



**Rudy Turner**  
First Class Petty Officer, U.S. Navy  
World War II

I joined the Navy on June 7, 1941. I had two choices; I could work for 50 cents a day, or I could go in the service for \$21.00 a month plus three meals a day and a clean bed. My basic training was done in Norfolk, Virginia. I was waiting to go to a radio tech school in Michigan when the opportunity came up for aviation metal-smith school in Pensacola, Florida. That was just right across the bay from my hometown of Mobile, Alabama. So I changed my mind and went to Pensacola. While there, I went to a movie with some relatives on Sunday, December 7, 1941. Suddenly, they stopped the movie and announced, "Pearl Harbor has been attacked. All servicemen are to report back to their base." Everybody in the theater was crying, including my sister.

I returned to the base. Though we were scheduled to finish our course in six months, we graduated in three months because they sped things up. The next thing I knew, I was sailing through the Panama Canal on my way to Pearl Harbor. We arrived there a couple of months after the attack, and it was a sight to see. You couldn't help but have hate in your heart after seeing what had happened. Oil was still floating on the water. Whenever we went on liberty, we had to take gas masks with us. After riding on a boat from the ship to shore, our white uniforms would have spots of oil all over them.

My first ship was a destroyer. We wound up in Guadalcanal, convoying landing parties from Guadalcanal to places like Bougainville. After traveling back and forth so many times, I got tired of going 10-15 knots per hour and watching other ships going 30 knots. I wanted some fast

action. But I had not even broken in a pair of socks in the Navy when we participated in the Battle of Midway. We were on our way to the Aleutian Islands when they told us to turn in our foul-weather gear because we were going back to the Pacific. After we got there, I had not been assigned a battle station and had to man a mounted 20mm gun. Other than a sidearm, that was about the smallest weapon aboard ship. I was pumping that thing as best I could, but in the excitement we didn't know who hit what. Young, I didn't have enough sense to be scared until it was over.

Finally, I was transferred off the destroyer and sent back to the United States, where I caught another ship (a cruiser named the USS Vincents) and rode it through the Panama Canal headed for the Southwest Pacific. The only thing that saved me was that I always had problems with my tonsils. I decided it was a good time to have them out and went to the hospital in Pearl Harbor while we were docked there. My ship left me behind and was sunk in Guadalcanal.

Since all my clothes had been aboard the ship that sank, they issued me a new sea bag when I returned to the States a second time. Then I served on the USS Wichita and USS Vicksburg before eventually ending up on the USS Chicago, a heavy cruiser. The Chicago went to Newport, Rhode Island, where we indoctrinated a new crew and went on a shakedown cruise. We wound up in Yokohama, where we witnessed the signing of the peace treaty. That probably was the highlight of my military career.

When they offered a "convenience of the government discharge" for so many points earned after the war, I said, "I'll take it." By then, I had served about five and a half years. So I left six months early. We had a job to do, and we did it. But it was over. I had married in the meantime, and my wife wanted me to come home. She appealed to me more than the Navy.

Upon receiving my honorable discharge, I settled down with my wife in Bristol, Rhode Island. Since there was no naval unit in Bristol, I joined the National Guard and went to school. Not too many jobs were available at the time. So when I was offered active duty, I took it. As part of that duty, I traveled to El Paso, Texas, in 1948 and went to guided missile school. After we returned to Rhode Island, I kept hearing our unit was going to be federalized because of the Korean War. So I signed up for automatic motor maintenance school in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Then I fooled around and started taking more courses and got commissioned.

The life of an officer is different from that of an enlisted man. It wouldn't have taken much for me to sign the bottom line and go back into the military. But my wife said, "No, we're going to stay here." So I left the National Guard, finished school and went to work for Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Akron, Ohio. When they opened the Kelly Springfield Plant in Tyler, I moved there. I retired from that plant.

I don't see how people can make it through something like World War II or even the crises today without the Lord on their side. Of course, I was young and didn't know what fear was. I may have been scared at times, like when our destroyer was hit by shrapnel and we had to bury a man at sea. I was in church before I was born. My daddy was a Baptist preacher, and Mama always was with him. They made sure my five sisters, four brothers and I were in church all the time. We sang a lot, and Daddy liked to brag, "I've got two quartets and a pianist for both." So church was all I knew. I kept the Lord's words, "Fear not for I am with you," in my heart and mind during all the battles. If people have God in their heart, they do not have to fear. On the destroyer, ten of us held prayer meetings on the fantail at night. That kept our minds off what *could* be, because what is *going* to be is the main thing. In other words, life is just temporary. I thank God for my Christian preaching father and my Godly mother who indoctrinated me in Christianity from birth.

