



War is hell.

Edited by Charlie Stuart

In hilly terrain near Pusan, South Korea, Capt. F. I. "Ike" Fenton of the U.S. Marines hears more bad news. It is August 1950, and his company has been fighting all night. More than half of his 190 men are wounded or killed. They are out of ammunition. He has lost radio contact with his superiors. And now, he is told, his first sergeant is mortally wounded.

Click. David Douglas Duncan takes Fenton's picture.

Duncan, a former Marine, is on assignment for *Life* magazine. He gets as close to the action as possible, trying to show, he says, "What a man endures when his country decides to go to war." Duncan's photographs are among the best known of the war, and a few, including that of Fenton, are ranked among the top American combat photographs ever.



U.S. Marines had been in Korea barely two weeks when the 27-year-old Fenton, who had fought in World War II, is plunged into a critical battle. In June, the North Korean Army crosses the 38th Parallel into South Korea. After the United Nations Security Council votes to authorize force to repel the surprise invasion, U.N., South Korean and U.S. troops establish a 150-mile-long defensive perimeter around Pusan, a port on the southeastern coast.

Fenton's company is sent into a breach in the perimeter and ordered to "hold at all cost," lest the attacking North Koreans flank and rout the allies. "The only marines coming off that hill are dead marines," Fenton says to his commander. Using bayonets and grenades borrowed from another company nearby, Fenton's men hold the line.

Reinforcements arrive, and the battlefield moves on to Inchon, to Seoul, to the "frozen Chosin"; Chinese troops join North Korea's; the Communist forces eventually are pushed back; President Eisenhower signs an armistice treaty in 1953. Killed are at least 600,000 Chinese; 1.5 million North Korean and 1.2 million South Korean civilians and troops; 3,000 U.N. soldiers and 36,500 Americans. Another 8,100 Americans are missing in action. The veterans, returning to U.S. soil, do not receive a hero's welcome and call Korea the "forgotten war."

The photograph of Fenton, his mouth set, but his pale eyes glazed by anguish, is reproduced countless times in books and magazines. "The weight of the world is on Dad's shoulders, realizing what he was asked to do, completing the mission and realizing the cost of what it took," says Ike's son George Fenton, 50, a recently retired Marine colonel who lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

The Corps runs in the family. Ike's father was a brigadier general and his brother, Michael, a private. In a seminal World War II photograph (below) taken on Okinawa in May 1945, Ike's dad, Francis Fenton, kneels in prayer next to a flag-draped stretcher. It bears the body of his son Michael, killed by a sniper.

Over the years, Ike Fenton didn't talk much about Pusan or the Duncan photograph. "He just said it was part of 30 years in the Corps," recalls his wife of 51 years, Eloise Fenton.

Often, people would hand him a copy of the picture and ask for his autograph. He would inscribe it, "War is hell."

