



**R.L. Jacobs**  
Corporal T-5 (5<sup>th</sup> Grade), U.S. Army  
2<sup>nd</sup> Signal Service Battalion, Signal Corps  
World War II

In September 1941, I became a student of radio and Morse telegraph at Tyler Commercial College. After Pearl Harbor was attacked on Sunday, December 7, 1941, all my fellow students and I gathered around a radio to hear Roosevelt broadcast his declaration of war against Japan. I will never forget the moment when he said, "Japan can consider herself at war with the United States of America." Then they started playing the national anthem, and I saw tears falling from the eyes of the young ladies in our group. Soon the college contracted with the government to train about 2,500 soldiers as radio operators.

Wanting to work for Southwestern Bell eventually, I loved studying the Morse code and worked on it all the time. My brother worked for them, and he had taken the same course. In order to graduate, we had to be able to send and receive 25 words a minute. My brother finished the ten-month course in seven months. But the Morse telegraph was beginning to fade out, and radio was taking over. One other boy and I were the only Morse code students at the college then, and they needed our room as a training room for the soldiers. One company consisting of 40 or 50 soldiers at a time would attend the classes. The soldiers stayed in the old Blackstone Hotel, the Bluebonnet Courts and the Alamo Plaza. The married soldiers rented apartments. It was something new for Tyler to have a lot of soldiers around. At the time, Tyler's population was 35,000. Of course, Camp Fannin filled it up later.

Not long after the soldiers began to arrive, the college officials asked the other boy and I if we would consider taking a course in radio at no extra cost for the balance of our Morse telegraphy course. We agreed to do that. Of course, the radio international Morse was much like the Morse telegraph. My brother built an oscillator for me to practice radio code. So I would work all day at school and then again in the evening. After going to bed at night, I would send dots and dashes in my mind.

I was about to finish the course in less than ten months and was working on my 25 words per minute when my radio theory teacher, John Shepherd, walked into our radio class one day and whispered to me that I was wanted in the office. Figuring I was in trouble, I went to the office of the assistant supervisor, Mrs. Jewel Spink. She told me that Mr. Hawthorne, my code teacher, and Mr. Shepherd, considered me to be the best student in the radio class out of 35 students. They had suggested that the college hire me as one of the teachers for the soldiers.

Since I liked code sending, I was glad to do that for the next year at the college.

Teaching those soldiers and making friends with them turned out to be one of the most enjoyable experiences in my life. Before actually becoming a teacher, I taught a soldier how to send and receive code. I always ran the code machines that sent the codes out to the tables where the soldiers were sitting with their earphones. They had to learn to send and receive 13 words per minute over a period of 13 weeks before being shipped out. As a sideline, I taught this one soldier to send and receive 20 words a minute. I had befriended the Jewish fellow from Syracuse, New York, and wanted to see him saved. He became interested when I gave him a Gideon Bible, and I almost got him to my church. A few weeks after he shipped out, he wrote me and said, they had sat him down at a desk in Buffalo, New York, and he never operated a radio. His letter said, "I remember the things you used to tell me about coming to church and becoming a Christian and receiving Christ." I don't know whether or not he ever was saved, but I hope he was. One of the other soldiers I invited to church did get saved.

After the college training program wound down, I entered the service on July 28, 1943. I was sent from Tyler to the Reception Training Center at Camp Walters near Mineral Wells, Texas. A month later, I left for a Signal Corps school at Camp Crowder, Missouri. I trained in everything I already knew but became more efficient. That was a snap, though I had not yet attained a speed of 25 words per minute.

Then they sent me to high-speed code school, where I would be required to attain that speed. Upon graduation, we would receive a little card as a diploma citing us as a "777 High-Speed Skilled Operator." During a 25-word-per-minute test one day, I happened to be in a receiving mood, though it sounded awfully fast. We had to complete so many code groups in five minutes. Suddenly, I knew I was getting it and had passed the test. When the five minutes were up, two or three instructors checked my test and couldn't believe that I had done so well. I said, "That seemed like more than 25 words per minute to me."

