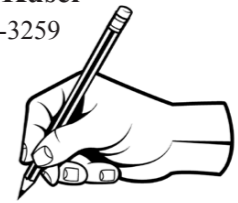




The Manning Exchange

Where Past & Present Meet

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History and current events are shared and preserved.

Manning Veterans of the Korean War

For several years I have been featuring the WWII Veterans of the Manning area. The final number I came up with is 601 Veterans from Manning. There are probably more and if I become aware of them I'll add their names to the database.

Even though we are now moving on to the Korean War, I still have hundreds of WWII Veterans who I have very little if any information and pictures. If anyone has pictures and information for a WWII Veteran then now is the time to come forward so we can work together and I can scan and digitize your information in preparation for the publication of the Manning Veterans' history book.

Before I start listing the Manning Veterans of the Korean War alphabetically, I want to feature a full story we have for one of those Veterans - Robert Wegner.

We were fortunate to get Robert's story because during the year of his interview and editing of his information, Robert passed away. So often I am too late and a Veteran passes away before I find time to work with him.

Please remember that while you may not think it is important to be included in the Manning Veterans' project...as a book about the community that will feature over 1000 area Veterans...it is important to feature everyone...the book is not about any one individual but will show pride in a community that has given its blood and treasure to help preserve our freedoms.

25 Manning men gave their lives in defense of our country. They were never given the chance to tell their stories so we need to tell it for them as best we can in the Manning Veterans' book. I hope everyone who served will come forward with their stories so we can collectively honor the fallen with a complete two-volume (1088 page) Manning Veterans' book.

Please keep in mind that not all of the pictures and information in this article about Robert Wegner will be used in the Manning Veterans' history book. Not until the time of laying out the book will I be able to determine how much room there will be for each Veteran's story.

The good thing though, is that all of the data I have scanned from each Veteran will be preserved in the Manning historical database I'm also working on, so nothing will be discarded.

Now we begin with Robert Wegner's story. Please read his information to get ideas for YOUR military story.

Robert Wegner - Korea

Interview by Nancy Stammer, July 16, 2012

Robert Wegner is the son of Edwin "Brownie" and Lolida (Schroeder) Wegner, who farmed southwest of Manning. He was married to Shirley Hansen and they had seven children: Debra Snyder, Carroll, Tom, Manning, David, Des Moines; Nancy Tunender, Manning; Dale, Sac City, Bruce, Des Moines; and Kyle, Des Moines. There are twelve grandchildren.



12 Crawford County Men Go Into Service Nov 17, 1950

Twelve county youths left Denison Friday morning for Omaha where they were inducted into the Army. They are Delbert Ebert, William Ahart, Robert Ahart, William Ballantine, all of Denison; Gordon Podey, Deloit; Donald Nelson, Dunlap; Verren York, Mapleton; Robert Wegner, Manning; Jay Wingrove, Dow City; Warren Noelck and Warren Wulf, Westside, and John Lorenzen, Manilla.

Original article from the Denison newspaper November 17, 1950. For the record (it may not be legible in this reprint) but the man on the far right was identified as John Lorenzen...At his birth his legal name was Johnnie Junior Lorenzen, and he later had his name changed legally to Jack Junior Lorenzen. I called Jack's wife, Wava, to find out why the name was listed as John in the Denison article...wondering if it might have been an error and that is when I found out the background of Jack's name.

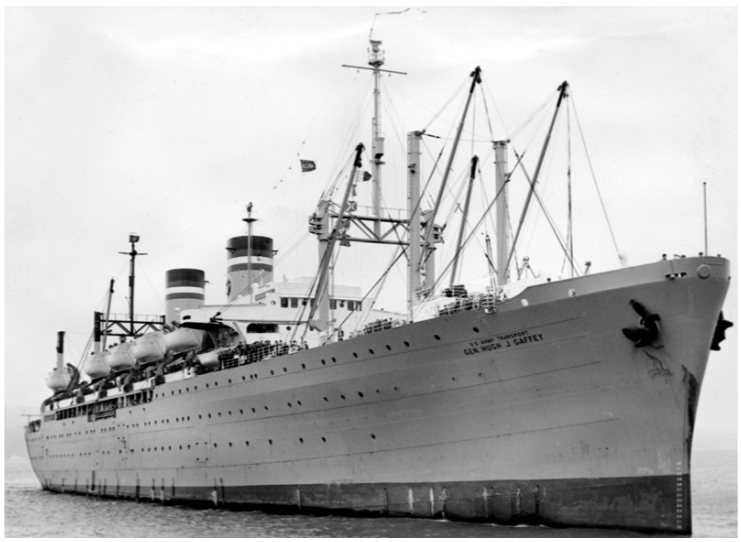
Twelve young men from Crawford County, including Robert Wegner, rural Manning, left for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in November 1950. They were a part of the second draft call of the Korean War, and knew that their likely destination would be the peninsula which had been involved in war since June of that year.

