

**The National Museum of the Pacific War  
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies  
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with  
Scott Gray West  
1742146  
Master Chief Petty Officer  
CV 2 USS Lexington  
CVE 12 USS Copahee**

**Interviewed  
May 17, 2005**

Scott Gray West  
1742146  
Master Chief Petty Officer  
CV 2 USS Lexington  
CVE 12 USS Copahee

Medal Earned:  
Good Conduct  
Ruptured Duck

Interviewed by  
John B. Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter  
May 17, 2005

My name is John B. Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter and I are interviewing this gentleman on May 17, 2005.

Mr. Tombaugh

Would you please state your name and address?

Mr. West

Scott Gray West, 2426 Waynesboro-Shubuta Rd., Waynesboro, Mississippi.

Mr. Tombaugh

What is your birthday?

Mr. West

September 26, 1913.

Mr. Tombaugh

Where did you sign up at?

Mr. West

At the Naval Air Station in Seattle, Washington.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you remember that station?

Mr. West

Yes, very well.

Mr. Tombaugh

What was the year you enlisted?

Mr. West

I enlisted in 1935. When I was assigned to the CV 2 USS Lexington.

The following is taken from the files of John B. Tombaugh:

"-----  
CV 2 USS Lexington (first carrier) built. The  
fourth ship in the US Navy to carry this name.  
Length :888' long flight deck,  
830 at W.L.  
Beam :106'  
Displacement :33,000 tons standard  
40,000 tons full load  
Machinery :four Turbines powered by 16  
hugh oil fired steam boilers.  
The Turbines ran four electric  
turbine sets of eight large  
electric motors connected to  
the shafts.

Power :33,200 kilowatts per hour  
 Ships hp :184,000,  
           45,000 per shaft at 317 rpms  
 Speed :34 knots  
 Armament :Eight 8" Triple Mounted guns,  
           twelve 5" AA guns plus eight  
           m.g.s.  
 Crew :341 minimum,  
       2,951 on the day she sank.  
 Catapults :1  
 Elevators :One, T shaped aft  
 Aircraft :90  
 Builder :Quincy  
 Built :1925  
 Completed :Dec., '27  
 Sunk :7 May, '42  
 Cause :Japanese bombs and with her  
        out of control the DD 360 USS  
        Phelps fired a torpedo into  
        her.  
 Lost :216 men  
 Saved :2,735 men.

-----"

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where did you take your basic training?

**Mr. West**

My basic training was in Norfolk, Virginia. I went through and trained in squadron 1735.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

While there you got to know a lot of the guys in your unit?

**Mr. West**

Well I got to know every man in Platoon 17 and their friendships have lasted all my life.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

When you got done do you remember when you graduated from there?

**Mr. West**

It was in early September of 1935.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where did you go next?

**Mr. West**

The CV 2 USS Lexington.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

How did you go?

Mr. West

It was on the cattle boat compared it a troop carrier, I can't think of the name but it was an old WW I single screw WW I boat.

I left there at Long Beach, California and went aboard the CV 2 USS Lexington. I went aboard as Seaman 2nd Class and left as 2nd Class Petty Officer.

Mr. Tombaugh

How long were you on the CV 2 USS Lexington?

Mr. West

Four years and at that time I was assigned to V I Division and assigned Division number 135, I kept that number all the time I was on the CV 2 USS Lexington.

Mr. Tombaugh

The following is taken from the files of John B. Tombaugh who is an honorary member of the CVE 12 USS Copahee and built a 9'2" model of the USS Copahee which today resides on his mantle in his home:

"-----  
**ESCORT CARRIERS, CVE**

CVE, at least known to the men that serve aboard them, stands for Combustible, Vulnerable, Expendable. Other monikers assigned to these include "postage stamp carrier," the "jeep carrier," and the "baby flattop." These were half the size of the CV 2 USWS Lexington and five of these CVE's could easily fit inside a modern CVN.

The first CVE built of the Bogue class was the CVE 12 USS Copahee from the SS Steel Architect which is a C 3 hull. The Steel Archirect had only just slipped its ways at the builders when it was towed to Bremerton and the main deck and superstructure were cut with a torch from the hull, lifted off with a crane, and set onto a barge platform. That was then taken back to the builder where it was lifted up and set onto the hul of another ship and welded onto the hull. Throughout her life as the USS Copahee she is to continue to have the name SS Steel Architect bead welded to the bow of the hull.

