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Korean War

I grew up in China Springs, a little community just outside Waco, Texas. In 1948, I enlisted in the Air Force for a three-year tour of duty rather than waiting to be drafted and not having the opportunity of choosing the branch of service I wanted. The Korean War had not begun. I was 18 years old and knew I would be able to continue my education with the help of the GI Bill when I got out.

When I volunteered, the recruiters were so nice to me. After I was sworn in, all that changed. Suddenly, it was, "You go stand over there!" Their whole attitude changed, and I was questioning whether or not I had done the right thing within two or three hours. Next they sent me on a bus to the airbase in San Antonio. After we arrived at our barracks, we were told to clean them up and get ready for inspection at a certain time.

I trained as a radio operator and learned Morse code. Before I went into the service, I had taken typing in business school. During my training as a radio operator, I learned how to tune into the proper signal and to type codes for decoding by others.

After I completed my training, I was sent to Japan and assigned to a radio squadron in the Intelligence group. We monitored foreign aircraft and radio stations. Our job included identifying them and pinpointing their location by determining where the radio signals originated. When the Korean War began, we monitored and tracked aircraft flying over and landing in North Korea. Once we spotted their location, we provided that information to military officials.

An enemy squadron flew in once, and we tracked them and pinpointed their landing at an airbase in North Korea. Some enemy codes had been broken at the time, so we were able to attain information unavailable to us before that. We notified the authorities, and they successfully attacked and destroyed that squadron.

Of course, all our work was top secret. To enter our compound, we first had to pass through a guardhouse. We didn't realize how effective our efforts were until we heard various

reports later. During my shift, I stood by a radio and picked up certain frequencies to get the code so I could monitor it. Several of us worked together in one room. One day I might be typing code with my left hand on one side of the room, and the next day I might be typing with my right hand on the other side. I still can't type with both hands at once.

As radio operators, we never were trained in combat. In Japan, however, our group would have been forced to fill in if we came under attack. We used to laugh about that. Luckily, it didn't happen.

While I was in Japan, I didn't have a lot of time to spend with the Japanese people. Outside our compound, I would see Japanese workers cutting the grass with sickles. One day we caught one listening to our radios from outside and trying to copy down what he heard. Apparently, he knew Morse code. I don't know what happened to him after he was turned over to the military police.

After I returned to the United States, my tour of duty was extended for another year through no choice of my own. During that year, I was able to teach other radio operators in Germany. My time there was quite an experience. The students knew Morse code, so I had to teach them to monitor radio signals by hand. Sometimes it wasn't very clear. I taught them what to look for or listen for while monitoring. Like I had done in Japan, all they did was copy what they heard and turn it over to someone else.

I was able to see quite a few interesting places in Germany. When I visited the Dachau Concentration Camp, I saw the area where the Jews had been told to strip for a shower. Instead of giving them a shower, the Germans sprayed them with poison gases and killed them. Then they cremated the bodies. Also, I saw where the Jews had been lined up against a wall and shot. It was hard to realize what those people had gone through and how many had died. Even today, I don't think a lot of people understand what really happened there. It was devastating.

Other than that, Germany was more like the United States than the other foreign countries I visited. Their highways were modern, and transportation was readily available. I had an experience there, however, that was unbelievable to a country boy like me. One day, a friend and I were going to Munich. When we stepped out of our taxi, another young soldier was trying to flag down a taxi. I recognized him right away as an old friend from high school. When I asked about his older brother who also was in the service, he said, "That's the reason I'm here. He had a car wreck and is in the hospital." Later, I visited his brother at the hospital.

Following my six-months tour in Germany, I returned to the States and was discharged a few months later. The first thing I did was get a job and start school. The Air Force hadn't been so bad, but it wasn't all that easy either.

During my military service, I attended non-denominational services on Sunday mornings and evenings. There were many Christian young men in my group. I saw people led to Christ, and that was quite an experience. I faced challenges in the military I never had encountered before. Being a Christian helped me get through those things. I met and was impressed by certain people with very strong faith. One young man had a good deal of education in the Christian faith. After the Korean War began, he led Bible study meetings in our barracks.

Of course, I was completely separated from my family during my time overseas. Before I joined the service, my family always got up and went to church on Sunday mornings. In the Air Force, I didn't have to get up and do anything I didn't want to do on Sunday mornings. But my friends and I enjoyed going to the church services. Our compound had once been a Japanese airbase, and a Kamikaze plane still sat on a pedestal outside our church. At home, I had attended a Baptist church, so the non-denominational services were a little different for me. Still, being

there comforted me.

A soldier also is faced with a lot of temptation. I couldn't have stayed straight if I had not been a Christian. Faith gives you something a little extra to help you through. Earthquakes occur frequently in Japan, too. I woke up one morning, and my bunk was shaking. Looking up, I saw the light swinging back and forth. That experience reminded me that someone greater than me was in charge. It was good to know I was a Christian.

As a boy, a lot of my cousins and family friends served in World War II. Some of them were killed fighting for their country. As a man, I still felt some of the patriotism that existed at that time, so I believed it was my duty to serve America. I was lucky and never had to experience combat. I remember some soldiers coming in from a night of drinking once. They got hold of a siren that was to be used in case of an attack or emergency and sounded an alarm. The rest of us jumped out of bed and ran to the trenches outside the barracks. That was about as close as I came to battle.