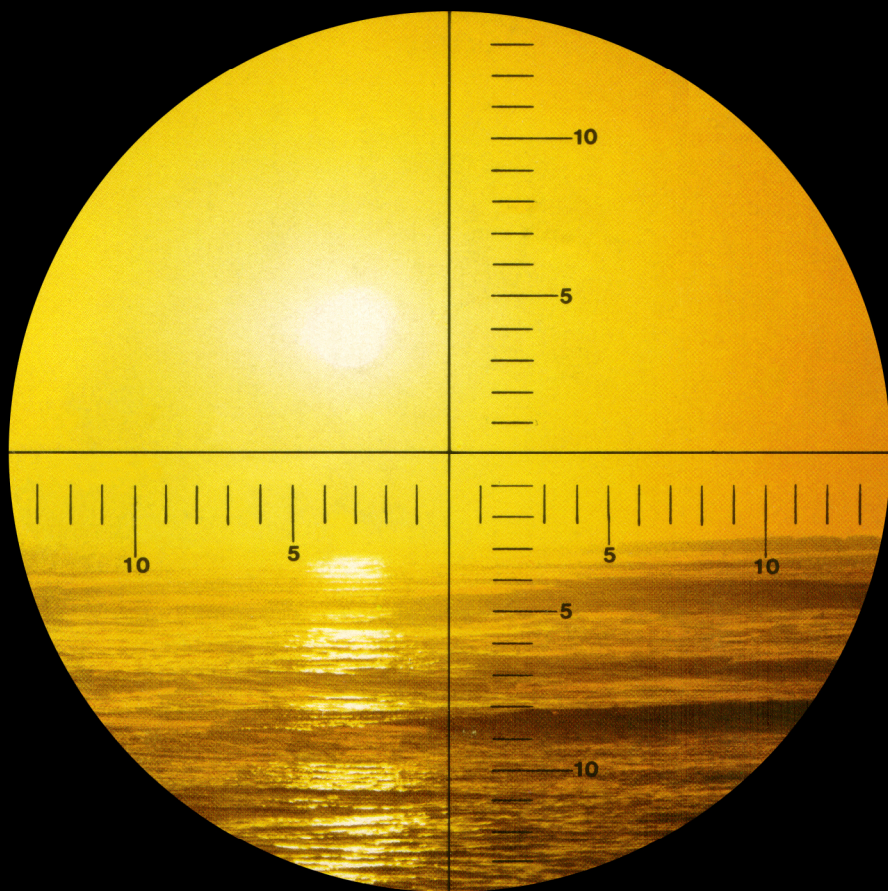


SABBATH AT SEA



MICHAEL LEE ROLAND

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Dedicated to my mother who reared me to love both my God and my country.

Forward

During my seventeen years as a minister specializing in military ministry, I have become acquainted with thousands of Seventh-day Adventist youth. Petty Officer Michael Roland is one that stands out for his complete determination to follow God come what may.

The story he tells is accurate. He did not lay down his life, but rather gave his life as a living witness for his God. As a result, several others aboard the U. S. S. *Lewis and Clark* accepted Christ as their personal Saviour. He was not awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, as was Desmond Doss, but I believe in the courts of heaven, his experience resounds with a loud “Praise the Lord.”

Many young people who become church members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church during their tour of duty in the navy run into this same type of Sabbath problem. It is difficult to keep a day holy to God aboard a navy ship. The Office of the Chief of Navy Chaplains has always been very helpful, but sometimes officers of lower rank or responsibility do not understand. Usually the navy chaplains are very helpful, but sometimes—. Hence, problems like Mike had can and do occur. But God watches over and can use our experience as a blessing and a witness unto salvation to others.

C. E. Bracebridge, Civilian Chaplain
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Questions Unanswered

The sense of duty and love for my country prompted me to join the navy. For three years I performed my duties on a submarine with no conflict. But then things changed! My newfound faith as an Adventist thrust me into controversy. The executive officer (X.O.) of the USS *Lewis and Clark*, second in command to the captain and responsible for counseling the crew, seemed to be the most disturbed by my convictions. He had confronted me about my faith before. But now I was ordered to report to his office. Why this request to see me? I didn't look forward to this meeting. He had promised that we would "lock horns" if I did not compromise with the navy and its regulations.

With much trepidation I entered his office. There sat the X.O. behind his desk, ruffling through some papers.

"You wanted to see me, Sir?" I asked.

"Yes, Roland." After putting the papers down, he continued. "The captain and I have discussed your problem at great length. The captain feels that certain resolutions can be made allowing you to abide by your religious convictions *and* the demands of the navy. He believes you are sincere. He does not believe you are trying to shirk your responsibilities. Therefore, he wants to help you. He has carefully reviewed article 5810100 of *BUPERS Manual* dealing with Sabbath observance."

The manual lay open on his desk. The X.O. picked it up and read aloud: "Members of the naval service, however, whose strong religious convictions require them to observe . . . their Sabbath, and to refrain on their Sabbath from any but the most *essential* work are entitled to respect for their religious convictions . . . *Decisions as to whether or not work is essential will be the prerogative of the commanding officer.*" He closed the manual. "While in the United States," he continued, "there will be no problem. We do not schedule duty on weekends anyway. We have decided that while in Spain, during the upkeep of the boat, it would not be considered 'essential' that you work during your Sabbath. However, while at sea, you have certain duties that *are* essential. They involve both the safety and efficiency of the boat's operations. At that time, you will be expected to man your watch station as scheduled, perform emergency repairs and damage control, and participate in all casualty and battle stations evolutions, whether they are actual casualties or drills. We feel that this offers a solution to the problem. How do *you* feel?"

"Well, Sir, I feel that I can participate in casualty and damage control for the safety of the boat and the crew. My belief permits me to handle emergencies. However, if I learn that it is just a drill, I would ask to be dismissed. Concerning my sonar watches, I must stand firm in my convictions. I cannot perform routine duties during the Sabbath."

"Routine!" the X.O. exclaimed. "Your job is *not* routine! The safety of the boat depends on your efficiency as a sonarman!"

"Yes, Sir. As a sonarman on submarine, my job is essential. But it is not necessary for me to serve on a submarine. My letter to the Chief of Naval Personnel explains that. I requested transfer, if necessary!"

"Transfer!" he objected. "Do you think you have the right to ask that the navy conform to your personal frivolities? Who do you think you are? You're the one who should make the adjustments!"

"Sir, I have *never before* opposed the navy. I joined the navy! It was my *choice* to serve my country! I have fulfilled my responsibilities in good spirit. *I also* want to serve my God! But your regulations make it impossible for me to serve both my country and my God! That is why I submitted my request for transfer."

“Well you’re *not* going to get your transfer! And we are going to be firm! The captain sympathizes with you. But I think we have offered you too much already. You’re no different from any other man on this boat. And I won’t treat you any different! I warned you that we would lock horns. And if you persist, I promise you, we will! No matter what anyone else says! Here! Sign this!”

He shoved a paper at me.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Read it!”

I took the document. “Received explanation of the provisions of *BUPERS Manual*, Article 5810100, Observance of the Sabbath. The following duties will be considered ‘essential’ within the meaning of the above article: normal watchstanding; emergency repairs; damage control; exercise and actual casualty and battle stations evolutions.”

I looked up. “Sir, I can sign this confirming that I have received an ‘explanation’ of the article. But it will not mean that I can abide by its terms.”

“OK! That’s all it means! Just sign it! It’s to protect us! We want to be able to prove, if necessary, that we have tried to reason with you.”

I signed the document, saluted, and left. As I walked away from the office, I reflected back on the events that had taken place many years before—in Sunday School.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy,” my Sunday School teacher had read. When she got to the words, “but the seventh day is the sabbath,” my hand shot up.

“Just a minute, Mike,” the teacher said. “Let’s read the rest of the commandment.”

I sat restlessly fidgeting in my chair as the teacher droned on, . . . wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.” Up went my hand again.

“Yes, Mike, what is it?”

“The commandment says that the seventh day is the Sabbath. Why don’t we go to church on the seventh day instead of on the first?”

“Well-uh—” the teacher gulped. Then she said rapidly, “Some people still do!” Quickly she moved on to read the next commandment. “Honour thy father and thy mother.”

I went home from Sunday School with the question unanswered. But as soon as my mother came home, I asked her for an explanation of the puzzle that the Sunday School teacher had pushed aside.

“Mother, why don’t we keep Sabbath on the seventh day instead of on the first? The commandment says that the seventh day is the Sabbath.”

“Well, I’m not sure, Mike. I think the calendar was changed or something.” She paused for a moment. “And, of course,” she added, “Jesus rose from the grave on Sunday.”

I had great faith in my mother, so I dropped the matter when she seemed to believe that everything was all right about keeping Sunday as the Sabbath. I thought no more about that dilemma until years later.

Soon, however, another question came up in Sunday School. The same teacher tried to explain to us about the tabernacle that the Israelites built in the desert. She explained that this earthly sanctuary was a copy of the one in heaven.

Again, I raised my hand. “Teacher,” I asked, “what was the sanctuary in heaven for?”

Again the teacher found herself at a loss for an answer. “I really don’t know, Mike.” She fumbled for words. “Of course it had something to do with worship. Yes, that’s it! It was the place for the angels to worship God.”

“Did the angels kill lambs in heaven to put on the altar?”

“Oh, Mike! Of course they didn’t kill lambs in heaven!”

“Well, why—”

“I don’t know why, Mike. Now let’s go on with the tabernacle in the desert.”

“OK, teacher, but why did the people in the desert—”

“I told you I don’t know why! That’s just what God told them to do.”

Another unanswered question lodged in my inquisitive, young mind.

In my early grades of school, I was taught evolution—traumatized! I couldn’t wait to get home to ask my mother the questions that would put to ease my anxious young soul. “Mother,” I asked “Does God look like an ape?”

“Of course not!” she answered with shock in her voice. “What would make you ask that?”

“Well, they tell us in school that humans are a product of evolution and at church I learned that God made man in His image. So if we evolved then God must look like an ape or an ameba or something like that? Did an ape-like God make an ape-like man and man get better? And if so...”

“Oh Mike, that’s confusing.”

As a child, for me, evolution didn’t destroy the nature of man. It had destroyed the nature of God.

When I entered high school, I joined the band and participated in other activities. Gradually these involvements in school affairs crowded out Sunday School attendance. My interest in religious matters grew cold for lack of any real commitment. The need of having a meaningful relationship with Jesus had never been made plain.

Early in my junior year, a friendly neighbor, Mr. Branch, asked me if I would like to study the Bible in a new and interesting way.

“Well, yes, I guess so,” I agreed. “How does it work?”

Mr. Branch took the first two lessons of “The Bible Speaks” from a folder he carried. He explained how the questions and notes related to the Bible texts, and he told me how to write answers in the spaces provided. Then he handed the pamphlets to me. “See you two weeks from today,” he said. “We’ll check over the lessons, and I’ll leave the next two if you are ready.”

I finished the two lessons in two days. I met Mr. Branch on the street later in the week. “Hi, Mr. Branch,” I said. “Could I have two more of those Bible lessons? I’ve finished the first two already.”

“Well!” Mr. Branch exclaimed. “You must really enjoy studying the Bible that way.”

“I do! It’s great!”

“All right, I’ll get the next two for you, and we’ll check the two you finished,” he said.

After reviewing the first two lessons, Mr. Branch gave me the next two, and he promised to return the following Saturday.

This procedure continued regularly until I had completed ten or twelve of the lessons. By that time Mr. Branch and I had developed a genuine friendship.

For some reason, which I found hard to understand, someone at Mr. Branch’s church decided the studies were going too fast. From then on Mr. Branch brought me only one lesson a week. But the delaying tactic did not dampen my enthusiasm. I frequently visited with Mr. Branch, and we discussed religious topics together.

I began experimenting with a Ouija board with several of my friends. There was a strange exhilaration in asking questions and then watching as the little heart-shaped pointer indicated answers. One day we were having fun with the board on the front porch when Mr. Branch came up the street and entered the yard. I was surprised that the board stopped working at the moment Mr. Branch turned from the street toward the house. This happened again at a later date, and I wondered why. A lesson in “The Bible Speaks” course identified the nature of evil spirits, and I immediately decided never again to play with the Ouija board.

In due time I came to the lesson on the Sabbath. For the first time in my life I found out what it meant to remember the Sabbath day and why many people observed the first day of the week instead of the seventh. But school activities—the busy schedule of band rehearsals, marching, games on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons—simply crowded out any serious thoughts about Sabbath observance. The band was the center of my social life. I just couldn’t give that up.

I did go to church two or three times on Sabbath, and I attended several evening programs. Looking back, I don’t understand why someone in the church—Mr. Branch or some other member—didn’t follow up with me. It seems that they just let me drop away without any effort to bring me to a decision. The only way I can explain it is that God had another program for me.

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go:
I will guide thee with mine eye.

~ Psalm 32:8 (KJV)

Navy Boot Camp

One ambition I had cherished all through my years in school was to don the uniform of the United States Navy. I was proud to be an American, and I felt that serving my country would be a high honor.

But why the navy? The idea of traveling below the surface of the ocean had fascinated me from early childhood. I pictured life on a submarine as a most exciting adventure. I tried to envision the thrills of deep dives, using sophisticated machinery for direction control, listening to the presence of other vessels with sonar equipment, and all the other aspects of underwater navigation.

Quite naturally, then, with high school diploma and proof of eligible age in hand; I enlisted in the navy and indicated my choice of submarine service.

In the process of filling out the necessary forms, the enlistment officer went down the questions about name, age, race, and so forth. “Religious preference?” the officer grunted.

“Oh, I’m a Christian,” I responded.

“No, not that. What denomination?”

“I don’t belong to any church.”

“Well, if you’re a Christian, you must belong to a church.”

“No, Sir, I really don’t.”

“OK,” the officer snapped. “I’ve got to put down something. You’re not an atheist or a Moslem; so what kind of Christian are you?”

“Well, I guess—I guess Seventh-day Adventist!”

He entered that information on the record, and I went off to boot camp with no more thought of my casual remark. Although I had taken “The Bible Speaks” course, I knew very little about the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and I had no idea what it meant to be a member.

Anyone who has been through a navy boot camp knows that the routine can become strenuous. The situation at Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois was typical. On a Friday night in midwinter my buddies and I were trying to relax in the barracks when an announcement was made. “Seaman Recruit Michael Roland, report to the chaplain’s office.”

I thought, “Oh, no! Something has happened at home.” I rushed across the base as fast as I could run. By the time I reached the chaplain’s office my lungs felt as if the frigid air had frozen them. I stood before the chaplain, waiting to hear some dreaded news. My heart pounded, and it hurt to breathe.

“What church do you belong to, sailor?” the chaplain asked, looking up at me with a broad smile on his face.

“Sir, I don’t belong to any church,” I answered.

“Your record shows that you claim to be a Seventh-day Adventist. How do you explain that?”

“Well,” I stammered, “I—I—guess that does demand an explanation.”

The chaplain looked up from the papers on his desk. “That’s all right, Mike. So you’re not a church member! Come to our meetings anyhow, and welcome. Maybe you’ll find that your choice of Seventh-day Adventist for your church was a good decision.”

I did attend services on Friday evenings for the remainder of boot camp. But these few contacts with the chaplain and the little company of Adventist servicemen did not result in any positive decision.

From boot camp I was sent to Key West for two months. Then I was transferred to New London, Connecticut, where I went on three patrols aboard the nuclear submarine the USS

Thomas A. Edison. Having satisfactorily completed my basic training and: having met qualifications for entering my chosen specialty, sonar technician, I was sent to San Diego for advanced training.

In San Diego I made the crucial decisions affecting not only my career in the navy, but my life as well.

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer;
and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

~ Isaiah 65:24 (KJV)

A Crucial Decision

San Diego—palm trees, beaches, and sunshine. I had always enjoyed the ocean; so what more could I ask for? Scuba diving became a sport of mine. It offered an all-new world of adventure. The beauty and grandeur of God's inner space, the colorfully arrayed sea life, and protective kelp beds revealed a new concept of God's love and care for His creatures. However, while in San Diego, a second world was also offered to me. There, with my navy buddies, I first participated in activities which I had known from childhood to be wrong. My life-style grew more and more separated from the Christian principles that I had learned and once held dear.

But my conscience spoke to me and prodded me. It drove me to my knees at last, and I cried out, "Oh, Father! What is it that I have done? Why am I doing these things? I know that You would never leave my side. What have I done to push You away?"

The answer came back as if God spoke, "My dear child, all your life you have asked the question concerning My Sabbath. I gave you the answer, but you did not listen. You pushed My Sabbath aside as if it meant nothing to you. What was I to do? You didn't trust Me."

"But, Father," I pleaded, "I am in the navy. There is no way that I can observe the Sabbath now! Please! Please! Don't leave my side! I promise You, if You will remain with me throughout my service in the navy, when I get out I will keep Your Sabbath, and I will attend a Sabbath-keeping church!"

Having made my promise to God with all sincerity, I trusted that He would remain by my side. I repeated over and over Romans 8:28.

I completed my electronics training and accepted orders to report to the command of the USS *Lewis and Clark*, Charleston, South Carolina. The submarine was operating in the Mediterranean Sea with the relief crew aboard. My crew was not scheduled to rendezvous with the sub for two months, during which time my anguish in San Diego and prayer to God continued to press my thoughts. There was an Adventist church in Charleston, and I learned that a series of meetings were soon to be held. The Prophecy Crusade would explain many prophecies of the Bible, and surely the special multi-slide presentation would be interesting. I looked forward to the meetings with anticipation. I had never understood Bible prophecy, but had always believed that God's prophecies were important, even in our time.

When the meetings began, I attended. They offered more than I had expected. Never before had I seen the Scriptures explained with such clarity. New aspects of God's will and character were revealed in each meeting. Now I began to spend many hours in solitude studying and reconfirming the truths that I had been taught as a youth.

At one meeting, Kenneth Cox, the evangelist, announced a special presentation—"Adam's Mother's Birthday." The title intrigued me. Who was Adam's mother? My curiosity grew. I had read the Genesis story many times. "But Adam was formed from the earth," I thought. "What was Pastor Cox going to tell us?"

Finally the night arrived when I would get my answer. Pastor Cox explained the events of the creation week, day by day. God spoke, and there was light. He created the atmosphere. Then He separated the waters from the land, providing an environment suitable for vegetation. With the seasons came the sun, moon, and stars, followed by birds of the air and fish of the sea. Then, on the sixth day, He created the animals. But Adam was different; Adam was created in the image of God. God formed Adam from the dust of the earth. Pastor Cox revealed the identity of Adam's mother to us; she was mother earth.

Now my conscience became more and more unsettled. I knew from my previous studies *what* God had instituted as a memorial of His acts of creation. "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." Exodus 20:11.

“Oh, Father! Please! Not the Sabbath!” I prayed. “I have studied and accepted everything thus far. You know I cannot keep Your Sabbath now! Please don’t put me under such conviction! Don’t ask me to do that which I cannot!”

I had always enjoyed the meetings and had always gone home with joy and peace of mind; but with this meeting came despair. Never had my emotions been so mixed. Pastor Cox went on, “The Sabbath plays an important part in our lives. And it will strengthen your relationship with God too. The Sabbath isn’t a burden! The Sabbath is a delight!”

Why then was I so troubled? I knew that the Sabbath was important. Why else would God have planted the seed of Sabbath truth in my mind as a child? Why had it become so clear to me during my anguished prayer in San Diego? And why, now, had it surfaced again?

“Oh, Father!” I prayed, “I want to keep Your Sabbath. I do not want to wait any longer—but I must! You know I am unable to keep Your holy day. But please be with me; do not forsake me because of it!”

That night was one of great restlessness. From then on, I decided, I would avoid the meetings altogether. But I kept praying for greater strength and understanding. Somehow I could not stay away from those meetings. I attended each night, and the conviction of God’s Sabbath grew, and more Bible truths were revealed. I wondered how these people—these Seventh-day Adventists—had such an understanding of the Bible. Could there be something special about them?

