California Maritime Academy Library

Interview with Harlan Dupuis

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Harlan Dupuis
Interviewer: Natalie Gross
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime
Transcriber: Rev.com

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Harlan Dupuis conducted by Natalie Gross on October 6, 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.

Harlan Dupuis graduated in the class of 1939, Deck.

Abbreviation

HD: Harlan Dupuis

NG: Natalie Gross

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Interview

NG: Good day. Today is October 6th, 2007. My name is Natalie Gross, and I'm a Cadet at the California Maritime Academy. I'm interviewing Mr. Harlan Dupuis who was born on September 10th, 1918. This interview is being recorded by Benjamin Bolin at the California Maritime Academy Library in Vallejo, California. Okay, Mr. Dupuis, I had sent you the questions, so we may as well get started with those, then.

HD: All right.

[00:00:36]

NG: Why did you choose to attend the California Maritime Academy?

HD: Well, I grew up in Santa Barbara, went to Santa Barbara High School. And I was very active in the Sea Scouts in Santa Barbara, and it was a very active organization. This was 1936 when I graduated from high school, still depression was felt very much. And being in the Sea Scouts, and I was always interested in boats, sailing, ships, so, I did have a strong interest even then, and I couldn't think of anything else to do. We probably would've been, wouldn't have been able to send me to college right off at that time. I would've had to do something. And in the Sea Scouts there was a head man who was also head of the Red Cross of Santa Barbara, and he was head of the Sea Scouts. Terrific fellow. And he'd been in the British Navy in World War I. So our Sea Scout ship ran like the British Navy.

[00:02:10]

NG: How did you get involved in the Sea Scouts?

HD: Well, I'd been in Boy Scouts and I went to the beach every day, both winter and summer.

NG: So. it just all fit?

HD: And my brother was interested in it too and was in. So, I just fell right into it after Boy Scouts. In Santa Barbara, as I say, it was still heavy depression there, even though it sounds like a big money town, it is not, for all people. It was an organization called the Santa Barbara Foundation, and Mr. Crawford, Tom Crawford, the head of the Sea Scouts, he was able to get this foundation to loan money to people who wanted to go to the Maritime Academy, Nautical School at that time. And there were 12 Sea Scouts from Santa Barbara who attended this school.

I've got their names, from 1934 to 1939. 1934 was the original class. And Ed Miller, I don't know whether you've heard of him, he was Commandant here at one time, he was in the class. And Sam MacKinnon, Class of '35. John Bailey, Howard Mollenkopf, Louis

Rossi, Walter Secrest, Chester Tubbs, Bill Warnekros, and Alex Witmer, were in the Class of '38. And I was in the Class of '39, along with Jim Hendy and Herman Leichel. So, they used to call it, that's why the school ship used to stop in Santa Barbara, at that time, coming back from cruises. So, we felt right at home coming up here. The school wasn't located where it is now, but it was in California City. I was told, if you want to go to sea, go to the school ship or go to the Naval Academy. I was more interested in merchant ships than I was in Navy ships at the time, I thought I was, so I came here. And I always did well in school, so I was able to get in without any problem.

[05:20]

NG: So, you said you stopped in Santa Barbara on your training cruises, can you tell me about your training cruise, like what you did for it?

HD: Yes.

NG: I have yet to go on mine.

HD: Well, at that time, we had, I was here for three years. And we had a cruise every year, and all the Cadets went on every cruise, because they all lived onboard ship, on the training ship. So, we all had similar experiences on the cruises, or pretty much so. Well, on the ship, everybody stood watch. The first year we stood both deck watches and engineering watches, so we had a little taste of each. And that was true of some of the classes too, all the classes, we had both deck and engineering. On shipboard, of course, we would go to classes and do regular ship routine on the cruises. And then we'd get into port, go ashore, and we would have some organized things with locals, usually, sports, and other things too, which was really, made us really feel good about getting in, into port. And then we had liberty, free liberty at times in the port. Well, that was the way the routine worked, it's almost like the school routine, that.

NG: Mm hm. Where did you guys go on your training cruise?

HD: Let's see.

NG: Where did you sail?

HD: In 1936-37 they were usually winter cruises. And we went south, Hawaii was the first cruise. And the next cruise was to the West Coast of Mexico, Central America, South America, Peru, Chile. And then back up to San Francisco.

NG: Do you have any stories?

HD: And the fourth cruise, which would have been '38-'39, we went to the South Pacific, Tahiti, Samoa, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia. As I say, we had activities in most of these places, ashore as well as onboard. Fortunately, the head of this Santa Barbara Foundation that I mentioned, was also the head of Rotary International. So, I was more or less sponsored by Rotary in that way, so I was able to go to the Rotary meeting in New Zealand. And I think the head of the local Rotary man took me to his sheep station, they call it, in the country, and I had a wonderful time. Let's see.

