CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

KOREA

I had to cancel my business deal and report. Carm and the kids were visiting in Iowa. On top of that my back was out of joint and I walked like I was a hundred years old. I took a lot of kidding about going to war on a crutch.

After the initial flux of activation passed, we settled down to await orders. The business deal was snapped up by the administrator of the partner's estate. I left the yard in charge of the foreman.

We had the company pretty well packed in Fort Wayne, so I obtained permission to go after my family in Iowa. While I was there I would call Fort Wayne every day, and if nothing was happening, I would stay another day. We drove up to northern Minnesota to see Ralph and Max and their son, Boyd. They were farming up there. We about had to tie Bristow to keep him from going with me when we left. He was itching for active duty but he had to get the crops in first.

The commanding officer at Fort Wayne was a salesman for a drug firm. He turned in the company car and they threw a whing ding company party for him as a farewell gesture. Then he flunked the physical! I received a call in Iowa to report immediately, as I was now commanding officer.

Back to Ohio. We decided to sell the lumber yard share to the foreman. Everything was up in the air. If I were going abroad, we didn't know whether Carm and the kids should stay in Willshire or in Iowa with her folks. If I got a plank at Camp Pendleton or someplace, they could move out there. We decided they would stay in Ohio until I got orders.

We tied up the loose ends of the company in Fort Wayne and had our farewell parties. Then on August 25, our sixth wedding anniversary, we held a flag ceremony at the Fort Wayne armory. I recall holding the United Nations flag. Then we marched, 225 of us, to the Nickel Plate Station, amid huge crowds, and boarded a train for Camp Pendleton. It was an emotional event.

Once again I was riding a rail across the continent, on the way to war.

There was lots of gambling, but this time no women, booze, disorder, and we lost no men. I'll say this--the company on that train was peopled by intelligent, self-reliant men, people you could depend on. I can't recall a single eight ball and I tend to remember eight balls. I fantasized about training and leading that company in combat. I would be famous.

Neil Shober, the top sergeant, could organize any group and straighten out any snafu. Neil started his career with a pick-and-shovel job on the old Fort Wayne streetcar tracks and would end up in charge of the city's public transportation.

And then there was Staff Sergeant Glen Bates, from my home-town. An artist couldn't draw a picture of a better N. C. O. --big and handsome and with that air about him that made him seem a hell of a lot bigger. Never have I seen Glen tell a man to do something and be questioned. You damn sure knew you'd better do it. If he had a shortcoming, it was speaking the truth, regardless of the rank involved. He could've been as good an officer as the Corps ever had, if he'd have stooped to diplomacy.

Lieutenant Gale Buuck was personnel director for the Fort Wayne International Harvester. He was another who told it like it was, to the President's face if need be, and I'll say more on

that later. Lieutenant Clarice "Lefty" Nuenschwander had been a great college baseball player. He would retire as superintendent of public schools in Berne, Indiana.

A diamond in the rough was Lieutenant Perry Wise, from Van Wert, barely out of law school. Whenever going overseas was mentioned, Perry would say, "Oh, they won't send me. I'm a legal officer." Naturally, that became a refrain--whenever Korea came up, someone would say, "They won't send me--I'm a legal officer."

The second day I finished the sandwiches and cake Carm had packed in a shoebox. Already I missed my wife and kids. As we chugged across the plains, I dreamed that we should just pack up the kids and our belongings and move out there and get lost from everything. Some of us married guys got to talking about all the things that could happen to kids, so, as I wrote my first letter home, I reminded Carm to keep Wade out from under the washing machine and away from the stairs and to have Lyn wear her life jacket while swimming in the Willshire reservoir. I told her not to work herself to a frazzle on painting and other house projects. Nothing there would rot in the next three or four years. This time I was going to war a married man.

We passed the Toledo marines in Denver. One fellow told me we were the fourth trainload of marines to go through that day.

Somewhere in Wyoming we had two diner cars added to the train. Since we officers had to pay for our chow, we decided to take off our bars and go to the first breakfast on one of the diners as "privates." We hoped the man would assume we were privates. To avoid suspicion we were going to scatter out in the diner. We would have pulled it off, but when I sat down Neil Shober stood up and loudly said, "Sir, I'll move and all you officers can sit together!" Well, we paid our $1.25, but all hands had a good laugh.

We rolled into Oceanside on August 28, late in the afternoon. Camp Pendleton was in chaos. Well over a hundred companies reported at the same time. It was two a.m. before we were all processed and classified. It was a traumatic time for a lot of green kids who had never been away from home before, and I felt sorry for them. There were a lot of four-letter words floating around from the veterans. The officers were separated from the men and placed in a pool. Likewise, the men were all thrown together.

Finally, an officer got on top of a building with a bullhorn and assembled all the men. It was a huge throng. He said, "Okay, now, all those men who have had less than twenty-six drills

move to this open area on my right. Those with more than twenty-six drills and no active duty move to the open area on my left. The rest of you stay where you are."

There was one big melee as those thousands of men struggled to disentangle themselves and get to the right spot, but eventually there were three groups. I had never seen anything like this. Next the bullhorn announced that those on the right would go to San Diego for recruit training, those on the left to advanced training, and we all knew what was in store for the veterans. There was much shuffling. A lot of gung ho kids slipped into the vet's group. A lot of vets slipped into the boot groups. A lot of both groups got away with it for a long time. This wasn't at all like the ramrod discipline and order of World War II, and I didn't like it a bit. We were rushing things too fast to suit me.

