

The Korean War Veteran

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Remembering the brave Royals on Hill 187

May 2-3, 1953

In Korea two weeks ago Canadian Veterans from all regiments and services conducted commemoration observances at the Canadian War Memorial. It overlooks the battlefields near Kapyong.

The occasion was the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Kapyong, for which the soldiers of the 2nd Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry were awarded a U.S. Presidential Unit Citation.

The following article chronicles the 58th anniversary of a much worse engagement in terms of battle deaths, wounds and numbers of wounded Canadian soldiers who were captured.

It was fought by the 3rd Battalion of The Royal Canadian Regiment on Hill 187 - just three weeks after the newly arrived battalion had entered the front lines.

The action was confined mostly to one company, but it equalled or surpassed in intensity what Canadians experienced at Kapyong, where two infantry companies had been engaged by the enemy.

Survivors of the battle will note, while not meaning to detract from the significance of the earlier battle, that the defenders at Kapyong were subjected mostly to small arms fire; that very few mortar bombs were fired by the enemy and virtually no artillery was used in assaulting the two companies of Patricias.

On Hill 187, by contrast, the enemy cannonade was colossal. It fully eradicated the Canadian defensive positions ahead of the attacks by their assault troops.

This unfortunate tragedy, the Battle of Hill 187 – which should be an unforgettable incident in the Korean War - was not even properly reported in Canadian newspapers. Censors in Korea wanted to keep the enormity of the losses covered up during the last months of the peace talks, while much wrangling and sabre rattling was taking place in the conference hut at Panmunjom.

Brigadier Jean Allard, who commanded the 25th Canadian Infantry Brigade, considered the battle a victory for the enemy and a loss for the newly arrived Royals. He was not eager to extol the defenders and their Regiment and

used the results and deficiencies uncovered by the battle to whip his forces into superior condition.

The deficiencies were not those of the green 3rd Royals, who had been in Korea little more than one month. They were endemic to the whole brigade, which had spent two months out of the lines in Divisional rest.

The upshot was that nobody in Canada knew about the great tragedy that had befallen the 3rd Battalion of The Royal Canadian Regiment.

Yet the Royals lost more soldiers killed in action that night than any other Canadian battalion did in a single engagement during the Korean War.

In fact, collectively, throughout the course of the war, the three battalions of The Royal Canadian Regiment had much higher casualties than those of the other two Canadian infantry regiments.



It was 58 years ago today that C Company of the 3rd Battalion of The Royal Canadian Regiment was attacked on three interlocking positions in the Hill 187 complex. One of several key bastions near the Samicheon River, the Hill 187 positions had been handed off to the Royals by the 3rd Battalion of the Royal 22e Regiment on April 19/20, 1953.

The positions were three quarters of a mile southwest of the predominant Hill 355, or Kowang-san, which was key to the defence of the entire valley.

The 3rd Battalion of the Royals had landed in Korea three weeks earlier on March 23, 1953.

The new men melded with holdovers who had served in the 1st Royals and had not enough time in Korean service to return to Canada, and with a few volunteers who had completed their service but opted to stay on.

Mostly, though, the Royals were all new to Korea, coming virtually right off of the ship.

By their second week in the lines, analysts at brigade headquarters were concerned about registration fire that was falling on the three forward features held by C Company.



Private John Nicholas Burak, 26, fell on Hill 187 on May 3, 1953. He was the only son of Mrs. Elizabeth Sayco of Calgary. He was the brother of Olga Perkins of North Vancouver, BC and Lena Hayes of Vancouver.

The enemy was cautious and the shells and mortar bombs came in slowly and were well spaced out, so the honing in of artillery preparatory to an attack was not overly obvious.

However, when shrapnel was collected it was apparent that a very large variety of guns and mortars were registering on the positions. This indicated a massing of the enemy's available artillery firepower with the objective of smashing the C Company positions.

Brigadier Allard and his headquarters team believed the new battalion would be hit.

