

A Forgotten Face from a Forgotten War

Having visited various museums around the country, there is always something unique that catches my attention a rifle picked up at the little big horn or a WWII helmet found in a barn in Normandy. I wonder "If that thing could talk the stories it could tell". As a collector of Ninth Infantry Regiment artifacts for the last 40 years, you learn a lot about the artifacts and the Regiment's history. How the item was used where it was used and in many cases who used it. I like to feel that each artifact in my collection tells a story. Whether it is a sack coat worn by Pvt. Smith in 1884 or Indianhead patch worn by Col. Kernan at Brest, France during WWII, each one tells you a little bit of the Regiment's history.

Perhaps some of the most touching artifacts and dear to one's heart are the ones that once belong to a valiant Manchu who died in the service of our country. This is the story of one such artifact in my collection. A few years back I came in possession of a West Point Uniform. The uniform once belonged to Edmund Lilly III, who entered the academy in 1946.

Edmund Lilley III known as Teddy to family and friends was born on May 26th, 1928 in Colon, Panama. His family was living there at the time, because, his father Edmund Lilly Jr. was then stationed at Fort Davis, Canal Zone. His father was career army who moved around the world, so as Edmond grew up he became your typical "army brat" getting his formal education here and there. In January of 1941 he moved to Manila with his family, while his father was stationed at Fort McKinley serving with the 57th Infantry Philippine Scouts. In May of 1941 with tension mounting in the Far East, the family was evacuated back to the United States where they moved to Fayetteville, South Carolina, his father's birthplace. In May of 1942 news came that the Philippines had fallen and his father was now a POW of the Japanese.

Growing up in Fayette, Edmund enjoyed hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. He participated in sports during his high school years. In the fall of 1945 he entered The Citadel at Charleston, South Carolina. He was a member of St. John's Episcopal Church a for a time considered the Episcopal ministry as a career. He then decided he would try for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He entered West Point in 1946, where he was a member of Company 1-2. During his term as a Cadet on a trip to Fort Bliss he met his future bride on a blind date, Mary Alma Russ.

On June 6, 1950, Edmund graduated from West Point, the next day he married Alma. While on honeymoon leave with his lovely new wife, things were starting to take a turn for the worst in Korea. Now a Second Lieutenant in the army, the young Edmond call his unit the 2nd Infantry Division and notified them of his location, several days later his leave was canceled and he reported to Fort Lewis, Washington.

By the end of July, Lt. Lilly was assigned to Company B, 9th Infantry and sent to Korea. The entire 2nd Infantry Division was slowly arriving in Korea and over the first couple of weeks in August it entered combat piecemeal fashion. For the 9th Infantry (RCT) and the entire Division things did not look good against what seem to be unstoppable assaults by enemy troops.

On September 3rd, the 9th RCT minus the 3rd Battalion was on an isolated ridge (Hill 209) overlooking the Naktong River in the Yongson Sector. Under a fierce attack by the 2nd, 4th, 9th, 10th North Korean Rifle

Divisions and the 14th and 16th Mechanized Division. Under this heavy assault the Regiment was driven from its positions but Lt. Lilly's platoon did not withdraw, to this day it is not known why. One thing is known that, Lt. Lilly performed his duty under very intense automatic weapons fire and explosions he calmly walked among his men and encouraged them to put up a valiant defense against insurmountable odds. The area was over run and it would be weeks before the fate of Lt. Lilly and his men would be known, his body was never found, he was twenty-two years old at the time of his death.

According to U.S. Army Korea officials, Sept. 1-15 were the bloodiest 15 days of the war, and many of the units stationed along the river suffered similarly heavy casualties in the following hours and days as the enemy seized key defensive positions. In fact, the North Koreans sliced the division in two and broke nearly all communications between headquarters and many frontline units.

Lt. Lilly would remain at his post for the next fifty-three years, it was not until 2003 that his remains were found and returned home. He was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart posthumously for heroic actions on that lonely isolated ridge. The Korean War has often been called the "Forgotten War" perhaps to some it is. Yet to the family and friends of men like Lt. Edmond (Teddy) Lilly III, it will never be a "Forgotten War" and most important we must not let it be a forgotten face. On September 3rd remember Lt. Lilly and the brave men from the 9th Infantry who gave their lives 67 years ago on a forgotten ridge in a forgotten war, lest we forget.

Al Castillo



2nd Lieutenant Edmund Jones
Lilly III

In his 1950 class photo at
West Point.

West Point