

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #24.045

Harold A. Smith

U.S.S. *NORTH CAROLINA* BATTLESHIP COLLECTION

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Interview #1

Interviewer is Donald R. Lennon

[If you will, Mr. Smith, tell us a little bit about your background. Are you a native of Maine or where were you born?]

I am a native of Boston. I left Boston when I was seventeen years old and never lived at home again. I went to main in 1948 and have been there ever since. Best part of the country to live in.

[I love to vacation in that area, it is nice country. You were in Boston until you were seventeen years old and at that point you decided to join the Navy?]

Yes. I went to boot camp in Newport, Rhode Island.

[When was this?]

This was in January of 1941. It was seven weeks training, but we got quarantined for three weeks for scarlet fever epidemic in Newport at the time at the training camp. Half of the companies that were on duty the same time we were went home and we had to stay for three weeks longer. We made up two companies. One became a guard company and the other became a mess company. When the first group came back, the majority were all shipped to Pearl Harbor. When we came back after our three weeks in quarantine and on

our boot leave, the majority came to the *CAROLINA* in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. We came on board the week after the christening ceremony. About the fifteenth.

[So you stayed aboard ship from the time you arrived? You slept aboard ship and everything?]

Right. We came right aboard and were very disappointed because a lot of the odd work was still being worked on. I thought it was a brand-new ship, nice and clean and it was a lot of work being done on it.

[What was your first impression when you first saw the *NORTH CAROLINA* there in the Brooklyn Navy Yard?]

I was a little disappointed because I thought it was going to be a nice spanking new looking ship, but all the yard crew was there, cables were draped all over the ship and there were sandbags all over the place holding down linoleum and things of that nature. I was a little bit disappointed, but I was sure happy to be there. I really enjoyed the ship.

[What duties were you assigned at that point?]

Well, Lieutenant Ward was division officer at that time. He later became the gun boss and he interviewed us and I wanted to be a carpenters mate and he said I would be good in the _____ division and that is where I ended up as a fire control striker.

[At that point in time, while the ship was still being outfitted and all, what were your specific duties on a day-by-day basis?]

Mostly it was just cleaning duties. I was assigned to the main battery cleaning station. It was in spot one and there was a range finder operator in turret two. That was mostly our duty, just cleaning up the area. I eventually ended up in Sky-2, practically all of my time was on board after that. Then we went to school in Washington, DC, for basic fire control training.

[Is that while the *NORTH CAROLINA* was still at Brooklyn Navy Yard?]

Right, still in Brooklyn. We went down to Washington, DC, four or five weeks for fire control school and then came back. We were doing our runs and firings off the coast of Maine.

[Tell me about those runs that you were making.]

I really don't remember too much about them as far as the shakedown cruise. I was _____ at the time. We used to go out and do different speed trials and degouging(?) and that type of thing. I was a seaman second at the time and wasn't really involved in the everyday operations as far as what was going on aboard ship.

[The *WASHINGTON* was there with you at that time on some of those runs in the North Atlantic. Do you remember the episode where the captain was lost overboard the *WASHINGTON*?]

No. I don't.

[I had a couple of people comment on that one.]

Later on I remember the *WASHINGTON* losing its anchor, but that was out in the Pacific later on. That is when we were operating together.

[This was in the North Atlantic.]

Right.

[I believe you have some specific ideas as to how the *NORTH CAROLINA* became known as the "Showboat"?)

I don't recall the *WASHINGTON* or *NORTH CAROLINA* being called the "Showboat" while we were in New York. My first recollection of being called the "Showboat" was when we were on our cruise to Jamaica and we left Brooklyn Navy Yard to meet the *WASHINGTON* in Norfolk, Va. and the *WASHINGTON* left Philadelphia and

they beat us to Norfolk. That is the first time they ever beat us anywhere. When we were coming up to our anchorage, we were by the *WASHINGTON* and the band was up on the bow playing "Here Comes The Showboat." That is my recollection of when the crew really started calling ourselves the "Showboat" and everybody else around was calling us the "Showboat."

[Did there seem to be any jealousy by the *WASHINGTON* crew about the attention that the *NORTH CAROLINA* was getting?]

Well, there definitely was a jealousy because the newspaper clippings were big spreads for the *NORTH CAROLINA* and little spreads for the *WASHINGTON*. We were good ships together. The crews got along together when we were in port together. We got along very well. Over the course of the four years that I was aboard, there were a couple of times, like *VERMONT* and *WASHINGTON*, we were with the *VERMONT* and *WASHINGTON*. There used to be quite a few battles going on in Seattle, the *WASHINGTON* and *NORTH CAROLINA* guys used to stick together, pretty much.

[Any particular activities or events that you remember from the shakedown cruises up to the North Atlantic. It was pretty rough, wasn't it?]

Rough water up there, that's right. I remember more of it after we got to going in and the war started. When we went up to Castro Bay before we went over to the Pacific, we were up in ____ were out. When the *BISMARCK* left Norway, we left Portland and Captain Badger was our captain at that time. He relieved Captain Hustvedt. He was our training skipper.

