

EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

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USS NORTH CAROLINA BATTLESHIP MEMORIAL

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[This is a session with Mr. John P. VanSambeek of San Jose, California. If you will, let's start with finding out a little bit about your background. Where were you born and where did you grow up?]

I was born and raised in a little town in Wisconsin named Kimberly. It was a home base for Kimberly-Clark Corporation (?), a paper mill and paper related products. I was born and raised there and went to school. On November, 1936, I enlisted in the Navy.

[Being from Wisconsin, what attracted you to the Navy? Of course, they have the lake there.]

I went to the paper mill several times. I would see these lacks (?) where people kept their timecards, time clocks. People who were there for eight-hour shifts, day in and day out, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. I said that is no life for me.

[You wanted to see the world instead.]

I said, "There must be a better way."

[So you enlisted. Where did you take your basic training?]

I went to boot camp at the Great Lakes in the middle of the winter. Being there on the lakes, Lake Michigan was similar to Wisconsin. Snow was six to eight feet deep. In fact, you don't even drill outside, you do it in the armory. There are very few days you can actually get out. The snow was too deep. Then I graduated from there.

[As far as boot camp, you didn't go aboard any ship at all during boot camp, did you? It was all just basic training, I take it.]

It's _____ trained, very basic. Then I was assigned to the USS CALIFORNIA, BB-44, Long Beach. I served on her until every spring a fleet _____ on maneuvers.

[When were you assigned to the CALIFORNIA, was it late 1937, early 1937?]

Recruit training was just three months. It was in the spring. It was 1938, if I remember right, I had a chance . . . I enlisted originally for a minority cruise. I had this southern king (?), and he had signed me up _____ my twenty first birth date. My first cruise was three years and some odd months. Directly, he came out and said that people could re-enlist for new construction. I was tired of going to islands on the west coast. At that time, I wanted to move, so I agreed to re-enlist for his instruction. I was sent back an offer for _____, but the ENTERPRISE commission CV-6.

[Well, the CALIFORNIA has basically just stayed there in the Long Beach area.]

Well, that was the end of the Depression, and the Navy didn't have much money. They didn't burn too much fuel oil because they didn't have a lot of money. I had a chance to go on the east coast, which I did, with the ENTERPRISE. That was _____, for South America and the shakedown cruise. I spent a lot of time in the Caribbean. I forget what year it was we went through the Canal and went to the west coast. That port there was San Diego. We operated out in San Diego. White (?) operations. Got to learn the ships

and submarines. October of 1939, they sent the ENTERPRISE, six cruisers and eighteen destroyers to Hawaii. They called Hawaii, the ____ operating out of Pearl. That got to be pretty tiresome.

[Oh, really.]

Same thing day in and day out. I never did like the Hawaiian Islands. We operated out of there ____ Sunday morning and ____ Friday night. I got tired of that.

[All training exercises, I imagine. Or was it not?]

Yes. Practice (?). So then again, the ____ came out, a new construction, battleship NORTH CAROLINA. People who re-enlist or agree to re-enlist could be transferred. It wasn't all ranks were available. I had made third class on the ENTERPRISE and ____ was one way of getting out Hawaii. I re-enlisted for new construction of the NORTH CAROLINA. I liked the ENTERPRISE.

[Was this early in 1941?]

Early in 1941, yes.

[Had the tempo of the expectations in the Hawaiian area picked up any by this time in concern for the Japanese?]

We knew something was coming. We weren't aware of the magnitude. At that time, most everybody figured the Japanese . . . Matthew Perry, who had been there fifty years prior, when he was there it was just one ____ ____ savages. Consensus of the opinion was that there wasn't much competition. But that turned out to be otherwise. They figured if something was to come it wouldn't last too long.

[So, you came back to New York to Brooklyn Navy Yard at this point?]

Yes. More importantly, we had two ships in a camp in Seattle which constituted a

receiving station. We were assigned to the ship along with the civilians who were building the ship, according to rank. The gunners base worked in New York in the snow. The quartermaster took care ____ things and so forth. When I first reported, it might have been fifty or seventy-five people who actually worked aboard ship. Some of the people were assigned to shore patrol duties and mascots and bakers and what have you.

[What was your assignment when you came aboard?]

I worked for chief boatswain. He would give us daily assignments.

[So, it varied?]

