

California Maritime Academy Library

Interview with John Lunkes

Oral History Project

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with John Lunkes conducted by Joseph Tapanes and Charles Heinbockel on October 10, 2009. 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 Lunkes is a graduate of the class of 1964, Deck.

Abbreviation

JL: John Lunkes
JT: Joseph Tapanes
CH: Charles Heinbockel

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Interview Outline

- 00:31 Where were you from prior to coming to California Maritime Academy?
- 02:17 How did your family feel about you being away at school?
- 03:36 What were your first impressions of CMA?
- 04:24 Where did you live on campus, and what were the conditions like?
- 06:16 What did you think of the Corps of Cadets?
- 08:39 What are some of the courses you took?
- 11:22 Who were your favorite teachers?
- 13:00 You were very active in campus clubs and activities. Was this required?
Did you have any free time?
- 15:05 Could you walk us through a typical day for you at CMA?
- 16:47 What do you remember about your classmates?
- 18:39 What did you do with your free time?
- 21:39 What kind of reputation did cadets have in the local area?
- 22:39 There was some major historical events that happen while you were at CMA, such as the Kennedy assassination. Do you remember how they affected you or others on campus?
- 25:45 Let's talk about cruise next.
How long were your training cruises?
- 30:52 What was your experience during the train crash in Cali, Colombia?
- 40:16 What did you do after graduation?
Did you spend any time in the Navy?
- 46:37 Do you feel that CMA prepared you well for your career?
- 50:38 What do you think of Cal Maritime these days?
- 55:03 *Galapagos Expedition Cruise*
- 59:04 What was involved in the equator crossing ceremony?

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Interview

[00:31]]

JT: Good morning, my name is Joseph Tapanes, this is Charles Heinbockel, and we are cadets at the California Maritime Academy. Today we are interviewing John Lunkes, class of 1964. He was born on July 21st, 1942. This interview is being recorded at the California Maritime Library. Mr. Lunkes, where were you from prior to coming to California Maritime Academy?

JL: I graduated from high school in the San Diego area in 1960 and had thoughts on several academies besides CMA. I was interested in the Naval Academy and Kings Point. My primary interest was CMA, and I took a year and went to an academy prep school to improve my somewhat weakened math background. And I met one of my future classmates there, George Conrad, who was there for much the same reasons, at the Boyden School in San Diego. Took the exams, made application to CMA and to Kings Point simultaneously. Was accepted by CMA, it shipped my gear up, I was ready to leave, literally walking out the door to go to the airport to fly up here, and Kings Point called and said I'd been accepted as an alternate, and I said, "Sorry, but you're too late." And, that the rest is basically for the records.

JT: Kind of along the lines of why you came to Cal Maritime, did Cal Maritime produce interest in the sea for you?

JL: Living on the coast, that was part of it. I didn't really have any kind of a sailing or water you know, aquatic background of any sort, but it's the business interested me. I've always kinda taken to things that were out of the mainstream a bit. And things were more or less targeted appealed to me and being out of the country in the you know, the seafarer end of it, you know, the, what I perceived as romance at the time was definitely an attraction. And, then the money was, was also a factor.

[02:17]

JT: How did your family feel about you being away at school?

JL: They were very supportive, I think the fact that I was going to a college level institution was, you know, it was in their favor, but they were always very supportive, never, never had any issues there.

JT: Were any other of your family members involved in maritime industry?

JL: Not at all, no. The closest we had was a, some very good friends of my parents had a son that was 15 years older than I was. In the very early days of World War II, he had gone to Kings Point and for whatever reason didn't finish and he's in his 80's now and we've recently regained contact. And he lives in Florida and we do communicate from time to time and I told him I said, "I think you were, being 15 years older, he was very much a

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

very big figure to me and I guess apparently some, a bit of an influence and I think that probably had something to do with my decision to go the route that I did."

JT: Were you the first in your family to go to college?

JL: No, my mother was a graduate, a college grad.

JT: So, was your family insistent on you going to college?

JL: I think it was assumed.

[03:36]

JT: Okay. What were your first impressions of CMA?

JL: Ah. Somewhat bewildered, I'd gone through high school at two different military schools. One in Wisconsin, and then when my parents moved to California I finished up as a day student, at Army and Navy Academy, Carlsbad. So, the military part of it was not strange to me. But all of a sudden you go from the situation in high school where you're the oldest you know, the king of the hill so to speak and you start that process all over again you know, through your plebe year and, and working your way through the, through the system. You know what to expect but you're not ready to accept it I guess is a, but you know you have to.

[04:24]

JT: Can you just explain where you lived on campus and what the conditions were like?

JL: It, what at that time was the new residence hall, which I think is now the, the old residence hall. It was I think that's maybe the first or second year I was in service and it was at the time in the early 60s, it was quite nice. Two to a room, each had a locker, built in wardrobe, a couple of drawers underneath the bunk. The bunks are on a unit desk, at a common desk at the head. What we call the queer board in between the two bunks and real steam heat. You know, depending on what side of the building you're on you either had a view of the straits or a view of the hill behind the, behind the, going up the faculty road. But, it was quite adequate, basically self-contained except for the classrooms and Neil's library was in there. They had a gathering room, where they had the weekend dances on the first floor. The canteen was on the first floor and the second floor had a TV lounge.

JT: With all those young men being so compressed together at the new res, was there a lot of joking going on, a lot of pranks?

JL: Absolutely.

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

JT: Yeah.

JL: Yeah, absolutely.

JT: Can you describe some of the stuff that happened?

JL: Yeah, one of the favorites was, the lockers or the wardrobes were plywood. Nailing somebody's shoes to the, to the bottom of the locker so they'd be late for formation. One of our classmates was not given to frequent bathe or it was perceived that way. So, there would be baths given every once in a while, with scrub downs with toilet brushes and pine oil.

