



"The Chinese were walking their mortars up the hill behind us. It was only a matter of time before they started dropping rounds right on top of us."

SSgt William D. "Denny" Weisgerber
Item Co, 3d Bn, 7th Marines

By Maj Allan C. Bevilacqua, USMC (Ret)

By early autumn of 1952 the war in Korea had become an artillery war, a form of warfare Americans have long been particularly adept at. Ever since the very able Union General Henry Jackson Hunt developed and perfected the modern techniques of massed artillery fires in America's Civil War, American forces had enjoyed superb artillery support. Korea was no different.

This does not imply that the Chinese were a collection of bumbling. To the contrary, they were very quick to learn. Abundantly equipped with the latest and best weapons in the Soviet arsenal by their friends in Moscow, the Chinese quickly became a formidable opponent in the employment of artillery. As the Marines of the First Marine Division soon learned, Chinese gunners were as skilled as any.

Beyond this, Chinese artillery units still were being lavishly supplied with ammunition from safe havens in Manchuria despite near constant aerial attacks on their lines of communication. Deep interdiction strikes by 5th Air Force bombers were failing to halt the flow. At the same time American artillerymen, Marine and Army alike, were beginning to feel the pinch of dwindling ammunition stocks. American industry, geared to peacetime production to fuel a booming economy, was not keeping up with expenditures at the front. Artillery units were encountering shortages. Orders were coming down from on high, as high as the Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, Far East in Tokyo, placing limits on the numbers of rounds that could be fired daily.

Major General Edwin A. Pollock, Commanding General, 1stMarDiv, didn't like this development at all. MajGen Pollock, a no-nonsense type who was described by one who knew him as "an outstanding Marine and a tremendous combat commander," had taken over the reins of the division from MajGen John T. Selden in late August. In the short weeks since then he had become sharply aware that the Chinese were very liberal in their employment of artillery. They also were beginning to work their way eastward, to the division's right.

It had started before MajGen Pollock had time to settle into the driver's seat. On the night of 4-5 Sept., Chinese ground units launched strong probes against the First Marine Regiment's positions on ravaged Bunker Hill and much-fought-over Outpost Stromboli (Hill 48A) by now familiar names. Minutes later artillery fires and ground assaults

In the war of attrition that bogged down U.N. forces in 1952, Marine forward observers adjusted indirect fires on known and suspected communist positions along the main line of resistance.

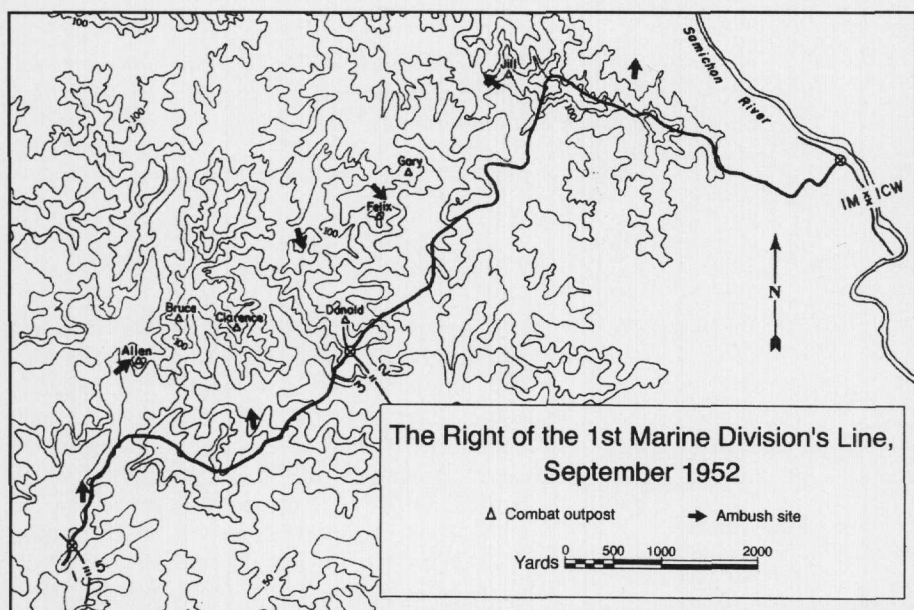
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The Artillery War

