

California Maritime Academy Library

Interview with Gordon White

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Gordon White
Interviewer: Dennis Federov & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 7, 2007

Place: Training Ship Golden Bear
Transcriber: Rev.com

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Gordon White conducted by Dennis Federov on October 7, 2007. This interview is part of the Cal Maritime Oral History Project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Gordon White is a graduate of the class of 1956, Deck.

Abbreviation

GW: Gordon White
DF: Dennis Federov

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Interview Outline

- 00:45 What years were you at Cal Maritime and why degree program did you graduate from?
- 01:20 What can you tell me about your school training cruises?
- 02:12 Did you ever serve on a commercial training cruise?
- 02:43 Why did you choose to come to Cal Maritime?
- 04:00 Where did you live while you were at the academy?
- 04:19 What were the most challenging courses you took at the school and do you remember who taught your classes?
- 06:04 What do you remember of any social events that were held at Cal Maritime?
- 06:50 What do you remember the most about your time at Cal Maritime?
- 08:12 How has campus changed since you attended Cal Maritime?
- 09:09 How did your degree help start your professional career?
- 09:36 Who did you get your first job with after you graduated? Did the job require a license?
- 11:11 What ships did you serve on during your career?
- 13:07 Could you elaborate on the history of the Golden Bear on the TSGB stack?
- 15:00 Could you share information about the state legislature trying to shut down the academy?
- 17:10 Would you say that Cal Maritime was more regimented than the schools your peers went to after high school? Did your friends from San Diego think it was strange?
- 18:14 How much liberty did you get when you were here?
- 19:20 How much liberty did you get on cruise when you were here?
- 21:43 When you entered the Navy after graduation, did you use your license to take a commission?
- 22:51 From your perspective with your participation on the Foundation, how has the school evolved since you were here?
- 24:04 How does the Cal Maritime Foundation help guide the direction of the school?

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Interview

DF: Good day. Today's December 7th, 2007 my name is Dennis Federoff and I'm cadet at the California maritime Academy. I am interviewing today Gordon white, who was born on...

GW: December 5th, 1935

[00:45]

DF: This interview is being recorded by Benjamin Boleyn on board the Training Ship Golden Bear and now I'll start with my questions and my questions. Mr. White. Um, what year did she graduate from California in habitat?

GW: [19]56.

DF: What degree or program did you graduate in?

GW: Nautical science.

DF: Uh, when did you start seeing that?

GW: [19]53.

DF: What division, uh, were you a part of? Uh, corporate cadets.

GW: The company, I forget

DF: How many divisions weren't there when you attend the California Maritime Academy?

GW: Maybe three companies, something like this.

[1:20]

DF: Uh, what can you tell me about your school training cruises?

GW: Oh, we're on the first cruise. We run over to the, right now we went down to Tahiti, then we came back to Acapulco, Piney trip, and then up to the coast and we stopped it that way or not. The second year we went down to Acapulco, and Peru and [illegible]. So that was three cruises.

DF: What year was this? From, this actually occurred?

GW: [19]53 to [19]56.

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[02:12]

DF: Do you ever start a commercial cruise by any chance? Did you ever serve on any commercial training cruise?

GW: No. No, no. Uh, well, commercial training cruise one time the Navy had us down to Long Beach, they had us on a destroyer that would transfer at sea.

DF: Okay.

GW: Stuff like that when in the Navy.

[02:43]

DF: Um, why did you choose to attend to California, California Maritime Academy? Was there a preference why you chose to come here?

GW: Essentially seeing, how that happened, I was going to LaHoya High School down there in San Diego. And a classmate of mine said, "Hey Gordon, you want to get out of school for a day" and say, yeah, sure. So, come on down, the California Maritime Academy ship is down there and they're doing the test. But his, his uncle or his cousin was coming in and midshipman that CMA, Landa Heron, so uh, we were sort of forced to go here, but we both passed and so we both went up here. But my friend Gary Coleman, he, uh, he didn't like it to him, like to go to the sea and he said, Gordon, he said, I'm gonna go back to Lahoya and marry a Lahoya heiress. And he did by his words, I still see him and she's worth millions, millions.

GW: But, that's how we got to the Academy. I had no idea what it was before I've talked to him.

[4:00]

DF: Yes sir. Uh, where did you actually live, um, when you were at this Academy, did you actually live on campus or was there a—

GW: No, I didn't live on campus, half of use were on the ship and half of us were in barracks.

DF: And this was during the school year?

GW: Almost three years.

[04:19]

DF: Three years. What were the most challenging courses to for you to take it at the school?

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GW: Wow. I guess maybe spherical trig. The rest of it, no problem.

