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## Public Information

A Memoir

George put a pudgy hand on Art's shoulder and said, "Go to sleep, Art." The skinny sergeant closed his eyes and fell back on the cot.

George was a hypnotist. He had hypnotized several guys in the 25th Division forward command post using the same routine. He'd ask them to close their eyes and gradually relax all their muscles, starting with the toes and working up to the head. Then he'd tell them in a slow, singsong voice that they were floating over a calm mirror-like lake. After floating a distance, they'd see a whirlpool on the surface of the lake. They'd circle the whirlpool and slowly descend. Finally, they'd enter the whirlpool and spiral down, down, down into the dark depths. Then, George would announce, they'd be in a trance, able to hear nothing but his voice.

Before he'd entered the Army, George had been a newscaster at a Texas radio station. Like most of us in the division public information office, he'd been in the news business before North Korea invaded South Korea. We'd all been just barely too young to make WWII, so now we were in Korea with a war of our own. George had told us that back home he had hypnotized his station manager and given him a permanent post-hypnotic suggestion to obey all of George's instructions. He claimed to have put the station manager under by spraying him with a chemical that had been a popular remedy for

nervousness in the last century. But then George claimed he had been able to levitate a piece of paper by concentrating on it. Nobody but George ever saw that paper fly.

Art Thrall was George's favorite subject. He'd hypnotized Art so often he was finally able to put him under by touching him and telling him to go to sleep. George needed Art for this performance. It was to be George's ultimate demonstration of the power of hypnotism. George had already regressed Art back to his childhood, and he claimed that in Texas he had regressed other subjects to previous lives. That's what he claimed. We didn't buy it. But now, George said, he was going to project Art into the future.

That idea interested us. After six months on Heartbreak Ridge and the Punchbowl, the 25th Division had gone into reserve. We had been in reserve for three weeks, and everyone knew we were going to move the next day. The question was, where? It was September, 1952, and the 25th had been in Korea longer than any other unit. The 24th had gone back to Japan months ago. So had the First Cavalry. Two National Guard divisions, the 40th and the 45th, had recently arrived. The rumor was that tomorrow we would be on our way to Japan. All of us wanted to know the same thing George was seeking—the ending to stories each of us had been writing for months, our own personal war stories.

"You are standing in the company street, Art," George told Thrall. "You see the chief of staff. He comes up to you and says, 'Sergeant Thrall, you are the best soldier in this division, so I want you to know where we are going.' He tells you where we are going, Art. Where is it?"

Art seemed to be struggling for an answer. Finally, he replied, "Can't say. Secret. Top Secret."

George didn't give up.

"Now you're walking down the company street, Art. You see the general's trailer. The door is open. You go in. The general is sitting at his desk with his back to you. He is reading something. You walk up behind him and look over his shoulder. What is he reading, Art?"

"Orders."

"What do the orders say?"

"Can't tell. Not enough light."

George tried a new strategy.

"It's several days from now, Art. You are in an airplane. It's circling an airport. You can see people on the ground. They are waving. You recognize some of them. Who are they, Art?"

Thrall suddenly began to cry. "Linda, Arty. My wife. My little boy," he croaked between sobs.

"The plane is getting lower, Art. You can see a sign at the airport. What does the sign say?"

"Sendai," Art said, and sobbed some more.

George brought Art out of the trance. He was satisfied. Sendai was a town in Japan that contained a base where the First Cav was now stationed.

The rest of us were skeptical. Someone asked one of the Korean laborers where we were going.

"Kumwha," he said. Kumwha was one point in the bitterly contested Kumwha-Pyonggang-Chorwon "Iron Triangle."

The next day, we packed up and moved to Kumwha.

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At least somebody seemed to know what was going on. We didn't, and we were supposed to be telling the world about it. But as I learned later, the world didn't care.

