

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OH0024-044

LCOR William Rogers, USN (Ret.)

USS NORTH CAROLINA BATTLESHIP MEMORIAL

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Interview #1

[Interviewer is Kim Sincox.]

(This is William Rogers's wife.)

[Tell me about turret number two.]

I was the turret officer from 1942 through 1943. I was the assistant turret officer when the ship was commissioned. Then I became the turret officer and second division officer.

[This is the lower projectile deck.]

This deck, the lower projectile, was sheet metal or stainless steel. They kept it real shiny so they could slide the projectiles across so they could load them. This part, of course, rotated.

[The center ring rotated.]

They used these to . . .

[The capstans.]

Where is the lift?

[Right there. There is the hoist.]

That is how they hoisted the mount up. Now in the center is where the outer hoist

is.

[One level down below.]

Yes, but they came up the center. You can see some of that when they get up above.

(You can go through here I see.)

[That is where the machinery. We will go one more below and then you can see them.]

Somewhere off of this is where the trainer and pointer were. They guys that elevated the guns. One level up.

[Actually two levels up. This is the lower projectile deck, then there was the upper projectile deck and then there is the electric deck or the pan floor, where they are supposed to be.]

They were down real low, below where I was stationed.

[Of course, we have these figures and we are real pleased that they turned out so well.]

(Isn't that great. I tell you, all the hours of work.)

These things right here . . .

[The carriers.]

Yes, the carriers where they brought them on. They lifted them loading the ammunition. Well, they got some of the pictures there which is good.

[Some of these are _____, we had these made after real plans.]

Now there were two different weights of shells. There was one for firing against ships which are called armor-piercing and then you add another shell which was lighter and I think it was painted green and that was the bombardment shell.

[Yes. High capacity.]

They weighed slightly less.

[About 1900 lbs.]

The others about 2500 lbs. That is something that people should know about. There are two different loads.

[I did explain that, the armor-piercing and high capacity and when you use each one and how you told the difference. This is from one of the manuals that told the different colors.]

(Magnificent job that you have told this pictorial visual.)

There is the chain hoist where they brought then in from up above. Right over there.

(The thing that brought them on to the ship you mean. I see. I remember the time when you would come ashore and you would tell me that they were loading ammunition today.)

Yes or unloading. That was a pain.

[Unloading must have been a pain. I read in some one diary that before Iwo Jima unloading the armor piercing and putting on so many high capacity.]

When I was on, we hadn't come to this. We were just starting to think about bombardment. All we had was the regular armor piercing. When I went and first sat in the South Pacific with her.

[At first, they just had all those armor piercing.]

Right. We didn't have a bombardment.

[I guess when they decided the strategy of the war was going to be more bombardment.]

(Was this after Pearl Harbor, right after you got out of Pearl Harbor when you joined the first task force.)

Yes. The first task force. That is where we are. Do you have any questions?

[I know the floor was coated with a light oil of some sort that made it easier to slide.]

Did I say it was a shiny stainless steel, real shiny so you could slide these things.

(And this rotated.)

[Yes, this rotated and this rotates, too.]

This is the whole turret right here. This is the rotating part of the turret.

(Oh, I see.)

I am still trying to figure out, I can't remember exactly where the pointer.

[They should have been . . . we are on this level and this is the projectile storage above us. They were supposed to be on this level. If you worked in the gun house, they were below you on this level.]

Yes. That is what I am saying. They could see anything. That was the surprising thing. One guy was called the pointer and the other was the transfers and all they did was follow a dial.

(The directions were given from up here?)

Either that or from up on spot one.

(On the bridge.)

Spot one took care of some of the directions.

[Do you remember if they manned only one. From what I can tell from the records they only seemed to man only one of these decks at a time. The two storage decks with the

projectiles. They seemed to only man one at a time.]

I am not real sure. I was mainly up above all of the time. I think you are right. It probably was only one.

(Was that because of the lack of personnel to handle more than that, or you don't know?)

[You probably didn't need any more.]

(You moved from one area to another.)

[I guess otherwise you would probably jam up those hoists. The people above are using the same hoist and you would probably get it all jammed or something.]

As you can see, you have got a tremendous amount of shells that are stacked double all the way around this ring. You have still got a lot of shell.

[Someone said they thought that you put all of one kind of projectile on one deck and another kind on another deck. If you are shore bombardment, you would meet on one level and if you are aiming at a ship, you would be at a different level. That made sense.]

(It did.)

