

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #OH0024-042

Robert LeRoy Palomaris

USS NORTH CAROLINA

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[Robert LeRoy Palomaris of Baldwin Park, California. If you will give me a little bit about your background, where you were born.]

I was born in Pasadena, California on St. Patrick's Day 1926. I went and signed up for the Navy when I was sixteen years old at the YMCA in Pasadena. I had all my papers waiting for me and my seventeenth birthday. On my seventeenth birthday I was in the San Diego Naval Training Station in California.

[From that you took your basic training?]

Well, they said I would be there for nine weeks and it turned out to be just twenty-one days. I found out later, being a kid I didn't know what was going on. They were getting ready for the occupation of bombardment and tar___ on Gilbert Island and so forth. Apparently, they had to fill up a lot of units for the Pacific Fleet and that is why they rushed us through.

[Twenty-one days. You didn't really get a great deal of training in just twenty-one days.]

No liberty, no leave or anything. Then they put us on a train. We went to San Pedro. There they gave us liberty cards and said we would be there from six weeks to six months. We were there one day. I had liberty that night. That was the only liberty I got and I went home because I was only about thirty miles from home. I got back the next morning and we had to report aboard. All those that had liberty until eight o'clock. They said, "Pack all your things up. You are shipping out on the J. FRANKLIN BELL for Hawaii in the afternoon." We were gone. The other four guys who had the port liberty never got a liberty at all.

[So less than a month after you actually were inducted, you were heading across the Pacific?]

I was on my way across the Pacific, that is correct. I thought What did I get myself into.

[That wasn't much time for adjustment, it doesn't sound like.]

Then we got to Hawaii and they put us in the Aiea (?) Barracks.

[When you were going across, was this in convoy or was the J. FRANKLIN BELL crossing on its own.

I think we were by ourselves. Going back that far, I do not remember any other ships with us, however there could have been. I know it was a crowded ship. There wasn't even enough bunks. We were sleeping on the deck.

[I didn't know whether they were sending any destroyers or DEs along as escorts to protect.]

There could have been. As I say, I don't remember that. We got there and they put us in the Aiea (?) Barracks and I venture to say we were there probably a couple of weeks and one after noon I was coming back with one of my buddies, there were four of us that

were hanging around together. When they saw me coming, they started hollering, "Hurry up, hurry up." They had packed my sea bag and had thrown it on this truck. There was about fifteen, twenty, twenty-five of us on this truck and they drove off. The next thing I knew, I was sitting on my sea bag right along the USS NORTH CAROLINA. It was May sometime when we got on. I spent the rest of those years aboard the NORTH CAROLINA until 1946. From the Gilberts on, the Marshalls, the Gilberts, Siapan, Tinian, _____ and all that. Iwo Jima, Okinawa and then Tokyo Bay.

[By the time you joined the NORTH CAROLINA in May of 1943, you were only a brief step away from having been a civilian. This other than crossing on the J. FRANKLIN BELL, this was really your first experience being aboard ship at all wasn't it, when you joined the NORTH CAROLINA.]

In fact, at that time, I didn't even know what that ship was. We were all sitting on our sea bag and one of the guys said, "Wow, that is a big ship. I think it is a cruiser." I said, "I don't know what it is." We were young kids, we didn't know. I hadn't been around any ships. Then we found out it was a battleship. There we were.

[What were you assigned to when you first went aboard?]

I was assigned to the first division and for about a month or two my battle station was in the second inch turret in the powder magazines(?).

[That was a nice place to operate from, wasn't it?]

I didn't know anything about handling powder in general quarters. I had gone through a 20-millimeter school in that twenty-one days at San Diego. I scored real good. I was a natural born gunner with rifles, shotguns, pistols or anything. So I caught on to that stuff. The name of the game was lead, whether you are shooting a turkey or a pheasant or whatever. After about two months, I wanted to see what was going on. I wanted to see the

action. That is what I got in the Navy for. I got to be a loader on a 20-millimeter. I was there until about the early part of 1944 when we came into Pearl Harbor. They were having a big gunnery school--20-millimeters on the other side of the island or somewhere. I was asked if I wanted to go on that. It was about a two-week school. I'd identify aircraft when they flashed them up. We fired 20-millimeters live and we fired 20-millimeters in a feed--a thing like a computer. It was really great. I had a big screen like the movies and all you would have are clouds and water. Then a plane would come up. You didn't know which direction it was coming from. As soon as you saw it you opened up. You could see the tracers come out of this gun. Like I say, it was electronic. How it worked, I had no idea. There was about seventy-eight of us in that school and I was number one on everything when the scores were totaled. A couple of months after that I got my own gun, which is mount five, which is still up there. They took the other two above me out.

