Carrie Kline: Well, today is December 8, 2003, I believe.

Johnson Arthur: Yes. Day after Pearl Harbor Day.

CK: We are here in – what is the name of this facility?

JA: This is Rappahannock Westminster-Canterbury.

CK: Rappahannock Westminster-Canterbury.

JA: There are several Westminster Canterburys in the state. This one is about eighteen or nineteen years old.

CK: We have with us Diane Jordan and Michael Kline and Carrie Kline and Captain Bill Johnson. Can you say, "My name is," and tell us your full name?

JA: [laughter] My full name is Arthur Clement Johnson, Jr. I was born and raised in Norfolk, Virginia. Born November 11, 1926. Went to school there. Did a short stint in the Army Air Corps. They found out I was qualified to fly their expensive aircraft, so they canceled the war and sent me home. [laughter] Actually, I was one of 38,000 cadets that had qualified and the war wound down, and we were an expense. So, we got a discharge pretty easy way. Then I went into the Virginia Pilot Association. It's a five-year apprenticeship. I was with the outfit for forty-two years and piloted about 10,500 ships in that time. Retired in 1988 and moved to Yeocomico Church, which is about twenty minutes from here. Then in May, we moved here. They've got great facilities here for what we need.

CK: This is great. Just back up and tell us about your people and where you were raised.

JA: My family?

CK: Yes.

JA: Oh, raised in Norfolk, so was my wife. The fun part – you remember the fun parts of your life. That was summertime in Norfolk, in Willoughby, in Ocean View Beach. My grandmother had a cottage that she had bought from the Jamestown Exposition in 1907. This house was on what is now the United States Naval Base. It was barged across Willoughby Bay and put on this piece of land. Later, the house was expanded and when I was living there, all summer long, she had her children and her children's children. There was sixteen of us at the dinner table at night. It was quite a lot of fun. I stayed sunburned all the time. I'm now providing dermatologist children with college education [laughter] because what do we know in those days, you know? I stayed out in the sun all the time. Graduated Granby High and then went into the Virginia Pilots Association with that little stint in the Air Force in the meantime. It was funny. I was big into aircraft and then I got this appointment. My father was a pilot and I got this appointment as an apprentice with the Pilots Association.

CK: Tell me about him. What was his name?

JA: I'm Junior. So, that would make him Senior, wouldn't it? [laughter] It was interesting. He was struggling quiet about his past.

Michael Kline: What was his name, please?

JA: Arthur C. Johnson, Sr. [laughter] He ran away when he was about seventeen or eighteen. Joined the Virginia State Guard. Lied about his age. He was big for his age. That unit was sent in the First World War to Europe. He volunteered for one of the most dangerous jobs, and that was a motorcycle dispatch rider. They were moving targets for German Rifleman, but he somehow pulled it off. [laughter] He never told me, but a friend of his told me that while he was in the service, as young as he was, there was a morale tour thing, something like our USO. Gene Tunney was World Champion Boxer at that time and he was doing exhibition fightings. My father was third in line to fight him. He never told me that, but I do know he was quick with his hands. [laughter]

CK: Quick with his hands?

JA: Yes. He was very strong. He taught me the rudiments of boxing, although he would do it with his open hands. He would play with me and say, "See this hand? Well, you better watch this one," and he'd touch me on the forehead or on the cheek or something like that.

Unknown Male Speaker: [inaudible]

JA: That voice you're hearing there now is an army veteran. He's carrying shrapnel in his leg from Anzio. This –

CK: From where?

JA: From Anzio beachhead in Italy during the Second War. We have a lot of military people here. Have five brilliant sub marinas, a couple of generals – well, one fellow's ninety-two years old and he was a sit down on a horse soldier, World War I. [laughter] We have one man here who's a hundred years old and he looks to be about sixty-five. We have a history here.

CK: Oh, that is Stewart?

JA: That's Leonard.

CK: Leonard Clark?

JA: Yes. Remarkable man. Just quiet. He quite often has dinner with a young lady, about ninety-two years old. [laughter]

CK: There must be a lot of steamboat recollections in this place.

JA: I haven't run across that except (Cawart?).

CK: What about your father? Now, what would he have seen going up and down the river?

JA: The pilots didn't have much to do with the bay traffic steamers. Those men were licensed for that profession and they went places that Virginia pilots didn't go. For example, on the great Yeocomico River, there were eleven steamboat landings on that short river and pilots didn't have anything to do with that. Those guys were great. They could take those ships up and down the river, night or day, fog. They were good. So, my dad didn't have much recollection with those, except one they collided with. It was Eastern Steamship company. They ran between Hampton Roads and New York. There was a mix up in whistle signals. There were no radios, no time for signal lights. The pilot cutter made a turn, and the *Juanita* – my dad called it the *Juanita* – collided and put a sizeable hole in both vessels. But nobody was hurt. I think that's as close as my dad ever got to one. [laughter]

CK: That is close.

JA: Yes. It just zigged when they should have zagged. It was just a collision that one of those – everybody was at fault, but nobody was at fault. They both had to go to the shipyard and be repaired. I've got photographs of it. Took the whole bow out of the pilot steamer. Her name was *RELIEF* coal-fired. But as far as these bay steamers, he would just tell the stories that I had heard. My immediate personal interplay with bay steamers was on the Potomac River. I was a Potomac River pilot also. Although the river is the Maryland river, Alexandria is a Virginia port, and Washington D.C. also. The merchant ships that carried the newsprint to Alexandria were usually deeper and not as fast as these Washington steamers. They were shallow draft. There was one skipper named Eaton, E-A-T-O-N. He was known all over the bay. He was quite a nice man.

CK: A skipper?

JA: Yes. He was one of the masters on there, on the city of – what was it? City of Baltimore and City of Washington, something like that. In the river, at nighttime, they had a schedule and they would always overtake a merchant ship going up the river. Then coming up behind us, they had a powerful search light on those things. He would throw the search light on the buoy nearest to my ship to let me know it was coming by, and I'd make room for him. As he passed, he would have somebody in the wheelhouse keep that light on that unlighted buoy. There were a lot of unlighted buoys in the Potomac River at that time. As long as we were insight of each other, no matter the twist and turns in the river, he had somebody keep that search light on the next unlighted buoy for my benefit, going up the river. He worked out a schedule with a stopwatch to run the fog. That's the bad thing about any passenger ship. You have to keep to that schedule. He was going up to Fort Belvoir, and there's two buoys that you make a turn and a turn to go across the face of Fort Belvoir.

CK: Fort what?

JA: Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He was running his timeout on the stopwatch and he didn't see the buoy. He rang his engine full of stern and the ship carried on, went right up, hit Fort Belvoir,

right up the bank, and backed off again. He was quoted as saying, "Well, I know where I am now," and turned and went on to Washington. [laughter] When they put that bridge across the Highway 301, they could find that thing in the fog, full speed, stopwatch, right on through that bridge. They were very, very good navigators.

CK: What do you mean running the fog with a stopwatch?

JA: Because you had no radar and it was just like looking in the side of your hat. You couldn't see, but you had turn points and buoys and navigational aids and landmarks and bridges that you had to time yourself to keep your position. If you knew that you were here, you knew in so many seconds or minutes you were going to be there. Then you'd make a turn and set another course and hit your stopwatch again for another distance. It was never a straight run from Washington to the Bay. There's many turns. That compass course goes from south to northeast to south and back to southeast again. He did all this with a stopwatch and his experience and his knowledge of the river. He was very good. They carried a lot of freight, these boats. Baltimore was really the big place for these ships. You'll find a lot of information in Baltimore about these ships. I've seen photographs that had as many as eighteen to twenty of these cargo passenger ships in port at one time. Yes. That search light – I overheard a conversation on the radio. I was a junior pilot standing to watch as a mate on the pilot cutter Virginia, not the one we're building now. *Twin Screw Virginia*.

CK: On the what, did you say?

JA: Not the one we are building now. This was *Twin Screw Virginia*. She had been a motor yacht built in Newport, News Shipyard. The pilots bought her during the Depression for 10 cents on a dollar at quite a bargain. She served us quite a long time. She's the finest pilot cutter I ever served on. I served on six.

