

California Maritime Academy Library

Interview with Gordon Simmons

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Gordon Simmons
Interviewer: Nate Alexander & Jay Janicki
Date: October 9, 2010

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Gordon Simmons conducted by Nate Alexander and Jay Janicki on October 9, 2010. This interview is part of the Cal Maritime Oral History Project.

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

Gordon Simmons is a graduate of the class of 1960, Engine

Abbreviation

GS: Gordon Simmons
NA: Nate Alexander
JJ: Jay Janicki

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Interview

JJ: Good morning, Today is October 9, 2010. My name is Jay Janicki, and this is Nathan Alexander. We are cadets at the California Maritime Academy. And today we have Gordon Simmons, here to interview. He was born on October 11, 1939. And we're conducting this interview at the California Maritime Academy. Gordon what made you want to attend California Maritime Academy?

[00:00:34]

GS: Well there was really two drivers. A kid that lived down the street from my neighbor Barnes, was a midshipman here. And the second driver coming out of high school was a 17-year-old kid, I wasn't really sure exactly what kind of major field I wanted to go into. And the California maritime again, it's very appealing because in three years, you'd have a degree, you had the course all set, you didn't have to make any major decisions a young kid and that was a kind of the spark that put it over the hill. I then, at the ripe age of 20, if I really wanted to do something different, I'd be able to do it then, but those were the two drivers, familiarity with somebody had already been through the program. In fact, I used a lot of his textbooks here. Some my textbook still has his rubber stamp in it.

NA: When you attended it here, you attend for three years, correct?

GS: That's right, it was a three-year program. Basically, all year round with breaks between semesters, a short Christmas break and then a break after cruise but basically, full time.

NA: So, you were coming here during the summer as well?

GS: Yes.

[00:01:58]

NA: Okay and then, what was your role at CMA, either with corps cadets or in the student population?

GS: Well, I started out like anybody else, just a grunt being awakened at odd hours and I remember thinking that life here was gonna be impossible because when I first came here, we lived on a ship and we were given, excuse me five minutes from the time that Reveley went off to get your bunk dressed up, put your Dungarees on and be in formation on the on the pier. And I just thought that was totally impossible, and after about the first week, you found out that you're on the pier and had time to BS with your fellow classmates. It was just an amazing transformation in what you can do in a short amount of time.

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NA: And then, before, were you in division, at the first few years and what division were you in?

GS: Yes, I was in division, but I don't remember what division I was in by division number. But I remember one very distinctive routine. I had a fellow classmate by the name of Hugh, who had rather large ears. And we were standing in formation before a chow meal. And the second class that was in charge of us, I think it was Johnston and he didn't have big ears, but they kind of stuck out perpendicular from his head that they just, you know, and just we're standing there, the second class men jumped on Hugh. My goodness you got the biggest old ears, and Hugh looked at him with a straight face to it. Yes, sir, would you like to start a club? And but what division I was in? I really don't remember the name.

[00:04:03]

NA: Do you think CMA made a different unique college experience for you compared to, you know, a different college or a private institution?

GS: Yeah, I think, right from the start, something that I later observed in industry is the fact that you are expected to be someplace at a certain time, at a certain prescribed address, and show a certain amount of respect to the people in charge and it's actually amazing when you get into industry, how few people think it's a requirement to be on a job on or ahead of time and stay until quitting or after quitting time. But the discipline you received here, that's just normal.

NA: Do you think of the overloaded course load that you had at CMA helped to prepare and balance different workloads while in the industry?

GS: Yeah, I think that along with the fact that they're preparing you to take the watches you're gonna take. In other words, as a midshipman, you get waking up at the regular four-hour watch routine and the first watch as I stood was out at the guard shack.

NA: Really?

GS: Used to be out there to guard shack between 12 and four in the morning, you know, you think what am I doing here? And sometimes surfing shifts to the local Vallejo boys would throw coke bottle down from what was highway 40 or something at the guard shack. But you know that was all through your careers or your time here at the Academy is you waking for watches and I guess later on, they decided that was too much interference with the academic learning of the students or something that's gonna go away in some way.

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NA: When you stood watches did you stand watches on the ship or was it--

GS: Yeah, we also did that.

NA: Okay.

GS: Being an engineer on a ship, one of the watches you stood was a donkey boiler and so you look at the temperatures in the birthing area, when it got to below a certain point then you let off the donkey boiler and brought steam. So, the first, you know, machinery interfaces really was with a small donkey boiler, just doing nothing more than providing steam heat.

[00:06:36]

NA: Understood, what clubs were involved with when you were attending here?

GS: Well, I started the Calvin Club, which was a Protestant group for Bible study. And when I came to the Academy, there was a Catholic fellowship that they went off on Wednesday morning, and I thought, gee, we oughta do something, For the for the rest of the guys. And some of the guys probably joined up just a means to get off base and be in town, but it was a good experience. It was conducted the Community Presbyterian Church in Valeo was gracious enough to provide breakfast for us and the pastor was willing to get up early enough to provide the Bible study and stuff for us, so it was a good time.

[00:07:25]

NA: Well, did you did you play sports while attending CMA?

GS: Yeah, I got beat up pretty bad playing flag football. The first game I can remember we were playing the Marines on Mare Island and was a six-man ball and because of academic or conduct restriction, there was only seven of us able to play. And when we started the game off, we kinda held our own, but what we didn't realize is the Marines were using their worst players just to beat the crud out of us and then by the end, the score was something like 76 to 20, or whatever was just, they actually had ballplayers and we were just toast.

[00:08:11]

NA: You were part of the Propeller club, correct?

GS: Yes.

NA: And as a member active member of the Propeller Club, what did you guys do?