This was the first CVE to have the Superstructure mounted on the side for the conning of the ship. All retrofits incorporated into the following CVE's coming off the ways were done as a result of those changes and additions done on the USS Copahee throughout her service in the war. (see AVG) The second CVE to be built of the Bogue class was the

*B7C Deal*

CVE Bogue.

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**BOGUE CLASS**  
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No. in class :44 (33 were transferred to the Royal Navy and the first delivered is the CVE HMS Audacity which was built on the captured German vessel SS Hannover).

Hull numbers of those kept in the US Navy :CVE 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25 and 31.

Copahee CVE 12  
Length :465' wl,  
          495' 8" oa  
Beam :69' 6" X 23' 3"  
Flight deck :111'6" wide  
Displacement :8,890 tons empty  
              13,890 tons standard  
              15,700 tons full load  
Flight Deck :442'3" long  
Width :111'6"  
Draft :26'  
Machinery :geared turbine  
Shaft :one  
Shaft HP :8,500 SHP.  
Fuel :3,420 tons (864,736 gallons.)  
Speed :18 knots max.  
Range :61.5 days at 15 knots  
          53.9 days at 16 knots  
          49.3 days at 17 knots  
          43.1 days at 18 knots  
Armament :two 5"/38 cal., twenty 40mm  
          (twin mounts), twenty-seven  
          20mm (1945).  
Catapults :both one and two depending on  
          the ship. Two on the Copahee.  
Aircraft :28 aircraft.  
Compliment :890 but generally  
          exceeded upwards of  
          1,200.  
Builder :Todd, Tacoma  
Built on the SS Steel Architect's C 3  
hull.  
Launched :21,10,'41  
Completed :15, 6,'42

Skipper :Capt. John G. Farrell, USN

These were called the Postage Stamp or Jeep Carriers.

It might also be noted that there was a time before the USS Copahoe had her flight deck installed the ship sat open to the weather and in Washington state it rains almost every day. As such the bilge became filled with the rain water and so a series of holes were drilled into the hull at the bottom to drain her. Once the water was out and the flight deck was installed the holes were plugged and the ship was now out of the drydock and afloat. It is here that a problem arose with the spreading of scuttlebutt aboard ship that these holes were filled with wooden plugs. As such every plug had to be visually inspected from the inside as the ship was now setting in the water. No wooden plugs were found !

The CVE 12 was then ballasted with wet concrete which was loaded from the pierside in navy buckets that were hand carried down into the bilges.

-----"

When did you report aboard the CVE 12 USS Copahoe?

Mr. West

I went aboard the CVE 12 USS Copahoe on September of 1942. I did not go aboard the USS Copahoe until later because I was aviation.

Mr. Tombaugh

You were in the VGS 12 Unit?

Mr. West

Yes.

Mr. Tombaugh

V stands for heavier than air and G stands for General Service.

Mr. West

Yes. Heavier than air General Service Squadron.

We had 21 planes, which was a lot of planes because the Navy, well America didn't have many planes then. We had seven fighter, seven scouts, and seven bombers.

Mr. Tombaugh

What type of bombers were they?

Mr. West

The Avenger.

That was the largest stick flown airplane that was ever built and we could carry one M 13 torpedo and two five hundred pound bombs.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

The fighters were the F4F Wildcat and later the F6F Hellcat and the CVE 12 USS Copahoe was used as a training ship for landing. In other words Carrier Qualification Ship.

When you were first assigned to the CVE 12 USS Copahoe where were you living?

**Mr. West**

In Seattle, Washington. My bride had an apartment there.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was the motor transportation you used at that time as you commuted back and forth?

**Mr. West**

I had a new 4-door Buick Sedan. I went into the war with a new car. It was eight-mile commute.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What did you do after high school?

**Mr. West**

Well I hung around for about a year doing nothing but living at home. I lived on a farm and we had food, the depression was on and you couldn't scare up a dollar anywhere.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What school did you graduate from and the year?

**Mr. West**

Wayne County Agricultural High School in 1932. This was a boarding school for the country kids that didn't have transportation in those days.

When I went to Grammar school I rode a horse drawn wagon to school and that route was only three miles.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What were living conditions like after you graduated from school?

**Mr. West**

Well, I can modestly say I came from an affluent family. We all worked in a family farm deal. When the depression came up we had nothing to sell for money. We had a lot of pine trees besides the regular farm. When the depression hit my father was selling pine for two dollars and half a thousand and that wasn't enough to pay his taxes.

So that's when I decided to go into the Navy and do something.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Your wife's name and when you were married?

**Mr. West**



I got married on September 6, 1942 to Helen Irene Young. We were married for 56 years.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Your children's names?

