

FORWARD TO

From Farm to Field

In the mid-eighteenth century, armies practiced maneuvers on open fields and the event became known as a “Field Day.” As the term evolved to become more encompassing it grew to represent an action that was away from Headquarters and in the “field.” Over the years, GI’s began to embrace it as a description of the battle zone, the area where the enemy was engaged. A person who was “in the field” was in a forward position where the day to day struggle was for survival and human necessities were primitive at best.

In 1940 nearly sixty percent of Kansans lived in rural areas as compared to thirty-six percent in 2009. Rural life was a commonality among all Kansans. If they didn’t live on a farm, chances were that they spent significant time visiting family and friends who did.

Farming in the 1930’s in Kansas was a desperate struggle for the basics of life. The Depression smothered everyone and farmers were no exception. They had to contend with rainless summers, the dust bowl, credit crunches and losing their farms. They had to be creative in raising their families many taking extra jobs in town or helping out on other farms. They developed a strong sense of pride and it mattered to them what others thought. Teamwork, an overworked modern day cliché, became a fundamental survival skill.

Children, of the 1930’s, shared the burdens of farming and learned how to make their own way with few resources. I will never forget the look in Wally Jeffery’s eyes when he said, “I never had my own bed until I was in the Army.” Social programs were minimal and people had to depend primarily on their own ingenuity and the assistance of others to survive. All they had was their pride and the strength of their word.

The rigors of the farm hardened them in ways that became valuable during the war. They knew how to be innovative taking advantage of anything that might later become useful. They learned how to handle the hardships of living in the field because it was to some extent only an extension of how they grew up. Jim Sharp told me, “It was cold and there was so much snow but it didn’t bother me too much. I learned how to deal with it growing up on the farm.” Everyone was lean and fit, and strong of will, forged by hard work and a hard life.

Raymond Brown remembered it this way. “After graduation, we were in the middle of the Depression and by the Dust Bowl area. I helped my dad on the farm all the while I was growing up, starting by milking cows when I was six years old and in the field with my own team of horses when I was ten.”

From the '30's there emerged an American personality that was unique in American History. The children learned how to sacrifice for what was important and how to handle hardship as they grew into young adults. They learned that they had to trust and help others because they knew at some point the favor would be returned. But maybe most importantly, they learned how make their own decisions and to be responsible for themselves, always concerned with what others thought of them.

In the 1940's, there emerged a young adult that embodied these unique qualities, a person highly adaptable to the "field." They accepted military life and life in the "field" as another challenge, another normal part of life. And when their job was done and they had created a new world, they went to work creating a new America. What an exceptional group of men and women.

In this book you will meet a few of them.