

**Keith Baker
Veteran**

**Interviewed by Senator Patty Richie's Office
Oswego County Legislative Office Building**

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KB: Well I was in the infantry for 7 months before I got kicked out. I had, well I got talked my way into serving. I had polio when I was a kid, 14 months old and they were taking anybody then so they started limiting service. There was three of us from (unclear) went in and we went through basic then got transferred to general service right back to (unclear) and then all over again through basics. Then I lasted another few months and then went to a camp down in Alabama and about that time my leg was just about shot and I tried to get transferred to tanks or artillery and they wouldn't let me and they put me out. Two weeks after that I was headed to Africa as a merchant marine. So I was a merchant marine artist (unclear).

INT: So tell me about some memories that you have serving overseas...

KB: I went to a lot of parts of Africa. Casa Blanca, Oran, Arzew, Algiers, Bizerte, and Tunis. Then we supplied up in Sicily and then we run back and forth to Anzio Beach Head that winter and as a matter of fact in Oran one of the guys I was in the Army with was from Fulton. He joined the rangers and the first two ranger battalions, the first and second got caught in a trap in (unclear) and they got whipped out and he was in the force. The force went in to rescue any guy they could and uh by the time they got threw they lost most of their guys. When I ran into them he just joined the Special Forces office at Canadian/American outfit. They told me something big was coming up and the next day they took off and sent off to Beachhead and took Rome. But soon that was it by the end of the invasion with Southern France but, that was nothing like Normandy. I went in, the next trip was in England and I was there Christmas day in 1943 or 1944 and the next trip was in Antwerp, Belgium. They were buzz bombing it trying to shock Antwerp (unclear). Then I went back and there were Indian sailors on the west coast so I went over there. I got out of Seago Antwerp (unclear) Holland three barges from San Francisco to enemy (unclear). There was gasoline barges and we ended up in Guam. They would not let us ashore there apparently we would get tangled up so they had us going around the island for three days and finally he set us up where we unloaded. Then we picked up a destroyer at the Newcomb which is this one (pointed at hat). They had four suicides planned and had forty two people killed and I have pictures of them. I was going to bring them down but could not locate them right off. We towed that back and we towed a BC that had a suicide planted, an LCS that had a suicide planted and another AM that had a suicide planted. So we didn't tow them all away, we towed some of them part way then somebody else came with another tow and logged half our tow. We towed the destroyer

to Pearl Harbor. Then we picked them up again and dropped them at San Francisco the day the war was over.

INT: How'd you find you find out the war was over?

KB: Well it was on all the news.

INT: So that's how you found out? Everyone else basically?

KB: Yeah

INT: Going back to Christmas Day of 44 did you go on shore then? Or?

KB: Oh I was on shore then.

INT: Oh you were?

KB: I was in Bristol England.

INT: And had that been bombed out?

KB: It was pretty bombed out pretty good.

INT: And what was that like to see all that destruction.

KB: Ah I saw a lot worse over to Cagliari, Sardinia because they pattered bombed that place. You could barely walk through each building. It was a lot of buildings knocked down.

INT: And what did you do on shore?

KB: Oh, whatever a sailor does I guess.

INT: Find a nice gin mill?

KB: I wasn't a drinker so I didn't go for that but the guys used to like me go with them so I could get them back to the ship. Especially down in Africa. You get in a Kasbah oh boy that was murder.

INT: What was that like? What part of Africa?

KB: The northern part of Danita porters. You see most of Africa was owned by French then and all the kasbahs were off limits but the guys wanted to look for some women so. Even they weren't drunk enough to handle those guys. We got lost there down in Tunis and its getting dark and the streets were about this wide and then there's overhanging balconies and I was getting worried because we had to get out of there and I ran into MP and I could've kissed him. So I told him, how did we get out here. He said get out of here, we are losing a guy a week in here. So one of the guys that was my buddy, he was an older guy. He'd been in World War 1 and he was a nice guy and then he got to drinking he was one of the guys that was miserable drinking. We got back to the (unclear) hotel. We didn't have a place to sleep so we slept in chairs. He says I, going back and I says don't. We're losing a guy a week. He says I don't care and that's the last time I've ever saw him.

INT: Now were you walking or were you driving to these streets?

KB: No we were walking.

INT: And what do the natives, you know?

KB: They were alright except they would knife you just for what you had on.

INT: Did you feel safe going to shore?

KB: Well yeah because you always went to shore in a group.

INT: Is there always one memory during that time that you will always think back to? Is there like that one long lasting I don't know about favorite memory but, something you always think of?

KB: I guess when I ran into the dining room pony on the Anzio Beachhead. He's still living, he lives in Panama City, Florida.

INT: Oh and you keep in contact with him?

KB: Yeah.

INT: Oh wow. That is amazing you've ran into somebody.

KB: I ran into quite a few as a matter a fact when we converted into carrying troops on this one ship, one guy another friend of mine from high school was in there as a troop.

INT: Did you know he was overseas?

KB: Pardon?

INT: Did you know he was overseas?

KB: No he was. We picked him up in Philadelphia. You know a funny thing we converted to carrying troops five hundred and we loaded ammunition and the number of foreign pipe holes up even floor but I would never understand that. Paul Hamilton had the same thing we did and they got hit with a bomb that just exploded. Six hundred guys were on that ship. I talked to guys who were in that convoy. We were the next convoy. I talked to guys that were in that convoy that said they had to wash body parts and everything off the decks to get it cleaned off.

INT: Just random draw of why they got him and not you?

KB: Well I was in the convoy in the back and they made an attack and that was it.

INT: When did you discharge? Was it right after the war or was...

KB: Oh I stayed in for a while. As a matter a fact that's what I wanted to do all my life is going to the sea anyways. I ran into a friend of mine, he was neighbor radio operator on Seago and (unclear) we were towing the crew back and ran into him in Rochester up to a meeting one time. I didn't know that he lived around here and he said well he lived in Indiana and then he went to Purdue University and he got a job at Holcomb for a whole

summer. Anyway ended up with Xerox and as a matter a fact he set up the first assembly line the. We were friends from that point on.

INT: Well that's a small world.

KB: Well anyways we got in touch with this Newcomb that was having a reunion so we got in touch with them asked if we can come and gosh we went to three different reunions they had and it was great talking to those guys where they were where they got hit and was amazing it was still afloat.