

## Kumchon

*September 25, 1950*

**September 24, 1950:** The company was stretched out in a streambed some distance north of Waegwan. About sundown the 1st and 2nd platoons and perhaps the whole company moved out marching up the dry streambed.

After dark as we rounded a bend in the creek, we came under artillery fire. It was the most intense I experienced for the entire time I was in Korea. I dropped to the gravel removing my helmet with both hands and in just a few seconds had dug a decent prone shelter using the helmet shell for a tool. The rounds were coming in salvos. A salvo would come in and then break for a few seconds followed by the next. In the breaks, we could make out voices out past the edge of the streambed. My squad leader, James Medley said "Fine, you and Beal go see who that is". At the next break Duane Beal and I took off running. We got maybe half way to the bank when the next salvo hit. We dropped. The shrapnel around us was making terrifying clicking noises as it tore through the dry weeds around us. I told Beal, "At the next break I'm going back to the hole." We both took off and as we regained cover I told Medley "I don't know who's out there, but they're crazy as hell." Medley didn't say anything further. We later found out the the voices were signal people laying wire.

We became lost and marched all night. At first light we came through a low pass in the hills and there was Kumchon laying out in front of us. Someone took a higher vantage point and yelled back, "There's gook tanks in the town!" We paused behind a railroad trestle while an air strike was requested to clear the tanks from Kumchon. Air panels were laid out in the open area to the left of the trestle. I either went or was sent to the top of the RR embankment south of the trestle to watch. The sun was up by now and it was not long before I fell asleep. I was 19 years old, I dreamed I was laying on top a young oriental girl of my age next to a foxhole. There was no raging sex in the dream although it might have become a "a young man's dream" had it gone on longer. Suddenly she was pointing into the air frantically. The sound of the burst of machine gun fire from a P-51 woke me abruptly and I slid to the bottom of the cinder covered bank.

James Medley and Raymond Croisant, the commo man carrying a backpack radio were hit by 50 cal. from the P-51. The one that hit Medley entered just underneath the skin about 6 to 8 inches below the arm pit, stayed between two ribs for maybe 6 inches, then emerged and burned a path for another 6 to 8 inches across his upper abdomen. The one that hit Croisant split one of his buttocks open (right I think). As the last P-51 had made his pullout he had by chance headed for us. He was too low to see the air panels behind the railroad embankment. Medley and others had stopped a couple of civilians under a railroad trestle and were questioning them. The pilot apparently saw the white clothes and squeezed the firing button.

We moved through the town and on west toward the hill we were supposed to occupy. I heard that "Intelligence" had told us there was no one on the hill, we could simply walk on the hill and it would be ours. We were marching west along the north side of a railroad embankment when we spotted NK on a hill south of the railroad. "Ediwah" we shouted, indicating we wanted them to come and surrender. Almost immediately a NK appeared on top of the tracks. He was shaking but finally understood we wanted him to throw down his rifle. He did and then jumped on over on our side. Another appeared. He got scared and changed his mind. When he turned to run, a GI shot him and the battle commenced. The first platoon left me guarding the single prisoner and moved off to the north towards a village.

The prisoner lay against the embankment. The second platoon moved off to the north behind us toward the village. Someone yelled "Where's the first platoon?" I stuck my head up to see if I could see them. The sound of the slug tearing through the helmet and the force of the impact made me feel as if my head had exploded. I rolled over on my back, yelled "**MEDIC,**" and thought of shooting the prisoner before I passed out. I didn't and instead felt with my hands expecting my head to be split open. I could feel no hole. I looked at my hands expecting blood everywhere. No blood. I yelled "**Never mind.**" John Shields never let me forget that episode. He had immediately started back for me when I yelled. He said later, "I thought what the hell are those guys doing, playing games at a time like this."

The firing was extremely heavy now. An NK machine gun had been brought to the tracks ahead of us and behind, our weapons platoon had set up a machine gun and they were firing at each other up and down the track. Heavy firing from the hill south of the tracks was being returned by the two platoons in the village. The slugs all seemed to cross right over me. The slugs whined for what seemed like hours and may have been. I kept my nose rooted in the dirt and prayed for survival. The old saw about there being no foxhole atheists was never more true than at that moment. I made lots of promises if God would just let me live through those moments.

Finally a GI came working his way up the ditch alongside the rice paddy. I yelled at him. "Are you taking any fire?". He shook his head no. I motioned to the prisoner to move down into the ditch. He did and we began working our way back to the rear.

