

Neven Ray Southwick

as interviewed by Judy Hansen

September 2014

(Mr. Southwick chose not to edit this)

I was born May 13, 1928 in Lehi to Eleazea and Sarah Broadbent Southwick and raised in Lehi. Mother & dad had a farm and would milk the cows and then deliver the milk. I graduated from Lehi High in 1946. The battles from WWII were all over but my buddy; Ferris Brown¹ and I decided we'd joined the Marine Corp anyway. Ferris was also from Lehi. We went to Salt Lake and enlisted in 1946. I was 18. They sent us to San Diego, California where the boot camp was.

It is wonderful what boot camp can do. They can take a miserable, grunty, no good person and when they get through with him he's a whole different man. I've seen the changes in some of them and heard the difference in them; and then there were us guys that were good. There must have been about 40 of us born and raised from Utah at the same time. We were different to them but there were others that came in from different areas and I'll tell you those DI's² really went to work on them. They teach you a lot there. They teach you how to obey. If you step out of order they would fill our big back pockets full of sand and we would have to run around a whole big area until they told you to stop. You didn't have to run fast but you had to keep runnin' with that butt full of stuff.

They pulled one on me. I don't know why; my bayonet must have had some dust in it I guess. They called the whole platoon out, we went over to the flag pole; I had to stand on my head while leaning up against the flag pole and talk about the American Flag. They were just having fun with me. Some of us were quiet guys and they just had to feel us out I guess.

They taught us everything at boot camp except the rifle. They sent us past Pendelton³ for two weeks. This was an area in WWII that they would run Marines through all the time. It was a rifle range and that is all it was. They ended up doing away with that place. They'd shrink things up. One place I was in was the air wing but they done away with that too.



¹ Ferris stayed in the service making it his life-long career.

² Drill Instructors

³ This may have been Camp Matthews

After boot camp, they sent us up just North of Camp Pendleton. I spent the better part of two years in that area. I was sent home but was still on inactive reserve because I was hooked to the Marine Corp for six years. After I got home I went to work at US Steel. I married my wife; Bonnie Jean Simms. She was raised in California until her 8th grade in school when her family moved to American Fork and later moved to Lehi. She was about a block and a half from where I lived. She'd get off the bus from school (she still attended in American Fork) and walk down the road. I'd had a little car out on the lawn and was cleaning it up. She went past and I thought, "Wow, that's a cute little chick – I'll have to get to know her" (he says as he laughs). I married her April 26th 1950. Her birthday is the 25th of June. The Korean War broke out on her birthday right after we were married.

About two months after the war broke out I was called back to service and had to report in September 1950. They sent us down to Camp Pendleton, California; me and my buddy Farris Brown. Farris had also gotten married and he had a baby. I took my new wife with me and we had an apartment right along the highway by the ocean next to Pendleton. They wouldn't let married people live on base. We had about six weeks of extra training for combat; I mean they were really pouring it on. It was pretty heavy training because things were already really bad in Korea. After that about 5,000 of us Marines boarded a ship. Most of them were all like I was – they were brought back in reserves, trained, and getting ready to go. They gave us a really small place to sleep in on that ship. It was about 2 feet wide and a foot and ½ high. It stacked about 5 people on each side.

There were 19 of us LDS boys on that ship and we would get together once in a while and talk. I'm sure there were others there but us 19 would get together. I remember Thanksgiving Nov 23rd we were out in the middle of the Pacific. We had to get lined up to eat. They gave us a plate, turkey, potatoes, and the whole works. I'm telling you that was the biggest mess you'd ever seen in your life. That turkey was never cooked and everyone was just dumping it in the ocean. We ate the potatoes and that was about it. That was one Thanksgiving I'll never forget.

Right after Thanksgiving the US Marines were up in the Chosin Reservoir and that is when they hit the Chinese; Nov 27th. It was broadcast on the air. MacArther said the war was going to be over; we're going clear to the top but they didn't realize the Chinese was coming by the thousands. Anyway, that's all we heard.

We were 18 days going to Korea. We stopped in Japan⁴ and had to store our sea bags. We got there the end of November 1950. They took everything we had and really loaded us up in winter gear. We were there for two days getting our new gear and then they loaded us back up on ship and spread us out into different units. I was assigned to Item Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division.

