

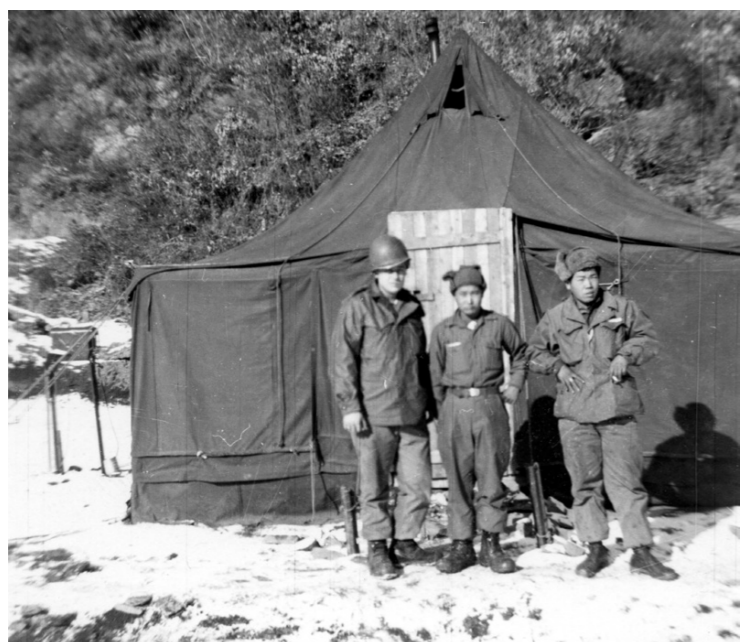
To keep himself busy, Meryl said he would write a two-page letter to Imelda, each night by candlelight. He tried to keep his letters positive and was always afraid it might be the last letter she'd receive. Mail was very slow and sometimes letters would take one or two weeks get to their destination. They received mail from a carrier who would run from foxhole to foxhole to deliver the letters.



Meryl during the winter

Setting booby traps was a constant job. The soldiers who pulled guard duty were instructed to only set five or six traps a night and many times they had a hard time remembering where they had placed them. When they were finished with their guard duty they would have to either show the next person where the traps were or dismantle them so the next U.S. soldier would not stumble into them. Most of the traps used trip wires that were attached to a grenade. Some traps were as simple as tying cans to a string so they would hear the enemy coming.

Meryl had some interesting experiences with snipers the first couple of weeks he was in Korea. The third night he and his fellow soldiers were digging a bunker while a sniper was shooting at them and they could not find his location. They tried many times to find him with field glasses but were unsuccessful. They finally called in artillery and "cleaned him out," as Meryl stated it. He said at the time he didn't realize what was going on because he just thought that was the way war was and you were constantly getting fired at.



Tiej from Omaha, Chan, and Kim

Before they would fight a battle, several soldiers would have to scout out the hill they were trying to take over. Meryl said it was usually a nine-man patrol; the slang term they used for this expedition was a "Suicide Patrol" because rarely would everyone come back alive. This is when Meryl learned to paint his face dark and crawl quietly. He also learned to slide his feet through water so he didn't make any splashing noises. These patrols were used to scout out the terrain they were going to encounter and to determine how many enemy troops there were and preparing to respond against the U.S. troop movements. Many times the Suicide Patrol saved the 200 men, who were positioned back at base camp, from being overrun by a surprise enemy attack.

Meryl went on many patrols while in Korea and he vividly remembers one in particular because the next day his division was scheduled for an attack but no one was sent out on patrol to determine enemy numbers and locations. Many of the U.S. soldiers felt they would be outnumbered during this mission and finally talked their commander into forming a patrol. When the patrol reached the top of the hill and scouted the enemy numbers and location, Meryl said the U.S. troops were easily outnumbered three to one. When the men from the patrol reported back as to what they saw, the offensive was called off until more troops could be called in for extra support. Meryl exclaimed during the interview, "We would have got our asses kicked the next day, without that extra support!"



Meryl shaving

Meryl described taking over a hill as "Operation Confusion" because although the U.S. military won't admit it, many of the casualties were caused by friendly fire. Taking over a hill was pretty simple he said because once you got to the top of it, it was yours. The thing that frustrated him the most about the Korean War was that you won a hill one day and the next day you could lose it, because the North Koreans would regroup and come back. He said they never knew when the enemy was going to strike because they would attack at all hours of the day or night. He said there was never much time to relax during the war because even after a battle there was police call. "Police Call" was when they had to pick up their dead after a hard-fought battle.

Another vivid memory Meryl had was during the morning when they were called up to the front lines and told to put on their bayonets for a mission; but it was fortunately cancelled when they arrived.

