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Having grown up in St. Louis, Missouri, I had attended St. Louis University for two years when I volunteered for the draft in January 1954. On my first day in the Army, I was processed through the induction center in St. Louis and put on a bus to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. We spent the night in old, temporary barracks that had been built during World War II. They turned off the lights at 9 o'clock that night and got us up the next morning at 5 o'clock, ordering us to make our beds, mop the floors, etc. My mother had always done those things, so that was a change for me. It was an eye-opening first impression of life in the Army. Then I was sent to Camp Chaffe, Arkansas, just outside Fort Smith, for basic training.

A pretty wild youngster in those days, I was 20 years old and having a good time. I had not been saved yet. On a weekend pass once during boot camp, two buddies and I were in a hardware store in town when the owner, a dedicated Baptist, invited us to go to church with him the following day. That Sunday, he fed us lunch after church and treated us like homefolks. That seemed rather unusual to me, but I've always remembered it. Off and on as a boy, I had attended a Baptist church in South St. Louis. During my high school years, my father was on the road all the time. When he came home, we didn't go to church.

After boot camp, I was assigned to a radar school at Fort Bliss, Texas, for eight months. During my training, I learned to operate a radar-controlled anti-aircraft gun. In January 1955, I

traveled to Germany and was reassigned to a SAC (Strategic Air Command) base in East Anglia, England, to help defend the Air Force from possible attacks by the Russians or any other enemy. A truce had been signed in Korea, so that war was winding down.

A radar technician, I worked with another soldier in a battery of five guns. We did repair work and routine maintenance. It was a fairly quiet time. Occasionally, we would be called out in the middle of the night when the long-range radar spotted an unidentified airplane. It was our job to start the generators, load our guns and wait until it was determined that the aircraft was not a threat. Then we would go back to bed. The first few times that happened were a little nerve-wracking. After the first two or three alerts turned out to be false alarms, it stopped being so exciting. In the end, they all were false alarms and usually turned out to be private airplanes whose pilots had neglected to file their flight plans. Of course, we nearly wore out our ammunition while loading and unloading our guns.

Being away from home was not a problem for me. I was ready for that since I had been kept on a close rein at home. I liked being able to do whatever I wanted when off duty. While overseas, I always carried a pass that allowed me to go about anywhere, within limits. That was a new experience for me, and a good one. It also was a carefree time because I didn't have a family to worry about yet.

I worked with a pretty wild bunch of fellows. We should have gotten into trouble, I suppose, but we didn't. Our Army detachment on the base had no chaplain. So we spent most of our free time partying in town.

My two-year tour of duty was completed by the time I left England. When I returned to the States, I was mustered out of the Army at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, in January 1956. I had become a more independent person as a result of my military service and my year in England. Before that, I always had lived at home and depended on my folks for my livelihood. That changed after I returned to the States, though I lived with my parents for about a year then. At that point, I began to make plans for a future independent of my parents.

During my time in the Army, servicemen had a sense of pride. No one was throwing eggs at them then. We were respected and felt like we were serving our country. We were well accepted in England. Only nine years after the end of World War II, they remembered the American servicemen who had fought there and were impressed. They were our friends.

Patriotism in those days was still very strong in America. When I was about 12 years old, I had been a little afraid. The Germans and Japanese had made serious inroads before we finally turned things around. After Vietnam, our country didn't face any truly menacing enemies or have to deal with war for a period of about 30 years. I think we became complacent. The events of September 11, 2001, woke up a lot of people. For a while, there was a good deal of bandwagon patriotism, but it didn't take long for that to fade.

Now anti-war protestors are parading in Washington, D.C., and it sounds like the days of Vietnam again. It seems that people love this country as long as it doesn't cost them anything. I fault Hollywood for a lot of that. Maybe our nation can't stand prosperity, but we do become complacent for whatever reason. That's a problem we need to deal with somehow. In the face of a serious threat, the average American probably will stand up and be counted despite the whiners and complainers.

I firmly believe all young men should serve time in the military and was disappointed when the draft was eliminated. Though people look at the draft as similar to establishing penal colonies, it really does not. Military service allows young men to see what's going on in the rest of the world and teaches them discipline and independence. I worry about the status of our armed

forces today because there simply are not enough of them. I wouldn't trade my time in the service for anything.

Remembering the pleasant experience of attending church with that hardware store owner in Arkansas, I decided in 1979 to become involved at Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler. Though 25 years had passed, that was my next church experience. I joined the church and was 45 years old the day I was saved. Looking back, I can see how the Lord worked in my life in different ways.

Today, the Lord is still teaching me. I am a Sunday school director at Green Acres and participate in the Intercessory Prayer Ministry and United Way. But I am a child as far as the scriptures are concerned. I learn something every week in Sunday school, just like everyone else. God taught me to accept Jesus as my savior, and I have learned and grown since then. I have made many Christian friends and meet once a week with a men's prayer group. My four children have been baptized and saved along the way, and now I'm starting to work on my grandchildren.