

Glenn E. Kersten Oral History Interview

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Hansley: Today September 29, 2012. This is the Pritzker Military Library Oral History Program. I am Chris Hansley, and I will be doing an interview with Glenn Kersten, who was on a submarine from 1971 to '77. Glenn thanks for coming in this morning, we appreciate you giving us your story.

Kersten: My pleasure.

Hansley: Due to your service on a U.S. submarine, we will appreciate the fact that for security reasons that may still be in place today, if you are unable to answer any questions. We will understand that. Could please tell us when and where you were born? And what is like growing up in that area?

Kersten: I was born in Milwaukee, in 1949. I don't remember too much about it, because I was very small and we left the city when I was roughly 6 years old. To me it was lots of parks and a pleasant place to grow up. We were actually living in Wauwatosa which is a suburb of Milwaukee. From there my Dad had a job in Seymour, Indiana, working with a type of glass bead that could be used as reflective surfaces on stop signs and that sort of thing. We moved to Seymour which is a small town in Southern Indiana. I enjoyed life very much there. I think I was one class ahead of John Cougar Mellencamp. We went to the same school, but I really didn't know him at the time. In the middle of third grade we moved to

South Bend, Indiana, which is where I basically grew up. My Dad worked at Uniroyal and I went through high school in South Bend. Good years.

Hansley: When did you move to the Chicago area?

Kersten: Not until much later, after I had gone to college and the Navy and gone back to college. And then to the University of Illinois, that's when I met my wife and we were looking for library jobs. She's a librarian also. So at that time we went to Riverdale and settled down there.

Hansley: During the '60s there were protests going on while you were in high school about the Vietnam War. What did your opinions of the protests, the protesters and the reaction of the government, what was that?

Kersten: It was very personal. I knew that sooner or later I'd probably be going into the military with the draft looming. And especially in college I noticed these were very tumultuous years. There were demonstrations out at the quad at Purdue where I was going to school. That happened at least twice a week during those years. I knew before too much longer, I'd be losing my deferment. And decided, like my Dad, to volunteer for the Navy, before I was volunteered for service in Vietnam.

Hansley: What were you studying in college at Purdue?

Kersten: I began with Chemical Engineering. Unfortunately I have a tendency toward laziness, and the first year and a half I sort of coasted. But then things got much tougher when I started taking courses P-chem and Advanced Chemical

Engineering and I decided, I'm too far behind, either that or I'm too dumb and it's not going to happen. I switched to journalism at that time, and graduated after 4 years with a degree in journalism, a BA.

Hansley: Did you have a job while you were in college?

Kersten: I worked in the dormitory kitchens, as a waiter. That's the only main job during the school year. In between semesters, I was working at Uniroyal actually. My Dad got me a part-time job there working for U.S Rubber later to be known as Uniroyal, in South Bend.

Hansley: Where did you enlist?

Kersten: I enlisted in South Bend. But they gave me two weeks to settle my affairs or whatever. I actually reported to duty here in Chicago, and we all got on a bus. Because I was probably the only one at the time who had a college degree, they put me in charge of the bus, the group on the bus, which meant absolutely nothing. I mean we just got on the bus and went to Great Lakes from there. I went through recruit training at Great Lakes.

Hansley: Did your Dad give you any special advice?

Kersten: Not that I recall. He also had his recruit training at Great Lakes. He remembered it as being very hot while he was there. I wound up going in the middle of winter, it was bitterly cold. His experiences were quite different than mine. But both of us did a lot of marching as is normal in a recruit training program. I remember loving the fact that I could eat as much as I wanted, and despite all the other guys

complaining about the food, I for the most part I loved the food and having 2-3 desserts a meal was just great for me. Fortunately I don't tend put on too much weight.

Hansley: During basic training they keep you moving anyway.

Kersten: Yes, exactly. We'd burn off the calories for the most part.

Hansley: Having graduated from college, you were a little older than a lot of the enlistees. Did they consider you more like an older brother or just one of the guys?

Kersten: I think they held me in a little more respect than usual. In the Company that I was part of, the Recruit Training Company, I was assigned to tutor some of the guys who were a little bit slower in learning some of the classes. By the end of the recruit training I was voted the so called Honor Man of the Company. Which doesn't really mean anything except that I didn't have to march in parade during the closing ceremonies. I got to make coffee for the Commanding Officer. Since I'd never made coffee before, it was a challenge. But, he seemed to like the results. Overall I just remember it being very cold, a lot of classes, [and] a lot of coarse language which I was not used to at the time. Being in the Navy I soon got used to it. That's my main memories.

Hansley: In the early '70s, how long was recruit training?

Kersten: It's almost 35 years now and I'm not exactly sure, I'm thinking it was approximately 3 months. That would be my best guess. I think there were about 80 guys in each company if I remember correctly. I remember our Company

Commander, was a Master Chief Boatswain's mate. Very gruff, had to be, because, most of these guys are kids, who are coming in. Some of them really resented that fact that they had to be there. Everything had to be done exactly perfectly. I remember just having to fold clothes in a very specific way. The whole object of course was to just to get people to do what they're told to do, in the way they're told to do it. It was just that a lot of things you were doing, didn't seem to make sense at the time. I think the main lesson was, do what you're told without thinking about it.

Hansley: When did you volunteer for submarine duty?

