

CHRIST AND COUNTRY

By John F. Hall

Jesus Christ represents the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity. Christ, as used by Christians, is both a name and a title. When used as a title, it means "The



Messiah Jesus," or "Jesus the Anointed." Christians believe that Jesus was crucified, and then resurrected, to fulfill the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. The first time, that I thought that I might be about to meet Christ, was when I was nine years old. I was burning up with a very high fever. I was in an infirmary and delirious. There was a light in the hallway that seemed to be getting brighter and brighter. I thought my head was about to explode, and that is how I would meet Jesus. Then I passed out.

Country music singer and song writer, Alan Jackson, wrote a song that contains these words: "I know Jesus and I talk to God." I'm the same way. Some times, I wonder why He even fools with me. On many occasions, Christ, through his divine intervention, has pulled me out of some very tough situations.

When I was a 17 year old paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division, I was fearless and foolish. On one bitter cold January night in 1964, I was the patrol leader with six other soldiers in "Recondo School." It is what I called a baby Army Ranger course. We loaded up into a Huey helicopter to make an 800 foot combat jump. I was the first to go into the helicopter, which meant that I would be the last soldier out of that helicopter. Once the pilot was over the drop zone, he would give us the "green light" to jump. The way it is suppose to work, is that each soldier would get out of the helicopter as rapidly as possible. The soldier ahead of me decided to look around before he jumped. By the time I got to the door, and put my boots on the helicopter's landing gear, to jump, the pilot flew past the drop zone.

I thought about asking the pilot to make another pass over the drop zone. But I realize that would be a "no go." Recondo school has a 50 percent failure rate, and I'm certain the Drill Sergeant would fail me for not jumping and abandoning the patrol. Even on a moonless, starless dark night, a pasture field looks a little brighter than a forest, at a height of 800 feet. I had to jump, and catch up with my patrol, or fail the school. So I pushed off from the helicopters landing gear. It takes about 30 seconds to hit the ground. The exact number of seconds would depend on my weight, and how much extra clothing and gear that I had on. I've seen paratroopers being killed when falling into power lines or hardwood trees, during one exercise that we had with the 82nd Airborne Division. I didn't have much time to pray to Christ. I end my daily prayer to Christ with these words: "I trust my death to Your love." I could, just see myself being gored to death by a tree limb. So I crossed legs, crossed my arms, and tucked my head as low to my chest as I could go. I closed my eyes and thought that I had prayed the last prayer of my young life. I crashed into the trees. It sounded like a bear crashing through a China shop. When I finally stopped, I could not see the ground under my boots. It was total darkness. I could barely see my hands in front of my face. When I would take off my black leather gloves,

my hands would freeze. I decided to pull the rip cord on my reserve parachute, and let it fall down. I released the main chute harness. I was two feet off the ground.

The third time that time that I thought I might meet Jesus, I was 19 years old. It began the week that I received my "Secret Security Clearance." This would be my first mission with the Fort Campbell Security Platoon. The mission was to escort several railroad box cars from the munitions plant at Milan, Tennessee, to the Naval Station Treasure Island, across the bay from San Francisco, California. Our seven-soldier security team included one Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO). It seemed like it took over a week to travel by rail. Our team lived in a caboose at the end of the train. The three box cars were always positioned ahead of the caboose. We had no radio communication with the train's conductor. Every time the train stopped, we grabbed our "Thompson." sub-machine guns. We also had extra clips of 30 rounds of .45-caliber ammunition. In addition, we were issued .38-caliber pistols. We formed a perimeter around the three box cars.

It is very easy to get hurt being in a caboose, especially if the train stops, suddenly. It would knock you off your feet. Also, when the train's coupling and uncoupling other railroad cars, and you were still in the caboose, it would hit so hard, that it would also knock you off your feet. I liked to sit in the caboose's cupola, a windowed lookout enclosure on top of the caboose. You could see over the top and sides of the three box cars. Baker Knight wrote a hymn in 1959 called, "Glory Train." Ricky Nelson made the hymn popular. These are some of Baker Knights' lyrics: "I want to ride that glory train. I want to ride, ride, ride that glory train. Yes, all I want to do when my life on earth is through, is to get aboard and ride that glory train. Ah, there's a railroad train that's leavin' just rolling down the track, and the passengers aboard it, they're never coming back. It's a glory train that's leaving; it's the train I long to ride, to that home way up in heaven where God's children all abide... Hear the thunder of the engine, get aboard her if you can. For the final destination is the far off promised land, where the Master will be waiting, in His home way up above; just to fill our hearts with gladness, and His great eternal love... When you get down to the station, and the train's about to leave; you be sure to have a ticket if you really do believe. That the Master's waiting for you in His home way up above. Just to fill our hearts with gladness and His great eternal love...".

I was a Specialist 4th Class at that time, and the Marines considered that rank to be equal to their NCO rank. The food was very good. We had to stay in their barracks, as they unloaded the classified cargo in the box cars and loaded them into a Merchant Marine ship. It was a World War II cargo ship in need of a good paint job. I was looking forward to the commercial flight back to Nashville, Tennessee. One morning, our NCO called us all together and gave us the bad news. The Marine security detail was pulled away, as Vietnam was heating up. We were given new orders, and the mission to escort the ship to South Korea. I only had a few dollars left. Our NCO told us that he would get us a partial-pay when we turned the cargo over to the Military Police in Korea. Once the cargo ship was loaded, we reported to the ship's Captain. He had a white beard, white hair, and white sideburns. He wanted to know who had a projectionist license. I raised my hand and showed him my license that was issued at Fort Campbell. He had a very tanned face

from years at sea. He said: “Good! You will show my crew and your team, movies every night. My First Mate will show you where the projector is located.”

