

Holiday Stories



NOTE: Again, thank you for the tremendous response to our request for holiday stories. Let's hope we all enjoy the holidays as much as our editorial staff enjoyed the response.

1st Cav Div Arty HQ—Christmas 1950

Below are a few photos from the 1st Cav Div Arty HQ "First Team's" Christmas celebration in 1950. If anyone remembers some of the people's names. Let us know.

Richard J. Clark, 2755 S. 600 E.,
Greenfield, IN 46140, 317-462-9616



1st Cav Div Arty HQ "First Team" personnel at Christmas dinner in 1950; note the mess crew's decorations on the back wall.



1st Cav Div Arty HQ mess crew



Members of 1st Cav Div Arty HQ "First Team" at South Seoul on Han River, Christmas 1950: Cahill, ?, Driggers (WV), Simerson (WI), ? May (or Mays), who was a WWII reservist recalled for Korea (L-R)

Chupori, Korea 1953

My wife and I were picking up a book from our Historical Society, dedicated to the veterans in town. Banners with our photos/names were hung up on street lights in the downtown area for Memorial Day and the 4th of July, to be hung up every year. One of the others members had some photos of his family in Korea. He wanted to show me. The area was Chupori, Korea, where the 461st Inf. Bn. Heavy Mortars was located.

Apparently Santa Claus visited the unit in 1953.

Emerson R. Lucas, 532 Fillmore St.
Riverside, NJ 08075



Santa Claus draws a crowd in Chupori, Korea at Christmas in 1953



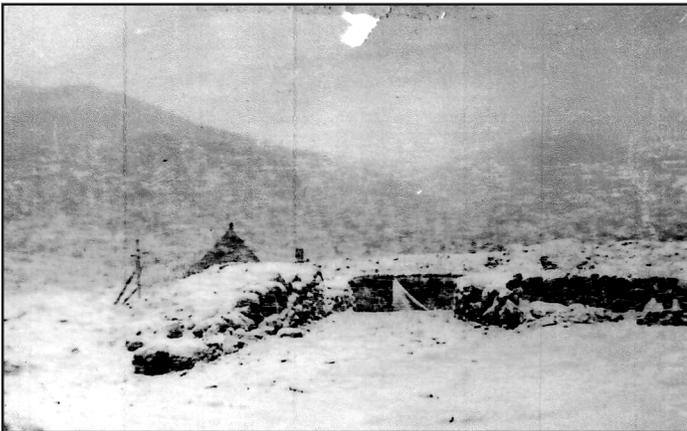
The Christmas party at Chupori in 1953

Editor's office hours

Editor Sharp's office hours, such as they are, are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST, Monday-Friday. He is not an employee of the KWVA, so his hours vary.



Santa Claus sighted at Chupori



A fitting snow-blanketed Christmas scene for 461st Inf. Bn, Heavy Mortars in 1953

Santa brings momentary joy to some Korean kids

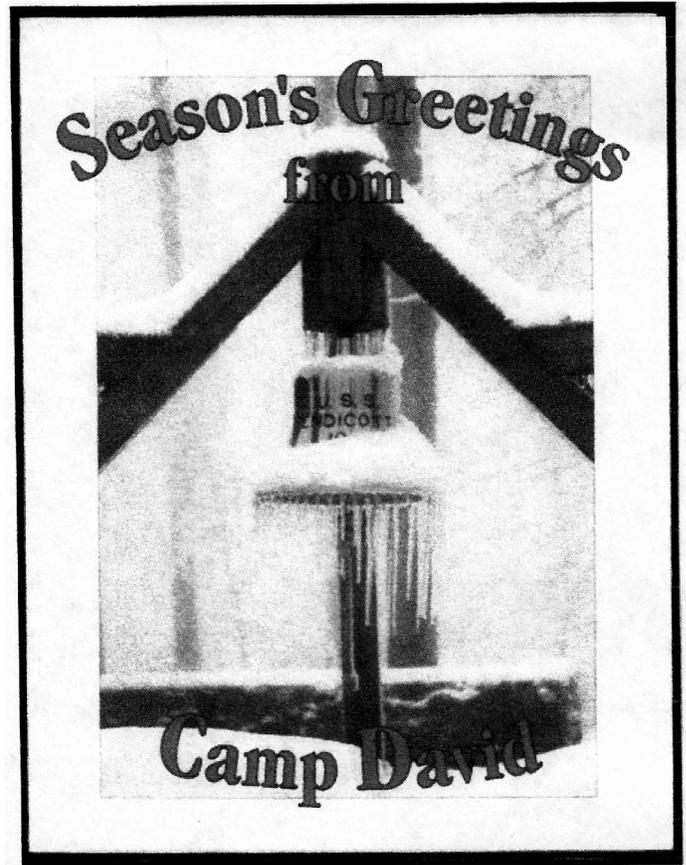
By Donald Aldrich

On Christmas Day 1951 *USS Endicott's* (DMS-35) crew hosted a party. Their guests were 35 children and 10 adults from allied-held Yang Do Island off the Communist coast. Some were natives of the island; others were refugees. They arrived in a ROK patrol craft.

The temperature was 20 degrees Fahrenheit and it was snowing heavily. The children were in rags. Most of them walked with bare feet in wooden clogs. A few had cast-off oversized GI shoes. There were dirty faces, shaggy mussed hair, and blank expressions. Each child soon had a sailor for a big brother. When a sailor had to go on watch another took his place. The whole crew was involved.

Turkey was a new dish. Rice was not on the official menu, but it was served in abundance and the guests built their meal around it. After the meal all the guests saw their first movies; a program of five cartoons. At 1530 the Koreans left. Each child carried a pair of heavy long wool stockings filled with fruit, candy, and rice. Many had special gifts from their "big brothers."

There were smiles now and those children's smiles reflected throughout the ship. All hands knew that it had been a good Christmas. Fire Controlman First Class Howard Douglas Mathieson wrote to his parents that evening, and he said what



Season's greetings from USS Endicott

everyone felt. His letter is quoted here because it carries the secret of Endicott's strength and the solid foundation of our United States of America.

He wrote:

100 Miles South of Vladivostok, Russia Dec. 25, 1951

9:30 pm Christmas Day

Dear Mom and Karl,

Well I have something to say. I don't know whether I will get this across or not. Please excuse my writing as we are doing 25 knots and the vibration makes it hard to write.

We had these Korean children aboard for Christmas dinner. Some of them were toddlers and on up to 14 or 15 years of age. You know, after having a first-hand look at what the Red-Terror can do to children, not only does it physically but mentally. I am very glad that we have been able to keep that from the borders of our own United States.

If you had seen them today or anyone and everyone in the United States could have seen them, they wouldn't be thinking of peace talk and having their loved ones home until the root of this poisonous weed was dug up and burned. Because we are not going to have peace on this earth until this Red-Terror is abolished.

Mother, if you could have seen these children's eyes when they came aboard here, how frightened and terror stricken, and then watched that terror fade for a while when we gave them their presents and candy, fed them and showed them about the ship and then showed them some cartoons. It is just wonderful what a little kindness does.

I got to thinking, "Dear Lord in Heaven, I hope I never live to see the day that something like this could happen in the United States." Karl, Mom, it is going to take a lot and I mean a LOT of backbreaking work to accomplish the kind of Peace on Earth and Good Will toward men that we have been praying for.

I am glad I am here, five thousand miles from home, helping to keep the Red Terror from showing in the eyes of the children at home. We are going to give fire support for some rocket ships. Will have to close for now.

