Interview with Joseph Rank

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Interviewers: Cassidy Williams and Stretch Ledford

A Note to the Reader

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Rank: I'm Joe Rank. I'm 67 years old, from Urbana, Illinois.

Williams: Where and when did you serve in the military?

Rank: I served in the military from, well as an ROTC student at the University from '65 to '69. Then I served active in the Navy from 1969 to 1989. I retired in 1989.

Williams: You said at the University. Which school did you go to?

Rank: I attended the University of Illinois. I was an Advertising major in the College of Journalism and Communications.

Williams: Think back to who you were before Vietnam and a little bit about who Joe Rank was when you returned. How were they different if they were different?

Rank: Who was I before Vietnam and after Vietnam? Well, I was a college student and a fairly naïve college student. If you'd grown up in the late '60s on campus, the University of Illinois and probably on any campus, 1968 was a devastating year. It started out with the North Koreans capturing the U.S.S. *Pueblo*, a Navy intelligence gathering ship. They imprisoned the crew for almost a year. Martin Luther King was assassinated. Shortly after that Robert Kennedy was assassinated. In the fall was the Democratic National Convention, and there was a lot of unrest at that time. The draft was going on, so college students like myself knew that one way or the other either as a draftee or those of us that were fortunate enough to be in ROTC, we were going to serve. There was no doubt in anybody's mind. It was a very uncertain time. I think we were optimistic. I went off to serve on my first ship, a 350 crew World War II vintage destroyer. You grew up fast. You worked eighteen-hour days. You were thrust into roles you were trained for, but a lot of things you really weren't prepared for. You dealt with them. You came out of it, and you'd seen the world or at least the Pacific. You were confident that you could do things. I think that time frame you grew up a lot. You became aware of the world. You became aware of the international situation that you weren't necessarily as a student. You had hints of it. I spent a three-year sea tour, half of which was on that first destroyer. Then we came back to our home port of San Diego, and it was put out of commission. I joined a new

ship. It was being built in Bath, Maine. We were going to around South America to get to our home port of San Diego, but we got as far as Rio de Janeiro and there was a revolution going on in Argentina at the time. The State Department said no, no you can't go to Argentina. You have to go back through the Panama Canal to go to San Diego. One of the interesting things as a result of that diversion is I got to con the ship, drive the ship through the Panama Canal. I don't think there are many people that can say they had an experience like that. We got to San Diego, then we went back for another six month tour in Vietnam waters. My three-year obligated service was up, and the Navy asked me where I wanted to go next. I said I want to go to grad school. I negotiated an assignment back here at the University of Illinois as a Naval ROTC instructor. I came back to my alma mater. I worked on a Masters' degree while I was teaching Naval Science. I think what I learned is after working eighteen-hour days, seven days a week aboard a ship, grad school and the teaching load was a breeze.

Williams: You mentioned that when you were at sea there were things you had been trained for but didn't feel necessarily ready for. What was it like to be in a position where you felt like you weren't sure what you were doing?

Rank: I think one of the things that ROTC did is it trained you to be a leader. Part of that is a sense of knowing what needs to be done and utilizing the skills of the people around you, of the people who have been trained to do certain things. The first time I had to con the ship, the conning officer on the ship is the officer responsible for the safe navigation who gives the orders to the

helmsmen who steer the ship and so on. The first time I had to come alongside an oiler to refuel, there are two massive ships going 12-15 knots steaming 100 yards apart with fuel hoses coming over is a little bit scary. You know that everybody around you has a job to do. They do their jobs, and you get through it. The second time you do it it's old hat. After a while, you actually don't have the jitters and you look forward to it. There are a lot of experiences like that, doing something new and relatively dangerous for the first time and realizing with the help of all the people around you, you can do it. It's a pretty heady experience.

Williams: Going back to something you mentioned earlier about the draft. If you could describe the draft to someone who knew nothing about it in a minute or two, what would you tell them?

