

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #24.058

Max Jenkins

USS *NORTH CAROLINA* BATTLESHIP COLLECTION

No Date [c. 1975]

Interview #1

Interviewer is Capt. Ben Blee

[Max when did you come aboard the ship?]

January of 1942.

[So, that was pretty much early in the game, right?]

Yes sir.

[She was commissioned actually in April of 1941 and then in, were you in that group from boot camp that went straight from boot camp to the *NORTH CAROLINA*?]

Straight from boot camp, but we went to Miami, to Key West and then out to the ship that was anchored out.

[That night they stopped and picked you guys up on the way to the Canal, did you get your boot leave?]

No, no boot leave until 1941. It lasted to 1941. They were shipping everybody out in three weeks from boot camp.

[Where did you come aboard?]

Gulf of Mexico. Key West, Florida.

[They put in there?]

Yes sir, it was anchored out in the Gulf.

[And what was your assignment?]

The first division.

[What was their responsibility?]

Tour one, we had from the bow the starboard side back to frame fifty-five, back to the first five-inch turret.

[You were in the five-inch mount then?]

No, the sixteen inch. First division, turret one. This was my battle station. Best air raid shelter on the ship. I was trainer, right control station. We would stand by, the only way we would ever fire is if everything, the directors will be knocked out you know, but that wasn't my first battle station. I was down in the handling room passing out powder for my first battle station.

[Passing the powder?]

Passing the powder from the fifth deck.

[And what were the mechanics of your job?]

The circle in the powder room, it should have a circle and the scuttlebutts, the scuttlebutt and the powder comes out of the scuttlebutt into the circle and we pass it into the handling room. You know where they are standing up through the hoist to the gun turrets.

[The handling room was on the same level with you?]

Right on the same level, you just had the scuttlebutt which comes open and your powder comes down and we pass it. We grab it and we pass it through the yellow scuttlebutt into the handling room. We and that circle, you know.

[These are concentric circles where each one is blocked off by a wall so that if one bag of powder goes, the whole thing doesn't go, right?]

Right.

[You were in one of those circles?]

Yes sir.

[Pass on powder and not idea what was going on.]

No sir.

[What was your job on September 15, 1942 when the torpedo hit?]

I believe that was my job in the handling room then. It was my battle station.

[Where were you when the torpedo hit?]

I was standing between turret one and turret two. I was watching the *WASP* burning at the time.

[Did you see the torpedo coming?]

No sir.

[When it hit I guess you were very aware of the torpedo?]

All I heard was a ping, not even a loud sound. I got a little oil on my face and that was it. They sounded general quarters and the lights were out in the turret and a seventeen year old has got to go down in the gun turret and with the lights and doesn't know where and even the gun turret officer's voice was cracking because he was all young at the time and he didn't know if it was going to blow up or not. That was a hard thing to do and to go down in that turret and with battle lanterns and not knowing what is going on.

[Did you know any of the guys that were hurt or killed?]

One in damage control, Nelson, was in the pump station all the way in the fifth deck where my battle station was and we used to sneak down to the pump room and take a smoke. That is another section and just a little bit below the handling room and a lot of the guys would do it and it was all right, and he was a real nice fellow, the one that was killed and everybody admired him. He would give us a little break and let us take that smoke.

[Who was your boss?]

At that time?

[Yes, when you first came in? Who was the enlisted man you worked for and who was the officer?]

We called him "skinhead Edens." Martinal was the chief boatswain mate, the division boatswain mate at that time, Martinal.

[And he was in the turret?]

He was the division boatswain mate, you know, of the whole division. But then we had severance when you had the first division then you had a true deck force that takes care of the cleaning detail and then you have a crew from the first division, then their cleaning details is a gun turret. I was in the deck force swabbing the decks down.

[You didn't go on sky patrol or sky watch did you?]

Yes, I stood watch on the bridge, helmsman.

[No, I meant every morning you had the sky watch at sunrise.]

We had general quarters. I went to my battle stations.

