

Unit recognized for Korean War heroism

'Chosin Few' finally honored after 52 years

By Mick Walsh
Staff Writer

Alfred Gerstenschlager gets a chill whenever he thinks about his time at the frozen Chosin Reservoir, the site of what historians have termed modern warfare's most savage battle.

But he's still enraged that it took more than 52 years for his old unit, the 92nd Armored Field Artillery Battalion, to get recognition for its part in that famed

Korean War battle.

"Finally," said 71-year-old Gerstenschlager, when he learned recently that the 92nd has been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for Heroism.

The Columbus man, who retired from active Army duty as a master sergeant in 1968, was among the surviving members of the 92nd to receive individual PUC ribbons during a ceremony in Asheville, N.C.

"I don't know what the delay was, or who was to blame," said the man known locally as Mr. G. "but I'm very happy that



Alfred Gerstenschlager, left, accepts the Presidential Unit Citation for Heroism ribbon from Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt.

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the unit has finally received the recognition it has richly deserved."

"Our unit had never been officially recognized for its contributions at the Chosin," he said. "Certainly, the 1st Marine Division and the Army's 7th Infantry Division took most of the casualties. And we were a support unit. I just didn't know if their members considered the contributions of the 92nd that important since it had never earned the Presidential Unit Citation."

For those whose sense of history dates back only to the Bill Clinton years, the battle at the Chosin Reservoir has been compared by military historians to Tarawa, the bloodiest battle of World War II. The Chosin battle pitted 15,000 allied ground troops against 120,000 Chinese infantrymen in a valley near Yudam-ni, North Korea. Fighting in frigid conditions, the Marines and Army soldiers fought off wave after wave of Chinese, killing 25,000 of the enemy while suffering 3,000 killed and 6,000

wounded.

Their escape from the enemy was made possible by the artillery work of the 92nd.

Bravo Battery, to which Gerstenschlager was assigned, fired round after round at the enemy for 72 straight hours.

Reunion speaker Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt of Fort Bragg, N.C., told the Chosin survivors that "no greater honor can be bestowed on an American unit in combat and certainly you earned that distinction."

Gerstenschlager was 17 when he enlisted in the Army in 1948. He would have been in the Navy if the local Esther, Mo., recruiter had been in his office on the day Gerstenschlager chose to enlist. After his separation from the service, Gerstenschlager taught ROTC at both Baker and Carver high schools for the next several years. Today, he's a school bus driver for the Muscogee County School District.

And a legitimate member of the Chosin Few.

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