Rank: Well, the military draft goes back probably during the Vietnam era we had had a military draft since just before World War II. Basically, all 18- to 25-year-old males were subject to two years of military service. In World War II of course, it was just virtually everybody who was qualified. Then during Korea and in Vietnam, it was more of a random thing. Students that were in college had college deferments. Teachers had teacher deferments. People in the ministry had ministerial or religious deferments. By and large, the people that were drafted in Vietnam were high school graduates, high school dropouts, people who didn't go on to college or people that went to college and either flunked out which wasn't unusual back then or graduated. Once your student deferment expired you were subject to the draft. As the demand

for sheer numbers drew down, they went to a lottery. Every birth date in the year had a number. The number was assigned to the birth date, and you know the ping pong balls in the lotto thing. They pulled out as many as they needed to meet the manpower requirement. It was sort of a random thing, a matter of luck. One birthday you were drafted. If you have a birthday the day later, you are not. That was sort of the randomness of it. One thing is if you were a young man in the sixties and very early seventies you had the specter of military conscription hanging over you. I don't think it was all that. It was just a fact of life. People had experienced it since World War II. I think if you tried to bring a draft back today it'd create all kinds of social upheaval because we aren't used to it.

Williams: Did you ever have a draft card? Can you tell us a little bit about how you kind of got out of the draft?

Rank: Well, yes I had a draft card. Every male when he turned 18 had to register with the selective service system. I think it was in the post office in downtown Champaign-Urbana, but you filled out a card. The draft board would determine your status. There were several statuses. One is physically-able, then there were people who were not physically qualified for any number of reasons. They were in a much lower category, so I didn't get out of the draft. I was registered for the draft, but if you were in ROTC as I was. I was in the Navy ROTC here at the University of Illinois, and you were deferred just as if you were a student. The deferment of course ended when you went on active duty the day you graduated.

Williams: Why did you choose the Naval ROTC instead of leaving it, as you eluded to, leaving it to luck?

Rank: There was a tradition at the University of Illinois. From the very beginnings of the University, the University of Illinois is a land grant institution, one of the aspects of the Land Grant Act of 1862 was the land grant colleges had to offer military instruction. The University of Illinois was one of many schools who interpreted that as a mandate. From the earliest days of the University until 1964, ROTC was compulsory for all undergraduate freshmen and sophomore males. I was the first class who enrolled in the University where it wasn't compulsory. There was this tradition of participation in ROTC. I was in a fraternity, and several of my fraternity brothers, upperclassmen, were ROTC cadets or midshipmen. I just happened to talk to one of my fraternity brothers that was in Naval ROTC, and he suggested that's what you ought to do because you'll see the world. And I saw the world.

Williams: When you talked about the draft, you mentioned luck. Did you consider the men whose birthdays were picked and then drafted unlucky?

Rank: I guess you'd have to ask them. For some people the draft was the beginning of a successful career in the military. For some they went to war and didn't come back. For some it was an obligation. I had a roommate in college who chose to go to Canada instead. Were they unlucky? I think that was just a hand that fate dealt you.

Williams: How did you feel about your roommate going to Canada being in ROTC?

Rank: My roommate and I were friends from Urbana High School. Very interesting, he was very tolerant of my choice to serve in the armed forces. He was very sincere in his beliefs. He believed that the war was wrong and the draft was wrong and we shouldn't be in Vietnam. He couldn't serve. We were very compatible roommates. I had my circle of friends. He had his. When we weren't talking about the war and foreign policy, we were best of friends.

Williams: If you guys went to the same high school and assuming you had relatively the same upbringing, how did you end up with such divergent views of the war?

