



The Flowers That Bloom In the Spring

By Maj Allan C. Bevilacqua, USMC (Ret)

"Day or night, however, there'd always be the chance that they'd 'walk the trenches' with their mortars. And they were good; my God they were good! I'd be terrified. You'd just cringe and hope. When I got into a real heavy firefight later on, things just happened so fast you didn't have time to think, but it wasn't that way with their mortars. I'd just keep saying 'Not me, not me.' It was horrifying."

—Former Cpl J. Richard "Dick" Munro
"Fox" Co, 2d Bn, 5th Marines

In the First Marine Division's sector of the Jamestown Line the only flowers blooming in the spring of 1952 were the deadly red and black blossoms of exploding Chinese mortar and artillery shells. The experiences of Dick Munro were the experiences of every Marine manning the forward positions along the main line of resistance (MLR) where daily visits by Chinese gunners were setting the tone for the war on the Western Front. In April some 5,000 artillery rounds and nearly 4,000 rounds of incoming mortar fire were logged along the division's front. The daily average of combined artillery and mortar fire falling

on Marine positions was in the neighborhood of 300 rounds.

If the Marines up front in the trenches, fighting holes and bunkers could only "cringe and hope," their brother artillerymen of Colonel Frederick P. Henderson's 11th Marine Regiment had their hands more than full trying to respond. If providing artillery support to infantry units spread across a 35-mile front was not enough, the 11th Marines was out-gunned by its Chinese opposites two to one. Fielding 10 artillery battalions lavishly supplied with ammunition, the Chinese were a formidable foe indeed.

In order to best support units on the

By spring 1952, the Jamestown Line on the Korean Front had turned into an artillery's duel. While Marines (inset) worked to load multiple 4.5-inch rocket tubes mounted on launchers and fire off their deadly barrages, the Chinese were dropping nearly 9,000 rounds of explosives daily along the Western Front (left).

exploding booby trap. Blinded in one eye, with his right foot and part of his right hand gone, McNesky crawled through the trench line, disarming other booby traps to prevent further casualties among his men. Resolute and determined despite great pain, Sgt McNesky gave a lesson in leadership.

No less resolute and determined were Private First Class Mario J. Cardillo and PFC Billie J. Bowerman. Cardillo, already bleeding from previous wounds, on 9 May answered the call for volunteers to go forward to relieve a pinned-down platoon from First Lieutenant Ernest S. Lee's Able/1/5. From an exposed position out of immediate contact with the main body of the relief force,

the enemy machine-gunners, blasting them with grenades and silencing the fire. Wounded a second time, he refused medical treatment and joined in the final assault that routed the enemy force.

For their selfless and heroic actions Cardillo and Bowerman each would receive the Navy Cross. Cardillo's decoration sadly would be presented posthumously to his family.

Actions like these, punctuated by the inevitable daily rounds of incoming fire, were the norm for a period historians have come to record as "relatively quiet." Most Marines who served on the Jamestown Line in late April and early May of 1952 remember it as an on-again, off-again war, with periods of doldrums interspersed with pulse-pounding furious action.

Second Lieutenant "Mick" Trainor (Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor, USMC (Ret)) recorded one Marine's view of it: "We stayed on the outpost for 4 more days. Each day was marked with a half dozen incoming rounds, which did little damage. More ominous, were the nightly probes. The Chinese were trying to get a fix on our defenses and would probe us here and there trying to draw our fire. They would deliberately make noise one night and flash lights another and fire into our positions, but they made no further attempt to assault the hill."

Life along the MLR could be contradictory. The days might be placid, Marines spending their time in bull sessions, sacking in or just loafing about, with some weapons cleaning and maintenance of personal gear. There was usually hot chow, for the most part very good, brought forward. From time to time there were modest issues of Japanese beer and PX rations.

Of all the things Marines on the MLR looked forward to, nothing ranked higher than mail call. Letters were devoured immediately upon arrival, as were newspapers, whether the *Pacific Stars* and *Stripes* or Stateside papers. It was the only means of keeping in touch with what Marines of a later war would call "The World."

Packages from home were prized, although their contents could vary widely. For every Marine who received a bottle of brandy packed into a loaf of bread there were three others who opened a box to gape at stale, moldy cookies, vol-

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MLR, there would have to be wide gaps between the four battalions of the 11th Marines. This made for greater difficulties in communications, resupply and redeployment and the regiment's ability to make maximum use of massed fires.

Fortunately, more than a few hard cases were equal to the task and then some. Sergeant Robert M. McNesky, a "George"/3/1 squad leader, on 30 April earned the Silver Star for bravery. Leading a small group of volunteers forward to investigate the possible Chinese use of an abandoned outpost as a jumping-off point for an attack on the MLR, McNesky was blown head over heels by an

Cardillo laid into the charging Chinese with deadly accurate fire. In the face of fierce resistance Cardillo maintained his position, blazing away at the Chinese at point-blank range, buying time for friendly elements to gain the upper hand. Cardillo refused to give an inch until he fell mortally wounded.