[Badger was pretty well thought of, wasn't he?]

He was the enlisted man's captain, he really was. He made a lot of innovations like soup for the mid-watch. We had soup for the mid-watch as long as I was ever on board.

The cooks always had some soup, even when we were out in the Pacific. He was a destroyer squadron leader when he came aboard the *NORTH CAROLINA*. He was a tough disciplinarian, but he was really good. We really enjoyed him. Sorry to see him leave when we were going to the Pacific. We thought he was going to go with us, but he left in Norfolk. I think it was Captain Thomas that took over after Badger.

[Thomas came before Ford?]

No. I am trying to think now. I have to look in my book to make sure. Was Thomas first or Ford. I am trying to remember. I think it was Thomas but I am not absolutely sure. They turned them over ever six or eight months or so. Something like that. We turn over captains. We had a good time. I met my wife in Portland, Maine, while we were there. A lot of fellows did at that time. We went in there in March and we left in May. In Portland, Maine in that time of the year is very foggy. Sometimes you go ashore and you wouldn't get back in a day because of the fog. When we came out, we came out of the Gulf of Mexico to go to Portland. We got there in March. All of our liberty boats were open boats and it was a cold, cold Portland, Maine, in that year.

[Did you ever have to pull picket duty in the whale boat?]

Just once in the whale boat, yes. Going from island to island, Peaks Island, Long Island. I don't know them all now because I haven't lived there in so long. We had a christening ceremony on Little Shimig(?) Island where they made a recreational area for the ship. We had a big clam and lobster bake on the island out there on Little Shimig(?) Island in the harbor. It was a big island. I think it was thirty-five or forty feet deep in low water. The *WASP* was in there, the *CAROLINA* was in there. A couple of cruisers, _____ was in there, destroyer tender. There was quite a few ships in there at the time. Portland was not a liberty port. They closed it down at nine o'clock at night.

[At that time Portland probably was not that large a city was it?]

No. Even right now it only about sixty-two thousand in the city of Portland, which is the largest in the state. Of course, when they started building ships in south Portland, the liberty ships and all of that, they had quite a big influx of people.

[Down along the waterfront there in Portland now you have all those stores and restaurants and everything. I don't imagine you had much of that in 1942?]

Yes, it has all changed. Now the b_____ has a repair facility there in Portland now and they do a great job.

[You said you only pulled picket duty one time on the open whale boat. That was a pretty miserable night, wasn't it?]

Oh yes. Because it was foggy and we didn't know too much about it because there was a lot of torpedo nets stretched between the islands and all. You had to just keep cruising around on those and it was cold and a couple of times some of the boats got lost and had to stay on an island all night like that. April and May in Portland are a foggy port in that time of the year. We left on the 29th of May. We thought we were going to be in on the battle of Midway, but we had to stop in Norfolk and get some supplies. The *WASP* went out with us and they kept right on going. They went straight out to the Pacific. We stopped there and then we went through the Canal to Long Beach.

[Close squeeze through the Canal.]

There is no bumpers in between the two, when we went through the Canal. We were 109 feet on the beam and the canal was 110 feet wide. It was quite interesting going through. I would like to take a cruise through there sometimes on a cruise ship. Then we went to Long Beach. The admiral for one of the old battleships came aboard with his staff, the enlisted flag staff was in the activation compartment and they introduced us to

cockroaches. They started shaking out their clothes; they were shaking out the cockroaches. We had cockroaches from then on out.

[Oh really.]

We never had them before that, but we had them from then on. They stayed on board until we went to San Francisco and then they left in just enough time to leave us infested. We stayed in San Francisco for a few days. Around the fourth of July or a little after that we left San Francisco and went to Pearl. I will never forget going into Pearl Harbor. Everybody standing out on the docks cheering and waving. You would have thought we won the war for them and we had just come back out of the States. That was quite an impression. I will never forget it. The *ARIZONA* was still smoking a little at the time. All of the other ships were around there.

[She was the first modern battle wagon to make it out there.]

It is indescribable how we felt standing there and these people standing on the dock. All the sailors and the crews, the workmen and all of that, they thought we were the tops. Commander Striker was the navigator at that time. He put that in there just like it was a motorboat. We only stayed there about three or four days, we were headed for _____ and Guadalcanal and we were with the *ENTERPRISE*. We operated with the *ENTERPRISE* quite a bit. We got our first air attack on the twenty fourth and quite a few guys in the F-Division all got their wrist tattooed, "August 24th." We put it on the left wrist so that the watch would cover it up. We were supposed to meet every year for a reunion. We call it the tattoo club.

[Do you meet?]

I don't know. I haven't been able to find anyone . . . I know two guys who have them I know are dead. My best friend, who I used to go ashore with all the time is dead.

He died fourteen years ago. I was talking to his wife just before I came down here this time. I looked through the roster and there are a lot of them in there who are missing. Even at this reunion there isn't anyone.

[No one from the F-division?]

None with the tattoo on.

[Not everyone had it?]

No. A couple of them went out and got drunk and the tattoo was way up here. But we did it on the wrist so that we could cover it up with a watch. Most of them didn't want to have tattoos.

