

# "Travel Light and Freeze at Night"

## The 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne) in Korea

by Troy J. Sacquety



CPT John C. Scagnelli, Commander of the 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne), in Korea, 1951.

The 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne) was activated on 20 November 1950 at Fort Benning, Georgia, but its beginnings started earlier.<sup>1</sup> It was organized under TO&E 7-87 dated 17 October 1950, and on 17 November, the Infantry Center set its manpower authorization at 5 officers and 107 enlisted men.<sup>2</sup> It, like the 6th, 7th, and 8th Ranger Companies, was in the second group trained at the Ranger Training Center by 3rd Ranger Company instructors. By then, the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Ranger Companies were in or enroute to Korea.

Most of the men came from the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, NC, while others were recruited into the company from units at Forts Campbell, Benning, or the Ranger Training Center.<sup>3</sup> Captain (CPT) John C. "Nails" Scagnelli, a former enlisted soldier who received a commission in WWII and postwar served in the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, was the company commander.<sup>4</sup> The description of CPT Scagnelli provided by his company executive officer, First Lieutenant (1LT) Joseph R. Ulatoski, set the tone in the unit: "His heart was always with the enlisted [men]. He was soft on formal discipline. The men loved him but he regarded officers as necessary appendages and this quickly drove most of them to total frustration."<sup>5</sup> These two factors determined CPT Scagnelli's approach to the six weeks of Ranger unit training conducted at Fort Benning.

According to LT Ulatoski, the Ranger training was very much *ad hoc*. The program looked good on paper.

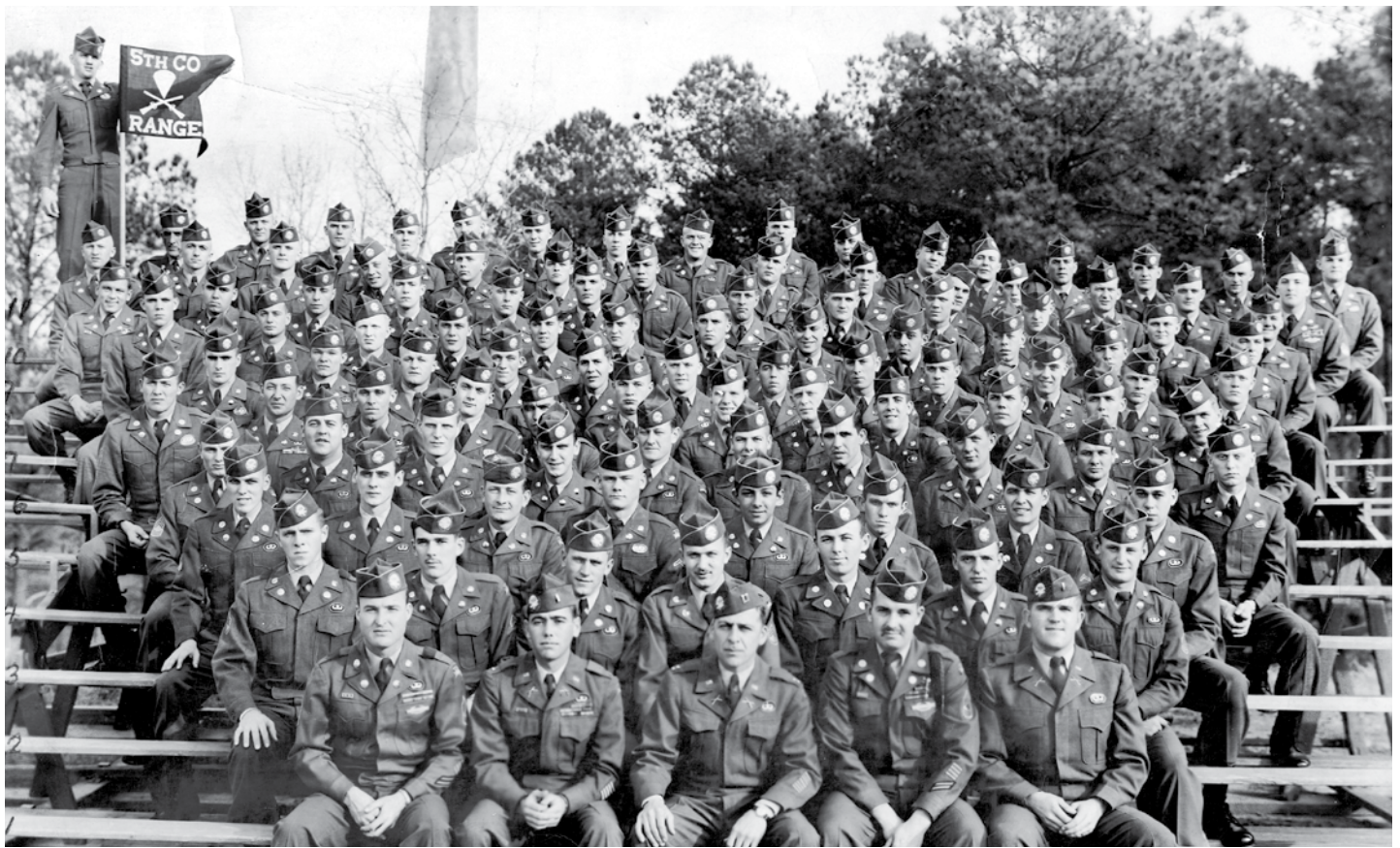
Physical training and field work were emphasized as was the ability to force march and immediately react to enemy encounters. Everything was done as a company; there were no individual standards involved. It was a group effort. According to CPT Scagnelli's method, you brought your people along with you. If somebody fell out, you got them up, and brought them along. The threat of being kicked out of the 5th Ranger Company was usually sufficient disciplinary motivation. The tough training endured by the group bonded the Rangers, especially the enlisted men in the hardscrabble outfit. "We had tremendous esprit in the company. It was not an unhappy company by any means," recalled Ulatoski.<sup>6</sup>

The second group of Ranger companies received training not afforded to the first. Cadre visits to Korea and combat reports prompted the Department of Army to send the second cohort of Ranger companies to cold weather and mountain warfare training at Camp Carson, Colorado, before shipping them to the war zone. During winter warfare training the 5th Rangers sought to create a unit identity to separate themselves from the other Ranger companies at Fort Carson.

