

GERARD
ROBERT GEARD SCHMITT
First Lieutenant, United States Army

Personal Information: First Lieutenant (1LT) Robert *Gerard* Schmitt, service number O-057429, was assigned to Mike (Weapons) Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on 5 December 1950. Since he is a known battlefield death, his name is not cited on either the "Johnnie Johnson List" or the Missing in Action - Captivity List of reports by returning POWs¹. Field Search Case: 0435F.

General Military Situation and Circumstances of Loss: LT Schmitt's Mike Company was part of the task-organized 31st Regimental Combat Team (31st RCT)². The 31st RCT was organized to replace the 5th Marine Regiment on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir and by 27 November had moved forward to the P'ungnyuri Inlet where they halted for the night. Since there had been little enemy contact in the past couple days, the two infantry battalions, the 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment (3/31) and the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment (1/32) established themselves for the night in two mutually unsupported defensive positions about two and a half road miles apart.

1/32, commanded by LTC Faith, established a defensive line north of the Inlet along with the Advance Command Post for the 31st RCT and the Heavy Mortars. 3/31, commanded by LTC Reilly, had set up a defensive line south of the bridge across the P'ungnyuri River near the small village of Sinhung-ni. King Company was immediately south of the bridge with Mike Company southeast of King along the finger of a hill and Item Company farther southeast on the same finger from Mike. Most of Love Company was manning a position at the base of the ridgeline across the river to the north of the main defensive position and had an outpost on top of the ridge. The 3/31 Headquarters was positioned just south of King Company.

The 57th Field Artillery (FA) had established its headquarters in a small building along the main north-south road about a mile and a half south of the Inlet. It had two of its gun batteries with it at this point (A and B Batteries) and they were forward-deployed within the 3/31 perimeter. D Battery (-) of the 15th AAA-AW established its headquarters in the same vicinity as the 57th FA and, like the 57th, its gun vehicles were interspersed with the infantry units forward. The 31 RCT armor had not yet moved forward from the rear CP near Hudong-ni.

Late on the evening of 27 November everything changed as the RCT was stunned by a massive Chinese surprise attack. 1/32 was hit first, just before midnight. About an hour later the Love Company outpost spotted large numbers of Chinese swarming down the frozen P'ungnyuri River and within minutes they slammed into the positions held by 3/31 south of the Inlet. Fighting was furious and within half an hour, Love and King Companies was overrun. As survivors fell back, the Chinese

¹ The "Johnnie Johnson List" was compiled by Army SGT Wayne A. "Johnnie" Johnson, who was captured in July 1950 and repatriated in August 1953. His list had nearly 500 names, of the so-called "Tiger Group" (mostly from 24th Infantry Division) who were captured early in the war. The men on this list died at or en route to North Korean POW camps. The "Missing in Action, Captivity" report was created from the debriefings of almost every POW who returned to military control during Operation Little Switch (some gaps) and Operation Big Switch (pretty complete). They were asked to review MIA rosters and to point out everyone whom they remembered as POWs, or whose loss they recalled just prior to capture.

² Historians have referred to the 31st RCT as Task Force MacLean during the time it was commanded by COL Alan MacLean and Task Force Faith, for LTC Don C. Faith, when he assumed command after the loss of COL MacLean.

attack continued on to the positions occupied by Item Company, overrunning them as well. Next in line was Mike Company but the soldiers of Mike Company stood their ground and the Chinese were forced to by-pass them to continue their attack toward the Battalion CP and the Headquarters Company. The retreat continued until it was finally halted at the artillery battery positions.

With the coming of dawn on 28 November, a counter-attack was launched and the Chinese were ejected from the perimeter. Fighting was again fierce overnight 28-29 November and the Chinese again breached the perimeter before being thrown back. In view of the overwhelming enemy force and the large number of casualties suffered by the soldiers, it was clear that the 31st RCT positions had to be consolidated. To that end, the survivors of 1/32 withdrew south to join 3/31, the 57th Field Artillery Batteries, and other support elements south of the inlet bridge, completing the move by late afternoon of 29 November.

The situation continued to deteriorate for the now consolidated 31st RCT. Elements of a Chinese division encircled the task force's defensive positions and blocked the road between the Inlet and Hudong-ni to the south. Enemy mortar fire on American positions at the inlet began about 2000 on 30 November and under the mortar barrage, Chinese assault teams crept in close to the perimeter outposts. When the main attack did come, it came from all directions and with a level of intensity not previously experienced. The perimeter was penetrated at numerous locations and only desperate fighting kept the Chinese from completely overrunning the American positions before again being pushed back.

On 1 December, after two attempts by an armor-infantry team to break through Chinese road blocks from Hudong-ni failed, the 31st RCT began a withdrawal, with truck-loads of wounded, for the Marine perimeter at Hagaru-ri. Given the limited number of operable trucks and the huge number of wounded, the difficult decision was made to leave the dead behind. The route from the Inlet to Hagaru-ri was a distance of about six road miles but the Chinese had established numerous roadblocks along the route. As the RCT inched its way through these road blocks toward the relative safety of the Marine lines, the Chinese fired on the column relentlessly causing it to stop and start continuously.

Due to the heavy volume of fire and vulnerability of stalled or disabled vehicles, many small groups of men, including wounded, sought shelter in the tiny village of Twiggae or attempted to cross the frozen reservoir to Hagaru-ri (in the end, none of the trucks of wounded made it to Hagaru-ri). By the afternoon of 2 December, the majority of the survivors made it through this gauntlet but stragglers continued to filter in over the next couple days. Just over 1,000 of the 2,500 troops who originally went north with the 31st RCT eventually got back to Hagaru-ri and just 385 of the survivors were able-bodied. It was during this bloody, moving battle that 1LT Schmitt was killed.

