

# Deck Officer Admits Error Over Course

By PATRICK J. KILLEN

SUBIC BAY, Philippines (UPI)—The man in charge of the USS Frank E. Evans at the time of its collision with the Australian carrier Melbourne told investigators his side of the story for the first time today. It indicated his misinterpretation of a radio message led to the crash.

The testimony from Lt. (j.g.) Ronald C. Ramsey, 24, of Long Beach, Calif., was in the form of three unsworn statements made shortly after the collision

June 3. They were read into the record of a six-man U.S.-Australian board investigating the crash which killed 74 U.S. sailors.

Ramsey had refused to testify before the board for constitutional reasons after he and another officer, Lt. (j.g.) James A. Hopson, 28, of Kansas City, Kan., were told they were suspected of negligently endangering their vessel.

## Panel Changes Mind

The panel previously had said it would not take unsworn

statements but today changed its mind. No explanation was given.

In the testimony, Ramsey made these points:

—He believed the carrier was changing its course from 230 degrees to 160 degrees—a sweeping left turn—after ordering the Evans to change its position to 1,000 yards astern of the carrier.

—As the two ships moved on a collision course and began closing in on each other at 38 knots, Ramsey realized the carrier actually had not changed its course. He then ordered a hard right turn, which he believed would have avoided the collision had not the Melbourne also turned at the last minute.

Ramsey said at about 3:10

a.m., the Melbourne ordered the Evans to take up its new position. He said he then heard a radio message from the Melbourne saying "My course or corpen is 160." The officer said he believed this to mean the carrier was changing course to 160 degrees.

In Navy terminology, Corpen means "changing to."

## On Collision Course

Ramsey said he told Hopson to watch the carrier closely because it did not appear to be following its new course. The two ships began to close and the Melbourne messaged "You are on a collision course," he said.

"I didn't understand...I yelled right full rudder," Ramsey said.

At this point, he said, he still

believed the collision could have been avoided. But then he heard the carrier signal "My rudder is hard left."

"I heard a tremendous roar and I was swept into the water. I kept clawing away from the ship," Ramsey said. Both Hopson and Ramsey were rescued by Melbourne crew members.

Previous testimony had said there was some confusion on the part of Evans crew members about the Melbourne's course. It also indicated the two ships had turned into each other just before impact, the Evans turning right and the Melbourne turning left.

Capt. Horace Robertson, the panel's U.S. Navy counsel, said Ramsey had been notified of the decision to introduce his

statements and was told that the board would continue to welcome his testimony. He said Ramsey had not replied to the panel's letter.