

GI Place Name in three Sectors of Korea

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ALTHOUGH PLACE-NAMING BY GI's in the combat zone might at first seem to be a haphazard affair, there are actually a number of general principles which determined not only which terrain features would be named, but also what these names would be. The place-names usually had some permanence, but they were occasionally changed by other units, and, therefore, I can assert only that the names presented below were those current in the U.S. Army Second Infantry Division during the period March 1952 to April 1953. The following place-names identified terrain features in the three front-line sectors occupied by the Second Division during this period; and, although this list is not exhaustive, it is fairly complete — the author's memory having been augmented by a few documents:

Alligator Jaws (friendly outpost): a descriptive name for two ridges which formed a V. When viewed on a map, the smaller ridge lines running from the inside of the V presented a serrated appearance. Thus arose the gnathic appellation.

Arrowhead Ridge (friendly outpost): a descriptive name for a ridge deriving its sagittate appearance from a sharp curve in the Yokkok-Chon River.

Arsenal (friendly outpost): probably a code name for a knoll at the base of T-Bone Ridge.

Betty Grable (enemy outpost): a descriptive name for a series of ridge lines parallel to our front. Elevations and depressions at certain points gave (especially when silhouetted at sundown) an appearance unmistakably feminine, if not supinely sensual.

Bull's-eye (friendly outpost): a descriptive name for a small, low hill with one trench encircling it just beneath the crest. Its target-like appearance and the frequency and accuracy with which it was used as one by Chinese mortars made the selection of the name twice-cursed.

Bunker Hill (enemy Main Line of Resistance):¹ a descriptive name for a hill with numerous visible enemy fortifications.

Camel's Back (enemy MLR): a descriptive name (dromedary, not Bactrian) for a large hill.

Checkpoint Easy (friendly outpost): the code name of a knob on a ridge line behind Old Baldy.

Death Valley: an apt albeit somewhat unimaginative descriptive name for a long valley which was under enemy observation and fire and over which supplies were transported to a company on the MLR.

Eerie (friendly outpost): probably a code name for a small knoll immediately behind Arsenal.

Hadacol Ridge (no man's land): *Hadacol* was easily folk-etymologized from the Korean place-name *Hasakkol*.

Hook (part of friendly MLR): a descriptive name for a curved ridge close to the enemy lines. The forward extremity of this ridge was known as the *Point*.

Hwachon Reservoir: a Korean place-name for a reservoir behind the enemy MLR.

Little Chicago (friendly outpost): a code name for a small knoll on the right flank of Old Baldy.

Little Gibraltar (friendly MLR): a large hill somewhat resembling its Mediterranean namesake. It was probably named by the British Commonwealth Division, which for long had occupied this position.

Monk's Hood Hill (enemy outpost): a descriptive name.

Old Baldy (friendly outpost): a descriptive name for a large hill. Prolonged bombardment had destroyed even the smallest vegetation.

Poke-eye Ridge (no man's land): *Poke-eye* was easily folk-etymologized from the Korean place-name *Pokkae*.

Porkchop Hill (friendly outpost): a descriptive name for a hill which presented an unmistakable porkchop shape when viewed on a map.

Silver Star Hill (enemy outpost): a commemorative name for an often-raided hill. The origin of the name was explained to me as, "That's the hill where Lt. Henry got his Silver Star [medal]."

Star Hill (enemy outpost): a descriptive name for a hill with an asteroid appearance when viewed on a map.

¹ Hereafter abbreviated MLR.

T-Bone (friendly and enemy outposts): a descriptive name for an extensive series of hills and ridges. The two friendly outposts, Arsenal and Eerie, were at the base of the T, with the remainder of the ridge in enemy hands.

Ten Sixty-two, 1062 (enemy MLR): a numerical designation of a very large hill. It was later named *Papa San* by another division.

Three Sisters (no man's land): a descriptive name for three small, closely-grouped, similarly-shaped hills.

Uncle (friendly outpost): the code name of a small hill.

Unnumbered Hill Number 188 (no man's land): a numerical designation for a small hill, around which took place much patrol activity.

Westview (friendly outpost): a later code name for Checkpoint Easy.

Yoke (friendly outpost): the code name of a small hill.

Yokkok-Chon River: the Korean name for a river which wound across the division front.

