

Interview with
KLAIR EDWARD MENDENHALL

November 7, 2018
November 14, 2018

UTAH DIXIE'S VETERANS STORIES
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

UTAH TECH UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
ST. GEORGE, UTAH

#2018-019AB

Utah Tech University provides access to its collections as an unaltered, authentic historical record to aid in the research and understanding of history, while acknowledging their impact on various peoples and groups. Some collection materials are reflective of past cultures and prejudices, including images or words that are inherently offensive, insensitive and harmful. The University does not support, condone or endorse these harmful ideas, behaviors or attitudes, and they do not reflect the official opinion of the University. Rather, the University embraces a culture that prioritizes diversity and inclusion, as demonstrated in the University's Mission, Core Themes and Values.

Final editing was completed in 2019.
For permission to use any part of this transcript contact:

Special Collections and Archives
Utah Tech University Library
Holland Centennial Commons 330
Utah Tech University
St. George, UT 84770
(435) 634-2087
specialcollections@utahtech.edu

This program has received funding from the Utah Humanities Council. The Utah Humanities Council promotes history and heritage, books and reading, and public discussion of issues important to our communities.

INDEX

Academy	17, 24
Air traffic controller	21, 22
Alaska	22, 23, 42
Aleutian Islands	23
Apricot tree	8
Arizona National Guard	6
ASW [anti-submarine warfare]	21
Attu, AK	22
Bartok, Lt. Commander Dr. Stephen	32
Brigham Young University [BYU]	7
Broadsided a yacht	15
California	14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 42, 45
Camp Barkley, TX	6
Catalina Island, CA	16
Chickens	7, 8, 35
CIC [combat information center]	21, 28, 29, 30, 31
Clyde Construction Company	13
Clyde, Edward [uncle]	13
Coast Guard Reserves	19, 43
Coast Guard, US	6, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 31, 37, 39, 42, 43, 45, 46
Connecticut	17
Cook	15, 16, 17, 27, 34
Correctional officer	24
Cotton	11
Creighton Elementary School	11
Entomology	7
Federal Aviation Administration [FAA]	21
Football	12
Fort Benning, GA	6
Fort Sill, OK	6
Fremont Air Traffic Control Center	21
Fukuoka, Japan	20, 34
Great Depression, The	7
Guam	33, 38
Gun fire support	21, 36
Hawaii	18, 38

High school	12, 13
History	2, 12, 26, 39, 40
Humanitarian work	32
Jailor	41
Johnson, Legia (Mendenhall) [sister]	9
Korean Conflict	14, 27
LeMay, General Curtis	6
Long Beach, CA	14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 39, 41, 42, 43, 45
Los Angeles Community College District Police	24, 43
Los Angeles County Marshals	24, 44
MacDill Field, Tampa, FL	6
Marijuana	33
Maritime Museum, Boston, MA	21, 25, 26
Masterson, Frank [cook on a ship]	27
Medical Civic Action Program [MedCap]	31
Mendenhall, Alice Ann [sister]	9
Mendenhall, Bertha (Mundell) [wife]	24
Mendenhall, Clara Alice (Bagley) [mother]	6
Mendenhall, Michael [son]	17
Mendenhall, Thomas Deal [brother]	22
Mendenhall, Tim [son]	22
Mendenhall, Wilfred Thomas [father]	6, 13
Mendenhall, Yvonne (Apperson) [first wife]	16, 23
<i>Minnetonka</i> [Coast Guard cutter]	17
<i>Morris</i> [Coast Guard cutter]	14, 16
Nagasaki, Japan	34
Naval Gun Fire Support Mission	28
Pearl Harbor, HI	20, 25, 26, 27
Pecans	8
<i>Perseus</i> [Coast Guard Cutter]	14
Philippines	20, 33, 34, 37, 38
Phoenix, AZ	11, 12, 14
Police officer	24, 25
Police science	25
Radar operator	15, 17
Radio operator	21
Redmond, OR	22
Rexburg, ID	7
Rose Parade, Pasadena, CA	42

Safford, AZ	7, 13
San Diego, CA	14, 22, 31, 42
San Francisco, CA	22, 23, 32, 38, 39, 42
San Miguel Island, CA	15
Santa Barbara, CA	15, 16, 17
Senior Chief	23
Sheriff Department	24, 25, 43, 44
Shot gun	32
Singapore	20, 27, 34
Springville, UT	13
Subic Bay, Philippines	20, 32, 34, 37, 38
 The Pasadena Police Department One Hundred Years	 40
Training detachment	22, 42
Typhoon	38
 United States Army Air Corps	 6, 7
United States Public Health Service	31
<i>U.S. Coast Guard Ship Taney</i>	20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39
<i>USS Tutila</i> [Luzon-class internal combustion engine repair ship]	37
 Vertical replenishment	 30
Vietnam	19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 42, 46
 Weather balloons	 18
Weather patrols	17
Woods, Dennis "Woody"	27
 Yokosuka, Japan	 20

KLAIR EDWARD MENDENHALL

Klair Mendenhall was interviewed by Randall J. Bunn on November 7, and 14, 2018 at the Southern Utah Veterans Home, Ivins, Washington , County, Utah. He related his military experiences with the United States Coast Guard.

RB: Before we talk about your [United States] Coast Guard experience, tell a little about where you grew up. Where were you born?

KM: [I was born in] Safford, Arizona.

RB: You mentioned that your father [Wilfred Thomas Mendenhall – 1901-1966] was an entomologist for the state of Arizona.

KM: Yes.

RB: Prior to World War II he was called up from the Arizona National Guard on active duty and he moved around a little bit. What kind of work did he do in the National Guard?

KM: He was an infantryman. He started out at Fort Benning [Georgia] as a captain. He eventually retired.

RB: What was his rank when he retired?

KM: [He was a] colonel.

RB: [Did] you, your mother [Clara Alice (Bagley) Mendenhall – 1899-1948] and siblings move and follow him around? You were in Fort Benning, Georgia, Fort Sill, Oklahoma and —

KM: Camp Barkley, Texas. Those were the main [places] that come to mind.

RB: Did he go overseas during World War II?

KM: He was in England for four years. He was in an officer's school in Fort Benning and was the third highest, as I recall, in the class and was transferred to the [United States Army] Air Corps. He went to MacDill Field in Tampa, Florida where he received his training. He spent the war with General Curtis LeMay's staff in England.

RB: He wasn't a pilot?

KM: No.

RB: He was with the Army Air Corps and spent his time in England?

KM: Yes.

RB: When he was in the war, where were you living?

KM: We went back to Safford [Arizona].

RB: Did your mother grow up in Safford?

KM: No. I think my mother was born in Rexburg [Idaho]. I am not sure. I know mother was born in Idaho. [Inaudible] They met while dad was at BYU [Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah County, Utah]. Dad [received his entomology degree from BYU. They moved to Safford, Arizona after they married and started their family there.

RB: He served overseas and when the war ended he went back to Safford.

KM: He went back to work for the state [of Arizona]. In 1946 or 1947 he was appointed [Arizona] state entomologist.

RB: That is a prestigious position.

KM: [He held that position] until he died in 1963 or 1964.

RB: In 1947 you were about twelve [years old]. What do you remember about your childhood? Was it a good growing up time?

KM: Yes.

RB: [It was] in the 1930s and 1940s. You were born in the middle of The [Great] Depression in Arizona. What do you recall about your early years?

KM: We didn't have a whole heck of a lot. We didn't realize it. We raised chickens. Our neighbors across the street had a cow, so we would swap eggs for milk.

RB: A lot of people did that.

KM: I remember that the only milk we had was raw milk. It went through the cream separator with cheese cloth on it to get all the alfalfa out of it.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: Mother saved the cream. Every two weeks, or so, she would have a two and one-half gallon jug as it was like an egg beater with paddles in it. We would make our

own butter and buttermilk. At our house in Safford we had six pecan trees, an apricot tree and another tree. It was the duty of me and my brothers to harvest the pecans every year. We would crack them, put the meat into quart jars [for] mother to seal and can them for the rest of the year. She used to make the best, THE BEST, pecan pies I ever had.

RB: [Laughter] I bet!

KM: Today, [my] wife comes pretty close to her.

RB: That is wonderful! Did she also can the apricots?

KM: We did some canning. I don't remember what all we did.

RB: What other chores did you have around the house [while] growing up? Did you have to gather the eggs from the chickens?

KM: Oh yes, we took care of the chickens. We had some Plymouth Rock chickens. I had a little chick. The first sign he was a rooster, I made him a pet.

RB: Did you name him?

KM: No, but it [was] so he would fly up to my shoulder. [Gesturing to his shoulder.]

