The Men Who Put the Heart in "Heartbreak Ridge"

American and French Boys Crawled Over Dead Comrades, straight Into Enemy Fire, to Win a Long, Bloody Korean Battle

By STAN CARTER

Victorious Americans poised to defend the hills they captured after a month-long struggle.

The tired, unshaven major looked up at the chaplain and grinned ruefully. "They're taking a beating, Father," he said. "They're giving a beating, too, but not many men are left.

It was in the desperate, early days on Heartbreak Ridge, where American and French soldiers of the 23rd Infantry Regiment were fighting the longest and most costly hill battle of the Korean war. The major had just walked down off Heartbreak Ridge. He seemed beaten and without hope.

These men thought their mission was suicide. Yet they crawled again and again up sheer mountainsides over the bodies of their dead comrades into the face of Communist fire. In a battle that raged for 30 days and 29 nights, the 23rd Regiment of the U.S. Second Division wrested Heartbreak Ridge from a numerically superior enemy. In the 23rd Regiment, 1,650 men, about half the unit's combat troops, were killed or wounded.

The 9th Infantry Regiment suffered 200 more casualties in three days at the beginning of the battle. Probably 10,000 North Koreans were killed or wounded.

There were men who personally knocked out Communist machine-gun nests with grenades, men who carried wounded and dead out through fire; men who fought continuously until they were completely exhausted. And there were men who stood up in formation and attacked in formation through a barrage of enemy fire.

"There's scarcely been a battle like it—ever," said Colonel James Y. Adams, of Monterey, California, commander of the 23rd Regiment.

Sergeant Alonzo M. Sturdivant, of East Bernard, Kentucky, and Corporal James Skaggs, of Columbus, Ohio, were killed going into a Communist bunker with nothing in their hands but knives.

Private First Class Franklin D. Roton, of Sheridan, Wyoming, had been a medic just three and a half days. He was standing on the ridge, tending a wounded man. A North Korean tossed a grenade. Roton threw himself over his patient to shield him from the blast and was wounded by grenade fragments.
Coral Manley Hand, of Sanford, Michigan, continued to fire his machine gun while North Ko-
reans swarmed around his company's position. The North Koreans threw hand grenades and
burst into the bunker. The American gunner took aim and killed three of them. The North Koreans
werefreshly equipped withe-20mm anti-tank guns. They dropped hand grenades and thrown
them on the Americans. The North Koreans fired at the American soldiers, but the American
soldiers returned fire and drove the North Koreans back.

The North Koreans had turned a four-mile-long
ridge line 18 miles above Yanggug in eastern Korea
into a fortresse with 1,000 logs and dirt bunkers so
that even direct artillery hits sometimes bounced.
Off the ridge line was the highest point in Korea and
one in the center. There were countless small
bunkers or fingers, running off toward the valleys on
the east, and the west. Picture it as the spinal column of a fish, with hundreds of vertebrae.

Before the battle Heartbreak Ridge was covered
with trees and undergrowth. At the end it was bald except for a few yellow pine trees and
scrub一把.

The center, the tallest peak, was flat on top. Its
southern slope was steep and could be circumscribed
by the trees on the summit. The northern peak had a
narrow, steep cliff. The northernmost peak had a
narrow, steep cliff. This northernmost peak was
beheaded by the American soldiers. The soldiers
conquered all the approaches to Heartbreak Ridge. It took two and a half hours to climb the center peak of Heartbreak Ridge, and up to 10 hours to carry a
wounded man down the steep trail.

Heartbreak Ridge was part of the main line of
resistance the Communists established during
the Kearsarge truce talks. It commanded the major
Communist supply route. The North Koreans were
building bunkers and artillery pieces in the
Satara River Valley, east of Heartbreak Ridge. The
Communists had constructed mortars and machine
guns on the American soldiers.

Wewatched the build-up on Heartbreak Ridge
just south of the northernmost peak. It
got to the top of the ridge the next day, but for
days the Communists clung to the
bunkers inside the battalion's perimeter, and
there was a constant, stiff, hand-to-hand fight-
ing before the foothold on Heartbreak Ridge
was secured.

The Second Battalion tried a dozen ap-
proaches in an attempt to assault the center
peak of Heartbreak Ridge, but it came un-
der fire and any Communists on the
bunker line were killed with the American
soldiers.

Eventually it had to give up the at-
tempt. Direct fire from the American
soldiers destroyed most of the Communist
bunkers at the
Heartbreak Ridge

An American tank rumbles down a road on Heartbreak Ridge, passing a machine-gun position and litter for dead and wounded.

