

## Major Goldsmith, Korea 1966-1967

In the 1960's South Koreans, intensely nationalistic and proud, populated a country in steep economic takeoff. There is construction everywhere in Seoul and streets are often busy with trucks of stone, bags of cement, scaffolding, and workers.



And they welcomed U.S. soldiers. Required to wear our uniform when off-base, and being taller and more pale than many Koreans, even in civvies we stuck out like a sore thumb in public.

There's no pretending to "fit in" but that discomfort was offset by people's warmth and genuineness. One felt safe and welcomed.

Traffic was a more dangerous risk to U.S. troops in Seoul. We joked that Korea, considered a hazardous duty assignment, was the best kept secret in the army.

I wrote to friends that unlike my fellow trainees who'd gone to Viet Nam, the greatest danger we faced in Korea was the traffic. The distant second greatest was being shot by a drunken or crazy G.I. In fact those statistics were reversed.

Major Goldsmith, along with four other lower ranking officers share a table at the Seoul base cafeteria.

Because one of my duties is setting up a nationwide non-combatant emergency evacuation notification system for DA employees and military families across Korea, I'm allowed separate rations and most often dine off base on Kimchi and rice.

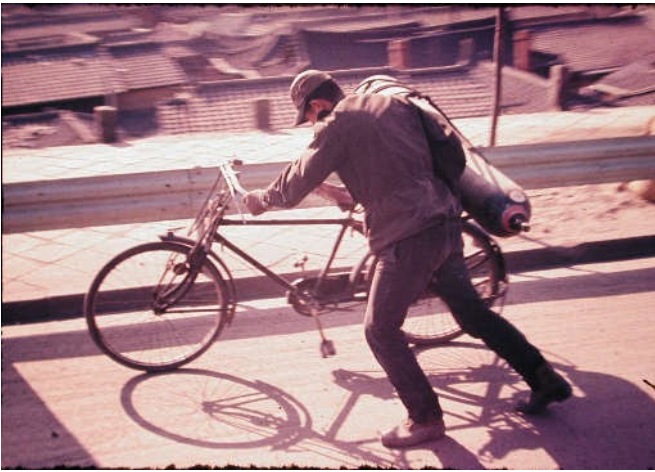
But when I'm back in Seoul we like to dine together and we catch up - friends. At breakfast we sit across from one another to eat and chat. The major has smooth black hair, a round face, and wears glasses framed in black plastic. I like his direct, un-pretentious matter-of-fact way of talking.

Goldsmith tells me how the Army cooks have learned to re-constitute powdered milk shipped from the U.S. because Korean cows are not certified as free of tuberculosis. I talk about the new "crook report" we've learned to print by sorting out of PX purchase records. We finish our coffee and push back our chairs to walk into the routine of our day. Counting, reporting, living.

Together outside we continue to chat as we walk towards the military compound gate. In Seoul's chilly morning air the wide roadway busy, packed with trucks, taxis, and life. The city is awake.



Bicycles whiz by. We ignore a familiar train of blue three-wheeled pickup trucks loaded with heavy bags of cement heading towards a compound gate and a construction project.



Among the thick traffic an older world moves slowly too. Another bicycle, loaded with an acetylene tank, is pushed by hand, moving slowly in the morning sun. Walking by the bicycle and stepping in his own shadow, a man leans hard against the heavy load.

Passed by a man towing a wooden wagon an ox plods even more slowly up the street, pulling a two wheeled cart. A jeep whizzes by the two of them.

Hapsangs, basically a VW bus with a driver and a pusher to jam passengers aboard, stop to accept or discharge local workers.

A drainage ditch running along the Yongsan compound wall is huge, more than six feet deep, to accommodate the monsoon rains as well as, in an emergency, biological needs of certain workers along the street and outside the GI compound. We cross the ditch a sentry gate #7 and step onto the sidewalk.

I walk west towards the 1st DPU - data processing unit, where we will count today's combat ready troops, sick GIs, and ... the dead. We nod "goodbye", and Major Goldsmith turns, crosses the street and continues in the same direction as I but on the other side. Fifty feet apart we continue in parallel.



On his side of the roadway the major passes along a low stone fence separating the sidewalk and road from a grassy hillside where a paved road climbs up to the building where he works.

From across the street I pause a moment to watch the Major trudging, slowing as he's nearing the entry in the stone wall. He turns through the wall and walks uphill, his back now facing the busy street.

There is a break in traffic. Taxis pull to the roadway center to pass slower drivers like a man pulling a

pushcard piled high with baskets.

By fateful coincidence - or perhaps they'd expected to meet - Major Goldsmith's jeep and driver pull up and the Major turns to climb aboard.

Major Goldsmith pauses, then waves to me as the driver pulls into traffic to go just a short distance before turning right to head uphill on the much smaller, quiet roadway. That hillside is much steeper than the main road. It's as steep as NamSan - North Mountain - in the center of Seoul. At what moment in our lives do we ever look at a friend and imagine: *this is the last I will see your face?*



The army jeep is much like those used since WWII, small, light, with a canvas top and open sides. There are no doors. The open sides make stepping in and out quick and easy, easier still because in 1966 there are no seatbelts.

There is a surge of traffic along the main road.

