

WEST SIDE WARRIOR

A WRITING SAMPLE– from the portfolio of Johnny Blue Star who served as main editor on this project. This sample is provided with permission from Ray Boylan, author.

FROM THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: This book (*the memoir, West Side Warrior*) was mainly edited by Johnny Blue Star, who has helped me write “Boots on Manhattan” both as a novel and a screenplay, as part of a book and film series called, “The Foot Soldier.” These works are based, to a degree, on some of the experiences I have written about in this book, although the plot is entirely fictional.



**A US MARINE’S MEMOIR
BY RAY BOYLAN**

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RAY BOYLAN BOOK AND SCREEN FRANCHISE: Ray Boylan is a former Korean War veteran, who later became an investigator for various private and governmental organizations. We have helped him create a memoir, shortly to be privately published- and are working on a three film/three novel franchise, based on his experience to a degree, but fictionalized. He says-

To friends and business associates of Johnny BlueStar: "I have been working with Johnny BlueStar for over three years developing three different projects. We correspond mainly by telephone contact. We put together a screen script, a novel and my personal memories. I have found Mr. BlueStar to be patient, knowledgeable honest and courteous during our business association. He applies a diligent and well versed manner to his work and being associated with him has been a privilege. We need more people like him in this world. I do not hesitate to recommend Mr. BlueStar for any project you may have to develop He will put his very best effort into your project. -

Sincerely,
Ray Boylan

PREFACE

I have a confession to make. I have had a lifetime love affair with a city. No matter how far away I traveled, no matter what adventurous reasons sent me away, no matter what awaited me in new places, I have always loved Manhattan. I'm in San Francisco now and occasionally hear inside me the unforgettable sounds of Tony Bennett's rhapsodic tribute to the City by the Bay.

I certainly do appreciate this great city, but I left my heart in the Big Apple. This was never truer than during my time halfway around the world, away on the battlefields of Korea where, between engagements, I yearned for New York's magic streets, raucous sounds, and thrilling skyline.

Every day from dawn to dusk for the last five decades, I flash back to the precise moment I was first wounded in combat in Korea. My mind's eye vividly sees the cloudless sky and the steam rising from the rice paddies early that morning. I even remember the half of a C-ration chocolate bar I ate for breakfast while plodding along the Korean mountain roads.

But later that day, like so many other days of a brutal life-or-death struggle, even when surrounded by the smell of gunpowder and the never-to-be-forgotten stench of dead bodies, the intoxicating fragrances of my city lingered in my nostrils—the dusky odors of her toiling workmen, the rancid smell of garbage, and the smell of freshly mowed grass mingled with wild flowers in Central Park.

I gave Manhattan as much attention as I could—as a young boy roaming the streets at night, as a teenager rattling my pretend sabers in parks, as a man giving in to the lure of night clubs and theatres. No matter what career I followed, no matter what

pastimes I engaged in, I always found supreme comfort in the endless gift of the city's excitement and depth of life.

The world has changed since the days when my friends and I went crabbing in the Hudson River along the sea wall and on the pier at 125th Street or played football on 89th Street. But New York hasn't changed. I don't expect that it ever will—that is, not the essence of the city. New York is people. It's what people build and do when they're smashed together and stacked onto an island that no one wants to leave (at least when I was growing up there). It's people from every nation, every age and every income living together like an enormous, dysfunctional family where each tribe has its secrets and prejudices. I was part of that family and I missed her.

But now, as a man seasoned in combat and capable of fighting for what I believed in, I also had more of an idea that amid the fun and pranks of childhood, there was a great city in trouble and I was one of the members of her great family who was truly capable of helping—and perhaps my city needed me just as much as I needed her.

I had been away for many years and traveled many thousands of miles, but I still heard my city's cry for help. I returned to see my beloved Manhattan ravaged and dying at the hands of enemies within and without who were exploiting the city and its inhabitants for their personal gain without any shred of decency or respect.

This book is about why I came back and why I stayed. It is the story of how I threw a lifeline into the waters and tried to save my beloved Manhattan.

INTRODUCTION

I joined the Marines when I was fifteen. I fought in the Chosin Reservoir, one of the coldest battlefields in world history three years later. I was wounded before that and many times I could have easily been killed. Yet I have survived.

Men go to war for many reasons. But soldiers go to war principally because they are ordered to and because they believe in their country and their personal honor. Yes, as I grew older, I realized that, in the United States, there is a difference between rank-and-file soldiers, the high command, and the policy makers in Washington. This is no more evident than in the Korean War, where the rift between MacArthur and President Truman created a giant chasm in public opinion and remains a fascinating story to this day.

But although I was aware of this highly publicized difference in outlook between MacArthur and Truman which, of course, led to MacArthur's dismissal as head of the United Nation forces in Korea, I probably did not know or understand many other things back then.

Looking at the world from the perspective of the foot soldier is one thing. Looking at the world from the vantage point of policy makers is another. From the perspective of the rank-and-file ground forces, the cutting edge reality is survival; the cutting edge motivation is what you think of the world. For myself, I believed in democracy and I believed in the American way. I also believed in the sacred duty of the United States Marines to defend the American people and, as a military organization, to obey their Commander in Chief and the Joint Chiefs.

In the Korean War, despite all the complexities that emerged, the call to duty for the US Marines and other branches of the armed forces, was simple. The United States

and other United Nations forces were fighting off an illegal invasion of South Korea, an ally, but also a democracy, at least in theory. I say in theory, because the fledgling democracy of South Korea was only two years old when it was invaded by the North Korean Communist Army.

Despite what I have characterized as a fairly direct and simple motivation, there were rhetorical veils camouflaging the conflict. For one thing, the United States, at least initially, called it a police action, not a war, for another, Red China's leader Mao-Tse-tung called his soldiers "volunteers." Without Red China's involvement there would have been an early victory for the Allied Forces.

For one thing, I didn't look at myself as a policeman, even a global policeman. I looked at myself as a United States Marine, fighting on the side of an ally, against an enemy, not just of the United Nations, but more specifically, of the United States. For another, as eventually an active combatant over and beyond the 28th Parallel in the North, I didn't look at the soldiers fighting us in Chosin Reservoir as Chinese volunteers they were soldiers, lit up partially with fanaticism, but also lit up with opium. I certainly doubted their "volunteer" status. These enemy soldiers were trying to take a sovereign nation away from its owners, the people of South Korea. The United States was trying to defend them, and I was part of that defensive action.

On June 29, 1950, General Douglas MacArthur, hero of the Philippines and the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) in charge of the Japanese occupation, was now put in charge of the Korean conflict on behalf of the United Nations. It is hard to even explain the exalted status that he had in the US because of his heroic return to the Philippines after his retreat, and in both the United States and Japan for his extreme efficacy as the chief

administrator of the Japanese occupation. His status in Japan was almost ironic because he helped forge democracy in that country, even helping to write their Constitution, yet he was treated by the now defeated aggressors as a kind of Shogun, an overlord of the former Japanese Empire taking over, in real world practicality, some of the functions of the defeated Emperor.