We played, as in the article that you sent to me, from the old Hawsepipe, we played basketball, I was on the basketball team with the... Or it was in Central America. And they had two or three of their Olympic team players on their basketball team, and the whole town turned out to see it, and we were really taken to the cleaners on that. But we had a good time. They were very hospitable down there. That was San Salvador, and we went on, I recall playing baseball in Melbourne, Australia, with local teams. And we were able, when we were in Australia, we went to the surfing beaches there. And the lifeguards were really good and had wonderful pulling boats. And our crew, we were used to whaleboats, rowing whaleboats, I was on the crew, and we were able to row their surfboats down there, which was a big thrill at that time. This was at, Bondi Beach, I believe, was the name of it. Well, is there other?

NG: We've got lots of questions.

HD: Let's see, I have some notes here to see if I left anything out. That was pretty much the things that came to mind with regards to the cruises, although--

[00:11:20]

NG: Now, you had to take courses when you were on cruise too?

HD: Oh yes, we went to school everyday.

NG: Everyday was school?

HD: Except the weekend.

NG: What kind of courses were you taking?

HD: We were taking seamanship. Ship maintenance, how to take care of a paint brush, how to chip, how to make a good splice. Mr. Sheaf, who was head of the Deck Department at that time, officer, he'd been on Swain and Hoyt, which was a shipping line at that time, and he was really down to earth on us learning things like how to handle the gear, the rigging, and the winches, splicing, everything, taking care of paint brushes too. We had navigation, and other courses, and as well as working in the engine room on those standing watches too. Everybody stood watches, so there was less time for actual courses,

book work. There was even a, I don't know whether they do that now, but when we were in Hawaii, at Lahaina, the ship put out buoys, and we were able to practice landing alongside buoys, which gave us a little feel for landing a ship, docking a ship. Let's see.

[00:13:50]

NG: What was the most challenging course, in your opinion, like what would you?

HD: Well, as I recall, navigation was the most challenging course, because we had an officer teaching it who was a graduate of the Naval Academy, and our text was the Naval Academy text in navigation. We were held pretty closely to navigation that pertained to merchant ships, mostly, but to the basic navigation, both celestial and piloting, plus some additional that Cadets at the Naval Academy went through. And that entailed our taking courses in geometry and trigonometry for celestial navigation. And those could be pretty tough. Then, at that time, I don't know whether it still applies, but in the examination for Third Mate, and I was on deck, you had to know the rules of the road by heart in order to answer some of the questions they would spring on you, so we had to start memorizing the rules of the road even then. And that was a little difficult to get the entire thing memorized.

[00:16:06]

NG: So, it was an officer from the Naval Academy that taught the course, was that correct?

HD: Yes.

NG: What was his name?

HD: Dodson.

NG: Dodson, wow. So, was he--

HD: And then there was a graduate of the Class of '34, I believe, Mr. Engs, who was really an outstanding navigator, and understood the mathematics of both celestial navigation and piloting, so we had him as well, we had good teachers.

[00:16:40]

NG: What was your favorite instructor, your favorite professor while you were here?

HD: Well, we liked Mr. Sheaf for his knowledge of seamanship and down to earth teaching us things for those of us who had never been to sea on a merchant ship at that time. Only one member of our class had been. He made us feel that we knew something about what

things were really like. And, as I say, he had worked for Swain and Hoyt, an inter-coastal, that at that time, they called them sweat and hurry.

[00:17:40]

NG: Okay, Mr. Dupuis, what do you remember about the school training cruise?

HD: Well, everybody lived onboard ship. For three years, we lived on the ship. And it was on the second deck forward, it was called the berth deck, and in bunks, two-high bunks, with two lockers below the lower bunk. And that was our total space for anything we owned, it had to be in that locker. It was up at 6:00 a.m. in the morning, out onto the dock, for exercises. Every day; summer and winter. Well, not unless it was raining hard, but we went through calisthenics every morning on the dock in California City.

And then go from there to washing down the ship, fore and aft, every day, and do certain maintenance, whatever maintenance was assigned, because the Cadets did practically all the work on the ship under supervision of the instructors. Then, after wash-down was breakfast, then go to classes. Now there were some classrooms ashore there. So, the academic classrooms were done ashore. And classes went on until noon, for lunch, went back aboard ship for lunch. So, all the living activities were onboard ship. And then in the afternoon, more classes and maintenance work, and then the evening was either study, regular study hours, and then continued study, or just liberty, well, not liberty, but relaxing. Whatever, listening to music or talking, anything.

As I say, the Cadets maintained the ship, on-deck, above-deck, and below-decks, and in the engine room at that time. And I think they probably still do, I'm not sure. I know everybody had an opportunity at one time to blow boilers and come out completely covered with soot, just to make sure you realized what being in the engine room was. That was kind of the routine on the ship every day, and then we had, generally, weekends off. With vacations during the summer, short vacations. Something less than a month, I've forgotten exactly, and that was it. Other than that, we were attached to the ship.

