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INTERVIEW WITH LES TUCKER

October 28, 1987

C: You can give your rank and serial number when you were in the Navy.

L: My name is Lester B. Tucker. I'm a retired Chief Warrant Officer from the U.S. Navy, having retired in 1967, entering the service in 1939. I served aboard the USS North Carolina during WWII in the Guadalcanal area, Solomons, from August 7, 1942 until September 1, 1943.

C: Tell me about what you did in the Navy. Tell me how old you were when you first enlisted.

L: I was 19 years old. I enlisted November 9, 1939, having completed high school and was serving in the CCC in California.

(Discussion of what made him enlist. Discussion also about his employment situation at the time, since it was Depression time.)

(Discussion about his duties and responsibilities while in the service--about his ranks and interests, etc. Talked about when the war started and where he was when Pearl Harbor was attacked--in New York City.)

C: Do you remember while you were out on ship ever hearing broadcasts from the enemy?

L: I know that you are referring to Tokyo Rose, having been in quite a bit of action in the South Pacific. I

cannot remember specific broadcasts but I do remember very well generally several broadcasts. I should say that we thoroughly enjoyed most of her broadcasts from the viewpoint of the entertainment. She always had the best records--Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw and many others--and it was a break for us to listen to the music.

C: Did you look forward to hearing it?

L: Yes, it seemed to me that the broadcasts we would receive would be in the early evening, around 1800-1900 hours (that would be 6:00 - 7:00 PM). It was a pleasure because we didn't have Armed Forces Radio set up at that time and it was entertaining.

C: Did the men talk about it?

L: All of the men, or the majority of them, enjoyed. Of course, we soon realized that she was a propagandist. But that didn't seem to deter us from listening to her.

C: What kinds of things did she say?

L: It would seem like she would go ahead and hit on homesickness. "And what are you American troops doing out here?" The only demoralizing effect that she seemed to have on us at the time was when she had rapid information, and we knew that we had lost a ship or a certain battle had raged in the area and it seemed like her intelligence was exceptionally rapid and good. And we would often wonder how come she got the word so

fast. So we would listen to that and, if we knew the ship had not been sunk or so forth and maybe just hit by one or two bombs or a projectile, we knew right then and there that she would elaborate that the ship had been sunk, or that so many people had been killed, like the Marines at Guadalcanal or Talage. And we were nip-and-tuck during the whole Solomons campaign. We were almost defeated and it was depressing when she would immediately, within 48 hours, say, "You Americans lost such-and-such ships and so forth. What are you doing here? Why don't you go back?" This was a little disheartening. But we teased and braved it and enjoyed the music. And we let that bypass our thoughts.

C: Was there anything you could identify as lies that you heard?

L: Oh, absolutely. The ship I was on, which was the USS North Carolina, was consigned to the depths twice. I don't remember the exact dates, but there we are just floating around, you know, as well as ever, doing our job, and so we knew that this must apply also to other ships, that she was absolutely exaggerating which, of course, later proved to be the truth. She was exaggerating.

C: So you heard her say that you'd been sunk?

L: Yes. I couldn't give you a specific date but there was one time when she said that a battleship [we were the

only battleship out there at the time] had been sunk. Seemingly the Japanese had very good intelligence. It was the rapidity with which she reported the actions--we wondered how could she get this information so fast? Often we weren't told of what ships might have been sunk or damaged in another task force or group. We hadn't been told a thing--we learned these things from Tokyo Rose.

C: Did you believe them?

L: Not all of them.

C: Any of them?

L: We might have . . . For instance, I remember when the Chicago was sunk and we took on the survivors, approximately 36 to 48 hours off the Chicago, and I can remember that broadcast--what date I can't remember, whether it was one or two days after we took the survivors aboard. But the Chicago had been sunk; they knew--they had sunk it. And the only way we knew about it at the time was from the survivors.

C: Did it ever make you think that there might be spies on your own ship or in your own forces?

L: Not at all, and the reason would be that radio communications was a controlled area, and it would have been very difficult for anyone to have a radio 200 or 300 miles from nearest land and to be relaying information from the ship, such as a crew member. No,

it never dawned on us that this would occur.

C: Did you know anybody who was depressed by any of her broadcasts?

L: I cannot recall anyone's name, but various personalities who were homesick or who had received a "Dear John" letter--yes, they would get slightly depressed but it usually passed very soon.

