

6th Medium Tank Battalion, 24th Infantry Division

by T/SGT Thomas A. Lyke, Second Platoon, 6th Tank Battalion, Korea, 1950-53



Second Platoon, Dog Company, 6th Medium Tank Battalion, 24th Infantry Division, Pusan, S.K., July 1950. 1. Roger Jelkins, 2. Bernard Williams, 3. Wayne Gee, 4. George Lee, 5. Lareno Jimenez (POW), 6. Samuel Mosthere, 7. Michael Martin (POW), 8. Robert Dotson, 9. John Trautman (KIA), 10. Hayward Hodges, 11. Joseph Roy, 12. Albert Myers, 13. Ray Maxwell, 14. Carlton Slider (POW), 15. Louis Lehman, **16. Thomas Lyke (POW)**, 17. Donald Harrell, 18. Harry Griffin, 19. Bobby DeGraw (POW), 20. Robert Alexander, 21. Milton Jenkins, 22. Steve Wallace, 23. Frank Hand, 24. Plt. Ldr. 1st Lt. Kenneth Sharp, 25. Pok, and 26. Plt. Sgt. Joseph Kirkland.

I coaxed my mother that if she would sign for me, I would enlist in the Army, even though I had just turned 16 years of age on October the 5th, 1948. She laughed but said if I could convince the recruiting SGT, she would sign. I altered my birth certificate to show I was born in 1931 instead of 1932. The recruiter accepted it, my mother signed, and I left for Fort Knox, KY, for basic in January 1949.

After basic, I was shipped to Fort Hood, Texas, for advanced armor training with the 6th Medium Tank Battalion, 2nd Armor Division.

I went home on furlough for Christmas of 1949, at which time I met my future wife, Charlotte A. Hooch. I re-



Cpl. Tom Lyke, Chipyong-ni, N.K., Feb. 16, 1951.

turned to Fort Hood to continue training in January 1950.

In July 1950, the 6th Tank Battalion was ordered to Korea, where we were attached to the 24th Infantry Division.

All the UN had left of Korea when we arrived was a 35 mile perimeter around Pusan.

We started our push north in September and joined the Marines and the 7th Division in Seoul; then on to the North Korea capitol of Pyongyang (although officially assigned to the 24th Division, the 6th Tank Bn. sup-



ported many other units in the Korean War).

I was wounded for the first time north of Pyongyang at Anjou, North Korea. The first



L to R: Kirkland, Lyke, DeGraw, Hodges and Lehman.

elements of the Chinese attacked us that day with 120MM mortars. It was Oct. 26, 1950, 21 days after my 18th birthday. I was evacuated to Tokyo General Hospital.

Along with five of my friends, I volunteered to return to Korea; we wanted to stay with our outfit because we had been together since basic.

It was a whole new war when we rejoined Dog Company in the first week of January 1951. The UN forces were retreating to a defense line they could hold. We fought hard to hold our positions. The 6th Tank was used all over place, being attached to anybody that needed armor support.

We were in support of the 24th Division and the 6th Republic of Korea Forces at
Page 12 Vol 62(2) Spring 2008

Kapyong, Korea, when the Chinese started their spring offensive on the 25th of April, 1951.

The Chinese and North Korean forces broke through our defenses and cut off elements of the units supporting the 24th Div and South Korean troops.

The 6th Tank Battalion stayed as rear guard to allow the UN troops to withdraw to another defensible line.

Dog Company, 6th Tank, got word of a group of wounded Airborne Rangers who were surrounded in a draw. We took five tanks from the second platoon and went in to get them. We found 65 rangers, loaded them on our tanks, and brought them out. From there, they were loaded in trucks and escorted to the rear.

The second Platoon was asked to stay as rear guard, as other elements were still straggling through.

The 5th Regimental Combat Team had the 555 Triple Nickel Artillery Battalion, which was also cut off. They had a truck loaded with 155mm artillery shells blocking the road.

Our tank retriever, which had been towing one of our

disabled tanks back for repair, tried to push the truck off the road so the rest of the column could get through.

Unfortunately, the truck ex-



D-10, "Dagwood," my tank, which was hit on the night of April 25, 1951. Photo taken on April 29, by other elements of Dog Company, which retook the area. April 29 was also the day I was taken prisoner some six miles from this spot.

ploded, and blocked the escape of all other vehicles. During the night the Chinese were able to move in close enough to knock out all of our tanks, half tracks and trucks, including my tank.

I was again wounded and knocked out. When I came to, things were much quieter, and all I saw were dead bodies – ours and theirs.

I moved out and headed south later that night, but I had to seek refuge in a cave when faced with a barrage from our own artillery. I tried to leave when daylight came, but there were enemy troops all around. I went back and burrowed deeper into the cave.

As the day went on, I heard noises outside. Three South Korean soldiers entered. They suggested we wait till



night and try to move south. I fell asleep, and when I awoke the South Koreans were gone.

I tried to move out, but the valley was swarming with Chinese; I returned to the cave. Four days passed, and I needed water and food. Trying to slip through the Chinese lines, I went up a hill and spotted a stream on the other side. I got a drink, but when I started to move, the Chinese were all over me. This was the 29th day of April 1951.

I spent the next 855 days as a prisoner of the Chinese and North Korean Communists. I went from 157 pounds to 87 pounds in a matter of 2 months.

I was moved on several occasions to different camps, because the Chinese claimed I had a reactionary attitude.

