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When I joined the Army, I was sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and on to Fort Polk, Louisiana. Everyone at Fort Polk was being shipped overseas. We stuck close to the buddies we made there while we served overseas together. After you do everything together for a while (shower, eat, etc.), you get to know everyone pretty well. We met new guys all the time. I even met a hometown buddy one day.

In boot camp, the military prepares soldiers for the situations they will face as a member of the Armed Forces. The drill instructors holler at the recruits and try to embarrass them. They're trying to make sure a soldier will be in control and able to follow orders. Of course, 18 and 19-year-olds think they're invincible. We had to learn to do what we were told to do when we were told to do it. If not, the end result was the stockade. Nobody wanted to do that, so we followed orders.

When I first arrived at boot camp, I didn't know what to expect. Since the recruits were on the bottom rung of the ladder, we always were the last ones to hear anything. Only after orders came down through the chain of command did we know what we would be doing.

I served with the 1st Infantry Division, 16th Regiment, in Germany from 1953 to 1955. My division was known as the Big Bloody 1. We were stationed close to the Russian border and expecting trouble with the Russians. As infantry soldiers, we marched or walked wherever we went. The weather was colder in Europe than anything I had ever experienced. When we marched, we had to tie extra socks around our stomachs. Every eight or ten miles, we had to stop and change our socks. Medics checked our feet periodically for frostbite. If a soldier was suffering from frostbite, he received an automatic court martial. We also had to take good care of our guns. If we went out, we had to clean our guns as soon as we came back. They told us, "If you take care of your gun, it will take care of you."

Every two weeks, we had an alert. We would load up in trucks and jeeps and go to our designated spot to wait two or three hours for the "All is Clear" signal. Then we would return to our billets (housing). When the Germans saw us, they knew something was going on. They would be saying, "The Russkies are coming! The Russkies are coming!"

I was based in Sweinford, and the area still was torn up from World War II. The 8th Air Force had bombed it. Only one building, the jail, was left because it had such thick walls. I think the only reason the Germans liked us was that we spent money in their town. I asked them about Hitler a couple of times, but they always clammed up and refused to talk about it. Honestly, I didn't like the Germans much then because of what they had done to our GI's during the war.

While I was there, I traveled all over that part of Germany and saw a lot of bombed out buildings and bunkers. I visited Stuttgart, Sweden and Denmark, too. Since Sweden and Denmark were neutral countries, we couldn't wear our uniforms there. We had to wear our civvies. But I got to see things I had never seen before. Some of their statues were very interesting.

Although my dog tags said I was a Protestant, I was a Baptist at the time. If soldiers were not Christians when they arrived in Germany, they soon would be because of some of the things we had to do. We had prayer sessions for all denominations about once a week. If we had to go on patrol, someone always was there to say a prayer for us before we left. I think the good Lord was looking over me all the time. If I got into a situation I couldn't handle, He was right there with me. I wasn't worried since I knew where I was going if I got killed.

My faith was strong, though not as strong as I would have liked. But I don't think some of the other men had any faith at all. They lived from payday to payday and only had faith in material things. Of course, if any shooting had started, their faith in God probably would have grown stronger. The Army issued us a New Testament when we enlisted. I carried it in my duffel bag but should have carried it in my pocket.

The other soldiers came from all walks of life and different parts of the States. We lived in what they called a concern with 20 or 25 billets where 150 to 250 men stayed four men to a room. In the United States, we had lived in barracks with 75 or 80 men in one area filled with cots. At first, the billets were enjoyable. Later, I was just ready to go home. An eight or ten-foot fence with barbed wire on top circled our encampment. No one came on our base without an ID card. There was a danger that someone might try to blow up our ammunition dump.

When I returned to the States in June 1955, I was glad to be home and have some good American food again. We had a PX in Germany, but the food wasn't American style. We called our mess hall cooks "belly robbers" because their food was so bad. On my first day at home, I went to a hamburger joint. I was really hungry for a good old hamburger. It had taken ten days to cross the Atlantic Ocean, and I was sick for nine of them. All I could hold down was crackers and Coke. I lost 20 pounds during that time.

Back home, I was put into the reserves just in case they needed us back. Of course, the specialists would have been called back first rather than the infantry. Luckily, I never had to go back.

Patriotism ran high during the early 1950s. When the Korean War broke out, everyone at my college either was drafted or joined the service. All the guys in my outfit were very patriotic. They didn't put up with anyone saying anything against the United States. An American flag patch was sewn onto our jackets.

God really is working in my life today. About six or eight years ago, I ask God to come into my heart. He took away all of my sins and all the dirt and filth in me. That made me a stronger and better person. My children are the same way now and are teaching my grandchildren. I've been a member of Green Acres Baptist Church since 1963. I love to go to Sunday school and wouldn't miss Brother David's preaching. He and Brother Paul are the best two preachers I've ever heard.