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## Fifty Eight Years Of *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* Perpetrated by the Korean War

I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1949 having just turned seventeen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October. Upon completion of eleven weeks of boot camp training at MCRD San Diego, California, I was transferred to the Marine Corps base, Camp Pendleton California. There, I was assigned to Headquarters Battery, 11<sup>th</sup> Marine Artillery Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and was trained in the electronic communications field as a radio operator/telephone lineman.

On June 27<sup>th</sup> 1950 we received orders to prepare for combat and ultimate shipment to the Korean Conflict in South Korea. We formed the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Marine Brigade from units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division; they were the first, second and third Battalions of the Fifth Marine Regiment with only two rifle companies in each battalion, and the 11<sup>th</sup> Marine Artillery Regiment plus the first Marine Air Wing and all support elements. We then sailed from California to Korea on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, 1950. On our way there we had two very memorable incidents at very high seas.

The *Italic* type is the result of my nightmares and/or flashbacks. Each situation, as described, came to me in multiple flashbacks and nightmares ie: PTSD.

*A U. S. Navy sailor stationed on one of our destroyer escorts contracted appendicitis and had to be transferred to our ship, the USS Henrico, for surgery. This was accomplished during a stormy high sea. In order to make the transfer our ships were side by side with about forty feet or less between them. A lifeline was shot across from the Henrico to the escort destroyer. The sea was very rough and the ships were swaying in opposite directions while the sailor was pulled across to our ship. He would dip down in the water then bounce back like a*

*rubber band when the ships would sway the other direction. It was very scary.*

*The other incident was also at very high rough seas. We had picked up an unidentified submarine on the ships radar, all hatches had to be closed and locked down and if you needed to go from one compartment to the other for food and, in some cases, to use the head, you had to go to the top deck where the waves were washing across the deck, the sailors had to put hand over hand ropes across the entries so we would not be washed off the deck. It was another very scary time, all this just getting to the war zone.*

We arrived at Pusan harbor South Korea on August 2, 1950. I had been temporarily assigned to a recon party as a radioman and we were the first stateside marines in the combat zone. After our recon of the area and all of the other units came ashore, I was then reassigned back to Baker Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Fifth Marines, as one of the communicators for their forward observer (FO) team. (**A forward observer (FO) team's job is to call in air strikes, artillery and naval gun fire to assist the ground troops when necessary**). There are about seven to twelve enlisted members and one officer. The amount depends on air and naval gun fire capabilities or requirements, Baker Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines provided us with security as needed.

I do not know the reasons why, but for some reason I do not recall most of my time during the Korean War, that is except for nightmares and flashbacks. I have had and still have many bad dreams and flashbacks about the combat

situations that I encountered while there. The nightmares, dreams and flashbacks are now called **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**, or **PTSD**. When I was much younger, during the

2<sup>nd</sup> world war, they were called shell shock. PTSD has brought back what seems to be some of the worst times for me. I will not get into the real gory things about the war but I do want to share some of my experiences that have resurfaced in my nightmares.

I hope that by writing these gory nightmares down on paper it will help me accept the reasons for them and by sharing them it may be some help to others. I know there were a lot more combat situations than I remember but the ones I do mention here are the ones that keep coming back in my dreams over and over. I have had, and still have, these dreams at least three and sometimes four times a week for the past 58 years.

When I was still in service and after retiring I would have the nightmares, according to the other marines in the squad bay and at home by my wife, but did not always wake up from them. Now that I have retired from military service and the civilian market, I am awakened by the nightmares and sometimes cannot go back to sleep, because when I close my eyes the nightmare is still there.

I believe the above statement is of great significance to those who may have PTSD and do not realize it, i.e. As long as I was working or kept busy they were not as bad. But, when I stopped working they seemed to be much more prevalent. I am presently on sleeping and antidepressant medication prescribed through the Veterans Administration. Sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. But they are better than not having them at all.