Then I learned something about them that really intrigued me. They believed in the sanctuary and its services. I had questioned about the sanctuary in Sunday School many years before—the purpose of God’s sanctuary in heaven. I learned now why God had instructed Moses to build a sanctuary in the wilderness, and about the meaning of the services to be held in it. How wonderful it was to learn that Christ had entered into the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary and was now mediating in my behalf. The whole sanctuary service was a service of love, a message of righteousness by faith. “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.” John 3:16. Yes, I learned all about the meaning of the sanctuary and its services.

The question came to me forcefully, Was I going to believe and trust God? Was I going to obey His commandments and believe that He would take care of me? I wanted to, but I didn’t know how. After all, for me to demand Sabbaths off while in the navy would be a big step. I didn’t know if I could take it. I didn’t know how to go about it.

One evening a gentleman visited me at my apartment. I had seen him at the meetings but had not met him. He introduced himself as Pastor Dillon.

“Oh,” I thought, “perhaps I will have opportunity to explain my dilemma to him.”

“Our records indicate that you have been to each meeting,” Pastor Dillon said.

“Yes. I enjoy them very much!” I answered.

“Do you have faith in God and in Christ as your Saviour?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Do you want to keep God’s commandments?”

Tears filled my eyes. For a moment I couldn’t speak. “I want to, but I can’t,” I answered, hanging my head.

“I don’t understand. What do you mean?” he asked.

“Well, Pastor! I want to keep God’s commandments, but I can’t because I am in the navy! The Sabbath commandment would become a major issue. I am a submarine sailor. And when we go on patrol, I will be expected to work during Sabbath hours. It’s my duty!”

“That is a problem!” he replied. “Would you consider speaking to Pastor Cox? He has more experience with this type of situation than I have.”

“Yes!” I responded, “I believe that might help.”

Arrangements were made for me to meet Pastor Cox and explain my circumstances to him. “How do you feel about the navy?” the pastor asked.

“I joined the navy, and I want to fulfill my obligation to it,” I answered.

“How do you feel about God?”

“I love God. I have known Him since I was a child.”

“How do you feel about His commandments?”

“I believe in them. I believe they were given to us for our own good. But—but I don’t know what to do about the Sabbath. I want to observe God’s Sabbath, but I don’t know if I can face the consequences.”

Pastor Cox then said something I shall never forget. “Mike, God does not ask you to obey Him and then worry about what may happen as a result of your obedience. God wants you to obey Him and let Him take care of the circumstances as they may arise.”

It was at that moment, I knew what I was to do. The Holy Spirit must have spoken to me through Pastor Cox. What peace I experienced as I heard his encouraging words. I felt that God’s angels must be present. I knew that they would be with me for strength and protection and that God would never let me down. I expressed then and there my decision to obey God.

My decision filled me with excitement, and I wanted to inform my command immediately. But Pastor Cox advised me to wait. He wanted me to meet with Chaplain Bracebridge first. Chaplain Bracebridge lived in Columbia, South Carolina. He was a civilian chaplain, but worked in behalf of military personnel. Pastor Cox promised to get in touch with him immediately.

Chaplain Bracebridge did meet with me. And he, too, asked me whether I trusted God. I told him that I did trust God and that I expected to now face problems with the navy, but that the problems didn’t matter to me. I wanted to obey God.

“Yes! You probably *will* face problems!” he answered. “It’s difficult to say just what the problems will be and when they will occur. The navy tends to handle each situation separately, and this *will* eventually involve the Chief of Navy Chaplain’s Office. However, I will keep abreast of things and let you know what is happening as they develop. You know, if you go on patrol, there will be no way to be in communication with you, but be assured, that as long as necessary, I will be here working in your behalf.”

“Yes, I know,” I replied, “but I know I want to obey God, and I know He will be with me while I am at sea.”

“Then this is what I want you to do,” Chaplain Bracebridge went on. “I want you to explain your conviction to a navy chaplain as soon as possible. That is the door through which I can help you. Once you speak to one, I can speak in your behalf, and the sooner I can do that, the better.”

And I say unto you,

Ask, and it shall be given you;
seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

For every one that asketh receiveth;
and he that seeketh findeth;
and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

~ Luke 11:9-10 (KJV)

Opening the Door

The next day, training was not scheduled until afternoon. So the morning offered opportunity for me to make the necessary appointment with the navy chaplain. There were six chaplains to choose from on the large Charleston base. There was a Protestant chaplain whose office was in the same building as my ship's office. His job as SUBGRU SIX chaplain was to represent submarine sailors and to deal with their problems. Therefore, I thought it best to see him. But when I called his office for an appointment, I was told he was booked solid until the middle of the next week. I called the other Protestant chaplains, but they, too, were busy. Finally, I decided to call one of the Catholic chaplains. His secretary told me that he had an opening in fifteen minutes. "Can you make it?" she asked. My answer resulted in a quick sprint across the base.

As I waited to see him, I wondered what he would say. I wondered what he would do. Then, his office door opened, and I was invited in. With a cordial greeting, he offered me a seat in front of his desk. There was another seat next to it; I had hoped he would take it. But he moved around his seemingly oversize desk and seated himself behind it. This gave me the impression that he would take a legal or formal approach to my problem. It was just what I most wanted to avoid. I wanted to be treated as an individual. I needed counsel—not an already-regimented plan or treatment as a troublemaker. Thoughts of my respect for the navy flashed through my mind as I became more and more concerned about his reaction.

Then the chaplain asked, "What seems to be the problem?"

Hesitantly, I replied, "Well—uh—Chaplain, I have a problem which I believe is a serious one."

"And what might that be?" he inquired.

Squirring in my seat, I answered, "I don't know where to start."

With a soft, comforting voice, he continued, "Please! Don't be nervous! I am here to help you!"

Somewhat relieved, I looked up at him and asked whether we could have prayer before continuing.

"Why! Of course!" he replied. "I would like that!"

"May I pray?" I asked. "I want to ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit."

"Yes! By all means! Please do!" the chaplain responded.

I knelt in front of the chaplain's desk. "Dear heavenly Father," I prayed, "we thank You for the opportunity we have of coming to You. Father, please be with us at this time, and please bless us. We ask that You send Your Holy Spirit to be with us, to guide us according to Your will. We thank You for hearing our prayer, for we pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

As I got up from my knees, the chaplain came around his desk and pointed to the seat next to mine. "May I sit beside you while we talk?" he asked. "Do you mind if I sit there?"

"Of course not! I'd like that." I smiled at him.

"It's not often someone comes to see me and offers prayer," he said. "It's a nice change!"

I told him that I felt better knowing that we had asked our Father to be with us; I no longer had a fear of speaking to him.

Then he asked, "What is this problem you have spoken of?"

"Chaplain," I said, "I joined the navy. I was not forced or drafted, but wanted to join. Now something has come up. I've been studying my Bible and have concluded that God wants us to observe His Sabbath from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. This is not possible in the navy."

"What do you mean by 'observe'?" he asked.

“By observe, I mean rest. I believe we are to abstain from our work and spend the Sabbath worshipping God.”

“And can you worship God for 24 hours?”

“Yes, I can. I do! By worship, I mean to spend the Sabbath with God. I don’t mean I have to be at church all day or on my knees. Worship can involve many things! It can be studying Scripture, visiting the sick, or enjoying a walk through nature! Witnessing to others, the love of Christ is worship! I believe that anything that will bring us into a closer relationship with God is worship!”

“I agree with your concept of worship,” he said. “But I am not sure I agree with your idea of the Sabbath! Don’t you think that God would understand your working during part of the Sabbath? After all, you would have the rest of the day to worship Him!”

“No,” I answered. “The day itself is holy. I cannot compromise.”

“What do you think about Catholics who are willing to eat meat on Friday?” he asked.

“What does that have to do with the Sabbath?” I wanted to know.

“Well,” he answered, “at one time, it was considered a sin for a Catholic to eat meat on Friday. It was difficult for many people not to have meat on that day. The church realized such problems existed and authorized the eating of meat on Friday.”

“Yes, Chaplain! The church did authorize the eating of meat! But that command to abstain from eating meat was instituted by the church, not by God.”

“But what about Jewish sailors,” he asked, “who are willing to work during Sabbath?”

“Chaplain, they have their consciences to contend with; I have mine!”

He sat back in his chair for a moment staring into space. Suddenly, he looked at me and exclaimed, “You’re right! You’re talking about God’s laws! I’m talking about man-made laws! I may not fully comprehend your belief, but I am a man of God. My conscience would not permit me to force someone else to go against his conscience. I am not sure I can be of much help to you concerning your problem with the navy. But I assure you—you will have my prayers. I wish you the best.”

I thanked him and expressed my appreciation for his prayers. His only advice was that I inform my command immediately so they would be able to work with it. “After all,” he said, “it’s only a short time before your crew will be leaving for Spain!”

What seemed to be my greatest task was just before me! I had to talk to my command! And that meant speaking to the X.O. Of all people, why him? If ever there was anyone who worked, ate, slept, and dreamed navy, it was the X.O. He was military from the word Go! And besides, I was a new crewmember; he knew nothing about me! What a first impression I was going to make! But I decided to see him immediately and get it over with.

As I walked toward the ship’s office, I prayed without ceasing, “O Father, please! If ever I needed You, it is now. Please be with me. Send Your angels to be by my side. And may Your Holy Spirit strengthen and encourage me. Don’t let me fail. I don’t want to let You down. Help me to keep my eyes on Jesus and not on the problems. Send Your angels and Spirit ahead of me to prepare the X.O. for my visit. Please plant the seed of understanding in his heart.”

It was a hectic morning in the ship’s office. Crewmembers came in and went out of the office constantly. There were no walls separating each division. Instead, shoulder-high partitions offered no privacy whatsoever. Due to the unusual circumstances concerning my visit, I would rather have spoken to the X.O. alone. But I realized it was an impossibility. Surely, our conversation would be overheard and word would get around to the other crewmembers. If so, they would consider me as just a sandbagger—someone who would do anything to avoid his duties. I was going to have to live with these men. I didn’t want them to hear the conversation.

I walked to my division to see if my sonar chief was there. He, too, was strictly military. And I didn’t want him to overhear my conversation with the X.O. I sighed a sigh of relief when I saw he was not in. But as I turned to go to the X.O.’s desk, I walked the sonar chief.

“Roland!” he exclaimed. “What are you doing here this morning?”

“I have to talk to the X.O.,” I answered.

He nodded, then made his way to his own desk.

“This is it!” I thought. “I have to do it! It’s time!”

“Sir, I need to talk to you.” I spoke quickly to the X.O.

“Sure, Roland. Have a seat.”

I sat down in a seat near his desk. “Sir, I have a problem.” My tone of voice and countenance must have revealed its seriousness.

The X.O. leaned back in his chair and looked straight at me.

I quickly sent up a silent prayer as I got directly to the point, “Sir, I have been studying the Bible and believe that God wants me to observe His Sabbath from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. With the knowledge I now have, I believe it would be a sin for me to do any work during that time. I am under conviction and want to keep this commandment. This is going to interfere with my responsibilities in the navy, and—”

“You’re—right!” he exclaimed, using harsh language. “Who do you think you are?” he asked leaning forward. “You used the right word: *responsibility*. You have a responsibility to the navy! You have to fulfill that responsibility, and I will personally see that you do! How long have you been in the navy?”

“Three years,” I answered. “My enlistment is for six.”

“You’ve been in the navy for three years? You should know the navy’s stand. We will not tolerate such ridiculous notions.” His fist landed a blow on the desk.

“Yes, Sir! I am aware of the navy’s position, but *I must* obey God’s will! It’s a matter of conscience.”

“Conscience?” he queried. “What about your obligation to the navy? Does your conscience allow you to break the oath you took when you enlisted? Tell me, Roland! Just where did you get this idea about the Sabbath?”

“From studying my Bible,” I replied.

“Just studying your Bible? You haven’t had any outside influence? Is there a church or a group responsible for filling your mind with such absurdity?”

“Well, Sir, I have been attending some meetings.”

“Oh! And how long have you been going to these meetings?”

“Approximately four weeks.”

“*Four* weeks? You’ve been going to meetings for four weeks, and that gives you enough *knowledge* of the Bible to jeopardize your whole naval career?”

“No, Sir! Not just four weeks! I wondered about the Sabbath when I was a child in Sunday School. I asked the Sunday School teacher questions about the Bible that she couldn’t answer. Then—”

“I don’t want to hear your whole life story!” he groaned. “You know, Roland! If you continue with this, I promise you that we will ‘lock horns’! And by we, I don’t just mean you and the navy! I mean you and *me*! Have you spoken to any chaplains about this?”

“Yes. First I spoke to a Seventh-day Adventist chaplain, Chaplain Bracebridge.”

“Seventh-day Adventist? Is that the church that is holding the meetings?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Is Chaplain Bracebridge in the military?”

“No, sir. He’s a civilian chaplain.”

“I see,” he replied quickly. “Roland, don’t you see what this church is doing? They’re *using* you! They’ll capitalize on this situation! Churches do it all the time. They are always stirring up trouble; then they scream ‘persecution’! Have you spoken to any navy chaplains?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Who?”

“I wanted to speak to the submarine chaplain, but he was booked till next week. So I talked to Chaplain Freeman.”

“And what did he tell you?”

“He told me that he did not fully understand my conviction, but he could not betray his conscience by forcing me to compromise mine.”

With an expression of disgust, the X.O. continued, “I think you should talk to the SUBGRU SIX chaplain!”

“But, Sir! He’s booked.”

“I know! I know!” he said while reaching for the phone. “This is important! Besides, Chaplain Brown better understands the responsibilities of a submarine sailor!”

When he hung up the phone, he turned to me and said, “The appointment is set for tomorrow morning.” Then he added, “Roland! I want you to give this whole thing some serious thought! Because I mean what I said; we *will* lock horns!”

I thought about the appointment made by the X.O. as I left the ship’s office, “Was the X.O. arranging another confrontation for me, or was he really wanting the chaplain to help?”

I was apprehensive. But there was one consolation; as I looked around the office, no one seemed to have paid attention to my conversation with the X.O. At least, for the time being, I wouldn’t have to worry about what my fellow crewmembers thought.

That evening, I attended the evangelistic meeting. After the presentation, I told Pastor Cox that I had informed my command of my decision and explained the X.O.’s reaction. Pastor Cox assured me that I would have his prayers. He told me that he would call Chaplain Bracebridge, letting him know that I had talked to a navy chaplain and that the door was now open for him to help me. Again, he emphasized the love of God and encouraged me to trust in Him. While Pastor Cox’s words were consoling, I still remained anxious about my appointment the next day.

And he answered,
Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them.

~ 2 Kings 6:16 (KJV)

Conflict With a Chaplain

Minutes seemed as hours before the time of my appointment with the submarine chaplain arrived.

What was going to happen? What was the chaplain going to do? Was he going to take a neutral position? And if not, with whom would he side? Would he support the X.O. and stand firm to navy tradition, or would he truly represent God as Chaplain Freeman had done? These questions needled my mind with relentless repetition as I waited outside the chaplain's door.

Finally, he came out. With a smile on his face and a friendly pat on my shoulder, he invited me into his office. His disarming personality continued, "Have a seat, Roland. I want you to be comfortable."

The chaplain sat facing me, and for a long moment he didn't speak. Then he asked, "Before we start, Roland, I want to ask you a question."

"Yes, Sir?"

"Do *you*, or does your *command*, have a problem?"

"Well, Chaplain, I have a problem that, because of its nature, is also my command's problem."

"No! That's not what I meant! Are you here because you *want* to be here or because your command called and made the appointment for you?"

"I'm here because my command made the appointment, but I do need counsel!"

"Do you want me to give you counsel?"

"Yes, Chaplain."

"Fine! The reason I asked is the nature in which the appointment was made. Since your command arranged it instead of you, I wanted to be certain that you wanted to see me, that you were not just following the dictates of your superior officers. If that were the case, it would be your *command's* problem that I would be dealing with—not yours. Then I would talk to *them*. To do otherwise would be a waste of my time and yours!"

The chaplain's words convinced me that he did want to help. My apprehension diminished, and I asked whether my command had explained the circumstances concerning my problem.

"Well, somewhat," he answered. "But I would like for you to explain."

"Chaplain," I replied, "I have recently been studying my Bible and believe that, now that I have accepted Christ as my Saviour, I should keep His commandments, one of which is the observance of the Sabbath—Saturday. My being in the navy puts me in quite a predicament."

"You *have* got a _____ problem!" he said, using language I had never expected to hear come from a chaplain's lips.

My expression must have revealed shock, for he said with a smile, "Don't be upset, Roland! I have many sailors come through my office. I have found that I have better communication if I speak 'navy language.' I'm sorry if I have offended you!"

I was not thinking of how he had offended me, but how he must have offended God. I could not understand how a "man of God" could justify the use of such language. I began to fear the man to whom I was speaking, and sent up a silent prayer for help.

"Are you trying to get out of the navy?" the chaplain inquired. "If you are, there are better ways of doing it! You could just simply run up to your captain and give him a big kiss. You could commit suicide, which would take care of all your problems, or you could just turn queer! However, I really don't think that you are trying to get out. I believe that you are sincere in what you are doing, but a person could be sincere in worshiping the devil. In your case, the most effective thing for you to do would be to compromise."

"A submarine sailor could worship trees," he continued. "His belief could be that he has to bow down to a tree each day. When he goes on patrol, he has a problem; there are no trees! He

could request that they take a tree along with them. That's a little farfetched, don't you agree? Or, he could request that he be allowed to remain in port, where there are many trees, while the boat is out at sea. On the other hand, he could go on patrol and forget about worshiping trees. Then, when he returned to port, he could make up for lost time with all the trees he wants. Do you understand the moral of this story?"

"I'm not sure I understand the moral," I replied. "But if I were that particular sailor, I would either have to take the tree along with me on patrol or stay in port!"

"The navy is authorized to give you one hour out of each day. You can *demand* that hour and do with it as you please. But you're asking for a full twenty-four hours in one day! Now I'm sure that the navy can, and will, respect your commitments and reach some sort of compromise. Now whether that compromise is two hours or a full twenty-four hours is not important. The fact is that you're going to have to be willing to compromise with the navy!"

The topic then shifted to my previous three years in the navy and my general attitude toward my duties. I told him that this was the first time that I had had a problem and that I regretted having it.

"I'm sure you do!" he replied. Looking at his watch, he apologetically informed me that he had another appointment. He opened the door. While still holding the knob, he asked, "What do you think? Do you think I have been of help to you?"

"Well, Chaplain, I understand and respect everything that you have told me. I appreciate all that you are doing for me, but I still don't believe I can compro—"

SLAM! The chaplain, in a furious rage, thrust the door closed in front of me.

"Is that what you got out of this talk?" he screamed.

I froze. His eyes pierced through me. He continued screaming with such lack of control that, at one point, he appeared to be foaming at the mouth.

"Is that what you think I'm trying to do?" he continued. "You think I'm trying to work on you? You think that I'm trying to make you compromise? You mean to tell me that I sat here trying to help you for forty-five minutes, and you turn around and say what you did? I want you to know that you have hurt my feelings! I thought you were a sincere Christian person! But a Christian wouldn't go around hurting the feelings of someone who is trying to help him. I'm beginning to think that you're a phony." He pointed his finger at me. "You *are* a phony. You know, if you continue the way you are, pretty soon you're going to start believing that you're God. I won't bow down to you. I won't worship you. As long as you have the attitude that you have right now, I can't help you." He wiped his chin.

"Oh, Father, please help me!" I pleaded in silent prayer as I stared at the closed door. "Father, I want to get out of here. I'm afraid. Don't let me stay here any longer!"

I turned to the chaplain and said, "Sir—"

"Don't call me Sir!" he protested. "Call me Chaplain!"

I continued, "Chaplain, I am sorry if I have offended you in any way. But I would like to be dismissed, if I may."

