The National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with
Mr. Leo Charles Kimble (S1/C)
United States Navy
USS Monterey CVL-26
Date of Interview: 11 October 2007

Interview with Mr. Leo Charles Kimble

Mr. Zambrano:

This is Mike Zambrano. Today is October 11th, 2007. I'm interviewing Mr. Leo Charles Kimble via email from his home in LaRue, Ohio. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, and the Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Hello Mr. Kimble. Let's start from the beginning. Where and when were you born?

Mr. Kimble:

I was born in Hancock County, Ohio on October 31, 1925, to Nora Estelle
Burnet Kimble and Ora Wayne Kimble. My mother said it snowed that year. I
was born at home, not in a hospital.

Mr. Zambrano:

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Kimble:

I had one brother, Desmond Carlyle Kimble, but with a mouthful like that, we just called him Bud. We were raised during the depression. My father worked for a dollar a day and sometimes he didn't even make a dollar. He worked on a hammer mill grinding up grain for cattle feed. The hammer mill was a mobile unit and they would drive it from farm to farm. My brother and I attended a one-room schoolhouse and I walked to school two miles each day. I started school when I was only five years old. We finally moved in with my grandfather on a 65-acre farm located in Hancock County because we couldn't make it on our own. My uncle moved in with them also. Then, one day my Grandfather fell out of the haymow and injured himself. He hit his head on a post and got a blood clot and had to sell the farm and move to Ada, Ohio. My father then bought a little four-room house for \$400 located on the corner of the Lincoln Highway and a county road. We always referred to it as the corner house. Dad paid \$5.00

a month for this house. If he missed a payment, they didn't care. My father went to work then for the WPA. He got \$15 dollars a week. We had a rough time but we had a lot of fun also. My parents were good parents and were very good to us. When I was in the service, he was managing a grocery store in Ada, Ohio and that is also where they were living at the time.

Mr. Zambrano:

Where and when did you enlist?

Mr. Kimble:

I enlisted in the navy with my best buddy Joe Stanley Davis in December 1943, and went to Great Lakes Boot Camp in January of 1944. Joe and I stayed together until May 1944 when we were separated at Pearl Harbor when Joe was assigned to the USS Anderson. We were heartbroken to be separated. I left Aiea, Honolulu and went out to Ford Island for about two weeks and then was called out on a draft to the USS Monterey where I spent the rest of the war.

Mr. Zambrano:

How old were you when you enlisted?

Mr. Kimble:

I was 18 years old.

Mr. Zambrano:

Did you enlist in Hancock County?

Mr. Kimble:

Yes.

Mr. Zambrano:

Why did you choose to go into the navy as opposed to the army or marines?

Mr. Kimble:

I wanted to enlist in the navy to avoid the draft so that I could choose the branch

of service to serve in myself.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you recall where you were and what you were doing when the Japanese

attacked Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Kimble:

On December 7, 1941, I was a junior in high school and was living at home with my parents. We were all astonished at the news of the Pearl Harbor bombings. I remember my mother asking my father where Pearl Harbor was located and he said, 'Someplace in the Pacific, I guess'.

Mr. Zambrano: What were you trained in and what kind of equipment did you use?

Mr. Kimble: We just had basic naval training and learned marching, swimming, saluting, etc

Mr. Zambrano: How long were you at Great Lakes?

Mr. Kimble: 12 weeks.

Mr. Zambrano: Where did you go after Great Lakes?

Mr. Kimble: After my boot training in Chicago, I went home for a two-week leave and was

then transported by train to Alameda, California.

Mr. Zambrano: What was that train ride like? How long did it take?

Mr. Kimble: It was just a train full of sailors and it took five days.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you receive any additional training other than boot camp?

Mr. Kimble: No.

Mr. Zambrano: So where did you go after Alameda?

Mr. Kimble: I was then transported to Pearl Harbor by ship on the USS Warhawk and boy did

I get sick for a couple of days. I wished I could die right then, but eventually I

got well.

Mr. Zambrano: How long were you on the Warhawk?

Mr. Kimble: About five days.