[Did you go to your battle stations one hour before sunrise?]

Yes, everybody had to go to their battle stations an hour before, the whole crew.

[Actually, well what time did reveille go, about four-thirty or so?]

I don't remember. I think an hour before daylight.

[You just grabbed a cup of coffee and go. Well maybe there was coffee there for you or whatever.]

I don't think you had any coffee until chow call, unless you had a pot there or some of them had a coffee pot in your turret.

[So you just went and sat through an hour at duty station. You'd get up, brush your teeth, wash your face, hit your battle station, and stay for an hour. Then you wash down the deck?]

Or whatever your duties that you are suppose to do that day.

[And then you go to chow. Starting with say the average day like tell me that everything you remember about that day from the time you got up, not a day when something real good or bad happened when the boredom is really pinging on you. Tell me what time you got up and what you did. Where did you sleep?]

On the first division we and the compartment on the starboard side forward, you know that is where it was torpedoed. I mean we were on the opposite side of the second division where they were torpedoed. Second division was on the port side and we are on the starboard; first division that was our sleeping quarters that compartment there.

[What level?]

3<sup>rd</sup> Deck.

[How many bunks?]

Four high.

[Which one was yours?]

The bottom bunk.

[Is that good or bad?]

Oh, I guess good and bad. If someone sat on your bunk you might get a dirty bunk. You don't fall out of a bunk.

[O.k., so in the morning, who held reveille and how did they hold it?]

Gee whiz, they sounded reveille over the speaker.

[Bugle call? Boat swain's whistle?]

Reveille with a trumpet.

[Yeah, with a toot te ta toot etc. bugle call?]

Bugle call.

[Right, o.k. and then everyone bounded from their bunks cheerful, smiling.]

Heading for the head, you know, you know of course then you had to clean up and go to the second deck and line up for chow.

[No you go to chow before you go to battle station?]

Oh, I'm in the middle flank here now, no, at sea an hour before sunrise you go to general quarters.

[Reveille went over the mike.]

I don't remember if they sounded general quarters or they held reveille and we went to our battle stations an hour before sunrise, gee I can't remember. I was there almost four years and I can't remember.

[For some reason somebody got you up and you made a head call and you went to your battle station. And you stayed there how long?]

An hour before sunrise.

[Say, sunrise would be five, five-thirty. Something like that?]

Right.

[And you would stay on battle station until how long?]

And hour before sunrise and around five or five-thirty we would come from general quarters.

[You would stand down how long after sunrise?]

That would be the secure for general quarter.

[But what time was this?]

Five and five-thirty.

[And then what would you do? How would you normally dress at this stage of the game? Blue dungarees?]

Blue dungarees and blue hats, blue Dixie cups.

[And sneaks, or what kind of shoes? Leather?]

Black leather shoes, regulation navy shoes. No sneakers.

[And then you went to make another head call and then hit the chow line.]

Right. Sometimes we would send one guy up from the first division and get the line and then up and drag on him a little bit and then the headmaster at arms checked you.

[How did you get along with the master of arm's? Were they pretty good "Joes"? They were just trying to do their jobs.]

Oh, if you were trying to get by with something and they caught you they ain't the nicest fellow in the world.

[But they didn't go out of their way to harass you?]

No, they had a duty to do, a job to do.

[What did you have for chow and how was it?]

Well, chow was good on the *NORTH CAROLINA*. We had a plan-of-the-day for the week where you got a variety each day and it was something different. You know, Friday is your fish, and one day . . .

[Not for breakfast?]

Oh, for breakfast you had your eggs, usually scrambled, each morning would vary, hot cakes.

[Beans?]

No, we never had any beans in the morning. Not any grits either.

[No beans for breakfast, Wednesday and Saturday mornings?]

They had that apple, you know you had to have that apple.

[O.K. then, after chow call after you finished chow call then what would your normal routine be?]

You would go back to your compartment until time to turn to, whatever time it was to go to work.

[About what time was it?]

