

Korean War Veterans feature Robert Hansen continues

Last week we started on the detailed story about Robert Hansen. This week we continue with his family history and then go into his military service. Before we get to the detailed story about Robert, here is a brief over-view that was published in the 1981 Gray Centennial book (Veterans' section).

Robert Dean Hansen was inducted into the U.S. Army, August 14, 1952, after serving a year in the Audubon National Guard. He was stationed at Fort Sill Oklahoma, for basic training at the Field Artillery Recruit Training Center at which time he received training in fire direction for heavy artillery.

In January he went overseas to Korea and joined the 555th F.A. in the "Punch Bowl" area and for several months served as a forward observer directing fire for the "Triple Nickel." During the 13 months served in Korea, the "Triple Nickel" was attached to the 5th Regimental Combat Team, which was moved often to strengthen various outfits including the 45th Division, 3rd Division, and 1st R.O.K. (Republic of Korea) Army. After mid-April, much time was served in the Chorwon and Kumwha Valley areas with heavy fighting during June and early July before the treaty was signed.

In February of 1954 he returned to the U.S. and was stationed at Camp Carson, Colorado, and served as communications chief for the 538th F.A. until he was discharged on May 14, 1954.

In 1936 the Hansen family moved to the farm by Gray where Bob lived until his retirement in 1992, after which Bob and his brother, Mel, moved to Manning. Bob attended school at Gray and graduated in 1948.

Today he enjoys sports on TV and follows the Manning (now IKM-Manning) football and basketball teams. He also enjoyed bowling and was on the Gray and Doc Vonnahme bowling teams for many years.

During his military service and now in retirement, Bob has visited all of the contiguous US states and Hawaii, with only Alaska left.

Military service

Bob served one year in the Audubon National Guard after a friend of his talked him into joining, and each weekend they attended meetings and trained in Audubon. They also trained for two weeks at Camp McCoy near Sparta, Wisconsin; today known as Fort McCoy. Sometime in 1950 the Audubon guard was ordered to the Pacific Junction, Iowa, area to assist with major flooding at that time - they were housed in Glenwood.



Bob was drafted on July 16, 1951, in Audubon and began active service in the U.S. Army on August 14, 1951, after taking his physical at the KRNT Theater in Des Moines. His service number is 26-791-452.



Bob on bivouac while training at Fort Sill



Bob was stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for basic training at the Field Artillery Recruit Training Center, where he received training in fire direction for heavy artillery. Bob also trained with a 30 carbine M1 Rifle and qualified as a Marksman on August 16, 1951, with a score of 137.

In January 1952 Bob left Camp Stoneman in Pittsburg, California, and boarded a transport ship that headed directly to Yokohama, Japan.

From there he was transported by ship to Korea where he was assigned to the 555th "Triple Nickel" Field Artillery Battalion (105mm). Initially they served in the "Punch Bowl" area but later on spent most of their time in the "Iron Triangle." Bob served as an artillery forward observer, and directed fire for Battery B of the 555th.

To better explain the complicated story about Bob's service, here is some official timeline information from the 555th

booklet, and some Internet sourced explanations about an artillery forward observer are provided in his history.

Official timeline 555th: On February 10, 1952, the 555th Field Artillery Battalion was relieved from operational control of the 40th Infantry Division Artillery and placed under the operational control of the 213th Field Artillery Battalion Group with the mission of reinforcing the fires of the 18th ROK Field Artillery Battalion and the 40th Division Artillery. For this mission the battalion displaced to positions just east of Kumwha.

On March 1, 1952, the 555th Field Artillery Battalion was relieved from its attachment of IX Corps, attached to I Corps with a further attachment to the 1st Provisional Field Artillery Group, and given the mission of direct support of the 15th ROK Infantry Regiment. For this mission the battalion moved to positions in the vicinity of Munsan-ni just outside of the neutral zone of the Panmunjom Peace Conference. On the morning of March 18, the 1st Marine Division moved into position, and the 555th Field Artillery Battalion was relieved by a Marine artillery unit. That day the 555 departed for its next position in the X Corps sector where it relieved the 300th Armored Field Artillery Battalion in the vicinity of Sangonbae southwest of Mundung-ni. The 555 was attached to X Corps Artillery, Groupment "A" and assigned the mission of direct support of one regiment on line of the 7th ROK Infantry Division.

From March 18 to July 19, 1952, the 555 furnished direct support to the 5th, 3rd and 8th ROK Infantry Regiments of the 7th ROK Division in turn until relieved on the later date by the 171st Field Artillery Battalion, 45th Division Artillery. At this time the 555th Field Artillery Battalion returned to the 5th Regimental Combat Team, then attached to the 25th Infantry Division, and resumed support of the 5th Infantry from positions in the "Punch Bowl" in the vicinity of Tokehanggung, Korea.

