

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #OH0024-036

Interview 1

Everett R. Beaver

USS NORTH CAROLINA

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Interviewer is Kim Sincox.

Story involving the USS FRANKLIN. We had launched air strikers that morning and I was on the 4-8 watch. Four a.m. to eight a.m. on the air search radar. I don't know the time, but it was before we were relieved for breakfast. You were always relieved a little early for breakfast when you were on the 4-8. I had picked up a radar contact on the air search radar. I don't remember the miles, but it was probably 30 or 35 miles out. I reported that I had an unidentified bogey. We reported it and then we put a plot on it. Then, of course, a minute later then you get another or thirty seconds later. You determine what its course is and what the speed is. We had no known friendly aircraft in the area. We reported it to the flag, which I think was on one of the carriers then. No one else in the task group could pick up the bogey. We had a very good signal and we tracked it in until one of the picket destroyers also had a visual sighting and reported that they had it. It was identified as Japanese. When that happened air defense aboard ship, which means that everybody concerned with anti-aircraft went to battle stations. My battle station was as surface plotter. So, I didn't have anything to do during air defense, so I went out on the signal bridge, which CIC is there. I saw the plane coming and everybody was firing at the lone aircraft, so were we, the single-engine plane. She somehow

slipped through all the enemy aircraft fire and the FRANKLIN was approximately 1,000 yards off our port bow. The aircraft dropped a bomb on the floor for the flight deck and aft flight deck. The FRANKLIN started exploding and burning because she \_\_\_\_\_ aircraft. We had to make a sharp turn to the starboard to keep from going through a bunch of men that were in the water. The Japanese plane continued onto the edge of formation and one of the CAB aircraft of the FRANKLIN shot the plane down. No one could understand why we were really not prepared for it. I guess because one lone ship picking up one bogey and no one else having it that you might be picking up some static or something on your radar.

[So, nobody questioned it or checked into it?]

We were a little late.

[What year was that, do you remember?]

I don't remember if it was 1944 or early 1945. I thought the plane, after she dropped the bomb, she turned to port and headed right for the NORTH CAROLINA, and I thought surely she was going to crash into us on the signal bridge. As a matter of fact, everybody started moving up beside the ship. So close that you could literally see the pilot, it went right down beside of us. It felt like you could throw a rock at him almost.

[What was your ranking, or what was your position at that time?]

I think at that time, I was a radar man third class. I was either radar man third or second. I got busted one time. Nothing bad.

[Nothing bad?]

No. Just wearing civilian clothes at Pearl Harbor when you were not supposed to or breaking curfew when you weren't supposed to.

[Why did you wear civilian clothes?]

I met a little girl over there; I had a date.

[You couldn't date in your uniform? I would think they would be impressed by the uniform.]

We had to come back to the ship earlier. Military personnel had to leave these places before civilians did.

[You wanted to stay longer. That was the whole idea.]

Right. They had a curfew at Pearl Harbor. Everybody had to be off the streets at a certain time. Everyone did, even civilians. But for the civilians it was a five-dollar fine if you broke curfew. Really didn't amount to anything much. But if you were military breaking curfew, it was far more serious. Girls will get you in trouble. That is the moral of the story. I was single.

[We got that on the record.]

Nineteen years old.

[Great. I am glad we got to tell this story.]