



B.W. Hairgrove
T/Sgt, U.S. Army
World War II
1945-1946

Before I went into the service, I had lived in a rather protected environment. I never had been too far away from my little hometown in East Texas. Since I was the oldest of four boys, my daddy gave me a lot of responsibility. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, we heard about it over the radio at the store. I was 15 years old, so I didn't think it would affect me that much. Of course, it did. A friend came by the store to visit one day and was talking to my father about the war. I was standing nearby. He said, "I think it's going to be a pretty long, drawn-out affair. I think that boy there will see military service." That alarmed me. I hadn't thought about that, but it turned out that he was right.

In September 1944, I was 18 years old and had to register for the draft. I had graduated from high school and was still living at home, working with my dad at his general merchandise store at the edge of town. Between Christmas and New Year's Day that year, right after the Battle of the Bulge, I went for my physical exam. I was sworn in a short time later and sent to San Antonio for two weeks of indoctrination.

Then I went to Fort Bliss in El Paso and wound up training for 17 weeks in anti-aircraft service. As a result of the Battle of the Bulge, Congress had passed a law that 18-year-old soldiers had to have six months of training before they could be shipped overseas. Prior to that, the military had been sending a lot of 18-year-old boys overseas to replace the men lost in that battle. One of my friends got caught up in that after being in the service only three or four weeks. He ended up as a prisoner of war in Germany.

During my training at Fort Bliss, the war with Japan ended. A lot of the men were being discharged on the point system. Since I didn't have very many points, they put me to training new recruits. I did that until December 1946, when I was discharged.

When I was 14 years old, I became a Christian at the First Baptist Church in Tenaha,

Texas. My faith strengthened me during my military service years, and I attended church services whenever I could. I think the Lord watched over me because I never had to go overseas. I was too young to worry much about the future. My cousin had enlisted at the same time I did, and we stayed together the whole time. We both were Christians and felt the hand of the Lord on us. A lot of guys did things they shouldn't have been doing, but we did not. I think the others respected us for that.

After I left the service, I worked with my dad in our store and at our farm. I started to college in the fall of 1947 and met my wife there. We married in June 1948. I have remained a Christian and have served the Lord in many different ways. I was ordained a deacon in 1956 and have served in several churches. At Green Acres Baptist Church, I have chosen to serve in other ways. Now I'm involved with the Volunteer Christian Builders. We build churches all over the United States, even in Alaska. I've slowed down on that lately because of my health.

During World War II, I think people felt more responsible for doing their part. They appreciated this country. The war awakened a lot of people to that fact that they better stand up for what they believed in or they wouldn't have it for long. Freedom is not free. Today, I worry about the way many people live. They just expect somebody else to do things for them. But I think we all have to assume responsibility for ourselves and for our families and for everyone around us. After the tragic attacks by terrorists on September 11, 2001, people at first wanted to go get the enemy and put an end to the problem. Now I see that patriotism waning and opposition growing against such things as going to Iraq. I don't think people look far enough ahead or really understand what's happening. Many people don't even believe there is a problem.

As long as we stay close to the Lord and put Him first, however, I think things will work out. I want to help but realize about all I can do is live a good Christian life and serve as a good example.