He opened the door, and I walked out. When I reached the hall, his demeanor suddenly changed. With a smile, he said, "If I can be of any further assistance please let me know." It was as if he did not recall what he had just said to me, nor the manner in which he had said it. I thanked him and stood almost breathless, while he closed the door between us. As soon as I entered the stairwell, my nerves unleashed. I ran down four flights of stairs, out the front door of the building, and down the street to my car. I drove home as quickly as possible. I had forgotten a promise I had made to the X.O. to stop by the ship's office and see him after my meeting.

Still trembling, I fell on my knees in front of my couch and leaned across its cushioned seat. "Father, help me to trust You. I am confused. I am afraid of the man I just talked to. How can anyone speak as he did and be happy? Father, he is a chaplain. He is supposed to speak in Your behalf. I don't want You to be misrepresented. Please be with him, and be with me too. Help me to be worthy of the name Christian. I do not want to compromise my faith."

Finally, my brethren,

be strong in the Lord,
and in the power of his might.

Put on the whole armour of God,
that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,
but against principalities,
against powers,
against the rulers of the darkness of this world,
against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

~ Ephesians 6:10-12 (KJV)

The Pastor and My X.O.

The harsh words of the chaplain remained with me. I decided to listen to some soft music. Perhaps it would help me to relax. As I put on a record, I noticed the phone sitting next to the stereo.

“Should I call the ship’s office and talk to the X.O.?” I wanted to, yet if I did, it would probably mean more problems. And I didn’t really feel like talking to anyone. I decided to just lie down on the couch and relax. Then the phone rang.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Roland?” a voice said.

“Yes,” I replied.

“This is Yeoman Brooks, the X.O.’s assistant.”

“Yes?” I said, questioning the intention of the call.

“We’ve been going over your files and have decided to disqualify you from submarine service.”

Being disqualified to a submarine sailor is like losing your wings to an airman. That meant that I could no longer serve on board a submarine. What were *they* planning? Where would they send me?

Then Yeoman Brooks continued. “We’re transferring you to skimmer duty [surface ship]. Do you have any preference?” he asked.

“What do you mean?”

He paused, and then asked me what kind of ship I preferred and whether there was any particular base to which I would rather be transferred.

I sensed that he was being coached as to what to say by someone on another extension, probably the X.O.

Leave submarine duty! After a pause I answered, “No, send me to any duty—anywhere that I can observe the Sabbath. But you might as well keep me on the East Coast; there’s no use in the navy wasting their money by sending me to the Pacific.”

He paused again, and then asked, “Is that all you have to say? Don’t you care where you go?”

“No,” I answered, “I just want to be able to worship according to my conscience.”

“OK, then! Bye!”

I knew that it was customary for the navy to transfer troublemakers off submarine to surface-ship duty—duty which was usually undesirable. This was the navy’s usual method of punitive action.

I had been proud of being a submarine sailor. Now I accepted the news with great disappointment. I repeated over and over Romans 8:28. “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

When Chaplain Bracebridge came to see me, I explained my command’s action. He encouraged me to keep my faith. He said, “The navy can only go so far. But you be faithful to God.”

He cautioned me, “The navy may be able to go only so far, but they may take it to the limits! I’ve been in touch with the navy, and this is what they plan to do: They are going to allow you to observe the Sabbath while in the U.S. and Spain. But when you go on patrol, they are going to test you. It will be at their greatest advantage at that time.”

“So I am going on patrol?” I questioned.

“Yes! They want you to!”

“What about my being disqualified from submarine duty?”

"I wouldn't worry about it," he said. "It was probably a test by your command. When it comes right down to it, the navy department will assist in making the final decision, not just your command. However, I do recommend that you write a letter to the Chief of Naval Personnel informing the bureau of your position. Submit the letter to your command. They will forward it; they have to. And it's your legal right to send it. This will protect you. It will not only inform them of your situation using the proper chain of command, but will let them know that you are trying to resolve it."

I followed Chaplain Bracebridge's advice and submitted the following letter to the X.O.:

To the Chief of Naval Personnel:

Due to my recent convictions and joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I respectfully request that I have from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown off each week so that I may observe the Sabbath. If my present position in the navy is not flexible enough, I would like to request transfer or retraining to a position that will allow me to have my Sabbath to worship God. If neither of the above is possible, I am willing to accept an administrative discharge at the convenience of the government. I desire to complete the terms of my contract, however, as a matter of conscience, I must follow God's law first.

The X.O. read the letter. "Do you want this letter to be forwarded to the Chief of Naval Personnel?" he asked.

I nodded my head.

"Roland, do you think it would be possible for me to meet one of the pastors from your church?"

In surprise, I answered that I was sure it could be arranged.

I talked to Pastor Cox, and the following Sunday, we had an appointment to meet at the X.O.'s home.

Pastor Cox and I met at the church. We drove from the church to the X.O.'s house. On the way, another car swerved in front of us, causing an accident. Fortunately, it was minor; but it was enough to delay our arrival. I became nervous; I didn't want us to be late. Realizing my concern, Pastor Cox said with a smile, "Don't worry, Mike! We *must* be doing *something* right, or Satan wouldn't work so hard to stop us!"

We finally arrived, and I introduced Pastor Cox to the X.O. He invited us in to his home and offered refreshments. Pastor Cox thanked him, but declined. My throat was dry, so I accepted a glass of water.

We explained our delay and discussed the accident as a type of icebreaker for conversation.

Then, looking at Pastor Cox, the X.O. said, "You know, Petty Officer Roland is in quite a predicament, quite a predicament!"

"Yes, I understand that," Pastor Cox replied.

"Several of us have talked to him," the X.O. went on, "trying to persuade him to understand that there must be a middle ground whereby this whole matter could be settled, but he refuses to budge. As a sonarman, it is essential that he stand his sonar watch on Saturdays. It is essential to the safety of both the crew and the ship. Could you tell me just where your church stands on the observance of Saturday? I know that Roland has told us. But I would like to find out from someone who has more authority, more experience. Maybe you can understand our point. Maybe you can shed some light on this, that Petty Officer Roland has overlooked."

"I would be more than happy to explain how the Seventh-day Adventist Church views Saturday, the Sabbath, and how that view affects our stand. First of all, I believe it's important that I explain just where the Sabbath originated. It has its very foundation in the creation of earth. We believe the biblical account of Creation—that God created the earth in six literal days and rested on the seventh day. God then blessed the seventh day and commanded us to rest on it too. It was not His intent to restrict us by this command; but rather, He intended for Sabbath to be a memorial to His act of creation. It was to be a special day during which we could worship Him in a very special way. The fact that He included this command in His moral law, the Ten Commandments, indicates the importance of Sabbath observance. I know that I

am thankful that God gave us this commandment! Without it, I probably wouldn't have sense enough to take the necessary rest that I need."

"But can't a person rest during the week?" asked the X.O.

"Of course he can," answered Pastor Cox, "but Sabbath rest is a different type of rest. The Sabbath is a day to take our minds away from the problems of the everyday world—the problems that may surround us throughout the week. It is not a day for just physical rest, but for mental and spiritual rest as well. I honestly believe that if more people realized the importance of the Sabbath and followed God's counsel accordingly, there would be less need for psychiatrists and institutions."

The X.O. interrupted, "OK! We've talked about the Sabbath in general terms; but let's get more specific, for example, in the position of Roland. You said that the Sabbath is a day to get your mind off of your problems. Yet, the Sabbath itself is creating a problem for Roland—a very serious one, I might add."

"It isn't the Sabbath that is creating Roland's problem, but the opposition to his freedom to observe the Sabbath according to conscience!"

"Freedom!" exclaimed the X.O. "What about the freedom of our country? I believe in freedom! The very purpose of the navy is to protect our freedom!"

"Yes, I agree," answered Pastor Cox. "That's why Seventh-day Adventists are not in our minds conscientious objectors! Instead, we think of ourselves as conscientious cooperators. Many of our members have served, and many presently serve, in the military as medics, with the stipulation that they be allowed to observe the Sabbath."

"Maybe so. But Roland did not join under such a program! In fact, he took an oath. He swore to be loyal to the navy and to abide by the uniform code of military justice. Does your church encourage a man to break an oath that he has sworn to?"

"When that oath conflicts with God's law, we must."

"In other words, your church will encourage Roland to continue the course he is taking, knowing that in doing so, it will create serious problems? Problems that are inevitable?"

"Yes, our loyalty must first be to God."

The X.O. quickly turned and threw the question at me, "How do you feel about this, Roland?" In a sarcastic tone, he continued, "How do you feel about such support?"

This was the first that I had been invited to join in the discussion, and the abruptness of the invitation startled me. I thought for a moment, and then answered, "My level of faith is something which is between me and God. Even if I had no support from the church, I would have to stand firm to my convictions. *My* salvation depends on *my* relationship with God." Remembering Pastor Cox's advice, I continued, "It's not up to me to worry about the circumstances I might face and how they are to be resolved. God asks me to trust Him; He'll take care of the circumstances."

Pastor Cox then told about seven sailors in Mayport, Florida, who had had a similar problem with Sabbath observance. They had been taken to captain's mast (a non judicial court) several times. Finally provisions were made, and the sailors were allowed to observe the Sabbath.

The X.O. spoke up quickly, "I'm not familiar with the case in Mayport. But I can assure you that Roland's situation is different. And it will be dealt with separately. Roland is a sonar technician. It is his job to be reliable and to fulfill our requirement. It's my job to see that he does just that. I warned him that his present course would bring him into direct confrontation with the navy. I told him that it would inevitably bring us to a point of locking horns. There is no way that we can accept Roland's request without some cooperation from him. We are prepared to do whatever is necessary to protect the interests of the navy!"

Pastor Cox started to comment, but was interrupted by the X.O. "I can see we're not going to get anywhere!" He thanked Pastor Cox for coming and politely showed us to the door. He refused to look at or speak to me as Pastor Cox and I left. It was as if I were not there.

Was this a small example of what I was to expect? Was I to be considered to be insignificant or of no importance? If so, would they have no consideration of my feelings? These thoughts quickly left my mind as I remembered God's promise:

Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee:
be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God:
I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;
yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

~ Isaiah 41:10 (KJV)

Welcome Aboard

In spite of my expression of uncompromising faith in God and in spite of the fact that I had been “disqualified” from submarine duty, my sonar training continued. In fact, the following week promised a training schedule that offered me very little time to spend in the ship’s office. That made it easy to avoid the X.O. On Wednesday, however, I had to report to my sonar chief to get a list of my training schedule and duties for the following week. I was curious as to whether my letter to BUPERS (the Chief of Naval Personnel) had been properly forwarded. So I decided to look at my service jacket. I knew that all information would be contained in the folder. The ship’s yeoman granted me permission to look through my files. I found the letter, and it did not appear to have been processed.

“Hasn’t this been processed yet?” I asked the yeoman.

“Shhhhhh!” was his response as he looked to see if we were being observed.

“And what is this?” I asked pointing to the bold print stamped across my service folder: QUALIFIED. “Why hasn’t this been marked out? You told me I was disqualified from submarine duty. What about my transfer to a surface ship? Have any papers been processed?”

“Please! Don’t talk so loud,” he whispered.

“You told me I was being disqualified! Was I disqualified from submarine duty?”

Again, whispering, he replied, “It was a scare tactic!”

“So, I am going to sea with the crew?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

Chaplain Bracebridge had been correct. I was going to be going on patrol; I wasn’t going to be transferred to a surface ship. Chaplain Bracebridge’s awareness comforted me. Whether or not my letter had been properly forwarded didn’t matter. I had fulfilled my responsibility. I had taken action to inform Washington of my situation through my chain of command. If they did not process my letter, it would be their problem. I knew that through Chaplain Bracebridge, Washington was already aware of it anyway.

As I was leaving the ship’s office, I met the X.O. He asked me whether I had explained my predicament to the captain. I hadn’t. So I waited, while the X.O. got my service record and then went to the captain’s office. On his return he said, “The captain is able to see you.”

The captain’s office was located across the hall from the ship’s office; unlike the X.O.’s, it provided privacy. But I really didn’t want to see the captain; I had hoped to avoid the X.O. and any type of confrontation that day. I hadn’t met the captain yet; so, as I walked to his office, all I could think, was, “What a way to be welcomed aboard.”

I knocked on his door.

“Captain, I’m Petty Officer Roland. You wanted to see me, Sir?”

“Yes, Roland. Have a seat.” The captain sat behind his desk, my service file open before him.

“I understand we have a problem,” he commented, looking up at me.

“Yes, Sir.”

“The X.O. has explained it to me.” While thumbing through my files, he continued, “Roland, I’ve been going through your file. You have no previous record of disciplinary problems with the navy. I am somewhat puzzled. What is happening? What could cause a sailor with your performance and loyalty to take such a drastic turn?”

“It is my responsibility to God,” I replied. “I want to keep His Sabbath.”

“Can the Sabbath be that important?” he asked in a soft tone.

“Yes, Sir. It is important.”

“How can a day mean so much?” he continued.

“It was given to us by God as a day of rest.”

"I'm not sure I believe in God; so it is difficult for me to understand. Have you considered the circumstances? Do you have any idea what you're facing? Any idea at all?"

"Yes, Sir. I've given it a considerable amount of thought."

"And what have you concluded?" he asked.

"Sir, I know that it will bring me into direct confrontation with the navy."

"It *has* brought you into direct confrontation with the navy. It has brought you into direct confrontation with me. I realize that you are sincere with your convictions. I realize that you desire to be loyal to the navy. Your past history testifies to that. But your desire to be loyal does not change things. You have a problem: You cannot keep your convictions and be loyal to the navy."

"Yes, Sir. I agree. But my loyalty must be to God first."

The captain, while shaking his head, continued, "Due to the unique circumstances of your problem—not *our* problem—I want to avoid any further complications. I am a navy man, and I have a responsibility to the navy; but I also have a responsibility to my crew. With the stand you have taken, it offers no solution. There is no way to avoid direct conflict. You told me that you have given this matter a considerable amount of thought, but would you do me a favor?"

"What's that, Sir?"

"Would you think about it some more?"

"But, Sir, I have already—"

"Would you think about it some more?" he pleaded, interrupting my sentence.

"Yes, Sir. I will."

"I mean seriously!" he added.

"I will, Sir. I promise!"

"Thank you, Roland. Do you have any questions?"

"No, Sir. I just want to pray about it some more."

"Then if you have nothing you wish to say, you may be dismissed."

"Thank you, Sir." I turned, but at the door the captain called, "Roland?"

"Yes, Sir?" I paused and turned.

"Welcome aboard!" he said with a smile.

I could only thank my heavenly Father for His watchcare over me.

And we know that all things work together for good
to them that love God,
to them who are called according to *his* purpose.

~ Romans 8:28 (KJV)

Reconsideration of My Faith

How relieved I was after I had talked to the captain! Until now, I had perceived my command as being concerned only about themselves—the navy. I knew that my X.O. was not happy with me. I knew that he was not going to tolerate my stubbornness, as he saw it. His authority was one that I both respected and feared, but how I thanked God that the one man on my boat who had more authority than the X.O. at least showed a sense of concern for my wellbeing. I knew that his position as captain would require him to be firm, but I accepted that. It was with sadness that I had observed his perplexity. He had to support the navy's stand, but he saw my point as well. He may not have understood it, but he knew it was very important to me. His concern for me *earned* him my respect. It was this respect that prompted me to comply with his request—I would seriously reconsider my stand.

To truly reconsider, without bias, I chose to separate myself from all outside influence—my command and the church too. I wanted my decision to be solely between me and my God.

I attended the evangelistic meeting that night, arriving just as it started, and I left as soon as it was completed. I didn't stop to speak to anyone. Since there was no meeting on Thursday, I stayed at home to fulfill my promise to the captain.

"Father, what am I to do?" I prayed. "I believe that You want me to worship You on the Sabbath, but I must be sure. I admire and respect my captain! Why must he face such dichotomy? I don't want to hurt him. Please, Father, give me the answer. What am I to do?"

The conflict raged within my mind. My thoughts went from one extreme to the other. "It is my duty to obey God, but I am also to love my fellowman. God will see me through, but maybe I have been wrong and He is showing me. I feel like God wants me to observe His Sabbath, but I feel terrible because my stand is affecting others."

The struggle continued as I paced the floor. "Why am I so perplexed? Why is everything so clouded? Father, please give me the answer! Please, help me."

Suddenly the realization came to me. God is not responsible for the confusion. The conflict is not between God and *me*. Satan is waging war against God; my mind is the battleground!

"Dear Father," I prayed again as I fell to my knees as that realization came to me, "I ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit and Your angels. May they teach and protect me. I thank You for Christ, my Saviour. It is He that I choose to follow. By the power of Christ, I ask that You control any evil influences that may be present. Help me to understand Your will for me. Help me to control my feelings."

Then I remembered words I had read before, that one should not base faith on feelings. Pastor Cox had taught that Satan can affect our feelings. Truth can only be found in God's Word; the Scriptures hold the answer. Finally I had peace of mind. I knew that God was directing me.

I opened my Bible concordance to the word *Sabbath* and decided to read and study every text in the Bible that mentioned that day, starting with the story of Creation. "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made." Genesis 2:2. I tried to visualize what the first Sabbath must have been like. God had just spent six days creating the world. Everything was perfect; sin had not yet made its mark on the earth. There was not so much as a withering leaf or a lame animal anywhere to be found.

God "rested" on the seventh day. Why did God rest? He didn't *need* to rest. The dictionary definition of *rest* included, "the state of calm and peace." Indeed, the earth was in that state.

God had just created man and woman on the sixth day. Adam and Eve's first full day of life was the Sabbath. I imagined that God had spent the day with them explaining each act of creation to them in detail. How exciting it must have been as God gave them a personal tour of the garden He had so lovingly prepared for them. I pictured God walking along between Adam and Eve, embracing both of them as they enjoyed their first Sabbath together.

I turned the pages of my Bible to the Sabbath commandment, "Remember the sabbath day—" Remember? I quickly read the other nine commandments. None of the others stressed the importance of remembering. Why was it stressed in the Sabbath commandment? Was it because God foresaw that man would consider His Sabbath commandment of little importance down through time?

The commandment continued, "For in six days; the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." Exodus 20:8, 11. Perhaps God told us to remember the Sabbath day because it was a memorial to Creation. The Sabbath and the story of Creation belonged together. They could not be separated. It would be impossible to remember the Sabbath and to forget Creation. That would explain why Satan would work so hard to convince us that the Sabbath was not important. He certainly doesn't want us to acknowledge God as our Creator. He doesn't want us to believe that we were created in the image of God; he wants us to believe that we evolved from a lesser level of life. Thoughts of my childhood confusion over evolution ran through my mind. Would an understanding of the Sabbath have remedied such childhood trauma? I studied further.

"And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God." Ezekiel 20:20.

"Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation." Leviticus 23:3.

"If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah 58:13, 14.

Speaking of Jesus, Luke wrote, "As his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read." Luke 4:16.

I spent many hours into the night praying and studying God's Word. When I had read the last Sabbath text, I weighed all the evidence. I no longer had any questions or doubt in my mind; it was God's will that man—myself included—observe His Sabbath.

I thanked God for His guidance and asked that He be with my captain. I wanted the captain to understand that I had no choice; I could not obey him and God.

Friday afternoon, I was pulled from class to see the X.O. During this meeting, he said, "You are being authorized Sabbath observance while in the United States and while in Spain. However, while at sea, your duties are essential." He put before me the list of essential duties which my command expected me to perform during Sabbaths. It received my signature confirming that I had read it.

Thus, the matter was laid to rest for the remainder of our stay (approximately two weeks) in the United States. I continued attending the Prophecy Crusade and expressed my desire to be baptized as a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

On Sabbath, June fourth, I publicly professed my renewed faith and trust in Christ by being baptized. What an exhilarating joy I experienced as I came up from the water! My troubles were inconsequential! My every thought was of the saving grace of Christ and His love for me. I knew that the gift of God offered me eternal life and a home that He had prepared for me. What a triumph for man! I imagined the joy of God's holy angels as they looked down on me and the others baptized that day. How wonderful it would be when Christ returned and took us home to join His host of unfallen creatures!

