

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Richard E. Ammon, Jr. **COLLECTION:** 4700.1135

IDENTIFICATION: Indiana native and Florida resident; U.S. Navy veteran; served on twelve ships during his twenty years of service; served on the USS *Kidd* 1959-1963.

INTERVIEWER: Laura Pattillo

PROJECT: Military Series – USS *Kidd*

INTERVIEW DATES: April 11, 1999

FOCUS DATES: 1955-1974

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1661, Side A

Born in Richmond, Indiana; joined the navy after high school in 1955; first assignment on USS *Tarawa*; two years later assigned to USS *Intrepid*, six-month Mediterranean and North Atlantic cruise; he wasn't interested in being on a carrier anymore; four year enlistment was up, reenlisted and assigned to USS *Kidd* in 1959; six-month Western Pacific cruise; back to San Diego then on to the Panama Canal; ship almost ran out of fuel due to a miscalculation of their course; he took training course to work in different areas of the ship; worked as an engineman but his rank was not officially changed despite appeals to the Navy Bureau; eventually put back in the fire room despite his wide range of experience; arranged to switch ships with a friend whose wife was ill; went to USS *Cone* in 1963; had to be released from the ship because of a knee problem, ten months in the hospital; reevaluated and reenlisted, took more training course to work on destroyers; briefly on the USS *Garcia* and USS *Glover*; went to Michigan for building of USS *Voge*; *Voge* almost collides with a freighter on first trip in St. Lawrence Seaway; commissioning ceremony for *Voge* in Boston; he is a plank owner for the *Voge*; transfer to USS *Bache*, an older ship in poor condition because the crew didn't take care of it; roaches so bad onboard that he couldn't put his tray down while eating, roaches would crawl on him at night; forward fire room on *Bache* was deplorable; Ammon ordering crew to clean it up caused animosity and retaliation, "I didn't make any friends"; quizzing crew of fire room on operation of machinery and realizing they didn't know what they were doing; his mail is hidden by other crew members; designing a pressure washer to clean the bilges; crew's morale improves and other parts of the ship follow suit; explanation of navy's planned maintenance system; crew members feel pride in knowing how to solve problems and make repairs themselves; water restriction on the *Bache* during a Mediterranean cruise; pulling in to port in Sète, France; ski trip in the Alps; anchored off Rhodes, Greece, rough weather spins ship around anchor chain, forces ship into seawall; ship starts sinking; procedure for abandon ship; sailors are put up in a hotel.

Tape 1661, Side B

Radio Free Europe out of Rhodes reports sinking of U.S. destroyer, February 6, 1968; Greek Orthodox people bring huge bales of clothing since everything sank with the ship; his locker was in a room with a water-tight door so he got most of his belongings back when the ship was floated; he decided to stay to help with the salvage, most other crew were sent back to the States; explains how they drained the berthing compartments; explains that another storm came two days after the sinking and damaged the ship further; sailors in the hotel were, "like a bunch of refugees"; Admiral Kidd comes to Rhodes, Ammon knows him from when he was a captain visiting the *Kidd* in Philadelphia, they speak briefly; inquiry after the sinking find the captain did not maintain control of the "chain of command"; salvage is completed and he goes back to the States; assigned to the USS *Richard E. Kraus* and the USS *Detroit*; joins the crew of the USS *McCaffery* in 1972; crew on the *McCaffery* takes pride in the ship; other ships' assignments during the Vietnam War, transporting U.S. forces and Vietnamese captives; problems with drug abuse during Vietnam; explanation of a "blanket party," a way for angry crew to retaliate against crewmen who stole, used drugs, started rumors, etc.; while the offending man slept in his bunk, others would throw a blanket over him and hold it down tightly while they beat him; this type of punishment was necessary because sailors, "can't work against each other in a small environment like that"; he discusses an instance of working together with another sailor when the *Bache* was sinking; fire room crew on the *McCaffery* was inexperienced, similar to the crew of the *Bache*; individuals must know and understand their jobs or else the ship cannot function properly; a ship damaged by a free-floating mine provided spare parts for the *McCaffery*; Ammon got a commendation for the two months he spent repairing the *McCaffery*; transferred to the USS *Koelsch* and travelled to the Red Sea; concluding comments.

TAPES: 1 (T1661)**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 14 minutes**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 48 pages**OTHER MATERIALS:** Correspondence (2 pages)**RESTRICTIONS:** None