

Local Korean War vet recalls reunion with long-lost brother in MASH hospital

-- Ontario resident George R. Miles and his younger brother, Richard Miles, became the first brothers in military history to serve together throughout their tour of duty

By Ann Metz
Mail Reporter

Korean War Veteran and Ontario resident George R. Miles, 79 Jonathan Lane, has many stories to tell.

He will tell you he was one of seven children born to Allen W. Miles and Vera Miles on May 16, 1932, in Wolcott, NY. Following his parents' divorce, George and his siblings were separated and placed into foster care at young ages. They also stayed at the Hillside Home for Children on Monroe Ave. in Rochester.

George may also share recollections of his days as an Army National Guardsman, first serving in the Third Infantry Regiment at Fort Myers, Va (also known as the Old Guard) from 1949 to 1950. He was assigned there after completing basic training at Fort Dix, NJ.

While serving in the Third Infantry Regiment, George performed guard duty at the Pentagon, participated in burial ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery and recalled a time when the Old Guard was put on standby after an assassination attempt on President Harry S. Truman while he was residing at the Blair House.

"When President Truman made his budget speech from the Capitol, we were called out to guard the area around the Capitol and the roof," Miles said. "I was part of the detail on the roof."

But the story that George remembers most and is most meaningful to him is the one he recalls about his time serving in Korea, when he and his brother Richard Miles were reunited unexpectedly in a M.A.S.H hospital after spending more than a decade apart in separate foster homes.

George has shared this story with countless other people and in 1993 was even selected by Turner Network Television to be featured in a short, nationally televised segment in which he shared his experience as part of the network's Weekend War Memorial event.

Here's how the tale of two brothers reunited began.

After joining the United State Army in 1949 and working with the National Guard in Fort Myers, Va., George volunteered for duty in Korea in 1950 and was assigned the rank of Private First Class. There he served in "C" Company, Seventh Cavalry Regiment, First Cavalry Division.

"While engaged in a firefight with the enemy we were pinned down and lost well over half of our company," George recalled.

He said the firefight occurred during a major offensive sometime in the fall of 1951 or 1952.

He said a request was made for the "D" Company Machine Gun section of the regiment to provide supporting fire.

"We had moved out too far and had to get support from the main line of resistance," George said. "With all the supporting fire we were getting, we couldn't tell if it was friendly fire or enemy fire."

As George and the others from "C" Company were preparing to pull out, he said he remembers helping another soldier from his company with shell shock.

"I heard incoming mail [enemy shells] as we were pulling back," George said. "I saw a large hole in front of us. I pushed him [the soldier he was helping] into it and jumped on top of him. The shell hit near the hole were lying in and the concussion blew me back in the air. I don't remember hitting the ground."

George said he regained consciousness in a M.A.S.H hospital, with a concussion.

"As I was looking around I happened to look over at the entrance to the ward and I said, 'oh, my God, that can't be my brother walking through that door?' I thought I was nuts!

I asked, 'Dick, is that you?' Then we both started to cry," George remembers.

George said he and his brother began to ask each other questions immediately.

Dick said he was in the hospital for "combat fatigue" and revealed that he was also in the 7th Cavalry Regiment, but in D Company, machine gun section.

This was the same company that had been asked to provide supporting fire for George and the others.

"He said, 'You were the ones pinned down out there?' I said, 'You were giving your brother supporting fire and never knew it.'"

George said it was pure chance he and his brother crossed paths in the M.A.S.H unit that day. Not only did neither know they were in the same division, but they didn't know they were in the

army.

"A corp. man happened to see we had the same last name," George said, "so he sent Dick over to see me, thinking we might have been related."

After talking with each other and catching up on some of the details of the past two years, the brothers began trying to devise a way not to be separated again.

George remembers conversing with his brother about transferring and the perils they faced.

"I said I would work on getting a transfer and he said he wanted to transfer into my outfit. I said, 'Dick, do you want our wives to get two telegrams saying killed in action?' In the infantry you don't have much of a chance," George remembers saying.

Not long after, George said he returned to his company and learned they were going to make an assault on "Bloody Ridge."

"I knew my chances of coming out of this were not good, but when I asked the captain if I could be transferred to my brother's company he refused to okay it," George said.

Undeterred, George went to see the chaplain, who sent him to the Regimental Commander. At first, George said the commander was reluctant to grant George a transfer, citing a tragic incident in World War II when five brothers from the Sullivan family all died together while serving aboard the USS Juneau, which went down after a firefight with Japanese forces.

"He stated to me that now the military will not put brothers in combat together because relatives could receive two telegrams," George said, "but I told him our story-- how we had not seen each other for many years, so he said he could put us both in the 8.2 mortars. He said it was safer than the front lines. He said you could still get killed, but you have a better chance of coming back."

George said he is indebted to that commander, to God and to all those who prayed for he and his brother back home. Both brothers were transferred to the 8.2 mortars that night and that same night, George said his old company was wiped out during an assault on "Bloody Ridge."

"This was the first time we as brothers were together throughout the time of our tour in the Korean War," George said.

He and Dick were assigned to the 45th Infantry Division, 179th Tank Battalion for the remainder of their time in Korea. George became an acting track commander of a quad 50 half track crew, while Dick served as a gunner on another half track.

"Our half tracks were used for direct support on the front lines. The enemy had a habit of shelling Dick one night and then shelling my hill the next night so we had the use of a jeep and went back and forth to check on each other. They called it the Miles brothers' jeep."

The brothers were not discharged together, however.

George was sent home earlier than expected after a three-month bout with hemorrhagic fever that nearly claimed his life.

Dick followed his brother home a few months later.

George has had various jobs since his time in Korea, including 32 years in Army National Guard in Rochester, where he was involved in restoring order during the Rochester riots, helping during the flood and he served inside the prisons when the guards went on strike in April and May of 1979.

For awhile he was also employed by the City of Rochester and delivered food to the Williamson Community Center.

Dick Miles still resides in Rochester and the two have remained close over the years. He is disabled from a stroke and was unavailable for this interview.

There's no doubt who George gives credit to for the miraculous encounter that day in the M.A.S.H unit.

"I'm indebted to God and to the Colonel who granted permission for me to transfer," George said. "And God bless those who will not be coming home, as they are the true heroes."