

**Robert Taylor**  
**USS Yorktown CV-5**  
**Current Residence Auburndale FL**

Here is a little background info on my dad, he has compiled several pages which I am trying to get into a book form for him. Some of the language is in 1st and 3rd person.

My Dad Robert E. Taylor just turned 96 on August 31st and is still going strong. I will do my best to keep this short but here goes.

**Basic Training**

Dad, born and raised in Jacksonville, FL enlisted in the on May 17th 1941 at the age of 17. On Sept 12th he took the train from downtown Jacksonville to basic training at the Naval Training Center in Norfolk, VA. It was his first time away from home on his own. "I completed my basic training and was awarded a Sharp Shooter's Medal on a WWI Springfield Rifle".

During training Dad had an encounter with a Nazi Sympathizer who was spreading propaganda as a "Fifth Columnist". Dad had to meet with Base Commander and an FBI Agent who wanted him to be a witness against this Nazi Subversive. Awaiting trial, Dad had received his orders to attend Naval Aviation Radioman's Training in Jacksonville FL. He was excited to be returning home to Jacksonville. A few days later December 7th 1941 the attack on Pearl Harbor happened. Dad contacted the Base Commander who informed him that the trial for the Nazi had been cancelled. The Commander told Dad that he was free to attend schooling in Jacksonville BUT, they were looking for volunteers immediately for the War.

Dad volunteered and was assigned to the USS Yorktown, an Aircraft Carrier in Drydock being equipped for the War effort. The Base Commander shook his hand and told Dad "Good Luck". He was so excited after seeing the ship and felt privileged to be assigned to such a "Beautiful Ship". We left Port on December 16th at 9:01 am and reached the Panama Canal on December 21st. We were escorted by several US Destroyers leaving Panama because German U Boat activity in the area. On December 30th we arrived in San Diego were given liberty and by January 6th 1942 we were headed to the South Pacific.

Feb 1st 1942 was our first combat missions were underway, bombing the Japanese on the Jaluit, Makin and Mill Islands with great success. A Japanese plane was spotted and general quarters sounded and we were ready for action. My post was a 5" Antiaircraft Gun on the port bow. Our planes shot down the enemy aircraft. After these skirmishes we headed to Pearl Harbor and arrived on Feb 6th. By then we had a record 101 days at sea.

Arriving at Pearl was surreal, the ships were still smoking from the Japanese raid on Dec. 7th. I noticed the USS West Virginia which had been sunk and was being raised( little did I know I would be a member of her crew in the future). By Feb 16th the Yorktown, was headed to Coral Sea accompanied by a flotilla of support ships and another carrier the USS Lexington. On our way we struck something that shook the whole ship, we rammed and sunk a Japanese sub that had surfaced. We joined forces with the Lexington and conducted air raids on Rabaul, and sank the Japanese vessel Maru Kokai off Lae. We

departed for the Coral Sea again on April 27th.

During our trip to Coral Sea I was allowed to “steer the ship” as part of my training and followed a course set by the officer on deck. On deck one night looking at the stars another sailor came up to me and started naming all the different stars and constellations. When I asked his name he told me “ I’m Elliot Buckmaster the Captain of the Ship”.

**BATTLE OF CORAL SEA** (Coral Sea would be the first naval battle ever fought entirely in the air) Onto Coral Sea we were refueling during rough seas and one of the mooring cables snapped and cut one of my buddies in half. It was my first real tragedy at sea and I’ll never forget it. On May the 3rd the Battle of Coral Sea got underway. The Yorktown and Lexington planes attacked and bombed Tulagi Harbor, damaging and sinking enemy vessels. Our raids continued and the Yorktown was kept at a safe distance from the islands avoiding being spotted by the enemy. On the 8th General Quarters sounded again, this time the Japanese planes were coming for us attacking our Port side. Our planes did a great job knocking off the Japanese planes, and we were firing our anti-aircraft guns successfully shooting down planes too. Unfortunately, one Japanese plane was able to get off a bomb that ripped down our #1 elevator next to my battle station shaking the ship from stem to stern, the rivets were popping out everywhere.

As fighting stopped, I ventured down below to see the damage. I had buddies down below that I wanted to check on. What I saw I’ll never forget, guys that I had just talked to earlier that day, torn to shreds and killed by the concussion of the enemy bomb that hit us. I remember tears coming to my eyes and then anger for what happened. The USS Lexington wasn’t so fortunate, the Lexington was hit so bad and we eventually (scuttled) sank her. I never dreamed I would see such a thing.

