EAST CAROLINA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #OH0024-036

Interview 2

Everett R. Beaver

USS NORTH CAROLINA

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Interviewer is Donald R. Lennon.

[Everett R. Beaver of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Are you a South Carolina native?]

Tarheel native.

[North Carolinian. Tell me some of your background.]

Well, I was just a kid when I went aboard ship as most of us were. When I became seventeen, I enlisted in the Navy.

[Where were you from?]

Salisbury. We went to Great Lakes boot camp and after that we had a nice train ride out to Treasure Island, San Francisco, there is the bay. Poor men, we lived like kings going out there. We were there several weeks waiting for assignment, and we were put on a troop ship and sent to Pearl Harbor.

[This was in the fall of 1942?]

Fall of 1942. We got to Pearl and a group of us were assigned to the NORTH CAROLINA.

[You didn't know until you got to Pearl where you would be assigned?]

Had no earthly idea. A group of us whose last name began with B's were all assigned to the radar gang for some deep secret that only the military would know why. That was in November of 1942.

[Had you had radar training at this time?]

No. None at all.

[Radar was a completely new technology at that time.]

Completely new. As a matter of fact, even the word radar was classified at that time. You could not reveal that it stood for radio detection and ranging. Anyway, we began to work with it. We had an old set of bed springs up on our formers. The little air search radar was just a small cathode ray tube, and it had no calibrations on it whatsoever. We had a little piece of scotch tape across the front of it. Marked in ink were increments of ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty and sixty. By practice and error, we had no way of determining altitude. We had no way of determining how many there might be in a group. We could just pick up some signals coming in. That was the early radar. We were one of the few ships in the formation that was equipped with radar.

[They didn't put radar on until it was out in the South Pacific. Had it been installed at the time of construction?]

I don't know. I have no idea. This is right after the ship had been torpedoed at Guadalcanal and came back into Pearl for repairs. This is when I came aboard.

[Did it give you a bit of an uncomfortable feeling going aboard a ship that you knew had just been torpedoed?]

No. You know how a bunch of kids are. You don't think about things like that. It

was quite an adventure.

[Was it under repair at the time?]

Yes. It was in dry dock. She was almost ready to leave because they held us in a receiving station for several weeks. I think the thing that I remember most about the ship was the awesomeness of it--the size. It took a while. You got lost trying to get around.

[I imagine in dry dock it really did look imposing.]

I don't remember if it was in dry dock or out of dry dock, when we were re-provisioning and getting ready to go. I just can't remember that well. Of course, after that I saw it in dry dock many times. It is hard to remember if the first time I saw her in dry dock, but it was huge. I had never seen a ship before, so it made it even larger.

[They didn't have battleships around Salisbury?]

Not hardly.

[Your radar training came at sea after you got on board the ship after you got on board the ship rather that any training that they were giving there at Pearl.]

On the job training. Later on as we would get new equipment, then we had the opportunity to go. I can remember one occasion we came back in and we got a new piece of equipment--surface search. Several of us went over on the beach and spent a week or two for instruction.

[What officer was in charge of the radar?]

The first one aboard was Lieutenant Phillips. He was also division officer for the radio division. They didn't know exactly what to do with radar.

[Had he been trained?]

No. He was a mustang that came up through the ranks. He was a radioman

apparently and maybe had become chief radioman and became commissioned. He was a full lieutenant at the time, and he was division officer of the CR Division, which is communications radio. Then they had the CS Division, which is communication signal. Then they called the new radar gang, CT Division, communication technician. The radio officer, Lieutenant Phillips was division officer for both divisions. They didn't know what else to do with it. Even the radar rate was the same as the radio rate accept it had an arrow through it. That was the only difference. It grew. It became more sophisticated. As a matter of fact, where the radar was located was in the radio room up on the signal bridge. As we got more sophisticated equipment, we came into Bremerton and got a CIC and became air conditioned and we began to do a lot of things that we didn't do prior to that.

[That is one question that I was just discussing with another gentlemen, whether the radio room was air conditioned?]

No. It was not until 1944 in Bremerton. As a matter of fact, if I remember correctly, probably about three places aboard ship were air conditioned. One was CIC, the other was the main battery plot, I do think sick bay was.

[He said he thought the wardroom was.]

I never spent any time in the wardroom. It could very well have been. I am not sure. It was sort of like a memory today.

[What are some of the highlights of your day-by-day life on board the ship?]

I think the monotony more than anything else after a while.

[In the war zone.]

In the war zone, you welcomed action. It was much better. Then you felt like this would shorten the time until you could get back home. Still, it was a very good adventure.

Even during the Saipan Turkey Shoot, for example. I remember standing up on top side and watching the fireworks and there is no fear. Didn't even think about one of them dropping a bomb on the ship. I think this is why the military had got to be young men. The only think I came in for--Captain Blee had asked me some time back. I was sharing with him about two things of significance. One, when we were hit bound on one of our own ships. Five-inch director. We had many casualties that morning. I had just started at the CIC, go out on the signal bridge. The division officer then, who was Lieutenant Commander Kurin, asked me to stay. I was a surface plotter, and I didn't realize they didn't need me, but I stayed because he ordered me to. Most everybody on the signal bridge got hit that morning. My buddy walked out right in front of me and I was a step behind him. He got out before he was pulled back and I didn't. He was seriously wounded. You often wonder but never mention what would have happened otherwise.