So, when MacArthur took over his responsibilities in Korea, his own very large shadow would darken considerably as he became more and more fiercely determined in his fight against the enemy, which he looked at, as many others did, not as just North Korea, but as the entire Communist Bloc, including Red China and Russia.

At the outset of defending the war, the American and South Korean forces were overwhelmed, forcing them to give way in Taejon and failing to stop the NKPA (North Korean People's Army) from advancing to the south. Still, by holding their position long enough, they gave the United Nations troops enough time to set up a defensive perimeter around Pusan, which held the NKPA off long enough to get 500 tanks and many more troops on site within a month, eventually outnumbering the enemy soldiers by something over 100,000 troops.

But holding a perimeter was not going to win the war. Drastic measures were called for. And General MacArthur, commander of UN forces, was happy to oblige.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BLOODY ROAD BEFORE CHOSIN

The apex of my experience in the Korean War was the battle at Chosin Reservoir in the far north, where I personally witnessed and experienced the deadly Chinese invasion. . In a certain way, it was my final introduction to the reality of war and the huge disparity between the comfortable civilian life in America, and the sheer, brute necessities of survival. And, however complex and debatable, nobody would ever, ever want such a thing to happen in America today.

The tragedy of 911 was a horrible sample of what can happen when your country is attacked. But 911, despite its horror, was a small incursion in time, confined to a relatively few innocents, compared to the scope of a war on land. In saying “relatively few,” I am only comparing it to the millions who died in World War II, Korea, Viet Nam, the Gulf Wars, and in Afghanistan. I am saying that nobody in their right mind would want that happening here. And part of the purpose of the American armed forces is to keep that from happening. And that possibility fueled the motivation of our armed services in Korea.

The deed that turned the Korean War was the amphibious invasion at the harbor near Inchon. Inchon is on the west coast of the Korean peninsula, about two hundred miles south of the 38th parallel. Before that invasion, the United Nations forces, now commanded by MacArthur, had been pushed very far below the 38th parallel. His first real task in Korea was to protect Pusan at the very south of Korea, the last real stronghold of the American and United Nations forces. To do this, approximately three months after the war started, though the defense of Pusan was holding, MacArthur still wanted to push

back the invaders surrounding the perimeter as well as to cut off the NKPA supply lines, further crippling the offensive in the South. For this reason, he decided to attack them north of the perimeter, at Inchon, a city with a harbor and a protective sea wall near the Yellow Sea. Inchon, was just a 100 miles south of the 38th parallel and 25 miles distant from Seoul, the capital of South Korea, which we United Nations Forces needed to take back.

When MacArthur decided to invade through an amphibious landing at Inchon harbor, he was probably energized by his advisor's skepticism, thinking how, given the Yellow Sea's powerful currents, the narrow approach to the harbor and its defensive perimeter in the form of 12 foot high sea walls along its beaches, the enemy would share that skepticism about an assault through the Inchon harbor. In a way, MacArthur's advance is very similar to T. E. Lawrence's approach through the Nefu Desert to the port of Akaba. With its scorching sun, burning sand and the lack of water, Aqaba from the Nefu side seemed an impossible route from which launch an attack. So the guns of Akaba were turned to the sea, just as the NKPA's eyes were turned away from the harbor as the almost miraculous invasion proceeded like clockwork.

So on, on September 17, 1950, MacArthur began the attack on Inchon from the turbulent waters on the West Coast of Korea, earning himself another feather in his cap as a great military strategist. The hope was to create a big push forward, allowing for the United Nations troops to recapture Seoul.

This assault was led by the US Marines, whose job was complicated by the lack of modern equipment and probably too few men for comfort. En route to the harbor, there were definitely

obstacles in the way and MacArthur took preemptive steps, principally to clear the way to capture “Green Beach” on Wolmi Island prior to taking the prospective prize, “Red Beach,” the beach at the edge of the harbor, protected by prodigious sea walls.

Operation Chromite, the overall plan for the invasion at Inchon harbor, was preceded by Operation Trudy Jackson, with CIA and military units landing at Yonghungdo Island. The team members, led by Navy Lieutenant Eugene Clark, managed to sink a patrol boat aiming to get wind of their operation. The NKPA, a brutal bunch, killed fifty civilians who they claimed assisted the operation.

Marguerite Higgins was the first and only female correspondent in the Korean War. In her book, *War in Korea- The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent*, she paints a vivid picture of the scale of the Inchon attack.

A total of two hundred and sixty ships were involved in the Inchon landing. Our transports had been preceded by sixty warships, including six cruisers and six aircraft carriers. The destroyers played a remarkable role. Six of them deliberately approached within range of the shore batteries in order to draw fire. The idea was to trick the main Red defense guns into giving away their positions so that the planes and big warships could go to work on them. The trick was successful, and the destroyers were only slightly damaged. For forty-eight hours big naval guns had been pounding the shore, softening it up for the assault.¹

There were three main designated landing targets for the Invasion: Green Beach on the Island of Wolmi-do; Red Beach, which occurred on the mainland, north of the Wolmi-do causeway; and Blue Beach, toward the South. The Green Beach invasion took place at 6:30 a.m. and was spearheaded by the 5th Marines 3rd Battalion and supported by nine tanks of the 1st Tank Battalion. It was a quick and easy win, taking the Island in five and half hours with only 14 casualties. The turbulence in the harbor held back the Red

Beach attack until early evening, but then the Marines landed and quickly began to scale the sea wall.

The taking of Red Beach was poignantly discussed in *The Korean War* by General Matthew B. Ridgway, the Supreme Commander of the United Nations Forces and Supreme Commander of the United States Far East Command after replacing General Douglas MacArthur in April of 1951. In this passage, he describes what occurred during and after the securing of the Island of Wolmi-do.

Marine Corsair planes strafed the island beaches and at half-past six the 3rd Battalion of the 5th Marines stormed ashore, scattering the dazed defenders and securing the island within forty-five minutes. Artillery was positioned on the island then to support the assault upon the sea wall. In places the Marines used ladders to scale the wall, which stood four feet above the prows of the LSTs. Elsewhere the LSTs simply rammed holes in the wall, or Marines opened holes with dynamite, through which the assault troops poured. They had only too little daylight to work in. By dark the advance elements of the 1st Marine Division were securely dug in on their beachhead ready to repel counterattacks. But so complete and so devastating had been the surprise and so sudden the victory, that the counterattack never came.²

Their aggressive, surprise attack was supported by UN intelligence misinformation suggesting that the invasion would take place at Kusan; thus, there was only a skeleton force at Kusan which was easily subdued, allowing for the Green Beach forces to readily join the battle for Inchon. While the invasion groups from Red and Green Beach began the battle for Inchon, Colonel Lewis “Chesty” Puller and his 1st Marine regiment landed on Blue Beach, meeting very few opposing forces and allowing the invading UN forces to rapidly consolidate forces. The results were devastating for the enemy.

