.

Elizabeth Anne Helm-Frazier retired from the Army as a Master Sergeant after twenty-five years, ten-months, and twenty-six days of military service. Elizabeth held a variety of high-profile positions in personnel (MOS 75-Echo) and career counseling (MOS 79-Sierra). She was US Army TRADOC's Career Counselor of the Year, San Antonio's Mentor of the Year, and was inducted into the Army Women's Foundation Hall of Fame. Since retiring in 2006, she has thrown herself into service. She's especially committed to keeping alive the legacy of the 6888th Postal Battalion. She helped raise funds to build a monument to the 6888th Battalion at Fort Leavenworth, served as a producer of the critically acclaimed documentary *The Six Triple Eight*, worked on gaining the unit a Congressional Gold Medal, and, most recently, got the National Archives to designate September 16 as National 6888th Battalion Day. Below, she discusses those who inspired her to become an Army changemaker in her own right.

My father never forgave me for joining the Army in 1981.

I thought he'd be proud. When my younger brother Johnie announced he was joining right out of high school, my parents were excited for him.

Not so for me. I came home, age 20, and told my mother I'd enlisted. She shot to the telephone and started calling people, like it was a family emergency. She probably dialed twelve people in two minutes. One of them was my dad, who lived nearby.

"You need to come up here and talk to your daughter because she has joined the army."

I still didn't understand what the problem was. I thought my dad would be happy about it since he and his brother were both veterans.

"The only women who join the Army are failures in life. They either can't get married or are gay." That's what he said.

Thank goodness for my grandfather, Johnie Davenport. He'd served in World War II as an Army cook. He came to my defense.

"Look," he said, "you're an adult. You have to make your own decisions. If you do what others want, you'll regret it."

He continued, "If you join the Army, three things will happen. You'll get smarter because you'll learn everything you can. You'll be a better person because of the experience you'll get and the people you'll meet. And, if you stay in twenty years, you'll get a government check for life."

He was right on all three counts.

Four years later at my re-enlistment ceremony at Fort Gordon, my mother said, "I'm glad you didn't let me influence you. This is the best thing you've ever done."

My father never came around. He died in 1998 without commending my service.

But, despite his retrograde views, my dad, along with my mother, had raised me to serve. Our community of Ridgecrest in Largo, Florida, was a largely self-contained African American community with a gas station, dry cleaner, barber shops, beauty shops, grocery stores, and, of course, a Baptist Church. My parents and my grandparents were active in the community. Everybody knew each other, and I seemed to be related to half the town. We supported each other, and everyone served.

I think that's why I liked the Army so much. I found the same kind of supportive community there.

Of course, there were challenges. In Basic Training at Fort Dix in 1981, there was only one female platoon, thirty-three of us recruits. But we supported each other, and thirty of us graduated.

Our Drill Instructor, Sergeant First Class Martin Pate III, pushed us toward success.



Members of the Women's Army Corps 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion sort packages taken from mail sacks by French civilian employees at the 17th Base Post Office in Paris, France, Nov. 7, 1945 (NARA)

"The only person stopping you from achieving is you," he said. "All of you here have the capability, the competency, the qualifications to do whatever you want to do in the military. The Army is changing. People might say you can't do a particular job because you're a woman. Don't let that stop you."

That little speech had a huge impact on me. "I can be whatever I want to be," I said to myself. I became driven now by two things: proving my father wrong and Sergeant Pate right.

And Sergeant Pate was right. The Army was changing.

Yes, I had the n-word spat at me, and, yes, a few told me women didn't have a right to serve in the Army.

But many others not only encouraged me to grow but gave me the tools to do it.

Sergeant Bob Anderson at Fort Gordon, for example, told me I had to hone my public speaking and be able to talk with authority to all ranks, high and low. He enrolled me in Toastmasters and, then, when he saw I was ready, kicked me out of the nest for a better position at Fort Ord, California. I owe so much to Bob.