Yes. Mainly what we did, you notice above all, was the hatches that had ____ ____, we had to test all those. We had ten hoists and horrible (?) weights and horrible (?) scales. We would check out almost every ____ aboard ship from one end to the other. Include ____ rooms to the navigation room. It was a good way to get acquainted with the ship. Every day we were working a different area.

[Going behind the civilian work crews, checking the fittings and making sure they were all properly installed and in place and this type of thing. Was Captain Hustvedt on board at that time?]

Captain Hustvedt was first commanding officer. One advantage for the crew was he knew most of the high society in New York. Especially when the war started, we weren't in condition to go to sea. The ship wasn't in condition. More or less public relations for the taxpayers(?), but we got a lot of publicity when we were in no condition to go to sea. The society ____ in New York wanted to do something for the boys in blue. Captain Hustvedt was a good ____, he arranged things for us. There was no end to it. He had so many, the limousines would pull up to dock. For example, they would have to detail people to go. I

remember one time I was on the CAL list (cruisers at large), I had overstayed my stay on the beach by a few hours. I had two weeks restrictions. We would have to ____ a number of times a day. I remember I ____ one night, six o'clock. Chief master at arms detailed us. Get your brooms (?) on, he said, "You are going to a party."

[Real punishment, huh?]

The beginning, we used to go to the one in Brooklyn, I think we used to go on the Henry Hudson. He was a fine piano player. ____ ____ _____. These women, they would hire ____ ____ and big punch bowls. After we got to know what was going on, we would sneak bottles in our depots. Captain Hustvedt would stay around, ____ ____ ____, and they are enjoying themselves and let them spike the punch. It was a good deal. Towards the end we got tired of it. Too much.

[To get on with serious business, particularly as the war approached.]

Well, some of the girls had good heads, a lot of them coming from higher echelon (?), they danced with us and so forth. Held conversation and that was the end of it. Some of them were all right.

[Were you living aboard ship at this time?]

When the ship went in commission, everybody moved aboard. The ____ commission a ____ we could go to Seattle ____ a receiving station. Once the war started, there was nothing in the world for people on the beach could do for you (?). We would work all day and have dinner aboard, take a shower and get cleaned up. Then we would look at our shipmates and say, "How much money do you have?" "Well, I have a dollar and a half." Sometimes I had a couple of bucks. In those days, you didn't make much. Seaman first class made \$53, seaman second \$36, seaman ____ \$21. At that time they used to deduct

\$.50 a month for hospitalization. It wasn't free. Third class made \$60, second class was \$66, first class was \$72 and chief petty officer was eighty some odd dollars a month. So anyway, we would take a survey to see how much money we had in our little group. It was a nickel to ride the subway. We would go to our favorite gym and put a white hat in the middle of the table. We all threw our money in there. We would drink until our money was gone. I remember one night, Drazenski(?) was with us. He was in the third division, seaman first class. I think he had about sixteen years in. He took some money out of the hat and bought a sandwich. He really caught hell for spending our money foolishly on something to eat. I used to hang out at a place called McGillis' (?) on 48th and Broadway. Great big oval bar. It was close to the theater district. I got to know the bartenders; we had had a _____. If the bartender didn't know you, they would put this card in the cash register and ring up the amount and he would put it in front of you face up, meant he wanted the pay for the drink. After he got to know you, he would draw up to or three drinks before you pay. If you got to be a friend of his, like I did, you could sit up there all night and every time you would drink, he would put it face down. Then when the theater crowd would come in there at night, the big spenders, they would buy a drink for the whole party, ten or fifteen people, Harry would pick my chit off, too, put it in their drinks. Free drinks all night long. Another good deal I had--he had been tending bar for I don't know how many years. He knew practically everybody, civilians that came in there. People had tickets for the fight or basketball game, you name it, he had them. I would go in there at night, reach up alongside the cash register and fan them out like a deck of cards. He would say, "John, where do you want to go tonight?" I remember one night I had went in there with Lou Gallo, one of us _____. "I got the bill for you." I said, "What do you have, Harry?" He

said, "There is a bricklayers convention over in Small's Cabaret in Harlem." He said, "Go, don't be alarmed," he said, "You will probably be the only white people over there." So, we got out of the cab and on the sidewalk by the stairs going down. I was asked two or three times what local (?) I belonged to, even though I wore a uniform. After I got down there, we were wandering in the crowd. There was a table right alongside of the dance floor. ____ ____ quit. Little gal come over with a pushcart, she said, "What are you drinking?" She would set a fifth on the table. She said, "What kind of cheese do you want?" She kept us supplied all night long. Then food, the main thing they had there was fried chicken because all the bricklayers were colored and they all like fried chicken. They had steaks, ribs, seafood, anything you want. It was one of the better nights I ever had in New York. Like I said, there was no end to what the people would do for you.