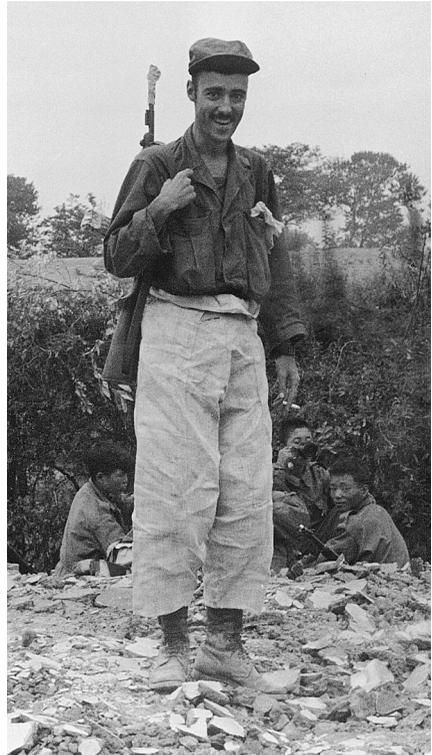
Perhaps a hundred to two hundred yards back to the rear the land fell off into a sunken paddy which was dry. The weapons platoon had mortars set up down there. I motioned the prisoner down into the field. A mortarman was leaning against a small tree reading a comic book.

The prisoner by sign language let me know he wanted to get something from his pockets. I nodded. He pulled a dirty looking piece of paper and another piece of paper folded up. He unfolded it and what might pass for tobacco was in it. He was going to

make a cigarette. I pulled the ever present pack of Camels from my pocket and offered him a tailor-made. He grinned and eagerly accepted. I lit one and lit his.

Someone said I should go back and see the medics about my headache which by now was ferocious. I left the prisoner with them and headed back to the company aid station.

In the village, the second platoon leader "Toady" Dreisonstock and his platoon sergeant were running down a street with a sniper kicking up dust at every stride. They turned in the first door they came to. It was a "honey well". They went in almost to their waist. It was still better than getting hit. After the battle, they were refused entry to the company area. They wore civilian clothes and got civilians to wash their clothes and bathed themselves. Then they were welcomed back. Anyway that's the way the story was told to me.



**Lt Thomas F Dreisonstock  
after the Honey Well Incident**

I heard one of the fellows who was killed took out a crucifix and holding it in front of him began to walk up the hill from which we were receiving fire. His body was brought down after the battle.

At the aid station it was decided several of us should get in a jeep and go back to battalion aid. All of us were walking except for a Sergeant who was hit in the thigh. He sat in the right front seat and we started right down the middle of a stream of water, not the same one we had marched up the night before because this one had water in it. Shallow water. It was a good thing most of us were walking because twice the jeep got stuck and we all had to get out and push — except the Sergeant.

At the aid station a doctor looked at my head, said they would write up a Purple Heart, gave me a couple of APCs and told me to get a good nights rest before going back. I slept on a litter that night. It was great.

It was several days before it dawned on me that by getting the Purple Heart my mother would be notified of me being wounded. I set about to reassure her it was not serious.

At Kumchon we became motorized infantry for a while. The company acquired quite a collection of vehicles courtesy of the North Korean Forces who had abandoned them in

wild flight. A couple of GIs found a perfectly good T34 tank, got it started and were having a ball until they turned it turtle in a ditch. They crawled out and left it there. We also ended up with three Russian jeeps, which sounded just like a model A Ford. Some of the medics ended up with a shaft drive german motorcycle complete with a sidecar. Someone else acquired a jeepster station wagon and ended up putting a replacement jeep engine in it and I have vague memories of a Russian truck. I'm not really sure of the truck. After a few days or several days word came down that we would have to turn in this equipment. Once again we became plain "gravel agitators."

## The Atabrine Tablet

One scene that I remember very vividly was of a morning chow although I can no longer place it in location or time. I only recall we were in a flat wooded area and it was a cool morning in the fall. The kitchen was with us as it always was when they could set up close to us.

I came to the coffee pot and drew a canteen of hot coffee. Two ROKs were in front of me and though I used sugar in my coffee at that time, I did not use it as they did. They had each spooned about a third of a canteen cup of sugar into their cups and then topped it up with coffee. When I had put what I usually used in the coffee I went on down the line. They were passing out atabrine tablets, I believe to guard against malaria. I took the tablet and since there was no water nearby I popped it into my mouth and followed it with the hot coffee to wash it down. It melted instantly and the bitter taste very nearly more than I could handle. I gagged and thought I would upchuck right there in the chow line. I learned a bitter lesson that morning — **Never take medicine with anything hot!**