

# My Walk With God

## Navy Days

Ch VI

*Navy*



*Hymn*

Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless  
wave,  
Who bid'st the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep;  
O hear us when we cry to Thee,  
For those in peril on the sea.

Most Holy Spirit, Who didst brood  
Upon the chaos dark and rude,  
And bid its angry tumult cease,  
And give, for wild confusion, peace;  
O hear us when we cry to Thee,  
For those in peril on the sea!

O Christ, Whose voice the waters  
heard  
And hushed their raging at Thy  
word,  
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,  
And calm amidst its rage didst  
sleep;  
O hear us when we cry to Thee,  
For those in peril on the sea.

O Trinity of love and power,  
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;  
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,  
Protect them wheresoe'er they go;  
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee  
Glad hymns of praise from land and  
sea.  
Amen

I boarded the train for Philadelphia, and so my independence began. My orders were to the Navy Recruiting Station in Philadelphia. Processing began at about 9:00am and after a days worth of this procedure I was sworn into the US Navy with about 90 other recruits. We were all destined for the

Recruit Training Center in Bainbridge, Maryland. After another train and buss ride, we finally arrived at about 10:pm. It took another 2 hours to be assigned a temporary barracks and off we were to sleep on bare mattresses with another 90 guys sharing one large room and one bathroom.

The next morning began at 6:O'clock, and was filled with another day of orientation. First we were presented with a box, into which we were to place all of our clothing and anything else we brought along with us, watches, toiletries, and any jewelry etc., and we were left naked. This was the first stage in the elimination of any personal status that we had. We all became equal in our identity. Another physical, haircuts, uniform distribution, company assignments, and meeting our company commander, who was a seasoned first class boatswain's mate, followed. He took pleasure in yelling and screaming orders at us. I'm sure it was the navy's version of psychological warfare, designed to force us into a cohesive team. I guess it worked because my entire Company developed a feeling of **trepidation** and **an aversion** towards him. The only things that we were allowed to keep were any religious medals we might be wearing, and I was also able to keep my Rosary. Along with our uniform distribution we all received a reminder of our spiritual needs as US Navy Sailors. All Protestants received a pocket size copy of the New Testament; Jewish men received a pocket size copy of The Torah; and Catholics received a pocket copy of Daily Readings from the Four Gospels and The New Testament, with other daily prayers, the Ordinary of The Mass,, and The Stations of The Cross. I felt a little safer.

Each Saturday or Sunday we were encouraged to attend whichever religious service might be appropriate for each of us. On Sundays, Catholic Mass was celebrated in the Regimental Drill Hall followed by a non-denominational Protestant Service. The lack of regular devotionals created an atmosphere of abandonment for me some of the time, but the general attitude of Christian morality within the Navy was apparent, and permeated the rules by which we, in The US Navy, all lived. I could not help to feel that God had His hand in the creation of the UCMJ (The Uniform Code of Military Justice), by which we were governed and the civil code by which we lived.

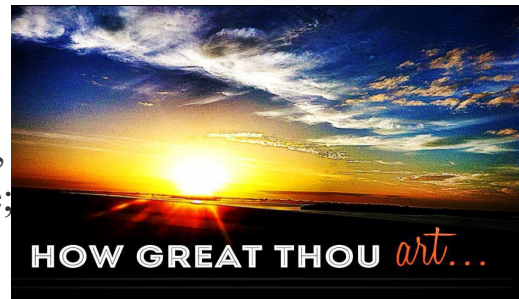
The standard 12 weeks of navy boot camp were compressed into 9, because of the need for men in the fleet during the Korean War. Marching as a company was our main mode of transportation. Our barracks was

about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from the mess hall where we took our meals, and the training areas where we received most of our naval instruction. There was time, while marching to our training areas, to occupy ones mind with things other than our confinement in boot camp. Home and the future occupied most of our thoughts. The life of Jesus and how that might parallel my own situation both here and at home kept creeping into my mind..

There were some occasions when we might get the chance to walk alone, through the fields that separated various areas of the camp, while returning to our barracks. During this time I remember singing or trying to sing the hymn “How Great Thou Art”. I loved that time.

## *How Great Thou Art*

O Lord my God, When I, in awesome wonder,  
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.



