

Lifestyles

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The Choctaw Sun 5A

"Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."
-- Winston Churchill

Church draws couple home again

PART TWO

SILAS -- The USS Lang encountered its first Kamikaze (suicide) plane at Leyte Gulf, and from that time onward, they became an almost daily danger that the crewmen had to consider.

The word Kamikaze means "divine will," and the pilots on the planes believed that they were doing the will of a divine person, the Emperor. Even though the men were enemies, the crewmen on the Lang admitted that they were perfectionists in the planes.

Consider just how hard it would be to stop a loaded bomber that was zipped in on a ship. The pilot did not care if he was killed, for dying was his intention. The sailors wondered how men who had such little regard for life could ever be defeated.

When 1944 ended, the Lang left the Leyte Gulf and sailed for the Philippine Islands. The men had been at sea for over three years, and all that time was marked by almost continuous battles.

How did the men hold themselves together? After all, everyone has a breaking point. John Earl Taylor stressed to us that very few men ever broke down, but how was that possible? Well, each man drew strength from the group, even while adding his own strength to the group. Every man had some pleasant thoughts about other times and other places, and the relieved those times again in their memories.

We saw the initial spark that was in John's mind on Dec. 8, 1941 when he decided to join the Navy. His first thought were about his parents and home, so it is time now, as the Lang sails through the dangerous waters of the Pacific, to turn that small spark into a flame, and then we can really appreciate John's sacrifices. In his deep thoughts about his parents and home, there were also memories of Black Creek Baptist Church, for we are dealing with a very spiritual person. In the church, two men, Augustus Toplady and John Newton, established the tone of the services rather often.

How did they do it? Toplady, through his "Rock of Ages," which is really the prayer hymn of the ages. Consider his



plea for safety, and imagine how a sailor in distress would retreat into that plea: "Rock of Ages, cleft for me; Let me hide myself in thee." Even on a dangerous and turbulent sea, the words were comforting. Now, give some consideration to Newton's bold application of faith: "Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come, 'twas grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." When John determined that he would return home and to the Black Creek Baptist Church, the glowing ember broke into a raging flame.

For 177 years, Black Creek Baptist Church has stood without apology to its humble profession of faith. Founded in 1829, it has since that time been a source of comfort for those in distress, and a beacon of hope for those with a loftier experience. The church actually predates the formation of Choctaw County by 18 years. Originally a missionary endeavor of Spring Bank Church, the congregation first met in a log house near the site of the present building. It was called New Prospect Baptist Church.

The name was very appropriate, for the church sat beside the Lone Star Trail, a wilderness road that ran from Georgia to west Texas. In the westward movement in earlier times, many travelers passed this way, and some of them stopped and made this area their

permanent home. The church changed its name to Black Creek Baptist in 1850 and joined the Liberty Baptist Association. We believe that our own Bogueloosa Baptist Church was a part of the association, for it was comprised of ten churches.

The Black Creek congregation was fully integrated during its earlier years, and all races worshipped together. In 1882, A.H. and Mary Ella Powe deeded to the trustees one acre of land where the church now stands. Also, about 1890, Ed McLaughlin deeded an acre of land to the black brothers and sisters in Christ so that they could build their own church, Shady Grove Missionary Baptist, which is still an active church.

In an ironic twist, McLaughlin died "in service for Black Creek Baptist Church." One Saturday morning, Ed cleaned out a spring near the church so that worshippers could have fresh water the next day. After finishing, he sat down on an old tree root and died of a heart attack, and that can only be called giving everything for the cause.

John Taylor, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Forest Taylor, attended the church throughout his youth. During that time, Margaret Turner was growing up in Turnertown near Needham. Her parents were Mr. and Mrs. Jack Turner. When John left for the Navy, Margaret was still in high school.

