



Portrait of American Valor. The men in this photograph represent four generations of soldiers who served, and continue to serve, their country in the 31st Infantry Regiment over a period spanning sixty six years. Standing, left to right: SSgt. Jerry White, Spc. 4 Julius Harley, Sgt. Don Mayville, PFC. George Boggs Sr.; kneeling and seated: Spc. 4 Brooks Pfeiffer, Sgt. Paul Kerchum, Sgt. Houston Turner, Sgt. Adam Brocher. (Photo by Brian Golick, Brian Anthony Photography, San Marcos, TX.)

The 31st Infantry Regiment Annual Reunion was recently¹ hosted by San Antonio's El Tropicano Riverwalk Holiday Inn. The Reunion was attended by over 330 guests and veterans of four wars. This annual event brought together the men in the portrait. These warriors represent the many thousands who have put on the uniform of their country in her times of need. Their individual stories, recounted below, are woven into the fabric of American history.

Perhaps everyone will know the name of some famous infantry *division*, such as the First Infantry Division (the Big Red One), the 101st Airborne Division (Screaming Eagles) or the First Cavalry

Division. But, what is a *regiment*? Historically, militia regiments were raised by a call for volunteers from a geographical region. Company officers and non-commissioned officers might be elected (e.g., future president Harry Truman was elected as 1st lieutenant in Battery F of the 129th Field Artillery of the Missouri National Guard); higher officers were appointed by state legislatures or governors. Some officers from the regular army might be detailed to command and staff these units. These regiments, each consisting of several battalions, which in turn comprised three or four infantry companies (nominally about 160 men and five or six officers), were the basic maneuver elements of armies. Divisions comprised several, usually three, regiments. This

¹ 23-26 August 2007

formal organization has been in continual evolution since the post-Civil War era. In our contemporary army, infantry divisions comprise three infantry brigades or brigade combat teams, each comprising three infantry battalions and supporting units. A contemporary brigade is roughly the same size as a traditional infantry regiment — usually three infantry battalions. Modern divisions change their organizational structure to satisfy tactical needs as they arise, but battalions retain nominal historical connections to traditional regiments, but are placed into the brigade combat teams on an ad hoc basis that varies over time. Thus, a brigade can comprise elements of several regiments. As the force level changes, the number of regimental units varies. Regiments are decommissioned or reconstituted as needed to fill the ranks. Some of the best known units have had a continuous existence since World War II.

The 31st Infantry Regiment was formed in the Philippines on August 13, 1916. At least one of its battalions has been in service, almost continuously, since that time. Its first deployment was to Vladivostok East Siberia in 1918 through 1920 where it had what would today be called a “peacekeeping” role during the Bolshevik revolution. It was here that the polar bear was adopted as the regimental mascot. Until the beginning of World War II the regiment was primarily stationed in the Philippines, but with a deployment to Shanghai in 1932, once more for peacekeeping duties. At the commencement of hostilities by Imperial Japan on 7 December 1941, the 31st was garrisoned in and around Manila. With the loss of Midway and Guam and the decimation of the Navy at Pearl Harbor, the United States was in no position to reinforce or withdraw the garrison in the Philippines. The Army declared Manila an “open city” to avoid civilian casualties from Japanese bombing, and deployed to defensive positions

on the Bataan peninsula on the northwest entrance to Manila bay, with elements on the island fortress of Corregidor. Although Japanese air and naval forces began making war in the Philippines on 9 December, 1941, opposing infantry units first clashed as Japanese advanced on the Bataan defenses, 6 January 1942. The defenders of Bataan (dubbed by war correspondent Frank Hewlett “the battling bastards of Bataan. No momma, no poppa, no Uncle Sam!”) having expended their rations and ammunition, succumbed and formally surrendered to Japanese Imperial Army units on 9 April 1942. Under orders to do so from President Roosevelt, commander of Allied forces General Douglas MacArthur was evacuated from Corregidor by patrol torpedo boat (PT 41) to Mindano, and evacuated from Mindano 13 March 1942. MacArthur, having vowed “I shall return” would invade the Philippines at Leyte, October 20, 1944. But, immediately following the American surrender in 1942, malnourished and exhausted prisoners of war were brutally force-marched 68 miles to camp O’donnell with insufficient water and food, and no medical support. This is known to history as the Bataan Death March.

Cpl. Houston Turner, aged 18, of Arroyo Grande, Ca. was serving first in Company I, 3rd battalion (Bn) and then in Co. B, 1st Bn. Following the formal surrender of American troops, Cpl. Turner escaped and evaded the Japanese in the mountains of the western Philippines skirmishing with Japanese troops on several occasions. After three weeks in the hills, suffering from untreated malaria and malnourishment, Cpl. Turner joined an American antiaircraft battery unit coming down from the hills, surrendering to Japanese forces at Mariveles in southern Bataan. He was among the last 50 POWs to make the Bataan Death March. This small contingent of POWs buried those comrades

who preceded them on the march, those who had died or been murdered where they faltered and fell. First interned at Camp O'donnell, Turner ended the war in the Cabanatuan camp. Following the war he continued to serve in the ordinance corps until 1952, separating from the service as a Technical Sergeant. Houston Turner now resides in West Hills in the Los Angeles area with his wife of 61 years, Georgia.