My only claim to fame occurred during a trip from Philadelphia to Bristol, Rhode Island, to see my wife. While waiting in a train station in Providence, I was reading a newspaper. All of a sudden, I noticed a Ripley's Believe It or Not article—"Rudy Turner Loses Wallet with \$1,080...Found on the Beach." I had lost my wallet earlier on an island just outside San Francisco when our ship hit some rocks and broke half it two. We had to abandon ship and paddle for our lives until the Coast Guard picked us up. By the time we got out of the water, my wallet was missing.

The lady who found it had lost her husband in the war and was a beachcomber. She told me later that whenever she walked on the beach and saw a ship leaving, "I fall on my knees and pray for you boys. I was walking along the beach and saw the corner of something sticking up out of the sand. I started brushing the sand away and discovered it was a wallet. I counted six different footprints nearby." She had turned my wallet over to the Navy base in San Francisco with my money still in it. What I really appreciated was not losing my cards for crossing the International Date Line and the Equator. I treasured those things.

I never wanted to talk about or remember anything about the war. If someone asked me what I did, I would say I just served for five and a half years. If they asked about ships I served on, I said I didn't recall the chronological order. I felt it was best to get evil things out of my mind. So after leaving the Navy, I concentrated strictly on serving the Lord and working at the church.

Several of my shipmates have called me and asked if I remembered something specific. I'd say, "No, I don't remember that." One fellow from Michigan married a girl in Flint, Texas, and called me when he moved there. When he came over to show me pictures and things from the USS Vicksburg, I told him, "I don't remember this." Personally, I didn't think it was worth remembering. It was important at the time, but once my job was done, I just wanted to forget it. I had enough ribbons and medals (including bronze stars, silver stars, etc.) to look like MacArthur, and I gave them all to my grandchildren. I did not choose to linger in the past or think about it. But if someone asked about the churches I've served, I can name every one and tell you what I did there and when.

I do remember hearing people talk about "good Atlantic duty" in Brazil, and how great liberties were there. I still have transfer slips I filled out trying to leave the South Pacific to go to the South Atlantic, hoping to get some *good* duty.

At the same time, there's not enough money in the world to buy my experiences in the Navy. But I wouldn't pay a nickel for any more like them. Mama tried to get me not to join the Navy. She said, "You get dizzy just swinging in a swing. You get out there on a ship, and you're going to stay sick." There were times when I wished I had listened to her. Every time we left port, I was dizzy and seasick the first day. After I got used to it, I liked being rocked to sleep by the waves each night. I got to see all the South Pacific islands, was able to visit Australia twice, and spent two or three weeks at a time in Honolulu. I never would have seen all those things if I had stayed in Mississippi. I also got an education by being around the other sailors, particularly on the little destroyer. It was small enough that I knew everybody onboard. We talked to each other about our families and even met each other's families at times. The thing that tied it all together was our faith in Jesus Christ.

I heard a story about my mama. She told the pastor at our little church in Mississippi that she prayed, "God, let my sons come back from the military safe and sound if they're going to be good Christians. But if they're going to come back and be the town drunkard and bring shame and disgrace to my family, I'd appreciate it if you'd just take them, Lord. They went in good. If

they can't come back that way, take them while they're good." That prayer stayed with me.

It was difficult being away from my wife when I was at sea, but we got mail. She wrote me every day. Sometimes, I would receive a two-week supply of letters. Since we couldn't turn on the lights at night, I would sit on my bunk and read them by flashlight. It was exciting to hear what was going on in Bristol day by day. Thank God, my wife had set up an apartment for us just upstairs from her family. So I knew they were taking care of her. When I wrote to tell her what was going on at sea, I would say, "All I can see is water. There's nothing to write about because I can't tell you where I am or where I'm going. All I can tell you is that I'm safe." We had V-Mail, censored but free.

One thing that got us through everything was that my wife and I always kept a sense of humor. We still do today. If you measure only the good things of life and forget the bad things, you're going to be a happier person. I look at life as a type of war. There are many battles to fight. But the day I walked down that aisle and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior, I won the battle and the war. I have no fear because I know where I am going.

