

## Northeast Korea — Luke's Castle — Winter 1953

# Three U.S. Tanks and ROK Rifle Company in Mountain Defense

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### Relief

The three M46s crawled into the rocky bed of the shallow Soyang River. It was a cold night. The tanks had traveled since dawn, taking two stops to refuel and one for a breakdown. They turned north into the swift current, each one causing a wave that reached almost to the driver's hatch. Mufflers glowed cherry red in the dark and sizzled when hit by water. Tank commanders hung on outside the turrets, calling corrections to the right or left. Counting the medic, mechanic and me, we were 17 men.

Moving north in the riverbed we reached the turn off going to Hill 812 and Luke's Castle, a key position defended by a South Korean rifle company. An American sergeant signaled us with a flashlight. The convoy turned out of the water to the trail. A guide was there to lead us to the three Sherman M4s being replaced by our three M46s.

The column moved in the dark up the narrow winding road for about two miles. The approach to the hill was slick with ice. Sergeant Bill Harbin of C Company, 245th Tank Battalion commanded the section being relieved. One of Harbin's three M4s had inverted grousers that dug into the frozen trail and got traction. He used it as a tow tank and attached cables to each of our M46s. It dragged us over the last hump of iced road to the top of Hill 812. Harbin and some of his men had been at Luke's Castle for 78 days. Four lieutenants had come and gone during that time but Sergeant Harbin had sole command at the relief.

### The Position

At first light our guys saw a white sheet spread out on the enemy side of the hill. It was a message of welcome to us from the North Koreans. A ROK (Republic of Korea) soldier interpreted the oriental characters into English. One round of our 90mm destroyed the banner. The North Koreans and we were to try to kill each other until April when we were replaced. The position would be lost in June but not by us.

Some of our group had been with B Company a long time. I had been there three months. All had experience with the Chinese but in modest operations. Lieutenant James F. Brady, B Company commander, explained that the North Koreans on 812 were apt to be more dangerous. It was our battalion's first experience against



Courtesy photo

*The author and his platoon spent 41 days defending Hill 812 in 1953.*

North Koreans. This hill was the most threatened place on the 12th ROK Division's part of the United Nation's Main Line of Resistance. It was high ground, important to the control of the region, and both sides wanted it. The ROKs now in possession had replaced U.S. Marines. North Koreans flanked the hill on three sides. We would see them every day. Their troops were part of the experienced 45th NK Infantry Division, which was in reality the North Korean Army reorganized after its defeat.

Our tankers had spent all of January training at Dodge Range, the 10th Corps tank facility north of Chunchon. Our vehicles were in fair shape. The small unit was experienced and had worked together long enough for us to know each other. We shot a lot of gunnery practice at Dodge. On the move to Luke's Castle we were confident but anxious. I was a second lieutenant, but was considered experienced.

None of us had seen Luke's Castle. Lieutenant Brady had been alone when he reconnoitered for the relief. A mustang, Brady had served as an enlisted infantryman before being commissioned at OCS. He wrote standing operating procedures for 812 and went over them with us in detail. Slightly built, he wore steel rim Army issue glasses and talked through clenched teeth. His briefing was thorough. Our relationship was professional, not personal. I was not to see much of him after we went to the position, which suited me fine.

Our mission was to give maximum support to the ROK unit defending the hill but to depend on ourselves for protection. We had authority for target selection. The American officer we saw every week or so was Major Sowa, K MAG (Korean Military Advisory Group) adviser to 37th ROK Regiment. He came there to check on 7th Company but provided me with welcome guidance.

There were about 150 South Korean soldiers on the hill. Captain Yul was in command. A wizened over-age-in grade officer,

Yul told us he had hunted and killed guerillas in the south. His company had three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. He also had an American forward observer from a U.S. 105mm howitzer battalion and could call on a squad of Republic of Korea combat engineers when he wanted them. The artillery was invaluable, and the engineers were helpful in many ways. They improved firing positions for our tanks by dynamiting out slots in the ridgelines. It was the only way to dig into the frozen ground.

