

Whether there was anyone in that haystack, I don't know. What I *do* know is that the enemy fire stopped immediately. Either they quit and ran, or they were dead. And, just like that, the action was over.

Everyone disappeared. I was left alone, panting on the side of the paddy. After a few minutes, I recovered and climbed up the hill to re-join my people. In a blink, it was all over. Just another pleasant walk in the fields, taking in the fresh air. I felt like I was in the not-so-wonderful Land of Oz.

The brigade stayed in reserve all day; at nightfall, we started a march to the Naktong River. I had never been on a night march, not even on maneuvers. It was nerve-wracking.

"No lights. No smoking. No talking. No noise. Just follow this road to I-don't-know-where, and when we get there, we will be there." Simple enough.

We marched throughout the night. When morning light came, we found ourselves among hundreds and hundreds of deserted enemy trucks, motorcycles, and who knows how much equipment. I can only attribute this to our having surprised the enemy, and his retreating before we arrived. I had not heard one shot fired, nor seen one wounded man. They must have just taken off. We found out later, through the local scuttlebutt, that we had come up against the 4th North Korean Division.

From what we knew, these were their best. It was going to be our best against their best, and it would be *today*, if I was any judge. All day we maneuvered for position — one squad going this way, another one going the other way. All with a purpose and all with a mission. The Marines were about to demonstrate what they could do.

We were still basically on this road to the river when our company — Easy — was ambushed and pinned down on the road. I was with a

group of flankers¹² on the other side of a ridge and could not, did not, see or hear anything that was happening on the road. Someone came dashing over the hill, yelling that the company was under attack on the road, and they needed covering fire from our hill.

Because I was a radio operator, I was armed with a carbine¹³ and, because of the weight of my equipment, did not carry a rifle — the combined weight was too much. I instinctively dropped the radio and the carbine, picked up an M1 that some dogface¹⁴ must have left in the dirt, and immediately dashed over the ridge.

In a moment, I saw that our men were pinned down by a couple of machine guns and our people could not, at least for the moment, bring their pieces to bear. I was in an ideal position on the forward slope of this rise, with my back propped against a telegraph pole, and sighted in on the first target: a gook¹⁵ machine gun. I squeezed the trigger and nothing happened ... a misfire.

I hurried to fieldstrip the weapon, finding it loaded with mud and crud and everything else. It was definitely not in firing order. So, in the middle of the whole mess — in full view of the enemy — I took the M1 apart, reassembled it, and sighted in again. I was way off the mark with my first shot, but I saw the strike of the bullet, and using Kentucky windage¹⁶, I sighted in again. Wouldn't you know it, the rifle misfired again.

So I fieldstripped it *again*, put it back together *again*, and, working the bolt manually, got off another shot that hit and killed the gunner. It was a damn good shot. Only the second one I'd ever fired at a man, and it was a good one.

This was just like the rifle range at Pendleton — nothing to it. I was as calm as a cucumber. Just load, breath, aim, and shoot.

I shifted my aim to the second gun, and still using Kentucky windage, hit the second gunner. With three bullets, I had killed two enemy soldiers. Immediately following these two kills, our men took control of the firefight, and it was all over. Our guys got up and out of the ditch and the enemy retreated, en mass. I could not believe it. No

one saw me do it — no one even realized where the fire was coming from, but there it was.

And then it happened.

I was sitting propped up against this telegraph pole, with my legs spread apart and my rifle held with a hasty sling¹⁷. Understand, I was working the bolt manually because the rifle kept jamming with every round. Anyone seeing me up there on that hill would certainly think I was shooting with a bolt-action rifle, not an M1.

And that's just what our guys thought — that I was a gook, shooting at *them*. They must have had their doubts, though, because they did not shoot to kill me, only to get me to stop. Their first shot hit squarely between my legs, not two inches from my groin, a shot they could not have missed from this range. I was a wide open target, legs and all.

I stared in disbelief. I'd come within *inches* of having my balls shot off.

I could feel the next shot coming, and I vomited right there, all over myself. But in actuality, the second shot never came. They just yelled up at me in our unique Marine verbiage to stop shooting and get the hell out of there. I did. Very quickly. I was in no position or mood to try to explain. They didn't know what I had done just two minutes earlier, but it did not matter. I did what I did, and that was that.

As I ran back over the hill, I realized I was all alone. Not one of my people had come over the rise with me, and I could not understand why. I was such a romantic — I felt sure that everyone would do what I did. Then I found out how wrong I was.

There were four or five men laying there, baking in the sun, and one of them apparently had heat stroke. It had to be over 100°, so I didn't wonder at that. I immediately took a handkerchief out of my pocket and wet it with some muddy water. There's no way I would waste clean drinking water on a man with heat stroke — I was only trying to cool him off by wiping his forehead.

Some of the water seeped into his eyes, irritating them. He immediately jerked up and wiped the dirty water out of his eyes. In that

moment, all of us knew that this man did not have heat stroke, or anything else wrong with him. But they all seemed to understand what he had done and, I think, sort of envied him.

He earned my profound disgust. As a matter of fact, I was disgusted with *all* of them, because not one man came over that hill with me. It was all on me. Absolute wonderment came over me. Maybe I really was on that yellow brick road headed to Oz. I was amazed that these men were Marines. I had thought that everyone here would be an everyday hero. Not so.

I worked loose from those guys and joined the line marching to the Naktong River. I didn't even know what the Naktong River was, much less where it was, but I did know that we, the brigade, had to push the 4th NK Division back across it. It was us ... the brigade ... about 4,000 men ... against a division. We would be attacking them in prepared, fixed positions. This was some sort of crazy. The attacking force is supposed to outnumber the defenders, not the other way around. But this really was an emergency situation. If they got past us, Pusan and the entire beachhead, the perimeter, would be gone. South Korea would be lost to the communists.

Just before sunset, we bivouacked on a hill, digging in a position that gave us a sweeping view of the entire area, command post and all. I was assigned my field of fire, as was everyone else. From my right rear, past the command post came the unmistakable sound of tanks, the ground under us rumbling like an earthquake. I turned to watch as three T51 Russian tanks came down the road. Russian? They did not have any infantry with them for support. I suppose they thought that we, as in every case before, would simply retreat at the sight of them.

Someone forgot to tell them we were Marines ... *not* the Army.

An air strike was called, and almost immediately, four P51 fighter bombers attacked. They were beautiful. They actually pirouetted in the sky, immediately knocking out the lead tank. Then they got the last tank in the line, leaving only the guy in the middle with nowhere to go. Our bazookas took care of him.