CK: Pilot cutter – Michael and I are from the mountain, so we need some help on these nautical terms.

JA: That's all right. Yes. Well, sometimes, you say pilot boat, but that is a smaller vessel. A cutter is in the vernacular pilot ship. That all means the same thing. It was a strange phenomenon when the moon was rising in the Southeast, our radio, which was a double-side band radio at the time – it was a strange piece of equipment – we couldn't talk to the people in Norfolk, twenty-five miles away, but we could hear and talk with the river traffic in the Ohio River back and forth. They were astonished as I was when I had these short conversations. Also, the oystermen in Chesapeake Bay, they worked under sail. It was Maryland law. They couldn't dredge with an engine. They had to use sail. That was a conservation method, really. Two of them were talking about the upcoming passing and demise of these bay steamers and they were talking about that search light. I was just listening and one of them said, "Yes." He said, "He passed me the other night and he throwed that search light on me and popped every stitch in my sails." [laughter] It's a pretty strong light. [laughter] These guys, they're something else. [laughter]

MK: What do you mean?

JA: He meant the strength of that beam of the light busted his sail, which, of course, is physically impossible.

MK: But you said, "These guys are something else." What does that mean?

JA: Well, their sense of humor. They have this reverse way of thinking. If the mast fell down, they would say, "Now, that's a fine thing to happen, isn't it?" [laughter] It's just the backward way of thinking. They're their own tribe. They're their own breed. They wouldn't do anything else. You can see one, he's got these hard steely eyes, quite often, cataracts because none of them would wear sunglasses. That's sissy stuff, you know? They'd get out there and squint in that sunlight and they damaged their eyes. Trying to think of anything else that the bay steamers – oh, yes. Again, running on the stopwatch in the fog. This was coming down for Norfolk. They always stopped at Old Point Comfort and then went to Norfolk and trying to get all the circumstances together now. Must have been during the First World War. Didn't have to be, but the Maryland pilot cutter had been in for stores and water and was outbound in the fog.

CK: In for?

JA: Water and stores, they have to replenish every thirty-five or forty days. The crew eats [laughter] lots of food. The military ships have water makers hooked up to the engines. But a pilot ship or small vessel had to go in and get the water tanks filled. Then they used it and then they filled it and they used it. So, that was a monthly thirty-five, forty-five days – it had to be done. So, they were coming back to the pilot station and this bay steamer was coming down in the fog. They collided and it sank the pilot steamer. Everybody got off safely in the rowboats. The steamer was not damaged too badly. They had very sharp bows and punched a hole in her and down she went. It was on an outgoing current. So, by the time these fellows had rode ashore, the pilot cutter had drifted away somewhere. In those days, the way of searching for sunken vessels was not as complete as it is today. You have electronics, you could find that thing in ten minutes. I was talking with my dad after the battleship *Missouri* went aground. When the battleship *Missouri* went to the shipyard after being gotten off the bottom, it had a very long scratch, 188-foot scratch and an eighteen-foot hole with a huge piece of metal hanging out of the hole. I asked dad, I said, "What do you think that was?" It was his opinion that she had run over that Maryland pilot boat, which was made of iron and had – because the battleship stayed stuck for quite a while. This was not the battleship's metal that was hanging out of that hole. My dad said he thought it was a Maryland pilot cutter that they ran over all because of the bay steamer. [laughter]

CK: The name of that steamer?

JA: I couldn't begin to guess. I couldn't begin to guess. It was one of the Baltimore to Norfolk or Washington to Norfolk steamers. One of the two.

CK: So, City of Baltimore or City of Washington, you are saying?

JA: Yes. One of those. I don't know how much research you've done in looking around locally in Irvington, but everywhere you go, there are paintings and pictures and drawings of these steamers. There was so many of them. They all had local names – the Piankatank and the various rivers, the Rappahannock, they were all named for – Corrotoman. It was the basis of the economy in Chesapeake Bay until you got your bridges and then you got your railways extended and you got your trucking lines and then a couple of storms. The [19]33 storm was about the beginning of the demise of that trade. Only the large passenger lines were in – there was a little one that ran – it was a connection in the railway named the C&O Virginia. They nicknamed her Smokey Joe – obvious name because she smoked. She connected the C&O Railway from Downtown Norfolk to the railway stationed in Newport News. It went back and forth to meet the trains. Very fast little boat. The pilot cutter – schooner *Virginia* got tangled up under sail with a race with a steamer in Norfolk one time and did very well with it. That's one thing dad told me about the schooner and the passenger ship, C&O Virginia. The C&O Virginia took a shortcut going across Hampton Roads, which it always did. It wasn't playing funny with the pilots. It was shallow, most of them were, and it saved time. Time was very important for these vessels. The schooner had to go further down Norfolk channel and then turn toward Newport News. When the C&O Virginia slowed to turn to go into its berth, the schooner *Virginia* sailed right across its turn. She was pretty fast. So, [laughter] that's about all I can think of about the passenger steamers in the bay.

CK: So, the C&O was both a passenger vessel and –

JA: Cargo.

CK: Cargo?

JA: Yes. C&O stood for Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. That was her. They owned that ship. It's a handy little thing. I rode on it once or twice. They were very gracious to the Virginia pilots. If they found out you were an apprentice, they wouldn't charge you anything. You could ride free. As an apprentice, at that time, I was making $20 a month. My dad made $10 a month. [laughter] They had an accountant named Johnson, but he had no relation, that if he cashed their $10 check, he charged them $1 for doing it. So, [laughter] that's ten percent commission out of that.

CK: What was it like aboard the steamship?

JA: Well, that little steamship was very comfortable. It had a musty smell about it due to the cargo that they were handling down in the holes below. They carried a lot of freight and passengers. [laughter] I don't think the passengers smell musty, but it was just something about the interior of those. They had very heavy carpets and very nice wooden wainscoting, nice furniture, very baroque. It was quite a pleasant ride. Quite a pleasant ride. Very quiet and just took about forty-five minutes from Norfolk to Newport News, downtown to downtown. It was pretty nice.

CK: Quiet, you say?

JA: Quiet. The steam engines, and steam was quiet. Now, the big old rocking arms that they had, those apparatus that they had up on deck, the walking beams drove connecting rod to the two-side paddle wheels. Now, that was noisy. That would make a lot of noise because the paddle wheels would be pounding the surface. Each paddle as it struck the surface of the water and then came back up would make a thundering noise. So, that wasn't a peaceful ride. But the steamers with the underwater twin screw or single screw, they were nice. Very nice.

CK: I do not quite understand. Explain the twin screw and the single screw.

JA: Well, it's just how many propellers a ship has. A propeller is called a screw. Sometimes, they have two of them. The *Lion* of United States had four. It adds to the maneuverability of a ship alongside the dock, which is important for a passenger ship because they didn't use tugboats to push and pull. They're very independent. They had to go on time, couldn't rely on anybody else coming to take the lines or anything like that. So, it's just their mechanical setup. Economics entered into it. If you had two engines to feed rather than one, size of the berth that you were going to – a whole lot of that type of ship.

CK: So, what would cause a vessel to have twins and –

JA: More speed. More speed for the long distances. Usually, the bay steamers, not always, but the bay steamers would have twins. But it was just a designer's factor. It depended on how much fuel the owner wanted to burn. Two engines burned more than one. The two engines give you more speed. So, it's a trade-off. They were grand and glorious ships. People loved to travel on them.

MK: From your father's career time through your own career time, can you talk about the change in fuels that were used on the boats?

