

Michael "Mike" Gydos

Machinist's Mate

Oral History

July 6, 2001

Deborah M. Lyon: He's a crewmember of the battleship, USS South Dakota. The interview is conducted by Deborah Lyon on July 6, 2001, at the Ramkota Hotel in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, during the reunion of the crew of the battleship. Sir, could you please give your name and address.

Michael Gydos: My name is Mike Gydos [guy-dus]. New Jersey.

Lyon: What were the circumstances surrounding your enlistment?

Gydos: I enlisted in the Navy on January 5, 1942. I was all prepared, after the war broke out at Pearl Harbor, to take my part in the United States Navy.

Lyon: How old were you at the time you enlisted?

Gydos: Twenty-one.

L: Why did you pick the Navy?

Gydos: My brother was in there during peacetime, and always like the Navy. The whole family did, so I picked that.

Lyon: Where did you do your training?

Gydos: In Great Lakes.

Lyon: What was your rating and your specialty when you came out?

Gydos: I was a machinist's mate. They called it the black gang, down in the engine room.

Lyon: How did you come to be assigned to USS South Dakota?

Gydos: When we left Great Lakes, they told us we were going to be assigned to a ship in Philadelphia, and that was the South Dakota.

Lyon: And you boarded the South Dakota then?

Gydos: Yes, at the U.S. Navy Yard.

Lyon: That would have been 1942 then?

Gydos: Yes, in February some time. I don't recall the date.

Lyon: Could you explain the different types of duties and responsibilities you had onboard?

Gydos: With my rating, I was put into the engine room as my choice. I requested that choice.

Lyon: What were your duties during the battle stations?

Gydos: I was assigned different duties. I had different battle stations, too. I had them in the engine room, and I had them up on deck with a machine gun. Twenty-millimeter gun. That was part of it, but most of the time I was in the engine room. There were different duties, and sometimes I volunteered.

Lyon: What was the most hazardous action you experienced while you were on the ship?

Gydos: The first battle we were involved in was the Battle of Santa Cruz, which was an air battle. We seen a lot of action there and shot down a lot of planes. We also got hit, toward the front. I wasn't near where we got hit. I was in the aft.

Lyon: When you were in battle, how did you manage any anxiety or fear you had?

Gydos: I just never felt--fear wasn't too much present till afterwards, when you realized what you went through. You wondered, my god, did we go through that?

Lyon: What are your recollections of being in the ship's company, the people you worked with and were around all the time?

Gydos: I liked them. We were just all out there to get one job done, with the war. I always got along real good with everybody. We got respect from the captain. We were very happy to have Captain Gatch with us.

Lyon: Were you able to move around the ship, or were you fairly restricted to one area of the ship during normal duties?

Gydos: I moved around quite a bit, yes.

Lyon: What's your reaction to shipboard discipline?

Gydos: Shipboard discipline was pretty good as far as I was concerned, but sometimes you felt it was a little hard, but not long.

Lyon: Do you have any recollections of courageous actions by other people or by yourself?

Gydos: During battle, it was pretty much like you had the area you were assigned. It was something very, very exciting to know what you were doing. You were fighting a war. When this was over, we were all working for one thing--to get back home.

Lyon: What did you do when you weren't at your regular work or on a battle station?

Gydos: You'd maybe get together with some other men you worked with, you read or played cards, or what little free time you had, you wrote home.

Lyon: What do you remember about being on the sea? Did you get seasick? Were you in any big storms?

Gydos: There were a few rough storms. I myself, when we were getting out there, you think a lot about when that moment comes, then you get up there where you're supposed to be and do what you're supposed to, you were wondering what the outcome was going to be.

Lyon: How did you deal with anxiety about submarines and bombing attacks and stuff?

Gydos: Fear is there. I'm not saying you weren't--you were. You knew what could happen. But you tried to do everything you were taught to do. You relied on that and your fellow men, that were supervising you.

Lyon: You have on your information sheet that you served on the ship until November 1942. So you were on the ship less than a year. Where did you go after that?

Gydos: With the South Dakota, I had one of the sea battles, at Savo Island, which was my battle. And then, after that, we went into--I think it was Noumea, and then I was--several other men--we were transferred onto another ship. After the action I had on the South Dakota, then I was transferred to USS McCawley, APA-4, which was a troopship. Then we picked up a group of Marines in New Caledonia, and we took them into Bougainville. We were going into what they called Rendova, that's in the Solomon Islands, and we unloaded--the full ship was loaded with troops. Then we headed back, and before we got out of the area where we unloaded them, we were hit by a torpedo. The ship was damaged, and we got sunk.

Lyon: Were you all picked up then?

Gydos: Yes, we didn't have to go into the water, because there was a destroyer right close to us, so most of us got right in there. Some of us stayed on the ship, trying to save it. But it didn't work.

Lyon: Were you part of the contingent that stayed on?

Gydos: Yeah.

Lyon: Do you remember the name of the destroyer that picked you up?

Gydos: Yes. It was the Ralph Talbert.

Lyon: Where did you go from there?

Gydos: I was reassigned to USS Crescent City. That was APA-21. I went quite a ways with

it. I was put off in New Zealand at that naval hospital, and from there, they sent me back to Philadelphia Naval Hospital.

Lyon: Had you been wounded in action?

Gydos: On the ship there, I had ten stitches. When the shell hit us, it knocked the metal door and it hit me.

Lyon: When you reached Philadelphia, were you still in the service?

Gydos: Three or four months, I would say. Then I was discharged.

Lyon: What year was that?

Gydos: 1944. July or August.

Lyon: Anything else?

Gydos: On the South Dakota, I picked up a lot of knowledge I never had before. It was very interesting. Man, those officers, they were just men you were happy to be with. And did your duty as told. I'm very happy I was on there, with Captain Gatch. I thought very much of him.

Today when I think of this, I'm sort of thankful things went like they did, because so many of my good friends didn't make it. I just considered that luck was there, along with everything you had the knowledge to do to save yourself and fellow crewmembers.

Lyon: You were twenty-one when you came into the service, and there isn't much of an age spread, but I know there were some as young as seventeen. Do you remember any differences, in the beginning, as far as maturity level? Did it seem like a big gap in age?

Gydos: It sort of did. Four years difference, you were involved in different talking and thinking about the future. It seemed that the younger generation, like myself, they weren't worried. They just figured, I'm going to get out of here. I'm going to do everything I can. I want to get back home.

Lyon: When you did get out of the service, you went back home?

Gydos: I was in Philadelphia. I stayed there forty years. Reading Railroad.

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