

Basic Detail Report



Eugene Smith Jr. Oral History

Date

July 8, 2016

Primary Maker

Eugene Smith Jr.

Medium

MOV, MXF, AVI, PDF

Description

Eugene Smith Jr. served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid (CV-11) as a steward's mate first class (STM1)

from 1943 to 1944. The Intrepid Museum recorded his oral history interview on July 8, 2016. See transcript for complete interview. Below is a summary: Smith began his interview by discussing his family and stating that his father and brothers also served in the military. He then explained why he joined the Navy, recalled the attack on Pearl Harbor. Smith, who was Black, noted how Dorie Miller had influenced him. As the interview continued, Smith momentarily recounted boot camp as well as his brief time aboard USS Santee (CVE-29). Smith then explained that he was attached to a squadron at this time, and his duty was to serve the officers. He also noted that he remained with the squadron until he was assigned to Intrepid. Smith recalled the first time he saw Intrepid and discussed his duties as a steward's mate, such as working in the officers' dining room, waking the cooks and steward's mates to start their day at five in the morning, and cleaning the officers' staterooms. He also stated that the officers were nice, however he wished that he could have been promoted to another job. Smith explained that he could not perform any other jobs because he had to stay in the mess, noting that, being from the South, he was used to discrimination. Smith then discussed being assigned to a 20mm anti-aircraft gun. He stated that Intrepid's captain had wanted steward's mates to man the ship's guns and noted that he was selected for this job. Smith also recalled receiving gunnery training at Fort Ord and Hawaii. He was glad to be handpicked and given the opportunity to receive gunnery training. This then led to an explanation of how he was injured during a kamikaze attack while manning a 20mm gun in gun tub 10 on October 29, 1944. Smith discussed the attack and recalled being taken down to sick bay. He was burned and lost sight in his right eye. He then noted that, while he was in the hospital, Admiral Chester Nimitz had visited and spoken with him. After discussing his injuries, Smith stated that he received a medical discharge. The interview then shifted to a discussion on life aboard ship. Smith explained that all of the Black sailors lived in the same quarters because they all worked in the officers' mess. He also described his bunk, noting the advantage of being on the bottom bunk, and discussed food, stating that steward's mates ate the same food as the officers. Smith then recalled that most officers appreciated the steward's mates, with some exceptions. He reiterated that, growing up in the South, he learned to work around these problems. Smith also noted that steward's mates had no days off unless the ship was in port and the officers were off of the ship. As the

interview continued, Smith discussed life after the Navy, explaining that he met his wife in Hunters Point Shipyard when Intrepid returned for repairs. He then briefly reflected on his time in the Navy, stating that he enjoyed the Navy and learned a lot. The only problems he had while on board Intrepid were from some Southerners. Smith then shifted back to the topic of life after the Navy. After his medical discharge, he returned to Alabama, married his wife, and moved to California. As the interview came to an end, Smith discussed earning the Navy Cross. Extent: 6 media files, 14 page transcript

Dimensions

44 minutes