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In January 1945, I joined the Navy. I had seen so many movies and heard so much propaganda that I really was anxious to get into the service and see some action. Now I'm glad I didn't. Originally, I was with a group that planned to mass in Okinawa and participate in the invasion of Japan. The Americans dropped the bomb before we left the States, however.

When I arrived at boot camp, I had to pull off all my clothes and didn't like that. But I knew I had to do it and certainly didn't argue with anyone. If they told me to do something, I did it. It was a new way of living for me. Everyone else was doing the same things, so I thought I could too.

So I served on an LCT during the occupation of Japan instead. By the time I arrived, the war was over. Thankfully, I never was in any danger. Many people died as a result of the atomic bombs, but many more would have died otherwise. In Japan, I visited some villages and saw several very large wooden casks filled with bamboo spears. The idea had been for the civilians to grab a spear and stick it in an American GI. If not for the bomb, I believe the Japanese would have fought to the very end. They did in the South Pacific. We would have had a hard time defeating them in man-to-man combat.

The first time I went ashore in Japan, I wore a .45 pistol because I didn't know what to expect. But there was no need for it at all. The Japanese people were very gracious at the time. I met a destitute Japanese family on the beach where our ship landed a few miles from Hiroshima. I gave the father a case of canned milk for his baby. He brought me a chalk statue as a gift in appreciation of the milk. Though the statue didn't have much value, it meant a lot to him.

Though nothing spectacular happened to me, I had some good experiences and a few that were maybe not so good. But it was good for me, and I saw a part of the world that I otherwise probably not have seen. My GI Bill benefits enabled me to go to college, and I'm grateful to the United States taxpayers for that opportunity. It made a big difference in my life.

When my tour of duty overseas ended, I tried every way in the world to get back home. I was able to fly to Guam seated on a stretcher on an ambulance plane carrying three Japanese prisoners. Scheduled to be tried for war crimes, they had murdered some GI's and had been

accused of cannibalism. In Guam, I had to wait a while before boarding a big airplane and sitting next to a high-ranking Navy officer. At the time, I was a third class petty officer. When we reached Honolulu, a Navy nurse bumped me off the plane. So I had to take a ship to San Francisco from there. Finally, I was discharged in July 1946 and rode a bus home to West Texas. I was so very glad to get home!

I was a Christian when I went into the service. Of course, I teamed up with other Christians, but I did not find the worship services very fulfilling. A sailor certainly could go astray if he was so inclined. It was important to me to have good fellowship.

I formed some friendships during that time that have continued to this day. One of those friends was from New York. In Honolulu, while we were trying to get back home, he borrowed \$40 to buy a watch. At the time, I didn't know him that well because he had not served on my ship that long. After I left for San Francisco, he caught a ship and sailed through the Panama Canal to New York City. He paid back that \$40 after he got home. I even talked to our captain a few years ago. I'm grateful to have been able to maintain those friendships after all these years.

All my life, I had heard how great it was to be an American. Before I joined the Navy, it seemed to me that being in the military would be a great adventure. I really wanted to be a part of the war effort, and I think everyone else did as well. I've been glad to see the recent revival of patriotism. I see "God Bless America" stickers and flag lapel pins everywhere. Flags are even being flown from automobiles. If we were attacked again, I think our citizens would rise up just like they did before.

I worked as a welder in a shipyard in California during the summer between my junior and senior years in high school in Odessa, Texas. Though I was only 16 years old then, I made pretty good money. So patriotism already was paying off for me. Women did a lot of those types of things, too. Their lives were changed as a result. They became more independent, and I'm glad they did. I think the core of patriotism has remained alive and well in this country.

I was only 17 years old when I went into the service. Of course, things were a lot different in the Navy than they were at home. Mama wasn't there to feed me and wash my clothes any more. The responsibilities and discipline were good for me and helped me later. Being raised in a Christian home helped, too.

After I left the Navy and finished college, I married a Christian woman. That's when my faith began to become stronger and stronger. And I think it's still growing. I am grateful to be a Christian and for the continuous presence of God in my life. My three children are also Christians.