On the following day, 10 May, the raiding party that Able/1/1 Browning Automatic Rifleman Billie Bowerman was part of came under intense mortar and automatic-weapons fire. Seeing wounded Marines in the open and exposed to heavy machine-gun fire, Bowerman, although wounded himself, immediately charged

leyballs or bright red mittens. The Marine who received a battery-powered radio achieved instant popularity; a knot of his fellow bunker dwellers always clustered about his prize to listen to the offerings of the Armed Forces Network.

However, rarely a day went by without the cry of "Incoming!" being raised somewhere along the division's 35-mile front. Then the letter readers, the cookie munchers and the radio listeners would dive for their burrows to wait it out.

Rare as well was the night without patrolling. Active and aggressive patrols were a fact of life, preventing the Chinese from moving in uncomfortably close. Patrols almost without exception went out at night. Broad daylight was not a time to be out in the contested ground between the lines.

There was also outpost duty, a squad, a platoon or an entire company sent to occupy an isolated hilltop forward of the MLR. Almost all Marines on outpost duty fervently hoped it would not be their outpost that transmitted the call "Box me in." The call would bring a ring of artillery fire about their small unit if it

were suddenly surrounded by a sea of Chinese. Neither did anyone wish to be confronted by the need to fire the pre-arranged pyrotechnic signal that meant the outpost had been overrun, triggering a barrage of friendly fire right on the outpost and its defenders as well as the Chinese attackers.

A major change to the daily routine took place on 11 May when Col Russell E. Honsowetz' 7th Marines relieved Col Thomas A. Culhane's 5th Marines as the 1stMarDiv's center regiment on the MLR. In the light of subsequent events Col Honsowetz' Marines could have been excused for thinking the move was a matter of really bad timing.

What lay at the root of the situation was some inconvenient Chinese-held real estate facing the far right of the 7th Marines' right-hand battalion, Lieutenant Colonel George W. E. Daughtry's 1/7.

Most bothersome of all was a stretch of high ground to the immediate front that was backed by a hill numbered 104 and a long finger ridgeline known as Tuma Ridge another half mile to the north. The positions had been a part of

the outpost line of resistance (OPLR) that had been tried, found wanting and then discarded as a viable defense measure during the division's first weeks on the Jamestown Line. The Chinese immediately moved in and set up housekeeping.

The 7th Marines, like the 5th Marines before them, concluded that the Chinese homestead was too close. Something had to be done about it, and the 7th Marines would have to do it.

On 26 May LtCol Daughtry issued Battalion Operation Plan 16-52. The plan called for seizing two pieces of high ground to the battalion's front, while at the same time neutralizing the Chinese positions on Hill 104 and Tuma Ridge. The main attack would be conducted by Captain Earl W. Thompson's heavily reinforced Co A, while a reinforced platoon from Charlie Co under 2dLt Howard Siers would conduct a feint to draw Chinese attention away from Able Co's attack. The entire effort would be supported by two tank platoons, the fires of LtCol George Thomas' 2/11 and on-call close air.

No one knew just how touchy the Chi-

Leathernecks of the 5th Marines had beaten back a Chinese onslaught. Dawn on the outpost gave the infantrymen time to take stock and prepare for another attack that certainly would come.



MSGT JAMES F. GALLOWAY

nese were about a lumpy hill mass known as Ungok, just east of Tumae Ridge. The presence of Marines on Tumae Ridge would be uncomfortably close to out-flanking Ungok. From the Chinese viewpoint, that wouldn't do at all.

