

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Alfred E. Keeler
Wichita Falls, Texas
September 18, 2018
U.S. Navy
Radio Operator

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is September 18, 2018. I am interviewing Mr. Alfred E. Keeler by telephone. His phone number is 940-692-6549. His address is 3513 University Ave. Wichita Falls, TX 76308. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World war II.

Gene, I want to thank you for taking the time to do this interview today, and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Keeler:

Are you a Navy Vet?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No sir, I'm Army.

Mr. Keeler:

Ok, well, I'll transcribe Navy Rank into Army Rank as we discuss things.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is okay with you.

"Agreement Read"

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, that's fine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back with a veteran he's moved or something. So, do you have a son or daughter or someone we could contact if we needed to, to find you?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, you can contact my younger daughter, same address, same phone number.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is her name?

Mr. Keeler:

Her name is Debbie Tracy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, and she has same phone and address.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, hopefully we will never need that, but you never know.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birthdate?

Mr. Keeler:

8 November, 1925.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Keeler:

I was born at the Station Hospital, Ft. Sill near Lawton Oklahoma.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Keeler:

I had two sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were they involved in any kind of WWII work or anything?

Mr. Keeler:

No, they were too young.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, what were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Keeler:

My mother was Grace, and my father's first name was Alfred, like mine. He went by his middle name Taylor.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You grew up during the depression, how did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, my dad was regular Army, First Sergeant, so we weren't affected as much as our neighbors that lived around us who were civilians.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it like growing up as the son of an Army man.

Mr. Keeler:

Like being in the Army, I was a Private in his Army.

Mr. Misenhimer;

(laughter) I see. Where did you go to High School?

Mr. Keeler:

Lawton High School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate high school?

Mr. Keeler:

'43, but I graduated up in Indiana. My dad was transferred as part of the initial cadre to open up Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So Where did you graduate high school?

Mr. Keeler:

Edinburgh, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer:

December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, I had a paper route, and we used to go see a midnight movie and go deliver our papers at 3:00 in the morning, so I was asleep and I don't remember the time and what, 11:00 or something like that. My mother woke me up and said the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was at.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No one else did either. When you heard that, how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Keeler:

I didn't know, I had no idea. My dad had already gone back to Fort Sill, so I don't know what they were doing there, but anyway, he was back at his post at Fort Sill at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, When did you go into the service?

Mr. Keeler:

June 3, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you volunteer, or were you drafted?

Mr. Keeler:

I volunteered, I was in round number 17 ½.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You took the Navy, is that correct?

Mr. Keeler:

Navy, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, sort of a long story, one of the guys in our class in Indiana, dropped out and joined the Navy. He came back about five months later as a 3rd class radio operator. So that was basically one of the things that I decided I was going to join the Navy and be a radio operator. But everybody, during that time, everybody was joining up or figuring out how can I help.

Mr. Misenhimer;

So, you were 17 when you joined.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, coming up on 18 between June and November.

Mr. Misenhimer;

So, your parents had to sign for you then.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, and my mother refused to sign for me, so my dad signed for me to join.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you take your boot camp at?

Mr. Keeler:

San Diego, and it was a shortened boot camp, it was only six weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh? Why was that?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, they needed troops overseas in a hurry, so they, I don't know what length boot camp was before that, but we did six weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, it was normally twelve weeks.

Mr. Keeler:

Well, was it normally twelve weeks back then?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir.

Mr. Keeler:

Ok.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do in boot camp?

Mr. Keeler:

Just basic stuff, scrubbed clothes, and hang them up on the clothes line, and do a lot of marching. A little bit of familiarity with a 40mm anti-aircraft gun. That was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have swimming?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, you had to pass swimming before you could graduate.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok. Did you have any kind of weapons training?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, we went to the rifle range, and I don't remember if we got any snap in or not. I was a pretty good shot, I had a 22 caliber from the time I was 12 years old, so I could hit a running jack rabbit. I could just barely failed to qualify as marksman and we had a 30 caliber and it might have been Springfield's, I don't remember. I think they probably were Springfield '03s.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were they bolt action?

Mr. Keeler:

Bolt action, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that's a Springfield 03, right.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, I think that's what we had on the rifle range. I scored 116 and you needed 120 to qualify as a marksman.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Were your drill instructors pretty tough on you?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, yeah, I guess they were. We had a chief, no officer, and we had a company of maybe, it's hard to say, maybe 150, I'm just guessing at that number, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Anything particular stand out from boot camp?

Mr. Keeler:

Not that I can remember. It was pretty hurry up. We spent a lot of time scrubbing stuff. Scrubbing, bed time, get up at 3:00 and scrub the same place all over again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

After boot camp, where did you go and what happened?

Mr. Keeler:

San Diego, radio school.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Tell me about that radio school.

Mr. Keeler:

Well, they had incentive if you could do ten words a minute you could graduate as a 3rd class. So, I put in a lot of work. I could already do a little bit of code, 2 to 3 words a minute, so I graduated early, actually.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you said Morse Code, right?

Mr. Keeler:

Yes, dots and dashes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was it to learn that?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, I guess really, not too bad. My dad before he became First Sergeant was a signal Sergeant. So, I knew semaphore and a little bit of code. The Army hadn't really started doing much code communication yet, at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you study, besides Morse Code, did you study flags and that sort of thing?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, flags, semaphore.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok. How many words a minute could you do?

