

On Sunday, 7 December 1941 the Japanese navy attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. At the time of the attack, I was working in the Post Office at Keene, Texas. It was one of the few Post Offices in the U.S. that was open on Sunday and closed on Saturday. The Post Office's building adjoined the W.O. Bell's Store, with side windows of both about four feet apart. I was listening to the news on the radio playing in the store.

When the Postmaster returned, I relayed the news of the attack to him. My first reaction was the thought that auto tires would become scarce as tires at that time were made from rubber imported from Malaysia.

I received my draft card 31 December 1941 and, in early January made a scheduled trip to Dallas for a physical. The examination took place in the hallway outside the court room in the Federal building. The court was not in session. We potential draftees removed all clothing and lined up side by side, toeing a line on the floor. A team of three doctors walked slowly down the row of people, each looking at a different part of the human body. I'm sure they would have noticed a missing hand or foot.

The person to my left, Mr. Fuller, had feet so flat that they curled up at the edge. He placed his worst foot out in front of the row of feet, and the team of doctors walked slowly by. About six steps past, the rear doctor came back, looked down and said "a little road work will fix those feet in no time".

I received my notice to report to Camp Walters, Mineral Wells, Texas on 11 February. Bus transportation would be furnished from the courthouse at Cleburne to Mineral Wells at 12:00 noon. My father drove me to Cleburne. Noon came and passed. We waited. Finally word came that there would be no bus, but one would be available the next day. That left several people stranded with their good bys said and no ride back home.

I returned the next day, went to Camp Walters, and was sworn in. In the first briefing, we were told there would be no passes for those who had not memorized the ten general orders. We were housed in a double bunk barrack. The lights would be turned out at 11:00 P.M. with a warning blink five minutes before.

I was one of two people from Keene. When the lights blinked, my friend knelt by his bunk and said a bedtime prayer out loud. Several soldiers nearby looked at me and motioned "is the guy nuts?". I assured them that he was normal and had been accustomed to praying out loud, and wasn't trying for a Section 8 discharge.

After about a week, about thirty of us were shipped by rail to Camp Wallace near Galveston, Texas. The camp was built on level, black soil which, when it rained, became black "gumbo". It would stick to anything, particularly shoes. The camp was an anti-aircraft training center operated by the Coast Artillery.

I received my first month's pay which was about \$11.00 as insurance and laundry had been deducted from the \$21.00 base pay. I qualified with the rifle on the firing range. We had classes on the 50 cal machine gun; 40 & 90mm AA guns: but none of the guns were at camp to look at. The class on the 40mm gun used a copy of Life Magazine as a training manual.

The big event was the firing of a real 90mm AA gun at a target towed by a small airplane. Ft. Crockett on Galveston Island had a beach front. The target was towed along the beach and the guns were fired out to sea. I was the gunner of my crew. My job was to load, close the breach and fire the gun. A battery of four guns were in place for target practice. I also had not practiced with the crew. The key position were gunner, elevation and azimuth trackers and fuse catter. The fuse cutter put the shell nose down in a device that rotated the forward end, which in turn set the head to explode "X" seconds after firing. The cutter thought the shell head had not rotated, so he tried to set (cut) the fuse again. The azimuth tracker thought that -- once a cut had been made -- the shell would automatically explode "X" seconds later (like a hand grenade). He dismounted and ran. When I fired the gun, the tracking had already stopped. The shell exploded far back of the towed target sleeve.

Those soldiers with a 110 test score or above were asked to apply for OCS (Officer Candidate School). I applied and was accepted, reporting to Camp Davis, N.C. in the middle of May. I now received corporal's pay.

Our quarters were two-storied barracks, which had large rooms on both floors, with single beds arranged in two rows. The beds had a isle in the center with the head of each next to a side window. Everyone in the barrack was an OCS candidate. Command positions and work details were rotated on a weekly basis. The rotation of assignments provided a work experience.

The officer in charge was a 2nd Lt. Gruvey, a young man, who spent very little time with the platoon. I wondered why he was still a 2nd Lt. Five days a week was filled with classroom work with a two hour study period at night. There was a field inspection on Saturday and week-end passes.

The platoon marched to class in close-order (shoulder to shoulder) formation at quick-time (180 steps per minute). Normal marching is at 120 steps per minute with slbow space between. The tallest soldiers were in the front ranks, four abreast, with the short soldiers bringing up the rear. The result was that the rear ranks had to trot to keep up.

One day, while marching to class, the platoon found the street ahead completely blocked by soldiers. Our platoon commander for that week had a squeaky voice and the command to halt was not heard by the front ranks. The platoon plowed through the troops like a battering ram through a wood door. Unfortunately the camp commander was watching from an up-stair window. The result was an extra hour of drilling practice each evening for a week. During the drilling some music composer came up with the song "John Brown's body . . .", but with different words such as "We'll hang Screwy Gruvey to a sour apple tree".

Our barrack was infected with bed bugs, which are blood sucking insects. A bite causes a red welt on the skin which itches. As a defense, the bed legs were set in cans filled with water. Some bugs would fall from the seams in the ceiling above. We had to endure these attacks for several weeks before a clean, empty barrack was available. The move was well organized. In sequence: remove all clothes, shower with soap, and put on clean uniforms. All bedding and blankets were discarded. Our move was successful.

It was obvious that the camp officers didn't eat the food prepared for the enlisted men. Vegetables such as potatoes and beans were only partly cooked (boiled). Some of my fellow students lost weight. As a last resort, I would always finish up the meal with bread and molasses.

On 14 August 1942 I graduated from OCS at Camp Davis thereby becoming a 2nd. Lt. I was given a 30 day leave with orders to report to Ft. Bliss, El Paso, Texas. I decided to see Washington D.C. first. Congress was not in session, but I visited the buildings and the Smithsonian Institution. I was impressed with Lindberg's airplane "The Spirit of St. Louis". Next stop was a visit with my aunt who lived in St. Louis, Mo.; and then a few weeks at home in Keene, Texas, before reporting for duty at Ft. Bliss.