CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE ROAD FROM YUDAM-NI

Daylight at last. Wonderful daylight! There was still heavy gunfire in the hills west and east of us. We were glad dawn came, but dreaded to look at last night's horrors.

We couldn't believe the dead Chinese. They were piled everywhere. We laid our dead out in rows, covered with panchos, and they froze.

We trudged up the slope and found my machine gunners dead in their positions. The scene was grisly. There were seventy-five dead Chinese counted in front of their guns. By holding their ground and sacrificing their lives, they had given us more time to get into position down at the C. P. We were sick about it. War is hell all right--and beyond.

The dead, wounded and frostbite casualties--god, we were hurting. H & S Company had lost many--I don't remember the

count. Major Canney was dead. The Wharang Platoon lost four men killed and eleven wounded. Company G had over sixty casualties. Cashion's platoon had something like sixteen men left--started with over fifty. Cash was out of action. I don't recall if he was hit or a weather casualty. Those guys went up the hill without their outer clothing so they could move better. They froze up there waiting for their clothes to be brought up.

Other outfits had been hit just as hard, some worse. At the height of our battle at the C. P., the Chinese had simultaneously attacked on all fronts. They had seized Hill 1403, the ice cream dip hill, and now we could see them up there, looking down on us. Company H, Seventh, had to come down the hill with a fighting withdrawal. About eighty of them came into our sector after Cashion and Cahill had cleared the Chinese off the slope above us.

West of Hill 1403, the Fifth's Second Battalion had held their end of Northwest Ridge. They lost seven killed, twenty-five wounded and sixty frostbite casualties. The enemy dead in their sector was incredible, estimated at five hundred.

Up on Hill 1282, to our right, Company E, Seventh, had been mauled. Forced into a desperate last stand. Their captain, Walter Phillips, was killed. At five a.m. the Chinese had held the summit, a direct threat to our C.P., the two regimental headquarters in the village, and the artillery units south of town. Company C of the Fifth Marines, led by Captain Jack Jones, had recaptured the hill in a brutal counterattack. There was hand-to-hand fighting.

After Jones had taken the peak, the Chinese charged time and again and were mowed down. They were fanatical. Their final charge was made by three men. And then some of the wounded lying on the hill kept firing all day, until they finally succumbed.

Company E of the Seventh had suffered 120 wounded and killed. Jones' company had lost fifteen killed and sixty-seven wounded to get the hill back.

A thousand yards southeast of there, Company D, Seventh, had been run off Hill 1240. They had regrouped, charged and won it back. At daybreak they had sixteen men left. And they were being attacked from three sides. A platoon from the Fifth's C

Company got up there and helped drive the enemy back. They could see them reorganizing on the other side for another charge later that morning.

I went over to the village square and witnessed a sight I'll never forget. I still have nightmares about it. The square was literally covered with wounded. Many of them horribly. Their cries and moans were surreal. The doctors and corpsmen were trying their damnedest to take care of them. Our regimental doctor had been killed that night. Two doctors were attending wounded in a mud shack full of smoke, and another was in the yard, picking out those who had the best chance to survive. I'm glad it wasn't my job. I was sick inside.

While I was there my good friend, Captain Schrier, C. O. of Company I, was brought in with a bullet in his throat. He couldn't talk and I first took him over to the C. O. and helped him report. The C. O. told me to take him to the aid station. I took him to the doctor's shack and tapped on the door. The door opened and the Doc was a wild man, red eyes bugging out and haggard, and he screamed, "Get the hell out of here! What do you think I am?" I didn't know what to do, so I just stood there after he slammed the door.

A few moments later the door opened again and there was the Doc, calm as a cucumber. "Why sure, bring him in," he said. I wondered what kind of shot he gave himself.

We had lost about seventy-five killed, over five hundred wounded, some fifty missing and over two hundred to the subzero temperatures.

And there was no rest in sight. Around 7:30 that morning, approximately a hundred Chinese hit Company G above our C. P. There was a short fire fight. Our men drove them off.

We could still hear the Second Battalion fighting out on Northwest Ridge.

At about eight o'clock we really got the word. We were completely surrounded--<u>cut off</u>!

The hills were crawling with Chinese. Two hundred thousand had crossed the Yalu altogether. At least a division of them were positioned along the road back to Hagaru. The two Seventh Marine outposts on the road south of us had been pinned down, isolated. The Chinese had thrown up roadblocks galore along the route. The Eighth Army was in full retreat. The Seventh Army Division units east of the Chosin had been cut to pieces. It seemed incredible

that everything could happen overnight.

I was in Colonel Taplett's tent when Colonel Murray came with new orders. He and Colonel Homer Litzenberg, C. O. of the Seventh Marines, had conferred early that morning and agreed that we must immediately organize a defense perimeter and prepare for a fighting withdrawal back to Hagaru. Now the field leaders were taking over, and they didn't give a damn what the U. N. Command in Japan or the Pentagon had to say.

