



Sergeant, U.S. Army Air Corps World War II

I grew up on a farm on the Red River about 25 northwest of Paris, Texas, and graduated from a rural high school. At the end of a year at Paris Junior College, I turned 18 and volunteered for the Army Air Corps. I applied for the aviation cadets program, envisioning myself as a great fighter pilot who would play a big part in winning the war.

Going into the service wasn't a difficult adjustment. It was just a new stage of life. It was exciting because I was young and thought I was doing the right thing. I thought I was being true to my country and to God in my willingness to serve. Though I didn't really understand what the war was about, I knew we needed to win it. The experience was broadening because I was thrown in with people from all walks of life and from every area of the country. Before that, I was rather limited on the farm as to what was going on elsewhere.

I wore a suit when I was inducted into the Air Corps in January, though I'm not sure why I thought I had to be dressed up. The only suit I owned, it happened to be of summer-weight fabric. I wasn't worried about that since I thought I would be issued military clothing in a day or so. As things turned out, we were not issued any clothes for about a week. A Texas Norther hit Mineral Wells, Texas, on my first day of camp. The temperatures were well below freezing at five o'clock each morning when we were called for reveille. Then I had to wait outside in the breakfast lines wearing my summer suit. After waiting in line and finally receiving suitable military clothing, including a heavy topcoat, I thought, *I have no idea what I'll experience in the military. I have a feeling I'll be glad when it's over. But I'll never be as glad to get rid of this Army clothing as I am to get it.*

Of course, I did not realize I would not become a pilot. By the time I finished basic training, the Air Corps was beginning to realize that they had more pilots than airplanes and the war was winding down. So I was diverted to a school for radio operators. After training in radio and direction-finding, I wound up with a rather uneventful military career.

Soldiers rarely stayed together for any length of time. We went through basic training with one group, attended school with another group and were assigned to work with a totally different group. Though I made new friends all the time, I got lonely, too. Looking back, I realize what a stimulating learning experience that was. Because of the military philosophy of "One for

all and all for one,” those circumstances also resulted in the forming of strong bonds wherever I was at any given time.

I spent a year in the Aleutian Island chain at Cold Bay, Alaska, directing airplanes over the Pacific and performing direction-finding activities. We lived in Quonset huts in Alaska with about eight men in each one. It was not unusual to have to shovel our way out through the snow in the mornings to go to work. The latrines were some distance away, too.

We worked at the radio and direction-finding station, where we communicated with airplanes and other stations to get weather reports, etc. Our direction-finding operation tracked the planes. That particular assignment didn't feel all that military since inspections and marching were rare. We worked six-hour shifts and were off the following 24 hours because of our rather concentrated duties. The only problem was there was nothing to do during our time off other than to try to stay inside, keep warm, read or be homesick.

Letters from home would be three or four weeks old by the time we got them, and it took just as long for our letters to reach their destination. But I always knew there were people back home who loved me, and that I loved them. I also had great confidence that we eventually would be together again. Of course, the timing and circumstances were out of my control, so I depended upon God and accepted the philosophy of what will be will be. I simply did the best I could and hoped everything would work out.

The Japanese had been on our island not too long before we arrived, and a few still were scattered around the other islands. But we never encountered any of them. When the Japanese finally surrendered, and the war ended, I've never seen anything to compare with the excitement at our post. We knew it would be just a matter of time before we could go home.

The next nine months there were agonizing for me because others had more points and were going home ahead of me. I had gone into the service somewhat late compared to them and had no combat experience, so I had to stay longer. Finally, I was discharged in June 1946. Before leaving, I was offered a civilian job in Alaska with the Civil Aeronautics Administration doing the same type work I had done for the Army. It was an enticing offer since I enjoyed the work. Out of concern about what the Alaskan lifestyle would be like for my little boy, I refused the offer.

After I got home, there was an absolute atmosphere of joy in America. Everybody was happy to see everyone else. People were busy trying to make up for lost time with their families and friends. Because of friends and loved ones who never made it home, however, our celebrations also were tempered with sadness. Returning soldiers had a little pocket money, so they were out buying cars and new clothes. Of course, new clothes were scarce at that time. Over a period of time, my wife had accumulated a couple of pairs of slacks and a couple of nice shirts for me. I was one of the best-dressed guys in town then.

The World War II years were truly an era of patriotism, not only for military personnel but also for every individual in America. Everyone was dedicated to one purpose and sought one result... to win World War II. The extreme dedication and our reliance on God got us through. Faith was our biggest strength. I'm sure I will not live long enough to ever again see anything to compare with the effort, dedication, devotion and patriotism of that period. I view that as the benchmark of Americanism.

Things are different in America in so many ways now, but I still sense a great level of patriotism on the part of the American people. My two grown grandchildren have talked to me about the war and my childhood quite a lot. I sense in them a great love for our country and gratitude for what America is all about. Immediately after the events of September 11, 2001, my

grandson was talking seriously about volunteering to serve in some way. In his late twenties and married, he said he felt because of all the things he had been given, he ought to do something in return. Once you get past the outer appearance of some members of the younger generation, they still have a great spirit.

I did not accept Jesus Christ as my savior until after the war, when I was 25 years old. But I know full well that He was looking after me all that time. I've often wondered why it took so long for me to be saved because I always had attended Sunday school and church, but I think there was a reason. I've had a glorious time of continued blessings since. People have asked me if I would like to live my life over again. On one hand, I would, but on the other hand, I'm not sure God would bless me as abundantly again. I'm willing to accept what He's given me in this life and what He promises me for the future.

God walks with me every step of the way now. I pray every morning, "Whatever I do today, Lord, I hope you'll be with me and help me to do, say, act and be whatever you want. Let me be in your Grace. Walk with me, and I'll do my best." Sometimes I may not be serving Him as I should, but I leave that up to Him. I keep an open mind and heart, as well as a grateful mind and heart, every day.

My wife and I have been living in Tyler for 12 years. Soon after we arrived, we selected Green Acres Baptist Church. The church, including its leadership and congregation, has been a tremendous blessing to our lives. We praise God for what is going on there and for what the church does for our community and throughout the world.

In the Air Corps, I learned to appreciate the diversity of our country and to put aside all prejudices. I was working side-by-side with people from all ethnic backgrounds, religions and educations. I went into the service as a rather innocent and not very responsible young man of 18. By the time I was discharged at the age of 21, I had married and had a son. I think I matured more in those three years than I did during any other period of my life.