

California Maritime Academy Library

Interview with Melvin Richley

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Melvin Richley conducted by William Dick and Benjamin Bolin 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.

Melvin Richley is a graduate of the class of 1949, Engine.

Abbreviation

MR: Melvin Richley
WD: Matthew Chamberlain
BB: Benjamin Bolin

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Interview Outline

- 00:32 What division were you a part of when you were at Cal Maritime?
- 01:11 How was it coming in with only fifteen students in your class?
- 01:39 How many instructors were at the Academy during your time? Are there any instructors in particular that stick out in your memory?
- 04:32 What was the first cruise you went on?
- 05:11 Did you go on three different cruises?
- 06:12 What was Pearl Harbor like a few years after the attack?
- 07:28 As a cadet on the commercial ship, were you expected to socialize only with the officers?
- 09:32 What kind of training did you do on cruise?
- 10:56 What responsibilities did you have in the engine room on the training ship? How was it decided which cadets would have certain roles?
- 11:35 What was your second training cruise like?
- 12:16 What were the campus building and living arrangements like on campus?
- 15:42 What classes did you take while you were at Cal Maritime?
- 16:28 Why did you decide to attend Cal Maritime?
- 22:21 What ports did you visit during your senior cruise?
- 26:59 What was your uniform like when you were at Cal Maritime?
- 28:02 Do you still keep in touch with a lot of your classmates? Did most of them go to sea?
- 29:44 You went directly to USC after Cal Maritime to study accounting?
- 34:34 Did you go to Korea during the war?
- 42:52 Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- 43:14 When you were a student at Cal Maritime, did you imagine that the school would evolve to what it is today?

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Interview

[00:32]

WD: Okay. Good morning, today's October 6th, 2007. My name is William Dick and I am a cadet at the California Maritime Academy. I'm interviewing Mr. Mel Richley, who was born on March 7th, 1928, and this interview is being recorded by Benjamin Bolin, at the California Maritime Academy Library, Vallejo, California. Mr. Richley, my first question is, what division were you part of in corp?

MR: What division?

WD: What division? Did you have divisions back when you were here, or?

MR: It's strange, but the number that comes to mind is E-3-13.

WD: E-3-13?

MR: Meaning, I was in San Mateo. Or was it here? Here E-3-13?

BB: You would have been 3rd Division, an engineer, and you were 13, number 13 among your classmates.

MR: Yeah, number 13, but I believe that was San Mateo.

BB: Oh yeah, would have been all the same.

MR: Really? I don't recall. We were just, I don't even recall the number here.

[01:11]

WD: Oh, that's quite all right. You said there were 15 students in your class?

MR: Yes.

WD: And when you first came in, you were the eighth engineer?

MR: Correct, when I transferred in there were seven deck and seven engines, and I became number eight engine.

WD: Wow, how was that coming in with such a small class?

MR: It was fine.

WD: You knew everybody right off the bat and--

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: Oh yes, yeah, you go to class, you got eight people in the classroom plus one instructor. Very nice.

[01:39]

WD: How many instructors were there at the Academy at that time?

MR: Oh, I don't even know, they're all, the few number there were are all pictured here in the front of the yearbook.

WD: Really? Anyone in particular sticks out? That you favored the most or enjoyed the most?

MR: Oh yeah, Flanner, was the Chief Engineer and an instructor. And Wes Avril, same thing. First Assistant Engineer and instructor. And Charlie Dunham, believe he was, now here was an Electrical Officer over here, Walter Lang, he was from the Navy.

WD: A lot of people come from the war and teach here after the end of World War II?

MR: Well, these were all Merchant Marine. And here, Frank LaBombard, he was from the Navy, retired from the Navy and came over here.

WD: Really?

MR: He was an interesting fella. Big, well-built, strong guy. I'll never forget, on our, first cruise, first for me, it was the second for my classmates, we were the California Milk Ship, and that's written up in this yearbook. They had milk that had been donated for the people in Europe, but no way of getting it there. And one of the steamship executives in San Francisco came up with the idea, "Well, maybe the Maritime Academy can take it there."

WD: Uh-huh.

MR: And so they asked and the answer was yes and so we went up to Stockton, and San Francisco, L.A., and San Diego, loading this milk and took it to Marseilles, Genoa, Naples, Piraeus, Greece, and offloaded it, a little bit each place, so we were the California Milk Ship, bringing milk to these various places. But the point on LaBombard is that we were tied up in Naples.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And that's a rather rough port. I mean, you keep your hand on your wallet and your money in that place. In fact, I had a cousin whose father came from Sicily. And he told me that that's where they sent the Mafia to be trained as pickpockets. And here was LaBombard standing there at the foot of the gangway of the training ship, and this local

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

comes running up and literally ripped his wristwatch off of his arm. Here's this 6'2", whatever he was, well-built guy. Rips his watch off and runs. And he gets to the gate and the crowd opened, and the thief ran through, and the crowd closed. LaBombard could not get through the crowd to catch the thief.