Korea, Autumn 1952





"STALEMATE: U.S. MARINES FROM BUNKER HILL TO THE HOOK" BY BERNARD C. NALTY

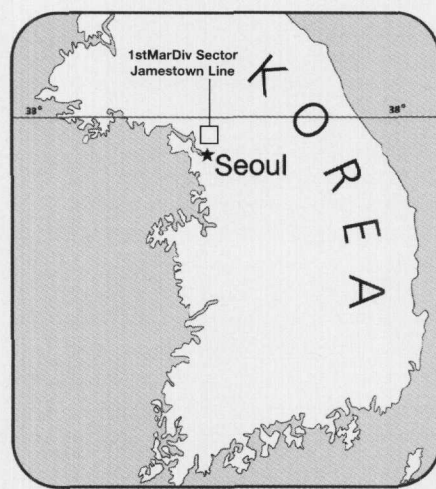
were unleashed against five outposts—Gary, Allen, Bruce, Clarence and Felix, well to the east in the sector of Colonel Eustace R. Smoak's 5th Marines, a section of the division's front that had been relatively quiet.

The attacks on Gary, Allen, Clarence and Felix were identified quickly as diversions. The same was not true of the assault unleashed on Bruce (Hill 25). That was the real article. No one was more aware of this than the reinforced platoon of Marines from Captain Edward Y. Holt's "Item" Company, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, holding the critical outpost. The Chinese threw their best punch at them.

Shortly before midnight on 4 Sept., rank after rank of Chinese infantry, an entire battalion, followed a pulverizing barrage of mixed mortar and artillery fire up the forward slope of Bruce. Under the close-in cover of automatic weapons, Chinese sappers employed demolition charges and bangalore torpedoes in an attempt to neutralize bunkers and cut a path through the outpost's barbed wire. The defenders of Bruce lashed back with a vengeance.

Not the least of the lashing was done by Private First Class Alford Lee McLaughlin, a native of Leeds, Ala. A veteran machine-gunner, McLaughlin poured murderous fire into the Chinese ranks, laying into them with disciplined, deadly accurate short bursts that dropped the figures in the mustard-colored uniforms in windrows. Despite the hideous losses, the Chinese pressed forward, feeding more and more bodies into the maw of McLaughlin's machine gun. As they had done so often before and would do again, the Chinese were attempting to overrun a Marine position by sheer weight of numbers.

They were doing a pretty good job of it. By midnight the Chinese attack had



lapped completely around the hill's defenders, taking them under fire from all sides. Marine casualties were mounting. One of those casualties was the munner of Bruce's other machine gun. As the gun fell silent, the Chinese rushed the position, seeking to take advantage of the sudden gap in the outpost's defensive fires. They reckoned without Lee McLaughlin.

Leaving his assistant gunner to man his own gun, McLaughlin sprinted through a curtain of fire and a hail of grenades to the second gun. Finding the entire gun crew disabled by wounds, McLaughlin fell prone behind the tripod. Firing with one hand while feeding ammunition with the other, he hemstitched the onrushing Chinese, piling their dead bodies in heaps. Ignoring the intense fire directed at him, McLaughlin raked the Chinese ranks, firing until the barrel of his gun began to smoke and the Chinese drew off, stunned by the actions of the wild man confronting them.

With that sector secured for the moment, McLaughlin sprinted back through the deadly red and black fountains of

exploding shells to his own gun. Afterward he could not say with any certainty how many times he crossed and recrossed the fire-swept hill to keep the outpost's two machine guns in action. When confronted by Chinese soldiers, he shot them at point-blank range with his pistol or carbine. For more than two hours Lee McLaughlin held the Chinese at bay, firing first from one position and then from the other.

