

CREATIVE WRITING -- 3/19/69 -- Ruth H. Hey

Only the magic name of Lindbergh made me forget my fear of airplanes and take a ride in one while on my honeymoon. Lindbergh had flown from this same field, and with this pilot, when getting ready for the flight that made history.

Nonetheless, twenty-six years later, I still preferred other modes of travel. Only lack of time induced me to take my second plane ride and fly to Texas to meet my new grandson.

Midway in Chicago was crowded. The passengers moved slowly getting on the plane. I had a choice of seats but took one next to the aisle, dreading even the thought of looking down to earth once we were up. Seat belts were new to me. The gentleman next to me, who could have been no one less than the chairman of the board, ignored my fumbling and looked unconcernedly out of the window.

A GI with rumpled suit and dirty fingernails, who had dropped breathlessly into the seat across from me just before take-off, showed me how it was done. Then apparently noticing my apprehension, he kept talking to me, telling me what to expect and assuring me that the ride would be smoother once we were airborne.

In spite of his kindness and thoughtfulness, I looked with distaste on his dirty fingernails. I wondered too, why he traveled in such a messy uniform. He finally slept, I read, and the chairman of the board ignored us both.

The flight was late arriving in Dallas. I just missed the last plane to Sweetwater. Others had evidently missed connections too; for late as it was, the hotel dining room was crowded. I did manage to get a seat, and seeing the serviceman waiting, invited him to share my table.

He had shaved, but appeared incredibly weary with a look in his eyes I couldn't understand. He acted as though he were in a strange place.

He had left Korea, flying non-stop to Maryland, was put on another flight to Chicago, and was now here when just hours ago he had been in a war.

Twice he had led his platoon against the North Koreans. The first time, many of his men were killed. The second time, he had helped bring out three, the only ones left of his group. They were badly wounded. He seemed to feel entirely to blame. Maybe he could have saved another, he said, but he just couldn't get to them. They were only

boys, some hardly able to shave; they shouldn't have been there--just boys, he repeated again. He seemed hardly more than a boy himself.

What was he going to do? How old was he? The rumpled suit and dirty nails really didn't matter now. I still remember the look in his eyes. Twenty-four years, and he had lived a lifetime!

No wonder he looked at us -- we people who place so much importance on a man's appearance. And he had seen men die!