[06:16]

JT: So, what did you think of the Corps of Cadets?

JL: Very diverse, a lot of different backgrounds. Our class had a particularly strong contingent from Hawaii, I think about, about five or six if I recall. There were several here in various classes from, that have been raised in Panama Canal Zone. A few from various parts of the country of course, most from California and the West Coast but a few from, from the Midwest and the East, as well. Some were older, and I think they naturally had been in the service or whatever or some were shipped out. And they tend to kind of assume a natural leadership role.

JT: Did your view on the Cadets, Corps Cadets change over time?

JL: Yeah, as you as you progress through and the fact that you successfully completed an academic year, was a real milestone and it was a hell of a lot of hard work. Yes, but yes, if the idea, the more you matured and advanced to the system, yeah you tend to look at things differently. And of course, the people coming in behind you knew nothing as you know, as compared to what you knew. But you also found out, you can get some people that, some battery midshipmen, as they were then called, that still had some pretty strong backgrounds. There was one in my class, but he started out in my class and if I remember correctly, repeated and tried for six years to gain admission, and he just, the persistence kept him around. He's been very successful in the industry.

JT: You started in the D1 deck but switched D2 your second-class year, why?

JL: I guess the school switched you. There was one member of the class of [19]63 that for some reason the commandant always made sure he was in the division that was on the ship, so he changed the division every trimester. It's to whatever division was assigned. I honestly don't know I probably knew at the time. Division One had some very powerful personalities and I think maybe the administration just wanted either to disperse that or break us up or both. I don't, I'm not sure exactly what.

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

[08:39]

JT: Can you explain some of the courses that you took?

JL: Yeah, first year civics which I thought was very interesting. Civics and government, English, which required some off campus study and I think that made it interesting. It gave us an excuse to, or a reason to go to the Cal Berkeley Library. And, between the two classes, and some of the public library, San Francisco. So, it was a reason to go to the city.

Math, which was probably the toughest, basic navigation part and the through of the navigation series. I always thought was interesting. And a lot of what I've learned in navigation, I still use today, not the application of it, but some of the principles is the astronomical part of it, and the geophysical part of it. Maritime law, maritime economics. And some of the advanced math, not interesting. We got into calculus, our first-class year after going through spherical trig, which was difficult for a lot of us, and we had to do it all by hand.

So, if you messed up, like to the six digits or eight digits, whatever they were you know, you missed, a digit or transposed it, your whole calculation was gonna be off. But we got into calculus and that the one of the, one of my classmates, he was always the anchorman. Well, they took bets on him that he wasn't going to graduate and had calculus in high school, all of a sudden, he became this fount of knowledge about calculus and, and most of us, I think kind of enjoyed it and the reasons why it was created and the reason you know, it existed.

But I think we only spent about two weeks maybe three but, but yeah, that was the main crux of the, the courses and I forgot blinkers, which some people actually fail that, flunked out of school. And that was, it was you know taught by upper class. But you had to have it for coast guard in those days and if you didn't pass it, you didn't graduate and you didn't get your license.

JT: You said that you went to board and prep before CMA to tighten your math skills. Did that help you; did that prepare you for CMA?

JL: Yeah well, it certainly didn't hurt. I just had no aptitude for math at all. I think part of it was, you know, laziness on my part, but the refusal to accept new ideas. But, math was just something that was difficult for me and yeah, and it, yeah and it also gives you another year to hopefully mature a little bit and approach things a little differently.

[11:22]

JT: As far as staff who was your favorite teacher, or your favorites?

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

JL: I liked Luke Cajar, the English instructor. They were all very interesting in their own ways. If I had to name one, I'd probably say, Commander Angular, the navigation instructor, who really taught us you know, what gave us, gave us the confidence to go out and apply what you had learned, and I found out how far ahead we were at Kings Pointers and navigation.

Before the days of the, I don't even know if you still use them, the navigation, the HO tables instead like table one through 12 or whatever they were. Well, you use those to navigate with and they were something, they were created during the Depression as a WPA project, and they had mathematicians how to work them and, and they sat them down and they worked all these things up.

Before those you had to work out your sights longhand and Kings Pointers had no idea how to do that. And I do it, just for the sake of doing it you know, just for something to keep from getting bored when you're you know, 10,000 miles you know, thousands of miles from the nearest point of land. And they were amazed anybody knew how to do that?

JT: What staff members did you not like so much?

JL: I'd admit one person I was never real fond of Captain Bowman, and I don't think he was real fond of me. And that's all I'm gonna say.

[13:00]

JT: Yes, you were very active on campus from everything from sub-commander to the Ring Dance committee in charge of floral arrangements. You were in the Propeller vice president [19]63 Hawsepiper editor in chief [19]64 Binnacle marine editor [19]63 Calvin club [19]63 the Ring Dance committee. Was being so involved required?

JL: Um, no and I guess that's just the way I am. I'm not real athletically inclined and I'm not real competitive. So, or I wasn't then so doing things like that, organizing things and you know, meeting a deadline and whatnot, I think was more my thing.

JT: With being so involved leave you with much free time on your hands.

JL: Not a whole bunch. But that was fine, I had to study and most of us did. I think all of us did, you had to study to survive here. And you know, if you weren't studying you know, you were gonna, you knew you should be. And there were probably a few, I'd say maybe each class has one or two, some guys that just absorb a lot in class and a lot comes naturally to them and they don't have to crack a book and, but they're the real rarities. But getting back to your question. No, it didn't leave you a whole lot of free time. And I don't think you really wanted free time. I didn't have a car, so I was pretty limited in what I can do, and hitchhiking was the primary mode of transportation. So, you know, doing things

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

that would keep you busy, and knew you had a commitment to I think helped. You know, it helped get you through in a way you know, gave you a goal.

