

USS Arleigh Burke Association
Oral History Project

Interview of CAPT (Ret) John Ingram by CAPT (Ret) Rick Easton on Oct 5, 2023

CAPT John Ingram, USN, Ret

- INSURV Inspector for Arleigh Burke Trial C / Acceptance Trial
- 400 D Program Office – System Engineer
- 400 D PMR – BIW
- 400 D Program Office – Production Officer
- SupShip Bath
- 400 D Program Manager

[editor clarification information]

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Rick

So what I'd like to start with is for you to give me just a thumbnail sketch of your Navy career and your background.

John

I entered the Navy in 1979 from the NROTC program at Maine Maritime Academy, and I had elected to participate in a program called the ED option program.

That allowed persons that were interested in joining the engineering duty officer community was to have the option to exercise a change in your designator after you received your warfare qualification to elect to go into the restricted line. So that was available to me as I entered the Navy went through the schools that were made available to me for both from a surface warfare officer school and and other individual training schools.

I went through 1200 pound marine propulsion assistant school in Newport, Rhode Island. And then to my first ship, which was USS Belknap and qualified as a SWO on Belknap. And then I spent almost four years on Belknap, and I worked almost exclusively in the engineering department, bringing that ship from the shipyard in Philadelphia to an active unit in the fleet again.

When I was in college, 1975, they had a horrific accident in the Mediterranean, where Belknap collided with John F. Kennedy. And there were eight sailors that were killed in

that accident. And if you ever saw pictures of Belknap after that basically from the superstructure down to almost the main deck was melted, because it had an aluminum super structure.

A lot of lessons learned on that ship that got rolled directly into DDG 51, Arleigh Burke, as a result of survivability studies, there was a study called SOCKS that was done by Joe Taussig, if you remember who he was. Joe Taussig was a guy that was in the Secretary of the Navy office, and he had almost single handedly been responsible for the upgrade of damage control and firefighting systems on board ships because he had been injured in World War Two and had lost a leg. And real survivability champion.

And some of those studies that were pulled together were at the direction of Mr. Taussig. He was related to Admiral Tozigi. In Norfolk, Admiral Taussig Boulevard, Joe Taussig was, I believe, a son of one of the admirals.

So anyway, I'm diverging from the story. After my qualification tour, I went into the engineer and duty community and went to Norfolk Naval Shipyard. After that, to graduate school. And when I left graduate school, I raised my hand and I said, Yeah, I'll go to INSURV because the detailer was trying to get somebody to go to INSURV and detailer goes, Aha, I've got one.

Rick

Graduate school was where?

John

Graduate school in Monterey. I went to the Board of Inspection and Survey, which was in DC at the time. And I inspected probably 50 ships over like two year, two and a half year period. And the last one that I inspected was Arleigh Burke at acceptance trials.

I remember going to [CAPT] Brian Perkinson, who was the program manager for DDG 51 came over to talk to us about the ship and set, set expectations because after the process of placing the ship under contract and then doing the detailed design and construction of the ship, they had reached a point where for the good of the Navy, the ship needed to be delivered.

He came over and set expectations with comments like, well instead of writing hundreds of cards about missing label plates, can you say, like, write one card that says label plates not complete and so we had a back and forth, and got a good understanding what the ship would be.

And when we went to Arleigh Burke, the ship was basically what I'd like to say, primer green and broom swept. I mean, it was, it was clean. It operated. It had no label plates, but had a distinct lack of nomenclature and operating guidance that we would see normally posted.

But things worked. And we took that into account in our inspection and report.

Fast forward a few months and I had succeeded in interviewing with [CAPT, later SES] Bill Lubke and, and Captain Perkinson and got a job in the program office. And I inspected auxiliaries and main propulsion. And one of my first tasks was to go into the program office and resolve all these stupid trial cards that I wrote. It's like, my God, why did I do that to myself all the deficiencies had to be adjudicated and much easier to be on INSURV and say hey that's bad and write it up, then to have to actually go do something and fix it. But kind of a valuable lesson to figure out what is acceptable and get things to the state that they needed to be for Arleigh Burke.

I was a O 4 - Lieutenant Commander, and my first exposure to the ship after the inspection was as a systems engineer. [CAPT] Tom Bowler was the the program manager at the time, and I was his firefighter for different issues jack of all trades, something popped up as a big problem. And it was HM&E related. He'd say get down there and fix that go and I'd go.

We had all kinds of problems with machinery control system, I was the system engineer, notionally in charge of MCS. I ran the machinery control system configuration control board. And fortunately for you, and for the Navy, the system that we had put on there was relatively much simpler to upgrade with new program control characteristics than like a Spruance class or a 963.

You guys got underway from Bath on your way to commissioning. And on your way down, you stopped for or you steamed for a photo op with Ticonderoga, and you were sailing along at five knots bare steerage I think, to get this picture. And then pulled into Norfolk and then went up to the to the Waterside.

And the experience to John Morgan was a bit touchy - shall we say it was a hair-raising thing, where he had to initiate some pretty strong orders to the helm and the lee helm in order to keep the ship safe as they made the berth there at the Waterside.

The ship released a message with all these things that were problems with the machinery control system, it handles like a pig it doesn't turn well. It doesn't do well at bare steerage it's not predictable on and on and on and on. And honestly, I'd have to say in hindsight, I wasn't there for some of the complaints that were made earlier.

But they were a repeat of things that guys like Kenyon Hiser had said, early on, this thing is not going to be suitable, and the response that was given to him from the engineers at the time was like, it's going to be okay don't worry about it, everything will be fine.

Well, everything wasn't fine. And it was not predictable, and it was not repeatable necessarily. In the way that the ships force and the Navy crew wanted to drive that ship. I got the job of changing program control to make it be something that the crew could understand, operate, and felt good about. And we did that in a very short period of time,

because what we were talking about was modifications to a computer program, rather than, as it would have been on a CG 47 or 963 changes to hardwired logic on boards, you would have to change hardware on a cruiser, or a destroyer.

To make that functional change to how the ship operated we turned around an interim fix very quickly that made the ship operate a lot like a CG 47. And then we followed that that up later with a with a permanent fix that made the ship operate at low speeds in the manner that took advantage of the acoustic and stealth ship characteristics that were advantageous at the lower speeds where you had a delay to the onset of cavitation, for instance, that was desirable. And you didn't want to thrash the water at 55 RPM like a cruiser, you wanted to have something predictable as you went through the modulation of the transmission until you got to 100% pitch and then you modulate engines. So, anyway, that's a lot of detail maybe, but that's the kind of stuff that I did.

