

## **“LONG JOURNEY TO KOREA”**

*By Frank W. Santucci*

1958 was a memorable year for me. That year was also notable for many others. Fidel Castro his Cuban Revolution in the summer and by December, Batista left Cuba. Elvis Presley was drafted in April. This made bigger news than Castro. This is the year Mollie and I got married. I was drafted the same month as Elvis Presley. I spent months in Kentucky and Maryland Army camps. I also got sent to Korea and that adventure was monumental to the point so that on this date, September 5, 2014, the facts still remain vivid to me, allowing me now to convey these events.

The journey started on a sad goodbye, at the original Greater Pittsburgh Airport. Fear and sadness was complicated by anxiety, I had never flown before. I was to fly non-stop to Seattle, Washington on a Northwest Airline, large four-engine plane. In that year security was not as stringent. Mollie and others were there almost to the gate entrance around 10 p.m. and dark. The plane was an all-night flight arriving in Seattle in the morning. My plan was to sleep all the way and wake up in Seattle and then onto Ft. Lewis. This was around the 7<sup>th</sup> of November. What seemed like a short ride, we were instructed to belt up as we were getting ready to land. What a great ride, I had slept for eight hours and now to land at the Seattle airport. Wrong! We were landing in Cleveland, only one-half hour since I boarded. As we continued on our non-stop trip, we landed in Chicago, Billings, Montana, Spokane and then to Seattle. Did they say non-stop or did I hear wrong, maybe it was all-stop. It was raining when I disembarked. I was sort of disappointed because of the rain, but after small talk with some locals in the airport, this weather is the norm. It was November, wet and cool. I looked for the bus that I had been previously instructed to take to Ft. Lewis.

It was still raining when I got to Ft. Lewis. Other draftees were on the bus also. When we got to the camp, we were assigned to an unused barracks. There was just a bunk bed and a small locker, no foot locker. We all had duffle bags and for the next three weeks we lived out of those bags. I had thought that we would be sent quickly to Korea, but we languished at Ft. Lewis. No duties for us as we were replacements for the boys in Korea. We had a lot of free time, movies, canteen and sleep was our daily fair. One of the days we had classes on Korean culture and language. About twenty miles south of Ft. Lewis was an iconic American landmark, Mt. Ranier. It was 14,000 feet high and impressive to see. Now that is the funny part, it rained and was so cloudy and foggy most of my time at Ft. Lewis, that I only got to see the mountain twice. Being from Western Pennsylvania with its soft low mountains that were rolling with no outstanding peaks, seeing this colossal peak has forever stayed with me. Not for long, when I got to Japan I saw Mt. Fuji, a snow peaked mountain with a long history.

One thing about Seattle, nothing is postponed because of rain. On November 11, 1958 we were informed that a parade was planned to celebrate Armistice Day. A bunch of the troops including myself went to town to see this parade, but it was pouring. The streets were lined with the locals. We thought for sure that the parade would be cancelled. No way, the unfurling flags could be seen up the road and the parade began. It lasted over one and one-half hours. It was Tuesday and a work day, but it was still a holiday, with the streets jammed. It rained all day.

Seattle being a bay, port city for the U.S. Navy, the USO had a large building in town. After the parade we, my new friends, proceeded to the USO. There were meals for us and snacks for the taking. We did not stay long in Seattle because the busses to Ft. Lewis were varied, not knowing the bus schedules, and it was expensive to stay in town.

It rained every day I was there at Ft. Lewis. A few of my Pennsylvania friends showed up and were also scheduled to leave Ft. Lewis on the same ship and same day. Even though I have been away from home for weeks, I was still in the United States and did not feel too uncomfortable. Then the day of orders arrived. The list of names on the CQ (Charge of Quarters) bulletin board sent anxious moments to the whole group. We were scheduled to prepare to leave Ft. Lewis at 6AM on November 19<sup>th</sup>. The ship's name was "Fredrick Funston" a troop ship that was used in WWII. The capacity was 2,100 passengers and 500 permanent party Navy men. We were bused from Ft. Lewis to Seattle's docks, Pier #91. It was raining and dark when we loaded the busses. About an hour ride and we were at Pier #91, still raining. We had put on our rain coats and the busses were dripping wet inside. The bus took us about 100 yards from the ship. We marched to the ship and entered on one of the side portals. We were directed by the Naval personnel to which deck we would be on. It was wet and dark at the level I was directed to. There were three levels of Army personnel.

I had been advised by some wise older soldiers to get the top bunk as there were four levels of canvas bunks, every three feet. That I did. Good advice. Those who got sick on the top just dropped their food to the bottom. We were assigned jobs, such as KP, fire guard and stair guard. During the time on ship I had done all three at least four times.

The ship was buttoned down and we were on our way after two hours of loading. The rain had slowed down and we were allowed on deck. I had never been on a ship like this and was fearful of sea sickness. I could still see Seattle when a dozen or so were seasick. On my way to this great free adventure, the word was we were heading to Adak, Alaska. We did have about twenty-five sailors on our ship and they were to be deposited at a naval base at Adak, such a desolate place, one story buildings, and nighttime when we got there. A small craft came out to get the sailors. As they disembarked our ship, we gave them the royal goodbye of whistling and screaming. In a matter of minutes they were gone and were on our way again. The sea

was real quiet this time and lasted for a few days. By the 27<sup>th</sup> of November were crossing the International Date Line. Now the 27<sup>th</sup> of November was Thanksgiving so we had two November 27<sup>th</sup>'s, but only one Thanksgiving. We were given certificates that stated we had crossed the IDL (International Date Line). There was a ceremony commemorating the crossing, a small ceremony took place and we all got a certificate stating the crossing date and time. I believe it was called the Order of the Neptune. Up to this time, the weather had been fairly calm. We were able to go topside each day and just sit around, but one day we got an order not go outside. A storm warning in the Pacific had been sent from the Naval bases. We got hit and it was scary. The ship was thrown up and down and side to side for two days. When I saw the sailors at the corners throwing up, I knew I was in trouble. If you could stay laying down, it was not bad. Once I stood up I got sick and dizzy. The word was just each crackers. We did this. I'm not sure it worked, but it was a thought. All the outside steel doors were closed for two and one-half days. The smell was terrible. The locked door was lifted on the third day. We rushed up the ladders to the outside. During the storm, sea water had leaked through some of the joints and had dripped down to where we were. The salt in the water dried on some of our uniforms that were hanging on the bulkhead. Seeing the salt marks made for much anxiety for us dog faces.

After this unforgettable cruise, we landed in Yokohama, Japan. Some of the personnel were scheduled to be deployed to Japan. We docked for one day and given a pass for eight hours. Yokohama is just like most seaport cities, bars, muggers, pawn shops, etc. The taverns had unusual names for a Japanese city. Tennessee was a country bar and New York was a large bar, American style. It was great to walk on land, but I still felt as if I was moving. We took off the next morning to Korea. It took two more days to arrive at Inchon. The tide is low and the ship, Fredrick Funston, anchors about 200 yards out and we had to load on landing crafts and head to the docks. Conversely the men leaving Korea were coming to the ship. We passed midway, almost side by side. As we passed there was screaming and obscenities hurled at the incoming craft, not only words, but oranges, other fruit and toilet paper rolls. It was so disheartening.

We landed and had to go to different barracks to get classified by our orders. Long lines were evident, well, no rain but it was cloudy. After being processed, we were directed to the Mess Hall. One thing that sticks out in my mind is the milk cartons. They were paper covered with wax and the milk was reconstituted, whatever that meant.

Our group was to replace personnel all over Korea. Seven of us were taken to RTO, the Rail Transportation Office. Our orders were to go to Puson about 200 miles south of Inchon. We boarded the train, an American train that the US had given to South Korea. The train was slow, took about eight hours to get to the RTO at Puson. My assignment was at Pusan Port, an Army and Navy Base that received most of the food for the bases in Korea. My job was an Ordinance

Parts Specialist. I was in charge of all the replacement parts for the trucks, 50 deuce and a half, 10 ¾ ton and 10 jeeps. I had arrived and was the boss. I had three Koreans assigned to me to do all the work. It didn't take long to get accustomed to being the boss.

Here I was in the land of the "Morning Calm," but wishing I was in Pittsburgh the "land of the daily smog."

September 5, 2014