The forward slope of Hill 812 was strewn with naked bodies of North Koreans left after a recent assault. ROKs had stripped the dead and thrown them outside the lines. Cold weather kept them from decomposing. Sergeant Harbin told me his tanks had fired every round of ammo for the tank's guns in that fight and had not withdrawn from the position. A counterattack by Korean riflemen saved the day.

Chicken wire was strung over infantry positions to catch hand grenades before they exploded in the trenches. ROK soldiers stayed in their fighting positions.

### **The Set Up**

We placed the command tank, number 36, next to ROK Lieutenant Lee's weapons platoon. The "poof" of mortar fire was our signal that something was going on. Lee had been to college, spoke English and was good about keeping us posted. He would put up parachute flares when tanks wanted battlefield illumination. I always paid him the compliment of saluting first. He was soon greeting me as, "Friend and Brother."

The command tank had a field of fire to the east that included an enemy strong point rarely occupied by day. It was about four hundred yards away, down a gentle, open slope. The approach to us from that position was well covered by ROK and U.S. fire plans. We watched the outpost for movement and sometimes fired the 90mm and .50 cal. machine gun into it.

We placed another tank on the crest of the hill to the immediate front. It had an unobstructed view and was a natural place to look for targets. The enemy avenue of approach from the west was in its field of fire. That was where the earlier breakthrough had taken place and where

the fatal breakthrough came when the position fell in June. That tank slot had a good view of "The Rock" of Luke's Castle as well as the steep approaches from the river to the north. The sheer drop in elevation made assault of our position from the north very difficult, though some North Koreans were to successfully scale the hill when they took the position in June.

Our third tank was placed three hundred yards southwest at an azimuth of about 220 degrees from the command tank. It was on the southwest finger of 812. There was a log bunker for the crew and a ROK rifle squad spread out on each side of the firing slot. An enemy strong point about a thousand yards to the west provided good target prospects but the position was not easy to defend. The enemy approach to it was concealed by the steepness of the hill. Our men needed to be in close touch with the covering ROK infantry and that was not easy to maintain. Language difficulties were always a problem.

The supply Jeep from B Company was our lifeblood, bringing up .30 cal. and .50 cal. machine gun ammunition as well as mail, food, and water. The Jeep was exposed to enemy observation in places and sometimes fired on. Periodically, a full tracked armored personnel carrier (APC) with a loud and smoky radial engine would come up with ammo for our big guns. The APC was a bigger and higher priority target than the Jeep. Its driver had a handlebar mustache and a risky job. We were to welcome that guy called "California" many more times through the winter as well as during the July fighting at Hill 755.

Neither the APC nor the Jeep could get up to our positions when there was snow and ice in the winter or during the spring rains. Then we had to hand carry the ammunition, gas, C rations, and drinking water up the slippery slopes. A round of 90mm weighed about 85 pounds. Excuses were not accepted so everybody helped with the exhausting work. We got thoroughly soaked with sweat on those climbs no matter how cold the weather.

### **Dusk**

Moving around on 812 at night was dangerous, so dusk was a tense

and busy time. Everybody, Koreans and Americans, stayed jumpy. Guns were checked as darkness fell. I wore a white armband for identification. We never used flashlights, but our guys did not have to be told about light discipline. Smoking was not allowed on the tanks. The GIs were as worried about being mistaken for enemy by Americans as they were of walking into a North Korean or a trigger-happy ROK soldier in the dark.

Standing operating procedure called for tanks to be in firing position at dusk. Range cards had to be updated every night. Some cards held as many as 20 plotted concentrations, each setting out elevation and deflection at which the guns should be set for specific targets. The cards were essential for night firing. Enemy avenues of approach and routes for friendly patrols were given names and numbers. Some plots were also made for firing close in and around other tanks in the event we were overrun. Range Cards were usually drawn on C ration cartons and were quickly prepared by good gunners. This work had to be accurate and the settings on the card changed every time the tank was moved.

We had a hot meal and mail call in late afternoon, going a few at a time to the always welcome supply Jeep. Spreading out gave the illusion of safety. The Jeep driver always brought gossip. He would tell about new people, those going home, who was getting rest and recuperation leave, which positions were taking casualties, and what was happening throughout the battalion. After meals each man observed the Army ritual of washing his aluminum mess kit in boiling water.

