Video Recording Log

Veteran Robert Hamm

1. Name and address of collector of interviewer.

Name of Donor/Interviewer: Kathleen Ricker
Address: Campbell Hall for Public Telecommunication, 300 N. Goodwin
City: Urbana
State: Illinois
Zip: 61801
Telephone: 217-333-7300
Email: kricker@ncsa.uiuc.edu
Partner organization affiliation (if any): WILL AM-FM-TV

2. Name and birth date of the veteran or civilian being interviewed at is appears on the Biographical Data Form:

Name of Veteran/Civilian: Robert Hamm
Birth Date: 07/17/1923

3. Recording format
VIDEO type: Mini DVD

4. Estimated length of recording (in minutes): 93 minutes  Date of recording: 08/23/2007

5. Location of recording: WILL AM-FM-TV, 300 N. Goodwin Ave, Urbana, IL 61801

6. Please log the topics discussed in the interview in sequence.

00:00:00  Introduction
00:00:44  Draft notice when he was 19, signed up for Navy to avoid Army
00:01:20  Worked in Engineering Plant
00:01:38  Recruits wanted him but he had to wait
00:02:15  6 months later Army looking for him, inducted into Navy
00:02:50  Recruiters asked him if he wanted to be Navy or Reserves, he chose Reserves because the duration was said to be 6 months
00:03:15  Great Lakes boot camp
00:03:30  Sent to Norfolk, VA, on battleship from WWI—used for convoys to Africa
00:04:10  Transferred to U.S.S. Franklin, pre-commissioning school, plank owner, original crew
00:04:45  Shakedown trip to Trinidad, then back to Norfolk, VA, then to the Panama Canal and to San Diego to pick up planes and air group, then to Pearl Harbor, 1942
00:05:30  Pearl Harbor, brand new carrier, loaded ship with supplies and munitions—unloaded, got planes on ship—tied up next to U.S.S. Arizona, could see gun turrets
00:06:45  Pilots on board—there several weeks—gunnery practice
Video Recording Log
Veteran Robert Hamm

00:07:00 Went to sea, Captain said there would be a Fourth of July party—bombed Iwo Jima, first mission
00:07:30 Engaged in battles in Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Iwo Jima—President Bush Sr. shot down—“Ha Ha Chi Chi and Iwo Jima”
00:08:35 Sailed to Marianas—there for “softening up” of island after invasion
00:08:52 The problem of being in Engineering—never know what is going on or where you’re going when you are below deck
00:09:14 Men on “smokewatch”—look down at stacks on ship and report if they started blowing grey smoke—also watch for submarines and torpedoes
00:10:40 Torpedo scares happened frequently—sometimes got orders for hard rudder to turn ship—never hit by torpedo
00:11:10 Sailed from Marianas to Philippine Sea—Najwa and Leite
00:11:25 Sent to Palau Islands—softening up for invasion—later told cousin was killed there in first wave of Marine invasion
00:13:00 Sailed South of the Equator—got shellback cards
00:13:25 Got word Japanese had turned Marines back and driven them off of the island—Army came in and reoccupied
00:14:20 Battle of Phillipine Sea—Japanese fleet hiding there—“Mariana Turkey Shoot”
00:15:00 Close miss during battle killed several and injured some—damage to deck edge elevator
00:15:45 Later hit by kamikaze plane—tore into hangar deck
00:16:05 Sailed to Ulithe Island—ship was inspected and taken to Pearl Harbor for repairs
00:16:35 Sailed to Washington, Puget Sound—there over Christmas
00:17:00 Leave—train from Seattle to Chicago—antique cattle train with pot-bellied stove—20 day leave—back to Washington
00:17:50 Ship finished in a couple of months—sailed to San Francisco and San Diego to get new air crew, new missiles, Tiny Tims
00:18:26 Sailed out, did not know where they were going—later found out going to bomb Japan
00:18:48 First carrier planes to bomb mainland Japan since Jimmy Doolittle—1945
00:19:55 50 miles off of coast of Japan—planes all loaded with bombs, gas, Tiny Tims—hangar deck and flight deck all loaded
00:20:25 Japanese bomber dropped 2 bombs—planes and pilots blown away—about 800 killed, 400-500 wounded
00:21:08 Santa Fe Cruiser came along and took off wounded
00:21:30 Burying men
00:21:50 Stopped at Ulithe—argument about Captain—part of repair party
00:22:38 Started looking for bodies—took a long time, finding pieces
00:23:00 Sailed to Pearl Harbor—[decides to withhold story about Captain] “let sleeping dogs lie,” “it wasn’t good”
00:23:28 Back through Canal—up through Gulf—rumors of German submarine in the Gulf—Captain decided to follow coast to beach ship in case of attack
00:24:10 Back to New York—dance put on by Lady Astor
Video Recording Log
Veteran Robert Hamm

