

Recommended for Citation

Outfit Given Up; Gains UN Line, Rejoins Battling

By *William Burson*

A Forward Battalion CP (UP)—The captain stepped up to the operations map with an eraser

He rubbed out the symbol which had designated "King" Company. In its stead he drew a blazing arrow topped with the mark used by a Chinese regiment.

"King," he said, "has ceased to exist as a military unit."

It had borne the brunt of the initial thrust of the Communist spring counteroffensive, and stood its ground for four hours in a sea of charging Chinese.

Its men were presumed dead, captured, or fighting a death stand surrounded by Reds.

But The Presumption was made without reckoning with the never-say-die spirit of Capt. Herman Stein of Neenah, Wis., and his doughty loyal men.

Twenty-four hours later "King" Company's symbol was back in the tactical lineup.

Stein and some of his infantrymen were battling again after a cross-country escape march. Sixty hours later the company fought a rearguard engagement screening the withdrawal of its regiment across the 38th parallel.

Sixty-six hours later this scrappy force, its ranks decimated, jumped aboard tanks and roared off in a vain attempt to bust a roadblock which had trapped 2700 withdrawing GIs. And they might have been successful had not two of the tanks been knocked out before they reached the ambush valley.

Thereby hangs the take of "King's" recommendation for a Presidential Unit Citation.

The recommendation was made by Lt. Col. Curtis Cooper of Detroit. And it was endorsed by Col. Peter W. Garland of Gastonia, NC.

The men—The battalion and regimental commander respectively credited "Stein and his boys" with saving their division from possible encirclement. It is a story of fighting courage unsurpassed in the Korean War.

It began the preceding Friday when the company attacked into the Chinese buildup and with marching fire and bayonets knocked a battalion from a hill which could give UN troops a vantage point to view the Red concentrations in the Kumhwa Valley.

The advance left "King" out in front of the main line like a sore thumb and when the Chinese threw their Sunday punch it was against this point.

"They milled in front of us all day Sunday," Stein said. "Artillery splattered them by the hundreds. But the gaps were filled as swiftly as a river closes over a tossed stone."

At 7:30 pm sharp, Communist mortar and artillery shells started screaming in followed by close rank columns moving up the ridge in front.

"They massed in the valley below," the captain said. "The whistles blew and the bugles blew. They whooped blood-curdling yells and charged like bulldozers. Everyone had a grenade in each hand."

Two suicide waves were downed. The third made the top and pushed the GIs back. But Stein regrouped the company and led a successful counterattack.

From then until 11:30 the infantry held fast.

"We had to pull back when they started in on us from the flanks as well as the front," the company commander said. "We withdrew to the next ridge and were ready for them when they followed up."

The GIs met the next charge without moving. They came to hand to hand grips with the Chinese who got within the perimeter. "We mowed them down and still they came," 1st Lt. Charles Post of San Antonio, Texas, reported. A radio operator died at his post as he called in artillery so close that shrapnel sprayed the Allies.

When their ammo ran out they took up where they left off with .45 automatic pistols or bayonets used as daggers.

The story was the same with the 57-mm recoilless rifle crew led by Cpl. Richard Osuna of Peoria, Ill.

1st Lt. Dayton Poe of Bluefield, W. Va., said he counted 28 dead Chinese in front of Stein's foxhole.

Sgt. Robert Farrell of New Bedford, Mass., destroyed the mortars and flat trajectory weapons as they ran out of ammunition. He said he saw several GIs without rounds for their rifles tackle Red soldiers in fistfights.

Some used the butts of their M-1's to batter the attacking Reds to death.

"Our ammo was gone," Stein said. "When I saw two of my men disemboweled with bayonets, I knew it was hopeless. I saw a column moving through the draw of my left trying to get behind us. I yelled for everybody to make to the hills and make their way back as best they could."

Cpl. John Bostwick of Richmond, Va., a medic, loaded every litter he had with wounded and ran with his bearers down the trail. They were the last ones to get out the way the company had come.

