

I was asked to write down some of my experiences that I had in the military. When I start, at 5 years old, it will seem strange, but what I remembered at 5 will have a bearing throughout my life.

So at 5 years old, my mother and I, were listening to the radio of the casualties that happen that week in the War (WWII). Four of my Mothers brothers were in the military. They were Donald Runnoe, Cyril Runnoe, Gorden Runnoe and Howard Runnoe. All were in the Army except Gorden, who was in the Navy. Later in life I learned that Uncle Don was in the National Guard in Marinette/Menomonee (Wisconsin/Michigan) and had contacted his brothers when the War started and told them, if they were going to enlist, to come to him. Three did and Gorden (Uncle BOOP) headed for the Navy.

When the uncles were in the Army they were stationed in the Pacific. Donald Runnoe went on to be a War Hero. His bio can be found on the internet under Donald Runnoe, He was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. I found out later in life that Don, Cy and Howie all served together in the same Company. Uncle Howie told my mother about a couple of heroic episodes that Don did, that I over-heard. Everything about the man was heroic.

The listening to the radio announcements, the war stories told, the movies of battles and heroes, Audrey Murphy, and more; all reinforced my memory of listening to those early radio broadcasts.

When the war ended all of them (THANK GOD) came home and stopped at our house, which was Gray St. Green Bay Wisconsin. Green Bay had one of the main Railroad stops close enough to the farm area that the Uncles were from (Black Creek, WI).

1952 and I'm 15 yrs old and in 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Central Catholic High, and they have ROTC. Guess who joined. A year later and I'm a Captain in the ROTC and one of the Sergeant teachers of ROTC, who was also an active National Guard person, got me, my brother Ron and some friends interested in joining the National Guard.

Joining the National Guard was interesting. Right at the beginning I had one of these memorable experiences. The Captain, who was to swear us in, asked what we wanted to do. I told him I wanted to be a Tank Driver. He said that may take a little time. That it required a Corporal rating, and (that) may take some time. However, he said that there were two tanks in the basement garage and they could only get one tank out. Supposedly, the person who put them away, over a year ago, is no longer around. Therefore, last year at summer camp they had only one tank available. I could see this upset him, having only one tank at summer camp.

I asked if I could try to get them out. He said go ahead. I was fortunate that I had spent a lot of summers on my Uncles farm, he had, a double brake tractor technology, same as the Sherman Tank. A short time later I told the captain to look out the window and there sat the two tanks. He swore me into the National Guard, gave me a Corporal rating, and completed the necessary paper work.

That takes us to Camp McCoy in northern Wisconsin. This was my first year at Camp and it was a mixture of basic training and specific training in Tank technology. Such as 'hand signals, tank nomenclature, guns,

cannon, turret, engine(s), weight, open terrain driving, etc.'. It was fun. Our Captain informed us that there was a General coming to Camp to inspect. They called it an 'Inspecting General' and they were usually tough. If we were to see him, he could be identified by a Star Flag mounted on his vehicle. Sure enough not long afterwards here comes a Jeep with a one star flag. After he stops I walk up to him, give him my best salute, and introduce myself. He acknowledges the same way and we have a brief discussion. Afterwards, we salute each other and as I leave he pats me on the back and whispers something to me. When I get back to our group my Captain says, "What was all of that about?". I tell him I heard he was a big hero in WWII and I wanted to tell the General I was proud of him. I never told the Captain that he was my uncle Don. The following year at Camp McCoy we were given two Patton Tanks to replace our old Sherman Tanks. What's the old saying, "It's not WHAT you know but WHO you know".

Off to 1955 and basic training at Fort Leonard Wood. The four of us who had signed up for National Guard elected not to go 'active duty National Guard', but enlist on our own. Out of the original group, Ron (my brother) picked the Marines, Brian Campbell the Army, Chuck Radossevich the Army-Air Force and Russ Massey the Marines. I had chosen the Army and therefore I was off to Fort Leonard Wood MO. As soon as the bus arrived at the Fort a Corporal came out and declared himself equal to Jesus Christ, and if we disobeyed him, it was hell to pay. I broke ranks went up to the Corporal and said you cannot talk to us in that manner. A few minutes later I was in front of the Captain in charge of a company (50-60 men). He had looked up my history and knew I had ROTC and National Guard, and said they were short on drill

sergeants and handed me an arm band with staff sergeant strips and made me a drill sergeant. Hard to believe but it happened. Of course, when I completed basic training, I was a PFC.

Off to Fort Bliss Texas, spent a short time there. Assigned the first day to Red Canyon Proving Grounds in New Mexico. Stayed the weekend at a YMCA and reported Monday morning at Ft Bliss Transportation Center. Boarded a bus and traveled to Red Canyon. The trip sounds like nothing but, in reality, it was my first experience in traveling. New Mexico was and is amazing. You didn't have to go far to see change. From big city to desert, from desert to mountains, from mountains to canyons. As we entered Red Canyon and arrived at the camp, one of the first things that hit me was tents, out-houses, some Quonsets, Mess Hall and two old fashion water tanks. Welcome Home!