From the design of the ship, the mission of the ship changed when they started going to these amphibious landings and the old battleships were strictly for fighting another ship.

(Sea warfare.)

Sea warfare. And that time had gone and that is how we got into so many engagements because we supported all these different landings.

[That is where the shore bombardment came in.]

Right. That is why the ship is really . . . the mission of the ship really changed.

[They thought it was going to encounter other ships more.]

(Actually at the time of Pearl Harbor, you were sent out into the Atlantic to hunt for the TIRPITZ, which was the leading German battleship at that time.)

That was before we came around to the west coast.

(That was before they decided to bring them around to the South Pacific. But the Bay of Pearl Harbor, you left New York Navy Yard to go search for a sea battle with the TIRPITZ.)

Well, to be prepared because they hadn't really decided what we were going to do.

[Also they thought you might hunt the TIRPITZ.]

(That is what they were during, supposedly.)

We went up to Portland, Maine and stayed up there for a while. They weren't sure but then all of a sudden we got the word to go west. Let's move on.

[We can go down to the Mezzanine. This is the Mezzanine level that only turret two has.]

This is where the powder went. The powder went in there.

[These are paddle hoist just like the others are projectile hoist. There is one elevator for each gun.]

Yes. There was one elevator. Below this level as I recall was the magazines.

[They are on that level. Actually there are a couple on this level. You can't see them. But there are some magazines through there. We will go through them. We have three of them open. The concept of having silhouettes was my idea, but my volunteer who is an artist thought about . . . I bet we could heat them a bend them. It was his idea to do them like this. He is very talented. The company that makes the material gave it to us. This is the first time anybody has ever tried this with that material. Here you can see a

projectile on its way up after it has come through strike down, it is on its way up. It keeps going up.]

Yes.

(What was it that fell on the one ring that I had given you.)

The carrier.

No. I am not sure. I think it was the powder gun.

[I know one of the crew members was killed by one of the carriers falling on him. In the beginning of one of the shakedown cruises.]

I didn't lose any. I only lost two guys when we got torpedoed. One in the berthing quarters. The best we can determine was that he was trying to save a guy who was caught in the shower and he got locked in.

[When they flooded it, he drowned.]

He drowned. I had one guy who was right outside turret two main deck. A guy was manning a twenty-millimeter. He was blown over the side.

(He was in your division.)

They both were in my division. We buried them out in the South Pacific, in the Tunga area. We went in there to drop them off, we didn't bury them at sea. We were on our way back to Pearl. I used to help before I became a division officer, I was assistant division officer. When we loaded up our first load of ammunition, I was down in the handling room loading up the cans full of powder for the sailors.

[We have cans on display, so you can tell us about that.]

This is what I was telling Captain Taussig yesterday when that second turret blew up on the island. It was surprising to me in reading the thing was that they only put five bags.

We always loaded six bags. You also notice this being what it is, it can't spark.

[That fascinated me.]

That is so that you wouldn't have any sparks.

(What was his thought about in the investigation . . .)

They said that he never really knew. I still felt that from my experience from two years in this turret, there was a spark up there sometimes.

[You can tell they really shined up all the brass. It looks very good.]

I forget what the decking was here.

[I was told that it was brass. The grooves are brass.]

So there would be no spark.

[Do you remember if it, was this also silver. It was all unpainted, so you would have seen the brass then.]

Yes. It was all unpainted.

(Captain Taussig is one of Jack's classmates from the Academy, he just made seventy. We went to his seventieth birthday and he still works as the assistant secretary to the secretary of the navy.)

[I heard him speak yesterday.]

(At his age, it is amazing.)

[This is the poor guy who also served as the hoist men. He was in there by himself, all locked up. On the ____ explosion, I heard about that, he said the flame could have gone down and he would have been just like that. A very lonely position, I think.]

The interesting part began as teamwork. Basically when we were at general quarters, I was always up in the gun hatch. The only time I ever saw this operating is when

we loaded or unloaded ammunition.

[That was part of your duties to overlook it?]

I just came down here to be with the guys.

(I saw some of them last night at the party. Some of the ones.)

[Tell me, I know there is a story about second division. You were an officer, you might not have known about when they were trying to find those binoculars. Do you remember that story?]

No. All I know is that I heard it last night. I had heard it once before. Not long after I left they caught two guys and the general court martialed them for having a still in this turret.

[They had a still in this turret?]

(Didn't they call it torpedo juice?)

