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Joseph DeHaan

Warren Duncan

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TRF man gets news of his brother's capture in Korea

It was forgotten, but now is remembered

by David Hill
Associate Editor

Between 1953 and 1954, numerous comrades had written to the DeHaan's to express their condolences on the death of their son Joe. They had learned from the Department of the Army that Joe had been captured while serving with D Company, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, second infantry division on Hill 1051 in Korea. When his comrades wrote to Gertrude DeHaan they explained that he had died, as the army had explained, of intestinal tuberculosis while in the hands of the opposing forces. Some of the individuals that wrote had been with him when he was captured, but in a letter written in June of this year, 47 years later, the DeHaans finally received a detailed account of his capture.

After Joe died, Gertrude DeHaan heard from and continued to correspond with many of Joe's comrades, but they never knew exactly how he was captured.

Warren Gerry DeHaan of Thief River Falls said that when they received the letter from Warren Duncan recently it was just like it was brand new. "It was something forgotten, but it came to light again."

Gerry's mother passed away some time ago, along with four of the 10 children in the family. DeHaan said there are four boys and two sisters left. He said the reaction of the other members of the family was about the same, except for another brother who served not far from where Joe was captured.

Gerry has entertained the idea of going to Korea, but has set that idea aside. He's not exactly sure why Warren Duncan chose to write now about how his brother was captured, but he's glad he did. Perhaps it was his recent visit to the memorial to the "Forgotten War" in Washington, DC.

The following letter was written to Gerry DeHaan on June 24, 1998, from Warren E. Duncan:

"I'm 47 years late, but I extend

my condolence to you and your family. Nevertheless I finally located Joe's family.

"Joe and I were very close friends, as we depended on each other, and we were together day and night, for several months.

"Joe was a very friendly guy, and very easy going, yet he and I had some very bad experiences while in Korea, as they called it, a Forgotten War.

"Joe and I were in 'D' Company 1st Battalion 38th Inf. Regt. 2nd Inf. Div. and on the night of 17th May 1951, we were attached to 'A' Company. We had been on Hill 1051 for 28 days with no action, until 4:30 p.m. We saw masses of Chinese troops crossing a clearing 720 yards to our front. We called the company commander to report our sightings and he said, 'to hold fire' as we had a patrol of our men out front. Then darkness fell on us and all was very quiet, you could have heard a pin drop. We knew something big was going to happen. At 9:30 p.m. the Chinese bugles began to blow. That was their signal to attack. They came across 30 feet of coiled barb wire like it wasn't there. Trip flares lit the skies. You could see hordes and hordes of Chinese troops coming at us.

"Joe and I only had a 45 calibre pistol and 12 hand grenades each. We expelled all ammo. I was the gunner on our 75mm recoilless rifle. Joe was the ammo loader. I told him to break off the breech block, I threw the telescope sight away so the Chinese couldn't use the gun on our troops. Enemy mortar rounds were hitting all around us. Joe was in the fox hole on the right side of the gun. I was on the left side. Two Chinese grabbed Joe, but didn't see me, as I was lying in the bottom of the fox hole. That was the last time I saw Joe. We were completely surrounded by Chinese for the next day and night before the Rangers got to us. Our job with the 75 mm recoilless rifle was to knock out machine gun

nests and tanks and anything we could knock out.

"I'm sending you some copies which are very poor quality of some articles that were in local newspapers last Veterans Day. Wish I could do more.

"When I came back from Korea, I went to Fort Knox, KY, to get paid and a leave for home. My luck my name wasn't on the pay sheet so I had to walk about one-half mile to Finance to get some money to come home. While I was gone all the other guys left, along with them went all my bags. I had 50 rolls of film in my bags, that I never had developed. The pictures were taken over my years in Korea. It really hurt me to lose all of that.

"Excuse this letter for I haven't written a letter since I was in the army.

"Again, your brother Joseph was the best friend I ever had.

"If Truman hadn't fired General McArthur, Joe probably would be home today. That's when all hell broke loose and we lost most of our troops."

Gerry DeHaan explained that his mother was notified by the Army in June of 1951 that Joe had been taken prisoner. She was notified October 26 of 1953 that he had died in prison. From 1952 to 1954, she received several letters from some of his buddies that were in prison with him. The Army said he died on February 19, 1952, and his friends said he died in November or December of 1951. His body was buried on a hill not far from prison camp #1. His body was shipped home on October 27, 1954 and was buried on November 8, 1954.

Joseph N. DeHaan was born December 6, 1930 in Chinook, MT, to John and Gertrude DeHaan. He moved with his parents to Red Lake Falls in 1934 and lived on a farm. He was a graduate of Northwest Ag School in Crookston, and in 1950 enlisted in the U.S. Army.

