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(Note: This is an excerpt from George's memoirs written by his daughter, Karen (Anderson) Boduch)

BATTLES IN E-DIVISION

Me and the Kamikaze Pilot – Face to Face

During one battle I vividly recall wearing the headset – listening and communicating from the exterior deck. The sky was filled with smoke and dotted with black marks from gunfire. The sound of the Dakota's gunfire deafening, causing her to actually move 11 feet sideways at the discharge of all the 16" guns.

A Kamikaze pilot was roaring straight toward me. As he strafed his gunfire, I froze where I stood. His bullets strafed the bulkhead (metal) of the ship vertically on either side of my body and as his plane roared just over my head, we faced each other straight on. I swear we could have reached out and shook hands. His face was young, maybe younger than mine and his eyes were surrounded with black goggles. His bullets had cut my phone cord as he passed over me. Shaking, I breathed a sigh of relief, amazed that I was still alive as the battle continued to rage on around me. I composed myself to the extent possible, grabbed another headset with a cord, and returned to duty.

Explosion Below Deck

Another hair-raising experience occurred on May 06, 1945 during a re-arming procedure. While on duty below deck at a steering station, a Coxswain and myself were near a 16" powder keg that was assumably ignited by static electricity causing the keg to explode as well as four additional tanks. We heard a whooshing sound – like sand being tossed against the bulkhead. The explosion caused flames to burst into our area and I immediately dogged-down the door. The crew flooded Turret No. 2 magazines (an ammunition storage area) with water. An announcement was made to prepare to abandon ship and six destroyers rushed to our aid – three on either side of us. That day we lost three men – killed instantly; eight more died later of injuries; 24 others experienced wounds.

Only through the efficient efforts of our courageous and highly capable men, the fire was extinguished, the damage repaired and the South Dakota pressed on. We sailed to Guam on May 11th.

A Zero Sneaks In

One morning when in the South Pacific waters, the South Dakota together with aircraft carriers, our planes were coming back in formation from a mission preparing to land on the carriers. Unbeknown to us or to our planes, the last plane in the formation was a Zero that had slipped into the formation unnoticed from behind and followed the formation of our planes back to their ships.

After the majority of the planes either landed or passed and went up to try to land again, the Zero dropped a bomb directly on the deck of the aircraft carrier (possibly the U.S.S. Enterprise) and flew off in triumph. General Quarters sounded and we stood helplessly watching the smoke billow up. The carrier was damaged but okay.

From that point on, policy was set that, there were two destroyers out about one mile and the planes were instructed to come in between the two, while other ships within the area tracked them.

The Dud Torpedo

What started out as another clear, bright and tropical sky in the South Pacific didn't last. Enemy fighter planes were sighted on radar, prompting the announcement of the order over the speaker system: "General Quarters! – All Hands! All Hands! – Man Your Battle Stations!" As always, we could hear their roar, as they grew closer. The big guns fired – the 5", the 40mm., and the 20mm. No matter where anyone might have been on the ship, the machine-gun, or automatic weapon-type sound of the 20mm. was telltale that they were right on top of us. Outfitted with headset and on duty as a member of Repair Party 7, I was standing at my station on the second deck when a Kamikaze was heading in for us. As he approached, he dropped a torpedo about 15' in front of me. I braced myself as it came down and raced toward the Dakota, until it collided with the bulkhead. I clenched my teeth and told myself, this is it. But, nothing. Nothing happened. Realizing it had been a dud; I was flooded with relief and was well aware of myself breathing again. Then, it was back to duty as that battle continued for about another 30 minutes.

The Difference In War Between Hollywood and Reality

You know, really talking about those times makes you think about it all over again. My friend Charlie Sauro [he was on the Cruiser U.S.S. Quincy CA-71], and I were invited by the Barnstable Middle School (Hyannis, Mass.) to speak with and be interviewed by their seventh grade students. So, in preparation we'd talked a lot about the war for a few days prior to that day. Vividly, it brought it all up to mind again. We found ourselves reflecting about experiences that had been buried away and hadn't even been thought about for decades. A night or so prior to that interview at that Middle School, Charlie and I agreed, we didn't sleep as well as usual.

What is difficult for me to comprehend is how people today seem to be interested – almost excited – in so much of the "bloody" incidents. That's what they seem to want to hear about... the killing – killing – killing. People need to understand what war is. War is not entertainment. It's horrible. Look that word up in the dictionary.

There were some *really bad* times. Gruesome things, just too hard to talk about, even now.

ONE THING. One thing happened that I'll tell you a little of, but that's IT. I'm NOT going to talk about it again.

We had lost a lot of men after one particularly long battle, the aftermath of which left spirits down, the mood somber. We were all trying to re-group and re-establish order. That involved having to collect the bodies and body parts of the men who had been killed. No amount of training can prepare a man for such a sorrowful, exhausting and sickening task.

The strong salt air rolled away numerous tell tale smells of battle still present. Without too much conversation, one could hear the sound of heavy footsteps on the metal ladders as we worked. Up and down, up and down, up and down the ladders, carrying and stacking the bodies and body parts, on the deck. There were so many. They seemed to be stacked so high in the pile. You couldn't think too much about what you were actually doing. You just did it – for one week.

I was climbing back up a ladder and was suddenly startled as I came upon a body part – a sailor’s head – lying on the top step in front of me. I felt as if I’d been electrocuted. Every nerve in my body was jolted. I was numb. I couldn’t use that ladder for more than a month.

And, that’s it. I’m not going to talk about that again.

That wasn’t Hollywood. **That was horror. That was WAR.**