

Joseph J. Begley
Radarman Second Class (?)
Oral History
July 6, 2001

Harry Thompson: This is an interview with Mr. Joseph Begley, a crewmember of the battleship USS South Dakota, conducted by Harry Thompson on July 6, 2001, at the Ramkota Hotel in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, during the reunion of the crew of the battleship. If you would, state your name and residence.

Joseph Begley: My name is Joseph J. Begley. My residence is Rosedale, New York.

Thompson: Could you tell us a little about how it was that you came to enlist in the Navy.

Begley: When I was a young feller, an uncle of mine was in the Navy. I think he was on the New York and the Texas. In Manhattan, we used to go down--the Navy ships used to park in the Hudson River--so we'd go down and they took us out on the Navy launches in the morning, and we'd come back in the afternoon, after lunch. I just liked being on a Navy ship. So as soon as the war broke out, I figured to myself, I'm not going into--I was twenty-one, I knew I was gonna get called soon, because they were drafting for the Army, so I signed up in the Navy. December 31, New Year's Eve, down at 90 Church Street. And I was accepted. And the next time I was called for the Navy was January 23, 1942. Went to Penn Station, stayed there with my mother and girlfriend. They had no trains, and they finally sent us all home. We were supposed to go to Newport, Rhode Island, but they didn't have equipment at that time, so they called me February 9 to report down to the East River down by the Battery (?), and I went aboard a night liner up to Newport, with about a thousand other guys. We slept in bunks and landed the next morning up in Newport. Changed clothes from civilian and became a--

Thompson: A sailor.

Begley: A half-sailor. Just breaking in. Didn't know anything about it.

Thompson: How long was your training there?

Begley: From February 10th to March 19th. The 20th I went down to Philly to board the South Dakota.

Thompson: So you boarded the South Dakota in Philadelphia.

Begley: That day she was being commissioned, and there was so many people there--1,900 fellows came down as far as I know from Newport, Rhode Island. And all the New York area guys, like Delaware, Connecticut, they said anybody that wanted to go home could go home until Monday morning. So I went home. The other half, from Pittsburgh and all out there, they stayed and went aboard ship. We didn't. Cuz they couldn't put us all up there with all the dignitaries around.

Thompson: So are you a plank holder?

Begley: I guess. I didn't stand up out there, but I am. The guys who are plank holders were on the ship when she went down the runway to hit the water. That's early.

Thompson: That's real early. You're about as early as it comes.

Begley: They called us pollywogs at the time. We had nineteen hundred of us. The old-timers were on the ship before me. They had brought it from Camden into Philly.

Thompson: What was the nature of your duties aboard the South Dakota?

Begley: Monday morning, which would be--the 21st was Saturday, 22nd was Sunday, 23rd I came aboard, and I was put in First Division. They went alphabetically, and my name was B

so I was in the First Division. The sixteen-inch gun mount was my battle station while I was on the ship. I only lasted there until about May. In the meantime they were putting radar aboard the ship. It was something new, and they gave a test on the ship, and some of the guys in the First Division said, "Let's take this test," and I went along with them. Took the test, and I was the only one that passed. So here I am in the radar division. I go up there, it's all old-timers that worked in radio equipment. I didn't even know how to turn the radio on. We didn't have radio in them days. So I said, "Gee, I don't know if I like it here." The commanding officer of that division said, "Don't worry, Begley, you'll be all right." So I was in the radar division. They were bringing the equipment aboard. They were putting all the antennas on.

Thompson: You were right on the cutting edge of technology.

Begley: The division was. We had twenty-seven men in the radar division.

Thompson: Did you stay in the radar division throughout your service?

Begley: I did. All the way. Guadalcanal, Savo Island. I was assigned as an operator in the transmitter room, with all the equipment, underneath the director of the radar. The watches I stood was in the director. We had one radar set and four or five fire controlmen. So we come back from--into the Pacific in '42, and then in '43, after we got shot up, we came back to Brooklyn, repaired the ship, and went out to the North Atlantic. I was still an operator.

Thompson: What was the training like?

Begley: They sent you over to their school--they had a radar school in Philadelphia. They broke us in that way; most of us started from scratch. Most of the training was by the officers on the ship, in our division. Most of them were engineers, and all that. Out of MIT, and Wisconsin and all these--Oklahoma. So all the officers were skilled--the chief was Fitzgerald and the warrant officer was Tufts. They came around to show you how to work the equipment. They made sure we all worked it--there was only twenty-seven men at the time.

