

MY GOD



MY COUNTRY

**And
Me**

By

Lewis D. Ellenburg, Sr.



"My country 'tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty
Of thee I sing
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light
Protect us by thy might
Great God Our King."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	Page 2
Prologue.....	Page 4
Children of John Thomas Ellenburg...	Page 6
Down On The Farm.....	Page 9
He's In The Navy Now.....	Page 17
Pearl Harbor.....	Page 21
Church Anyone?.....	Page 25
Pacific Challenges.....	Page 29
I Make Captain (of the Brig).....	Page 38
Back To War Again.....	Page 41
Stateside Duty.....	Page 46
Civil Service - Then Home Again.....	Page 54
My Second Job - Preaching.....	Page 60
Working For The Space Industry.....	Page 68
Retired, At Home, Still Busy.....	Page 75
Epilogue.....	Page 80
End Notes.....	Page 83

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Updated: 6 June, 2021

Prologue

“Get all excited go tell everybody that
Jesus Christ is King
Get all excited go tell everybody that
Jesus Christ is King
Get all excited go tell everybody that
Jesus Christ is King
Jesus Christ is still the King of Kings!”

Have you ever heard the song “Get all excited, go tell everybody that Jesus Christ is King”? Well that’s the story of almost my whole life. I love to tell about Jesus. I love the Lord and I feel that He has delivered me from near destruction so many times in my life that I can’t remember them all. Several times my life was hanging on the brink of disaster as if by a thread, but God in His tender mercy delivered me from death. God has been so good to me and I thank Him from the bottom of my heart and I thank Jesus and the Holy Spirit and all the heavenly host for all they have done for me and my family. You know life has mountains and valleys. There’s going to be a good high mountain here and a low valley there, and we’re going to have to go through some of the valleys, but in the end, everything will all smooth out - IF WE JUST HANG ON! I believe that God answers prayer. I believe that He has answered mine, some negative, some positive, but there’s always an answer. I try to pray every day – for the church,

for my family, for my friends and neighbors, for my country, even for strangers and for myself. I know that many of you have prayed for my safety, because after all these years, I am still alive and reasonably well. I am telling my story with the hope that you will benefit from my experiences in the Lord's care.

CHILDREN OF
JOHN THOMAS ELLENBURG, JR.
(Born 1/17/1876, Died 12/31/1949)
And

Wife: Georgia Haynes
Married 3/1901
Born 7/24/1882
Died 9/17/1904

Jasper Ellenburg
Married Eunice Harper
Born 4/29/1902
Died 1/1/1978

Mattie Lou Ellenburg
Married Leonard Stone
Born 4/2/1904
Died 9/13/1970

CHILDREN OF
JOHN THOMAS ELLENBURG, JR.
(Born 1/17/1876, Died 12/31/1949)
And

Wife: Julia Emma Cox
Married 11/12/1905
Born 5/6/1885
Died 12/1915

Eva Mae Ellenburg
Married Judd Bright, Sr.
Born 12/2/1906
Died 11/5/1995

Lillian Beatrice Ellenburg
Married Denson Bynum
Born 7/31/1908
Died 4/12/1989

Harvey Ellenburg
Married Jewell Harvell
Born 4/8/1910
Died 7/18/1963

Boy Child
Stillborn
Born 12/3/1911
Died 12/3/1911

Cleo Ellenburg
Unmarried
Born 6/1/1914
Died 2/9/1954

CHILDREN OF
 JOHN THOMAS ELLENBURG, JR.
 (Born 1/17/1876, Died 12/31/1949)
 And

Wife: Martha Lou Edmondson Married 7/23/1916 Born 10/15/1895 Died 2/27/1989
--

Jonathan Willie Ellenburg Married Vera Hughes Born 5/30/1917 Died 2/17/1978	Lurlie Gene Ellenburg Married Dorotha Hyatt Born 7/17/1927 Died 5/29/2004
Lewis David Ellenburg, Sr. Married Ruth Pounds Born 6/11/1920 Died 10/12/2008	James Phillip Ellenburg Married Margaret Wooten Born 8/11/1929 Died 4/8/2007
Vera Ellenburg Married J. Edward Harvell Born 1/1/1923 Died 4/11/2014	Warren Gene Ellenburg Unmarried Born 3/26/1932 Died 5/22/1944
James Elbert Ellenburg Married Bonnie Mckelvy Born 8/13/1925 Died 6/4/1990	Arnettie Ellenburg Married Wilbur Wright Born 1/23/1935

DOWN ON THE FARM

Chopin' Cotton, Balein' Hay
Sweatin' for my meager pay
Plane the lumber, Clean the barn
Love your neighbor, Do no Harm

I was a farm boy. I was born at Grassy, Alabama. That's a small community about three miles east of Arab, in north Alabama. My dad, John T. Ellenburg, lost two wives before he married my mother. He had a total of 15 children. I was the second son of his third wife, Martha (Mattie). All our lives we have been a very loving family. My father was a very ambitious businessman. It seemed that his hand was in most of the businesses in the community. At one time, he owned a cotton gin, a gristmill, a planer mill, a saw mill, and a syrup mill, all under the same roof. The machinery was run by a steam engine. Everything was run by a 75-foot long drive shaft. Dad also owned a very large farm with several hundred acres of land and the farmhouse where we lived. All the members of his family who were old enough worked on the farm. He also employed a great number of the people of the community. I helped Dad in one of his business ventures operating machinery; this experience helped me greatly later on in life when I chose my permanent career. Operating that

machinery was a very dangerous job. One day I came very close to losing my life while dressing lumber on the planer. The old belt was loose on the machine and at age 17 I wasn't very smart. I had seen dad use the bottom of his shoe to steady the belt. What I did not know was that dad had leather soled shoes and mine were rubber. I put my foot on the belt to hold it tight against the pulley and my rubber soled shoe stuck to that rubber belt like it was glued on. My foot went round the pulley and the force threw me to the ground. My ankle was broken in three places, but God saw fit to save my life. In another incident, one of my brothers lost three fingers on his left hand when his hand got caught in the syrup mill. I worked on the farm picking and chopping cotton, cleaning out the barn, and working in the garden along with anything else my Dad thought of for us to do. Even with the nine of us kids who were at home at that time, there was always plenty for us to do.

I guess you could rightfully say that Dad was a pretty prominent member of the local community. He wasn't greedy or stingy with his wealth. He tried to be fair and considerate with all people. But, he had an especially soft spot in his heart for anyone who was down on his luck. He even got in trouble with some of the other area business people because he charged the lowest rate in the county to gin cotton. He charged three dollars to gin enough cotton to make a bale. His closest competitor charged five dollars a bale. The farmers would pass up this one gin which

was about three miles away and come over to my father's gin to have their cotton ginned. Two dollars was more than two day's wages in those days. That was a lot of money to a farmer. Dad's gin ran day and night during cotton-picking season. He would furnish ties, bagging, labor, and ginning for three dollars a bale. Dad's competitor got enough of that. One day a mysterious letter just showed up at Dad's gin office. It had burned corners and some burned matchsticks inside. The note read "GO UP ON YOUR PRICE." Dad knew that it meant that if he didn't go up on the price of ginning cotton, someone would burn down his gin. My dad ignored the letter, but he didn't ignore the warning. Dad or some of his neighbors watched the gin constantly, around the clock. Finally, one night about midnight, the very man dad suspected came to the gin with a can of kerosene. Dad and a neighbor quietly watched him when he came up. They were going to surprise him when he started pouring out the kerosene! But the man just stood there for a few minutes and turned around and went home. Well, dad relaxed then. He said, "Hey, he's not gonna do any harm, cause if he was, he'd a done it then." So, everyone quit watching. A few nights later, we woke up and the gin was on fire. The entire building went up in flames. The fire was so high it threatened to burn our house, which was nearby. Hugh chunks of burning cotton were falling on top of the house. The neighbors and all of us kids fought hard to draw water from the well and pour it on the house.

The house was saved, but we lost almost everything else because of that fire. You see, the gin was full of bales of cotton that belonged to dad's customers. He wouldn't allow his customers to suffer the loss from the fire that burned his gin. Dad sold almost everything he owned, including a large portion of his land, to pay for the burned cotton. There was no insurance on the businesses or the cotton. Dad hired a detective to find out who set the fire. He tracked down the man who did it. The man and his wife were out of town on a trip when the detective reported to dad. They were in a wreck and the man was paralyzed for the rest of his life. The man eventually lost everything he owned. The detective asked dad if he wanted to prosecute the man. Dad said, "No, he couldn't do anything else to him. It looked like the Lord had taken care of everything."