When peace talks began in Korea in July 1951, both sides agreed to stay in the same positions they oc-

cupied, and they started talking about prisoner exchanges. Soon after that, Korea became the "forgotten war." There's been a lot of talk about the traumas suffered by Vietnam veterans, both their psychological problems and the hostility they met when they returned. I've never had any guilt feelings or nightmares and I've never had a "flashback." Nobody ever protested what we did.

They just never knew we existed.

For the record, the Korean War killed 54,246 Americans in three years. The Vietnam War, in 16 years and with vastly more Americans "in country," killed 58,021. When the peace talks in Korea began, the United States had suffered 75,000 casualties there. In August 1952, a year after the talks began, there were 41,000 more US casualties. When the war ended in June 1953, there was a total of 157,530 American casualties, more than twice as many as had accumulated by the time most Americans thought the war was over. We PIO types worked hard to get the word out, but trying to keep the public informed about the Korean War was something like trying to give a speech in sign language at a school for the blind.

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Some of the troops in the 25th Division PI office had been in Public Information from the beginning—even gone to PIO school. I hadn't. I'd been a newspaper reporter in Kansas City, Missouri. So because I had the police beat, the Army made me a policeman. After basic, I served in the 3420th MP Detachment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, pulling post patrol, town patrol, both with other MPs and with civilian Fayetteville police officers, and stockade duty. The prison sergeant at the main stockade was a hefty individual known as Fat Daddy. The usual reli-

able sources held that Fat Daddy was the original of James Jones's sadistic Fatso in *From Here to Eternity*. If he wasn't he could have been.

One day, a notice appeared on the bulletin board outside the first sergeant's office. It was a volunteer sheet for Korea. That was in the summer of 1951, when the papers were still full of news about Ridgeway's "meat grinder" offensive. The notice went on the bulletin board at 10 a.m. The first sergeant took it down around noon. It was oversubscribed. Nobody was eager to get into a war, but everybody wanted to get out of the 3420 and away from Fat Daddy. With Fat Daddy we knew what life would be like. Life in Korea—who could tell? But it would be different. I signed on early enough to get transferred.

It was early January when I arrived in Korea. I was assigned to the MP group managing the POW camps on Koje Do [Koje Island]. The camps must have been designed by a quartermaster rather than an MP. The object seemed to be to surround the maximum number of people with the minimum feet of barbed wire. We had no effective control over what went on inside the wire. The prisoner exchange that started at the end of 1951 demonstrated that. At one camp, the head POW honcho lined up all the Chinese prisoners and ordered all those who didn't want to go back to China to step forward. As soon as they did, the others jumped on them and beat them to death. At another camp, those who *wanted* to go home were stomped to death.

On February 18 and March 13, 1952, the prison camps on Koje erupted in major, coordinated riots. The commanding general had to call on infantry resting up from the combat in the north to put down the riots. The infantry on Koje at that time was the 27th "Wolfhound" Regiment of the 25th Division. The word "riot" doesn't quite convey the magnitude of these disturbances. They

were more like battles than normal riots, with the prisoners wielding improvised spears, knives and maces. The troops had to kill 89 POWs and wound another 166 to restore order. The riots got little notice in the States, and nothing was done to change the enormous, unmanageable prison camps.

Koje Do made headlines back in the States later, when I was up north and living with the Wolfhounds, who had long since left Koje. When another disturbance threatened, the commander, Brig. Gen. Francis T. Dodd, tried to negotiate with the prisoners. They grabbed him, dragged him into the camp and condemned him to death. To save himself, Dodd signed a paper "confessing" to inhumane treatment of the POWs and condemning the voluntary repatriation program. Brig. Gen. Charles F. Colson, sent to rescue Dodd, decided against using force. He signed a similar paper, and the prisoners released Dodd. The Communist propagandists had a great time with the two "confessions," but the Army finally decided to do something about the camps. They sent in paratroopers of the 187th Airborne Regiment and broke up the camps into manageable units.

By that time, I was elsewhere.