At the age of 22, Bob had been working for Herb Hass Construction. He knew many of the others shown in the photo - especially Gordon Podey of Deloit, John "Jack" Lorenzen of Manilla, and Warren Wulf of Westside. They all went into the 2nd Battalion but were split into different regiments, sometimes by ABC order and sometimes by skill. Lorenzen, a mechanic, went into the motor pool. Podey went to the 19th Infantry. Wulf and Wegner went to the 21st Infantry, where Wulf was assigned to 81mm mortars and Wegner to heavy weapons, Company C. Several of the Crawford County men were sent to Germany instead of Korea. Bob lost track of the others as the training started at Fort Leonard Wood, which had just been reopened August 1, 1950, to provide basic and engineering training to soldiers on their way to Korea.



Gordon Podey, Jack Lorenzen, Robert Wegner Fort Leonard Wood

In March, the troops were given a leave to come home. When they returned, all four companies, more than 400 soldiers, were loaded onto a troop train at Kansas City, and they spent the next week headed for California. They slept in bunks stacked four high. From California, they boarded the USS General Hugh J. Gaffey, and were shipped to Japan April 11, 1951.



General Hugh J. Gaffey. Bob and 300 men (called military casualties) from Fort Leonard Wood left San Francisco (sailed under the Golden Gate bridge), along with the California 40th National Guard to Sendai, Japan, where the 40th took training; Bob's group continued on to Yokohama.

After arriving at Yokohama, they moved by train to the south of Japan, and then taken by barge to Korea. By then, the soldiers were "soft" and they were required to undergo "Advanced Training" - five days of constant running, up and down the hilly, mountainous Korean landscape. "After that, if you were told you were going to the Front Line, you were glad because you were so tired of running," Bob said.

In Korea, they were in the 2nd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. Bob was in H Company. The 24th Division was the first to fight in Korea.

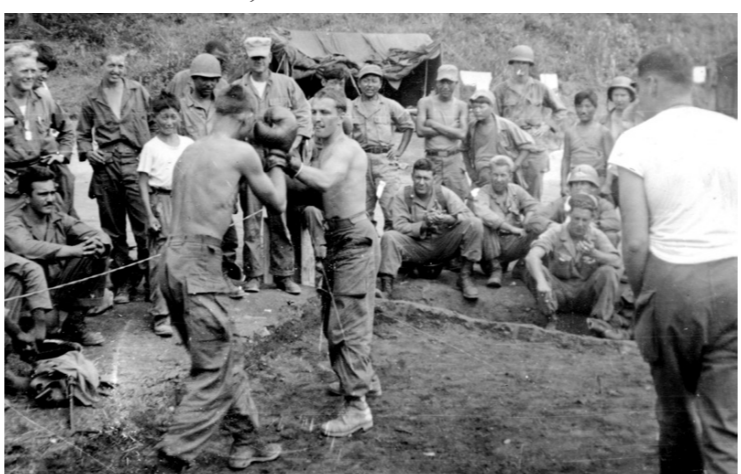
The Korean War was the result of the political division of Korea at the end of World War II. Previously ruled by the Empire of Japan until 1945, the peninsula was divided roughly in half along the 38th parallel. The capitalist southern Republic of Korea was supported primarily by the United States of America, with contributions from allied nations of the United Nations; the communist northern Democratic People's Republic of Korea was supported by the People's Republic of China, with military and material aid from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The 38th Parallel was the dividing line between North and South Korea, and border skirmishes and raids had persisted since WWII had ended. The situation escalated into open warfare when North Korean forces invaded South Korea June 25, 1950, and UN troops - 88% from the United States - were called in to help South Korea repel the invasion. The defenders were nearly driven out of their country by September 1950. John Miller from Manning was one of the US troops attempting to hold the line, and his unit was forced to the ocean. With the US and twenty other countries aiding South Korean forces, over the next two months they drove the North Koreans past the 38th Parallel and almost to the Yalu River at the Chinese border. Many of the first US soldiers had been office workers in Japan and they came to Korea ill-equipped for the bad winter of 1950-51, with few having coats or warm clothing. They suffered severe casualties from the fighting, the weather, and the mountainous terrain.

