



Editor's Corner

My Dad was a Veteran

by Bruce H. Campbell, MD FACS – Editor-in-Chief of the *Transformational Times*

My dad was a veteran. He spent over three years on a light cruiser, the [USS Santa Fe CL-60](#), during World War II. His ship earned thirteen battle stars, seeing action from the Aleutians to the Philippines. I have no idea what that experience was like.

Similar to many other citizen-soldiers of his era, Dad never planned to be in the military. He grew up on a Missouri farm during and after the Depression, knowing only that he wanted a different kind of life. He worked his way through college and graduate school by scraping together enough money to, as he said, “keep body and soul together.” Like everyone else, his life was upended on December 7, 1941.

He enlisted in the Navy shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. His mother, back on the farm, bemoaned his choice. “Why didn’t you join the Army like your brother?” she cried. “Navy boys all drown like rats!”



After ninety days of Officer’s Candidate School, newly commissioned Ensign Ray W. Campbell, USNR was on his way to the Pacific. He served in many capacities on the ship from gunnery officer to officer of the deck. He occasionally assisted the ship’s doctor (who had trained as a gynecologist) in surgery. He helped direct rescuers after the [attack](#) on the USS Franklin, and was nearly killed when a kamikaze plane barely missed the gun turret where he was standing. He played the ship’s small portable organ to accompany Catholic,

Protestant, and Jewish services. He wrote letters to parents of sailors who died. His ship became part of the occupation fleet after the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war. He returned home to a different world.

My dad was twenty-three when he enlisted and twenty-seven when the war ended in 1945. For perspective, I never lived more than a hundred miles from where I was born until I was thirty. Between twenty-three and twenty-seven, I was finishing medical school, starting residency, and trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. At the age when he was fulfilling his service as part of the Greatest Generation, I was exploring the depths of imposter syndrome.

My dad spoke very little about his experiences. At home, we looked occasionally at a [book](#) he had helped compile about his ship's campaigns. There were a few mementos around the house. He called a shipmate once in a while. He didn't march in parades or join the VFW. I wish I had asked him why but, now, it is too late.

Because my dad spent little time talking about his Navy service, I am encouraged that there are VA-based [programs](#) that help veterans to tell their stories. I count myself fortunate to have met many veterans throughout my career at the Zablocki VAMC.

I have the utmost respect and admiration for the veterans for whom I have cared and for this week's *Transformational Times* contributors. I hope you will pause and sit for a while with each of the essays. Please listen to their stories and then take time to honor the veterans in your life.

Bruce H. Campbell, MD, FACS is a Professor in the Department of Otolaryngology and Communication Sciences at MCW. He is on the Faculty Pillar of the Robert D. and Patricia E. Kern Institute for the Transformation of Medical Education.

