

Dr. Harold Buell Oral History Interview

RALPH INGRAM: This interview is taking place between Ralph Ingram, Jr. and Dr. Harold Buell, spelling last name B-U-E-L-L, and it concerns Dr. Buell's experiences during the Battle of Santa Cruz on 26, October, 1942. The time is 18:06.

Dr. Buell, when you were at Santa Cruz on the aircraft carrier Enterprise, what do you recall about seeing the battleship South Dakota for the first time?

HAROLD BUELL: Well I had -- the South Dakota was in our formation, and I remember that the first I saw of it was when we had departed from Hawaiian Islands and headed south. In other words, I had been on Guadalcanal, gone back to the Hawaiian Islands, Pearl Harbor, then was reassigned to the Enterprise, bombing I-10, and when went to sea that time and headed south again, the South Dakota was in our actual formation, and of course it was the big, new battleship at that time. So, that was my first recollection of seeing it. And its position in the formation at Santa Cruz was right off of our starboard bow at about a one to two o'clock position out in the screen.

RI: All right. What was --

HB: When I say "out in the screen," I mean the destroyers were out on the other side of it and it was in that position within the circle.

RI: All right. Did you have immediate knowledge of the mission of Taskforce 16 at Santa Cruz?

HB: Well, I had just come from the Guadalcanal area, so I knew that there was a lot of effort being made by the Japanese to take the area back. So, we going back down there meant, of course, that perhaps there was going to be another action of some kind, but I don't recall having any idea having any idea that there was going to be a battle such as Santa Cruz fought. I mean, it was just, we were going back down there and was going to be the carrier force, I guess you could say, in the Guadalcanal area.

RI: What type of aircraft did you fly?

HB: I was flying the SBD Douglas Dauntless in those days; it was the standard dive-bomber of the war at that time. The SB-2C Curtiss Hell Diver was doing to come to the fleet later, but at that time of the war, the SBD was the standard dive-bomber being flown by both the marines on land and by us at sea.

RI: How many missions did you fly during the Battle of Santa Cruz?

HB: Well, I recall flying the day before on searches. We were looking for the Japanese fleet, and I remember the day before, my skipper was Lieutenant Turner Caldwell, and we went on a search -- oh, pardon me. I've got that -- I'm mixing up Easter Solomons and Santa Cruz now. On the morning of Santa Cruz, I had a sector search. I don't remember going on anything except that one search that morning. We had probably -- I know we did flights both before and after, but the day -- 26 October -- I flew just the one morning search, along with several other -- there were several sectors and mine was one of the sectors.

RI: Did you locate any Japanese ships?

HB: No, I did not locate anything in my sector, nor did I hear the radio reports of people finding Japanese ships in the other sectors. We would often have communications problems in those days, and both in my sector and to the sector just to my left, neither pair of planes in those two sectors heard anything, and we just simply flew our mission out about 225 miles from the ship and a little cross-leg of about 25 miles, and then came back. And when we came back to the ship, however, it was obvious that there had been an attack to the force.

RI: All right. Turning now to that attack, on the 26th of October, the Enterprise and Task Force 16 sustained a

series of three Japanese air attacks. Describe your experiences pertaining to those three air attacks.

HB: I would say that the first air attack had already occurred when I got back. By that I mean, when I approached the force, I could see one of the carriers -- not the Enterprise; the other carrier, Hornet -- had been damaged, but was still underway, and I remember as we approached the screen, we didn't actually get shot at but we proceeded in very cautiously because -- the ships were still in formation, but it was obvious that there had been some problems there. When we got in around the inside the screen and circling the Enterprise, then we got the signal to land. And I noticed everything seemed to be in great haste. As I recall, I ended up, I was kind of the leader of this group of planes that came back from the searches, so I landed. I was about the first plane to land aboard, and they spotted me up on the bow of the ship, and I recall that everybody was running about and the bullhorn was urging everyone to move fast because there was an attack coming in, and I guess that was probably the second attack that you're talking about, of the three.

RI: All right. Regarding these air attacks, do you remember anyone over the air net referring to the USS South Dakota as being the "Big Bastard"?

HB: Do I remember hearing that over the radio?

RI: Correct, or for any --

HB: Over my radio in the plane, you mean?

RI: Right.

HB: No, I don't recall having heard that.

RI: All right. Do you recall any of the other airmen referring to the battleship South Dakota by that name because of her heavy antiaircraft fire firing at anything that was firing, friendly or otherwise?

HB: I don't recall too much of hearing much over the radios. Of course, we only -- we had very limited radio ability in those days. We were still on the old non-VHF type radio sets. I was one of the people that very rarely ever talked. We were not supposed to talk or say anything unless we had something important to say. And, there was some conversation going on on the radio set-ups, and I think as I recall, there was some fighter direction going to the fighters trying to intercept the Japanese planes, but I don't recall any other extracurricular, extraneous talking about the battleship, if that's what you mean by your question.

RI: Correct, sir. Very good. Describe to me now your experiences once your plane was spotted on the deck of the Enterprise.

HB: Well, after we had been spotted, it was pretty obvious that the attack was literally getting ready to come down. I looked up and I could actually see planes about ready to attack, to dive. So, I did not head for the ready room -- which was about a little further aft of the ship -- I simply went over to the starboard side and down into the gun tubs that were on the starboard side of the ship, forward. I guess I had partly in my mind that this area was somewhere near where my room was, and that -- I guess I felt I would be just as safe there as anywhere else on the ship, and of course, I wasn't going to be fighting anything. So, I ended up in the gun tub positions, which were on the starboard side, forward, and these gun placements of course were starting to bring the Japanese planes under fire and they were shooting at the planes. Is that what you --

RI: Correct.

