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PERSONAL MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR II

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I was born in Terre Haute, Indiana on March 28, 1926. When I was four, our family moved to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and moved again to the Chicago suburb of Wilmette, Illinois when I was six. Finally, we moved to Dayton, Ohio in 1934 when I was eight, living at 40 Traction Ave, with electric streetcars running down the middle of our street, (later called S. Dixie Ave) in Southern Hills on the south side of Dayton.

It was in Dayton, Ohio in 1939 that we first learned of the beginning of World War II, when Germany attacked France and then conquered all of Western Europe except England. I was just 13 years old at the time and was in the eighth grade.

America and England had a very close tie, but we chose to remain neutral in the conflict, remembering the very high price we had paid for our entry into World War I against Germany. We did supply England with war materials to defend herself. However, Canada went to war at that time. The war, between 1939 and 1941 was mainly confined to Europe, with Germany later expanding its fight against England, Russia and North Africa as well.

Japan was not yet at war against America though they had invaded China and controlled much of that country. No other country in the Far East was yet affected by the war in Europe.

I had been baptized and was a member of the Central Christian Church at Sixth and Brown Streets in Dayton at the age of ten, but was not yet saved when the war began in 1939.

When I was fourteen, in the mid-winter of my first year of high school, I attended a "Watch Night Service" on New Year's Eve of 1941 (December 31, 1940) in the home of the teacher of a Bible Study group, The Lebonah League, that I had begun attending shortly before.

When the invitation was given at midnight, I trusted the Lord as my Savior and knew that I was truly saved. The next day, my brother and I spent the day at the home of the rich business man, Mr. Eavey, (he owned many super markets) who had begun this Bible Study group, at the annual get together of this group. My brother Gilbert was saved three days later, under the influence of the same fellow student, Bob ("Doggie") Brown, who had helped convince me to be saved on New Year's Eve.

A year and a half later, in the summer of 1942, I attended the annual Bible Conference of this Bible Study group and, together with my brother Gilbert,

dedicated my life to the Lord. At the same time, I felt the deep conviction on my heart that I was to someday do fulltime service for the Lord.

At the time, I was very shy and many felt that there would never be a time when I could stand before people and do the work of a pastor or a full time Christian worker. Even when I felt this deep conviction of His call on my life, I realized that if I were ever to succeed the Lord would have to do a wonderful work in my life to make it come to pass.

In those first two full years of WWII, our lives in America were very little affected by the war. America did begin to "draft" many of its young men to build up its armies but they did not enter into any conflict.

On December 7th, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The attack was so treacherous and damaging that it deeply stirred the entire nation. I remember I was just 14 and a freshman in high school at the time. We were hanging around a neighborhood grocery store when the news came of the attack. The very next day, the United States, under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, declared war on Germany, Italy and Japan, and we began to take the war very seriously as a nation.

Within a few months, the news came that much of the entire Far East had fallen under the control of Japan, with thousands of American soldiers in the Philippines being taken prisoners. There was even fear that Japan might seek to invade Alaska and the mainland of the United States because of the loss of so much of our navy at Pearl Harbor and our overall lack of military preparation for such a conflict

Even as young high school students, our lives were deeply affected in these early months of American participation in the war. All of the young men (except for some in farming communities who were given deferment from military service so that they could grow crops for the nation) who graduated from high school all over the nation that year were taken into the Armed Forces, and many patriotic programs were held at our own high school that affected those of us finishing our studies.

We younger ones knew that we would be affected in the same way when we would reach that time of graduation if the war did not end before then. Our physical education courses in high school were changed so that we would be given more rigorous physical exercises to make us fit to serve in the Armed Forces someday. Even as teenagers, we took very seriously the part we would someday play in the conflict.

The "drafting" of millions of young men into the U.S. Armed Forces was seriously begun at this time. Eventually, a total of more than 16 million men and women were taken into the Armed Forces for the wars both in N. Africa, Europe and the Far East. Tens of thousands of them, including many of our high school classmates, would die or would be taken prisoners by the enemies during those years.

Our family was directly affected when my brother, Walter Gilbert Fremont, was taken into the Army in the spring of 1942 following his graduation from our high school. He eventually was sent to Europe in the fall of 1944, though he did not see direct conflict by fighting in any of the famous battles of that war.