And I, fortunately, loved to sail, and one of the Cadets in my class, Gene Yates, lived in Belvedere and had a sailboat, we raced on the bay then on weekends in the summer. So that was a break for me. In those days, as I recall, hitchhiking was a big thing, and we always had to wear a uniform ashore, 'cause those were the only clothes we had, was a uniform, and I would hitchhike to Santa Barbara every weekend sometimes, and it was, being in uniform, it was relatively easy to get a ride. So, hitchhiking was the way to go when everybody was broke most of the time anyway.

There were a few amateur barbers on the ship, of which I was one. We charged the sum of 25 cents for a haircut, and it might have been worth it, I'm not sure. But... It was a different world, I think, somewhat in those days. Well, that's the comments I think about, living onboard, it was very close living, but you get used to it, just as you do in the Navy,

and it becomes natural. As I recall, the lower classmen were, usually had to be in the upper berths, and the upper classmen in the lower berths, so they didn't have to climb up. So that's a few memories that I recall.

[00:24:33]

NG: What can you tell me about your other classmates, is there any?

HD: Well, I mentioned Gene Yates, who was another sailor. We did not have an active sailing program at that time as you have now. But, he and I and Louis Rossi, also from Santa Barbara, the Santa Barbara would sail on weekends, frequently. But the class was so small, I knew everybody in my class. After the first year there was a little separation between engine and deck, but everybody lived and ate together, so there wasn't too much of that, nor competition. But there was a little bit of banter would go on between the deck and the engineering.

But, as I say, you knew everybody in the class, and everybody was about the same age, had been high school graduates and come there. And came, all of them, as I recall, came from California at that time, in my class. Only one, John Boyer, had been to sea on a merchant ship. He lived in Benicia and sailed out of there on a tanker for a short period of time. All of the Cadets were very amenable and got along well, as I recall.

There was quite a bit of interest in sports as a break in the routine and things. The sports was not highly competitive then, we didn't, against other, we didn't play against other schools around here, but we did play against Navy, when we were in the Navy yard, we'd play against the crews of the Navy ships, basketball and baseball and things. And we did row the whaleboats, considerably, the crew did, so they had whaleboat races.

Well, like everybody, you have a couple of friends that you're a little closer to than others, I did. I recall one, Jim Hendy, from Carpinteria who also was a Sea Scout down there, in the Santa Barbara Sea Scouts. And he was a wonderful fellow, and he was killed at Leyte Gulf during the war. It just happened. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was on the beach, I was a beach master there at Leyte Gulf, in the Navy. But Jim was on a Liberty ship, I believe, that was bombed by the Japanese. He was killed. So, lost a good friend. That's about it for that.

[00:28:40]

NG: Can you tell me what it was like being, I know, when I read through the yearbook, you were the Cadet Commander?

HD: Yes.

NG: For the Class of 1939? Can you tell me about that?

HD: Well, I was it. I can't remember much about it. It just... I don't know, I just fit right into it, I guess. I didn't feel it was any big thing at the time. And it wasn't, you know, it was a small class, but we were used to, the ship, living on the ship, to quite a bit of restrictions. Like with ranks, different ranks, and so forth, so it came pretty easy for me. And having been in the Sea Scouts, it doesn't sound like very much, but that was the British Navy, as I mentioned, that Sea Scout ship. We did, as Cadet Commander, and the three other division commanders, had a little better quarters in the berth deck. As I recall, there were two of us in a little cabin in the corner of the berth deck, each of the two corners. And that was the privilege that we had. Other than that, we didn't get any special privileges that I can recall, but we were looked at to, more or less, lead, oh, for example, when we fell into ranks and so forth. But I can't remember a lot of that now. It's a long time ago.

[00:31:09]

NG: Okay. That's fine. Now, when you graduated from the academy, what was it like in the work field at that time?

HD: Well, I had, at graduation, I received a sextant. And I think it was donated by American Hawaiian Steamship Company, and they offered me a job upon graduation. So as soon as I graduated, I went to work for American Hawaiian, who didn't go to Hawaii, generally. They went inter-coastal freight, freighters. But, as I mentioned earlier, this was right close to the end of the depression. The Merchant Marine was still depressed.