JT: Did you play any sports at CMA?

JL: Not really, we had division intermural football, flag football, and, although at that time we had a good water polo team. And we played some basketball, but I think water polo was our primary interscholastic sport here?

[15:05]

JT: If you could just walk us through a typical day at CMA, what time did it start, just go through a typical day?

JL: We used to have an early rouse if you wanted to get up and study. You had to have lights out by 10:00 p.m. unless you could get away with it. But you can get arouse any time after I believe, 2:00 a.m. in the morning. And that was another thing we used to do, we used to each sign up at the watch desk. And, as a practical joke, we'd sign somebody up for an early rouse and say must get up, you know. They have to study throw water on me if required to wake up. Yeah, but once it happened you know, it was fun doing it to other people once it happened to you it kind of stopped, you know.

But the general routine was up at 6:00 a.m., cleaning formation at 6:00 a.m. or 6:15 a.m., lower class would cleanup or third class would clean second first classrooms and then the common areas the, the showers and then toilets and hallways and whatnot. I think mess formation was at 7:15 a.m. or 7:00 a.m., 7:00 a.m. or 7:15 a.m. and then classes from 8:00 a.m. till 11:45 a.m. at least and then lunch and then ships work from in the afternoon till 4:00 p.m. and then about 4:00 p.m., 3:30 p.m. or f4:00 p.m. and then, free time till dinner at 5:30 p.m., I believe.

[16:47]

JT: What would you say about your classmates?

JL: We had a good group here. And, you really had to get along here, the place was so small. And, then I think a lot of guys that left got left because, you know, the personalities were such a good, you know, they were very great at, where in a larger institution, they would have been lost and then they were kind of left to themselves. When you're living on that ship and there's six to a bunk and, you know, six to a tier and, 75 guys in a certain berthing compartment, you basically have to get along. You know, even if you're an asshole, you know, you've got to figure out ways around it or, you know, you'll just be shunned, you know, people wouldn't want anything to do with you.

JT: Did you develop long lasting friendships?

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

JL: Yeah, yeah, definitely. There's a couple of us that have been in touch continuously. Classmates and others. My first reunion in a long time was five years ago and ran into a couple of classmates that I hadn't seen since graduation in a sense, like, you know, you saw each other last week you know, just literally picked up where you left off. But yes, you do form lasting friendships and not only with your own class but with other classes and a lot of times it's because you'll meet them after graduation. You know, the day you graduate and then walk out of here, everybody's basically doing their own thing and going in their own direction and, and all of a sudden, you'll catch up with somebody, you know, fairly shortly after, maybe a few years later and form a lasting friendship.

JT: Since the quarters were so close, and everybody knew everybody's business, would you describe it as a kind of a brotherhood here?

JL: Absolutely, yeah.

[18:39]

JT: What did you do with your free time, when you did have it?

JL: A variety of things. Well, number one having a car like I said, doesn't help me but, I enjoyed going, getting into the city number one. And going to the Maritime State Park. We used to have, we used to do vessel shiftings. But there was no formal program, and you know, it started out by riding the red stacked tugs and you just go out onto a pier and then hop on a tug and walk around like you knew what was going on and tell them you know, where you were from and they'd sort of, they'd take you in. Port security was nowhere near what it is now. You know, anybody could wander around onto a pier.

The one in San Francisco had a working waterfront and start riding the tugs and usually the, somebody on the tug, the skipper or one of the mates was a CMA grad or knew somebody that well you know, there was a, there was a commonality there. And there are several times they'd you know, invite you home with the family for dinner or take you up to their favorite watering holes, The Crow's Nest next to pier 39 which is no longer there.

And, you know, buy you drinks and that led to going on the vessel shiftings and some companies were adamant about not doing it. APL particularly but, others were kind of warm to it. Matson would let you do it and, in the days, when they had 24 ships kicking around. But you had to do it on your own, it took some doing and sometimes it just took some, the confidence to walk aboard the gateway and act like you belong there and buffalo your way through it.

JT: The surrounding area of Vallejo was much different back then, did a lot of cadets go, what would cadets do in Vallejo, would they---

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

JL: Avoid it.

JT: Avoid it?

JL: We had a couple of classmates, there was a place right up the road here, called The Green Door and I don't even think the buildings there anymore. But it turned out to be a biker hangout. And it was with the exception of Ma Oogles right outside the gate, which was okay, it was run by a little old lady, probably in her 70's. And she kind of looked out for us and took care of us. And it meant you could always go in there and get a hamburger and a cold beer. And a lot of times that's you know, that's where you went. The Depot Club, two guys got beat up one night in my class by Hell's Angels and their girlfriends, so we avoided that place.

Downtown next to the Greyhound Station was a place called The Depot Club and these places were inexpensive. That's where you know, that's where you could, you could get beer for a penny an ounce in those days and some kind of a greasy sandwich that the guy was using a knife that had just fallen on the floor to make, you know. But Vallejo did not only did not offer a whole, a whole bunch and when people got out, if they didn't have, you know, friends or family close by or a girlfriend or whatever, usually went into San Francisco.

[21:39]

JT: What kind of reputation did the cadets have in the local area?

JL: It probably depends who you ask. The school wasn't publicized real well, and my wife was raised in Crockett and she said they really never knew what it was. I guess her first contact was one, her next door, lifelong next-door neighbor was you know, came over here to go to school and was a member, was in my engineering class. I think generally, they were, most people didn't know what it was. The people that did know about it were very favorable. I know if you stood up here up at that highway, you know, with your uniform on and you know, your thumb out hitching a ride, usually, you know, the locals knew who you were, they'd pick you up. Which is not something I'd recommend anybody do anymore.