Mr. Zambrano: What were your impressions of Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Kimble: I saw some of the ships that were sunk in the initial attack on the island. I was

amazed at the beauty of the islands. It was a lot different than my childhood

country home where I was raised.

Mr. Zambrano: What ship were you assigned to and what were your initial duties?

Mr. Kimble: My first duty assignment was when I got assigned to the USS Monterey, CVL-

26. I was assigned to the Airedales and worked with the planes coming and

going. We positioned the planes after they landed.

Mr. Zambrano: Can you be a little more specific? Did you use any particular tools or

procedures?

Mr. Kimble: We just pushed them in a line; no particular tools or procedures were involved.

Mr. Zambrano: Was there a formal title for the job you performed?

Mr. Kimble: They just called us the Airedales.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you service all the planes or just a particular group such as torpedo bombers

or fighters?

Mr. Kimble: We serviced all of the planes.

Mr. Zambrano: What kind of planes were on the Monterey?

Mr. Kimble: F4Fs and TBMs

Mr. Zambrano: Do you recall any of the men that you worked with and what were they like?

Mr. Kimble: No, too many years have gone by. Most of my fellow workers were okay guys.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you remember the name of your boss?

Mr. Kimble: No.

Mr. Zambrano: Can you tell me anything about the pilots? Do any stand out to you?

Mr. Kimble: They were all officers and I never met any of them personally.

Mr. Zambrano: What would you do with planes that were really shot up?

Mr. Kimble: We just shoved them overboard into the ocean.

Mr. Zambrano: During a battle, how hectic would the flight deck get?

Mr. Kimble: It depended on the battle, but things were always pretty hectic.

Mr. Zambrano: I'm sure you've heard this next question before, but did you ever get a chance to

meet Gerald Ford while you served on the Monterey?

Mr. Kimble: No, but after he became President I wrote him a letter and told him I served on

the Monterey and I received correspondence back from him. It was a very nice

letter and I still have it.

Mr. Zambrano: The Monterey was considered a light carrier. Can you tell me how that

compared to some of the Essex Class carriers like Enterprise and Hornet?

Mr. Kimble: It was smaller than those ships.

Mr. Zambrano: How many planes did a light carrier normally carry?

Mr. Kimble: I have no idea.

Mr. Zambrano: What were living conditions like on an aircraft carrier?

Mr. Kimble: My living conditions consisted of a bunk about six feet long and I had a locker

to keep my personal effects in. The bunk was on the poop deck and there were

about two hundred sailors there also.

Mr. Zambrano: What exactly is a poop deck?

Mr. Kimble: It is a part of the ship with a lot of bunks on it where the sailors slept. I am not

sure why they called it the poop deck.

Mr. Zambrano: Were those your quarters throughout the entire war?

Mr. Kimble: No, I moved four times to various places on the ship.

Mr. Zambrano: What did you do for recreation?

Mr. Kimble: Read books, went to movies, and wrote letters home.

Mr. Zambrano: Considering the working conditions, what kind of uniform did you wear while

working on the flight deck?

Mr. Kimble: The clothing we wore on deck was dungarees, shirt and pants. When we went

ashore we wore undress whites.

Mr. Zambrano: What about beards? Sometimes I see pictures of sailors with beards. Was that

allowed aboard the Monterey?

Mr. Kimble: Beards were allowed but I didn't have one. I did grow a mustache though, which

I shaved off when I got home. I didn't want my girl to see me with it.

Mr. Zambrano: Here's one I ask everyone: what's the food like in the navy?

Mr. Kimble:

Mealtime consisted of breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It was served on two chow lines, port and starboard. They piped down chow three times a day, 1st section, 2nd section, 3rd section, 4th section and then stragglers. The food was pretty good too.

Mr. Zambrano:

Were you considered part of a section?

Mr. Kimble:

Yes.

Mr. Zambrano:

Which one?

Mr. Kimble:

It was V-1. Airedale was a slang expression for the V-1 Division.

Mr. Zambrano:

Who were you closest to during that time?