On October 22, 1952, the 5th Regimental Combat Team was attached in place to the 40th Infantry Division which relieved the 25th Infantry Division. The 555 continued with its direct support mission until October 31, 1952, at which time the 5th Infantry went into a reserve area at Toko-li. For three days the 555 remained in direct support of the 223rd Infantry Regiment, 40th Infantry Division. Thereafter, during the period November 5, 1952, to January 6, 1953, the mission was general support of the 40th Infantry Division Artillery reinforcing the fires of the 625th Field Artillery Battalion.

On January 8, 1953, the 555th reverted again to direct support of the 5th Infantry when the 5th came out of reserve to occupy its old place as defenders of the Punch Bowl.

The 40th Infantry Division was relieved by the 45th Infantry Division on February 2 and the 5th RCT was attached in place of the 45th Division.

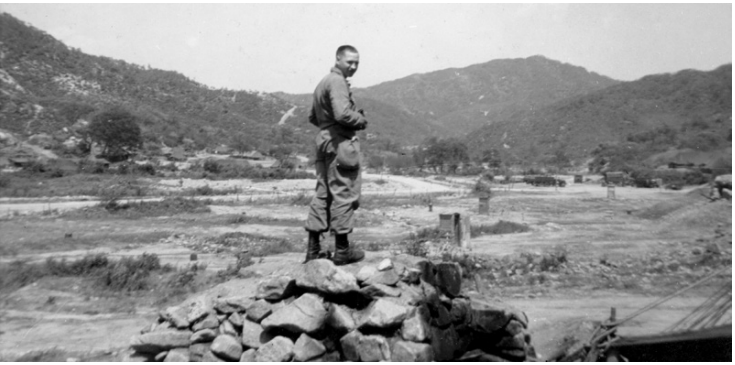
The 555 assumed an additional mission of direct support of the 19th Battalion Combat Team (Philippines) on February 7, 1953, when the 19th Battalion Combat Team relieved the 1st Battalion 5th Infantry Regiment. On February 11, 1953, a third mission of direct support of the 62nd ROK (Republic of Korea) Infantry Regiment was assumed as elements of the 62nd ROK relieved the 3rd Battalion 5th Regimental Combat Team on the line.

The 555 continued until February 21, 1953, at which time the 160th Field Artillery Battalion, 45th Infantry Division Artillery assumed the mission of Direct support of the 62nd ROK Infantry Regiment.

On March 23, 1953, the 19th Battalion Combat Team came off the line and the 555 retained only the mission of direct support of the 5th Infantry. This mission continued until the 5th RTC was relieved by the 224th Infantry Regiment, 40th Infantry Division on April 15, 1953, at which time the 555 remained in position in direct support of the 224th.

On April 19, nine months to the day after occupying position in the Punch Bowl, the 555 was relieved by the 980th Field Artillery Battalion, 40th Division Artillery and moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of Toko-li with the remainder of the 5th RTC.

On April 21 the 5th RCT moved to the IX Corps sector and was attached to the 3rd Infantry Division, with the 555th occupying position in the vicinity of Choom-ni midway between Chorwon and Kumwha where heavy fighting occurred during June and early July before the Armistice was signed.



Bob Hansen in the Kumwha Valley

Overview information gleaned from the Internet: To understand the role and importance that the artillery Forward Observer played during the Korean War, you must understand the challenges artillerymen had from the rolling hills and valleys, high-peaked mountains, large irrigated farming areas, brutal winters and boiling summers. Artillerymen loaded and fired the guns, handled the communications, tracked the enemy, served with the infantry, and sometimes gave their lives for their service.

Some Forward Observer Fire Request types are as follows:

Identification of the Observer. The fire direction center must know who is requesting fire. This can be a code name or any other method acceptable to the commander.

Azimuth. Direction which the observer is looking at the target. This is very important especially if the observer is at an angle to the direction of fire from the guns.

Target location. This location can be in many different forms. It can be identified as coordinates, range and azimuth from a known location, and range and direction from the observer to the target, or shift from a previously fired upon target and others. Circumstances determine what method the observer will use in identifying the location of the target.

Substance of the target. The fire request should identify the type of target for the fire direction to order the proper shell and fuse type.

These are examples of fire requests made by Forward Observers. They will vary in content but notice that they generally follow a set procedure in transmission. Not all fire missions were done in this format, taking into account the expediency of the mission being called.

FIRE MISSION #1. Observer is from Able Battery, and is their second Observer. Target is small group of enemy setting up a mortar. The target is in an area easily identified on a map and the coordinates of the target can be determined with some degree of accuracy but adjustment will be necessary.

Request #1: "Fox Oboe Able No. 2, Fire Mission! Azimuth 2300, coordinates 236-421, enemy mortar digging in. Will adjust!" The Fire Direction Center transmits confirmation to the firing battery and will repeat the information, adding such information as "Battery one round in effect". This means the eventual fire for effect will be six rounds, one round per tube. The initial fire would be two rounds fired simultaneously which the observer would adjust from the center of the burst of the two rounds. The classic adjustment would be a left or right adjustment to get the rounds on line with his line of sight and the target.