WD: Oh, man.

MR: Yeah.

[04:32]

WD: Wow, so that was your first training cruise that you went on?

MR: Yes, yes.

WD: That was in--

MR: Well, from here, I was--

WD: Right.

MR: Spending a year as an engine cadet before that.

WD: At San Mateo.

MR: Yes, on the Linfield Victory, and the Cape San Diego, and the Solon Turman, the lightship that you mentioned doesn't exist, or you mentioned doesn't exist anymore. Solon Turman was the lightship.

WD: Right.

MR: Cape San Diego was American President in line.

WD: Oh really?

MR: Yes, and the Linfield Victory was McCormick Steamship Company is the name I know it by because my dad was port agent in L.A. Former Cormack, but McCormick became [illegible].

[05:11]

WD: Okay. You went on three ships, so that was three different cruises at San Mateo?

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: Well, they weren't really cruises as such, just that my dad asked John Clerico, who was port engineer, more than port. He was the company engineer for McCormick Steamship with his office here at Pier 40, and 38 in San Francisco, and he requested that I be assigned to a McCormick ship.

WD: Ah.

MR: And that's what Linfield Victory was, and I joined her in Okinawa Supply, and Pearl Harbor was our first port.

WD: Really? And you just resupplied Pearl Harbor?

MR: It was interesting or very surprising to go to Waikiki expecting to see your salt sea island and find a standalone gas station right in the middle of it and nearby a theater that's still there. The gas station's gone, but that theater that's there today was there in 1946.

[06:12]

WD: Had they cleaned up all of what happened during Pearl Harbor, during the attack? When you went?

MR: Oh, yeah, Waikiki was--

WD: It was all clean?

MR: All tourists.

WD: Really? Five years later?

MR: Yeah. The Pink Palace was there just as it is today. Yeah, it was R&R for submariners during the war.

WD: Yeah?

MR: Our Hawaiian hotel.

WD: Oh, sounds like fun.

MR: That's the Royal Hawaiian. The Awana Hotel was there, the old wooden hotel you see today, was there.

WD: Don't recall ever seeing it, but I haven't been there but once.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: I'll never forget that. I wanted to go there, but I didn't wanna go by myself, and one day I'm on deck, and the three Mexican wipers went walking down the pier, and I yelled, "Where are you going?" I could see them with bathing suits, carrying bathing suits. They said, "We're going to Waikiki," and, "Oh, can I go with you?" "Sure," and I ran in and got my trunks, and I went with them. When I got back, the First Assistant Engineer called me into his room, and he said, "You wanna be with the officers "or the cadets are in those ships, "or do you wanna be with the men?" And what he was telling me is, "Do not go to shore with the wipers." If you're gonna live with the officers, be with the officers.

[07:28]

WD: So, you had to socialize and help with--

MR: couldn't go swimming with the wipers.

WD: Really? And they were hired? Or were they lower class cadets?

MR: No, no, no, they were part of the crew, the ship.

WD: They were?

MR: They were wipers. You know, you've got wipers, firemen, oilers.

WD: Right, and they were all just hires?

MR: Part of the crew.

WD: Really?

MR: They live on the lower deck, and the officers lived on the upper deck.

WD: So as a cadet you were considered partly officer?

MR: Oh, yes. Like on a standard victory ship, you've got the center on the officer's deck, in the center you've got the Chief Engineer's office, and then next to that his T room.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And then on the other side of the Chief Engineer's office, you have the First Assistant's--

WD: Right.

MR: Room. Where he has a desk and his birth.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And that's the passageway that goes across, the door to door, they go out port, or go out on deck, but from the First Assistant's door, you could come out there door and there's a passage for your third ships, and you left, and the first room is a cadet's room.

WD: Oh, so you're right next to the chiefs.

MR: Yeah, the deck and the engine had shared the room, upper and lower birth with a desk, and uh... I got that in another book. But anyway, yeah, they shared the room.

WD: That's interesting.

MR: And then after that is the Second Assistant Engineer and after that's the Third Engineer.

WD: Wow, so you were in front of--

MR: Right in the officers, yeah.

WD: The first and the second.

MR: So, the First Assistant was telling me, "Do you wanna associate with those guys downstairs, "go down there and stay."

WD: Oh, geez. That's harsh reality. Suppose that's the way it was back then, though?

MR: I guess so. It's that way today.

WD: Oh, it's not as so much. I mean, I can socialize with the ABs and not get in trouble for it, but they still have segregated dining halls, dining facilities.

MR: Yes.

WD: What was your first training cruise like here at Maritime? And you said that you were taking milk?

MR: Yeah, it was great, we--

WD: Was that all you did, or was there more than just taking milk over to the Naples or Italy?

MR: Well, it was the training cruise, but we were carrying milk also.

[09:32]

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Right. What kind of training did you do?

MR: Just operate the plan. And I was an engineer.

