

FORGOTTEN BY MANY...REMEMBERED BY SOME

The Korean War seems to be one of those “forgotten” ones. The kind few ever mention or talk about, but it’s really not a deliberate effort to blank it out from memory. It’s just because, at the time, America was in full throttle lift-off mode heading for the “boom” years. Besides which, folks had had their fill of the big one...WWII...so the Korean thing, that “police action”, was just part of a bigger thing called...The Cold War...with the Soviets. In that context, Korea just became a “footnote” reference in our historical memory of those times.

The Korean War Memorial in Washington is a reflection of that...with its pale steel life-sized combat squad trudging silently up-slope towards an undetermined objective, their faces only vaguely defined...Ghost Soldiers...that ghostly sense amplified by thousands of faint illusively etched faces peering out from the polished dark gray granite retaining wall beside them. Combined with the reflections of those silent forms on that wall it makes an emotionally powerful point...these are the Ghost Soldiers...forgotten by many...only remembered by some.



**William R. Taylor, on short leave,
as new recruit and budding paratrooper ,
17th Airborne Div. Camp Pickett, VA, Feb. 1949.**

Unlike fog, most wars don’t creep up you on little cat feet. More often than not they just seemingly erupt out of nowhere, like one of those Midwestern mid-summer thunder storms which come roaring in with deafening blasts of thunder and lightning, quickly turning into tornado-like lashes of violent destruction. That’s the way it began with the Korean War, on a quiet and sunny June day in 1950.

I was all of 22, a newly minted three-stripped “buck sergeant”, sent up from my parent outfit, the 65th AAA Gun Bn. on Okinawa, to the Eta Jima School Command, at Kure, on southern Honshu, Japan. As my battalion’s communications chief, I was there to learn the more technical intricacies of that function, particularly as it applied to the latest of radio and radar technologies. Back on Okinawa...we were mostly equipped with left over gear from our invasion there in 1945...so this was like going from the Neolithic to the Iron Age...in one giant leap forward.

Five years of peaceful occupation duty and mostly friendly fraternization with the Japanese (busy rebuilding their world with American help and funding), had created an almost country club atmosphere over there, so coming up from the bare bones backwaters of Okinawa to the plush environment of southern Honshu was pure TDY bliss. Eta Jima had formerly been the Japanese Imperial Naval Academy, so the facilities there were “posh” to say the least. It was also a nice sized island right in the middle of Kure Bay, but an easy ferry ride to go explore the sights of southern Honshu, or, to enjoy the fleshpots and joints of Kure’s nightlife, which rivaled even those of Tokyo. The Eta Jima School Command was host to student personnel from all over the Pacific Command, from different services, including a small, wild, but great crew of our Aussie friends and allies (southern Honshu and Kure were part of their zone of occupation). All told there were some 1200-1500 of us there attending training courses of one kind or another. It was a lively environment, with a minimum of military type structure, just enough to keep us aware we were still “duty bound”...not on an extended

“Spring Break.” Keeping to our class schedules was the primary rule, where our training was serious and conducted in a no-nonsense style. Homework studies and cramming for tests required a certain amount of self-discipline, and, since most of us were NCO’s of one kind or another, we were all left on relatively long and easy “leashes” as far as the school’s Command was concerned.

So you can imagine the shock when on that day’s mid-afternoon, the school’s loudspeakers began blaring out: “Attention! Attention! All students and faculty assemble immediately in the central courtyard! Form up there by dormitory units.” Once there we found out the cause for this disruption of our routine. The Commandant himself addressed us: “Gentlemen, the North Koreans have attacked across the 38th parallel. We are now at war, and you are all hereby being transferred over to the Korean peninsula as reinforcements. Report to the Supply Center, by class sections to receive your field and combat equipment. That is all.”

When some began asking what about our parent units, a school staffer came to the microphone telling us all our parent units would be informed of our being sent to Korea, and we would receive our specific unit assignments after we landed in Pusan. Everyone was to be ready to be ferried over to Kure by 1800. In the meantime we were advised to go retrieve a few personal effects from our lockers, and stand by for further instructions.