Kersten: I think, again I'm not quite sure of the time period. Immediately after recruit training I went into Electrician's mate A School, which also was at Great Lakes. I believe at that point they had the whole class or all of the classes march in to hear a lecture by a submariner. Who was in his dress whites, really handsome looking and dashing and debonair and he gave us all the benefits of being on a submarine. You know, you get extra pay, the equivalent of hazardous duty pay, is submarine pay. You can get a little extra moola every month. Just the excitement and the exhilaration of being on a submarine, really gave us a marketing pep talk there. A lot of people joined I think basically on that basis. You had to have a certain, had to have scored a certain amount points on the basic exam, military exam, I forget what it's called now, in order to get this advanced training. Apparently I had scored high enough. It sounded good to me. I had built a plastic submarine when I was a kid, a model submarine. There was *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* on TV and that looked pretty cool. I thought, well that sounds like fun. The only main

drawback of course was that in order to go on submarines I had to extend. I think it was at the same time, I decided to join the nuclear program. That was another thing that this officer had really pounded on us. That if you're a nuke, you'll have all sorts of opportunities after you get out of the Navy, because you've got this specialized training, you could go to nuclear power plants, which later turned out to be quite true. But at any rate, I did have to extend extra, I think the basic time was 4 years, and then an additional two years was added on because I was getting the nuclear training. It did take almost a year and a half to get all the training I required to get into the nuclear power program.

Hansley: How did you decide on being an electrician after being in college for chemical engineering?

Kersten: There again, I still had a scientific bent, and my Father had been radioman, when he was in the Navy during World War II. He still is very good with all sorts of technical things. I wanted to have some useful trade that I could depend on. Electrical training seemed like an obvious thing. If I were to go into the nuclear program, I had to go into one of four different ratings at the time. You were either going to be a Machinist's mate, working with machinery; an Electrician; an Electronics Technician or, at the time it was called, an IC man. I think it's Internal Communications or something. During my time in the service they sort of got rid of that IC rating. So you had to be one of those three and I guess I didn't score high enough to become an Electronics Technician, so electrical training became my goal.

Hansley: What was your first assignment after your electrical training?

Kersten: I was sent, well the time of year, it was too early to go to nuclear power school, so they sent me to the USS Sperry, which is a submarine tender, out at San Diego. A huge ship or at least it was huge to me. It's not as big as modern day cruise ships, but the function of the Sperry was to service submarines that pulled up alongside. Sometimes you'd have two or three submarines stacked up alongside the thing, the ship. They would provide shore power, electrical power to each of those submarines, they would fix anything that was broken, [and] they would provide supplies for the submarine patrols. They brought on food or any other sort of materials that had to be replenished on the submarine. I wasn't directly involved with that. I was put into the electrical crew, and I did basic electrical maintenance for the first two weeks. And then somebody walked into the, our electrical office in the morning and said, "Anybody here got any lifeguard training?" I raised my hand, I had a Junior Lifesaving Badge, and he said, the lifeguard on base broke his arm, we need a temporary replacement. For the rest of the time on the Sperry I was actually assigned on base as a lifeguard. I did almost nothing there, it was just fun. I was very fortunate. After the Sperry, then I was sent to nuclear power training, in Vallejo, California. That was a six month course. That was all basically book learning. There was no, we didn't actually train with the mechanical systems, which was to come later. We learned about nuclear power. How reactors work, how the reactor drives the steam turbine, which drives the submarine, or in the case of the nuclear powered carrier, the screws for the carrier. A lot of intensive training at that time, at that time of course you'll probably

remember we were in big competition with the Russians. A lot of what we did was supposedly very secret. I had a secret clearance. We were not allowed to take study materials home with us I lived off base, [and] that was punished very severely if you did something like that. Even though we weren't learning really anything to terribly damaging to the US defense at that time, I don't think. But anyhow we all took it seriously and obeyed the rules. We spent the day on base and then went off and enjoyed life in a regular apartment during that time. I stayed with 3 other guys in a house, we rented a small house. That went on for 6 months, beautiful weather down there. And after that, I was sent to nuclear prototype training, in Idaho Falls, Idaho, where the weather was not good. From a life of basic enjoyment, it was a life of cruelty in my opinion for another six months. Nuclear proto-type training, they bussed us out very early in the morning, it was still dark out and it was winter time in Idaho. They bused us about 45 miles to the sight where they had, either two or three proto-types. The prototype was an effort before nuclear submarines were built, to learn how they would act in real conditions, without jeopardizing lives of crew members. They built a half of a submarine in a big concrete basin, that they could fill with water, they could, the nuclear reactor was inside the prototype, they could tilt this whole thing and down, side to side and see how the reactor would react under these different conditions. It was amazing to see something this large inside a big enclosure. I had no experience with major industry at this time. It just looked humongous in this big concrete basin. By the time I got there, all the basic testing had been done and so it was used as a training facility. Everything worked. All of the electrical

systems worked, they had a reactor, so you would sit in front of an engineering— basically the engineering office. You would have three watch stands; you have the throttleman, who operates the amount of steam that's coming out to turn the propellers, that throttle man [worked at] the steam plant control panel – SPCP. And you'd have an electrician who operated the electrical systems, and you have the electronics technician, who operated the reactor. They were actually operating the control rods that go up and down and change the amount of radioactivity that's being generated. That turns into heat which turns the water into steam, the pressurized water into steam, which then drives the screws. In addition, that steam was also used to turn turbines that would provide electricity for the ship. We, among other things we were taught some of the basic submarine operations. I vividly remember having to memorize the locations of all of the pressurized air connectors. Now if you're in a situation in an enclosed space, like a submarine and a fire breaks out, you have to have some way to breathe obviously. They would have these EABs, Emergency Air Breathing apparatus. They were basically just goggles with a hose attached to it. Not a goggle, but a whole face plate with a hose attached to it, a short hose. You would plug this into one of these hundred pound [air] connectors and you could breathe until you disconnected it, then you could run to the next one. Well some of the sadistic instructors, if you weren't getting it fast enough, would force you to plug in, "Ok that's enough." [I ran] down to the next one, which if you didn't know where it was you were in trouble. You'd jerk it out and find the next one. You were making believe you were making your way to the location of the fire, to be a fire