But Colonel Taplett argued like fury. "Hell," he said, "all we need is a few replacements and air supply and we can hold this place forever!" Murray tried to explain the hordes of Chinese, our division strung out for eighty miles, etc., but Taplett wasn't appeased. Withdrawal simply was not in Colonel Taplett's book.

Taplett called his officers together and gave the orders. "We're gonna bug out of here," he said, "and we're gonna do it like marines. We're gonna take our wounded and equipment with us and we're gonna make it back."

Some old marines actually cried at the news. Withdrawal was not in their vocabulary, either.

We commenced redeploying units to establish a tight defense perimeter. We moved H & S Company and the Weapons Company

away from the hill and set up along the road. We threw up a road-block. Taplett moved Company H, who had seen little action in the attack, from the road fork to the Company G line on Hill 1384, above our C. P. The remnants of Company G came down to the valley to serve as the reserve company. Company I relieved the battered marines on Hill 1282. The Second Battalion companies out on the west road withdrew, against harassing enemy fire, to the Southwest Ridge. The Seventh Marines manned the south and east sectors of the perimeter.

Before these movements could be made, the Chinese attacked Hill 1240, where the sixteen men left from Company D, Seventh, and the platoon from Company C, Fifth, were barely hanging on. A swarm of Chinese drove the marines down the slope a ways. They held there until relieved by Company B, Fifth, in the afternoon. All the while the Chinese rained heavy mortar fire on them.

As soon as Company I assumed their positions on Hill 1282, they were bombarded by mortars, grenades and small arms fire. Meanwhile, Chinese machine gunners and riflemen spit bullets down on Company H from the high ground of Hill 1384.

Many of our weapons wouldn't work in the cold. We soon discovered the Chinese carried a lot of U. S. Bolt-Action Springfields,

and they worked. I suppose they had taken them from Chiang Kai-shek. There were stacks of them taken from the battlegrounds. I have always said it was the best weapon we ever had.

A few days earlier I had received a letter from Frank Friemoth, long-time friend and Van Wert County Game Warden. He said that if I would procure the metal parts of two Springfields, he would make us both a sports rifle. I not only got two rifles, I got two "star-bore" rifles. Later, when I got a brief spell, I stripped the wood parts away, wrapped the metal parts carefully in C-ration box cardboard and wired them under a company truck. The next step was to get them out of this trap we were in. Then the problem was how to get them out of Korea.

We had captured a Chinese officer. Our interpreter asked how many men he had lost. He replied in the thousands. He asked how many we had lost. It was a fraction of his losses. Then he retorted in Chinese. Our interpreter said, "He say, 'Good, you soon be out of men.'"

He damn well may have been right. Our only hope was Hagaru, fourteen miles down that icy mountain road. God only knew how many Chinese straddled that road. That morning Colonel Litzenberg had dispatched the First Battalion, Seventh, down the road to rescue

the isolated Seventh Marine outposts. They fought and bulled their way, with air and mortar support, to Company C, five miles south. They made it back with them late at night, but F Company, entrenched at the top of "Fox Hill," remained an island in a sea of Chinese at Toktong Pass.

That night we braced for another onslaught. Fifty percent alert. The anxiety and, again, the temperature, were punishing. Another sleepless night. I wondered if some of the men might begin to crack under the pressure. Enemy mortar barrages fell in most sectors. A few light skirmishes erupted around the perimeter. And then the sun came up! The banzai charges never came! What a relief! We began the morning's activities wondering if they had shot their wad the night before, or if they were laying back and awaiting replacements for the next big one.

We heard they were storming Hagaru. For days the place had resembled a boom town, tents and supplies scattered everywhere, as troops poured in and scrambled to construct a forward base. The main defense unit was the Third Battalion of the First Marines. One battalion was all that could be spared. The Chinese had taken positions along the road all the way down to Chinhung-ni. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Ridge, C. O. of the Third Battalion, threw up a

hasty, undermanned defense perimeter around Hagaru. There were engineer, artillery and service troops, detachments and advance parties on the line. One of Colonel Ridge's companies never even got there before the Chinese attacked. But everyone dug in as best they could. It was an amazing defense against a devastating all-night-all-day onslaught. Through it all, engineers hacked away at the half-completed airstrip, using floodlights at night. Chesty Puller had said his men would keep the Chinese out. And they did. At sundown on November 29, Hagaru, our oasis fourteen miles away, was still hanging on.

