MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

FRED M. LATHAM

INTERVIEW 1026.2

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing Fred M. Latham at his home at 309 Johnson Street in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1026.2. The date is December 17, 1992. This is a continuation of an interview with Mr. Latham on 12/15/92.

Dr. Patterson: The tape is running again and I'm glad to be back here to finish our earlier interview. When we closed off before, we were talking about your war career and you had reached Saipan. I wonder if you could pick it up there and briefly finish your war career and then get you back to New Bern and the things you did that were important to you, you can describe those, and then we'll get back to your childhood again.

Mr. Latham: Very good. Okay, Joe, at Saipan we actually got in the boats; in other words, climbed down the ships cargo nets with our packs and weapons. We got in the landing boats and we went in reserve circles with the landing craft. We circled and circled and circled. Finally, they had us re-board the ships. We climbed back aboard ship since we were not needed to invade Saipan. The other troops had gone in and secured it. We travelled from there and we went to Guam and, therein, was my first exposure to hostile fire. We made the landing on Guam, and there we had approximately three thousand dead in three days on the beach at Guam. We were pinned down and the Japanese were above us in the cliffs firing down on us. We finally broke out and broke through there. That was a major battle. We finally overcame them in about three weeks. From there we trained for the

next battle which was Iwo Jima. At the time we didn't know what it was, but we made practice landings there on Guam simulating an attack on another island. Then we finally went aboard ship in January of 1945 and our destination then, later we were told, was to be Iwo Jima. Just preceding this on Guam, on that battle, we had the Marianna "Turkey Shoot." All that went on too. Then as we went on up to Iwo Jima, there were two divisions of Marines already on the island and they were having difficulty, getting shot up and so forth. So we came into the middle of the island and allowed the two existing Marine divisions that were on there too, one go to the left flank and one to the right flank and we took the point in the center of the island. The first attempts of myself and my group to get ashore was rebuffed because there was too much damage of ships and boats and everything on the shore. We couldn't get in, so we came back out to the ships. Then that night at midnight, we came back in again and went ashore. The first thing I can remember, everything was black except for tracer firing and so forth, but I sat down. The first thing I sat down on was a lump in the sand, and it turned out to be a dead Jap that I sat on. That was one of the first memories I had on board there. But we had a big battle there at Iwo Jima and I did watch the flag go up. At that point I was actually on board ship just below Mt. Surabachi and I was looking at it through field glasses. We watched the flag being put up, and a great roar went up on the ships. Then we had the battle going on there and the Japanese using their tremendous spigot mortars, which were sort of an unguided ballistic missile. The rockets

weighed six hundred pounds, these weapons were very effective against us. We were always saying they were going over and falling off the other end of the island and everything. Those things were rock'n and roll'n us. We finally got through the battle there. That lasted close to a month there before we finally broke their back completely. It was just a few survivors of the Japanese that we were able to take prisoner there, maybe a 100 out of 25,000 or so. We killed them. We left about 6,000 dead of our own on that island and 45,000 were wounded.

Dr. Patterson: Where did you go from Iwo?

Mr. Latham: Iwo, we went back to Guam, therein, to be rebuilt. They were talking then about us going into, the next deal would be to go into Japan. So we were training to go to Japan and also rebuild our forces with new troops. Then in August, I guess it was the 8th or 9th of August, the B29's were using the air fields on Guam. After we had captured Guam and Saipan, the Seabees came in and they built these tremendous air fields there. Then the B29's were flying from there all the time. I'd see just waves and waves of B29's going off towards Tokyo and Japan to do their bombing. Of course at Iwo Jima, while I was there, I saw the first B29 land on Iwo Jima. It couldn't get any further. That was the main reason for taking Iwo Jima, was to get a place for the Air Force, or the Army Air Force, to be able to stop.

Dr. Patterson: Did the war end then while you were back on Guam?

Mr. Latham: It ended, as I say, on Guam around the 8th or 9th

of August of 1945. The aircraft took off with the atomic bomb and dropped it on Hiroshima and then Nagasaki three days later. It was within a day or so that the Japanese capitulated totally, and what a celebration it was when we got the word. It was just after dark. The celebration started basically from the center of the island where we were camped with all these many thousands of Marines and they started firing, guns firing into the air and tracers and everything. We thought we were being attacked again at first, and then we could hear all the yells and hoorays and so forth. Our first impression was, we jumped into our fox holes and ready to pull the top in. But very shortly thereafter, they started calming that down, and then there were tremendous parties using captured Japanese "Suntory"whiskey, and that was the end of the war.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, were any of our men killed on Guam during that celebration?

Mr. Latham: I don't know. It's very possible that there could have been some killed then because we were our own worst enemies on friendly fire type things.

Dr. Patterson: I was on Okinawa at that time and there were a fair number of our men killed. I saw them all lined up in a building. A senior medical officer took me there and showed me. You made my war career sound like nothing compared to what you did. I think it's just great that you were there and that you survived all this. Now, you got back to New Bern.

Mr. Latham: I'm back to Guam and I'll take us right back on into

New Bern now. We had a point system to get back, and immediately of course we were trying to get back, and by November my points came up and we were piled into landing ship tanks, an LST, 750 of us. There's normally 150 people on board one of those at the maximum. There were 750 of us put into that LST. They just marched us into the inner tank deck with no tanks. They marched in us until we came out the top, and then they marched from the stern to the bow. They kept marching us in until we got to the bow, but we wanted to go home. So, we went back into the Pacfic Ocean, and it took us fifteen days to get from Guam to Pearl Harbor. The health officials at Pearl Harbor forced us to get off of the LST because they said that was an unsanitary situation to have that many troops on board a little ship like that. So they took us off. It was about Thanksgiving '45. Then they put us on board a battleship, the USS Texas, which was the sister ship to the Arizona, which was sunk at Pearl Harbor 7 December, 1941. As we came in, we could see the hulk in the harbor. We then went from Pearl Harbor to San Diego. From San Diego, we got on a troop train and we came across country in three days. The train wasn't going fast enough for me. So when it got to Richmond and they said it was going to be another day and a half to get down to New Bern, I got off the train without permission. I still had my orders and everything with me showing where I was suppose to report, which was Camp LeJeune. I got off the train and went out and hitched hiked. I made a little sign saying "New Bern." I got out on the highway right outside of the train station at Richmond, and there was very little traffic at

that time, but a car came by and stopped and picked me up. It was a Marine, and guess where he was going? He was going to Cherry Point! So, I had a ride all the way from Richmond to my front door in New Bern! The day that occurred was the 31st of December 1945. Well, my parents had historically paid their social debts by having a big party every New Year's Eve. So I arrived just at the beginning of the party. They were getting ready for the party. It was about eight or nine o'clock in the evening. I talked to this young Marine who had driven me up. I said, "Come on in, I'll let you meet my folks and we'll see what's happening in there. Usually, they have a party this evening." He came in, reluctantly, but he came in the house and the party was just beginning. They were getting everything ready. Before the evening was over, I really had a welcome home. There were, I'd say, at least a couple hundred people that came and went during the evening. Everyone that I ever knew just about was there, including my future wife, who at that particular time had a date with a big six foot six Marine Lieutenant, me as a Private First Class, not paying much attention to him! Well, I guess I was paying more attention to him rather than her. But all the girls were coming over kissing me. About one o'clock in the morning when everyone was leaving, this young lady and this big Marine were leaving, and this young lady says, "Fred, I believe you've been kissed by every girl at the party." I said, "Well, I missed one, and I believe that's you." So right there I gave her a big kiss as she was leaving, and that was the beginning of my New Bern romance.

Dr. Patterson: Well, Fred, that kiss had lasting effects I think.

Mr. Latham: That's for sure.

Dr. Patterson: Well, Fred, getting you back to New Bern now. I'm glad you got back to New Bern safely. Let's go back to your childhood and talk about some of the memories that you haven't spoken to. I know you told me one time that your first airplane ride was a real experience. Perhaps you'd like to speak to that.

