

IN THEATER

EIGHTH ARMY RANGERS: FIRST IN KOREA

by Eugene G. Piasecki

With assignment orders in hand and just waiting for transportation to the 24th Infantry Division, Second Lieutenant (2LT) Ralph Puckett, Jr. heard his name called out on the camp's Public Address system. LT Puckett was to report to a specific room in the Camp Drake headquarters building. He found Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) John H. McGee, who was interviewing and selecting volunteers "for an extremely dangerous mission behind enemy lines." Puckett's immediate response was: "Sir, I volunteer. I have wanted to be a Ranger all my life. If you will take me into that company I volunteer to be a squad leader or rifleman." Told to return the next day, Puckett learned that McGee had selected him not only just to be a member of the Ranger Company, but to be its commander.¹

On 25 June 1950, the aggressive invasion by the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) caught the Far East Command (FECOM) by surprise. The Communist juggernaut threatened to destroy American KMAC advisors and Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) forces as it drove to control the entire peninsula. General MacArthur, commander FECOM, alerted occupation units in Japan for immediate movement to Korea to stem the NKPA advances. LTG Walton H. Walker, Commander, Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA), realized the necessity to trade space for time in order to consolidate his units in a defensive perimeter around Pusan, initiating an aggressive mobile defense around the existing port facilities. Explaining his actions in a message to MacArthur, Walker stated that the 24th Infantry Division (24th ID) needed to be completely rebuilt and he had doubts about the operational capabilities of the newly arrived 25th Infantry Division. FECOM initiated Operation FLUSHOUT to send tons of supplies and equipment to replace those lost in the withdrawal. U. S. Army administrative and support troops were dispatched to Korea as combat replacements because qualified infantrymen were in short supply.² The creation and employment of the first American Army Ranger unit formed after World War II were initially tied to NKPA tactical changes, reduction of the North Korean guerrilla activities in the Pohang Pocket, and the need to begin some type of offensive operations.



Brigadier General John H. McGee was captured by the Japanese in 1942. McGee escaped from a POW ship in 1944 and finished WWII as the commander of the 169th Infantry, 43rd Infantry Division. In 1950 he was the Chief of the Miscellaneous Division, G-3 Section, Eighth U.S. Army, which created units to perform unconventional warfare missions during the early days of the Korean War.

Ralph Puckett, Jr., USMA 1949, was selected by McGee to become the Eighth Army Ranger Company Commander. Colonel Puckett was a charter member of the Ranger Hall of Fame in June 1992.



LTG Walton H. Walker and General of the Army Douglas A. MacArthur meet in P'yongyang, North Korea, 21 October 1950.

38° 38°



Eighth Army SSI



"Pohang Pocket" - Area of 1st Marine Division guerrilla hunt

The Pohang Pocket was selected by the NKPA to base their guerrilla effort against UN and ROKA forces.

As the situation in Korea steadily deteriorated through July, the fate of United Nations, American, and ROKA forces hung in the balance. The NKPA breached the Eighth Army defenses between Taegu (Eighth Army Headquarters) and Pohang creating the "Pohang Pocket" behind the lines. NKPA patrols probed the Yonil Airfield perimeter and Communist agents in Taegu fired flares to illuminate targets for North Korean artillery. General MacArthur realized that any efforts to disrupt the NKPA attacks would have to come from FECOM assets since additional American Army units and draftees would be slow in coming. These conditions prompted FECOM to use existing personnel and equipment to create the Eighth Army Rangers and the GHQ Raiders to interdict enemy supply lines and reduce the NKPA war-fighting capability. The man tasked to accomplish MacArthur's intent was LTC John H. McGee, assigned to the Miscellaneous Division, G-3 Operations, Eighth U. S. Army.

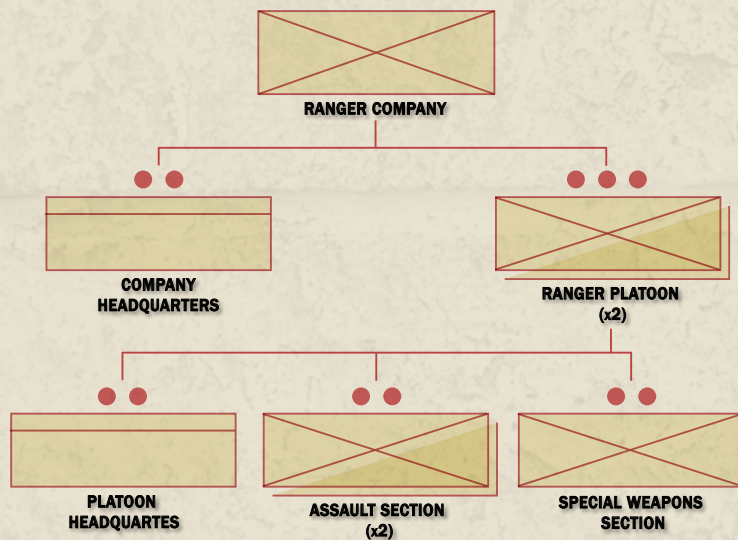
Originally, LTC McGee focused on conducting guerrilla operations in North Korea, but the gravity of the situation in the south caused him to shift emphasis. EUSA needs soon turned his efforts into creating units to work behind enemy lines in the Pohang Pocket to destroy the NKPA guerrillas operating with impunity there.³ While

McGee redirected his efforts, friendly forces defending the Pusan Perimeter began having some success. Despite NKPA pressure, the consolidated UN units repelled NKPA attacks, capitalized on the advantage of interior lines, and stabilized the perimeter to accept reinforcements and rebuild the land forces in Korea. In response, the NKPA resorted to guerrilla tactics. Dressed as Korean refugees, NKPA operatives joined the thousands of Korean civilians seeking safety in Pusan. As the refugees flooded the roads into Pusan and Taegu, civilian-clothed NKPA agents managed to disrupt traffic with raids and roadblocks, infiltrations, and rear-area sniping attacks.⁴