### **Night**

Each tank kept two men in the turret during darkness. Duty was two hours on and four off until dawn. Punctuality was enforced. Someone showing up 10 minutes late for a change of watch could provoke strong words and create grudges. From time to time I would take the place of one of the men for all or part of his watch. It was the best way for me to know what was going on.

Standing procedures called for me to visit each of the three vehicles all night at irregular times. It was scary work with a lot of slipping and sliding over frozen

terrain, but the inspections were essential.

On the first round I would examine the range cards and verify that each vehicle had a five-gallon can of water and extra C rations. Lieutenant Brady had insisted that each tank be self-contained and provisioned in the event the hill was attacked and overrun. Survival might depend of it. We sometimes talked among ourselves about the possibility of enemy assault.

Heaters never worked and Little Joes (gasoline powered generators for the tanks) and radios were not reliable. SOP called for one operable transmitter and two working receivers on each tank. We considered ourselves lucky to even make a net with the company command post (CP) at the beginning of each night. Our equipment was old, and Company B had only one radio repairman. He worked for the company exec and did not get his orders from me. All were quick to blame him when radios were down, which was most of the time. Because telephones were reliable, the commo man was also expected to find and repair breaks in wire strung on top of the ground. Most of his checking for blown out wire was done alone and at night. Everybody bitched at the poor guy. He must have felt like Job.

Our bunkers were well enough constructed to withstand direct hits from big mortars. My CP bunker was hit one day by what must have been a 120mm mortar. Several of us were in it. My ears rang for a couple of days, but the bunker held up. Though small, it held six crude bunks. They made for good sleeping with our rubber air mattresses and down-filled sleeping bags. A big rat once awakened me by crawling over my face. After that I slept with my face to the light of our Coleman lantern which was kept going all the time.

It was important to stay as clean as possible. From time to time the APC would bring up a bundle of clean long johns, socks, and canvas combat fatigues to be worn over our regular wool olive drab pants. There would be much sorting through garments looking for a fit. Our filthy clothes were then returned to the company for washing by a Korean civilian. Every person was expected to shave and wash his feet every day. We kept two five-gallon water cans in each bunker and washed out of a helmet or a small pan. No one was allowed off the hill to visit a shower point during my 40-day stay there.

We had a little CP table for maps, the hand cranked telephone, and a battery-powered portable radio for news and music. It was the only recreational radio in the company, and our little unit on 812 was complimented by having it. Everybody knew we had the toughest job. Truck mounted radio stations Gypsy and Rambler had smooth talking announcers broadcasting around the clock. The radio was always played quietly and usually only at night. Our bunkers were for safety, sleeping, washing, and warming. Soldiers respected that and spoke in quiet voices. For music we listened to the mournful *My Baby is Coming Home* and the silly *How Much is the Doggie in the Window?* On 5 March 1953 we learned from the radio that USSR Premier Joseph Stalin had died. All hoped that would speed up the peace talks at Panmunjon but

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none believed it.

The medic and mechanic took turns all night on phone watch. In addition to a line to company CP, we had a sound powered telephone linked into all the ROK positions. Chatter on those lines told us about threats both real and perceived.

### The Guns

Shooting was dangerous. We expected sniper fire every time we pulled a tank into a firing position and often got it.

It was always a challenge to improve gunnery. Aiming mechanisms of the old guns had a lot of play or looseness in them. Kentucky windage, or cheating on the sight reticle, was necessary in laying the tube. Every gun had a personality, and each gunner had to know how much the crosshairs were off. First-round hits were rare.

Earlier in the war, our M46s had belonged to the 6th Tank Battalion. Those vehicles were battle worn veterans. Gun Book entries were hopelessly out of date. Some of our tanks had been in Task Force Crombez at Chipyeong-ni. Tanks played a significant role there in routing Chinese surrounding the 23rd Regiment of the 2nd Division. It was Lieutenant General Matthew Ridgeway's first victory in Korea, and it turned the tide of the war from the Chinese to the U.S.