DF: Do you remember-

GW: Spherical trig was kind of fun, I enjoyed that

DF: Do you remember who taught the course by any chance?

GW: Who taught it?

DF: Yeah.

GW: Yeah. Well, we have Neid, he taught navigation. We had captain Sweeney, he taught tankers. We had, uh, Pedersen he taught seamanship. Uh, had Mr. Martin taught English. That's about all.

DF: So, who's your favorite professor or instructor on campus?

GW: Pardon me

DF: Who's your favorite professor or instructor on campus? Could you perhaps tell me why he was, uh, your favorite instructor or professor?

GW: Well, you have a good way of teaching navigation, you know, when I was blue and when I was brown.

DF: Uh, what do you think of the uniforms while you're at school? Do you think they were a –

GW: They were fine

DF: What do you remember about your classmates?

GW: Oh, they're good guys.

[06:04]

DF: I'm assuming you have friends that here today. Um, uh, what do you remember about any social events that were held at California Maritime Academy?

GW: Well, not too many. Not that I can remember any social you asked me as far as dances and stuff like that. There was a ring dance once a year and that was usually at the Claremont Hotel, which is a fancy hotel, an old one, in Berkeley I think. And that was, you know, there wasn't anything else as far as that goes

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DF: Uh, which clubs, sport teams were you a member of when you had California Maritime Academy?

GW: None

DF: None. So, I guess it wasn't mandatory for you to actually play sports or, or perhaps –

GW: No not really

[06:50]

DF: What do you remember the most, uh, about your time in California Maritime Academy? Is there a particular event that you remember or any particular things that you want to-?

GW: Well, when I was first accepted in, went to the school, first day was pretty busy moving in. So then, uh, you know, when the day was done, everybody hit the showers. And this one fellow who eventually turned into my roommate was a big tall guy named Burton and he's not here today [illegible]. I haven't seen him say on ship from here to here. What is this? You know? So, I said to myself, what am I doing? Yeah, he was quite a guy. There's more and more stories about him, you know, fun stories. I, well, that's the main thing. Okay.

DF: Um, what were some traditions that students and faculty participated in at the California maritime Academy. Were there any, uh, students, professor, instructor activities that you remember perhaps?

GW: No.

[08:12]

DF: No. Um, how has campus changed since your attendance at the California Maritime Academy?

GW: How what?

DF: How has the campus actually changed?

GW: So, on campus you wouldn't recognize it now. I mean, you know, before we had him, he had some temporary barracks that were building in World War II. That was about it, temporary barracks, gonna tap on the shipment in from Paris

DF: Um, in respect to the programs offered the California Maritime Academy, do you wish you took advantage of but did not?

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GW: No. No, understand that - what is it?

DF: Uh, it's, uh, pretty much. Which classes do you think you should have taken at Maritime Academy?

GW: It was all set of courses.

[09:09]

DF: Uh, how'd your degree help us start off their professional career?

GW: How did it help?

DF: Did Yeah.

GW: Ah well, as soon as I graduated, I was called into the Navy, our whole class, just about, was called for the Navy. And so, I spent two years in [illegible] Japan as an executive officer on that tender.

[09:36]

DF: Did you get your first job with, after you graduated?

GW: U.S. Navy, I said

DF: Did your job require you to be licensed?

GW: Not necessarily this

DF: So, you didn't actually have to have a license?

GW: Well, it's because of, uh, you know, we took in NROTC, so when we graduated, we all had that behind us, and so that was leading towards an officer's position. And so, without the third makes license, probably wouldn't get the officer's commission license, so yeah you had to have a license.

DF: Uh, do you ever hold a rank in the Merchant Marines by chance?

GW: Did I hold a what?

GW: A rank

GW: Oh yeah, master

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DF: Master and that was your ending rank, correct... that was your very last one

GW: No. Well, I've done a lot of sailing, but I've also worked at shore a lot and so in times I wasn't sailing. That'd be working to shore Saudi Arabia for three years and wait for it to meet her, Bangladesh [illegible].

DF: Could you perhaps they need to extend a little bit on those experiences-

GW: but in between those on shore side assignments, I would sail in the Merchant Marines I would sail as either a second mate for NATO chief mate

[11:11]

DF: Um, what ship did you serve on your career?

GW: Oh dozens

DF: Could you perhaps name a few.

GW: That's Palmetto state. I was on that for 13 months. That was a victory ship, have you ever seen a victory ship, unless you've seen the Red Oak. Um, unfortunately I have to visit victories in Richmond is a restaurant. Right? I heard about it. Yeah. Then he would probably take a look at the Jeremiah O'Brian, that's a Liberty ship. The Liberty ships won World War II. Without them it would be no stuff delivered to the allies. I see. And then also the Murmansk. You ever heard of that?