HB: Did you want me to go on and -- well, at this point was when I did look over and could see the South Dakota also shooting.

RI: Now, what was her position in the screen at this point?

HB: As I recall, she was about one o'clock, our course heading -- if you use our course heading as twelve o'clock, she was like 1:00 to 1:30 bearing off our starboard bow, forward.

And, in a very close position; a thousand yards, I guess. Maybe less than that. And I did notice that she was putting up a terrific amount of antiaircraft fire, and of course, the Enterprise has very good AA fire. We had been in several battles and we had experience gunners and we were putting up a lot of AA fire also.

RI: You mentioned --

HB: It was at this time that I started seeing several Japanese planes exploding in the air as they were coming in their dives, and also being shot down as they pulled out and as they were trying to get away. And, it was because of the many planes being shot down by both South Dakota and ourselves, that I asked the gunner, I said, boy, what great shooting, and that was when I was told that part of it was good shooting, but they were also using a new shell which had an automatic device on it that helped by exploding when it got near an enemy plane.

RI: OK. Would you describe that type of ammunition for me if you would, please?

HB: Well, apparently what I was hearing for the first time was about the proximity fused shell, and I don't remember this young man's name but he was about the same age as me and a JG like I was. He was one of the gunnery officers of the ship. He had some clips of shells there, 40 mm clips, and

also as I recall there was a three inch gun involved in the shooting there. And he showed me how the clips of shells, every so often there as a shell that had a -- as I recall it was kind of light colored or a gold tip painted on it, and he said those are the fancy fuses in the tips of those shells. Then he said, don't -- however, this is very secret information; don't talk about it to anyone -- and of course I wasn't going to be saying anything to anyone right at that point anyhow. But, I didn't talk about it later, either.

RI: You mentioned --

HB: It was apparently a very well-kept secret about the proximity fuse.

RI: Correct. You're very correct. You mentioned that you were in a gun tub. Now, was that a five inch or a 40 mm, or --

HB: As I recall, there was two or three different types of guns in these tubs. I believe that the either three or five inchers were a little further aft of where I was. I think I was in the more automatic weapon area of the 20s and 40s.

RI: OK. In the process of observing South Dakota during these air attacks, did she ever appear to be out of control or weaving in and out of the task force at any time?

HB: Not during the time that I was watching during the attack I'm just describing. We all would weave, you know what I

mean? The ships would make turns and the South Dakota made turns in formation, as near as I remember, with everybody else. Do you mean by this that she suddenly went out of control?

RI: Correct.

HB: And through the formation?

RI: Correct.

HB: I don't remember that occurring while I was up there watching during this attack. Now, I want to add however, there could have been that she might have done something out of control and I wouldn't even have known the difference, you know, just watching the ship moving through the water.

RI: Now, did you remain in that same area for the duration?

HB: As soon as that attack was over -- and I'm talking now about, well, I can't estimate time. I guess five or ten minutes I stayed in that area, and of course we did get hit. We took one bomb hit right about where my plane was, and it went down through the deck. I think I told you about that. It exploded down by the water line, and my plane was one of those lost over the side from the concussion of that bomb. Then a second hit took place back about the island area, and not quite in the middle of the deck, and it went down below decks before it went off, and

that did -- that bomb did destroy VB 10s ready room -- not ready room. Pardon me. Office space areas. But, the ready room area where most of the pilots were, when I arrived back there, it had not been hit and everybody was of course nervous about -- the fact that the ship had been hit had everyone concerned.

RI: All right. Once the Enterprise was hit, could you give me a brief assessment of the major damage that was received?

HB: Well, fortunately for the ship from the standpoint of being able to continue fighting, neither of the hits hurt us that much. The hole made in the flight deck was covered -- actually two holes; one back by the island and the one up on the bow, were both covered with sheets of repair wood and we never really stopped operating aircraft. The hit also did not cause us to lose any way -- you know, we didn't lose any engine capability or anything of that type. So, the Enterprise kept on operating pretty much in spite of the hits. But, the one hit did kill a lot -- there were a lot of casualties on the second hit. As I recall, something like 40 or 50 casualties. I don't know the exact numbers, now, the casualties. But, it was down below the hanger deck area, down into compartment areas, that these casualties occurred. It did not stop us from operating

aircraft. In fact, the Enterprise never stopped operating aircraft anytime during that day.

RI: Did it knock out one of your elevators?

HB: As I recall, yes. I believe it was the forward elevator. Well, it knocked it out in that the damage was such that the captain did not attempt to move the elevator because he was afraid that the elevator, if he got it down and he couldn't get it back up, it would be just a hole in the deck. You follow what I mean?

RI: Exactly. You would then be out of commission.

HB: So, he didn't do anything with the elevator, and as I recall, we did not operate that elevator -- when we left the area and went back to Nouméa. We didn't operate that area until we got back out of the war area and could properly test it and all that.

RI: What was your visual impression of South Dakota's antiaircraft fire?

HB: It was -- I guess a good word be that often used one; it was awesome. The ship was heavily armored -- by that I mean, had an awful lot of guns -- and when they would all get firing at approximately the same time, the ship would almost be enveloped in smoke and explosions, you know, from its own guns, almost like it was being hit with bombs. It

wasn't, of course. It had a tremendous ability to put up fire power.