Our job was to shoot North Koreans and we did it every day, sometimes morning and afternoon, and many nights. Target selection and shooting was hard work and took time. We searched with the glasses for movement and patterns of activity before pulling the tanks up to fire. All weapons were cleaned after each firing and the 90mm had to be swabbed. Soldiers who were already bone tired, all the time, did that cold, dirty but necessary work.

It was easy to make excuses for not shooting and to put off shooting. When we didn't shoot, the enemy usually didn't shoot. If we didn't shoot, the men didn't have to clean guns. Life was not as dangerous. Executing a tank defense by firepower created work, and there was no way to tell a man that shooting was not putting him in greater danger. People bitched about it. We got counterfire often. None liked that.

### Counterfire

The first soldier killed with us occurred during counterfire after an exchange I started with Tank 36. He was a likable Korean, a KATUSA (Korean Augmentation United States Army) working with our artillery. I knew him rather well and losing him grieved me. It still does.

We shot aggressively and believed we were hurting the North Koreans. But they always came back in effective, sometimes surprising, ways. Once, at enormous risk, the North Koreans deployed a large flat trajectory recoilless rifle very close by. It was probably not more than 200 yards west of 36's firing slot. I had checked the area with binoculars but completely missed the camouflaged emplacement. They shot us just as we began firing in another direction. The tank commander's hatch and the loader's hatch were open. It was not possible to follow outgoing rounds or

to accurately sense hits with the hatches shut. I could not tell where the enemy fire was coming from. The first rounds to hit us made a lot of noise but no fragments came into the fighting compartment. It is a mystery why the North Koreans never used armor piercing ammo. With it they would have killed us all that morning.

I told the driver to back the tank to a position of hull defilade, in the lee of a knoll in our immediate rear. He gunned the engine but the tank did not move. The driver told me the left track and suspension system were disabled. I made a decision to abandon the tank and told the four crewmembers exactly how we would evacuate. The driver and bow gunner would leave through their escape hatches underneath the tank. The loader, gunner, and I would go out the big hatch on top. We would use the same dive on the lee side as used in the past to dodge snipers. I would go first, immediately after the next round came in. The others were to follow after other rounds hit. Just like in parachute training at Fort Benning, it took less nerve to lead the stick than to follow. I bailed out OK, hit the ground running and got safely behind the knoll. Everyone got out and joined me. We helplessly watched the tank receive a large number of hits. Everything outside the tank was shot up, the 50-caliber machine gun, the sponson boxes, mufflers, and radio antenna, but the tank did not burn.

Battalion maintenance sent up a recovery vehicle to pull the vehicle out and take it away. A couple of days later maintenance returned with a "brand new rebuilt" M46 from Japan. A dream comes true. Everything about it was perfect, down to a gun mount that had no slack and radios that worked. We used it to put massive fire on the ridge from which the recoilless rifle had caught us. We even spent days bushwhacking snipers with the 90mm gun, sometimes using all of the high explosive (HE) and white phosphorus (WP) rounds in the ready rack. We worked over every commo trench and bunker in sight and enemy activity slowed. Then we spent hours with the glasses looking for more distant targets. The area near the ford, 2,000 yards in front of us, and on the mountain above it were treeless and target rich. In addition to bunker busting, we often shot enemy soldiers with the 90 as they ran off the mountain (Papa San) and approached the ford.

The North Koreans retaliated by bringing another big gun into action. It was at about a 030-degree azimuth (northeast) from Hill 812 on a hill beyond the Soyang River. It was a flat trajectory weapon firing from a bunker. Logs covering the aperture would be removed when firing started and replaced afterwards. We could not knock it out.

### **Close Air Support**

Air war was foreign to us but we knew the North Koreans had machine guns capable of bringing down aircraft. The remains of a U.S. artillery observation plane were lodged in a tree near our position. Shot down by a machine gun, the pilot and observer had somehow managed to land in the treetop and get out alive. Aside from that wreck we had never seen an airplane in our skies, friendly or otherwise. We took air superiority for granted.

I asked Major Sowa, the KMAG (Korean Military Advisory Group) advisor to 37th Regiment, for an air strike to help with the troublesome bunker across the Soyang. Word came back that

on the next day we would, indeed, get a strike, but we would have to mark the targets with WP rounds. No ground controller was available.