They took us over to Pusan, Korea right on the bottom end of the Korean peninsula. They unloaded us and we went about 20 miles out in a battlefield and that is where we stayed for the better part of a month; just outside Pusan. There were hills all over. We had to take turns up on the hills for a couple three days until another group would come up and take over. That is where we spent Christmas 1950. Basically there was no fighting there but we didn't know where the enemy was. The Chinese and North

⁴ According to Wikipedia the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division went through Kobe Port.

Korean's were all over. They were coming down and we didn't know how many were really down south. For protection the Marine always has the high ground.

After a month they brought an LST⁵ to haul troops on. They put five tanks on it and our whole battalion; not so much our executive folks but all us marines. They took us around to Po Hang airport. The Japanese had owned Korea for several years and they had this airport by the ocean which was still owned by the Japanese. There was an airfield there. It was Japanese territory. They brought us around there and got our battalion off. They knew there were enemy all around those hills and we had to secure the area while we were there.

It was hard to keep food for us because we were always on the run up in the mountains. We weren't down in the level very often. We were always up high and we'd go a couple days without anything to eat. Finally they sent a radio to our company and told us they would meet us up on a certain trail in the afternoon because they had food for us. Well, they general have c-rations which usually have pretty good stuff in it but they didn't bring us c-rations. They brought big loaves of bread that was cut a good inch or more thick. Then they cut thick slices of spam and put that on the bread and said, "Here ya go." Wow, I couldn't stand that spam so I just ate the bread (he laughs). That was all we had for several days. We were hungry!

We got back down by the airport and they loaded us up in trucks. The 2nd Army Division was further up and they were in big time trouble up there. The Chinese were back in Seoul and it was a mess. They were trying to get us ready to help as fast as they could.

My friend Farris Brown had been put in the air wing. They were getting the airport ready for them. The end of the runway dropped about 20 feet to a little road. They had a couple hundred trucks loaded up and the truck I was in stopped at the end of the runway below the airport on this little road. I looked up and there were three marines sitting up on that runway; Farris Brown was one of them (he laughs). We were there for an hour and talked and talked. I didn't know this until after I came home but Farris had written to his wife Jean who lived in American Fork. Her and my wife Bonnie had got together and read a letter he sent home telling her, 'I've seen old Southwick for the last time. He'll never get out of this.' Of course both women cried.

Up we went in these trucks while it rained and the snowed. I'm telling you it was COLD – real COLD; and damp. Anyway they took us up there about 20 miles away from Seoul and then they unloaded us. We knew the Chinese were behind us and scattered all around but this is where they dumped us. Our whole platoon lined up for battle; again with no food. The Air Force brought this plane in with c-rations on parachutes. They couldn't see the ground because they were in the clouds and there was rain and snow. They pushed out those c-rations anyway; BOOM they scattered c-rations for acres. Walt⁶, my fox-hole buddy said it was a good thing we hadn't gone up any further or they would have dropped them

⁵ Landing Ship, Tank (LST) is the naval designation for vessels to support amphibious operations by carrying significant quantities of vehicles, cargo, and landing troops directly onto an unimproved shore - wikipedia.

⁶ Walt Meyers from Seattle, Washington

right on top of us; they couldn't see us and didn't know where we were. They had these little cans of fruit cocktail in them and boy we gathered up about 20 of those each and put them in our packs.

They had a big long ridge line and it was the first one we'd seen ever. Our whole battalion infantry was lined up. There were four of us in a fire team and then 12 in a squad. We were spread pretty thin. There was about ½ city block between each one of us. We had to go up and take that ridge. I'm not going to talk about the battle there but there was one thing that happened I think is worth mentioning. I wasn't in a very good position moving up the middle of a gully and my buddy was up on the ridge. We were all in fog. We kept walking and pretty soon the fog lifted a little bit and I saw these grenades coming down at me. The Chinese and north Korean grenades were a wooden stick grenade. The hollow handle of the stick grenade has a ring, pull cord, igniter and a 3-4 second time delay. The wooden top is unscrewed; the ring slipped over a finger, and throwing the grenade causes the pull cord to activate the igniter.⁷ The Chinese would take the cap off and it had a string in it then they would tie the string on their fingers and they could put three or four in one hand and throw them all at once setting all of them off at the same time. I watched them fall but they weren't quite close enough to me. I turned my back to them and was pretty protected because of the heavy clothes I had on. We walked a little way further and here come another set of grenades and I thought, "gee whiz I better find some cover." There was a little rock about a foot and ½ high and I hit the deck right behind that. I didn't think it would reach me but pretty soon one of my buddies up on the ridge yelled down and said I had better roll away from there. I looked up and there was a grenade sitting right there next to me; it didn't go off. We continued up on the ridge. We lost a lot of Marines that day; About 15 of them were in my battalion.

