

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
VOICES ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
NOAA HERITAGE AND THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
CAPT. JOHN K. CALLAHAN, JR.

FOR THE  
NOAA 50TH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY  
MOLLY GRAHAM

COUPEVILLE, WASHINGTON  
SEPTEMBER 3, 2021

TRANSCRIPT BY  
MOLLY GRAHAM

Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview with Captain John K. Callahan, Jr. for the NOAA 50<sup>th</sup> Oral History Project. Today's date is September 3, 2021. Captain Callahan is in Coupeville, Washington. The interviewer, Molly Graham, is in Scarborough, Maine. I wanted to pick up with your second stint on the *Discoverer* in 1989.

John Callahan: Yes. Did we finish with the *Oceanographer*?

MG: Yes, that was before the second stint on the *Discoverer*.

JC: Yes, the last sea assignment I had was first as Captain of the *Oceanographer* and then as Captain of the *Discoverer*. The *Oceanographer* came first, then the *Discoverer*.

MG: Yes, so we're on the *Discoverer*.

JC: We already did the *Oceanographer*.

MG: Yes, unless there was something I'm missing.

JC: Did I tell you about my foray into international law?

MG: You did – the story about what happened in Panama.

JC: Yes, yes. I found a memo that I wrote on a report of that. The two errant crew members were fined – we paid ninety dollars for each of them. They had a choice of ninety days in jail or paying ninety dollars.

MG: That's an easy choice.

JC: Yes. Anyway, I just came across that memo. The thing I was just talking about in American Samoa – we stopped in American Samoa, and I had the Lieutenant Governor over for dinner on the ship. At one point, I thought there was a value to connecting with politicians, if you will, in foreign countries to kind of wave the flag. I thought, as an oceanographic research vessel, we were in a unique position to do that. As I was alluding to earlier, I found this memo that I wrote, and I just happen to have a copy. If you don't mind, let me look at this. I wrote it to the Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere. It was involving a dinner on the ship and then conversations afterward. I was concerned and wanted to alert people to the fact that American interests in the Pacific were not volatile, but there was stuff going on. Apparently, there were some developments in the island nation of Kiribati, and we were denied permission to conduct research in that area because of those problems. That signaled the declining US interests and influence in that part of the country. One of the things that, after this conversation with them, that the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of Samoa was, we ought to consider establishing a base in that area of the Pacific, given NOAA's [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] interest at that time in climate change of all things – thirty years ago. Anyway, I don't know whatever happened to that suggestion. Apparently, we don't have a base in American Samoa that I'm aware of. I just noticed in the newspaper the other day that, I think, the Department of Defense was looking at establishing some kind of an island base in the middle

of the Pacific. The point I was trying to make was that the flag-waving, if that's an acceptable term, that could be done by NOAA vessels traveling internationally, I thought, was an excellent opportunity for the scientific community, as well as for anybody that had American interests in that part of the world.

MG: This was while you were on the *Oceanographer*.

JC: Yes, this was on the *Oceanographer*.

MG: What kind of research were you hoping to do there?

JC: Well, it was just a continuation of the research that we had been doing – climate change, El Nino and La Nina, all of that stuff. We were operating in the middle of the Pacific, doing all sorts of weather and sea observations on a regular basis. We would depart from Seattle and go out to the middle of the Pacific Ocean and do research and then come back to Seattle again or Honolulu. It just seemed to make a little bit of sense to start looking at other areas [for bases]. If you were going to be there for any extended period of time doing research, you'd be able to base out of [there].

MG: Did you have a land assignment between the *Oceanographer* and the *Discoverer*?

JC: No, I cross-decked. I went from the *Oceanographer*, walked across the pier, and walked on board the *Discoverer*; they were docked next to each other.

MG: I don't have much in my notes about your second stint on the *Discoverer*. I was curious if you could talk more about that time.

JC: Sure. They had laid the *Oceanographer* up, thought that it was too expensive to run, it needed too much repair – whatever. They went ahead and laid up the *Oceanographer*. Then, they needed to do something with the officers that were on the *Oceanographer* as well as the crew. For me, it was great. I went from Captain of the *Oceanographer* to Captain of the *Discoverer*, so I could finish out my sea term. Along with me came a number of crew members from the *Oceanographer*, permanent employees who had seniority compared to some of the people on the *Discoverer*. As you can imagine, that caused some personnel problems, if you will, in the crew, to the extent that, all of a sudden, there was an influx of *Oceanographer* people. There's always been a friendly competition between the *Oceanographer* and the *Discoverer*. They were essentially twin ships. Each crew had their own personality and thought that they were the best, etcetera. There was a little bit of upheaval when you meshed the two together. Some of the officers came with me. I think most ended up getting reassigned to land billets; it was time for their rotation anyway. So, it was an amalgamation [of personnel] when we took off on our first trip. Like I said, it was a hard time. I just had lunch with the former Chief Steward of the *Oceanographer*, who was reminding me that when we shifted over to the *Discoverer*, he had been assigned and selected as Chief Steward of the *Oceanographer* because he was an absolutely outstanding individual with all sorts of experience that most of the people in our fleet, in terms of the steward's department didn't have. He was doing all sorts of new stuff. He bought the same kind of – when you're working ashore, in a restaurant, for example,

they have ways of recycling, but if they served roast chicken that night, and at the end of the night, they still had some chickens leftover, they would chop it up, and the next day, there's chicken salad or something – ways to do things, to make use of things. He had established that on the *Oceanographer*, and the crew really loved this guy. We were eating better than anybody. It was kind of like other stewards [would say], "How are you doing this? How are you giving the people a choice of steak every night?" Anyway, the guy that was the Chief Steward on the *Discoverer* was more of a traditional guy, who had come up through the ranks, and also had seniority. When they meshed those two [positions] together, the guy that was chief steward of the *Oceanographer* – and we considered the *Oceanographer* the "Queen of the Fleet" – was now going to have to either work for this guy or share the responsibilities. As you can imagine, it was a tricky situation. That happened in a number of instances where you had people coming in and matching up with other people that had been doing the same job. Anyway, we took off on our first trip, and that was to do some mapping in the Exclusive Economic Zone, EEZ. Some of this stuff we were doing for the Navy and some of the data was classified. When we took off on the way down, it was – well, let me backup. Before we left, one of the things that I liked to do was to talk to everybody before we left. When I talked to the crew, it was basically, "We've got a very important job to do. We have to do this safely. So, let's have fun, do the job, and make sure it's safe." To the officers, same kind of message. I wanted them all to increase their skill levels, to be trained so that when they walked off the ship, they really had some experience behind them. In the meeting I had with the officers, I asked how many people here had driven the ship. I think two people raised their hands, the Executive Officer and the Field Operations Officer. It was like, "Are you kidding me?" [laughter] I took the ship out myself to prove to everybody that I could drive. I think that's kind of traditional. Then afterward, I decided, from now on, a lot of effort is going to have to be spent getting these officers up to speed. There were twelve junior officers on that ship. On the way down to our first station, we ran into some problems with engines. It had to do with the air conditioning, or the heating systems, or whatever. Repairs had been done in Seattle, and they were screwed up. So, we had to pull into San Diego and get some emergency repairs on these particular systems. We had a meeting in the wardroom to tell everybody what we were doing because we weren't supposed to make any stops; we were supposed to head south. I asked who was the youngest officer in the wardroom. This lady raised her hand. I said, "Come on, you're driving." I took her up to the bridge] and said, "Okay. You're going to take it in. I'll stand behind you. and the Executive Officer will be here. We'll guide you." And damn if it didn't start getting dark. We were pulling into an area that had a wooden dry dock next to it. All I can tell you is that I watched very, very carefully as the young lady did this, and she did a great job – nervous, very nervous, but really, really a great job. That kind of set the stage for the rest of the officers. It was like, all right, everybody's going to drive. Then, I had a debriefing afterward, which was also a practice that I had instituted, where whoever did the docking would then explain what they did, what they did right, what was wrong, what they would do differently, any of those kinds of things, and an answer some questions from the other officers present. Anyway, there we went. Excuse me. It wasn't the Exclusive Economic Zone. It was RITS program – CO2. We were looking at trace elements in the water. It was going to be – we were going to Manzanillo. We were going to go to Easter Island, which was really interesting. We were going to go to Tahiti and then back to Seattle. In that area, as you can imagine, [there were] great ports in terms of things to look forward to. I can remember when we got to Manzanillo, if I recall correctly, when we left, I had a Mexican outfit, complete with hat, serape, and such. I showed up on the bridge in that outfit to say goodbye to