JA: Well, the first steamer was, of course, the generated steam, used primarily coal. The pilot cutter, *RELIEF*, was coal-fired. The pilots took her to the shipyard and extended her ten feet to make more room for fuel – for coal – so that it could stay on station longer. Then fuel oil was refined and then a gentleman named Diesel developed an engine using diesel oil, which is very much like your home heating oil. I have piloted a couple of British ships that were very fast that had engines which were exactly like the engines in a 747 aircraft. Quite a piece of machinery. Very powerful. Very fast. They had a mechanical setup that the two engines were on – well, for lack of a better description, railroad tracks in the engine room. The two tracks came together as one. If they lost an engine where it was not repairable by the engineers on board the ship, they would radio the home office. The home office would put an engine in an airplane and fly it over here. In the meantime, they'd take this engine on a railroad track under a hatch and get a container tower to reach down there and take the engine out. When the new one arrived, they'd put that one in there, take it down the tracks and hook it up again, and they were in business in ten hours. They could change the engines.

MK: Like a pit stop in a car race.

JA: Almost. Yes.

MK: [laughter]

JA: The military has similar types of turbine engines and – plus, for the military, they don't have to worry about fuel bills.

MK: That is great stuff.

CK: Yes. Well, talk about the people whose job it was to keep this these vessels fueled then constantly, I suppose.

JA: Well, an onboard person, you're talking about. Yes. Well, they had engineers who ran and maintained the engines. In a coal-fired, there were boilers that you had to shovel coal into constantly to keep a fire going. The fire generated heat that then boil the water into steam and the steam was transferred into the engine. So, you had two firemen down there all the time shoveling coal. My dad, although he was an apprentice trying to learn piloting, quite often, as an apprentice, he was pressed into duty, shoveling coal down there. Matter of fact, the time that they went into the shipyard to have the vessel lengthened, they needed that coal out of the vessel, all of it. It was a large number of tons in there. The captain told the two apprentices – he said, "You can have a two-days shore leave when you get all that coal out there." Dad said, "You never saw so much coal come out of that boat in all your life." [laughter] Run it in the wheelbarrows. They put it in wheelbarrows, run it down the gangway, and dump it on the dock. The two of them just cleaned that thing out in a half a day. [laughter] Because they wanted that shore leave. It's a very rare thing. The apprentices of those days, and my days, didn't get much shore leave.

CK: Who were these fellows?

JA: Who were these fellows?

CK: Yes.

JA: The names?

CK: Well, names or personalities.

JA: They were local men. My dad was born in Suffolk, which is in Nansemond County. All of the apprentices were from Newport News and Hampton and Norfolk and Princess Anne County, local people. Quite often, right after we started talking about it, after the Civil War, the percentage of relatives, brothers and uncles and everything, was about sixty-five or seventy percent. The manpower there was, somebody who was related to somebody else. That was because before the war, there were twelve pilot vessels competing with each other. The state law was, only four people could own one of those boats, but it didn't say how many shares of one boat you could own. So, a lot of times, you owned a quarter of three or four boats. They were all sunk during the Civil war. Then the Pilots Association was formed and they stopped

competing with each other. So, they had just one vessel and they worked together. But they were all local people.

CK: I am going to come in a little bit closer so you don't have to keep turning your head. Now, it is just two of us.

MK: But you want a side shot, I think.

CK: I was not liking my view.

MK: What is involved in being a pilot on a bay passenger boat? What is involved? We are talking back in the [19]20s now or…

JA: Well, now, let me try to define that. The Virginia pilots, the state pilots – first of all, all maritime states in the United States have a state pilot organization. But the people who commanded and piloted and worked on the passenger steamers that you all are interested in, were not at all affiliated with the State Pilot Association. They had a federal license, a Coast Guard license, that gave them – it was a certain limit of tonnage size ship that they could handle, and that was their job. They had to draw a chart from memory of all the places they were going, all of those little creeks and docks and piers. Pardon me – for the Coast Guard. They did all that work themselves. I never went on the bridge of one of those passenger ships, not even as a tourist. So, it was a complete entity from what I was doing as a pilot. I piloted mostly foreign ships and saw these fellows – these ships. There was a railway ferry that ran between Little Creek Virginia, which is now Virginia Beach, and Cape Charles. That was a railway hookup. I would see them. Before, we had the VHF communications and radar and things like that. At night-time, again, the signal lights, the search lights. If they were coming down, say from Cape Charles going to Little Creek, and they were going to cross in front of the ship I was piloting, they would signify that by – they knew I was looking at them and I knew they were looking at me. They would take this search light. If they wanted to pass on their port side, they would flash one light, which was the same as blowing a whistle. But they were too far away. You can't hear a steam whistle more than a couple of miles. But sometimes, they would set this up three or four miles away with that light, and we would agree that he was going to pass a cross in front of me. Or, if he saw it was getting close and I was on a fast ship, he'd flash two, that he was going to pass me on his starboard side, go behind my ship. That's how we communicated with the safety. They were sharp. Those guys were very good.

MK: So, would this have been true on the bay steamers too, the system of communicating through lights?

JA: Yes. It was the same numbers of flashes on the lights as you were, by law, supposed to blow a whistle. In other words,, if you want to pass port to port, you'd blow one whistle. But at night-time, it was even more effective a way, you could flash that one light and the guy would answer with one light and you'd already set it up miles apart. It's a very good, very safe thing. I'm repeating myself, those guys were professionals. They were very good. I had the greatest respect for all of them. I never saw one of them do an unseaman-like maneuver. It was always

clear cut what you were going to do, how you were going to meet them, how they were going to meet you. Never any fuss and feathers.

CK: If it was in the daytime, would you know which vessel by the sound of the whistle?

JA: You could, yes. If you were local and you were here, there were several of them. Is that making a noise when I kicked that? [laughter] I'm sorry.

MK: That is okay.

JA: There were several of them that had distinctive whistles. There were several freighters – foreign and American freighters. The American Export Lines had the most beautiful "basso profondo" steam whistle. There was a signal for tugboats. Again, no radios. You blew four, long blasts. I guess it was midnight or so after I was blowing the whistle to get the tugs to come and get my ship. It was an American Export ship. They were all asleep and I couldn't wake them up. I blew the whistle four times, and I blew the whistle four times. Finally, the owner of the tugboat company, Joe Wood, was way back in the middle of the city. He called the headquarters and said, "For heaven's sakes, go get that Export ship before he wakes up the whole town." [laughter] So, next thing you know, I'm looking at the tugs on the dock. All the lights come on. The steam comes up, and they come running out and grab the ship. [laughter] Yes. The whistles, you could tell.

CK: I just love how you lay all this out. These crewmen, especially the pilots, I guess, you were referring to. No fuss, no feathers.

JA: Yes. Well, guys being guys in confined spaces, there were some differences of opinion. I don't want to bear down on the pilots too much because your view is for the coastal steamers and I don't have that much information about those. But a lot of our crew were hired and they we kind of ebb and flow as to how many we had. We had a crew of eight seamen that stood watches six hours and six hours, four and four men. Quite often, the majority of them would be from the Carolina Outer Banks. Then the majority would kind of swell over to the Mathews County and Gloucester people, and then back again. But they were all watermen. They were all very good. I had one of my mates point out a Carolinian one time and I said, "Yes. That guy's a great seaman. Everything comes natural to him." He looked at him. The mate was from Yorktown, and the man we were talking about was from Manteo, North Carolina. He said, "Yes." He said, "His mama had him while she was swimming Hatteras inlet." [laughter] So, that really put some salt in that boy's blood, but he was a good sailor.

MK: What did he mean exactly by that?

JA: He meant that everything on salt water just came naturally to him. He was just born to it. You live on Hatteras Island, you got water on both sides of you, you know? Recently, through the middle of it – you remember the hurricane took out the center of that Island. But this boy, he was an excellent sailor. They worked two weeks on board and then a week leave ashore. He would come back from leave every time with his knuckles all scarred up – [laughter] scuffed up. He'd had a difference of opinion with somebody and they'd stepped up behind the barn and

settled it, you know? I was trying to talk him into the job – the pilots owned their own business. So, you took turns being the captain of the pilot cutter at Cape Henry for one month. Well, at the time I was there, there were fifty pilots. So, every fifty months, my turn came up to be captain of the boat for the month. This guy's nickname was (Juan Chis?) from Manteo Harbor down there.

CK: Spell?

