



Submitted by Jeannie Sweet, daughter of Bernis Keller.

As with most men of his era, he doesn't really want any recognition. He simply wants to tell the story—of men who fought for their country and the ship that was their home for all those many months. The ship is the U.S. South Dakota. The man behind the story is B.H. Keller. Together, history was made and a war won.

On August 22, 1942, I enlisted in the Navy. After a three-week boot camp, I caught a merchant ship to Pearl Harbor where I was assigned to the USS South Dakota. I was assigned to a gunnery gang, loading 57 pound shells into five inch 38 twin mounted guns. The main task was to defend the carrier Enterprise. This was the first time in naval history a battleship had been given such a mission.

Although most of the men on the South Dakota had little or no active naval experience, they quickly distinguished themselves in combat at the Battle of Santa Cruz, where 32 enemy aircraft were shot down.

The USS South Dakota participated in 13 major battles including the Marshall Islands, Luzon and Iwo Jima operations. I was there for it all. I served 37 months on the South Dakota, 35 of them on active overseas duty.

I was there in Tokyo Bay when the Japanese signed the peace treaty officially ending WWII.

After returning stateside following the war, a young officer asked me if I wanted to re-enlist. "I said," 'sir,, I respect that stripe you have on your sleeve, but you know that man up on the bridge that they call captain, I wouldn't re-enlist for his bars."

The USS South Dakota carried 114 officers and 2240 enlisted men during WWII. Ninety-Five of those men were killed in action. I, as a twenty-three-year-old Seaman 1st Class came home. And the USS South Dakota became the most decorated battleship of World War II.