everybody and take off – “Who’s that guy[they said]?” [laughter] Off we went to Easter Island. That was a very interesting project to the extent that we had to refuel. In order to refuel at Easter Island – they had no docks. If you went ashore, it had to be by a small boat. We had to maneuver into a four-point moor. To my knowledge, I had never heard of anybody putting a NOAA ship in a four-point moor. We did it. You put two anchors out in front, one anchor out on the starboard side, and then you maneuvered the ship around to where you’re going to be where this little underwater port was that they would connect up to your fuel line on a ship. When we got to the right place, we dropped the other anchor and then set the stern anchors. I had advice from the guy who was running the fueling facility, so that was great. But we put that sucker in a four-point moor and refueled. The first night ashore, I think I must have lost – I don’t know – twenty, twenty-five percent of the crew. [laughter] They went ashore. Like I said, you can only get there by small boat. The ones that were most efficient were [belonged to] the islanders because they did this all the time. We had hired some of the islanders to run boats back and forth, but they quit at ten o’clock or something. Meanwhile, a bunch of these guys had gotten this – I think it’s called Pisco, some kind of alcohol that is prevalent on that island. They ended up sleeping in people’s yards. They were taken in by natives. [laughter] Pretty amazing. Let’s see. What else [about] Easter Island? I presented the Mayor with a drawing that the Pipe Major from the Washington Scottish Pipe Band had done when he was a graduate student in geography. He did a map of Easter Island at the time. This guy ended up working for an “unknown” government agency [CIA]. He was pretty good at this stuff and I got to present it to this guy the Mayor. I think it’s on display somewhere down there at this point. Yeah. So, Easter Island, and then we did our work – water samples and determining what the pollutant levels were in the water. We ended up in Tahiti. On the way back from Tahiti, was pretty interesting. Two things actually happened that are memorable to me. One, I went up to the bridge; every night, I would walk up and just walk around, see what’s going on. One night when I came out into the plotting room, I noticed that the fathometer was going up almost in a straight line. “Whoa, what’s that?” I asked the guy who was navigating in the plotting room, “What’s going on?” He said, “Well, that just started.” I said, “Well, stop.” I got the guys up on the bridge to slow down. Then I called the Chief Survey Tech up, and I said, “This looks like we’ve got some kind of a mountain or something going on here.” It was really kind of interesting because I wouldn’t have known all that. I wouldn’t have known what was going on unless I had been on a hydrographic ship, the *Peirce*, as Executive Officer, doing surveys on the East Coast, where you looked at fathometers every day and the record that was going on. It was really interesting how that experience came to the forefront then. We notified the Chief Scientist that there was some kind of anomaly going on. We just wanted to spend a little time, find out what’s going on. We did a little search pattern. The Chief Survey Tech was also a former hydrographic kind of guy. We made up a little grid. Then we went back and forth, and damn if we didn’t find a mountain about the height of Mount Baker out here in the State of Washington. To our knowledge, it had not been discovered by anybody. I understand that it now – it has a name. I had suggested we name it after the *Discoverer*, but the Board of Geographic Names gets to determine what something is going to be named. I don’t think that happened. Essentially, we discovered an underwater mountain, which I thought was pretty cool.

MG: Weren’t there two others that you discovered? I don’t know if it was on the same trip, but I have a note that there were three uncharted seamounts, and the largest was this one that was the size of Mount Baker?

JC: Yes, I think there were some other ones— in the same area, obviously, some kind of volcanic activity, probably. So, it was not just one; there were a couple. The one that was the larger one was the size of Mount Baker. It was all at the same time. I don't think it was — in my mind, thirty years ago — but I think that was all at the same time. The other thing was that we had left Tahiti. We were headed back. I authorized a swim call. We stopped the ship, and we allowed people to go in. We put a small boat over as a precaution. At the time, we had rifles on the ship. So wWe had somebody armed and not necessarily trying to shoot sharks because that's not going to work, but certainly, it would be enough — the noise would be enough to alert anybody in the water that something's wrong; get out of the water. The thing about having a swim call is there are certain things you don't do. You don't throw garbage over. You don't allow people to be fishing while you're doing it. You know, common sense. To my mind, the big thing is you come to a halt, and then you do it. You don't sit there and let the engine noise or the sewage go automatically off the side or whatever. You don't sit in an area for any length of time because any kind of creatures are going to then know you're there, and they may get curious. So, you stop the ship. You do the swim call. It doesn't last for more than fifteen, twenty minutes, and everybody gets out of the water. We had done that a couple of times. So, we stopped, and we had a swim call. Everybody had a great time, and then we came back. The only reason I'm telling you this story is because years later, the guy that was my Executive Officer on that particular trip had a swim call after leaving Tahiti. Unfortunately, they had been stopped for a while, I understand, because they thought that there was some kind of damage or something they wanted to check out. They heard a bump in the night, apparently. They wanted to make sure that there were no problems with the props or anything. At any rate, one of the ladies that was in the stewards' department, I think eighteen years old, was part of the swim call, and a great white shark took her leg off. She survived. She ended up working for NOAA for a few years afterward, but it was an absolute shame that it happened. It's just one of those things that happen sometimes. As a result, immediately afterward, all swim calls were stopped, including in the Navy for a while. I don't know what the situation is now. But that was a terrible, terrible incident.

MG: Yes. Admiral Stubblefield told me about that, too, in his interview.

