EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #24.059

USS *NORTH CAROLINA* BATTLESHIP COLLECTION

John Kirkpatrick

March 30, 1976

Interview #2

Interviewer is Captain Ben Blee

[This is Ben Blee and the date is March 30, 1976, and I'm sitting in the admiral's quarters on the *NORTH CAROLINA* talking to John Kirkpatrick. John, as the record shows cause we have a lot of his books and papers, was a plank owner onboard the ship. He served in the AA battery--the secondary battery--started out in the Fifth Division and wound up as air defense officer leaving the ship on April 6, 1944. So here is John and I want to start by questioning him about a photograph I have here, that is his, of himself and one of men that served with him in Sky Control, now tell me who this man is, John.]

This is Larry Resen, Larry came aboard when I believe he was about sixteen years old and was part of my crew in Sky One, a porter, he was a brilliant youngster and took very capably to hydraulics and soon became a fire controlman third class. When I became air defense officer and moved to Sky Control and I found it quite difficult in finding an officer who had a concept of the battery that Resen had and although he was just possibly seventeen or eighteen years old I had him there with the control circuits of the port battery while I kept the control circuits of the starboard battery. So that although

Resen was a fire controlman third class, all of the officers--they respected his ability and alertness to such an extent that they were happy to have him as their "control officer."

[Great! For purposes of identification, this picture is in our collection and it is the one just showing John on the viewer's right and this young fellow Larry Resen that he had been talking about on the left. Resen with eyeglasses--the Polaroid lens eyeglasses--up on his forehead and both of the men wearing headsets. What do you know about Larry Resen today? What is he doing now?]

Well, we kept in close contact. After the war, he went to the University of Colorado and was president of his class there and then he was editor of the *Oil & Gas* Journal and then for the last maybe fifteen years or so he has been the editor and chief of the *Chemical Engineering*. I'd say he has had a very outstanding and useful career. He has done quite well as an author and I'm awfully proud of the type of a man that he has turned out to be. He was an orphan boy and I practically adopted him. He came and lived in my home and [I] kept in touch with him throughout his career.

[Well, it sounds to me that you spotted him as a comer in the beginning when he was just a young fellow sixteen years old and kind of got him started in the right direction.]

Well, yes, he had a fine mind and a beautiful spirit and he fit in very well with the kind of people that developed the *NORTH CAROLINA* into the attitude that she finally achieved. He was dedicated, never looked back at hard work and the irony of this is that while he was doing these things onboard ship at the time when the stresses were so high, he was also studying to take his competitive examinations to go to the Naval Academy. He took the examinations and won out only to be prevented from going because of

malocclusion of his teeth. It was a most ridiculous loss, I think, to let a man of that quality go by whether he had any teeth or not.

[It was a minor problem. John and I are now looking at a photograph in his collection which shows what I think is the crew of Sky Control after the bombardment of Kwajelein. The bombardment of Kwajalein was what date?]

I believe the last of it, we completed it on the thirtieth of January of 1944.

[Yeah, I think that figures. Well, tell us about that picture?]

Well, it had been a long bombardment and we had to stay on our battlestations all day in order to guard for anti-aircraft and then at nighttime then to disturb the people over of the beach--that is the Japanese--we would bombard all night long. Periodically with the main battery and also with the secondary battery so that it was very difficult controlling the five-inch battery, while at the same time taking the blast shock of the main battery firing.

[That reminds me. For the benefit of out tape recording here, John was controlling the five-inch battery at the time and he was of course in Sky Control exposed to all of it. I think that the purpose of the bombardment, aside from causing some destruction over there on Roi and Namur, the two islands of Kwajalein Atoll . . . One of the purposes was to keep the Japs disturbed all night to keep them from getting rest. Do you remember it that way?]

Yes, that's right along with whatever destruction that might possibly take place.

[Can you remember anything in particular about the damage that was done by the bombardment?]

Yes, it seems that we hit some amunitition dumps that caused quite a mushroom and also this had been quite a while ago, but I believe that the Japanese had some dummy

aircraft on the field made out of boards and gunny sacks probably and I think we destroyed a few of them.

[Well John, you remarked in some of your papers that you can never remember ever being as tired or exhausted as you were after those three days and nights bombarding Kwajalein. What do you remember about that?]

