

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Alton Keeton

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Interview in progress.

Mike Zambrano: This is Mike Zambrano. Today is August the 30th, 2007. I'm interviewing Mr. Alton Keeton in Austin, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War and Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. I'm going to put this here so it's closest to you... 'cause your voice is the one that's important on this interview. Can you... can you tell me where and when you were born?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, I was born... June 16th, 1921 in Iowa Park, Texas, and... I lived there till... oh, we lived on a farm really, then we moved over to a Electra, Texas and I lived there until we... 1928... till we moved over to Oklahoma to pick cotton. Never did make enough money to come back to Texas so I was raised in a little town called Lone Wolf, Oklahoma. When I grew up... went in the Navy from there... July of 1942.

Mike Zambrano: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Keeton: Well, there's two families. My... my immediate family was... two brothers... I mean one brother and one sister, but I had half brothers and... you know, step-brothers and step-sisters on both sides; four on each side.

Mike Zambrano: What were your parents' names?

Mr. Keeton: My dad's name was Edward Marshall Keeton; my mom's name was Rosa Anna Davis Keeton.

Mike Zambrano: And...I...I guess your dad ran the farm?

Mr. Keeton: He did.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Uhm, so you said you'd moved to Oklahoma. Is...is that where...uh, you went to middle school, high school, so forth?

Mr. Keeton: Well, there was no such thing as middle school. You went from eighth grade into high school, and that's where I went to high school...and (unintelligible words) where I went to school.

Mike Zambrano: Do you remember the name of the high school?

Mr. Keeton: Lone Wolf, Oklahoma.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: Lone Wolf High School.

Mike Zambrano: And...do you recall where you were when...when Pearl Harbor happened?

Mr. Keeton: On the road to...to...Stillwater, Oklahoma...with an old boy named Laverne (sp?) Webber (sp?). We was going up there to see his sister; she was a student up there. And we started to turn around and go back and go to the recruiting station and we said, "Well, we're this far, let's keep on going," so we went on up there. And...we went...next day...I went over to the recruiting station; I didn't even have a ride over there; I had to thumb a ride, and they were closed that day, and I said, "Well, I'll come back another day." So I went back and they said, "Well, we can't take you right now, but we'll take you...we'll let you know." So then on the 28th of July of '42 I joined the Navy.

Mike Zambrano: So...what made you choose the Navy?

Mr. Keeton: Well, I just always had a hankering to go to China, and I figured that that's the only...that that's the only way I'd get to go to China would be to join the Navy, so I joined the Navy.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. So you...you enlisted; so do you remember where you took your oath?

Mr. Keeton: Oklahoma City.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, and where did you go to after that?

Mr. Keeton: Went to boot camp in San Diego, California.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, and how long were you there?

Mr. Keeton: I think then it was only four weeks that we had. I know we had...for rifles, we had broomsticks. That was our rifles.

Mike Zambrano: Really? Is that because there was a shortage of rifles or...?

Mr. Keeton: Shortage of rifles and...and an abundance of recruits.

Mike Zambrano: Does anything stand out about your time in basic training?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, I made...I said...on the way to shower one day...one night...and the...I saw the Chief sitting there with...thumb and he had two fingers...(unintelligible) typewriter and I said, "Chief, you need some typing done?" He looked up and he said, "Boy, can you type?" And I said, "Yes sir, I'm a good typist." So I made it out...really easy after that; I didn't have to do any marching; I made up through all the...KP lists and everything like that, so...I made it through boot camp without doing any marching and I needed it; I knew I needed it, but I didn't have to take it so I didn't volunteer for nothing. He told me that...says that one thing that...one thing..., "Don't volunteer for

nothing unless you know it's something you wish desperately to do." So when I first asked for Machinist Mate's School, and it was filled and three lines down was...started the Hospital Corps School so I was first on that list, so I said, "Okay, but I don't much about being a Hospital Corps," and he said, "Well, you'll learn." I remember the first...injection we ever made was...we took a needle and vaccinated an orange; that was our first...but my first medical experience was vaccinating that orange. And after that why, I just kindly went on and...and advanced. Shortly after I got out of Hos...Hospital Corps School I made Pharmacist Mate Third Class and moved...moved up pretty fast. And I decided that I wanted to go to submarines because I met a guy on one of the wards who was a submariner. And he said, "Doc, that's the place to go," says, "I know you'll en...you'll enjoy that." But he says, "You remember, you've got to be a Second Class Hos...you got to be a Second Class Pharmacist Mate...to get on the boats." And I says, "Well, I can make that." And so I made Second Class and went to Charleston, South Carolina to...Independent Duty School; that's a school for Pharmacist Mates serving onboard ships without doctors, and that's how I got to go to submarine school.

Mike Zambrano: Where did you take your pharmacist training at?

Mr. Keeton: San Diego, California.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay, same place. Uh, do you remember how long that schooling was?

Mr. Keeton: Six weeks I believe.

Mike Zambrano: And what else did you learn there other than giving injections?

Mr. Keeton: Oh I learned how to make bandages and how to bandage people; how to diagnose pneumonia and stuff like that...basics of...the basic knowledge of...uh, oh...what do you call it...diagnosis and of course, how to treat...and how to get along with people which wasn't hard for me.

Mike Zambrano: Were you pretty social?