Thompson: How conscious were you that that was a distinct advantage over the enemy?

Begley: I didn't know that at the time. Had no idea what was happening. You sent a beam out, a signal came back, and you had a pip on the screen. You followed it, and you'd take a range and all that. You had the range-finding guys there, and they were doing their job. You could pick anything up, twenty miles out, no problem. We were so high, the ship. I guess the superstructure was about a hundred twenty feet high.

The big screens could pick up planes coming in, no problem. And they could go over the horizon. You knew the horizon was round, cuz the ships would disappear. If you'd get a ship like a hospital ship coming in--we knew they were coming in because we'd been told--we'd pick them up as soon as they hit over the horizon, as soon as their mast come up, we'd pick them right up.

Thompson: When general quarters were called, and you were doing something else, you were off-duty or whatever, did you rush to the--

Begley: You had to leave your station; you didn't wait for a relief either. You went to the next station, because everybody would be assigned to a certain station.

Thompson: Now you were aboard during the Savo Islands--

Begley: Right. I was the number three 16-inch gun director in the radar transmitter room, underneath the director. The director has the antenna on it--the fire controller unit. The antenna went up and down, and the unit turned. The radar room underneath stayed still, it was the director that done the turning. But you had all the machines in there, all the parts, the power and everything, tubes and all, to keep the set running.

Thompson: What deck level were you at?

Begley: Right on the main deck. That was the transmitter room, and up above us was the director. Maybe thirty feet. The guns were in front of us.

Thompson: Any concussion?

Begley: You wouldn't feel it. The hatch door was locked, and you were inside. As a matter of fact, when I come out of there, locked in the compartment, that heat down at Savo Island, you never seen a person with so much prickly heat. I had to go down to sick bay to get lotions. I was covered. I was in there for fourteen hours, I think. Cuz once you went in there, you couldn't open them hatches. They had the hatches dogged down; they were locked. Unless they got blown off.

Thompson: At Savo Island you were in there fourteen hours?

Begley: Well, they opened it up once to feed us. They gave us a box of food. It was canned food, and a couple of cigarettes, and that was it.

Thompson: And communication--

Begley: I only had communication with the fellow operating the radar, the radar operator. He was up above me, with the fellows using the range finders. And then you had an officer running the director, and a telephone--a fellow connected with phones. The officer would tell him something and he'd send a voice mail down to fire control. The fire control director--a lieutenant was in charge of that. I done most of my time in the Marine Division--the Seventh Division. I guess it was the Fifth and Seventh--it was on the starboard side, the last two five-inch mounts, and we had Marine officers and Marine telephone operator, and the other three guys were the range finder and the leveler and the horizontal--we could send the antenna up and send it down, and move the director around. We had that control. You have the director here and the leveler there and the horizontal guy, and the officer would be over there. His radio guy would be over there, I'd be over here, and the regular range finder, he'd be right in the middle in the back seat. Three guys in the front, three in the back. I had to be watching the screen. They'd be facing that way--they could see out. They had sights to see out. The only guy in the back that couldn't see out was the guy with the phones.

Thompson: They had glass on the--

Begley: Oh, yeah. Magnified, all the glasses were magnified. They could see right out to the horizon. If we spotted a ship, they started looking out through the--especially the big range finder--would pick you right up. They'd lock you in, and they locked in with fire control. We locked in with radar plot. The radar locked in; that was different from fire control. We had our own plot movement; we had officers and guys down there working the plot movement.

Thompson: Would that also have been on the main deck? The plotters.

Begley: No, I think two levels or three levels down. The same as fire control. Below the top, in case of anything happening.

Thompson: The command room, was there a different one for each of the main guns?

Begley: No, they were all in the same one. C-I-C. Big table like this, with a plotting board. I never worked in there. I used to go down there, but I never worked in there. They were a little more skilled, them guys, plotting where the stuff was. I was more on the outside.

Thompson: Your radar detail, your group of six guys, was there a separate one for each of the main guns? Or was there just one big radar room?

Begley: In the director was only the six guys. Each director had six guys. We had four directors. And then we had two--one for the sixteen-inch gun and one way up in the superstructure. You could see the rangefinder sticking out. It looks like a platform up there.

That's for the two forward batteries, number one turret and number two. They controlled both of them guns. They had their own director.

Besides, for the five-inch guns, we only had eight 5-inch guns because we had the admiral's quarters. All other ships of our class had five on each side, port and starboard, five mounts. I guess one director had three mounts and the other director had two. And the same on the other side. We had two on each side. We only had eight double-inch-fives.

