

A Time Best Forgotten

By CC Huffhines

Near the end of 1950, I was recalled to military service because of the war in Korea. I had completed my Bachelor's degree from the University of Texas. At the time, I was in New York, preparing to work on my Master's Degree in business. My ex-roommate in Austin phoned with the news that I had been called up to active duty again. After a short 2-week refresher training at Fort Ord, California, I was on a ship to Japan over New Year's Eve.

I was assigned to the 8th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 1st Cavalry Division in South Korea. I was 24 years old, a First Lieutenant in charge of a platoon of men much older and more experienced than me. Our job was to clear land mines, strategically placed by the Chinese, who were fighting on the side of North Korea.

This duty often required us to crawl on our bellies in mud as we attempted to locate wires attached to the mines, and then disarm the mines. Because I was younger than most of my platoon, I usually volunteered to lead the belly crawls.

Land mines were placed in large numbers by the enemy. Often, when an infantry group set up a food tent nearby that set off a mine, they froze in place until we could clear the area.

This work was mind-rattling. One day I had a sergeant crawling next to me, who accidentally tripped a wire and was killed by the mine he set off. This was the only death in my group ever, truly a miracle as we often came under artillery fire.

After one year of this awful life, we received the surprise announcement that the entire 1st Cavalry Division was to be immediately transferred to Japan, being replaced by a new division. This was especially pleasing to me as I previously had spent a year in Osaka during our occupation of that country. We were sent to the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. This move involved many ships to carry thousands of men and all the equipment, truly a massive, impressive event.

After all this, when I returned to the US expecting to be discharged, I was sent to upper New York state for my discharge wait-time. Here my job was to blow up beaver dams that were disliked by those damn Yankees!

Finally, I was discharged in October 1952, ending almost two years of frightful memories. And that was my shelter from the storm.