They said, "It was 28 words per minute." That 28-words-per-minute was the highest speed I ever achieved. The speed with which a radio operator can copy code traffic affects his efficiency. The higher the speed, the more efficient the operator.

One day just outside Camp Crowder in a little town near Joplin, called Neosho, I was in a barbershop filled with soldiers. One of them kept staring at me. Every time soldiers met, they always asked, "Where are you from?" in the hopes of finding someone from their hometown. When I told the soldier in the barbershop that I was from Tyler, Texas, he said, "You know, I went to radio school there at a college. You look familiar." I said, "Yes, I was one of your teachers."

After 14 months at Camp Crowder, I was sent to Petaluna, California—a little town between Santa Rosa and San Francisco, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Signal Service Battalion had a very small installation. I had to learn a Japanese code, which was very simple since I was already a high-speed operator in Morse and International Morse codes. After three months of training, I was assigned to the installation as a radio operator of "Intercept Only" for the next 15 months.

We didn't transmit anything, but intercepted Japanese traffic out of the Pacific Theater. Every few minutes, WAC's would pick up our typed traffic reports and carry them to another part of the building to teletype the information directly to Arlington Hall, West Virginia. There the reports were broken down, decoded, re-encoded and transmitted to our bases in the South Pacific. It was extremely interesting and enjoyable work.

The most important message we could receive was the Japanese weather message called an Iyo. The Japanese use the same vowels we use but rearrange them. We didn't receive very many

weather messages, but they had top priority when we did. We had to remove our report from our typewriter immediately and deliver it to the WAC's down the hall, instead of waiting for them to pick it up. The reason for the high priority rating was that the messages included bombing weather information that had to be transmitted to our B-29 bases in the South Pacific within five hours. The weather message simply consisted of a short string of figures; for example, 3569072. That was it. Usually after we received such a message from a busy Japanese station, they would be shut down in less than 24 hours. Our B-29s either destroyed it or put it out of commission for several days.

The Japanese were very efficient with their radio transmissions. Some of it was manual. We nicknamed their telegraph key a "cooter" key. Most of their traffic was sent by machine at the rate of 300-400 words per minute, though. In those cases, we had to receive the messages by machine and tape it on a reel of paper with dots and dashes. Then we could copy them later. There was a slot across the top of our typewriter that the tape went through, and we pressed a foot pedal to pull it through as we typed.

We learned that when two Japanese operators would get in a radio net in the jungle, they each would want to send their own traffic first. So they would start to argue with their "cooter" telegraph key. The strongest bad name that one Japanese could call another at the time was a fool. Eventually, one of the operators would give up and call the other man a fool.

One afternoon in California, I was in the day room writing a letter home. The room was full of soldiers writing letters, reading, playing ping-pong, etc. A soldier seated at my table kept looking at me. Finally he asked, "Where are you from?" When I told him I was from Tyler, he said, "Some of us here went to college there and studied radio operation. You look familiar." After I told him I had been one of his teachers, he called some other men over. Five of them had already been overseas, earned their points, and returned to the States as radio operators. It was a small world.

After the war ended in August 1945, I was sent to Camp Beale, California, not far from Sacramento. I received my discharge there on March 15, 1946, after thirty-one and one-half months of service.

My faith was very important to me throughout my time in the service. I accepted Christ in February 1939 at the age of 16 at Central Baptist Church in Tyler. The first thing I wanted to do after being saved was to learn the Bible. I guess the Lord laid it on my heart to memorize scriptures, so I began to do that. One of my chief interests was listening to the "Old Fashioned Revival Hour" by Charles E. Fuller out of Long Beach, California, on the radio. He was an inspiration and had saved many soldiers during his services.

Just before I went into the Army, I was listening to Dr. Fuller one Sunday. He was preaching on the significance of numbers in the Bible. Then he said, "By the way, we're broadcasting through 777 stations now and covering 97% of the globe." His wife (whom he always called Honey) always read several letters from all over the world at the beginning of the program. Servicemen who had been saved by his ministry when they heard him on their short-wave radio wrote most of them. One letter really stayed with me.