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I had been transferred to "the pipeline," which meant traveling through an interminable series of replacement depots. At one place, because I could type, a first sergeant tried to snag me for a morning report clerk. Fortunately someone from 25th Division PIO had more clout. I was soon wearing a patch, designed by our public information officer, proclaiming me a "Lightning Combat Correspondent." "Lightning" was the code name for the 25th "Tropic Lightning" Division.

The Tropic Lightning was in reserve when I arrived. I was assigned to the Wolfhounds, my friends from Koje, as a division PIO representative. A bit later, I became the regimental public information NCO, reporting to the regimental, instead of the division, PIO. There is no place on a regimental table of organization for a public information NCO, but all the Tropic Lightning regiments had them. I replaced a guy named Bill Macauley, who had replaced one named Hugh O'Reilly. O'Reilly had held the job in Japan and had gone to Korea with the regiment when it was a "regimental combat team" with its own armor and artillery. As an RCT, the Wolfhounds were shifted from one weak point in the Pusan perimeter to another, becoming known as the "fire brigade." O'Reilly was everywhere the action was, using a personally purchased Speed Graphic and personally purchased darkroom equipment to record the fighting. When he left the regiment, O'Reilly gave it the camera and darkroom equipment.

In Japan, O'Reilly got the regiment to adopt an orphanage in Osaka. Every month, the troops contributed part of their pay to the orphanage, even during the worst of the combat. The monthly contribution usually came to about $10,000. One month, a major going to Japan on R&R was to deliver the money. It never arrived. The major claimed he gave the money to a nurse who was going to Osaka. The Army CID came around asking about the money, but I don't think they ever found it.

O'Reilly married a Japanese girl. He tried to explain to her about the prejudice she might encounter in the States.

"Oh, I know all about that," she said. "You mean that some people in the United States feel about us Japanese the way we feel about the Koreans."

Hollywood made a movie about O'Reilly, *Three Stripes in the Sun*, starring Aldo Ray.

Macauley replaced O'Reilly, and shortly after I arrived, Macauley accumulated enough points to go home. At that time, I had six points. I'd be around for a while. You got four points for each month under fire, three points for being in the division CP or regimental headquarters, two points for division rear and one point for anywhere else in Korea. Theoretically, when you accumulated 36 points you rotated. Macauley had a lot more than 36 points. So did everyone else I met who rotated.

When you got near the magic 36 points, you were said to be "getting short." When they got "real short"—over 36 points—some guys began to act a bit oddly. There was a corporal named Lampson in Able Company. Lampson had founded FOG, the Fraternal Order of Gophers [as in go for your hole]. After he'd accumulated a lot of points and was still in the Land of Morning Calm, Lampson stopped shaving. He vowed he wouldn't shave again until he got orders to rotate. His company commander retaliated by ordering Lampson to stay in his bunker any day a replacement came up to join the company. The CO didn't want him to scare the new kids.

The main job for us PIO types was writing stories about the troops to send to their hometown papers. Much of the work at division was preparing stories from the regiments for transmission to higher headquarters, which would ultimately send them to the appropriate media. I was lucky. I spent almost all my time with the Wolfhounds and dug up my own stories.

When the Wolfhounds went back on the line after I joined them, Mac and Paul, a couple of the guys at division, wanted to see the MLR [main line of resistance]. It turned out that they were almost as new as I was. We all went up in their jeep—as far, that is, as a jeep could go. You have to stop at the base of the mountain and clamber up a footpath. The newspapers called them hills, but

they were mountains, steeper and higher than anything east of the Rockies.

The MLR turned out to be a series of sandbag fighting bunkers on the forward crest of the ridge connected by a narrow communications trench. On the rear crest of the ridge were more sandbag bunkers where the men slept. Usually the regiment kept two battalions on the line and a third in reserve, holding a line of trenches and bunkers on the ridge immediately behind the MLR.

The MLR looked peaceful enough when we got there. I had the O'Reilly camera, so I posed a couple of soldiers in the commo trench, pointing their rifles at the enemy MLR, about 200 yards across a valley. I was straddling the trench and focussing the camera when I heard a WHAP! and saw a big cloud of dust rising from a point about 15 feet from my toes. My models were scrambling into the nearest bunker. After a moment, it dawned on me that I should do the same.

