

California Maritime Academy Library

# Interview with Bruce Hope

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Bruce Hope  
Interviewer: Margot Hanson  
Date: October 11, 2014

Place: Cal Maritime Library  
Transcriber: Rev.com

## Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Bruce Hope conducted by Margot Hanson on October 11, 2014. 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.

Bruce Hope is a graduate of the class of \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_.

## Abbreviation

**BH:** Bruce Hope  
**MH:** Margot Hanson

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## Interview Outline

- 00:53 How do you think your time at CMA has influenced your life?
- 02:04 Are there any words of wisdom you'd like to pass along to current and future cadets?
- 02:32 Do you want to share any stories from your work life?
- 03:58 Are you still in touch with any of your classmates?
- 05:09 Can you tell us about the 1962 train collision in Colombia?
- 08:54 *Setting up the research station in the Galapagos*
- 10:02 What are you proudest of in your life?
- 10:50 What did you do after graduation?
- 12:23 What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in your life?
- 13:35 How has the campus changed since your time here?
- 16:18 Can you tell us about your time teaching at San Francisco State?
- 17:53 What do you envision for the future of Cal Maritime?
- 18:59 Do you have any memories from classes, clubs or teams that you'd like to share?

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## Interview

**MH:** Okay so here we are in the Cal Maritime Library group study room and I am conducting an Oral History interview. This is October 11th, 2014, and my name is Margot Hanson. I'm a librarian here and I am here with...

**BH:** Bruce Hope, engineering graduate, 1964, celebrating our 50th anniversary year. Had a great party last night and now I'm here at the, bright and early in the morning considering the evening to be interviewed for this Oral History.

[00:53]

**MH:** Great. So first off, I'm going to start off with a question about how do you think your time at CMA has influenced your life?

**BH:** Well, I hate to read a response but since I've prepared it, I'm going to read. I've always felt that if I did not have the opportunity to attend CMA I would very likely not be the successful individual I am today. I would probably have lacked the skillset to address unforeseen events and work out successful conclusions. I would probably not have been able to withstand the many vicissitudes of life and come away standing. I think my time spent here as a life-changing experience and a very positive one at that. I'm a stronger person, I have a great deal more self confidence in facing the unknown and setting and accomplishing life's goals. In summary, CMA was a positive driving force, shaping much of who I am and what I am today. The experience guided me from a wavered boy, not even shaving to a man ready to face the challenges of life. And of special significance, it enabled me to become an officer and a gentleman in the United States Navy, something I would never have dreamed possible just three years before I graduated.

[02:04]

**MH:** Thank you. So, related to that, are there any words of wisdom that you'd like to pass along to current and future CMA cadets?

**BH:** I think the most important thing that I have found in life and certainly CMA taught me that is enjoy what you're doing, and you will do it well. If you don't enjoy what you're doing, you will be a failure. So, find a path that is a path to have enjoyment and enjoy the people you work with.

[02:32]

**MH:** Great, great wisdom. Do you want to share any favorite stories from your work life?

**BH:** This is one of the most fascinating ones and it's one that is, I guess, so unusual that I just want to share it with you because it also involves a fellow graduate cadet engineer. We,

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the two of us graduated together and we got jobs in New Jersey. We were flown out because of our contract with the Union, first-class, we'd never almost been on a plane before. We arrived in New York and joined our respective ships and his ship was a round the world cruise and mine was Mediterranean back and forth on a passenger freighter. So after about almost four months, I got off my ship and was headed back to California, get into the Hoboken Tube, the Tunnel, the Transit, and who comes walking toward me but my cadet classmate of four months ago, we were in the same location, same place and we walk into each other and what chance is that? So we ended up having many beers, talking about our times traveling back and forth and then we went out to California again after having been four months gone. So just an unusual event and we've been best of friends ever since.

**MH:** Yeah, that's pretty amazing.

**BH:** Yeah, it was amazing.

[03:58]

**MH:** Uh-huh, so that actually, this wasn't on the list of questions that I sent you, but I had another related question. Are you still in touch with any other of your classmates?

**BH:** Yes. We stay in touch with probably a core group. Maybe out of the total class, there are probably a dozen of us who stay in touch with each other. And in fact, I was on the committee that helped form the endowment proposal for our class which we presented to the class last night so there's a core group that stays in touch. And it's one of those things where you've been through so many things and we were the class that was in the head-on collision in Colombia back in 1962 and that formed relationships that were unusual in the sense that we went from drinking beer and riding on the engine of the train to having to administer first aid and deal with people trying to rob the dead and it was a pretty horrific experience. But some of the early training at the Academy helped us respond very quickly to an unusually, turn of events so...

**MH:** Yeah. Can you, I was reading a little bit about that from the class of [19]64 legacy-

**BH:** Oh, you got our notes, you've done your homework.

[05:09]

**MH:** Yeah, Kathy shared these with me. So, can you tell me a little bit more about that collision? Like the background on that?

**BH:** Well, we were in Buenaventura, Colombia, and we were there for two, a couple of days, and the first group, half of the midshipman and associated instructors took the train up to Cali and then they came back. They spent overnight in Cali and came back the next day.