Well, at that time I had been aboard the ship going on three years and developing the battery--its procedures and training the personnel--and on up to that time it had been a very demanding job. I think that whatever you are doing that kind of wears you down so that when we went into Guadalcanal, we have a possibly similar stress but as the time went on, I think a person gets I guess you would call it war weary. So that whereas in a situation like this I could spell off the men and let them go below and have a smoke and rest and take turns being in the lookout stations and the like, I was unable to do it myself because I didn't feel like leaving the station because of the responsibilities of it and it just seemed that whenever those three days at Kwajalein ended, I felt a degree of exhaustion that I didn't really get over for maybe a couple of years.

[Yes, I can understand that exhaustion is cumulative.]

I went onto the other job commanding the Anti-Aircraft Training Center and the Fleet Machine Gun School in Waianae, as gunnery officer of the *ALASKA* and executive officer of the *OKLAHOMA CITY* after that before the end of the war, but I never felt quite the same after that.

[Well, let me ask you a couple of more questions about being up there in Sky Control. Bear in mind those who may hear this tape some day that Sky Control is up nearly at the very top of the foremast and that was his battle station. Now John when you

were up there for those long periods of time, how were you given food? Tell us about getting food up there.]

We would usually have sandwiches. It was very seldom that we couldn't go down for some food. However, I do remember--I believe it was off Tarawa--when it was Thanksgiving and we had been up to our battle stations all day long and secured and went down to have our Thanksgiving dinner and we had just gotten our plates loaded when here came battle stations again. So we came down about 10 o'clock that night and had some turkey sandwiches.

[Now when you were up at Sky Control and had to stay there for prolonged periods of time but had to go to the head, what was the provision for that?]

Well, you could go down on the bridge in the admiral's quarters, or if necessary, we kept a bucket on the platform below.

[For real emergencies, you had a bucket up there?]

Yes.

[I have just asked John to talk to us briefly about the Battle of the Eastern Solomons which took place on August 24th 1942. This was the ship's baptism to fire, its first Japanese air attack.]

Well Ben, you're asking these questions right off of the cuff here and it was about thirty-four years. Maybe I could answer it as you would possibly expect--we'd trained and trained and trained morning and night, getting ready for this. Not only had we trained, but there had been the generation of effort to develop the equipment we had to use which could be very well considered the very best anti-aircraft battery in the world at that time. We were also going into mortal combat for the first time [which] is a tremendous experience, as you well know. We had our radar reports that a large number

of bogies were coming in and these were the first times that we had sited the enemy and, of course, we didn't know what to expect except they kept coming in a large numbers and they hit and all hell broke loose. All of our entire battery was firing at once, the heat from guns and the cork in the air burning and the flash of them was tremendous and it's there that our training and our anticipation--the study of the action taking place by the British--came instead, for an example . . .

[Well, let me interrupt you for a minute John. Of course, the volume of fire that this ship could put up was way beyond anything that we had ever had before or any navy had in one ship, for that matter, and I'm wondering if when everything was going off did all that smoke from our own guns interfere and block your visibility or interfere with your awareness of what was going on around the ship?]

We didn't seem to have any lack of targets to shoot at, that we could see, although there were a lot of things that we couldn't see.

[You told me that a least in one point in that battle you could see at least one bomb come down from way up high dropped by a dive bomber and it came in from the portside, crossed in front of the tower foremast, and hit the water on the starboard side. Can you put your memory of that on our tape here?]

Oh yes. The dive bomber was coming in from the portside by the beam, oh I'd say at about 45-degree angle and decline, and the strafing and then it dropped the bomb and came by the forward edge of our Sky Control station. I could watch it quite easily and then it went on down and hit the muzzle of the twenty-millimeter gun that was firing at a torpedo plane that was coming into starboard. And then the bomb went in between the lifelines and detonated in the water along side the ship. Incidentally the twenty-millimeter gun kept firing and drilled a hole through the deck and you will see there are possibly

pine planks in the deck there now where the teak wood had been removed by this twenty-millimeter gun.

[Well, you saw this bomb coming down. How close would you say it passed in front of you?]

I'd say three feet.

[You could almost reach down and touch it.]

Your reaction in a case like that makes things slow down so it seemed like it was going about twenty miles an hour.

[How big a bomb was it do you suppose? Five hundred pounder or less?]

