

TO THE COLORS



By Bill Palmer

Part II

Last week we met Minneota's Doug Konold and learned how he was drafted into the Army in January 1951.

He completed Basic Training in the winter and received orders to the war in Korea before returning home on furlough.

"We had to report to the depot in Monte and the train was going to the West Coast," Doug recalled, "My family took me up there and here were all these guys that I knew."

The new soldiers rode to Seattle, Washington in cars reserved for their use. Within days they boarded a troopship for the passage across the Pacific.

"We ended up in a stateroom on top —there were about 15 of us and we had bunks," Doug explained, "We carried all the groceries and all the supplies to wherever they needed them."

Doug liked the stateroom because it kept them out of the crowded troop decks below and the hauling gave them something interesting to do.

"We'd sit in the stateroom and play cards or sit out on deck," he remembered. He added, "We carried ice cream and all kinds of food."

The troopship arrived in Yokohama, Japan after two weeks at sea.

Buses took them to a temporary camp where they encountered their duffle bags.

"Here was that pile of duffle bags," Doug recalled with a laugh, "My God it was big —bigger than a straw pile and you had to go find your bag." He added, "The NCO's just sat back and laughed."

The young replacements sorted out their bags and loaded on trucks for the naval base at Sasebo. They then loaded on a train for a trip through an undersea tunnel to the naval base.

"There was water running down the side of the tunnel," Doug remembered, "They had candles burning in the side — that was the only light."

The train emerged from the tunnel and the young soldiers found themselves at a huge naval base with sailors all over.

"I looked around and here one of my best friends was crossing the street — he was a sailor, Dougie Anderson," Doug remembered. They spotted one another and met later that evening at the Army beer hall.

"There were just hundreds and hundreds of GI's there, all in green fatigues when here comes these two sailors in whites," Doug recalled with a laugh, "Boy did they get a jawing all the way up there . . . it was Dougie, he had come out to see me."

The two friends enjoyed their Minnesota reunion on the far side of the world.

The new soldiers soon boarded an old Japanese ship for the crossing to Korea where they landed in the city of Pusan.

The next morning the new replacements loaded on rickety, narrow-gauge railroad cars for the ride north.

"I thought back and the Goose (Minnesota's Chicago and Northwestern passenger train service) was really modern compared to this."

Doug remembered, "There were rough lumber bunks and the windows were all shot out — they had machine guns up on the front and back of each car."

The leadership issued live ammunition and told the men to watch the countryside because snipers had been active along the route.

"The countryside was very barren — it was almost like a desert," Doug remembered, "the farther north you got, you started running into the forests and the hills."

He added, "It was June and the weather was hot and dry."

The train pulled into Avscom City where the men received their unit assignments.

"I was assigned to George Company, 19th Infantry, 24th Division," Doug explained.

"I spent the rest of my time there with them."

"They were in a rest area when we got there and that was a good thing," Doug recalled, "You went up to your company and you dug a hole and you crawled into it."

A few days later Doug's Company returned to the front, marching along trails on the back side of ridgelines.

"You carried your pack, your shelter half, your raincoat, e-tool (entrenching tool), your jacket, fatigues, pants, and shirt, and your rifle with three bandoliers of ammunition — 10 clips each with eight rounds per clip," Doug explained.

As the men approached their fighting positions they passed an area of earlier fighting where dead Chinese soldiers were covered by only a thin layer of dirt.

The stench from the decaying bodies was the worst smell Doug had ever encountered. The men passed quickly and arrived at the company area.

"Your holes were staggered out 10 to 15 yards apart," Doug recalled, "You always had two in a hole and the deeper you dug them, the better off you were."

The men of the company began going out on patrols immediately.

"The first time I went on patrol we were walking along a road in the valley when this plane came over and we heard this terribly loud noise," Doug remembered.

It was a 500 pound bomb. "Man, they make a noise when you are down in the valley!" he exclaimed.

The patrolling was constant.

"We just went out until we made contact with the Chinese — a couple shots fired and then we'd turn around and come back," he explained, "That was every day all summer long — they just

wanted to know where they were at.”

“At night the Chinese would go on their patrols,” he continued, “You’d just sit there and stay awake — you had an hour on and an hour off — you didn’t sleep on guard duty.”

The days and nights passed — each the same as the one before.