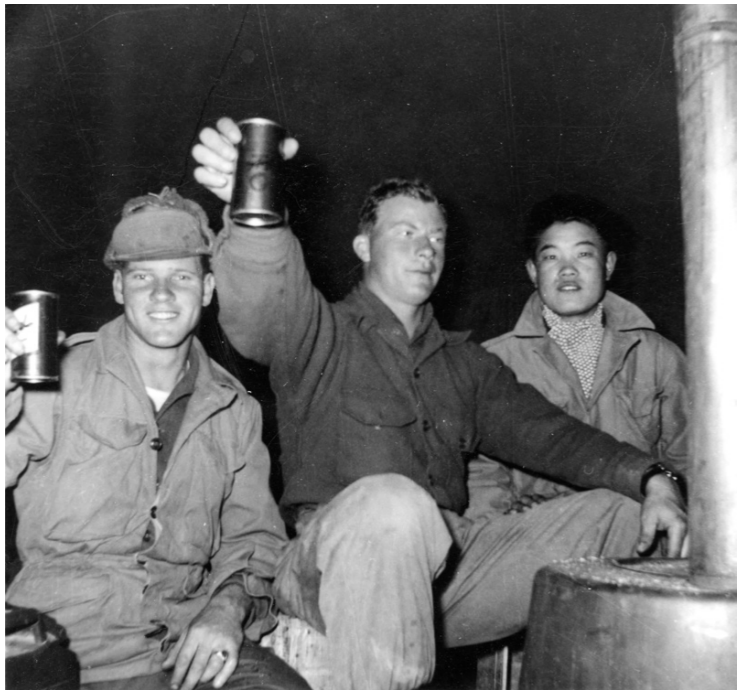


Korean War Veterans feature Robert Hansen continues



George Hyatt (left) with Doc William Crist

The FOs used a BC scope that reached up out of the bunker (like a submarine periscope) to observe the enemy and locations of explosions. Bob would radio the Fire Direction Center (FDC) what he observed during the battle.



Hill on the left was a lineman for Battery B, James Johnson in the middle was from Alabama, and unknown Korean who served with them. Note the heater (right) inside the tent.

As soon as the line crews were able, they strung phone lines back to the (FDC) so the communication between each location was instant. While using a radio, there were pauses between the communication, and they were battery operated which had limitations. Having direct wire communication would also prevent the enemy from listening in on the radio conversations. When B battery fired, Bob would report back where the air burst occurred and say right or left and adjust the distance. Then B battery would fire again. Bob would swing the scope 500 yards and radio back to the battery. If the air burst was within these two general target points then the order "fire for effect" was given by the commander and all three batteries that consisted of eighteen howitzers would fire over that area. They weren't looking for exact points since the artillery would explode overhead and cover that whole area with shrapnel.



B Battery - preparing their howitzers for the next battle

The shells were controlled by VT fuses (variable time fuse) which would explode them overhead when they were approximately forty yards above the ground in the target area.

Bob could hear these shells flying overhead but couldn't see them. One time a howitzer operator entered the incorrect information and the shell was fired short, which landed behind the bunker...Bob didn't know how close it actually was but obviously surprised them. So they immediately reported back "short round" and that howitzer was shut down until they readjusted the settings.

When it was foggy they generally couldn't fire the howitzers using the VT fuse because the shell could prematurely explode right after it exited the end of the barrel.

Both sides (US and Koreans/Chinese) wanted the high ground so there were constant skirmishes and fire missions back and forth each day which could move the line of resistance slightly north or south, depending on who gained with their offensive.

The observation bunkers were completely protected with sand bags - even the roof. Though shelling occurred from both sides each day, it was mostly a stalemate with little movement one way or the other, and why the FOs were dug in with trenches and bunkers.

Each night the infantry would send out small squads on reconnaissance missions to spy on the enemy locations and their movements. Bob would meet with a Lieutenant in charge of these missions so he could inform them where their scouts were located. This way the batteries of the 555th could provide them fire support if needed, or fire to another location to distract the enemy during their missions.

While Bob's job was dangerous, he noted how those small squads had especially dirty and highly dangerous work. The scouts got close enough to smell the Chinese and Koreans who loved to eat food with a lot of garlic.

