California Maritime Academy Library

Interview with Robert Piazza

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Robert Piazza
Interviewer: Kevin Sweeney & Kevin Luce
Date: October 5, 2012

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Robert Piazza conducted by Kevin Sweeney and Kevin Luce on October 5, 2012. 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.

Robert Piazza is a graduate of the class of 1965, Engine

Abbreviation

RP: Robert Piazza
K: Kevin Sweeney / Kevin Luce

Interviewee: Robert Piazza
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Interview Outline

00:38 How would you say the campus has changed since 1965?
02:18 How has the city of Vallejo changed? What was it like living here then?
04:34 *Campus dances in the '60s*
06:36 What was it like standing watch on the Golden Bear training ship when you were a cadet?
08:28 Do you have any memorable experiences from sailing on the training ship or the destinations you went to?
11:29 While on the Golden Bear, do you remember any dangerous experiences or machinery problems?
12:44 How would you describe the morale on campus among cadets when you were here?
20:16 What made you decide to come to Cal Maritime in 1962? What sparked your interest in the industry?
24:04 Are there any other experiences related to hazing that you'd like to share?
26:38 Will you tell us about making the Hawsepipe yearbook?
28:22 Did world events such as the Vietnam War have any effect on campus when you were in school?
30:36 Do you remember the day Kennedy was assassinated?
32:55 When you graduated from Cal Maritime, what was your first job experience?
41:01 What advice do you have for cadets transitioning to the workforce?
42:41 Do you think it was worth it coming to Cal Maritime?

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Interview

K: Okay, today is October 5th, 2012. We're here with Bob Piazza. And when is, what is your date of birth?

RP: March 28th, [19]44.

K: And we're here with Kevin Sweeney and Kevin Luce. And we are in the interview room of the library and yes. Let's begin.

[00:38]

K: Okay. First question. So how would you say the campus has changed here since 1965?

RP: Significantly. Not only in physical appearance but also in number of students. And I think the caliber of the students has changed a great deal. As far as the campus is concerned, obviously, there's a lot more facility here today than there was back in the sixties. In the sixties, there was a lot more than there was in the fifties. It's a growth issue. Student wise, if I remember correctly, my class, I think we had 126 that entered in our third class year, as we called it then. By the way, you know we were a three year school back then? And we were on a trimester system. So essentially you were at school all year long. Two semesters were academic semesters and then one was cruise. And you went on cruise three times, all three years. By the time we graduated three years later, my class graduated with 69. That's both engine and deck. So that's total, okay? So the attrition rate was fairly heavy back then. The caliber of student, I've said this to many people, I don't think I could qualify to come here today from an academic standpoint. I think it's much more stringent today. It's more selective today. So you guys are smarter than I am.

K: I don't know about that.

RP: Any questions on that?

[02:18]

K: So obviously Vallejo, the city of Vallejo has quiet changed a lot as well. What was it like living in this town when you were a cadet?

RP: Well, that's an ominous question. We didn't live in town. Your third-class year, you weren't allowed to leave the campus during the week. You can only go off on weekends. And then one weekend a month you're restricted on the weekend because you had the duty. Which meant that you had to stand fire watch and to stand at a residence hall watch, gate watch. Going into town during the week was strictly for Newman Club or one of the other organizations that you went in there for meetings with. Because we weren't really part of the Vallejo community, those of us who didn't live in Vallejo, in other words, we

didn't come from Vallejo to begin with, you didn't really get accepted into the social life with the JC or whatever. I mean, it was, unless you knew somebody.