Rick

So you became associated with the program initially through INSURV, and then immediately following INSURV, which was the acceptance trials, moving over to the program office when did you actually move to the office was it before after commission.

John

It was right. Just before commissioning, it was like, probably July of 91 and you were commissioned on the fourth of July that's correct. Yeah, so I just got there. And my first thing was make MCS right. MCS had all kinds of problems with it. That should have been predictable to the engineers that were designing it scrolling alarms, so many alarms that you couldn't tell what was going on. If you talk to Kenyon, you'll get all this chapter and verse.

One of the things that you care about just in everyday underway steaming are how are your reduction gear bearing temperatures doing? You had to look them up on charts and they were tabulated in like on a spreadsheet. One of the things we did was let's create a graphic. I want a graphic of the main reduction gears and show me exactly where those things are what their temperatures are on this funky plasma display. You didn't even have color you had orange plasma displays but let's give people something screens that they want to go to, to check the status in the, the oversight of the engineering plant, and not just columns of tabulated information, and then scrolling alarms when something goes out of sight higher out of sight low that become so prolific that you can't figure out what your casualty was.

There was a lot of work to do there. That was not done so that I would say HSI, and man machine interface was not like the science that it is maybe today or the focus that it is today, it was almost an afterthought. I know that the crew made recommendations and they're like we'll get to that.

I had some really good people at NAVSSES Philly that I relied on that were like truth sayers, and we were able to do things and do them quickly so that it would change the

ship for you, not change the ship, three ships down we were able to bring stuff to the ship pretty quickly, which was satisfying. It was a fun job.

I dealt with the DMS problems that you had with the electrical system problems. We had AN/UKY 43 power supplies that were like going out like somebody eating a bag of Lay's potato chips. There was something that was called the MOV, molybdenum oxide varistor, that is like a shock device that is supposed to be able to take hits and it's almost like a, it should be like a life of the power supply thing. And those are failing left and right. What the heck is going on? Why are these things taking so many spikes and hits?

I was part of the Aegis Power Committee, we were getting together trying to figure this out and it kind of crossed over into the combat systems realm, because this was not good. AN-UYK 43s were like, where your computer programs for your fire control systems and your war fighting systems were. And if their power supplies are going down, like routinely, which they were, you got to fix that.

And so those were really great engineering problems in practice that you can't like sit on the sidelines, you need to get in there and get it, get it fixed quickly. It was exciting being part of the program office then.

The other thing that we had was money. It's great to have money so we could say we're going to fly up to Minneapolis, and visit with the guys that made the power supplies up there and figure out what's wrong. With a bunch of electrical engineers and 500 pound heads okay, get in the plane, let's go. And by and large we were able to track down those problems and, and resolve them. Really satisfying for an engineer to be able to do that.

The other thing it taught me is listen to the operators, because if you don't fix it for them they'll hate you forever, number one. And number two, you're giving them a piece of gear that they don't deserve problems.

So, after that job, I went up to Bath, Maine, and I was the PMR (program manager's representative) So I get to build DDGs I in the program office, we were, we were working on all the way through DDG 68. We were contracting it at a clip of like five ships a year in the early years before we won the Cold War in 1991.

And it's like, well, I guess we don't need attack submarines anymore. And we don't need to buy so many ships because the peer threat is going away. But we were, we bought a lot of ships early some contracts were 1989, 1991, 5 - 5 - 4 that was the profile. So two ships to one guy three ships to the other was kind of the typical split.

And so when I got up there as PMR, we were doing things all the time there were trials. And if you had three trials for every ship, you were going out to see all the time. Great, great fun. If you couldn't get excited about that kind of thing and you were into shipbuilding, check for pulse man you're not alive, if that doesn't turn you on.

We went out to sea a lot. For Bath Ironworks three ships a year was a lot - that's a lot of throughput for fairly small yard, and you had similar throughput down south at Ingles so the people in the program office - if I thought I was busy in Bath as the PMR people in the program office are going both ways like I got one here and I got one there.

Those were great days. I wish we could get back to that because the nation kind of needs that level of shipbuilding. But you can't do it. If you aren't trying to procure a product that works.

We knew that Arleigh Burke worked we proved it other problems that that we ran into were during operational testing evaluation. I followed the ship with that too. And we were supposed to be hands off not know anything as the as program office

Rick
in what position?

John
So I'm in the program office.

Rick
And this is before PMR?

John
Yeah, so you went, I step, I step back in my memory there I'm sorry,

Rick
That's okay.

John
You [Arleigh Burke] went to Norfolk, you operated for a while you did a PSA, and I believe it was right after the PSA that you went to a bit out. And when you went to a bit out. At that point the program hands everything over to OPEVAL, and it's supposed to be completely off the ship and in the dark.

Well, you were having problems with generators and circuit breakers at that time. You remember the generator problems we had it's like that was another classic and I was the person that was like, [CAPT] Bowler's fireman, you got generator problems, okay, go down there and fix those.

We have fuel nozzles that we're plugging up. And Kenyon goes to supply to draw another set of fuel nozzles and instead of six nozzles which would be an engine's worth he's got one. Like, what do I do with this?

I'm calling up to Bath and telling Jim Bridge who worked at SupShip. Bridge, I need you to get every nozzle that you can lay your hands on and send them to DDG 51. And don't stop until I tell you to stop. So we're like sending nozzles to the ship, taking other nozzles that were no good and putting them into a rotatable pool to get them refurbished and back in service.

And we went through that for quite a while before we came up with fixes to the system that led to a nozzle that didn't plug up as much.

You had starting issues because of that like, your air flasks were good for five to seven HP air starts for these generators if you were cold. And if you had nozzles that were coked up and you didn't know when you press the button if it would complete the start and end up at whatever the RPM was big, big deal.

And during OPEVAL, you went out there and came very close to if not hot dark and quiet. Because of that. We were contacted to help with some problems.

There was a breaker - ACB 101 - that was defective. And somehow I found out about that. And it's like call up the Bath Ironworks and the Westinghouse one was fine the Cutler hammer one was no good. Give me a 51 ship set of ACB 101 breakers and send them to Norfolk to the pier for Lieutenant Commander Hiser.