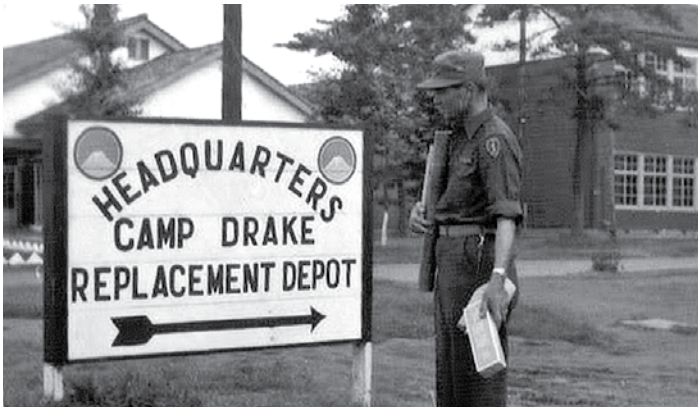
With just seven weeks to produce a special unit designed to counter the new NKPA threat, McGee knew time was a critical resource. Using a World War II Ranger Company Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) as his guide, he went to the replacement detachment at Camp Drake, Japan to begin screening enlisted soldiers.⁵ After selecting sixty-five enlisted volunteers, he still needed the requisite two platoon leaders and a commander for the Ranger Company. After

Ranger Company (TO&E 7-87)

February 1944



LTC McGee used the Ranger Table of Organization from World War II as the template to form the Eighth Army Ranger Company on 25 August 1950.



Sign indicating the location of the Far East Command (FECOM) Replacement Detachment at Camp Drake, Japan.

interviewing dozens of officers, he finally chose Second Lieutenants (2LT) Charles N. Bunn, Springfield, Illinois, and Barnard Cummings, Jr., Denver, Colorado, to be the Ranger's first and second platoon leaders. McGee still needed a company commander. That's where 2LT Puckett fit in. Despite individual differences, Bunn, Cummings, and Puckett were all classmates at the United States Military Academy (Class of 1949). They attended the Infantry Officer Basic Course (IOBC) and Airborne School before being shipped as replacements to Korea.

Having selected the initial group of Ranger volunteers, 2LTs Puckett, Bunn, and Cummings rounded out the unit by visiting service units in Japan and interviewing soldiers at the replacement detachment at Camp Drake. They needed seventy-four enlisted men. FECOM's one restriction on their recruiting was that trained infantrymen were "off-limits." They were already in short supply and now needed to defend the Pusan Perimeter. Every volunteer was informed of the potential danger of Ranger operations and given the choice to continue or leave. Puckett had final approval authority. He chose only those men he felt would be physically and mentally capable of finishing Ranger training and accomplishing Ranger missions.⁶

With the final roster of volunteers approved, the Eighth Army Ranger Company was activated on 25 August 1950 and training began.⁷ Puckett remembers: "The training that seemed to be the biggest challenge was the physical aspects during the first few weeks. They were part of the Army of Occupation in Japan that had not been focused on combat readiness."⁸ To correct this, the intensive regimen to improve physical fitness included road runs, forced marches, calisthenics, and grass drills. For the Rangers, the constant physical training day and night was not enough to distinguish them from the other soldiers at Camp Drake. Ranger Billy G. Walls and some of his "buddies" solved the identity problem. "One day while drinking with two others we saw an American boy with a Mohawk haircut. We went to the barber shop and all got Mohawks. Afterwards we went to the shower room for some serious drinking where we were seen by one of the officers who promptly made it mandatory for all Rangers to have Mohawks."⁹ While the physical preparation in Japan was productive, the Rangers' true



Charles N. Bunn, USMA 1949, and the First Platoon Leader. After the Eighth Army Rangers were disbanded, he was reassigned to the Ranger Training Center at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Barnard Cummings, Jr., USMA 1949, was selected as the Second Platoon Leader. Declared Missing In Action after the battle of Hill 205, his remains were never recovered.



test awaited them in Korea. On 1 September 1950, the company boarded the Japanese ferry *Koan Maru* at Sasebo headed for Pusan.

Arriving at the South Korean port a day later, the Rangers boarded a Korean train that took them north fifteen miles. U. S. Army 6x6 trucks carried them to their training base on a small hill overlooking the village of Kijang. On the edge of the Pusan Perimeter, LTC McGee had established the Eighth Army Ranger Training Center, which the volunteers called "Ranger Hill."¹⁰ Unlike Camp Drake, there were no permanent facilities and the center was in the combat zone. According to Ranger Jesse E. Anderson, "The Rangers lived in designated platoon areas in shelter-half tents with the company headquarters in a squad tent next to a boxing ring put up by LTC McGee."¹¹ Living and training in a combat zone were emphasized that night when the company established a 360-degree defensive perimeter around Ranger Hill to deter, or if necessary, defend against possible North Korean guerrilla attacks. Two-man foxholes were dug in front of each tent in assigned defensive sectors. Machine guns were mounted at strategic locations on the hill and trip flares for early warning were set out each night around the camp's perimeter.¹²

Before training started, Puckett had established four goals that applied to all the Rangers regardless of rank;

1. *Each Ranger would be in outstanding physical condition. Every Ranger would be a Tiger!*
2. *Each Ranger would be highly skilled in the tactics and techniques of the individual soldier (T&TIS). Every Ranger would know his stuff.*
3. *Each squad, each platoon, and the company as a whole would be a smoothly functioning, highly efficient killing machine.*
4. *Each Ranger would have the confidence and esprit that caused him to believe that he and his Ranger Company were the best that the United States Army could produce. This goal was as important as any of the rest.*

Puckett's philosophy was simple: "The officers set the example and either taught the class or participated as a trainee. We shared the same hardships and became hot, cold, wet, dusty, hungry, tired and dirty just like the