Everything eventually ends, even wars, although some of the sailors on the Lang probably doubted that fact for a few years. After helping secure the Philippines, the ship returned to the states for some needed repairs before joining the fleet for the final assault on Japan. By far, the ship's toughest time was the ninety day stretch that it served on the "picket" line during the battles for Okinawa. The ships were like pickets that were trying to keep the Japanese off Okinawa.

Okinawa was the greatest air-sea battle of all time, and it took place in the sea 70 miles northwest Okinawa. The battle was between Japanese Kamikazes and 148 destroyers. 122 of the American destroyers fell victim to the Kamikazes, and that was eighty per-



John and Margaret Taylor

cent of the total. Each day of the campaign, an average of 55 American sailors were killed and over 60 were wounded.

The Kamikazes did not come at an even rate. They frequently came in swarms and very little could stop them. On April 6, 1945, 13 destroyers were hit, and seven of them were sunk or scrapped. There is nothing cheap about our freedom, and we never tire of singing the praises of the men who kept it for us. The Kamikaze pilots faced death only once, but American sailors on the destroyers faced their own deaths many times as they stood face-to-face with the Kamikaze pilots.

And then, it was all over because President Harry Truman never hesitated for a second while making his decision about the Atomic bomb. He knew that the bomb would save thousands of American lives, and using it was a matter of when, not why, so the first bomb fell on Japan on Aug. 6 and the second on August 9. Japan, the Land of the rising sun, surrendered on Aug. 14. Incidentally, President Truman never once apologized for using the bomb, although he did say several times that he

decommissioned, John transferred to Port Arthur, Texas. On Feb. 13, 1946, his enlistment in the Navy ended. On the following day, Feb. 13, he was free and twenty-one of age. Behind him were tens of thousands of miles of sea duty in waters that were often hostile, but such was the price of our freedom.

John came to Mobile, enrolled in school, and studied refrigeration. He followed the trade through the years. He worked for Bio Foods in Mobile and for General Mills after they bought the company. Margaret went to Mobile and worked for Morrison's until she also went to work for General Mills. When the couple married after a few years, they both expressed an interest in returning to Choctaw County. When his fellow workers asked John why he wanted to return to this county, his reply was the most unselfish that we ever heard, and in that moment, the flame glowed the brightest.

"When I went into the Navy," John said, "the people in my neighborhood and church looked out for my parents. Some of those people are gone now, and most of the others are getting on in years. Some of them need help, and just as they helped my parents, I am going back to help them." This is the reason why you might find John on top of someone's house, or under it, and it is the reason why Margaret is totally involved in her church and neighborhood. John is a deacon in the church, as well as its treasurer, and Margaret teaches an adult Sunday School Class.

The couple retired in 1980, and this has been their work since that time. They are very happy in their endeavors, and it shows. We were never treated better than we were on the day of the interview, and we are grateful to them. With their help, Black Creek Baptist has grown and will continue to grow. If you are looking for a friendly church that is filled with warmth, let us point you in that direction. Some of that warmth will be from the flame that was first ignited at the Southern Choctaw High School ---

On Dec. 8, 1941.

After the Lang was

Norton graduates from Marine Basic Training

PARRIS ISLAND, South Carolina -- PFC Preston Stripling Norton graduated from basic U.S. Marine Corps training at Parris Island, South Carolina on August 25, 2006.

During training, the private earned a Shooting Badge with Expert Marksmanship rating.

He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, Alpha Company, Platoon 1069.

On Sept. 1, he transferred to Jacksonville, NC where he attended the School of Infantry Training Battalion, graduating on Nov. 3, 2006 as a Certified Marine Corps Infantry Rifleman.



PFC Preston S. Norton

He is currently awaiting assignment to the Marine Corps' Special Forces Reconnaissance school.

A 2006 graduate of Robertsdale High School, in Robertsdale, Alabama,

PFC Norton is the son of Howard Champ Norton, of Fairhope.

He is the grandson of Howard Norton and the late Esther Norton of the Morgan Chapel community near Butler.

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