RB: [Laughter] Yes, [he] was your buddy!

KM: Mother went out one day to the chicken coop looking for eggs. [When] she walked inside the rooster flew up and landed on her shoulder. I don't know if she panicked or not, but she took a broom to him and we had him for Sunday dinner.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: She said, "No bird is coming after me!"

RB: Did you ever have to prepare the chicken for a meal?

KM: No.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: I never had to do that.

RB: Did you have any dogs?

KM: We had a dog named "Skippy," a little Boston Bull Terrier. He got a chicken bone caught in his throat and it killed him.

RB: Oh, no!

KM: We didn't have any more dogs until later on in life.

RB: You had three siblings in your family. Where did you fit into the mix?

KM: I was number three. Legia [(Mendenhall) Johnson – 1926-2003] was the oldest, [Thomas] “Tom” [Deal Mendenhall – 1931-1967] was second, I was the third and [Alice Ann Mendenhall – 1939 -]

RB: Alice was the fourth?

KM: [Yes].

RB: Legia was your older sister and Thomas was your brother. Did you get along good with your brother and sisters?

KM: “Tom” and I fought like brothers do — all the time. He was so much taller and ended up being six-foot-four.

RB: How tall were you?

KM: About five-foot, it seemed like!

RB: [Laughter]

KM: He could stick his hand out, put it on my head and hold me away from him. I couldn't get him back! We still love one another and got along.

RB: He was how much older than you?

KM: He was four years older. There was four years between each of us [children].

RB: That is kind of a big difference. Like in school, they would have been a lot older than you.

KM: My sister [Legia] was eight years older than me. I was four years older than Alice.

RB: What kind of things did you do for fun [when] growing up? Did you play games, play with the neighborhood [youngsters] or do sports?

KM: We played with the neighborhood [youngsters]. We played out on the streets at night. Back then you could play out until it [was] dark. We played Kick-the-Can, Hide and Seek — golly, you name it, we played those kind of games. We, the boys, played a lot of war. There were [not] toys available. Any toys you had, you

had to make yourself. We would make pistols out of one end of an orange crate — the thick end. We would put in a notch, a barrel and then we tied a clothes pin to the pistol grip. Then we would cut a piece out of an inner tube from a tire and put this around the nose of the gun and the little notch that we made would pull it to the back. It was a rubber gun. That is what you [were] shot with. [We would squeeze the clothes pin] and that released the rubber band.

RB: [Laughter] And you could shoot the enemy!

KM: Behind our place there were ten or twelve pomegranate [trees]. The [fruit] were our hand grenades. There was none of this, “I got you.” “No, you didn’t, you missed.” “No, I got you.” If you were hit with a pomegranate, you knew you were hit! It left a stain [on your clothes] that the mothers hated.

RB: Now-a-days they use those paint ball guns. You used pomegranates guns!

KM: We just threw them, just like hand grenades.

RB: [Laughter] That is great!

KM: We made our own toys. We [used] Coke-a-Cola bottles — we took a part of an inner tube, cut a strip about this wide, [gesturing with his fingers] cut a hole in one side to slip over the neck opening of a Coke bottle — like a harness for a horse. Then take the back two pieces of the inner tube and nail them to a flat board. Put four nails on the corner of the board, put some strings around it and you had a wagon.

RB: Oh, yes! [Laughter]

KM: That is what we did.

RB: Were there a lot of [youngsters] in your neighborhood?

KM: There were quite a few. In the summertime we used to go down to the end of the street where one of the farmers had an irrigation pump. So once a week when he turned the irrigation pump on, the water came out in a big flow. It kind of ate away off the banks until [there was] a big hole and that was our swimming hole. We were usually pretty good until we got a little older. Toward the end of the war, people started driving cars around, we would get in a big tree with a rope. We would wait for a car to come down the road and [then] we would swing out over the road and scare the people.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: We would come back in, let go of the rope and fall into the swimming hole.

RB: [Laughter] Did someone teach you how to swim? Or did you just learn on your own?

KM: I learned on my own. We learned to pick cotton to raise money for Christmas presents. That was the main [crop], cotton.

RB: Did your parents grown the cotton?

KM: No, the local farmers [did]. They didn't have any men around to pick the cotton.

RB: Oh, [it was] during the war.

KM: So we did it.

RB: Picking cotton is kind of hard on your fingers, isn't it?

KM: You bet! We learned to hold this way. [Gesturing with his fingers.]

RB: You would pull it out, but don't get poked from the prickly parts, [the hull].

KM: That is right.

RB: Gosh! Then you had to stick it in a bag.

KM: Yes, in a cotton bag.

RB: How much did you earn picking cotton?

KM: I forget, but it was pretty cheap!

RB: Yes! [Laughter]

KM: Two or three cents a pound, I guess. You had to pick a lot of cotton to [make any money.]

RB: [Laughter] Tell about going to school. Did you go to one school up to the eighth grade?

KM: The elementary school was pretty much in one general area. We went to kindergarten, first, second, third [and] fourth grades, then we went to another building on the same plot [of] ground [for] the fifth grade. It was about the fifth or sixth grade when we moved to Phoenix [Arizona].

RB: The big city?

KM: Yes. I graduated from Creighton Elementary School in Phoenix, Arizona.

RB: Did you like school?

KM: Yes, it was alright.

RB: [Did] elementary school in Phoenix go to the eighth grade?

KM: Yes, it was before they had the middle schools. [It was] K through eight then four years in high school.

RB: You said [earlier] that you graduated from West Phoenix High School. What was your high school experience like?

KM: Of course, we were older than and [we] dated girls and did all the usual things.

RB: Did you do any sports in high school?

KM: Yes, played some football. [I wasn't] very good at it.

RB: Was your older brother an athlete?

KM: No, he wasn't.

RB: He didn't play basketball [at] six-foot-four?

KM: No, he didn't play basketball. Looking back, I really don't remember what he played. I played some baseball in the league, mostly in the summer time, but football was the main [sport], as I recall, in high school.

RB: What position did you like to play?

KM: Fullback. That was before [they had] cages over the front of your face. It seemed like, invariably I was getting smacked across the eyes and [receiving] black eyes from being tackled.

RB: [Laughter] What was your favorite subject in high school?

KM: I always liked history.

RB: Yes!

KM: I loved history! Geography played a part later on in my life.

RB: Where there places that you dreamed about visiting sometime in the future? Learning about these places?

KM: No, I didn't dream about them, but I found them interesting. During the war, mother would take us up to Springville [Utah County, Utah] to visit our grandmother [Wilfred Thomas Mendenhall's mother was Rachel Anna (Huntington) Mendenhall – 1874-1948]. I used to like to sit in the rear window of the old cars. There [was] a spot where a [youngster] could lay up on the back of the seat. I used to like to lay there and look out the rear window and see what was going on. I like to travel, so that made it pretty neat!

RB: From Safford to Springville was kind of a long drive. [Laughter]

KM: Yes, I forget how long. [It is 694 miles.] It took a little over a day. We would [leave] Safford and go to Prescott, from Prescott to [Highway] 89 to Salome, Cottonwood, Flagstaff, through Indian country over to Jacob's Lake [Arizona], to Kanab [Kane County, Utah], and [go Highway] 89 all the way up to Springville.

RB: You would have seen some interesting country — some beautiful sights in Arizona.

KM: Yes. We used to get stopped by the Indians when they were herding their sheep. The Navajo [Indians] had a lot of sheep up there. That is when you could, if you were very polite about it, take a picture of them.

RB: Is that right?

KM: Later on they didn't like pictures taken.

RB: I guess you graduated from high school in about 1953. Do you recall what class you were in?

KM: I was in the first class that completed four years at West High [School]. West High was a brand new school when we started as freshmen.

RB: After you graduated [from] high school, what did you do?

KM: During the summer months [while attending] high school, I would go up to Springville to Uncle "Ed's" [place]. That was my dad's sister's husband. Edward Clyde was his name. He was one of the managers for W. W. [Wilford W.] Clyde Construction Company.

RB: A big company!

KM: So I helped work on roads. I built ten miles of road from Glendale [Kane County, Utah] up to the cutoff going over to Cedar Breaks [National Monument, Iron County, Utah]. We built quite a bit of road out [at] the old Five Points in Ogden [Weber County, Utah]. One summer [was] spent in a place called LeVan [Juan County, Utah] out on the western desert. I hated that place!

RB: [Laughter] Pretty hot and desolate, I would imagine.