JT: At this time, Charlie Heinbockel will be conducting the rest of the interview.

[22:39]

CH: Alright, so there's some major historical events that happened while you were at CMA. So, one, the biggest one that I can think of is the Kennedy assassination. What were you doing when you found out about that?

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

JL: Let's see that was [19]63, I was yearbook editor and for some reason I'd been in the admin office to, we were expecting some mail delivery or something, and the superintendent secretary who was very nice lady, Mrs. Holt said, "Oh, did you hear what happened?", I said, "No". And she goes, "The President's been shot." And, I said, "The president of what?" And, she said, "Oh, the United States." I said, "No, you're kidding." Well, you hear it on the news. And it was Thanksgiving weekend because my parents were up. And we wound up staying in a motel in downtown San Francisco or a hotel.

And, you know, this thing played out over that weekend at word, not only was Kennedy shot and ultimately died, but his assassin was killed by a guy named Jack Ruby. And I did see that on TV and I remember the whole thing very vividly. And it, things like that sober ya. And one of the instructors who I forgot to mention before, Philo Wood read regulations, you know could call us coast guard wrecks, and he made a very good pitch. You know, the analogies as you know, people ask what can I do and what not and he said, "Kennedy was a naval officer." and he said, "He was a good naval officer." and he said, "That's what you do. I encourage you to all strive to be the best you can." and words well chosen.

CH: How did you see it affect campus?

JL: It really didn't. The level of study here, well you know, for the most part was fairly intense. You had to survive this place. 'Cause if you missed a grade point, instead of getting a 65 in math, you got a 64 you were out, you know, there was no making it up. There was no doing anything to improve your grade point. And you got back in if the board of governors said you could get back in, which meant a good disciplinary record. And, you know, doing relatively well and I don't know what their criteria was exactly, but I'm sure it had to be some kind of an academic performance to, to compensate for your failing in one subject. So, the place was pretty intense and. Yeah, people talked about it, but I think you realize there's not much you can do about it you know, get on with it and deal with the needs at hand here.

CH: So, the civil rights movement was also going on, did that affect CMA at all?

JL: No, no whatsoever.

CH: Right. Things like the Cuban Missile Crisis were also---

JL: Yeah, that got discussed, you know. I think things like that, you know, we were just because of where we were, where we were and what we were studying for I think you tend to be a little more tuned into that and realize that can have some real consequences.

CH: Right.

JL: One way or the other.

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

[25:45]

CH: So, I wanna talk about cruise a little bit. So, how long were your cruises?

JL: The cruise trimester was January through March, through about the third week in March, and we actually would leave here, we'd be out of the country about two months. And then it, you know in those days you'd left usually directly and sail forward and then came back and took about a week to 10 days going up the coast, San Diego, Long Beach, etcetera.

CH: And what was it like living on a ship for you?

JL: It was confining but you got used to it. And, when I say confining the, you know, the, the tiered, the bunk tiers were three high, one of them you know, six to a stack. There was a combination, like a footlocker built in underneath, that was shared and then you had a standing upright metal locker and that was all your stuff. That's all the space you had, unless you could finagle something somewhere to stash things. Being on the yearbook, the Binnacle of the yearbook staff, we did have a work area onboard that we totally took advantage of. It was kind of handy because I think the way it was configured; a lot of people didn't know it was there. And, it was probably half the size of this room, as long and about half as wide. And, we had worktables in there and we had bookshelves and we brought things like tape recorders in and. So, that that kind of helped you get through a little bit you know, but, and we basically after three, a few years, two cruises, you kind of found your own space and being first-class you had more entitlements and it could, you're in a position to take advantage of things.

CH: Right, so how did it change from the different classes? Like your first cruise is supposed to be--

JL: First cruise, your third-class cruise was all work. Cleaning ships work, you know a lot of manual labor, basically ordinary seaman type work, and AB type work. Second class cruise you got into more of a supervisory role. Carrying out the day to days, overseeing the day-to-day part of it and in first class you got no planning and, and not just the ship's work but the drills and that kind of thing you were, you had the responsibility for, for seeing them through.

CH: So, have you ever returned to any of the places you cruised to overseas?

JL: Right off the top of my head, I'm gonna say no, but yeah, with the Golden Bear. No, and that's not to say I wouldn't like to. My first cruise I went to Acapulco and I think we enjoyed that a lot, and it's one of the places we'd like to visit again in conjunction with our timeshare. But getting there from the west coast is not easy.

CH: Right.

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

JL: And even though it's an hour, only an hour, sail south of port of Vallejo. It takes two plane changes and an overnight flight usually to make the trip. I'm trying to think, Galapagos Islands for, we made, we went there twice. And, for a long time, I'd spent more time in the Galapagos Islands than I had in any other foreign port. And I, you know, I know it's a tremendous destination that I have no desire to ever go there again. We didn't go to Hawaii, so no, I guess the answer is, no, I never have gone back to any of the ports.

CH: Okay, so what would you have to say about the officers and staff aboard the ship? Were they like helpful?

JL: Yeah, absolutely, and one of the instructors, Philo Wood that I mentioned before, not the best classroom lecturer, very hard to follow and he used to pace back and forth, and we figured out if the class lasted, the period lasted eight, 10 more minutes because he'd pace further in one direction than he did the other, he'd be out the door. But, as a watch officer on the training ship that he was, probably the most informative, the most valuable resource. He'd retired from the Navy, he'd originally gone into the Merchant Marine, he had a degree from Cal Berkeley as I remember. And he met the Merchant Marine during the Depression and there were no jobs and went to the Navy and then made that a career and then he did sail, had merchant experience, which was kind of a rarity among some of the faculty. But just a wealth of information on the branch on a cruise, just you know, and if he didn't have the information, he would do what he could to find out for you. You know about the industry in general and, and ship handling and that type of thing.

