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After All Was Quiet on the Front

Korea was where Henry Harden, Jr. headed when he was drafted into the Army, but the military life was not anything new to Mr. Harden. He had attended Carlisle Military School, from which he graduated in 1947. Mr. Harden spent his time in B Company when he first arrived at Carlisle; however, after expressing interest in learning how to play the trumpet, he spent the rest of his time at Carlisle in Band Company where he became a bugler. Mr. Harden loved playing reveille, explaining that “I enjoyed being in the band a whole lot because I loved playing the trumpet.” After graduation he and four of his close friends from school went to Savannah to join an artillery unit.

Mr. Harden stayed in that unit and transferred to Philadelphia to go to engraving school. After he finished, he moved down to Charleston and started working for the W.P. Cart Company, a Silversmith and Jeweler on King Street downtown. In 1950, Mr. Harden was drafted to fight in the Korean War. He did his training at Camp Polk, Louisiana, and then boarded his troop ship, the *General William Weigel*. They went from the Gulf of Mexico to the Panama Canal, which Mr. Harden said “was a real experience.” He told me about how they camped out at a lake near the Panama Canal: “We were told that that would be the last fresh water shallow we would get

until we got to Japan.” His unit then arrived in Hokkaido, Japan, where they spent most of the time training on amphibious landings and how to use the recoilless rifle.



Source: www.history.army.mil

It was the recoilless rifle that was key in Mr. Harden’s artillery unit, but no one really knew anything about it. So Mr. Harden, being handy with a pencil and paper, drew a simple schematic of the recoilless rifle for the men in his platoon so that they could identify

all of its parts and understand how it functioned. To explain the importance of the recoilless rifle, Mr. Harden described how versatile the weapon was: “You could fire it from the shoulder in a standing position or a sitting position, and it had a built-in tripod to it that you could lay on the ground and adjust the elevation.” From his discussion, I could sense how impressed Mr. Harden was with the recoilless rifle—I am sure many others during the war were as well.

In the interview, Mr. Harden told me that he and his platoon were given at least one good meal a day. He remembered that the first time they got ice cream on the frontlines, it melted into the mashed potatoes. But Mr. Harden didn’t mind. “It was good!” he said as he laughed.

Some days, however, all wasn’t good. Mr. Harden then went on to tell me of a major defensive position that his platoon had to hold, which was Hill 290 or, as Mr. Harden, called it, “T-Bone Hill.” He then shared with me the story of how the Koreans tried taking the hill in the night, how his platoon held them off by keeping constant artillery fire and illuminating the hill with rounds until it was clear they had successfully held the position.

By the end of the interview, Mr. Harden was telling me about the last time he was on the frontline, and how grateful he was that it was uneventful. He told me about how he and his men celebrated on the train ride home, that they cleared out a liquor store and bought watermelons off the back of a cart. Although he was clearly relieved to be going home, Mr. Harden emphasized to me the importance of his service. He told me that he was glad that he served his country and how proud he was to do so. Although Mr. Harden was drafted to fight the war, his attitude toward it and how he handled himself and his men while in Korea are awe-inspiring. I am glad that I got to hear Mr. Harden's story, and I know others will enjoy hearing it, too.