

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project  
Don Taub Oral History  
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Interviewer: MS – Unknown  
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Don Taub: Don't start yet. I'll give you some geographical turf – County, Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa, Barbara, but it went inland, and his counterpart was in St Louis, Missouri. So, they split the United States somewhere there. I don't remember where the border was. But my larger turf ended up all California from here.

Male Speaker: Yes. All this is with –

DT: With pretty little Mexico.

MS: The main thing we want to get this down, because we have another interview coming. We want to make sure we have as much time with you as possible.

DT: Okay.

MS: So, I get to speak –

DT: But we still want to limit it to Los Angeles.

MS: Yes, Port of Los Angeles.

DT: Not Long Beach.

MS: Yes, Port of Los Angeles.

DT: Okay.

MS: San Pedro.

DT: But when you talk about this port, or both ports, you got to talk about what was going on outside.

MS: Sure.

DT: The sea lanes, offshore, oil and gas leasing right in the sea lanes. Out a little further, you have the naval missile range, the test range.

MS: That's okay. Well, let's get started. We're going to get into [inaudible]. So, the first question I'm going to ask you is the hard one.

DT: I did the sea lanes, by the way. [laughter]

MS: Please say your name and spell it.

DT: Spell it?

MS: Yes.

DT: Tell me when you're ready.

MS: I'm ready.

DT: My name is Donald M. Taub, T-A-U-B. Captain U.S. Coast Guard retired. I retired in 9th October of 1982.

MS: So, Captain, tell us, first of all, what year were you born, and where were you born?

DT: I was born in Lorain, Ohio, which is about 25 miles west of Cleveland, Ohio and the Great Lakes. It was a steel mill town, a shipbuilding town. It was known as where the coal and iron meets. Supposedly had the largest steel mill in the world, which was about five miles long,

MS: What year?

DT: 1932, February 1st.

MS: I know the rain very well because I went to Oberlin College.

DT: You did?

MS: Yes.

DT: Me too.

MS: You did?

DT: Oh, no, no, no.

MS: Anyway, let's get on to –

DT: You went to Oberlin College.

MS: Right.

DT: Small world. That was a girls – Madame Chiang Kai-shek went to school there.

MS: Well, no, that was the first co-educational college in the country. So, there were guys and girls there from the beginning. [inaudible] from 1832.

DT: Okay.

MS: Anyway, but I know Lorain very well. Anyway, so, let's go back to talk about how did you first get involved with the Port of Los Angeles?

DT: I came here primarily because of the political topics at the time related to developments ongoing. One of the hot topics was a liquefied natural gas terminal here in the harbor, LA. The property had already been leased for that terminal. I was perhaps the only person in the entire coast guard that had first hands-on experience with liquefied natural gas having dealt with it in Europe for building ships there and making the rules as we went.

MS: So, when you came here, what year was that? What was the port like that time when you came here?

DT: That was in July of 1976.

MS: What was the port Los Angeles like in [19]76? How would you describe it?

DT: Well, it was already combined with Long Beach, the largest commercial harbor in the United States. Back in that time period, one of the Pacific Rim Bank locally was Pacific something, had long rated this harbor as the sixth largest economy in the world, based solely on a 25-mile radius of this harbor. That tells you something of its importance then. Back in the period of 1976 [inaudible] the combined harbor of Los Angeles, Long Beach, within a 25 mile radius of the harbor was rated as the sixth largest economy in the world, probably larger than the Soviet Union.

MS: So, when you came in [19]76, you came just in time for one of the most memorable experiences in the Port of Los Angeles. That was the sinking of Sansinena. Please tell us from the beginning to the end, what that story was as you saw it, and what you did.

DT: The Sansinena in its time was known as a super tanker. In its time, it was a relatively my modern ship. This really large tankers, VLCCs were just coming on stream, and this harbor was not deep enough for those larger ships. The Sansinena blew up on December 17th at around 7:00 p.m. on a Friday here in San Pedro at Berth 46 which was known as the Union Oil Terminal. It was the largest and the deepest water berth in the entire port at that time. It was actually very difficult to get to it. If you look at the map of the harbor, it's close to the entrance of Los Angeles. You come through Angeles gate and you have a dredge channel there. Outside of that channel is quite shallow. I'm not going to tell you some stories about more groundings and things there. It was a tight turn, relatively tight turn. I shouldn't call it a tight turn. That's actually in the outer part of the harbor. Hence, there's a lot of maneuvering room. The Sansinena -- as I recall was an Italian flag tanker, I could be wrong on that -- use that dock regularly. There were underground pipelines, as I recall. There were 36 -- might have been 48 inches -- I'd say 36 inches in diameter that transported the oil from the dock to the Union Oil Refinery storage tanks inland, which I don't know how many miles inland that is. I'm getting ahead of the story here.

