The Adventures of Jim, Sr â€“ Part I

Description

He walked into the office one day to ask about some repair work, and for some reason, I thought to ask him is he was veteran. The answer was yes.

The following text is the story of Jim Helinger, Sr, a US Army Air Corps Glider pilot in World War II, about his wartime exploits. Iâ€™ll segment it up some and post most of it in the next few days. Itâ€™s not a story of blood and gore and the ugliness we all know goes on in war, but he rather would just tell of the things we know young men do in times such as these, when they are far way from home and facing the reality of conflict. Most of it will make you smirk, and some of it will have you laugh, as his stories are slices of life as it was, and, had then been blogs around, Iâ€™m sure much of this would have been typed by Jim himself.

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Before I post, my advertisement for capturing history for our future and those who follow us. I posted this â€œwarning orderâ€• a few days ago.

> â€œThe Library of Congress Veteranâ€™s History Project has some useful tools to help you in capturing these valuable first person stories. Donâ€™t let them go undocumented!â€•

If you know someone, take the time to listen to their story and record it however you can for the Library of Congress.

On with the show!

Like so many others on Dec 7th, 1941, he heard the announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor on the family radio, a Philco. He knew he had to do something, and at he decided to enlist. Sometime between the decision to enlist and heading for the Army Recruiter in Louisville, KY the next morning, he figured if he was going to go in, he wanted to fly.

Visiting the recruiting office the next day brought a harsh reality home. At 17 years old, he would not be accepted into the Army Air Corps. He might have joined the one of the other services, but he wanted to fly. He waited until his 18th birthday, February 22, 1942.

Arriving at the Post Office on his birthday, he found a line of about 50 men. He got in it and asked the others what it was for. The Ã¢â‚¬Å“Aviation CadetsÃ¢â‚¬Â• was the answer. He was in the right place. He was shepherded through the input process, taking the written test and Ã¢â‚¬Å“squeezing by.Ã¢â‚¬Â• The medical exam was done as well as the physical fitness exam, which he did very well on. He was called on the loudspeaker back into see the doctor. He was told by the Doctor that he wasnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t qualified medically, because he had a heart murmur. He said Ã¢â‚¬Å“It doesnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t hurt.Ã¢â‚¬Â• The Doctor told him he was sure he was a patriotic young man and assured him he could probably serve in the Navy, or somewhere and sent him home.

On leaving the part of the office where he had tried to make it into the Army Air Corps, he saw another line outside the other end of the building. He asked someone in it what it was for. Ã¢â‚¬Å“Aviation Cadets.Ã¢â‚¬Â• He got in line. This time, he Ã¢â‚¬Å“breezed throughÃ¢â‚¬Â• the process and so began the flying career of Jim Helinger, Sr, US Army Air Corps..

The first stop on the route to becoming a pilot was Basic Aviation Cadet Training in Biloxi, MS. JimÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s first comment about this training was Ã¢â‚¬Å“they tried to break your spirit, knowing you would be pilots and officers.Ã¢â‚¬Â• It was Corporals and PFCs who ran the place. The purpose of this initial training was to teach these men how to be soldiers first, before receiving any specialty training. While he was in Biloxi, he said he never got off the base, and that everyone got sick with the Ã¢â‚¬Å“Mississippi Miseries,Ã¢â‚¬Â• which was a generally miserable feeling, and a hacking cough.

Upon finishing basic training, it was off to the College Training Detachment at Southwest University in Memphis, TN. For eight weeks, Jim studied college course, and picked up eight college credits. Following Ã¢â‚¬Å“college,Ã¢â‚¬Â• the next stop was the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SACC) for a month of school that trained, then tested the cadets for dexterity, reflexes and knowledge retention, under varying conditions. It was here that Jim had to indicate his preference for assignment in the aviation ranks. The card he had to fill out, along with the others, had three choices: Pilot, navigator and bombardier. You didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t just check the block, you indicated your desire for each by a numerical grade, with 9 being the highest. He put a 9 for pilot, 1 for bombardier, and left the blank for navigator empty, against directions. As he told this part of the story, there was a twinkle in his eyes and a big smile on his face as he said Ã¢â‚¬Å“I wasnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t going to be a navigator, doing all that math in the plane.Ã¢â‚¬Â• He was assigned to train as a pilot, getting his wish.

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End of Part I.

Stay tuned for more action and adventure in Part II!

Category

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