The 937th Field Artillery "155 millimeter Arkansas Long Toms" were positioned farther behind the 555 and also supported the infantry. Bob would also assist the 937 when they fired their artillery. The 155 Long Tom was more accurate than the howitzer and it didn't take long for them to zero in on their target...generally Bob had to only radio back once with the

location of the ground explosion.

Wayne Hansen, of Audubon, served with the Long Toms. After the Armistice was signed, Wayne came to Bob's location to visit one day.



June 1953 The morning after "Harry OP" The howitzers were protected by these bunkers during battle.

After serving at the forward observation post for about two months the 555 was moved to another location. Three other FOs replaced Bob and his two FOs so they stayed in back with Battery B and served in other duties...This was around the 4th of July. Bob "didn't like the looks of things" because he realized they were only 1700 yards behind the forward observation post. This location gave very little time for retreat should the enemy make an offensive move. Generally the batteries were back about two or three miles behind the observation post.

The US Navy would also fire offshore about twenty miles away into this area. US reconnaissance planes would fly over and direct fire for the Naval operations.

The only US helicopters used at this time were to remove the wounded and dead.

South Koreans who spoke English were used as translators. The two Koreans who worked with battery B both spoke English quite well - one was nicknamed "Goldie" because he had all gold teeth, and the other Korean was named "CP-1." Bob said Goldie was in his late 40s and was very intelligent...he had twelve children. Goldie was wounded in his arm when they were over-run on July 13, but he was able to return to his duties after about a month in recovery.



Korean helper "CP-1" (Command Post #1), Balcom, and Lancour (CP-1 was one of two Koreans who served with Battery B)

Koreans soldiers were constantly rotating in and out of Battery B. They were there for training on the howitzers and then later transferred to their Korean outfits to operate their howitzers.

Bob remembers a unit from Turkey serving in the same area as the 5th RTC. He noted how big these Turks were and that the Chinese were afraid of them because they carried swords.

While serving there for several months they were over-run after dark on July 13, 1953, by the Chinese People's Volunteer Army.

Supplies, including a beer ration, had just arrived at camp, and while Bob was having a drink the attack began. Bob remembered if his can of beer was still sitting where he left it. There was little time to react...A counter offensive began but soon became a direct fire situation. Bob said "we were lucky to get out of there alive."

The other forward observers who were in their bunkers during the over-run had to walk out on their own because no support teams could reach them.

Lieutenant Parkhurst was captured while at his forward position during the initial invasion. Bob got to know Parkhurst while at the battery position. About seven or eight months after Bob had returned home, while watching TV with his brother, Mel, about a US/North Korean prisoner swap, Bob saw Parkhurst exiting the plane along with other US prisoners. Next a surprising thing happened when Parkhurst was pulled to the side and interviewed by the member of a TV film crew, so Bob got to listen to his story. Up until this point Bob did not know if Parkhurst was killed during the Chinese offensive or survived as a prisoner.



USO show in the Iron Triangle - before the Armistice was signed

Back to the Chinese invasion:

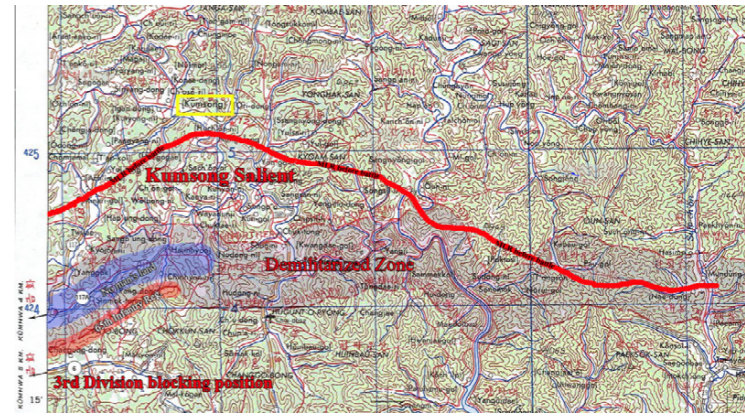
Bob was in charge of a detail squad with B battery and they were ordered to retreat back to guard the bridge during the night so A battery could retreat. B battery was located closest to this bridge.