Your loving son,
Howard

Reach Donald Aldrich at 972 Blazing Star Crossing, Mesquite, NV 89034, 702-969-0770

A Night between holidays to remember

By Cpl. Eugene Gaster - Hq. & Hq. Company - 9th Inf. Regiment - 2nd Division

It was nearly midnight. The bitter cold, nearly 27 degrees below zero, penetrated the men, nearly to the bone, as they rested momentarily on the barren snow-covered hillside. They appeared as silhouettes, some staggering from exhaustion due to the arduous climb moments before, with their M-1 rifles slung from their tired shoulders. Somewhere in the darkness the enemy was close behind them.

Thankfully, the enemy was at the bottom of the hill and still needed to make the climb. Nevertheless, they were there. How many? No one in the platoon on the hill knew. They could only surmise what awaited them if they didn't move on quickly. Some were so tired they could have lain in the snow and said their goodbyes. Instead, they were encouraged on by Captain Lincoln Wray, company commander.

What ever happened to the promise from several officers and non-coms that they would be home with their families to celebrate Christmas?

It was nearly midnight and a few snowflakes drifted down slowly, oblivious to their plight. If one did not know better it was a peaceful Christmas night, except it was a few days after



Captain Lincoln Wray and wife Kath

Thanksgiving. The encampment on Thanksgiving night was abuzz with rumors that the war was about over and peace talks were ongoing, but somewhere ahead of them, and unknown to them, a dreadful scene was unfolding.

Plans were being formulated that would involve them all personally. Somewhere, other men, strangely dressed in their white quilted parkas, had other plans. They were not eating

turkey and mashed potatoes (the powdered kind) and enjoying small talk. They had other plans.

After the meal that somehow managed to stay warm in their mess kit plate, the men sat in tents, some playing poker with their army scrip—small dollar bills issued primarily to replace ordinary currency. It seemed almost like monopoly money and it flowed freely, as it was cheaply printed and bore no resemblance to the familiar faces of the U.S. presidents.

The men were young, some barely out of high school, yet seasoned from their basic training. The small talk was punctuated with laughter and crude jokes at times like young men do. The mood was lighthearted and they chatted about their girlfriends back home. Some older ones talked about their wives and kids.

Not one among them sensed what was about to become a nightmare waiting to happen.

To the left of their encampment was a South Korean brigade and to the right was a United Nations ally. All was secure at Headquarters Company, Ninth Infantry Regiment, Second Division... in the middle. Or was it?

I was one of those men.

A little geography

The United Nations front line near the Ch'ongch'on River, about 50 miles south of the Korean border, was the battleground. The UN's line was horizontal from the Korean west coast to the Taebak Mountains in central Korea. The Ch'ongch'on River crossed into the north of the UN line at the town of Kujang-dong. From Western Korea and to the east were small villages, some of which had been reduced to rubble.

We laughed as ever so often, amid the rubble in many towns, was a lone bank safe, which I suppose was empty by the time we passed it. Many mud huts remained on the outskirts. The villages had names that were foreign to most American troops, many of them hard to pronounce, e.g., Kujang-dong, Yongsan-dong, Chongju, Tokchon, Yongwon and Ipsok—names I have long forgotten until I started writing this story. After 68 years, I wonder if any ex-military in my outfit would remember the names.

These small villages were connected by a series of road junctions, such as Sinanju, Anju, Kunu-ri and Pukchang-ni. The badly rutted dirt road (hard as a rock) that ran south from Kunu-ri into Sunchon and eventually into Pyongyang became our main retreat route, as it did for some of the UN forces near the center of the front line. The hills on the northern bank of the Ch'ongch'on River were ideal barriers that enabled the Chinese to hide themselves and attack the advancing UN forces. Being one of the coldest Korean winters in 100 years (as low as -30 ° F), it wasn't the best time to fight a battle. Then again, no time is right for war.

Oh, holy fight...

Our unit was approximately 35 miles from the Yalu River, separating North Korea from Manchuria, when the People's Republic of China entered the war on the side of North Korea and forced the Allied forces to retreat behind the 38th Parallel. The 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Division, Headquarters Company was an integral part of that retreat.

Our unit became vulnerable—and consequently surrounded. There was light snow and ground cover and bitter cold. We were

told to pack our belongings and board the now famous deuce and a half trucks and a convoy was formed quickly. Our particular truck had no cover and we stood, jammed in, as I recall. We carried full packs and slung M-1 rifles with only a .30 caliber bullet belt and one canteen of water at our side.

Some details are vague after 68 years. I remember some of the articles I packed, but not all, other than the usual stuff such as toiletries, mess kit, etc. They included \$300 Army scrip from poker winnings, my Waltham watch that I received from my dear mom for graduation and which I was going to mail home for repairs, a North Korean flag, a small jeweled oriental dagger, and an emblem from a captured North Korean's officer's cap.

Suddenly the convoy, heading south, stopped abruptly. There was very little chatter among us. We heard rapid fire from somewhere in front of us. The word quickly spread from the leading vehicles that the Chinese and North Koreans had a road block and were cross firing across the road with machine guns and rifles. To this day I do not know if they blocked the road with a vehicle. (Perhaps one of the ex-military that was with the 9th Infantry Regiment and reading this article will contact me with more information.)

We were told to take nothing except our canteens and rifle. I was dismayed at what I had to leave behind. We jumped from the truck and my feet were so cold I barely felt them when I hit the ground. My knees buckled as I hit the near frozen road. There was a ditch alongside the road and we were told to go into it. It dawned on me at that moment that the danger was close. We lay in the ditch for a brief moment and I wondered about the next move. In front of us was an open field. Thankfully it wasn't a rice paddy.

Without much time to speculate where we were going or what was to follow, an order came to our sergeant, from Captain Lincoln Wray, to cross the field and head for the hill. Korea has many hills and many have sparse vegetation. It was several hundred yards across the field and offered very little cover from wayward bullets. We were merely black silhouettes heading to what?

Many of us could have been gunned down at any time, but I guess it just wasn't our time. I was not particularly scared, but the night was not over!

My brother's story rings true

My oldest brother landed at Omaha Beach in World War II when I was barely 14. He returned home after being wounded at St. Lo in France. He told the family some things that were horrific, but at my tender age the sheer brutality and deaths in a war seemed so abstract and more like a movie. To comprehend young men dying was hard to fathom for myself and my friends. Now it was real!

Being with a Headquarters Company I felt extremely fortunate. We were close to the fighting, but rarely in the thick of it. But it did not mean we weren't in danger many times. Just being in a war zone presented danger from mortar fire, enemy snipers, or even being overrun at times. Headquarters Company controlled many things such as troop movement, liaisons, administrative duties, guarding prisoners, maintenance, motor pool, field feed, mess, supply and infantry support as needed. We were still close enough to be surrounded and trapped.



LtGen Joseph M. Swing, Sixth Army Commander, presents the Bronze Star to Captain Lincoln Wray

If one has ever heard Taps being sounded, they realize it has a mournful sound. Three or four hundred yards behind us was an unknown Chinese soldier, well trained on the bugle, who sounded Taps. It was a sound that none in our group ever forgot. It chilled us to the bone.

We moved quickly up the hill in front of us. The steam from our breath infiltrated the darkness. No one spoke, fearful that all hell would break loose from the unseen force behind us. None of us even dared to stop or even look back. Now the young troops were men. Hard as steel from the rigors of basic training and all with one thought. We may never get out of this alive.

Taps if for the deceased, not the ling

Men began to speak in whispers:

"Are we going the right way?"

"Wish I could light a smoke."

"How close are the Chinks?"

"I'm running out of water."

"Maybe we should just turn around and start shooting."

"At who?"

"Too damn dark to shoot...you dummy."

"Let's keep moving and get the hell out of here."

The silhouettes moved silently into a small ravine then up a grade. Another damn hill. Hardly enough trees to hide behind, so I leaned against a small tree and took a drink from my canteen. It was about half full. The water was ice cold and I shivered as questions and thoughts raced through my mind.

"Who was on our left flank? Our right flank?"