JA: He was leaning on his hand like this and I was trying to talk him into becoming second bosun because he'd been very good at it. But he was just too independent. He didn't want the job. There was a young college boy that came to work for us every summer. His father was commanding officer of the local Coast Guard. So, we had a job for him. He was sort of an absent-minded kid, but good-hearted. He just brought the motor launch alongside and he tied it up. He was walking along with his half [unintelligible] on the hands, holding the handrail on the cabin to come around and get aboard the big boat. There was a mop lying on top of the cabin. Now, when the pilots got off coal ships, they had a lot of coal and they would swab down the deck of the motor launch. The mop handle was sticking out under the handle. I'm talking to Juan Chis, and Juan Chis is watching him. This boy's nicknamed Junior. He grabbed the mop handle and the mop shot like this and Junior just stepped right overboard. [laughter] The sea was carrying him to sea and Juan Chis didn't move. I said, "Juan Chis, we got a man overboard." He said, "Yes. I know it." [laughter] I said, "Can he swim?" He said, "Yes." I said, "How do you know that?" He said, "He did the same thing last week." [laughter] I said, "Well, get in a boat. Go get him." [laughter] So, Juan Chis ambled down and got in a boat and went out and got Junior and brought him back aboard. [laughter]

CK: [laughter] What else about this tribe of men who worked aboard the steamers? What did it take? Who were they?

JA: Well, the bay steamers – now, we're talking again about the bay steamer, not my pilot cover.

CK: I understand.

JA: But they were pretty much cut out of the same cloth. First of all, for the majority of them, they were men who had worked with their hands on the water, oystermen or fishermen of various types. But they knew the water. But this was a quieter, safer job to be on these steamers. They had work to do. They had to supervise cargo and maybe they got a job as quartermaster, which paid more. It was a steady income as opposed to fishing. So, they would be the quartermasters and they would become a junior officer on these ships, and maybe like Kevin Eaton, work his way up to becoming a master on these things. So, it was a career-oriented thing for these men.

CK: What did a quartermaster do?

JA: He steered the ship. He followed the captain's orders as to which direction to steer the ship by steadying a compass point on these magnetic compasses. He also supervised keeping the wheelhouse in order and clean, make sure they had the proper maps, the charts in front on the chart room table all the time. Because you don't run on one chart in Chesapeake Bay. For example, when I took my exam for the Coast Guard, the second question was, "Draw a chart of

the description of the area that you had just written about at thirty-mile increments." So, I drew thirty-mile charts from Cape Henry to Washington D.C. You should see some of the charts that young people are drawing today. They are masterpieces. We have some of them framed in the pilot office on the walls. You could actually navigate by these things. That's part of your exam. So, these guys had their charts, like any chart table, laid out. When they ran off of one chart, they'd put that on the bottom and the next chart came up. That was part of the quartermaster's job also. Getting a coffee for the captain was another big thing. [laughter] You had to memorize – what I did, as an apprentice, all fifty pilots, how they wanted their coffee. It was very important duty. [laughter] How you learned to pilot a ship by carrying coffee cups.

MK: When you talk about this breed of men, it sounds almost like a kinship. Were these people who grew up in skipper families? Had their fathers been listed? Was this sort of an inherited activity?

JA: We're talking about the pilots now? The Virginia pilots or the –

MK: Well, as close to the Bay as – or maybe generally.

JA: Yes. Mathews County, for example, they're very, very water oriented. Mathews County, during the Second War, lost more sailors to maritime enemy action than any other county in the United States per capita. They all got salt water in their blood. Same way with the Carolinians. There was a special area near Gloucester called Guinea. They refer to it as Guinea. Those Guinea men have a characteristic all their own. Even today, [laughter] you don't want to get one excited. He's likely to rearrange the features on your face. [laughter] I don't mean this in a derogatory manner. It's their characteristic, quite often. When you get over there and ask somebody about a Guinea man, and, quite often, they'll shake their head before they start talking.

MK: Sounds like something to be proud of.

JA: Yes. It's their nature. There was a freedom streak within them. None of them would like to be confined behind a desk or an office. They couldn't live. They have to be outdoors. They have to be outside.

CK: They had a what within them, did you say?

JA: It's a freedom streak. You can't confine them. You might put them in jail for a little while [laughter], but you couldn't, as a profession, as a work ethic, you could not put them behind a desk. None of them. Even in the off chance that they had their education to do it. Their education was the world as they saw it. They lived free and they died free. It was just the way they were.

CK: I wonder if these are some of the people who wound up working on the steamers.

JA: Very much so. Very much so.

CK: Can you say that?

JA: Yes. Yes. Am I squeaking? What's squeaking? That's downstairs, I suppose.

CK: I suppose. It is not you. [laughter]

JA: I might rattle, but I don't squeak. [laughter]

Oh, there it is.

MK: Can you plug in that wire by your heel there into this? You never hooked it up.

JA: That squeak was that chair he was moving.

MK: Okay.

CK: Okay.

JA: There is, onboard a moving vessel, there's this – I don't know. You say you're from the mountains and everything. You can look at a ship's wake and stare at it pretty much the same way you can stare at a fireplace. It's constant, but it's ever changing at the same time. There's just this open feeling of being on a moving vessel that can't compare with much else.

MK: Can you say even more about that? That is good, but can you talk even more about that feeling?

CK: What do you mean?

JA: I don't know. It's akin to an expression they use about people who used to fly small aircraft. They fly by the seat of their pants. You don't need the instruments. They're one with the aircraft, you know? You can do this with a ship, moving it along, guiding it, feel the way the engines are driving it, how fast or slow it responds to its rudder and how it gets moving, how it stops. You're kind of akin to that. You feel like you're almost wearing it when you're on a really nice ship. There were all grades of quality of ships and people. I just loved it. The whole world came through my front door. Took me a while to realize that too. I just kind of took it for granted. But –

MK: The world came through your front door?

JA: Through my front door, yes. All these foreigners from just about any place on the planet that you could name, I met at one time or another. We would have time on the ship. A short trip would take two or three hours going into Hampton Roads from sea. Sometimes, took longer. On the Potomac River trips, it was always fifteen or sixteen hours. You got to know these people as people, not as an officer with stripes. I'm on the bridge – a Potomac River pilot on the bridge for fifteen hours. The officers are changing watch every four hours. The quartermaster doing the steering is changing every two hours. But every time they come up to take the watch, I'm still there. [laughter] So, you get to know these people pretty well.

MK: What precisely are you doing on the Potomac River?

JA: I'm avoiding running the ship aground. [laughter] A Potomac River pilot, I'm trying to phrase it that way because I don't want you to think I'm the only Potomac River pilot. We had six or seven of us that specialized on the Potomac and the York River and the James River. Every Virginia Port had pilots out of our organization that did this. Our job was to go aboard, meet the captain and the officer on watch, and then give orders, if you would, to how fast the engine should be run, what direction the ship should go. You do this to keep the ship afloat in deep water and avoid colliding with other ships and getting the ship to its destination. You do this by verbally commanding, if you will, the action of the ship.

MK: Where is the captain all this time?

JA: All this time, he's not on the bridge all this time. He is not on the bridge all this time.

CK: Where is he?

MK: You mentioned the captain.

JA: The captain is the master. He's human. He'll meet the pilot when you come on board, and really, he wants to check you out, especially if you're a young pilot. He doesn't know you from Adam. He doesn't know your capabilities, so he has to kind of casually stand around and watch you work for a little while before he can feel comfortable to go below and shave and get himself presentable for the authorities that are coming on board. They never dressed for a pilot, but they dressed for the authorities. A lot of times, you have a guy that you've met before and you give him a newspaper. We had fifteen newspapers that we carried out to inbound ships all during the day. That, in itself, was an interesting story. But he would take the paper and say, "I'll be back." He'd go below and shave and get cleaned up and come back up. When he released that newspaper, the crew jumped on it, not to get the news, but to see the bargains ashore where they could go and buy clothes or any items to take back to their country. They don't care what the headlines were, except one Japanese. When Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe got married, this Japanese captain went out of his mind. They were his two favorite people. He grabbed the newspaper and went running all over the ship, shouting that they had gotten married. He came back up on the bridge and, pounding the paper, "Top combination, Mr. Pilot. Top combination." [laughter] So, these are the wonderful people that you meet.