In the spring of 1944, just a month before my graduation from high school, all of the young men in my class were taken by bus to Columbus, Ohio for physical exams to see if we were fit to enter the Armed Forces. All of us passed this exam and were registered for eventual induction into the Armed Forces. I had already passed a written exam that qualified me to take some university training to prepare me to be an officer, but I would have had to enter the NAVY and my mother did not want that, so I turned down the opportunity and waited for induction into the Army instead.

Following that physical exam, we were permitted to finish high school. After graduation, I worked for several weeks as a life guard at a local swimming pool, but on June 22nd, 1944, I was taken into the Army and was sent to Indianapolis, Indiana to be formally inducted and to be assigned to a base where I would receive my "basic training". While waiting for that assignment, because I knew typing I was permitted to work in an office for those several weeks we were there at the induction center, and even got to go home one weekend as a reward.

After several weeks at this induction center, we were put on a train that took us down to a large artillery base, Ft. Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina, to begin our "basic training" in firing the artillery guns, both small and large, the army used in every battle they fought. I remember the base was very hot and sandy, and we had to take long hikes in those conditions, but it was perfect for artillery training.

On one side of this base was the very large Field Artillery Replacement Training Center where we would train. On the other side of the main highway from us were some organized artillery outfits whose men were completing their advanced training and were waiting to be sent either to Europe or to the Far East with their guns and other equipment.

There was also a large airfield on the base, Pope Field, where the Air Force was training "glider pilots" for future invasions. These were silent winged planes that would be towed by other airplanes and then would be cut loose to land on enemy soil with the troops that would ride in them. Many would die in them.

On weekends, we were permitted to leave the base and go into the nearby city of Fayetteville for the weekends. While my barracks mates were in town for drinking and other purposes, I sought to find Christians there. Almost immediately, I came into contact with a devout Christian family there, the J.C. Lee family, who opened their home for some of the Christian soldiers to stay each of the entire weekends we were free. They owned a furniture store in the city. We enjoyed this hospitality for more than a year as I remained on that army base. Sometimes it crowded their

home on weekends as there would be as many as four or five of us staying with them and eating all our meals at their table. They never complained!

Though my brother Gilbert and I had dedicated our lives to the Lord at the summer youth conference when I was sixteen years old (just before he entered the army), I had never taken my daily life for the Lord or the challenges of the Christian life as seriously as I should have.

However, being in the Army, surrounded by men in my outfit and barracks who mostly were heavy drinkers and lived openly sinful lives, and who had no connection at all with spiritual things, forced me to really get serious for the Lord both in barracks life and also in the use of my weekends.

I began to have faithful daily devotions that included kneeling down beside my bed to pray in the darkness of the barracks at night. On weekends, a Christian, Whitney Dough, from the headquarters outfit of our training base, who was a skilled musician and a former participant in the radio ministry of Percy Crawford in Philadelphia, got me involved with several others in a Saturday night street meeting ministry in the main square in Fayetteville. Men from my barracks found out about it and would come and mock us during our meetings, but we persisted. We also took a small part in a radio ministry once a week, and would also go to the little country church the Lee family attended to lead singing and testify and speak.

Before he shipped over to Europe, my brother Gilbert and I met several weekends for reunion and fellowship. One weekend, he came down from his base in Virginia to Raleigh, N. Carolina to join me, and the other weekend I took a train up to Petersburg, Va. to be with him. We had always had a close relationship and slept in the same room in a “double decker” bed while growing up. I remember him as a great example and encouragement both before and after I entered military life.

At the end of our basic training in November of 1944, we learned that all of us were scheduled to be sent over to Europe to be replacements for the thousands of soldiers who had been killed in recent major battles there. We knew that, upon our arrival in Europe, we would probably be put in regular Army fighting units and would not be artillery any more, and so we were somewhat discouraged to have gone clear through artillery training only to be used like that.

HOWEVER, just before we were to leave for a two week furlough home and then to be shipped out from the east coast of America, a FEW of us learned that our orders had been changed and that we would be transferred, after a two week time at home, to the other side of the base instead and join an artillery outfit, the 570th Field Artillery Battalion, that was still undergoing training for overseas duty. All the others from our training outfit went to Europe as scheduled and we never saw them again.

