

California Maritime Academy Library

Interview with John Beard

Oral History Collection

Interviewee: John Beard
Interviewer: Jake Van Riper & Kevin Hawke
Date: October 7, 2011

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with John Beard conducted by Jake Van Ripper and Kevin Hawke on October 7, 2011. 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.

John Beard was an alumni from the class of 1976, Deck.

Abbreviation

JB: John Beard
JVR: John Van Riper
KH: Kevin Hawke

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Interview

JVR: Today's date is October 7, 2011. We are interviewing Mr. John Beard, who is an alumni at the California Maritime Academy. I'm Jake Van Riper, this is Kevin Hawke. We're both cadets here. The interview is taking place at the California Maritime Academy in Vallejo, California, and I'm a Global Studies Major and Kevin is an engineer.

KH: Yeah, Marine Engineer and Technology Major.

JVR: And our interviewee Mr. Beard is a tech major alumni from 1976. And let's begin the interview.

JB: Great.

JVR: So, Mr. Beard, what year did you graduate? Well, 1976, of course.

JB: 1976, yeah.

[00:59]

JVR: And when did you actually come to CMA for the first time?

JB: After graduation, I mean

JVR: I need you to start there.

JB: On August of 73 as a student, yeah.

JVR: And what division were you a part of in the Corps of Cadets?

JB: I was in 1D.

JVR: 1D?

JB: We had four deck and for engineering divisions, yeah.

JVR: Nowadays we have, we have six divisions, so they're a lot larger than what it were when you were there.

JB: Yeah, I was in the last class that actually went through in three years. So, we only had, my first gaming at first class, second class, third class, all in one division.

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[01:38]

KH: What can you tell me about your school training cruises?

JB: The training cruises?

KH: Yeah.

JB: The first one was short and we were actually going to go to Orient, we're going to go to China and Japan, but they shortened it because we have our Oil Embargo, big things going on with their countries and so we went down to Mexico, Acapulco, Mazatlán, we went over to Hawaii and then sail in Portland and back and we didn't cross the equator that year. So my freshman year, we didn't have the traditional equator crossing and we were supposed to go to my second year and we didn't get to go then, we're gonna go to the Galapagos and they cut that up, and my second class cruise, we went to, to the Caribbean and we went through the Panama Canal, which was really fun, except that we had a problem with our engines and we had to go to anchor and we set an anchor for seven days on the Atlantic, so we couldn't get off the ship, except for one day they took us shore, a shore so we can have a party, and we were scheduled to go to Trinidad for a big, they have a festival there, like kind of like New Orleans has the Mardi Gras.

JVR: Sure.

JB: And we came into Trinidad, like the day after the festival, we missed it.

JVR: Oh, it's too bad.

JB: Yeah, and then my third, my first-class cruiser went, I did the one like you guys did this year. We went to New Zealand and Tahiti.

[03:03]

JVR: Out of those cruises, which one was your favorite?

JB: I think the Tahiti, New Zealand was my favorite. I know we were so far away, it was kind of fun because I knew, you know, once you know you're gonna make it, you're gonna graduate, you start relaxing and you start having more confidence and having more fun and being first class on the cruise, it was a really good time. Yeah, a good time.

[03:27]

KH: Did you guys have an equator ritual?

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JB: Yeah, we did in my senior year, which was interesting because we didn't have many shell backs on the ship because we had, yeah, so it was we got pretty easy. We didn't have 100 guys, they were fire hoses, and maybe about 30 guys who were going to cross, so, yeah.

[03:50]

KH: So, you never did any commercial cruises all three on the train?

JB: No, I did. I went, I did a commercial cruise with what was called the Potential Grey Swans. At the time, it was a combination passenger ship and break bulk and some containers, and I, I made a, I was on it for a couple of weeks because, and when we, we had a three year program, we didn't have a lot of time off. We were in school 11 months out of a year, so I had two weeks, I made a trip up to Canada and down to Long Beach, and then I found out later on that the captain really liked me and he wanted me to stay on the ship to do a loop around South America, but the Admiral didn't let me go.

KH: All right.

JB: So, I could have been on the ship for two months.

JVR: No.