CK: You use the term, "The bridge?"

JA: It's part of a wheelhouse that encloses all of the instruments and the steering wheel and the charts and the chart room, and then out on the ends of the wheelhouse, that's the bridge. It's all the wing of the bridge. The entire thing is called a bridge.

CK: Interesting.

JA: A very old nautical name.

CK: Yes. Now, I am trying to picture this crew, particularly the steamers. Was everybody white then?

JA: Not necessarily. I would say it was a pretty good mix. Maybe half and half. The officers were pretty much all white because they had an education. The Black people didn't have the education at that time. They were willing workers. They were very wonderful personalities. They got along well with each other, with the whites. They worked together. But they didn't have the higher paying jobs because they were labor. The reason they were labor is they didn't have the education. That holds true today. If a person, Black or white, doesn't have an education, he's not going anywhere. Today's education is very, very important for the upcoming pilots. The requirements are now that they have to be a four-year college graduate with some degree into where, if they don't make it with the pilots, they can go into another profession of their choosing, but they can't get in without an education.

CK: Talk a little bit then about the breakdown of who did what then aboard, the steamers.

JA: Well, starting with the captain, they were very well paid and they earned the money because it was their responsibility for the safety of the ship and the passengers and the cargo and the crew. Then the officers who might have had masters' licenses, but they were hired as first, second, and third mates. Usually, the second mate on any ship has the responsibility of safe navigation, keeping the charts up to date. Whenever the Coast Guard puts a new buoy into place or takes an old one out, he has to put that on that chart. So, when the captain's taking his ship up the bay, he doesn't look for a buoy that's not there. He sees that the mate has noted on that chart that it's moved. Then the people that that work, these officers, have to have a personality, a managership personality, where they can get cooperation from the hired hands to do their job without offending them, but at the same time, making sure that they understand he's the authority on the ship. Then there's just manual labor, tying the ship up, untying the ship, moving cargo around. Then there's the catering staff, you might call it, the stewards, the cooks, the wait staff. They're specially trained to accommodate the needs of passengers. Well, like the railroad porters in those days, they were special. They knew how to communicate with their passengers and whatever they wanted, they tried to get it for them, food and drink and clean beds. It's like running a large, floating hotel.

CK: So, were they in some way in league with the railroad porters?

JA: I don't know. This was before unions, but I'm sure that they could be talking because take the C&O Virginia. She was owned by the Railway. So, they had to be affiliated with the porters on the trains and maybe they traded jobs sometimes. You got tired of riding the trains, so they came on board and waited for tables on the C&O Virginia. That's just hypothetical, but, yes, that could happen because these people were always seeking jobs. The Second World War had a tremendous impact in taking male manpower out of the country, out of the work chart. The women moved into these workplaces, shipyards, and – I don't know if – you're very young. You probably never heard of Rosie the Riveter. But that was a name that the federal government nicknamed some of the women that worked in the shipyard because they were riveting and welding and cutting steel and doing men's jobs at that time during the war to support it.

CK: But just the yards?

JA: Oh, any billing aircraft.

CK: But not the vessels?

JA: Yes. They worked on the vessels.

CK: They did?

JA: Yes. Not many. Not many. That was a very male-oriented profession at that time. Very male oriented. One of the things was the privacy. The dormitory-type lifestyle that the crew had, they all slept in the foc's'le and they all used the same facilities. There was just hardly any privacy for a female on a ship like that.

CK: So, you would not find them?

JA: Very seldom. Russians did. They had a lot of women crew members on their ships.

CK: Well, you gave such a nice delineation of the breakdown of duties. Now, how did that breakdown, in terms of race, in terms of who was doing what?

JA: Believe it or not, at that time, on the ships, it wasn't true ashore that this fraternity, this brotherhood of sailors. If you were qualified, you got the job. There was no two ways about it. If you had the education, if you could sit down and pass that man's written exam, and then you physically did your job, you weren't slackers. You didn't get somebody else to do your job. You didn't goof off, you got the job. Yes.

MK: That meant you could eat together in the mess hall?

JA: Officers and deck hands did not eat in the same place on larger vessels. On smaller vessels, such as tugboats, steamers, they all ate at the same time in the same place.

CK: Well, that applied to steamers.

JA: I don't know much about it now. Only the captain and maybe the three or four officers had their own dining facilities. I would say the junior officers and the bosun and the rest of the crew all ate in the same place. But I think the officers would be separated. They're just kind of a perk.

CK: So, it was by the echelon of what you were doing aboard the vessel rather than the color of your skin?

JA: Yes. Yes. This is a saying that I invented. "There's no such thing as democracy on the bridge of a ship." [laughter] So, a master of a ship, he's got to be a benign monarch and make sure everything runs the way he wants it. It might not be the way the next man wants it, but this

is the way this man wants it. So, everybody, to keep their job, does their job. As I said before, if they were capable, the captain made sure that guy kept his job because he didn't want somebody to come on board and take his job he didn't know was qualified. So, it was a pretty strong fraternity there. They would leave this ship, maybe go on sick leave or something and somebody filled his place. Needed a job when he came back, he'd get in touch with the other ship. If he got a berth over there, yes, well, he was a good man. He would write a letter or even just word of mouth, and he would transfer from one passenger ship to the next in the same level job.

CK: Makes me curious about how those whose job was to serve the passengers would have related to those whose job was keeping the vessel going.

JA: I think there was an overlap there. I think there was an overlap. On the pilot cutter, we'd get guys to come out of the steward department to work on deck. It was not much of a raise in pay, but it was a different quality of job. It was different responsibility, different hours. Steward department sleeps regular hours and gets up and works daytime hours. A crew, there's somebody always working around the clock, they're deck hands. That's the difference. Sometimes they like that regularity.

CK: Were these stewards known for outstanding quality of service? Can you talk about that?

JA: Yes. Outstanding in any direction you want to go on that. [laughter] We've had some excellent cooks and some of the funniest things. You get guys coming in that tell you they can cook and you put them back on the beach the next day because they can't boil water. They just wanted a job. Others come along and they stay there a couple of three years and then look for greener pastures. But in the meantime, they're very good cooks. There's a yarn my daddy told me, if you want to hear it. He was a Black cook. His name was (Gene?). He was very, very good cook, and his specialty was soups. One day, onboard the pilot cutter, one of the pilots saw that this inbound ship was going to interrupt his lunchtime. So, he went into the mess room and Gene had already set up the tables for lunch. But Gene didn't see the pilot come in. The pilot sat down. There was this pitcher of iced tea and bowl of soup and crackers and some condiments and so forth. So, the old boy launched into this bowl of soup. When he finished, he called Gene, who was back in the kitchen galley and says, "Yes, sir, Kevin, you want lunch?" "No, don't have time for lunch. I'll just have another bowl of this soup." He said, "What soup is that?" He said, "This bowl you had sitting right here." Gene says, "My Lord, Kevin, sir, we're having pork chops for lunch and you done ate all the gravy." [laughter]

CK: You have to wonder what Gene did then. [laughter]

JA: [laughter] He went and made ball gravy, I guess. [laughter]

CK: Without the meat drippings this time. [laughter]

JA: Yes. [laughter] It'd be hard to do.

MK: In your own career, you were a pilot who met these large ships coming from other places and then piloted the men –

JA: Yes.

MK: – to where they were going. How does this translate for the responsibilities of a pilot on the bay steamers? Would they have just been there for the whole trip?

JA: Yes. They lived onboard those ships,

MK: Start with the pilot and tell me that.

CK: My tape is out.

JA: Well, they're –

MK: Oh, hold up a minute here.

CK: We might need to change the tape, give you a little –

MK: Yes, let us –

CK: – moment to breathe.

MK: – give you a breather here.

CK: Yes. Then we will get back to that.

JA: Now, you're asking on these bay steamers.

MK: I just wanted you to talk about whether –

CK: Let us take a little break and change –

JA: Well, I want to get to his idea so I can –

CK: Oh, yes.

