



OPERATION "TOMAHAWK"

Laf Keaton

On February 28, 1951 the entire 187th ARCT closed in at our rear assembly area at K-2 airstrip near Taegu, South Korea. I was told to report to the 8th Army HQ on March 3rd, by order of General Ridgeway and assigned to work with the 2nd and 4th Ranger companies in preparation for the first combat jump for an Army Ranger unit. Over the next four days the Ranger companies made five training jumps, then on the 8th and 9th of March, they participated in mass tactical jumps in which over 4,000 paratroopers ran through their mission scenario. One man was killed during the exercise.

Chinese and North Korean troops were establishing defense in depth positions near Munsan-ni. On March 19, 1951, Troop Carrier Wings arrived from Brady and Ashyai Air Forces Bases. U.S. tank units were to link up with the 187th ARCT, at Munsan-ni, (within 24 hours

after the jump) as the anvil of the Airborne hammer. The mission of the 2nd and 4th Ranger companies was to seize the village of Munsan-ni.

From Taegu, we flew out to sea for our rendezvous, then flew north in column. Crossing the coast we could see C.C. Forces in trenches dug around the DZ. Prior to the jump the Air Forces reported enemy groups of a thousand men moving in on Munsan-ni valley. It was clear, sunny day and because of the large number of targets the USAF pilots called Munsan-ni "Holiday Valley."

The jump was made from C-119 Flying Boxcars of the 314th Troop Carrier Group and C-46 Commandos of the Air Force Reserve's 437th Trooper Carrier Wing. Each man carried two cases of ammunition, strapped to pack boards, which were slung over our combat packs at the knees. Light machine guns were jumped, tied to the individual parachutist. I'd estimate the weight of all the equipment, plus main parachute and reserve chute, to be over 300 pounds. Rounds were ripping past us, on our way to the ground and we were heavily engaged as we landed. We went into immediate attack and took the critical terrain to establish blocking positions to cut off any retreating Chinese and North Korean Forces. Enemy dead littered the drop zone and there were Chinese all over the place. I wondered if they might be killing each other, since they were in line of fire of each other in every direction, or were lousy shots as far as nailing the bold and daring paratroopers. Mortar rounds were peppering the area as we fought toward our assembly point. Once we assembled, we moved toward the village of Munsan-ni to complete our mission. During the sweep of the village, a large number of Communist Chinese Forces surrendered, while many

The enemy fought furiously during the daylight hours, but when darkness descended they withdrew to higher ground, if permitted. We would then launch highly successful attacks against their night positions. As the enemy retreated towards Uijongbu, we continued to meet fanatical resistance with our advances. The enemy would often launch counter attacks, blowing horns and firing colored flares while being supported by accurate artillery fire. Fanaticism, however was no match against the ferocity of the crazy paratroopers. Chinese dead littered the wake of our advance. Our aerial observers would inform us of enemy trenches, in which around ten Chinese were dug in, and we'd use the information to force the enemy to withdraw. Our attacking force destroyed the 234th CCF Regiment on hill 507 and with this dominate terrain feature in our hands all organized resistance in the area collapsed on March 27, 1951.

Later reports revealed that the CCF had been in the Munsan-ni area for two or three days before our air assault landing and were digging in around Munsan-ni in a plan of withdrawing toward that sector to draw United Nations Forces north into well entrenched troops. Then envelopment by enemy forces could be accomplished, thereby cutting off U.N. forces from friendly units.

Link up from the south with elements of the U.S. 3rd Division cleared the last vital approach north along the Uijongbu-Chapman axis on the 28th of March. On the 29th of March, the 3rd Division took over our positions and General Bowen, 187th ARCT commander moved us back to Taegu.

Having just completed an audacious leap from aircraft into the jaws of death, five hundred feet above Munsan-ni, against a numerically superior and fanatical force, we were ready to return to K-2 Airstrip at Taegu. After 6 days and nights of continuous and fierce battles and the knowledge that we would find another mission to "disrupt and destroy" whatever remaining elements of the once mighty juggernaut, General Ridgeway wanted us to annihilate. That turned out to be "Operation Killer" at Bloody Inje.



About the author: Lafayette F. Keaton is currently the President of the Lt. Vincent J. McDonald Chapter and the Chaplain for the 511th PIR Assoc. He resides in Portland, OR

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