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GS: Basically, we just learned what the interfaces of the industry was gonna be. You know what it was like if you join the MEBA, The Marine Men Beneficial Association. And I didn't do that primarily because the year I graduated, they changed the initiation fee and don't quote me exactly on the price, but it used to be about \$100 to join the MEBA. But when I graduated, it gone up to over \$1000,

NA: Over a \$1,000?

GS: Yeah.

NA: Wow.

GS: And I said no way I'm not gonna do that, I'll do something else.

NA: Or especially in you know that day and age \$1,000 is quite a lot.

GS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:09:06]

NA: Wow. The transition from being a civilian to a cadet or Midshipman at the California Maritime Academy, how was that for you? Having to go from wearing not wearing uniforms to wearing uniforms and scheduled classes for you and watches as well?

GS: It wasn't a problem because Unlike guys around here with cadets wandering around, different things, you didn't do that when I was here. Your classes were all at the same time, same place. So, you're always moved as a as a unit and a group, so that that was no problem. Wearing a uniform was easy, because then you didn't have to make decisions but what you're gonna wear and that sort of thing and the biggest change was probably changed in the respectful attitude for the people above you. It's a little bit tough when you got a guy that's a year or so older, to addressing as sir, and give him his respect and so that transition of realizing it's the position you're submitting to, not the individual, was a good learning experience.

[00:10:19]

NA: Was the school a lot more militarized? Rather than compared to is now cause,

GS: I'm not exactly sure what it is now. But then, everything was you know, you marched from the ship to the to the quad for lunch, you stood outside. The underclass or starting class was in formation five minutes before the upper class had to be there. So, you were in formation for probably 10 minutes and then they broke by division to go into the mess hall so you could be out there, standing pretty gumbo quite a while before your turn came along.

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JJ: Things have changed.

[00:10:58]

NA: What classes and teachers that stood out to you a lot? Which classes do you think you know, helped you in the long run or that you really enjoyed?

GS: I think probably the license preparation courses and dealing with the chief engineer guy by the name of Flanner was very impressive. The one thing that really sticks out was a piece of advice he gave. He says nothing in your Coast Guard license will ever require you to do anything you think is stupid. And I've had many occasions over the course of my career to, how's delicate way to put this, question authority when they wanted you to do somethings and now you know and so that that piece of advice did me well.

The other was Don Lippmann who did the electrical routine and I got a lot out of that that was a good course in fact, when after I quit going to sea I was surprised that Westinghouse wanted to hire me as an electrical field engineer and I looked back and I said well, gee, I didn't have that many that many credits with juice but a combination of that and the practical experience on the ship was on a ship I was given a job as a third class to working on some communication buyer in for MC and it was 144 conductor cables, fine wires connect up all of the stations and I was so proud of myself that I stripped this out, cleaned it very nicely. And the second class it was in charge came back and just tore me a new orifice and what I had unknowingly done is they're in bundles of 12 with one of the tracers around those 12.

So when I got done you know, I had umpteen red wires, umpteen blue wires and I thought, well, I'll just get somebody to help me and we'll wring it out, and we'll put them back to where they go. And he said, no, you'll, you'll tag each one. And so, I went from the halfed inch room, ground one go up to the forward engineering, trying to find that wire out of 144 and back and forth until I had it all put back together and properly identified. And that was a tremendous learning experience to say the least.

[00:14:05]

NA: Sure, I'm sure it was did you get a lot of electrical and communications training while you're at CMA?

GS: I've got a fair amount of electrical you know, as far as the theories and motors in the different kinds of motors and one thing or another but most of it was geared toward the practical end of how you do it, but there was obviously the theory that went with it. And it puts you in very good stead to handle the you know, the various switchboard and things you ran across. There's no problem with figuring out what was happening. The other thing that was, put you in really good stead when you went to shifts is you know about as a third class you started off you had to trace all the systems on a ship. Nobody gave you a

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handbook of what all the piping schemes were. You went down and traced each line from the sanitarys, the main steam line and condensate. And so when you went to sea to pick up your first shift you've never seen before, you know, you could walk through and somewhere within an hour so you could trace all the major systems and have notepad that you're ready to go,

NA: Thank you, well you know, we do the same things here. But as a fourth class, we have to trace all systems, which will tell you straight out of high school. I don't know if I could have done it. So, you know, that's a ship's, you know, fairly modern, so everything has little quirks and corners, but it's definitely a great learning experience. I think that's something everyone needs to learn and know how to do in the industry.

GS: Yeah, it's... The first job I had I was went to the Haiti Victory I flew out of Fairfield Air Force Base to Hiccum. And I got on the ship about 10 o'clock and the Chief Engineer when I report in says, well you'll relieve the port engineer and have the ship ready to get underway at seven, you know? And I said, well, gee, I was hired as a junior third. He said, I don't need junior thirds. I need to watch-standing thirds and you're it, okay.

NA: All right.

GS: So, you know, it was a quick learning experience, but there is absolutely no strain. So, it's good.

[00:16:38]

NA: All right. What did you and your fellow shipmates do for fun while on on campus?

GS: On campus?

NA: And off campus.

GS: On campus, the most of the fun was we'd arranged to have dances or something with the Mills College or nursing colleges or whatever, where they're all females or both all males, so that was, actual events on campus, that was it. The other things on campus was a lot of time was spent intermural sports, that type of thing. You basically couldn't go off campus. So, anything you did, you did on campus. There used to be, as you come into the Academy, there was a tavern on Academy road, just maybe a couple hundred yards outside the front gate and that used to be a source of money for me, because I had a classmate Algar who I've told you about who had been in in the Navy for about eight years, I guess. And he come by and said, "Hey, how about loaning me five bucks?" Yeah okay, "I'll pay you back double." Well, he put on his Midshipman uniform, hop over the fence and go up there and get the locals to challenge us at shuffleboard, thinking he was a low grade cadet and didn't know one side or the other and he'd come back and how much

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was I gonna pay you? So, you're gonna double, well I can do better than that. That watering hole there collected a lot of mid shipment that weren't supposed to be there.