JA: – approach the – I don't remember there ever being a position on the bay steamer as a pilot. The master and the three officers all did the piloting.

MK: Oh, okay. Well, that is what I wanted to get at.

JA: Yes. Okay. Well, I can answer that too. What time is it?

CK: It is ten minutes to eleven. Are you okay for time?

JA: I don't know.

CK: Concerned about your wife?

JA: Oh, well, yes. I just want to make sure she got her breakfast.

MK: Do you want to go see and we will change this tape?

JA: Yes. It'll take ten minutes.

MK: That is fine.

CK: That is fine.

JA: Excuse me.

CK: Take your time.

JA: Oh boy. [laughter]

MK: Oh boy. I know what that feels like.

JA: I used to be able to drive a car eleven, twelve hours on the road and wouldn't get out. I go down and off and come back again and I feel like I have to look around for somebody to help get me out of the car. [laughter]

CK: Yes.

JA: I'll be back.

CK: Take your time.

MK: What a great guy.

CK: Yes.

MK: Did you get that story about the gravy or what did you write about it?

CK: Yes. I just knew he started something else, I got out.

MK: Okay. Well, let us not load both cameras again. We could just load yours.

CK: Okay. He said it was grand and glorious for the people who rode them. I do not know if he wants to say any more than that.

MK: Yes. Let us get him to talk more about that.

CK: He also said it was the whole economy at the time. I do not know if we can get him to say more about that. I am not sure where else to go beyond that.

MK: Probably nowhere else. Do you have a fresh tape I can put in this for the next – oh, the next interview is not going to be until tomorrow.

CK: Yes.

MK: I do not know how to close this without a tape in it.

CK: Just close it the same way. You take –

MK: Oh, I just push this button –

CK: Yes. You push that and let it do the rest.

MK: Oh, all right. Sorry. These lights have worked well.

CK: Yes. I did not like the view I was getting at all. The background behind him was so washed out. Maybe they do have –

MK: I got some gaps in this log.

CK: What happened? Why did you just put it down and did not –

MK: Well, I was fooling with adjusting.

CK: Oh, you can pause that. We forgot to pause that.

JA: The passenger ships going up and down the bay and up in the rivers and everything.

CK: Just a few seconds, we will be with you. Okay.

JA: All of them had to sit for their licenses if they were officers. In those days, they didn't sit for the Coast Guard. The licensing was handled by the steamship inspectors. But they still had to have a license. It was categorized and the captain had all of what the junior officers had. The next junior officer had all what – junior to him, but he didn't have what the captain had on his license. It just kind of ratcheted down. But if they were going to work navigating the ship up the bay to Baltimore, to Washington, they all had to have a pilot license for that tonnage vessel and for that territory that they were covering. So, when they stood the watch, it was pretty much on schedule. They almost were in the same place in the bay every time they took the watch. They would come up, let's say, at midnight. Changed watch at midnight. Well, that ship was almost always in the same position in the bay or in the river as it had been two nights before. One night up, one night back. So, even though they had a license for the entire river, unless they traded watches with another officer, they usually just piloted that one stretch wherever they were for four hours. But they were licensed for the entire trip and they did the piloting.

CK: You talked – does that get what you were after?

MK: Yes. I think so. Let us see. Did you ever ride a steamboat yourself? Do you have any firsthand –

JA: Only that C&O Virginia crossed Hampton Roads, a forty-five-minute trip. I really, as a junior pilot, as an apprentice, if I could find some place to sit down, I went to sleep. [laughter] It was catch-as-catch-can.

MK: So, the bay steamers were just clear outside of your –

JA: Absolutely. Yes.

CK: But you talked about them as the basis for the economy.

JA: Absolutely. Those vessels are what transported all of the farmers' goods from local, small communities to big cities like Baltimore. Baltimore was really almost the hub of the commerce in Chesapeake Bay for a while. But also, to Norfolk and to Richmond. These little docks, like in the great Yeocomico River, the eleven piers, always had commerce. The crops of the season would come across that dock to those ships to be taken to Baltimore. There's one right up at Yeocomico Church that was wiped out in the 1933 hurricane, eight miles from the Bay. It had a dock, an oyster cannery, a tomato cannery, and a store, and, of course, passengers transported back and forth. That was just typical of what happened. All these rivers divided the communities. You either had a little cable ferry going across the river or the steamboat came to your side of the river and took your corn, your tomatoes, potatoes, whatever you grew, to the big city and then brought the paycheck back. I heard of one man that got shot, very dangerously wounded, lost an eye. The doctor – it was near my community, and this was years ago – had to wait for the steamboat to come in and the steamboat to finish its rounds. Then the same steamboat to go back to Baltimore to take this injured man to the hospital. He survived it. That's how relying they were on those vessels because I'm talking primarily on the western side of the Bay. The eastern shore had almost as much traffic. They had Cape Charles and a couple of small villages and small rivers that only these little ships could get into because they were so small and not too deep, on Hancock and Crisfield. Then you hopped way up the eastern shore to Choptank River, St. Michaels, all of those places going up the river, but there was all that commerce. For the ships, I don't think these passenger ships used the ships, but for the ships, they built the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal that connected the Delaware Bay with the Chesapeake Bay. It's called a C&D Canal. A British captain asked one of my colleagues up there the history of the canal. The fellow started out by saying, "Well, George Washington surveyed this –" The Britt stopped him and said, "Now, don't tell me you're going to blame this on that poor man too." [laughter] Because at that time, it was just a ditch. I don't know if you've been over the Delaware Memorial Bridge or this Chesapeake Bridge. It goes over that canal. It's very impressive. Ships going all the time connecting the two ports. But they were not these passenger ships you're talking about. There's some freight, small oil tankers and things like that, that run up and down the Bay. The Bay has always been a highway for commerce. A lot of people use it as a playground now with sailboats and motorboats. But there's still that

commerce, the transferring fuel from one city to another, fuel, grain. He'll come to a small town like Kilmarnock, a little grain vessel will come in. They have a green silo there. During the season, he'll load up grain and take it down to Norfolk and discharge it at a big grain pier that puts it in the ships going overseas. That's how the commerce is tied together by that water.

CK: Wow. You have such a nice way of pulling things together in your narrative.

JA: Well, thanks. Oh, I meant to bring you a copy of my book. You'll be around?

CK: Yes.

JA: Over in Irvington? Are you staying in Irvington?

CK: We are staying on Fleets Island.

JA: I didn't hear you.

CK: Fleets Island, across from Whitestone.

JA: Oh, way down the end of the road there?

CK: Yes.

JA: Yes.

CK: When you were – I am sorry.

JA: Go ahead.

CK: When you were talking about the man getting shot, I could not help but wonder about this Oyster War that people have referred to.

JA: [laughter] Anything I can say about that would be tales told to me by waterman.

CK: About what now?

JA: Waterman. About that Oyster War. It goes way back. The State of Maryland, of course, owns the river via King's Grant up to the low watermark in Virginia. But oysters are oysters and the watermen, being the independent breed they are, Maryland got upset that – this is, I don't know, early 1700s – and told Virginia and said, "We don't want you Virginians dredging oysters in the Potomac River." They finally got real tough about it. So, Virginia responded by saying, "Okay. We won't dredge the oysters. You can't bring your ships through Chesapeake Bay to get to Baltimore." You see the southern half of Chesapeake Bay is Virginia, sixty miles of it. So, Maryland said, "Let's talk." So, they made some agreement, but even then it was a shooting war. Maryland had patrol boats and later patrol aircraft, and one of the aircraft was a float plane.

They had two float planes. You see them on these Alaskan expeditions all the time. Bush pilots. The waterman telling me this starts by saying, "Now, I didn't see this [laughter], but this plane landed out there beside so-and-so's boat. So-and-so pulled out a rifle and shot holes in the sponson and sank the airplane, but I didn't see it." [laughter] He sank the Maryland trooper's plane right there in the Potomac River. So, they were serious about this thing. Then there were gun boats that the Maryland Navy had that would either ram these oystermen or shoot at them. Those guys can tell you some yarns too. It just goes on and on and on. I'm digressing here now, but I can't let this go by. There was a retired waterman named Joe Leiner, L-E-I-N-E-R, who, among other things, was an excellent carver of duck decoys. They were so good that they're on display in the St. Michaels Museum.