KM: It was fun [and] I made good money. My Uncle “Ed” was driving me down to Glendale to my first summer job and he told me, “The foreman here and all the powers to be know that you are my nephew and that doesn’t count for a hill of beans. Because if you don’t cut the mustard, they will fire you on the spot. They have my okay to do it. One thing you remember, whenever they ask you to do something, you always do, on your own, just a little bit more than they asked. You will never have trouble holding a job or getting a job the rest of your life.”

RB: Good advice! I take it that you have never forgotten that.

KM: I have never forgotten that. During my senior year, myself and three of my buddies joined the [United States] Coast Guard Reserve in Phoenix. That is how I got in the Coast Guard. When the first semester came around at Phoenix [Junior] College and my draft number was getting close to coming up. At the end of the semester I said, “I am going “active” [duty]. I have seen too much Army life [with his father]. I want three square meals and a warm bed every night.” So I joined the Coast Guard and went to Long Beach, California.

RB: Do you recall when that would have been? Mid-1950s?

KM: [In] 1953, because there was a —.

RB: Was the Korean [Conflict] already [going]?

KM: I think I spent about one year in the Coast Guard before the Korean [Conflict] ended.

RB: [Did you] go to Long Beach to do your [initial] training with the Coast Guard?

KM: I spent a short period of time training on a little oil burning ship called the [US Coast Guard Cutter, USCGC] *Perseus* out of San Diego [California]. [It was an Argo class patrol vessel built by Bath Iron Works, Bath, Maine.]

RB: *The Perseus*?

KM: *The Perseus*. [It was] 165 feet long.

RB: What kind of ship was it?

KM: It burned the old black oil for power — smoked liked everything. It was terrible! Then [I was] stationed on the Coast Guard Cutter, *Morris*, which is 125 feet long. We called them “a buck and a quarter.” [*The Morris* was an “active class” patrol

vessel built by American Brown Boneri Electric Corporation, Camden, New Jersey.]

RB: [Laughter]

KM: It had two great big GM [General Motors] diesel engines. We left Long Beach headed to San Miguel Island [California] where it had been reported that a missing B-24 from World War II had been found. We had eight forensic scientists from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base [near Dayton, Ohio] with us. We were taking them out there. They were going to check out the crash site. We left at midnight. I had the first watch. We stood four hours on and eight hours off. I got off and just got to bed, and there was a tremendous crash. We [had] broadsided a yacht, sank it and killed three people on the yacht. [The collision with the yacht occurred on October 2, 1954 and had loss of life.]

RB: That was awful!

KM: Immediately they turned us back to Long Beach and we couldn't take the Air Force [members] out for another four or five days until they did some investigations. It was a long story, but we hit them broadside.

RB: Was it at night?

KM: It was 4:00 in the morning.

RB: Was it hard to see?

KM: It came out in the trial that radar hadn't picked it up on our old SU radars. It was just a blip. We reported it to the officer of the day. He acknowledged it. The outboard lookout visually saw it and reported it. [It was] acknowledged. The quarter master on watch was also a radar operator. He kept telling them, "You have steady bearing and decreasing range. You have to do something." He acknowledged it, but didn't [do anything]. The yachtsman] looked like [it was] trying to turn from hitting us. He didn't. He came out and the officer in charge of the ship at that time gave the command to, "Right full rudder. All ahead stern." That turned us right into the [yacht]. We hit right between the mast. Of course, that stopped our forward movement. Immediately the ship backed out and the yacht sank.

RB: What happened to the —?

KM: He [was] reprimanded. I don't know what happened to him. I volunteered to go to an eighty-three-foot patrol boat in Santa Barbara, California and started out as a cook.

RB: What were you doing on the —?

KM: [I was] just a seaman.

RB: Whatever they needed you to do?

KM: The eighty-three-foot boat out of Santa Barbara needed a cook. I said, "My dad taught me when I was a little [youngster], Boy Scout, how to cook. I will try it." They said, "Okay." So I went to Santa Barbara and became a cook.

RB: That was kind of a nice duty, I guess.

KM: Well, [yes], it was, but you get a lot of emergency calls because you are a small craft. We handled [those].

RB: You said it was patrol. What were they patrolling for? Anything that might happen?

KM: At that time, the larger ships like the *Morris*, used to patrol Long Beach Harbor. We used to have patrols on Catalina [Island, off the coast of California] because everybody was still afraid there was going to be a war going on.

RB: I see, [just] protecting the [California] coast.

KM: Protecting the coast and keeping an eye on Catalina Island. [The calls were] mostly search and rescue that we were involved in.

RB: That makes sense.

KM: It was in Santa Barbara that I met my first wife.

RB: What was her name?

KM: Yvonne (Apperson) [Mendenhall].

RB: How did you meet her?

KM: I was the cook, so I did all the buying of the food. It was a small boat with only ten people on it. I met her at the grocery store where we bought the food.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: She was the bookkeeper and kept our books.

RB: When you bought food at the grocery store, you were part of the [United States] Coast Guard; did they give you credit and then bill the Coast Guard?

KM: Yes.

RB: You just picked up the supplies?

KM: We had order sheets that we had to fill out because they had to be according to Coast Guard specifications. They used to allow us \$1.75 per man per day. I was supposed to feed [them on that].

RB: So you had to calculate how much food to [buy]?

KM: Yes.

RB: You were an important [fellow], because you had to make sure you could feed everybody and better not waste the money.

KM: We [were] married there and my first son [Michael Mendenhall] was born in Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara. As I spent time in the Coast Guard I realized that there wasn't much future for a cook in the Coast Guard. I was an E-3 [Enlisted Grade 3]. So I put in for radar school [and] was accepted. Radar school was held in Groton, G-R-O-T-O-N, Connecticut. It is across from New London, Connecticut.

RB: Isn't that where the Coast Guard Academy is?

KM: Yes, in New London.

RB: [Were] you selected for that?

KM: For the school, yes, [but] not for the academy.

RB: No, but to be a radar operator. [Did] you travel back east?

KM: We drove back east.

RB: You, your wife and your young son?

KM: [Our] son [was a] year old. [I] went to school there and then they shipped me back to Long Beach, California where I was on the Coast Guard cutter, *Minnetonka*. It was 255 feet long. [USCGC *Minnetonka* (WHEC-67) was an Owasco class high endurance cutter.]

RB: That is a big one!

KM: We used to do weather patrols. We would do patrols of the bay. The Coast Guard had weather stations along with the [National] Weather [Service] all through the war. Our station was 30 North 140 West, half-way between Los Angeles

[California] and Honolulu [Hawaii]. We were not only a weather station [we also] sent up [weather] balloons every six hours and tracked them with radar. That is what we did most of the time. We carried four or five civilian weather men on each trip. We were gone for thirty days and sit in the middle of the Pacific [Ocean] and bob up and down.

RB: [Laughter] [When] you sent these balloons up, did they have —?

KM: The weather balloons you that you used to see — the big round things.

RB: Yes. [Did] they have equipment on them to measure —?

KM: Yes, a little box at the bottom.

RB: Did they actually send signals?

KM: Yes, back to the ship. The weather men interpreted the signals that came back. We just tracked them by radar to give them the wind direction — to determine the speed.

RB: What did you do with that information?

KM: That information was given to the weather [station] and they sent it back to the mainland.

RB: Then they could track the weather systems?

KM: Basically, they did what the satellites do today.

RB: Only manual! [Laughter]

KM: We also acted as a check point for the Trans-Pacific flights. All the big airlines used to fly [those routes]. They would check in with us if their flight plans were close enough to us.

RB: Instead of having an air traffic control tower, it would be a Coast Guard ship out in the waters as they were flying. You could track their flight path?

KM: We didn't normally do that, we could, [but] it would be or our own practice. Basically, it was for them to check their navigation to see how far they were off. We could take shots with a sextant.

RB: Sextant, yes. I was going to say periscope.

KM: [It] would be a more accurate position, at that time, than they would have up there because they were just [flying] by magnetic compass on most of the airplanes

back then —the old DC-3s and DC- 4s. We [were able] to talk to pilots — the new ones who came out — the aircraft that flew. [Such as DC–7s.

RB: Did you like that?

KM: That was a lot of fun!

RB: I bet!

KM: I hated to be away from the family.

RB: How long would you go out on [a] cruise?

KM: We would be out on station, we called it, for thirty days at a time.

RB: Thirty days? Could you communicate home?

KM: No, that was long before you could do that.

RB: [Laughter] It is about twelve [minutes] after. When do you need to finish?

KM: In about a half-hour — on the half-hour.

RB: [At] 4:30 [p.m.]. That is good, we are progressing [well].

KM: I can come back to finish, if we need to.

RB: Okay. I think we might be alright. How long were you in the Coast Guard?

