

Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Barbosa, 1st Sgt Arthur 'Artie'

Date: 02-27-14

Length : 0:28:06

Interviewer: Joanie Schwarz

Transcription By: Donna DeVerna, Bob Hoffman Video & Photography

My name is Artie Barbosa. And in 1952 I was a Squad Leader, Machine Gun Squad Leader with "Easy" Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines. And we had just transferred from the East Coast of Korea to the West Coast. And everybody gave a big sigh of relief because the hills in Central and North Korea were out of this world, unbelievable. And rumors was flying that we were going to make an amphibious landing but that never came about. Instead we went into the trenches, and trenches that stretched from one side of Korea to the other side, and it was very eerie. What do I mean by that? Especially about 5:15 in the morning when the mist starts to role in, you're in a trench and you look up. You see the barbwire, and the sandbags, and you could swear you were in France in 1916. Unbelievable, and it did, it left you with an, I don't know, an odd feeling.

Well anyway, out on that outpost we had a reinforced rifle platoon. And that was, came to, it was actually eighty marines on the hill, and we had two light machine guns, and two heavy machine guns, and 160 mm mortar, was our artillery. Anyway, life out there wasn't bad. The only drawback, we didn't notice this at first, was the fact that the color of our uniforms were the same color of the uniforms of the Chinese. Now the cut was different, but you know, at night, and you can't see. You don't want to hesitate in combat. But on the other hand you don't want to shoot a fellow marine and so that there was a little problem with that in the beginning. Anyway, like I said, the duty out there wasn't bad. Chinese did the same thing that we did. We'd go out 2:00 in the morning before and see if we could capture a Chinaman and the Chinese would do the very same thing to us.

Well one, one night they did, they did kind of give us a warning as to what was to happen. They sent out, I'm going to say, about eight Chinese. And they were armed with automatic weapons and were firing nothing but tracers. Now I got to say one thing for the Chinese, they were very patient. And that's one problem that we'll never solve in this country. Americans are not patient. And these Chinamen, these soldiers were able to get right up to the barbwire without being spotted. And then what they did, they just fired into our outpost, nothing but tracers. And I remember this one soldier, the way our gun was located we, we could have got all of them. I'm certain. In fact my gunner was jumping up and down. He wanted to fire I, you know, I didn't give him permission because I realized that if I let him fire and we killed all of them, the gunner the next day would have had my head, used it as a soccer ball because they were for one reason and that was to get us to fire at them to give away our positions as to where they actually begin.

Well this went on for at the most ten to fifteen minutes. And the other thing I remember that, about that incident was this one Chinese soldier was firing into our position but he wasn't even looking where he was shooting. He was talking to his buddy. And he must have told him a joke because his buddy just started laughing like (hell). Then like I said they quit firing, backed up and left. And the next day about 3:30 they fired three 120 mm mortars at our position. One was short. One was long. And one was right on that outpost. So we knew what they were doing but what could we do about it? Nothing, so that night, got off watch at 11:00 with my gunner and in

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those days it was a little different. Today, they're all volunteers. Now, back then they weren't. I had draftees, reserves, and regulars in my squad.

Woo! Never, ever a dull moment, but I must say that, that night each one of them stood tall, the draftee, the regular, and the reserve. So Danny and I we, you know, made some coffee, kind of unwound and just shoot the breeze and what, what did we talk about? It's like I tell these young recruits, there's only one subject and that subject is girls. That's what you talk about. And I think that's, that's gone on since ever there was anybody's army. And at about 11:25 we said ah, let's call it a night. And we took about two steps and the entire skyline lit up. Unbelievable and it was almost like it was 2:00 in the afternoon, and then we heard this boom, boom, boom, boom, boom! So I said to Danny, somebody's going to catch hell tonight. And little did we know until we heard that first incoming round as it whistled in on our position, that it was going to be us. And they fired rockets, mortars, artillery, 76's, woo! For a good half hour that little outpost just shook. And we were helpless. There was nothing we could do, couldn't make it back to the gun. We just had to lay there and just hope, you know, we'd make it. And it was one of those situations where you say that, you know, oh, God, if you get me out of this one I promise I'll go to church every Sunday. Now of course you don't, but you know you'll answer for that later.

