

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

CHARLES H. HALL

INTERVIEW 1501

This tape was made for the Memories of New Bern Committee and consist of an interview with Charles H. Hall of New Bern conducted in New Bern on February 25, 1992 for the Transportation Task Force. This tape is assigned number 1501, and the interview was conducted by Bill Edwards, interviewer number 1500.

Mr. Hall: I became associated with James West in the late Twenties. He came down here in 1925 and started the bus line. He started with three buses running from Goldsboro to Morehead, and every year or so he'd add more routes to it; Washington to Wilmington, Goldsboro to Rocky Mount, and took in seventeen eastern North Carolina counties down here up to and through late Thirties. My first association with James West was as a skipper of his boat in the late Twenties. I kept his boat for him and whenever he'd go out I would go as first mate or what have you.

Mr. Edwards: Keep that down at Barbour's?

Mr. Hall: No. It was kept at the foot of what used to be George Street at the river where the old bridge used to go across before Tryon Palace showed up. In the late Thirties Jim West's boat had grown to a fifty-four foot ACF yacht. Beautiful piece of equipment. By that time I had started working for the bus line, I started with him in 1930. In the late Thirties, I had orders to get the boat ready, and I did, and who should come aboard but what looked like to me all the high brass of the U.S. Marine Corps. This was long before Cherry Point, before World War II, not long either, but late Thirties. We started down the Neuse river. Of course, I had to handle the boat while they

did the talking. Most of the talking was done in the wheel house so I heard it. I listened with interest. They explored all possibilities, had every chart of eastern North Carolina you've ever heard of looking a site for the Marine Corps Air Station.

Mr. Edwards: Back that far?

Mr. Hall: Yes sir. We cruised a full day. You may not know it, but the area around Arapahoe was given serious consideration. What stopped it, was no easy access to a port. As you know the geography as good as I do, the rivers cut you off. The site of Cherry Point was finally selected, and I'll never forget if I live another eighty years why Cherry Point was selected. I heard it with my own ears from the Marine Corps brass. Their guideline was seeking the most northern point they could get on the Atlantic Coast that was ice free. That was Cherry Point. If you go up even as far as Elizabeth City, you are often ice bound. You can see now the reasons for Cherry Point.

There are so many. One is access to a deep water port of Morehead City, good highways. When World War II started it looked like North Carolina turned into an armed camp, out posts everywhere, and the bus line grew with them. The bus line, to put it frankly, had business in spite of itself during that time. We grew from thirteen buses, Bill, in three years to 125, and if you think that's done without some headaches you try it some time. Of course, after the war, we had to face the fact of war time experiences, having to be paid off in a reduced service situation of less income than during the high income years.

That made it rough. It was all so interesting to me, and I was

fortunate, Bill, in realizing the need. Shoot Hall didn't know a lot, and he knew it. So, he surrounded himself with able people. We had four departments in the company, and I put a competent man in charge of each department; maintenance, driver's operations, traffic, O'Bryan, and accounting, Bob Ward. Those boys had full authority to act in those departments. We'd all get together every Monday morning in my office and go over what had been done, what needed to be done, agreed on what we had to do, and then Shoot Hall went fishing. I mean, I left them with it. If they goofed, I would get in there and help them. If they couldn't handle it, we'd find out why. But it worked!

Mr. Edwards: I don't want to interrupt your train of thought, but let me interject a question once in a while. Were you operating under reduced rates for the military then? You were talking about low revenue.

Mr. Hall: No. Lower revenue from fewer passengers, Bill. During the crisis of World War II, everything was rationed. Gasoline was rationed. Tires were rationed. The only gas tickets you could get for your car were, well, what would take care of your local driving, but if you tried to take a trip to Kinston or Goldsboro you'd run out of gas and you'd park your car. You couldn't go get groceries or do nothing. So, the bus line had the business. Once rationing was over, cars began to come back. As people could transport themselves, public transportation went down.

It was that simple. But going through all of that, and with these capable people that I had to help me, it was an enjoyable experience

all the way through to my retirement. Now, I'll let O'Bryan brief you on his part of being top dog, particular after the sale of the bus line. It wasn't as easy for him by far as it was for me.

Mr. Edwards: Did you have to deal with Unions?

Mr. Hall: We were organized in 1952. I had a flat twenty-four years of talking with Unions. It was not a pleasant experience but I learned how to live with it. Many of these big Union people would come in. The bus line was big business then to them. They all had a policy, and in my Shoot Hall way I was able to learn early on, that the first thing they'd try to do is make you mad and then they had you. But, they had a hard time with me! There were so many things happened during that period in addition to what I've handed you here on these clippings. We had a lot of years experimenting with steam for buses. (picture) That is a Lincoln touring car that we converted to steam. It was originally gasoline powered. You notice in one of these pictures you can see the boiler under the hood. The engine, Bill, was in the rear axle, steam engine. The radiator on the car was the condenser. We built steam in this boiler. We had an oil fired automatic furnace under it just like in your home, fully automatic.

I'd get in that thing stone cold on a cold morning and in four minutes I'd have 600 pounds of super heated steam. All appearances, since the engine exhaust in the top of the radiator, the radiator condense steam back to water and by gravity in what was the gas tank on that Lincoln, thirty gallons believe it or not, was the water tank, not the gas tank. I drove it for years. It was an experience I'll never

forget. The brute power of 600 pounds of steam was something to handle.

Several experiences with it stick to my mind. One is, I went down one afternoon for a newspaper. At that time we parked head-in to the curbs. When I came out I wasn't even thinking about steam, so I just got in and pushed the throttle up a little. It was on the steering wheel. The clutch pedal in the Lincoln had been converted to a valve action, so if you push the clutch pedal down it put the valves in reverse action and she's supposed to back up. Well, I just cracked the throttle.

She was sitting there not making a sound, 600 pounds of steam, burners cut off. I forgot to push the clutch pedal down which reverses it.