The results of the Korean War are similar to our modern Gulf wars with high enemy losses compared to UN forces lost. In fact, the very high number of NKPA troops killed—more than 35,000—is staggering, compared to an amazingly small amount of UN

troops killed in the invasion—566, to be exact. That is, the number of UN forces killed was only 1.6 percent of enemy fatalities.

Of course, despite the theoretical magnificence of the victory at Inchon, war is still war, and for every loss there was a mother and father, a wife and children who suffered that loss. The numbers cannot even come close to describing the suffering caused by war. Still, the NKPA probably realized how completely unprepared the forces of the South were and probably sought a quick and early victory, not even remotely guessing the effects of a rapid UN mobilization and the wily old commander who used a simple, but deceptive massive rear guard action at Inchon Harbor to fool them. It's likely that, all along, the NKPA knew they eventually might have backup from the Chinese, but the invasion probably surprised both the Chinese and North Korean Forces with its swiftness in quickly turning the tide of battle.

On September 21, 1950, a few days later, I stepped into the fray when my unit, the 7th Marines, debarked from the USS Bexar at Inchon's harbor, South Korea, the very site of MacArthur's invasion. That day I felt apprehensive and excited. It was four months since my last day on American soil at Norfolk. It was a sunny day and the flashing waves of the Yellow Sea made me squint toward the shore. From the ship's deck, I could see the city of Inchon beyond the beach where we were to land. Beyond the city there was a green, steaming jungle. Inchon was the lynchpin in General Douglas MacArthur's strategy to repel the invading North Koreans who had already pressed well south of Inchon and the nearby capital city of Seoul. MacArthur's plan was essentially to flank them from the sea. We would land behind their forward divisions and cut off their

supplies, then turn our attack north.

By the time the rest of Item Company and I splashed ashore at Inchon, the beachhead had been secured. We descended from the Bexar on rope ladders (called Jacob's ladders). I was almost to the end of the rope ladder and in the boat when all of a sudden my foot got caught in the ropes and I fell over dangling upside down by my foot, five feet above the deck of the Higgins Boat. I must have looked like a dumb, clumsily wild bird trying to land on its stomach. Other Marines in the Higgins Boat managed to get me untangled. I thought that this was an omen and I would be lucky to get through this event and the landing on the beach without getting shot. In fact, it was an "administrative landing," meaning that the beach was "secure." But "secure" in military parlance does not necessarily mean "safe."

Within an hour after of putting our first footprints in Korean sand, a sniper killed the 2nd Division heavyweight boxing champion. I knew him because we lived in the same barracks at Lejeune, and I went to many of his matches. I was more aware than ever before of my vulnerability. I tingled with the realization of where I had arrived. I was "in country." I had invaded a foreign land. I was at war.

A few days after I arrived in Korea, I saw a Vought F4 AU Corsair go down in the back of a mountain. Later that night, I and another Marine, Bonnicouny, were chosen to ride a truck to the crash site and retrieve the bodies. I had met Bonnicouny just prior to this assignment. When we arrived at the crash site, civilian South Koreans had two bodies, a Marine pilot and his gunner, wrapped in white sheets. They loaded them onto our truck but there was only half of one body. Bonnicouny became spooked and would not touch the bodies, although we returned them eventually to our camp.

The next time I met Bonnicouny was in the Mash unit. He had been shot through the arch of his boot and received a really bad burn. Unfortunately, the next contact I had occurred later in the war when I passed by some dead Marines, covered with ponchos. One was Bonnicouny, and the other was a Marine named Powell Crosley IV, grandson of the famous car manufacturer, industrialist and Cincinnati Reds Owner, Powell Crosley, Jr. Powell IV was killed in action on October 2, 1950.

Our orders were to march inland, a 30-mile trek that took us three days. Each Marine carried an assortment of “782 gear” such as a helmet, a canteen, a backpack, and various other essentials. I don’t know why it was called 782 gear, but it did feel like it weighed 782 pounds.

We slogged through rainforest and rice paddies, gear dangling from us like a line of pack mules. Halfway to Seoul, we passed Kimpo Airport, the site of a fierce battle just days before. It was my first sight of war dead. Bodies were scattered about the airfield like litter along Columbus Avenue. Some were half-covered with sand, a meager attempt at burial that only gave them a more ghoulish appearance.

On the third night, September 23rd, we were moving toward a bridge when I had my first experience in both combat and in killing. The bridge was on a highway across the Han River that served as a boundary for both the city and the combat zone. We had descended a wooded slope toward the highway. I remember crouching in the grass beside the road listening to the “pop” of enemy rifles, any of which could be pointed my way. It’s hard to ignore those sounds. In the coming weeks, I would learn that it’s best to develop a healthy respect for the sounds of war without allowing them to paralyze you. But it was hard to keep the idea that “people are shooting at me” from crushing all other

thoughts in my head as I crouched beside that highway, hearing them for the first time. Our squad eventually spread out and formed an attack line, each man peering out from under the brim of his helmet just inches from the ground. I was toward the left flank of our line. As we moved in, I caught sight of a North Korean soldier concealed behind a post on the bridge. He was waiting for the rest of my company to approach.

I never thought twice and I had to take action before he would turn and see me. I suppose that the rigid training of boot camp paid off for me at that point. I suppose that instant was one of the reasons why we carried rifles everywhere, fired at thousands of targets, drilled endlessly, bayoneted practice dummies, and screamed our hate for America's enemies again and again. I considered no alternative because there was none. Without hurry or hesitation, I took careful aim and shot the enemy, not at a man or a soldier or a son or a brother.

He—it—was the enemy and I put three bullets into him. Each bullet caused a little explosion when it struck the body and then movement ceased. I lay there for a few minutes as still as my dead adversary and considered what I had done. No training, no matter how grueling or ingrained, can defend a man's soul from guilt when the breach is first opened. Would I be punished for this killing? Should I be punished?

There wasn't much time to consider those issues or any issue beyond who might be shooting at me next. I was a combatant now and there was no use wishing otherwise. Another step through my rite of passage had come and gone. A continuous popping of rifle crescendos around the bridge and I got up and ran forward really hoping that no one had seen me shoot that soldier. I shook off my doubts and guilt feelings and headed over the bridge.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Jacob's ladder; LCV landing craft (Higgins Boat); damaged bridge near the site of Ray's first kill; evacuating the wounded in Seoul.

Once on the other side of the bridge, bullets were flying and hitting the ground around us, forcing us to become fully engaged in battle. For each measly foot we gained, we had to dive to take cover under any protection we could crawl under. Every time we changed positions, a barrage of machine gun fire would engulf us and force us to suspend our advance.

We finally got out of the enemy's range and reached the hills surrounding the city that provided better cover and a higher vantage point to engage the enemy from, an enemy that seemingly could not be stopped.



Marines firing at retreating North Korean soldiers.