[Mount five is still there.]

Yes. It is the last on the star board side.

[That brought back some memories when you stood and looked at that didn't it?]

My God, I have taken a million pictures of it. I am afraid it is going to disappear someday. That was an experience, really. I finally got to do the thing that I wanted to do and the thing I thought I would do best.

[You say you were aboard during the Gilbert campaign? Any specific memories of incidents having to do with those campaigns as far as your personal feelings?]

Not so much that, but I felt there was a lot of bombardment. A few error attacks. At the beginning of that I wasn't up on the top deck so I don't know what happened up there. But there was a lot of events when we got around Siapan and Tinian into the Philippine Sea, Okinawa and so forth. I had one very scary moment that was around the end of the war in

Okinawa. A Japanese was _____ at the time, it might have been a valve (?) dive bombers, but they had dropped two bombs on one of our carriers. One bomb landed in the water starboard and the other one landed in the water. He missed the target. He leveled flat off on the water and headed right directly for a bow. AT about seventeen hundred yards the whole starboard battery was opened up on him. He just kept coming and kept coming, magazine after magazine. As near as I can remember, I was just about on my fourth magazine and he was within about four hundred yards of us going 320 mph, so we are talking about seconds. You could see the tracers going into him. Not only from my gun but everybody else and you wonder what kept him alive. All of a sudden, everybody got on him and pieces just started coming off. It just blew up like a firecracker.

[Just disintegrated right in front of you?]

Disintegrated. The task force was making a turn. It was the only plane on the task force at the time, so we got out of the saddle of the gun ___ ___ ___ on the water. Everything was gone, there was no pilot or anything like that. At the time, my gun crew and myself smoked. Within maybe three or four minutes when this was over with, we tried to light a cigarette and we were shaking so bad we couldn't light it. Neither one of the four of us. We started to laugh. That is when you get scared. I have done a lot of shows about the ship which Paul Weaver knows back in California for the kids, different grades. Show them our movie and showboat battleship awards and also the biography of Admiral Nimitz. Then we have an answer and question thing. I've done maybe a dozen shows and always one child will come up and say, "Were you ever scared." That is the story I more or less tell them. During the action, you were not scared.

[You didn't have time to be.]

You just knew you had to get him. It was afterwards that you start thinking, Wow!

That was close. I will never forget that.

[What about your first time under fire. Think back.]

You mean when I was under 20-millimeters?

[The first time when you left Pearl and went into a combat zone and the ship was actually being fired on by aircraft or enemy fire.]

Well, I was never worried. I wasn't seeing anything because we were below deck as I mentioned before. The time when the sixteen-inch guns were going off or if there wasn't any air attack or there were times when there were air attacks when I was still down there. You would hear the 5-inch go off. Being a kid, I didn't know what was going on up there. I didn't even know the 5-inch from the 4 until later, until I heard it a few times, then I knew it. Then every time a gun fired, you knew what was firing.

[It never occurred to you that, Gee, here I below deck and if this thing gets hit, I am going to have a tough time getting out of here.]

No. I can't really say I did. I might have. Forty-five years ago is a long time. I was never ever worried about it. I figured I just wanted to get the thing over so I could get back home playing baseball. That was my main thing. Outside of those little incidents I was telling you about, after the attack or whatever, you would get a little shaken up. I'll play that now. Never entered my mind that I wouldn't get back home--the whole ship would get back.

[You enlisted as soon as you became seventeen. Had you not done so, you possibly could have picked up an extra year or so before you would have drafted, which would have brought you right to the end of the war before you would have ever got into the warfare. Did you ever, after you once got aboard ship into the South Pacific, ever think Why did I do this?]

No. To give you a quick little story I had already signed up. I was not quite sixteen and a half when I went down and signed up and everything. I was playing baseball at the time, I had pros looking to sign me and everything. I had a try out at the Los Angeles Angels Pacific Coast. That was a AAA ball club and L.A. was the Chicago Cubs Farm team. They gave me contract to sign. I told them that I was only going to be here about another six months because I was in the Navy. I had signed up for it. They said, " Oh, we can't sign you because you can't play ball next year. We will see you after the war." I thought about that. I thought, Well, gee whiz, I could have been in there and played a year. I also thought they could have drafted me in the Army or something. I didn't want any part of that. I wanted the Navy. As a kid, you figured you were going to win the war. I guess that is what we all thought. It was a little different story back in those days from what it is now. I think America was more gungho than what they are now. I really believe that. Even thought we did a great job in Iraq, there is a lot of those guys, if you remember, didn't even want to fight at all. They put the marines in the brig because they wouldn't go over there. I don't think you had that too much in World War II. Everybody wanted to go over there and get the thing over with. That was my feeling. I knew we had to do that before we could do anything. We couldn't settle down in America until you got rid of that whole situation over there. The Germans, Italians, and the Japanese. I think a lot of Americans felt that way. I know I am one of them. I am speaking for myself right now. That is more or less the way I look at it.

