

Don joined the army in July of 1949 with plans that the GI bill would eventually cover most of his college expenses upon discharge from the service. After basic training Don was sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for artillery training and then sent to Okinawa for further advanced training.

After the Korean War broke out, Don was assigned to the 15th Field Artillery Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Division which was fighting near the Yalu River. The U.N. troops were greatly outnumbered by the North Koreans and the Chinese causing the loss of many lives. The Eighth Army was ordered to evacuate while the Second Division was ordered to cover the withdrawal. In the battle of Kunuri on November 29th, 4940 men of the 2nd division were lost. Don lived to fight another day.

In early February of 1951 the commanders prepared a counter assault across the center of the Korean peninsula. The South Korean troops were to the bulk of the fighting with elements of various U.S. infantry and artillery units.

What the commanders did not know was that the communist forces were launching a major offensive and had moved four Chinese and two North Korean divisions in the area north of the village of Hoengsong. On February 11 the communist forces engaged elements of the South Korean army. The GI's of the 15th Field Artillery Battalion were encamped for the night relying on the South Koreans for protection. When the Chinese attacked in the dark, the South Koreans fled. The Chinese and North Koreans swarmed over the U.S. positions. Some 208 men of the 15th Field Artillery Battalion died, resulting in one of the most concentrated losses of American lives in the war. This battle in the Hoengsong Valley became known as "Massacre Valley" since much of the fighting was hand to hand combat. Casualties were very heavy during the fighting on the 11th, 12th and 13th. The surrounded American troops decided to attempt a breakout of the entrapment but were soon overwhelmed and taken prisoner.

Cpl. Gately and the captured survivors were marched at night for several weeks across the mountains and into the southern part of North Korea. In the third week of the march they arrived in a former slave labor camp. The conditions were very crude; there was little food and no clean water. Pneumonia and dysentery were common. Some of the prisoners died from lack of medical attention.

On April 22nd in 1951 U.S. planes hit the camp believing that it was a staging area for the enemy troops. An estimated 50 U.S. soldiers were killed or wounded. The North Koreans decided to move the POW's northward and turn them over to the Chinese. Many died during this forced march which military historians classify as a "Death March". Atrocities committed on the Americans were a daily event.

About May 5th the Americans were loaded onto a train at the North Korean railhead in Sinanju. The men were stuffed into box cars so tight that no one could move. Men who died never hit the floor. The journey lasted five days. U.S. planes on one occasion attacked the train. The train pulled into a tunnel just in time. In no time the tunnel filled with exhaust. The men were screaming to be released. The guards did eventually lead the men out of the tunnel for fresh air. The train arrived in Sinanju, North Korea on May 9th. The surviving POW's were then marched eastward along the southern bank of the Yalu River. They were heading to the area of Changson, which was the site of what became known as Camp #1. On May 14th Cpl. Gately collapsed along side the road suffering from many weeks of starvation and sickness. He could no longer pull himself up. His comrades attempted to assist him but the guards would not permit them to do so. He was left alone to die. He was 19 years old. It is assumed that he was buried by the villagers along side the road, a resting place known only to God.