

When I worked on the WWI & WWII Veterans and the military eras before, I was able to find lots of pictures and information because the old-time Manning area families were still around.

Over the last 20+ years most of those old families have died out...so I have no moms & dads or grandmas & grandpas to go to locally anymore to ask for pictures and information that they had been preserving for generations and who intensely appreciated the history they had in their possession.

Now that old historical source is gone for me in this area. The pictures and history that were once readily available to me here in Manning were either thrown away, or divided up by the next generation who inherited those things and then they took them to the four winds.

Needless to say I have no idea who would have that history now or where they live.

The new problem arising is this next generation, many of whom were born, grew up, and went to school in Manning and inherited their parents/grandparents' history are passing away.

The younger generation who is now inheriting what's left of the old Manning history do not live here and for the most part were not born in the Manning area, so they have a lot less interest in their roots that started in Manning.

Unless I can get my hands on what's left of this history, it won't be much longer and there will be basically nothing left.

This is a major reason why I am trying to get pictures and information about every Manning connected Veteran and include it in the Manning Veterans' book and the Manning historical database I'm building.

This first Veteran feature is a perfect example of what I described above. The old-time family is gone and no one from that family lives in the area...many of them have passed away, so it will be a struggle to find pictures and information about his service. The information I have which is from various sources have conflicting facts. I have e-mailed one of the siblings to see if they can help, but as I mentioned, none of the family is around here anymore which slows up the progress on the book.

#50 Michael J. Kasperbauer (no pictures, no write-up, just some bits and pieces of history)

I hesitate in showing this picture...while it is Mike, he is wearing a WWII Navy uniform that he wore in a local pageant.

He served in the Army and by showing him in a different uniform can be confusing unless the reader notices the previous information.

The picture came from his sister, Marian's collection that I scanned years ago. Fortunately, Marian noticed that this picture was not part of his military service and when she told me that he was in a style show/pageant and displayed this uniform.

BUT it is a nice picture of him and why I'm using it for now.



Mike Kasperbauer wearing a WWII Navy uniform for display during a style show.

Mike is the son of John and Clara Kasperbauer. I was able to scan Clara's memoirs and this is where I found some of Mike's military information. Marian also had a newspaper clipping about Mike's ROTC service and I have his obituary...the problem is there is conflicting information so hopefully I will be able to find out what is correct in the near future.

Page 119 Clara's memoirs part 1

He was an advanced R.O.T.C. student and received his Second Lieutenant Commission in this organization.

Page 2 Clara's memoirs part 2

In the winter quarter of 1951, Mike entered Iowa State College. He continued his studies and in May 1954 he received his B.S. degree in Agricultural Education and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army Signal Corps.

He served in the Army at Fort Gordon, Georgia, until 1956. While at the base, he was assigned to the Southeastern Signal School as a staff officer.

After his honorable discharge he returned to Iowa State where he received his M.S. degree in Agricultural Education on June 15, 1957.

Obituary

After his undergraduate degree, he served our country as Captain in the United States Army during the Korean War.

Mike Kasperbauer Ends ROTC Course July 1953

CAMP GORDON, GEORGIA. - Michael S. Kasperbauer, Iowa State college student and son of Mr. and Mrs. John

Kasperbauer of Manning, Iowa, has just completed six weeks training with the signal corps reserve officers training corps summer camp. He was one of approximately 1,100 cadets in training here. Attendance at summer camp is required before the ROTC cadets become eligible for commissions in the reserve.

Training emphasis is placed on application of theories previously studied in college classrooms. Combat lessons learned in Korea and World War II were driven home by instructor personnel who are veterans of those wars. Each cadet has installed and operated radio and wire networks comparable to those used in an infantry division, and each student has been rotated through command position to test his ability as a leader.

There is never enough time to get to everyone about their military service but on two occasions which I hated to do, we visited with two different Veterans who were literally on their death-beds.