fighter. But, that was very nerve racking. I suddenly realized I didn't know exactly where all these things were and I better learn them fast. Much of an electrician's life is taking readings of controls. And in fact that's true of most of the crew. You would take readings of various gages and switches and that sort of thing, and write it down on the log sheet. It was mostly somewhat a boring routine. But at the time I was just learning this stuff, so it wasn't boring – yet! I learned the basics and there was in addition to that practical training. We also had even more intense nuclear training. And this is where we really learned the nuts and bolts of how to run a nuclear submarine, or at least the engineering parts of it. We had a lot of classes. I was, again I started out being kind of lazy, and taking my time. A fire was burnt under my butt and I decided I better do this now. I did graduate a little bit slower than some of the other guys, but I did finish the training. I was so glad to get out of Idaho. It was just very cold. You were on an 18 hour schedule which mimicked what would later be the schedule on the submarine. You would be working, you know, noon to six a.m., one day or one week. Then you'd get a couple of days off, then the next time you'd be working from 6 p.m. to noon the next day for another week, then you'd get six days off. It was shift work basically. My body never did get used to that. That's how it went for six months. I was never so glad to leave a place in my life. In between each of these assignments I'd get some leave time to go home and enjoy life again. Then we would go back and be reassigned somewhere else. My next assignment was Charleston, South Carolina. I was assigned to the SSBN 657, the Francis Scott Key, which is a nuclear powered submarine. There are two types of nuclear

powered submarine. There're Fast Attack submarines which do a lot of fancy foot work you might say. They would have relatively short patrols, special operations. They might follow Russian submarines or play tag with Russian submarines. They might secretly glide into foreign harbors and that sort of thing without being caught. They might lay communications lines on the ocean floor or something. All sorts of things they would do. But, on my type of submarine, which was a ballistic missile submarine, also known as a Boomer, we basically went out to sea and the object was not to be found by anyone else. You could not be found by, hopefully, by other submarines, or by satellites or planes flying overhead. The whole object was to stay undetected, because we were supposed to be a nuclear deterrent. The whole object was to prevent another country, and mostly we thought about Russia, from getting the advantage and giving us a surprise attack, a surprise nuclear attack in particular. Because we were undetected, or hoped we were and had a battery of 12, now I'm forgetting, I think there were 12 ballistic missiles or at least 12 tubes on the Francis Scott Key. I'd have to check my notes but, at any rate, the object was to stay undetected and act a nuclear deterrent. We didn't do any special operations normally. From what I was told, we would be assigned a particular grid area in the North Atlantic. We would swim around in that grid area, which is a fairly large area for several days and then we'd be assigned another grid area; move to that and go in circles for a while. It was not real exciting from that standpoint, but that's what happened. Anyhow, to get back to basics; I went to Charleston and was assigned to the Gold Crew. Each ballistic missile submarine, also known as a Boomer, had two crews, a Gold Crew and a

Blue Crew. I was lucky enough to be assigned to the Gold Crew because we had a very good Captain and a good crew, who had already earned some high efficiency ratings and that sort of thing. Later on that became a useful thing in my opinion. But anyhow, the crew was just finishing its off patrol time. Now, you would go out to sea for about three months and then you'd come back for three months. But all of our operations were conducted out of Rota, Spain. The whole crew got on board a plane, a commercial plane, and we flew across to Rota. Then we spent a couple of days waiting for the Blue Crew to return the submarine. Then there was turnover, so we would go on. Both crews would officially turn over the systems, you'd go through and take inventory and make sure nothing's missing. We'd find out if anything was broken, needed repair. The Blue Crew left and flew back to Charleston and they would have their off patrol time. That's the way it went for six patrols, each crew taking time off. My first patrol was, and each patrol as I said, is about three months. The undersea time, under water time, was roughly 80 days. When you first take over the boat you would go out to sea, for a couple of days just to test the systems, make sure everything is working correctly. You would have various system tests. You would make sure that the crew was trained in all of the systems, in all of their tasks. The most exciting part was called angles and dangles. They would take the submarine out to past the coastal shelf to deep ocean. We would submerge, dive at a fairly steep angle, go down to test depth, which I guess I'm supposed to say was below 800 feet and then level out, then surface again, coming back at a very steep angle. It was very interesting; a 30 degree angle doesn't sound like too much unless the floor is actually at that angle.

You could watch stuff that, if you hadn't secured it properly, things would actually roll down the aisles, between machinery, and the officers would obviously get a little peeved at you. That was exciting. Going down to test depth was also a little nerve racking, because you start to hear a little creaking in the hull. You think about all the pressure that's outside the pressure hull on the submarine. The fact that one little leak could sink the ship in not too much time. Of course a lot of submarine training has to do with emergency preparation. You know what to do in case of a seawater leak, a flooding emergency, or an electrical emergency, loss of electricity, or reactor shutdown, reactor scram or fire. I think those are the main casualties that we prepared for. For the two days we would take it out and do all of these tests, angle and dangles, I'm trying to think of anything else. Basically the crew was getting to know each other and getting to depend on each other for things. After that we came back in to port, to Rota, Spain, and at the time the U.S. had a big base there which we rented from Spain. At the time that was, I can't think of his name, the Spanish tyrant, can you think of it?

Hansley: No, I can't think of it right now. [Francisco Franco – ed.]