MK: Can you say that again? We got a flushing.

JA: [laughter]

MK: There was a – his name was?

JA: Leiner, L-E-I-N-E-R. Joe Leiner. They left the water, I don't know why, but it was more money in it for him to carve duck decoys. They were magnificent reproductions. Some of his work is on display in the St. Michaels Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels. They have a lighthouse that this Museum got and put on the grounds, and you can sit in the shade of it in the summertime. Joe would go out there and sit at one of these picnic benches and draw a small crowd and he'd be whittling and telling yarns. He was talking about two oystermen. In Maryland, I get the idea that you can have clams in this bed and oysters in this bed in the edges of the marsh. These two boys were where they weren't supposed to be at wee hours of the morning. They thought they heard the game warden's boat. So, they put their boat up in the marsh and took out running. They had boots and everything and just ran. They didn't know where they were. Finally, they collided with this very tall fence. While they were climbing the fence to get over it, and they get boots stuck in the fence and everything, they're wondering, "What in the world a man kept in here that the fence had to be so high?" Fell down the other side, took out running and ran right across home plate. They were in a baseball diamond and they climbed the backstop. [laughter] Leiner could do that to you all day long. [laughter]

CK: The oyster episodes did not continue into your day on the Potomac?

JA: No. No, I don't remember seeing any of that. When I started in the Potomac in 1950s, the only illegal activity I saw was fishermen, so-called, standing on a bank in Maryland and throwing sticks of dynamite in the water, and then going out in the boat and pulling up the stunned fish. When I blew the whistle at them, they jumped in the pickup truck and took off. [laughter] But the water was littered with fish. That was about the only illegal thing I saw on the river.

MK: You talked about running in the fog and running with a stopwatch. Did any of the buoys have bells? Were there any sound signals?

JA: Some had bells, but you have to have wave action.

MK: Some what?

JA: Some had bells –

MK: Some?

JA: Some of the buoys had bells, but they were not as sophisticated as they are today. But even if a buoy has a bell on it, you have to have wave action to make the buoy ring. The rivers, unless it's blowing half a gale, then you don't have fog, then you don't need the bell. But the one bells that they had were after they put up the Highway 301 bridge. That bridge is named for Harry W. Nice. I love that name. They have the most godawful sound system on the two abutments where you go through this. This sounds like a Chinese gong or something. This one is wham, wham, wham, wham, wham. Then this one is bash, bash, bash, bash, bash. It's a horrible noise. But they're different sounds so that you don't mix them up. You know which side is which. You take a neophyte through there that's never been through there and hear this sound, it scares the heck out of them. They don't know what in the world is going on because it's very loud and it sounds like it's right up the side of your ship when you're going through there. You only do this with radar. I wasn't a stopwatch man, [laughter] stick your face out in the fog and get water in your coffee. [laughter] I did some of that as a junior pilot. But after the military released radars to the merchants, we began using radar. Couldn't think of doing that without radar now.

CK: What did you mean exactly about the stopwatch? How did it work?

JA: Time and distance. See if I can summarize it. He knows his ship, his master, Captain Eaton. One of the instruments they have on the bridge is like in a sports car. It's a tachometer. Shows you how many RPMs the engine is turning. He knows, at those RPMs, what speed his ship is making, no matter if he changes speed, slow half or full, he knows his ship well enough. He knows how many miles that vessel will go in how many seconds or how many minutes. That's what the stopwatch is for. So, when he picks up a known point that he sees a buoy or he hears a horn, starts his stopwatch because he knows it's 3.2 miles to the next one. 3.2 miles will take this amount of time at that speed. So, when that amount of time has run out at that speed, he knows to hit that stopwatch and that next mark is right there. If he's not, he's missed it. That's how it relates. It's time and distance and speed.

CK: Great intelligence.

JA: Yes. No computers. No computers.

MK: Were there lighthouses along the Potomac?

JA: Many. Many lighthouses, all along the bay and the Potomac. All the rivers had a lot of lighthouses.

MK: Can you remember some of the ones of the Potomac, let us say?

JA: Well, you start at Smith Point, then you got Point Lookout, and then Piney Point, and then Ragged Point. Can't think of the island there because they've changed the name. Upper Cedar, Lower Cedar, Mathias Point, Maryland Point, Sandy Point – there's always a Sandy Point. There's always a Cedar Point. Fort Washington. See if there's one before that. Fort Belvoir, Fort Washington, and Alexandria. I may have missed a couple right there, [laughter] but they were the basic ones. Fort Washington stands – you can knock it down with a ship. Stands right on the edge of the river. Physically, you get up and run your starts, you could climb up the boards and knock the thing down. It's very picturesque. It's got a little fort behind it. It was where the colonials were going to defend against the Brits. They had this fort and they all aimed down the river. The Brits walked around behind them. [laughter] Took it without firing a shot. [laughter]

CK: It sounds dangerous to come upon.

JA: Yes. Well, there are some points – a matter of fact, my dad, he was a James River pilot. Dad told me one of the axioms is to stay off the points and in the bends because the deep water would follow the bends going around would scour out the bank. But the points would be sticking out under the water. So, you stayed off the points because the current would carve the river's bottom. You stayed in the bends and off the points, just as a rule of thumb.

CK: The points being?

JA: A point of land like so.

CK: Because you would want to stay off a point of land.

JA: Yes. Well, what happens over the many, many years, centuries, is these points of land used to be here. But now, the water has eroded it and now it's just lying under the water about like that. The visible point is back here, but the old point, ten thousand years ago, was out here and it's still there. But it's underwater. So, that's why they'll quite often stick a lighthouse out there. In the Potomac River, they had one that the ice had capsized the cement base like this. So, the Coast Guard came along and put the light up like that. [laughter] They didn't bother moving the cement base because it would get knocked over again. So, they just put the light up. I forget the name of that one. It's just above Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon was an interesting thing too. If you had a foreign military ship or a military ship, they rendered honors to Mount Vernon. Slow the ship down. If you had a band, the band played the national anthem. If you had a bugler, the bugler played taps. You stroked the bell once every ten seconds until you pass a certain point. Very moving ceremony.

CK: So, there was music aboard these vessels?

JA: Military vessels, sometimes they'd have a band. If it didn't have a band, a Navy vessel would come into Washington, the Navy band would meet them on the end of the dock and play Anchors Aweigh while they were trying to dock the ship. [laughter] (Hard (hoompa?), right, hoompa?). [laughter] Took a submarine in there one day and the band was right there, eye level.

This poor officer was trying to dock the ship and he was getting Anchors Aweigh right in his ear. He did a good job putting the ship in there. [laughter]

MK: Mark Twain took the name of a process of measuring the –

JA: Yes.

MK: – depth of the river. Was that a practice in the Potomac and the other rivers around here too?

JA: All rivers at one time, but not when I was there. But Mark Twain took the Mark Twain, Samuel Clemens, because – we call it a lead line because it had a piece of lead on the end of it. You threw it out and it was marked in increments. Two fathoms was Mark Twain. Twain was a word for two in those days. The leadsman, that was his job, one of the crew, would – the ship is going forward and he'd stand where he could throw this lead out. It was referred to as a blue pigeon. It would go out forward and sink. They'd try to get the line vertical just as it came while the lead was still on the bottom. If it was two fathoms, that was Mark Twain. Each mark, at nighttime, you could feel it. It had a different shape. The Mark Twain was a piece of leather with a hole in it. He would turn around and sing a very melodic Mark Twain to the bridge. So, they'd know what depth of water they were walking. He'd throw that lead all the way up the river. I was talking to a group of school kids in Virginia Beach and I had my inflatable coat and everything. I said, "For Pete's sakes, don't pull that red [laughter] knob. I won't be able to get through the door." But they all were all through there and everything. I had the lead line with me and they were studying Mark Twain. You should have heard them when I said, "Now, this marks six feet and this marks nine feet." I held up that piece of leather and said, "This is Mark Twain." They all took a breath. It had never dawned on them that Mark Twain was a piece of leather with a hole in it. [laughter] So, it was a pretty good –

MK: It was tied onto the string or the string fast to it?

