

Basic Detail Report



Kenneth Steller Oral History

Date

April 30, 2016

Primary Maker

Kenneth Steller

Medium

MTS, PDF

Description

Kenneth Steller served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid (CVS-11) from 1971 to 1973 as a hospital

corpsman third class (HM3). The Intrepid Museum recorded his oral history interview on April 30, 2016. See transcript for complete interview. Below is a summary: Kenneth Steller began his interview by discussing his childhood in Little Falls, New Jersey and his decision to enlist in the U.S. Navy. He recalled boot camp and Hospital Corpsman School, both at Great Lakes, Illinois. Next, Steller described his time working at the Naval Hospital at Camp Lejeune. He recalled his duties working in general medicine and the pediatric clinic, treating family members of the Marines on the base. He also fondly remembered winning a football game against the Marines, which was significant because the Marines considered the hospital corpsman effeminate based on their association with nurses. He said his experiences there treating young men with combat injuries reinforced his anti-war perspective, and it opened his eyes to the sacrifices made by American soldiers. The interview then shifts to Steller's deployment on USS Intrepid. He described arriving on the ship and his duties and training in sick bay. He explained the function and staff of the Medical Department, while describing the common illness and injuries he saw at work. He also recalled serious accidents and some of the challenges of practicing medicine on a ship at sea. Next, Steller elaborated on the medical staff, describing the doctors and the diverse backgrounds of many hospital corpsman. Steller, who is white, had Black and Native American colleagues. He contrasted their strong relationship to the racial tension in American society broadly and on the ship in particular. He shared his memories of the racial unrest on Intrepid in January 1973. He added that racial divisions were less pronounced on liberty; when Black sailors were attacked in Portugal, some white sailors came to help out. Steller said that he joined ship-wide conversations on race (likely as part of the Human Relations Council) and explained how this experience led him to social justice organizations after his time in the Navy. Steller continued the discussion of change in the Navy with his impression of Admiral Elmo Zumwalt and his Z-Grams. He recalled generational conflict between crew members over appearance, though he said that the Medical Department was always less traditional than other divisions. Steller then described Intrepid's mission in the Mediterranean, the ports he visited, and his love of travel. He noted how often sailors would ask to have a bad tattoo removed after liberty. Then he described daily life on Intrepid, including his berthing area, his sick bay uniform, the mess deck and training drills. Towards the end of the interview, Steller

discussed his career in counseling after the Navy. Finally, he reflected on the role of Intrepid in modern life, where so few people have direct contact with the military. He hoped sick bay would one day be restored and open to the public. Extent: 8 video files, 32 page transcript

Dimensions

86 minutes