The men of A battery were able to escape but had to destroy their howitzers with incendiaries before retreating so the enemy couldn't use them. Because of their location down in a valley they had a harder time retreating.

By this time, C battery had already crossed the bridge with their howitzers, but A battery was only able to save one of their howitzers.

Bob and the others lost their personal items, including all of Bob's pictures he had taken during that time. Bob's first sergeant was KIA, and fortunately the only death in these three batteries during that invasion.

They retreated about five miles and then the very next day Bob and his other two forward observers were ordered to another location to continue directing fire for the 9th Corps and the 1st R.O.K. (Republic of South Korea) Army who was also attempting to repel the enemy advancement.



The solid red line indicates the position of the Main Line of Resistance prior to the Battle of the Kumsong Salient on July 13, 1953.

With only 14 days before the cease fire that ended the shooting phase of the Korean War, Chinese Communist Forces launched their largest offensive of the last two years of the Korean War. Their intent was to remove a northward bulge of the MLR in the vicinity of the town of Kumsong.

The Chinese commanders threw at least five of their armies into the surprise assault: the 24th, 68th, and 60th already at the front, and the 54th brought up from the rear. 150,000 men in these units focused on a relatively narrow, twenty-mile sector of the front defended by six ROK divisions: the 6th, 8th, 3rd, and 5th from ROK II Corps, and the Capital and ROK 9th attached to the adjacent (western) U.S. IX Corps under Lt. General Reuben Jenkins. From west (left flank) to east, the ROK units were the 9th and the Capitol (Tiger) Divisions in the IX Corps sector, and the 6th, 8th, 3rd and 5th Divisions in the ROK II Corps sector.

The assault by the Chinese was aimed at the ROK Capitol Division, which was holding the sector on the right flank of the IX Corps, near Kumwha, the right leg of the Iron Triangle. The Capitol Division, nearly overwhelmed by three Chinese Divisions which broke through their lines and threatened complete envelopment, fell back in confusion."

Later in the day on the 14th, the Chinese broke through several places along the western side of the Capitol Division's front line. Further attacks caused the 1st Cavalry to disintegrate as a fighting force. The rest of the ROK Division, comprising the 26th Regiment, was ordered to fall back to the next prepared positions while under pressure from the 202nd CCF Division. As the Capitol Division was thus engaged...A major bug out began.

The Chinese divisions had pressed savagely against the ROK positions in the Kumsong bulge and had practically destroyed the ROK Capitol division and much of the ROK 3rd Division. Casualties on both sides were extremely heavy, because it was a stand-up fight directly on the main line of resistance with direct assaults by the communists into the heart of the ROK defensive positions. In this last, sad series of battles, thousands of young men died or were maimed for mere yards of territory. UN casualties for June and July 1953, were more than 52,000 men, mostly ROKs. Estimated casualties for communist troops in the same period were 108,000.

Cease fire

Once the Armistice was signed on July 27, 1953, the 5th RCT moved farther south to another location where they built a temporary basecamp along a road. It wasn't very long and they were ordered to move again to another temporary location.



Bob Hansen (left), Sergeant Stratton

Early in the morning during one of the many moves to a different location, the driver of a truck hauling US troops fell asleep and it rolled down a ravine. At the bottom the truck turned over and trapped the men who were riding in back. At the time of the incident, Bob was in the truck behind so he saw the whole thing happen.

Bob and other men had to work their way down to the truck. At the bottom they crawled through a culvert to get to the injured men.

Bob and others had to crawl under the truck to help get the wounded men out from under the vehicle. The men who were wounded the worst, at first, didn't want to be moved (broken bones and other painful injuries) but there was a fear of the leaking gas catching fire so they had no choice but to pull them out.

Then they had to carry the wounded men back through the culvert and up the hill on stretchers where a helicopter could land.

Bob doesn't remember the exact number of men involved in the accident (20 or 30) because it was one of the most traumatic events he had experienced in Korea. It was difficult for him to deal with, even many years later during his interview for this article.

Heading home

In February of 1954, Bob returned to the U.S. From their last basecamp they loaded onto trucks and were taken to a train station and headed south to Pusan (Busan in 2015).