JB: And I got \$10 a day they paid me and when I come out for lunch, there was a cold bucket of beer in my room

[04:39]

JVR: Sounds good. How did you end up securing an internship?

JB: That's a good question. I think I knew somebody that worked for the company, there was, I'm not sure how active the school was, and you had to pretty much go out there and hustle up there.

JVR: Right.

JB: And I did some stuff on Tugboats too, a little bit

[05:04]

KH: So why did you choose to attend the California Maritime Academy?

JB: Well, I had been in the sea scouts when I was a kid, three or four years and I really loved it. I just spent all my spare time and one of the guys in the sea scouts was coming in. He was two years older than I, he was coming to the Academy and his brother had graduated

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himself on the 2nd May and he's making lots of money in driving of shiny XKE and maybe I said, I hope it's like fun, so that's what made me, what made me do it.

[05:36]

JVH: Were a lot of your classmates, you think, at the California Maritime Academy for the same reasons that you were? Because they were really interested in the industry?

JB: Yeah, I think so. A lot of them are either new people, or maybe their parents have been in the maritime industry, and that was interesting because some guys came in and it was obvious that they'd never been on a boat or anything, they didn't know anything about ships.

JVR: Right.

JB: And I was always kind of curious to what led them to go.

[06:06]

KH: Where's your hometown? Where are you from?

JB: Berkeley.

KH: Berkeley?

JVR: Okay, so you grew up in the Bay?

JB: Yeah, my dad was a professor at CAL.

JVR: Okay.

JB: And my parents weren't too happy about me going to CMA.

KH: Yeah.

JVR: Did your dad want you to be more of an academic in your profession?

JB: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, and that kind of yeah, and my mother, that was my stepdad, my real father was a Navy career guy.

JVR: Okay.

JB: - So, she didn't want me to end up like him

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[06:39]

KH: Were you the first in your family to go and graduate from college or are you sitting down?

JB: Now, my whole family, my dad was a PhD, my mother was a Master of Psychology and my brother went to college, yeah.

KH: Yeah.

[07:01]

JVR: So, when you attended the Cal Maritime Academy, did you split your time between the ship and living in a dorm room like they do it now or?

JB: Yeah, everybody had to spend one. We did trimesters and everyone had to spend one trimester on the ship, and then, you know, it sails.

JVR: That's right.

JB: So actually, we were, I spent, the second half of my first year was, we went on to sea and then we came back. I just stayed on the ship for that little time. Yeah, and then up to the old days. That was the only thing that was here, the brick building.

[07:22]

KH: What was Vallejo like here at the Academy?

JB: Vallejo was kind of depressed, a little bit rundown in economically even in the immediate area, and Mare Island was still going strong. It was very active. There was the Vietnam War, it was just winding down when I came here so it was very active. A lot of submarine ships and a lot of people were employed there, so the city was in a lot better shape than it is now, but it was still you could tell its heyday when the World War era was gone.

JVR: Was the city actually built up the way it is now close to campus or was it still developing?

JB: Yeah, it was pretty much built up. There're those homes that were up on, the pier weren't there at all. There was--

JVR: The ones before Bogner Field?

JB: Yeah.

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JVR: Okay.

JB: It was it wasn't there.

[08:17]

KH: What parts of the Bay were your favorite to do on the weekends that you like to do on your time off as

JB: Well, I went home most the time. If I didn't have watch, I had a girlfriend, but sometimes when I stayed here, sometimes we take a while but once in time, we took a trip too, we took two and sailed down Angel Island, spent the weekend down there, that was fun, and other than that, just hanging around here, I didn't do much.

KH: Yeah.

[08:47]

KH: What was the hardest courses you took back?

JB: I'd say spherical trigonometry was probably one of the hardest because trigonometry was difficult as it was, but then you take and put it on a sphere, to me it was easy, until I really understood what navigation was and then once you understood how the stars and everything was going on with that globe, then you'll understand what it was, but before that, it was very difficult and physics was hard.

KH: Physics, yeah.

JB: Yeah.

[09:16]

JVR: Do you remember your teachers?

JB: Oh, yeah.

JVR: They are still around?

JB: You know, I used to see one of my teachers in San Francisco once in a while, he, most of them have passed away. There are a lot of my teachers who were Ex-military and World War two era guys and all merchant mariners and Keever who was this Captain here up until a few years ago was one of my teachers, so I see him and that was about it, yeah.