MS: Yes. Take it back to --

DT: How it happened.

MS: -- your experience. There you are. Were you in your office yet? I mean, how did it

happen to you?

DT: It was on a Friday in the early evening. Friday, of course, theoretically, I had the weekend off. As captain of the port, it never will happen. It was a 24/7 job. I always on a beeper. I had just gone home for dinner, and we were seated at the table about 7:00 p.m., and all of a sudden, wham. Now, that's in Huntington Beach, California. I live about a half mile off the beach. My window shook, and I remember very well I said to everybody something to the effect, "Don't stop, keep eating. The telephone is going to ring," and it did. [laughter] I spent the next three days without sleep on the scene.

MS: What happened next? After that phone ring, what happened next?

DT: I hopped in the car and took off for the harbor. Of course, I was having a radio. When the explosion occurred, if you refer to the map of the harbor, my boat docks were literally in sight of just across the channel from where the Sansinena was. The on-duty boat crew had just finished dinner and were walking back to the boat station and were blown off their feet when it went off. So, they saw it happen, and they promptly got in the boats and hustled on over. Also, the Los Angeles Harbor Fire Department has fireboats in the near vicinity. One just very close, just to the west of it and one further up the channel. So, they were Johnny on the spot as well. Perhaps I ought to tell you how it occurred.

MS: Yes, go ahead.

DT: The Sansinena had just offloaded its cargo of crude oil. Crude oil, you have all the components of the petroleum from the low of tar to the high of propane, methane, and somewhere down the middle, gasoline. So, the tanks were now in empty, but you have the residual fuel in them. Of course, the tanks are full of vapors. That's the most dangerous time on a tanker when the tanks are empty but full of combustible vapors. It's a little longer story as to what ignited it. I can get to deal with that separately if you want, because we did the investigation, it took us quite a while –

MS: So, it ignited and blew up. So, when you arrived there, what did you see?

DT: You want me to tell you how it blew up? I mean, what happened?

MS: Yes, tell me when it blew, what happened.

DT: When it blew up, the ignition – now mind you, this tanker had a deck house forward where the bridge and pilot house was. But the main engine room and mess deck and the cruise quarters mainly back aft. In those days, the ships were built with what was known as a crack arrester, namely, a riveted seam down the length of the sides of the ship, just over the side, down 8, 10 feet, or whatever. That would end up acting like a zipper. The explosion occurred initially in the furthest aft tanks, just forward of the after deck house. It ripped up – got a piece of paper?

MS: No. We can't see it on film. Just describe it.

DT: It ripped up like opening a sardine can. It started from the rear, lifted up and going forward. Now it's got a deck house forward on that deck, which sort of weighted it down and caused it to twist like a pretzel and keep going until the entire length of the deck, from the bow to the deck house went flying in the air like a frisbee. It twisted such that the deck house was on the bottom. It flew inland just a bit, the main body of it did. On the dock were some very tall lighting posts, or whatever you want to call it. I think they must have been about 50 or 70 feet tall. Never touched them. But some of the ship came around, flipped over and was flying through the air and came back right up against the bottom of the poles without touching them, without knocking them down or even tilting them. That tells you something. Now, of course, it blew out windows in the town in San Pedro. There was a large boat marine in that area. A lot of damage was there, and parts of the ship probably flew as much as a mile away. That would become our big task of figuring out what caused it. We had to prevent the fire department from messing up the scene, which made them quite angry with me. Until we could lay out a grid. We actually laid out strings like a grid system, and mapped every dog on piece of scrap to identify what it was. Through that scrap, we discovered the cause, and then we let the Fire Department put out the fire. [laughter]

MS: So, when you arrived, what was that scene like? What did you see when you got there?