There that thing was, Bill, against about a ten inch high curb, head-in, and that engine in the back building up torque, you know how steam is, you're a railroad man, head-in to the curb she couldn't go forward, and in about ten seconds I heard something kind of crack and groan. I looked out over that long hood and you won't believe it, but that engine in the rear axle was lifting the front wheels off the ground. She was coming right slow up in the air. Scared me half to death! I believe it would of kept on if I'd of blocked it and gone on and turned over backwards. You've heard of tractors flipping over?

Of course they got rear wheels that high. Well, that thing was coming right over like that. One other thing then we'll get away from that.

With it completely silent; no steam exhaust, you see, it condensed, and ran to the rear, there was no noise like your old steam engines.

I pulled up to a Gulf station near Five Points one day. He couldn't tell it was steam, and I didn't tell him. I pulled up to the pump,

and the old man was sitting out there in a chair. I said, "Cap'n, fill her up for me." He looked at that big thirty gallon tank under the back and he said, "Man, I got it made today." He got there and grabbed the gas hose and I said, "No, whoa, whoa, don't put gasoline in that tank, fill it with water. I burn water!" He said, "Tell me again?". I told him again. I stood beside him, Bill, while he was squirting water in the gas tank, and I'm not going to use the words he did but they were vile! He topped it off with saying, "I've seen everything!" I never told him. He put the cap on it, I got in, cracked the throttle, she, shh, shh, shh, shh, shh, shhh. That poor man died knowing he put water in somebody's gas tank. (Laughter) There's one other thing. Out at the bus garage on George Street, a story about that garage. You may know from your local experience, that was a large brick building before the bus line bought it, built by the Government in the late Thirties. During that terrible drought we had in the mid-continent in the early Thirties when all the farmers had to leave and the farms dried up, the Government shipped thousands of western steers, these long horns, over here to eastern North Carolina and turned them loose in the swamps so they could live and eat. The Government followed them by building this cannery on George Street which was the bus garage. We later bought the cannery and made a bus garage. That garage was built to can beef that had to be sent over here to keep it from dying from the drought in the Midwest in the early Thirties.

This particular picture was a machine that our boys built in the New Bern garage to take the burnt oil out of buses that we were giving

away, and for years and years we heated the garage with the burnt cylinder oil. That's all it took right there. A little tank with a float in it to keep the oil level here from an underground tank.

This was a preheater, it had a little nozzle it squirted in the steam boiler that heated the bus garage. Back then, Bill, you did more things maybe than you do now to keep going, you know what I mean. From 1946 to the mid-Fifties, I owned a flying machine and private flying and enjoyed every minute of it. I'd put the bus number on top of every bus we had so from the air I could identify them.

Mr. Edwards: You weren't spying on them, were you?

Mr. Hall: No, no. But one story comes to mind about that. I was flying from Washington to Norfolk one day and one of our buses was North bound. We just had a cold front that was blowing a gale from the Northeast. My airplane wasn't good for more than about 120 indicated air speed. I saw the bus on schedule wiggling along up the road, watching him to see if he was obeying the stops traffic rules.

Well, I had a strong head Northeast wind. My air speed was indicating 110. My ground speed wasn't more than forty because of the head wind.

The bus was going right off and leaving me with me going in the same direction. Next day that driver was in the New Bern bus station. I said, "Vance, I was following you yesterday morning between Washington and Norfolk", I didn't tell him I was flying, I just said I was following him, I said, "and my speedometer was showing 110 miles an hour and you were running right away from me." That driver looked me right straight in the face and he says, "Mr. Hall, it might of been

showing 110 but if it was. your speedometer was wrong!" He told me off right quick! Another story and we'll get to facts. I was sitting in the office one morning, and a bus came in from Wilmington. A little old lady jumped off and asked somebody where the main office was, and they pointed at me, and here she came. Came up my steps holding up that skirt you know, and she'd jerk it in there, and my door is always open, and she walked right in. She said, "I want to tell you I'm trying to get from Wilmington to Norfolk. Now, I've ridden with that driver from Wilmington to New Bern, this is as far as I go with him!" I said, "well, would you mind telling me why, what's wrong with the driver?"

She said, "Sure I'll tell you!" She said, "A half a dozen times from Jacksonville and Maysville into New Bern, that driver would sit right up there at highway speed and flap his arms just like he wanted to fly! You got a crazy bus driver on that bus and I'm not going to leave this town with that driver!" Well, the driver was out there checking his tires and I called the dispatcher and got him in. I told him what she had said. He looked me in the face, he said, "You know what day of the week it is?" and I said, "Sure, it's Friday." He said, "Well, do you know what I do every Friday when I come in here?" I said, "Yeah, you bring us country produce from along the road, eggs in particular."

He said, "Well, I've learn how to keep from stopping to every farm house to get fresh eggs. If I see them I just act like a chicken. If they got eggs, they wave me down and I get the eggs!" (Laughter)

The old lady heard that. She even smiled at me. She walked out with the driver and went on with him to Norfolk.

Mr. Edwards: That's the kind of stories we like to have on here.

Mr. Hall: Well, I didn't know which way you wanted to travel. It's been an experience I'll not forget. I was so lucky all the way. They took good care of me. I had stock in the Company, made some good investments, Bill, when I was earning. It's taking good care of me now.

Mr. Edwards: Great. Tell us about some of your experiences with the Marine Corps. I know everything didn't go absolutely smooth when you were hauling Marines.

Mr. Hall: No, no. When Camp LeJeune was first started they sent a Colonel in there named Brewster. He was early on, one of the first aboard. They were still digging it out of the boondocks. I had to deal with a lot of these early on people, you know, to get started.

He was worried about a lot of things. They were doing with nothing too, like everybody else, and the Colonel got right friendly with me.

On one of my visits with him one day down there he said, "Shoot, we're going to get along pretty good. When I started in the Marine Corps there were all white boys. We've had black boys come in and they're good Marines, but now they have saddled me with the women!" (Laughter)

They had just started bringing in women into the Marine Corps. Another experience during the war; we had a German Prison Camp out at Glen Burnie.

Mr. Edwards: I remember that.