Now let me say this at this point. That fire sounds like a sad thing to happen, but you know what! That was the best thing that ever happened to the Ellenburg family. Before the gin burned, my Dad had no time for anything but work. After the gin burned, he spent a lot of time talking with his neighbors about the Bible. They used an old abandoned store building across the street from our house to sit around and discuss scriptures. Soon others joined the discussions. During that time, my dad and I were baptized into Christ in Oliver Stone's pond. Eventually, there were so many people interested in studying the Bible that they started a community church. The building

wasn't much to look at, an old store building with just a few concrete blocks holding up 2 x 10's to sit on and an old pot bellied stove to keep us warm. An old friend of dad's came to preach regularly for a few years. His name was brother Moody. Brother Moody believed in preaching the Bible. It was either the Bible or nothing. He believed in the church of the New Testament, the church that Christ built in AD 33. So we called it the Grassy Church of Christ. That got the congregation off to a good start. The biggest blessings of all came when mom and a lot of the other kids and many of our friends and neighbors decided to obey the Lord in baptism in that old store building. They were baptized either in Stone's pond or in Clemen's Creek that was nearby.

The love among the brethren was so strong, it drew the members together like a close-knit family. That old church kept growing and growing till they needed a bigger building. Dad provided the land on which the new building was built. Everything was better in the new church building. It had comfortable pews and rooms for Sunday school classes. Boy, did the singing sound good! We would sing for the Lord and pray and we would hear preaching.

In its heyday, there were approximately two hundred members in the Grassy Church of Christ. Sadly, the membership declined after a while as most rural churches did. But back then, the church community continued to be as close as brothers and sisters. I can remember some times

when 20 or 25 people would come home from church to our house for lunch. My mom would sometimes set three big tables so everyone would have a place to eat. My mom's cooking made a big hit with everyone who came to eat.

Eating together was not the only result of being a close-knit community. If anyone got sick, the church would come to their house and work in the fields and take care of the livestock or any other chores the sick person could not do. I remember one time when my Dad got sick and had to go to Baltimore to the Johns Hopkin Hospital to have surgery. Back home, the whole church community got together and planted his crops. Needless to say, we made it through his illness. God blessed those good brothers who helped! Nobody ever went hungry in our community. I remember that in the fall of the year, my Dad would buy my mother a hundred pounds of sugar to make jams and jellies and the like. I remember many times when he would buy a hundred pounds of sugar for neighbors who were in need. No one need ever worry about food; they always got what they needed from someone who could provide it. Remember what Psalms 37:25 says: "yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." We never saw a "bum" in our community. That scripture worked very well for us, don't you think.



Mattie and John T. Ellenburg



My home in Grassy Alabama



My sisters



My brothers

HE'S IN THE NAVY NOW

“You’re in the Army now,
You’re not behind the plow,
You’ll never get rich,
By digin’ a ditch
You’re in the Army now!”

These were the words that rang in my head when I was in Arab high school. As soon as I graduated, I couldn't wait to join the armed forces, but not the Army - I joined the Navy. I was really ready to get out from behind the plow. On September 18, 1940, I signed the papers and loaded up on the bus to Norfolk, Virginia, for training at boot camp. When we got out of boot camp, I was assigned to a ship in Norfolk. Our ultimate destination was Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, where my first permanent duty ship was docked. On our journey toward Hawaii, I remember how beautiful the islands were; the Panama Canal was especially beautiful and interesting. We stopped at Balboa, Panama, which was a particularly rough port. None of us wanted to go ashore but when the call for volunteers for shore duty came out, I volunteered as a shore patrol, policing the troops while they were in port. That night, a bunch of sailors got drunk and started throwing furniture out of the window of a third floor apartment. We had to go up and arrest them and

take them back to the ship. I was supposed to throw them in the brig, but I just told them to go to bed and sleep it off. I was glad when we finally got out of that place.

From Balboa we headed on to Hawaii. We arrived there several days later. I reported to my first home ship, the U.S.S. Buck. The U.S.S. Buck was part of the special fleet of destroyer ships that had anti-submarine capabilities. The war had not yet reached our shores. But our time was coming.

I enjoyed my duties on the U.S.S. Buck. That is, I enjoyed everything except the 120 degree heat. It was literally hot enough to fry an egg on the steel decks, but that didn't bother me. I used to fire a boiler and throw wood in it when I was back home in dad's shop. The duty of the U.S.S. Buck was to patrol around the Hawaiian Islands. Sometimes we were lucky enough to dock and get a little shore leave. Those times were great! You could get a great big 'ole milkshake for fifteen cents. The beaches at Honolulu were fantastic! We could go swimming at Wikipiki Beach and bask in the sun, just like the tourists. Every Saturday the entertainment center was open. We would listen to music and sing along with the 50-piece band. But all good things have to end sometime. The U.S.S. Buck was ordered to rotate which meant it was our turn to return to the United States.

Just before time for my ship to leave, I started having severe pain in the area around my appendix. I was ordered to the hospital ship for surgery. After my appendix was removed, I asked the doctor "How bad was it Doc?" He said, "that was the prettiest pink appendix I have ever seen." It turned out that it wasn't appendicitis after all. But by that time, my ship had already left for the U.S.A. Boy, I was disappointed that I didn't get to go home with the other members of my crew. They assigned me to another ship, the U.S.S. MacDonough (DD-351). But yet again God was looking out for me. I learned later that the U.S.S. Buck was hit near Salerno, Italy and sunk. The explosive hit the ship on the end where my bunk was. Only twenty-five members of the crew survived. If I had been on that ship, I wouldn't have made it home. My bones would still be out there in the Mediterranean Sea. You see, God wasn't ready for me to die. He had taken care of me again. I don't know why, but He did.

I was not the only member of my family that served in the military. My brother Elbert was in the Navy. My brothers, Lurlie and Philip, served in the Army. God protected us all. Thank you, God, for Your continued loving care.

PEARL HARBOR



Balboa, Panama
First time through the canal

Let's Remember Pearl Harbor
In the land across the Sea,
Let's remember Pearl Harbor
And the men who died for me.

December 7, 1941, was a beautiful sunshiny day – for a while. I was on board the U.S.S. MacDonough (DD-351). We were moored in the middle of Pearl Harbor with three other destroyers alongside the mother ship, the destroyer tender U.S.S. Dobbin, Our leaders were still ashore at an all-night party hosted by Japanese businessmen who used the party to lure them away from the ships. I was preparing to go to church services that were being held on another ship when the attack came. We had just finished breakfast and a group of us were standing on the quarterdeck ready to catch a boat to go to the other ship when all hell broke loose.

Suddenly there were many planes, and explosions, all around us. They all came at us at one time. At first we thought it was just another drill, but somehow this was different. There were large billows of smoke and loud noises, and we thought, “What is all this?!” We knew pretty soon that it was terribly, terribly real. Our ship's engines were off, so we had no power to control our gun turrets. My gun station was on a 5-inch 38 caliber anti-aircraft gun, No. 3. We manned

the gun and began firing at the planes. I believe we hit one and knocked his wing off, because he crashed. After a while, a gunner's mate named George Dunn relieved me from my battle station. I found out later that we were not even firing live ammunition, They were practice shells filled with sand, not explosives. It was like shooting squirrels with a 22-caliber rifle back home in the woods. You had to make a direct hit on something essential before it would do any good at all.

The Japanese had launched everything they had at us. Ships, torpedoes and airplanes. Some of our ships had no ammo on them and others could hit only very high targets. But the Japanese planes came in low over the mountains, right down over the water. They were so low they had to dodge our ships. You know, they were so close to me that I could see the smiles on the Japanese airmen's faces, I mean we are talking 35 or 40 feet. Boy that really irritated us. Some of us were trapped like mice in a trap because our own ships blocked us in the harbor. Ships were sinking all around us. People were jumping into the water, which was covered with oil. They were trying to swim around the oil on the water. The bombardment lasted for hours.

There were mini subs in the water. There were big nets across the entrance to the harbor, but the little subs slipped under the nets and hit our ships with torpedoes. As the explosions rocked the ship, the potato lockers came open and potatoes spilled over the deck. The guys on

the deck were so frustrated they began to throw potatoes at the low-flying aircraft. The enemy must have thought the potatoes were hand grenades because they stopped flying so close to our ship. We would alternate between firing the guns and throwing potatoes. It was an amazing thing to watch. We lost a lot of men and ships that day. I don't know what the statistics were. I know that there was a whole lot of destruction that day. They beat us and beat us bad.

We broke away from the mother ship and drifted free until we could gain power. We knew that we would make a smaller target if we could float out into the harbor away from the rest of the fleet. It was pitch black dark in the engine room. The men were working with flashlights in their mouths so they could use both hands to work on the engines. As hard as it is to believe, some of the men worked so hard and so long that we had to pull the flashlights from their mouths for them because their jaws had locked. It took hours for



us to float free and finally get our engines started so we could have the power to get out of the port. When we finally got the engines started, we were ordered to seek and destroy the Japanese fleet. We went out looking, but I don't know what we would have done if we had found them. The only thing we had to fight with was courage. I guess it's lucky for us that the Japanese fleet was long gone. We were told later that the Japanese had orders to take over the whole island and our whole fleet. I believe they could have done it if they had been smart enough and fast enough. I tell you what, the Japanese really mistreated us. They started a war, came in on us and tried to kill all of us without even letting us know that they were mad at us. This made us mad. It made us want to be good fighters. We would have our day. Just wait.

CHURCH ANYONE?