[30:52]

CH: So, what is your story from the train crash?

JL: Oh, we were in the second group to go up. We were Buenaventura in Colombia, which was, we used to, I think we said it was a mix of Vallejos, bunch from another world in those days. And I hope that neither one of you are from Vallejo. So, yeah it was a real dump and, the, everybody knew it. The, I understand the American Council and Grace Line had a pretty strong presence there. All got together and made arrangements for these trips up to Cali and the first group had come back the night before and they said, "Ah, it was great, you guys will love it.", you know? It was cheap. So, our group headed out at six o'clock the next morning for the train station. We'd been at a party. I think Grace Line had thrown a party and got, the night before for some of the dance. And I don't think we got in from that till two in the morning. And we're back up at six and you know, in various states of whatever. And, got on the train and it was a Thursday as I remember it.

And, being the start of the weekend, they'd added wooden coaches to accommodate the locals that you know, the increased passengers. And the bar was open, and we all thought that was cool, you know, seven o'clock in the morning, let's go back and drink beer. And they let us go up on the engine which I didn't do but the engine, some of the engineers

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

did. And the guy's hanging off this engine with a beer in one hand like that and you know, it's seven o'clock in the morning.

All of a sudden, you know, all hell broke loose and there was this tremendous thunder crash. And, you know, things tipped over, glass was crashing and people getting knocked off tables and, the, I'm trying to remember, if the wooden cars were in the front or the, oh they must have been in the front because the steel cars telescoped right through them like a piston and just tore them up and anything in their way you know, anything or anybody. And it took a few minutes to figure out what had happened. I mean you know this was, we grew up with Disneyland and you know to be you know these things aren't supposed to you know, end our lives but the, the teamwork and you know guys didn't, didn't wait to be told what to do.

And, you know I'm not sure we did the right thing a lot of times, given first aid, you know, I think our antiseptic was whatever booze we could rescue out of the bar car. And, then you know, if somebody had a cut, "Here, here try some of this." you know. "You have a headache, here take a snort." But you know, pulling people out of there and, you know, your first thing was whether, you know, there's help coming. Well, no, there is no help. You know, you're out the jungle here and there's a river, you know, that they, and the roads on the other side of the river. So, they, you know, it's gonna take them a while, it's gonna take some effort to get here.

And I know a lot of us came back with no belts because we used them for tourniquets, and no T-shirts because we used them for bandages, and they pile this, when the whole thing was over. The one thing I remember is pulling people out and we're stacking dead bodies on flat cars. And to this day, I still have, every time I see a flat car and a trailer on the siding or something I just, I just, you know, it goes through me I just wince.

But finally, the fire department came up and there was some kind of a tour guide attached. I don't know who the guy was or where he was from and when it came, like a lot of people in any kind of an emergency situation, they're just useless. And you guys will find this out if you ever get like in a labor situation where you don't know what's gonna happen from one minute to the next. Some people you might as well send them home you know, because they're gonna be no help. All they're gonna do is sit there and wring their hands and wonder you know and make it worse for everybody else.

But finally, the fire department showed up such as they were and they, somebody arranged a couple of school buses and got the people, us and the people that could walk and there was all, well, there was one of our classmates was badly injured. He was out of school for a year, his arm was caught between the two locomotives. And the engineers and people said it then and they will say it now as they gave him, you know, they got up there and they knew what the hell they had to do, what lines they had to, what valves they had to close and what they had to remove to get him the hell out of there. And, then there was one that got his foot caught between the two and just dived out.

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

Apparently, his shoe got stuck between the two engines, but he got his foot out in time. But, other than that we, you know, we got off scot-free but when the school buses showed up on the road across the river, we had to ford this river to get across to them. That was probably ankle deep, but very fast running as I remember. And, again, with no belts, you know, to hold our pants up, and no T-shirts under our shirts. Of course, we're all soaked and bloody and, and dirty.

So, there was myself and somebody from the class ahead of me. It was, we were in the same division at the time. We were in the back of the school bus and they started piling everybody on there. All the locals and some of them hadn't had, if they'd had a shower, it hadn't been for a couple of days. You know, or a bath and it was hot, and it was sweaty, and it wasn't air-conditioned, and the thing stunk. And this one fellow looks at me and I look at him and he says, "Let's get the hell out of here."

We open the back door of the bus and there was a taxi. And there were taxis there to haul us back and everyone told us, "Don't use them, they're gonna rob you blind." And well, we finally made a deal with one of them. And the instructions to the bus driver were to haul us back to the ship. Well, we didn't want it, we weren't ready to do that. So, we got this taxi to have us, have us, drop us in one of the local bars. The last thing I remember was the poor captain from Grace Line running around on a Vespa scooter trying to corral us all to get us back to the ship. And we got back and the fella that was with me with was class of '63 and he'd done a couple years of, a year or two of college, and I let him do all the talk. "Okay, so what happened to you two guys?" He says, "We just got waylaid coming back." And that was, nobody ever asked about it again.

CH: So, what did your family have to say when they heard about the trains?

JL: They heard about it and I'd forgotten about this until I collected all my stuff and sent the news clippings down here to the library a couple of months ago. They were actually contacted by a reporter from a local newspaper in Oceanside, where they were living. And, you know, they said well we you know, we determined that they're okay, and then they had a, the Radio Club got permission to operate alongside the dock confirming to send out a standard message. You know that we were okay, well they were concerned but they were relieved to know that you know, they got the good news along with the bad news and. So, you know, I think once they got all the information, they were okay with it.

CH: So, overall, how, do you think cruise taught you a lot?

