

“Man Your Battle Stations”

... Recalling times spent aboard by USS South Dakota, General Quarters

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While serving aboard the USS South Dakota, my battle station was called a “General Quarters Station.” It was located in the after diesel engine room on the fourth or fifth deck below the main deck. My area of responsibility was in the diesel engine room in the #2 emergency pump room. My function was to switch on the pump and either by opening or closing different valves, I could remove water from flooded lower tanks or flood the tanks. I was in contact by phone with an area called Damage Control Central. Pump Rooms #1 and #2 were to be used to control the ship’s buoyancy in the event of being struck by torpedoes, bombs, or if we ran

over a reef, and also to help keep the ship level so it could operate its main battery guns in order to continue firing at an enemy during engagements.

During the Santa Cruz air battle, what scared me most was wondering how I would get out if we were forced to abandon ship. During the battle, when the ship’s guns were firing, we were almost overcome by the smell of gunpowder. The deafening sound of the 5” guns and 20 and 40 mm anti-aircraft guns was coming down the air vent into the engine room. This vent was necessary because when the diesel engines were running, plenty of air was needed. To this day I can still recall the sound of gunfire and the smell of powder coming down the vent.

During the air battle, the engine was never turned on, but it was used during the Guadalcanal night battle of November 13-15. We were hit many times during this engagement and one such hit caused one of the switchboards to short out. It took the chief machinist mate at least three attempts before the diesel engine finally kicked in. Power was off throughout the ship, except for the “battle emergency lights.” This was definitely a scary few minutes, waiting for the engines to start!

During both engagements, I never had to turn on the engine room pumps, but had the need arisen we would have been prepared since we frequently ran General Quarters Damage Control drills, during which we practiced running pumps and flooding various tanks, to control flooding and buoyancy.

Another frightening experience was when the ship first stopped in “Tongotabu,” as we called it, to take on fuel and more ammo for our anti-aircraft guns. This was in August 1942. Someone goofed in their weight calculations, probably forgetting to figure in the new added weight, which made us sit lower in the water, and we struck a reef. To all of us in the General Quarters

engine room, it felt like we were hit. The deck plates did a dance as we passed over the reef, but fortunately only our outer hull opened up. The divers in my division couldn't tell how bad the opening was because of the oil leaking in the water. We were sent to Pearl Harbor and into dry dock for a week while repairs were made.

After repairs were completed, we joined up with the USS *Enterprise* and her group. A second group with the *Hornet* got engaged in what became known as the Santa Cruz air battles. The *Hornet* group was attacked first and the *Hornet* was lost. Our group found a rain squall that hid our location for a while but eventually our group also came under attack. We were protecting the *Enterprise* and in so doing were given credit for shooting down 32 planes. From this battle on, we became known as "Battleship X" so that the Japanese would not be able to identify how many new ships the Navy had.

I also recall how the destroyer *Smith* used our high speed wake to put out a bow fire where a Japanese plane crashed. The *Smith* turned into our wake, which put out the fire.