So, it was stuff like that, that it was exciting. It was more than a nine to five job for sure because I'd get calls all the time. And it, it was nice working for a program that tried to do the right thing. And I think, and we did.

Rick

So what happened after you're, you're slating up to Bath PMR how long were you up there?

John

I was there from 1995 to 1998. And then in 98 I went back to DC to work for the program again. I became the production officer, so I've been a system engineer, a PMR, the DDG production officer responsible for both north and south. Then I got promoted to Captain and went to the Pentagon. And after, after my tour at the Pentagon, I got selected to be the Supervisor of Shipbuilding at bath.

Rick

And what did you do it what did you do in the Pentagon again.

John

I worked in N81 in in plans, and back in that those days the plans were centered around a process called I-Wars. And so assessments that anyone was the assessments branch, and they would provide the CNO with program.

Rick

Were you working DDG 51 or Arleigh Burke.

John

I was working everything I worked, I worked requirement. I was part of what I used to like to call the ORD police. The ORD was this condensation of documents that ...

Rick

Operational requirements document right

John

Yes, every program needed it. And it was for major programs it was something that got validated by the JROC. So, you had to go in there with your, with your stuff in in one sock so to speak it had to be squared away. I worked the word for the F/A 18 Super Hornet, Amphibs and everything that came through requirements wise.

Rick

Did it include the ORD for Arleigh Burke?

John

Now the Arleigh Burke had, by the time I got to the Pentagon, they'd already approved flight IIA, which was a change to the ORD but it had been done already and we were building flight to a put another contract anyway. So it was contracted for in, I want to say 98 fiscal year fiscal year 96. And there was a multi year in 98. So, 96 97. The first one was like the last ship 96. And the documentation had preceded that to go make the upgrade.

So, there were ORDS for a lot of things but Arleigh Burke wasn't. Some of the systems that would go on the ship - ORDs for missile systems and different things. And then I also worked as, as the assistant for acquisition issues for N8.

So at that time it was [Admiral] Ed Giambastiani, which was fun watching a submarine guy. And how those guys operate like really tight as compared to the surface guys who like seem to be all over the map and not so tight the submarine guys were able to get ships built when it where no requirement existed, like hey what, what I want is to take three of these boomers and turn them into SSGNs, where's the requirement for that there is no requirement for that.

It's okay, we're squared away and we're going to get it sold through our community and the political world. So that there's a demand for a large submarine that can shoot cruise missiles. Just what they didn't have an ORD for an SSGN, not initially, they had an idea, and their community was tight enough to say hey this is what we need. It's a sustainment of ballistic missile submarines.

And it is a complement keeps the technology going, and they're really able to sell that they would do something every year called the clam bake, where they'd get together it's kind of like the surface guys do that in January but that the clam bake the head of the submarine community it's like kick ass and take names all the submarine flags. This is a song we're singing. It was like choir practice for all the submarine flags. So they're all singing the same song, and all on the same page. It's pretty interesting to see and compare to something that wasn't necessarily that that anyway after that I went and was Supervisor Shipbuilding

Rick

In Bath again

John

Right bath. Yeah, got to build like, eight more destroyers. And at that point we had, we were supposed to have LPD 17. And then a deal was brokered by the assistant Secretary of Navy, and the two shipbuilders that swapped LPDs for DDGs.

So Bath got more DDGs, and all LPDs went to Ingles. And then, after my tour at SupShip, there was one more job that I that I wanted to do in the Navy, and that was the program manager for DDG 51. And so, and [RADM] Charlie Hamilton was PEO ships and he asked me to do the job. And that was the one I was ready to retire, that was the one job that I that I told myself well if I get offered that job I'd do it, because I wanted to do it.

Even though the program was by that time supposedly winding down. No, so we had, we had all our, all our solicitations and procurements were under our belt there was a FY 02 to 05 multi year, and the class was supposed to stop with DDG 112. So, I went to DC as the program manager. And the things that I got to work with at that time were the DDG modernization program, where we had sold Congress on the idea to remove people from the ship by modernizing certain systems. And it wasn't just us that that was sold by lobbyists as well at the shipbuilders.

So there were some, some restrictions on how we could use the money, but we put this, the, the case together that if you allow these particular systems to be done. They will result in manpower reductions that will be worth it over the 30 to 35 to 40 year life of the ship. So, was able to do a lot of work on that and then other things were like trying to continue building the ships at the at the demonstrated performance that had been achieved over this pretty long run of ships.

We were we were getting pretty good value for those ships and they were right around a little over a billion each in some of those in some of those multi years, and you were paying a billion. Say, let's just say it was a billion for ships that if you compare them to Arleigh Burke the capability was eye-wateringly different and better over that period of time.

You went through block four Aegis to baseline seven phase two and added capability like close in to the land resolution and reduction and sea clutter impact to the Aegis weapon system and upgrades to AWS addition of systems like King Fisher is one that comes to mind with the ASW impact. All of that happened as an increase to capability while maintaining the cost relatively constant, which is a pretty neat trick.

That's what happens if you build in quantity.

So, I was trying to build out those ships and do them at a nice price. While, like looking at the at the at the supplier vendor base and saying, Yeah, I'm not going to need like reduction gears after [DDG] 112.

But that that came back to haunt us when Admiral Roughead went to Bath one day and DDG 1000 was on the waterfront, as was DDG 51. 1000 was in pieces they had maybe the mid for body under construction. And he goes, I need more of those over there. Not that.

Rick

And who is this again?

John

[ADM] Gary Roughead CNO Yeah, so, Sea Change - like that. Because before him who had the CNO bid. Well, Mike Mullen, right. And [ADM] Mike Mullen was a former and 86, who had supported DD 21 DDG or DDX DDG 1000 chapter and verse over probably at least 10 years, and Roughead takes over, and he says, I want that, not that. I need that, not that.

Talk about confusion, and a wrench in the works of DDG 1000, and a restart of DDG 51. Oh my god when that when the top guy comes and says something like that, and his staff starts making it happen.

We were supposed to build 32 DDG 1000 we ended up building three for notionally 24 billion, so eight billion a copy for something that still can't they can shoot a missile, but they don't have the missile that they're advertising yet, and they probably won't for a while. Right. They want to shoot a hypersonic missile which is a great thing, but that's not ready for prime time. Not yet.