Sometime around noon that day the Chinese made a determined stab at capturing Hill 1282, the eternal hotspot of Yudam-ni. An impasse developed. Company I, firmly established on our side of the summit, would clobber them as they charged over the top. Dangerously close air and mortar support helped. However, Company I couldn't take the summit and drive them out of the area, because a higher hill on the other side was infested with them. From that hill they could fire down on the top of Hill 1282 whenever the marines appeared. Neither line could drive the other back. They were within shouting distance of each other on either side of Hill 1282. It turned into one of the damnedest grenade battles ever. Back and forth, like they were playing "Alley Over."

Company I threw over 1,000 grenades that day. They came down for loans from the rest of us.

We were getting low on several necessities besides men. The only water I remember getting was when I drank a boot print in the snow dry about four times. I guess we ate a lot of snow. We were receiving supplies and ammo by air, but there wasn't enough air power available to supply a regiment by air drop, let alone two. Helicopters were coming in and evacuating our critically wounded.

Those supply pilots would fly over, ascertain the drop zone, and from the rear of the planes would blossom parachutes of every color in the rainbow. They were color-coded according to the material being dropped. The pilots did a whale of a job, and a dangerous one--the Chinese were blazing away at them. Sometimes the chutes would drop among the troops. Then it was every man for himself. I always picked the biggest rock I could find and nestled up beside it. I figured at least it would hit the rock first and soften the impact.

The Korean women who were tagging along with us were wild about the brightly-colored nylon parachutes. We used some of the chutes. I cut large squares out of one and wrapped my feet to reinforce the worthless shoe pacs. It may have prevented frostbite. When the Korean women realized we didn't want all of the parachutes,

they began grabbing them up. They were so excited they would rush out into the drop zone before the drops were completed, so as to get first choice. We were watching one drop when an elderly lady rushed out and began wrapping up a chute. A plane made a final pass and dropped a large wooden box. The parachute failed to open all the way. We all screamed at the lady. She stood up and looked at us, and never knew what hit her. Her family wrapped her in the chute and carried her away.

I was talking with the chaplain and mentioned the Springfield rifles I had wired under the truck and the problem of getting them out of the country. He said if I got him one, he would slip mine out as religious paraphenalia, if we ever got back to Hamhung or someplace. He said he wanted it for a deer rifle. Chaplains were not permitted to fire on the enemy. I got him his rifle and it was a dandy. Now I only had to get that truck back to civilization, and the chaplain. Just minor prerequisites.

Another attempt was made to rescue F Company at Toktong Pass. They had been besieged again the second night. Three hundred yards out of Yudam-ni, the rescue force ran into heavy machine gun fire. Air strikes cleared the way for a couple miles, but then some pilots warned that there were so many Chinese waiting up

the road that they might get cut off themselves. So, they returned to Yudam-ni and for the third night the Seventh Marines on Fox Hill were on their own.

Nightfall came, still no sleep, so damn cold. We figured they'd hit us hard again that night. They'd had two days to regroup. As I stood my watch, I expected them to pour over that hill any moment. I fought to keep awake--I hadn't had any sleep. While concentrating on the shadowy hills, I let my thoughts wander to the other side of the planet, to get my mind off this shit. Wondered what Carm and the kids were doing. Fourteen hours difference, must've been noon there on the farm in Iowa. She and Dorine and Mary cooking. Old Don and Bud and Short out in the barnyard, probably freezing their ass, too.

There was some small arms fire on the ridges. Can't take another banzai, I thought. There were two or three thousand Chinese camped just over Hill 1282, the pilots had said. On this side our battalion had about 950--we'd lost about 150. God, I was beat. I thought about some farm for sale up by Bristow's. Didn't sound too bad, $8,000. Maybe we'd drive up there if it were still for sale. Suppose we'd end up in debt again and working like the deal to pay it off. I was anxious to know how Ralph made out with

his crops. Most of the guys thought he was too far north. I hoped he missed this whole Korean deal.

There were grenades up by I Company. Carm had gotten the basket from Guam already. Ivy had gotten a big kick out of a picture of Lyn and her grass skirt. Old Grandpa Fred, poor old guy. Mom said in her letter he haunted the post office every day, looking for something from me. I wished I'd written him more. Well, there I was, back in the same pair of ruts I'd struggled so hard to get out of after the last war. Carm had been so damn right about this deal. If I ever got back to her I would say, I love you--you're the world's best advisor and I am to listen to every suggestion you happen to give. Mortars up on the ridge. Camaratta was up there. I wondered how Schrier was with that slug in his neck.

"Clay--wake up. Your watch."

"Ah, shit, when does that goddamned dog team leave?"

"Wish someone'd tell the Chinks the war is over."

"Ha! Yeah, this policing the world's a pain in the ass."

