

(Exerts from the history of the last two years of the Dakota at war, untold, and personal stories of sailors and Terry Barge, of the sailors serving on her fighting decks and inside her huge hull)

The Dakota had yet to do any bombarding with the big guns on my shift. We crossed the Equator several times in the two years. The first time we crossed we pollywogs were initiated by those that had already crossed the Equator. This is a very degrading experience and I must have blanked out most of it from my mind, except one, and that was where I had to kiss an old salt's belly button that was smeared with some kind of foul smelling grease. So much for that.

I've talked about no air conditioning as such for crew members. That's not entirely true. All over the main deck of the Dakota there are numerous things standing up about five feet and maybe 30 inches in diameter that are called air scoops. Top-side air was forced through most all of the areas of the interior of the ship by the thrust of the ship being underway. The problem is that the heat below decks, in the 70 and 80 degree heat in the South Pacific can be horrific. It took me some time in my sleeping bunk to realize that a six inch aluminum tube had holes cut in it by some of the crew right where their bunks were. I had soon cut my own hole. Even then, at times it was still unbearable. At serious times and if the weather was foul above deck, I took my blanket about amidships in a main passageway that had a very large fresh air duct. It was a little wider than the standard passage ways so I spent many nights sleeping on my blanket there. I was ignored by passing traffic and I ignored them. Also, when the weather was great top-side, and it was 90 percent of the time, I would sleep topside. I really can't describe the beautiful Pacific, day or night. I saw some sharks, a whale or two and amazing flying fish that flew maybe six inches off the water for long runs and disappeared under water to another emergence. The nights were unbelievable beautiful and the moons, I swear, were twice the size of ours on the South Dakota prairie. At night I could stand on the fantail and watch the florescence in the water in our wake for hours. I had to laugh one beautiful day top-side. You could see forever in every direction and the sea was as flat as a pool table. Off in the distance came a little cloud. I made a point of looking in every direction for any other clouds. There wasn't a one, let alone one that looked to be the size of a tennis court, and it was raining under it. I watched it for a very long time, until it went out of sight, still raining. It reminded me of a cartoon in our paper back home. I believe it was 'Hl Abnor, where every once in a while there would be this guy walking around with a little cloud over his head and it was always raining on him.

I must say something here about the sailors assigned to what was called Fire Control. An extremely focused and trained bunch on every ship. Think about this for instance. On the Dakota there was a compliment of about 2,500 living bodies at sea. It is no stretch to say that the Fire Control people hold the lives of everyone on the ship in their hands. They are very good at it. Superbly trained and constantly drilled aboard ship. In my safe little powder room I never knew when we had taken a hit. With every hit there is a fire of one degree or another. In the 4 years that the Dakota was on the front lines it took more than just a few hits. Many times coming out of the powder room after the all clear, I could smell smoke coming from somewhere aboard. I don't see a Fireman today that I don't think of that and the hives they are responsible for. On one occasion of an air attack on our fleet, we on the Dakota had been given the all clear some of us went topside to look around.

What we saw was that pretty much the whole flight deck of one of our small converted carriers was engulfed in flames. The Fire Control crews were pushing planes off the rear of the flight deck; some of them with the pilots still in them. The pilots in the water were being picked up by our destroyers. I don't remember if it was this particular carrier or another converted carrier that had been seriously damaged and was burning, dead in the water, but the crew was taken off by destroyers and the carrier was scuttled to prevent the enemy from getting at some of the new technology and war plans aboard.

One day I went into the head (that's what the Navy calls a toilet) to relieve myself. The head actually consisted of a trough running the full length of the head, about 30 feet. It had about three inches of fast moving sea water running through it. Very efficient. On the trough there were three foot sections with open fronts that did offer some degree of privacy. I was comfortably seated, about center, when all of a sudden I heard some rather naughty words and the sound of splashing water coming from near the water entry area. I leaned out far enough to see a sailor with his pants at half mast coming down the line dipping his hands in the water at every stall. When he got to me I clamped my legs together as he, raced on by, splashing and dipping at every remaining stall. When he reached the end he uttered some more naughty words that told me he was unsuccessful in catching his billfold that had fallen in the water.

Soon after we anchored we were notified that the formal surrender signing would not be held on the Battleship South Dakota as it was expected to be. Instead, it would take place on the brand new, never fired a shot, Battleship Missouri. We were all devastated. The President, Harry Truman, was from Missouri and he made that call and that's all there was too it. The Missouri had just slid off its blocks into the Atlantic. It was some two weeks reaching Tokyo Bay through the Panama Canal. So we waited. Surprisingly, we on the Dakota were given shore leave to go into Yokohama.

Surprising because there was no protection for us ashore, not even our Shore Patrol. But a small group of us went anyway. We were issued a few Japanese Yen as if we were going shopping, and I did. We were warned to stay together in a group. When our shore boat docked we did huddle together for a time. There was an old man and an old lady standing on a street corner staring at us. Reminded me of going to a zoo and staring at the animals. There were no young people in sight at all, for obvious reasons. At the right of us there was a block or two of what appeared to be business buildings, all boarded up. You couldn't tell what was to the left of us at all. Looked like a gravel or dirt street; no curbs, no gutters. The group took off to the right toward the boarded up business buildings. I took off to the left by myself; always a loner. I hadn't seen anything to be frightened of yet. I came upon a series of little stands about 10 feet square each. There were old people in them standing behind counters vending an odd variety of stuff for sale. The old people looked at me and showed no feelings one way or another. I bought a Japanese army cap at one stall and, a Victrola record that was playing at another stall. It was a woman singing Japanese of course, but it was the weirdest sound I've ever heard. Many years after the war those souvenirs ended up, along with my Grandfather's Colt 45, at the bottom of Bad River in Ft Pierre, SD. Again, that's another story.