RI: South Dakota has been given credit for being responsible for the saving of the USS Enterprise on that particular day, and she in subsequence was given credit for shooting down 26 Japanese planes. How do you respond to that assertion?

HB: Well, as I recall at the time, the Enterprise claimed quite a few planes shot down. If I had to estimate I'd guess 25 or 30 planes. And then, also, as I recall, the South Dakota also was credited with 25 or 30 planes. In other words, the -- at that time, it was kind of a feeling on the Enterprise that both ships had shot down a sizable number of Japanese planes. And of course, the claims were always higher than what scores later showed to be. I don't know what the actual scores for each ship was after the battle, you know, in history.

RI: I'll explain a little bit of that when I cut the tape off.

HB: I've read it but I can't recall right now, what the actual score was. But I -- at the time, I would say that the feeling on the Enterprise was that we had done a good job of shooting down planes, but also that our friend the battleship X had also done a tremendous job of shooting down planes.

RI: OK. I want to turn our attention now, briefly, to Guadalcanal. You mentioned that you were there and you flew off of Henderson Field. What time period did you fly off of Henderson Field?

HB: What type of plane?

RI: I mean, what time period, pertaining to 1942 and the Santa Cruz battle.

HB: Well, Eastern Solomons took place on August 24th, so this battle -- the Santa Cruz -- was two months and two days later. But on August 24th, we had what they called -- well, it was called the Battle of the Stewart Islands back in those days, then history-wise it's known as the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, and in that battle, I was part of Enterprise Flight 300 that left the ship at about 4:30 in the afternoon, just as the Japanese were coming in to attack, and we ended up -- there were 11 of us in the flight. Turner Caldwell, my skipper -- Lieutenant Turner Caldwell was the leader of the flight. We were ordered to go find the Japanese carriers. That's a whole long, involved story about -- there were three Japanese carriers --

RI: I'm familiar with that.

HB: Zuihō I think was the name of one that was sunk.

RI: Correct.

HB: But the two big ones, the Zuikaku and Shōkaku, we never found them and we flew approximately 300 miles to the northwest, never found the carriers, and of course, we were beyond our gas range, so we went to Guadalcanal to Henderson Field as an alternate, more or less to save not just our planes, but our lives.

RI: Exactly.

HB: And of course, at the time of departure that afternoon, we literally -- I remember distinctly, the Enterprise had already been hit a couple of times by the Japanese planes diving on her, so we knew the carrier had been hit, too and we didn't know how bad. So, we went to Guadalcanal, and we arrived there and it was dark. A little moonlight was just coming up. Marines actually started to fire at us at first when we came in over the field, but somebody apparently -- the message got out that we were American planes. They tried to light up the field a little. I remember looking down in the jungle and the lights that were -- there were only a few lights along one side of one runway, and then across the end of a runway, so that it made kind of a letter L in the jungle. And we just simply landed in there, and of course it just so happened that the seven scouting Five -- VS5 -- and four VB-6 planes -- 11 planes -

- we stayed there for approximately one month and operated with the marines.

RI: Describe to me briefly the general living conditions and combat conditions while you were on Guadalcanal.

HB: Well, we're talking now about -- the field had opened about the 20th of August, and we're talking now about going in there -- we started operating on the 25th of August. The rest of August and into September -- actually, all through September and pretty well into October -- well, actually, if you want to get right down to it, clear until the November final defense of Guadalcanal on November 14th and 15th, during that period it was a very tough operation from the standpoint of Americans. We had a limited part of the island under our control and we didn't have supplies. There hadn't been adequate supplies unloaded in the initial landings on the 7th, 8th, and 9th of August, so it was pretty much a shoestring operation. We did not have even foodstuffs. We were on two meals a day for quite a long time. So, that combined with malaria and dysentery and just general wearing down of people, a squadron lasted only about a month or so under those conditions. Is that what you wanted?

RI: Exactly. Perfect. You were not on Guadalcanal after Santa Cruz, correct?

HB: No. At that time there were still navy pilots operating in there, but at Santa Cruz, we did not go in to Guadalcanal.

RI: You stayed on the Enterprise?

HB: We stayed on the Enterprise and it was not until three weeks later, October 26th, then we went back and then we came back out for the final -- it was during that November 14, 15 and I believe 16th of November that the air group from the Enterprise went in one last time and operated from Guadalcanal.

RI: You didn't go in though, correct?

HB: I didn't go in. I had an early morning search on the 14th, and found -- was one of the people that attacked the -- there were 11 transports escorted by 11 destroyers -- a sizeable group -- coming down to reinforce, and one of the scouts in another sector -- fellow by the name of [Red Cormandy?] -- found these ships, and then I was flying with a fellow by the name of [Hugerwolf?]. We flew over and made one attack, and then -- pardon me. It wasn't Hugerwolf on that. It was a guy by the name of Griffith. Griffith and I attacked and then went back to Enterprise. The ship had launched almost all of the planes to go into Guadalcanal, operate from Guadalcanal. The last planes went in around one o'clock or so in the afternoon, and they operated the rest of that day and the next couple of days

and then came back to the ship. But, the ship in the meantime -- after unloading all the airplanes -- left the area. I was on the ship when it went back.

RI: But you attacked the reinforcement convoy and then returned immediately back to Enterprise?

HB: Pardon?