[You didn't even have to tell them what local you belonged to, did you?]

No.

[Once the NORTH CAROLINA put to sea, you spent some time in maneuvers along in the Atlantic. Both off of Maine and North Atlantic and maybe a trip to Jamaica.]

We conducted gunnery practice in the Chesapeake Bay. At that time, they were leery, didn't want to gamble and take such a valuable ship out to sea because of German submarines. We conducted most of our early gunnery practice right inside Chesapeake Bay. That wasn't enough room for us, ____ ____, a pretty good size body of water. We finally had to go to sea. We had our destroyer escorts with us. Captain Hustvedt only made a couple of trips out to sea with us and then we went with Captain Badger. Everybody loved him. I really got acquainted as I stood all my watches at sea, with the navigation ____, we both stood watch. He had a sense of humor. I remember we had a chief boatswain by the

name of Dillingham. He had very little hair. Just a little around each side. One day he was out on ____ and he had his hat off. The old man said, "Boatswain mate, tell Dillingham to put his hat on. The sun is hitting his head and sending a reflection in my eyes." He was always ____ like that, had a good sense of humor. He used to summon the heads of departments on the bridge. He used to call them daylight hours and half the night, sitting in a chair in the navigation booth. He would tell me, he said, "Get a hold of Commander ____ and tell him I want to see him." The next time he would say, "Get a hold of Commander ____ first lieutenant." He would conduct his meeting sitting up there. He was no _____. I went a long time after we had left Portland, Maine, waiting for the ____ up there. Every time the TIRPITZ would go to sea, we would go to sea. When she would make a hundred and eighty degree turn and go back to Norway, we would make a hundred and eighty degree turn and go back to Portland. The WASHINGTON and the PHILADELPHIA wasn't too far behind us. They got wind. He was coming up to relieve us. We started making our job orders, things to be done in the Navy Yard. This one particular time he summoned the first lieutenant up there to him, all the job orders had to go--every departments, all job orders had to go to the first lieutenant, who in turn, would submit them to the Navy Yard, the ship superintendent. He said, "Bring up the job orders, I want to see them." So, he came up there with a stack of job orders about four inches thick. He said, "Jesus Christ, we are not going to fight the war in the Navy yard, there is a war going on." He went through there and he tore about three quarters of the job orders up and threw them on his desk and he said, "Ships ____ will do that. Throw that away. A few of these things justify having the Navy Yard do, we are not going to fight the war in the Navy Yard." We spent very little time in the Navy Yard.

[Do you have any recollection of the time that the Captain of the WASHINGTON was lost overboard? I understand that the NORTH CAROLINA helped try to look for him.]

No. I don't recall that.

[It was up in the North Atlantic when the two ships were there together. You mentioned Commander Maxwell, he was pretty popular with the men, too, wasn't he?]

Well, that was because he was actually enlisted man. He came up through the ranks. He could remember back. He was ____ support ____.

[He could relate.]

He was easy to relate to. He had a rough childhood. He was an orphan. He was adopted. He came through the ranks. He didn't come in a Commander. He knew what the other half accomplished. That is why he was so popular. The PA, PF, and A Division, which was the Black ____, had quite a few people. He was their departmental head and they like him. He was well-liked by everybody. Another incident that comes to mind is back in the main deck is a round hatch that goes down to the machinery space for the crane and fantail. Basically every night they had card games down there. Cachinsky, this sixteen year seaman we had, and Kinchowski, who happened to be a seaman that ran longer, those two fellows would run the casino. They would have the ship's cook make sandwiches for them and he got a date to the game that way. They would have a card game practically every night. Every division had a police petty officer and ____ force, if they saw a card game, the majority of them would say break it up or they would confiscate the cards. If it was a considerable amount of money involved, they would confiscate that and it would go for ship recreation. Most of them were aware of the fact that you had to have something to do.

[That was the big stakes.]

That was the big stakes.

[Did they ever break it up?]