DF: No.

GW: I have hundreds of ships, convoy delivering goods to more man's Russia. You want to support in World War II. But half of those ships say a hundred ships in the convoy, 50 of them were in some submarines. And so, the more advanced one is a heroin heroin experience.

BB: Did you any, I know this was before your time, you, did you know anyone in your family who served on a board that during that runner man's crowd?

GW: Aboard that?

BB: Yeah

GW: no, no, no.

DF: Um, have you spent any time at sea you have career and you obviously did spend some time, but how many months at a time did you actually go out there?

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GW: And it's usually about four to five months at the house.

[13:07]

DF: Um, and I believe you, there's a few little stories that you want to share with us perhaps about, um, I believe you wrote a history about California Maritime Academy foundation in [19]91, and this was called Bear on the TSGB Stack because you perhaps saw the library

GW: Well this is what it's talking about. This has all the details of the founding of the foundation and the bears that's on the hillside there where they came from, the city far East side. See when I got out of the Navy then I worked for the city for our East line as a port captain. And what was the question?

DF: Uh, just to elaborate in this whole, uh, their TSGB Stack.

GW: Oh yeah, go going there bro. Let's say Friday you sign went out of business. Unfortunately, it's a good company, but uh, [inaudible] son is 29-year-old son. It was literally driven into the ground. You didn't survive. And so, each of the shifts, there are about 13 shifts, and each shift had Golden Bear on the stack because it was called the Bear Line.

So, you know, when that happened, we had a couple of Golden Bears, one side of the staff. And so, I arranged myself and Catherine Meade, another graduate arranged for another golden bear to go up to the Academy.

[15:00]

DF: And there's also another question is about shutting down California Maritime Academy by state legislature. Could you, could you please clarify that?

GW: Yeah, the Academy was started in 1929 but we had problems for funding about every five years. That'd be a concerted effort to close the Academy down. They almost did. I mean it was just that close. That's another story. That's when Admiral Rizza comes into play. Without him, the school would've been shut down on toast was the federal legislative analyst in Sacramento and he wanted to shut the school down.

In fact, the school would be in, the budget would be sticking out here and very vulnerable to anybody and say, well let's say a few million good in the California Maritime, and so we watched the drive through telegrams and letters and stuff going to the steamship owners and operators and that went up to Sacramento and that was largely the same, the California Maritime Academy.

DF: Is there anything else you'd like to add perhaps?

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GW: Oh, I just take a look at this. Have a read something here, stuff this pretty well. Tell us what happened once the foundation goes, which was created in the 1972 and it's now very good shape. We're having a big drive for funds, the foundation, so spread the word. Tell folks to send them that \$20

DF: Well thank you so much sir. Thank you so much for sir. You've collected all of this. Thank you so much.

[17:10]

BB: I have a couple of questions for you, you guys up there. When you originally came here and your time here, would you say that this was a more regimented school than any of the others that your peers went to right out of high school and was there any, did your peers, your friends, back in San Diego give you any grief for coming to this different, this strange regiments at school instead of going to like, you know, UC San Diego

GW: Oh no, we used to wear uniforms and the girls like that. In fact, up here whenever you're all in school used to go to Stanford and we used to go to see crawled C-O-P then because in the city we used to take girls out there, you know, and the CMA, Canadian Marine Air Force. Yeah.

[18:14]

BB: Women just let a guy in uniform. That's always a good way to spend. And you guys got very little Liberty when you were here as well. It's not like now where the students get to go home on the weekend or actually live on campus and apartments

GW: first year here, maybe have a say every 30 recap was a stay up at the guard house up there. And we get other watch quarters where you have the stay. And so, there was, we had to be back by 10:00 p.m. on Sunday night. And then the second class when you're in the second class, you could stay out until 11:00 p.m. and then seniors could stay until 12:00 a.m. So that was a big deal. And you stood inspection, you know, every third weekend, wherever you have any weekend, you still inspection.

BB: You guys had a marching and maneuvers every Saturday mornings in Corps.

GW: Yeah, yeah, of course. Yeah. Yeah. And who's the March, We had rifles.

BB: That's right. I remember that work. But yeah, close enough. They intimidated when you're at the guard house,

GW: Yeah, yeah, model O-3, model O-3, once, no.

[19:20]

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BB: On your various cruises short, when you had your, shore leave, your precious shore leave, what do you remember? Some of you guys remember any special incidences or you know, Valparaiso or kind of Dow, you know, that's the place that was where we were planning to go on a short leave. Do you remember any of those scenarios?