There was no strategic value in attacking those particular positions; any ground taken could not be exploited and the enemy would be caught under the sights of allied troops on Hill 159 and Hill 355, to be devastated by massed artillery fire and air strikes.

But the warning message was there, in the hundreds of varied shrapnel chards.

Allard had just taken over from Brigadier Pat Bogert. He was less than happy about the condition of all of the Canadian units on the line.



The mood at brigade, 30 miles behind the lines, where officers and men lived in marquis tents, dined in mess halls, had white stones lining their pathways, had been rosy, with expectations that the war would end very soon. It was a beautiful spring and to some the Korean War had become tantamount to some wonderful holiday – *but don't tell anyone in Canada about it.*

Allard, as new to his command as the Royals, set about to put everyone on a serious war footing once again.

Private Michael Paul Chiasson, 20, killed in action on May 3, 1953, son of Leo and Mary Welina Currie, from New Waterford, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

He was a hard driving soldier who had commanded the Royal 22e Regiment in Italy in World War Two and finished the war commanding the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade. He had been thrice awarded the Distinguished Service Order in Europe for brilliant command under fire.

But in Korea he inherited many problems left over from the previous command structure.

Several stupid things were going on at the front.

One had been to “augment” Commonwealth troops by filling holes in their numbers with Republic of Korea soldiers – mixing the Korean speaking, differently trained ROK troops with every front line platoon of Canadians. Giving them a quick course in Canadian weapons and tactics was almost laughably ineffective.

It was idiotic to try to intermix the Canadian and ROK troops. Language and cultural barriers and distrust between them were a strong impediment to possible success.

Can anyone imagine being ambushed on a fighting patrol by enemy soldiers and on your own team being among soldiers who are yelling in an Asian language?



Private James Joseph Christoff was killed in action on May 3, 1953, at age 22. He was the son of Peter Christoff of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. He was survived by his father and brothers Chris, George, William, Stephen, Benny and John and by sisters Olga, Margie, Rosie, Lillian and Laura.

One would not understand them and under duress the Koreans would not understand commands given by their own Canadian leaders.

All of the Commonwealth countries were having difficulty getting enough replacement troops. Filling the ranks with Koreans whose English language abilities were more mythical than real was a stopgap, but in actuality became a permanent solution to the atrocious troop shortages.

Canada was perhaps most remiss in this.

It was political. The people in all of the nations whose sons were in the war wanted it to end. Three years in Korea had been too long for a war that was supposed to have been won in a few months. The objects of the war seemed less and less clear, if they ever were, and the possible fruits of victory were even more obscure.

“Peace” talks had been ongoing for more than two years, with little progress indicated.

The “augmentation” had been fully approved by Canada's Department of National Defence.

The Canadian commanders in the field were remiss for permitting conditions to deteriorate where such a peculiar arrangement seemed an essential one.

During the past year they had let infantry companies of only 50 to 70 men hold positions that by the book required well over 100 and in actual practice, should have been manned by 200.

Shame on them for that!

Filling the holes with ROK troops was a scandalous way to make up for the terrible shortcomings. It was unfair to both the Canadians and the Koreans. All of the Commonwealth forces did the same thing.

The right way would have been to make much noise and demand proper reinforcements. Bring the scandal to the attention of the Canadian people - that their sons were fighting in units drastically undermanned, against an enemy whose numbers would dwarf theirs even if the battalions had been at full strength.

But then again, the response in the home countries might well have been, “What? Is that war still going on? It should have been finished long ago. Why get in an uproar? It will be over very soon.”

The politicians would not have been pleased to have their military officers nagging them and creating public dissent.



Believe it or not, this is C Company, 3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment shortly before the Battle of Hill 187. Even though the company has been reinforced with integrated Korean Augmentation Troops Commonwealth (KATCOMs), it numbers a little less than 70, including all officers. The company was committed to battle at roughly half strength, even though reinforced by the Koreans. It is amazing that such scandal evaded the furor of the 60 families in Canada whose loved ones were killed, wounded or taken prisoner in the tragic battle a few days after the photograph was taken.