Then, at 0230, the Chinese launched their heaviest attack yet. Masses of Chinese infantry, advancing through their own barrage, ignoring their casualties, surged up the slopes of Outpost Bruce where more than half of the defenders lay dead or wounded. Down to only one gun now, the other out of action, its barrel burned out by the nearly 2,000 rounds that had been fired through it, Lee McLaughlin met them head on. Lifting the remaining gun from its tripod, McLaughlin rose to kneel at the lip of the trench. With the barrel of the gun cradled in his left arm, he once more laid into the Chinese. Struck in the side by multiple fragments from an exploding mortar round, he was toppled backward into the trench.

He didn't stay there long. Bleeding and in pain, McLaughlin climbed back to the trench, picked up his machine gun and went back to work. When the scorching hot barrel began to burn his arm, he changed hands, cradling the smoking barrel in his right arm and firing with his left hand. Soon enough his right arm too was seared, and the gun, overheated, was out of action. No matter, there was a Browning Automatic Rifle nearby, and the plentiful bodies of Chinese soldiers yielded an abundant supply of hand grenades. Cursing and daring the Chinese to do their damndest, McLaughlin continued his one-man war.

Maybe it was the sight of the raving maniac confronting them. Maybe the bloodletting was too much for even the Chinese. Whatever the reason, the Chinese called it a day. So, too, did Lee McLaughlin. At daybreak, with both arms badly burned and a handful of mortar fragments embedded in his side, McLaughlin walked off Outpost Bruce. In his one-man stand he had killed and wounded more than 200 of the enemy. On 27 Oct. 1953, Lee McLaughlin received his country's highest award for military valor, the Medal of Honor, from President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

That was not the only Medal of Honor awarded to a defender of Outpost Bruce. A like recognition went to PFC Luis Fernando Garcia. As the battle raged with savage intensity, Garcia, ignoring his own wounds, dashed through the enemy fire

to secure a desperately needed supply of ammunition. When a Chinese grenade landed at the feet of his platoon sergeant, Garcia unhesitatingly threw himself atop the sputtering missile, offering his own life to save the life of a fellow Marine. PFC Luis Fernando Garcia would be awarded posthumously the Medal of Honor.

Bravery was common coin among the defenders of Bruce. Among the bravest were Second Lieutenant John G. Word and Sergeant Nils V. Ingemansson. For their resolute leadership and dauntless courage throughout a night of intense combat, during which they continually risked their lives without a thought to the danger to themselves, each would receive the Navy Cross.

At the height of the fighting on Bruce, the Chinese, perhaps out of sheer habit by now, fed more and more men into the meat grinder of Bunker Hill. It was in the thick of the melee that Hospital Corpsman Third Class Edward C. Benfold, an Easy/2/1 corpsman, saw a pair of Chinese pitch grenades into a shell crater that sheltered wounded Marines. Sprint-

ing to the scene, Benfold picked up a grenade in each hand. Howling with rage, he charged from the crater to run headlong at the Chinese attackers and press a grenade against each man's chest, sacrificing his own life to kill them. Like the courageous Luis Garcia, HM3 Edward C. Benfold would be awarded posthumously the Medal of Honor. On 31 March 1996, the guided missile destroyer USS *Edward C. Benfold* (DDG-65) was commissioned at San Diego.

Coincidentally, while Lee McLaughlin was demonstrating his own particular brand of courage on Outpost Bruce, another machine-gunner, PFC Jon D. Adams, was displaying bravery at Bunker Hill. Like McLaughlin, Adams, a gunner with a section of Browning M1917A1, .30-caliber, water-cooled, heavy machine guns from Weapons/2/1, fought a memorable personal battle against waves of onrushing Chinese.

With the remainder of his squad casualties, Adams kept his gun in action single-handedly, flailing the attackers with streams of deadly accurate fire to protect

a vital sector of the defense. Faced with the need to displace his gun to an alternative firing position, Adams, despite painful wounds, picked up gun and tripod (a combined weight of almost 90 pounds) and braved intense fire to take up a new position and once more rip the oncoming ranks.

Needing to displace once again and with his tripod damaged and useless, Adams picked up the gun with his bare hands, firing from the hip, ignoring the searing pain of the hot water jacket. Partially blinded by the blast of an exploding concussion grenade, Adams refused to give up. Only after being seriously wounded by shell fragments and after personally killing or wounding nearly 100 attackers did Jon Adams consent to medical treatment. He would live to receive the Navy Cross.

Joining Adams in receiving the Navy Cross at Bunker Hill that night would be yet another machine-gunner, PFC Rodney J. Green of Easy/2/1. Behind a Browning M1919A4, .30-cal., air-cooled, light machine gun, Green raked the ranks of

Cannoneers of the 11th Marines kept their M101, 105 mm howitzers in action to support fellow leathernecks along the MLR. (Leatherneck file photo)





LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

Above: At every opportunity Marines took the time to care for the tools of their trade. When the sun went down along the MLR, the weapons were put to good use.

Right: On 6 Oct. 1952, PFC John Kane, Charlie/1/7, received the Purple Heart from his battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Leo Dulacki, for wounds sustained in the intense fighting on combat Outpost Warsaw.

charging Chinese with streams of bullets, taking time out to aid several wounded Marines. Then, seeing two other machine guns out of action and their positions in danger of being overrun, he ignored his wounded hand to pick up his own gun and charge to reclaim both threatened emplacements.

That done, Green reorganized the defense in that sector, gave a quick course in machine guns to a nearby rifleman and went back to pouring fire into the packed ranks of Chinese. Wounded again by fragments from the shower of mortar rounds falling around him, he kept up



TS/SGT JIM ENGLAND PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN KANE

his devastating fire until he was wounded yet a third time. Waving off the stretcher that was called for him, Rodney Green walked calmly through the rain of incoming fire to the company aid station for medical treatment. Only after returning to his post to check on his men would

he consent to being evacuated.

That night of 4-5 Sept. set the tone for the coming weeks on Korea's Western Front. As if to emphasize the role artillery would play for the remainder of the war, on 6 Sept. the Chinese pummeled Outpost Bruce with a constant barrage of mortar and artillery fire. During the next 24 hours more than 2,500 rounds fell on the thoroughly battered hill. To observers back on the main line of resistance (MLR) Bruce appeared to be experiencing some sort of volcanic upheaval. When the 5th Marines was relieved by Col Thomas C. Moore's 7th Marines on 7 Sept., no one in the ranks of the 5th Marines was the least bit put out by going into division reserve.

The shells continued to fall throughout September and into the first days of October. The weather might be growing colder, but up along the MLR and on the outposts things were as hot as even the most pugnacious personality could wish for. October was only two days old when a combat outpost called Warsaw (Hill 137) got hotter than the proverbial hinges of hell. Warsaw, well to the east in the division's line of outposts, sat directly in front of the critical section of the MLR known as The Hook, close to the division's junction with the British Commonwealth Division.

Shortly after 1830 on 2 Oct. the Chinese unleashed a thunderous barrage of mortar and artillery fire against the 45 Marines of the 2d Platoon of Capt John H. Thomas' Item/3/7 holding the hill. Following a pattern that was by then familiar, masses of Chinese infantry, preceded by sappers carrying bangalore torpedoes and satchel charges, followed close behind the curtain of fire. The Chinese attack hit with pile-driver force, surging through the protective wire, washing over the trench line and forward bunkers. Seemingly endless waves of Chinese swept up and over Warsaw, firing sub-machine guns and throwing grenades.

The Marines of Warsaw fought back furiously, but for every Chinese who fell another took his place. Marine casualties were skyrocketing, fully half the platoon was dead or wounded, and still the Chinese poured more men into the fight. Warsaw was going to be overrun.

Driven to cover in a bunker with four other Marines, 18-year-old Private Jack W. Kelso fought like a man possessed, firing point-blank into the packed mass of Chinese trying to blast and claw their way in. When a grenade sailed in through a firing port, Kelso scooped it up, dashed outside into sheets of small-arms fire and threw the grenade back at the attackers. The grenade exploded almost upon leav-

ing his hand, knocking him to the ground and splattering him with fragments.