I didn't hear nobody say
Watch for natives on your way
Who'd a thought we'd have a chance
To say a prayer or do a dance

After Pearl Harbor, the Navy gathered together several ships that they called a task force. We were to seek out the Japanese and destroy as many of them as we could. Since we were still a small force against a large army of Japanese, we would use the hit and run method of fighting them. That strategy had to be used for over half of the war. By then we had cut them down to our size and we could go on the offensive. One day we began to run low on fuel. We were ordered to go to a certain island and wait for a sub to show up to give us fuel.

While we were waiting, four other men and I were sent by the captain to check out the island to see if we could find some fruit or some other kinds of food. When we arrived on the island, we were met by a group of natives who wanted us to go to this little grass shack. We soon realized that the shack was some kind of native meeting place and they were about to have some kind of worship service – and it wasn't even Sunday. They didn't ask us if we wanted to go, they just took us by the arm and escorted us to the shack.

We could not understand a word they said, and they couldn't understand us, so we just went along with them. They evidently had seen us coming and had prepared a feast for us. It consisted of raw pork and pork fat. They gave it to us to eat, but of course it was not very appetizing to us. When they insisted, we ate some. When it came back up, they understood that we couldn't eat it, so they allowed us to stop trying.

It was then time for church and again without invitation, they took us into the shack. When we got inside, they sat us down. I looked at my watch. It was 5 o'clock, the time we were supposed to get back to the ship. We got up to leave and these big 250-pound natives took us by the shoulders and set us down, hard. So hard it hurt my rump and back. The place where we were sitting was just a board on the ground. We got all shook up. Boy, what were we gonna do?! We kept trying to get out and trying to explain to them that we needed to go, but church was still going on so they wouldn't let us interrupt. Finally they got the message and let us leave. I looked out at the beach and saw our boat leaving the shore. They had been to pick us up and were on their way back to our ship! The ship was ready to leave the harbor. We ran out to the beach waving our arms and screaming for them to come back and get us. Finally someone on the ship saw us and sent the boat back for us.

We were really thankful that they came back. We would probably have been on that

island for the rest of our lives. The island was uncharted and nobody would know where to come back to get us. That captain was fighting the Japanese and he was not worrying about a few little men who couldn't follow orders and get back to the ship. He had the whole crew and his ship to think about.

When we got back to the ship, an amazing thing happened. Someone told me that the captain had ordered me to report to him. Boy, when the captain sends for you, it means trouble. He held me responsible for what happened. I went to his bridge and snapped to attention. He said "What do you think you were doing out there, didn't you get my orders?" I said, "Yes sir, I got your orders." He said, "Then why weren't you down there waiting for us?" I proceeded to try to explain what had happened. After he heard my story, he said, "Well I can understand now what happened." He dismissed the report he had written on my men and me and let us go free. You can bet I gave a big sigh of relief! So we got back to our duties and started fighting the Japanese again. By that time, the Japanese had taken over most of the islands west of Hawaii. They had taken over and fortified them



PACIFIC CHALLENGES

“Glory, Glory, Hallelujah
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah
Our God is marching on.”

After Pearl Harbor our ship sailed to the waters around the Solomon Islands. One of the first engagements I remember was near the island of Guadalcanal. A large force of Japanese soldiers occupied this island and it had a small airstrip. My worst battle in the Pacific was fought near this island. It was one of the bloodiest battles in the war. Our job was to clear the beach so that the Marines could land. I was on the big gun shooting 54 pound shells, pulling the trigger and spraying the beach. I think I fired about twelve hundred rounds onto the beach trying to force the Japanese off the beach so our marines would have a place to land. We fired until the Marines were ready to land. We were on the front line closest to shore. The big ships had to wait until we cleared the beach and moved out before they could start firing because they were behind us. We were no further than two football fields away, trying to protect our Marines.

I'm sure you've heard a lot of stories about the brave 1st and 2nd Marines that landed on Guadalcanal that day. I can tell you first hand that

those boys did an awesome job. They were real heroes. When they went in, they lost a lot of men. We could see them landing. We kept firing to keep the Japanese from shooting them down in the water. When the Marines took over the beach, the Army came in and landed some troops. The Marines withdrew and went to Tulaghi Island to clear the beach for another troop of Army men to take over. Those boys were fighters, I tell you. They fought and fought. I believe they could have fought through a tunnel.

By this time, the Japanese had called out their airplanes and ships to take us on in battle. They outnumbered us. They had more ships and supplies than we did, but we still fought them. We would hide around the end of the island and when the Japanese would arrive at the island, we would blast them. They didn't know where we were because nobody had radar back then. Our Task Force got into major engagements. One combat engagement was at Santa Cruz Island (Ndeni) which is at the southern end of the Solomon Islands near Guadalcanal and Tulaghi. It lasted only one day, October 26, 1942. Two American aircraft carrier task forces faced off against several elements of the Japanese combined fleet, including two fleet carriers and two light carriers. The Japanese sank one of our carriers. We didn't sink any of their ships, but the fleet carrier, Zuikaku, light carrier Zuibo, and heavy cruiser Chikuma were all put out of action. We fought and fought. Finally the Japanese thought they had won and moved out.

We couldn't afford to leave the Marines and soldiers there and let the Japanese come back and blast them away, so we didn't leave. After the Japanese left, our troops went into Guadalcanal and rebuilt the airstrip. The Navy sent in a bunch of Navy fighter planes. After the planes came in, we were able to set up a major operations facility there. Now that the troops were well established on Guadalcanal, the Japanese would have a major fight on their hands if they tried to attack our Marines and soldiers. But try they did, and we had some serious battles.

I remember one battle in particular. The Japanese were determined to drive us out of Guadalcanal. We got word that they were coming and we were prepared for them. They sent 27 or 28 twin engine bombers to sink our ships. We fired at them with everything we had, until the Navy fighter planes came into range. Once the Navy fighter planes arrived I had a ringside seat to one of the most amazing dogfights anyone ever witnessed. I watched it all through the telescope on my gun. I watched a guy named Lt. O'Hare. Now let me tell you something, he was a fighter. He went in above those bombers in that little fighter plane he had and would fly downward like he was gonna run right through them, shooting at them as he descended. He did this so that the ships couldn't fire at him without hitting their own planes. He would get one then go back up and get another. I sat there and watched him and counted off five planes he shot down during that battle. He became an ace that day. And I was an

eyewitness. I remember it as if it was yesterday. After we got back, I heard a lot about him. He was a brave man.

I believe the next battle I was in was the battle of Bougainville, the largest of the Solomon Islands. We were escorting some large aircraft carriers and of course, the Japanese wanted to knock out our carriers with a passion. They even had submarines that tried to slip between the carriers and us and tried to torpedo the carrier. One time I looked up and there was a submarine telescope sticking up out of the water about 10 feet from where I was standing. We threw down depth charges, but they just rolled off without exploding because they were set on safety. We finally got the submarine. I think someone must have manually set the depth charge. The sub was probably hit with a 500-pound depth charge. I think the depth charges were later altered so that we could use them on both deep and shallow targets. It turned out that most of the battle was between our planes and theirs. We used our guns to try to keep them away from the aircraft carriers and us. We didn't do a lot of damage to the planes, but at least we kept them disturbed. But the major battle was fought in the air. We lost a lot of ships and they lost a lot of planes and submarines that day. We continued to patrol the area and about a month later, we engaged in a raid on Salamaua-Lae, a small port city in New Guinea, that lasted almost a day. On Feb. 14, 1942, I was part of a flotilla commanded by Adm. William F. (Bull) Halsey when we raided Wake

Island, but no effort was made to recapture it until the Japanese surrendered it in 1945.

I can remember the Coral Sea battles were major engagements. One of the first major battles we ever won was in the Coral Sea. We were sent out on patrol looking for the Japanese fleet. We would tell the Naval aviators where they were, then we would run and hide. Then our planes would come in and attack them. We had a good thing going there. We sank a lot of ships. It was during the Coral Sea battles that things started turning. Before we had to run from the Japanese. Hit and run. Hit and run. But by this time we had gotten them down to our size. They started backing off a little bit. Now we could run them a little. We could hit them and not have to run.

I guess we fought several battles in the Coral Sea. We backed the Japanese all the way up to their base on Truk Island, which is north of Guadalcanal in the southern Solomon Islands. We lost several ships, but not as many as they lost. We were giving them some competition at that time.

Sometimes when there was a lull in the war, our ship would pull off at a place where we could get out on the beach for a few hours to rest. Only half of the ship could go at one time. Most of the time when it was my time to go, I wouldn't want to get off the ship so I would sell my liberty pass to some guy who did want to get off. I could get \$20 for a pass. I would just stay onboard and

work. That's what I was used to doing. You know, money wasn't worth anything to us. What could you buy? Nothing. I just saved the money to send home to my parents, brothers and sisters. Most of the guys would spend their time lying around on the beach drinking beer, cuttin' up and having a good old time. That was about all they could do. Sometimes they would play cards or gamble and such. We also had beer allotments. I had no desire to drink beer, so I sold those too. I was only making \$70 a month back then. To make a little extra money to send home, I used to run the ship's Coke machine. I made more money off the Coke machines than I did from my salary. The one who tended the coke machines also had to clean the toilets in order to get the money from the Coke machines, so I also cleaned the toilets. I didn't mind cleaning the toilets, I used to walk around in cow manure or horse manure, and sometimes I was even barefooted. I didn't have to do that in the Navy. I just had to clean toilets. I didn't mind at all. Even after sending money home to mom & dad and the kids, I still had all I needed to spend.