Since most of the young Rangers were not combat veterans, the direction taken was towards distinguishing physical signs much like the Eighth U.S. Army Rangers getting Mohawk haircuts. Gold earrings were a short-lived fad to which "CPT Scagnelli turned a

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The 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne) at Fort Benning, Georgia, 1950/51.



Rangers Timothy "Chief" Ontayabbi, James F. Donnelly, Nicholas R. Gallo, and John G. "Corky" Wray train at Camp Carson, Colorado in early 1951.

blind eye." His attitude was, "If the troops wanted to do it, if it made them feel good, they could do it," stated LT Ulatoski. "We had a bad reputation there. 'Scag' led the hell raising in Colorado Springs and Denver and the troops very willingly followed. Finally, it got to the point where the Camp Commander restricted the company to the barracks. There were just too many fights and problems. The WWII veteran's response was: 'We're going to war. Let's enjoy ourselves.'" After four weeks, the Camp Carson officers and the Colorado Springs and Denver city fathers were glad to see the 5th Rangers leave for Camp Stoneman, California.



As depicted in this drawing, the 5th Rangers, led by CPT Scagnelli, earned quite a "reputation" as "hard chargers" with local bartenders of Colorado Springs.

At Camp Stoneman, where other units and personnel were normally quarantined before heading to Korea, the Ranger companies cut their troops loose. Most headed to San Francisco. After several days of carousing in San Francisco, the 5th Rangers joined the 3rd and 8th Ranger Companies on 5 March 1951 to board the USS *General W. F. Hase* (AP-146) for Korea. While at sea, in addition to physical and weapons training, CPT Scagnelli assembled the Company on the fantail. He emphatically read the Company's delinquency reports aloud before tossing them overboard.<sup>8</sup> Nineteen days later, the Ranger



Area of 25th Division advance until 21 April 1951.

were informed that they were replacing the recently deactivated Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA) Ranger Company (8213th Army Unit).<sup>10</sup> Many assumed that the stateside-formed Ranger Infantry (Airborne) companies had caused the demise of the in-theater assets created early in the war.<sup>11</sup>

CPT Scagnelli and the 5th Rangers did not get a warm welcome from the 25th ID staff. LT Ulatoski recalled: "We never felt like a part of the division; we were always just attached. We did not feel welcome. Several of the Division's staff officers admitted that they did not know what to do with us. Even transportation had to be borrowed when we moved because the TO&E did not provide enough vehicles to move the troops and their many and varied types of weapons and equipment. Even then, it was reluctantly provided."<sup>12</sup>



25th Infantry Division SSI

Once committed, the 5th Company conducted fairly extensive but routine patrolling in front of the 27th Infantry Regiment advance to seize Line KANSAS (Operation RUGGED). This led to night ambushes of Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) mine-laying teams.<sup>13</sup> By 9 April 1951 when Line KANSAS was secured, EUSA was already planning to continue pushing north.

Operation DAUNTLESS was to advance the UN lines twenty miles farther north across the 38th Parallel to first, Line UTAH, and then Line WYOMING. This UN offensive was aimed at Communist strongholds in the notorious "Iron Triangle." Before the 25th ID was to launch its attack, the 5th Ranger Company had to seize Hill 383, key terrain overlooking the line of departure (LD). This action led to the 5th Ranger Company's first major fight.

LT Ulatoski described the mission: "The 25th was heading north towards the 'Iron Triangle' area. It was going to be a division attack. But, there was a series of hills a couple of miles north of the front line, right at a knuckle of the [Hant'an] River, which dominated the crossing sites. They [the 25th Division G-3] felt that if the 5th could get up there and hold those hills, the division's river crossing would be relatively unhindered and expedited. The company's mission was to seize Hill 383 at night because the division was due to jump off early



The 5th Ranger Company, along with the 3rd and 8th Ranger Companies sailed to Korea on the USS General W. F. Hase.

Companies disembarked at Pusan to await transport to Inch'on. The three Ranger units arrived at Inch'on on 31 March 1951 after a three-day LST (Landing Ship, Tank) voyage. There, the 3rd, 5th, and 8th Rangers went their separate ways.

The 5th Rangers, slated for attachment to the 25th Infantry Division (ID), were trucked through Seoul. The South Korean capital had only recently been liberated for a second time by United Nations forces. The signs of combat were everywhere in the city. Despite this, Private First Class (PFC) James W. Deery recalled, "I kept looking at the truck drivers and soldiers walking alongside the road as artillery boomed in the distance. Everyone seemed so nonchalant."<sup>9</sup> Alongside an airstrip in the 25th ID rear area, the 5th Rangers unloaded. They

the next morning."<sup>14</sup> There was no time to reconnoiter an approach route and current intelligence on CCF dispositions was lacking.

