

EDDIE LEE ROEBUCK

1928 –1951, KOREAN WAR

U.S. ARMY, PRIVATE

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Eddie Lee Roebuck, son of Emerson and

Elizabeth Roebuck, was born on March 12, 1928, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He had two sisters, Lula and Elizabeth Jr., and a brother named Emerson Roebuck Jr. The Roebuck family originally lived in Georgia before migrating to Pittsburgh.

Like many other Black families of the era, Eddie’s family had moved to a northern industrial city in search of better employment and an escape from racial violence in the Deep South. In the 1910s and 1920s, Pittsburgh’s Black population more than doubled due to this national “Great Migration.” Jobs in the steel industry were plentiful and attractive, and many believed their fortunes would change in the north. Enclaves and communities sprang up as the migrants grouped together in certain neighborhoods. One such community, the Hill District of Pittsburgh, became the Roebucks’ home as they settled into a new life in Pennsylvania.

Eddie was ten years old when his parents separated. Census records suggest that the Roebuck siblings often lived with other family members after their parents’ split. Fortunately, Eddie was still able to complete eight years of grade school, one year of high school, and three years of trade school. He worked as a laborer for a brick manufacturer.

That all changed when Eddie Lee Roebuck entered the Victory Building in downtown Pittsburgh, joined the U.S. Army on October 8,



Soldiers of the 5th U.S. Cavalry near
Pyongyang, North Korea. *National Archives*

1946, and shipped off to Maryland. During his first enlistment, the Army stationed Eddie at Aberdeen Proving Ground, an ordnance testing and research facility in Maryland. Eddie completed basic training there from October 1946 to February 1947, while also qualifying as a marksman on the M1 rifle. His first assignment was with a company billeted at Aberdeen.

When Eddie first enlisted, the United States military was still a segregated institution. Opportunities available for Eddie to serve his country were almost entirely defined by the color of his skin, and all-Black units were the outfits in which most Black servicemen were confined. But in his second year of service, all that began to change.



Downtown Pittsburgh as seen from the Hill District, 1950.
Historicpittsburgh.org

In 1948, after decades of advocacy and protest from African American citizens and others, segregation in the U.S. armed forces was abolished. Although he faced mixed reactions from his staff and the public, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, mandating the desegregation of the military. Separate branches of the military complied at different speeds, however, and the U.S. Army tended to respond the slowest. It would take until 1954 for the last segregated units to disappear.

Private Eddie Roebuck nevertheless reenlisted on February 28, 1951. The first few months of his new term bounced the 23-year-old around a great deal. He first reported to Fort George Meade in Maryland for two weeks, then transferred to Camp

Breckinridge, Kentucky, for more training. From Kentucky and then Pittsburgh, Eddie traveled to Fort Lawton in Seattle before heading across the Pacific to Japan.

The journey across the Pacific by ship took about two weeks, and he was in Sasebo for a matter of hours before bouncing across to Pusan, South Korea. At last he could settle into his long-term assignment with Company B, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, on August 13, 1951.

Eddie and the 5th Cavalry were part of a larger United Nations fighting force defending South Korea. The 5th Cavalry deployed to the Korean Peninsula in 1950 and fought at Pusan, Taegu, and Pyongyang. In February 1951, the 5th were



American military trucks rumble across the Korean border.

National Archives

part of U.N. Task Force Crombez that rescued the surrounded 2nd Division and French forces at Chipyeong-ni. They were a veteran unit with a distinguished record.

Through the summer of 1951, 1st Cavalry Division tentatively probed its front for enemy activity. By the time Eddie Roebuck arrived in early August, the division was preparing for a push across the Imjin River toward the city of Chorwon. Eddie probably saw his first combat around August 23, when 1st Cavalry Division advanced four miles across the Imjin. In September, however, Chinese and North Korean forces counterattacked, forcing the division back to the United Nations’ main line of resistance. Action see-sawed back and forth near Chorwon all month and into early October, with a mixture of small skirmishes and battalion-level engagements. It would have been a rude awakening for Eddie Roebuck, who had been in the combat theater less than two months and heard the sound of gunfire every day.

No report exists for the day that Eddie Roebuck died—October 7, 1951—but the 1st Cavalry Division seems to have held its usual positions

near Yonchon. British troops about 20 miles away logged nearly 2,300 enemy rounds falling into their position on October 7. It seems there was a flare-up in the fighting along 1st Cavalry’s sector. Somewhere in the confusion of these many small localized combats, Roebuck lost his life.

Three men were recovered together on October 20, having fallen near Yonchon—which lay about six miles southeast of Chokko-ri—on October 7. When Eddie Roebuck’s body was found, he lay alongside another Black soldier. Private Elijah Odom of Blackville, South Carolina, originally assigned to 7th Armored Division, but attached to the 5th Cavalry as a light weapons infantryman just like Eddie Roebuck. When he died October 7, 1951, the South Carolina farmer had left behind a wife and two daughters only six months earlier.

Private First Class Joseph “Gig” Arthur Lambert, a World War II Navy veteran who, like Roebuck, reenlisted during the Korean War fell alongside Roebuck and Odom. Lambert was a Hampden County, Massachusetts, soldier and heavy weapons infantryman. Lambert was honored in Chicopee, Massachusetts, in 1956, when a public school was



Troopers from Roebuck’s 5th Cavalry on the march to Pyongyang, October 1950.

National Archives

renamed “Lambert-Lavoie Memorial School” after him and 1st Lieutenant George Lavoie, who was also killed in Korea.

Army Chaplain Clarence Lund conducted a Protestant burial service for Eddie and others at the U.N. Military Cemetery in Tanggok, South Korea on October 28, 1951. Eddie’s remains were exhumed for repatriation a few months later. Along with four other Pittsburgh soldiers who lost their lives in Korea, Roebuck’s body arrived in San Francisco aboard the SS *Enid Victory* on February 19, 1952.

Eddie’s family considered a number of final resting places, such as New York and Winchester, Virginia. At last, they chose Grafton National Cemetery in

Taylor County, West Virginia, as the closest to Pittsburgh at the time. The present-day National Cemetery of the Alleghenies near Pittsburgh did not open until 2005. Eddie Lee Roebuck joined Grafton’s honored dead when he was interred there on March 5, 1952.



PLACE OF INTERMENT:
Grafton National Cemetery
SECTION B
SITE 1506

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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.

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For readability, bibliographies have been omitted from this publication. Student research for these biographies relies heavily on primary sources—census records, city directories, draft cards, muster rolls, and more—made available digitally through Ancestry and Fold3. Yearbook repositories and the digitized collections of many universities and archives have been invaluable resources. Most newspaper research was conducted digitally via Newspapers.com, NewspaperArchives, and the Library of Congress’s *Chronicling America* database.

Servicemembers’ Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs) and Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs) are another essential part of project research, provided free of charge in most cases by the National Archives through standard records requests.

As the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project has grown and matured, the team has found that new sources sometimes surface for veterans researched in prior project years. To better maintain a “living bibliography” of all its veterans, a single master document is kept up on the project’s webpage under the “Programs” tab at www.wvhumanities.org.

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