

An Interview with Robert Webber Sr.
USAF Veteran Retired
By Michele Starkey

Robert Webber Sr. was born in Brattleboro, VT in 1930 and would live there until the age of 10 years until his family moved to New London, CT. While Webber was just a junior in high school, he joined the Naval Reserve Program and learned about submarines. He told us that he would spend 23 months in the Naval Reserve Program but discovered that he truly did not enjoy the submarine duty. Ironically, some sixty years later, his son would retire from the Navy as a Commander after graduating from the Naval Academy in 1989 and spending most of his service on submarines.

After being discharged from the Navy in January 1949, Webber enlisted in the Air Force. He completed his basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas and attended Military Police school at Camp Gordon, GA and then returned to Lackland for about four months until he received his overseas orders for Japan.

When did you arrive in Japan?

“It was December 25, 1949 and we arrived in Komaki, Japan. I was assigned to the air police section and performed duties as an air policeman. We were there for about six months and the Korean War broke out.”

Did you go to Korea?

“Yes, we were sent to Korea in July. We went to Tagaeu, Korea. The major responsibility during that time was to provide security for General Earle E. Partridge who was the Commander of the Fifth Air Force. We provided security at the General’s off-base quarters. Things began to heat up and we came under heavy fire from the North Koreans.”

Did you leave the area?

“Actually most of the detail did move out, but the Allies rallied and the General moved to Seoul. I went on a detail to accompany the General’s belongings on the train. At the time, the train was filled with Korean refugees riding on top of the boxcars. We arrived in Seoul about a week later.”

What happened next?

“Well, the Chinese had entered the War and we had to provide security at the air base in Pusan. My unit rotated back to Japan in March of 1951. We were stationed at Johnson AFB just outside of Tokyo and I handled mainly police investigations – accidents, AWOLs, those sorts of matters.”

How long did that last?

“I left Japan and returned to the USA via ship and it would take fifteen days to reach the Golden Gate Bridge. I’ll never forget the arrival date because it was January 8, 1952 – my birthday. I took a bus home to New London. I was sent to Moody AFB in Georgia for about 4 months. I wanted to fly planes and ended up in Harlington, Texas for a 3 month stint until it was determined that I couldn’t fly because of some eye issues. I was discharged again in November 1952 and returned to New London only to re-enlist thirty days later.”

When you re-enlisted where were you sent?

“I was sent to Mitchel AFB in New York from December through March 1953. In April, I was back on a ship heading for France. It took 2 weeks to arrive in Chaumont AFB. I

attended a military police investigator school in Germany while I was stationed at Chaumont. The third time must have been a charm, because when my duty was done, I was able to fly home to the States instead of taking another ship back. I re-enlisted again in November 1955.”

Where did you go after you re-enlisted?

“I ended up at Stewart AFB in Newburgh. I met Betty Belle Miller at the Aragon Ballroom on Route 9W in December of 1955. We were married in the Stewart AFB Chapel in November 1956. We were stationed at Stewart AFB for six years and three of our children were born at West Point hospital.”

What duty came next?

“I ended up being transferred to the 914th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron near Armstrong, Canada in northwest Ontario. I had to leave my wife and kids behind but when I arrived in Canada, I found out that there were other families there and just a lack of housing. I worked with another airman and we converted an old bunkhouse into apartments. I convinced my Commander that my family needed to be with me and then I hitchhiked home on the thruway to get my wife, my three kids and the dog. I brought them up to Canada on December 1, 1961 and we enjoyed one night in our newly renovated apartment before the pipes froze and there was no hot water. I had to get a portable toilet and bring a 40-gallon tub of water for my wife to use for bathing the kids and cooking. My wife deserved the medal for staying up there through it all, besides the lack of running water we survived a sewer backup issue. The children were just 2, 3 and 4 years of age and my wife had her hands full.”

Where did you go from there?

“We were transferred to Duluth, Minnesota in July 1962. We lived in a cabin for six weeks until our quarters became available. When we finally moved into government housing, the sewers backed up again in the basement and we lost most of the kid’s toys and things. During that time, the Cuban Missile crisis was exploding and I had to leave on TDY. Nine months after my return, our fourth and last child. I was working on the base full-time and working as a security officer for Target part-time. We stayed there until March 1967 when I received my orders for Nakhon Phanom or NKP AFB. I brought the wife and kids home and rented a house in Cornwall. Before I left, the house caught fire and my wife had quite a mess to contend with once again along with the four children.”

What did you do in Thailand?

“I was assigned to the 56th Air Police Squadron. I was given the duty to formulate plans and procedures designed to protect weapons systems and other priority resources essential to combat operations. The finalization of these plans and the successful implementation of them greatly increased the security of our base. In April of 1968, I received orders assigning me to Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls, Texas.”

What did you do when you arrived at Sheppard?

“I worked in security operations at Sheppard AFB. We stayed there from June 1968 until June of 1970. I retired from the Air Force in September with a Bronz Star that was awarded to me for my duty in Thailand. We packed up the kids and moved back to New York. I went into banking and got a job at the Empire National Bank on Broadway in Newburgh. From there, I went to work at the Mid Hudson Savings Bank in December of 1978 and retired in May 1992.”

So, you stopped working in 1992?

“No, I went to work at the Meadow Hill School in September 1992 and worked in the cafeteria for eight years until I retired in 2001. I began volunteering at St. Luke’s hospital in the pre-admission testing division and stayed there for two years. Afterwards, I began delivering Meals on Wheels and helped with the Orange County Senior Dining Program. I joined the VFW in the 1970’s but I have been a more active member for the past nine years and serve as a Trustee. I also joined the Knights of Columbus in the 1970’s and remain a member of the Monsignor Henry O’ Carroll Council #444.”

Robert and Betty still reside in Newburgh and their 4 children have blessed them with 14 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

The VFW Post 1161 meets every third Friday of every month in the City of Newburgh Post 973 Bldg. The meetings begin at 1:00 pm and you can call Quartermaster Steve Fanizzi at (845)236-7295 or Commander Donald Ruckdeschel Sr. at (845)562-7828 for more details.




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THE AIR FORCE COMMENDATION MEDAL
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FOR

BY

BY







THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, AUGUST 24, 1952
HAS AWARDED:

THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO
MARCEL BLAZONAKI AIRMAN 1ST CLASS
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

1952

AWARDED BY THE
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
ON MAY 1957 OR 21 April, 1957

AWARDED BY ORDER OF THE CHIEF OF ORGANIZATION
EDEN 2nd 2nd OF 1957

Earl Warren
PRESIDENT, 1953-57
14 January, 1957



Harold Brown
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