After leaders were briefed and pre-combat equipment checks completed, the Ranger force passed through the 24th Infantry Regiment front line to penetrate deep into enemy-held territory to seize Hill 383. They were to be relieved the next day, 11 April 1951, by the 24th Infantry Regiment. After eight hours of night movement that included crossing the Hant'an River, the 5th Rangers reached the base of Hill 383 at dawn. Any element of surprise was gone. While discipline in garrison was not CPT Scagnelli's concern, the intrepid WWII veteran was a natural combat leader, especially in tough situations. As his men rested CPT Scagnelli called for artillery preparatory fires before attacking at 1000 hours. The 3rd Platoon led the Ranger Company assault up the thousand-foot hill. The 5th encountered little resistance until they reached the top.<sup>15</sup>

There they suddenly found overwhelming numbers of swarming Communist Chinese soldiers. CPT Scagnelli ordered an immediate withdrawal off the hilltop so that he could bring in napalm. After the air strikes, the 3rd Platoon charged back up to engage the Chinese defenders in close combat. Confusion reigned among the enemy force. One Communist soldier forgot to pull the safety pin before throwing his grenade. It ricocheted off the head of 1LT Mack McGinnis before falling between him and Sergeant (SGT) Robert A. Dulaney.<sup>16</sup> After the 5th Rangers captured the hill, CPT Scagnelli set up a defensive perimeter with 2nd Platoon on the east, 3rd Platoon on the north, and 1st Platoon on the west. Forgetting that the Chinese were more familiar with the terrain, the Ranger Company rear was left unguarded because it was a "sheer drop to the Hant'an River hundreds of meters below."<sup>17</sup>

Unbeknownst to the Rangers occupying Hill 383, the 24th Regiment kick-off attack had not gone well; relief on 11 April was not going to happen. The American 25th and 24th Infantry Divisions on the right flank of the U.S. I Corps zone faced two CCF armies, the 26th and 40th.<sup>18</sup> The 105-man 5th Ranger Company had penetrated deep into enemy territory and was now all alone. Because the conventional forces could not relieve the Rangers, extremely large numbers of Chinese soldiers would arrive at night to "greet" the small Company.

The anticipated Chinese ground attack was preceded by a twenty-minute mortar barrage that began at 2000 hours. In between concentrations, the 5th Rangers listened to Chinese commanders issuing orders. Two red flares signaled the lifting of indirect fire and bugles sounded to start a massive ground attack from three sides. In the resulting close quarter bayonet fighting, a Ranger remembered that that he "could smell the garlic" on the Chinese soldiers' breath because they were that close.<sup>19</sup> After fighting off successive waves of CCF attacks for three hours, it became obvious that the Ranger company (half the size of a conventional infantry company) could



Example of a Marine air-observer team guiding a USMC F46 Corsair in for a strike on an enemy-held hill. The Corsair pilots were highly praised by Army & Marines for precision strikes on targets and their extremely close support of forward units. (U.S. Marine Corps photo.)

not hold out indefinitely without reinforcement or more ammunition. Under heavy Chinese pressure, CPT Scagnelli decided to make a break south over the cliff to their immediate rear. Two badly wounded Rangers, SGT William Kirshfield, Jr. and Corporal (CPL) Walter J. Maziarz, heroically volunteered to cover the night withdrawal under pressure.<sup>20</sup>

The two flank platoons, the 1st and 3rd, withdrew as the 2nd Platoon in the center provided covering fire. Under intense, continuous pressure from the Chinese, control was lost when CPT Scagnelli gave the order to "escape and evade." Soon, it was every man for himself. The rendezvous site for assembly was the Hant'an River crossing site. One small group of Rangers found a small trail down the cliff and began to run, barreling into a squad of Chinese soldiers working their way up the hill. The Chinese were so surprised that no one managed to fire at the Rangers until they had raced out of range. When a large group of Rangers had collected on the far bank of the Hant'an, CPT Scagnelli led them south to the forward positions of the 24th Infantry.<sup>21</sup>

5th Company Rangers would trickle back into friendly lines for the next several days. MSG Garland J. McAbee, Technical Sergeant E. G. Wofford, and another 2nd Platoon Ranger, unable to find a clear route down in the dark, holed up in a cave to avoid the Chinese. At



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dawn the trio managed to slip across the Hant'an to cross several miles of enemy territory before attempting the harrowing entry through allied lines.<sup>22</sup> Others did not have it so "easy." Private (PVT) Jess S. Moore managed to capture a Chinese Thompson sub-machinegun but was wounded in the retreat. He tried to reach safety, but fell into a hole. The captured weapon hit him on the head, "knocking him silly. When he regained his feet he went the wrong way and was shot twice, but made it across the river before passing out." PVT Jack J. Cambra recalled that "I spoke with someone who carried Moore to an aid station and marveled that Jess had his first aid dressing on the knot on his head but was bleeding profusely from his bullet wounds . . . he eventually returned to the Company, although about twenty pounds lighter."<sup>23</sup>

So, it was no surprise to several soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Division, huddled over a fire at night heating rations and boiling water that an unarmed Chinese soldier and two Rangers emerged from the darkness. They joined the group and began warming their hands too. One 24th Infantryman quipped, "Man, them Ranger boys have been coming through our position all night. Now two more come through and they have Joe [POW] with them." Having been pushed off Hill 383 after several long hours of fierce fighting and evading the enemy for most of a day and night, the Rangers felt little ill will towards their prisoner. In fact, according to Ranger John "Jack" Cambra, the prisoner was taken by Bernard "Ben" E. Murdock, who, when taking the POW across the river, slipped on a moss-covered rock. "The prisoner grabbed Ben's rifle and dragged him upright and returned his rifle. Ben motioned for him to return to his fellow soldiers, but he wasn't having any. For him, the war was over."<sup>24</sup>

After they had warmed themselves sufficiently, the two Rangers and the 24th Infantrymen shared food and cigarettes with the Chinese POW before turning him over for interrogation. Then, the Rangers went in search of their unit.<sup>25</sup> It was just another day in combat with many more to follow. In its first major engagement, Hill 383, the 5th Ranger Company had suffered two killed, eight wounded, and had three missing in action.<sup>26</sup> The bodies of Rangers Kirshfield and Maziarz were later recovered by 25th ID soldiers when the hill was retaken a few days later.