DT: When I got there – I recall this was in mid-December, December 17th, so it got dark early. So, I assume that at 7:00 p.m., it would have been about quite late. But by the time I got there from my house, which would have taken me a half an hour, my car, it was already dark when I got there. But our guys were already out, and the fire boats were already doing their thing. The captain of the port, we had booms for oil spill containment, floating booms, fortunately, had several miles of this stuff, much of which we got from the oil companies. The oil companies had a cooperative, and we didn't have much of our own materials. Legally, the captain of the port, of many titles he has, he's the pre-designated on scene coordinator for any kind of thing that happened. So, I was theoretically the federal boss of all federal agencies, state agencies, city agencies. One of the problems was it was all on paper, and drill scenes. Drills and everything were fine or in meetings, in the early event, it came down to, well, who's going to pay for this? [laughter] Those kinds of things got ironed out over the years that followed. But it was a beginning for such things as recent as Katrina in New Orleans as to –

MS: Let's go back when you arrived. Was this a huge ball of fire? What would it look like? Was it noisy?

DT: The noise was gone. The ship had already sunk. The ship broke in half. The after deck house was still afloat. There were people out there. They're guests for dinner on the ship, by the way. [laughter] None of them are hurt, other than shaken up. It's amazing that they weren't physically hurt. I can't address that because I don't really remember. But the after deck house was tilted and sticking up and was afloat. The very front end of the bow was sticking out of the water. The stern sticking up and actually on the bottom. But the whole mid body of the ship, whatever it was 600 some feet, was underwater. What was left of it had sunk because the upper part of it and the forward deck house were all on the shore, which, by the way, killed a man and a watchman in a gatehouse there. One of the problems that has since been corrected, you had very large pipelines leading a long distance inland. I don't remember the distance. It's probably a

couple of miles to the Union Oil Tank Farms at the Union Oil Refinery. These pipelines are full of oil, a whole lot of oil, and were uphill. The only shut off valves were down at the bottom, under the wreckage. The wreckage broke the pipelines, and all that oil came back. So, most of the oil that entered the harbor was not from the ship. It was what's coming back through the pipelines, and there was no way to stop it.

MS: There was no fire?

[break]

DT: I threatened the chairman of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth Rear Admiral Roy Hoffman, "If you don't knock this off, I'm going to —" I've been interviewed several times already by LA Times and that full pages, but I restrained what I was saying. I think he backed off. He was our boss. He was a Navy captain at the time. I was running a mothership for the Swift Boats. You know, Swift boats had no cooking or anything, a hot plate for coffee or something. A very short range but they had more guns than they had crew. There were only six people on them, and they were all Navy guys.

MS: I want to talk about this, but I'm curious. Let's go back to the Sansinena. So, you arrived. Now, what are you doing? What are your tasks? You spent three days and three nights there. What were your activities once you got there and started working in this situation?

DT: Essentially, I was running around like, seeing what's going on, and sort of somewhat coordinating. It didn't really need much of a coordination. It was a cooperative effort, and everybody knew what to do. They really didn't need me to tell them what to do. [laughter] But the larger concern is, eventually, the liability part of this. Who's going to pay for it? Now, I probably said that I was there for three days out of sleep. That's not really true. I slept on a sofa in my clothes. I may have had a toothbrush in those three days. I don't remember. But in that state of fatigue, I went up we had a meeting at the Union Oil Terminal's office in a big, long table. All the people presented and were there. This was my first experience into this sort of thing. We've got something going on down here and millions of bucks, and who's going to pay for it, and all that kind of stuff. I had, with the help of one of my junior officers, typed up a letter, single sheet of paper, as I recall, and didn't even fill the whole page. That basically said, I wrote it for them to sign what I wrote whereby they accepted full responsibility, financial responsibility, which was no small undertaking. One of the reasons, I think they were very easy and receptive. I expected a hell of a fight with lawyers, and this will go on for months. But no, I don't think it took longer than an hour. They write unanimous, "Yes. We accept liability. Give us a piece of paper and I'll sign it," and they did. Earlier, you may recall, was the famous or infamous Santa Barbara oil spill, which was also in the Union Oil Terminal. So, you might say their legal department had experience in that area, [laughter] and they very readily accepted responsibility and put the bill. That cleanup operation went on for nearly a year by the way, which few people would know. Some very excellent people were brought in. One was a small outfit, a salvage outfit. I remember that guy's name, Fred Devine Salvage Company from Portland, Oregon. He rigged it up. He invented the equipment on the spot. I should go back to the nature of the oil. This oil was heavy. Oil separates, some of the light ends evaporate, literally evaporate in the first twenty-four hours if you have sunlight and that sort of thing. Some

parts of it float and some parts of it sink. So, it had the combination of the three. I don't know how much evaporated, but we contained the stuff on the surface with the booms and skimmed that off with skimmers, which in those days we just barely had enough of. But all this oil was a large amount of oil on the bottom, which we didn't know about until we had gone down there with divers. A salvage company rigged up a special equipment, a barge pumps that he designed himself to suit the oil and et cetera. It sucks up most of it. But in pockets on the bottom, the bottom was irregular. There are pools of oil that remain for as much as a year. I shouldn't say that, should I?