"That was a 45 millimeter anti-tank gun," one of my models said. "They keep them in tunnels in their mountains and push them up to the mouth of the tunnel to snipe at us." He may have been going to say more, but there was another loud blast and dust flew out of the ceiling of the bunker. "That was a 60 mortar," he said. My first thought was that the North Koreans didn't like photographers. My second was that I had been needlessly drawing fire.

More mortar shells exploded, some outside the bunker, some on top of it. Each time a shell exploded, one of the troops in the bunker—a kid with many points, it turned out—visibly flinched. He began to tremble.

"What would you do if someone was hit outside there?" Mac asked him.

"I-I-I'd g-g-go out and g-g-get him," the kid answered.

The Wolfhounds had moved into this position just two days before. The day they moved up, they were greeted by loudspeaker harangues in Korean. A case of mistaken identity: Joe [our nickname for all North Koreans] thought we were ROKs [Republic of Korea, or South Korea, soldiers]. We made mistakes about identity, too, but ours were more intentional. The Pentagon had tried hard to convince the world that MacArthur's offensive in 1950 had knocked the North Koreans out of the war. At this time, it attributed all enemy actions to the Chinese—part of a government effort to downplay the war. The North Koreans had been knocked out, so they said, and the peace talks had begun. Everything was quiet. The "boys" would soon be home because the North Koreans and Chinese had been driven out of South Korea. It must have been hard to explain why two armies were still shooting at each other, running "contact patrols" and busily killing each other in various ways while no territory changed hands. We had a hell of a time publishing stories about combat, even in *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, which circulated only in the Far East Command.

In spite of what the Pentagon said, there was definitely a North Korean corps—at least two divisions—opposite the Wolfhounds' front, with trenches, tunnels and bunkers extending back at least 5,000 yards. Shortly after looking at that network of fortifications covering mountains as far as anyone could see, I read in *Time's* Pacific edition that GIs in Korea were gazing at that enemy line and yearning for the order to attack. Like hell we were.

The North Koreans soon got the players right. They must have looked through a telescope and seen the wolf heads on the helmets of the new troops opposing them. The next day, they dragged up the loudspeakers again and spoke in English.

"We know you Wolfhounds, you butchers of Koje Do," Joe said. "We will fix you. You will get what you deserve."

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General Sherman was right about war. But each war is its own kind of hell. Korea was literally another world. You seldom saw a paved road or any building more substantial than a bunker or a tent. You only saw such things on the very rare occasions when business took you to Chunchon, an almost-destroyed city where people lived in houses with only two walls and where they climbed ladders to get to second-story rooms because the stairway had been blown away. You never saw a civilian car or any vehicle that wasn't olive drab. Worst of all, you never saw a woman.

Once a friend, a contemporary who, like most of my contemporaries had been in the service but not in the war, asked, "Didn't you ever get to town?"

For a moment, I was dumbstruck. Then I realized he didn't understand that there were no towns. Any towns in our area had been leveled. And he didn't understand that when infantry are fighting a war, they don't get a chance to go gadding about. At least they didn't in our war.

Personally, though, I had a pretty good war. In many ways it was far better than MP duty at Bragg. My boss, the regimental PIO, was also division liaison officer. He was usually at division headquarters, 10 miles away. To start work, I'd take a carbine and basic load, a sleeping bag, a Speed Graphic, a number of film holders, a notebook and a pencil or pen. I'd go out to a road and hold out my thumb. The first truck to come along would pick me up. I'd hitchhike out to the company I wanted to visit—where was always my choice. I'd talk with the

troops on the line and take some pictures. Finding a place to sleep was no problem. Every bunker with a vacancy wanted to entertain someone who would get their names in the papers. After I'd shot my film and collected the facts, I'd go back to headquarters and write the stories. The Signal Corps back at division had taken over O'Reilly's darkroom equipment, so they processed the film. I was pretty much my own boss.

