

## Section 6, The Other Front Lines: Korea and Germany

### “We on the ‘Z’ were but a Speed Bump on the North Korean Invasion Route”—Bill Gist

Instead of heading off to Vietnam, I was assigned to Korea with the Second Infantry Division (the storied Indian Head Division), arriving in July, 1970 and departing a year later. My unit, the 2/23, was stationed three to four miles from the DMZ. As an infantry platoon leader, I would take the men up to the Guard Posts (GPs) for 4-5 months. In addition to the border guard mission, we ran patrols in search of infiltrators. Stationed at the forefront, we would have been the first force to engage any North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) units that attacked through our assigned zone. In real terms, we were just there to let the Division know that the NKPA had launched an invasion. The Division’s plan in case of an attack was to wipe out everything around our sector at the Freedom Bridge with artillery and massive air strikes. [*Editor’s Note: the Freedom Bridge, also known as the “Bridge of No Return,” is located on the DMZ and crosses the North and South Korean Military Demarcation Line.*] This included our GP locations, so we would have been collateral damage. The North Korean army, a million strong, was within five hours of our position, and 24,000 North Korean troops were within 30 minutes of us. Units on the DMZ would have been little more than a speed bump.

**The Enemy We Faced:** Along the Korean DMZ, affectionately known as the “Z,” we faced a highly trained, specialized unit of elite North Korean infiltrators. They were lethal adversaries who slipped across the border with radio gear, cameras with powerful telephoto lenses, and Soviet or Chinese arms. The infiltrator’s favorite weapon was the old Russian PPS4 submachine gun, and he was well-versed in its use. He could run for miles with a full load of equipment, expertly conceal himself, and negotiate minefields with long steel rods. Fanatically loyal to North Korea, he would commit suicide with a grenade rather than face capture. Our foes operated in a world of darkness, infiltrating, ambushing, and committing sabotage and assassination. Ambushes were selective, but occurred when they got the drop on you. "You just can’t make mistakes out there or you’re as dead as you’ll ever be in Vietnam," said one seasoned officer. Another North Korean specialty was psychological warfare directed at infantrymen manning guard posts at night. Communist broadcast speakers transmitted messages of defection and discontent; they were constantly playing mind games with our GIs. The “Z” was not a nice place to visit, especially at night. And I certainly wouldn’t want to live there!

**Life on the Line - How We operated:** To counter North Korean infiltration, U.S. troops occupied guard posts (GPs), patrolled the DMZ and the Fence, and set "stakeouts." Automatic weapons were banned in the DMZ by the armistice agreement, which also prohibited the use of helicopters there. If someone got seriously injured, it

could take us four or five hours to get him out. A line of GPs, strung along the entire 151-mile front, served as the initial line of defense. Placed on the crest of 600-foot hills, GPs were circular installations with fighting bunkers extending outward from a circular trench. Bunkers were constructed of sandbags and timber. An observation post was in the center. Perimeters were surrounded by two or three strands of concertina wire with Claymore mines staked to the ground with wire. Each U.S. GP was operated by 10 to 30 men, and manned on a 24-hour basis. Living conditions were Spartan to say the least. Personal deprivation, combined with the constant tension, produced stress, fatigue, fear and loneliness.

**Night Patrols:** Major action occurred at night. Armed only with rifles, M-79 grenade launchers, and hand grenades, the men depended heavily on searchlights, flares and starlight scopes. Strange noises—a "groan" in DMZ parlance—often prompted fire. You always thought the groan was a bad guy—and sometimes it was. Most significant enemy contact, however, occurred during patrols. Designed to deter infiltration and detect signs of enemy activity, they ran 24 hours a day. "Hunter-killer" teams, with one man armed with a 12-gauge shotgun, prowled the DMZ. Others staked out known or suspected infiltration routes to intercept enemy agents. Most of the serious fighting had occurred in the 1966-69 timeframe, but there were still incidents. I think it was in March '71 that my unit, on three separate occasions, engaged infiltrators in fights. We came up two incidents short of qualifying for the CIB, I was later told. In the event the barrier system was breached, mobile reserves (including gun jeeps and armored personnel carriers) were ready to roll. In the 7<sup>th</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> Division's area of operations we used foot patrols and airmobile searches in counter-guerilla sweeps. In the 2/23/2<sup>nd</sup> ID's area of operations we used foot patrols and airmobile searches in counter-guerilla sweeps. Patrols lasted from a few hours to a few days.

