

Retired Ranger Receives Medal of Honor for Korean Battle

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A retired officer who led fellow Rangers and Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army (KATUSA) Soldiers across frozen terrain under enemy fire to seize and defend Hill 205 in the vicinity of Unsan, Korea, received the Medal of Honor on 21 May.

COL (Retired) Ralph Puckett Jr. received the award for going above and beyond the call of duty as the Eighth Army Ranger Company's commanding officer during an operation that began on 25 November 1950.

Just a few months prior, then-2LT Puckett, a recent graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, was tasked to stand up and lead a provisional Ranger company at Camp Drake, Japan. The Eighth Army Ranger Company relocated to then-Pusan, Korea, where the Soldiers began what was expected to be seven weeks of specialized training at the Eighth Army Ranger Training Center. The needs of the Army reduced the company's training to five and a half weeks in early October 1950, and the company was activated and redesignated as the 8213th Army Unit. It was then attached to the 25th Infantry Division to help lead the unit's advance to the north.

Hill 205

Days before 25 November 1950, the 25th ID with the Eighth Army Ranger Company, under operational control of Task Force Dolvin, were pursuing North Korean forces as they retreated northward toward the Yalu River and the border of China.



COL (Retired) Ralph Puckett Jr.



**Then-1LT Ralph Puckett Jr. led fellow Rangers and Korean Augmentation to the United States Army soldiers across frozen terrain under enemy fire to seize and defend Hill 205 in Unsan, North Korea.
(Photo courtesy of Puckett Family)**

On 24 November, Puckett and his company seized and occupied Hill 222, suffering several casualties. The following morning, after enduring a night of near zero degree temperatures and no sleep, Puckett received orders to secure Hill 205 and defend the critical position overlooking the Chongchon River.

Riding on the tops of Sherman tanks from the 89th Tank Battalion, Puckett and his 57 Rangers and Korean soldiers maneuvered toward the hill. A half-mile from Hill 205, the force encountered enemy mortar, machine-gun, and small-arms fire. The Rangers dismounted the tanks and prepared to attack.

Puckett took his company across 800 yards of frozen rice paddies under heavy enemy small-arms and mortar fire. At one point, Puckett crisscrossed the open expanse three times so his Rangers could locate and eliminate a concealed enemy machine-gun position.

After they reached the base of the hill, Puckett ordered his Rangers to fix bayonets and led them up the slope to secure the top. Six Rangers were wounded during their assault. Once Hill 205 was secured, Puckett had his Rangers prepare their defenses against an enemy counterattack they knew would be coming.

“We began to put in a perimeter defense,” Puckett said. “We always defended 360 degrees because we were always alone. We had our individual weapons, machine guns, rocket launchers, and hand grenades — that was it.”

As they made their final preparations, Puckett and a handful of Rangers crossed back over the open field to battalion headquarters. While there, he procured another radio and supplies and coordinated artillery fires.

Shortly after Puckett arrived back at Hill 205 around 10 p.m., the Rangers came under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire as Chinese forces entered the Korean conflict against U.S. and U.N. forces. It would be the first of six battalion-sized attacks against Puckett’s unit.

Puckett directed a strong defense against the aggressing force, all while calling in “danger close” artillery fire to keep them at bay. Though he sustained a wound to his right thigh from a grenade, Puckett refused to be evacuated. Severely outnumbered nearly 10 to one, Puckett continued to direct his company and waves of artillery support through additional counterattacks. He would leave his foxhole during each counterattack to observe the enemy’s movement, motivate his Rangers, and call in artillery where it was needed the most.

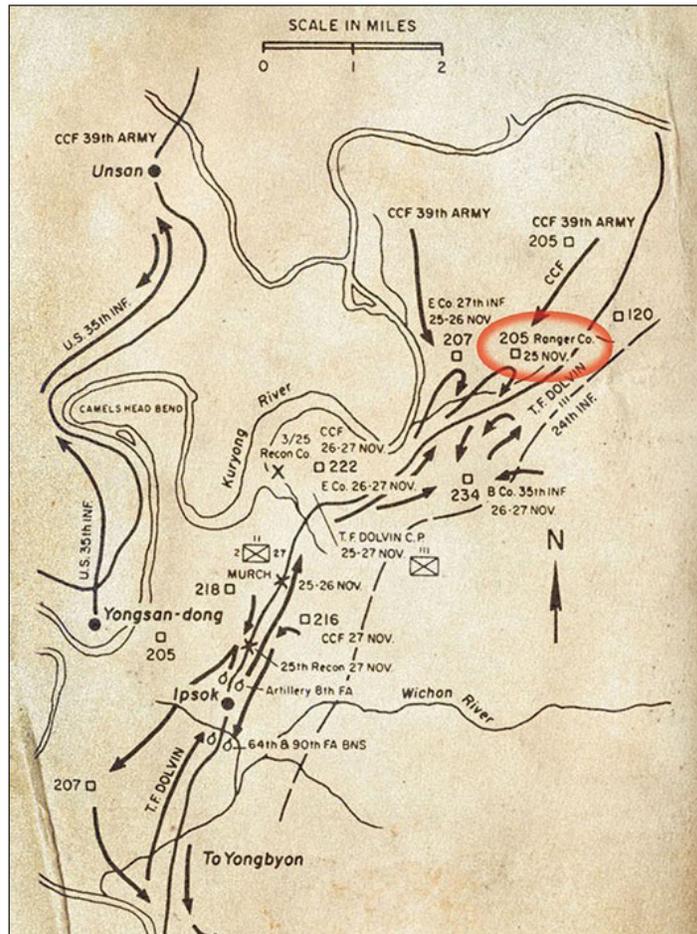
As ammunition started to run low, the number of casualties on both sides continued to grow. After being wounded a second time, Puckett pushed through the pain to lead his force while the Chinese drew even closer to their location. He eventually ordered his unit to fix bayonets as they fought through another wave of the assault.

During the final counterattack in the early hours of 26 November, the battalion-sized Chinese force overran Hill 205. Heavy mortar fire inflicted heavy casualties as Puckett commanded his Rangers to withdraw to safety.

Severely wounded, Puckett ordered his Rangers to leave him behind to ensure their safety. Disobeying their commander's orders, two Rangers fought back against the Chinese force as they crested the hill and dragged Puckett down to safety.

Of the Rangers on the mission, 10 were either killed or missing with another 31 wounded. Puckett was initially awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic actions and devotion to duty that day. He received a second Distinguished Service Cross for his actions in the Vietnam War and later retired from the Army in 1971.

Editor's Note: This article is a compilation of two Army News Service articles by Devon L. Suits. (Read more at <https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/puckett/>).



Hill 205 Battle Map