[Obviously, the first aerial attack that had an impression on you, what were your thoughts going into that? This was your first baptism in fire.]

It is funny because we were well-trained. My heart was going a mile a minute until the first gun went off. Everything just clicked in place. I was the JP operator on there and communicating between air defense and the director officer. It just came normal. Nothing panicked about it. It was just a normal situation. Our first casualty was Patrick Collen. I am not sure, they said it was straight by a Jap, but I am not sure if it wasn't just friendly fire that just happened to hit him. He went through boot camp with me when I was in boot camp. I have his signature on my boot camp picture. He was our first casualty on that one. In fact, it was the only casualty we had that day.

[What was hitting you primarily?]

We had dive bombers were dropping. They came close. We had a little spray every once in a while but we didn't get hit with anything as far the ship was concerned. The *ENTERPRISE* got hit a couple of times.

[But, it was primarily the dive bombers that fired?]

Dive bombers and torpedo bombers. In fact, we were firing at dive bombers and I signaled the director officer that there was a torpedo attack coming in and we brought all we had three mounts on the foot side, Sky-2 was our director. We had three mounts, two, four, and six. When we came down, shells into the water and then back up onto the torpedo planes. They never stopped firing all the way down. They just kept on going. The marine disaster was in mount two. When we got all through that battle, it was about seven minutes long, I guess. Mount two guns, the paint had peeled off the barrels of the guns.

[They had gotten so hot.]

Yes. You would think that we had been in there for hours, the way we were talking about it afterwards. Just swapping stories about what was going on. I think we got some planes. We were a well-trained ship. The gun crews on the mounts could run those loading machines every day. Lieutenant Ross who was our director officer, he was a fifth division officer. We used to call him "Barney," because there was a boxer at that time named Barney Ross and we used to call him Barney. He was our director officer. He was a real disciplinarian, but he would read the riot act to us occasionally and then he would say, "What is wrong with me?" Then we would get a shot at him. We had a good crew. We had a real good crew and director at that time. Then we went back after our torpedo.

[Anything about the torpedo that comes to mind?]

What I always think about the torpedo, that I remember is because we were operating with the *WASP* and I say when I was a kid, I was almost eighteen years old when this happened. I witnessed the *WASP* launching in Quincy, Mass., when they launched the *WASP*. We were down for the launching. Two Navy planes out _____ collided in the air at the launching. I remember an old timer, the old wives tale, "The stallion with blood will end with blood." When I saw the *WASP* get torpedoed, I remember that day in Quincy

when the two planes crashed, they got torpedoed and then we got torpedoed. Then the *O'BRIEN* took torpedoes. I think we would have got two that day. They used to call us "the 13-knot fleet," because that is all we had been traveling at. As the admiral used to say, "We want to conserve fuel." After that day, the fleet got up to 18 knots.

[Was there any type of personal reaction that took the torpedo?]

Well, it was funny. I knew that the *WASP* was torpedoed so I went to my battle station right away and I was sitting up on top of Sky-2 before we got hit. One of the fire controlmen, Martinal, who is dead now, he was the hairiest guy we ever saw. He was in the shower at the time. He was all soaped down and when we got hit, he took from the shower and was running up on the port side of the ship and I am looking at him go by on the main deck and all I can see is hair and soap suds. No clothes on. He went into turret one. That was his battle station. There was a fire in the magazine so they flooded the magazine and they abandoned turret one. Here comes Martinal, still with no clothes on, but soap suds, running back down again. I was telling him about it afterwards. He said, "Well, it wasn't funny." I said, "You weren't sitting where I was." I just remember the geyser (?) going up and us picking up speed.

[Even knowing you had taken a hit, you really weren't concerned with the condition of the ship?]

No. I didn't think. I got my phones on and did my job. I remember the geyser (?) going up and smelling the smoke the powder and all of that. Yet I can still see it. I can see it today, even as it happened. I can still see Martinal running down the deck. When we were coming back home to Pearl, there was a PVM circling. It was quite foggy. I remember getting on the range finder and identifying the plane and a PVM. We were concerned about whether it was a Japanese plane or one of our own Navy support planes.

That was a little scary. We didn't have any radar at all, even the surface radar was knocked out when we got hit by the torpedo. It snapped the bedspring up on the _____. We didn't have any radar.

[You were just limping back?]

Well, we stayed with the fleet until dark and then we left the fleet after dark. At one point we were going 25 knots after we got hit. In fact, I was talking to a fellow from one of the destroyers. He was on watch on the bridge when he told the duty officer on the bridge said the *CAROLINA* had been hit. The officer looked over and he had to speed things up to 25 knots. He started giving the fellow a hard time about giving false information. He said, "I saw it." But yes, we were doing 25 knots after we got hit. We were a well-trained crew. I think we were the best in our fleet at that time. Of course, I am prejudiced.

[The ship was well built, to get hit like that, and seal it off and keep going.]

