

## **Naktong Crossing**

*September 22, 1950*

We loaded on trucks and left the “pinewood” after noon. The 6 X 6s eased along the rough dirt Korean roads. There seemed to be no haste as there had been so many occasions in the recent past. It was apparent we were not rushing somewhere to plug some gap. But where were we heading? We began to see apple orchards again as we slipped lower into river bottom country.

Then along in the afternoon the trucks slowed and came to a stop. Everyone piled off and the company formed into squad and platoon clumps. We moved off the road to the right into an apple orchard and began settling in the squad areas assigned. “Dig-in!” It was peaceful here and there seemed no great need to fortify but we commenced to dig anyway. Contrary to most locations, the soft river bottom soil was extremely easy digging and large comfortable foxholes quickly appeared.

I cannot recall his name but can still clearly see the face of the large country kind of kid who declared “I’m gonna make some hot chocolate.” I did not foresee the consequences of his “hot chocolate” and neither did the others who knew what he was doing.

As the smoke from the small fire curled up through the apple trees we came under artillery or mortar fire from across the river. The trees led to tree bursts every bit as dangerous as the air bursts from proximity fused shells. “Get that goddam fire out!” came the shouted instructions. There was great haste on everyone’s part now to get tops on the foxholes for protection from the fragments raining down. Quickly there were tops on the foxholes from the soft bottom soil for protection.

With the fire out the incoming fire tapered off and soon we were once more at ease. It was obvious we could not be seen moving amongst the trees and only the smoke had drawn attention to us.

Someone laughed and said “ J.C.’s diggin’ a tunnel from his hole to “Bogie” Wines’ hole and won’t come out.” Many of the replacements of which I was one thought this incident funny. But the tree bursts had a terrible effect on J.C. who had been through Choch’iwon and the other horrific experiences of the company in the early days of the war. The tree bursts had driven him to the brink and perhaps shoved him over a little.

The next morning we had chow and then formed up and marched to trucks where we boarded and made a short run to the end of a river bottom road and the edge of a wide sand bar. We began to cross the sand bar and this time we were in a hurry.

I don’t recall being under any fire as we trotted across the sand bar but it was apparent that someone had been under fire here. Out to the left maybe 30 or 40 yards could be

seen a light 30 machine gun laying in the sand. I wondered only momentarily about who might have been carrying it and what had become of him. Then we came to the edge of the river and engineers hustled us into boats and we paddled across the river.

The river was narrow here and on the other side rose sharply for maybe 20 or 30 feet to the edge of a bare road. Beyond the road the land rose quickly as low hills. We moved up this road cautiously with some apprehension.

We followed the road until evening and then moved off to the west onto the low hills. There was relative quiet with no sounds of battle near us. Dark fell quickly and we didn't dig-in but threw down shelter halves to lie on. We had not eaten since breakfast and hunger now intruded into our thoughts. In the darkness rations finally arrived and were parceled out. One days C-rations were divided amongst three men. I took the GI can opener from my fatigue jacket pocket and eagerly removed the top from the can I held. Next the spoon was taken out of my fatigue jacket pocket, wiped in the dark to remove any dirt and thrust into the contents. I had no trouble believing my taste buds. It had to be soap. "What the f—k is this!." I dived beneath the shelter half and struck a match to see what it was. Beef Stew. Cold beef stew topped by a layer of grease. Beef Stew was alright when you could heat it but something else again when cold. I emerged from the shelter half and in the dark removed the top half inch or so from the can throwing it to the ground. The remainder was passable although it would have been ten times that good heated.

The next day I was close to a radio and overheard the following conversation:

(Someone to elements of the 19th). "Have you relieved the 5th RCT yet?"

"We haven't been able to catch the 5th RCT yet."

We were immensely cheered by this. The war was at last going our way and would surely be over shortly.