The next day one of my sergeants told me that my four corpsmen had been flown to Korea already. I knew that three of them were just green boots with hardly any training. That was the last straw. I requested an audience with the commanding general and got it. He listened to my complaint and assured me they had gone to Alaska. They had. They flew the great circle on the way to Korea.

Everyone got haircuts, physicals, I.D. cards, dogtags, etc., in record time. We officers tried to help our men all we could but it was tough, being separated. My N.C.O.'s did a good job--they were billeted with the men. Everyone wondered where he would go from there. Back came the answer--"Ah, they won't send me. I'm a legal officer."

Casual Co. Hq. Bn.
Trng. & Rep. Reg.
Marine Barracks
Camp Pendleton
Oceanside, Calif.
Aug. 31, 1950

My Dearest Carm, Lyn & Wade,

Guess as long as I have a minute in the evening you won't need to worry about getting mail. This is the climax of my day. I just live the day through for the time I can sit down and write to you. Seems this is as near to you as I can possibly get. I'm still homesick for you and the kids. Those last moments at the train just go through my head like fire. I can still feel you kissing me and see Lyn and Wade just as they were. Every night I dream of being home just as realistic as can be. I'll be there sooner or later, honey.

This place is certainly a madhouse. Damned if I ever saw <u>anything</u> like this in my whole career. We piddled around all day doing all sorts of unnecessary things and tonight we went to a movie again. Saw "Bright Leaf," with Gary Cooper and Lauren Bacall. Wasn't bad.

I still haven't any definite dope on what assignment I'll get. Lots of reserves going overseas. I don't know if I will or not. I want so damn much to be with you and the kids. I've seen so damn much unnecessary B.S. since

I've been here that I'm just about done with the outfit. Guys going out with three and four kids. Somehow it just don't seem right. Guess we're beginning to treat our people in the same manner as Russia. No heart and soul anymore.

I've run into several of my old Third Marine friends. They aren't so eager about this thing as we all were the last time. If you write to Max, tell Ralph to not be a damn fool about this thing. Tell him to at least stay out until they get partially organized again. This damn confusion is demoralizing.

I suppose you are beating your brains out at painting, taking care of the kids, etc. I'll tell you one thing -- if and when we live together again, we are going to do some living. I mean we're going to enjoy each other and the kids to the utmost. I could kick my ass for leaving you even for one night a week, now. Of course, that's past and we'll have to look ahead, now.

Well, it's getting fall there by now. It seems like fall here at night and rather so in the daytime. Everything is dry and burned up as usual.

The mail situation here is totally disorganized, of course. I don't know if I'll ever get any from you. If you miss mail call, your mail is put in the "old mail" box and you have to pick it up at "old mail" call. They have about one "old mail" call per week. I'll keep writing every day, though, and if anything happens (an emergency) get hold of the Red Cross and have them locate me. You might get me by phone by calling "Camp Joseph H. Pendleton" and ask for Barracks 15-B-2 and leaving a message for me to call you. That's the only way I know, honey.

Well, sweetheart, I'm going to hit the sack, now. I'll write again tomorrow if possible at all. Be good. Take care of Lyn and Wade. I love you.

Love as ever,
Ron

Days passed waiting orders. Company B was scattered, most of them going to training in Pendleton or to recruit training in San Diego. We worked day and night, so many men were coming in. I meanwhile squared away the personal matters you have to worry about in a mess like this. I took out $10,000 worth of life insurance and arranged for an allotment of $200 per month to be taken from my pay and sent to Carm. I phoned her and we decided she and the kids would come out to California as soon as I received an assignment.

Eventually, I was sent to Tent Camp Two again. We swept the foot of dirt, tumbleweed and coyote dung from the Quonset huts and moved in. I was given a job teaching scouting and patroling to the group that had been on the bullhorn's left. I was busy from dawn to dusk.

As Tent Camp Two was fairly close to San Clemente, I began looking for a place to rent and made arrangements to have Carm and the kids come out. I rented a beautiful apartment in San Clemente on the beach. As Carm didn't drive, we fortunately had a neighbor, Leone Passwater, who drove our '49 Ford out just for the vacation.

On September 12 I was informed by the replacement draft commander that I would go overseas on September 14. I told him

that would be just dandy, as my wife and children would arrive on the thirteenth and I'd have to put up with them only one day. Too, look at the rent it would save. He extended my tour in the States to the end of the month.

Leone, Carm and the kids arrived at our predetermined rendevous place, a hardware store in San Clemente, and the kids lit up like full moons when they saw me. We had a lovely time on the beach for a couple of weeks.

I was giving a lecture one day to two or three hundred men on the side of a hill. During the talk I strode back and forth in front of them. When I called them off the hill one kid, wearing sunglasses, suddenly froze beside me and said, "Don't move, Captain!"

He fixed his bayonet on his rifle and killed a sizeable rattler right by my feet.

The snake had a fist-sized bump in his mid section. I said, "He's swallowed a gopher. Let's open him up." There was nothing, just the swelling. He must have been sick, for he hadn't rattled or struck even when I'd almost stepped on him.