WD: Just operate? Keeping it going?

MR: Yeah.

WD: Excellent.

MR: It was a neat ship. We had two engine ropes.

WD: Oh, the forward and the aft. I remember seeing that in the uh... What was the difference between the two?

MR: One ran the port shaft and one ran starboard shaft.

WD: Really? And they were forward and aft of each other not port and starboard?

MR: Correct.

WD: Really? So you were, were you in forward or were you in the aft engine room?

MR: I was in the after-engine room.

[10:56]

WD: After engine. Did you have any responsibilities?

MR: Well, I'm the guy that suggested this, and that is that, I think we only had eight engineers in our class. I suggested that we have a chief, first, second, et cetra, engineer.

WD: As cadets?

MR: Yes, and so I was the First Assistant Engineer in the after-engine room. Fred Yuart was Chief Engineer of the after-engine room, and Don Monally was engineer of the forward one. Paul Beck was First Assistant Forward, and we just had our duties to do.

WD: That was excellent. How'd you decide who was gonna be chief, and first, and second? Or was that just pulling straws?

MR: Overall, I was number one academically, but they put it in this military--

WD: Oh, so.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: Whatever you wanna call it. And I didn't score high on that.

WD: All right. So, it was mostly academically based, but if you can pull a few strings, it would-

MR: Well, academically and military department and all this, they counted 40% of your overall grade.

WD: Really?

MR: Yes. For the way they were grading in those days.

[11:35]

WD: Wow. All right. How was your second cruise like? Did you, you went down to Mexico City, you said?

MR: Well, yes Acapulco, and then you could take an optional short trip which I did.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: You could fly from Acapulco to Mexico City.

WD: You could fly from the port?

MR: As a group, yes.

WD: Wow. And how many of you went on that trip?

MR: Well, my class, the eight of us.

WD: Oh the entire?

MR: The 15 of us went.

WD: All 15? Who was taking care of the ship while it was in port?

MR: Oh. Oh, I left this out. We all, the entire student body, went on the trip.

WD: Really?

MR: We took one cruise a year.

WD: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: And we all went.

[12:16]

WD: Okay. We lived in barracks here. In fact, when you leave the guard house up here at the gate, come down the road there, that lawn you go by, that's where I lived. On that lawn.

MR: On the lawn?

WD: Yeah, there were barracks there.

MR: So, the brick building wasn't here at all?

WD: There's nothing up on the hill except the, head of the school, the chief engine refiner, and the chief, they lived up in those houses up there. That was the only thing up there. You have a baseball field up there today. That wasn't up there then.

MR: No?

WD: No.

MR: Ah, well. So, it's just--

WD: It's all down here.

MR: Shrub? How about all the houses around? None of those houses were around here at all?

MR: There were five houses up there.

WD: And that's it?

MR: Yeah.

WD: Just for the president and for faculty that wanted to live on campus?

MR: Well, that was it. There were those five houses. They were the only people that lived on. The only officers, instructors, whatever you wanna call them, those five houses up there, and then that lawn area were the three barracks where the students lived.

WD: Were they wood barracks?

MR: Yes.

WD: How many to a room?

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: Four

WD: Four to a room?

MR: Four births to a room.

WD: Four births, okay.

MR: There weren't necessarily four people in a room.

WD: Okay, so four bunks.

MR: Right.

WD: How many rooms?

MR: Oh, I don't know.

WD: Quite a few for--

MR: Whatever the student body was divided was three bunks.

WD: For the first, second, and third class? Enough that--

MR: Oh, we were mixed. We had... I know I had Al Macklemore as a roommate in one.

WD: Were the first, second, and third, they weren't segregated at all?

MR: No.

WD: Really? Wow. What else was down here? I noticed that the boathouse was pictured in the yearbook. That was here. Were there any other buildings? Or it's just one main classroom? Or did everything--

MR: We had the pier and the boathouse. I believe you call it Gymnasia Mail.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And that was there.

WD: That was still there?

MR: Just like it appears today.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Really?

MR: In fact, I just left this lecture down here to come to meet you.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And the head of the school, Bill Eisenhardt.

WD: Yes.

MR: He was mentioned. He left, the basketball floor in Mayo Hall was falling through.

WD: Oh, really?

MR: Yeah, they have to do some serious renovation in there.

WD: I didn't know that.

MR: But anyway, that building was great by the pool and the basketball, the whole thing there. That was the only really great building here at the time. Everything else was just wooden things.

WD: Wooden.

MR: Classrooms, and the barracks and--

WD: So, there were classrooms here? You didn't have any classrooms on the ship?

MR: No.

WD: Or was there practical training that you did on the ship?

MR: Let's see if it shows in here. We live in the, uh... We live in the, uh... Cargo holds. We had births. We had bunks in what had been the cargo area in the ship. It's not shown here. But anyway, forward in the ship, there should be, there's gotta be a picture of the ship in here. Yeah, right here.