Cpl. Paul Kerchum, aged 21, of McKees Rocks, Pa., serving in Company B, 1st Battalion of the 31st Infantry Regiment. Having fought till the 31st's provisions and ammunition were expended, survived the 'Bataan Death March' from Bataan to Camp O'donnell. From camp O'donnell POWs were dispersed to other camps, used as slave labor, and endured 42 months of captivity until liberated by American troops in early 1945. Following 1945, Kerchum served another 20 years in the Air Force, including service in Korea. He now resides in Benson Arizona with spouse, Gloria.

The Corregidor defenders held on until 6 May 1942. Not pictured because a prior commitment caused him to miss sitting for the portrait, but attending the Reunion, was Tillman Rutledge, a native of Merkel Texas, also a veteran of defense of Bataan and Corregidor, and Japanese POW, now residing in San Antonio.

As a measure of the American feat of resistance at Bataan and Corregidor, better-provisioned British Singapore surrendered to the Japanese onslaught on 15 February 1942. As Corregidor held valiantly, Jimmy Doolittle and his aircrews bombed Japan with 16 B-25 bombers launched from the deck of the USS *Hornet* on 18 April 1942. Shortly after the fall of Corregidor, on 5 June 1942 the Japanese Navy lost four irreplaceable aircraft carriers at the battle of Midway, sealing the fate of Japan a

mere seven months after the Pearl Harbor attack. U.S. Marines landed on Guadalcanal 7 August 1942, beginning the long fight through the Pacific islands up to Japan. Japan would surrender unconditionally on 15 August 1945.

The 31st was on occupation duty in Japan in 1950 when North Korea invaded the south, overwhelming the surprised, ill equipped, and poorly trained American and south Korean units. The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) pushed the allied units into a small pocket of resistance around the southeastern port city of Pusan. Elements of the 31st Infantry landed at Inchon serving in General Douglas MacArthur's famous amphibious outflanking and envelopment of the NKPA. The regiment subsequently was withdrawn from western Korea, and amphibiously landed on the east coast of Korea at Iwon, participating in the drive to the Yalu river, border between North Korea and the People's Republic of China. When the Chinese intervened in Korea with a massive force totaling 200,000 men in November of 1951, the 31st Infantry participated in the strategic withdrawal of outnumbered United Nations forces, fighting on the east bank of the Chosin reservoir. In this battle, of an original force of 3200 men, only 385 walked away physically unscathed. Only recently has it become clear that the valiant efforts of these massively outnumbered soldiers delayed more than two Chinese divisions for six days, facilitating the successful withdrawal of many other allied fighting units. In the final year of the Korean war, elements of the 31st Infantry defended Pork Chop Hill (the story told in the book by S.L.A. Marshall, and the movie of the same title starring Gregory Peck). Members of the regiment earned five medals of honor in Korea.

Sgt. Donald Mayville, aged 18, fought with 3rd battalion of the 31st Infantry at Chosin reservoir in December 1950. Sgt.

Mayville made a career in the Army, and was on his third tour in Vietnam when American forces were withdrawn from that fight. He retired a master sergeant. He hails from and still resides in Detroit Michigan.

George Boggs Sr., hailing from North Philadelphia, entered service, aged 20 years, in 1951. PFC Boggs deployed to Korea in the summer of 1952, where he served with Company M, 3rd battalion of the 31st Infantry as a rifleman and 57mm recoilless rifle crewman until rotating off the line in February 1953. Boggs participated in the fighting centered on Triangle Hill (Hill 598, in the same famous hill complex as Pork Chop hill and Old Baldy), one of the most intense infantry engagements in the Korean war. George presently resides with his charming spouse Lillian just north of Philadelphia in Elkins Park, Pa.

The 6th battalion of the 31st Infantry was formed at Ft. Lewis Washington on November 1, 1967, and trained for its deployment to the tropical jungles and rice paddies of VietNam in the snow-filled woods of Ft. Lewis in the winter of 1967-68. The battalion deployed to the third brigade of the 9th Infantry Division operating in the Mekong delta region south of Saigon from late April 1968 till the withdrawal of the division in 1970. Headquartered at the 9th Division's Dong Tam base camp on the Mekong river, the regiment's companies conducted continuous airmobile and riverine actions against enemy units, searching for Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army elements by day, laying in ambush positions at night, with special reconnaissance units conducting night raids against Viet Cong political infrastructure. It was not a mode of operations that led to large-scale fixed-piece engagements with the enemy; rather it was a war of attrition and debilitation of the enemy's will to commit aggression. American soldiers served 12 month

tours before being rotated to other assignments. Very occasionally, NVA units overwhelmed a platoon or company sized unit, but militarily the enemy had been losing the daily battles for three years when United States forces were withdrawn from the field.