Firefights erupted all around us for days. No place was safe. During one skirmish, I found a large hole and jumped in to escape the bullets flying overhead. The bottom of that hole contained a hunk of metal about six inches long and three inches wide with razor sharp one-inch edges. The hunk of metal was shrapnel from the shells of the USS Missouri's sixteen-inch guns that had created the hole. I put the shrapnel in my backpack with the idea that I would take it back to 89th Street and display it to the Panthers, my gang at home. I must have felt quite an attachment to it to take on the extra three pounds it added to the 30 pounds of ammunition belts, ten pound rifle, and as many grenades as I could carry.

Every night, each of us received three grenades, which meant six grenades per foxhole per night. Bob Custance, my foxhole buddy, quickly taught me their value. Firing

at an enemy required lifting your head out of the foxhole, creating a silhouette and inviting a bullet to the head. Worse, your rifle flashed like a bolt of lightning and popped with each round, announcing your location to everyone within range. Grenades were much safer.

With enemy approaching uphill, Bob and I would lay our backs against the front of our foxhole and toss the grenades over our heads. It was important to get just the right arc on the toss. There were 10 seconds between pulling the pin and the explosion, but no one dared trust the timing, so we had to throw it early. Too early, though, and we might give the enemy time to retreat or, worse yet, throw the thing back at us. It was therefore very important to launch the grenades high to give them some time aloft.

If we didn't use the grenades during the night, we were expected to turn them in the next morning, but Bob and I hoarded them like gold. Of course, it meant carrying more weight the next day. But who minded? These grenades were like beacons that went out in front of us (and sometimes behind us) causing deadly damage. They had a weight of little over four pounds each. These grenades, upon exploding, sent slivers of shrapnel into the targeted area, causing an impact that would either kill the enemy or send him ten feet into the universe. I slogged through many a Korean rice patty carrying six of these babies in the chest pockets of my dungarees.

On September 27th, 1950, I found myself on a mountain road just outside Uijeongbu in the hills near the capital city of Seoul. I was carrying two days' worth of grenades and our entire platoon was moving pretty slowly along the road because of the delicate work being done by the squad of engineers removing land mines up ahead.

While the rest of us waited, a sniper in a small cave high on a hill opposite us managed to pin us down.



A .30 caliber machine gun was used by the sniper up the tree.

Matt Wojtoweiz, a reservist from Ohio, was our bazooka expert. He was carrying the new 3.5 mm rocket launcher and was eager to make little pieces out of our antagonist in the cave. But despite his enthusiasm, he was denied authorization to use the weapon because a weapon of that power was not to be used against a single individual under the rules of war.

About three months later, on December 12th Matt Wojtoweiz was killed in action at Chosin Reservoir. Matt had the misfortune to be positioned too near an enemy artillery explosion and it split both of his legs. Strangely, his brother had died of the exact same type of wounds in WWII.

The rules of war never seem fair when you're at war. Snipers are a military aberration. They work alone, something most soldiers are trained never to do. They kill from distances outside the range of their victims. You can look at that as either clever or

cowardly, but they present a unique source of antagonism to their opponents because their actions are more individualistic. For that reason, they can be held more responsible than an anonymous shooter in a foxhole in the midst of massive gunfire and explosions.

A long reach is an asset in any fight. A war could turn in our favor if our missiles could fly farther than their missiles. But snipers aren't missiles that can make decisive strikes to disable entire divisions. No army in history has won a war because of its superior snipers. Wars are started by assassins, not won by them. Snipers kill one soldier at a time, one bullet at a time. In the big picture, they are more pesky than perilous. But that doesn't make them any less worrisome to a Marine hunched beside a jungle road. This particular sniper had managed to shoot several men along the road. As a result of the sniper's cruel work, there were bodies lying in the open and wounded lying in half-cover, too exposed for corpsmen to come to their aid.

Two of the wounded were staff NCOs, bandaged legs soaked in blood, who had braved being in the open to drag their wounded comrades to safety. I passed them on my way to the front. I don't know whether my actions said more about the level to which my nerves had already been blunted, or about my level of fatigue from lugging my rifle, my 782 gear, and a three-pound souvenir up that mountain, but I wasn't making much progress by walking almost upright instead of running in a hunched scurry.

My squad was going to the head of the column just behind the Marine engineers who were using bayonets to clear the road of land mines. We darted past dozens of other Marines who were squatting behind rocks and trees and peering out for a clue about the invisible killer in the cave—that is, all except me. One such somewhat sequestered soldier who was crouched behind a boulder looked up at me.

“You better move it,” he said. “They just carried a guy out of here who wasn’t humping it fast enough. That sniper got him.”

He turned back to look for the killer and I turned to move farther up the road, half ignoring his warning. I was tired, I was carrying too much weight, and we weren’t going anywhere anyway. Then the sniper must have gotten me in his crosshairs. I heard a shot and something hit me in the face with a sudden sting. I dropped to the ground and knew immediately that I had been hit in the face but I wasn’t sure how bad the wound was. I reached for my cheek and saw my hand covered in my own blood. My face hurt with a stinging sensation. Was that all? If I had just been shot in the head, would I still be awake or even alive?

I checked the rest of my body for damage because of the stories I had heard about men going for several minutes without realizing they had lost an arm or leg. Everything seemed to be intact. Just then, a Marine from the minesweeping team came to my aid. He turned my head aside and dug into my cheek, extracting a piece of metal about the size of a dime. It was shrapnel. The sniper had missed a direct hit on me.

He had targeted me since I was moving slower than the rest and aimed at my head just as it emerged from behind the boulder where I had received the warning. The bullet hit the rock and shattered into flying shrapnel, sending a sliver into my right cheek. The Marine handed the shrapnel to me. Looking down at it in my bloody hand, I saw the six grenades against my chest. Had the sniper’s aim been just a little lower, or if he had aimed at my torso and not my head, he might have gotten a spectacular kill with a Fourth of July burst of six hand grenades and body parts flying in all directions.

A corpsman arrived and gave me a shot of morphine. He then cleaned the wound and applied a bandage, a bright white bandage that made me a target and an easy mark to give the sniper a second chance. The ricocheted bullet, my second metal souvenir in so many days, went into my pack and the corpsman went to see the platoon leader, a lieutenant named Ray D who was taking cover at the base of a hill. The corpsman told the lieutenant that I needed to go to the rear to an aid station to get some penicillin, but Lieutenant Ray D had other ideas. Moving back was just as dangerous as moving forward at that point. Plus, we had orders to take a hill where North Korean soldiers were positioned and had our own George Company pinned down on an opposite hill. I agreed and felt an enormous sense of pride that I volunteered to stay with the squad and continue the attack on our assigned hill.

We were already short a squad of men because of the sniper slowing up our forward advance and my help was really needed. To his credit, the lieutenant asked me to stay with the platoon until we secured the hill. So I wasn't surprised when the lieutenant said that Boot Boylan was needed, and I found myself nodding my head in agreement.