### **Winter Fun on the Korean DMZ – Gary Zittlow**

New Year's Eve 1971, and there I was sitting around with my platoon in a "hut" with the North Koreans yapping on a loudspeaker in Korean. (Yes it was loud and distinctive!) I asked one of my KATUSA's (Korean personnel attached to American units) what they were saying, but he said "No, No sir ---you don't want to know." I said "Yes, tell me, no problem, tell me." Finally he relented and said, "They are telling us to cut our officer's throats and come to the North." That was the general tone of the dialogue between the North Koreans and us.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Armor, our company rotated two weeks on the DMZ then two weeks off, so we received combat pay every month. In the winter of '70-'71 my platoon was assigned a short temporary mission of securing a bridge across the Imjin River, while the ROKs who were normally there were taking over some responsibility in our sector. Things did not go as planned. First, it was COLD on the morning we were supposed to move, so much so that we had to jump two out of the five tanks in my

platoon to get them started. Then our radio mics were frozen up so we couldn't communicate between the tanks. Then we got to the back gate of the compound, which was supposed to be open. It was locked. So, of course, we had to head to the front gate. We were running late, so I took the platoon through the compound too fast. (I got my ass chewed for that.) Then (for those of you who don't know tanks, a tank on ice is like an ice skate running wild) we were on our way to the bridge (about 3 miles), mostly downhill slipping and sliding the whole way. My mic on my radio was still frozen up and I couldn't communicate with my driver. I needed to tell him urgently to avoid going over a bridge at a creek because we would crush it. Finally I got down and kicked him to get him to stop, which he did about a foot from the bridge. By the time we got to the Imjin River Bridge, the ROK infantry company had already returned and was waiting for us. Not one of my better days.

### **Red Eyes and It Wasn't the Soju (Korean Adult Beverage) – Paul Kochis**

I arrived in Seoul, Korea in late August, 1971 and was assigned to the 7th Division HQ as the Division Redeye Missile Officer, reporting to, oddly it seemed to me, the Division Chemical Officer, LTC Adolph Perez. [*Editor's Note: The Redeye Missile was a manportable surface-to-air missile system first introduced in 1968. It used infrared homing to track its target.*] HQ was at Camp Casey, a collection of Quonset huts, garages, some non-descript buildings and bunkers nestled mostly underground. COL Perez was a jovial, conservative and welcoming man with whom I developed a close friendship in short order. We had a Master Sergeant, a grizzled, lifer alcoholic who kept a half pint of vodka in his desk drawer. Sarge was a classic lifer who absolutely loved being stationed in Korea. Why? His live-in mistress was cheap and provided all the comforts of home. I quickly learned that this was a pattern for many NCO's who were on their second or third tour there.

The second officer was a young, clean-living Captain who guided me through the subtleties of working in 7th Division HQ under the command of Major General Harold G. Moore, a most impressive officer, man, and Vietnam hero. Shortly after I arrived, General Moore summoned me to meet him. His purpose was to make sure that I had some steel in my spine. He said something like, "You represent me when you go into my companies to do Redeye inspections and training. You will need to be ready to tell Colonels and Captains that their Redeye unit is not up to snuff. Some may try to intimidate you. You just remember, Lieutenant, they put their pants on the same way you and I do." Coming from him, I absorbed his lesson clearly. Humble, but steely at the same time.

I found the assignment to be pretty heady stuff, ordering up a Huey to go train or inspect some brigade or company, being greeted usually by the XO or S1 of the unit. The training was never live fire, always with simulators. Frankly, the units were very smart (STRAC). There were no issues. It was strange, though, to be sleeping in a BOQ that

was about 100 yards from the bunkers that housed tactical nuclear shells for use by long range cannons...

