

Basic Detail Report



Peter G. Kochera Oral History

Date

June 16, 2017

Primary Maker

Peter G. Kochera

Medium

MTS, PDF

Description

Peter G. Kochera served aboard the submarine USS Growler (SSG-577) as a quartermaster third class (QM3)

from 1962 to 1963. The Intrepid Museum recorded his oral history interview on June 16, 2017. See transcript for complete interview. Below is a summary: Kochera began his interview by stating that he was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. He then explained how he entered the submarine service, noting that he visited a recruiting office and was informed that he would not want to join the regular Navy because he was too old. The recruiter told Kochera all of the reasons why he should join the submarine service, before stating that he would be sent to submarine preparatory school instead of boot camp, and upon completing submarine preparatory school, he would be sent to submarine graduate school. After passing submarine graduate school, Kochera was sent to Pearl Harbor to go aboard Growler. The interview then shifted to a discussion on the initial screenings that occurred prior to entering the submarine service and the training that a sailor received in basic sub school. Kochera explained that sailors were taught the submarine's different systems, were put through a pressure test, and completed an ascent in the Submarine Escape Training Tank. He discussed quartermaster school and celestial navigation school, noting that he was homesick during these experiences. Kochera returned to the topic of navigation by discussing star fixes, before backtracking to note his training aboard USS Cod in Cleveland, which occurred prior to his time in submarine preparatory school. He then listed some of the material that was covered in submarine graduate school and stated that the next step was qualifying. Qualifying involved great amounts of studying, and once qualified, a sailor was no longer called a non-qual by the crew. Kochera noted that he received the non-qual treatment a little more than usual because he was a reservist. This topic then led to an explanation of how the crew tried to get under one another's skin, and Kochera recounted an instance when this happened to him. As the interview continued, Kochera mentioned that he became the boat's barber because he knew how to cut hair. He cut everyone's hair, from the mess cook to the captain. He then discussed his interactions with some officers and noted how his age affected his interaction with crew members of different ranks. Kochera described when newly qualified crew members drank their dolphins, as well as some other memorable moments on liberty in Hawaii. He then recounted some of his initial experiences on Growler, including qualifying, as he noted the various systems they had to learn. Kochera next explained his role as a quartermaster. He discussed celestial navigation, describing star fixes and how

they were used. The crew used star fixes to correct the Ship's Inertial Navigation System, or SINS. Kochera also used the periscope to obtain visual fixes. He then noted Growler's mission, recalling that Growler was there to observe, and if necessary, fire a Regulus missile. While discussing Growler's mission, Kochera also described one time when Growler became attached to a fishing net, which led to the boat being held down for three days. He also recounted less eventful times, noting that you would get into a routine and not know one day from the next. As the interview continued, Kochera discussed operating the bow and stern planes. A sailor who was not skilled at this job could create a vacuum in the boat if the submarine was in rough seas. This vacuum was uncomfortable and painful for the crew. Kochera then stated that you eventually developed a feel for operating the planes, and you knew you were doing a good job when no one yelled at you to straighten out the boat. The interview then shifted to the topic of day-to-day living. Kochera noted his bunk's location, recalled how much clothing he brought aboard, explained how he rotated and rationed his clothes, and stated how often he showered and how everyone smelled the same. Kochera said that he did not exercise because there were no facilities to do so, and that the lack of exercise combined with the availability of food to cause him to gain weight. This led to recollections of the cook, "Ma" Irvin, and the various meals they were served. Kochera then noted that Growler fired practice missiles in friendly waters, before he described the feeling of the crew as they returned from a patrol. Kochera specifically described the trip from Adak to Hawaii, explaining why the outside of the boat had turned white, and noting that the crew became anxious as they approached Hawaii. He then stated that a girl was waiting for him when Growler pulled into port, and he described the crew's sea legs when they left the boat. This discussion of their return to port then led to a recollection of a crew member who was killed in Honolulu while on liberty. The interview soon transitioned to Kochera's time aboard USS Grayback (SSG-574). He took advantage of an opportunity to go to Japan for two weeks when Growler was in port. Upon returning, he was ordered to go aboard Grayback. He then recalled a number of mechanical problems on Grayback, as well as some of the liberty and leisure experiences that resulted from these problems. Kochera also discussed some dangerous incidents, including when Growler took on water, and when a fire killed one crew member on Grayback. Kochera stated that he had to sleep in this man's bunk. He then noted Grayback's return to Treasure Island for decommissioning and his discharged from the Navy. As the interview came to an end, Kochera discussed life after the Navy and reflected on his time aboard Growler and his experiences in Hawaii. He also stated what he hopes visitors will take away from seeing Growler. Kochera then returned to the topic of his time in school in Hawaii, when he was lonely and homesick, and he explained how these times became better. The interview then ended with Kochera recounting a number of dangerous incidents he had experienced throughout his life, including some during his time aboard Growler, and stating that he now travels and owns real estate. Extent: 9 media files, 37 page transcript

Dimensions

98 minutes