One was Marvin Gaer and his son-in-law, talked to Marvin about his military service - at my request.

The other Veteran was Meryl Kerkhoff. Sally Hodne interviewed him shortly before he passed away. I followed up with Meryl several times getting some pictures and captions.

As I began working on his information for this article I ran across the interview that his grandson, Jared Kerkhoff, had done with Meryl in 1995.

It is interesting about some of the various aspects that they talked about versus what Sally gleaned from Meryl. There was a lot of similar information but both interviews had different perspectives. So now the challenge for me is to combine both interviews, but I'm so glad that Jared visited with his grandpa, because he did get some interesting stories from Meryl that Sally did not have.

I write about this to give a heads-up to any child or grandchild who may have interviewed a relative about his/her military background.

Please submit this information, too, if you have it on file about a Veteran in your family.

#51 Meryl Kerkhoff (several pictures, detailed write-up)



Meryl Kerkhoff fought for almost nine months of his two years of military service on the battlefield in South Korea. He remarked that he never prayed so hard in his life as when he was there and described the fact that he came home alive as being "one lucky man."

Meryl was born on January 17, 1929, to Alphons and Frances (Bluml) Kerkhoff and grew up near Templeton. He spent all his school days at Sacred Heart Elementary and Sacred Heart High School, graduating in 1946. Meryl's memories of World War II include that the junior and senior boys were allowed to miss classes for three weeks in the fall to help pick corn. They got full credit for the classes they missed.



Back: Keith, Scott, Dan, Ron; Front: Marty, Meryl, Imelda, Mary

Meryl married Imelda Grossman on December 26, 1950. The Korean War was waging and on May 9, 1951, he was drafted. One of the hardest times of his life was when he had to leave his wife, Imelda, who was two months pregnant with their first child, and go to basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He trained there for eight weeks in engineering, and then received instruction as a noncommissioned officer so that he could become a squad leader and instruct new trainees.

One of the happiest yet sad times of his life was seeing Imelda and his new-born son, Marty, before heading to Korea on June 4, 1952. The trip took twenty-eight days by ship. His company left from Camp Stallman, Washington, to the Philippines, next to Yokohama and then Tokyo in Japan, and then to the seaside port of Pusan, Korea. There the men boarded a train for Seoul and from there were taken to the front lines. Meryl served as a foot soldier and machine gunner with the Third Battalion, Second Infantry, in Love Company.



Three submarines and a ship in the Port of Pusan, Korea

Meryl's first impression of Korea was that it was a desolate land of hills and mountains, much like the Loess hills in Iowa, only much taller. Everything had been blown up by artillery... the villages and vegetation were in ruins.

Meryl's group was divided into four sections, we'll call them 1, 2, 3, and 4. There was always one group in reserve. There would be three sections on the front line: those in the very front, those in the middle, and those in the back. If 1, 2, and 3 were in the field, 4 would be in reserve. When 4 went out, they would take the place of 3, 3 would move up and take 2's place,

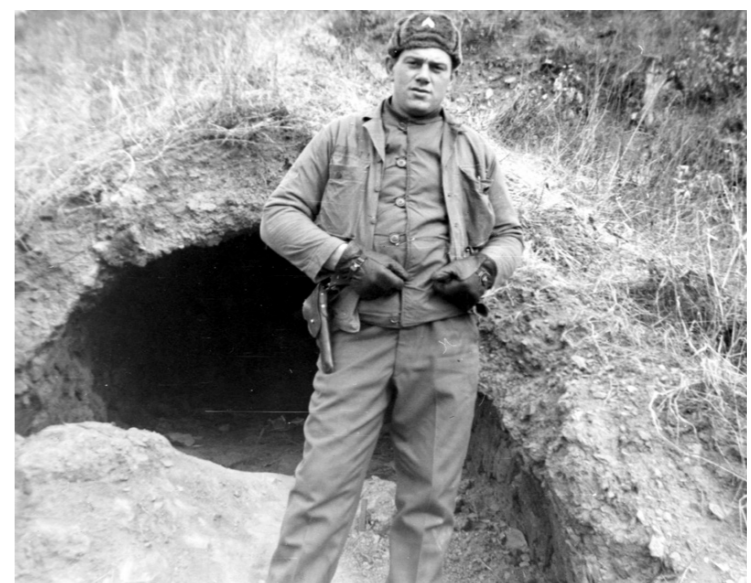
and 2 to 1. Number 1 would go into reserve until the next rotation. The men had to put in thirty-six rotations on the front before they could go home. This could usually be done in a little over a year. Because of this set-up, when you were in the front two lines, you had North Korean mortars coming at you from the front and American mortars going over you from the back.