Mr. Hall: Every morning we had to send a bus out there, pick up a load of prisoners, take them to a particular farm, they of course

were guarded, they'd work all day on the farm, and we'd bus them back to the camp. One of my duties was to meet with officer in charge out there and see that all the paperwork was properly handled, and there were reams of it everyday! I'd go out in the morning and sign for the prisoners. I don't know what I'd do if they took off, but I'd sign for them.

Mr. Edwards: You didn't furnish guards, did you?

Mr. Hall: No, no. In the afternoon, I'd go back and the Colonel would sign my papers that I had delivered what I carried, you know, security whatever. We'd been doing that for several months and finally that old officer, he looked me in the face he says, "You know, we're going to win this war if the paper holds out." Just what he told me.

Mr. Edward: I understand that some of those prisoners didn't want to escape. They wanted to stay right where they were.

Mr. Hall: That's right. They had it made. They really did.

Mr. Edward: There were some Italian prisoners there too, weren't there?

Mr. Hall: I don't recall that.

Mr. Edward: I was thinking I had heard that there were. Some of them worked down at A. C. Monk Tobacco Company, too.

Mr. Hall: Yeah, yeah. One other thing that happened, and half the town here knows about this. During the life of the Army base at Camp Davis and Holly Ridge, they were trained to use and to operate barrage balloons. They were captive balloons, Bill, non-ridged type on steel cables. They would winch them up and winch them down. The

theory was, you put enough of them around a critical area you couldn't bomb it, things couldn't get in low enough to hit nothing. Well, for some reason a lot of those balloons would break loose at the camp.

I never heard why, but it wasn't uncommon to see an average of one a month coming over New Bern.

Mr. Edward: I never heard that, of course, I wasn't here then.

Mr. Hall: The camp was Southwest of here, so the prevailing wind would carry them in this direction. It was rather spooky to see a balloon coming along its cable dragging the ground and every time it would cross a power line, you'd can guess what happened with one end of that cable on the ground and the other end dragging on 22,000 volts.

It looked like the town was beginning to burn up. There was so many attempts, locally, to try to stop them. I recall an account in the paper, one farmer finally got hold of one cable and wrapped it around his tractor somehow and stopped one. I wouldn't have dared to try and grab one of those. It's quite an experience to see though. I don't know the size of the balloon.

Mr. Edward: Probably fifty or sixty feet long.

Mr. Hall: Yeah. It felt like a Dirigible, but it was all a gas inflated thing like the kids balloons. It was quite a sight to see those things coming.

Mr. Edward: Yeah, I'm familiar with the things. I was suppose to be transferred to Holly Ridge at one time but they changed the orders, so I never did get there. I was stationed in Louisiana. What about

the city buses? You operated the city buses for a while, didn't you?

Mr. Hall: Yeah. Kenneth Jones started it I believe. We bought him out. O'Bryan, the man that replaced me, during his early years with SeaShore, one of his responsibilities was managing the city bus line. That was quite an experience. We set the bus line up. It had no garage of its own and no maintenance as such. When a city bus needed attention we would roll it through the SeaShore garage, and it would pay for every minute of work needed and every part put on it. In other words, they paid their way without the overhead of maintenance, on such a small operation. We made money with the city bus line for a number of years, but as cost came up and patronage dropped it just didn't pay so, we had to stop. I remember so many times, and Obie too, trying to get help of one kind to another through subsidy or what have you, but none of them seemed to pay off. I remember a hearing in Raleigh before the Utilities Commission. Obie was there of course and testified. We were trying to get relief from the gross receipts tax that was on utilities. I say gross receipts, I mean that literally, Bill, it wasn't some off of your net. You took it off the top of your revenue. That was on both inter-city and intra-city operations. I told the Commission that we were operating as efficient as we felt anybody could. One of our witnesses was in the legislature at that time, Chris Barker, a New Bern native. Chris came over and testified for us before the Commission. Chris made a statement for that Commission I'll never forget. Chris looked right straight in those Judges faces, and they had six of them up there you know, they

didn't try you with one, they put the whole panel on you, and Chris said, "Gentlemen, if there's any outfit on Earth that can operate a bus line any cheaper than the way city transit is set up under SeaShore, then I want to meet them." We got what we went after, and Chris did it for us, I'm satisfied. He knew the operation. I often in later years would see Chris and we'd chat and kid and joke about what he did for us. But he came over from the legislature and testified.

Mr. Edward: He made us a good Representative.

Mr. Hall: Oh, I loved that boy, loved that boy!

Mr. Edward: I've heard two or three versions, but how about telling me your version of where "Shoot Hall" came from.

Mr. Hall: Bill, I can't. It's too personal. I'll tell you off the record sometime.

Mr. Edward: Okay. I thought for years it was "Chute", but somebody else says no it's "Shoot".

Mr. Hall: That's right. That's right. Back in the early years of busing, Bill, our first buses were flat top. You may remember them. All the baggage was on the flat top of the bus. The seats were sedan type. They went clear across the bus. There was a door for each row of seats on both sides.

Mr. Edward: It's like the old English railroad coaches.

Mr. Hall: Yes, way back. That was when I was driving in 1932 and 1933, I drove for two years. One Sunday morning one of our buses was headed South, one of these flat tops, sedans we called them. A black man waived and she stopped. He says, "Can you take me up the

road about ten miles?" The driver said, "Sure, sure, hop in." He said, "Well, got my buddy back there behind that myrtle bush, he wants to go too", he said, "Get him out here and come on, I'm running a little late." The man ran back and here came three or four of them with a casket. They had it behind the myrtle bush. The driver didn't know what to do, he'd told them to come on. So, they came out to the bus, went to back of the bus, slid the casket up on the flat top, went ten miles down the rode, slid him off, and buried him at the little church, and everybody was happy. That was in the wee days of transportation.

