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A friend of mine was on the Draft Board, so I went down and signed the papers for the U.S. Navy. When my draft notice arrived, I was able to go into that branch of the service. At the time, I had graduated from high school and was working for Southwestern Bell. The company at first didn't want to give me a leave of absence, but my boss told them, "Here's a man who is willing to give his life for his country. And you don't want to give him back his job when he comes back?" They changed their minds.

In the end, I had a very interesting Naval career. When I went to boot camp at the age of 18, I came down with meningitis along with eight other men. The seven other men died, but I made it. The Navy gives sailors in sick bay APC's (all purpose capsules) to fix everything. So they placed me in a ward and gave me APC's. About seven o'clock that first evening, a black physician came in. After taking one look at me, he said, "Get this man to the hospital right away." I learned later that he had decided to make one last round to check patients. If he had not made that decision, I would have died. While going through that illness, I was in a coma-like state and wasn't sure whether or not I would make it. But I really didn't know what was going on for several weeks.

After regaining my health, I returned to the Naval Training Center to finish boot camp. They assigned me to the kitchen. Then I contracted pneumonia. I tried to find the black doctor who had helped me before but was told, "What do you mean? We don't have any black physicians and haven't had any." So I call him my angel. I gave my heart to Jesus when I was eight years old and had not been away from home very often. After getting through my illness, I thought, *Well, okay. The Lord's looking out for me.*

Finally I was sent to Korea, where I served on LCU's (landing craft). We carried troops in and out and supplied them with ammunition. One night I was on quarterdeck watch and kind of feeling sorry for myself because I was so far away from home. I started humming, "Jesus Loves Me". Suddenly I felt a little hand slip into mine. A little Korean boy had been brought aboard, and we took care of him. His name was Kim. Upon hearing my humming, he came to me and said, "I know that song." A missionary had converted him. After that incident and my earlier experience, I could go anywhere and do anything. I knew the Lord was with me.

Many military people sponsored Korean children. Most of the American ships had children

in similar situations onboard. They let the children do odd jobs and gave them a warm place to sleep. Though it was against regulations to have a civilian onboard, people turned their heads a bit and stretched the rules. I think we felt it was important to show the South Koreans that we were not just guys with guns in our hands. We were people with compassion.

Our quartermaster had found Kim wandering on a beach and realized he was hungry. After bringing the boy aboard and feeding him, the quartermaster asked about his parents. He replied, "I don't know. I haven't seen them since the bombing." When we left, our replacement crew adopted Kim. I wrote to him for a couple of years but finally stopped hearing from him. A good influence on the men, he kept us honest. We'd be thinking we had it bad until he began telling how bad he had it. Though I wonder what happened to Kim, I know he was a Christian. We traded Bibles before I left, and I still have his Korean Bible at home.

North of Pusan, Korea, the military commanders were trying to bring in as many supplies as possible. At the time, the Pusan Perimeter existed and we had been pushed down almost out of Korea. Liberty ships were brought in from the States. My unit would pull up next to a Liberty ship and take on ammunition, grenades, etc. Then we would hit the beach, where the Army loaded the artillery onto trucks. On one occasion, we were relieved from that duty and told to sail up the coastline to evacuate a trapped group of Marines and Seabees.

After we found those men and got them out of there, we returned to Pusan and were surprised to find a band playing and dignitaries waiting. Our commander told us, "Guys, one thing I didn't tell you was that the area we were in was heavily mined. We didn't want to shake you up too much." If an LCU had hit a mine, there would have been no one aboard left alive. So we discovered that we had become heroes because of our actions.

After six or eight months in Korea and Japan, I was able to go home. I had proposed to my girlfriend in a letter, and she had accepted. We planned to marry as soon as I came home. On our way home, my ship stopped in Hawaii and was delayed. Though my fiancé already had printed wedding invitations, we had to postpone the ceremony. That happened to us three times. She was about to pull her hair out. We finally were able to get married on December 18. Then I was assigned to an amphibious base in Coronado, California. After my second tour (in the Far East), I had told her she could come to San Diego and we would live there during my last year of service. She had only been there a few days when I received word that I would be going to Bikini Island for an atom bomb test. I said, "No, no, no! Not me. I just brought my wife out here, and I'm not ready for this."

But the Lord always provides. I was pretty blue about the situation when a young man approached me the next day and said, "I understand you're going to Bikini. Well, I have a girl who wants to get married, but I don't. Could I take your place?" He had the same electrician rating as mine. I told him that I had prayed about it and didn't want to leave my wife alone. He had only been back in the States two days.

