

During my 14 month tour of duty aboard BB57 I went through all of the engagements and experiences of the SoDak after it left Bremerton, WA in 1944 until it was placed in mothballs at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard in 1946.

Many experiences remain vivid in my memory such as watching the aircraft carriers Princeton, Bunker Hill, and Randolph explode and burn for hours after having been hit by kamikazes or bombs. The Princeton was the only carrier that was actually sunk and it was voluntarily torpedoed by our own destroyers since it was damaged beyond repair. The Bunker Hill and Randolph both returned to the States under their own power. I was amazed at the courage and bravery of the men who stood on the decks of those ships assisting wounded and to those others of damage control who fought the fires and explosions without regard to their own lives and safety.

Being actively involved in the bombardments of Iwo Jima, Okinawa, the Philippines and the Homeland of Japan were also never to be forgotten experiences as well as transiting the Panama Canal after leaving Tokyo Bay. Ours was the first ship to fire on the homeland of Japan as we were flagship to the admiral of the operation.

Riding out typhoons will always hold a spot in one's memory. We rode through several of them and I used to go up into the superstructure and watch as we listed towards the water and then wondered if we were going to right ourselves or just keep on rolling over. I was thankful for not being on a destroyer in those times as destroyers looked to be completely out of the water in one instant and completely submerged in another. I understand we did lose three destroyers in the typhoon off Okinawa while on our way home after the war.

Three other experiences forever to remain in my memory are as follows:

After being secured from battle stations (mine was in a 16" powder magazine) I always went topside to watch the planes return to their carriers. Some of the planes were quite badly damaged and it was amazing that they were able to land on the carrier with maybe parts of a wing or tail section completely gone. It was a trick for Japanese pilots to follow our planes back to the fleet and I happened to see one plane peel out of formation and dive toward the carrier Essex. It dropped a bomb missing the carrier and flew straight towards *BB57*. I could see his bullets strafing the water so I dived under the number two turret. Our entire port side anti-aircraft battery opened fire at him and as he crossed over the ship the starboard side opened up. I still can not believe that we missed him, but as one of our carrier planes followed in pursuit we knocked off part of his landing gear. The pilot waggled his wings to let us know he was friendly so we ceased fire. We were told that our planes did get the enemy plane somewhere over the horizon.

One time we were handling the 3 or 4" lines on the main deck (I think we were recovering paravanes) when a huge wave came over the bow hitting us. It washed me backwards to the life line and another sailor was pushed back against me. Fortunately the lifeline stopped our slide and the wave subsided in time or there would have been two men overboard.

When we were in enemy waters we usually stood 5" projectiles on the deck, inside the mount, to be easily accessible for rapid firing in case of attack. We lashed the projectiles down with a line, but we happened to be in very rough waters while I was standing watch in the mount, and the projectiles got loose and began to roll back and forth banging against the steel bulkheads. Those of us inside the mount (except for one sailor who said, "Let's get the hell out of here!" and made an exit out the hatch) were down on our hands and knees trying to scoop in and hold as many of the projectiles as possible. The timing mechanisms were protected by caps, but it would

have been difficult to convince any one of us in that mount that there was no danger of their exploding. After it was all over those projectiles were thrown overboard rather than firing them because of the danger that the timing mechanism might possibly have been changed and they might have exploded prematurely after leaving the gun barrel.

My hat is off to damage control and the rescue units aboard the USS South Dakota too. It took superb action, courage, and bravery to get things under control after the explosion we had in the number 2 turret powder magazine while taking on ammunition from an ammunition ship. They were groping around in dark smoke filled holds and passageways helping their comrades topside to the fresh air. Not knowing where the problem was or what to do I was among those sailors ready to abandon ship in an instant.

Sincerely yours,

Donavan Charles