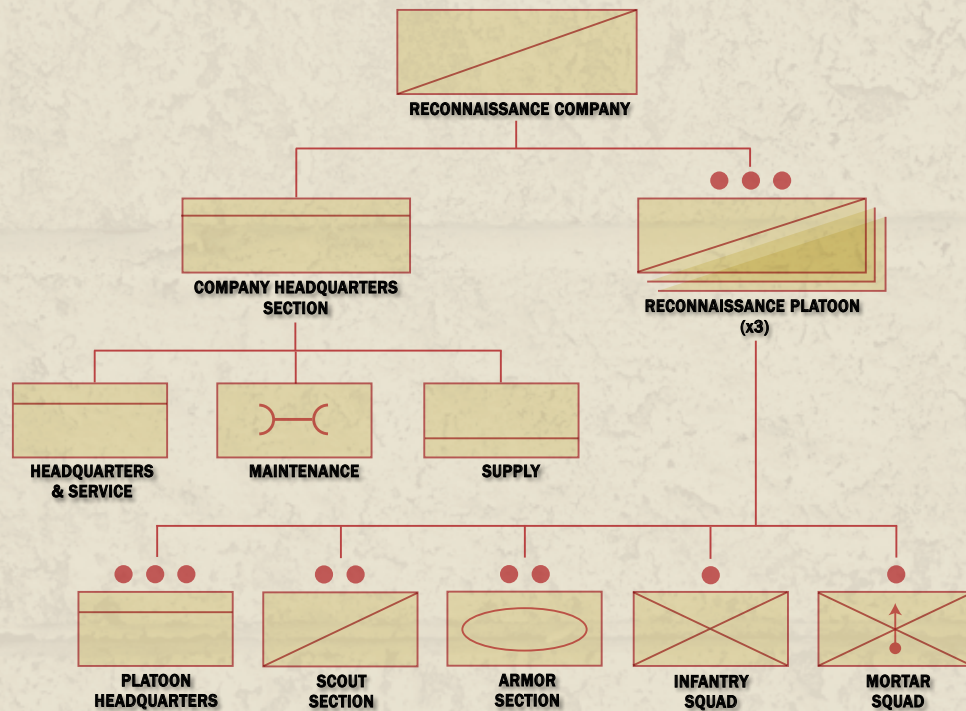
Infantry Division Reconnaissance Company (TO&E 17-57N)



IX Corps SSI



25th Infantry Division SSI



The Infantry Division Reconnaissance Company provided security and reconnaissance for the Division Headquarters. This diagram presents the unit as it was officially approved by the Department of Army, and does not reflect combat-related variations.

men. We worked together, became a team, and looked after each other. We learned to trust and depend on each other, developed confidence, and expanded our bonding. We stressed fundamentals in a progressive battle-focused program with high standards that everyone was expected to meet, and we listened to and incorporated training suggestions from the men into our program.”¹³

For LTC McGee and 2LT Puckett time was short because the Rangers had to be able to conduct: Raids, Reconnaissance Patrolling, Combat Patrolling, Motorized Reconnaissance and Movement, and Trail Block missions. Ranger training instructions came from three sources: LTC McGee’s experiences with the Philippine Scouts before World War II; training notes from McGee’s brother, George, a former World War II Merrill’s Marauders battalion commander; and the infantry doctrine in U. S. Army Field Manual 7-10 *The Rifle Company, Rifle Regiment*, dated October 1949.¹⁴ Puckett said, “There was nothing brilliant about anything we did, nothing particularly innovative. I studied FM 7-10, the basic field manual for the rifle company. Colonel McGee was completely supportive. He never overruled anything I recommended.”¹⁵ The result was a training program that built leadership skills around the basic infantry fundamentals of shoot, move, and communicate, and progressed from individual soldier skills to collective unit tactics culminating in field training exercises. Most of the Rangers had a common view of their training.

Ranger Richard D. Branham said: “Map reading, vehicle patrolling, weapons firing, night patrolling. . . hand-to-hand, bayonet drill, hill assault were all accomplished very well as were squad and platoon tactics. I remember above all and many times thinking that LT Puckett was half mountain goat.” Ranger Elmer H. Cassatt echoed Branham’s sentiments: “Training was extra hard work pushed into a short period of time. It was many long marches with some blisters, bayonet drill that would do some men in, night patrols, bad weather, being wet and cold for days in the field, rough hand-to-hand fighting, weapons training, firing on the range, overcoming insects, parades, inspections that seemed useless, personal health, leadership of instructors, good food most of the time, etc.”¹⁶ Though intense, Puckett’s training methodology was quite simple: “I established high standards and required all to meet those standards. . . by working together in a demanding, battle-focused training program the standards of which had to be met, we turned ourselves into Rangers and all that the word meant.”¹⁷ That was important because their training was about to be cut short.

The end of September 1950 marked the end of the fifth week of the seven-week Ranger training cycle. According to 1LT Puckett, “COL John A. Dabney, G-3, the Eighth Army, wanted the Rangers to become operational ASAP. Eighth Army wanted every available soldier, and our company was the only uncommitted company in Korea

while we trained.”¹⁸ COL Dabney’s driving concern was to use the Rangers’ unique capabilities to either support and exploit the 15 September X Corps landings at Inch’on or contribute to GEN Walker’s EUSA breakout from the Pusan Perimeter. Dabney wanted the status of the Rangers’ training, and McGee’s recommendation for their immediate combat employment. The original requirement to reduce the North Korean guerrilla threat in the Pohang Pocket would disappear when the Eighth Army attacked north from the Pusan Perimeter. EUSA was to destroy the enemy as it advanced north to meet X Corps in the vicinity of Seoul between 16 and 22 September 1950.¹⁹ McGee considered the Rangers ready for combat with the following qualifications:

- A. *Their missions did not exceed the capabilities of the three American officers, sixty-three enlisted soldiers and ten Korean Augmentations to the U. S. Army enlisted (KATUSAs) assigned.*
- B. *The company commander was allowed adequate time for reconnaissance and detailed planning.*
- C. *After evaluation of its performance in combat, the Company either be expanded into a Ranger Battalion or deactivated.*²⁰

The final Training Report for the Eighth Army Ranger Company provided to the Commanding General, Eighth United States Army Korea on 1 October 1950 formalized LTC McGee’s assessment. In it he emphasized the Rangers’ high level of physical conditioning and patrolling skills while reminding everyone that they had limited firepower, rapid foot mobility over difficult terrain, and their strong chain of command was made possible by the increased sense of duty possessed by unit sergeants.²¹ Considered operationally ready for combat, the Eighth Army Ranger Company became the Eighth Army Ranger Company, 8213th AU (Army Unit) on 8 October 1950.²² Two days later (on 14 October 1950), 1LT Puckett took his advanced echelon (ADVON) to the 25th “Tropic Lightning” Infantry Division (25th ID), IX Corps at Taejon. The EUSA Rangers were to work with the 25th ID Reconnaissance Company, commanded by Captain (CPT) Charles Matthews, against guerrillas in the Poun area, northeast of Taejon.²³

