

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

Joseph E. Iacono Interview

June, 25, 1975

My name is Joseph E. Iacono. I live presently at 329 Thornacraft Ave. in Staten Island, New York. I enlisted in the Navy in November 28, 1940. I was seventeen. I was on what they called a minority cruise or kiddy car cruise and I went up to Newport, Rhode Island, training station up there. From there I was assigned to the U.S.S. Camden which was a receiving ship for the North Carolina, somewhere about commissioning time which was April 9, '41. We went aboard somewhere around that time. I served from that time until September of '43; we were at Pearl Harbor at the time. At that time I was an apprentice seaman on one of the working parties. The Navy was new and I was in a deck force at the time. The food was good. Navy's good food, I don't care where you go. My battlestation at that time was in the magazine room of number three turret; and then again all you did, was as far as I was concerned, was take a bag of powder out of a canister and pass it into a hopper.

I must have been a stupid kid because I don't remember being afraid until the day after we were torpedoed. We had been in an air attack prior to that and the day after was the first time I remember the incident too. I was sent back aft. I worked in the machine shop at that time, and I was sent back to the starboard catapult to check out a crack that probably happened when we were torpedoed. I was straddling the catapult and in my mind the guy on the P.A. system was screaming "all hands stand clear of the starboard side." Well we were so well trained to go forward on the starboard and aft port. My battlestation was down in damage control on the third deck. Practically at the location where she was hit. Here I am running down the starboard side down the ladders and finally

to the third deck, and all the time hearing this fellow say "stand clear of the starboard side." I sat down against the bulkhead, and it was between compartments, and I said to the fellow next to me, I said "Jesus Christ, a guy could get killed around here." That was the first time I really woke up. Really, I was a stupid kid but that's the way it was.

[Do you recall when the ship went through the Panama Canal?]

Yes.

[Where were you?]

Well like I said originally, I came aboard in the deck force. I had gone to a trade school, so I wanted down in the black gang which I wound up doing later, but I think I was in the deck force at the time. I don't remember too much except going through it.

[You mentioned the day after the torpedo. Where were you when the ship was torpedoed?]

I was working in the machine shop on a big eighteen inch gap lathe. She runs from port to starboard and I don't remember what I was doing. But I do remember all the tools that I had on the carriage jumping up and everybody just took off for their battlestations. I remember what went through my mind, I never thought of a torpedo. I thought of another ship in the distance laying one into us, you know. I remember running around the shop shutting machines off and then taking off for my battlestation which was in that area. I had gotten through that door. It was closed off already. So that's the last door they kept sealed off because forward of that compartment they had, if I can remember right, they had cracks in the bulkheads and they had to shore it up. So our station was moved aft a little. My first impression was that there was a sea battery that had hit us. The ship went into an immediate list and seemed that she came out of it as fast as she went into it.

[Did anyone announce that the ship was torpedoed over the

[Did they ever announce over the P.A. system that the ship had been torpedoed?]

Not that I remember. I think that through that scuttlebutt, we knew it was a torpedo rather than what I thought.

[Do you recall being under air attack?]

Yes, I was on a one point one, I was an ammunition passer on the one point one. That is the last mount on the port side between the last five inch mount and the sixteen inch chart. There is forty millimeter up there now. They put them on at Pearl, but that was a one point one and that was my battlestation at that time.

[You don't remember much about it except firing away?]

Kept passing the ammunition as they said.

[You were on the ship from 1941 until 1943, is that right?]

That is right, September '43.

[Do you remember any unusual incidents or humorous stories, that might be worth putting down?]

I don't know what the heck is unusual. Well, if you think catching a sand shark off the stern is unusual, I caught one one time with a line and a hook. I had a friend in the machine shop, his name was Fritz, who had a friend of his who was a cook. Naturally everybody on the stern says naturally you don't eat sand sharks. Well just because we don't eat them, we're going to, and we did.

[How big was the shark?]

He wasn't too big, I guess he was about three or four feet. So he got his friend to cook 'em up and it was delicious. I remember it being delicious. It had to be different, right?]

I was in the refrigeration gang for awhile and we had a little pickings out of the refrigerator once in awhile when we would get the

keys under the roost and check in the coils and be able to get the food right and cook it up in that little compartment back there. It worked out real well. We ate good.

[Where were you?]

I think we were at anchor and I guess we were around Wewak at the time. If I remember right we did stop in there a few times, it was more or less the staying area from what I remember.

[What else do you remember?]