00:24:30 While in New York war in Europe ended—Time Square—also in Time Square when war in Japan was over
00:24:55 Signed up with friends to bring troops back from Europe
00:25:15 German luxury liner being converted to troop transport—school to learn German because everything on ship was in German
00:26:05 Transferred to another carrier—U.S.S. Lake Champlain—just like U.S.S. Franklin—put in #3 fire room just like on the Franklin
00:26:35 Sailed to South Hampton, England to pick up troops, returned to Stanton Island
00:27:00 Second trip, appendicitis—Captain operated on him, 3-4 days out of New York—light duty for a few weeks
00:27:45 Leave—had no money—borrowed from Salvation Army—went home
00:28:56 Discharged in Chicago
00:29:15 Went back to Engineering Company—making 40 cents an hour
00:29:35 Friend told him to join Santa Fe Railroad Company—got on steam locomotives in rail yard—dangerous, fatalities
00:30:35 Married, 3 sons, moved to Urbana, IL
00:30:50 Working at University of Illinois
00:31:00 Father-in-law got him into carpenters union in Chicago, IL, apprentice there
00:31:30 Applied as carpenter at University—had to get a physical—doctor said he was unfit for the job because he might get a hernia
00:33:28 Worked as a janitor—applied to work at a power house—told he was too old
00:34:15 Carpentry—had his own company—built houses—contracts for University buildings
00:34:38 Moved to Oakland—built kiln to make wood finishing
00:35:55 Moved back to Urbana, IL
00:36:10 Oakwood for 30 years, Urbana, IL again for 5 years
00:36:30 Navy reunions—1st was in New York—son was born—1948-49?—reunions started 6-8 years apart, hard to find everyone
00:38:15 When ship was hit, Captain ordered all non-essential men to leave on Santa Fe—crew down to 704 from 3200, “704 club”
00:39:10 “Better not get into that”—about people that left the ship [possibly related to previous self-censorship about Captain]
00:39:25 No one that left the ship could come back—friend on flight deck was blown off ship, picked up by destroyer and taken to Pearl Harbor—snuck him back on ship—picked shrapnel out of his back for two weeks
00:41:40 After war his friend wanted nothing to do with other men from the ship or reunions—said guys at Pearl Harbor were spitting on him because he was an engineer and left his ship—being punished even though it was Captain’s decision—hard feelings
00:42:45 At Ulithe—Captain sent for some of the officers to come back on ship who had been ordered to leave previously
00:43:50 Friend never got over it—did not want to see any friends from the ship back in civilian life—became chief engineer at Corning West
Video Recording Log
Veteran Robert Hamm