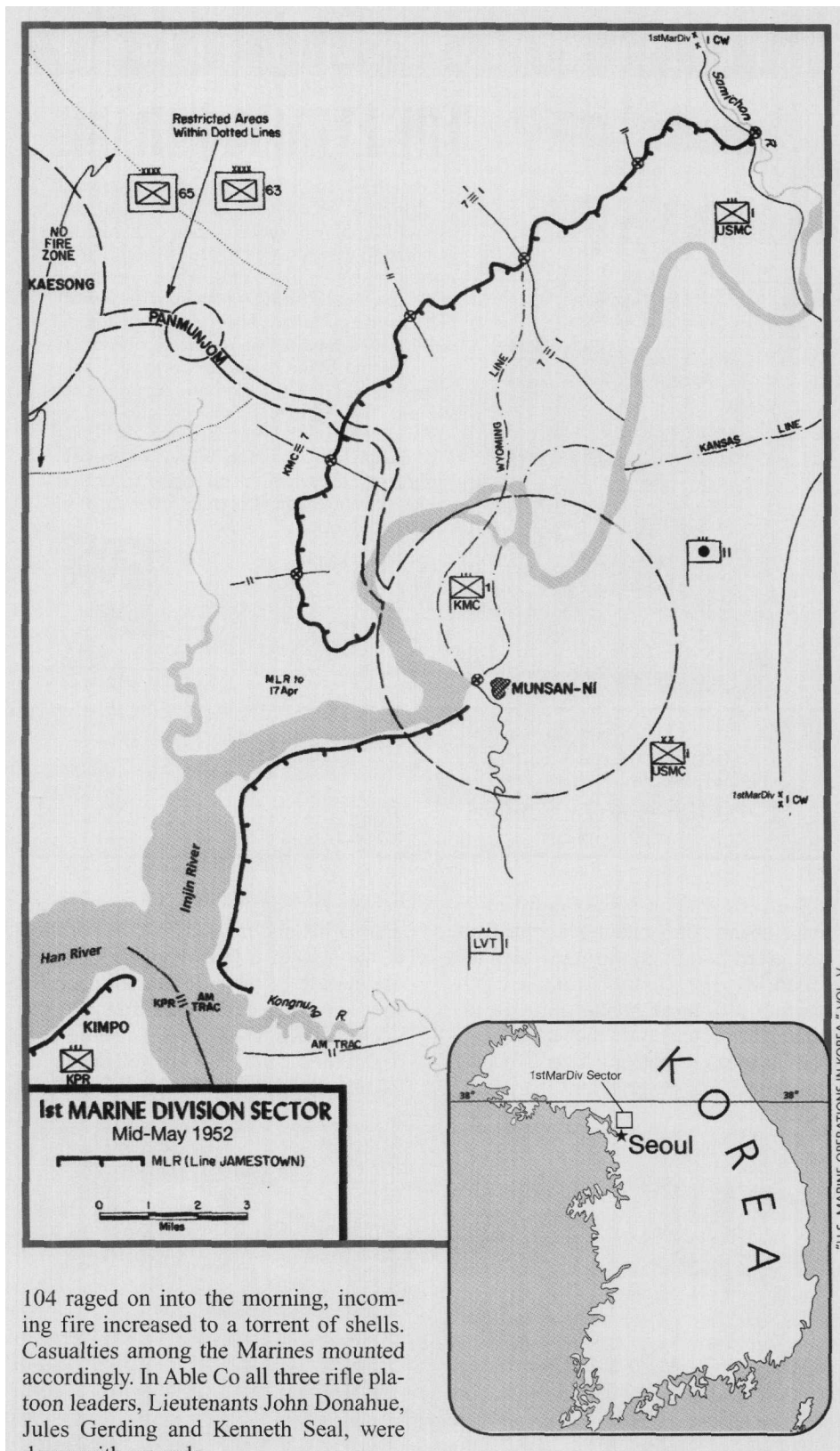
Both Able Co's main attack and Charlie Co's diversion jumped off on schedule promptly at 0330 on 28 May, with Capt Thompson's Able Co Marines advancing almost to the base of Hill 104 before the Chinese could react. That reaction, a counterattack by a reinforced platoon, was sent reeling back by the fixed bayonets of 2dLt John J. Donahue's platoon.

The essence of the Able Co attack was Marines such as squad leader Sgt Robert F. Touchette leading from the front through barbed wire, mines and intense Chinese small-arms and automatic-weapons fire. Pouring fire into the Chinese occupants of bunkers and trenches, Touchette battled up the hillside, carrying his squad along by his example of courage and determination. Confronted by a skillfully sited bunker, Touchette charged forward, a grenade in each hand, to blast the defenders into silence. Wounded in the right arm and both legs, he refused to be evacuated, continuing the assault until the summit was reached. For his fearless bravery and inspirational leadership, Sgt Touchette would be awarded the Navy Cross.

Corporal David B. Champagne, an Able Co fire-team leader, knew a thing or two about fighting. Leading his men through a hail of Chinese fire and grenades over-running trenches and bunkers, Champagne was among the first to chase the Chinese from the top of Hill 104. Painfully wounded in the leg during the Chinese counterattack, Champagne refused to be evacuated, choosing to stay with his men on the hilltop.

Hobbling over to a Chinese grenade that had fallen in the midst of his fire team, Champagne picked up the smoking missile, drawing back his arm to throw it in the direction of the enemy. As the grenade left his hand, it exploded, turning his hand to pulp and blowing him completely out of the trench he was standing in. Exposed and in the open, he was mortally wounded by incoming mortar fire. Cpl Champagne would be awarded posthumously the Medal of Honor.