Right after dawn Company I got another serious attack. Air strikes and mortars kept the Chinese back. Then we spent the

morning getting Company G up there and bringing Company I down, under frequent attacks. I went up there with a group of men to relieve First Lieutenant Williams, the man who had called me a "retread" back on the Bexar. When we got back down he was so tired and worn that, in telling me about the action and events of the past two nights and days, he laughed and cried at the same time. It was the last time I saw Williams. He was killed shortly after that.

That afternoon the Chinese almost broke through between Hill 1282 and Hill 1240, and many casualties were inflicted on G Company's right flank. There was constant crap up there into the night. We were also edgy because pilots reported Chinese streaming onto Hill 1403, northwest of us. We couldn't figure out why they hadn't attacked from there. They seemed to be obsessed with Hill 1282.

There was an air and mortar strike over on Southwest Ridge as the Second Battalion, Fifth, withdrew from a hill over there and set up closer to the road.

Anticipation swept through the lines. We were about to play our big card. We just needed one more blessed night without a fanatical all-out attack. And we got it.

December 1, 1950, dawned and the Fifth and Seventh Marines were breaking out of Yudam-ni.

In the pre-dawn hours I set all kinds of booby traps, some I'd learned in the Pacific and some suited to this situation. I buried all the dud shells I could find in the fire pits, placed wet snow around grenade handles till it froze, pulled the pins and secreted them every place I thought there would be a fire built, and left various other goodies for the Chinese to enjoy.

We had a long column of North Korean civilians who wanted to leave with us. The Korean in charge of the Wharangs reported to me that many civilians had said they would carry stuff for us. I told him to pick fifty and we loaded them with all kinds of supplies and equipment. We piled up excess clothing and things that we had no room for, allowed the civilians to take what they wanted, and burned the rest. I think some of those folks had five or six uniforms on, one atop the other. They looked like little fat teddy bears.

We moved out at eight a.m. Company H moved off the hill above our C.P., while Company G held firm on Hill 1282. The problem was how to get them off without alerting the Chinese, who would swarm over the summit. As we hustled through Yudam-ni and on south, Corsairs dove over Hill 1282 on a dummy run, to distract

the Chinese while Company G withdrew. When they were all off the hill, their captain signaled, and the Corsairs dove again and again and bombed hell out of those Chinese. It was coordinated with an artillery barrage and ignition of ammunition that Company G couldn't carry on the run. That hill went up like Mount St. Helen's. Company G got out of town without a hitch, the last unit out. Yudam-ni was set afire and a bridge south of town was blown. It all worked beautifully. Sadly, eighty-five fallen marines had been left behind, laid to rest in a field burial. We needed every vehicle we had for the living.

We took positions on a hill west of the road, relieving a battalion of Seventh Marines so they could move south. Suddenly, our orders changed. Darkhorse was to pass through everybody and spearhead the caravan down the road. Oh, man, here we go again!

We worked our way through the damnedest congestion you ever saw, troops, trucks, trailers, wounded, artillery, and jeeps. It was a real chore getting our vehicles, loaded with supplies and equipment, through the traffic, but we were at the head of the column and ready to lead out by mid afternoon.

As we were making final preparations, I found something I had been looking for for some time. Most of our panchos were stiff, cold, uncomfortable, and noisy in the sub-zero temperatures. This

one was nylon cloth and was as supple as could be.

I had just hung it on the strap of my rifle, when a man came and told me one of my boys, who had frozen feet, had been hit. I went to investigate and saw that the poor guy had found a comfortable place on top of a truckload of gear, and a sniper had shot him right through the head.

"Stay down and on the other side of the trucks!" I yelled at the men in the area.

Sure enough, at that moment I got a burst of machine gun bullets around my feet. Man, they snarled and cracked wickedly. I rolled under the truck and out the other side. We laid low until the snipers were chased out. I never missed my new pancho until later. I lost it when I hit the deck and scrambled under that truck.

We began the ram down the road. Seventh Marines attacked the ridges on both sides. The point of our column was the only tank that had made it to Yudam-ni before the Chinese trapped us. Next came a couple of bulldozers. Behind them were the Lone Wolves--Company H, with a platoon of engineers, Company I, Company G, and my boys.

The road to Hagaru was narrow all the way. I remember only a few spots wide enough to pass trucks. In some places it was notched out of the hillside, and on some sharp curves at Toktong Pass engineers had erected platforms with log poles to provide enough space to make the turn with vehicles. Now it was was a good thing that General Smith and his Division staff had decided to delay in November to build up Hagaru and fortify the road. The mountains were very steep and the ridges ran almost totally north and south, so we could go only in those directions, except on foot. Much of the time we would be in the valley between ridges. It was favorable terrain for the Chinese, who were up in the hills all the way to Hagaru.

I think we were at an altitude of five thousand feet above sea level. I encouraged my men by telling them to remember we were walking to the sea, and for every thousand feet we went down it got three degrees warmer. We needed all the encouragement we could get.