Mr. Keeler:

You had to do 10 to be able to graduate.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, so you did 10 or better then.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, I did 10, but the 3rd class went along with that graduation.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So, after radio school, then what happened?

Mr. Keeler:

I went to Hawaii to IEA which was a big Navy replacement depot. That's where the Navy, I think, double crossed me, they had formed or were forming what they called Jasco's, (Joint Assault Signal Companies), so they put me in the Marines at that point.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, that's where I met Gallagher, Corporal Gallagher a marine, and his job was to convert them swabbies into marines. He had a foot about size 88 I think, he kicked me in the butt many, many times.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He was pretty tough, huh?

Mr. Keeler:

(laughter) Well, no, having grown up in the Army with my dad except for when we were shooting, I had at that time, I had an Enfield which was some kind of British 30 caliber rifle. Gallagher could hear a click on an empty rifle from 12 miles away, I think. So that's where we learned how to count shots.

Mr. Misenhimer;

What's some other things that happened there?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, other than getting kicked in the butt a whole lot of times, that was about it I think.

Mr. Misenhimer;

In your radio school, what all did you learn there? You learned Morse code and the flags and all of that.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, well, I already knew flags, all they were teaching was Morse code.

Mr. Keeler:

Well, that's the part I was telling you I don't like to talk about. We, I was on the beach Attarawa with the second Marine division, for a time was the only operational radio on the beach, we had an old guy, he was really old, he was 32, and he said "kid, see if that thing works", and there was a destroyer just off the beach, we were communicating Pop

was giving me instructions that I'd send to the destroyer, and the destroyer was knocking out guns.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, we left a lot of dead Marines there, and that's the difficult part.

This was a special Japanese, I guess they called them Navy Marines, I don't know what their name was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What Island was this?

Mr. Keeler:

This was in the Gilbert's, they called Tarawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, this was after you left Hawaii.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah.

I was on the beach sending location instructions that Pop gave me to a destroyer that was knocking out the Japanese guns. There was another unit that landed later that I had never heard anything about and didn't know they were there. But there's a DVD out, which I'll give you the name of that came out in '93, that has combat film in it. In that particular DVD, there's a guy standing there with no helmet and got a bad case of clean up the language, combat constipation. As in very scared. I had no idea that there was anything going on like that while I was there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me back up then, when did you leave Hawaii to go overseas?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, shortly after my birthday. We were in a convoy that we joined up with on the 18th, or 19th November, before the invasion on the 20th. I don't remember how many days we were getting from Hawaii to the Gilberts. But I spent my 18th birthday, we were at sea at that time, so, that's before 8 November to 20 November.

Mr. Misenhimer;

What ship were you on going there?

Mr. Keeler:

I don't even remember, it was either an APA 72, or an AKA, one of those two kind of designators. 72 was the number on it.

Mr. Misenhimer;

The APA is a personnel carrier, and the AKA is a cargo carrier.

Mr. Keeler:

Well, 72 is the only number I remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So, you went to Tarawa is that correct?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer;

And what did you do there?

Mr. Keeler:

A radio operator on the beach, second Marine Division.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Second division, ok, what's some things that happened there?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, that was hell for three days. The sad part of that was Gallagher didn't make it. The guy that kicked my butt all over Hawaii didn't make it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He was killed there, huh?

Mr. Keeler:

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the date you landed on Tarawa, do you know? Battle of Tarawa started on November 20th, of '43.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened in that battle?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, the whole world was only what you can see, so other than what I just told you about, that was about the extent of my world.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you communicating for the Second Marines, who were you communicating with?

Mr. Keeler:

A destroyer. And I don't remember now, what it was its name, it's number, or anything like that. It was just a destroyer that was bombarding wherever Pop told them to shoot at.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You would relay that information to the destroyer?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah. I don't know if there were coordinates, the only thing sometimes he would say were either left, or right, or a little bit short. That kind of thing. So, he was giving me information to adjust the gunfire.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened there?

Mr. Keeler:

Basically, that's about all that my mind will let me play back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you there?

Mr. Keeler:

Just about 3 days.

Mr. Misenhimer;

3 days, ok, then what happened?

Mr. Keeler:

Then I went back to Hawaii. Didn't even leave Pearl Harbor, we were loading the Bushnell to go to Midway, and I went to Midway at that point. My job radio operator.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Bushnell is a ...

Mr. Keeler:

Sub tender. I don't remember which book it was in, but there is a picture of John McCain, the senator, his dad is in one of those pictures on the Bushnell, he was a, I'll just say Major, Lt. Commander, sub Commander, at Midway at that time, but I never met him, or knew he was there until I saw this book a few years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's the Bushnell, right.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, Bushnell, sub tender. Also, at that time, there was a trumpet player, Ray Anthony who was as good as Harry James, except he joined the service. He never got any notoriety for it. He was there at sub base. He went to the Royal Hawaiian after he was at sub base maybe six months, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Then you went to Midway, is that correct?

Mr. Keeler:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This was after the battle there?

