

**James M. Haynes**  
Seaman First Class  
Oral History  
July 5, 2001

**Deborah M. Lyon:** This is an interview with Jim Haynes, a crewmember of the battleship, USS South Dakota, conducted by Deborah Lyon on July 5, 2001, at the Ramkota Hotel in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, during the reunion of the crew of the battleship. Please state your name and where you're currently living.

**James Haynes:** My name is James Haynes, and I'm living in Casa Grande, Arizona.

**Lyon:** Could you explain to me the circumstances of your enlistment?

**Haynes:** We were at war with Japan, and I felt it was my duty, and I always loved the Navy. In fact, I was a Sea Scout. I liked the Navy so that's why I joined the Navy.

**Lyon:** Your age at the time of your enlistment?

**Haynes:** I was nineteen years old.

**Lyon:** Could you give me some more information about the Sea Scouts, and its relation to why you selected the U.S. Navy?

**Haynes:** It's a senior organization of the Boys Scouts, and we'd meet once a week. We had our own ship above a shoe store, and we used Navy terminology. It was a fun thing. We had a boat on a lake. We were sailors. That's one reason I selected the Navy, and I always liked the Navy anyway. I had to try twice to get in. The chief said, "Son, you'll never get in the Navy. You're color blind." So I got around that. After three or four months, I tried again and didn't have a problem.

**Lyon:** What was the place of your training?

**Haynes:** San Diego Navy Training Station.

**Lyon:** What was your rating and specialty?

**Haynes:** I was a seaman first class. I spent my entire time working with guns, twenty millimeter and five-inch.

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

**Haynes:** We had four weeks of boot camp. When we graduated, we were told we were being sent overseas. When we got to Pearl Harbor--it took us nine days to get to Pearl Harbor--they assigned us on different ships in alphabetical order. Lucky I was assigned to South Dakota. The first time I went aboard the South Dakota, this boatswain mate second class had a handlebar mustache and a real deep voice--one of the men called him Sir, and it scared me to death the way he hollered at him.

**Lyon:** Where did you board USS South Dakota?

**Haynes:** Pearl Harbor. She was in drydock. That was in 1942.

**Lyon:** What was the nature of your service on board the South Dakota? Were you involved in gunnery or supply or anti-aircraft or--

**Haynes:** It had to do with the gunnery department, mostly, because that's what I worked on--twenties for a year, and on the five-inch. We had to tear them apart and wipe all the seawater off and put oil on them. Make sure there's not any water on them. Every day. And bring on the ammunition. I was in charge of the lower handling rooms two, five, and seven, so I'd keep track of the shells we had down there. And take temperatures every morning and turn them into the armory.

**Lyon:** What was the most hazardous action you experienced?

**Haynes:** Well, after being in the Navy only about nine weeks, it was our first battle. I was on the twenty-millimeter on top of number two turret, and a five-hundred-pound bomb hit the number one turret. So I got a little piece of shrapnel out of it. That was my first experience in a navy battle. At the time, it didn't bother me at all, because we was busy watching the guns firing and the planes diving, and loading the twenty-millimeter. So you didn't pay any attention, you didn't realize--in fact, I wasn't scared until after it was all over with. Then you realize they were shooting back at you. You'd see the tracers coming down from the plane toward the ship.

**Lyon: How did you manage your fears while onboard ship--of possible death and injury?**

**Haynes:** Well, I never thought about it. We were just there, and we had a job to do, and we'd do it. We did a lot of griping, but that's what kept you happy.

**Lyon: What are some of your recollections of your place in the ship's company? Were you able to move about the ship?**

**Haynes:** We had our division--the department was about eighty men. Those were the shipmates I got to know and love and lived with for three years. So they became like family to me. We could go anyplace on the ship we wanted to. We weren't restricted. We didn't venture up into the officers' quarters or anything like that, but we could go anyplace on the ship we wanted to.

**Lyon: What was your reaction to shipboard discipline?**

**Haynes:** Probably just like everybody else. I probably griped about it, but there has to be discipline or you wouldn't have anything. In boot camp, that's what they tried to instill in us more than anything else, was discipline.

