



K O R E A

# THE BODY SNATCHERS

Story by Maj Allan C. Bevilacqua, USMC (Ret) • Illustrations by Dave Rydberg

*"As the third Korean winter approached[,] outpost clashes and small unit actions along the rest of the UNC front line began to slacken. During November and December, neither side appeared eager to pursue the offensive. Chinese aggressiveness declined noticeably."*

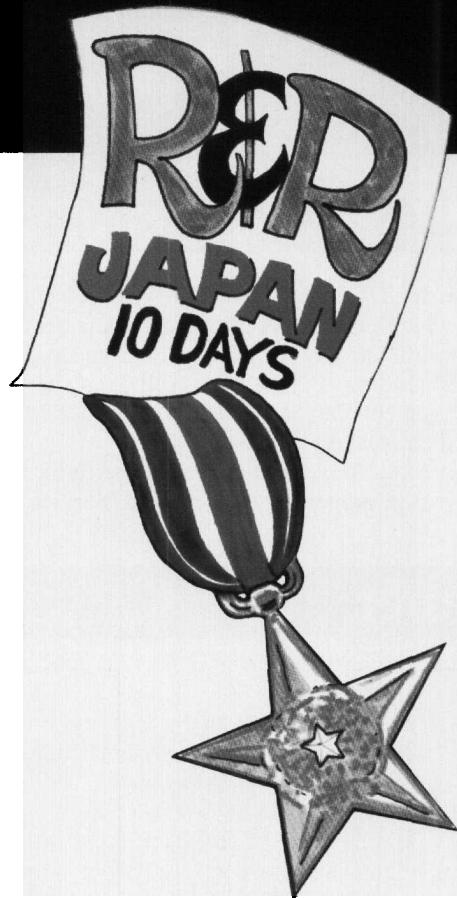
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**F**or the Marines of the First Marine Division, the approach of Christmas 1952 (the third Christmas of the Korean War) brought a strange lull to the Western Front. After the vicious fighting that had raged throughout the late summer and autumn, action had dwindled into long-range potshooting and patrol activity. Contact with Chinese troops was increasingly rare.

There was so little contact that Eighth Army Headquarters began to get a little edgy about what the Chinese were up to. Information collecting rose to the top of the priority list. All across the front more and bigger patrols, some of them involving entire companies, were sent out with the sole objective of bagging prisoners for interrogation. The results were spotty at best. More and more there was less and less information that would reveal what the Chinese were up to.

Contrary to the old adage, no news is not necessarily good news, at least not in the realm of military intelligence. Each day, increasing pressure to obtain prisoners was applied from the top. In no time at all, the hunt for prisoners became a cottage industry all along the Western Front.

It was about this time that an intriguing rumor began making the rounds of



the rifle companies manning the main line of resistance (MLR). Whoever brought in a Chinese prisoner, so the scuttlebutt went, would be rewarded with a Silver Star and an extra 10-day R&R (rest and rehabilitation) leave in Japan.

As Sergeant H. B. "Harry The Hawk" Ellett saw it, the first part of the rumor was pure pipe dream. But an extra 10-day R&R for a Chinese prisoner? That sounded reasonable. Added to the regular 10-day R&R he would be entitled to, that would be almost three solid weeks of slothful self-indulgence in Kyoto.

The Hawk was mulling this over as he sat in a bunker, looking intently out of a firing port. The Hawk's platoon was taking its turn on a hilltop outpost known as Carson, which along with two other outposts dubbed Reno and Vegas, went

by the collective name of the Nevada Outposts. Through the lens of a spotting scope The Hawk was gazing westward, scanning the forward slopes of a heavily fortified hill mass known as Ungok, home to a reinforced Chinese battalion. Ungok was decidedly inhospitable in every aspect, a place whose residents had a well-earned reputation for reacting violently to any and all intrusions.

While Ungok was without charm, to The Hawk it wasn't without possibilities. If it was a prisoner you were after, Ungok held potential candidates. To The Hawk a large patrol wasn't the way to go. Large patrols had been tried and found wanting. Too many people attracted too much attention.