Oh I don't know I'd hate to say; I wasn't sizing it up to its weight. I was contemplating . . . as a matter of fact it is funny how you really . . . I thought I was killed so I said to myself, "Thank God for a good life" because I thought I was going to be killed.

[Those were your actual thoughts . . .]

But after it went on by, I instantly forgot about it and got busy with conducting the battle. I might say that one of the saving graces was the fact that we had gone through all the discomfort of the wearing of these flash gloves and hoods and glasses. It's one of those things that nobody wanted to wear, but after that battle we could all be thankful that we had gone to that precaution.

[Yes, sure. Well, you remarked earlier down there on the main deck with those twenty-millimeters were--one of which was damaged by the bomb--that those gunners were in the act of firing at incoming torpedo planes that were coming in from the starboard bow. Can you remember any more about that?]

Yes, as an example, this torpedo plane launched its fish and immediately turned its belly up to get away and the twenty-millimeters were rather inadequate weapons for much anti-aircraft. They had a rather close-in target that was too close for the five-inch and the five-inch were busy elsewhere. So they shot down this torpedo plane and I don't know where the torpedo went--it could have sunk on delivery there. Whether fragile a weapon . . . so many of the torpedo planes would be lost.

[John, during that battle, as you remember, we lost one man killed and only one man and my recollection is that he was hit by a bullet from a strafing plane. Can you tell us what you remember about that?]

Yes, Sky Four director officer was the only man we knew of who did not put on his flash clothing, so I noticed his guns were being shot without any discretionary controls, so I relieved him immediately and had Lieutenant Fowler (second lieutenant Marines), a splendid officer incidentally, take over the control of the Sky Four. And it was in that sector that we lost our only man, it was hard to determine why he had collapsed in his twenty-millimeter gunner's position, because the bullet that hit him was one of the Japanese--I believe it was probably smaller than a thirty-caliber but the same type that they had found so many of at Pearl Harbor.

[Very small caliber machine gun type bullet.]

But to kill a man you could hardly find out where he had been hit. Clay Ross was in charge of Sky Two and he did a spectacular job of covering the *ENTERPRISE*. The effectiveness of his fire in shooting the dive bombers that were attacking the *ENTERPRISE* was just phenomenal, and that was one of the greatest services of the anti-aircraft battery in this battle.

[For the record, Clay Ross was, of course, an officer in the five-inch battery and after John's departure from the ship in April of '44 or soon after that, Clay Ross took over that job as the ship's air defense officer. Now also for the record, please tell us what Clay Ross is doing now.]

Clay Ross later on went with me as gunnery officer at the Anti-Aircraft Training Center in the Hawaiian Islands and then became commanding officer there and then he came to Oklahoma City as the man in charge of the Navel Reserve Training Center and then he got out of the Navy and went with Sears Roebuck and now he is one of their senior vice presidents.

[That's very interesting.]

He came aboard ship; we walked up the gang plank together and he was a schoolteacher from Arkansas at that time, a fine man.

[I wanted to go onto another thing about the Battle of the Eastern Solomons. There is a legend that you hear from time to time in the Navy that is used even today in AA gunnery schools to kind of inspire the young fellows to do well and it goes back to the *NORTH CAROLINA* in that battle. Now bear in mind that she was the first new battleship in the Fleet and this was her first air action. There she was demonstrating the immense firepower of this new automatic five-inch battery twenty guns together with all the smaller weapons that the ship had, and she put up a tremendous volume of fire. Now tell us the story about the message from the *ENTERPRISE*. That is what I am getting at.]

Well, shortly after the battle, I was told from the bridge that the message had come over from the *ENTERPRISE* asking us whether or not we were on fire. As a matter of fact, I questioned that myself during the course of the battle in that the smoke and flame was so intense that I thought we had been hit and we were on fire.

[John, you and I know that as a rule the primary target from the Japanese point of view was the aircraft carrier in our carrier task forces, but I believe that I'm right in understanding that in that battle of the Eastern Solomons that this ship was itself singled out for attack. Can you tell us a little bit about that?]