Chorus:

Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art! b

With God's help in keeping my opinions to myself, and holding my temper, I succeeded in surviving my 9 weeks of boot camp. Not only did I survive, but I did quite well considering my poor performance in high school. We were all interviewed during our last week of training in order to assign us, to fit the navy's needs. Some of us went directly to the fleet while others were assigned to specialty training. I was off to Radarman School in Norfolk, VA.

I felt free while at school in Norfolk. On Sundays we were able to go to church in town, when not on duty. I sought out Catholic Churches in downtown Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Newport News that I attended. I felt at home in Portsmouth at St. Paul's. During times when duty assignments

prevented me from leaving the school, I would attend the Navy Chapel at the Marine Base that shared our property. The Chapel served both The Protestant, and Catholic communities. This is where I learned the Navy Hymn shown at the beginning of this chapter. There was a massive stained glass depiction of the painting shown here; but modified with a US Navy sailor standing at the helm, being guided through the storm by a huge depiction of Jesus, standing at his side. It was good to know that someone else was showing all of us that Jesus was always at our side. I made some attempts, at this time, to become more united with Jesus in Confession, and in my behavior. I purchased a very nice black leather Bible with ribbons to keep track of my current and favorite readings. One day as I kept the bible with me, I took the ferry boat to Hampton Roads to go to church, and on the way back to school at Norfolk, I left the bible on the ferry. I felt almost as if I had lost Jesus. After returning to the ferry station to inquire if anyone had turned it in, with no success, I prayed that for whoever had found it, the bible would be a comfort and blessing to the finder. Since that time, and loosing a number of Rosaries, I prayed the same prayer of hope.



When I graduated from Radarman School, in the top 5% of my class, I was sent to the fleet, assigned to the USS Tarawa CVS-40, an aircraft carrier home ported in Quonset Point, RI. Again there was less of a spiritual atmosphere aboard ship than I would have liked. I Had, however, my Rosary always in my pocket, and my copy of Daily Reading given to me in boot camp. Even though I prayed every night before falling asleep, my Rosary and Daily Readings fell by the wayside. There was a Catholic Priest (Chaplain) assigned to the ship and he provided Mass every Sunday on the hanger deck when at sea. Mass was not always available when in port on Sundays due to other obligations our Chaplain had, so I would seek out a local church when he was unavailable. I was therefore able to maintain regular attendance at Mass on Sundays. This became noticeable by other members of my division aboard ship when they began to accompany me to Mass ashore. So went my first 3 years of naval service. I was able to maintain my obligations on Sundays and most Holy Days but there was definitely a lack of spiritual growth.

Because I was only 17 when entering the navy, my enlistment would be up before my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. In December 1957 I was discharged early and I went home to Roosevelt. It was good to get back to St. Anthony's in Hightstown. Much had changed in the 3 years I had been gone. Most of the people of my age had gone off to college or left the area for work. The



economy of 1958 was in recession and work was not easy to find. My father had been able to secure a position as maintenance engineer at the Cities Service Oil Co. experimental laboratories outside of Hightstown in '57. That seemed a good fit for him. I was very thankful to God for this change. To me, things at home were a little better but there was definitely a lack of finances to afford anything but the bare essentials. Now that I was no longer obligated to Navy Service, I considered that it was my chance to seek a life closer to God. In the secular and military environment I recently left, I felt that I was unable to afford such a luxury.

Problems appeared to block my way however, as soon as I considered religious life. I had no higher education and my high school grades were less than average. Applying to a seminary was out of the question. The need for higher education, and without a financial sponsor, I wouldn't be able to gain acceptance. I had applied, however for a position as an air controller with the Civil Aeronautics Administration before I left the navy and was awaiting notification for a position at their training center in Oklahoma. In December of 1957, with the economy in recession, and I was unable to find employment with which I could support myself while waiting for an answer from the CAA. My youthful impatience became overwhelming, after about 6 weeks waiting for an answer from the CAA, and I could no longer ask my parents to support me.

