

Glenn Toms was born on November 19, 1925 in Rouzerville, PA, grew up in Waynesboro, PA, where he lived until he joined the Navy in 1943, then moved to Germantown, MD in 1953, where he has lived ever since. He has been a dedicated member of Damascus American Legion Post 171 since 1979, a member of VFW Post 9412 in Gaithersburg, MD, and a member of the Masonic Lodge in Smithsburg, MD.

Glenn served in the U. S. Navy, volunteering for service in 1943 at 17 years of age, serving a total of 9 years and 5 months. During WWII he served in the Asiatic Pacific, Russell Island, and Admiralty Islands (Kwajalein, Roi Namur Marshall Islands). After the war was over Glenn was stationed in Phoenix, AZ storing airplanes in the desert until he was discharged in April 1946 with the rank/rate of Aviation Electric's Mate First Class. As he couldn't find work upon returning home, he reenlisted in the U.S. Navy, serving two more years on active duty, and in 1948 went into the reserves. He was recalled to active duty in 1951 for the Korean War, and was assigned to Norfolk, VA where he spent two years as an Electronics Inspector. Glenn's awards include the American Area Campaign Medal with 2 stars, World War II Victory Medal, Asiatic Pacific Area Campaign Medal, and the Good Conduct Medal.

Upon enlisting in 1943, Glenn was sent to boot camp at Great Lakes, IL. After boot camp he was assigned to a blimp squadron at Naval Air Station, Moffet Field CA, where their mission was to fly up and down the California coast looking for Japanese submarines. Glenn's drill instructor was a big Indian Chief Petty Officer. He treated all the sailors just entering the service well. And the person Glenn most admired was Chief Gillis. He was in charge of the maintenance group. When the guys went to town "I had to drive because I was the only one who had a driver's license; so I couldn't do any drinking. I just had to sit and wait on them."

At this time the U.S. was building up for the invasion of the Philippine Islands, and Glenn was transferred to a Combat Air Squadron at Point Mugu, CA, where he trained with Marines for duty in the South Pacific. Glenn never got to the Philippines because the 7th Cavalry invaded the Admiralty Islands. After pounding the island from Navy cruisers and destroyers, B24's and B25's, they went ashore, with the 7th Cavalry clearing the way. During the battle 4,500 Japanese were killed, but only 3,552 were buried. Of the Japanese survivors, 450 fled into the jungle. With no food or supplies, they turned to cannibalism.

Glenn flew as a rear gunner on an SBD Dive Bomber many times. "If you want a thrill you should try this out!" Glenn said: "I always wondered why a pilot would come out to get into his plane and ask who worked on his plane. I quickly found out. I remember an Ensign came out to his plane one day and asked me if I was the one that worked on his plane. I said, yes it was me. He told me to check out a parachute, and said that I was going along on the in-flight check out. I guess that was one way to be sure that your plane was worked on properly. During the flight the pilot rolled the plane over and over, and you could hear loose nuts and bolts rattling around, because somebody dropped them and never picked them up. Then he went into his dive, and that is one scary thing because I'm sitting in the back with no controls; all I can do is hang on for dear life and bear with the G-forces."

“Servicing the planes was very dangerous. We were all young and inexperienced. The chief came out with a head of lettuce and said: “I want to show you guys something to make sure you don’t get too close to the plane when the engines are running.” He threw the head of lettuce into the propeller and we had instant salad. Lesson learned! Another serious danger was servicing torpedo planes because we had to crawl up inside the bomb bay doors to service the plane while the plane was running. I was always scared that someone would come along and close the doors while I was up inside. We were supposed to put tags on the planes that someone was working inside, but nobody bothered to use them. These maintenance guys were wild, they’d take the planes and taxi them all over the place. As I said, we were just a bunch of young kids.” One good thing is that I drew flight pay, even though I didn’t actually fly the plane. I rode in all kinds of planes, including Sea Planes and the Dauntless Dive Bomber.

