

Somehow, we — what was left of Easy Company — had to get out of there. It was on us, the 1st Marine Division of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. It was clear we were on our own. We had to figure it out by ourselves. We were at the furthest point of the 10th Corps' advance into North Korea. The furthest North and the furthest west of anyone. And I was, at that point, the spearhead of the outfit. To me, that meant only one thing: I had the furthest to walk to get out of this than anyone else.

Staring out into the abyss at mile upon mile of mountains frozen in ice, I knew the only way out of here was running this 23-some-odd-mile gauntlet right up against and through a very determined enemy. They were well disciplined troops who were not afraid to die. Who knows ... maybe they were afraid to live.

I had no idea where our other outfits were or if they even still existed. Were they as lucky as we had been or were we now all alone? No one knew; we had to prepare for the worst.

There was no order to pull back to Hagaru-Ri. That was seven miles away. It may as well have been a hundred. We were not going to go there unless we were wounded, dead, or ordered to. And that order was not forthcoming. Where would it come from, anyway? Tokyo? They did not have the foggiest idea that we were even under attack. They were all busy finishing up their great Thanksgiving meal and congratulating themselves on how wonderfully the “war” was going. If they vomited all over themselves, it would serve them right. I doubt if there was even one of them that did not get laid that night... as we froze.

We were all alone in this freezing hellhole called U Dam Ni — or was it You Damn Me? All the field phone lines were severed and none of the radios worked, their batteries frozen solid. Who ever figured to engineer something to work in minus-40° weather? It was just too damned cold for anything to work except for our M1s, some machine guns, and the mortars. Ammo was going to be a big problem.

We had to get resupplied, but from where? By whom? Who even knew we were there?

Wait a minute, I take that back. The Dai Ichi, those geniuses in Japan, knew. As a matter of fact, their last order to us was, as it had been for weeks, to advance west to join up with the 8th Army. Surely *they* would be able to help us. The idiocy still astounds me. We were actually freezing to death in our boots, just about paralyzed from the cold and our orders were, still, to advance west and north, join up with 8th Army, and proceed to the Yalu River. Make all haste. The word is that we will be home by Christmas. Maybe in a body bag, but home.

Dawn brought at least a 40° temperature increase. So there we were, in balmy North Korea, sunning ourselves on top of this gorgeous mountain as the temperature hovered at about 0° Fahrenheit. We thought it downright warm. I couldn't take my gloves off or blow my nose, but compared to last night, this was nothing. Were it not for all the dead men lying everywhere, I might actually have felt good. I had not been wounded. I was not hungry or chilled through to the bone. My feet were the only real problem. I think that at that time I would have traded my soul for a pair of dry socks and innersoles. Really. My feet, and everyone else's feet, were blocks of ice.

It was less than 30 miles from U Dam Ni to Koto-Ri, but it promised to be some kind of a terrible march — or fight, or whatever. It was a long way away. Too far for many of us. I was perfectly confident that *I* would make it. But my heart sank at the thought of the suffering and deaths that would occur along the way.

The Chinese were going to do everything they could to stop us, and we were going to do everything we could to get out of here. What would happen after we got out was another thing. We were surrounded by who knows how many Chinese. They had many men. Many, many

regiments. Divisions. Divisions on divisions. They were all over the place. They showed themselves openly now; out of range of our guns, of course, but openly. They knew they had us — it would just take another day or so. Last night was a temporary glitch, the loss of maybe a regiment in each sector, a slight setback. Yes, the Marines had put up a good defense, most commendable, but another day, two at most, and it would all be over. Soon, very soon, the Marines... the very best the Americans had... would be no more. They would all be dead in their holes and scattered to the winds, never to be found.

The Chinese had every reason to believe this. Every reason but one. And that one reason was they would be attacking a division of the finest fighting men in the world. It would take a hell of a lot for them to beat us. The gauntlet had been tossed. The battle of the Chosin Reservoir had been joined. An unknown and inexhaustible number of them against 14,000 U.S. Marines. Anyone like these odds? Place your bets ladies and gentlemen, the main battle is about to begin.

The airfield at Koto-Ri had been built by our engineers at the insistence of Marine Gen. Smith, much to the consternation of Army Gen. Arnold. What the hell did you people need an airfield for? Couldn't Marines walk? And besides, you had trucks, didn't you? What's with you guys? Can't you do anything right? You have my orders, now carry them out. You WILL join up with 8th army and you will do it NOW. Post haste, as soon as possible. We're pushing to be home by Christmas and at this rate we are not going to make it. So stop stalling and hop to it. Stop wasting time and equipment on building some stupid airfield that you'll never need. Get a move on, that's an order. It's about time you Marine hot shots stopped malingering and did some fighting. Now get a move on. Yes sir, Sir, Yes Sir, Yes sirree bob, Sir. Right away Sir. Just get out of my face and let me try