

## U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA BATTLESHIP COLLECTION

Paul C. Wenck Interview

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I am Paul C. Wenck of 98 River Street, Coney Island, New York. I enlisted in the United States Navy in 1940 out of Albany, New York. I had my initial training in Newport, Rhode Island. At that time I was honor man in Company 43 while training. I stayed back in training at the training center and played Navy basketball for the training station on the Eastern Seaboard League. I went into the central room and stenciled clothes for recruits for awhile. I heard about the new ship being built, the North Carolina, in New York City. I then asked for a transfer. I was sent to the Navy yard at New York and was sent aboard the U.S.S. Seattle, which was tied up and used as a recruit ship. From there they transferred me over to the U.S.S. Camden which was used for personnel being transferred throughout the Navy Yard. At that time I was assigned to the U.S.S. North Carolina.

[Was it 1940 or 1941 when you went on board?]

Probably more like '41.

[Could it have been winter time, do you remember anything about the the weather?]

I believe we were wearing blues so it was probably winter, early '41 just before commissioning actually.

[Well she was commissioned April 9, 1941, it could have been anywhere from January to March.]

Working parties were sent on board the North Carolina. We did odd jobs, putting in storage bins and any miscellaneous work that we could help to assist the ship being prepared. Meanwhile I had to go back aboard and do a little mess duty for the chief's mess on board the Camden. Back

on board I went to the North Carolina, worked on there and got into the third division. I was in the third division the day of the commissioning. Our boatswain mate was a man by the name of Johnson. I was with the third division as deck hand for some time. The commissioning was a great day of excitement as I recall, all these dignitaries around, all these high ranking admirals. Every sailor had to be on his toes and everything was ship shape the best way it could be on board. We were all dressed in blues for photos and the commissioning. It was a great day.

[Were you there for the various trials that took place?]

I was in, I was assigned to number three turret down in the magazine room. I was in there for some time and I went into the pit, of the center gun, number three turret. From there, having talked to my boatswain mate about advancement in the service and so forth, he advised me that I should look into another field. He was a great man with a lot of confidence in me for some reason. A great man was this Johnson. I respected him.

[Was he Old Navy?]

He was an old Navy man. Quite a bit older than I was. I was eighteen at the time. I went into the executive office and worked there for some time. But I was sort of a lonesome fellow with all my shipmates that I worked with below who were being assigned to different divisions especially the "S" division which is slide division. Such fellows as Donald Day, Wendy Gum and I were three indispensable fellows the way we figured it. Unseparable, I should say. So, we stayed together and have been friends all these years ever since the ship was commissioned. We all went through training together, one good thing about it. Later I left the executive branch and got into "S" division.

I wasn't in the exec office very long. I had the forward starboard under Thomas Harry and Chief Fowler.

[These were general stores?]

Yes, general stores and Chief Fowler was our main boss at that time. I advanced through the ranks and made chief in 1943, chief store keeper.

[That's fairly rapid advance to make chief that early. Were you in charge of a number of store rooms?]

I had a whole group of store rooms. I had mustered all the mess boys. I gave them all their advancement tests. I haven't seen any of them since. Really, I haven't seen any of them and I'm surprised that they haven't been back to the association. I would sure like to see them back.

[Were you, I suppose you were on board ship when they went into Pearl Harbor?]

I was on ship when she left New York and followed her all the way through the North Atlantic, all the way through the tests. I was there at Pearl Harbor. I remember the joyous welcome with those ships in the terrible mess. I remember it very well.

[Were you on board deck, I suppose you were standing quarters going into Pearl ?]

We were at quarters when we came through; you can never imagine the welcome we got. The people were just awed by the size of the ship, and the greatness of it.

[Was there any excitement when you went on liberty, the ship I mean?]

Everybody wanted to talk to you. You'd get in the yard and the yard workers wanted to talk to you and know about it, and what happened, and how it got about. I guess it was quite a secret. We had a great experience going through the canal. They had to grease her through the

way I can remember it. The beam was so wide she kept rubbing all the way and scratching.

[Could you hear the metal scratching?]

Certainly, you could hear it. They went through into L.A.. We had liberty there and went into Frisco and took out supplies and headed right out to Pearl Harbor.

[Do you remember anything unusual that occurred during trial run, when it fired the guns the first time or you know the various trials or even going out into the North Atlantic, into the Pacific?]

I remember vaguely some. Everybody was wondering what was going to happen to that ship when they fired those first salvos. Could she take it or would she break apart? Would there be an explosion? There was just a little frightful feeling I felt among certain people, especially me down in the pit. I never saw anything like it in my life. You would never imagine the feeling I had when that big sixteen inch breech came towards me at that particular time. It was just an awesome thing and I just straightened up with myself feeling of fright, I'll tell you that. And then it eased off.

I went on all guns onboard the ship except the five inch. I never was in the five inch gun mount. I started off with fifty calibers on deck, water cooled, way back. Then they repaired them and put the twenty's on and got rid of the fifties.

[Forty, twenty, but you never went on a five inch thirty-eight.]

I never went in the turret and I thought they were quite a gun, really a great gun.

[Were you in any of the battles on one of the guns?]

Oh yes, I was on the guns. I was on the twenty millimeters and I was on the forties.

[Do you remember anything unusual about the various battles or engagements you were involved in, about planes getting too close?]