On November 10, 1944, while stationed in the Admiralties on the island of Pityilu, Glenn was checking out an F4U Corsair plane, and had just turned off the engine when he heard a tremendously loud boom. In Glenn’s words: “I thought my plane had blown up. I felt the ground tremble, and saw the smoke in the harbor. I later learned that the ammunition ship USS Hood had blown up. We didn’t know if a Japanese submarine torpedoed it or the men handling ammunition were careless. We never did find out, although Tokyo Rose came on the air and claimed that a Japanese midget submarine destroyed the ship.” The largest remaining piece of the hull found measured no bigger than 16 by 10 feet. No other remains of the ship were found except fragments of metal which had struck other ships in the harbor, and a few tattered pages of a signal notebook found floating in the water several hundred yards away. Of the 350 men aboard, and of those men in small boats alongside handling ammunition, no human remains were ever recovered. The only survivors from the ship’s crew were a junior officer and five enlisted men who had left the ship a short time before the explosion. Two of the crew were being transferred to the base brig for trial by court martial, and the remainder of the party were picking up mail at the base post office. Glenn’s personal opinion is that the explosion was caused by careless handling of the munitions. He was talking to some of the guys who had been over to the ship earlier to bring ammo to the other ships, and they said those guys on the Hood treated the ammo like you wouldn’t believe. They let the ammo roll down the planking, and Glenn thinks that when some of the ammo rolled down the planking, it fell off and it created a spark.

Glenn did some island hopping, and he was shipped off to the island of Eniwetok, and then to the Island of Kwajalein atoll. A lot of sailors got killed at Kwajalein because they went in with the Marines. The Marines needed more people so the sailors went with them. Of course, the See Bees went in ahead of everybody. Glenn was checking out an F6F Hellcat aircraft when a shipmate came out of the maintenance hut waving his hands and telling him to cut the engine. When he got out of the cockpit and hit the ground, he told Glenn that the war was over and they were going home. Glenn says: “I stayed there for two more months because the married men were the first to go home.”

“We rode the merchant ship *Howell Lines* to Russell Island, and when we arrived there were so many guys sitting around with nothing to do that they assigned a bunch of us to go around the island picking up coconuts; that was our job! We only stayed there for a month, long enough to pick up a bunch of coconuts, then they brought in an old LST (troop landing ship) which took us to the Admiralty Islands.”

The ride back to the states was on a converted Dutch liner. After two days the ship broke down, and they drifted around in the ocean until a tugboat showed up to tow them to Pearl Harbor. They stayed there for a week and got underway, only to break down again. So another tug shows up, and this time they got towed all the way to California. The conditions on the Dutch ship were terrible. They ran out of chow; lunch was a candy bar and a coke. They rationed toilet paper – 2 sheets per day! The sailors would gamble and fight all day long. It took thirty-three days to reach California.

For the two years prior to the start of the Korean War, Glenn was working at Fairchild aircraft in Hagerstown, MD. He was then called up from the reserves. As his wife was pregnant at the time, he got a deferment for 6 months. After the deferment he was called up right away.

“During the Korean War I was at Norfolk, VA and my job was to check out the F9F airplane which was the first jet they brought out into combat. My job was to set the planes up and be sure they were in top flight condition. After the Korean War I got out and came back to work for Fairchild in Hagerstown, but I got laid off shortly after so I got in the car and went down to DC to look for a job. I saw that Emerson Research was hiring, and got a job working on the control systems for the Hound Dog missile they were making. I was there for two years before I realized that there was no retirement plan available. I met up with some friends who said they could get me a job at David Taylor Model Basin in Bethesda, MD. The basin has a water tunnel about ¼ mile long where they test submarine and ship models. I was hired to work on submarines. Imagine that, going from aircraft to submarines. Our job was to put strain gauges on ships to measure and record the stresses. I retired there and received 30 years credit, which worked out pretty good because working for the Navy Department, all my Navy time counted towards retirement.”

Glenn’s happiest moment was when he saw the Golden Gate Bridge in California; and he knew he was home free. Although he was treated well after the war, coming home was a difficult adjustment because there was no work to be found, His most vivid memories of the war is “wondering how we did the things we did at seventeen, and here we are today. The good Lord had to be with me”. I guess we all have to ask ourselves how these men and women of the Greatest Generation did the things they did at seventeen, or eighteen, or whatever age they were during the war. We can only say “Thank You” that they did what they had to do.