Rick

So, all good points so that's obviously a great career.

Any recollections of your time as PMS 400 D Program Manager specifically regarding anything that you did for USS Arleigh Burke.

During some point she went through I believe a baseline nine upgrade right.

John

Yeah, and that was under, under consideration at that time, so I would have been responsible as the advocate for the funding for what I believe they called ACB 12. It was an upgrade to Arleigh Burke, and other earlier ships to essentially put an up to date combat suite in, and that funding came in through the program, went to IWS to develop. But the, we were in 400 D and in PEO ships budget advocates for that for that effort, and it was part of program record.

From a Burke standpoint every time I saw or heard about Burke, it was just chugging along, things were going great with the first ship in the class and it kind of remarkable over such a long period of time for that to occur. But it was.

There's a pretty big contrast to go from going to Norfolk, when you sailed Arleigh Burke into Norfolk for the first time, looking for the ship, and seeing that mast and saying, Ah, there it is to going to Norfolk as the program manager and seeing those masts everywhere and being like, Whoa, which one's the Burke, I don't know. They're all they're everywhere we populated the waterfront in three or four home ports with those ships. And so, it was gratifying in a way that maybe people that had done 963 felt when all of a sudden those ships are everywhere. I think about the gray beards of my day that the guy that was supervisor in Pascagoula, and Admiral Wyatt, Bill Wyatt. And he was around when Spruance was being built, and there was a time when she was the first, and then there were a lot of them. It was cool to be able to see that as and to know that some of the things that we worked on together remain on the ship as part of the, as part of the ship for the life of the ship.

Rick

Just for the record, what was the that you are supervisor of bath and what were the dates roughly that you were PMS for?

John

I took over in in bath in July of 2001. And I turned over to Mike Stanton in around that time July August of 2004. And then, and then August 2004 till August 2007 as the program manager.

Interesting thing when I when I went to a SUPSHIP Bath. A bunch of my friends were still there on the Pentagon. And so on 911. I was dressed up in my white uniform, getting on a plane at the Portland jet port going to Philadelphia, for a dedication of building 77 high, which is where the, the hot plant, the LBES was, for Rich Cunningham who'd passed away.

Richie was, Kenyon knows Rich, he was, he was my truth saver for MCS he knew everything about MCS and he could tell me this is a problem that's a problem. They're not telling you the truth here that he was that kind of guy of the G51, and we were going down there to, to dedicate the building and name it after Rich.

And I got to Philadelphia about 10 minutes and nine, and went from the airport Chris Pafford picked me up, drove to NAVSSES, and we got there people are watching the TV's like you got to see this. And of course, the, the terrorists took down the World Trade Centers and I wouldn't fly at home that night like I expected.

But there were two Bath Ironworks engineers that had gone down on the plane with me and they had meetings at NAVSSES, and they had a car, and I said hey you still have that car, don't turn it in, can I get a ride. And I drove back to Maine from Philadelphia that evening. And you couldn't go, we wouldn't want to go through the city so we went garden State Parkway but even there it was like, there was this just greasy black smoke cloud in the sky, even at we're going through there that evening. And it's unbelievable over Manhattan, and from the Tappan Zee bridge he used to be able to see the twin towers from the Tappan Zee. There's just this like it looked like Mount Saint Helens have gone off and in Manhattan, and no towers, just this black cloud, still, at like seven o'clock we were driving through there.

Rick

Interesting. So, what would you say you're most proud of achieving with the DDG 51 specifically.

John

I'm very proud of the longevity of the ship and the relevance, and we're fighting currency of the class. I think, it's remarkable, I might have said this to you before, but the view of Congress towards the Navy. We're, we're a bunch of liars we tell them that we want to be given money to procure ships, and those ships are going to last 30 years. And then what do we do, we decommission them at 23, like some of the cruisers, or we decommission them five years after construction delivery, like some of the LCS.

They can't say that about DDG 51. We built those ships, we were given the money. We saved them money, we came up with innovative procurement methods, like multi year procurement and profit related to offer, so that we could do competitive allocation, instead of competing on quantity. And we followed through.

They can't call us liars on the DDG 51 class, because those ship that the 51 is in service. Now longer than they initially expected. And the service life has been adjusted as you go. That's service life is a function of the guys in the bullpen. They're the ones that come up with the, the story of how long and it's it's a budget thing, by and large.

And that's what made it happen on the 51 class I'm very proud of that I it's a testament to the Naval Sea Systems Command and their ability to do what I'm not sure they could do today which is a contract design in house. And that's a testament to the shipbuilders and their ability to translate that design into the ship hardware and have a ship that meets requirements. And, and a program that understood how to do things the right way.

I think, Admiral Meyer is a big reason for why the program was set up the way it was and had this commitment to doing things the right way. But that's not seen in other programs. It's rare. If you're building a complex ship, it's kind of rare.

Rick

What Admiral Meyers favorite thing build a little test a little learn a lot.

John

Yeah, yeah, that he had a bunch of things, and I do keep a list of his quotations somewhere I don't know if I don't have it right in front of me but I used to have it at my desk. And build a little, test a little, learn a lot was one of his things. He would absolutely rip you a new one if he found you talking about software, vice computer programs. He was a very it was a stickler for calling things the right, the right term, the right terminology. And some things just irritated him because they weren't precise. And he felt like we're in a precise business. And that's something that he learned from going through the weapon system development that he did as a as a younger senior officer and then into the O6 and then flag ranks with Terrier. And the three T's and all the, the weapon systems that he worked - typhoon. He, his discipline and commitment, resonated through a lot of the people that were my contemporaries and I, I am proud to say I knew Admiral Meyer and he knew me. And that's, I want to let a guy like that down in what I did, because it was important to him, and he was a great leader, even, even after he retired.

Rick

Even after. So, next question. What was your biggest challenge in regard to DDG 51. I mean some of it may have been said in some of the things you said...

John

Nothing was insurmountable, but the biggest challenge, and we did a pretty good job to it was was to show quick turnaround on a reported problem from the time a problem was reported to the time a fix was in place. I wanted that to be as minimum a number, as we could do. We had some systems on the ship that were absolute dogs. Remember vapor compression distilling plants.