I'd say they had enough attacking planes to take care of the carriers and the battleships. Realize this is kind of an initiation for them, too. I might say that their flyers were splendid flyers. Their ability as shown in that battle was probably at their highest in their war experience and as the war went on I believe they lost their fine flyers and had to resort to kamikazes and the like. We fired heavily with all our guns and the targets were usually rather close in. There is no question that the *NORTH CAROLINA* was a prime objective of the Japanese and I think that the morale factor it might have meant to them to have sunk us would have been probably as inspiring to them as would have been their sinking a carrier.

[Well, certainly when that bomb came down and almost hit the tower foremast and passed within just a few feet of yourself, there could have been no question that that bomb was aimed at this ship and not at the *ENTERPRISE*.]

The same with the torpedo attacks.

[No question about that whatever.]

One funny thing that happened . . . we had a, if I remember correctly, somewhat of a lull after four or five minutes. It wasn't a long-lasting lull, but we had this young officer who is an identification expert up there at my battle station and he'd excitedly told me that I was just firing on our own planes--that he hadn't see any Japanese planes.

[Doesn't it sound like he was very good at identification.]

But in a moment of stress like that it was awfully disturbing to have that accusation made. He was probably more disturbed than I was.

[The record, as I read it, shows that in that battle the *ENTERPRISE* Task Force of which the *NORTH CAROLINA* was a part was attacked by about eighty aircraft altogether, about eighty different aircraft—some ordinary bombers, some torpedo planes, some dive bombers, some strafing--and they came in in waves and the whole battle only lasted a few minutes. The record shows that the ship was credited officially with shooting down seven aircraft and possibly getting seven more. Is it your feeling that gives the ship full credit for what she did or do you think that this ship shot down more aircraft than that?]

Ben, I don't know. It is hard, as you say, when there is an attack by that number of planes. That identification officer, incidentally, after the battle was showing sketches of the Japanese ships, when you are as busy as we were you know firing in all four directions it is kind of hard to tell what the total was; the main thing is we did not get hit. And secondly, through Clay Ross's group, Number Two did a splendid job in protecting the carrier. So, it really is incidental, as far as I'm concerned, how many planes went down, because we did not go down ourselves.

[Right, the record is absolutely clear that the *NORTH CAROLINA* did a hell of a job in that battle and I don't think any authority--any naval historian who is savvy about that era--would disagree that the *NORTH CAROLINA* fire very well might have been just what saved the *ENTERPRISE* from being sunk that day. She was hit by three bombs, but she survived to fight to the end of the war. But I personally think that had the *NORTH CAROLINA* not been there, the Enterprise very likely would have been sunk that day.]

Also, Ben, the status of our fleet at that time was at a low point and if we had lost those ships at that time we would have been just about out of business in the Southwest Pacific.

[We would have been fresh out of carriers. We had lost the *LEXINGTON* at Coral Sea and in May we had lost the *YORKTOWN* at the battle of Midway in June and this battle we are talking about is roughly two months and a half later in August. The *WASP* was coming out; I think "Sara" [the *SARATOGA*] was laid up temporarily. The *ENTERPRISE* was probably the only carrier that was operational in the Southwest Pacific at that particular time so her loss would have been a really tough blow. Now, John, I would like to ask you, if you will, to just give us your recollections about some of the commanding officers of the ship you served under starting with the first captain, Captain Hustvedt.]

We were blessed with the captains and the executive officers we had in the *NORTH CAROLINA* in the years we were preparing for the action we just mentioned. Captain Hustvedt was fine--I started to say beautiful person--really an inspiration to all of us as what you might consider an ideal officer and a wonderful seaman and leader for us. Very dignified and reserved and I'd say an excellent captain in all regards. And I believe his future record bore out his ability in that area. Now Officer Badger was quite different; he was from a long line of naval officers. While he was captain of this ship, he was studying strategy and tactics. He was worldwide in his thinking. You could go into his cabin and here he would have maps out studying in detail parts of the world in geography. His efforts were to prepare himself for flag rank. He was tough, caustic. I think he was an excellent leader, rather colorful, and we were awfully fortunate to have him in our formative period.

[I take it, if I may interrupt, John, that Badger was a pretty aggressive sort of person and more so than Hustvedt. Is that true?]

I don't know that I would say that. His aggressiveness may have been a little bit more on the surface, but I think that Hustvedt got just about as much done. I wouldn't know, but of the two, I would bank on Hustvedt. He was just more my type of a guy. I thought very highly of Officer Badger, but I guess you might say I was a greater admirer of Hustvedt. My respect for both gentlemen was high.

