Spalding "Ken" Kenan Manson Jr.
Lieutenant
Oral History (telephone interview on two discs)
December 18, 2001

[Disc 1]
Harry Thompson: I want to make sure we have your name correct. It's Spalding?
Ken Manson: I'll spell that. S-P-A-L-D-I-N-G. Middle name is Kenan K-E-N-A-N. Last name is Manson M-A-N-S-O-N. Junior. Captain Witte has a book from me that I prepared, that I had written about 1996 for my five grandchildren. When I visited [the memorial] at the reunion, I saw a copy there. My book was written concerning the entire Navy life, which included ROTC training. He asked if he could pull out certain portions that applied primarily to the South Dakota, and I said that would be okay. I was aboard the South Dakota about two years. The explanation of my activities included the eight or nine cruise letters that were written by Chaplain Cunningham. Mine, that my wife had saved, were so battered and so yellow that I just retyped everything exactly the way Chaplain Cunningham had written. This is what made my story easy to tell to my grandchildren because we had these eight or nine letters, I can't remember exactly how many there were, but they covered very well our total experience in the Pacific Ocean, from the time we went through the Panama Canal. Cunningham was aboard, and I happened to end up being in the room next to him, so we talked. I finally left the ship as a full lieutenant. I came aboard as a jaygee in the Atlantic Ocean. The title is "U.S. Navy Life" on one line, "During World War II For a Junior Officer As Experienced By" and then my name, Spalding Kenan Manson, Jr.
Thompson: I want to read the permission form that allows us to conduct the interview. This interview, which is being conducted by Harry Thompson, history researcher for the Center for Western Studies, with funding from private individuals and the South Dakota Humanities Council, on the 18th day of December, 2001, is a commissioned project formed in consideration of the Center's agreement to record, preserve, and transcribe this interview to be placed in the collective work of the Center at Augustana College and/or the Library of Congress and the Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.
Manson: I was in the Navy for three and a half years, and two of those years was aboard the South Dakota, so my loyalty is to the South Dakota. It was my home for two whole years. I feel very appreciative of being able to serve on the South Dakota. My first ship was USS Texas. It wasn't nearly as grand a ship, and that's why I wanted to get aboard the South Dakota so bad. I think, probably, I was the only guy who ever asked permission to serve on the South Dakota. At the time I made that request, I was actually aboard the South Dakota with an admiral's staff, who was Commander, Battleships, Atlantic Fleet. We transferred from the Texas with his flag to the South Dakota when we went to operate with the British fleet. So I had been aboard the South Dakota for about three months, and then I realized that since he was Commander, Battleships, Atlantic Fleet, he was going to leave when the South Dakota headed back to the Pacific. If there was any way I could possibly get switched to the ship's crew while I was there--I had become very friendly with the admiral--and he said, anything you want. They called me Ken. He said, "Ken, if that's what you want, sure I'll write the letter." I was afraid I was going to lose this wonderful opportunity to stay aboard the South Dakota. So he wrote the letter.

We did coding and decoding of top secret messages that were to go only to the admiral. We worked closely, down in the decoding room with the ship's communication officers. When they had a top secret message that was "For Admiral's Eyes Only" they had to turn it over to one of the members of the admiral's staff. That would be me and there were two other junior officers that did his decoding. When the radiomen turned it over to me, it was just a garbled message, and I had to set it up in the decoding machine. Once I started typing it out, that became very classified information, so I had to usually hand deliver that myself to the admiral. Maybe wake him up at three in the morning. Anyway, we'd chat, and he'd maybe offer me a cup of coffee. He said, "Gee, I can't blame you. This is a beautiful ship."

Thompson: I have your address as Metairie, Louisiana. What is your rank and rating?