Mr. Latham: It was about 1929. From the details that I can remember, I'll have to say it was probably in late August or early September. The barnstormers used to come through and fly out of the airport, which again, was very close to where the Craven County New Bern Airport is today, on the other side of the Trent River. At that time it was a dirt, grass strip. These aircraft flyers would come in and people would go up. They would take you up for a dollar or two dollars for a ride. In this case, my father took me over there and took me up in this bi-plane which was about World War I vintage. We went up and flew over New Bern and around the rivers and about, and all of a sudden it got real quiet up there. I looked up and the propeller had stopped turning. The wind was rushing by. It was open cockpit. I had my nose sticking out over the cockpit edge and my father pulled me back in. We ended up forced landing over in the Grantham's area in a cornfield. At that point, I say, I assumed that was about August or September cause the corn was dry. We came lickety-split right down in the cornfield and bounced in there and stopped. All

these people came rushing over to see if we were all right. So, that was my first ride.

Dr. Patterson: There weren't many planes coming to New Bern in those days.

Mr. Latham: Very few. That was a big occasion when an airplane came over. Later, I went up in Ford tri-motors. Next year, say, 1930, '31, there were some Ford tri-motors and they were all coming in trying to make a buck too.

Dr. Patterson: Were there many amphibian planes coming in then landing on the river?

Mr. Latham: Later there were some amphibian planes. During the thirties, there were a few. I believe Grumann amphibians were the main ones that I remember. They flew up and down the river. There biggest problem was making sure the fish stakes and so forth were not where they were going to land because they could puncture a pontoon.

Dr. Patterson: Were these military planes or civilian planes?

Mr. Latham: There were both military and civilian planes coming in. I remember the Grumann duck, maybe that's what they called it. It had wheels up under the pontoon so it could land on land or in the water. I remembered a few of those. They would come down and come up to an area near Union Point. In that area, they would come up there. Then sometimes they'd be down near where the Pamlico cutter was.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, you have other memories that you haven't spoken to. Why don't you tell me some of these things that were

important to you in your childhood.

Mr. Latham: Okay. This was more or less growing up in Riverside, or "Little Russia." I remember as a child that the side streets in Riverside were basically not paved. They had oyster shells on them to keep the dust down and also to keep the mud down. Then we had ice wagons pulled by a horse. That was before we had electric refrigerators. Every morning the ice man would come by with an ice wagon pulled by a horse. The kids would run behind the wagon and when he would stop, we would jump up on the back of the wagon. Just as soon as he had chipped a block and carried it into the house, we would get the little chips of ice and suck on the ice. Then another little thing we did was skate on National Avenue which was paved out to right at the end of National Cemetery and then it stopped. We would have these hard southwest winds, usually in the spring, and we would skate. We'd make sails from an old window shade and a couple of tobacco sticks which we got from around the abandoned Banner Warehouse. We'd make sort of a square rig sail. We'd get out and the wind would blow us and we would go flying down National Avenue until we got to the end. The end being sort of a hill, a slope, but to us it was a hill at National Cemetery, we'd got at the end and we run out of hard surface. The next thing you'd know you were letting go of the sail and running very quickly with your skates on to slow down. That was quite fun. The next thing, I was learning to swim. I learned to swim at the Pokamo swimming hole. I think it was some sort of an Indian name. It was right at the end of Avenue A and behind Mamie Saddler's grocery

store. The old store is boarded up and still there. It was down on the Neuse River there. It was the site of a World War I area where concrete ships, or boats, were made right in that immediate area. Then these timber slides that they would launch the ships on sideways, were still there. Right at one side of that is what was our swimming hole. We would go overboard there. It went from shallow to suddenly very deep. But that's where I ended up learning to swim. Some of the larger boys would sort of help teach you. Some of them were a little impatient and they would push you over towards the deep dark water. I remember the first time, I said, "Now, don't push me over there. I can't swim. I can't swim." They pushed me over there anyway, and I swam!

Dr. Patterson: This was rather an inlet from the Neuse River. It was connected to the Neuse River.

Mr. Latham: No, no, no. It's right on the Neuse River.

Dr. Patterson: Was it a separate lake type thing?

Mr. Latham: No. This was just a shore. It's right between the Rowland Lumber Company, which had been previously Roper, and right on their southern border, exactly on their southern border. There was an oil, I believe Esso or that company, oil dock that came in and they had tanks behind over a little close between there and the railroad track. That was the area I'm speaking about.

Dr. Patterson: So this was part of the river?

Mr. Latham: Yes, it's part of the river.

Dr. Patterson: Deep hole.

Mr. Latham: Deep hole, and that was our swimming hole. You had to wade out a little ways.

Dr. Patterson: You'd be interested that, when I interviewed Hubert Jones, he told me about this too, and that's where he used to swim. He said the final challenge was being able to swim from one side to the other.

Mr. Latham: You could swim out in the natural channel. There was a channel right on the west side of the river where the boats would come up. But further out where it had apparently been dredged, the dredge fill had been kicked over into the middle of the river and there was a shoal out there. What they did was swim across the deep, deep water, which was 20, 25 feet deep, and swim over to where you could touch bottom on the dredge fill. It would be out maybe a hundred yards.

Dr. Patterson: I think that's what Hubert was talking about.

Mr. Latham: Yes.

Dr. Patterson: He said that he watched the launching of the first concrete ship and it didn't go well and that the ship broke up into pieces of concrete in the process of launching. Well, go ahead Fred.

Mr. Latham: I learned a little bit there too, cause that was a little bit before my time. One of the other things we did was to play on the old Civil War earthworks which were across from the National Cemetery, and that area was later called Riverside Beach. There were plum thickets and everything that grew up on these earthworks and they were fairly large. Not quite as large as the ones at Fort Totten, but they were large enough that we'd have fun playing around the area

there.

Dr. Patterson: Were these Union?

Mr. Latham: They apparently were Union breastworks because they would be protecting New Bern from any guerilla activities from the Confederates coming down river. From there you could see all these pilings that were made part of the protective breastworks in the water. They were to prevent any boats from coming up the river. They're still out there. Stumps of those old pilings are still out there.

Dr. Patterson: Are the breastworks still there?

Mr. Latham: The breastworks have been flattened. Developers have come in and now it's just a standard little neighborhood all the way through the Riverside area. That was a fun area. The old railroad track used to come right along beside Contentnea Avenue there by Sunnyside. It was a spur for the Roper Lumber Company and the Rowland Lumber Company. They had an old train that pulled flat cars loaded with lumber, and it had one of these tremendous smokestacks on it with a big ball at the top, as it were, that smoke came up and out. It was wood burning. They used that to pull the lumber from the Rowland Lumber Company, and previously the Roper Lumber Company before the fire in 1922. They would haul the lumber out to some point over on the other side of Sunnyside where it was transferred to other trains which would take it away to the market. I used to go up and watch the big steam engines that were used to cut the logs. I can still remember the actual saw area which was still being used in the Rowland Lumber Company. They would bring these logs in on the river. Then

they would bring them up into a log pond, individually snake them up into a log pond off of these log rafts. They would snake them up and they would be pulled up sort of an escalator type gadget that would bring the log into the mill. They had these tremendous steam engines in there which would turn these big saws. I can always remember the controls that would control the speed of the engine as it was going. The steam would be coming in. These things had fly wheel sort of centrifugal control. If it'd go too fast the balls would swing out and this would cause a valve to close to reduce the amount of steam going to the engine and they were continuously going in and out, in and out. That would act as a governor for the engine. But I watched how they did that.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, where did these log rafts originate?

Mr. Latham: Early on, they were from immediately around New Bern. I understand that the mill, when it burned, cut something like, or produced something like forty thousand board feet of lumber a day, every day. It hired over 500 people there.

Dr. Patterson: So, after the logs were cut away from around New Bern, did they come down the Trent River?