Now, some of my classmates, of course, were from Vallejo. And so, my wife's from Vallejo. Just to give you an example and I'll tell you the story and how he met her if you want to hear it. But, okay. So, let me go on with Vallejo though. Vallejo back then was a very thriving town because you had the shipyard, which employed a lot of people, a lot of middle-class, lower middle-class, but all working. Versus today, Vallejo is really a sad state of affairs financially. And that's primarily because of the loss of jobs at that shipyard. And people didn't go elsewhere to find jobs. They're here, and now they're on welfare or some may be retired or whatever the case may be. There was no fear in walking down any of the downtown streets of Vallejo back in the sixties. Today, I wouldn't do it at night. That's a significant difference. Back to having the duty on we one weekend a month, well, one week a month here, what are you going to do on a weekend? And you can't leave. You're stuck. So, we would sponsor a dance on Saturday nights. And we would invite girls from Vallejo.

There was Mills College, St. Mary's College, pick one of the nursing schools. And the girls that came up, for the most part, and don't ever show this to my wife, were those that either couldn't get a date or were between dates. Well, you know. So, it became affectionately known as the pig push. Well, that's what it was called. Third class year, I went to them pretty religiously because there was nothing better to do. And I was from Southern California, so I didn't really know anybody up here. And I couldn't go home on weekends. That was out of the question. It was just too far. Highway five didn't exist. You had to go 99. 580 didn't exist. 780, they just finished at about that time. So, it was difficult going home. You stayed here.

My second-class year, I think I went to a couple of them and then I gave that up because of, there were girls between dates. But I think it was Halloween my second-class year, no, my first-class year, I was coming back from the Green Door, which was down the street here. It was a bar in a pool hall. And I'd been there with my roommate and he lived over in Concord. So, he went home. I came back to school Saturday night. And the dance was going on in the gym. And so, I walked through just to see what was there. And I see this nice-looking gal and I'm wondering, "What in the hell is she doing here?" One thing led to another and lo and behold, a year later we got married. So that's how that happened. Next question. If I'm boring, you just tell me.

K: Not at all. We probably touched on the last subject where we asked what did you guys do for fun?

RP: You heard it.

[06:36]

K: Yeah, I heard it. Moving on to Golden Bear and cruises, what was it like, first of all, was it like standing watch and sailing on the Golden Bear when you were a cadet?

RP: Well, you almost have to answer that on a comparative basis. Probably the single most difference today, standing a watch on the current Golden Bear versus ours, is the comfort of standing watch. We didn't have air conditioning. And we were a steam plant, which meant that it was significantly warmer down in the engine room. I think from a deck standpoint, there's probably not a lot of difference other than the electronics that you have available to you today versus back then. I mean, we did navigation with a sexton. It wasn't done with GPS like you guys do today. And I presume you still do, what do they call it? The site sighting or whatever. Do you use a sexton or not?

K: I'm engineer, he's,

RP: Yeah, that's why I asked you.

K: I'm a global studies, actually.

RP: Oh, you're global studies. You guys don't know.

K: Yeah, they don't give us a symbol.

RP: Well, I saw the anchor, so I assumed. So it was always warm down there. I mean, really hot. And so, when you didn't have to make a round, you know, to go check on a piece of equipment, which you had to do, you stood under a blower all the time. And even under the blower, it was still 125 degrees except the air was moving, all right? I would say that, for the most part, it was 99% boredom and 1% sheer terror. And the 1% sheer terror came about when something went wrong because then you had to scramble pretty fast. That was watch standing.

[08:28]

K: Do you have any memorable experiences from being on the ship or the destinations you went to?

RP: Oh, they're all memorable.

K: They're all memorable?

RP: Yeah, First, third class year, we went down through the canal to Rio de Janeiro and stops along the way. Of course, that was very exciting. Particularly for a kid 18 years old who hadn't really been out of the country. Second class year, we went down the West Coast of South America and then to the Galapagos Islands, which was really neat. Not too many people had been there then. And then first-class year, we went to the orient. Hawai'i,

Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan. And back again. Great trips, all of them. And a great experience because later in life, I got involved, the company I worked for, I got involved in international sales and international business. And having had an exposure to some other cultures, albeit not really extensive, but some.