Manson: I graduated from Tulane University Naval ROTC unit on May 2, 1942. I became an ensign. At that early stage of the war, generally the junior officers were promoted to the next rank almost exactly one year later. I became a lieutenant jaygee on May 1st of '43. I became a full lieutenant as of May 1st in '44. My last assignment, after I left the South Dakota, which was right after Okinawa, I was assigned to the University of Texas at the Naval ROTC unit there. I left the ship on May 23, 1945, and had something like a month's leave before I reported to the University of Texas in June. The war ended in August, and the captain of our ROTC unit came up to me, and he said, "People are dropping out of the Navy so fast. You got some of the highest points. How would you consider a spot promotion to lieutenant commander if you stayed in one more year? I said I would consider that a real compliment but--I told my wife when I went home that day that I'd already turned him down. I was anxious to get back and get a job.

Thompson: What date did you come aboard the South Dakota?

Manson: With the admiral's staff or after? It was May 1943, and Admiral Hustzett (H-U-S-T-Z-E-T-T) was ComBatLant. That stands for Commander, Battleships, Atlantic Fleet. He transferred from the Texas to South Dakota in early May '43. We reported aboard when the South Dakota had just left its repairs and went up to Argentia, Newfoundland. The Texas was in New York City when we got the orders to report to South Dakota, so a destroyer took us from New York City up to Argentia. We got aboard in the cold, dreary-looking weather of Argentia, Newfoundland. Overcast and grey and ugly. We rode on the destroyer for about two days, I guess. I think the South Dakota was in Argentia for about a week. The reason for that was, we'd been invited by the British to lease some new battleships to help them try to catch the German battleship. The Tirpitz was running rampant up in the Norwegian fjords, and it was coming out and threatening a lot of convoys that went from America up over Norway to Murmansk, Russia. So we went over and met the British admirals and the captains of their ships. Great sounding names of ships like the Duke of York.

The main British naval base had been moved from southern England up to Scotland so the German bombers couldn't hit them. The naval base was called Scapa Flow. Scapa Flow is this nice big harbor, surrounded by islands. So we went from Argentia, came up and anchored in Scapa Flow, and then got to meet with the admirals and plan the strategy to proceed off the coast of Norway and catch the Tirpitz. Which we were unsuccessful in doing. By that time the British had already sunk the Bismark. Anyway, we tried to operate with them. Our general tactic was, we would pick up the convoys heading from the United States to Murmansk around the northern tip of Norway, and we would always place ourselves on the western side of the convoy, in the hopes the German spotter planes would see the convoy, signal the Tirpitz that there's another plum out there, and get the Tirpitz to come out. Then when we

realized he was on his way to the convoy, we could maneuver our ships around and circle the Tirpitz and trap him that way.

The British had one problem. Most of their ships were built prior to the war, and they were not as fast as the Tirpitz. So they couldn't surround the Tirpitz, they would lose it, so they wanted two battleships. And the two ships that went up there, we were the South Dakota, and the Alabama came along with us. The two of us went over there with four new fast destroyers, and that was the U.S. component of the /British operation. They had several carriers and cruisers, but they wanted us because we were faster than their ships were. They said the orders came strictly from Hitler, since he'd lost the Bismark, that he didn't want to take a chance on the Tirpitz going out. Hitler was convinced the main invasion of continental Europe was going to come through Norway.

It was on the way back from Scapa Flow to Norfolk that the admiral gave me permission to--I wanted to be in Engineering because I was a civil engineering graduate. Gunnery wouldn't do me any good after the war. He said you've got to get permission from the South Dakota captain--it was Captain Lynn McCormick at the time. They were so short of anybody with engineering experience down in the engineering division, that he said we'd be delighted to have you. Both the engineering officer and the captain were ready to accept me, so it worked out better than I could have hoped for.

Thompson: Describe the nature of your service while on board, after your service with the admiralty staff. What were your duties aboard?

