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**Three US Tanks and an ROK Rifle Company
in Mountain Defense:
Northeast Korea – Luke's Castle – Winter 1953**

By Nimrod T. Frazer, 30 June 2004

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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 been traveling 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. They sizzled when water hit them. Tank Commanders hung outside on the turret ring crouched over drivers, giving course corrections. Counting the medic and mechanic, there were seventeen men. Headlights stayed on until reaching the turn off going to the base of Hill 812, home of Luke's Castle. An American NCO signaled with a flashlight. The convoy turned out of the river to the tank trail. The guide was from the three M4s being replaced by our three M46s.

We were part of B Company, 140th Tank Battalion; Lieutenant James F. Brady was Company Commander.

Lights were doused and the column moved up the narrow winding road for about four miles. The approach was steep. The relief on 812 took place before midnight, ahead of time. There was only the engine noise and a few GI catcalls.

The Position

In first light of dawn on the 13th of February, 1953 our guys saw a white sheet on the enemy side of the shared 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 90 MM destroyed the banner. These Americans and North Koreans were to do their best to kill each other for the rest of the winter, until April when we were replaced. The position was to be lost in June but not by us.

Some of our group had been with B Company a long time. I had been in it three months. All had experience with the Chinese in modest operations. Lieutenant Brady explained that this job on Hill 812 was apt to be tougher. It was our battalion's first experience against North Koreans. This hill was the most threatened place that the 12th ROK Division had on its Main Line of Resistance. It was high ground, important to the control of the region. Both sides wanted it. The ROKs holding it had replaced US Marines. The North Koreans flanked the hill on three sides. Their troops were part of the experienced 45th NK Infantry Division, which was the consolidated North Korean Army.

Our Soldiers

Our company had spent all of January training at Dodge Range, the 10th Corps tank facility north of Chunchon. Our vehicles were in fair shape. Our small unit was experienced and had worked together long enough for us to know each other. We had taken gunnery practice at Dodge. On the move to Luke's Castle we were confident but anxious. I was a 2nd Lieutenant.

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 as a tanker. 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 clinched teeth. His briefing was thorough.

Our mission was to give maximum support to the ROK unit but to depend on ourselves for protection. We had authority for target selection. The American officer we saw regularly was Major Sowa, KMAG (Korean Military Advisory Group) adviser to 37th ROK Regiment. He came there to check on 7th Company.

There were about 150 ROKs on 812. Captain Yul was in command. A wizened officer, over-age-in-grade, Yul told us he had hunted guerillas in the south. His company had three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. He also had an American Forward Observer from a US 105MM Howitzer Battalion of the 40th Division and a squad of ROK combat engineers. The latter were sometimes willing to improve our firing positions by dynamiting out frozen tank slots in the ridgelines. That was the only way to dig into the ridges in winter.

The forward slope of 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.

Chicken wire was strung over infantry positions to stop hand grenades. ROK soldiers stayed in their fighting positions.

The Set Up

We placed the command tank, number 36, next to Lieutenant Lee's ROK weapons platoon. The "poof" of mortar fire was our signal that something was going on. Lee was intelligent, English speaking and very good about keeping us posted. He would put up parachute flares when tanks wanted battlefield illumination. I always paid him the complement 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 at a range of about four hundred yards, down a gentle, open slope. That approach was well covered by ROK fire plans. We watched the outpost for movement and sometimes fired the 90MM and 50 Cal. MG 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 avenue was where the earlier

breakthrough had taken place and was where the fatal breakthrough came when the position fell in June. That tank slot has 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 NKs were to successfully scale the hill when the position fell in June.

Our third tank was placed three hundred yards southwest (azimuth of about 220 degrees) from the command tank. It was on the southwest finger of 812. The position had a log sleeping bunker with a ROK rifle squad spread out on each side of the tank slot. The position had good target prospects. There was an enemy strong point with some movement about a thousand yards to the west. Our 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. Language difficulties made that hard to do.

The Jeep from company was a vital supply link, bringing up 30 cal. and 50 cal. as well as mail, food and water. Drivers were exposed to enemy observation and sometimes fired on. From time to time a full tracked Armored Personnel Carrier with a loud and smoky radial engine would come up with resupply. 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 Armored Personnel Carrier nor the Jeep could get up to the fighting positions when there was snow and ice in the winter or during the spring rains. Then we had to hand carried the ammunition, gas, C rations and drinking water up the slippery slopes to 812. A round of 90MM weighed about 85 pounds. Every man helped with the exhausting work. Excuses were not acceptable. Even in bitter cold we got thoroughly soaked with sweat on those climbs.