A blue *hapsang* stops just past this turnoff. It is quickly surrounded by a melee of passengers, some trying to get off while new passengers are being pushed on by foot of the hapsang assistant.

The Hapsang helper grasps handles on either side of the doorway and literally plants a foot to shove the last passenger on board. There is a pause.



The street in front of the Yongsan compound near gate 7 is wide and traffic has become heavier still. Soldiers and civilians are walking fast along the ample sidewalk. A crowd at the hapsang stop fills the sidewalk and some step into the roadway but keep near the curb.

We all are walking, pushing, driving, or hitching a ride as if this day and our lives will go on forever.

It happens.



My attention shifts. There is a loud horn blowing from a truck heading downhill on the busy road. It's a simple horn, a plain *beeeeeeeeeeeeeep*. But it's frantic.

A large black low-bed truck is weaving crazily through traffic like a madman, horn screaming.

On the verge of loss of all control, the truck has no brakes. Its driver is in panic, trying to avoid a terrible collision on the busy street. *Beeeeeeeeeep. Beeeeeep.*

The truck is heavy, loaded with bags of cement. Too heavy. These cement carriers are a common sight - Seoul is bursting with growth and new construction. But this cement truck is in trouble.

The truck passes me, horn blaring, so close that through its windshield I see the driver's terrified face. Eyes wide, he turns his head and looks towards the hillside where he spies an opening in the stone wall and the near-empty smaller roadway onto which the Major's jeep has just turned and has ascended fifty feet up the steep hill.

Seeing his only chance to avoid colliding with the *Hapsang* and the crowd of people around it, the driver whips his truck to his left, veers and teeters across the road in front of me, then careens up the side road where in their jeep Major Goldsmith and his driver have their backs to the street. Looking only ahead, they are blind to the chaos behind them.

The truck driver now sees the jeep directly ahead. Fighting enormous forward momentum from the weight of his load, he tries to steer around the jeep. He almost succeeds. The jeep is just clipped on its rear left corner causing it spin madly sideways as the cement-truck continues past.

Major Goldsmith is thrown violently out of the jeep. He lands flat on his back, near the center of the road. The jeep driver, fighting to avoid a roll-over, veers off onto the grass and turns the jeep downhill. The cement truck passes them, continues uphill another forty feet and slows. The steep hill is eating the truck's forward momentum.

Darting and weaving through the traffic, I am running towards my friend who is lying still in the center of the side-road. He is perhaps just stunned by the impact - from a distance he doesn't look badly hurt. *He just fell out of the jeep*, I tell myself. *He'll be ok*. I am running, running, running, running, running.

I look up. The truck, having lost its forward movement pauses. Then in horror I see the heavy truck begin to move backwards, agonizingly slowly, then it gains speed as it rolls backwards downhill. This is too terrible, this exact moment, for words. The Major has not moved. He is alone.

I scream: *Turn off, turn to one side, turn your wheel, turn turn turn!* The driver, white with fear, is paralyzed. He freezes.

The heavy truck rolls straight backwards over the Major, its enormous weight crushing his head and chest before continuing to roll back downhill out into busy traffic where it blocks the roadway, zig-zags to the opposite curb, slams into the heavier stone wall, and halts.

Traffic stops. ... Time stops.

I am at the Major's side. His head and chest are horrible, flattened inhuman pulp. The remains of what is no longer Major-Goldsmith struggles to breathe fruitless breaths making a terrible sucking noise.

The details of this death are so disturbing that while I see them vividly sixty years later, I dare not add more except to say, for the solace of his family, that when the truck rolled backwards over him the stunned Major Goldsmith was killed instantly and could not have been conscious nor suffered.

A taxi stops. The driver and bystanders open its back door and in a frantic rush actually throw the now-no-longer-major onto the seat, chest down, as if that could stop the blood pouring from his chest, the sucking sound, and the sorrow that pours from the hearts of those left behind.

7/4/2013 To: lynnita@koreanwar-educator.org <http://8tharmy.korea.army.mil/>

RE: Eighth U.S. Army Command, United Nations Command, Seoul Korea 1966-1967

Detachment 1, 1st Data Processing Unit, Seoul

U.S. Army Strength Accounting - Personnel Identification

When serving in the Eighth U.S. Army (Det. 1 1st DPU 1LT USAR) in 1966 and 67 I worked with a Major Goldsmith whose tragic death I witnessed in Seoul during that time. I am writing a recollection of that tragic event and would like to cite the Major's first name, place of birth and his assignment at that time. Have you a clue about how I might find this information?

In case it helps identify this case, the Major's death was not combat related. Having dined together, we got up from lunch, walked outside of the Seoul base cafeteria and onto a public street to walk back to our respective jobs.

We said good day and I crossed to the opposite side of the street from my friend. The major's jeep and driver happened by and the Major got in the jeep to continue his journey. The driver of a commercial flatbed truck loaded with bags of cement lost control, struck the jeep, and in ensuing events best omitted here, Major Goldsmith perished.

Daniel Friedman

Note: A 2022/05/26 review of the census of people named Goldsmith who are buried in U.S. national cemeteries reveals that across the various branches of U.S. military service and dating at least from the U.S. Civil War 267 Goldsmiths have served in the military and have since died. None of them is the Major Goldsmith whom we remember above.