

Prologue

There I was in January 1953, sitting in a foxhole loading my rifle in the dead of winter, trying not to wet my pants, and wondering what the hell I was doing on a remote mountain radio relay site in Korea. And to think it was all over a can of tomato juice, a badly burned Korean boy, and a petty, self serving commanding officer.

As I sat in that foxhole in the middle of a firefight, I kept thinking back to the time I was in Air Force basic training on the firing range, trying to learn how to handle a rifle. The sum total of that course was firing 30 rounds of ammunition. The instructor assured us that 30 rounds was plenty and that infantry training was unnecessary. Airmen never carried rifles, he told me, because their chance of seeing combat was one in a million.

I had only been there a few days when one night I was awakened by the sound of rifle fire. The sentry had fired nine rounds, alerting everyone on site that we might be under attack. As I sat up, every man in the Quonset hut was jumping out of bed, grabbing his rifle, and running out the door toward his designated foxhole.

I sat there for a moment gathering myself when one of the airmen in the hut came running over to me and handed me a rifle. As I grabbed it, I reminded him that I was the cook, thinking that he didn't realize I knew nothing about combat. He just ushered me out of the hut and directed me to my foxhole.

“Lunch,” he told me, “is over.”