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U.S.S. NORTH CAROLINA BATTLESHIP COLLECTION
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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I served in command of the battleship NORTH CAROLINA for seventeen months, from late January, 1946 to the final day of decommissioning on June 28, 1947. I also served in the cruiser SAN DIEGO in the same task force with NORTH CAROLINA, Task Force 17, a fast carrier task force, around the carrier HORNET. This task force was organized after the battle of Midway. We proceeded to the South Pacific. I can always recall the day when the U. S. S. NORTH CAROLINA joined our task force down there. I remember a quartermaster on the bridge of my ship, the cruiser SAN DIEGO saying, "I feel a lot safer with that battlegoon around now." A few weeks later on September 15, 1942 during the noon hours we ran into some Japanese submarines. The carrier WASP was the first one to be hit by a torpedo. A few minutes later a torpedo barely missed my ship, the cruiser SAN DIEGO, and hit the NORTH CAROLINA on the port bow just forward of the number one turret. A few minutes after it had been hit, the destroyer O'BRIEN, number 415 which was also in our task force was also hit by a torpedo which struck in the bow near the destroyer numbers.

I can always remember Admiral Murray, our task force commander, sending a message to the NORTH CAROLINA, "Can you make 23 knots?"

Captain Fort in command of the NORTH CAROLINA sent back the message, "I'm making 27 knots now." Of course the propeller speed was turning to make 27 knots, but the ship was not making that through the water. We were leaving her behind. A couple of destroyers were sent to stand by her. Those of you are fortunate to receive copies of the pictorial history of the ship, which gives everything pertaining to the ship, from the day the keel was laid in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, until the ship's arrival in Boston and New York after the end of the war. This book was in the hands of the printer when I took command of the ship. So, after all I

had nothing to do with the preparation of it. But, it is an excellent book. The pictures and the write-ups of the history of this ship were presented in an excellent manner. I've sent copies of this pictorial history called the Showboat to the Secretary of the Navy, the top admirals of the Navy, like Admiral Nimitz, and Halsey and to others. I also sent copies to Governor Cherry of North Carolina, all N. C. Congressmen and the two senators of the state. I have turned over for duplication to Captain Blee the replies of these top admirals and government officials. They were loud in their praise of this pictorial history. Soon after taking command, I decided that the exploits of the ship all during the time that she was in commission and particularly during the war should be commemorated. I arranged to have three bronzed plaques designed and constructed commemorating the war time engagement that the ship participated in. One of these plaques was presented to the Brooklyn Navy Yard which of course built the ship. Another one was mounted on the bulkhead on the starboard side just aft of number two turret. The third one was presented to the state of North Carolina. In September of 1946 while we were on the midshipmen cruise and we were at Annapolis I flew down to Raleigh, North Carolina. I took with me Lieutenant Commander Lowe, an assistant gunnery officer, and two chief petty officers, Chief Turret Captain Richardson, and Chief Boatswain Mate Allen, both of whom served in the ship from the day of commissioning. Former Secretary of Navy, Josephus Daniels, presided over the ceremonies. He was Secretary of the Navy when I was awarded my diploma when I graduated from Annapolis in June, 1920. Admiral DeBois, a commandant of the Naval District at Charleston, also was present and he presented a flag to the Governor. The principle highlights of the ship's operation while I was in command occurred during the midshipmen's cruise of June, 1946 until October. The Task Force consisted of the battleships NORTH CAROLINA and WASHINGTON, with the task group commander Admiral Cooley in WASHINGTON, the Aircraft Carrier RANDOLPH,

and two plain guard destroyers. After the ship returned to the United States at the close of the war every man in this ship was transferred or got out of the service. We had to train a new crew in addition to training six hundred midshipmen. The itinerary during this cruise was from Annapolis to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, into the Panama Canal Zone, and eventual return to New York. After we dropped off the midshipmen in Annapolis, we took aboard a group of high school science students from Philadelphia. They thoroughly enjoyed their two days on this ship. Their enthusiastic letters, and those of the principal of the high school have also been turned over to Captain Blee. After I returned from the midshipmen's cruise in October, the NORTH CAROLINA was made the flag ship of the Fourth Fleet. Vice Admiral Barbey flew his flag from the NORTH CAROLINA until it was ordered to go out of commission. In about December of 1946, the ship was ordered to be decommissioned along with the battleship WASHINGTON. This is a very long and disagreeable job. Since most of the men had been transferred, we had to get more men to help prepare the ship for decommissioning. The decommissioning ceremonies were held in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. They were presided over by Admiral Kincaid, the Commander of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet. In addition to Admiral Kincaid and his staff, all former members commanding both the NORTH CAROLINA and WASHINGTON had been invited to the ceremonies, and some of them were present. Sometime later I read in the paper about the efforts of the citizens of North Carolina to save this grand battleship from being retired to the navy yard annex in the Bay of New Jersey. I think all those officials of the state of North Carolina and those that contributed to the cost of bringing this ship to Wilmington deserve the greatest credit. I was in the office of the Secretary of Commerce, Luther Hodges, who had formerly been Governor of the state of North Carolina, on the day that the ship arrived in Wilmington. I was there to present to the state the national ensign which flew from the ship on it's last day during decommissioning ceremonies. This flag was later sent to Mr. Hugh Morton who was the chairman of

the U. S. NORTH CAROLINA Battleship Commission. Later on, I also turned over the ship's silver service which was originally presented to the ship by the state of North Carolina. I suggested to Mr. Morton that we had turned it into the Navy Yard in Brooklyn. I now am pleased to learn that this silver service is now in the ship itself. Having moved to California several years ago, I was unable to be present at the various reunions that were held in Wilmington. But there have been a number of reunions out in the Southern California area, and I have attended several of them. I think it's very impressive to me that it is primarily those who served in the ship during the war who have been instrumental in keeping the memories of this great ship alive. A crew so often has a regular service on so many ships in his long career, he has not always taken the lead in preserving the memories of these ships. I think those who have done their utmost to keep the memories of the NORTH CAROLINA alive deserve the greatest credit. I know this was also true in the case of the cruiser SAN DIEGO which was built in Boston, and of course most of the men who came on board a few weeks after World War II broke out were from that area. They did the same thing in keeping the memories of that ship alive. Those of you who have had the opportunity to read the historical history of the ship, The Showboat, will recall that there were previous ships named the "North Carolina." It may interest you to know that a first cousin of mine Joseph Nolan served in the Armoured Cruiser North Carolina in World War I, and was coxswain of the captain's gate.