Eighteen by thirty-six foot holes. We had three fellows down taking airtight integrity in the compartments. We lost those. We lost the fellow that was on board on watch up on the deck. I think he got blown over the side. Really for three years of operations, we were very fortunate as far as our casualties were concerned.

[Remarkable. As many combat situations as you were in that is a total of ten men over the whole span of the war.]

Three years. Operations for three years. Then we went back to Pearl and we all had a good time, getting drunk. I remember going over the side to scrape the side of the ship as we were letting the water out of the side of the dry dock, it was fun then. We were knocking somebody off into the water. Then we still had to go down and wire brush the side of the ship. This was all handlers deal, the odd workmen didn't do that at that time. I can remember getting over the side and I was looking down, whether to go down the rope

thirty feet or climb the rope fifteen feet to get back on the deck. I didn't know which way to go. That was a little scary. That was probably one of my most scary points the whole time.

[When you were over the side scraping?]

When I was over the side scraping. I had to climb back up. There was no ladder, there was just a hand over hand up the rope.

[You were just holding on while you were scraping?]

Yes. We were on the staging, but they left the staging and we just climbed up the ropes and got back up on the deck.

[Wow!]

That is what I said too, "Wow!"

[You had to be in pretty good shape.]

I don't think I was. I was just scared enough to do it. That was all. But then we went back out to the *QUINCY* and *ASTORIA* that got sunk. It was a gloomy day on board ship. I will tell you. We were at general quarters all night practically that night. The next day, Lieutenant Ross was gloomy. We finally asked him what was going on. He said, "We lost four cruisers last night in twenty minutes." That was the *ASTORIA* (?) and the Australian cruiser *CANBERRA* (?). They all went down in about twenty minutes.

[They weren't close enough for you to hear of it.]

No. We were with the carriers that night. We did a lot of training to do things that never came about. Going up to _____ and going up to bombardment and you know we got there. We did a lot of training on it. When we went back, we went back to Nouméa. That was our quarters for a while. One time we were going to go to Australia. They turned us around. We could see Australia, but that is as far as we got. We turned around and went back up into the islands again. Our biggest runs up all the way through to Iwo Jima and

Saipan, we were involved in the Saipan/Turkey shoot. I have been to Guadalcanal. I almost got killed in Okinawa. One of our forty-millimeter guns stopped firing. It came about a foot from the back of my head and burned all the hair on the back of my head and my face.

[What happened to it?]

The gun was training around into the superstructure, and they were on cans. They stopped firing. The cans had slipped and the guns weren't stopped.

[So it was off its mount, in other words?]

Yes. As you turn in one mount, one gun would stop, the next gun would stop. As you kept turning in, they all would stop. They wouldn't fire. This one was turning in and it didn't stop firing.

[This was a malfunction that was causing it to turn to far?]

No. We were trying to shoot a plane down that was coming down. I was standing there. The Japs were coming. It missed the carrier. It was coming across the bomb station at about fifty feet above the water. We were firing at it. I was in control of a mark 51 director controlling a five-inch gun. The forty-millimeter gun mount was right next to us. They were turning around. When this gun got close to me, the mother flash was burning the hair on my face and my arm. It actually was about a good sunburn--a blister look. Had it come another foot, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you about it now. I would have been the eleventh casualty. That was the same day that Brent, Watson and Carrum, the other fire controlmen on the fourth side of the ship got killed the same day when the *HELENA* fired into the ship. That was a case of coming down and not stopping, which I imagined happened a lot throughout the fleet. I remember in Saipan, we went down to Guadalcanal, there were seven ships in the formation. Then when we were in Saipan there were horizons of ships. It was amazing the number of combat ships that were in that formation at Saipan.

The aircraft carriers shot down so many planes. We shot down a few. I have a picture in one of these books. I think we got the last of the 422nd plane. I think that is ours. Then I got transferred. After Okinawa, we came back to Pearl and I got transferred back to the States in June of 1945. I didn't want to go but I did want to go. I went back to fire patrol school in Washington. I was transferred. After the war was over, they said I had fourteen months obligated duty and I better go to sea. So I went on the *OREGON CITY*. _____ commission from Quincy to Boston. While we were in Boston waiting to go to the Guantanamo Bay, the *NORTH CAROLINA* came into Boston. I had a couple of liberties with a couple of the friends of mine. We had some pretty good times in Boston. That was the end of my career. I got through in 1946. The Korean War started. I went back in and was on the *VALLEY FORGE*. I was on there for about thirteen months.

[Where did the *VALLEY FORGE* operate?]

It operated in Korea, off the coast of South Korea. I joined it in September. At Christmas time, they started back to the States. We got back to the States at just about Christmas time, when the Chinese came back down over the border. So we turned around in seventy-two hours and were heading back to Korea again. We stayed out there until we came back to Bremerton (?) waters.

[So you actually got two tours in Korea?]

Very swift. So we came back to Bremerton and they were cutting down on some of the crews at that time and I bid my farewell to the Navy.

[What primarily were you doing there along the coast of Korea?]