Back when I was fresh E-4, new at Fort Gordon, I thought I saw an officer out of the corner of my eye walking toward me. So, I stopped and saluted.

"Soldier, don't salute me, I'm not an officer," she said. It was First Sergeant Theola Melton. She was Black, and I was in awe.

Later, I went to her office.

"First Sergeant," I said, after introducing myself, "I want to be just like you."

"I'm honored that you want to be like me," she said, "but I want you to be better than me. The Army is changing, and you're going to be a part of that change."

It was like she was passing the torch.

"I'm old, soldier," she said. "But you are going to be able to do so much more than I was able to do. So, you be better than me."

I took that advice and modeled my career after Theola Melton.

And there's been more progress since I retired in 2006.

I saw more women, more people of color entering my field of career counseling. And now, combat arms is open to women. So is air defense and artillery. Women are in Special Forces. I got to see General Ann E. Dunwoody promoted to a four-star in 2008. Six years later, Admiral Michelle Howard received her fourth star, the first Black woman to hold that rank in the US military. The opportunities seem endless now.

And that's because of the women who came before us, like those of the 6888th Postal Battalion.

I first learned about the 6888th Battalion from that now well-known photo of Major Charity Adams reviewing a formation of soldiers in World War II. All the soldiers were Black women. I'd seen the photo during Black History Month and Women's History Month. But I never knew what the unit was or the story behind it.

I just kept the photograph because I liked it and found it inspiring.

Then, in early 2002, I saw the photo again in a newspaper obituary of Charity Adams Earley. I learned she'd been the first African American woman to be an officer in the Army WACs and commanded the first battalion of African American women to serve overseas during World War II. After the war, she worked at the VA, taught college, and devoted her life to community service.

Someone gave me her autobiography, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC*, and I read it cover-to-cover. This was history, our history, my history.

I saw immediately that I achieved what I did in the Army because of the hardships and struggles Charity Adams and fellow Black WACs endured. They blazed the trail, and I became determined that their history wouldn't be forgotten.

I'd like to think that if my dad could know the story of the 6888th Battalion, he might see me and my service in a different light.

Maybe he'd even say those words I'd always longed to hear him say: "I'm proud of you."

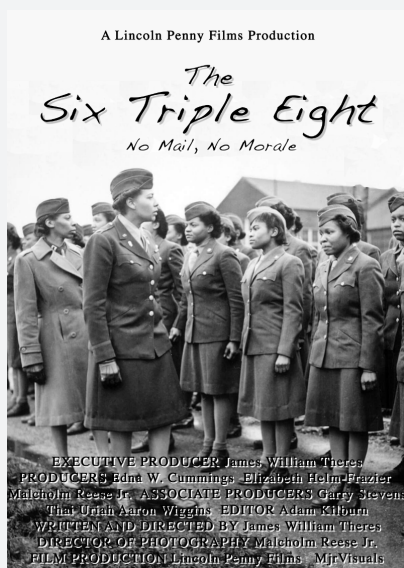


Retired Master Sgt. Elizabeth Helm-Frazier touches the bust made in the likeness of battalion commander Lt. Col. Charity Adams on the monument honoring the all-female, all-African-American 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion Nov. 29, 2018 in the Buffalo Soldier Commemorative Area, Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Elizabeth was on the project team to help get the monument funded so that future generations will know that women in uniform also helped guarantee freedom. (Prudence Siebert, Fort Leavenworth Lamp)

UPCOMING EVENT

HONORING THE 6888TH POSTAL BATTALION ON SEPTEMBER 16

Join us on **Saturday, September 16 at 7:00pm ET (4pm PT)** to mark **National 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion Day** with a screening of the documentary *The Six Triple Eight*, followed by a conversation with filmmakers James Theres and Elizabeth Anne Helm-Frazier.



Until ten years ago, few Americans had ever heard of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only all-African American, all-female unit that served overseas during World War II.