KM: I was in the Coast Guard over thirty-six years. The first fifteen and a half [years] were active duty. Then I [moved] to the Coast [Guard] Reserves because I couldn't see losing that much time, possible retirement money, so I stayed in the reserves.

RB: You put in thirty-six years. That is quite a bit of time.

KM: Thirty-six–years, total time in the Coast Guard. It was strange [how] I got out of the Coast Guard. When we came back from Vietnam, I was on a Coast Guard Cutter team.

RB: Tell about that. [Was this] in the 1950s or early 1960s? You were off the coast of Long Beach, California?

KM: Yes.

RB: Were you involved in Vietnam?

KM: Yes, *Taney*. It was named after [a United States Secretary of the Treasury]. [A United States Coast Guard High Endurance Cutter stationed off the coast of Vietnam.]

RB: T-A-N-E-Y?

KN: Yes. We [received] orders that we were going to be switched to [United States] Navy control. [That is what happens to] the Coast Guard in war time. We were going to Vietnam.

RB: What time period is this?

KM: [It was during] 1969 and 1970. [Inaudible] We got ready to go. We spent eleven and half months over there. I tried to keep from going by saying that I was the only surviving male member of the family.

RB: Your brother had died?

KM: Yes. My dad had died. They said, “Well nice try, but it doesn’t work, because your ship is not officially assigned to a war zone.” We were assigned to Subic Bay, Philippines. They said, “We are not at war with them. We are not fighting them.”

RB: [Laughter]

KM: “Even if we do [support for Vietnam, the so-called], the goody [things].”

RB: You were supporting the war, but not close enough?

KM: Not close enough.

RB: [Did] you go to the Philippines?

KM: Yes, we were in and out of there. That was our home port.

RB: What did you do there?

KM: Refueled and then went back out. We were around the peninsula of Vietnam for almost the whole time we were there, with the exception of going for a little bit of R & R [rest and relaxation] in Singapore [occupied by Japan] and [doing] some ship repair in the [ship] yard in Yokosuka and Fukuoka, Japan. Most of our time was spent there until we lost a shaft and a screw. Then they sent us to the Philippines, flew out a shaft and a screw from Baltimore [Maryland] where the Coast Guard yard was and we came home. *Taney*, by the way, is the only ship left today that was at Pearl Harbor.

RB: Really?

KM: It is in a Maritime Museum in Baltimore Harbor.

RB: You were on that ship?

KM: We were on it.

RB: What was your role in Vietnam, off the coast, on the *Taney*?

KM: Mostly gun fire support and to abort any suspected junks [ancient Chinese sailing ships still in use today]. I forget how many. I have an annual down there. I will have to bring it out when I meet back with you.

RB: Yes. [Do] you have it in your room?

KM: We did a lot of medical work with the troops ashore. The let [the medics] go and do medical programs with the natives. We did a lot of that. We had a doctor on board who thrived on doing that.

RB: With the South Vietnamese?

KM: Yes.

RB: Were you still working as a radio operator?

KM: Radar [operator]. We did do a lot of voice radio, CIC, on board ship.

RB: What is CIC?

KM: Combat Information Center. You have probably seen old movies where the sailor is writing backwards on a big plastic board with "Xs" on it.

RB: Yes.

KM: We did that. That was our place. I [received] some training as an air traffic controller, ASW [anti-submarine] warfare controller where we controlled the fixed wing and rotor wing, anti-submarine warfare aircraft. I was in the regular [Coast Guard service] for nine years and then I [was] out for four or five years. During the period I was out, I went to work for the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] at the Fremont Air Traffic Control Center [California].

RB: That took you to northern California. What was your job?

KM: [I was an] assistant air traffic controller. We worked the [San Francisco] Bay area and all the way out to Sacramento [California]. I worked that [job]. My youngest son [Tim Mendenhall] had asthma so very bad that we had to go someplace where the weather was a little more conducive, so they transferred me to Redmond, Oregon.

RB: That is how you got up there!

KM: [It was a] flight service station operated by the FAA.

RB: This is probably in the 1970s?

KM: [It was in] the late 1960s.

RB: Late 1960s would be before [you were in] Vietnam.

KM: My brother [Thomas Deal Mendenhall] was killed in 1965 and I had a twinge of patriotism and re-joined the Coast Guard, and went back [on] active [duty]

RB: How did your brother die? Was he a helicopter pilot?

KM: He started out as a tank commander. He did two tours in the Cold War in Germany in tanks and he did not like them so he switched to flying. He started flying fixed wing, observation airplane, then he switched over to helicopters. He was in Vietnam about nine months. My father died and he came home on emergency leave for thirty days. I [was able to] spend a lot of time with him. Then he went back to Vietnam. He was shot down and killed. I have a copy of the citation for his Distinguished Flying Cross.

RB: The medal he [received] and the write up [about it].

KM: He was killed and that is when I decided I had to go back and finish up what I had started.

RB: That makes sense.

KM: So I did. I went back to Vietnam. They said, "You have three years left on this enlistment. Or you can have five if you want to stay in for twenty [years] and get out." I said, "Well, what do you want?" "We have an opening for a teacher on our ship's training detachment which was a mobile training unit." We had a forty-foot trailer with a computer in it [where] you could generate battle problems. The Coast Guard had so many smaller craft [ships] up and down the coast that we had to have battle, war training. But they were too small to go to San Diego to get it. So the Coast Guard had this training detachment, so we were on the road about forty weeks out of the year. So we worked with all the little cohorts up and down the coast from San Diego to Attu, Alaska.

RB: This is after Vietnam?

KM: After [serving in] Vietnam.

RB: All the way up to Alaska?

KM: Yes, clear out to the end of the Aleutian [Islands]. [I spent] three winters out there.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: When I [came] back, I said, "Okay. You promised me I could have any station I wanted." They said, "Yes, what do you want?" I said, "I would like [the] Long Beach area because we have a house there and my step-daughter [Michelle Lucia] is going to be going to kindergarten pretty quick." "We don't have any [openings] in Long Beach." I said, "How about San Francisco?" At least I could commute back and forth. I could get a space-available flight out of Travis [Air Force Base] or San Francisco. "We don't have anything there." I said, "Well, [why] did you ask me? Where do you want to send me?" "To Houston, Texas."

RB: Houston, Texas? [Laughter]

KM: The Coast Guard operates the ship canal that goes up the Gulf of Mexico up to Houston. It is a deep water port in the middle of Texas. I said, "No thank you." I turned down the regulars and joined the reserves and finished [there].

RB: You said your step-daughter was young and going to start kindergarten. When did you divorce your first wife [Yvonne (Apperson) Mendenhall]]?

KM: She divorced me when I was in Vietnam. That would have been in 1969.

RB: Was part of that [due] to your separation, all the time, from the family?

KM: Part of it.

RB: Marriages are complicated. What was your grade and rank when you [left] active duty?

KM: [I was an] E-7.

RB: You were an E-7? Very good! What is that called?

KM: Chief. I retired as a Senior Chief which is an E-8. The highest is an E-9.

RB: You got out of the regulars and spent the next fifteen years —

KM: Twenty years.

RB: — twenty years in the reserves. By that [time], you were living in Los Angeles?

KM: Long Beach

RB: In Long Beach where you worked for the [Los Angeles County] Sheriff Department?

KM: Eventually, I did. I started out — [my] wife [Bertha (Mundell) Mendenhall] said, “Go to school and get your degree. I will work while you get your degree.” One day she came home with a newspaper and said, “Here try this job opening in Pasadena [California]. They need a correctional officer in the police department.” So I went out [there].

RB: Did you have an associate degree in law enforcement by that [time]?

KM: No.

RB: So you tried for that [job]?

KM: I tried for it and got [the job]. I was in Pasadena for two and half years working in the jail [while] I was waiting for an opening in the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Academy. When that [was available], I went to the academy. You have to go through the academy to be a certified police officer.

RB: Yes. That is like eight weeks?

KM: At that time it was sixteen weeks.

RB: Sixteen weeks!

KM: Now it is not that [long]. About half of what we went through.

RB: I have heard that.

KM: I started with the Los Angeles Community College District Police and worked there for about five years. I had enough time, and age-wise, where I could retire from the College District Police. So I did that and went across the street and signed up with the Los Angeles County Marshals. I was still in law enforcement. The marshals were eventually absorbed by the Los Angeles County Sheriff [Department]. So that is how I ended up a sheriff.

RB: You were working in law enforcement at various places and you were in the reserves for twenty-years. How did that work? Did you serve once a month?