Rick

Who doesn't.

John

I had. Yeah, I had Randy - Randy Fortune was the deputy, and he told me once - Randy would sit in his office and he, he make pronouncements and, and he was just a wonderful guy to work for. And he said about the vapor compression distilling plant how fast does that thing turn the belts on it, driving the compressor it was like 13,000 RPM, he goes anything that's spinning that fast ought to be going to the moon.

And so, it's an indication of the answer to the question that you asked me it's like, we had that on 51 [to] 59. And why, because we're buying the ships in bulk. When we're buying five ships a year we had to buy five vapor compression distilling plants for those ships, every year. And by the time we figured out, hey it's a dog we had, we had contracts in place, all the way out to like, 68.

So how do you, how do you rip this system that really had issues that should not have been put on there to begin with out by the roots and replace it with something. Like I said, identify problem, get it fixed for the operators, make that fine minimum. Hard to do when you've got like a whole boatload of these things bought that are supposed to go in. So what we do well, I did one in line out of sequence in line so we'd installed the DDG 68 vapor compression distilling plants, and the ship went down to Portland to get the sonar down put on as you remember, that's the way it used to be there. And we ripped out the VCD and put in the RO and came back up the river with reverse osmosis on that ship before delivery. So the ones that we delivered, what do we do we tried to get them by PSA, I don't want to give this to the fleet. Right. So PSA got real good at ripping out our ripping out VCDs. So that when you do fleet introduction and turn it over, it goes to the fleet with something that's worthwhile. Its hard to do so from that standpoint of challenge, but satisfying when you could do it.

Rick

What was your greatest success in your view.

John

Redesign of the AG 9130 gen set.

Rick

Whatever that is.

John

Okay, so when you delivered, you had a generator, you had three gen sets called AG 9130s, and they were plagued with problems. Who was the firefighter? Watash. Get down there and fix that. We had hoses that had 37 1/2 degree flared fittings that were leaking. And there was something called a, it was like a ring that you could put into a 37 and a half degree flared fitting and tighten it down and it was, it would. It would squish out and kind of make a seal. So, the ships force, in some cases, it put so many of those things in there. And it made it no better that there was no way it was going to seal after you had that in there.

Some of the hoses sprang leaks through their through their sides, because the liner for the hose was not. It was non-conductive. So it set up a potential between the fluid going through the hose and the stainless steel jacket. And you'd have a spark and then a hole. And you're leaking oil. When you did leak oil the deck was grating. It wasn't a solid deck like you had on a 963 or a cruiser. So the P.E.B. would say, you got to clean up every last bit of oil. There can't be any in there. And you couldn't even see where it all went. But it was in there.

So, I went down to Norfolk. There was a guy that worked for ComNavSurfLant or NavSeaCenLant. He was a tech rep, Dave Brewster, that guy forgot more about gas turbines that I would ever know. Really nice guy. He was old and moving slow. I watched him climb into the modules, I physically hurt for him, because he's kneeling on open grating. It was hard to get in, hard to work on. And it's like, this is UNSAT. That man right there who's trying to help the ship should not have to deal with that. That's bullshit. So, immediately, I put a step on the platform between the deck plates and the generator door so a guy could climb in without contorting himself. A guy like Dave Brewster.

We did quick things and we did a total redesign where we went to Cincinnati and looked at a mock-up and brought a ship's force. It happened to be 52's ship's force. Rick Caceres was the senior chief. And he brought his crew and looked at this and said, yeah, that's good. And he was in the factory before we said, okay, change it. And that became the 9140, which was way better. We made engineering changes using some NAVSEA money that they had for component improvement program and program office money and made the changes quick enough to get them into the ships. It was stopping the leaks, making them operate well, fixing the fuel nozzles, coming up with a better starter than air start. We put on mechanical starters on later units. All of that, I had a driving hand in that and I'm pretty proud of that. It was better for the operators. In all cases, there were things that I was proud of because it was better for the operators.

Rick

What did you enjoy most about USS Arleigh Burke or your association with Arleigh Burke?

John

What I loved? I loved the ship visit that you did to the HMS Lancaster.

Rick

And you might have mentioned this to me before, but tell me.

John

I did. That's when I came upon a wardroom scene on the British ship where you and the XO, the British ship were standing on your heads and trying to drink beers. And the reason it's memorable is because it was a weekend and the ship had come in and I was down there. My wife was at home in D.C. and I was in Norfolk working on getting ready for, it was the follow-on test and evaluation after the electrical problems that we'd had.

And I watched all the officers go over wearing SM-2 shoot-em-in-the-face ball caps. And with Bond, James Bond, name tags on, it's like, that's pretty funny. And I went back to work and about 20 minutes later, Hiser's calling me, it's like, you need to come over here now. It's like, I'm busy. I'm doing something. He said, no, you don't understand. This is not a request.

And when I got there, it was like controlled chaos. It was a wonderful thing to watch. their mission in life was to make your crew, your wardroom, drink as many of those elephant beers as they could in a short period of time so that you'd toddle down the pier and they'd laugh.

Look at them yanks.

Rick

Probably about right.

So what was the most irritating thing, troublesome, or frustrating thing?

John

Well, we had things that irritated me. I, I didn't get irritated much. But if I get an answer from somebody that was trying to help me track down a problem that led me to believe that their commitment level was not the same as mine - we're going to have a problem.

Some of the congressional things were a little bit irritating there. There was a one the on the generator sets again. There was a whistleblower case against the vendor, and they made all kinds of allegations and if he you know if you've ever read a whistleblower case, their, their interest is in throwing enough mud against the wall so that something sticks, even though there's there may be more of truth. But these guys, the guys that that made the case had been doing something inappropriate in the workplace, and I won't say any more than that, but that's what they were they were terminated because they were doing inappropriate things in the workplace, and their response to that was to bring this whistleblower case.

And I think that's what was made about the systems that were the kind of things that would come up when somebody hears something but doesn't know the full story. Like I heard you had problems with the AG 9130 early on and there were oil leaks everywhere and that was a problem. And it could cause a fire that could burn the ship down. Okay, well, no, it's lube oil. It's not going to probably do that. But it's enclosed and it's got a firefighting system, but we had to answer that very frustrating to answer with facts with data, which we could do, but it took a lot of time and we did answer that they made allegations about the reliability of the things, and I had worked very hard to improve the reliability.

