

# *Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs*

## REMEMBERING MY FATHER

By Gail Embery

My earliest memories of my father take me back to when I was five or six years old. His army picture hung on the dining room wall of the lady I called Miss Julia, my godmother. I spent summer vacations and Christmas and Easter holidays at her house until I was about ten years old. My favorite seat in the house was next to the army picture. I found myself admiring the handsome man in the nice brown uniform every time I was over to visit. I especially remember those eyes; they were penetrating and seemed to stare back at me.

One day I asked my grandmother who the man in the picture was. She told me he was an army man and old family friend. I told her I would like to meet him someday. Without looking at me she said that would not be possible because the Army couldn't find him. I remember going to bed that night and praying for God to help the Army find him.

Some years later, around age ten, Miss Julia left me at her house with her mother, Honey, while she went to work. Honey caught me sitting next to the picture and admiring it as usual. It was she who told me that the man in the picture was actually my father, Coleman Edwards, and that Miss Julia was his mother and my grandmother, and that she herself was my great grandmother. The news was so overwhelming and shocking that I think I must have cried for a week. Anyway, I was still crying when Miss Julia came home from work. Her mother, Honey had to tell her why I was crying. I think all hell broke loose because my mother was married to another man, who I called "Daddy", and I would eventually have to go home when the vacation break ended.

The worst part about learning that the man in the Army picture was my real father was wondering where he was and how he was doing. I later learned that he was missing in action for about four years before my grandmother learned he died in service. I also learned that my father joined the army to help his family financially. During the early 1950s jobs were scarce, particularly in the African American Community.

In the back of my mind, I always hoped to find my dad alive. My grandmother, Julia Edwards, passed away in November, 1990, and my father's only sibling, my Uncle Oscar, passed away in September, 1999. After my Uncle Oscar passed away, I had to go through all the important papers in the house. I found an envelope labeled "Army Papers" in my grandmother's handwriting. It took awhile for me to get my nerves up to open the envelope. Inside, I found a letter dated November, 1953, to the Adjutant General's Office, Lansing, Michigan from my grandmother. She indicated in this letter that she had received notice two days earlier (November 2, 1953) that her son was reported dead as of March 31, 1951. Her letter further stated that he was carried as missing in action since November, 1950.

About a year after my uncle's death my father's cousin, I call him "Uncle Buddy", was on the internet searching for the "first black Michigan teacher". From there he was led to the first black Michigan Army Unit and learned that the government was looking for families to provide DNA samples to assist in identification of remains of men still missing in Korea. Uncle Buddy printed a copy of the information and left it at the house for me. Two of my father's cousins provided DNA samples and I am hopeful that my father's remains will be found so that I can provide a proper burial on American soil.

## *Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs*

I attended my first family update in Columbus, OH, in 2001. At that meeting, I learned that my father was captured, held in a prison camp and listed as dead on March 31, 1951. What follows is a summary of the information received from the Department of Defense as of September, 2008, regarding my father, SGT Coleman Edwards.

*The difficulty began on the night of November 25, 1950. SGT. Edwards was among the survivors that were taken prisoner during a Chinese counter-offensive and marched to the POW holding sites for transfer to POW camps. SGT. Edwards moved first by nightly marches to a temporary "Mining Camp" in the Pukhin -Tarigol Valley and probably arrived there on Christmas Eve. Many of the captured men perished from malnutrition, dysentery and disease. But SGT. Edwards helped carry and care for the weakened men and lived to march to Camp 5 at Pyoktong where he eventually died. He was buried by fellow prisoners on a rise of ground a short distance from the main camp.*

It may sound a little strange but I believe that my father has been on this journey with me, and I know that he is guiding me in the right direction. That five year old child's prayer is still in my heart. Dear God, please help the United States Army find my father's remains.

(All rights to Gail Embery no portion of this article may be copied or reproduced without permission.)

*The Coalition of Families of Korean & Cold War  
POW/MIAs promotes the fullest possible accounting for 8,000  
American soldiers who remain missing-in-action from the  
Korean and Cold Wars. Our members are the families of the  
missing men.*