We never did have any air attacks, thank God. I didn't want to be on a carrier in an air attack. Most of them were air strikes. We were taking pictures of planes coming in and crashing on the decks. That is what we were doing. In the fire control gang, taking care of

the forty-millimeters and the five-inch. As far as the fire control gang, we didn't have too much to do as far as battles.

[Koreans were not coming out to the . . .?]

No. We didn't have any air attacks at all while I was on board. There was no air attacks. The Migs stayed in over Korea. We never saw any ____ ____.

[I imagine it would be quite a difference having to deal with a jet as opposed to the slower World War II prop planes.]

I won five dollars on that one time. I was up in the director, and I was looking through the range finder of the director. I said, "Here comes a plane in without any propeller on it." They guy said, "You are crazy." I can't remember the fellow who was in the director with me. I said, "I'll bet you five bucks." He said, "Okay, I'll bet you." He stuck his hat out just as the jet was landing. I said, "Come on, and give me the five dollars."

[Did he not know about jets or he just wasn't thinking about them?]

He wasn't thinking about them, because we only had one squadron of jets at that time. There were more coming aboard. He wasn't paying too much attention to the jets. That is how I won the five dollars from him.

[Going back to the *NORTH CAROLINA*, what type of relaxation . . . I know some of the crew members boxed, others played baseball, others relied just on the movies that were shown on board. What were you involved in?]

Mostly pinochle. Pinochle and cribbage. We were pinochle players. I learned to play pinochle and my whole family is a pinochle bunch.

[You weren't part of that gambling party that operated right into the fantail were you? The big stakes crowd.]

No. I used to shoot crap a little bit. I remember I never shot crap at all and we were coming from Bremerton (?) to Long Beach and we were shooting nickels and dimes. I learned how to shoot crap. We used to have a few crap games in our shops. For about nine months, I sent two hundred dollars a month home. I just didn't have quite the nerve to get into some of those big games. I was watching an eighteen hundred dollar roll one night, crap game. The guy had eighteen hundred dollars on the table and he said, "shoot," _____ eighteen hundred dollars and there was thirty six hundred dollars when he rolled them and he won.

[At that point in time, where would enlisted men get that kind of money?]

We didn't have any place to spend it.

[It just accumulated?]

It just accumulated on your payroll. When I came home, I think I had over a thousand dollars in pay on the books when I came home in 1944. It would rotate, too. The smaller games would rotate. You may have four hundred dollars tonight and I would have nothing. Tomorrow night I might have the four hundred dollars and you would have nothing. A lot of it did a lot of rotating. Everybody had a hot hand at certain times. It worked out a lot like that. The big games, I think there were some loaded dice in there. Some professionals at it. I don't know. I never got into any of those. It was mostly amongst our own division that we played in. That was most of the recreation. Just playing cards and sitting around in the compartment and laying out on the deck. Loved to be on topside at night.

[When you were sea for any length of time, did that have an impact on you psychologically?]

I don't think I knew any better. When we came back into port, it was back to the

islands. You would have a recreational thing. You would go off and get two cans of beer. I didn't drink beer, I drank Coke, so I would get about six cans of Coke for my two cans of beer. I played baseball on the island. I remember Bob Feller pitching. I was shore patrolling them. I was watching this guy pitch. God, he had something familiar(?). The fellow with me said, "That is Bob Feller." I knew it. The way he kicked his leg in the whole thing. I had just seen him play with the Red Sox in Boston. He was not in *ALABAMA* at the time. As far as I know he stayed on the *ALABAMA* as long as any of the celebrity type ball players and all, Ted Williams from the marines was on the *ALABAMA* for quite a while. It wasn't just a six-months tour and then go back to the States.

[So you did serve?]

Right, exactly. He was on the *ALABAMA* at least two years. That is basically what we did. We would just go and lay around on the beach because there was another five thousand sailors or marines or whatever on all these little islands we used to go ashore on. Then we went back to Pearl. It was a few drinks.

[Nothing more to do when you were ashore than it was when you were aboard ship.]

Not much. It really wasn't. We were a happy crew. The whole ship was a happy crew. It didn't seem to bother them too much.

[You talk like you had some good officers?]

Very good officers. There was always a few, just like there were a few unlisted men, but they were mostly a good bunch. We really enjoyed Lieutenant Ross. He became head defense officer and then he was transferred. I don't know where he is now. I have looked in all the stuff that we have had since I have been going to the reunions and I don't see anything on him. Admiral Kirkpatrick was air defense officer first. When the *FRANKLIN* got hit, there was another report that their plane shot that Japanese plane down.

We shot that plane down. It was a big foul up. We were on that plane. We were on the starboard quarter of the *FRANKLIN* at the time, about 2,000 yards on the starboard quarter. That was our station when we were operating with the carriers. We picked up this plane on the near port side, was way off____. Destroyers, screen was there, a couple of cruisers were there. Nobody was firing. Sky-2 picked it up and all the other directors picked it up. They said, "It is a Jap. Lower your firing." They wouldn't give us the order to fire. I can understand that when they are flying over all the other ships and nobody's firing, not even the *FRANKLIN*. It came radioed over the . . .