[Fate.]

Yes. What Captain Blee was interested in was he knew that somebody had picked up a bogey, which was classified under unidentified aircraft presumed to be enemy the morning the FRANKLIN was hit. But no one had the story on that. It was not a part of any official records anywhere as I understand. I began to tell him about it and he said, "You were the operator on radar that morning?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "We have been searching for a long time to try to find out who it was to get the story of what happened." So, I thought I would share that with you this morning or this afternoon if you would like to have that on record.

[Yes, indeed.]

It was early and it was the four to eight a.m. watch. I picked up a bogey to the west

of us. I don't remember the exact miles, but somewhere around forty miles. I reported it to our CIC officer. Of course, they, in turn, reported to the flag, which was one of the carriers. When you are operating an air search radar and you get a report like this, you hear it on the radio. You hear it on the radio so that everyone up in CIC can hear it. You immediately go to a manual and try to locate that target. Apparently, no one else could pick it up. I had a good track. We got a track order coming in and we continued to track it in and no one else could pick it up. Just one of the phenomena that it happened that particular day. We kept reporting this to the flag and yet we didn't go to air defense. Finally, one of the picket destroyers visually sighted the aircraft and reported it as a Japanese plane. Of course, then we went to air defense. The plane was quite close to the formation by then. We sounded air defense and I was relieved on the radar by whoever had that as a battle station. I walked out on the signal bridge and just as I did, I could see the Japanese plane making a run right down on the FRANKLIN. She dropped a bomb on the forward part of the flight deck and then the after part of the flight deck. She had just recovered aircraft that morning and still refueling some and the aviation gasoline started burning, exploding and all other types of marmin (?) started into solid wall of fire. She was about a thousand yards off our forward bow at that time. Many of the fellows either were blown in the water, or they jumped off the deck to get out of the fire. We had to make a sharp turn to avoid running through them. We began throwing life jackets and life raft and things to them in the water. Of course, we know what happened to the FRANKLIN, she burned and exploded all day long and even up through the night. Finally, she was taken in tow. I think she lost all of her boilers except one and they felt she was going to sink. But they managed and due to the help of destroyers or cruisers that were sent alongside to help with the fire fighting. Finally, she was taken in

tow and eventually ended back up in the States. That was the story.

[What kind of time span from when you picked the bogey up for the first time until it was actually visually sighted? How long of a time span are we talking about?]

Well, it couldn't have been too terribly long. The plane probably wasn't flying more than 180 mph, that is 3 mile per minute, so if you are forty miles out, you are talking about a period of time of about ten, twelve or thirteen minutes perhaps. Today with aircraft it would be nothing. I imagine this was probably not a first line airplane. I don't have any idea because it was later on in the war, and she didn't have a whole lot of . . .

[She didn't have much air, fire power left.]

If you would give about 180 mph, which would be fairly accurate. A single engine airplane. I doubt it was in excess of that, it could have been slower.

[No indication of why no one else could pick her up?]

No. It was just one of those things and no one else could. I understand the reluctance to go to air defense when there is only one person who has this. But when you get a track and a plot on them and then you indicate what the course is and what the speed is and we were pretty certain that it wasn't one of our air craft. We all took the plane under fire every shipment formation and not a soul hit the airplane. So, the Japanese plane flew right through the formation. After she dropped the bombs on the FRANKLIN, the pilot backed his aircraft and headed right for the NORTH CAROLINA and we thought we were going to have a kamikaze, but he kicked a little right rutter and he straightened her out and went right down the side of our ship.

[And no one still hit her?]

One of the FRANKLIN`s fighter planes was in the air and shot the plane down just

about the edge of the formation just as she got a couple of miles past. No, the ships were unable. It made it a little difficult because we are practically not much higher than the main deck of this ship.

[When you were in the radar room, you were on four normally, unless you were on alert?]

You didn't necessarily stay on the radar that long because you had someone else on watch with you. All watches were four-hour watches.

[When you were in the combat zones, it probably was pretty intense, wasn't it? Watching the screen and this type of thing for bogeys.]

Well, yes. Of course, you are trained to detect something that wasn't normal. You began to realize or see a tiny little something there. Of course, trying to determine what is clouds because the radar would pick up cloud formation and you would get a signal back. Of course, cloud formation had no speed and had no direction. Prematurely, we went to air defense many times at night when someone called that they had contact and didn't. I think the B-29's when we finally secured Saipan and Tinian and they were operating off of Tinian, I believe it was. On their runs up to Japan they rarely turned their IFF on. A lot of times we would go to air defense at night and it would be our own aircraft. It was interesting.

[You remained with the NORTH CAROLINA until the end of the war, I take it?]

The only ship I ever served in was this ship here. I left the ship in December 1945 and was discharged.