Mr. Latham: They came down from the Trent River. They came up the Neuse River. They came down the Neuse River. Most of them that I can remember watching the log rafts being brought up by these little tug boats and the rafts would sometime be half a mile long. They would have these big spikes nailed into each log, about three of them in a log, and these would be chained. Individually, each log in line

would be chained like, we'll say like a horizontal fence with logs. These would be pulled up to the area of the mills. The ones I'm thinking of right now, they were the Pine Lumber Company and the Slater Lumber Company, which were closer to the downtown area behind just before you get to the ice plant on what was then Griffin Street and is now North Craven. They would pull those in and anchor them against the shore prior to their coming up into their inside log ponds and then being again towed up and put through the saw mill. When they would come in, we would go out and run on them. It looks like a half mile long raft of logs, and we were light, so we would bounce. If some of the logs were a little smaller, we would have to bounce from one to the other to keep from sinking down. It was sort of a game with us, but it was very dangerous. But it was a game. The people in authority in the mills, I know they must have gotten a lot of gray hairs trying to keep us off of those rafts. That was quite a memory doing that.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, as you go north on what's now North Craven Street, in what order were those lumber mills as you remember them?

Mr. Latham: I believe the first one that I was involved with going in and watching all these activities going on, sawing the logs and so forth, was the Pine Lumber Company and then Slater Lumber Company I believe. There were two of them right close together. After that was the oil mill, what we called the oil mill, and that was the one that came all the way over to the railroad bridge. That was another big, big building. We used to go over and fish off the back of that.

That would be where we would go out and fish around the pilings. That building had soybeans and things of that nature in there. Just on the industrial side there, as you went just across the railroad tracks, you came up on another warehouse, a tobacco warehouse, a stemming plant. All these buildings are gone now. Then there was one directly across the street, which was then Griffin and now North Craven. There was a tremendous one there. I always thought it was tremendous anyway. It was lined up and part of the Banner warehouse group. There were three of them; one from National Avenue, and then there was one on North Pasteur, and then behind that, off of Griffin, or North Craven, there was another plant. They were right in line.

Dr. Patterson: Are these tobacco warehouses...

Mr. Latham: Tobacco warehousing process. I think they were Banner. Excuse me, the other two were Monk Tobacco Company, and those were basically processing plants. Rather, the Banner warehouse was an auction warehouse, and the other two were processing and stemming plants I believe. They had a lot of equipment in those.

Dr. Patterson: Where was the Roper Lumber Company in relation to all of this?

Mr. Latham: Roper Lumber Company was down about three blocks north of there. It began about where the Maola Milk and Ice Cream Company is today.

Dr. Patterson: Now, did that become the Rowland Lumber Company?

Mr. Latham: Yes. Immediately after the 1922 fire, Roper sold to Rowland, and then they transferred the equipment that was then in

the Rowland Lumber Company. When I knew it, it was Rowland Company. The equipment there came from the old Roper mill that was at Oriental. They refurbished it after the fire. They brought a lot of that mill up. That's another part of my life.

Dr. Patterson: Now, you have a memory of the aftermath of the 1922 fire. Did you not play in that area?

Mr. Latham: Oh yes. I played in that area. Around the Rowland Lumber Company during the thirties when things got real tight, that was just in a period of my more active childhood, and we entered into the Rowland Lumber Company area there and played among the stacks of lumber and all the equipment after they had closed down because of the Depression. That just made a tremendous area to play in. I'm sure the people who owned all that property were not too happy with us being in there, but we would go in and play. It was warehouse space blocks long. One of them we called our fort. Today they would say it is these young juvenile delinquents who are breaking into something. We actually got into one building and climbed to the roof. There would be groups down below who would try to take us. One gang would be trying to take the ones on top. They had all these little snuff cans that we found in the place. We would fill them with sand or whatever and we made these catapults up on the top of the building and we would catapult these things down, and they would swing down with things, and the other ones were throwing rocks up on top at us.

Dr. Patterson: Did you play tennis in that area too?

Mr. Latham: We played tennis. I was a very avid tennis player

from the time I was about 10 or 11, 12, along in there. I played out where the tennis courts are in existence right now out on George Street. First, there was a lot of the old chimneys still around out there and the front steps and back steps of brick that were left from the homes that were burned out there. Then the WPA and the CCC boys came and cleaned the bricks. The WPA built these concrete tennis courts and I used to spend many, many, many summer days out there playing tennis with friends. Enola Sue Flowers was a great tennis player then and Adelaide Ward. Her father worked for the Rowland Lumber Company. A group of us would go out there and play from dawn to dusk. I remember one morning I got up a little early. I had been out and played from dawn and I came back to get my breakfast. I hadn't eaten any breakfast and I had played. It was a hot summer. I got to the breakfast table and I passed out from heat exhaustion right at the table and fell with my face right down into my cereal. My father was there and he prevented me from playing tennis for a week, and that was terrible! But he knew something was wrong. I had just overdone.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, what do you remember about Kafer Park?

Mr. Latham: Kafer Park, first, it had a wooden fence that was built up around it. There was a grandstand and bleachers for people to sit in. There was a local team, a professional team, that used to play teams like from Kinston and Goldsboro and so forth. On a summer night, my father would decide to go out to the ball park. We would go out there and the old cars were parked vertically, more or less, on either side of the street. There was just about room for one and

a half automobiles to get by at the end of all these parked cars. Then you'd go in and you paid your dime or whatever it was that you paid to get in. They had the lights on. They had to put lights out there too. I'd go out with my father and he'd pay my way. But when he wasn't there, I would wait outside usually over in the cemetery and wait for a foul ball to be driven across the street and the boys would all scatter trying to catch the ball cause you could come in free if you brought the ball back to the ticket window. So that was my usual way of getting into the ball park to watch the ball games. That was interesting.

Dr. Patterson: Well, I think probably many times, my father and I sat with you and your father at those games, cause we did the same thing. You played at Fort Totten too as a boy, didn't you?

Mr. Latham: I sure did. At Fort Totten, it was a larger earthworks. I mean it was like 15 to 20 feet high and it extended for almost a block. What was left there, as I remember, two separate mounds or earthworks, and you'd come up one end. By that time I had a bicycle, a balloon tire bicycle. I would go over with groups. We would go out and we'd ride out there. Actually, first of all, you couldn't ride straight up, it was too steep. So we'd pull our bicycles up the sides and up on the ends. Enough traffic had walked up on the top so that you actually had paths. We would ride our bikes up and down those paths. Then when you would come to a point where it would go down, it would be quite a slope. We would go zooming down and hopefully not breaking our bikes or our backs.

Dr. Patterson: Well, I know a lot of folks at that time played out there. I don't remember those breastworks. It's sad that they're gone I guess. Getting back to the tobacco warehouses. Do you remember tobacco auctions?

Mr. Latham: Yes. I went to quite a few of them out in Riverside.

Dr. Patterson: At Banner warehouse?

Mr. Latham: At Banner warehouse. I remember in front of the Banner warehouse there was an old stone and concrete fountain that was continually running. The water was coming out and it was drinking water. I always hated when the place burned down cause that was removed. But anyway, I'd go inside and they would have all the tobacco put out in these big baskets. Each farmer would have his crop put out. There would be lines and lines of it and they would have tags on it. The buyers would come down and they would make a bid for the tobacco. The auctioneer, I can't do a tobacco auctioneer, but anyway, they sound the same today. They would go along from basket to basket with the buyers surrounding them. Then the auctioneer would go and take the leaf from each person there who was buying, and finally one would offer the most for it. At that point, they would put this tag down on the tobacco and that company or that buyer would, that was his property then as soon as he paid.

Dr. Patterson: Was New Bern a big tobacco market then?

Mr. Latham: It had a market. It had two warehouses. I remember them; the Banner warehouse and then there was another one on the

opposite side of the railroad track, just about seventy-five yards across from there. Tobacco was sold at both of those. It was never as large as Kinston or Wilson or Greenville or those markets, but there was a considerable market there.

