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Korean War

At the age of 21, I was drafted into the Army in October 1951. I was expecting it but not necessarily wanting it. I was inducted at the processing center in Shreveport and sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. A week later, we boarded a train for Fort Ord, California, where I was assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and went through 16 weeks of infantry basic training.

After boot camp, I attended leadership school for eight weeks. Our commanding officers prepared us physically and mentally for whatever was ahead. They did a good job. Though our training did not eliminate our fears, we were well prepared to perform our jobs. In June 1952, I received orders to go overseas. Following a two-week leave at home, I shipped out to Korea. I was assigned to the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division in North Korea. We landed at Inch'on and were trucked to an area about 25 miles north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel.

The worst part of it for me was the unknown. Though newly returned veterans of the Korean War had trained me, I wasn't sure what to expect. I didn't know what outfit I would join until I arrived. Finally I reached my destination and was put with the Service Company of the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment. It was a support company for the line companies. We were located about five miles behind the frontlines. I was thankful for that assignment since I had thought I would go directly into battle. Somehow they changed my MOS from a rifleman to a truck driver after I left the States. So I served as a truck driver in the motor pool for the next eight or nine months, delivering supplies to the frontlines.

My time in Korea was completely different from what I had expected. In my mind, I could see myself just fighting all the time. During the daytime, it was very quiet. At night, things broke loose. That was a surprise. Before I became involved in the war, I was apprehensive. But the morale of the soldiers was good, despite the fact that no one really wanted to be there. We were there because we had to be. A lot of us were married and had to leave our families behind.

Usually I delivered supplies to the frontline during the daytime, when things were quiet. Soldiers would be sitting around on top of their bunkers, cleaning their rifles or washing their clothes in a helmet. Two or three times, things got a little hairy. Once I was hauling ammunition

when mortar shells started falling around me about a quarter of a mile from the frontlines. Traveling alone as usual, I immediately left my truck. The attack only lasted about 15 minutes, and luckily the truck was not hit.

One night we were moving troops and driving over a high pass with a lot of snow and ice on the ground. The dirt road was glazed over, and there were no side rails. My twelve-speed truck slid across that pass inch by inch as I drove in the lowest gear possible. Knowing I was responsible for the men in the back of my truck, that was another hairy experience. I'll never forget that night.

In the fall of 1952, the Americans planned to take a particular hill. Our troops were dug in at a railroad dump down in a valley. The North Koreans and Chinese were on the hill. It took about a week or so to take the hill with 24-hour-a-day fighting. We used everything we had. Planes flew over and dropped bombs and napalm. The offensive also included artillery, mortars, machine guns and small arms fire. Some of our companies were almost completely wiped out. At the time, I was assigned to Graves Registration (GRO). That meant I had to bring dead American soldiers back to a GRO tent for processing. They would place each soldier in a body bag along with all his belongings and ship him out. Since the tent couldn't hold all the casualties, body bag after body bag was just placed on a hillside nearby.

Faith is a growing thing from the time one accepts Christ until death. Now I'm more mature in my relationship with the Lord than I was then, but I'm still growing. The Lord was good to me during my days in Korea. He protected me. I did not get a single scratch. A lot of men couldn't say that. Many men died, and many others were wounded severely. In my mind, I felt like I would make it through. I believe that was due to my faith in God. I don't see how anyone could survive such a time or even the challenges of day-to-day living without the Lord.

We worked seven days a week, so Sundays were just like any other day. When we were placed in the reserves about 50 miles from the frontlines for a period of a month to six weeks, it was different. Then we were able to have time off and go to church services.

To rotate, we had to earn 36 points. Typically, a soldier earned three points per month and stayed twelve months. Soldiers on the frontlines earned four points per month, so they could rotate in nine months. Sometimes 36 points didn't mean an automatic rotation. For instance, I spent 14 months in Korea. I wasn't relieved of duty until the ceasefire in 1953.

Everyone was glad the war was over. The first step was to exchange prisoners of war. Waiting in Inch'on to board a ship home, I read the posted orders each day and watched for my scheduled departure date. The day my name appeared on the list, I boarded a ship loaded with American GI's who had just been released from a prisoner of war camp. They seemed to be in good shape, but we were not allowed to talk to them. Only after they were debriefed in the States would they be able to have any contact with other soldiers.

I came home with an appreciation for what I had. Americans live so much better than the people in other countries. The South Koreans lived in great poverty. Before my arrival in that country, the North Koreans had moved south almost as far as Pusan on the southern tip of Korea. When our troops landed at Inch'on in late 1950 and cut them off, they pushed the North Koreans back to a line north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. A lot of Americans paid for that with their lives.