Dusk

Moving around on 812 at night was dangerous. Dusk was a tense and busy time. Everybody, Korean or American, stayed jumpy. Guns were checked as darkness fell. I wore a white armband for identification. We never used flashlights. Smoking was not allowed on the tanks. Our guys did not have to be told to use light discipline. They were as worried about being mistaken for enemy by an American soldier 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 were updated then. Some had as many as 20 plotted concentrations, 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 at dusk, going a few at a time to the supply Jeep. Spreading out gave the illusion of safety. The Jeep driver also brought gossip. He would tell us about new people, those going home, who was getting R & R, casualties, and what

was happening at other positions. After meals each man washed 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 ten minutes late for a change of watch could be counted on to produce strong words and create grudges. Sometimes I would take the place of one of the men for all or part of his watch. It was the best way to know what was going on.

My seldom-met goal was to visit each of the three vehicles during every two-hour period of the night, changing the timing so that the crews would not know when to expect me. It was scary work, slipping and sliding over frozen ground in the dark. But, the inspections were essential.

On the first round at night I would examine the range cards and verify that each vehicle had a five-gallon can of water and extra C rations. 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 talked about the possibility of that happening.

Heaters never worked, 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 make a net with the Company CP radio at the beginning of each night. Our equipment was old and Company B had only one radio repairman. He was not part of our platoon and did not get his orders from me. All were quick to blame him when radios went down. Because telephones were reliable, there was great demand for the commo man to find and repair breaks in wire strung on top of the ground. Doing that was a dangerous and scary job. 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. The 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 bunks of commo wire laced between engineer stakes. 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.

Staying clean was a morale builder. From time to time the APC would bring up a bundle of clean long johns, socks and canvas combat fatigues to be worn over wool Olive Drab pants. We sorted through the garments looking for something that fit. Our filthy clothes were then returned to the company houseboy, a Korean civilian, for washing. 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 (Command Post) table for maps, the hand cranked telephone and a battery-powered portable radio and news and music. This was the only recreational radio in the company. It was a compliment that our men on 812 had it. Everybody knew we had the toughest job. Truck mounted radio stations Gypsy and Rambler had smooth

talking announcers broadcasting around the clock. We usually played our radio quietly and at night. Our bunkers were for safety, sleeping, washing and warming. People in them spoke in quiet voices. 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 our guys did not believe it.

The medic and mechanic took turns all night doing phone watch. In addition to a line to company, we had a sound powered telephone linked into the ROK phones throughout the position. The lines were open all the time. When chatter picked up we knew there was perceived threat.

The Guns

Target selection and shooting was dangerous. We expected sniper fire every time we pulled a tank into firing position.

Improving gunnery was a challenge. There was play or looseness in the aiming mechanisms of the old guns. 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 cross hairs were off.

Earlier in the war, our M46s had belonged to the 6th Tank Battalion. They were battle worn. Gun Book entries were out of date. Some of our tanks had been in Task Force Crombez at Chipyeong-ni almost two years earlier. 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 US.

Our job was to shoot North Koreans with the 90MM. We did that every day, sometimes morning and afternoon, and many nights. The 50-caliber machine gun on the tank turret was easier to shoot and clean. With tracer ammunition, it was ideal for harassing and interdiction fire, and for suppressing fire, but a tank commander had to expose himself to use it. At Luke's Castle we almost never used the bow gunner's machine gun or the turret mounted co-axial machine gun.

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. Weapons were cleaned after each firing. The tube swabbed after the 90 was fired. People who were already bone tired, all the time, did that dirty work.

It was easy to make excuses for not shooting or to put off shooting. It was safer not to shoot. 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. Exposure to hostile fire escalated when we shot. There was no way to tell a man that stepped-up shooting was not putting him in greater danger. People would bitch about it. We got counter-fire often. No one liked that.

Counterfire

The first soldier killed with us was during counterfire. It came in an exchange I started. He was an excellent ROK, a KATUSA (Korean Augmentation United States Army) working with our artillery. Losing him grieved me then and still does.

We shot aggressively, believing we were hurting the other side. But they always came back in effective, sometimes surprising, ways

Once, at enormous risk, the North Koreans brought a large flat trajectory recoilless rifle. It was in a prepared position, probably not more than 200 yards west of where we pulled up 36 to fire. I had checked the area with binoculars but completely missed seeing the well-camouflaged log covered gun emplacement. They shot us just as we began firing in another direction. The TC hatch and the loader's hatch were open (it was not possible to sense outgoing rounds with the hatches shut). We did not know where the enemy fire was coming from. The first hits on 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 TC 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 number of hits. I think 17. Everything outside of 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 that pulled the tank out and took it away. A couple of days later Maintenance returned with a "brand new rebuilt" M46. It was from Japan and had no turret number. 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 had caught us. We had no trouble from there for a while. We even spent days bushwhacking snipers with the 90MM gun, sometimes using all of the HE and WP rounds in the 72 round ready rack. We worked over every commo trench and bunker in sight on the south side of the river. Enemy activity from those parts slowed. Then we spent hours with the glasses looking for targets on the north side of the river. 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 replied after a few days of this 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. It was a flat trajectory weapon fired 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 US artillery observation plane were lodged in a tree about a quarter mile south of our hill. 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, our KMAG (Korean Military Advisory Group) advisor to 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 White Phosphorus rounds. No ground controller was available.