A Veteran Goes One More Mile To Help A Fallen Comrade

A Veteran's Day Special Report

Page #1



The 75 mm. recoilless rifle platoon of Dog Company, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry regiment 2nd Infantry Division was spread out among the riflemen of A Company, along the ridges of Hill 1051. It was the morning of May 18, 1951, and beyond their foxholes, the men of the heavy weapons platoon waited; for beyond their lines lay 200,000 Chinese soldiers determined to push the Americans and their allies back to the sea.

Warren Duncan, a 17 year old from Morgan County sat next to the 75 mm. recoilless rifle, his loader, Joseph Dehaan, a few inches away.

The 38th Infantry, like the rest of the division, had been pushed back into central Korea following months of constant fighting with Chinese and North Korean forces following the battles along the Chongchon River in November-December 1950. The Regiment had been re-supplied, re-inforced, and sent back up to the front lines in an attempt to stop the Chinese advance.

"When we left Kunni-ri in February," Duncan recalled, "our platoon was down to five men out of over a 30 who entered the battle."

The Chinese, having failed to destroy the Americans at Chongchon were determined to finish the task they had set forth the moment they crossed the Yalu River.

Soon the morning erupted with the haunting curl of hundreds of Chinese bugles announcing the attack. The

Continued to page 3

Warren Eugene Duncan (pictured above left) and PFC Joseph Dehaan. The two men served with the 2nd Infantry Division during the Korean Conflict. Duncan's desire to find Dehaan's family following his friend's capture would take nearly fifty years to accomplish.



Leon Boos and Dehaan, with their recoilless rifle unit shortly before the battle that would eventually cost Dehaan's life.



Pictured above are members of Joseph Dehaan's family. Dehaan's brother, Jerry and his wife, came to Tennessee this past September to visit with Warren Duncan.

A Veteran Goes One More Mile To Help Fallen Friend

Page - 22

enemy came, wave after wave against the rifle company's position. Attack after attack was driven back. Dead and wounded Chinese and Americans lay all around them.

" We had used up all our grenades," Duncan said of the most effective weapon the American had to keep the advancing Chinese at bay. " Our rifle ammunition was gone too, and I had a couple rounds left in my .45....."

Then a concussion grenade exploded inside their foxhole.

" When I came too, I could see them (the Chinese) dragging Joe away," Duncan said. " They must have thought I was dead because they left me alone."

It would be the last time Duncan would see his friend alive.

Chinese forces pushed through the American lines, taking hundreds of prisoners. By the time Duncan could gather his thoughts, the rifle positions his platoon were supporting no longer existed. it was 9:20 in a.m.

For the rest of the day Duncan tried making his way to friendly forces. Reaching a creek at twilight, he heard the

Sound of enemy troops moving

near. " I lay in that creek all night, too afraid to move. They were all about me and I just knew that at any moment one of them would come up and see if I was dead or not."

Warren Duncan would rejoin his regiment by the next day. For him and the other men of his company, there was still much fighting to be done.

Note: There was a second Morgan Countian on Hill 1051 that night too, 24 year old Robert Jacks, who like Duncan, served in the same platoon.

Joe Dehaan died while in the hands of his captors, at the prisoner-of-war camp at Chong Song, North Korea on February 19, 1952. The official cause of death was listed as intestinal tuberculosis.

" He starved to death," Duncan explained.

For the next forty-seven years Warren Duncan thought often of Joe Dehaan and his family. " I knew they lived somewhere in Minnesota," he said, " but that was about all I knew."

men in July 1995 while attending ceremonies at the opening of the Korean War Memorial in Washington, D.C., Mr. Duncan found Joe Dehaan's name on a causality list - that he had died in captivity.

Like many veterans who wish to put closure on a part of their lives they thought they had forgotten, Warren Duncan began searching for members of Joe Dehaan's family.

A member of the 2nd Division Association - made up largely of veterans of the Korean War - Mr. Duncan began writing old colleagues - gathering information.

Then, through the Internet, he found a number of Dehaan families listed in Minnesota. " I started calling them," Duncan said. "...and I found one of Joe's brothers."

Four brothers and two sisters are still living in the Thief River community, not more than fifty miles from the Canadian border. This past September, Joe Dehaan's brother, Jerry and his wife, drove 1500 miles to meet Warren Duncan.

Their meeting was emotional. " We had a lot to talk about," Mr. Duncan said.

They brought with them a letter addressed to the family from another member of Duncan's platoon, Mike Zimmora of Ohio, who like Dehaan, had been taken prisoner that night. Zimmora told the Dehaan family of their brother's never ending efforts to make things better for his fellow prisoners. " He died keeping his pain to himself," Zimmora told the family.

But Mr. Duncan's search to find family members of his lost comrade didn't end the mission he had undertaken. Joe's name had been left off the Korean War Memorial's Honor Roll. Warren Duncan began writing letters to coordinators of the memorial.

And at last, Joe Dehaan's name was placed on the honor roll, never to be forgotten in the annuals of history thanks to the friendship and loyalty of a man who had shared the same experience that only men in war can share.