Rank: You have to look at historical contexts. Why Vietnam in the first place? You go back to World War II. There was no question that we were fighting evil. Nazi Germany, the Empire of Japan, it was evil. After World War II, the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union and to a lesser extent Communist China, are basically at odds for world domination. You saw after World War II the Soviets had taken over and walled off half of Europe. The Korean War, you saw the North Koreans, the communists in Korea, vying for control of the whole Korean peninsula. In our fear at the time was communist expansion all over the globe, and in retrospect can you imagine half the world like a North Korea today? I think what prompted the Vietnam War was this fear of communist expansion in the world. I think at the time it was a real fear. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were embarked in a huge nuclear arms race. When I was a kid in grade school, we had drills in case the Soviets dropped a nuclear bomb on us. You know we ducked under our desks. People were building fallout shelters in case of a nuclear war. I think that was the

mindset of most of the free world at the time: Communists are bad, and they are trying to take over the world. In Vietnam you had the Communists, the Vietcong. Then you had the South Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese had been a French colony.

Ledford: I thought that was a really important question, let's get back to that. How did two young men who went to the same high school end up with such divergent views on the war? You guys came out of the same neighborhood and the same cultural milieu and somehow ended up on opposite sides of this thing. How did that happen?

Rank: Well, I would say when I was a senior in high school I think the prevailing world view of most certainly Middle-American people was that the war was a just war. It was to prevent the collapse of a friendly regime in South Vietnam and to prevent the global spread of communism. I think that was probably a prevailing view at the time. By 1967, the war in Vietnam was turning bad. The Tet Offensive in 1967, you know the Chinese New Year, the North Vietnamese launched a devastating attack. Casualties started to rise. I think that a growing number of people had the feeling that there was no end game. What are we trying to accomplish? I think my roommate was one of those who questioned, what is it we were trying to accomplish? We still have this problem today with ISIS and Afghanistan and Iraq. We have an armed forces that their mission is to fight and win wars, but we send people to war without a clear-cut how do we know we're successful? How will this end? I think that's what happened in Vietnam. We'd have some successes militarily, and

then the national leadership would say, "Ok let's back off a little bit and see how this works." Every time we tried to bring something to a conclusion, we had a lack of will or a lack of understanding or hope that it would end on its own. I think the parallels between Vietnam and what we're experiencing today are very similar.

Williams: Do you think it was maybe your family's military background that led to the difference between you and your roommate?

Rank: My mother served as a WAVE in the Navy World War II. My father was in the Army in World War II, but that wasn't unusual. All the male role models we had growing up: our dads, our uncles, our school teachers, everybody had served in World War II. I don't think the fact that my parents were veterans had any impact on my decision.

Williams: You were talking about how in World War II it was clear we were fighting evil. When you were in Vietnam, what did you feel like you were fighting?

Rank: Of course I was aboard a ship, and we were basically support forces for the ground forces that were in country and for the pilots that were doing aerial missions over Vietnam. I think early on it was we're fighting for this South Vietnam, this country. South Vietnam has had European influence from its colonial days. It was a Catholic country. We were fighting the communists from the North. I think as time goes on you recognized this might really be a civil war and not that good vs evil thing. It's just two factions. I watched a movie while in Vietnam in the wardroom, the officer' mess on the ship, a

Steve McQueen movie, *Sand Pebbles*. It came out in ’67, ’68. It was about an American riverboat on the Yangtze River in China in the 1920s. Its role was to protect American interests in China against Chinese warlords. It sort of struck me the parallels between the 1920s and the 1960s, 1970s. The first realization that this might just be a tribal war. We might not have a clear-cut interest in one side or the other, but that was the first inkling. You saw the parallels between the twenties and the seventies.

Williams: How did that affect your service on the ship slowly realizing you weren’t one hundred percent sure what the war was about?

Rank: I suspect that on a ship of 300 people there were a lot of people that were unaware of the issues, could care less about the issues, or had doubts about the war itself, but everybody believed in the job that they were doing. The boiler technician that kept the boilers running, the machinist mates that kept the engines running, the cooks that put three meals a day, everybody had incredible pride in what they were doing. They were doing the best they could. They took pride in their jobs. I was very proud of what I did. I was very proud of what they did. It’s sort of the cliché today, are we doing things right or are we doing the right things? I think for all of us that were in that environment, we were doing things right. We were doing what we were supposed to do. Whether we were doing the right thing, that’s a policy decision that comes from Washington and Congress and whatever.