Now, after James Theres' documentary, countless news articles, a Congressional Gold Medal, and a soon-to-be-released Tyler Perry-directed feature movie, *Six Triple Eight*, the story of the 855 women sent

to England and France to untangle a two-year backlog of undelivered GI mail is known and celebrated nationwide.

We have Elizabeth Anne Helm-Frazier to thank for bringing this previously unheralded Women's Army Corps unit to public awareness. Along with retired Army Colonel Edna Cummings, Elizabeth has worked for years to honor a generation of pioneering soldiers who blazed a trail for the women of color who followed.

The 6888th Battalion was born of crisis in February 1945. Seven million pieces of US mail destined for eight million GIs in Europe were stacked to the ceilings in British and French warehouses.

In the context of global war, undelivered letters and parcels don't, at first glance, rank as urgent problems. But for American troops, mail call was a lifeline, the only connection to home, and the most important factor for maintaining morale.

Commanded by Major Charity Adams, the first Black woman officer in the Army WACs, the 6888th Battalion served in a strictly segregated US Army, where facilities

were separate and unequal. The women took on their mission with inadequate resources and little equipment. All they had was the determination and ingenuity to categorize, sort, and redirect mail to its intended recipients.

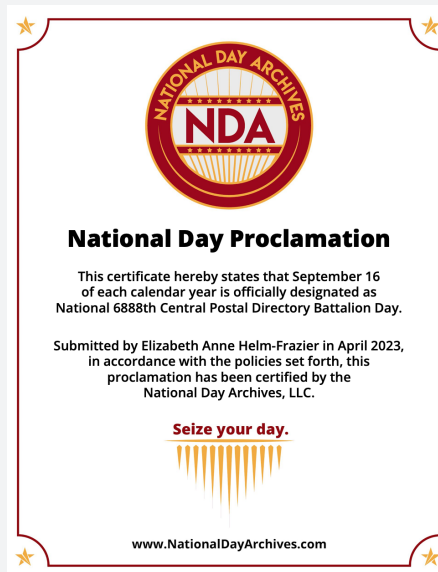
The battalion sorted 65,000 pieces of mail, on average, each shift, a number made more remarkable considering many envelopes had indecipherable addresses or simply read "Robert Smith, US Army, ETO." Which of the 7,500 Robert Smiths in Europe was supposed to get this letter?

In many cases, the only solution was to open the mail, read the letter, and search for identifying information, such as hometown newspapers or local addresses, to determine the correct recipients. In such a way, the women of the "Six Triple Eight" cleared the backlog in Britain in three months. In France, with the aid of civilians and German POWs, they dispatched an even larger mountain of mail in less than six.

Veterans of the 6888th Battalion returned home to a country still dominated by Jim Crow. In 1942, the nation's largest black newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, had called upon readers to embrace a "Double V" campaign for democracy and freedom at home and abroad. This challenge to racial segregation would only bear fruit in the decades following World War II, as the modern Civil Rights Movement took hold.

But the memory of Charity Adams and her WAC soldiers would endure as inspiration for future generations of Black women soldiers, like Elizabeth, who now honor their predecessors by sharing their story.

You can join our film screening and conversation on September 16 by going to veteransbreakfastclub.org/events.



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EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY: THE BERLIN WAR GOES UP, 1961

by Phil Metzler

In the spring 2023 issue of VBC Magazine, we ran an article about the Berlin Airlift of 1948-1949. Army veteran Phil Metzler of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, responded by sharing his own memories of serving in Berlin, not in the Airlift, but thirteen years later during the second Berlin Crisis. Below is his story. After his time in Germany, Phil would serve another five years in the Army Reserve as Commander of the 29th Administrative Company of the 29th Infantry Division, Maryland National Guard.

In June 1958, I graduated from the Pennsylvania Military College with a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army. Two months later, I married my girlfriend, Sue.

It was “peacetime,” so I could choose to go on active duty for either two years or six months. The shorter option meant six extra years in the Reserve, so I chose the longer stint.