Gave you a little better appreciation when you did go and do the business in Japan or Hong Kong or wherever. And so that you didn't end up being the Ugly American when you got there. Probably the most memorable experience was on on my first class, cruise. Our accommodations on the ship are nothing like what you guys have today. Where my division slept, if you will, or bunked in, was the forward hold. It was a cargo hold. And stanchions had been, four-inch pipe stanchions, have been welded in from deck to ceiling. And three to four bunks had been, or cleats would the have been welded in on those stanchions. They were folded up tight with a metal ring if you will. And to that ring was lashed a piece of canvas. And then on top of that canvas was maybe a three-inch-thick mattress. That God only knows how many people would've used.

And as the first classmen, you got first choice where you slept. And the idea was you wanted to get up high because anybody going on watch when you're asleep, they're going to step on your nose or your foot, sure as hell, climbing down. Whereas if you're on top, you're climbing on them. And so, the underclassmen were down below because they couldn't do anything about it. But in the way over, we were four days out of here and we were starting to get some pretty good swells and the ship took a roll and we had the port hole open. And at two o'clock in the morning, it was like somebody opened a firehose. All that water came pouring in through that port hole. It wiped out the whole starboard side. So that was memorable. It took five days for the mattresses to kind of dry out.

[11:29]

K: Oh, jeez. While on the Golden Bear, when you're sailing it, on any of your trips, did you guys, what would you think would be the most safety hazard of your watch standing experience? Any close calls or casualties? Not casualties or deaths, that hasn't happened. But machinery casualties or anything like that? Do you remember any of those experiences?

RP: Yeah, I think probably the most significant one was when our double effect evaps would get salted up. And of course, if you contaminated boiler feed water with salt, steam plant at the time, that was a big deal. And as a cadet, you were responsible. One of the watches was in the auxiliary machinery room which was between the two engine rooms. We had twin screws and two engine rooms. And the engine rooms were also the boiler rooms. And then the auxiliary machinery room was in between. And that's where the evaporators were. And if you salted that those evaps up, you were really shit on that ship for a long time. So that was a big deal.

[12:44]

K: So kind of moving away from that, the Golden Bear stuff, well today, the attitude among students is probably different than it was when you went to school. What would you say the morale is amongst the cadets? As part of, kind of a vague, hard question to ask. But what do you think the attitude of everyone going to school was, when you were cadet?

RP: Attitude towards the administration, politically, socially? All the above?

K: Well, that's probably, I'd say probably a huge topic in itself. Just towards just towards school in general.

RP: It changed from third class year to first class year.

K: Okay.

RP: And I'll tell you why. Third class year, we had 126. Some of the 126 that were there were because they wanted to be. Some were there because their parents wanted them to be. And some were there because they didn't have a choice. So, the attitude as a third class, oh, plus, as a third classmen, you've got the underclass who are telling you what to do. And not only are they telling you what to do, but part of the curriculum back then, unwritten, was there was a lot of hazing. I don't know how much you guys have heard about that. So those that didn't want to be there took that kind of hazing and their regimen and the military aspect of it very negatively. And until they were purged out of the system, most by the way of the attrition took place the first semester. And it was those guys that really didn't want to be there. They were out.

Second semester, it started to become more academic. They couldn't cut it academically. Or they couldn't cut it socially. They were out. By the time you got your second-class year, there were few in the way of attrition. And it was typically academics. Or disciplinary, as the case may be. By the time you got the first class, very, very few. One or two. And again, it was academics more than anything else. As a third classmen, I think I just came here a couple months ago when the when the new class came in and had orientation. Well, orientation back in my day was you stood out in that grinder for the first day you were here with your civilian clothes on it and your little ditty bag with your toothbrush in it. And they welcomed you. If your parents were there, they welcomed them. As soon as they were done with that, they asked the parents to leave. There was no party, there was no dinner. No milling around with other graduates or alumni. It was, "Hey, thank you, goodbye, leave." The parents left.