I do not regret the time I spent over there or the people that I had to eliminate in order to save millions of others. I do sometimes question why I returned when so many others did not. South Korea is now one of the largest and richest democratic economies in the world and I believe that part of it was because I and many of my buddies were there to help them. I know in my heart that what we did saved many lives even though we lost some lives in the process. Nothing is free and not all people are chosen or capable of doing this type work. There must be reasons some give all and some only give to later return and live thru other world struggles.

In either case, we were there not because we were selfish, greedy or misinformed, it was because someone needed our help. War has been with us from the beginning of recorded time in one form or another and always will be as long as there are those selfish, greedy and misinformed people.

Pusan, Korea is located on the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. The city of Pusan was the last stronghold the South Koreans and US Army from Japan were still holding when we arrived. It was the Marines' job to relieve the South Korean Army and push out the perimeter then

turn that ground back to the South Korean Army and then do the same thing with the U. S Army. For whatever reason, the two armies would lose the ground we had gained and we had to go back and retake it. This went on for what seemed to be forever.

*The Marines' tempers were running very high and at one point we were on our way back to the front and the U. S. Army was marching the other way. Words were said and a fistcuff between the U.S. Army and U.S. Marines took place until the officers and noncoms stopped it. I am not sure if this incident was ever published.*

I lost a lot of close buddies while in Korea, many were killed and/or wounded. *I remember the first of many of my forward observer (FO) team that was shot. In that first case he was shot in his privates parts. As he was carried away smoking a big cigar, his comment was, "I didn't want children anyway". Of course, he had been heavily sedated.* The forward observer (FO) teams had a very, very high rate of personnel losses; many times we were positioned on high ground in front of our own combat lines in the middle of the enemy so we could have a good view of the valleys in order to call in strikes. By doing this it placed us in a very high casualty rate.

After nine months in combat I was the only original member of my FO team that had not been wounded or killed. I do not know how many replacements there were, both officers and enlisted. I just know it was too many. After a while I did not even try to remember their names, I just called them buddy or by rank.

*During one situation a buddy and I had just laid a telephone line from the rear artillery guns back to our unit and when we arrived at the site where we had left our team, it was dark, the hill had been overtaken by the enemy and when they saw us they started shooting. My buddy and I started to run down the hill but we both stumbled and fell down so I told him to play dead. Talk about scared, the enemy came up to us and started to search us just as our troops started shooting at them. The enemy scattered and ran for cover. My buddy and I got up and ran towards our lines hollering, "we're marines, don't shoot, don't shoot we're marines". To this day I do not know how we were not shot by our own troops. I suppose they must have seen us fall down.*

*Later that night I was told that our troops were running short of ammo and as I had just come from the rear I knew how to find them, so I volunteered to go back and get some ammo.*

*When I arrived in the rear I told the officer in charge (CO) what I needed and he said for me to stay there until morning. When the officer left I found the ammo tent and cut a hole in the side and took two tins of ammo and ran back to my troops.*

*During one of these relief trips from the U S Army to the South Koreans' regiments, I fell out of the back of a 6x6 truck on my head and was knocked out cold. I was transported by helicopter to a field hospital after I had been strapped down to a stretcher. I was then strapped to a wire stretcher mounted on one of the helicopters landing runners.*

*I remember waking up briefly while in the air, the wind was taking my breath away and the pilot said hold your breath as long as you can. I did, and then I passed out again. When I awoke at the field hospital, still strapped down on the stretcher, a corpsman was fondling my genitals. I asked him what he was doing, it was dark, he ran and I never did see his face. The next day I told the doctor about it and he said there was nothing he could do. I said, in that case, I was going back to my unit. He said, "You can't do that, you must be released by a doctor first." I said, "You can not do anything about my problem, so just watch me." I got up, went outside to find my weapon but I could not find it, so I took the best one in the pile. I then went over to a jeep driver and asked him for directions to the front lines and off I went. I rejoined my unit later that day.*