So fortunately, we had data that said you know MTBF was supposed to be 3000 hours and right now we're at this this many hours and we anticipate we're going here. So you answered it with data, but it was necessary to dispose of the case, but really off the path of trying to help the ship and to take time out of my day. And that thing, believe it or not, went all the way to the Supreme Court. [ed note - twice] I was, I was being deposed for that stuff after I was retired.

Rick

How did your prior career and training prepared success as it relates to DDG 51.

John

Well, the things that that I enjoyed about being a SWO on a ship were almost exclusively engineering issues.

On the Belknap, we had a ship that was towed into Augusta Bay. And then back to the Philadelphia naval shipyard, all the auxiliaries were taken off and put in a field next to the damage control school for about three or four years before they decided they wanted to rebuild it, then they took all of those things and they supposedly class B overhaul them. And in almost four years on the ship I was Boilers officer, machinery officer, MPA, I can count on one hand, the equipment, I didn't have to tear into we're talking upwards of 40 or 50 steam driven on auxiliaries in both plants boilers. You remember what happened on the Saratoga with boiler tubes, and that happened at Philadelphia Naval shipyard, and that's who overhauled my boilers. So, I spent a lot of time in the plant, and I have to say, after I did that, I was ready to go ED because I liked it. And that's the kind of stuff that I was able to parlay into success and in 51 because we had a well funded program that cared about doing it right. And I knew that I wanted to make that ship the best ship that could be all of them.

Rick

So what would you do differently if you could redo redo something or some things regarding DG 51.

John

Well, I think, nothing comes to mind that I would necessarily do differently. In every case that I've ever lost my temper there has been nothing good that happens from that. And so it's kind of a kind of wishy washy answer, but there were several times when I lost my temper. I lost \$70 million once as a program manager, because somebody was doing something that was there was no requirement for, and they expose that to the resource sponsor. That made me pretty hot. You know, so I lose \$70 million because these people were off doing something that wasn't a requirement. It was to do a COTS DV Sig Pro. And there was no money or requirement for that, but they decided to take under run money that is what I would use to solve my own funding problems and say, Oh, we can use this. And when that got exposed to the comptroller's \$70 million gone.

You know, that made me pretty hot. And getting hot didn't fix anything but make the people that I was angry at, angry at me. So, I would do that over there's no there's no good that comes from losing your temper, in my mind. And in the end I got 50 million of it back. Why - Katrina. No, it wasn't. Wait a minute, it wasn't Katrina, it was, we burned up a deck house. We had a fire on DDG.

Rick

New construction?

John

Yes, 103 down in in Pascagoula because of Katrina. So Katrina happens and what goes on the shipyard is covered in water. And stuff goes haywire down there, and people are impacted by losing their homes. And then on a Saturday. We have a guy that's welding on the ship, you'll be able to picture this the O3 central passageway where the state rooms are. And that state room forward on the, on the port side was being used as a, as an office and it was locked. And there was a welder, that was below that state room welding in the overhead I think he was like outside of CSMC in in towards the forward part of the deck house. And we couldn't get in there, so we didn't check there. And there was a box of paper on the deck and it caught fire. And so it catches fire, the guy realizes there's a fire.

He calls the base fire department at Ingalls. There were four people on duty that day at the fire department on Saturday. One guy calls in sick. Another guy gets bit by a snake. So the third guy takes the guy that gets bit by the snake over the Singing River Hospital. That leaves one guy. You know, one guy at the shipyard fire department to respond to shipboard fire. One guy. He goes down there quickly sees that he can't do anything about it goes back calls the Pascagoula fire department. By the time they got there, it burned for over an hour. You know, uncontrollably, like, when they get there.

They were just at the point of doing a Aegis loadout. Okay, and they were going through the holes where the arrays were, thank God they didn't have the arrays in. But, and they didn't have most of the equipment. Smoke was billowing out of where the forward array faces would be. It acted like a chimney. And from CIC up through the entire deck house, up to the directors on top of the deck house burned to a crisp. In O3 level where the ward room was all those NOMEX bulkheads, there wouldn't a bulkhead be seen. NOMEX supposed to be fireproof -- gone. It was, it was like a ballroom from the ward room to the COs cab.

Rick

Now who had to pay for this?

John

Guess what - we're self insured. So after the insurance claim which is 50,000. The Navy paid for that. So I got \$50 million back to buy a new deck house.

Rick

So that was so it just interested in why it wasn't the shipyard's fault because they weren't involved in the ...

John

It wasn't malicious. You know, for you to lay that on the ship builder, it would have to be deliberate malpractice. It wasn't. The guy just screwed up and proven deliberate malpractice really hard. You have to have like records that said I know it says this but we're doing that. You don't do that so the shipbuilding for at least Navy ships is by and large self insured, because you can't find that an insurer an underwriter that would ensure a Navy ship with all the changes that we do.

One thing that insurance guys hate is when you change the contract. Okay, I ensured that for 500 million. Okay, now we're going to add 50 mil, wait a minute. You're not going to add 50 million and no 20 million and 10 million here. I'm not ensuring that. So the Navy self insured. Getting my money back. The money that they took from me they gave back to me to buy a deck house, which we did.

Rick

So, I want to check that I hit all the questions, even though some of the end up being repetitive. Yeah, I think we just answered the question what you would do differently right.

John

Yeah and it's like I said, squishy, not lose as much.

Rick

So, so this may be slightly repetitive too - but what went well? And you don't need to list everything but maybe the top thing or two and getting Arleigh Burke to sea

John

What went well for a first of a class ship?

I believe the ship was well designed with system problems that were by and large known. And, and it was able to be taken to sea safely and turned over to the operators with enough information in the technical information, such that you were able to operate it and maintain it, I think that's something that went well, that I worry about in other programs when I see him cutting corners in logistics - in the the things that you really need to operate a ship.

I think on Burke, in spite of the fact that it was maybe 85% done we went to acceptance trial. It worked. You know, you had your little idiosyncrasies, like the interim electronic controller for the engines. Ideally you wouldn't call a piece of gear that went from DDG 51 out into the DDG 70s interim. And that would have finished the development. Yeah, but we knew what we knew what the issues were - it was a FSEE [free standing electronics console - LM2500 controller] with a little bit different interface. It wasn't like completely unknown, we, we did enough engineering and understanding of it to know what the issues would be.