Then the second class who were in charge of orientation, better known as hell week, would start orienting you on how are you going to wear the uniform? How are you going to get your hair cut? How you're going to answer a question from an upperclassmen. What you're going to do and what you're not going to do. And it was very much like bootcamp. I say that because I came here in '62. In 1961, during my junior and senior year of high school, I went to bootcamp in the Navy. So, I already had it, already knew

the game. So, for that two weeks, you lived on the ship. They'd get you up at four o'clock in the morning banging tin cans and what have you and lined you up on the pier and then made you march up and down the road here, or whatever, and then maybe make you clean the heads, or whatever, and then let you go back to bed at 5.30 and then six o'clock is time to get up again. It was that kind of hazing. And the other thing you had to do as an underclassmen, was you were responsible for cleaning an upperclassmen's room. Oh yes.

K: Oh, wow.

RP: Personal servitude, that's what that's called. You were also responsible for cleaning the heads and the shower. And the hallways. There were no, what do you call them? Janitors, or whatever, like you guys have. No, no, no, no, no. You did it. You did all that. And if an underclassmen didn't like the way you cleaned his room, look out. You were in deep doo-doo. 'Cause he would just ride your butt. Going to dinner or to breakfast or to lunch, it made no difference. You were assigned to an upperclassmen's table. An upperclassmen for a third classmen, meant a second classmen. You didn't interact at all with first class, other than on watch, when you stood watches. And they were in charge. Other than that, you just steer clear of them. But the second class were responsible for your discipline and for what you did outside of the academic hours here. And believe me, they were in charge.

Before you could eat dinner, you had to walk up to the table, which was like one of these folding type tables, whatever you want to call them, with two benches. And a whole whole bunch of over here in the dining room. And you'd stand at the end of it with that tray right up to about your nose. At attention. And you had to request permission to sit down. And generally, you'd be asked a question. How many steps are there going up to the residence hall? It was a question. And if you didn't have the right answer, you couldn't sit down. They make you leave with your tray and come back. And they'd ask you another question. For example, who's Charlie Noble? Charlie Noble, by the way, was the control system. I think it was in the aft engine room at the time.

They were maritime oriented questions, for the most part. They were kind of silly and superfluous. But the idea behind them was to teach you that trivia sometimes is important. So, pay attention to the trivia. You might need it. And also, discipline. You're being asked a question. You have to answer the question. If you don't know the answer to the question, don't try and fake it. 'Cause it will cost you. We were not allowed to put our hands in our pockets. And if you did put your hand in your pocket out in the open and you got caught, they would make you sew your pocket up for a week, or whatever. There was one time during the year, after you got back from cruise the first year, your third-class year, you still had to adhere to all of the discipline stuff and the upperclassmen and what have you. The only way you could get that suspended, where they couldn't give you a bunch of crap, was if you took the anchor. You know the anchor that's sitting out there? Right now, I think it's locked down.

K: I think so.

RP: If you could move that anchor someplace on campus without being caught by the upper class, all discipline was suspended until the second class got it moved back again. Yup. We dumped it over here, and there's a little crick down at the base of the hill. We dumped it in there. What we didn't know was, it was so muddy it started to sink. You couldn't use the mechanics to get it out, by the way. If the upper class use mechanical means to get it, nor could you move it by mechanical means, they'd do it by hand, then all discipline, disciplinary action by them was suspended for the rest of the semester. And then you became second class. Well they couldn't get it out. They finally had to get a tow truck in here to get it out. Which was fine with us. There's a story for you.

[20:16]

K: Fantastic. So, I should've probably asked this earlier, but what made you come to Cal Maritime in 1962? What, how did it spark your interest or how did you decide to be in this industry or want to be in the industry?

RP: Good question. Since I was about 12, I wanted to go in the Navy. And you know, back then, we used to watch victory at sea movies and all these old black and whites and what have you. They weren't old then, but they are now. Anyway, that was an interest on my part. I kinda liked the sea. I liked, I thought I liked the Navy, et cetera, et cetera. I won a trip on a APA to, from Long Beach to Hawai'i and back through the Navy League. And I think that was my junior year in high school when that happened. So that really peaked my interest. The next question was, okay well, how am I going to do this?