KH: Is there any teachers you disliked the most or had favorites here?

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JB: I had one and it was a, he had been a World War II. He was a retired Navy captain and he was a little eccentric, and for some reason, I got the impression he didn't care too much about me, so it was pretty brutal for three years

JVR: Yeah.

JB: Yeah, he picked on me sometimes.

[10:17]

KH: So, what was it like wearing a uniform, like around and stuff when it was during the Vietnam War?

JVR: Yeah, especially as the war was winding down.

JB: Yeah, well, actually, it was kind of neat sometimes because like if we were in foreign ports where they are going to the Navy bases and buy beer and stuff, when you're 18, 19 years old, you're down in Panama or something, you're going to have a cold beer. It was kind of nice and then not having to worry about your clothes, which ones you're going to wear, it was kind of handy.

JVR: Yeah.

[10:49]

JVR: But being from Berkeley, did you ever encounter any negative political sentiment about you know, wearing uniform and--

JB: I didn't wear it downtown.

JVR: No, no.

JB: Yeah, but as far as, I think a lot of my friends and stuff were kind of mystified that I've chosen to go into this field and yeah, from that sentiment and partly probably had some of the reasons why parents were against it.

JVR: Uh-hum.

JB: It was more of a mystery than anything and plus there was several of my friends and we were all from the same area. We're all here going to, there's like four or five of us that I knew from high school.

KH: Coming in?

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JB: Yeah, so they knew us, and it wasn't that big.

KH: Okay.

JVR: Yeah.

[11:35]

KH: What was the popular political sentiment like on campus like, was, most people like the Vietnam war or against it?

JB: So, we actually had, some of our guys had were vets, we had a few of our students were, had been to war and they were pretty casual. I don't remember, I just remember like a lot of guys were worried about becoming reserve officers because at that time, it was required to chat, and they were worried that if the war wasn't over, then we might have to go.

KH: Yeah.

JVR: Yeah.

KH: Did you serve in the military at all after you?

JB: No.

[12:12]

KH: Okay, would you remember about your classmates? Any memorable classmates or stories or?

JB: Tonnes of male characters and a lot of them did really well, a lot of guys went on to become captains and merchant ships, port pilots, pilots in LA and Chevron and stuff like that, and it was, I remember this one guy, he was from Seal Beach. He was a surfer and this guy you could go rousing for watch at 3:30 a.m. in the morning, and he'd sit up a smile on his face. Well, the nicest guys I've ever met and he's a pilot in Long Beach now, doing really well. He was about six, six, and he was real skinny, probably weighed 170 pounds, we called him stick man, that was his nickname and he'd eat, we go to eat breakfast and if you didn't eat your breakfast, he take everybody's plate and finished it off.

JVR: Any other? Do you ever any other classmates?

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JB: Oh yeah. Wow, we played a lot of football in those days because the intramural competitive football between divisions was huge, that was a big deal especially playing against the engineers and stuff in that.

JVR: Yeah.

JB: Harry Bolton the captain here was on the team when I was there, and we won the championship. He was really good athlete and we won the championship two or three years I was here, and the third year we went to the championship game and we lost, and that was fun.

JVR: Right, and the Hawsepipe, the yearbook from 1976 mentioned that you were first division football, for football champion, and additionally it said you were the first vice president and a member of the student council.

JB: Yeah.

[13:56]

JVR: So how involved were you at your time in campus? Our campus?

JB: It was interesting, I was the first-class student council president and that was kind of neat because it gave me a chance to be involved with what was going on in it and to help. I didn't realize that before I got on there that you were actually involved with distributing money to different--

JVR: Right, to different clubs.

JB: Clubs and to like the basketball team, they come and ask you for money for a road trip and that was fine. They kept because I wasn't a Corps officer, so that helped keep me involved in what was going on the campus and it was pretty good go on the resume

JVR: And the also said you were president of the Corvette club and was that a serious making?

JB: No, it was amazing. It was my big dream was to own a Corvette, so everybody tease me about that, yeah.