[What about the daily routine. I know some of your crew mates between combat experiences made reference to the boredom of this day by day routine. How did you feel? What did you experience?]

I was never bored. You always had chores to do. We were always on the move

doing something. If you weren't out at sea, battle station could happen at any second--night, morning, or noon. When we had our own free time, I would always spend it all writing letters. We saw movies. No. I just took it with a grain of salt. Saturday became Sunday and Sunday became Monday and here we are. I imagine a lot of the fellows really didn't want to be on the battleship out there. It was hot and you have all kinds of things--heat rashes and so forth. I didn't like that anymore than anybody else, but we had it. You go to sick bay and they would put something on you and you would feel better.

[What about the days and weeks when you were at sea, between port calls? How did you react to that?]

As far as being bored or anything?

[Well, as far as missing the diversion of being able to get off the ship occasionally.]

No. I loved it. I just loved the sea. Some of my shipmates and I, in the evenings when we could, would sit up there with our legs over the side, hanging on to the lifelines watching the flying fish or porpoises or whatever else might come by. We would talk about the different places where we all would come from. Every state in the union was represented aboard this ship. Day after day those things happened. Sometimes when we got into port, like in the Carolina Islands, or whatever, sometimes we would fish off the side at night.

[I was getting ready to ask you did you ever do any fishing off the side?]

Oh, yes. We did a lot of it later on. There were some fellows that had fifteen poles on there. I didn't know that for a while, but there was a locker on the ship somewhere and they had fishing poles on it. We just used hand lines. I remember one day one of my buddies hooked something. He set the hook in the fish. It had to be a shark or something bit because it just took off. It started burning a thing right through his hand until finally he

saw he could stop it. It just took a slice right out of his hand like a burn. If he had hung on to it, it would have cut him. That is why I am just guessing it was a shark.

[What did you catch?]

We caught a lot of fan sharks and things. I don't remember ever catching anything like a yellow tail or anything.

[No Pompano.]

Then there were some fish we caught that I couldn't even tell you what they were. They weren't barracuda or anything like that. Something I didn't know. It was fun. I enjoyed it. We would go down to the meat locker on the ship for pieces of meat that he would cut of steaks or pork chops or whatever. That is what we used for bait. We didn't have worms or anything, which might have changed the whole situation. When you start feeding something like that down there you probably are going to get sharks.

[I you had had some nice shrimp or something.]

Halibut or something. But it was fun. We were out in the Pacific. I didn't know where I was or what I was going to catch down there. I didn't know what in the world the Pacific was all about. I know a lot more about it now. I would like to talk to some that had fishing poles that probably did a lot more fishing than I did to see what they caught.

[You list that you were on the ship's baseball team. I talked to a couple of chaps yesterday who played on the team--one a pitcher and what have you. When did you get the opportunity to play? It was only when you were in port, obviously.]

In port. Most of this is as I remember--I remember playing an awful lot in Ulithi on Mogamog. That is where most of our games were. I can't remember where else we might have played. I remember we played a lot up there because we were in there quite a bit. We played all the different ships. We played the battleship SOUTH DAKOTA, the

ALABAMA and some cruisers, a couple of aircraft carriers. I don't remember who. I know we beat the SOUTH DAKOTA, which made everybody on the ship happy.

[I was about to say, there is no love lost between the NORTH CAROLINA and the SOUTH DAKOTA was there?]

No. I don't remember the score, but we did beat them. We were all happy about that. There was no way we were going to lose that one. That was a lot of fun. You see, I played baseball all my life so I just fit right into that. There were probably a couple of hundred guys trying out all over the ship, on the bow on the fantail doing this and that. Out of that, there were probably only . . . there was a picture in the cruise museum. I never counted. There were probably only fifteen of us on the team. They couldn't let everybody go. We got two cases of beer when we went over. I didn't drink beer at the time. I was too young and I didn't like it, so I traded mine in for Coke's. Somebody else got the beer.

[Were you able to play catch or practice or anything on deck or anything while you were at sea?]

Yes, we did that.

[Did you lose many balls overboard?]