JA: Yes. It was made fast to it – sewn, actually. You'd take a braided line and twist it open three strands. You'd stick the end of the leather in there and then close that. Then you would take a palm and a needle, a leather needle, heavy needle, and sew it with waxed string so it wouldn't come off.

MK: So, in the dark you would –

JA: Yes, you could feel different knots and different rag. One was candle wick where they – we used to have lamps. You've seen lamp wicks? That kind of thing. Another one was a piece of canvas. Another was three strings with knots on the end of it. Yes. You could read it in the dark.

MK: These were standard on all the –

JA: Pretty much. The seagoing vessels had a little bit different variation than the river because the river, sometimes, meant one or two or three feet. Ocean-going ships usually started at Mark Twain.

CK: You did still use that?

JA: I did. I did. We had one skipper of the pilot – I was one of two apprentices at the time. Chick Hickman was ten months senior to me. This fellow, the old pilot, walrus mustache, a whole nine yards, you'd go get him a half a cup of coffee. Then when he came out of his cabin, the coffee cup would be full. [laughter] He stayed mellow the whole time. Well, anyway, he knew this bay like the inside of your hand. He went charging down Old Point Comfort on this twin-screw pilot cutter. Chick was on the port side and I was on the starboard side. This man was so close to the beach that the beach was sloping like this. Chick was getting a fathom less water over there than I was getting over here. He was going along at full chart. He was doing about eleven, twelve knots. You talk about something to try to throw that lead out in the air far enough for it to hit the water and sink and go into thirty or forty or fifty feet of water so that you have a vertical line to get an accurate – that took a piece of work. [laughter] I'm glad Captain Wood didn't come down there too often.

CK: Took a good throwing arm, I guess.

JA: Well, we were physical in those days. The apprentices, we rowed boats to put pilots on and off ships and –

CK: Rowed?

JA: Row, row your boat – and pulled on lines to pick the boats up and down and scrubbed the decks. In the first six months, I had so many calluses on my hand, I could have rubbed a hole in a marble table. [laughter] It was really very physical. Very physical.

MK: You had to be an able person.

JA: You did. You had a little stupid and very physical. [laughter] You have to have a certain attitude. Got to be optimistic.

CK: Optimistic?

JA: Optimistic. Yes. Nothing's going to happen. I can't tell you how many bones I've broken with that attitude. [laughter] Everything's fine. Nothing's going to happen.

CK: Were you in the [19]33 hurricane?

JA: I was a kid. I lived in Norfolk at my grandmother's house at Willoughby. Police came along at 4:00 a.m. and ordered us out. We had guests from New York and this fellow was very tall. Ray Taylor put me up on his shoulders because the water was up to the porch. The porch was six feet off. There was the sand. Ray went to step on the steps and the steps had washed

away. [laughter] He went right up to his chest in water with me sitting on his shoulders. So, we went out and got in my aunt's very big automobile. It was an old Nash thing. It had a running board that high off the ground. We put the majority of the family in there and hit higher ground. We went into Norfolk to her brick apartment. I slept underneath the grand piano that night on the floor. I was seven years old. But it was quite an adventure. For a long time, I thought that storm only hit Norfolk. I had no idea that it had done the damage it had done all up the Bay and into New Jersey and New York. Fantastic storm.

CK: What happened to the steamers then or after? I mean, did they continue?

JA: That put a lot of damage to the smaller docks and there was a lot of commerce that they couldn't carry. So, it was a loss of revenue. So, it was kind of like the ends of fingers and arms and hands being pulled in to where, economically, they just died. They were run up in marshes and left to rot alongside piers. Just the more economically viable, like the Washington and the Baltimore steamers were left. Truck traffic, train traffic, highways, bridges, all cut into that commerce. It was kind of a glorious age, but it was a sad thing to see it go.

CK: Glorious?

JA: It was. Yes. It had a kind of – I don't know. It had its own patina. You'd see them – they were very taut looking ships. They had a character about them. It's almost like you were seeing a military parade go by. They had a statue about them. All that humanity on board, having fun, traveling, sleeping, eating, gambling, it was quite something.

MK: Wonderful to hear you talk about this.

JA: Yes. Well, you see it today. You've got bay steamers today that are motorized. You've got – let me see. The group that has four vessels, the Yorktown *Clipper*, yada, yada, ya – all clippers. They're motorized. They carry 120 passengers. They all run the bay. They'll run all the way down the inland waterway and back, that type of thing. So, they do still exist. They don't carry much freight. It's mostly passengers. I've been on many of them in foreign ports. They're licensed to carry passengers a limited distance offshore. Then when they transfer from one foreign port to another, they can't carry passengers over the open waters. It's a safety Coast Guard regulation. But it's a good way to travel. If you ever go on a cruise anywhere on the ship, take one of the small ones. A hundred and twenty passengers and you get more service. You get to know people better. You go into more interesting places where the big ships can't get into. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

MK: My last question is going to be, at what age, as a child, did you know that you wanted to be a pilot? Was this something you set your sights on because your dad did it? Talk about that a little bit. As a child what –

JA: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I had very little knowledge of what in the world it was.

MK: Of what was?

JA: Of what the business was. My father was there some nights and some nights he wasn't. This limousine would come by and pick him up in strange hours, day and night, and disappear. But I never knew what he was doing. In the summertime, between school sessions, he would take me and another friend aboard the pilot cutter for a day's visit. All I got out of it, I got seasick [laughter] and I yearned to be back on that beach. So, as far as the inner workings, I talked with a lot of other pilots' sons about this. They've ridden on ships, which I did, with their fathers. They didn't understand what their father was doing. That's just the veneer of the profession. I mean, you become the apprentice and you have fifty bosses in that time. You're like a farm animal. You're put in the pasture on this side and when you come out that side, they ask you how much grass you ate. [laughter] There was no formal education. You had to do it all yourself. You learned with a hands-on experience by riding with other pilots. But all of this, I had no knowledge of going into it. But it's a profession once you get into it, it gets in your blood. I'm still a pilot. I always will be. But there are times of doubt going through that apprenticeship. It's pretty rough. I was in the Air Corps in the cadet program. You do that standing on your head compared to this apprenticeship because you've got fifty guys right down your throat all the time for no other reason except I'm the apprentice of the pilot.

CK: How long does this last?

JA: A total of five years. Two years working on deck and learning your trade and then you get your first state license to handle limited-size ships. Then as you go, every six months, you get a raise in grade and your licenses. In the meantime, you sit for your federal licenses. At the end of five years, you have two master's licenses, state and federal, and two pilot licenses, state and federal. At the end of the fifth year, you become what the Virginia Pilots call a share man. You're on two thirds wages, limited leave time, limited sick time, and at the end of the sixth year, you voted in. You could have been blackballed at that time. After six years, it was possible. Then you become a full owner. You own one share in the pilot business. At that time, after earning $20 a month for two years and then $50 a month for the next three years. When I got that raise, I got married. [laughter] You had to come up with $8,500 for your share of stock in the Pilot Association. They didn't care who you killed to get it. They didn't lend it to you, which would've been a smart financial move for them because they could have just taken it out of your pay at whatever interest they wanted to charge. But every man owned one share.

CK: So, what made you decide to embark on this arduous task?

JA: My father. [laughter] When I got out of the Air Force, he said, "You don't reenlist in anything. I've got you a position as an apprentice in the Pilot Association." I said, "Okay." Blind, went right into it. I guess it took me a year to make up my mind whether or not I was going to stay there. It was arduous, to say the least. The toughest part was memorizing all those coffee cups. [laughter] It wasn't really, but – [laughter]

MK: On the Ohio River, we talked to people over there working on the Ohio, and they say –

[end of transcript]