MS: Actually, we know. We talked to the diver, Parker, diving service, and he talked about going into those pools.

DT: Yes, Parker. I forgot his name. I remember Fred Devine. But that was done with a purpose. It was done in conjunction – I forget her name, with the University of Southern California that has the Marine Institute over near fish harbor even today. A very lovely lady. She was a PhD in Marine Biology, or something or other. They did a cooperative thing with other colleges around here, like Harvey [inaudible]. I don't remember the names of them. Where it had a whole group of college professors, student types, biologists, who were divers, and they all laid out a grid on the bottom. Put stakes in the bottom, stretch lines, four ways, sort of like what we did with a wreck on the shore. They studied that over that period of time. I can't say it lasted a whole year. It lasted at least six months. Now I don't remember exactly the high end. It was a year. They discovered a lot of things. They discovered that there was now living creatures under the oil that you would not have found before. This sort of thing happened in the Santa Barbara Channel with studies with natural oil seeps. That's another subject that I don't know if you want to get into that here, where you have certain marine creatures that live on the oil, [laughter] whatever. So, there was a bit of good outcome for science in that case. Some sort of embarrassing, could be embarrassing nobody. I don't think anybody knew about it. A very short time later, another tanker was coming in, and then it might have even been going to the same dock, I'm not sure. But it was another tanker that came in. There's a bend in the dredge channel, and it ran the ground. That was on a Saturday, as I recall. Because I remember I was the speaker up at University of Southern California, and I had to rush down there. I was talking about LNG terminals then. In that time frame, something else was discovered. Recall that the breakwater was federally built many years ago. I'm not sure when it was, 1940s, [19]59 or something.

MS: Original by [inaudible] in [19]99.

DT: Most of that rock came from Catalina on barges. Well, right on the edge of this dredge ship channel, we discovered a pile of boulders that have been lost up in one of the barges and forgotten about. Nobody knew about it until somebody hit them, [laughter] and of course, they were removed.

MS: So, I want to go back. You're starting to tell us this, I get some of the other humorous stories too. It's just that talk about your original office and who were your nearby neighbors and give us a sense of that.



DT: Well, there were a lot of interesting things here. It was a different time. The waterfront was pretty much run by old fashioned stevedores with a hook and bales and rough and tumble types. My personal office, which soon moved out of, by the way. We're already in the process of moving out of it. But when I arrived, that was my office, it was at Pier A in Long Beach. As the head of the dock between two piers. There's one building there, we also had boat docks there our own boats. My office shared the building with a restaurant. It was known as the Pegasus. It was a topless restaurant, very good place for the cabinet port. We moved out. I should take that back. It wasn't 100 percent topless. It was a see-through net. But that also tells you how times are different in a lot of ways back then. It wasn't all that long ago.

MS: Okay. This is another example. It's such a good story. Tell me that story again. So, when you move into your offices, describe what the [inaudible]?

DT: The captain of ports office, I mind you were scattered about with boat ducks. But my own office was at Pier A in Long Beach. At the head of the dock and a small building, the other had two tenants, my office, and a Pegasus restaurant, which was an interesting place. It was a topless restaurant where all the waitresses bore a see-through net type of top or however they did.

MS: Now, as part of your job, you had to investigate the neighborhood, I'm sure, around and make sure everything was acceptable to the captain of the port. So, did you investigate your neighbor?

DT: One of my titles was commanding officer port security, a lot of titles. That was not within the domain of port security. Everything was quite safe there.

MS: Let's talk about what your responsibilities were. Give us a sense of the what you described as a confluence of quagmires. Talk about what you were getting involved with and what your responsibilities when you were the captain of the port.

