

Legacy Donor: Thomas W. Mason

Thomas W. Mason, the Scholarship Foundation's first Legacy Donor, is the author of the "Old China Hand" award presented annually to a gifted recipient. Tom's award recognizes his service to our country in China in the 1930s. Mason enlisting in the Army in 1931, and was assigned to the 9th Field Artillery in Ft. Lewis, Washington. As it was the height of the Great Depression, Tom says he joined less for patriotism than for "the guarantee of three squares per day." Tom wanted to serve in China; however, a volunteer was not accepted unless the soldier had served a full three-year enlistment, received an Honorable Discharge, re-enlisted, and waited for a vacancy. After being accepted for China duty, Tom left Fort McDowell on Angel Island, on 9/1/34, with stopovers in Hawaii and Manila, and arrived in Longkou, China, on 9/27/34. Assigned to the 15th

Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Division, stationed at Tientsin, Tom joined the Service Company of the 15th in the Transportation Platoon. This was a glorified term that meant he took care of the horses and mules. Tom didn't like horses and hated mules, a perfect union of man and beast, thanks to the U.S. Army. At that time, a Private in the Army earned \$28.75 per month, but Tom earned an extra \$2.00 per month as a teamster. At that time, a bottle of beer at the P.X. cost nine cents.

In all, Tom says his days with the "Old China Hands" were some of the best of his military career. With official military duties completed by noon each day, the afternoons and evenings were filled with athletics. He and others often questioned why they were there, and what was the purpose of their mission. In later years he concluded that they were the line of communication between Peking and the sea.

Tom continued his military career for another 18 years, retiring as a Chief Warrant Officer in 1954. In between, there was World War II and the Korea Conflict where he played a vital role with the 3rd Infantry Division during the Hungnam evacuation in December 1950. He also served with U. S. Army HQ in Japan, 14th Infantry at Fort Carson, and as Motor Officer for the United Nations Command at the Presidio. In all, Tom served the U. S. Army for 23 years. Currently, Tom lives in an assisted care home in Newport, Oregon. He has no living family except his family of the 3rd Infantry Division. Our special thanks to Society Members Dave Adams and LTC Tim Stoy for their support of this article and their communication with and respect for Tom Mason, Old China Hand. (Excerpts with permission, from *Dragon* (15th Infantry Organization's publication), pp. 14-15, January 2006). Thomas W. Mason has also approved this profile for publication.