Manson: One of my fortunate experiences, before I even got on the South Dakota, when we were on the Texas, we were in on the North African invasion--I was brought onto the admiral's staff, because I'd been on the ship's crew of the Texas. Then when the admiral came aboard the Texas, which was equipped with admiral's quarters--I was basically a communicator. The American forces put ashore General George Patton for the first time--he was in charge of the Army that landed in the Casablanca area of French Morocco. The date of that landing is November 8, 1942. The greatest thing was, among the many junior officers the admiral's staff had, up on the admiral's bridge during the landing of the North African invasion, the admiral said, "I'd like to have Ken Manson up on the admiral's bridge with me," as well as the communications officer, who was a full commander. So there was the admiral, there was the commander, and here was this little junior officer--ensign--up there on the bridge, which had a fantastic view our North African landing. We got to see all the Higgins boats unloading troops from the troop transports, and the ropes going down the side of the ship. It was such a fantastic, lucky break for me to be up there with the admiral, looking at the beach and the ships unloading troops. The admiral I was with at the landing in North Africa was Admiral Monroe Kelly, a nice individual.

Thompson: Aboard the South Dakota, can you describe the nature of your duties?

Manson: Ninety-nine percent the same as they were aboard the Texas. It was coding and decoding of top secret messages. It was great to be in on the planning--that was exciting. I was twenty years old.

Thompson: If you could give me your date of birth and place of birth.

Manson: My birthday is January 22, 1922. I went to college and joined the Naval ROTC when I was sixteen and graduated at twenty. I had my twentieth birthday in January of '42 and got my commission on May 2, 1942. My place of birth was Jacksonville, Florida. My family moved, when I was a year old, to New Orleans and I lived there ever since.

Thompson: How would you describe your ethnic background?
Manson: I happen to be Presbyterian. Most of my ancestors are either English or Scottish or Irish.
Thompson: What was most your hazardous experience?
Manson: The South Dakota has a fantastic history. Most of the great things that happened were before I got aboard, the Coral Sea and Savo Island. That's one of the reasons I was so attracted to the South Dakota. Not only was it a great, efficient, fighting machine, these guys had been through the worst kind of naval battles that I'd ever heard about. That they could take that kind of beating helped me convince my wife--I was married on November 30, 1942--when she said why are you going to leave the admiral's staff? I said the South Dakota is such a proven fighter, I think I'm safer aboard the South Dakota, as well as being much more excited about the whole thing.

When I first reported aboard the Texas, I was in the gunnery department, and my watches were on the five-inch mounts. These were hand-loaded single five-inch guns. I was in charge of three of them on the port side of the ship. You had to hand-load the shell; you had to hand-load the bag of powder. We knew that if a torpedo plane came at us, we could get off two shots at that plane before it would drop its torpedo. We could get off that shot and we could hand-load a second shot, and the plane would be right on us. When I got aboard the South Dakota, they had these automatic twin-mount five-inch guns. They could crank out probably ten shots in the same time we could have gotten off two on the Texas. I said to myself, this thing is so beautiful and so automatic I would hate to leave this ship.
Thompson: Any fears of death or injury?
Manson: We took a bomb hit June 19 of '44 off Saipan. That was probably the most single damaging thing. Well, you asked another question which I haven't finished. When I reported to the South Dakota, after leaving the admiral's staff, this was right at Norfolk, August of '43, I had asked for the engineering department. The place they needed the biggest help was in what they called the A Division. The engineering department has four divisions, the A division, which stands for Auxiliary equipment, which means every motor, every pump, anything that has anything to do with the engine of the South Dakota, other than the main propulsion system. The main propulsion system, and the people most involved with that, were in two divisions, one called the M Division, which we always called the Machinery division, it had to do with turbines--and the other was the B Division, for Boilers. I became the A Division junior officer for about two months. That included the motor that controlled the ship's rudder and the machinery that converted salt water into drinking water. The fourth division was the E Division, which was Electrical. My duties most of the time were with the A Division.
[Disc 2]
So as they looked around, they said, "Ken, you're probably the best guy to take over the E Division until we can get back to port and pick up a guy who has made it his career." The electrical system of any ship is so complicated, especially on a new ship. People who ran the E Division, who had the most knowledge about it, were the guys who had come aboard in the Navy early enough and made it a career and moved up through the ranks of machinist's mate or electrician's mate and into a chief and warrant officer and then became commissioned officers. So they didn't have anybody aboard ship at that time. They said, "Ken, what do you know about electricity?" I said, "Not much." But it didn't matter. I said I took a year of

electricity, and they said that seals the deal. So I was acting electrical officer for about three months.