*Another time, when we were laying a telephone line back to the FO team, we started receiving incoming mortar fire. We started to run into a group of trees but before we reached the trees we had to take cover so I laid down in a small ditch and was hit on my right hip with a piece of shrapnel. I knew I had been hit but could not tell how bad. We got up and started running again for the trees. When we arrived, there was a group of US Marine tanks. The enemy shifted the mortar fire to the trees and the tankers chased us out of trees in order to save their tanks. We took off running over the hill away from the mortar fire and I guess the enemy could not see us so they stopped firing.*

*When we got back to the FO team I felt something burning in my right hip. The shrapnel was about the size of a piece of corn. I removed it with my TL-29 Pliers and there was very little blood so I just rinsed it off. Some of my buddies received the Purple Heart for less. One buddy received one for a cut on his hand from a C-ration can of food.*

*Sometime after finding my unit and what seemed like a lifetime of combat, on or about the 5<sup>th</sup> of September we were sent back to Pusan. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of September we were put back on a ship for the historic landing at Inchon, South Korea.*

*That was on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September. The tide at Inchon was plus or minus forty feet and we had a very short landing time, so much so that during the landing the tide receded and left some boats high and dry. We made an assault landing on Inchon beach and after much fighting we seized the beachheads by nightfall.*

*The bay and city of Inchon is on the northwest side of the South Korean peninsula, west of Seoul, South Korea. Seoul is the Capital city of South Korea. Then by the 18<sup>th</sup>, we took Kimpo Airfield, a major airport for Seoul. The fighting was very heavy all the way to and through Seoul. On our way there I remember that we had to cross the Hon River. We were in a half track. A half track runs on ground or will float and run in water. The driver was new to combat and, from appearances, to the half track. While crossing, the water splashed over the front and hit him in the face. He panicked and took his foot off of the accelerator and the half track dipped then surged and started taking in water. A marine sergeant on board reached down with his foot, pushed the accelerator and got us across the river.*

*Taking Seoul was house to house, business to business and street to street fighting. It was a very bloody fight; we lost and/or had many wounded troops. After Seoul we were sent out on patrols in the surrounding areas. On one patrol we were positioned on a hill and started to settle in for the night when we started receiving enemy fire. We called in for some artillery flares so we could see the enemy. There were hundreds coming up the hill. The FO officer had us fix bayonets.*

*When all the fighting was over there were only about five FO team members left. We were so mad we had lost our buddies that some of us went around and stabbed the dead enemy again with our bayonets.*

*It was not long after we took Seoul we were put back on ships again, it was on or about the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, we then sailed to Wonsan, North Korea.*

*We arrived and went ashore on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 1950, after the mine fields in the bay were cleared. I celebrated my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October fighting our way up to the east side of the Chosin Reservoir.*

*We were there only for a short time before we were told to turn that area over to an army unit that was part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Division called Task Force Faith. We then went to the southwest side of the Chosin Reservoir to assist the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines Regiment. They were already on the southwest side of the Reservoir at Yudam-ni, North Korea. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment had taken very heavy losses from the Chinese forces.*

Some of the Chinese Forces were much better equipped to survive in the cold weather except for their feet, they were wearing quilted uniforms. But, as I remember, they were only wearing rubber type slip on shoes or rags tied on their feet. Some of their officers did have boots. Some of them also had automatic weapons, such as American made Thompson sub machine guns.

*We had just made contact with the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and a buddy and I had to lay a telephone line from the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines Artillery Battery back to our FO team. When we arrived at the Battery they were under direct attack from the Chinese army and were firing point blank at the enemy with the artillery guns. Needless to say, we did not get a telephone line in right away because we had to help the gun battery, by providing small arms fire, until the enemy was contained before we could return to our FO team*

*Shortly after we had turned the east side of the reservoir over to the Task Force Faith Group they were overrun by the Chinese forces and they really took a beating losing most of their officers, discipline and organization.*