Yeah. Where were we? We got back to Seattle. The next one [trip], we took off, and we did the Exclusive Economic Zone survey that I was talking about. That was mostly off the California coast. On the way down, we hit a storm, pulled into Bodega Bay, where another NOAA vessel had pulled in. We were waiting for the storm to go by so that we could get back out and continue south and I authorized a picnic ashore. Both the Fisheries vessel and our vessel crew members could go ashore — officers as well — and have a beach picnic. To make a very long story short, some of the people didn't observe what the rules were and we ended up with some people with alcohol problems and attempts to carry that [alcohol] onboard the vessel. Bottom line was I ended — I fired one person and disciplined a bunch of others. The only reason I'm telling you this story is because it was one of the things that I thought was — that I still look back at and just kind of shake my head with a little bit of a smile. I fired this guy, and I told him that under the table of defenses and penalties that we had in effect at that time — there was no option. As a first offense, [and] you're gone. I think he was a temporary employee. I told him we were going to put him ashore, and we're going to pay his way back to the Marine Center, and that

also, in my opinion, he had an alcohol problem. I told him I was going to tell the personnel officer that I worked with that I would like to see if we could get him into a program if he was willing. If he wanted to, they would arrange that. So he got into the small boat to be put ashore. He talked to, I guess, one of his buddies, who was the coxswain, to make a circle around the ship. As he circled around the ship, I was the recipient of a number of obscene gestures and a bunch of language that you wouldn't want to be repeating anywhere. So, he had his moment, and then off he went. We get back to port months and months later, like six months later, something like that, and I get a phone call. Normally, we come in in the morning; they bring the mail aboard. People would immediately want to get off the ship and go see their families and stuff. You had people from the Marine Center coming over – “What about this? What about that?” At the end of the day, you're pretty well spent. I was up in the cabin about five o'clock, and I get a call from the quartermaster. He says, “So-and-so, this guy [the person I had fired] is here to see you.” [laughter] I said, “Don't let him up. Hold him at the quarterdeck, and don't you go anywhere.” I figured this guy is going to do something to me, right? So, I go down. “Hi. How are you doing?” He says, “Do you remember me?” I said, “Yeah, I do. How are you doing?” He said, “Well, I just wanted to stop by and give this to you,” and he hands me a package. I open up the package, and it's a plaque. The plaque says something about ship's rules, rule one “The captain is always right. Number two, if some kind of circumstance arises or if your confused, go back to rule number one.” It was some funny thing. I just kind of looked at it like – and he held his hand out to me. He said, “Thank you. I'm now six months sober. I realized I had all sorts of problems. I've turned myself around.” “Well, congratulations. I really appreciate that.” I went back up to my room, and I went, “Wow.” There's so many other times that I've been involved with people where you had to take some kind of disciplinary action, and the only thing you could get is, like I said, profanity and stuff, but this guy actually turned himself around. It was really well worth it and worth making sure that you did enforce the rules. Sometimes people have a tendency to turn the other cheek, if you will, about, particularly alcohol. That was a win, as far as I was concerned.

MG: Yes. It sounds like it was a wake-up call for him.

JC: It was. It was. That's what, I think, a lot of people need. I had an officer one time on the – when I was Executive Officer of the *Peirce*, who had an alcohol problem. I called him into my room and had this meeting with him and told him that he had a problem and he needed to get that thing squared away, or else I was going to write him up and do something about it. He not only took my advice, but he turned himself around, and I was still friends with the guy twenty, thirty years later; he hadn't had a drink since. Sometimes people have to be grabbed by the collar and shook and then [told], “Hey, look, you got a problem. Do something about it.” All right. What else? We were operating off the California coast, doing swath surveys, which was very interesting. It was rough water always because the swells came in from the same direction. Of course, the way they laid the lines out for us to do this survey was right in the middle of the trough. You were just rocking back and forth. I can remember one time coming out of my cabin, looking at the chairs that surrounded the table, and I had them bungee-corded. As the ship would roll to the left or to the right, the chairs would actually come away from the table for two or three feet and then snap back in again. I couldn't sleep that night. I remember I bought a book on folding napkins for the ladies in the stewards' department because they were having this little contest of folding napkins and who can do the most fancy folds and all. I bought this thing

off the internet. The stewards' department was absolutely great. When we would have dignitaries come on board, they did amazing things. At any rate, the weather was so rough, I couldn't sleep, so I came out into the cabin. Remember, I had all these napkin folds in this book. I pulled all the napkins out in the Captains pantry. They came in the next morning to make up the room and stuff, and they had fifty napkins folded on the table in fancy ways. [laughter] I still have that book, by the way. Other things about the *Discoverer*? The *Discoverer* has an aloft conning station, which the *Oceanographer* used to have, but they took it off because somebody thought that that was going to improve the stability of the ship. I remember being involved in that discussion about that stability thing and asking for the calculations because I, as a naval architect person, wanted to check that out because it didn't seem to make a lot of sense to me. There weren't any detailed calculations, so, they decided to leave the one on the *Discoverer* on board. On the foremast of the *Discoverer*, you have an aloft conning station. But what they had done, is they took out all of the engine controls, which had been up there. Before that when you went to the aloft conning station, you could actually maneuver the ship from there, just one person, right? They took all that out – another one of those wonderful things that the Maritime Administration had designed into the ship as cutting-edge stuff that if you don't instruct people on how to do it, and make them feel part of it, etcetera, they're just going to – “Ah, it's newfangled stuff. We don't want to do that. We know better than that.” Anyway, the thing was up there, but it was only used essentially as a lookout thing. I was curious. When my relief showed up, the Captain, the guy taking over after me [Captain Don Suloff] made a – what do you call it? –familiarization cruise. When we took the ship out of PMC [Pacific Marine Center], I went up to the aloft conn with a walkie-talkie, and I drove the ship out from the aloft conn just to see if it would work, and it did. My conclusion was that you have 360-degree visibility, which is great, but you lost the ability to look over the side and see how close you were to the pier. So, from close aboard kind of maneuvering, it [was] probably not the greatest thing in the world. But for picking your way through an ice field or for maneuvering on your buoys or anything open ocean stuff, it was pretty good. At any rate, what else? I think it was sometime around August that I got relieved [from] the *Discoverer*. My next assignment was to be the Deputy at the Pacific Marine Center. I'm thinking right now and I can't think of anything else. I think I did tell you the story about the chief scientist when I threw a man-overboard drill.

MG: Yes.

JC: That was actually on the *Discoverer*, not the *Oceanographer*.

MG: What year was it when you came off the *Discoverer* and became Deputy Director of the Pacific Marine Center?

JC: It was either '89 or '90. Let me look and see if I have that down someplace. I came off in September of '89 and moved into the billet of the Deputy Director of the Pacific Marine Center.

MG: How long were you in this role? It overlaps with an interesting time in the Corps' history with the fleet modernization taking place. So, I want to hear about your role specifically, but then more generally, what was going on in the Corps at the time.