"Was my army career to end tonight?"

"What was I doing last year at this time?"

"Mom and Pap don't even know where I am!"

"My sisters, Marilyn and Doris, and my brother Ivan doesn't know either!"

"I feel so alone. I miss my family and my watch."

"What time is it anyway?"

We moved on and my legs and feet felt frozen. It would be wonderful to be sitting in front of the space heater in the living room on Locust Street, Uniontown, PA and listening to Christmas carols.

The Taps sounded again...this time closer.

Our own troops fire at us

The night seemed darker and colder, but the constant moving kept our feet from freezing and the occasional "Taps" spurred us on. Suddenly shots rang out as we crossed a barren area and we ran for cover. Some fell to the prone position, M-1s ready!

Ahead was a small thicket of woods. The Chinese had caught up with us. God help us. A fellow running next to me stumbled and was falling. My arms were strong due to the daily push ups. One hand held about 9 lbs. of rifle and with my free hand I grabbed at him, righted him, and we kept going without losing a beat. He happened to be one of our cooks...and who wants to lose a "good" cook? (Just a bit of humor here, because it is horrific to even lose one person.) Thank God and Captain Lincoln Wray that not one soldier was hurt.

It was a group of 2nd Engineers who mistook us for enemy, in the dark, and fired on us and not the Chinese. Amen.

How Wikipedia describes it

"On the morning of November 30 [1950], the 9th Infantry Regiment led the withdrawal by attacking the roadblock. Four tanks were first sent down the road and the Chinese held their fire. Encouraged by this development, Colonel Sloane ordered the 9th Infantry Regiment to press forward, but Chinese machine gun and mortar fire immediately stopped the advance at 9 a.m. The ROK 3rd Infantry Regiment attached to the 2nd Infantry Division was sent to reinforce the US 9th Infantry Regiment, but it was routed by friendly fire. With no contacts between the American commands and the British units, the Middlesex Regiment advanced to the south end of the valley without attacking the roadblock.

"Believing that the roadblock was short and the British were attacking up the road, General Keiser ordered the 2nd Infantry Division to run through the blockade at 10 a.m.

As the 2nd Infantry Division entered the valley, later known as the "Gauntlet," the Chinese machine guns delivered punishing fire while mortar shells saturated the road.

"The length of the roadblock caught the 2nd Infantry Division by surprise, and the road was soon filled with wrecked vehicles and wounded and dead soldiers. Those who tried to take cover in the ditches were promptly left behind by the convoy rushing south, and unit cohesion instantly evaporated.

"During the day, the air cover tried to suppress the Chinese positions with some success, but with no air cover at night, the Chinese attack intensified. Finally, the Chinese blocked the road completely by destroying the US 38th and 503rd Artillery Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Division and the immobilized artillery pieces forced the rest of the division to abandon all vehicles and to retreat by hiking through the hills.

"At the rear of the division, Colonel Freeman attempted to save his 23rd Infantry Regiment by retreating through the Kunu-ri-Anju road. In one of the last acts of the battle, the 23rd Infantry Regiment fired off its stock of 3,206 artillery shells within 20 minutes and the massive barrage shocked the Chinese troops from following the regiment.

"The last stragglers from the US 2nd Infantry Division finally arrived at Sunchon on December 1." (End of Wikipedia text)



(Cpl) Eugene Gaster

Without the wisdom and bravery of one extraordinary man, Captain Lincoln Wray, many lives, including my own, may very well have been lost on a lonely frigid night on a hill in North Korea. Captain Wray has passed on, but I am positive that in the hearts and minds of the remaining veterans of that

night...he will never be forgotten.

Captain Lincoln Wray was a hero!

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Madison, OH 44057, 440-983-4174,
redraideruhs49@roadrunner.com

When is enough enough? When you have enough!

This particular incident occurred more than 60 years ago. It is one which I replay in my mind from time to time, especially at Christmas time. It is a scene which is as clear today as it was when it occurred. It is one of those things which has an effect on one's life, although at the time you don't realize how much it would impact your later life.

Our regiment was deployed in the Chorwon Valley in central Korea. It was a brutally cold winter, so cold that the air froze the water in our canteens. If we were lucky, we got back to the rear once a month to get a hot shower, clean underwear, fatigue pants and shirt, and maybe two cans of beer. We were dirty and stank but, fortunately, the cold kept the smell to a minimum.

The story really begins on Christmas Eve 1952. Six to eight of us were manning an outpost about a quarter mile in front of our own lines. It was a clear, cold starlit night that was eerily quiet with little or no small arms or artillery fire. The enemy had set up amplifiers behind their lines and began playing Christmas carols, e.g., "Silent Night," and other familiar songs.

Interspersed with the songs were exhortations reminding us how far from home we were and that we should stop fighting a war we could not possibly win. As we peered out at the enemy positions, the rats ran toward our faces and startled us. I guess they were trying to decide whether to jump in with us to get out of the cold.

I decided that it was time for my Christmas dinner, which consisted of a can of C-Rations, my favorite consisting of wieners and beans in tomato sauce. After opening the can, I stuck my spoon into the can only to find out the food was frozen. Using GI ingenuity, I put the can inside my parka and let my body heat thaw the food.

At that point I was feeling pretty lonely and sorry for myself, 7-8 thousand miles from home on Christmas Eve with no immediate relief in sight. Needless to say, by the Grace of God

A VETERAN'S CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN

It is Christmas time in Heaven and I see
The countless trees, around the world below,
With tiny lights reflecting in the snow.
The sight is spectacular, please, wipe away that tear,
For I am spending Christmas in Heaven this year.
I hear the many Christmas songs that people hold so dear,
But the music can't compare with the Christmas Choir up here.
I have no words to tell you the joy the voices bring.
For it is beyond description to hear the angels sing.
I know how much you miss me; I see the pain in your heart,
But we are not so far away. We really aren't apart.
So be happy for me, you know I hold you dear.
And be glad I'm spending Christmas in Heaven this year.
I sent you each a special gift from my home above.
I sent you a memory of my undying love.
So have a merry Christmas and wipe away that tear.
Remember I am spending Christmas in Heaven this year.

By Tailhook Jack (Real name withheld by request)

It helps to know your flags

By Bill Morgenstein

For some reason Halloween was a big holiday for us. It was party time. You drank until you fell. The Philippine ambassador was long gone and lost. Captain Jim (Jimmy) and Mr. X (me) remembered downing whiskeys at the OEC Club. Waking up out of our stupor we were in a very unfamiliar place. Worse our boots were gone and walking around in Khaki army socks was no pleasure.

We had to get off the rocky road, walk into a town, and find the base. We didn't have a compass with us and I have a notoriously bad sense of direction. After lots of aimless walking we saw 2 or 3 story buildings in the distance. Hopefully, we thought, that is Seoul.

As we approached during what seemed like an eternity we saw a shocking site. Flags were draped from the window. Not just flags, but RED flags. My God, we must have wandered into North Korea. As we were now completely sober we knew a number of things.

1. We couldn't be seen.
2. We had to head south.
3. If we were discovered without boots by the MPs we would be court-martialed.

The sun was setting, so we figured out which direction was south and headed that way, hiding and freezing with fear every time we heard a sound. Feet stinging, hungry, feeling cruddy we walked, hid, walked, hid....until we saw what looked like the MSR ahead (main supply route), which would lead to EASCOM (Eighth Army Support Command) and our base. Our luck; here's a cab.

Luckily our documents weren't stolen and I had MPCs (military payment certificates, which is Army currency) hidden in my sock. "SAC Army base," we yelled in unison. Since the driver

was not responding Jim went into his Turkish soldier act.

The Koreans were deathly afraid of the Turkish soldiers, who all carried long knives. Jim was screaming gibberish and pounding the top of the taxi cab's front seat.

"Yongsan, Yongsan reservation," he yelled.