Bleeding from a half-dozen wounds, Kelso ducked back into the bunker and took up the fight. It was no use; there were too many Chinese. Sprinting back into the open to get a better field of fire, Kelso called to his comrades to leave the bunker and fall back while he held the Chinese at bay. Blazing away at his assailants, Jack Kelso stood alone, buying time for his brother Marines until he fell, riddled with bullets. Called by his squad leader, Sgt Keith Yarnell, "the bravest man I have ever met," Kelso, already a holder of the Silver Star and Purple Heart, would receive a posthumous award of the Medal of Honor.

Back on the MLR a counterattack force was sent forward immediately. That was Item Co's 3d Plt with veteran platoon sergeant William D. "Denny" Weisgerber at its head. The platoon had no sooner reached the base of Warsaw than it was taken under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. What no one knew at the time was that the Chinese, having taken Warsaw, had run out of gas doing it. They weren't going to abandon Warsaw peaceably, though. They were going to leave on their own terms under the cover of a fierce covering action and a rain of mortar shells.

The 3d Plt pressed upward into the teeth of savage resistance, exploding mortar rounds accompanying them every painful step of the way. Leading the way against a skillfully sited machine-gun position, Denny Weisgerber, a man who could make his point in a forceful manner, stormed the enemy gunners with grenades and rifle fire. The machine gun fell silent, its crew blackened and bloody bundles of smoldering clothes. Struck in the hand, Weisgerber ignored the wound to continue at the head of his men, pressing home the attack, driving for the summit of Warsaw.

Mortar rounds were falling all around Weisgerber when he saw a wounded Marine lying exposed in the open. Running to the man's side through sizzling shards of red-hot steel, Weisgerber draped the fallen Marine across his shoulders to carry him from the line of fire. A stunning blow from mortar fragments slammed him to the ground. Gritting his teeth against the blinding pain, he fought on to drag the wounded man from harm's way until he finally collapsed, unable to go any farther. For his leadership and dauntless courage on Outpost Warsaw on the night of 2 Oct. 1952, Staff Sergeant Weisgerber would receive the Navy Cross.

The Chinese may have been evicted from Warsaw, but their willingness to

fight was far from diminished. For the next four days they continued to pound at the thoroughly battered hill, turning it into a moonscape with more than 2,000 rounds of mixed artillery and mortar fire. On 4 Oct. the Chinese, having gained Warsaw once again, withdrew once more, leaving it empty for the 1st Plt of Capt Paul B. Bynum's Charlie/1/7, sent forward from regimental reserve.

The platoon barely had time to get acquainted with the landscape when the roof fell in. Shortly after midnight on 6 Oct. a thunderous barrage fell on the new arrivals, turning the darkness into overlapping red flashes of exploding shells that preceded yet another assault. Firing point-blank into the ranks of Chinese infantry, the Marines of the 1st Plt beat off attack after attack. For the next four days Outpost Warsaw was the scene of constant combat.

A week later the platoon was relieved. More than 80 percent of its members had become casualties. Trucked back to the regimental reserve area, the remnants of the platoon passed a group of recently arrived replacements from the 25th Draft. PFC John Kane, nursing the wound he had sustained on Warsaw, remembered them. "They gasped at the blood-soaked, begrimed veterans of Warsaw. We must have been quite a sight. You could tell they were reconsidering their career paths."

Author's note: Denny Weisgerber's Navy Cross came with a price: his right leg and part of his left hand. When he left California's Oak Knoll Naval Hospital, the man who by his own words was "born to be a Marine" was a Marine no more.

Being a Marine is as much a matter of the heart as it is one of what a man wears on his back. In the half-century since that night on Outpost Warsaw, Denny Weisgerber married, raised a family, became a successful businessman and was elected mayor of his hometown. Retired now, he is still much in demand as a speaker at patriotic events. An illuminated American flag flies day and night in front of his house. The eagle, globe and anchor is still very much a part of Denny Weisgerber.

Editor's note: Maj Bevilacqua, a former enlisted Marine and later an instructor at Amphibious Warfare School and Command and Staff College, served in the Korean and Vietnam wars. He is a frequent contributor to Leatherneck and has been writing a continuing series of Korean War articles to commemorate the 50th anniversary of that war.

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