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Peacetime

October 10, 1960 – October 9, 1964

I was 18 years old and had just completed a year of electronics school in Knoxville, Tennessee, when I went into service. I had been away from home briefly to a couple of camps and to Volunteer Boys State for a week, but that's about all.

I was on active duty for four years and then active reserve for two years. I went through basic training at San Antonio. Then I went for technical training at Biloxi, Mississippi, and then I was assigned to the Island of Crete in the Mediterranean for about 15 months. I was a Morse Intercept Operator in the Security Service. While I was there I did get to go to Greece, Germany, and on a Holy Land Tour that included Cairo, Egypt, Jerusalem and Beirut, Lebanon. This was 1961 that I was at a security service base in Crete where we tracked the activities of the Soviet Union, their air craft in the Black Sea area and all in that Eastern Bloc. We had surveillance air craft and were following the activities of the Soviet Union. Thankfully, I was in service mainly in peace time and really there wasn't any type of combat that I was involved in.

I remember a USO show and also one of the things that we looked forward to was the Navy coming to Crete every three or four months. We got powdered milk on the base, and the Navy would bring fresh milk from France, so the guys at the base would go eat on the ships, and the guys on the ships would come to the base because we had newer movies than they did.

Well, while I was in the military my mother passed away. I had a brother in the Metroplex so after I got out of the military, I lived with him for awhile. I got work and I met my wife, Terry. I think when I went into the Air Force I was looking at things through a boy's eyes and when I came out, I was pretty much mature enough to consider myself a man. The discipline in the military was very important and played a major role in my growing up and becoming a responsible citizen.

Well, at the time, I probably didn't feel like it was God's way, but back in '89 I was working with the Postal Service in Tyler and my job was eliminated. I wound up going back home to Tennessee as the postmaster at Alcoa, Tennessee, for eight years. While we were there, my son, Rob, who was in high school, became very involved in some Christian organizations and today he's a minister of college students at First Baptist Church in Denton. I feel like the influence that he had after we moved to Tennessee greatly changed his life. I look back and say," Well, God sent us there for a purpose. "

While our daughter, Debbie, was at the University of Tennessee, she went as one of the Young Life college kids who did Bible studies and worked at Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri, for two summers. That's where she met her husband. So you know, you do things and at the time you don't know why you're doing them, but if you look back, you can say, "Well, God knew."

Well, patriotism was very much on the wane until 9-11 of 2001, and for several months after that it seemed to be important and on the rise; but I think people are getting more comfortable and it doesn't seem to be as important to them as it was. I have very strong feelings about patriotism. I had two brothers in WWII and one of them was killed so I have always had very deep feelings about my country. If we come to another conflict, I think our kids will rise to the occasion. Well, I just look back on my experiences, the four years I was in the Air Force, and I wouldn't trade them for anything. I would do it all over again.