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Robert Gilman

Air Force/ Army

27 years in service

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### Robert Gilman

Born June 2, 1926 in Manhattan, New York, Robert T. Gilman grew up an orphan, living in various locations around the famous city without the familiarity of a stable family. When he graduated high school, Mr. Gilman had no specific career plan in mind, but he was drafted during the time of the Second World War. Mr. Gilman was not anti-war; he was stationed in Roswell, New Mexico under the branch of the army/ air corps, which was convenient for him since he worked for an aviation company his senior year of high school.

Robert Gilman was drafted into the last nine months of World War 2, so he was not as impacted by it as the soldiers who were face-to-face with the enemy for a longer amount of time. Mr. Gilman's MOS was 737; he was a flight engineer for a multi-engine plane. During WW2 he worked as a crew flight engineer in the 509th bomb group for the B-29 bomber plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Japan. Although it was "the killer punch," Mr. Gilman treated it like any other "routine mission" because he "had no concept of what it could do." To Gilman, it was "a new weapon," an answer to the proposal of "use whatever we could to end the war; to destroy the enemy." He "didn't look at it with vengeance or a hatefulness... because [it] didn't have any personal impact" on him. In fact, none of the war did for him. He feels that "because [he] was raised as a foster child [and] has no commitment with family," the war didn't have a lingering

effect on him. However, “in the following week, there would have been two more [drops of atomic bombs]. [They] were ready to do it.” Mr. Gilman flew 4,742 hours in B-29, a number he remembered because “it was like his direct number.”

When Mr. Gilman went on leave, he would chase girls.” This led him to meeting his soon-to-be wife Nannie “Nan” Gilman. They later married, one of Mr. Gilman’s friends from the service, Garrison, was Robert Gilman’s best man. He formed friendships with a few non-drinkers, though they didn’t keep in touch after the war. He is now the only one still alive out of his group of friends. Mr. and Mrs. Gilman went on to have five children, three girls and two boys, two of them becoming world class athletes. Mr. Gilman also went to school during his time off, his education being supported by the GI bill. He would always carry around photos of his wife and children while in the military service.

After World War 2, Robert Gilman served in the Korean War. His MOS was 750, 684 and 747. Though they had destroyed North Korea’s Air Force, Mr. Gilman did recall “being scared by Russians” as his enemy because of how good they were at war. He recalls, “They were good... we trained them in the Second World War.” Mr. Gilman remembered, “When I was flying the missions you could hear them over the radio talking to our pilots... and they would call, ‘Hey Joe... I am 25 miles away from you. I got you on radar and I got my missile on you and I’m gonna get your ass.’”

Nan Gilman is and has always been a treasured hero to Robert Gilman. While he was at war, she raised their five children. Though Mrs. Gilman admitted it to being lonesome without her husband, she kept busy with their children and working with the church. She was a telephone

operator until after their second child, when she quit to focus on raising their children and being involved with their local church.

After the Korean War, Robert Gilman served in Vietnam. His MOS was 750, flying. Mr. Gilman worked as a non-commissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) in aircraft maintenance management during 1964 and 1965. In Vietnam, Mr. Gilman recalled the helpful use of alcohol during the war, how it calmed the nerves as he truthfully compared to medicine. Four of his specialists were killed in combat and when he returned home, Mr. Gilman noted that “people didn’t seem to be friendly” and that it was a “different atmosphere.” Robert Gilman was working on NCOIC when his eyesight began to fail. He also recalled the pranks that the soldiers would pull on each other. One called the “short sheet operation” where a soldier would take your sheet and fold it so that when you went to bed, you couldn’t get your feet in the sheets.

Robert Gilman retired as an FAA inspector and is now a member of the American Legion, a veterans’ organization that he is not an active participant of because his eyesight problem. Service in the Air Force was beneficial to Mr. Gilman because it made way for his career. He notices that outside of hardware and communication functions, service was just the same for him as it is for the soldiers today. He says he “had it much easier because [he] didn’t get affected by the psychology of it.” Mr. Gilman says he could fly back home, whereas with today’s soldiers, the enemies follow you. As for how different the world was when Mr. Gilman returned home, he believes that “when you change with it you won’t notice.” When Robert Gilman hears about the military actions being taken, he, on occasion, sees “the same stupid mistakes” which he attributed to in hindsight. One main thing Robert Gilman learned about his time in the service was to “avoid war.”

Robert T. Gilman was a true hero to the United States, time and time again , from WW2, to the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. And to him, his wife Nan Gilman was a hero. He takes the time to note the importance of the fact that “the thing that made my life nice was her.”