From the preceding list it may be seen that rivers and reservoirs were not renamed by our forces. However, that these objects were not renamed does not mean that GI's used the existing Korean names. Since these features did not exist in sufficient number to cause confusion, they were referred to simply as *the reservoir* and *the river*.

Towns and villages were identified by their Korean names in official communications, but otherwise this use of native place-names achieved little currency. One exception to this generality was the use of the name of the village of *No-Dong*, a name which seemed to capture the GI's Rabelaisian imagination. Valleys were rarely named and were usually designated by a reference to the high ground surrounding them.

Of all the terrain features, the high ground is the most frequently named, as a glance at the preceding list will show. Since these hills and ridges are usually the most conspicuous and important features, there arises a need for common references to them. This need is met in three ways: (1) designation by number, (2) designation by code name, and (3) designation by a descriptive term.

The first method (the official method) is to designate the hills by numbers which show their height (usually in meters). Since the elevations of high points are marked on military maps, this system

permits easy identification. Furthermore, it has the advantage of presupposing no familiarity with the terrain features themselves. Therefore, upon moving into new areas, units normally refer to hills numerically. That some sort of designation is necessary may be seen in the reference to one hill as *Unnumbered Hill Number 185*. This oxymoronic appellation stems from the fact that the elevation of the hill was not marked on the map and had to be interpolated from the map's contour lines. Unfortunately, numerical identification is seldom satisfactory. Some of its disadvantages are that: (1) a number is more difficult to remember than a name, (2) more than one hill can bear the same numerical designation, (3) numbers are easily transposed — especially when the situation is confused and the communication is poor, and (4) numbers are only slightly descriptive. Yet, occasionally a numerical reference will prove to be satisfactory. For a relatively long time Hill 1062 remained otherwise nameless, even after nearly all its neighbors had been named; but its onomastic resistance was apparently due to its height and its having one more digit than the surrounding hills.

Designation by code is the least important method. It is infrequently used, and the names are ephemeral. The names seem to stick only when the hills are tactically of little importance or when they have no striking peculiarities in appearance.

Designation by descriptive name is the most important method. It is probable that these names originate from two sources, depending upon whether the characteristic features of the hills are apparent on a map or from the ground. Hills named for shapes which become apparent when viewed from above are most likely named by those above, i.e., commanders or their staffs. For example, Porkchop Hill exhibits its distinctive shape only when viewed from above. It is likely that those hills whose characteristic features are visible from the ground are named by the groundlings, for example, Monk's Hood Hill and Old Baldy.

An analysis of the preceding list of place-names yields a number of conclusions: (1) Hills constituting part of the MLR are not often named. This is probably because the enemy MLR is not encountered as much as is the enemy outpost line and because the convenience of referring to terrain on the friendly MLR as "Company E's positions" or "Third Battalion's area" causes descriptive designations to be superfluous. (2) Outposts are given descriptive

names more frequently than any other terrain features probably because the largest amount of activity takes place around or on them. (3) The only native place-names likely to be put into any widespread use are those which are easily folk-etymologized, e.g. *Hasakkol* to *Hadacol* and *Pokkae* to *Poke-eye*. (4) Code names (often taken from the Army phonetic alphabet) are apt to be applied to smaller or less notorious outposts, e.g. Uncle and Yoke. (5) Time lag in the naming of hills is apparent in the names of *Old Baldy* and *Bunker Hill*. Old Baldy, which was once covered with vegetation, could scarcely have been named before sufficient bombardment had occurred to give it its distinctive barren appearance. Bunker Hill, of course, would not have received its name before enough time had elapsed for the construction of its numerous fortifications.

Although it was not a topographic feature, the forward medical aid station of one battalion had a descriptive appellation. It was known as *The Doughnut Shop* because its dealings were with perforated materials.

One observation of linguistic interest, which could not be derived from the list of place-names, is the effect that the serious purpose of war and familiarity of use can have on the connotations of certain words. During a briefing on a patrol action, for example, the average American male can sit almost impassively and listen to the denotations in a sentence, such as, "The patrol will proceed to the left tit of Betty Grable, move east past the groin, and return across the upper part of the thigh." That this sort of sentence can be heard and not occasion giggles, leers, or sly glances offers linguistic evidence that Sherman's appraisal of war was correct.

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