Anyway, like I said this went on for a good half hour. And then all of a sudden silence. And we seen two green flares go up in front of us, two green flares behind us and two green flares on each side, or our flanks. I looked at Danny. He looked at me. And I'm going to tell you what it was really like. He looked at me. We looked at each other and we said this word. Now this is a famous word, no matter where you go in the world, you say it, people know what you're talking about. That word, that word was 'shit'. And we did get back to the trench and the gunner was there. And he said to me I want you to move your squad down the finger. There were actually two fingers. Dewey was on one. I was on the other. And then he just turned around and walked away. So I saddled up the squad and moved down the finger. And then the finger, the ridgeline and we called it a finger. And then told Danny set the gun up here. Now here's where your discipline comes in. He didn't look up at me and say, Sergeant Barbosa, are you trying to get me killed? I'm silhouetted. I'm on the skyline. This is the worst place we could put the gun. He knew it. And I knew it. But it was the only place we could put that gun because as I was going down this finger with the gunner and the assistant gunner I was also looking at the terrain. And I, you know, said to myself, when our turn comes I wonder which way they'll come. And I happened to guess right. I picked it. But, in order to cover that area with the machine gun the gun had to be exposed. But that's what you're paid for, right? And then all these young marines holler back, right! You know, and we started firing in support of Dewey. And the odds of that battle there were seven hundred Chinese that attacked us that night. And we had eighty marines on that hill.

And now, I don't know what it was, and till to this day I still don't know. But something was bothering me. Something, I don't know, it's hard to say. I like to think later on it was my sixth sense because I couldn't see down the, the finger, or the ridgeline that we were on only to a

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certain point. And the rest was, you know, just too dark. So I said to Stark who was the assistant gunner, I said I want you to throw an illumination grenade down this finger. He got one, pulled the pin, let it pop, counted to about two, threw it, and when that went off let me tell you. I was stationed in China for almost two years. I never seen so many Chinamen in my life. They were sitting there, the gunner, the Chinese gunner was getting his gun in action and the squad leader or whoever he might be, I don't know. He was pointing at us, at our gun. And this I didn't understand. There must have been at least thirty Chinese I'd say, a platoon, and they were behind the gun watching what was going on like they were at a soccer ball game. Anyway the Chinese got off the first burst, fired about five rounds, so it indicated to me that this guy knew what he was doing so I told Danny, but see, that Chinaman must have really been, been nervous. And in fact that night I think everybody on both sides was nervous. And he got off five rounds and he was high. And I said to Danny I want you to kick up the dirt in front of that gun. He did. And he got the gunner, the assistant gunner, knocked over the machine gun and killed the squad leader if that was what it was, and a bunch of those people that were watching the spectacle. Of course then they, you know, all, they all scatter. And you know, our fun then just began because we couldn't help Dewey any longer. We had our hands full.

Now, I also got to tell the story of Frank Jeffs. He was young marine, eighteen year's old, hated the military, all branches of the military. And he gets drafted. And where does he end up? In the marines, and I'm telling you he almost died. And this guy was the biggest complainer in the entire 1st Marine Division, Second Army Division, the Air Wing, and the Girl Scouts. He was at it twenty-four hours a day. But I gave him slack because when we were on the move or on our patrol I never had to go back to the end of the squad and say, Frank. Keep up with the squad. And he was always there. So I felt that when the squad got tired of listening to his song and dance they'd take care of it. And they did, but that's another story.

So how long this took I don't know, happened very early. The gunner and the assistant gunner were hit by shrapnel and small arms fire, both at the same time. And at this point after those two were hit there was just Frank Jeffs, the big complainer, and my self left. And we had our hands full. But we (broke up an assault) and we were just laying there. And I was thinking to myself I could not see how we were going to get out of there, no way in hell. So I, you know, I figured time, numbers, and ammunition. So I said to Frank, you know, Frank, well, do you think we're going to make it? Now this is the marine that hated the corps, I mean, he was complaining twenty-four hours a day. And his answer came from deep down inside him and just blew out. And what did he say? He said, hell, yes. We're marines aren't we? And I couldn't believe what he said.

Now the Chinese threw three hand grenades before they started their assault on us and two of them went to never-never land, you know. It's a good thing they didn't play Little League in China in those days because those guys couldn't hit the side of a barn with a grenade. But one of the grenades got tied up in the web belt. The web belt was what held all the ammunition together in a long belt. And you could, well, open a can, and each can had the two hundred and fifty

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rounds. And, but the third one like I said got hung up on a web belt. And when that grenade went the way Frank and I were situated behind a gun, he took about ninety-five percent of that blast, mumbled a few words and he died. Well, Frank Jeffs was one hell of a marine. And that's seven hundred Chinese. I still often think about that, how eighty marines held them off.

Well now Dewey, and we had everything happen that night, Dewey was to be awarded the medal of honor for what he did that night. But he also shot the gunny. And this is, you know like I said, the color of uniforms, what a mess they, you didn't know who was behind you. The only people you knew was who was in front of you. And I often thought about that that night. I had no idea who's on my flanks. And I was, I was just very unfortunate, very fortunate, to me the Chinese didn't have too much organization as when they were assaulting our positions. They did break our line. And their riflemen had a lot of hand-to-hand combat, using whatever they could, entrenching tool, pick, rifle butt, bayonet, Ka-Bar, and machine gunners were fortunate in that area.