And when I went to work, my first assignment was, found myself chipping and painting the holes of laid-up ships, the shipyard in Alameda, along with captains, chief mates, chief engineers, engineers that were kept on the payroll until there were ships needed. And that was my introduction to going to sea. And running a hydraulic chipping hammer all day long and scraping and painting in the ship's hold. So, we got a little feeling of what the basics were like. But soon after I got a berth, as fourth mate, on one of the ships, one of the freighters, and things were beginning to pick up in the Merchant Marine, so they put more and more ships, they had the ships, but they put them into commission. From there, the ship that I was on, I think it was the Iowan, and it was running inter-coastal, from the West Coast to the East Coast, and those days, there wasn't the inter-trucking, nor the rail, and shipping was the cheapest way to move freight from one coast to the other. And American Hawaiian was a good sized company that ran from one coast to the other, freighters on a steady, so that we would pick up cargo in the beginning up north, Seattle, Bellingham, Tacoma, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, on the ship, and go down through the Panama Canal and up to the East Coast, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, and then back. Take certain kinds of cargoes one way and another kind the other way. From this coast we would take paper, pulp, paper pulp, lumber, flour, canned goods, big things of dried fruit, hides, just like old sailing

ship days. And there was no such a thing as a container then. That came later, after the war.

The job entailed storing, stowing the ship properly, and that was a science in itself. So, that was a big part of the job at that time, would be checking to see that everything was stowed the way, that the stowage plan that was laid out, was handled. And then, usually on the East-bound ships we carried deck-loads of lumber, which was a big thing moving from the West Coast to the East Coast. And then from the East Coast, coming back, it was more manufactured goods, shoes, clothing, textiles, and Campbell' Soup. Campbell's Soup was a big thing all over the country then, and we would actually go to the soup factory in Camden, New Jersey, and load 200 or 300 tons of Campbell's Soup to bring it to the West Coast. And then there was petroleum and other things in, again, all in what's called break bulk, bulk amounts.

Then, in those days, the ship, every hatch that was operating had a big gang of longshoremen in it on deck, who ran the winches on the dock and down in the holds. So that the ship was full of longshoremen when five, say five hatches were operating, with all those, now it's containers and there's not that, you don't have that intimate contact with the longshoremen that we did then. And it meant, for us, the officers on the watch, of up and down the holds, one hold after another, the whole watch to see that things were going right. And if it rained, they had what they called hatch tents that were put over the hatches and would allow the pallets to come up and go in and drop into the hatch. And a slit in this hatch tent allowed the wire cable to load during rain or snow. Of course, every ship had heavy lift gear, as well as the standard rig, boons, and winches, battery hatch, and certain heavy lift, over 10 tons, say, would be handled on that heavy lift gear. Usually they were 20-ton capacity, I think, as I recall.

Let's see. And the ships loaded day and night, too, the ships were lighted, and it would load day and night. Let me think. Well, that's how the work was. And then of course, at sea, if you were a deck officer, you stood a watch, four-on, eight-off. And a deck watch consisted of a mate, an officer, an able seaman, and an ordinary seaman. And one was the helmsman and the other was a lookout. And the officer did the navigation, piloting, at sea. And called the captain when he was supposed to, depending on the captain, and depending upon his experience too. I had, I was an officer, going inter-coastal for some time, and then they put me on the East Coast as a relief mate, so that when a ship would come in, the officers that lived on the East Coast, could get relieved, take their vacations, and I would take over for them, depending on who it was. So, I had a lot of experience going between the ports on the East Coast, between one to the other and back again. I remember I had a little notebook with every buoy with a light with the characteristics of it and where it was up and down that East Coast, and I tried to memorize them. So I was, although we did have pilots, local pilots there, of course.

Things were a little different in those days too because with a four-on, eight-off, if you are off, you were sleeping or doing something, essentially, so in port, on the same watch

routine, if you wanted to go ashore, you had to go by yourself, or you could go to the engineer, or the sparks, the radio operator. So, there wasn't the association with the other officers going ashore so much, as everybody was on watch or waiting to go on. But we docked in, the port areas were pretty tough areas, but as I recall, you never had the feeling of any danger going ashore, not like you would today, I don't think. And there were places like Greenpoint in New York, and Brooklyn, there was some tough waterfront places. People were different I guess, I don't know. So, as a result of this, I had an opportunity to make a lot of transits of the Panama Canal going each way, which I always found to be interesting, whether I was on-watch or not. Then American Hawaiian got ships going other than just inter-coastal as things picked up. And I had a number of trips, one that is shown in my navigation book, notebook, it was a round-the-world trip, actually, that took about a year, we were a year.

We went from the East Coast to South Africa to Karachi, India, Bombay, India, Madras, Calcutta, then all through the South Pacific, like a tramp steamer used to, although we weren't a tramp steamer, we were owned by a big company. But they'd pick up a cargo here and there. I recall we even had a full load of coal on two occasions that we took from Calcutta, India to Singapore. And we went to East Indies, Borneo, Philippines, all over through there, very interesting. And the winds of war were beginning to be felt then, I recall, in Cebu, the Philippines. We were at the dock there, just the dock was sort of half in town, right in town. And high school kids were in ROTC uniforms on Military training. They were concerned that, but we were not in the war at that time, that was 1940, '41, to early '41. But, or '40.