No. Not when I was aboard, they never did break it up. There might have been others aboard ship, but not that I was aware of. When we were aboard, you didn't have free reign. People ____ ____. If you did venture into another department's spaces, they would eyeball you and follow you. The people they dealt with day in and day out, worked with, ate with, slept with, stood watch with, those are the people you really knew. You could have people in the engine rooms serve aboard here for five years and you would never know them. At night, especially when it starts getting warm, stuffy down below, most of them congregate on the fantail. Most in their little clicks. That is where I ____ ____. I got to know quite a few people that way. This guy from sick bay, this guy is from __ ____ navigation bridge, this guy PX division. They always headed back to the fantail. I got to know quite a few of the people that way. During the day, it was pretty quiet.

[You stayed within your department unless you had specific reason to go to the engine room or something.]

You couldn't move off, you had work to do. If you weren't on watch, you had maintenance work to do. You could go visiting after working hours. You would put a frown on their face, they would really eyeball you.

[What about the mess hall, did you eat by departments in the mess hall?]

The watch standers went at the head of the line, then the rest of the crew went.

[So, you did mingle of sorts.]

Yes. Same way at movies at night. Brought two movies. As soon as they finished one reel on one side, they would run it over the other side. If you were too late to catch the

movie on that side, you could always a half hour later or so, whatever time it took to run the first reel over to the other side. Some of the movies depend on how often you refuel or if you refuel cans, you could swap movies back and forth. If there is a big gap in between, some of these movies, you knew what was coming in the next scene.

[You had seen them ____ . How new were the movies by the time they had made it aboard the ship?]

They weren't too bad. They were probable six months old.

[So, something like Wake Island, you saw it while the war was still on.]

Some of them would make the circuit out in the fleet. They would say, "Oh, boy. New movies." So, we would get the title of the movies that had been aboard three weeks earlier. Somebody would say they've got movies down there that we've seen two or three times. Had to have something to do.

[Once you finished the shakedown in the Atlantic and had the repairs done in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, then you headed through the Canal to the West Coast.]

Yes. Our first stop was Long Beach. Before we got into Long Beach over the horizon, you could see the breakwater, you could see the masts of ships in the there. Got closer, I could make them out. It was battleships. Since the ships were so tight, we didn't know what position--a float or had sunk. So, when we saw the mast sticking up over the breakwater, we knew we hadn't got them all(?). So, we got inside the break water. We spent one weekend in Long Beach. Monday morning, we got under way with the rest of these old battlewagons. Being ashore at Long Beach that weekend, working with these fellows off the old wagons, we asked them what they had been doing. They said, "Once in a while we come down here, but we spend all our time up in San Francisco." I said, "Jesus,

the war is going on, _____ in San Francisco." Monday morning, we went out to San Francisco and got there, tugs got alongside of us and backed us into the pier. Started torpedo mats across the entrance to the pier and we got liberty, that is where we were going to fight the war. We got several days up there; I forget how long it was. Maybe a week. One morning, we got on our way to gunnery practice. I think it was two days before gunnery practice. At the end of the second day, two destroyers pulled up alongside of us and we were headed into the sun. All these old gofers made a hundred and eighty degree turn and they were headed east back into San Francisco. It didn't take us long to figure out that we were going to Pearl. Then we got to Pearl. We went in there for a day or so, refueled, went out and _____.

[What were some of the battleships that were there on the California coast? The whole World War I vintage?]

The whole World War I vintage, because the WASHINGTON followed us and she _____ was up to Portland, Maine. So, they were all pre-war wagons.

[At this point in time, those they felt were needed for defense of the west coast against the possible Japanese invasion?]

I don't know why if they were in defense of the west coast, you would think they would have spread them out, but they were all congregated in one spot, San Francisco. The people loved them. The people that were serving aboard. The San Francisco was always a good liberty town.

[They left them there?]

No. These two destroyers came alongside of us, and we headed west. They made a hundred and eighty degree turn and headed back to San Francisco. I don't know how long

they stayed there, but it was quite some time. We were with the ENTERPRISE a long time and which I liked. The ENTERPRISE phoned home too. We were the only wagon out there for, I forget how long. I think SOUTH DAKOTA was the first new one that came out there. She looked quite a bit different. They were shorter. They had a different silhouette. It was quite some time before the SOUTH DAKOTA came out here. MASSACHUSETTS, the ALABAMA, INDIANA, I believe, then the WASHINGTON finally came out. I think they did take some of the old wagons around San Francisco and the some around in the East Coast, maybe Africa. I am not sure because I wasn't there. I doubt if they spent the whole war in San Francisco. I never recall seeing one of the pre-war wagons operate with us. They didn't have the speed. They couldn't keep up. They had a few that could churn out 21 knots and that was tops. They couldn't keep up with us.

