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Office of University
Communications

June 27, 2017

Throughout his Life, Amos Glenn Henson '53 Remembered Advice of GWU President

*"I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky;
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by."*

These words from "Sea Fever," by poet John Masefield (1916) have echoed in Glenn Henson's mind through the challenges in his life. The 91-year-old World War II veteran—who lives in Vienna, W.Va.,—heard the poem recited many times by Philip Lovin Elliott, president of Gardner-Webb University from 1943 to 1961.

"In chapel, Elliott would say, 'We've got some things to do,' and he would recite the poem," recalled Henson, a 1953 graduate. "He said the lines with conviction, and it made an impression on me. It meant that he was determined to do something right and to do it well."

The words inspired and resonated with Henson, because he had experienced difficult times in his life, such as failing the sixth grade, dropping out of high school to serve in World War II and finishing school after the war. Seven years before hearing those words in chapel, a 17-year-old Henson and some friends lied about their ages to join the Marines. His unit was headed for Japan when the atomic bombs were dropped.

The ship was rerouted to North China, where the soldiers attempted to supervise the transition of power. "The Chinese nationalists welcomed us, but the Chinese communists didn't like us," Henson revealed. "Thirty-two men were killed in my regiment over a three-month period."



Glenn Henson, left, was honored by the city of Vienna, W.Va., with other veterans.

Glenn Henson in WWII

Glenn Henson dropped out of school to serve in World War II.

Glenn Henson at GWU

Glenn Henson, second from right, at GWU with friends and Miss Oster Whisnant Shytle, counselor for boys.

On the way back home to Rutherford County, N.C., Henson witnessed one more death, a Marine who had been rescued from a Chinese prison. They buried him in the Western Pacific. The somber service is etched in Henson’s mind as well as the chaplain’s request for the men to write letters to the soldier’s family, who expected a joyful reunion, not the devastating news he wasn’t coming home.

Henson worked in a textile mill for a year, then he and some friends decided to ask the principal if they could finish school. They were allowed to return, but would adhere to the same rules as the younger students. Henson worked hard, graduated in two years and enrolled at GWU. “Gardner-Webb had good teachers – some of the best in the country,” Henson stated. “I got a good foundation from the demands that were made. You had to meet requirements for conduct and academics.”

Prepared for the next step, Henson went to N.C. State University in Raleigh, N.C., and obtained his Bachelor’s in Mechanical Engineering. He landed a job with DuPont’s Savannah River Plant, a nuclear facility in Aiken, S.C. In 1962, he transferred to a new plastics plant built by DuPont in Vienna. He and his wife, Frances Mae, joined Vienna Baptist Church and he volunteered in the community, serving on boards and lending his expertise to city projects.

The couple had four sons, and he coached little league baseball.

When a city leader asked him about starting a new youth sport, Henson suggested soccer. He helped start the league and

coached for 15 years. The community recently honored Henson and four veterans by placing their pictures on a monument recognizing Gold Star families whose loved ones died while serving in the military during wartime. “He has done so much for this community and this church, and he has done it freely,” praised Dennis Pratt, associate pastor of Vienna Baptist. “I don’t know anybody who doesn’t speak highly of him.”

Henson retired from DuPont as a senior engineer after 37 years with the company. He helped design the machinery to manufacture Teflon, Nylon and Butacite, a plastic that goes inside safety plate windshields. Engineers spend their days solving problems. “It was almost always a challenge,” Henson reflected. “If it didn’t work right, you had to make it work right.” During those trying times at work or in life when things didn’t go as planned, Henson recalled the voice of Phillip Lovin Elliott repeating the words, “I must go down to the seas again...”



Glenn Henson in center

Glenn Henson, center, coached little league for several years.