We marched three quarters of a mile and--wham!--Company H got hit by enemy crossfire from both ridges. Six guys got killed. Many others were wounded. Company I attacked on the east ridge and Company H took the west. It was dark and there was no air

There were two bloated Chinese floating on the surface.

We got rolling again before midnight and in no time stopped again. Company I was under heavy attack on the slope of a mile-high mountain on our left. We lost communications with them. Colonel Taplett sent a runner up to them and he got lost until the next day. We didn't know anything about the battle until their casualties began to stream down early in the morning. God, it had been brutal. We had something like a hundred casualties. They swamped the aid station, set up in a hut beside the road. We had our vehicles parked in a circle around it, like covered wagon days.

Colonel Taplett sent Company G up the mountain to mop up. There were around 350 dead Chinese counted on I Company's battlefield.

On the other side of that mountain, unknown to us, the First Battalion, Seventh Regiment, had fought a battle during the night. They were playing out the wild card of the breakout plan. Actually, there were two spearheads to the advance. After dark, those Seventh Marines had taken off across the mountains for Toktong Pass. It was a straight line to the pass. Their mission was to come in the back door, surprise the Chinese camped around Fox Hill and clean them

out. Otherwise, our train could be blocked at the pass when we got there. In the dead of the night, they had veered off course back toward the road. That's how they got on the other side of our mountain. Their point company had lost radio contact with the rear of their column. Shouting up to them was useless--it was impossible to hear with fur parkas over their ears. Finally, their C.O., Colonel Raymond Davis, had personally trudged ahead through the snowdrifts and barely stopped them before they walked right into a Chinese bivouac. After they ran the Chinese off their side of the mountain, those poor marines literally fell over in the snow. From the jump-off at Yudam-ni till then they had been marching and fighting for twenty hours without a break. That night trek through bleak icy mountain country, lugging double loads of supplies, had been an excruciating test of human stamina. They were about a mile from Fox Hill when the sun rose--and facing another fight with Chinese on a hill north of the pass.

Meanwhile, the rear units of the caravan had gotten banzai attacks throughout the wee hours. Three battalions stretched across the road to points a mile or so away on both sides. On the western flank the Third Battalion, Seventh, and a company composed of remnants of other units, were pushed back from their hilltop and suffered serious losses. Our Second Battalion, astride the road,

fought all night and all morning, until Corsairs scattered the enemy with an intensive half-hour strike. Our First Battalion held a line east of the road up to a finger of the reservoir. Fanatical Chinese assaulted them from across the ice. They killed about two hundred Chinese. In the morning the three battalions began breaking off to follow the train. It had been a hell of a night for all of us.

I was standing in the doorway of a mud shack at dawn, beside Colonel Taplett, looking at an M-1 rifle with an elaborate scope on it. Taplett said it belonged to some major. Suddenly, he pointed to a hill across the valley and said, "Look at that son of a bitch of a Chinaman. You'd think he was on a camping trip." He had come out of a hole, yawned and stretched impudently. I lifted the rifle and looked at him through the scope. I couldn't see a damn thing through it. While I had it up there, I raised it to what I thought would be about six feet Kentucky windage above him and squeezed off a round. His feet flew higher than his head and he scrambled for his hole. Taplett said, "That'll l'arn him."

In a few seconds there was more lead flying through that thatched roof than you could count. Mud, dust and crap fell all over me. From then on I made up my mind if they didn't shoot at me, I wouldn't shoot at them.

We prepared to push ahead. We transported the severely wounded back to the regimental aid station. The walking wounded took positions along the caravan. We destroyed all unnecessary gear such as cots, stoves and tents in order to load other wounded men on the vehicles. We put them in eider down sleeping bags and cared for them the best we could. We lined the dead along the road, covered with blankets, for the regiment to pick up when they came by.

There was that damn Captain Schrier, lining up with the walking wounded. He'd led his men in that fierce battle with that bullet wound in his neck. He got hit up there again. Now he refused to ride the trucks with the wounded. He was going to walk to Hagaru with two wounds.

His company had lost all but about fifty men. Colonel Taplett radioed Colonel Murray for another company to lead the procession along the road, while Companies G and H operated up in the ridges. Here came a rag-tag outfit wearing green neckerchiefs made out of parachutes. They called themselves Dog-Easy. They were the remnants of Companies D, E and G of the Seventh and A of the Fifth, companies that had been devastated the first night at Yudam-ni.

They led out and again we were on the road. Snipers fired down on us. If I remember correctly, Swede Swenson was shot in the upper thigh here. He was placed in an eider down sleeping bag in a trailer behind a hospital van.

