

**Frank W. Bronk
Veteran**

FB: My name is Frank V. Bronk. I graduated from high school in June of 1947 and in August I enlisted in the Navy, from Albany, New York. When I went in, I had already been through electronics school, so I went through boot camp as a Seamen recruit at eighteen. When I got out of boot camp, after five years of boot camp, [shows photograph of boot camp members] – this is a picture of the boot camp members...and I am right here [points to photograph]. When I got out of boot camp, I was Seaman Second Class and I came home on two-weeks leave and went back [unclear] across the street to electronics school. I stayed there until, I think, July, when I graduated. [Shows graduation diploma] This is from research. [Shows a different diploma]

Interviewer: This is from later. Those are from '48 and '49.

FB: I graduated in August of '49. Oh wait a minute; this is a [unclear] one.

Interviewer: Yeah.

FB: It's the wrong one.

Interviewer: I don't think you have that one [unclear].

FB: This one right here, June 25th, 1948. [Shows photo] This is a picture of our graduating class from [unclear] and [points to photograph] I'm right up here this time. I got out of there, went down to Washington D.C. until October '48, when I graduated. And when I graduated from there, I was an electronics technician Third Class, a Third Class Petty Officer.

FB: [unclear] From there, we took a cruise to the Caribbean and we were over there for about six months. And we came back [unclear] Boston, and from we went down to the Caribbean for three months, training crews, and – let me back up.

We came back from the Mediterranean, the Sunday after the [unclear]. It was a four-week training program, and then I went back to my ship and we went from there for a cruise to the Caribbean. We came back and we had stopped in New York, Norfolk, – spent a little time there – Boston, stopped in Jacksonville once, and then in the latter part of May we went through the Panama Canal.

So we were sitting in Long Beach, California when the Korean War broke out. We were at a [unclear], we were there [unclear] and we had an open house. We took them on tours throughout the ship when we could and I acted as one of the guides – I was first class at the time – and we'd take a dozen or so people at a time, and that was fun. I had a lot of invitations from them and then I got a lot of

tips that we weren't supposed to take. They take your hand out and say, "You got a bill in there."

So when the Korean War broke out, right out there we went. Down to San Diego, loaded up stuff for us, head to Valley Forge – there's nobody over there, we were the only [unclear] over there. And we took off as soon as we could. We got to the Hawaiian Islands, spent about two weeks there for a little training, stuff like that, and then went right out of [unclear]. We left Valley Forge [unclear]. And from there, that's when they had us way down on the end of the peninsula there, just about, so another force went up one side and we went up the other side to cut off their supply lines. We were in it at the beginning there, it was just us two carriers there, but then a bunch of the other carriers did get over there – I don't know – I guess about six of them after a while.

We spent a month out there, went into [unclear], one of them places to resupply and stock up, get a little recreation, then back out again. Then they had to [unclear], so they pinched them off here [pointing to a map on his shirt], so we took part in that, too. That's where I got these [unclear] stars from [points to medals] [unclear]. And then the last one was from [unclear], when the Marines were trapped up in the [unclear]. We helped get them out, flying cover for them like that. When that happened, we were all set to go in for our turn to deport – it didn't work. We stayed right out there. We got lucky though, it was snowing and they had to keep shoving the planes back.

Interviewer: This is the ship here? [Points to photograph]

FB: This is the carrier, yeah. Now this here is from when we came back and this was the air group that was on at the time. And if you look closely, we had a banner here [points to photograph] [unclear]. We were over there, not quite a year, but for enough that they gave us permission to fly their banner. I think there was a [unclear] for every man and a room for every officer. And we got a little glimpse of the Golden Gate Bridge here [point to photograph].

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

FB: We came back in there. Oh, this is just a regular picture of a ship. [Holds up a photograph]. I forgot where this was taken, but it's anchored on the harbor somewhere. You get a side view of it. My battle station was up in here, just forward of the secondary [unclear]. I slept back here. [Unclear]. Battle stations, you get from there, up to there and you got to hurry. [Unclear]. There were choppers right in here. [Unclear] if you had a man who stayed there at night to take any calls for [unclear] like that, and he'd come down and get whoever took care of it. And you got up in the middle of the night and ran and you stayed there until it was fixed. [Laughs] No excuses; you drank a lot of that heavy midnight coffee, too, believe me [both laugh].

[Displays ribbons and medals] That's what the third styles was for, [unclear]. Those were the three major battles that we were in. Of Course I got the [unclear] for both Europe and Asia, because I was in the Mediterranean first, then we got up from the [unclear]. The, the fifth one, I guess everybody got. The U.N. ribbon, the China service, because we were so close to trying to attack and photograph the Chinese [unclear]. There was just four of a [unclear] who got fired because he wanted to [unclear] there and he wanted... And of course this medal I can't let go, with my name on it to show it's mine. [Both laugh].