Mr. Keeler:

Oh yeah, the battle there was about a year before I was there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do at Midway?

Mr. Keeler:

Radio operator.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On the land there.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah. That's where I was telling you earlier this morning, I gave myself credit for saving an Army B-24 bomber that had overflown the island.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that, what happened?

Mr. Keeler:

I was a radio operator, in what they called the ground to air circuit, we had at Midway, the old PV-5's patrol aircraft out just flying around looking to see if Japanese or anything, and they were usually back at the base about 3:30, quarter to 4 in the afternoon. So, at 4:00 if all the flying was finished, I didn't have to sit there and listen to nothing, I could just unplug my earphones, and they had a built-in speaker. This particular afternoon, you had to get permission from operations down the tunnel from where we were before you could do that, and I called and the Lt. Carter, I'm surprised I remember the name, Lt. Carter said no, there's a B24 bomber headed this way, and see if you can raise him, and I did, and the guy jumped up and practically knocked your head phones off he was that loud. And I asked him, when they were going to arrive, and he said about 3:30, but it was a quarter to 4 by then, and so, I asked him did he want a direction finder,

and he said he wasn't sure. We talked back and forth a little bit, and he said yes, he had overflowed Midway by about 250 miles and was headed out toward nowhere, and we finally got him convinced that a direction finder would probably give him some information, and we gave him that, he didn't believe it. So we had a method of communicating to prove who we were called authentication, and I gave him authentication and by that time, the chief in charge was aware of what was going on and we had a radar station across the road from where we were, and he called them and asked them if they had anything and they were on what they called short-range, and the chief said put it on long-range and they said yeah, we got a little tiny blip, so we had DF radio and the radar both confirming this guy had overflowed us. He finally headed back and given a position report every 15 minutes with DF and radar, and he finally said got Midway in sight, thank you, thank you, thank you. They said please remain there in the radio shack until we get back, until we land and there was a, I'll say Lieutenant, pilot captain came down and he'd tell everybody this kid saved my ass. *(laughter)* this kid saved my ass. So, he took me to the officer's club and I aint never been so drunk in all my life. So that was about the only thing in that particular instance where I say I took credit for saving that B-24 plus what the crew was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good, that's fine. What's some other things that happened there?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, we had a first-class E-6 and he was on the California at Pearl Harbor, he got called to go back to the states for new construction, but he cracked ok, so last I heard Johnson was in a VA hospital. That was about it. We had a sub would come up and shell us, nuisance shelling, but I got wounded in that particular one instance, I tell everybody now, the Japanese was mad at me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you get wounded?

Mr. Keeler:

The Japanese was shelling us, and the communication between radio shack and up at ops apparently was broken so I was hand carrying a message over to the Marine command post. My buddy running behind me, a Hispanic from South Texas, never knew where South Texas. His name was Enrique, he said call me Henry, I could never get it right, he got killed running behind me somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you get wounded?

Mr. Keeler:

It was just kind of like pea gravel, shrapnel kind of stuff. Blown up by a shell.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get a Purple Heart for it?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, I went over on to sick call, the corpsman there, he was just picking out the pieces, you know, but, somewhere along the way I got my ankle twisted, so I was in the hospital for, I don't know, 2 or 3 days, and the chaplain brought the Purple Heart, they are supposed to write to your folks, you know, if you're in the hospital, but he said we don't want to worry your folks, right? And I said no, that sounds reasonable, so they never knew anything about it.

Mr. Misenhimer;

How long were you on Midway?

Mr. Keeler:

For about a year. I left Midway in September of '44.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Then where did you go?

Mr. Keeler:

We went back to Hawaii to their communications, fleet communications that I was telling you about this morning. Admiral Nimitz headquarters up near Wahiawa which is north of Honolulu 25-30 miles.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all happened there?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, a whole lot of communications with the fleet. We had total operations there, we had a radio room where I was at, downstairs we had the three circuits that were sending codes out to the subs, to the support group, and to the tactical group like Admiral Halsey and Spruance and people like that. We had coding boards which was all officers, and as a side item, right behind us was a fleet intelligence outfit called FRUPAC which was the group that detected the Battle of Midway what the Japanese were doing. But the reason they were called FRUPAC they didn't want anybody to know who they were or what they were doing. But that was Fleet Radio Unit Pacific, that was what the FRUPAC stood for.

Mr. Misenhimer;

What's some other things that happened there?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, that's what I was telling you this morning, I killed a submarine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, tell me about that.

Mr. Keeler:

Well, if you'll hold on a minute, if I can read a short paragraph out of a book, I'll be back, are you ready to be bored?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sure, go ahead.

Mr. Keeler:

The name of the book is I-boat Captain and this is a Japanese name Zenji Orita, and the American author of the book is Joseph D. Harrington, this is an excerpt from the book.