I began to prepare myself for a life I had never imagined. After a long absence during my time in the navy, I sought out St. Anthony's one Saturday afternoon and went to Confession. Then, on a cold winter Monday morning, I drove to the New Brunswick Navy Recruiting Station and reenlisted. I was 20 years old now and no longer need permission from my father. I went home that evening and told my parents that I would be leaving for the Brooklyn Navy Receiving Station the next morning.





After a 2 week wait in Brooklyn, I had my orders in hand. Off I went again, to the fleet. This time I would no longer have the familiar environment of the North East and New England to call home. I was headed for the unknown, of, Long Beach, CA, and the USS Belle Grove. I drove alone across the pre - Interstate Highway, US Highway system. I would visit an uncle in Monterey before checking into my final duty station in Long Beach. The trip took me through the west that I only knew from the movies. Even during winter time, with snow covering the roads, I was in awe with God's creation of the American West. It was almost as I had imagined from the movies, except for the lack of cowboys and gunfights (*at the OK corral*). As I traveled through New Mexico and all the way to California, I was impressed as I drove through the small towns. In their center was, most always, an adobe Spanish colonial Catholic Church. The faith of the people displayed by these churches impressed me deeply.

I finally arrived at my uncle's home outside Monterey. The Pacific coast of California was a breathtaking sight for an easterner. Three days later I, traveled the Pacific Coast Highway to the Long Beach Naval Station where my ship was home ported. What a disappointment. After spending time in the Navy on , as they said in colonial times, a ship of the line, (*a WWII Essex Class aircraft carrier*), the Belle Grove, an amphibious transport landing ship dock, was exceedingly um-impressive.

This was my first week alone in a new and unfamiliar part of the country so I took the time to explore. Beach towns south of Long Beach seemed the most interesting, they lacked the crowds that I previously encountered when driving along the coast west of Los Angeles, on my trip from Monterey. With the whole weekend available, off I went to the south. After an hour or so, San Clemente came into view. It was a quiet town with a beach below the low cliff to the west. After checking into a motel for the night, I checked the telephone book for local churches and found Our Lady of Fatima Church had a 9:00am Mass Sunday morning. Mass was familiar, as was always the case, in this pre-Vatican II world. When leaving the church after Mass was over, the view of the Pacific was

brehtaking from the horizon to the south to the horizon in the north. I recalled the many towns I traveled through on my way down from Monterey. San Simeon, San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Santa Monica, and now San Clemente, They were all part of the Spanish Colonial Missions and all named for Saints in Heaven. Even the massive city of Los Angeles, is named after God's Angels. A little twinge of comfort overcame me and I knew that God would be with me and help me in my new assignment aboard the Belle Grove.



Our first deployment aboard Belle Grove was in support of the nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands in 1958. The ship was old, slow and had a flat bottom that did not contribute to it's stability at sea. As a 2<sup>nd</sup> class petty officer, I was the leading radarman aboard and therefore in charge of the combat information center. It was a little overwhelming at first as I was used to having more experienced men to rely on. I would now need to rely more on prayer. During this first tour, however I gained a respect for the job assignments that the ship had. We had no chaplain aboard so I was left only with my private prayer and reflections. Whenever the ship was in port on weekends I would seek out a Catholic Church. There was a Navy Chapel on the US Navy base in Olongapo, PI, where Mass was celebrated daily, and I took advantage of this whenever we were there. Somehow, the presence of God seemed more real in that small Chapel.

I don't remember exactly when it happened, but somewhere in this part of my life, came the death of Pope Pius XII. A sadness had gripped the Church and myself. I had never considered Catholic Life without Pope Pius XII. But how can one know the mind of God? A new pope was elected, John XXIII, a jolly old man was he. To me it signaled a new era in Church History. It looked like we had Santa Claus for a Pope. He was very much a kindly old man and to the world's surprise he called a Counsel to order in '62.

After serving aboard Belle Grove for 1 ½ years, orders came in for me to be reassigned to the Anti-Submarine Warfare School at San Diego in '59 as an instructor. It was with great anticipation that I traveled to San Diego for this assignment.



San Diego is a city named after the visionary who spoke with the Virgin Mary at Tepeyac, in Mexico, in 1521. Juan Diego carried her message from the vision, we now call, Our Lady of Guadalupe to the local Bishop who had a Chapel built on the site in response to the Virgin's message.