The 5th Rangers might have gotten a larger role in the offensive. With the UN forces pushing north, according to the Ranger veterans, rumors arose that they would conduct an airborne insertion. According to them, the I Corps staff wanted to use the unique capabilities of the Airborne Ranger Infantry companies. Since I Corps had the second cadre of Ranger Companies, the 3rd, 5th, and 8th, it looked to secure drop aircraft and hastily drew up plans to organize and insert this provisional Ranger Battalion by parachute at a road junction near Ch'orwon. In that way, the combined Ranger force would occupy positions that would block



Rangers of the 1st Platoon hold a makeshift guidon in Korea, 1951. Many of the Rangers wear the Shoulder Sleeve Insignia of the 25th Infantry Division, surmounted by a Ranger scroll.



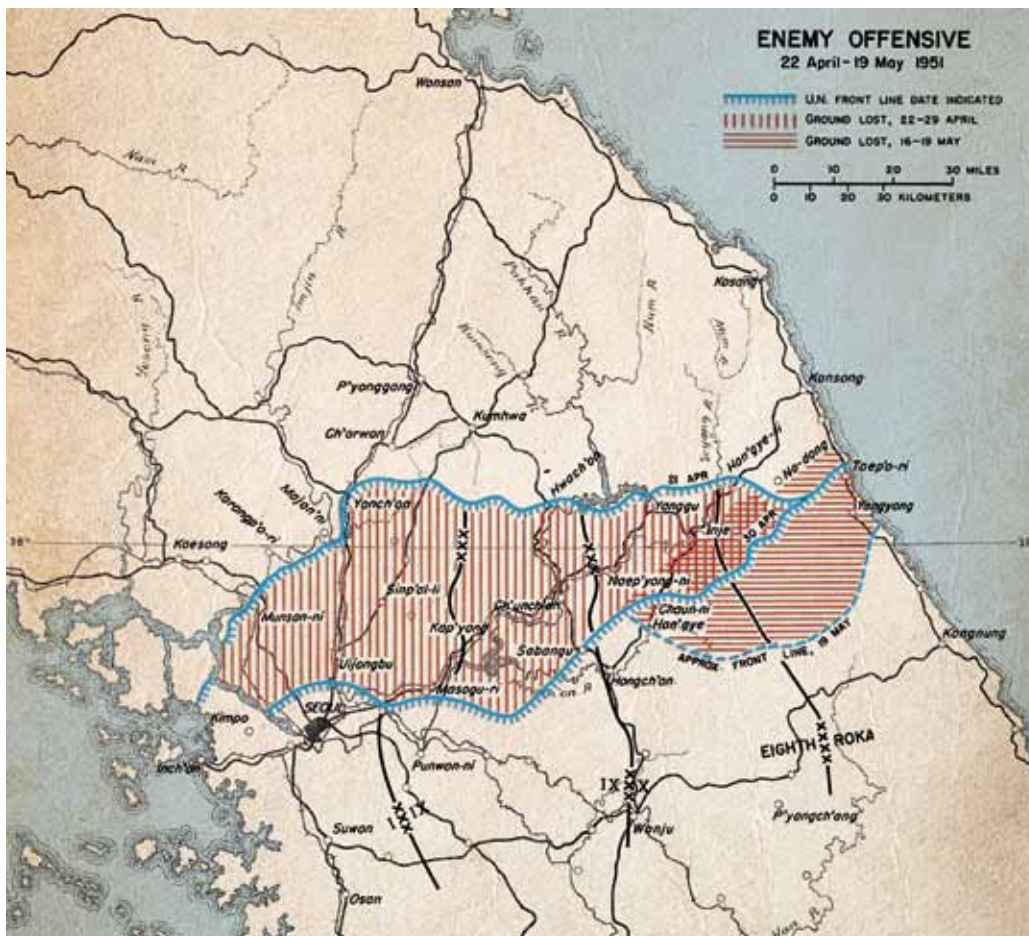
SGT William Kirshfield, Jr., wounded on Hill 383, volunteered along with CPL Walter J. Maziarz to stay and cover the company's retreat. Both were killed in action. In 2000, Kirschfield was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame.



27th Infantry Regiment DUI

several enemy Main Supply Routes. Not only would this hamper enemy logistics, but would also trap any Communist forces that tried to retreat along that route. According to the Ranger veterans, the proposed airborne operation was aborted. Instead, the Rangers, after a number of patrols, were assigned to fill in a gap in the front lines between the 24th and 27th Regiments. But this was fortuitous for the 5th Rangers. On the very morning that the jump was to take place, the Chinese began their Spring Offensive.<sup>27</sup> Since major Chinese forces came through the targeted crossroads, the Rangers would have been overwhelmed.

The Chinese Spring Offensive again caught the UN forces by surprise and forced them to withdraw. As the 25th ID retreated south the 5th Rangers walked past Hill 383. Operation DAUNTLESS was in shambles.<sup>28</sup> During the retreat the 5th Ranger Company, operating with a 25th Reconnaissance element, fought rear guard actions during the day. They would hold positions, mostly along the available roads, until the Chinese came abreast of them in the overlooking hills. After the inevitable firefight, the rear guard would pull back to the next designated location. At the end of each day, the 5th would then go into reserve behind line infantry battalions, usually those of the 27th Infantry Regiment, and the drill would be repeated the next day.



