

Homer B. Beaver
Colonel, U.S. Air Force
World War II, Korean Conflict, Vietnam War

As told by Mr. Beaver's widow, Sue Smith

For 47 years, I was married to Homer B. Beaver and was an Air Force wife for 33 of those years. Everyone called my husband "Eager Beaver", and that was just the type man he was. Beaver and I were quite young when we married, and he already was in the Air Force. Of course, I followed him around. We also served the Lord in the military as laymen.

My husband joined the Air Force just before the war ended in 1945 and went through flight training for B-17, B-29, B-52, and B36 aircraft in Sacramento, California; Houston, Texas; and Ardmore, Oklahoma.

When he left one day for England, I felt as if I would never see him again. I was concerned about the mission because of the dangerous weather conditions. All the time he was gone, I prayed for his safety. The flight crews were in England for more than a week. On their way back to the States, Eager and his crew ran into a whiteout in Newfoundland. They thought the tower had picked them up and told them go in a certain direction, but they actually talked the crew into the side of a mountain instead. The crewmembers knew they were in trouble but didn't know what to do. Eager was the navigator, so he was down in the nose of the plane trying to figure out what was happening. Someone standing behind the pilot suddenly yelled, "Kip! It's a mountain! Pull up!" It was too late.

They burrowed into the mountain, and the aircraft's nose broke away. My husband was buried in that nose for quite some time and could hear the plane burning all around him. But they couldn't find him. Finally, he was able to knock out some little windows and stick his hand outside. One man risked his life to rescue him. The crash victims were stranded on that mountain for a number of days. Though other planes dropped men in an attempt to get them out, the snow was so deep that the rescue team couldn't walk. They had to crawl to the crash site.

It was an awesome experience, but our Lord just put His arms around us. The day they came to tell me that my husband had crashed into a mountain and had been saved was the day I found peace. We knew then that God had us in His hands and had something for us to do. Following that crash, Eager developed rheumatoid arthritis but flew for several more years. We stayed in the Air Force longer than a lot of people do, but it was a wide-open mission field.

After World War II ended, my husband decided to have a career in the Air Force. He was sent to Fort Worth and later to the War College in Montgomery, Alabama. Then he was stationed at different Strategic Air Command (SAC) bases for periods of two or four years, according to his responsibilities. In Nebraska, he helped install an underground computer system at the SAC base. For a while, he was stationed in Ohio. His last duty was at the air base in Anchorage, Alaska. It was good duty. We left in 1978 after Eager came home one day and said, "I've got to hang up the blue suit. I can't do what I need to do and what the Lord wants me to do in the Air Force."

In addition to World War II, my husband also served in the Air Force during the Korean Conflict and the Vietnam War. I prayed him and (later) our son through Vietnam. After Eager left for Vietnam in 1964, I awakened one night with a terrible feeling. So I prayed. I found out later that his living quarters had been bombed, and he had been just hanging on to a wall. But he

was all right. He was gone for a year that time. Not long afterward, our son went to Vietnam, where he flew helicopters and was part of the Search and Rescue group.

For years and years, as part of his duties with the Strategic Air Command, my husband would go overseas for six months at a time. I would stay home with the children. Many times we were separated for three to six months. Eager rose in responsibilities and rank during that time but never tried to pull strings to go to a particular place. We knew that the Lord would send us wherever he needed us. When we were together, we mostly were in Okinawa at a foreign field. He also was stationed at Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth for ten years. Though life as a military wife was rough at times, it was a good life. My goodness, any life is rough. As the saying goes, you either react or respond. Wherever we were, I was always busy with church activities or wives' activities at the base. It was a wonderful time for us.

After Eager retired from the Air Force, we attended only one reunion. We both enrolled in Southwestern Theological Seminary and worked with the Southern Baptist Mission Board from 1978 until 1988. He served as vice president of administration.

We left the Foreign Mission Board and moved to Tyler in 1988. My husband had grown up in Kilgore, Texas, and I was raised in Danville, Arkansas. Our two boys, one of whom is a retired Marine colonel, lived in different places.

Eager and I attended John Childs' Sunday school class, a very loving group at Green Acres Baptist Church. When my husband was ill and died from rheumatoid arthritis, those class members put their arms around me like a family. The church has grown so much now, and I think it is a wonderful place.