The driver sped to the post but we had him leave us about 50 yards on the side. We were frightened again because if the MPs saw we had no boots we are in a heap of trouble. But, when we got to the gate we experienced a bit of luck.

As we approached and showed our documents a Korean "honey bucket" truck (human waste collection) was passing. The MPs were distracted by the noise and the smell of the human waste, which the Koreans used to fertilize their crops. By the way, Koreans are not overly fond of dogs and one of my friends from the JAG Corps (our legal team) saved a dog from the honey bucket brigade. Unfortunately the smell never left the dog. Anyway we were saved, got back to the barracks, and told our story.

Carl, a Harvard-trained lawyer who thought he knew everything, laughed. (That was one of the few times I had ever seen him laugh). Usually Carl had no common sense, but this time he knew what the flags were about. No, we learned, we were not in North Korea. There is a small village nearby that is inhabited by a small Nationalist Chinese community. It had been a Nationalist Chinese holiday!

We didn't know the difference between Communist Chinese or National Chinese flags. Shame on us.

NOTE: *If any member wants any other Army or stories from my Korean tour I will be happy to forward a pdf copy to them.*

Bill Morgenstein, 800-753-7840, bmorgens@aol.com
(Learn more about the author and his memoir, *The Crazy Life of a Kid From Brooklyn*, at <https://www.the-crazylifeofbill.com>)

A Christmas without a crumb

I arrived in Korea in March, 1960 aboard the troopship Gen. Daniel B. Sultan. After processing through ASCOM city, I was assigned to the First Cavalry Division's 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery (Rkt/Hwt), Hq. Btry. on Camp Snow, "Mickey Mouse" Corner, three miles behind the DMZ, near the Imjin River and the "Spoonbill Sector."

As Christmas 1960 approached, the battalion was forward deployed just south of the "Z" at our "live-fire" range northeast of Camp Casey near Camp Santa Barbara - a desolate, frigid and inhospitable place ringed by mountains near the Korean War's Iron Triangle and Pork Chop Hill battlegrounds.

At mail call a week or so before Christmas, I received a somewhat battered parcel addressed from my mother in Wyoming. In those pre-mass air transit days, Christmas parcels going by ship had to be mailed to Korea by Sept. 15th to reach what was then then called "the end of the longest supply chain the U.S. Army maintained in the world."

As I opened that battered package, out fell one of my mom's ring fruitcakes and the broken pieces of several dozen "pretty stale" Christmas cookies. I cut the fruitcake in pieces with

my bayonet, and buddies from my squad fell on those “wonderfully stale” reminders of Christmases past with a vengeance, until not a crumb remained!

For just a few moments, a bit of Christmas cheer glimmered in that desolate, cold place far, far from home!

Bruce A. Miller, Norwalk, CA, millerzhu@verizon.net

Home by Christmas?

Does anybody remember the “We’ll be home by Christmas” claim in 1950? Here is a cartoon from the January 1994 issue of *The Graybeards* that references it.

Thanks to Richard J. Clark, 2755 S 600 E, Greenfield, IN 46140, 317-462-9616. He served with USA 1 CAVD 99 FA BN HQ.

GRAYBEARDS
the forgotten warriors of the forgotten war

THE KOREAN WAR

THE FORGOTTEN MAN by LARRY CHAMPAGNE

ABMC and KWVMA say: "Names were not part of the original approved design."
Stan Hadden says: "Neither were faces on a wall."
ABMC and KWVMA say: "At this eleventh hour we cannot change the design."
Stan Hadden says: "It's never too late to listen to the voice of the people who want the KIA/MIA names on the Memorial. The following story tells how it can be done — easily."

STORY ON PAGE 3.

MID-WINTER COUNCIL MEETING IN BALTIMORE
The KWVA Council will meet on Friday, February 18, 1994 through Sunday February 20 in Baltimore, MD. If you are interested in attending or want more details, please contact: HARRY WALLACE, P.O. Box 12205; Baltimore, MD. Or phone 410-327-4834 EST.

Korean War Veterans Association
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THE GRAYBEARDS
ON VOL. 8, NO. 3, JAN. 1994

Larry Champagne's cartoon in the January 1994 *Graybeards*

Thanksgiving 1963: Stuffed, but content

It was just one more cold day in South Korea, but there was no wind. It was only five days earlier that we had gotten the news that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. Things all around our small Army Security Agency Compound in Yong Dong Po were still very somber.

Most of us only worked a half day with exception of those covering the as needed 24-7 assignments. The short work day was because it was Thanksgiving Day.

Almost all partook in the mess hall Thanksgiving dinner put on by the U.S. Army with a few frills added by the mess sergeant. We had all the fixings we were familiar with...turkey, stuffing,

cranberry sauce, yam potatoes, mashed potatoes with gravy, and more.

There was an impressive touch of red wine served with the feast, of which proportions were plenty large. We left the mess hall with our bellies full. The only hitch was that there was no dinner this day, no third meal. No problem though... we were all stuffed.

Then, just as we left the mess hall three of us were invited by Kim San Ke, a South Korean friend who worked for the U.S., to go to Seoul and meet a gentleman friend of his who was a professor at the University of Seoul. The gentleman had earned a PhD at a university in the United States. Away we went in the small buses that were the public transportation in South Korea back in the early 1960s.

It was a privilege meeting with Professor Yun at his small home in downtown Seoul. He was also a 7th degree black belt in Kong Su Do Karate. We all left our combat boots at the front door and sat on the floor as customary. After exchanging introductions and greetings, food and drink began to appear on the nice table that we all sat around with cushions and pillows.

Now, remember, we just ate a big thanksgiving dinner at the mess hall a couple of hours ago. We were still not only content, but stuffed. We thought of saying no thank you to all the offerings, but decided that would be an insult, so we went on and had a few bites.

The family insisted we partake more and we did not see any polite way out, so we ate a little more. To show us more courtesy they kept feeding us more and more food until we all felt we would explode.

Professor Yun showed us his 12-inch black and white television and some other trinkets he had, all showing us he lived at a better level than most South Koreans at that time. Nonetheless the house was very small, tiny by American standards, and no automobiles were owned by private citizens at the time.

Sitting back for a breather, feeling totally stuffed and hoping the flow of food would stop, the professor then brought out a fifth of Cutty Sark scotch and a fifth of Jack Daniels. Now this was the icing on the cake. To have American liquor like this was definitely a symbol of status, which the professor did hold in South Korea.

We found some room for a drink, well, maybe two drinks, before saying good night and heading back to our compound. Of course, we needed to get home before the county curfew, which was still in effect in that year.

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Hunting and New Year's Eve in Japan

By Norm Spring

After one and a half years in Japan assigned to the Military Police I volunteered a second time for Korea. I had quit the 11th Airborne in Fort Campbell, Kentucky to volunteer. I took intensive combat training and arrived in Japan in September 1951, during occupation. Instead of completing my trip to Korea I was assigned to the Military Police. Leave it to the Army.

Hunting pheasants in Japan was a goal I had for my furlough

prior to being transferred to Korea. It was granted since I was going there. The base where I was stationed had all Japanese barbers. I asked one if he could recommend a place where I could pheasant hunt on my furlough. I had my own shotgun, an 1100 Remington 16 gauge, semi-automatic.

The Japanese barber wrote a letter in Japanese and told me to take it to a certain train stop and show it around. Since it was written in Japanese I did not have the least idea what it said. I had to take a train to get there.

Upon arrival I, in my army clothing, with gun encased, showed my letter around. A lady read it and took me to a farm house. She gave the letter to the lady of the house (called mama san), who invited me in and introduced me to her husband. They spoke no English and I knew very little Japanese. Somehow we managed to communicate.