Sometimes it got pretty discouraging out there sailing around looking for the enemy. I don't know how long I was out there, but I know it was a long time. We never knew where we were going. The Japanese knew about that too, and they did everything they could to discourage us some more. They liked to tell over the radio about how many ships they had sunk and how many airplanes they had shot down. One day

they bragged about sinking the U.S.S. Saratoga. We happened to be patrolling along side the Saratoga that day. I looked out and there she was, this big beautiful aircraft carrier, and there was not a thing wrong with her. She was bombed later but they didn't sink her. We got a big kick out of the Japanese propaganda, it was really inspiring us to go out and fight harder to hear all those lies.

I remember the time we were tasked to escort the U.S.S. Lexington. The Lexington was some fantastic ship. We were always in demand as an escort because all our men were well trained and experienced. From the officers down to the deck hands, every man knew his business. I didn't feel that I was all that well trained, but nobody kicked me off the ship. I remember Admiral William (Bull) Halsey; he was the Admiral on the Lexington. We were on many missions with him. He was in charge of the battles at Santa Cruz and Wake Island. The Lexington did a lot of damage to the Japanese fleet before she was sunk. We did what we could to save her, but the Japanese sneaked right by us and got to her. They were never interested in sinking us except when they ran out of big targets. It was amazing how those Japanese could sneak by us and sink those ships. When we lost one, we felt like we had lost a lot of close friends. Then we would be reassigned to another battleship or carrier and go back to work hunting Japanese.

During one of my last battles on the Coral Sea, I got into a little trouble. I was working as the

battle telephone communicator, giving orders to the men who were manning the guns. I'd tell them which way to turn to hit a target. The battle got pretty hot and the noise was so loud, the men couldn't hear me over the telephone. I looked to the left of the ship and saw a low-flying Japanese torpedo plane coming toward us just above the water. I knew the gunman didn't see him. I was on the deck above the guns so I ran into the no-firing zone of the ship and stuck my head down over the side of the ship and screamed for him to fire. The gunner had seen the plane before I got there and just about the time I put my head down to tell him, he fired. The detonation from the gun blew me 20 feet across the deck. I felt excruciating pain in my head and felt both of my eardrums burst. I had a concussion and I was bleeding from my ears. I was in sickbay for three days. We had no doctor on that ship; we had only a pharmacist in sick bay. He had all he could do taking care of the seriously injured. As soon as I could get back up on my feet, I kept fighting. My ears bled for about a month. But to me that was just a minor thing. It didn't keep me from doing my job. I spent several more months on the U.S.S. MacDonough, but I still wasn't feeling too well and I was still having trouble with my ears. This time I was sent back to the States because of my injuries and battle fatigue.



I MAKE CAPTAIN (OF THE BRIG)

Welcome Home Weary Sailor
Come and heal your wounded Heart
Now you'll walk a little slower
Time to rest, you've done your part

I received my orders to report to the U.S. Naval Hospital at Mare Island, California in December to see if they could do anything for my ears. They had continued to give me trouble since they were injured during the Coral Sea battles. I stayed in the hospital for three and a half months. When I left the hospital they sent me to Treasure Island, California, where I was assigned to be the brig captain. This meant I was in charge of the prison where our troops were sent when they broke the law. I supervised about 100 prisoners. Some of the prisoners were from my old ship. When they got to the states, they were supposed to get a 30-day leave. But about half of them got only 72 hours leave. They were told that they had to stay in California so that they could return to active duty as soon as they could get our ship out of dry dock where it was being repaired. The battles were still raging and the ship was needed as soon as possible. Guess what, about half of the 150 who didn't get leave went home anyway. We called that "over the hill."

When these sailors came back to the ship, they were arrested and thrown in my brig. They were supposed to be given only bread and water for five days when they first got there. I couldn't feed my shipmates bread and water, so I helped them out when I could. I had a messenger bring them whatever they wanted to eat. I paid for it. One day my commanding officer called me into his office and asked me why the prisoners weighed more when they got out than when they went in. You know, I didn't know that he weighed the prisoners in and out. He said, "They were supposed to be on a starvation diet. Now can you explain this?" I said, "Well sir, I just couldn't do that, I've been through many battles with these guys. Some of these guys were my friends." He said, "Well what am I going to do with you. It looks like you're not going to work out on this job." I said, "Sir, you can send me back to sea duty, because shore duty is not for me." He sent me to Tacoma, Washington to catch another ship. I was there about a month while construction was being completed on the U.S.S. Pybus, a small escort aircraft carrier. It was the best duty a fellow ever had. I learned that the ship was being built to give to the British. When the Pybus was commissioned, I was assigned to that ship and our orders were to deliver it to the East Coast and give it to the British Navy.



My Fire Control Crew



My buddy and me

BACK TO WAR AGAIN

Return to Active Duty

The brave rejoined the war
Then wounded, weak and weary
Came home to fight no more

When we had turned the U.S.S. Pybus over to the British Navy, I was assigned to the U.S.S. Greenwood, DE-679, which was docked at Boston, Massachusetts. I learned when I got on board, that the Greenwood was leaving for the South Pacific the next day, 29 November 1943. The Captain met me when I came aboard, which is very unusual. He said, "Can you steer this ship?" I said, "Captain, can I go ashore in Boston tonight?" He said, "If you can steer this ship, you can do anything you want to do tonight." It so happened that only one man other than the Captain could steer the ship. ME! So I went ashore right at Sculley Square in Boston. The next morning we left harbor and I was the helmsman. I had formerly had several opportunities at sea to take over as helmsman, so I had considerable experience with the job. So I took control. When we left the harbor, it was a long way to the ocean and we were traveling on into the night. Guess what! It was messy and foggy that night. One could hardly see his hand in front of him. We were about half way to the

ocean when all of a sudden there was a large freighter headed directly toward us and into our path. It looked like we would surely crash. Well, guess what again. Without a word, I turned sharply to the right as far as I could. The freighter did likewise and we barely missed each other. But now we were out of the channel where we were supposed to travel and we had to travel in a circle to get back on our course. I learned later that we had gone right through a minefield. If we had hit a mine, the ship would likely have sunk. Over and over God took me through the war without losing my life and I had many chances. Thank you God.

We sailed through the Panama Canal again on our way back to the South Pacific. During the following months we spent most of our time on sea reconnaissance duty. I remember that one of our reconnaissance tours of duty on the sea was 76 days long. When the end of the 76 days was getting near, we started to run out of food. We had only two meals a day and the only thing we had to eat was beans and rice that had weevils in it. We were very glad to get it. Of course I was an old farm boy and I wasn't used to having the best anyway. We had to struggle to stay alive, but when you are fighting the enemy and when you don't know whether you are going to live to see tomorrow, you don't worry about what you have to eat. And that is exactly the way it was with us. I don't think any of us thought we would last a week out there. After being out for

76 days, we docked at Sidney, Australia, for a week.

After several months of sea duty, we were delighted to get to go to Sidney, Australia. We got to stay for one whole week. What a time! The Australians entertained us royally. Praise the Lord! We were ready for some R&R! We stayed there long enough to load up with food and went out again for another 67 days.

The U. S. Greenwood was a Destroyer Escort, a small rough sailing ship. On occasions the seas were so rough the sailors could not go topside. Some sailors were reassigned duty because they could not overcome being seasick.

Much of our time was spent searching for enemy observation stations. The South Pacific has many islands. Some islands had small groups of inhabitants, some might contain only one or two people, while many were uninhabited. Some of the people on these islands were enemy spies. Because of our ship's small size we were sent island hopping to look for enemy positions. The Solomon chain consists of approximately 1200 islands providing many hiding places for enemy lookouts to report on the movement of our U.S. forces. We were deployed to locate and destroy these type operations. We would often sail up rivers that were not normally navigable. I remember one river that was about fifty feet wide. The natives lived in grass huts along the riverside with their outhouses extended over the riverbank. Our ship's wake created large waves in the river.

I saw some of those outhouses literally swept off the riverbank by our ship's wake. On some occasions the outhouses were occupied. The surprised occupants exited quickly, sometimes without their cloths. We were as surprised as they were.

Many of the islands had no wild life. One thing that surprised me was I didn't see one snake on any of these islands. I was informed that an animal somewhat like a large gopher, called a mongoose, had eaten all the snakes.

