

A Man is Not Dead Until He is Forgotten

The Story of PFC Darrell Thomas Hendricks

Marines die, that's what we're here for. But the Marine Corps lives forever. And that means YOU live forever.
GySgt. R. Lee Ermey,

Finishing boot camp Darrell Hendricks of Albany, Ga. was assigned to the Weapons Company of the Second Battalion Fifth Marines (2/5) First Marines in Korea. The 2/5 is the most highly decorated battalion in the history of the Marine Corps. Their motto, "Retreat, Hell!" comes from the French trenches of World War I, when Marine officer, Lloyd W. Williams, was ordered to retreat and shouted, "Retreat? Hell, we just got here!"

For four days in March 1953 the 2/5 was about to live up to its motto.

The Chinese were massing for an all-out assault on the Marine combat outposts named Reno, Carson and Vegas. Referred to as the Nevada Cities, they were located north of Seoul atop three strategic crests near Panmunjom.

Carson was the westernmost outpost, located 800 yards from the Main Line of Resistance (MLR). Reno was situated in the center. It was the farthest from the MLR, about 1,600 yards, and the most difficult to defend because of rough terrain.

Just south of Reno was an area called the Reno Block. Occupied only at night, it was established to stop an enemy drive on the MLR if Reno fell. Vegas, the highest of the outposts, was to the right of Reno and approximately 1,300 yards in front of the MLR. The cities were held by composite platoons of rifle and weapons company personnel.

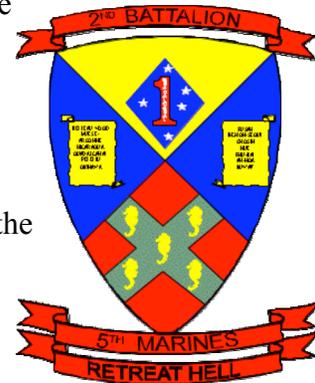


In his book, *The Final Crucible: Marines in Korea, 1953*, author Lee Ballenger wrote: "The location of the Nevada Cities was a problem. They were surrounded by higher ground held by the enemy, and each one depended on the others for flank defense. If one outpost fell, the others were as vulnerable as a stack of dominos in a hurricane. As March waned, the winds began to blow."

At 1900 on March 26, 1953 all three outposts were blanketed by a barrage of Chinese artillery, mortar and small arms fire. It was a clear warm night with a half moon rising as the Chinese 358th Regiment stormed the Nevada Cities outposts "like Tartar hordes

.from the steppes of Mongolia." 1st Lt. John F. Ingalls, of C Co., 1st Bn., 5th Marines, recalled: "As the bombard intensified, the men withdrew into the bunkers. Ammunition shortages were a problem, and I ordered them to fix bayonets." In the first 24 hours 31,385 rounds of incoming artillery pounded the outposts. Simultaneously, company size attacks were carried out on outposts Berlin and East Berlin located east of the Nevada Cities.

Chinese counter battery fire was directed toward the Marine artillery emplacements and the service roads leading up to the Nevada Cities. The roads were already muddy quagmires due to torrential rains in the days preceding the attack. With the mud and artillery fire the roads were deemed impassable forcing relief columns to navigate the rice paddies and crawl up the muggy slopes to the outposts. Indirect fire and Chinese ambush patrols was taking a toll on the reinforcements and the columns were temporarily called off and the Marines returned to the MLR.



In hand to hand combat the Marines were forced off the crest of Vegas. Carson was holding its ground. Meanwhile, at Reno, Hendricks and his fellow Marines were not so lucky. Chinese soldiers overran the outpost in short order. Survivors retreated into caves. However, the enemy quickly began sealing up the caves.

At approximately 2320 hours on the 26th, D Company of the 2/5 led the assault to retake Vegas. "Advancing against almost insurmountable odds, they inched their way ahead. Forward elements got within 150 yards of the top of Vegas but terrific casualties forced the company to stop and hold the ground they had taken"

Following D Company up the side of Vegas, E Company started receiving such heavy losses they too had to stop and moved into D Company positions.

JULY 27th

In the early morning hours the Second Battalion of the Seventh Marines (2/7) was placed under operational control of the Fifth Marines. Approaching Vegas they came under intense machine gun fire with incoming mortar and artillery rounds at a rate of two to three rounds per second. By nightfall they had relieved D and E Companies near the top of Vegas.