WD: Oh, that's the ship?

MR: We lived up here.

WD: Oh, I see.

MR: The upper twin decks.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Okay. And the rest were cargo hold on the aft?

MR: They were cargo below here, carried them up down there.

[15:42]

WD: Okay. What sort of classes did you end up taking while you were attending Maritime?

MR: Electrical engineering. It was very directed.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: Like we took the course in physics. The course in physics was, or in chemistry was a better example. The chemistry class was a class in boiler water chemistry.

WD: Oh really? So, it wasn't a broad spectrum, it was pretty focused on the Maritime aspects.

MR: Exactly.

WD: Well, that's good.

MR: And the electrical same way.

WD: So just based on how to operate the generators on board ship and the electrical components that go along with that?

MR: And do the power, and the voltage, and that sort of thing.

[16:28]

WD: Well, that's interesting. We definitely don't have that these days. Why did you end up attending the Maritime Academy? How did you get involved in Maritime aspect?

MR: Well, several things. One, as I mentioned earlier, my dad was an agent for a McCormick Steamship Company in L.A. He was a native of Eureka, California, and as he grew up, he became a checker on the waterfront there in Eureka.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: His dad worked in the sawmill, and he went to work there. His dad was a shingle sawyer, and he went to work there in the lumber mill, and he told me he was so tired, had a noon lunch, and instead of eating, he took a nap. And so he got from there over to the waterfront and became a checker. And then the local banker told him that the McCormick was starting a steamship company in San Francisco, and he recommended my dad be the

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

agent for McCormick here in San Francisco, and my dad went down and met Mr. McCormick. And came back, and Allard saw him back there, Allard was the banker, Allard saw him back in Eureka and he said, "Well, why didn't you go to work for McCormick?" And he goes, "Well, you didn't pay enough." And so apparently, Allard communicated with McCormick and my dad got the job at a higher rate of pay.

WD: That's good.

MR: And went to San Francisco.

WD: Wow.

MR: And then, that was around World War II, World War I time, and then 1925, the agent for McCormick in L.A. Harbor, and his wife were having their first child, and they were from San Francisco, so my dad traded jobs with him so that Joe Ludy could be back in his hometown of San Francisco, and my dad was down in L.A.

WD: Oh.

MR: And a year later, one of the captains, Captain Henry Lause, invited my dad to go to L.A. to see his new grandson that he was so proud of. And my dad went to L.A. and ended up marrying the sister of Captain Henry's wife.

WD: Wow.

MR: Yeah.

WD: And so from there, that's--

MR: But anyway, my main point on that is that my dad was steamship agent, and as a kid, my mother, once per summer, would drive my brother and I, I had a brother, two and a half years younger, drive the two of us down to the harbor, and they put her car on deck, and we'd go on board and we'd spend the two nights and the day in between going from L.A. to San Francisco, and we get to Pier 38 or 40.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And we would offload her car, and we spent a couple days visiting with his friends around San Francisco, and then drive home, stopping to visit his friend in Modesto and on down to L.A.

WD: Wow.

MR: I'm driving on Highway 99 which is--

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: That's--

MR: Really crummy compared to my freeway.

WD: I believe that. I've taken the 99, it's a desolate drive.

MR: Terrible. But anyway, what got me into the Maritime was the relationship there, and then World War II, and I had every desire imaginable to avoid the United States Army.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And so, I applied for King's Point when I was 16 years old.

WD: Really?

MR: They have a minimum age of 17, and they don't know it, but they accepted me when I was two days before my 17th birthday. And so, I graduated high school age 17 and three months. That's March, April, May, and June, yeah. 17 and three months. And I reported to San Mateo on July 5 of '45.

WD: Wow. And then the year after you came here to CMA?

MR: Yes, two years.

WD: Two.

MR: Because of the month after I reported there, the war ended, and they converted the 18-month peacetime program, wartime program to the peacetime program of four years.

WD: Oh.

MR: So, I spent 10 months there at San Mateo, and then about 10 or 11 months aboard those three ships I mentioned earlier. And then I was supposed to go to King's Point for two years, and I wanted no part of New York, and so I contacted Cal. Maritime and transferred in here.

WD: Wow.

MR: And was very pleased I had done so.

WD: So, if you would've stayed, if the war would've continued, and you would've done your 18 months, you would've ended up shipping with the United States Navy to go to World War II?