I am sure we lost some. I don't recall seeing them bounce over the side but I am sure we lost some. Just playing catch, you know we would drop the ball. I don't remember ever using a bat up on deck ____ or anything like that. I don't think we did that. Just played catch to keep your arm in shape. Mostly we would do that when we knew we were heading back to port because we knew we were heading back to port. Because we knew we were going to start playing some games.

[Once you got out of the war zone in route back and forth.]

Yes. I don't remember how often we did it. We weren't playing catch everyday, I

know that.

[What about things like volleyball, seems like that would have been something that would have been appropriate to be played on deck?]

I don't recall anybody ever playing volleyball.

[I know there was a lot of boxing. I was trying to think of other physical activities, sports that would be appropriate played on ship that would have given you exercise.]

Boxing was a big thing. What else was there. There was one thing that sort of shocked all of us. We had a ship's bookmaid (?), you have probably seen it. There is one down in our cruise museum into the glass. They put all the difference sport things--I am trying to remember what else they had--boxing, they had the boxing team in there. They left out the baseball team. I guess the ship photographer took pictures of us because nobody had a camera. We weren't allowed to have cameras. It had to be the ship that did it. Otherwise, we wouldn't even have a picture of the ship. I donated that picture that is in there. That is my picture that I gave them that is in there of the team. A couple of those guys are no longer with us. One of my best buddies in that picture, E.B. Smitt.

[What other kinds of diversions were there? You said movies, boxing and baseball when you were in port.]

Writing letters, listening to Tokyo Rose. I love that. They played great music and everything.

[Was that about the only radio channel that you had access to? Was the Japanese radio . . .]

I don't remember. I wasn't trying to dial and get KMPC, KFI, and KFOS or anything.

[I was wondering if there was any other broadcast that you could pick up?]

Probably not because that was all shortwave. I really couldn't say that for sure. I wouldn't want to say one way or another. I know I heard her a lot. In fact, I got one of those tapes at home. I gave Captain Conlon one of them. It is a live broadcast. You can even hear the crackling like it come over the ship. It was never really perfectly clear because it was short wave. She played a lot of big band music, We Bunny Baker back in the 40's. Trying make everybody homesick. We just loved it. I never got homesick. A lot of times she would come up with different things after an attack or a bombardment that had taken place. "Now we got you where we want you." In fact, this happened after we bombarded Hitachi when six battleships went down the coast, just before they dropped the atomic bomb. I don't remember how long after that they dropped the atomic bomb. We shelled at all six battleships. One was the King George vessel of the United States Navy. We were part of that. We had Hitachi on fire when this whole thing was over with. Then we just put the foot down on the gasoline and took off out of there. That was the fastest I have ever felt a ship go. It was just rocking on the advent.

[Why were they moving out so fast?]

We were still close to Japan. We were thinking a big suicide attempt was going to come after. While we were taking off and heading back out to sea, we had the radio going, here comes Tokyo Rose. I remember her saying, "You are not even going to have time this time to write letters to your loved ones because we have got you right where we want you." We never had one plane come after us.

[They probably didn't have any planes left.]

They didn't have many left. It was just one of those things like this is the end of you. We didn't believe it. At least I didn't believe it. I figured just get out of here and get back with the carriers and everything, which we did. Shortly after that, I don't remember what

the span was, then the atomic bomb was dropped. Into Tokyo Bay we went. I remember those things. I also remember our captain at that time. I don't remember which one. I might have been Handlin. Whoever it was said, "The war ends and I get into Tokyo Bay, I am going to sail my little sailboat in Tokyo Bay." He had it aboard ship. They assemble it and he got in it and sailed. I wish I had had a camera to take pictures of that. A lot of the guys don't remember that. I do.

[He just sailed up and down the Tokyo Bay.]

The whole fleet was in there. Just around the ships.

[What kind of sailboat was it?]

It was just a small sailboat. Naturally it couldn't be very big to be on here. Where it was on the ship, I couldn't even tell you. They assembled it, lowered it in the water, and he got in it. I thought it was great.

[That is amazing.]

Of course, we were all happy because the war was over.

[Speaking of the captain, do you have any remembrances either pleasant or unpleasant about the officers on board?]

Never had any ups or downs with them. We all got along--at least I did.

[Who was your gunnery officer at the time?]

I think it was still Admiral Stryker, well he wasn't Admiral then. He was second in command of the ship.

[He was gunnery officer and then moved up to exec?]

Yes. I knew him through both parts of both of those. I don't remember now. Paul would remember who the gunnery officer was.

[He started out as gunnery officer.]

I know he did. Everybody loved that man. It is his wife that sent me the rifle that is down there as you come aboard the ship.

[That is his uniform. He is quite a guy. I knew him personally myself.]

