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My mama died about a month after I was born, the youngest of four children, in the Cascade Mountains in Washington. Then my father had a logging accident and was unable to support four kids. He had been working in a mine but was unable to continue, so he was forced to put us up for adoption. One aunt took three of us to California. I stayed in Washington and was adopted by another aunt. My grandfather worked in a mine almost until the time I was drafted into the service. As a young boy, I had to work in the mine on weekends. I was dealing with explosives at the age of 11 or 12. They were 80% nitroglycerin and very unforgiving. If we dropped them, that was it.

I did feel fortunate that my aunt had adopted me and given me a place to sleep and a little food. Tomato soup and a little bit of cheese now and then were lovely commodities to me. Once I was so hungry that I stole cheese out of a mousetrap.

At home, it seemed like every day began with a beating by my adopted mama with a horsewhip with four thongs. That got my attention. If I forgot to do something I was told to do during the day, I would be locked in the attic that night with no food, no water, no chair and no light. I had to sit on a 2x6 board. I guess I was being well trained in discipline indirectly. Life wasn't too pleasant. By the time I got to high school, I already had started thinking about getting away. I dreamed of going to Alaska and very quietly bought a gun and traps to take with me, even a bear trap. My delusions of grandeur included trapping in the winter and goldmine in the summer.

Then the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. A couple of weeks later, they shelled an island off the state of Washington. Everybody dove for enough ammunition to defend themselves in case the enemy came to shore. Of course, I had purchased a lot of ammunition for my dream of

living in Alaska. Next I received notice that I would be drafted into the Army when I turned 18.

When I reported at Fort Lewis, I was amazed to see more food than I had ever seen in my life. Though they placed me on KP duty as punishment for something, I actually thought it was great. A sergeant asked me if I was used to scrubbing things. I said, "Yes, sir."

"Don't 'yes sir' me! I'm just a sergeant. But you can say 'yes'. You see that spoon over there?" he asked.

I saw a spoon about 20 inches long and said, "Yes."

He said, "Do you see that big pot full of fruit cocktail? There's quite a bit left in there, and you can have as much as you want."

Thinking he meant I could have it all, I ate the whole thing and got a little bit sick. Before that, my food had consisted of whatever I could kill with my .22 rifle or fishing rod. During this time of change, I knew nothing about God whatsoever. By the time I finished high school, I had only heard of the Bible but had never read one. I didn't know what was in front of me, but I knew something was lacking somewhere. My brain just wasn't connecting well.

I was sent to Camp Howze in Texas for basic training. When they discovered that I was an explosives nut, they sent me to ammunition dump about nine miles outside Leesville, Louisiana. On weekends, I could go to the base. The people at the ammunition depot said I had a lot of know-how about explosives, so they decided to send me to EOD (Explosives/Ordinance Disposal) School. Recently I found out that the Navy calls EOD the "Crab Unit". They set and explode charges as necessary.

In EOD School I learned about different types of German mines and was trained to work on them. Later I learned how to start vehicles that had been hit by shellfire or, failing that, how to hook them up to a 10-ton wrecker and get them out. I can't complain about my training or the food at all. I thought it was great. Also, I wasn't beaten every morning any more. Of course, that relieved a lot of pressure from me.

Next I was sent to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. There we received last-minute instructions for escaping from a sinking ship. That didn't sound very good to me because my uncle had tried to drown me once. He had thrown me in a river when I was four years old. He also tried to drown my sister by holding her underwater. So I was scared to death of water. I'd even hold my breath to wash my face.

From New Jersey, we went by train to New York in December to board a little liberty ship holding 200 men and tons of frozen food for the men overseas. We also were frozen so to speak since there was no way to get heat to our quarters beneath the deck. In the bath area, we invented a way to get four hours of sleep before returning to the colder area so someone else could sleep there for the next four hours. Four or five days out, we suddenly were surrounded by ships — destroyers, cruisers, battleships, etc. A Navy aircraft carrier was right next to us. I stood there with my mouth wide open watching their huge elevator going up and down and wondering how in the world they built that thing.

We sailed south for a while, and the weather became mighty warm. I had no idea where we were going when suddenly we hung a left and headed straight north. All the beautiful Navy ships left us. About four little American destroyers and a couple of English Corvettes (destroyers) stayed with us. Eventually, we joined a large convoy in the middle of the ocean. Then we lost an engine on our ship, and the convoy left us. Soon the second engine died, too.