For the first time since their formation, the Ranger Company platoons were to operate independently. 1LT Puckett, the company headquarters, and 1LT Cummings and 2nd Platoon were based out of Poun while 1LT Bunn and the 1st Platoon were located at a village nearby. Operating in conjunction with the Recon Company, the Rangers rapidly acquired combat experience. Using Ranger patrolling skills, they located and eliminated enemy pockets of resistance bypassed by the UN drive north from Pusan.²⁴ As the EUSA approached the 38th Parallel, General MacArthur and President Harry S. Truman met on Wake Island on 15 October 1950 to discuss the situation in Korea. MacArthur told the President that he expected formal NKPA resistance in Korea to end

around Thanksgiving. He anticipated that EUSA would be back in Japan by Christmas. Moreover, he no longer feared Chinese or Soviet intervention. Unknown to both American leaders, the Red Chinese had already begun moving forces across the Yalu River into North Korea.²⁵

The size of the Chinese intervention was unknown. Actually, four Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) armies, the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 42nd each comprised of three divisions, had crossed the Yalu between 14 and 20 October 1950. All four armies kept their original designation of the *Fourth Field Army* until they crossed into Korea. Then, they became subordinate units of Li T’ien-yu’s CCF *XIII Army Group*. Of the four CCF armies positioned in front of the Eighth Army, the 39th posed the greatest threat to the 25th Infantry Division.²⁶

As the 25th Infantry Division moved the 175 miles north to Kaesong, the Rangers conducted patrols and set up fire roadblocks to stop enemy vehicle movement. Being just two miles south of the 38th Parallel, the EUSA Rangers, the 25th ID Reconnaissance Company, and elements of the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment organized into Task Force (TF) JOHNSON swept and cleared a triangular area bounded by Uijong-bu in the south, Tongduchon-ni in the north, and Shiny-ri to the northeast.²⁷ After leaving TF JOHNSON on 18 November 1950, the Rangers returned to Kaesong, and came under operational control (OPCON) of the 89th Medium Tank Battalion (MTB) commanded by LTC Welborn G. “Tom” Dolvin.

On 20 November 1950 the 25th ID moved north to join the EUSA’s renewed offensive against a combined North Korean-Chinese force believed to be approximately 25,700 soldiers. Because the 25th ID’s sector of the IX Corps front was too wide for a two-regiment attack, but too narrow for a three-regiment front, the 89th MTB was reconfigured to form Task Force DOLVIN to “spearhead” the drive. The same day the 25th ID published the operations order, the Rangers began to motor march north. At 0100 hours on 22 November 1950, they reached Kunu-ri, North Korea, and by 1600 hours they had joined TF DOLVIN at Yongdungp’o.²⁸ The next day, 23 November 1950, while the rest of TF DOLVIN ate a full Thanksgiving dinner, the Rangers had turkey sandwiches in between briefings, equipment checks, and ammunition issue.²⁹ As an added



President Harry S. Truman and General Douglas A. MacArthur met at Wake Island on 15 October 1950 to discuss the situation in Korea.

Task Force DOLVIN



Eighth Army
DUI



25th Infantry
Division DUI



89th Medium Tank
Battalion DUI



27th Infantry
Regiment DUI



35th Infantry
Regiment DUI



LTC Welborn G. "Tom" Dolvin, USMA 1939. LTC Dolvin, a WWII veteran of the 191st Tank Battalion was already experienced against the North Koreans having led the 25th ID's breakout from the Pusan Perimeter in September 1950.

Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Welborn G. "Tom" Dolvin, a World War II European Theater combat veteran, was playing golf at Fort Benning, Georgia on 12 July 1950 when a messenger arrived with orders changing his assignment from Austria to Japan. He was to command the Eighth Army's 8072nd Army Unit (AU), Medium Tank Battalion in Japan. A week later, LTC Dolvin arrived in Japan and discovered that his battalion contained six officers and sixty-five enlisted men from Eighth Army and nine officers and one hundred and forty-six enlisted men from 2nd Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas. Its primary fighting strength was three medium tank companies; one company (seventeen tanks) was equipped with M26 Pershings (90 mm main gun); the other two (thirty-four tanks) with M4A3E8 Shermans (76 mm main gun). Supplementing the battalion's fire power was an assault gun platoon with three M45 105 mm howitzer tanks. A variety of other wheeled and tracked vehicles such as M39 Armored Utility Vehicles and M3 (Scout Car) and M4A1 (81 mm Mortar Carrier) halftracks supported all other combat elements.

On 31 July 1950, the battalion was not all together. One company was in Pusan. The remainder were spread from Camp Drake (Tokyo) to Masan, Korea. Only a portion of assigned personnel and equipment were ready for combat. By 4 August 1950, the 8072nd AU MTB reassembled in Pusan and three days later became the 89th Medium Tank Battalion. With redesignation came reorganization. Unlike tank battalions in the 1950s infantry divisions, the 89th would be organized like a World War II MTB with four tank companies instead of three.¹ This allowed Dolvin to train his one company of Pershings and three companies of Shermans in a secure area while rotating them in and out of the line for rest and maintenance.²

There were two TF DOLVINs. TF DOLVIN I spearheaded the 25th ID's breakout from the Pusan Perimeter to secure the southwest portion of Korea from Chinju to Hamyang and Namwon (26 to 30 September 1950).³ TF DOLVIN II led the 25th ID drive north to the Yalu River. TF DOLVIN II had these elements:

- A. B Company (-), 89th Medium Tank Battalion (MTB) (M4A3E8) with the 8213th (Eighth Army) Ranger Company attached
- B. E Company, 27th Infantry Regiment with the 89th MTB Assault Gun Platoon attached
- C. B Company, 35th Infantry Regiment with 1st Platoon, B Company, 89th MTB attached
- D. 25th Infantry Division Reconnaissance Company
- E. Reconnaissance Platoon, 89th MTB⁴

After supporting the Eighth Army Ranger Company's attacks on Hills 222 and 205, TF DOLVIN II remained intact until after the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) Second Phase Offensive on the night of 25-26 November 1950. Concerned that the CCF would initiate an attack directed at the 25th ID's center, the division commander, Major General (MG) William B. Kean, made two significant decisions. First, he cancelled plans to continue the advance northward on the morning of 26 November 1950 and second, he created Task Force WILSON under command of Brigadier General (BG) Vennard Wilson, the assistant division commander. TF WILSON merged the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry and all TF DOLVIN II elements except the Rangers (who became the 25th ID security force). LTC Dolvin later became Chief of Staff of the 25th ID until late 1951 when he was reassigned to the Office of the Chief of Research and Development, U.S. Army in Washington.