With a new found freedom I explored much of the San Diego area. It abounded with Spanish Colonial history that was all new to me. From the colonial architecture of Old Town to the many churches and monuments of the Spanish time, God's hand was evident in the Spanish missionary influence as well as the beauty of His natural landscape.



I was finally able to attend Mass every Sunday, either at the Naval Training Center Chapel or at a local church in the area. My favorite was St. Joseph's Cathedral down town that was built in the old mission colonial style, that is except for it's beautiful stained glass windows. Even with all of these reminders of God around me, I slowly became subject to the secular environment of my new friends at work. Not that they were a particularly bad influence but they did not express the same interest in the Spiritual Life that I had always sought out. I stopped going regularly to confession and began to look at Christianity as one great common religion where a person could seek God in his own way; after all, I was now 22 years old. I even considered looking at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons). Just look at what nice wholesome people they are.

One afternoon, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1961, I attended Mass at the Navy Training Center Chapel, it was All Saints Day. The priest's homily just blew me away. It was a theological dissertation on the doctrine of All Saints. The Saints suffering in Purgatory, the Saints militant on earth, and the Saints triumphant in Heaven. I knew from that moment that I was a



member of a family of saints, all who have striven or are striving for, or who have been striving for eternal life with God and all His Angels in Heaven. From that moment, I renewed my purpose for life with Jesus and couldn't wait for my next opportunity for Confession that came that very weekend. Isn't it curious that we hear the same things over and over again all our lives, but what does it take for the message to sink in. I didn't know but God's grace penetrates ones soul, when He sees our inner-most desires conforming together in His plan.

All of my thoughts of exploring other Christian denominations vanished from my thoughts. How could I give up any part of my faith for a different view of reality that was incomplete in it's nature. None of them believed in the most important thing that Jesus left us; His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, in the Eucharist that we receive in Holy Communion.

Instead of devoting my time to those things that would give me pleasure, I starting thinking about what kind of legacy I would leave on earth when I was no longer here. Having a family life suddenly became more important to me. One friend in particular was Gerry, another radarman that I was working with, who had a family that seemed to me to be ideal. Even though it may not have been so, it was better than anything I could compare it to. They were not church goers, but they did have a strong Christian morality that they lived by. I was working with no other Catholics at the time and very few of my friends at the ASW School had any kind of christian moral base by which they lived.

More technical training in my radar field was necessary if I wanted a more responsible position in the Navy. A more responsible position would give me better access to influence other men in their walk with God here on Earth. I applied for and received orders to a radar technical (Radarman Class "B") school at Treasure Island, San Francisco. God always gives us the opportunity to dig ourselves out of the mire of our own creation, not only with cities like San Francisco, after the great earthquake and fire of the early 1900's, but with our own lives as well. It is sad to say that I have had to re-learn this lesson many times over. I was living in the shadow of this iconic setting; the city and the bay. Here Treasure Island stood in the center of the great San Francisco – Oakland Bay Bridge. I became

occupied with my desire for a family of my own. I had dated a couple girls during my time at Treasure Island but none were the ones I felt that I could build a family with. I did remember a particular girl that I had met while stationed in San Diego. I thought at the time, this is the one for me. Things did not fall into place then, but I had not given up hope. The operational part of my schooling would take place at the Fleet Anti Air Warfare Training Center in San Diego, close to where I had been previously stationed. The chance to reunite with my old friends, and the girl I had met there, was somewhat exciting. A year and a half earlier, while still stationed at ASW School in San Diego, I was at my friend Gerry's house one Sunday noon time for breakfast following Mass. I walked a young lady in a very nice pink lady's suit with white gloves and a matching pink pillbox hat. Surely this girl new how to dress. She was not like any other girl I had ever dated, and I knew right away that she was the type of girl that I could marry. Of course, she would be dating another one of my friends at the time, so I was immediately demoralized. Now I was about to get a second chance. How good is God!

## NOTES

*from the future*

*Who knew at the time, the path I was setting myself on for life. I was always one for adventure, well I had unknowingly set myself upon the most wonderful adventure a man can experience while still on earth. I have now had company in my 60 years adventure and every day is still a new and learning adventure shared with my wife Glenna and God.*