GW: I'm sure with one or two of them if I can [inaudible]. Well we always looked forward to Acapulco. Yeah. One of the midshipmen not in my class. And that's what he told his mommy there were bad women in Acapulco, you know, and she wanted to stop it at all. So then so yeah, we didn't go to Acapulco the next year, we went to Panama, which is much worse than Acapulco. See one thing about him on a training ship as opposed to Kings Point is the comradery that you get from your classmates and you know things you remember the rest of your life. Whereas in Kings Point you don't have that.

BB: And, from what I've, what I've been learning, every time you guys stopped in Acapulco, you were mandatory repaint the ship.

GW: Yeah. That's the way it worked

BB: Cause I believe now the students kind of are slung over the side. We're running the Bay and they're over the side painting. No, actually stopping and painting. Um, from what I understand how they do it, that give you more time at Acapulco, that kind of endear to your heart.

GW: Oh yeah, sure. Acapulco is fine, so was Panama.

BB: Good.

GW: So, let's try it out. But [inaudible] [inaudible] um, Valparaiso to you. Um, Chile.

BB: Did you guys ever have special events down there and Chile did that?

GW: Oh, we were in, you know, we went to the academies luncheon, you know, us in the midshipman from their Academy. Yeah. We were treated very well.

[21:43]

BB: Trying to think of some other, when you were brought in to the Navy, did you take advantage of your license to actually not get drafted per se, but take a commission or were you kind of chased by the draft board? We need to get you into Korea, but you know, we see it, you're in school and you're in Naval Science that, did you play one against the other?

BB: Or let's just say when we graduated, we all had our orders already. So, this one.

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Right. But from a reservist to active duty. Yeah. And there's your orders, they're cut and you're off to Korea,

GW: Japan,

BB: Oh Japan. When you went to Japan and it was during the Korean

GW: It was the end of the Korean war Wars in about [19]53 I was in Japan from [19]56 to [19]58

BB: Um okay.

GW: Have a great time of it. So relative peace time for the most part these times, the Japanese love this. Then I don't know what's happening in between that.

[22:51]

BB: And what do you see now being a part of the foundation, how the school has evolved, you know, from the very regimented, everyone here goes to school and they, their curriculum revolves around the running of the ship, you know, practical to it being a part of the CSU system where students can study such a myriad of different subjects here and have this ability to serve a board the ship. Did you ever see it evolving that way when you were here?

GW: Yeah. And that was always a worry through the old timers and ourselves too, as far as the practical seamanship. So, you got a good practically go semen guy. Companies love them, you know? And so that's what our reputation hung on was practical seamanship deck and engine. And so, a lot of the old timers especially, you know, really are a little worried about where the school might go. More cerebral areas, more practical seamanship. So, both of them have their good points. And

[24:04]

BB: And, how does the foundation really play a role in that as you, you see it in participate in it. How does the foundation really help guide the direction? Do you think

GW: Well the Foundation is in support of the school. So, in fact, we were having a big fundraising, which was gonna put one right now for a year. They'll never stop. But it's especially for areas that aren't covered by the CSU budget. So, in one begets the other, you know, once you don't have good fundraising, then the CSU management, they get worried about the school. So, I mean, we'd have to raise a certain amount of money to keep in the good graces with the CSU

BB: And running our own training ship is, you know, pretty hefty, uh, bill

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GW: That's good practical seamanship and that's what you need is good practical seamanship as even with every,

BB: Even though every student may not be a deck or an engineer, everyone serves a board the ship at least once. And uh, I'm glad that's a current practice that they're not going to be doing away with, but I can see the, uh, the opinion that, you know, more time aboard, you know, more of the commercial cruises. That's why, uh, Dennis asked at some point became the option where instead of serving three years aboard the training ship, you can take one year, go do an internship off with a Madsen or such where you get, you know, away from our regiment that you're in, you know, slinging grease in another engine room.

GW: Yeah, no, that's good. No, that's all good. Right. Your ships now are getting so large, I mean, they're huge. Showing up 10 and 12 people on the crew. I mean, give me a break, you know, and it's no fun anymore. It used to be there. You see, I was in the year of our yarn mistake, you know, which is the old-fashioned way of loading cargo. You have two booms once here, and then you go back, back, back and forth. And so, it's you know, slow compared to containers. I mean, there's no comparison. But in the old days of general cardboard that's called while you'd be in Yokohama for maybe two, three, four days, even then you go to Colby for another couple of days and you'd go to Pusan for two days. So, I mean, you know, you got to shore.

BB: No, you're never get to share, a group of long Shoreman with those massive digitized cranes

GW: and they'll put five cranes on you right there. They're gone.

BB: Yeah. So, um, I'm, uh, the academies is moving along with the industry, keeping up on the advancements. And that's one of the great advantages we have getting the students prepared for a career in the maritime business.

[End of interview]