So it went. Mess call began shortly thereafter. Section by section we were then herded to the Supply Center, receiving our field gear, boots, helmets, packs, sent back to our dormitories to pack up our footlockers with our other clothes and effects, told to mark them with our names, serial numbers, and parent units. Our lockers would be sent to them to be held for further forwarding later.

Then we waited...and waited...and waited. It was a very long night, as group by group everyone was ferried over to Kure, and there assembled in the train yards alongside a half dozen trains composed of a hodge-podge of passenger and boxcars. It was a scene of mass confusion and scrambling disorder as we were herded willy-nilly in to those cars. Not an easy task, and there was a wide range of heated verbal “exchanges” made in the process with expletive-laden old-Army style English. There were some moments of flashbacks for me from all this, recalling similar scenes back in France a decade earlier, we were chased out of France by the Germans.

Eventually, however, we were all packed aboard, and the school’s staffers began distributing hastily prepared “transfer orders” to each of us. These orders didn’t say much: “By VOCO (verbal order commanding officer), Eta Jima School Command, ---(we were instructed to print our rank, name and serial number in the form’s blank space ourselves) is hereby transferred to Hqs. Korean Command at Pusan, Korea.” We were all further instructed to turn these “orders” in when we arrived there.

Slowly, one by one, the trains began rolling away, heading for Osaka, the port for our transshipment to Korea. It took all of three days to get to Osaka, another three or four to be shipped by boat to Pusan, and there, found ourselves in a similar vortex of confusion. No one was interested in our so-called



JAPAN 1950

...as Buck Sergeant, one year later, at Eta Jima, Japan, shortly before Korean War began.

“orders”, just told to line up, pick up our weapons, and load onto waiting Army trucks. There was no roll-calling, no selection for specific units... just...you, you, and you...this truck...that truck, etc. Everything was made urgent...move... move... move...go...go...go. And the trucks roared off in all directions hauling their loads of armed men.

To this day I have no real recollection of where we were, or what unit I was sent to, other than some vague notion it was part of a unit of the 24th Division. It was near sundown by the time we arrived at that unit, perched on a high meat-loafed shaped ridge, almost sheer all around except for its back slope, up which we had to trudge from where the truck had dumped us at its base. Arriving at the bunker CP, our small group was met by a gruff and obviously tired and grumpy First Sergeant, who simply growled...listen up...this sector’s quiet for now, so, there’s some C-rations and coffee over there, then, pick a spot over by that rock...and get some sleep...you’ll need it. We’ll sort things out later.”

I won’t go into all the details that followed here. Let’s just say it was one of the hardest times I ever had. Shortly after that reception, the First Sergeant led me to a forward position, saying, this is your platoon, Sergeant...keep in your holes during the day...not much going on then...keep sharp watch late afternoon early evening...that’s when they let go with their goddam mortars! See that ridge across the valley... that’s their front line.. Call the CP...on the field phone...if anything starts up. Send your guys over one by one for chow...after dark. That’s it, Sergeant, any questions? I shook my head, and he left. Never saw him again.

And that was how the Korean War began for me.

It ended many weeks later, after the Marines made their Inchon landing. By that time we were just a remnant of what we had been, and it was a Marine forward combat patrol that found us up on that ridge. Knowing how trigger-happy such point units were, I cautioned my guys to stay under cover until I gave the signal to stand up.

As the nearest Marines came close up that slope, I slowly stood up, with my weapon at the trail. I must have been a sight, gaunt, in filthy ragged field clothes, a tall beanpole silent scarecrow. Their point man let out a shout, went into a combat crouch, as did his mates, but my silent unmoving and obviously not hostile form, despite the weapon, soon had them curious, and cautiously approaching me.

For a few moments we just stared at each other. Then, at my signal, one by one, the rest of my guys slowly silently stood up. The nearest Marine blurted out:”Holy Shit! Who the hell are you guys?” Another turned and shouted back at his leader;”Hey, Gunny, looks like we found some lost dumbass Army guys here!” At that I stepped forward, identified myself by rank and name, loudly growling out:” Who the hell you calling dumbasses... dumbass... you’re here too!”

That did it. Before we knew it we were all laughing and hugging together like happy idiots. Their Gunny and I quietly shook hands, grinning at each other. But we were all in bad shape, and before we knew it we were all gently but firmly gathered up by pairs of Marines, and half carried down that slope to their company CP. Before long we had been more or less cleaned, given odd bits of Marine field



Sergeant Stevens & Sergeant Taylor buddies, 65thAAA Gun Bn, Okinawa Jan 1950. Both were TDY in Japan, when Korea War broke out. Both, sent to front but with different units. After being returned to Okinawa in Sep, 1950, Taylor learned his friend had been killed in July.

clothes as needed, fed, and otherwise treated with extreme generosity and kindness, before being turned over to their medics for evacuation.

Happy as that moment of fraternization was, it was soon over, these Marines had more important stuff to take care of, and off they went. I can't help but wonder how many of them ever made it back from the Yalu and the Frozen Chosen.

After a brief stay at Tokyo General Hospital (I had an infected scratch on my right ankle from a small piece of mortar shrapnel and was down to 145 lbs) I was finally back on Okinawa again with my 65th Gun Bn. Many of its guys I had known were gone, almost all were new ones. Col. Moore, my battalion commander, was so happy to have his old Com. Chief back, he almost gave me a hug. Ironically, the whole time I was in Korea, I had been carried AWOL because the Eta Jima School idiots had never explained what had happened (nor did my locker ever show up either). Col. Moore soon took care of that. But then he had the unhappy task of telling me that my buddy Sgt Stevens, our Ops. Chief, who had also been on TDY to Japan, had been similarly "shanghaied" and then later killed in Korea.



**Sept. 1950 –
65th AAA Gun. Bn.(120mm)
Tengan, Ishikawa, Okinawa.
Recovering from weight loss
after return from Korea.**

That news was a stunning blow, and the cumulative effect of those events in Korea and this news, had me in a deep funk for days. Back then there was little or no understanding of what we now call PTSD. My way of coping with it was to go on a roaring drunken rage for several days. After sobering up again, though still groggy from that, I became more gung-ho than Gung Ho, driving everyone, including poor Col. Moore nuts. But somehow that acute episode soon passed, and I slowly more or less came back to "normal."

In the meantime, our unit had been put on a war footing, and brought up to it full four battery strength. Col. Moore used that opportunity to get all us "old timers" promoted by cleverly transferring us on paper to that extra unmanned battery, promoting us to our new ranks there, then slyly transferring us back with those ranks to our regular positions. It was a masterful bit of creative paper shuffling. In my case, that brought me from buck sergeant to Staff, to First Class in less than two months, and then up for Master within three months. So Korea faded to the back of my mind as we worked like dogs to get our unit up to full wartime standard. Ultimately, I was selected for OCS, and headed back to America.

I've a few pictures from those times, and some poems I jotted down about them. Don't know how much value these might have as "poetry", but they do reflect how I felt at the time about it. I was luckier than most of those who were there then, and who went through it all in the years that followed my brief time there. Later, when my first son was born, I named him after my buddy killed in Korea. Since it was not a known given name in our family, everyone wondered why I chose it, but, I've never explained it to them, and no one has ever asked me why ever since.

Now, it's mostly a fuzzily remembered and ancient history, of which only certain parts of it are still deeply held in those recesses of my mind. And there they must and will remain.

FOREWORD

Most items have both a date and geographic indication acting as milestone markers for what was happening and where I was when these were being written. Lastly, many of these were written just before, during, and after the Korean War, and then stored in a footlocker. Later items were added and stored away with these, most of them remaining there for almost fifty years.

About eighteen years ago, I finally opened it again, to pull out and sell some battlefield “souvenirs” that had been stored with them for all that time (along with the pieces of a 120mm mortar round that barely missed me, but from which a small shrapnel piece of it nicked my right ankle thus “earning” me a Purple Heart and Bronze Star). Gathering up all those papers, I put them in a box, along with some old books, and back into a storage closet.

Some five years later, when I decided to clean things out, I came across them again, only to find that, after so many years, many of these were faded and barely legible because most of them had been written on whatever scraps of paper available at the time. But with a bit of straining memory, and some “forensic” editing, I was able to restore much of the original wording to put them into this collection.

To what extent any of it can be truly called – poetry – I’ll have to leave to the reader to decide.

W. R. Taylor

12-05-09



THE CENTURION CHRONICLE

WR Taylor - Editor

**Camp Pickett, Virginia, 17th Airborne Division,
Boot Camp, 1949**

WINTER REVEILLE

Frosty mists of a reluctant dawn
swirl and mix with vapor trails of breath
from shadowed forms and shapes
of ambling, shambling men,
as yip-voiced squad leaders
try herding them into a loose assemblage
vaguely resembling military order.

+

Then with low-woofed sounds,
they call their rolls and face about
to the top-kick's solitary ramrod form,
whose deep-growled voice
commands attention, and report.

+

He too then smartly turns about,
giving his own flourished salute
to the silent form that commands them all,
while all this stirs a restless mass,
made anxious by alluring mess hall smells,
impatient for release from this mystical ritual
beginning yet another military day.

+



**....as Corp.(Comm.Chief)
65thAAA Gun Bn. Okinawa,
Dec. 1949.**

Naha, Okinawa Shima, Japan
1950

NAKAGUSUKU CASTLE

Ancient ghosts re-enter
and live by moonlight,
there is a spoken silence
of rustling silk.

+

Gently resonant sounds
of armor and gleaming lances,
mark the halls and arches
of each sentry way.

+

Through tranquil courts
wind bells chime in song,
and trees are evergreen
high above the sea.

+

A lovely princess waits
while gardens flower,
laughter flows with talk
gong with samisen.

+

Ancient ruins are still,
soundless in their dreams,
glories past are witnessed
by only wind and trees.

+



May 1950 –
Yamaguchi Cave near
Chomonkio Gorge,
southern Honshu, Japan,
on weekend excursion
with Aussie military friends
just weeks before outbreak
of Korean War.



May 1950 –
On hiking trail in bamboo forest
of Chomonkio Gorge.

**Tengan-Ishikawa, Okinawa Shima, Japan
1950**

NIGHT WATCH

There's moonrise beyond that hill,
an orange melancholy glow
from a glowering eye of night.

+

Reflected on the cold long beauty
of our great guns,
which lie sleeping dog-like.

+

They're just waiting for the dawn
to then bark awake,
and – bite!

+



**May 1950-
Dorm quarters at
Eta Jima School Command,
Kure, Japan, just before
outbreak of Korean War.**

**Hiroshima, Honshu, Japan
1950**

THE RESIDUES OF WAR

We stand a silent, huddling troop,
nervously stealing glances
at the film strips on our wrists,
grimly scanning both these,
and the panoramic residues of war.

+

We stare with incomprehension
at the utter vastness of such devastation,
a searing wasteland of desolation,
whose few skeletal remains of structures,
makes sharp the enormity of loss.²

+

Where once there was thriving life,
at the bridge we see the nightmare,
of all those shadowed forms
scorched and etched into its sides,
vaporized by one flash of light into eternity.

+

**Close Air Support
Marine Pilots Style
Korea 1950**

THOSE CRAZY BASTARDS IN OUR SKY

Those crazy bastards in our sky,
circling falcons waiting for our calls,
to plunge headlong as they stoop
with screaming wings and chattering guns,
striking hard at those who come against us.

+

They keep on swooping way down low,
then flair straight back up and high,
a Ferris wheel gone mad with killing lust,
dealing death to all our foes –
those crazy bastards in our sky!

+

Tokyo, Japan
Reflections on Korea
1950

OLD-MAN CHIEF

I grew old, at twenty-two,
night after night, watching brave young boys
eager as wolf cubs – hunger driven –
prepare for another night's hunt
to feed their brothers of our pack.

+

I grew old, at twenty-two,
as into darkness they would lope away,
grinning, with eyes bright – certain, cocksure –
they'd soon be bringing back enough
for all to last another day.²

+

I grew old, at twenty-two,
dawn after dawn, waiting for young wolves
to come bounding home – gleeful, smiling –
proudly prancing for all they'd brought,
but, slowly, fewer ever did.

+

I grew old, at twenty-two,
an old-man chief, one of few when found,
leading only ghosts – memory haunted –
by the loss of such companions
whose bones yet lie somewhere, all unsung.

+

Korea Epitaph
1950

TO MY KOREA GI'S

So brave, so brave
those valiant beating hearts,
so true, so true.

+

So bare, so bare,
those shallow mounds of earth,
so new, so new.

+

**Carmel, California
1951**

**BY THE SEA -
REMEMBERING A PAST INVITATION
ON OKINAWA**

At the house of my friend
we sat before small tables
drinking our sake and tea,
eating well of rice and bean curd.

+

At the house of my friend
I was an honored guest,
learning well of things strange,
yet, pleasant to my ways.

+

At the house of my friend
there was a perfect song,
as the women were singing
while a samisen chanted.

+

At the house of my friend
I left my humble thanks,
walking partway together,
parting more like brothers.

+

Fort Ord, California
1951

THE DI

Far from Korea's shattered shores,
and crushing private loss,
I stand in chevron-sleeved glory,
duty-bound to mold sheep-brained youth
into some semblance of being dogs of war.

+

So I growl and snarl and curse my lot,
for being made a Judas-goat,
who must prepare them for that carnage,
they will surely all have to face,
despite any promises otherwise given them.

+

Forbidden to mention harsh reality,
subject to sanctions for doing so,
I disdain the mendacity of such taboos,
pleading earnestly for their fixed attention
so that they may return whole – not in a box.

+

Alas, my passions for their readiness,
just wets their appetites for glory,
though not my desired intention,
but gratified by their devotion to learn,
I yield them hard-earned survival knowledge.

+

At cycle's end, when it means their leaving,
my ghost-haunted mind is proud,
they have become at least bright war-pups
and true war-dogs they may yet be,
yet such pride is mixed with sadness as they go.

+

But the hardest moments are yet to come,
when each bright-eyed youth reaches out,
to cheerfully shake my hand in thanks,
grinning, full of pride and hope,
as silently I just nod and grimly pray....God-speed.2

+

At OCS

Ft. Riley, Kansas, 1951

A NIGHTMARE RIVER FLOWS

In the depth of sleep
there comes a limpid flow,
crystalline and pure,
whose gentle flowing touch
half-awakes the mind,
to find myself standing by its bank.

+

There are no sounds,
only the faintest murmur of its flow,
as I touch it with a hand,
bemused, and uncertain of what aspect
its strange presence means,
or what it might portend.

+

Something draws me to it,
wading in with boots and all,
yet wary and alert, crouching low,
for any kind of hostile motion,
puzzled by that lack of sound,
I quickly scoop its coolness to my lips.

+

I sense there's something wrong,
then in shock stare at its pinkish hue,
not water this, not water this,
as in dismay I see it turning darker still,
into a nightmare river of flowing blood,
from which I cannot leave.

+

A greater horror strikes my mind,
trembling now in disbelief,
as the first of them begin to show,
a leg, an arm, and other parts, drifting by,
joined soon by heads and faces of those I knew,
my guys, my kids, what's happening here?

+

Some stare, some smile, yet none speak,
but I know them all as they float by,
carried slowly along by that bloody flow,
I call them each by name, but they just sadly stare,
unable to respond or wave to me,
only staring back with their reproachful glances.

+

Now, some drift more closely by,
eyes shining bright, almost smiling
hey, Sarge, come on in, come with us,
the water's fine, don't mind the hue...
they fade away downstream as I step forward...
to wake weeping.... from that nightmare river flow.

+

I curse this dream, I curse it much,
for it never lets me peacefully sleep,
ever a companion of my nights...
sometimes not,...but returning now and then...
a horrid unwanted guest....familiar, no longer vivid,
yet, somehow, comforting in its hated way.

+

Time, has made it fade into the shadows,
chained and boxed away,
into the depths of my mind
where now it's only a dim remembrance,
and most gladly so,
of when that nightmare river once flowed.

+



* * * *

(Armed Forces Day – Aschaffenburg, Germany – 1953)

- - A young tank commander and his son -
Tk. Co., 18th Inf. Regt., Big Red One Division.

LOOKING BACK
(to a far time)

He stands tall
with insouciant grin
and double-barreled pride,
of fatherhood,
and dashing -Armored- service.

Memory of those grim realities
on distant war-torn shores
now made ever dimmer
by the feathery lightness
of one small child,
perched sparrow-like,
upon his arm.