The only guys I met who had more independence were a sergeant and two corporals who made up the armor vest team. Their boss was hundreds of miles away, in Pusan. The Army was introducing a nylon vest for GIs in the rifle companies. It was a modernized version of the "flak vests" the Army Air Forces used in World War II. The team was working its way across Korea, stopping at each company, seeing to the distribution of the vests and explaining what they could and what they could not do. The vest could stop shell fragments but couldn't stop most of the bullets we faced. It might stop typical pistol bullets, but not the high power 7.62 Tokarev rounds Joe and his Chinese ally used in their burp guns. It certainly wouldn't stop rifle bullets.

Of course, there's always someone who doesn't get the word. One soldier donned his vest and handed his carbine to a buddy.

"Shoot me," he said. "I'm bullet proof."

The buddy and others persuaded him to hang the vest on the much-blasted remains of a tree. Then the buddy fired a carbine at it. The carbine bullet, from a far weaker weapon than the .30-06 M-1 rifle, penetrated the vest, the tree, then kept on going.

Independence wasn't the only advantage of my job. I was doing what I liked best—reporting the news. I had been a reporter before I got in the Army, and I'd be a reporter when I got out. That's something I had that the armor vest mavens didn't. The armor vest team leader

was a commercial artist. One of the corporals was a machinist, the other a salesman. But I knew that neither the salesman nor any other team member would be selling armor vests in civilian life. I'd still be writing. In school, history had been my favorite subject. Now I was writing history—little bits of it.

I liked what I was doing so much I even dreamed myself a post-Korea chapter. After I got out of the Army, I'd come back. The paper I'd worked for had folded, but I could see a new and brighter future in journalism. I'd come back to Korea with a couple of Nikons and a pair of tape recorders and accreditation from a bunch of small newspapers and radio stations. I'd join the freewheeling gang of war correspondents traveling around Korea in heated jeeps they had somehow acquired. When the environment started to get to me, I'd hop back to Tokyo. In my personal future as a correspondent, I saw freedom and stories that mattered. History. I knew that what I was writing was not something every high school student was going to read in American History 101. But they were incidents that deserved to be recorded, and I was recording them, and some future historians would be able to read the record, and future generations would learn something about what went on in the affair called the Korean War. They'd learn about the medic who got the Silver Star because he crawled down a mountainside under fire to rescue a wounded man, dragged him back up the mountain, then went down again and dragged another man up. This man, the authorities discovered when they started processing his citation, had had a "C" physical profile and never should have been sent overseas. They'd learn about a gung-ho lieutenant named Umlaut who had led his platoon to the underground command post of a North Korean battalion and wiped it out, along with every man in it. His platoon came back

without a casualty. Except for Lieutenant Umlaut. He was killed.

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Those future scholars would learn about Sandbag Castle, a little spur of our MLR a few miles west of the Punchbowl. It was a complex of bunkers and tunnels we had inherited from the Turks. When the talks began, all UN forces had orders to advance no farther. The Turkish Brigade, though, interpreted those orders to mean that if they couldn't push beyond their trench lines, there was nothing to stop them from moving the trenches themselves. So they began to dig towards Manchuria. They pushed a trench straight at the North Korean trenches, covering it with sandbags as they went, and protected it with flanking bunkers. They were within 10 yards of the North Korean line when they were ordered to halt. At the head of their trench, they built a bunker that was more like a tower of sandbags.

