

# Korean War Veteran Roy Fort

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Roy Fort and his twin brother graduated from Morton High School in 1947. At this time, both young men were driving trucks for their father. In 1950, Roy and his brother received draft notices. Their father, not wanting to lose two valued employees, went to the draft board and requested that only one of his boys would be drafted. When the drafted son completed his service, the father said that the other would serve.



"My brother was to be married in October 1950, so I said that I would go," said Fort. He was drafted on October 17, 1950 into the U.S. Army and was sent to Ft. Leonard Wood in Pulaski County, Missouri for basic training. At Ft. Leonard Wood, Fort was looking forward to becoming an engineer, however, the U.S. Army needed men for the infantry.

After basic training, Fort traveled by train to Seattle, Washington. "It was the prettiest trip. We had Pullman cars. It was really a nice three-day trip. It was kind of neat," said Fort. In Seattle, 7,000 soldiers boarded a troop ship that had seven decks below sea level. After a 15-day journey, the ship landed at Yokohama, Japan. The troops then boarded a train to Sasebo, Japan on the country's southern tip. From Sasebo, they took a seven-hour ferry boat ride to Pusan, South Korea. Another train trip to "the boonies" (as Fort called next stop for the 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Division) in South Korea was in store for soldiers.

At this location, the infantrymen were put through an exercise for three days that prepared their bodies to go without water. The soldiers were to go up and down hills without a canteen for water.

"We learned how to climb hills. Each soldier carried one-half of a tent and his partner carried the other half. Our packs weighed 45-50 pounds. I had a Browning automatic rifle that weighed 22 pounds, plus 100 rounds of 30 caliber ammunition," said Fort, noting that he weighed approximately 135 pounds at this point in his life. After the time at this outpost, Fort was back on a train again heading to somewhere north of Seoul, South Korea.

While serving on the battlefield during the Korean War, Fort said that he spent more time in Japan due to the wounds he received. "We were digging a trench around the side of a hill. There were 11 soldiers in our squad. The Sergeant in charge got shot and was taken to a M.A.S.H. hospital. We saw the white phosphorous and knew that there would be action," said Fort. He was wounded on October 9, 1951 and called it "slight" with a little blood on his leg. "I laid there quite a while. My gun strap was there but no gun and no shovel," said Fort. He was taken to a M.A.S.H. site for a tetanus shot and stayed at the hospital overnight. The next day he hitched a ride back to his unit arriving on October 10, 1951. On October 12, Fort was wounded again. He noted that there was a big push planned for October 13, 1951.

"Companies were amassed on a hill. We were up on a ridge all day, hearing the thump of mortars as they were being fired," said Fort. At 6:30, he and his buddy separated. His buddy went right and he went left. They were both wounded in a mortar attack. Fort was hit on his right side and was only able to crawl around the base of the hill. He was not paralyzed but he couldn't get up. Fort was transported to a M.A.S.H. hospital, where his wounds were treated and doctors performed exploratory abdominal surgery. He stayed 14 weeks in Japan healing from his wounds. Fort was back on line on December 31, 1951.

The weather was very cold as Fort returned to his company, -7 degrees. The soldiers were living in bunkers. "The Chinese knew how to build bunkers. There were three of us in a bunker. We shared sleeping bags. When one of us got up, one other took his place in the sleeping bag," said Fort. He told of the two pairs of boot liners that each soldier was issued. When one set got wet in a soldier's boots, a second set was used and the first set was placed on his chest to dry. If a soldier's socks and liners got damp or wet, frozen feet would be the result.

As the 40th National Guard was to replace his unit in January 1952, Fort was chosen, along with three other soldiers, to be sent to Japan. The men were sent to a base 400 miles north of Tokyo to prepare barracks for soldiers from the 24th Division returning from the battlefield. The four soldiers were by themselves for two weeks. "While the 40th was there, we had passes to the village. As a 22 year-old, I enjoyed going to the village, but when we didn't have passes when the 24th returned and we had to sneak back into camp," said Fort. He said that was the end of the possibility of him becoming a sergeant and he would remain a corporal. A Purple Heart was awarded to Fort for his wounds, with Oak leaf cluster for military merit.

As his time in Korea and Japan was coming to an end, Fort needed six points of the 36 required points to come home. His return trip across the International Date Line allowed for him to celebrate his 23rd birthday twice on July 5, 1952. Upon completing 21 months in the U.S. Army of a 24-month draft period, he was discharged in October 1952. Almost immediately upon arriving home, he drove to South Dakota to go pheasant hunting with friends. "I had been there in 1949. Others were waiting for me in South Dakota. We hunted for five days," said Fort.

After military service, Fort returned to his former job of hauling milk and freight for his father's business. When his father decided to sell his business and give up his great trucking permit, Fort worked for his brother, Ralph Fort, in his Chrysler dealership. He then ran Frank's Standard, retiring at age 74. He married Francis Madaecy in 1956. She is remembered for her strength and resilience during her lifetime. They have one daughter, two sons and five grandchildren.