Williams: You said you were very prideful in what you were doing, what was your job?

Rank: Well, I had a couple jobs. My primary job was anti-submarine warfare officer. I was responsible for the sonar technicians and torpedo men to protect the ship from a submarine attack. By and large, our adversaries didn't have a formidable submarine force at the time, so there wasn't a whole lot of submarine threat in the Gulf of Tonkin. First of all it's very shallow for submarine warfare. I was also a gunnery officer. I was responsible for probably 60 gunners' mates and fire control technicians that operated the 5-inch guns and the analog computers that controlled the guns.

Williams: You said you were in charge of the guns. What/who were you shooting at?

Rank: Well, one of our primary roles in Vietnam for a destroyer was to provide gunfire support to the marines and the soldiers that are fighting a ground war in the country. To the extent that our guns had the range to provide fire support for them, we were an alternative to howitzers and field artillery. The guns would have a range of eight miles. Vietnam is a coastal country. Most of the activity is along the coast, so eight miles would get you a lot of the coverage. When an American patrol, marines or soldiers, were being fired on they could give us the coordinates of where the enemy fire was coming from. We could direct our gunfire support to neutralize the situation.

Williams: Obviously being miles away, you weren't really seeing where your gunfire was going. Did you ever think about what it was hitting or what was happening?

Rank: No, when you're firing from that range you couldn't see what you were hitting. Sometimes you'd see a plume of smoke if you hit an ammunition dump or something like that. Did we think about the people that we were firing against? I guess we did, but on the other hand it's combat. We're firing to protect our comrades that are being fired upon. That's the nature of battle. If you've seen any of the World War II movies that are popular right now on television or in the movies, *Band of Brothers*, *Fury*, things like that. You realize that one-on-one if I were to meet a North Vietnamese person in a social situation, we'd probably have a lot to talk about. When that person is trying to kill, not me I was offshore, but if he's trying to kill one of your fellow countrymen, all bets are off. It's just the nature of combat.

Williams: If you were to describe war in one word and your experience of it, what would you say? War is…

Rank: War ought to be the last resort if diplomacy and everything else fails. It should be a last resort. I think most military people, people that have combat experience, would agree. You don't commit troops to something without a darn good reason. War is the determination to fight and win. That's why we have armed forces. We have armed forces to fight and win wars. If we put them in circumstances where that isn't the objective, then that's a misuse of armed forces. Armed forces should not occupy a country for 10 or 12 years. Armed forces shouldn't be nation building entities like the Peace Corps or the United Nations or anything else. When we misuse the armed forces like that, it's bad because the soldiers and the sailors and the marines are conflicted.

They are trained to do a certain thing, and then they get into an area of operations like Afghanistan or Iraq, and they are there to facilitate Jeffersonian democracy. The rest of the world is not ready for Jeffersonian democracy. People that haven't had a 2000-year-old tradition of voting and democracy, you're not going to teach them in 18 or 24 months. Am I anti-war? I'm anti the wrong war. I'm very much opposed to the misuse of our military.

Williams: You said the armed forces are trained to win, and we should only go into wars that we could win. What do you define as winning?

Rank: What I define as winning is accomplishing whatever the objective is that leads us to the war. If our objective is to defeat ISIS for example, then we better understand what it's going to take. How do we know when we've done it? Do we have the will collectively, not just the United States, to do that? You don't do it unless you're convinced that you have a clear-cut objective and a clear-cut exit strategy. How is it you're going to get out of the situation once you've accomplished your goal?

Williams: This view of war you have now. Was this affected by Vietnam? Did you have a different outlook on war before you went to Vietnam? How has that outlook changed and developed into what you have now?