Kersten: Anyhow, if you walked into town in Rota, you very likely see guys with sort of funny looking hats and sub-machine guns walking around. You knew you didn't mess with these fellows. I don't remember hearing any stories about any U.S. seamen getting into trouble, but obviously you don't mess around with guys with sub-machine guns. I'm sorry I can't think of the name of the dictator in Spain at the time. Rota was a nice little town and I found it very interesting. We would get

a little time between patrols and to wander around town and meet the Spanish people. One of my friends found this little bar, where there was a singer from England, and I basically just fell in love with this woman, but nothing happened. I knew no Spanish except for “Una Coca Cola por favor.” That was the limit of my linguistic abilities at the time. My first patrol, we went back out, after all of the repairs were made and all of the supplies were in. How, incidentally before I leave that, bring supplies on to a submarine is quite an adventure. It’s like a bucket brigade. You’re going out for 75 to 80 days and obviously people need to eat during that time. A lot of food was brought on, so much food that it would not fit into the storage area. You would have layers of cans covering some of the forward passageways. You actually walk on these for the first couple of weeks until they finished up all that food. Bringing the food on was sort of like a bucket brigade. You would bring on box after box after box, you’d hand it to the next fellow in line and he’d hand it to you. Most of these things it just got to be routine after a while. Submarines had to find a way to get rid of their waste. They could not—just in case something classified was included in the waste they had to make sure it couldn’t be found. They had a trash disposal unit onboard. In my reading apparently they do something different now. But at that time they actually had these galvanized cylinders. It was about three feet tall and was brought aboard as sheets of galvanized tin, you’d have to bend this around into a cylinder and then put a bottom on the thing and put into this trash disposal compactor. Into that you would put one or two of these so called TDU weights, Trash Disposal Units Weights, TDUs, real heavy lead weights, or maybe it was iron, I really don’t

remember, probably iron. Lead would be too expensive. These weights were brought on in boxes, were I think probably about 50 pounds, really small boxes, about eight inches cubic, but real heavy. You would be carrying, remember the bucket brigades; you'd be moving these things from side to side, picking it up from one guy and carrying it to the next guy. You'd have the whole crew, all the enlisted men at least out there doing this. Sooner or later, it occurs to some joker to remove the TDU weights from one of these boxes, and you're used to carrying, you've just lifted and transferred about 30 of these boxes, and it's real heavy, and all of sudden somebody hands you another box that looks identical and whooph, it goes up in the air, because it's been emptied of the weights. Obviously, you had to have a crude sense of humor to be on these boats. But there were time when we had a lot of fun. We went out to sea; I spent the entire first patrol qualifying for submarines. To qualify for submarines is also known as "Earning Your Dolphins." I brought in my dolphin pin today. It shows that I have one Gold Star and one Silver Star, which means, the Gold Star means five patrols and the Silver means one more, so, a total of six patrols. The Dolphins are an emblem of that fact that you have some expertise in knowledge about submarines; that you can be depended on to know what to do in case of an emergency. That's basically what the whole thing is. It's a mark of respect if you earn your Dolphins. You are respected as a real submariner. Usually your first patrol goes toward that. You would have to learn the basics of every single system on the submarine. And that includes not only the engineering spaces where I was spending most of my time, but you'd have to know about how sonar works, how the steersman and the

planesman operate their systems. How we keep track and how we navigate under water, how what happens in the case of flooding, what steps are taken to protect yourself or to save the submarine, what happens if sea water gets into the battery compartment, which is very bad karma, because chlorine gas is generated.

Basically you have to know the basics of every system and then be tested by an expert in that system. Usually you would go to a 1st Class Petty Officer or a Chief Petty Officer to get approved on that system. You would have a final interview with three, usually, Chiefs and/or Officers who would ask you random questions about safety and submarine systems. If you passed that you got your Dolphins, so that was the big deal. The first patrol, exciting, dangerous, interesting, after that things got very quiet, very dull, very monotonous, so patrols two, three and four were monotony personified, because there's not much to do on a submarine.

You're on an 18-hour watch rotation, not 1-day, 18-hour rotation. You might get up at midnight, work until, you would stand watch for the first six hours, the next six hours was either training or maintenance, in my case electrical maintenance and that sort of thing. Usually that occupied the first two hours. Then you had maybe three hours to goof off. You could play cards, you could read, you could listen to music, you could watch a movie—at the time of course, nothing was digital. They brought along films, current films and that was a great stress relief because you could sort of take yourself out of the boredom of submarine life. That second six hours was maintenance, training, and the last six hours was usually [for] sleep. We were in bunks that were three high. They were made of, I think, aluminum. Underneath the mattress pad was an aluminum sheet that you could

lift up and there was about a four inch space underneath your mattress where you could store your clothing. On a ballistic missile submarine, we also had a little cubical space where we could store other things. If you brought along a cassette player to listen to music or your book collection, that sort of thing, you would keep that there. Each of these bunks, again they were three high, and you didn't have much space between your bunk and the one above you, not a lot of privacy there, but there was a little orange curtain that you could pull across and sleep in relative quiet. They would have lights out most of the time. Every so often they would call a field day and you would have to get up in the middle of your sleep segment cycle and clean equipment. That was not much fun, but at least it was a little variety, mixed in with the monotony. That's the way life went. My first qualification was Auxiliary Electrician Aft. I was lucky in that I got to be a roving watch stander. I would basically walk all around the engineering sections, looking for electrical problems, looking for actually any sort of problems. Each space had a regular watch stander who would pretty much stay there, but I got to rove throughout the engineering sections. I also had to take a lot of readings. I would walk into the maneuvering area, that's the name I was trying to think of, walk into maneuvering—remember when I was back at the prototype school I talked about the throttleman, the electric plant control panel and the reactor plant control panel, RPCP. In maneuvering you also have all, just banks of switches that have gages and electrical monitors. You would have to take these readings by pressing little toggle switches down, and I got real good at that. I could pull down four at a time, and quickly mark down the things. Well nothing ever changed on these readings,