I had excellent duty for those two years: Adjutant General School at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, followed by an assignment at the Presidio in San Francisco as a Personnel and Special Services officer for the 40th Artillery Group.

As the end of my tour drew near, my Captain called me in and asked if I had given any thought to staying on active duty.

“Officers in your branch are needed in Germany,” he explained. “If you took your wife along, it would require a three-year commitment.”

I went home and mentioned the offer to my wife. Her response has gone down in Metzler family lore:

“When do we pack?”

So it was that on March 1, 1960, Sue, our two-month-old daughter Margie, and I boarded a Douglas DC-7 turboprop at Idlewild Airport in Jamaica Bay, New York, with dozens of other military personnel and their dependents. Our destination was Rhein-Main Air Base near Frankfurt, after fuel stops in Greenland and Ireland.

We sat tight in a Rhein-Main base hotel for a couple days and then boarded an old Douglas C-47 “Goony Bird” with metal bucket seats. We flew over Soviet air space in East Germany and touched down at Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin.



BERLIN WALL REINFORCED -- Under the watchful eye of Communist police, East German workers near the Brandenburg Gate reinforce the wall dividing the city. Since erecting the wall on August 13, 1961, to stop the flow of East Germans into West Berlin, the East German Communists have added bunkers, spotlights and firing and observation posts. Photo from IPS. (61-12996. Accompanies Z-1/71-SN-49.)

East German workers near the Brandenburg Gate reinforce the Berlin Wall (NARA)

I reported for duty the next day as assistant housing officer. My job was to inspect NCO and Junior Officer quarters at check-in and check-out. Later, I became Army Postmaster in charge of the mail in West Berlin for all US military and civilian personnel.

It was good duty, and our lives were peaceful for the first year-and-a-half. We traveled around the region freely. Access to East Berlin was easy. No restrictions. No checkpoints.

On May 21, 1960, Soviet officers even attended our Armed Forces Day parade as well as the reception that followed at the Officers Club.

By the following year, however, the mood of the city had changed dramatically.

Relations between the United States and the Soviet Union had soured. Berlin became a flash point in the Cold War, just as it had during the Airlift thirteen years earlier.

Millions of East Germans had migrated to the West since the Airlift. Most, at first, fled for political reasons as the Communist regime in the East crushed every hint of dissent.

In 1960, a new flood of economic dissidents began leaving the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as East Germany was called. A coercive new Seven-Year Plan all but wiped out private ownership of farms, shops, and industry in the GDR. The economy ground to a halt, and young, white collar workers, East Germany's best and brightest, began to flee.

Most of them simply walked into West Berlin to start new lives in the Federal Republic of Germany, the US-aligned state in the West. By August 1961, the East German brain drain reached 2,000 per day.

We in the Army saw this mass migration first-hand, as waves of luggage-toting East Berliners were processed non-stop through the Marienfelde Refugee Transit Camp in the American sector. There, they received the basics—food, medicine, shelter—and then were flown to points west for settlement.

The mass exodus was a humiliation for the Soviets. In June 1961, at a summit in Vienna, Austria, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev threatened President John F. Kennedy with cutting off US access to West Berlin, much like Khrushchev's predecessor, Josef Stalin, had tried to do during the Airlift.

We all began to wonder if the much-feared Third World War would flare up right where we stood, in West Berlin.

We kept up with our normal duties into early summer, but our infantry troops and tank units intensified their training.

Sunday, August 13, 1961, dawned a cool, bright, and crystal clear 50 degrees, a perfect day for a drive around town.

Sue and I packed Margie and our new baby into our little Volkswagen Beetle and made our way toward the reception center at Marienfelde, where there were small wooded areas for family recreation.

The line of refugees waiting at the transit camp was tremendous, several blocks long. Those in line seemed to know that something was up. Something big.

Just across the border, in East Berlin, we could see some military activity. It looked like East German troops laying concertina wire.