The natives had no modern conveniences or manufactured items such as guns, knives or clothing. Neither did they have a monetary system. They would trade hand made items for anything they wanted. They used war clubs and crude arms for defense. As a matter of fact I have one of their hand made war clubs. A local chief traded it to me for a \$0.15 mattress cover. The chief cut a hole in it and wore it as a gown and, boy, was he proud of his new garment. By the way, the chief had been offered more than \$20.00 for that club. One of my shipmates had dropped the cash to him in his boat. He picked it up, looked at it and pitched it into the water where it floated away. He had no use for money.

I liked these island searching assignments. They kept us from several battles where many of our sister ships were lost. Thank you again, Lord. By this time in late 1944, the war was catching up

with me. I had served three South Pacific tours



Shore Patrol in Australia

and was suffering from battle fatigue. The extensive damaged to my ears continued to worsen. The captain decided it was time for me to go home.

STATESIDE DUTY

War weary and wounded
One of America's best
Was given stateside duty
To aid his peaceful rest

In October 1944, I was ordered to Washington DC for instruction at the Advanced Fire Control School. I was given leave for 30 days because I was suffering from battle fatigue. I had to report to school on November 26, 1944.

We had been constantly in battle or on reconnaissance missions so the mail to home



Sister ship to the U. S. S. Greenwood

was very slow and sometimes we just didn't have time to write. It had been several months since my folks had heard from me. They believed me to be either missing in action or dead. I was sent directly to Alabama from the South Pacific so I

didn't have time to notify my family that I was coming home. My ship docked at Mare Island, California and I headed straight home to Alabama. I arrived in Alabama by train from the West Coast early Sunday morning. I hitched a ride from the depot to our house. The church building was across the street from my house and church services were in session. You can imagine the surprise, shock, and utter joy from my family when I walked in the door of the building. I was still dressed in my uniform and had my bag on my back. There was much rejoicing and praise to God. When everyone had finished greeting me, the service finally resumed. What a great service we had that day at Grassy Church of Christ.

While I was on leave, I visited my sister in Boaz, Alabama. My sister's son, Tom Bynum, was about three years old. I took him to a 5 & 10 cent store named Elmores, a very nice store. Up to this point in my life, I had very little interest in girls. I would occasionally date first one and then another and then never give them another thought. That day my life changed forever. Forget the old adage that there is no such thing as love at first sight, I can tell you for sure that old adage is wrong. I looked across Elmores store and there stood the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. The first thing that popped into my mind was "That girl is going to be my wife, and if she is married, I'll pay for the divorce." (Folks, I don't believe in divorce, so it was a lucky thing she was single.) I asked the first sales girl that I saw in the

store who that girl across the store was. She said that she was Ruth Pounds. I said, get her to come over here, I want to ask her for a date. When Ruth came over, I tried to get a conversation started, but she wouldn't give me the time of day. I took my little nephew home and came back to Elmores. I followed Ruth to lunch and tried again to talk to her. She still wouldn't talk to me. Boy, this caused a problem. I was in love; I mean the REAL thing. She thought I was just a wild sailor trying to flirt. I followed her back to the store. They sold records on a counter that had a record player so that you could listen to the record before you bought it. I played records on the record player until the store was ready to close. They invited me to leave, so I went outside, but I wasn't about to leave. This woman was going to be my wife; she just didn't know it yet. I waited around outside until they closed Elmores, then I followed her out into the street. She asked, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going home with you." She said, "NO WAY." I said, "Yes I am", and I went home with her. After we had visited for a while with her mother, I asked her if she wanted to go for a ride. I guess she had decided that I might be an okay guy, because she consented to go. I didn't tell her where we were going, and after we had driven for a good little while, she began to get nervous. She said, "Where are we going?" I said, "To see my mama and daddy" – twenty-five miles away. She wasn't too happy about that

It was pretty late when I got her back home that night. I didn't make any advances to her, so she settled down a little. She told me later that she was beginning to think I was honest and sincere. I was! My folks were church going people. I lived across the street from the church where I grew up. I invited her to go to church with me the next Sunday. She agreed to go. After church she went home with me for lunch and ate some of my mama's good cooking and talked with my family. She made a hit with mama when she helped wash dishes for about 25 or 30 people. We were both pleased to find out that both our families were pretty reputable. It turned out to be a beautiful day – I had made a little progress. Mom and dad made things easier for us by accepting her so easily. My sister, Lillian Bynum, the one who lived in Boaz, helped a lot too. Lillian's husband, Denson Byrum was Mayor of Boaz. They were all very reputable people; my whole family was reputable. I never did change my mind about wanting to marry Ruth.

After my leave was over, I had to report to Washington, DC, to Advanced Fire Control School. For the first time in my career, I was not happy at my duty station. I was too far away from the woman I loved. I wrote to her, I called her, and I courted her every way I could think of. But she was slow to respond. She and the other girls around Boaz were taught to be very careful not to get involved with a military man. Remember, too, that she had only met me that one weekend and went to church with me one time. I understood

why she was hard to reach and, you know, I was glad. It made me respect her even more. We continued to communicate frequently and see each other occasionally. After about six months or so, she had no doubt that I was very serious about getting married, and she had become quite attached to me. I loved her mother, Mom Pounds, and she loved me. Mom Pounds was a widow and I think I reminded her of her son, Howard Pounds, who was in the Army in Europe, in serious combat.

When I finished training in Washington, I was transferred to the U.S. Naval Hospital at Bethesda, MD, for treatment. My ears were still giving me a lot of trouble. I was there for 29 days. I was transferred from there to the Commandant 8th Naval District in New Orleans, LA. I was assigned to the Personnel and Training Command to be trained for a new job. Because of my injuries, I was given limited duty at my new duty station. After I was trained, I was assigned to the Industrial Manager, Federal Office Building, in New Orleans for duty.

While I was stationed in New Orleans, Ruth and I stayed in close touch. By this time Ruth had become the assistant manager of Elmores store. One day I got a weekend pass. I rode the train all night and arrived Saturday morning in Boaz. I went directly to Elmores store where Ruth was working. The first question I asked Ruth when I walked in was "How much money do you have?" She said, "Fifty dollars." I said, "I've got five, let's get married." She tossed

the keys to the store to her assistant, and we left arm in arm. No wedding plans had been made and we didn't make any. We knew that we only had the weekend, so we went by and picked up Mom Pounds and took her over to my folks house in Arab. I went for Brother Romer Williams, R.L. William's father, to perform the ceremony. The date was May 5, 1945. I called my supervisor and she gave me a couple more days to help Ruth get her things together, then we boarded the train back to New Orleans. When we got back to New Orleans, the streets were full of people laughing and dancing and screaming, "The Japanese have surrendered!" "The Japanese have surrendered!" It was forever after known as "VJ day." For a short time, Ruth and I lived with some friends of mine. We finally found an apartment we could afford and bought a few pieces of used furniture. We were as happy then as if we were in a castle. We have been happy together ever since. As I said, I also loved Mom Pounds. For a while she came to New Orleans and lived with us. Her income combined with ours helped make ends meet.

I continued to have trouble with my ears so finally the Navy doctors ordered me to go to the U.S. Naval Hospital in New Orleans for what they called a Medical Survey. I was examined and tested for 30 days. The results of that survey found that I was no longer "fit for service". On September 18, 1945, I was given an honorable medical discharge. I was then considered to be a

“Disabled Veteran.” I held the rank of Fire Controlman, First Class.

During my service, I was awarded several medals and ribbons including eight bronze stars and two silver stars. These decorations were for battles which included action in Pearl Harbor, Air Action Off Bougainville Island, Salamaua-Lae



The prettiest girl in the whole USA!

Raid, Guadalcanal-Tulaghi Landing, Santa Cruz Islands, several battles on the Coral Sea and for the Capture & Defense of Guadalcanal. I was given four service ribbons, one each for the Asiatic Pacific Campaign, American Defense, the American Campaign, and for World War II. Later, I was awarded a special congressionally approved Purple Heart as a survivor of the Pearl Harbor attack.



1st Anniversary - 1946

Me and my Gal - 1944

CIVIL SERVICE – THEN HOME AGAIN

Retired from service,
The old ships and me
A change of commission
Before we're set free

After my discharge from the Navy, the Navy asked me to set up a maintenance organization in New Orleans working to decommission ships and put them in mothballs and to handle guns taken off merchant ships. One thing we had to do when we decommissioned a ship was to dispose of the furnishings on the ship. We were not allowed to sell or give the things away, nor could we take them home with us; we had to pitch them into the gulf. That was really hard for us to do. None of us former enlisted guys had much of anything, and we had to dispose of washing machines, pianos, tables, and everything else that wasn't screwed down. I had 75 men in my organization. I was on this job for about a year when I was transferred to Orange, Texas to continue decommissioning ships. It took three years to finish the job of decommissioning these ships. When the job was finished, I was relieved of my duties and dropped from Navy civilian service. I was then a displaced veteran.

By this time, Ruth and I had started a family. Our first child, Lewis David, junior, was

born while we lived in New Orleans. Our second child, Donald Howard, was born while we lived in Orange, Texas.