DPMO researchers have conducted extensive oral history interviews with surviving members of the 31st RCT over the past several years (the latest interviews were in May of 2009). Interviewees included men from 1LT Schmitt's Mike Company, including another officer, as well as several men who were taken prisoner there. Unfortunately, none of those interviewed had any further information related to his loss. Additionally, we have found no information indicating he ever appeared at any POW camp, holding area, or medical facility or that he was ever alive in enemy hands.

Continuing Efforts: In an effort to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing U.S. servicemen, DPMO and the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), formerly the Army's Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (CILHI), have negotiated with the government of North Korea for access to crash sites, battlefields, and prison camp cemeteries.

The North Koreans have authorized limited access to their main military museum and national library in Pyongyang for POW/MIA-related research. The North Koreans provided our researchers with a selection of documents and artifacts from these archives for review during visits in 1997-1999. DPMO also reviewed information from Chinese sources, including recent searches of their main Korean War museum in Dandong, their Army Publishing House, and other Chinese museums. Unfortunately they found no information on 1LT Schmitt.

Excavations by CILHI/JPAC in North Korea, between 1996 and 2005, resulted in the recovery and repatriation of remains of over 220 U.S. servicemen. While North Korea operations have been on hold since June of 2005, we are hopeful that recovery operations will recommence in coming years. The North Koreans also conducted unilateral recovery operations in various locations around North Korea, including the Chosin Reservoir battle area, but we have no indication they found his loss site.

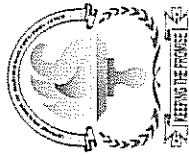
In September 2006 and May 2007 meetings, the Chinese offered to conduct searches for information on U.S. losses in their archives. They have assembled a team to look for such records throughout China. In February and April 2008, DPMO and their Ministry of National Defense signed arrangements that, for the Chinese, authorized researchers to release this documentation. We hope the anticipated, multi-year effort will shed more light on our missing men.

In 2004 and 2005, our North Korean recovery operations took place in Unsan County and the Chosin Reservoir area. Recent work in South Korea began around Seoul and the Pusan Perimeter. These were followed by searches at air loss sites and along POW march routes and teams have returned to South Korea for operations again in 2009.

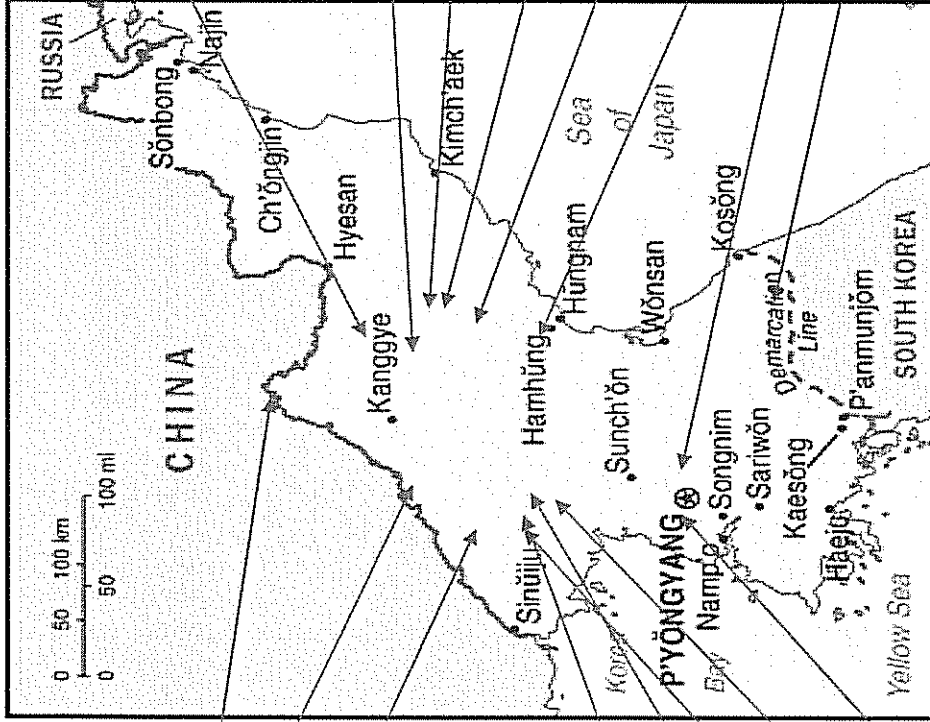
We continue to actively seek information about 1LT Schmitt's loss, including regular dialogue with Korean War veterans groups, in the hopes of developing new. We will forward any discoveries to family members through the U.S. Army Service Casualty Office.

[3 August 2009]

Major Remains Concentrations In North Korea



- POW Camp Burial Sites (1,200)**
- Apex (270)**
- Camp 5 (322)**
- Death Valley Camp (233)**
- Unsan/Chongchon Area (1,559)**
- Kuryong (176)**
- Kujang (276)**
- Unsan (285)**
- Kunuri (404)**
- Pyongyang Cemetery (185)**



- Valley #1 Camp (41)**
- Chosin Reservoir Area (1,079)**
- Yudamni (199)**
- Sinhung (100)**
- Twiggae (244)**
- Koto ri Cemetery (30)**
- Hungnam Cemetery (49)**
- Suan Camps (220)**
- DM Z (89)**

Estimated numbers of remains are in parenthesis

“Keeping the Promise”