A young soldier wrote that he went into battle with the Gideon testament in the left pocket of his fatigue jacket. Some of those Gideon testaments had metal covers about 1/16-inch thick. An enemy bullet had knocked the soldier down. But it hit the metal book cover and didn't injure him. After leaving the battle zone, he opened the Gideon testament and found the point of the bullet resting on Psalm 91:7—*A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.* The soldier wrote, "Dr. Fuller, I showed this to my

commanding officer and led him to Christ with it.”

Those thoughts tided me over through the war more than anything else. So I owe a lot to Dr. Charles E. Fuller, who has been with the Lord for several years now.

I made friends with a lot of the soldiers that I taught. James Odom, a musician from Cedar Town, Georgia, was one of them. He came to church at my invitation and attended a Sunday school class for young men. The teacher led him to Christ. James joined the church and was baptized while he was attending radio school. When he was in the South Pacific, James wrote me and said he was teaching a Bible class in the jungle. It was fascinating to think that God had rewarded my efforts as a teacher for those soldiers.

One morning just before a company of students was about to ship out, a sad time always, the Lord laid it on my heart to get on the intercom and make a little speech to encourage them. I said, “Wherever you go in this war, just remember the most important thing is knowing Christ as your personal savior.” When I finished, they all cheered. Later they put out a little paper with my speech included in it. It was thrilling to witness to those men and see some of them come to Christ.

In the service, every soldier ends up with a buddy. My buddy was an 18-year-old boy from Chula Vista, California. He and I were out in the wilderness of Missouri for three weeks at the end of our radio training for CPX maneuvers before being shipped overseas. I began witnessing to him. It was February and one of the coldest winters I ever saw. Eight of us slept in our tent. One night after we all had gone to bed, the young man started asking me questions about how to get saved. Then he said, “Well, I think I’m good enough as I am to get to heaven.” Rising up on my elbow in the pitch-black darkness, I faced him and said, “As far as God is concerned, you’re just as rotten as hell on the inside. You need to be saved.” That hit him hard, and he asked, “What must I do to be saved?” I quoted Paul’s words to the Philippians jailer.

Time rocked on. As strange as it may seem, two soldiers never stayed together very long. But he and I were together seven months. Our bunks were always next to each other, and I continued to witness to him once in a while. Sometimes he would get sarcastic. One day I told him, “Your trouble is you’re under conviction, and you need to be saved.” The last day he and I talked was on my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday. We were in the barracks, and he was shipping out to Boston the next day. I said, “Hollingsworth, just remember one thing. Wherever you go in this Army, and whatever may happen to you in the war, here is one soldier that was more interested in the most important thing about you. That’s your soul.” He dropped his head and said, “I know it. I appreciate that.” We shook hands and parted.

Later I got letters from him from time to time. In every letter, he would write that he still remembered the things I had told him at Camp Crowder and that he appreciated my frankness. I read those letters with disappointment because I was hoping to read that he had been saved. In California one week, I had been down in the dumps when a WAC laid a letter in my hand. The Lord spoke to me then very plainly and said, “Here is the letter that you’ve been wanting.” My friend’s letter began casually, as usual, and I began to feel disappointed. Finally, I read, “Bob, I still remember the things you used to say to me because now I know Jesus Christ is my savior. I walked out in the dark in Luzon, dropped to my knees and prayed, ‘Lord, if you think I’m worth anything to you, pick me up and save me.’ And He did, just like you said He would.” I kept that letter a long time. I believe that was the highest point of my service life.

I would like to see true patriotism return to America in the fullest sense of the word. It grieves me when I hear about protestors and that sort of thing. I believe in patriotism to the “N-th” degree and love my country. Though I’m 80 years old now, I would still be willing to enter

the service if called upon. I appreciate the fact that President Bush is not ashamed for people to know that he knows Christ and that he reads his Bible and prays every day.