

who had accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in the Bible study that we held every night underway.

There were as many as 40 men who came to study God's Word and memorize passages so they could present Christ as Savior to their shipmates. We had a very wonderful way to do that. In the Navy there are long tedious "watches" where men are assigned to just "be there" for 4 long hours. At a gun or on the signal bridge or way up in a fire control station with orders to "stay". It could be a boring time or one could talk to a shipmate who had the same orders and at the same place. We were memorizing the Scriptures that were God's instructions for living, for finding a purpose in life, for understanding why He sent His Only Begotten Son into the world and how we could inherit eternal life, and have no reason for fear in any circumstance. We had little cards that had some of these Bible verses on them, and we had the reference at the top of the card and bottom, and we taught the men to memorize the reference as well as the verse. We had hundreds of them and a sort of competition to see who could learn the most. It was sort of like a game, certainly a challenge, and everyone likes that. We told our Bible study men to ask a shipmate to help him by holding the card and checking to see if he quoted it and the reference correctly, and they all discovered that it made those tedious hours pass so much more quickly..and "it was fun too, Chaplain" . Maybe it was a "sneaky way" to get into a shipmates mind, but it sure didn't do any damage. In fact, many of the "shipmates" started coming to the Bible class too, and were saved. Maybe you think, "saved"? and they were going to die? Well, I still believe the simple verse I first learned as a child. "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," That's the greatest Life Insurance any one ever could have because Jesus, Who died for my sins said "I am the Way the Truth and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through Me" and "I am come that men might have LIFE and have it more abundantly" That was the greatest thing that ever happened to our world, and it still happens daily.

I said that it may have been a "sneaky way" to get a shipmate to study the Bible as he held those little cards and helped his buddy memorize Scripture, but it **worked**, and some of those men accepted Christ the last Sunday I preached to them, exactly a week before they went to be with the Lord down below deck or topside in enemy fire that blasted and burned our ship. I lay back on the fantail bleeding, not wanting to follow many of our crew who had abandoned ship with the Captain that last Sunday morning, before daylight because of the many sharks cutting through the water around us, and could see men's bodies hanging on the superstructure where they had fallen and entangled above me as the flames licked at them, and I was helpless then; but thank God I had been faithful that last Sunday to a full compartment of men, including the Captain and a War correspondent who came to our worship service. I felt then and I feel now that God had put me on that ship to be a faithful witness. Twenty years later one sailor came to see me to thank me for pointing him to Jesus Christ in that last worship on that ship, and I am content.

You have my inability to sleep to blame for my writing all this to you two. I stumbled across an E-mail chat group of old US Sailors last night and I guess that started it all. But I have often wondered how I got from where I was when, newly married, happily enjoying my ministry, proudly ecstatic over our first child, delirious over the most desirable talented perfect pastor's wife any minister ever had, I could end up on that sinking battle cruiser in the Solomon Islands. Maybe, at this distance from it all, on my 85th birthday, which is tomorrow, I could see a little more clearly that God has been using me--as I promised Him when I surrendered to His call to preach the Gospel--using me for His purposes to tell all hands that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst". St Paul said that and I have experienced it---and I am satisfied because He is my Lord and my Savior and God, and it has all been Good!

May you find that same assurance, that "Blessed Assurance"

Cousin Matthew John