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World War II

At the age of 19, I left college and went into the service on January 26, 1943. I spent a week at Camp Walters, Texas. It was cold as the dickens there, but we had to sleep in tents because the barracks were full. All we had for heat were old round-bellied stoves. Finally we were sent to Milsap, Texas, to board a train. They told us, "If the train comes from the east, you're going to California. If it comes from the west, you're going to Fort Benning, Georgia." I knew they were training infantry soldiers in Fort Benning, so I sure didn't want to go there. I wound up at Camp Roberts, California, where infantry and artillery training was going on. So it really didn't make much difference.

Life in the military was an adjustment, though I dearly loved going through six weeks of basic training in the California mountains. I was assigned to a field artillery training unit and had to learn to take orders. But I had done that at home, so it wasn't a problem. When we went to the firing range, I already knew how to shoot a rifle and thought that was fun. One mistake I made was wearing a pair of socks with a hole in the heel during a long hike. We marched down a river a little longer than I had expected, and I rubbed blisters on my heel.

I already was a Christian when I went into the Army. There were chapels on the base, and I would go to church services whenever I had a chance. Our chaplain was a good Christian man from Missouri. That made the transition a little easier. I hope my colleagues observed my deportment. Many things went on in the service that shouldn't be condoned, especially concerning the guys who were married. Of course, they were young.

After boot camp, I was placed on permanent party as a cadre with the training corps and stayed there for the next six months. The cadres wore big campaign hats so they could be easily identified. Next I was transferred to Fort Ord near Monterrey and Pebble Beach, California. I loved it up there. It was an Army Ground Force Training Center that prepared soldiers for overseas duty. They offered advanced training, including infiltration courses and other rough classes. A new group of soldiers arrived about every six weeks. Things were getting pretty hot in

the war, so we stayed busy. After the Battle of the Bulge, a lot of Air Corps cadets were placed in the infantry. Of course, that didn't go over very well. I worked in an office as a training clerk until they caught up with me and sent me overseas.

After I went through the advanced training at Fort Ord, I was sent to Camp Ansa near Riverside and Los Angeles. A week later, I shipped out for Bombay, India. I spent 31 days aboard ship crossing the Pacific. We stopped in Melbourne, Australia, for a couple of days. That was a beautiful city. Once we arrived in Bombay, we traveled all the way across India to Calcutta on a train. There we went to yet another training center. The Army was big on training centers. Our summer uniforms were still in the hold of the ship, so all we had to wear were our wool uniforms. We got pretty hot before our other clothes finally arrived.

Two weeks later, I received orders along with three other men to catch a freight train to a small town beyond Nepal. We rode in a boxcar with a case of C-Rations and a case of K-Rations, and the trip seemed to take forever. During our trip, we ran into a small gage track and had to unload the entire train so it could be moved to a different gage track. We stayed on board until the railroad tracks stopped at the town where we were supposed to catch a plane. Unable to find a plane, we joined a truck convoy. We had been assigned to the 151<sup>st</sup> Medical Battalion and arrived in their general area during the middle of the night. When they told us that our outfit was about a mile back in the jungle, the three of us got out of the trucks and started hoofing it. We had seen a black leopard along on the road, so we were a little uneasy. But we finally found our outfit, one of three companies in the area. Though we didn't realize it, we actually were on the Burma Road at the time. It was April Fools' Day.

The next morning I was told to catch a plane at the airstrip to Headquarters Battalion, about 100 miles north of there. The other two men were to stay there. Lugging my heavy duffel bag, I walked to the airstrip and found a C47 on the runway. A group of pilots and some other soldiers who also were being transferred were already onboard. We flew to Myitkyina, Burma. The C47 pilot looked like he was about 16 years old, so I was a little leery. A lot of the men started getting airsick and throwing up in their helmets. After we landed, one of them said, "I'll never get on another one of those things as long as I live."

When we landed at Myitkyina, a guy from my outfit met me. I was his replacement, so he took good care of me and didn't let me out of his sight. He had been overseas 30 months. I threw my duffel bag in his jeep, and we drove to the Headquarters Battalion. It was simply three or four British tents, but they were much nicer than the American tents and considerably cooler. The sides of the British tents could be rolled up for better airflow, and they had mosquito netting on each side. They also had pretty good food there, too, but no town. Myitkyina had been flattened by artillery. A week later, my escort left for home.

The Burma Road ran from Ledo, India into China, and we had aid stations all along it. While delivering payroll, I made one trip all the way down the road. We flew to Ledo and then went on to visit each aid station and pay the guys. One of the stations was at Baumo, Burma on the road to Mandalay. The last station was in Won Ting, China. That trip was quite an experience. There was a Chinese division along the road, too, and they were walking. Normally Myitkyina was a jumping off place for flying over the hump. They had two airstrips. But we motored down the road to transport supplies.

President Roosevelt died while I was in Myitkyina. Soon we received word that we were shipping out. We tore down the tents and joined another truck convoy to return to Calcutta in August 1945. Two ships were waiting there, and our battalion boarded one. The war ended while we were on the high seas. We had been running blacked out. Suddenly all the lights on the two

ships came on. I had just taken a shower and was walking up the gangplank wearing nothing but a towel and a pair of shoes when I saw the lights and heard everybody hollering. When I asked what was going on, they shouted, "The war is over!" I thought, *Boy, I'm going home!*

The other ship sailed through the Suez Canal to New York. My ship turned left and wound up in Australia for a couple of days. That really wasn't too bad because we got good food there. We ate steaks and drank milk. From there we went to the Philippine Islands. I figured we surely would stop briefly and then go on. Instead, we landed at the Lingayen Gulf and were sent to a staging area in San Fernando. My battalion was deactivated there, and everyone went home with the exception of three men and me. Though we had enough points to go home, they said there weren't enough ships for everyone. We stayed there until December deactivating the outfit and sending other guys home. Then I was transferred to Baggio, the summer capital of the Philippines. That was good duty. The climate was just like California, cool at night and warm in the daytime. In early January, I finally caught a ship home and returned to Camp Ansa in Riverside, California.

After one night at Camp Ansa, I caught a train the next morning to San Antonio. A week later, I was discharged on January 27, 1946. I had served exactly three years. I rode a train to Troup, Texas, and my parents met me at the station. My hometown of Arp was nearby.

As a Christian, I never worried about dying while I was overseas. My faith in God was responsible for that since I knew He was watching over me. I don't think I came back from the war any different than I had been before. I had known it was my duty to serve my country, and I did. Very few men didn't enlist in the service during World War II. If they didn't serve, everyone wanted to know why not. While home on leave once, I met my pastor downtown. He said, "Jack, how come you're not overseas? John's overseas." John was his son. I explained that I was following orders and so far they had not ordered me to go overseas. Since the terrorists' attack on September 11, 2001, we've seen a resurgence of patriotism in America.

Today I serve the Lord by teaching a Sunday school class for second-graders, and I have a good Christian wife.