



Max Callon
Private First Class, U.S. Army Air Corps
World War II

In October 1944, during my junior year in high school in McPhearson, Kansas, an Army Air Corps recruiter tested the boys for the cadets' training program. When I was accepted, the recruiter said that would keep me from being drafted at the age of 18. In May 1945, I went into the Air Corps and was sent to Keesler Field Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi, for pre-flight training. The war ended while I was there. Though I didn't become a war hero, God was with me all the way.

The Air Corps gave us three options. They said we could go home and be drafted, go to airplane mechanics school, or go to military intelligence school. I decided to attend the military intelligence school at Scott Field in St. Louis, Missouri. While there, I hooked up with an instructor, a sergeant who was leading a chorale group that performed each Saturday at the Chase Hotel for the Chaplain's Hour. That was the first religious connection, though I was a Christian already. I also sang at some of the big churches around St. Louis. After graduation, I went to Greensboro, North Carolina, to await transport overseas. I was to serve with the Occupation Forces in Germany. Over the next three months, three or four groups left for Germany, but I remained in Greensboro.

Finally I went to the chaplain and asked if he could help me. The commanding officer (CO) told him, "His records from the military intelligence school have been misplaced, but I'll find them." Soon the CO called me in and said, "We're sending some regular Army sergeants to Puerto Rico. Their homes are there, and they're being rewarded with a transfer to Borinquen Field. They are coming in next week, and I'll send you with that group. You will replace a sergeant in the Message Center, coding and decoding secret messages."

We proceeded to New Orleans and boarded an old boat. In Puerto Rico, I bunked at the Squadron Headquarters building and performed KP duty for the next three weeks. Since rankings were frozen, I didn't have even one stripe. All the other men were sergeants. Again, I went to a chaplain and told him I needed some relief. He asked if I knew anything about music. When I

explained my background in St. Louis, he asked, "Can you type?" I told him yes, and he said, "My chaplain's assistant over the Caribbean area has just gone home. If you can take care of the music, our bulletins and the rest of it, you're hired. I'll get you a jeep and a bicycle."

I took care of all the different religious groups, including the Jewish and Catholic soldiers, and even served as an altar boy at times. Most of the men at the base had fought in World War II. Ministering to them was exciting. Though they were non-coms ranking way above me, they still came to me for counseling at times. I advised them to pray to the Lord, and He would get them through. Before long, I decided that I was being called into the ministry. When I wrote that to my parents, they were pretty excited. But the news didn't set well with my fiancé's mother. By the time I came home, she had made sure that her daughter had another guy.

When I first came back to Kansas after my discharge from the service, I worked for my older brother, a city engineer in McPhearson. For a year, I traveled across the country playing basketball with the Harlem Globetrotters, the House of Davids, the Kansas City All Stars and the Kansas Wheatshockers — two white teams and two black teams. I was their advance publicity man since I was the only one with a car (1937 Hudson). I put a loudspeaker on it and traveled all over Kansas City, St. Jo, Emporia and other little towns broadcasting the news that our teams were coming to play ball. Then I met my wife Shirley, a student at a music school in Lindbergh near McPhearson at the time. I took her along one day when I was speaking at a youth revival service. That day, I realized I didn't have the ability or talent to become a preacher but felt guilty because I thought I had been called to it.

When we married and moved to Colorado, my wife's home, I decided to enroll at the University of Colorado. The university's quota was full of out-of-state students on the GI Bill, so they advised me to go to the Colorado State Teacher's College in Greeley for a semester to establish residency and come back. As a music major in Greeley, I played football and lived in the athletic dorm. One day I saw a note on the music director's office wall about the need for a music minister at the First Baptist Church, three blocks away from the campus. When I applied, they hired me.

After graduating from college, I coached and taught school in several towns and became a minister of music in every one of them. Though I had tried to get away from it, evidently that was not God's plan. He intended for me to minister in the field of music. First, I was music director at a First Christian Church for no pay. In the next town, I became music director at the First Methodist Church.

My second child was a Down's Syndrome boy. My brother Gerald was living in Houston and suggested I come there because of the area's special schools for Down's Syndrome children. He also told me the local churches needed music men. For the next 23 years, I served as a music minister for churches in Dickinson, Friendswood, Park Place, Oak Forest and other towns around Houston. I also served as a deacon for the various churches. I managed to send three daughters to Baylor on my schoolteacher's salary. Though I kept trying to get out of the music ministry business, someone always came along saying they needed me. Of course, that helped pay for my girls' college expenses. I also ran the summer recreation program for the city parks.

My son died at the age of 28, and I decided to retire. After I had a heart attack and suffered from colon cancer, my doctor advised me to leave the teaching business. We moved to Tyler, where I joined Green Acres Baptist Church, became involved in the music program and am still going.

It's goofy, but I see God's hand directing all the things that happened to me. When I went into the service, I didn't know God's plan. At Fort Leavenworth, I met 18-year-old boys who had

lost brothers in the war, and I had lost several cousins. I thought, *Oh, my lands, this is going to be horrible*. But I ran into some strong, tough athletic country boys. If they heard a boy crying at night, they'd holler, "Shut up or I'll knock the snot out of you!" I was so surprised to see those tough guys reading their Bibles and getting guys involved. That made me realize God was there. No telling what I could have gotten into in Germany, but He led me down a different path.

Patriotism in America today has been a problem for me since September 11, 2000, and I can't honestly think that the United States or its allies or anyone else will be able to change the world. There are too many enemies out there. Only through God and Jesus Christ will this be solved. His coming again is the only answer I can see. There's too much pollution in religion, the economy and the environment. But we can't handle it alone. Instead we have to ask for the Lord's help. I know where I'm going, so I can meet life head-on. Young people should be able to say that, too. If they know Jesus and accept him as Lord, that frees them up so they won't be afraid no matter what.