And now as I said, Dewey shot the gunny. And how that happened, and I probably would have done the same thing. There were two seriously wounded marines in the bush. And four Chinese soldiers come up behind Dewey's gun. And they hollered. And they're behind you, Dewey. Dewey picked up two riflemen, two ammo carriers went down, cleared the area, went back to his gun. And like I said I probably would have done the exact same thing he did. He heard these footsteps running. So he said to himself, oh, I didn't get them all, takes his forty-five out, spins around, pulls the trigger and shoots the gunny. Oh, shit! You don't shoot gunnery sergeants in the Marine Corps. I mean that's a big no-no. And when Dewey realized what he had done, if you would have been a woman you would have gave birthright there and then. And all the gunner did was say, don't, don't be worried, Dewey. It was my fault. I should have let you know I was coming in. And it's a good thing, you know, like I said before. Everybody's hand was shaking and they were, and that's what saved the gunny's life because Dewey, when he shot the gunny his hand much have been shaking because woo! He hit him in the leg. If he would have been calm, cool, and collected he would have, he would have killed him. Because, you know, God, it was even less than ten yards that he was, you know, on Dewey coming in.

And then asked Dewey can you hold this position. And I don't care if the whole Chinese army was coming down. Dewey would have gave the same answer, yeah, gunny. We'll hold. We'll hold. And then the gunny limped off trying to get these riflemen back and trying to get them between, between the two machine guns, form some kind of line which eventually tried, a lot of, a lot of the riflemen what they did, they fought, in, in circles like fighting the old cowboy and Indian days, and it was quite an accomplishment that those young marines put up. And they started to break it off at 3:20, 3:15 in the morning. Now, you know, combat's crazy. Here's, why first of all they broke it off I'll never know, because they had us. But they did, and maybe they didn't want to pay anymore price than they already paid. And this one Chinese soldier's going back to his position and he takes a look and he sees at this time Dewey's wounded and a navy corpsman is working on Dewey. And he takes a grenade, pulls the pin, lets it pop, tosses it

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in. Dewey picks it up and he's going to throw it. But where's he going to throw it, got no place to throw it. I mean there are wounded marines all around him. So he says to the navy corpsman I got it in my back pocket, doc. Took the grenade tried to get it between the ground and his wallet but he had to get his hand out of there in a hurry. And in doing so, uh, the grenade went off. But it was a happy ending. Dewey survived. But he, you know, he paid the price. He had trouble with his hip from the time he was twenty till, he's still, still around, we get together. And yeah it, he, and for taking that grenade and laying on it, actually he was on his back. He was awarded the medal of honor for, for that action that night by General Eisenhower.

But it was a night to remember. And I think over, what did we learn? I don't know what we learned. But it was a really, remarkable, we just concentrated on one thing, and that was taking care of each other, you know. And it was, it was, I had one man in my squad, one man, one young man in my squad who had both his legs blown off, and all night he was calling my name, and all night I, you know I said, to him, I'm not going anyplace Hunter. We'll be here. I promise you that. And of course I didn't know his legs were off at that time. And that morning when the corpsman came around and asked if I'd help put him on the stretcher, of course, you know, I'd help. And as I approached it was still dark. It wasn't light. And I reached down to put my hands where his legs would have been but nothing, absolutely nothing. And then I took a good close look and woo. We had a foot over here, yep, and he survived but he died about three days later. And like I said that's, that was one night, one night to remember.

And we're a lot older now and of course a lot of it leaves you. But you know it wasn't a major battle. And what I'd like to do is just want to read a sentence from the book, Outpost War. And I'll read as follows. "Although not a famous battle, the firefight on OP-3 was equal in courage to any of the last stands recorded in military history. There was one exception however, this stand was successful. Greatly outnumbering the marines, enemy troops failed in their objective. And most of the defenders survived."

Now that's about the best way, I've got this book here, "Outpost War". But the story I just told you is sixty what, one or two years ago and it's hard. It's leaving. But I don't think I'll ever, ever really forget. And there was quite a bond that was made that night with those that did survive, and later on those that were wounded and came back to the outfit, but just a shame, it really is. And we all agreed on one thing, if you're going to fight a war do it like you did in World War II. Don't play games because you're only going to lose people, and for what? For nothing, and I'll stay away from that subject for a while. So that was the story. I hope I didn't bore you, but the point being that seven hundred Chinese assaulting eighty marines were unable to take this outpost. And that's quite a compliment for those young men out there fighting. Now how am I going to wrap this up?

I hope I didn't bore you and you know, got to believe in yourself, and no matter what, whether you're in the military or you're a civilian. And depends on what you want, the harder you work the more you can have. If you'd rather just party and run around, that's fine, too. But then don't

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cry in your beer when you're in your sixties and I got no money and the government should do this or that. So I think I took up enough of your time. And too bad you're so far away. I'd like to go to the school and talk to you. And meanwhile you young people take care of yourself. And remember you're living in a great country. Thank you.