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INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT ANDERSON

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R: As a Navy veteran in the Asiatic-Pacific area during WWII we had occasion to listen to broadcasts by Tokyo Rose. It was announced and we looked forward to listening, usually in the evening wherever we might have been, usually down in the New Hebrides, New Guinea, as I recall down in there. Knowing very well that it was a propaganda broadcast on short-wave, we would stop everything actually and listen to it on the small ship I was on because it was interspersed with the music of the big time bands of the 1930s and '40s and we liked to listen to Harry James and some of those boys, but then she always had a message, a propaganda message. And I can recall one in particular--she hit upon atabrine tablets, which was a drug tablet that we all had to take and at that time was the only known--it wasn't a "cure", it was a deterrent of getting malaria. And the tablet was real yellow in color and it affected your body so your complexion was almost yellow. And after a month or so of taking these, one tablet a day and it was kind of mandatory and we didn't want malaria so we took this tablet, and she came on and the solo broadcast was that we that had taken atabrine tablets to the point of discoloring our skin was causing us to become sterile. And propaganda goes so far, but that

kind of worried some of the young married fellas out there and some of them planning on getting married. It didn't bother me because, heck, that was the furthest from my mind at that time. I know an M.D. aboard ship had to come on and say, "Don't worry, fellas, that is strictly propaganda--there's no research that atabrine tablets were going to cause sterility."

But another thing, as I recall, is--she came on trying to, I guess as I understood, get everybody homesick. And she came on several times with all the "Dear John" letters we were getting, it was an effort in our futility, and our government, and our knowing that we would never get back to the States because of the Imperialists' superiority over the area, the folks back home (especially the women) were not going to wait. So we'd get "Dear John" letters and rightfully so.

C: Did she read any of them over the air?

R: No. Naturally it was a devastating moment for some of these people that were getting "Dear John" letters, and I hope you understand what I mean by a "Dear John" letter--the relationship is through in a letter. And friends, sweethearts, young wives--and that was a devastating effect in itself. And she promoted, increased the anxiety of these "Dear John" letters.

This was the two main things that I remember about

Tokyo Rose.

C: Did you have any friends or buddies who did receive "Dear John" letters who were depressed by this?

R: Well, we by and large were very amused by it. It got to a point where we were wondering what was going to come out next. I was on a back echelon--the ship was on a back echelon--most of the islands had been secured, so then to hear her say how we were outmanned, outgunned, and the superiority of the Imperial Forces was like a comedy to us at that time. This was 1944 and the spring of 1945. And fleet commanders let us listen to it. They would record the short-wave and play it to us at a certain time on the ship because it was amusement and you didn't have movies or anything like that, except old movies, so it was just a lighter section of our day after chow in the evening.

C: Did you say they were recorded?

R: Evidently, because as we went from time zone to time zone on the ship on movement we got it a certain time each day, so I knew it wasn't coming direct. Now maybe the fleet censored some of it out, I don't know. I'm not aware of it. It was after evening chow, as I recall, which was around 6:00 - 1800 as Navy time. So that was an ongoing thing. But it could have been censored, I don't know. But the thing about the atabrine tablets and the "Dear John" letters--if it

had been censored before we heard it, they let that go, for whatever reason.

C: What kind of voice did she have?

R: Tokyo Rose had a beautiful voice. She was easy to listen to. And that was kind of appreciated, and besides, it was a sexy voice as far as the troops were concerned. And they liked that. She could lead in to the music portion of it beautifully, you know, about Glenn Miller, which was very popular at that time. And I think it was about the time when he had disappeared or was killed in the Service, so his music was more than relevant to us at that time. And, Harry James . . . but most of the big name bands, she had a piece of music--not complete recording and I don't remember how long Tokyo Rose . . . You see we weren't allowed radios, it had to come over the ship's intercom system to us, so I'm sure it was censored, a lot of it, but they didn't censor out the "Dear John" and the attabrine tablets.

C: How did the music make you feel?

R: Great! Great! She had us there, because then we were attentive. Then we would laugh and "ha, ha" at her when she would come out with some of the propaganda statements and so forth because we knew they were wild and out of context, especially when our fleet was chasing the Japanese fleet all over the Pacific and she

was telling us how superior the Imperial Navy was and all that, and that we would all be in Davy Jones' locker and all of this business. I think our service personnel and commanders looked at it as kind of an ego-boosting thing. You know, "Hey, see what she's saying? and where we are? It's all false anyway." So that's probably why they let it go.

C: Did you have an idea what she looked like?

R: No. In fact, with her soft voice I guess most of us, and I for one, had envisioned her as not a Nisei but she could be in Hollywood in the movies--you know, beautiful gal, that's the way we envisioned her. And she was saying how well she was treated in Japan and was so glad that she wasn't in America anymore, and all of that. So we knew that her background was from the States.

C: Did she refer to the States? To California?

R: Not specifically that I recall. Like I said before, I don't know how long her broadcasts were--10 minutes, 15, half hour or whatever.