[15:14]

JVR- Also, one more question about the yearbook, you were posing in a picture with, there's some, a couple guitars in the back, it looks like you were with like a rock band, you remember that all?

Were you a musician, musician at all?

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JB: Oh yeah, still a musician.

JVR: Okay.

JB: It was funny to bring that up

JVR: Yeah.

JB: You did your homework, I was just looking through something, I didn't know that was in the yearbook. I have a picture of that in one of my scrapbooks and I saw that last night because I knew I was coming up here today. I thought I looked through the book and see if I could bring back some memories and I saw that picture. That's funny. I have like a black Christmas hat on or something.

JVR: Yeah, so.

JB: Yeah. Yeah, I played professionally for many years. I was with a pretty successful band. We did a lot of playing in San Francisco, large venues and then radio and had an album that was actually on the charts and, and Norway or Denmark or something like that and then I played the--

HR: Okay.

JB: Yeah, well, I played the r&b band for about eight years, really popular of enrichment.

HR: What's the name of the band?

JB: The one that plays in was the Coronados and then the band I just was out, it's called GTS.

[16:15]

HR: Yeah, did you guys play a bunch? I know on cruise, we all brought guitars and then I'm just kind of learning right now, but we'd all play it on. You guys do a bunch of that on cruise pretty good?

JB: Yeah, we had a, I didn't play much guitar, I play bass now but in those days, I didn't play, I just sang and then on that picture you saw, I was singing and the guy in the background was playing guitar, he was were amazing guitar player. The guy could just, he would just, he could wail, he would take us literally wander up town to some club over in Vallejo. It was like all black, Club Blues Club and he'd walk in and they all knew him, "Jazz boy, come on" He'd sit down with this guy. He was an amazing musician and he had an album out with a group too. Yeah, they, he, and a bunch of guys, they'd have like six, eight guys and they got a hold of guitars and basses and even have a full drum set in the gym all the time. Yeah, even though you all ship out a piano to your school ship.

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KH: Yeah.

JVR: Yeah.

[17:23]

KH: What's your, what do you remember most about the time, your time at CMA, what's your favorite memory?

JB: I think some of the shenanigans, just the stuff that went on, you know when you're up late at night studying and everybody's a little stir crazy and all of a sudden, you know, water gun fight would break out or something, you know, guys just get restless. You got that young energy, you know, that and the football games to me was really fun.

KH: Yeah.

JB: I like that, yeah.

JVR: What was your least favorite part of Cal Maritime Academy while you work at?

JB: The least favorite, probably the pressure from, the academic pressure probably because I didn't come into CMA very, like very much with math skills and the math really was hard for me, I had a hard time so it was always a constant fear that you might flunk out and those days you couldn't flunk a class while you're gone, I mean, disciplinary problems are gone and they told you the first day you came into school that the attrition rate was like 45%. So, it just, you didn't, you had your head down, you're fighting all the time, try not to be a victim, yeah.

JVR: Right.

JB: Yeah, I think that was the worst part.

[18:39]

KH: What are some of the traditions while you were here about the students of our faculty?

JB: See, the tradition and one of the things was probably like, released to throw people in the streets on a birthday. He had a birthday that grabbed on to walk it down the pier and throw it in the water, the quite across thing was a big tradition when you want to cross and the initiation and then stuff like the morning formations that was really big, and then on every Friday, we had an inspection, they'd come and inspect your room and check you and your uniform, and a lot of times, they brought over a Drill sergeant from Marine and

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Marine Drill sergeant to inspect us and he used to just kick it up because guys would have long hair and they'd have it plaster down and try to pass inspection and right long sideburns and he could see right through that.

KH: Yeah.

JB: And sort of stuff, it's really hilarious. I remember him telling some guy one time, "Would you just polish your shoe or Hershey bar?"

JVR: And then that was the favorite part of the week?

JB: Yeah, watching guys try to get through the inspection, it was funny and having their hair plaster down, then they'll go out at night and see that like this.

[19:59]

KH: How's the campus changed since you were here?

JB: Well, when I first came in, it was just the brick rose hall on top, that was it and then that mastic was here, and there was the gym, and that was it, and the library and it was one lab for the engineers and all the rest was all grass. Yeah, so it was pretty wide open, a lot of space to just go lay on the grass or throw frisbees. Yeah, that's part of it.