I don't want to go into these battles too much because when I do it gets really noisy in my head. Anyway, we'd go this way and then that way. We watched the 5th Marines get in a little battle. One day we walked all day long. We went through this graveyard. It was the only one I seen in Korea like this. It had grave markers higher than my head. These must have been special people. There had to of been a hundred of them. The Koreans didn't bury their dead like this. They usually had burial 'mounds.' They'd always trim the grass and weeds around these graves. I was around this graveyard when a gunner started shooting at us. The only reason I wasn't hit was because I was able to get behind a grave marker. There ended up being some real rough stuff that went on.

After that, we went down the hill to the road again and there was a French unit that went running through. The Chinese were chasing them. Their lead officer had gotten killed about six or seven miles below this area. The Marine Corp was supposed to pick him up so they could send his body to Japan. They were going to meet us when we came off the hill but we ran into the Chinese before we got over to them. We were way up on high ground and there was one little shack down by the road. When we got down there, there were dead soldiers lying all over. The only thing they were wearing were their skivvies. Their hands were tied behind them and their feet tied together. I don't know what nationality they were but they were not Asian soldiers. They had killed them all. It was cold and they were all

⁷ Korean War Weapons and History website <http://www.koreanwaronline.com/arms/grenchin.htm>

frozen⁸. Seeing those dead soldiers bothered me for a long time. This was probably February 1951. They moved us out of there quick. They didn't want us getting mixed around with them because it is really hard on the infantry men to see that; they hurried us up the river.

We were always moving from one hill to the next. Every night we would dig in. We would dig one fox hole for two marines and we always dug them at night. Sometime it was frozen so hard it was tough to break the frozen ground. Both men in each fox hole would keep watch for two hours at night while the others would sleep. Every fox hole took their turn at watch. They moved us ALL OVER the place going into different situations and different battles! We lived in a different fox hole every night the whole time we were there. We were moving all the time and always had to be thinking ahead of things such as where we were going to get water. We had a canteen and when we found a spring we'd fill it up and put a water purification tablet in it. It has to sit an hour before we were able to drink it.

I lost some good buddies. One of them was a boy from Pittsburgh. His name was Hill. His mother and dad were divorced and he had a sister. He had joined the Marine Corp and was just the nicest kid you had ever seen. When he was in the fox hole he would lay his towel out, his toothbrush, his soap, and everything. He was so clean I couldn't believe it. The rest of us were just dirty, cold, and smelly (he laughs). I lost him. I felt so bad about that boy because he was such a good-good boy. He had come past me and I had told him, "Don't come up now, I'll call ya when I want ya" but here he come and he was out. I said, "get down, get down, a machine gun is on us." He went on his hands and knees and I was still trying to get him down. There was a little tree close by but that machine gunner hit him. That gunner knew exactly where Hill was and he knew where I was. He kept shooting at me. We were in the sunlight but that machine gunner and bunker was in the fog. He could see us but we couldn't see him. I lost that boy right there and it always bothered me because he was such a nice kid.

The rest of the company got up and we took the hill. It was rough stuff. The North Koreans and Chinese had a whole unit of machine guns and everything up there. The enemy had left the ridge and went over to another ridge. They were trying to get away from us. They would have a bunker and at least two in the bunker with a machine gun. I didn't know it at first until we run into them but if we killed one of them they shut the bunker down. They would disappear and you wouldn't see them go. They had tunnels with little tiny bunkers as small as they could get into and they would go underground 40, 50 feet or even longer underground in these little tunnels. They come up a long way away from us. We had gone through three bunkers there but they were gone.