That evening, the final session of the Prophecy Crusade was held. As I sat in the congregation, I looked around at my newly formed family. I had spent a lot of time with them

and had grown to love them. My eyes became clouded with tears. I would certainly miss them. This would be my last fellowship with them for a while. My crew was scheduled to fly to Spain and meet with the submarine in three days.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice.

~ Philippians 4:4 (KJV)

Sabbath in Spain

With encouraging words and expressions of love my church family and I parted. My seabag had been packed with books they had given me to read while on patrol. Now as I approached the plane, I glanced back at the terminal. There were members of my church family. How I wanted to run back to them. I realized there would be problems to face ahead.

The thought came to me, “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” 1 Corinthians 10:13.

My sonar friends were already seated on the plane. So I walked past them and selected a seat near the rear of the plane. The seat next to me was still empty, and I wondered who would occupy it.

Soon, an unfamiliar voice addressed me, “Do you mind if I sit here?”

“No, I don’t mind.” I answered and glanced at the hash marks on the man’s cuff. “A navy career man! A lifer!” I thought to myself, “And of all things, why did he have to be a machinist’s mate?” Prejudice had always existed between those who worked aft and those who worked forward. Thus, a machinist’s mate (aft) and a sonarman (forward) were as opposite as two poles on a magnet.

During my qualification for my dolphins on board the USS *Thomas Edison*, I had been harassed while studying the systems that were located aft. Now, since I was a new crewmember on board the USS *Lewis and Clark*, I had to requalify. It wouldn’t be as difficult as the first time, of course, but I would still be subject to harassment, depending on whether the crew liked me or not. I knew that my convictions could give my fellow shipmates the impression that I was a sandbagger—a definite excuse for harassment.

“A sonarman?” he queried, looking at the insignia on my sleeve.

“Yes,” I replied.

“I see ya have your dolphins,” he continued. “This isn’t your first patrol.”

“No, just my first patrol on the *Lewis and Clark*.”

“Well, I think you’ll like it! The *Lewis and Clark* is one of the navy’s most efficient submarines. It’s a kind of ‘showboat’ for curious congressmen and senators. It’s in good shape, and we have a very good captain.”

“Yes, I know,” I replied. “I’ve met him.”

My newly acquired friend and I exchanged friendly conversation, but soon my eyes grew weary, and I fell asleep.

I was awakened when the flight attendant dropped the tray in front of me and placed my meal on it—ham slices, green beans seasoned with bacon, potatoes, and salad. The juices from the beans had mixed with the potatoes.

“Aren’t ya hungry?” my friend asked, apparently wondering why I didn’t begin to eat.

“A little,” I replied. “I think I’ll just eat the salad.”

“May I have the rest? I’m starved.” He grinned at me.

“Sure! I’ll keep it here ‘till you’re finished with yours.”

“Thanks! Are ya sure you don’t want it?”

I looked at him and smiled. “I don’t eat pork,” I replied.

“Oh, are ya Jewish?” he wanted to know.

“No, but it is because of religious preference.”

“Hey, I’ve got an idea!” Reaching into his pocket, he revealed a fist full of packets. They were nuts that the airline had been passing out. With laughter, he continued, “I’ve been stocking up on ‘em. You never know when you’ll need ‘em! And I guess you need ‘em now! Here! Take ‘em!”

As I opened the first packet, I thanked God for His provisions. I didn't close my eyes; so I thought my prayer went unnoticed, until my philanthropist friend, asked, "You thanked God for those, didn't ya?"

"Yes, I did," I answered.

"I've never had much to do with religion, but I do believe in God. Do ya think God might have used me to help you?"

"Yes, I believe He did!" I replied.

He slapped me on the shoulder and said, "I think I'm gonna like ya!"

I smiled with mutual agreement. I sent another prayer of thanks to God. Indeed, He was taking good care of me, and His care for me was helping others.

Our plane set down in Rota, Spain. It was approximately one o'clock in the morning when we reached the submarine tender. The *Lewis and Clark* was tied up next to it with the "blue crew" on board. We (the "gold crew") were to take up temporary berthing on the tender until turnover was completed, which would be in approximately six days. We had to live in close quarters with no special storage space. All of our belongings remained in our seabags. There were 130 of us packed into very close quarters. The bunks were stacked three high and offered no privacy whatsoever. I found a bunk in an area with all my sonarman friends and did my best to get a good night's sleep. The first day of turnover was always a busy one; it was important that I be rested.

Ricci Sholock, a third class sonarman, who had become a particularly good friend, gave me a grand tour of the submarine the next morning. I had visited many submarines before, but this one was in better shape than any I had seen. I could see why it was considered to be one of the most efficient boats in the navy. It increased my sense of patriotism. I determined to do my best to serve my country while on board, but it could not interfere with my loyalty to God. Of that I was sure.

Soon Friday, the preparation day, arrived. That evening I spent the time in my bunk reading my Bible and sections of *The Great Controversy*. The usual commotion was going on in the berthing area, but I was able to concentrate and commune with my heavenly Father. I well knew the possibility of problems the next morning but was determined to enjoy the tranquility which I was presently experiencing. I slept that night, comforted by the peaceful influences of God's love and His ever-present watchcare for His children.

The next morning, the wakeup light went on, arousing the crew to prepare for muster on the weather deck of the tender. There was no such thing as weekend leaves while in Spain or at sea; duty was the same on every day of the week. My chief had not said anything to me about my being authorized to observe the Sabbath. I wondered whether he had been informed. Even if everything had been prepared, what would my friends think? My conviction would no longer remain secret. Would I be considered to be a sandbagger and thus rejected by the crew? "I have to trust God; I must give Him full control of the helm," I told myself.

Rain poured down that morning. So we couldn't take formation on the weather deck as before. Instead we crowded in an outside passageway, sheltered by the deck above. After all crewmembers were "present and accounted for," the X.O. dismissed us, turning authority over to our divisional heads.

"OK! All sonarmen get a quick breakfast and get down to the sonar shack as soon as you can!" commanded the chief. "We have a lot of work to do!"

"All sonarmen?" I thought. "He hadn't said, 'All but Roland.'"

"Chief?" I called.

"Yes, Roland?"

"May I speak to you?"

"OK, Roland."

"In private?"

"Sure," he answered, directing me against the bulkhead. At least we were separated somewhat from the rest of the men.

"Chief, I would like to be excused from work today."

"Why, Roland? Are you not feeling well?"

"No, Chief, it's not that! I can't work today because of religious convictions I have."

He laughed. "Religious convictions?"

"Hasn't the captain or X.O. talked to you, Chief?"

"No! They haven't! And I'm not about to let anyone off because of religion! I'm an atheist and will not tolerate such nonsense!"

"But, Chief—"

He interrupted, "I don't want to hear about it anymore! Now get to sonar!"

"But, I can't, Chief!"

"Roland, if you don't obey me and get to sonar, I'll see that you are placed on report!"

"Chief, I would like to talk to the sonar officer first."

"I think that's a good idea," he replied.

The sonar officer, a Baptist, was also the Protestant lay leader for the crew. I approached his quarters and found him alone.

"Sir, may I speak to you?" I asked.

"Yes, Roland, come on in."

"I have a problem, Sir."

"Go ahead," he said, encouraging me to continue.

"Has the captain or X.O. talked to you about me at all?" I asked.

"No," he replied.

"That's funny," I responded.

"What's the problem, Roland?"

"Well, Sir, I'm a Seventh-day Adventist. Today's the Sabbath, and my conscience will not permit me to work today."

"How did you work things out on other boats?" he asked.

"I just became a Seventh-day Adventist. This is the first time that the problem has surfaced."

"I see," he speculatively replied. "I'm a Christian too. *My* Sabbath is on Sunday. I don't like to do unnecessary work on Sunday. Paperwork, for instance!" he exclaimed, pointing to a stack of unprocessed forms. "I find that it is possible to do some things during the week; therefore, I don't do them on Sunday. However, I have duties which must be done on Sunday. I perform those duties on Sundays with clear conscience. But, you know, Roland, I'm not as concerned with your idea of Sabbath observance, as I am with the day you choose. Why do you choose Saturday?"

"I didn't *choose* Saturday, Sir; it's the day that God has given us for worship."

"Oh! You base your belief on the Old Testament?" he responded.

"No, Sir. Not just the Old Testament, the New Testament as well."

"But the Sabbath day was changed in the New Testament!" he insisted. "The New Testament indicates that Sunday had become the Sabbath." He reached for his Bible and opened it to Acts 20:7 and read:

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

"See? They're having church on Sunday! They're even having communion services. They're breaking bread!"

"Sir," I replied, "I don't believe this text is referring to a church meeting. In the first place, it was late at night; it says 'midnight.' And 'breaking of bread' does not always refer to communion services. Even if it did, the New Testament gives examples of the breaking of bread on other days of the week, not just Sunday. I believe the disciples were meeting together because Paul was going to leave for Macedonia the next day. They loved him and wanted to fellowship with him before he left."

"This isn't the only text! There are more! First Corinthians 16:2 has the apostles taking up an offering on the first day of the week." Turning his Bible to the text, he read:

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

"May I see your Bible?" I requested.

"Sure! Here." He handed it to me.

I read the text to myself and prayed for an understanding of it. Then, I reread the text to the sonar officer, “ ‘Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.’ As I interpret this, Sir, I don’t believe the emphasis is on the day of the week as much as it is on the fact that Paul wanted the collection to be ready for him to pick up when he came for it. Paul did not make this request because it was the first day of the week. His request was ‘that there be no gatherings when I come.’ ”

“But I, as a Christian, worship on Sunday because that was the day that Christ was resurrected from the tomb. Sunday worship is a memorial to His resurrection. I keep that day as a memorial.”

“But,” I replied, “in almost every text referring to Christ’s resurrection on the first day of the week, it refers to the day before as the Sabbath. Besides, baptism is a memorial of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Saviour. As we are immersed in the water, it symbolizes the death and burial of an old life and the resurrection to a new life with Christ. A life made possible by the death of Christ for our sins.”

“I still believe that the Sabbath was just for the Jews!” he insisted.

“But it’s one of the Ten Commandments,” I replied, “and besides, Adam and Eve were not Jews. They enjoyed the Sabbath in the Garden of Eden.”

“Yes. But *all* the old laws were done away with when Christ was nailed to the cross!”

“Even the Ten Commandments?” I asked.

“Yes! Even the Ten Commandments!”

Never had I heard a Christian say that the Ten Commandments were done away with. I thought and prayed about what he had just said; then I asked, “Then it’s all right for me to swear using God’s name? It’s all right for me to kill? I can commit adultery?”

“No! Of course not!” he exclaimed.

“So you’re telling me that all of the commandments are valid except for the Sabbath commandment?”

“I think we’ve discussed this enough!” he replied. “The fact is that you’re not willing to follow military regulations. I’m sorry, but I must give you a direct order to report to sonar. If you fail to comply with that order, I will have to place you on report!”

“Sir, before you do that, I would like to talk to the X.O.”

“I think that would be wise,” he replied. “However, I think I’ll talk to him. You stay here ’till I get back!”

“OK, Sir!”

I sat there anxiously waiting my sonar officer’s return. I knew that I had been authorized Sabbath observance while in Spain; but, I also knew the X.O. would still be upset.

Fifteen minutes later the officer returned. “The X.O. gave me permission to excuse you from your duties today. However, you are to remain in the berthing area of the tender!” he said.

Because thou hast made the LORD,
which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;
There shall no evil befall thee,
neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.
For he shall give his angels charge over thee,
to keep thee in all thy ways.

~ Psalm 91:9-11 (KJV)

An Atheist's Sabbath

I accepted, with disappointment, their terms to remain on the tender during Sabbath; I had hoped to locate a Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church and attend their services. I knew I wouldn't understand the sermon, but the presence of fellow believers would have been blessing enough.

There were two hatches through which to exit the submarine. The forward hatch was located near the sonar shack. I chose to exit through the after hatch; I wanted to avoid an undesired meeting with the chief. He, like the X.O., was all navy. Perhaps he didn't share the enthusiasm of the X.O., but the X.O. didn't profess to be an atheist. My restrictions to the tender would keep me from my church family, and I certainly didn't want a confrontation with a godless foe—especially on the Sabbath.

Since I was restricted to the berthing area, I decided to lie in my bunk and spend the Sabbath reading. I had been reading but for a short time, when a friend interrupted, "Roland, what have you done to the chief?"

"What do you mean?" I queried.

"I don't know. Something about your going over his head to get Sabbath off! He said he'll get even with you tomorrow on his Sabbath!"

"Oh, no!" I replied nervously. "Is he really upset?"

"I've never seen him this angry!" My friend shook his head as he spoke.

"Did he really say he'd get even with me tomorrow?"

"Yes! He said you could have your Sabbath today, but he'd see to it that you worked twice as hard tomorrow on his sabbath!"

"His sabbath?" I questioned. "That's interesting—"

"Yes, it is!" he interrupted. "That makes it even worse for you; he hates religion!"

"He told me he was an atheist," I replied. "An atheist observing the Sabbath?" We both laughed.

"You'd better do something!" he advised.

"God will have to take care of it," I answered.

Laughingly, he said, "God better have good connections with the navy."

"He does!" I replied.

As my friend returned to the submarine, I became overwhelmed with anxiety. My problem seemed to be mushrooming. How well Satan had planned his attack! If there was one thing I hated, it was being pressured while working! I always did my best to perform my duties, but I couldn't stand to be pushed! I couldn't work with someone looking over my shoulder constantly. But it seemed now it was going to happen. I couldn't avoid it. "I will have just had a day off," I said to myself. "How could I protest such treatment?" The joys of the Sabbath had quickly become clouded by the darkness of despair.

Then I realized, all my attention was on myself and the navy. How could I expect the Sabbath to be a joy? I had taken my eyes off of Christ. Now I saw my error and I prayed: "Father, You know me better than I do. You know how I feel about being pressured while working. I ask that You be with me. Father, I want to do my work so well tomorrow that the chief can't say anything. Give me the strength and understanding to perform my duties beyond that which could be expected. And, please, help me to glorify Your name!"

I settled back into my reading and once more enjoyed the blessings of God's truth. Not long had I been reading when another friend interrupted.

"Roland, what's going on?" he whispered, looking around to see if anyone was present.

"Why? What are you talking about?" I asked.

"It's the X.O. and the captain!"

I sat up preparing myself. Then, fearfully muttered, “Why—? What—? What is the matter with the X.O. and the captain?”

“I was serving coffee for the officers this morning when the sonar officer came, telling the X.O. that you wanted the day off for Sabbath observance.”

“What happened?”

“The X.O. was mad! He didn’t want to let you off.”

“What did he say?”

“At first, nothing! He just looked at the captain. Then, the X.O. said it was OK, but I could tell that he was unhappy. It was as if his pride was damaged.”

“Were there very many officers there?”

“All the officers from both crews were there! It caused quite a commotion! I saw one officer from the blue crew look at his relief and say, ‘It’s probably going to be an exciting patrol with this guy on board! I’d sure like to see what happens to him!’”

“Do very many people know about what happened?” I asked. “*Everybody knows!* It’s all over the boat!”

“Are they upset? Do they think I’m a sandbagger?”

“Some do, but I heard a few speaking of freedom of religion.”

With the news of the officers’ reactions came greater perplexity. It certainly appeared as if they were preparing to lock horns, as my X.O. had promised. My chief had said he was going to work me twice as hard tomorrow. Again I prayed that my Father would be with me and that He would help me to perform my duties in a way that could not be questioned by my superiors.

The following morning I reported to muster with the sonarmen on the tender’s weather deck. Again, the chief told us to get a quick breakfast and get down to sonar as soon as possible. I did just that! In fact, I went through the chow line and grabbed only an apple and a banana. I decided to eat them on the way to the submarine. I wanted to be sure that I was working when my chief got there. On the way, however, I realized how foolish I was; I couldn’t work on any equipment by myself. It was against navy regulations. For safety reasons, we were never authorized to work on electrical equipment alone. When I entered the sonar shack, I was surprised to find that Ricci Sholock was already there.

“Aren’t you going to have breakfast?” I asked.

“No. Dieting,” he said with a laugh.

I asked him if he would supervise me while I worked on the BQS-4. He seemed eager to oblige and told me that the BQS-4 had some very serious problems. Both crews had been unsuccessful in solving them for over a year. The ‘4 was considered of little importance, so they had kind of let the problems ride. However, to have it performing in complete operating condition would have made my chief very happy.

During my training in San Diego, I had become interested in the system of the BQS-4; therefore, I was familiar with its circuits. I carefully studied the schematic diagrams and concluded that most of the problems had to be in one particular circuit.

Ricci disagreed. “They can’t be in that circuit! The chief had all of the components in that circuit checked; they’re all good!”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Yes, we’ve checked them at least three times!”

“I still think the problem has to be in that circuit! Perhaps there’s a cold solder joint. Were the joints checked?”

“I don’t know for sure.”

“Then I’ll check them.”

I took the soldering iron and began touching various solder points at random. In just moments, five major problems had been corrected. I didn’t know where the problems had been; I just knew that my random touch of the soldering iron had corrected them. Ricci and I laughed about it. (I silently thanked God for answering my prayers.)

“Boy, is the chief going to be happy!” Ricci laughed as he spoke.

“I hope so,” I replied.

“Oh, he will be! If you only knew how many hours we have spent, trying to get the '4 working! I'm sure he'll be happy!”

Soon, the other sonarmen started arriving. When the chief came in, Ricci immediately informed him of our accomplishments. I buried my head inside the base of the equipment (hiding from the chief) and continued working; while, at the same time, praying for the protection of my heavenly Father. I was especially concerned about my work that first day after the Sabbath.

The chief was evidently satisfied with what he saw. He never spoke one word of hostility; he glanced at me with an expression of bewilderment.

My work continued throughout the day, with only very short breaks. Not once did my chief say anything to me. It was as if he was afraid of breaking my concentration. He put Ricci and me in charge of the '4 and told us to devote all of our time to its upkeep.

Everything seemed to be going well all week. I worked long, weary hours. Finally, Sabbath arrived. I felt physically and mentally drained, so I slept most of the Sabbath away. Saturday night, I read and studied as I had hoped to during the Sabbath hours.

Sunday was no different from the previous one. Early Monday morning, the chief called me to the side, “Roland, do you need anything at the exchange for patrol?” he asked.

“Yes, I do need some things, Chief.”

“I want you to go get whatever you need, and, Roland, take your time.”

The base was large. To go to the navy exchange and get what I needed would take most of the morning, anyway. So, to be permitted to take my time came with surprise. “Take my time?” I asked to be sure I'd heard right.

“Yes, take as much time as you want.”

“But, Chief, you're not letting the other sonarmen have such liberty.”

“They're not working as hard as you!” he replied.

“Thank you, Chief, but I'll just get the things I need and return; I still have work to do on the '4.”

“Don't worry about the '4!” he insisted. “You deserve this break!”

“But what will the other sonarmen think?”

“Don't worry about them! I'm Chief!” he said.

I went to the exchange, purchased my essentials, and returned to the bus stop. I didn't want to take advantage of my chief's offer; maybe he wouldn't mind, but the sonarmen might.

While waiting for the bus, someone quietly sat down beside me. His khaki-colored uniform revealed high rank. I looked at the officer and was startled to see that it was the chief.

“Chief, I didn't know you were coming to the exchange!” I exclaimed.

“Uh-ya-I-uh-I had some things to get.”

“Oh,” I replied.

“Roland?”

“Yes, Chief?”

“May I—may I ask you a question?”

“Sure, Chief!”

“I'm really curious about something!” he said.

“What's that, Chief?”

“Roland, what in the world keeps you going?”

“What do you mean, Chief?”

“You've been putting in many hours in the sonar shack. What gives you the strength to go on?”

“Chief, I am observing Sabbath, but I want to do the same amount of work as the others; so I work harder.”

“Believe me, Roland,” he interrupted, “you're getting more done than the others. I wish all my men worked as hard as you!”

“Chief,” I continued, “maybe I am. It is because I have asked Christ to give me the strength to do so. I do not do it in my own strength.”