Many 31st Infantry companies and platoons in the Mekong delta patrolled in the same areas of operation for months at a time, staying within range of artillery deployed in forward "fire support" bases. During these deployments friendly relationships with the local populace were the rule, not the exception. SSgt. Jerry White of Houston, Texas, graduated from Baylor University in August in 1967 and entered the Army in February 1968. White deployed to Company D, 6th battalion of the 31st Infantry in January 1969 serving in the Mekong delta until January of 1970. Jerry ended his deployment as the platoon sergeant of the 3rd platoon. Aged 24, Jerry met a Vietnamese girl, Tuyet, who lived near the firebase at Vinh Kim. They fell in love, but a combat tour is not a friendly venue for romance. Jerry returned to the United States when his tour was done, and Tuyet remained with her family in Vinh Kim. After a 30-year interlude, as many Viet Nam vets have done, Jerry made a pilgrimage to Viet Nam, returned to Vinh Kim, where he was surprised and delighted to find Tuyet, a widow, still living there. Jerry and Tuyet were married 26 December, 2004; the couple now resides in Austin Texas.

Specialist 4th class, Julius Harley of Tallahassee, FL., aged 19 when deployed, served in the reconnaissance platoon of Company E, 6th battalion 31st Infantry Regiment from May 1969 till April 1970. Spc. Harley served as a radio-telephone operator (RTO) to two Echo company NCOs and the platoon leader. Harley still resides in Tallahassee, where he has owned and operated a lawn service business since 1984.

The 6th Battalion was decommissioned with the withdrawal of the 9th Infantry Division from Vietnam in October 1970.

The 4th battalion of the 31st Infantry regiment formed at Ft. Devens Massachusetts September 10, 1965 as an element of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Deployed to Tay Ninh on 14 August 1966, the 4th of the 31st was attached to the 25th Infantry Division. The brigade was withdrawn from the field on 29 June 1972. The 196th was the last combat brigade to be withdrawn from Vietnam.

The contemporary incarnation of the 4th Battalion is represented in this portrait by the uniformed soldiers on active duty. The 4th battalion has been home-posted at Ft. Drum, New York, since 1996. Presently, the 4th battalion of the 31st Infantry Regiment is one of the three infantry battalions comprising the 2nd brigade combat team of the 10th Mountain Division. Prior to 11 September 2001, elements of the 31st Infantry Regiment served in the Balkans following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Since 11 September 2001 elements of the 31st Infantry have served or are serving in Uzbekistan, in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Kuwait, and Qatar, among other places in the central and southwest Asia region.

Spc. 4 Robert B. (Brooks) Pfeiffer III, of Portorchard Washington, was 20 years old when he volunteered for service in 2004. Finishing basic training he was assigned to 4th of 31st at Ft. Drum, where he received further training, and was subsequently deployed to Iraq.

Sgt. Adam T. (Trent) Boucher, of Conway, New Hampshire Graduated Kennett High School in 1994 and entered the Army in November 1997 at the age 23. After completing basic training he

was assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Co. 1st Battalion 15th infantry on Fort Benning, GA. While stationed there he deployed to Kuwait, in support of Intrinsic Action 99-02, and to Qatar in support of Eastern Action 99-02, from August 1999 till November 1999. In August 2001 he was re-assigned to Charlie Co. 1st Battalion 18th infantry in Schweinfurt Germany. While assigned he deployed to Kosovo from May 2002 till November 2002. Following re-deployment he was again re-assigned to Fort Drum, NY as part of the 4th Battalion 31st infantry regiment. Since his arrival he has deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, twice totaling one year.

Eight good men: Sons, husbands, fathers. A cross section of America, the modern 31st Infantry includes soldiers of every creed and ethnicity, as it has since President Truman desegregated the armed forces in the 1940s. Each war that these eight men served in was fought, or is being fought, *to secure freedom from a tyranny*, whether for freedom for Americans, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Bosnians, Kosovians, Kuwaitis, Afghanis, or Iraqis. This motivation for war, not for conquest and pillage but to secure freedom from tyranny, is an American invention, unique in human history. Every American can be justly proud of that ethic, and of all the many men, here represented by these eight, who have stepped forward willingly to bear the burden and, when necessary, pay the price in blood.

General MacArthur, addressing a joint session of Congress following his relief by President Truman, and his retirement in 1951, said "In war, there is no substitute for victory." Without MacArthur's hoped-for victory, the American Army still faces the NKPA across the 38th parallel demilitarized zone, 54 years after the 1953 truce. Behind this DMZ a terror-sponsoring regime is working fur-

tively but relentlessly to arm intercontinental ballistic missiles with atomic warheads, and to distribute weapons of mass destruction to other terrorist states and free-lance Islamic-terrorist groups. Let us learn the lesson of this history and, by our firm will and the grace of God, harry and pursue these neo-

barbarians, who would impose their brand of intolerant tyranny, until they are finally and utterly defeated.

David Kennedy, Magnolia Texas, September 2007.

Co. D, 6th Bn. 31st Infantry Regiment, 1967-1969.