

The journey back to fort read

Experience, Personal Experience



The year is 1944. You are a young man living in Chaguaramas but journeying several times a week to work in the American Base at Fort read Journal your experiences during this time.

Approximately a year after the beginning of World War 2, Winston Churchill the British Prime Minister at the time gave permission to the United States of America to set up bases in several British run Caribbean countries. A memo was sent to Trinidad and Tobago in October of 1940 by Admiral John Greenslade stating his visit to Trinidad, and the purpose of this was to ascertain the Geographical location suitable for setting up naval and army bases and army bunkers. The most suitable locations were in Wallerfield , Chaguaramas and Sangre Grande By the year 1941 Cumuto which was one of the chosen locations Fort Read American army was established. This base was approximately 24 square miles; within the area an airfield which was about four miles, including two runways, parking lots and taxi stands providing service to the runways. The Air Corps was under the command of the Army and Fort Read being one of them was then an Army base. Fort Read had buildings to accommodate 27000 of which approximately 15000 were locals who were required to travel by train from Port-of-Spain to work each day. There were five regiments and each regiment consisted of about three to five thousand men; these regiments were the 213th light anti-aircraft, the 252nd regiment the 135th Combat Engineers, the 99th anti-aircraft regiment of black soldiers and the 33rd infantry regiment. (" Trinidad And Tobago By World War II History Essay," n. d.)

I was one of the locals among many who formed a part of the regiment stationed at Fort Read Cumoto in the year 1944. I had just turned 18 and

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volunteered to be of service to the regiment in support of the U. S soldiers stationed in Trinidad . Traveling to and from Chaguaramas Trinidad where I am from was often tiring as I was required to wake up at 3am in order to board the train at 4am from Port of Spain to Fort Read. Luckily, for me this would be a thing of the past because my family along with others had to evacuate due to the pending war. The trains were often crammed and most days I was required to stand during my journey. Most days the tension was high as all the men who were headed to Fort Read were nervous including me because we were uncertain of what lies ahead upon our arrival there. The silence was nerve wrecking and I could hear a pin drop until departure, when the smell of burning coals filled the air and the sound of the steam engine grinding to a start on the iron tracks as we set off on our journey. The thought of leaving loved ones behind lingered on my mind.

I arrived at Fort Read after about 2 hours from boarding and reported for duty. The security at the gate was tight; men coming in and out were searched thoroughly. Upon, entering the base you could hear the shout of commands to personnel being trained. The commanding officers were properly attired and look as though they were ready for war. They wore helmets, body paddings and neatly pressed trousers, the boots on their foot were so shiny that you could see it glow in the sun. One of my many duties was keeping the ammunition clean and ready for use, being a young person I was fascinated to see the different types of guns and explosives. There were men assigned to keep the air strips clear and free from any obstruction, as planes were entering and being deployed regularly. Whenever, a plane returned there was a celebration among the men, however, the atmosphere

was not the same for departure. One could tell when a plane with soldiers was leaving for war; silence filled the atmosphere as if it were a time of mourning. The men that were leaving stood outside the plane looking fearless, while they were greeted by their fellow comrades and tribute was made to them. They also recited the anthem of both countries Trinidad and the United States of America and prayed heartily, knowing that there was a chance that they might not return.

Messengers visited Forth Read on a daily basis to keep us update with details of the war. We were informed of the number of men that left for war, how many men were recruited, how many returned and the progresses along the way (whether we were losing or winning). The messenger even had letters sent by the family members of the men who were serving, that being the only communication they had with the people on the outside. It was always comforting for those who received letters to know that their love ones were safe while they were serving in the war, as it is hard for a man to fight for a nation and be unable to protect the ones dearest to his heart. I was allowed to leave two times a month to visit my family and every time I left I thought of never returning but, something within me kept me going and I would return. I wasn't always fund of the thought of going home because my family always shed tears when I had to leave and seeing the look on my mother's face pained my hearth. Whenever, I was leaving my mother touched me on the shoulder and said " son god is with you, a mother's biggest fear is to bury her child but the god lord is with you and you can't not return".

On October 21st 1944 the messenger arrived at 10am, he came with a message that was different than usual. It was a letter to our commanding officer from the commanding officer at the chaguaramas Base requesting troops because they were outnumbered and losing men. Upon receiving the letter and reading it our commanding officer sound the alarms, which signalled us to immediately assemble on the runways. As he read the letter, silence took over Fort Read. The commanding officer had a list and began to call names which he selected randomly amongst the troops. Fear came over me with sweat dripping down my forehead; you could almost see my heart pounding in my chest through my uniform. He had almost reached the last name, two more to go and there it was, my name was on the list. I stood in shock for a moment and thought to myself " What would my end be like". Trembling in fear I walked away to collect my things, thinking of what lies ahead. One of my closest friends at the base came to me and said" what will you do? That's the heart of the war". I looked at him and turned my head lost for words I could only remember my mother's word every time I left for service.

After travelling for a few hours we had arrived, horror filled the atmosphere; there were wounded men on every corner. The commanding officer immediately briefed us and ensured that we were armed heavily, as attackers could strike at any given time. My first night in camp at chaguaramas was incident free up until about 8am the next morning. The sirens went off and all men were ready for attack, but they came by air. The war planes released 15 bombs by air, boom, boom, boom; men were running and ducking for cover. I immediately ran to head to the bunkers along with

other men. The commanding officers then said “ no” at the top of his voice “ we will not retreat we will fight it’s time we put an end to this ongoing war”. We all attacked with full force shooting down the planes and disarming them. There was a sense of unity and patriotism as well fought side by side. After, surviving this attack I became fearless and willing to take on any challenge hence forth. A few days later it was back to Fort Read, luckily we all survived. It was a pity we could not stay till the end because we volunteered to serve in Forth Read and not chaguaramas.

My journey back to Fort Read had me thinking and there was a fire burning within me that could not be quenched easily. Months passed and before you knew it, it was the year 1945 and the war was over, with victory on our side. Men were running from all corners waving the flag high and the country was at ease. The tension that raised high now went down to an atmosphere of peace. Returning home safe to my family gave them immense joy. The damage from the war was grand and it took our great nation some time to recover, but we overcame. To many this would be a mark in history but to me this is a lifelong experience that will forever linger in my hearth until I leave this earth. Recalling each memory as the days go by.