We were wallowing in 16-foot waves in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean surrounded by sharks when a submarine decided to shell us. Of course, they wouldn't have wasted a torpedo on a little old liberty ship. The convoy sent an English Corvette back to us that dropped depth

charges and got the submarine before any damage was done. I would imagine that the poor guys working on the engines in that hot hole of our ship were very uncomfortable, but they finally got both engines running.

At last, we were full steam ahead for Europe. The convoy had slowed down for us, but we lost our original placement and had to remain in a back corner of the convoy from then on. Though it was a vulnerable location, it was a good vantage point. I drew pen and ink pictures of the places we saw and still have them.

After landing at Liverpool, England, we traveled to Tewkesbury for more training. From there, we went south to Plymouth to board an LST. Before boarding, I was trying to figure out how they would get that boat out of the mud. I didn't realize that the English coast had such high tides (15-16 feet). Then we sailed up the French coast to LeHarve in north Normandy.

The invasion of Normandy was over by then, so our only problem was getting our equipment ashore in the pouring rain. It was breathtaking. The Air Force had mangled the German Army on both sides of the one-way road we traveled in Normandy. I was thinking maybe I needed a little more ammunition.

Of course, when you're only 19, you think you're absolutely indestructible. Along the way, I ran into an old Frenchman with a very long face. I said, "Where is your home?" In broken English and a little French, he explained where he came from and that he was a photographer. He took me to his house, and I neutralized all the mines that had been planted around it. I remember thinking, *If I don't blow up, I'm going to save a piece off the first mine that I neutralize.* So I unscrewed a part (ZZ42) that strikes the cap of the mine and put it in my pocket and I still have it. The Frenchman just looked at me and shook his head. Afterward, he took me inside his home and gave me photographs he had taken of the Germans preparing to invade England. They were practicing in a rubber raft on dry land, and an officer was standing there telling them what to do. But I had to leave pretty quickly and didn't have time to get those pictures. Two years ago, I returned to the same place and found the old Frenchman. He remembered me. Scooping me up in his arms, he said, "Mon ami!" (My friend!) He also remembered that I wanted those two pictures. He promised they would be waiting for me at home, and they were.

From LaHarve we went on to the combat area. We quickly learned it wasn't possible to keep our equipment or ourselves dry in that rainy climate. We were issued one blanket (I managed two) and a raincoat, and we carried a rifle in one hand and our mine-neutralizing equipment in the other hand. At one point, we bumped into a group of GI's and they asked us for a password. We didn't have a password since we had made a wrong turn. They were going to shoot us because they knew that the Germans had been trying to pass themselves off as American GI's. Instead they examined us closely, and we had to tell all kinds of stories so they could determine whether or not we really were Americans. Finally they believed us and helped us find our way to the right road. At this time we were in Patton's Third Army.

We were almost to the German border when I saw a German soldier standing with his rifle pointed straight at me. Then I realized he had been hit by a flamethrower and was dead. Never having seen too many dead people before, that did something to my mind. I thought, *Man, that could be me.* I forgot about my hunger and about the cold. I just wanted to be sure no one had me in their gun site. Whenever we were told to dig a foxhole after that, I turned into a beaver. It was a good time to reassess what my life was all about.

I had married a beautiful girl just before leaving the States and had accepted Christ as my savior. The bad part was that I had no one to teach me right from wrong. I did some of the most stupid and mean things during the war. Looking back, I wonder how I could have done those

things. Sometimes I knew I was wrong, but sometimes I didn't. Letters were hard to come by. I tried to find the time to write my wife and tell her how much I loved her, but it didn't always work out that way. I got a letter from her one time that said my letters looked like spaghetti because they had been so cut up by the censors. So I started drawing more pictures as I went along and sent them instead of letters. Those were not censored except for the dates I had written on them.

We participated in the last part of the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes Forest. It was bitter cold. Our overcoats had been replaced with Mackinaws because we resembled German silhouettes when wearing the overcoats. In that heavy forest, everything was black. So we had to be very careful and really look to determine whether we were shooting at Americans or Germans. I neutralized a lot of mines and rescued damaged vehicles.

Four of us were placed on the front just barely into Germany and never saw our company commander again. We didn't know what was going on in our camp back in France. Dead people were laying everywhere. There was no potable water to drink. Using our helmets to gather water, we threw tablets in them and hoped they would kill the bacteria. After being locked away in an attic without water so many times, I was kind of used to it. The comforts of home definitely were not there. If we slept, we did so with one eye open. We always were listening for a breaking twig or a shot or a plane flying over.

