

U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA BATTLESHIP COLLECTION

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(COPY)

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Otho E. Farrar

[This is Otho E. Farrar. You're from "M" division, right? Which was what?]

Number one machinery space.

[Do you remember when you came aboard the ship?]

June of 1943, I came off an island.

[Off an island?]

Yes, at the beginning of the war I was on a secret base, or at a secret base on Tongatabu before the NORTH CAROLINA came out to the Pacific. I put in a little over a year there and then I went to New Caledonia and I stayed two weeks and came aboard the NORTH CAROLINA.

One thing I want to tell you, I heard them talking about the torpedo. When the NORTH CAROLINA came into Tongatabu they listed her and took the bodies out and I was one of the honor guards when they buried those fellows on Tongatabu. I came aboard the ship a little later.

[And you had no idea at that time that you'd be going aboard the NORTH CAROLINA?]

No.

[What was your specialty?]

I was a machinist mate, number one engine room.

[What were your duties?]

Well, I was head of the watch most of the time on the ship.

[What was your rank when you came aboard?]

When I came aboard I was a machinist mate, second, and then I made machinist mate, first and I acted as chief, but they stopped the special recommendations. I just acted as chief towards the end of the war.

[Did you make chief before you got out?]

No. Washington stopped that just before I did, I was up but I didn't make it. They stopped all specials.

[What were your particular day by day duties? If you went on watch did you have a checklist that you went by or just what did you do?]

Well, when you went on watch you were head of the watch just like an engineer in a powerhouse. (I work in a powerhouse for DuPont now.) You had a certain number of men under you and you just checked to see that things were operating all right, and that everybody is on the station in a proper manner and that the machinery is working properly and drink coffee mostly.

[Who was the engineering officer?]

Well, Admiral Maxwell was the engineering officer at first, of course he made Captain and Admiral later. I believe he is dead now. Then we had J. J. Mooney, who was a professor.

[Was Maxwell there when you were there?]

Yes.

[Did he really have an accent?]

Not too much that I can remember. He was a nice old fellow and always wanted us to call him "Pop", which we did. Yes, he was all right. When he left, he made captain and I believe he went to Washington and then J. J. Mooney took over. He was a professor from MIT and he was a swell guy too. Really good. We had an engineering officer, but I can't think of his name. He was a school teacher from Kansas, an older fellow. Then we had an engineering officer in my space, T. T. Frankenburg who was from New York. I get cards from him every Christmas now. He is still in engineering and he works for a light company up in New York and West Virginia traveling back and forth.

I'd say most of the time if things went well we would drink coffee and take our watch easy.

[Were you aboard when the NORTH CAROLINA took the hit on the five-inch director?]

Yes, I was aboard then.

[Where were you?]

I was on my battlestation engine room, number one engine room.

[Did you know that you had been hit?]

Well, they announced it. I really didn't know it. We could hear the guns down through the ventilators, but that's about all we could tell.

[But you really didn't know? The ship was big enough and sturdy enough even though you took a direct hit from a five-inch gun you really didn't know it until you were told?]

Right. It had to be something most unusual if we could tell it inside. All we could hear was the gunfire, and have smoke.

[They had a first class petty officer's area on the ship?]

We all slept together in our area right about the engine room.

[From the seamen to the first class?]

Yes, all of us were in the same area. The chiefs had their own quarters.

[Reveille went pretty much with the watches?]

Yes.

[What on and off were you doing?]

Well, we had enough first class that we could stand a watch of four on-eight off, but there was a time when we didn't have enough and it was four and four. It depended on how many first class we had. If we had some transferred, it made a difference. But four and eight wasn't bad at all. Of course you get up a lot then. General quarters would sound anytime and I've been to battlestations more than once just in my skivvies with my clothes under my arm. Down the hatch I'd go. But all and all it was real good.

[What would a typical day be like? I guess even though you had to go for break-

fast, either you are coming on or you are coming off watch, you are never in the middle of a watch at breakfast? So what would a normal daily routine be like? What were some small things that you did that you think you might be able to remember?]

