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AP US History

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King High Remembers- Mr. Bill McInroe

Mr. Bill Ray McInroe was born in Stevensville, Texas on February 8, 1931. In 1950, at the age of 19, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. He left from Camp Pendleton, California, in that same year and landed in Inchon, Korea on September 15, 1950. He was part of the First tank company "13" 1st tank battalion 1st marine division, and after landing in Inchon traveled to Seoul, beneath the 38th parallel in South Korea. There, he participated in the siege of Seoul and the Seoul train station. At Seoul, he was part of a crew driving an M26 Sheridan with a 90mm Gun. He was fired upon by enemy anti- tank and anti-aircraft guns, but they were mostly ineffective at stopping the heavily armored tanks. The only incident his group experienced was when one tank's engine compartment was damaged by enemy guns, and the M26 Sheridan next to his caught fire as a result of the damaged engine compartment and leaked fuel. He was sent in the line of fire to put it out with a fire extinguisher from his vehicle, but escaped unscathed.

Following the battle at Seoul, he moved northward to the infamous Chosin Reservoir. The primary American machine gun assigned to the tank at Chosin was the 1928 Model A1 Thomson submachine gun. During this brutal fight (Mr. McInroe was stationed at Chosin from November 27 to December 6th), in the winter of 1950, it was often so cold that their firearms and the vehicles would lock up. Mr. McInroe noted that the hydraulic fluid in the tanks and other machinery would freeze and halt progress. According to Mr. McInroe, the cold was almost

inescapable, but waterproof parkas helped the soldiers immensely, especially in snowstorms. His battalion and their tanks were lined up along the road. One side of the road was lined by trees, and the other was flanked by a large, stony berm. Here, Chinese soldiers came out from the trees and ambushed the line in near darkness. Mr. McInroe and his tank crew were forced up the berm, where one tank track became damaged and unusable. They had no choice but to abandon the vehicle. They were forced to dismantle the weapons and destroy what they could of the tank before escaping, in order to prevent the Chinese soldiers from stealing the tank.

After escaping from Chosin, Mr. McInroe became one of the “Chosin Few” survivors of the battle, as many others had perished. South of Chosin, he was traveling through a valley and suspected minefield, with Chinese mortars in the surrounding hills. This occurred on June 22, 1951, a few months after the ordeal at the reservoir. He was assigned to help retrieve damaged tanks. The model of the tanks he was helping to recover was the M26 Sheridan tank. The retrieval vehicle was a retriever tank on a M4A3E8 frame (WWII type.) In the minefield, the tank was attached to the rear of the retrieval unit, a large tracked vehicle with booms atop it, and was towed away. However, although the area had been declared clear of mines by the engineers in the project, the Chinese had placed a crude mine and extra explosives deeper than normal, so that it could not be detected by metal detectors. When the tank, which put more pressure than normal on the ground while being towed passed over the mine, it exploded. He was inside of the tank at the moment it passed over the mine, and recalled that his friend was just about to light a cigarette (lighters are discouraged on explosive- filled tanks) before the mine went off. He was thrown out of the tank, and experienced lacerations over his body. A fellow marine, Cpl. Pope, had his leg blown off in the explosion, and another experienced serious shell-shock. The men were taken to a hospital a few miles away. His friend who had underwent shell-shock passed

away, succumbing to a lack of blood flow to vital organs. Another tank crewman, last name Markel, died the next day from injuries. Later, Mr. McInroe would receive a Purple Heart for injuries sustained in the tank explosion.

In other aspects of war life, he described life on a military base during the Vietnam War. Barbed wire fencing would surround the facility, and every night men would walk the perimeter and place claymore mines that would destroy any enemy attempting to raid or invade the base during the night. Machine guns lined the perimeter, each with overlapping ranges of fire to shoot enemy soldiers in case of an attack.

After the Korean war, Mr. McInroe served two tours in Vietnam. He did not see as much direct conflict as he had in Vietnam, but served in the tank division and with the Combined Action platoon. After leaving Vietnam, He would continue to aid the military in training officers in military strategy, recruiting Marines, and training Marines in tank strategy and driving.

Following Vietnam, Mr. McInroe worked at a recruitment office in Seattle for three years. Here, he worked to recruit men for the Marine Corps. He continued in this area for several years, across the United States. He ended up working in various locations, including Washington state and Idaho. In training recruits and officers, he would instruct them on how to present arguments, composed of an attention gainer, body, argument, and conclusion. Mr. McInroe He spent a considerable amount of time in Japan after the war, especially in Okinawa. In Korea, he traveled to Inchon, Daegu, Seoul, and various other cities.

In 1970, Mr. McInroe ended his service with the United States Marine Corps. He had served for a grand total of twenty- three years, eleven months, and eight days. He is decorated with several patches and medals, including the historic Purple Heart. He also has the distinction of having served in two wars: Vietnam and Korea. He was a survivor of the Battle of Chosin

Reservoir, and was involved in the 1951 siege of Seoul. Before he retired, Mr. McInroe worked with the Veteran's Administration (VA) in the VA Regional Office in Los Angeles from 1970 to 1984. He was training coordinator for all of southern California and helped Veterans of all Cold War- era wars receive benefits. Today, he lives in southern California and is retired.