RI: You attacked the reinforcement --

HB: Yes. When we heard the ships were there, we left our sector, climbed, went over, made a two-plane attack -- which was what every -- that was the instructions to everybody; was, when they heard any reports going in, to head for the target and attack it. Then you had your choice of returning either to the ship or you could go on to Guadalcanal. I elected to go back to the ship. I had been to Guadalcanal.

RI: Right. I can imagine your reaction to that.

HB: I didn't particularly want to go back there. I went back to the ship instead.

RI: All right. You were never on Guadalcanal when the Japs bombarded, correct?

HB: I wasn't for that bombardment, but of course at the time I was there, in August and September, we had bombardments of the same types that -- we had bombardments of the same

types that the South Dakota -- if you're referring to when she went up there on either the 13th of 14th of November --

RI: Fourteenth.

HB: -- and stopped the Japanese bombardment, fleet, in the night battle --

RI: Correct.

HB: We had -- I had gone through bombardments of that type earlier at Guadalcanal. I think the main difference was that the bombardments of November were battleship bombardments, and of course that was a heavier shell than the cruiser and destroyer bombardments that had been given Henderson Field prior to that time.

RI: OK. So, that's all I have. Is there anything else that you would like to contribute or say at this time?

HB: Well, I've written a lot of this stuff up in better order in my book and in my notes and things on these battles. But, I deliberately didn't lay out any notes or anything here because I decided I would answer your questions just as my memory remembers it.

RI: That's fine.

HB: So, if I haven't been very accurate on numbers of planes and things like that, well, just forgive me, but I have compiled some of those statistics through the years but I

didn't try to use any of that information for this particular interview.

RI: OK. Let me shut the tape off and I have a few closing remarks, then we'll conclude --

END OF INTERVIEW

RI: This interview is taking place on 12 May, 1990, between Ralph Ingram, Jr., and Captain Warren Taylor, United States Navy, retired. Time is 08:30.

Captain Taylor, what was your initial impression of the USS South Dakota.

WARREN TAYLOR: I guess it's size more than anything else. I first came aboard her in the Bremerton Navy yard and I'd never really realized that she was that big and had that many guns aboard her. She had more guns, as I recall, than any other ship in the navy at that time. Probably more than any other ship had ever had, because she not only had her nine 16 inch guns, but she had, let's see, 8 mounts -- twin five inch 38s. The other battleships had two more each because we were configured for flag. But we had dozens and dozens of 40 mm and .50 caliber guns strewn all over the entire ship, including three 40 mm all the way up on the bow, and it was all of this tremendous amount of

firepower and size that impressed me, I suppose, more than anything else.

RI: All right, sir. What was your battle station and rank at the time of boarding South Dakota?

WT: When I first came aboard I was assigned to the 5th Division, which was one of the gunnery divisions, forward on the starboard side for the five inch 38s. After about a week or so, the plotting room officer appealed to the gunnery officer and I was moved down to become the secondary battery plotting assistant.

RI: And what was your rank?

WT: I was an ensign.

RI: Ensign. All right. You were in secondary battery, correct?

WT: Yes.

RI: Explain to me as best as you can recall, the operation -- your basic responsibilities in secondary plot.

WT: Well, we had four computers there. These were mechanical type computers, and attached to each one was what we called a stable element. As the ship moved in pitch and roll, this was the gyro device that maintained constant position. And from that, the computer derived information to go into the fire control solution, so you could shoot five inch shells into the air and hopefully hit your target. And

other inputs that went into this were wind speed and direction, ship's course and speed, and then by a process the computer operator would track the positions of the target as reported to him from the director up in the -- topside, and he would track this until we'd get a solution, and you could tell when he had a solution when the predicted position, as derived by the computer, kept following the positions as reported by the director. Then when he'd get a solution, why, the plotting room officer would tell the gunnery officer that we had a solution down there, and the gunnery officer would authorize to go ahead and fire.

RI: How much time would elapse from a time a director picked up a target to the time that you acquired your solution?

WT: Well, it depends a little bit upon some of these various factors; if you're getting a lot of roll and things like that, it'll take a little bit longer. And if you're getting a solution that's coming directly in or going directly out it would take a little bit longer. But in general, it'd probably only take a minute and a half maybe two minutes to get a solution upon which you could fire. Of course, later on, several months after I came out there, they began to get what they called a proximity fuse on the shells, so that, if the shell got anywhere near a target,

it would explode, and that shell would send shrapnel through the area where it exploded, and it would be sufficient in most cases to probably damage the aircraft, put it out of the sky. Initially we didn't have that type of fuse and it was just like shooting a bullet at a moving target, and if you didn't get a direct hit, why, it wouldn't go down.

RI: Do you recall any air attack that is foremost in your memory?

WT: Well, being down in secondary battery plot, I didn't get much of a chance to see air attacks. I remember one time, later on as I qualified as Officer Of The Deck, I was up on the deck when we had planes coming inbound rather rapidly - - excuse me -- and I was unable -- it was pretty obvious that I wasn't going to be able to get from the fourth or fifth deck up to the fourth or fifth deck down in the amount of time before the ship got all bottled up in condition zebra, so I requested permission from the gunnery officer to go up to one of the main battery directors, and I saw incoming planes at that time. Of course, I was very impressed; it was really the first time I'd ever seen planes coming in. The Essex was on our port quarter and I remember one plane that came in and everybody was just about certain that she was going to be hit by this

kamikaze, and then at the last instant evidently somebody hit it and a pilot must have pulled the stick back into his stomach because he pulled up and to the right a little bit and went right off the Essex' starboard bow. But that was really the only time I saw planes being shot down.

