

Carl N. Jackson
Seaman First Class
Oral History
July 6, 2001

Arthur Huseboe: This is an interview with Carl N. Jackson from Stark, Florida, a crewmember of the battleship USS South Dakota, conducted by Arthur Huseboe on July 6, 2001, at the Ramkota Hotel in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, during the reunion of the crew of the battleship. Now if you'll read your name and address.

Carl Jackson: Carl N. Jackson, Stark, Florida.

Huseboe: Tell us how old you were at the time of your enlistment.

Jackson: Twenty one.

Huseboe: How did you happen to enlist in the Navy?

Jackson: Well, the draft was chasing me. I went to the recruiting station--I went to the Army, the Marines, and the Navy. The Navy is the one that told me the biggest story. They painted a rosier picture than anyone else. I signed up and went from there.

Huseboe: What was the place of your training?

Jackson: San Diego. We went from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Oklahoma City, to San Diego.

Huseboe: How long was the boot camp?

Jackson: Four weeks, plus. At that time they needed replacements.

Huseboe: How about your rating?

Jackson: Seaman first class.

Huseboe: Did you have any special training?

Jackson: No. Gunnery division. Deck Division.

Huseboe: How was it that you were assigned to USS South Dakota?

Jackson: They put us on the troop ship at Treasure Island, San Francisco, and took us to Pearl Harbor. It took eight days to get there. When we got there, they loaded us in trucks, and drove out in the middle of a ball field. Some guy drove up in a car with a speaker on it, and he called names off. Alphabetical order. This ship, this ship. When he got down to mine, I went to the South Dakota.

Huseboe: Do you remember other ships they were assigning people to at that time?

Jackson: I'm sure the Saratoga was one, because she was in dry dock at Pearl. And the South Dakota was in dry dock.

Huseboe: Was the South Dakota in dry dock because it damaged its keel on that reef?

Jackson: Yes. And when we went to Brooklyn Navy Yard after Savo Island, that's when they replaced all the pom-poms with forties. They were a noisy gun, the pom-poms.

Huseboe: Were you operating some of the guns?

Jackson: I was a gunner on a twenty millimeter, and we stood watch on the forty millimeter.

Huseboe: Did you have to strap yourself in?

Jackson: Yeah, just had a little belt around you.

Huseboe: Were you firing the twenty millimeter at Santa Cruz?

Jackson: No, I was loading. At that time, I was the first loader. I remember that day. Our station was on top of number three turret. We fired from there. Most of the people that was on the port side will tell you about a Japanese torpedo plane that came in, and it looked like every gun on the ship and ships all around was shooting into it. But he released his torpedo, and it sailed right over the fantail. It was a beautiful sight. It sailed right over and hit the water. He

went on, and I think he hit on a destroyer. I remember the destroyer--we were doing about thirty knots, and the destroyer when it hit, it just looked like the whole thing lit up. He just turned and went through our wake, and when he come out the other side, the fire was out.

Huseboe: That was the Smith.

Jackson: I don't know what the name of it was.

Huseboe: Was that the most hazardous action you faced, was at Santa Cruz?

Jackson: No, that was a ball game. Savo Island was by far worse than anything else.

Huseboe: What was your battle station at Savo Island?

Jackson: They retired all of the anti-aircraft guns. We was in the Ninth Division compartment over the officers' wardroom.

Huseboe: So you were not actively engaged. The big guns were firing--the sixteen inches?

Jackson: Sixteen inches. When the destroyers went down, they were burning, and it kind of made a nice silhouette of the South Dakota. That's when we got most of the--got hit. Forty-two direct hits. Fourteen-inch, eight-inch, and five-inch, probably. The next morning when we went outside, it looked like a screen door. Full of holes. Thank God, most of them went right on through.

Huseboe: That was the most hazardous experience you had. How did you handle that?

Jackson: Scared the hell out of me. You can still see my prints on that steel deck. When they started firing, they said, "Lay down on the deck." When one of those big shells hit, it looked like everybody in that forward room just raised up and slid away from the bulkhead. After we got into the battle a little bit, I got up and was gonna go back into the Ninth Division, and had to go through the superstructure, going up to the upper decks, and they was bringing wounded men down. They brought one guy down, and handed his feet to one guy, and said, "He's dead." They told me to take his head, and I looked down, and he had a gash right through his head. There was only a little red light and it was hard to tell what was wrong. I carried him in there. A shell had hit a steam line, and hot water was on the floor going back and forth, and blood was mixing with that, and when I looked down and saw that guy's head, I handed him to someone and I turned around and walked out that door and went to the hatch going outside the compartment, opened it up, closed it, and went out and just sat down, slid down on the floor, took a few deep breaths, and the fear went away after about two seconds. The fear didn't go away, but the sickness went away. I got up and went back in. That was by far [the worst.]

Huseboe: Your duty station on the ship when it wasn't at combat was where?

Jackson: Main deck. Port side. We were deck division. We took care of the port side. Chip that paint and put it back on. We also refueled destroyers.

Huseboe: Were you on that, when that powder exploded?

Jackson: Yes. We had sixteen-inch projectiles lined up on the carts taking them up when--I was almost on the bow when that thing blew. And I took off--I tell you, for a little bit, I'd have been halfway back to Oklahoma before I got my feet wet. When that fire shot out of that hatch, it looked like twenty/thirty feet in the air.

The ship was 680 feet long. 108 feet wide. I was on it three years and four months, and I'm sure there were a lot of places I didn't go see. We could go wherever we wanted to.

Huseboe: Anybody you remember who was notable for courageous actions?