The husband (papa san) sent for a Japanese hunting guide with two English pointers. This amazed me. The plan was for me to eat and sleep with the Japanese family and the guide would pick me up at daybreak to go hunting every day. The papa san would make sandwiches for me for lunch and give them to the guide to carry.

The guide and I, with two dogs, walked everywhere. The hunting was pretty good, especially with a couple of good pointers. Throughout the week I shot pheasant, both Chinese ring necks and Japanese green backs, with long tails. I also shot wood cock and partridge.



Papa san and Norm Spring with birds and dog

At noon we'd stop by a stream for water so the guide could make tea over a wood fire. One time I noticed a trout holding between some rocks. I managed to catch it by hand, cleaned it, and roasted it over the fire on a stick. The guide got a kick out of that: we were hunting and I caught a fish.

At the end of the day we brought the birds home. Papasan cleaned out the insides, wiped them dry with newspaper, and hung them on the outside of the house. Nights were cold.

The living arrangements consisted of sleeping on the floor on a straw mat in a line across the one room. There was a large

The Papa san and guide who helped Norm Spring—with the pointers and birds



hibachi (clay pot) that burned charcoal sitting in a depression large enough that everyone could sit around it with their feet in the hole. That is where we ate while holding our plates. The papasan would cook and hand it out. This routine continued for six days. On the seventh day papasan negotiated my payment to the guide.

He also insisted he should give me a shave before I returned to base. There was only one chair and one picture on the wall. The picture was of the papasan in World War II in his military uniform.



Norm Spring (L) and his guide at lunch time

I sat in the chair as papasan lathered me up and used a straight razor to shave me without a nick. I gave the family all the birds and the whole family waved handkerchiefs as I departed on the train. The name of the family sounded like Hodicross. I wish I'd kept their address to stay in touch.

After leaving Tokyo I was transferred to an Air Force base, I believe it was Tachikawa, that also served as a transfer center we called a repo depo. It was New Year's Eve 1952-53, and the master sergeant announced no passes unless we had a relative nearby.

I called a friend of mine in Tokyo and asked him to call the sergeant and to tell him he was my brother so we could celebrate New Year's. The pass was granted and the two of us went to a non-commissioned officers club. We drank three bottles of

champagne and got quite loose. We traveled by Japanese taxi back to our bases. When I arrived at the gate the guard stated, "You're late, soldier." I told him I got lost. The next day, January 1, 1953, I arrived in Inchon, Korea.

Norm Spring, 1416 Lake Ave.,
Grand Haven, MI 49417, 616-402-8938

Who took the parkas?

While stationed at Osan Air Base, South Korea (in the old days known as KSS) an exciting thing happened to me just prior to Christmas Day 1970. The phone rang and my boss, Mac, picked it up and in his low and always limited answers said; something like this....."Yes! Ok! Yeah! Sure!"

He finished by saying "Mac and Roberson."

After hearing "Mac and Roberson," I asked, "Mac, what's that about and why did you use my name?"

He replied, "I just put us on a detail."

I said, "Mac, I'm not going on any detail. I can assign someone else to do a detail."

"I know," he said. "But you and I ARE going on this one."

I'm so glad that he put me on this detail.

I was overflowing with curiosity and said, "OK, Mac, what's going on?"

He explained that the Supply Sergeant asked for our unit to pick up and deliver 50 parkas for the "Bob Hope Show" entourage that was coming to our base on Christmas Day. The Supply Sergeant knew we had a weapons carrier, and Mac knew that I had military driver's licenses he lacked. You can guess the reason he needed me: as the driver.

As everyone knows Korea is very cold in the winter. And the 'show participants would need parkas before deplaning the aircraft, walking to a large shelter tent loaded with tons of "goodies" and continuing to the show platform.

By the way, we retrieved all but two parkas. The story was that someone higher up the "food-chain ladder," other than Mac or me, made off with those parkas. Hmm!!! Could it have been a "high ranker" and/or one of their guests?

JUST WONDERING!!!

Gene Roberson, 4041 Winterberry Ct.,
Washington, MO 63090, 636-239-4333

Not the best Christmas homecoming ever

By Maurice Trottier

Landed from an LST in Pusan with the 78AAA. Since there were no planes to shoot at we became a field artillery unit supporting mostly the 1st ROK Division. This we did until we reached Unsan and the Chinese ruined our Thanksgiving of 1950. I rotated in November of 1951 to arrive at Fort Devens, Massachusetts.

All of the following events took place on Christmas Day 1951.

After being checked out and paid I was bused to Worcester, Massachusetts to wait for another bus. One bus left for New Hampshire and someone mistakenly took my duffle bag. Now, while waiting for my bus, I called my girlfriend and I talked to her mother. She said to me "Oh, Mary is married." So I traveled to my hometown of Pawtucket, RI and proceeded to my house with a

duffle bag that was not mine.

I knocked on the door and a young girl with a baby in her arms told me my mother didn't live there anymore. I visited the landlady. I had lived in that house since I was four years old and the landlady and I were good friends. She did not know where my mother had moved. We talked and cried and I called a cab and went to my brother's house.

I got to my brother's house where there was a note on the door announcing "Gone to Boston for the Holidays." I did not go looking for my younger sister because she had recently been married, and I did not know where she lived. By this time it was getting dark.

I took a cab to my older sister's house, but no one was home. I returned to the bus station, put the duffle bag in a locker, and walked to the Boys Club for a place to rest, but it was closed for Christmas. So, I went to a bar next door and ordered a beer.

The bartender asked my age. I said 20 years old. He replied, "Sorry, no beer." Now I was totally down in the dumps. I returned to the bus station and called a pen pal. I told her my story and she gave me an address to go to. By the time I arrived her mother had reheated the whole Christmas dinner for me.

After the meal her father asked if I had a license and I said yes. He handed me the key to his brand new Dodge and she and I went dancing. When we returned her mother had prepared a place for me to sleep.

The next day I went looking for my mother. She had remarried, to a man who disliked me immensely. My mother and father had divorced when I was 14 and I always felt he was the reason for the divorce.

My mother invited me to stay with her, which I did. Christmas was on a Tuesday and we had dances on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. When I went to the dance on Saturday Pat, her husband, told me I had to be home by 10 p.m. The dance ended at 11 p.m. and I walked a mile home. When I got to the house the door was locked.

I knocked three times with no response. Next, I pounded, then I kicked the door. He finally opened the door, but told me he would see me in the morning. Now, it's Sunday morning and my mother has made breakfast of steak, eggs, home fries, and coffee. While I was eating, with a steak knife in my hand, he reached across the table and grabbed me by the neck of my shirt.

I immediately stabbed him in the hand, pointed the knife at his throat, and warned him never to touch me again. I left my mother's house and never lived with her again. I went back to stay with my sister.

I sat in a chair for three days trying to find myself. I was thinking of going back to Fort Devens, where I would be with friends. After a stay of 30 days at Fort Devens with malaria I got discharged, but I reenlisted in the paratroopers at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. There I was with my real family.

I retired with 22 years of service and have been married for 53 years with four great kids, Gary, Greg, Rebecca, and Kimberly.

Yours in Comradeship,

Maurice P. Trottier, 20 Oakdale Ave., Pawtucket, RI
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Thanksgiving and Christmas 1950

By Ronald Todd

Here are four vignettes from my remembrances.

1

As I remember (now being 86 years old), I landed at Inchon on 15 September 1950 as a member of George Company, 2nd Bn., 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th ID. We swept down the west coast and first came under fire at the Suwon train station. We met the units that broke out of the Pusan perimeter somewhere around Osan.

After cleaning up stragglers of the North Korean fighters, we boarded trucks and went to Taegu, Taejŏn, and then to Pusan. We camped on the beach just north of Pusan and waited for orders. While there we cleaned our equipment and swam in the surf on the Japan Sea.