they were supposed to be electrical or heat readings on the various parts of the reactor plant, that sort of thing. Fortunately nothing ever changed. You'd get very quickly at seeing, "Yeah, it's the same, that's the same," doing four at a time. In addition I would fill in if the throttleman, I was also qualified as a throttleman, who stood in front of this big silver steering wheel it looked like. But the purpose of this steering wheel was not to steer, it was to open up the steam vents, letting more steam into the turbines which caused the turbines to run faster, which caused the shaft to turn faster. At the end of the shaft, outside the submarine was the screw that gave us propulsion. Most of the time, we cruised along at 20 knots, a nuclear submarine can go faster than that, but that was our cruising speed. The throttle man's watch station was one of the most boring of all, because he basically had to sit there hour after hour after hour doing nothing but talk to the other guys in the maneuvering area. I would relieve him to go to the restroom. The only thing the throttle man, the important thing the throttle man had to do was to take a reading of the shaft, the number of turnings the shaft had taken, at exactly on the hour. One of my buddies on the boat was from Redwood City, California. The officers and the other watch standers would often conspire to get him talking about his hometown which he loved to talk about, Redwood City. Right about five minutes to the hour they'd get him off track and he'd realize it's five after, "Oh damn now I missed the reading." That was a moment of great hilarity among the crew. That was forever after known as going to Redwood City if you missed your shaft reading. I guess you might say we were getting the shaft at that point. I was also qualified for the electrical control panel, and I would

relieve that person there too. I was not qualified RPCP until probably my fourth patrol in. In addition to wandering around the engineering spaces, and checking things out, I would act as watch relief. The maneuvering area was a very small room. It was actually right about the size of this room, which is what 8x15, something about in that area. You'd have the three watch panels: SPCP—Steam Plant Control Panel; the Electric Plant Control Panel; and the RPCP—Reactor Plant, and behind them sat the Engineering officer of the Watch, otherwise known as the EOOW. And the Engineering officer of the Watch was usually a young officer and qualified nuclear, he went through the same training that all the rest of us did. But he was in command of the situation. There were good officers, there were some officers that were not so hot, but everybody was pretty bright. We had to be fairly bright to be in the nuclear program. It really was a pleasure meeting with these fellows and dealing with them for the most part. I mean, there are always some people that you don't care to live with, but for the most part we had a very good crew. The only things that broke up the tedium were the occasional alarms— which came most of which were training alarms fortunately. We'd have, you'd hear the diving alarm, everybody's familiar with that from World War II movies, [and] there were other alarms. You'd have a missile emergency alarm, in case something went wrong with one of the missiles. There was a collision alarm, another one you've heard from movies I'm sure. There were flooding alarms, and I know I'm forgetting one or two. There were a variety of them. Even if you were fast asleep, you had to immediately get out of your bunk and get to your watch station. Throw on some pants if you could. But the object was to get back to your

watch station as quickly as possible. My watch station was all the way back in the far end of the ship. I was responsible for running the battery operated propulsion unit – EPM – Electrical Propulsion Motor. That was actually an important watch station, but it was very isolated. It was all the way back in the engineering compartment because it had to be hooked up to the shaft somehow. You would engage the shaft, in case the nuclear power plant lost power, the reactor scrambled and was no longer able to generate steam. You had to have some way to keep the shaft turning. That was the reason for the EPM. If an alarm went off I had to quickly run from the forward part of the boat, roughly 350 feet, through all of these, whatcha macallits, hull...

Hansley: ...Hatches?

Kersten: Hatches! Thank you. I couldn't think of the word, watertight hatches. There were three of them I had to go through in order to get back to my thing. That was fine as long as they were all open. But if they had been closed for some reason, you might not get back there and somebody else had to take your place. The reason they might be closed is if you had a major steam leak or something in the engineering compartment and you obviously had to close off the hazards from the rest of the ship. That was my other major duty, and also I had to be stationed there during the time when we took the boat out to sea and back. I'm very susceptible to seasickness unfortunately. A submarine, while it's very stable under water, is not stable on top of the water. There is a lot of rocking motion, side to side, and there is some forward and backward, fore and aft. Invariably I would get sick during those times. I would be stretched out on my back just moaning until we got

out to sea. We would submerge and everything was okay after that. I'd go to bed for a few hours and I'd be over my seasickness. For the first couple of patrols I'd never heard of Dramamine. I didn't know what that was. I got smart and started taking it. It was a whole lot better after that. But those first few patrols were not pleasant, going in and out of port. This went on for the first few patrols. Because we had had high efficiency ratings, our crew and boat was selected to do some special operations. And we did some hide-and-peek operations with ASW vessels and planes; ASW stands for Anti-Submarine Warfare. If these planes flying overhead were able to find us, obviously the jig was up. But, if we were able to hide from them and not be seen either by the surface ships or by the flying threats we were doing well. The nice thing was we got out to the middle of the ocean, middle of the Atlantic, and there were a couple of days when we had nothing to do while we waited for the task force to get out there, the ASW task force. All of us got a chance to get up on the surface of the submarine, as we were surfaced obviously, and just enjoy sunshine and fresh air. You can't imagine how good it is, after you've been cooped up in a submarine for several weeks, to smell sea air. Fresh and see sunshine. It's just—it's like going to heaven. I can't think of any other better description. You would pop the hatch and you'd smell that glorious fresh air. Now obviously on a nuclear submarine, you have to have a way to get oxygen. They had an oxygen generator. They would actually run electricity through seawater and generate hydrogen and oxygen. The hydrogen was pumped overboard I believe. But the oxygen was used to supplement our own air. We had carbon dioxide scrubbers which would get rid of the carbon dioxide that you