Mr. Kimble:

While on the Monterey, I was closest to my friends Kenneth D. Sanky, Charlie Hudson, Curly Whiddon, & Honest John Topian. But my very closest friends were Joe Davis, who joined the Navy with me, Charles Baker, who joined the Seabees, Bill Boutwell, who joined the Marines, and of course, my brother Bud, who joined the Navy as soon as he got out of school. Joe and I got separated and assigned to different ships. I ran into Charles Baker in Pearl Harbor and got to spend some time with him and when the war was over, Joe's ship and the ship I was assigned to when I was getting ready to be discharged, were side by side at Charleston, S. C. I also ran into my brother Bud when I was at Philadelphia being reassigned to the USS Nields.

Mr. Zambrano:

In regards to Mr. Sanky, Mr. Hudson, Mr. Whiddon, and Mr. Topian, did you stay together throughout the war?

Mr. Kimble:

Yes.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you have any special recollections of other friends on board?

Mr. Kimble:

Not really. I do remember a man that was the same age as my father. I thought

he was very old, but he was only 37. He was a very nice fellow and sometimes

offered me advice. He caught me looking at my girlfriend's picture one night after lights out and he teased me about it. I felt kind of foolish then.

Mr. Zambrano: What were your immediate superiors and subordinates like?

Mr. Kimble: My immediate superiors, commanders, and subordinates were okay. I avoided

them as much as possible.

Mr. Zambrano: Why did you avoid them?

Mr. Kimble: Because they were officers and we were just peons to them.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you remember Captain S.H. Ingersoll?

Mr. Kimble: Yes.

Mr. Zambrano: What was he like?

Mr. Kimble: He was a pretty nice gentleman for a Captain.

Mr. Zambrano: How frequently did you write?

Mr. Kimble: I wrote letters about once a week or more, mainly to my mother and my girl

friend and received letters from same.

Mr. Zambrano: How frequently did you receive mail?

Mr. Kimble: We received our mail irregularly. Sometimes we got a lot and sometimes our

mail was delayed for several days or weeks.

Mr. Zambrano: I understand that you have some examples of letters that you wrote to your

future wife. Would you like to read one?

Mr. Kimble: Yes. This is an excerpt from one letter: 'Tonight, me and Joe thought we would

go to the movies back on our fantail, so we crawled up on some life rafts and

Joe thought he'd get down and stretch his legs for awhile. On the way down (we

were sitting up about 6 feet from the deck) Joe got his foot caught in a rope,

slipped and just rolled. He was upside down, swinging back and forth like a

pendulum on a clock. He knocked over 8 big heavy CO2 bottles and finally just

laid there flat on his back while they were just clanging all around him. I laughed until the tears rolled. Joe looked up and pointed his finger up in the air and spun it around and said, "Goin' home now!" I just went into convulsions. Also, when Joe and me went to New York on a pass, so that Joe could see his girl, we were sitting on bar stools in a restaurant and Joe was about half loaded. Fluff and Joe were on one side of the bar and I was sitting across from them on the other side. All of a sudden I heard everyone start laughing and I saw Joe getting up off of the floor (he fell off of his bar stool). He picked up his hat and dusted it off. Fluff glared at him and said something to him, but Joe just grinned and stuck one finger in the air and looked sheepishly at me and said, "Goin' home now". I just hammered on the counter and laughed and laughed until I could hardly breathe'. To this day, it is a phrase we use when something silly happens to anyone.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you have any other letters that you'd like to share?

Mr. Kimble:

This is from a letter written on February 10th, 1946. We were on the USS Neilds waiting for discharge. 'Here it is, Sunday night and Joe and me are the only two aboard ship, I believe. Almost everyone is out on a 48 or 72-hour leave. But we just didn't care about going. I certainly do hate this town. (Charleston, S.C.) It is just about the size of Lima or Findlay (Ohio) and there are about 2000 sailors uptown every night, drunk and breaking windows or knocking women down. Joe and me were involved in a little brawl last night. I will send you a copy of what happened. We got tear-gassed and I cried for at least an hour, and we were only innocent bystanders. Oh, well, that is the Navy for you!'

Mr. Zambrano:

It sounds you kept in touch often. Your letters home must have been a comfort to your family and friends?

Mr. Kimble:

My family and friends were of course concerned for my safety and my welfare.

Mr. Zambrano:

What did you miss most about this time?

Mr. Kimble:

I missed home and my loved ones and sometimes got very depressed because I wanted the war to be over so that I could go home again.

Mr. Zambrano:

What was the weather like in the Pacific?

Mr. Kimble:

Most of the weather was good, but it was very hot. The worst weather we had was the typhoon that damaged our ship and we had to return to the states for repairs. We steamed into Bremerton, Washington to dry dock in January, 1945. We were allowed to go home for 21 wonderful days, 11 days home and five days travel time by train.

Mr. Zambrano:

I've heard that the typhoon lasted about two days. What kind of damage did the Monterey sustain?

Mr. Kimble:

We lost all of our planes and had about twelve or fourteen sailors killed in an explosion below deck. The damage was pretty severe. They were thinking of abandoning the ship but changed their minds. We had to go back to the States for major repairs to the ship.

Mr. Zambrano:

Did you ever encounter any Japanese prisoners of war?

Mr. Kimble:

No, I never had any contact with POWs.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you recall what battles were you in? What was your role?

Mr. Kimble:

Midway and the Philippines.

Mr. Zambrano:

Where was your job during General Quarters?

Mr. Kimble:

I was 2nd loader on 40mm anti-aircraft guns.

Mr. Zambrano:

So what does a 2nd loader do?

Mr. Kimble:

My job was just to hand up shells to the 1st loader. They came in clips of four, one was a tracer and the other three were regular shells.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you ever witness any kamikazes?

Mr. Kimble: Yes, I watched one go into the flight deck of the Bunker Hill. Very scary.

Mr. Zambrano: The Battle of the Philippine Sea is a pretty significant action. Do you recall the

initial Japanese attacks that day?

Mr. Kimble: Yes, all of them.

Mr. Zambrano: That was the battle that Admiral Mitscher decided to turn on the ships

floodlights to help pilots get back and land. How busy were you that night?

Mr. Kimble: Very busy.

Mr. Zambrano: I believe the order was that pilots should land on any ship. Did you get many

planes from other ships?

Mr. Kimble: We got a few, but not too many.

Mr. Zambrano: What was the general impression of Admiral Mitscher on the Monterey?

Mr. Kimble: Most of us did not know him, so we had no particular impression of him.

Mr. Zambrano: Before Philippine Sea, did you participate in operations against Kwajalein and

Eniwetok?

Mr. Kimble: Not that I remember.

Mr. Zambrano: What about Makin Island in the Gilberts?

Mr. Kimble: Not that I remember.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you recall anything about the strikes on Wake Island?

Mr. Kimble: No.

Mr. Zambrano: I understand that the Monterey participated in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. What do

you recall about that action?

Mr. Kimble: Nothing. It has just been too long ago.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you recall what task force you were in?

Mr. Kimble: We were in Task Force 58.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you recall anything about strikes on the Ryukyus?

Mr. Kimble:

No.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you remember any other actions that you were in?

Mr. Kimble:

No, too many years have gone by. I am turning 82 on October 31st, 2007.

Mr. Zambrano:

What was the most difficult period for you during the war?

Mr. Kimble:

The typhoon. It was scarier than the war.

Mr. Zambrano:

I've heard that there were fires below deck. How did that happen and where

were you?

Mr. Kimble:

This, I remember very well. There was an explosion below deck, and a lot of

fires broke out. They needed fire extinguishers to fight the fires. I climbed down

a ladder to where I knew there was one and the ship was rocking back and forth

tremendously. There was water with a lot of debris and pieces of metal floating

around in it. I waited until the ship rocked the right way and swam through all of

that mess and got one of the fire extinguishers and took it where they needed it

most. This was a day I'll never forget.

Mr. Zambrano:

Is it true that Admiral Halsey gave permission to abandon ship, but that Captain

Ingersoll refused to give up the ship?

Mr. Kimble:

Yes, but I had my mind made up that if they gave the order to abandon ship, I

was going to take my chances and stay with the ship. I thought it was safer than

the stormy ocean.

Mr. Zambrano:

Other than the typhoon, did you have any intensely emotional experiences

during the war?

Mr. Kimble:

My grandmother died while I was away and I couldn't attend the funeral.

Mr. Zambrano:

Were you ever hospitalized during the war?

Mr. Kimble:

No. I was never hospitalized. I did get treated for the flu a couple of times.

Mr. Zambrano:

How did you hear the war was over?

Mr. Kimble:

They announced the end of the war on the loud speakers of our ship.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you recall where you were or what you were doing?

Mr. Kimble:

On ship, but I don't recall where I was at the time or what I was doing.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you recall where you were and what you were doing when you heard that the

atomic bomb had been dropped?

Mr. Kimble:

I was on my ship just doing my daily duties.

Mr. Zambrano:

Did you feel any sense of shock or surprise that the war came to a quick close

after that?

Mr. Kimble:

No, just a great feeling of relief. It took a while to realize that it was really over

and that we would be able to go home soon.

Mr. Zambrano:

Any special memories from that time?

Mr. Kimble:

Well, I have this letter mailed from Tokyo, Japan, September 6th, 1945. 'If I sound wound up on this, please overlook it, but I can now tell you anything I want to. Ain't that swell? I have been getting letters from you now regular as clockwork. You sure are a good kid, honey. Well, here we are now, leaving Tokyo Bay. We were in here about 8 hours today and picked up our Marine Occupational Force who left the ship about 10 days ago. Japan isn't so bad. It was just like steaming into Seattle. Mt. Fugiyama, we sailed right under it practically. We are headed for Okinawa now and from there we go to Pearl Harbor and from there - well, we are pretty sure it will be the east coast, probably New York, but we don't know when, maybe weeks, maybe years.

We left Seattle (1944) and sailed down the coast to Alameda, California, and

from there to Pearl Harbor and from there to Wake Island to Ulithi. Our first

bad raid was at Kyushu on May 13th. I thought for a while I wouldn't be kicking

to wish you a happy birthday. All of them damned Jap planes were Kamikaze. But there were only 5 that broke through our combat air patrol. The A.A. made short work of them, all but one, who scored a direct hit on a big carrier a few thousand yards from us, the flagship to be exact. Our planes got about 15 of them meatballs in the air. Our pilots and planes are the best. We have been starving the past few weeks and will continue to do so till we get the hell out of here. I finally accomplished the one thing I wanted to do. I laid eyes on Tokyo. That's one memory I'll have anyway. I got a little bit of crap of the natives in the Philippines. We went ashore there and kicked around a village for a while. Them natives aren't anything but a bunch of Jews. They have more money than I'll ever see. I don't know whether you'll believe this or not, but today was the first time I have seen land for 68 days. What a cruise! I nearly went crazy. It's been nearly three months since I have seen a woman, but I can wait. Well, I'll knock this crap off now and say, So-long, Hoping to see you soon, I remain as ever, Your no good boy-friend. Leo'

Mr. Zambrano:

That's quite a letter. Do you recall the name of the flagship that was hit by the kamikaze?

Mr. Kimble:

Yes. The name of the flagship that was hit was the Bunker Hill.

Mr. Zambrano:

I've heard about a temporary group of Marines that went ashore in Japan before more permanent troops could arrive. How long were those Marines ashore?

Mr. Kimble:

They were in Tokyo for several days after the war was over and we picked them up.

Mr. Zambrano:

What kind of duties did they usually have onboard the Monterey?

Mr. Kimble:

They operated the 20mm anti-aircraft guns on our ship.

Mr. Zambrano:

Can you tell me what it was like for you to go come home?

Mr. Kimble:

When the war was over I was sent to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for the transfer to Charleston, South Carolina. where I was assigned to the USS Nields for decommissioning. I got home on May 3rd with my discharge and was married on May 26th to my girlfriend, Elva. We have now been married 61 years. We had four children, one of whom is deceased. Our beautiful Nancy died of cancer at age 49. She left four children and one grandson behind.

Mr. Zambrano:

Do you have any other stories that you'd like to share?