[00:18:19]

JJ: So, did you yourself ever go off campus?

GS: I would never do that. No, I was too interested in obeying the rules, to further my career.

NA: What was the best way to get off campus?

GS: Usually the best way was to go up and go over the fence. Just upside where the the guard shack was because that was always manned. And you didn't wanna have a fellow classmate acknowledge the fact that you had gone through the gate. You showed a little respect for your fellow guys on the gate by either calling, tell them you're going so you could close your eyes or.

NA: Yeah, so no I didn't see a thing.

GS: Were you awake the whole time? Well, I think so.

[00:19:16]

NA: I think it's awesome. So, did the cadets here at CMA have like access to the ship regularly and plan operations where they could work on boilers and help train before you know crews came around?

GS: Basically, we had every afternoon after the academics basically ran the four hours in the morning.

NA: Okay.

GS: And the afternoon was spent on the ship or there was a butler-type building. Just before you got to the boathouse that housed, it had an atlas diesel and some other things in it that you were able to go and. Well how much torque do you put on a head bolt on a diesel? Well, two men on a six-foot board, pull as hard as you can. Well, don't we have torque? No, we just don't torque wrenches.

NA: Things have changed.

GS: Just grab it and go, so, yeah, we had access and then there of course, on board ship, depending on what you did, you had welding projects. One of the first welding projects you had to do was make a steel box. And it had a basically a Schrader valve that you had to place your valve. Then you'd pressurize the steel box and submerge it. And you had to

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make the cube thing so that all the welds were tight, and no bubbles came out. And then they do light things. When you're assigned to an electrical group, you go around and your toolbox that you're assigned, had you know, all the tools you'd ever need to work on something up to the. The biggest wrenches you carry in a box is an inch and 1/4. Anything bigger than that, you went to the tool room, but everything else, you had your own toolbox. As well as you had, you know voltage things with fuse pullers and that sort of thing because unlike the modern ships and circuit breakers almost everything on these older ships was all fuse boxes.

[00:21:38]

NA: Yeah. For like a very regular class day say like Monday or Tuesday so you say do four hours in the morning and in an afternoon is all your--

GS: Practical, right.

NA: Practical. So, what would like a normal day of classes be where you're taking like English or like.

GS: Yeah, English is a bummer 'cause we had a guy, he believed that English could only be written one way that was probably the toughest course for a lot of us. And the hour you spend in class was basically writing.

NA: Really?

GS: Yeah, you'd read some material or you could have your own material, but you would go into class and you would spend one hour writing and then those would be graded and marked up rather ferociously and you did that over and over because the license exam, when I read it was all written, it wasn't multiple guess, it was all answer the questions everything. So, he started off very early, trying to improve the writing skills and skills of those that attended. So, you'd have that and then you'd have maybe a drafting class. Everybody and engine group given a drafting board and it had the old T-square and a 3060 and a 45 and you did your various drafting products. And then maybe there was math. And earlier they had you know kind of a seamanship class, which basically just learned what a C one or T two or Mariner class or whatever just what they are and how you call them and how you identify them. So, that would be a typical four hours. And then later on you went into your senior year. You picked up thermo and and physics, all those. So, but that would all be in the morning.

[00:23:44]

- And then why attend here? What was the uniform for regulations and uniform specs?

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GS: Basically. You had khakis and all the academic and the morning meal, you were all in khakis after you. Let me start over, when you got up, you'd be in Dungarees, and then you'd spend that length of time, either swabbing the ship or if you're in a barracks, swabbing the decks and waxing them or whatever. Then you assemble for morning chow, and that was done in khakis and you were always last in the shower and the washroom because your class was first. So, you were pressed to make the commitment of time to get your shower and shave and then back into the khaki uniform. Then after lunch, you went into Dungarees and did the work and an awful lot of the athletic events, Football and stuff was done in your Dungarees.

NA: Really?

GS: About the only time I can remember was, when we went to PE and we did swimming. And there there was a lot of that was on survival and so some of that was done in your Dungarees. I don't know what they do now, but you button up your collar on your shirt, you use your shirt is a life preserver and just put air in or whatever. And then swimming underwater, simulating the fact that they were on a ship and there's an oil slick that was burning and how to get under it and how to clear a breath hole to come back up, so.

NA: Things have not changed.

GS: That part hadn't changed.

NA: Not one bit.

GS: Yeah, oil still burns.

NA: And we still try to float with their uniforms.

GS: Yeah.

[00:25:43]

NA: So. things you know things have changed and things haven't changed. What do you what are your opinions on allowing females to attend the academy?

GS: I don't... I think in some way, it probably detracts from the camaraderie that just the guys together. I'm sure you have to be more delicate with your language and approach that wasn't there. So I'm sure that the sensitivity part of that is probably a little different and I think it probably, but I'm not here so I don't know, I think it probably detracts somewhat from the male bonding with each other because that's all you have. You're developing a friend and bonding with him, it's gonna be there.

JJ: Indeed.

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GS: But I you know, I've never been in a co-ed college environment, so I don't know. I know from a work environment, that they create some some pretty interesting challenges. So yeah, I don't know. I don't know which is best.

[00:27:02]

A/J: As well as you know, the females attending Academy, what do you think about non license majors like business or global studies?

GS: I'm sure that that's probably some of the trendy industry because I don't know, I don't have any great feeling. I know just from the tradition of being a deck ape or a black hand, that's kind of a nice traditional, easy break, easy to understand. Some of the nuances of the different degrees is probably a little tougher to understand. And recruiting for Westinghouse, you'd find people, they're history major or what are you gonna do as an engineer for Westinghouse with a history major, you know what I mean? Yeah, I'm not sure how those other things fit in.