00:44:40   Reunions occurring every year
00:45:00   Reunion at Bar Harbor, ME—had a stroke—no public hospital—taken to private hospital across the street from Bush and Kennedy estates
00:48:00   President Bush supposed to speak at reunion—too busy, but did a fly-over
00:49:04   U.S.S. Franklin day to day—big ship, about 800 feet long—had bombers, fighters, torpedo bombers—could carry bombs up to 2,000 pounds heavy
00:50:07   Marine “Corse Airs”
00:50:23   Heard that some pilots from “Pepe One’s” “black sheep squadron” joined ship after he was shot down
00:50:43   Discussing movie reels—Navy guys, pictures—news reel with famous broadcaster—one with Gene Kelly, made honorary crew member
00:52:23   Photograph of U.S.S. Franklin after bombing—Bob Blanchard being given last rites by Father O’Callahan—he did not die, given name “Chicken Bob”
00:53:40   Gene Kelly—each guy gave a story

00:53:45   Lots of fires on ship—one sailor talking about getting lungs burned—had to drink out of spittoon because there was no water
00:54:50   After ship bombed—officers gone—crew raided officers’ lockers—everyone drinking in fire room
00:55:40   [Tape change]
00:55:53   [New tape starts mid-sentence] Ship photographer Ray Bailey
00:56:55   Bombing of ship—nearly everyone on hangar and flight decks killed—he was on 4th deck

00:57:45   Problem—does not want to get Captain involved—not at general quarters when hit—not supposed to happen when in battle area—hatch doors were all open—ship burning and blowing for 24 hours
00:58:50   [Does not want to get into detail about bombing]
00:59:10   People he knew on ship—only know people you work with—about 3200 people on the whole ship—knew men in fire room and engine room

01:00:50   Re-provisioning ship—bringing stuff on
01:02:15   Officers had own mess and own food—good stuff—stealing officers’ food and dropping down hatch to fire room—hiding food in bilges
01:05:30   Officers found out
01:06:17   Sheet metal shop made fire room a coffee pot out of copper with lead soldering—held about 50 cups of coffee—heated water with steam pipes in engine room from super heaters, 800 degrees—used boiler water which had boiler compound in it
01:09:00   Divisions had specialties—kept to themselves
01:09:15   People in air divisions thought very highly of themselves
01:11:00   Standing watch on deck at night—on watch 4 hours, off 8, rotated constantly
01:11:40   When not on watch had to work—maintenance or engine room
01:11:48   Did not get much sleep, especially in battle zone
01:12:08   Sonar for submarines was really sensitive—in fire room men were making rings out of quarters—making too much noise, Captain passed word they were messing up the sonar
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01:14:09  Going on liberty to islands on whale boat—Eniwetok, Mantis—rim of volcano
01:15:25  Japanese ship sunk close to beach—could swim out to it and swim into hold—got souvenirs of Japanese guns and ammunition
01:17:15  Islands had coconut trees which were reduced to stumps from Navy shooting at island—CEBE’s made windmills for washing machines—cooling beers in gasoline tanks
01:18:47  Time Square when war ended—great place to be—got old after a few months
01:20:15  Supposed to go to Le Havre, France, but only made it to South Hampton, England—would take train to London for liberty—London was barren
01:21:00  Stayed at a place like YMCA—no roof or windows, army cot and blanket, bombed out building
01:21:35  London in bad shape
01:21:55  Read books about U.S.S. Franklin—4 of them
01:23:30  Author asked him to tell his story—there was a release form—had heard that for other books there had been lawsuits—did not want to get into trouble for talking about Captain
01:24:45  “I never said nothing for 62 years, so I figured, forget it. The damage is done, and it’s not going to make anybody happy.”
01:25:05  What it’s like to read books now—likes to see if people see it the same way he does
01:25:45  A lot of people thought the Captain was a good person—he never said anything because it would be negative to other guys on ship
01:26:10  Not many men from U.S.S. Franklin still alive, so reunions every year
01:26:45  Last newsletter—staff taking on children and grandchildren on board for reunions
01:28:15  A lot of the men came through Great Lakes but never got to see Chicago as a city—reunions there
01:29:45  Books, authors, other Illinois veterans, tapes
01:32:07  Wrap-up