Jobs were hard to find. Ruth's brothers, Burrell Brown and Howard Pounds were also displaced veterans looking for work. Howard stayed in Texas, but Burrell and I decided to go back to Alabama and look for work with the government. We both eventually found a job in Anniston at the Army Depot. Because I was a disabled veteran and a displaced career employee, they had to hire me. They didn't like being told what to do, obviously, because they did hire me – at my old salary – but they put me to work cleaning restrooms. Well, I had done that before. Remember I'm an old farm boy and I don't mind cleaning restrooms. I really liked being responsible for only myself. Previously I had been a top manager supervising 75 people. If they wanted me to clean toilets, I could thank God that I had a job. They would be the ones to answer for making it rough on me. I was a Christian, I loved the Lord and I loved people. Because of my assignment, I was able to do about anything with my spare time. I used the opportunity to talk to people about the Lord. I started a Bible study during our lunch hour and lots of good fellow workers attended the study from all kinds of faiths. The study was very successful. At first I didn't think we were doing much good, teaching the Lord's word, but later I found out that some of the men became Christians and I expect to see them in Heaven. I

remember one in particular, a fellow by the name of Charlie Borden. There were several others, some have gone home already. The boss, Mr. Jenson, was a Catholic and of course he didn't attend the studies. At first he wasn't very kind about them, but in time, things changed.

Mr. Jenson received a disassembled very complicated machine for testing gyros and other things. It looked like a tank in some ways. His shop was supposed to test gyros, etc., with this machine. It was very large and weighed tons. There were about two hundred very intelligent, well-trained technicians in his shop, but nobody knew how to put this thing together and make it work. Mr. Jenson knew that I had a lot of training and experience working with machinery, so one day he called me into his office and asked me if I thought I could set up this tester and make it work. I was always a positive thinker, so I told him I thought I could if he would allow a man I would pick to help me. That suited him fine because he was in a tight bind. Mr. Jenson was a smart man, smarter than I was, but he was afraid of that machine. So he allowed me to go to work on the machine. We worked diligently until the task was completed, switched on the power, and the machine hummed like a hummingbird. I knew nothing about the hazards of the machine, so I was not afraid of it. He thought I was a wizard, but I was nothing but an old country boy with a lot of courage. Mr. Jenson said, "I'm promoting you to Branch Chief." I told him, "I'm doing just fine cleaning restrooms, I don't want a promotion." He

said, "I'm the boss, and if you want to work here you have to do what you're told." There were about thirty or forty technicians who were in line for that promotion, but I got it. I said, "If that's the way you feel, what do you want me to do?" So from then on as long as I was at Anniston Army Depot, I had a good job, good pay, and was very satisfied with my work as a supervisor in a nice office. The Lord works in mysterious ways and He has blessed me over and over again. Thank you Lord.

An old friend of mine, Mr. Whitney, lost his job at Anniston Army Depot and needed work. Every time I saw him, I remembered the time when he offered me a drink of moonshine whiskey that he took out of his locker at work. I told him that he had to get the whiskey off post, and he did. I didn't drink at all, and I didn't want any of my employees to drink alcohol on the job either. I liked this old friend very much, so I told him that I would do what I could to help him get work. I took the rest of the day off and took him to another friend of mine who worked in personnel, Mr. Blackwell. He was unable to find a job for Mr. Whitney, but he said that he wanted me to interview for a job that he knew of at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, in the Missile Development Organization. I told him I was happy with my present job, but as a favor to him, I agreed to talk to one of the German bosses, Mr. Schuler. Mr. Schuler worked for Mr. Heinberg and Dr. Von Braun. Mr. Schuler was very pleased with the interview and told personnel and me that he

would like for me to work for him. They offered me a considerable raise and the job was only 30 miles from where I grew up near Arab. That was too much to resist, so I took the job and moved my family to Huntsville and I began work on missiles at Redstone Arsenal. It turned out to be very interesting work. My supervising job was also easier because I had only five instrument makers working for me.



Don and David - Christmas 1948



Two little men - 1951



David liked to sit this way

MY SECOND JOB – PREACHING

My best in life I learned to give
By teaching from God's word
Best job a man could ever have
Is working for my Lord

I have several friends who had become young preachers, Carlos Kirkpatrick and Ancile Jenkins, Elbert Lewis, and Junior Moore were four of them. Most of the rural churches didn't have a full-time preacher in those early days. So the young preachers would preach on monthly assignments at one church or another in the country congregations. I would drive the boys to one church drop one off and on to the next and drop off another until I had dropped them all off. I would stay with the last one I dropped off, and then I would go back and pick up the others when the services were over. It was during this time that I began to feel the call that God needed me to preach too. The Bible teaches that everyone who is taught and becomes a Christian is to be a teacher of God's word. (Matthew 28:19-20) I was a little afraid to try, but I thought, "If Carlos and Ancile can do it, so can I." My little home congregation in Grassy was very supportive of my desire to preach. I was privileged to preach there for about six months at one period of time.

For many years, I was working at Redstone Arsenal during the day, and preaching at night and on weekends. I preached on a part-time basis at several small congregations of the Church of Christ in the rural areas of north Alabama and southern Tennessee. Elkmont, Mullberry, Liberty Hill, Camargo, and Taft in Tennessee; and Brocks Chapel, Friendship, and Grant Mountain in Alabama were among the congregations where I preached. I'm sure there are some that I can't remember. I preached at the Taft congregation for about six years. My objective was to preach until the congregation built up enough to support a full-time preacher and obtain good leadership like elders and deacons. Then I would move on to the next church and begin again to build the congregation. I assisted other preachers in building their congregations, like Grant, which grew to a membership of about 125 people while I was helping. I spent a lot of time studying the Bible with potential members and helped with their baptisms. My first objective in life is to serve God. This doesn't mean that I neglected my job. I worked to support my family and I enjoyed my work. I didn't worry about putting the job second as long as I knew that my work was good and my supervisors were pleased with it.

I was privileged to preach in Gospel Evangelistic Meetings at many locations in the U.S. and in several foreign countries, such as, Germany, Switzerland, and New Zealand. I preached as a fill-in preacher at numerous

congregations in the area. Several times I preached at Farley Church of Christ in south Huntsville, Alabama, where my oldest son, David, is presently an elder. All of my preaching assignments have been happy occasions for me. Usually, my wife was with me and we had some very exciting times doing the Lord's work.

Many times Ruth and I would spend a weekend in someone's home and visit and study the Bible with them. On one of these occasions, we needed to baptize a person and the only water around was a pond that was owned by a very prominent man in the neighborhood who was not a Christian. I asked him if we could use his pond to baptize a man. He said yes and went down and cut the wire on a new barbed wire fence he had just installed so that we could drive our cars down to the pond. I asked him if I could study the Bible with him, he laughed and said, "Oh I'm all right." I hope he is.

Byron Laird preached for the West Huntsville Church of Christ for twenty-six years while I was serving as one of the elders. He was one of my most supportive brothers-in Christ. We made several mission trips together throughout the states and Canada. He has always been a great source of encouragement and strength for me. We spent many successful and happy hours together doing the Lord's work. Byron is one the most effective preachers in the Lord's church. I thank the Lord for Byron and his wife Tillie. I thank God for blessing us with such good friends and co-workers.

I would have to write a whole new book to tell you about all the unusual times that I have experienced while in the preaching business. I will tell you about a few. Anyone who knows me knows that I love to fish. I had a friend named Johnny Coppett who was a captain with the State Police. Johnny was not a Christian. I had talked to him on several occasions, but he still had not obeyed the Lord's command to be baptized for remission of his sins. Johnny and I went fishing one day. It was the perfect time for me to talk to him about his soul. During that talk, Johnny decided he wanted to be baptized. We just got out of the boat; I baptized him right there in the river. We got back in the boat and had a good time fishing the rest of the day. Johnny is still a very faithful Christian until this day.

I saw a man standing on the street who had no arms, just short stubs sticking out from his shoulders. I could see that he was a very underprivileged person, so I told him that I would buy his lunch if he would allow me to watch him eat. He got his food and stuck a spoon in a rubber band on that stub and ate as well as I could. His acceptance of his handicap fascinated me. I took him home with me. It was obvious that he had not had a bath in some time and he could not reach his feet. I washed his feet and gave him some socks and put them on his feet. I took him to a motel and paid the rent for a week. I wanted to invite the man to go to church with me, so I called the next day to check on him and the hotel manager said that he had spent the night

and left early the next morning taking the bed sheets and pillow cases with him. I never saw him again.

That story reminds me of another unusual thing that occurred one night near Morgan City, Alabama, when I was having a home Bible study with a man who had only one arm. He had lost the other arm in an accident of some sort. When we had finished studying, the man said he wanted to be baptized. We went out to a pond; it was about midnight. We shined lights out into the water and could see what I thought was snake eyes shining all over the water. I had always heard that snakes don't bite at night. I don't know whether that's true or not, but it didn't matter, we waded out into the water and I baptized him. The Lord was really with us that night. We didn't get bit.