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

- MR:** Well, I don't know about Navy. I would've been Merchant Marine.
- WD:** Merchant Marine. That's interesting. 18 months goes to two years during the peacetime or four years, you said?
- MR:** Four years total, yes.
- WD:** Four years. Four years.
- MR:** For your peacetime. In fact, they had a cutoff. It was ridiculous. I was in section E-3 as I mentioned earlier, and instead of cutting it off by the section, they cut it off by the date. Anyone who reported before July 1 was in the three-year program, and anyone after July 1, on or after July 1, was in the four-year program. Half of my section was in the three-year program, and half was the other. Anyway, I was in the four-year program, and put in the two years there and then two years here, but going back on these cruises, in those days, we lived in barracks, and came cruise, we all moved aboard.
- WD:** Mm-hmm.
- MR:** And went on a cruise and came back and moved back to the barracks. No one lived on the ship other than during the cruise.
- WD:** Oh, okay. How long would you go out on cruise for? Would it be--
- MR:** About three months.
- WD:** Three months?
- MR:** Yes.
- [22:21]
- WD:** Well. What other ports did you end up visiting during your senior year?
- MR:** We left here, and we went to Valparaiso, and we spent about a week there. And it was really great because the Chilean Navy was informed, we were coming, and they put on a dance for us at the big gambling hall there in Vina del Mar, and the daughters of the naval officers were there to dance with us.
- WD:** Oh.
- MR:** In fact, I, I got kinda serious with the, uh, with this gal. Her father was a captain in the Chilean Navy.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Really?

MR: Yeah. I think she thought we might be getting married or some such things.

WD: Oh.

MR: Great gal. Very attractive. She found me one time. She had married an American Airline pilot.

WD: Oh, no kidding.

MR: Yeah, she called me from L.A.

WD: Really?

MR: Where I was living at the, yeah.

WD: Oh, so you kept in touch with her?

MR: Somewhat, yes.

WD: That's amazing. The connections you make while on cruise. My cruise actually did go down to Valparaiso and Vina del Mar, as well.

MR: Great place.

WD: It's beautiful. It really is.

MR: Yes.

WD: It's probably the best out of the South American. We also went down to; I believe it was Costa Rica and Peru. Lima Callao.

MR: Mm-hmm.

WD: Did you go down to Callao at all?

MR: Yes. The seaport for Lima.

WD: Yes. What was that like?

MR: It was great. And Lima--

WD: Oh, I see, yeah. Are you in that photo?

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: Yes, I am. I'm right here.

WD: Oh, right in the middle?

MR: And this fella at the end here is Bud Pearson, and he is 10 months older than myself, and we, wanna say lived across street from me in L.A. We grew up together, went to the same grade school.

WD: Really?

MR: And I told him about the trip, and he applied, and he was hired as a laundryman on the training trip down to South America.

WD: Oh, geez.

MR: And there was Bud in Lima.

WD: Wow.

MR: These are the laundryman. These two fellas were working in the laundry as did he.

WD: What else did you guys end up doing down in Callao? I noticed that you went and visited the, um... I wish I could remember the name of that statue. The, uh... Yes, I remember seeing that at waterfront walking down the street. Were there any social dances? You said that in Valparaiso, you had the Chilean Navy meet you there. Did the Peruvian Navy or the Maritime?

MR: No.

WD: No?

MR: No, just the one there in Valparaiso. Here's the big gambling hall there in Valparaiso.

WD: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MR: Where they put on that dance for us.

WD: And it's still standing today.

MR: Here's the training ship on the harbor.

WD: Oh, that's the same birth that, we birthed that while we were there two years ago.

MR: Yeah, Mediterranean style. Drop the anchors and back the stern tab to the--

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Oh, at moor?

MR: Right.

WD: Yeah, we didn't have to do that, but it hasn't changed much. Still looks the same.

MR: Then we stopped in, um... Acapulco. As I said, we flew into Mexico City, and we took a ride there in the boat, and the, uh, floating guard was there in Mexico City. Went to the bull fight.

WD: How was the bull fight? Was that pretty interesting? Culturally, we don't have that going on in the United States, but was it a pretty enjoyable trip? Going to Mexico City?

MR: Yes, yes, and I had gone to school, military school, in Anaheim when I was in grade school.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And there were two fellas from Mexico City going to school.

WD: Oh.

MR: And I was able to visit them in Mexico City on that trip.

[26:59]

WD: Really? Small world. Make friends in great places. I was wondering, what was your uniform like when you were attending Cal Maritime?

MR: Here?

WD: Yes. Was it just basic khakis?

MR: Yes.

WD: Khakis.

MR: And the dress blues.

WD: Dress blues? Were those just a suit with black pants and black shoes?

MR: There should be a picture. Yeah, here.

WD: Oh, yeah.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: We're wearing our blues. Here's a picture of the cadets in their blues marching--

WD: Oh, it looks very similar to what we have today.

MR: In San Francisco. And here we are in khakis and in blues. Was on the Golden Gate Bridge.

WD: Wow. Did you have dress whites at all? A dress white uniform?

MR: No.

WD: No dress whites?

MR: No, none.

WD: We've done away with the dress whites. We haven't used it very often, and I believe my class was the first class that we didn't get it.

MR: Good.

[28:02]

WD: You still keep in touch with a lot of your friends that you graduated with, your classmates?

MR: No, the one I kept in touch with most died a few years ago--

WD: I'm sorry.