Our socks rotted off about even with our ankles. Our underwear rotted as well, so I didn't wear it much. One day we were walking down a road when a truck pulled up and someone asked us if we were DP's (displaced people liberated from work camps). I said, "Would DP's have rifles?"

He said, "You look like you need new clothes."

"Well, we haven't had a bath in three months," I said.

"You look worse than that," he said.

As it turned out, that 18-wheeler truck held portable showers. So we were able to take a shower and get new clothes. We felt like we were right uptown. It was good to feel like a soldier again. A week earlier, I had tried to bathe in the Saar River. Just as I was washing my feet, somebody opened up with an automatic rifle. Trying to get out of there real quickly, I had to climb up a mud embankment. So I didn't gain anything on that trip to the river. The next day, a GI floated down the river facedown with a .45 Thompson strapped to him. I didn't feel too clean after that.

I found out I could tolerate a lot of things. The best thing was to pray about it and communicate with the right place. I don't know how many times I prayed for food. Once I had just finished praying for food when we accidentally hit a deer. I had jumped out of the truck onto that deer before he even stopped quivering. It's a miracle how God smiles and helps out a person who doesn't deserve it. I didn't feel like I deserved His attention because I goofed so much. I had a hard time not swearing, even after I came home. That's a horrible habit to break.

The Battle of the Bulge scraped the bottom of the barrel in German manpower. Afterward in Metz, we saw a large number of German prisoners, most of whom were boys from age 12 and some old men. They had been taught to kill and had a bad attitude. If we tried to talk to them, they would spit on us in a hurry.

The four of us needed a place to stay after the Battle of the Bulge, so we moved some people out of their house in a small town and stayed there. One of us stayed awake while the others slept and I went out on patrol first. The Germans were on a ridge overlooking the valley where we were. As I walked down the road away from the house, a man and his daughter

stepped out of their house and asked for medicine. I gave the lady sulfa pills and pointed at my canteen saying, "Water... a lot of water." They seemed to understand.

By then, we were out of food. We also needed gas and ammunition. One day I decided to go hunting in the forest for something to eat. I was drawing a bead on a squirrel and thought, *If I shoot, I'm going to attract someone. But I'm going to shoot anyway.* About that time, I heard hobnail boots walking down the stone path. I turned around to face a German officer with a Luger pointed at me. I pointed my rifle at him. Then I realized his pistol was empty, so I told him to put it down and step back. That turned into a fiasco. I didn't make him back up far enough. When I bent down to pick up his pistol, he jumped all over me. Luckily, he didn't have a knife. At the time, I weighed 210 pounds and was lean and muscular. Our struggle finally came to a Mexican standoff as he had knocked my rifle into the brush and took off running. I grabbed my rifle and drew a bead right between his shoulder blades. Then I thought, *I can't do that. He hasn't done anything harmful to me.* So I let him go, though I shouldn't have. That was not what I had been trained to do. But I couldn't have lived with committing cold-blooded murder. I think God told me to let him go. Ashamed, I didn't tell anyone about the incident. But I did get a beautiful 9mm Luger out of the deal and still have it. Collectors call it a Black Widow.

I returned to the house shaken and bruised. When my friends asked where I got the Luger, I told them I found it in the woods.

Soon we received word where we could pick up some food. As we drove away, an incendiary hit our canvas-covered truck. We bailed out, but my back was burned. One of the guys said, "We've got to save our truck somehow. It's the only thing that's going to get us anywhere. Or we'll be on foot." Flames moved across the top of the canvas like a pair of scissors and cut the canvas in two. It fell on each side right over the gas tank. I quickly cut the ropes with my knife and got the canvas away from the truck. Some engineers showed up about that time and started throwing the gas cans off the truck. Three of them blew up without hurting anyone. After waiting for the truck to cool off, we jumped back in and it worked. So we had a charcoal truck. The only things left on it were steel other than the tires.

The guys decided to drop me off at the house where I had given the German man and his daughter medicine a few days earlier. The man and woman tried to communicate with me; a difficult job since I couldn't speak German and they spoke no English. But we found out we all spoke Norwegian and managed to communicate. Every day, they put my hands around the bedpost and laid me on my stomach to peel the charred skin off my back until I could finally stand to wear a shirt again. When my friends came to check on me after that, I jumped in the truck and away we went.

When one of our sergeants came up from our company in France and looked at our truck, I asked, "Will I get a purple heart for this?"