"I-12 had been lost somewhere in the enemy's rear. This submarine left port on October 4 for a solitary patrol in the Eastern Pacific. A very fanciful report claims that two American ships sank one of our submarines there on November 13th, but I'm afraid that all that they got for the record was a whale. I-12 sank the American SS John A. Johnson Northeast of Oahu and continued to cruise until after the end of the year. She was commanded by Commander Kaneo Kudo a very gentle man, extremely thoughtful of others who appreciated life's modern things. His boat was last heard from on January 5, 1945, so she was either lost operationally or to a ship or plane that never got credit for the sinking." So that's the excerpt out of the book, what happened on January the 8th, we had this strong signal talking to our station in Panama just piddling around, piddling around using the call sign JPDF and this had gone on for about 10 minutes, so I decided we'd try to find out who this guy is and what he wants, and like I had said earlier about authentication, I finally sent him a word and told him to authenticate on it, and he went back to what's my signal strength, do you have anything for me. So, that's when I talked to my friend Bob Kelso and said Bob, send this out on the teletype to all the stations, see if we can get a DF on this guy. And he stayed on the air, he was up maybe about 15 minutes piddling around, and we had a Lt. Bartos, I sent word down the coding board to Lt. Bartos and she came up and I was telling her what was going on, so she got San Francisco up on the DF loop and we located the guy. In the meantime, he had sunk two more ships, a tanker and a merchantman. And we had him pinpointed, and so the next

morning two destroyers found him on the surface and sank him. So that's what happened to I-12. In the, where we worked, we only had two officers, we had Mo Porter who was what we called a mustang enlisted and then commissioned during the war, he was a full Lieutenant, Captain and a warrant officer, I can't remember his full name, he was either Greenberg, or Greenglass, or Green something-or-other were the only two officers that we had there Mo Porter, was the officer in charge, called me and Lt. Bartos into his office and he said because this FRUPAC outfit also monitored our communications sometimes, he had a list on his desk and said "did you send that?", "Yes, sir, and a whole lot more." And he said Captain as in Colonel Forrester said told us these two destroyers had actually sunk I-12, and he had a commendation ribbon there for Lt. Bartos. So, that was the end of the sub, and that's the end of that story.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, that's a good story.

Mr. Keeler:

At the end of the war, I had been moved by the warrant officer down to the teletype section, I don't know if you got the package that I left at Fredericksburg with the pictures in it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I didn't.

Mr. Keeler:

Ok, what came across my teletype from, I'll give you a couple of messages and then tell you what they say, this one is dated 15 August, 1945, it came from Washington from a group called TOPS, meaning the office of the President State, and it went to Admiral Nimitz on Guam, and I left a copy of this down in Fredericksburg.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok.

Mr. Keeler:

What it says is what they call General of the Army.

Mr. Misenhimer:

MacArthur?

Mr. Keeler:

MacArthur, yeah, so this first message that I'm just telling you about said that MacArthur would be the Supreme Commander, the second message that I'm going to tell you about originated in Washington, the Washington Navy Station was NSS going to NPN which is at Guam, and I'll just read you the first part of it. "Transmit following to Japanese Government by any means available. Address to the Japanese Emperor, Japanese Imperial Government, Japanese Imperial General Headquarters, from Supreme Commander for the allied forces", and there are instructions to fly down to Manila to figure out what you've got to do in order to surrender on 2 September. That message came off of my teletype. I still have that original message in my possession, and I wrote to on 12 August 2009 to General Hagee who used to be in charge down there, I understand there's somebody else now, but anyway, I said I would like to sell this particular message with its historical impact so I could send my grandson to PHD school. He wrote back and said he would love to have it donated, and then he took exception that I said it had facilitated the unconditional surrender of Japan. His idea was that that wasn't exactly right, it happened with the surrender on the second on the Battleship Missouri. So, what I'm planning to do now, is when I turn 95 in a couple of years is donate that document to the WWII in New Orleans. Other than that, that pretty well winds it up, except I got a personal signed letter from the Secretary of the Navy, I guess I misplaced it somewhere, all it said was we served in a fantastic Navy and they did this and this, and that and that, that kind of thing, just a letter of commendation, but there was

a Navy commendation medal with it so I guess you could check it out if you wanted to. The Secretary of the Navy at the time was James Forrestal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any actual personal contact with Nimitz?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, when he moved from Hawaii out to Guam, he gave a luau to the staff he was leaving behind, and a few enlisted people, there was maybe two dozen of us, and I was one of the guys invited. Why, I have no idea. But anyway, during the luau, somebody came up and said anybody know how to play horseshoes? Well, growing up in Oklahoma, everybody knows how to play horseshoes, I guess. So, I said yeah, I do, and the Lt. Commander said well you've got to let the Admiral win, and I said well you'll have to get somebody else. He went back and come on, the first game was no contest, it was about 21 to 13 or some score like that, second I won 21-19, so we're going for the third one, and they was back and forth, I'd lead a little bit, he'd lead a little bit, and then we'd get down, I think I was 19, he was like 18 at the time, and you know how the scoring on horseshoes?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, uh-huh.

Mr. Keeler:

Ok, well I had a leaner, that was good for 3, and then my second horseshoe was pretty close, and the dad gum Nimitz threw a ringer and knocked my leaner off and beat me. *(laughter)* So yeah, that was enjoyable, the luau wasn't bad either.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Now, when he went to Guam, did you go to Guam also?