Well, if we get up early enough and we brush our teeth and wash up and then if we had the watch at eight, why we would go ahead of the chow line. Whoever was going on watch could go ahead. We might have toast and hash or it might be scrambled eggs. It might be spam cooked in corn or something like that. Usually we had eggs for breakfast, and bacon, or something like that. It was a good breakfast, a normal breakfast. We had beans a whole lot too. I liked the beans. Then we would go on watch and we'd get off at twelve.

[What would you do while you were on watch? Is it a meter checking job?]

Well you would answer the phone. That was one of the big things. Whoever was on throttle, of course, they were giving commands all the time. You would just tour around and see that everything was working properly and if they called for a change of speed or anything, why you had to rev up something or the boiler. You had to put more burners in the boilers or whatever it might have been. If we were going full throttle forward and they called for full astern, that old ship would really shake then cause you had to cut off the head throttle and throw the astern throttle open. At that time the boiler looked like the cases would do like that until we can throw that steam back in again.

[So it would look like it would be breathing?]

Breathing, yes, they would really jump!

[The boilers would?]

Yes, they would be changing just as fast as they could and of course you would close the throttle and open the astern throttle real fast and it would make a whale of a difference. That thing would really vibrate then.

[I would assume from the way you talked that neither you nor any of your crew ever really suffered any battle connected injuries, like from missile wounds or anything like that.]

Not in my space. No. Of course you talked about up above that five-inch shell a while ago. . . .

[And the torpedo.]

One seaman, I think it was, he might have been in aviation, I don't know what class. One of them got shot through the head with the machine gun off of what we called the "kingfisher" airplane. One of them got shot that way.

[Why did he get shot through the head for that?]

Well the prop and the machine gun were synchronized and it was loaded for fire. Evidently he had just come in, I'm not sure, and he had just come in from spotting.

[The prop mover was shot through the head, an unusual accident isn't it?]

It is, it is!

[Well, at any rate then, after your watch you'd go up and have lunch?]

Go to lunch and then go up on deck and get a little sunshine. One time the captain had to give an order for the engineers to go topside and get some sun because we would stay down in the hole most of the time so he made us go up top. At night time, when I came off watch at midnight, I'd get a blanket and a pillow and go up by the forward sixteen-inch guns and sleep on the deck until it was time to go on watch again or breakfast or whatever it was. That's the only way you could stay cool.

[How hot does it get down in the engine room?]

I don't remember ever seeing a thermometer or looking at one, but all of us had heat rash something terrible. I used to sleep with my hands locked above my head because my arms hurt under here a whole lot.

[In the pit of the arm?]

Yes, and we had prickly heat and the blisters and that stuff would give us a fit down in the hole.

[You had to live with it constantly.]

We were in the tropics mostly and it was hot down there.

[The ventilating system didn't really cut it?]

No, when you went into battle the smoke and the gun powder would come down the ventilator too. That would make it worse. It stuck in your pores, a little powder or something came down. The first year I was back at work at DuPont, I had the heat rash break out again and I went to first-aid and the nurse said it was the worst she had ever seen but she gave me something or other and it burned me up but I've never had it from that day to this. All of us had heat rash and prickly heat, all engineers.

[What kind of lunch would you normally have? Was there pretty good chow?]

Well, I thought we had good chow. Now there were times that we would get tired of one particular thing and we might not eat it. After a battle and holidays we had a big deal. I remember one time on a Sunday, we were at lunch and that day we had chicken and ice cream and different things and they had general quarters and the guys would just take the ice cream and put it between two slices of bread and call it an ice cream sandwich. I've seen that happen a number of times.

[It was those little squares of ice cream that they used to give. They served that a lot, didn't they?]

We could buy ice cream from the store quite often. We had anything that was necessary certainly.

[Do you remember when the boy got killed by the machine?]