The hill in question loomed about 200 feet ahead and rose about 500 feet up the road from there. It was barren near the bottom, but grew more forested higher up until topping out in a bald crown. Mirroring what we did earlier during the approach to the bridge, we spread out ten yards between each man and started a slow climb. I was the last man on the right flank of our line. We climbed for 20 minutes through dense jungle with poor footing. It was impossible to move forward without watching for footholds, and it was impossible to watch the ground with the knowledge that we weren't alone on that hill.

Soon I noticed that I did not have any platoon member to my left so I slowed my advance. I was within 50 feet from the summit when one of our reserves, a former Navy sailor, cut loose. "Sailor" ran right past me, bounding up the hill and flushing North Korean soldiers like quail on the back slope. I looked to my left and saw that the rest of the line hadn't caught up. Sailor had jumped alone, and I watched him alone shooting at the fleeing enemy and firing his rifle wildly at them while they retreated down the mountainside.

I thought, at first, "Wow, what a hero!" But moments later, seeing his free-for-all style in the midst of a barrage of bullets, at that moment I wondered about his sanity. Did he think he was some kind of superhero, or what? Because by any sensible military standard, he was being very reckless, although admirable in my eyes and deserving of an honor medal. My brief admiration of his courage did not last long because his solo assault was short-lived. Within seconds, I heard the harrowing noise of a .30-caliber machine gun known to us as a "burp gun" firing from behind me.

Sailor took a bullet through the leg into the calf and out the shin. He jumped in the air and then dropped, immediately taking another round in the left forearm. He didn't scream or cry, but I could see the look of fear and excruciating pain in his face. I could feel bullets slamming the ground between Sailor and me. It seemed like the whole hill was vibrating, causing earthquake-like tremors. I searched desperately for the burp gun shooter but I never could pinpoint his location. All I could determine was that he was behind us up in the trees. Sailor slid down the hill 10 feet to where I was wishing I could crawl inside my helmet.

"Oh, God," he murmured.

“Don’t waste your breath, Sailor. I’m going to get you out of here.”

“I can’t die. My Dad passed away a couple of months ago and she’s totally alone.”

“You’re not going to die, pal. Boot’s gonna take care of you,” I said, using both our first aid packets to bandage his leg and wrap his arm. Blood was running down his leg, soaking what was left off his trousers.

“Shit. I could bleed to death, couldn’t I?”

“I don’t know, but we’ve got to stop this bleeding.”

But I couldn’t stop it and I became very worried and concerned for him. I watched his blood run downhill into the mountain sand and imagined a calm, quiet afternoon when I would revisit this site to find the rifle sticking into the ground by its bayonet and the helmet hanging from it in memory of Sailor.

But when I returned to reality, I sharply focused on the present. It was my obligation to make every effort to save his life and get him out of here. But bullets were hitting the ground all around us, and I didn’t have much time for daydreaming. One thing that was clearly diminishing our chances for survival was that frenetic machine gun.

I finally figured out that “Burp Gun” was shooting from lower on the hill and to my left—or right, now that I had turned to face the threat. He was spraying the top of the hill and everywhere he could see. I—or someone—anyone—needed to get the bastard. But I was busy and there were problems. For one thing, Sailor and I were blocked from Burp Gun’s view by the tops of a row of tall trees. For another, I wasn’t about to go anywhere while I was tending to Sailor’s wounds.

Meanwhile, thank God, other members of our squad were making their way toward us and up the hill looking for Burp Gun. The squad members then opened fire into the trees about 300 feet down the slope, launching a barrage of lead and anger in exchange for Sailor's wounds. But Burp Gun was not close enough and too well protected for accurate shots. After about forty minutes of gunfire and watching Sailor turn gray, it suddenly became quiet but we did not move forward until the next hour.

One of our squad muttered as he came to the top of the hill, "That crazy sniper bastard's on leave."

"Where did he go?" I asked, longing to shoot somewhere, anywhere he could be hiding.

"I hope to hell."

"That's a tough target to find," I said.

"Actually, you can point almost anywhere in a hundred mile radius of the reservoir and you'll be pointing right at it. Every day I hear someone say they're cold as hell." He turned to go. "They just don't realize they're living in it."

Though he hadn't given me any clear direction, we followed him down the hill, the others keeping watch while I acted as Sailor's crutch. Downhill, I got some decent news when we found Marines from George Company crouched in the trees watching a hut. They told us that Burp Gun was hiding in there. It was a small square building with bamboo walls, a thatch roof, and one open window. I decided to part with a few of my grenades.

Bracing myself to give a little payback to our dangerous adversary, I put Sailor into the hands of a member of G Company and scurried out of the trees to the open

window. I crouched beneath it and threw two live grenades inside. I wasn't quite sure what two grenades would do, but in a second or so I found out. It was kind of a slow explosion. The blast seemed to puff up the hut, sending dust from the window and doorway and pieces of wall and roof falling around its perimeter.

Seconds later, two Korean civilians emerged. They were unarmed. One had been hit in the mouth with shrapnel. I noted to myself how similar his wound was to mine. The other was fine with not a scratch. In sign language and broken speech, they told us that Burp Gun had hidden himself under the hut's bamboo floors. The grenades had destroyed much of the floor and they didn't know if he was still alive.

Sailor was fading. As much as I wanted to know if the grenades had ended Burp Gun's war, I set off downhill with him in search of a corpsman. It was around 4:00 p.m. when we stumbled into an aid station where medics immediately put Sailor on a jeep and sent him to an Army MASH unit.

I said a little prayer for him and his poor mother then turned my mind to my situation.

Seeing the wounded Korean civilian with the mouth injury had reminded me that I still was injured myself and needed penicillin. I was "tagged," which meant that I was assigned to a stretcher strapped to the back of another jeep and told to stand by for evacuation. The word evacuation brought none of the joy or relief I might otherwise have expected.

All I knew, all I could process after a bloody day of fighting, was that I was where I was supposed to be. I was 7,000 miles from home on an obscure hillside in a foreign, forgotten war, and that was just where I was supposed to be. So much of battle is about

being where you're supposed to be, whether it's on the left flank approaching a bridge, or on the right flank capturing a hill. I didn't daydream about going home. I just lay down on the stretcher and, for the first time in hours, breathed deep and caught wind of how filthy and unbearably tired I was. I enjoyed the knowledge that the fighting was somewhere else for now but safety didn't bring peace. It seldom does.

Suddenly, Recon Company marched past me as I lay there. I shouted a greeting and got some jeers about my wound in return. It felt good to see Recon Company again and to see them still young, strong, smiling, mocking, but they were headed into the breach I had just escaped and where some of them would die. But the reprieve also gave me time to consider some other less pleasant things. Why had Sailor broken ranks and sprinted up the hill like that? He had won a medal in the Navy for saving an officer's life on a carrier flight deck during an attack. Rumor was that he was out to get another medal. Had he appeared in Burp Gun's view slowly like the rest of us were walking, he would have presented a better target.