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And we were in the second group of people so we were very excited to hear what they were doing and all the fun we would have in Cali. So, we got up bright and early and they had special cars for us that were, I would say definitely more classy if you will, than the cars for the locals which was a good thing as it turned out. So, we were there bright and early and as good midshipman we had our breakfast of beer and more beer and we decided some of us that it would be more fun to ride on the engine of the train than sit in the back in our caboose.

So we got up on the engine of the train and as we're going up on the hill, some of us yelled, "Gee, there's another train coming" but obviously it's gonna stop before it hits you and you look down and there's only one track so it's not like it's a sidetrack and they collided at probably 40 miles an hour the one coming down and they were going up about 20 miles an hour and I thought, "Oh, I can hold on" but that was not gonna happen so I was thrown at least 40 to 50 feet into, down in a gully and didn't have any particular bad, you know, injuries except later on, very early on, one of our cadet classmates was trying to get from the hillside across to the riverside so he could get away from the trains and he got caught in the middle and his arm was caught between the two trains. So, we turned to immediately to really, you know, get him out of that situation. He ended up spending a year off from the school and came back and graduated with us. He was in a previous class and then the rest of us went back and tried to help the people who were in the other cars because the cars essentially collapsed.

And there was 60 some people who passed, died and a lot of looting and then the military came in and shot some people and it was an experience that is one that you don't want to have again but certainly you've kind of glazed over because you don't see death that close, you know, that early, I was 18 years old and you kind of glazed over and did what you had to do and it was an unusual experience, one that I'll never forget. I gave one individual his last cigarette and he died as I was administering to him and so it's, you know, here you are and you do what you have to do, you team up together and you get the job done but we never got to Cali. We were sent back to the ship to do head count to make sure we were all alive and well. Oh well!

**MH:** Wow, so I would assume that that experience probably cemented the connections between your class.

**BH:** It definitely did because, you know, you're thrown into a situation where you have to count on each other and early on, because this was just after our first trimester, it was our first cruise. And so you're thrown in situations where you either do it or you don't and you understand very quickly that you count on your teammates to get the job done because nobody else is gonna do it and you're not, you know, you're out in the middle of nowhere and it took the Army probably a good hour to get there. In the meantime, you're trying to administer to the sick and the injured, not the sick but the injured.

**MH:** Mm-hm.

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[08:54]

**BH:** So yes, it cemented some early relationships. And the other thing that was fascinating is we've been to the Galapagos three times and we were among the class that set up the station there, the research station there. And then we went back to take stores of goods there when we were first classmen so it's kind of interesting to have been to the Galapagos three times. Most people haven't been there once so it's... And that was really fascinating just as a port of call, if you want to say that but you know just the prime event of going there and seeing the big tortoises and swimming with the sharks and just an incredible adventure if you will.

**MH:** Yeah, so that was part of your cruise?

**BH:** Yes.

**MH:** Uh-huh.

**BH:** Yeah, it was part of our cruises at our third-class year and our first-class year, so it was really a great adventure.

**MH:** Wow, I would love to go there someday. Okay, do you have any favorite stories from your work life that you want to share? Oh, no, we did that one.

**BH:** We got that one down, yes.

[10:02]

**MH:** What are you proudest of in your life?

**BH:** I think I'm most proud of my family, my grandchildren, my relationship with my wife, just all of the things that are most important to me which is friends and family. As far as things that I've done, I have many work-related friends that we still get together, retired from Chevron and just the being with friends and family is the most important thing to me. It's interrelationships with people that really if you will, turns me on, I love it. I love people, I enjoy getting together, enjoy sharing stories and just helping people out.

[10:50]

**MH:** Great, okay. I was wondering a little bit more about your work life and let me see if there's a good question to ask related to that.

**BH:** Well, I did graduate from the Academy and then I went to sea, ended up taking a couple of tours of sea duty to Vietnam on United Fruit Company ships which were nice because, well, sort of nice. You took stores over, frozen goods for the troops but you brought body

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bags back in the freezers which wasn't particularly pleasant, but you went in and out very fast, so you didn't get stuck there. Then I went back to college and got an MBA at San Francisco State University because I wanted to come shore side. So I sailed for a couple of years, went back to school and then was a teaching assistant for a little while at the university and then went to work for Chevron where I retired after some 27, 28 years and a very varied career in the fact that I started out as an engineer and I ended up as a Chief Financial Officer with one of their subsidiaries. So, it shows what the Academy can do, it helps you address what you need to address and to get the job done.

[12:23]

**MH:** Yep, okay. Yep, we covered that. What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in life?

**BH:** I think I've learned a couple things and the Academy certainly helped me with this is, number one is you don't put off things that you need to do today till tomorrow because they just get worse and in fact, it builds and that it gets worse and worse in your mind, even though the problem isn't any worse you just think about it too long. So, I've learned that throughout my life, I try to get done things that I need to do today and then I clean the slate and I can face something new tomorrow. The other thing is always always value friendships. They are key to getting, not only things done that you want to get done but feeling good about yourself when it's all over.