[20:27]

JVR: Were there any clubs, programs, or classes that you wish you had participated in when you were a student here?

KH: That didn't take advantage of--

JB: Not really, I didn't have that much time. I was on a drill team for a year too and that was fun. I enjoyed that, and then I played soccer. That was interesting, but just didn't have enough time to do all that stuff and some guys were good enough academically, they could play sports and still do okay, but I had to really bear down. I wish I, if anything, I wish I would have stayed at school more and study, I think I missed out on not being here a lot of times on the weekends when guys would all study together, and I was home and that hurt me, I think when I broke up with my girlfriend, I stayed here more, I just started doing a lot better, yeah.

[21:26]

JVR: When you were here, did Cadets still use rifles to guard the gatehouse?

JB: Um.

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JVR: Or was that allowed?

JB: No, I think that was like the year before, they had weapons and when I was here, the Zodiac Killer was going on, he killed somebody in Vallejo. I think they found two or three victims in Vallejo, so we were, a lot of guys wanted to have weapons because we were scared out there sometimes. We had to guard the shack, you'd be out there at 2:30 a.m. in the morning unarmed, you know, when you're a half mile away from anybody and there was a lot of, guys will take the night lunches up there and feed these cats, so they're always feral cats, and sometimes you'd be sitting in the guard shack and you're looking at bushes and you see his eyes glowing at you. It's pretty scary.

[22:13]

KH: How has your degree helped your professional career? How it helps start off your professional career?

JB: Well, the one thing I found is that CMA had a really good reputation, any employers I ever went to, just the fact that I graduated was I never had one employer asked to see my transcripts. Yeah, if you got a license here from CMA, they, you were hired. Yeah, you always had a good reputation.

KH: How did it prepare you for your career?

JB: Well, if anything, I'd have to say that I was probably over prepared. I knew so much I'm so well trained when I came out of here, I think, like I'd get on a ship and I, many times like if a Gyro went down, I was the only guy on the ship to restart the Gyro and my navigation skills were so much better than the other officers and just knowing stuff like rules of the road that you know, you knew that he knew so much more than most people.

JVR: Where are some of these other officers when trained?

JB: A lot of them were hawsepipe guys.

JVR: Okay.

JB: Guys didn't go to academies; I think they're ex-military or had just worked away up to the ranks.

[23:31]

JVR: So, it was the merchant marine industry everything you'd thought it would be?

JB: Well, going to sea was a little bit different than I thought it would be. It wasn't quite as romantic. A lot different, when you're on a school ship and you got 200 other 18, 19 year

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old guys that are your friends and you get on a merchant ship and you find there's only like 20 people on the whole ship, and you get off watch and there's nobody around, so it's a little bit more lonely. You have to know how to keep yourself entertained, reading, hobbies, that type of thing. Yeah, and also the job, job opportunities were not so good, now stays a little bit more difficult.

[24:09]

KH: What was your first job when you got in here?

JB: I was still made on Corps of Engineers hopper dredge, which was really good experience. I was dredging the river bars all up and down to the West Coast, Washington, Oregon, San Francisco and, you know, actually, as a third man, I was doing all the piloting and shipping, so that kind of experience was just not gonna get anywhere, but that was really nice.

[24:38]

JVR: Were you ever in charge of unlicensed deck hands?

JB: On a ship?

JVR: Yes.

JB: Oh, yeah.

JVR: Okay.

JB: Yeah, and on every watch.

JVR: Right.

JB: Yeah.

KH: What was the highest you advanced your license?

JB: I know, I didn't upgrade because I came to shore after about three years and started working on shore and I've been 32 years with the ferries, and the ferries only need 110 license, so I never upgraded from third man.

[25:15]

KH: So other than that, Army Corps of Engineers third ship you're on, did you serve on any other ship while at here?

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JB: Yeah, I worked on tanker and I served on Mattson ship, on a sugar ship, it goes from CNH over to Hawaii.

KH: Yeah.

JB: Yeah.

[25:40]

KH: While you're at sea, you indicated that you had a girlfriend while you're at Sea man and then your, what about while you're at sea, did you have girlfriend or relationship while you're sailing?

JB: Yeah, after school?

