



Robert Tipton
Storekeeper First Class, U.S. Navy
Construction Battalion, 49th Battalion
World War II

My wife Julia and I were living in Houston when I volunteered for the Navy CBs (Seabees), the Construction Battalion with the Civil Engineer Corps. While at boot camp in Norfolk, Virginia, I was transferred from the 47th Division to the 49th Division. A few weeks later, the 47th Division shipped out to Guam and was there when it fell to the Japanese. Not one person in that battalion survived. The Lord blessed me by changing my assignment. I never saw battle. Instead, I worked on land as a storekeeper performing warehouse work and dealing with supplies.

After basic training, I was sent to Bermuda for a year. Enemy submarines were coming in close to Bermuda and New York at the time (1944), but we didn't suffer any casualties. We took over building construction from private contractors and set up a permanent base. Admiral Nimitz had an office there, but I only saw him from a distance. Over the following six months, I was based in Providence, Rhode Island. My next assignment was at Rhoda, an island off the coast of Guam where I stayed about 18 months. A lot of snipers were still there after World War II ended.

In November 1945, I received my military discharge and returned to Texas. Julia had been living in Dallas. A red vase is my one souvenir from my Navy days. We had gone exploring one day on Rhoda and walked into a cave filled with dirt, filth, and lots of radio equipment. But I spotted the red vase sitting on a table and thought it was the prettiest thing I had ever seen. So I picked it up and carried it back to camp. When I came home, I packed it in my bag. It was a miracle that it made it through that long trip without getting broken.

I was a Christian when I entered the Navy, but I found out that their church services were pretty weird. The officers always went in first and got their seats. If any seats were left in the back, we were allowed to use them. When my wife and I moved to Tyler in 1991, we found Green Acres Baptist Church and have been there ever since.