DT: I'll take that in two parts. The captain of the port is a federal legal title. Actually, there's two titles were involved. One was officer in charge of marine inspection, and one was captain of the port. These are titles where in federal laws going way back, I believe the cap in the port was created in the World War I era, Espionage Act of 1917. Whereas, the other title goes back in the 1980s, I mean the 1890s. That gave a lot of authorities, federal authorities, to that person that has that title. In the basic law, it was not necessarily a person in the Coast Guard. It was that person who had all these authorities. But, and realistically, it was always a job given to the Coast Guard. So, we covered, you name it, just about any federal law that related to water fell upon the Coast Guard. Eventually, even fisheries in some aspects. One of the biggest things at that time was dangerous cargo in the port. A lot of dangerous cargo, that's a big topic in itself, and a relatively new thing. That was the area of the environment. Clean Water Act, which made oil pollution hot topic of the day, hazardous substances, port security. Issued port security cards, seamen's documents, inspected ships, even shipbuilding. As a sideline, we also did rescue. [laughter] The captain in my time, my boats rescued more than all the rest of the Coast Guard, and that was not one of our jobs, theoretically. We got no money for it, by the way, which is a different topic of budget and what we got money for and what we didn't.

MS: So, let's go backward then. Let's start with rescues. You have any particular favorite rescue stories that you were involved with that you remember that were particularly memorable?

DT: I was not personally involved in rescue kind of things. I didn't have time for it, quite frankly. That was this thing that took care of itself.

MS: Let's go back to the next one. What about port security? Any stories where there were issues of port security you remember that you were involved with?

DT: Port security was security. Safety is one thing. Security is another thing. Security was not a big topic at all. It was probably at the bottom of the list. There's perhaps only one thing that fell into that category was we had Russian so called electronic spy vessels who we allowed to come into port. Sometime two at a time right at my office. It was not known, but largely, it was cooperative. They were doing it to us and we were doing it to them, and it was a case of, don't make waves.

MS: So, why were they coming into port?

DT: Essentially, you might call them fishing crawlers. They were quite large vessels. They weren't freighters or anything. They had different configurations, but they were electronic surveillance vessels. Well, they were small vessels, and they needed fuel. They needed food. The crews needed to get ashore and spread their legs and that sort of thing. I had similar experience with that myself in the Soviet Union when they were an enemy, when I was their guest.

MS: So, this is a story that I think has not been told that often. So, basically, you get a call from a Russian spy captain who had said, "Listen, I got to come in and get some fuel. Can I come in on Wednesday?" I mean, how would that work when these vessels were coming in and out of the port?

DT: It was just a routine thing. It was a regular happening thing. It wasn't every day, but there ran in spurts, perhaps, where there's more of it than other times. Sometimes we had two vessels at a time in the harbor.

MS: Did you get to know the captains?

DT: No. That was something I personally had no dealings with. My job was so vast, and what my concerns were at the time were in largely important development kind of stuff and offshore oil drilling.

MS: We're going to start backing into that. The next thing you talked about was environmental changes that are taking place in the port. How are you engaged in that?

DT: It was the captain of port, he's a senior government official, federal, state, city, et cetera. As I said, that carried a title of pre-designated on-scene coordinator, and that's in capital letters, where if it happened, I was automatically the boss, whether he was there or not, at least in title.

I'm getting off subject here.

MS: Environmental issues.

DT: At that time, environmental issues were large topics in the public and in politics. We had a whole series of federal laws that related to the environment. Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammals Act, Clean Water Act, and eventually a fallout from the Sansinena incident, was Port and Tanker Safety Act. Nearly all these things were focused on the environment. Another was Coastal Zone Management. These gave rise to things like the California Coastal Commission, which we're partners, so to speak, cooperatively and enemies as well.

MS: How did you get engaged with that part of your work? Did you get engaged with that issues and environmental issues, and those kinds of things as applying those acts of supervising them, enforcing them?

DT: It was just a part of what was happening. It wasn't by my choice. It was what was going on. The harbors here, for example, were already involved in port development, which, as you can see today, has changed dramatically, and has made this as it was then as the largest commercial harbor in the world. That has different measures, by the way, I should say. But in that time, and probably still today, those standard measures were in things, like in the amount of oil, the amount of containers, the amount of automobiles, amount of fish. LA was number two. In fish, for example, LA was number one in one kind of fish, and number two and the other kind of fish, whereas San Diego was his counterpart. So, many things were happening here. It had Alaska oil coming down and needed oil terminals to accommodate these large ships. President Carter was in office at that time. One of the things he personally initiated is what was called his fast-track legislation had three projects in mind that he was focused upon. Two of them were right here, the LNG terminal and the Alaska oil terminal. The other one was the Tennessee Valley hydroelectric project.

