



THANKSGIVING "OVER THERE"

Cold War Voices from the Front

Bill Shepard of Plymouth, US Army, Korea:

"I came back home after the Second World War and then was recalled during the Korean War. It was a shock -- I hadn't even really told my new wife that I was still in the Reserves...

"I wrote a letter home from Korea on Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 1951, that my wife has saved. You can see by the letter:

Am so full I can hardly move! We just finished eating a huge turkey dinner with all the trimmings. I'll enclose the menu. Typical Army -- feast or famine, but today we had the feast.

We were up on the front lines eating cold K rations and then suddenly we go to the rear for Thanksgiving dinner, and then right back to the front line!"

Mary Elizabeth ("Betsy") Sproles of Plymouth, WAVES, US Navy, stationed in the Territory of Hawaii:

"I enlisted in the Navy of March of 1951. fairly early on in the Korean War. My family (my ancestors include Warrens and Winslows) has served in the armed forces since colonial times. Its a family tradition that I was proud to continue...

"Thanksgiving 1952 -- we had the usual metal trays, but we had full fare -- mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, sliced ham, turkey and dressing, and green peas. The salad bar was set up with fruits and nuts and candies. It was quite ornate -- the boys outdid themselves with paper turkeys decorating the salad bar. But there weren't any tablecloths, just the bare tables with your metal trays same as usual, and the cups with no handles. You could have coffee, tea or milk -- but only half a pint of milk -- milk was rationed for some reason. We had different kinds of pies -- mince and apple and pumpkin. The Navy had good bakers, I have to admit."

Bob Bavelock of Plymouth, US Army, stationed in Germany in the early 1950s as an interpreter:

"Through the local Catholic priest, I had become acquainted with a German family. The father of the family was a retired river boat captain; he always wore a tan fez. The daughter of the family had spent a year in America (at the University of Michigan) as an exchange student, so she knew all about Thanksgiving and turkey dinners.

"I was invited down for Thanksgiving dinner -- the daughter explained to me ahead of

time not to expect it would be exactly like an American Thanksgiving dinner. We did have turkey -- canned turkey! They served this canned turkey breast swimming in sauerkraut with lots of juice and gravy. They also served a clear chicken soup with a knodel (an enormous dumpling), the ubiquitous boiled potatoes, and -- on the side -- a great favorite of mine, sautéed lung. For desert, we had prunes (traditionally served with goose). The turkey to me was incidental. I was with a family, that's what really counted."

Rick Sterling of Plymouth, 1st Cavalry Division, US Army, Vietnam:

"My company was out in the field Thanksgiving 1970, so we found a place to bring in a helicopter. They flew out turkey and cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes and pie, and set up a chow line out there for us. It was during monsoon season, so we got a little wet while we were eating. We would stand around eating, pretty much. The only shelters we were carrying around with us were small tents. Each man had a shelter half and we'd snap them together and a couple of us would sleep in there at night, but there wasn't room to really sit around. So we stood around in the rain and ate our soggy turkey dinners."

Robert White, Jr., US Army, Vietnam:

"I spent 3 years in Southeast Asia in the late 60s and early 70s. My fondest memory of that period was when choppers dropped us a Thanksgiving dinner in Mermite cans. We can cans of HOT turkey, HOT mashed potatoes, HOT gravy, COLD cranberry sauce, cornbread stuffing, and peas. Man, that was good! We had to wash it down with hot canteen water. There were NO complaints. We were not expecting such a nice meal, as we were in the field."