

# Five brothers who went to war

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The five Cely brothers shouldered the burdens of the family when their father died.

Two months later came Pearl Harbor and they shouldered the burdens of their country as well.

They would leave their mother and sister behind on the family's Powdersville farm to serve.

"We were healthy and we were going to be drafted," said Charles Cely, who was 28 and married at the time. "We accepted it."

In the next four years of world war, the five Cely brothers shared different experiences on three continents.

Faith, patriotism, respect and sense of commitment to help others were qualities that the five brothers said helped them get through the tragic events that followed.

It's those qualities that they say separates their generation from those that followed.

"The men I was around, they were true to their country. You could count on one another. You could depend on one another. You don't do that now," said Raymond Cely, who spent nearly a year of his service in a Nazi prison camp.

The Cely brothers — Charles, Raymond, Jim, Wallace and Brooks — had been through the Depression and knew what hard times were.

"We realize the value of working and saving, but this generation — our children — doesn't appreciate that," Charles said.

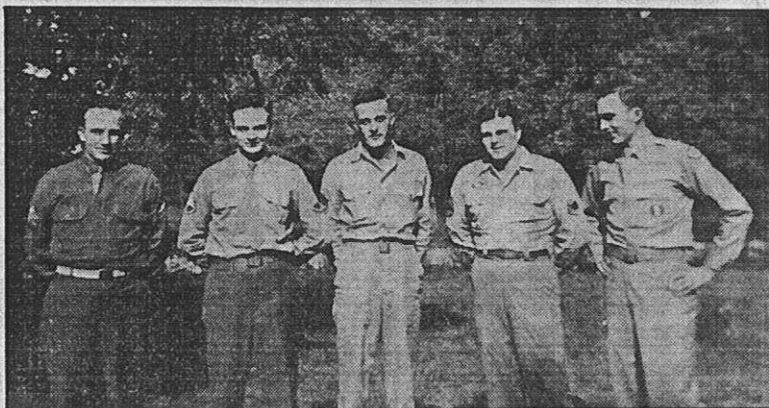
Raymond said those values combined with their faith and strict discipline helped them accept responsibility and the calls of duty.

Three of the five had close calls.

Wallace, who had been serving with the ROTC at Clemson College when the war started, flew missions to identify bridges and develop plans for blowing them up to slow down the Germans as part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Wallace once stepped off a bridge just before the Germans blew it up.

Raymond, knowing he would be drafted, enlisted after high school and eventually became a tech sergeant for the 9th Air force Division. During his 59th flight on May 29, 1944, the B-26 he was flying in was shot down on the outskirts of Paris.

He doesn't remember how he got



Five brothers: The Celys in their World War II garb

out of the plane or pulled his rip cord.

"I was in space coming to Earth. The chute opened and the plane hit the ground about the same time. The heat from the crash shot up in my face," Raymond said.

With several broken bones, Raymond was taken in by a French family, but eventually turned over to the Germans, where he began his stay in a prison camp.

There, he recalled trading cigarettes for cheese, and he lost 45 pounds.

"They would bring in a bucket of barley soup and that's what you would have all day for 24 men," Raymond said. "We ate cats and dogs — anything that came through." Raymond's prison camp was liberated by the Russians in early 1945.

Miles away, his brother Brooks, who joined the Marines before the war in 1938, fought in the Pacific as part of the first Marine Division.

Much of his time was spent in the Solomon Islands, Guadalcanal, Guam, New Zealand and other areas of the Pacific.

Heavy rains, mosquitoes and nighttime battles with the Japanese fill Brooks' memories. Besides casualties from battle, Brooks said the men had another war on their hands with malaria.

"There were times when you wanted to give up and you didn't care if you would live or not — that's how bad it was," he said.

Brooks ended his tour of duty in late 1944 after 30 months in the Pacific.

Both Charles and Jim Cely, who were drafted, stayed in the United States during the war. Jim, who

served despite having only one eye because of a fishing accident, worked in an Army infantry office at Ft. Gordon in Georgia.

Charles performed homeside duties for the Army Air Force.

Charles said he never understood war and why people would want to kill each other. He recalled a time when he guarded German prisoners of war at a camp near Biloxi, Miss.

"They were just like us. They just were drafted into the war."

When all five were reunited several months before the victory over Japan, there were no parties and no parades waiting for them.

"Everybody just went home and went to work," Charles said.

The brothers say the war's impact on their lives has been one of character building and discipline.

"For a while there, everybody had a harder outlook on life. You didn't take as many things for granted," said Brooks, who went on to serve a total of 27 years of active and reserve duty in the Marines.

Raymond added, "War is hell if you've ever been through it — hell on all sides — but when you come out of it, you're a stronger man."

Charles believes it was faith in God and a strong mother, Constance Cely, that kept all five of them alive.

"She loved us all and brought us up to respect each other and love each other and that kept us together," he said.

All five brothers were involved in starting Cely Brothers Lumber Co. in 1948. The company still runs with the help of 81-year-old Charles as Cely Construction.

Both Wallace and Jim died of cancer in the 1970s. Brooks and Raymond are retired.