Anything we picked up on radar went right down to the radar room. Anything fire control picked up on the big range finder, that went right down to the fire control station with the computers and the gyro and all. I guess maybe each one could check on one another. Our direction might be a little off from the fire control range. They had to figure out if they dropped something and let it go, that it would hit the right target. They checked on each other.

Thompson: You were aboard the South Dakota for how many years?

Begley: I started March 23rd, and I left it September 3rd, '45. About forty months, I guess.

Thompson: What stands out in your memory, either the action the South Dakota saw, or storms, or discipline, command structure, how the guys got along aboard ship--

Begley: Oh, the guys got along fine. Although half of them I wouldn't even know. On the ship there was twenty-five hundred men on that ship. I was on the starboard side, you try to go to the port, you get lost going there, there was so many guys. There were round-the-clock meals. You worked on the starboard side; you ate on the starboard side. You had to have buttons to get in. A-B-C or 1-2-3, whatever your lunch shift was.

At Savo Island, I didn't see anything because I was locked in the director. In Guadalcanal, it was different. Because I got prickly heat so bad, I had to go down for that calamine lotion a couple of days in a row to try and get back in shape, they put me up in the number one radar fire control director. That was about ten or twelve stories up. We controlled the two 16-inch guns. And so did the fire control. The fire control unit way down in the ship, they controlled the range, and we controlled the radar.

Thompson: How was that different?

Begley: What happened that night, I think it was the 14th-15th, because the night before the Juneau had got sunk and the Frisco got hit, and they lost four cans--destroyers, that is. So we went in the next night, the Washington, ourselves--we lost two destroyers. Another one was hit, I don't know about the fourth one. I was up in the superstructure, about ten-twelve levels up, in the radar for the number one main battery director.

When we hit the Guadalcanal, something happened. We lost power for five minutes. Everything went black up in the superstructure, as far as the radar went. The guy upstairs was Topalinski (?), was the radar operator. He hollered down, what's wrong? You couldn't even see down there, so we didn't know what was wrong. Then the lights came back on. Maybe the emergency lights come on after about five minutes. We was just getting them on when a repairman--his name was Gardner--he come up to find out what happened in the radar room. To give me a hand, because I'm still new. We had the fuse box and test lights all ready to go, had some tubes, but there was nothing. I think the lights in our unit went out again, not with the ship, I think just our unit. We weren't getting power up there.

So the next thing that happened, the chief and Lieutenant Burke--he got killed in this thing--they came up, and Gardner and I was trying to get the fuse panel going, checking all fuses to see if we blew any. Of course, we had no light in the unit transmitter. So they come up, and Lieutenant Burke come up with Fitzgerald, the chief--he had about thirty years on the job, the chief. He was a radioman, but he knew radar. So they stepped into the room, it wasn't

a big room, about this size the units were. They took us off the wall, pushed myself and Gardner back. They said step back, so we stepped back to the bulkhead, which is not from here to there. And they stepped to the equipment.

Next thing, we got hit. Up on the tenth or twelfth deck or whatever it was. Right through the--we didn't know that--everything went blank. God, there was smoke and fire and everything. We didn't worry, but there was nobody--I didn't see anybody then. The lieutenant got killed--Burke--I don't recall his first name--his picture is on the monument there. The chief had half his jaw blown off, Gardner had shrapnel, and I was the only one who walked out, of the four in the room. I didn't know where I was, and you couldn't go anywhere because it was too dark. What happened to them I have no idea. There was all water coming down, and whatnot, and as I finally seen a light out there, I said, gee, how did we get a light out here, and here was the two holes. They said the next day, one was an eight, the other was a fourteen-inch shell went through the room. Right next to us. But it knocked everything out. Killed the lieutenant, and the chief, that was the end of him as far as the Navy went. Gardner came back later, I don't recall when, because he was in sick bay for quite awhile. Then we lost quite a few guys up through the superstructure, over me, too, the lookouts and all of them.

Oh, and we had two fellows off the Quincy come aboard. They got sunk on the Quincy-- Eichlar (?) and I can't think--the other fellow was Joe something, an Italian name that started with a C. He came from east side Manhattan--99th Street. He got killed. He was in the transmitter room, one of the directors over on the other side. He had just come off the Quincy after being sunk out there. For about nine hours he was in the water. Bob Eichlar was the radar operator, both as a team, came off the Quincy, and one of them got killed. He was only on our ship maybe about three months.

