

# Basic Detail Report

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## Errol Kellum Oral History

**Date**

May 19, 2016

**Primary Maker**

Errol Kellum

**Medium**

MTS, PDF

**Description**

Errol Kellum served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid (CVS-11) from 1966 to 1969 as a radarman third

class (RM3). He worked in the combat information center (CIC). The Intrepid Museum recorded his oral history interview on May 19, 2016. See transcript for complete interview. Below is a summary: Errol Kellum began his interview by discussing military service in his family, and recalled how a teacher at his junior high school in Baltimore, Maryland, who had served on an aircraft carrier inspired him to join the Navy in 1966. Intrepid was Kellum's first ship, and he came aboard while Intrepid was on the line off Vietnam. He described how he was highlined onto Intrepid when he first boarded the ship. He described the reckless excitement that characterized his attitude toward dangerous new experiences at the time. He recalled boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Center before he was deployed to Intrepid and early roles on the ship before he was trained on radar. Kellum's first job aboard Intrepid was in the bakery, before he was moved to a deck crew and then to helmsman duties. Kellum described the experience of steering, the ease of turning the wheel and the concentration required to keep a course. Backtracking in time, Kellum recalled enlisting before finishing high school, prioritizing an aircraft carrier and Vietnam on his dream sheet, and rapid-fire vaccinations before going overseas. He felt lucky to have served on a historic carrier, and was initially impressed by the size of Intrepid. Kellum recalled a first class petty officer who threatened him with a recommendation for tunnel rat duty in Vietnam, an incident that drove him to study and test his way into radarman duties. Kellum described the demographics of the general and officers' mess crews. He explained that the mess cooks were separate from the steward's mates, who were largely Black or Filipino. The mess crew he worked on was 10-20% Black, including Kellum. One of Kellum's friends from Baltimore worked as a steward on Intrepid. This led to a discussion of race relations on the ship. Kellum shared a story of a white, Southern crew member in CIC who tried to prevent him from reporting the last known location of a missing plane. Kellum nevertheless passed on the reading, which was instrumental in saving the life of the pilot. He characterized race relations as unstable, influenced by changes happening in the States. The interview shifted to other details about life on board. Kellum went on to praise Captain John W. Fair for his principled and upstanding nature. He then described Pete Rose and Joe DiMaggio's visit to the Intrepid on their way to Vietnam. Asked about the ship's radar, Kellum recounted how radar duties were split up among the crew, and he talked about the range and power of the radar array itself. He described

the heat and activity of shifts in the Combat Information Center (CIC), and the difference between radar and sonar. The interview moved on to the subject of liberty. Kellum recalled visits to Japan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, including interactions with locals and learning more about the world. He mentioned the removal of nuclear weapons from the ship before visiting Japanese ports. Then he talked about the end of his service in the Navy, his complicated feelings about the Vietnam War, and the story of four deserters from Intrepid (the Intrepid Four). He also recalled Intrepid's involvement in the Six Day War while passing through the Suez Canal, the decision not to allow sailors liberty in South Africa because of apartheid, and the crossing the line ceremony. As the interview drew to a close, Kellum expressed his pride at seeing the ship again and said he got the travel bug from his time on Intrepid. He talk about his family and his career after his naval service. He mentioned that he had planned on staying in the Navy but that plan was derailed by cross-country travel and partying. He then described his career in sales after the Navy, starting a family, and his continuing career. During the final close-ups Kellum brought up the loss overboard of a sailor in Engineering who he had been friends with, nicknamed "Popeye," whose name Kellum never knew.

Extent: 8 video files, 30 page transcript

### **Dimensions**

91 minutes