



Retired Army Col. John R. Burks, holding a copy of his new book, is pictured with two of his four children, Sam Anderson (center) and Lynn Sisney.
 COURTESY PHOTO

His fair share

Retired Army colonel writes about his life, military career

BY APRIL WILKERSON
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OKLAHOMA CITY – Retired Army Col. John R. Burks is the textbook definition of having served his country: fighting in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, teaching survival skills to young soldiers, advising the Oklahoma governor and adjutant general about military readiness, and more.

Now Burks is serving his family and the public by writing the story of his life. *A Fair Share of War* recently was published and is available online through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Burks said that although he never set out to write a book, he was gathering all the stories during the 33 1/3 years he served in the military.

“I wanted to do it for my family so my children would have a better feel of why I chose the military as a career,” said Burks, who now lives in Pauls Valley. “It’s a way of explaining the necessity of being absent from the home as much as I was. They didn’t know at the time why Daddy was gone again.”

When Burks was a little boy, his father called him “colonel,” though he never knew why. But he ended up fulfilling his nickname. Burks writes about his life as the world was changing, from the attack on Pearl Harbor and his entry into the military to earning his “silver wings” to his drive to teach young soldiers the skills they needed to survive in Vietnam’s jungles. He also spent six years at the Pentagon and finished up his career as a senior adviser to the Oklahoma National Guard.

“It gave me a life’s dream,” Burks said of his military career. “I was doing what I always wanted to do, and I was rewarded by promotions and opportunities that I might not have had otherwise. I also met some wonderful people along the way at every level of government.”

Burks said growing up in small-town Wynnewood prepared him well for military life because of the teamwork and dedication required by such a calling. Now, as people outside his family begin to read his story, he said he wants them to remember his outlook as much as his individual battles.

“Whatever profession you choose, there’s a mission and a challenge,” said Burks, who will turn 87 this month. “To survive and rise up in that system, you have to adjust to the needs of the mission, and you have to know you’re not the solution. You’re helping to solve, through teamwork, part of the problem. Whether you’re an attorney or a surgeon or a soldier, you still have rules of the road that come with the job, and teamwork is the biggest one of them.”

One of Burks’ daughters, Sam Anderson, said her father’s positive outlook shines through in the book.

“Most people think he tells lots of war stories about horrible things, but when you read the book, it’s more about his relationships with people,” she said. “It’s not so much a book about war as it is about people. I’m very grateful that he wrote it all down.”