[Once you got into the engagements in the South Pacific, this was the first time you had experienced enemy fire. How did you react to that?]

We were summoned in general quarters and ___ ___ ___ in turret three. Myself, like so many other people aboard, had no idea what was going on. We could hear gunfire, quite a bit of it. We knew something was going on. To what magnitude, we had no idea until we ___ in general quarters and I dropped out of the back end of the turret and an area around the five-inch, twenties and forty was livid (?) with brass shell casing. That was the first. The next time, no big deal.

[Felt pretty secure.]

Yes. Especially behind all of the armor. Be aware of the fact that a lot of the people in the twenties and forties were exposed, being topside. At least they knew what was going on.

[Yes. They could see.]

They had a life preserver on. They could bail over the side. Considering all the other people who were inside these confined spaces. You had life jackets, but you couldn't get to the water. It didn't do you any good. There was two ways of looking at it.

[What was your battle station once you got out into the war zone?]

Defense ____ condition readiness, but I stood on my ____ watches.

[So, you were still on the navigation bridge.]

Then when you went four on and four off, then I was back in turret three, along with general quarters, I was in turret three. I got to know that right ____ turret three quite well.

[Any particular episodes that really stand out in your mind from that period?]

No. Not really. It has been so long ago, I don't remember. Always things happen, something humorous, but it was so long ago I don't remember.

[You were on board when it was torpedoed?]

Yes.

[Where were you at that point?]

I was standing on the fantail. The ____ was up on the port fowl (?). They had just completed recovering the planes. They ____ aircraft sailor. They always had great _____. We were chugging along about 12 knots. Very, very slow. I saw a big blue and black smoke from the explosion on the WASP. I had no idea at first glance it was a torpedo. For some reason or another, I happen to glance aft and the O'BRIEN back here off the port quarter, I think it was the O'BRIEN, a destroyer anyway. I just happen to look at her and I knew it was a torpedo. I turned my head back up forward to see how the WASP was going, I felt the ships shudder. We had one. It was only a couple of minutes, and we were back on

an even keel.

[No panic at all from anyone, was there?]

No. They sounded general quarters right away. Nothing but a mass of humanity went in different directions. When they secured general quarters, we had two destroyers who were missing. We were by ourselves. I forget where we went, Ulithi. _____ over the side to evaluate the damage we had sustained and to remove the dead. We left there and went to Pearl.

[That is when you were transferred.]

That is when I left the ship.

[Had you asked for transfer?]

Yes.

[You were anxious to get to new construction or just tired of the battleship.]

No. At that time variety was the spice of life. I had this one down pat. As far as my own rate was concerned. I just had to see what they had to offer. I went back to the States. It was quite a number of _____. What they did when you go in the port, they were cranking out new ships like hot cakes. Back in the States, they hadn't had people available. They couldn't put people out of boot camp completely. They had to have some sea people. The ship had no choice, the Bureau was telling them to transfer x number. I volunteered and I went back to the States. I got two weeks leave and I reported back into San Francisco. I rode the MINNEAPOLIS. The MINNEAPOLIS, their bow shot off and _____ engagement. She was in Pearl when we got there. They had put a false bow on her. We rode her, in fact, they had transferred most of her people to the States for thirty days leave and new assignment, we had to man the MINNEAPOLIS and take her back to the Navy Yard in