JULY 28th

At 0400 the 2/7 renewed their assault on Vegas. The attack failed and they had to move back to their positions 150 yards from the crest. The 2/7 then called for close air support from the First Marine Aircraft Wing. In just 23 minutes the Wing dropped 28 tons of bombs on the crest. This lethal tonnage was dropped with the 2/7 only 150 yard down slope. Not a single Marine was killed or wounded.

Then in the early afternoon E Company 2/5, returning from the MLR counterattacked Vegas. Sheer tenacity and grit got them to the top, in hand to hand combat they “literally dug the Reds out of their defenses.”

When the three platoons of E Company retook Vegas they were down to a total of 30 men (eight men, seven men and 15 men respectively). Later that night, F Company, now down to two platoons, relieved E Company atop Vegas. At 2000, Vegas started getting incoming rounds and the Chinese were attacking their flank from the Reno site. Major Benjamin Lee, now commanding Vegas called for artillery on all perimeters. The Chinese sustained heavy losses in the bombardment but by 2130 they again held the high ground. Lee reported that F Company was “surrounded by force.”

At the same time Vegas was under renewed attack, Carson came under an assault but the enemy was driven off with Carson sustaining minimal losses.

“ . . . the highest damn beachhead in Korea.”

The Commanding Officer of the Fifth Marines, Colonel Lewis (Silent Lew) Walt, reacting to the flanking of Vegas from Reno, declared Reno untenable and ordered the site destroyed. Reno was pulverized by bombs and artillery neutralizing the site, denying its use by both the Marines and the Chinese.

JULY 29th

Back on Vegas, F Company still surrounded by the enemy, an incoming round of 120mm mortar killed the site commander, Lee, and F Company commander, Captain Ralph Waltz. At 0500 the Marine firebase delivered a three minute artillery barrage to Vegas perimeters. Taking advantage of the artillery, E Company 2/7 relieved F Company who returned to the MLR, reorganized and were sent to Berlin and East Berlin outposts.

Later heavy rains set in as the Chinese retook Vegas only to lose it again to the determined Marines.

JULY 30th

F Company 2/5, returning from Berlin and East Berlin, relieved E Company on the crest of Vegas. Corporal George Demars commenting on his return to Vegas said, “The guys were like rabbits digging in.” These Marines were determined to stay this time and stay they did. This determination did not escape 2nd Lt. Irvin Maizlish, commenting on how deep the Marines were digging he said, “We were going to hold this ground and the spirits were unusually high.” Smiling he said, “I even heard some of the men singing the Marine Corps hymn as they were digging.”

They did hold Vegas. The Chinese attacks diminished in intensity and finally stopped.

The Chinese 358th Regiment was decimated by the Marines sealing the destruction of the entire Regiment.

Marines had endured their bloodiest combat to date on the Jamestown Line. Looking back on the horrendous fighting for "The Nevada Cities," one rifleman called the crest of Vegas "the highest damn beachhead in Korea."

GEARING UP FOR KOREA

The Korean War saw the Marine Corps expand from 75,000 regulars to a force, by the end of the conflict in 1953, of 261,000 Marines, most of who were Reservists. Complete mobilization of the organized ground reserve had been accomplished in just 53 days, from 20 July to 11 September 1950.

THE AFTERMATH

At the conclusion of the Korean War in July 1953, a total of 42 Marines had been awarded the Nation's highest military award, the Medal of Honor; 26 of these awards were posthumous. In addition, 221 Navy Crosses, and more than 1,500 Silver Stars were awarded to Marines. Of the awards cited above, Marine reservists received 13 Medals of Honor, 50 Navy Crosses, and over 400 Silver Stars.

The war in Korea had been a costly one. Marine Corps casualties from August 1950 to July 1953 were: died 4,506, wounded 26,038, a total of 30,544. The Nevada Cities campaign resulted in 156 Marines killed, 801 wounded and 19 captured.

A 1953 issue of Leatherneck Magazine described the Nevada Cities Campaign, "When the great battles fought by Marines are written, history will record the heroic struggle for three tiny outposts in Korea. These hilltop battles, fought with indescribable fury, took their place beside Belleau Wood, Bloody Ridge, Suribachi and Chosin."

Hendricks never came home from the crest of Reno. For him and those that were "promoted to glory" during the Nevada Cities Campaign, they are with us today due to the fidelity of the Corps and all the Devil Dogs that came before them and those that march beside them into eternity.

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