And then somebody come up--I was alone there--it was dark, couldn't see anybody--they said, "Down, all guys down." Because water and steam was coming up, so we had to go down, and then damage control came up to put the fires out. They come up with hoses; they didn't want anybody in their way. And then the medicals come up to take whoever was hurt up there, down. I couldn't tell you, it was so dark, I didn't see anybody up there.

Thompson: So you didn't know until afterwards--

Begley: Oh, what happened. Yeah, I didn't even know we got hit. Except it was black out, and a lot of smoke, till I looked outside. They had the search lights on us, the Japs did, and it was coming through the portholes, and I knew we didn't have portholes up there. Then the next day, they said one was a fourteen and one was an eight. They were good-sized holes. One was real big. I went over there and looked out the hole. And you could see the destroyers down there. They were firing, we were firing. The ship was alive. Our room was the only room out, as far as radar. The ship was still firing. It hadn't let up at all. The five-inch and the sixteen-inch guns were firing.

Thompson: And the reason you were up there was because you had just had prickly heat so--

Begley: Right. They gave me a new station. I was lucky. Of the four guys in the room, I was the only guy that--I maybe got a little something on my finger or something. I know I felt something, a whiff of air going by, but I was in good shape cuz I was over on this side. Gardner was over there, the lieutenant was there, and the chief was here. They got on the machine because they were good at it. The lieutenant came, I think, out of MIT. So he knew what he was doing. All our officers were sharp.

Thompson: Can you describe how you responded at the time? Was it confusion? Was there fear on your part?

Begley: I never knew what--I didn't know what hit us, so there was no fear. Just that I couldn't see where we were, and I knew I couldn't go down the hatch because you're going down a ladder, you go down without hands, you'll be on the next level. So I was told. When they come up, they come up with flashlights--nightlights, y'know--and then they made you go down. So I got put down on the second deck. One deck up, where the five-inch guns are. And you had to stay against the bulkhead; they was still firing. But they sent everybody out on the port side, and the fire was on the starboard side. So it was safe there. Unless we turned around. I'd have to get out of there.

Thompson: The South Dakota guns themselves--

Begley: Oh, yeah, you can't be out there. The repercussions. Even the five-inchers, you're not gonna be around with the five-inchers. And the forties, they were powerful guns. There was four of them in there, four of them barrels. When they're firing them things, they're *firing* them.

Thompson: Those of us from my generation can't conceive of the size of those guns and how they must have sounded.

Begley: The ship went out of the water, they say. I don't know. One fellow told me today three foot--I heard six foot--when they fired the nine at once, that ship lifted up. You better have hatches all closed. If you don't, they're blown right off the deck. It would blow you right off the deck. Even with a lifeline on you, you'd be gone. We wouldn't be able to pick you up if it was too rough.

Thompson: So that was Guadalcanal.

Begley: Right. The action was over, I guess, in about half an hour. It didn't last that long, but we got a lot of dead people on board and an awful lot of injured. The next morning, they got the ship out, and one of the cans came out with us--escorted us out. We had no radar. We checked all around; we finally had one radar going--the sixteen-inch gun director had their radar. But that was only going forward. You only could see 180, maybe 200, degrees, because it couldn't turn all around. We came back alone. Our speed was pretty good. I think we could do 32; we usually ran around 28.

We passed the Frisco coming up, and she had bombarded the night before, with the Juneau. We passed her. She was an old cruiser; she made 18. But for us, 28 was cruising speed, no problem. When it got up to 32, she'd really start rocking, especially if it was rough. When the screws come out of the water, that ship would shake.

That's it; I can't tell you anything more about Guadalcanal. The next morning they were burying the dead. I think in our own division, we had nine guys killed. We only had twenty-seven men, eleven wounded, there was seven guys left coming back.

We only had the one director. The FCs, and the big FC, they were all shot out. They didn't even operate. A lot of the fire control directors, their antennas were gone. The sets were good, but the antennas were gone. So they had the regular lookouts on the bridge and all, to go north. At night I guess it was a little rough for them guys with no radar.

Thompson: After Guadalcanal you were taken back to--

Begley: To Brooklyn Navy Yard. We landed December the 15th down in Grabeson (?) Bay. You had to unload all the heavy ammunition before you could go in. We got in the 17th at the Navy yard. We all got liberty. I lived in New York. Well, half the ship stayed, but the rest got ten days, and it was freezing. They'd taken all our peacoats as we went to the South Pacific, so

we had no peacoats; all we had was a blue uniform. So it was freezing out there. But I only lived in Manhattan--84th Street--my mother-in-law lived there. No, I lived on Second.