By noon G Company had the mountain secured. They could see some of Colonel Davis' Seventh Marines to the east, moving cross country on a ridge toward Toktong Pass. About that time, Davis' point men reached Fox Hill.

We got about three hundred yards down the road past the mountain and were brought to an abrupt halt by a Chinese roadblock, machine guns and a blown bridge at a rocky ravine. Company G attacked from high ground to the left, and Dog-Easy Company attacked on the right.

Several of my boys were in a shallow ditch, firing at the Chinese. Lo and behold, I recognized the bald head of the Chaplain. He was firing that Springfield that he had said he wanted for a deer rifle.

Later in the day I saw him and remarked, "Man, I've sure been seeing a lot of deer up here lately." Even his bald head turned red.

Corsairs swooped down over the Chinese positions. As they pulled out they just cleared the ridges. It was a very difficult maneuver. What a superb job the Marine Air Wing and Air Force were doing. Without them we weren't going to make it, not by a long shot. They were keeping at least four Corsairs over us at all times during the daylight hours, bombing, strafing and napalming.

As I was going along the column while we waited, I saw someone had dumped a truck over an embankment for destruction. It was burning merrily. In the flames I recognized the metal parts of my star-bore Springfield rifles. Sorry, Frank. Fortunes of war, you know.

By dark our engineers had built a makeshift bridge across the ravine. The tank and bulldozers crossed over and on we went through the night.

Walking along I noticed a big marine sitting in the snow beside the road. It was the obese officer who had flown over from Japan with me, the one with the exception in his papers that kept him in combat duty. His feet had finally broken down under his weight. I walked over to him.

He said, "Ram, if I ever get out of this mess, I'll go to church every Sunday."

I grabbed somebody aside and we got him up into one of the trucks.

In the high ground to our right, Company H had been stopped in the afternoon by heavy fire as they crossed a stream bed. They radioed for air power but didn't get it. The pilots were busy that day. So they laid low until after dark and then borrowed a Chinese trick. They conducted a banzai charge! Screaming and firing, they routed the Chinese, who probably thought it was the whole damn battalion.

We were all summoning up our last reserves. However, instead of losing strength, I seemed to be gaining. I felt strong, not suffering from the lack of food and water. I'd become mean and short-tempered as hell. There were others like that, too. But you were pushed to the point of hallucination. Suddenly, you would hear machine gun fire, would flinch and then would realize it was the truck in front of you, the tires crunching in the snow.

Most of the men seemed to be at the end of the rope. It was just too much. Four days of fighting at Yudam-ni, two days marching

and fighting, frozen half rations, icy narrow road, no sleep, frozen water, eating snow, frozen feet, frozen dead, the wounded and a solid wall of Chinese on all sides. At every holdup men would flop down on their backs, exhausted. Some would refuse to get up. I would slap them silly and jerk them to their feet.

Suddenly, after midnight, in the wee hours of December 3, everything fell apart. The tank slipped halfway over an embankment and wouldn't budge. The survivors of shot-up Dog-Easy Company practically disobeyed orders to move on without the tank. When they did move, they got only a little ways down the road, got hit by Chinese fire and just couldn't continue. Company G came down off the ridge, exhausted, depleted and disorganized. Company H was stuck somewhere out there in the high ground to our right. Marines sank into the snow and wouldn't move. To top it all off, more snow was coming down. It snowed six inches that night. We were bogged down short of Toktong Pass and extremely vulnerable to attack. Broken down. The will to survive was succumbing. You could see it all around. You could feel it. It was nightmarish.

Not the colonel. He went right on with it. He assigned Company G to the point. We didn't have the manpower left to take the ridges, so we would have to depend on air power and our recoiless

rifles, machine gunners and sharp shooters to get through the hot spots. Lieutenant Mize took the reins of Company G. Camaratta took second command. Taplett ordered me to form a platoon of H & S men to reinforce their company. He also attached the survivors of the Dog-Easy outfit to Blackie Cahill's platoon.

Someone brought a big chain up from a supply truck, and they rigged it up from the tank to a bulldozer. No deal. The damn thing snapped under the strain. But they tried a second time with the length shortened. Slowly, like a tug-of-war, that dozer dragged the tank back onto the road! We cheered and pounded each other on the back. You could feel the momentum shift back to us that moment.

To hell with being a bump in Korean soil! The colonel and several of us went up and down the line, barking, dragging reluctant men to their feet. I yanked men upright, slapped them several times across the face, kicked their ass and said things I would never have said under different circumstances. Get up, marine, goddamn it, you're going home!

We rolled toward Toktong Pass at daylight. There was only sporadic enemy sniping. Company H was overtaking their final objective, a hill just southwest of Fox Hill. The First Battalion

of the Seventh had seized various points around Fox Hill and had routed hundreds of Chinese with a bold, surprise charge up a hill.