JC: Yes. As I had mentioned, the Corps itself under Admiral [Francis] Moran was moving towards a more Corps-centered reality. In other words, the Corps first; the individuals second, which was the opposite [of] what it had been. In other words, people have personal concerns, and they'll always be addressed, but the paramount thing is what does the Corps need? What's the Corps' job? Under Admiral Moran, we moved that way as compared to, as I mentioned, previous Directors, particularly the first one, where the person was the most important thing, not the Corps. I think that was going on at the time. There was a need for replacing the ships that we had. The ships were designed initially for a twenty-five-year lifespan, which – so, you're looking at – so, let's say, '66, they came out – '76, '86. They were reaching the end of their design life span in – what? – '85? In '90, they would have been twenty-five years old. It was apparent that something had to be done. Now, the government is infamous for designing a ship [to last] twenty-five years and then running it for forty. They do that [with] a lot of money in preventive maintenance as well as maintenance, and they keep the thing going. These things [ships] are just dying out there on the vine when somebody finally decides, "Okay, we really need to have new ships." Well, they were at least thinking in terms of "fleet modernization." You weren't necessarily thinking in terms of new ships, at least not for the oceanographic and hydrographic area. There was talk about replacing fisheries ships with new vessels. There was a lot of political horsepower behind that. Hydrography is not a very politically charged discipline. Fisheries people had a lot of political contacts and power. If there was any effort being made to get new vessels, it was going to be in the Fisheries area. As far as the rest of the fleet was concerned, it was going to be "fleet modernization" – put these things in [a shipyard] and rehab them. If they need new engines, put in new engines. If they need this do it – but in reality, a lot of the stuff they were doing was – I don't want to say cosmetic, but, for example, on the *Oceanographer* and *Discoverer*, they ripped out some tiles in the mess areas and replaced them and stuff. They didn't put new engines in or new generators or anything. They rebuilt some of that stuff. I'm trying to remember when – they took out, for example, the bow observation windows in the bow observation ports of the two Class I vessels. We also had observation ports midships in those vessels. They got taken out and welded over. We had a diver's well in the Class I vessels, which got welded up and converted into another fuel tank. They were doing those kinds of things. Like I said, they were trying to extend the life of the ships. At the same time, you had this movement going on, as far as the Corps was concerned, to put commissioned officers on Fisheries vessels. As the [Fisheries vessels] Masters retired from the Fisheries area, then we tried to replace them with commissioned officers. That, obviously, met some resistance in the Fisheries community. But we had had a number of commissioned officers serve as junior officers on Fisheries vessels and learn something about fishing. So, all in all, it worked out well, I think, and I think that when the Fisheries people realized that they had pretty much an ally in a commissioned officer, as opposed to a merchant mariner sea captain, who was not really interested in anything other than driving, that was probably a better deal for them. That's what was going on. I'm trying to go back – there had been a movement politically to kind of do away with the Corps. But I think that was prior to me going to the *Oceanographer* and *Discoverer*, and so we [the Corps] weren't getting any bigger that I'm aware of. There was some resistance at the Administrator levels to having commissioned officers. But that's about what I remember from that.

MG: Did these conversations or the fleet modernization itself impact your work at all?

JC: Well, at the Marine Center, yes. We had to provide information to headquarters. I forgot a movement that was going on. Let me get to this in a second. The marine engineering and electronics divisions and operation divisions in the marine centers had to essentially collect data on what was needed to modernize these ships and then feed that information to Washington, where theoretically, it would get massaged, and then they'd have a budget request to get so much money. The actual work of putting together what was necessary was being done at the Marine Center. Of course, I was the Deputy at the Marine Center. Before I got there, there was something else going on at that time. Again, forgive me; I cannot think of the dates that are involved. But there was a big push to compare operations being done by commissioned officers and vessels to what would it be if it was totally done by civilians. It was the A-76 process. What was interesting about that particular process – there's nothing wrong, I think, in doing a comparison between what is being done right now and what it would cost to have a contractor do it, i.e., A-76. But when you draft up the specifications on how to do that comparison, it should be fair, and sometimes, I don't think it was in that particular instance. In particular, my concern about that was the fact that the commissioned officers, for example, on hydrographic ships as well as other NOAA vessels, were being only credited as being ship drivers. There was nothing in the formula that I was aware of that spoke to whatever scientific expertise or engineering expertise that they had that got applied to the job. In other words, if you had a merchant marine captain running a hydrographic ship up in Alaska, you're going to need another person to oversee the hydrographic work. But that was not counted in. So, there was this big push to see whether or not a lot of the functions being provided by the government, including commissioned officer stuff, could be done by private contractors. That resulted, by the way, in a lot of efficiency because when they would look at it, they would say, "Oh, you've got two people doing this. Why is that necessary?" Or "If you did it this way with a contractor, it would be great." Definite advantages to that. But the question was, was the criteria that was being used to compare these things really accurate and fair? So, back to the ship modernization thing. We were supposed to supply all of the stuff that would be necessary, to draft up what would be necessary to do this. I got into trouble one time because when the *Oceanographer* had been laid up, she needed an engine repair and a couple of other minor items. Unbeknownst to me at the time, because I was the Captain of the ship at the time – I didn't know what was going on – at the Marine Center, particularly, I believe, the Marine Engineering Division, had made representations about how expensive it was going to be to bring the *Oceanographer* up to speed. I forget what they were saying. Eight million dollars or something was needed to have repairs done. When I became the Deputy of the Marine Center, I had two suggestions regarding the *Oceanographer*. One was, let's use it as a berthing area for people that are ashore right now doing medical or training or whatever. We can also use them to do some maintenance on the vessels. I think we did some of that. I know we did some of that. One of the things was we had some engineers, one from a Class I that I remember in particular, and we had spare parts. We rebuilt the engine on the *Oceanographer* and tended to some of the other little things that needed to be done. Admiral Spear was the guy I was working for at the time at the Marine Center. I told him I wanted to take the ship out and spin it around in Lake Union and bring it back in again, so we could get the other side next to the pier to do some painting and the rest of it. It would also show that the *Oceanographer* is ready to go, not that big a deal. I went over the morning we're supposed to do that, and lit the engines off. We got ready to go. But before I could get the phone line disconnected, I got a call from Admiral Spear. He had gotten a call from Washington – "Don't do it. We don't want that ship moved." I didn't understand it and

shut it [the engines] down. I found out later that what they had done was they had gone through Washington with all these figures about what was going to be necessary to get the *Oceanographer* to be able to run again. Here I was, taking it out in the middle of the lake, spinning it around, and bringing it back in again, showing it can run right now. They didn't like that. [laughter] Oh, well. Where were we? I get easily sidetracked.

MG: Well, tell me more about the Deputy Director position at the Pacific Marine Center? What were your duties there? What was that position like?

JC: Well, I was supposed to manage the staff and be the buffer between everybody and the Admiral, advise him as to what's going on. I had ancillary duties, if you will, which, by the way, I also had on the *Discoverer* to the extent that I would get memos from people regarding legal issues that the Corps was facing and asking for opinions if you will. I was also, at that time, I believe, on the Officer Personnel Board. I became a member of the Office of Personnel Board. In 1992 or '91, I did another order for the NOAA Corps swords. We discussed that, right?

MG: I think you mentioned it a few sessions back.

