

U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA BATTLESHIP COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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June 26, 1976

24,026
(1071)

[Jay, will you tell us when you enlisted in the Navy and when you were assigned to the U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA?]

Well, I was commissioned from the Merchant Marines in June of 1941 as a junior grade lieutenant in the supply corps. I reported to the NORTH CAROLINA the seventh of November, 1941 for training and duty. I was thinking that I was going to be sent to school - supply corps school which at that time was at Harvard. But they sent me to the fleet and I found out that I had sea experience, but the supply experience I had to learn myself. We had a very good supply officer, Commander A. B. Clark. He taught me an awful lot. He was transferred. We had another junior grade lieutenant by the name of Watts who took over. So, instead of having three stripes, we had two stripes and a half which amounted to three stripes. We were running the supply department. It was quite an experience trying to get used to the Navy ways after coming out of the Merchant Marines. But, you learn fast and you learn hard. Well, within a month or so I could call myself a fairly good officer. I was aboard the ship until April of 1943.

[April of 1943. . . so you were in during the battle of the Eastern Solomons aboard the ship and well oh you were there during the Marshall Islands campaign.]

We got up as far as Bougainville.

[Were you supply officer during the whole time you were aboard?]

Assistant supply officer, yes. Then I was transferred to an attack harbor vessel as a supply officer. In the meantime promotion came fast for lieutenants. I spent fourteen months aboard this AKA before being sent back to the States.

[Well, thinking back to your year and a half approximately that you were on the NORTH CAROLINA, what experiences or incidents stand out in your mind? Either combat or other type of duty?]

One thing really stands out. We had a commander from the British Royal Navy as an observer. In the conversations, he was saying that this was something like the fourth ship that he had been on as an observer. The other three had been sunk from under him. We didn't like that man around. We were torpedoed but fortunately we made it to port.

[He was on board when you were torpedoed?]

Yes. We also had a correspondent aboard from Colliers by the name of Norris who was one of the editors. After the air attack, he was transferred over to a tanker that fueled us to go back to the States to get back there by Christmas. We met him in Pearl Harbor after we got back and we had been torpedoed. He was a very unhappy man that he hadn't been aboard when it happened. He had missed it. What mostly sticks out in my mind are the people.

[Tell us about some of them.]

Well, he is now Admiral Maxwell, Bill Maxwell. At the time I reported aboard, he was a full lieutenant in the engine division. He was really an outstanding man. I understand he is not too well now.

Then there was Admiral Joe Stryker who was an outstanding man.

[Everyone seemed to have an impression of Stryker.]

Yes. Most of the officers. . . well, I say all of the officers aboard were outstanding. They took pride in being on the ship. They did a good job.

[Any particular incidents that you can remember that involved any of them?]

Now, this is thirty years ago. I can remember old Bill Maxwell, he could always get hold of some liquor and dates for us no matter what port we hit. He always seemed to be able to get hold of an automobile. He'd arrange some good beach parties for us.

[That helped the morale.]

We made an awful lot of men like chiefs who we had made into warrant officers

and from warrant officers we got regular commissions for them. All those men were outstanding. Otherwise, they would have never made it.

[Any particular supply problems that you experienced at this time?]

All I know is that the supplies came fairly good. We didn't have too much trouble. We could carry a lot of supplies aboard. Of course, we had to feed a lot of men. Mostly every port we hit had supplies. We could get what we needed.

[That time you were out for seventy-three days. Were you still on board then? I remember some of them complaining about the food getting low.]

It got low, but we still fed them. We were very careful at every port we hit to get toilet tissue. If you ran out of that you had a very unhappy ship. The toilet paper was always stored in three or four different places around the ship in case we got hit. Otherwise it would have all been gone like on that submarine. They didn't have it stored around and it all got wet and they couldn't use it. They had a very unhappy ship. The same thing happened on this AKA before I took over. I made inspection. There were 220 in the crew. They ordered soda crackers, saltines, for so many months. The list is made up of 2000 men. They forgot to divide and they say car load after car load of soda crackers were sent down. I went aboard about a year and a half after that happened and we still were up to our necks in soda crackers.

[Surprised that you didn't feed some of the fish.]

Well, you had to be careful because most everything was charged off except three things: your ship's store, your clothing and small stores, and provisions. You had to account for that.

[Because they are so easy to swipe.]

You were given so much per day to feed a man. You were allowed to make so much profit in your store, clothing and small stores. You had to break even and all that. But, all-in-all, it was quite an experience.

[Being a seaman from the Merchant Marine days and having been on other ships other than the NORTH CAROLINA, what is your impression of the NORTH CAROLINA? How did she shape up?]

Well, to take a grade from 1 to 10, and I'll give it a 100 (hundred). It is a wonderful ship. This other ship, the AKA, I saw more action than I saw on this ship, but it just wasn't the same because this is where I got my initiation into the Navy. It was fortunately with 'spit and polish'. I have cared ever since.

[During general quarters, as a supply officer during regular duty, what were your duties during combat?]

My duties were in the coding room, which is well below the waterline at radio one, right outside of radio one. When there were submarines around, it was a horrible sound to hear those depth charges go off. They would rumble right through the ship and you would think "there is water alongside of me and if it comes over my head I am surrounded by water."

[You really couldn't see any of the action that was going on. You could just hear it.]

No. I could just hear it. I gave Captain Blee a drawing that one of my storekeepers made of a Jap Zero with the fuselage that is cut out of the piece of the plane that we shot down. You saw that. That was in 1942. It was still in good shape. You might as well have it here as in a drawer at home. I also gave him the last peaceful Armstice Day Service that we had aboard, the program for it.

[Can you think of any other experiences or anecdotes here aboard the NORTH CAROLINA?]

Not too many, as I say it's been too long ago. Things half jell in your mind, and it is like a joke that you can't think of the punch line. You don't tell the joke. We had good shore parties. Incidentally, when I had the duties the weekend the

war started, the next weekend I had off was in 1944, which is a long time. I had two days leave in that time. Then I came back and had shore duty. I made up for it as a bachelor and war hero.

[Did you stay in and make a career of the Navy?]

I would have but I missed out by one year of age and fifteen days in rank. I think when they wanted something, they'd pull out my record and just keep it right out of my reach.

[So, you separated as a lieutenant?]

No. I came out as a full commander in 1949. That's when Mr. Johnson was Secretary of Defense and he threw about 90% of the officers out. He didn't throw us out; he just said we don't need you anymore. I went into the reserves. When I became sixty I retired from that.

[Any impressions that since you were an officer you probably had more contact with the ship commander than of course the enlisted men. Any particular impressions of Badger and Fort ?]

Badger was a very capable officer and very forcible. When he said something, you didn't question it. You knew it was right and you did it - no questions. Captain Fort was not quite as dynamic but he was a capable officer and Captain Baker was the same. The last captain of the ship, Captain O'Brien, I did duty with him later out in Astoria, Oregon. He was the CO of the Gunpoint Naval Station. I was with him as a reserve mate.