In “basic training, we had trained on 155 howitzers, but, in our new outfit, we would be using the largest land guns the Army had, the 240 Howitzers and the Eight Inch Rifles. Both of these types of guns could fire shells 22 miles to their targets. I was assigned to the section of our outfit that surveyed in our positions, so was spared the heavy toil of having to "dig in" the guns to protect their positions from the enemy. The ones on the survey team lived in their own tent and we had a close relationship with each other though none of the others were Christians.

This change of plans was like a miracle of the Lord, and permitted several of us to continue active weekend ministry in Fayetteville until the very early summer of 1945. This delay in being sent overseas also permitted us to be spared any direct danger in combat since we would not finally arrive in the Philippines until after the ending of the war in Europe and only a very few months before the end of the war against Japan in the Far East.

We finally left Ft. Bragg, N. Carolina in very early June of 1945, and went to the West Coast where we were to take a troop ship over to the Philippines, to be used in the final battles with the Japanese there and in the planned invasion of Japan itself.

Sailing out of San Francisco, we were crowded into a converted freighter for the long trip across the Pacific, and arrived there nearly a month later. By this time, I had found several Christian friends in my outfit, the 570th Field Artillery Battalion, and so had constant fellowship with them both during the voyage and after we arrived in the Philippines.

On landing in Manila, we were sent up to the eastern side of the Island of Luzon where General Yamashita and his troops were still fighting in the mountains. We were sent to the battle area, in San Jose, Nueva Ecija, and later received "battle stars" for being in the danger zone. Because we were an artillery outfit, we never actually went into the mountains to see direct conflict. In fact, our guns were so heavy that they could not even bring them up to us, and we mostly did guard duty.

We were up in that area, sleeping in tents in a large former rice field where our outfit was based, when the news came over short wave radio that the two atomic bombs had been dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan, and that the Japanese were faced with agreeing to surrender and ending the war.

Our whole company was in shock at this news as we considered the possibility that the dropping of these bombs might so suddenly end the war. Our officers, who usually did not mix with the enlisted men in our outfit, were just as shocked as we were and sat down with us for hours discussing informally the implications of these events.

Though many today believe that the dropping of these bombs was completely immoral and a stain on the reputation of the United States, to this day I believe that the dropping of those two bombs was the right thing to do and have never felt any

regrets, though thousands of Japanese died in the explosions they caused. The truth was, had it been necessary for us to actually invade Japan, many millions of Japanese would have died in the battles that would have followed and the bombings of their cities, as well as tens of thousands of American soldiers involved in the invasion.

Our occupation of their country following their surrender was surprisingly peaceful, and the Japanese have remained friends of the United States through these many decades since then. General Mac Arthur was well received and respected by the Japanese and used great wisdom in administering the occupation.

Though many soldiers from the infantry outfits of the Army actually went to Japan to occupy it following the surrender, our artillery outfit stayed in the Philippines for the following eight months, mostly being divided up and stationed back in the Manila area until the time of our return to the United States for discharge.

When we went back to the Manila area, just several weeks after the Japanese surrender, I was stationed in several different places.

At first, for about six weeks in Alabang, Laguna, our entire battalion helped process returning American prisoners of war who had been brought back from Japan. As a typist, I had the job of processing their papers each night.

Then, for about two months, we were stationed in Antipolo, Rizal, with our tents being pitched ON THE VERY SITE where the Faith Fundamental Baptist Church was later built, pastored by a young man, Pastor Conrado Edpao, whom I had helped lead to the Lord and disciple as a young missionary. It now seems strange to me to repeatedly be invited back to that beautiful church building for speaking and other ministries as I remember the months that I lived on that site in an Army tent.

Finally, through the intervention of a pastor friend from Dayton who was serving as an Army chaplain, I was transferred to the heart of Manila to work with him. Manila was completely devastated by the war when we were there, with few large buildings still standing. It would be many years before order would be restored and the city rebuilt.

Before finally being transferred to Manila to be an assistant chaplain in the Headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Western Pacific, I had gotten involved in the ministry with soldiers led by a missionary couple from ABWE, Rev. and Mrs. Edward Bomm, who had been interned in the Philippines by the Japanese and who were cruelly treated during W.W.II.