Other foolishness was at work as well.

To “pretend” that there were troops in the field and distract the enemy, the Royals had been provided with “hot boxes” - batches of explosives and pyrotechnics wired to simulate rifle and machinegun fire, mortars... whatever.

So men should risk their lives packing a heavy load of sham battle paraphernalia into no-man’s land with the object of “distracting” the enemy? Think about that. They were facing a very battle wise enemy. The enemy did not rotate troops, but remained in the field.

Their ears certainly were combat tuned and they could tell the difference between real and sham firing.

Another ill conceived tactic was taking watch dogs out on fighting patrols. If the enemy was near the dogs would go on point and then...and then, *what?*

The soldiers did not trust their lives or their actions to dogs. Soldiers are not trained that way.

They rely on themselves, on each other, but not on animals that suddenly go on point and can't speak to explain why they're doing it.

Maybe they need to pea or there's a pheasant in the foliage.

On one fighting patrol of the 3rd Royals a sapper from the Royal Engineers was providing dog support with his stolid animal.

The dog went on point. The sapper went to the sergeant in charge, told him to hold up, that the dog detected enemy.

“That’s bullshit!” the sergeant told him.

He continued forward into an enemy ambush and was shot and killed. So was the dog.



The dog did as he was trained to do and the men did as they had been trained to do – which was not to be led about by a dog.

Private Russell Leon Gardiner, 22, was the son of Hubert and Nellie Gardiner of Omemee, Ontario. He was killed in action on May 3, 1953. He was also survived by two brothers, Ronald Munro, Francis Jean and his sister Verna May.

The sapper told this story decades later at the saloon in the Sofitel Ambassador Hotel during a veterans revisit. He had newsclippings of his dog, too, and wept, saying how he was trying to get him a medal, but nobody would listen to his pleas.

It was also thought by the men of the Royals that the dogs were trained to sense Asian soldiers, so they would not let their ROK augmentation troops go on patrols if the dogs were used.

One very stupid directive the Royals had to live under was one issued by Brigade. The front line infantry soldiers were not allowed to prime their grenades, except the ones they took with them on patrols.

The grenades kept at hand in the defensive firing pits were to stay in their crates until needed.

So absurd! In the event of attack, the soldiers would have to unscrew the baseplugs from the grenades, insert the fuse assembly, screw the baseplug back in and torque it with a special wrench.

In other words the grenades would be useless – and those not primed *were* useless when the enemy attacked!

None of these things were the fault of the poor Royals; the fellows in the trenches who had to serve and endure the effects.

It also needs to be remembered that the 1st Battalion of the Royals had undergone a devastating enemy attack when they held the Hill 355 complex six months earlier, in October, 1952.

From August through October during that year, the 1st Royals lost more than 40 soldiers killed in action.

On the tragic night of October 23/24, 1952, they had undergone the most colossal artillery barrage of the war until that time, and then were stormed by shock troops. That October night alone the 1st Royals had 18 soldiers killed in action, 35 wounded and 14 captured.

Some of the Royals who had served on Hill 355 during that horrid attack also were present defending the Hill 187 complex in May, 1953.



Thus, some would experience two of the worst enemy attacks made against Canadians during the Korean War.

Private John Paul Keating fell in action on May 3, 1953 on Hill 187. The son of Mrs. Teresa Keating of Toronto, he had served in the Canadian Army for a little less than nine months. He was 22.

One of the officers serving in C Company with the 3rd Royals was Lieutenant Donald Stickland, of London, Ontario. He had joined the Royals as an officer in the Special Force in 1950 and had served with the 2nd Battalion of the Royals in the Battle of Chai Li in May, 1951.

Stickland's platoon had been the first subunit to take casualties in that battle. He lost an entire section when the platoon walked into a concealed machinegun position. He had returned to serve with the 3rd Battalion.