JC: Yes. I just came across some correspondence about that order for the NOAA Corps swords. I had some ancillary duties, but basically, I was managing the staff at the Pacific Marine Center. I remember when I took the job, I called all of the heads of the departments or the divisions into my office and had a one on one with them and asked them to fill out a questionnaire. By the way, I don't know if I mentioned this previously, but both the *Oceanographer* and the *Discoverer* – I always tried to have some time where the people, the crew members, could come and talk to the Captain privately. I'd have people in for dinner, one or two per night, where they could tell me what's going on and what they wanted to see happen, etc. I did the same kind of thing with the Marine Center; only I had them fill out a questionnaire. It basically said, "What are the three things you like about PMC? What are things you don't like?" The last one was, "If you could, name three things you could change about the Marine Center." When I collected all of those, I selected the ones that seemed to be common, and I took that as my charge for the next two or three years to change those things, to make those things happen. I can remember getting some of those things [questionnaires] back. One guy in particular – I just came across this the other day when I was going through one of my boxes. One of the things that he was complaining about was that commissioned officers were in charge. He thought the Commissioned Corps should be done away with and that the civilians at the Marine Center could do a much better job. There were two people at the Marine Center that were in charge of divisions that thought this way. I was flattered that they would talk to me that way and actually tell me how they felt. That was good because that's the way they felt. It was a classic, absolutely classic – not confrontational. That happened a lot of times when I saw in my career where the civilians we were working with thought that they could do a better job than the commissioned officers, and they were being held back because commissioned officers were holding those positions. This person was saying, "We're stopped. We can't go any higher than the head of division here because commissioned officers are, like you, Deputies and then the Admiral. Our careers are at a standstill, so do away with the Corps." Anyway, that was my job. I was involved in Total Quality Management [TQM]. I got trained as a total quality manager guy, started that program [at the Marine Center], and had great success with it, by the way. Basically, what it entailed was

people coming in and saying, “This is what needs to be changed,” giving them some ownership in it and letting them know that they’d actually been listened to. You’d go to the working people and say, “What do you need to get things changed, make your job easier, and, by the way, make things more effective?” In the beginning, people were not too forthcoming about it. But as they saw some results, and they saw somebody would recommend that we should [change things] – I’m trying to think of an example. I can’t think of anything right now. But somebody would make a suggestion. We’d put that into effect and give them credit. That would encourage other people to do it [make suggestions]. We were having a grand old time with that one. [We] got personnel on board over at the NOAA personnel office in Seattle. Admiral Spear, the guy that I was working for, was on board, and that’s what you need. He came up with “World-Class Service”; that was going to be our thing [TQM Core Value]. I don’t know if you remember that TQM [Total Quality Management] movement, but you were supposed to look at having something that people could identify with as a Core Value – not a motto, but something that you could look at every day and say, “That’s what we’re about. That’s a ‘World-Class Service’ to the fleet.” I saw, later on, as this program started to peter out over the years in other areas, they would come up with these incredibly long things [Core Principles] – “We are about this,” and they had fifteen sentences about what we do at this place and integrity and “we’re this etc..” People don’t read that stuff. They see it once, and then they forget about it. What they need is something they can relate to immediately. Anyway, then we got a new Director. Admiral Moran left, and Admiral Spear left, and they [the new Admirals] weren’t supporters of TQM. [laughter] If you don’t have the top support, it dies, which taught me a very important lesson. I postulate that the surest way to kill a program in the United States government is to give it a name, because if you can give it a name, like TQM, or “Management by Objectives”, or any of those buzz words that were flying around the time, that gives people a target to shoot at. “I can do better than that. That’s a bad program. Why don’t we do something new?” So, within five years, the program will be dead. If I look back at Management by Objectives, TQM, and a bunch of others, sure enough, five years later, they weren’t around.

MG: You didn’t stay on for much longer after that, too, because you retired in 1993 from the Corps.

JC: I think it was ’93, yes.

MG: Tell me about the last years of your career with the NOAA Corps.

JC: With the Corps, yes. The new Admiral that came in that replaced RADM Spear needed to build his own team – my term as Deputy pretty much had been over in terms of length of time. So, they needed to replace me. That meant that they needed to find another job for me. They wanted me to come back to Washington, DC. It was kind of interesting. I tell people the story and laugh about it, really. One of the selling points [of transferring back to DC] was, “Come back to DC. You’ll be in the “catbird” seat for the next Admiral selection, etc.” I asked, “You can’t guarantee that, can you?” “No, of course not. But you’ll be back here, and blah, blah, blah.” It turns out that [later] they actually reduced the number of Admirals, so the number of selections that were going to be made didn’t come about for years and years. I think the first selection that was made was years and years later, and that was Evelyn Fields, who’s a good friend of mine, by the way. I’m really happy that I didn’t go back to Washington, DC. They

flew me back for an interview. The General Counsel wanted me to come back on his staff as a troubleshooter. I agreed to go back for the interview. When I got off the plane in DC – I think it was August – the humidity of the Washington DC area, which I had been in love with in prior assignments – I hit that humidity and that heat, and it was kind of like, “Interview is over.” [laughter] Why do I want to carry papers around in Washington, DC, in this temperature? I didn’t see anything that I could really contribute. I could do things like I had been doing when I worked for the General Counsel previously and worked for Admiral Moran doing investigations and stuff like that, but I didn’t see anything that would allow me to contribute at a greater level. So, I decided to retire, which I did.

MG: I’ll ask you some more follow-up questions about that, but at the same time, you were teaching at the Northwest Procurement Institute. Can you tell me what that experience was like? Did you want to say more about the end of your career with NOAA first?

JC: I’d have to think – if you wouldn’t mind tabling that question. We can pick that up next time. Here’s what happened. When I retired, I had a distinct feeling that I had failed. I had not been selected for Admiral. I thought that I should have been at the time. I definitely had this sense of failure. My decision to leave the Corps at that time was based on the fact that I didn’t see a job back in Washington, DC. I had also been involved in a personal relationship here in Seattle. It looked like it might be leading to marriage. I liked the Pacific Northwest. All things combined, if you will. In reality, what happened was, I didn’t get selected; that’s all. That was the sum total of everything. At the time I didn’t realize that. So, for the next two years, I got involved in a lot of “do-good” organizations. In fact, I incorporated and helped found the American Musical Theater Ensemble in Seattle to produce Broadway musicals with talent that was in the Seattle area that had been on Broadway or associated with that kind of genre. [I] spent a lot of time doing that. At one point, I was in a musical with, who was going to be, if I married this woman, my stepdaughter. She was a phenomenal entertainer. She had auditioned for this play. It was supposed to go to Russia. I went and took her to the audition because I wanted to make sure that this was okay. While I was there, [laughter] they asked me to audition, and I did. The next thing I knew, I was in this little musical thing at Christmas. It ended up being a mess. They were going to Russia, but it wasn’t very well-organized. I told them I needed to know where I was going to be in Russia because I had had security clearances as a commissioned officer and done stuff like that. I couldn’t just go running around Russia, right? They couldn’t provide me with [information on] where we were going to be. It was going to be homestays somewhere – kind of a flaky thing. So, myself and Christie, the prospective [step]-daughter, backed out, and that ended up with a big legal hassle. Between that kind of stuff and the American Musical Theater Ensemble, I became the President of the local SAME, Society of American Military Engineers Post. I then became a National Board member of SAME and was elected as a Fellow for SAME. I was co-chair of a couple of national conventions and a couple of regional conventions with them [SAME]. I founded [an incorporated] a scholarship organization for them [in Seattle], which is still going today. I did that kind of stuff. It wasn’t that I was just keeping busy. These were all good things to do with my time. But I got approached by a woman that had previously been in Personnel in Seattle that had retired and went to work for the Northwest Procurement Institute. She said, “Hey, look, they’re looking for an attorney to teach their law course. You’d be great at doing this.” So, I went and interviewed with them and started teaching government contract law. Now, I want to back up just a little bit.