Mr. Keeton: Very social.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, so you ended up in a submarine and what submarine was your first?

Mr. Keeton: Oh, the first one that I really served in...was the [USS] Seadragon. I served her...I went...I went aboard...in Monterey, California, and boy it was rough getting out of that boat and getting up on the...on the sub...with...we'd ride a wave in and then jump on...and it'd be rough enough to...we'd jump up and jump off the...the boat onto the sub; I remember that definitely because I was scared before I even got on there. And you don't go aboard a submarine in them days and...be just a real...you'd have to be friendly and you'd wait for them to talk to you; you don't start a conversation and things like that. In other words, you don't push yourself onto them.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: You wait until you're accepted, and it didn't take long. I was accepted in about a week...'cause right after I got on there some guy had cut himself and...I whipped a few stitches into it; put a bandage on it and he said, "Boy, that Doc's pretty good." So then after that, they called me Doc, and that's what I went by. And every sub I served in...was Doc.

Mike Zambrano: Were you the only Pharmacist Mate onboard?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah, yeah; only medic they had.

Mike Zambrano: And how long were you on the Seadragon?

Mr. Keeton: Oh about...I guess a total of seven weeks; something like that.

Mike Zambrano: Seven weeks? Isn't that kind of short?

Mr. Keeton: It was short, but we went up to...we went up...off the coast of Newfoundland...I mean not Newfoundland...Aleutian Islands on patrol, but we never saw anything and nobody saw us, so...we came back to Monterey and the Pharmacist Mate had come back; he had been on emergency leave and I got off; went back to Mare Island; caught a transport then to Pearl. That's when I got on the (unintelligible) Fish....relief crew.

Mike Zambrano: When you...when you first saw the...the Seadragon, what did you think of it? What'd you think of the submarine?

Mr. Keeton: Oh boy, it was something, 'cause the Seadragon was the one where that...Johnny Lipes did the appendectomy, you know?

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Now I've heard about that; was that the first one that was ever...

Mr. Keeton: The first...

Mike Zambrano: ...done?

Mr. Keeton: ...by a Pharmacist Mate.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: But Johnny Lipes was a...a O.R. Tech, operating room technician, and he'd been in...every station he'd ever been at he worked in the operating room

though he'd done appendectomies prior to his do...doing this one. They allowed him to do it in the presence of the doctor, and he became, of course, quite famous...Johnny did.

Mike Zambrano: I think they...they added that part in a movie, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: I forget what it was called, but it's...

Mr. Keeton: "*Run Silent, Run Deep*," I think...could have been the name of it; I'm not for sure what the name of it was, but it was part of a movie, yes.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, what...what were your other impressions of first getting into submarines? I mean...I've been...I've been in...

Mr. Keeton: Oh, I was so excited; I couldn't wait to get...really get going and being...a part of the crew and going on liberty and...getting things done; getting my place and my medical stuff squared away; my training schedule set up and that was the most important...was training session and...of course, to qualify on submarines you have to go through the boat and...learn how to do everything in each compartment; how to take on water; how to take on fuel; how to start the diesel engines; how to get underway; how to run the maneuver board; all that you have to learn how. I'd line the boat up for a battery charge and...oh, where...all the tanks are and how they...what their (unintelligible) were. And that's...basically what you do when you first go aboard...you qualify.

Mike Zambrano: So they taught you these things when you got aboard?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yes! Well, we had that...some of it in basic submarine school...'cause it was in...called Spritz's (sp?) Navy then...basic submarine school was. He was

a Chief Torpedo man and he run that school with an iron hand, let me tell you!
I still got a patch on my submarine vest and I'm a graduate of Spritz's Navy.

Mike Zambrano: When did you go to submarine school...just...after the Pharmacist Mate School?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Where was that at?

Mr. Keeton: New London, Connecticut.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, alright. Oh, do you remember the name of the Captain of the Seadragon?

Mr. Keeton: No, I don't. Unfortunately that...escapes my mind.

Mike Zambrano: Do you remember anybody in particular from the Seadragon?

Mr. Keeton: Oh boy! You got remember this is like...sixty-seven...sixty years ago.

Mike Zambrano: Oh that's okay. If you can't, that's okay.

Mr. Keeton: I don't remember. I think I remember a couple of guys, but I'm not for sure, and I don't want to call names that...you get them mixed up with somebody else...

Mike Zambrano: Well that's okay.

Mr. Keeton: ...or a different boat.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, seven weeks you said you were on her. Uh, did she go on war patrol during that time?

Mr. Keeton: Well, that's what was called...made that one trip up to the Aleutians, but we didn't see nothing.

Mike Zambrano: How did it feel like to be under water?

Mr. Keeton: No different, really...smoother.

Mike Zambrano: Smoother under water?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah.

Mike Zambrano: What was the weather like on...on that first trip?

Mr. Keeton: Well, we had some...I remember it was the...real cloudy, overcast...we had like a rolling sea; in other words the ship would...submarines don't...yaw and pitch; they roll. As soon as we'd submerge, why, it'd just level out and be real smooth and...nice and...and enjoyable.

Mike Zambrano: Was it cold?

Mr. Keeton: No, it was kind of in the summer time.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: Spring, I guess it was.

Mike Zambrano: So after the...the Seadragon, where did you go?

Mr. Keeton: Pearl Harbor.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, and were...

Mr. Keeton: Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, and then what ship did you get after that?

Mr. Keeton: Well, I didn't get another ship...then till the war was over and I got on a submarine tender called the [USS] Apollo, AS-17, I think it was. And...good thing I did because it...I got on there like on a Thursday and Sunday night...I had an attack of appendicitis and Monday morning I was operated on; had my appendix cut out halfway between Pearl Harbor and Panama.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: So...so you had your appendix cut out at...at sea also?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Wow! Uhm, just to back up a little. You said that you were on the Apollo when the war was over?

Mr. Keeton: Well, just before it was over...I got on the...they assigned me to the Apollo on a relief crew; that's where that...(unintelligible) Fish relief crew was...and I rode her then till they changed it; they moved the relief crew off of there and left me and another relief crew, so I rode with another relief crew; I don't remember the name of it...or what...which boat it was. And then we went on through the Panama Canal and up to New Orleans; that's when I caught the (unintelligible). It'd dock on there; got orders to go to...Bob Gray (sp?) his name was; I remember him, Chief Pharmacist Mate. In fact, I just saw him a couple of years ago at a reunion in...in New...in...near...Florida and I knew him. God love him, he's just getting Alzheimer's disease. So that there's...a terrible thing, but it's the way it is.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, you said...just going back a little bit...you said that...after the Seadragon you were at Pearl Harbor. This is still 1942, right?

Mr. Keeton: No, this is 1944.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay.

Mr. Keeton: Time passes on.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, so what did you do at Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Keeton: Well, I was in a relief crew there at the sub base dispensary, and I worked...in sick call...by my own asking...make sure that I didn't miss out on any...any case that would come in that I might encounter...after I got on submarines.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: So I kind of prepared to...anything to prepare myself for emergency on a sub.

Mike Zambrano: So did you stay there for the remainder of the war...or at...at least until you got on the Apollo?

Mr. Keeton: Till I got on the Apollo.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. And would...just a couple real basic questions...like...what was the daily uniform that you would wear while you were at Pearl?

Mr. Keeton: Well, in the dispensary, of course, we wore whites, and after I went onboard the tender...some days I'd wear whites; some days I'd wear...it was like...if I was giving shots or something...then I'd give...then I'd wear whites...make it seem more...medical. I could have worn dungarees, but I didn't.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum. Do you remember what your commanding officer's name was?

Mr. Keeton: Know his name was Jacobs; last name was Jacobs. I forgot what his first name was. I think they called him *Indian Joe*.

Mike Zambrano: Indian Joe?

Mr. Keeton: He was part Indian. I know...I know he was a Navy Captain because he come down there when I was laying in that bunk with...after my appendectomy. He says, "You know, you're not...you're not a very popular person on this ship." I said, "Sorry, Skipper." And he says, "We got four hundred and forty-five Army reservists on here going back; they got points from after...for discharge,

and you held them up for...I think six or seven hours while they did the appendectomy.” So he says, “You better be careful when you go up topside.” Of course, he was just kidding me, but still, you know.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Keeton: I remember the first day I got to come topside was the day we went through the Canal.

Mike Zambrano: What was that like?

Mr. Keeton: Well, you go through the different locks and, you know, you're...some...you got so much water and then you...go up another...probably up another and then go into another lock...and it was...well, it was...interesting; not really exciting but interesting...to know how that canal worked at the time. Now I understand it's all different but that's the way it worked those days.

Mike Zambrano: Now Captain Jacobson, you said?

Mr. Keeton: Jacobs.

Mike Zambrano: Jacobs; okay. He was your commanding officer...

Mr. Keeton: On the Apollo.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay, and what kind of man was he; what kind of officer?

Mr. Keeton: Well, I don't know what you're getting at. He was a good...he was a good submarine skipper...I understood; I never was...served with him on the submarine, but...he got promoted to the Captain and then he got the...assigned to the Apollo....as the Skipper of it.

Mike Zambrano: So he'd been a submariner before that?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay. And what exactly did he do on a submarine tender?

Mr. Keeton: What did he do?

Mike Zambrano: Well, I mean...what does a submarine tender do?

Mr. Keeton: Well, they...they're a mother ship for submarines...(unintelligible). A submarine needs repair of any type or part of it, why then come...alongside the tender and tie up and they give the deck hands the chance...chip paint and repaint topside; make any repairs below decks; that's what the tender...that's what a tender does.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: A mother ship to the submarines.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, and that's just any submarine or are they assigned to specific submarines?

Mr. Keeton: Well, it's...they're assigned to...to specific ones...here and there. Usually...usually in a better place like Pearl Harbor, (unintelligible) there was two different submarine tenders, and then they had the sub base there...for major stuff which couldn't be handled by the...tenders.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. And how long were you on the Apollo?

Mr. Keeton: I don't remember the month, but it was shortly...they wasn't going to send me down there because...I hadn't been out of that appendectomy...treatment long enough to...really get me healed up but I says, "That's alright, I'll take care of myself." I remember then I went down there and...two days later the ship's cook had to go on emergency leave, so I took over one of the jobs as...as ship's cook, and I cooked on there for four months...after...for four weeks...

and...till the cook got back off of emergency leave. I remember one thing; I'll never forget this. One day we was going to have...wieners and sauerkraut and...well that was later on. We were submerged anyway; been at inboard...and I opened a can of sauerkraut. Boy, let me tell you something...you talk about something that smells...that sauer kraut went into that ventilation system...and everybody got, you know, "What the hell happened?!" They thought maybe they'd flushed...a toilet inboard. That's how bad that smells when they...you open a can of sauerkraut. It was a big gallon can of sauerkraut; I remember that! And little things like that you don't forget, but you...always remember them, you know?

Mike Zambrano: Right, right. Do you remember that when you smell sauerkraut nowadays?

Mr. Keeton: I always think about it, yeah.

Mike Zambrano: What was it like living inside of a submarine? I mean...for example, did you have a battle station when they went to general quarters?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah! Oh, you better believe that I did! But I was always available, in case something happened. But then...I had one...emergency valve right...in the after battery, near the after battery compartment...that's where my sick bay was...where my little locker was with my medical supplies; the main one anyway, because I had some in the after torpedo room and up in the forward torpedo room, and that how I could get my medical supplies distributed...throughout the subs. And the locker was only about two feet wide and...five or six feet tall; it was right at my feet, so if anybody come there even during the night, I had a bottle of aspirin...or APCs we called them

then. It was...it was a combination of aspirin...(unintelligible) and caffeine, and I had to make them...I had to make up...and put a pair of rubber gloves on and get my...little capsules out and I'd fill them up with this powder that's called APC. I had a bottle of them there in case somebody got a headache or thought they needed aspirin or the derivative of an aspirin. And they had the...all going...and band aids; I really didn't have band aids; I had to make up...little bandages 'cause there was no such a thing as...ready-made four by fours and two by twos you had to make them up yourself.

Mike Zambrano: Did you make them up ahead of time?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah, you always had to make them up ahead of time, yeah. But I didn't have an autoclave, so I'd stick them in the oven and heat them and I'd wrap them; that's the nearest to anything sterile that I had. So...

Mike Zambrano: So...so what exactly was your...your position at general quarters; just to be ready in case someone got hurt or...?

Mr. Keeton: I was just a member of the crew; just like anybody else.

Mike Zambrano: Uh huh.

Mr. Keeton: It was, yes, in case...somebody got hurt then I could be...I could get off that safety valve thing or...real quick. And...no, I didn't have safety, I had one of the ballast tanks...

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay.

Mr. Keeton: ...that could be dispensed with. Everybody had to man...(unintelligible) his own safety. You had to be there twenty-four, seven in case that safety...meaning...if something happened and you needed to go topside, that

safety valve could push you up. You opened it and then it...(unintelligible)
had enough buoyancy.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, let's see...I always ask...I always ask this question. What did you think of the food?

Mr. Keeton: Oh, we had the best; we had the best of everything. We had a lot of weevils, and after...awhile...we didn't know if it...or...(unintelligible) because I had...I was Food Service Officer also.

Mike Zambrano: As well as Pharmacist Mate?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah. And I had to make sure that the food was prepared properly and it was...in the manner of speaking...we didn't get too many weevils. I said, "Well, the one that gets the most weevils, gets the most protein."

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Keeton: So...

Mike Zambrano: Oh, so you're kind of combining your jobs there; food and medicine.

Mr. Keeton: Yeah. I had to go with the ship's cook and make up the menu and...and that was the biggest part of it.

Mike Zambrano: What about living space?

Mr. Keeton: Well, I mean living quarters on a submarine is tight for everybody; the bunks...you only have a certain...amount of clearance between bunks, and you're main locker, clothing locker, was an outboard of your bunk. And that's where you lived so to speak. I don't recall exactly how many inches there was between bunks, but there wasn't very much...not very much clearance between your bunk and what you had to get up into.

Mike Zambrano: And, I assume that you had a system where...you alternated your bunk with someone?

Mr. Keeton: Well, some did, but mine they...nobody ever took my bunk because they knew...the Doc had to have his...'cause I didn't get as much sleep as the rest of them did.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, so you needed your bunk a lot more often?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, so whenever I'd get a chance, I'd take a nap.

Mike Zambrano: Anything else that you recall about your time on...on the Seadragon? I mean the seven weeks...anything else that stands out?

Mr. Keeton: No, I don't guess so.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, let's see, so...from the Seadragon you went to Pearl Harbor and you were...you...you mentioned that you were stationed there for awhile; was it a hospital?

Mr. Keeton: Well, it was a dispensary.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: Submarine base dispensary.

Mike Zambrano: And then...from...after spending your time there, you...

Mr. Keeton: Went aboard the Apollo.

Mike Zambrano: ...the Apollo and headed back towards the States. And you said you went through the...the Panama Canal...

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: ...and...back to...

Mr. Keeton: Was operated on...halfway between Pearl and...and Panama.

Mike Zambrano: What did you feel? I'm just curious to make you think that you had appendicitis?

Mr. Keeton: Well, I knew I did; my belly was hot and...and my...I was...I went up and did a blood count on myself, a white blood count. It began to...it was over then...normal limits, so I went again and...and sometime later...we got another...blood test; it had risen quite a bit; the white count had gone up. So then I woke up and my buddy says, "Hey, get ready because I'm...I've got appendicitis and you got to operate on me." He says, "Get the hell out of here and leave me alone and go back to bed." I says, "No, come on I've got to,"...Johnny Lesco his name was...he was a Corpsman in the O.R...so...I started...trying to prep myself; got ready for the operation. And when...I went under the knife; it took him about...thirty, thirty-five minutes to operate me because my appendix had grown up underneath my large intestine; he had to cut it away from there.

Mike Zambrano: How long did the operation take?

Mr. Keeton: About forty-five minutes.

Mike Zambrano: So...obviously you had a full recovery.

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah.

Mike Zambrano: So you prepped yourself, and you diagnosed yourself, too?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, I did that.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, do you remember the doctor who operated on you?

Mr. Keeton: Doctor Lester W. Fix (sp?)

Mike Zambrano: Hm.

Mr. Keeton: Never forget him.

Mike Zambrano: Was he al...already on the te...uh, on the Apollo?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah, they had two doctors on there.

Mike Zambrano: Oh! Okay.

Mr. Keeton: It was a big ship.

Mike Zambrano: Hm. Oh, how many...how many men? I mean...how many men on the ship?

Mr. Keeton: I don't remember how many they had on there; I was on a submarine tender at the time.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Keeton: Probably a couple of thousand.

Mike Zambrano: Oh really?! Oh, okay, well I can see why they would have two doctors then.

Alright, so...you go to the...through the Canal and you...go into...head up to...I think you said New Orleans?

Mr. Keeton: New Orleans, yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, so...in New Orleans you...you do what?

Mr. Keeton: Oh, I was just on the boat; we was getting ready to go to the...shipyard in Philadelphia. It was going to go out of commission we heard; they was sending us up there...so we was making preparations getting this stuff ready to...I had to get my medical records all transferred. They guys getting transferred off of the boat and getting them ready...to go give them a transfer of physical.

Mike Zambrano: So uh, the boat that you were going to...to put out of commission was the Pompom (sp?)?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: That was up in Philadelphia?

Mr. Keeton: Right.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. So it doesn't sound like (beep noise), it doesn't sound like you were with her very long.

Mr. Keeton: No, I really wasn't.

Mike Zambrano: And...was this after the war had ended?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, well let me...let me back up a little bit...ask you this. Do you remember where...where you were or what you were doing when heard that the atomic bomb had been dropped?

Mr. Keeton: (Pause), they...the god's truth...I don't remember. But I think I was on the Apollo, but I don't remember exactly.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. By the time you got to Philadelphia, had they already signed...the surrender (beep noise)? It would have been early September.

Mr. Keeton: Yeah. I think they'd already signed it.

Mike Zambrano: Let's see, any thoughts about the end of the war? I mean...I'm sure you...you were happy.

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, I just wanted to go home to my bride. I got married in May of '44 and...I saw her for just this short time and then I had to go back to sea. And then...

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, where...where did you get married at? Were...did you...were you on leave and you came home to the States or...?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, I got...I got married from...I was over to the sub base in Pearl (beep noise), I mean New London. We getting near the end of a tape?

Mike Zambrano: Uh, yeah; it'll beep one or two more times and then I'll...I'll just flip it over. But...where did you say you were getting...you had gotten married in?

Mr. Keeton: Got married in Chicago.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, so you came home; you got married.

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: And then you went back to...?

Mr. Keeton: Back to New London.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, New...New London?

Mr. Keeton: By that time, I'd gone up to New London and I was still on the Pompom.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, okay. Well wait...uhm, so you were married in Chicago and then you went to...you didn't go back to Pearl from there?

Mr. Keeton: No, we'd already come through the Canal and gone up to New Orleans and...and Philadelphia.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. (beep noise)

Mr. Keeton: So...

Mike Zambrano: So how much time did you spend with the Pompom?

Mr. Keeton: Oh, it's been a couple of years...all total.

Mike Zambrano: You know, I...I better flip the tape now or else I'm afraid it might cut you off in the middle. (recording stopped temporarily) Okay, so we were talking a little bit about the Pompom and what exactly did you have to do to put it out of commission?

Mr. Keeton: Well they...ordinarily they would have sent me up to the sub base dispensary in New London and I says, "No, I don't want to go up there; I'll lose sub pay." So they said, "Well, you can stay on the boat, but you got to be...act like a seaman." I said, "Okay, that's alright with me." So I was inside the torpedo tubes with a mask and a wire brush scraping all the gunk and...green...matter that had accumulated over the years out of the tubes; in other words shining them up and putting the...preservative on them, so...just like a regular seaman would do. I got that job done and I helped with...helped the engine and...remember one time...one of the (unintelligible words) was back there and they rammed the...this screwdriver into his finger and...I was standing right there by him and...started to say something, so he grabbed a handful of axel grease and...stuck his finger down in there and...says, "It'll be alright," said, "that there's good and sterile stuff." So he wouldn't let me...let me put a band aid on him; he had...he had it all fixed up himself.

Mike Zambrano: So he was alright sticking his hand in axel grease?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, well, it's sterile.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, what other jobs did you do in regards to...commissioning?

Mr. Keeton: I stood watches topside.

Mike Zambrano: Even there in Philadelphia?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah. Somebody had to be up topside all the time in case...some...body come down there, you know, 'cause we had...still had our officers' crew aboard.

Mike Zambrano: And what other duties?

Mr. Keeton: Well, in fact, (pause) I was the Yeoman; they didn't have a Yeoman, so I...opened the mail and...they'd transfer the guys...or what a Yeoman usually does. I didn't have any problems there because we knew how to do all that...even though it wasn't part of our...our requirement to be a Pharmacist Mate. And somewhere along that line in 1950 somewhere...can't remember exactly when it was but it was in the early '50s...in January or February, they changed us from Pharmacist Mates to Hospital Corpsmen; they changed that...nomenclature of our rating...name. And after that then we were...instead of being a PHM-1 I was a...HM...HM-1.

Mike Zambrano: HM1?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: 'Cause when I made Chief...I took the test on the...boat and passed it and made Chief, but I didn't get it till I got to Corpus and that was in early of 1942, I mean 1945. So...it was '40...when was that...'46 I guess it was.

Mike Zambrano: So, did you go from Philadelphia down to Corpus Christi?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, no, I went into St. Thomas.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: I had to go to St. Thomas and decommission a submarine base down there.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, submarine *base*?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, they had a...auxiliary base down there, so I went down there. The Chief Warrant Officer; the Chief Clerk liked me. He said, "Doc, I'll give you a break," so I went to St. Thomas and was down there for...about a year and I

got my wife down there and we had a real honeymoon. I bought an old 1944 Ford for twenty-five dollars; man that was a running car!

Mike Zambrano: So you were there for a year, huh?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, something like that.

Mike Zambrano: And...where...what...what did you do there?

Mr. Keeton: Oh, I just worked up in the dispensary; I didn't get that sub pay or nothing, but...I got my...I got...all the records and got everything...all the medical stuff boxed up and ready to go to...ready to be shipped over to Roosevelt Road...and then (unintelligible) Puerto Rico and stayed there...I stayed there till the day she was decommissioned.

Mike Zambrano: The which one?

Mr. Keeton: The day that St. Thomas was decommissioned; turned back over to the islanders.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: There was still some stuff there that part of the Marine detachment was still there but...they stayed on for awhile.

Mike Zambrano: So then from St. Thomas you went to Puerto Rico?

Mr. Keeton: No, I went to...New London, Connecticut to another submarine tender.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, which one was this one?

Mr. Keeton: Don't remember the name of it now because it was tied up there...and now it was...they always had a saying that...the (unintelligible) got underway then they would have to dig the coffee grounds out from underneath her

because...they'd throw the coffee grounds over the side; she was there long enough for...build up quite a supply of coffee grounds.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckle). Uhm, what were your duties...what were your duties on the (unintelligible words) hosp...hospital...?

Mr. Keeton: Being a hospital corpsman.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Uhm, you know you mentioned submarine pay before; what was the difference between a...submariner's pay and somebody that served say on a destroyer?

Mr. Keeton: You had fifty percent of your base pay; we looked forward to that,

Mike Zambrano: That sounds pretty good.

Mr. Keeton: Oh hell, yes. And you got ten percent...another ten percent for being...uh, sea...for sea duty...you got ten percent, so I actually got sixty percent of your base pay on submarines where the other way you only got ten percent.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm...

Mr. Keeton: ...which wasn't very much pay at the time. Fact, when I made Chief...I made Chief...base pay was two hundred and twenty-five dollars a month...that's as high as you could get.

Mike Zambrano: But with the...with the submarine pay, that...that put it over three hundred a month?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, right about three hundred.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Uhm, when did you make Chief?

Mr. Keeton: Actually I made Chief in '48, but like I said, I didn't get it till '50. I didn't get to put it on till '50, but I made it on the test of 1940...'48...or '49 I guess it might have been 'cause I come ashore to Corpus there in 1950...as a Chief.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Uhm, why did you decide to stay in...I mean after the war?

Mr. Keeton: I didn't want to go back to Oklahoma and pick cotton...is the main reason.

Mike Zambrano: Did you enjoy what you did as a Pharmacist Mate?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah! I really did.

Mike Zambrano: So what's your next...what did you do...after...after St. Thomas?

Mr. Keeton: Well, like I said, I went back to New London and on that submarine tender up there.

Mike Zambrano: Hum, okay.

Mr. Keeton: And...so after St. Thomas...oh, I got assigned directly to the Clamagore.

Mike Zambrano: After St. Thomas?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, so...hum...so was the Clamagore before...or after the submarine tender in New London?

Mr. Keeton: Had to be after.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, okay.

Mr. Keeton: You get me kind of...or I'm getting kind of confused with some of the dates because, you know, it's been a long and...

Mike Zambrano: I understand. Well, we can just focus on the Clamagore. What is...tell me a little bit about that; how long were the Clamagore?

Mr. Keeton: Over two years.

Mike Zambrano: Wow! Okay, and same duty...you're hospital corpsman on the Clamagore?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: And...

Mr. Keeton: Sonar watch; radar watch; helms...helmsman...underway.

Mike Zambrano: Really?! So you got to...do a little of each of these jobs?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: You...always said that I'm a sailor first; all this other is secondary. So that's the way it's been.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. So tell me a little bit about operating a radar.

Mr. Keeton: Well, you just...let that...thing go around and around and you pick up ships; report them to the bridge. The more...the more interesting part of it was sonar. Sonar was...coming into Key West they...oh, we went from...when I got on the Clamagore she was still in the Navy yard in Philadelphia being converted to a...a GUPPY, and if...I don't know if you know what GUPPY is or not, but GUPPY is "Greater Underwater Power Propulsion," and they added the "Y" just to make his name out of it. So, it...it...she was the first of the snorkels.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay.

Mr. Keeton: So we had...our first dive after completion was out in Chesapeake Bay and I remember we...the Diving Officer wasn't too (unintelligible) alert, so he made...he bounced us off the bottom; the Old Man took over then.

Mike Zambrano: He bounced the sub off of the bottom of the ocean floor?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, of the bay.

Mike Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Keeton: Scared the hell out of all of us.

Mike Zambrano: You remember who the Captain was?

Mr. Keeton: Walter W. Small...from...South Carolina. In fact, he just passed away; I saw where he'd just passed away a couple of years ago; the greatest guy that I ever met in my life.

Mike Zambrano: Really? Good Captain?

Mr. Keeton: Good Captain. The Executive Officer was R. G. Black. We had a Gunnery Officer name of Calgory (sp?) and one named Proctor (sp?).

Mike Zambrano: What was the first one's name? Codrey (sp?)

Mr. Keeton: Codrey.

Mike Zambrano: Codrey, okay.

Mr. Keeton: He...later made Rear-Admiral.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Keeton: Yeah. R. G. Black was a reservist; school teacher from...I forgot where he taught, but he taught school in some...in a...university. I think he...I'm going to say...some place like Georgia Tech, but...that wasn't it.

Mike Zambrano: Um, okay.

Mr. Keeton: And he was from Georgia, but it was one of the Georgia schools that (throat clearing) where he taught.

Mike Zambrano: Do you remember who the Chief of the boat was?

Mr. Keeton: Willie Wyles (sp?).

Mike Zambrano: Willie Wyles.

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, Chief Torpedo man.

Mike Zambrano: What was he like?

Mr. Keeton: Nice guy; Willie was alright. His wife work...worked in a (unintelligible) there at Key West...the first tavern you got to after the gate...after you got outside the base...the first tavern that you ran into was...oh, the...I forgot the name of the tavern, but that's where she worked.

Mike Zambrano: Is there anybody else that you remember from the Clamagore...since you were there for two years?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah. In fact, one of them I'm still in touch with...Henderson. He's a retired Lieutenant now; he rides a...in fact, I've got two of his newsletters in there. I get newsletters on the Pompom, too.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay.

Mr. Keeton: Or the Clamagore I mean.

Mike Zambrano: And what did...what was his job?

Mr. Keeton: Radioman. Then there was...Mike Ferdin (sp?) was an Engineman. Race Collins was a Torpedo man...Combs (sp?) I think his name was; he just passed away here not too long ago.

Mike Zambrano: What was...what was Mr. Collins' first name?

Mr. Keeton: Ace.

Mike Zambrano: Ace, okay.

Mr. Keeton: Old Ace Collins. You may not...might not want me to tell this but I'm going to. We were in liberty in...(pause), oh, that's a different time...in a different

boat, and I went out on the Seadragon. I better not tell that story; that's not too nice.

Mike Zambrano: That's okay.

Mr. Keeton: We went into a...into a nightclub up there, and...so this gal come over and she put a...started to putting the make on Old Ace and somebody tipped us off and said, "Don't...tell him to stay away because he's a...she ain't no girl; she's a boy." It was a queer joint. So he...he wouldn't believe us. So finally he reached up underneath her dress and says, "You got a hole set of...you know what!" And...that caused quite a furor, and we had to get out then...I know in a hurry. So Old Ace kind...kind of perturbed that he had...found a boy dressed up like a girl.

Mike Zambrano: I guess...that wasn't...a very common thing back then.

Mr. Keeton: No, it wasn't. We didn't know there was a difference; first time we'd been on liberty up there and...we just wasn't...in there and...and it...that's about the size of it.

Mike Zambrano: And that was when...you were with the Clamagore?

Mr. Keeton: No, I was at the...Seadragon then; that one of the liberties off the Seadragon. That's why I said I'm...back tracking and making things go crazy...if whoever interprets that interview they'll think, "What's the matter with that guy; is he crazy or not?"

Mike Zambrano: Oh, that's why I ask some follow-up questions just...just to kind of clear it up. So...so that was on the Seadragon then?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Any other interesting stories that stand out during your time of...during the war?

Mr. Keeton: No, I don't guess so.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, just going back to the Clamagore. Two years on it...where did you go to after the Clamagore?

Mr. Keeton: Corpus Christi, Texas.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, and what did you do there?

Mr. Keeton: Same thing; the hospital corps.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: Only I was in administration. I did the first...I was the first cell (sp?) officer.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay. And at this point you're already Chief?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah, I was already a Chief.

Mike Zambrano: So was it an actual hospital?

Mr. Keeton: A regular hospital, yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Do you remember the name of it?

Mr. Keeton: Federal Hospital, Corpus Christ, Texas.

Mike Zambrano: And was it for...just...I assume it was just for servicemen?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah.

Mike Zambrano: And were these like servicemen that were being transferred back to the...well, what year is it? I...I wanted...I was going to ask...are these servicemen being transferred back to the States from the war?

Mr. Keeton: Well Korea had started, see?

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay, that's right.

Mr. Keeton: And we'd begun to get people from Korea...

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: ...casualties from Korea.

Mike Zambrano: Now you were...you stayed in the States; you didn't go...to...you know, serve on a ship during Korea?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, I stayed in Corpus for two years, and I got a set of orders to a destroyer in Newport, Rhode Island, the USS Lloyd Thomas.

Mike Zambrano: Lloyd Thomas?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Keeton: And I rode the Lloyd Thomas for...almost three years.

Mike Zambrano: Did she go to the Pacific?

Mr. Keeton: No, we started to, and they...turned us around and said they wanted us to go through the Panama Canal, I mean through the Suez Canal and go...that direction, and we didn't even go through there. We...we got almost there and they, you know how the Navy is...they change your orders...so instead we went into Naples, Italy...and stayed there for some time. Then we operated in the Mediterranean and then went back to Newport. How much longer is this going to go on; I'm getting thirsty and...

Mike Zambrano: Oh, oh it's four minutes actually; I could probably stop. So you spent thirty years in the Navy?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: So it means you got out in '73?

Mr. Keeton: '72.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay, and...

Mr. Keeton: February the 1st, '72.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, well you couldn't forget a date like that.

Mr. Keeton: No, not hardly.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, so...after the Mediterranean what other ships did you serve on?

Mr. Keeton: Well, I didn't; I went to the Marines.

Mike Zambrano: You went to the Marines?

Mr. Keeton: Yeah, the Navy furnishes Medics to the Marines, and I spent ten straight years in with the Marines.

Mike Zambrano: Did you do any time in Vietnam?

Mr. Keeton: Two tours (unintelligible).

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, were...were...what years were those?

Mr. Keeton: Well, let's see...(pause)...I went over there in...(pause)...I guess '66 was the first tour and then a year later it was '67.

Mike Zambrano: And...what'd you do there?

Mr. Keeton: Well, field medic. And after I did that, did nothing because we weren't in the front lines. We didn't get...shot at and we didn't do any shooting. We were kind of in the rear with the gear...so to speak.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Well...

Mr. Keeton: Which was alright with us.

Mike Zambrano: What rank were you when you got out of the service?

Mr. Keeton: Senior Chief.

Mike Zambrano: So...hospital man...

Mr. Keeton: HMCS.

Mike Zambrano: HNCS, okay, thank you.

Mr. Keeton: I made that with the Marines.

Mike Zambrano: Hmm, uhm, what was your impression of Vietnam?

Mr. Keeton: Well...lot of jungle; we were...the first time there we was right near that delta and...we saw quite a bit of...well, where they'd already been blasting in there with...cannons and that...clearing some of the way out of there. It was the first time, and the second time, why, we never even got close; we were in (unintelligible) near Da Nang...as a back-up outfit.

Mike Zambrano: What area did you spend most of your time in?

Mr. Keeton: I guess...the second time...was over there...in Da Nang area...mainly off the coast.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm...just going back to World War II. Are there any stories or recollections that you'd like to share...that we haven't talked about?

Mr. Keeton: (Pause), I tell you the truth, I've kind of forgotten...was...I'd even talked about. (Pause), Oh, I remember one time...we had...a Gunner's Mate name of...(pause)...Dubbs (sp?), and he was standing watch and he sees some debris out there that...in the ocean that was unusual for that area and for having any debris and he says, "There's debris out there," and he says, "how do you spell it?" And they says, "D-e-r-b-r-i-s." So after that, he called it Derbis, so we nicknamed him Derbis Doug; I remember that.

Mike Zambrano: Did he ever find out what the debris was?

Mr. Keeton: Oh yeah, just...some seaweed drifted (cough).

Mike Zambrano: Anything else?

Mr. Keeton: No, I don't remember anything else that I can think of right off hand. After you go...and tonight I'll probably lay there and think of a thousand things. I remember one time on the...oh, this was after the war though, had a ship's cook named Snorkel (sp?); had a big nose; we called him Snork. He was baking...he had something in the oven...a turkey, I think, in the oven...think we took a dive, and we went down at a pretty good angle and spilled some of the water out there; he had water there...a black man...he was doing that turkey...he had steaming up and I happened to be on that valve right there by...I told him to get away from that oven door; he was going to open it and it could...it was really steaming, so I get...swinging from...big, round wheel...close that valve; I was swinging on it with my feet up against that door of that oven to keep him from opening it...didn't reach the danger point but it was something that stuck in my mind.

Mike Zambrano: So he didn't open it?

Mr. Keeton: No...not till we got leveled off.

Mike Zambrano: Any other recollections?

Mr. Keeton: I can't think of anything right now, man.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, well you know I'll leave you my card and if you...you know if you think of some other things I can always come back at a later day.

Mr. Keeton: Okay.

Mike Zambrano: Alright. Well, I think that I pretty much...that pretty much covers my questions for today. Certainly want to thank you for making time for...(unintelligible) with me; I appreciate it.

Mr. Keeton: You're welcome.

Mike Zambrano: And...I'm just going to switch this off here.

(end of interview)

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