Rick

What would you recommend to do differently on the first ship of a new class.

John

I would recommend that the design for the new class be as complete as possible. Before starting fabrication starting construction, having been through situations where

you start with an incomplete design. It's really hard. Very hard. And I think the most important.

Here's the most important thing - if you're the government. I would pay extra attention to providing information about systems that you're going to procure yourself and give to the ship builder, such that that information is as good as it can be, and maintain it under rigid configuration control, because it'll pay dividends for the ship yard that has to build your product. I've seen too many instances of crap GFI [Government Furnished Information] given to a ship builder. Late time late to when it was needed, defective or deficient. And not, not given any consideration for that to the ship builder ship it was got a tough job.

The recommendation would be you can make that job easier if you take care of your stuff, the way you would like them to take care of their stuff. You know, there's that and that applies to specifications to the to the government furnished information, the material that you're going to buy. If there's a change in that stuff, you got to let them know as soon as you know it. Otherwise you're going to get a claim or a notification of change at least.

And change is not good. If you can lock down that information and the technical requirements, the best you can, you'll be doing a service to the persons that have to build your ship. I think they did a pretty good job on DDG 51. I mean that it, if the spec had a problem. They're really good at going back and changing the spec. You know, they didn't say, oh, here's the fix. And if you just do this, we don't have to change the spec. No, they actually went back and changed the spec, because that's what you should do.

Rick

So follow ships wouldn't have the problem?

John

Right. Well, and, and the ship's force got something that's relevant. The worst thing for the ship is when you got this situation on the ship and the spec said do this, and they don't match and they don't know why.

Rick

Yeah. What did you take away from DDG 51? Or what's the one thing that you took away from DDG 51 that had an impact on the rest of your career or the rest of your life?

John

Well, I think one thing, I told this to somebody who was working on something that was really hard.

We made it happen.

This person happened to work for Ingalls and has moved on and works for Northrop Grumman.

But I told the person, hey, you did a great job.

And this is what success feels like. Remember that. I felt that way about Burke. We did a good job and we were successful. And I learned what success felt like. And I used that as a measuring stick for other things that I got involved in.

You know, if you do something the right way and you have success, even if it was hard, it's something that you should keep in mind. You know, this is what it takes. These are the kind of things that you have to do to ensure success.

And I think that made me a better engineer, a better program manager, a better shipbuilder, supervisor of shipbuilding in every job that I worked.

Especially as I went up, I enjoyed having the success with the people that worked with me or that I worked for, which were the people that I was responsible for. And that Burke kind of drove a lot of how I acted in the rest of my career because I was working with great people. And I watched people do phenomenal things for me just because I said, could you do this?

You know, so that kind of success is contagious almost. And I think that's what the Arleigh Burke kind of set the bit for me in an area of my career that I really grew to love. I'm glad that I spent two thirds of my career like acquiring ships because it was immensely satisfying.

Rick

Did you have any interaction with Admiral or Bobby Burke?

John

Yes. Not how you think, though. When I was a sophomore in high school, so that's like 15 years old, maybe.

Rick

Quick aside, what was your year group?

John

I was 79.

So I graduated from high school in 1975. And I grew up in the D.C. area. And when I was a sophomore, I worked at a place called Westwood, Texaco in Bethesda, Maryland. I worked in a gas station, pumping gas, checking oil cleaning windshields. And Arleigh Burke would drive into Westwood, Texaco now and then and the manager of the station would like go hermatile. The admiral's here. Get out there. Wash his windows. You know, and so I would pump Arleigh Burke's gas and wash the windows, check the oil.

And I told him I wanted to be in the Navy. And he graciously spent a little bit of time talking to 15 year old me about how great a Navy career would be. He was, I think a member the board, the governing board of Texaco at that point, which is why they knew who he was. And he comes in and pull out all the stops and make sure that he's happy and get his gas pumped.

Rick

Did he live up in Bethesda that time?

John

Yeah, he did. And I, I saw the admiral at times from afar. But you guys when the ship was having its events I know that he was there and then when he passed the program manager and, of course, Admiral Morgan and Admiral Hamilton. They all went to Annapolis for the funeral. But, yeah, it was I knew who the admiral was. And I was so bold as to introduce myself and say I wanted to go into the Navy and he he liked that. That's good.

Rick

Okay, I know. And this next question that you've actually had a lot of interaction here and you've described I think some of it already. So I want you to talk about as much as you feel is useful, but it's a very broad question is, did you have interactions with project leadership, eg Admiral Meyer, Nyquist, Meinig, and recollections to share regarding the project, as we're calling it here, leadership.

John

Yeah. Admiral Meyer, I had a lot of a lot of interaction with both as a program management or program office system engineer. And, and then when I became PMR the Admiral would be at, he'd try to be at every ship, christening, commissioning. And since I was going to those things, a lot of times we would sit together and have conversations with him.

Rick

Was he retired at this point?

John

Yes.

Rick

You didn't have any interaction with him on active duty, right?

John

No, no. When I was a junior officer, when I went through the ED school, he came out there and was the speaker at graduation. So I've got a picture of him. I'm shaking his hand.

Rick

He was an Admiral at that point, right?

John

Yeah. It was right before he retired. And he came out to talk to the class. And, and we were graduating from that particular school.

Rick

At Port Hueneme?

John

At that point, it was at Mare Island. You know, they moved to Port Hueneme later, but it was at the naval shipyard up at Mare Island. And so I had met him back then. I was a lieutenant. And he was fairly lofty for a lieutenant. But very magnetic speaker, and then I got to know him working in the DDG 51 program and get to know him really well. When I was program manager's rep and then went back and as a PM, Charlie Hamilton asked I actually helped with the seed money for the war rooms. You know, that was Aegis money. And I was the controller of Aegis money and Admiral Hamilton said, hey, we want to get this started. I'm like, okay, yes, sir. And so part of what the Admiral used to set up the war rooms for future combatants was just money and we were the only Aegis program left at that point.

Rick

Okay. So, yeah. Who is the most unrecognized hero that you knew contributed to the success of the DDG 51 program.

John

Wow. I could go through names of people. They eventually received recognition. But we were pretty good at recognition actually. It's a shortfall of other programs and a casualty of government timidity with respect to recognizing the people that make you successful.