“Don't you ever get tired?” he asked.

“Yes, Chief, sometimes I get very tired.”

“Well, would you do me a favor, Roland?”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Would you slow down! I need you for patrol; I don’t want you getting sick!”

With relief I replied, “Chief, I appreciate your concern. I will still get my work done!”

“Roland, what is it about Christ that gives you so much faith?”

“I believe I’m doing what He wants me to do, and I believe He will take care of me.”

“Are you really going to insist on Sabbath observance while at sea?”

“Yes, Chief, I have to! I know it will make it difficult for you and I’m sorry!”

“We will have problems with it, Roland!”

“Yes, Chief, I know! But I’ve tried to avoid them; there’s nothing more I can do!”

“Well, there’s not much I can do either! We’ll just see what happens!”

“Thank you, Chief. I appreciate your attitude!”

“Well, Roland, normally I wouldn’t accept a request like yours. But you are trying, and you’re a good sonarman! I just wish we didn’t have this problem!”

“Well, Chief, I have to say that I believe that God has given me many of the abilities for which you are pleased; I wouldn’t be as efficient if I weren’t trusting Him!”

“Roland, do you really believe that the Bible is inspired?”

“Yes, I do!”

“Why?”

“It gives me hope; it offers me a future; and there are many prophecies which have clearly been fulfilled.”

“Prophecies—?”

The bus pulled up and interrupted our discussion. As we stood to board, another chief got off. The chief decided to stay with his friend.

“I’ll see ya back at the boat, Chief!” I waved.

“OK, Roland,” he replied. “Maybe we’ll continue this discussion some other time.”

Knowing that the chief was pleased with my work and knowing that he wasn’t going to make things difficult made my return to the boat pleasurable. And the questions he was asking about faith and the Bible—I was pleased to have had the opportunity to witness to this man who claimed to have no faith in anything.

This meeting, was it by chance? Or was it by divine appointment! My trust in God strengthened me as I realized He was fulfilling His promise:

**When a man’s ways please the LORD,
he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.**

~ Proverbs 16:7 (KJV)

Sea Trials

Friday, July fifth, we entered fast cruise. I was stationed topside, manning the lines, as the tugboats guided our submarine safely from the Rota harbor. We were not yet going on patrol—just seven days of sea trials to check the efficiency and operation of the sub. Fast cruise, with its intense testing and drills, lacked in mercy. It offered little time for sleep and even then, the alarm would sound, GONG—GONG—GONG! closely followed by, “Man battle stations! Man battle stations!” Or the boat would be maneuvered with “angles and dangles.” Then we would wake with our heads pressed against the ventilation ducts in our bunks.

Sabbath would be no different; it would have its share of activity. We were ordered below from topside; the hatches were secured. The submarine dived to the dark depths of the sea, but it was not escaping the influence of my God.

The control-room charts posted the time of sundown. Minutes before God’s day of rest, I went to my bunk to read and enjoy the Sabbath in solitude. Suddenly came the alarm, “Fire in the engine room! Fire in the engine room!” I jumped into my dungarees and rushed to my post.

“Chief, is this a drill?” I asked.

“Yes, Roland.”

“Then—uh—since it’s Sabbath, may I be dismissed?”

“Yes, but stay in your bunk out of everyone’s way!” he commanded. “You know you have the 0600 [6:00 a.m.] watch, don’t you?”

“Ye—es.”

“Are you going to show up?”

“No-n-o, Chief, I’m sorry. I can’t.”

“Well—good luck!”

“Secure the drill! Secure the drill!” was announced as I crawled into my bunk. I resumed reading until I fell asleep.

Early in the morning Ricci came down. “Roland, it’s 5:30. I’m supposed to make sure you’re getting ready for watch. I guess this is it—huh?” He shook his head. “You’ve got more guts than I do!”

I was apprehensive; yet I trusted God’s power.

A messenger soon arrived by my bunk and informed me that the conning officer wanted to see me.

“I’ll be right up,” I answered.

This was it. The navy’s test. As I neared the control room, I prayed for the courage and words to speak in defense of my faith. “STS-2 Roland, reporting as requested, Sir!”

“Roland, I understand that you refuse to report to Sonar because of some religious convictions that you have.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“As a conning officer, I give you a direct order to report.”

“As a matter of conscience, I can’t, Sir.”

“Then you leave me with no choice but to place you on report.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“You are dismissed!” As I turned to leave, he stopped me. “Roland!”

“Yes, Sir?”

“I just want you to know that I do not want to do this. My conscience bothers me a little, but I have to!”

“I understand. I know you’re just doing your job. I don’t hold it against you. God understands too.”

“Thank you, Roland!”

I had returned to my bunk when I received another message. “The X.O. wants you to report to his quarters.”

The X.O. was the last person I wanted to see. I feared the pending conflict. My steps were slow, and I hesitated as I saw his open door. I wanted to turn back, but I had asked God to be with me. This was not my battle, but God’s. And He would be my defense, I felt sure. I had chosen God’s way. He would be with me all the way. A peace and an assurance came over me.

As I walked into view, the X.O., who was seated at his desk, reacted with anger. “Have a seat, Roland!” He motioned me to a seat.

Timidly, I obeyed.

“This is it, Roland! I warned you! I told you we would lock horns. I worked with you. I tried to avoid this confrontation. You have refused every means of reconciliation which I have offered. I do not appreciate insubordination, nor will I tolerate it! I don’t care what the reason. Here.” He threw a document at me. “These are the charges against you. Sign it.”

I signed.

The X.O. continued, “Captain’s Mast has been scheduled for you on Monday morning at 0900! We will be back in port by then, and you are not to leave the boat for any reason not relating to your duties! Is that understood?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Now, get out of here, Roland! You disgust me!”

When our boat returned to port, its stay would be brief. Every submarine sailor cherished the period between fast cruise and patrol. For purposes of morale, we were given as many liberties as possible. Once the boat submerged for patrol, life would change. For two months we would be denied that which we had taken for granted. A submarine offered no sunsets, no fresh breezes or flowers—just an entanglement of pipes and complex systems. Being confined to the boat wouldn’t make my psychological preparation for patrol any easier.

On Sunday morning the lieutenant who had been appointed investigative officer, came to sonar. He read the charges brought against me:

STS-2 Michael L. Roland did fail to go at the time prescribed to his appointed place of duty, to wit: the Sonar Watchstanders Room on board the *USS Lewis and Clark*.

STS-2 Michael L. Roland having received a lawful command from LTJG James S. Walters, his superior commissioned officer, to report to duty in the Sonar Room aboard *USS Lewis and Clark* (SSBN 644), did willfully disobey the same.

“Are these charges true, Roland?”

“Yes, Sir. They are.”

“Why didn’t you report to your watch station?”

“Because it was the Sabbath, and I can not work on the Sabbath. I had informed the command of my convictions.”

“Did you make any preparations for another sonarman to stand your watch?”

“No, Sir. I did not.”

“You mean you failed to show up for duty knowing that there would be no one to take your place?”

“Yes, Sir. But like I said, I had talked to the command. They knew my convictions. They knew I couldn’t stand the watch, but they scheduled me for it anyway.”

“I see, Roland. I have no more questions.”

His report to the captain was as follows:

Interviews with listed witnesses, the accusing officer, and P.O. Roland established without conflict that P.O. Roland of his own free will decided not to stand watches during the period of his Sabbath observance. P.O. Roland did not attempt to arrange an exchange of watches for the period he would refuse to stand watch. By choice P.O. Roland, in fact, did not report to his watch station in Sonar. When ordered by LTJG Walters to report to his watch station P.O. Roland willfully disobeyed the order.

These things I have spoken unto you,
that in me ye might have peace.

In the world ye shall have tribulation:
but be of good cheer;
I have overcome the world.

~ John 16:33 (KJV)

Calm Waters

The charges brought mixed response from the crew. “He deserves whatever he gets!” was the majority opinion. Others did not agree. They became angry when they heard that the charges included my failure to provide a substitute for my watch. “That’s not fair!” they exclaimed. “They’re setting *you* up! They knew you would not be in sonar! They knew about your convictions. They’re more responsible for the lack of a watch stander than you!”

Almost every sonarman volunteered to stand my watch the next time that there would be a conflict. The chief seemed proud as he saw his men rallying to my support. He couldn’t officially authorize such an exchange, but I knew he supported it.

“Roland,” he said, “we’re gonna cover for ya! The X.O. regards you as unfit for sonar duty. He wants you to do dishes or something during patrol. But I want you in sonar, and I’m gonna fight to keep ya!”

“Chief, if I were to prepare a watch schedule for sonar, one with a cycle allowing me Sabbaths off, would you approve it?” I asked.

“Ya, Chief, we’d go along with it, wouldn’t we, guys?” Ricci said, turning to the other sonarmen for support.

Overwhelmed by the response, the Chief replied, “Uh—yes—I’ll approve it! But I won’t have the final say; it will have to go through the chain of command. Do you think you can do it, Roland?”

“It’ll take some juggling, but I’ll try.”

A messenger arrived interrupting our planning. “The captain wants to see you,” he said.

I went at once to see the captain, who informed me again that captain’s mast was scheduled for the next day.

“Yes, Sir,” I replied.

“I’m sorry that it has come to this, Roland.”

“So am I, Sir.”

“The chief told me you’ve been confined to the boat when we return to port.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I ordered no such restriction! The X.O. got a little carried away; due to the circumstances in your case, I see no reason to treat you as criminal. You need your liberty as much as any other sailor on this boat, so there will be no restrictions on you. When your duty section is authorized liberty, you are free to leave the boat. And I will inform the chief of my decision.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“You’re welcome, Roland.” He smiled. “You’re dismissed.”

Our boat completed its necessary tests ahead of schedule. Thus we returned to port that afternoon. I was performing some final tests on the ‘4 in preparation for patrol when my chief interrupted me. “Roland, I have a special duty assignment for you today!”

“What’s that, Chief?”

Smiling, he continued, “I want you to go on liberty and have the best time you possibly can!”

Jerry Walthall, a fire-control technician and a good friend, heard the chief. He spoke up, “Hey, Roland, can I come too?”

“Sure, I’d like that!” I answered.

We went to the restaurant at the petty officer’s club to get something to eat. While there, Jerry became inquisitive. “Tell me about your church.”

“What do you want to know?” I asked.

“What’s the name of it?”

“Seventh-day Adventist,” I replied.

“Why is it called that?” Jerry wanted to know.

“It is called the Seventh-day Adventist Church because we believe in the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of God, and we believe in and teach the soon coming—or advent—of Christ.”

“How soon do you think Christ—” Jerry began again but he was interrupted when several of his friends joined us at our table. Jerry introduced his friends to me, and then added, “We were just talking about Mike’s church.”

“I guess you’re having some problems with your beliefs,” one of the friends responded.

“Yes, some,” I replied.

“I’m a Christian too,” the friend continued, “I don’t observe Sabbath, but I sure support you and wish you the best!”

The other three who had joined us shared his attitude. After an enjoyable meal and inspiring fellowship together, one of the fellows suggested we all go to the movies.

“That’s a good idea!” Jerry replied. “Do you want to go, Mike?”

“No, thanks, I’d rather not. But you go ahead.”

“Oh, come on, Mike. Please come!”

“I don’t want to see a movie,” I replied.

“Oh, come on!”

“Why do you want me to go so much?”

“I want to ask you more questions.”

I laughed. “During the movie?”

“It may be boring!” he grinned.

“We can continue our talk later. OK?”

“OK! See ya later!”

I walked to the breakwater, a stack of large stone boulders that extended out into the ocean about a quarter mile, which separated the rough seas of the Atlantic from the calm of the Rota harbor. I found a spot where I could feel the fresh tang of the salt air, the warmth of the sun’s rays, and the cool ocean breeze. I relaxed as I sat on the cool smooth stones. Having been confined during recent weeks I hadn’t had a chance to really appreciate nature, as I would have liked.

The time spent that afternoon on the breakwater was very meaningful. This was my first opportunity since leaving the United States to spend a quiet moment alone with God.

While resting on the smooth stones of the breakwater, I fell asleep and dreamed about captain’s mast. I experienced the anxiety and anticipation of the court proceedings, but was comforted to see that angels had been sent to my side. Court was of an unusual nature. It didn’t question so much my loyalty to the navy but my loyalty to God. I awoke. The dream had seemed so real. Anxiety pressed as I tried to imagine what questions could be raised. Then I remembered a text that Pastor Cox had shared with me. I took my Bible from my pocket and began searching for it. I knew it was in Luke, and I skimmed through the book until found it:

**And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and *unto* magistrates, and powers,
take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say:
For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.**

~ Luke 12:11-12 (KJV)

Captain's Mast

Non-judicial Court

Monday, June eighth, I stood in the corridor outside the officer's stateroom awaiting captain's mast. The presence of my chain of command was required. When the chief arrived, he whispered, "Good Luck, Roland," before entering the room. Another sailor (a seaman) took a position standing next to me. He was having captain's mast also, but for a greater offense. When the submarine left port for fast cruise, he had hidden on the pier and hadn't gone with us at all.

We were talking when the door opened and the chief of the boat stuck his head out, "Roland, you may come in now."

I walked in, stood before the captain, and snapped to attention. "At ease, Roland. Relax!" was the captain's response. "Have a seat."

Leaning forward, the X.O. objected, "Sir?"

The captain replied to the X.O., "Due to the nature of the charges, this captain's mast may take longer than usual. I see no reason to make Roland stand through it. Making Roland comfortable will not affect the proceedings nor its outcome!"

The X.O., apparently embarrassed, accepted the mild rebuke and quietly sat back in his seat.

The stateroom had deck-mounted tables. The captain sat directly across from me. To his right was the chief of the boat. To the captain's left were the sonar officer and sonar chief respectively. Beside my chief sat the investigating officer. The X.O. had chosen to sit at another table a few feet to the captain's right.

The captain opened the proceedings by the reading of charges brought against me: failure to report to my watch station and failure to obey a direct order to do so. "The investigating officer reports that you admit to these charges. How do you plead!"

Before I could answer, the X.O. responded, "Sir, if I may interrupt—"

On looking over at the X.O., the captain replied, "What is it?"

"Sir, for the record I would like to add that the report also states that Roland failed to provide a substitute for his station."

"I'm well aware of that," the captain replied. "But there are peculiar circumstances involved in Roland's case. Let's forget the trifles and get to the point, which are the two charges I just read." Turning to me, he again asked, "How do you plead?"

The room grew silent. Every eye in the room seemed to be focused on me. "Guilty, Sir," I replied. I could give no other answer. I was guilty. But the captain wasn't satisfied.

"Do you have anything else you would like to add?" he asked.

"Well, Sir, I am guilty of not performing my duties as assigned and I am guilty of refusing to obey a direct order from my superiors, but I don't believe I am guilty of insubordination in the true sense of the word. It has been my desire to perform my duties to the best of my abilities. It is only where my duties are in conflict with my faith that I must refuse."

"I understand, Roland. And the reports I have, indicate that you do normally perform your duties at a level of maximum efficiency—a level at which your chief expresses astonishment. With the exception of this incident, I agree—you have an excellent performance record."

"Well, Sir, I must say that I believe that God has given me these abilities. I seem to be more efficient now than I ever have been."

The X.O. rolled his eyes back. But the chief smiled, while the captain continued, "Your work is commendable, Roland, but in light of the evidence, the investigation, and your own plea,

there is no question as to your guilt. The navy has certain bylaws which must be obeyed. It is my responsibility to see that they are, regardless of premise. Therefore, as captain of this vessel, I find you guilty as charged. Disciplinary action is as follows: I fine you \$75, one seventh of your base pay for one month. I'm sure you realize how I arrived at such a figure. I also reduce your rank from sonar technician, second class, to sonar technician, third class. However, I am suspending rank reduction for a period of three months. If, during the next three months, you have any other disciplinary action, the suspension will be vacated; rank reduction will be automatic. Under the circumstances, I see no reason to take other action, such as restriction to the boat. You are free to carry on with the same liberties as the rest of the crew. Do you understand the punitive action I have taken?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I now declare mast dismissed. You are free to go, Roland." The captain picked up his papers and began to talk to the other officers in the room.

I left the room to go back to my work. When I returned to the sonar shack, my friends eagerly asked what had happened. After telling them, one of the fellows exclaimed, "Wow! They fined you \$75? That's pretty stiff! I feel sorry for Bohnam [the other man scheduled for captain's mast]. They'll probably throw the book at him! He didn't even go on fast cruise!"

Later, in the crew's mess, I read the results of Bohnam's captain's mast. My shipmates pushed and shoved to read the results too.

"That's not fair!" I heard someone exclaim. "That's religious persecution!"

They all reacted with rage. "Bohnam wasn't even fined! They were harder on you than they were on Bohnam! You were only absent one day! He was absent for three—and wasn't even on the boat! He showed no intent of working. At least you tried to perform your duties! It's clear that they were harder on you because of your religion!"

"I wonder what they would do if my convictions conflicted with their plans?" Another asked. "We can't allow this! There's a principle here! The military's supposed to be defending our country's right to freedom of religion, yet they punish us when we defend our own!"

As the results of the masts spread, my sympathizers grew from a small group of sonarmen to a majority of enlisted men. The question of freedom of religion was on the tongues of many. I no longer had to be concerned about the feelings of my fellow crewmembers. I was not thought of as a sandbagger, but a defender of rights. They knew that I would have to go before the captain again, and many vowed to protest if the "harshness" continued.

That evening I gave God a special thank-You for His guidance and His watchcare.

Praise ye the LORD.

Praise ye the LORD from the heavens:

praise him in the heights.

Praise ye him, all his angels:

praise ye him, all his hosts.

Praise ye him, sun and moon:

praise him, all ye stars of light.

Praise him, ye heavens of heavens,

and ye waters that *be* above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the LORD:

for he commanded, and they were created.

~ Psalm 148:1-5 (KJV)

A Chaplain's Warning

The following day a messenger was sent to me. The captain requested my presence at his stateroom. I had already been to captain's mast; I had already pleaded guilty to the charges brought against me; I had already been found guilty of all charges. "What could the captain want with me?" I thought. I was apprehensive. Captains carry the highest authority on board a naval vessel and command respect. But in the short time that I had been under this captain's command, he had *earned* my respect. It had become apparent to me that in spite of the fact that he did not believe in God, he was of the nature that the Spirit of God could speak to him. He was responding to the Spirit's voice and was being torn by the decisions he was having to make.

I responded to the captain's request, "You wanted to see me sir?"

"Yes Roland, come in. Have a seat." He seemed uneasy or distracted. His eyes apprehensively jumped around the stateroom. "Would you do *one more* favor for me?" he asked.

I took his use of words, "one more favor", to be referring to my compliance to reconsider my request to observe God's Sabbath in the first place. My situation had put the captain into a complicated dilemma and in spite of my request to observe the Sabbath on his vessel; he always showed the utmost respect for my beliefs and me. As captain, he commanded my respect; as a compassionate commander and judge, he had *earned* it. Obviously my decision to obey God's commandments had put me into a problematic situation. However, I could see that my decision had also put my captain into one too. It was ironic to see that he, too, had (as a matter of conscience) been put into a position in which he would have to perform a careful balancing act between the demands of the Navy and the Law of God. It was ironic in this sense—The captain was responsible to the Navy as acting judge in my situation and yet he worked diligently to see that my beliefs were respected. The X.O. (on the other hand) was responsible for the moral of all the boat's crewmembers—all of them—including me. The X.O. acted more as a judge than the captain and showed very little respect for my beliefs much less any tolerance for them. Of the three of us, I was trying to balance God's law with those of the Navy in a respectful manner; the captain was trying to balance the Navy's law with those of God's in an acceptable manner; and the X.O. was passing judgment on both of us. Ironic? Yes—because it was the X.O. who was (outright) not performing his duties as outlined by Naval regulations. So yes—I respected the captain. I thanked God, too, that I had such a captain presiding over my case. For this man, I was willing to do most anything (within the laws of God).

"Would you go see the chaplain on the submarine tender?" he asked.