Six gull winged U.S. Navy F4Us from the aircraft carrier *Philippine Sea* showed up as promised. They circled overhead at about 6,000 feet while we used Willie Peter (WP) ammunition to mark the principal target and alternates. We did not have radio communication with the planes. The planes peeled off one at a time. Each made his dive; shooting machine guns to the point of releasing a bomb, then pulling out. North Korean machine guns rattled at the Navy planes on each pass. Our GIs loved it. They were yelling and whooping. I was worried that an F4U would be shot down. The planes made good targets for the NK machine guns we heard firing nearby. The Navy pilots worked for a long time, releasing one bomb at a time. Some were more aggressive than others, pulling out of dives only after going well below our ridgeline. Others let their bombs go from higher altitudes. After one of the higher drops, a GI yelled, "There goes a married one!"

We were filled with admiration for the flyers, even the careful ones. The bombs tore up the bunker that started all this, hit everything else we marked, and the flyers left without losing anyone. Our guys joked about how those pilots would get a shot of whiskey on returning to the ship, eat with silver, dine on white table cloths, and sleep between sheets on mattresses that night.

### **Friendly Fire**

One night the mail Jeep brought news that an officer who knew me had joined the battalion. It was 2nd Lieutenant Sam Steiger. We had been in the same OCS Company at Fort Knox. He was assigned to a position on Hill 854. It was east of us on the opposite side of the Soyang Gang where the river passed from North Korea through the Main Line of Resistance to South Korea. The position was several thousand yards away.

The very next morning my driver Corporal Fordham and I were sitting on the hillside enjoying the good weather. We were about 30 yards from tank 36. A big round came screaming in and hit just above us. I told Fordham that it sounded like a 120. It was definitely bigger than what we were accustomed to. Another round came in after about a minute, hitting just downhill from us. There was a bracket on tank 36. I looked at Corporal Fordham and said one of us had to move the tank. He said that he would do it if I would let him wait until after the next round came in. I was happy to agree. The next round came in short, with fragments hitting the tank like rocks hitting a washtub. He sprinted to the tank, started the engine in a split second and gunned backwards down the hill. His superior driving saved the tank.

After Fordham put 36 into defilade, the firing shifted to ROK infantry positions downhill on the east and stopped after a few more rounds. I got a phone call from Company CP. Had we received any incoming? I said we had and thought it was North Korean 120s. An American major that I did not know came up soon. He said our incoming was friendly fire from Hill 854. A new officer had misread his map. It was Lieutenant Steiger. The next day Steiger came to Luke's Castle and shook hands all around. He was graceful, humble, and apologetic. Initially relieved from duty as a platoon leader and assigned to a ration breakdown detail,

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Sam was later redeemed by participating in the rescue of tankers from 812 when it fell. He was awarded a Silver Star and a Purple Heart. I attended a welcome home party for him in the fall of 1953 at his parent's apartment in New York City and told his Dad about the incident. Sam later served several terms in Congress as a representative from Arizona.

### Changes in Command

Captain George Patton joined the 140th as commander of Company A, replacing Captain Kenneth O. West. One of Patton's platoons supported a ROK rifle company west and south of us. He called a meeting of his leadership as well as those from units joining the A Company positions. First Lieutenant Orrin Sharp, the executive officer of Company B, picked me up in a Jeep at Luke's Castle, and we went to a bunker in the rear for the Patton meeting. I knew Patton from Fort Knox where he had taken the advanced course. He and Major John Eisenhower attended my OCS graduating class's commissioning ceremony and reception.

It was an honor for me to be serving in the war with the son of one of our nation's great heroes. I was also to serve with him in the summer fighting for Hill 755. That time away for the Patton meeting was my only absence from Luke's Castle between 12 February and 31 March.

Major Dumas, formerly executive officer of the 140th, became battalion commander. The logistics and support at 812 were much better than during our earlier tour on the northwest corner of the Punchbowl. We got the latest model Nylon flak jackets, fur hooded parkas, pile caps for warmth under steel helmets, leather palmed trigger-finger mittens that came to the elbow, and down-filled canvas covered sleeping bags.