In spite of the suffering they had gone through as Japanese internees, this very dedicated couple had agreed to remain in Manila after other interned missionaries had gone back to the USA, and to be in charge of the ABWE work until the other missionaries could return and relieve them. In addition to their work for ABWE,

they also dedicated themselves to a number of different ministries with the soldiers in the Manila area.

The ministry in which in which I most personally was involved, and the ministry I remember most vividly, was the G.I.GOSPEL HOUR held each Saturday evening in the auditorium of a large mortuary on Rizal Avenue in Manila. The soldiers had rented those facilities from the owner for this one evening each week.

Sometimes, while we were using the auditorium with about 500-600 soldiers crowded in there hearing the Gospel, using a generator for our power, there would be three or four funerals laid out on the platform behind the speaker, lighted with candles and separated from us only by a thin curtain. The room where they stored the caskets was the room where we would lead to the Lord anyone who responded to the Gospel messages. These Saturday night meetings continued there for many months. My work as a young soldier was mainly working with the personal work with those who responded rather than leading the singing or speaking. Hal Webb, Bill Adams, George Zinn and others helped lead these meetings. I would stand by the generator at the side door waiting until time to help with the personal work.

Later I was also the announcer on a regular Sunday afternoon G.I. Gospel Hour radio broadcast from a local station. Dudley Olson and then Bill Adams headed that work. We had our own choir of soldiers and Gospel presentations by various Army chaplains for that half hour broadcast each Sunday afternoon.

On Sunday nights, we would have another Gospel meeting in the large auditorium of a church near the site of the ABWE church. The ABWE church, First Baptist of Manila, together with the facilities of the prewar Manila Evangelistic Institute, had been destroyed by the Japanese in the final battle for Manila, though these facilities were later rebuilt as some of us used excess G.I building materials to raise up a temporary structure. In addition to its function as a church, this “pre-fab” building was also like a soldiers’ retreat center where we could go during the week. I also remember meeting many of the returning ABWE missionaries, the Spahrs, Kohlers and others at that building in early 1946, and their lives also made a spiritual impact on my own life.

Around the first of January, 1946, some of us began working on Sunday mornings with an evangelical church in Imus, Cavite, that was just 20 miles from Manila. I still have copies of pictures taken with the pastor and congregation. The area out there was somewhat dangerous for Americans at that time, for there were many rebel groups based there, and so we tended to drive rather fast through the countryside whether it was day or night. On some Saturday nights, I would ride a jeep with a quartette from the 86th Division, led by Hal Webb (later to graduate from Bob Jones University and become a well known evangelist), to hold evangelistic meetings in that same church and the nearby town of Anabu (the “home of the rebels”). I don’t remember being the speaker for the main meetings at those places, but often testified and helped with Sunday School.

In the middle of April of 1946, I was scheduled to return to the USA to be discharged. As already mentioned, as a 16 year old young person, I had both dedicated my life to the Lord for His control and had also been given the strong conviction in my heart by the Lord that I was to be in "full time service" for Him someday. At that time I had no idea exactly HOW the Lord would lead in that calling or WHERE He might choose to use me.

However, as we left Manila Harbor for the USA in mid-April of 1946, I finally had the clear conviction from the Lord that He wanted me to devote my entire life to FOREIGN MISSIONARY SERVICE, and so I prayed there on the deck of the ship, just as we were leaving Manila Harbor, and dedicated myself to returning to the Philippines as a missionary someday. As we later landed in San Francisco, I realized the whole direction of my life had been changed by this decision on that ship.

At the time of this decision, I realized that life there as a missionary would be very different from the life I had had there as a soldier, but I told the Lord that I was willing to work anywhere and do any kind of work there for Him, never imagining some of the ways He would choose to lead in the Philippines itself.

At that time, I also could not have imagined that that calling would later include eleven years as a missionary in the Philippines (1953-1964), also 30 years working with the Chinese in Hong Kong (1964 to 1994), a ministry that would continue for many years after "retirement" in 1994, or that it would also include 17 years of ministry in Shanghai, China (1983 to 2000) ministering to university students four months a year while based in Hong Kong.