Mr. Keeler:

No, I just went out to Guam to take a package of messages out there. We had gotten so far behind because of the high priority stuff, that I told Mr., I'm going to call him Greenberg, I don't remember the warrant officers name, I said we outta just send these out with the courier because we are never going to be able to get them out radio transmission fast enough and he said good idea. And he got me a priority 6, which is Colonel level for coach seats, but I was just in Guam in and out before I left, didn't see Nimitz at all there. There was what allegedly was a Kamikaze attack, it was around Christmas, and we heard a lot of shooting going on and we just thought it was, we were down south of Agana and heard a lot of shooting going, we just thought a bunch of drunk Marines, you know celebrating Christmas, and the Marines claimed they killed 200 Japanese, whether they did or not, I don't have any idea. Was off the coast of Okinawa on the battleship Mississippi on a Boondogle and not generally known, we had RCA civilians setting up radio teletype between Japan and Hawaii, so by the time we got there the RCA guys had already set up. A guy wrecked communications so we didn't get involved at all, just turned around and went back.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Now this was after the war, right?

Mr. Keeler:

No, this was Okinawa, April of '45, so we had RCA civilians fighting in the war when they were not supposed to be doing that kind of thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So, you were at Okinawa, were you?

Mr. Keeler:

Just off the coast, I was a passenger on the battleship Mississippi, and they were shelling, you said you were in Korea or Okinawa?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I was not overseas, Korea.

Mr. Keeler:

Ok, up on top of a hill or mountain or whatever it was, on Okinawa was a place called Shuri Castle which was a heavy defense point, so the Mississippi morning fired the forward battery all morning long, and then it was like a business, they shut down and had lunch, and in the afternoon they turned around and fired that thing all afternoon with the after battery. So, I was a couple of places where there was shooting going on, but I didn't think anyone was shooting at me personally.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now there at Okinawa, did you say hit any of the Kamikaze's?

Mr. Keeler:

No, although they were, I guess up North where the destroyers had their radar screens set up. No like I said, it was kind of like a business thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, off the top of my head that's all I can think about right now anyway, unless you have further questions.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, I've got some questions, for you. What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Keeler:

Being on the beach with the second Marine division.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On Tarawa.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, that was scary, I had just barely turned 18. But I'd heard a lot of growing up at Ft. Seal, I was used to hearing canons firing and stuff like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the medics?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, because after they established communications with the Battleship Maryland and the beach, I was helping medics, and I don't like to talk about that, with

(End of side one of tape)

(Beginning of side two of tape)

Mr. Keeler:

Well, like I said, I don't like to talk about it, but with the medics, it's really tough when you are trying to sop up blood and it's running between your fingers, and the medic says, let him alone, he's going to die, and the guys eyes are telling you, don't leave me, and you've got to leave and go help the medic do something else. So, I'm getting kind of teary eyed here, I'm supposed to be a soldier, but I guess I ain't so tough no more.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fine, don't worry about it. Were you at a particular outfit?

Mr. Keeler:

I was at, depending on which time you're talking about, was in, I was trying to think I'm sure I was, but I don't recall what it was called, we just said we were NPM or NQM depending on Hawaii or Midway. And we had an APO number.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home from WWII with any souvenirs?

Mr. Keeler:

Not that I recall, we had 2 or 3 Japanese prisoners that was on the ship from Midway back to Hawaii, I had a couple of coins, but I have no idea what happened to them.

Mr. Misenhimer;

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Keeler:

It was always pretty good, we were dead tired during an operation like Iwo Jima as an example, we were on 12 shifts, off and on, off and on, 12, 12, 12, kind of a interesting thing, hard to believe, but the chow line would be so long sometimes that the menu would change two or three times. You would see guys coming out of mess hall, what are you having? Well, we had steak, we had French fries, so on and so forth, and then the next group they had something a little bit less, finally the next group was having pot pie, chili con carne or something like that, we were in line, and by that time we had women, girl waves were on the base, prior to that Nimitz had said no waves in the Pacific, although the Army had females there. And so, we were in this long line and she was chattering with the guys, and we were in with this 12 and 12 and 12, and she wanted know did you do this, and did you play baseball, and dah, dah, dah, just conversation. He said man, he said I am so damned tired, I don't even do deep breathing exercises. *(laughter)*

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever in any typhoons over there?

Mr. Keeler:

No, but we had a typhoon hit over by the Philippines where Halsey, it was, I didn't remember now if it was Halsey or Spruance. Halsey took the fleet into that typhoon and we lost 5 or 6 ships. And we had a big investigation. I didn't know we had that many Admirals in the Navy, but there was a whole bunch of Admirals where we were at because we had a 26-hour delay in this warning get out of that area. Luckily, I was on the day off so I wasn't involved in that.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Did you ever hear of Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, not Tokyo Rose as such, but it could have been, but kind of going back historically, we had backup communication things was basically dug out and put a little dirt on top of it. So we would sometimes go and listen to Tokyo radio because they were playing American dance music primarily and then they would come on with their propaganda kind of stuff, but there was one case where they were talking about some Army B-24 pilot had been shot down in New Guinea I guess it was, so I wrote this information down and sent it to his wife in Florida, and that would have been late '43, early '44, somewhere along in there, and she kept up a regular communication with my mother and what until the end of the war, but I never did hear that he had made it through the war. So, I don't know if he did or didn't, but Tokyo Rose, after a big battle they would come on that they sunk 27 carriers and 18 battleships and all that kind of stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Keeler:

No. Well, I said no, we didn't have a ceremony. I went to Ulithi, I don't know where the hell Ulithi's at to this very day, but anyway, there were 1100 ships in Ulithi. That's

where I got on the Battleship Mississippi to go up on the Okinawa. If somebody told me today to go to Ulithi, I wouldn't know how to head out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date were you discharged?

Mr. Keeler:

February 5, 1946. That's what that letter I was telling you about from the Secretary of the Navy, that letter is dated 26 February.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, I didn't, but my wife said I did. I guess varying opinions. I had a job before I got out because there were a couple of guys in our unit in Hawaii that were telegraph operators for railroads, so they taught me the American Morse which was similar but different from the international Morse code. So when I got back to the states, I went up to the San Luis-San Francisco division headquarters in Tulsa, and the division chief was having a staff meeting and they just invited me right in. *(laughter)* So I interrupted the staff meeting and he said how can I help you, and I said I'm looking for a job, so I actually had a job as a telegraph operator about a month, I guess, before I got out of the service. So, I went from being in the Navy to a telegraph operator in the east yard in Oklahoma City.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your GI bill for anything?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, I did. Went to K.U. got it. Let me back up. Went to central radio, I was going to learn television is what my intent was. And my instructor, I don't know why he did it, but he took me aside, he said, don't waste your GI eligibility here, he said go over to K.U. so, at a place called, Sunflower, it was an A- old building that they built over in Kansas during the war was an ammunition factory. It was complex this tar shack building was called Sunflower, 12 miles from K.U. and 35 from Kansas City where she went to work every morning.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Keeler:

No, I can't remember it. I think Midway was maybe 1504, that's all I can remember of it.
No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No reunions, ok. What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Keeler:

I was a radioman first class, E-6. The war was over by that time, I didn't make E-6 until October of '45.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, I have to separate, because I've got a whole chest full, I joined the Air Force in '49. What did I get from the Navy? Asia/Pacific with three stars, only two of them earned, I mean one of them earned and like I said, I was at Guam and Okinawa, they were shooting, but not at me. So, I got three battle stars on that. Did I say Good Conduct?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, Good Conduct, ok.

Mr. Keeler:

Navy Good Conduct, um, what's the blue one called, American Theater, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Ok, yeah.

Mr. Keeler:

The Commendations that I was telling you about that came with that letter. And I don't know what that was for, *(laughter)* surviving maybe.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Probably got the Victory Medal.

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You said you got the Purple Heart?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, uh-huh. But I never did wear it because I got what was called walking wounded in my mind. The only reason I was in the hospital was because I had a twisted ankle that was swollen up looked like an elephant.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Now, on April the 12th of 1945, President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, I was getting ready to go to work, our latrine, we didn't have individual lavatories, we just had a long metal trough with a faucet, and I was shaving and someone came in and said Roosevelt died and nobody believed it of course. Roosevelt was indestructible in our mind.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So what reaction did people have to that then?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, I guess everybody was in shock, it's like I said, we thought Roosevelt would live forever.

Mr. Misenhimer:

May the 8th of '45, Germany surrendered, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah. That was sort of a foregone conclusion, because we being in communications, we kind of got an inside look at what was going on pretty much.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On August 6th of '45, they dropped the first atomic bomb, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, yeah, eventually, but like everybody else, we said what's an A-bomb? We had no idea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then August the 14th when Japan surrendered, have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, yeah, but like I was telling you before, we had direct communication between ourselves and Guam, probably denied to this very day by anybody you ask, but Japan had six representatives at the Nimitz headquarters on Guam. The instructions that I just read about for Nimitz send it to Japan any way he could. People were there at Guam. That's kind of where that was at. Nobody would admit that's true, but I'm telling you that that's what it said, so on that unofficial network that we had between Guam and ourselves, I went to work on Sunday afternoon, that would have been about the 12th, something like that, and the shift chief that I was relieving was a guy who claimed he was Polish, his name was Kerbstadt, he said the war was over and I looked around and everybody was giddy. I said what the hell is going on? He said I'm telling you the war is over and he gave me a little twix looking thing, and it said the Japs quit, the war is over. And that was on 12 August, but it didn't become official until the 14th. So, we actually knew a couple of days ahead of time if you could believe our unofficial communication channel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you all have any kind of celebration on the 14th then?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, well, they had free beer, and they passed out, at the actual surrender, they passed out, they had photographs of the Japanese coming up on the Missouri and so forth, and the MacArthur signing, and Nimitz signing, but by the time I got there, all the good photos were pretty much gone, but they had, I was just looking in my junk when I got all this stuff out for you, I've got a picture, they were having a dance down at, what I guess we'd call it a little PX kind of thing, so they were dancing and drinking beer and having a good time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in WWII?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, not other than just being there, I guess. I think it was a lot of things that went on that were just basic routine, get up, go to work, go back to the barracks, and we'd get liberty every now and again and go down to Honolulu. Honolulu was ok, because there was no rationing in Honolulu during the war, so you could have a steak dinner for like a dollar and a quarter, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you say you went back in the Air Force?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, in '49. I didn't know the Navy had all of that dad gum water out there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Why did you join the Air Force? Did you go back full time, or just the reserves?

Mr. Keeler:

Oh, no, I was full time regular Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer;

How long were you in?

Mr. Keeler:

From '49 until '75, so I completed in the two branches, plus my PS time in the Marines there. I had a little over 31 total, left the Air Force as E-9 Sgt. Major.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Anything from your career in the Air Force you need to tell me about?

Mr. Keeler:

Well, since it doesn't have anything to do with Nimitz, I didn't know if you'd be interested in that sort of thing. Yeah, I joined the missile department here when they

were just beginning, there were twelve of us, six civilians, six Master Sgt's and one GS 13 and Mr. Schmidt went to the commanding General and said I need more officers to properly set up this organization. General Wallace said, use the people you've got, so what happened we had six Master Sergeants like myself, we had no education for that kind of a job and very little experience. I met, off the top of my head, the guy who shot down Yamamoto, Tom Lanphier, was that his name?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes.

Mr. Keeler:

Ok, by that time, Tom I think his name was, Tom Lanphier was the Vice President at Convair Astronautics in San Diego, and they sent me out there to sign a piece of paper that certified that they had met their contractual requirements and they wanted a progress payment of \$100,000 dollars. And I said I ain't gonna sign it and so they had a like the Army wears stripes, the civilian contractor had different color badges, so I went up the channel of badges and ended up in Tom Lanphier's office. He said what's the problem Sergeant? And I said well, you want me to sign this piece of paper saying you guys had all your contract requirements, and I said they can not teach how to repair this missile because the trainers their supposed to train on are still being designed back in Hangar 8. And I said, so I'm not going to sign it. And he was personable, he said that's ok Sergeant, I'll just call my buddy down at ATC headquarters and he'll send somebody out, sure enough, here came Major nice guy, and he signed it, Tom got his 100,000. Met a most interesting person there, he was from Switzerland, his passion was mountain climbing, and we'd go to lunch, with maybe six or eight around the table and nobody listen, and what the heck was his name, I can't think of it right now, but anyway, he pioneered the route of Mt. Everest that the British guy and his climber successfully used that route and climbed Mt. Everest the first time. His sponsor was an oil billionaire named Slick from

California, and all he was interested in was capturing the abominable snow man, that's what he wanted. So he paid for the trip where we'd go over there.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington D.C.?

Mr. Keeler:

I know there is one, I'm planning on going up there when I'm 95 with my son-in-law. After I left the Air Force, I went to Westinghouse in Baltimore, spent another dozen years doing the same thing. A lot shorter hours, a lot better pay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in WWII, did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Keeler:

Yeah, I tell ya kind of a two-part story, I told you earlier my dad went to establish Camp Atterbury. Bob Hope was there, and my mother was working at the service club, and she called me and said "The Bob Hope show wants a bunch of sandwiches, do you want take some of them down?" So, I said sure, so I went down and asked Bob Hope for an autograph, Bob Hope said get lost kid. But I did get an autograph from a guy with the big, I don't know, Jerry Colonna, do you know who he is?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, big moustache, yeah.

Mr. Keeler:

Francis Langford, and I don't remember the band leader, but I got those three took them back to high school, and nobody was impressed. *(laughter)*

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is that right?

Mr. Keeler:

So, now I'm in boot camp in San Diego and I have to get an appendectomy and Bob Hope is there, and he's coming by, and I'm in bed, and he said what happened to you kid? And I said South Pacific. *(laughter)* I hadn't been out of the states yet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Keeler:

No. Well, I'm gonna say no, but the answer is yes, at the end of the war, the messages coming through there, Red Cross messages. This guy needs to go home now because his dad fell off of the silo, and it's planting season and on and on and on, and the Red Cross answer would be "Disapproved", so we would just take the original message and retype it approved and send him home, another message would come through, our son's been overseas 90 days and his mother is really nervous and worried about him. The Red Cross would say approved, and we'd just switch it to disapproved. So that was our association with the Red Cross.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I see, ok. Is there anything else you recall from your time in WWII?

Mr. Keeler:

No, not off the top of my head, if you think of something you want to talk about, I'm home most of the time. Westinghouse war story.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, go ahead.

Mr. Keeler:

An engineer at Westinghouse named Bernie, and because of his war deferment job, he wasn't drafted, so he said "I went home 4th of July", he just lived across the border over in Pennsylvania, he said "when I got back, here was my draft notice", and they sent him to Sheppard here in Wichita Falls in August to go to basic training, and he said there I was, it's 106, he said I'm in full Class A uniform with a neck tie, and my belt and a rifle guarding the water tower. *(laughter)* When I came home for Christmas, I went out to the base and took of the water tower still there. I went back after Christmas vacation and I gave Bernie this picture, and he said "You son of a bitch" *(laughter)*

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's all the questions I have, unless you've thought of anything else.

Mr. Keeler:

No, haven't thought of a thing, but like I said, I'm here on stand-by for you if something you want to talk about further comes up, why, I'm here, it's been very enjoyable.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Thank you, I've enjoyed talking to you too. Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your service to our country in WWII, and after that.

Mr. Keeler:

Ok, thank you much.

Mr. Misenhimer;

Ok, bye.