RI: The rest of the time you were below decks?

WT: Yes.

RI: Do you recall participating in any night air attacks, night engagements?

WT: Oh, yes. We'd have a number of times you'd get bogeys come in at night and they'd be tracked with radar instead of visual tracking, and you'd get solutions on them and they'd fire with a radar solution.

RI: Do you recall how successful that was?

WT: Well, as I recall, the South Dakota was credited with 32 kills prior to the time I came aboard, maybe a few more than that. Later on she got another 32. Some of those were surely at night. I think by the end of the war she was credited with 64 aircraft kills, and I'm sure some of those occurred while I was board at night.

RI: Did you later serve in the main battery plot?

WT: Yes, I did. I was -- long about seven, eight, nine months, I was asked to come over to the main battery plot to be assistant plotting room officer along with a chap by the

name of Joe [Whitley?]. We plotted the fall of shot for all of the later bombardments of Hamamatsu and Toshiro and [Kamashi?]. And, we were down in the plotting room doing things like that. This was -- I was pleased to be able to do this because this meant that I could go up and get qualified as Officer Of The Deck Underway. In secondary battery, you stood all of your watches there, too, and you were standing the one and three watch, plus your dawn and dusk alerts and any other alerts that came along, and you didn't get a chance to do any deck watches. But when I went over to main battery plot, why, then I began to -- as junior officer under instruction -- after several months, qualified while I was still an Ensign Underway for the battleship.

RI: Describe to me, sir, the -- describe the acquisition of a target and plotting your main battery and your fall of shot. Would you go through that procedure for me?

WT: Well, when you acquired an aircraft target, he would be tracked by the people of the director. They had a range finder there, and they had a pointer, and a trainer. And the trainer would move in a horizontal direction, and the pointer would move vertically up and down. And they would put their -- if you could see it, they'd put their crosshairs on him, or if they were using radar they'd put

their radar blips on him -- and then the range finder would take a stereoscopic ranges on him. Then, whenever he'd get what he considered a good range, he'd press a button and this would indicate down in plot that you had a good range, and presumably the pointer and the trainer were on the target just about all the time. So, when all three of these things coincided and you got a solution -- and as I said earlier, and this was being followed by the computer. The computer was now generating inputs to the position that would track right along with the observations of these people up in the director, and you had a solution then you'd fire. The types of computers were pretty much the same; over in the main battery it was a different mark and mod, but we had stable elements and things like that. But, if you were shooting for surface targets instead of aircraft targets and like that, we'd have a chart in front of us for instance on these various cities that we bombarded, and if we thought we knew this particular location on the chart might have an armory of some sort, or the other might be a bridge, so we'd try to plot our forward shot so as to hit those particular targets. What we'd do is, we'd put the train -- pointers, trainers and range finder operators would train on some stationary object, and then you would offset from that object to the

target that you wanted to hit, and you'd have a constant offset that you'd be working with all the time. And as the ship steamed back and forth over a predetermined course, why, the computer would take inputs on the ship speed, ship's course and all that, and you'd apply the offset down in the plotting room and indicate when you thought you had a solution, and they'd fire. Of course, you had -- in most of these instances, as I recall, we had our spotter planes up there. They'd give us a spot indicating whether we were over or under, and usually -- well, always on a solution like this, you'd do the best with all of the inputs that you have, and then you'd have what's called an ACTH; an Actual Correction To Hit -- that is injected into the problem as a last component that includes factors that are simply unknowns; extra wear on the barrels of the guns themselves, or wind that wasn't quite accurately indicated. So, when you get a spot from the aircraft, you'd change the Actual Correction To Hit a little bit and the next salvo that would go out, why, you'd try to do better with it.

RI: All right. Do you recall the designation of the computer that you were using in main battery plot?

WT: Let's see. We had a Mark 8 as I recall. As I recall it was a Mark 8 computer, and the one over in secondary was Mark 1 Mod 1.

RI: Right. OK.

WT: Of course they're obsolete now completely and I've forgotten some of the designations, though I thought I never would.

RI: Give me your recollections of the first bombardment of Japan. As I recall, Captain Charles Momsen gave the order to commence firing. But give me your recollections on the bombardment of mainland Japan.

WT: Well, we had several battleships up there and other types of ships that were going to be bombarding. We'd all been assigned different targets and we had been told that we were going to fire first, because the South Dakota I guess had been out there longer than anybody else and they were going to give her the honor of plotting the first major caliber shots and firing those shots into the homeland of Japan. And, Joe and I were vectoring things around down there, and I guess we were probably a little bit slow because the gunnery officer was urging us to press on and let's get a solution, or the task group commander would order firing anyway. So, we came up with our solution and we were quite excited; this was the first time this had ever been done, and we knew it was going to be pretty damn impressive, because that was -- we were just going to take that town off the map, which I'm sure we did. We were

using mostly high capacity shells then, instead of armor piercing shells, which would be used against a ship-type of target so that it pierces and then explodes after a very fractional delay. With a high capacity shell, as soon as it touches something it explodes and sends shrapnel all over. And that's used against buildings and things like that.

RI: OK. Do you remember off Okinawa -- I don't have the exact dates in mind -- do you remember the powder explosion that occurred on South Dakota?