We used to have something called the Aegis Excellence Awards. This is all Admiral Admiral Meyer's idea, Aegis Excellence Awards. And he would go to industry if industry was doing a good job, he'd give them an Aegis Excellence Award. Some of these companies would run through walls for Admiral Meyer because of that. We used to hand them out to the shipbuilders, to people at SupShip, to people in the program office. And you'd see them at their desks.

You know, if you if you got an Aegis Excellence Award, it was a big deal because they had to, they put you in front of a committee, and they had to vote on giving it to you. And so it was a big deal. And those things went a long way to recognize people. I'd say unrecognized or unsung heroes.

I think amongst the shipbuilders, I could always find people in the group of people that were responsible to build the ship that were there all the time. And they would sometimes get recognition. And sometimes the crew, like you and Admiral Morgan, would recognize somebody like a Dave Albert who was the hull manager, hull superintendent for Arleigh Burke, and really went above and beyond.

But there were guys like that, that were where the rubber meets the road. And I I would say the shipbuilders themselves, many of them were unsung heroes and not recognized for what they did, as much as they could have been or should have been. You know, you'd get recognition to the company and sometimes down into the people that were working towards the success of the ship. But when it's like 20 degrees out and they're there every day life as a shipbuilder is not easy. And the fact that they can build products like that is a testament to their commitment. And it's not just a job. It's more than a job. You know, no one told them they had to do that. You know, it's a choice. And so I celebrate that and I think that they would be appropriate people to recognize.

Rick

So you've shared one interesting sea story, and that was our host, the British ship. The question is, do you have an interesting sea story, lessons learned or anecdote to share?

John

Do you remember when the ship went down to Autec [Atlantic Undersea Test and Evaluation Center]?

Rick

In general terms, I do.

John

Yes. Well, in my time, which totaled maybe four years of sea time on the Belknap before I exercised my option, I've never done swim call and John Morgan loved swim call.

John Morgan has swim call. And I'm like, I am not missing this. When am I ever going to have another chance to do that? I went the top side and the boat was deployed with the shark watchers and the shotguns and everything. And we had a lovely time doing swim call in probably the most ideal conditions for swim call ever. You know, in tropical like waters, completely beautifully pristine blue. And I enjoyed that a lot. I enjoyed that a lot.

Rick

That's a great story. Yeah. OK, so. Second to last question, do you have any pictures memorabilia that you can share? You said you had this list of Wayne Meyer quotes. Find that that's certainly something.

John

Yeah, I certainly can do that.

Rick

But and you've probably got enough things that you could spend a year taking pictures of them and electronically recording them. But the Wayne Meyer quotes would be great. But anything else that comes to mind that's easy to share at this juncture and then. Yeah. Open up the thought process that when you can do it, the archiving of. You know, I don't know if they gave you a shadow box on retirement some pictures things like that. That I think would be great for the U.S.S. Arleigh Burke Association historical files.

John

I pulled together a bunch of pictures when I when I retired that were like a slideshow. As people waiting to come in, we my retirement was at the at the Navy Memorial. And a lot of things didn't go the way I wanted to for my retirement. I got very sick right before I retired. And and so my focus was on health related matters and not getting invitations out and so forth. But it was a very nice thing. And I've got some pictures in there from the Arleigh Burke and a picture of a bunch of us on the on the DDG 52 as a sea trial with with people that were just contributors. I remember.

One of the first technical meetings I went to, you remember Andy Summers? Andy Summers was the ship design manager for Arleigh Burke. And Andy Summers was in this technical meeting and it was like the first one. It was up in Bath and we were in a conference room. And Andy Summers is yelling at the top of his lungs. That's bullshit. We're not going to do that. That's you. The specs say this and you're going to do it that way. And the guy he was yelling at, I'm trying to remember who it was, it might have been Art Dresser or somebody like that yelling just as loud at Andy Summers. He's like, oh, shit, the specs don't say anything about us doing it that way. We're going to do it this way. They were like nose to nose. And I'm like, oh, my God, what have I gotten myself into? These guys are like passionately screaming at each other. And then at the end of the meeting, it's like, OK, where are we going? We got the no-host now? Wow. Andy could get passionate at a moment's notice. And he was a funny guy and a good engineer. Sometimes you had to reel him in.

But yeah, I've got pictures of people like that that participated. And there's people that I would call today that at NAVSSES, Tony Checkio is another one. You had, remember the bulkhead where the shore power connections were? Yeah, it was like that. And the shore power connections had a little cover on them.

Rick

There were eight.

John

If not, there might have been ten. And because the bulkhead was slanted, after a while, there was a void behind them. And you could open up that void and look at all that water. You know, that's not good. Water and electricity. Whoa, bad juju. So we had to modify the ship.

Why was the bulkhead slanted? Well, radar cross-section. As a matter of fact, I think we probably laid some radar absorbing material on that bulkhead at different times. So you couldn't just like change that without thinking about it. But water and electricity, not good.

So people like Tony Checkio and Tom Coughlin from NAVSSES, like put their thinking caps on. What are we going to do to change that so we don't get this water intrusion? I don't want that. I don't want some sailor hooking up shore power, disconnecting shore power, all of a sudden to have a bad event because we've got water intrusion into the space. And they came up with it. You know, that's kind of things we did. We were able to do that. They were smart enough to think of how can we do. Let's recess the box. Let's put the, put the shore power connection in a vertical orientation instead of like canted and put an eyebrow over the top of it. That doesn't interrupt the signature too much.

And so doing those kind of things with people that were motivated to kind of come up with a solution because you asked them to. Pretty cool. Pretty cool stuff.

Rick

So that was great. So, so maybe you just provide the whole slide show if that's easiest. I mean, that's about you. We don't need to make it hard. But if you wanted to just carve out the Arleigh Burke stuff too, you could do that too.

John

I'll see if I'll see if I'll see what I can find. I have to go. You know, Dean Krestos called me the other day and he was looking for a commissioning coin for the DDG 1000 because he couldn't find. He knew he had one, but he couldn't find it. He's making a bar in his basement with all these commissioning coins. It's like, let me look. And I had to dig things up, but I found one. So I'll have to go digging again and look for the 51 stuff, but I certainly have some things.

Rick

I want to thank you for your time.