Yes. We all did. I've never heard one shipmate had any dislikes about him. He knew what he had to do. A lot of times, he would have to say no to you. I remember one time I was asking for an extra couple of days leave or something because I was trying to get the New Year's Day or something. He said, "No, I can't grant it. You have to be back." He knew what day the ship was going to go. We didn't. That was his job. If he could have given me two more days I am sure he would have. I didn't get mad about it. He and his wife are the same. She is a great woman.

[I haven't talked with her but one time since he died.]

She came down here one year with their son and his fiancé. Paul and I went back to Washington. They got married about a week later. We got them a present and everything. I have been in correspondence with Ann Stryker ever since that time. I sent her pictures of my trip in the South Pacific. He trusted me with that rifle. It took me two years to get her because I haven't been her for the last couple of meetings. I told Captain Collins I had it and he said, "Sure we could use it. I just want to be sure that Ann knows that." She just wrote me and she knows that it is here aboard ship. That is what she wanted.

[Any other anecdotes that you remember?]

You mean different things that might have happened on the ship?

[Yes. Things that you were involved in or observed.]

There was one time. The scariest that I ever was. The Japanese didn't scare me because I was firing back. I figured I could handle the situation, but this one I couldn't. We had just got into the beginning of typhoon Viper, this was in Okinawa in 1945. We started

taking on a lot of water. So that captain passed the word, "All hands stand clear of the main deck." To make this real quick, an hour or so later, it was, "All hands stand clear of the boat deck." And a little while later, it was, "All hands stand clear of all weather decks." I will never forget that. We were down below, guys were sleeping and reading. I was playing Pinochle. We had been refueling destroyers just before it started getting real rough. Then we had to cut off the refueling. The hoses were still laying up there. Our division officer, it was a first-class boatswain main came down and said to about fifteen of us, "Get your life jackets." I thought, Why. Of course, you don't argue. We just got our life jackets and we all went up on the deck. To this day, I don't know what we were doing on the port side. We were starboard side. He sent three of us up to the bow. The only other fellow I remember was Pence, a coxswain. There were three of us. We were up there and the three of us went up almost to the tip of the bow because that is where the fuel line was laying. His name was Fidera. What he was trying to do was to tie the lifeline down so it didn't get washed over the side. I can understand that, but no one was supposed to be up there. The rest of them were down by the number one turret on the port side to tie it down in there. It was getting real rough. We weren't in the full fledge of the typhoon, but it was rough. The wind was high. The ship went up on a big swell. We came down and I would say there was about two feet of water came over. It knocked all three of us down. It knocked us crawling. Then we started coming back up on this. We were going higher this time. Pence started to holler down to Fidaró, he wanted to say, "Hey, we better get the hell out of here." Before he could say that we started down. I thought, Oh, my God. This is going to be it. I grabbed the mark 14 cable that comes out of the mark 14 _____. They were grabbing spray shields. We talked about this later. They guys in sky control said that the whole bow was under at least fifteen feet of water.

[You were under water?]

I came down over all. I was head over heels coming down. Finally I came up to this spray shield in front of the sixteen inch. By this time the ship was turning port. I came to the top of the water. I was still in a lot of water. The ship was going port and I am headed right over the side. The only thing I could see was the top lifeline with all this water and me going under. A lot of other guys too. I just jammed my arms straight down and I caught the top and the middle lifeline and just hung there until all the water was gone. If I had gone to the side it would have been all over with. Nobody would have picked you up. I would have drowned. I was not a good swimmer anyway. It would have been all over with. We didn't lose anybody, but a fellow named Roberts from around the San Francisco area was on the outside of the lifeline. I dragged him back in. He broke his leg. We dragged him to the hatch and then we got all the guys. We went on down. I don't know what happened to the fueling line. I never found out what in the world we were ever doing up there. It wasn't our job to ever be there. In fact, we were told by the captain not to be there. I know that they broke his rate down for doing it. He looked like a mummy when it was over with because he broke his arm, did something to his leg and cracked a bunch of ribs. He was all taped up. They got slammed against the turret. The water coming down just hit them like a wave. We were under it. We just went down with the bow. They took the full fledge of it. It is a wonder they didn't go over the side. That was the scariest I have ever been in my life. I thought that was all she wrote. Even when I could see the top lifeline. I wasn't sure it wasn't going to go over.

[It looks like in a situation like that, sending you out in the middle of a storm, they would have tied a lead rope to you. Or something of that nature.]