Bremerton, Washington, where they took one complete turret off. Some other cruiser had lost a turret. We got a seventy-two. There was quite a few people I knew from the NORTH CAROLINA who rode the MINNEAPOLIS back. We got the seventy-two and the yard workmen took the turret off. The end of the seventy-two, they didn't have enough people to man it. So, they started dribbling back. I know I got back a day late. They figured they had enough people to man the ship to take it down to Mare Island. Even though they had so many people overly they couldn't even get this big ship out to sea, not a word was ever said. So, we got to Mare Island the beginning of 1948. As soon as we hit Mare Island the beginning of 1948, we fell into some ___ second class in a mote (?), we went to Treasure Island. I went to Treasure Island, they said, "No. Don't take your sea bags off the bus because we are going to transfer you to Market Street." I said, "Market Street." That is right in the middle of dodge (?) country. The Navy had leased some store, a big building, it had three stories as I remember. They had monks (?) all set up there in a big mess hall. There was an annex and a receiving station at Treasure Island. So, I ran into a few fellows--second classman--and I ran into a chief quartermaster I knew. I said, "What is your job?" He said, "I am the draft dispatcher." I said, "What is that?" He said, "Every morning, Treasure Island sends a list over of people that are living here. I get on the PA system and call off all the names in the morning and they have two hours to get down here with bags and baggage and we send them off to where they are going." I said, "Well, that sounds pretty good." The rest of the guys were basically all shore patrol. I said, "Do you need an assistant?" He said, "Yes." He told me what to do, so the next morning I got the list and I got on the PA system and called off all these names and had the buses pick them up. So, I got rid of these people and I called TI and said, "I got rid of 150." So, they would send 150

more over. That lasted about three weeks and I ran out of money, and I finally called home and I said, "I've had it." Like I said, everything is for the boys in blue. People really go through it. I had all I could handle. "Get me out." So, I went up to Astoria, Oregon, and I got Henry Kaiser's first flock (?) out, CVE-55. CASABLANCA was the name of it. It did resemble a ship that I was accustomed to, wagons and carriers. It was basically a shell with the bare essentials. We got aboard there. Most of the people came off of combat ships. New experience for practically everybody aboard. We did our operating up through the Sound. Our flight operations up there. Then they decided to make a training ship out of us. We had changed our whole port and Youngloves(?) Grocery in Tacoma(?). Youngloves (?) Grocery is a big wholesale grocer. They had a big dock. We used this dock. We would come in every Friday night. Depending upon how fast Henry Kaiser was cranking out these new ships. Some weeks he would throw out a ship a week. We discharged one crew and we would pick up the next crew. Sometimes we would have to wait a week before we could get a new crew. It depends on how fast they came through the receiving station at Bremerton. We used to get milk in five-gallon tin containers. We kept all paint on the dock. We put it in a shack for Youngloves' (?) Grocery. The gas system, we charged all the lights up from the flight deck to secure flight operations before they would drain all the lines back into the ship's tank, I would have the fellows there with five-gallon milk containers and fill them up with high-test aviation gas. We would get back to Youngloves (?) groceries and we would carry all these five-gallon containers with the gas over to the dock and we would swap bottles. See, hard liquor was hard to come by. The state of Washington had didn't have a liquor license. Anyone over 21 can get a liquor license, it only cost fifty cents. They didn't have a bunch liquor stores, and you had to take a bunch of

junk, you know some cheap stuff to get a good bottle, so if your card was punched you have had it for the week. With the aviation gas at my disposal, I had an unlimited supply. We got to know the girls over at Youngloves (?) Grocery and they were hard-pressed for gas. In fact, when we made that last curve coming into Tacoma. The old man would get on the whistle. Civilian help was hard to come by. The girls were glad to see us come back in, so they would blow the ship's whistle, the girls that knew we were coming they were our line handling party. They handled our lines for us. It was great.

[Had they caught you, they would probably hang you, would they not?]

It was the same way when the war started, income tax. There was no way I was going to pay income tax. Quite a few people felt the way I did. Didn't bother to fill out a return. People back in the States in prison were better off than we were. At least they had fresh air and fresh food. _____, but in those days, what are they going to do to you. Grandfather is too scared _____. That is the attitude we had. I furnished the right people, if we did get caught, there would be no problem. A good many of the officers _____ furnish gas. I had all side cleaners and they had the main _____ on the side and they would carry paint and paint thinner and whatnot back and forth.

[Doing a little bartering, huh?]