I believe that would be around seven-thirty, and our duties for the day.

[What did you personally do starting at seven-thirty say starting an average day?]

When I first went aboard it was cleaning the deck, shine bright wood, of course there were a few destroyers on the sea detail, rigging for destroyers and whatnot.

[For refueling?]

Working parties, there would be so many anything would come up for a working party there would be so many men designated from the first time all these divisions.

[Did you have a specific time each day that you trained on your job?]



Not as I recall.

[Well, did you have a specific time each week that you trained on your job?]

Whenever they sounded general quarters. Of course, the crew topside got a little bit more shaking down than we did because the anti-aircraft guns were flying at the sleeves they pull through the air. You know, and then they came out with the planes and the drones, the radio control, and they used those for anti-air-craft.

[What do you recall as being the most exciting day or event that happened to you? How long were you on the *NORTH CAROLINA*?]

Three years and eight months.

[For all practical purposes that was the war?]

Right.

[That was it. So what do you think during the entire war was probably the most exciting adventurous or memorable thing that happened to you?]

Oh, the torpedo would have to be the one that sticks out mostly in your mind. You didn't know if you were going to make it or not on that one.

[Were you there when the five-inch gun from the other ship hit?]

I was below deck I think and didn't know it happened.

[How about when they fired into the *KIDD*?]

The *KIDD*?

[Were you on then?]

Oh yes, I remember something about that.

[Do you remember some guys had some dogs and some other guys had some chickens?]

I took care of the dog, Lulu. The first division bought Lulu in Waikiki.

[What kind of dog was Lulu?]

He was a dog-dog and he got the mange and we had to shave him off you know and then one day they sounded general quarters and I put him in the locker and I didn't completely dog him down in the locker where they kept the swabs and buckets for cleaning detail. I put the dog in there and I had to do it real fast and I had to go to turret one and after we came out the sixteen-inch had fired and the doors on the locker had sprung from the concussion from the sixteen-inch and no dog. I thought, well that's the end of Lulu and a few minutes later here he comes running. I don't know how he got out of that. they guys used to like him you know when we would be swabbing the deck and the decks would be wet and the dog would come running and try to stop and he would slide about fifteen feet. He was a big pet for the first division.

[How big a dog was he?]

He was a small dog similar to a terrier, short ears though.

[Erect, pointy ears?]

Right. He was a good pet. Everybody fed him and petted him.

[What happened to him?]

When I left the ship, there were a few guys that had bought him and they told me if I gave them sixty-five dollars I could take the dog home. And I'm sorry to this day that I didn't. I had the old dog that was on the BB-55 so I don't know what happened to Lulu or who got Lulu.

[Somebody said some guys had some chickens.]

Some chickens? I never heard of anybody having chickens aboard. Sounds more like the Fourth or Fifth Division. We had a chicken in the First Division.

[Another thing that somebody said was that there was another dog. Said there were two dogs but one of them didn't last too long.]

I don't remember another dog.

[Do you have any pictures of Lulu?]

No, except in the books you know the *Showboat* book they gave us when they left the ship. He is in that twice. Then he is in the first division that I'm in. I'm holding the dog up in the first division book. You know the ones on the book we had.

[And they bought him in Pearl?]

Waikiki Beach.

[And they don't know what. Was he a little tiny puppy then?]

Right. I remember the name but it was some foreign.

[Was he a long haired dog?]

Short hair.

[In your impression of the crew, you know some crews seem to take on the whole . . . the crew is pretty much same way and I don't want to put any words in your mouth but some crews are surly crews, you know they just do anything that they have to and not anything else. Some crews can hardly wait to do something; they want to excel in everything. Some crews are just sort of mediocre in every sense of the word. How would you characterize you *NORTH CAROLINA* crew?]

I think it was a very proud ship. It wanted to be "the showboat." Everyone I think was proud of the ship. When it first went into the Pacific, we pulled into Los Angeles and even the sailors seeing the *NORTH CAROLINA* admired it. One of them said, "You on that ship? You on that *NORTH CAROLINA*?"

