

Lynwood Rutland

Electricians Mate Petty Officer First Class

Oral History [Telephone interview]

December 14, 2001

Arthur Huseboe: How about your rank and rating?

Lynwood Rutland: I was an EM1.

Huseboe: And the dates you served on USS South Dakota?

Rutland: I'm a plankowner. I put her in commission. Right out of electrical school.

Huseboe: And you were with her until she came back to the States in '45?

Rutland: Yeah.

Huseboe: What's your date of birth?

Rutland: Twelve - twelve - two - three. I'm 78.

Huseboe: Place of birth?

Rutland: Langdale, Alabama. I grew up there. I went through the eighth grade there, and as soon as I got in the Navy, I got me a certificate of equivalency.

Huseboe: What work were you doing before you went in the Navy?

Rutland: I done some electrical work. Mostly I was just a farmboy. Motor mechanic. But they didn't need motor mechanics at that particular time, when I was coming out of boot. They needed electricians, so they sent me to St. Louis. Along with my twin brother.

Huseboe: How did you happen to enlist?

Rutland: I worked in a cotton mill in Langdale, Alabama. I got tired of it; I said I'll just go join the Navy.

Huseboe: How come the Navy?

Rutland: They had a recruiting station in Opelika and we were close by, because I lived in Langdale, I just couldn't see myself staying in a cotton mill all my life.

Huseboe: How old were you when you enlisted?

Rutland: Seventeen.

Huseboe: Where did you do your training?

Rutland: St. Louis, Missouri. Technical school. That was electrical school.

Huseboe: What was your specialty?

Rutland: I was a gyro compass technician and electrical supervisor.

Huseboe: How did you get assigned to the South Dakota?

Rutland: 'Cause they needed people. They were commissioning USS South Dakota about the time I finished up with school. So I went directly from St. Louis to the ship. Camden, New Jersey, and Philadelphia. They were loading the ship with food and tools, et cetera, when we got there from St. Louis.

Huseboe: What does a gyro compass technician do onboard ship?

Rutland: Take care of the compasses.

Huseboe: You must have been at the battle of Savo.

Rutland: Oh, yeah. I stayed on her thirty-four months.

Huseboe: Some of them said the storms were almost worse than the battles.

Rutland: I'd already left. I left in Washington. Bremerton Navy Yard. We got the Presidential Unit Citation. We were in the Pacific and the North Atlantic. That's some weird places up there. Icebergs as big as cities.

Huseboe: What was the scariest thing you went through?

Rutland: The battle of Savo Island.

Huseboe: How did you fit in, as far as work on the ship? Were you stuck in one place, or could you move around fairly freely?

Rutland: Oh, yeah, I was in what I'll call the aft part of the ship. My situation was in a group of electricians who took care of the laundry and all the cooking stuff. And some of the small gunnery. Each electrical unit was assigned a piece of the ship's electrical. Now, battle station wise, you could be assigned anywhere. My usual station was battle station four dash eight. That was down below, on the second deck. We stood by and waited for people who were in charge to tell you to do something.

Huseboe: Did you get topside quite often?

Rutland: Oh, yeah, I went topside quite often. I have stood on the deck and watched the Japs come at us. They'd be full of holes, the aircraft.

Huseboe: Shipboard discipline, how was that maintained? You were in a particular team, or crew, or how did you operate?

Rutland: We were in a crew. Let me get this book, and give you my twin's name. His name is Leonard Rutland.

Huseboe: He wasn't on the same ship, was he?

Rutland: Yeah.

Huseboe: Did that cause a little confusion?

Rutland: At times, yeah. He lives in Hommassa, Florida.

Huseboe: What did he do onboard the ship?

Rutland: He was in a group of people who took care of telephones and some of the stuff to do with the five-inches maybe or the quads. The quad forties.

Huseboe: Do you have any recollections of anybody who received an award for his courageous actions? I know the captain got a Navy Cross, I believe.

Rutland: He made admiral, you know.

Huseboe: Were you seasick onboard?

Rutland: I never was sick on the South Dakota. I have been on other ships.

Transcribed by:
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