They just weren't thinking. We shouldn't have been there in the first place, that I

know. Everybody knew that. We weren't even on our side of the ship, it wasn't even our job to be there. Starboard side would have been our job even though you still weren't supposed to be there. What he ever thought about why he was on the port side, I don't know. That is where we were anyway.

[It is amazing that none of you went overboard.]

Yes. Really it is. With all that water there, if something would have turned our something, we would have been over the side without even touching or seeing anything. I didn't even know where I was. I was scared. I really was scared to death. We were absolutely helpless. There was nothing we could do. I've been in waves at the beach and been knocked down and didn't even know where I was rolling around. At least you know you are not out in the middle of the ocean somewhere.

[You know you can find the bottom at the beach.]

I sure found out how powerful that water is. I also remember some of our ready boxes where our twenty-millimeter magazines were stored. I don't remember which typhoon it was, cobra or viper. The portion of that water took those ready boxes which are all steel, all dogged down and just peeled them, like it was opening a can of dog food. We had potatoes on the fan tail, tied down. All the lines were tied down. There were about two potatoes left on the deck that just didn't wash over the side. Our west ____ ____ block king fisher was all checked over, all busted up. You really get to see the force the water really has. Winds were 120 or 130 or 140 miles per hour. I am sure you have heard about that and probably seen a lot of it in movies. Those are my vivid memories. Plus I remember a lot of the air attacks I remember a lot of them.

[Anything specific about the air attacks?]

No. I remember we shot down quite a few aircraft. About twenty-seven all

together. I wasn't on the ship for all of them but most of them. I do remember one incident that I couldn't fire at. It was coming down like it was coming down our stack. We thought it was a suicide attack on us. There was a carrier at Wake Island--a converted carrier--off to our port side. Naturally I was at my gun, but we just stood there and watched because you could only turn the gun so far. I couldn't fire it. He hit it right straight down and then he veered off for the Wake Island and we figured he was going for the carrier. Then he came back to us again. He was getting lower and lower and lower. We thought, He is going to get us. He was coming right straight down. The last second he swerved up and headed for the carrier. He hardly any higher than a telephone pole when one of our forty millimeters hit it. He went PHEWWW. Nobody got killed. There was a quad forty off the flight deck of the carrier. We talked to one of those guys later just by accident. We thought we were dead. When the thing blew, they thought it was them, I guess, until they thought, Gee I am still here. That I remember. I got to watch that. I didn't have no part of that. That was toward the end of the war. I don't remember what year. I do remember it was the Wake Island. I remember one of our forties hit it.

[He just couldn't make up his mind which ship to go after.]

It might have just been a faint thing. Who knows what they had in mind. He knew one thing, he was going to die and he was going to get one of us. They generally went for carriers unless they didn't have a choice and they would hit anything. Here we had a choice. They weren't very far along side of us. The last attempt at the last second. He went for it. It might have been a good thing because had he gone right for us, I don't know what they were firing or what they were doing because if they had come for us they would have been firing right at our super structure coming down. I remember that and I remember the other one. It was just a matter of hitting them when they crashed and clashed. I was just coming

off watch when the FRANKLIN got hit and I saw that. I was about the only one on the bow and had my gun uncovered. I couldn't fire at it because he came right over our sky control after he dropped the two bombs on the FRANKLIN. Everybody came back up on deck after that. We started throwing life preservers over and anything we could get our hands on. There were guys in the water, some dead, some injured, some just in the water, hollering and screaming for anything. That was bad news. We watched that carrier burn for two or three days. It was a long time. We thought sure it was going to sink. They kept a skeleton crew on it and got it back to Pearl Harbor and we went aboard it when we got to Pearl Harbor. Unbelievable how that captain ever got that ship back. It was almost gutted. It was an absolute, entire catastrophe. It really was amazing.

[With that kind of heat, it looks like it would have buckled to the point that it would have taken on so much water it wouldn't have made it.]

They did a heck of a job on it to bring it back. In most instances, you would have just abandoned ship and let it go. That is one captain that just stayed with his ship. I will tell you he did. I don't know who it was, but they are going to give him a 4.0 on that.

[Any other accounts.]

There are a lot of other one.

[You have had some good vivid recollections there.]

I had a lot of buddies who I still have. We write to one another and send tapes to one another. Especially Paul Wazer and I. We have been real good shipmates for years now. We have done a lot of different little things you know. The comradery runs as deep as this ship is. I think just about everybody feels the same way. That is why everybody keeps coming down there. They come down even when they are sick.

[I know one of the crew members yesterday was talking about he was on an

unhappy ship after he left the NORTH CAROLINA. He was contrasting the comradery and the feeling on the NORTH CAROLINA and the unhappiness on the other ship.]

