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World War II

I joined the Navy on November 29, 1941. Four-year hitches were not available at that time, so I had to sign up for six years. Pearl Harbor was attacked while I was in boot camp. That was really something because nobody knew what would happen. Thinking the enemy might try to attack our base, the commanding officers gave each of us two rounds of bandolier shells and 30/30 shells along with a 30/30 rifle. Though I had shot a .22 and a shotgun before, I'd never shot a 30/30. Of course, the other guys were the same way. They told us to run down to the beach each time we heard the siren. The siren would go off every two hours at night, and we'd get up and run down to the beach. Of course, we didn't really know what to do.

So boot camp was short. Three weeks after leaving home, I boarded a battleship called the USS Pennsylvania on the night of January 1, 1942. I stayed on that ship for four years, until November 1947, and knew every hiding place on it. The Pennsylvania had been in dry dock at Pearl Harbor when a 500-pound bomb hit it. That was the only reason it didn't sink. The only ship still floating, it returned to the States to pick us up a week later.

The Lord took care of me all the time we were landing on different islands. Tarawa was one of the worst I ever saw. We bombarded it for two or three days, and there wasn't anything left on the island by the time that was over. So we didn't think any Japanese soldiers could have survived it. But when our landing barges went in, the Marines lost about 2,000 men. They didn't know about the coral reefs at Tarawa. We watched with binoculars from about 1,000 yards away as the landing barges ran up on the coral reefs and were mowed down by the Japanese. I thought, *Lord, I know why I'm on this ship.* Many of the casualties, men blown all to pieces, were brought to our sick bay.

After Tarawa, we landed on about 13 different islands, including Guam, Saipan, Tinian, Attu, and Kiska. Attu and Kiska were in the Aleutian Islands, where it was really cold. We took Attu and went on to Kiska. After bombarding it for about a week, we landed and found nothing but dogs. It had been a Japanese submarine base, but they were gone. Before leaving, however, they fired more torpedoes at us than I had ever seen in my life. I don't know how our battleship survived, but it did. I know the Lord was with us. I would look up, and a torpedo would be

passing the bow. Then I'd turn, and another one would come by. From the Aleutian Islands, we went to Honolulu and then returned to the States for a little while.

Next we sailed for the Philippines and Okinawa. When the Kamikaze pilots began attacking us, I saw a twin-engine Betty plane coming at us one day. He just kept coming and coming. "Lord, what am I going to do?" I prayed and started to go to the other side of the ship. Though we were firing at him with 40-milimeter guns, he just kept coming. About the time he was 50 to 100 feet off our bow, his plane blew up. The debris fell on the ship, but we were all right. I said, "Lord, you took care of me again."

About six other guys in my division and I started a prayer group at one time. Finally our group grew to about 15 or 20 men. Every night we weren't on watch, we would pray to get through things without harm. Many times when I was watching the radar system, I would pray, "Lord, if we get through this, we'll be all right." I'll always remember looking up in the dark of night and seeing all the stars. Seeing that, I knew there was a God.

Our aircraft radar could pick up the enemy at about 200 to 300 miles away. We could pick up surface craft at 30,000 yards sometimes. One day the radar kept sending little pips, and I thought something was out there. I kept asking the lookout guy if he saw anything at that bearing, and he would say no. But I kept getting the pips. Growing larger and larger, they would come on the screen and then go off again. Finally, the lookout said, "Yeah, there's a big group of whales out there." We never knew what we were going to find.

Near the end of the war, we went to Okinawa. On their way to Manila, the Japanese landed there to surrender one morning. That night, a torpedo hit our ship. Striking the stern, it knocked both starboard screws off along with the rudder and put a 40-by-50-foot hole in it, killing 20 quartermasters. It blew the deck up against the overhead. I had been on watch that night and had just climbed in my bunk in our compartment on the third deck when they hollered down, "If you want out of there, you better get out now. We've been hit." It felt like a death charge had gone off. When I got topside, I saw that the aft turret was already under water. They closed it off so we wouldn't sink. Two tugboats towed us to Guam the next day, and we stayed there in dry dock. The following day, the war ended. We had been one of 500 ships at Okinawa headed for Tokyo to observe the surrender, and an admiral had been onboard when we were hit. He left right after that.