**MH:** Excellent advice.

**BH:** Thank you. It's amazing because some people in my career and in my life, you see people who've cut off relationships or shortchange people and it comes around to bite you. You can't throw people under the bus and expect that the bus won't hit you.

[13:35]

**MH:** Yeah. Since you've been checking out the campus, have you noticed, do you want to describe how the campus has changed since your time here?

**BH:** It's not even the same campus. Thank goodness the administration building is the same or I wouldn't know where to go but it's just marvelous. I mean the campus, we used to chuckle because it was like, if we didn't do it ourselves, the campus wouldn't get done and now you look around and we're gonna go to the opening of the new, is it called physical education building or the? Yeah and I mean, it's just a marvel. It's incredibly, I haven't been inside it, but looking at outside it, it's just incredible structure and facility and just going to the dinner last night and the new dining hall, looking at the cadet's area downstairs is... That's light years ahead of what we used to do in the old cafeteria facility. And just the whole physical appearance, the new classroom area and keep in mind that we graduated with about 76 of us so there's a lot more people on board than there were



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back then and we were three years and now it's four plus I guess 'cause there's even graduate students here. So it's a different, it's a different facility but the nice thing is at least in talking to the cadets, you get the same feeling that they are here, they're proud of what they're doing, they enjoy the facility. There's a certain esprit de corps when you see cadets in uniform that they are, they're just straight, upright, and I don't mean to be conservative in this but there's a feeling you get about being in that military environment that is unusual and special.

**MH:** Yeah, it's definitely unique.

**BH:** It's very unique and you know, having gone to San Francisco State when they were trying to close the campuses down in the 60s over the Vietnam War, it was light years different and when I was teaching at San Francisco State even though I was teaching in the business school which on a scale of one to 10 is the most conservative section of San Francisco State, it was a variety that you didn't really have at the Academy which was good and bad. I'm not saying it's all good or all bad, but it was a very different teaching at San Francisco State versus being a cadet at the Maritime Academy.

**MH:** Yeah.

**BH:** And the other thing is that's really wonderful is we now have cadet full female and male cadets which we were an all-male school when we were here which had its impact if you will, and I think it's probably a lot better now with having a mixed cadet corps.

[16:18]

**MH:** Mm-hm. So, you mentioned teaching at San Francisco State, can you tell us a little more about when that was and what you did there?

**BH:** When I was going from my Master's when I was in my last year and then a year after my Master's I was offered a job as a teaching assistant and I took it because it allowed me to become both better at my core delivery which turned out to be one of the better things I did in life because when you stand up in front of young men and women and behave as an instructor, you better know what you're talking about because they'll slice and dice you if you don't and you get to develop a very quick rapport with your students, one that either works or doesn't. And I was relatively young and so it was pretty easy to establish rapport with my students but it helped me immensely through my career in that I learned stand up presentation skills which are sometimes difficult to acquire in the sense that you have to be prepared for most any question out of anywhere because you don't have a script. So, it was probably an addition to the Academy, a very important learning experience that I obtained early on.

**MH:** Mm-hm, yeah. I teach a class here and you have to know what you're talking about if you're gonna stand up there as an authority figure.

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**BH:** Oh yeah, you can't get up there and pretend you're gonna BS because it doesn't work.

[17:53]

**MH:** Okay. What do you envision for the future of Cal Maritime? We talked about some of the changes. What do you see for the future?

**BH:** I think I hope, and I talked to the president last night, I hope they continue on what I will call their core mission which is training maritime officers for today and tomorrow and also that as they work they continue to be at the front of technology because I think regardless of what avenue of education you're in or whatever avenue you choose to pursue, technology is rapidly changing everything we do. And certainly, between the time that I went to this school and now the technology has changed but you have to be at the forefront, or you will not be a leader and that's to me is key.

[18:59]

**MH:** Yeah. Well, that pretty much covers the questions that I had in mind. Do you want to... We have some related questions about coursework, any challenging courses that you remember or clubs or teams while you were here. Do you want to talk about that last?

**BH:** The only thing that I always think is funny as we called it the Depot Club and we were all, we were never allowed to leave during the week until we were first classmen. So, when you're first classmen, finally, you got Wednesday nights off which was the only time he could leave campus. So, there was next to the Greyhound bus Depot, downtown Vallejo, which was this kind of a seedy area anyway, there was this bar called the Depot Club and on Wednesday nights, they served nickel beers. And needless to say, you found virtually all of the first-class engineers and deck down there at the Depot Club with pitchers of beer, having their meal of the day so to speak. And it was one of those classics, you know, we called it the Depot Club like it was an important event and we went to the club like going to some real function but all we're doing is having a great time down at this bar down in South Vallejo. But the experience here, regardless of whether you were deck or engineer, it was just a bonding experience which was unique in my career and in my lifetime and it was a formative experience given that I didn't shave when I showed up and I graduated as an ensign in the Navy so it was a very formative experience.

**MH:** Yeah. Well, thank you so much.

**BH:** Thank you and thank you for the tie.

[End of interview]