

Presented By The Wisconsin American Legion Foundation's
Celebration of Freedom

STORIES OF HONOR

Stories of risk, sacrifice, duty and honor.

There is a saying in the U.S. Marine Corps – once a Marine, always a Marine. And, despite James Jolly's numerous near-death experiences while serving in the Korean War, he remains a living, breathing example of a Marine, personified.

The King resident grew up the eldest of six siblings in Lapeer, MI. Eager to escape a life of poverty, he found a loophole that would allow him to enlist in the U.S. Military when he turned 17. Having always admired the Marines, Jolly joined the U.S. Marine Corps right out of 10th grade. He never even heard of Korea and knew very little about Asia. Yet, he was about to risk his life for a cause and people he knew nothing about.

Jolly went straight to Parris Island, S.C. for his basic training.

"I liked the training; our instructors had just come back from World War II," Jolly said. "They told us, 'We're going to train you to make the other soldiers die for their country instead of you dying for yours.'"

Jolly and his fellow soldiers headed to the Mediterranean Sea for six months, then back to Camp LeJeune, where they practiced jumping out of a helicopter. "That was a new thing at the time," Jolly said. "Then they told us we were going to Korea."

After WWII, Korea was split into North and South Korea. North Korea was under the influence of Communist Soviet Union and China, and they had begun advancing southward with the goal of taking back South Korea. Not wanting to see Communism spread, the United Nations, led mostly by the U.S., joined South Korea in the fight to stave off the spread of Communism into South Korea.

Jolly said his regiment had been told a battle had broken out between north and south Korea, and that he and his fellow soldiers were going there to help the south.

"We were all excited; we had already been in the Marines for two years," Jolly said. "We thought we were prepared."

Jolly served as a "very good" machine gunner with the 1st Marine

It took almost three full days before Jolly and the others met their first heavy resistance.

"We had a battalion of North Koreans with three tanks come in the morning," Jolly said. "We captured one tank; the other two we think headed back for Seoul. Our unit captured the very first T-34. The tank was shooting over our heads and ended up backing into a deep ditch, so it was ours."

They couldn't go much further though.

The river was too deep to wade and all the bridges had been blown out. They had to wait for Army ducks to arrive to get across. Once they did, they experienced house-to-house, building-to-building fighting all the way through Seoul.

Once the U.S. had taken back Seoul from the Chinese for South Korea, Jolly said the war was basically over with at that time. They had pushed the Chinese back into North Korea.

They received orders from General MacArthur to advance to the Yalu River, which borders North Korea and China, based on intelligence he received that the Chinese wouldn't likely intervene. MacArthur said based on the intelligence information he received, the Chinese wouldn't have more than 50,000 soldiers. In fact, more than 260,000 Chinese soldiers had already crossed the Yalu. It was a mistake that would later cost MacArthur his job.

Eventually they were told to retreat, but given they were still surrounded by the Chinese, dealing with a blizzard and negative temperatures in the double digits, escape didn't seem likely.

"We thought we were going to stay there," Jolly said. "The bridge was blown out and our engineers had to rebuild or we couldn't bring our dead and wounded."

The night they decided to finally break out, it was 40 degrees below zero in Kothari. The clouds broke open enough for a single star to shine through. By that time, Jolly said, out of 15,000 Marines, 3,000 were dead, 6,000 had frostbite and 5,000 were wounded. "When the star broke through, we thought it was a miracle," Jolly said. "We knew it would still be a tough fight to get out. But it gave us the strength to get out. Almost all of us saw it; it was so wonderful. We thought it was a Christmas miracle. It sounds nuts, but it happened."

Jolly has three purple hearts as a tribute to his bravery. He was shot on two separate occasions and hit with a mortar shell in the leg. "They were lousy shots, luckily," Jolly said.

One hit he sustained was from a mortar shell. "I didn't know I got hit on that one," Jolly said.

Another shot Jolly simply refers to as a "flesh wound."

The worse was when Jolly got shot in the face; it was March, 1951. "That one got my attention," he said. It happened when Jolly's machine gun jammed and he had to climb out of his foxhole to fix it. The bullet went through his face under his eye and through his neck and out his shoulder. He went to a M.A.S.H. (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) unit for a month and then sent back to the front lines. "My unit and I were well trained," Jolly said. "We all thought Marines could walk on water. You never

think it's going to happen. I wanted to go back, really. They bandaged me up, and told me to try to keep it clean and I was on my way back."

After the war Jolly returned to the U.S. and worked as a carpenter for much of his career at Montgomery Ward. He met and married the love of his life, whom he lost about a decade ago.

He moved into a veteran's home in King, and all but gave up on life. That was until a woman named Amber Nikolai started doing outreach for the facility. She started talking to the residents and learning their stories, hoping to use them as a way to drum up interest in the facility. That's when she met Jolly.

It was through her guidance Jolly began opening up about his experiences and got help for his PTSD. He speaks to other veterans with the hope that they too will open up and share their experiences as well. Speaking to other veterans gave Jolly his purpose back.

Although all of the veterans who fought at Chosin were invited back to South Korea by the South Korean Government, Jolly just can't get himself there.

Like many military veterans, Jolly lives with post-traumatic stress disorder. For him, it reveals itself in the dreams he has. Specifically, Jolly thinks about Chosin and his time in Kothari. His unit was on its way to relieve another that was being overrun. They loaded up on trucks and tanks, but the convoy never made it. Thousands of Chinese came out of the hills and took out the middle of their convoy. "That's when I lost most of my platoon," Jolly said. "I saw them dying beside me. And sometimes I still can."



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Chris Kroeze**

Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Dog Co., which was a machine gun platoon, under the Marine Corps famous officer, Lewis "Chesty" Puller.

According to Military.com, Lt. General Lewis "Chesty" Puller was a "Marine's Marine" and a true leatherneck "with the scars to prove it."

"He was one of the greatest Marines I ever met," Jolly said. "He was always on the line with you."

Jolly said he encountered Puller only once first-hand, during the battle at Chosin Reservoir. "He jumped into my machine gun pit, tapped me on shoulder, and said, 'You have a Chinese machine gun about 200 yards away,'" Jolly said. "And we took care of that."

Puller had a soft spot – his men.

"When we were totally surrounded, he was told by Gen. MacArthur to evacuate," Jolly said. "He wouldn't. (The officers) stayed with us. The Marines didn't like MacArthur."

Once they got their orders, Jolly and his regiment were sent to Incheon, a city in northwestern South Korea, bordering Seoul and Gyeonggi. The men were on a small landing craft and the water was very rough from a typhoon. "Most of us were sick," Jolly said. "There was 29-foot tide waters and our ship had to back off until the evening." Later that afternoon the soldiers landed at Blue Beach. Jolly said the resistance there was light; many of the enemy soldiers they encountered simply gave themselves up. U.S. Battleships had shelled Incheon to pieces, Jolly said. "The ships had made a real mess of things," he said.



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