Orders finally came and we boarded ships and sailed north and disembarked in North Korea. I think it was Wonsan. From there we fought our way north to a small abandoned village where we stopped and regrouped. As I remember, almost all of the troops were billeted in empty houses or whatever structure was available.

One of the things that really impressed me was the hot showers. It was November and we celebrated Thanksgiving while there. We could take showers whenever we wanted. The engineers constructed and placed large water containers in cuts in the side of the hill on the outskirts of the village. The water was heated by fires that were kept going under the water tanks and the water was directed by gravity down to the showers at the lower area. I don't remember how many showers there were, but it was all done outdoors.

While we were in in this village, we melted the chocolate bars that were in the "C" rations (we called them "communist bars") and spread the chocolate on the snow that was packed into our canteen cups. Someone had a friend in the mess tent who gave us gallon cans of "DONALD DUCK" grapefruit juice, which we mixed with medical alcohol we smuggled or "liberated" from the medical tent. We called that drink 'Stump Juice.'

2

Sometime after Thanksgiving we were told that we were moving south. We relocated to Hamhung/Hungnam and waited a day or two for orders to move. We slept the night before the move and woke up the next morning to find a couple inches of snow covering our sleeping bags.

As we were preparing to move out, a young North Korean girl circulated among us with a basket of apples to sell. We would buy an apple and when she was busy looking somewhere else we would put it back. She ended up with just as many apples as when she started.

We learned that we were going north into the mountains to a place called the Chosin Reservoir, where the Marines had gotten themselves surrounded and needed help to get out. We were transported by truck for a short ways and then put on a small narrow track train for a while. We walked over a bridge as dark set in.

It was snowing large wet flakes and it was very cold. We were

fired on by ambush from both sides. As it got progressively dark we received a lot of casualties and it became very confusing, as a lot of us became lost. I found myself in the company of two others and we stayed on the side of a mountain and dug into a snow-bank until morning sunlight.

We made our way up to the crest of the hill and looked down on the Marine camp at Hagaru-ri. We went into camp, found a warm tent, and were allowed to get some sleep. After a few hours of deep sleep we found our unit and were assigned to our duties.

Our C.O. sent us up to a knob north east of the compound at Hagaru-ri. We were a .57mm rifle squad and we relieved a Marine machine gun squad so they could go down and get warm. We stayed there for a while and they moved us around quite a bit until it was time to break out. No matter what the Marine history books say, we, the 31st RCT, 7th ID were there. We fought our way out just as much as and received casualties as severe as the Marines.

#3

As for thinking about what we would like to eat while we were coming out, a lot of us had different tastes. While coming down the frozen road we stopped many times to try to clear a road block or to return fire into the mountains on our left or into the fields to our right. During those times we would ask each other what we would like to eat.

Some would say "thick steaks, hot baked potatoes, gallons of hot coffee, the kind that didn't have ashes in it, BLTs, puddings, etc." When it got to me, I said that I wanted "strawberry milkshakes and creampuffs." I don't know why, but that's what I said.

After getting across the bridge built by the engineers (God Bless Them) at the reservoir pumping station we made it to the rail head, which was about three quarters of the way down. They put us on small open coal cars and gave each one of us a small box of cereal and a half pint of milk. At the rail terminus we were put into deuce and half trucks to be taken into town. I don't know if it was Hamhung or Hungnam.

One of my most cherished remembrances was this; the truck I was in stopped in the medical compound and we were told to get out. I jumped down and landed right into a big mud puddle. Because my feet were so frozen, they buckled under me and I went face down in the puddle.

There was a young lieutenant standing there to direct us all to where we were supposed to go. The splash I made from that puddle completely covered that young officer, who was wearing freshly cleaned and pressed utilities. He never said a word; he just bent down and picked me up like a baby in his arms and with tears streaming down his cheeks took me into the medical tent.

He laid me down and took off my boots (those useless Mickey Mouse boots). They had to cut my two pairs of socks so they could peel them off my feet like onion peels. They probably smelled just as bad. That was the last time I saw that officer, but I bless him often. They tagged me and the next morning I was on a C-54 on the way to Japan.

After we landed, ambulances took us to Osaka Army General Hospital. I was still wearing my dirty filthy utilities with my pack

and personal belongings. The personnel there....doctors, nurses, and Japanese female and male orderlies...descended on us like we were royalty. God Bless them all.

They took me to a single room and helped me take off my clothes. They must have given me a shower, dressed me in clean pajamas, and given me a nice blue robe and slippers. Then they put me in a beautiful bed with clean starched sheets and left me to sleep.

During the night I found that I could not sleep, apparently because it was too comfortable. So I pulled everything off the bed and slept soundly on the floor. The next morning, when they came into my room and found me on the floor, they thought I had fallen out of bed. I told them why and they understood.

It was during the first few hours of my stay there that I asked if there was a snack bar or a cafeteria in the building. They told me there was a snack bar downstairs and even wheeled me down there. The little Japanese girl who waited on me asked what I would like. I asked if they had any cream puffs. She assured me that they did, so I ended up having four or five strawberry milkshakes and at least a dozen cream puffs. It was wonderful.

#4

Shortly after arriving at Osaka Army General Hospital a bunch of us were transported to another building across town called the Annex. I have tried to find photos of this building and where it was located but to no avail. This was just before Christmas 1950. The ward I was in was on the third floor, and there were at least a couple hundred of us squeezed in. It was quite a group.

I made friends with several guys there. We were all getting a little squirrely after a while. Three guys asked me if I wanted to break out and find a nightclub. They had it all figured out. I don't know how they did it, but they had cased the building and found a small window in the basement that was always unlocked and slightly open. It looked out onto a dry moat that was about twenty feet below street level. We said, "What the heck (not heck)? Let's go for it."

All of us could only hobble. We were unable to walk a straight line and/or shuffle. The four of us, after bed check, slipped downstairs and found the open window. We somehow made it up to street level, where we split into two teams and went in different directions.

One guy and I went to the right toward the main street. Here we were, in military pajamas, blue robes with U. S. Army embroidered on the left breast, and slippers trying to flag down a three-wheeled jitney. We made it to a small nightclub and were roundly accepted. We had a grand old time.

As the sun was coming up we decided it was time to return to the Annex. We made it back and scaled down into the dry moat but found that the window was now shut and locked. What to do? We had to crawl back up to the street level and go around to the front of the building, where we were met by waiting MPs. They took us up to our ward and stood us in front of the Annex administrator, a Bird Colonel, who was quite upset.

He threatened to give us back our dirty utilities and send us back to our units, injuries be damned. The head nurse came to our defense, reminding him that it was almost Christmas and it would be inhumane to punish us in that way. He relented, but banished

us to the supply closet, which had locks, and took away our pajamas, slippers, and robes. He placed us on bare beds with no sheets or blankets.

Whenever the nurses had to come in to get clean sheets from a locked cabinet, we had to cover up with our mattresses. Also the heat was minimal and, being so close to Christmas, it was cold. When Christmas Eve came, Santa Claus came into our little cubicle and distributed candies and fruit. The nurses came in later and gave each one of us a fifth of Canadian Club. That kept us warm.

I found out, after getting caught, that the two guys who went in the opposite direction got caught right away. They ratted on us and talked about the open window. All the administrators had to do was wait for us to come back, which they did.

After recuperating at Camp Nara, I was sent back to my unit. A short time after that I received my five-day R&R in Tokyo.

(Sgt) Ronald Todd, San Dimas, CA, 91773,
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XMAS '43

By J. Birney Dibble

I've spent Christmas at home "only in my dreams" many times in my 93 years, including twice in WWII and twice during the Korean War. But my strangest Christmas in uniform was my very first, at home actually, in 1943.

