



Paul E. Appleby

Instructor Pilot, United States Air Force

World War II

October 1942 - 1948

I often slur my speech, do not pronounce my words clearly, run my words together and have little or no expression in my voice. If you will listen closely and bear with me you will understand that I am just lucky to have a voice at all, let alone a good speaking voice. God blessed me in many ways but not in public speaking. I was asked to speak in Mrs. Hardy's SS Class on Veteran's Day and as I told the group, I did not know why because I have done nothing special, been nothing special but I do love my country. And in my following words, I will try to tell you why I love my country so much. I was a Sr. in High School when on Dec. 7th, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. It was a sneak attack and they killed thousands of civilians and our service men; destroyed most of our Naval fleet. It was a complete shock to everyone and naturally most of the young men at that time wanted to immediately sign up for the service, including me. I wanted to join the Air Force. At that time I was a Sr. in high school and only seventeen and my mother was so upset that she begged me to wait until I graduated from school. My oldest brother had already joined the Marines. I was 18 in May and graduated in June of '42. In Sept. of '42, I registered for the draft and classified as 1-A. In October of the same year I was drafted into the Army. Since they needed men badly in the Air Force, they drafted me into that branch of the service. As fate would have it, that is exactly what I wanted. The Air Force sent me to Miami Beach, FL. For six weeks of basic training. I was housed in a hotel about 500 yards from the ocean on the 4th floor. While there one night with the whole city being blacked out, I looked out my window and could see a glow out on the

ocean. I found out the next day it was German submarines patrolling our shores and torpedoing our American ships. Not many people knew this and realized just how close we came to losing our freedom.

After basic training, I was sent to Chicago, Ill to a radio school to be a radio operator on a B-17. During this time I took my Aviation Cadet exam because I still wanted to be a pilot, and I failed it. I was deeply disappointed. I decided the best thing for me to do was to continue with radio school and then I would have another chance of taking the pilot's test all over again. After several months had passed I took the test and passed and was sent to Miami Beach, Fl. Again to be reclassified and soon after sent to Arkadelphia, AR. To be enrolled in Ouachita Baptist College for two years training, or the equivalent if I passed the test in less time. I took the test after 6 months and passed. I was sent to San Antonio, TX and took numerous tests to see if I was qualified as a pilot, bombardier, navigator, or for ground duty only. I got down on my knees and promised God if he would just allow me to become a pilot that I would serve Him faithfully, go to church every Sunday and follow the path that he would have me go. After one year of vigorous training and many, tests I had the privilege to walk across that stage and receive the coveted silver wings. After I got my wings, I was under the impression that I would pick up a crew, and be assigned to a squadron overseas. Instead, I was sent to Pampa, TX which was home of the B-25 Bomber to be an instructor. After months of being an instructor, I strayed from my promise to God. I told myself I was either too busy or too tired to go to church. I got my orders to go overseas and received my overseas shots. I was on my way! But again fate stepped in and I was stricken with some kind of allergic reaction and was paralyzed all over. They were so afraid that I would stop breathing that they had to get me to the only iron lung in the U.S. at that time. It was in Temple, TX. My buddies put me in the nose of a B-25 Bomber and flew me to Temple. I never had to go into that contraption but it was in my room just in case I needed it. At that time I could have been classified as a human vegetable. My mother was allowed to stay in my room and teach me all the skills as far as alphabet and numbers . . . I had lost everything, use of arms, legs, and speech. The only thing I could do is move my eyes and I could hear. I was sent to 4 different hospitals and the last one being Army, Navy Polio Hospital in Hot Springs, Ark. I was not afflicted with polio but they had the facilities to give me the rehab that I needed. In the two and a half years in hospitals you can believe me when I say that I had plenty of time to think. I could not understand why God had let this happen to me. But with my Chaplain's help, he told me that God was not a vengeful God and maybe God saved my life. This was HIS way of getting my attention. I realized at that time that God loved me so much that it was His way of saving my life and teaching me how to trust Him more. God allows some things to happen. Why? Because all things work together for the glory of God.

After years of struggle, I was retired from the Air Force and discharged from the hospital in 1948.

I love my country. My country has never let me down and I will never let my country down.

Since I have been a civilian, one of my favorite scriptures is “but for the grace of God I am what I am and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all; not I but the grace of God which was within me.”

When my wife and I moved to Tyler, we attended Green Acres Baptist Church and at that time, Paul Powell was the pastor. He told the story of this ex-service man that was partially disabled trying to climb to the top of this mountain that had this big, shining white cross at the top but had gone as far as they could and were on their way back down and they passed this handicapped man. They hollered and told him, “you will never make it; you will never get to the top.” The man replied, “Well, I might not ever make it to the top, but I just want to see how high I can get.” Well that made an impression on me. I am 79 years old and I am still trying to see how high I can get.

Paul Powell came to my home by my invitation to tell him I wanted to be baptized by being immersed. It would be an ordeal since I was on crutches at the time. He said it did not matter where I was baptized that he could just come to our house and do it in our pool. I mulled that over and thought to myself, crutches did not keep me from doing the things I really wanted to or had to do, up or down steps. I told him that it would be fine, I would make it down the steps into the baptistery. God gave me the courage and the strength with the help of Paul Powell’s friendship and guidance along with my Army chaplains in the hospital. David Dykes’ preaching and his teaching have reinforced all my beliefs that God is a loving God, not a vengeful God, and I know Him now as my personal savior.