Well, you have heard all your life where people say it is an unlucky ship or a mystery ship. They have all kinds of different names. I am sure there were a lot of fellows that weren't happy about being on or out at sea.

[They wouldn't have been happy on any ship.]

They wouldn't have been happy anywhere, that is right. As long as they were on a ship in the sea, they wouldn't have been happy. For most of us it was just a matter of, "Here we are. Do the best you can with it. You can't get mad because everything didn't go your way." That is the way I look at it.

[As few men as were lost, when you consider how many battles the ship was in.]

We went to general quarters about fifty times after attack, or bombardments or whatever. You lose ten men and do you know that all ten of those are ifs. Really, it wasn't just bang, they got it. It was if(?). They had that I-19 and fired that _____ torpedo and one of them went wild and got it. It was just a wild torpedo. It wasn't even aimed at us. We could have missed it real easy, right? We wouldn't have lost those guys. The fellow that got shot on the 20-millimeter from the fantail, they got him to sick bay. They looked for his dog tags and they weren't there. He died because they couldn't give him a blood transfusion because they didn't know what his blood was. So, after he was dead, I guess they undress them or whatever, his dog tags were on his ankle. I wasn't on the ship when that happened, but that is the story I got.

[No, I have never heard that before.]

Had they found it, he may have lived. We wouldn't have lost him. I was the one that spotted the plane that came up over the cruiser. We had two planes on the task force.

_____ shot one of them down, we took water on the bow (?) for the sift (?) condition one easy(?) on the bow (?) battery, we were up on the boat deck. Played pinochle for a while then we quit playing pinochle, the three of us walked up on the _____ and leaning against the line there. I was looking at the fleet out there and I saw this cruiser and I saw this plane hedgehopping. I said, "Gee, that looks like a Zeke." The cover guide laying against the bulkhead on the main deck was 20-millimeters. When they heard me say that, they said, "You are right. It is." So they started strapping themselves in the saddle until I ran across to the starboard side to go down the ladder, hauling up my gun crew to man our guns. She got down to the bottom of the bin and started running for my guns and couldn't get good position. If I had a baseball and had been lucky, I could have knocked him out. If he had turned to look, we would have been eye to eye.

[Was he firing or bombing at this time?]

No. He was _____ to suicide a carrier. I forget which one, USS SARATOGA.

[The lower he was the more unlikely it was that you could shoot him down.]

Part of our starboard battery were not in position one. They were still at battle stations because they weren't involved with the water in the middle of the ship. They opened up. I don't think anybody hit him. Maybe somebody might have killed the pilot because he got real close to the carrier--right into the deep six. While all of this was going on, he said, "What is with your shirt?" Well, I had a little bit of blood going on here. It didn't hurt. It pulled through my shirt and my shoulder(?); had a little piece of something go through the leg. We were so involved in the whole thing--the plane crash and everything--what had happened, they had fired a five-inch projectile from one of the _____, probably that cruiser that he hedge-hopped hit right above where we were playing pinochle. It killed those four guys from up there and wounded forty-four others. Now that was one of our own

projectiles. Had that not happened we wouldn't have lost anybody aboard this ship. Like I said, it is an if. It could have very easily gone through that whole war without losing one single person on this ship. Of course, if doesn't buy any there, it's just how close it could have been. It wasn't like a plane came in and dropped the bomb and killed five guys and nothing you could do about that.

[Was it shrapnel that had nicked you?]

Yes. It was a mess. It really was.

[It was your blood that was on the shirt, wasn't it?]

In fact, until I got divorced, I still had that shirt. It is a long story, but that disappeared into the sunset, for what reason I don't know. It is not worth anything, except to me. I kept that shirt. The main thing about that story is that we could have very easily with a little bit of luck . . . a stray torpedo, one of our own, five-inch projectiles, and a guy that didn't have his dog tags in the right place.

[I thought it was a major offence not to wear your dog tags around your neck.]

Well, that is where I wore mine. Everybody did. Maybe some guys didn't like things around their neck, I don't know. I am sure he wasn't the only one that probably did something like that. That is the story I heard from the ship here. I didn't see it personally, but I can't say for sure that is where it was. I imagine it is true because a lot of them are buddies of him and they found out what really happened. That is where his dog tags are. That is really about all I can give you unless you have something else.

[After you left the NORTH CAROLINA in 1946, you returned to the United States on a German gunboat. Do you have any comments about that?]

I could give you a story on this.

[How did you get to Germany in the first place?]