Endnotes

- 1 Arthur W. Connor, Jr., "The Armor Debacle in Korea, 1950: Implications for Today." *Parameters*, Summer 1992, 72. www.usamhi.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/1992/1992%20Connor.pdf.
- 2 Connor, "The Armor Debacle in Korea, 1950," 73.
- 3 Roy E. Appleman, *The United States Army in the Korean War. South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June-November 1950)*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, 1961), 579.
- 4 TF DOLVIN II was the result of 25th ID Operations Order 15 dated 21 November 1950. Robert W. Black, *Rangers in Korea* (New York: Ivy Books, 1989), 31.

89th Medium Tank Battalion



M26 Pershing Tank. Held over from WWII for service in Korea, the Pershing's age contributed to its numerous mechanical problems. It was eventually replaced by the M46 Patton Tank beginning in 1951.



M4A3E8. Nicknamed the "Easy Eight", this tank was the improved version of WWII's M4 Sherman. Armed with a 76 mm main gun, it was also replaced by the M46 Patton.



M45 Howitzer Tank. This was a 105 mm howitzer mounted in the turret and hull of an M26 Pershing chassis. It was found in the assault gun platoon of the Medium Tank Battalion.

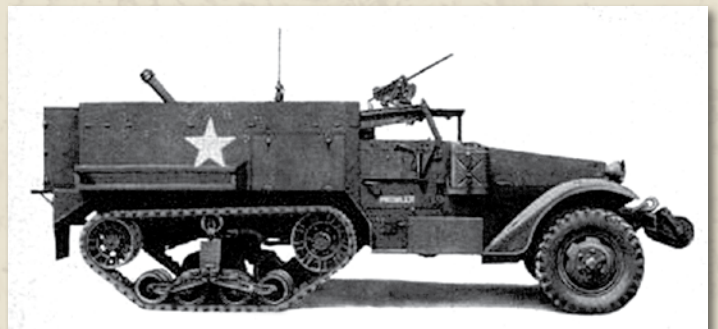
25th Infantry Division Reconnaissance Company



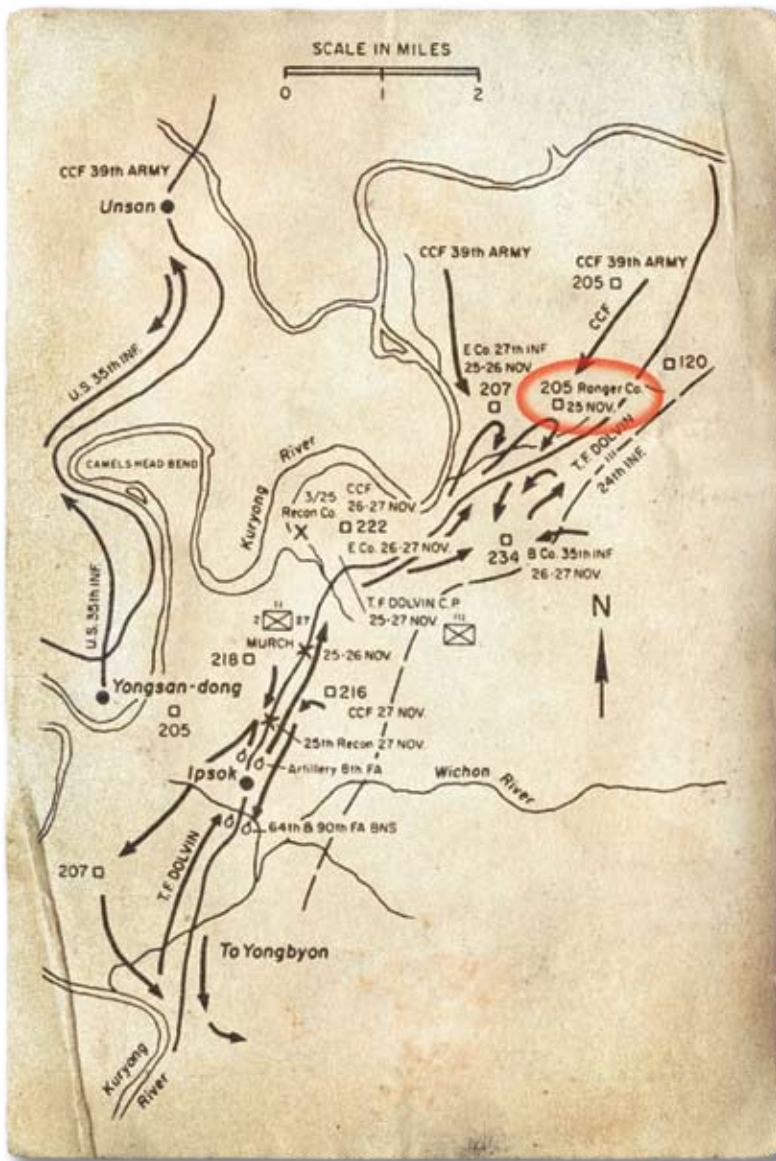
Two M24 Chaffee Tanks were assigned to each armor section.



One M39 Armored Utility Vehicle transported the platoon's infantry squad.



M4A1 81 mm Mortar Carrier. There was one of these per platoon.



TF DOLVIN Map. Shows the route and objectives of TF DOLVIN in North Korea from 25-27 November 1950.

security measure for the tanks, Ranger patrols scouted five thousand yards forward of the TF line of departure (LD). The patrols made no contact. In the meantime, a 25th ID liaison officer arrived with the operations order with H-Hour at 1000 hours, 24 November 1950.³⁰

Crossing the LD on time, TF DOLVIN had B Company, 35th Infantry on the left flank, the Rangers, aboard the tanks of B Company, 89th MTB in the center, and E Company, 27th Infantry on the right flank. Shortly after crossing the LD, the Rangers encountered two 8th Cavalry Regiment soldiers who had escaped from the Chinese after being captured at Unsan in early November. The former prisoners reported that twenty-eight more wounded and frostbitten Americans had been abandoned by the Chinese approximately five kilometers ahead. The TF pushed on, found the other prisoners, and sent them to the rear.³¹

It was 1400 hours by the time TF DOLVIN reached Hill 222, its original Objective 6. The tanks buttoned up and the Rangers dismounted when they began receiving



Major General William B. Kean commanded the 25th Infantry Division from the start of the Korean War on 25 June 1950 through Operation RIPPER on 5 March 1951.