JL: Yeah, it did. You know, it's definitely hands-on. You know you go out and, even the basic stuff like splicing you know, when I was chief mate years later I, through Vietnam when you took anybody that could fog a mirror you know, to crew a ship. I was out there showing the ABs how to do you know, splicing and you know, marlinspike and that kind of thing. 'Cause you know, these guys, either they never knew to begin with, or they hadn't sailed in so long that they forgot. Yeah, but it's definitely hands-on and then you

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

know, that was a good thing. I mean, even from your third-class year, the worst job you could ever have was working in the laundry. I mean, there's nothing like humility. It was 110 outside or you know, whatever it is, 150 in the laundry probably. And thank God you only do that once; you know during the cruise.

But just you know how to make things work and living in a very confined space. And, in just applying what you've learned. You know, seeing how it all plays out and how you do, you know how what you do is going to affect something else. And it was a confidence building thing too, you know, you weren't expected to get it right. And you know, that's, it's a training ship, and that was one of the things frankly, I criticized the captain for if somebody made a mistake. He ought to know about it before everybody else knew.

You know, some of us would say, this is a training ship. You know, we're not being paid to do this, we're paying to learn how to do it. I think sometimes the best way to teach people is let them fail. You know, let them make a mistake and then figure out what, let them figure out what they've done wrong. And, if they ask you, you know, give them the advice that you think they need but, maybe write that too, you know not everything you did worked out the way you intended it to. You know hopefully you didn't make the same mistake again.

[40:16]

CH: Yeah. So, how about after you graduated, did you spend any time in the Navy or?

JL: No, I wanted to and, 'cause I wanted to go in the Navy before I went into the Merchant Marine. And, at that time when you process through here, in terms of graduation you had to spend time with them, you could visit with what you would call naval programs officer. At that time in San Francisco would take the final. I said, "Hey!" I said you know, "I'm here, so, what you want me to do here?" And they started to give me all kinds of reasons why they couldn't take me on active duty, and I said, "Okay." So, I did the reserve thing and, mainly by correspondence courses when I was going to see which the only way I could do it, anybody here two years later they were asking for volunteers for various reinforces in Vietnam.

And, I just said, "Hey, you know, I gave you guys a chance." I'm gonna do this my way and I kept up the reserve for, eventually gone and went and came up shore and got into my unit and, not having had any active duty was a real disadvantage as far as returning points. It was a real disincentive not to continue. And 'cause you peep out, at that time you peeped out of the reserve and sometimes you have to go on non-pay for like units and we'll teach you for a quarter. But they had say four lieutenant commanders who, three of them would be getting paid and one wouldn't. And they'd always, well they knew always rotated that around so to you know, to share the grief a little. But then I went overseas with my oil company working ashore and there was absolutely no chance of

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

correspondence courses. I'd taken a lot of them, most of them. And there wasn't that much left and the ones that were out there took a hell of a lot of discipline that I didn't have. So, I, I got an honorable discharge from the reserve and--

CH: So, what companies did you work for?

JL: Oh, all through the MNP. None of them which are in business anymore. Two relief jobs with Robin Line which is owned by Moore McCormack. Grace Line, Fairline, and then I got a permanent job with Espion, which at that time was a, had some real good runs. Owned by States Marine but operated as a different, a separate entity. And, we had some real good trade routes. I started out as third mate of around the world ship, it was a four-month trip. It was east coast, west coast, Asia, Sihanouk, plan new ports, you know, to the Suez into Spain, and then across to Halifax and down. Then I did a year on an India ship with one of the US to Eastern Gulf Coast to India and Pakistan. You know, and even that wasn't bad. Then I went over to the States Marines side. I was a year as chief mate, out at Badgers State but, about 15-months after I got off the ship it blew up and sank and it was seeing. Well, I think the best, the most I enjoyed going to sea was third mate on the around the world ship. Days before containers and you'd kinda spend four or five days and, sometimes more at a port and, in the days when they liked Americans.

CH: Right, so was it difficult to find a job once you graduated?

JL: No, no. And we'd heard that and we had a little bit of a foot in the door you know, when in Baltimore had gotten a bad reputation at one of the companies for, the level of the plebes or the caliber of mates that they'd be sending out. So, the local made a deal with the academies and then president of Okla came out here and said, "Two or three or three or four of you want to come back, so we get you a job." he said, "Get you out." One thing good they did was go to the companies and say, "Hey, you know we'd like you to hire through us. We'll get you the right you know, the people you want. And not these bums that you have sitting around the hall."

And they'd for example, they'd go to the hall and there the business agent or the dispatcher would come up and say, "You have an interview sir, stick around after five o'clock." Okay. So, five o'clock could come and go and, guys are heading out the door and you're kinda hanging around and you're looking for an excuse 'cause you can't tell anybody, you know. The dispatcher looks up, everybody gone, but you. Third mate on the water, you know.

So, it worked out well. But no, I've never had a problem getting a job. And you talk to guys that'll tell you that and you really you gotta start quizzing them and say, "Okay, well you know, have you been in the hull?" "No.", "Well, what have you been doing?" "Oh, went skiing, went to Hawaii, went to Mexico, then I went on vacation and then I can't find a job." "Well, hey did you look---" "No, no." You know, it's being there at the right time. But there was no shortage of jobs and then it was a little tighter I think for maybe

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

the like [19]62, class of [19]62 and [19]63 'cause really all they had was. So, you're on the coast and representing MSTs. But the closer you got to the Vietnam and then in '65 Vietnam just went wide open, and they had jobs they couldn't fill which I how I got a third mate on the around the world ship. And that went on for years.

CH: Right. So, how long was it that you were working, obviously out at sea?

JL: Well, July [19]64, I got off my last ship on October of [19]69, [19]68. And, then I was actually still on the payroll vacation and whatnot into early [19]69 when I came ashore.