One of my dearest friends in captivity was William Deer With Horns, of the 19th Regiment, 24th Division. He, two other POWs, and I escaped in July of 1951, but we were recaptured shortly thereafter. Deer, as we called him, died the following night from his beating.

After the peace talks began in July of 1951, the treatment and conditions improved somewhat; I weighed 105 pounds upon my release on 28 August 1953. I arrived home on the 19th day of September, 1953, for a furlough with my family. I was discharged on the 24th day of October, 1953.

Charlotte and I were married
The TARO LEAF

on October 1st, 1954. We have two children, Thomas J. Lyke and Charlene K Floyd.

I have been blessed to have had the privilege to serve my



Tom Lyke on August 29, 1953, the day after his release by the Communists. Red Cross Photo.

fellow EX-POWs and veterans in several organizations:

- National President of the Korean War EX-POW Association, 3 years;
- A member of the Board of Directors of the Korean War EX-POW Association, 13 years;
- Disabled American Veterans, National Korean War EX-POW Chairman, 2 years;
- Disabled American Veterans, Texas POW/MIA Chairman, 3 years;
- Texas State Commander of VUMS (Veterans of Under Age Military Service – for people who lied about their age to join the Services under the age of 17).

MILITARY MEDALS AND



RIBBONS

- Bronze Star Medal
- Purple Heart Medal with 2 Oak Leaves
- POW Medal
- Good Conduct Medal
- National Defense Medal
- Korean Service Medal with 9 battle stars
- United Nations Medal
- Korean War Service Medal
- Presidential Unit Citation with Oak leaf
- Meritorious Unit Commendation
- Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation

Tom Lyke

Apt 301

2801 FM 2004 Road

Texas City, TX 77591

(409) 935-8595

lykekoreapow@msn.com

Editor Note: This was the end of the article from Tom, but now for just some of “The rest of the story.”

Tom Lyke is an Honorary Ranger with the Ranger Infantry Companies (Airborne) Association of the Korean War.

Ranger Rex G. Masters, President R.I.C.A., in a letter congratulating Tom on his being so selected, says: “Thanks to you and your Tank Company there are Ranger survivors to tell about it (the Korean War)!”

Several paragraphs of Tom’s nominating letter, written by Joseph C. Watts, Jr., are appropriate here. (begin quotes)

There were many people and units that supported the

Rangers. How many of them were in there with their support so close they opened themselves to capture? Tom Lyke of D Co., 6th Tank Battalion (M46, 90mm, Patton's) did.

The 6th Tank Battalion was assigned to the 24th Division in Korea. Their Commander, Col John S. "Red" Growdon, was a WWII tank commander under General Patton in the ETO. General Ridgeway knew his reputation for firepower and shock—action. For instance: on 19 October 1950 the 6th was attached to the ROK force when they took PYONGYANG in an envelopment from the northeast while to the south the 1st Cavalry Division, 5th Regt., waited for boats to become available so they could cross the TAEDONG river and take that city (Appleman).

Elements of the 6th then moved 25 miles north of PYONGYANG, near SUKCHON—

SUNCHON. They were on the DZ to welcome the 187th RCT as they parachuted in on 20 Oct. (Blair).

Consider the number of times Tom Lyke and his D Co., 6 TK Bn, extricated Rangers or came to their aid:

- February '51, CHIPYONG, 1st Ranger Company and the 23d Infantry Regiment:

On 15 February 1951, the 5th Cavalry Regt task force CROMBEZ, named after their CO who ordered Infantry to ride tanks through a CCF and NKPA gauntlet, used D Company, 6th Tanks, to point a breakthrough to the 1st Rangers at CHIPYONG-NI. The 6th Tanks were detached from 24th Div and attached to the 2nd Div. and further attached to TF CROMBEZ. D Co. lost their Company Commander, Capt Johnnie M. Hiers that day. The 23d Infantry, commanded by Col Paul Freeman, and 1st Ranger Company had given the CCF their first defeat in this engagement. Thanks to the 6th Tanks they survived to tell about it.

- March '51, MUNSAN-NI, 2nd & 4th Rangers: On 23 March 1951, D Co., 6th TK Bn. was the armored component of Task Force Growdon with elements of the 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Division, as part of Operation

Tomahawk that broke through to 2nd & 4th Ranger Companies (187th was there too) at MUNSAN-NI (Appleman).

- April '51, west of KAPYONG, 8th Company and the 5th Infantry: On 25 April 1951, D Company lost seven tanks when Hqs., 24 Division assigned the 6th Tank Battalion the mission of penetrating to, and the exfiltration of, 8th Rangers near KAPYONG. D Company lost five tanks that day, an entire Platoon, and another two that evening. If it hadn't been for D Company, the sixty-five 8th Company survivors may not have. The severely wounded Company Commander, Jim Herbert, was one of those that got out on D Company tanks (Appleman). Ten Rangers and several tankers were captured, Tom Lyke included.

I trust this will assist you and the Ranger Congress in determining that the next

Honorary Ranger, Tom Lyke, does meet the criteria.

Appleman, Roy E., Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army (Retired). *DISASTER IN KOREA, The Chinese Confront MacArthur*. 4th Ed, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989.
Blair, Clay. *THE FORGOTTEN WAR, America In Korea 1950—1953*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday Inc., 1987.

End Quote.



Tom Lyke receiving the Honorary Airborne Ranger award; from left: Bill Rhatigan, Lou Lucasick, and Tom Lyke.