There was one case that was particularly rewarding to me. There was a man named Joe Gatlin in the West Huntsville congregation who attended services with his wife and daughter. One Sunday after worship, Joe and I went into a classroom and discussed the Lord's church and His commandments. I ask Joe if he would like to become a member of the Lord's church. He said, "Not now," and I wondered if I had done the right thing. My worries were all set aside the next Sunday morning before services when he walked up to me and said, "I'm ready to be baptized." Praise God! Without any formal announcement, we went to prepare for the baptism. By the time we were ready, word had spread through the

church like wildfire and more than 100 people were present for the baptism and to welcome him into the family of God. What a wonderful day!

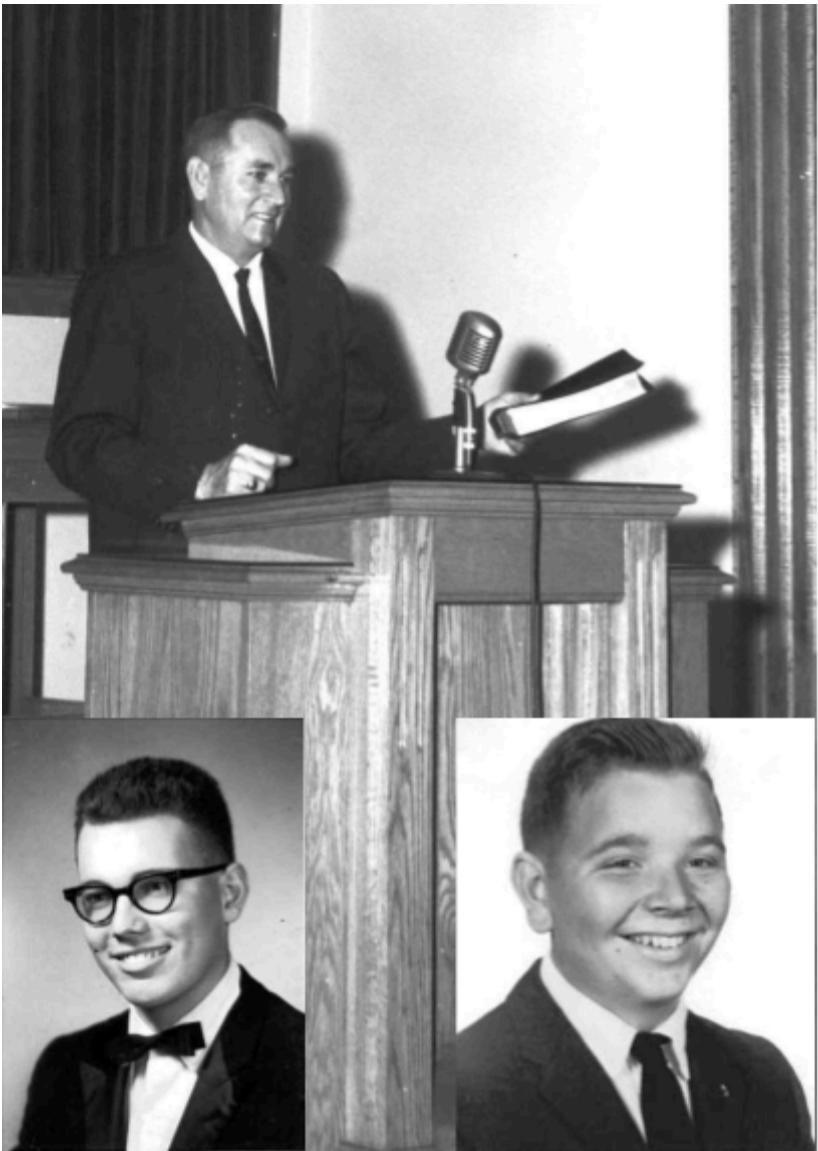
I haven't kept accurate records during all the years I have preached. The records that I do have reflect that during my years as a minister of the Gospel, I have taught and baptized about 50 people, I have performed about 25 weddings and held more than 50 funerals.

I plan to continue these efforts as long as I live and am physically able with God's help. I will go to eternity at life's end and so will you. I hope you are prepared for the judgement so that you can spend eternity with God, Jesus and all the heavenly hosts forever and ever. Prepare yourself, read your Bible and do what God requires of us. I hope to see you in Heaven.





Byron and Tillie Laird with Lewis and Ruth on a mission trip.



Showing the way for the next generation.

WORKING FOR THE SPACE INDUSTRY

If you asked if I'd work for the Germans
I promptly would answer "No Way!"
But my German friends worked on missiles
Right here in the old U.S.A

My immediate supervisor at the Government Missile Development Division (GMDD) was a German scientist, Mr. Albert Schuler. His supervisor was Dr. Von Braun. Another interesting scientist, Dr. Seiber, worked with me. He was a very intelligent man who shared his knowledge and experience with me. I was very impressed with these men, especially Dr. Seiber and Dr. Von Braun. Their work with missiles fascinated me. I learned a lot from them during the five years I worked on the Missile Development Program.

I had an unusual problem during my work at GMDD. My immediate supervisor suspected me of being an intelligence agent and he told me so. Of course I was not an agent of any kind, but I doubt that I ever convinced him of that. He was probably suspicious because I got along so well with all the Germans. Of course you know my name, Ellenburg, is German. I guess that went a long way toward my being accepted as one of the team of Germans. Then again, I treat everyone

the way I want to be treated, and that attitude has always worked for me.

I worked on the missile program through several phases of missile development, including the Redstone. By then I decided I was ready for a change. A supervisory job came open in the Electronic Maintenance Branch, Field Maintenance Division at Redstone Arsenal. I was trained and experienced in this type work in the U.S. Navy. I interviewed for the job and was accepted. I was made Chief, which was a very good promotion for me. My immediate supervisor in the Maintenance Division was Col. Skillinger.

My job was to supervise maintenance of all kinds of electronic, mechanical and hydraulic equipment. Since hydraulics was used on all the missiles, I was tasked to work on all types of missiles. My employees and I were required to perform highly skilled, sensitive tasks to develop instruments for the missiles. I felt really blessed to be able to work on such an important job.

The Government decided to make a separate division for calibrating missile parts. I was assigned as the Chief of the new Calibration Center. I got in on the ground floor, so it was my responsibility to lead a team that decided what type facility we needed and how much funding we would need to build it. I had to appear before the Congressional Budget Committee in Washington to present my case for funds. I was competing with Dr. Mark McDaniels, who was asking for funding for a new research laboratory at

Redstone. Dr. McDaniels beat us out of the funds the first year, but we were able to get the funds the second year we presented our case. I didn't feel too bad that Dr. McDaniels beat me out of the funds. After all, I was just a little farm boy with a high school education and a few college courses and he was a P.H.D. I was no competition, but we both finally got our badly needed laboratories.

The new facility was a huge concrete masonry building with offices, restrooms, and storage rooms located around the perimeter. The three main laboratories were in the center, separated from the rest of the building by a continuous hallway, which acts as a buffer zone of dead air space. Because of the accuracy of measurements – some to within one millionth of an inch – made at the Calibration Center, it was designed with features unique to that building. The inside was designed so that outside vibrations would not throw off delicate operations.

I continued to be the Chief of the Calibration Laboratory for a few years. The responsibilities of the lab developed into a worldwide operation. I was required to attend special training classes and to travel to several foreign countries, mostly in Europe. The organization grew to the point where it employed several hundred people. I had contractors as well as military and civilian people working for me. Because of the phenomenal growth of the laboratory, the Army reorganized it into divisions and a General was appointed as Chief of the laboratory. The new people who came in were

much higher qualified than I was. I felt that they were properly assigned. I was very proud of my accomplishments at the Calibration Center. My supervisors were also pleased with my work. I continued to be given very important missions to Washington. My supervisor, Don Hervig, even relied on me to go to Washington without knowing what my mission was. I felt like Abraham of the Bible when he told me "Go to Washington and call me and I will tell you what to do." And, I would go.

After a few years, I decided that I would like to retire. I asked Ruth if she would mind if I retired from Civil Service. She said, "Whatever you want to do, I'll be happy." She always said that every time I made a major decision. I know that my jobs kept me away from our home a lot during those years, and Ruth had the bulk of the child-rearing job in our family. She was a very good mother and our boys have turned out beautifully. Both are good Christian men and are very responsible leaders of their own families.

I went into personnel and told them I was considering retirement. They said, "Before you leave, you will have to turn down another job." The job they were talking about was in the Pershing Missile Project Office. I was to be Chief of the General Maintenance Branch. I had no intentions of accepting the position, but two things happened that made me change my mind. Mr. Sam Cowell was presently holding the job. When he learned that I had interviewed for the job, he chewed me out for even considering taking his job. It meant that he would be transferred to

another job. I don't like to be chewed out, that was the first reason. Secondly, I liked the man who would be my immediate supervisor, Lt. Col. Carl Powe. He was a considerate religious man whom I felt would be fair and honest. The work was a culmination of all the jobs I had held previously, so I felt confident that I could handle it. I took the job. It was the best position I ever held with the Government.