Dr. Patterson: What happened to that market in New Bern?

Mr. Latham: Well, they had the Depression. During the Depression, things just got too slow, and they just didn't survive in that area. They just didn't survive. Over in Kinston, they specialized. The city itself actually supported the growth of the warehouses over there more. As a result, we sort of slipped out of the tobacco market. Then that one old warehouse was used for storage, and then the other one was used for a circus. In the winter here, it would put all of its tents and rides and so forth, all the equipment would be stored there on that side in the one just across the railroad track. It would be on the west side of the railroad track there at National Avenue and George, where they meet. I can remember that.

Dr. Patterson: What happened to those warehouses eventually? Did they burn?

Mr. Latham: The Banner warehouse caught fire and burned. I can remember that. I came right down there. The warehouses was burning. At first it didn't appear to be very great. Then gradually, all that dry hard pine it was made of in the floors and the beams and everything, it just grew into a tremendous conflagration. Then when it broke through the roof, the flames leaped to the sky, 200 feet into the air. Then eventually the front facade, brick facade there, started to

topple. There were firemen in front and they had to rush and pull their hoses back across the street on National Avenue, pull it back across the street, and that wall just fell right over. This tremendous crash right on top of my favorite fountain - Kerzonk!, and that was the end of the fountain and the end of the Banner warehouse!

Dr. Patterson: Fred, the 1933 hurricane is something that folks of our time can remember. What are your recollections about that time?

Mr. Latham: I remember my father coming in saying we were getting ready to have a tremendous storm and not to leave the house and stay in the yard or around the house. That night the wind began to blow and the rain began to come. All night long the tree limbs and trees fell and, it was just a roar of the hurricane winds blowing from the northeast and the front of the house. It was very difficult to sleep that night for sure. The next morning the storm was still blowing, but by now it had passed us. It was blowing 40 or 50 miles an hour later. The damage had already been done. I am at this point about nine years of age and have already got the wandering spirit, so I took my little Brownie camera and I went about taking a few pictures there. I walked all the way down to the East Front Street area. Actually, I went down to Johnson Street cause I'd heard the bridge had washed away. So, I wanted to see that and I went down and skipped and jumped over all the debris that was all up in the streets. There were little boats and logs and lumber from the lumber yards along the way and buildings were down, and it was just a devastation as far as the waterfront area. Then I walked out on the bridge.

Dr. Patterson: What was that like?

Mr. Latham: That was a real experience, Joe, because the only thing that was left of the bridge was the beginning and out to the swing draw and then just a little section that was just beyond that probably about 15 to 20 feet where it had joined to the rest of the bridge. From there, it was just pilings and cross beams that you looked at all the way across over to Bridgeton. This was the bridge at the foot of Johnson Street. I looked across there and these storm waves were still high enough, but they were on their way out. The waves were rushing out pushing it down river. It seems that the sections of the bridge had actually been broken and floated off of the piles. They floated off some distance down the river and then went ashore. Later they took those same sections and floated them back up and used cranes and put them back on the pilings.

Dr. Patterson: I understand this time they put them on, instead of cross-wise, they put them on length-wise to eliminate the bumps.

Mr. Latham: There were plenty of bumps on that bridge. But that was one of my major experiences. Then, of course, all the trees down and the houses. Then, again, on East Front Street was, I saw at Hubert Jones', the picture of the top of the cottage that was behind the Morrison house. What I call the Morrison house, where the great cypress is, the Indian treaties, and so forth.

Dr. Patterson: Boyd Myers...

Mr. Latham: Boyd Myers lives there now. It's right behind there, there was a summer cottage. I always thought it was the Senator Simmons'

summer cottage. But it was destroyed. The roof was blown completely off. Later, though, they repaired that. They repaired that and put it back.

Dr. Patterson: Did you tell me that Donald Smith was living there?

Mr. Latham: Donald Smith and his wife, Inez Gaskins Smith, lived in there while he was band leader here in the high school.

Dr. Patterson: This was later of course.

Mr. Latham: This was later on. This was after the war, after World War II.

Dr. Patterson: In the hurricane of '33, was there any damage to the Trent River bridge?

Mr. Latham: I don't remember of any damage there. It was fairly well protected from a northeast blow.

Dr. Patterson: You mentioned having meals, or one meal anyhow, at a restaurant on Middle Street next to the Baptist church.

Mr. Latham: Yes.

Dr. Patterson: Tell me about that.

Mr. Latham: Okay. My father loved to go out and ocean fish and so he wanted to teach his son to do the same. So he asked me if I wanted to go fishing with him the next morning one evening, and I said, "Oh yes!" He said, "All right, you have got to get up with me when I call you." Well, I didn't realize that he was gonna call me about three o'clock in the morning. To him who was on call twenty-four hours a day, that was no big thing, being on call as a doctor. He almost didn't get me up. At three o'clock, I looked out and it was still

dark, and when I realized it was three o'clock in the morning, I didn't know if I wanted to go or not, but I finally got up. Then we went down to this restaurant which was next to the Baptist church on Middle Street. Later, that same area was J. C. Penney's.

Dr. Patterson: What was the name of the restaurant?

Mr. Latham: I'm trying to think what it was, if it was Mr. Paaffe. I believe that was one of his restaurants. I'm not sure. We'd have to check that one out. But anyway, it was a nice good size restaurant in there and it was opened all night. We went in, and that was the first place I got some coffee. I got coffee to wake me up! I tasted it and I didn't care much for it, so they decided they would make what they called cambers coffee which was mixed half and half with milk. I managed to get that down, but I didn't think much of it at the time. Then we left from there and we went down to Beaufort or Morehead, and we rented a boat that took us out through the Beaufort bar and we went out at least 20, 30 miles beyond Cape Lookout. We were out on the water before daylight. We went out there forever it seemed to me, chugging on out. We went on out to the Gulf stream. We fished out there and caught king mackerel, tremendous king mackerel. I have a photograph of me holding one up. After we came back in, we came back to New Bern and we went down to Hamilton's fish market, which was then at the foot of George Street on the left as you go out across the bridge. The bridge was right there. I have a picture of me holding this big king mackerel. I just could hold him up, he was as long as I was. That was another memory in there. There was another fish

restaurant there and a seafood market.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, do you remember the drive from New Bern down to Morehead, that fish trip? What was the road like between New Bern and Morehead then?

Mr. Latham: Well, it was an experience to go down there. We'd go down and it was down through the woods basically. It wasn't a straight-a-way type trip. You had a lot of curves. You went on down just outside of New Bern, about 3, 4 or 5 miles outside of New Bern, there was sort of an S-curve. It's still there on the back. That was one of the areas. Then we'd go right on down to past Tom Haywoods which is they, oh, what's the name, the Lost Colony put it on there.

Dr. Patterson: Croatan.

Mr. Latham: Croatan, right. Croatan right there. They had a fire tower right there. We'd always spot the fire tower before we got there. You'd come on by there and went on down to Havelock. As you went into Havelock you went across and old stone bridge which was the upper reaches of Slocum's Creek. Then we made a big hard turn at Trader's store. You'd come in there and it bore to the left. It should have been called a corner. You went and made your turn there, and then you went on a little further and you turned again and went on down into Carteret county towards Newport. When you came to Newport, they used to whitewash all the trees. Highway 70 went right through Newport, and they whitewashed all the trees. There's a pretty little drive right through the town there. You'd come on up into the Morehead area along the sound there. I'm trying to remember and there was a,

I'm trying to name, the Boat Club, Bogue Banks Club. We always had to look down this sort of boulevard as you'd get this glimpse of this big building on the end on the sound, which had been a club and then was a hotel later. I forget the name of it now. Then you would go along the railroad track into Morehead City down to the docks, the piers, which is fairly similar today.