What about only two men, though? What about two men slipping quietly over to Ungok, clunking some unsuspecting Chinese soldier over the gourd, trussing him up like a Christmas goose and hauling him back to Carson? Why not?

During the next few days everyone The Hawk approached with that idea thought he was stark raving nuts. Neither massive indifference nor strange looks deterred The Hawk from seeking a raiding partner. Somewhere in the nearly 30,000-strong reinforced 1stMarDiv there had to be someone crazy enough to accompany The Hawk over to Ungok.

Still, it was stretching the bounds of probability to think The Hawk would find that someone right in the company. Nevertheless, two days after he first began asking around, The Hawk was approached by Sgt Emile Boudreau, the swarthy-hued Cajun with the perpetual 5 o'clock shadow and the piratical mustache. The section leader of the company's 60 mm mortars, Boudreau was well-known as a man with a prominent go-to-hell streak in him. His response



to The Hawk's proposal was a broad, wolfish grin.

Several nights later, with a fine, dry snow spitting from low, wind-driven clouds, The Hawk and Boudreau inched their way through the blackness and down the forward slope of Carson. Each wore a pile cap pulled low over a blackened face. For armament both men packed a Model 1911A1 .45-caliber pistol and a Ka-Bar fighting knife. In addition, The Hawk carried a standard-issue wool sock filled with river gravel. Boudreau sported a like sock containing a hefty bar of hard, yellow laundry soap. Various pockets of their winter field jackets held a dozen or so 3-foot lengths of communications wire and a half-roll of green engineer tape to bind and gag their prisoner.

The night was as black as the inside of a cat. The Hawk and Boudreau hadn't passed more than 100 yards from the base of Carson before they were hopelessly lost. They were in the middle of an old minefield that had been planted by the South Koreans who had held that sector the previous year. The minefield didn't show on the map they had prepared carefully that afternoon from information supplied by the S-2 (Intelligence) shop. This was more than likely because the South Koreans never had bothered to record it.

Boudreau triggered a Bouncing Bet-

ty that popped into the air with a loud FOOMP! and a shower of sparks before clattering to the frozen ground—a dud. There was a brisk exchange of fire between the Chinese on Ungok and Marines back on the MLR, each convinced they were firing on a patrol from the other side.

The Hawk and Boudreau were trying to burrow into the rock-hard ground while green and red tracers crisscrossed inches above their heads. Both were beginning to entertain second thoughts about the sanity of the whole prisoner business. As soon as the firing sputtered out, the pair made for the bed of an ice-covered stream that neither man could

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recall having seen on the map.

As they followed the frozen stream up, the body snatchers were seriously considering the possibility they might be lost. A reinforced squad of Chinese, armed with weapons, appeared to be moving carefully downhill almost directly overhead. Ellett and Boudreau fingered their .45s, their Ka-Bars and their homemade blackjacks. They did their best to melt into the ground until the Chinese went on their way.

After the last of the Chinese patrol faded into the darkness and the snow, the men made tracks again. Following the streambed, they eventually arrived at the crest of a saddle between a pair of lumpy-looking hills. Neither knew it, but they had stumbled into a gap in the Chinese line, a gap the Chinese usual-

ly covered by observation and fire. At the moment, no one seemed to be doing any observing. Unseen in the curtain of falling snow, the Marines slipped down the reverse slope of the saddle and into the night.

Behind Chinese lines, although they didn't know it, the pair headed in what they hoped was the direction of Ungok. From time to time voices speaking in Chinese sent them skidding off at angles until they weren't entirely certain whether they were bound for Ungok or the San Diego Zoo. A succession of such abrupt changes of direction soon put them well in the rear area of the Chinese regiment holding that sector of the line.

They weren't alone. Even muffled by the snow there was the unmistakable

sound of a large body of troops marching straight down the snow-covered dirt road where Ellett and Boudreau were standing. With no other concealment at hand, they spilled headlong into the deep ditch bordering the roadway as the first of the approaching figures emerged from the snow. In minutes, solid ranks of Chinese soldiers filled the road only inches from where The Hawk and Boudreau lay holding their breath.