The Chinese were fleeing our way. Hell, we didn't know it until the marines at the pass radioed back to Colonel Litzenberg and then Colonel Murray radioed up to us. Hundreds of them coming right at us! Colonel Taplett radioed for an air strike and we braced for a fight.

I happened to be standing by the T. C. S. jeep where the forward air controller was talking and listening to the Corsairs above us. One pilot said he had spotted approximately three hundred Chinese troops on the road. He said he would make a run but wouldn't drop, and the other three were to follow him and drop rockets and napalm. He made the run to mark the target. The second plane dropped his napalm but not the third and fourth. At the same time, marines from all sides opened up with mortars and heavy machine guns.

"Why didn' t you drop?" the second pilot asked the others.

Back came the answer. "There was no target left."

We had massacred them, the last obstacle to our most important objective. Shortly after noon the two spearheads of

the breakout reunited at Toktong Pass.

Captain William Barber, the commander of that gallant company that held Fox Hill through five days and nights of Chinese attacks, had picked his position well. It was a ridge that rose out of rather flat approaches and was defensible on all four sides. The only trouble was they had somewhere around two hundred men, while the Chinese had had thousands. There were hundreds of dead Chinese in front of their position, and that wasn't counting the ones scattered around the other three sides. Captain Barber received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their incredible feat.

There were very few men in F Company, including the commander, who weren't seriously wounded, frostbitten or extremely ill. Twenty-six men had died. We immediately relieved them of their positions and started placing the helpless ones on stretchers to get them aboard trucks and get our over-worked and weary doctors and corpsmen to work on them. It was an ordeal just to get them down. The paths were like toboggan slides--you'd lose your footing and down you'd go, stretcher, moaning patient and all.

In the midst of all this, I noticed two marines, friends of mine, sitting serenely by a fire, eating canned C-rations. I walked up to

them and said, "Men, how about a hand with these wounded? We're having a rough go of it."

One of them looked up at me and said, lethargically, "I'm eating."

I was ill-humored and mean anyway, but now I really lost control. I pulled out my .45 pistol, pulled the slide back to load it, and placed it on the man's temple.

"You son of a bitch," I said, "you're about to take your last bite."

They wearily got to their feet and shortly I saw them sliding down the hill with a stretcher.

As we helped F Company with their wounded, I spotted a raggedy-ass platoon coming across the hills, getting down from their position, Seventh Marines who had made the trip across the mountains. They were half-frozen, with a week's growth of beard, and their lieutenant had sandbags tied over his shoes. I met him to direct them in and took a good look at a familiar face--Perry Wise, the lawyer from my Fort Wayne company!

Man, was I glad to see Perry! But I couldn't resist blurting out, "Well, I'll be damned if it isn't the legal officer!"

He wouldn't talk to me for a long time after that, but now we're good friends and he's my family attorney. He was decorated for gallantry in Korea and sure deserved it after that overland hike. Perry was a red-ass marine now and eventually rose to full colonel in the reserve, became an excellent attorney and served as county judge.

The procession to Hagaru resumed, with the weary men of the Seventh falling in behind the tank as soon as they got down to the road. Our battalion stayed at the pass for the rest of the day and late into the night. The long column of rear units filed past. As each outfit arrived at the pass, they would report to my company, so as to keep track of who was going through. It was a pitiful sight. The trucks came by with the dead stacked on them like cordwood.

A big, burly top sergeant came up to me to report, and it was another ghost from the past, Chick Zook, the kid of my weapons platoon back in the Pacific. We had a brief reunion. He had taken charge of his platoon when the lieutenant was knocked out of action. If Chick got out of this tangle, he was set up good. He could retire from the Corps on twenty years at age thirty-four.

Along came a motley group of Chinese prisoners, under guard. The Chinese were in as bad shape as we were. Many of

them had come in tennis shoes. Many had been armed with antique rifles and they had seized our casualties' weapons at every chance. The prisoners had ice frozen to their knees and sounded like dutch shoes when they walked by. Hands were solid blocks of marble.

I was walking along the convoy after dark, when I spotted a dozen white uniforms coming toward me. It was a marine and a group of Chinese. They still had their weapons and gear. I asked the marine what was going on. He said, "Oh yeah, Captain, I want you to meet Joe and company. Joe just came down to get warm. He used to be a room boy for the marines in Shanghai when he was a kid."

"For god sakes," I said, "you'll get them warm and they'll be back up there in the morning shooting at you."

Joe, the Chinaman, looked at the marine and said, "He's fuckin' well right, Joe."

They went on down the road and left me scratching my head. What a goofy war.

