AMERICAN LEGION
Columbia Post 300

Korean War - Army Security Agency
Dennis Thornton



After joining the Army Reserve at age seventeen in March 1950, our company went for two weeks of annual training in July 1950 at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. The Korean War started in June 1950. We were told that we would be activated and sent to Korea. The company included mostly World war II veterans, who had started families and jobs after the war. Those veterans changed their orders because they could. We privates remained in limbo. I returned home to finish high school in 1951 prior to being called up for active duty and mobilization. I planned to join the Army after graduating from high school.



I reported to activation processing as an enlisted reservist. After some testing, I met with the recruiting officer who offered that I could be accepted into the Army Security Agency, sent to specialty schooling, and then sent to Korea as a non-combatant. I willingly accepted being in the Regular Army to join the Army Security Agency for a three year commitment.

I was okay with that. After basic training and a trip to Vint Hill Farm for a school assignment at Camp Gordon, Georgia, and leave, I traveled for debarkation out of Oakland, California.

We travelled to Japan on a troop ship in July 1952 for eighteen days. I then flew to Korea.

My assignment to an Army Security Agency company in Korea landed me north of Seoul near Chungcheong Buk-Do below the 38th parallel. The 38th parallel became the line of fighting for the two years of my assignment. Our company supported the front lines. We received a Unit Citation for that critical support mission. Our direction finding unit monitored Air Force emergency signals helping to rescue several flyers who had been shot down.





Coming Home

My return to the United States aboard a troop ship took nineteen days via the North Pacific to arrive in Seattle, Washington around the 10th of January 1954. My travel back to Minnesota by train brought me home around mid-January 1954. We crossed the International Dateline on New Year's Eve. That made the next day new Year's Day as well.

My Army hitch was four years, seven months, and three days. I later joined the National Security Agency and retired after thirty-three years. The Cease Fire agreement establishing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea happened on July 23, 1953. We lost about thirty-five thousand soldiers in three years.

Surviving the Korean War as an Army Security Agency non-combatant, I have been married for sixty-eight years. We have three boys, six grandchildren, and seven great grandchildren.

Our small town of around 1500 people in Osakis, Minnesota boasts farming and fishing resorts on Lake Osakis. Even though our town is small, I met three soldiers Osakis in Korea. I also saw a guy leaning against a guard rail on our troop ship who looked familiar. I called him by his last name, and he turned out to be the older brother of my schoolmate.



Autumn Flowers in Osakis Minnesota 1946

As a non-combatant, we still had guard duty around the camp perimeter. We were alerted for infiltrators in-coming, but none hit us. My non-combatant wounds included a tangle with a barbed wire fence and a pair of broken glasses when I tangled with a pole's guide wire. I also suffered a near miss from a drunken soldier's 45 caliber pistol when he fired at the ceiling while I was in the room above.



Home on the Farm