Mr. Kimble:

Here's one. My friend, Joe Davis was best man at our wedding. He married a girl from Toledo, Ohio named Marjorie Oldham. They had two sons. Joe is now deceased but we had many good times together before that. I was also his best man. My friend, Charles Baker married Patricia Ryan and they are both still living. They reside in Florida at present and have also been married 61 years. He got out of the service ahead of me and also got married as soon as he got home. Bill Boutwell married a girl named Wanda. I was his best man also and my wife Elva was bridesmaid for them. They are also both still living and we still see them occasionally. We are all pretty old now and have to deal with the problems of aging and that's not much fun either. My brother Bud married Barbara Hayes but died at age 45 from a heart attack at his daughters wedding. They were living in Florida at the time. They had four children, one boy and three girls. Their daughter Cindy died just this winter. Barb remarried after quite a number of years and now resides in Georgia. There was a funny situation about Bud's marriage to Barb. Joe Davis became engaged to Barb when he came home from Boot Camp. When he left, he asked my brother Bud to "take care of Barb" for him. Bud did and he ended up marrying her himself. She became my sisterin-law. Joe recovered and went through two other girls before he met and

married Marjorie Oldham from Toledo, Ohio. She was a very good wife to him and we were all pals. They had two boys, Terry and Tim. Marge resides in an assisted living residence in Arlington, Ohio at present.

Mr. Zambrano:

What did you do after you got out of the service?

Mr. Kimble:

I married my girlfriend, Elva Marie Wagner and we have been married 61 years now. We had four children, three girls and a boy, Joyce, Nancy, Linda, and David. I became an industrial engineer and even after I retired, I continued to do contract work in that field. I had a contract job working at Marysville. They had a contract with the US Government to build army trucks. Their contract was about to run out and I was working on the bid team to get the contract renewed. The contract was given to Texas though because of President Bush so a lot of the people from Marysville went to Texas to work on the contract there. I was one of them that was chosen to go. I spent two periods of six months there. there. The first time we lived in Katy and the second time we lived in Sealy. It was very interesting. My wife Elva worked a lot of her years as a secretary. She later worked for General Telephone, now Verizon, and retired from that company. Then we started our own business, Treasure House, which was a gift store in a trade center in Detroit, Michigan. We had that business for eight years until we sold it. When we first got married we lived for 12 years in Ada, Ohio, home of Ohio Northern University. Then we moved to Richmond, Indiana. I worked on some secret government projects there for awhile. Then we moved to Coldwater, Ohio where I worked for New Idea. Then we moved to Celilna, Ohio and were there for 11 years. I worked in Van Wert for Chrysler Motor Company at that time. I was always doing industrial engineering work. Chrysler got into some trouble so I left there and moved to Marion, Ohio and accepted a job with

Marion Power Shovel Company. We bought a nice home in the country and have lived here since August of 1974. We kept this house while we had our store in Detroit and maintained an apartment there also. We had a happy married life and things were great until I started having health problems.

Mr. Zambrano:

I'm sorry to hear that. It sounds like you've had a good life. One question comes to mind though: in regards to your education, did you utilize the G.I. Bill?

Mr. Kimble:

Yes, I used the G.I. Bill to attend college. I studied Business Administration at Northwestern School of Commerce. I worked as an accountant when I first left college but became interested in industrial engineering, which I made my life long career.

Mr. Zambrano:

When the Korean War broke out, were you recalled to the service?

Mr. Kimble:

No, I was not recalled for the Korean War.

Mr. Zambrano:

What was your rank when you were discharged?

Mr. Kimble:

My rank was Seaman 1st Class.

Mr. Zambrano:

Did you have any lasting effects from the war such as bad dreams?

Mr. Kimble:

I had no bad dreams of the war. I was very lucky to be a happy survivor.

Mr. Zambrano:

Well, I think that covers all of our questions, Mr. Kimble. On behalf of the National Museum of the Pacific War and myself, I'd like to thank you for the

time that you took for this interview you.

Mr. Kimble:

You're welcome.

Transcribed by:

Mike Zambrano, Jr.

Round Rock, Texas

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