"Anything (within the laws of God)—*but that!*" I thought. "Anything!"—Until I heard his request. His request brought back memories of the SUBGRU Six Chaplain. I was horrified at the thought. I squirmed and resisted the captain's request. "I've already seen *two* chaplains," I replied "I don't know how another chaplain could be of any assistance." But the captain pleaded with me. He told me that the chaplain was a good man and that he was of good nature. He had been in the Navy for many years and was wise. He assured me that the chaplain would not try to change my religious convictions in any way whatsoever; he assured me that his request was so that the chaplain might advise in respect to military matters. I could sense his pain and concern for me so I agreed, once again, to follow the captain's advice.

The following day, I boarded the submarine tender and met with Chaplain Swift. Lieutenant Commander Swift was of the same rank as my X.O. Chaplain Swift confirmed my captain's state of mind. He told me how my situation had become a spiritual burden for him. He told me how my captain was "not a man of God" but that he was a good man and that this experience

(even though he had to take a stance against me) had him taking a hard look at spiritual matters. He (without breaking confidence) made it apparent that the captain had had such a conversation with him.

Then the subject changed. He said, "You have been found guilty in the proceedings of captain's mast. You have the right to appeal your case to the level of court martial."

I told him that I had *pleaded* guilty and therefore I would not have any reason to take this to the level of court martial.

"Yes I know," he said. Then with cadence he repeated, "You-have-the-right to-appeal-your-case to-the-level of-court-martial," while pointing his finger down at his desk.

I paused and thought for a moment. Then again, softly answered, "I pleaded guilty...."

Then he looked up at me and seemed to be searching for words. "There are powers that be—," losing eye contact, he continued, "that are—that are doing things." He cocked his head uncomfortably to the side as he carefully maneuvered the verbal minefield. "They—they...."

I prayed a silent prayer for God to be with us and to help the chaplain with what he was trying to tell me.

Suddenly he looked up again and brought his hands together. His fingertips barely touched as he formed a small ball. He said, "Look, there are people who would like to see you appeal your case to court martial. If you were to do that, it would be a big mistake on your part. Once it goes to the level of court martial it becomes a judicial matter and it's a whole new situation than you are presently in and *you don't want that.*" Again, with established eye contact, he emphasized, "*You don't want that!*"

My heart felt as if it had sank to the pit of my stomach when I realized that he was probably alluding to my being sentenced to serve time in a navy brig if I were to be found guilty of charges in a court martial. I assured him that I had no intent of appealing it to court martial.

He leaned forward and said, "They really want you to do this. You have to understand that. They will do *anything* to make that happen. They will speak to you and make it sound like they are looking after your interests when they suggest that you appeal your case."

As I sat there and listened to his words, I don't know what was making my blood rush faster; the fact that there was this 'plan' put into motion against me by 'powers that be' or the fact that God was revealing the plan to me.

I looked up and realized that there were probably officers taking big chances with their naval careers to see that I got this warning. Out of respect for them, I would have to be subtle. I would have to keep what I had just learned to myself. I thanked the chaplain for his advice. I expressed my appreciation and told him that I had the highest respect for the captain. I told him that I knew the captain was in a difficult position and that I was sorry for that.

Again, without breaking my captain's confidence, he stumbled through just enough words to make me realize that he thought God was using my experience to reach my captain. I thought, silently to myself, "How wonderful that would be—to be a tool through which God would bless such a deserving man. How wonderful it would be to have the privilege to help a man in a spiritual sense who was struggling so hard to help me in a physical sense." I smiled inwardly as I thought how wonderful and loving our God is.

We had prayer together; he said he would keep me in his prayers; and I was dismissed.

A day or two after seeing Chaplain Swift, I was called to the X.O.'s office. He had a completely different demeanor than I had seen in the past. He came across, as the way the X.O. should be expected to be. (An officer responsible for the moral of the crewmembers—no matter what.)

He smiled and told me, "Roland, I've been thinking about your situation. Yours is different than most anyone else's." He had a tone as if there were perhaps a righteous justification to my actions. "You have the right to appeal your case to the level of court martial," he continued, as he was moving around his stateroom working on some papers.

"But I'm guilty," I answered. "There is no need in appealing."

His head jerked up in apparent surprise by my candor. "Yes," he said. Searching for his words he continued, "but—but *your* situation is so very different. You haven't done anything with the *intent* of disobeying the rules and regulations of the navy. Yours have extenuating

circumstances. You've got a more noble purpose. I think it would be good for you to take this to the next level so that it can be elevated where it can be *heard*." He threw his head back proudly.

"But Sir," I responded, "I've already sent a letter to the Chief of Naval Personnel."

"Yes," he replied, "But I think if you were to take this to court martial, you could help others who (one day) might come to the same convictions as yourself." He looked up and smiled.

He persisted for a while until he realized his attempts were futile. Then his original demeanor of disgust returned revealing his true intent. Unable to negotiate my signature on the request for appeal documents, I was dismissed.

The law of the LORD *is* perfect,
converting the soul:
the testimony of the LORD *is* sure,
making wise the simple.
The statutes of the LORD *are* right,
rejoicing the heart:
the commandment of the LORD *is* pure,
enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the LORD *is* clean,
enduring for ever:
the judgments of the LORD *are* true
and righteous altogether.

More to be desired *are they* than gold,
yea, than much fine gold:
sweeter also than honey
and the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is thy servant warned:
and in keeping of them *there is* great reward.

~ Psalm 19:7-11 (KJV)

Sabbath at Sea

The sonarmen and I worked together to prepare a watch bill which could apparently resolve the problem of my being absent during Sabbath. It was completed with mutual enthusiasm, and, having met our chief's approval, was forwarded to the sonar officer, who also approved it.

When the X.O. received it, he sent for me. "Roland, I have the watch bill that you submitted."

"Yes," I answered, "I hope it—."

"I can't authorize it!" he interrupted.

"Why?" I asked in surprise. "It's fair. I end up with more man hours of duty than the others!"

"It doesn't offer a normal cycle," he answered, "a cycle providing maximum efficiency and alertness for the sonar watch."

"But, Sir, the chief—"

"I won't approve it, Roland!" he interrupted.

"Yes, Sir," I conceded.

We were in port when Sabbath arrived. My duty section was off that day. The chief permitted me to observe Sabbath however I chose. This was my first free Sabbath since leaving the United States, but I also knew it would be my last. I spent it quietly at the breakwater's end, sitting on the smooth stones while I meditated, read, and enjoyed the beauty of God's creation by which I was surrounded.

However, the following Sabbath our boat was again led into the Atlantic by the tugboats. Only this time we would not soon return. When the submarine dived, it was to remain under water for seventy-five days. Its duty was to be a deterrent. Only a dire emergency would bring it to the surface before the patrol's end. I was in sonar as we left, prepared for emergency.

"I guess this is really it!" I said to the chief. "I'm stuck with the command for ten Sabbaths!"

The chief laughed, "What do you mean, Roland? The command's stuck with you for ten Sabbaths!"

"A—00—GA! A—00—GA!" sounded the alarm. "Dive! Dive! Dive!" I could hear the rush of water flooding the ballast tanks as I prepared to leave sonar.

"Don't worry about anything, Roland! I'll stand your sonar watch as agreed!" exclaimed Walker, one of the men.

The sonar division was aware of the switch, so no one came to get me at 11:30. However, Walker came down at 12:00.

"The command wants you to relieve me." He explained.

"I can't."

"I know! I'm just doing what they told me to do!"

Soon, the chief arrived. "The conn wants you to relieve Walker."

"You know I can't, Chief."

"Yes, I know!" He put his hand on my shoulder. "Here we go again! Well, good luck!"

Soon the messenger arrived. "The conning officer wants to see you!" he said, and left immediately.

I went to the control room to see the officer on duty.

"Roland, I'm sorry, but I have to order you to report to your watch station."

"Sir, I'm sorry too, but I can't."

"Then I have to place you on report, again." He paused. "I hate this! I wish they would have had someone else on duty this time instead of me. Roland, I really don't like doing this."

"I understand, Sir! Like I told you before, I don't hold it against you. I know you're just doing your job. Don't let it bother you!"

I returned to my bunk where minutes later the messenger came with the message, "The X.O. wants to see you."

This time my visit with the X.O. was extremely brief with few words. "You know the charges against you, Roland. Captain's mast is scheduled Monday morning at 0900."

On Sunday afternoon, my sonar officer requested that I see him. "Roland, we have a problem!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps you can help us to resolve it!"

"What's that, Sir?"

"The captain is perplexed about your case; his conscience is troubled. He is at a loss to know what to do. He respects you. He does not want to take any further action against you. Yet, as captain, he must do something. And I'm sure that you're aware of the crew's attitude. They're turning against him! And, quite frankly, he's worried about it. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"Yes, Sir, I do."

"Do you have any suggestions?"

"Sir, I don't believe the captain has any choice!"

"What do you mean, Roland?"

"Sir, the captain has fined me one seventh of my pay for a month, and I accepted that. I'm not working one seventh of the time. He said that he was going to take away one stripe if I got into trouble again. I think he has to hold to his original decision. I also think he should take one seventh of my base pay for two more months."

"Two more! Why?"

"Because we were in Spain for one month, and we're going to be at sea for two more. I don't deserve to be paid when I'm not working."

"But what about your family? Can you afford such a pay cut?"

"Sir, I'm not married. And besides, I have a bank account that I can fall back on. God is taking care of me."

"But what about the crew?"

"Sir, you take care of the captain and I'll take care of the crew. They're my friends. I'll just explain to them that the decisions made by the captain are justified. I'll make them realize that in the previous masts, the captain was not being stern with me, but was being lenient with Bohnam."

The sonar officer jumped up. "The captain will be relieved to hear this!"

"Sir, tell the captain that I am sorry for what he is going through."

"Don't worry about it, Roland! Somehow I think this has all been God's providence. The captain is a good man; he just needs Christ." The officer paused. "I have always wanted to witness for Him, but I have never had such an opportunity as I do now. The captain has never opened a Bible to read it. Now he's reading it constantly. Of course, he's trying to find texts to help reverse your decision. And you know that the Holy Spirit can work when someone is reading God's Word."

"Yes, Sir," I replied.

"Roland, before you go, do you mind if we have prayer?"

"No, Sir! That would be nice!"

We bowed our heads as the sonar officer prayed: "Dear Lord, be with Roland; help him to do that which is right in Thy eyes. And be with the captain. He is searching Thy Word. May Christ be revealed to him as he does. I can't help but believe that all, which is happening, is Thy providence. We pray that Thy will be done. Amen."

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

~ John 8:32 (KJV)

Interpretation of Scripture

On Monday morning I stood outside the officer's stateroom awaiting mast. This time I stood for a considerable amount of time and grew nervous. My throat became dry. I could hardly swallow. A sailor rushed by to get himself something to drink from the crew's mess. He stopped and backed up to where I stood. "Can I get you a cup of water, Roland?" he asked.

"Yes, please!"

He returned with two cups of cold water and handed me one. I drank it down and nervously thanked him.

"Here, drink mine!" he said as he handed me the other cup. I drank it and handed him both empty cups. He took a few steps then turned, "Hey, Roland, good luck!"

It wasn't until perhaps years later that I connected that moment to this verse: "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." (Mark 9:41 KJV)

The doors opened. The chief of the boat came out. But instead of ushering me into the room he grabbed my shoulders and moved me about four feet down the passageway away from the door. I wondered what was being said that they didn't want me to hear.

Finally, the door opened again, and I was called in.

The captain immediately encouraged me to take a seat. I was surprised by what I saw. In front of the captain lay an open Bible and a tape recorder. As I looked around, I saw that every officer not on duty was present. Those not part of the proceedings were sitting to the side. Some were sitting side-by-side on the bench in front of a table. Others were sitting above and behind them on the tabletop itself. It looked like improvised seating at a small sporting event. At the table with the captain were the same people as before. The chief of the boat had decided to sit with the X.O. at a separate table, and there was a different investigating officer.

"Roland," began the captain, "due to the nature of your situation and the circumstances involved, I would like to record this proceeding." Pointing to the recorder, he asked, "Do you mind if I record it?"

"No, Sir."

He started the recorder, and then continued by reading the charges against me. They were the same as in the previous mast: failure to report to my duty station and refusal to obey a direct order by a superior officer.

"Petty Officer Roland, are you willing to discuss these charges with me, or do you wish to remain silent, which is your right?"

"I want to discuss them," I said.

The captain cleared his throat and then went on. "I have some questions to ask. We have discussed these things before on numerous occasions. But I want to review them in case we missed anything. Are you aware that you have a contract with the navy? And in making that contract with the navy, you either swore or affirmed to obey the orders of the officers appointed over you in accordance with the Uniform Code of Military Justice, navy regulations, and other rules set down by competent authorities?"

"Yes, Sir."

"It's been my observation that you have, in fact, faithfully complied with your contract with the exception of the offense of which you are accused at this mast and of the same offense in which you came to mast approximately two weeks ago. It's also my opinion that your failure to obey is based on religious grounds, a conviction, which you have acquired since you joined the navy. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Sir."

“Have the navy’s rules regarding observance of the Sabbath and definitions of what are essential tasks been explained to you?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Do you understand them?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Have you been helped by the command, by your division officer, executive officer, and others in the command to find the means to compromise with your religious convictions and live within the rules of the navy?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“How have we done that?”

I replied, “We have discussed on many occasions, different ways by which I may compromise. And you have asked me to restudy the Scriptures to see whether they offered any solutions.”

“Have you done this?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Have you found a way?”

“No, Sir.”

“Have you talked with navy chaplains about your problem?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“What transpired at these talks?”

“I talked to a Catholic chaplain in Charleston who finally told me it was up to me to follow the dictates of my conscience. Then the X.O. arranged for me to talk to Chaplain Brown.”

“Chaplain Brown, the SUBGRU SIX chaplain?”

“Yes, Sir. After speaking with me, he told me that he could see that I was sincere. He suggested ways of compromising. He said that he could not support what I was doing. He also said that if anyone asked him for any guidance, he would counsel them to do what was lawful.”

“Excuse me, Captain,” interrupted the sonar officer. Turning to me, he said, “Roland, I think it’s important that you tell the captain what Chaplain Brown said to you and the manner in which he spoke.”

I became nervous as my eyes focused on the tape recorder.

“You don’t have to tell me now,” replied the captain. “You may discuss it with me later if you wish.”

“I would rather talk about it later, Sir.”

“Have you talked with any other chaplains?”

“Yes, sir. I talked to a chaplain on the submarine tender.”

“Chaplain Swift, Lieutenant Commander Swift?”

“Yes, Sir. He said that although his convictions did not agree with mine, as a matter of his conscience, he could not force me to work on the Sabbath because of the moral implications.”

“Petty Officer Roland, do you understand that the command also has certain legal, moral, and religious convictions?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“They are equally as strong as your own. And the one thing they have withstood that yours haven’t is that they have been tested over a long period of time, in my case about eighteen years. And despite how strongly I feel about certain things, namely a man doing his job, I have tried, and others in the command have tried, to reciprocate and find a middle ground for you to walk. You have found it impossible to do this. Can you explain to me why you can’t find a middle ground? Is there something you can put your finger on that can help me in this regard?”

“It is my understanding, from Scripture, that the seventh day of the week is to be set aside as one different from the others—a day during which no work is to be done. My only solution was the proposed watch bill which I offered to the X.O.”

“I commend you for thinking along those lines. We’ll discuss that later. Is your religion based on the Bible?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Is it based on a belief in Jesus Christ?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Do you know where the Sabbath originated?”

“Yes, Sir. It originated with the creation of the world—in Eden. Observance of the Sabbath is our way of acknowledging God as Creator.”

“What I really meant by the question was, do you know what religion originated the Sabbath? Where the word came from?”

“Yes, it is a Hebrew word meaning ‘rest.’”

“Yes, it is a Jewish word. It was a Jewish religious holiday—the seventh day of the week. The Jews had many rules regarding the Sabbath. In fact, I’ve read that there were over 1500 rules of things that people could, or could not do, on the Sabbath. Jesus ran into these rules and He broke them. Did you know that?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Why did He break them?”

“He broke the rules of the Jews, not the guidelines as offered by God. At the time Christ was on earth, the Jews were following a very strict Sabbath. It had lost its meaning. The rules were inflicted upon the Jews, misleading them by the power of Satan. The Sabbath, to the Jews, had become a burden rather than a delight.”

“What was Jesus’ rationale for breaking the rules of the Sabbath?” the officer asked.

“I don’t believe that Christ broke the Sabbath. What He did was lawful, but accusations were made against Him when He helped someone or did a good deed.”

“That was one of the reasons! A good deed or mercy. If you read the New Testament, you’ll find that He said that the Sabbath was made for man.” The interrogating officer paused. Then he went on. “There were two, maybe three, reasons for violating the rules of the Sabbath. One of them was mercy and the other was necessity. Out of necessity, Jesus found a way to compromise, to rationalize, and to do the things He had to do in regard to the Sabbath. I am just offering it to you as another avenue of thought. Necessity covers a lot of words. It covers a lot of deeds. I believe the navy has given us the ability to observe the Sabbath in the light of the teachings of Christ. One of the things that is necessary on the Sabbath is to maintain the safety of this ship. One of the things necessary to maintain the safety of the ship is to have an alert watch. I think that is all dutifully in keeping with the teachings of the Man that you profess to follow. I’m not trying to break your convictions. But I’m trying to give you some ideas to think about.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Before you embarked on this course, did you seek counsel from your own church?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Describe it to me, would you?”

“When I was converted,” I began, “a pastor came to my apartment to visit. He asked me if I understood the grace of God. I said ‘Yes’. He asked me if I was willing to keep the commandments of God. I told him that I was willing, but that I couldn’t. He, then, asked in what respect could I not keep the commandments. I told him that I understood how the Sabbath was to be observed, but my present military position would make it impossible. He suggested that I talk to Pastor Cox of the church. Pastor Cox told me that God has a plan for everyone. He explained that God doesn’t ask us to worry about what will happen. We are to follow His laws, witness for Him, and live each day for Christ. Then, everything will be taken care of by Him. I must admit I was perplexed. At first, I didn’t know what to do. I studied the Scriptures again, to be sure of my grounds.

Before I approached the executive officer, I made sure that I was right. I did not want to jump into anything that would get me into trouble and find out that I was wrong.”

“But you did jump into trouble!”

“Yes, Sir! But I’m not wrong! I had two laws in conflict with each other. I had God’s law and the law I’m under in the navy. It was much more important for me to obey God’s law first.”

“What does the Bible say about the law, the civil law, the state law?”

“It says we are to obey them. But, in doing so, we are not to go against the Ten Commandments, which Scripture says is the ‘perfect law.’ Acts 5:29 says, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’ I know I can’t go against God’s commandments. All ten are binding.”

“Which of the Ten Commandments are you referring to especially?”

“The fourth—the Sabbath commandment.”

“What does that commandment say?”

“ ‘Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy—’ ”

“Hold it! Hold it! Hold it!” interrupted the captain. He folded his hands, closed his eyes, and bowed his head as if to pray, “Oh God, I *remember* the Sabbath! I *remember* the Sabbath! I *remember* the Sabbath!” He opened his eyes and looked at me. “There! I’m *remembering* the Sabbath! And I’m keeping it holy; I’m praying to God. I’m telling God that I remember it!”

This sarcasm from the captain surprised me. I had never expected it from him. It frightened me. But I continued, “Sir, there is more to the Sabbath commandment.”

With an expression of guilt, the captain answered, “Roland, I’m sorry for what I just did. I shouldn’t have made light of your beliefs. I don’t believe it is necessary for you to tell me the rest of the commandment. In the eyes of most people, it doesn’t mean that you can’t remember the Sabbath day without breaking the civil law. Are you familiar with Romans 13, which deals with duties toward state authorities?”

“Yes, Captain.”

“I want to make certain that you know my interpretation of that Scripture. First, everyone must obey the state authorities, for no authority exists without God’s permission. God, according to this Scripture, authorized the navy to make rules. So, in a sense, you may be violating His rules by not obeying the navy’s.”