[Yes]

Now are you ready to continue?

[Yeah, you can go right ahead].

Then we had Captain Fort. I don't believe that Captain Fort had the ability or the attributes that would make him as capable a commander as Admiral Hustvedt and Admiral Badger. However, he certainly did well, and we have no complaints to make of him except that I don't believe that he contributed to the personality and the character of the ship as did his predecessors. Now, Wilder Baker was the best all around Captain we had. He was a great seaman. I never will forget his coming aboard ship taking the con and saying "Get her underway." I believe we were in Norfolk. He took the ship around Norfolk Bay like it was a rowboat, and we all knew immediately that we had a great seaman when Wilder Baker came aboard. I found him also very fair and broaden-minded. He wasn't as ingrained with the military attitude that some of his predecessors were, so he had wonderful flexibility. He also had a wonderful dignity and ability that I think he was one of the greatest I had ever met and I certainly did appreciate the associations I had with him. Then we had Captain Thomas who I don't believe was very well, and I do know he had a lot of dental trouble. He, for some unknown reason, took a great interest in

the battle reports we had to write. Unfortunately, "Corky" Ward and I had the problem of getting them out to his satisfaction which is something that seemed to be beyond our ability to such an extent that we got to where we would hate to get into any kind of an engagement because of the frustration of writing up the report to satisfy Captain Thomas. While he was in command, I left the ship.

[I want to ask him about the executive officers of the ship that he remembers starting with the exec who put her into commission, Commander A.G. Shepard. So go ahead John.]

Commander Shepard was a really a great officer. He was the son of an officer. He was quite the old Navy type though he also had a great deal of flexibility and objectivity. He can be remembered in my mind when we went to mast--always very proper and military. He reprimanded a sailor, who was AOL and was pretty well beat-up, for having gotten into a fight ashore, and his reprimand was, to quote, "If you get into any fights with anybody off of this ship, you're suppose to win them." He then put him in the brig for a couple of days. The little things like that that came from Commander Shepard along with his strict discipline and other activity gave the particular boost to the spirit of the ship and why we were in being. The next was Commander Crocker, who unfortunately, seemed to have a limited sense of humor and also a strange sense of the "spit and polish" aspects of the Navy. I believe that interfered strongly with his effectiveness as a leader of our ship in the warfare area. Commander Thackrey was his relief. He had briefly been our first lieutenant. He was an excellent officer, a fine gentleman and contributed clearly to the "Spirit of the ship." He was quiet but very effective and knowledgeable and whatever he did, you could respect him because of his ability, his knowledge and his thoughtfulness. Then I believe he was relieved by Joe

Stryker. Joe Stryker is the man that probably never would have gone far in the Navy where it not for the war, because he went on the assumption that you didn't need to study the regulations, that if it made sense, it was the proper thing to do. We learned from Guadalcanal that the terribly competitive manner of selecting officers for command who had not made mistakes in their career proved to be a bad thing for us. Joe Stryker, I am sure, had made enough mistakes in his career that he would not have been selected for much of a promotional basis, but an executive officer with his dedication, his common sense, his humanity and his great spirit did probably more to instill in the ship the "Spirit" that makes her loved by so many of us after all these years.

[Now, I want to ask John about some of the gunnery officers that he served under and to set the stage for that I will just explain that Commander Tom Hill was the first gunnery officer, that is, he was in the commissioning detail as the "gun boss." Then, Commander Zemmer was his successor followed by Commander A.G. ("Corky") Ward. Now, I will turn this over to John and ask him if he can give us some recollections of those three.]

Well, I certainly will always appreciate Commander Hill, because he was a wonderful leader, an imaginative person. He knew his business, and I guess I will be especially appreciative because I came aboard here as an engineering duty officer. He not only let me enter the gunnery department but gave me the command of the Fifth Division. So, as I was looking out of the hotel window this morning and saw the starboard side of the quarterdeck, I will remember the exhilaration I had for having been called back into the Navy and to have stood on that starboard side of the quarterdeck with my division in front of me. There were one hundred and five men, and I was probably the happiest guy in the United States Navy. Admiral Hill and I did keep in close contact long after he left

