



Twelve days of intense combat in October 1952 cost the U.S. 7th Infantry Division 365 KIA for a piece of turf that ultimately remained in enemy hands.

SHOWDOWN ON TRIANGLE HILL

by Richard Ecker

In October 1952, the U.S. 7th Infantry Division occupied a sector of the Main Line of Resistance (MLR) in central Korea near Kumhwa. Opposing the division, the Chinese 45th Division held elevations to the north, including Hill 598, also called Triangle Hill. Both sides were well dug-in. Battle lines had not changed significantly in almost a year.

After peace talks began in November 1951, the Eighth Army assumed an "active defense" posture and combatants on both sides marked time awaiting the outcome of the talks.

The "War of the Hills" had begun. For six months, this war played out as artillery/mortar exchanges and minor skirmishes that did little to change the situation. Then, in spring 1952, as frustration over the failure of peace talks increased, "active" defense gave way to active engagement. *Operation Showdown* began to take shape.

Col. Lloyd Moses, commander of the 7th Division's 31st Infantry Regiment, relates in his memoirs, "Not long after my arrival in the 31st Infantry, the division and corps commanders talked to me about an attack on Hill 598." By June 1952, Moses wrote, plans were under way "to move our MLR forward ... On 23 July, I began to make serious plans to capture Hill 598, should we be called upon to do so."

Hill 598 was a formidable objective. The apex of its 2,000-foot triangular crest overlooked U.S. 7th Division positions on a line of hills about half a mile away to the south. From this apex, two massive ridges extended to the northeast and northwest. The ridge to the northwest was dominated by a hill called Pike's Peak.

The other terminated with a pair of hills that had been dubbed Jane Russell in honor of the well-endowed American actress. A less prominent ridge, named Sandy, sloped down to the east. About 1,000 yards across the valley from Sandy stood Sniper Ridge, which, because of its strategic location relative to Triangle, also was an objective of *Operation Showdown*.

On Oct. 8, Far East Commander Gen. Mark Clark approved the operation. By then Maj. Gen. Wayne Smith, 7th Division commander, had selected the 31st Infantry to conduct the assault on Triangle Hill. The attack on Sniper Ridge was assigned by the Corps commander to elements of the South Korean 2nd Division.

'Shower of Grenades'

Operation Showdown began on Oct. 14. Although the original plans called for a single battalion attack on Triangle Hill, the objective was too large and too well-defended for such a limited force. So Moses ordered his 3rd Battalion to take the west sector of the objective, including Hill 598 and Pike's Peak. The east sector of the complex, including Jane Russell and Sandy Ridge, became the objective of the 1st Battalion.

In spite of two days of preparatory air strikes and artillery barrages, the two assault companies on Hill 598, L and K, met fierce resistance from the Chinese as they made their way up the hill's steep south slope. Small groups from the attacking force repeatedly assaulted the crest of the hill, each time being repulsed by "a shower of hand grenades, shape charges, bangalore torpedos and rocks."

Within the first half hour, all of L Company's officers became casualties. After two hours, with both assault companies still bogged down, I Company was committed to the battle.

Taking advantage of earlier gains by the 1st Battalion, I Company attacked the hill from the east through Sandy Ridge. L and K companies, pinned down throughout the day, were finally ordered to withdraw. I Company held into the

BATTLE CASUALTIES

Killed in Action	365
Wounded in Action	1,174



COURTESY D.M. GIANGRECO, AUTHOR OF "WAR IN KOREA"

ATTACK AND COUNTERATTACK: Troops of the 7th Infantry Division move cautiously in a trench on a hill along the Iron Triangle. The Battle of Triangle Hill, part of Operation Showdown, proved costly for the Americans in October 1952.

evening, but faced with repeated counterattacks, also abandoned the assault.

In the 1st Battalion sector, A Company led the attack on Sandy Ridge and Jane Russell. Pinned down almost immediately by small arms fire from Hill 598, the platoon on Sandy sustained 25 casualties in the first few minutes. When the remainder of the company was also stopped short of their objective, B Company was sent into battle.

Sandy Ridge was finally taken and consolidated, but the attack on Jane Russell remained bogged down. C Company was then pitched into the maelstrom. After three hours of combat against intense resistance, "the crest of Objective 'B' (Jane Russell) was in friendly hands."

On that crest, 1st Lt. Edward R. Schowalter performed feats Hollywood could not duplicate. He led platoons of A Co., 1st Bn., 31st Inf., up Jane Russell Hill. "Right through the hail of grenades and small-arms fire he led us," recalled one GI.

Nearly killed twice, he at one point found himself stacked among dead Chinese. Severely wounded, he spent six months in the hospital recuperating. Modesty was Schowalter's hallmark.

"I always figured I was awarded the medal as the representative of a superb fighting team," he said. "We took that

hill together. I wear the Medal of Honor on behalf of all the men who fought and died on that hill. It's really theirs."

Repeated enemy counterattacks, however, finally forced the 1st Battalion to abandon its positions, and by the end of the day, the enemy remained in control of all 31st Infantry objectives.

Unit's Deadliest Day

In terms of casualties, it had been the most costly day for the regiment in all of its more than two years of action in the war: 96 KIA and 337 WIA. It could have been a lot worse. For the first time in the history of modern warfare, every combatant in the assault force was wearing an armored vest.

The following day, the 1st Battalion of the 32nd Infantry, placed under the command of Moses, assaulted Sandy Ridge and Jane Russell, while the 2nd Battalion of the 31st attacked Hill 598. E Co., 31st Inf., reached the trenches on 598 and, reinforced by F and G companies, secured the position. Strong resistance, though, continued from the enemy on Pike's Peak.

Pfc. Ralph E. Pomeroy, a member of E Company, manned a machine gun at the end of a trench to protect his platoon's flank. When the enemy attacked, he kept up heavy return fire, killing many of them and slowing the assault.

Shortly after, he was severely wounded from a mortar burst, and his gun mount rendered inoperable. Still, he removed the gun and aggressively moved forward. After suffering a second wound and with his ammunition depleted, Pomeroy took on the enemy in hand-to-hand combat—using his weapon as a club—until he was killed.

Pomeroy earned the Medal of Honor.

On the northeast arm of the complex, A and B companies of the 32nd Infantry were unsuccessful on Jane Russell and had to withdraw to Sandy, where C Company had established a foothold. At that time, Moses ordered I Co., 31st Inf., into the battle. No units, however, were able to do more than consolidate positions on Sandy.

Early on the 16th, Smith transferred command of the operation to Col. Joseph Russ, commanding officer of the 32nd Infantry, and the two idle battalions of the 31st were ordered to replace the 17th Infantry in the west sector of the division's front. The 2nd Battalion of the 17th was placed under the command of Russ and secured Jane Russell Hill that afternoon.

Attack and counterattack continued for the next eight days as Russ continued to rotate units into the battle. Then, on Oct. 25, the Republic of Korea (ROK) 2nd Division relieved the 7th Division on Triangle and, after 12 days, U.S. involvement in *Operation Showdown* ended.

The best available U.S. casualty estimate for *Operation Showdown* is 1,540: 365 KIA, 1,174 WIA and 1 captured.

A week later, the ROK division that was struggling to hold Triangle, even as it continued its battle for Sniper Ridge, was finally forced to abandon the hill.

An objective planned to be secured by two battalions in five days had required an entire division. And it was only partially occupied after 12 days and could not ultimately be defended. For the remainder of the war, the battle lines around Triangle Hill remained essentially where they were before *Operation Showdown* was conceived. ★

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