Jackson: Johnny Homan, he received a Purple Heart. He was stationed on the tenth level, or something, where they had a six-man lookout. A shell exploded and killed all of them but two, and he got some shrapnel in his face. And John Lock.

Huseboe: What about seasickness? Did you get--

Jackson: I never, not one time. In the typhoon, I went up to the eleventh level, and that spray from the waves would hit you in the face, that high. That battleship was like a cork out there, and it didn't bother me one bit, but a lot of men, it did. One guy in the Exec's office, Dale Houston, I think he was probably sick more than he wasn't, poor guy.

Huseboe: Was bad weather a constant concern?

Jackson: When we was in the China Sea, we had the typhoons. Actually, that was the only real bad weather we had.

Huseboe: Submarines?

Jackson: I wasn't worried about submarines. Maybe I didn't have sense enough to be worried, but we had a lot of armor.

Huseboe: Torpedo attacks from planes?

Jackson: That worried me. But fortunately I was out on a gun station. If I'd have been stationed inside where you couldn't see, that would really--I was in sick bay one time, and we had an air attack, and you could hear the guns firing. You couldn't see where they was coming from. Now that bothered me. But you're topside, you can see them, and you know what's going to happen then. The one thing I remember at Santa Cruz--the Washington and the Hornet and the task force--we were sitting out there at the battle stations, and the planes looked like this big around going round and round, and every once in a while, you'd see something light up over there. We watched it like a football game. It wasn't bad at all. You couldn't tell anybody was getting killed over there. Pretty soon, a guy said on the speaker, "Here them sonofabitches come." And then for the next--I don't know how long--we was busy as hell. We put a lot of flak in the air that day. At the Santa Cruz, they sunk the Hornet.

[For island landings:] We'd be lined up five or six battleships in a row. Each one would fire a nine-gun salvo. It looked like the island was going to disappear. We'd go back and forth, back and forth, and do that. When we left, they went in there to land.

We saw a few dogfights. Not a lot of them, but once in awhile, we'd catch them out there. Every once in awhile, you'd see a plane light up.

Huseboe: You didn't land at any of those islands yourself, did you?

Jackson: Guam, we got off in Guam. And New Caledonia. We had liberty at New Caledonia, such as it was. Ulithe and Mog Mog. We went to the Fiji Islands. We did go on the beach, and we got bananas.

When we came back from Savo Island, and got patched up in Brooklyn Navy Yard, we went through the Canal, and then we went to the North Atlantic. The Arctic Circle. Scapa Flow, Scotland, was where we anchored. The South Dakota and the Alabama were operating with the British Fleet. We were looking for the von Tirpitz, I think it was. That was short term. The most I remember about that, standing watch on the forty millimeter at midnight, and writing letters home. "Hey, Mom, it's midnight here and the sun is shining." June, July, and August. We traveled 247,000 miles, from the United States to Tokyo, and we crossed the International Date Line thirty-six times. And the Equator thirty-six times.

H: How about the quarters on board?

Jackson: When I first went on, I slept in a hammock in the mess hall. I only slept there a week or maybe two weeks, and then I got a bunk. Some rooms had four deep and others had three. You'd just fold them up, hook them up. Watches were four on and eight off. The only bad thing, after Savo Island, they'd send out nuisance raids. Get you out of bed at two o'clock in the morning, four o'clock in the morning.

Huseboe: Did you have newspaper or radio?

Jackson: They had a newspaper on the ship.

Huseboe: You didn't have malaria on the ship. You weren't troubled with mosquitoes.

Jackson: They had a container with Adebrine in it. Along with salt pills. When you'd get you some water, you'd take it. After I got out, I had chronic malaria for seven or eight months. It would only last--you'd get the fever and hot and sweat.

Huseboe: How did you pick that up?

Jackson: I have no idea.

Huseboe: Maybe at Noumea?

Jackson: It could be.

Huseboe: I heard the little seaplanes that were aft on the ship got shot to pieces at Savo.

Jackson: Yeah, they swung the number three turret around, aft, fired all three salvos. The plane that was on this catapult, we never saw it again. The one that was on the floor was upside down. They say we sunk the cruiser, so it was well worth it.

Huseboe: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Jackson: Well, one thing, we was out there in the South Pacific somewhere, I don't remember where, and we was anchored. Oh, it was at Guam. I was walking up the catwalk, and there was a bunch of officers coming down this way. I kind of slowed down, and the officers turned to go in the wardroom, and I looked up, and I saw this guy I went to school with. We embraced there and talked a little bit. He was a pilot on Guam. The officer with him said go tell the chaplain he's your cousin and he'll give you permission, you can go over and visit him. So we did that. We went over, and when we got there, they were coming back from a raid, and some of them had one motor gone, and all that good stuff, and they come in and landed, they got out and went into this little tent there for interrogations. We went in with them, and they gave a little drinky poo.

Huseboe: What were they flying? B-29s?

Jackson: Yeah.

Huseboe: You on the South Dakota bombarded Japan.

Jackson: The first salvo came from South Dakota.

Huseboe: It's been a good interview, Carl.

Jackson: My mother, bless her heart, she had more foresight than most people. She bought a scrapbook for all four of us kids. There was four of us in the service at the same time. She kept all the letters I wrote her. She kept a lot of stuff for the scrapbooks. Four boys--one in the Navy, one in the Army--my brother was at Pearl during the attack. He went there in '39. He came home just about the time I went over, so I missed him. Had one brother in the Merchant Marines, and the other in the Army Engineers. He was the only one got wounded. He drove a bulldozer, and an officer's jeep got stuck on the beach, so he went to push the jeep off. He pushed the jeep away, and when he got right where the jeep was, a land mine blew him off. He hurt his back a little--nothing serious.

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