The most exciting assignment was around February, 1972 when I and a Captain Connerly from Second Division were tasked with preparing an actual a live-fire demonstration for President Park Chung Hee and the CG of 8th Army. We were both thrilled with the opportunity! We soon began shuttling on a Chinook to the southeastern shore where the demo would take place. The plan was for our units to fire two Redeye's at drone targets at about two miles distance over the sea. As grandstands were being built for the high level observers, we rehearsed for about three weeks. We were told the demonstration would cost about \$1M, not chump change then, and that "it had better work." Well, three weeks into the project, it was abruptly cancelled and, less than a month later the 7th Division was deactivated. With almost six months left in my enlistment time, I was sent off to 8th Army HQ to work in the US Korea Procurement Agency, essentially to mark time. I had little idea what I was doing. Other than to settle the Korean affairs of a Department of Army civilian who died suddenly (I had to retrieve his personal effects from the home of his mistress's parents), it was a waste of time. I received an early out in May.

Compared to the distinguished service of the vast majority of OC 24-69, I had a "free pass." Korea at the time was very much a developing country. Outside the cities, life was rural, poor and craving dollars spent by the U.S. Armed Forces there. Without doubt, the high point of my Army service was surviving OCS and being commissioned.

### **Gallows Humor from the Korean DMC – Bill Gist**

**An operations officer who couldn't read a map!** Our Battalion S-3 sent my Infantry platoon out with a Mechanized unit to find infiltrators who had been spotted in our AO. He gave us the coordinates of the sighting up in the mountains and indicated a narrow trail we should follow, including the coordinates where the track vehicles would be able to turn around to come back down. We found the infiltrators, who had committed suicide to avoid capture, but when we headed for the turn-around point on the opposite side, we ran into a sheer 50-foot drop-off. With no way to turn around, the tracks had to creep in reverse down the twisty mountain trail. It took six hours! When we confronted the S-3, he admitted that he didn't know how to read a map very well and had missed the drop-off that cut us off from the turn-around point. "Sorry..."

### **An ROK battery commander who, thankfully, was a horribly bad shot:**

During a joint live-fire exercise with the South Korean Artillery/Infantry, my platoon came under live fire from 105mm howitzers from the Korean artillery. Luckily it was "close but no cigar" for the ROK (Republic of Korea) battery commander. We sheltered under a huge mountain overhang until we got them to stop shelling. We found out later that the officer in charge of the battery was on his first assignment as a battery officer,

and was just “winging it.” Fortunately for us, he probably couldn’t have hit the sea from the beach.

**Guard Post duty on New Year’s Eve:** My infantry platoon was assigned to GPs overlooking the DMZ just north of Freedom Bridge. The location we were in was within one-half mile of the North Korean outposts on the other side of the ‘Z’ and within binocular range. Their troops were constantly watching and photographing our every movement. On New Year’s Eve, at 0630, I had my guys on the 3 GPs “moon” their North Korean counterparts. (Boys will be boys and all that, and I was young.) That night we initiated a firefight between the ROK GPs in the area and the North Korean GP opposite them. That served as our New Year’s fireworks show.

**Germany Was an Icebox but Much Better than the Heat in NAM – Clark Yokely**

After OCS I was fortunate to spend the next three years assigned to the 1st Bn, 4th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division in Aschaffenburg Germany. The battalion was a mechanized combat-ready unit with our main mission to defend West Germany from a Soviet invasion. They called it the “Cold War” which I related to more than just the “Iron Curtain” because I literally froze my butt off most of the time we were in training. I never saw war and never felt war while in Germany. The only battles I fought were the constant training exercises which mostly occurred in the winter months when the ground was frozen. (This prevented major damage to the fields as we maneuvered all over West Germany.) The training usually occurred in Grafenwoer, Wildflecken, or Hohenfels and routinely lasted from three to four weeks. If one was “lucky,” like me, you could also be assigned as a training officer for the Mechanized Infantry Squad Proficiency Course (MISPC) or Expert Infantry Badge (EIB) testing; Control Officer for REFORGER; or Safety Officer for a tank range. That could add at least another two months to your yearly field experience in cold weather. And by the way, those tank ranges are the reason I can’t hear too well today!