I had enlisted as a senior in high school when I was accepted into the Navy V-12 College Training Program, to begin on July 1, 1943. That program was designed to fill the huge lack of junior commissioned naval officers. The Navy had plenty of senior officers and men in the enlisted ranks, but very few ensigns and junior grade lieutenants. V-12 would take care of that: four semesters of college in one year and bingo, the Apprentice Seaman trades his \$50/month and no chevrons for \$150/month and a gold stripe around the sleeve of his dress blues.

I was sent to Duke University in Durham, NC. There were 2,500 of us gobs and 600 Marines. There were a few Sailors from the fleet, but the vast majority were right out of high school. It was as strict as boot camp, I was told by one of those who'd been there. But that's another story.

Well, we were given Christmas leave, six days, from 0600 on December 23 to 2200 on December 28. "No way I can go home," I thought gloomily. Air fare was about \$150, equivalent to about \$2,250 in today's dollars. Only the really rich flew in those days.

I didn't have a car; very few of us did back then. I rode my thumb when I went somewhere nearby, such as to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to see Martha Faison, the love of my life. The train to Illinois would take a day and a half, three days round trip, leaving only three days at home. Not worth it!

Or was it?

I went! I don't remember the exact schedule but I got home – Aurora, Illinois – on Christmas Eve, after changing trains in Lynchburg, VA and Chicago. I was stopped by the Shore Patrol in Union Station in Chicago because I was wearing a white hat, out of uniform in the north in winter, but was sent on my way when I showed him in my orders that I came from down south.

I surprised – and clearly disappointed – my folks and sister by

announcing that I would stay with them Christmas Eve and Christmas Day but was going to West Chicago on the evening of Christmas Day to be with my high school sweetheart, Lorrie McFarland, for about 24 hours and leave there late on the 26th in order to come back to Aurora and leave for Duke on Monday, the 27th.

My plan was all worked out. The 24 hours with the folks was just wonderful. But it started to snow mid-afternoon on the 26th and was beginning to pile up by the time I was ready to drive the 30 miles to West Chicago. I started out with departing shouts of “Drive carefully!”

I didn’t get very far, just a few miles out of town, when I realized it would be foolhardy because I was driving in a significant snow storm! After I passed the second car in the ditch I turned around and went home.

A never-to-be-forgotten Christmas.

As happens with most teen-age love affairs, I never saw pretty little Loretta again!

Birney Dibble, jbirneydibble5@gmail.com

Christmas mass aboard a future Toyota?

I served aboard the *USS Bataan* (CVL-29) for 22 months. I was an Electricians Mate and worked out of the electrical shop until I made a few mistakes. Then the Chief discovered I was color blind and he sent me to the movie booth to run the ship’s movies. I can hear him now saying, “We will call you when we want white light bulbs screwed in.”

Needless to say, I wound up with one of the best jobs aboard ship.

1st: We were the movie exchange at sea.

2nd: We ran movies in four places when we were underway.

3rd: We showed all the v.d. movies to other shipmates when in port.

4th: I was usually the first one off the ship when we docked to draw new movies at the exchange.

5th: The job came under recreation so they paid me \$40 extra per month. In the early 1950s that was a lot of money.

I still had to stand some watches, but they worked around the movie schedule.

My first Christmas on the *Bataan* was in 1951 and we were in Okinawa in Buckner Bay. Our chaplain decided to have Christmas mass. We set up the altar on one of the elevators and raised it about 2½ to 3 feet so that the men could see. The word got out about the mass and we had sailors come from all the other ships that were in the bay. We must have had at least 1,100 to 1,200 enlisted and officers from other ships. The hangar deck was full. I had the honor to serve that mass and the good priest was tired when he finished.

I see that the “Graybeards” has written little about the Navy. I would like to brag a little about the *USS Bataan* CVL-29. She served in the Pacific in World War II and in Korea and was a very blessed ship.

In Korea, we flew mostly the Marine checkerboard squadron off our deck. They were fearless pilots and gave close ground support for both the Army and the Marines. In the 22 months I



USS Bataan
CVL-29

was aboard her, I had three trips to Korea. It was my time to grow up and become a man.

If you would like to know more about the *USS Bataan* CVL-29 or her sister ship the *USS Bataan* LHD5, please see our web site www.bataancvl29.org.

Just a side note: we had thirty years of wonderful reunions starting in 1987 and ending two years ago in San Francisco at the Marine Memorial Hotel. It was appropriate to hold the final reunion there because that is where we put the ship out of commission at Hunters Point. Since she was sold for scrap metal, you could be driving the *USS Bataan* as a Toyota!

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New Insight about *Meredith Victory* and Hungnam Evacuation in December 1950

Who did God favor?

By *Therese Park*

In this journey called “life” we never stop learning, even something you thought you knew far more than other subjects. Finding “Memorial Planned to *Meredith Victory* Captain, NMU Crew” in the May 2004 issue of *Seafarers* told me how much I didn’t know about the Hungnam Evacuation in late December, 1950, even though I wrote about a U.S. Marine who was one of the passengers on *Meredith Victory* along with 14,000 North Korean refugees who were brought to the safety of the south on Christmas Eve.

This article wasn’t only about 14,000 refugees and the remnants of U.S. Marines severely hit and evacuated after the Chinese “Volunteer troops” stepped into the war theater uninvited. Nor was it about how heroic the captain of that ship had been, allowing that many people from North Korea to board a vessel that wasn’t made to haul such weight—especially since the vessel already carried 300 tons of military supplies for the U.N. troops still trapped in the north.

The article revealed that on Christmas Day, 1950, the 455-foot *Meredith Victory*, operated by the Moore-McCormack Lines under charter to the Military Sea Transportation Service, Captain Leonard LaRue at the helm, was carrying supplies to American servicemen in Korea on behalf of the Navy. Three days earlier, on



Refugees aboard the *Meridith Victory* leaving Hungnam

Please turn to **HOLIDAY STORIES** on page 64

HOLIDAY STORIES from page 24

December 22th, *Meredith Victory*, along with 200 other American ships, was summoned to the North Korean seaport to evacuate American and South Korean Marines as well as more than 90,000 North Korean civilians waiting to escape the communist state.

LaRue, a Philadelphia native and World War II veteran, saw refugees thronging the decks, carrying their household items and children in their flight from the Communists. He ordered his crew of 47 men to help them. Soon 14,000 men, women and children crammed into the five cargo holds, in addition to covering the entire main deck of the freighter that was designed to hold only sixty people.

According to the article, “The ship set sail for the port of Pusan, a 28-hour-journey, a treacherous journey through the heavily mined Sea of Japan, which was patrolled by the North Korea submarines. In addition to more than 14,000 people, the ship was carrying 300 tons of jet fuel in 52-gallon-drums.”

Food and water were scarce and sanitary conditions were deplorable, the article reported. When the ship finally arrived in Pusan, the Korean officials, who were inundated with other refugees who had arrived earlier, told the captain to head for Koje Island, 50 miles south of Pusan, where the North Korean POW camp had been established. The ship arrived there safely on Christmas Day, but the port was too small to handle more than 14,000 people, forcing the passengers to wait on board another night. The next day, U.S. Navy LSTs (Landing Ship Tanks) came and transported the refugees to the shore.

In the ship’s log, Captain LaRue had written these words: “The nearness of Christmas carries my thoughts to the Holy Family—how cold they would have been, without a shelter.” Amazingly, not a single person died and five babies were born during this amazing journey, the article read.

Captain LaRue remained as captain of *Meredith Victory* until the ship was decommissioned in 1952, forcing him to lose his position. In 1960 he was awarded the “Meritorious Service Medal,” the highest honor given to Merchant Marines. He later received many citations and recognitions from the U.S. and South Korea governments for his heroic humanitarian services.

In 1954, Captain LaRue officially retired from his seafaring-life and embraced a life of prayer as a monk at St. Paul’s Abbey in Newton, New Jersey, with a new name—Brother Marinus. He died on Oct, 2001 at age 87.