No, I don't remember the time. I can't recall that one. I remember when we were in Ulithi when we were on the fantail, we were watching a movie and the two-man

subs got in on us. The HANCOCK, I think, was hit then and I believe they hit a tanker coming in and I think they got at least five two-man subs that night. One of them got hung-up there on the reefs trying to get in and some of them got in. That was one night I left the fantail and I had the number one engine jacking over in a little while before the officer got up on the battlestation. He walked around a while and came back and said, "I don't believe it is necessary to get ready that fast." Well if they wanted to go I was going to be ready. They actually didn't move capital ships; they would send a destroyer between them sounding and checking. All I can remember now is the five-inch shells and 20 MM. I believe that's about the most that hit us. We might have had some minor stuff.

[Who do you think was the most unforgettable person that you knew on the crew, officer or enlisted man? Someone that you just felt was the most interesting, either respected or because of personality or charisma or whatever?]

Well I certainly always thought a lot of Commander Maxwell, at that time, he was a commander. There were a number of enlisted men, in fact, there were any number of good men certainly. You'd find some few who you didn't care for too much. Some of those old coal miners from West Virginia and Kentucky and all, I used to buddy with and they used to tell some mighty tall tales. One in particular I remember, was let's see, he told me on a Sunday I think it was, just about time we got in the war. One of his buddies had already been called up in the army. He had been away and come home on leave and of course he was in his uniform and all of them got down by the railroad ties down the mountain and were drinking and talking and they got in an argument about unions. The soldier was giving them a fit because he didn't want the unions to strike while he had to fight. They got to drinking too much and they ran the soldier away and in a little while he came back with a double-barrel shotgun and two boxes of shells. He got up on a mountain behind a tree and

cut down on them and one guy had real thick glasses and one of the railroad ties piled up and one of them stuck up beyond the others and he got up and started to run when the guy shot at him and then the railroad ties struck him in the head and knocked him down when he hopped up he said, "Watch out men, he's got a thirty-eight, too." Down the mountain he went.

Things like that are real tall ones, just to pass the time.

[Who do you think was the most professional sailor officer or enlisted man aboard the ship?]

Well, one Jack Clemmons, of course, he was the one who really got the association going.

[He was a professional sailor who knew his job. What was his job?]

He was in damage control.

[What was his rank, do you remember?]

He was a chief, I think, he was a chief. I always had a lot of respect for him.

[The guy you would jump quickest when he hollered?]

Well, I didn't have that much to do with him. He was just a man you took to. You figured he knew what he was doing.

[Do you remember his full name? Jack Clemmons?]

No, he's dead now. His picture is around here in this little museum. He was one of the ones who originally got things going for the association so we could have our reunions and all. He died, I think of cancer. He lived here in North Carolina. Others? Well, there was Chief Blackus aboard when I first went aboard. I had a lot of respect for him. He was an old timer. He had been in the Navy for a good many years and then he was transferred and I don't know where he went.

[What about the engineering officer who relieved Maxwell?]

Oh yes, Mooney, D. A. Mooney. What did I say? J. J.? It is D. A. I had a lot of respect for him. Anytime you had a problem, math or anything, well he did different things. Just like an old professor, he'd stop and correct you and get



you lined-up. I had a lot of respect for him, especially one time. I think there were four or five of us at liberty in Honolulu and we went on deck for inspection before we went over and all of us were looking like a sailor-shined shoes and everything. I think that the inspecting officer had been out before and had a jag-on and he turned us down so we went to the commander and he went up there and we went ashore. There wasn't anything wrong with us.

[That was Mooney that you went to?]

Yes. D. A. Mooney, and he went up right then and I knew that we were going ashore. He looked out for us.

[Would you say, by and large, that this ship has always had the reputation of a very cooperative, enthusiastic crew? You know I have talked to everybody I could and I said, "Was there ever any serious problems of morale?" Everybody said no. Did you know of any serious problem of morale?]

No, I don't because a lot of little things came into it. One thing that the old man wanted for all of us was that we had plenty of water to take our showers with and stay clean. Generally we had good food. He would make us come up and get a little sunshine once in a while. I don't know of any real problems in morale. To me it was a working crew, that's what it was. You did a job, if there ever was any trouble that way I just don't know.