MR: And that was Al Macklemore.

WD: I'm sorry to hear that. Did most of them go out to sea and sail?

MR: Well, Al wanted to go Navy, and he went directly from Cal Maritime, active duty in the Navy.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And then converted his reserve commission to regular Navy, and he eventually retired from the Navy.

WD: Oh, really?

MR: Yes. And we had three in my class here that had been enlisted men in the Navy.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And I believe they might've gone back to the Navy. I don't really know what happened to them because they're the three that I just totally lost track of.

WD: Yeah. Well, would you say the majority of your classmates went into the Navy or Merchant Marine?

MR: I would say there were about three that went Navy and probably the same number Merchant Marine.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: I know Orton went to work work for the telephone company in the L.A. area.

WD: Oh, really? Right out of California Maritime?

MR: Right.

WD: Straight out? He was an engineer, I'm assuming?

MR: Yes. And... I don't know what Earl Richards did. He was from Long Beach. His father was a fireman for the fire department in Long Beach.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: I don't recall what Earl did. He's long dead, now.

[29:44]

WD: Oh. You went out and you went to USC, correct? Right out of Cal Maritime?

MR: Yes, directly. In fact, I was a week late entering there because graduation here in those days was in September.

WD: That's early.

MR: Yes, so we graduated in September. Oh, uh... Oh, shoot. The admiral for the Pacific Ocean, who's really the hero of San Francisco, he came over from San Francisco and presented us, at the graduation ceremony, with our reserved commissions in the Navy.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: Nimitz. Admiral Nimitz.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Oh, Admiral Nimitz. Okay.

MR: Yes.

WD: And he presented you guys with--

MR: Yes, he came here and, in the auditorium,, presented us with our reserved missions.

WD: Wow, what a treat. That's a special event.

MR: I thought as such, yes.

WD: Yeah, that's amazing. Wow so--

MR: But anyway, yes, I graduated here and was a week late starting my first classes at SC.

WD: Oh. So, right from September, graduation, and directly over to USC the week?

MR: Yes.

WD: And from there you studied accounting and law, you said?

MR: Accounting there and graduated there in three years. They gave me one years credit.

WD: Oh.

MR: For the work I'd done at King's Point and here.

WD: Okay.

MR: And so I graduated in three years and thought we had a war going in Korea at that time in 1952, and I became convinced if I didn't do something with the Navy, the Army was gonna have my body. So, after trying to get in the Navy Supply or ONI.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: I finally sent a telegram to Bew Perris. I will always remember the exact wording of that telegram. It read, "Being chased by the draft board. "Request immediate active duty." Back came a telegram. "Situation understood. Orders follow." And I got one from Arthur Anderson one Monday evening. I was supposed to report for the draft board physical exam Tuesday morning, but there in the mail were my orders, and I went to Naval Office of Procurement the next morning, they phoned the draft board, the draft board said, "Send us a copy of your orders." Of the orders which they did, and I reported to the Henry W.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Tucker at Marrow Shipyard. She was undergoing extensive modifications. They took out her guard ship's passageway and put in additional radial room there.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And she was a DDR, a radar picket destroyer. Every division had four destroyers, three regular DDs, and one DDR, and we were the DDR in that division.

WD: And so, what was your job, essentially? Just, um--

MR: I went aboard. Oh, while I was at USC, my instant commission had aged three years, and I was a lieutenant junior grade with a year and a half seniority on the JG.

WD: Not bad.

MR: So, I reported to the Tucker as the senior JG on board. Which made me the damage control assistant with the engineering officer who had been in Naval ROTC during the war.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: But he hadn't served, so he was brought back during the Korean War, and he got off about two months after I went aboard, so I became the engineer.

WD: Wow.

MR: That was really great because I was the only engineer in the division.

WD: Wow, no kidding.

MR: Yeah, we come into port and tie up, four of us nested alongside of the Destroyer Tender.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And the other engineering officers would come over to tell me that, "the Chief Boiler came to tell me this. "Is he pulling my leg, or is that necessary?" I was advising the other engineers on their engineering problems.

WD: Wow.

MR: Yeah, one of the other engineers was a history professor and the other one was an English professor, and I've forgotten what the other one was.

WD: No kidding, and these were all, they had been all pulled from reserve?

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: Right.

WD: Wow.

MR: Yeah.

WD: That's impressive.

MR: In the Navy, I don't know if you've been exposed to it yet, but you find out that the Navy operates with executives.

WD: Okay.

MR: And then the executives that tell the enlisted men what to do.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: They may not know what they're doing themselves, but they're telling the enlisted what to do.

WD: Well, as long as they pretend to know what they're doing, I suppose.

MR: Right.

[34:34]

WD: Instills confidence. Well, did you ever go over to Korea at all?

MR: Oh, yes, we were off the shore of Korea the night the war ended.

WD: Oh, really?

