

Recalled to Duty

William Clyde Preacher of Ridgeland was older than most of his classmates, but there was a reason for that. Billy, as he was known to his friends, entered Clemson College as an animal husbandry major after serving from 1948 to 1949 as a paratrooper in the 11th Airborne Division based in occupied Japan. A veteran, Billy was exempt from military training, yet he enrolled in advanced ROTC as an upper classman.

At six feet, one inch in height and weighing 195 pounds, Preacher was an end on coach Frank Howard's football team, earning a letter his senior season. Teammate Richard Sublette remembered Billy as "a great player." The Tigers' 7-3 record in 1951 included a 34-0 shellacking of Auburn and a trip to the Gator Bowl.



After graduating from Clemson in February 1952, Billy was ordered to active duty. He was assigned to Baker Company of the 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division then fighting in the stalemate that had settled over the Korean peninsula.

The war started when North Korean troops flooded across the 38th Parallel dividing North from South Korea in June 1950. United Nations forces held on to the Pusan Perimeter until the bold Inchon landings in September turned the tide of battle. For two years, Communist forces including North Korean, Chinese and Soviet troops battled United Nations troops back and forth across the peninsula, capturing and retreating over the same ground on repeated occasions. Old Baldy, a key terrain feature in west-central Korea, was the site of five major engagements, the last of which raged from March 23 to 26, 1953.

The 7th Infantry Division was augmented by a Colombian infantry battalion, the only South American ground unit to fight in Korea. Placed on the front line within the 31st Infantry Regiment, the Colombians endured repeated heavy Chinese attacks, holding the line and preventing penetration of the division's front. On March 24, at the height of the battle, Billy Preacher led his platoon in an attack on enemy positions on Old Baldy. Preacher "received a severe blast injury" from enemy artillery and was twice knocked unconscious. Despite his injuries, Preacher rallied his men, refusing medical evacuation. Preacher "was valiantly leading his men in the attack, encouraging and rallying them to put forth their utmost efforts." Billy Preacher was twenty-five years old when he was killed in action. For his gallant leadership under fire, Preacher was awarded the Silver Star.



Billy Preacher's body was returned to the United States and buried at Ridgeland Cemetery. He was survived by his mother, sister, and brother, then an Army lieutenant at Fort Jackson.