Then one night Shoot Hall was coming in late. Rocky Mount to New Bern was my route for two years, Bill. A fella pulled the rip chord to get off out between Dover and Cove City somewhere, I don't remember where, I was half asleep. I stopped and pulled off the side of the road and opened the door, and he walked up and stepped out. Of course, the bus was well lighted but it was dark as midnight outdoors, no lights, no towns. I was watching him. I was sitting here, and he stepped out right there, and when he stepped out, Bill, he went straight down.

I mean even his head went straight down out of sight, scared me half to death! I jumped up and looked down and he come crawling out. He wasn't hurt, but I had stopped that bus right where one of these big culverts come under the highway and dumps into the ditch. It was not marked. I pulled that door right up for him to step out and he went ten feet right straight down. He must of had some thoughts that wouldn't be very pleasant!

Mr. Edward: It's a wonder it didn't kill him. Was there water

in it?

Mr. Hall: I don't remember that.

Mr. Edward: Thank goodness he didn't drown. Could you tell us more of your memories of Mr. West?

Mr. Hall: He was a smart operator, Bill. He came from Ohio. He was raised on a farm, a little town up there named Sabina. At that time when he was a boy, and that was a great wheat country, all the thrashing was done by these tremendous steam wheat thrashing machines. You've seen pictures of them. Great big iron wheels and a big fly wheel and a big flat belt that runs to the thrasher. When he came to eastern North Carolina and started his bus line, he always kept steam in the back of his mind. That's the reason we got into steam right during the critical years of World War II. It was another way to get power and maybe more efficiently than what we were doing.

Looking through papers one day, he found an old Stanly Steamer in Boston, Massachusetts. He said, "Shoot, go up there and see if you can buy it." I said okay, if you want to play with steam, I'm with you, I'd like to mess with it too. I went to Boston, to West Newton, a suburb and found the steam car owner. It was an old Stanly touring.

I didn't think the thing would get out of Boston, but I was told to buy it. I put a string on the purchase, and I told the old man I'll buy your Stanly but you got to drive it to New Bern. The old man took me up on it, and he drove that Stanly from Boston to New Bern! I drove that same car for a couple of years. We tore it down and then converted the Lincoln I showed you in here, to steam. You're a railroad man,

you know the fascination of steam. Of course, I don't reckon you were in it, were you? You were overlapping from steam to diesel.

Mr. Edward: Somewhat. They had just bought the two diesel switchers when I came back out of service. The main line locomotives were all steam.

Mr. Hall: Bill, I got world wide interest started in the steam when people heard of it. A man from Norway was so anxious to get a steam vehicle that he did all he could to get what we were doing. He liked it because of his frigid temperatures for some reason. He said he could handle that. He could start a steam engine cause he saw all it needed to get going. Get your steam up and she'd go! You didn't have ignition troubles, but gasoline or diesel was something else up there. The outsider that impressed me was a bus salesman. He worked for the American Car and Foundry Company, and you will appreciate his point. He came down and saw what we were doing. We had a bus well along, a full size passenger bus with steam in it. This Lincoln was just a pilot car. We later built a steam engine, put it in the bus, put a big boiler in there, and this man came down and saw how close we were to getting a steam bus on the highway. He says, "I'll tell you what I'll do", and his company at that time was American Car and Foundry, they built a beautiful bus, he says, "I'll give you, I'll give you a brand new ACF bus if you'll put your steam plant in it and let me sell them for you." Well, that sounds good to me. I said, "Why are you so interested?" At that time, Bill, about half the railroads in the country were steam all slowly

converting to diesel. He said, "Do you think that I'd have any trouble at all selling a railroad man on a bus if it was steam powered?" He had it all worked out. But our steam project collapsed when Jim West died. The people that were handling his estate put the stop sign up to anymore steam experiments. So, it died with him. I finally had to sell all the old steam bus, the steam cars, just clear out and turn them into cash.

Mr. Edwards: You have any idea where they are today? In the junk?

Mr. Hall: I followed that steam car that I've showed you for years. An old man came down here and got it. He came with an open stake body truck. I said, "Cap'n, how in the world are you going to get that heavy Lincoln on that truck?" He says, "Watch me." He drove the steam car up to a filling station, put it on the grease lift up to the same height of his truck, and drove the steam car right into the back of the truck and went to Pennsylvania with it. He got sick, couldn't work on it, it just laid there and sort of went to pieces.

It changed hands three or four times. The last I heard it was in Greensboro with one of these steam bug fellas fiddling with it. Then, I've lost track.

Mr. Edwards: Did you keep any records of the economy of it?

Mr. Hall: It was excellent, excellent! I drove it all over. I went in several parades with it. I went to the one in Morehead. The most fascinating part of operating it, Bill, was I used to go down to Camp Bryan on hunting trips in the winter and those ruddy roads,

you'd put that steam car, you see a hole there that would bury an ordinary car and you say well, there ain't no need of going in cause you'll never get out. I would just crack the throttle and turn everything loose but the steering wheel. I never touch for power or nothing. It would come to a hole and fall in it two feet right straight down, and that old steam engine, she would build up torque. You know, you get your torque sitting still with steam. Just like a Sherman tank, she would only put one ounce more power to those rear wheels than it took to get out. It knew exactly how to measure the power needed to lift it. You can't do that with gasoline. You got to buzz them and spin them and dig yourself deeper. Steam has that capability.

With the engine in the rear axle there was no clutch, no transmission, no gear shift, simplest thing in the world. And efficient, the fuel tank was about ten gallons at the most. I'd make round trips to Beaufort, Morehead. Fuel was no problem.

Mr. Edward: What would you use for fuel, kerosene?

Mr. Hall: Number one fuel oil.

Mr. Edward: How did you burn it? Nozzle?

Mr. Hall: Yeah. We'd modernized it. The old Stanly, he had these old pot burners under the boiler that would stop up. I bet you he was on his back 500 times with a piece of small wire prodding out those little nozzles you're talking about. In our case, we went to the modern home heating type plant that burns fuel oil. We just took a small home burner and put it under that little boiler. The original Stanly boiler was built, Bill, with twelve gauge shot gun barrels for

the tubes in the boiler, and it was wire wrapped a certain way to keep it from blowing up and killing somebody.