MS: So, what did that mean for you, having those two top presidential priorities in your area of command?

DT: The fire that was already burning, so to speak, it had all its development going on and tending, much of it did develop. Another thing that talking about it in environmental interest was this harbor in general was too shallow. There were only a couple places that were dredged. They have two entrances. The rest of the harbor was essentially designated as a federal anchorage, which, by the way, was also part of the captain of the port's responsibility to regulate in actual practice. So, he turned it over to the two harbor pilots' groups that ran it. We didn't have the people to do that sort of things. That's the way it was set up in law, which made no sense. So, there were all these things. The harbor itself had to be dredged. The environmental interests were very hot against that. Also at that time, you had the Air Quality Management District for the LA basin. They were hot against any development that may create pollution. I don't know how many hearings I testified at. I said as many as thirty, congressional, state, federal.

MS: Well, let's go back to this –

DT: But air pollution was a hot topic then.

MS: Let's go back to this overall description. You used the term the confluence of quagmires. Use that term and explain what you meant when you wrote this down.

DT: That was my tongue in cheek calling of the place, the confluence of quagmires. All these competing interests, all happening here at the same time, all pulling in different directions. I often described this area as a confluence of quagmire. There are so many competing interests, environmentally, port development, commercial, need for dredging, offshore oil industry. By the way, there's also the boating industry and a fishing industry. They all wanted to share this relatively small piece of geography. So, I was involved in all of it. [laughter]

MS: You talked about the fast track.

DT: Another job I got had nothing to do with my job, but it had to do with somewhat related my job. I was also the Department of Transportation's representative to the Secretary of Interior as his advisor, I guess the paper said, on Outer Continental Shelf and guests' exploration for the whole Pacific Theater, that included Alaska. [laughter]

MS: So, you wore so many hats and we couldn't see your head, right?

DT: I was also the Department of Transportation's only representative at that time for developing the National Energy Plan, which was done in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. I seem, by just being here, the expert in whatever somebody invented, and it kept happening.

MS: I'm skipping back to where we were before. I see in your notes a place called Jeux Biffs restaurant. Tell me about that.

DT: Jeux Biff would be a good place for pool houses and California [inaudible]. It's hard to describe it.

MS: We don't have to mention fuel. So, just say what was –

DT: Jeux Biff's was a waterfront restaurant on Terminal Island that was out of another era. It was a one of a kind place. Unfortunately, it's gone. There was a newer Jeux Biff's restaurant, but that wasn't the same.

MS: Describe it. What kind of place was it?

DT: You know, it's been so long ago. It's hard to tell you. It was a little sort of dingy, dark. It had all kinds of paraphernalia hanging on the wall of the ceiling. You know, the nautical things, twenty coats of varnish on the tables. It just had this atmosphere that you were in another world, just a fun place to be.

MS: Who would be your fellow customers when you went there?

DT: If you could get in the door? [laughter] Waterfront people of all sorts, management, workers, my fellow Coast Guardsmen. Remember too, they had a Navy base here at that time and a Navy shipyard, which also affected all these things.

MS: Did you go there often?

DT: No. A few times. I wish I had more time to go there, more time. You know, there's only so much you could do.

MS: So, let's go back to this confluence of quagmires. Once you do that term, how is this place a confluence of quagmires? Why would you apply that term to it? What is it about this harbor that justifies that term?

DT: Well, it was a confluence of so many different things, all focusing here. It was quagmires because so many of them were in opposition to one another. It had one side saying no and one side saying yes. The development was just plain necessarily, this port would not have gotten developed the way it is today, if it hadn't gotten started back whenever it did. Perhaps, it's been a continuous process since the turn of the century in some respects. It isn't that it all happened then. But it was a time when it was very active of a lot of things, plus all these federal laws and estate laws that were counterparts of federal laws.

MS: Give me an example of where the conflicting interests. What were the examples of the yes and no on either side of things?