the *NORTH CAROLINA* both directly and through my brother Elmer who worked with him on the launching of the atomic bomb. He had gone from the *NORTH CAROLINA* to be Admiral Nimitz's gunnery officer. Commander Hill was a man of high spirit, great ability, and impetuousness that was, I think, maybe one of the greatest attributes to our ship's spirit. He would leave you alone, and trust in your initiative and your efforts to accomplish your responsibilities. Therefore, in being able to size up people in their attention to their responsibilities gave this ship a great push ahead. Whereas on the other hand, he was relieved by Commander Zemmer, who didn't know much and didn't think anybody else could do anything without his supervision and was a terrible deterrent to our gunnery department. Fortunately, we were able to get rid of him as soon as we could do so rather impolitely through the understanding and good humor and objectiveness of both Captain Badger, no [it was] Captain Baker, and Commander Stryker. He was relieved by Commander Ward. "Corky" Ward is one of the finest gentlemen and most capable officers I believe we have ever had in the United States Navy. The fact that he obtained four stars in later years attests to that. The strength, though, that was instilled in the gunnery department by Tom Hill, and directly through "Corky" Ward enabled us to overcome the destructiveness that might have been quite severe during the time Zemmer was gunnery officer.

[Thank you, John. At this point I want to ask John to comment on this ship as compared with several others that he served on in his many years in the Navy. I would just like to put it on record that before World War II he had served on the two battleships the *ARIZONA* and the *CALIFORNIA*. Then, what was the cruiser that you served?]

CINCINNATI.

[The *CINCINNATI*, and then, as the record shows, he served on the battleship *NORTH CAROLINA* from ’41 to ’44. Then after that he served as “gun boss” of the battleship-cruiser *ALASKA*, followed by duty as exec of the Cruiser *OKLAHOMA CITY*. So, he served in six first line combat ships. So, now back to my question, John, how does the *NORTH CAROLINA* stack up against the others?]

Ben, I can’t answer it except that I never served on a ship in the United States Navy that I didn’t appreciate and have wonderful friends and influences and still have a warm feeling for those ships. The feeling for the *NORTH CAROLINA* is probably like everything else, the more you put into something the more you get out of it. I was here for not only three years, but three very strenuous years. In those years, I had a great satisfaction of really appreciating the ship we had physically and was able to serve also with the same type of people that I found on these other ships. But since we would go to sea for a long period of time and be thrown together very closely during all these long times, it is natural that I formed a strong feeling for this ship. I believe also with our problems of developing our armaments and our engineering, the whole ship as a unit including especially the cooks and bakers that we grew close together not only man-to-man but man-to-ship. I believe that the people we had on here were no different from the ones on other ships, but we were able, I believe, with this particular type of a person we find in the Navy, both as enlisted men and as officers, we developed a ship here the like of which I have never experienced in our feelings towards each other and our feelings towards the ship itself. I might add that we appreciated and respected people for what they were rather than any rank or other outside attribute might be concerned. Their respect and treatment of their fellow shipmates, their attention to duty, their determination to do the best they could do regardless of whether they were a captain or a

seaman second class were the things that prevailed. With this opportunity, I don't believe that there was anything special about our ship other than we had the greater opportunity that I had ever experienced before to feel this particular way and respect for each other and for our ship.

[Thank you, John. Now let me go onto another aspect of that. Looking back among the various key officers that served on the ship, the different commanding officers, the execs, the gunnery officers. Could you single out any one or two or three that have you think perhaps contributed most to the spirit and character of this particular ship?]

Yes, I am afraid, though, that I will have to get away from our captains. The captains are rather . . . I mean sometimes you'd be surprised that you ask a sailor who was captain of the ship, and he wouldn't have any idea in the world. There again you ask who his boatswain mate is or who is his chief petty officer, and he would know him very well. I am kinda beating around your question a bit, Ben, but we had to begin with a really select group of chief petty officers and say like in our five-inch mounts, in our gunners' mates. And the same in the engineering department with our leading petty officers. You can't overlook the great influence that they have, that if you have strong officers and weak petty officers then you have your hands full. We, fortunately, had strong petty officers, especially our chief petty officers and our warrant officers. We were awfully fortunate with our Commander Shepard, our first executive officer, who was a very strong personality and one who kinda gave the force as far as the relationships on ship concerned to our crew and to our officers. Then, of course, we had our ups and downs. Our captains were bright, but they really didn't have as much influence on the ship as one would believe. Then, of course, we had Commander Thackrey . . . and