Again, I was doing good stuff, but there was still something that was hanging on to me about my career in NOAA and what have you. I had done this course, and it was called the Advanced Course. In it, you were supposed to identify yourself. And I did. The person who was running the course – I said I was a former Naval officer, something like that. He said, “Wait a minute. I know you, and I know what your background is. Why are you skipping over that?” And I had, I had skipped over the fact that I was a NOAA Corps officer. I said, “Well, that’s because nobody ever heard of it [NOAA].” He said, “Well, let’s test this out on the room.” There were, I don’t know –over seventy people in the room. “How many people have heard of NOAA?” Maybe forty people put their hands up. I said, “Yeah, but nobody’s ever heard of the NOAA Corps.” He said, “How many people know of the NOAA Corps?” and about fifteen people did. I sat down. He said, “You’re a very accomplished guy. You Commanded ships. You had this. Blah, blah, blah.” I sat down and [thought], “I always do that. I always just downplay the whole NOAA thing.” All of a sudden, it came to me that I was ashamed. I was ashamed that I didn’t make Admiral. Therefore, I denied myself another career because I didn’t want to fail again. I got back up in front of the group and said, “Hey, guess what just happened.” [laughter] That gave me the freedom, actually, to have another career. I accepted the invitation to go up and interview with the Northwest Procurement Institute. That started me on a nineteen-year career, where I taught government contract law, government finance law. I was probably the best teacher they had by virtue of the reports that they got from the agencies that I worked with. As it turns out, I was pretty good at it. I worked with sixteen, seventeen different agencies. Some of them would actually request me by name. They’d say, “If this guy is going to teach the course, you’ll get a contract. But if he’s not teaching, we’re going to go somewhere else.” I ended up doing that for nineteen years. I’m being modest. I’m not bragging, but I was really, really good at this. I ended up working a lot– and during the few years, I started to wind down a little bit towards the end. Towards the end, I wanted to – instead of doing a course a month or something like that, I wanted to back off to just a few. I ended up working more with the Veterans Administration and the National Forest Service. The Forest Service was the closest that I could come to the people that I knew in the Coast and Geodetic Survey. These people were out there every day doing an actual job. I loved working with those guys. They’re real down-to-earth people. They’re not subject to the Federal Acquisition Regulation. They had their own contract format. That was a big learning curve to come up on. But then I was able to develop a course for them, actually, where I would match up the Federal Acquisition Regulation with their Timber Sale contract. When I finally did retire, I ended up selling that course to an organization that is still – I hope, anyway – doing [teaching] it. Also, I worked with the Veterans Administration and their wounded warriors project [Warriors to Workforce]. That was probably the most humbling and phenomenal experience. It was like being back on the ship again. I’d have these guys anywhere from a week to two weeks – guys and girls. They were all service members. A lot of them had no hands or bad stuff that happened to them. They were being trained as Contracting Officers. I had them for like two weeks. It was fun. It was just absolute fun. I think part of the reason that I enjoyed it – I was really, really interested in doing this. In my mind, what I was contributing was, I was giving them the opportunity to be really good Contracting Officers and really represent the government and to do it in a very honest and upright manner. You see all this crap in the newspaper about government crap in contracting. I was coming at it from the standpoint of that may be, but nobody that’s coming out of this course is going to do that. Right? It was fun. At one point, I remember, I used to have them come up [to my podium] at the end of the course. There was an exam, and when they would complete the exam, I would correct it for

them. I wanted them to know what they got wrong. The questions I had devised were questions that were practical in nature, not esoteric. I worked with these people in a lot of different ways. I remember being outside in the hallway with one of them who was having a PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] thing going on. I mean, these people were out there and actually did it. Anyway, the instructions that I gave were that if I'm working with somebody, correcting their exam, please do not come up here until I finish with that person. At the end of the exam, there's one particular guy who had had some problems, and I had been working with him. I'm correcting an exam, and all of a sudden, there's a bunch of people that come up together. I'm going, "Wait a minute. Didn't you guys get the word here?" This guy just steps forward. He was a former Marine. He stepped forward. He grabbed my collar, and he pinched it. Then, they all left in silence. I looked, and he'd taken his Marine Corps emblem and put it on my collar. That's a kudo. That's a real kudo.

MG: Yes. Wow. This role must have given you so much confidence and fulfillment.

JC: Oh, it was phenomenal. I got to use all of the stuff that I had in the Corps, examples of contracting stuff that I'd experienced. And they enjoyed it very much. I would start off by saying, "Most people will give you a speech right now about all of their accomplishments and stuff. That's kind of bullshit. What would you like to know about me? Any question is fair game." Then I'd go around the room and answer any question. Invariably, somebody would say, "Have you ever been in the service?" "Yeah, I retired as an O-6." "Whoa. Okay. Cool." It was very fulfilling. To my knowledge, not one person that ever took any of my courses ended up in the newspapers. That's the only time you see contracting officers in the newspapers is when things go *pfft*, like that. I still hear from some of them. In fact, there's an awful lot of places I can go in the country and go to a VA [Veterans Affairs] office, and people will still recognize, "Oh, that's the guy." They used to call me the "frog guy." I used to throw frogs out as prizes for everything that they would know. Somebody would do a correct answer; they'd get a frog. In fact, walking into one course, I said, "My name's John Callahan. What would you like to know about me?" Something happened, and I grabbed a frog and threw it. The guy goes, "You're the 'frog guy'. You're the 'frog guy'. We know about you." [laughter]. Then, I had a stroke. That was a couple of years ago. That screwed up my ability to talk, believe it or not. I decided [it was] time to back off. My wife was very supportive of me backing off. Then, of course, I had open-heart surgery nine months ago. Any desire that I had to reinstitute my teaching career, probably, it's over.

MG: What was that like for you when you had the stroke? Can you tell me about what the recovery has been like?

JC: The stroke was interesting. I didn't even realize I was having a stroke. I had a sensation. I lifted something, and something was not right, I guess, because all of a sudden, I felt like I was hearing myself outside myself and a little bit of tingling in the right arm. I called my wife, said, "I'm going to lay down. What the heck." She said, "No, no," and called the EMTs [Emergency Medical Technicians]. They examined me and found that everything was normal. But they wanted me to go to the hospital and get checked out. I walked out to their EMT car, told my wife, "I'll give you a call from the hospital. When they release me, come pick me up. But stay here right now. We have the rug cleaning guy here." On the way to the hospital, all of a sudden,