The southern end of Heartbreak Ridge, and a battalion of the 9th Regiment was able to take the southernmost peak with only four casualties.

But in the next three days the 9th Regiment lost 200 men from Communist mortar and artillery fire while barely holding on to the peak. The First Battalion, attacking from the southern peak north along the ridge line toward the center peak, was pushed back repeatedly by extremely savage Communist counterattacks. The casualties were heavy.

On the morning of September 15th the Communists overran Charlie Company of the First Battalion in a counterattack. The company had to withdraw, leaving behind two of its machine guns. The last time two of our men were seen, they were standing in front of Japanese machine guns, firing away with the Reds. Another man of Charlie Company killed a North Korean with an entrenching tool.

Three days later the Third Battalion got to the top of the northernmost peak in a night attack with flame throwers. At 1:00 A.M., September 19th, the Communists counterattacked. The Americans were still holding on to the summit at 6:00 A.M. and it looked as though they would be able to hold the hill. At 8:00 A.M., the enemy overran the American positions and killed everyone on the hill.

The First Battalion continued to attack the center peak from the south. On the fifth attempt, on September 23rd, three men crawled to the summit of the high mountain. By evening, 21 Americans were on the summit, but the North Koreans were still inside bunkers on the mountain top. With the weapons they had, the Americans could not get the Communists out. Early on the morning of September 24th, the Communists counterattacked. The Reds came out of the bunkers on the mountain top and from the ridges to the west. Few of the Americans got off the hill alive.

About 4:30 A.M., the North Koreans swept down from the mountain top and surrounded the remainder of the First Battalion on the southern slope. It took until dawn for the weary Americans to fight their way out of the trap, but at the end of the engagement there were 250 to 300 enemy dead in front of the First Battalion's positions.

On September 28th, Navy planes bombed, strafed and poured napalm on the center peak and the ridge west of it for a half hour. Then for a half hour the Second Division's artillery panned the peak. After the shelling, the French battalion launched an all-out assault on the peak from the north while the First Battalion attacked it from the south. The First Battalion was
Map shows scenes of heaviest fighting for Heartbreak Ridge, which U.S. and French troops took after several battles over Korea's worst terrain. In its tracks by intense enemy fire. In the first 15 minutes of their attack the French suffered 100 casualties. Six French soldiers tumbled down the steep northern slope of the mountain and spread a square of red cloth on the summit to indicate to Allied airmen that the ground was ours. Then they were killed by the Reds.

All three regiments of the Second Division began a limited objective attack the night of October 5th. The Americans and French in the 23rd Regiment assaulted the center peak of Heartbreak Ridge and the smaller ridge lines west of it. A tank task force of the 23rd drove up the Satae-ni Valley east of Heartbreak Ridge, drawing the bulk of Communist artillery fire away from the ridge itself. The 9th and 38th Regiments broke through the Mundung-ni Valley and the mountains west of Heartbreak Ridge. At 6:00 a.m., October 6th, the center peak of Heartbreak Ridge was ours.

"The thing that cracked it was the attack in the west," said Colonel Adams. "It left the enemy uncertain and unable to concentrate his fire on Heartbreak."

**Enemy Defends Ridge Savage**

The North Koreans had been to defend Heartbreak Ridge to the death and that was what they were doing. On the night of October 8th, the enemy made an extremely violent counterattack against the Third Battalion, holding positions west of the northernmost peak of Heartbreak Ridge. The worst of it lasted 20 minutes. Waves of North Koreans poured in on the Americans, screaming unintelligible words. The Communist attack was broken after the Americans had suffered 90 casualties and the North Koreans had suffered many hundreds.

Fifty tanks of the 72nd Tank Battalion and two companies of the 38th Infantry Regiment broke through Communist lines west of Heartbreak Ridge. The task force drove up the Mundung-ni Valley, flanking the Communists on the ridge. At four o'clock in the afternoon of October 11th, American and French troops of the 23rd assaulted the last Communist-held peak at the north end of Heartbreak Ridge. Allied artillery had a curtain of fire behind the hill to prevent the Communists from receiving reinforcements from the north, but Allied infantrymen moving up the flat, open ridge line toward the peak were pinned down by intense Communist fire. A Chinese soldier was captured, but it ap-
Heartbreak Ridge

peared that the bulk of Communists on Heartbreak Ridge were North Koreans to the last. American troops on the ridges west of the road nearly took off the last red-led hill, and at dawn on October 12th they linked up with American and French elements attacking from the south.

Colonel Adams was disgruntled. “We’ve got it!”

