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Sp/5 (E-5) Sergeant, U.S. Army

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At the age of 18, I enlisted in the Army shortly after finishing high school. Though the Korean War had just ended, they still were drafting men into the service. I thought it would be a good experience and also wanted to attend school later with the help of the GI Bill.

Young and naïve, I found out that the Army was not exactly what I had expected. By the second or third day of boot camp at Fort Bliss, Texas, I ended up on KP duty. My name started with a “B”, and they always started assigning duties at the top of the roster. So I got a lot of KP experience. That was a rude awakening because I had to go on duty at about 2:30 a.m. and didn’t get off until 9:30 or 10:00 that night. Other than two 15-minute breaks, I spent that time on my feet all day listening to an old sergeant pushing us to peel potatoes, wash dishes, etc. I thought, *This was a mistake!*

Our training was very infantry oriented. We marched a lot and went on bivouacs. Crawling under machine guns that were firing just above my head was pretty frightening. But I prepared myself for whatever was to come by telling myself that I was there to defend my country if need be and by following orders. Certainly, I never had any thoughts of refusing to serve or of refusing to do anything they asked me to do. I felt like I owed that dedication to the country and to myself.

From Fort Bliss, I was sent to Quartermasters’ School at Fort Lee, Virginia. Then I was shipped to Anchorage, Alaska, where I spent the next two years maintaining records at a supply depot. We supplied aircraft and ship parts to military bases all over the world. Alaska is one of the most beautiful places a person will ever see, summer or winter. Though there was a lot of snow in the winter, temperatures would warm up to 80 or 85 degrees in the summer. Moose used to come right on our post. I’d like to go back on my own someday.

I returned to Fort Bliss after leaving Alaska and remained there for my final six months of service. It was nice to be able to go home occasionally there. While in Alaska those two years, I had not been able to go home. It was pretty hard to go that long without seeing my family. I couldn’t afford to call them because things were so expensive there, and I only made \$76 a month as a private. By the time I left, I was classified E-5 and was making \$145 a month—big

money.

My military experience was good for me. I learned a lot about discipline and even enjoyed parts of it. I grew up in the Army and got a taste of life as an adult. It provided me with the desire to better myself. I think any young person would benefit from the training they would receive in the military.

At the time, Americans were very patriotic and took a lot of pride in their country. Those of us in the military took a lot of pride in that, too. I've always been grateful that I did serve because I learned many things that I would not otherwise have learned. Today, I don't believe Americans are as patriotic as they used to be. I don't think patriotism ever again will reach the pinnacle it reached during and after World War II. Although this country is not perfect, it has been good to us. So I hope patriotism will improve.

I became a Christian at the age of 11, though I wasn't very dedicated while I was in the service. But I always felt the presence of God and felt that he was watching over me. God has worked in my life in a lot of ways when I didn't realize it. Looking back, I can see that he took care of me when I didn't have enough sense to do it.

I've been blessed with a wife, four children and four grandchildren. After I left the Army, I got married and decided to return to school to become a court reporter. I worked for the state courts in Texas for 14 years and in the federal courts for 16 years. Three years before I retired, we built a house in Tyler because our daughter and her three children lived here. We really enjoy our life in East Texas now. I do a little fishing, fly radio-controlled airplanes and try to spend time with my grandchildren.