KM: You did your once a month, weekly meetings. Every summer you spent two weeks. I was fortunate enough to meet a [fellow], can't remember his name, he was a customs air pilot. He flew for the United States Customs Department. He chased drug runners. He said, "How about coming down on your summer duty and go with us?" They liked the idea because I was police officer who carried a weapon. I did that for three or four summers.

KM: We had quite [interesting] experiences chasing druggies. While I was going through the Sheriff's Academy that was when they require you to go back to college and get some [education] That is when I [received] my degree in police science.

RB: Why don't we stop right here. I would like to continue [our interview].

KM: Sure.

RB: Maybe next week?

KM: That would be good.

RB: We will end the [interview now].

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

Today in November 14, 2018 and we are continuing our interview with Klair Edward Mendenhall.

RB: Last week we talked about [your] growing up years, getting into the Coast Guard, experiences off the coast of California, going to Vietnam and after discharge working with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

You have shared with me a couple of books. One is *The History of the U. S. Coast Guard Cutter Taney*. That was the ship that you served on?

KM: I went to Vietnam on [it]. [It is] the last ship, still afloat, that was at Pearl Harbor.

RB: That is right. You said it is currently located [in] —.

KM: The Boston Maritime Museum in Boston [Massachusetts]. [The actual location is at the harbor in Baltimore at the "Historic Ships in Baltimore", Maryland.]

RB: [This] flyer states that "it was commissioned in 1936, 327 foot high endurance cutter, one of seven secretary class ships built. It has given a half century of continuing service with the distinction of being the only warship still afloat that

saw action during the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was decommissioned in 1986 and is now a part of the Baltimore Maritime Museum.”

RB: Have you ever been back to Baltimore to see it?

KM: Yes.

RB: When was that? Do you recall?

KM: It was about [in] 2000 [with] our daughter [Michelle] and her husband. He was going to medical school at the University of Maryland in Baltimore.

RB: Which daughter was this?

KM: That was Michelle [Lucia, a step-daughter]. He started out as a dentist, then he went [into] oral surgery and became interested in maxillofacial [surgery], which is [involved with] cancer. So he is a medical doctor also.

RB: Wow! He is quite a distinguished young man.

KM: He was back there in school for almost ten years. We [were able] to go back a couple of times.

RB: Did that bring back any memories when you were able to visit the *Taney*?

KM: Oh, yes!

RB: It looks like a [very] fine ship.

KM: It has more metal in it than a destroyer, for crying out loud! [Laughter] It had a lot of iron and destroyers are a lot of aluminum.

RB: [Laughter] I am looking through your book. It gives the history of the ship. It was named after Roger Taney, who was from Maryland.

KM: He was secretary of the treasury.

RB: Is it with the Maritime Museum?

KM: Yes.

RB: Part of that whole complex?

KM: Yes.

RB: Yes, here it is.

KM: It covers [its] duty before World War II. It didn't do much in [the] Korean [Conflict]. They did a lot of weather stations.

[END OF RECORDING TWO.]

KM: That is what is called damaged control [men]. [Referring to his friends, Dennis "Woody" Woods.]

RB: Tell about these gentlemen in this photograph. [Reviewed photo of four men.]

KM: The tallest one is Dennis Woods. He was a damage controller on the ship. The middle [fellow] is Frank Masterson who was our cook on the ship. I forget the name of the steward's mate over on the side. He was in charge of the stewards who served all of the officers. The other [fellow] was our cab driver.

RB: The cab driver? [Laughter] That is great! When was this taken? In Singapore?

KM: In Singapore.

RB: Was this when you were on leave from your tour in Vietnam?

KM: Yes. They sent the ship down there for R & R and for supplies. Singapore, at that time. Singapore, at that time, was still under British control, even though it had become an independent nation. Britain still had their naval base there and that is where we tied up.

RB: When would this have been?

KM: [In] 1969, 1970. I have more junk! [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] I am reading an article from *The Spectrum* or *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

KM: No, it would have to have been from a California newspaper.

RB: It states:

"Pearl Harbor Vet Honors Only Surviving War Ship

The 327 foot Taney was one of the first vessels to return fire doing no less than four minutes. Today it is the last Pearl Harbor war ship afloat after serving for half of a century and being decommissioned in 1986."

RB: So you were even written about in this article?

KM: Yes.

RB: In the book it states: "RD1." What does that stand for?

KM: That is an E-6.

RB: An E-6? What is the title [for] RD?

KM: Radarman.

RB: *“Radarman One Klair Mendenhall, who ran the CIC [combat information center] for the CICASW officer, Lieutenant, JG, Ted Sampson and his chiefs, RMCS Bill Goforth and RDC Lyle “Nelly” Nelson remembers will the second time the Taney came under fire. The ship was north of Quy Nhon and was preparing for a NGFS mission —”* [Quy Nhon, a city on the coast located 400 miles from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.]

KM: Naval Gun Fire Support Mission.

RB: *— “on targets out of Taney’s line of site. As the mission began, Taney got off about four or five rounds when Mendenhall and others on the bridge observed puffs of smoke and explosions on the shore. Recently, the gunners had fired defective ammunition which had exploded in the air well short of target. As Taney’s crew watched the short rounds on the beach, they thought they were observing their own defective ammo. At first, they were hitting on the beach area and then they started getting closer and closer to the ship. Then we realized that these were mortar rounds and that somebody was walking them out to us. Mendenhall notes, ‘so we made a hasty retreat away from the beach.’ ”*

RB: What do you remember about that incident? Do you still recall that?

KM: Oh, yes. It was hard to convince the captain. When he finally decided that we were right, he said, “All hands go to general quarters. Put your helmets and everything on,” because, during that time, [things] were pretty lax. [Unless] you were working a gun mount or if you were working in regular clothing, uniforms. The rest of the people could keep back, take pictures and watch. So they started shooting at us and everybody [was] upset! The captain [was] so excited he ordered the engines all full stern. We were anchored, but the anchor had not yet broken loose from the ground. So we pulled it for about a quarter of a mile before it finally broke loose.

RB: [Laughter] You were trying to exit from the shoreline?

KM: Exit from the shoreline. The ship would shudder and shake. The captain just plainly forgot that we had dropped the anchor.

RB: Oh, no! [Laughter] Making it hard to make a quick retreat!

KM: Yes, to make a quick retreat. [The enemy] was gaining on us.

RB: Were they in small ships or junkets?

KM: They were on land, a quarter of a mile of land.

RB: I see. What were they using to fire on you? Was this Chinese equipment?

KM: I have no idea.

RB: But they were like mortars and they would —.

KM: You wouldn't hear them. You might hear a whizzz. They were like a twelve inch or five inch thirty-eight wing shot. When they went through the air, you would hear whizzz. You don't hear mortars. They are very quiet.

RB: Yes, until they reach their target.

KM: Until they explode.

RB: Did anything hit the ship?

KM: No.

RB: Luckily.

KM: After that, anybody who went on deck had to be in proper uniform, helmets and the whole shooting match.

RB: Wow! That was in 1969, you think?

KM: Yes.

RB: [The article] goes on the say, "*Mendenhall was serious about his work in the CIC. He had served in the reserves from 1952 to 1967 before he returned to active duty. He knew, as he got his assignment to Taney, that he would have to bone up on the ship's radar and sonar equipment. When Taney was ordered to Market Time —.*" That is another ship?

KM: That is the name of the program we were in — Market Time Patrol where we sailed and covered the whole peninsula of Vietnam. We would intercept junks, stop and search them. [We] were mainly there to keep any additional supplies getting into the ground [locations].

RB: Because the junks that were allowed through without supplies, were they fishermen?

KM: Yes, mostly fishermen.

RB: But you had to make sure that they weren't infiltrating.

KM: If we didn't know them, we would stop them.

RB: It says that, "*— you were not thrilled about being away from your family, but you did your duty. A personal incentive for him was the fact that his brother, an Army major and helicopter pilot, had been killed with his entire crew in Vietnam. Though personable, Mendenhall was no-nonsense when it came to duty. When the ship pulled into port Mendenhall informed the men in his section that he didn't care what they did ashore so long as when they got back to CIC they were ready to work. No excuses!*"

RB: You were a supervisor at that time?

KM: Yes.

RB: How many men did you supervise?

KM: It depended upon the watch you were on. We had four sonarmen, eight or nine radarmen and we all worked in the same quarters. We learned each other jobs.

RB: You were probably in your mid-thirties?

KM: Yes.

RB: These [fellows] under you were all younger, in their early twenties?

KM: Yes, mostly younger.