C: How about the . . . did you have a girlfriend at the time?

L: I was engaged at the time.

C: How about all those remarks about the 4-F people going out with your girlfriend?

L: Certainly that occurred, and there were men that were transferred from the ship that had listened to Tokyo Rose that had written back to their shipmates and said, "When I got home my girlfriend was going out with someone and I guess Tokyo Rose might have known what she was talking about." But this was rare, this was an exception when this would occur. Anything in communications--letters primarily, at that time--we very seldom got a Red Cross telegram that far at sea--but anything that would abrase you, play upon the personality of unknowing reality, Tokyo Rose seemed to be pretty good in applying these suggestive statements. That, "Yes, your girlfriend is back there. You've been gone so many months she's probably dating so-and-so.

Not a specific person, but a fella she works with, maybe. Don't keep your hopes up that she's going to be waiting for you." Such information as that.

C: What about requests? Did she play requests for music?

L: I certainly can't remember her playing any specific requests from--there was no way we could get in touch with her for a request.

C: How about prisoners-of-war?

L: Well, of course at that time the major prisoners of war, the Americans, were those that had been captured in the Philippines, although a few in Hong Kong. And we had absolutely no information about those prisoners-of-war.

C: What year was that?

L: Of course I was only in the South Pacific from, as I said before, the initial attacks on Guadalcanal up through the New Britain campaigns in the eastern Solomons, up to about September 1, 1943.

C: Then were you sent home?

L: Yes. You rotate your men after two years in the Navy. Assignment for schooling, new construction, or, like myself, back to flight training, shore duty for a while. Remember the whole period I am talking about we have not enlarged our forces, naval forces; we're almost at a very boresome state, long days at sea, boring routine, and under those circumstances, hanging

on waiting for the Navy to increase, send ships--it was many times just . . . it got on your nerves because it was so boring. All you could do was study for advancement, stand your watches, and of course we would get up at anywhere from 4:00 to 4:30 in the morning to be at our battle stations against the submarines primarily, until about 30 minutes after dawn, then it was breakfast, then training, gun practice or specific technical training in your field, on watch. (Talks about watch schedules--day after day, week after week, etc.)

(Talked about staying at the Royal Hawaiian for 25¢ per day.)

- C: Tokyo Rose had a reputation for referring to specific bars and hang-outs that people liked and she'd talk about the Coconut Grove or about the team she'd rooted for, or something like that, and it was those little pieces of playing on homesickness--did you ever hear any of that, being a Californian?
- L: Well, of course Tokyo Rose was a southern California gal just like I was a southern California boy, raised in Long Beach area. I think she must have been 3-5 years older than myself, having graduated from the University of Southern California or California about 1940-41, because she was in Japan when war broke out on December 7 and I didn't graduate until very early '39

from high school. Yes, I was acquainted with some of the places, but in the Depression those people that didn't have the money did not go to the Coconut Grove but, of course, the Coconut Grove was used from time to time for a U.S.O. show or for dances put on by the Hollywood Theater Guild, just on occasion, and a lot of servicemen would go up there. But there were other places--and of course not being 21 I didn't go to bars in '39, '38.

C: Did you have any idea of what she looked like?

L: I think we all tried to match her very sweet voice with her face. Having gone to school with about 90-100 Nisei there were some very cute Japanese girls, including some in my class, and of course having never served in Japan at that time you would put together . . . well, such a voice like that she must be a very nice-looking, by American standards, woman. And then years later when I served in Japan in 1946 and again from 1950-1953 in Sugei, Japan, it's just like in the United States--the variations in females' looks cover a broad spectrum.

C: Was she a fantasy for the various servicemen who were out there for months at a time, or do you think that it worked that way?

L: I don't think so. I believe that we were pretty steadfast in our thinking about, "Hey, this is a

propagandist." We all would conceive in our minds what she might look like but, no, I could see no concept applied by individuals.

C: Were you wounded in the course of the war?

L: I can just say "nearly." (Discussed being coverage for the "Enterprise" and the near-hit for him during an attack.)

C: Just to finish up with Tokyo Rose, did you have any anger or hostility for her or for what she was doing? How did you feel about that?

L: I really think I was unconcerned about her personally. I did not know that she was a citizen of the United States at the time. I cannot remember that being revealed to us. It may have been and I could have forgotten. But as far as any feelings at all pro or con, I can't recollect. All I can say is that I certainly appreciated the music she played.