Now on this night of May 3, several things were happening.

Lieutenant Gordon Owen who commanded the Pioneer Platoon had been sent to Number 7 Platoon to see about removing an unexploded shell.

The platoon was commanded by Lieutenant Ed Hollyer, a tough young soldier who had once served in the ranks as a private. It occupied a feature known as "Little Hill 97."

The position was forward and to the left of the central feature, which was occupied by Lieutenant Douglas Banton's Number 8 Platoon. This was the position that permitted the Royals egress to and from no man's land.

There were a dozen rows of double apron wire strung in front of it, with a pathway leading through gaps in the wire. On each side of the path and well out beyond the wire the ground was sown with hundreds of mines.

The defensive measures had kept the enemy out, but they had a serious downside. Canadian troops needing to get out into no-man's-land to keep tabs on the enemy had to move through that narrow corridor. The enemy knew it and so could bushwhack them when they went out. They could do the same when they tried to move back in.

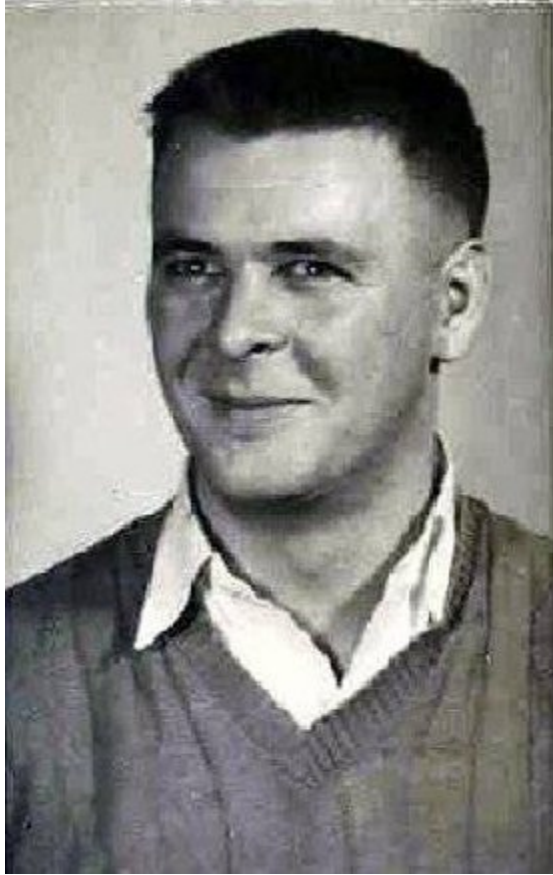
The men of Hollyer's and Banton's platoons had noted a lot of enemy activity out beyond the wire.

So on the night of May 2, at about 8:30 p.m., the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Laidlaw Campbell, had sent out a 16-man fighting patrol from A Company. They were to make an armed reconnaissance and set up an ambush of their leader's choosing.

The patrol was commanded by Lieutenant Gerard Balfour Meynell, a young American born officer whose parents lived in Maine.

Before he went out, Meynell stopped at the observation post of the forward artillery observation officer, Lieutenant George Ruffee, who served with the 81st Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery. They had gone to Acadia College together. It's located in a town in the Annapolis Valley about 60 miles northwest of Halifax.

Ruffee, a World War Two veteran, was very concerned about the C company situation and that of Meynell's patrol. They carefully went over procedures that would bring down 25-pounder shell firing tasks on various locations.



Lieutenant Gerard Balfour Meynell, 24, was born in Brooklyn, New York and was the son of Gerald Balfour and Margaret Meynell, who lived in Maine. He enlisted at Halifax, Nova Scotia. He was killed in action leading a fighting patrol after calling artillery fire onto his own position. He and his men had been ambushed and were surrounded and under heavy automatic weapons fire. The artillery officer who complied with his request for shellfire was his friend Lieutenant George Ruffee. They had attended Acadian College together.

The trouble with the planning that night is that local commanders did not consider that the enemy was preparing to come at them in force. The enemy commanders had large ambush patrols of their own set up, to keep any Canadian patrols from upsetting their

attack plans.

It was not long until Meynell's team, which could both rove and set up an ambush at his discretion, were bumped by the enemy. They came under concentrated machinegun and automatic weapons fire.

Meynell moved his men to the cover of a paddy dike and radioed for a flare. The flare went up and showed they were in a very bad way with many enemy troops around them.

Meynell radioed Ruffee and asked for an SOS shoot around his position. Ruffee complied and sent the shells down around them. He never heard his friend's voice again. Nobody ever would.

Lieutenant Meynell's body would remain in the paddy for several weeks until recovered. His burial records would cite the cause of death as machinegun bullets.

Corporal J. C. McNeil took command of the patrol, rallied his men, tried to save those who were wounded. Their situation was untenable.

As McNeil tried to maneuver them back to the C Company position, his men came under attack from not one but two large enemy formations.

Lieutenant Hollyer was observing this from Little Hill 97. He could see the muzzle flashes from the encircled fighting patrol and many flashes from the enemy weapons.



Lance Corporal Richard Arthur Nankervis had been wounded prior to the May 2/3 attack on Hill 187. He died of wounds on May 1, 1953, at age 20. He was the only son of William and Margaret Nankervis of Timmins, Ontario. He was also survived by two sisters, Ann and Catherine. Prior to joining the Royals he had served in the Canadian Militia for two years in the Algonquin Regiment.

Hollyer could also see by flare light large gaggles of enemy troops moving toward his own position and toward the wire around Number 8 platoon.

He radioed the Battalion commander and gave a quick assessment. He was told that Lieutenant Banton was preparing to dash out with his stand by flying squad and to get over and stop him.

But Hollyer could not reach him in time. Banton and his men were already on their way. Those

who knew Banton knew that even if Hollyer could have reached him, he still would have gone out to rescue the others.

As Banton led his Royals along the snaking pathway through the wire, others from the ambushed patrol tried to turn him back. He pushed on and got well beyond the last apron of wire.

Then his rescue patrol ran into yet another enemy ambush. The fusillade of automatic weapons fire was devastating. Banton fell at once.

One of the men with him said that before he was hit he had called to the soldiers of the other patrol who were under fire, "Come on in through me!"

Lieutenant Banton's burial records will later show that he was killed outright by a bullet wound to the head. They also show that the brave young officer was wearing a wool sweater and the gold striped blue scarf of the Royals as a regimental cravat around his neck.

Lieutenant Ed Hollyer was out in the trenches on Little Hill 97. He could clearly see by flare light that the enemy was now moving through the wire around Number 8 platoon and moving into the wire around his own position.

He gave Colonel Campbell this assessment. Campbell ordered the planned defensive mortar bombardment and then upgraded this to place artillery fire close in on the slopes of the C Company positions.

However, the enemy had by then infiltrated through the wire and was moving up the slopes.

Then hell descended on the three platoon positions of C Company. More than 1,000 enemy shells converged from many angles. They came down in unending barrage for quarter of an hour.

With them came the screeching, hooting enemy. They set off demolition charges in bunkers, tossed grenades by the dozens, raked the slopes with automatic weapons fire.

In Lieutenant Ruffee's artillery observation post Captain Mutt Mullins, C Company commander, tries to direct anyone he can reach by radio.

Ruffee's post is hit by incoming shells, knocking them both about, but neither of them will pull out.

Ruffee is using an infantry radio pack to send messages to a nearby platoon which relays them by a more powerful wireless set to battalion headquarters and to the supporting artillery fire control points.

Ruffee's own communications team had been knocked out when the enemy shells first came in.

The bunker that held his wireless equipment and its operators had received a direct hit. His two gunners, Clifford Weir of Windsor, Ontario and Gunner Murray Truthwaite of Selkirk, Manitoba, were killed instantly.



