

The Long Journey Home

Harold C. Pearce's short life would be defined by war. "Buck" grew up on a farm in the Dillon County community of Little Rock. As a teenager, he joined the church upon his profession of faith and later graduated from Dillon High School. In March 1945, with the country at war, Buck enlisted in the Army. He was discharged from the service during the force reductions that followed the end of World War II.

Pearce enrolled in Clemson College in 1947. He remained on campus only one year, "playing around," according to one sibling, and soon reenlisted in the Army and was trained as a military policeman. Pearce completed a tour of duty in Puerto Rico and was then transferred to the 24th Military Police Company of the 24th Infantry Division then part of the post-war occupation force in Japan.



When North Korea invaded its southern neighbor in June 1950, the 24th Infantry was the first US division to be deployed to this new war zone. Its mission was to absorb the shock of the North Korean aggression, stop its progress, and then hold on until additional American and United Nations forces could arrive.



The 24th Infantry had quickly moved north into battle. Fighting outnumbered against a better equipped foe, the 24th was unable to hold a stable front. On July 19, Corporal Pearce was part of a team escorting North Korean prisoners of war behind battlelines for interrogation. The next morning, as he was returning by jeep through Taejon to rejoin his unit, he was struck and killed by machine gun fire. Later that day, members of his 1st platoon saw his body slumped over the steering wheel, but they were under such heavy fire that they could not recover his body. In September, Pearce's family was notified that he was missing in action. In February 1953, Pearce's status was formally changed to killed in action.

When United Nations forces eventually pushed the North Koreans out of South Korea, efforts were made to recover and identify the remains of those who had been killed earlier in the fighting. If remains were not identifiable they were tagged with the location where they were found. One such set of remains was designated Unknown X-210.

Several investigations were unsuccessful in determining the identity of X-210. In February 1956, these remains were removed to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. In 2018, the Defense Department approved a proposal from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to disinter 652 Korean War Unknowns for reexamination, scientific testing, and possible identification. The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System's Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory utilized modern DNA testing technology to make identifications of X-210 and other remains.

On July 29, 2019, Corporal Pearce's family was notified that his remains had been identified. Corporal Harold C. Pearce was buried with full military honors on September 26 at the Catfish Creek Baptist Church Cemetery near Latta. After sixty-nine years, Buck Pearce's long journey home was accomplished.