Rank: I suspect every soldier, sailor, marine, airman that's been in combat has a different view of war coming out of it, at least the first one, then going into it. I'd said yeah, mine has. Going into it, it was this was a necessary thing. As it

progressed, I sensed that we didn't have an exit strategy. We didn't know when we were going to be successful. We didn't have clear-cut outcomes, and if we did we didn't pursue them to conclusion. I think everybody having been through Vietnam for example, Korea was another one, where it just sort of ended in a status quo. We're going to pull out. Here's the line. World War II, I think people who came out of that had the satisfaction that hey we had defeated two major evils. I don't think we have the same feeling, well I think Korea probably. Can you imagine if North Korea had taken over the whole Korean peninsula? That wouldn't have been good, but I suspect that veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have some of the same feelings that we had after Vietnam. What really did we accomplish?

Williams: You were talking about the satisfaction of soldiers coming home. Are you saying you felt dissatisfied coming back from Vietnam?

Rank: I think by and large America was dissatisfied with Vietnam. I mean I was totally satisfied that I did a good job. I did what I was supposed to do. I gained a lot of confidence. Do I wish the war would have ended differently? Sooner? A more clear-cut resolution? As it turns out we essentially fought for a number of years, we pulled out, and within short order everything we had tried to accomplish was undone because the communists took over all of Vietnam. Fast forward forty years, if you look at Vietnam today I think we'd be pretty happy with the outcome. It's a booming economy. The folks are I think anything but the godless communists that we were afraid of. Forty years

sort of changes your perspective. Had we not fought in Vietnam would the outcome have been the same forty years later? I don't know. I have no idea.

Williams: We just want some of your specific experiences. Could you take us through a day on the ship? One of the days you were doing the shooting and being that backup.

Rank: Let me start first with an atypical day. For a line officer like myself, a typical day you would stand on the bridge of the ship giving steering orders or whatever to the helmsmen, watching out for other ships and vessels and navigating and all that. You'd do that four hours on, eight hours off. You'd have eight hours of watch standing a day plus other duties. We used to have on Sundays 'holiday routine' as we called it, and everybody looked forward to holiday routine. That meant that if you weren't standing your watch you could sleep, you could do whatever you wanted. You didn't have to tend to your other shipboard duties. Everybody was looking forward to July 4, 1970, Independence Day. We were going to have holiday routine and were looking forward to that. On that day we had three underway replenishments. These were three-hour evolutions where you go alongside an oiler to refuel while you're at sea, so we went alongside an oiler. That was three hours. Well, that was all hands. When you do that everybody's got a job to do either hauling over the fueling lines or safe navigation or whatever, so we did that, three hours. We also had to rearm. We had to take on ammunition, so we went alongside another ship, an ammunition ship, another two or three hours alongside. Then, we went alongside a store ship, frozen food, supplies and

things like that. That day we had, in addition to my eight hours of watch standing on the bridge, had probably another eight or nine hours of all-hands-on-deck dangerous evolutions, you know going alongside an oiler or an ammunition ship and a store ship. I can remember that day vividly. July 4, 1970: The day that we didn't sleep. A typical day if you were on the gun line in Vietnam, if you were assigned to provide gunfire support to the troops on the ground, the entire ship would be divided into two sections. We called them port and starboard. All the similar duties are split, so half of the ship is on duty manning guns, the ammunition, the magazines, the combat information center where they are plotting the targets, the computer room where you're controlling the placement of the guns. Six hours on, six hours off, six hours on, six hours off, six hours on, six hours off nonstop. That's a typical day if you're doing that. A typical day if you were escorting an aircraft carrier, serving as a plane guard for an aircraft carrier, in addition to your normal two four-hour deck watches, the destroyer would steam in the wake of the aircraft carrier at a hundred yards, two hundred yards and follow it around. Of course, they have to steam into the wind to launch aircraft. They'd launch aircraft, and you'd be extra alert. Then a couple hours later they'd have to recover aircrafts. Sometimes we'd be splitting our time. One aircraft carrier is launching. As soon as that's done another aircraft carrier is launching. We have to steam over to the other one and do that. They have to recover. It's just a lot of, for a line officer or a deck officer, a lot of standing on the bridge worrying about collisions at sea, worrying about pilots going into the water, worrying about

how deep is the water under your keel, making sure you're always in safe waters. Then the other thing is when you're not on watch, as a junior officer you'll have 45-60 sailors working for you. You're responsible for their training, their evaluation, their counseling. They're 17 to 21-year-old kids. They've got family issues back home. They've got things that they worry about. As a young officer, you're a leader. You're the boss, but you're also a counselor. You're also a problem solver. It's a lot of responsibility really early on. I think throughout my entire Navy career that's been one of the things that really attracted me to staying on. Every time I had the opportunity to get out of the Navy, I was offered a job that offered those kinds of opportunities for growth and challenges.