For weeks I had thought I needed a good snort of whiskey. When one damaged truck was overturned down a hill for destruction,

I was sent down to burn it. There lay a whole case of Hiram Walker in the snow. I opened a bottle and took a big mouthful. Do you think I could swallow it? I had to spit it out. It just wouldn't go down. I ignited the truck and lugged the booze up the hill for the more hardcore drinkers up there.

The wretched Seventh Marines at the head of the train arrived at Hagaru at about seven that night. They were at the verge of collapse. But Colonel Davis halted the column just outside the defense perimeter, tightened up the ranks, and they marched into town in formation, with their shoulders thrown back like they were in the weekly dress parade back at Sea School. We had come out of there and we had brought our dead (except Yudam-ni fatalities), our wounded, most of our equipment and every last ounce of our esprit de corps.

We rejoined the caravan sometime after midnight in front of the two rear battalions. Boy, were we eager to get this thing over. We were getting very little fire from the Chinese scattered in the hills. All we had to do was break through the seige force surrounding Hagaru. It looked as if we were on the home stretch, when I'll be damned if we didn't grind to a halt again.

Just ahead of us some howitzer prime movers ran out of diesel fuel. That invited a platoon of Chinese to fire on the artillerymen. Further up the road, there was a bridge across an iced-up stream, and beyond that an open space between two hills. During the delay the Chinese blew the bridge and then waited for us on the two hills. A gauntlet. Goddamn, what next?

Windy Swain, now the executive officer, came up to me and said, in his usual drawl, "Ram, looks to me like we plowed up a snake here. They want you to get groups of men behind trucks and make a run across there. Have the trucks drive as fast as the men can run."

We set up machine guns to hold the enemy down. We put men in and behind a truck and they raced across the ice and down that bowling alley, as we called it. Others followed. The Chinese concentrated their fire on the drivers. When a driver got hit, someone raced out there to replace him. Valor was commonplace that night.

While we were waiting to send a truck across, a machine gunner was having trouble with his gun. I ran up there and said, "Come on, man, get that thing going."

He looked up at me and said, "Skipper, this fuckin' fucker is all fucked up!" I got the giggles. I had never realized how

important a word can be in a sentence. We jerked another gun off a truck and they went across.

Meanwhile, the engineers were repairing the bridge. Two truck drivers waiting nearby were killed. A couple of howitzers, a recoiless rifle and a heavy machine gun were set up to lay barrages on the hills. Colonel Roise's Second Battalion, Fifth, attacked the ridge to the left. With daylight Corsairs pounded the hills.

We finally made it through the bowling alley. Tanks and British marines were sent out to help us in. I was moving along the road where there was a six-foot bank on the right. There was a tank up there with its muzzle right over the road. When I was passing under it, it cut loose on a target across the valley. I heard a guy say, "That's right in there! Give 'em another!" That was the last thing I heard out of that ear for a long time.

Within sight of Hagaru! I was standing beside a Long Tom artillery piece, when one of our bombers popped over a hill and dropped a bomb very close to me. I guess he mistook us for enemy. The big gun muzzle shielded me from the waist up. The blast twisted my bottom half, took off my trouser legs, parka tail and broke my shoe laces.

I couldn't move.

The gun pulled away, exposing me, and some bullets began spattering around.

Vehicle after vehicle passed me. I began to think I was going to be left.

Then a jeep ambulance, pulling a trailer, stopped. Two guys jumped out and threw me in the trailer, which was already full of wounded. I apologized to the guy below. He said, "That's okay, Joe. I wish they'd throw some more in. It's warmer that way."

We rolled into Hagaru, sometime around noon, December 4.

I could walk a little but was in pain and it was severe. The town's women had huge kettles of boiling water. Their water was an open pond behind the houses, so I was glad to see it boiled. They sold it to us for ten cents a cup. We all had a cup of hot C-ration coffee. Then I got some different clothes.

I had gone eight days and seven nights without a wink of sleep, without one bite of food, with little water and with little time off my feet.

We thought we'd get some rest but Hagaru was under seige. Colonel Taplett told me to take a muster of H & S Company. We had 75 men and 5 officers fit for duty. We had started out with 250. Tanks were racing from one point to another to keep the Chinese at bay. The lines were so thin that two of my men went right through them on the way to a defense assignment and were captured by the Chinese.

After we were situated, we took turns getting some sleep. The townspeople took us into their homes. The family who took me were very nice people. The man was very gracious and would chain-smoke our cigarettes as fast as we gave them to him. The house was heated by a zigzag network of tunnels under the cement floor leading to an enclosed fire pit out back of the house, with a hollow log for a chimney further away. The house was warm as long as you stayed on the floor. Stand up and it was cold from the waist up.

He put me in a room that had some kind of grain on the floor about six inches deep. I crawled into my sleeping bag. As dead as I was for sleep, it took a long time to doze off.

When I did, I slept the sleep of the dead.