

Bridge And College Prep In A Tent

Toward the end of the WWII our B-26 bomber squadron was moved to an airbase in Germany. It was near the border about four miles from the town of Venlo, Netherlands. It is almost impossible to convey the exuberance of the crews on the night of May 8, 1945 when the German surrender was announced. A few days later we were brought back down to earth as we were told that we would be trained on a newer bomber and sent to the Pacific.

On August 15, 1945 announcement of the Japanese surrender gave rise to another joyous celebration. This one was dampened by the realization that we were in a very long queue of soldiers awaiting transportation home. The enlisted men from our squadron were transported to France, where an open field holding hundreds of four man tents awaited.

My tent mates and I were quite compatible, but we had to provide our own entertainment. None of us had ever played bridge, and we decided to teach ourselves the game from the book "Hoyles Rules of Games." We learned the bidding conventions, playing strategies, and other fine points of the game. I can truthfully and modestly say that during our stay in tent city I was a very good bridge player.

Three years before the war it became necessary for me to drop out of school after the ninth grade and join the labor force to help support the family. I came to understand during that period that my best hope for improving my quality of life was through education.

The Armed Forces Institutes offered a number of correspondence courses. While in tent city I took, for credit, a course in elementary physics. The really significant effort was in college algebra. I obtained one of the correspondence course text books and plunged into it with great gusto. I spent several months methodically solving every problem in the book. When I finished, I had a very solid foundation in algebra.

Back home in Enid Oklahoma the GI Bill offered me the possibility of a college education. During an appointment with the dean of Phillips University, a small college in Enid, I explained my situation to him. After consulting with my high school principal he allowed me to enroll on probation.

Before my GI Bill eligibility ended, I received a BS degree in mathematics and physics from Phillips University. I then earned a Masters Degree in physics from the University of Oklahoma followed by one additional year of graduate study in physics at the University of Michigan.

The GI Bill provided a huge stepping stone to me and to many other ex-service men and women.