It was just a question of time before the last-ditching Communists, too, would surrender or die. There were still 35 North Koreans holed up in three bunkers on the summit, but they were surrounded by the American and French forces all around the rim of October 12th mopping up. At dawn on October 13th, the last Communist resistance on Heartbreak Ridge ceased.

The 23rd Regiment had fought in some of the bitterest battles of the Korean war: they fought at Kun-ri in November, they turned back the Chinese on the night of the last-ditching battle on February 9th, they were the blocking force in May when the Second Division almost singlehandedly repulsed the last-ditching North Koreans on the Eastern Front. But today they say that never have they seen nor heard of a battle as savage as the battle of Heartbreak Ridge. Colonel Adams had been present for the toughest fight in the 90-year history of the 23rd Regiment.

“The Red defense was fanatical,” Colonel Adams said. “They fought and died on the last day. We were to the last man. Never before had I seen such a defense. Never before had I seen such a battle.”

There have never been American troops who have fought harder. Those French are wonderful, too. Once they start, nothing stops them.”

General Young said, “The Communists were fanatical. The terrain was the most difficult in the world. The gallantry of the men and officers of the 23rd Regiment has been the outstanding feature.”

There will never be a complete list of the heroes of Heartbreak Ridge. Colonel Adams said 100 men deserved the Congressional Medal of Honor for their bravery. The names of many of them are unknown. There were 13 men who died in action, 64 were wounded, 26 officers who bled off the ridge on the stump of his leg after his foot had been shot away by Communist mortar fire. He said no to an officer who wanted to call for a stretcher. The stretcher-bearers were needed more urgently on the top of the ridge where the really seriously wounded were, he said.

Major General Butner Nickolas, of Clarkson, Tennessee, sent four times into Communist-held territory to evacuate wounded men of his platoon. He went from four to seven or eight hours without sleep. But the deadly fire searched for wounded men. The First Battalion ran out of medical supplies and the number of personnel of wounded men increased. The machine guns and mortars were gone. The men gathered their individual first-aid kits into a stockpile and stoked fires of a small amount of small arms and mortar fire the medics sat on top of the ground, taking care of the wounded.

Brigadier General Dychtwald from a Communist bunker three stories high stopped every American toward the center peak. On September 22nd, Lieutenant P. C. Mellow, of the Third Battalion, tried to control the road and take control of the peak of the bunker.

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Lieutenant Mitchell was killed by enemy mortar fire while placing a machine gun on the ridge in full view of the enemy.

"I think Mitchell was responsible in great part for the high morale of the men," said Captain William S. Jordan, of Santa Clara, California, commander of Baker Company.

"He was a superb battlefield leader. Every man in the First Battalion had blood in his eye because of the death of Lieutenant Mitchell."

A week before the battle ended, a helicopter landing spot was cleared on the center peak. Three Army helicopter pilots dodged Communist mortar and small-arms fire again and again to pick up the wounded. At times the Communists held positions within 300 yards of the landing area.

The 23d Regiment was being supplied on the isolated ridge partially by light L-19-type observation planes of the Second Division air section. During enemy fire, they swept in low over Heartbreak Ridge and dropped cases of C rations as close as they could to the Americans’ foxholes. Major Robert Bostright, of Santa Monica, California, was credited by grinning infantrymen with killing two North Koreans when he accidentally dropped a C ration box behind enemy lines.

One boy—who one knows his name—was shot in the stomach five times, but he kept charging forward into the enemy until he fell over.

Corporal Billy B. Burkhard, of Knoxville, Tennessee, was a cook who was killed because he volunteered to go up on the ridge to help out his buddies.

Private Clifford R. High, of Manteca, California, reorganized his platoon after the lieutenant that led it was killed. He assumed command on his own initiative and led the platoon to the top of the last Communist-held hill. Once during the action he was knocked unconscious by the concussion of a grenade explosion and was reported by his men as dead. He regained consciousness and led the platoon on to its objective.

"But getting down and saying this fellow was a hero or that fellow was a hero—gee, it’s hard," said Lieutenant Raymond Rid- dle, of Dearborn, Michigan. "You see so much. They’re doing it for their buddies. The men had spent so many lives and so many wounded getting what they held they just weren’t willing to give it up."

**THE END**

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Stan Carter, an Associated Press war cor-respondent, covered the bloody battle for Heartbreak Ridge from the time of the first American assault until victory. He spent more time on this front than any other correspondent. Carter, 27, was born in Los Angeles, was educated at the Univer-sity of Southern California and at Pomona College. He worked on four California papers, then joined the A.P. in 1949. He was assigned to the Korean war in March.