*Some of the men had been cut off from their main unit and were on the ice covered reservoir trying to reach us marines just to the south and west of the reservoir. A small group of us marines were sent out to rescue those stranded men. It was night time, very cold and dark. Just as we started to get on the ice we were fired upon and had to take cover. The enemy would fire on us only if we stood up or moved. A buddy and I, while trying to take cover back on the shore, fell though the ice just before reaching the shore. It was freezing cold and we could not get out of the water right away due to the enemy firing at us. We were a black spot in the middle of a white blanket, and a very easy target.*

*After a very short time my buddy and I were failing very fast. He said he could not take it any longer and going under the water so I grabbed him and pushed him up on the ice and told him not to move until I could get out of the water. It took just about all I had left in me and when we thought it might be safe we stood up and ran as fast as we could back to our unit (CP),*

*Command Post. In order for us not to be shot by our own troops we called out, "don't shoot, don't shoot, we are marines". We did this all the way back to the CP. When we got back we were put in a warm up tent. There was no clothing for us to change into so we had to stay in our wet freezing clothes. My buddy and I were placed on cots near the side of the tent because they did not want us to thaw out to fast. The warm up tent did not seem to help much because the tent was full of other marines trying to get warm before having to go back on rotation to the front lines and they were standing between us and the fire.*

*After a very short while in the tent we started receiving incoming small arms fire from an enemy group that had penetrated our lines on the side of the hill. Everyone had to get out of the tent and find cover; again we were a black target against the snow at night time. I yelled to our troops not to move or shoot back because they could see us moving in the snow or follow our tracers to where we were at, some heard me but I guess some did not.*

*We must have had to lay there for what seemed like at least three hours waiting for our troops to regain our line on the side of the hill.*

*I truly believe that my buddy and I did not freeze to death because our clothing had frozen solid, keeping our body heat in. It was -20 to -40 degrees with a wind chill of about -80 to -100 degrees. It is impossible to describe the pain we endured that night. To this day I do not know if that buddy made it out dead or alive. During the days in the valley we would build fires, if we could. I remember the next day I went to one of the fires that had been going for a while and pushed the coals off to the side so I could lie down in my sleeping bag, where the fire had been, when I did I then fell asleep.*

*When I woke up I had burned a few holes in my sleeping bag from some of the small embers. Yes, our troops did get some of the stranded men off the ice*

*A few days or so after we reached the lines of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines we received orders to start fighting our way back to Hagaru-ri, North Korea. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines took the lead following the Main Supply Route (MSR). The 11<sup>th</sup> Marines, wounded and supply companies were in the middle and the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines took the rear and flanks. Since we were on the MSR, the Artillery units could not always setup and did not always have the need for an Artillery FO team, the team was limited to air strikes. Therefore some of us were placed in units that needed us as infantrymen.*

*Fifty Eight Years*

*I was volunteered to help protect the rear flank and pick up wounded and/or dead and put them into trucks for safer transport.*

*On or about the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December we were hit very hard in the rear so two officers and eight enlisted men, including yours truly, fell back and fought off a company of about 150 to 200 of the enemy. I was cited with the Marine Corp and Navy Commendation Medal with combat V, for Valor.*

*During the fight we were running short of ammo and I remembered that some of the dead marines we had put on the trucks had some ammo on them, so I climbed up in the truck to get some ammo and when I did I put my knee in one of the dead men's stomach and his eyes opened up, I thought I was going to die right there. After I composed myself, I told him to stay put and that I would be back as soon as I could. The fighting was so hard, I never did get back to him, and I do not know if he lived or later, died. I did look for him when we put some of the dead marines in a makeshift grave along the side of the road.*

*A person does not always know what he can or will do until he is placed in a position where he has to do it.*

*We were pinned down many times on the MSR, one of those times one of our truck drivers was wounded. I said to a buddy that was next to me to get the wounded out of the truck but when I looked at him half of his face was shot off so I jumped up on the running board and grabbed the steering wheel until the driver could put the brakes on. I pulled him out of harms way while some of the other marines got the wounded out of the back of the truck and to safety.*