Mr. Edward: That was on the outside of the shell, not each tube?

Mr. Hall: Right after you put the tubes through the headers the heat went through the tubes. The water was around them.

Mr. Edward: Tied to the boiler then, wasn't it?

Mr. Hall: Yeah. Fascinating. Let me tell you something. I used to blow that boiler down about once a month. I had a blow valve on the front under the radiator. Six hundred pounds of super heated steam would blow twenty feet before you ever saw anything. It was so hot. It could kill you if it hit you in a vital place. I respected steam.

Mr. Edward: I've heard of some of these Navy men on ships with high pressure steam. They look for leaks with a post card. It'll cut that post card.

Mr. Hall: At night, the copper tubing on the boiler that carried the steam around to the various automatics and were open to the steam, at night in a dark place if you would raise the hood those copper tubes were glowing with 600 pounds of super heated steam. You could see the incandescence. Hot stuff! But power, boy that was power!

Mr. Edwards: It must of been. It's a shame you didn't get a chance to pursue it further.

Mr. Hall: Well, we've talked enough steam. Anything else come to mind.

Mr. Edwards: What about a little more about your flying

experience? You were out at the airport when it was developing, weren't you, when the first airlines came in?

Mr. Hall: Yeah. I was there when Fred Turner was aboard and National Air Lines came in. I served twenty some years on the local airport authority. My reason for wanting to be on it, Bill, maybe it was selfish, but I realized early on that the bus line, then a local carrier, could benefit by feeding it's services in to the long haul airplanes. For example, a man comes from Miami to New Bern, if he wants to get to a eastern North Carolina town, the bus line could carry him. And the reverse of that, if that man wanted to get back to Miami, we could bring him in to the airport and away he goes. And it worked for that reason. I was criticized a lot. One local news man was very critical of me. He says I was on the Airport Board to hurt the airport.

Yeah, right in the newspaper. Well, he was radio, I'll tell you that much. But I knew it wasn't so.

Mr. Edwards: I think I know who you're talking about. It's unfortunate that a lot of people can't see beyond their noses. Now, you obviously did. Winslow, my brother, went down to the Georgia Railroad down in Atlanta, run out of Atlanta, and they had their Chief Engineer said, "These airlines just a passing fancy, they won't last."

Mr. Hall: Bill, what killed through service for New Bern, flying now we are talking, and I know, I was in on it. National, they gave excellent service here for many years. They were a Miami to New York you know, East coast service. What hurt us badly here and eventually

ended trunk service to New Bern; picture an airline flying Miami, New Bern to New York. In order to serve New Bern, he's got to come in here with an empty seat to board a New Bern passenger, and if you were running National Airlines, if you could load that airplane in Miami, you'd do it. You're not going to run half empty to New Bern to haul ten people to New York. That's the basic thing. To shuttle out of New Bern good, that's what happened since. We've got shuttle planes. I don't think you'll ever see any more.

Mr. Edwards: I don't think so. This other idea is working well.

Mr. Hall: One of the best things that could happen I think for us is to get that big freight hub somewhere close by here. One flying experience, Bill, with the airport that I'll never forget; one morning we had a load of Marines to carry from Cherry Point to New Bern Airport.

At that time these independent charter airplanes were not allowed on the base at Cherry Point, at critical times, war times, stuff like that. So, this old clunker flew in. It was a two engine propeller driven type transport airplane. I rode the bus over just to see how they made out. The airplane was sitting there. They'd just landed it, and it was hot, it was smoking, and oil was dripping out of one engine. It would of taken somebody with a gun to force me on it, what little I know about flying, the way that thing looked; greasy, hot, dripping oil out of a starboard engine. This little PFC Marine, he must of been in his teens walked up to the plane, it was so hot and so drippy with oil. You could hear him a half a block away, he says, "Ladies and gentlemen, there will be a slight delay while the crew

changes the rubber bands in the starboard engine." And he got on it and away she went. Hope they made it! But I'll never forget that young boy's comment! He rode it! (picture) Here's the original Stanly with the family sitting in it. That's in front of my home out here.

I drove that for a couple of years. We took the Lincoln and built our own boiler and our own engine and everything but use this for a guide. We had to learn from steam to start with. That's the one that was driven from Massachusetts.

Mr. Edward: That's the bus rear end there, isn't it?

Mr. Hall: Bill, when the first whammies came out, the Highway Patrol used them to control speeds on the highway, you remember they put rubber hoses across the road and you would "pop, pop" and the time between the pops was your speed. Our bus drivers began to get tickets when the tack o graph on the bus, that's a printed record of speed, engine, everything that the driver does. The tack o graph showed he was not speeding. Just coincidental to what I'm starting to tell you, in every case, and I went to court many times with bus drivers when his tack showed him innocent and the patrolman said guilty. In every case that I went to court I beat the patrol, and that right there is the reason. That is an instrument I built with the help of the shop.

We kept it at the bus garage. We'd drive a bus on it and the bus rear tires would settle between those two drums. We could drive that bus at any speed we wanted to and this was connected to an extremely accurate speedometer. We could sit in that bus sitting still, here's a speedometer on the post from here compared with the speedometer on

the bus, and every bus that went through that shop was checked before it went on the road. I went to court and was able to prove my instruments were accurate. They were mechanically operated. The patrolman was sitting there measuring the time in seconds that we "bopped, bopped" across the rubber hose.

Mr. Edwards: He was doing it with a stop watch?

Mr. Hall: Right. In every case the Judge would look down at the patrolman, he'd said, "Mr. Officer, here's a man with a proven piece of mechanical device that's accurate. You're asking me to take your stop second thing between hoses. I've got to rule against you." Every time! That right there did it.

Mr. Edwards: They finally gave up didn't they?

Mr. Hall: No, because a lot of them were speeding, but Shoot Hall would never go to court with one that was.

Mr. Edwards: You mean, you wouldn't support him?

Mr. Hall: Not if he was speeding, no mam!

Mr. Edwards: I don't blame you. Good for you.

