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My high school math teacher was in the National Guard. Looking for brownie points, he talked several of us seniors into joining in 1954. The first time I had to serve KP duty and peel a pile of potatoes that I thought had no end and wash pots and pans, there was no doubt in my mind that I was in the military. The first time I had to fall out and do pushups for an improperly buttoned shirt was another wake-up call. I also figured out pretty quickly that not everyone was raised in a Christian home the same way I was. But I stayed in the National Guard through college, and the extra income helped. By my sophomore year, I was married.

After graduation, I wanted to pursue a master's degree and decided to go through Officers' Candidate School. When I completed school and obtained my master's degree, I took a job in another state. I worked there for 10 years and continued in National Guard meetings.

Most of the time, the National Guard is considered a service branch that handles emergency situations such as floods and riots. During my years with them, I helped evacuate people whose houses were underwater. I never was involved in riot duty, though there was a lot of that going on. To me, it is very important to maintain citizen soldiers in America for emergency purposes. In 1961 during the Berlin Crisis, a lot of National Guard troops were called to duty. Many units have been called to serve in Afghanistan recently. Through time in various trouble spots around the world, specific units of the National Guard and Army Reserve have been very helpful.

When I was in the National Guard, I served with some good officers and with some who I wondered about. I once served under a commander who only worried about inspections and saving face. He said, "You people have got to remember that things are not as they are, but only as they appear to be." I have never forgotten that. He was a charade as an officer and leader because he had nothing to contribute. All he wanted to do was pull the wool over others' eyes when they looked at him.

I never again saw a lot of the men I went through OCS training with because I left the state immediately. But I served with some great guys in various units. Some were with ATF and worked on big cases. Some worked in the real estate business. Others were Automobile dealers,

etc. One was a traffic engineer for the City of Dallas was in my reserve unit. Another fellow was an engineer who worked on the nuclear reactors at Glen Rose, Texas. A particular headquarters company commander decided to go the wrong way, though. He was a gung-ho GI Joe with expertise in explosives and weapons. A few years ago, I heard that he was arrested for training rebels in Columbia, using his talents in a totally erroneous manner. In the reserves, there is a conglomeration of people from all walks of life.

My military experience helped me grow as a person. I learned to work with people from such a fabulous array of backgrounds, some of whom were extremely sharp. That broadened my scope considerably.

Thank God, I was raised in a Christian home. I trusted Jesus as a young boy. A country kid didn't dare to not believe in Jesus. That faith has stayed with me, and He has always been important in my life. During our weekend drills in the National Guard or Army Reserve, a church service always was held on Sunday. Though not a high percentage of the troops participated, I never missed many of those services. I believe everyone should take time to pause and worship God, on the job or wherever. God and protected and guided me so many times. He's reached down and yanked me back in line, telling me, "Whoa, boy! Don't do that." I thank Him for every one of those times because I was wrong.

When I returned to Texas in 1969, I joined the Army Reserves and finished my military service. We moved to Tyler in 1983 and joined Green Acres Baptist Church shortly thereafter. God has blessed our lives. My wife and I spend a great deal of our time volunteering with the Salvation Army. Being retired doesn't mean God can't still use us. Instead, we're doing what we should have been doing all along... working full time for God.

Though I missed World War II, I've heard many gruesome stories from veterans. That always made me fall on my knees and appreciate what God has done for America and for people in their individual lives. We have so much to be thankful for in this country, freedoms people cannot begin to appreciate. I have been fortunate enough to travel to many parts of the world, including Russia, Europe, South America, South Africa, Australia and more. My travels helped me realize that we have freedoms nobody else in the world experiences. God has blessed America so much. For instance, Zimbabwe is under the rule of a horrible dictator and is an ongoing crisis. Most of my friends from that country have left for safety's sake. We have to do whatever it takes to preserve our freedom in America.

When I hear about people wanting to change the pledge of allegiance or dishonor an American symbol, it really bothers me. The terrorist attacks in our country on September 11, 2001, woke up a lot of Americans and put God back in their lives. We had become lackadaisical and taken things for granted before that. I was in Northern Ireland when the terrorism problem was very bad. In fact, I passed through a checkpoint five minutes before a car bomb was detonated there, killing several persons. So patriotism has been on my mind for a long time, well before the events of September 11th.

It concerns me that our reserve forces are not provided with modern equipment. A lot of their equipment is obsolete or unusable. I think they will have to be reequipped and retrained before we can mobilize the kind of military forces we are capable of producing. Sometimes I get aggravated at the doves that think we don't need to spend money on our military needs.