I told my wife that we better head back to our apartment as I was sure we were going to go on alert.

Sure enough, as soon as we got back, I was told to put on fatigues, grab my combat gear, and report to the Army Post Office. We stayed mostly on alert for the next several weeks. This Wall going up to the east had caught us all by surprise.

It was a dismal and frightening scar cut through the city, zigzagging north to south, about 100 miles: barbed wire and cinder blocks stacked up to fifteen feet, later replaced by solid concrete walls. At the Wall's foot sat barbed wire and mines. Perched atop, more barbed wire, watchtowers, and gun emplacements.

No more free passage. No more open streets and sidewalks. All vehicle and pedestrian traffic narrowed to a single crossing point at *Friedrichsstrasse* -- "Checkpoint Charlie" -- manned on our side by US Army MP's and on the other side by Russian soldiers and East German Police.

Eventually, our duty got back almost to normal, although we now received briefings on how to get our spouses and kids out of Berlin if the shooting started.

Looking back, I realize now how brave the spouses were. Very few of them left Berlin. If World War III had erupted, they would have suffered whatever fate we did.

I also see how naïve many of us were. We wanted to knock



Barbed-wire barrier on Bernauer Strasse: People's Police keep East Berliners in check, 13 August 1961 (German Federal Government, Photographer: Horst Siegmann)

the Wall down and re-open the city in brave defiance of the Soviets and East Germans. Some Assistant Secretary of State came to talk sense into us at Berlin Command, letting us know we couldn't just tear down the Wall. He was roundly booed.

The agreement signed between the Great Powers at Potsdam back in 1945 after Germany's surrender had guaranteed free passage of all parties, US and Soviet, between East and West Berlin. We were determined to demonstrate that right on a nightly basis by passing through Checkpoint Charlie without showing IDs or otherwise asking permission of the East German police.

That was my duty about once a month, and it was always tense. My duty sergeant and I, armed with nothing but our .45s, drove our Army Chevrolet through the checkpoint as the East Germans glared and harassed us.

Other American personnel were on occasion stopped and turned around.

President Kennedy sent General Lucius D. Clay, hero of the Berlin Airlift, to the American sector, along with an infantry brigade, tanks, and Vice President Lyndon Johnson, as a show of resolve.

Clay increased the number of probing rides like the one my sergeant and I did. Each time the East Germans stopped or harassed us, Clay escalated the standoff by adding MPs, jeeps, even Army bulldozers to the crossing parties.

Finally, on October 27, Clay ordered ten M48 tanks into position opposite Checkpoint Charlie. The Soviets on the other side responded with ten T55 tanks. The two sides stared each other down for sixteen hours, engines rumbling, a football field-and-a-half apart on *Friedrichsstrasse*. Once again, World War III seemed close to starting right outside my family's doorstep.

Both sides, thankfully, pulled back. Just like in 1948-49, neither the US nor the Soviet Union wanted war in the middle of Europe. The Soviets tacitly guaranteed access to the East in return for an equally tacit pledge from Kennedy not to attack East Berlin.

My tour of duty ended in March 1963, three months before President Kennedy's iconic "*Ich bin ein Berliner*" speech.

I'm proud of the small part I played in this history-making saga, that moment in the Cold War when the fate of the world hung in the balance.