Dr. Patterson: Was the road, the highway, at that time wide enough for two cars to pass each other and stay on the road?

Mr. Latham: It was probably fourteen feet. You were lucky if it was fourteen feet. It was narrow, very narrow. But my daddy's driving-he'd loved to make the car go fast. Even at that time he would drive 50 and 60 miles an hour going down there. He wanted to get down there in a hurry. He wanted to go fish'n! I inherited a little bit of that from my younger days.

Dr. Patterson: Did you remember on the route there would be signs nailed to the trees, tin signs depicting a little red man advertising some sort of tobacco?

Mr. Latham: I remember a lot of the Burma Shave signs going down there and that's similar.

Dr. Patterson: Yes. We used to count those little red man signs. Fred, when did you learn to drive a car?

Mr. Latham: I was almost fifteen, or just about fifteen when I started getting the keys and getting out in front of the house and backing the car forward and learning the gears and everything. Then I drove maybe out to the end of National Avenue and Oaks Road and back

without any license. More or less a clandestine type of operation. Then when my birthday came, sixteen, in February, my daddy took me down to what is now the New Bern City Hall. At the time it was the courthouse, federal building I believe then. He took me up and the drivers license examiner talked to me and with my daddy. He says, "Can you drive?" I said, "Yes, I can drive." He says, "Have you already driven some?" I said, "Yes sir. I've driven a little bit." I told him what I'd done. He says, "All right." The car was parked right down below us on the street on Craven Street. He says, "All right. Here's your license. Now, I'm gonna watch you when you leave here. Now, you drive away from here and you drive around downtown and then you come back and you drive pass me again and then you drive around the corner and you drive down pass me again and then you come back up here. You park it right in the same place you got it. I'll be watching you." So, I went down and cranked up, by myself, and I went ahead and did what he instructed and I came back and I parked. He says, "You did fine." So, I've been driving ever since.

Dr. Patterson: What kind of car was this you drove?

Mr. Latham: The car that I drove was a Studabaker President, eight cylinder. It was a fast car. Now I had wheels and now the boys and girls all wanted to ride. My father didn't realize what he had done. His instructions on showing me how to drive rapidly, I showed him how to drive more rapidly. I drove, the record I think I had, I drove from New Bern to Kinston, city limits to city limits, in twenty-one minutes. And that was before the new roads opened out there.

That was flying. That car had super gears in it. It had five forward gears with overdrive. I drove that thing in overdrive all the way up. I mean gradually, just sort of like a truck driver, just kept going up. I drove it over there and we went down that road at 120 miles an hour going over there. Then coming back, we slowed down to 60 cause I had thrown some oil out of the engine and it was running a little hot. I came back and I told my daddy I think it may need to have the engine checked on it, it sounded like it was running a little hot. I believe it was Mr. Bennett who was the mechanic over at the Studabaker place. He came down and talked to my daddy after and he says, "He's been running that thing pretty hard." So my daddy came and says, "I don't want you to run that thing that hard again." I says, "I wont do it." He says I just about ran all the oil out. He says it must have been done while I had the car. That was the only time I ever did that fool trick.

Dr. Patterson: You talked earlier about your sailboat and some of the things you did with your sailboat, the trip when they thought you were lost in the storm. Do you have other memories life on the river? Bardie had a boat. He had a motor boat.

Mr. Latham: Now, Bardie and I would get out on the river. I would sail out there. He had this little dory, about a sixteen foot dory, and it had a little Briggs an Stratton five horse power engine in it with a straight drive. He steered it with a little tiller which was on the side of the boat. You push it forward and it'd go to the left, pull it back and it'd go to the right. It had only one direction

to go and that was forward. It would not backup. When you started the engine, it was in "go" because there was no gears. He would get out and he would play around with me sailing out there off of Union Point and so forth and usually come back with a water balloon or maybe just a bailing device and he would throw water on us. I had, actually, a little pump and he'd come back by next time and I would be prepared and here we would either throw water or squirt water out of the pump. But we played around like that and had a lot of fun.

Dr. Patterson: Were there a lot of your friends out on the river then? Was there a lot of activity on the river?

Mr. Latham: There was. Emma Katie Guion, she liked to get out there on the river on a sailboat. And then again, as I call it, Dr. Hand's gang, they had his sailboat and his son Billy, he would always have a crowd out. His boat was larger than mine and they had a little cabin on it. My sailboat was a Comet and that was a fast boat at that time. It's still around. That boat, though, would sail circles around the larger boats, which they couldn't stand that. We would play out there and sail all around and go down as far as I guess beyond almost down to Northwest Creek in that area. That was a long way down as far as just on a day sail. We'd go down that way though and fish a little bit from the boat. We would come back and quite often we would tie up at Dr. Hand's club right next to the bridge at Johnson Street and stop there. I'm trying to think who it was now that tipped my boat over. I prided myself on never having capsized, and I said it to the wrong person. I'm trying to think who he was cause I'd like

to have him remembered in infamy. He climbed down on my sailboat while it was tied at the dock down there at Dr. Hand's and climbed up the mast high enough and then leaned way out and he capsized my sailboat right at the dock. Then that meant I had to spend all day trying to bail the thing out and get it out. It had my little outboard motor in it too, which really irked me quite a bit. I can't remember the name now.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, let's change directions a little bit and talk about your father. Now, I remember your dad very well. He was a prominent physician in New Bern. He and my father were contemporaries and good friends. What do you remember about your daddy's life as a physician?

Mr. Latham: Extremely busy. He was on call 24 hours a day 7 days a week. He made house calls. We had a telephone and the number started out I think 720. That was our home number, and the office number was 780. You'd pick up the phone and the operator said, "Number please", and you gave your number. Whenever the kids would want to call their friends, if daddy was home, he would say, "Get off that phone. That's a business phone", and we wouldn't be allowed but just a minute or two on the phone. We would be told, "Go over there if you want to talk to 'em!" Then as I came on from about 4 or 5 years old when we moved into the home that my mother still lives in on National Avenue, he had a small office built into the house. So when people would come at any hour after his regular office hours were over, he would direct them into this little office and he'd go in and see them

and tend to their needs. Then he would see them again perhaps at home or at his office down on Pollock Street. He had an office there. I can take you back further there. When he first came to New Bern, he actually had an office in Bridgeton in the old Hyman building over there, which is still standing in Bridgeton. Then he moved over to the Elk's Temple. Then he had an office in an old home, Miss Nina Basnight's home. She had an apartment in the back.

Dr. Patterson: This was right across from the Athens Theater.

Mr. Latham: Right across from the Athens Theater. He had an office on the second floor. He had the entire second floor all fixed up. He had a laboratory up in the front part and he had a waiting room and a bathroom. In the front he had a regular office type room and then examination in the back. At that point, he had this tremendous x-ray machine. I always remember that. I learned to operate that early and had my pictures taken. The thing was about that, all you did was stand behind a lead glass type shield and the patient or the person getting x-rayed would be out in front. The big x-ray tube was right out in the open and glowing and ultra violet and x-rays escaping everywhere. I can remember when they turned that thing on, my hair literally stood on end from the static electricity from that thing going. I was impressed with it but I didn't like to stay around that, and that was a good thing I'm sure.

Dr. Patterson: It was a good thing.

Mr. Latham: I always wonder if that wasn't one of the things that cut his life short, was x-ray. Cause he taught x-ray while he

was up at St. Luke's Hospital to the nurses and all those folks through there for years. Later on after his death, I found hundreds of his x-ray film, many that had the watch which I had inherited, there the watch was. The hand and the watch was there while he was holding someone setting a bone underneath the x-ray or actually holding steady while they were doing it. What is it when you use it without a film, it's called a...

Dr. Patterson: Fluoroscope.

Mr. Latham: Fluoroscope.

Dr. Patterson: He was not wearing protective gloves then.

Mr. Latham: He was not wearing lead gloves, no. And so, I always wonder if that didn't help destroy his kidneys. Finally, he died of Bright's.

