

Harper's Philosophy Makes For Happy Retirement

by Becky R. Dethero

Herb Harper enjoys retirement! He is proof that a multi-faceted life provides avenues to hobbies and opens doors to opportunities. Harper, who celebrated his 66th birthday this week, relates his philosophy as keeping all things in moderation.

"I try not to let myself get too intense," he says. He believes that staying on an even keel is the key to enjoying life.

For a boy who dreaded history in school, it is ironic that most of his hobbies are connected to history today. Harper has contributed to two published books and made submissions to three others that may be published.

Chappy, by Alfred Phelps is the story of Daniel James, the first black four-star general of the United States Air Force. For this book Harper relates his personal experiences serving under James during the Vietnam War.

Force for Freedom: Legacy of the 98th Bomb Group, was compiled by Harper and the members of that group, fondly called the Pyramidiers.

Though often asked when he will write his own book, he confesses he has no plans to do so. However, his contributions to *Air Power History*, a publication of Virginia Military Institute, were recently published.

Retired from two careers, Harper tells his stories and

shares his philosophy with an assurance that scarcely reflects the teenager who left his Polk County home to take jobs at Brown Stove Works and Cabin Craft in Bradley County during the mid-1940's.

He soon enlisted in the United States Air Forces, serving two years in combat during the Korean War as Weapons Maintenance Supervisor for the B-29 Super fortress. Upon reenlisting, he became part of the fighter squadrons who were assigned to guard Oak Ridge.

During the first of Harper's two assignments in England he met Joan, his bride of 38 years. They faced their life of travel with enthusiasm. Their family soon included a daughter and two sons.

From his experiences, Harper learned history is the thread that ties all things together. He quotes, "He who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it." And Harper is trying to see to it that history is preserved.

His 22-year career with the Air Force led to Thailand where he prepared F-4 Phantoms for flights into Vietnam. When the Harpers returned to Bradley County, Herb began his 18-year career with Duracell Battery Company.

They also bought a farm which Harper admits became his hobby. He raised cattle, chickens, ducks and did a little



Herb Harper stands among memorabilia from his 22-year career with the U.S. Air Force. Activities of his retirement today reflect those service years.

gardening. He even built the cross fence around the property himself.

"I enjoyed it until it became a chore for me. When I get too intense about something, I let it go," he says. Though the Harpers still live on the land with their pets, farming per se has passed to make room for new hobbies.

Herb and Joan have attended annual reunions of the Pyramidiers since 1986. "We enjoy exchanging stories and meeting new people," he explained. But more importantly, Harper is now historian for this national group. In so doing, he is a detective of sorts.

He was instrumental in finding significant information regarding a bomb crew to which a memorial was erected on the French/Italian border. In

addition, a priest in Yonkers, New York writes that Harper is providing the impetus to establish a long-needed newsletter about veterans, , yes, heroes, buried in that Yonkers cemetery.

Harper is busy. Whether he is writing an article for coin collectors or building a goldfish pond for Joan, everything is an adventure. With his insatiable curiosity and Joan's zest for life, there are sure to be more adventures to come.