Then we took this bomb hit, which sent us back to--first they sent us back to Eniwetok, they couldn't fix us there, they couldn't fix us at Pearl Harbor. This bomb hit from a Jap plane destroyed a major electrical connection from the bridge down to the CIC room. It just ruined the electrical system. So they had to get back to the States. They sent us to Bremerton, Washington, and fortunately they got a guy who knew something about electricity, an ex-warrant officer who moved up through the ranks from ensign to jaygee and he was now a full lieutenant. They bought him aboard in Bremerton, and I was able to go back to my comfortable A Division officer job.

The training motor, which turns the turret horizontally, burned out. This motor is about three or four feet in diameter. All the cables were completely charcoaled. Here I was the electrical officer. The captain said Admiral Halsey (or Spruance, I forgot who it was) is expecting us to have three turrets working by the time we land at such-and-such. And we were on the way to that landing. He said, "I cannot tell the Admiral that we can't make our number three turret work." You're talking about one-third of our main battery. It's got to be operational by the time we get to the landing. He said we may have the biggest naval engagement we've ever had. I said let me call together my experts.

I had three or four warrant officers, all of them had made their whole naval careers. One said, "I think I can build a whole new motor from the wire we've got aboard ship, by rewiring this burned-out motor." I said, "You've got to be kidding me." He said, "I'm convinced I can do it if you give me all the men I need. Take them off their watches and give me the men I pick out. I want to work around the clock. We'll pull up that crazy motor and we'll rewire it and we'll put it back down in there while we're underway." I told the captain, "This is what I think we can do." He said, "Get going on it. Anybody wants you, they're going to have to go through me." We got down there and found the big motor that had burned out, and it was evidently put in early when the ship was built, and a lot of stuff had covered over the top of it. We had to cut a hole in the steel deck to bring this burned-out motor up. We didn't have any hooks above the motor, so we had to take a steel plate and make it a hook and weld it to the deck above. We put a chain fall down to bring this motor up the deck where we could get to all sides of the motor. I'm telling you more than you want to know, but I wanted to give you some of the crazy experiences of being an electrical officer when I didn't know anything about electricity. We finally got the thing working, after about two and a half days, and the big key moment was, "Lower that motor back down in there." We pressed that switch. I was eating nails, practically, when the warrant officer says are you ready to press that switch. Cuz if this doesn't work, I don't know what we're going to do. We heard this grinding motor, and all of a sudden, turret number three moved horizontally, just like it was supposed to. This warrant officer should have got some sort of medal. He was a genius.

Thompson: As an officer, what was your reaction to shipboard discipline?

Manson: Let me give you a little background. I heard from other officers, who had been aboard the South Dakota from its initial sailing--Captain Gatch was a regular kind of guy. Naval Academy and strict discipline, but he was also a relaxed kind of guy. I found out from a shipmate who had been at the Academy, he said, "Ken, I was wondering what I was going to find when I got aboard the South Dakota." He said it had kind of a reputation around Annapolis and Washington, D.C., and his phrase was "non-reg." Non-regulation. He said Captain Gatch, after being beat up and survived, he was much more relaxed in the

unnecessary discipline. For instance, officers didn't have to wear ties. At that stage of the Pacific War, that was really an oddity. Captain Gatch felt, we're going to make this a fighting ship, make the people aboard as comfortable as possible, and I think that really was a true story. In the Engineering department, we were probably more non-reg than the guys who were in gunnery. When I came aboard South Dakota, it was slightly non-reg, but not ever to the point where it affected or hurt any kind of discipline aboard the ship. The enlisted men appreciated this, and I think they appreciated the fact I recognized this when I came aboard. They could come up and talk to me.