Worse, I couldn't shake something that the men from G Company had told me in the trees while we watched that little hut halfway up the hill: They had come from another hut, one on the road at the bottom of the hill and in line with the tree where Burp Gun was firing his machine gun. Several wounded Marines had taken shelter there and others were giving first aid. My company had unwittingly shot at our own men when they turned back and to the left and randomly fired in an attempt to hit the sniper. Our guns had wounded several Marines and one had been killed. The men from G Company who cornered Burp Gun in that hut had come to find him, not to avenge a death or complete a mission, but to stop us from shooting wounded Marines.

Exit Wounds

The MASH Unit to which I was sent was a busy semi-permanent hospital with police and fire departments, thanks to the MPs, and waterworks and street departments, thanks to the engineers. There was even a park in the form of an open, relatively flat field where vines and weeds had been trampled to mud by patients whole enough to play football. Every building looked the same in this city. We had a green canvas city hall, a green canvas hospital, and a green canvas police department.

The field hospital itself was an orderly column of green-walled canvas tents, the prototype for the television show that brought a Korean MASH unit into millions of American living rooms, albeit without the wisecracking, cross-dressing staff. I arrived at night and was admitted by a tired-looking Marine with glasses so smudged and dirty that I was surprised he could see the limp, lined paper upon which he wrote my name under the single bulb that lit his table. I was given pajamas and sent to a row of bunks in a tent that was completely dark.

In the darkness, an NCO came to my bunk. “Now that we got most of that out of the way, I need your home address.”

“No way, but thanks,” I whispered back. “You’re gonna send my mom one of those creepy little telegrams about how much you regret to inform her that her son has been wounded in action and scare the hell out of her.” My mother had been scared to death when I played football and I didn’t want her to agonize over this too.

<p>CLASS OF SERVICE</p> <p>This is a full-rate Telegram, or Cablegram, unless the electrical character is indicated by a symbol applied above or preceding the address.</p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">WESTERN UNION</h1> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">W. F. MARSHALL, PRESIDENT</p>	<p>SYMBOLS</p> <p>DL = Day Letter</p> <p>NL = Night Letter</p> <p>EC = Editorial Cable</p> <p>MLP = Cable-Post Letter</p> <p>Ship Radiogram</p>
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The time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.

(38)

NAD89 XV GOVT PD=WUX WASHINGTON DC 5 1022A=
 MRS KAY BOYLAN=
 101 WEST 86 ST=

1950 OCT 5 AM 10 51

REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON PRIVATE FIRST CLASS
 RAYMOND EDWARD BOYLAN USMC HAS BEEN WOUNDED IN ACTION
 27 SEPTEMBER 1950 IN THE KOREAN AREA IN THE PERFORMANCE
 OF HIS DUTY AND SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. I REALIZE YOUR
 GREAT ANXIETY BUT NATURE OF WOUNDS NOT REPORTED AND DELAY
 IN RECEIPT OF DETAILS MUST BE EXPECTED. YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY
 FURNISHED ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RECEIVED. HIS NEW
 ADDRESS IS "FIRST PROVISIONAL CASUAL COMPANY FMF FLEET POST
 OFFICE SAN FRANCISCO CALIF"=
 M H SILVERTHORN MAJOR GENERAL USMC ACTING COMMANDANT
 OF THE MARINE CORPS=

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

The dread telegram that was sent home to Mother.

“It's not the largest wound, but it could be quite dangerous, Ray,” he replied.

“Please understand that I have no intention of scaring your mother, but that telegram must go out.”

“Okay,” I said, giving in, “but would you mind if I write her first before you send your letter?”

“I don't see why not.”

Despite the lateness, I immediately asked a nurse for a pen and paper and wrote a letter to Mother that I then took to the hospital's Red Cross representative and asked to have delivered as soon as possible.

"Dear Mom," I wrote, "I got wounded but don't worry, I'm totally OK, just a scratch on the cheek." I then told her that I would be back with my unit soon. Mother got my letter one day before she got the dreaded government telegram. I later learned that she had broken down and sobbed uncontrollably.

"He's such a good little boy and now he's scarred for life," she sobbed to my Uncle Joe, who took the letter from her and scanned it carefully.

"But, Dolly, it says he's absolutely all right," he told her.

You see, back in 1943, a German shepherd dog—owned by a snarling, old, and semi-crippled widow named McCleary—bit me. Mother and I were standing outside our building arguing about a broomstick that I had proudly whittled into a spear. She wanted me to get rid of it, and I was getting quite upset. Frustrated, I swung the stick and cracked it on the sidewalk, breaking off its point and arousing the shepherd that was lounging on the stoop. The dog was muzzled but he leapt at on my back, knocked me to the ground, reached his teeth past the loose muzzle and sank them into my back. Mother screamed and helped old Mrs. McCleary wrestle the dog off me before carrying me two blocks to Roosevelt Hospital. When we arrived, my blood had soaked through Mother's dress and was dripping off her elbows.

Later on, sequestered in that MASH tent and lying on that cot and remembering what happened after that stupid dog bit me, made me thank God for medical progress. The New York hospital staff had cauterized the dog bite with hot irons with not a drop of

anesthesia in sight. That was easily the most painful experience of my life. Seven years later, as I lay there, I remembered thinking that a gunshot wound was less painful than those cauterizations. At least, the dog tested negative for rabies a week later. Mrs. McCleary appeared at our door to plead her dog's case. It was our decision whether or not to let the dog live. I, along with most of our neighbors, fervently desired to see it put down. But Mother saw it differently. Maybe it was because she had trained herself to see value and dignity in the people she cared for in that hospital upstate, and she saw the value in that dog for what he gave to Mrs. McCleary.

He was, after all, the only companion the widow had. That cur and the widow lived out their days together in the building next door to my grandparents' apartment. I don't know if it was my imagination, but I did notice that my attacker seemed to snarl less at me after that.

I ran into Sergeant Richard Twohey from Recon Company one evening in the green canvas mess hall. My former squad leader during Recon training, probably the most significant training I had in the Marines, was now shoveling beans into his mouth with his left hand because his right hand was cocooned in an enormous white ball of gauze as a result of mortar shrapnel. Twohey told me that Joe McDermott, Walter Cole, Gene Mosickie (later KIA) and some of the other guys I had trained with in Recon Company were guarding the US Embassy in Seoul, the only patch of US soil in this godforsaken country, with Sergeant Larry Bielickie as their leader. More of my buddies were in the crucible while I relaxed and watched the tag football game. It made me eager to rejoin the fight.

Three days and 300,000 units of penicillin later, I got my wish. I was released unceremoniously and told to rejoin my unit by whatever means I could find, which was now at least a three day march away. The problem was not the distance, but my clothes. My Marine dungarees had been destroyed after I traded them for hospital pajamas. This was an army field hospital and I had been issued US Army fatigues.

It took me three days and two nights to get back to my unit, during which time every ranking officer I met while passing through each of their lines thought I was a soldier trying to defect to the Marines. The first ride of that trip was in the open bed of a 6X6 truck with a few other Marines on a similar journey.