WT: Yes. We were taking aboard ammunition, had an ammunition ship alongside, and as I recall she was on the starboard side, and they would have a hoist, a sling, and bring aboard a number of canisters and set them down on the starboard side, forward right about where turn two was. And, then the men -- two men each -- would pick up one of these canisters and would take it on in, my recollection was, went in a hatch there and then it had to move forward a little bit over several other hatches, and then down to where the powder is stored in the turret itself down below the turret in the powder storage area. And so, each one of these canisters would go over a number of hatches. They're about 14, 15, 16 inches high. These canisters are pretty heavy, and my understanding of that eventual cause of that

explosion was that -- these were reduced charges that we were taking aboard, incidentally, because we were going to have a practice firing before we actually shot our regular 16 inch charges. They were about 8 inch bags, as I recall. Of course, they were made of silk so that they completely burn and there was very little if any residue to be blown out of the barrel after the firing. And the reduced charges were put in the canister, but my understanding was that they did not have any spacers in those canisters, and the bag itself -- the bags themselves would be able to roll around in that canister and the silk would rub up against the metal. Well, you probably recall that experiment at school when you have a rod and a silk handkerchief and you rub the thing and you get static electricity. So, it's my understanding that, having gone over a number of hatches and having been upended and turned and things like that, that one of the -- one or maybe several -- canisters went off down in the powder storage area, and then the fire started. Those people were killed immediately, and then there were a number of others that were killed from the smoke inhalation.

RI: And in the process, these powder canisters were handled by men -- they were not handled mechanically, correct?

WT: Well, when they came aboard they were handled by a hoist to be put down on the deck, but after that you had to go through passageways and go down hatches and things and there was no way to handle that thing really by a trolley or something. There just wasn't any trolley built for that.

RI: What were you doing at the time of the explosion?

WT: I was back in the aft junior officer's bunkroom. Matter of fact, I was writing a letter to my wife and, as was usually the case -- I'm sure they were not connected -- but when one thing goes wrong, very frequently a number of things go wrong, and the first thing that went wrong was the explosion of course, and the second thing that went wrong was the LMC, which was the means of communicating messages throughout the entire ship, and on the LMC circuit there's a speaker in every space in the entire ship. And I remember hearing that speaker come on in the aft JO bunkroom, and it was very garbled and you couldn't hear much of what was being said. It was very indistinct, but I did catch the word "fire, fire" something or other on turret two. I thought, what in the world is going on? So I ran over to a hatch on the port side of the ship and I saw people streaming to the stern, running as fast as they possibly could, and I went out along the starboard side of

the -- I think that was called the [01 metal?] of the superstructure -- and I saw that there was a lot of smoke coming from that area, and I ran into Warren Calhoun who was the turret officer of turret two, and at various times he had been giving me instruction in how the turret operated, and I was familiarizing myself over a period of several months with the operation of those turrets, and I knew the other turret officers, too; Art Paulson had three, and Joe Hadley had number one, and at various times I'd been in all of those turrets, in the cabs and up and down throughout them. And, Calhoun asked me, he said -- he gave me a quick rundown on what had happened, that they'd had a powder explosion down below, and that the sprinkling system evidently had not come on. That was a third thing that evidently went wrong. And then he said he was going to go in the turret and would I come in with him and man phones so that I could keep contact with him, where he was and what he was doing, and report it on up the line. And, he went on down below and turned on the saltwater flooding system, and actually, if he hadn't done that, why, that fire could have been a lot more serious, it could have spread a lot further. But he flooded that entire area down there with the manual operation of those valves to admit sea water to the area. Then the automatic system didn't

shut it off either, so he had to shut the thing off again, wadding around in pretty deep water. But, that was a very harrowing experience. My recollection was -- I'm sure others that you're interviewing may have more accurate words -- by my recollection was that the task group commander had said that if we didn't get the fire in control in 10 minutes, to abandon the ship. By the time I got to where I was on the 01 level, I could see that the ammunition ship, they were literally cutting all the lines with axes from their end, and that ship -- the ammunition ship went to full speed and turned on a course of 90 degrees to ours and just went as fast as she could to get out of the area, because, of course if we had exploded and she'd been anywhere near, why, she would have exploded, too and that would have been the end of a number of ships. We did also have one destroyer that pulled out of all the other ships. All the ships turned 90 degrees at this stage of the game and started to head out as fast as they could, but one destroyer was detailed to tail us along the stern in case people did go over so they could pick them up. Of course, that would be a dangerous operation by itself, but that little destroyer did stay with us, and I'll tell you, when she came alongside, from then on she got more ice-

cream and anything we had, she was getting first class treatment.

RI: (Laughs) All right. Back to the kamikazes. Just give me a brief statement regarding your experiences with the kamikazes, how did it affect you?

WT: It was an unusual thing for a person to be willing to give their life like this for their country, to go on a one-way mission -- or at least at the start we thought this was what it was. Later, I believe it was shown that some of these people were actually chained in the position and didn't have any option. They had enough gas to take off from where they took off from and get out there, and they couldn't have made it back even if they wanted to. Matter of fact, my oldest son's daughter married a Japanese girl, and two of her uncles were kamikaze pilots, and she indicated to us that yes, it's true; they were chained in in some cases. (Inaudible), but it was a very horrifying experience to realize that these people were out there to sacrifice themselves -not to just drop a bomb on you or shoot a few bullets at you or something -- but, they were determined on crashing that whole airplane into you. Of course, their principle targets were carriers because those had the most destructive devices onboard them, but they were after any kind of a ship they could find; if they

couldn't find a carrier, they'd take on a destroyer or anything. That's a very disconcerting thing to know; that they're out there doing that.