[You were on there for three years.]

Yes, a little bit more than three years, I think.

[Are there any officers that you became particularly attached to or had any strong

impressions of?]

Well, not really. There was very little ____ between enlisted men and officers of the Navy--pretty strict protocol. There were some that we stood watches with that we could do some kidding with. But that was a different war all day. I didn't realize until later on when I got my own pilots and license and became a commercial pilot and started flying with CAP and part of the Air Force and I took a commission there. There was quite a difference. I don't have any hard feeling toward any of them at all. They were kids too. I can see that now. They were thirty years of age, we called them Pop. We didn't call them Pop, but we call enlisted folks Pop if they were thirty-one or thirty-two--what ancient age.

[I know that frequently I have heard some of the enlisted men have very favorable memories of such people as Joe Strike. Today I have heard several people talk about Maxwell, who was chief engineer.]

I got to know Maxwell after, three of us formed a battleship association. I was the first president of it for about four years. Two boys from Charlotte and myself, Chuck Pattey and Jack Clements and myself worked. Maxwell at that time . . . this was before he was officially appointed as superintendent of the vessel. We got together here and had dinner in the captain's office one night. That is the way this outfit got started.

[So, it didn't get started at all until after the NORTH CAROLINA came here.]

As a matter of fact, I got on one of the mine sweeps and went out that morning when she was offshore in the rain and they couldn't bring her in until the next day. I had always had a dream that it would be nice if we could form a reunion, a group of fellows get together, a _____ sort of thing. So, it has grown and it has survived and I think now we will manage until we die off.

[Thinking of being a North Carolinian, when you arrived at Pearl and got your assignment to the NORTH CAROLINA, did that have a particular appeal to you?]

Not at seventeen years old.

[It was just an assignment.]

I think I was seventeen years and two months. The first stop we made after we left Pearl was Fiji Islands. I went ashore and out of the bushes stepped several big Fiji Islanders that looked like they were about seven feet tall, with black betel nut teeth. Quite fearsome. They climbed a coconut tree and got some coconut. They took the machete, chopped it and handed it to me. It was a little exciting and a little fearsome.

[You didn't know whether to make friends or run?]

Not hardly.

[You mentioned the boredom as being a major problem. What about any recollections of particular routine or particular events on board the ship that did stay with you as far as high points are concerned?]

I think the relationship that you had with your shipmates was terribly important. You felt at the time that these folks were much closer to you than family. I am sure that if it had been that you could remain in reasonable proximity to other folks, you would have remained close friends. But being from every part of the country, you went back home, they went back home and some kept in contact, but not too often and not too many. I think the friendships that were formed were terribly important. It was good. I saw a big world that I didn't know existed. I knew that what I was doing before I went in the Navy, I wanted to go home, and I wanted to do some things that were a challenge. I wanted something more than the farm and a cotton mill. I knew it would require getting somewhat an education. It was

good and I would recommend it for any young man.

[You toured rather quickly out there in the South Pacific, did you not?]

I regret in many ways that I never experienced that seventeen to twenty-one years of age which are very important to young people today. I think we had pretty good generations. I would recommend it today. I think perhaps, if we go back to mandatory military training, that we probably could turn out a little bit better folks than what we are doing.

[Referring back to the early radar and how primitive it was, with the early bed spring type of radar. The technology today.]

Desert Shield, I was absolutely dumbfounded. In flying, I was aware of a lot of the things that we have today--loran and the ability to navigate by radio, altimeters that were extremely accurate, the capabilities of radar approaches for airports and that sort of thing, but nothing at all like what we have.

[That is what I was wondering. I have always been a supporter of the draft myself but thinking in terms of the amount of training that is necessary for a person to function properly with the type of sophisticated equipment that they are using today. I don't know whether the two-year draftee would have the opportunity to be properly trained before he would be out and gone.]

I don't know how we could utilize them. I just don't know. I think that the trend into a democratic military is good. I think that you must have immediate obedience to orders. I don't think that you could question too much especially in time of war, when something is necessary. I think that decisions are made and you have got to carry out the decisions whether you agree with them or not. I don't think that some of the things that

happen today, some with the lack of respect, some with the disobedience, some with the insubordination, would not have been permitted then. I don't know what we would have done if we had had as many women aboard as sailors. War would have been a different war. That is a different story too. It was interesting. I just took a group of my people over to Hawaii, several months ago, we went to Honolulu. We went down to hotel street, some of the areas where prostitution used to be. It has changed very little. Some of the buildings are still there.

[What did you get into after you left the Navy?]

I spent a career with Nationwide Insurance Agency in Salisbury. We bought a motel at North Myrtle beach after I retired from Nationwide at thirty years. We operated it. We thought we would stay there and the Lord kind of pulled a dirty trick on me when I was fifty-seven years of age. I was called in the ministry. I had to go back to college and seminary. I graduated from seminary when I was sixty-one years old. I ministered to senior adults at First Baptist Church in North Myrtle Beach until today.

[That was a change in career late in life. Did you go to Southeastern?]

Yes.