### Accident

A disaster of our own making came when fire destroyed everything in one of the bunkers. A flambeau used for lighting started it. We had one Coleman lantern for our three bunkers and had devised flambeaus, bottles of gasoline with cloth wicks, for lighting in the other two. One got kicked over and the gasoline exploded into fire.

Everybody got out safely but our loss included most sleeping bags and parkas. For several weeks all of us shared the equipment we had left. When a man came off watch he gave his parka to his replacement before going to the replacement's bunk and getting into that sleeping bag. The close and dirty living was hard on dispositions and dignity. We paid a big price for the kicked over flambeau. A dangerous form of lighting, I should never have allowed it to be used. We had candles.

### Serving with the Koreans

We fell into a comfortable way of working with the ROKs and joked about going native. I wore a camouflage fishnet over my sandbag helmet cover, just like the ROKs. With a 12th

ROK Division patch sewn to one side and a 37th ROK Regiment patch on the other, I thought we fit right in. Their soldiers had hammered the unit crests out of beer cans. Many of us had come to identify with 7th Company, and we were certainly dependent on them, as they were on us. We all knew many of the ROK officers and soldiers, knew some Korean words and I met with Captain Yul in his bunker most days. We helped them in every way possible. Their wounded usually walked off the hill but our Jeep evacuated ROK soldiers unable to walk, including Captain Yul's interpreter when he got hit in the buttocks. He left 812 laughing as he lay on his stomach on the stretcher on the back of our supply jeep.

### Long Range Ambush Patrol

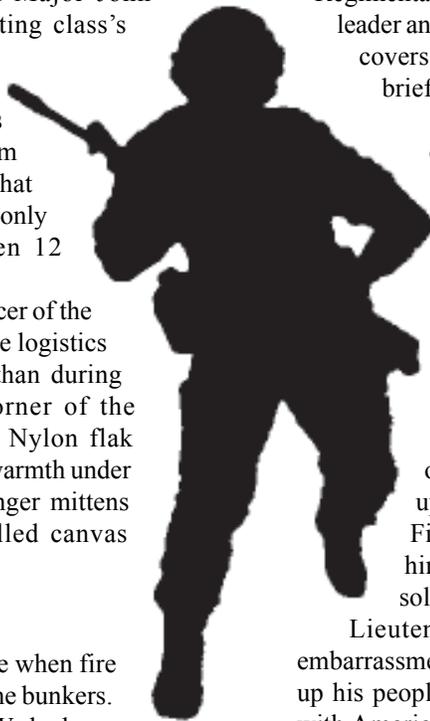
Good weather never lasted. An especially heavy snow shut down 7th Company's regular patrolling, but Captain Yul's Regimental Headquarters put out an order for prisoners. A patrol leader and seven men were picked and issued white camouflage covers to be worn over helmets and clothing. They were briefed and rehearsed.

We put Tank 36 into firing position and plotted concentrations along the route to the patrol objective, an ambush site near an underwater bridge crossing the Soyang. The patrol leader borrowed my M1 Carbine, a model that fired full automatic. He led the men out of our lines in deep snow at dark with his last man reeling out telephone wire behind. They were gone that night, all day the next day and returned just before dawn of the second day, in deep snow all the time. We knew from called in reports that they failed to take a prisoner. On returning to our lines, cold, worn out and dejected, the patrol lined up for debriefing. Captain Yul came out of his bunker. First he slapped the helmet of the officer, and chewed him out for failing. Then he did the same with each soldier. My Korean friend, the weapons platoon leader

Lieutenant Lee, and I stood together and cringed with embarrassment over the incident. It hurt to see Captain Yul beating up his people, something that would never, ever have happened with Americans. Our tankers from B Company were now living with another Army with other values.

### The Cost of Carelessness

Clear weather brought out lots of enemy. Tank 36 took its 72-round basic load into position to fire. I picked the first target and gave the gunner a command to traverse left. He tried to traverse but got no movement. Corporal Fred Fordham was in the driver's seat and looking up saw the trouble through his open hatch. A sandbag had been accidentally left on the outside turret ring, stopping the traverse of the tube. The reach from the driver's seat to the sandbag could not be made without Fordham's exposing his body. We were observed in that firing position and expected sniper fire. Fordham told me he would drop out the escape hatch under the driver's seat, crawl underneath the tank to the rear, and then crawl to the front of the vehicle on the side toward the sniper. The plan was for him to



stand up quickly by the driver's hatch and remove the obstructing sandbag. It seemed reasonable and I approved with the admonition to be careful.