They called it that. They set up an actual still.

[Talk about dangerous. Did they know how flammable alcohol is? I hadn't heard that one.]

The reason they got caught was because some guy decided to go on watch and he was half smashed. He was about to go up on the bridge. The Captain saw him staggering around.

[That was when they found out where he was getting his supply.]

(What about the binoculars? You hadn't heard that, what was the story?)

[The story was that the binoculars was that the Captain, I guess, was really strict. They found out during inventory they were missing something else.]

[This must have been awfully crowded in here, in the angular space.]

Drill bag. These were drill bags.

[Yes. The drill bags were stored in here because they would be safe and wouldn't catch on fire.]

(What did they call them?)

Drill bags. We had competition between the three guns and how fast they could load. I think one of my crews, I recall, would load a box in eighteen to twenty seconds.

[That is amazing. They would load a gun in eighteen to twenty seconds. That is better, they are supposed to be two a minute.]

We used to have competition when we had these loading drills.

[So you would have a practice session and they would time?]

Yes. They would time.

[Do you remember if they rewarded any kind of prizes?]

(No.)

No. Just the camaraderie.

(The amazing thing was that Jack was the second turret officer, the first turret officer was there and the third turret officer was there. Captain Ned Garrett and Captain Bill Affy (?).)

He was an assistant.

[Goodness. I know this is how they came down.]

She goes down three. The powder storage is down below there. Watch your head here.

[Here is one of the magazines. These canisters are larger because they are the ones from the honorable class because that is what we happen to have.]

They carried three bags each, you know. I got working so that when one other guy, he and I would load these things. That was when I was still a high assistant. That is when I thought it nice that I was willing to come down here.

[Do you remember how you got them up?]

They had a collar. There should be a chain.

[They had a collar that they could attach to them.]

They had a collar to come down.

[And hook around them, right. Kind of like those carriers.]

They came vertical. Then you have all these stacks.

[The same artist who did the figures had the concept for doing this.]

These things smell full of ether.

[That is what I was told.]

Oh, yes. The ether in them was just fantastic. One of the trials, the first trial firing of number two, we only had one hoist available and it so happened Walter Winchell was in the turret and these white bags came through smelling of this ether. I thought that poor old Walter was going to pass out right there. We passed them through by hand into each gun, because we only had one hoist at the time.

[So when you had that big nineteen gun salvo, or was it before that?]

It was before that.

[I heard that the magazines wreaked of ether. Do you remember if anyone ever passed out?]

Not that I heard of. No I don't think so. Again you see that you have the brass so that you don't see any sparks. Again I am not sure about the decking. The decking we are

walking on.

[I imagine it wasn't painted either, I guess. Nothing else was.]

I don't really recall.

[We have our topper here taking the top off the cans.]

There should be a hoist around here somewhere where they come down.

[There was the one they were looking at. There is two of them. The division was about a hundred and twenty-five. When we went to general quarters. We picked up at least another twenty-five so that the total compliment was about a hundred and fifty. It was ____ and other people that were assigned down here.

[I was going to ask, in the regulations, it said that some of the stewards' mates were assigned here. That would have been blacks, right? They would have been in the magazines. I read where they were assigned to the magazines. Do you remember?]

Yes.

[So there were some stewards mates?]

Well, I call them mess attendants.

[Mess attendants and they were black attendants.]

(And Filipinos.)

Yes Filipinos.

[Some Filipinos also.]

I don't remember exactly, but the mess attendants, we had some guys that were real freshmen, not freshmen, apprentice seamen. That is not what brought the compliment up. That was the unusual thing about the island was the fact that they only could fire one gun at a time. We always, from the time that we went into commission, once we started getting

our full complement, all three guns got loaded.

[You had a lot more people.]

Yes. We were twenty-five, twenty-four hundred people versus fifteen hundred.

[You were at war or getting ready.]

Which way do we go now?

[Through this way.]

I think seeing it this way and then working your way up is better.

[Watch your head.]

There is what Joe was talking about.

[Three different _____, there is your shell and your six-powder bag.]

(All the way down as it goes in.)

[Having powder bags made for the, this one is armed with the armored cruiser. The little tiny, was a 42 lb. ball, believe it or not, but it is a 40 lb. ball went with the ship of the line. This is the largest in each one _____. You can see how much bigger they got.]

We tried to bring this out yesterday.

** NOTE: The remainder of the interview consists of a tour of the USS NORTH CAROLINA BATTLESHIP.