Enemy gains in the Chinese Spring Offensive.



Soldiers of the 25th Division just south of Ch'orwon during the Chinese Spring Offensive, 23 April 1951.

Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion ordered CPT Scagnelli to send a Ranger platoon to fill the gap between the 3rd Platoon of G Company and F Company.<sup>29</sup> The 3rd Platoon, 5th Rangers went to the front line with little guidance other than “go link up with G Company and see what you can do!”<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, the rest of the 5th Ranger Company was ordered to fill gaps elsewhere in the line. The Chinese soon commenced to attack in force.

They attacked in human waves and hit right at the junction of two companies of the 27th. The Americans fired massive amounts of artillery but to no avail. The Chinese kept coming and “walked right over their dead.” In places the bodies were four to five feet high.<sup>31</sup> G Company soon dissolved under the pressure. David Hackworth described the

attack in his book *About Face*: “Suddenly there was no shooting in the valley . . . Then [there] was a hum-a drone-as the Chinese yelled in unison and steamrolled through the 1st and 2nd platoon. They smashed the position in half, creating a gap of 500 or 600 yards. The floodgate was open and the enemy was pouring though . . . mortars were firing; we could see the sparks as they left the tubes. Then the flood hit them-no more mortar section.”<sup>32</sup> Some of the Chinese managed to penetrate as far as a mile behind the lines before 25th Division reserves contained them.<sup>33</sup>

While this was happening, the Rangers moved to set up a blocking position to the rear of G Company in order to intercept stragglers. It proved exceedingly difficult as Americans and Chinese soldiers were intermingled. As ammunition began to get low, the Rangers grabbed survivors who yelled “We’re G Company, Don’t Shoot!” and integrated them into the defensive position. But, the Rangers were not without their difficulties.

On having to shift their position, the commander of the Ranger’s 1st Platoon, 220-pound LT Frederick M. Lang, was hit in both legs and incapacitated. Rather than restrict the movement of the platoon, he ordered SGT Albert A. Romagnoli to put him down when he picked up the wounded Lieutenant. When Romagnoli refused the order, LT Lang “threw his torso around to make it impossible for Romagnoli to carry him.”<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, at the CP and elsewhere, the 25th Division quickly recovered from the attack and sealed off the penetration.

Daybreak caught the Chinese in the open and F-51 Mustangs strafed the area at will. Once the main enemy force was cleared, the 5th Rangers were ordered to mop up the area of any stragglers. In so doing, they found the body of LT Lang. In front of him lay the bodies of several Chinese whom he had killed before being bayoneted.<sup>35</sup> The 25th Division then retreated one last time to Line GOLDEN, just above Seoul.

The retreat in the face of the CCF Spring Offensive marked the beginning of the Ranger companies being used in roles for which they were not intended. The capability of a Ranger company to penetrate deep behind enemy lines in order to disrupt supply and communications had been nullified by what was quickly becoming a static stage of the war. The dilemma facing the 25th ID G-3 (Operations) was how to employ the 5th Ranger Company effectively in this static environment. Hence, after the attack on Hill 383, the Rangers were increasingly misused as they were employed as conventional line infantry and assigned to special task forces, to block penetrations in the front lines, or to cover withdrawals. Although these were missions for which the Rangers were not designed, they did them well.

Once behind Line GOLDEN things were quiet for a few days. Having driven the UN forces south of the 38th Parallel again, the CCF broke contact all across the front and pulled back to establish well-fortified defensive lines. The 25th Division then started sending out patrols to reestablish contact, for which they again called upon the 5th Rangers. One such instance was when the Rangers were ordered to participate in Task Force HAMILTON, commanded by Major W. T. Hamilton of the 89th Medium Tank Battalion (MTB).<sup>36</sup>

The Task Force (TF) was comprised of Company A, 79th MTB, the reconnaissance and an assault gun platoon from the 89th MTB, the 5th Ranger Company, an artillery Forward Observer (FO) team, a U.S. Air Force tactical air control party (TACP), a medical detachment, and a 65th Engineer Battalion mine-clearing detachment.<sup>37</sup> They were to conduct a reconnaissance-in-force forward of the 25th ID lines to locate the enemy's main line of resistance (MLR). Ulatoski recalled that CPT Scagnelli told him that Task Force HAMILTON "was to go north until it hit something substantial and could not go any farther."<sup>38</sup> That place would be a small valley near Kimo-ri.

"From the start we were road bound. As we headed north, the valley narrowed. The tanks were in the lead. As the valley continued to narrow, and the road began

to rise towards a range of low hills to the front, one of the tanks hit a mine. Then, the engineers went to work. Shortly thereafter another tank hit a mine. Progress became much slower as the engineers now had to screen the road for mines. The Rangers dismounted to provide security for the engineers. As progress was made, the road ahead crossed over a saddle with hill masses on

either side. As we approached the saddle, it became obvious that the hills on either side dominated the road and would be a good place for a fight or ambush. The aircraft overhead reported there were signs of

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— 1LT Joseph R. Ulatoski

digging on the hills but no sign of enemy activity,” said Ulatoski.<sup>39</sup> CPT Scagnelli directed the 2nd Platoon, led by recently commissioned Second Lieutenant (2LT) Garland J. McAbee [an 82nd Airborne Division WWII veteran] to the top of the hill on the left (west).<sup>40</sup> The 3rd Platoon, commanded by 1LT Ulatoski, was to go to the top of the hill on the right (east). The 1st Platoon would provide security for the tanks which were nestled closely against

the base of the hill on the right (east). But, unbeknownst to the Americans, the hills were well-defended by the enemy.