Six gull winged US Navy F 4Us from the aircraft carrier Philippine Sea showed up as promised. They circled overhead at about 6,000 feet while we used Willie Peter (White Phosphorus) 90MM 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 on each pass. Our GIs loved it. They were yelling and whooping. I was very 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. They were from the carrier Philippine Sea. 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 immediately 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 MLR to South Korea. The position was several thousand yards away.

The very next morning my driver Corporal Fordham and I were talking about the morning's work as we sat on the hillside about 30 yards from our 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 but I had no idea that a US 90MM high velocity flat trajectory weapon could be slamming rounds into our hill. Another round came in after about a minute, hitting just downhill from us. Somebody had 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 got 36 into defilade, the firing shifted to ROK infantry positions downhill on the east. It stopped a few rounds later.

I got a phone call from our Company CP. Had we had received any incoming? I said we had and thought it was North Korean 120s. An American Major 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, 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. I told his Dad about the incident. Later Sam served several terms in Congress as a Representative from Arizona.

Changes in Command

Captain George Patton joined the 140th as CO of Company A, replacing Captain Kenneth O. West. Patton had a platoon supporting a ROK rifle company flanking us on the west and south. He called a meeting of his officers and senior enlisted people as well as those from units joining the A Company positions. First Lieutenant Orrin Sharp, the Executive Officer (XO) 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 had met him at Fort Knox while attending OCS. He was taking the Advanced Course then and attended my graduating class commissioning ceremony and reception. It was an honor for me to be serving in combat with this son of one of our country'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 the only time I left Luke's Castle from 12 February to 31 March.

Major Dumas, who had been Executive Officer of the 140th when Major Joe Pezdirtz, commanded it, became Battalion Commander during this period. 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 flack 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 ROKs

We fell into a comfortable way of working with the ROKs and joked about going native. I wore a camouflage fishnet, like the ROK soldiers, over my sandbag helmet cover. 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 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 tail. He left 812 laughing as he lay on his stomach.

Long Range Ambush Patrol

Good weather never lasted. An especially heavy snow threatened to shut down 7th Company's patrolling, but Captain Yul's Regimental Headquarters still 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 a ford crossing the Soyang, an underwater bridge. The patrol leader borrowed my MI Carbine, a new 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 with only cold food. 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 weapons platoon friend, 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 a 72 round basic load into position. I picked the first target and gave the gunner a command to traverse left. He commenced the traverse; movement stopped. 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, blocking movement 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 volunteered to drop out the escape hatch under the driver's seat, crawl underneath the tank to the rear, 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. I told him 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 position at the rear of the tank. A rise there shielded us from the sniper. I thought Corporal Fordham was dead and was very 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 tank trail, a rough ride. He was sent by ambulance from there to a MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) hospital at Jade, 10th Corps Headquarters, near Inje. That was a trip of about 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. He just 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

Our hill was briefly in the psychological warfare business. On 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 surrendered. The North Koreans responded in a day or two by mortaring leaflets into our position. They were for the ROK soldiers, not the Americans, and 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, company sent up a barber to cut hair and give marvelous hot water shaves to each of us. He made several visits before being discovered with drawings of our tank emplacements. I saw the drawings. National Police executed the guy as a North Korean Agent.

Incoming Rounds and Raids

SOP required a telephone report of incoming rounds. It told the amount, size and time of incoming. A slow day was 4 or 5 rounds of light mortars and/or small arms. We always figured that heavy fire was in preparation for an assault. We got the heavy fire from time to time but no assault. We believed that our regular output of 90MM and machine gun fire was a big factor in discouraging such an attack.

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

The position was raided in a squad-sized attack on the Puerto Rican replacement's first night. ROK infantrymen in front of the tank failed to stop the assault. North Koreans got to Michaelson's tank with a shaped charge weighing about twenty 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. The TC didn't appreciate my having assigned the untrained and confused soldier to him, but he kept the guy.

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 for the time we were together.

On the other hand, I had taken a marginal Master Sergeant to 812 with us. Because of his rank he was used as a TC (Tank Commander). Even though the senior enlisted man on the hill, he just didn't work out. We had different agendas. He carried 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.

Michaelson was legitimately promoted to Sergeant before we left the hill.

We had few visitors to 812. Our guys, probably out of envy for those from the rear, spoke of them derisively as tourists. A welcome visitor, however, was Chaplain Speiker, a New England Unitarian, who came up to pray and counsel. I was hard on the men sometimes and his visit gave them an opportunity to complain to him privately about me if they wished.

Good Times and Bad Times

Eating C rations twice a day assured regular bowel movements. 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; I grieve for him.

A tanker on 812 never, ever got much sleep or rest. Our duty schedule called for two hours on, four off from dusk to dawn, every night. For me duty was inspection tours in the dark and 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. The pressure was constant. The worst of it was being badly 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 as to be 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. His duty was at the company CP. We were literally miles apart and seldom spoke on the phone. I had never shared a bunker with him. We hardly knew each other and I had not laid eyes