DT: Well, you can go on and on. One of the hottest topics was the liquefied natural gas terminal and the idea of it being very dangerous. On one hand, this was an ideal place to put it from the point of view of existing infrastructure. But if you're thinking in terms of what could possibly happen, very doubtful, but could happen. This is the wrong place to put it was one sort of thing. On the other kind of thing was the dredging of the harbors that was necessary. It was necessary that ships were very limited as to where they could go. They could only come in at high tide. They had to have tugs around them to make sure they didn't stray from the channel. The ships were getting bigger and bigger, and the harbor was slogging up and this sort of thing. So, on the environmental side, you had the "No, no." That was a dirty word, dredged the harbor. That's like shooting my mother. [laughter] There were a lot of things like that that were in competition. Offshore oil drilling was another case. Bureau of Land management's Mandate was to sell the leases for the oil tracks out there. These lease sales went on several times, every few years. In my time, there were three different lease sales, and they were like a checkerboard trying to sell up, lease up the [inaudible] seabed for oil and gas drilling. First, starting with exploration. You also had a dividing line of the state waters where the 3-mile side of it belonged to the California Lands Commission, or they were the controller, which was state waters. Now what they were doing, projecting in worst case scenarios, they're building all these oil platforms out there and how do you get the ships into the harbor. They're going to have to weave their way, zigzag through oil platforms to get into the harbor. These ships are getting bigger and bigger and bigger and less maneuverable. The increased number of ships coming into the harbor was contrary to

air pollution people. So, no matter what it was, somebody was against it.

MS: What about the relationships with the town? Talk about the pressure, the demands on your facilities and the budget cuts. What the effects of all that were? You said twenty-four hours, you had a demand on your facility.

DT: Then rescue was a twenty-four-hour a day thing. The whole job was twenty-four hours a day, just like your police or fire department is. The sort of multi mission kind of thing, everybody can do everything, which was not really so, for example, in the area of dangerous cargo. This is very complex, and most ships coming into the harbor were coming in twenty-four hours a day, 3:00 a.m., whenever you had to be down there to meet the ship with these people that were qualified to check it out. It was mostly a paper check, quite frankly. But it required people who knew the specialty area, which very few people did. In fact, I barely knew the elements of it. We also had to have boats for twenty-four hours devoted solely to rescue work. I'd have boats solely devoted not for rescue waiting for an oil spill to happen because that was a hot topic at the time. With the legislation, the Clean Water Act that gave this job to the Coast Guard, came money and resources initially. The change administrations took those resources away but left the responsibilities. It was very, very difficult. Here, it was difficult because so many of our facilities were scattered around. The boat marinas had boats up in Santa Barbara, Los Alamitos Harbor, et cetera. Helicopters at Los Angeles airport, I think the most we ever paid to any of them was a long-time running contract of \$5 a year. Sometimes they're \$1 a year just on paper, Suddenly, these people wanted to be paid what they wanted. We took boats out of the water. We couldn't pay the rent. We stopped both operations because you couldn't afford the fuel bills and the utility bills. Like you, we got to pay for electricity, telephone bills and everything else. Their only owned property that Coast Guard had here was Coast Guard base. So, it there were lean times. Of course, I sort of badmouthed Reagan. I may have liked him as the president, but I didn't like him for what he was doing to me personally. [laughter]

MS: A lot of people felt that way. [laughter]

DT: But it was serious. We've had to fire people. We had a lot of civilian employees. I don't know how many letters I signed. There was a period, I think I recall, four quarters where there was no federal budget. Where the budget would run out on – usually happen on a Friday. There's no money to operate on Monday. It went on for three-month bites with what was known as continuing resolutions. It was pretty predictable what Congress would give us the money again next Monday, and then three months from now, the next Monday. But we actually went through the process of having to select – we had a lot of civilian employees and various functions, administrative jobs, personnel, supplies, secretaries. Roughly, I'd say a third of our people were civilian people who had been working for the Coast Guard for maybe twenty years. We had to choose who was not vital and write them a letter. Between the lines said, "Thank you very much. We loved you for twenty years, but we don't need you anymore. Goodbye." Then on Monday, say, "[inaudible] it up. Come on back." That went on four times and why it was in the job. Another competing confluence of quagmire, so to speak.

MS: How many personnel were under your command when you were here?