The 3rd Platoon quickly encountered resistance as they began to climb their hill on

the right. Chinese soldiers engaged them from well-camouflaged positions dug into the hills. At this point, communication with the aircraft overhead was lost and the Rangers had little idea of what was in front of them. Ulatoski recalled, “Still, we fought our way to the top of the hill. Then, all hell broke loose. People started coming out of hidden tunnels behind us as others flooded onto the top of the hill. I lost radio communications within the

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platoon and with the company. Everything failed at that point. Chinese were coming out of holes on top of the hill and more were charging up the back of the hill. It was sheer pandemonium as hand to hand fighting broke out.” Then, the Chinese began mortaring the hilltop where their troops were engaging the 3rd Platoon.<sup>41</sup>

In the midst of the chaos, LT Ulatoski spotted four Chinese soldiers with a machinegun in a prepared position getting ready to engage the Rangers. Just then, a mortar round exploded nearby, knocking Ulatoski to the ground. It happened at the very moment that he pulled the safety pin from a hand grenade prior to throwing it at the enemy machinegun. He was wounded and momentarily unconscious. “Private First Class (PFC) John K. Hammond saw the grenade in my hand as I lay on the ground. As I started to regain consciousness I remember

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— 1LT Joseph R. Ulatoski

# Brigadier General Joseph R. Ulatoski

Joseph R. Ulatoski was born in Stamford, Connecticut on 2 June 1927. Enlisting in the U.S. Army Infantry at the age of seventeen in March 1945, he graduated with his class at Stamford High School in June. Too late to see combat in WWII, he graduated from Officer Candidate School in March 1946, and was assigned to occupation duty in Korea with the 44th Military Government Company, 96th Military Government Group. This was followed by an assignment to the G-2 (Intelligence) of the 6th Infantry Division in the Pohang dong area to counter Communist infiltrators from the north. This led to working with XXIV Corps as an agent handler for intelligence operations into North Korea. Returning to the United States in 1948, he served at Ford Ord, California where he received a Regular Army commission. First Lieutenant Ulatoski then volunteered for airborne school, and after graduation, was assigned to the 11th Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. In 1950, Ulatoski volunteered for Ranger training at Fort Benning, Georgia, serving concurrently as the Executive Officer and rifle platoon leader in the 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne) until being seriously wounded on 14 May 1951.

By the time 1LT Ulatoski was released from the hospital in 1951, he knew the Ranger companies were being deactivated. Volunteering once more, he was assigned to the 8086th Miscellaneous Group, the Eighth U.S. Army Unit (AU) charged with organizing anti-Communist partisan/guerrilla activity. On 10 December 1951, the 8086th AU was absorbed into the 8240th AU, which later became the United Nations Partisan Forces, Korea (UNPFK), a legacy unit of today's U.S. Army Special Forces. Ulatoski served as the senior advisor/commander of Task Force KIRKLAND Forward, operating off the east coast of North Korea until June 1952.

Having already served in three separate U.S. Army special operations units (Military Government—today's Civil Affairs, Rangers, and the 8086/8240th AUs), Ulatoski studied Russian in the Army Foreign Area Specialist Training (FAST) Program. This curriculum included attendance at the Defense Language School, a year of Russian studies at Columbia University, and two years at the Army's Foreign Institute in Germany. At the height of the Cold War, his education and language skills led to an assignment as the Assistant U.S. Army Attaché to the Soviet Union from 1957-1959. That was followed by tours with the 1st Battle Group, 10th Infantry Regiment at Fort Ord, California and at the U.S. Army Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he served from 1961-



1962 on the Tactics Committee of the Counterinsurgency Department. He then attended Command and General Staff College in 1962-1963 and subsequently earned a Bachelor of General Education degree in 1964 from Omaha University, now the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Several tours in Vietnam followed. These included duty as the operations advisor to the Vietnamese Army II Corps (1964-1965), followed by command of the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division (1967). After attending the Army War College in 1967-1968, Ulatoski returned to Vietnam, assuming

command of the 2nd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (1970). When the 25th ID was alerted to return to Hawaii, the decision was made to retain the 2nd Brigade in Vietnam as an independent unit. Thus, Ulatoski had the opportunity to command a separate 6,000-man reinforced brigade. These combat command tours were interspersed with staff positions at various high-level headquarters including the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command (CINCPAC), today's USPACOM, and the Office of the Undersecretary of the Army.

From 1971 to 1973, Ulatoski served under the Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations as Deputy Chief of Army War Plans and as Executive Officer for the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense. Promoted to Brigadier General (BG) in 1974, he commanded the Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) in Thailand, which was responsible for accounting for U.S. personnel missing in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, South Vietnam and North Vietnam. In 1975, Ulatoski became the Assistant Division Commander of the 8th Infantry Division in Mainz, Germany. For his final assignment, BG Ulatoski was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence for the U.S. Army Forces Command at Fort McPherson, Georgia. Ulatoski retired from the Army in 1977, and subsequently had a very successful business career. His U.S. decorations include the Combat Infantryman's Badge (2nd award), Master Parachutist Badge, Distinguished Service Medal (2), Legion of Merit (4), Bronze Star (4 awards, 2 with V device), Army Meritorious Service Award, Air Medal (22), Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Purple Heart (2), World War II Victory Medal, Army of Occupation Medal, Korean Service Medal (with 5 battle stars), Vietnam War Service Medal (with 6 battle stars), and the Ranger Tab.<sup>1</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Joseph R. Ulatoski-A Personal Summary, copy provided by BG Joseph Ulatoski to the USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.