Oh, they came in close. As I recall, they flew over; we had quite a few planes attack us at different times. Yes, they flew over and I believe part of one exploded and fell somewhere on or about the ship. In fact I have a piece of that made of a fabric.

[Where were you when the ship was torpedoed?]

I had just gone up starboard forward ladder by number two turret and I was looking out and I saw the carrier as it had been torpedoed. I saw a destroyer cut in front of us and I looked over in between the turrets and saw these fellows getting ready for muster. Next thing I knew there was a bunch of hats and water and the torpedo struck.

[Did it knock you down?]

I was flung to the side and I fell near the hatch right by number two turret. I picked myself up and got out. That's where my battle station was. I was heading up on the bow from muster. Just about eight o'clock right through there in the morning; we had just finished breakfast. That was quite an experience.

[Well, torpedoing usually is. You don't have warning particularly]  
No warning whatever.

[You weren't even at battlestations at the time.]

No, they had passed word for general quarters, because I was headed up there at least at that particular time every morning they had quarters.

[Do you recall the first bombardment when you bombed what was it Nauru Island or the North Carolina was to suppose to have bombed a Japanese Island for the first time?]

I recall those. I was not on the big guns at the time.

[You were back in the stores?]

I was back in the store department, I was in a loading magazine.

[Even as a store keeper, as a chief store keeper, what was your battle stations?]

Normally you had charge of loading facilities.

[Loading guns?]

Loading magazines for your different size guns. I do not believe to my knowledge any store keeper got around five inch or the sixteen.

[That's interesting. Storekeepers on carriers served as loaders on five inch, thirty-eights. That's the reason I asked. They did not on the battleship to your knowledge?]

Weren't they on damage fire control?

[Yes, they were on damage fire control and I guess the same thing was true as far as the battleship is concerned.]

I was on the forty millimeters on top of number three turret.

[Did you fire or were you a loader on the forty millimeter?]

I was a loader on that.

[Do you remember anything unusual about living conditions aboard the battleship?]

As far as the living conditions on board this ship, I believe you couldn't ask for anything cleaner and better. The crews were in fine shape to do the work. They got along good. I never saw any personal physical fights between anybody. Our division always was cooperative; nobody fought after food; we had good food.

[Considering war time conditions spam and things like that I guess.]

I think that spam and a few other things are overclassified issues. Now maybe some people did have a little more than what they should have, but we didn't. We had a regular good menu.

[You think in other words that it was a well fed ship?]

It was a well fed ship. I think the morale on the ship was good when I was onboard her. Somebody would get a little lonesome once in a while for home. Somebody would start griping a little but they would get over it. There was always someone else to talk to who was probably in the same boat and who straightened out the other individual and got straightened out himself.

[Did you ever have liberty much after you got overseas, anywhere, the Islands?]

I think the crew had sufficient liberty. They had recreation parties and they had plenty to eat on recreation swimming parties. There was always enough. They did whatever they could to make the crew of this ship happy, and as a general rule I can't say that there were any gripes. If a guy had a gripe, he caused it himself I more than believe. He had misery within himself.

[Do you remember anything about your commanding officers? I understand this ship went through a number of captains and it is difficult to remember, particularly when they show on the bridge or something of this sort, when you were in direct contact.]

I myself was not in any direct contact with them. I saw them and respected them. If they had their faults, I didn't hold them against them or care about it. I never was turned in by anyone, any officer, and when ever they talked to me.

[Do you think it was a strict ship?]

Of course war time conditions are different from peace time. There is not as much strictness. But occasionally even in World War Two you had commanding officers who were extremely strict. This ship had to be ship shape so there was strictness. I think it did everybody good. When you went to quarters you were looked over and I imagine that your division

officer, if you didn't look right, would tell the boatswain mate or whoever was under your chief and he would take care of things if you got slack. To my knowledge in supply, I never heard of it.

[Storekeepers, I gather, worked in dungerees or did they?]

We worked in dungerees, right. After awhile you got dungerees, but when you went in more or less as far as I was concerned. My belief was that it was not out of order. When they put you in dress or whites or what ever it was, it had to be. But most of the time, the crews in the war zone were in dungerees. They were distinguished by different gun mounts or divisions by the color of their hats, whether they were ammunitions handlers or things like that.

I talked with, I believe he made ensign at the time, his name was Belog, Ensign Belog. He later became the commander of the Navy Yard at Philadelphia, and I believe he is retired now. But we had a nice chat together, and he told me the advancements and so forth. So I left the ship as a chief storkeeper with the idea of going into an Amphib outfit. I left the ship at Pearl Harbor in 1944, late '43. I was assigned to Ford Island in Pearl Harbor. I got very interested in aviation, so I talked to an Ensign there by the name of Shoody. He advised me to change over into aviation, so I did. Now my rating was chief aviation storekeeper, CSKV. From there I came on board the Palpins and went in to Pensacola and from there I studied up on aviation and asked for a transfer into a school a NAPPC, Memphis. I did duty there, then I shipped overri into the Flying Boats at the Patuxent River, Baltimore, Glenel Martin Company. From there I went into the training school there and they decommissioned it there at the time that I was there and shipped us back to Memphis. From Memphis I decided to leave the service.

[What was the date?]

October 8, 1946.