

From: Hal and Ted Barker: koreanwar.org

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HELICOPTER SQUADRON ONE 1951

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1. Editorial
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Hal and I wish a 'Seasons Greetings' to each of our readers. We especially want to extend that message to all of our servicemen and women who are on duty around the world.

A tradition for our Holiday / Christmas newsletter has been to feature a wonderful story written by Dave Hughes of Colorado Springs.

Dave was a 1st Lt with K Co of the 7th Infantry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division during the first year of the war. He retired from the US Army as a Colonel. He taught at the US Military Academy. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for action during the attack on Hill 347 in October 1951.

We last published this story of hope during grim warfare in December of 2007. As a result, the Shank family finally contacted Dave Hughes to let him know that Lt. Shank and the entire family were well.

The story was used as a central theme of the keynote speech this past July to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the truce to stop the fighting in Korea which was July 27, 1953.

The speech took place at the Korean War Veterans Memorial, Washington, DC; a fitting location for this solemn event.

Web Version in easy to read.pdf format

www.koreanwar.org/html/news/2013/News-12-25-2013.pdf

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2. Shank's Bootees
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w/permission author, Dave Hughes, Colorado Springs, CO.

Dave Hughes
dave@oldcolo.com

Shank's Bootees

It was during the dark days of the December retreat when I first saw them. They were hanging from the cold muzzle of an old, battered, Springfield rifle - a pair of tiny blue baby booties. Their pale silk ribbons ended in a neat bow behind the front sight, and each little boot hung down separately, one slightly above the other, swinging silently in the wind. They reminded me of tiny bells, and even though one had a smudge of dirt on its soft surface, and part of the ribbon that touched the barrel had lost color from scorching heat, they seemed to me to be the freshest, cleanest objects in all of drab Korea.

At first the booties had fixed my attention, but after the surprise of seeing these symbols of home in such an incongruous place had worn off, I let my eyes drift, unobserved, to their owner.

He was a lieutenant, young, I could see, and tired; not so much from the exertion of the trudging march, but with the wear of long days and nights in combat. He was talking to men from his platoon, all of them together watching the core of a little blaze in their center, and I could tell that he was answering some of their disturbing questions about the war. There was a tone of hopelessness in the men's voices, but the lieutenant sounded cheerful; there was a glint in his eye, and a squint that melted into an easy smile when he spoke.

As my companions moved on, I glanced back briefly to the blue bootees still fresh, still swinging. Often in the next few weeks I saw the lieutenant and his bootees while we moved southward before the Chinese armies. Around the ever-present warming fires I heard the simple story of the officer and his boots.

The lieutenant was named Shank, and he, twenty-two years old, led a rifle platoon. He had come over from Okinawa while the Army was clamped in the vise of the Pusan perimeter, short on manpower. Shank had his baptism of fire on the hills outside Taegu. His youth and fire helped keep his decimated platoon intact, while the North Koreans frantically tried to crack the American lines. Then came the breakthrough, and Shank's company, rode on the record-breaking tank and truck dash northward. He picked up the Springfield rifle then, and kept it because of its renowned accuracy and apparent immunity to the cold weather. A violent day south of Pyongyang won Shank a Silver Star for gallantry, as he led his flesh-and-blood infantrymen against T-34 tanks and destroyed three of them. The Chinese intervention and beginning of the American retreat brought him up to where I met him, south of Kunari.

The bootees? That was simple. He was an expectant father, and the little boots sent by his young wife in the States reflected his whole optimistic attitude while the battle was the darkest. I also learned that when the baby came it would be announced by a new piece of ribbon on the boots - blue for a boy, pink for a girl.

Then I forgot about him as we prepared to defend Seoul from above the frozen Han River. We were hit hard by the Chinese. They streamed down from the hills and charged the barbed wire. They charged again and again, piling up before our smoking guns. The days were but frantic preparation for the nights. Companies dwindled, and my platoon was halved as cold, sickness, and the enemy took their toll. I neared the end of my mental reserves. Names of casualties were rumored, and I heard Shank's among them. I wondered where Shank's bootees were now.

Then the endless night of the retreat from Seoul came. When we got the word my few men were too dulled to show any emotion at the announcement. Most were too miserable to want to retreat again for twenty-five miles, Chinese or no. But we did, and the temperature dropped to 30 degrees below zero as our silent column stumbled along the hard ground. It was the most depressing night I had ever endured - pushed by the uncompromising cold, the pursuing enemy and the chaotic memory of the bloody nights before. I, as a leader, was close to that mental chasm. Only the numbness prevented thinking myself into mute depression

We plodded across the cracking ice of the Han River at four-thirty in the morning, and marched on south at an ever-slowng pace. Finally the last five mile stretch was ahead. We rested briefly, and as the men dropped to the roadside they fell asleep immediately.

I wondered if I could get them going again. Worse yet, I didn't think I could go myself so tired, numb, and raw was my body.

Then in the black despair of uselessness in a second-page war I looked up as a passing figure brushed against my inert shoe pacs.

There walked young Lieutenant Shank up the Korean road, whistling softly, while every waking eye followed him to see the muzzle of his battered Springfield rifle. Swinging gaily in the first rays of the morning sun were Shank's bootees, and fluttering below them was the brightest, bluest, piece of ribbon I have ever seen.

Lt David Hughes
Seoul, Korea, Dec 1950
7th Cav Inf Rgt 1 Cav Div

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3. Thank You to our Sponsors | Donors/Members
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Thanks to all who have made this newsletter and the website possible!

Visit the following page to see the names of those involved.;

Donors: www.koreanwar.org/html/membership.html

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2. This Mailing List
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Required Notice for Bulk Mail:

We began sending this newsletter mailing in December of 1998. The first issue went to just over 2000 persons.

This list is a private list for our visitors and members. A person may join or leave the list at will. It is compiled from our Guest Book and comprises public service messages of general interest to veterans and families.

To join or leave the list: email to: Ted Barker tbarker@kwp.org
Place: Subscribe or Unsubscribe in the subject line.

Consider forwarding the Newsletter to your friends by email or print. Word of mouth is how we grow.

Thanks to all who have made this newsletter and the website possible!

[Hal and Ted Barker](#)