**Lyon: Let's talk about your recollections of courageous actions. Any commendations?**

**Haynes:** I got a Purple Heart, but that wasn't anything I done. That was something that happened to me. I'm proud of it. We didn't get to go in any fancy ports or anything. We were always on the battle line. We'd have liberty parties, but we'd take our own food and drinks over with us. You couldn't buy anything on the islands we were on. Unless we were at Pearl Harbor. We hit Pearl Harbor a few times.

**Lyon: What were some of the islands you had liberty parties on?**

**Haynes:** I can't remember all the names. The first one, I think, was Efate. I think it was in the Marshall Islands. That was our advanced anchorage then. As we advanced further toward Japan, we'd move our anchorage up a little closer.

**Lyon: Do you want to talk about your reactions toward the sea and being on the sea?**

**Haynes:** The South Sea is smooth as glass. Beautiful. I remember one night, I was up there by myself, I could see the American flag--Old Glory--flying. When I first went to sea, I'd be dizzy for about nine days. I never was sick, but I'd be dizzy. When we was on land for awhile, the next time we'd go out, I'd be dizzy for about nine days, and I was all right after that. It didn't affect my work or anything. Weather at sea--we were in two typhoons. I'll tell you, that's scary, those typhoons are. We lost two destroyers one night. They capsized. One of them had just dropped the mail the day before, so at least we got our mail. They said they picked up all the survivors. That was during the Okinawa campaign. Between Okinawa and the Philippines. We'd go down for the Philippines campaign, and then we'd come back by Okinawa and help with artillery support. We lobbed some of the sixteen-inch in. That was between Formosa and China in the North China Sea. That was cold water there. The typhoon

was between Okinawa and in toward the Philippines. In Okinawa, every once in a while, we had kamikazes coming in. Our assignment was to stay pretty close to the Enterprise.

North of the Philippines, the Japanese tricked Halsey--had a dummy convoy go up that way, with a few carriers. We chased them up that way and left the old fleet down to fight the big Jap navy. Lost the Princeton up there. I was standing out on the main deck, right by my battle station, and I saw that bomb hit the Princeton. It hit the powder room and blew up. Then GQ sounded, and I went back in the upper handling room, so that's all I could see of it.

**Lyon: Anything else you want to talk about?**

**Haynes:** I was always told, don't go on a big ship, because regulations would be too strict. Well, I wouldn't trade it for any small ship. We always had clean sheets, always had hot meals--they might be interrupted, two or three times in a meal, but when they'd sound all clear, we'd go back to the mess hall again. And during battle, they would secure two men at a time to go eat. Maybe you'd have to rush back to your battle station, but you got hot meals all the time. I really admired the Marines on the beach, because they're the ones that really had the rough time.

**Lyon: Were you transporting Marine troops?**

**Haynes:** We had a detachment of Marines on the ship, probably eighty men, I guess. They stood officer-of-the-deck watches, stuff like that. And manned the guns, too. But we supported--I guess we supported just about every island we invaded over there. We'd go in and bombard the day before, and dive bombers would go in and dive bomb, and then the Marines would have to go in and really do the fighting.

I'm proud of our ship, like most of the guys I served with. Every time they write about it, they don't get all the stories straight. All of our documentation was the day after it happened. It is written down, I've got it on paper, every battle and the date and time, and what happened to us. So that's actually the way it happened. These books you read, they don't tell the true status. They don't have the true story about South Dakota. Someday I'd like to really get the true story out, like we have here at the reunion. What the South Dakota did during World War II. We had fifteen battle stars, thirteen from the United States, two from the Philippine government. Then we had the Navy Unit Citation, and we had the President of the Philippine Islands citation. I think our record is better than any other single ship record. We shot down sixty-four planes and sank three ships and were in nine bombardments.

We led the fleet home under the Golden Gate Bridge. That was a sight. People all across the bridge, cheering when we went under the bridge. Our quarters was the officers' quarterdeck, on the port side. We got our picture in the paper, standing behind Halsey, when the photographer was taking pictures of Halsey.

**Lyon: Was there anything I missed in the interview, that you'd like to add?**

**Haynes:** I just enjoy these reunions, getting together and talking to the men I served with. The wives have more fun than we do. They can't get over the memories we have, of things that happened fifty/sixty years ago. I don't know how many more we'll make. I'm seventy-nine years old now, and we'll have to stop one of these days. I'm glad we have the second generation following up with us to carry on the tradition of the South Dakota.

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29 November 2013