During my tour of duty in the Far East, we served as a standby group in Japan that would serve in Korea if necessary. By then the American forces were progressing well in Korea, so we didn't have to return to that area. Instead, we performed maneuvers and offloaded tons of ammunition, tanks, jeeps, and other equipment from the Liberty ships. The harbor at Pusan had been damaged and could only handle one or two ships at a time. I had a great deal of respect for the skippers of those Liberty ships. One Thanksgiving while we were unloading equipment, the ship's captain invited us to join his crew for Thanksgiving dinner. That was the first fresh meal we had eaten in some time. Our refrigeration unit wasn't functioning, so we usually just had C-rations.

About a thousand Marines were onboard our ship as we sailed directly to Pusan from San Francisco on my first overseas tour of duty. The Marines disembarked there, and we went on to Yokusuka, Japan. While our ship was docked at Pusan Harbor, we saw a boat marked No. 715 flying a Baker flag with ammunition on its deck. I thought, *Golly, I'm glad I'm not on one of those*. After receiving my orders in Japan, I rode a train to the southern part of the country and caught a ferry to Pusan. There I was assigned to that very same boat, No. 715. A few weeks later, I learned that about 30% of the Marines we originally delivered to Pusan had been killed. Most of those men were about my age. That's when I realized, *Hey, this is not fun and games. This is war*. Fortunately, there was a wall of steel between the bullets and me onboard our boat. Some people called it a police action, but it definitely was a war.

In all, I served three and a half years of my four-year hitch on sea duty. Luckily, most of the men I served with were Christians. My wife and I went on to have two children, and the Lord is still looking out for me.

When I first went into the Navy, I was a fairly active Christian. When I came out, the pastor at my church in McAllen, Texas, said, "I've been looking for someone to work with children. You're the one I feel should do it." I had been away from church activities during my years in the service but had read my Bible regularly. But I agreed to help the pastor and soon began teaching Sunday school. Later I directed a department at the church.

I had returned to work for Southwestern Bell after my four-year leave of absence. Eventually, my job resulted in 17 moves from 1957 to 1971. The Lord sent us so many places to enrich our lives. I was given an assignment in New York with AT&T. The night after my interview, I looked out from my hotel room at all that mess in Manhattan and told the Lord, "I don't know what I'm doing here, but you have a reason." The chances of my getting that job were very poor because the other candidates already were AT&T employees. But they hired me, and I stayed for three years. Moving from Amarillo to New York was quite an experience.

I was exposed to mission work in the Bowery and saw all the derelicts, including ex-presidents of large corporations who had become addicted to alcohol. That sight will strengthen one's faith quickly. In the sanctuary where we gave our testimonies, I noticed that a group of very dirty men were seated on the right while a group of men who had been cleaned-up sat on the left. The group on the right was comprised of new arrivals. After the people at the mission worked with the derelicts on the left a while and cleaned them up, they were able to move to the left side of the room. Seeing that improvement was something else.

I retired in 1987 but still work for the Lord. Every Thursday in Tyler, I give out clothes at Good Sam and work in the Soup Kitchen. Today I credit the Lord for everything. He brought me maturity and the ability to know what I wanted to do with my life. He showed me He could do all things and did. I don't see how anyone could consider not being a Christian, especially in the military.

Like other veterans, I wouldn't go to war again for a million dollars but I would give a million dollars for the experience. My military service brought me closer to the Lord and prepared me for the future by widening my experience.

Today, South Korea has blossomed. North Koreans must think, *Hey, look at that. Isn't that something?* Maybe I played some little part in that during the war. If we had let it go, the entire country would be under the control of communists. When I think about the Gulf War and our present situation, I realize that freedom is not free. The citizens of the United States of America have been blessed with so much. I especially became aware of that when I saw the skinny, homeless children in Korea who barely survived. The people in the Middle East have lived with

war for so long. It's all they know. So many times, America is accused of being too aggressive in trying to force freedom on others. The biggest problem is that some people don't know how to accept the responsibility of freedom.

Since the attack on the World Trade Towers, patriotism has been much stronger in America. The firemen and policemen who gave their lives that day trying to rescue others were like soldiers. At least for a period of time, that tragedy has brought Americans together. During World War II, patriotism was widespread. But even then I never saw such a display of flags and patriotism as I've seen recently. I'm really thankful for that. Maybe every once in a while, we need someone to ring our bell so we'll know there are things we must defend.

Recently I wrote about my military experiences as a record for my children. Of course, there is a big transition between civilian and military life. The first thing that happens in the service is that everyone starts telling you what you can and cannot do. The night I arrived in San Diego for boot camp, they assigned us to a barracks and said, "Take everything out of your pockets and put it on your bed." I had never before seen such a collection of brass knuckles and switchblades. Realizing I would be spending the next 16 weeks with this group of 384 men, I was petrified. It was quite a transition, but I prayed, "Lord, bring me through this and help me understand." He did. Three days later, I began to understand the need for military discipline. It brings everyone together. I probably have strayed in my lifetime and not been as close to the Lord as I should have been. But without my military experience, I do not feel I would be as strong.