When I arrived in-country, my first CO was a ROTC graduate, newly promoted to 1st LT. And by the way, he was one of the best men I ever reported to; I still communicate with him today. Officers and higher ranking NCO’s were few in the Battalion. Vietnam demands drained manpower from our unit, and I’m sure all others. A side note, after being in-country about 6 months, my CO was sent off to Vietnam and I was reassigned to B Co, reporting to one of our classmates, Ron Stryker. He is and was a great friend; he was also a serious, hard-driving commander respected by me and his men. Not only did Vietnam drain personnel from us, but it drained from the supply lines for parts and equipment. Often we would be tested on alerts where we were supposed to clear the compound gates within one hour with all equipment and vehicles ready to fight a war. Most of the time, we could barely get 60 percent of the tracks and wheeled vehicles out the gate. If the Russians had ever come our way, I’m afraid we would have been in a rearward redeployment mode.

I was promoted to CPT and became the Battalion S-4 my last year in Germany. I had a great team working for me, both officers and NCOs. These men were committed and devoted career soldiers who made the logistical team a smooth running machine. As many of you have said, these are the men who were true warriors; all of them had fought in Vietnam, some in Korea, and even one had fought in WW II. I know I learned a lot from them and at times felt I should call the NCOs, "Sir." My experience was nothing like so many of the 50<sup>th</sup> Company members who went to Vietnam. However, I found my tour interesting, challenging, and rewarding in so many ways. These were, without a doubt, the best experiences of my young life. Looking back, I would never have wanted to miss those times and those years.

### **Eyeball to Eyeball With the Red Army at the Fulda Gap – Bob Winship**

*[Editor's Note: After OCS, Bob Winship served with the 3rd Armored Division (the storied Spearhead Division) in West Germany. During the Cold War the Division's primary mission was to defend the [Fulda Gap](#), alongside other [NATO](#) elements, against the numerically superior [Warsaw Pact](#) forces. As many as nineteen Soviet and East German divisions faced off against NATO forces in the area. To prepare their defenses against an invasion, the 3rd Armored Division's units frequently conducted field training. Beginning in 1969, the Division participated in an annually staged war game, [REFORGER](#), which simulated the invasion of Western Europe by Warsaw Pact forces. Unlike Clark Yokely in the previous story, who froze his posterior off out in the field, Bob "ruefully" notes that he missed out on most of the fun in the field.]*

I was only a platoon leader in a line company for a few months and only made one foray to the Fulda Gap on a training exercise, just for a few days. In the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Armored Division there were two line battalions of Mechanized Infantry companies. Every year on New Year's Day the officers of these battalions played a grudge football game. The 1/48th had won for at least 5 years in a row. As a young 2LT, I played quarterback for the 2/48th in the "big game." I ran for two TDs and threw for two more, and for the 1st time in years the 2/48th won. I apparently caught the eye of the sportsminded Brigade Commander and he offered me the position of Athletic and Recreation Officer for the Brigade. Not being particularly gung-ho, and with no intention of remaining in the Army, I accepted his offer and spent my remaining time in Germany with an office in the gym and responsibility for maintaining morale by scheduling leagues and tournaments for the enlisted men in all sports for the two bases of the 2d Brigade. As additional duties I was also assigned various training assignments, such as squad level tactical training evaluator for the entire 3rd Armored Division.