KH: Yeah.

JB: Not for much, I had one girlfriend when I sailing for a while and it wasn't too long after that, that I stay in the shore, yeah.

JVR: And no one else, no one else in your family is in the Maritime industry?

JB: Just my dad who was in the Navy Corps, but not Maritime, no.

[26:03]

KH: Do you have any words of advice to pass onto future CMA students?

JB: To future what? Graduates?

JVR: Or the current graduates, yeah.

KH: The next generation.

JVR: Next generation CMA students.

JB: Oh, the ones coming in?

KH: The ones coming in and the ones graduating, whenever.

JB: I would say yeah, the biggest thing is to never stop learning, you know, I know it sounds like a cliché, but the thing is a lot of times you like see, I envisioned myself being on a tramp ship maybe, I will say on down on the tropics and you know, now here I am a ferryboat Captain so you don't know and every little experience you have, you know,

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whether it's, you bartended for two months or one time the ferries were on strike and I was actually making \$5 an hour under the table, Sweeping, you know, I've been Captain when we can have sweeping floors and just to feed myself but that explains what I learned doing that re-modeling kitchens and bathrooms and all that kind of stuff was great, and it makes you better at what you're going to do, so I say that every experience you have, every job is part of your resume and helps to make you a better third mate.

KH: Okay.

JB: If I know how to make somewhere that, whatever the experience I had is going to help me be a better mate or even your experience as a maid, if you go into some other field is going to make you better. So even if you change careers, it's all part of who you become. I'd say that's the main thing and don't stop reading.

JVR: Right.

JB: Read, read, read, and I've, since I've been out of school, I've gotten a real estate license, I've been a professional musician, I'm a training instructor in martial arts, I teach Tai Chi at a Health Club, I've remodeled houses and I can go on and on different stuff just because I enjoy it. I learned how to teach golf, I have a certificate from the American United States Golf Teaching Federation and one Corp championship because it's just fun to just keep learning all that new stuff, you know, multidimensional

JVR: So never stop challenging yourself.

JB: No, yeah, no and like going back to school maybe if you sail for a few years and go out and get a master's degree in this or that so you got to have the freedom to do that and not be afraid to change. That was one thing that caused me some anxiousness when I was here at school is maybe at one point maybe I just didn't think that this was for me. I didn't feel like I had the liberty to change, maybe change over being an engineer because there's more jobs so sure or do, be a lawyer or something. You gotta have that, that's really important.

KH: Are there any other questions you'd like to be asked or anything else you'd like to add?

JB: I don't know, I think I answered all your questions.

JVR: I believe you did.

JB: Probably more than you wanted, huh?

JVR: And that was good.

JB: - You guys still play football out here?

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KH: Yeah, they did a divisional football, yeah.

JB: Is it like football?

KH: Yeah, it's like football, I also play rugby.

JB: Oh, yeah, all good, that's fun, huh?

KH: Yeah, it's a lot of fun.

JB: How do you like going on the school ship?

KH: It was good, I liked it. Yeah, I did my senior cruise this summer and then be done hopefully in April.

JB: Yeah.

KH: End in April, but yeah, as

JB: - You're going to take thirds?

KH: Yeah, taken in January.

JB: All right.

KH: Yeah.

JB: Well, when I went in to take mine, they had a so well prepared, it was like, you just start reading the question, you almost knew the answer before you finish.

KH: Yeah, I'm just starting to start saying, stressing out.

JB: Oh, yeah.

There was a Denny's up the street and we used to go out there and we would sit and study like four or five of us and drink coffee all night and then we come back here and have a beer or whatever, and then we got our physicals and the doctors were like, "I can't believe you guys, what are you doing to yourself? All these 20-year-old guys drinking 10 cups of coffee and stressing.

JVR: Yeah.

JB: Yeah, I was a fun of good times, and that's it really interesting, you know like now, I open up a book, I open up one of my old book about stability or something, I just can't,

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God, I really knew that. You forget so much of stuff and you can't believe how much you knew you cannot.

JVR: Yeah.

All right. Well, I think, I think that's the interview, but thank you very much for answering all our questions.

JB: My pleasure.

JVR: Appreciate it.

JB: I hope I told you what you were looking for.