

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Stan Shefveld

USS NORTH CAROLINA CREW REUNION

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Interview #1

I served aboard the NORTH CAROLINA from 1943 through 1946. My name is Stan Shefveld. I was with the fire control division, called the F-Division. My main responsibility was in the main battery department of the F-Division. I would like to share one of the interesting experiences that I had aboard the ship and probably one of the most frightening ones. It was the typhoon that we got caught in right off the Philippine Islands. You can imagine winds up to a hundred miles an hour beating around in an open sea. The particular ship that we are talking about--the NORTH CAROLINA--displays forty-five-thousand-ton weight. It bobbed us around just like a cork in the water. The maximum roll of this vessel was thirty-three plus degrees before it would capsize. At one time we went thirty plus degrees, which was within a matter of two degrees of actually laying us on the side. We did lose many destroyers, of course, during that time. I was stationed in what is called spot two, which is the main battery director aft. It's above turret three. It's about sixty to sixty-five feet above the waterline. I opened the hatch at the top of the director to take a look out to see how bad it was, and I got splashed in the face with salt water. That's

sixty feet of waves coming up over the ship, which is a tremendous amount of height and pressure. I just almost lost my breath; it was that much pressure. While in the director, before our large roll that we took, I made a pot of coffee, a little hot drink that we had up there and I called down in the tube down below us to change out and come up and have a cup of coffee. About that time is when we rolled about thirty some degrees. I lost coffee and coffee pot and everything else. I think the most fascinating thing was with a storm that intense that the next day when we looked out, the sea was just as calm as a gymnasium floor. There wasn't hardly a ripple. It was almost impossible to believe that a sea that can be that tremendously torn up by wind and the tremendous force that it energized and caused damages to our vessels could suddenly become just as calm as a floor. It was just fascinating to see this contrast in nature. The cleanup, of course, afterwards was tremendous with the amount of damage that had been done. Not only to our fleet but even on cleaning up the deck afterwards, where moorings had broken loose, and it was a mess to clean up afterwards. Another day or so the crew worked pretty hard to clean up. We were ready to go again.

[Did they come up to get their coffee?]

No. I think after that we were all so struck that nobody came up for coffee afterwards. We cleaned up the mess that was there and decided not to try it again, because you didn't know when you were going to go again.

[Now when you were going along in the sea on a regular day, on a normal day, could you feel the motion of the waters moving you?]

Not too much on a normal sea, you could, of course, like I said in that particular storm the ship would hit the wake between two waves and when it come down it was just

like an explosion. It just would hit. Even when you were sleeping--my sleeping area was four decks below--you would hear the ship cracking and groaning. Just like a tremendous explosion going on for sixty _____. There was such an air pocket of contact between those two waves.

[Would it make a BANG when the ship would then hit the water or the waves?]

Right, it would come up and it would hit--it was actually a concussion between the two. There would be a wave here and a wave here and the ship would come up and drop down. It was such a tremendous one. As I mentioned, as I was talking to the group yesterday, that there were times when they could not steer the ship. The rudders were out of the water and their colors(?) were out of the water. It was such a tremendous force. So it was almost impossible to steer the ship. It is a miracle there wasn't more actual collisions because of that.

[Do you remember how long this typhoon lasted. Was it like eight hours?]

It was either twenty-four or twenty-eight hours. It was over a day's time. Pretty close to twenty-eight hours.

[Did you eat during that time?]

Yes. The tables were tied down. You had sandwiches and nothing hot and nothing loose on your tray. You held your tray with one hand. There was a lot who were not able to eat. I was fortunate I didn't lose it, but there were a lot of them that weren't able to eat because there were a lot of seasick sailors. All the tables in the mess hall were tied with a rope to the poles. It was just a limited number that we could use.

[When you slept in your bunks, they would have those clips that would pretty much tie you in.]

It kind of kept you in and you hoped that you wouldn't roll out.

[Did you sleep too?]

I slept some. We were on watch and we were always concerned. Of course, before the next roll, we didn't have quite the (tape ended.)