When we came back from Bremerton, we stopped in Pearl Harbor for a few days. The next morning a whole bunch of guys were standing outside my door. We had kind of a "eight o'clock" where you could complain to the division officers if you had any problems. I must have had half a dozen guys that wanted to get married. I said, "Look guys, I'll tell you right out, the Navy says we're supposed to discourage any guy who wants to get married, particularly these cute-looking Hawaiian girls." Compared to the regular American girls, they looked exotic. But they could talk to me and level with me. I think I got much more work out of those guys. I was never a guy who liked to give orders. I was the kind of guy who said, "Look, guys, we got to get this done and it's gotta get done right now." Man, they jumped to it and really did it. It wasn't because I was ever on them to do that. Some of the guys in gunnery, whether they were Academy graduates or not, they thought they had to stand up straight and give an order. I didn't work that way. I worked to pull together, and I think I got a heck of a lot more work out of them. We called Engineering "the black gang." We were always dirty from the black oil, and the coal soot they used to have. I was frequently dirty from oil from my knees down. I think we had one of the most efficient ships. And it was non-reg. South Dakota had that reputation.

Thompson: Do you have any comments about seasickness or fears of weather, submarine warfare, bombing attacks?

Manson: When that bomb hit on June 19, 1944, I was not--let me go back again. Besides standing watches in the main engine room--the A Division officer, that was his watch standing division, just like the head of B Division and the M Division, we all took our turns, standing one watch on and two watches off, the way the whole ship did. But my battle station was--we only had one damage control station in the Engineering Department. Topside, the Gunnery Department, they had about two or three, but mine was the only Engineering damage control station. So I was below decks, about three or four decks down, and my battle station was just outside the hospital sick bay area. We had to be close to the engine room, because our primary job during battle was, in case we took a torpedo, or in some way one of the boiler rooms or engine rooms would not function, we had to do an awful lot of studying ahead of time to learn where the valves were. One of the beautiful things about a nice new ship was--if a torpedo put one of the engine rooms out of commission--we could still get all four propellers turning by moving the steam and oil and everything else from the three working engine rooms to bypass the damaged one. We had to know where the valves were, where you turn all these things off and on, so we could get enough steam going to the fourth propeller that normally was operated from the damaged one. We could still give the captain the power of four screws.

I had breakfast on the morning of June 19th, '44, with the young ensign who was in the topside damage control station, and was killed when the bomb hit. I had breakfast with him at 7:30 or 8:00, something like that, and at eleven o'clock, he was dead. They first told us not to

leave the damage control station for engineering, because that's too important to us. Then they finally released us and said you can go topside and do what you can to help out. They'd moved up their other deckside damage control stations to repair the damage. So I got up there, and found the guy I'd had breakfast with. He was lying on the deck in the wardroom. He was turned over toward the wall and I could see his leg was broken, like a ninety degree angle, halfway between his knee and his ankle. I recognized him in his uniform, and I went over there, and he was lying with his head facing the floor and the wall. A guy had just dragged him over there, and he knew me, and he said, "Mr. Manson, don't bother turning him over. He's dead." I said, "Are you sure?" He said, "Please don't turn him over. Half of his head has been sliced away."

I didn't feel any fear. It was just you had a job to do. One of the dangers of that situation is when the Jap plane dropped that one bomb, he also wiped out a whole bunch of machine guns--forty millimeter, fifty caliber, twenty millimeters, and things like that, for the port front quarter of the ship. We were afraid the next Jap plane, any of them that seen that one bomb hit, they're gonna be able to come in that corner of the ship without any antiaircraft fire coming at them. Because it had all been wiped out. That was a concern, but it was never a fear. I think that's true of the ship as a whole. We had a job to do. We went to cleaning it up, throwing steel over the side to get it out of the way.