“Screw this road! Screw it,” said a Marine who was sitting across from me.

“Screw this damned country! Screw these damn Koreans. Screw all of you. Screw every last one of you. Don't like it? Want to do something about it?”

I nodded at the Marine sitting next to him. “What's wrong with him?”

“He has just learned that he lost his best buddy a few hours ago in an ambush. He ain't taking it too good.”

“I thought so,” the bereaved Marine hissed. “Cowards! Stupid, filthy cowards!” Everyone looked on in silence as the Marine's grief turned to anger. Despite his untoward display of emotion, we all understood how he was feeling.

Suddenly the irate Marine spied an opportunity for revenge in the form of a North Korean soldier riding on the hood of a jeep full of American soldiers. If a prisoner was being transported and Marines occupied all the seats, the prisoner would be handcuffed to the hood and transported to G-2. The angry Marine grabbed a rifle and aimed over the side of our truck directly at the fast approaching jeep carrying the communist.

I saw what was about to happen at the same instant that a lieutenant, riding shotgun in the Jeep, saw it, too.

“Don't do it!” the lieutenant yelled as he raised his .45 caliber sidearm.

I acted on instinct, grabbing the mournful Marine from behind and bringing him down like an opposing player in one of the old neighborhood football games. I doubt the lieutenant would have actually shot at a truck carrying American troops, but apparently the prisoner was valuable enough to warrant the threat.

The driver dropped us off at the rear combat line and refused to go any farther. I hiked forward for the rest of the afternoon and spent that night on the side of the road camped next to the 11th Marine Regiment Artillery Company. It's a good thing they were not firing their weapons because they would have received return fire from enemy artillery, which sometimes scored a direct hit. Just an exploding artillery shell causes a concussion and sends shrapnel that travels at 700 miles an hour. I managed to sleep the whole night through. I spent the next night with some buddies in our regimental bazooka team.

I had only spent a week at the rear, but it was hard at first to get used to being back at the front. Less than an hour after shaking hands with my old squad members, I was standing on a little knoll talking with a Marine from our machine-gun squad.

“Seems like ages since I left you guys,” I said.

“Not to us,” he replied with a smile, looking up briefly while methodically oiling his weapon. “All we hoped is that you were alright and would return soon.” He put then down his oilcan and began rummaging through his stuff.

Suddenly, there was a loud report and he immediately crumpled to the ground, blood soaking his jacket near his heart. I was so shocked that I just stood there, wide-eyed with surprise. Then something crashed into my lower body. It was another Marine, Tony Saunders, tackling me to the ground. As I tried to figure out what had happened, I heard bullets splatter by.

“What are you doing, Boot?” Saunders said, addressing me by my nickname. He spoke through clenched teeth, “Do you want to get your head blown off, too? Stay down and get off the skyline!”

“Why him and not me?” I said, feeling dizzy and almost in a dream world. It was sheer dumb luck that made that enemy soldier aim at him and not me.

“We gotta get out of here fast!” Saunders said. We low-crawled to cover behind some boulders.

Saunders was ready now, carefully aiming his handgun at a North Korean soldier I saw peeking out from behind a clump of trees. The pistol erupted with a flash and ringing in my ears and the soldier fell over, ending another ugly episode that would haunt my memories.

I soon found my battle legs again and managed to endure a few more skirmishes until October 10th when my unit returned again to Inchon to board the USS Henrico, a troop carrier bound for North Korea. Our destination was Wonsan located on the northeast coast of North Korea. The trip took ten days from the time I boarded to the time I landed, during which time I developed an abscessed tooth. I soon found myself sitting in the dental clinic expecting the worst, which came in the form of an impossibly long needle wielded by a male dental assistant.

“Can I pass on that?” I asked.

“You don't really want to pass on this,” he replied. “You have an abscessed tooth and it's got to come out.”

A few minutes later I was sitting outside the clinic waiting for the Novocain to take effect when Sergeant Mitchell walked by. He was the sergeant in the Battalion S-2 Unit that I was assigned to in the Mediterranean.

“Hey,” he said, “I was getting my teeth cleaned, when I saw you sitting there. Congrats, Boot, you got yourself a Purple Heart.”

I shook my head in disbelief, but Sergeant Mitch insisted that I check with the first sergeant and said that he had seen a list of twenty-eight Marines who had received the medal and my name was on it. I emerged from the shipboard dentist with one less tooth and a dizzy feeling that wasn't caused by high seas. Between the swollen wound in my right cheek, and the throbbing gums in my left jaw, I felt like I had been through an ugly little fistfight near the Soldier and Sailors' Monument in Central Park with the kids at home. Maybe a medal would make me forget the pain.

I went to see the First Sergeant. The citation that accompanies a Purple Heart reads, “For wounds received as a result of direct contact with an enemy force.” My wound certainly qualified, but I was a little wary of going to the first sergeant to request a medal I was supposed to have received already. The first sergeant didn't make it any easier as I sat down at his desk.

“Don't give me that crap, Boylan. You lost your damn medal.”

“I didn't know I had it until three hours ago, Sergeant Mitchell just told me.”

The first sergeant's rising voice trailed off as the lieutenant walked into his office.

"Boot's absolutely right, first sergeant, and it's all my fault. I signed off on the list of twenty-eight medal recipients and didn't check to see if they got them. In fact I was just getting around to it when someone decided to drop a mortar shell on my office. Forgive me, Boot, but on the day of the awards ceremony, your entire unit was cut off and men from several companies were trapped with you by the enemy and did not attend the ceremony so they did not receive their Purple Hearts."

Needless to say, that little episode had me feeling more than a little self-conscious, not the least because I had seen much more severe wounds than mine on Marines who would receive the same medal. In my mind's eye, I saw Sailor's blood trickling through the mud and pooling into puddles being slapped by Burp Gun's bullets. I saw the blood soaked legs of those two NCOs who had gone into the sniper's view to pull comrades to safety.

"I think I should go." I said, feeling suddenly undeserving. How could I compare myself to those who had received graver wounds or, indeed, given their life?"

"What about your medal?" the lieutenant asked.

"Maybe later," I said as I left the room.

Two full years would elapse after I had left the Marines, and the memories of blood and battle had grown pale, before I wrote to the Veterans Affairs' office. I received the medal in the mail accompanied by the good conduct medal and my other unit citations and combat engagement campaign medals.

The USS Henrico finally arrived at the entrance to Wonsan harbor, but we did not dare approach the shore. The harbor was so full of mines that a bombardment by

thirty-nine naval aircraft dropping 2,000 pound bombs had not detonated them all. An Underwater Demolition Team had gone in to try to finish the job. Already, the USS Pirate (AM-275) and USS Pledge (AM-277) had hit mines and sunk, with the Wonsan enemy shore batteries joining in to increase the misery. On October 18th, some more magnetic mines were also discovered the hard way as the South Korean YMS-516 was destroyed.