I lost my ability to speak. I knew what I wanted to say, but the words weren't coming out. Then, all of a sudden, *boom*, it was back to normal again. That happened two or three times. Meanwhile, my wife came up to the hospital. They didn't have a – I guess it's a – neurologist on-site at this hospital, Whidbey Island Hospital; it's a small place. So, they had me hooked up by a TV camera to somebody at Swedish Hospital [Seattle]. I was going through my symptoms with that person in preparation for a decision as to whether or not to give me this drug that you have to get within six hours, or whatever. So, I was talking to the guy. As I was talking to him, all of a sudden, again, I lost my ability to speak. He said, "Oh, yeah." They gave me the shot. They stuck me on a helicopter, and they flew me down to Seattle. Things got a little bit worse because the damage to the brain doesn't show up right away. I had a hard time walking and talking and remembering stuff. They kept telling me, "Oh, you're going to really respond great because you got the shot. The way you're responding right now – blah, blah, blah." They got me up to walk the second day, I think it was. I couldn't get my legs to move the way they're supposed to. The guy grabbed me in the back, [by the] belt on my waist. He [said], "All right. Now, you got to put one foot in front of the other." He said to me, "Like you were marching." I went, "Hmm." I started to sing out loud the Coast Guard song. As soon as I started singing that, I could march. I marched all the way around the ward, and people kept looking. "Who's this guy? He keeps singing all this marching stuff." But the therapist said, "That's great. It works. Do it." That's what I did. I marched around, got home four or five days later, and then went through the rehab process, getting my fingers to work and walking. I'm still not completely right on the right-hand side. Something's going on in the right hand. They thought it was carpal tunnel. They did an operation. That isn't it. So now they're checking my spinal cord in the neck to see whether or not I have any kind of pressure on any of the nerves. If that's not the problem, then some of the feeling that I have in my right hand is maybe the result of the stroke and may never come back. I was very happy, actually, that I got the treatment that I did, that my wife was smart enough to call the emergency medical technicians. As part of that process, they found out that I had a heart murmur, which turned out to be the aortic valve. They watched it for a year and a half. As it started to shrink, and it got to the point where we have to do something about this, then I had the open-heart surgery and had it replaced, as well as one of the artery things around the heart got cleaned out. What I remember about that was waking up and staring at the corner of the room. I was on a ventilator, and my first thought was, "Oh, my God, I'm alive." I keep thinking of that periodically. I walked out this morning to go to the garage to see if I could find some information for our interview today. When I walked out, the sun was shining; it's about sixty-seven degrees, and the first thought I had is, "Thank God I'm alive. This is really beautiful." So, it gives you a little bit of a different perspective on what you have.

MG: I bet. Can you tell me a little bit about your wife? How did you two meet? What is her background?

JC: Oh, yeah. [laughter] Oh, yeah. I was doing a course for the VA in the Chicago area – Hinsdale, I believe. It was a two-week course. They had two sessions I was doing back-to-back. I was essentially in Chicago for a month. One of the first nights I was there – Tuesday night, I guess it was – I had my little computer bag, and I was towing it behind me, leaving the classroom walking through the Embassy Suites lobby. They had a bar and a restaurant. As I was walking by, there was this girl standing there in front of the bar, waiting to get her food. She had ordered food, I guess. She had long, long hair, all the way down to her waist – it was whitish



blondish – and was really beautiful. I’m not at a loss for words necessarily to talk with women or anybody [when] I see something that needs to be acknowledged. I went up to her, tapped her on the shoulder, and said, “Hi. My name’s John. I just wanted to compliment you. Your hair is absolutely beautiful.” She said, “Well, thank you.” I said, “You’re welcome.” I turned around. I walked away. I just wanted to compliment her on her hair. The next night, I was at the manager’s reception and looking for a place to sit down. There was only one table that had any chairs at it. She was sitting there, actually, reading a book and having a glass of wine. I said, “Do you mind if I sit here?” She said, “No, not at all.” I sat down and we started talking. She was very sad. Very sad. We had started talking, and she apparently had just lost her husband two years ago. She was an SAP consultant. She was consulting someplace, and they were staying at a hotel. He just had a heart attack and died. I empathized immediately with that. I said, “You really look like you’re very, very sad.” She said, “Well.” I said, “It doesn’t have to be that way.” [laughter] I wasn’t coming on to her or anything. I was just telling her, “You still have a life ahead of you. You can still live life. You can still do stuff. You can still get a lot of joy out of life. The choice is yours, actually. You can stay in a grief situation for an extended period of time and never get out of it. Or you can experience the grief and get on with your life and see what else life has to offer.” She responded very well [to] that. It came time for the manager’s reception to end, and I said, “Look, I’m going out to get something to eat. Would you like to come along?” She said, “No, I have food in my room.” “Okay, fine. Maybe I’ll see you again.” “Yeah. Okay.” The next night, she was down there. I was at the manager’s reception. Again, I had a glass of wine, sat at her table, and had this very involved conversation. She was really alive now. She was really talking, and she’s got an amazing background. She went to Cornell, did agricultural stuff, and then she went and got a master’s degree in Oregon in finance, worked for Chevron, then got in on the ground floor of SAP and became a SAP consultant. I’m not bothering you with the length of the story. At any rate, it comes time for the [manager’s] reception to end, and I said, “Would you like to go out to dinner?” She said, “No, I have food in the room.” That went on for three or four weeks. I would see her at these managers’ receptions, not all the time, but sometimes. We’d have great conversations. I’d ask her for dinner. She would refuse. “I have food.” “Okay, fine.” The last week I’m there – it was Tuesday. I said, “Would you like to go out for dinner?” She said, “No, I have food in my room.” I said, “What do you got?” It was some kind of instant thing [Lean Cuisine]. I forget what it was. I said, “I’ll tell you what, I’ll buy it from you. Let’s go out for dinner.” She said, “No, no.” I have my Lean Cuisine. She said, “I’ll go out for dinner with you on Thursday night” because she knew I was leaving Friday. She was living with her sister in Rochester. She would go home on weekends to Rochester. Anyway, we go out on that Thursday night, and we sit down at this restaurant. We started a conversation. She said, “So when did you get the silver medal?” I went, “huh?” She said, “The silver medal. You are a retired O-6 in NOAA. What was that for?” I said, “How the hell do you know about the silver medal?” She said, “Oh, I got your records.” She had gone on the internet. She’s a computer whiz. She had my entire service record – every award I ever had, everything. She knew how much money I made as a retired guy. She had all that information, at which point I went, “This is the one.

[laughter] So, I invited her out to visit in Seattle, which she did. We started a courtship. A year and a half later, I guess, we got married. In fact, she was saying, “Well, we’ve been seeing each other for a year now.” Her company would pay [for] wherever she would go on a weekend. Whenever I was teaching, like if I was teaching in Phoenix, she’d meet me in Phoenix for the weekend. We’d go tour and stuff. It was great. One day, she said, “Where is this going, by the

way?” I looked at her. I said, “In six months, if we still feel the same way, let’s get married.” Next thing I know, St. Patrick’s Day, 2007, she’s in a Scottish dress, I’m in my kilt, and we got married.

MG: That sounds lovely.

JC: It is. You can’t go back and say, “Gee, if I had met her coming out of college. I would have had all that time with her” – because I wouldn’t have been the same person. I have really enjoyed this time. The only time that we’ve ever been apart on a daily basis, is if I’m in the hospital having an operation. We like each other.

MG: That’s good. Speaking of Scottish dress, the other thing I was really curious to ask you about was the Mastery of Scottish Arts School of Piping, Dancing, and Drumming.

