

Robert Wegner - Korean War



Bob Wegner "in the shower." A log was placed into the stream of water that came out of the mountains to make the shower.

There were a few cows in the fields. Mostly, however, the land was blown up from the fighting. At one place, they made a shower out of a drain from a mountain stream, and also drank from the stream. Halogen tablets were used to disinfect the drinking water. Later, they had to walk up that mountain and discovered a dead horse in the stream. The Chinese soldiers often used horses to travel, so they figured the horse had been shot. Bob and his comrades sat on one hill for nearly two months during official peace talks, while they watched the Chinese continue to dig trenches and fox holes to fortify their positions. After the peace talks failed Bob's company had to blow the enemy out of the area again.



Bob Wegner with his 30 caliber weapon - live action during six days clearing a hill. When I worked with Bob on captions for his pictures I asked him how he could have a slight smile when this picture was taken during a live fire event.

Bob said "You had to adapt as best you could to some sort of normal life, and if you didn't you would go crazy."

During the fall of 1951, Bob was involved in two major offensives. The first was *Operation Cleaver*, which started September 21 and lasted about two weeks. The purpose of the operation was to straighten the boundary lines of the 38th Parallel. The entire 21st Infantry was involved, with a Korean unit at one flank and another unit at the other flank. Although they only moved 3-4 miles, Company C started with 29 men and had 14 left at the end. There were no fatalities - in fact, during the entire time in Korea, Company C didn't lose any men - but there were many wounded, including one who stepped on a hand grenade.



Bob 2nd from left in back row: While only one soldier was killed in Bob's company while he served in Korea; during the October 1951 offensive, only these 14 men out of a total of 29 in their company came out unscathed...The rest were wounded and had to be medevaced out, but fortunately none were killed.

Bob was also involved in *Operation NOMAD*, which took place in the central sector of the Korean peninsula, south of Kumsong, North Korea. The operation began October 13, 1951, overlapping the final days of the *Battle of Heartbreak Ridge* to the east. It was one of the most brutal, and most costly, battles experienced by the US 24th Infantry Division during its historic tenure in Korea. The Allied troops launched an aggressive push against Chinese Communists deeply embedded in the mountains before them. The objective was to push the Chinese off their fortified winter line and also to take the city of Kumsong, a key supply center for enemy troops. The cluster of jagged peaks comprised a formidable fortress with an elaborate tunnel, trench and bunker system built within the mountains. During air, mortar and artillery attacks, the enemy went underground to protect themselves. Emerging predominantly unharmed, they preferred to attack or counterattack after the sun went down. The Allied troops moved by truck at times, but also walked, sometimes only making 2-3 miles a day. The 24th Division reached Line NOMAD by October 17, and after five straight days of fighting, the troops hoped for a chance to rest. But they were immediately assigned a new objective, Line POLAR; they secured it five days later, on October 22. Coincidentally, Peace Talks resumed October 22. C Company and H Company were attached to George Company and everyone received the Bronze Star.



Members of Company H, 21st Infantry Regiment, 90th Reconnaissance Battalion, out of Fort Leonard Wood. Back: Herman Wisrich, Ralph Webber, Kenny Wallen, Harvey Vance, Lial Thoms, Thomas Vaughn; Front: Robert Wegner, Fay Unruh, Howard Weddower, Don Treimer, Chuck Wagner



Don Weggandt, Bob Wegner on reserve. Bob had his own camera and took pictures while in Korea. He had them developed in Japan.

Between the two offenses, Bob's company went on reserve. While on reserve, they stayed in tents rather than sleeping bags. They worked on their equipment, played cards, and shared in guard duty.

Company C was allowed R&R in the winter, and Bob's turn came December 26, 1951 - January 2, 1952. He went to Kotohira, Japan, which was a wonderful experience over the New Year holiday. The worst part, however, was knowing he had to return to the front lines.

January 29, the 21st Regiment received notice that they were being rotated home. They started moving supplies off the Front Line to Incheon, doing the work at night in an attempt to keep the Chinese unaware of what they were doing. It was common knowledge that they didn't fool the enemy when new troops were coming in. Bob's platoon leader - who had arrived after the rest of the unit and therefore couldn't leave with them - had to stay behind. He was later killed in action after Bob left.



Taken when heading home from Yokohama, Japan, after processing out of service in Korea.

February 4, they left Incheon, and February 9, they landed in Sendai, Japan. March 25, they boarded the USS Gaffey (the same ship which took them to Japan) and arrived in Seattle on March 28. From there, Bob was sent to Camp Carson, near Colorado Springs, Colorado, to finish his 21 month assignment. Camp Carson housed the 11th Armored Cavalry and, for Bob and the other returning troops, didn't offer much to do other than putting in their time. They did get the chance to ride in tanks. Bob received his discharge August 16, 1952, on his 24th birthday.

Don Weggandt, Bob's tent mate the entire time they were in Korea, had suddenly disappeared shortly before they were due to leave for home. Bob wrote to Don's wife, and learned that Don had an appendicitis attack and had been hospitalized. He returned after six weeks. Had he left earlier, while they were on the Front Line, Bob would have been officially named a gunner and would have received his Sergeant stripes. Before leaving Korea, Bob was told that if he would stay there, he would get his rank and extra pay. "No way," Bob said. "When the next boat leaves, I'll be on it."

As a private, Bob earned around \$110 a month; sergeant pay was around \$150 per month. He sent \$50 home each month, keeping the rest of the money - minus deductions. At first, he had to pay for the \$10,000 life insurance policy that he was required to buy, which left \$30 a month. Later, he was no longer required to pay for the policy - which he still has - and he would have \$50 - \$65 a month spending money. The war was officially over in July, 1953.

In addition to the Bronze Star, Bob received the Combat Infantry Badge, the Korea Service Medal, the United Nations Medal, and one Overseas Bar.

After returning home, Bob worked for Max Detlefsen a couple of months, then started farming. He and Shirley Hansen were married in 1960.



Back: Kyle, Dale, Tom, Bruce, David; Front: Deb, Shirley (Hansen), Robert, Nancy

Bob joined the VFW in 1951 before he left for Korea; as soon as he was three miles off the coast of the US, he became eligible, and has held all offices in the organization. He joined the ceremonial team around 1960. He is also a member of the American Legion and the Korean War Veterans organization.

In 1989, the 21st Infantry started holding yearly reunions. Bob didn't attend the first five years, but after the death of his wife in 1994, he started attending and hasn't missed one since. One of the people he sees is his tent mate, Don Weggandt.



Wegner farm southwest of Manning

As Bob's mother, Lolida, would receive the pictures he sent home during his time in Korea, she would put them in a scrapbook she made for him. Below are a few more items of interest and pictures from Bob's time in Korea.



Mr. Moneybags is in Florida this Christmas.



Where are you? In Korea! You risk your life, Big Business rakes in the dough.

Propaganda flier that the Chinese dropped over the area the US soldiers were located.



US military certificate - 10 cents



Safe Conduct Certificate (front): Attention U.N. Soldiers - This certificate guarantees good treatment to any Chinese or North Korean soldier desiring to cease fighting. Take this man to your nearest officer and treat him as an honorable prisoner of war. (signed) Matthew B. Ridgway, Commander in Chief, United Nations Forces.



C.W. Redding, and Bob Wegner in the snow. They dug bunkers in the snow and used cans similar to smudge pots for heat and light. They had winter sleeping bags for night. About four men could fit into these bunkers. They were at this location for about a month. Food and supplies were brought up by trucks as close to camp as possible and then carried by men the rest of the way.



After four days push toward Kumsong, Korea