The first thing you learn is that we are permanent party and the troops stationed around the United States, in Nike posts, are our guests. We not only are there for their training and firing off a missile, but too feed them and house them. Too have the 'things' they need. Such as smokes, clothes, snacks, drinks, and BEER.

Of course the reason Red Canyon Proving ground exists is because of the NIKE Missile. It is a SAM Missile. That is S for Surface, A for Air and M for Missile, The missile sites are stationed all around the perimeter of the US. It is obvious that these locations could not 'practice' shooting the missile off, hence, Red Canyon. So, there are a lot of permanent party people there too make sure they can fire a missile if necessary.

I was assigned to an area that kept electric generators working. These generators were important for electricity at camp, for; housing, administration, food, etc, and power at the Missile Site. Also, when the packages (this is what we called our guests) were firing off the missile, a lot of government guests would arrive for the SHOW. Many times these individuals were Senators, Congress Representatives, and in some cases wives.

When these dignitaries arrive it is usually by plane arriving at Holloman Air Force Base. This base is approximately 30-50 miles by air but longer (125 miles) by vehicle. Although there is a small landing field at Red Canyon it is not designed to handle civilian planes or people. When guests arrive at Holloman, it is necessary for a number of us permanent party people to be assigned vans and go pick them up at Holloman. It was on one of these occasions when I was assigned to pick up wives that I have my most unforgettable experience.

I picked up five wives at Holloman and drove for about two hours to get us to Red Canyon. We had passed the Admin area and were headed for the down range missile site, when one of the ladies called out to me to stop. I stopped and asked what the problem was, she said that she was pregnant and thought that her baby was coming and I should take her to the hospital. I informed her that there was no hospital at Red Canyon and the nearest hospital would be where we just came from, Holloman Air Force base. She said, "Well let's get moving." I flagged down the next vehicle and transferred the other four women to that van with instructions for them to find her husband (who was a Senator) and have him contact Holloman as soon as possible. Also, instruct Holloman to send two Helicopters; one to pick up his wife and how to find us; and a second Helicopter for him,



After that was done the Senators wife and I headed back towards our exit/entrance. However, we never got more than a mile and she stopped me again, this time she said her water had broke and the baby was due. I'm 18 years old and have the faintish idea what was going on. She said I had to help her deliver her baby. Ya right, so she told me what to do. To help the baby by holding the baby's head and not to pull, but help guide the body out of the womb. She pushed and I guided and shortly the baby was born, she also explained how to tie off the umbilical cord, which I did. We no sooner got the job done when I heard a Helicopter coming and flagged it down. It was the right one and had two paramedics who helped her aboard with the baby. To this day I cannot recall her name or the Senators. I've tried in recent years to contact Holloman with no results.

With that experience driving, I got a new job in the Motor Pool. I do not know where I learned this little saying but it goes like this. When answering in a phone in the motor pool, the guy answering says; "We got Jeeps, Peeps, Duce-In-Halves, Great Big Double Cluchers that bend in the middle, HELLO'. Well wouldn't you know I answered that way and it was the Camp Commander Col. McCarthy. After a chewing out he said he needed a driver because his main guy was out on leave. I told him I would be right up. So started my friendship with the Col..

Well the experience at Red Canyon is not done yet. Shortly after the baby incident I was helping Louie (part-time) at the PX at camp when Louie asked where I got the learning in running a store. I informed him, while I was in high school, I had about 3-4 jobs around town. One was a small grocery store, which included ordering, stocking, pricing and some cash register experience. Another was working in a tavern in early morning cleaning, stocking and clean-up. There were a couple others,

one was making donuts in a river of hot oil. Louie said he was going to put me in as PX manager because he was getting out of the Army in a couple of weeks. He did, I got it, and was now getting two pay checks. One check from the Army, and one check from the PX. Shortly after I became manager, I was instrumental in getting a new PX store built. The old one consisted of a Quonset with a tent attached to the front. The front wall of the Quonset had been removed allowing for a lot more space. The new PX, was a Butler type building, which was about four times in size of the old building. It also had an office with a safe and a bed room area. It was pretty cool. The time period now was mid 1956.

At this time I was able to hire a couple of helpers. The addition of a Beer Hall was part of the reason for more help. I remember a couple of names, Royce Martin and Eugene Bush (he was from Texas -- Humm). There were more but for only a short time. I remember one guy was from Hollywood Fla. He said when I got out of service and wanted a job his father would hire me. But, that's another whole new story. Since the Col. and I were friendly, I would leave him and the company sergeant, a Sergeant Nale (Nail), a cigar every morning at the back door area of the PX. I would leave the door unlocked for them. It didn't take long and the cigars were gone. I guess I was practicing; (WHO you know, rather than WHAT you know) again.