Dr. Patterson: Did he get a lot of night calls?

Mr. Latham: He got night calls. He certainly did. He was up at all hours. He might get a call at midnight and he would go. If it was two o'clock in the morning, he would go. He was also an obstetrician. He was general practice/obstetrician. Finally, he gave up being an obstetrician as far as delivering babies. It was just too much. Then he sort of specialized in diagnosing and psychosomatic medicine. I think he called it psychosomatic medicine. During the thirties, he began writing quite a few essays and poems during the slack days in the middle of the day. They all seemed to wait til night to when he was home and they would call him. That was during the Depression period and he had time on his hands then. He had his

typewriter and he learned to type. He described some of the individuals. If you were from that period, you can probably recognize those persons he would write poems about. About when they would come up to see him up the stairs, if it was a slow, bump, bump, bump, that the individual was down in depression, or if she came bouncing up the stairway, she was on a high.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, during the Depression, how did folks pay your dad for the services?

Mr. Latham: Meagerly. I can remember my mother saying that she was expected to feed the family on twenty dollars a week, and that was five of us. Six actually. There was six of us eventually. It was a difficult time, so she more or less ran the tabs over at Hawkin's store which was a little store in Riverside across on North Pasteur Street across from the Riverside Elementary School. But they would come in, and quietly, either at the office, daddy would come in from the office and maybe he'd have a ham or maybe it was a little charred keg with bootleg liquor in it which would be kept in the basement. They would pay off in kind. It was a barter. Services for something; like, corn or all the things which you could survive on and the country meats. Literally, a lot of his patients were from out in the country. Early on I can remember going with him on Sundays and go out to see various people as far as the Street's Ferry area. We'd go out on these farm places. I would stay outside while he would go in to see the patients. I'd usually play around the farm yard at that time. Then we might go over toward Vanceboro and we'd go across on the Street's

Ferry. They would drive up on the ferry which was sort of a little flat barge with a little edging on the side, for the wire. It was on a cable, and the engine from one side to the other could pull you from one side to the other. They would re-hook it from one side and then push it across and away you'd go over toward Vanceboro. That's out where Weyerhauser mill is now. But I went all over the county with him seeing people.

Dr. Patterson: Was the Depression a bad time? Would you'd say it was a bad time for your family and for the people in New Bern?

Mr. Latham: It was a bad time. There were a lot of hungry people around. They didn't have the soup kitchens and things that you do today. Daddy knew most of the people who had children who were having a hard time getting three meals. Supper was usually our big meal of the day because we were at school. We would have boys or girls in from those families, so they would come eat supper with us. I won't mention names of these individuals cause I'd rather have them tell about that, but there are people who have been in New Bern, are in New Bern, and I could tell it was much harder for them. I never had any of them living at the house, but up until then, they ate at our table.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, when we started talking about your childhood again, I interrupted the chronology of your life. When you came back to New Bern and were discharged from the service, what did you do then?

Mr. Latham: After that party, December 31, 1945, the next day I proceeded on down to Camp LeJeune and reported in according to my

orders. The train bringing the rest of the troops had not arrived yet. So, I checked in and was ahead of the game as it were and I was assigned to a group that was ready for discharge. I stayed at LeJeune, Tent City area there, for approximately a week and a half. I was processed and I came home. I was so eager to get back to New Bern that I left my overcoat right there. This was, say, in January. I came back home and went down to my daddy's office on Pollock Street. I had my "ruptured bunny" pinned on me. This was a little badge that you got for having served and were now discharged and gave you permission to wear your uniform until you got home. I came in and he put things down and told his secretary there to hold all of his appointments for an hour. He took me down to Hill's clothing store over on Middle Street which was right around the corner from his office. We went in and purchased me the first suit, a new suit, which had to be altered cause there were none that fit me in there. I always remembered that it had baggy pants, but I had a new suit! So I got that suit, and he says, "Okay, now you can go back out and see your mama." He took me on out. We went on back out, and, we'll say, we broke for lunch and went out for lunch there. From there, I had a malaria problem that I contracted on Guadalcanal. I believe it's a falciprium type malaria, which was quite severe. It took me several years to get over the malaria attacks. That was one of the major things I went through. My father, he had a new experimental drug that has since become standard for treatment of malaria, and I took it. First of all, I took quinine during that first four months. I didn't go

back to school immediately, that quarter, I did a little later. I went back to North Carolina State in the March quarter when I was having quite a bit of problems with malaria. Then in the summer by the time I got home, I was having real problems. So he put me on the quinine and what is now called 'chloroquin'. At that point it only had an experimental serial number. He gave me that and it helped. Later I took it again. I was still taking the quinine. I believe it was your father, I believe he was still living at that time, and I was by now dating down on the New Street area, that's where my future wife was staying with her half sister, Florabelle Day Tolson, and I met him out there and he was talking to me asking me how I was getting along. He had heard I had malaria. He asked me a question, he says, "Have you tried arsenic yet?" It put me back cause I didn't have any thought of taking arsenic. But that was apparently one of the treatments that they had. In controlled doses, they had used arsenic for treating malaria. I said, "No." (laughter) That was a period of time that I would have to say stuck in my mind. That was the last case and I remember your father there.

Dr. Patterson: Did you try it?

Mr. Latham: No!, I did not try it. (laughter) I had been in enough chemistry that arsenic, to me, was something to avoid. Later, I went on back to State. That summer I stayed out. That was the summer of '46. I went back to State again in the fall. I went through that. By now I was a sophomore there. I went on another year there. Then my father became ill with the Bright's disease and died during the

fall of, actually it was in December of '47.

Dr. Patterson: In Richmond.

Mr. Latham: He died right here in St. Luke's Hospital, but he had been Richmond to the hospital up there.

Dr. Patterson: The Medical College of Virginia.

Mr. Latham: Yeah. I went up there to see him from college, from the University then by now. I had transferred over to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Because of all of these problems my father had, I was transferred out of chemical engineering over into chemistry and into pre-med. I was trying to find a salt that would split and could be used for a person with kidney failure. I remember driving up to Richmond. My future wife went with me. We went over there and at that time we were driving an old 1942 Buick. We drove over to Richmond and I saw him and he was really down. They had him sedated with morphine and all kinds of things. He was almost comatose when I saw him there. It came to a point where I was able to communicate with him and he asked me to shave him. I took a razor and actually shaved him in the bed. Every little time it would sort of tug because it had been a couple of days since they had shaved him, it was the weekend, and he would sort of jump at every tug. I didn't want to hurt him as it were. But I did shave him. After that, he came back to New Bern and spent his last days. Well, actually, when he came back, he forced himself up. He took himself off the drugs and then he said, "I want to go home." (I'm getting emotional) Anyway, we went over to Belhaven and he said goodbye to his mother and his father

and said this is the last time I'll see you. Then I drove him back over here to New Bern and at that point we drove in. He was reminiscing all the way back. (pause)

Dr. Patterson: Fred, this is a very difficult thing for you to be talking about, so let's just go ahead. After your father died, you went back to Chapel Hill?

Mr. Latham: Yes, I went back to Chapel Hill. Then in the following June of 1948, I was married to my wife, Edna Muriel Day, Captain John Jarris Day's daughter. She was half sister to Florabelle Day Tolson who was Genevieve Tolson Dunn's mother. Then I went back. At one time I was both at State and at Carolina. I was enrolled at both places. I wanted to go on over to Carolina and attempt medicine, so I transferred over there. I finished the pre-medical course over at the University, but the competition at that time was just too much for me and I couldn't get into med school. I think there were forty-five berths, as it were, openings at the University medical school. There were 1,800 applicants. My grades would not allow me to compete with that type of competition, so I went ahead and changed my major from pre-med to chemistry and completed and graduated from the University over there. Then I came back down to New Bern. For a period of time I moved down to Oriental. My wife's old home was empty at that time and we went down there until I was able to find employment. I finished my curriculum in December of 1950. So from there until the next October, I was unemployed and I was down in the Oriental area enjoying finding out about life on the river again. I also came back up to New Bern.