### **Thwarting a Warsaw Pact Invasion with Schnapps – Clark Yokely**

I have a lot of great memories from my service years; these are mainly appreciated by men and women who have also served. This is a funny one, not so funny at the time,

and still to this day an embarrassing one. On one of the annual REFORGER exercises (training to thwart a simulated Warsaw attack into West Germany), I was “control officer” for a German battalion somewhere in the southern part of Germany; who knows where? We ran all over the country. Other than drinking schnapps with the German officers who were putting together their operation plans for the next day’s movement in a one-lightbulb barn, things were going very well. What an experience, particularly with that old German farmer standing with us just as proud as he could be of his six-foot high wooden barrel of schnapps. It was fire water for sure, and it was terrible. I would back away from the maps and the light and carefully pour it on the ground.

Anyway, as I recall, the German battalion moved out around 10:00 PM (22 hundred hours). To be honest, I wasn’t real sure where we were going and had no communication from my head controller. My jeep was the last vehicle in a long convoy of track and wheel vehicles. The whole battalion, along with every other battalion, was moving on these country back roads. I’m not sure anyone knew where the hell we were. Around 2:00 AM, we were completely stopped and waiting in an endless line of vehicles. We were so tired. I told my driver and Sergeant to get a few winks; I would stay awake. Well, about an hour later, I woke up, we were sitting in the middle of a dark road, not a vehicle, not a man, not a noise to be heard. The entire convoy had moved on before us and vanished into the night. You talk about being embarrassed! I had to wake my guys up and tell them we were totally ass lost, and it was all on me! They loved it and we spent half the day trying to find our battalion, the one *I was supposed to be controlling*. We kept saying that they were lost, not us! Finally, around noon, we found our unit and once again, the laugh was on me. My fellow German officers laughed for days after that. Nothing was ever said by my control group. I’m not sure they knew anything, and I sure wasn’t going to mention it. But you know what, I was still offered the Schnapps at every operations meeting. They were probably hoping I’d get lost again.

### **The Three-Year Germany Option to Stay Out of Nam... Almost – David Hanner**

I took the three-year option and got my first choice, Germany, hoping to avoid Vietnam. I arrived along with another OC 24-69er, David Hipp, and we were assigned to the same battalion 35 miles north of Frankfurt. After almost a year of seeing every other lieutenant shipped off to Southeast Asia, I decided to volunteer for Vietnam and get it over with. This was a big mistake (one of many I made while wearing the olive drab) because within months of my leaving, no more lieutenants from Germany were being sent to Vietnam. So, leaving my Fraulein and new-found skis behind, I took off (or should I say, "diddy mau-ed") for the land of Marvin the Arvin.

I was assigned up in I Corps to 3/187 Battalion, 101st Airborne which was better known as the Rakkasans - the same battalion that had suffered through Hamburger Hill the

year before. I served as the Night Duty Officer (NDO) in the battalion TOC (tactical operations center) from my arrival in Early November, 1970 until late January, 1971, when I was assigned as a platoon leader, just in time to join the platoon for Lom Som 719, the last major battle of the war. [*Editor's Note: This was a major ARVN incursion into southern Laos that ended in a rout of the South Vietnamese forces.*] The 101<sup>st</sup> portion of the effort (Operation Dewey Canyon II) supported Lom Som from the Vietnamese side of the border. This wasn't a good time. Both the S-3 and battalion commander and two of the men who reported to me when I was the NDO were killed. My platoon was incredibly lucky. I only had to medevac two of my men. One was bitten by a poisonous snake and the other one was hit in the head by a PRC-25 radio battery that exploded. Both were back in the field within a few days. Once Lom Som 719 was completed, our platoon worked "the flats" for a short time before I was assigned to Brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Company as HHQ Company XO.

Not long after getting to brigade headquarters I read in the *Army Times* that the Army was starting to RIF officers, so I made a hand-written request for an early discharge, which was accepted. So just before I was due to have my silver bar doubled, I accepted my PFC designation with honor and was discharged in late July, 1971.