Another time Meryl's luck held out was when he was ordered to go out on a patrol with six other men in the squad. They did not want to go on this patrol but left reluctantly. Two of the men were South Koreans. When they were digging their

bunker, the South Koreans were standing up, but the Americans were lying down because they were so afraid. While Meryl and the other American soldiers were out on patrol, the bunker was hit by artillery and the two South Koreans were killed. When they returned to the bunker, one of the officers turned his face away from the bunker so he wouldn't see the gruesome scene. While out in the field, the soldiers slept in foxholes or bunkers. Fighting the enemy was difficult, but dealing with the monsoon rains seemed to make it twice as hard. Keeping clean was nearly impossible and changing their socks often was a must, because if you didn't do this you were guaranteed to get foot rot.



Mann, Merle Kerkhoff, Chang

3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) "Rock Of The Marne!" This chapel is also where the leaders of the various squads met to discuss military plans. Merle took a three-day course on being a squad leader but never submitted to become one.

Meryl also fought in the cold of winter. The soldiers wore thermal boots, but their feet still got extremely cold. Meryl said, however, that he was lucky to be there in the winter of 1952 because the winters of 1951 and 1953 were much colder. The front line was considered a stationary area which meant no one was allowed off the line unless they were shot or injured. Many soldiers wanted to quit, but they were forced to fight. If they backed off the line or refused to move forward, they were told they would be shot. Many of the front line soldiers were negative and bitter. It was very difficult to find anything positive to rally around.

On April 15, 1953, Meryl was taken from the hills and was given light duty away from the front lines. His last assignment as a soldier was to guard fuel barrels at camp... He felt like this was a big break.



Meryl on left holding a sign signifying four aces and the logo "Winners Take All."

All promotions were frozen during the war to save the U.S. government money because the higher you were ranked the more money your family could receive. Meryl was paid more money because he had a wife and child. He received \$127 a month basic pay and \$50 bonus a month for being on the front lines; "Foxhole Pay" as some called it. Meryl sent half of the money back home because there was little need for it where he was located during most of the war.

Meryl became good friends with his ammo carriers, Jeff Goss, from Crossville, Tennessee, Howard Silverstein of New York, and the tripod carrier, a Korean soldier, Sun Ho Tek. One night when they were out in the field, Meryl woke up about 2 a.m. and Jeff had decided to take Meryl's gun apart and clean it. The problem was that it was too dark to see to put it back together. Of course Meryl was quite alarmed with this, but when there was enough daylight he reassembled it. They were just thankful that there were no raids during the night.

Norbert Sturm, from Carroll County, was a friend of Meryl, and when he found out they were in the same vicinity, Norbert convinced his commanding officer to let him take a jeep and go visit Meryl. Meryl was out in the field, and when Norbert was about half-way up to the front lines, he decided he wasn't going to take the chance, so he turned around and went back to his base. There were several other Carroll County men who were in Korea at that time and they all returned to Iowa safely.



Meryl was 13th in the rotation list home - he is pointing to his name and rank on the rotation sheet.

There were around 100 possible names in this rotation list. Meryl said it was a good feeling when he reached 13th when this picture was taken. Generally three men were rotated out & in every two or three weeks.

Meryl served his thirty-six rotations in eight months and three weeks; however, to rotate out of the zone, he and two other men had to ride a two and a half ton truck back to the combat line one more time. Meryl said they did lots of praying

that they would be lucky this final time.

Meryl was transferred to Incheon, went through Seoul, then to Sasebo, Japan, back to Tokyo and then to Seattle, Washington, by boat. He jokingly says he spent forty-five days on a ship and wasn't even in the Navy. He went by train from Seattle to Camp Carson, Colorado, where he was discharged from the Army. From there he went by train to Omaha, and was, at last, back in Iowa.

Meryl was honorably discharged on April 25, 1953, with the rank of Corporal.



