

John Jenus Kevice
Narrator

Phillip Leonard
Hoosick Falls Historical Society
Interviewer

Interviewed on July 31, 2003

Louis Miller Museum, Hoosick Falls, New York

Phillip Leonard PH
John J. Kevice JK

PL: Where do you live John?

JK: Twenty Wall Street, Hoosick Falls.

PL: How long have you live in Hoosick Falls?

JK: All my life.

PL: Why don't you tell us a little about before you went into the service?

JK: Well before I went into the service, I worked at Noble Woods Machine Company for a short while. From there I went to work for the Arsenal and I worked at the Arsenal until I was put into classification A for the draft. I didn't want to go into the Army, so I went to the Recruiting Office in Albany to see if I could join the Navy. I went over there and there was a Chief by the name of Sullivan. He also was on a draft board here in Hoosick Falls. I told him I wanted to and he said, "Well where do you work?" I said "The Arsenal." And he said "I can't take you, you work in the Arsenal that's a defensive job and I can't do it." I said "I was classified in 1A and subject to the draft." He said, "Well you have to get a discharge from your Colonel from the Arsenal." So I was back working night shift at the Arsenal and I talked to my superintendent and she said "You want to go in the Navy?" I said "Yes." Then she said "Go upstairs at eight o'clock and tell them you're resigning from the Arsenal. They got to take a resignation as long as you go into the service." So I did that and I went back over to the recruiter's office and he said, "Yes, in that case we can take you." That was in October of 1942 I went into the Navy.

PL: Before that did you go to St. Mary's [School]? And did you graduate from there?

JK: Yes, I went to St. Mary's and I graduated in 1936 and at that time we were the biggest class out of St. Mary's.

PL: I'm sorry I interrupted you, but you said you went back to enlist into the Navy.

JK: Yes, I went back and I enlisted on the fifteenth of October in 1942. And there was another guy from Hoosick Falls his name was Sunny...I think his father was and electrician...I can't think of his name but there was two of us from Hoosick Falls. We were in the first Company to go to Sampson [Naval Training Base], It had just opened. We went there for twelve weeks and after that I was assigned to Machinist School while he went to Illinois. I spent sixteen weeks there and graduated and with pretty good honors, I was graduated second-class machinist from the school. Then I was assigned to Optical School in Norfolk Navy Yard. That was over in Plymouth across from the Charles River in the Navy Yard. There was a big optical shop there and there was about fourteen of us going to school there to learn about optics, gun sight telescopes, and anything optical that the Navy used we would repair. I got through with that and then I was assigned to the repair ship, the USS Markab (AD-21). It was a Destroyer Tender which has a series or squadron of destroyers assigned to which it served. They supplied them with water, fuel, food, and did any repairs that had to be done- we were a big floating Machinist Shop. There were nine hundred people aboard, it was a large ship. From there I went to San Francisco and stayed there for a couple of weeks on shore patrol. Then they sent me up to the rivers in Washington to the Naval Yard there. I was there for a couple of weeks and then I caught a transport up to the Aleutians [Islands] where I went aboard my ship, the AD-21 USS Markab, the one on A Deck in the Aleutian Islands. Boy, that was a despicable place I wouldn't want anybody to put there. I went aboard ship exactly on Christmas Eve in 1943. When we got back to the States I was only onboard ship for about two months, it was in February. We got back to the States after going through an awful storm and had to do a lot of repair work. When I was back in San Francisco I got a notice from the Red Cross that my mother had a severe stroke. I got some time to go home and got as far as Wichita Falls in a plane and a big snowstorm grounded us and we went the rest of the way by train. My sister was a nurse at St. Mary's Hospital in Amsterdam and that's where they had my mother. So I stayed there for about three or four days and I had to go back to the ship, we were about to ship out again. From there we went out to Hawaii to Pearl Harbor and stayed there for a month. From there we went out to Majuro, which is one the Marshall Islands and there we serviced the fleet. While we were there I remember that the big fleet came in with transporters, it was the time that the Company was going over to Saipan [Island]. From there we went on to the Caroline Islands, to Ulithi and I was there for two or three months. From there we got ready to service the ship that was going to invade the Philippines. We went into the Philippines after it was invaded, we went into Leyte Gulf at Luzon [Strait] and Samar [Sea]. We were there until the War ended but while we were there I ran into two old buddies from Hoosick Falls. One was Frank Driscoll, he came aboard the ship in the middle of the night to get all of his gear because they were shipping out to attack Okinawa. A few days the War ended, Jim Casey came aboard our ship to go to church, there was Mass aboard our ship but we never did get to Mass that day.

PL: Well let's talk a little about it. After a big sea battle then you would have to fix the ships and do whatever repairs you could.

JK: One thing I remember, it wasn't a nice thing to see, but I remember when the aircraft carrier Franklin was sunk the survivors from that came aboard our ship. It almost made me cry to hear one guy say to another do you know where this guy is? Do you know where that guy is? They lost track of their own buddies. That was sad.

PL: So that was your job you were keeping those Destroyers going so they could bombard and do the things that they had to do?

JK: That is correct. We kept them supplied and sometimes Cruisers came in and we would fix them up too. There was one ship that lost their Mast; it was made out of wood so we made them one right there. They were mad at us [Laughing] cause they figured they were going back to the States to get it repaired but they didn't.

PL: That ship must have been quite the Machine Shop?

JK: It was a floating Machine Shop they did everything. Anything you wanted they even fix torpedoes, it was a big repair ship.

PL: That's interesting. Now the Wars over, that was September of 1945 they signed the peace treaty.

JK: Well and in October of 1945, it was late in October I got my discharge papers I was going to return State side. I had to go over to Samar over by Leyte Gulf. From there I caught a transport back to the States and turned back into Portland, Oregon and there went by train transport back to Toledo Beach on Long Island, that's where I was discharged.

PL: Then what happened? I read somewhere that you were in the reserves.

JK: Yes, well you could be called back.

PL: I see, you had to stay in the reserves, I had to stay in four years too after.

JK: Yes two years, but I didn't have to go back in again. But then I got back and I went to work at Noble Wood.

PL: Where you married while you were in the service?

JK: No I got married in May of 1946, [Unclear] I married her and we had three children.

PL: Where are your children now?

JK: The oldest one is in Texas, she works for GTE she has a real good job with them. Mary Lou, she's over in Waterford she work for an employment agency out there she's got a good job. Then Joni, she's over in Albany. Yes, I have three daughters and I have a six grandchildren and one great grandchild.

PL: You went to work for Noble Wood, you stayed right at the Machine Shops?

JK: I worked there until they closed, I became a foreman there and from there I went to Oak Industries and that when they bought out this tripoint on Long Island. Three of us went down there to machine Teflon, that's what the tripoint did they worked with Teflon. They kept me down there for a few weeks and then I got back up here and they opened up the plant here in Hoosick Falls. We worked there until it closed and Oak Industries was bought out by Signalton and I worked there until I retired.

PL: Is there anything else? I mean that was an interesting story to learn about your family. What else can you tell us about Hoosick Falls?

JK: Well the house that we live in right now was built by Jim Miller, in fact the Miller Hose Company was named after him. That's where the Polish Hall is today, that was the Miller Hose Company. When they were building the High School by the Walt Greywood Mansion they tore down the library part of the Mansion. Jim was building the house that I live in now and I have the fire place, and the stain glass windows that I have now all came out of the Mansion.

PL: And there all in your house?

JK: Yes, there in the house right now.

PL: That's really historic. Is there anything else that you would like to say for the record? You told a great story and we appreciate it, thank you very much.

JK: Okay Phil.