Usually, I was the last in the security team to go to bed at night. I was also in charge of selling candy and popcorn when showing the movies. I had to keep a record of what I sold, and I turned in the money to the First Mate. I had to re-wind the film, and put it back into its metal film container. I would fold up the movie screen, and put the projector back into its protective case, and store them in a large locker. I had to sweep the floor to get up the candy wrappers and spilled popcorn. This was January, 1964. Showing movies was all that the crew had for entertainment. The Captain was glad that I was able to show the movies. There was not much that our security detail could do, out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

I guess that the ship was making about 17 knots an hour. That is about 19 miles per hour. We traveled about 456 miles the first day. It is 2,428 miles from San Francisco, California, to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. It took the ship five days and three hours to arrive at Pearl Harbor, and lay anchor. The Captain called the security team together. He said that he would give us three days of shore leave. A tender will take us to the beach at Honolulu. After three days, the tender will return and pick us up. If we are not there, he would leave us. I only had a few dollars since no one expected our orders to be changed. I decided to stay on the beach, since I had no where else to go. The beach belonged to the Army and it was patrolled by the Military Police (MP5). It had public restrooms and showers, which I appreciated. One night, I was sleeping on the beach. The sand was warm. Two MPs came by and shined a flashlight in my face. I showed them my military ID and my Orders. I explained that my orders had been changed, and I did not have any money to rent a hotel room. They gave me my military ID and my Orders back. They told me to be careful. On the third day, the tender came back to pick up the security team. I used all the money I had just to buy snacks to eat. Once on board the ship, I went down to the galley and asked the cook to give me three of everything.

It is about 4,687 miles from Hawaii to South Korea. The East China Sea is a semi-closed sea bordered by the Yellow Sea to the north, the South China Sea and Taiwan to the south, Japan's Ryukyu and Kyushu islands to the east, and the Chinese mainland to the west. The cargo ship has to travel into the East China Sea to reach Pusan, South, Korea. Half-way into the east China Sea, our cargo ship ran into a typhoon with waves as high as 60 feet. I was thrown out of my bunk and unto the metal floor. I looked around and did not see any other security team members. I did not know if the Captain gave the order to, “abandon ship.” I picked myself up, dressed, and slowly went out the door. The sea was angry with so many waves that I thought the ship was going to break in-half. I was not sure if I could make it to the ship's bridge, where the Captain was steering the ship. I made it, and came inside. I guess that I looked white as a ghost. The Captain told me to sit on the floor and grab something to hang on to. He said: “I've been through worse than this.” I feel asleep, and the sea calmed down. I woke up and the Captain told me to get up and to take over steering the ship. He pointed out the azimuth setting on a huge compass, and told me to keep it on course. He said that he was going down to have coffee in the

galley. He was gone for over an hour. I was just relieved that Christ let me live another day.

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend wrote a hymn called, "Holy Spirit Living Breath of God." I've been using a nasal inhaler twice a day, and a lung inhaler four times a day, for the past three months. I have lung disease. I don't smoke, but I suffer from second-hand smoke from serving my country in the 101st Airborne Division, the Kentucky Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve, from June, 1962 until June, 2005. I know what it feels like to be out of breath. What I like about this hymn is something that I have not considered. That is, Christ being with, within, before, beside, beneath, above, and behind me. My days of serving my country are long since gone. About all I can really do is to pray and serve Christ with my stories.

These are Keith. Getty's and. Stuart Townend's lyrics: "Holy Spirit, living breath of God, breathe new life into my willing soul. Bring the presence of the risen. Lord to renew my heart and make me whole. Cause Your Word to come alive in me. Give me faith for what I cannot see. Give me passion for Your purity, Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me. Holy Spirit, come abide within, may Your joy be seen in all I do. Love enough to cover every sin, in each thought and deed and attitude. Kindness to the greatest and the least, gentleness that sows the path of peace. Turn my striving into works of grace, breath of God, show Christ in all I do. Holy Spirit, from creation's birth, giving life to all that God has made. Show your power once again on earth, cause Your church to hunger for Your ways. Let the fragrance of our prayers arise, lead us on the road of sacrifice. That in unity the face of Christ will be clear for all the world to see. Christ be with me, Christ behind me and Christ before me. Christ beside me and Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me. Christ beneath me and Christ above me, Christ in quiet and Christ in danger. Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger. I bind unto myself the Name, the strong Name of the Trinity. By the invocation of the same, the Three in One and One in Three. Of whom all nature hath creation, Eternal Father, Spirit, Word. Praise to the Lord of my salvation, Salvation is of Christ, the Lord."

Looking out of my side kitchen window, I notice the mail man making the circular drive to my mail box. Craig Perry, the corporate farmer that rents this farm from the widow lady, had his Mexican workers combine the wheat, last night. He was lucky that the straight line winds from May 26th did not do much damage to his wheat crop. My great nephew, Corey Harrison. hired about five Mexican workers to put the metal roof on the new barn that he had constructed behind his house. Corey put up a wood fence for his daughter, Katie's horse. I may write a story about the horse, later this summer. Henry F. Lyte wrote the poem, "Abide With Me." These are some of his words: "Abide with me; fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens; Lord with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me... Swift to its close ebbs our life's little day; earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away; change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me... Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; shine through the gloom and point me to the skies. Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; in life, in death. O Lord, abide with me..."

John F. Hall

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>