Two gunners fell side by side. Gunner Murray Andrew Truthwaite, 20, (left) of Selkirk, Manitoba, was killed in action alongside his comrade, Gunner Clifford Donald Weir, 21, of Windsor, Ontario. Their wireless communications bunker had taken a direct hit by an enemy shell. Gunner Truthwaite was survived by his parents, John and Eupemia of Hamilton, Ontario, brothers Clarence and Ian and his sister, Catherine. Gunner Weir left behind his parents, Clifford Boyce and Jeanette Weir, his brother Norman and sisters Jeanette and Delores.

The defending Royals in the trenches had been shocked by the holocaust. Many had been killed, many were lying wounded; others were fighting for their lives.

When the enemy saw a wounded man they pounced on him, scooped him up and made for their own distant hills. When they saw Royals on their feet defending they tried to rush them and take them down alive.

There were shoot outs at close range; there were absolute brawling, frantic bashups.

Imagine the horror for those holding on. The air was livid, shells cracking ears and hearts, fiery tracer bullets arcing in and around them, striking slopes. Sputtering gold flares were swinging in their canopies above them.

The enemy comes in threes and fours and never alone, but the few Royals are very few and are spaced far apart. Each tries his best to defend with his bolt action

Enfield rifle, but they are horribly outmatched in numbers and by burp submachine guns.

How any survived, none can later say. They fought and it was a great struggle; a horrifying melee.

Many of them were from the Maritime provinces, their arms tattooed with sailing ships and hearts and sweethearts and with notes of betrothal or of fond wishes for dead fathers and pledges to do honourable things.



Private Raymond John Grennan has been born at Barnaby River, New Brunswick and was living in Montreal when he volunteered for service in Korea in March, 1952. He was killed in action during the enemy attack on Hill 187 on March 3, 1953. He was survived by his wife, Doris, of Outremont, Montreal, his parents John and Agnes, brothers Cecil, Richard, Frank, Leonard and Patrick and his sisters, Mary, Jolice, Sarah, Geraldine and Cecelia

Others came from cities and towns in Ontario, Quebec, the western provinces.

Indeed they did do honourable things!

More than 50 fell in all, including the Royals who had been on patrols in no man's land. But not one man ran from the fray. Nobody retreated.

After the tally had been adjusted as the fate of those missing in action became known, the

Canadian losses among the Royals that night had been 26 soldiers killed in action, 27 wounded and seven wounded and taken prisoner.

With them, firing to their last bullets were the defiant ROK soldiers from Korea. They went down, too, in the same horrid proportions.

Of 24 serving with the rifle platoons, four died, four were wounded and taken prisoner and the other 14 were carried wounded from the field.

Lieutenant Gordon Owen, the pioneer platoon officer, was wounded early on, but came to in the surreal world of shellfire, flares, screaming enemy troops.



He vaguely remembers that before the barrage there were 12 rows of double apron wire in front of the position.

Private Thomas Richard Woodbury, 22, was killed in action on May 3, 1953. He was the only son of Thomas and Helen Woodbury of Temiskaming, Quebec, and the brother of one sister, Doris.

Now he can see there is no wire left at all. The landscape has changed entirely.

He shoots down two of the enemy who try to grab onto him. He goes down with a shell blast, recovers wounded.

He gets to his feet again, is hit two more times until he is mobbed and carried off down the slope. Beyond the position a phosphorous round comes in and he is wounded a fifth time, burned by a splash of the white hot chemical.

Snipers Jim Gunn and his partner Terrance O'Connell had been on duty in Number 7 Platoon when the attack came in. O'Connell has been badly wounded. Gunn was wounded, too. He manages to hide a carbine equipped with an electronic night scope before he's tackled by several Chinese. He struggles with them but can't get free. They have weapons jammed into him.

When they try to lift O'Connell he yells and motions, convincing them his friend is dead. They march him off with shells still coming in, with bullets lacing the area.

O'Connell, while badly wounded, will survive.