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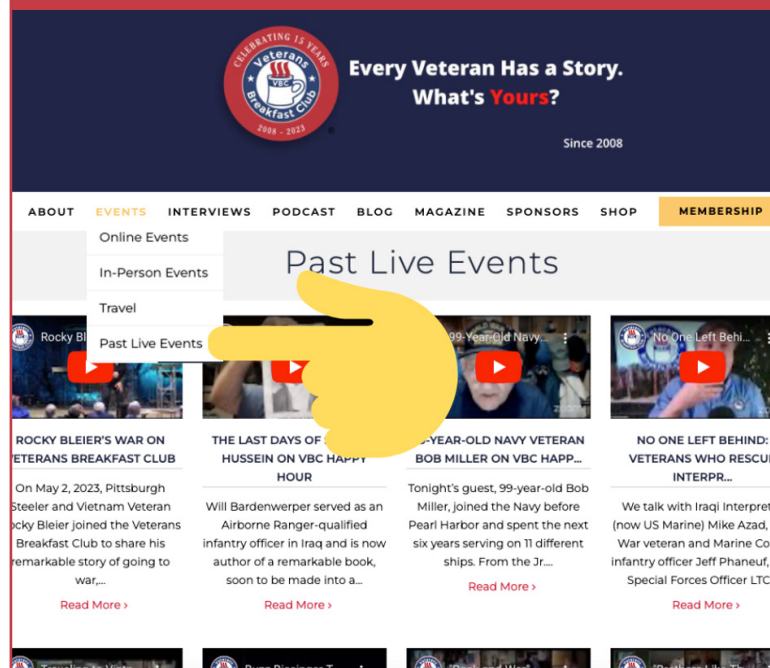
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A 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION SOLDIER SHARES FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF VIETNAM, 1968

*This letter is excerpted from Annette Langlois Gruneth's award-winning book, **Combat and Campus: Writing Through War**, which chronicles her brother Peter Langlois's combat experience in Vietnam. This was Peter's first full letter home after landing in Vietnam two weeks earlier. We're grateful to Annette for sharing this letter with us. You can order signed copies of **Combat and Campus** at annettegruneth.com or by emailing Annette at annettegruneth@gmail.com.*

Saturday, 3 August 1968

Dear Mom, Dad, and Annette,

Thanks much for writing. Mail is one of the few contacts G.I.s in Vietnam have with the "world." I spent 5 days at Cu Chi taking a refresher course on how to stay alive in Vietnam. From there I was flown to Dau Tieng near the Cambodian border. This is the rear base camp for the 2/22 infantry. I only stayed there overnight, long enough to be issued my M-16 and field gear.

The next day I flew over to Ton Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon. My entire battalion is set up in a perimeter defense around the airport and the outskirts of Saigon since they're expecting another NVA offensive here any time.



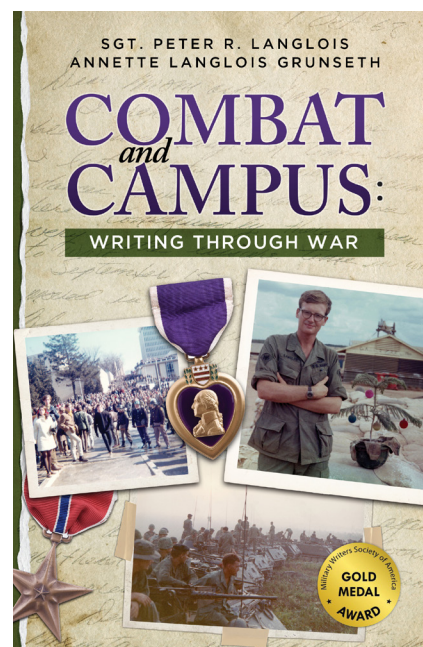
Sgt. Peter R. Langlois (courtesy Annette Langlois Gruneth)

The 2/22 Infantry is mechanized. In other words, the primary means of movement is with armored personnel carriers ("tracks"). There is one APC for each squad within a platoon so in one company, there are 16 APCs, each with a 50-cal. machine gun and 2 M60's. Everyone but the driver rides on top of the APC because the inside area gets completely blown to hell if the track hits a mine in the road. The APC also serves as the squad's house. We sleep eight men in our track at extreme close quarters. Hammocks, and ammo cans seem to make the best beds.

Normally, my company operates up north near Trang Bang but the monsoon season is in progress now and it's too muddy for major offensive operations with the tracks. So for now and probably until the end of November, we'll be camped in the mud (knee deep in spots) outside the air base.