For the better part of the night the Marines hunkered in the ditch while the falling snow blanketed them. It didn't take a military genius to figure out that a really big unit, perhaps a regiment, was passing by.

It was almost dawn before the last Chinese soldier faded from view. By that time the snow had settled into a blizzard. Hungry and shivering, their only food a C-ration chocolate bar that Boudreau fished from an inside pocket, the men spent the day hiding out in the ditch to avoid being seen. Late in the day the snow let up, and the clouds parted a bit. Taking a chance, The Hawk rose above the lip of the ditch to orient the map and get a fix on their location. If they were any farther behind Chinese lines, they would meet the residence



requirements for Chinese citizenship.

At nightfall two half-frozen Marines warily emerged from their roadside hideout. By unspoken agreement there was no mention of the body-snatching business. There was only one priority now, and that was slipping back over that unguarded saddle and lighting out for Carson.

Halfway up the rear of the saddle they were stopped cold by digging sounds and muffled voices speaking in Chinese. The Chinese were filling in the gap. What had been unoccupied real estate 24 hours ago was being transformed into a rabbit warren of trenches and bunkers. The open door was tightly closed, and the gateway to Carson was firmly barred.

Snow was falling hard again as they backtracked cautiously down the saddle and set out on a wide swing to the left. There was no sense in working to the right. That led straight to Ungok.

They hadn't gone 200 yards when they came upon a Chinese soldier. Swaddled in the standard Chinese quilted winter uniform, the soldier was carrying several large ammunition cans on a *yo-bo* pole across his shoulders. Looking down at the ground to ensure his footing, the soldier was almost face to face with the two Marines before he saw them.

For a few moments the three men stood motionless, gaping in bewilderment. Then the soldier, aware at last that the two men in front of him were not fellow Chinese, started to yelp in alarm. Swinging his weighted sock like a lariat, Boudreau clopped the soldier squarely between the running lights. The soldier went down for the count. It looked as though the body snatchers had their body after all.

Who wanted him? By now there wasn't enough hard cash in the entire Chinese People's Army for that soldier or any other Chinese soldier to buy his way to Carson with The Hawk and Boudreau. Two men being very, very careful might be able to slip back through the Chinese lines. But two men trying to hustle a bound and gagged prisoner through those same lines? Forget it!

Using communications wire to tie the soldier head to foot, they crammed half the bar of yellow laundry soap into his mouth, making it fast with engineer tape, and propped him against a tree. Somebody would likely find him in the morning. They could

have killed the soldier on the spot, but he didn't look much older than 15.

It took the Marines four nights of stealthy travel and three days of hiding out, working their way to the left, to find a spot where they could slip back through the Chinese lines. During the third night, while they crouched in a shell crater under a volley of incoming 155 mm harassing and interdicting fire, they began to wonder if their own side even wanted them back.

By the time they had made it to that spot, they were all the way over in front of the British Commonwealth Division. On a pitch-black night, in the midst of yet another snowstorm, they succeeded in passing through the Chinese lines and making their way toward friendly territory. Several hundred yards from the MLR, they encountered a listening post from Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and after a few tense moments convinced the Canadians they were friendly.

After relating their saga to officials at every echelon, Ellett and Boudreau were returned to their own company around noon. The company commander and the battalion S-2 were impressed by the information The Hawk and Boudreau brought back. They had developed more information on the Chinese positions across the way than the combined reconnaissance patrols of the past two weeks.

But what about a prisoner? Hadn't there been any opportunity at all to snatch one? The Hawk looked at Boudreau. Boudreau looked at The Hawk. Neither could think of anything appropriate to say, at least not to an officer.

*Author's note: Is this a true story? It was related to me in 1955 by Harry The Hawk over a bottle of Asahi beer in the Bar Kiss Me in Itazuma, just outside what used to be Middle Camp Fuji, Japan. Truth, like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder. You be the judge.*

*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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