Yes. Regardless of the rules and regulations, there is always some way to get around it. Somebody would come up with something. Captain Badger, he had a second class boatswain mate, I forget what _____. And he requested to see the old man. I happened to have the watch up on the bridge. They had zone inspection quite frequently. Inspections and inspection. They had so many drills, maintenance was going to help. They had those inspections, always find fault of this, that and a few other things. This one _____,

he had a whole stack of plan of the days, and drills, drills, drills, roll inspection, roll inspection. He requested an interview with the captain. I happened to have watch. He said, "Captain, I have got to bitch." The guy was coming _____, he wanted to have a nice space that he was responsible for and he said, "You can't do it. Something has got to suffer." The old man agreed with him. He'd get various heads of departments up there and he said, "Something has got to come to a head. We have got to balance this thing out." The old man told him, "No. Drill, number one. Everything else needed will be a sacrifice. You ought to be able to strike a balance now." From that day on, look at the plan of the day as a big change. That is probably upper most in my mind--Drill, drill, drill. Until you are blue in the face. In the daylight. In the dark. You know, general quarters in the middle of the night. Darkened ship. You knew where all the steps were on the ladders, you knew where all the instructions were. In fact, you could tell how old the people were aboard ship because if they had beat up heads and stunned shins, they hadn't been here too long.

[They had tripped over the doorway.]

These ladders going from one deck to the other, you would hit one step, one half way down and then the deck down below. I don't have the faintest idea anymore how long it took to have everybody at their manning stations. All hatches and everything else secured. It didn't take very long.

[They had a stopwatch on it, I am sure.]

I am sure they did. By the time all these places checked in and ready, it couldn't have been too long after general quarters had sounded. In the beginning, yes. You know, because people going in the opposite direction. In fact, a lot of them didn't know where the hell to go, didn't know how to get to the battle station. After a while . . .

[By the time you got into the battle zone, I am sure you had most of the worked out.]

It was second nature, you could do it blind-folded.

One of the drills, the sixteen-inch, we did it day in and day out, day in and day out. Myself, I was down to a twelve-second load. You would have the gun loaded and in position. They would say "Commence fire." You open the plug, pour it there, parameter ____ ____, three sacks of powder on the tray, split them, two down, one forward, in the middle of three on here, close the plug, hit the ready light and you are off the platform in twelve seconds. The gun was loaded for me in an elevated position. The fly point was way down the fifth it would take a little longer to elevate the gun. To depress it rather, you would elevate the breech. As soon as that platform was in _____ distance, eight or ten feet down the fifth, you would jump down there and you would have the plug open and by the time you would get in loaded position, you had it pointed there. It was too loud; you couldn't hear anything. Just the machinery running. Everything was hand signals, give the rammerman a signal to ram the projector link and then you had the other operators in separate department, they had a glass door to reduce it. He jumped the first three sacks in there and he would have to get those out of the way for the second three. You would push two up aft and one forward and then you would dump the other three sacks and the rammer would put those out. To this day, I had that mishap on the _____. I think it was the rammerman that blew it. The projector, you could ram that thing a mile a minute, no harm done. Rotated man seats and that is as far as it is going to go. When you ran the powder in, you don't want to waste any time, but you only have about a foot leeway. You get in there too far you are going to bust those sacks. If you don't hit it hard enough, then you will have to ram it a second time so you could close the plug. That is what I think happened on our

way. The rammerman got carried away and rammed it in too fast.

[I talked to several officers who were aboard ship or knew of incidents where guns had exploded before like that. One during the war, I believe. They said, "Cusack, poor man of sabotage was just ludicrous."]

When I first heard about it, TV, I was on the CALIFORNIA; I was on the gun crews there, too. Basically, it was the same thing. When you have that plug open, you have a primer running out of the _____. He extracts the old primer and inserts a new one. I was on the CALIFORNIA, I closed the plugs. When I was in the process of closing the plug, it sheared off this primer which was ______. It had a big flash in the turret. It scared the hell out of us, because the plug, after it closes it rotates. Only it finished only about half of its rotation. So, I am aware of what it can do wrong. Things happen so fast, your one objective is speed along with safety. You do this over and over and over. In fact, that _____ there is right down turret three. You start another operation before you are finished with the previous one. Are you familiar with the old _____? This latch comes up and you have to have your hands on it because it comes up so fast. You have got 250 lbs. of air pressure closing out a plug. _____ slam up there and rebottled. You have to have your hand there to catch it on the rebound to lock it in while you are turned around ready to hit the ready light. The pointer and trainer coming below can elevate. So I got my hand there one time before the salvo latch got there. Never got the purple heart either. One time we had an air attack, I forget where it was. This fellow crawled out of the top sack after secured from general quarters with blood on his face. Some fire _____ get by and _____ rate in horsepower and he got a purple heart. He had been asleep somewhere and some lightbulb broke or something and he got a purple heart.

[He got a purple heart.]

He wasn't aware of it, he came topside and somebody saw blood on his face.