

Freeman recalls return from Korea

OFF THE WALL

TIM
BALLARD



The Fourth of July brings back memories to Bradfordsville resident William D. Freeman — he got to celebrate the Fourth of July, 1953, in the United States three days after getting back from the Korean War.

In fact, Freeman made the national news scene. He and two other Kentucky GIs, Shannon Sloan of Waynesburg and Joseph Miller of Dayton, had their picture snapped by an Associated Press photographer aboard the transport *General Sturgis*.

The photo ran in *The New York Times* and many other newspapers around the country, including *The Courier-Journal*.

Freeman, a native of Cornishville in Mercer County, dropped by the office the other day to show us his picture in *The C-J* from 1953.

He had another six months in the service before he was discharged — at the age of 20.

Freeman enlisted at age 17.

"I was only 19 years old when I got home," he recalled. "I went through all that, and when I came back I couldn't even buy a beer in the bar. I was illegal. I wasn't 21."

Asked if he had seen heavy fighting, Freeman said, "Well, I was there."

But the numbers speak for themselves.

When he arrived in Korea in June 1951, he was with Company H,

2nd Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division.

Company H was one of four companies in the 2nd Battalion. A company has 175 to 200 men in it.

The division was in Korea until the middle of December, when it was rotated out to Hokkaido, Japan.

From the four companies, Freeman said, "there were enough of us left to make up a good-sized platoon."

A platoon has 30 to 35 men in it, so you can see that the division had seen quite a bit of action.

"That's the way I remember it," Freeman said, "and I think history will back it up."

He was made a staff sergeant while on the lines at the age of 18.

"I believe I was the youngest staff sergeant to be picked at the time," he said, "but I don't know for sure."

Freeman stayed in Japan until October 1952.

"I signed a waiver on my Korean time," he said. That meant the Army could send him back to Korea, which it did. This time he was in the 7th Infantry Division.

He was there several more months before being pulled out of Korea.

Freeman and 63 other Kentuckians returned to the United States on the *General Sturgis* on a voyage that let him see lots of places.

The troop ship stopped at Honolulu to drop off soldiers who lived there, then went through the Panama Canal.

The *General Sturgis* stopped at Puerto Rico to disembark soldiers who lived there. The rest of the soldiers got off in New York.

Including in the Kentucky contingent were soldiers from Bardstown, Greensburg and Columbia, as well as J.B. Stratton of Salvisa. Stratton provided Freeman with a copy of the article from *The Courier-Journal* listing the returning ser-



William D. Freeman visited his parents in Cornishville before overseas. This is the only photo he has of him and his father together.

vicemen.

"We spent about 33 days on the water coming back to the States," Freeman said. As a noncommissioned officer, however, Freeman, got shore leave in Honolulu.

He came back with a Combat Infantryman badge, the Korean service ribbon, five battle stars, the U.N. service ribbon and the Japanese Occupation ribbon.

He was stationed in Virginia and South Carolina before being sent to Fort Knox, where he was discharged.

Where he was nearly killed "I went all through that war and hardly got a scratch," man said, "and wrecked an automobile and was in a new brick building at Fort Knox unconscious 33 days with a brain concussion."

But Freeman recovered, going to a career as a truck driver.

He lived in Colorado and Oklahoma, moving to Marion County in 1990.

He moved to Bradfordsville with his wife, the former Phyllis of Lawrenceburg, in December.