The tower, officially "Listening Post Agnes," but known to all as "Sandbag Castle," was a magnet for North Korean mortar shells and foot patrols. There was fighting in the tunnels and over the tunnels. Early in the morning on September 5, 1952, the North Koreans hit the castle with 1,200 mortar shells and attacked the squad that held it with two companies of infantry. The attackers were both brave and skillful. Their gunners had been practicing on the castle for a long time, so the North Korean infantrymen were able to call mortar fire almost on top of themselves as they attacked. Corporal Benito Martinez, the machine gunner in the castle tower, told the three men with him to get back to the MLR. He stayed and continued firing. On the phone, he told his platoon leader not to try to rescue him, because the North Koreans were all around him. He picked up a

BAR, and crawled through the tunnels to another bunker when the North Koreans put satchel charges against the big bunker. Martinez held out until dawn and won the Medal of Honor posthumously. Lt. Thomas McLean led four counterattacks and was wounded each time. The counterattacks were ultimately successful. McLean received the Silver Star. Martinez and McLean were recognized heroes.

When the sun rose, the castle was little more than a series of holes in the ground. The ground was covered with North Korean bodies, some of them booby-trapped. There were no live North Koreans in sight.

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Some things that happened didn't make good stories for the newspapers, but they made an impression on me. One involved a guy named Bill Reynolds, a squad leader in Item Company, I think, who came from somewhere in the South. I met him fairly early in my career as a "combat correspondent." Bill was short. He was real short. He had 51 points. He was as seasoned a veteran as you could find in Korea, and the men in his company looked up to him. Bill knew all the tricks. "He could walk so soft he could come right up behind you and you wouldn't know it until he spoke to you," a member of his squad said.

When I met Reynolds, he was getting ready to rotate the next day. As we were talking, a machine gunner a couple of hundred yards down the line was firing at a sniper. Reynolds called to him.

"Hey, don't draw too much fire," he said. "I'm getting short." He laughed. Typical GI gallows humor.

I went back to the medical bunker and was talking with a medic when somebody nearby shouted, "Medic!" The shout came from Reynolds' bunker. The sniper fir-

ing at the machine gunner 200 yards away had put a bullet through a loophole about four inches square and hit Bill Reynolds in the base of his spine. It killed him.

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Very few people in a war, I believe, think that they personally are going to die. Death was not something we dwelt on. I know I didn't. It would have spoiled my war correspondent dream. Seeing people get killed is unpleasant, even enemy people.

Once I was talking with an artillery forward observer who had worked out a deal with a tank platoon leader. Tanks had been winched up to the top of the hill to act as steel pillboxes. Looking through his BC scope, the FO had discovered a footpath about 3,000 yards behind the enemy MLR. He timed how long it took a 90 mm shell to get from a nearby tank to that path. Then he timed how long it took a man to walk a certain distance down the path. Eventually he and the tankers determined how much lead the tank gun would have to give a walking man to hit him at 3,000 yards.

"Look through the scope," the FO said. "See that tree right in the middle. When Joe passes that tree, I tell the tank to fire, and Joe and the shell will come together at the same time."

I was looking through the other 20-power BC scope when a North Korean appeared on the path. As he passed the tree, I found myself hoping he and the shell would not meet. Knocking off some guy from miles away when he was on his way to get a bowl of rice seemed . . . well, it just didn't seem like war. Right after he passed the tree, the North Korean stopped and tied his shoe. He never met the shell.

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Some time later I was on my way to a place called King Outpost. King Outpost was a cluster of trenches and bunkers on a hill about half a mile in front of our MLR. We had inherited it from the Seventh Division when we moved into the Kumwha area. Our opponents here were Chinese, and we heard that they had wiped out a couple of companies of the Seventh with nighttime raids on King Outpost.

When the Wolfhounds took over, they put Mike Company, the weapons company of the Third Battalion, on King. The men of Mike didn't mess around. They brought up water-cooled Browning machine guns—the kind many people were saying was already obsolete—and plenty of ammunition. A water-cooled Browning wasn't very mobile, but it could fire continuously for hours if you kept the water jacket full and the ammo belts coming. When the first Chinese tripped the first flare, everybody cut loose. The next day, there was a battalion of dead Chinese in front of King Outpost. Some of them had no guns, just a kind of vest with pockets holding a half-dozen stick grenades.