Mr. Hall: When a driver came to me and said I got a ticket last night, he said I was speeding, I said well, I'll check your bus and we'll see. If that tack disk confirmed this machine, I'd say, "We'll get you a hearing, I'll be there with you". I didn't even take a lawyer. If he was speeding and that said so, I said, "Joe, go pay your fine, I am not going to do nothing for you, you were speeding, take the medicine." It worked.

Mr. Edwards: They learned to keep the speed under control then,

didn't they?

Mr. Hall: Oh yeah.

Mr. Edwards: (picture) What is this one, Shoot? It says Kelso special.

Mr. Hall: Lynn Kelso's daughter got married and Lynn chartered a bus for the wedding party. They flew in and we just went over in the bus. You see the airplane sticking up? That was Lynn Kelso's daughter. She's presently in this "homemade business" now. The girl is a nice youngster.

Mr. Edwards: Mary Lynn, is that the one?

Mr. Hall: I think so. But that's kind of getting back.

Mr. Edwards: Yeah, 1971. You've got some interesting photographs here.

Mr. Hall: One thing about Lynn Kelso that I was always impressed with, back during the critical days of the War, Lynn was in the early stages of Craven Community College. You know he was one of the grandfathers of that. I couldn't find qualified mechanics, Bill. During the War, nobody could. With the help of Lynn and Craven College, it wasn't Craven College then, what was it?

Mr. Edwards: Craven Technical Institute. Craven Tech they called it.

Mr. Hall: That college came to me after I asked Lynn to help. He got his people to come to me and say, we'll set up a maintenance school, a mechanics school on diesels in your garage if you'll get as many as a dozen people that are interested. Well, to get my own

folks interested I took the course myself to show them I was interested, and that Craven College crowd came in here. I had mechanics in my own shop and didn't know it until I trained them. I sent them through the courses. I had qualified help running out of my ears. I had it all the time but they weren't trained. I trained my own people that way, and I'll never forget Lynn and what he did for that bus line.

It was quite an experience. (picture) Here's a Chairman of the Utilities Commission, Harry Wescott and Ike Bailey one of the prominent lawyers in Raleigh. They came down to my fishing camp one weekend. They were sitting out there in the cool of the evening.

Mr. Edwards: I see you got a picture of the Union rep's.

Mr. Hall: This was an International Vice-President of the AFLCIO. He would come down nearly every time. I got right friendly with him, except in a business way. (Laughter) He told me something, he said, "Shoot, you'll never make a good Union man until you've been in jail."

That was his comment. We met with him one day. He got a call from Jacksonville, Florida that he had to get down there. They were striking on him, his Union. He died that night trying to get from here to Jacksonville, Florida. So, right soon after that was taken, (picture) he was gone. (picture) Sheriff of Guilford County, Bill, John Story.

I used to hunt with him down at Camp Bryan. Incidentally, I killed the deer and he's posing with the deer and my rifle, but that's all right. A month after that picture was taken he went back to Greensboro, went on a deer hunt up there, he was walking down one side of a ravine between two hills, walking in the bushes, his buddy was on the other

side, saw the bush move, shot the bush and killed the sheriff.

Mr. Edward: Well, I have never killed a deer, and I think one of the reasons is I was going to make absolutely sure before I pulled the trigger.

Mr. Hall: Yeah. You remember Dick Bratcher?

Mr. Edward: Yeah.

Mr. Hall: (picture) His boy. (picture) David Ward's family. I took them ocean fishing one day. Getting to the bus line, just one comment I do want to make to you. (picture) There's Robert Holding and his family. He's gone, and his daddy too. They were both president of Seashore at one time. When Jim West died, Robert Holding, Sr. took over as President of the Company until his death in 1957. Robert, Jr. served when his daddy died until Robert died in the late Seventies.

Mr. Edward: His father was very instrumental in getting the A & EC Railroad going.

Mr. Hall: He was a wonderful person. What I started to tell you, early on mid-Thirties, Jim West retained Libby Ward as Counsel for the bus company, and Libby got in real deep. He was later made a Director in the Company and served well until he died in 1971. David took over from there.

Mr. Edward: Hap Tucker was reelected too, wasn't he?

Mr. Hall: Hap was one of the nicest people I ever met, Hap Tucker.

Mr. Edward: He could be mean in court!

Mr. Hall: You know what I've heard said about Hap Tucker? I told him this to his face, Hap is one of the few lawyers that would

be able to stick a knife in your side and run around you with it and make you like it! That's the way he's been described to me!

Mr. Edward: That's what you call a diplomat isn't it?

Mr. Hall: Hap, was a diplomat. But Libby Ward, with all due respect to the others, Libby Ward was one of the few men that I've ever worked in business with, and I had from the early Thirties to his death in 1971 which is forty years that I associated with Libby, he's one of the few people I've ever been around, Bill, when he was working for you like on a hearing before the Utilities Commission, he's the only man I've ever known that would give you one hundred and ten percent of everything that he had, you got it. There was nothing clouding his mind. He wasn't thinking about going around the corner after that hearing and having lunch with Joe Bloke. You had all that man had! I sure hated to see him go.

Mr. Edward: That's the kind of man I'd like representing me. There's Camp Davis. Is that aerial photograph that you took?

Mr. Hall: Yeah, I took all of those.

Mr. Edward: How long have you been flying?

Mr. Hall: I flew for about seven years and loved every minute of it. I got in it intentionally because it was transportation. I saw a possibility of coordinating air and ground here in eastern Carolina. We never got into the flying end of it, but I always liked it. One experience there, Bill, that might interest you. I was going to Florida one day, it got so easy, I'd just get in the airplane take off to Miami and whatever, but I had to land in Savannah for fuel.

They filled me up, and I went to pay the bill and I looked at it, I saw sixteen cents road tax per gallon on aviation gas for flying over the State of Georgia. I said, "Cap'n, you got to explain this to me. I'm a little country boy from eastern North Carolina, and I don't understand these things." He said, "Well, I've got to charge you that's the law down here." I said, "Cap'n, I'm going to continue to fly over your state but it's the last time I'm gonna land for fuel."

