

Medals: twice wounded in Korea

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"I graduated from here and moved on to Madras. By then I was 17 years old, almost 18. I tried to talk to my mom. I told her I'm not learning anything there. 'I'm too old for that school,' I said."

Yahtin wanted to join the military because it offered vocational opportunities, things he felt he needed to learn so he could get a good-paying job. His mother wouldn't let him join the army, so he waited until he was 18.

He hitched a ride from Madras to Bend and signed up. "But I didn't ask for no war," he said.

He had to wait a week before there were enough recruits to transport to basic training. He went through basic at Fort Ord in Northern California before his unit, the Fourth Infantry Division, was sent to Japan.

Like many veterans of combat, Yahtin's memories, and misgivings, are vivid.

"Just like right now, I didn't feel like I should be involved in a war for the U.S.," he said. "I couldn't believe that I should go to war for the U.S., because of the way that we (Native Americans) had been treated. But I had to. I had no choice."

"It was worse when we went to In-chon. I was just an ambulance driver. I was not a combat medic. And so when In-chon happened, they unloaded me and my truck, and handed me a weapon, with eight clips and eight grenades."

"They sent me out there to pick up the wounded, all by my lonesome. No directions, nothing. They just expected me to do it on my own, I guess. So it

was quite a thing for me to go to In-chon and not really know what I was supposed to do or where I was supposed to go."

Even though he had a loaded weapon, Yahtin said that if he fired it, it was only in response to enemy fire, just to defend himself.

Though he was originally awarded a Purple Heart, he was wounded twice, giving him credit for a golden cluster, to signify a second wound.

The first came Dec. 7, 1950, only a month after he arrived in Korea, at Chosin Reservoir. His unit was retreating, and he was hit high on the left thigh.

"I ended up in the hospital for four months," he said. "It still kind of hurts. Cold weather really hurts it."

The second time was June 2, 1951, when his unit was involved in a motor attack.

"I was in my ambulance, and my ambulance got knocked out with me in it," he said. "I got shrapnel. Totaled my truck."

Yahtin was in Korea until 1954, when he was sent back to the U.S., to Fort Lewis, Wash.

He was back stateside, but that didn't mean it would be easy on Yahtin, then still only 23 years old.

"It was a bad time to be discharged because when I came back, I was really screwed up," he said. "It was never regarded as a (medical) problem. But I had been through so much combat, and seen so many people dying, some of them on me, leaning on me and talking to me, telling me not to let them die."

"All those things, even today, bother me. When I came back, they stationed me at Fort Lewis, and I couldn't deal with being in a barracks with a bunch of other people. The only way out for me was to just go somewhere. And, of course, even I didn't know what was wrong with me. I thought I was crazy. I was seeing all these things. I

was seeing people talking to me. I didn't want to be involved with anybody. I didn't want to know anybody. That's the way I was when I came back to the U.S."

But in a time before anyone, including military personnel, was diagnosed or treated for Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, the Army appeared neither understanding nor sympathetic toward Yahtin, and he was dishonorably discharged.

He got married and raised a family, but he wasn't healed. It wasn't until the 1970s when he met a Veterans Administration counselor named Carl Whaley.

"And this guy, he brought all this stuff out of me. I didn't understand it fully myself. He filled me in about post-traumatic stress," he said. "He would come to my house, visit with me, talk with me."

Yahtin has mementos, articles of clothing to wear when he and fellow veterans are honored. He has a jacket with honors he had already received.

He had received a Japanese Occupation pin, three Presidential Unit citations for his time spent in Korea, and a Korean Defense Medal.

He still works in the woods with his oldest son and still finds great peace.

"When my boy came back, I let him run the equipment. But I enjoy it," he said. "It just takes everything away from me. I drive my grader, listen to it run, and do what I have to do."

He said he is more at peace with his time spent in Korea more than a half-century ago, and is candid about his experience. But his experience there gives him a perspective on the current Iraqi conflict, which, like the Korean War, he calls "the President's war."

In the fall, he meets other Korean War veterans in Milwaukie, where Yahtin said there are still many survivors.

Fry bread: difference of opinion

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"It isn't the culprit that has made Indian people heavy," said Tammy L. Brown, nutrition consultant with Indian Health Service's diabetes division. "It's the fast foods, the sugary drinks. It's the overall diet."

But, if fry bread gets Indians talking about health, then that's fine by Brown and Harjo. "Just because it was food that was forced on us doesn't mean we have to keep embracing it," Harjo said.

For a long time, Indians have made fun of commodities and even refer to an overweight person as having a "commod bod." Jokes are tossed around that fry bread has killed more Indians than the federal government.

But artist Steven Deo, a Creek and Euchee Indian, said laughing is a way Indians have dealt with obesity and diabetes.

"At some point, we have to

confront that," he said. "We have to prepare the next generation to come out of that poverty, to strive for bigger and better things."

Deo created a series of public service announcement posters, and debuted his first one — a picture of a big, tan piece of fry bread with the words: "Frybread Kills" — at a show in New Mexico last year.

"It has stirred some controversy," Deo said. "But at least we're talking about it now."

It's mid-day at the Health O'dham Promotion Program, or the HOPP, and the step class is in full, sweaty swing. Health lessons are posterized around the gym, reminding Indians to get their five fruits and vegetables a day and that white bread and rice convert quickly to sugar. Music is blaring, the treadmills are filling up and Mashone Antone, 36, is on her second trip to the community gym today.

Last October she took a hard look at her life: She was over-

weight and so were two of her three children. They stayed in the house a lot, ate fast food, indulged in fry bread and barely thought about health.

But Antone, a juvenile probation officer, wanted to change that, for her children and for herself. Now she's up every day at 5 a.m. for a two-mile walk, then hits the HOPP before work and again after work. She's shed 30 pounds and wants to lose 50 more. Her daughter often joins her at the gym, and now the family takes walks and plays basketball.

Soda is out, fruits and vegetables are in, and fry bread is now only a rare treat. "When I think about it, that was my downfall," Antone said. "I don't miss it."

Harjo would be proud. But getting someone with Antone's enthusiasm is a challenge for the gym's staff. Nutritionists estimate 80 percent of the Tohono O'dham people are obese. They hold a weight loss challenge, fun runs, and offer nutrition counseling.

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