You can write for your records, I did this two or three years ago after all these years. In fact, Edward was in here. He is the one who told you about it. I said, "Well, I would like to see what they have on my records." I had an accolade on there, I didn't even know about because it wasn't a big deal at the time. First of all, I only had about 2 points to go to get out of the service. I was ready to report to the New York Giants baseball team. I couldn't wait to get out then and work over it. One of my buddies said, "Your name is on the list, you have to get on the EUROPA going to Germany because he kidded you a lot. No, I was on it.

[What was the EUROPA?]

It was like the Queen Mary.

[Oh, it was transport.]

It had swimming pools on and all that. We used it to bring out troops back from the war. We were through with it. We took it over and the United States gave it to the French. It was sunk a couple of years later in the big storm in France. I remember I was in Detroit Michigan at the time. The headlines READ, "EUROPA SUNK." I should have kept the paper. Anyway, when all this was happening and we got to Bremerhaven (?) in Germany, I am supposed to have been home out of the service at one point. Then there were a few other ones over there. So the captain came and got us all down in the mess hall one day and he said, "For all you fellows, I know how you feel. As of last Saturday, I was supposed to be out, too." He was just in for the reserve. He said, "What I am going to do is get some leaves for you fellows, so you could see some of the country." I got thirty days in Copenhagen, Denmark. I look back to it now and I am really happy it happened, even though I was mad that I was over there then. While some of us were gone, the Captain had called _____ to the Navy Department where we got a hold of President Truman.

Truman said, "I would like to have you bring back . . ." I forget what it is. It was a gun boat. It is the kind the British would come up to. It looked like a tanker or so forth. As soon as it got close, they would push buttons and doors would open up and out popped guns and they would blow the British out of the water. I do know that. The last man through the hatch, like we dogged down our doors, all you did was push a button. I couldn't believe some of the things on there. The Germans showed them how. Everything was in German. Oc tune this and oc tune that, a few words I knew. They taught the fellows that were still there coming back how to operate this thing. When we set sail, all I did was stand on the end of a boiler and sort of sit there. There was an officer, I will never forget this. He was sitting there reading comic books. I had the 12 to 4 watch at night, the guy on the other end of the boiler was the one with all the dials, he is the one that learned what to do. All I had to do was if the oil pressure went down was to turn the handle. That is all I had to do. You had a speaking tube that went like this down the inside. He would holler, "Up, yeah. Losing a little oil pressure, turn it up a little bit." This went on I don't know how long. Maybe an hour or two. "A little more, a little more. It is not coming up." Above me on my side was a safety valve. I remember it had eight hundred pounds or something. I remember it had eight hundred up there and that was as high as it went. I kept turning this thing and kept turning this thing and turning it over this period of time and I said, "Hey, it is on full." He said, "It is still not coming." About that time, the thing went Kaboom. The glass blew up and the officer dropped everything and went up the ladder. This guy got all shook up because the boiler is going like this. What had happened was it had burned all the packing inside. Don't ask me about the packing. I know nothing about boilers, but he took off. I am there with that boiler myself. I want to get out of there. Thank Goodness, I turned it off and then I went up the ladder. I think if I hadn't have done that we might have all been out

there in the middle of the Atlantic. All the guys knew about it. We had heard the story and everything. No one had me come up to the captain. He didn't say nothing. Somehow that got on my record. I was surprised to see.

[What that you had turned the valve on?]

No. It didn't mention the valve. It just said, "An accolade for Robert Palomaris for what he did on the SS Dithmarschen." I thought, Well Gee whiz. The captain had to do something about that, or it would have never got on my record. I never said anything to anybody for it to have got on the record. We don't have anything to do with records. He didn't call me after and say, "That was a great thing you did," or anything like that. That did not happen. That is why I was surprised to see it.

[Was the boiler damaged or were you able to proceed?]

We went into the White Cliffs of Dover, England. Whatever they did, they got packing and we brought the ship back to Philadelphia. That is when I left with a party of four heading for California for discharge in San Pedro. That was it.

[Did you go to play baseball then?]

I played three years of pro ball, minor league. I never got to the major league. I got married and got everything. I had a three seventy-two batting average and was supposed to go to triple A the following year and all these things happen and I quit. I look back at it and I think I made a mistake, but you do those things. Spilt milk, you can't pick it up. I worked in the tile business for forty-two years, which I just retired in. We did murals all over the United States. We did one at Epcot Center, which Frank Conlin has seen. We got an international award for that. It is 135 feet long on both sides by the entrance way to the craft pavilion. That is the land pavilion. That is about it. I have a racehorse now. He has a little gimpy(?) leg. We are trying to get him back to the races in July or August. It was a dream

of mine since I was a kid and I am living it right now. Even though it is not that good right yet.

[That is exciting.]