[Why did the other ships miss it? Apparently none of them picked it up on the radar coming in and didn't see it until it was visually. . .]

We had it visually when it was out on the destroyer screen. That was probably 10,000 yards out. It was just flying in all by itself.

[I was talking with the radar man yesterday. He said they picked it up on the radar screen forty miles out coming in. They couldn't make anyone believe that there was a bogey coming in.]

Right. We had it. I saw it on the range finder. I was on the range finder looking, asking each other, "Are we right?" I got on the range finder and the range finder operator and the trader pointer(?) and they all identified it as a Jap, but nobody was firing, so I could understand why the air defense officer didn't want to fire. We didn't think so at the time. The jerk, why the hell didn't he let us throw up one shot anyway, to wake up somebody. That was the whole thing, you know. One shot . . . that never would have happened. Everybody would have picked it up and ran away. It was like the time after our air attack in 1942, the airplanes always had a habit of buzzing the carriers when they came back from a mission. They would come down there and buzz the flight deck and go up and make the

circle and come down and land. After our first air attack, we were tracking a plane coming in. He started to dive and we opened up on him. He went right into the drink. It was one of our own. He was diving down on that carrier and that was all we needed.

[Were they able to fish him out?]

I don't remember whether they got him out or not, but we got reprimanded, but we also got commendation for being alert and they stopped diving down on the carriers when they came back. That was the end of buzzing the flight deck when they came back from a mission. He just went into that dive and we opened up and he went into the drink. He never even flicked to come out of the dive. He went right down. That is why I think if that had happened with the *FRANKLIN*, somebody would have popped a shot. It would have gotten bad. Those guys were coming out there like corks out of a bottle. They were popping up all over the place. I saw three or four guys crawl into one of the life rafts that we threw over the side. We picked up some of the guys. It was a real mess. We felt a little responsible for the fact that if we had just made a shot, even one twenty-millimeter, that is all it would have needed to alert everybody and it wouldn't have happened.

[They had an enormous list of casualties on that, didn't they?]

They did. They had seven hundred, I think. They went back to New York, finally got back to New York, but it was in tough shape. When the kamikazes hit, that was the most demoralizing part of the whole war, as far as I was concerned. They sank some ships, but they didn't seem to do as much damage. They put some carriers out of commission, but it was the fact that they were throwing everything up there and they are still coming in. Then they whacked the ship.

[You had to actually blow them out of the sky to stop them.]

That is just about right. That is what happened to the one that we shot down, that I

referred to on the forty-millimeter hitting my head. There isn't anything you can do. That was about the worst part of the war, as far as I was concerned.

[You rather take a torpedo than a kamikaze?]

Yes. When Brendon(?), Watson and Carrin(?) got killed, I got burned. We were beginning to come home then. I had been on board four years and I decided that I wanted to get home. I put in for transfer to go back.

[So you asked for a transfer?]

I will tell you, the day I left that ship, if somebody on board had said, "Hey, Smitty, come on back." I would have turned right around and gone back on board. I didn't want to leave. I had gotten married in 1944 when we were home that time. It was another nine or ten months that I was gone. I wanted to go home. All the older hands that came along with me were getting transferred back and I was a senior PO, other than the chiefs. Lieutenant Mason who was a division officer said why don't I stay aboard and become chief. I asked him if he would guarantee me chief, he said, "No." I said, "Well, I am leaving." I think I would have been chief if I had stayed aboard.

[Any of the kamikaze raids that you remember specifically that was out of the ordinary?]

The ones that hit the *BUNKER HILL* seemed to be. My friend, who was on board, had a brother on the *BUNKER HILL*. When they came down, they had got hit with two almost simultaneously and went down. I think I remember that one, other than the *FRANKLIN*. Actually the *FRANKLIN* wasn't a kamikaze and left them. We shot it down. I mean there are a lot of stories about who shot it down. We had been tracking it for a long time. I think the *BUNKER HILL*, other than the *FRANKLIN*, was it. Like I said, it was demoralizing. The sky went black with flack and everything. These guys were still coming

in.

[You almost had to either hit the fuel tank or the pilot himself, right?]

He could get rid of ____ and almost make the plane explode. I don't know what the hell used to keep them up there. I almost had to be a direct hit to get them. You see some of them with part of the wing coming off, but they would be still there, almost like a missile. That is just about the way we described them. Like a missile coming in there. Diving. Nothing turned them away. I don't think you had any more protection than the old planes did.

[They were actually in most cases just old planes, loaded up.]

Loaded them up with explosives. The pilot was doped up or whatever he was. We used to call them chicken kamikazes when they would dive on a ship and miss. Like the one that came on us and missed the carrier. Just pulled out and was just about fifty feet in the water. We called him a chicken. He didn't want to crack into the ship. That was about the only real things that bothered me about it. It was fun, too. When we were in Saipan, we had targets of opportunity formed by the Saipan. We picked up a truck going down the road. We had the same three mounts that we always had. The truck was going down the road and we were shooting at it like it was a surface ship. It turned up a side road and we got up on it and chased it up the road. Finally, the guy stopped and the shells hit it. We spotted the Jap running through a corn field, so we popped a few more shots at him. I don't know what he thought he was. . .