So, I landed in Florida or South Carolina from then on. But they did not charge airplanes road tax.

Mr. Edwards: They were charged with having a lot of speed traps down there. I don't know whether that was correct or not.

Mr. Hall: That was a trap! (picture) There's another bus with the number on top.

Mr. Edward: (picture) That was your airplane?

Mr. Hall: No. I took that because that was a plane like mine with an adjustable propeller.

Mr. Edward: Oh yeah. That was in the early days of the adjustable pitch prop.

Mr. Hall: You'd get a lot more power out of your engine that way, Bill.

Mr. Edward: I could hear them taking off out there.

Mr. Hall: (picture) World War II Liberty ships anchored to rust. If you look real close each one of them is a boat, big ocean going, up the James River.

Mr. Edward: They used to have them down there at Wilmington too.

I don't remember the name of the waterway, but there were hundreds of them down there.

Mr. Hall: Yeah, Cape Fear probably. Bill, I'd be at Cove City, this always impressed me, (picture) it's a sand ridge in a perfect oval. This is looking toward the southeast. Eastern North Carolina is full of those same things. I have researched it, and talked to a number of geologists and people. Many years ago there was a meteoric shower in eastern North Carolina, and these are meteoric impacts. All came in from the Northwest, plowed into the ground at an angle going toward the Southeast and threw this sand ridge when they splattered. Only, somewhere down under there is a hunk of something.

Mr. Edwards: You know, they say that's one explanation for the lakes, Catfish Lake and all those lakes.

Mr. Hall: One other contributing factor to those lakes is the fact that in that area the ground will burn. It gets on fire in dry times, and it'll burn a hole twenty feet deep going straight down. I walked in many of them hunting down there and had my hat float off in the winter time. (picture) I'll show you my airport at Cape Lookout.

During World War II the officer that stayed at the Cape, they had artillery guns over there you remember, he got tired of walking in the sand so they paved him a sidewalk from his cottage to the guns.

Well, they happen to pave it exactly Northeast and Southwest, and I learned early on that's the way I like to land. But it was just a little wider than my wheels. (picture) Look at that drop off, but I landed there hundreds of times and didn't have a minutes trouble.

It looks worse than it is. I would put one wheel in the middle of the sidewalk and hold the other wing up with the ailerons til she slowed down to about twenty, twenty-five miles an hour, then drop the other wing down.

Mr. Edward: Those donut wheels, you could land on a beach couldn't you?

Mr. Hall: Oh boy, I did. I'll tell you something about beach landing. (picture) Look, there's dry beach sand. There's what my tire does, but look at my tail wheel. You don't dare hit your brakes, Bill, on sand. It'll lock the wheel. She'll pitch pole and turn upside down. You stop by coming back hard on the stick and digging that tail wheel in, that's your brake. (picture) There's a scene. That same scene here, but there's my foot prints. See that's how I was sinking in the sand, and look at my tire over there. You can imagine what'll happen if you put brakes on.

Mr. Edward: There wasn't a whole lot of load on those wheels per square inch.

Mr. Hall: No, no. (picture) There was the actual airplane.

Mr. Edward: Pretty.

Mr. Hall: I used to love to fly down to the beach, Bill, and land beside wrecked boats. A lot of sail boats were lost during the years I was flying.

Mr. Edward: Did you fly with the Civil Air Patrol?

Mr. Hall: No. Bennie Baxter did that. Bennie was in it. In fact, I bought my airplane through him. He had the Piper agency here.

I bought a new airplane from Piedmont Aviation. They were selling them then. Bennie flew me to Winston-Salem, and I flew my plane home.

Mr. Edwards: Who taught you to fly?

Mr. Hall: Mike Holton. He went with Piedmont, you know.

Mr. Edwards: Yeah. I think he was a check pilot with them for a while.

Mr. Hall: Oh yeah, he was a senior pilot for quite a spell. He was a good boy, still is. Mike pulled up here about a year ago in front of the house, and I was out there doing something. He hung his head with a hat on out the window, looked at me and said, "Hi", and I said, "Hi". He said, "You don't know me, do you?" He'd got fat and got old and ugly too. I didn't recognize him, but we had a nice chat.

Mr. Edwards: I run into Mike fairly often. What about some of the hurricanes? You remember anything about them in relation to bus lines?

Mr. Hall: Yeah. I spent the night of the '33 hurricane up Brice's Creek on Jim West's yacht trying to take care of it. I literally spent the night on the bow of that boat, Bill, with a pike pole. I had two storm anchors out in the middle of Brice's Creek, and a current was running up that creek I reckon twenty miles an hour. I bet you I fended more chicken coups, out houses, fences, and trees. If they hung in my anchor line they would drag my anchor. So, I spent the night on the bow of that boat with a pike pole and pushed debris off my anchor lines.

Mr. Edwards: What was the name of that boat? Didn't he have one called the "Wild Goose?"

Mr. Hall: He did. His first one when he came to New Bern was called "Tullis" for his first wife. She died in '39, and he married Myrtle Rodgers West later. But his first boat was named Tullis.

Mr. Edwards: Didn't he have a Wild Goose I, II, and III?

Mr. Hall: He had three before he died in '46.

Mr. Edwards: That's what I thought. I remember the three. I don't remember the one and two.

Mr. Hall: The early buses, of course they all had air brakes, but they had the most mellow air horns on it, some of the buses. You know your train, air and steam same thing through a whistle, but we got a good mellow one one time and put it on his best yacht, the Wild Goose. You could hear that thing twenty miles away! We could hear him coming. It was a wonderful thing! I followed that boat for years.

It stayed in North Carolina for years after it was sold, and every time I'd hear that horn it would bring back the memories.

Mr. Edwards: One of the sweetest sounds I've ever heard was some of our locomotives coming through what's now Glenburnie? You know where Glenburnie crosses the railroad that area through there? The Engineer always had a name for everything. That was a Dark House or something like that.