It was during this time, that a few of us got together on the week-ends to explore around the hundreds of miles at Red Canyon. We found the old Stage Coach Trail and signs showing where people stayed, like McDonald ranch. Old water tank for coach horses (we would swim in the tank it was so big). Also caves, an Indian silver mine, a prospector's gold mine, and a Stage Coach Cabin.

Two of us went to Holloman Air Force Base where we knew that there was a test track set up by a Col. John Strapp. We knew that the Col. was looking for volunteers and sure enough he was. When my time came up to ride the 'sled', I had to sign a waiver. Basically it was if I die, the army was not liable. This was fine with me because it also proved that I was there, on that date, and rode the sled. The 'sled' was that, a sled. But it was attached to a set of railroad rails so at high speed it would not fly. The sled also had rockets attached to the rear of the sled. In the future these same type of rockets would be used to lift the SPACE SHIP into the atmosphere. (That's in the future). For now the sled tests were to try and figure out a way to solve the bends and other problems caused in high speed high altitude airplane flights.

The results of my ride was logged. I remembered that I had travelled at 686 miles per hour. In fact, after the ride I was very unstable and had to sit down for a while. The Col. said there were a lot of gauges and not easily read by a non-professional. Also, miles-per-hour was not as important as G-Force. Also he asked if I wanted to go again and I said NO!!!!

Years later, I learned that that sled was moved to New Mexico Museum of Space History in Alamogordo NM, along with the paper work (Waiver) and all the of test results. (My wife and I visited the museum in 2014 and were informed, by the Administer of the museum, that the paper work was still in storage.) I haven't seen the actual results yet. (However, the experience is as real today as it was in 1956.) So I don't really know how fast I really went. Major Strapp is reported at a top speed of 632 MPH.



Back at Red Canyon. During the period from mid 1956 to May of 1958, most things were business as usual. There were a number of things, but I'll just list them off instead of a lot of detail.

Visit Roswell NM, this is where the bottomless open wells are and the Alien from space

Visit Ruidoso Downs Quarter Horse racing

Visit Albuquerque NM Old Spanish Town

Visit Albuquerque with buddy and learned sword fencing

Drove Col. McCarthy to Albuquerque for meeting at an Air Force Base there

Visit Ghost Town a few miles out of Carrizozo NM

Went to Las Vegas on a short Leave

Went with a fellow military person to his father's ranch in NM for a 3 day

cattle-round-up. (3 days on a horse ouch)

Met with FBI because someone broke in our storage Quonset and stole some beer

(FBI is PX's police)

Visit Lincoln NM Billy the Kid history

Multiple trips to Fort Bliss for PX duties (and sometimes Juarez)

Flew an Airplane from Red Canyon to Ft Bliss

Went snow skiing at Albuquerque's Sandia Peak

Snake hunting for Rattle Snake venom

Hitch Hiked rides at the 4 Air Ports in the Ft Bliss area (they were free) (I loved flying)

Frequent both Joe's Yucca Bar & Mrs. King's Cactus Bar in Carrizozo

Went hunting deer and mountain lions

Had a lot of fun

By May of 1958 I was a short-timer (less than 90 days to serve). The PX had hired a civilian manager and assistant manager, who I was training.

I still had some driving duties for the Col.. It was during one of these drives that he mentioned the problem he had with the Chapel that was being built. His complaint was that he wanted to dig up stone (flag stone) for use on the outside of the Chapel. He could not find anyone who knew how to do this. Well I'm the guy, my father taught me how to do that when I was 16 years. I was assigned a helper and the next day we were out in the boon-docks digging up Flag Stone, I called my Dad that night to verify the recipe for the concrete as well as chicken wire and aluminum clips. I gave that list to the Col. and he made sure I had all the ingredients as soon as possible. The Chapel turned out to be the Col's dream. It received a lot of attention and a number of pictures can still be found on the Inter-Net.

There was of course an incident at the time that I was working on the Chapel. By 1958 Red Canyon had been modernized fairly well. Stone Latrines with running water (even hot water). Most of the Out-Houses were gone, except one by the chapel. This one was saved for the workers so they didn't have to walk so far. Well on this particular day I was using the 'John' when I noticed this rope hanging from the rafters. I climbed up on my seat and looked over the divider and sure enough there was a human hanging there. I went immediately to Head Quarters and reported what I saw. Sergeant Nale the Camp's Sergeant, followed me back to the Out-House. He pulled the stalls door open and verified the man was dead. He also identified him as a lieutenant who was with the then Missile group in attendance. The following day a CIA individual was at camp and interviewed me. He, the CIA guy, had the Out-House literally razed by a crane which exposed the hole completely. He then put on a divers suit and proceeded into the shit hole. After a short while he found a letter and examined it and found

out it was addressed to the dead man. In essence it was a Dear John letter from his wife saying she was leaving him. They were satisfied that it was suicide.

What a way to end an active career in the Army. Build a Chapel, find a dead man, help deliver a child (a boy), ride a sled, and a thousand other things.

I hope you found this interesting, fun, exciting and worth your time.

Thanks

Gerald (Jerry) Ronsman