From there he would give add or drop with the first adjustment of 400 yards; then 200 yards followed by 100 yards and then an add or drop of 50 yards, then the command "Fire for effect" is given. This method was generally used but after becoming familiar with the target area a Forward Observer would quite often make adjustments for line of sight along with the initial add or drop and many times the initial rounds would be within 100 to 200 yards of the target.

FIRE MISSION #2. Observer is from Baker Battery and is the Observer number 1. Target is near Check Point 210. The target is enemy squad in open.

Request #2: "Fox Oboe Baker No. 1, Fire Mission! Azimuth 3200, from Check Point #210, right 300 add 500, Enemy squad in open, will adjust!" The Fire Direction Center transmits confirmation adding such information as "Battery one round fuse VT in effect."

FIRE MISSION #3. Observer is from Charlie Battery and is the Observer number 1. Target is 1000 yards from the observer. The target is an enemy bunker.

Request #3: "Fox Oboe Charley No. 1 Fire Mission! Azimuth 0400, Coordinates 234-146, Range 1500, enemy bunker, request precision fire, will adjust!" Fire direction transmits confirmation and adds such information as "Precision fire, fuse delay in effect."

The battery will fire one round on adjustment and then when fire for effect is called for, the guns will fire fuse delay and a succession of rounds will be fired with the Observer reporting the landing point of each round in regards to the target. Fire Direction Center will average 'overs', 'shorts', 'lefts', and 'rights' to make corrections until the target is destroyed.

FIRE MISSION #4. Observer is from Charlie Battery and is the Observer number 2. Enemy is in attack on a front of some 500 yards. The Observer sends estimated target center and calls for additional fire.

Request #4: "Fox Oboe Charley No. 2, Azimuth 2800, coordinates 354-456. Spread sheaf 500 yards, enemy infantry in attack. Request all available fire!"

Fire direction responds by repeating the request to the Observer and adds: "One battalion in initial fire, requesting support from Corps. Report observation!"

Artillery Forward Observers surely did not win the war. But the power and responsibility that was placed into a twenty-two or twenty-three year-old's hands was amazing to say the least. One call on a field radio or EE8 field phone could bring in more destructive power than an entire company (and sometimes battalion) of infantry. For those FOs that had the distinction of calling in a DIVARTY or Corps shoot where all available artillery within reach of the target was at their disposal, the terms most used to describe the experience was "awesome" and "unbelievable" when the destructive power is witnessed. Many a Chinese and North Korean soldier lost their lives, and many U.S., ROK, and UN lives were saved, by a man who did not even pull a trigger.

We now go into some memories Bob has while serving as a forward observer and also in the back with Battery B. The exact timelines will not be listed since this information is only intended to give the reader an idea of the day to day life Bob had while serving in Korea over sixty years ago. As with all memories there may be some aspects stated in generalizations but are to the best of Bob's memory.

When Bob's name is mentioned during his forward observation duties, he was working in concert with two other men in the bunkers, but to simplify the story, either Bob or FOs will generally be listed.



Battery B base "Outpost Harry"

There were three men at the forward Observation Post (OP) - a Lieutenant, Asberry, and Bob Hansen were forward observers and served with the 5th RTC, Battery B, also called the "Bastard Outfit," because they supported so many different battalions and infantry.

These three forward observers (FOs) directed fire for B battery. There were three batteries in the Triple Nickel, "A" Able, "B" Baker, and "C" Charley. The enemy targets were generally several miles away from Bob's forward observation bunker.

They were moved to a number of locations while serving near a jagged and uneven 155-mile front line called the "Main Line of Resistance" between North Korea and South Korea. Initially, Bob was positioned as forward observer in the Punch Bowl. During this time there were also tanks from the infantry that were dug in near their bunker. Even though Bob was not connected to the tank group he would assist them.

They had wired communication between each other. One time, when communication wire was being strung out by a wire section crew to connect to the tank group, Bob heard 50 caliber machine gun fire on the other end where they were working, and fortunately the enemy had not yet sighted Bob's location. Bob reported the area where this gun fire was coming from so the American batteries could lay down some suppressive fire power to drive the enemy back.

Bob would also observe when/where the enemy would fire from their post and pass that information to the tank group. They would fire, then Bob would tell them right or left of the actual target...the tank group would then adjust and fire again...then Bob would let them know if they hit their target. It didn't take very long for them to find their target. The desire was to do this quickly so the enemy wasn't able to locate the Americans and then fire at them. Even though the tanks were dug in, many times they would back out after firing...just in case the enemy spotted their location and returned fire. Even though this tank group was not there to support the forward observers, Bob stated that "It was nice to have them there!"

About once a week while at the forward observation post the FOs were transported by jeep or truck back to base camp in the morning to shower and eat a hot meal, and then return to the forward post before nightfall. During the rest of the week they were brought a meal during noon each day, otherwise they ate C-rations. One of the main drivers who transported Bob back and forth was Corporal George Hyatt from Chicago.