A machinegunner stayed behind voluntarily to cover the withdrawal. He died firing his gun.

The men split up. Every able-bodied soldier took a wounded man with him. No wounded were left on the hill.

Stein led one group toward what he thought to be the positions of Easy Company. Sgt. Louis Lese of Thomaston Conn., and six men with him made their way to Lov Company and helped that outfit on its way out of the encirclement.

For six hours Stein's men stumbled through dark valley and crept up unfamiliar hills. To their south they got near the enemy so they turned north into Red territory. PFC Billy Jay Wells of Norman, Okla., scouted ahead of the main party.

In one instance SFC Ray Remp of Pittsburgh, Pa., said the men saw an enemy patrol on the ridge line moving south while they were in the valley moving northeast.

"I think every one of us stopped breathing as those Chinese went by," he said.

After three hours of this stealthy march, Stein consulted his company and turned south. As the first rays of the morning sun lighted the hills, the tired bedraggled troop topped a crest and saw American tanks below.

"I think we all must have said a little prayer of thanks," 1st Lt. Ray Admire of Ravenna, Ohio, said. "I think if we had been 15 minutes late we would not have gotten out. In the

daylight we wouldn't have lasted ten minutes in those hills."

The tanks carried the company back to the battalion headquarters. There Stein's group was reunited with the six men led out by Sergeant Lese.

After 12 hours rest on a sunny sandbar in the Ildong River, Captain Stein led his remaining men back into the hills and into the fight. ♣

The Distinguished Unit Citation for King Company, 19th Infantry Regiment, reads as follows:

As authorized by Executive Order 9396 (sec. I, WD Bul. 22, 1948), superseding Executive Order 9075 (sec. III, WD Bul. 11, 1942), citation of the following units in the general orders indicated is confirmed in accordance with AR 220-15 in the name of the President of the United States as public evidence of deserved honor and distinction. The citation reads as follows:

*Company K, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division (second award), and the following attached units:
Machine Gun Section, Company M, 19th Infantry Regiment (second award);
Forward Mortar Observer Team, Company M, 19th Infantry Regiment (second award);
Medical Aid Team, Medical Company, 19th Infantry Regiment (second award),*

Are cited for outstanding performance of duty and extraordinary heroism in action against the enemy near Chip'o-ri, Korea, during the period 18 to 23 April 1951. During this period, Company K and attached units were spearheading an attack by the 3rd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, to secure the high ground overlooking a suspected enemy build-up area in the Kumhwa Valley. Fighting their way over rugged terrain, the company and attached units seized objective after objective and, on 22 April, reached a terrain feature from which they could observe the enemy build-up area. Throughout the day, friendly artillery placed devastating fire in the area with effective results. At 1930 hours, two enemy columns, supported by intense mortar and artillery fire, advanced up the ridge and charged Company K's positions. Two waves of the assaulting enemy were immediately cut down by the accurate fire from Company K's automatic weapons and rifles. The third wave made the top of the ridge, and its overwhelming numbers forced Company K and attached units to withdraw to more tenable positions. The company commander then regrouped and encouraged his men and led them in a bayonet counterattack which, after a fierce hand-to-hand engagement, succeeded in driving off the enemy and regaining the lost positions. From that time until 2330 hours, the courageous and inspired soldiers of Company K and attached units held fast as wave after wave of determined hostile troops hurled themselves at the friendly positions. When the enemy attacked in overwhelming numbers from both flanks as well as from the front, the weary but still aggressive friendly troops were forced to withdraw to another ridge line, where they immediately began preparing for the next assault. Company K and attached units met the fanatical enemy charge with a devastating volume of fire and succeeded in repelling it. As the numerically superior enemy began to envelop Company K and attached units, it was necessary to take up more favorable positions. With ablebodied men carrying their wounded comrades, they successfully withdrew with all casualties. In the course of this action, Company K and attached units inflicted approximately 900 casualties on the hostile forces and displayed such gallantry, determination and esprit de corps in performing their mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions as to set them apart and above other units participating in the action. ♣