With Hollyer in his command post on Little Hill 98 is Lieutenant L. G. Cote of the Royal Canadian Signal Corps. He had come forward to try to establish a radio link with Meynell's ambushed patrol from A Company.



Though just 19, Private Ian Neil Raeburn left behind his bride, Carol Leslie (Herrington) of Fredericton, New Brunswick. He also was survived by his parents, Michael Gilchrist and Margaret

Elizabeth of Oak Point, New Brunswick, his brothers Marcel, Bruce and Colin and sisters Leigh and Anne.

Now Hollyer and Cote make a reconnaissance to assess the situation.

They advise Lieutenant Colonel Campbell that Number 7 platoon has been overrun; the enemy are all over the position.

Hollyer asks Campbell to switch the defensive fire to proximity fused air burst shells that will rake the enemy with shrapnel from above. He asks them to be fired directly onto his own position.

After a long time he asks the fire to be lifted, again goes out to reconnoitre.

The enemy troops are all over his position. Some of his men were fighting them hand to hand.

There are wounded and dead enemy soldiers everywhere. Their comrades were tossing them down the slope to bearers who were packing them off to their own positions.

But Hollyer is spotted and charged by two of the enemy. He takes out his pistol, shoots them down. He goes over the top of the fighting trench onto the slope.

When more enemy troops came scurrying up the remains of the trench above him he takes grenades from one of the cases that had slipped down the slope.

He tosses two of them but they are not primed! They harmlessly thud the ground. He would vent later that he likely had come on the grenades of the only soldier in the Battalion who had been stupid enough to *obey* the Brigade directive not to arm the bombs until ordered.



He and signals officer, Lieutenant L.G. Cote gather up a few men – he has only five left – and fight their way over to Number 8 Platoon.

One of the first soldiers killed in action on Hill 187 was Private William Frank Lucas, 27. His comrades and his family remember him as a kind, soft spoken man who was always willing to do things for others. He was the son of Frank and Ruby Lucas of

Toronto and also survived by brothers Edward, Gordon, Leo, Howard, John, Donald and Richard, and sisters Catherine, Sylvia and Violet.

Lance Corporal Julien joins them with the eight men of his section. They have fought the enemy at close quarters throughout the attack. He had been observed fighting with his fists. He hammered one of the enemy soldiers to the ground by bashing him in the head with a grenade.

In Number 8 Platoon Corporal Pero has pulled a handful of men together. They have fought off the enemy; will not give up the position. He has been observed fist fighting, slashing at some with his empty carbine.

Corporal J.C. McNeil who had taken command of Lieutenant Banton's shot up patrol, has fought his way back in with survivors. They brought in some of their wounded.

Those few Royals who are marched off or carried off by the enemy are amazed when they're hustled into tunnels and taken deep underground. The enemy has a great subterranean bastion with separate large chambers. The slopes above are being blasted by dozens of shells and mortar bombs but they are so deep that the blasts and vibrations barely come through.

The enemy begins interrogating the Canadians, who steadfastly refuse to answer them.



Private Lloyd Stanley Roach, 24, of Pictou, Nova Scotia fell in battle on Hill 187 on May 3, 1953. He was survived by his parents, George Hocken and Sadie Roach, of Pictou, brothers Victor George, Harold Joseph and sisters Margaret Joyce, Lorraine Gertrude and Hazel Mary.

In all, the enemy have captured seven Canadian soldiers, all wounded. They have also taken four of the Korean augmentation troops who served with them.

In the subterranean vault on the enemy hill some of the Royals show with fingers how many enemy soldiers they shot down before they were overpowered. One of them holds up five fingers and then two more. A Chinese officer screams at him, orders them all to stay silent.

The battle has raged for a long time.

Up above the imprisoned Canadians, D Company of the Royals has launched a counterattack. The skies are a predawn gray and the ground still lit orange from with flare light. Lines of scarlet tracer bullets are arcing at targets in front of the positions as the medium machineguns of the Royals and of the Princess Patricias keep up harassing fire on the enemy.

