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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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I want to take this opportunity to use this tape and jot down a few words about the memories I had on the U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA from September, 1943 to February, 1946 when I was discharged from the Navy. I remember the first time I saw the U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA. It was in Pearl Harbor in 1943 in September. I reported aboard for duty. It was at night. I went aboard. It was at dry dock. It was being repaired from a torpedo hit that had happened earlier down in the Pacific during the War. I saw the ship and went aboard. They brought us down in some trucks; quite a few new men were being drafted on this ship. I went aboard and reported in to the master of arms who took us down to the mess hall. We had to sleep down there on the mess hall deck a couple of nights before we were assigned to divisions. They gave us a speech about taking care of water, conserving water, and about the ship's routine. They told us that we would eventually be assigned to divisions. A few days later I was assigned to the 4th Division, deck division.

I remember the division petty officer was Butch Soborter, 2nd class boatswain mate. I'd been on the ship a day or so, hadn't been indoctrinated. The division PO hadn't had time to get us fully indoctrinated to the ship's routine, and what was expected of us and where we worked, and all. One night about 10:30, 2230 hours, we were laying in the bunk, and they sounded general quarters. The division petty officer came around and everybody was running and out of their bunks, all excited and everything. I was sitting up on the side of my bunk, and he said, "Go to your battlestation." I told him I didn't have a battlestation. So, anyway no more was said. Some of the newer men left the compartment. A few of the newer men like myself just stayed in our compartment. General quarters lasted about a half hour or so. The next morning, I read in the newspaper printed in Pearl Harbor where a Japanese plane had been seen over Pearl that night.

Everything was fairly routine from then on. They checked us into the division. They told us about our battlestations. I was assigned a battlestation on "Heavy One", a 40 MM gun up on the starboard bow of the ship. I was assigned to stand one of the wary watches in the sky control. Of course, I worked in the 1st division deck department.

After that, I don't remember dates and exactly where we went. A lot of the stuff that they have been talking about here, I don't even remember the dates it happened. It got to where time sort of stood still for me. I didn't keep up with the time or even the dates. I remember a lot of times the things that happened and the way it happened. I remember some of the people. I think of them from time to time.

We went on down in the Pacific after we left the dry dock, the yards, I believe it was an island named Eniwetok, I don't know, it might not have been that island. I don't remember exactly. I guess the first time any enemy action took place to speak of, we had a lot of drills on our battlestations with loading the guns and practicing. Of course they were trying to break in the new men, plus keep the older crew members on their toes. We were sitting one night at general quarters. A bogey had been reported on the radar. I was sitting up on the deck. We were standing easy at our guns by the battlestations. This must have been about 2300 hours. A marine detachment was assigned to the 20 MM guns, the 4th division personnel was assigned to the 40 MM guns, and I think the 5th division had the five-inch mounts and the 6th division had the sixteen-inch turrets. The 7th division was the Marine Corps. I remember I was sitting easy at our gun stations and all of a sudden this marine jumped up and commenced firing this 20 MM gun. The sky lit up with a light out there. A plane hit the water. It was burning. I saw the gasoline burning on the water. I don't know how he knew that this was an enemy plane or how it was there. He must have seen the exhaust. Everybody was excited and talking about it, but I don't remember the details involved.

I remember Saipan. I believe the cruise book called it "Turkey Day at Saipan". This was on Thanksgiving. I remember being down there in the mess hall and I had me a big old brown turkey leg. I was getting ready to sit down at the mess table. I believe I was in number 7 mess hall at that time. They set "condition one" in the anti-craft battery. Of course I just sat my tray like the other men did up on the table and ran up to the general quarter stations. Shortly thereof, the sky just seemed to turn black. All the ships around were just firing into the air. I didn't actually see any planes, but evidently they were out there. I was too busy loading. I was first loader on my gun mount there. I was too busy loading that. We were firing too. So I didn't have time to look up. I was just trying to do my job the best I could like everybody else was doing. I guess everybody was doing a good job. Nobody complained. The gun was firing with all the rest of them. Quite a bit of shooting was going on. Quite a bit of excitement. I don't think I was really scared. I was excited and kind of nervous. I don't know really how I felt. But nobody complained any about being scared that anything was going to happen to them. Everybody did their job well.