enemy mortar and automatic weapons fire. 1LT Cummings led the second Ranger platoon in an 800-yard assault to seize the hill. Without warning, the B Company, 89th MTB tanks opened fire on the advancing Rangers. Ranger Billy G. Walls, a second platoon machinegunner, recalls: "At this time our tanks opened up on the Rangers from the rear; I saw the tank shells hit into the Rangers. LT Puckett ran screaming to the tanks and stopped the shelling."³² Despite suffering casualties from friendly tank fire, the Rangers seized the objective and took up defensive positions for the night of 24-25 November 1950.³³

After a freezing cold night on Hill 222 (temperatures dropped to zero degrees Fahrenheit), the attack north resumed on the morning of 25 November. The fifty-one Rangers present for duty remounted the B Company tanks in the TF center. For reasons known only to him, LTC Dolvin had switched his infantry to opposite sides; E Company, 27th Infantry to the left flank and B Company, 35th Infantry to the right. Advancing together, both infantry companies did hard fighting along the TF route, until 1000 hours, when the 35th Infantry captured the southwest portion of Hill 234 and the 27th Infantry and the 89th MTB assault-gun platoon secured Hill 207. It was up to the Rangers and the B Company, 89th MTB tanks to capture Hill 205.³⁴

Better suited as the objective for a full-sized infantry company with more men and assets, 1LT Puckett and his fifty-one Rangers mounted the 89th MTB tanks to seize Hill 205, a thinly wooded crest about 5,000 meters further north.³⁵ When the tanks entered the frozen rice paddies below the hill, they stopped and once again buttoned up after the first shot was fired at them.³⁶ Hopping off the vehicle, Puckett tried to open his tank's phone box to talk to the commander. When that failed, he climbed back on the engine deck and started beating against the turret with his rifle. When the tank commander cracked the turret hatch open approximately four inches, Puckett, in no uncertain terms reminded the commander that unlike his three inches of armor, the Rangers only had a quarter inch of clothing to protect them. They needed tank fire support for the assault. Ranger 1LT Charles Bunn remembered that almost as soon as the Rangers hit the ground, enemy mortar fire bracketed them.³⁷ Instinctively, SFC Morrissey, 1LT Cummings, and 1LT Puckett started leading the Rangers toward the objective. TF artillery support, air strikes, and the tank gun fire enabled Hill

205 to be captured as the enemy fled. The EUSA Rangers reorganized and consolidated on the objective. Puckett established a 360-degree perimeter, sited automatic weapons on likely avenues of approach, and told the Rangers to dig in and prepare to spend the night. Then Puckett went to the TF command post to coordinate his artillery fire support plan with CPT Gordon Sumner, the artillery liaison officer, and to review the operations overlay. The Ranger CO saw that not only was his right flank exposed, but the closest friendly unit to the Rangers was several kilometers away. Returning to Hill 205, Puckett reflected: "I felt all alone, but totally focused on my direct responsibilities and prepared to hold the high ground on Task Force DOLVIN's right flank."³⁸

The Rangers dug in and improved their defensive positions during the afternoon and early evening hours unaware that the CCF intended to start its Second Phase Offensive that night. At approximately 2100 hours, Ranger First Sergeant (1SG) Charles L. Pitts, at the base of Hill 205, was arranging for hot chili to be carried up as part of the company's resupply when he heard machinegun fire coming from the left flank.³⁹ Unknown to Puckett and the other Rangers, this signaled the start of the CCF attack which overwhelmed 3rd platoon, E Company, 27th Infantry, in squad defensive formations on three separate small hills below Hill 207, E Company's main position. Alerted to an approaching enemy, the Rangers prepared for an attack. About 2200 hours, swarms of Chinese beating drums and blowing whistles and bugles, began a frontal assault. Heavy Ranger small arms fire and Puckett's pre-planned artillery concentrations halted this first attack around 2250 hours. Unfortunately, several Rangers were wounded including Puckett who was hit in the left thigh. He refused evacuation for what would be his first wound. Roughly ten minutes later the Chinese launched a second attack which was also beaten back, but was quickly followed by another, also repelled.

Each attack resulted in more Chinese being committed and the fighting closed to hand grenade range. After being wounded a second time (in the left shoulder) Puckett reported at 2350 hours that the Rangers still controlled the hill. After repulsing a fourth and then a fifth CCF attack, their ammunition was almost gone. According to Ranger Billy G. Walls, his platoon sergeant, Ranger Harland F. Morrissey, issued the order to "fix bayonets and prepare for counterattack." Then they waited. Finally, at 0245 hours following an intense mortar barrage, the Chinese launched their sixth and final attack on Hill 205 with the lead Chinese assaulters throwing hand grenades.⁴⁰ Unable to get artillery support, critically short of ammunition, and with most of the Rangers still alive being wounded, Puckett sent his last radio message: "It's too late. Tell Colonel Dolvin we're being overwhelmed."⁴¹

Then Chinese swarmed over Hill 205, bayoneting and shooting the Rangers who fought from their foxholes. Wounded Ranger Merrill S. Casner had a Chinese soldier put a rifle to his head and pull the trigger. It did not kill him, but Casner faked death



SFC Harland F. Morrissey gave the command to "fix bayonets" during the sixth and final CCF attack on Hill 205 on 26 November 1950. During WWII, he earned a Silver Star with the 1st Marine Parachute Battalion.



PFC William L. Judy was a mechanic in an engineer unit when he volunteered for the Rangers.



SGT Billy G. Walls volunteered for the Rangers because his platoon sergeant in basic training had been a Ranger and he wanted to "fight with the best." He and Morrissey introduced the Mohawk haircut.



PFC David L. Pollock was Billy Walls' assistant machine gunner who helped Walls evacuate Puckett from Hill 205. Pollock and Walls were each awarded the Silver Star for their actions on Hill 205.

until he could get off the hill.⁴² Amid the noise and confusion, Ranger William L. Judy found LT Puckett seriously wounded by either grenade or mortar fragments. Unable to move, Puckett told Judy to leave him behind. Judy had other ideas and went to find Morrissey to help him evacuate his company commander. Not finding Morrissey, he located Rangers Billy G. Walls and David L. Pollock to help him. Walls and Pollock found LT Puckett on his hands and knees, wounded in his left shoulder, both feet, thighs and buttocks, and surrounded by Chinese. The Rangers fired into the Chinese soldiers driving them away. Walls charged forward, picked Puckett up, slung him over his shoulder, and ran off the hill while Pollock provided covering fire. They hid in a small draw filled with brush



The Turkish Brigade was commanded by BG Tahsin Yazici and arrived in Korea on 19 October 1950 with 5,000 men in three infantry battalions, artillery and engineer units. Attached to the 25th ID, it remained in Korea until mid-summer 1954.