The Lord was good to me. I never was injured. On the whole, we were very fortunate because we lost very few men off the Pennsylvania during the war. We traveled in a convoy with about four or five other battleships, two or three troop carriers and a bunch of destroyers. On the landing days, there also would be cargo ships and all the landing craft. I would look out and be amazed. We were supposed to keep track of all the ships on radar, especially if an admiral was onboard. Usually we served as the flagship in the Pacific, so we had to know the names and destinations of all the ships. We knew more about what was going on than anyone else. We knew where the troops were and what they were doing. I mostly worked with the Combat Information Center (CIC) to relay information. Sometimes I would hear Army guys radio in, "Get that Japanese off of my tank!" Then you'd hear the guns going off. It was really an experience, though sometimes we wouldn't see land for six months at a time. However, the radar men knew when land was out there even if it couldn't be seen with the naked eye.

Every three months or so, we received mail. My brother died of a heart attack in August 1943 while we were at Kiska, but I didn't hear about his death for two months. Finally the Red Cross contacted me in Honolulu. When they asked me if I wanted a 30-day leave, I said, "No, I think it would be worse on my parents if I went home. My brother and I are their only boys." He

had tried to join the Navy with me but couldn't pass the physical because of high blood pressure. If someone dies nowadays, everybody will know it the next day.

Tokyo Rose reported three times that our ship had sunk. I tried to write my folks and tell them not to believe all the stuff they heard, but we weren't allowed to say some things. So my mother would write, "I had a letter from you, but something was scratched out."

The USS Pennsylvania fired more rounds than any other battleship in World War II. Our big 14-inch guns would fire up to a distance of 20 to 25 miles. At night, we used to fire star shells for the troops on shore. When we loaded 1,400 pounds of projectile in each gun and put 300 pounds of powder behind that, it was powerful. Sometimes we would fire 12 guns at a time. Once we had to have the guns realigned at Hunter's Point. We had fired so many rounds that they needed new bushings. The men at Hunter's Point said they had never known of another ship needing to have their guns realigned.

Many times, I saw other ships destroyed. The Kamikazes were awful in the Leyte Gulf off the Philippine Islands. Everything would be quiet, and suddenly those planes would begin diving into ships all around us. The Japanese were out of bombs by then. But the Lord was taking care of us. A couple of cruisers and destroyers were hit, but none of the larger ships like the troop carriers or battleships. During that time, I often stood at general quarters for two to five hours at a time thinking, *Oh, man, this is bad*. After it was over, I'd pray, "Thank you, Lord. Thank you." Two weeks later, MacArthur showed up.

We were in a typhoon near the Philippines once that lasted for three days. The wind probably blew 120 miles an hour or more, strong enough to nearly roll over our battleship. Unable to set up mess tables for those three days, we just ate K-rations.

When the war ended, we were told that anyone with four years of service who had signed up for six years could get out. I thought, *Boy, I'm going home!* Then they added, "EXCEPT radiomen, radar men, and quartermasters." *Holy cow!* I thought. So I had to stay in until my six years were up. I was transferred to a tanker and made six or seven trips to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, hauling oil back to Japan so they could bring their troops back.

During my six years in the Navy, I participated in 13 different operations and went on leave only twice. If I had to do it again, I would go back to the Navy because I still had a place to sleep every night. Those guys in the Army and Marines were sleeping in trenches. That wasn't for me. My father had served in World War I but never would talk about it other than to say it was bad. They used gas then, and a lot of his good friends were killed.

When I went into the service, I had never been far from home and had been brought up in church by God-fearing parents. My mom, a Bible teacher and WMU president, was the most involved. Dad worked nights at the power plant in Trinidad, Texas, and didn't have much time. Two days out on the train from Dallas to San Diego for boot camp, I thought, *What have I done? I don't know about this*. But the Lord said to me, "You'll make it if you just trust me." From then on, I did.

I married a beautiful lady from Washington right after the war ended. We met in Oakland, California, on a blind date. One of my Navy friends stationed in Alameda had invited another friend and me over, and his wife had invited two girls. My future wife and I were the only two to show up. We've been married 57 years now, and she is a real server to God, too.

When young people go to ballgames or other places and hear the national anthem, they don't understand what it means. They could care less. But I know the Lord has something in mind for this country. Of course, there are a lot of young people who really know the Lord. All I can say is that if they'll trust the Lord, they won't have a bit of a problem.