exhale. But, in a submarine, you're still breathing hydraulic fuel oil and fuel oil and all the smell of 120 guys on the boat. At that time there was...you were still allowed to smoke, so a lot of guys smoked cigarettes or cigars even on the boat. We had a very excellent ventilation system but again, it's not the same as being out in the fresh air. When we were allowed to get up there, on this special operation, it was just glorious. I remember one guy manufacturing a make-shift kite. I actually have a color slide of the guy flying it off the surface of the submarine in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Another fellow went to the machine shop and created some sort of hook out of some spare metal, and managed to finagle a steak from the mess crew; [he] tried to fish for sharks off the side, never caught anything, but it was, years later of course it makes for an interesting story. That was such a nice change. We had two or three days of surface operations and then we steamed back to Rota, I think. We might have gone all the way to Charleston, I forget. On one of those patrols we went back to Charleston, or Virginia Beach or it was someplace where they were doing overhauls and we had to have some new equipment. I think that's the case. We started in Rota took it across and then went to maybe Groton, Connecticut, I forget, one of those ports. They put in dry dock while we spent our off patrol time. The last, my very last patrol we also were lucky enough to have mid-ocean operations also. Again, I got to go up on deck in the middle of it. Those were really fun experiences, after being cooped up. By the end of my sixth patrol I was really tired of being a submarine sailor. I just wanted out at any cost. I had no trouble resisting the offers to extend your time and have your choice of sea duty

anywhere in the world. I was not at all tempted to stay in the Navy at that time.
After my sixth patrol I left the Navy basically.

Hansley: A couple of questions. How do you stay in contact with family and friends?
Obviously you can't mail a letter.

Kersten: We, at the time, I think now-a-days they have much better ways to communicate. But at the time, we could not communicate until we came to periscope depth. The periscope had all sorts of fancy antennas up along with it. They could beam short encrypted coded messages up to a satellite and bounce back to the, I don't remember what the name of the operations group the SUBLANT [Submarine Force Atlantic] or something or other. In addition to operational information that was transmitted you would also get short messages for the crew. These were called Family-Grams. Your family was allowed to send you, I think, four or maybe five Family-Grams each patrol. The Family-Gram I think was a maximum of 50 words. It had to be very short. My Dad and Mom, I know, packed a lot of information into those 50 words. "The dog broke a leg but getting better," all sorts of things. "Mark graduated from high school," all of those things, it was just so nice to get a message from home, even as short as that was. There's no way to get packages. We were pretty much isolated for that 75 or 80 days that we were out at sea. We would have some mail waiting for us when we got to port. I don't really remember if I ever got any mail in Rota. I think it all came to Charleston. But those letters were very precious to us. I was always disappointed if my family didn't send all four Family-Grams that they could. A regular civilian had no way of knowing how boring, and I'll be honest, sometimes depressed the crew gets

when you no longer have access to fresh food, fresh air or clean air, and family and friends. I mean obviously you made friends on the boat too, but it's just not quite the same. That's one thing. I forgot to mention too, that most submarines have a half-way night. They would have a special meal prepared, usually surf-and-turf. You would get unlimited steak and lobster, lobster tails. I remember one guy just having a mountain of lobster tails and just really chowing down. We ate family style on the mess decks, you could seat about, I'm remembering, I think about 30 to 40 guys at one time. And they would bake fresh rolls and sweet rolls in the morning and fresh bread and that sort of thing. It wasn't all canned food, but most of it was. Eating was a large part of the enjoyment for me, enjoyable times.

Hansley: The food on board was pretty good?

Kersten: It was pretty good, yes. They had a Chief Petty Officer, who was in charge of the mess decks. You would have regular Seaman who were qualified submariners who would act as the cooks. Most of the food was pretty good. It was all made in large quantities and it was pretty decent. I never felt like I was starving onboard. Fresh milk ran out after the first two weeks, there was no milk. You would have Kool-Aid which was known as "bug juice" for the most part. Usually there were two different flavors or they might have grape Kool-Aid "bug juice" and some lemonade or iced tea. Usually there was lemonade or iced tea, I guess. And that's about all I remember about the mess decks, plenty of food.

Hansley: When you went on leave, well not really on leave, but for your three months off the boat, what were your assignments?

Kersten: We had to undergo training. We would, at that time; we would take rating exams to advance. I don't know if you're familiar with the Navy ratings, but you started out as a Seaman or Seaman Recruit. You become a Seaman after graduating from Recruit Training School. Then after that if you advance in rank you become a 3rd Class Petty Officer, 2nd, and then 1st Class Petty Officer. To Chief, and then Master Chief, and then there were Warrant Officers. Then you get into the regular officers. By the time I got out of the Navy I was a 1st Class Petty Officer. That was far enough for me. I had no desire to go farther than that. During the off crew times, the entire crew would go to some meetings at least on a weekly basis, I seem to remember. You would have some sort of training lectures. They encouraged you to get other types of education too. If you wanted to take a course in Spanish, which I did actually one of the times I went "off patrol," you were encouraged to do that and given the money to do that. It really didn't improve my language abilities any but I took the course. You would, just like any military organization you'd have to stand inspections every so often, to make sure that you had the proper uniform. Fortunately there was no more marching around. But the rest of the time you were pretty much on your own. It was like an extended vacation. It partly made up for those long underwater patrols, was to have these two and half months of enjoyable—time in beautiful Charleston, South Carolina. You can't knock that town it is beautiful, especially in the spring and summer.

Hansley: You came back to Charleston for your three months?

Kersten: We came back to Charleston. Yes.

Hansley: You didn't stay in Rota?

Kersten: No. No, Rota was usually just a very short time. We would often have a little bit of leave time, that we could take and travel elsewhere in Spain if we wanted. I went on a tour of Sevilla (Spanish for Seville) Spain one time that was a lot of fun. I went to the town where, one of the many towns where, Christopher Columbus was supposedly born. There are several that claim his birthplace. I saw a bull fight while I was there. I was not impressed. In fact I was kind of offended by how brutal it was. But the Spanish people for the most part were very friendly. I remember vividly learning or seeing Spanish teenagers at the time doing this coordinated rhythmic clapping. One guy would be clapping (clapping sounds) and very intricate impressions. There would be a syncopated person, clapping the syncopation to that, and very interesting to me. I don't know if it's still done or that was just something in that time period, very impressive. I went to see a little carnival side show one time in Rota. I was not, I'm not a drinker, so I didn't spend any time in bars like many of the guys did. But I like to walk around and see things. That was my main enjoyment while I was over there.