CPT Charles G. Ross was originally assigned as CPT Vann's Executive Officer. He had the distinction of being the last commander of both the Eighth Army Ranger Company and the 1st Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne).



and trees. Judy finally found Morrissey and a few more Rangers, and rejoined the company at the collection point at the base of Hill 205.

Exhausted after carrying Puckett about fifty yards, SGT Walls dumped Puckett on the ground as he and Pollock tried to catch their breath. After a short rest, Walls said to Puckett, "Sir, you're too heavy," and the two men grabbed Puckett by his wrists and dragged him the rest of the way down the hill.⁴³ Eventually, they reached the base of Hill 205 where 1SG Pitts had established a collecting point. LT Puckett was carried to a tank and loaded onto the back deck. He was evacuated to the aid station about one and a half miles away. The CCF occupation of Hill 205 prevented attempts by 1SG Pitts or the other Rangers to search for dead or missing Rangers on the hill. The next morning (26 November 1950) 1SG Pitts, as one of the few leaders not wounded, took charge of the Eighth Army Ranger Company and prepared the morning report. Among the fifty-one Rangers who attacked, captured, and then defended Hill 205 only ten remained unharmed. Four casualties were sustained in the attack up the hill. An additional twenty-seven more were wounded, and ten were missing after the sixth CCF assault drove them off Objective 10. Among the missing Rangers was 1LT Cummings whose remains were never recovered.

The action at Hill 205 rendered the Eighth Army Ranger Company combat ineffective. After 26 November 1950, the Company was only capable of conducting routine patrols in front of the 25th ID front-line trace, acting as a security force for regimental or divisional headquarters, or assisting the Turkish Brigade in securing Kangwha Island at the mouth of the Han River. 1LT Ralph Puckett, Jr. was evacuated to the United States to recover from his wounds.⁴⁴ He was replaced first by CPT John Paul Vann and then CPT Charles G. Ross.⁴⁵ The original Ranger screening and selection criteria went by the wayside and special training programs were eventually discontinued. New personnel were assigned directly from mainstream replacement detachments. Replacement training was done between company missions, but it lacked the focus and intensity of that given to the original EUSA Rangers by LT Puckett and LTC McGee. While the EUSA Ranger Company did participate with the 25th ID in Operations KILLER and



CPT John Paul Vann assumed command of the Rangers on 5 December 1950 after Puckett was evacuated for his wounds. Vann returned to the Ranger Training Command at Fort Benning on 5 March 1951. He was killed in Vietnam in a helicopter crash in 1972.

RIPPER, no amount of operational experience would save them from being disbanded and replaced by the 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne) on 31 March 1951.

EPILOGUE:

During its short life, the Eighth Army Ranger Company fought in four major campaigns, spent 164 days on continuous front-line duty, and was awarded the Korean Presidential Unit Citation. The Eighth Army Ranger Company has never been officially acknowledged as a separate unit by the Department of the Army. Although organized under two recognized U.S. Army Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) documents by General Headquarters (GHQ), Far East Command message CX50251, 2 December 1950, the company was never officially "activated" under either of these documents. They remained a FECOM TDA Army Unit (AU). Years later, the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) told Puckett that Table of Distribution and Allowance (TDA) units could not be awarded combat campaign streamers. Only TO&E units were authorized them. This meant that the only Ranger unit in Korea during the Pusan Perimeter defense and the only Ranger unit that could have earned a battle streamer for that period was not entitled to one by Army policy.⁴⁶ Despite the lack of formal honors, Retired Colonel Ralph Puckett best explained the spirit of the Eighth Army Rangers: "We had the confidence that came from believing that we were the best that the United States of America could produce."⁴⁷ ♣

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Endnotes

- 1 COL (Ret) Ralph Puckett, Jr., Eighth Army Ranger Company, e-mail to Eugene G. Piasecki, 14 February 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Puckett volunteered for the Rangers as a result of the stories he had heard about the Rangers and his personal desire to be with the best. After his interview with McGee, Puckett learned that his boxing experience, recent graduation from Jump School, and excellent physical condition worked to his advantage since McGee had also been on West Point's boxing team. Impressed with his attitude and aggressiveness Puckett stated McGee selected him to command the Ranger Company because he believed an officer with no combat experience would be more aggressive than an experienced officer who had fought in World War II.
- 2 T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War. The Classic Korean War History* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1963), 108.

