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Voices of the Past

Part of the Army Heritage Center Foundation's Educational Series

KOREAN WAR

Highlights:

- Richard Turner joined the US Army in 1946 and re-enlisted in 1949.
- This article is adapted from SSG Turner's oral history, presented in his own words with minimal editing for clarity.
- When the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, Turner volunteered for the 2nd Infantry Division and was sent to the front lines.
- Turner participated in the pivotal battle at Chip'yong-Ni.
- At this time there are no known photographs of SSG Turner.

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Frozen to the Bone: Staff Sergeant Richard Turner

(Korea, 1950-1953) My name is Richard Turner and I served with Charlie Company, 23rd Regimental Combat Team, 2nd Division, in Korea...When I first came home in '51 I was one of the first group rotated. We used to sit around, as I was still on the regulars, used to sit around and talk war stories, as guys that have been in a war will do. And when I got discharged in '52 then, then I didn't think I talked about the war that much.

So one day, say ten years ago, something reminded me of something that happened in Korea and I told my wife. "Did I ever tell you about the time," and I started into this story. She says, "Yeah, about ten times." Up to that point I had thought to myself that I had never told a single soul that story, except here my wife had heard it ten times and I just wondered who else had heard it ten times.

I had stopped telling war stories quite a bit, and only for I knew I must be repeating myself and people don't like to hear that kind of stuff. They didn't understand and they didn't believe, anyhow, some of the things that I saw and I did. When I tell you about them, the civilian people here in the States just did not believe me. They just looked at me, and I could almost see in their face, "Yeah." When I told them some of the things, you know, until I got the picture not to do that, I could almost hear them saying, "People that were really in combat don't talk about it." Haha. Just the reverse is true. People that were in combat do talk about it. And they, the civilians like the say, "Well, it's too horrible for him to remember it and that's why they don't talk about it." Well, that's not right because we remember it in our minds, why not talk about it? In fact it's better if you do, I believe, it's better if you do talk about it."



Fortified front line bunkers, Korea, 29 Jan. 1953. Photo courtesy of USAHEC



Gen. Matthew Ridgway commanded all UN Forces in Korea. Photo courtesy of USAHEC

"I'll give you a little background on myself and then I'll go into my stay with Charlie Company. I joined the Army in 1946 as a regular for a three-year tour. I spent most of that first two years in the States and then went overseas to be a occupation troop in 1948, where I stayed until my enlistment was up in '49. I reenlisted for my own vacancy, and stayed in Japan. I really like the Asian people, even though they were Japanese and had been instrumental, some of their troops had been instrumental in killing my brother and some of my relatives, as most people had people killed during the Second World War.

Ridgeway, I do believe, was in command then. I saw him several, several times and even chatted with him once. At any rate, I just got to thinking to myself, do you know that the tour is only a year here, not much longer than that, and here I am, I've had a few shots fired at me but I've never fired back at the enemy; I am a professional soldier, been in the Army four years, what in the world am I doing? I should really go where the fighting is.

So I volunteered... it sounds crazy, but I volunteered to go to the 2nd Division. I told my Col. Bullock at that time, my section chief, that I wanted to transfer up to the front. He understood because he was a World War II Veteran. He understood, and I went. And I had my choice of divisions to go to. I picked the 2nd because I knew it was based at Fort Lewis and that's close to my home and I told everybody, "Yes, I'm going to the 2nd Division because I heard they were rotating home and I want to go home with them." I didn't dare tell anybody I volunteered to go to the front; they would have thought I was crazy.

"I got up to the front and I'll tell you, Mr. Knox, during this tape I will tell you stories and I don't know all the times where I was, what towns I was, or the dates. I could only give you kind of approximates like it was warm or it must have been summer or it was raining and must have been spring. That's the best I can do, and I really apologize for that, but I just have no knowledge of what towns we were in. They weren't... they didn't have sign boards up on them like they did in Europe in World War II, and we didn't always get the big picture. We didn't have a lot of maps with us; we were infantry and on the move mostly. And so I'll start my story from the time I was on my way to the 2nd Division."

Source

Richard E. Turner. Korean War Veteran's Survey. Box 8. Folder 24: SGM Company C Survey. USAMHI.

I was onto my second hitch in 1950 then when the war broke out in Korea and I was working in 8th Army Headquarters then for General Walker, later to become Bulldog Walker. We went right over. So I was in the rear echelon for the first part of the war until right after the first Christmas, that'd be the Christmas of '50. At that time I was working in the G2-G3 section. Gen. Walker had been killed and Gen.

"Snowing all the time, of course. Very cold. I was trying to get acclimatized to living out in wooden buildings in the rear area to living out with no covering at all, and it was kind of rough to do that."
-SSG Richard Turner



An American front line outpost on mountain top, Korea, 1950. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC.