

**Video Recording Log**  
**Veteran Robert Wahlfeldt**

**1. Name and address of collector of interviewer.**

Name of Donor/Interviewer: Harriet Williamson  
Address: 300 N. Goodwin  
City: Urbana  
State: Illinois  
Zip: 61801  
Telephone: 217-353-7300  
Email: hwillmsn@uiuc.edu  
Partner organization affiliation (if any): WILL AM-FM-TV

**2. Name and birth date of the veteran or civilian being interviewed at is appears on the Biographical Data Form:**

Name of Veteran/Civilian: Robert John Wahlfeldt  
Birth Date: 06/07/1925

**3. Recording format**

VIDEO type: Mini DVD

**4. Estimated length of recording (in minutes):** 72 minutes    **Date of recording:** 10/17/2007

**5. Location of recording:** WILL AM-FM-TV, 300 N. Goodwin Ave, Urbana, IL 61801

**6. Please log the topics discussed in the interview in sequence.**

00:00 Introduction  
00:47 Background—Danville, IL—Germantown—joined Navy before graduated H.S.  
01:40 German background—stopped giving services in German—family active in community  
03:20 High school—working on railroad—war broke out—draft—volunteered for Navy to avoid infantry  
05:00 Induction center, Chicago, IL—train to Portland, ID for boot camp—sent to Norfolk, VA  
06:15 Assigned to U.S.S. Waldron June, 1944—sent to Carney, NJ to join ship  
06:55 Farragut—boot camp—training, tests for future assignments—swimming  
08:10 Machinist, laborer on railroad  
08:40 Electrical Mate—dad had radio shop—experience in nomenclature—sent to Purdue for Electrical Training for Navy—lab and battery work  
09:45 U.S.S. Waldron—“The Bloody W”—rack fell and killed workers  
10:40 Went to Bermuda—someone put pair of pants in reduction gear—had to go back for repairs—Bermuda Triangle stories first circulating—ship in a task group got lost—scary  
11:15 Went to Chicago, IL—went through Panama Canal through Delaware

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- 11:35 Went home after Bermuda, there 5 days—returning to civilian life strange—anxious to return to ship
- 12:20 Life on destroyer—bad impression of Navy in beginning—first night wallet stolen—better in Norfolk—made friends—fire training
- 13:45 Assigned to Engineering—lived near electrical shop—kept close to work
- 14:15 Assigned to sound-powered telephones—generator sets: watched main distribution sets every night, on 4 off 4 hours a night
- 15:15 Battle station times—quad 40—putting projectiles on ready rack
- 16:05 Guns fired by director on bridge--#2 gun mount barrel warped during kamikaze attack
- 17:00 Never had health issues—very strong and healthy from living on farm—never sea sick
- 17:35 Normal schedule at sea—crew—went in as Electrician Striker Fireman 1<sup>st</sup> Class
- 18:10 Made rank—duty to make sure connections on electrical board were tight—count tools
- 18:30 Apprentice fireman misplaced screwdriver on board—could have fried board
- 19:35 Panama Canal—several leaves—got into fight—liberties taken away a few weeks
- 20:35 Convoy of destroyers—his #699—commissioned in NJ—Missouri Battle Wagon launched at same time
- 21:25 Took a couple days to go through Panama Canal—lochs
- 21:45 Wondering what would go wrong—shakedown through Panama Canal, trip to San Diego and Hawaii—but ship still very new
- 22:15 Atlantic and Pacific Oceans
- 22:45 Hawaii—practice shooting with plane targets, launching torpedoes—firing at sleeves—Navy anxious to get the ship into fleet
- 23:45 Met friend from Danville at Pearl Harbor—R&R—fishing—shore leave on sand bars
- 25:00 Correspondence—one-line diary on ship
- 26:10 HI—October—anti-aircraft training—Eniwetok Atoll
- 27:25 Task Force 58
- 28:10 Didn't know where they were or what was going on—listening to Tokyo Rose—had to be careful about what to put in garbage because it would get picked up by Japanese
- 29:10 Combat experience—went to Formosa, S. China—ship called picket or escort—operated from a distance from fleet—one of 1<sup>st</sup> ships with RADAR—assigned to certain areas
- 30:40 Life on ship same—always on alert—spotting duty—sound gear—sub chaser—polished ping transmitter
- 31:50 Marine life—always on the move—top speed 35 knots
- 32:25 Other areas of Pacific—Formosa—French Indochina (Vietnam)—break up into groups when planes launched—there to pick up pilots if didn't accomplish landing
- 35:00 Operating motor whale boat to pick up pilots and crew—sail out to wreck, dive in, return to ship, give first aid and transport airplane crew to hospital ship
- 35:35 Destroyer supplied and refueled on water
- 36:45 Storms
- 39:15 Okinawa—kamikaze planes everywhere—watching projectiles from Missouri—saw kamikaze in water next to ship—several sister ships hit

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- 41:00 Job after combat—damage repair—go through compartments—segregation: steward’s mates—African Americans that took care of Officers—hidden from view, rest of ship did not know there were black people on ship
- 42:55 Left Okinawa—went back after signing of peace accord—occupation—ships historical program—newsletter “Half Moon”—reunion in TX—wouldn’t let him write article about African American sailors in Navy—censorship—became very interested in civil rights after war—black sailors couldn’t understand why there was no respect for them
- 46:35 After war—ships stayed in Japan—Captain given responsibility to repatriate people—American Officers to repatriate
- 48:00 Yokosuka—ship building port—metal shop—totally empty—saw some welding innovations that he later used—going out into community with interpreter
- 50:30 No fear—some big cities had compounds—no hostility from people—could trade sugar for most things
- 52:05 Impression of Japan: shocked—more modern and nice than expected
- 53:00 Information about Japanese—in military only taught how to kill people—not told anything else about Japanese people
- 54:00 Occupation duty—stand around in public with M-16’s—no training—waiting for 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry to arrive for 1<sup>st</sup> Occupation
- 55:00 Inspections of islands and ports
- 55:25 Went to U.S.—San Diego, Los Angeles, Baltimore—30-day leave, married
- 56:10 Went back to Chicago in May by train—discharged, back to Danville, IL
- 56:50 Returned to civilian life—mother had to sign for him to get married because he wasn’t of age—had to get a blood test
- 57:40 Looking for job—railroad hired him as laborer, then helper, then machinist—machinist trade
- 58:40 Civil rights movement—transferred to government service for machinist work—Equal Employment committee at VA—created 1<sup>st</sup> display about black history of VA
- 01:01:50 [Tape transfer]
- 01:02:00 Recruiting for black employees of VA at H.S.’s around town—some trouble with committee getting restricted and opposed—city hired Equal Opportunities Director and ended up getting rid of commission to fire him—group fought back
- 01:07:00 Found out about AWARE in Champaign—moved
- 01:07:30 When daughter went to college, brought home textbooks—would stay up nights and read her books—books very important in family—always wanted to be a teacher but never went to college
- 01:09:00 Experiences in war—got really excited about civil rights activism—people in church and rest of community close-minded
- 01:10:20 [Wrap up]