I was in between the two towns then. In October of 1951 I got a job in the laboratory in the Overhaul and Repair Department at Cherry Point. I spent the next thirty-two years there. When I say there, I travelled all over the country for them and literally, later on, I was travelling all over the world. I was with specialty. I took my chemistry down there to Cherry Point. The government had numerous courses. They had short courses. If there was one particular thing that they needed, you'd be able to do if they would send you off to a college for six weeks or so to get a short course in something. I went to Boston College there up with the Jesuits and I learned to operate spectrographs, infra-red spectrophotometry and came back and set that up down here at Cherry Point. At that point I was titled an Analytical Chemist. Then I started getting into the specification writing and process development and how to repair things. I specialized in adhesives and polymers and rubber, manufacturing rubber goods. I helped set up the procedures for manufacture of rubber goods and plastics and advanced composites later on down at Cherry Point. I guess I wrote hundreds of specifications. Then somewhere in about 1956, I was working with the groups out of Philadelphia, the research labs up there. They decided to change my title down there to more clearly describe my job. They changed my title from Analytical Chemist to Materials Engineer. So from that point on, I was doing more telling how to do things rather than doing and working specification repair procedures for aircraft work. First, we went in and introduced electrical potting (encapsulation). This is the encapsulating of the electrical

connectors on aircraft. I did a lot of that. I worked out at St. Louis with the McDonald Douglas Aircraft Company. Then I came back and I did manufacture repairs for Honeycomb structure the aircraft. Then in 1969, we had a problem during the Viet Nam war. I had to go over to Naples, Italy to help set up an Italian repair area over there to remove this special polyurethane potting compound which had gone from solid state to liquid state in all the aircraft. It had to be removed because it was short circuiting the aircraft all over Viet Nam and all over the world. I worked out a process to remove that. At that time I got an award for the first million dollar savings by process at Cherry Point. Then I came back from that area. Later in that period of time, I took over the Metallurgy Branch. I went from polymers to metallurgy. I had been in chemistry and I went into the polymers and eventually, I went and took over the metallurgy area wh0ich also had to investigate the crashes and all the problems and metal failures in the aircraft from all over the world. That's where I was when I retired. One of the reasons I retired, it got close to me. I had to go out to the crash sites. I went out to California to Joshua Tree National Monument out there where they had lost a CH-46 that had crashed out there. I had to go in and take all the parts and try to figure out what caused the crash. That was one. Then I had another one that was out in Arizona where an aircraft had actually been doing close air support type practice and he had dived down and he had attempted to pull out and couldn't, so he smashed into the ground. I had the entire hangar down at Cherry Point, or one of the hangars,

with all of the bits and pieces of the aircraft down there. We dug down til we found what caused that crash, and would you believe it was a nickel? A nickel had fallen down and caught into the yoke of the control stick and had bent. So, that was the last year. I'd had enough then.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, what year did you retire?

Mr. Latham: I retired in June of 1984.

Dr. Patterson; When did you move from Oriental to New Bern?

Mr. Latham: I moved to New Bern from Oriental in August of 1964. At that point, we were having school problems in Pamlico County and I came on up here with my family.

Dr. Patterson: Now, let me just focus this for a minute, this is what I was going to ask you next. We're winding down, but before we finish this interview, I'd like to hear what you have to say about race relations in New Bern. I'd like for you to look back to your childhood days, to the way it was then, and then to the sixties when the Civil Rights Act came through and when Martin Luther King was killed.

Mr. Latham: All right. Starting right there in Riverside when I was on National Avenue, at that time it was 45 National Avenue, it's now 1301 National Avenue, they renumbered all the streets, C Street ran perpendicular to National Avenue right back to the railroad tracks. There were one block back, which is now I believe E Street runs off of C between there and B Street, there was a row of little colored row houses, small cabins almost. They are still there. They've been

renovated, but they're still there. There was one behind, it would have a C Street number we'll say, and it has just been torn down for being a drug house back in there within the last year. But that house, there was a colored family named Hargett and they had numerous children. They had one son named George Hargett and he was one of my friends. We played and intermingled up and down that street. We didn't have any barriers at all right there when I was very young. They were special. They were in our immediate neighborhood. They would come up to the house, and back and forth, we played together. Then I came of age to expand from my immediate neighborhood to the little neighborhood gangs. At this point I began to learn about the segregation bit. Then as you came up, there was some animosity. Not from our little group that was, we'll say on C Street, down that way on E Street, but those from across the way in Duffyfield or that area, an area we were not allowed to go over. The railroad track was the demarcation line. There was a turf battle usually between boys of approximately the same age of both blacks and whites. Each one wanting to have his turf a little further over into the others turf, so you'd have a few problems. There was always the racial epitaphs that were put out for both sides. You just did not play with those people. You just didn't associate with them. Your group, as I mentioned earlier, the Pokamo, that was our turf area down there all the way up to the railroad tracks. Some of the black kids at one time had made an effort to come down. They came down ten or twelve strong and they were gonna go and use the Pokamo beach. They were gonna come

into our area and they were going swimming. Well, the word got out that they were down there. So, the little gangs gathered and the next thing you know there was, I don't remember any fisticuffs, nothing that close. They started running when they saw a group that's as large or larger than their group coming down there. They grabbed their clothes and they went down the shore up towards from the Pokamo over toward the railroad tracks. As they got over to the streets, all the streets were covered with oyster shells, the oyster shells being used to pave the streets, then this was ammunition to throw. So both sides started throwing missiles, rocks they could find, but mostly oyster shells and they were slinging them. They were coming back both ways. One boy that I remember, and I believe his name was Roy Floyd, he received a whack right across the ear with an oyster shell which cut his ear and folded it over. With this, blood had been spilt and so the whole group started, more or less, in a skirmish run against the black kids who then...

Dr. Patterson: Was this boy black or white?

Mr. Latham: He was white. He'd lived on Avenue B across from the Riverside Elementary School. At that point, that was the signal blood had been drawn and so all these groups went rushing and screaming like wild Russian bolsheviks across the way. The black kids went in retreat and ran back across the tracks cross Dunn Street, down Dunn Street and on back over there and they didn't ever come back. At that point, I had my bicycle down there and I took Roy, I took the Floyd boy, and I peddled him downtown to Middle and Broad Streets. Dr.

Hollister's office was down here. I took Roy into the doctor's office and they saw what was happening. He immediately took him in the back and proceeded to sew Roy's ear back on. That was one of the major problems that we had as a group.

Dr. Patterson: So, there were sort of gang battles.

Mr. Latham: They were gang battles. Actually, turf battles. Now I was marked cause I was recognized as being in this one group, and the group across the railroad track over by Greenwood Cemetery and that crowd in that area were watching for me going to school or what have you. They would try to catch me by myself, that group. I had one day that I had an air rifle. I used to go over to the "Coal Shutes" and shoot at the little sparrows. There were millions of little sparrows in the Coal Shute and the water tower there. One day I was walking down towards the cemetery on the east side of George Street and all of a sudden here comes-it looked like the same group of ten or twelve black boys coming across the field. They spotted me by myself. But I had my air rifle. They were running and a screaming and a coming and a throwing rocks, and I turned my air rifle and I started popping just as fast as I could shoot. I was shooting them with my air rifle and then they turned around and went back. When I went back into Riverside, I didn't go down that street for a while. Later, they caught me. I had been around in an evening, and I knew they were after me, and they caught me when I'd left Wyatt Jones home on Griffin Street, (North Craven). I started back down and was looking from Sunshine filling station, which the building is still there on the corner of

Dunn and North Craven. When I got there I was looking down to the left to the street light down and I couldn't see anybody, and I looked north on North Craven and I didn't see anybody. There was this big old tobacco warehouse building right there on the left almost up to the street. I walked into the shadow of these big trees, huge trees. They're gone now, but they were close to three feet in diameter at that point. I walked down there, and as I got at that point, three of them came out. They were like in Indian file, one behind the other, and they grabbed me. These were colored boys, and they had caught me. They came up. One of them had a knife and he says, "You say one word and we're gonna cut your throat. We're gonna beat you up." So, I didn't say a word and they beat me up. They beat me senseless and left me lying there on the ground. I came to and I got up and I went home and I didn't say a word. I didn't speak of that for years. I didn't say a word. Cause I knew I was being paid back for what I had done for being both in the gang that had run them off from the river shore, plus, I was also the one who had had that air rifle and had prevented them from beating me up at that point. So now they had their revenge and everything was all right from then on.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, when you moved back to New Bern from Oriental in 1964, you were right in the midst of the school integration situation. What was it like in New Bern during that time?

