ELECTION NOTICE

In accordance with our Bylaws we need to elect 2 Directors for a 2 year term at our 2010 Reunion in San Antonio.
Any member in good standing wishing to run for one of these positions must submit his intent in writing to me by 20 March 2010 via mail or e-mail. Please include a short biography listing your interest and your qualifications. Candidates must have an e-mail address in order to communicate with the other Board Members.

Write to Bill Potashnick,
KWVA Election Committee Chairman
1587 Applewood Circle
Yardley, PA 19067-5748
e-mail: BillandPeg@verison.net

MY EXPERIENCE ON HILL 281

During the past few years I have read several articles in the SECOND INFANTRY BULLETIN about Hill 281 (some called it ARROWHEAD RIDGE). I got to Korea in November 1951 and was assigned to Medical Company, 9th Infantry Regiment. I was a Medic with Baker Company when the 9th moved to the Chorwon area in the spring of 1952. In about June, I was then with Charley Company when we moved up to Hill 281. I lived in a small bunker (actually a hole about 2ft tall and about 6 ft. wide) carved in a hard bank for about two weeks. Then another medic Richard Hollyoak joined me. Together we built our own bunker on the back slope of the ridge close the trench.

Shortly after that Sergeant Gordon Stanley came up from the aid station and called all medical aid men together—he announced that I, Vernon Schaecher, would be the senior medic, so that moved me up near the command post. I stayed there in a bunker with the heavy weapons men. About this time it started raining and kept raining for a solid week. Our bunker started to collapse so we sat out in the rain day and night with just our ponchos. All this time we were worried about an enemy attack knowing the river behind us was flooded. When the weather cleared there was a lot of enemy activity.

They started shelling us every few days, and then the shelling became more frequent. By the end of July, we were being hit every day. It was obvious they were digging trenches at night because we sometimes could see them early in the morning. Also at night, we could see flashes of light so we knew they were bringing more troops and supplies. Two of our tanks were moved up to the Yokkok-Chon River behind Hill 281 to fire on the enemy ridge placement. Then the enemy pinpointed their location and started heavy shelling.

We had a pretty good view. One tank was hit and bounced in the air in a cloud of dust. It looked like a direct hit but when the dust settled the tank fired a round back at the enemy. We all gave out a loud cheer and a cheer could be heard echoing all along the ridge. (When I first got to Korea, I watched a LOT of air strikes on the enemy ridge but recently had seen none and I wondered why).

Soon after this, the enemy artillery was aimed back at our position and there were many casualties. One round hit directly in our machine gun emplacement seriously wounding three more men. The thing I remember most is one guys hand—the first two finger laid limp over the back of his hand with the bones torn out. A few days later a round hit directly through a bunker opening. One man inside had his chest blown open. I had to put his arm in a sling and wrap his entire upper body in bandages leaving only one arm out. I got the blood plasma mixed ok but
could not get it to flow into his vein. We waited for the helicopter to arrive and to my surprise Sergeant Stanley came running up on to the ridge. He helped me get the plasma flowing. The patient was alive when we got him on the helicopter.

A couple other casualties I recall were down by the river where the engineers were trying to keep the supply line open across the river. They had a hard time with a walking bridge because of the high water and constant shelling. The first person was by the kitchen tent. He had been hit by a lot of shrapnel but the thing I remember most is that he had a fork in his pocket which had become imbedded in his flesh. I just finished giving him a shot of morphine when I heard another call for a medic.

(The heavy shelling had started again). I had to run a short distance to the river where I found this soldier lying on the ground with blood gushing from his leg. There seemed to be no else around. He had a big hole in his leg just above the knee. I took off his belt and used it for a tourniquet. By the time I got his wound dressed and in a splint, the shelling let up a little. He had lost a lot of blood but this time I got the needle in his vein myself and got the blood plasma flowing. Someone came up with a camera and took a picture when we were stabilizing him before loading him on a helicopter. (I was the one holding the blood plasma bottle. If you read this and have that picture, I would like a copy). He was alive when he left us.

Soon there was a lot of activity off to our left flank, seemed about a mile away. Flashes from flares and shelling went on for about four days and nights. Rumors were that we were soon to be going out to attack an enemy outpost to put pressure on them and to take prisoners. I thought! Why us? We had already taken a beating with all the shelling.