Even though I was trained in maintaining combat missiles, I knew less about the job than anyone else there did. I knew I had a lot to learn. In the office, my people cooperated and my supervisor was tolerant, so things went well. We had Pershing Missiles deployed in several parts of the world, mostly in Germany. Soon I was issued orders to go many places in the U.S. and Europe to review my responsibilities. My crew and I were responsible for maintenance of all Pershing Missiles worldwide. My first task as Branch Chief was to supervise updating the fielded Pershing Missiles and correct any malfunctions we found in the fielded systems. I was working for the smartest people I had ever been associated with. Our motto was, "Can Do," and we did. So off to Germany we went. The crew used the trip as an opportunity to party and be entertained. Since I was a long-time Christian and no party person, none of that appealed to me in the least.

I remember one occasion when my boss asked me to take care of a matter concerning the Germans. The Germans owed the U.S. about six

million dollars back pay for maintenance on their missiles for the past six years that had been paid out of our operating funds. My division supervisor, Col. Skimp, told me to get the Germans to pay us what they owed us. So like our motto says, "Can Do!" even though I wasn't quite sure how I could do it.

When we arrived in Bonn, Germany, I called a meeting of the Pershing people and the high level German people who worked with their Pershing program. The first thing I did at the meeting was to announce, "You people will receive no further support from my U.S. contractor until you pay the debt that you owe for maintenance services." The U.S. contractor was Martin Company, Orlando, Florida. Now this really tore things up. The Germans hated me and they let everyone in Washington and Huntsville know about it. However, the first thing they did was pay us the money they owed us. The second thing they did was to send a message to Washington and Huntsville that said, "Don't send that Ellenburg fellow back over here again!" When I got home, the Col. called me into his office and asked me, "What did you do to those Germans?" I told him, "I stopped all services that they were receiving from the fifty Martin men that we had in Germany." That was the only time I can remember that a Col. hugged a person's neck. He was happy and Washington was happy. I was relieved, because I had not told anyone what I was going to do, and I didn't know how he would react to what I had done. Thank You Lord!

I told the Col. that I didn't want to go back to Germany anyway. He said, "Don't unpack your bags yet, you're going back to Germany." I did go back, several times, and they treated me nicely from then on. I stayed on that job for about two or three years.



Don Hervig, David Rice, the new calibration Lab building and me.

RETIRED, AT HOME, STILL BUSY

I was busy as any man alive
Once had two jobs, I then had five!
An elder, preacher, on the Board at MA
DAV Chaplain, Giving food away

Eventually the time came when I could work no longer, so I retired from civil service. With my combined Navy and civil service experience, I had accumulated more than thirty-three years of service.

After retirement from Government service, I began to work in the community. My boys were already grown and gone from home. They were keeping themselves busy working and rearing our grandchildren. My wife did a great job rearing them and now we have three lovely grandchildren to love. I found myself getting very involved in several different areas of community service work. I still preached frequently; I was an elder in the Church of Christ; a board member at Madison Academy, the Christian school where my boys attended; a service officer and Chaplain for the Disabled American Veterans; and I managed a benevolent organization.

One of the greatest privileges a man can have is to become an elder in the Lord's church. I was an elder for many years. As an elder of the church, I was privileged to travel to Sydney,

Australia and to the Lambasa Church of Christ in the Fiji Islands, to meet with the missionaries serving there. It was a very successful trip. I enjoyed meeting the brothers and sisters in Australia. When we arrived at the airport in Fiji, a group from the church, including several little boys, was there to meet us. The little boys were shouting: "Bula vanockie non gossie!" "Bula vanockie non gossie!" I asked our interpreter what they were saying. He said they were told that an elder was coming to visit and they are saying "Hello, old man! How are you?"

I have been given several awards as Chaplain of the DAV. In 1996 I was given the State of Alabama Governor's Annual Alabama Veteran of the Year Award. Governor Fob James gave the award to me at a banquet that was given in my honor. The plaque reads "Disabled American Veterans - Who has done most to foster the highest ideals in community service, membership, and our American way of life."

I guess one of the most rewarding things in which I have been involved is the benevolent program I managed. It began when I was in charge of our congregation's benevolent program and evolved into a very large operation with as many as six or seven participating congregations and other organizations. We first approached the Kroger store on Drake Avenue and asked if they would sell us their day old bread to distribute to needy families in our area. The store manager, Mr. Lane, was receptive to the idea from the moment I approached him. The Kroger store

began giving truckloads of surplus items, including day-old bread and other “nearly new” groceries, to church organizations and the DAV to distribute to the needy. These items would ordinarily be thrown away. A typical day’s truckload of food may consist of orange juice, milk, cookies, cakes, and bread. One day I was given 1,200 pounds of meat, because the store’s freezer had broken down.

Food may be taken door-to-door in poverty-stricken areas of the county or deliveries may go directly to a rescue mission or the food bank or on an impromptu drive for storm or flood victims, depending on the need. At first Ruth and I tried to make the deliveries alone, but soon realized that the job was too big for the two of us. I began to seek others to help us.

I am still in charge of arranging for organizations that will take the food to the needy. When one congregation loses their benevolent program manager or drops out of the program, I recruit another sponsor. We have fed a lot of hungry families during the time I have been in charge of this program. We wish hungry people weren’t out there, but as long as they are, we plan to distribute free food.

As I looked back over my life before retirement, I realize that I have been blessed more than I ever could have imagined. Even though I spent a lot of time in hospitals, I was blessed because the Navy paid for my care. I feel that God and the Navy did all they could for me.

While I was in the Navy, I remember being in a lot of hospitals for long periods of time. I remember the Hospital ship, U.S.S. Relief; the U.S. Naval Hospital at Pearl Harbor; the U.S. Naval Hospital at Mare Island, California; the U.S. Navy Hospital at St. Albans, Long Island, New York; the U.S. Naval Hospital at Bethesda, Maryland; and the U.S. Navy Hospital at New Orleans, Louisiana. I had what I thought was appendicitis, I had battle fatigue, mastoiditis, and ear infections, but most of the time I was having trouble with my ears from the blast that burst my eardrums. I remember once taking over 100 penicillin shots, four shots a day for 30 days. The shots provided only a little relief from the problem. Since my retirement from the Navy, the Government has provided over 50 years of medical care for me. Thank you U.S. Government. Thank you Lord! I guess I had been hospitalized at least 15 times with ear problems, when I learned about the Shea Ear Clinic in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. Shea diagnosed my latest ear problem as Meniere's Disease. He rebuilt the ear canals and put in new eardrums. I am gradually regaining some hearing in those ears. I still need to wear two hearing aids. Thank you and God bless you Dr. Shea.

LIFE IS STILL VERY GOOD

THANK YOU LORD

Epilogue



Alabama Disable American of the Year Award
Presented by Governor Fob James

I have it done, I now can rest
And fall asleep, book on my breast
A smile upon my weary face
Still praising God's redeeming Grace

At this writing, my two fine sons are still doing well. David with his precious wife, Connie, have two children, the oldest, Tanya, is married to Ryan Kimmet and they have my only great grandson, Zachary. David and Connie's youngest child, Kyle, was recently married to a beautiful girl named Sarah. Don with his precious wife, Nancy, have one son, Stentsen, who is in the Marines. I am very proud of my family and I can't praise my lovely wife Ruth enough for what she has done for them.

My son David spent four years in the Air Force with a tour in Viet Nam during that conflict. My son Don lost the sight in one of his eyes when he was very young, so he could not qualify for military service. Don is very proud of his son's choice to join the Marine reserves. Don is presently a deacon at Decatur Road Church of Christ in Birmingham. We have had very faithful children since their youth.

I continue to try to help save souls the best I can, but I am presently 82 years young and age has its limitations. Teaching lost souls to obey our Lord is still the most rewarding part of my life.



At this time, Ruth and I have been married 57 years. Life has sometimes treated us roughly, but our love for each other has never wavered. Her love for God and for us has sustained our family through all these years. We are doing what we can for this world while we wait for our new home in heaven. God Bless All of You.

“Amazing grace,
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost,
But now I’m found
Was blind
But now I see.”



Don't grieve for me, for now I am free
I am following the path God laid for me
I took His hand when I heard Him call
I turned my back and left it all.
I could not stay another day
To laugh, to love, to work or play.
Tasks left undone must stay that way.
I found that peace at the close of the day.
If my parting has left a void
Then fill it with remembered joy.
A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss,
Ah yes, these things I too will miss.
Be not burdened with times of sorrow
I wish for you the sunrise of tomorrow.
My life's been full, I savored much.
Good friends, good times, a loved one's touch.
Perhaps my time seemed all too brief
Don't lengthen it now with undue grief.
Lift up your heart and share with me
God wanted me now, He set me free.

END NOTES

1. Inside flyleaf: Quotation from of the song, *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, words by Samuel Smith.
2. Page 4: Quotation from the song, *Get All Excited*, Words by Bill Gaither.
3. Page 17: Quotation from the song, *You're In the Army Now*.
4. Page 29: Quotation from the song, Battle Hymn of the Republic, words by Julia Ward Howe.
5. Page 81: Quotation from the song, *Amazing Grace*, words by John Newton.
6. Page 82: Poem by Shannon Lee Moseley.