We departed to Pearl Harbor for repairs listening to Tokyo Rose on the radio claiming that the very ship we were on was sunk. On May 27th we arrived at Pearl Harbor by the 29th we were in dry dock. I was ordered to go put on my dress uniform and to report to the Officer on Deck, we were stationed as “Side Boys” that were formal greeters for the Official Delegation including Admiral Nimitz to meet with Captain Buckmaster. The estimated repair time for the Yorktown was 90 days, Nimitz ordered it to be ready in 3 days. We thought we were returning to the United States to Bremerton Washington. At sea the Captain announced on the PA System that we had broken the Japanese code and were part of a task force that was heading to Midway!

### **BATTLE OF MIDWAY**

We were about to take on the whole Japanese Navy and this was it. The planes from our carrier group were assaulting the enemy. We encountered a “Swarm” of Japanese bombers approaching us over the horizon. You couldn’t count the number of planes coming at us. My battle station was a 5” 40 MM anti aircraft gun, which we began firing without ceasing on the approaching enemy planes. There were so many planes coming at us you couldn’t miss. We were knocking planes out of the sky like a turkey shoot. We shot the wing off of one Japanese plane and it threw the pilot clear from his plane, he was wearing this “black cape” and we watched as fluttered from the sky and landed flat on our deck.

We were taking multiple hits during this attack and had no idea to the damage we had received. One of our pilots landed back on deck got out of his plane and yelled “Scratch one Flat Top” we had sunk one

enemy carrier and eventually the other 3 enemy carriers were sunk too. Things became quiet and the air had cleared. I remember pulling shrapnel out of one of my buddies, he said he would keep it as a souvenir. ( I learned that later he would be killed on the enemy's next attack)

The silence was broken when the General Quarters sounded again, the Japanese Torpedo planes were coming over the horizon, we began shooting them down as fast as we could but we began to take hits. The Yorktown lost power, began shaking and smoking terribly. The ship started to list from the torpedo hits and the Captain gave the order to abandon ship. As we started across the deck we had to walk around the Jap Pilot that we shot down and landed on our deck, it was a gruesome site. I still have nightmares to this day about that.

### **Abandon Ship**

Guys were abandoning ship, some jumping others going down the life lines (these lines were made up while we were in Pearl Harbor for repair). I decided to go down one of the lines, on my way down the guy ahead of me kept stepping all over me. I spoke up to him and he told me his hands were badly burned and could not hold on. I told him to slip down and grab onto my shoulders and I would lower him down with me. We dropped into a raft full of survivors and we were afraid that the raft might get sucked down if the ship began to sink rapidly. I decided to jump in the water when I heard someone screaming " I can't swim", I took off my life vest and gave it to him. We all got away from the ship as fast as we could.

Our Destroyers began to pick up the survivors and I was with a group of about 8 guys and we had drifted about 30-40 feet from the one of the US destroyers. At that minute the destroyer began to move away from us to pick up a larger group of sailors in the water. It was getting darker now and I felt my heart sink in despair. Being at sea with no hope, dark and no life vest. I began praying for the first time in my life. I mean really praying. I said "God, if you get me through this I am going to go to one of those Bible classes and find out what you're all about. As the ship was pulling away someone on deck tossed a lead line in my direction (lead line is used in measuring depth, it has a piece of lead on the end of a woven rope) I missed the line with my hand but when the line went into the water I was able to get my big toe around and grab hold of the rope. The rest of the guys grabbed onto my back and we were pulled to the netting on the side of the destroyer USS Balsh.

Midway was a US Naval Success and has been called the "Greatest Sea Battle of All Time".

We learned later that the Yorktown was still afloat but was torpedoed by Japanese subs being towed back to Pearl Harbor. Back at Pearl Harbor we were put up in barracks and told not to mention anything about the loss of the Yorktown. I worked on the USS West Virginia which was being raised from the attack on Pearl. One day cleaning up the engine room we had to remove some of the sailor's remains who were killed during the attack back in December. Dad eventually served on the USS West Virginia but was reassigned back to the States. There is so much more to say but most importantly, my Dad did make it to that Bible class and got saved, making Jesus the Lord of his life. Got baptized in one of the streams in the Kalihi Valley and joined the Navigators, a program for Born Again Christians. He met his wife (my mom) Shirley at a Church Service back in Jacksonville Florida, and have been married for over 70 years. I am so blessed to have parents like them.

Respectfully,

Mark R. Taylor with Robert E. Taylor