I remember the U. S. S. FRANKLIN. It was up ahead of us when a suicide plane hit it. I remember the men in the water floating down the side of our ship as we came up behind them. I remember one strange thought I had about one incident there; a man had his life jacket on and he was floating in the water. Of course, there were several bodies in the water. Some of the men seemed to be moving around, some hurt really bad, and some possibly dead. Some were probably dead. There was this man there with his stomach all bloody and messed up. I looked down at him. I seemed to pay more attention to him than I did to the rest of them. It impressed on my mind. I thought how useless he looked. I didn't feel sorry for him. Of course, I hated to see what happened. I just felt that he looked useless. That's the feeling I had

the best that I can describe it. I remember the ship was burning real bad. I remember when the cruiser came alongside of it and took their fire hoses and poured water over on it. The FRANKLIN was listing very heavily the last I remember of us being with it.

I remember Iwo Jima. We went down there to Iwo Jima and it was early one morning. We first started the bombardment of the island. I was up on the gun mount at that time. I believe I was assigned to "heavy fifteen" over turret three. I remember it was early one morning they fired the sixteen-inch guns on the island. It must have been bombed by airplanes before that. I don't remember. I remember there was fire over on the island, a lot of smoke. I remember the LST's coming up to the island and firing rockets off of them. You could see them firing rockets off of them and the phosphorus shells exploding. It was a mess over there. I remember the bomber planes and dive bombers coming in with all that smoke; they would come in and some of them would dive and you could see the bombs fall out of the planes. They'd fly away. Sometimes the plane would come in and dive down; you would see where shells would explode close to it, anti-aircraft shells. I was wondering how the Japanese could survive in all that fire over there and still be able to shoot those planes. Actually some of them were shot down. You could see them when they were shot down. They would go spinning and fall right down. They wouldn't pull out of the dive. I remember when the marines landed there. We were using the sixteen-inch guns, and bombarding the island. We would go down one side of the island of Iwo Jima. I was very tired and so were some of the other men. We couldn't get up on our gun mounts. We just lay down on the deck. We were just standing by with some of the anti-aircraft guns. We lay down under the rear end, underneath the sixteen-inch turrets while they were firing. I remember the unburned powder would come out of the gun after it fired and blow back on us. We'd sleep a bit and then we would wake up of course when they were fired, but the noise wasn't all that bad. It sounded like a distant thunder from these sixteen-inch guns. It wasn't quite as bad as these five-inch and the machine gun battery, 20 and 40 MM's. This went on for some time. When the ship would change course,

there was a group of ships there, I don't quite remember their names. I believe the U. S. S. WASHINGTON was there. They'd change course and come back up this side of the island. They would sound the warning bell on the turret and we would know that they were going to swing the turret around. We get up and go around the other side of the turret and lay down on the deck, and go to sleep. At Iwo Jima, I remember down in the mess hall for days to come after that, they had a mock-up map of the island over there they had made. They had flags on it showing how much the enemy had been pushed back on the island. It showed the shape of the island, and outlay of it. You could go down there every day and see what changes they had made. Even after we left the island you could see these changes. I remember later on seeing a movie in the mess hall, a newsreel about the battle the marines had over on the island. It was made through the slit of a tank.

I remember another time there, burials at sea, burial of the personnel at sea. I was back on "heavy fifteen" over turret three at this time, and the captain made an announcement. Before he made his announcement, a suicide plane had come in and one of our own destroyers, all the ships I think were firing at it. If I remember correctly, we were firing at the plane. But anyway, one of our destroyers was firing at this plane, he fired too low, and the shell hit the number 4 five-inch director up on our port side of the NORTH CAROLINA. Of course, I didn't know anything about it at that time. A lot of people didn't. After it was over the captain came on and made an announcement that some of our shipmates were killed. Later on we knew the details of what had happened. They were buried at sea. I remember standing watches at the sky control lookout. I was up there at the sky control watch when these personnel were buried at sea. I looked over and watched the chaplain and heard the ceremony, and saw the men dropped over the side during the burial.