Shortly after that, the Japanese started moving into that area. And I remember, we were in Sumatra, which is a big tea growing country. And they wanted to get all of the tea out of there that they could, that was their main crop. So, we took pretty much the entire crop in one load out of there. And again, when we go to the Philippines, you'd load mahogany lumber, we'd have deck-loads of mahogany lumber we would carry. Sumatra and Java rubber, and the Malay Peninsula, we'd bring rubber back. It was an interesting one year of going around. Like a tramp ship did in the old days, except we had the advantage of not being one. And our skipper, I remember, was Captain Dowling. A wonderful skipper. But the crew would, might go ashore, and get a little too much to drink and end up with no money to get back aboard. And the skipper would only give one draw per port. He had the name of One-draw Dowling. So, if you lost all your money in the first day of port, well, you were out of luck unless you could borrow from somebody. But he was a good skipper.

Again, there were no containers, so that all of these cargoes were stowed one piece at a time, you might say, like tea came in 2-1/2-foot square cube boxes, and rubber in similar containers. And they would be, the longshoremen would be locally there, would stack them up into certain things, certain areas of the holds, so that a cargo plan in those days was an important thing so you knew where everything was, because once those hatches were closed, there was no access. Well, that was still the peacetime as far as we were

concerned, the peacetime Merchant Marine. Of course, everybody, I included, as soon as I went to work, I joined the Masters, Mates, and Pilots. All the ships were unionized then. And the crew hired out from the Union hall, and the officers were employees of the company. But, still, members, most of our officers were members of Masters, Mates, and Pilots, or the MEBA, the engine room group.

We had all American crews then. Things are different now. Well, that was, as I say, that was the peacetime, my peacetime experiences, and I thought, narrating my own experiences would give you an idea of how things were then. Making up for sea meant lowering all the boons, securing them for sea, and battening all the hatches. And the opposite when we would come into port, raise the boons so they were ready for the longshoremen, and everything was ready to go. And most of those ships, these were all freighters that I was on, had either three or four mates, all of whom stood watches. If there were four mates, the chief mate did not stand a watch. He was up all day, and that was all the crew. Well, that was, as I say, peacetime with the war clouds up there.

[00:51:29]

NG: So, you served in the Navy as well, is that correct?

HD: Yeah, I was in the Merchant Marine during the wartime too.

NG: Okay.

HD: Well, first, the war was strange. We were not in the war, but Europe was at war. Japan and China were at war, and we were neutral then. And that was an interesting time for the American Merchant Marine, to be neutral, sort of. Officially neutral and we would cruise with big lights on each side of the ship, shining on a tremendous sized American Flag, 12 by 16 feet, say, all night long, and would sail fully lighted. And at daytime, of course, the Flag's painted on the side of the ship, and we've always flied the American Ensign or the American Flag. The ships would run alone, American ships ran alone, and took their chances. Most of them, my experience was we had no problem. I made one trip, for example, from the East Coast to the Mediterranean to Port Saeed, Egypt, like this, with the ship all lighted up with flags on the side, and we went through the Gibraltar, down the Mediterranean to Port Saeed. And that's a port for Cairo. At that time, North Africa, the British, and Germans were heavily engaged.

The Italian Navy was active in the Mediterranean, and German aircraft were. But we sailed through there without any problems. It's a good thing we weren't stopped. Our cargo was nominally not military, but in fact it was, that is food, petroleum, vehicles, railroad equipment, and when we were in, at specifically in port, the British were, the British Forces in North Africa, and Australian, were trying to prevent the German, under Rommel, from getting to Cairo. And that was going on at that time, so it was a very tense

time for people in Egypt. But we went both ways without a hitch. Now, later that wasn't the case.

That was a funny period for us because you knew, for example, the submarines were out there, but we were protected by our neutrality, I guess you'd call it. Now, when we entered the war, it was altogether different. Ships ran blacked out all the time, except, and they ran in convoy most of the time, but not always, and the only light that was shone outside the ship was a little light on the stern that shone down into the wake of the ship to keep, and that was how they kept the convoy's station, it was this light. You could see it, but it wasn't visible to submarines, hardly, that was the only light that shone after we once were in the war.

After Pearl Harbor, I was on a, I happened to come back from that Mediterranean trip and came back to San Francisco, and joined another ship, and we were in the first convoy, after Pearl Harbor, that went to Hawaii. There weren't too many ships there, there was a bulk cement carrier, had a full load of cement, and a couple of tankers, and then freighters, and each of the freighters, which we were one, towed a big salvage barge, all bound for salvaging in Pearl Harbor. And we had never towed a barge before, these were big chain towlines. But we made it to there with our barges and without too much trouble. The only trouble we had is our, they had put guns on the ship, they had armed the ships lightly at that time, with a few machines guns, and a little 37 millimeter anti-tank gun on the stern, on wheels, and it was in chocks and lashed down. And the only problem we had is the gun crew missed the ship, the Navy gun crew. And I, having been to the Maritime Academy, the skipper thought I must know something about guns. So, I was in charge of the guns. But we had no, fortunately, we had no enemy contact. So, I got by safely.