Meryl in front of the 2nd Infantry Division Rotation Center

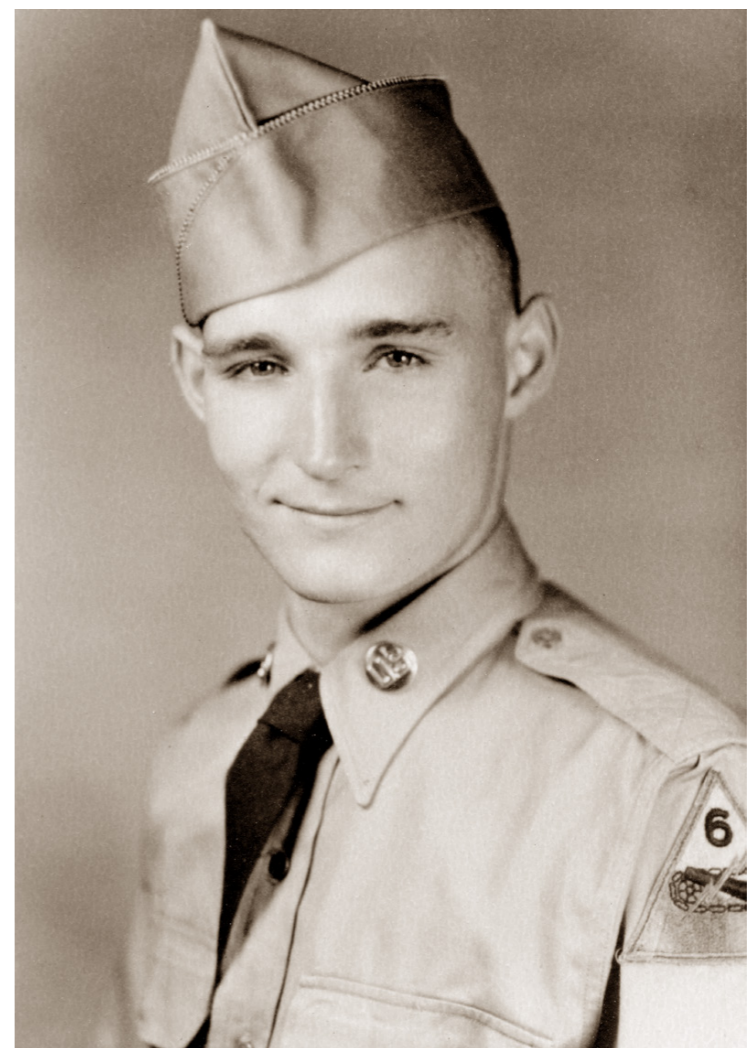
The war ended shortly after he got home. Meryl described the Korean War as the "Forgotten War" because when the troops returned home there was no celebration for them. This did not really bother Meryl because he was just happy to be alive, uninjured, and see his wife, Imelda, and son, Marty, who was now seventeen months old and walking. During the war, Ben Grossman, Imelda's father, took care of them. At first it was hard for Meryl to get re-acquainted with Marty but as the days went by it was like he was never gone.

After his time in the service, Meryl started farming south of Manning and spent two nights a week attending the G.I. school for farm training. When he had to pick a subject, he chose auctioneering. One of his good friends told him, "he'd never make it" as an auctioneer. Meryl did "make it" and celebrated fifty-one years of auctioneering and his eightieth birthday on January 17, 2009.

Leland Kienast, who we are featuring next passed away in 1999, and unfortunately no formal military story was recorded. I have a basic write-up right now but in 2011 I scanned his military scrapbook so I have quite a few pictures and other items and documents to work with. For now I'll post his basic story and show a few pictures but won't work on the full formal story until a later date.

Leland comes from a very patriotic family with his dad, John, who served during WWII. He also had four brothers who served: Elmer, Harvey, LeRoy and Maynard.

#52 Leland Kienast (several pictures, basic write-up, working on a detailed write-up)

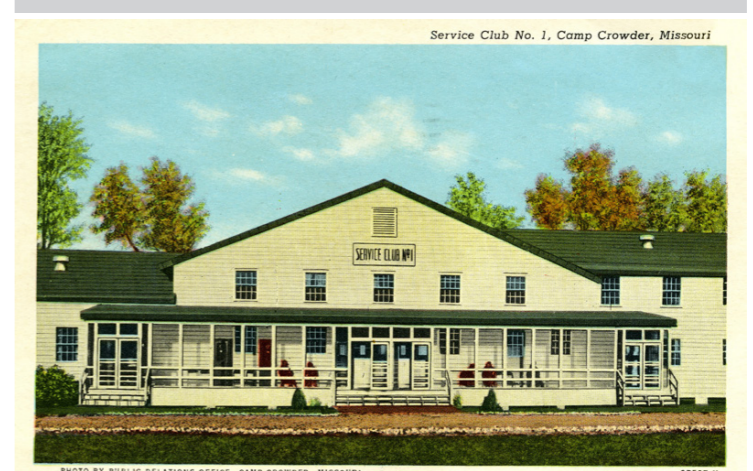


Leland H. Kienast was born May 4, 1933, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Kienast. He was educated in the Manning Schools graduating in 1950. He enlisted in the army May 5, 1953, and took his training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He was a Combat Construction Specialist receiving the National Defense Service medal during his two-year stint in the army. On May 5, 1955, Leland transferred to the Army Reserve, Iowa Military District, where he served until May 15, 1961. He was honorably discharged at that time having achieved the rank of Corporal E-4. Leland passed away on May 12, 1999.

Leland was married to Genelle (Kruse) Kienast until July 11, 1994, when she passed away. He then married Marla (Lamaack) Nissen in March 1995. Leland and Genelle had two sons; Tim and Bary, both residents of Manning along with their families.

Using the basic military information I was provided by Leland's sons, I can use the pictures and documents from his scrapbook to build onto this basic story.

This takes time on my end and why I'm always asking the living Veterans to work with their family members on the military story now. Then contact me so I can get that information and also pictures to scan and edit.



From Leland's scrapbook I discovered that he was inducted into the Army at Camp Crowder, Missouri, before going to Fort Leonard Wood for basic training.

After a time at Fort Leonard Wood he was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, for a phys of schooling as a physical training instructor, then he returned to Fort Leonard Wood.

Leland Kienast continues next week.