DT: Actually, it wasn't all that many. I think, directly, was only about 150. We had a lot of reservists. We haven't touched on that topic. Most of the Coast Guard reservists in this area were a large body of them were assigned to the captain of the port. They were port security specialists. Generally, they were older people, experienced people. Without exception, I think, the whole group of them were a mix of firemen, city and county, firemen, different police agencies, city sheriff, highway patrol, county prosecutors, FBI, were in the Coast Guard Reserve. I put them to work. That was one of the ways we filled in. They were very beneficial because on average, I'd have kids that are 18, 19, 20 years old, and I'd have this state highway patrolman who was packing a rod and 35 years old and had a lot of experience. So, they were very, very valuable, and of course, didn't cost me anything. [laughter]

MS: We're going to have to bring it to a close. How would you sum up? What do you feel about the years you spent in the harbor? What do they mean to you? What are the memories? What do they all come together in your mind this time you spent here?

DT: I enjoyed it very much. It was an experience that's sort of one of a kind. It was the hottest place in the coast in that area in the Coast Guard. Everything was happening here. Things were happening all over the United States, but this was the only place really where everything was coming together. Not everything, but probably more was going on here than anyplace else. To be kind of stuck with a job or lucky enough to have that job, I felt I was very lucky to have that job. It was very interesting. It was very challenging. It was learning every day. I became experts in things I knew nothing about. The day before, I dealt with governors of California, senators, congressmen, mayors, other services, other agencies, and more. So, I probably said our biggest relationship was with the industry itself, the marine industry, both afloat and ashore. We also had the fishing industry and the recreational boating industry had what was going on offshore, had the Navy with missile range offshore. It was enough for ten people, and it was a lot of fun, a lot of fun. I wish it hadn't ended. [laughter]

MS: Perfect. So, how did the Sansinena blow up?

DT: The Sansinena had discharged its cargoes. So, all the cargo tanks were basically empty with the exception of residual fuel and what was sticking to the structures and the vapors within the tank. That is one that's the most potentially dangerous if you get the right amount of oxygen in. By the way, you have to have the right fuel air mixture. If it's too rich, you can't light it. If it's too lean, you can't light it. Now, the ship was getting ready to depart. Having offloaded its cargo, now had to ballast, bring in saltwater ballast into ballast tanks. Their ballast tanks were separate from the fuel tanks. The large pumps fill them up very quickly. They're empty to start with, so you're expelling the air out of them. It happened that there were ballast tanks right under the wings of the bridge. The deck house had ventilation fans drawing air in, drawing fumes in. Electric motor spark, bingo. But let's get back to how it happened. The venting system on a tanker, on this type of tanker, grade A tanker, was a collection of vent pipes that ran on the deck and up the mast, high up, connected to all the tanks so the tanks could breathe. When you put a liquid in, you got to push the air out, and vice versa. As you empty the liquid, it's got to be able to draw air in. So, you now have the tanks in this situation. What we found

was this vent piping is one of the signs you hardly ever would look at on a ship during our

normal inspection. By the way, we did not inspect foreign tankers in those days. I would start that program, first several programs I started under again, the unique authority of the captain of the port is going to make his own rules ahead of federal rules. The vent piping is often wet and exposed the corrosion. It only gets painted on the outside, and most corrossions on the bottom. But turned out we found identified from the wreckage of vent piping with holes in it on the bottom which were right where it went up the mast, which was right near the deck house ventilation room with the fans running above the tank. It was being filled with ballast, water going in, pushing the fumes out. The ventilation fan, drawing the fumes in. Apparently, electric spark in a motor, ordinary motor, ignites the fumes goes out through the opening, and there's a vent piping with a hole in it, which has nothing but vapor in it. This is in the front of the ship, near the front of the ship. But the explosion occurs in the back of the ship. Our deduction was the air, the vapor mixture was at the right combustibile range where spark flame went through the vent piping, this large piping all the way back the length of the ship. It entered in the aftermost fuel tank, or cargo tank, where it went bang. Then the deck started ripping up like a sardine can from the back, slowly going forward – not slowly, fast going forward. This is evidenced in the wreckage that was below the water. The bulkheads were all this is how we identified where it occurred, where the bulkheads underwater were all this way blown out. So, you know the explosion was there, and right above it was where the deck was, and it was the first thing that went up. So, the whole darn deck, the whole length of the ship with the deck house on top of it, went flying through the air like a frisbee because this riveted crack arresters on the side of the ship, which in effect became like a zipper and enabled the whole dog on the deck for the chip to peel off, like peeling a banana.

MS: Okay. We understand it now.

[end of transcript]