

TO THE COLORS

By Bill Palmer



Part I

Doug Konold was born and raised in Minneota and lives there today.

His nation called him to serve for a time far from Minneota.

Doug's father died while still a young man, so Doug had to accept more responsibilities earlier than many boys as he helped his mother and two sisters make a home for themselves.

But every boy's life has room for fun and Doug's boyhood was no exception. He described how he and his friends used the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad's passenger service through Minneota for small adventures.

"We called it the Galloping Goose," he said of the CNW's daily passenger train, "It would go west in the morning and come back east in the evening." He explained, "We'd walk to Taunton and then we'd sit there and wait for the train to come back through and we'd get on – it cost us a dime to ride back to Minneota."

Doug graduated from Minneota High School in 1947; went away to school in St. Cloud for a time; and then returned to Minneota to begin his working life.

War broke out in Korea in June 1950 and it reached out to Doug one year later.

"I was between 21 and 22 years old when I was drafted," he recalled, "we had to show up in Marshall for a bus and we went for our physicals to the old Federal Building in Minneapolis in September 1951 — that was quite a deal." He laughed as he explained, "I had never seen three or four hundred naked men in one place — that was pretty strange!"

The young men from Southwest Minnesota returned by bus that same afternoon, but not

everyone had passed the physical screening.

Doug remembered a boy from Hendricks who had been diagnosed with high blood pressure which made him unfit for military service.

“He felt pretty bad,” Doug recalled.

Doug left Minneota in January 1952 for his Army service.

“They had a bus again in Marshall because there was quite a group going up,” he remembered, “There were a number of guys I knew and we were all on the bus together.”

The bus took the young men back to the Federal Building, but for a different purpose.

“We got sworn in and they said, ‘All right, line up — let’s go!’ and we got on a bus for Fort Riley, Kansas,”

Doug shook his head and laughed, “We changed in a hurry!”

The Army trainers at Fort Riley assigned the men to barracks by alphabetical order.

This meant that Doug and his friend Donny Kom-pelien ended up in the same training company.

Doug said, “It is always nice to see someone you knew.”

He described the barracks as two story, wooden buildings with rows of bunks.

“We got assigned to a bunk and a footlocker and that’s where we lived for thirteen weeks,” he said.

Doug remembered his first days of Basic Training as marching from place to place for haircuts, shots, uniforms, and equipment.

“You marched in a group; you went in there and everyone went in and you waited until everyone got out and then you went to the next stop,” he explained.

“That was the start of being taught discipline.”

The trainers emphasized the importance of keeping the barracks clean — this was another way of teaching discipline and the importance of teamwork. “You didn’t have a speck of dust anywhere, including up in the rafters,” Doug recalled.

Training days began early and ran late.

“We got up about five or five-thirty; you shaved and dressed; made your bunk; and made sure your footlocker was in order because they came around to check your footlocker when you weren’t around,” Doug explained.

“We went to chow and came back to police up the area and then you went out and did your training.”

“We did a lot of physical training — push-ups, jumping jacks, and we did a lot of running,” Doug recalled, “I was pretty athletic, so I didn’t mind it at all.”

Doug remembered doing map-reading exercises in the Kansas hills; learning about combat patrolling in those same hills; and doing lots of training with their M-1 rifles, indoors as well as at the target ranges.

“It was like firing any other rifle,” Doug recalled, “What astonished us was that there were a lot of guys who didn’t know anything about a rifle — [the trainers] watched them like a hawk.” He continued, “All the guys from around here thought the [rifle] training was pretty stupid, but we didn’t realize that a lot of the guys had never touched a rifle.”

Doug’s training company conducted their Basic Training during the Kansas winter.

“Don’t think Kansas doesn’t get cold in January,” Doug said, laughing, “Boy, it was cold!”

He added, “You had long-johns, sweaters, and fatigue uniforms and that’s what we used.”

He said, “We stayed in classrooms in the coldest weather, doing speed tests assembling and disassembling the M-1’s.”

The trainees graduated in early spring of 1952, earning a furlough home before reporting to

their first assignment.

“It was about midnight before our furlough when they handed us our orders,” Doug said.

“I remember Bud Cur-wick and I (Bud was from Ghent), we were going to Far East Command, FECOM they called it, well, we knew where we were going.”

The two friends knew they were going to war in Korea.