Our infantry guys were replaced by another company so they could drop back and plan their attack. Our mortar crew stayed on Hill 281 and I stayed with them. They brought up a load of litters from the aid station and I had a group of Korean "choggy boys" help me get them to our outpost. I remember going back to the area where our company was planning and practicing their attack. Lieutenant Jack Grosvenor and Sergeant Madison were in charge. The lieutenant said this attack was to be all volunteers. He asked me if I wanted to volunteer to join him and the sergeant on a side ridge where they would be coordinating the attack. (I did not answer him). The next day he informed me that another medic, "little doc", would be joining him and Sergeant Madison.

On the night of August 13th, we went down to our outpost below Hill 281. A young M.D. came to our outpost to care for the wounded. We were told that we would attack just after midnight on August 14th. We had to remove our water canteens to avoid the noise. They had us wear a steel vest that was pretty damn heavy. I carried a 45 pistol in a holster, two hand grenades, two first aid bags and a litter. They had us at the back of the column with the litters as we moved out.

The shooting and explosions had just started when the call for a medic came out. I ran up and this sergeant was shot right in the windpipe. He was breathing through that hole and it would slur with each breath. I had a piece of hose from a plasma kit and I pushed it in the hole. To my surprise it went into his windpipe and opened up his airway. I continued to try to stop the bleeding but he pulled the hose out and would not let me put it back in. All I could do was to put him face down on the litter to try stopping the blood flow and get him back to the doctor.

By that time, wounded were coming from all directions. Almost all were arm and leg shrapnel wounds from all the explosions around us——hardly any were from gunshot wounds. I treated a lot of people but it was hard to move around to get to the most critically wounded. When I did move, I saw Richard Hollyoak also treating guys. I spoke a few words of encouragement to him. I found out years later that he was listed MIA. After what seemed like a VERY long time, the colored flare (our signal to fall back) was shot into the air.

I thought we had all the wounded off the ridge, and then I heard a cry for help up from us. I went back up and found a wounded ROK soldier. While I was treating him another call for a medic came from further up the ridge. Just when I got to this soldier, a of round artillery hit very close by. I fell right on top of him. He asked if I
was hit. I said. "I don't know". I was in a bit of a
daze but was not hurt. The shelling was very in-
tense so I had to drag him off the ridge away
from there. I then came upon two soldiers with
another wounded man. As I was checking the
two wounded, one of the soldiers said he was
going for help. I told him we need two litters. The
other said he was going also and ran after him,
I should have told him to stay but did not. The
two wounded were Steve Mastabayo and Her-
bert Mattocks.

It did not take long until I could hear the
enemy coming off the next ridge. I could hear the
leaders ordering them and it sounded like more
than just a squad. I knew they came out to look
for any stragglers— and that was us. There was
not much chance of help coming for us now and
it was just starting to get daylight. Luckily there
was a pretty heavy fog. Mattocks was hurt very
bad. I prayed with him but he died right there. I
was sure he was dead so I took off his dog tags
and put them in my pocket.

Mastabayo had a bad leg wound. I knew
we had to move because I could hear the enemy
coming closer above us. I had nothing to splint
his leg so it was very painful and I had nothing
to move him with. I then got on my hands and
knees and he got on my back. I could carry him
pretty well this way and followed along the bot-
tom of a ridge away from a tree line where I just
knew the enemy would be waiting for stragglers.
By now it was full daylight but the little fog left re-
ally helped. We came to some rough terrain and
I lost my balance. That was really painful for
Mastabayo. We were trying to get him on my
back again when the fog lifted and it was clear.

We had to lie flat out in the open and the
sun was bright. A short time later a small piper
club type airplane was flying slowly back and
forth. I thought he was probably taking picture. I
got out my scissors and tried to use the flat blade
to signal the plane. A long time later our artillery
started firing toward the ridge line above us cre-
ating a smoke screen.

That gave me a chance to move Mastabayo
down behind a two to three foot
ledge. Then I could hear what sounded like our
troops below us in the tree line. I decided that as
soon as I could see one or two of them, I would
stand up and wave my red cross armband but
just then it became real quiet again. They were
not coming out after us after all. I'm not sure
what it was all about but at least we could move
a little and sit up. But now we would have to wait
for darkness again before we could travel further.
The bright sun felt good because my clothes
were wet. By mid-day it was very hot. I tried to
hold my shirt above Mastabayo until the ledge
gave us some shade. We had no water so he
was suffering a lot. He became delirious and was
talking loud and moaning and groaning. I told
him he had to be quiet or we would surely be
captured. I decided if he couldn't help himself at
all, I could not get him back to our outpost even
after dark by myself. I then placed my steel vest
and both medic bags on the ledge above him to
mark his location.

