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Greenville Native Fights at Chosin Reservoir

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J. Gleim, Museum Curator)



These objects belonged to US Marine Corps veteran Joseph Selnekovic. Selnekovic (b. 1930 d. 2011), a native of Greenville, Mercer County, Pennsylvania enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1948. He was stationed with the 1st Marine Air Wing in Cherry Point, NC, where he served as a mechanic for F4U Corsair fighter planes. With less than 10 months left in his enlistment, Selnekovic's unit was sent to the Pacific, where they landed in Busan, Korea in August 1950.

As part of the 1st Marine Air Wing, Marine Fighter Squadron 212, Selnekovic's unit provided air support for the US landing at Inchon. In November 1950, the unit moved to Yonpo, Korea and carried out close support strikes as part of the Battle of Chosin Reservoir. During the battle, his unit was evacuated so quickly they were forced to abandon and burn a plane on the ground but were able to safely transport 100,000 Korean refugees from the area.

The Battle of Chosin Reservoir marked the entry of China into the war. There, Chinese soldiers surrounded the First Marine Division for 17 days in sub-Arctic temperatures. Outnumbered and plagued by the extreme temperatures, the Marines suffered extraordinarily high casualties and were forced to retreat. The event is one of the most storied in Marine Corps history, and veterans of the battle, including Selnekovic, called themselves the "Chosin Few". This collection, which includes newspaper articles, photographs, commemorative documents, and a Tootsie Roll container illustrates the story of Mr. Selnekovic's experience in the Marine Corps, the harrowing battle at Chosin, and how both Americans and Koreans honored the men who fought there.

Perhaps the Tootsie Roll container seems out of place among these military artifacts, however at the time of the battle at Chosin Reservoir, "Tootsie roll" was the Marine code word for 60 mm mortar ammunition. During the battle, Marines radioed for "Tootsie Rolls", but the radio operator did not have the code sheets to interpret what the men on the ground were asking for. Soon, pallets of the candy were dropped on the Marines. The mix-up was quickly corrected, but the Marines on the ground found the Tootsie Rolls invaluable as well, providing sustenance and keeping their mouths moist as rations dwindled in freezing temperatures. Further, the men discovered the Tootsie Rolls could be warmed used to plug bullet holes. As the candies refroze, they created a tight s