I was finally discharged from the Army in the middle of May, 1946 from a base in Indianapolis after completing one year, ten months and 23 days of Army service.

As I was discharged, I learned that that time in the Army guaranteed many benefits. One of the benefits I received from the government for this time in the Army was four free years of college training (exactly 36 months). This benefit included all college expenses, including text books and any special fees that might be charged for extra activities. I also was given \$75.00 each month for personal expenses. This sum fully covered my room and board expenses at that time.

Though I lacked a little more than one month of time in the Army to fully qualify me to complete my fourth year of college, the government granted my request to receive this benefit to the end. I completed my four years with no debts of any kind.

My final memory of World War II has to do with the memorial service that was held at my high school, Fairmont High School in Dayton, Ohio, just several days after I was discharged and arrived back at my home in Dayton. It was led by an Army Colonel who had been my neighbor in Southern Hills while I was growing up.

As the names of my schoolmates that had fallen in battles against the Germans and the Japanese were read, it was then that I fully realized the toll that World War II had taken on my generation. I had been in the Senior Play with one of them, Eddie Benson, but had not seen him again after our graduation in May of 1944. I had not even known that he had been killed in Europe until that memorial service. The same was true with several of my other classmates who never returned from the battlefields or the ships where they had fought the enemy.

However, even with the emotional sadness I felt in attending this memorial service, I had no personal regrets about having served in the Armed Forces myself. I reflected back on the way the Lord had “straightened out” my spiritual life, and the value to my life of every experience I had gone through in those nearly two years I had been gone. As I sat there in that auditorium that day, I thanked the Lord for sparing my own life and looked forward to entering college that fall and then serving the Lord for the rest of my life. My younger brother, Bill, who would later serve in the army as an officer, sat there soberly beside me listening to what was going on in the service.

For a brief time after my discharge from the Army I kept in touch with some of the men from my own outfit, the 570th Field Artillery Battalion, but finally lost contact with all but one of them, a Christian friend, Lincoln Clubine, from another battery than my own. He died this year. As far as I know, there has never been a reunion of any kind of the men in our Artillery Battalion, though I have had contact with some of the dedicated Christians from other outfits I fellowshipped with and joined with in witnessing work in N. Carolina and the Philippines.

I also have never felt led to join any organization for veterans. Part of the reason is that I was in college following my discharge from the Army in 1944, and then have been overseas so many of the years since I finished my service in the Armed Forces.

Also, while I respect them and agree with many of the objectives of these organizations for veterans, I do not always agree with many of their activities as these mostly unsaved men and women get together for their meetings.

I have chosen instead to reach out with help to disabled veterans and some of the special projects these organizations have promoted. I can contribute to these causes without being named as a member, and I can also determine whether or not my contributions are completely used for these causes they support.

It would be nearly seven years before a return to the Philippines would come to pass, following years of schooling and getting experience in serving the Lord in summer camps, rescue mission work, street evangelism in Chicago, leadership positions at Wheaton College and pastoring. Throughout that waiting period I never lost that conviction of missionary service from the Lord that He had laid on my heart while in the Philippines in 1945 and 1946, and kept sharply focused on that calling. Close friendship with Jim Elliott and others at Wheaton College in those

years, and strong participation in missionary activities on the campus, helped me greatly to faithfully stay on that path of life

While waiting for an answer from the ABWE mission to which I had applied in the fall of 1952, I served, from December of 1952 to May of 1953, as “interim pastor” of the First Baptist Church of La Salle, Illinois as they sought for their new full time pastor. I had already had a long summer of pastoring in southern Illinois in 1949 and two full years of pastoral experience at a small church, the Southtown Bible Church, in Downers Grove, Illinois while I did my graduate studies at Wheaton College from 1950 to 1952.

I finally went to the ABWE (Association of Baptists For World Evangelism) “Candidate School” on February 1, 1953 as a single person, together with six other prospective missionaries, and was questioned by the Board and appointed to teach in the Seminary in Manila just ten days later, on February 10, 1953. After a brief time of deputation to raise support, while still serving as “interim pastor” in La Salle, Illinois, I sailed to the Philippines on a freighter in the early summer of that year.