And these are all our ribbons that we got. [Displays ribbons and medals] A couple of these – like this one here – is a unit, a Navy unit, a combination. This one here was a Presidential unit combination. Then last year I got this Korean Service medal. And this here is a Task Force we were in over in Korea, Task Force Seventy-Seven.

Interviewer: Now did you wear that on your uniform?

FB: No, I forget where I picked it up, but I suppose you wear it on a sweater or something. We never wore them. And this is the last uniform I had, First Class Petty Officer. Four years of service, because I got in at five years and six days.

And the second time I went over there, we weren't enough to ship from San Francisco. Another guy and I, we went down to San Diego and took [unclear], got it ready and went back over. We set up an Airbase on the harbor over there [unclear]. There was an Australian Airbase there, but the United States Air Force was in the process of taking it over. We were there to act as in between while this was taking place. And then we'd leave in patrols and it was easy to do it. Those Aussies were pretty easy to get along with, too. [Interviewer laughs]

Then I left the ship there, took a train up to [unclear]. The other trains were a whole regiment of French-Canadians on there. Wild boys. There were just a few of us sailors, we had better quarters and we had any more ships coming, we had to help out on the ship. But those guys were wild. Yeah, they were waiting to take off and you'd look over there and they were ready to jump off; they were all processed through the state. They got partway home, the main bearing [unclear]. You should've heard that squeal, you could hear it all through the ship. So rather than come out, we turned back and went back to the harbor. Sat there, and nobody could leave the ship, but those guys – they went nuts. When it was fixed, we came back and I got discharged in Seattle, Washington. So, what else do you want to know?

Interviewer: What made you decide to join the Navy?

FB: I don't know; I just liked the idea of it. I liked the idea of the radar part of it. Now I'd been down to Albany a couple times to get information about it. And I wrote my senior theme in high school about Navy radar and how different

animals use radar [unclear] and how we did it. So that's why I decided to go in the Navy.

Besides that, they had good schooling in that. I went down and I said I was good for three years and they asked me about taking a test for electronics school, right in Albany. Because my test scores going in, were pretty high. I took that and they said you'll know in about two weeks whether you passed or not, and I got a letter a couple weeks later and I passed. So I went down there for four years. Of course it's up to you whether you get there or not, because every two weeks you had an exam and you could flunk out any time. You had to keep up.

Interviewer: How old were you in this picture here? [Show photograph].

FB: Eighteen-years-old. Eighteen, that was taken right out of boot camp and as you can see, I was Seaman Second Class. I was there for two weeks because I went back and went to school and I was First Class. And at the end if you had enough marks you can graduate Petty Officer Second Class, like the top ten-percent there. I wasn't that smart. [Both laugh].

Interviewer: So after you came home, what did you do?

FB: Well, I went to work for G.E., no fanfare. In fact, the war was still on when I got out; well, we called it a war, they called it a conflict. The Forgotten War, you know? In fact, there's still a stalemate, an armistice that was assigned, so technically, there's still a war going on.

Interviewer: So it's just a truce?

FB: Yeah. Yeah, all that fighting and they ended up right back where they started. All those lost lives; we lost quite a few on the ships, too. Accidents, planes, – had them take off then zoom – they sunk because they overloaded them. We used to lather this napalm, and they used "Tiny Tim" [unclear] that they could lob into the caves there. We had different accidents and fires on the ship.

Interviewer: How many were in the crew?

FB: That we had on the whole ship?

Interviewer: Mhmm. [Verbal affirmation]

FB: Well, between three or four thousand, I think. Us guys, in our division, when we went to the Mediterranean and we were along the East Coast, there was only about eight to ten of us guys. When they had sent us to Korea and they called up the reserves, there was somewhere between twenty-five and thirty of us. And we didn't get in each other's way, really. I mean, we had three chiefs there and they were just hanging around, so to speak, and they were just talking about leaving their jobs and business and things like that. They overloaded you, really, with [unclear] over there.

Interviewer: You stayed for five years. That's considerably longer than regular [unclear].

FB: Yeah, too much years. When the war broke out, he pulled us off for an extra year.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, so...

FB: And then the extra six days was because of the guys that didn't get in on time. It was an honorable discharge; I got it right there in the folder.