[A battleship, take after him.]

Six five-inch shells going "Boom, boom, boom."

[Y'all were using him primarily as target practice.]

Yes. After it was all over, we started counting up the number of shells we fired and

figured out the prices and how much it cost to kill that one guy if we did kill him. I don't know, he might have got away. Those were the lighter moments. Of course, at Iwo Jima, I think we bombarded for a solid hour. Nine gun ____ once a minute. We stayed there for seventy-two hours in Iwo Jima.

[Wasn't that deafening?]

The sixteen-inch are not as bad as the five-inch. The five-inch were sharp crack report.

[You were there in one mountain, you had this one right behind you.]

You see, I had phones on, too. That is what helped me as far as my hearing is concerned. That would block the sound that way. The sound is what did it to me. With the sixteen-inch was kind of a "woo," whereas the five-inch is a sharp crack. It really gets you after a while. We fight a lot of five-inches. We did a lot of bombarding with that. The story that I forgot to tell you about was when we were coming back from the Solomons where we had torpedoes. The USS *KIDD* came out of Pearl Harbor to escort us in. It was brand new out of the States. We were playing war games with them. We were going to illuminate them with star shells. We got a foul-up in the party room. Instead of illuminating them, we had the star shell mount was shooting star shells just like it was a service attack. We had a good track on the *KIDD*. We fired two star shells. One hit the water line and one went through officers' country.

[Oh, no.]

The next day when they came alongside the fuel, they were fueling us, the cooks and bakers on board here made a big cake with a big purple heart on it. We sent it over to them with the ice cream while we were fueling. The captain on the *KIDD* thanked us for the damage control problem that we gave them. There was no explosion, but right on the water

line was a five-inch hole with a big rag stuck in it. I don't know what they did with the one that went through officers' mess. The second shot went right through officers' mess.

[No one was injured?]

No one was hurt. It was kind of a fun type battering back and forth joking with each other.

[Anytime you get a hit though?]

If somebody was killed then it wasn't so funny, but we were lucky that nobody did get killed on the *KIDD*.

[Do they have credit painted up on the side of the ship there for the *KIDD*?]

I don't know whether they have or not. When I came along side it, their stack was painted with the pirate Captain Kidd, the whole stack was painted with the profile of Captain Kidd. They should probably put one up there on the bridge. That would be something for you to do in your spare time. Get a picture of Captain Kidd and put him up here on the bridge. I was in Boston last summer and the new *KIDD* was in there. I happened to be talking to some of the sailors and I told them the story about the *KIDD* in World War II. They thought that was quite funny. I said, "Yeah, you weren't on the *KIDD* then."

[You were talking about the officers, I think Stryker was pretty popular?]

Very popular.

[Maxwell was.]

Yes. He was engineering officer.

[Was T.J. Van Meter on the ship at the time you were?]

I don't know. The name sounds familiar, but I don't recall. Stryker was a great person. He was like a famous navigator first and then he became exec. He was a great guy.

Another one was Nicky Hilton. He was up in the fire drill shop where the radar was. He was a radarman on watch.

[He was not an officer.]

No. He was an enlisted man. I came up to the shop one day and he was sloppy, just plain sloppy. He was on watch. I got on his case about it. Somebody said, "Do you know who he is?" I said, "Yes, he's a slob." They said, "No. His father is Conrad Hilton." I said, "Who?" I didn't know who Conrad Hilton was at the time. I said he was a slob. It was a great crew, I thought. We didn't get to know too many outside of your own division because you were so busy.

[I have heard that before.]

Yes.

[You get very little opportunity.]

You get a few fellows that you happen to hit it off with or something. There was a fellow who was on the *CAROLINA*, his name was Haynes, an electrician. When I went on the *VALLEY FORGE*, he was on the *VALLEY FORGE* also. We got to be buddies, going ashore on the *VALLEY FORGE*, more so than on the *CAROLINA*. I knew him here. We operated. He was doing a lot of electrical work around the mounts and stuff like that with us. But you don't get too many. Even those fellows from main battery and secondary battery. Once you got really operating, you are on watch at different times, other than at quarters. And of course, when we always had tug of war with the engineering department. We would run a hawser up by turret one with a couple of pulleys and come down both sides of the ship. The engineering department was on one side and we were on the other and all the gunner department, and at that time, right arm reach, we used to call them would all reach for right arm top side. Gunners mates, fire controlmen, navigators, boatswain mates,

all their reaches were right arm. All the engineering department, electricians were left armed. That's what we used to say, the right arm reach and left arm reach.

[Was this just tug of war?]

Yes. Recreation.

[Recreational type.]

It was a tug of war. You pulled on a four-inch hawser with all these guys. You could feel the shrink. I don't know. We won it a couple of times and they won it a couple of times. I don't remember just exactly how we won. I will be a little diplomatic about that one.

[It was a draw.]

I think we beat them, though.

[You can say that as long as they are not around.]

Yes. In the smoker, the region had to have a boxer. We were all too smart to be boxers.

