

Relatives of Waianae war hero sought

By Bob Krauss
Advertiser Columnist

The son of a Marine Corps major who won the Silver Star on Heartbreak Ridge during the Korean War in 1951 is looking for relatives of a Waianae hero who won the Medal of Honor there.

Hal Barker of Dallas, Texas, is here after a trip to Korea where, he said, he was the first foreigner to visit the famous battle site in the demilitarized zone.

He said he has tried without success to find the relatives of PFC Herbert K. Piliilau, whose heroism on Sept. 17, 1951, during the month-long battle of Heartbreak Ridge has become folklore in Hawaii.

Piliilau remained behind and singlehandedly covered the withdrawal of his unit, which was under savage attack by North Korean troops. He fired his automatic weapon until he ran out of ammunition, then threw grenades and, finally, fought with his trench knife and bare fists until overcome by sheer weight of numbers.

When Heartbreak Ridge was retaken by U.S. forces, Piliilau's comrades counted 40 enemy dead in the area where he fought.

Barker said he became interested in Heartbreak Ridge because his father has always refused to tell him how he won the Silver Star there.

"In August of 1979 I finally wrote to the Marine commandant to find out more about my dad," said Barker, a carpenter. "The Marines sent back the commendation for Dad's Silver Star.

"He made three attempts by helicopter under heavy fire to rescue a Marine pilot shot down in enemy territory."

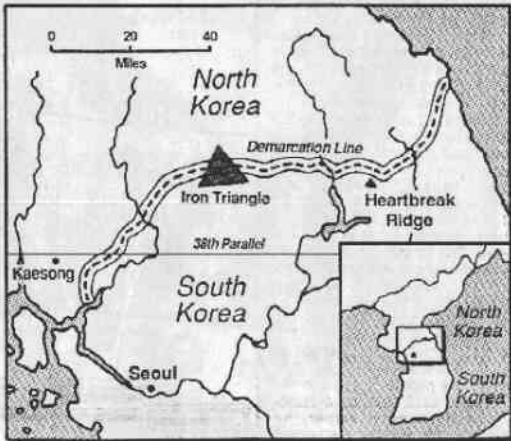
Barker said he kept writing letters until he got in contact with the 23rd Infantry Assn., Korean Branch, made up of veterans who fought on Heartbreak Ridge.

He was invited to attend their annual meeting in 1982. There he met about 60 men who had watched his father hover repeatedly over the ridge while enemy artillery and sniper fire punctured the helicopter. The rescue attempt failed but the older Barker returned unharmed.

His son became so interested in the battle, one of the fiercest of the Korean War, that he has attended every meeting of the 23rd Infantry Assn. since 1982, has led a fund-raising effort to build a Korean War Memorial in Washington, and flew to Korea to see the battle site.

He said Korean soldiers were surprised by his visit and told him foreigners were not allowed before this in the high security area.

"They took me to an observation point on the highest part of



the ridge," Barker said. "I looked out toward North Korea where my dad attempted his rescue. It's unbelievable territory.

"The ridges are no more than three or four feet wide and they slope upward at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees.

"Our men had to pull themselves up those ridges to capture the high ground under withering fire. To see the conditions under which those men had to fight, it's just unbelievable. It's wide open to fire from the next ridge."

Barker said he brought along

a Purple Heart given him by a Heartbreak Ridge veteran from Macedon, N.Y., as a memorial to heroes like his father and PFC Piliilau.

"We tried to bury it but we couldn't dig into the rock," said Barker. "So I threw the Purple Heart over the ridge where it drops about 600 feet. The South Korean soldiers clapped. They said it was an honorable thing to do."

Barker said he has to go back to Dallas tomorrow and would like to make contact with Piliilau's relatives if possible. He can be reached at the Airport Holiday Inn Hotel, 836-0661.

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