I crawled near the tree line as flat as I
could then half floated down a small stream
which took me toward our outpost. I walked up to
the barbed wire with my hands up, not wanting to
get shot. I got through the wire un-noticed and
without stepping on a mine. When our guys saw
me, the first thing I wanted was water. I then
walked up to the command post. When I got
there I actually could look on the other ridge line
where I could see Herbert Mattock's body where
I had left him.

I was shocked. I gave his dog tags to the
officer in the command post. I told the officer
about Mastabayo and where he was located. We
could actually see the vest and the bags I left
with his spotting scope. The next plan was that I
would lead a rescue patrol out to get him after
dark. I was very tired and hungry. So I went to
the bunker and found some food and went to
sleep.

I returned to the command post just be-
fore dark. A friend gave me his M-1 carbine
(semi-automatic). A full automatic would have
been better. I also had my 45 and two hands
grenades. Then four volunteers showed up. One
was first lieutenant Henry Schenk, a big red-
head with a handle-bar mustache. I was hoping
for a nine man squad.

We left the outpost with me leading. Next
was Lieutenant Schenk followed by the other
three. The last man carried a litter. It was pretty
dark. We went along the small stream. When I
decided to cross ( which was a guess), we got
into some bush and weeds. When we got to a small clearing I stopped and waited because we had made some noise. When we started walking again I heard some movement in the weeds. I backed up and told the Lieutenant. He asked where we were going, I pointed. He told me to go ahead. I then headed to the weeds where I thought I had heard the noise.

About then I heard the enemy pull a pin on a hand grenade. He was only an arms length from me. It made a sizzling sound like lighting a firecracker. I shot 4 to 5 rounds into him and ran back as low as I could to get away from the grenade. I stepped right on one of our guys who were only about ten feet back. Burp guns were firing non-stop. I yelled "run for cover" or maybe "I'll cover you". I'm not sure. I turned and fired several shots and dived to the ground. I could feel the shots above me and I slid into a water filled shell hole.

I was quite sure the three guys got behind some cover but I had no idea where Lt. Schenk was. The burp guns were still firing non-stop and the enemy was throwing more hand grenades so I was pinned down pretty good. I threw one grenade back at them—that's all I had. Then a grenade landed right behind me. It felt like my shoulder was blown off. My helmet saved my head except for the ringing in my ears. I was hurt and dazed but fired no more shots. I was thinking of the other guys, hoping they got out. I still had no idea what happened to the Lieutenant.

Then the firing stopped and everything got real quiet and I'm still in the water filled hole. I could hear their leader yelling ("chink Talk") at his men. Soon I could see them standing right above me. I still had my 45 but surely would have been shot if tried to use it or if I made much noise. I slid down into the water with just my nose out and tried very hard not to make a sound even when I did get some water in my nose. I knew when the enemy had left the immediate area and felt I was safe for the time being.

I stayed in that water all night hoping I would still be alive in the morning. I was worried about Lt. Schenk and was listening for any sound from him. The bugs and mosquitoes bit up my face pretty bad. A frog came and sat on my forehead and I just let him stay there to keep the bugs away.

When daybreak came, I got out of that hole and went over to the small stream and lay on the bank in the sun where, hopefully, no one could see me. I was very cold so the sun felt good. I thought I had moved toward our outpost, so if they had sent out a patrol looking for me, I could see them. I was very mixed up in my directions. I think a patrol came out and found our litter, but nothing else. I waited until I got pretty warm and felt like walking. I started very slow, looking around as I walked along the stream. I thought the water was running in the wrong direction but I knew I had to go downstream like I did the day before.

Just as I saw our outpost, this soldier saw me and started yelling. He ran out to meet me and help me into the outpost. That young doctor I had seen the day before was right there to meet me and go with me to the aid station. They told me Lt. Schenk did not make it back so now I felt guilty about leaving him, Mastabayo and Mattocks out there.

A few days later I saw our Company Commander, Lieutenant Jack Grosvenor with his arm, chest, and upper body all bandaged. He said "Little Doc" saved his life. He said the enemy used Bangalore mines on the ridge to stop our attack.

The 2nd Infantry Casualty Book lists forty-five casualties for the 9th Regiment on August 14, 1952. I would guess that nearly all were from Charley Company. The enemy just had that ridge well defended and we were unable to penetrate on that day. I was transferred to a hospital in Korea for a short time then to the 141st hospital in Japan. I stayed there until late November when I was transferred to Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver. My wounds did not heal until January, 1953. I received an Honorable Discharge on February 6, 1953. Sgt Vernon L. Schaecher was awarded Bronze Star with V device for action on 27 July 1952 near Chorwon.