JC: Yes. I was in the Washington Scottish Pipe Band in Washington, DC. When I got out to Seattle, I joined Keith Highlanders and used to go to these drumming schools and got to meet a number of the instructors. They would get together after class for an evening and drink single malt scotch and cavort and play instruments – a good time. That’s one of the reasons I went to these schools. Somebody suggested that maybe we ought to start a school in the Seattle area. It was always one of those things – yeah, yeah, yeah. Actually, it was more like, “Why don’t we get one of these schools to come up [to Seattle]?” Otherwise we’d have to go somewhere like Tacoma or someplace. “Why don’t we have it in Seattle. It would be more convenient?” Nothing happened. Then I took another course, and the course was called “The Landmark Self-Expression and Leadership Program,” and you had to have a project. My project was, I was going to – I had a chalet up in Snoqualmie Pass. I was going to have three or four of my drumming friends meet at the chalet for a weekend, and we’d have John Fisher come down and instruct. John is a Canadian national champion drummer. He worked with Alex Duthart. I had actually taken lessons from Alex Duthart, who is the acknowledged World Champion of Champions drummer in Scottish piping. He’s dead now. But nobody has ever touched some of the stuff that he did. People [like] Joe Morello and a lot of these American drummers would come and see him, see how this guy was – what he was doing with his hands and his music was incredibly great. Anyway, the coach that I had in this course said, “That’s kind of a small project for you. You’re a bigger person than that. You need to have something bigger.” He was on me about this, and I got really pissed. I said, “Oh, yeah? I’ll tell you what, I’m going to start a school. It’s going to be a world-class school here in Seattle. It’ll be up and running in a year.” He said, “Good.” Later on, I’m going, “What the heck did I just say?” I knew some of these instructors, one in particular, a guy named Ian McLellan, who was the Pipe Major of the Strathclyde Police Pipe Band. This guy led the pipe band in Strathclyde to six World Championships in a row – never before had been done. I don’t think it’ll ever be done again. The guy is phenomenal. He’s the Piping God. I called Ian up, and I said, “Look.” Well, I started calling around. Part of this course was you have to start finding out who’s in the field and get involved and all that. I called around, and I asked a bunch of these guys, World Champion pipers, “We’re going to have the school. Would you come and teach?” The deal about our school is most schools have – they’ll have one world champion kind of person, and only the advanced pipers go to classes given by that guy; all the other people go to other lower instructors. I said, “This thing I’m going to start is anybody can go to the world champion guy –

including kids – and get their first lessons from them [the Word Champions]. That’s the vision for this thing. I had talked to a bunch of them, and everybody [imitates grumbling] was non-committal or said they couldn’t do it. There’s a million schools that are trying to get these guys to go. Well, Ian – I had known him – said, “Yeah, I’m in for it.” He really got sold on the idea that we were going to bring piping and dancing in the Pacific Northwest up to world-class levels.” To do that, we had to start with the young as well as medium and really good pipers. As soon as Ian signed on, all of a sudden, people that weren’t talking to me before, one of them in particular, called me and said, “I changed my mind. Can I come?” All of a sudden, I had five instructors, piping instructors, that were, without a doubt, the best in the world. Nobody ever put this kind of school together that had this many world-class pipers on their staff. Likewise I enrolled a number of world champion drummers, and then one of the local ladies got involved, and we got the world champion dancers. We started the school. Within a year, it was up and running. Like I said, with that faculty, the school got filled, and people loved it. And these guys, the instructors, loved the fact that number one, I was asking them what to do. Usually, they get told. My vision was you guys are the world masters. You tell me what it was that we need to do to make this school good. We just want to make sure that all the kids get in there [having world class instruction]. They came up with all sorts of wonderful ideas. We had a great time. Started a concert in Seattle for the general public, which would in two years move to Benaroya Hall, which is the premier concert facility in the Pacific Northwest and [one of the best] in the country, actually. Then, the biggest compliment, we got a bunch of other schools started imitating us around the country. We call this [our school] the Winter School because most schools happen in the summer. We had it in January, February. Now, there were other people picking up on our model and starting schools. It was great. Some of our students – I remember one kid. He’s twelve or thirteen when he started. Two or three years ago, he was competing in the World’s Pipe Band contest in Glasgow. In fact, a number of guys were [competing at the World’s Class level]. The pipe bands in the Pacific Northwest have come up. We did have a pipe band in the world’s competition, grade 1 level from the United States, but it was people from Washington, DC. At any rate, it was a great success. It’s still going. I left, and some other people finally left. By the way, I incorporated it in the State of Washington. It’s a 501(c)(3). It got merged with an organization that’s operating out of Bellingham, WA right now, and they’re still doing a Winter School. I think they’ve moved the concert from Benaroya Hall to some kind of facility a little closer to Bellingham. Yes, it was great. As a result, I ended up with a bunch of friends – I mean, close friends now – of these world champion piper guys. I’ve had the pleasure of taking my wife over to Scotland and staying with some of these people and meeting them over here when they come in. She’s Scottish by background. Yes, it was great.

MG: What a great thing to be part of.

JC: Amazing. The thing that amazed me the most – the first concert we had, when one of these guys would be playing, the others would sneak out, go to the back of the auditorium to listen, and I thought that was really interesting. Because the only time these guys had ever seen each other at the same venue, they were competing against each other. Now, they were just listening to the other person. Wow. What a good lesson – no ego at all. None at all. The music was the important thing. It didn’t make any difference who did it. It was just really – like I said, this one guy, Ian – six times in a row World Championship Pipe Major. That would be like having the

New York Yankees win six world championships in a row. When is that going to happen? It's not.

MG: Well, you founded it. What was your role after its founding?

JC: I was the Director. I was the Director for five or six years, at least.

MG: How is the school faring during COVID?

JC: That I don't know because I've not been involved in it now— when I started teaching, and my schedule got very full, I lost track of that whole thing. I seem to remember one of the drummers sending me an email saying that he was still looking forward to doing it. I believe they had it last year. Yes. They would have. They would have it in February usually. I think they had it, and it's still going. It's still going.

MG: Good. Well, I've gotten to the end of my questions, but I know there's probably a number of things I've left off my list. Is there anything you can think of? We can always schedule an addendum call if we feel it's needed.

JC: Okay. Yes, that would be good. I was looking around to see whether or not there was anything else that I wanted to tell you. Right now, I can't think of anything. I'm really starting to feel embarrassed about talking too much.

MG: Don't be. It's a good thing. You had so many anecdotes, and that really helps to illustrate what was going on. This has been such a treat and a great opportunity to learn about the Corps' history from your perspective. I think, though, that as I go through the transcripts, I may find some follow-up questions that I neglected to ask. If you're open to one more session when I get through those, that would be great.

JC: Absolutely. That'll give me an opportunity to go through – I just found some correspondence and stuff – to see if there's anything that would be of note for your project.

MG: Okay, good. I'll probably reach back out when I'm ready to schedule that. I think it might take me several weeks to get through the transcription because we've talked so much.

JC: I'm so sorry.

MG: No, don't apologize. It's really it's a good sign. The more material, the better. I'm just really grateful for your service and all the time and memories you've shared with me. It's been so fun to get to know you this way. I'll look forward to staying in touch.

JC: My pleasure. I mean, absolutely, pleasure. Thank you so much for being so attentive. You're such a pleasure to do deal with. I have a tendency to just be totally open with you, and that's a gift on your part.

MG: Well, I think it's mostly you. You made my job very easy, and you kept my attention. So, thank you.

JC: Okay. All right. Have a great weekend.

MG: All right. You too. Bye-bye.

JC: Bye.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Molly Graham 1/2/2022

Reviewed by John K. Callahan, Jr. 3/6/2022

Reviewed by Molly Graham 3/6/2022