



CORPORAL FRANK VOLOCK UNITED STATES ARMY KOREAN WAR

A veteran of the Korean War, Frank Volock was born on December 3, 1928. At least, he says laughing, “that’s what they told me.” Home for Frank was his family’s farm in the famous Black Dirt lands of Orange County, New York, reclaimed from swamps just before and after the Revolutionary War, and famous for its sweet onions. His grandfather had come from the border area between Austria and Poland and at some point the name Wolak became Americanized.

Thanks to the farm growing up in the Depression did not mean having to go without food. But farming was hard, tough work. “Most of our work was on hands and knees, we had no machinery.” School, St. Joseph’s, was a three-mile walk away and the nuns were “very, very strict!” For Frank there were no sports, no Scouts, or other after school activities. After-school and weekends meant working the farm.

World War II hit the country. “When I was 15 years old I tried to join...told them I was 18.” A lot of kids tried to join, lying about their age. But his father found out. And it was back to the farm. “I hated farming,” Volock admits with a laugh. “We used to work from dawn to dark, you know, 60 to 80 hours a week.”

Then came the Korean War. Frank enlisted. It was in December, 1951. The Soviets had put up the Berlin Wall, and Mao’s Chinese Communist Army had conquered China. The fear at the time was that the communists would use Korea as a stepping stone to overrun the rest of Asia. As to Korea, “we didn’t think there was anything to it, people figured we’d just go in there and, you know, take care of the situation.” Frank signed up with a sense he was doing his duty. Plus, he allows with another laugh, “I was



so happy to go and get away from farming. But I found out serving in the military wasn’t that easy.

“I took my Basic at Fort Jackson, South Carolina... What happened to me is, during training a bayonet struck me in the side and it got infected, so I stayed in the hospital a week. Happened at my sixth week. So when I got out of the hospital I had to start out all over again with another outfit. Then I got my orders to go overseas, to Korea.

“We sailed from Brooklyn Navy Yard. Picked up troops in Puerto Rico, went through the Panama Canal, and then into Japan.” After a couple of days they landed at Inchon, Korea. “There we were assigned to the 2nd Division, 23rd Regiment, F Company. We took training for about a week to get used to the area. Then they sent us out.”

For three weeks they were under a constant barrage of artillery shells. They had to scramble, dig in, improvise.

Their own artillery support came up. Then: “we’d take a hill, they’d take one back, we’d take another...” Frank started out as a rifleman; then was assigned to machine guns. Frank handled the ammo, his buddy handled the gun. “He didn’t last long, so I became the machine gunner... they were .30 caliber guns. We had quite a few battles. We would be engaged, maybe 30 days or so, then they’d pull us back for a rest. Then we’d start up again, somewhere else, kept on going from one place to another.

“We machine-gunners were up front, artillery in the back. At times things could get pretty bad...very tough. We would take one place, then they’d take it back, a lot of back and forth, we’d hit them, they’d hit us. We lived in fox holes, bunkers. The bunker was about 8 feet long, 6 feet wide, made out of dirt.

As to Korea, “we didn’t think there was anything to it, people figured we’d just go in there and, you know, take care of the situation.”

We had a beautiful place for our latrine, 20 feet away,” Volack recalls, with a laugh. Then his face saddens.

“Sometimes they would bring us our food, so we wouldn’t have to walk around the camp for our grub. Once I seen this guy coming [with our food] and I was waving to him, about 100 yards away. Then a round hit him. I hollered I was going after ‘em but someone grabbed me and pulled me back...and then the enemy let loose with another round thinking I was going to run out there. That bothered me for years and years.”

North Koreans with guns weren’t the only enemy.

“And then we had rats. I had some candy, and I kept on wondering how come this candy’s always disappearing? It was because of the rats. One time I figured I’d fix the rat good. I dug a hole and threw my candy in there...and rigged up a grenade. I heard noises, and then my grenade went off. I got the rat.”

They had to pull guard duty around the camp, in two-hour shifts. They used passwords. “You would say like ‘Yankee’ and they’d have to reply ‘Stadium’, stuff like that. If you got a different answer you’d better watch out. We had North Koreans who looked like South Koreans, spoke the same, we had a lot of spies around, you know. So we had to be very careful. The South Koreans fought in their own units but sometimes we took some [North Korean] prisoners and so they would translate for us.”

There was a lot of face-to-face fighting with the enemy. “If a North Korean put up his hands we’d slug him in the jaw to knock him out because we didn’t know if he was faking a surrender or not. Some of them had a lot of intelligence about us. They knew our names, what units we were in...”

They set up cans filled with pebbles on a wire around the perimeter to act as a warning system. It didn’t help though against artillery. “One day we were getting hit pretty bad with artillery shells. I remember I was thrown up in the air. I didn’t know what was happening. I woke up in the field, about half a mile away I guess. I had been dragged there. And when I tried to get up, I wanted to walk but I couldn’t... They came and gave me a shot of something and before I

knew it I was out again. I woke up in a hospital [in Osaka, Japan as he found out later]. I was there about four months...I had a concussion, back injury, shrapnel...”

He was sent back to the States, to San Antonio, for recovery under medical supervision. He served out the remainder of his enlistment as an MP. “I couldn’t find myself for a long time...because of what I had seen, you know...” He had been fighting for nine months in Korea. Emotionally, though, the fighting was not over. “I was doing crazy things...sometimes I would hear voices, noises. The sight or sound of a Jeep set me off. It still bothers me.”

He did not receive his Purple Heart medal until 15 years later. There was a notation of the honor on his discharge papers, but “they must have thought someone had already given it to me. It was funny, I was supposed to get some other medals and things, so I wrote to them and they wrote back, ‘what do you want them for?’ But I finally got them. Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Korean Service ribbons.”

Frank didn’t tell his family he was coming back. “I hitch-hiked home. They didn’t say much to me and I didn’t say much to them about the war. We were told not to talk too much.

“I’ll tell you what, though. When I got out of the service I was glad I lived on a farm ‘cause that helped me out. I felt safe there.” The worst, he recalls, were the “throw-backs”, the recurring flash-backs and nervous attacks that would pop up without warning. He couldn’t attend wakes or funerals. “They couldn’t figure it out. They didn’t understand PTS Disorder until much later. I got help finally maybe 20 years later.” There were a lot of Korean veterans who came back from the war with it.

Would you change anything if you could do it all over again? Frank was asked. “Well, I’d try to stay in the back lines more,” he jokes. “But seriously, being in the military, they make a man out of you. I recommend it, especially for someone who isn’t sure about what to do in life.” Or who doesn’t like farming?

