

ALL GAVE SOME; SOME GAVE ALL

This week's veteran is Raymond(Red) DeClerck.

Red enlisted in the Army on March 23, 1951. He had worked at Charles Isome's Standard Station after graduating from Assumption High School in 1949. He was sent to Korea where he was assigned to L Company, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. The 9th participated in two famous battles that resulted in a high number of casualties, Bloody Ridge and Heartbreak Ridge.

The Battle of Bloody Ridge, August 18 to September 5, 1951, was fought to secure an area just north of the 38th parallel. The 9th Infantry Regiment bore the brunt of the attack. The ridge was captured on September 5th at a cost of 2,700 American and South Korean casualties. The North Koreans retreated less than a mile to the next ridge, which became known as Heartbreak Ridge.

The Battle of Heartbreak Ridge lasted from September 13 to October 15, 1951. Due to formidable defenses set up by the North Koreans and Chinese, the United Nations troops were never able to take Heartbreak Ridge. Again, there was a high number of casualties, 3,700 American and French soldiers. The 9th was heavily involved in the fighting.

During his year in Korea, Red had two experiences that he shared with his family. Once he awoke from an unconscious state to find he was amidst a group of dead soldiers. He hid in some nearby bushes just before enemy soldiers came along and stripped the dead soldiers of valuables. Red was not discovered. It was three days before he found his unit.

Another time, Red's unit was pinned down in a valley by two enemy machine guns on the hills on both sides of its position. His unit leader sent out two soldiers at a time to try for a breakthrough. The first two pairs were killed. Red's name was called to be in the third pair. Running as fast as he could, he made it through unscathed. He then proceeded to circle behind one of the machine guns and lob a grenade that silenced it. For this act of bravery, he received one of his two Bronze Stars.

After his separation from the Army at Fort Knox, KY, on December 22, 1952, he returned to Assumption to operate the Shell Station in partnership with Gerald(Smile) Ryan. Later, he became a Shell Oil distributor delivering fuel and oil to farmers for thirty-five years.

Red married Marcia Stringer and they had four children: Steve DeClerck, Julie Holthaus, Michelle Jostes, and Mike DeClerck. He later married June Smith. Red died in 2001. As a fund raiser, the Assumption VFW Post has the annual Red DeClerck Golf Tournament. Red's favorite saying was: "Love Freedom; Thank a Vet".

Thank you, Sergeant Raymond Joseph DeClerck, for what you did for us.