Anyway, I'll tell you about one other guy. They told us we better take a break so we took a break. I was cleaning my weapon and this kid; this Marine came over and asked if he could sit down by me. I said, "Sure" and we took a few minutes and started talkin'. He said, "You're a Mormon aren't ya." I said, "Yes" and he said, "Well I'm a Jew from Chicago"; or someplace around there that has a steel mill. We just talked back and forth. He told me his family wanted him to go to school and not work in the steel mill where they work. We were only there talking about ten minutes and we said we'd get together. He left and I never seen him again.

⁸ Many soldiers died of frostbite during the Korean War before ever reaching the battlefields. The temperature in some areas fell below zero for long periods of time (<http://facts.randomhistory.com/korean-war-facts.html>).

My wife had written letters to me almost every day. Sometimes it would be a month before we'd get our mail. During those quiet times the mail clerk would deliver our mail and he would stand there handing out letters saying, "Southwick, Southwick, Southwick." I'm telling ya, some of those guys didn't get anything. Two of them had gotten divorces while they were there. Every mail call there was a handful for Southwick. We didn't write letters home because we only had one short pencil for our entire squad. We saved it.

As time went on we were on several other different hills. It was a constant year of battle from hill to hill. One day you couldn't find the enemy; might be two days. We'd go up another hill and they weren't there but pretty soon they'd come; they'd come at you in the night. They were really good, especially the Chinese because they would come at us in different ways. I've heard quite a few people talk about different things going on during the war but there is nothing quite like being in the infantry. You're packing a rifle and your right in the middle of the fighting all the time.

As things were winding down they got us up in what they called the punch bowl area. This is the border line of North and South Korea around the 38th parallel. They wanted us to cross two rivers. One wasn't too wide but the other was really wide. This was in the summer of 1951 and it was HOT. We were trying to cross the smaller river so we could get across the larger one. We'd get into the water and it got progressively deeper until we were in water up to our necks and everyone had their rifles in the air. I'd have to grab the butt of the rifle in front of me and the guy behind me would have to grab the butt of my rifle. We'd got our whole company or platoon on the other side except five of them. It was too deep and they got washed off into the big river. They had all their packs on and just floated away. They disappeared and were gone for four days. Eventually they got on shore and came up the river but they were on the other side. We couldn't go no place and they couldn't get any food to us because it was raining so much. They brought a little aluminum boat up and put it in but that went down the river. We were there for two or three days without any food but finally the rain let up and we were able to cross over.

It was getting close for them to call us to go home. There were 5,000 of us stationed there waiting to go and there started to be rumors. They were putting us in helicopters. This was the first time a whole platoon was in a helicopter. We had to go six miles over the hills and then right as my platoon was starting to unload from the helicopter one of my buddies came running up and said, "You're going home, we just got notice." I said we were getting ready to go up to battle but they gather us together and told us there were five of us that were scheduled to go home. There were Marines coming and going all the time. We were told we had to march right straight out of the hills and over to the Sea of Japan. We had our rifles & bayonets and walked straight over down out of the hills ten miles until it became flat. It was just us; we didn't see no enemy, nothin', or anybody the whole way. We got down and found the ship sitting in the ocean. There was a crew waiting for us. We handed them our rifles and they de-loused us, put us in a little boat, and took us over to the ship that was loaded up with 1,900 US Marines waiting to go home. They were just waiting for the five of us. We got out of the boat, climbed up the rope ladder into the ship, went to Japan to get our gear, and they took us home.

We were aboard ship November 1951; one year later. It took 14 or 15 days to get home and we arrived in San Diego. Our wives were there waiting for us. They had been notified that we were coming. There were a lot of different wives standing on the pier. The Wallen twins, from Odgen whose brother took the Congressional Medal of Honor in WWII were both there with me and their wives were waiting. I could see Bonnie but she couldn't see me; I was a couple levels up. I got off ship and walked right up to her before she even realized I was there.

I was in San Diego five days while they went through my paperwork and I was discharged. I came home to Lehi and went back to work at Geneva Steel in the Rolling Mills. US Steel recognized the men in the military and held our jobs for us. I built a little home a block south of Main on Center Street and had my family Grady, Sherry (Peterson), and Laurie (Norman); one son and two daughters.

I was proud to be a Marine and so thankful that I could do these types of battles for my county because I love this nation. I'm telling you there is not a free nation like this United States and people need to realize how wonderful it is because we have a measure of freedom. You get out of the United States and you don't have our type of freedoms anyplace else.