He said, "No. You'll get a court martial for losing your truck. You guys get busy and get this truck back together." He just chewed on us. Finally we found parts for the truck and put it back together.

In another vehicle incident, I was thrown out of a jeep one day and broke several bones in my hand. Then the driver told me, "Smith, you look terrible. You've got blood coming out of your eyes, ears and nose. You think you can help me get this jeep out of the ditch?"

"I can try," I said and put my back to the jeep and leaned on it. After we finally got it out, I told him he would have to set my hand.

He said, "I can't stand to look at you. You make me sick!"

So I had to do it myself by using my good hand to pull the bone in place. After that, I used

my teeth and my good hand to tie my shoelaces and underwear. Then my hand became infected where the bones had poked through. We also had run out of food again, so I had chewed willow branches to curb my hunger. The nurses weighed me, and I was down to 140 pounds. When they gave me a shot of penicillin and rubbed penicillin ointment on my open wound, they told me that I had done a good job of setting my own bones. So I got the idea that I would like to become a surgeon when I got home. Sure enough, I took pre-med courses in college back in the States.

By mistake, we went to the concentration camp at Dachau near Munich. I had hooked a right when I shouldn't have. We saw a lot of people in terrible condition. They were nothing but skin and bones, and many were dying. I took pictures that I still have. Before we arrived at the camp, we stopped by a railroad that led to it. I had never seen narrow-gauged cars loaded with people like that. They had been sealed up with people still inside.

Most of the prisoners were Jews, but many were Slavic. There also were a lot of Germans there. They all were used for experiments. One such experiment included placing anodes all over a person's body and putting them in a bathtub filled with oil. Then the German soldiers would raise the temperature of the oil until the person died, all the time recording the body's reactions. Their excuse was they were trying to learn how pilots could escape harm in a burning aircraft, and these people were no good to anybody. Another experiment involved placing someone in cold, icy water and waiting to see how long it took them to die. The U.S. Army captured all these things on film along with all the Germans' records. I understand it's all in a warehouse in New York today.

I looked into another railroad car that was full of blankets. I grabbed two of them because I had been cold, really cold, throughout the whole war. That night I laid my raincoat on the ground, put my regular two blankets on top of it, and covered up with the two German blankets. Around midnight, I woke up sweating and itching. I thought the blankets must have had lice or fleas in them. Three German prisoners told me there were no fleas or lice in the blankets. The problem was that they had been made from the hair of the prisoners in the concentration camp. I felt so dirty after that, and I couldn't believe it. I kept one of those blankets and now take it to all the schools to show so people will know what was done to those poor prisoners.

I often think about the misery extended to so many people by the Germans. After the war, I read a lot about it. The SS officers were always fighting. They had each other annihilated by death squads. I couldn't believe some of the things I learned about the "Einsatz Gruppen" (No Return) and the LAH (an SS group that served as Adolph Hitler's bodyguards during the Battle of the Bulge). Those people took 81 American prisoners in Belgium and tied their hands behind their backs with wire. Then the tanks pulled up with machine guns, and the man in charge, Joachim Peiper, gave the order to shoot them. Afterward, the officers walked through the bodies and shot each American soldier in the head. They were merciless and mean. If an SS officer was hit by gunfire in France, the Germans would wipe out the entire town — women, children, old people, young people...

Though I didn't know it at the time, there were people who were worse than the SS. They were called the Sickerheitsdienst (SD) and wore a diamond SD insignia on their flannel jacket. The SD was comprised of killers without a conscience. For instance, Ernst Rohm (head of the German SA) had great influence over Hitler, who commanded the SS. In the beginning, there were only a few SS officers, and Rohm had about 30,000 men. Those figures eventually climbed to three million. Though Rohm was his best friend, Hitler had him assassinated. The man who assassinated him was named Eike, who also was in charge of all the death camps. I believe he was killed during an air raid, but he left a trail of blood behind.

In 1937, Hitler sent a telegram to President Roosevelt and to the school in New London, Texas, after a gas explosion had demolished the school and killed many children. The telegram said that the people of Germany were very sorry for all the children who had been killed there. But he already had started killing people in death camps in 1933. That was a mixed-up affair.

Death should not be taken lightly. Life is such a delicate thing, like a butterfly that lands on a flower and suddenly drops off. His time on earth is over. The more that I can witness to people, especially our young people, the more I feel like I'm doing God's work. I hope so at least.

I John 4: 7-8, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."