(End of interview.)

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Stuff I remembered Later

In the early winter of 1944, the Army decided to launch an Air Raid on Wake Island from Midway Island; a round-trip distance of about 2,000 miles. The Flight designated for this mission was the Dogpatch group consisting of Mammy & Pappy Yokum, 'Lil Abner, Daisy Mae, 'Injun Joe, and Mc Goon; with the character painted on the nose of their B-24 Liberator Bomber.

I was the Ground-to-Air radio operator at Midway when the "strike-report" came in: GOT THE RADIO TOWER - AND THE ZEROS ARE THICK AS FLIES. We lost two B-24s over WAKE thought to be Pappy Yokum and Injun Joe; another on the way back, the Mammy. Daisy Mae made it back OK, and Lil Abner though battle damaged was still flyable. McGoon was another story. McGoon made a belly-landing on the N-S runway and stopped about 20-feet short of the lagoon. The story going 'round was that the pilot and co-pilot were injured so the plane was landed by a gunner - who had washed-out of pilot training.

The Navy not to be outdone decided to also bomb Wake Island. The plane to be used was the lumbering PB2Y²- Coronado. Initially designed to be a long-range patrol plane, it was also equipped to carry 8-500 pound bombs. and so the Navy went to war against Wake Island with 5 or 6 of these planes. They launched 2 separate raids and as far as I knew, all planes made it back safely. A sea-plane, they would leave the lagoon about 4:30 in the afternoon, and return about daybreak the next morning.

Not long after this, the radio room was crowded with 3 or 4 high ranking Navy Officers, and one tall, lean person wearing a total khaki uniform with no insignia or badge of any type. It turned out that it was Charles A. Lindbergh. He was there training to be a fighter pilot with Marine Air Group 23 (MAG-23); and when MAG-23 went off to war, he went with them and shot-down 4 or 5 Japanese planes - so the story goes.

Midway used the old PB5 - Catalina for patrol. Based on Eastern Island, they would leave about 6 A.M. and return by 4 P.M. that afternoon. Radio traffic was very light. A position /condition report about every hour and that was it. One afternoon at about 3:30 a plane reported BACK ON BASE ON SCHEDULE***AND THAT WAS THE LAST WE EVER HEARD FROM HIM!!! He had disappeared without a trace! Intensive sea and air searches went on for a month...nothing. We never found an oil slick, seat cushion, floating debris...nothing. To this day, this mystery remains.

When I was at Midway Island in 1944, it was a strategic submarine operating base. But for the most of us, it was little more than basic garrison duty. Secure in our radio shack 21-feet underground to avoid bombardment from Japanese battleships that never showed up; it did have its lighter moments - for me at least. At Midway, the highlight of the week was when the mail plane would come in from Hawaii on Tuesday at about 2:30. One afternoon, the Bo'sung Mate called me and asked if I would radio the Mail Plane, and see if they "had wheels on board" so he wouldn't have to go out into the lagoon to off-load crew and mail. And so the call went out intending to query whether they were flying one of the newer PB5-A with wheels installed on the pontoons so that the amphibian version could taxi up the ramp and onto the dock. The answer came back. YES WE HAVE WHEELS ON BOARD. And then things fell apart. The message went up the tunnel about 50-yards to the Operations Center. MAIL PLANE COMING IN - WHEELS ON BOARD. I think that the most surprised crew in the entire Pacific Theater was this crew when they were greeted by the Commodore (0-7) and his staff.

The war had ended, and I was upstairs in the radio room goofin' off. Before the war, Danny Donovan had been a street cop in New York City/ Now at 38, he was a Radioman 3/C in Hawaii. Hi Danny. Keeler, I keep getting this call NPM DE WAKE what do you make of it? Answer him back Danny - use DE (from). And this is a copy of that message:

NPM DE WAKE

I AM SHEIGIMATSU SAKIBARA COMMANDER OF WAKE ISLAND. I HAVE RECEIVED YOUR SURRENDER MESSAGE OF 20 AUGUST 1945. PLEASE GRANT DELAY UNTIL I MAY COMMUNICATE WITH MILLE.

2355 DD

WAKE surrendered on 04 September 1945

* Admiral Sakibara was tried as a War Criminal for executing the 98 civilian workers who were left after the capture of the island and was hanged.

** Danny Donovan returned to New York City as Sgt. of street cops. I returned to the United States on 15 December 1945. I reported in after leave to the Recruiting Station in Oklahoma City. OK City sent me to New Orleans (Algiers)/ After about a week, Algiers sent me to Norman, Oklahoma - 20-miles from OKCity - for Discharge. February 5, 1946

PSC Norman, Oklahoma

Radioman First Class: United States Navy

Its hard to say just what emotions I felt, sort of gladness all over with a little sadness mixed in. The ceremony was quite simple and short. We were shown a picture of the Navy and talk by Secretary Forrestal, given our Discharge, gave our final salute, and walked proudly out the door labeled "CIVILIAN EXIT"

*** I was honored to wear the uniform of the United States and to be one of the custodians of the nations defense. I met a lot of heroes during those years who did not get to come home. They were the warriors with the courage and the resolve who seemed to know instinctively that Bravery Cannot Be Denied...