The trip around the Korean Peninsula had been short but the landing itself was delayed and would take ten days. Our ship reversed course every twelve hours or so, pacing back and forth off the coast until the last of the mines were cleared. We called it Operation Yo-Yo. On October 25th, we finally steamed into the harbor and made our landing with the same rope ladders, the same Higgins Boats, the same splashing, and the same sandy welcome mat that we had encountered at Inchon a month before.

But just before we arrived, the harbor had been graced with the arrival of Bob Hope and Marilyn Monroe. The USO Tour, replete with these coveted entertainers, had been visiting the men of the USS Missouri who had managed to beat us to Wonsan Harbor. Unfortunately, we arrived too late and I never got to see Hope or Monroe. We had to settle for the jeers of the Missouri's sailors as we passed her fantail.

“Where ya been? What took ya so long getting here? Y'all scared of a few mines?”

I doubt any of them ever realized that half of the Marines on this ship were decorated veterans with bravery medals and/or Purple Hearts. I would have liked to have seen the show but not with this bunch of sailors. I was in no mood for their crap. I had seen too much combat, too much pain.

I knew how much Bob Hope and Marilyn Monroe cheered the hearts of American soldiers, not because of their talent and beauty, but because they were Americans who brought a little piece of home with them, even if it was for just a few moments on an overcrowded ship's deck. When Bob Hope stood on the deck of the USS Missouri and told jokes, the punch lines were all about politicians or golf or women, but the message was, "We're behind you. We're praying for you. Your family and friends and a hundred million people in the American heartland that you don't know are pulling for you. Come home safe." So I heard secondhand. But I missed the show and Hope got on a plane for Los Angeles leaving us in Wonsan. He would not be returning anytime soon.

Besides, a missed show could not be my essential focus. The Allied success in the South and the liberation of Seoul had prompted General MacArthur to press his attack north. North Korean troops were now fleeing toward China where they would be reequipped with new weapons, new organization, and new courage. My regiment, the 7th Marines, was to spearhead the advance to the Manchurian border 130 miles to the north where the Yalu River splits North Korea from China.



Circling the hills surrounding Seoul.

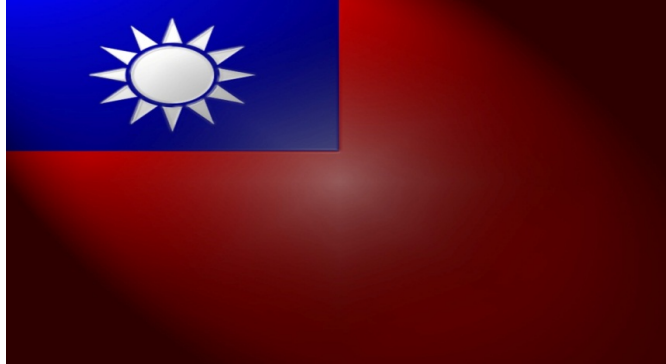
At the time, we would be farther north than most of China, most of the United States, and all of the Himalayas. The northern latitude and the lateness of the year made for cold going. We were given parkas, long johns, and rubber shoepacks, which all turned out to be grossly inadequate for the 30 degrees below zero that we were about to face. Then we boarded an open cattle car train for a bouncing, shivering ride from Wonsan to Hamhung.

We left the train and walked to an old two-story schoolhouse in Hamhung, a large wooden building with a fenced yard that provided a relatively warm and maybe a safe place to spend our first night in enemy territory. The walls had maps, an alphabet, and little cutout figures hung on the walls just like schoolrooms all over the world. I slept on the floor of a classroom where children had been learning stories only days ago. I wondered what future school children here or back at St. Gregory's would learn about this war and our place in history. As usual, those thoughts and the violence of the last few days allowed for little sleep. I left my buddies sleeping in the classroom and went to find a latrine in the rear yard.

Maybe it was the Irish Catholic in me, but the moment I saw it I disliked the Chinese Communist flag, a symbol of unification. A "unified" China never struck me as a very worthy cause, because if you dislike an enemy, who wants them to be unified? Besides, the Chinese flag struck me as a poor copy of the Soviet flag, another country I didn't care for.

But then I saw a red, white, and blue Free Nationalist China Republic flag flying from a hut about 200 yards away. It was odd to see it hanging on the roof of a North Korean hut because the North Koreans were firmly allied with the Communist Chinese. It

seemed to me to be an omen that even here someone, somehow, wanted to signal to the United Nations Forces that there was at least one ally present.



Free Nationalist China Republic Flag

It occurred to me that the flag would be really cool to have when we got to the Yalu River where perhaps I could hoist it upon a mountain for the enemy in Manchuria to see. It also occurred to me that it would make another nice souvenir to take home to 89th Street. I thought about that flag most of the night.

The morning daylight finally came with the sun just starting to push warmth through the trees in the east. The North Korean weather had not turned to freezing yet. I had to go use the makeshift latrine, which was dug in the rear of the schoolyard. I saw that flag again in all its showy splendor of red, white and blue. I had to have it. I noticed a hole in the back fence so I crawled through it and started to walk toward the hut and my souvenir when I stepped—or, more accurately, sank—waist deep into a honey pit.

There is no way to put this delicately. A honey pit is the business end of a North Korean human waste system used for farm fertilizer. My eagerness to capture that flag had gotten me waist deep in human feces—a honey pit and everything that goes with it.

Luckily, this pit was new and only hip deep; a similar mistake back at Wonsan or some other more established spot might have gotten me in over my head.

I clambered out of the pit, gagging from the stench and the slimy consistency of the stuff. I had almost never touched human feces and now I was half-soaked in crap half a world away from home with no shower in sight. All I was wearing was a long johns top, trousers and boots. The wetness was getting cold. Shivering, I walked around the perimeter fence to a gate where two MPs were standing guard. The merciless taunts of my fellow servicemen commenced. I have had a lot of nicknames in my life such as Gus, Ray, or Rex. But for the rest of that campaign, I was “Stinky” to the rest of the Item Company.

Getting rid of that stink proved to be no easy task. Lieutenant D told me that he didn't want to see me again until I had a shower. But this was a Korean combat zone where showers weren't readily available. I begged and borrowed as many new clothes as I could and managed to get long johns, trousers, and socks but couldn't find any spare belts or boots.

I had been carrying a bottle of Old Spice for reasons that escaped me and I now used it to sweeten up my boots and belt. Unfortunately, it just fermented and made matters worse. Bob, my foxhole buddy, told me that it took more than a week before the smell started to dissipate. I pitied him because we were very close most of the time. The only relief he got was when it was his turn to maintain a keen watch down the hill where would get a whiff or two of fresh air.

That honey pit wasn't the most dangerous trap I stepped into on the march to the Yalu. The biggest trap for any U.S. Marine who was part of MacArthur's big push to the north would be the fighting around the Chinese reservoir.

NOTES

1. Marguerite Higgins, *War in Korea— The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1951), 140.

2. General Matthew B. Ridgway, the Supreme Commander of the United Nations Forces and Supreme Commander of the United States, *The Korean War* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 41.