I really want to go to the Naval Academy. Well, unless your parents are are politically connected, you're not going to get in. Except you can get in through the Naval Reserve Program. They had 160 billets a year that the Naval Reserve could pick enlisted guys, if you will, to go in. So, I figured that's the way I'm going to do it. So that's why I went to bootcamp. I joined the Naval Reserve latter part of my junior year of high school, went to bootcamp. And then the next year I applied for the Naval Academy. I didn't get accepted because my medical records didn't get put in in time. Another story unto itself. So that meant I would have to wait another year to go in. Rather than being in the class of '66, let's see, it would have been class of [19]67 out of the Naval Academy. So, I had to do something.

So, I applied to University of Rochester and UCLA. Got accepted to both. And the question was, which one? Well, either case, it was going to cost me $5,000 a year. I didn't have $5,000. My parents aren't wealthy or weren't wealthy. So, I agonized over that one. And then I saw the sign on the counselor's office at high school for Maritime Academy. "Oh, what's that about?" So, I looked into it and I found out that it wouldn't cost me very much to come here. At the time, it was like $200 a semester. It's all relative. And I thought, well, if I can get in there, it's inexpensive, number one. Number two, I can use it

as a prep school for the next year to go to the Naval Academy. Assuming that I get in. That was the objective. And that's what I did. Sure enough, my third-class year, we're down in Rio and I get a letter in February, February of [19]63, from the department of Navy saying that I'd been accepted.

But I had to report to Bainbridge, Maryland by March 1st. 'Cause they send you the prep school. Well now how am I going to get from Rio de Janeiro to Bainbridge, Maryland without any money? Money was the issue. There was no way in hell it was going to happen. I agonized over the weekend while we were in Rio. In some way, maybe, I could come up with it. Borrow it, or whatever. Finally, I decided to hell with it. I've only got two and a half more years to go here. I get a degree. I'll get the commission. And on top of that, I get a license which I won't get if I go to the Naval Academy. So, I decided to stay. That's how it happened.

[24:04]

K: Okay. Kind of what you were touching on earlier with the hazing towards, from the first class, that kind of stuff nowadays is very strictly prohibited. Is there any other experiences that you'd like to share about that?

RP: Yeah, you know, it's generally looked on unfavorably. But there is redeeming value to it, believe it or not. As long as it doesn't get carried too far, which unfortunately it does and that's why it's verboten today. But there was some valuable lessons in it. As a third classmen, you were being managed by upperclassmen and it gave you an opportunity to observe management styles. There are various management styles. Typically, somebody who doesn't know how to manage manages by fear. "You did this, or else." Then there are those guys that manage on the basis of respect. "Hey, I need to get this done and I need you to help me get it done." That's the other way. Not everybody's responsive to that, but that's the other way. There's the carrot and stick method. You know, "If you do this, I'll give you that." That management method. So, you had an opportunity as an underclassmen to experience, really, all of those management styles on you by upperclassmen and you learned which ones motivated you positively and which ones motivated you negatively. When you became a second classmen, now it's your turn to experiment with management styles. And then you in essence do that. And then as a first classmen, well then, you've you've done all that and yet you kind of got it at that point and you don't engage in the hazing end of it because you don't need to. It was valuable, very valuable in that respect. And I think that's lost now. Whether anybody want to bring it back or not is a whole separate issue because you still have those idiots who don't know how to deal with it on either end of the spectrum. I had a couple of my classmates that left just because they couldn't handle the hazing. I don't know if that answers your question.

K: Yeah, that's a great response.

K: So you worked with the Hawsepipe, right?

RP: I did.

K: Tell us about that.

RP: I was business manager.

K: Yeah? Raised the money.

K: Oh, wow.