Thompson: Were you married at the time?

Begley: No, in '44 I got married.

Thompson: How did your family react? You had written letters back home explaining your experience?

Begley: No, you couldn't do that. They wouldn't allow any of that, oh, no. That would all be cut out of the letter; you'd only have your address.

Thompson: So when you got back, you told your family about what a close call it was?

Begley: I guess I did. I didn't give them that much because you weren't supposed to be talking too much. You didn't know who you were talking to, friends, and then it sounds like you're bragging. Half the guys weren't in the service yet. They had a couple of years to go before half of them got in--that I hung out with.

So we stayed in Brooklyn Navy Yard until about March or April. Then we went up to the North Atlantic. Then we done a short tour up there out of Scapa Flow. And we were doing the Murmansk run, trying to get the--the Norwegian battleship up there, I'm trying to think of the name of that--we couldn't get her out there. We were trying to draw her out. We were working with the English fleet; they were running the operation, as far as I know. We went to Iceland, and we were up at Portland, and all them.

Thompson: Was the ship under German control--when you mentioned you were trying to draw her out?

Begley: Right. I'm pretty sure she was, yeah. She was up in her own fjords but--the von Tirpitz, she was, but she never came out. We had quite a few--we had the Alabama, us, I think we had five of our own destroyers, and they had a couple of battlewagons, not as new as ours, and they had about five cans, and they had a load of fishing boats. It looked like a big fleet we had. The fishing boats were them high-sea boats, for rough seas. Cuz it got cold up in the North Atlantic. We became polar bears because we went over the line up there--the Arctic Circle.

Thompson: Did they have a ceremony for that?

Begley: No, they didn't. I'm glad they didn't. That one down at the Equator, man, that was rough. These guys weren't kidding around. When they gave you a shellacking, you knew you got it. That ceremony started at six in the morning and lasted until twelve at night, and not a guy missed that. They had you listed, and you had to show, whether you were an officer or who you are, you had to show. If you didn't show, they would have got you. And our security was very good. They didn't miss anybody.

We had a couple guys, coming down from the North Atlantic, we were fueling, I think it was the Eighth Division, or Seventh Division, it was on the port side, refueling, going into Scapa Flow, and they put the lines up, and it was always rough, even in April and May. Two seamen went overboard, and we lost them. They went out searching for them, cuz we had a bunch of destroyers come help, but as far as I know, they were never found. The waves were so high. We lost three fellows there.

Thompson: After Guadalcanal and your service in the North Atlantic, what might we want to say--

Begley: And Norfolk. We pulled in and stayed there about ten days. I think I got liberty and went home for ten days. Then when we came back, they didn't say anything but we were going to the South Pacific, so my own division--two guys jumped ship. First class radarmen.

The guy that was up in the tower over me that night, I was in the transmitter room, he was in the director. Topolinski, he was an old-timer in the Navy, about ten years, he jumped ship. And Tronson from out here in Nebraska somewhere, he was a first class radarman--they were radiomen, they became radarmen--he jumped ship. And other guy that was a first class, he wound up getting transferred. So we lost three first classes.

While I was up in the North Atlantic, I was going around with them guys that was doing the repairs, trying to pick the thing up. I wanted to get into repair, and the lieutenants--we had a lot of good lieutenants on board--and Tufts was the chief warrant officer. He broke me in on how to use the service scopes and all the radar--testing and checking fuses and how to short them out, so you didn't knock yourself back, and that's how I learned. I wound up in the repair division then. Cuz they needed guys after the other guys left. I did the rest of my time as a repairman. I done my last--I'd say two years--as a repairman.

My last battle station was up in the bridge. They put repeaters--by that time, we had eighty-five pieces of radar equipment onboard--it only got the signal what they got down in plot, and it was sent back up. I used to be in plot--C-I-C. During an engagement, a general quarters, they sent me down there when I became a repairman. I'd just sit there, if something went wrong with one of the sets.

We had two SCs, surface to water, and we had one SG. No, the bed swing antenna, we had one of them, and we had two surface to ground. They often went off when firing the guns, they would shear, because the radar tube--or the whole screen--would move over there, or it would be over here or down here, and you couldn't read the screen then. I was one of the guys that set it up. That's the job I had.

