

## **Veteran recalls life during Korean War**

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The life of Allen Rose was likely saved by a Bible in his shirt pocket.

“That story is like you’d hear in the movies, but it actually happened,” the 84-year-old veteran recalled.

On a cold February day in 1951, the 21-year-old soldier sprinted from resistance with a rifle in-hand. His unit was surrounded by South Korean soldiers as he helped a fallen comrade into a foxhole. In the blink of an eye, a bullet shot through his left elbow, piercing two pairs of socks he had drying in his shirt pocket and puncturing through a small Bible.

Allen’s rifle flew from his hand. He crawled to retrieve it, realizing it might be his only chance for survival, and tunneled his way into the foxhole with the soldier he rescued.

Call it chance or divine intervention, what is certain is the soldier’s gratitude towards his mother for gifting the pocket-sized book to him before he left to battle in the Korean War.

The Bible with the frayed bullet puncture is on display in Allen’s home in Rossville, Kan. After the incident, the wounded Rose was flown to Japan for a brief hospital stint to be stitched up to fight again. He is stunned that he was able to keep the Bible intact for a remaining five months.

### **Must be someplace better than this**

Allen’s father was unable to find work during much of the Depression, and despite his best efforts, he made barely enough to keep food on the table for his wife and eight kids. The family shuffled through apartments in Illinois, some of which they were forced to leave due to unpaid bills. The kids did not receive much of an education and when Allen was 16-years-old he quit school permanently to work as a farmhand with his father. Working was about all the two had in common.

On March 24, 1950, Allen’s life changed forever when he enlisted in the military.

“I did it because I had no life at home and I thought there must be someplace better than this,” he said. “I found out there wasn’t at that time.”

When he stepped off the train in Fort Riley, Kan. to attend basic training, Allen did not know what to expect. He recalled the platoon sergeant “scaring the life” out of him, foreshadowing what life would soon consistently be.

He made \$78 a month, enough money for the poverty-stricken youth to finally feel independent. But thoughts of his family persuaded him to send \$50 back home to his mother each check. When he was deployed to Korea in September 1950, Allen received \$50 more a month and was then able to keep the \$78 for himself.

“Of course, I had no idea what war was,” he said of his thoughts before deployment. “I really didn't know what I was getting into other than when I was in basic training they had started fighting in Korea. So they gave me some combat training and tried to tell me what war was about before I left.”

After his first airplane flight, Allen landed in Japan and was placed on a small boat bound for Puson, South Korea. Allen's massive seasickness and anxious disposition were not helped overnight when an alarming siren sounded and the soldiers were instructed to abandon ship.

“I already made up my mind that there wasn't enough people on that ship to throw me in that dark ocean,” Allen said.

It turned out to be a false alarm, and the boat arrived safely in Puson. But the idleness did not last long. The soldiers were being transported on a cattle car when a commander stopped them and told them to throw everything down except cigarettes, ammunition and rifles.

“At the same time that they told us that, I could hear right up the road not very far from us guns going off,” Allen said. “The G.I.'s, being as stupid as they were, they started asking all kinds of questions they didn't understand— why they were supposed to get down... It wasn't very long until they knew why.”

The immense evil of war was upon Allen. To this day, he cannot fully explain the depth of his pain, but vivid memories are ones he'll never forget, no matter how hard he tries.

“When we started up the mountain, the dead people were so deep, so thick... trucks would run over them, tanks would run over them,” he said. “The smell was so bad that we had to get off the road as far as we could and walk. It was so bad that I didn't use any of my cigarettes for about three days.”

### **Every man for himself**

The first day of battle was a long one, but not enough to warrant rest. The exhausted unit trekked to a new location that night. From then on it was continuous combat.

Small novelties allowed Allen to get through. In November, after months of waiting on the request, a carton of cigarettes arrived from his mother. It had been weeks since the soldiers had last smoked, so Allen generously threw his haul to the ground with a, “Have at 'em boys!” But the joyous moment was short-lived. It was warfare that night.