And when we got out, my buddy and I – he lived in Chestertown – we bought a car in Seattle and took a trip down the coast to pick up all of our stuff so we could ship back. [Unclear]. So we headed back across, came up through the desert, had a layover in Las Vegas – spent a few days there because [unclear]– came on up through, you're almost [unclear] there, and right across. We got home about a month later, so we saw some of the world. And he went his way, and I went my way. I bought out his half of the car and kept it for a while the traded it in. It was a '46 Hudson. [Both laugh].

Then I went to work for G.E.; I was there for roughly five years or so, before I got laid off twice – the second time, I didn't come back. It was that bad for five or six or so years. Jobs were hard to find and I did what I could; I worked at a gas station, worked as a laborer, and finally I heard of an opening over at [unclear]. So I went over there. I liked machine work, I liked it better than electronics work, so they hired me and I stayed there for thirty-six years. I was doing something I really enjoyed doing. As a machinist, it wasn't just a machine I operated, if you gave me a blueprint, I'd make it for you.

Interviewer: You stayed on the USS [unclear] for the whole time that you were in?

FB: No, I was on there for about three years. I left her in San Francisco and went down and got the other ship out of [unclear] and went back over for about another six months or so until my enlistment was up.

Interviewer: Now what was the name of the second ship?

FB: The USS [unclear]. Navy fourteen, I think. The Philippine Sea was a CV Forty-Seven. They had three carriers bigger than that at the time. I think there was about eight of us: Lady, [unclear], Valley Forge, and one down in New York City – I can't think of the names of the other ones. They had the Coral Sea, the Midway and the Roosevelt; they were the three real big carriers. We were the biggest ship to go through the Panama Canal; you could almost step right over onto land there. [Both laugh]. Yeah, it was quite an experience.

Interviewer: Good [unclear]

FB: Yes, you could see those [unclear] going through the docks.

Interviewer: You look like you could still fit in your uniform.

FB: I don't know, I've never tried it. Had it hanging in the closet for a good amount of years.

Interviewer: Frank, of all the time you spent in service, what comes back to you as the most memorable moment that you spent in those five years and some odd days?

FB: Well, I think the most memorable is probably my first night at sea. We lost a man overboard, we couldn't find him and I'll never forget it; it always stuck with me. For most of us guys it kind of gave us the willies. He ran right across the flight deck, jumped off of the catwalk and kind of slipped or something and right over he went. We started to look for him, but we all figured the undertow took him down and put him right through the props because he was so close to the side.

Interviewer: How far was it from the catwalk to the water? 100 feet?

FB: Not quite that much. Below the flight deck – the flight deck's about seventy-two, seventy-eight feet above the water – so maybe about seventy feet. And one time in Korea, we had a plane come in and we had a whole flight ready to go out, all fueled and loaded with ammo, and this plane came in, missed the barriers, and burrowed into those planes. Six of them went up in flames and it was quite a big fire. Six of them we lost; we just couldn't save them so we just pushed them on over the side to save the others. Not a man was hurt or killed in that at all, it was really amazing. Fighting that fire, some of those guys were killing the flames. It was a scary experience; it scared all of us.

There were several other different little things. I could see this guy walking to the prop and he cut his head off, the top of his head. He was a squirming man and he lived until they got him on the sickbay. All in three days, down there, only a young Seaman. [Unclear] They were going forward and whenever the plane stopped, they'd chalk them over, get ready to take off. Well, the plane stopped and he didn't. He walked right on into the prop; he just wasn't paying attention.

Interviewer: Well, I guess this gets us towards the end here. What would you say is probably the happiest time you spent?

FB: Well, two times, really. We docked along the French Riviera and they had Liberty and [unclear] and it was really nice. And then while we were in the Hawaiian Islands, a bunch of us guys went together to Liberty and ran into these two women, their father was a high [unclear] of the Navy, but they offered to take us on a tour of the island. So we met them the next day, and they had a car and a picnic lunch. Everything was above water; there was no hanky-panky about it. But they were nice, yeah; they gave us a complete tour of the island, it was a really pleasant thing. We really enjoyed that. I got to see some of the things that my

father told me about because he spent a couple of years in the Army in the Hawaiian Islands. I think those are the two.

Not only that, but the five years I was in, I only missed one Christmas at home; I thought I was pretty lucky on that. And that Christmas was about the time the Chosin Reservoir had happened; we were over there for that. So I felt pretty good about that because I was a homeboy, that's one reason why I wanted to come home. I had a job offering in Los Angeles, but my buddy and I said we had to go home; we hadn't been home in quite a while. They gave us thirty days and we came back and he went with electricians and I went down to [unclear] G.E. and I could get the same job for about five cents an hour less, or I could go back over there for five cents and we stayed there.