

**Joseph Fliszar**  
Storekeeper First Class  
Oral History [telephone interview]  
December 13, 2001

**Deborah M. Lyon: My name is Deb Lyon, and I'm calling from the Center for Western Studies in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and I'm a part of the USS South Dakota battleship oral history project, and I'm speaking to Joseph Fliszar. How old were you when you enlisted?**

**Joseph Fliszar:** I signed up in the Navy, and it was February 1942. I was twenty-two years old. I was either gonna be drafted or sign up.

**Lyon: How long were you in the service?**

**Fliszar:** I got out in '45 in September.

**Lyon: When you were posted to a ship, were you posted to USS South Dakota initially, or were you on another ship before that?**

**Fliszar:** I came right from boot camp, from Great Lakes Naval Station, sent to Philadelphia Navy Yard, assigned to USS South Dakota.

**Lyon: So you were on the South Dakota the entire period of the war?**

**Fliszar:** Yeah. Till I got out.

**Lyon: So you saw everything that happened with that ship.**

**Fliszar:** Yeah, right up to--I didn't get to Tokyo. I got off just before that. I got off just about a month before.

**Lyon: What was your birthdate?**

**Fliszar:** July 20, 1920.

**Lyon: Where were you born?**

**Fliszar:** Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

**Lyon: Until the time you entered the Navy, what was your education level?**

**Fliszar:** I'd graduated from high school. I was working for Acme Markets when I signed up.

**Lyon: Following the Navy, did you go to school after that?**

**Fliszar:** I took a year in college. I got a good job. They took me back and made me a store manager. From there I became a buyer, and I retired as a buyer with Acme Markets.

**Lyon: What were the circumstances of your enlistment? I gather you enlisted to avoid being drafted?**

**Fliszar:** As an apprentice. That's all they gave you when you signed up, was apprentice seaman. And then I became a first class seaman, and then I became a storekeeper first class. I was a storekeeper third class, and then to second, and then to first. I got out as a storekeeper first class. I went through all the ranks. The ship was in Philadelphia Navy Yard, I was assigned to the ship there. That's where they were putting the guns on, and all that other stuff.

**Lyon: Your primary assignment on the ship then was as a storekeeper.**

**Fliszar:** The first six or seven months I was a seaman. Then I became a third class storekeeper. With that, my duties was a storekeeper, I also had duties in operations. I was assigned to Sky Defense as a watch. As I got higher, I got another job down in the radar plotting room. We had various jobs, besides doing our work as a storekeeper.

**Lyon: What are some of your recollections about crewmembers you had as friends, and how the operations of the ship were?**

**Fliszar:** It was wonderful. I had a very happy-go-lucky ship and crew. They were

unbelievable. It was enjoyable. I had a cousin on the ship--I found out after two years. I didn't know he was there. You have 2000 people on there. And when you're signed to a certain division--I was in S division, which is supply--the others had First division, Second division--the First Division would be a deck crew, and the Second Division would be something else. Then they had the Gunnery Division, and you had the Engineering Division. I was lucky. I was in the S Division. I still had a battleship assignment. When we went into action, I had a certain place to go to.

**Lyon: I know you were involved in several battles, and you had other incidents that occurred. There was the incident when they were loading ammunition and it went off.**

**Fliszar:** It exploded down in the hatch about five decks below. They said friction ignited the powder, and when it hit the deck, it just exploded. We lost a few men down there.

**Lyon: Is there anything else in particular, let's say, something that happened at Savo Island?**

**Fliszar:** Everyone was different, but I think the one I keep thinking more about, was the one when we were going through Guadalcanal with USS Washington ahead of us, and we were right behind it. A couple of destroyers were up front, and the sailors were out in the water there. That was sad, because we couldn't pick them up. We were a capital ship; we had to go right through the canal. We got banged up a bit. I don't know how many men we lost, but we were getting a lot of shells from the land.

**Lyon: I understand from the history that the ship was involved in a couple of typhoons. Were you on board for both of them?**

**Fliszar:** Not the Philippines. We were going down someplace and we hit a typhoon. The ship just swayed back and forth. That's scary. A 35,000-ton ship leaning towards the ocean, and the waves are so high, they got right over the ship. It's something you don't want to go through too much. I know we went through two of them, that I recall. It lasted maybe eight hours or so, I think it was till we got through it.

**Lyon: Comparing the typhoon and the fear of the weather and the fear of the ocean itself, versus what you were experiencing going through a battle situation, do you have--**

**Fliszar:** They were both--I think the battle situation was a little worse because you were getting hit by these kamikazes coming at you. We got hit a few times. First, when we went out, our captain was injured because one of the bombs hit on turret one, and the shrapnel hit his arm. He got hurt, he was taken off awhile later, but when we got hit by a couple of bombs with these kamikazes dropping them on our ship. That was the first battle I remember--where Captain Gatch got hurt. We went back into port to get fixed up. Well, when we first went out, we hit a reef, so they took us back into Hawaii, and they couldn't fix us up, so they sent us back through the Panama Canal, back up to Brooklyn Navy Yard, and they adjusted the ship's guns. They put more guns on it. Then we went for a shakedown cruise to Iceland, to Reykjavík, and then back out to the Pacific. We lost maybe six months. They fixed us up, and we went right back through the Canal, and then we had all these battles--Savo Island and all that. I think it was 27 or 28 encounters. I have a list of them. I have a nice little scrapbook; I look at it every once in a while. There's a wonderful little book called *God on a Battleship*; it tells you everything about the South Dakota. That was written by our chaplain at that time. He didn't miss anything. Whatever he wrote in this book, it was unbelievable, it brought back a lot of memories. *God on a Battlewagon* by Claypoole; I've got the book right here.