[46:37]

CH: All right. So, do you feel that CMA prepared you well for that career?

JL: Yeah, there were some things I think, had they had a, at that time had they had a more formal program I'd shift to it 'cause I keep running up and down the coast. Just for normal merchant ship routine. You know, there's some things the first trip I really felt stupid. You know, they told me to you know, call, they said we're gonna be tying up at 2:30 in the morning or whatever. So, I didn't know to call the crew half an hour early. I called them at 2:30 and hell the pilot was upset, you know, men was upset, there was no one to head back to handle the mines, you know. And they got out there but the delegate came up saying, he says, "Give it some time." and he sent me to make coffee or something. You know, not having dealt with, with union work rules, but you learn that stuff you know. And you know, so most skippers and mates don't expect you to know everything. Some of them do, some of them are real assholes. But most of them understand that you're a grad and it's a bit of a learning curve and. You know the academies definitely wanted us. He had this bare and entry of the union to work through, in Baltimore you know, at the time. So, it kinda worked for everybody.

CH: So, the Hawsepiper you mentioned you're interested in continuing your education in business in foreign trade?

JL: Yeah, I had designs on that and that never happened. I was interested in what used to be called Thunderbird in Arizona. And a couple of my classmates went there, and you know, it was worthwhile, and I just never pursued it. I got bogged working ashore and got married and you know, had a family and, and not, you know I think maybe had I not had the veterans benefits that I had that I might have been a bit more motivated to do it. But I was quite happy doing what I was doing. I really had no reason to do it differently.

CH: So, what was it you did once you went ashore?

JL: I started working for Marine Terminals as superintendent, San Diego. And another one of the best jobs I ever had and well, I knew it wasn't gonna last. When I first got there, they were in transition from brick bulk to containers. You know, just wound down the

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

business very dramatically. And I think when I first got there, they were handling like 12 ships a month and when I left a year and a half later, I got transferred to Long Beach it was down to probably less than half of that. And it was all due to the brick bulk loading containers which were moving through Long Beach. And that was in San Diego for a year and a half, and they transferred me to Long Beach. And that lasted six months and then, I saw another CMA grad who was a class ahead of me who had been working for the bay area. And he left to go with Sealand and they moved me into that slot and I was there five years. And then, went to work for Arabian-American Oil Company in Saudi Arabia for five years.

CH: So, what would you say about your overall career at sea and shore?

JL: I enjoyed it, overall. Yeah, I don't think I would have done anything differently. I came back after five years in Saudi Arabia, I came back and worked for Sealand for about 14 years. And, got downsized in '95 and '93 I saw it coming and said, "Hey, maybe it's time to do something differently." and went into real estate. And did that for 14 years. And, really enjoyed it, it's running our own business and that was fun.

[50:38]

CH: Yeah. So, what do you think of Cal Maritime these days?

JL: Very impressed, the, you know, I had doubts. To us a real shocker was when they allowed women. And, then when they had a women president, I got a call from somebody who was either them the alumni president or had just been the alumni president and he say, well, he didn't say it this way but it's the way it came across, like I have some awful news for you. He didn't say that but it's like, you know, I thought somebody died. And, he said, "They have a new superintendent." And, I said, "Oh." He says, "A woman." And I didn't know what I was supposed to say. And I think what drove it was they had some, because of the uniqueness of having female students they'd had some sexual harassment problems. Be they were truthful or not, I don't know.

But, I think some of it was involved around the equator crossing ceremonies. Which was kind of a talking about the cruise, that was a unique experience. But you know, you kind of wondered if the school was headed in the right direction in different times. And, from what I've seen now, I think between, a couple of presidents in particular Joseph Rizza, Jerry Aspland and Doctor Eisenhardt. You know, they're number one, the recognition they're getting is terrific. I've had people tell me, they say "We had no idea that CMA had such a high result and such high recurrent." And you know, local people you know, 54 years ago they'd never heard of the place, you know. Even though they drove right by it every day.

So yeah, no it's you know, they've had to change too. They, the industry has changed so much that they really whatever you consider the American Merchant Marine is vastly

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

different than it was you know, when I first graduated. You know, there's a lot more challenges, there's a lot more stronger requirements, pollution control didn't exist.

CH: Right.

JL: We used to throw all our garbage down over the side, if you pumped, if the chief pumped a little oil so what, you know, nobody cared.

CH: So, aside from the few things you mentioned right there how else have you seen a change?

JL: I think going to the Cal State University system was probably the only way to survive.

CH: Right.

JL: Legislature in the mid-70's, or early [19]73 I think, Blaise Fletcher tried very hard, they targeted the school as far as I understand to close it down. And 'cause it's obviously, it's a very expensive place to operate with the ship and the training facilities and then the small enrollment. And, they targeted that, and they literally wanted to shut their doors and, they did not either recognize or they underestimated the influence of the alumni association and, I know I wrote letters to a couple of legislators and some other people did too. And the compromise as I understand it or as I saw it came back, "Okay, we're gonna let you stay open but you've gotta upgrade your curriculum." 'Cause then it was, and they'd run in some of these other programs and well they always had to fight for funding. You know, it gets you, if you're up against everybody else here you are higher education but standing and you have to go up against the UCA system and the Cal State University system. And, there were probably some things that you know, a lot of people didn't like about it. But I think overall it would get you into the fold. And I think it's probably in the long run given it a lot of horsepower and recognition.

CH: So, you would say that it's changed for the good or---

JL: Oh yeah, yeah.

CH: So, is there anything you wanna add or ask?

JL: Well, yeah if we go back the cruises a little bit.

CH: For sure.

