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Pennsylvania Native Participates in the Occupation of Korea, 1946

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



Photo of US Army XXIV Corps Insignia Patch.

Marion Deppen of Millersburg, Pennsylvania wore this U.S. Army XXIV Corps insignia patch during the occupation of Korea in 1946. Deppen was eighteen years old when he was drafted in February 1946. He took an option to enlist in the regular Army for eighteen months and was sent to Camp Crowder (later Fort Truman), Missouri to begin his training. Deppen rose to the rank of Technician 4 and received training as a Medical/Surgical Technician at Fitzsimmons General Hospital in Colorado and at Fort Lewis, Washington.



Photo of Marion Deppen.

In October 1946 Deppen boarded USAT General HB Freeman, bound for Incheon, Korea. After Japan surrendered to the Allies in September 1945, it lost control of its territories including Korea. Korea was divided at the 38th parallel and Soviet forces occupied the north, while the US controlled the south. Deppen was part of a contingent of replacement troops sent to South Korea to bolster the occupying force. Deppen's trip was harrowing; he recalls the ship sailing through a typhoon that caused "waves as big as barns" to strike the ship. During the storm, the Army colonel in charge of the transport died of a heart attack.

Once Deppen arrived in Korea, he was one of three men assigned to XXIV Corps Headquarters Company stationed at US Korean Base Command ASCOM City, 8 miles from Incheon. Tensions were running high; political and economic unrest plagued the American-occupied territory as American forces tried to gain control of the area. The captain of the XXIV Corps Headquarters Company told Deppen when he arrived on base "there will be a civil war here in Korea. I hope it's not while I am here – I hope it is not while you are here."

Deppen trained to do sutures and minor surgical procedures; he recalls having sutured 75 patients during his time in Korea. Adjoining the Army dispensary where Deppen worked was a small medical facility operated by a Korean civilian who lacked formal medical training. Under Japanese control, Koreans had been banned from higher education, and much of the population lacked access to medical care. The Army dispensary provided him with assistance and supplies.

On the few times Deppen left his base, he was troubled by the extreme poverty he encountered. The majority of Korea's industrial and technological infrastructure was in the northern part of the country, now under Soviet control. Frequent blackouts, unpredictable shipping, and frequent shortages plagued the largely agricultural southern part of the nation.

Marion Deppen returned to the United States in May 1947. After his enlistment, he attended Penn State University on the G.I. Bill and earned a degree in Agriculture. In Korea, amidst growing Cold War antagonism, a Soviet-US Joint Commission failed to make progress on developing a plan to reunite the nation under its own government. In 1948, the United States called for a United Nations-sponsored vote for all Koreans to determine their fate. The North refused to participate, and in response the South established its own government in Seoul as the Republic of Korea. The North followed suite and established a government in Pyongyang as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, and the civil war Deppen's captain had predicted in 1946 began.