**Mr. West**

We had four children; Carol, Charles, James and Gary.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

When the ship was launched what deck were you on?

**Mr. West**

I was the line chief and naturally the Hangar Deck and Flight Deck was my domain I guess you could say.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where did you berth?

**Mr. West**

My berth was up forward; we had to go out on the forecastle to get onto the ladder that went down there into that berthing compartment that was the chief's quarters.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

You were almost down into the chain locker then?

**Mr. West**

We were a little aft of the chain locker but below the water line. That wasn't too big a ship for an aircraft carrier so you utilized the space.

I can modestly say I was one of the very competent aircraft carrier men on December 7, 1941.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

How often do you have reunions?

**Mr. West**

Every year. Next year will be in St. Louis, Missouri.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

When you were on the ship do you remember the commissioning?

**Mr. West**

No. I wasn't there because I was in the squadron and organizing the men and getting our planes ready. I didn't get aboard my ship until San Diego, California and I came down there on a train.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

How long did it take to get all your equipment and I'm talking about all the VGS 12 equipment, planes and everything aboard ship?

**Mr. West**

We were well organized when we got there. The squadron personnel mainly came down on train cars arranged for 120 men and we unloaded and went to the air station. We operated off the air station for a while doing carrier training and flew down to the old time Maze which is residential area now but it was out in nowhere back then. They would land and go back.

Then we would load up all the airplanes we could onto the little carrier while leaving just enough room to launch with the catapult. Then we took off west.

We unloaded those planes until we could launch off the flight deck. I think we might have been down around New Caledonia when we unloaded those planes.

They were on the line and I was back in the boonies at that time, I was down at Magenta Bay, New Caledonia. I just sat down there.

The Battle of Shortland Islands. The CVE 12 USS Copahoe didn't have anything with this.

But there were about 20 or so airplanes sitting on a SeeBee's punched out airway with no wings on them and they were not available for the strike at Shortland Islands. So they said to get somebody down there to get those airplanes on the line. I was sent down there and stayed there for three months.

Those freighters would come in and bring anywhere from three to nine airplanes on them with no wings usually. We had those butt head barges and the CB's had made us a ramp so we could put the barges up against the ships and shore and pull the planes off and take the planes up to our little runway and get them into flying condition with about 50 gallons of gas in them and get any pilot we could find and take them up to Tontuta that was about 35 miles away. When they got to Tontuta they were put on the line and didn't worry as we had made them operational.

Those barges had outboard motors and you had to have a crane to set them on. They were about 500 horsepower, if you needed a bigger barge you just bolted on a bigger section and the same went with more horsepower.

After I had been there about three months also at the same time the Japanese found out they had better back up a little bit Nanda and Munda, Solomon Islands. We were at Nanda and the Japanese were at Munda. I wasn't there because I had gone south to Magenta Bay, New Caledonia. So they came one day with a dispatch stating that they were looking for men to go Catapult and Arresting Gear School. I said: "That is for me because if I'm going to die it will be between clean sheets and a hot meal in my stomach."

By the Way, I still got my P 38 can opener, you know what that is don't you.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Yes.

**Mr. West**

The CVE 12 USS Copahoe came from Numea, New Caledonia and I went aboard and they took me to San Diego, California where I headed for

Catapult and Arresting Gear School.

My wife had come from Seattle, Washington to San Diego, California in my new Buick so when I got there they issued me gas rations so I could make a trip to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We got stopped a few times for violating the 45-mile an hour speed limit. We would drive at night and we got to stop and spend a day with my mother before going on to Philadelphia. When I arrived I went down to Naval Aircraft and checked in where the commanding officer's office was for the Catapult and Arresting Gear School. So I went in and the man behind the desk said: "West, what the hell are you doing here?"

I said: "I have come to learn about Catapult and Arresting Gears."

He said: "You'll learn alright. You have three days to acquaint yourself with the facilities and syllabus because you don't know how bad I need an Instructor."

But I was out of that jungle and those mosquitos.

I taught school about a month when they needed somebody to take crews out to supervise new installations and repair battle damage. I spent the rest of the war, three years doing that.

At least I got home occasionally.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Do you have any humorous stories you would like to tell?

**Mr. West**

I was a charger you might say. My record is 4.0 except down to the last conduct and behavior somebody lowered my number to 3.99.

I was over, I did this and that and did it well.

Nobody ever ask me to apply for a commission so I never did.

I had plans on what to do with my life.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was your service number?

**Mr. West**

1742146

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What would you tell young people today?

**Mr. West**

I was glad to serve my country.

-END-

7.5 hours