JL: I think, number one it got us out of here at the right time of the year, January, February. And, we always went south of course. The one cruise I really felt was a missed opportunity for me and probably a lot of us, 'cause we had it thrown upon us and it was not something.

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

[55:03]

I don't think the school, I'm sure the school didn't wanna do it initially, was the Galapagos Expedition Cruise. We'd been to the place once and there was nothing there and you know, it was, there was no development of any kind. And, once you'd seen the place, you'd seen the place. You know, unless you were really into diving and into rare animals, you know. It had a very scientific element kinda thing. You know, you wanna go different places. And they, our the [19]64 cruise was originally supposed to be a Tahiti and Australia and I think New Zealand.

And, as I heard it the word came down from the National Science Foundation and maybe even the White House that "No, you're gonna take this expedition and you're gonna support this expedition of the Galapagos." Well, there was instant resentment. You know, just instead instant resentment. And apparently there was some money attached to this and they you know, were put in a position and I mean, the government owns the ship, I mean, they couldn't say no evidently.

So, they revised the cruise, and we did make Tahiti. But, instead of Australia, we ended, we went back to Kayo, Peru, which we'd seen before, two cruises before and, Guayaquil, Ecuador which is on a port of, at that time of Buenaventura, Columbia, you know. But some of the people, the people they had on the cruise, the scientific expedition, number one were very regular people and they, these were probably leading people on there, well I know they were, very you know, well thought of in their fields and you know, multiple advanced degrees and whatnot. Here they're sleeping in a, their sleeping arrangements were not better than ours.

And they ate with us in the mess and, but there was this animosity, it never, it finally kinda wore down and they conducted seminars and talks in their particular fields of expertise. And there was one old gentleman, I think he was Belgium, this was an international group. They had Japanese and Europeans and, besides Americans. And I understand this was like his pilgrimage or whatever and he died, if I remember correctly, he died a short time there and he was probably you know, from what I can remember, he must have been pretty close to you know, his 80's at the time.

But the sent their science writer, on board, and real nice guy and I got to know him a bit. 'Cause I offered the he needed a place you want to get away or anything. Here's the combination to the lock you know, feel free and he kinda hung out there. And this was totally against policy. We were told that on certain fares there will be no fraternization. But, as long as you didn't get caught, you could get away with it. And, a real nice guy and I saved, some friends of ours saved his articles for me. And I turned those over to the library here a couple of months ago.

And we also carried on that trip a couple of weather observers for the weather, the US weather bureau. And real regular guys and apparently, they used to assign them to the

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

ships and, or whatever to conduct these, before they had satellites. To launch weather radars and record the data and send it in to you know, for offshore station for evening coverage. But I think that was, that expedition looking back now and knowing, seeing what's, we didn't realize how important it was, what a big deal it was. And, besides that having it literally shoved down our throats and, in view of Australia. Was a little bit hard to take.

[59:04]

CH: So, do you wanna discuss like the basic, the equator crossing show?

JL: Yeah, yeah. I guess it must have been my first-class cruise I got some pretty good photos of that. It started out the night before, they locked you in a, I can't remember the term there, was it shellbacks?

CH: I've heard the term shellback.

JL: I can't remember what it was before. If you had crossed from what they call you before you crossed, I think shellbacks.

CH: Polliwog?

JL: Polliwog, yes, thank you, yeah. They corralled all the polliwogs and put them down in a chain locker or the rope locker or some dam place. It was hot and it was kinda here off the tropics. And it was hot, and it was sweaty and there's 50 of you or whatever in there. And my equator crossing you know, the night before, we somehow broke out of there. And there was a bit of a fight, and I remember giving some guy a bloody nose.

One of the upper classmen and, it seems we overpowered him and then I can't specifically remember what happened after that but then the next day they had a, you crawl through a long canvas shoot that was filled with the ship's garbage, well salted, and peppered down, so it's. And, then they'd swat you, while you were in there, they swatted you with fire hoses. So, the canvas deadened the, you know deadened the sting. But it still took a little bit of skin and all the salt and pepper in the garbage you know, you'd feel it.

And you got through that and then they had a breeches buoy rigged up on a cargo pulled over the side. And, if you got the breeches buoy, you could free fall for the 40 feet or whatever into the water. And then, off, and, then you came back up and I forget what the royal court was first or the, yeah, I think the garbage shoot came first and then you went through the royal court.

And, they had a big black cook, Roger Riggsby, nice guy. And the guy probably weighed 400 pounds and he had this humongous belly and he loved this, he used to, I think he

Interviewee: John Lunkes
Interviewer: Joseph Tapanes & Charles Heinbockel
Date: October 10, 2009

Place: Cal Maritime Library
Transcriber: Rev.com

lived for this. He'd then get up there with his big bare belly all waxed down with I dunno whatever, you know, fish oil or whatever. Part of the ceremony was you went through and you'd have to kiss Riggsby's belly. And, then they'd rattle off some charges, you know some guys walked out on a bar bill in Cayala or wherever you know, Acapulco or you know, stiffed the whore somewhere. And that was your fate. And I forget what happened after that.

I know one guy had to stand on a trash can, he was a lookout for Davy Jones. But this was basically like a half a day you know, event. And we all got certificates after we you know, either on the cruise or at the end of the cruise, I can't remember which. But yeah, it was something to look forward, once you'd been through it you know, it wasn't that bad and you kinda get dumped on the breeches buoy you can free fall for you know, 30 or 40 feet was, kinda made it worthwhile. That was a bit of an adrenaline rush.

CH: So, is there anything else you wanna add?

JL: I think that takes care of it.

CH: Okay.

JL: Yeah, thank you.

CH: Well, thank you.

JT: Yeah, thank you.

JL: Well, you bet, well I hope this helps and good luck with your history program.

CH: Thank you, I think that's all we have for today.

[End of Interview]