

In 1957, a month after high school, I joined the Marine Corps. and was sent to the Recruit Depot in San Diego (yes, a Hollywood Marine). One of the DIs assigned to my recruit platoon was Corporal Brault. Cpl. Brault fought his way out of the Chosin Reservoir with the 7th Marine Regiment. In the evening, while we sat on our upside-down laundry buckets, cleaning our rifles, Cpl. Brault would tell us stories about the Chosin, which by my time had become one of the great legends of the Marine Corps. Cpl. Brault inspired me. He was a good Marine, and part of a great chapter in United States Marine Corps. history.

Sooner or later most Marines decided to be as good a Marine as some other Marine they had met, and admired.

So the Marines in the Hill Fights had great tradition as examples, and were led by Marines who had been part of prior Marine Corps. legends.

- Regimental Commander Col. Lanigan was a Lt. on Guadalcanal.

- Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Pappy DeLong was a Pvt. on Guadalcanal, and a Lt. in the fight at Chosin.

-Battalion XO Major Moose Beard was a Lt. in the Chosin.

-Even at the company level, there were inspiring Marines, Senior NCOs and former NCOs with temporary commissions-like my friend, Lt. MacFarlane (Fox and Gulf Co.), who was a Pvt. in Chesty Puller's 1st Marines.

Pvt. MacFarlane went over the wall at Inchon on D-Day and fought his way to Seoul. He later fought at the Reservoir, fought and marched from the Reservoir to the sea at Hamhung, and all the while carrying a 60mm mortar tube. So it was, with the decisive victory at Hill Fights, one generation of Marines inspiring the next generation.

The Hill Fights. You knew at the beginning, this was BIG-not just a squad here and a platoon there, so often the case in Viet Nam. The NVA sent the better part of two divisions to take and hold the Khe Sanh airstrip-they were serious. The Marine Corps. responded with two infantry battalions, lots of artillery, continuous on station air support, enough helicopters for frequent medi-vacs and resupply, and even a few companies with their very own ARC Light, B-52 strikes. Most marines present had never seen the power of so many Marines at one time and place, with a complete array of supporting weapons-and even Life Magazine reporters to tell the story. It was big!

But all of that was not enough. Most of the Marines who fought the Hill Fights were 18, 19, 20 and some a bit older. They did not necessarily have the experience of prior battle, but did have the benefit of relentless Marine training, and the will to be good Marines, and that really mattered in the Hill Fights.

When firefights start, formal leadership quickly becomes fairly remote and only eventually, maybe minutes, maybe hours can formal leadership reorganize and assert itself. So the question then becomes what will the Privates, PFCs, Fire Team leaders and Squad leaders do? And, during the Hill Fights they did just fine.

- They did just fine with acts of courage under fire
- They did just fine on long, dangerous patrols
- They did just fine after enemy mortar barrages
- They did just fine on their own when bedeviled but not defeated
- They did just fine with un-awarded courageous acts, fighting for each other and not for individual recognition
- They did just fine overcoming the betrayal of the M-16 rifle
- Think of this, after being over run by hundreds of NVA and after fighting back, holding their position, killing over 130 NVA and taking heavy casualties, ECHO Company, 24 hours later was one of the lead assault companies in the capture of 881-N. These young Marines at the Hill Fights did not quit, they did just fine.

One final, almost sacred remembrance, Corpsman running to the gunfire. No detailed briefing, no risk/reward evaluation for them, just "Corpsman Up!" and a race toward the fire and the wounded, rendering aid, often under fire, doing their lifesaving job with dedication and skill, deep compassion and sometimes with profound personal anguish. They did especially fine.

So 50 years later what can be said? The histories have been written. There have been more famous battles-Bellwood, Iwo Jima, Chosin Reservoir, but the Hill Fights in their own right were a solid chapter along the way of 242 years of continuous Marine tradition. And thank you, Mr. Edward F. Murphy, for making our story, *The Hill Fights* (available on Amazon), a complete and permanent part of written history.

I will always be proud of what the Marines did during the Hill Fights, and especially proud of the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines . . . and a quiet part of me will always be a Marine on Hill 881 North . . . and always the echo, a faint echo, of the Marine Hymn.

Major Charles P. Chritton
USMCR (INACTIVE)
Platoon Leader in Fox 2/3
during the Hill Fights

Copy Right April 2017