[00:27:59]

NA: Okay, okay. So, at CMA we did have multiple training ships and you know so right now we're on our fourth, what ship were you on?

GS: I was on the, I guess it'd be the Golden Bear I. It was a twin-screw turbo electric. It was originally an AKA.

NA: Okay.

GS: And so that's what I was on. I remember in my senior year, we were starting to maneuver and had I come out of run, and a cubicle just lit up the biggest ole arc you could ever imagine. And unbeknownst to me, I was a long ways away from the cubicle wondering how I got to where I was looking back. So, I told him, hey, we won't take any bells in the forward engine room, you know, and the chief engineer was, he was down in a heartbeat. You kids, I told you, you gotta really handle this stuff rough. And I says chief, tell them we're taking about chief you know, making the motor run it's not a problem. It's when you come out of run that we have a little problem. And so, he took the fellas, got it up, synced, put in, everything was fine. We got a stop bell and man it just lit up and the next thing I remember he had a flashlight that always had about five cells in it or more and he is at the top shining the light down on me, and then he said, "Don't ever bring me down here when it's broken and you haven't got it fixed." But the interlock was, instead of letting the exciter die down the interlocking, so you just broke full voltage, full current right through it and it just opened up.

NA: Was the chief of the ship, it was better not to see him then actually see him?

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GS: Yeah, yeah, Finer was, you were very happy not to see the chief with his five cell flashlight because if he was around there was something going wrong.

NA: I agree.

GS: But he also, he was great for the old reciprocating engines and he had a finger that was all screwed up and he was synchronized so he could feel the hot bearing. And he said well, what would you do? How would you check it if the oil came back said you have a hot burn and says stop the engine and check. I could see your hand real well and verifying it so yeah.

[00:30:41]

NA: What was the plant like on the ship?

GS: I'm not sure what you mean,

NA: Like well, how was the engine room you know?

GS: The boilers were a forward ships and the firing flat from the boiler to the main motor was probably maybe five feet. And I can remember as a third classman just coming out of my skin because the first job you do is fireman-type routine. And they had missed getting a motor up to synchronous speed before they tried to put it in a run, so you got the armature going over faster than what it can pick up and it just it just bounces like nothing. And I had never seen steel flex like that and make so much noise. I thought man, we're done. We're cooked but after you figured out what's going on, but the first time you're on at sea and that occurs, it's an exciting adventure.

NA: It's definitely had a life-changing moment, I think.

GS: Well you know, you start off with that and then I've been in some very rough weather on ships where you have the main steam lines actually bottom out on the on the suspension and when you see a 16" steam line, carrying 650 pounds PSI and it bottoms out on its support structures you just think, "Man I hope they designed a little margin in it."

[00:32:24]

A/J: So how many Bear cruises did you actually do?

GS: I made three.

NA: Okay.

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GS: As I recall the first trip we went to the Galapagos Islands and Callou, Peru and up the coast. That was an interesting cruise. Then, I think the next cruise was kind of short and we went up to Portland, Vancouver, and then down into Southern California ways and back up, and then the third cruise who went through the Panama Canal, up into New Orleans, Jamaica, and came back around. And every time we were in Panama, I would always take my leave day and jump a ship going through the canal just for kicks. It was a fun thing to do.

NA: How was that experience?

GS: It was great, it was a really unique experience and to see the number of line handlers that came on board and they all came on you first seen they come on with this rolls of cardboard and kind of what are they? Well, after they've gone through the locks, they have nothing to do for quite a while, so they roll out their cardboard on the deck and go to sleep. So, it's interesting.

JJ: So that was on your liberty that you were able to get off and go to other ships?

GS: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, you had... You had the watch sections and if you weren't on the watch sections, you were off. So you could use that time to do what you want, you know, you go to the Cadillac club or the Mambo club, or grab a ship, so.

[00:34:20]

NA: Things have changed. And like, unique, you know, like memorable moments that you had while on cruise, whether it be on the ship or on in the--

GS: Well in my senior year, I was battalion adjutant and one of the one of the good things you have there was, you're responsible for the mail, to make sure it gets to everybody and so when we pulled into Panama, the CO and the Commandant of Midshipmen, had a car coming down to pick them up. Well, I convinced the driver, since I had stripes on my uniform that that was my car. He says well, they're supposed to be two of you. So, I got a classmate, and said well there are two of us. Where are we going? Said well, we're going to Panama, into Panama City to pick up the mail. And so, on the way back I told my classmate he says, you know, this is not good for us, unless you dig through a little one of those mail sacks and I'll take the other. We gotta find some mail for the CO or we're gonna be on the short end of a stick taking his car. And so, we got there and the Commandant of Midshipmen, boy he was fit to be had. He was ahead of the hang, just pacing until the car come back. And so, he came aboard and said Captain, I knew you wanted this mail from your home. I like to see enterprise in a young man. Ole Birdman wanted to string us up.

[00:35:57]

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NA: So, you already mentioned port of call. Is their favorite one that you had?

GS: There were some delightful ones. Vancouver was neat because they set up a dance for us with the women's nursing college. That was a great time. In fact, I can't recall anything. Callou was, that was kind of off limits to us. So we couldn't stay in Callou when we go up in Lima, and you go through Callou and it was, it was pretty, it was pretty devastating to see the conditions and so I can understand why they wouldn't let us run around there.

NA: Yeah.