One day orders came to muster in the area of the flagpole, to be bused to the airstrip, the start of our trip to Korea. Our group had thirty-five officers in it. As no time was given for the pickup, we took picnic lunches and mustered with our families around the flagpole. The kids played together, we all spent a pleasant day and the bus never showed up. The next day we again rallied around the flagpole and no bus. As some U. N. troops had reached the thirty-eighth parallel in Korea, we hoped maybe our trip would be cancelled before we got a bus. No such luck. The bus came on the third day, September 28, and we had another emotional parting. I was hauled off to the airstrip and my family embarked for the midwest.

There were news photographers at the airfield as we boarded and took off for San Francisco. The flight took a little over two hours. I sat by a window and watched the terrain along the coast all the way. We had a four-hour layover at San Francisco and I scribbled a letter to Carm.

We left Moffet Field that evening and flew all night, eleven hours, and saw nothing. As we were up 10,500 feet, some of the boys had to have oxygen. I didn't but my ears hurt.

We landed at Barber's Point, Honolulu, at 5:30 the next morning, Hawaii time. I didn't see much of Hawaii but what I saw was beautiful. The weather was perfect and they said it was like that always. Damn, I wished Carm and the kids were there. I wrote them another letter.

We had a good breakfast and then were put aboard an old rust-streaked C-54 and headed for Johnston Island. I sat beside the navigator and he was in a sweat. He had one heck of a time finding the route. The crew were reserves recently recalled to active duty. All they talked about was how the plane before us had crashed. This didn't help us appreciate the old rusty tub with its wings flapping up and down. Four and a half miserable hours to Johnston Island.

If you ever have a chance to go to Johnston Island, don't do it. It's a speck in the Pacific, surrounded by a reef that keeps the ocean from rolling over it. The highest point is fourteen feet above sea level, and they had to bulldoze off the top to make enough real estate for a landing strip. You can see the ocean in all four directions. Barren and flat and very hot. We ate noon chow there, and the guys stationed there all had that vacant, asiatic stare and seldom talked. I suppose if you wanted solitude and fishing it would be okay, or if you wanted to save all your pay. I mailed another letter to Carm.

We took off for Kwajalein Island and had to return to Johnston for a new motor. When we finally got back in the sky, it took over seven hours to get to Kwajalein. It was hot as hell. Everyone smelled like goats. Everyone was tired. I felt all right--I can sleep where others can't--but I sure wanted a chance to shave.

During a two-hour stop on Kwajalein, I dashed off another letter to Carm.

At one a.m. we took off for Guam. Again it was seven long hard hours.

Oct. 2, Monday (here)
Sunday (there)
Agana, Guam

My Dearest Carm, Lyn and Wade,

Am sitting here in Agana, Guam, and boy is it raining. Bucketsful. We landed here at 0637 this morning. Really had a rough trip from Kwajalein. Up and down, to and fro all night. Here we are scheduled to stay for about six or eight hours. I took a shower, shaved (all but my upper lip) and ate breakfast a while ago.

I met an Army sergeant here I once knew in Panama. We ate together while he gave me all the dope on the islands. There's lots of civilians here, etc. One thing I've decided is that I do not want to subject you, Lyn and Wade to life of this sort. I think we'd better take our chances outside, sweetheart, although I suppose ten years is a lot to throw away--that is, if they keep me that long (three more years). What the hell, may as well enjoy the next ten outside. We could buy a farm and have three or four more kids, enough

exemptions so that they won't draft me--ha!

I was wondering how the kids reacted to the separation this time. Probably didn't bother them too much as they should be getting used to a state of flux by now. Damn rain is splashing in the window and this is the only desk in the place.

You'd better arrange to have your mail forwarded from Willshire if you stay in Iowa any time at all. When you do go to Willshire, check at the bank on that note of Griffith's and let me know what they did about renewing it, etc. We'll need that money when we buy a farm.

I bought Lyn a little grass skirt and you a little woven sewing basket here. I hope you get them. Let me know when you do.

Well, my sweetheart, I'm going to find some place to get some sleep. I'll write you from Japan. Guess we're landing in Tokyo. Until later--I love you, darling.

Love as ever,
Ron

I ran into an old Third Marine buddy stationed on Guam. He took me on a jeep tour to all the beaches, cliffs, caves and places the Third had taken after my departure from the Pacific. I had funny feelings about that place.

We landed at Haneada airport, Japan, at ten p.m., October 2, amid a drowning rainstorm. As we disembarked, a couple of Japanese shysters walked up to us and asked us if we had any big American currency to trade for yen. The hair actually raised up on the back

of my neck. The last Japanese I had seen were bent on killing me.

Next we had a two hour bus ride to Yokasuka Naval Base, Yokahama, Japan, over the bumpiest damn roads I have ever seen. We got to bed at about one a.m.

I woke up at five with the worst headache of all time. Small wonder--my body had just been trajected from Pendleton to Yokahama in the worst of aircraft, through some of the roughest sky and over the bumpiest roads. I found a handful of aspirin, ate them, and began to recover. I went up to the officers' mess to eat, about a mile from where we quartered, which was formerly the Japanese Annapolis. Just outside our door you could see ships lying all over the harbor, bombed in the last war.