MR: Yes, we went aboard the Tucker as I've said, and it was about four months later that they completed the work there, and we went down to our home port of Long Beach, and then down to San Diego for under ward training which meant having inspectors come on board, and we went through engineering drills and aircraft coming out and whatever, and then back to Long Beach, and then we sailed with our division for West Bank.

WD: Okay.

MR: And I shall never forget that sailing. Going by Point Fermin, we were tied up in Long Beach there. It's all been destroyed in the last couple of years.

WD: Oh, really? Okay.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: All been converted. The Chinese have taken that area over for commercial.

WD: For shipping.

MR: But anyway, we came up in Long Beach entry, and we're heading past Point Fermin, and the Chief Machinist from the after-engine room called me, and I was in the forward engine room, I wasn't after. They had a leak in the main line going into the LP Turban, and, he said, "Sorry, it's just we have that leak, "and we can't go to Pearl Harbor like this. "We have to go back to the shipyard." And I said, "For what?" He said, "To repair that leak." And I said, "Just secure the steam, and tank the bolts, "and get the flange out, and doctor it up a bit." "Oh, we can't do that here." And so, I went up and told the captain, and I said we're only doing 15 knots. We can lock that shaft and just stay in formation. And he said, "No, no." He said, "I don't wanna take any chances like that." He says, "If you think we can do it," he says, "We'll report to the division commander, "and we'll fall out of our place here, "but we'll steam along with them, "so whatever you wanna do." So, we went down, and we locked the shaft, and I told him to get me one of those regular cans for the vegetable's things come in, so big around and about a foot high.

WD: Yeah.

MR: And I said, "Fill it with water." Cold water not chilled water.

WD: Right.

MR: Just regular water, and I took the bolts out, and here I'm sitting down there in my officer's uniform, and taking the bolts out, and getting that flange out of there, and doctoring it up, nuttering it up, and stuck it back in there, and bolted it up, and no more leak.

WD: Wow. That's engineering on the go.

MR: Yes. They believed they had an engineer on board. Not some guy from a history class or something.

WD: Well, that's good.

MR: No, it was a really a great start with the crew.

WD: Oh, I'm sure. Proved yourself right off the bat and proved to them that you can do it. That's excellent. Well, what was it like being off the crew?

MR: Well, from there we went to Pearl Harbor, and we operated out of Pearl Harbor for a couple of weeks meaning we would be in port for the weekend, but during the week, we're out chasing whatever, and then the division went on midway to refuel and onto

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Yokosuka, and gee, I'll never forget that night going into Yokosuka. We hit the edge of a hurricane.

WD: Oh.

MR: We were rolling about 42 degrees, and they told us, if you go 45, you don't come back, and at two in the morning the captain called me, and I went up on the bridge, and he called me Smokey. Engineers put smoke out the sack, and he said, "Smokey," he said, "I want you to take on Bellis," and I said, "Well, whatever you say." I went down, I got the Oil King I don't know if you know that term yet.

WD: No.

MR: But in Navy ships, there's one fella given the responsibility of keeping track where the fuel oil and balance of water is.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: He's the Oil King.

WD: Okay.

MR: And so, we got the Oil King, and I said, "Okay, the captain said we take on Bellis." Well, of course, they don't wanna take on Bellis 'cause the next day we're gonna be in port, we're gonna fuel. They don't want the damn seawater mixed in with their fuel. So, I don't know if he put the Bellis in there or not. I just gave him orders, and I left. And when I first went aboard that ship at Bear Island, the Chief Boiler Tender came to me, and he said, "We need some alcohol." And I said, "What do you mean alcohol?" And he said, "Well, torpedo juice." And I said, "For what?" He says, "To clean the side gauges on the boilers." And I says, "Well, okay, how much do you get?" And he says, "Well, the smallest container "is five gallons." I said, "Five gallons? "My God, that's gonna take out the Navy for history," and he said, "That's the smallest it comes in." So, I looked on the catalog, and sure enough, they had one gallon cans available on the same Navy catalog, so I ordered five one gallon cans, empty, and the one five gallon can of alcohol. And we got it and transferred it so that I gave him one can, and I took one, and the damage control got one, the main got one, and the aft officer got one. We each had safes in our room. We each put the one gallon in our safes, and the Chief Boiler Tender gave his one gallon to the Chief Armorman's mate who locked it in the sickbay on the ship.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And so that night, with the hurricane and the ship rolling and wild, damage control assistant and I each got a water glass and some grapefruit juice, and we got 50% alcohol and 50% grapefruit juice and downed it, and got in the births on our bellies with our

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

elbows out and our legs spread, so as the ship rolled, we wouldn't roll out of the birth, and we woke up in the morning in great shape. We were walking around, had a full night's sleep, and the rest of the ship was staggering around from lack of sleep. Oh. And there was this enlisted man, a seaman, apprentice, or whatever the title who was so in fear that he was in the fore and aft passageway, sitting there where the hatch is to the Tucker was what they call a long haul destroyer. They had had it 10 frames to the middle of the ship.