Garland J. McAbee, a WWII 82nd Airborne Division veteran, joined the Rangers as an enlisted man but received a battlefield commission.



Leaflets, such as these produced by the 1st Radio Broadcasting and Leaflet Group, encouraged Communist soldiers to surrender to UN forces. Such leaflets may have played a role in the decision of the Chinese soldiers who used 1LT Ulatoski as a “safe conduct pass” to become prisoners of war.

hearing him screaming, ‘The grenade, Lieutenant! The grenade, Lieutenant!’ Then, he threw himself down on top of me and locked my fingers around the grenade spoon. Hammond worked it free and knocked out the machinegun nest, saving us and other Rangers nearby,” remembered Ulatoski.

“As I came to my senses, I realized that we were on the verge of being overrun. Our only alternative was to pull back to a point where we would be covered by tank fire. At that point the Chinese were attacking the platoon from all directions and all organized resistance was rapidly dissolving. I gave the order for everybody to get off the hill. As far as I knew at that point there were only three of us left on the hill. I told a BAR man to drop back and give us covering fire. He got hit in both arms but he jumped up and headed down the hill. The platoon sergeant Master Sergeant, Owen L. Claycomb, was hit in the head and killed. Then, when I tried to jump up to follow the others, my left leg gave out under me and I fell forward. Somehow I managed to keep getting up and throwing myself forward down the hill using my one good leg until I crashed into a ravine. It was kind of an out-of-body experience until I slammed into a tree. Right in front of the tree were two Chinese soldiers firing down the hill. They turned, reacting to the noise, and there I was. I had my .45 and knife, [and was] bleeding like a stuck pig. Instead of shooting me, they dropped their weapons and the two grabbed me under the arms and began dragging me down the hill. All they had to do was reach up and take my .45 and knife but they carried me to safety to become prisoners of war,” recalled the seriously wounded lieutenant. “But, the scariest thing was being in a stretcher outside one of the bubble helicopters. They strap you in and you can’t move. That terminated my service with the 5th Ranger Company.”<sup>42</sup>

The 2nd Platoon led by LT Garland J. McAbee encountered almost the same situation as the 3rd Platoon. They too came under intense fire from camouflaged positions almost immediately after launching their attack, but were able to fight their way out as an organized unit. “The 5th Rangers suffered heavy casualties in its fight against a reinforced dug-in battalion. The moral of the story is: Never attack an enemy main line of resistance with an understrength company,” said Ulatoski.<sup>43</sup> The May 1951 Command Report for the 5th Rangers had twenty-eight wounded, three killed, and one missing. MSG Donald H. White, acting 1st Platoon leader, was last seen charging the Chinese with a machete.<sup>44</sup>

It was serendipity that a month earlier, after two Rangers brought a Chinese POW back from Hill 383, that two Chinese soldiers manhandled the seriously wounded 1LT Ulatoski to safety in order to surrender. Despite heavy losses when employed against well-defended enemy lines like regular infantry, the 25th ID continued to throw the 5th Rangers “into the breach.” This misuse caused the company heavy casualties.

One such casualty was CPL Walter Eckhardt, a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) man in the 1st Platoon. He was wounded on 4 June 1951 during the attack on “Objective SUGAR” (Hill 722) in support of the 27th Infantry Regiment. While engaged in close combat with Chinese troops, Eckhardt knelt down to clear his BAR. I heard “a loud crack, much like the noise when slamming a door” as something jarred me. I was surprised to see my BAR lying on the ground. As I (instinctively) reached for it with my right hand, I was even more surprised not to see my hand grasp the barrel to recover the weapon. Then, I looked down and saw my right arm from the biceps down, flopping around like a chicken with its head



After Korea, CPT Scagnelli joined the 10th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He is seen here on the right along with 10th SFG commander Colonel Ekman (L) and CPT Marshall (M), in Bad Toelz, Germany in 1956. Scagnelli retired from Special Forces as a Major.



Many of the 5th Rangers, like CPT Scagnelli, joined the 187th Regimental Combat Team after the disbanding of the Ranger companies in Korea on 1 August 1951.



187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team SSI

cut off.”<sup>45</sup> The Ranger corporal told his assistant gunner to take the BAR as he clasped the badly wounded arm close to his chest. The Company medic put a tourniquet on his arm to stop the bleeding and made a sling. Eckhardt made his way down the hill to the 27th Infantry aid station where he was quickly evacuated to a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) covered in blood from “his shoulder to his boots.”<sup>46</sup> On that day, in addition to Eckhardt, the company suffered two killed and thirty one wounded.<sup>47</sup> Included among the wounded were CPT Scagnelli and 2LT McAbee. It was just another day in the Rangers.

Even though by now, the Rangers were severely understrength, the unit continued to perform the kind of missions assigned to regular infantry line companies (twice the size). From 5 June until 23 June, the 5th Rangers conducted routine reconnaissance patrols, or served to maintain contact with friendly units when there were gaps in the line. However, it was clear that the 5th needed to refit. From 24 June until 16 July 1951, the Rangers went into 25th Division reserve to focus on training, rehabilitation, and replacing their losses. Then, on 17 July, the Ranger company received its last mission; to secure positions,

including a ferry site, along the Imjin River. But the mission was short lived. On 28 July, the company was pulled back into 25th Division reserve. There, like the other Ranger Infantry (Airborne) companies in Korea it was disbanded on 1 August. Most of its personnel were transferred to the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. A few Rangers like 1LT Ulatoski, volunteered and served in other Special Operations units in Korea: the 8086th Miscellaneous Group, the 8240th Army Unit and the Joint Advisory Commission, Korea (JACK). Others, like Scagnelli, John J. “Jack” Cambra, John H. Hale, Lonner B. Westmoreland, and Bernard E. Murdock later joined Special Forces.<sup>48</sup>

Some of its veterans still have doubts about the use of the Ranger companies in Korea. Ulatoski summed up his frustration: “One of the fallacies of the Rangers was that you were supposed to be set up in the rear, ready to go in and do (special) missions, and you would be provided everything that you needed to do those missions. You had the trained personnel, the weapons, but insofar as the other gear needed (and supporting fires), no.”<sup>49</sup> But, the Ranger Companies in the Korean War did have an impact that remains to this day.