The morning after the fight, I was on my way to King Outpost. This was a good story, and I was getting short—I expected to rotate soon. I had no time for any but good stories. The trail to King curved around in front of the MLR. Everybody in the fighting holes was wearing an armor vest. I wasn't, and when I looked over at Chinese-held Hill 1062, what the papers later called Papa-san, I felt a trifle naked. A couple of soldiers invited me to stop for C-ration coffee. While we sipped caffeine, they told me that three Koreans carrying supplies to the outpost had been killed on the trail a little earlier. But, they pointed out, there was a commo trench running alongside the trail.

The commo trench began where the trail moved away from the MLR. The farther I walked, the smaller the trench got. Finally it measured about six inches wide and six inches deep. That might protect a telephone wire, but it wouldn't do much for me. At the same time, the sounds of firing got heavier—rifle and machine gun fire, not cannons, fortunately. I looked back; I looked ahead. There was no other target in sight. Nothing but one GI strolling over a plain towards a hill in the middle of nothing. I remembered the North Korean on the way to his supper. I stopped and waited a few seconds. Then I jogged for a distance, stopped again, walked. Then I jogged again.

When I got up to King, there was a lot of incoming fire. Nobody seemed very disturbed. "Just 45s [45 mm anti-tank guns]," the first sergeant said. "When they land, they're no more dangerous than hand grenades." I got information from him and the company commander and as many of the troops as I could about the previous night's fight, then headed back at the same irregular pace I'd used coming up.

When I was writing the stories for the troops' hometown newspapers, I heard that the first sergeant, the company commander and several other members of Mike Company had been killed that afternoon.

❑

Eventually, I rotated. I had 36 points and a CIB [Combat Infantryman's Badge] but I doubt that I would have left that early if my term in the Army hadn't been coming to an end.

I got my first taste of what the 'Nam vets called "the world" when we got to Japan. A master sergeant in the permanent party at Sasebo gave the keynote:

"All right, you guys. You're in civilization now and you're going to have to start acting like soldiers." Like soldiers? What did that yard bird know about real soldiers?

Before we boarded the troop ship another one of those cadre "soldiers" lined up the troops and said everybody had to contribute a dollar to pay the Japanese KPs who had been helping the kitchen personnel. If those Japanese KPs had been getting a dollar from every man that passed through Sasebo, any one of them would have been able to buy out Toyota. Somebody got that loot, but it wasn't the Japanese KPs. Some of the troops going home hadn't been in Korea long. They stayed in line. Lots of the old Korea hands, especially the first three graders, just stepped out of the line and went back to their barracks.

Back in the States, at Ft. Devens, Massachusetts, I was reunited with guys I hadn't seen in two years. Very few of them had been to Korea. Most had spent their time Stateside or in Germany. The guys from Germany were full of war stories. They told everybody about all the time they had spent "on the line" facing East Germany. They had even seen real, live Communists. They couldn't imagine that anything had been much different in Korea.

Among civilians, only people related to service personnel in Korea seemed interested in the war. Politicians showed more interest than most citizens, but to them the war was a political football. Some were charging soldiers were being killed because there was a shortage of shells—a blatant lie if there ever was one. We fired more shells in less space and in less time than any army in history. Other politicians were promising to end the war, but not explaining how.

❑

At Sandbag Castle, three survivors I interviewed remembered a soldier falling on a hand grenade to save his comrades. The grenade, fortunately, proved to be a dud. Whether this happened once, twice or three times, I couldn't find out. Nobody admitted that he was the hero. Maybe the hero had been ashamed that the attempted self-sacrifice came to naught. If the grenade had exploded, he would have been recognized as a hero. But it's better to be alive and unrecognized than dead and celebrated.

❑

"The plane is getting lower, Art. You can see a sign at the airport. What does the sign say?"

"Sendai," Art said, and sobbed some more.

George brought Art out of the trance.

My dream of the future evaporated as completely as Art Thrall's had that night he came out of his trance. To hell with Korea and stories nobody cared about. I took a reporter-photographer job on a paper in the middle of Kansas. ❑