

Mansegyo Korea

December 11, 1950 to January 2, 1951

A lot of this location is pretty hazy, doggone it, all the locations we were at are getting hazy or even non-existent. When I first got back from Korea I could tell anyone day by day what I had done for the almost six months I was in Korea. Then the sequence went to pot and then the locations began to disappear except for a few that are kind of tattooed into my memory. A lot of Mansegyo has gone that way.

I believe this is where the two Brits went AWOL and “joined” us as we moved up to the line. I can still almost see the two Brits standing there in strange looking woolen overcoats, they really weren’t strange — just a different color. I think they were carrying bolt action rifles but that is no longer clear either. We were relieving them or they had been relieved by some other outfit. They had asked “Do you chaps mind if we tag along?” We didn’t. Mansegyo was the location they left to return to their outfit. Hap Chandler gave each a new carbine and wrote a letter of explanation to their commanding officer attempting to keep them from getting in trouble for their foray.

As I think back I believe the road ran north and south about 25 or 30 yards east of a low hill mass. Farther east there were higher hills rising from the East edge of the narrow valley. A little farther north the land flared into a much wider valley with the higher hills circling back west to form an irregular bowl. The road curved around toward the east and either stopped or passed through a cluster of several native houses. My squad settled into a house. The open field north of this spot stretched a 1000 yards or so to a hill or hills about half as high as the hills to the west and the higher hills to the east.

One night a B-26 dropped flares and then strafed the western line of the company. I think it was a BAR man who fired at them and exclaimed, “If those sons-of-bitches are gonna shoot at me, I’m gonna shoot back.”

There was no snow when we got there. We had a squad foxhole just big enough for one or two which we manned as an outpost at night and sometimes during the day. It was equipped with a field phone. One day I saw two figures moving at the edge of the hill to the north. I thought seriously about asking for mortar fire on them but decided not to. Later I learned they were Charles Byrge and Russell Oxley the first platoon weapons squad leader and his ammo man pheasant hunting so far in front of our position you could not tell whether they were GIs or not.

I think Byrge is the guy who took over the light machine gun squad in the weapons platoon. I heard he had been a prisoner of war in the pacific in WWII and had signed a waiver in order to come to Korea. He was the guy who reportedly shot pheasants on

the fly with a carbine and wanted to duel a NK machine gun squad at what I called the eagles nest earlier. I have always believed he came to Korea for the money. The first of the month he would draw some script and gamble with the other guys. He always sent home several hundred dollars afterwards. In January, he went to Japan on R&R, bought a new zippo lighter and a Parker fountain pen for me. Soon after returning from R&R he told us goodbye, said he was returning to the states, went to the medics and told them he was having those dreams again. He left.

We were always hungry and so Herlindo Tabares and I went to all the houses and gathered the beans that were there as some sort of cultural symbol, then we cooked the dried beans. When we got through we had a pretty good pot of beans and in between the half hour sessions in the outpost hole at night we would fry a handful of these beans in our messkits over an open fire in the yard of the house. I don't remember when it snowed but by Christmas there was a good layer of snow that had been packed on the road by the three daily trips to chow at the kitchen area.

Christmas day I decided it was time for a bath. I had not had a bath since the creek east of Anju – Thanksgiving day. I built a fire under the largest pot, the one we referred to as the cattle pot. We called it that because someone told us the Koreans heated water or food for the cattle in it. Then I took a bath, at least as good a bath as you can take in what was probably a four or five gallon pot. I even shaved and got ready to celebrate Christmas dinner in style. I can't recall what it was but Arnold Tye recalls it was turkey. If that was true, I'm sure we also had dressing, sweet or mashed potatoes and probably cranberry sauce. I know that we had a lot of fruit cake at Mansegyo because we had found a Sears catalog somewhere and it seemed half the company had ordered a fruit cake and they came in. Mail order was wonderful.

It was at Mansegyo that the grenade launcher attachment for my M-1 came in along with several propelling rounds for the rifle, two concussion greandes and an attachment for a regular fragmentation grenade. I had asked for these several weeks before and was eager to try the weapon. I don't recall asking for permission to try the grenade launcher but I'm sure I did. 50 to 75 yards to the front and westerly from the outpost was a draw opening into the field – I mounted a concussion grenade, planted the butt of the stock in the packed snow and fired. It flew true and about where I wanted the impact to be. If there had been a hoard of Chinese coming down that draw it would have given them a headache if not worse.

I returned to Mansegyo December 11, 1992 just before "Otie" (my wife – Leota Fine) and I returned to the states. Very appropriately it snowed the entire 35 or 40 kilometers from Seoul and all the way back. I took some pictures there but could never get oriented at all. I really think we were located west of the highway next to the hill but could not get over there that day.