GS: And the Galapagos Islands. Man, that's worth a nickel. Because you'll have two islands, one island that is sitting there, just covered in vegetation and iguanas and everything, and there'll be an island next to it's just totally barren. And it's always fun to watch the young kids because for fun, they did get a couple three kids on each side of a big iguana and getting him running and then one kid would grab him by the tail, give them a swing. And trading there was, was pretty good. You could get a big stock of bananas for a pack of cigarettes with and the, the master that we had at the time, unfortunately, didn't stay with us long because the academy apparently didn't appreciate him, but he would, he traded as I recall, it was about 50 gallons of diesel fuel and a few hundred feet of, of old Manila line it wasn't worth it and we had lobsters coming out our ears on the ship. I mean, they just brought boatloads of lobster and he made sure all the midshipmen got plenty of that lobster.

NA: Stop at Galapagos next.

GS: The other thing that was interesting about him. When we went into Callou, the pilot was supposed to be on board and the pilot didn't show up. And this Anderson had been a canal pilot for 20-25 years. I don't need a pilot and drives in and docks. And that created a fear because the US Embassy and some other people came down to say how disrespectful it was, he said well, he didn't show up and so we got ready to go. He didn't show up and he just turned that day into a mudhole. He ran those two full against each other and she was just tearing up and he left. And I'm not exactly sure what happened in administration back here but as soon as we got back, he was gone. But he was a great master excellent ship handler. Probably did more for the deck apes on ship and the capability on that cruise and just a really good guy.

[00:39:27]

NA: Was there a common feud between the deck side and the engine side?

GS: Oh, yeah, yeah. Particularly when it got hot and the deck apes had to be up there chipping and doing a job, they would periodically take a scupper full of paint chips and dump it in the blower intake to reward ya. And so, the payback. Other than direct physical payback, we usually when they were trying to maneuver or do something, they do maneuvering

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practices see, and we would we would disable the RPM indicators to the bridge so they'd both show the same RPM and it would speed up one prop and slow down the other. It'd yaw, and they'd be cranking the wheel trying to maintain course. So, there was a few things like that. And I think the other thing that went on you had upperclassmen that were particularly vindictive in their method of treatment of the underclass. Well at sea, you had a chance to get 'em because we ran the laundry. So, when you found out their laundry coming through, their skivvies got starched, their Dungarees got starched and sent back to them,

JJ: To stand up on their own.

GS: Yeah you couldn't unfold them they'd be enough starching Dungarees to be all folded up nicely ironed but couldn't hardly open the legs on 'em

[00:40:59]

A/J: Was there like a lot of hazing that went on especially when you pass the equator?

GS: Tremendous amount of hazing at the equator, we had a guy with the chief Stewart was rather rotund, and they greased his belly up with all sorts of niceties. And you had to kiss the the baby's belly. And the battalion commander was, I don't think he was chief Stewart's favorite anything like that or cooks and just grabbed his head and rub it all the sauce. But yeah, there is a fair amount of that and going through the gauntlet, but it was good.

NA: All worth it?

GS: Yeah, yeah, I wouldn't trade it.

NA: Do you think it's something that every midshipmen and cadet should go through?

GS: Oh, yeah, yeah, it's not physical punishment. Not putting the guy waterboarding, your friend, but you know, just show you the limits of your frailty to some extent and overcome some of the fears.

[00:42:11]

NA: Were there any major problems that went on to our cruise whether losing the plant or you know, blowing main bearings, something like that?

GS: No, our cruises were pretty much uneventful. When I was working from STS in Hawaii, though they made a trip down in South Pacific, and they had a lot of problems because they got some really lousy bunker sea and they'd be taking a boiler offline every other day or so to try and wash it down and clean it up so they could continue firing but we

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never had that I can recall any. Probably, the roughest it was ever was we hit a bad storm and had to call for it back and on that ship, the birthing was in what heck was it, number one? I forget which cargo hold, but we had all the deck covers and everything off. And this storm came up out of nowhere and we had water running down through the birthing compartment up there trying to close things up. And so that was that was kind of an interesting adventure.

[00:43:27]

NA: Where'd you hit the worst weather? Well yeah either being on a bear cruise or while you know, at sea with the industry?

GS: Probably the worst weather I had was that I can remember was when went out of Panama to New Orleans and in the gulf. I was really surprised how turbulent that got. That's the cartoon.

NA: Yeah.

GS: That's when that occurred. I remember getting seasick on my very first time at sea. I was working overhead lighting and in the laundry room which was in a fantail and you know getting up there on the ladder trying to screw the screws and going through the data packages and you know this is not a good place . So, I wasn't too sure about that.

NA: We've definitely hit our weather before, and that was, when you concentrate on one certain point and you start yelling, I guess it changes you.

[00:44:40]

JJ: How about as far as cadets getting in trouble. any Was there cadets that maybe failed cruise or?

GS: Well but probably the most famous is classmates Diana Ray Ferbush. The night rats were pretty crummy. We used to call them horse cock sandwiches. They're not good. So, we decided we need to have something better. And so, the the dead waiter was from the offices quarter end of the galley, loaded into the dead waiter, and send him down to get something edible. And he ended up in a heap of trouble. My senior year, I kept pretty much all my classmates out of trouble as much as I could 'cause I ran the match. And the interesting part about that was the change in some people when they got authority. They tended to try to, to take it out on their fellow classmates and I you know, I just said hey, man, you put up with this crud for two years, leave your classmates alone. Just keep the 200 classes squared away and leave your classmates alone. But some people couldn't do that.

NA: I agree that the authority affects people in different ways.

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GS: Yeah you know, I mean. I remember, I don't know what they do now, but lights was out at 10 o'clock and you couldn't, that was it. Well, when I was here, that's when when Eliot Ness first started the TV, the Treasury, you know, routine. That's when that series first first started. So, I'd invite the fellow classmates and I think who was division five then I was bunked in with vision five, but I wasn't, I wasn't part of it. So, I invited him down to to watch "LA Next". And the division commander came in. You guys are all on report, hey that's good. Make sure you make the chits bold. I said yeah, make them bold, you know, because I wanna know which ones I can throw out when mass time comes. He went storming off you know they never did, right? But was that was a neat finish besides getting mail you were the you were the head of the disciplinary board from get run all the chips and so ones for your fellow classmates just magically disappear like that.