Williams: Is there any one person that was beneath you that you might have counseled or mentored that immediately pops into your mind? Could you tell me a little bit about their story?

Rank: Well over the years of course there have been several. I think every sailor's first ship is special to them. Your first ship, your first duty assignment, is probably the time you grow the most. For some reason, this ship when it has reunions, and they've been doing them every year for the last several years, I go to the reunions. You see people that you haven't seen in 40 or 45 years. I had a guy come up to me, a former sailor of mine, he came up to me at a reunion and he says, "I want to thank you for saving my career." I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." He says, "Do you remember that time?" He had gotten into trouble. He hadn't gotten back to the ship in time,

so he was AWOL essentially. In the Navy and the Army and the Air Force, they have nonjudicial punishment. It's basically like going to the principal's office. He was sent up to stand before the captain for his nonjudicial punishment. The captain could have busted him or reduced him in rank. He could have given him a fine or could have confined him to the ship for several days. Although when you're confined to the ship at sea it doesn't mean much. Anyway, apparently the supervisor has to go up when the sailor is brought up to the captain for discipline. He says, "You really stood up for me." I said, "I did?" And he says, "Yeah, I'll never forget that. I could have lost a stripe, lost a rank. I probably would have never re-enlisted. That was really nice. I appreciated that. You can't believe what a difference that made." You never know what impact you have on people. A lot of times you'll never know. This kid, who at the time was two or three years younger than me, he wound up being a very successful electronics executive. He comes up to you forty years later and tells you. I suppose over a period of several years there is a lot of people you either inspire one way or maybe inspire the other way. I know several of my sailors have gone back to college and become Naval officers. I think that happened all the time.

Williams: That particular sailor, you said he didn't get back to the ship in time. I'm assuming that was one of the times you were on the port. Tell me about what you guys did at the port for fun and that experience.

Rank: That first deployment was six months. We spend 145 days at sea and 35 days in port. A lot of times when we went into port it was for repairs or

provisioning or whatever. Even though you were in port, you were still working an eight or ten-hour day. After the day's work, usually two-thirds of the crew would be allowed liberty. They could leave the ship and didn't have to be back until first thing in the morning, but there was always one third of the crew on board for safety and in case the ship has to get underway in an emergency or whatever. It wasn't unusual if you went into a port like Hong Kong, there were plenty of opportunities for sailors to let off steam. There was a very vibrant bar district not unlike Green Street in Champaign-Urbana. It wasn't unusual for a sailor to miss muster in the morning because he had a good night in town. We were in Hong Kong. We were in the Philippines a lot, Japan. While we were in Japan, there was a world's fair in Osako, Expo '70. We got to do that. Taiwan was an amazing country. A lot of times crew members would sign up for local tours while they're there. There's shopping particularly in Hong Kong. People would come back to the ship with electronics and cameras because everything was really cheap in Hong Kong. You got to see a lot of the world. That was an exciting part about the Navy is the ports of call.

Ledford: I want to go back to your life on the ship, not so much about the schedule but about the experience.

Williams: You talked about it while you were looking at the book. Can you tell us about one of the days where you rescued one of the pilots in the water?

Rank: You get the distress call, and you see the flare or somebody gives you a vector. On one of the aircraft carriers they say this is where the pilot is. Hopefully he is wearing a life preserver. You steam there, and you put the motor boat in the water. The crew goes out and plucks him out. He's pretty glad to be back to safety. Most of the cases, we just lent assistance because the helicopter or something from the carrier would come with a rescue diver, particularly with someone who was shot up. No sense bringing an injured pilot back to a destroyer that doesn't have the medical. We would go out and render assistance, but for the most part those rescues were actually done by the helicopters from the aircraft carrier.