Mr. Latham: Well, I came back and of course I was looking for a home. I had given up down in the county. I had attempted to keep a neighborhood school open and I had come up here. I ran around with

Deck Ward, with Alfred and asked him, I said this is the situation, "They want to close my school down and consolidate it into the center of the county, and I don't want them to do that." He says, "Well, it's gonna happen regardless cause the state is doing it." I said, "This is my strategy." So, we sat back down there and I tell him everything I was gonna do to try to stop that county school board from doing what they were doing. He says, and you do that, and this is what they'll do, and went back and forth. We went through it for about an hour, hour and a half. When we finally got through, I knew that we were "whupped," the war was "whupped." But I still had some battles I won down there before it closed up; like, I kept the Oriental School opened for that year. We hired a lawyer, John Wilkinson, over in Washington. We didn't get one from New Bern or one from Pamlico. We went out of the county. We got one over there and actually made all of the school board, who were right during the middle of their busiest time with bringing in tobacco and field crops, forced them back into session by court order to answer to why they were gonna close that school up and to allow it to stay open. And they had to do it, for that year anyway. So after that year, we decided, well okay. We knew it was coming, that they were gonna close the school down. We decided to come on up here. We came up here, and the day we came up here, the day New Bern City Schools opened. By then I had talked with Bardie and Mary about looking for a house. I was looking over in the Grantham's area and I liked it over in there. Then Mary says, "Why don't you try my house down on Johnson Street? You might like

that." Says, "Come on up. You can rent for a while and see what you think of it." I said, "Okay." So, down we went to Oriental, got the moving vans, and we moved from Oriental and we moved up to 309 Johnson Street and we've been here ever since. But at that time, I remember they were trying to do the integration out at the high school. My wife had joined the city schools as a primary teacher. She taught down here at Central Elementary Schools. During that period of time, to come on up, Martin Luther King was doing his very active role to overcome the segregation and desegregate. Then, the people in town were very actively watching what was happening with the desegregation of the schools. My personal thoughts at that time, even in Oriental and also for all the schools, was to instead of starting at bringing all the children that were still in the segregated schools, was to start in the first grade and take an entire class and just bring them in at first grade level. If you were in the second grade, you continued right on through. That system would just be phased out as it occurred. But nobody listened to that. They had to keep it up and I think it's made twenty-five years of problems because they didn't do that. In other words, bring the kids in where there was no impression or animosity. Say, when I came up and started, I mingled with the black kids and played right on through until I was in my teen years.

Dr. Patterson: What sort of problems occurred here at that time?

Mr. Latham: I don't really remember.

Dr. Patterson: Was there a riot out at the school?

Mr. Latham: There was a riot out at the school, but this was

later. Before that, I remember one more riot that occurred at the death of Martin Luther King. My son then was out at the high school. His school friends used to come and they had a club down in my basement and they called it their "pad." In other words, they were into the long hair bit and the surf boards and things of this nature. The night of Martin Luther King's death, that day or the next day, the blacks, actually their protest march started up from the Five Points area and was moving up Broad Street. Then it finally got very rowdy and they started breaking windows and breaking automobile windshields and things of that nature coming on up here. I kept all these kids in the house. We could hear the noise coming. I called and found out what was going on. We stayed in the house where we could hear the noise of all these people coming up. They came all the way up to the courthouse. Their protest was very violent coming down there. Finally, as they quieted down and the police had them moving back towards their home area, then I let these kids go back home. I said, "You go right straight home." That was the situation. Then there was one other time where they had apparently an extreme right, Klu Klux Klan situation where they bombed the mortuary.

Dr. Patterson: Oscar's Mortuary.

Mr. Latham: Oscar's Mortuary got bombed. There was a general meeting of the blacks down in the churches down here. They were trying to get people together. Someone came down and put dynamite in one of the automobiles right by, I think that car was right on Metcalf Street right at Johnson, very close there. They set that dynamite

charge off. Someone set it off, no one in the car, but they set the dynamite charge off and it shook the windows in this house. I recognized what it was, the type of explosion. I'm familiar with explosives. Finally, we found out what had happened. The individual who had perpetrated the crime was eventually caught over in the Vanceboro area. He was one who made his living selling cheap insurance to the blacks on a short term, like term insurance. I just couldn't understand it, his hate like that literally for the people who were responsible for his livelihood.

Dr. Patterson: So, this was a white man blowing up a black man's car.

Mr. Latham: Right. They were having church meetings. I think it was at the AME Zion church down there, and it might have been at the Episcopal church. It was down in that area.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, when your daughter was in high school and your wife was teaching at Central School, there was trouble then too.

Mr. Latham: Correct. I was at work at Cherry Point lab and I got word through our grapevine that there was a riot at the high school. I immediately called the school, my wife who was at school. I called the office and had her come to the phone and I told her that I'd heard that there was a riot out there at the high school and asked where was my daughter, Nancy? She said she hadn't heard about it. Then she asked permission to go out to the high school and have someone take her class for that period. They immediately granted her permission to drive out there to pick up her daughter. When she got out there,

first she saw a man taking an ax away from someone, some young black fellow, and that was her first impressions, "Oh my lord, where's my daughter?!" She went and she kept asking questions and asking questions and she couldn't find her daughter. She found that they had been sent around, but they didn't know where anybody was. It was just chaotic for a period of time. She finally came back and tried to call around to see where she was. Eventually, my daughter, we had pre-primed her what to do in case of any emergency there or any strife, to go over to her uncle's home which was just over on Rhem Avenue from the high school, and she had immediately left the campus. When things started getting out of control, she went over there and that's where she was. There were so many people calling on the telephone that the lines were just blocked. And that was it.

Dr. Patterson: Was there a full fledged riot at the high school?

Mr. Latham: It seemed to me from the descriptions I got, of course it was all second hand, third hand, there was a Confederate flag waved in there. There were both blacks and whites in the audience there. It was apparently not a formal gathering as far as the teachers were concerned. Apparently the students had decided they were gonna have this meeting. It turned out that the uninvited guests in this case were the black students cause the white students actually decided they were going to have things like they used to be. They were gonna have their own dances and their own proms and things like that instead of having them mixed. The other side was gonna have theirs. They made their impression on it and they were gonna stand on what had happened

and they were gonna have more. So, between the two of them there was a situation where someone waved the flag and someone was trying to take care of things up on the stage to mediate or to control what was going on, and the next thing you know things were flying and people were actually up on the stage. There were blacks and whites whacking and then hitting each other. First it seemed like it was just fisticuffs. Then they were up on the stage. Someone had a knife or something up there, but I don't know of anyone getting cut.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, this is a good place to stop. Your story is great. It's a remarkable story of growing up in New Bern, and your life has been remarkable. You've done great things. What you have told me is gonna be of tremendous help to this program. And let me say at the end of this as I said at the beginning, that what you're doing with your photography to help us with these interviews and the things we're doing is just tremendously important. So, I thank you and I thank you for the Memories of New Bern program. I'm gonna cut this off now and tell you again how much we appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW