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World War II / Korean War

Raised in Purvis, Mississippi, I was about 16 when World War II began. When I turned 18 on December 28th of my senior year in high school, I had to register for the draft. I received a deferment for the next semester to finish school. I graduated at the end of April and was drafted into the Navy on May 10, 1943. They needed every young man who was available, and we all felt it was our duty to serve.

Those who were left at home really suffered. One of my good friends was a strong, healthy-looking man who had been a high school football star. But no branch of the service would take him because he had a kidney problem. He died early but never could conceive of any reason he couldn't have been a part of the war action. People were very cruel to him, calling him a draft dodger. In those days, that was the worst name a man could be called.

Along with other men I knew in the Navy, I volunteered to go overseas many times. I served at the time with a friend who now lives nearby. Though he stayed in the Navy for 27 years, he never went to sea. But our positions were too vital where they were. We were in a dive-bombing training squad. We knew we were doing our duty, but it always was a little disconcerting that we weren't allowed to go overseas.

When the war ended, I was in sickbay and didn't get to celebrate much. I spent 36 months stateside in the Navy, most of it in Jacksonville, Florida. When I was discharged in April 1946, I returned home and started school at Mississippi College (now Southern University).

While going to school, I joined the local National Guard. I went to work for the Mississippi Highway Patrol in 1950. In February 1951, President Truman mobilized the National Guard because of the Korean War. So I was called to serve in the Army. After having spent three years in the Navy, I didn't care much for the Army. My job was safe until I returned, but my only interest was in getting out of the military. I did return to my career with the Highway Patrol later, but going back into the service was a big transition for me to have to make. Our group of 123 men was mobilized as one unit from our one little town with a population of about 1,000-1,200. They took the pharmacist, the newspaper editor... everyone. Some of them were married

with families.

Looking back, I know the Lord protected me all through my life. Though my family and I went to church regularly, I never made a public profession of faith until September 25, 1949. I was 25 years old. So when I first went into the service, I was not a Christian in the strictest sense. By the time I was called to the Army, I was a Christian and felt as strongly about my faith as I do today. So it was a different situation than before. I had never married, and my parents had died, so I had no ties at home except for my sister and was free to do whatever I wanted to do. Christianity has always been important to me. I don't make a big show of my Christianity in public or in my business. I didn't think I had to. It's going to show one way or the other.

Again, all my service was stateside, and I was never in any peril that I didn't put myself in. Many men from my unit went on to Korea. I was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, to attend Intelligence School. I earned a certificate that says I'm intelligent. Of course, I have to pull it out every once in a while to show it to my wife. Seriously, however, I never used that training at all. I returned to my unit in the fall of 1952 and was released in December after 21 months of service. So I have an honorable discharge from the Navy and an honorable discharge from the Army. My total military service was over a period of about five years.

I'm a member of the Christian Builders group now. About a year ago, we went to the new building at Green Acres Baptist Church to plant shrubbery and trees. We were digging in black mud that stuck to our shovels when a man mentioned he was from Kansas. I said, "I went to Intelligence School there. Now if I volunteer for this job again, you call my wife when you get home and tell her to tear that certificate up."

In the Navy, we always hoped we would make it home and have the freedom to raise a family that wouldn't have to face the things we faced. In my case, that happened. My son is now 45 years old, and he never was called upon for military service. But my son-in-law, who is in the Naval Reserve, has been on alert since October 2002 and could go at any time. Many times, I have felt that young people could benefit from military training. When I was drafted into the Navy, I had to grow up fast. But I wouldn't take anything for the experience. Even the tough discipline of boot camp is good for a man. Of course, I don't want anyone to have to go to war.

My family was very poor when I was a boy, especially in our area of the country. Today, we have so much more than people had then that it's hard to put things in perspective. Even though my family was so poor at the time, we had everything we really needed. Of course, we had to work for it. Many families didn't have a car at all, much less two or three in a garage. But we cooperated with each other. Some of my greatest friends now are people who went to high school with me. Most of us are in our seventies.

Life goes on. At some point, you might wonder what was the best part of your life. I'm not sure. I married at the age of 29, and we've had a great life, especially when our children were little, we had a great life. It still is because they're still my best friends. My son and I have worked together in my business for many years, and he's carrying it on. My daughter is my CPA. It's just all been the best.