Three American tanks were already stationed at the fighting location three miles outside of the mess hall when the unit arrived. They were told to “Hold the hill at all costs.”

“By the time we got up and showed our faces, they were just blowing us down like flies,” Allen said.

He fired his gun so much that it burned up and he was placed on radio duty. At dusk, with no other units nearby to help, the commander told Allen, “Pass the word down the line— every man for himself!”

The U.S. soldiers scattered. Allen started running with them until he noticed a lieutenant who had just come into the company that morning running the opposite way.

Despite Allen's best efforts to get him to stop, the soldier kept running. “He had never seen no combat before, so he was going to win that war by himself,” he said. The soldier was never seen again.

## **Bravery in action**

Allen received the Bronze Star medal for bravery in action for one of the many battles he fought in. The unmarked news article that described the event is preserved with the rest of his war memorabilia in his Rossville home.

The article detailed the events of Oct. 19, 1950 when Allen's regiment, Company F of the 5th Cavalry, was in a battle against 30,000 defenders. The citation issued: "Heedless of his personal safety, Cpl. Rose moved fearlessly and aggressively forward to single-handedly engage individual enemy riflemen and automatic weapons crews... by his display of courageous leadership and unrelenting stabs at die-hard defenders so inspired his companions that they continued in the attack upon the enemy until the mission was successfully accomplished."

The citation claimed that Allen killed at least five enemy soldiers.

"They don't know that some of that was true," he said. "They know that some of this I've done, but they don't know how many people I killed. I don't know how many people I killed."

Allen is certain that he killed at least two people on foot and knocked out two tanks, which most likely carried two soldiers each, but he does not consider all the information sent back home to be accurate. There was no way of knowing.

And for how proud he is of his medal and his service, the horrific memories he brought back with him do not allow him peace.

"I'll be truthful with you— people think I'm a hero, but I'm a coward," he said. "I'm afraid I'm going to die. I'm afraid they're going to kill me."

He still wonders about the lieutenant he stopped chasing.

## **A soldier comes home**

During basic training in March 1950, Allen weighed 170 pounds. In July of 1951 when he was released from active duty, he was 112.

The most beautiful sound he heard in over a year's time was, "Rose to the CP with baggage." When he heard that, Allen knew he was going home.

"Tears ran out of my eyes when they told me they were going to fly me back to the United States," he said. "But I was worried about that boat ride. I was never so sick in my life as I was in that one ride to Korea."

Allen was decorated with a Purple Heart for being wounded in action and a Bronze Star for bravery, but those medals did not make it any easier to adjust to life back in the states.

But Dolores did.

Neither of them could say that it was love at first sight. They had both been hurt before and weren't looking to be serious. Nevertheless, love found them.

"It didn't take me long to notice she was for me," Allen said. "I was at a point in my life where I needed somebody. So it was a good time she came along."

The two married in a simple ceremony in 1952 with 35 cents between them. The Roses take their hardships in stride—from Dolores' battle with cancer 30 years ago to Allen's ongoing struggle with diabetes.

"There were a few rough times," she said. "I guess it's just the way of life."

Allen adores Dolores' strong nature and her ability to put up with his difficulties. Though he does not make excuses, the feelings he had post-war were rough, resembling PTSD, but at the time he had no one to turn to for help. His intention even after Korea was to stick with the military, but once Allen met Dolores, he knew he couldn't put her through that.

"I'm damn glad I didn't," he said. "Especially because after I got back from Korea they started fighting in Vietnam and I couldn't take another war. I'd have lost my mind... I can't explain what combat does to you, but it does plenty."

After three kids, multiple career changes and various homes, Allen lives a simple life in Rossville with his love. His days are sometimes spent at the Rossville Legion reminiscing with comrades.

"This is my home now," he said.

And it might have never been if it weren't for a Bible in his pocket.