I was 27 years old when I finally began missionary service in the Philippines as a single missionary. As I returned to Manila, it had mostly been rebuilt, but the memories of the devastation I had seen there in World War II still remained.

It would be the fall of 1958 before I was led to marry the church secretary of my home church in Dayton, Darline Nelson, whom I met for the first time when I came back on a delayed furlough in mid-April of that year. We served the Lord together as missionaries in the Philippines and Hong Kong for 41 years until she went to be with the Lord in February of 2000 A.D.

My entire missionary life has been spent in the Far East as a missionary in the Philippines, Hong Kong, China and other places, both in "full time" service and coming back six to seven months a year in "retirement" to the Far East to minister in a number of different countries.

TO SUM IT UP, if I had not seen service in the U.S. Armed Forces in World War II, it seems unlikely that I would have been as willing for God to have brought into my life the seriousness for the Lord He desired and the long years of foreign missionary service He has permitted and blest. As of this date, September 22, 2007, I have finished more than 54 years of missionary service, with the end of this ministry not yet in sight.

Earlier, I mentioned that, when God first laid the conviction on my heart that my life was to be devoted to full time service for the Lord, I was extremely shy and many doubted that I would ever be able to stand before people and minister publicly. While it is true that the last two years of high school, with experience in speaking and debating publicly, did help me to overcome some of my shyness, I feel

that it was the challenges of ministry in the Armed Forces that were mostly used by God to prepare me for the ministry that the Lord has given of witnessing, teaching and preaching in these many years as a missionary.

Though, at the time I was in high school, I did not welcome the prospect of Army service, I now look back over my life with praise and deep thanksgiving to Him for all the ways He moved and worked in the Armed Forces to shape and mold me for His service, and for His grace and goodness in the many ways He directed and led in those two years.

While in Wheaton College in the late part of the 40's, it was also a privilege to study and fellowship with a generation of former World War II soldiers from all branches of the Armed Forces of the United States.

Sometimes, some of us would gather together and spend time thinking back over some of the Army experiences we had had.

I vividly remember one classmate, who later became an outstanding missionary leader, who had had some terrible experiences on the battlefield where, in one particular battle, he was practically the only survivor from his company of soldiers.

Rather than having nightmares about those experiences, he could see how the Lord had used those experiences to make him more dependent on the Lord and more willing to devote his whole life to serving the Lord. This particular experience led him to a life attitude of great gratitude to the Lord for His protection and care, and the conviction that he could completely trust the Lord with his life wherever God might lead him in the future and whatever challenges he might face in those places of God's leading.

His testimony and his victorious triumph over any bad effects from these experiences made a deep impact on my own life, and helped me later to understand and give thanks for every experience I would go through in the future in service for the Lord.

Many of these former members of the Armed Forces also were numbered among the hundreds of missionaries who went to the fields of the world from Wheaton College in those post war years. They had come to Wheaton from their military service very mature and facing life very seriously, and so their lives were very sharply focused on spiritual life and walk with the Lord. I still have contact with some of these.

Three of my children from my marriage to Darline, Paul, Marcia and Carol, are foreign missionaries with their families in the Far East and Germany. Our other son, John and his wife, are also faithfully serving the Lord in the area of Buffalo, New York.

At this point in my life, I am serving now with my second wife, Joyce, to whom I was married in May of 2002. She and her first husband faithfully served the Lord in the Philippines until he was killed in an MAF plane wreck there on the island where they served the Lord in December of 1968. We had known each other when I would go down to her island to speak at youth conferences, and then were led together in marriage several decades later following the death of Darline in the year 2000.

Following our marriage, we committed ourselves to serving the Lord together wherever He would lead, and this has taken us back, again and again, to the Far East to continue the ministry that I had had for those many years. She has been an important part of this ministry as she gives seminars for women, counsels women and young people and gives spiritual support to my own ministries.

We are now serving together in Hong Kong for these six and a half months as we have taken the place, in an important church work, of our son-in-law and his family who are on furlough. I am also teaching four hours a week in the Bible School where I formerly taught. Both Joyce and I will be doing seminars at the church in these months.

As long as God continues to give us both good health and keeps these doors open for us in His will, we plan to continue to serve Him together in this part of the world in the future.