The former positions of C Company have been completely levelled. It is as though some horrid, fiery whirlwind has swept through.

Indeed, one had.

In addition to the concentrated enemy barrage that wounded and killed so many the 81st Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery, has fired 3,400 25-pounder shells onto and around the positions.

The Royal Artillery and American artillery units fired another 8,000 shells of various calibers. The Princess Patricias mortar platoon had dropped 4,000 mortar bombs onto and around the positions.

Vickers medium machineguns of the Patricias fired 93,000 rounds and the Vickers of the nearby Royal 22e Regiment fired 70,000 rounds in support of C Company.

When things calm, Private Jim Bradley, from Windsor, Ontario, who was serving high on the main hill and not directly engaged in the attack, came down to C Company looking for his friend, Victor "Red" Percy.



Corporal Douglas Harold Richard MacLean, 27, had served in the Canadian Army for five years and was killed in action on Hill 187 on May 3, 1953. He left behind his wife, Ethel Marion and his daughter Heather Margaret and sons Richard Allan, Harold Douglas and Thomas. He was also survived by his parents, Allan and Bertha MacLean of Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia.

He finds Percy's gear in a blown out bunker, fastidiously assembles it and carts it on up to his own position.

He believes Private Percy is not dead, but may be one of the prisoners. In that he is correct.

Even in captivity the Royals defy their enemy. On one occasion, Lieutenant Owen and the others rig a dead mouse with a parachute made from a bit of rag.

Their prank had followed a lecture by the enemy on how allied air force planes supposedly were air dropping infected insects and vermin onto the people of North Korea.

The Royals swear that the mouse descended in the parachute. It causes a great uproar. When the prank becomes obvious they are poorly treated for their audacity.



Private Daniel Melvin Wellington was killed in action on May 3, 1953 at age 24. He was survived by his parents, John and Elizabeth Wellington of Ottawa and by his brothers Lawrence, Donald and William and by his sister, Jackie. His comrade in arms, Private Garry Duchene, named his son Daniel in his memory.

When they are released from a prison camp three months later, Lieutenant Roger Owen, the much wounded pioneer platoon officer, will be in charge of their column. When first captured, his wounds had gone untreated for more than two weeks.

After the war ends and the prisoners are repatriated, Jim Bradley eventually gets a chance to return a piece of Victor Percy's equipment to him for a most precious, personal souvenir.

It is easy to say, let us never forget these Royals.

Yet everyone did.

How must this horrid battle have haunted the hearts and the minds of those caught up in it? Not just for weeks of months or even years, but for decades?

There were no definitive news reports about this battle. There was a terribly inept article, diced and scratched by censors that appeared in a few Canadian papers two



months later. It told no story; only gave an impression that a company of the newly arrived Royal Canadian Regiment had been attacked.

Private Clayton Morningstar, 22, of Niagara Falls, Ontario, was badly wounded on Hill 187. He did not survive. Private Morningstar died of wounds on May 10, 1953, one week after the battle had ended. He would have had his 23rd birthday, three days later, on May 13, 1953.

Through the years, tales told by those who were there on the night of May 2/3, 1953 have fallen on deaf ears. Those willing to talk about it finally gave up and went silent.

Nobody was interested. Anyone with vague interest believed the war had pretty much ended long before the spring of 1953 and those on the ground in Korea were mostly a symbolic force, not actually fighting.

So the story of the brave 3rd Royals who fought their enemy in pitched battle soon after arriving in Korea, is not only forgotten; it was not even told.

The Royals who fought in the Hill 187 battle were not entirely forgotten. In 2002 when the base for the 2,000-strong Canadian contingent of the International Security Assistance Force was established in Kabul, Afghanistan, it was named Camp Julien. It honoured the memory of Corporal George Patrick Julien, who had fought with his section in the tragic Battle of Hill 187 on the night of May 2/3, 1953. Corporal Julien was one of three Royals who were awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the field.

Pro Patria