It's not because we steeled ourselves against it, I don't believe, there was just a job to be done. There was never a feeling of fear, and I never saw it in any of the men we had.

What I thought was the most harrowing experience--you've probably heard about the explosion. Off Okinawa, we were loading new ammunition. We'd been bombarding Okinawa like crazy. Okinawa was a much tougher battle than most people realize. We practically had used up all of our shells and powder bags in the bombardments. We came back at least three or four times and bombarded. At one time the Army was just stuck on a certain point there, and they needed extra artillery, you might say, to get through to move up through the middle of Okinawa. We'd just about used up all our ammunition, so we were pulled back some fifty to a hundred miles off Okinawa and were reloading alongside a ship called the Wrangell, W-R-A-N-G-E-L-L, which was a supply ship. They gave us some fuel as well, as I remember. We had fuel lines and big hawsers going back and forth.

Before the explosion, I went up on the top deck. Because I was going to go down in the main engine room to take my duty in about another hour, I went out to get some sunshine and watch the maneuvers. They did a beautiful job transferring the great big sixteen-inch shells over to our ship. We gotten mail call, and I thought I'd write a letter to my wife and answer her letter. I went to my room. By this time I'm a full lieutenant, so I've got a nice room on the main deck level. Had I been below, I probably wouldn't have ever survived the smoke.

I sat down and started to write this letter, and all of a sudden, I felt this big bump. I thought we must have hit a strange wave. Or they dropped a shell on the deck. I stood up and was folding my papers, and the next thing I knew, another big bump. I started to walk toward the door. At that time two sailors came from the forward part of the ship, running right by my door, and they said, "Get out fast! Number two turret is going to blow!" By this time, I was trying to stand in the corridor, and I couldn't see my hand in front of my face, there was so much black smoke. Being on the main deck, it was pretty easy, and I felt my way along. I couldn't see anything straight ahead of me. I knew everybody who was there had already run out. I finally made a turn, through the wardroom, and I knew there was a corridor from the back of the wardroom that went over to the port side. It was about a fifty-foot-long corridor

and I could see daylight out there. I prayed, if I can just make it, Lord, to that doorway. And if it blows then, I might be blown overboard, but at least I'll get out of there.

When we knew there was a fire in number two turret magazine, everybody in the Navy knows if you have a fire in a magazine, that ship is going to blow in two. The question is how long it's going to be--how much time do you have. By the time I felt my way along through the black smoke of the wardroom, we'd already had four explosions. I thought I don't know why this ship hasn't blown sky high. By the time I got to the side rail, I grabbed the steel rail on the side, and I was ready to be blown over. Thank goodness that I had reached that point.

At this time I ran into my chief machinist mate, who was my number two in charge of the engineering damage control party. He looked at me and said, "Do you think we can get down there?" I said, "I know we can't get down there past number two turret. There's nothing but flame and smoke coming out of there. But I know where we can go. Let's go back to number three turret." There's a way to get down to what we called the engineering corridor, about four decks down. Along the way it had hoses and nozzles and firefighting equipment. So we went back to turret number three. When we got back there, we didn't realize the captain had passed the word already, "Prepare to abandon ship." I talked to a guy who had been up near the captain, and he said, if we don't have those flames out in the next two minutes, we're going to abandon ship. We know where this thing is going. You can't have a fire down in the main battery magazine without this thing blowing up. The captain was just going to stay up there on the bridge and ride it down. That was his job, I'm sure he felt that way.

My machinist mate chief and I went down by number three turret, moved up the engineer's corridor, passed by all the entrances to the four engine rooms and picked up our hoses and found a cabin where the hoses are normally rolled up, opened the door, pulled the hoses out, took the nozzles--the metal part is probably three feet long, with a one foot bend of about a forty-degree angle, and this beautiful fine spray nozzle out on the end of it. You're about three or four feet away from the nozzle itself. So we hooked up on the hose, and we said let's turn on the water and see if the water lines are still active. Sure enough, water came out.