RP: Yeah.

[26:38]

K: So tell us about the Hawsepipe. It's gone now.

RP: That's a shame.

K: Yeah, it is. We might try bringing it back next year.

RP: Hawsepipe was really kind of a yearbook for the graduating class. And of course, the underclass were also included, as you well know, in the photographs and some of the stories that went in there, but it was primarily for the first class, the graduating class. It was really self-administered by the cadets. We did the editing. We decided what went in it. We funded it. Went out and got ads. That's what I did, I sold sold ads. Went into San Francisco every Friday afternoon, and become a salesman. That's how I learned sales. Really. That's a tough thing to sell. You're selling an intangible, advertising space. And then what you put together, what the group put together, not only the individual, but our class put together, it became our handiwork and something that we took with us. I still have mine. I still have all the three years. Third class on up. And I go back, and I look at them. And it's kind of neat to do that. You don't have that now, right? Shame, shame, shame, shame. You guys need to do that.

K: It stopped around 2009.

RP: Pardon?

K: It stopped around 2009. So just recently.

RP: Well anyway, it's memories, you know? Memories aren't important to you now because you don't have that many. Later on, you will. Yeah. Do you have anything else you want to ask?

[28:22]

K: Maybe ask some questions during the time period. 'Cause when you were attending school that's kind of the peak of the Vietnam War, in 1965. That's when they doubled the amount of troops overseas. Did any of those events' kind of tie into school and what you might be doing when you graduated? Being merchant wise or?

RP: Well, I think it depends on who you were, what your objectives were at the time. I mean, I told you mine were you go into the Navy and do my thing. So yeah, it was important to me and I paid attention to it. But again, at 19, 20, 21 years old, how much do you pay attention to politics and world events? Probably a more significant event that took place was the Kennedy assassination. That was pretty significant. And then before that was the Cuban Missile Crisis. Those were really more dominant, I think, in our minds at that time then the Vietnam War was. The Vietnam War didn't exist in 1965 per se. Because if you remember, it was really the Tonkin Gulf incident that they kicked it off. But prior to Tonkin Gulf, if you go back and read the history, and again, I didn't know this back in '65 because I didn't read any history and didn't care at that point in time, it really started back when the, after world war II when the French occupied Indochina. And then our involvement started around 1960 after the, the VC kicked the French out, essentially. It was Vienwho or whatever it was. On graduation, my class of 69 guys, we all, almost all of us got commissions in the reserves. Not all of us went on active duty. I would guess and say that maybe 20% went on active duty the rest stayed a Merchant Marine. It wasn't significant. And the peak was not '65. That was the buildup. '65 was really when the troops started going over there. And yours truly. It peaked route probably around '69.

K: Okay.

RP: Okay? And then started tapering down after that until we got outta there.

[30:36]

K: So you mentioned the Kennedy assassination. Do you remember? I mean, the day that happened?

RP: Oh yeah. Right here on campus.

K: Yeah?

RP: Yeah. When the news came out, the first reaction was, "Oh, come on, your BSing." You know? And then you watch the news and it was true. And of course, the concern then was, well, you know, the big deal then with the Soviets and the Cold War. Are they going to take advantage of this opportunity? That didn't happen. And it all kind of calmed down after that. But yeah, it was concerning. For somebody who didn't care about politics, you

started to care real quick because it starts affecting you or it could affect you, you know? How involved are you guys in politics today?

K: Follow it. Follow an election.

RP: You pay attention to it?

K: Yeah.

RP: Do you analyze in your own mind how it might affect you if it goes one way or the other?

K: Yeah, definitely.

RP: Good. 'Cause we didn't.

K: Well, I'm sure that the media outlets are a little bit different now.

RP: Oh, yeah.

K: With internet and all that.

