

This Month in NCO History: July 20, 1950

A Heroic Stand At the Battle of Taejon

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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SGT.
**GEORGE
D. LIBBY**

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

From the moment Sgt. George Dalton Libby arrived on the Korean Peninsula with the rest of the 24th Infantry Division on June 30, 1950, the odds were stacked against them. But Libby's efforts through extreme adversity would earn him the nation's highest military honor.

The Taro Division was the first American force to reach the Republic of Korea in response to the invasion by the North Korean People's Army five days earlier. The 24th ID was charged with slowing the advance of the North Korean assault until more U.S. forces could arrive. But that was no easy task.

The division was grossly understrength in the aftermath of post-World War II cutbacks. Its speedy arrival and limited training time in Korea meant the 24th would be, in effect, a strategic bump in the road, meant to hinder the enemy's advance while 140,000 United Nations troops formed what eventually became the Pusan Perimeter to the south. This translated to setback after setback in the early days of fighting.

Beginning July 14, the 24th ID began a valiant stand against three attacking North Korean

divisions during the Battle of Taejon. The North Koreans successfully pushed the Americans back from the Kum River east of the city before beginning an intense urban assault.

On July 20, the remaining elements of the division were attempting to withdraw from the city that once housed its headquarters. Libby was among them as part of C Company, 3rd Engineer Combat Battalion. According to his Medal of Honor citation, he was aboard a truck bound for the town of Taegu when it encountered a North Korean roadblock. Enemy forces ambushed the truck, disabling it. The subsequent barrage of bullets killed or wounded all Soldiers aboard except for Libby, who exited the vehicle and scrambled to a nearby ditch to take cover. As bullets whizzed around him, Libby returned fire, allowing wounded Soldiers to leave the truck and take cover. Twice during the firefight, he exposed himself to enemy fire by running across the road to administer aid to wounded Soldiers and pull them to safety.

Soon after, Libby heard an M-5 Half-track approaching. He flagged down the driver and began helping the wounded aboard. As the vehicle drove off, the enemy directed its fire at the driver. That's when Libby made the decision that thrust him into history. Realizing that no one aboard would be able to operate the vehicle if the driver was killed, Libby used his own body to shield him. Libby received several bullet wounds in his arm and torso as the massive tractor rumbled away from the scene, his citation states. The vehicle made frequent stops with Libby firing his M2 carbine at enemy forces they encountered as he helped more wounded Soldiers aboard.

Eventually, the tractor came upon another roadblock and was peppered with bullets. Libby, who had ignored requests to receive first aid, once again held himself in front of the driver to shield him. Libby was struck by bullets repeatedly but refused to withdraw as the driver careened through the roadblock and headed toward safety. Libby held his position until he lost consciousness and died. He was 30 years old. His citation states, "Sgt. Libby's sustained, heroic actions enabled his comrades to reach friendly lines. His dauntless courage and gallant self-sacrifice reflect the highest credit upon himself and uphold the esteemed traditions of the U.S. Army."

Libby's body was returned to the United States. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor on Aug. 2, 1951.

Libby was born Dec. 4, 1919, in Bridgton, Maine. He served during World War II before his time in Korea. Since his death several buildings and monuments have been named in his honor. Perhaps the most notable is the George D. Libby Bridge, which spans the length of the Imjin River and links North and South Korea.