We did, I think we tried them out a little bit, but that was about the size of it. After that, all the ships that I was on in the Merchant Machine had a Navy gun crew onboard. And the next trip was on a brand-new Liberty ship, that I was chief mate on, and we had a gun crew there. We loaded at Port Chicago, our total load was out of Port Chicago, bombs, ammo, trucks, vehicles, everything, and we're headed for Espiritu Santo, in the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific. In that case, we had the gun crew. Even they stood watches, just as we did. We'd ran singly, not in a convoy, blacked out and zigzagged all the time. The convoy zigzagged too. And I don't know whether you know what zigzagging is, but you steer a pattern of time and distance on a certain course and change it. And these courses, or the patterns of these courses, are such that it's difficult for a submarine to get a good bearing on you. And you don't quite go as fast, zigzagging, so the ships are slow enough as it is, but zigzagging takes a knot or a knot and a half off your speed. But we did, zigzagged all the way to Espiritu, and laid there for at least a month waiting to get unloaded. There was nobody there to unload, so we just lay at anchor there. And the crew was going crazy after a while with nothing to do but lay at anchor.

We finally got unloaded and headed for the Panama Canal from the South Pacific. It's probably another three weeks trip to the Panama and went through the canal. We were on our way to Hampton Roads, Virginia. And on the other side of the canal we took on fuel, water and fuel. Some of the crew got ashore, got pretty, pretty drunk, they weren't used to, they were used to the hot tropical weather then, but they weren't used to drinking, and they came back aboard dead drunk and we were ready to leave. When you're in port taking on fuel you have to plug the scuppers, so if you have an overflow, a tank overflow, and we did have a tank overflow, and this drunken crew came back onboard with the deck covered with oil, and got in, they got in the biggest mess that you've ever seen, we had fights. We had to cast off and go out to sea, which we did, and headed on up. We finally got cleaned up and everybody settled down. But the crew was just so long at sea and laying the South Pacific, and long at sea again, that they just let go. But it all worked out. We got into Hampton Roads. Hampton Roads is Norfolk, Virginia, and that's where the big convoys were making up for Atlantic trips.

And I could tell you a lot of what that kind of a trip was like, because we, a little background, the ship was put into the yard there, Norfolk, and they reinforced the bow for ice for moving, going in ice, and issued the crew, especially the deck crew, cold weather clothes. And the clothes included felt boots, about 1/2-inch-thick to go inside the sea boots, and the fur lined vests that were donated by the fur industry. They weren't selling many furs in those days. We were at war of course. And the sheepskin lined coats and helmets like the aviators wore and mittens, sheepskin lined mittens. And goggles, they were for standing watch on deck. And took on a cargo.

And a little history here is, the summer before, the convoys to Murmansk lost a lot of ships. They were badly beaten up. And both Churchill and Roosevelt decided they would discontinue the summer convoys. And this was going to be the first winter convoy. And they had big, in Churchill's book, he talks about the big arguments that he and Roosevelt had with Stalin about discontinuing the summer convoys, that were losing so many ships. But this was going to be the first winter convoy to Murmansk, and this was a brand new, well, it was new after being to the South Pacific, Liberty ship. So we made up the convoy, and we didn't know where we were going at that time, and after the captains', the captains' meeting in anticipation of the, they get all the instructions for the convoys, but then when we got to sea we found out where we were going, and this was winter in North Atlantic. And it's really rough, trying to maintain a convoy with slow ships like a Liberty ship was, and zigzagging. But we made it, our way, slowly across the Atlantic within about 500 miles of Britain. And we had one night, real blowing a gale, and heard this big explosion in our ship. We thought, geez, we got a torpedo.

Well, we checked on it and it wasn't a torpedo, it was a crack in the hull that went from the tween deck below, up the side, all the way across the deck and down the other side, and it would work back and forth as the sea, in the seaway, opened and closed. So, we had to stop immediate, stop the ship and drop out of the convoy. And lightened the ends, emptied the tanks of the bow and stern to kind of bend the ship back mid-ships, to lighten

the ends so there wasn't the stress on the cracked area. And then we rolled steel cables through the bollards and the chocks on deck, across the crack, and set 'em up on the winches, and tried to hold the ship together that way, and then proceeded slowly, alone, to Northern Ireland where we got orders to go into the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast, and we made it in there, going alone, and into the shipyard. And went in for repairs, they put new plates on, double plates and big transfers, longitudinal beams, strengthened all the corners of the hatches. And did a super job and we were there, not long, it was a day and night repair job, and we didn't have to discharge all the cargo, just in lieu of the cracked and fractured area. And then we rejoined the convoy in Loch Long, which was Northern Scotland, near Glasgow, in time to make the convoy on up to Murmansk. And those ships, so we sailed from Loch Long in about a 30-ship convoy then, and we had an escort.