As ARSOF legacy units, the Ranger Companies of the Korean War have a memorial stone in place at the USASOC Memorial Plaza, Fort Bragg, NC.

Subsequently, the curriculum used to train Ranger Infantry (Airborne) Companies by the Ranger Training Center, U.S. Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, GA, provided the basis for training individual soldiers, junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO), in small unit leadership and tactics. The Ranger Department produces some of the finest small unit leaders in the Army thus spreading those skills throughout its combat units. While misused to a great extent in Korea, the Ranger companies did more with less, and performed better than most line infantry companies. They are a strong link in the lineage of the 75th Ranger Regiment today. ▲

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## Endnotes

- 1 Robert W. Black, *Rangers in Korea* (New York, NY: Ivy Books, 1989), 251.
- 2 COL (ret) Walter Eckhardt, email to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 1 August 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Eckhardt, email. **The unit was overstrength by design at its formation. It originally had 7 officers and 148 enlisted men. Twelve men did not complete the training program and were sent to the 82nd Airborne Division. Seventeen Rangers transferred to the 7th Ranger Company on 19 January 1951.**
- 4 Scagnelli served in Panama in 1940 in the 33rd Infantry Regiment, then transferred to the 661st Ordnance Company Aviation (Pursuit) in 1941 (also in Panama). He then served in Flora, Mississippi with the 833rd Ordnance Base Depot Company in 1943. He next landed as an infantryman at Omaha Beach in Normandy on D-Day and fought in the European Campaign. Unit Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinner menus provided by Ms. Rosie Scagnelli, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC; emails provided by Ms. Doris C. Baker, copies in the USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 Brigadier General (ret) Joseph S. Ulatoski, interviewed by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 14 November 2003, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Hereafter referred to as Ulatoski Interview.
- 6 Ulatoski Interview.
- 7 Ulatoski Interview.
- 8 BG Joseph R. Ulatoski, email to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 23 July 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 Walter Eckhardt, *Travel Light Freeze at Night: A History of the 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne)*, p. 4., USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

- 10 MAJ John G. Provost, "Nomads of the Battlefield: Ranger Companies in the Korean War, 1950-1951" (Master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College), 31, found online at the Combined Arms Research Library Digital Library at [http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm4/item\\_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/p4013coll2&CISOPTR=1475](http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/p4013coll2&CISOPTR=1475), accessed 6 July 2010. **Also see Gene Piasecki's "Eighth Army Rangers: First in Korea" in *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History, ARSOF in the Korean War: Part 1*, Vol. 6, No. 1 2010, p. 34-44.**
- 11 See Eugene G. Piasecki, "Eighth Army Rangers: First in Korea," *Veritas* (Vol. 6, No. 1., 2010), 34-44.
- 12 Ulatoski Interview, Ulatoski email.
- 13 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 7.
- 14 Ulatoski Interview.
- 15 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 11.
- 16 Robert W. Black, *Rangers in Korea* (New York, NY: Ivy Books, 1989), 104.
- 17 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 12.
- 18 Billy C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow: November 1950-July 1951* (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2000), 372. **Each CCF army was the equivalent of a U.S. Corps and normally had at least three divisions.** Troy J. Sacquety, "A Giant Enters the Battle: Order of Battle of the UN and Chinese Communist Forces in Korea, November 1950," *Veritas: Journal of Army Special Operations History, ARSOF in the Korean War: Part 1*, Vol. 6, No. 1 2010, p. 103.
- 19 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 104.
- 20 Black, *Rangers in Korea*, 105.
- 21 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 13.
- 22 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 13.
- 23 Jack Cambra email to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 4 August 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 24 Jack Cambra, email #1 to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 6 August 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 25 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 14.
- 26 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne) extract from 25th Division Command Report compiled by Walt Eckhardt, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 27 Ulatoski email; Eckhardt email.
- 28 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 19.
- 29 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 22.
- 30 Ulatoski email.
- 31 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 23-24.
- 32 David Hackworth, *About Face* (New York, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989), 99, 101., as quoted in *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 24.
- 33 Mossman, *Ebb and Flow: November 1950-July 1951*, 432.
- 34 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 25.
- 35 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 27.
- 36 **Another instance was when the 5th Ranger Company was assigned to Task Force DOLVIN from 23 May to 28 May 1951.**
- 37 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 30.
- 38 Ulatoski email.
- 39 Ulatoski email.
- 40 **McAbee was a Master Sergeant when he received a battlefield commission.**
- 41 Ulatoski Interview.
- 42 Ulatoski Interview.
- 43 Ulatoski Interview.
- 44 CPT John C. Scagnelli, "Command Report for May 1951," 1 June 1951, National Archives and Records Administration, Entry 429, Box 5235, Record Group 407.
- 45 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 38.
- 46 *Travel Light Freeze at Night*, 38.
- 47 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne) extract from 25th Division Command Report.
- 48 Jack Cambra email #2 to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 6 August 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 49 Ulatoski Interview.