Enemy territory in the background

The battles were fought on hills that had names. Meryl's first engagement was "Old Baldy" next to the infamous "Pork Chop Hill." He also fought on "Hill 281" and a hill called the "Hook." The only way to fight on these hills was by foot because if tanks tried to crawl up the hills they could tip over or run off their tracks. The soldiers wore steel or bullet proof vests. When the North Koreans made progress over a hill, the U.S. and South Korean forces would push them back. The Americans would make progress, and then the North Koreans would push them back. "That's how the war was fought - never a big invasion. Never either side progressing," as Meryl recalled.

Meryl carried an air-cooled machine gun. Two ammo carriers and a soldier who carried a tripod, on which to set the gun, were always with him. One time when Meryl was on the front line, there was an explosion right in front of his machine gun. It was so close that his helmet was blown off, and for a few seconds he thought his head was blown off also. He was very lucky that it was just the helmet.



Meryl in front of a fox hole dug out in the side of a rocky hill.

Life on the front line was very rough and Meryl was never really stationed anywhere specific and most of the battles were at night time.

Some of the time they lived in tents in camps near the hills but they also spent many nights sleeping in bunkers. The bunkers would act as small bomb shelters when they placed rocks around the perimeter of the fox hole because the shrapnel would hit the rocks before it would hit the men. Meryl said they would have to leave their hole to get to their machine gun post and most of the time he operated the machine gun. The other men would dig around the person operating the machine gun. Meryl chuckled when he said "You'd be surprised how fast you can dig a hole with your helmet when you are scared as hell." Meryl would comment about digging holes years later while working on the farm south of Manning when his boys and grandsons were digging fence post holes - he would tell them that you've never dug a hole unless you've dug it with a helmet and you were scared. Meryl also teased them that they would have never survived in Korea because the boys dug their holes too slow.

During the first night Meryl pulled guard duty, there were just two of them. The other soldier's name was George West and he was experienced at pulling guard duty. West was showing Meryl the art of booby trapping and was setting a trap by himself about twenty feet from where Meryl was when West was targeted by a sniper. West was not hit but was captured by the sniper and the last thing Meryl heard was a yell. They never found his body or heard from him again. That incident, terrified Meryl so that he would set his booby traps in record time when he would get back on the front lines during each rotation.

Meryl had one occasion where he captured a Prisoner of War during a battle. The man was sitting up against a tree with a wounded leg. He wasn't armed but had a knife. Meryl took him at gun point and brought him back to camp. He said most P.O.W.s were a burden because the US soldiers had to dress their wounds and take care of them.



Meryl's squad

When they rotated back to base camp, someone would have to guard it at night; generally two to four soldiers. Meryl reflected, "You couldn't believe how lonely it could get at four o'clock in the morning. Those cold, wet, and rainy nights in Korea were some of the loneliest times of my life." He continued, "These were also some of the worst times because you had nothing but time to think." He said it was always good to try and keep busy somehow, and some of the soldiers would drive themselves insane by thinking about where they were and what might happen to them. This would also be a time when a soldier would question whether what they were doing was right or not.

Meryl Kerkhoff continues on page 2