The October 20, 2001, issue of *The New York Times* quoted Mr. LaRue’s hand-scribbled notes about his rescue mission: “I think of that voyage often...How such a small vessel was able to hold so many persons and surmount endless perils without harm to a soul. The clear, unmistakable message comes to me from that Christmas tide in the bleak and bitter waters off the shore of Korea. God’s own hand was at the helm of my ship.”

The May 2004 issue of *Seafarers* taught me so much about what role the U.S. Merchant Marine’s ships played during the war by rescuing not only depleted and haggard allied forces attacked by the Chinese troops, but also 90,000 North Koreans from Hungnam Port, including *Meredith Victory* with Captain LaRue at the wheel.

I have a question: which “LaRue” did God the Almighty favor?

The fearless Captain LaRue, who heard the Almighty’s voice saying, “Fear not, Captain, for I’m with you” the night he steered *Meredith Victory* with 14,000 North Korean refugees on board, or Brother Marinus, who prayed 46 years on his knees in the monastery?

Santa in Military Boots

By *Therese Park*

Christmas in 1950 was unforgettable for me. In the six months after 95,000 North Koreans had launched a surprise attack, on June 25, with 150 Russian tanks and ammunition, the fate of our motherland South Korea was no better than a woman on her death bed, counting her remaining days.

The excitement of the “Inchon Landing,” the U.N. troops’ amphibious landing on the enemy occupied port city, which General MacArthur had successfully engineered and then ordered U.N. troops to advance to farther north, was short-lived, as 300,000 Chinese volunteers stepped into the Korean War Theater uninvited and attacked them mercilessly.

We heard about the “Pusan Perimeter” in the news, too, the new U.N. defense line along the 140 mile-long Nakdong River, which the Eighth Army commander, General Walton Walker, had established to protect what remained of South Korea from the communists as well as to restrike the communists and kick them out of the peninsula.

During the past six months, the population of our town of Pusan off the Pacific coast had grown ten times greater—from about 250,000 to three million—as the South Korean government had moved in and promoted the town as Temporary Capital of Republic of Korea. The sad part of it was that the government confiscated all school buildings in Pusan for government administrative purposes, e.g., refugee shelters, food distribution facilities, and temporary military lodging or hospitals.

We fourth-graders lost our school building the day after the news of war had reached us during Monday assembly on June 26th. That day our principal had informed us that our school would be occupied by the South Korean army as a temporary hospital for the injured soldiers who were being transported from the battleground at that very moment, and that we must empty our classrooms and clean them as soon as possible.

Our cleaning job took longer than we had anticipated. The following day, while we were still moving boxes and wiping windows and the hardwood floors, a long line of dust covered military trucks and ambulances crawled into our playground. How frightened we were at seeing so many injured soldiers being unloaded from the trucks and ambulances by soldiers wearing white arm bands! It was our last day inside that school building.

In the fall, our school reopened on a hillside on the mountain behind our neighborhood, on bare dirt, without a roof over our heads or desks and chairs. But in less than two months the cold weather settled in, and we lost our school again.

No school to go to, we listened to the news every day. I still remember listening to the news that more than 800 Americans, including soldiers and Christian missionaries from many different countries, who had been captured and forced into a Death March, had finally arrived in the North Korea POW Camp near the Manchurian

Border” after losing many of their fellow prisoners-of-war, who were killed on the road for not walking fast enough.” This news saddened the Korean Catholic community, including our parents, because Bishop Patrick Byrne, who had served as Apostolic Delegate to Korea for a few years, was among the POWs. We remembered seeing his photos in the newspapers.

But Christmas was approaching. In the midst of the gloomy war news, the melody of “Jingle Bells” was joyful and our anticipation of seeing Santa bringing presents was indescribable. Finally, on Christmas Eve, our family of nine, our parents and us seven children, walked to our parish church for the midnight mass as we had done in earlier years, but Santa wasn’t the same. Instead of a short skinny Korean Santa, this year’s Santa was a jolly faced, hefty American we had never seen before.

After the long service was over, the Santa waved his long arm, speaking in what seemed to be English, and our Korea pastor announced, “Children, Santa wants you to come forward to receive your present.” I stood in line with my siblings and other children, anxious to receive the bulging red stocking this American Santa was handing out. When my turn came and I stood before him, I was stunned. This Santa was wearing military boots under his fuzzy red coat with white trim.

I had seen such boots whenever I bowed to an American soldier on the street, as our parents and teachers had told us, and he’d reach into his deep uniform pocket and produce a hard candy wrapped in clear paper or a mini Hershey bar. As I received the red-stocking with both hands, I understood a solemn reality: American soldiers have connections with the North Pole!

Returning home, we each opened our presents. My red stocking had what I had wished for: yellow American pencils with erasers, Hershey Bars and hard candy, and crayons. All school kids treasured those smooth-writing American pencils, including me and my siblings.

Our country that had been liberated at the end of WWII was still too poor to worry about such insignificant things as pencils, but we needed them every day. Compared to the Japanese pencils, whose lead broke too easily, these pretty yellow pencils not only wrote smoothly but lasted a long time. And those Hershey bars were manna from heaven.

I still love those yellow pencils and Hershey bars even after nearly seven decades have passed since I saw Santa in military boots.

Therese Park, <http://www.theresepark.com>

Christmas on Heartbreak Ridge

In December of 1953, I was on Heartbreak Ridge as part of the 160th Infantry, E Company. We were on the ridge from October to February. The North Koreans and Chinese hit us hard during the holidays. The attacks were heavier during that time period. It seemed as if they were trying to punish us.

On the up side, our medic, Bill Clough, decided we needed a Christmas tree. Heartbreak Ridge had no trees on it after all the bombing it had endured, so he made a tree and decorated it with whatever he could find.

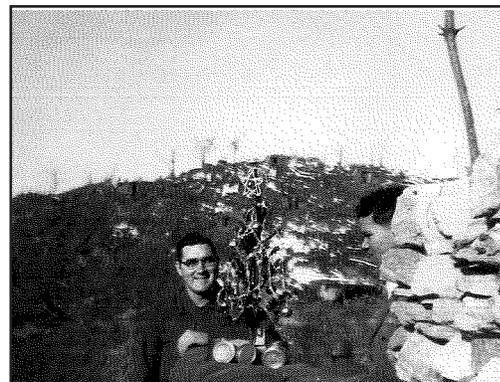
The tree itself was made of wire. I recall that some of the wire was from coat hangers. Decorations were candy and gum wrappers and tin foil. He used C-rations to make it stand up. He was very proud of

his tree and displayed it in front of the bunker.

Another memorable experience from that Christmas was the cards “sent” to us from the Chinese. They were sent in mortar rounds. If they opened in the air, the cards would rain down on us. Some of the rounds fell to the ground as they were duds.

The “cards” looked like Christmas cards, but they were actually propaganda, trying to convince us to leave. Some told us that our wives and girlfriends had left us. Others told us to “surrender or go home.”

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Rae Kohn on
Heartbreak Ridge

CHRISTMAS AT SEA

The days lengthened into night
Tireless, sleepless, I climbed
The ladder to the flight deck
To breathe fresh saltwater air
Our angels of death had completed
Their mission and slept for a new day
Giving me seclusion of their flights
It was a clear night with a full moon
A billion polished stars winked at me
As if all were right in the universe
I could hear and feel the breeze
Gently caressing my face
The ship rose slowly and rhythmically
As we plowed through the lofted swells
I stared at the darkness of the ocean
Trying to see something of home
Yet, lurking on the horizon
And blurring my vision of home
The Korean coast in all its darkness
Dispelled all thoughts of peace
I continued searching the waves
For something, anything

By Tailhook Jack (Real name omitted by request)