RB: It further says, "*Taney began her Vietnam deployment patrolling off the southern tip of Vietnam along the mouth of the Saigon River where the water was shallow and the threat from enemy submarines, such as it was, was nil. The patrols were usually about thirty days out and the cutter would be refueled and replenished and underway by a combination tanker refrigerator ships or 'UNREP.'*"

KM: Under way replenishment. When you see two ships together and the row between them, bags going back and forth, they were sent in that way.

RB: "*The ship also received provisions and mail by helicopter or Vert. Rep.*"

KM: Vertical replenishment.

RB: "*Mendenhall and his men were certainly at the nerve center of the ship. 'We were right behind the bridge and had all the secure voice nets while most of the other*

communications, teletype and what have you, took place in the radio room which was a deck below us,' he notes. 'We were continually changing codes every day. Some of them every twelve hours.'"

RB: Was that a little bit tedious to keep up on changing the codes?

KM: Yes, because everything was scrambled. You had to have right codes or you wouldn't [receive] any messages. It was a hassle more than anything else.

RB: [Laughter] *"Every twenty-hour period you would have to change codes, scramble and what have you. When the CIC would get a radar hit on an unknown vessel they would run an identification friendly or foe, IFF, electronic interrogation. If the vessel positively answered the interrogation, it would be logged and let pass. If there was no reply to the IFF, then CIC would run checks with the Navy intelligence to determine, if possible, who the ship was and where it came from. If the vessel was still unknown, the cutter would go on GQ —"*

KM: General quarters.

RB: *"— general quarters conduct, conduct a check of the boat's papers and perhaps, even make a boarding. If all was in order, the boat was allowed to pass. If not, the vessel and the crew would be taken to the nearest shore station and turned over to Navy and Vietnamese authorities ashore for investigation. Taney checked thousands of vessels while on Market Time, but boarded only thirty."*

RB: You never boarded another ship, did you?

KM: Yes, a couple of junks.

RB: What was that like? Were you able to communicate with [them]?

KM: We took a Vietnamese advisor.

RB: They could translate?

KM: They did the talking.

RB: *"One important mission Taney's medical staff provided was the Medical Civic Action Program or MedCap. When Taney first received orders for Vietnam the United States Public Health Service physician was assigned on board. At the time, all medical school graduates were liable for service in the military. Many ignorant of the fact that the US Public Health Service, USPHS, staffs Coast Guard ships at sea joined the USPHS. They were shocked to find that they could be, and often were, assigned to war zone duty on Coast Guard cutters. Taney had such a doctor assigned to her after she got her orders to deploy. The doctor reluctantly joined the ship and went on refresher training in San Diego. He*

quickly found that shipboard life was not for him and no sooner did Taney return to San Francisco than he jumped ship and was never seen again. Taney called him HMI Ken "Doc" Fincher and SNGlen Lelachur in charge of sick bay. It wasn't until the ship arrived at Subic Bay that the USPHS radiologist, Lt. Commander Dr. Stephen Bartok of the USPHS was flown out from the states to join the crew."

RB: Did you meet [Dr. Stephen] Bartok?

KM: Yes. I think that is the picture there.

RB: Yes. I see him in the picture with a Vietnamese villager.

KM: Yes. The next page, there he is. I think he is doing the vert. rep. [vertical replenishment] there

RB: This is the vert. rep. in 1969 with the helicopter.

KM: What we did, was when we pulled into these ports, they gave the doctors permission to do humanitarian work. We had to supply security for them. We only had 150 [men] so if you weren't working that day, a lot of times, you [were] called for security duty. And you [went on] to shore with them.

RB: Did you have a weapon with you?

KM: Oh, yes,

RB: What weapon did you use?

KM: I carried a shot gun.

RB: Did you ever have to use it?

KM: Never had to use it. Most of the [fellows] liked to carry the M16s, which were a fairly new weapon at that time, or the M40 machine gun. The sailors on the junks would look at them, just stand there and say, "Okay." But if you got on with a shot gun, they could see that big round barrel, [it was like] the parting of the Red Sea! They were make way for you.

RB: They were intimidated by the shot gun more so than the M16! Did you learn how to shoot a shot gun growing up in Arizona?

KM: Yes.

RB: So this was nothing new to you. Talking about life on the ship, a little bit:
"Though drug use was common, but still the still prevalent social taboo against

marijuana use divided the crew into two groups. One that used alcohol and the other that got high. The two groups didn't mix much in port and went their separate ways. When they returned to the ship, however, the feeling of unity on board ship prevailed and the mission came first. The drug issue, for the time being, was put on the back burner. The two groups agreed to tolerate each other's habit."

RB: Did you experience that?

KM: That is when I told them, "When you come to work for me, you had better be sober. You had better be straight. If you [aren't] that will be the end for you."

RB: Was drug use a [very] big problem?

KM: No, not a bit. It was funny, because when we got to work and were headed back home, they took a lot of the old fire extinguishers and unscrewed the tops of them and cleaned out the insides. They would shoot CO2 [carbon dioxide] cartridges, the old fire extinguishers, and try to kill any odor that was in them. They would pack the old cylinder with marijuana with an aluminum foil top on and screw it [shut].

RB: [Laughter] That would kind of prevent the smell [of marijuana] begin detected?

KM: It would prevent the dogs from smelling it.

RB: That is interesting.

KM: They put [the fire extinguishers] out there.

RB: Where did they get the marijuana? On shore in Vietnam?

KM: On shore.

RB: Was it pretty prevalent?

KM: Oh, yes. We could buy it in the Philippines —

RB: Is that right?

KM: — if they wanted it, pretty cheap.

RB: Yes? [Laughter]

KM: It was funny because the only place they would have inspected us for marijuana was in Guam on our way back home. Nobody came ashore. Nobody came aboard.

BF: [Laughter]

KM: So the [fellows] did all that work for nothing.

RB: [Laughter] Right! Then when you got to the states, you had already gone through a US port of entry, so there was no investigation or check.

KM: No, check.

RB: [Laughter] It says here: *“Tolerance, however, wasn’t the watch-word of many of Taney’s crew on liberty. Like sailors in port, the world over, they behaved themselves in time honored fashion, that is, often badly. While on deployment, Taney stopped in many exotic places, Subic Bay, Olangapo [Philippines], Sasebo, Japan, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore and even ports in Vietnam itself. As Lt. Commander Huggins had predicted, the crew found many diversions while in port. Some they could tell their mothers about and most they did not.”*

RB: When you did go to port, what are some of the things the [fellows] would do?

KM: They would go get drunk.

RB: Did they go to bars that catered to the American troops?

KM: Yes. Everybody liked the American dollar. We didn’t have any trouble there. Myself and the other two [fellows] you saw in the picture, Frank and Woody, we would go down together. We were a little older than the majority of the others. Frank had a couple of years of duty in southeast of Vietnam, in Thailand. He had been a cook at the LORAN [short for Long Range Navigation] Station. [It was a hyperbolic radio navigation system developed during World War II.] So he knew his way around. That helped a lot. We could kind of bypass and stay out of the problems.

RB: Did you do some sightseeing?

KM: We did a little bit of sightseeing. When we were in Fukuoka Japan, in the shipyards there, most of the [fellows] would take the short trip to Nagasaki to see where the [atomic] bomb was [detonated].

RB: Did you go there?

KM: I didn’t go there. The three of us didn’t go there. We went into the town and got a hotel room. We stayed there and took a trip out to a Buddhist Temple. So we got to see some [places].

RB: What did you think of Japan?

KM: Japan was pretty nice. A lot cleaner than the rest of the Orient. The rest of the Orient smelled. It has an odor that you will never forget the rest of your life.

RB: Really?

KM: Kind of a gingery — if you have [been] in some Chinese restaurants in Chinatown, you will smell it. You can tell it.

RB: Interesting. Did you ever stop at Iwo Jima?

KM: No.

RB: I don't know if they still do, but they used to have a LORAN Station there.

KM: Satellites have done away with all the LORAN Stations.

RB: Yes, that is a thing of the past now. It says here, *“RD1 Klair Mendenhall remembers how one young SM [Seaman] declared himself a conscientious objector when he learned Taney was to go to Vietnam. The [fellow] fought hard to get off the ship, to no avail. Once he got to Vietnam, however, and discovered the pleasant attractions of several ports of call, he found he was having such a great time that he really liked being with the ship. The seaman was striking for boatswain mate and during a storm the ship took a freak wave and he [was] thrown up against the stanchion and broke his arm. Dr. Bartok decided to transfer him off the ship and back to the states for treatment. This really upset the seaman and as tenaciously as he had fought to get off the ship before, he now fought to stay on. Again, to no avail. Tearfully, he had to leave the ship and return home.”*

RB: [Laughter] Do you remember that experience with that seaman?

KM: Oh yes!