Hansley: What was your impression of the Spanish people, in how they treated the American military?

Kersten: Most of my experiences come from Rota, where they probably thought of us as a plague. I never had any outright antagonism toward me. I think most of the Spanish people sort of kept their distance. But there were always a couple of

pesky teenagers who wanted to shine your shoes. And I would be walking around in Hush Puppies, which you know, you can't shine those shoes. "Shine your shoes mister?" I forget exactly how they would put it. Sometimes they'd actually follow you around on their knees, trying to start shining your shoes and earn some money that way. But that was by far the minority. For the most part, people treated us very well. I think we spent a lot of money in the stores and in the bars. They came to depend on us at the time. Now the United States no longer has a station in Rota, I understand. But at the time it was big business to some.

Hansley: Were you in uniform when you were on these jaunts?

Kersten: No, on the jaunts, no I would wear civilian clothes at that time. In fact I kind of think we were told not to wear uniforms outside the base. I may be misremembering that, but I think that's what I remember. I don't remember ever going off base without civilian clothes, civvies.

Hansley: When was your tour of duty in Spain over?

Kersten: My last patrol ended in 1977. So that was the last time I saw Rota, Spain. I had a good buddy, a machinist's mate, and he and I took two weeks of leave after the last final patrol and we actually tooled around seven countries, in two weeks. Yes, we pretty much zoomed through the area just to see a bunch of things. We started out in England, and we took one of those very fast ferries across to Belgium. The name of it was a Hydrofoil. It was a Hydrofoil Ferry across to Belgium and then went from there to France, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria; I think I'm missing one or more of the countries. Anyhow, we had very good time. We rented a car, a

little Fiat. We had decided not to drive in England, because we're used to riding on the right hand side. We just had a great time, one of my fondest memories. That was last time I saw Spain. We flew back with the rest of the crew. Actually, we didn't fly back with the crew—this was after they had gone home. We flew home and then we were both mustered out. I think he got out right about the same time I did.

Hansley: Did you have to pay for your own flight home? Or did you take some kind of a military transport?

Kersten: I...that time we did take an Air Force plane back. We left from Frankfurt, Germany and were lucky enough to get an Air Force flight.

Hansley: Where did you come back into the U.S. and where did you actually get discharged from?

Kersten: I think we flew back to Charleston. At least we got back there. I'm not sure if we had to take a commercial flight from Canada after landing there, but at any rate both of us went back to Charleston. In fact I remember Jim and I were getting out at the same time now because he had one of the worst jobs. He was in charge of, remember, this is after we were relieved from submarine duty. They basically just made work for us to do. I was an electrician so I was put to work on the base electrical lab. I helped hookup shore power for some of the submarines. But my buddy Jim got stuck with the lawn mowing crew, which were mostly guys who were, had done something wrong and were in the brig. They had no inclination to

work at all and he just had horrible time at the time. That's where I got out from, Charleston.

Hansley: How did you get back to either Indiana or Chicago?

Kersten: Commercial air flight.

Hansley: Once you got back to Chicago, you had nothing else that needed to be done with the military. You were out?

Kersten: Right. Actually I went back home to South Bend, Indiana. After that I got a part-time job for a few months working for the Century Center, which is a big convention center in downtown South Bend as a maintenance man, doing electrical work, standing watches basically. I did that for about three months until I went back to Purdue; got through the GI Bill, and went back to college to get another degree, this time in Life Sciences. After three years I graduated with a BS in Biology in Life Sciences. By the time I had finished that, I had worked in a lab at Purdue, and had learned enough to know that I really didn't want to teach even though I had been encouraged to do so by my lab professor. I really didn't want to work in a laboratory, a commercial laboratory. I went to the counselor at Purdue and explained my dilemma and she said, "I see you've got a lot of different experiences Glenn. You know you have electrician, you have journalism degrees, you like to write, you've been in the Navy, you're experienced, and you're an older person. Have you ever thought about libraries?" That was almost like a light bulb turned on. That sounds pretty good. I could use a lot of my different experiences in that field. I think I could do pretty well at that. I continued to use

the GI Bill, bless that wonderful advantage, to go back to school, but this time to the University of Illinois, where I graduated with a Master in Library Science, Library and Information Science. From there I was hired as a Reference Librarian for the Harvey Public Library, spent two years there. I worked for, at the time it was called, Suburban Library System, as a Reference Librarian, which was a real great job. That was sort of acting as a reference librarian's reference librarian. Librarians from other public libraries would call us and ask for our assistance. We had the advantage of unlimited time to work on difficult problems. At the time the Internet was still in its infancy. We had a number of databases that we could search. That was a great job, did that for about ten years. Then went to—I was recruited actually—to work at the Tinley Park Public Library, as a Reference Librarian, which pleased me no end, because I live very close to the library. Rather than driving long distances I could now commute in ten minutes or less. That's where I am now.

Hansley: Did any of your siblings go into the military?

Kersten: No, I have one brother. He was fortunate, that he is four academic years behind me. It just so happened that by the time he lost his deferment they were no longer drafting. The draft was no longer in effect. He was very fortunate he did not have to go into the military. He became a chemist. He also went to Purdue, and is doing very well for himself.

Hansley: When you were on your deployments, did you feel any danger at any point in time? Or did you shadow any submarines that you are able to talk about? Or were you even aware that that was happening?

Kersten: Ballistic submarines don't shadow anybody. They just try to hide from everyone. No, we never did that. I think that's the fast attacks that get to play those kinds of games.

Hansley: Do you know if you were ever shadowed?