[On the smoker, explain that?]

Boxing matches, entertainment, dancing, guys singing and this type of thing. We had a fellow, Drake was his name. He posed for boxing. He looked like the old John L. Sullivan, with his arms outstretched and that is the way he went into the ring. He was going to box the guy that way. The guy knocked his hand down and popped him one. He got killed. I don't think he boxed after that one particular time. We didn't have any boxers in the division. We had a lot of fun. It was a good group.

Sorry more of them didn't show up now. I don't know whether it was lack of communication or what. I think, some was lack of communication. I tried to get the newspaper at home to run an ad. They had run a small one about it earlier and that was all

they would run. I had a big spread on it, with a picture of the *CAROLINA*. They just wouldn't run it for me. I told the guy that I was talking to, "No wonder you people are going out of business. You don't want to put anything in the paper that is worthwhile." I guess that is about all I can say about the *CAROLINA*. It was a great four years. I grew up there.

One incident that happened to me. I took an examination to go to officers training. I passed it. They looked at my records and they didn't have my high school diploma, as graduating from high school. They said you can't go without a high school diploma. So I wrote home to my mother and asked her to send me my high school diploma. She sent me the high school diploma. I brought it up to personnel and they put it in my records. They said, "You have to take the exam over again." I took it over and I flunked. I said, "That is what a high school diploma does for you." On some of these days you are up for an exam and one day you are not up for an exam. The high school diploma flunked me. So I didn't go to officers training. I stayed in fire control. I really enjoyed it. I was thankful for Lieutenant Ward when he was a division officer that he didn't let me go become a carpenter. Carpenter or damage control. I had a good time on board. I don't know if he is still alive or not.

[He made full admiral. He was class of 1941. I think he is now deceased. I think he died several years ago. We worked with the class of 1941. We have a project going with them. In fact, I have to spend two or three days in Annapolis in June. They are having their 50th Anniversary in Annapolis in early June. I have to go up and spend several days with them.]

It was interesting _____ who was on board. He was out of the Monnel(?) medals (?) and Curly. Curly his son was on board, he was an officer on board. . . . When we were in New York in ____ ____, this drill officer came aboard, that was the highlight while we

were still tied up in New York. Lieutenant Ross, who became a commander, was the first reserve officer to come on board. And did he take the crap from the Academy men.

[From the Academy men. That doesn't surprise me.]

He had quite a few degrees himself. He had two or three degrees.

[But he wasn't Academy.]

No. He wasn't Academy. He took a lot of the watches. He earned his dues.

[Before it was over, they accepted those reserve officers as being an important part.]

He was the first one. The four men were Brent, Watson, Carrin and I can't remember the fourth man, but he was actually the closest to the shell hole. He could turn around and put his hand in the shell hole. He lost a big toe. Then on the single bridge, a fellow was going up to the single bridge, up the ladder, and the shrapnel came by and just sheared off his buttocks. Both cheeks. Just like a knife. The forty-millimeter mount after the shell, they got sprayed real bad. So the signal bridge and the mount, other than the three fellows that were killed, they sustained quite a few shrapnel wounds.

[What kind of treatment did you have to have for the burn?]

Not much. I just put a little salve on it. Like I said, it blistered just a little bit. I guess they said on the report, third degree burns. It was like a bad sunburn as far as I was concerned. No hair, but bad sunburn. I reached up and just pulled the hair off in clumps because it was all burned around there.

[Didn't damage your ear or anything?]

No. It didn't do that. I had glasses on and so it just burned around here. It didn't bother my eye or anything. There was a burn ridge right here.

[So you were wearing glasses at the time?]

Yes. Sunglasses. The polaroid glasses. They fit real tight. At that time, I didn't

think any more about it. Then I got notification of the purple heart award. When I got home, my face had already cleared up. That was about a month later. It was longer than that. I got home in June, so it was three months before I got home. She was just getting the letter from me when I was on my way home from the Navy department saying that I would write to her and tell her what happened.

[I am sure it kind of worried her, because when you think about purple heart, you think of someone losing an arm or leg.]

Exactly. If you are going to get a purple heart, that is the easy one to get I would say. No blood was spilled. That was the extent of it. The fellow that survived it could put his hand in the hole, shell hole above him. That is how close he was to that thing. Sometimes I guess it is good to be closest to it. The reason they found out it was the *HELENA* was the base of the shell was on the under platform on the second platform on side two. They got the serial number and the lot number and they knew what ship.

[So there was no question at all as to where the shell came from?]

No. They knew right off. The lot numbers . . .they found out who received that ammunition. It was amazing how they could tell exactly where it came from. That was just laying there on the deck. Nobody in Sky-2 got hurt. The hatch just bounced up in the air and one of the fellows was quite a comedian anyway. Welch, he is also dead. We used to call him Purch. He opened up the hatch. He said, "Boy, it is an awful mess down there." He was a North Carolinian, I guess they call it. He died a few years ago. Very nice fellow. None of the crew up there knew that, they knew the ship got hit, but they didn't know exactly where it was or what it was.