[00:47:28]

NA: As part of being a part of the battalion staff, did you have any special liberties? Or stuff you'd get away with besides writing off chits and naturally disappearing thing.

GS: The biggest benefit, other than to go get mail regularly was, I was the guy responsible for putting all the watch sections and liberty sections together. And so, I would make sure that the section that I had that I was in, if we're gonna be in a port for three days, we ended up with two days liberty out of the three. It was it was always good, always good that way to be able to give your section that little bit better break.

[00:48:22]

NA: Absolutely agreed. Did you ever revisit any of those ports that you, like Panama, once in a while or went back to New Orleans stuff that you enjoy the Galapagos did you go back there?

GS: I never went back to the Galapagos. But I've been back to New Orleans a number of times. When we came in into New Orleans, we tied up probably half a block, maybe from the jacks bear. And they had a place on Bourbon Street. It was called Felix Oyster bar. And it was a big long marble bar with oyster shuckers behind it. And now it says, and so I've been back in the Orleans few times and always went back to Felix. In Panama, the great place is a place called Lee's Steak House. And when in Panama, I've been back there. And I think it was they had a meal and if you ate the whole meal including the 72 ounce steak, you could get it free, and there was a number of Midshipman that made the operator of Lee's Steak House unhappy.

[00:49:40]

NA: Believe it after cruise food in Chow on cruise, I'd eat almost anything. How did how did you Bear cruises, help out with like, you know going to industry or commercial? Do you guys do a commercial cruise?

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GS: Yeah, I sailed for almost two years with MSDS. Well now it's MSC but.

NA: Okay.

GS: And I sail for them just after change for what was called ATS, Army Transport Service. And the army actually ran more ships during World War II the Navy did. They're all installed ATS ships. And you know having stood watches you know all the way from firemen, water tender, whatever everything is done in the engine room put me in very good stead. I never had any trouble with any engine room that I walked into. There was no sense of awe or fear, you know, it's got a power plant. It's got a screw, and just go for it.

[00:50:43]

A/J: So, you felt fully prepared once you left CMA?

GS: Oh, yeah, more than more than adequate. And particularly, because most of the people you were responsible for, were much older, and I was 20 years old and I had oilers that were probably mid 50's and firemen that were in your 40's or whatever. And you know, you're telling these guys what to do, and you realized as a result of the Academy is, it's not how old or how young, it's the position that you carry and what that position is responsible for. I can remember when we were in court, and if we weren't moving any cargo, all we had was one boiler just barely open long and a generator. We stood 24 on and so I'd always send the oiler up to sleep for a while and bring him down, send the fireman up. And then I'd go up usually and sleep from like maybe four to seven or something like that and then come back down. And young engineer from Maine, took over the watch section I had, and he came up after his first 24 hours.

And those guys said they should be going to sleep, get some rest and I said, well, there's more than one way to lose your license, you know, how many times you go find yourself noddin' off 24 hours down in that warm engine room? And how many times you go kick the rag bag that the fireman was sitting on? It says, you know, I'd rather lose my license because there's somebody that was awake and if you're not doing anything, well, it's tough to keep a guy awake for 24 hours straight. You know, it's not like guard duty in the Marines or somewhere the enemies coming over, you just. So, it gave me the confidence to evaluate people and the character of people, and see, yeah, okay, I can trust this guy to do his job while I'm taking a couple hours of rest.

The first when I went down to get this first ship I was telling you about and I went down to do trace the lines and the oiler was setting on the at the operating flag reading a newspaper with the boiler, getting some cool air and he looks up at me and takes out his cigar and he says, everything's running fine. I said, okay. So, I went back, tracing my lines and came back up and takes out his cigar and he says, I told you everything was running fine. I said, well, now there's two of us that know that everything's running fine

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but I had to trace out, he said, well you don't understand, he says, when we're in here in port, we're running slow like this. You'll be in a fire engine room telling the firemen what to do, or I will, but we won't both be here at the same time. And I said thank you, I'll be in my stateroom, call me at four. But afterwards, I found out he was retired Navy chief Boiler, 30 years Navy. So, he was a squared away guy. He didn't need a 20-year-old kid helping him with the situation.

But you learn, I think, and the Academy gives you an opportunity to, it at least gave me the opportunity to see how people work when you when you give 'em orders, how they work under stress. How calm they are, in fact several of my classmates were some of the casualties they had with the engine running away on the ship. They were more calm than the instructors. their Just go about their business and shut her down. So that aspect is extremely important. Being able to judge behavior and not feelings is critical. You know, you make me feel bad. What do you do? You just make me feel bad, well I can't help you solve the problem with it, you know. If he told me he poked you with a stick or you beat you with a club, you know what behavior did, and so you learn and pick the signals masses that I did for guys, to decipher between behavior and just when some upperclassman threw some guy on just 'cause he didn't like him. And some of the second class I used to get upset because they throw third class on for doing something and you try and spin it down well, you know, is it is the behavior the guy did you know? My biggest failing was always had to have my pants pockets sewed up, because I had always forget and put my hands in my pockets.

NA: Yeah.

JJ: Wow.

GS: I don't know if they do that anymore now But if you put your hand in your pocket, that's a good way to find out that you had all your your khaki pants pockets sewed up.

NA: Wasn't that a tradition in the Navy, that you couldn't put anything in your pockets?

GS: Yeah.

NA: Nowadays there's phones and we have our key cards. That's why I put a lot of things in your socks correct?

GS: Yeah, the other thing did, carry things in your pack and save your belt, you just tuck it.

NA: Okay.

GS: Tuck it, there you go.

