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Corporal, U.S. Army
Korean Conflict

I was teaching sixth grade at the Campus Ward School in Longview, Texas, when I was drafted in February 1951. Along with 50 or 60 other men who were drafted at the same time, I went to Shreveport, Louisiana. There they handed me a sheet of paper and said that since I was a schoolteacher, I should be able to call the roll when we arrived at Barksdale Air Force Base to make sure everybody was there. So I did.

At Barksdale, we took our physicals and grew to a group of about 130 men. They entrusted me to be their carrier of information to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. When we arrived at Fort Sill, about 11 o'clock that night, we had not had supper and very little lunch. So I told the patrolman there that we had not eaten and that we really ought to eat before doing anything else. They woke up the kitchen people and had bacon and eggs for all of us in a little while.

All of our training was done at Fort Sill. After finishing our written tests, we were disbursed to various places. My next assignment was at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, where I was assigned to the 45th Cavalry. They were about ready to go to Korea, where the North Koreans had pushed everybody down to Pusan. The sergeant said, "Hey, you're from East Texas, right?" His name was Morse, and he was from Henderson, Texas. Then he asked me, "Have you had basic training?"

"No," I said.

"Well, what are you doing in this outfit?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Let's go down and see the captain," he said, and we did. The captain said they had to check it out and sent a communique somewhere. They found out that I had not been assigned to them but was supposed to go to Fort Riley, Kansas. So I was shipped along to Fort Riley, where I went through basic training.

During basic training, a pleasant event happened. We had been told to use a compass to chart seven or eight different spots. Whoever finished first would win a three-day pass for their platoon. Having been a math major, I understood the compass, the back asterisk and all the other things involved. I said, "Hey, we don't need to go 1-2-3-4." So Lester Classic, an Iowa engineer in my platoon, and I looked at it and thought, *Yeah, we can do this.* We finished in about an hour and a half, though they were expecting it to take all afternoon.

On my three-day pass, I came home to Longview and visited with my parents at White Oak. When I returned to Fort Riley, a few of us with different classifications from the rest had to take six more weeks of advanced basic training. I was classified as Scientific and Professional Personnel, so they wanted me to take that class. It was the same as officer training, though we would not be officers. They just wanted us to be able to handle anything if we were overrun in a battle overseas.

Then the Kansas flood happened. Since I was tall, my lieutenant came to me and said, "Now, White, I'm going to ask you to do something that's going to be a little dangerous, and you don't have to do it if you don't want to."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Well, I want you to check every barracks on the post to make sure everybody's up," he said. "But don't wait too long to come out." Then he strapped a telephone on my back and I went to make sure everybody was out. I was in water about high tide deep when I called to say I was coming out.

On another occasion, something occurred on the rifle range that I'll never forget. A boy from New York City, who had never been around a gun, was at rifle practice and said something. The first sergeant yelled out something and then was right on top of him. The boy said something else and whirled around. The rifle went off and split the sergeant's head gear. Of course, the sergeant yanked the rifle out of the boy's hand and hit him pretty hard. He was trying to make him think. Anyway, it showed that carelessness doesn't pay.

After leaving Fort Riley, I was assigned to the Quarter Master Core in Fort Lee, Virginia, as an instructor. My subjects included safety, responsibility and an interchange of parts. For instance, if a tank is not working and you can take parts off a cook stove to make it work, you're sure going to do that. While I was there, I kept noticing that there were nine different services in the Quarter Master Core and wondered why we needed all the different nomenclature for the parts that we ordered. Finally I asked my colonel to check into that, and he did. Now they only have one book to order by or one number for the same part by, whether it's for the Army, Navy, Marines or whatever. I don't know if I was instrumental in that or not, but it was gratifying to find out that they have done that.

When I asked Col. Scott to okay my transfer to Europe, he said, "No, I won't okay it. But I'll tell you that you can go with me whenever I get my orders." Well it wasn't long before he got his orders to go to Korea.

I told him, "Well, no. I don't think I'll go this time."

I was only in the service for two years — drafted for 21 months and extended for three months. After making PFC (Private First Class) pretty quickly, I was told that I would be frozen in rank until something else happened. The Korean Conflict was just about over, and they wanted me to stay on with a GS-12 government rating (about two and a half times the salary I would be making at home). But I wanted to come back and teach school.

Though I don't believe my time in the service particularly changed my life, it was a very good experience that reinforced some things. I had been a pretty good student and a fair

athlete, so I accepted commands fairly well and didn't hesitate to do the required physical activities. Eventually, I was placed in a low-level supervisory position and also taught classes. I was able to have order in the classroom but it wasn't always easy with men who didn't want to do anything. Of course, that was quite different from teaching young people.

The only thing I didn't like about the military was being so far away. I drove home from Virginia several times, starting out around midnight and driving nonstop until I reached home 27 or more hours later. Once I had to drive through fog all the way from Atlanta, Georgia to Texas, and that trip lasted 33 hours.

Patriotism in America has gone up and down over the years. When there's a crisis, however, people come together. But I think that most young people always will come to the defense of our country because they like what we do. When I see "God Bless America" bumper stickers, I think they are saying, "I hope God takes care of us." Instead they should say, "God, I'm with you. So let me do what you say I ought to do to help out." That's kind of like President John Kennedy's statement: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

By the time I left the Army, my old school had closed. I was sent to Foster Elementary, a new school in east Longview, and finished out the year there. Then I coached at the junior high school in New London until they consolidated with Gaston, and I became principal of the Gaston Campus. From there I went to the Tatum Independent School District as superintendent for six years. Four years later, I became principal of Hogg Middle School in Tyler. I retired after 20 years of service.

I married Gloria after moving to New London. Her daddy was a big watermelon farmer in Henderson. After seeing her for the first time one Saturday night, I asked some guys, "Who's that?" Noticing the car that she and her girlfriend were driving, I later went looking for it and found it at a local café. I went in and sat down where I could see the girls. As I left, I told the cashier that I was paying for whatever they had.

The next day, I saw her car next to the picture show and thought, *Well, maybe she's in there*. So I went in and there she was. I sat down behind her and said I would pick her up at seven o'clock that night to take her to a different movie. Though she said she would have to break a date first, she agreed to go. Hallelujah!

One of my friends in the service, who was with me all the way through to Fort Lee, had a father who was a preacher. Now he's a preacher, too, and I still hear from him. I became a Christian as a 17-year-old boy, though I always had been prone to believing that God existed. I was singing in the church choir for a revival when the preacher said, "Now if any of you have been praying for someone, why don't you go over to them right now and tell them." A young lady in the choir leaned over and said, "Rex, I've been praying for you for two years." Her words persuaded me that it was time to surrender everything to Jesus Christ. For the rest of my life, I've tried to be a good Christian. Of course, there have been pitfalls along the way when I had to ask God to pull me out.