Williams: Can you tell us about maybe one of the days you fired the most? One of the days where you were assisting the marines, what did it feel like to be on the ship that day?

Rank: When we were providing gunfire support, generally the firing was a single 5-inch gun, and we'd fire five or six rounds of high explosive ammunition. The projectiles were 5-inches in diameter and probably 20 inches long, 70 pounds. They'd pack a punch. Generally, we were firing at soft targets, not hardened targets. These were bunkers built out of bamboo and that. It wasn't like the old sea battles where you do a broadside, and you'd fire six guns and 20 salvos trying to sink another ship. These were fairly surgical missions. Once again as one of the goals of military force is you try to avoid collateral damage. We did some training exercises where you'd go out and fire a full barrage of six guns and six salvos, and you know boom, boom, boom, boom,

boom. The picture in the crew's book sort of shows that. In combat it was much more precise, much more surgically precise. The whole idea is you don't want to destroy villages. You don't want to destroy crops. You don't want to destroy livestock. You want to take out the source of the problem.

Williams: Talking about the boom, when you were on the ship, these sound like very big weapons, was there any rebound?

Rank: Oh yeah, there's recoil when you're firing a large caliber gun like that the guns recoil. You feel it, and you hear it. I have hearing loss dating back to those days. I don't think we were as careful about ear protection.

Williams: What did it sound like?

Rank: You know, if you've gone to the Fourth of July fireworks and hear the big shells that make a lot of noise, that's what it sounds like. It's not the pop, pop, pop that you hear from a machine gun or a handgun. It's pretty powerful.

Williams: What did it feel like?

Rank: When the guns went off, you felt it. It was a jolt, no different than backing into a bumper in the car behind you. If you tap it, you'll feel a jolt, but I mean it's not painful or anything. I suppose if I was standing out on deck next to the gun when it went off, it might be a little more dramatic than that.

Williams: Just in general, all of the shooting and even just the long hours standing and focusing, what was the toll on your body mentally and physically?

Rank: Well, I've mentioned before that the most precious commodity at sea is sleep. There were many, many times you couldn't string five hours of sleep together. You were tired, but you learned if you had 45 minutes, you could fall asleep real quick. You took a lot of naps. The other toll on my body, a destroyer not that very big. There was not a lot of room for exercise. You stood on your feet a lot during the day, but you didn't do a lot of exercise. The food was fantastic. I probably put on fifteen pounds, like the freshmen fifteen, that first deployment. I've since learned to moderate that. The food was good, and you either were working, sleeping or eating. There was no time for exercise. Even if you wanted to exercise, there is no place to go jog or anything like that.

Williams: It sounds like it was exhaustion mostly. Trying to do something surgical and precise while also being so tired, can you walk us through that? I'm sure you learned how to manage it, but what was it like to have to do something so surgical while also being so tired?

Rank: How do any professionals manage to fight fatigue and all that? When you're up, you're up. When you had something important to do, for example putting a range or a bearing or an angle into the, they were only analog computers back then, in the computer, you needed to be precise because a one-degree error on a bearing at a long range could have a devastating effect. It could cause the projectile to land way away from the target. I think people took so much pride in their work, but there were also checks and balances. For every precise thing like that, there was somebody to check. When you were on the bridge and you gave a rudder command, you know right full rudder steady on

course two seven zero. The helmsmen, the guy doing that, would repeat the command back to you just to make sure he got it right. Of course there were two or three people that could monitor that in fact he's doing what you're telling him to do it. You could see it on the compass. Were there mistakes? Sure there were mistakes. Were there catastrophic mistakes? No. We did have one situation where we were coming out of one of the ports, probably Osaka, Japan, one night. There were hundreds of other vessels, fishing boats and whatever, and we did get clipped by a garbage scowl. We had a little collision. All of the diligence in the world would have never kept that from happening. It's just one of those things. It was dark. It was congested. Any action that we would have taken to avoid that collision, we couldn't have done it on our own. It would have taken both vessels to maneuver. Accidents do happen, but I think by in large when something is very very important, when there is a lot at stake, there's a lot of eyes on the problem. There's a lot of people.