RI: OK. In regards to your position in the main battery, the spotter planes -- the Kingfishers -- were you in direct contact with them?

WT: Yes.

RI: They would radio back your fall of shot, and then you would adjust from those corrections, correct?

WT: Exactly.

RI: OK. Let's look at the surrender of Japan. Describe to me your feelings, your emotions, and your experiences as the South Dakota entered Tokyo Bay.

WT: We had been ordered to pull away, go back 30 or 40 miles from some exercises that we were going to be conducting -- I don't recall whether they were just raids or bombardments -- and, then all of a sudden we came down one morning and we saw them in the newssheet that was printed about the entire area to let everybody know what was going on out there. We heard about the dropping of the first atomic bomb. So, everybody read about this and they didn't know whether we were being put on, whether this was just a big story was being foisted upon us, or whether it was really true. Then we began to realize that they were actually

going to surrender. Then, I guess it was Admiral [McCain?] -- but we've still got planes that were coming out, we were in stand-down condition, we weren't trying to engage them anymore -- but I think it was Admiral McCain as I recall, who was asked -- somebody said, what do we do about these guys, and he said, "Shoot them down in a friendly fashion." So, from that point on, then we realized that there was going to be a surrender, and there were all sorts of activities that were going on; we were trying to organize that people could operate railroads and send men over to do that, and other people could be military police, and other people to do various and sundry things. And we'd form up different teams. Every day we'd be forming up a team for this, or a team or that, or a team for something or other else. And practically all the junior officers were assigned to several different teams, depending upon which one was going to be called out to do what. Among others, I was in charge of the honor guard, for when you were going to have -- the first word was that the ceremony would take place aboard the South Dakota, and we'd been out there probably longer than any other ship -- that hadn't been sunk, that is -- and I understand that President Truman changed that and ordered it elsewhere. So, there was a shuffling around. Admiral Nimitz, as I recall, was briefly

aboard us and he took his flag elsewhere, and Admiral Halsey came aboard. He was actually aboard for the ceremony and we took him to Tokyo Bay, of course, all the guns were trained on the side. We still weren't positive that this was the real thing. These little Japs were tricky guys and we didn't know whether this was just a big hoax that was being foisted upon us. But, we did go on in and we were able to see the ceremony. Didn't even have to happen until after because the Missouri was very close to us and we could see it. I recall one point in time when I was Officer Of The Deck one night and we were in Tokyo Bay there -- we'd been there three or four nights as I recall - - and we'd sent some liberty parties ashore and the men are pretty ingenious, and they'd run across a Japanese armory, then they found a bunch of small boats. And, they took all these guns -- there were about like two or three thousand guns, rifles -- and put them in these small boats and started to come back. Well, they were all over liberty at this stage of the game, and there were around 20 of these boats. And when I took over the watch at midnight, the fellow that I relieved said, "Well, there's still a lot of men that haven't come back from liberty, but what they're doing is, they're bringing back these small boats loaded to the gunnels with rifles." The CO had ordered that they all

be tied up on the port guard arm on the quarter there. So, I had several of them that came back on my watch and we got them -- got the guys and got their names when they came aboard and sent them down to go to bed, but they were all going to have to appear at mast because they were all over liberty. Well, while this was going on about 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning, I had this slightly inebriated sailor come down, he staggered up and says, "Sir, sir, they're coming over the bow!" I said, "Who's coming over the bow? What do you mean?" He says, they're coming over the bow, and then he started to stagger on his way. So, I sent my junior officer up to take a look and the -- and he came back and said, yes, that's what they're doing. So, I put him in charge of the deck and went up to take a look and there's a couple of small boats tied to our anchor chain, and they were climbing up our anchor chains to get aboard so they wouldn't get picked up.

RI: (Laughs)

WT: By the time the morning was over, we had 23 or 24 boats -- I forget the exact number -- and literally a couple of thousand guns. It turned out there were enough guns to give everybody one as a souvenir, and my recollection was that a lot of these did go that way. I don't know why I never chose to take one when it was offered, but I think

the rest of those guns were given to everybody when they left the ship.

RI: Did you go ashore?

WT: Oh, yes. I went ashore the first day that people went ashore.

RI: What were your impressions of the people, the surroundings?

WT: Well, we all carried sidearms, .45s, and everybody was very cautious of us. They didn't try to gather around us or -- they looked at us as though they were pretty scared because they didn't know how we were going to take this thing either. We were pretty angry after Pearl Harbor and during the entire war, and they thought we were libel to just take them out and shoot them right then and there. And, their police, every time -- they'd been disarmed, told that they couldn't carry any weapons. But, they did have a nightstick, a baton of some sort, and every time you'd pass one of them they'd bow low and use this nightstick or baton to sort of indicate a salute. It was very interesting how subservient they were. This was the first day ships had sent over people. Some marines had gotten in there ahead of us, of course, and we ran across this marine sitting there and he had a couple of small flags, and one was the so-called meatball -- white flag with a red ball on it, raised -- and then there was a couple of other flags that

he had, and you know, like these flags that you see on a Fourth of July parade; a small American flag, but these were small Japanese flags, three different kinds. And, of course the chap that I was with thought, oh boy, that'd be a great souvenir. So, we asked him did he want to sell us some of those, and he said, "Oh, sure. I'll sell you some." He said, "I've got a couple of them." He wanted three flags for \$5.00. So, he said, come on over the barracks and he went in his room, and my friend and I -- a Lieutenant James Jones -- each bought three flags. Well, then we continued walking on our way, exploring here and there. We found some caves and went into that. Then we found this big warehouse and we saw there was a line of people standing there, a line of Americans standing in line and they were going in and coming out with these shoe boxes. So, we were pretty inured to lines at that stage of the game. We got in the line and when our turn came up we went inside there, and it was a warehouse filled with shoe boxes filled with flags. So, we each carried as many shoe boxes as we could and went back to -- and these were for free, of course -- and we took these back to the South Dakota, and every man aboard the ship got a free flag, but we paid five bucks for the first three for ourselves.

