



Text Version of Audio Story: General

He was the youngest kid in the outfit. They called him “*Baby Face*.”

I think his drill sergeants knew that he could have easily gotten out of the draft as a conscientious objector. After all, he came from a highly religious sect of the Pennsylvania Plain People. His father and grandfather were ministers. They didn’t believe in military service and, yet, the *baby face* was there at basic training. He was ready to do his part whatever it took to win the war.

The sergeants, besides liking him, couldn’t help but have been impressed with his strength and stamina. They must have looked at this young man, so full of life, and realized that he would probably die somewhere in the South Pacific. They liked him so much, they gave him a weekend pass out of boot camp to see the sights of Chicago — just unheard of.

After basic training, he was sent to the West Coast, where he would wait for the ship that would carry him across the Pacific Ocean. He was slated for certain death. He was slated for what seemed inevitable, at least at that time.

FDR would send these men sailing in a zigzag pattern in an attempt to avoid enemy torpedoes. Their destination would have been, by far, the bloodiest day in the history of the world — a beach landing and a full-out invasion of the empire of Japan.

It must have been a scary time for an 18-year-old soldier staring death in the face. But, more immediately, it must have been a lonely night. He was the oldest boy in a family of 13 children, thinking about everyone gathering in the parlor of the farmhouse back in Juniata County. That baby-faced soldier was my father.

Frozen in history on Christmas Eve 1944. A general pulled up in a limousine. “*I’m looking for two volunteers to join my family for Christmas dinner tomorrow.*” The *baby face* threw up his hand and said, “*I’m one of them, sir!*” The other soldiers were reluctant. Finally, another stepped forward.

“*My driver will be here 1100 hours sharp. Be ready. As you were, men.*”

My father sat at the general’s large dining room table. “*Tell me what your name is soldier and from where you hail.*”

“Well, sir, my name is Lauver, and I come from the Pennsylvania Dutch country.”

“Hmm, I once knew a Lauver from Pennsylvania — pass the potatoes, please. He was a minister. All his buildings were painted yellow. What was that man’s name? He had an outdoor, wood-fired, brick pie oven, big enough to park a Sherman tank in. He took me in and gave me a meal.”

My father was stunned. The general had just described his boyhood home.

“Would you remember that man’s name if I told you, sir?”

“I certainly would, soldier.”

“Solomon.”

“Why, that’s it! The Reverend Solomon Lauver.”

“Well, he still lives, and he’s 81 years old. He is my granddad and, sir, you have been a guest in my home, as well.”

Many years later, and more than 3,000 miles away, the kindness of a meal was accidentally being returned to a lonely soldier on Christmas Day. The *baby face* would spend the balance of his service in the explosive South Pacific and occupied Japan. His life was spared, and I am alive today because of Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb instead of a full-out invasion of the empire.

My father, Clair K. Lauver, died in his Juniata County home on the evening of October 8, 1999, with his entire family by his side.

I’m the American Storyteller.