Well, you know, just to give you a little idea of what I think of these people, I'm now an assistant chief mechanic in the city of New York, for the mechanical division of all the motor equipment in the Department of Sanitation. We have over five thousand pieces of equipment; and, well the department top strata is the director, two chiefs, and I am one of the assistant chiefs. So I'm pretty involved in the mechanical works. Through the years I've learned a little bit anyway; but, you know the older you get the more you realize you don't know. Anyway, the point I'm getting at is that they had the chief machinist mate in that machine shop, his name was Laurence Schwack. They had a first class, I don't remember his first name, his name was Macy. If it wasn't for those two people, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing today. They taught me the fundamentals you need at the machine shop, and I think they made a pretty good mechanic out of me. Macy was in service and then he went out and then he came back in. He came in just before the war. Schwack was a professional. He later became ensign, and I don't know how far up the line he went. Same thing Masegee, followed in the same footsteps. Til this day I don't see people around that have the expertise of those two people.

[Evidently the machine shops were well run on board that ship.]

Well, we worked a seven day week, a regular eight hour day. They produced a lot of work and they did beautiful work. You don't realize it at the time but when you look back and you see what is going on in industry now, you realize how professional they were. They were really professional. We did some jobs down there that were really unheard of. I remember one job they put me on was they reconstructed an enternal gear from scratch. They had nothing to go on. It was just a matter of figuring it with formulas and the little bit that they had.

[What was the gear for, do you know?]

I think that is was something in the turbin. It had just wiped out all the gears. You could do just about anything down there. They made a feed pump shaft for the U.S.S. Blue, Destroyer Blue at one time. She had burned up one of her fuel pump shafts, feed pumps, and they made one down in the shop for her. It was made strictly from prints. When you're making something out of ~~of~~monel or stainless steel, what ever the material was, it was one of the two, I don't remember which, and you are cutting large threads like three and four inches and so many thousandths and nothing to try it with. Two men were working on it in teams sort of around the clock, and it was crated and sent over. It had, you know, will it fit? And this thing they got a radio message back and from what I understand and the pump was running on the line so that shows how much expertise was there. Mainly it was perhaps Chief Schwack and his first class.

[These were the men who ran the shop, they were the professionals. You had people coming in who probably had little or no experience and they worked with them.]

Well, they had some experience. I had some I worked in the trade

school in the same line. Later on there was another fellow, I think his name was Conrose. He came out of Dearborn, Michigan. He worked for the Ford Motor Company and he was of the same caliber. Of course I had gone from apprentice seaman to machinist mate first myself on the ship and eventually I wound up on a destroyer. I was the chief machinist mate on the destroyer, but even the replacements they just had it. Maybe, you know what they say, how an unusual ship this was, unusual ship. This was an unusual ship. You know everybody has there little petty gripes, but by-in-large the morale was good. I would say, after a while you were a little bit bored I guess, when we used to run that so called torpedo junction, just running back and forth, back and forth.

[When did you have liberty, or did you have liberty?] ~~or did you have liberty?!~~

I don't remember any liberty. I remember going ashore on Wewak. We did go ashore a few times. It was a day time deal until we went to Pearl, then you had regular liberty there.

I don't know too much about what she did after I left her, although I did screen for her for awhile. While I was on a destroyer, we were basically in the same task force. We screened for everybody, and at times we screened for the Carolina.

W. S. Maxwell was the chief engineer and I partly owe my job to him, too. I'm sorry I didn't mention him. When I had gotten out of the service I needed some documentations that I had worked on the machine ship to show that I had five years experience to start off in the job. I had written to the Bureau of Naval Operations and asked them if I could find out where Maxwell was at that time. They sent me a letter back that he was assigned to the American Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, and I forward

a letter to him. He was a captain at that time and he wrote me back a nice letter, two letters, a personal letter and the other letter that had given me the information that I needed. Incidentally he lives in Brooklyn. He was quite a man. He was a great man; I guess you could say everybody loved him. Well respected, well liked. Well he had a good crew and it was part of his doing. I did pick up the pieces about him later. I saw something in the Inquiring Reporter. It is a New York paper where he had written in at one time. At that time he was rear admiral retired and he had something to say. I don't remember what it was but I remember he was in charge of smoke control in the city of New York. Then he had gotten another appointment, something to do with the environment for the state of New York. So he was a very active man even after he left the service.

When I was on the Destroyer Wedderburn, the 684, I was down in the engine room on watch and we were under air attack. I don't remember when it was, it had to be around the time of Okinawa I guess. You always seem to brag about your old home which I did on that ship, and they piped over the loud speaker, "the North Carolina just shot one down;" and I'm jumping around, "see that fellows, you know." "Correct that, that was one of ours."