The officers' mess was really a nice place. All the waiters and waitresses were Japanese, dozens of them. Hardly any of them spoke English. I ordered two eggs over easy and got them scrambled. Everyone who was stationed there really liked it. Volunteer groups who had left Pendleton before us had jobs in Japan, Guam, etc. Of course, I thought, such luck would never befall me.

The day was spent playing "beesball" with the Japanese on the airfield. Somehow or other the planes were messed up, so we

boarded a bus and departed for another airport, some sixty miles away in Tachikawa. I looked forward to seeing the Japanese countryside. However, we had a Japanese driver whom we suspected of being a former kamikaze pilot. He had two manias, one for blowing the horn and the other for speed. He evidently hadn't learned about brakes as yet. The road was narrow, built on a high levee and it was twenty or thirty feet down to the rice paddies. He ran pedestrians and cyclists over the bank. My eyes hardly left the road, but it was surely interesting to glance at the passing rural Japan, seeing all the ancient customs, etc., firsthand.

As we unloaded at Tachikawa (never have I been so grateful to reach a destination) one of our guys said to the driver, "You silly son of a bitch, I oughta cut your throat!"

The driver bowed and smiled and said, "Sank you, sank you." He hadn't understood a word.

In fact, the only word the bus drivers seemed to know was "B. O. Q.," Bachelor Officers Quarters. Wherever you wanted to go you just told them, "B. O. Q.," and then rode till you saw the place you wanted.

We stayed overnight at Tachikawa and the next day flew south to Ashiga, across the strait from Pusan, Korea. We hadn't seen much of our gear since we left Pendleton. I'd taken showers and had bought a toothbrush but I still had on the same clothes. Everybody was the same so nobody was obnoxious to the other. However, maybe that was why every bus driver had lead feet.

Already I was falling in love with Japan. I admired the respect and courtesy inherent in their society. The Japanese in Japan were much more courteous than those I had encountered in the South Pacific a few years earlier. They were the damnedest most elegant and resourceful people I have ever seen. I saw a myriad things, silk and linen housecoats, etc., that I wanted to buy for Carm and the kids, but didn't get the chance. You had to have script, occupation money, to buy from the American establishments and yen for the Japanese shops. Supposedly, it was a $1,000 fine if you had any American money in your pockets. I didn't manage to get mine exchanged. I wished I had our studio photographs with me, of Carm and the kids. Japanese painters would reproduce them in color on canvas for about three dollars while you waited. They were amazing. So lifelike that the person seemed to be right there with you in the room. If my family had been along, I wouldn't have minded a permanent billet in Japan. I sent them two letters and

an enclosed sample of script.

We left the bright lights of Japan and flew to Korea by night. We entered Korean air space from the south and all the way to Seoul we could see flashes and tracer bullets flying about the hills and rice paddies below. Mopping up and guerrilla operations were in full swing. A chilling sight for thirty-five guys fresh out of four or five years civilian life.

We landed at Kimpo airport in pitch darkness. We stepped from the plane onto the cement runway and two of us fell into a bomb crater that the pilot hadn't even seen. Not being lucky enough to break any bones, we warned the others and waited for our welcome party.

Four hours later a truck showed up and we piled aboard. This type truck was built to haul sixteen men. We got thirty-five and their baggage on this one. I claim it's a record.

As artillery boomed and roared in the hills around us, we jolted towards Seoul. We could see nothing. The smells of the countryside were impressive, however. Sort of a mixture of the aroma of dead rats and outdoor toilets in July. Some of this, of course, was caused by fertilizer in the rice paddies.

Riding through the streets of Seoul, we got only glimpses of that ghost city. Burned out buildings, dirt and rubble. The people were under strict curfew. Occasionally, one would duck out of our blackout lights and into the nearest pile of rubble or building.

We bedded down at about two a.m. in some old bombed-out, roofless buildings amid broken glass, debris and crap of all sorts, and on the hardest floor in Seoul.

At about three a.m. I heard glass crunching. Thinking maybe it was a thief or enemy of some sort, I challenged him. It was a marine on duty in the area. I asked him what he was doing out at this late hour.

He said, "Oh, I have a shack job and can't catch a ride till daylight and thought I'd bunk down till then."

"Don't you know this place is lousy with V.D.?" I asked.

"Oh, I have a corpsman buddy," he said, "and he gives me a penicillin shot before I go out."

"What if you get wounded and are resistant to penicillin?"

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. Wake me at six if you're up."

I shook my head and returned to my cold sleeping bag on the hard floor.

At four a.m. I awoke to a lot of shooting pretty close by. Guerrilla attack, I thought. I picked up my carbine and went out into the street. There I encountered an M.P. and asked what the shooting was. He informed me that there was nothing to worry about, as it was merely the South Korean police out shooting people they didn't like. Resolving to be friendly with their police thereafter, I retired again.

Daylight produced a regular 3-D horror show. Before this my war experiences were strictly between soldiers, no civilians, women or children involved. Here were the horrors of war at their worst. Seoul was in shambles. The dust was unbelievable. It was two inches thick on the rooftops, if you could find a roof. Hordes of poor souls wandered about in the dust and turmoil. They were living in packing boxes, in the streets and every damn place. They just stood around until someone herded them to some other place. There were children by the hundreds, many of them

carrying their smaller brothers and sisters on their backs by wrapping a blanket around them and folding it in front. The babies would fall asleep and their heads hung and flopped around until you wondered how they kept from being hurt. Streets full of kids trying to bum food from us. It was heartbreaking. Their parents were dead or missing and the poor little guys were just trying hard to survive. They ate from garbage cans and just stood around, lost.

One little girl came up with her little brother strapped to her back. She wasn't over five. That would be about like my kids back home. I gave her my last stick of gum. She smiled and said, "Sanks, Joe." I was immediately surrounded, besieged by dozens of others.

We reported to Division headquarters and bummed some C-rations off the Army. I dashed a few lines to Carm. A truck came to take us out to our assignments.

We left Seoul and headed northwest. Army troops were coming from the opposite direction, and in one truck a young Army private yelled at us in the highest tenor voice I've ever heard, "Hey, mac, don't go up there. They're using live ammunition!"

He was met by the snarls of the seasoned veterans, and one, mimicking his voice, said, "Oh, dear soul, do tell. I'm so frightened. Couldn't you go along to protect me?" The kid wilted.

Eventually we reached the front and were split up. I and a few others reported in to the Third Battalion, Fifth Marines. This was the First Marine Division, the First, Fifth and Seventh Regiments, the home of the professionals, the regulars, the old breed.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Taplett, the battalion C.O., met us, asked if we were reserves and said he was sorry about that but war is war. He interviewed us and right away I got off on the wrong foot. I intended to bring up the subject of my tender back, which still wasn't up to par. When he asked what I wanted to do I said, "Anything as long as I don't have to walk too much--"

I got that far and he blew up. "Listen son," he said, "we all walk around here!"

I thought "son" hell, I'm as old as you, but I said, "Hold the phone, Colonel. I've always been infantry but my back is out of place," etc. You might as well keep your mouth shut when you have a sore back, but he simmered down anyway. I was beginning to find out what it meant to be a replacement, where no one knew

you and where you had to prove yourself to be accepted.

I guess it was in Korea where I realized that the high brass in the Marines are all crazy. They grab off every damn little campaign. The Army was over there by the numbers, yet it looked to us as if the First Marine Division was taking the brunt, and would continue to do so. The code name for the Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, was "Darkhorse." It should have been "Workhorse." The Fifth Marines had been a cornerstone of the defense that had halted the North Koreans, and the Third Battalion had been tapped so frequently for special assignments that they had been nicknamed the "Lone Wolves." They even had made a flag with a wolf on it.

The North Korean Army had crossed the thirty-eighth parallel and attacked South Korea (Republic of Korea, R. O. K.) on June 25, conquered Seoul on June 28, and had run pell-mell down the peninsula. General Douglas MacArthur had thrown up a delay defense with an Army division. That slowed the blitz enough to allow the Eighth U. S. Army to establish a defense perimeter across the entire southeast corner of Korea, defending Pusan, the southern port. The startling North Korean victories had created panic among the South Koreans, an air of defeatism among the American troops and shock in the States.

But when the Marines had landed in Pusan in July, the mayor had said, "The panic will leave my people now."

For weeks the North Koreans had battered the Pusan Perimeter, bent on driving the Americans into the sea. At one point they broke through the defense over the Naktong River and had everyone alarmed. It was the Fifth Marines who led the counterattack that drove them back across the Naktong.

September 15 had brought the suprise Inchon invasion, MacArthur's brilliant gamble that had turned the war around. The plan was to recapture Inchon and Seoul up north, outflanking the North Koreans and cutting their long supply line, and then to break out of the Pusan Perimeter in the south. The First Marine Division had been attached to the Army for the campaign, forming the Tenth Corps (X Corps).

The Lone Wolves had spearheaded the Inchon landing. They were to assault the island fortress, Wolmi-do, that guarded the Inchon harbor. Air and Naval bobardment had wiped out the big guns on the island, and so the Third Battalion met light resistance when they landed. They had the flag flying over the island within ninety minutes. MacArthur was watching from the fleet flagship and radioed, "The Navy and Marines have never shone more brightly

than this morning."

Inchon and Seoul were recaptured, our forces broke out of the Pusan Perimeter, and by the end of September North Koreans were bugging out of South Korea in droves.

When I linked up with the Lone Wolves, they had been mopping up pockets of resistance northwest of Seoul. Now they were pulling out of the hills, moving south toward Inchon. Since I only wanted to see this Korean mess over, and it looked as if it were, I jumped merrily into a truck and relaxed a little.

We came to the Han River. The bridges had been destroyed and an Army pontoon bridge had been thrown up. It was one-way traffic and there was a heck of a lot of it, north and south. The Eighth Army was moving north to take over. The dust was terrific. We had an interminal wait for the traffic to go in our direction.

The Han had a very wide expanse of sand flats, hundreds of yards, on each side of the water. Out on the sand were hundreds of North Korean prisoners, working under the blazing sun and under American and South Korean guards. They were filling and dragging huge bags of sand down to a levy. They were a miserable lot and could hardly drag one foot after the other. They were being

kicked and beaten at every whipstitch by American and South Korean guards alike. The guards would take their rifle butts and just beat hell out of any one of them that happened to be near. I saw one North Korean try to sneak a drink out of the river and he got kicked smash in the face. There was a big grave scooped out behind the prisoners, the size of my house, about three feet deep. I could see twenty or thirty corpses in it. If any of the prisoners collapsed, they just put him out of his misery and dragged him over to the grave.

I had never seen people treated like this. By the time our turn came to cross the pontoon bridge, I was sick and disgusted. Our truck driver must have read my thoughts, for he remarked, "Just let the sons of bitches get you in their sights and see how much mercy they have."

Ever since I'd heard that the U. N. forces had reached the thirty-eighth parallel, I'd hoped the war was over. It looked as if it were. The North Koreans were back in North Korea after a good licking. Communism had been contained. Syngman Rhee, the South Korean dictator, had his country back. The United Nations resolutions condemning the Communist aggression had been backed by force. MacArthur and President Truman had a dramatic victory.

Were we marching to Inchon to board transports for home? No. We were going to board transports for an amphibious assault.

I'll be damned if the powers-that-be hadn't ordered us to invade North Korea.

We were held in assembly at Inchon for several days, waiting for the transport fleet to get ready for us to board. Inchon was even more shot up, dirtier and more unsanitary than Seoul. I had a reunion with some of the boys from Fort Wayne Company B, including three of the corpsmen who had flown out when we arrived at Camp Pendleton. We ate C-rations and talked. I kept running into the same old faces from the last war. The men in the outfit were mostly young kids, though, with a smattering of old-time marines. There seemed to be a shortage of officers, I guess because of the blood at Pusan and Seoul. Of the thirty-five officers who flew to Korea, I was the only one with infantry experience and they were all younger than I. One big guy, who had been a PX steward, got a letter after we got there that said he had been found to be obese, but they were making an exception in his case.

With the shortage, I was given three jobs--headquarters commandant for the battalion, commanding officer of Headquarters and Services Company, and commanding officer of the Wharang Platoon, a detachment of about sixty Koreans. They had been an entire police force from Wharang Province, near Seoul, and had volunteered en masse to serve with us. They were very well-educated and all seemed to have a sister or brother attending college

in the States. They would be invaluable on patrol and as interpreters. They were damn good soldiers.

So, in effect, I was headquarters commandant and a rifle company commander to boot. It kept me running, the toughest job I ever had. I had to coordinate all the H.Q. troops, such as intelligence, quartermaster, motor transport, plans and training, besides having the colonel and Major John Canney, our executive officer, looking down my throat all the time.

I should explain the H. Q. symbols for the battalion. S-1 is the designation of headquarters and includes all clerical workers, etc. S-2 is the intelligence section and includes communications. S-3 is plans and training and operations. S-4 is the quartermaster and supply section. I had charge of all personnel in S-1, S-2 and S-4, plus certain ones in S-3.

While we were in Inchon, we held memorial services at a military cemetery. Pitiful sight. I had the firing squad. While we were listening to speeches, I counted the white crosses both ways and multiplied them in my head. I had just read a newspaper report on the number killed in Korea to date. The crosses in that

one cemetery outnumbered the report. I counted several times to make sure and it came out the same. I wondered who was pooping whom.

We boarded the transports on October 11. I went aboard the U.S.S. Bexar (pronounced "bear"). It was really a good ship for a transport--chow was excellent, beds were good, everything was clean and nice. Of course it was crowded. And we didn't weigh anchor. We just sat there in the harbor. We had movies every night, but I usually stayed in my quarters and wrote Carm and then showered before the mob returned from the flicks. I took quite a ribbing for writing every day. I told them, "I'm 'very married' and besides that, I have a fertile brain." Most of the boys were always talking of the Cadillacs, etc., that they were going to buy with all the money they saved in Korea. They were mostly young and single and my mind ran in different channels. I also managed to write Grandpa Fred, Howard and Joe, John Estill and the boys at the "Town Pump" back in Willshire, and my half-brother, John, who had joined the Marines and was in North Carolina.

The guys were beginning to treat me with a little more respect than when I first arrived. Replacements always have to carve their niche in an old outfit. At first I didn't have anyone to chum with

and didn't feel like it, anyway. Then I started having long talks at night with Second Lieutenant August Camaratta. He had been running an implement business back home in Iowa. We concluded that farming was the occupation for us after this fracus. Our reminiscences of Iowa and Ohio made me even more homesick. Whenever I got the chance, I took out the two snapshots I carried, shots of Carm and the kids on the beach at San Clemente. Everyone remarked about them, saying my boy was the spittin' image of his old man and marveling at Lyn's size for a five-year-old.

We all got a great laugh out of a letter one of my sergeants received. He always used the expression "up the ass" to say that you had an excess of anything. If we were issued too many clothes, he would say, "God, we got clothes up the ass." Well, I guess he used it at home, too, because his wife wrote that their five-year-old daughter was telling the neighbor girl the story of "Goldilocks and The Three Bears." She said, "Goldilocks went in the bears' house and ate Mama Bear's porridge and Papa Bear's porridge and Baby Bear's porridge. Boy, she had porridge up the ass!" We nearly cried laughing. These kids, we said.

One night while we were anchored at Inchon, I dreamed I was home in Willshire in bed. I heard all this noise and woke

up and couldn't figure out what was happening. I thought something was wrong in the cellar, or that one hell of a storm was kicking up. I groped around for Carm before I finally realized where I was. It had been the ship's motors, steam pipes, etc.

October 15 was "Rope-Yarn Sunday," the ship being at anchor on a day of rest. It was a gloomy day, drizzled rain all afternoon, cold and damp. We had a smoker (boxing matches) planned but it was rained out. The boys were getting restless aboard and eager to get on the move again. We knew Truman and MacArthur were meeting on Wake Island that day and our fate depended on it. Probably won't be anything good come out of it, we were saying. We only hoped that Russia and China would stay out. Everyone said we wouldn't mind if it were an all-out war, but this crap of fighting a limited war, someone else's war, was no good, especially for a man with a family. We particularly resented the terms, Police Action and U.N. Troops. Hell, it was war--we were in it and it was a U.S. war. Some nations had token troops there but not enough to make a ripple. The resentment was expressed in many ways. You'd see a "Long Tom" artillery piece rumble by with "Harry's Police Pistol" painted on it or a big tank with "Harry's Squad Car No. 1."

We finally sailed out into the Yellow Sea on October 17. I worked all day and all night and all the next day. We rolled along on a smooth sea around the peninsula and up the opposite coast, heading for the port of Wonsan, North Korea. We were all geared up for a bloody assault, but suddenly, on the nineteenth, we reversed directions. Excitement swept the ship. The war was over! No such luck. The Wonsan harbor had to be swept for mines and we spent a week cruising around the Sea of Japan. Every twelve hours the fleet changed course. We called it "Operation Yo-Yo."

The young bucks were impatient to get on with the landing. Most of the regulars were hot to go, particularly a young first lieutenant named Williams. He was built like a bowling ball and reveled in action. He was bored stiff with the delay and voiced that fact continuously. He said it one evening when about all the battalion officers were in the officers lounge, and I said to him, "Hell, I'm not complaining. I haven't lost anything in Wonsan, North Korea. But we could be using this time going towards California."

He replied, "What the hell, you old retreads shouldn't be up here in the first place." That brought down the house and from then on the reserves were known as retreads. I was thirty years

old and already a retread.

When we finally landed on October 25 there was no resistance. Believe it or not, Bob Hope had landed before we did. A South Korean division had raced up the coastal road and secured Wonsan two weeks before. Bob Hope put on a U. S. O. show for air crews, etc., who had flown in before we landed. I guess he made several cracks about the marines wandering around the Sea of Japan. Across the mountains, the Eighth Army had captured Pyongyang, the capital. North Korea had crumbled.

Our orders were to move rapidly north, secure the Chosin Reservoir area, 150 miles up, and then push on to the Yalu River, the Korean-Chinese border. We would be the left flank of a three-pronged drive by X Corps in Northeast Korea. The middle prong, the Seventh Army Infantry Division, would move from the northern port of Iwon to the Yalu. The right flank, the R. O. K. I Corps, would advance along the coastal road to the northeast corner of the country, where Korea borders a portion of Siberia. Meanwhile, in Northwest Korea, across the rugged central mountains, the Eighth Army, with R. O. K. troops attached, would also drive north to the Yalu. In military lingo it was a massive double envelopment, the Eighth Army on the left and X Corps on the right. In plain

English it was a big invasion of land that Russia had grabbed off in the closing days of World War II.

We stayed in Wonsan a few days. There was an end-of-the-war confidence afoot. It seemed there was nothing left to do in North Korea but occupy and patrol. But warnings otherwise came early. Two guys gathering wood on the beach were killed by a booby trap. At Kojo, forty miles south of Wonsan, the First Battalion of the First Marines were attacked by a thousand North Koreans. They had a lot of casualties. Chesty Puller, commander of the First Marines, hustled down there by train with a battalion of reinforcements and mopped up.

We began the drive north on October 29. The Seventh Marines left by road and rail for Hamhung, about eighty miles north of Wonsan. We Fifth Marines had the job of protecting the M. S. R. (Main Supply Route) between Wonsan and Hamhung. The First Marines would guard the Wonsan area and then follow. I really hated to start living like a beast again.

We loaded on trucks and moved out behind the Seventh. I thought we'd never stop and everyone was bursting to urinate. We finally halted right in the middle and on both sides of a small village. About seven thousand men jumped from the trucks and

relieved themselves. One old sergeant shouted, "Hooray! If we can't lick 'em, by god, we'll drown 'em!"

The country was different than South Korea, colder, cleaner and more sparsely populated. There was mud, huts, fleas and lice, but the people looked healthier.

We camped at Munchon, north of Wonsan, and began exactly what I feared, mopping up operations. Once again it fell my lot to catch almost daily patrols. It was only natural that the Wharang Platoon be sent to reconnoiter for the outfit--they knew the country, language and customs. I never once felt comfortable on patrol in Korea. It seemed like we were always in the open, surrounded by natural hiding places for the enemy. I always felt like I was about to be ambushed. It was not at all like the thick jungles of the South Pacific, and I almost longed for the good old days of slithering through the bush.

I was sent back to Wonsan to deliver some documents to Division H.Q. As we returned to the Third Battalion C.P., my jeep driver and I were speeding up the narrow road with about a four-foot embankment on each side. Suddenly, we were smacked in the windshield by a piano wire attached to two potato masher-type grenades at either end. The grenades landed in the back

seat. The driver slammed on the brakes and skidded into the embankment. I dove over the embankment and rolled down into a ditch. The driver raised straight up in his seat and nearly emasculated himself on the steering wheel.

