

FRANK COLLINS PRIVATE U.S. ARMY

KOREA
1933 - 1951

WRITTEN BY SELA BYERS AND MAIRIN GILLESPIE
UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL
INSTRUCTED BY MEGHAN DUNN

DRAFT THIS IS A WORK-IN-PROGRESS
FOR TEMPORARY DISPLAY ONLY



Officers and men of the 9th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Battalion at Pohang Air Base, Korea, in September 1950.
Truman Presidential Library

Frank Collins was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on March 21, 1933, to Annie and Jacob Collins. A middle child in a family of six children, Frank had two older siblings: Jacob Jr. and Annie, named for their parents; two younger sisters named Barbara and Louise; and a brother David who was the youngest. The family dwelt in the west end of Kinsman, a predominantly Black neighborhood on the city's east side.

Frank was born less than three weeks after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inauguration. Roosevelt won the presidential election in a landslide as the nation entered the fourth year of the Great Depression. Frank's family was just as caught up in the economic hardship as many other Americans. During the 1930s, up to 30 percent of Cleveland's workforce was unemployed. Evictions and foreclosures were rampant, compelling many residents to settle in shantytowns. One such "Hooverville" (a nickname for Depression-era shantytowns derived from Roosevelt's predecessor, President Herbert Hoover) sprung up along Kingsberry Run, a heavily polluted stream a block south of Frank's home. The area was notorious for unhealthy living conditions, crime, and a series of unsolved murders. To help support these individuals, the Cuyahoga County Relief Administration was established. In July 1935, the county agency had 76,610 families and single men receiving direct relief, which meant that they were receiving cash instead of groceries. It is possible that the Collins family was receiving such aid, and that they knew of people who were.

Times were tough when Frank grew up, but infrastructure projects funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) helped create a demand for construction trades. While Frank's mother Annie managed the household and worked to care for the kids, his father Jacob worked as a building contractor and bricklayer. Despite his trade and WPA projects in the city, Frank's family still experienced unemployment as his father was reportedly out of work throughout most of 1938 and 1939. Things seemed to turn around for the Collins family as Jacob gradually found work. By the time the United States entered World War II, Jacob Sr. had joined the Cleveland chapter of Union Local No. 5, a building trades labor organization, which he listed as his place of employment in 1942. By 1950, he was working 48 hours a week laying bricks as the city's economy boomed.

While his father's work picked up, Frank was coming of age. Growing up along Colfax Avenue, Frank likely attended Rawlings Junior High School less than a half-mile from his home before moving on to Central High School. Officially, Cleveland's schools were racially integrated, but many of the Black students dwelling around the Central, Fairfax, and Kinsman neighborhoods found themselves enrolled in Central High School despite living closer to other schools. Central High School emphasized vocational education and had a reputation for cutting courses such as mathematics and foreign languages. Worse still, half days, or "relay days," were frequently employed to save on costs. The shorter school week was implemented to accommodate the overcrowding that had resulted in Cleveland's schools with a rise in the enrollment of Black students. It is difficult to determine how long Frank attended school, but he likely did not graduate. By 1950, at the age of 17, he was working 40-hour weeks as a bricklayer alongside his father, his older brother Jacob Jr., and his brother-in-law Simon Goldwire.

While Frank laid bricks in Cleveland, tensions were mounting between the United States and the Soviet Union. Following the end of World War II, both nations competed for global influence in what became known as the Cold War. News of Soviet occupations across Eastern Europe, communist victories in China, and the Kremlin's successful nuclear weapons test dominated headlines around the United States throughout the late 1940s. Wary of unchecked communist expansion, President Harry Truman unveiled the Truman Doctrine which promised American economic and military support to democratic capitalist countries under threat of communist aggression. Beyond material aid, the federal government also authorized National Security Council-68 (NSC-68) which permitted the president to deploy U.S. ground forces to support foreign allies and contain the spread of communism. Truman vowed to use these measures to defend countries located along the geographic boundaries of this ideological confrontation.

On June 25, 1950, the Cold War became a real conflict when North Korean communist forces, known as the Korean People's Army (KPA), with the support of the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, crossed the 38th parallel to invade South Korea. Almost immediately, the United Nations condemned the invasion and the United States prepared to intervene on behalf of its ally. During the next two months, the KPA made steady progress as they captured the South Korean capital of Seoul, then advanced south to concentrate on attacking the port city of Pusan. Using NSC-68, Truman authorized the military to deploy, and U.S. reinforcements began to arrive in significant numbers by late August and September. The United Nations Command (UNC) led by General Douglas MacArthur came to help in mid-September and recaptured Seoul after conducting a daring seaborne landing behind KPA lines at Inchon.

As fighting raged on the Korean peninsula, Frank Collins volunteered for the U.S. Army Reserve and entered service on August 10, 1950. Only 17 years old, Frank could not legally enlist on his own and had to receive his parents' signed consent. The Army Reserve was initially meant to remain in the United States but as battlefield losses mounted, General MacArthur began activating its personnel for service in Korea during the same month Frank enlisted.

Shortly after he joined, the Army sent Frank to basic training which typically consisted of 14 weeks, several hours of which were tailored to the soldier's assigned Military Occupational Service (MOS). This was a new approach to



Replacement troops gather to receive assignments at Camp Drake, Japan.