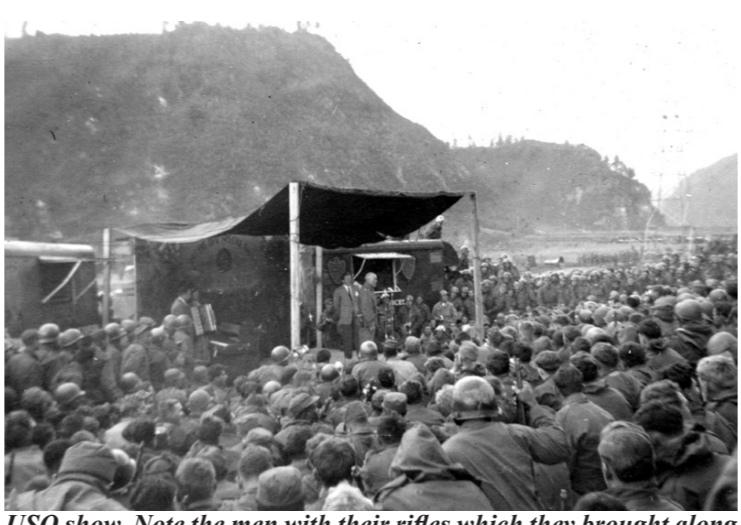
Bob's unit arrived in the spring of 1951 and they were sent to the Front Line, helping to keep the communist soldiers from coming back into the south. May 23-24, he was a part of a group which broke through the resistance and drove the predominantly Chinese soldiers farther north, past the 38th Parallel. July 5-6, Bob was one of about 30 soldiers who were ordered to carry ammunition to the 101st Airborne, which had been cut off on Hill 850 and were out of ammo. They made most of the 15 mile hike by midnight, then slept on the ridge until morning. After the delivery was made, they hiked back. They had left with no food; luckily, Bob had a couple of chocolate bars in his pocket which kept him going.

From July to August, they "sat on the same hill" while peace talks were starting. Life on the Front Line included waiting for fire calls, sleeping in sleeping bags on the ground, and two-hour shifts of guard duty every night. The importance of staying awake during guard duty was hammered home when a British Columbia group to the side of Bob's company was caught sleeping by the Chinese; the next morning, those troops were found hanging in the trees.

Many men turned to boxing for recreation. Bob, who hadn't boxed while in Manning, was down to 129 pounds. In one fight, he knew the opponent was a heavy smoker, so his trainer recommended that Bob keep out of the man's way until he ran out of wind. Bob did, and won.



Bob - facing camera



USO show. Note the men with their rifles which they brought along in case of attack.

Danny Kaye and Monica Lewis provided a USO show for the troops. When Monica arrived for the show the military jeep that she was being transported in had a flat tire in the base camp where Bob Wegner was on reserve, so he got the job to help change the tire.

Bob was a member of the heavy weapons company. When they first arrived in Korea, they used 75mm recoilless rifles which had a range of about five miles. It took four men to carry the 115-pound barrel; one man to carry the 49-50 pound tripod; and others to carry three shells weighing 50 pounds. This was in addition to carrying their own M-1 rifle, ammunition, sleeping bag, backpack, and other supplies.



75mm recoilless rifle - shown while on reserve. It took four men to transport this weapon and the gunner carried the tripod and ammunition. This is the weapon Bob trained with and used in Korea, of which he said is why many men who used them now have hearing aids; the military had little if any ear protection back then. The gun used a perforated artillery shell casing, combined with a rear vented breech using propellant gases from the firing of a shell, to greatly reduce the recoil of the weapon.

A soldier started off carrying the shells, worked up to being an assistant gunner and helping carry the barrel, and then became a gunner. The gunner carried the tripod (turned in his M-1 for a 45 pistol) and usually became a sergeant. Bob worked his way to gunner, but because his tent mate Don Weggandt became a gunner first and there were a limited number of gunners, he didn't receive his stripes nor earn his extra pay.



Don Weggandt

In late summer, the military came out with a lighter weight, water-cooled 30 caliber machine gun. One person could carry the 25 pound gun and a belt of ammo; it used the same tripod as the original rifle. Company H used both the 75 mm and 30 mm guns after that.



Bob with a 30 caliber water-cooled machine gun. During one mission a US soldier was firing the 30 caliber gun near Bob's location and an enemy sniper hit the barrel that was sticking out in front of a rock so all of the water drained out. He continued firing but eventually the barrel overheated and quit firing.

Bob said he was lucky to be assigned to the heavy weapons company. While the infantry moved forward, the heavy weapons operators stayed in the back and used coordinates to fire over the heads of those on foot. One time, he watched from one hill as the infantry moved up the next hill. Chinese soldiers suddenly came out of a bunker and started firing on the US infantry. Don was able to fire on the Chinese and save the riflemen. But there were times when the riflemen moving forward would get too close to where the big shells were landing, and the gunners would be ordered to "turn those damn rifles off!"

The terrain was very hilly, with more trees and bigger mountains the farther north they went. There was an occasional corn field, with rows about 100 feet long.



Bob standing in a field of corn

Robert Wegner continued on page 2