

## Dad's WWII Memories – June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2001

When Pastor Fred was our pastor he had meditation at our council meeting. He spoke of how important it is to share with one another. He gave us an example. He was married, had a wife and one child. He needed Pampers, baby food and such but had no money. He poured out to God and said, "Lord you asked me to be a preacher and here I am with no money!" Two days later there came a cheque from his grandparents.

There are a few things I wish to share with my siblings before I loose more than my hearing!

I am not going to say much about Regina other than the meals were not very good.

I don't remember much about my embarkation leave, but the morning we left it was early. At the breakfast table that morning the devotions was "In my Father's House are many mansions....". I gave Ma a hug when I left. I don't think she even cried. What she did say stayed with me throughout the war, "Remember every dark cloud has a silver lining."

I don't remember how long we were in Ottawa before we got on the train to Halifax. I do remember looking out the window and wondered if we would ever see it again. I'm sure all of us felt the same. I went to the washroom and cried out, "Lord make me strong!" A feeling of warmth came over me. When I came back to the guys, one of them asked what I did in the washroom. I did not answer, but I'm sure he knew.

I did complain about the meals in Regina, but they were very good compared to the meals on the ship. Imagine fat mutton on a boat.

We arrived in Liverpool at 6am and took the train to Cascosta. We spent 9 days on the water. After a few days, four of us went to Horsham.

I remember very well my first day as a nursing orderly. The place was really in an uproar. A very sick patient has come down with spinal meningitis. The nurse said, "You can start making beds." I didn't know how to make a bed – I just sort of straightened the blankets. The nurse came and said, "You don't know how to make a bed! I thought you were a registered orderly." I said, "In my paybook it says 'recommended' as an orderly." The other nurse came and asked me to sit with a sick man. I had to wear a gown and if I ever touched him I could not touch my face. I

remember how itchy my nose was that day. It was very good for me to have this job because I was able to see how they did things, like making a bed.

The patient's name was Stanley. He was in a coma. Whenever he would turn or toss, I would just call his name and say I was right there. Then he would relax.

After about the third day, he was still in a coma. A nurse took over for me while I went for lunch. When I came back she asked if I would fill the bucket with coal. I took the pail and was just in the process of filling it when a patient came running out to me and said the nurse needs help. When I came inside I saw Stanley fighting with the nurse. All I said was "Stanley." He relaxed and lay down. He then spoke for the first time since entering the hospital, "I heard the nurse ask you to get coal and I just wanted to come and help you, but this lady wouldn't let me go." A few days later he didn't need anyone to sit with him so I was transferred to another ward. I came in to see him every evening after work. One night when I came in, the nurse met me and said that they had wanted to weigh Stanley that day, however he had insisted they wait until I was there. There he was with his blanket off, ready for me to help. I held his hands as he stood on the scale. He was very thin. We were very close. He actually thought I saved his life. He is the only patient I had that sent me a parcel when he returned home.

I shared the following memory with Bev and Archie when they were home last....

One day I came home from work and found no one there, so I went for a walk on what they called Melody Lane. I walked for 30 minutes. I was real lonely. I looked behind and saw no one coming and nobody ahead of me. I crossed the ditch into a bluff of trees. I said a short prayer, "Lord, I feel so alone. I don't know how I can take it. Hold my hand." When I returned to the road there was a man standing there. "What a lovely evening for a walk", he said. I usually turned back at this point and told him so, but he explained that the road was shaped like a horseshoe and came near the hospital. So we continued on. When we got to his house, he asked me in. We had a short visit. I was certainly a changed man, so on the way back, I said "Thank you Lord!" Then I looked up and the Big Dipper appeared so bright, it was as if I was at home and saw the Dipper in the same place. It really brought me closer to home. I have the same Dipper and the same God!

I spent two years in England with some downs, but mostly ups. I was involved with a chapel near by the hospital. If I hurried I could make it there in 3 minutes. They were usually good at work to let me off early. One day it did happen that I could not get away early. I don't know if it is the same in other churches, but at this one when the door was shut, you were not to open it. Not knowing this, I just opened the door and walked in. I sang in the choir when I could and attended the mid-week studies. It was a very friendly group.

Just one or two things on our way to Italy...

We had spent 14 days on the water and the night of Pete's birthday, I was coming up from the mess hall anxious to see the beautiful Mediterranean Sea. On the way the siren went loudly. I said "Oh no", thinking it to be another drill. A sailor, his face white, said, "This is the real thing!" We got to our bunks in a hurry. There was a PA system that would make a noise when it would cut in. This is how they kept us informed of what was going on. The first ship was hit and went down in seventeen minutes. All of the people were picked up and accounted for by another boat.

We were five ships in total - one ahead of the other. There were also two destroyers for each boat. That night the enemy shot down two of our ships and one destroyer. At the height of the action the guns were just above us. The noise was deafening. I'm not sure if it was a vision or a voice, but as clear as can be I heard "Do you know you will be in Heaven in so many minutes?" There was no thought of dying, but I said, "What a contrast!" I even wondered what would be the first thing I would see. The noise was really getting bad. I then closed my eyes and said, "Lord if my time is up, I am ready." The most wonderful feeling came over me - a feeling of peace and joy. I said, "This is real!" Just then the noise stopped. The lights came on and the PA system opened up. Over the speaker a voice announced, "We can thank the men manning the guns, they exploded the torpedo bomb that was headed for our ship." My response at the time was "They weren't alone!"

We were told we could now leave our bunks. The people did not scream or clap, they quietly moved on deck - some with pale faces. I couldn't get over what had just happened because I knew there was a Higher Power involved. Most of the men had gone. While I was still on my bunk a man came up to me. One look at me and he said, "What happened to you?" I did not

answer, but I turned and together we went on to see the beautiful Mediterranean Sea.

This winter I have read some books from the library about the war - the last book was written by a nurse stationed in London. Her boyfriend was an officer on this same convoy. He wrote in detail about the horrible evening. Apparently the reason there were so many ships hit was because the sun had blinded them. In fact, the last ship just let the bullets fly in the direction of the sound of the enemy's aircraft. He said it was a miracle a torpedo bomb exploded. What does that say. I looked up the word miracle in the dictionary. It is described as "some kind of super natural event".

I had no idea that I would be rambling on so long, but I do have to end up with the song that just came on television. "I believe for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows and somewhere in the darkest night a candle glows and for everyone who goes a stray, someone will come to show the way. I believe above the storm the smallest prayer will still be heard and someone in the great somewhere hears every word. Every time I hear a newborn baby cry or touch a leaf or see the sky then I know why I believe." It is no wonder it hurts when I hear people say "Oh God!" - He is real!