Fordham crawled through the escape hatch. We waited for a few minutes. Nothing happened; we did not hear a sound. Without exposing myself I yelled for Fordham out of the open tank commander's hatch. There was no answer. I told the crew that I would go out and check on him. Knowing that I was apt to be fired on, I crouched on the tank commander's seat before diving out on the side of the turret away from the sniper, catching handholds to break my fall down the side of the tank. I heard the sniper's rounds pass overhead. Then I crawled around the back of the tank to the other side, the exposed west side. Fordham was slumped with his head down into the front idler wheel. I called him and got no answer. I crawled to where I could reach the collar of his flak jacket and dragged him out to a rise that shielded us from the sniper. I thought Corporal Fordham was dead and was relieved to hear a slight moan. He had taken a shot in the neck that entered in the front and exited in the back.

The medic had a hard time finding a vein. Fordham showed pain every time the needle hit. Someone brought a stretcher. Fortunately a Jeep was on the hill. The trip to the battalion aid station was about five miles over the rough tank trail. He was sent by ambulance from there to a MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) hospital at Jade, 10th Corps Headquarters, near Inje, another 20 miles over the dirt main supply route.

Corporal Fordham wrote me later that he was OK after having been unable to speak for a long, frightening time. Hospitalized in Japan, he wrote that he was ready to come back to the platoon. I wrote back that he had done more than his part and should try to get to the States with that wound. We missed Fordham's quick courage and will to work. He was a splendid soldier from upstate New York. I felt responsible for his having been shot and he barely missed being killed.

Our soldiers routinely took life-threatening risks. I am very proud of that, one of the best characteristics of American soldiers, but it was often foolish. All believed that nothing bad would happen to them. It was that way with every man.

### Psychological Warfare

Psychological Warfare briefly flourished on our hill. For several clear nights a team of ROKs set up a gasoline powered generator and loudspeaker to broadcast propaganda across the line. Our ROKs would invite the NKs to surrender, making promises of a good life. Some would sing between announcements. Not one of the enemy surrendered. The North Koreans responded in a day or two by mortaring leaflets for the ROK soldiers on 812. They had narrative messages in Korean with crude, cartoon-like drawings, some with an ugly, grasping Uncle Sam.

### Treachery

We all needed haircuts and as a morale builder, the company sent up a barber to cut hair and give marvelous hot water shaves. He made several visits before being discovered with drawings showing of our tank emplacements. I saw the drawings. National Police executed the guy as a North Korean Agent.

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### Incoming Rounds and Raids

Procedure required a telephone report of incoming rounds. We called in the amount, size, and time of incoming. We always figured that heavy fire was in preparation for an assault. We got heavy fire from time to time but never got an assault. We believed that our regular output of 90mm and machine gun fire was a big factor in discouraging attacks.

Something ugly was always happening on our hill. Just as the Army had eliminated all-black units, it broke up the all Puerto Rican regiment in Korea while we were at 812. The unit originally served with distinction, but had become plagued with bug-outs, unauthorized retreats. An infantry private was sent to us when the Puerto Ricans were dispersed throughout Eighth Army. Arriving on the chow Jeep, he knew no English. I assigned him to Corporal Michaelson, who commanded the tank on our dangerous west flank.

The position was raided in a squad-sized attack on the Puerto Rican replacement's first night. North Koreans got to Michaelson's tank with a shaped charge weighing about 20 pounds. They were driven off, leaving the anti-tank explosive unused on the ground. Michaelson told us that during the fight the new guy lay moaning on the floor of the fighting compartment, doing nothing. Michaelson didn't appreciate my having assigned the untrained and confused soldier to him.

