Donald Richard "Rick" Munson

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Donald Richard Munson Story

by Donald Richard "Rick" Munson

Born September 15, 1923, in Wheeling, WV. Donald (AKA, "Dad" or "Pop-Pop") grew up with older siblings Harry, Samuel, Clarabel, and the youngest, Johnny.



Donald Eugene Munson

Brother Harry and Dad joined the U.S .Army during World War II, Harry served in the U.S. Army and was killed in the Battle of Tunisia in North Africa in April 1943.

Dad served with the Army Air Force's 328th Airdrome Squadron, in the China-India-Burma theater. He served as a radio operator on cargo airplanes—C47s, I believe. You might ask, "How did he become a radio operator?" Well, the officer in command put a group of new recruits in a room with typewriters for training, all the while playing music. After a while an officer walked over to Dad, and said, "You've got rhythm, come with me."

Dad had lots of stories he told to our adult relatives and friends, but we kids would find chance to overhear some of them:

Dad told of, "flying the hump," which was basically this insanely risky supply run during World War II. From 1942 to 1945, Allied pilots had to haul cargo planes over the Himalayas—nicknamed the "hump"—to get stuff from India into China. The usual land route (the Burma Road) was shut down, so this was the only way to keep Chinese and American forces stocked while they fought Japan.

The flights were brutal: crazy weather, thin air at high altitudes, and mountains that weren't even properly mapped.There was no room for error in this delivery job. The Japanese fighters would attack the cargo planes and the crew would open the side door and shoot back at the Japanese Zeros with Thompson sub-machine guns. He made it through every time.

Guard duty is something every G.I. remembers. Apparently, they had guard towers around the base. Each guard tower was mounted with a 50-caliber machine gun. There were two soldiers assigned to each tower. One night while dad and his teammate were on duty in one of the towers, they heard noises coming from the dark jungle surrounding the base. They radioed back to headquarters to verify if there were friendlies in that area. The answer was, "No." So, they opened fire with the 50. As daybreak came, they could see that the noisy culprits were a herd of *Brahma bulls*!

There were also great post-war stories:

First, after he had returned from military duty, there was a legend of how Dad became the neighborhood's favorite TV repairman. The training he received as a radio operator in the military included being able to maintain and repair various radio equipment. A neighbor was complaining to Dad that his TV wasn't working properly, so Dad offered to take a look. During his investigation he found one of the tubes was bad (for decades until not that long ago, TVs and radios operated using tubes). He replaced the tube and the neighbors' TV was up and running. The news spread throughout the neighborhood like wildfire, and Dad was forever the guy the neighbors called on first!

Dad loved cars. One of my growing up memories was Dad always working on some kind of vehicle. Dad would buy a car or a pickup truck, make repairs, clean it up, then sell it. As my brother Roger and I got older, Dad would pass on his expertise to us. It started as simple as getting him tools. "Rick, get me the half-inch socket," or, "Roger, get me the three-quarters inch wrench."



The next step in our training process was showing us what he was doing. Using that knowledge, brother Roger would go on to open his own auto repair shop. As for myself, I could do most maintenance and repairs on my own vehicles. The only thing I haven't done is replace a car's rear-end. Sadly, today's auto computers and technology have made making repairs much more complex and difficult to do on your own.

Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter were always big events in the Munson household. Aunts, uncles, and cousins came to the event. Dad made the stuffing and cooked the turkey or the ham for these events. And they were excellent. The ham, as I remember, had cloves and pineapple slices on it. The dinner table was surrounded by all the relatives and lots of laughter.

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As we all grew up, married, and left home, Dad was always there for us, no matter what came up. If a kid need help fixing a hot water heater or a furnace, a car, or a TV, he was always there.

One grandson recently commented that his “Pop-Pop” was a mentor and helped shape him into the person he is today. I do believe all the grandchildren would say the same thing.

Sadly, he was a heavy smoker— unfiltered Pall Malls, I believe. He ended up having a triple-bypass. He had also become an insulin-dependent diabetic. All of his health problems caught up with him and on August 27, 1988, he passed away at 64. We miss him still.

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