



POW/MIA Update

by Marty O'Brien

Progress Report

"Tiger Survivor" Shorty Estabrook and Rick Tavares report that the Military Order of the Purple Heart has given its backing to H.R. 2369, "Honor Our Fallen Prisoners of War Act" - a bill to posthumously award the Purple Heart to those who died in enemy prisoner of war facilities from 1941 to date. On September 4, Ray Funderburk, the National Public Relations Director for the MOPH, reiterated the Order's strong support for the bill as a guest participant on Veterans Radio <www.veteransradio.net>.

Also participating in the last program of a three-part series dealing with Korean War POW issues, during imprisonment and after repatriation, was former Army veteran

and POW Robert Fletcher, who was captured on November 27, 1950. Funderburk pointed out that a qualifier for the award of the Purple Heart is that the person has to be wounded by an instrument of war. Funderburk said that the MOPH considers the death camps in themselves as being instruments of war.

Brian McGinn Remembered

Brian McGinn of Alexandria, VA, a Vietnam veteran and an accomplished author, died on July 20, 2005 after a long illness. On July 23, he was buried at Mt. Comfort Cemetery in Alexandria.

Brian was born in New York, but raised and educated in Ireland. In 1969-1970, he served with U. S. Army intelligence in Vietnam. He was a key member of a team of dedicated people from all walks of life who for many years worked diligently to get posthumous U. S. citizenship (upon application) for non-citizens of all nationalities who served, fought and died in our nation's wars while wearing Uncle Sam's uniform.

The Irish leg of the story started when John Leahy, a native of Kerry, Ireland, and a decorated Korean War veteran, was in New York during the bicentennial celebration of our nation's independence. He got to thinking of his fellow Irish who had died in Korea and who were never recognized as full citizens. He mobilized a team. Twenty-seven years later, on October 30, 2003, after a lot of hard work, a total of 28 Irish warriors were awarded posthumous citizenship under the terms of "The Posthumous Citizenship Restoration Act of 2002."

The Irish born men hailed from counties Cork, Mayo, Kerry, Limerick, Roscommon, Lonsford, Leitrim, Galway, Antrim, Tipperary and Louth. Twenty-seven of them served in the Army; one was a Marine. Twenty were killed in action, two died while POW, one died of wounds, one was missing in action and four were non-hostile deaths.

After a Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on October 30, solemn ceremonies took place on Capitol Hill and at the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Many notables attended that day, including Gen. P. X. Kelley, former commandant of the Marine Corps, who shepherded the process of the campaign in the final days leading up to the signing of the bill.

Pat Maguire, of County Fermanagh, Ireland, a decorated Korean War veteran, was the person who convinced McGinn to research all

of military and civilian Irish deaths in Korea. The result was www.irishinkorea.org. Brian's hard work helped many, not least those families who finally saw their soldiers made posthumous citizens. May God hold him in the hollow of his hand!

A Death March and Nightmares

That's the name of a great little 127-page soft-cover book written by Donald Donner of Newport, Washington, a "Tiger Survivor," describing his life in the Army in Japan in 1948 - 1949, and later in Korea with the 24th Infantry Division. Like most former POW, Donner didn't talk much about his experiences in Korea after he came home, but as the years went by he came to realize that the plight of the POW in Korea was - largely unknown - and the public needed to know. So, for the sake of his grandchildren and his legacy, he sat down and wrote the book.

Shortly after the Korean War broke out, Donald was sent to Korea. He arrived at Taejon on July 8, and for the next twelve days participated as a radio operator and a close combat soldier with Battery A, 11th Field Artillery Battalion, in the heroic but futile attempt to save Taejon from the advancing North Koreans. His descriptions of the battle and the chaos surrounding the combat are instructive and riveting.

Donald was captured on July 20, and survived the infamous "Death March" to the prison camps along the Yalu River near Changsong where he was harshly imprisoned until August 1953. His is just one of many remarkable stories of courage, survival and hope, stories by ordinary men of faith who fought bravely only to live a nightmare - but who now look only to the future. They are stories that definitely need to be told.

"It is so asinine," he said, "that those of us who lived this nightmare must also be the ones to preserve for posterity the truth of what happened there."

The book is available on-demand by Trafford Publishing, Canada, 1-888-232-4444, <sales@trafford.com>, U.S. \$15.

Corporal Heath Interred With Honors

Corporal Leslie R. Heath of Bridgeport, Illinois, was interred on August 20 in Bridgeport, some 54 years after he was captured by Chinese Communist Forces on the morning of April 23, 1951, along with more than 80 other members of Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Regimental Combat Team.

Cpl. Heath was held in a temporary POW camp known as Suan Camp Complex in North Hwanghae Province in North Korea. Reportedly, he died in June 1951. His remains were returned by the North Koreans in July 1993. They were identified by forensic experts of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Hawaii in May 2005.

Heath's mitochondrial DNA sequence matched that of two of his maternal relatives.

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