RI: (Laughs) When you were in Tokyo Bay, did you go on -- first of all, were there any Japanese warships located in Tokyo Bay, and did you have an occasion to go on one of them?

WT: Well, that ceremonial ship that's in (inaudible), that was in the [Akushka?], and of course, we would right abeam of the Akushka, and when we went ashore, that's where we went. And then on another day, we did go ashore and take a train from the Akushka up to Tokyo proper, and we could see whether there'd been a lot of damage up there, and there just wasn't a lot to buy and we were all interested in souvenirs and buying silks, and things like this, but they didn't have that much stuff. I recall going into a department store and getting some bolts of silk and I brought those back. Of course, silk was very hard to get during the war in the States, and my wife was thrilled when I brought this stuff back. But, we did get into Tokyo proper, yes, but I don't recall seeing any ships, any Japanese ships, to tell you the truth. Small ships. We were -- the Akushka, they had a number of small ships, and as I mentioned earlier, those small boats. But that's about all. I didn't see any large ships. I don't think they had many large ships left by that stage of the game.

RI: (Laughs) They were all sunk. Do you recall witnessing any of the American prisoners of war being released?

WT: Well, they were -- that was one of the team efforts that were -- doctors were forming up teams of people to go over there and try to go to these prison camps and make sure that we got our prisoners out. I wasn't ever assigned to one of those teams, but other people were -- corpsman and people more useful in that kind of an exercise. But as I recall, we had a couple that may have come back through the South Dakota, but I don't think we had very many and I don't have a very clear recollection of how long they were with us or what.

RI: OK. From October through January of 1946, just give me a brief --

WT: From '46 or '45?

RI: From October of 1945 through January of 1946 -- let me make sure that's correct. Anything that you recall of significance?

WT: Well, we left about October I guess, after having been in with the occupying forces for a month or so, and we started to steam back to Pearl Harbor very slowly. As I recall, Admiral Halsey had flown that leg of the return, and he had already been there and I think he also went back to the States, and then came back out to Honolulu again. When we got to Honolulu, he came aboard and we took him back to San Francisco which was our first port of call, and I happened

to have the deck when we went under the Golden Gate Bridge and sounded the whistle and all that sort of stuff, and they had fireboats out there shooting streams of water and all that sort of thing. We anchored out in the stream, and I guess the mayor and the governor and all those people came aboard, and then we brought the anchor up again and then went alongside at one of the docks there at San Francisco. And we were there for about a week or so. I recall, I was very fortunate. I immediately went over -- I had gotten a call through to my wife from Pearl I guess, there were -- people were waiting for a couple of days to get calls through; I managed to get one through and told her to come out to San Francisco immediately, which she was very fortunate in getting a train reservation. Just on the outside chance -- I didn't know when she was going to get there or anything about it -- I went over to Oakland and just waited for her. I figured I'd meet every train that came in. And on the second train, she was on it, and we had a lot of interesting experiences trying to get hotel rooms -- which you had to beg, borrow, steal and lie about -- to get a hotel room you had to have reservations in advance, but if your wife wasn't there yet, you had to use somebody else's wife to take her up and get a chip that says you can have a hotel room. So, we worked that a

couple of times. We had the duty wife and some people would take her up and get a hotel room, and then their own wife would come in and the guys that were the bellboys and everything, they'd see this going on and they'd wonder what the hell's going on. We were able to get reservations for all of the girls that didn't come out. Then we went down to Long Beach and I was aboard there until just before Christmas. Then I organized a plane, a DC-3, to take back about 30 officers and men to the East Coast. We were on the second leave group. Some had gone right away as soon as we hit the shore, and we were going to go on another leave group while the ship went down through the Panama Canal, and we were going to meet her in Philadelphia. That was our hometown at the time, the suburbs of Philadelphia. So, my wife and I and several other -- three or four other officers and a number men, went on this DC-3. It was cold as the devil. It wasn't insulated; they didn't know there were going to be that kind of passengers. And we flew back and stopped at St. Louis -- first we stopped at Albuquerque I guess. There was a storm going ahead of us. Stopped in St. Louis and we had to wait the night out there because of the storm, and during the middle of the night the pilot got everybody up and said, well, we're going to be able to go. Let's go. So, the senior officer on the trip, he was out -

- he wasn't married -- he was out in town with some girls that they picked up and he didn't get through to the airport in time, so he was left behind. That was Mary [Mulderok?]. And the rest of us did get aboard, and they made stops in Washington, Philadelphia, and then New York. That was an interesting experience.

RI: OK. That's all I have to ask you. Do you have any parting comments or would you like to add anything before I shut the tape off?

WT: I can't think of anything particularly significant.

RI: OK, sir. Let me shut this thing off. I just have a couple of questions and parting comments, then we'll call it a day.

END OF AUDIO FILE