NA: What about like tools? Do you not put tools in your Dungarees?

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GS: No that was in your toolbox.

NA: Okay.

GS: You took your toolbox to whatever thing you're working on. Probably the most difficult is one of the most simple is, when you're trying to pump bilges and you got an air leak someplace caught a rag and one of the pickups and that valve didn't shut all the way. That was that was probably the most, most tedious setting to find out where the air leak is from and why you couldn't get suction on a bilge pump.

NA: There any like secrets that you learned at CMA that you know that you've kept with you the whole entire your whole entire career in the industry?

GS: Well, there's some personal things you learned about people that have never shared with anybody. They'll go to the grave with me. They won't come out, things I know about various people and things they did. And that's part of the trust you build with people is, getting somebody to share some of those things and stuff and they need a place to hide. You have to know that. Usually, you know, the saying is that more than one person knows a secret, it's not a secret. You have to learn how to do things in secret stuff.

[00:58:02]

NA: What are the secret of the trade?

GS: Secrets of the trade?

NA: There's one thing you could tell us, that we should keep with us for a lifetime. You know about running an engine room, what would it be or helping out with our career?

GS: I think the engine, the advice I was given by The Chief Engineer, your license never gonna require you to do anything you think stupid. And that's certainly well, both while going to sea it certainly well and in other jobs that I've worked with. And, you know, sometimes you work for a boss and I had a basic rule that I tell him what I thought, first off, and then if it wasn't illegal, immoral, or gonna get somebody injured, and you wanted it that way. Okay, well, I don't think it's the way to go. But so, you'd couple out three things.

I remember the first time going to sea, we had an inspection team from, I think they're from Fort Mason and we did various things. You know, we simulated damage control and stuff mattresses in holes cut up woods and made soft patch repairs. And then they decided to have a man overboard drill. And I was motorman on number one lifeboat, so I went up, swung the boat down, they jumped in. Saw if the motor would kick off and got back out. We wanna lower away and have you drop off the painter. And I looked at the man, and went, "No way." I don't know what the sea state was but we had a white caps and I'm not

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leaving a perfectly good ship to play the drill. And the master was beside himself to get all these inspectors there. And I just said not gonna do it.

You do what you think you have to do, but you know there's no man overboard. And so, you learn as a result of dealing with people and learn most of those skills in the academy is don't something stupid if you think it's stupid. Someone may prove you wrong and it's okay but go with your gut and what your training tells you. You can look out and see white caps and know that, hey, lifeboats cool they're designed to get away from the ship, but it's getting back on that's a problem. Anybody can drop off and dump the lifeboat and get away from the ship but coming back on.

NA: Catching that's pretty, pretty tough.

GS: Yeah since they both lock at the same time, if one pops out and you've already throwed it to lock, you're going for a ride.

NA: Especially if that stern one first. That's bad news.

GS: Oh, yeah.

NA: I was actually motorman on our lifeboat number one on the Bear, so that's very cool.

GS: Yeah.

NA: So being--

GS: Back on a Bear we had the lifeboats didn't have motors. We had the idiot sticks and joystick propeller routines because that was designed for passengers, people not familiar with oars or whatever, so. We lost we had added some flotation devices you know, drop off for extra life preservers. And we hit this storm, some of those went over the board. Just wiped them clean and send them for a ride. Okay?

[01:01:56]

A/J: Being back at CMA to bring back any memories for you?

GS: Oh, yeah, yeah. I had dinner with some of my classmates that are here for our 50th reunion and a lot of things came back, yeah. Like the old World War II barracks were in the third classmen. They knew they were gonna be torn down and we're gonna be moving out of them. So, the upper class decided to take and see who could throw a javelin, the length of the hall and stick it in the wall. They were fairly long halls, but then the hall went down steps and steps out and they just say, all underclass stay in your rooms, you hear the javelin go whizzing down the hall, stick it in the wall. But yeah, there are some

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interesting things like that. The class ahead of me was the son of the writer that wrote, he was a writer Michonne and he was an interesting guy. A lot of interesting people.

[01:03:12]

A/J: Do you keep contacting with the midshipmen you graduated with?

GS: I keep in contact with a few that I graduated with, I probably have more contact with those in the classes behind me, because a lot of them came to work for me.

NA: Okay.

GS: In fact Dwight Peters who's a EF51, I invited him to go to our class dinner and I would venture to guess that I either trained or worked with, while I was working at Westinghouse, probably somewhere close to 10 guys that graduated with me. And my boss in Sunnyvale, guy named Jack Horn is pretty active around here. He's EF70 I think. He's in rain division in Sunnyvale.

NA: Okay.

GS: He was program manager that I reported to, so yeah.

NA: So, coming back here now is it a lot different since that the Navy base is no longer active?

GS: You mean Mare Island or?

NA: Yes, sir Mare Island.

GS: Oh yeah, Mare Island has a lot of good memories for me because my dad was a quarter electrician. And at some point, in his career, he worked in a battery shop. And so, he used to take me over and tour the old fleet boats all along and then I spent my entire career in Westinghouse working on submarines all the way from side 598 class 41 from freedom up through the latest Triton submarines. So that's my entire working career. Installing some of the first repair facilities for that system, both in the US and in Scotland. So, it's been a fun ride all because of the technical tools plus the people skills that I learned here. And people skills are equally important to the academics. It's a good, good ride.

[01:05:53]

A/J: Looking back on it all you think was well worth it to attend CMA?

GS: More than worth it, more than worth it. I wouldn't trade the experience you know, starting off with my folks were unable to pay and I was able to get a loan to complete my

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education plus the the money coming from Maritime Commission held and then by reserve Commission and the Navy as an ensign was and a number of my classmates got their draft notices and ended up in active duty. I had relatively low draft numbers called in, but Westinghouse had requested an occupational deferment for me that I didn't know anything about because I was working on the Polaris program at that time. That was what they called grid crackle for the highest military priority around. So, they defer me 'cause I was working with operating the Navy.