“There are authorities with rules that I can not follow,” I said quietly.

“Do you believe that everybody should be left to his own devices to decide which laws to obey and which laws not to obey?” the questioning officer then asked.

“No, Sir, but I feel that God’s law is supreme.”

“God said, Roland, and I read this to you from the Bible.” The officer picked up a Bible on his table and opened it at a place where there had been placed a marker. “ ‘Everyone must obey the state authorities, because no authority exists without God’s permission, and the existing authorities were put there by God. Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered; and anyone who does so will bring judgment on himself. For rulers are not to be feared by those who do good, but by those who do evil. Would you like to be unafraid of the man in authority? Then do what is good and he will praise you, because he is God’s servant working for your own good. But if you do evil, then be afraid of him, because his power to punish is real. He is God’s servant who carries out God’s punishment on those who do evil. For this reason you must obey the authorities—not just because of God’s punishment, but also as a matter of conscience.’ ” Romans 13:1-5, TEV.

He paused, put the Bible down, and then asked, “How long were you associated with the Seventh-day Adventists before you had this meeting with Pastor Cox?”

“I’d been aware of the church long before I joined the navy, probably seven years by now. I joined the navy with the knowledge of the Sabbath. For some reason, as my time in the navy increased, my relationship with Christ decreased. As I realized this, about a year and a half ago, it started bothering me. I decided that when I got out of the navy, the first thing I would do was to find a church I could trust and know that their teachings were correct. I wanted to be associated with Christ. As this continued, it became such a burden, that it was by the grace of God that I found the Seventh-day Adventist Church and became converted.”

“Well, I understand your background. But when did you first walk into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Charleston?”

“Approximately two months before we left the States,” I replied.

“We left in June, so about April? About the same time you came to see the X.O.”

“About a month before I came to see the X.O.”

“During that month, how much time did you spend with the church?”

“I spent each Sabbath with the church and an hour each evening, with the exception of Mondays and Thursdays, for approximately five weeks.”

“What did you do during that hour?”

“The church had a crusade, during which they explained Bible prophecy and biblical truths.”

“Was this personal instruction or part of a group instruction?”

“It was part of a group. But when anything came up that I didn’t fully comprehend, I would ask the pastor about it. He would show me different scriptures that would help me to understand.”

“When you say you were converted, what do you mean?”

“I decided not to worry about the problems of the world. I wanted to live on a day-by-day basis.”

“How do you live on a day-by-day basis?”

“I surrender each day to the Lord. I start it with prayer and devotion. I ask that He be with me. And I ask that others may see Christ in me.”

“How do you observe the Sabbath?”

“Well, Sir, I spend a lot of time in my bunk. It offers a place of solitude for me, a place where I can spend time reading and learning more about God. When I’m not in my bunk, I enjoy witnessing to those who are interested.”

“I was more interested in how you observe the Sabbath while in the United States.”

“I like to walk through nature and enjoy the beauty of God’s creation. I spend time studying my Bible in order to know God better.”

“Do you go to church?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“How do you get to church?”

“I drive.”

“When you drive your car to church, do you close your eyes?”

“No, Sir.”

“Why not?”

“Because I would run into a tree or another car and have an accident.”

“Exactly! You have to keep your eyes open to avoid an accident! It is a matter of necessity! Roland, you are the eyes and ears of this submarine! You are responsible for the safety of the submarine and its crew! You drive your car on Sabbath, yet you won’t drive this submarine! How do you distinguish between the two? What is your rationale? Why can you drive your car on Sabbath, but not this submarine?”

“We’re not taking this submarine to church.”

An outburst of laughter caused the captain to look around the room, and he tapped on the table for silence. I was too serious to laugh; my answer had not been intended as humorous. I was frightened by the response.

After a pause, the captain continued, “You mentioned that during the Sabbath, you witnessed. What do you mean by ‘witnessing?’”

“Sharing my faith with others.”

“Has this happened?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“On submarine?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I would like to discuss that with you later! Have you reasoned through the situations we discussed before, with regard to your moral obligation to your shipmates to provide for their welfare and safety seven days a week?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“How did you reconcile your failure to be able to do this?”

“I felt that the watch bill I proposed could have taken care of that.”

“Did you reason through all the other services you need on your Sabbath: your food, your heat, your light? Who would provide those for you? Have you reasoned that through?” he asked.

“Yes, Sir. I realize that there are people on board working during the Sabbath. I must admit that I have wanted to apologize in some way. My conscience has bothered me. I definitely see

that I have no place on a nuclear submarine. I need a transfer where I can be free to observe the Sabbath.”

“What if a whole country of people decided to observe the Sabbath? With no one working, how would certain necessities such as electricity be provided during Sabbath? What about food? Do you see that you can project yourself into almost any situation? But, at some point, there would still be necessary things done on the Sabbath. Jesus recognized this.”

“On that train of thought, Sir, I feel that a whole country could observe the Sabbath. I believe that God would bless them; He would provide the people with their needs.”

“I commend you for your faith, Roland. But,” he said, turning to my sonar officer, “you’re my authority on the Bible; are there any examples where something like this ever happened?”

Giving it some thought, my sonar officer replied, “Uh—yes. Yes, Sir, there is. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, there was no food. God provided food from heaven. On the sixth day, He provided a double portion—enough for Friday and Saturday as well. You’ll find the story in the second book of the Bible.

“Yes, Sir,” I spoke up. “Exodus, chapter 16.”

With embarrassment, the captain continued, “I don’t really want to get into this too far. Roland, there are several Bible stories regarding the Sabbath, concerning what we do and what we don’t do. And it breaks down to these two points: we can do acts of mercy, and we can do acts of necessity. The navy’s regulations reflect exactly those two points in observance of the Sabbath. You will do what is necessary!

“One thing we planned for Saturday morning, which happens to be your Sabbath, is field day, which is a time to get berthing and heads spruced up and aired out. What did we discuss about Saturday morning as far as you were concerned?”

“Concerning field day we concluded that it was not essential work, and that the—”

“Not essential in your case!” interrupted the captain.

“Yes, Sir, you released me from my field day duties because it was during the Sabbath.”

“And you agreed to do what? Perform a similar service at some other time during the week. Right?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“The same type of rationale could be applied to any religion. If it isn’t necessary, you could be accommodated. However, in the case of the sonar watchstander, or any watchstander for that matter, that’s a different matter. So is response to a casualty, response to emergency, response to a message from higher authority that requires us to take action. Just out of curiosity, what did you do last Saturday during field day?”

“I studied my Bible.”

“Where?”

“I stayed in my bunk, out of everyone’s way.”

“In our society, you have a lot of individual rights. You even have the right to decide on rules. That is how rules get made, and that is how rules get changed. But your right to decide only extends to a point where it infringes on the rights of others, and this goes back to a rule of Christian faith as old as the Ten Commandments. The golden rule says, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ That’s a real basic tenet in Christianity, which in your case, I don’t think you follow. You are not doing to others, as you would have them do unto you! I don’t think you would like others to lay off the job the other six days of the week and you try to run the whole thing by yourself.”

“Sir, the proposal that I offered concerning a switch in watches had me standing more watches than other sonarmen. I am not trying to lighten my responsibility!”

I felt somewhat proud of what I’d done and in taking credit for my efforts.

The captain continued, “You can look at it that way. When you get to a certain point, I don’t know where the crossover is. We run out of watchstanders to put on a special watch bill just to satisfy your beliefs. Is there such a point?”

For a moment I lost my train of thought, and I became confused. My disjointed response showed fear. “It has almost made me afraid to witness on this boat. If I caused thirteen sailors to become converted to my faith,” I contemplatively continued, “they’ll face the same things I’m

facing.” My words became laborsome, unintelligible and ground to a halt. Suddenly I thought of my answer concerning the setting up of the sonar watch.

“Oh, God,” I prayed silently, “please forgive me for being proud. Send Your Spirit to be with me again!”

With humbleness and yet with firmness I now answered the question. “I am sure that God, in His power, can take care of me and others who are affected by my decision. I have offered a solution. I requested transfer if necessary. It was the navy that decided to keep me on submarine. I cannot hold myself responsible for the circumstances. Although I may regret them.”

“Roland, are you aware of the oath you took when you joined the navy?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“What did it say?”

“I don’t remember it verbatim.”

“I just happen to have a copy of it here. I would like to read it to you:

I, Michael Lee Roland, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic. That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same—”

The captain stopped. “I don’t understand!” He scratched his head. “In all my time in the navy, I have never seen anything like this!” Shaking his head, he repeated, “I just don’t understand it!”

The X.O. leaned over to read the oath over the captain’s shoulder. Then the chief of the boat got up and walked over to read it. I looked at my sonar officer. He seemed agitated. He had been supplying the Bible texts to the captain. I read his expression to say, “Maybe I’ve been batting on the wrong team!” The chief looked at me as if to ask, “What could you have going for you now, Roland?”

I didn’t know! I was as curious as the others!

When the captain looked up, he said, “Well, I’ve already committed myself. I’m going to continue. Besides, there are still some important points in this oath.

“ . . . I will obey the order of the president of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me. According to regulations and the uniform code of military justice.”

He finished reading, and then looked up. “Roland, at the end of everyone’s military oath are the words ‘so help me, God.’ I was going to show you that in breaching your contract with the navy, you were also breaching a contract with your God. But the words ‘so help me, God,’ have been crossed out of your oath. I don’t know how or why this would be done, but it has been. It makes me wonder—”

The X.O. interrupted, “Sir, the purpose of captain’s mast is not to find out *why* a person is guilty. It is to find out *if* a person is guilty and to decide on what punitive action should be taken.”

“Yes, I realize that.”

“But, Sir, I think we’re getting off the track of the real issue,” the X.O. added.

“Are you disagreeing with my procedure?” asked the captain.

The X.O. thought for a moment, then answered, “Yes, yes, Sir, I am.”

Apparently irritated by the X.O.’s insubordination, the captain responded, “I’m finished anyway!” And he closed my service file.

He turned to me. “Roland, the fact that you tried to work a watch bill that would free you to spend your Sabbath doing nothing, is certainly a matter of mitigation. And your willingness to spend extra time in sonar is a matter of mitigation. But it is no more or less what any submarine sailor would do when the chips are down. The fact remains that we can count on you only six days a week. When Saturday comes around and I need you, you’re not there. You are letting me down. Also you are in violation of the rules and regulations of the navy and of this command. I find you guilty of the charges. The suspended reduction that was invoked last mast goes into effect. I am going to fine you a seventh of your pay for the term of the patrol. Whether or not we keep you in sonar or assign you to other duties will be decided later. Mast dismissed.”

These *are* the things that ye shall do;
Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour;
execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates:

~ Zechariah 8:16 (KJV)

Mutiny and Witnessing at Sea

Following captain's mast, I was scheduled to stand my sonar watches pending assignment. The sonar officer told me that the command had considered breaking radio silence to request a rendezvous with a helicopter. They would receive a replacement for me and transfer me off. But such a maneuver would pose a threat to our mission; thus, the idea was quickly abandoned.

It was the X.O.'s intent to keep me out of sonar; I was "a disgrace to the navy and its traditions," he said. His goal was to have me assigned to the galley, doing dishes. The sonar officer did not accept this rationale. He considered me as being essential to sonar, Sabbath or not. My chief felt the same way. He defended my usefulness with the captain and my convictions to fellow crewmembers.

One day I heard one of the officers ask the chief, "What are you going to do with Roland?"

"What do you mean?" asked my chief.

"If I were you, I'd hang him!"

"Why don't you guys leave Roland alone! Can't you see that he's trying to do his job?" my chief replied.

That same officer asked me whether I didn't feel as if I were cheating God.

"No. Why?" I asked.

"Well, I used to be an Adventist," he said. "I don't go to church anymore, but I know that you believe in paying tithe."

"Yes, I do."

"Don't you feel like you're cheating God? You're being fined so much that you can't pay as much tithe," he said.

I disagreed, "Chief, I pay my tithe *before* the government gets its hands on my money, not after!"

Later, I was in sonar when my chief came in. With an expression of victory, he said, "Roland, you're going to stay in sonar!"

"What about Sabbaths?"

"The command has decided to give you Sabbaths off. During Sabbaths, I'm going to stand your watch."

"But, who's going to stand *your* watch at the ballast control panel?"

"Mr. Lipscomb."

"Mr. Lipscomb?" I thought. "So essentially, they have an officer filling in for me. I hope he's not upset!" I added aloud.

"Don't worry about it, Roland! You've got your Sabbaths, and I've got my sonar gang!"

Mr. Lipscomb walked in, "Chief, I want to go over our arrangements—"

"Mr. Lipscomb?" I interrupted.

"Yes, Roland?"

"Sir, I want you to know that I appreciate your standing my chief's watch so he could be in sonar."

"Thank *you*, Roland!" he said with pride. "I consider it a privilege to do it! I don't know when I've ever been able to do anything for God, and I feel good about it!"

A few minutes later I received a message to report to the X.O.

"You wanted to see me, Sir?" I asked, entering his office.

The X.O. didn't look up as I entered, but answered, "Yes, Roland. I've been giving this thing about witnessing considerable thought. I don't think it is a good idea for you to witness while on the boat."

"Is—is that a direct order, Sir?"

He shouted, "Yes! Yes, Roland! If you want to take it that way, I'm giving you a direct order not to witness!"

Sensing his hostility, I answered, "Aye-Aye, Sir!" Then I quickly exited to the passageway. As I walked away, I felt a strong force come over me; I had to return. I thought, "Oh Father please! I don't want to go back. I'm afraid." But I could not continue down the corridor. I turned, and as I walked back to the office, I prayed, "Father, be with me. Give me the courage and words to speak." I knocked on the frame of the X.O.'s door still not knowing what the Lord (if anything) would have me say.

I looked into the office. "Sir?" I said, and waited to be acknowledged.

"Yes, Roland?"

"Sir, I *have* to witness."

His mouth dropped open. My statement was reason enough to take me back to court. "What do you mean, you *have* to witness?" he asked.

"Sir, for me *not* to witness would be more of a burden for me than anything this command could do to me *for* witnessing."

He responded in anger, "I just want you to know, if anyone gets mixed up in your ludicrous ideas, I will consider it mutiny for both of you! Is that understood?"

"Sir, I don't believe that the Holy Spirit will allow anyone to get into trouble."

"I didn't think the Holy Spirit would allow *you* to get into trouble!" he proudly retorted.

I paused for a moment and with a soft smile and voice replied, "I don't consider myself to be in trouble."

"What?" He became outraged. "Get out! Get out of here, Roland. I don't want to see your face!"

The chief of the boat ordered me to perform my field day duties on Friday. He assigned me the responsibility of cleaning the officer's passageway outside the captain's and the X.O.'s staterooms. "Be sure to clean the corners of the deck really well Roland!" he ordered. With that in mind, I took an old toothbrush and used it to get into all of the crevices. While cleaning I was thinking about the Sabbath, which was soon to be my blessing to observe. The captain soon walked by and seemed surprised to see me assigned to such a menial task but none-the-less was very pleasant with me. Soon afterward, however, the X.O. exited his quarters and seemed thrilled to see me on my hands and knees scrubbing the deck around his living quarters. His expression seemed to be one of gloating.

"Good afternoon sir!" I greeted him with a smile.

The X.O. seemed puzzled by my positive attitude. Apparently he had expected me to be demoralized. His jaw dropped open and froze to one side as he stood and just stared at me for a moment. Then he just turned and walked away. Not gaining the gratification he had expected by seeing me being humiliated each week, I was given new instruction. The next week I was informed that my duty had been changed. On Fridays, I was to clean the periscope well from then on.

The periscope well cavity could only be reached by removing a small panel at its base below deck, offering minimum access. I felt like a contortionist as I twisted and squirmed to clean the required areas. The discomfort became more intense by the hydraulic oil that leaked onto my hair and down my back. It was a job that could easily be hated. But it was the preparation day, and I was determined to prepare my mind for the Sabbath.

Once, while hanging through the opening, I began to hum hymns and got carried away. I didn't realize that my humming was being transmitted through the well into the control room above. Until I heard someone shout, "Hey, Roland!"

Looking up, I answered, "Yes, Sir?"

"Are you going to take up an offering?"

I laughed. "Can you hear me humming?"

"Everyone in the control room can hear you!"

"Sorry, Sir!"

"That's OK, Roland. It makes watch more interesting!" he laughed.

Before I knew it, I was having to dodge pennies, nickels, and pesetas that were being tossed into the periscope well from the control room.

When Sabbath arrived, I stayed in my bunk reading. Suddenly, my curtain was jerked open. I looked up to see the chief of the boat.

"Get out of your bunk!" he screamed.

"But, Chief, it's field day! I have no place to go without being in the way!"

"I don't care! If everyone else is going to be up, you're going to be up! Where you go is your problem!"

I went to the ship's library. My friend, Jerry, cleaned that compartment during field day.

"Jerry, do you mind if I stay here during field day? The chief of the boat kicked me out of my bunk, and I have no place to go."

"No, I don't mind! It's boring here anyway."

"Do you think your boss will say anything?" I asked.

"No, to tell you the truth, he sympathizes with you. He feels that everyone should stand up for what he believes," Jerry answered.

"You know that the command gave me a direct order not to witness to anyone while at sea, don't you?" I suggested.

"What? You're still going to teach me, aren't you?" Jerry asked in a very eager, pleading way.

"Of course I am. I told them that I couldn't obey such an order. The X.O. just retracted the order by saying that if anyone on this boat decides to observe the Sabbath because of what I tell them, he would consider it mutiny for both of us."

"Mutiny? That's pretty heavy! But that's not going to stop me from learning! We can study other things now, and I can learn about the Sabbath when we get back to the United States. I want to go to church with you then. Do you think that we could discuss the Bible here while I clean each week?"

"Can you get the library cleaned and study the Bible at the same time?"

"Yes, I'm always getting the work done early."

"Then, I don't see why we couldn't. I think that would work out fine. It'll give me a place to come each Sabbath where I can still worship."

"The other day in sonar, you mentioned something about baptism. What is the purpose of baptism?" Jerry wanted to know.

A thunderous crash came from the door that had just been kicked open. Stumbling through it was Jerry's boss, Ray. He had just finished cleaning the attack center. In his left hand he grasped the handle to a vacuum cleaner. Coiled around his neck was the hose and part of the cord. The rest of the cord dragged on the deck behind him, getting snagged on everything in its path. Stumbling his way into the compartment, he handed a bucket to Jerry and said, "Go get this filled with soap and water so we can—" He paused and looked around. "Haven't you done anything yet?" he screamed. "You've had ten minutes to get started. What's been going on?"

"Well," Jerry said hesitantly, "Mike and I have been talking about his religion."

"Oh, you have?" Jerry's boss replied while releasing himself from the restrictions of the snakelike cleaning gear. "Don't let me interfere! Go ahead!"

Although caught by surprise, I felt I'd better do something while I had the chance. Fumbling through the confusion, I finally came out with, "Well, anyway, as I was saying, people are baptized to show that they love Christ and have accepted Him as their Saviour."

"Do you mean to tell me that you were baptized?" Ray questioned.

"Yes, I was baptized."

"Aren't you Jewish?" he continued.

"No, I'm a Christian."

"Are you Protestant?"

"Yes. I'm a Protestant."

"A Protestant who worships on Saturday?"

“Yes. What’s so surprising about that? I’m a Protestant, and I observe Saturday as the day of rest.”

“You’re kidding,” Ray said. “I never thought there was such a thing.”

“Such a thing as what?”

“A Protestant who goes to church on Saturday! That’s incredible. In all my life I have never heard of such a thing. My wife and I don’t belong to any particular church. We’ve sort of hopped around from church to church, but have never been satisfied.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“We have yet to find any that have taught strictly from the Bible. What really gets me is that I have always thought the true Sabbath was Saturday. Now to hear you talking about going to church on Saturday makes me wonder whether we have searched enough. What’s the name of your church again?”

“Seventh-day Adventist,” I replied.

“You are talking about baptism. What do you think about sprinkling?” Ray wanted to know.

