



### **Bill Strother**

Ensign, U.S. Navy Reserves  
World War II, Korean Conflict

During my second year in college in the spring of 1945, I decided to join the Navy and signed up for Naval Combat Aircrew. World War II was raging across Europe and the Pacific. Though I didn't know what I might be walking into, I was not afraid. At 19, a boy thinks he's invincible. Some of my friends had already enlisted, and I was gung ho.

On July 3, 1945, I left for boot camp. The war ended while I was there. On scullery duty at the time, I was peeling carrots when I heard the news about the atomic bomb. I breathed a sigh of relief. By then I had heard tales of the high mortality rates for combat aircrewmembers, but I realized I had become the property of the federal government and was trying to abide by the rules.

In spite of my concerns, I really wasn't that afraid, however. My father was a Baptist minister, and I had been a Christian since the age of about eight. I prayed for the Lord's protection and knew He was with me. I took it for granted that if I didn't make it, I had the hereafter. My father had told me that when he ministered to people who were dying, he realized that the Christians always had a positive outlook. But the non-Christians went down hard. Though still young, I also thought I was mature enough to handle whatever was handed me. Having graduated from high school at 16, I had grown up a lot at college.

A good Christian man was in charge of my group at boot camp. He was older and had children our age. We looked up to him. He was understanding and never tried to put us down. So he helped make our training experience a better one. After boot camp, however, things went downhill until my discharge a year later.

On August 6, 1946, I was relieved from active duty as a Seaman First Class, but remained in the reserves. They were releasing as many servicemen as they could. Later I received orders to active duty during the Korean Conflict. At the recruiting station, an officer asked me, "Didn't you have mathematics in college and don't you have a degree?" When I said yes, he suggested that I try to get an officer's billet. Following his advice, I took the exams that afternoon and passed. But I was a quarter of an inch too short. The chief said, "Stay in town overnight and come back up here first thing in the morning. Then you'll be tall enough." I couldn't stay that night but returned later and barely made it. After that, they cancelled my orders to go to Korea,

and I received a commission as a ensign in the reserves, inactive.

Things cooled down in Korea, so I was discharged again in June 1959. My military experience was a good one and had taught me discipline, especially during boot camp.

Today people are beginning to realize that America could be in danger again. With the resurgence of patriotism following the attacks of September 11, 2001, I believe our young people are willing to serve this country and protect it. I hope their renewed sense of patriotism lasts. Of course, this situation is different from the circumstances of World War II. There was no doubt then as to the identity of the enemy and their location. Now we don't know what to expect.

Hopefully, young people will read the veterans' interviews being conducted by Green Acres Baptist Church to learn more about the sacrifices that have been made to secure our freedom and take it to heart. I well remember Pearl Harbor and seeing all those graves years later. And I think about all the soldiers still buried overseas. We lost thousands of good men. I'll never forget watching the World War II veterans return home. Some of them barely made it and had suffered terrible injuries. Many had not been home for as long as five years. They were elated to be back on American soil.