RB: Did you find that interesting that he changed his tune after awhile and came to like serving?

KM: Yes, because we were not on the ground like the foot soldiers, the Marines and the Army. We had it pretty good. To try to keep the morale up, we tried to have barbecues on the fantail. [The rounded overhang part of the stem of a vessel, especially a warship.]

RB: That was nice!

KM: They cut a fifty-five gallon drum in half and barbecue on it. They would barbecue chickens, hot dogs, whatever they wanted.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: We were doing it one day and we [received] a call to do some gun fire support. When we pulled in to where they were going to shoot, forward they were firing their guns and [in the back they were doing barbecue cooking]. It was on a Sunday.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: Everybody was getting upset because the ammunition they were using was a five “.38 [caliber naval gun [that] had a cork filling in it. The cork would blow out and kind of float through the air like snowflakes and get in their food.

RB: Some of the residue —

KM: Residue from out of the shells.

RB: — would get in the food and that bothered them the most.

KM: It [pissed off] the [fellows] because they had to pick off [other residue from the corks].

RB: [Laughter] That is great!

KM: Those are some of the good times.

RB: Sure! Did you feel a good sense of comradery with the other crewmen on the ship?

KM: [With] ninety-five percent of them, yes, there were always two or three. But there is one thing you learn, and I learned early, it doesn't matter if you don't like the way he dressed, talked or whatever differences you had, when you got on board the ship you better forget [them]. Because he had to depend upon you and you had to depend upon him at some time. You couldn't do that if you were angry at [each other].

RB: Yes, that is really true. You could, at least at the time being, overlook some of these things that annoyed you and just get along.

KM: Just get along.

RB: I am reading here, *“In mid-January 1970 Taney was patrolling market time operation areas eight and nine when on 20 January the starboard propeller shaft sheared. This caused a loss of propulsion to one of her two shafts which slowed her best speed to a mere eight knots. The shaft was broken, but it still held but barely. Taney was released from her station and limped to Subic Bay for repairs.*

As she was quite near the end of her deployment anyway, this casualty effectively ended her tour in Vietnam's combat zone. Taney linked up with the USS Tutila [a Luzon-class internal combustion engine repair ship], removed the shaft and prop and secure the prop on the fantail. Taney steamed slowly to Subic Bay for repairs."

RB: I think you mentioned that the last time we talked; that you had problems and the ship had to go for repairs. You never went back?

KM: Never went back. Earlier, when we went to Japan to the shipyard, at Fukuoka and Hakata, the twin cities there. We thought something had happened. What [it was], the [ship hit a] log, to something big and to get it out of the water, [they] had what [was] called rolling shocks. All round bottom ships have this, like blades that stick out. They keep [the ship from rolling so much. One of those had been hit and bent back about half way. That is what they found out after they put [the ship] up on dry dock what had happened. That was a different incident than the one they talk about here.

RB: Okay. It says, *"The cutter remained in the dock yard for about six weeks while the crew waited for the new shaft to be flown in from the Coast Guard yard at Curtis May, Maryland."*

Do you remember that? The time you spent in the Philippines?

KM: Yes.

RB: Were you confined to the ship? Or could you go on shore?

KM: We were granted liberty. The naval base at Subic Bay has a lot of [very] great facilities, one of which was a golf course.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: So we played quite a bit of golf.

RB: That was kind of a nice diversion from shore patrol. *"The crew suffered doubly while they lingered. First, for their immobility and lack of meaningful labor and second, for the loss of tax-free hostile fire pay."*

KM: That is right.

RB: [Laughter] *"MMC [chief machinist mate, E-7] Ray Butler and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Al Perry, found themselves so broke that for recreation they were reduced to eating free popcorn at the movies on base and then going to the chief's club to drink ten-cent gin and tonic. It was a difficult comedown from the days when Taney's crew were the lords of every PX [Post Exchange] they surveyed*

and knew no want. In time, the shaft was delivered and quickly installed and Taney was released to go back to the states. ”

RB: Tell about that. You [received] combat pay? Is that what it was when you were in Vietnam? If you [didn't] get combat pay, you still [received] your [regular] pay.

KM: Combat pay was extra. It was non-taxable. You still get paid but, you were paid for being in a combat zone.

RB: That [pay] provided the extra that the [fellows] could party with, go out and buy whatever they wanted. Now they didn't have that extra that they were accustomed to, so that was the sad part.

KM: We were not actually assigned to a battle zone because we, the ship, had [not] been assigned to a base in Vietnam. Our home port was Subic Bay, the Philippines which didn't automatically qualify [us] for combat pay. You had to be in the battle zone, fire and be active in order to collect the pay. We collected battle pay for eleven months.

RB: Even though you were on that tour, the last month or six weeks, you didn't qualify. It goes on the say, *“Toward the end of their tour, Taney left Vietnam in route to Guam and Hawaii before setting course to San Francisco. Between the Philippines and Guam she ran into a severe typhoon where the waves broke up so high that the water coursed down the ship's air vent and flooded several compartments. In the humidity, the water quickly spawned mold and the Taney took several days at Guam to hang out her linen to dry.”*

RB: [Laughter] Do you remember that typhoon?

KM: Yes.

RB: What was that like?

KM: Messy.

RB: During a typhoon, when you are on a ship like that, do you just stay down below? Or indoors?

KM: Mostly [the fellows] would be on the mess deck where they play cards or what have you or in your rack [bunk] asleep. Trying to, anyway! We had four hour watches with eight hours off, around the clock.

RB: Was it easier to [have] seasickness in a typhoon?

KM: No, I don't think anybody did. Lot of people were too scared to get seasick.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: It was an older ship that had the vents, you have probably seen in comic movies where they had the big round [vents] come up and you could see the comedian come crawling out. Those were, actually, air vents.

RB: I know what you are talking about.

KM: They are designed to have this “u” shape, like a sink, the [P-trap] valve. Water ran right through that and dumped out below deck. So they had a time trying to seal up all of the air vents, which in turn made it hot and nasty.

RB: And the humidity caused the mold to grow. *“On March 3, 1970 the Taney arrived at San Francisco in the wee hours of the morning and had to stand outside the harbor until 0900 [hours] so that she could feted in style by her welcoming committee. As Taney steamed under the Golden Gate [Bridge], she flew a 160 foot long banner from her main mast, one foot for each member of the crew. Small boats, fire boats, helicopters escorted the cutter to her berth where civilian and Coast Guard dignitaries and family members waited to welcome the crew back. Taney was home from the war again.”*

RB: Do you remember that coming in?

KM: Yes.

RB: What was that like?

KM: I was more interested in seeing my [children] and wife.

RB: I bet you were! Did they meet you there in San Francisco?

KM: Yes.

RB: Where were they living at the time? Long Beach?

KM: In Oregon.

RB: You had been away for a year, so I bet they were anxious to see you as well. I enjoyed reading that part of the [ship’s] history. I want to talk about your time with the Pasadena Police Department.

KM: That was a special annual made to celebrate the 100th birthday of the police department.

RB: When was that? What year? Do you remember? Let me see — 1986, maybe? *“On July 10, 1886 Dunmore joined Bristol.”* Maybe not. [The Pasadena Police

Department was founded in 1886.] *“1874 six of Pasadena’s first twenty-seven residents found it more comfortable in shirt sleeves.”*

KM: I had just gone to work there and didn’t know that much about the department. There is a picture of me towards the back.

RB: This is quite a special book. It kind of traces the history of that department [where] you worked.

KM: There is one picture of one motorcycle patrolman on his knees. Maybe it’s later on.

RB: I am looking through the book, *“The Pasadena Police Department One Hundred Years.”*

KM: It is towards the back. It made the national news.

RB: How come? I am going to show the camera this photograph.

KM: Just a big tall officer giving a ticket to lady driver in a little bitty sports car. He was about six-foot-six.

RB: So he had to lean down?

KM: Yes.

RB: Did you know him?

KM: I knew him enough to say hello to him. It should be on the next page.

RB: [Here is] the clerical staff.

KM: No, not that. That was the cadets.

RB: The cadet program — they look pretty young. The jail unit.

KM: I should be in that jail unit.

RB: Yes, I see you. Here is Klair Mendenhall for the jail unit.

KM: Our official title was correctional officers.

RB: What did you do in that capacity?

KM: Basically, a jailor.

RB: [Did] you have to monitor the prisoners there in the jail, in and out?

KM: [Yes], I booked them in and out.

RB: Would they have to go for —

KM: — court.

RB: Did they go someplace to [be] fed?

KM: No, we fed them.

RB: Did you bring the food to them and they stayed in there?

KM: Right.

RB: Did you have any interesting experiences dealing with some of the jailees?