*The Korean War
Photography of Hanson A.
Williams, Jr., Pepperdine
University Special
Collections and University
Archives*

FRANK COLLINS

expedite reinforcements to Korea. Rather than send soldiers to advanced training after completing basic, specialized MOS skills were taught in parallel through this extended schedule.

Frank was designated as MOS 4745, infantryman, with possible duties including rifleman, light machine gunner, mortar man, and messenger. His training would have consisted of military protocol, physical exercise, field maneuvers, and weapons training. The use of rifles and carbines, machine guns, anti-tank defense weapons, mines, and demolition charges would all have been part of the curriculum. With the war in Korea already at full pitch, many soldiers probably had every expectation of being sent there.

Following the completion of his training sometime in November, Frank would have transferred to the West Coast. A transport ship would then have moved him and thousands of other army replacements to a forward depot, such as the one at Camp Drake, Japan. To help make up for losses sustained in the fighting, new personnel like Frank were usually assigned to their divisions at this point, then parceled out to regiments and companies with the most urgent manpower needs. The Army assigned Private Frank Collins as a replacement in Company K, 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division.

The 3rd Battalion had originally been established within the 9th Infantry Regiment as a racially segregated Black unit. While President Truman had ordered the military to integrate in July 1948, the 3rd Battalion remained a Black unit when it initially deployed to Korea two years later. As battlefield losses mounted, however, army officials increasingly found it difficult to replace losses while preserving the segregated composition of these last holdouts.

Frank's unit had been in almost constant combat since early August from holding the Pusan Perimeter during the summer to the U.N. offensive into North Korea, and the subsequent retreat following November's Chinese counteroffensive. By December 1, 1950, the 3rd Battalion had lost 397 men of the 645 it had at the start of November. The pragmatic need for soldiers to replace losses gradually compelled army officers to integrate segregated units such as the 3rd Battalion, making Frank among some of the army's first soldiers to fight a war in a racially mixed outfit.

Frank likely arrived at his new unit sometime in December 1950. Throughout the month, the 9th Regiment received hundreds of replacements as the army sought to reconstitute its strength after a particularly costly retreat in what became known as the Kunu-Ri gauntlet. Conditions were harsh as snow fell and temperatures dropped to zero degrees Fahrenheit. Vehicles malfunctioned and men were exposed to frostbite and other dangerous conditions.

Sometime around Christmas, the regiment crossed into South Korea near Daeseong and the 3rd Battalion detached to garrison the area around Chungju. To celebrate the holiday, each man in the regiment received a

pound of turkey along with the trimmings. Throughout January and part of February 1951, Frank and the 3rd Battalion occupied the hilly outskirts of Wonju, a vital road and rail network, where they set up defensive positions, conducted patrols, set up roadblocks, and worked to hold the line against the Communist Chinese and North Korean forces.

By early February 1951, Company K was detached from the 3rd Battalion and assigned to an independent task force which included a tank platoon and portions of a heavy mortar company. The new force was called Support Team Able and was attached to the South Korean 16th Infantry Regiment, 8th Division which had been struggling to halt a Chinese assault in the vicinity of Hoengsong—situated just north of Wonju. The weather was cold as Support Team Able occupied the hills overlooking the northwestern approach to the town.

On the night of February 12, Support Team Able deployed along Route 2 just outside of the crossroads town of Saemal. Chinese forces attacked and cut Frank's unit off from supporting U.N. forces, inflicting heavy casualties. As an infantryman, Frank would have likely been on the front line as the unit attempted to fight its way free to friendly forces. Among the survivors of the retreat was Frank's wounded company commander, who reported to his superior that Company K had been cut to pieces and he did not know how many of his men made it out.

Frank was not among the survivors. On February 12, 1951, at the age of 17, the Army reported that Private Frank Collins was killed in action. It is difficult to know when U.S. or U.N. forces were able to retrieve Frank's remains, as it wasn't until March that U.N. forces again held the ground on which Frank and his comrades had fought. Frank's remains were likely transferred to a United Nations Military Cemetery, such as the one in Pusan, where they awaited transfer back to the United States.

Frank Collins' body returned to the United States on April 4, 1952, and was laid to rest in Grafton National Cemetery in Grafton, West Virginia. Frank's father was raised in Huntington, West Virginia, and this may be the reason for Frank's interment in Grafton rather than closer to his native Cleveland. For his service, Frank Collins received the Purple Heart, the Korean Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation, the Republic of Korea War Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.



ONE WHO MADE IT HOME. Another POW from the 9th Regiment, Corporal John C. Goodman, was abandoned by Chinese troops because his wounds prevented him from walking. He was rescued later by Australian troops. *National Archives, NAID 276537316*



SOURCES FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY TO BE INCLUDED IN FINAL VERSION

SOURCES

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Full bibliographies will be included in the final draft of each biography, available later in the summer of 2024.

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Grant Program of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's first National Cemeteries—founded shortly after the Civil War—the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. Since the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, Grafton High School, and University High School.

Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council
 1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston, WV 25301
 wvhuman@wvhumanities.org
 www.wvhumanities.org
 304.346.8500



Veterans Legacy Grant Program
 Department of Veterans Affairs
 Washington D.C.