I said, "Yes sir." This was one sailor telling me they even admired it. You know, the first new battleship in the far power and the lines and even today. She's beautiful.

[She's a gorgeous ship, no question about that.]

[Of all the officers and enlisted men aboard the ship, who do you think not from a personal view point because I know you have buddies, but who do you think you admired the most either officer or enlisted; mainly because you trusted him, had confidence in him and respected him and would do precisely what he told you to because you knew it was right? I mean who is that guy? Was it a chief, was it a first class, was it an officer?]

Well in the officer line, I think everyone aboard ship most admired Captain Badger. When I stood watches on the bridge, I was able to talk to Captain Handlin. He asked me what I was going to do after the war and I appreciate that. He was a very nice fellow.

[I'm talking about the guys that gave you orders maybe from time to time. I doubt if Captain Badger ever gave you an order.]

No, No. I have to go to our division boatswain mate Spedarrow (?).

[He's here, isn't he?]

I don't believe so. I've never seen him.

[I've heard his name I don't know where.]

I think everyone's favorite chief boatswain mate was Dillonham (?) aboard ship. He was to an admired sailor aboard ship, Dillonham (?), chief boatswain mate. He was an old-timer at that time.

[Did you ever have contact with Commander Stryker?]

I saw Commander Stryker about four years ago. I went to his house in Alexandria.

[No, I mean when you were aboard ship?]

Oh yes, yes sir. When I was standing watches aboard the bridge, when I finally made a rate, I talked with Stryker.

[What was the top rank you attained?]

Cockswain, boatswain mate, third class.

[But you ran into him aboard ship. What was your impression of him?]

Stryker?

[Yes.]

Admired officer, he was tough, you know. He did a lot of walking I know that.

[He was around a lot, was he?]

I would like to say I saw Mr. Stryker about four years ago in Alexandria. He had a big home in Alexandria, Virginia. I went over and knocked on his door and I expected to see an old bent over gentleman coming out because I was seventeen when I went aboard and he looked younger than I did when he opened the door. I couldn't believe it.

[Someone told me that although it was a happy ship that . . .]

And a tight ship.

[. . . that also you guys got a chance to thumb your nose at other ships because somebody made it possible to do things that other ships just seem to withhold from their crew for nothing more than spite. The example he brought up was he said, for instance, when we were in the Hebrides we were the only ship up there that the crew could swim. The *WASHINGTON* was anchored in the next berth and he said we were out there swimming and having a hell of a good time and they said they couldn't. Do you remember anything like that?]

I don't remember that the other ships couldn't. I know they would have the catamaran they put around the torpedo net but they used to dive off the ship inside that. They were shark infested waters.

[Were you aboard when they fired the nineteen gun salvo?]

No, that was on the shakedown cruise that came aboard after we came back.

[Right, and you remember when they got in the business with the *USS KIDD* but you don't know any of the details.]

No, not any of the details.

[You don't remember any of the cake or any of that stuff?]

I remember fueling the *KIDD* because they had a pirate painted on the stack, you know, a picture of a pirate, Captain Kidd. We used to fuel that destroyer quite a bit.

[Very fortunate that nobody was hurt.]

[Do you ever remember one of the officers who was in either turret one or turret two and he had kind of a Greek name? there was a piece of a scuttlebutt around ship that he dropped some ashes on the deck of the bridge up there and Captain Badger made him get a dust pan and fox tail and clean it up. Do you remember anything about that?]

I remember sometime it was a red light out there and the officer of the deck couldn't see it and Badger about blew his top, you know, and he said something like if it was a bull's-eye and I don't remember the exact words.

[You don't remember that name Dianthopolus, some Greek name?]

Yes, I remember that name.

[Do you remember what it was?]

No, I don't.

[Someone was telling me he got transferred off a few months later he got promoted because he was the captain of the destroyer that came alongside for refueling.]

Is that right?

[You don't remember that?]

No.