**Lyon:** USS South Dakota is considered the most decorated battleship in World War II.

**Fliszar:** You'd never know it. I'm in New Jersey. They're giving the New Jersey so much credit. Y'know, Halsey was on our ship as commander of Third Fleet. The other one was Fifth. That was Spruance. We were on the Third Fleet, and he was on our battlewagon. Then when the New Jersey came out, he transferred over to the New Jersey. But we were very decorated. We were the first of the new battlewagons out there. They called us Battleship X. that's what the book says.

**Lyon: That was because the Japanese thought they had sunk you?**

**Fliszar:** Yeah. It was one of the first new battlewagons out there, but they would never name the ship. They called it Battleship X.

**Lyon: To confuse the enemy. You are a plank owner.**

**Fliszar:** Well, you could call it that. You're called a plank owner when you put the ship in commission in Camden. I was one week late. The ship was just launched from Camden-- which is across the river. They went into Philadelphia, that's where the ship got [outfitted]. Then we went on a shakedown cruise. That's going down the Chesapeake Bay, out to Norfolk and back up. I'm a green kid, and that night they gave us greasy pork chops. I always remember that, I got sick. I'd never been on a ship. That was my indoctrination in the Navy. But I learned fast. I didn't get sick after that.

**Lyon: Were you ever injured in the Navy, or did you receive any wounds?**

**Fliszar:** I saw a lot of wounded. But the Lord was with me, and I got through it.

**Lyon: What were some of your assignments--what was your general quarters?**

**Fliszar:** General quarters was sky defense. That was on top of a mast, and I was one of the watch. I had to report. It was at night, you couldn't see nothing, but you made sure you had your earphones on. That was one of my battle stations. After a year or so, they switch you. Another one was down in the plotting room, in radar. I was never on any kind of a gun assignment. We all had battle stations.

**Lyon: What's your remembrance of some of your friends there?**

**Fliszar:** The biggest kid that was nice, that I remember, he just died recently. Robert Ferguson from Connecticut. He worked up a thing where he got all us Eastern boys to have a reunion up here in Connecticut. It was two days, a wonderful time. We had a chaplain by the name of Cunningham, and he even came up there, but he died recently. He was the other chaplain; he was the Catholic chaplain. We had a wonderful time. He came up from Florida to be with us at this mini-reunion. I've lost touch with all the rest of them. There's not one that I know of anymore.

**Lyon: Everybody was having a pretty good time in Sioux Falls in July, when we were there doing the interviews.**

**Fliszar:** It was a good ship. I was proud to be on it.

**Lyon: What was shipboard discipline like?**

**Fliszar:** It wasn't easy. You played the part. In other words, they took care of us because they knew we were a bunch of rookies. There was some old salts on there; they'd ride us a bit. It was in good fun. All good-natured. I would never say there was any harassment from any of the officers or any of the old-timers on there. The old-timers, you could see the hashmarks on their coats, but they never played the part to knock us down or anything. They were there to help us. Like I say, going into battle, you didn't know what the heck was going to happen. But we got through it. And we had a lot of young kids on there. We were greenhorns. The Navy had good training, and we had a good crew on that battleship. Right from the top with the captain--and the officers.

We lost some men. I remember when they threw them overboard, in canvas bags, with a 5-inch shell in there. That's a burial at sea. It was sort of sad. Then we went across the Equator. I got initiated good. I drank some salt stuff, whatever they gave me. We had a good band on the ship, too. Our own band. They also had their own battle stations, but we had music. We had recreation, movies and whatever. The Navy band was excellent.

**Lyon: How often did they have a chance to play?**

**Fliszar:** Maybe two-three times a week, if we weren't in battle. We had recreation, a little music, the band would play for maybe an hour. We enjoyed it.

**Lyon: When you went into port, did you ever have liberty then?**

**Fliszar:** Oh, yeah. In Hawaii, we were only there a couple of days. When they found out ours was too serious of a problem, they sent us back to New York. I remember going to Guam, and they had beach parties, too. Giving the boys a little recreation. Swimming. They had nice recreation. They played baseball or softball or whatever. They were very good; like I say, there wasn't anything that they missed.

**Lyon: I gather that you married after you got out of the Navy?**

**Fliszar:** Just about six or eight weeks later. I got married, and two weeks later, I landed up in the hospital with appendix. Right here in Long Island. I was still in the Navy.

**Lyon: So you've been pretty much a New Jersey resident all your life.**

**Fliszar:** I'm in North Brunswick now. I got married in my Navy uniform, because I was still in the Navy. I got married July 1, and got out--it must have been two months later. I was on the ship right along. I missed the signing by about two months. They started cutting back, and they started cutting storekeepers--who wants to go? My officer said why don't you go, I said why not, so they flew me back to San Francisco. I was glad when I got out. From there, I went right back working with Acme Markets.

**Lyon: It sounds like you had a really good time.**

**Fliszar:** I did. We had some stress. We must have lost forty or fifty men when we got hit so bad on the side there. The superstructure was hit; I saw bodies in the water. We had fun, but it was still a serious war. We had a good ship to be on. I was very fortunate to be on that battlewagon, compared to a destroyer, or even an airplane carrier that was getting bombed. I saw three of them sunk. I saw the Yorktown hit so bad, I saw the Franklin go down, I saw the Princeton go down. All these carriers were hit when we were in these battles. We had a lot of casualties; I saw all these ships get hit. We were standing by in case they needed help. We were well informed as to what was going on and how the war was progressing.

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