

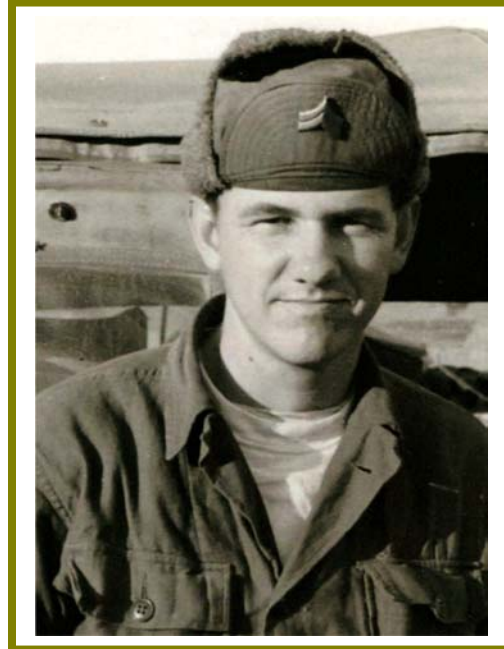
Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution
Proudly "Spotlights" our May 2012
Patriot of the Month



Donald J. Pelzel

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Donald J. Pelzel was born February 18, 1932, at Hays, Kansas, and graduated from Hays High School in 1952. After graduation from high school he worked a short time for a nursery before working for the Kansas Highway Department.

"One evening while visiting with some of my friends we decided to join the Army before we were drafted. Along with five friends we took our physicals in Kansas City, Missouri and were sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri, where we took our basic training. We were later moved to Ft. Smith, Arkansas, where I received my artillery training firing 75 mm cannons. We thought we would be sent to Europe, but were ordered to take a train to Oakland, California. As we left the train, we saw a row of caskets draped with American Flags. It was a grim start to our journey to Japan," said Pelzel.

On their way to Japan aboard the *USS Breckenridge*, they were busy aiming their guns at mines in the water to destroy them before they destroyed an Allied ship.

Within twenty four hours of arriving in Japan, he was put on another ship bound for Korea and arrived on February 18, 1953, his twenty-first birthday. He then boarded a train where he endured the cold, miserable

conditions of Korea with temperatures of twenty to thirty degrees below zero. The trip seemed long but it was all too soon that he was up on the front and the fighting began.

The first battle he fought in was Ch'orwon (just above the thirty eighth parallel). He was serving in the 90th Field Artillery Battalion and his first job in Korea was an Ammunition Corporal where he unloaded from trucks and cleaned the 155 howitzer shells. Each of these shells weight ninety seven pounds with some having "regular fuses" and some "time fuses" which were more dangerous as they threw shrapnel when exploding.

Pork Chop Hill was the second battle he fought in and it consisted of two separate fights while the United States and Communist Chinese and Koreans negotiated an armistice. In the United States the battles were controversial because of the many soldiers who were killed for terrain of no strategic or tactical values. The United Nations supported by the United States won the first battle when the Chinese withdrew after two days of fighting. Pelzel said, "While serving in Korea we had many different jobs, one being that of night guard. We had to learn to speak "halt" and "who goes there" in Korean.

The second battle involved many more troops on both sides and was bitterly contested for five days before the United Nations Command conceded the hill to the Chinese forces by withdrawing. It was during this time that Pelzel's artillery groups fired 33,000 rounds the first day and another 77,000 the next day which are said to be the world records for artillery fire. "The good news was that the enemy didn't have cannons that could reach us, but we could reach them," he said. "It was a scary time as we were required to fire our cannons continuously and after it was over we were all like zombies. It was a mental thing and we were sent to Japan for some much needed rest and relaxation," Pelzel said. Though just 980 feet tall, history would place a higher value on "the hill" as the fierce and bloody battle for control of it was deemed as one of the most important in ending the Korean War.

Less than three weeks after the Battle of Pork Chop Hill, the armistice was signed by the United Nations Command (Korea), Chinese People's Liberation Army and North Korean People's Army, ending the hostilities.

After returning to the states, Corporal Pelzel received his discharge at Ft. Riley, Kansas in 1954.

Donald's awards, medals, and citations include:

- Korean Service Medal
- National Defense Medal

- United Nations Medal
- Good Conduct Medal

Donald and his wife, Clare, have one son, three grandchildren, and one great grandchild. He teaches high school history. Donald is a member of St. Ann's Catholic Church, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion. He enjoys golfing. He attended the 25th Division 90th Field Artillery Battalion Annual Reunion.