

For many years, Tootsie Roll has been a generous sponsor of our “Heads Up For Vets” Initiative, providing our Veterans with purple Tootsie Roll Pops. You may be wondering why Tootsie Rolls holds significance with our Veterans. Here is a short story about how Tootsie Rolls became the candy that saved the Marines!

During the Korean War, the First Marine Division met the enemy at Chosin mountain reservoir in subfreezing temperatures. The ground froze so hard that bulldozers could not dig emplacements for artillery. The cold impeded their weapons from firing automatically, slowing down the recoil of the artillery and automatic weapons. The cold numbed their minds, froze their fingers, toes, and rations. They were seventy-eight miles from the sea, surrounded, supplies cut, facing an enemy whose sole objective was the annihilation of the First Marine Division as a warning to other United Nations troops, and written off as lost by the high command. A war correspondent asked if they were going to retreat. The Commanding General, First Marine Division General Oliver Prince Smith replied “Retreat? Hell, we are attacking in another direction.” Col. Murray said “We are coming out with our dead, our wounded and our equipment, we are coming out as Marines or we are not coming out at all.”

So, they put their seriously wounded in sleeping bags, and secured the deceased to the fenders and hoods of the trucks. Those they had no space for, they buried. Every Marine became a rifleman. Unable to build a fire to heat their rations, the men were close to starvation. Destroying non-essential equipment, they discovered boxes and boxes of Tootsie Rolls, frozen solid from the sub-zero temperature. The Tootsie Rolls were issued to all the men. The sugar gave them energy and the candy satisfied their hunger. After two weeks of bitter fighting they finally reached the sea with most of their dead, their wounded, their equipment and one very important extra: 100,000 North Korean Civilians voting for freedom with their feet following them out. Some of them live in the United States today. The 15,000 Soldiers and Marines suffered over 12,000 casualties, 3,000 killed, 6,000 wounded and thousands of frost bite cases. Surviving Marines called themselves “The Chosin Few.” Many credited their very survival to Tootsie Rolls.

Be sure to check out our “Heads Up For Vets” Initiative on our website to learn more about the support we offer our veterans year-round.

Learn more at: www.purpledayeveryday.org/events/heads-up-for-vets/