Convoys were always escorted with Navy ships. We had a British and Canadian escort with mostly destroyers, with a ship, an escort ship for every ship in the convoy. There were about 30. And then we learned later there was an outside escort that would go between us and the Norwegian Coast of cruisers. We didn't know they were there; they were out of sight. And the convoy was sailing north from Scotland, all the way above the Arctic Circle, almost to Spitzbergen, well above Norway, because the Germans at that time were in control of Norway, and their warships were in there, and they engaged these cruisers. But we weren't aware of that, and we were able to go all the way up and around. Of course, the reason the summer cruises, or summer convoys, were stopped was they had so much daylight. In the winter, the dead of winter like this, there was only about three hours of daylight way up above the Arctic Circle. So, we would sail on up and into Murmansk without any submarine activity. Of course, we did have an escort like you couldn't believe, and went into Murmansk safely. And there, Murmansk had been a city of about 40,000, and it was open all winter, open of ice all winter, and went in. The town had been completely flattened by German bombing and evacuated of all civilian personnel. There were no people there. There were just the Army for stevedores, and a few other Military people. And each ship was assigned, in our case, it was a woman, to be an interpreter, 'cause nobody spoke English. And it was all soldiers did the longshoring then and unloaded the ship, with our help.

We gave them a lot of help. And we finally got unloaded there. And from having been way up to in north there, the ship, all the decks were covered with ice all the time, never bare, and they were still covered with ice. You just get used to it. We loaded then, after we finished discharging, we had strictly Military and food, fuel there, and railroad, we had a little locomotive onboard too. And everything else was Military vehicles, a lot of food stuff. So, going back, we loaded manganese ore. Russia is the world's major source for manganese ore. So, we loaded manganese ore for ballast. A couple of feet in each hatch, in each hole, and came back under ballast from there, still in the same convoy. And we made the same route way north and got back to, well, we got almost to England, and it began to thaw, the ice melted off the decks, and the decks were full of cracks again. So back to Harland and Wolff shipyard in Northern Ireland.

We got out of the convoy for the shipyard repairs again. And amusing, at that time, we learned that that ship had the greatest number of structural failures of any ship that was built recently. And it had been a welded ship and the welding was in its infancy in those days, and they laid these failures to the welding. Not the welding per se, but the welding program that didn't allow the built-up stresses that the welding caused to be relieved. But after we got repaired again, we joined another convoy and came back to New York. And I got off the ship in New York. Let's see. Well, those convoys then, in the winter, they would still kind of fall apart in a gale because you'd lose steerageway and couldn't maintain your station. And then as soon as the gale went down, the escorts would round everybody up, like a sheepdog, and then continue on. So, we got back to New York. And I got off the ship and set back to San Francisco, by train, there were no planes flying then, by train. And had a little vacation.

And then got on a, then I, oh, I was on a C3, that was a newer ship, a brand new C3, which was at that time the best of the cargo ships that came out of the Maritime Commission. And I thought, boy, maybe I'm gonna get to be skipper, 'cause I'd been, I had my skipper's license some time before then. But I got one of these brown envelopes in the mail with orders to active duty in the Navy. I'd been in the Naval Reserve for a time, after I'd graduated from school. So, I went in the Navy as a Junior Grade Lieutenant, JG. And they gave me one week, from the time I got the orders to join the USS Crescent City in the South Pacific, not to sail for the South Pacific. And I had to go to firefighting school, get uniformed, my Navy uniforms, I didn't have any Navy uniforms. And, well, report in.

And one week and I was on a troop ship heading for the South Pacific. And that in itself, the troop ship was something, some of an experience, because this had been a passenger ship that was taken over from the Italians, an Italian ship, I think it was the Conte di Biancamano that ran immigrants from Italy to Argentina and Brazil before the war. And it had been caught in Brazil and taken over by the Allies. And it was a big passenger ship, but converted quickly to a troop ship, to haul troops to the South Pacific. And that was my transportation. And immediately given an assignment of what was called a compartment officer.

There were so many troops on the ship that not everybody can go to mess or can even come up on deck for air at the same time. And nobody stays on deck unless they're scheduled, and they're scheduled by compartments to go to mess and to come up on deck for air. And this was my first assignment in the Navy as a compartment officer. Fortunately the unit that I had, the unit, it was an Army unit, had good noncoms to do most of the work, but I had to be down that compartment a lot of the time taking care of things and seeing that they got to meals and got on deck when they were supposed to, to their assigned place. And those ships, that ship didn't, maybe later, but those ships had no air conditioning. They blew tropical air from the deck down into the holds and that was it. I think they were four bunks high in the troop compartments, the bunks were, and about that far apart. I didn't have to live in that compartment, but I was there a lot of the time,

all day, every day. And that was, so I was glad to see the Crescent City, when I joined the Crescent City. I went to Noumea, the New Hebrides, and then took another ship to Tulagi, in the Solomons, where the ship was waiting, I joined the ship there. The Crescent City, you know what the Crescent City is?