The Chinese, reacting violently to the Marine incursion in the vicinity of Ungok, threw a firestorm of mortar and artillery fire at the Able Co Marines and the supporting platoon from Charlie Co on Hill 104. As the fighting atop Hill

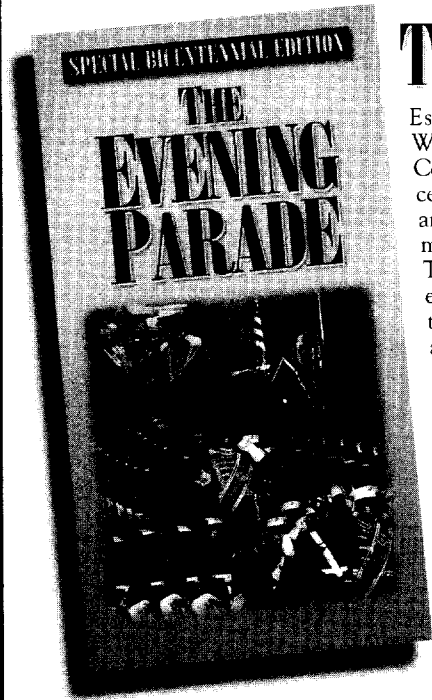


104 raged on into the morning, incoming fire increased to a torrent of shells. Casualties among the Marines mounted accordingly. In Able Co all three rifle platoon leaders, Lieutenants John Donahue, Jules Gerding and Kenneth Seal, were down with wounds.

Among the dead were Staff Sergeant Rollins M. Bryant of Able Co and PFC John D. Kelly of Charlie Co. Fighting his way forward in the initial attack on Hill 104, Bryant fearlessly led his men in the face of withering enemy fire to reach the crest of the hill. Once there, he skillfully sited his men in a hasty defense to repel the counterattack that was not long in coming.

Taking command when his platoon

leader was wounded, Bryant, despite painful fragmentation wounds, never faltered in directing the platoon's response to the repeated attempts by the Chinese to dislodge it. The action raged for hours, and Bryant, although weakened by the loss of blood from wounds he refused to have treated, continued to lead from up front until he fell mortally wounded by a volley of enemy mortar fire. He posthumously would receive the Navy Cross.



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With his platoon pinned down by intense enemy fire, radioman John Kelly was given permission to trade his radio for an M1 rifle. He used it immediately, blasting a Chinese bunker into silence, killing the occupants. In the face of heavy odds he took on another bunker. Wounded this time, Kelly nevertheless charged the

bunker, once again killing all inside. Continuing his one-man assault, he sprinted to the side of a third bunker, thrusting the muzzle of his rifle into an aperture and delivering point-blank fire into the interior. Then, caught in a scything flail of machine-gun fire, Kelly fell dead. For his unconquerable fighting spirit and un-

surpassed personal courage, PFC Kelly posthumously would be awarded the Medal of Honor.

Despite the actions of such valorous men as John Kelly, Rollins Bryant, David Champagne, Robert Touchette and other equally courageous Marines, the attack had gone as far as it could. Casualties had been too heavy. While there were but nine dead in the assault force, the wounded numbered more than 100. There simply weren't enough unwounded Marines to lend the necessary weight to a continued attack. Shortly after noon, on orders from battalion, contact was broken off, and Able Co withdrew to the MLR.

The attack on Hill 104 produced mixed results. On the positive side the Chinese had been cleaned out of the high ground directly in front of 1/7's sector of the MLR. Another positive, but one attained at great cost, was an appreciation that the Chinese would strenuously resist any threat of an incursion in the vicinity of Ungok.

One more thing was learned, and it was an eyeopener. In defending against 1/7's attack against Hill 104, the Chinese had poured in more than 4,000 rounds of mortar and artillery fire, a record for incoming fire in a single 24-hour period. The Chinese of the Western Front were definitely a muscular foe.

Author's note: A veritable walking bull's-eye, Dick Munro had an unnerving talent for drawing enemy fire. Wounded three times in only two months, his third wound would put him in hospitals for almost a year and would end his days as a Marine.

Munro graduated from Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y., and entered the world of business. He rose to the position of chief executive officer of Time, Inc. Much of his success, he maintained, could be traced to the qualities he learned from the Marine Corps. In an interview with author Henry Berry, Munro said: "I have a very warm feeling for my time in the Marine Corps. Above all, I learned self-discipline. You can't succeed in business without it."

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.



TSGT JACK A. SLOCKBOWER

Friendly conversation about a deadly business was what Marine snipers (left to right) PFC Charles D. Lindsey, Cpl Daniel L. Klod and Private James H. Burchnell talked about while enjoying a smoke on Korea's Western Front.

