



Leroy Anderson
Mess Sergeant, U.S. Army
543rd Replacement Training Company
World War II

On February 4, 1942, I entered the service at Camp Grant, Illinois. For the next eight weeks, I went through basic training at Camp Robinson in Arkansas. My good friend Paul Anthes from Michigan and I saw a notice on the bulletin board at camp one day about a cooking and baking school. We applied and were assigned as assistants to a company's cooks. When they baked pies, we had to clean the ovens and such. It wasn't a lot of fun, but we did it.

After about a year at Camp Robinson, I was assigned to the 543rd Replacement Training Company at Camp Fannin in Tyler, Texas, cooking for their 900 soldiers in basic training. The camp stayed full of recruits because there was such a need for infantrymen on the battlefronts overseas. They were all young fellows about 18 to 20 years old who left for the frontlines after only eight or ten weeks of training. Trains would take them to the East Coast for processing before being shipped overseas. As soon as they left, another group would come in. But I was a mess sergeant, so I never actually saw battle.

During my time at Camp Fannin, I married Lois Virginia at the Calvary Baptist Church in Tyler, where she worked as the church secretary. A few weeks later, I was shipped overseas.

Our troop carrier landed in Naples, Italy. The fighting had stopped in that area, so we were able to enjoy the town and met troops who had come down from North Africa. From Naples, we were assigned to various locations. My unit was loaded onto trucks and driven over the Volturno River to a dairy farm belonging to Count Keanno, Mussolini's son-in-law. We moved in, cleaned out the barns and set them up for different functions, including a mess hall. That was interesting. We set up our kitchens with four or five gasoline-powered ranges in the middle of a barn and put in tables for the mess hall. The cattle stalls were still there so they could be brought in for milking every day. Five or six cooks would alternate their time by working 24 hours at a time and then being off 24 hours.

I stayed in that location until the war ended about 18 months later. There always were alerts that the Germans might be coming over. When they did once or twice, we had to take cover in ditches or whatever. But we all managed to survive. We never met the enemy eye-to-eye

because they were in the mountains above us.

The Battle of Anzio already had taken place by the time we arrived, but there were more battles to be fought. When there were a lot of casualties on the battlefield, our soldiers would have to leave for the frontlines. Those young boys were just waiting to be called. One battle occurred on top of a mountain. From their vantage points in the mountains, the Germans were able to see across the countryside and know what our soldiers were doing. Wounded American soldiers were sent to a fine hospital in the hills outside Naples.

The younger generation ought to be thankful to those in our generation who worked and trained to fight for their country all over the world.

It was difficult being so far from home. My wife worked and lived in Denton while I was overseas. When I came home in 1945, our preacher suggested I think about going to school in Denton. So I went to North Texas State University and graduated in 1948 with a degree in music. Then we moved back to Tyler, Texas, where I became the band director for Hogg Junior High School. Seven or eight years later, I began teaching at Hubbard Junior High School. I retired in April 1980.

Like me, all the men I served with in the Army were Christians and serious about it. While we were at Camp Fannin, we visited various churches for meetings and to give testimonies. Sometimes the ladies would bake pies for us, and we really enjoyed that. Though I had been raised as a Lutheran in Illinois, I was baptized at the First Baptist Church in Tyler. Now I've been a member of Green Acres Baptist Church for 27 years and enjoyed every bit of it. I served as a deacon and later was honored as a deacon emeritus.