During the day we clean weapons and take it easy. However, every night we go out on ambush patrols and set-up waiting to nail any VC or NVA trying to probe the perimeter. I will admit it scares the hell out of me. There's a 7:00 p.m. curfew in this area so anyone we see coming through our ambush site gets zapped.

Sometimes, we have a daytime mission. Three days ago we rode the tracks about 10 miles out into the rice paddies, then dismounted and waded into the paddies about 3000 meters in order to provide a blocking force for another unit's operation. We were about 1/4 mile behind the battle area but could see everything that was happening. I'm still shaking from the experience. We could hear the mortars and artillery shells whistling over us; complete with rockets and machine guns, and jets with napalm made for quite a display. At any rate, the VC were wiped out and we never had to react to the other units for support.



Last night I was on an ambush patrol in the rain. More than likely each night is spent sitting out in the boondocks and getting soaked. We can't use ponchos because they reflect light and are noisy - this might give away our position, so we just wear jungle fatigues and no underwear - helps dry you out faster. At any rate, last night it was pouring like hell so the patrol leader decided to set up the ambush in a Vietnamese "Hootch" i.e. thatched house the locals call home. I spent the night behind a machine gun set up in the front doorway.

[Vietnamese] children are around all day trading cold soda and ice for "chop chop" i.e. C-rations. A few enterprising girls have set up a "boom boom" house outside the perimeter; however, the CO threatens an instant court martial for anyone he catches there.

So that's what Vietnam has been like so far - hot, smelly, muddy, wet, rainy. Whoever said "war is hell" was absolutely right. I'm sure when God created earth he forgot about Vietnam. It is just a stink hole of a place full of vermin and filth. I swear I'll kiss the ground when I get back to U.S. soil.

Of course, everyone here seems to be good sports and everyone acts and treats his fellow soldier like a brother. We find humor one way or another with everything to keep our minds off the tragedy and the idiocy of this war.

Things I need:

1. Rubberized rain suit (parka and pants) with zipper or snaps on front of the parka. (Most of the guys have sent home for this item.)
2. Plastic case to put writing material in (zipper type plastic envelope).

Much love,
Peter



Peter's Alpha Company, 2/22, 25th Infantry Division assembling for patrol on top of their "tracks" (courtesy Annette Langlois Grunseth)

HUMOR

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS, MARCH 10, 1969

Among Peter Langlois's souvenirs of Vietnam was a clipping of the article excerpted below from the March 10, 1969 edition of the Tropic Lightning News, the weekly newspaper of Peter's 25th Infantry Division. Annette says her brother always found it funny. Written without a hint of irony, the article touts the career benefits of Vietnam Army service.

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS



Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime



Vol 4 No. 10

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS

March 10, 1969

UNCLE GIVES OPPORTUNITIES AND BENNIES DURING YOUR VIET TOUR

Everyone knows there is a job to be done in Vietnam. Your career counselor would also like to make you aware of the benefits and opportunities available to you during your tour here.

For example, have you ever given any thought about how much additional money you make and save while in Vietnam? First off, all pay and allowances for enlisted men are tax-free. That's just a start. Add the extras. Depending upon your rank, you receive an additional \$8 to \$22.50 a month foreign duty pay. Hostile-fire pay means another \$65 a month.

There is free postage and up to seven days of R&R for every 12 months of service. For this R&R, the Army flies you free of charge to such locations as Hong Kong, Bangkok, Tokyo, Singapore, Australia and Hawaii. You may also go on a three-day pass within Vietnam.

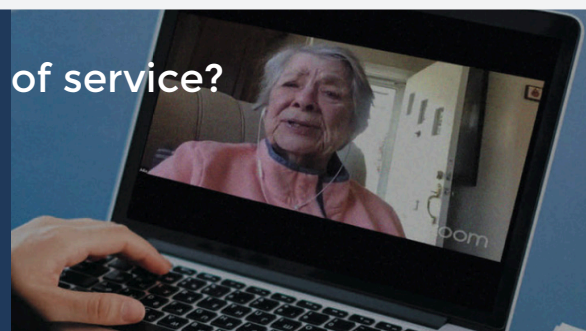
When your one-year tour of duty is over, and if you decide to extend in the country for an additional six months, you will be given 30 days of non-chargeable leave, including free round-trip transportation to almost any point in the free world that you select.