“As Adventists, we feel that a person must be completely immersed.”

“You’re kidding!” he added again.

“No. If you look at examples in the Bible, you’ll see that.”

“What happens to a person when he dies?” the man now asked.

“We believe that he sleeps and knows nothing. The Bible tells us so.”

“I can’t believe it!”

“Why not?” I was now quite puzzled by Ray’s questions.

“I don’t mean that I don’t believe you. I just can’t believe that I am sitting here talking to someone who interprets the Bible the same way that I do, and actually belongs to a church.”

“GONG! GONG! GONG!” The alarm sounded. “Man battle stations missile! Man battle stations missile!”

“I have to go to the torpedo room!” Ray responded. “And Jerry has to go to the attack center. Where do you go, Roland?”

“I’m supposed to go to sonar. During battle stations I’m in charge of tracking ships in the area in case we have to fire on them. I can’t do that! Up to now, my only problem has been with the observance of Sabbath. I went along with all the procedures leading up to an attack. But I could never follow through with the real thing! Now that it’s Sabbath, I don’t think I can participate, drill or not. Now, I’m going to get into trouble again!”

“Well, Jerry and I have to go. What are you going to do, Roland?”

“I don’t know! I guess I’ll just stay here in the library.”

The two men left, closing the door behind them. I could hear the commotion of everyone rushing to his battle stations. I tried to read but was distracted by the present situation. I paced the floor, and I prayed. Finally, the announcement was made, “Secure from battle stations.”

Jerry and his boss, Ray, returned. “What happened?” they wanted to know.

“Nothing. Maybe they understand. Maybe they don’t want to stir up anything.”

But just then the library door opened and a messenger walked in. “Roland, the captain wants to see you right away,” he said.

“I’ll be praying for you, Roland,” Ray consoled.

“Ya! Me too, Mike.” Jerry added.

**Be careful for nothing;
but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known unto God.
And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,
shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

~ Philippians 4:6-7 (KJV)

My Ultimate Test of Faith

When I arrived at the captain's office, I knocked on the door. "Come in, Roland," he answered, and suggested I have a seat. As I sat, he continued, "I have called you here because we have received a message from the Red Cross."

"Sir?"

"Your mother is in the hospital."

I could feel my heart begin to pound as he continued, "The message does not give the nature of the situation. It just says that she is having tests," the captain said.

"Isn't there any clue as to what's wrong?" I asked, desperate for an answer.

"No, Roland. I'm sorry."

"Doesn't it have to be pretty important for the Red Cross to contact me?" I asked.

"Usually. But they said they would keep us posted as things develop." He paused. "Are you OK, Roland?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I am really sorry, Roland! Under the circumstances, I'm sure you don't need the weight of this on your mind. You're not working today. Take it easy. Relax. If there is anything I can do for you, feel free to come to me."

"Thank you, Sir. *I am* concerned for my mother, but I don't want to worry. My heavenly Father has been with me thus far through the problems I have faced; I believe that He will be with my mother. I must trust that He knows what is best."

I returned to the library and tried not to worry. But I loved my mother so much. It was my mother who had first told me about Christ. I had been hoping to share what I had learned with her. I didn't want anything to happen to her.

When Jerry and Ray learned of the message, they promised to be around for me anytime I needed them. It was a great comfort to realize that I had such companionship.

The Sabbath came to an end, and I returned to my normal duty status. While I was in sonar, the phone rang. I answered it, "Sonar. Roland speaking."

"Is this dial-a-prayer?"

I laughed, and then inquisitively replied. "Yes." I knew immediately the voice belonged to Ray.

"Hi, Roland. How are things going?"

"OK," I replied.

"Have you heard anything more about your mother?"

"No, not yet." I answered.

After that hardly a sonar watch went by that he didn't call "dial-a-prayer." I always carried my pocketsize Bible to sonar with me so as to be prepared for his bombardment of questions. Ricci, who was usually on duty with me in sonar, overheard my conversations with Ray on the phone and he became curious.

"Roland," he asked, "do you think that maybe we could study the Bible during some of our watches? We're allowed to read other books. I don't see why we couldn't read the Bible," he said.

"OK. But I've been told not to witness while on patrol. We'll have to be careful."

"How 'bout if we study during our night watches?" he suggested. "The control room will be rigged for black. When anyone opens the sonar door, the switch will turn out our lights. In the darkness, you could hide your Bible."

He had hardly finished speaking when the lights went out, and a messenger entered. "Roland, the captain wants to see you." I reported as ordered.

"Roland, we received another message from the Red Cross. They are still taking tests on your mother. As of yet, they do not have any results."

"What are they looking for? Didn't they say?" I queried.

"Yes, Roland. I'm sorry. I withheld some information from you—information that was in the first message. I'm sorry, but the tests are for cancer. Maybe I should have told you before. But at the time, I thought it best that I didn't. I'm only telling you now because of the faith you have in God. The Sonar Officer has advised me that I should give you the details of the message from the Red Cross. He believes that because of your faith you should be able to be specific in your prayers to God. I am really sorry about not telling you before."

"That's OK, Captain. I understand. I appreciate your telling me now. Somehow, I believe that my mother will be OK, but I will accept whatever the outcome."

The captain smiled. "Roland, I *do* admire your faith."

Naturally, the news of my mother's condition made me sad, but I trusted in God. When preparation day arrived, and I went to the conning tower to have the periscope raised for cleaning, I prayed:

"Father, please, somehow, make this a special Sabbath! I am distressed over my mother. Please, if it be Your will, I want to see her again. I want to introduce Christ as her personal Saviour! I know You hear me; help me to accept Your answer and praise You for it! In Jesus' name. Amen."

I looked at the closed quarters pressing around me. How could the fragrance of a lily or the beauty of the wind blowing across a green field reach me a hundred feet under water? I raised the periscope and looked through it. Visibility was always poor under water; it never offered a view that extended beyond the bow of the boat. I quickly made a 360 degree sweep, and then trained the periscope off the bow. I stood smiling—my prayer had been answered. My fellow crewmembers began to laugh, "Roland, what's happened? Have you cracked? How can you enjoy looking at dark, green water so long?"

"Come! Look!" I exclaimed.

Before long, there was a line of sailors waiting to experience the blessing that God had provided. Off the starboard bow, swam two dolphins—my favorite animal. As I reflected on the graceful, yet playful moves of the dolphins, I thanked God for the evidences of His love and care for all His creatures.

While I was cleaning the periscope well, the captain came to see me.

"Roland, I received another message from the Red Cross. All the tests were negative. Your mother is OK!"

With tear filled eyes, I replied, "Thank you, Sir. Thank you for coming down to tell me."

"Roland, did you know your mother would be OK?"

"I didn't know what the tests might reveal, but I believed that God would take care of her whatever happened."

"Your faith is remarkable, Roland!"

"Sir, my God is remarkable!" I added humbly.

The captain smiled, and then expressed his happiness concerning the message. As he left, he called back, "Roland?"

"Yes, Sir?"

"Have a good Sabbath!"

"Oh, I will, Sir!"

Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him;
for the hour of his judgment is come:
and worship him that made heaven, and earth,
and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

~ Revelation 14:7 (KJV)

Day of Rest

The dolphins off the bow and the news of my mother's wellbeing marked that Sabbath in my memory. But, more than that, it became a turning point. I was permitted to enjoy the remainder of patrol in peace: the Captain was kind, the sonar chief was supportive, and the X.O. avoided me.

Our little "company" of believers on the submarine met in the library for Bible study. The command became aware of our arrangement, but said nothing of it. Perhaps their indifference was the result of something else that happened that same Sabbath day.

I had a watch scheduled that started approximately one hour before the close of the Sabbath. I told the chief that I would come up to relieve him after sundown. I was not aware of the serious problem that was developing in the maneuvering room. The sonar officer was standing the maneuvering room watch. The decisions of the officer in charge were of exceeding importance. One mistake could result in disaster, an error on his part could steer the boat into an underwater mountain or some other obstacle. Just before time for the change of watch, the sonar officer gave an order.

"Sir, are you sure of this order?" asked one of the men.

"What? Uh-no! No! Belay that order!"

Later, another order was given in error.

"Sir, is something wrong?" one of the men asked the officer in charge.

"No. I've just got my mind on other things, that's all!"

Again, a third mistake was made.

"Sir, are you sure nothing's wrong?"

"Yes, I mean uh-yes, there is something wrong! I've been thinking about what this command has been doing to Roland because of his request to observe Sabbath. And I—uh—I'm afraid that this boat is going to receive the wrath of God for what we've done. I'm afraid we're going to have a collision with another ship at periscope depth or something," he said.

"Do you really think this could happen?" the men asked. "Would God really do this?"

"Yes. I'm really afraid," the officer said.

After the close of God's Sabbath, I made my way to sonar to take my place on sonar watch. As I approached the sonar room I heard a commotion. Then I heard my chief call out, "Roland get up here. You've got to try to bring this under control." The sonar door was open which was odd because (being rigged for nighttime) the lights in sonar were automatically turned off whenever the door opened.

As my eyes adjusted to black, I looked and to my surprise there was a mob of sailors crowding outside my watch station. "Here he comes!" I heard called out from the crowd. "Move so he can get through." In one motion the crowd opened a pathway for me to walk through. The faint lights of the sonar control panels revealed expressions of both relief and anxiety on my shipmate's faces. As I entered sonar the mass pushed in behind me. The chief gave them orders to wait outside. They seemed afraid that the sonar door would be closed between us leaving them in darkness.

"I'll let him answer your questions," the chief called out, "but you'll have to wait outside of the sonar room!" he insisted. "I have a sonar watch to maintain here."

Then I was bombarded with questions. "Do you think God will sink this boat?"

"Is God vengeful?"

"Do you think He's upset at the command—at us?"

"What are y'all talking about?" I asked.

Then they told me that the sonar officer had been worried. "He's been making terrible mistakes in maneuvering. We learned that his mistakes were because of his fear of God's

wrath. He knows a lot about God! Do you think he's right? Do you think God's angry? Would God do this?"

I looked at the chief, "How long have they been waiting here?" I asked.

"They've been up here since the close of their watch. Some have been here for over an hour."

I turned to the crowd. Realizing the level of their fear, I asked, "Why didn't you come down to my bunk and ask me these questions? Why did you wait up here for me." I was sad to see the anxiety they were having to endure.

"We wanted to!" one called out.

"Yeah, but we were afraid that you might be sleeping on your Sabbath!" another added.

"We knew that you have been given a tough time for your beliefs and we believed that you needed your Sabbath to rest. We were afraid that if you were sleeping and we woke you, that might trigger God's anger against us."

I was surprised and humbled to hear such fear instilled in my fellow shipmates.

Again, they stated, "Officer Douglas has been making terrible mistakes while standing the maneuvering watch. He hasn't been able to concentrate on his job because he thinks that God might punish us for what has been done to you. He's the protestant lay leader!" they exclaimed. "He should know these things."

"What do *you* think Roland? Would God do these things to us?" one called out. The crowd grew silent and all eyes were on me waiting for my answer.

"I don't know." I began to think about past happenings. "Perhaps God is not happy about some of the things that have happened, but I believe He's taking care of us. I also believe He understands the situation of the command and the nature of their actions. I don't view God as a vengeful God; He is a God of love. He does not want to destroy man; He wants to save man. Besides, even if He were angered to the point of revenge, I'm on this boat. If this boat sinks, I go with it. If His wrath were in my behalf, why would He do something that would result in my death?" However, I did not reveal to them that I believed God could protect me, should such an event take place.

"So you don't think He will do anything to hurt us?" one of the men asked.

"No. In fact, I can assure you He won't!" I insisted.

I saw anxiety replaced with relief. With a sense of peace, the crowd dispersed.

This incident triggered a response from the chief. He stayed in sonar to ask me questions about God and the Bible.

"Roland, when we talked before, you told me about Bible prophecies. Do you really believe that there have been prophecies in the Bible fulfilled?"

"Yes, most certainly Chief."

"Give me an example," he said.

I read the prophecy of Daniel 2 to him and explained its fulfillment by the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

"Yes, but how do you know that Daniel didn't write this prophecy *after* all these kingdoms reigned?"

"Historians have studied the writings of Daniel. His style of writing, and the events he mentions were characteristic of the time of Babylon."

"Maybe so, but there are so many authors of the Bible. To me, it's a compilation of confusion."

"Have you read much of the Bible, Chief?"

"Well, no, I haven't," he admitted.

"Chief, the fact that there were so many authors is one of the Bible's strongest proofs of authenticity! Its authors have been able to write centuries apart and still maintain consistency! There's one prophecy in Daniel that is being fulfilled today. Hundreds of years after Daniel wrote of these events, John the revelator also wrote about them. His prophecies parallel the prophecies of Daniel. When we combine these two prophecies, we get a more complete picture of what is happening. Although each prophecy is written by a different author, they are consistent."

"OK!" interrupted the chief. "I agree! I believe that the Bible must have been inspired by *some* power, or it wouldn't have been protected as it has been. And I suppose there is

something to be said about the fulfillment of its prophecies. But that doesn't mean that the 'power' was God, as you see it."

"So, Chief, you do believe that the Bible is inspired by something or someone?"

"Yes, I do believe it."

"Let me ask you, Chief, if you were that 'power' and you wanted a book to be written to help mankind, would you let credit of your concern go to someone else? Would you want them trusting someone else when you're the one that could really help them?"

"No."

"Chief, the Bible reveals to us its author. It tells us that 'all scripture is given by inspiration of God.' The Bible is not just counsel to us—it reveals the very character of God. It helps us to understand His relationship to man. Do you believe that God would want us to have a misconception of Him?"

"No. I guess not! It's a lot for me to swallow. But I admit that it makes more sense than what I have thought!"

The brief Bible study ended, the chief left, and sonar returned to a normal watch station.

I was sitting at the equipment when the captain came in. He had some charts to show us concerning enemy submarines that had been detected in the area. The phone rang. The captain answered, "Sonar." He pulled the receiver away from his ear. Initially puzzled, he turned to me. "Here, Roland, I think it's for you!"

I answered to a dial tone. "There's no one on the line, Sir!"

"There was someone!" he insisted. "They asked for dial-a-prayer!"

I was relieved to see the captain laugh it off.

I knew who the mysterious caller was. Ray was the only one who called "dial-a-prayer." Why he hung up, I still don't know. Because, if there was anyone who had no fears or second thoughts about expressing himself, it was that man, Ray. No one was immune to his strong opinions and sharp logic—not even the captain.

He had once asked the captain if it was true that the *Lewis and Clark* was one of the navy's most efficient submarines.

"Yes," the captain had replied to Ray's question. "We have a record to be proud of! Why?"

"Well, as I see it, Captain, this boat is an invalid, a cripple in the middle of nowhere!"

"Why?" questioned the captain.

"I'm in charge of loading torpedoes, Roland's in charge of tracking enemy ships, and Jerry's in charge of firing the torpedoes. This boat, to me, is nothing more than an oversized gun: I won't load it, Roland won't aim it, and Jerry won't shoot it."

Perhaps he was correct. But the sub was able to complete the patrol with no apparent problems. On Sabbath, October fifth, the submarine surfaced to return to the Rota port in Spain. What a relief it was to again see the rays of the sun shining down through the control-room hatch and to smell the fresh, salt air. We docked next to the tender and the in-port duty roster was posted. My section was scheduled for liberty.

I walked to the breakwater's tip and prayed, "O Father, it's over! The worst is over! Thank You so much! Thank You for Your miracles! Thank You for being with me!"

The sun rested a moment on the horizon, bringing to a close the day of rest. The painted sky, brushed by the hand of God, set the ocean ablaze with brilliant reds and glimmering golds. Tears of joy flowed down my cheeks as I marveled at God's handiwork. It was as if God were saying, "This is My gift to you! For all those Sabbaths you spent in the dark depths of the sea. For trusting that I would light your path."

Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee;
be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God;
I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;
yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

~ Isaiah 41:10 (KJV)

Epilogue

The seed of truth planted during my childhood. A decision made affecting my life. From chaplain to chaplain with uncertainty. The navy locking horns with my convictions. God's intervention. The seeds of truth planted on board the *USS Lewis and Clark*. These are just opening chapters. What happened when we returned to the United States? What about my shipmates? Did I see my mother again?

I received an honorable discharge—for the convenience of the government.

Jerry completed his term of military service. He and his wife, Leslie, are now members of the Charleston Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Jerry's boss, Ray, his wife, Kathy, and Ricci were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When Ray and Ricci refused instruction with the navy's torpedo fire-control trainer, the X.O. threatened Ray with up to five years imprisonment and Ricci with court martial and rate reduction. But they held firm to their convictions. As a result Ray was transferred to shore duty for the remainder of his enlistment, and Ricci received an early discharge from the navy.

I returned to my hometown. While there, my church asked me to share this experience with them. It was that Sabbath that I received the greatest blessing and an answer to my most sincere prayers. I had the privilege and honor of experiencing my mother's renewal of faith through baptism.

I don't remember the name of the sailor who gave me cups of water when I was awaiting captain's mast. I never really knew him. But to this day I get the greatest blessing thinking of that moment when a stranger would stop and make such a kind gesture. My heart warms when I read the verse, "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." (Mark 9:41 KJV) I claim that promise. I pray that I will meet him in heaven and we shall be able to share that moment together with the angels and the rest of God's glorious creatures when we declare the Righteousness of Christ to the universe. I pray that I may be half the servant to the Lord for others that he was to me that day.

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart;
and lean not unto thine own understanding.
In all thy ways acknowledge him,
and he shall direct thy paths.

~ Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV)

And the story of God's love continues.



Sail of the *USS Lewis and Clark*
at Rest



Sail of USS Lewis and Clark

Remember . . .

My journey observing God's memorial to creation started in Charleston, S.C. while preparing to serve on board the *USS Lewis and Clark (SSBN 644)*. Ironically, the ship's motto was "Theirs to Discover Ours to Defend". I had *discovered* the blessing of God's Sabbath; however I had to *defend* my right to observe it.

The *USS Lewis and Clark* was decommissioned, and in 2002 its sail returned to Charleston, S.C. to become a breathtaking part of the Cold War Submarine Memorial and is an "enduring memorial... to recognize the unique contributions of United States Navy submarines and those who served in them during the Cold War in the cause of world peace and freedom."

It was from directly beneath this sail that the same officer placed me on report twice. This officer is not only the officer who regretted having to place me on report but he's also the officer who performed my chief's watches during Sabbaths so that my Chief could stand my watches—Mr. Lipscomb.

"Mr. Lipscomb?" I interrupted.

"Yes, Roland?"

"Sir, I want you to know that I appreciate your standing my chief's watch so he could be in sonar."

"Thank *you*, Roland!" he said with pride. "I consider it a privilege to do it! I don't know when I've ever been able to do anything for God, and I feel good about it!"

It was directly beneath this sail that the members of the crew gathered outside Sonar because they feared the wrath of God.

It was directly beneath this sail that I received offerings from the shipmates who threw coins down to me after hearing me humming hymns from the periscope well while I was cleaning during the preparation day. I brought those coins back to the Charleston Seventh-day Adventist church.

This is also the sail through which the periscope was raised and I saw the dolphins off the bow.

It was directly beneath this sail that the captain gave me the good news of my mother's health.

When I look at the memorial, I not only see a memorial to those men who served "in the cause of world peace" but a memorial to the God who protected *them*.

I—"Remember . . ."

Michael Roland, the author, as a boy in Sunday School was puzzled when the Sunday School teacher read the fourth commandment to the class. Why did God say, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God"? By the calendar it was plain to see that the seventh day was Saturday, yet Sunday seemed to be the day set aside as Sabbath. Neither his teacher nor his mother could explain this to him.

When Roland grew up and joined the navy, he learned about the true Sabbath and the reason for keeping it holy. But how does one keep the Sabbath in the navy, especially on a submarine?

You won't want to put the book down until you've finished the story of how Petty Officer Roland served both his God and his country even though many times insurmountable difficulties seemed to arise.

This is a story of courage, perseverance, and witnessing in a modern-day setting.

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