KM: Yes. One of the first [jailees occurred when I walked around the corner]. As you [come] on shift, you go out and check every jail. As I walked around the corner of the building, it surprised me. I saw these two legs sitting out in the hallway. The [fellow] had prosthesis legs. We wouldn't let those in the jail. Especially, in the drunk tank. They could use them as a weapon.

RB: That is right. Just take them off.

KM: That was kind of a surprise for me. Later on, I had probably been there about a year, working the graveyard shift. Got off at 6:00 one morning, went home and I had a call from the captain of our division. He said, "What did you do wrong?" I said, "What are you talking about?" "Well, we have one of our prisoners in a jail cell that had a rubberized floor was found dead." I said, "I don't know anything about it." "You must have. It was on your shift." I said, "No, it wasn't because when I signed off everybody was alive." The officer who took my place had signed that [everything] was okay. He said, "That might be so, but for some reason he [the captain] had it in for me and said, "You did something wrong." I said, "No, I didn't." They did an internal affairs [IA} investigation and I was exonerated. This captain said, "You might have been exonerated, but you still did something wrong."

RB: [Laughter] He wasn't going to give up.

KM: He wasn't going to give up. That is probably the worst ones. Did you like your time with the Pasadena [Police Department]?

KM: Pretty good. The only thing I hated was the drive from Long Beach to Pasadena.

RB: That is true. That is a long drive.

KM: About twenty-five miles.

RB: And the traffic. Although, it is worst now, I would imagine.

KM: When I first started there, the New Year's Day that I worked — the Rose Parade is held in Pasadena. We had the Pasadena Police Department had authority over the whole parade route. We had a twenty-hour period [where we had] over 450 arrests.

RB: [Laughter]

KM: Since then they have changed that so the sheriff's department brings in a mobile booking unit and park it in the parking lot of the court house, which is just a block and a-half away from our jail site. The sheriff's department handle everything on the parade route and one block back from Colorado Boulevard. The police department had authority over the rest of the city. [This] made it a lot easier for everybody.

RB: Tell again what period you worked with the sheriff's department. Do you remember?

KM: Let's see if I can remember the dates. There should be some dates in [the book] some place.

RB: Maybe you can walk me through. You finished your service in Vietnam in 1970. Did you stay with the Coast Guard on active duty after that?

KM: I stayed with the Coast Guard for another, almost four years. I made E-7, chief, and they wanted to put me on a mobile training detachment out of Alameda [California]. The mobile training detachment trained all the small boats from San Diego to Alaska. I did that for three years. They told me before I accepted the job that I could have any station because I only had four or five years left to do in the regular Coast Guard. I said, "I would like to be stationed in Long Beach." We have a big Coast Guard detachment here." [They said, "We have nothing for a chief radar man in Long Beach." So I said, "How about San Francisco? They have the Bay up there and they have boat control and everything else." They said, "We have nothing in San Francisco for a chief radar man." I said, "What the hell did you ask me for?"

RB: [Laughter]

KM: Where are you going to send me? They said, "Houston, Texas." I said, "Oh, no."

RB: You didn't want to go to Texas?

KM: I didn't want to go to Texas. That is when I got out of the regular Coast Guard and went into the Reserves.

RB: That was about 1974?

KM: [It was] 1975.

RB: It was 1975 that you got out of the regular [Coast Guard]?

KM: Yes.

RB: You were living down in Long Beach, as I recall, going to school. Then your wife kind of keyed you into a job opportunity.

KM: Yes, she found it in the want ads. That was a job for a correction officer in Pasadena. I went out and took the test and got the job.

RB: That would have been, maybe, about 1975 or 1976 that you started?

KM: Maybe a little later. Between there and 1980.

RB: About how many years did you work with [the] Pasadena [Police Department]?

KM: About two or two and a-half years. Then I [went] into the Sheriff's Academy. So that severed [ties] with [the] Pasadena [Police Department]. When I got out of the Sheriff's Academy I went to work for the Los Angeles Community College District Police. I worked for them for about five years.

RB: Where did you work?

KM: The [Los Angeles] Southwest College.

RB: Where is that?

KM: [In] Watts, Los Angeles.

RB: Oh, gosh! [Laughter]

KM: For awhile I was the only white officer on the campus.

RB: Is that right?

KM: They have good people there.

RB: Sure.

KM: They had pretty good police officers. I stayed there long enough to reach the age of fifty which was the minimum age for retiring. At that time, [after] five years I could retire. That very minimum turned out now-a-days to be great!

RB: Yes!

KM: I retired from the college police and went to work for the Los Angeles County Marshals [Department]. I worked in the court houses, hauled prisoners around and what have you. [I] stayed with them until they were absorbed by the sheriff's department. [I] finished in the sheriff's department as a bailiff.

[END OF RECORDING THREE.]

RB: This is your law enforcement badge. "Deputy Sheriff, Los Angeles County, Retired." [Did] they presented this to you when you retired?

KM: Yes, in 1997.

RB: That is great! You were working for law enforcement from about 1975 to 1997?

KM: Yes, eleven or twelve years.

RB: Pasadena, community college, county marshals and the sheriff's department. That total period is about twenty-two years?

KM: Right, but it didn't count for county retirement because I had school retirement with the [college] police [department]. [In] the sheriff's department it was about twenty [years]. I forget. That was a trip, too! When they came out with the Age Discrimination [in Employment] Act [of 1967 and amended in 1986 and again in 1991 by the older workers Benefit Protection Act] — do you remember hearing about it?

RB: [In] about 1991?

KM: Congress passed it, but they had a lot of loop holes [in it]. That is when they changed it [with] all [employees] in safety positions like airline pilots, firemen and policemen, the mandatory retirement age [would be] age sixty. They left a loop hole in it — the municipalities could either go by the Federal guidelines for a period of time or they could keep their own guidelines that they had used [in the past] until the Age Discrimination Act went into effect. One of those Washington-type things. The sheriff's department, at that time, decided that they were going to follow the Federal guidelines. I was sixty-two [years old] at the time. So they were going to let us go, everyone who was sixty years old. They had some big strapping fireman that worked for the county. They fought them, but they didn't win. They were going to let us go, so after all the hassle was over with in 1997,

April 1st I was retired. We had bought our first condo in St. George in 1994 so we could visit with the [children] and have a place to stay.

RB: Where was it?

KM: At the Sunstone Condominiums, right at the corner Diagonal [Street] and Sunset [Street]. [On] April 1, 1997, they said, "You are retired, but don't go very far because we retired all these people and now we don't have anybody to fill [the] positions."

RB: Of course! [Laughter]

KM: Los Angeles County allowed all of us to go back and work almost six months before they finally retired us and got people to replace us. In November of 1997 we packed up, sold our house in Long Beach and moved here.

RB: You have been here a little over twenty years.

KM: Yes.

RB: Between your Coast Guard retirement and the Los Angeles County retirement, you did pretty good.

KM: Yes, we did. I probably shouldn't say anything about it, but the biggest thing, maybe I won't, about the insurance. I think the policies that Los Angeles County granted some of their teacher unions and firefighter unions helped to put the state [of California in the] and financial situation we are in now.

RB: That is true.

KM: Because some of those [fellows] in the Los Angeles Police Department, if they worked thirty years and reach seventy years of age, they could retire at ninety-five percent of their salary.

RB: [Laughter] That is incredible!

KM: Plus the county paid all of their health insurance. Nothing came out [of their retirement].

RB: Not too shabby!

KM: Not too shabby!

RB: [Laughter] To close [our interview], you have been here in St. George for a good twenty years. How long have you been here at [Southern Utah] Veterans Home?

KM: I came here in August 8, 2017, a year ago.

RB: Where does your wife live now?

KM: The same place we have always lived.

RB: In that condo on [the] Diagonal [Street]?

KM: We moved there in 2000. We moved up to The Ridge, which is up on the side of that mesa, above Paula's Restaurant. All of those look-alike brick homes up there. They call that The Ridge. There is about 200 units up there. We have lived up there since 2000. [My] wife still lives there.

RB: She lives alone?

KM: Yes.

RB: [Did] it get to the point where you couldn't live alone, you needed more assistance?

KM: I was diagnosed in 1982, I think it was, with Parkinson's [Disease].

RB: So that long ago? 1982? That is a good thirty-five plus years.

KM: No, that is the wrong date. I have to write this down and keep it. People always ask me about it.

RB: We will go ahead and end the session now. We can talk a little bit more. I want to thank you for sharing your experiences with the Coast Guard during the Vietnam period with us. Thank you.

[END OF RECORDING FOUR. END OF INTERVIEW.]