### **NATO Exercise Coordination – Terry Hummel**

Summer 1984. I had just completed a non-flying, Armor Officer slot at Fort Drum, NY. In June, I completed the Command and General Staff College (on the Commandant's List) by correspondence in less than 120 days, just in time for the O-5 promotion board. Only a year before, HQ, Department of Army had sent me a nice letter, which announced that I had been transferred from Infantry Branch to the new Aviation Branch along with a Regular Army appointment. Congratulations! And now it was time for reassignment. Where would my new Aviation Branch manager send me? Of course! It was to another non-TOE, non-flying assignment in Germany. [*Editor's Note: TOE stands for Table of Organization and Equipment, a DOD document prescribing the organization, staffing, and equipment of regular units. A non-TOE assignment is a non-traditional one.*] So, I signed in as Staff Officer, Special Operations and Resource Management Branch, Exercise Division, ODCSOPS, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR), Heidelberg, FRG. Days after I signed in, I also received news that I was now a Major, Promotable (P). I was on a roll. What next!?

For the first two years at USAREUR I was to be responsible for planning and directing USAREUR participation in the Allied Command Europe (ACE) Mobile Force (AMF) exercise series as well as certain bilateral exercise series, such as U.S.-Spanish and U.S.Moroccan exercises. My official travels took me to various NATO organization headquarters and U.S. embassies in many countries. The norm was frequent TDY to places such as Bodo or Oslo, Norway; Izmir, Turkey; Mons, Belgium; Rabat, Morocco; Copenhagen, Denmark; Madrid, Spain; Salisbury, United Kingdom; Verona, Italy; and more. I enjoyed working with my allied counterparts, especially the German and British

officers. We were collectively referred to as the largest traveling party in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), probably for good reason.

Although I could fill a book with my experiences from this assignment, to include attendance at a traditional mishwi (native banquet) at a remote oasis in the northern reaches of the Sahara Desert, one NATO exercise coordination trip, in particular, stands out in my memory. I had been temporary duty (TDY) at Headquarters, "Land Southeast" in Izmir, Turkey for the week. While there, I made several late afternoon visits with my hosts to local non-tourist restaurants, a gold dealer and the markets. I was usually very careful about my eating habits. (My predecessor had picked up a serious case of amoebic dysentery and was evacuated to Walter Reed Hospital to save his life.) Somehow I slipped up, and you guessed it. Mohammad's revenge, big time, attacked me during the middle of Thursday night.

Friday morning I showed up at HQ, Land Southeast dressed in my civilian traveling clothes and carrying my suitcase. I would participate in the 50-minute exercise closing conference before departure by commercial air from Izmir to Istanbul, Turkey, where I would catch an international connecting flight to Paris, France. Several of my colleagues commented on how pale and washed out I looked. I felt much worse than I looked. The flight from Izmir to Istanbul was pure hell. I was wearing my usual travel attire; grey wool trousers, blue wool blazer, shirt with tie and dress shoes, plus courier briefcase. In terrific pain, I had nearly dirtied my clothes before reaching the flight latrine in a blind panic. As soon as the aircraft door opened at the airport in Istanbul I managed a hurried run, walk, stiff-legged shuffle to the nearest restroom. I was consumed with mid-section pain. What if I could not make it to the commode? Horror! I had not thought to travel with an extra change of clothes close at hand. Could I safely make the rest of the trip home to the hospital ER in Heidelberg where the doc could give me some liquid corks, pills, and an IV, if necessary? Would I be able to travel to my next NATO exercise conference in Norway the following Monday?

Mind back to the present. My acute pain made me realize I was about to explode in an enveloping cloud of mist. I raced through the restroom entrance and slammed the commode stall door open with a loud bang. Horror upon Horrors! There was no sitdown commode in the stall! As I looked down I observed a shiny, white porcelain fixture with a hole in the center, level with the floor. On each side of the hole was an imprint of a shoe, size 16, facing toward the door. A white "brown bomber"! What deranged idiot had designed this restroom with a type of commode where one plants his feet, bends or stoops over and hopes for the best? My dress shoes! My natty, tailored, gray wool trousers! My briefcase! You may be wondering how that rather sticky situation turned out. Did I make it to the ER in Heidelberg, Germany? Was I able to attend Monday's conference in Norway? For the answers, be sure to catch the next episode of "Adventures on the NATO Exercise Coordination Circuit."