- 3 Robert W. Black, *Rangers in Korea* (New York: Ivy Books, 1989), 12-13. The defensive line between Taegu and Pohang was originally called the Nakdong Perimeter and only became known as the Pohang Pocket after the NKPA had broken through its defenses.
- 4 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 10-11.
- 5 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 13. Puckett used the TO&E McGee gave him to form the company into a five-man headquarters element and two thirty-six man platoons for a total company strength of three officers and seventy-four enlisted men. The company headquarters consisted of the commander, first sergeant, supply corporal, company clerk and messenger. Each platoon had a headquarters element of one officer and three enlisted men; two assault sections of eleven men each; and a special weapons section of ten men. Each assault section was armed with a mix of M-1 Garand rifles, carbines, and supplemented by a light machine gun. The special weapons section included a 60 mm mortar, two 3.5 inch bazookas, and a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR); each platoon headquarters also had a sniper rifle as part of its armament (Gray, 'The First Rangers in Korea,' 24-26).
- 6 While preferring single men under the age of 26, Puckett did make exceptions. He generally selected average soldiers who had demonstrated solid duty performances and motivation. This included a few World War II veterans such as Corporal Earl Cronin who had fought in Europe and Corporal Harland F. Morrissey who had won a Silver Star as a member of the 1st Marine Parachute Battalion.
- 7 Records of Events Section, Initial Morning Report, 26 August 1950 from the Eighth Army Ranger Company Association Newsletter, 25 August 1987. General Order 237, Headquarters Eighth Army APO 343 dated 24 August 1950 published on 25 August 1950 activated the Eighth Army Ranger Company.
- 8 COL (Ret) Ralph Puckett, Jr., e-mail to Eugene G. Piasecki, 11 March 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 Rangers Billy G. Walls and Merle W. Simpson, Eighth Army Ranger Company, interviews by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 7 July 2005, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company from August 1950-March 1951*. A Narrative Compilation as of July 1992, 12. Ralph Puckett was the officer Walls saw and recalls: "I saw Walls in the hall with a Mohawk. He recommended that all of us get a Mohawk. I agreed immediately. Told him to pass out the word while I published a written order. Then I went for my Mohawk. We kept the Mohawks until the weather turned very cold in November. 1SG Pitts did "the honors" with his barber kit, important equipment for every First Sergeant.
- 10 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 15.
- 11 Ranger Jesse E. Anderson, Eighth Army Ranger Company, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 6 July 2005, Eighth Army Ranger Company Reunion, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 12 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 15.
- 13 Puckett e-mail, 14 February 2010.
- 14 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 15. Colonel (retired) Ralph Puckett, Eighth Army Ranger Company, letter to Dr. Richard L. Kiper, 30 April 2004, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 15 Puckett letter to Kiper, 30 April 2004, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 16 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 18-19.
- 17 Puckett letter to Kiper, 30 April 2004, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 18 Puckett e-mail, 11 March 2010.
- 19 Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War*, 171.
- 20 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 18; Gray, 'The First Rangers in Korea,' 36-37. The Korean enlisted men were part of the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA) Program. The KATUSA Program was conceived in July 1950 by an informal agreement between South Korean President Syngman Rhee and General Douglas MacArthur and implemented by 15 August 1950. On that date, GEN MacArthur ordered LTG Walker to increase the strength of each company and battery of United States troops by 100 Koreans. The Koreans would legally be part of the ROK Army and would be paid and administered by the South Korean government, but receive U.S. rations and special service items.
- 21 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 24. Puckett e-mail 14 February 2010. McGee assessed the company as prepared to undertake the missions of: Raids, Reconnaissance Patrolling, Combat Patrolling, Motorized Detachment, and Trail Blocks. He also stressed the importance of achieving tactical surprise and the necessity for having sufficient time to plan and rehearse missions.
- 22 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 23. Also on 8 October 1950, Puckett, Bunn and Cummings were all promoted to First Lieutenant. A Table of Distribution Allowance (TDA) unit is considered a temporary unit organized from in-theater assets and has no lineage. This meant that the campaigns and honors of the Eighth Army Ranger Company could not accrue to the Ranger heritage. This has caused much resentment over the years. (Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 23). EUSA issued General Order 106 with an authorized American strength of three officers and seventy-four enlisted men under Table of Distribution 301-1498, dated 19 September 1950.
- 23 Roy E. Appleman, *The United States Army in the Korean War. South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu (June-November 1950)*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, 1961), 721; Shelby L. Stanton, *Rangers at War: Combat Recon in Vietnam* (New York: Orion Books, 1992), 349. Puckett relates in his 14 February 2010 e-mail that the Rangers had to be attached to some unit because they had no mess, no medics, no transportation, ---nothing. The TO&E under which the Rangers was formed called for all of that support to be at Ranger Battalion Headquarters level and since there was no Ranger Battalion, Puckett stated: " We had a great relationship with the Recon Company."
- 24 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 28-29. The Company also received a ten-man squad of KATUSAs to supplement their numbers and act as interpreters with friendly civilians. Puckett placed one KATUSA in each headquarters element and split the remaining number into each assault section.
- 25 Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War*, 185-186.
- 26 Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu*, 766.
- 27 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 34.
- 28 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 31. The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 36-38. The 89th Medium Tank Battalion was attached by authority of 25th ID Operations Order #15 on 21 November 1950.
- 29 Puckett e-mail 14 February 2010.
- 30 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 31. This was 25th ID Operations Order #6 dated 1000 hours, 23 November 1950.
- 31 The 8th Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 40-41.
- 32 The 8th Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 41-42.
- 33 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 32.
- 34 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 32.
- 35 Colonel (ret) Ralph Puckett, Jr., Commander, Eighth Army Ranger Company, interview by Colonel (ret) Harry J. Maihafer, 1 December 2000, *Military History Magazine*, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/ARMY+RANGERS+BAPTISM+OF+FIRE.-a066419967> accessed 12 January 2010. COL Maihafer and COL Puckett were classmates and graduates of USMA, Class of 1949. Maihafer has also written the book *From the Hudson to the Yalu* which contains stories about several of his classmates who fought in Korea.
- 36 Puckett e-mail, 14 February 2010.
- 37 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 46.
- 38 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 45-47. Puckett e-mail, 11 March 2010.
- 39 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 50.
- 40 Walls interview with Briscoe, 7 July 2005. Puckett e-mail, 14 February 2010.
- 41 Puckett interview with Maihafer, 1 December 2000. Prior to the sixth attack, two Chinese mortar shells landed a fraction of a second apart and exploded almost on top of Puckett's command foxhole. Bernard Cummings, Puckett's classmate and one of the three original officer volunteers in the Eighth Army Ranger Company was killed instantly. Puckett now had wounds to both feet, left shoulder and left arm, thighs and buttocks. In fact his right foot was so badly mangled he had to persuade treating medical personnel not to amputate it.
- 42 The Eighth Army Ranger Company Association, *The Eighth Army Ranger Company*, 56.
- 43 COL (ret) Ralph Puckett, Jr., e-mail to Eugene G. Piasecki, 4 April 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 44 Puckett e-mail, 4 April 2010. Puckett remembered: "The right foot was in such bad shape that the doctors considered amputation the first five months I was in the hospital. I have had 20+ operations on the feet and still have a miniscule amount of drainage but all is well."
- 45 CPT John Paul Vann began his career as a B-29 Superfortress Bomber navigator during WWII. After the war he remained in the Army and received a commission in the Infantry. Assigned to the 25th Infantry Division in Korea, he commanded the Eighth Army Rangers, between December 1950 and February 1951 until he was reassigned to the Ranger Training Command at Fort Benning, GA. In 1962 in Vietnam he was an advisor to the South Vietnamese Army, but resigned his commission in 1963 and returned as a Deputy for CORDS in the III Corps Tactical Zone. He was killed in a helicopter crash in Vietnam in the early 1970s.
- 46 Puckett e-mail, 11 March 2010.
- 47 COL Ralph Puckett, Jr., Personal notes for: *Chapter III: The Korean War—Formation and Training of the Eighth Army Ranger Company*, e-mail to Eugene G. Piasecki, 11 March 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.