WD: Oh, okay.

MR: When we finished fighting in Europe, and we were starting to get ready with the Japanese--

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: There was far greater distances in the Pacific than there had been in the Atlantic and needed more fuel capacity in the destroyers.

WD: Oh, so they didn't--

MR: So, they simply took the design of the destroyer, took it in the middle, and added that 10 frames in the center.

WD: Okay. All for fuel space?

MR: Yes. But they also put the evaporators on top of those fuel tanks.

WD: Mm-hmm.

MR: And evaporators on one side and storage on the other. But anyway, anyway, that was how we took care of that that night. The next day we were in there. Oh, I know what I was saying. That fella sat on the hatch going down to that expanded area there in the ship.

WD: Right.

MR: And the next day, they sent him up to the hospital, and he was discharged from the Navy. Unfit for the duty at sea.

WD: Because he was too scared? Of the hurricane?

MR: Yeah. Jack Williams was my, it's Williams right in the middle up there in that picture. Jack Williams was the Damage Control Assistant.

WD: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: And we only enjoyed that alcohol about three different times. It was really rough out.

WD: Otherwise it'd be used for cleaning the gauges? I suppose--

MR: I mean, again, these ships today, and it's just floating hotel. They just, they don't go anywhere except straight ahead. But those Navy ships--

WD: The one with the Navy lines.

MR: They worked, yeah. The old freighters, they bounced around a bit, too.

WD: Really? Well, that's great.

MR: So.

WD: I think that's about it. It's about 12:28.

MR: Okay.

[42:52]

WD: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add, sir? Anything I didn't remember?

MR: No, just that I had a wonderful time at Cal Maritime and think very highly of the school, and enjoyed listening a little while ago to Bill uh--

WD: Eisenhardt?

MR: Eisenhardt. He seems like a very fine--

WD: He's a good president.

MR: Head of the school.

BB: Can I ask you a couple questions, Mel? Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?

MR: Go right ahead.

[43:14]

BB: So, when you started here, did you see that this is the direction Cal Maritime was going when you were a student here? Did you imagine that the school would evolve to what it is today?

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

MR: No. No, at that time I pictured it as strictly a training school for the Merchant Marine, and it's gone well beyond that. It's, uh... Giving degrees now that are fine college degrees. At that time, it was really, well, it was a three-year training school. Now, as you well know, it's four years, and it's... Well, we had just Merchant Marine people, retired Navy people. I don't know if there was a, I'm quite confident we didn't have a qualified college educator in the engineering faculty. No, none of these.

BB: All were come from practical maritime backgrounds instead of academically trained professors.

MR: Right. This Charlie Dunham was about the closest to being a college time professor. Same thing on deck. In fact, I sailed in that one ship as an engine cadet. The American President in line, C1B, Cape San Diego. They'd had a major strike in 1946, and I got back in the Long Beach Harbor on the Linfield Victory, and a few days later, my telephone rang at home with my parents and it was Bob Keller. Bob was an engine cadet, D3 there at San Mateo, and he said that he had been in San Francisco, and they had put him on this C1, and they had, right after the strike, the captain was 24 years old, and the four mates were all 26 years old, and they were going through the Panama Canal to Havana. And I said, "Geez, I'll try to get on there "because the ship I'm on has been sold "to another steamship company, "and it's just laying here in Long Beach, "and I'm not going anywhere." So I phone San Francisco the next day. They had what they called district instructors in San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York. So, I call the one in San Francisco, and he had authorized my transfer to the Cape San Diego. The captain of the Cape San Diego was Roger Swain who came here as an instructor, and the second mate was Nat Maine who came here as an instructor. They were both graduates of Cal Maritime, and the junior assistant third engineer was 19 years old, and he was a graduate of Cal Maritime, and so with that experience there, it was more stimulating to not go to New York and come here instead, and I came here, and Roger Swain and Nat Maine both came here. In fact, they should be in the picture here of the faculty, and, yeah, there's Roger Swain. I don't know, did you know Roger Swain?

BB: Hmm.

MR: Well, he retired from here. He was in Sacramento, and, uh... Here's Nat Maine. I missed that before. His first name is Nole, but his nickname was Nat. No, that's Martin. Here it is, over here. Yeah, N.F. Maine. Here's Nat Maine right here. Yeah, so those two fellas I sailed with in the Merchant Marine, and I came here. And Cole, actually was just out of the academy, and he was junior third on that ship.

BB: Great. Thank you very much for coming and participating with us.

WD: Well, thank you.

MR: Appreciate it.

Interviewee: Melvin Richley
Interviewer: William Dick & Benjamin Bolin
Date: October 6, 2007

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

WD: Thank you, sir. I really appreciate it, and it really was a pleasure.

MR: All right, wish you great luck in your endeavors.

WD: Thank you, sir. I can use every little bit of luck I can get.

[End of interview]