Mr. Hall: Bill, let me tell you something that's going on locally in relations to hurricanes that concerns me. We're getting high rise bridges now across all our waterways. They're building one presently

at the Inland Waterway on 101. When that high rise is completed to replace the draw bridge, and I'm not against eliminating draw bridges; I figured recently I spent a month of my life sitting waiting for draw bridges I know on the highway, but what we are doing in the case of this one at Core Creek in particular, when that's completed there's no earth level route left for most of Carteret County to get out if they have a real emergency during a storm. You do not cross a high rise bridge which is sixty feet above the high tide. Now, that's sixty feet of boat clearance, Bill, for navigational purpose. That puts you way above the tree line. You don't drive out of that county East of the Inland Waterway with safety. You cannot cross that bridge. Now, I know we have prior notice to hurricanes, but there's always somebody that won't leave. I'm concerned that we're going to get a "Hugo" one day and we're going to find most of the people in the Inland Waterway where they tried to cross that bridge.

Mr. Edwards: It might be. I'd hate to cross one in a little Toyota I use to drive.

Mr. Hall: I had this constructive thought about it. If somebody in authority can get to the highway commission people and see to it that they make those railings high enough on these bridges, particularly at the peak, to prevent a car from blowing overboard.

The later a bridge is built now a days the lower the railings. Take the Trent River, it's about knee high to me. Just right to trip a vehicle that blows up against it.

Mr. Edwards: I hear people complain about the old Trent River

bridge. The rail being just at eye level.

Mr. Hall: I agree with that. Well, now which would you rather have, a safe bridge or a bridge with a view?

Mr. Edwards: I'd rather have a safe bridge.

Mr. Hall: Just a thought. Being in transportation for so long it's the first thing that hit me when I crossed it. They built one at Sea Level. I reckon you've crossed it, on Hwy. 70?

Mr. Edwards: Yeah.

Mr. Hall: I don't believe it's knee high. I didn't get out and measure it. I wish they'd realize that they're shutting people off.

Mr. Edwards: That Morehead bridge, that could be a real problem, people getting from between the Atlantic Beach to the Mainland.

Mr. Hall: What concerns me is the way people are taking the notices. Now, I spent the last four hurricanes on Harker's Island.

They been on there with loud speakers demanding that you leave. That's when "Hugo" was coming on. The last four hurricanes were misses, but they ordered evacuation of the island all four times. Now, those people are going to sooner or later, if they not already doing it, they're going to start ignoring warnings.

Mr. Edwards: They already do, some do.

Mr. Hall: Now, when we get a "Hugo", and take my word for it we will, they either got to leave or they'll drown.

Mr. Edwards: Well, you know the last time we had a serious hurricane here was 1955. That's when "Ione", when we had three in thirty some days.

Mr. Hall: I'm no meteorologist, but I love the weather. I've got a full set of weather instruments in my place at the Island. It's a hobby. Based on what meteorologists tell me, as you know I'm a weather spotter for one of the TV stations. I call severe weather into him.

The word amongst meteorologists, if you know one real well, he'll tell you that world wide conditions, whether it's man's influence or not, we are developing into more storms and more serious storms. I saw something this weekend that we better watch out for tornadoes this Spring. Everything is more apt to create them, whether it's air pollution or world wide warming, you name it, I don't know.

Mr. Edwards: I don't know either. You know right around New Bern and this area is where the cold fronts come down from the North and warm fronts come up from the South.

Mr. Hall: It's not a pretty picture, and it's not one to talk about publicly, but it concerns me. I'd like to think that we do what we can about it before we're in trouble. That's why I mentioned the bridge. Let's talk more about the bus line. I was twenty-one when I started driving. I sold tickets in the New Bern Bus Station for a year and a half, two years.

Mr. Edwards: Was that where the bus station was before you got out of it?

Mr. Hall: No, where it is now on Broad Street.

Mr. Edwards: They are using the bus station out on George Street now.

Mr. Hall: That's just been built in the last year or two. That's

by the new owners.

Mr. Edwards: The one on Broad Street is where you started?

Mr. Hall: Yes. December 1930. I sold tickets for two years, drove for a couple of years, then got real smart after two years of driving. The buses started breaking down right and left. So, me and my twenty-two year old wisdom walked in the boss's office one morning and I said, "Mr. West, these buses are breaking down all over the place.

If you'll put somebody on my run for a while, I'll help you fix these buses." Just like that, my enthusiasm! The old man took me up on it, and I have not touched a bus steering wheel since!

Mr. Edwards: Did you have any experience with a mechanical capacity?

Mr. Hall: I loved mechanics. I helped him get them straight. He put me in charge of the shop after that, and that was my job for a long time until he moved me up under him.

Mr. Edwards: When did you move into management?

Mr. Hall: Just before he died. He made me assistant manager in his late years, during World War II, in the '40's. He died in '46 and I took over. Then Obie comes along and he had about nine years of it after me, and he retired. I hope you can get to Obie, he is a good boy.

Mr. Edwards: I talked to him some time ago, but I haven't been able to get up with him recently.

Mr. Hall: You were talking about a habitual criminal they had out there in Jones County, just couldn't nobody do nothing with.

Somebody said to the sheriff, said, "Sheriff, you need to rehabilitate him." John Creagh looked the man right in the face and said, "Look, how can you rehabilitate anybody that's never been habilitated in the first place!" I wondered about that fitting into present day law and order. How much truth there is in that.

END OF INTERVIEW

This is Marea Kafer Foster representing the "Memories Of New Bern" committee. Today is the 30th of August, 1992. On Wednesday, the 26th August, 1992, Mr. Hall gave to me the following information. Mr. Hall's full name is Charles Henry Hall, Jr., but he later dropped the junior.

He was born on March 8, 1911 in New Bern, North Carolina. His father was Charles Henry Hall, Sr., his mother was Mamie Berry Hall. His wife's name is Virginia Smith Hall. He and Mrs. Hall have two daughters, Virginia Hall Southerland and Jessie Hall Gardner.