There was no explosion. The pins never pulled from the grenades. I cautiously peeked over the bank. The driver was still behind the wheel, holding his privates.

"Why in hell didn't you evacuate?" I asked.

He looked at me and sickly moaned, "I think I did."

At long last, mail came for me, three letters from Carm. We had been completely out of touch since I flew out of Pendleton, over a month, the longest period in our six years of marriage. Hell, I hadn't even known if she was in Ohio or Iowa. She had talked about having Leone drop her, the kids and the car off at her folks and Leone taking a train on to Ohio, which is what they had done. I was glad to hear that. I had worried about the family living alone in Willshire. Man, was it great to be in touch with the outside world again! Enclosed were two snapshots of Lyn, Wade and me in the car at Pendleton. I cut them down so they fit my billfold.

It was a pitch-black quiet Halloween night in Munchon and I had a late watch in the black-out tent, the only lighted space in our area, when we got the bad news. I had left on patrol that morning with the Wharangs and got in just at dark. I got a letter from Carm, messed around trying to eat chow, no light to read her letter, laid down, couldn't sleep, not sleepy yet, just tired and dirty. When I took over the watch in the black-out tent, I began writing a letter to Carm, amidst the officers going over reports and making plans. Then came the news reports. At least a division of the C.C.F., Chinese Communist Forces, had been sighted on our side of the border and a battle was imminent with--who else--the First Marine Division. Here we go again. Just scuttlebutt, I hoped.

November 1 was a really beautiful day, just like any fall day back home. We had a football game, those of us in the town proper. I didn't play--my back and legs had been bothering me more than somewhat. The Seventh Marines were moving north out of Hamhung, toward the Chosin Reservoir. And the new enemy entered the war. Not a division--tens of thousands of Chinese had crossed the Yalu and sneaked south undetected for two weeks, marching by night and hiding by day. An incredible feat. On November 1 they overran the South Korean regiment at Sudong,

thirty miles north of Hamhung, where the Seventh Marines were headed. On the western front, they stopped the Eighth Army cold, inflicting heavy casualties up and down the line.

November 2 was damn cold. They boarded us on a long train of dirty old flatcars with no sides and moved us to Hamhung. At every village on the way, the women and kids came out to sell us the local cuisine. They came with trays of delicious foods. Although it was strictly against orders, we ate it like hogs. How I liked the smoked squid and wanted a barrel of water afterwards!

By the time we reached Hamhung we were a cold, filthy mess. My face was black. I hated to get into my sleeping bag that way, but all the water I had was drinking water, too precious to waste washing. One good thing--I hit the jackpot at mail call, seven letters, five from Carm, one from my half-brother John and one from Uncle Joe and Wanda.

That night the Seventh Marines, camped in the foothills just south of Sudong, were assaulted by two Chinese regiments and a North Korean tank regiment. A four-day battle ensued. The Seventh clawed and scratched their way north into the rugged mountains beyond Chinhung-ni. It was a costly struggle, but they secured the two villages and Funchilin Pass, a hairpin eight-mile shelf

north of Chinhung-ni. The Chinese disappeared, defeated. However, they also vanished in the west, where they had the Eighth Army at standstill. You can imagine how that baffled our strategists.

Around this time, as the Seventh advanced north, the First Marine Division was stretched out over 130 miles. Sergeant Lester, a buddy from the J. Fred Talbott, and I had already discussed this as the main problem in this campaign. If Washington wanted North Korea occupied, where in the hell was the manpower to do it?

A special surprise came on November 3. Carm sent her picture in a package. The mail orderly thought the package contained something to eat and hung around while I opened it. When he saw Carm's picture, he admired it and said wistfully, "It's things like this that make you appreciate the States." She also sent lighter flints, which I had requested because I couldn't get ahold of any. I fixed up a cardboard case for her picture and carried it in my jacket pocket, right over my heart. That night I wrote and asked her to send me a carton of Hershey bars. We hadn't had anything but C-rations since Wonsan, and I was craving rich chocolate. I also sent her some samples of Korean currency.

We marched out of Hamhung on the morning of November 5, with the temperature close to zero. I was looking forward to a

delightful winter outdoors. Our regiment was pretty scattered out for the next few days. Six or eight miles north of Hamhung the road forked. The northwesterly branch led up to Sudong and on to the Chosin Reservoir. The northeasterly fork ran toward the Fusen Reservoir, which was about twenty miles northeast of the Chosin. An enemy line had been sighted near the Fusen. We Fifth Marines had to patrol the M. S. R. south of Sudong and scout the Sinhung Valley up the northeast fork. We saw prisoners by the dozens, a pitiful sight, cold and miserable.

Throughout this advance from Wonsan toward the Chosin, we met some guerilla resistance, but nothing to stop us. The newspapers in the States were characterizing it as "minor" resistance. Some of it wasn't so damn minor. The guerillas were either bandits or disguised North Korean soldiers. Sometimes they would feign civilians and suddenly attack, especially our outposts. They would grab all the weapons and chow they could and make off. These were vicious attacks and there were casualties on both sides. Also, the First Marines were getting heat at Majon-ni, a key town where roads from Seoul, Pyongyang and Wonsan converged. It was so lively that the mountain road from Wonsan to Majon-ni became known as "Ambush Alley." The guys calling this stuff "minor" were looking after their own careers and manipulating public opinion.