RP: Well, back then it used to be, you turned the TV on, or the radio, as the case may be. But I remember Walter Cronkite, for example. You'd listen to him and, back then I never really thought whether Walter Cronkite was conservative or liberal or cared, for that matter. Or a Democrat or Republican or whatever. The assumption was that the reporting was facts. It wasn't slanted. The assumption was it wasn't slanted one way or the other. Looking back on it, and being a little more knowledgeable today, it was slanted. As hard for anybody, I think, to say anything to someone else without it having a bias to it, hidden visuals, bias, whatever it may be. Even my talking right here, I mean, I have a bias. Okay, it's me. I'm not going to change. That happened then too but we just didn't realize it. Today, you assume immediately, depending on the media outlet, what the bias is. And you're probably right.

[32:55]

K: Should we talk about moving out of school and working? We're going to ask you what you did when you finally left Cal Maritime and graduated. What was your first job experience like? Or who did you work for, exactly?

RP: Sure. Right after graduation, they held up our commissions. The reason they held them up was we also had the Berkeley thing going on. Of course, we're real close to Berkeley, so the military wasn't sure whether we were going to go be rabble-rousers in the Navy or whatever, they want to do a little background on you. So be it. So, in the meantime, I went to work for, first APO. I took a ship out of out of San Francisco, no, Long Beach. I

forget, was it President Jefferson, if I'm not mistaken. Just six-week trip that was it, temporary. 'Cause you had to join a union in order to work back then. UVA or whatever. I came back in and I got a letter from the Navy department saying, "You can't leave the country 'cause your commission is pending." Well, how can you be a Merchant Marine and not leave the country? That's a little difficult. I worked it out. I went to work for Mattson on the, I think it was the California. Carrying sugar from Hawai'i here and containers back.

I did that until November when my commission came through. Went down to the federal building, got my commission. And they promptly handed me my active duty orders. And that was on a Friday. And I had to report to San Diego on Monday morning. So, I came home here to Vallejo. We were living with my mother-in-law at the time. 'Cause we didn't know where we were going to end up. And I told my wife, I said, "Well, we're packing up. We're moving to San Diego." So, we put everything we owned in a four by six trailer and down to San Diego. The Navy, in all of their wisdom, decided that I needed to go to two schools. One was a CIC watch officer's school. Which was kind of being a decky, you know? And the other was a prospective engineering officer school. Which was kind of interesting. And that was two months school. And what was it about?

Let's see, turbines, auxiliary systems, all of the stuff that I'd had for three years. When I showed up at that school, the instructor there, the guy who was in charge, was an engineering duty officer. And he had my jacket there and my educational stuff. So, he called me in and he says, "Hey, yeah, you know all this stuff." He said, "You're gonna be wasting your time here." He says, "You need to be here for one week." And he says, "And that's in engineering administration because the paperwork and what have you is a little different in the Navy than it's going to be elsewhere. You need to know that." Okay, great. He said, "So you show up on Monday morning. You get the curriculum and what you have to study for that week. Come back on Friday, take the test." He said, "I may have things for you to do during the week that are totally unrelated to going to school here. Maybe helping me here in the office or whatever." He said, "The rest of the time," he says, "You can go do what you want to do." Which was neat. And I said to him, "Well, that's all well and good but I do have to pass this class, right?" He said, "Oh, you'll pass. Don't worry about that." I said, "Yeah, okay."

Well, as it turned out, I did exactly all of that. I passed, I graduated third in the class. Two Naval Academy graduates graduated first. At first and second, which they lorded it over me. And I informed both of them, "Yeah, but you had to be here five days a week. I wasn't." Okay, long story. Went out to the fleet after that, on a destroyer escort in Vietnam. We did what was called Market Time Operations, which was interdicting coastal trade all along the Vietnam coast. Searching for contraband, guns, VC, whatever. We had two, three inch 50 automatics. So sometimes we would be called in for gunfire support. But we could really only lava shell maybe five miles. So, we weren't going real deep with them, you know?

Did that from, let's see, I went over there in March of [19]66 and then I left the ship in May of [19]67. So, I was on the ship one year. We were home ported out of Guam. I didn't see much of war, but nonetheless, I got out of the Navy early to go to work for MSTS, which is now MSC. And I was on the General Mitchell, third engineer, carrying troops over to Vietnam and back. Left that in probably November of [19]67 and went to work for North American Rockwell autonomics division, aerospace, as a staff project engineer on the minute man three guidance computer cooling system. It was interesting. It only lasted three months and they laid me off. Then I immediately went to work for Getty Oil Company. Getty oil, at the time, had 16 tankers. Worked in LA out of an office and essentially told the tankers where to go, what to pick up and where to drop it off. I bought stores for them, engineering stores. If they needed anything, had it delivered to the next port that they were going to. That sort of thing. I did that for about a year. It was boring. So, I left that and went to work for Dresser Industries, their pump division, in '68. Went into product engineering. I did that for about two years then got promoted into sales. Did that for a couple of years. Moved back inside to marketing. Moved back out into international sales. I lived in Europe for a couple of years. Moved back in again, as general sales manager. Then we bought Worthington Pumps. I don't know if you've ever heard of them?

K: I haven't heard of them.

RP: Well we, Worthington was about a $450 million company. The division of Dresser, the pump division, was about $60 million. So, it was kind of the flea biting the elephant. But because the Dresser bought Worthington, they took their people and put them into the management slots. So, I really moved up quickly in that organization. In a period of, it was three years, I went from being a plant manager to a vice president of sales and marketing. Did that until '92. And then they did a joint venture with Ingersoll Rand. You've probably heard that name. I did not want to go to work for the joint venture company and made a conscious decision to leave. Which I did. And came to work for Price Pump Company up here in Sonoma. So, I went from an $800 million company to a $5 million company. But I was the president. And it's neat because money-wise, I mean, I'm way ahead of the game from that standpoint. But from a stress standpoint it's a whole lot less. And a lot more fun. It's kinda like driving a speed boat versus an oil tanker. Do you know what I mean? Now I'm part owner in the company. And have been for several years. I've been here 20 years now. And that's where I am. I can retire. I'm 68 years old. I've tried twice. And my other partner's, he's making it easy for me to stay. For example, I can go any place that I want to, wherever I want to go other than work. That's why I'm down here. And still get paid. That's not a bad deal, huh?

K: Definitely.

RP: Yeah. Is that short enough?

K: That's great.

RP: That's 45 years. Yeah, that's a lot.

[41:01]

K: Should we wrap this up with the last question? So, what kind of advice or recommendations would you have for any of the cadets, first class cadets such as myself transitioning to the workforce as far as what licensing is coming up? But what advice or recommendations would you have for first class entering the work force?

RP: Have a goal. You need probably a, what I would call a short-term goal. Short term might be five years from now. Long-term might be 10 or 15. I won't go beyond that because it's almost out of your control to some extent. Where do you want to be at in 5 years? What's your objective? Where do you want to be in 10 or 15 years? What's your ultimate objective? Do you want to be CEO of a multi-billion dollar company? Is that an objective? Once you set the objective, then you're going to have to determine what you need to do to get there. And identify what those individual steps are, the path. And then maneuver yourself into that path so that you have a shot at it. Not everybody gets there. Again, if that's what you want. That's my advice to you. Because if you don't have that goal set and then start doing the planning and the steps you need to get there, you will be a rudderless ship throughout your life. That's my advice.

K: Okay, interesting. So, is there anything you want us to ask you? Anything else? Any questions that you hoped we asked?

RP: Yeah.

K: Yeah.

RP: Do I think it was worth it coming here?

[42:41]

K: So Mr. Piazza, do you think it was worth it coming here?

RP: Absolutely.

K: Yeah?

RP: You know, if I had to do it all over again, same exact thing. Except I probably couldn't afford it today.

K: Well, that's very uplifting.

RP: Alright.

K: Yeah.

RP: Turn that off.

[End of interview]