Then after the explosion, they sent me up to--on the starboard side, in the Marine and the hospital corpsmen's division. Then I was sent up to the bridge. I think Momsen might have been the captain. In case the set went out, he wanted to see what was going on. Like during that heavy storm, the night we lost three cans, I was on the bridge. The storm didn't bother me. The bulkheads were eighteen-twenty inches. Even if we got in a fight, we wouldn't have any problem; it was solid steel. They had about twelve guys, I guess, up there. Officers, most of them was officers--the captain and all his aides, the navigator, and whatnot. The radio guy.

Thompson: What was it like to be up there with the command structure?

Begley: Good. They didn't bother you. You had to salute the officers, but after one salute, that was it. They didn't bother you. I enjoyed my time in the Navy.

Thompson: How did your Navy experience prepare you for what came later in life?

Begley: I became a policeman in New York. The following year I got on the police department. I done twenty-two years and nine months there, and I finally got out. I got half pay, with a pension.

No, it shaped me. Like I said, it was a great bunch of guys on the ship. Even though you didn't know three-quarters of them. Twenty-five hundred men is a lot of men. You don't recall all the faces. You get off on liberty, there'd be a bunch of us going off, and we'd all kind of hang out in the same places. You'd see them on the chow line, and certain guys stood out. We always had a great bunch of guys. So it didn't hurt me. I was well-schooled when I got in the police department. It was the same thing--it was all veterans. You couldn't get on the PD if you weren't a veteran--in 1946, all the way till about '51. That was the rules. After about nine weeks in the police department, in rookie school, we were out in the street. That's how fast it was. They didn't have to break us in. they didn't have to train us. The Army, Marine Corps, pilots, they were all in there.

I moved out to the Island in '54. I had five kids while I lived in the city, and then out on the Island, I had four girls. I had three boys and two girls moving out there, so I had five, and then four girls in a row-- six girls and three boys. I have twenty-four grandchildren.

Thompson: Is your wife with you here?

Begley: No, I lost her eleven years ago. She was here the first ones I came to, '85 and '87. Then she got sick in '88 and she left in '89.

Thompson: Any final comments you'd like to make?

Begley: I enjoyed myself. I was really mad when they put me on the Missouri. And especially when I spent seven weeks there. They called me at eight o'clock that night, the 2nd of September, after the signing on the Missouri. It said, "All hands, hear this. Begley, report to the officer of the watch." He was down below because it was raining that day--two decks down. He said, "Pack your seabags; you're leaving in the morning." I said, "What!" He was one of my division officers; he was a new fellow on the ship. I said, "I'm not looking to leave here. I hear the ship's going to Frisco, and I want to go to Yokohama to see what is out there." He said, "That's the orders." It was a Sunday night, and all the offices were closed at night, so you can't get ahold of anybody. But then a bunch of officers in my own division--we all got transferred, and I guess they maybe recommended me because being married, you had extra points, and I had enough points to get off, and I'd been on the ship since the beginning. And the radar unit, you actually didn't need it when the war's over, except for navigation. Battles was all we did. But they could have give it to some other guy who was waiting to get home. A lot of guys in my division would have jumped at it--until I got on the Missouri and found out it was a cruise. We ended up going seven weeks.

Thompson: It took you to Pearl Harbor.

Begley: Right. And then through the Panama Canal. I guess we were in Pearl Harbor--I didn't count the time; I wasn't doing anything. The time went so fast in the Navy, but it took seven weeks from Yokohama down--I don't know what the distance was. I left all my buddies behind; half of them didn't even know I got transferred, because I was gone in the morning. The Missouri pulled alongside, they put a gangway between the two ships, and we tied up. First, a bunch of Halsey's crew come off, then Halsey himself come off, and his saddle come off. He'd said he was going to ride Hirohito's horse; well, he had this saddle--one of the sailors was carrying it. He had about fifty men, and then about a hundred fifty of us--after he left, he goes down to his quarters--and then we're aboard the Missouri, and that's it.

Thompson: About a hundred fifty of you transferred?

Begley: Easy. Or sixty. The next thing, we're underway. Nine o'clock we're sailing to the blue horizon. But we went to Pearl Harbor. I guess I was to Pearl Harbor about five times down there, on liberty. Good place. And then the Panama Canal. I went over and back and over with the South Dakota, and then the Missouri took me back home. That would have been four trips through the Canal. That's a whole-day ceremony. From early morning until seven o'clock at night, you're still going through the canal, it was so big.

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