



Durwood Glenn Underwood
Specialist Fourth Class, U.S. Army
Peacetime
1955-1957

Born and raised in Lometa, Texas, I was looking for a job as a young man and having a hard time finding one. Every time I would apply, one of the first questions was, "Have you been in the military service?" When I answered no, they'd say, "Come back and see us when you get your military service completed." After a while, I decided it would be best to get my military service behind me. So I went to the local draft board and told them, "The next thing that comes up, put my name on it."

It wasn't long before they did. I went from Lometa to Abilene on October 13, 1955, for a physical and passed. The next day at about one o'clock, they told us to take that one step forward and we were in. My next experience was the flight to California for basic training. They gave me a free ticket to Fort Ord. I had never flown before, and the plane was going up and down. But I handled it all right.

At Fort Ord that night they issued us our clothing and assigned us a place to sleep. It wasn't time for the next class to begin, but they wanted to keep us busy. They sent me to the mess hall, where the mess sergeant told me to wash all the windows. "Yes, sir," I said. Working fast, I did a real good job of washing those windows. When I finished, I reported back to the sergeant that I was through.

"Fine," he said, "go wash them again."

"Yes, sir." This time I didn't get in as big a hurry since I had begun to understand what the Army was like. That sergeant wasn't any happier about me being there than I was to be there. He did his job, and I did mine.

I finished the eight weeks of basic infantry training on December 21, 1955, and they gave me a bus ticket back to Lometa so I could spend the holidays at home. Around the first of January 1956, I reported to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, for eight weeks of artillery training.

Then I got another free airplane ride, this time to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The folks there were short of people who could type. After they looked at my records and found out I could type, they transferred me to the Headquarters Company of the 759th Field Artillery Battalion at Smoke Bomb Hill in Fort Bragg. I stayed there until they deactivated the 759th and transferred me to the headquarters of the 18th Airborne, right up the hill about half a mile. That's where I remained until finishing my service in October 1957. Except for typing and pulling KP or guard duty, not a whole lot went on.

My military experience was limited quite a bit because we weren't in an all-out shooting war then. But all branches of our military forces are important because they each play a role in a team effort. Whether a soldier is on the frontline of a battle or just filling up space, he knows he'll be there when the call comes. If it happens during his watch, he goes. Everyone in the military has an important job. The only exciting thing that happened to me was when the Russians launched Sputnik in September 1957, about a month before my discharge. The military didn't know what was going to take place, so they temporarily froze all discharges. Luckily, by the time my discharge date came up, they had seen that it wasn't going to be a big deal.

I left the service and went to Houston to look for a job, knowing this time that I could answer yes to the question about military experience. On January 2, 1958, a tugboat company on the Houston ship channel hired me to work in Personnel at their dispatch office. I stayed there until 1970, when my wife Laretta and I decided to move to Tyler.

Laretta is the most important person in my life. We met when she came to Houston after graduating from college in Little Rock. That was the beginning of her problems for the rest of her life. My wife taught school for about 20 years before retiring, and also organized a veterans' program at Gary Elementary School in Tyler that ran for several years. We have three daughters — Karen, Cheryl and Shelley. So far there are no grandchildren. Other than God, my family is the most important thing to me.

At the age of 15, I committed my life to Christ during a revival service in the big town of Lometa. Now I'm active with the Volunteer Christian Builders at Green Acres Baptist Church. We work together to help build churches and also do some disaster relief work.