I remember having to work very hard on ammunition working parties. Sometimes I thought I could go no longer, but hung in there until the job was done. We had

these commissary working parties. They'd call away seven men from each of the first six deck divisions to bring stores out of the storage room up to the commissary issuing room. Sometimes we'd get these parties. Different people would be assigned to them at different times. They'd get these petty officers to make sure the work was distributed fairly. It was pretty hard work so they would only send us down once in a while when our turn came to go. That is the reason that I didn't get my picture taken for the ship's cruise book. I think if I remember correctly, I was working on the commissary working party at that time and the petty officer in charge didn't want to let me off the detail to let me go up and change clothes and go back to have the picture made. He said it wouldn't be fair to the other personnel working there. On the working parties, it wouldn't be fair if some of us were to take off. So I didn't push the issue any further. So consequently, I didn't get my picture taken for the ship's cruise taken with the 4th Division.

I remember the food. You'd stand in the chow line for a long time but the food was good. I remember drinking hot tea in hot weather out there, but it was good. I remember the coffee that they served was really good coffee except when it got cold. Then, it was awful tasting coffee. As long as it was steaming hot, it was fine, but let it cool off and it was almost unbearable to taste. I was there with the ship's crew members a couple of times. They were talking about the old timers. They were talking about the battles they had had in which the ship was involved. I believe it was the Solomon Island. This was before I came aboard.

I remember the boatswain mate. He was a seaman at that time I believe. His name was Bus. He was talking about they had 50 caliber machine guns that sat up on the fan tail. They were firing at these Japanese planes that had come in. He said one of them got really low. He looked up and he remembered telling the men that that Japanese pilot was a woman. He knew it was a woman. I remember him saying that one man was shot directly through the head with a machine gun from the airplane. Must

have been a 50 caliber of whatever they used at that time. I remember another man, he was talking about how the planes looked when they were shot down, describing the war in general. Of course, you were told these things before. I saw the end of the war myself. There were stories of a man working on a plane and the machine gun went off and shot him through the head. I've heard stories of this nature. It didn't happen while I was on there. Lt. Barken was the air defense officer. He used to be the watch officer in charge of sky control in the air defense battery, machine gun battery, during our watch hours at times. Marine Captain Wilson was a watch officer in sky control. I got to know these men very well. You'd stand watches on four hours. You'd take turns on our lookout sector. We had two men assigned to each sector. Certain sectors that covered the whole circle of the ship --the whole 360 degrees. We'd watch for a half of an hour, and then we'd take a half of an hour break during the four hour period. We'd be off watch eight hours and come back on for four more hours. A lot of times we'd be very tired. We would be on a watch from maybe midnight to four in the morning and come down and shortly thereafter they'd have us fueling destroyers or washing decks over. They always kept us busy . . . a lot of work to do. We'd have to fuel from a tanker, or something like that. You got very little sleep. I've actually gone on my gun stations like some of the other men. I've seen them do it. You'd lay down as soon as you could get a break. I'd hang my arms over the gun's shield and just dose off. I would go to sleep standing up. When we were resting easy and were allowed to, we'd lay down on top of one of the forty MM boxes and get some sleep anywhere we could. Of course, you still had to be close by so whenever the man would tell you to man our stations we'd be right there ready to go. People who stood watches on these 40 MM guns and gun mounts in condition three watches had it a little easier I think than they did in sky control because each man I think had one turn on a four hour watch to stand by a telephone.

They could kind of relieve each other and the rest of them could lay right down on the deck and sleep. We don't do that in sky control. I stood watch up there, and a few more men from the 4th Division were assigned to what they called the "L" Division which was actually a lookout division. They had it a little easier in their work and got more rest than people assigned to deck duty. I remember complaining about that, but not that it did any good. We were wearing dungarees on yard liberty in Honolulu in Pearl Harbor. On the yard, I used to like to go over there and get a pint of ice cream in a cardboard box. It would taste sort of like cardboard, but it was good when you'd just come out of the Pacific. I would go out there and get under a tree and go to sleep in the yard. I didn't care too much about Honolulu the town; it didn't appeal to me very much. It wasn't very interesting. There were a lot of tattoo parlors up there. People were trying to take pictures. A lot of sailors on liberty were trying to find something to drink and a little entertainment for relaxing purposes. We had movies down in mess hall number 7. I remember when in port and anchored out, they would have movies on the fantail. Deck divisions and what they called the duty divisions had to take time out to rig the movies on the fantail. One incident one morning about reveille, I was standing in the chow line for breakfast, I looked out and the ship was anchored, I think this was in Eniwetok or Ulithi, I don't remember exactly. I looked out and there was a ship that was burning and they passed word for general quarters. I understood later on that there was a Japanese submarine that slipped in there and torpedoed it. So some of the ships got underway and as to whether the submarine was sunk or anything, I don't know.