So, as you see, a tour in Vietnam offers both financial and career advantages. Your career counselor has all of the details about this and other career opportunities. He welcomes your visits. Just call Cu Chi 5234.

Are you a veteran interested in telling your story of service?



Record your story with the VBC Veterans History Project! Scan the QR code or head to our website to get started.



Just the helmet shows as a GI crouches in a foxhole dug into a rice paddy dike by the Viet Cong as snipers opened up from a treeline against an American company searching area on the fringe of the Mekong Delta, about 20 miles south of Saigon, Vietnam on April 17, 1967. (manhai on Flickr)

PEARS AND A SECOND CHANCE TO LIVE

In addition to Peter's candid and sharply-worded letters, Combat and Campus: Writing Through War also contains Annette's reflective poems that trace her and her family's heartache during and after the Vietnam War. Below are two selections that beautifully reveal some of the hidden trauma of war.

Pears

Growing up in the shadow of WWII my brother
grabs a pear from the Green Stamp fruit bowl,
pulls the stem out with his teeth, pretends to throw it,

Making hand grenade blasting sounds.
He arranges green army men on the floor for attack and retreat,
plays war games in a foxhole dug into the empty lot next door.

As a Boy Scout he learns survival, camping out
on weekend bivouacs. With Dad, he hunts pheasant,
partridge, and sometimes deer. He becomes a good shot.

Like his father, uncle, and grandfather
he grows up to serve in the military.
His draft number comes up at college graduation, 1967.

After basic training he flies off to Vietnam hastily prepared.
He is issued old weapons from past wars; has no rain gear
for monsoon season. My parents buy a rainsuit and mail it to him.

His letters tell of living in a track as they sweep the jungle,
rolling through rice paddies, dodging snipers, and ambushes.
His letters describe mortar attacks, direct hits, and missing limbs.

Scouting and hunting skills keep him alive in that jungle.
He tells me, You have it easy because you're a girl,
you weren't forced into war, or that kind of fear.

Maybe I have it easier, but whenever I eat a pear
I feel his burden – my guilt ignites
as the taste of pear explodes in my mouth.

– Annette Langlois Grunseth

A Second Chance to Live

A fox hole saved you in Vietnam
on that miserably hot, humid night.
You told us how your buddies
opted to sleep above ground
to escape the stifling heat in that bunker.

The mortar landed on top of them,
but the depth of that fox hole saved you,
the blast blowing you into the wall.
You came home. They didn't.

Partly deaf from ruptured ear drums,
and shrapnel peppered in your flesh.
You were given a second chance,
to marry, have children,
become a husband and dad,

to be a news reporter,
a public relations pro
for an insurance company,
and two paper companies.

It was a good second life
with family, some skiing, sailing,
a little camping thrown in.
It would've been happily ever after

except for buried anger,
your knotted silence,
and those cancer cells,
burning bright orange.

– Annette Langlois Grunseth

Sgt. Peter R. Langlois returned from Vietnam with the Bronze Star and Purple Heart medals. He worked in journalism, public relations and marketing until his death in 2004 at age 59 from Agent Orange related cancer.



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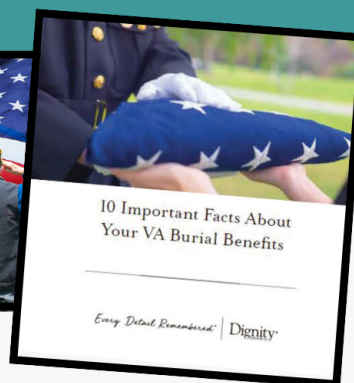
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