

War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: Cincinnati, Ohio

Age: 90

Having taught 2 ½ years in a three-room school in Emerton, Texas, I resigned, packed my bags and left for Sheppard Field Air Corps base at Wichita Falls, Texas, to seek my fortune as a mechanic instructor. The salary would be \$2,500.00 per year. I had been making \$80 per month for an eight-month school year.

After six weeks of intensive training, I was assigned to teach the hydraulic systems of the B-25 and B-26 medium bombers. Some of my students had been seasoned mechanics in private life and much older than my 21 years. Some of the advice given to instructors:

1. When you are asked a question to which you don't know the answer, tell them you don't know, but will get the answer at the next break. Never bluff.
2. Get rid of the Texas speech "twang," as the men were not in Texas by choice and didn't like it.
3. Conduct oneself as a professional.

The school had three eight-hour shifts that changed every three weeks. One afternoon as I arrived for class, a small band was playing "Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer" as the men marched to class. A plane was circling overhead, using up gas. The landing was delayed as the landing gear was not locked down. Finally the pilot made a perfect landing on the two rear wheels. Who knows? Maybe those prayers did help. I like to think so.

A few weeks after my training ended and I was assigned a classroom, I had a blind date with Larry Komen who was a drill sergeant at the basic training side of the field. We married six weeks later. We had almost a year together before he shipped out to Douglas Air Base at Douglas, Arizona. I resigned my job and took the train to Douglas, which was on the border of Mexico. I was offered a job with the major in charge of the repair depot. They were just getting B-25s and B-26s in. I never took the job, as Larry was shipped to the Pacific. I came to Cincinnati and lived with Larry's parents.

I got a civil service job making permanent records of service men's pay. Records of all branches of service were recorded there. Again I was working eight-hour shifts that changed every three weeks. The cards were punched, sorted and recorded. A very large machine called a tabulator made permanent records. The tabulator was the forerunner of the present day computer.

Prior to Christmas, Larry's parents and I filled boxes and mailed them as directed. Boxes had to be shoe box size. Families from all those men in the Pacific were doing the same. None of the gifts arrived. The ship carrying all those gifts was torpedoed and sank.

Flash backs to those war years include standing in front of the class. The men and teacher all stood as they had taken all chairs out of the room so the men would not go to sleep. Also, I remember the great joy when the Japanese surrendered. We celebrated in the streets.

Larry and I had one son (Donald) who was born nine months after Larry's return home. Larry died at the age of 49 from a heart attack. We had almost 23 years together. Later I married Joe Engel who had three sons, two were still teens. Joe died from cancer 1 ½ years after our marriage.

I retired from teaching in 1980. For a gal who grew up doing farm work, I had two good husbands, 15 step grandchildren, 28 great grandchildren and many friends, and I had traveled to 56 countries. Not bad for someone who had only been 100 miles from home at age 20. I always wanted to see the other side of the mountain.

I've been blessed by living in those times. God never closes one door without leaving another one. It's up to us to step forward and open it. I'm 90 years old and still active. The war years impacted me in many ways. Instant gratification has not had a place in my life. I'm still looking forward to seeing what's around the corner.