*When we got back to the east coast of North Korea at the port city of Hungnam we boarded ships for transport back to South Korea. I was on the USS Mann and I could not stand to be down in the hole of the ship so I went up to the upper deck and fell asleep under an exhaust fan where it was warm and I stayed there until we reached South Korea.*

*After a few weeks of recouping at the bean patch from the battles of North Korea we had to get back into the fray again, as the Chinese joined the North Korean armies and came back to South Korea.*

*I was reassigned to Baker Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, as part of their FO team again along with all new replacements. We were out on a company patrol looking for the enemy when we started to receive small arms fire from a very small village setting in a valley so*

*we stopped on top of the hill overlooking the village for the night.*

*Before nightfall the FO team established artillery fire points around the village.*

*The next day we went in the village and did not find any enemy. We continued our patrol, about 300 yards past the village and we started up a hill going out of the valley when the enemy started firing at us from the other hill just behind and across from the one we were on. We were sitting ducks, lost a few men there also. I was carrying a radio on my back and the battery pack was hit with small arms fire fortunately we had a spare. I made it to the top of the hill and some of the marines were able to eliminate most of the enemy on the other hill.*

*It was still cold and snow on the ground in South Korea and some of us set up in a mud house. It was occupied by some South Korean citizens. It was the first time I had seen radiant heat in the floor. We were taking a short break and a new replacement was bragging about a hand gun he had. He was showing us how you could pull the trigger when the safety was on so he pulled it three times and the gun went off just over my head. If some of the other marines had not pulled me off of him I think I would have killed him.*

*We were called by HQ and they told us to move back south and west to look for a larger group of enemy troops. We started back through the village not knowing the enemy had circled behind us and they opened up with everything they had. There was a creek running along side of the village and most of us were able to seek some shelter from the small arm fire and mortars. The captain, who was our FO officer at the time, called in artillery fire on the village where the enemy was but the rounds dropped short and landed right on top of us in the creek. The captain was hit in the face very bad so I called our artillery battery to have them cease firing. They did not stop for what seems like at least five minutes. We lost a lot of marines from our own shells that day, both wounded and dead.*

*In mid March of 1951 we had just returned from a patrol and while we were waiting for our next assignment, my FO officer came back from Headquarters with information about some of us that had been there the longest, He said, some would be returning to the States. He told me that I was one of them because I had the most time in combat from our unit. The officer left and then came back in about an hour. He apologized, and said I had just been bumped off the list so that a Marine, who had more time in combat than I and*

was coming back from another patrol, would go home. I was very disappointed, but I accepted it. About another hour later the officer returned again. This time he apologized again and said that I was back on the list because the other marine had just been wounded and he would be put on a different list to go home.

I was sent to a ship and returned to the United States, arriving in San Francisco Bay, California to a very big welcome home parade. We all rode in convertible automobiles from downtown Oakland, California then across the Bay to San Francisco downtown and back to Treasure Island in the bay of San Francisco.

I am not looking for fame, fortune or sympathy by writing this. I just want to share my PTSD experiences with those who may have similar nightmares and/or flashbacks and do not know where they can get help and it may help me in the process.

If you are still in service let your Commanding Officer or a military doctor know what is happening. If you are now a civilian, contact the closest Veterans Administration office or hospital, and do it without delay, because they can and will help you get through it. There are many service organizations such as the DAV, VFW, POW, MCL, and The Chosin Few. Or maybe you would just like to communicate with someone that has been there. If so, please, contact me via email at [rayhoulette@aol.com](mailto:rayhoulette@aol.com).

If anyone of you were there with me and/or remember any of the above please feel free to contact me also.

Some of the dates and times may not be accurate but the nightmares and flashbacks are true. I have just tried to put them in the order as I can remember them. Whatever war you may have been in and/or sometime stateside traumas can produce PTSD. I did not know that help was available for PTSD until about five years ago. I hope this will help you before fifty five years of your illness passes. Help is there; let me show you where it is.

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