So the two of us headed on, continuing forward to where the fire was. By this time the whole place was all lit up because you could see the flames ahead of you. The bulkhead walls were burning, the deck over your head was burning, and we looked up and we said what in the world could be burning; there's no insulation. It was dripping hot water on top of us, because we'd been spraying as we went along, and we realized it had been what they called fireproof paint. I can remember just lathering the fireproof paint all over the walls. But they said, don't worry, it's fireproof, it won't burn.

We'd had at least four blasts--four canisters had gone off. Actually, it wasn't four canisters. They came over in pads of two. So when they had four blasts, that meant two of the sixteen-inch canisters had gone off. It was just the heat from the other ones. The canister gets so hot it finally ignites the powder in the canister. So four of those had gone off, and the ship hadn't blown up yet.

Pretty soon we got closer to the hatch where they lowered the ammunition, and here they had all this forty-millimeter and twenty-millimeter ammunition stacked on the deck, blocking the passageway. We couldn't go forward. We said let's climb over the stupid crates. We didn't know what was in the crates. We brushed off the soot and all the debris that was on top of these crates, and we saw it was ammunition. If they stayed long enough in the hot blast, they would have started going off. We said, gee, it's fortunate we got here in time. So with the

spray nozzle, we hosed all the crates down and climbed over them, moved on up to the next bunch of crates, until we finally got up to the place where the hatch was, where all the ammunition had been passed down, and got all the flames out. We looked down, and there was some other guys, they said, no, everybody who's alive is already out of there; don't even try to go down there.

We'd picked up, fortunately, rescue breathing apparatus when we first went down by turret number three. Otherwise we wouldn't have been able to stay down there that long. We didn't have time to throw on any fireproof suits. If we'd have waited for that, the ship would have blown up, I'm afraid. We had to spray each other. We would stay in the lead from the fine spray for a few minutes, and then you couldn't stand it any longer. You were completely being dripped on. When your water spray would hit the deck above, it would hit this real hot steel. By the time it dripped back down on you, it was scalding hot. It was dripping on our bare heads--we didn't have any caps on--it was dripping on our arms, so we said let's take turns. You get behind me and hose me. That's the way we worked along the engineering corridor.

When you ask what was my most hazardous experience, that's it. The chief and I, we were never scared. It was just a job to be done. The ship's on fire; let's put it out. And thank goodness we hadn't blown up. When we got out, we said, it's a miracle.

One of the stories was--when the first explosion came along, when we were tied up with these big hawser lines across to the Wrangell, the people who were on topside heard some kind of a muffled explosion, they looked over at the Wrangell, everybody had picked up an axe, and they were hacking the hawser lines, and the Wrangell was pulling off ninety degrees and moving away as fast as they could. There was another ship close by that saw that first big flame shoot up out of the South Dakota, and one of the admirals ordered the destroyers to come along behind the South Dakota to pick up survivors. He said there's no way you're going to get a magazine fire--they could talk to the captain of the South Dakota--it was Momsen--and he said, yes, we're on fire. The number two turret main battery magazine. Put those destroyers behind the South Dakota so we can pick them up when they all jump overboard.

The chief and I moved from the port side of the South Dakota, we were moving toward the back to get to turret number three, we had guys running by so fast they nearly knocked us down. When we got back there, there must have been a thousand guys on the fantail of the ship with their life jackets on, ready to jump overboard when the captain gave the order. We hadn't heard any order. In fact, it wouldn't have made any difference. I would have gone down there, the chief would have gone down there, to put out the fire. If the two of us had not been familiar with that engineering corridor, they probably never would have put out that ammunition fire. It could have been one chain reaction, going back into the magazine.

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