Commander Stryker was here much longer than the others and he had an attitude and a personality and a aggressiveness and a warmth toward officers and men alike. He would talk with an officer and talk to enlisted men in the same vein such as you would expect from General Eisenhower. Therefore, Joe had a great influence on the attitude of our ship, and we were most fortunate in having him on board here first as navigator, and then as executive officer for the length of time and the period in which he was in this position. That is not to say that we had officers like Ensign Simmons, Lieutenant Fowler, Watts the Supply Officer--just any number--that had a very positive influence and gave Commander Shepard and Commander Stryker something to work on. I presume that when Commander Stryker left the ship and his successor, whether he was relieved or not, the spirit would have carried on in spite of whatever the difficulties might have been for that particular continuity. Ben, that is a kind of an intangible answer, but you've given me an intangible question. One man simply cannot do it.

[Well, I think judging from things that you have already told me, John, that you would also add to those who helped Tom Hill, and "Corky" Ward.]

Oh, most certainly! I say that in the time that you have allocated here for me that

. . .

[You can't say it all]

Right, and also you're hitting me fresh on these questions.

[Okay]

But, Tom Hill most certainly, and Captain Hustvedt and Captain Baker. You know without people like that surrounding an executive officer, or a chief petty officer, they are rather ineffectual, but if they're given a chance to breathe by someone who will back them up and support them and encourage them, then you get the job done.

[Right, John. In view of the fact that the *NORTH CAROLINA* was the first new battleship to be constructed in about twenty years, I would've supposed that the Navy would have selected its finest officers and men, at least in the senior ranks, to put her in commission and to serve in her because of the very, very special interest they would have taken in this ship. Now what does that remind you of or bring to your mind?]

Well, first, I believe that coupled with this selection of our senior officers, and officers in general, was the selection of comparable enlisted men. As I had mentioned before, the chief petty officers, and the gunner's mate who had given it that specially needed leadership and also ability in what was probably our greatest challenge that makes the *NORTH CAROLINA* different from other ships in the Fleet, in that we were given new weapons and a new ship. We were required to develop new procedures--as to an example your fire control and your gunnery controls. That required new training ability for literally hundreds of men. In doing that we had to do an awful lot of trial and error. We had a lot of mistakes. We worked awfully hard, though, to develop these procedures, and therefore point the way to the ships that followed us and prevent their having to make the same studies and the same mistakes that we did. Certainly, there were others for them to do also. But, it did set us apart as a responsibility to prove that our country was right in building this ship, and to meet up with our responsibility to the successors of these weapons whether it be in battleships . . . or they say that five-inch 38's of the same type that went on destroyers as well later. So that, I believe is why the *NORTH CAROLINA* and our officers and crew were quite unique. I believe also, Ben, that you suggested the target of the opposition during the first winter of the war in the North Atlantic, the Germans kept reporting that they sunk the *NORTH CAROLINA*, and they built up the *NORTH CAROLINA* probably with their people as a prime target and one that they could

consider a real feather in their hats should they sink us. I believe you mentioned that our operations in the Southwest Pacific, they could have very well been an objective for the Japanese as well.

[Yes, it could have been a great "coup" or a tremendous accomplishment on the part of either Germany or Japan, because they knew that it was the pride of our Navy at that time.]

Yes.

[That concluded the interview I had with John Kirkpatrick on March 30, 1976, on board the ship. It is now the following day and I want to add the following as sort of a postscript. I think John and I were not entirely successful toward the end of that interview on getting on the tape a point which I know from our un-taped discussions was on his mind. He felt that one of the reasons that the *NORTH CAROLINA* was a great ship, a superior ship, was that her officers and men had to work so much harder than most ship's companies. As the first of new battleships, with so much in the way of new weapons and new equipment, her people had to break the ice all the way. This coupled with the pressures of the War required a tremendous effort from all hands. Making that ship combat ready and keeping her so was an extraordinary challenge and when this challenge was met and fulfilled, all hands experienced a sense of accomplishment that went way beyond the usual sort of thing. As is so often true, you get out of something about what you put into it. This helps explain why so many of us remember the "Showboat" with a special kind of pride and affection. This concludes this interview.]