### People

Corporal Michaelson was another of those quiet people in the Army who could always be counted on to perform well. I relied heavily on him. On the other hand, I had taken a marginal master sergeant with us when we went to 812. Because of his rank he was made TC (tank commander). Even though the senior enlisted man on the hill, he just didn't work out. He curried favor with the men and overlooked sloppy work. Perhaps I did a poor job of bringing out his best. In any case, I put the sergeant on the chow Jeep one night and sent him back to the company. I told company to do what they wanted with him and to send me any replacement. I then called the men together and explained that the ranking enlisted man on that hill would be Corporal Michaelson. He was to be treated as if he were a master sergeant, though his pay and rank were that of corporal. On that hill we all observed military courtesy by saluting once a day but none of us wore rank anyhow. I had given Michaelson a brevet promotion, which is giving someone the responsibility without giving them the pay or rank, but he was legitimately promoted to sergeant before we left the

hill.

We had few visitors to 812. Our guys, probably out of envy for those in safer jobs, spoke of them derisively as tourists. A welcome visitor, however, was Chaplain Speiker, a New England Unitarian, who came up to pray and counsel.

### Good Times and Bad Times

Our latrine was a wooden ammunition box with a hole knocked in the top. Visiting it and taking down three layers of clothes to squat on the icy hillside could be quite a thrill, especially when a round came in. Someone took a picture of one of our most popular guys, Corporal Emillio C. Rodriquez, on that ammo box with his pants down. He was the funniest man in the outfit, always getting a laugh out of every situation. The picture was passed around after he was killed when the hill fell. In it he was laughing as always.

A tanker on 812 never, ever got much sleep or rest. Our duty schedule never let up. For me it was the responsibility for everything around the clock. We were constantly shooting, cleaning guns and pulling maintenance on the vehicles. Hand carrying gas and ammo in bad weather and reloading the heavy 90mm rounds after shoots was physically and mentally grinding for all. The pressure was constant. For me the worst of it was being scared by incoming fire and in making the rounds at night. Any of us might have several hours in which to sleep but be so wired we were unable to sleep. Then we might be plagued with sleepiness at a time when going to sleep was out of the question. All were subject to getting to the wit's end. The men had each other in ways I could not share.

I was mentally and physically exhausted when a savior arrived. Sergeant Bill Squires, the first sergeant of Company B, did not usually figure into my life. We hardly knew each other, strung out as the company was. He did not answer to platoon leaders. His duty was at the company CP, and he answered to the Exec and the CO. We were literally miles apart and seldom spoke on the phone. I had not laid eyes on him since arriving at Luke's Castle. He had no responsibility to me nor did I have any to him. That was the Army way. But Squires showed up on the chow Jeep one evening and told me to get in the sack and rest. He told me he would run things for a while. I do not know who told him I needed help or how he came to that conclusion on his own, but he was there. I needed the rest and I completely trusted him with my responsibility for 24 hours. I slept all that night and into the morning; then I



Courtesy photo

*The author, Lieutenant Frazer, (left) and Captain Dougherty stand outside the command post for B Company, 140th Tank Battalion in April 1953.*

heated water and bathed all over, before sleeping some more.

### End of the Tour

Spring rains set in. It was cold, wet and muddy. In our misery we continued to faithfully follow the SOPs, made new range cards every night, kept up the firing, covered infantry patrols, cleaned weapons, all of it. I continued inspections at night all around the perimeter and into the shadow of "The Rock" that was between our position and the enemy's. I knew which ROK trenches and fighting bunkers were vulnerable and closest to the North Koreans. I knew all of Captain Yul's positions; on some you could hear enemy voices. Sometimes I threw small stones into enemy positions to hear them tumble down on their side of 812. Their soldiers would chatter.

There was always the question of dealing with the next serious assault on our hill. We believed tanks could make a major contribution to the defense of 812. We had done it.

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**Nimrod T. Frazer** entered active duty as a private first class with the Alabama National Guard when it was mobilized in December of 1950. Commissioned a second lieutenant after completing OCS, he volunteered for Korea. He was recognized by the 37th ROK Infantry Regiment for the tour on Hill 812 described in this paper. In June of 1953 he was awarded The Silver Star for action at Hill 755. His unit, The 140th Tank Battalion was awarded the U.S. Presidential Unit Citation and the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation.

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