[Well, what do you think was probably your most unusual experience aboard?]

Well I guess our first battle was the most tense. The Gilbert's.

[The Gilbert invasion was in November, 1943.]

Right, I think that was the first one. We might have had an air attack or sighted a plane once in a while, but that was the first one I can think of. I don't know if Kwajelein came before that or not. I believe the Gilbert's were first. Makin is where we went. Of course the trouble was at Tarawa. I guess that was the

main thing, once you get one battle behind you or something like that, it is a little different then.

[The first time someone shoots at you is a lot different from the second time.]

It's bad everytime.

Well on the islands we had two dogs on the ship, maybe some of the others can tell you about it. They were on topside all the time. We had some chickens aboard, one time, too. They sold some of them in downtown Seattle when we got to the "States" at Bremerton Navy Yard. I think one dog died. I don't know what happened to the other one. There were two dogs on ship.

[Who took care of them, everybody?]

Somebody up here, you know, everybody.

[What kind of dogs were they, just dog-dogs?]

Just dogs as far as I know.

[How about the chicken? Who the heck was raising the chickens?]

I have forgotten how many but they had some chickens. I don't know whether they got them from New Hebrides or where. I believe it was New Hebrides, I'm not sure. No, we had some chickens aboard for a little while and sold them in Seattle.

[Were they pets?]

I guess they just brought them on board for pets or something, I don't know. Of course when we anchored in New Hebrides we used to go swimming. We'd put the torpedo nets out so we could swim inside.

[I understand this was one of the few ships that allowed swimming. You were anchored right by the WASHINGTON and they wouldn't let their crew swim?]

We did. There again, I think that had a lot to do with morale on board the ship.

[Did you come into contact with Commander Stryker?]

No, very seldom with the officers other than engineering. Of course, I knew him to see him, but that's about all.

When we went to Bremerton Navy Yard I had been in the Pacific two and a half years and the first time I got to the "States" I went home. I had fifteen days at home and then I came back and then I stayed until the war ended. We had one guy down in engineering and he was a regular Navy man. He and one of the younger boys, about seventeen years old, went over in Seattle and got liquored-up and went down the main street and they were laying in the gutter, both of them were "barking at the moon." They were loaded for bear.

[Did they get captain's mast or something?]

I don't know what happened. Somebody had to go get them out of the "jug" over there. But I don't know what happened to them. Then we would go into Pearl Harbor once in a while. I visited Pearl Harbor in Hawaii about nine years ago. I flew over and I didn't recognize anything. Everything is different.

You know when they were talking at breakfast this morning, it's hard to think of a lot of the things that happened in the past, all of a sudden like this. You'll start talking to these guys and all of a sudden things will come back. I did want to tell you about being in the honor guard for those guys who were buried on Tongatabu.

[How many of them were there?]

I think there were four.

[What kind of cemetery did they have there?]

Well, it was just a jungle deal right out in the jungle. The natives there built-up little houses above their graves. It is kind of built-up like down in New Orleans, similar to that. They would decorate them a whole lot. It was just jungle. I don't know whether they put a stone up later or anything or not later. One of the guys on the island with me, a guy named Simon, his girlfriend's cousin was one of those fellows, but I don't know the name. He wrote later and she had written him that he was burried on an island and they gave his name and of course he knew who it was.

[Where is your ancestral home?]

I was born in Amherst County, Virginia. I was born on Buffalo River at my grandfather's house. My grandfather had fifteen children, thirteen lived to be grown and married. He had two big houses joined together. He had a big farm. He was in the Civil War under Colonel Mosby. My other grandfather, Farrar, served on both sides. He was with Joseph Johnston in Mississippi and got captured. They put him, I believe Leavenworth was the federal prison then. Yes, and he escaped but he had to go through assistance to escape. When they caught him again, they told him if he'd guard Indians that they wouldn't put him back into prison, so he did. I have the old discharge, this old real thick old brown paper where they gave him a discharge as a corporal. He had to stay there until the end of the war.