Kersten: If we were, the lowly enlisted men like myself weren't told. The sonar men probably knew a lot more about what was actually going on. Then obviously the officers, the watch officers and the navigation crew probably knew a lot. But I didn't spend any time in the control room area, except when I was there for some reason for training or something. I don't know really what kinds of secret things were going on. As far as danger, I do remember we had a major steam leak on one occasion. It happened to be while I was watching a movie. Just clearly remember, my best friend at the time, just streaking out of there, as soon as that alarm went off. Because we knew in advance most of the time when there was going to be a test alarm going off. But in this case, we knew this had to be the real thing. In fact, after the alarm went off we also got a message over the "4MC", basically the loud speakers. The officer said a major steam leak in the engine room. My buddy just took off like a streak. He was one of the first ones back there. I think one guy was scalded on his arm a little bit. But they managed to shut off the steam before the leak hurt anybody badly. I'm afraid I really don't remember the details any

more. But, that kind of thing is very scary. I mean everybody's a little shaky after something like that happens, because you have these weeks and weeks and weeks of tedium and boredom and nothing happening. Then adrenalin pumps in. I don't remember any other major problems that I felt in danger. Just going down to test depth, that's the only time when I had the heebie-jeebies.

Hansley: Are you involved in any of the Veterans organizations?

Kersten: I am not. I've been invited but I really... I guess now I'm able to look back at those days with equanimity, but for years and years and years it was just something I wanted to get away from. I just wanted to forget and be a regular guy, a civilian. A lot of things that I just did not enjoy, it was just such a pleasure to get back to the sunlight. And I know a lot of enlisted men would reenlist again and again and again. And they seemed to love that. That type of life. But for me it just was not, not to be.

Hansley: Are you involved with any of the, either the Sperry or the Francis Scott Key crew groups?

Kersten: Sperry, no I've never felt any affiliation with them. The Francis Scott Key has a web-site dedicated to the crew. I have contributed a little bit to that website. They do have reunions every now and again. I've never, my life is so busy now. I don't feel like I have time to do that sort of thing. And to be honest I'm not really inclined to share sea stories with old sailors. Even though I do enjoy reading them, if you ever get a chance for people who are listening to this later on, go to one of these submarine crew websites and read some of the sea stories that they

have. I mean, some of them are hair-raising, some of them are hilarious. I'll give you just one example. I'll try and make it as genteel as I can. The toilets on a submarine are shaped just like a regular toilet. However, they have a ball joint which has a hole through it. And you operate a lever to let the waste go through into the waste tanks below. Ordinarily that's no problem. You turn on a little valve that flushes the water in and that allows the waste to drop down, you turn off the water; you close the ball valve and no problem. Every so often they have to pressurize these tanks to get rid of the waste. You can imagine if you're a drowsy crew member, you just got out of bed, after sleeping three hours, you're really tired, you, just want to go to the restroom, do your business and go back. Even though they have signs clearly posted when they're blowing these tanks, you can very easily, as a drowsy crew member, lift the sign up, go inside, close the door, do your business, open up the ball valve and *whoosh* and you get all this stuff in your face. Almost every patrol there's two or three guys who are lucky enough to have this happen to them. Usually there's some sort of award given to them at the end of the patrol. I was lucky enough to have it happen to me once. The Golden Flush Award it was called. These things do happen on a submarine; I didn't mean to make it sound like it is all doom and gloom. For me it was sort of depressing. Mainly because, I guess I was older and I knew, I have experienced more fun things than a lot of the younger guys. I knew that civilian life could be a lot of fun. That to me was....

Hansley: You did get an award on ship?

Kersten: I did get an award on ship. Yes!

Hansley: When and where did you meet your wife?

Kersten: I met Nancy at library school at the University of Illinois. We got to know each other almost right from the start. She and I were in the same class. I started walking her over to the local malt shop and that sort of thing. It developed there. We got married right after school ended for both of us. We had no job prospects whatsoever. But we were married. At the time I was full of confidence that I could find a job right away. As it turned out, I did find [a job] very quickly; Nancy, not quite as quickly. But the most amusing thing there was, her final class, or one of the last classes she was taking there, was scheduling the final. The professor there said, "If none of you object, I would like to schedule our final for Thursday, August 7th." Everyone in the class turned and looked at Nancy. She said, "Well, Doctor, if you don't mind, unless you want me here in my wedding gown taking the exam, I think we better reschedule to an earlier date." We got married after that and moved to Riverdale. I started at Harvey. She went to work for a different library, Prairie Trails Library and the rest is history.

Hansley: When you were on ship, did you miss any major family events that you found out about once you got back to Rota?

Kersten: I don't think so, nothing major. Well, I shouldn't say that, because my parents were going through a divorce at the time. One of my last patrols, I learned about this. They were already separated. I wasn't actually there for the divorce; it was sort of an amicable divorce, so it wasn't anything major. As far as happy, happy occasions, I did miss the occasional Christmas and New Year celebration. I

missed the occasional holiday whether it was Easter or Halloween or whatever.

What I missed most was going up to our family cottage in Minnesota. We used to do that every summer. That's one thing that I really hated to miss. But, other than that it was just life as a young man. You go off and you can't always be there for family.

Hansley: Have you and Nancy ever gone back to Spain? So you could show her where Rota was, is.

Kersten: No, we have been back to, we've gone overseas. We went on a trip to London and Paris. And we intend to go back at some point. We'd like to take one of those river cruises down the Rhine River or something like that. But we didn't go back to Spain. I haven't been back there.

Hansley: Is there anything else that you'd like to add or anything you thought I would have asked and I haven't?

Kersten: Not that I can think of. I think we've pretty well covered it.

Hansley: Glenn, the Pritzker Military Library thanks you for coming in today and to share your story.

Kersten: It was my pleasure.

Hansley: You're welcome.

Kersten: OK, thank you.