

The Eagle's Nest

As I have said before, when I first returned from Korea, each day of the 178 days I was there until being hit on "Sleeping Bag Hill" was burned into my memory. They were all in sequence and I could recount each days happenings. I was sure the memories would never leave me but they have.

The Eagle's Nest was always notable to me for what I personally experienced but not for it's location. It was and has remained a mystery to me both then and now because I never knew where it was. I can no longer remember how many days the Company was there.

I believe in calendar terms that it was some time after Kumchon and certainly before crossing the 38th parallel into North Korea. It was not in the regular path of advance. The explanation at the time was that we were searching for pockets of North Korean troops cutoff and isolated by the rapid progress of the UN forces after breaking out of the Naktong perimeter.

We moved into a large schoolhouse for the length of our stay and began to run patrols into the surrounding mountains. I only recall this one that I took part in. I cannot remember all the individuals in the patrol. There were 12 to 15 in the group. Lt. T L Epton led the patrol. The others I can remember were Charles Byrge and Russel Oxley of the weapons squad 1st platoon. The weapons people carried a light machine gun. The light machine gun is only light when compared to the heavy machine gun. It is not an easy carry. More of the weapons folks carried ammunition boxes.

We left the company area and began climbing into the hills. We kept working higher and higher farther and farther out. I recall thinking, "*Dammit, he's gettin' us out too far.*" We ran the backbone of a mountain for a long way following a worn foot trail. We came finally upon a bluff blocking our path. The bluff rose nearly straight up for perhaps 40 or 50 feet of rock ledges.

About this time we also encountered two or three GIs from another outfit. They told us their unit had been nearly wiped out in an engagement on the other side of the rise confronting us.

As they left back down the trail a North Korean squad was spotted near the top of the bluff starting setup of a machine gun.

Apparently our orders had been to make contact and then return with the information for Epton said, "Let's get out of here." Charles Byrge then said, "Lieutenant, let me and my ammo man stay and setup. I'm sure we can beat 'em gettin' setup." Epton replied "Okay, we'll wait for you back down the trail."

The remainder of the patrol began trotting back down the path we had followed up there. Our movement along the backbone attracted "friendly" attention from the valley below and we began to receive small arms fire from American troops. There was not a lot of it and fortunately no one was hit.

Back down the trail we reached a small clearing and stopped to wait for Byrge and Oxley. After a time we heard a large bore weapon fire down in the valley just once. It impacted back behind us where we had been.

We waited for a time and suddenly Charles Byrge appeared on the trail from the summit. He was trotting and cradling the machine gun in front of him. Russel Oxley followed behind carrying a box of machine gun ammo in each hand. They were both huffing and puffing from the effort.

Byrge blurted out, "We had 'em beat. We had just pulled the first round into the chamber when a goddam tank down in the valley hit 'em with the first round from their 90mm. I never saw a shot like that before." He was angry that he had been denied his duel. I just wanted to get back where people knew who we were and weren't shooting at us.

We continued our return to the schoolhouse without further event. Shortly after this we resumed the advance north.