I remember on the fantail they had two OSU-2 planes, airplanes. They would land when they would come in from flight operations; they would land in the water and taxi up behind the stern of the ship. We would swing the cranes out, I believe the 6th



Division took care of this, and pick them up out of the water and put them on the catapults. We'd fire off these catapults with some kind of powder charge. They would use the planes for spotting the sixteen-inch guns. They would give back radio reports of where the shells were hitting at, exploding at, how close they were to the target.

Of course, I was just a seventeen year old kid when I first went aboard the U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA. I was under twenty when I left it. It seemed to me that everything that had happened to me in my life up to the date that I went on there was awfully boring. Of course, I stayed pretty busy. We had a lot of work; but in between time, I had a lot of time to think, especially while standing watches. It was an awfully boring, monotonous type of life.

I remember after we came back to Seattle, Washington and had the ship's propeller repaired or the shaft problem, propeller shaft trouble, I didn't want to go back to the Pacific and neither did anyone else. We weren't scared of the war or nothing like that. It was just the monotony and the boredom and the misery of the day to day living out there. The weather was awfully hot. I know when I was assigned to mess cooking detail in the mess hall, I had a job like the other men had had which they call the "tray runner". You'd take these metal trays we'd eat from and take them to the scullery and stack them back in the rack for the people who would come through the chow line to pick up and go up and get their food in. I remember carrying them. It was awfully hard work and hot. I remember sweating under my clothes where I'd pull these trays up against my stomach. I would get hot and they would breakout in what they call prickly heat. It actually turned into what they call ringworm. So, I went to sickbay. The corpsman down there would put some methylate or would put some type of medicine treatment on it and send me back to duty. This was just like putting clear water over the infection because it didn't really help

anything. The only thing that helped was whenever you'd change jobs and get to where it was cool. They had no air conditioning on the ship, especially in the mess halls and the living quarters. I remember that. It was awfully miserable at times. I used to like to lay down on topside and sleep where they had a breeze when the ship was underway. I got to where I would just lie down anywhere to get a little sleep just like the other men.

I got infection in my feet from the heat and they still give me some trouble at times when the weather gets hot. I don't like to visit Florida or any tropical country because of the heat and what I remember that happened to me in the Pacific and the misery that was out there. I guess some people don't complain about this problem. I don't like the heat because it makes me think about a pretty miserable life altogether. I remember being assigned to a side cleaning detail. I can't remember the petty officer in charge of this detail, but I knew he was from North Carolina. He was a likeable type fellow. We were painting the side of the ship with camouflage paint on it. We painted the whole ship, and of course we worked from daylight to dark. Certain men were assigned to this detail three months at a time. A really dirty job this side cleaning was. Of course, you'd get a little break when you'd get underway, but you'd still work around the gear locker where we kept our equipment and stuff and kept that up to shape. We'd hit port and over the side we'd go and start painting and cleaning the side of the ship. I reckon it was a pretty miserable life for an unrated man, or at least from my point of view. There were other people who had better jobs and some had worse. Unfortunately, some men were killed on the ship as I mentioned earlier. I guess to just sum it up, it was necessary in the hazards of that type of war.

I put a cruise over in Vietnam, but I didn't go to Korea, even though I was in the service at that time. I don't think any of it struck me or even the news from it as being anything close to being like it was in the Pacific in World War II.

I remember running into a storm down in the South China Sea. I was standing watches up in the sky control. The waves would come over so heavy over the ship's bow. They would even at times slosh right over the number 2 turret sixteen-inch gun. You could look out and some of the destroyers in the convoy couldn't be seen at times. Sometimes it looked just like it was completely covered by the waves. Water was coming over the flight deck on some of the carriers. At times, I've seen the mechanics push airplanes, not at this particular time, but later on during the cruises. They'd push airplanes off the fantail of these carriers. They'd come in and they were damaged beyond repair. I remember seeing them do it.