Williams: Did you ever make a mistake that you personally felt responsible for?

Rank: I suppose there were several, no catastrophic mistakes. A lot of times you'd be maneuvering. You'd be in one station, and there might be four or five ships steaming in company with an aircraft carrier. Everybody is supposed to change course or go to a different station. In ship handling, you have to do a computation, how fast, what course do I take, what speed to get there, at the appropriate time. The first commanding officer I had was probably the most inspirational guy I ever served under. He was not a screamer. He'd give you a lot of rope. He'd let you make a mistake as long as it didn't hazard the ship if

you'd learn from it. I can remember one time where we were changing station, and I was maneuvering the ship. I got a little close to another ship, not dangerously close but closer than anybody wanted. The captain was sitting on his chair on the bridge, and his knuckles were white. He was looking. Once I finally got into proper station and everything, he gave you a look. You felt so bad. Anybody else would have just yelled or screamed or taken charge and done it himself. He looked over, and I felt about this tall. He had the confidence in me, and he had the confidence in himself that nothing I could do he couldn't fix. That was the nature of his leadership is he let people do things that other commanding officers, other skippers wouldn't. People that served under him I think when they went to their next assignment they had far more skills, far more confidence than a lot.

Williams: Is there anything that I haven't touched upon? Maybe a story or an experience or something about the war that you really want to share that I haven't gotten to?

Rank: You want to talk about coming back afterwards?

Williams: Sure. What was it like coming back?

Rank: I know a lot of Vietnam veterans had negative experiences. People were disenchanted with the war. I think they took it out on veterans. What's happening now with veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, there are people disenchanted with the way things are going, but they are certainly not taking it out on the people that served. That's wonderful. The funniest thing is I came

back to the University of Illinois after my first three years at sea in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was all but over. The protests we had on campus earlier had subsided. I didn't sense a lot of anti-war, anti-veteran sentiment. The one thing that's ironic is I was assigned to teach the capstone class in Naval ROTC. It was called Principles of Naval Leadership. We taught military law, management, time management, money management, you know all the things. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences decided that they could no longer offer academic credit for the course because leadership was not an academically viable subject. The ironic thing was the College of Business had an assistant professor and a grad student that were auditing the class because the wanted to start a leadership program in the College of Business. That was my experience returning. One of the units in the University thinks leadership is bunk, and the other says hey we need to get into leadership. Now Engineering said hey we'll give you credit for that course, but our kids still need 135 hours of engineering to graduate. That's interesting. To this day I don't know whether LAS every restored academic credit to that course.

Williams: Did you feel disrespected almost by them taking away that credit?

Rank: No, it's the way things were. It didn't affect the teaching. I taught the class. The poor kids that didn't get the three hours credit either had to spend another semester or take an overload to meet their requirements. That was my coming home. I wasn't spit on. I wasn't disrespected. It was just the sad realization that somebody didn't think leadership was worth teaching.

Williams: So you were a student in the ROTC before the war and then you had students after. Did you notice a difference in the students you had, maybe their mindset or lower enrollment or anything?

Rank: I was an undergraduate in ROTC here. Of course that was during the war, I just wasn't in it at the time. In '65 and '66 I think everybody was behind the war. No one had any qualms about ROTC on campus. After '67, after the Tet Offensive when the war started to turn, I think the antiwar movement picked up steam. I didn't sense up until the time I graduated any hostility towards ROTC, but the fall after I graduated there were antiwar riots on campus: rock throwing on Green Street, the National Guard called in. I was gone for that three-year period from June of '69 to summer of '72. By the time I came back, everything was back to normal. Enrollment is down, but enrollment went down because of the end of compulsory ROTC as well.