

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Robert Serra

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VR2-A-L-2013-066

Robert J. Serra, a World War II veteran who served on the USS Yorktown at the Battle of Coral Sea, and at Midway where the Yorktown was sunk, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember-WW II* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Aug 14, 2013 Location: Serra residence in Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Betty Workman & Jan Culp, ALPL Volunteers

Total Pages: 40 pgs. Total Time: 1:47 / 1.78 hrs

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on October 24, 2013.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Robert J. Serra, *Veterans Remember*, VR2-A-L-2013-066

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Robert (Bob) Serra was born on July 14, 1920 in Pawnee, Illinois, and moved several times until the family finally settled in Springfield, Illinois. Serra graduated from Lanphier High School in Springfield in 1938, then worked for a time in the Ayling Kite Factory in Springfield. In the fall of 1940 he decided to enlist in the Navy, following the lead of a friend who was also joining. Serra took his Navy Basic Training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center north of Chicago, then was sent to Norfolk Virginia, and assigned to the USS Ranger, then in port. He was soon transferred to an F4F Wildcat flight squadron in Norfolk, where he initially performed menial duties, but eventually trained on maintaining the F4F Wildcat. In the summer of 1941 the squadron was assigned to the USS Yorktown (CV-5). For the next several months, the Yorktown patrolled the Atlantic, mostly seeing duty in the north Atlantic, often serving as an escort for British convoys, who were often attacked by German submarines. (The U.S. was not at war with the Germans, so the Americans had orders not to fire on the submarines.)

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Yorktown transferred to the Pacific, Serra's main duty was maintenance of Wildcats. The Yorktown suffered a direct hit in early May, 1942 during the Battle of Coral Sea. The ship steamed to Pearl Harbor, was patched up very quickly, and two days later sailed north toward the tiny island of Midway. During the Battle of Midway, the Yorktown was hit multiple times, and on June 4th the order was given to abandon ship. Serra went over the side, and spent four hours in the water before he was able to clamor onto a neighboring ship. (The Yorktown sank on Jun 7th, 1942.) Following the battle, Serra was assigned to a Carrier Aircraft Service Unit 4 on the island of Maui, and later transferred to San Diego, CA where he served out the remainder of the war in an Assembly and Repair unit. Bob passed away on June 17, 2014.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Service on the USS Yorktown, CV-5; Battle of Coral Sea; Battle of Midway; F4F Wildcat; combat in the north Atlantic in 1940-1941 (prior to war); life in 1930s Springfield, Illinois; basic training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center; Pearl Harbor after Japanese attack; Carrier Aircraft Service Unit (CASU); Ayling Kite Factory;

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