

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #24.049

Thomas M. McAlone

USS *NORTH CAROLINA* Battleship Collection

October 5, 1992

Interview #1

Interviewer is Capt. Ben Blee

[What are the dates that you served on the ship?]

March 30, 1942, to December 15, 1945.

[Where was your battle station?]

Damage control. That would be up in officers' country. Below deck.

[What did you actually do on damage control?]

Well, I had the ear phones.

[Taking reports from the bridge?]

Yes. Taking reports from the bridge if we were being attacked or something like that.

What part of our ship that was hit, we were supposed to take care of that part of the ship. There were five of us in that part of the ship at the time.

[Where and what was your duty station?]

Master at arms.

[Exactly how did you do that?]

Well to the best of my ability. No problems. Treated everybody the way I wanted to be treated. When the chief said do something, I had to do it. Like put somebody on report or something; that was my job. I did my job.

[Did the master at arms ever do any shore duty?]

No. I never did. They have master at arms in the service on the beach. Mine was all abroad ship.

[What was your rating and rank?]

First class boatswain mate.

[Under what circumstances did you become a member of the United States Navy?]

I joined of my own free will.

[Any particular reason why?]

I always wanted to go into the service.

[Versus the Army, Air Corps.]

Always wanted to go into the Navy, when the war started I went in.

[What did you do for fun and recreation?]

Well, did a little drinking and fighting, a few girls now and then. Mostly bars when we got liberty.

[What particular battle experience stands out in your mind?]

When we were torpedoed on September 15. I was on watch that day with sky control when the *WASP* got hit, the *USS WASP*, the carrier. It was hit that day and was sunk. We got hit the same day. That was with a torpedo. That was the scariest experience I ever had.

[What is sky control?]

That is super structure, all the way at the top. They had lookouts up there. I was on watch that day, at that particular time that it happened. I saw the *WASP* on fire; I reported it to the officer that it looked like a plane had crashed onto the carrier. About that time, another torpedo hit it. It looked like it come out of the water. We made a hard port turn, and we got hit.

[How long did you stay up there during this engagement?]

Well, we went to general quarters right away. Then I went from there back aft to my battle station.

[What was your favorite liberty port and why?]

All of them. Just to get off the ship and relax. Do a little drinking, chase a few women now and then, you know.

[What were your holidays like on the ship?]

Very nice. We had nice dinners. Turkey on Christmas and Thanksgiving. Cigarettes. They give you cigarettes and cigars and stuff like that. Pumpkin pie. Very nice. Lonesome, but nice.

[What did you like or dislike about the ship?]

Really, nothing. It was my home as far as I was concerned. I enjoyed it. Scary at times, but it was still home for four years. It was just like family. The whole crew. We were all family. Very few squabbles. If there was any grievance, you settled it with gloves. I had to put a few in the brig, but not my doings. I was told to do it. So I had to lock them up.

[How does one go about putting someone in the brig?]

Well, the chief master at arms will be with you. He is the one that files the report of what happened. They may have given him some back talk or lip or something. Until they had their court-martial or whatever it was, they would be in the brig. Except if you were in the war zone.

If you were in the war zone, we had like a cage upstairs topside on the back of the ship where we put them. We wouldn't leave them below deck. Everything we did--the master at arms did--we were told to do.

[Who were your favorite officers or ones that you disliked?]

My favorite officer was Commander Stryker. He was a fine man. Instead of prisoners most of the time in our brig, we had beer. That was for recreation parties. He was a fine man. He was my favorite. He was the commanding officer.

[Can you describe any funny incidents?]

Yes. I can. It was me. I came back off of liberty one morning in the after mess hall; we had a ladder that we went down into the ship. A guy said, "Why don't you play p-38?" I dove down the ladder. I was drunk then and I didn't feel, I really didn't feel nothing to the next day. I went right on down the ladder on my stomach. Shot right in the mess hall.

[Do any damage to yourself?]

No.

[Can you describe the relationship between officers and crew?]

I think maybe a few of them had a grievance against an officer. Most of them were fine. They treated us with respect and we treated them with respect. You had to at times like that, because we were all doing the same thing for the same cause.

[Can you tell us about black sailors?]

I was in charge of the stewards aboard ship. To me they were as good as I was. I treated them with respect and they treated me with respect.

[How many were there?]

I think there was about fifteen of them. They worked at the officers' mess. We always got along fine. It was my duty to wake them in the morning for general quarters. Never had no problems.

[What did you and your shipmates consider good luck or bad luck?]

Well, coming out of there alive to me was good luck. The Good Lord was looking after all of us. To me that was lucky.

[Were there any superstitions particular to the USS *NORTH CAROLINA*?]

Not that I know of. I don't think so.

[Thank you very much, sir.]