NG: Mm hm.

HD: It became Golden Bear II after the war. But it was a good ship and it had been only in service in the Merchant Marine for a year or less before it was taken over and converted to an APA, assault transport. And it had been, at that time, it had been in the South Pacific, starting with Guadalcanal, in '42, and this was the end of '43. It had been there almost two years and made quite a few landings there. So, I went onboard, reported aboard the ship. A welcome sight, after the troop ship. And then my Naval service began, which was quite a story, if you'd like to hear that.

NG: Whatever you'd like to share with us.

HD: Well, I went onboard, you had a question here.

NG: I know, it was...

HD: Let me just, just so...

NG: And if there's anything that you want to add in too, anything additional, 'cause I know we've covered a lot today.

HD: You said, what was it like serving in the Navy--

[01:21:13]

NG: During the war?

HD: During the war as a graduate of the California Maritime Academy? Well, you heard the beginning, which the academy didn't prepare me for, but nothing would. But I joined the Crescent City, and at that time, she was quite a bit different from when she was in the Merchant Marine. She had a crew of about 500. Carried well over 30 landing craft, and would carry 1,000 Marines or Soldiers, combat loaded, for landings. And as soon as I went aboard, I was assigned to be Division II officer, a division officer of Division II, which had most of the landing craft in davits, three high. No, two high with one outside, against a Strongback, lashed outside. And they had Welin davits. And that's where I started, as division officer, and made landing at Guam, my first landing was at Guam. I was in the boats at that landing. After that we went back and staged for the next landing. The next landing was to be Peleliu. We went back to the Solomons and staged it. By staging, you get ready for the next group, the next unit of either Marines or Soldiers. And

in the next case it was the Marines, the 1st Marine Regiment, or the 1st Marine Division for Peleliu.

And I was taken off my job as 2nd division officer and made the beach master then. And I had a beach platoon as beach master, which included some communications people, a doctor, an assistant beach master, and medical people, a lot of medical people. And some boat, and we would go ashore, in that case, and in the others, in about the third wave of boats to land, and take the platoon in, and the purpose being to make sure that the boats got in, unloaded, and off, and the cargo, the equipment that came off the ship, did not plug up the beach, but would be moved on. And it happened that at Peleliu, the Marines were pinned down, and us too, for about a day and a half, before we could move off the beach, in spite of tremendous pre-landing bombardment, that is the most frightening thing you can imagine.

Just solid bombarding by a big fleet of surface ships and aircraft. But the Japanese were pretty stubborn at that place, if you've ever read the history of that landing. But anyway, we were on the beach about four days and then went back aboard ship and sailed, the ship was unloaded by that time, and sailed back for repairs and getting the boats ready, and getting ready for staging for the next operation, which was Leyte Gulf. And we had Army troops there at Leyte. And I went ashore there, and that was a much easier landing than was Peleliu. And as I mentioned, Jim Hendy, the ships in the anchorage were bombed by the Japanese there, pretty heavily, and Jim was lost there. I didn't know it. But Peleliu, Leyte Gulf, and there were big surface ship battles went on around there too. And then we went back again and staged for Okinawa, landed in Okinawa.

By that time, I was 1st Lieutenant. 1st Lieutenant of the ship, and then later became, the 1st Lieutenant is like the chief mate, he's in charge of everything on-deck in the boats. And then after that navigator, became navigator of the ship. And at Okinawa we were there six months, waiting to stage, until the operations ashore were completed, which were very difficult, and we took on, we had a big screen of destroyer, radar, what's called radar picket ships, a screen of destroyers around the island to warn all of our Forces on the island and the ships of Japanese attacks, which came daily, of airplane attacks. And the poor, the screen got subject of a lot of Kamikaze hits, and we would pick up the, we had been converted into a semi-hospital receiving ship, or casualty receiving ship at that time, and that's why we were there so long. And we'd pick up the casualties, bring them onboard, and we had about 30 doctors at that point. And would give them temporary care until a hospital ship would come in, and then we would transfer them all, all the casualties to the hospital ships.

NG: I don't mean to stop you, Mr. Dupuis, I really, everything, this is amazing, but we've kinda got to, start to wrap it up a little bit. Is there anything else you want to, anything to add in, on top of everything else we already talked about.

HD: We went and took, carried some Chinese troops up to Northern China, and then came back. I was Exec at this time, by this time. And then we went through the canal back to New York, and I was relieved of duty, came home. Went to Cal.

NG: Oh, my goodness, wow. Thank you so much for sharing all this for us.

HD: Well, I hope it wasn't too long-winded.

NG: No, this was amazing. Really, I appreciate it so much, thank you. Thank you.

[End of interview]