NA: What was that, the Polaris program?

GS: Polaris missile.

NA: Okay.

GS: The first nuclear missiles. Well, the first one we put out had a range of 1,200 miles so in order to hit Russia, you operated out of the mid in Scotland. And so, I worked Polaris, then while Polaris there was A1, A2, and A3. And A3 had a range of about 2,500 miles. Then you went in Poseidon and Triton. And Triton has a long enough range, so it will be while you're sitting at base at Banger, you can bomb them in Russia. So, I used to get a lot of questions. How can you be out there doing this war military stuff? And I said I like the style of life we have in this country. I just assume use my skills running a power plant or sewage treatment, whatever, but buys this is some some security for us. And I don't think people really realize how close we came to this whole confrontation with the Russians during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I mean, we had put stuff together and planned to run them with submarines and reload them. It's just unbelievable. I get goosebumps now just thinking about that, how close that was.

NA: It was a wild time.

GS: Yeah. And worked the Discover project was some of the first missile stuff that came out. That what I was working on for MSDS on the recovery ship. And those were launched out of Vandenberg. And the Russians would come out and trail us and put up all sorts of electronic interference, so we couldn't get telemetry data, and if we didn't have a shotgun or the Russians were going out, we'd go out and burn dogs down. So it was, it was an exciting time. And all the adventure all the travel is the result of being here. I mean, I probably wouldn't have thought of all the European travel, whatever I did, but just seeing the limited amount of country I saw while out for sail on the Bear, so yeah, that's not too bad to see how the other half lives. It was good.

JJ: So, there anything that we missed that you think is valuable information add or?

GS: Anything that you missed? No, I think it's pretty well-covered and what we did, the change in the physical aspects of the campus here is just unreal, because we had one classroom building in the mess hall and lived on the ship.

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NA: Wasn't this all one big huge area?

GS: We didn't have all this dream, and there was no palm trees on the waterfront. You used to go down or hunt rats. I'm sure if they catch a rat killer out here now. And you know the the the watch stations were all, man I think we had a 52 Chevy pickup truck to take us to the various posts guard posts or whatever. It was a different environment. I mean you couldn't come through the gate without a Midshipman standing there to find out what you're doing.

NA: Things have changed.

GS: Yeah, yeah. Are they still frown on you guys having student barbers?

NA: Yes, yeah, it's how they would like for you to have, go to the barber that they provide.

GS: Yeah, that created a real raw, because you couldn't make enough money to, because we moved into the new marriage. That must have been, I guess that was my second-class year. My roommate was a barber and the barber. And the barber they put down in a barracks there couldn't make any money because nobody was going to him. So, they still have that problem?

NA: This haircut's not from the barber.

GS: Yeah, but nobody had enough money to go pay a barber to cut their hair. I think he only got 25 cents or 50 cents a head, something like that.

NA: Was the residence hall when you when you moved in was that--

GS: It was brand new, yeah, yeah, it was brand new. I think it was I think I was up there and part of my, because I went from the ship and then went out to the barracks here after cruise, so it must have been the start of my second-class years. That would have been '58.

NA: Did you enjoy the new res hall?

GS: No, no, no. They were nice in the standpoint of the room and stuff. Instead of being a herd of 30 or 40 in a thing. The power waxers and all that crap, I just assume not have that.

NA: Do you remember what room number you were in?

GS: Oh, no.

NA: First day?

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GS: Second day.

NA: Second day, were you oceanside?

GS: Oceanside.

NA: At least you had a view.

GS: Yeah, I had a view.

NA: How was that walk down the staircase?

GS: The walk down was not bad, but we had a number of people that wanted to see who could generate over a horsepower. So, the easiest way to generate power with your body is to run up and so we used to do time trials to see who could generate more horsepower running up the steps. So, it was pretty good. But steps we had were, just wooden, they look a little bit different than what I saw.

NA: I think cadets now curse the stairs. We have to walk all 222 all they way up to the top.

GS: There's one above the old I saw this newer one down lower but there's another one even farther up?

NA: A brand new one that they built a year and a half ago.

GS: Well that's up by where the faculty.

NA: Faculty and right next to Bonder field.

GS: We used to we used to do all of our football games stuff up behind the factory, the houses up there.

NA: Have you taken a tour of the new campus?

GS: Yeah, yeah, I walked around. I'm gonna go on the sea cruise tomorrow. There's just something a little more magical, having a big old wind up up a steam turbine as opposed to the ones that you have. And that was the big debates that we used to have there because diesel's were large low speed diesel were just kind of starting on when we were in school and so you'd always debate whether the efficiencies of steam versus diesel one. Back then the large low speed diesel's, the best they could do was about, as I recall is somewhere around 110, 112 RPM was as slow as you can get them to run with some degree of efficiency and and a marine wheel, on turbine, you could get it down to about 98. So, you had some improvement in wheel efficiency that you gave off and the others. And then it's just kind of a fun debate.

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NA: Yeah.

JJ: Yeah.

GS: About what you're gonna do.

NA: How long has it gone since you've gone to sea?

GS: Since I've gone to sea? On a license or gone to sea, period?

NA: Let's say on a license.

GS: I haven't shipped on my license in 47 years. For yeah, for about, 45, 47 years. Gone to sea on a lot of submarine sea trials in one thing or another, but those are fun too.

NA: So tomorrow should be a lot of fun.

GS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, be different.

JJ: Well, I think that just about sums up--

GS: Good! Pleasure meeting you.

JJ: Yeah.

NA: It was a lot of fun, I appreciate it.

GS: Yeah, take care, hope you guys get all A's.

[End of interview]