I remember a destroyer, HANCOCK, was taking on fuel from a carrier, refueling from a carrier and a suicide plane hit it on the fantail. I remember seeing the smoke over there. I don't know what happened. I heard about it later. I believe the story like this in the ship's cruise book.

I can remember some of the personnel on the ship. Lieutenant Barkin and Captain Wilson. I remember a friend of mine from Phoenix, Arizona, Fernando Lopez, boatswain mate 2nd class, Shephard Scotter, boatswain mate 3rd class, and there are various other people . . . . I remember one man whose name was W. T. Russell. He used to complain about the Navy . . . . that he'd never join it again. He'd really cut it down. He got to be ship's serviceman. We'd sit up on a "ready box", 40 MM ammunition "ready box", and talk about the Navy and back home. He was from Nashville, Tennessee fairly close to where I was from. In 1947, I decided I'd re-enlist in the Navy. I went down to the recruiting office in Nashville, Tennessee and who did I see? You guessed it, there was W. T. Russell right there waiting to re-enlist in the Navy. He'd done it the same time I did. We both went to Green Coast Springs, Florida together. I haven't seen the man since. I kept wondering how many other men re-enlisted in the Navy. I stayed in for twenty-five years. I retired on July 10, 1969, chief boatswain mate.

I remember before the war was over there was a man named Keiser, a seaman in the 4th Division. He was on "heavy fifteen." He was a "JA talker" or telephone talker, stand-by telephone talker. A message came over and everybody was talking and sort of having a little fun. He wanted to keep us quiet because the message was coming over. It was something about an unusual type bomb or heavy explosion that had happened to Japan. But it didn't make sense to anybody there, and we made fun of him a little bit. He kind of got mad about it. A little later on we learned that the first atomic bomb had been exploded which was bringing Japan down to her knees at the end of the war. I remember that captain made an announcement one night when I was laying in my bunk. He made an announcement about Japan. A radio message had been received that Japan said that if they could have their own government under certain terms that the people would agree to surrender. He told us to go on like nothing had happened until further orders came in. So, we'd act like the war was still going on. Nothing had changed. He was just making a message as he received it. Everybody was happy. A man came through earlier and woke me up. One of my friends there and the man told me that the message had come in. I don't know how the word got out that Japan wanted to surrender. This thrilled me. I was glad of it. The rumor got around before the captain made the official announcement. That made us happy and I wasn't very sleepy after that.

Some nights there I used to stand on the fantail and supervise the chow line, and keep people from doing what we called "dragging it" in the chow line. That means if you had a friend in the chow line, you'd just walk right in front of him and nobody would say anything about this. It wasn't fair, but they would do that. It just got to be where everybody was doing this, and we were back there to keep this from happening. Just little routines like that made life what it was on the U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA.

I had been assigned the mail sentry detail. In other words, in the ward room the officers would open the mail when you'd write a letter. You would just put it in an envelope and drop it into a box where the officers could glance over it and cut out anything there that may hurt the security of the ship of the Navy. They could mark it out where it could not be readable in case the enemy got a hold of it or perhaps the wrong people. Then he could put it back into the envelope and mail it to the party. This would be signed over to the seaman who would sign for it and pass it through the machine and seal it up. They'd drop it in a bag and carry it down to the post officer after they got the mail censored and it would be mailed off.

One nice thing about the tankers coming alongside you'd usually know that you were going to have a mail call. Even though at that time, I didn't get much mail I was always glad to get a letter from my grandma or my aunt. I didn't have any girlfriends at the time when I left home. They were to come later after the war, not that I knew about it at that time. We were wanting the war to get over with. In fact, I would have liked it and other people would too. They wanted to really get more involved in it. If we were going to survive, we'd survive and if we didn't, we didn't. The main thing was to get it over with. I just wanted to get back to the hills of Tennessee. I didn't know exactly what type work I was going to do at that time. I had made no plans then. I just knew I was wanting to get off the NORTH CAROLINA, get out of the war, get back home, and pick up where I cut off at. I remember feeling proud. I had a lot of pride in the NORTH CAROLINA even with the type of job I had. I felt that the war was necessary. I had no regrets of doing it.

