

Narrator: Tom Chauvin (TC)

Company Affiliations: Port Arthur Shipyards (Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company Ltd.), United Steelworkers Union (USW)

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Summary: Shipbuilder and president of the local United Steelworkers Union Tom Chauvin discusses the major ship repair and shipbuilding operations at Port Arthur Shipyards from when he first started working in the 1960s. He details the strenuous and often dangerous work conditions, as well as the rough-and-tough character of his colleagues. Other topics discussed include the variety of trades in the shipyards, workplace alcohol use, and unique job orders. Chauvin then details his ascent to president of the local United Steelworkers Union, and his focus on workplace health and safety. He discusses several incidents dealing with management, and some workplace accidents that resulted in fatalities.

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Content Warning: *This interview contains graphic description of workplace accidents that some readers may find disturbing.*

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: Well, it's a pleasure to be here with you this afternoon, Tom. Perhaps we can start by you giving your name for the record on the tape and then describing how you came to work at Port Arthur Shipyards, where you put in a good many years?
TC: Ok, well my name is Tom Chauvin. My full name is Thomas Lewis Chauvin. I entered a architectural drafting course back in 1965, and I went looking for work as an architectural draftsman, believe it or not. I went to different places. I went to Timberjack trying to get in the office as a tracer to start out. Like this was mechanical engineering, but I knew that too, so I tried to get in there. I knew how to design buildings, had all the books and everything. And I couldn't get a job anywhere, so I went down to the, at that time it was called Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company Limited. And I went into the personnel office, and I talked to the guy there.

And he says, “Well.” I tried to get into the engineering department as a tracer starting off. He said, “Well, we don’t have any work for you right now for that.” I says, “Well, I don’t care what it is. I don’t care what kind of work you got.” I says, “Just--.” I told them what my qualifications were--. I knew how to read prints and everything. I says, “I don’t care what it is.” I says, “You just phone me up.”

So a short period after that, they did phone me up, and that was in the fall of 1966. I went down there. I didn’t know what to expect. They told me, he says, “You’ll be working with the ship fitters in the punch shed.” He told me. I didn’t know what the heck that was. I went down there anyway. So I walked down there and in those days, you didn’t punch in. You used to come to the office, and there was a little niche in the main office and there was a guy standing there. And as you came in, you told him what your number was, and he gave you a brass coin with your number on it. You had to carry that around with you all day. That was the punch-clock at that time, see. Then at the end of the day, you came out, you threw the brass coin in another box on the other side of the parking thing, and they used to pick it up. And then they knew who was there and who wasn’t there all the time just from that.

I should mention on payday—I’ll mention that now that before I get into what happened—on payday, you used to come in, you’d get your coin, and they used to give you a piece of paper. You had to carry that around with you. At the end of the day, you had to sign that piece of paper acknowledging that you got your pay. You had to carry that with you. And about 4:30, you used to line up in your shop, and three people used to come down from the office. One was money manager—he had a big pile of paycheques—and there was a security guard. Used to have a .38 stuck in his belt. We used to pay cash back then. So [laughing] you would sign the little sheet, give that guy the sheet, and he would give you your money. And the guy was standing there all the time. And the guy wasn’t very big, he was just--. He looked like, I don’t know, about that big, but he had this big gun stuck in his belt thing.

EE: Maybe a bit over five feet tall might--?

TC: Just a little bit, yeah. Not much more than that.

EE: Packing the iron!

[Laughing]

TC: Yeah. I can’t remember his name now. I think it was Forbes. Can’t be sure. I think it was Forbes. But anyway, it was kind of humorous because we had a rough crowd down there. Anyway, right after that, it was just like a cloud of dust because everybody in that place just ran up the road there. Once it used to be a bunch of whistles blowing all the time, and on the final whistle, they just

ran up that road with that cash in your hand. And when you got to the parking lot, all our wives were waiting up there for them [Laughs] so they couldn't get up to the drinking places, eh? [Laughs] It was kind of funny, actually.

But anyway, that's how it started out there. So anyway, I walked down there. I went to the punch shed as I was told to do. I walked in there, and it was fairly chilly at that time. This was in the fall. I had warm clothes and everything. I had mitts. And the guy says, "Well, you're going to be working with that guy over there, Erwin Bennett." "Erwin Bennett?" I said. "Yeah," he says. He says, "He's got a brother. He owns Bennett's Bakery." I says, "Oh, oh." I says, "That's right. I remember that name." He says, "Well, you'll be working with him." He says, "You just go over there, and he'll tell you what you have to do." So at that time, we had two ships in the dock. There was one on the dock and one on the waterfront. One was the *Lake Winnipeg* and the other one was the--. Uh, I can't think of the name of it now. But we had to replace the whole double bottoms on it.

EE: Despite the fact that it was the Shipbuilding Company, most of the work that was done there was ship repair?

[0:05:03]

TC: Most of it was. They did build quite a few ships there, but that was before I got there.

EE: Yeah, in earlier days. Yes, of course.

TC: Yeah. Oh, yeah. All day.

EE: But when you were there it was mostly ship repair?

TC: Yeah.

EE: The two main places were the drydock and then where you tied up on the docks on the side there?

TC: Yeah. That's where they did most of the repair work. But the heavy, heavy repair work was done in the drydock.

EE: And so if you were replacing the bottom--?

TC: Oh, it was quite a place. But it was cold in the wintertime. They used to, when you worked in the shop, we made all these big panels up for the double bottoms. And it was hard work. You had to swing a sledgehammer all day. The fitter used to--. The guy I

was working with--. At that time there was a three-man gang. There was a shipfitter, a helper, and a welder-tacker. The fitter would set this thing up where he wanted it, and he'd put a square on it or whatever, and the helper would hold it there and the welder would tack weld it in place. That's the way they used to work--three-man gang. Anyway, that was quite a job that. It was all winter. And then they used to have all air tools. All the tools were air tools there. There was very few electrical tools except for lightbulbs, like electric things for light extensions. All the major tools were air-run.

EE: Compressed air, mmhmm.

TC: They had two big boilers over in the powerhouse that supplied all the heat. Our shop wasn't heated. All the other shops were. They had steam heat going through them. Our shop was just like a big shed. You had to dress warm. But for heat, you used to have these extra heavy pipes with a connection on the bottom and an airline running into it. They used to throw some kindling in there to get it started, and then you used to throw coke in there. And if you got cold--. We used to have these, maybe about ten of them in the shop in different areas, so you could warm your hands up. You'd warm in front of that thing as you were working because it was fairly cold in the wintertime. Sometimes it got--. Well, I was there a few times--. They never sent anybody home until about 35 below, and 35 below is 0 Fahrenheit. They sent us home because everything--. You couldn't do anything. Because once you did something, the tack welds would shrink so fast, everything would crack and snap. So, they had to send us home.

But over the years, then we got into riveting. There was still riveting at that time. That was quite interesting that. They had a--. It's a very, very work-intensive thing. The first thing you did when you went out there, you worked with a welder, and the welder used to use a torch with a big tip on it. And you'd heat the bottom of the rivet red-hot, and he'd hit it with a little bit of oxygen, and it would blow the rivet out. That's what we used to calling blowing rivet. This one we were repairing them. Blow the rivets out. Originally, they were telling me they used to pay him a nickel a rivet back in the old days during the Second World War for doing that.

EE: This was popping the rivets to get the old steel off?

TC: Yeah, they used to call it blowing the rivets out.

EE: Blowing the rivets.

TC: Like I said, it was a three-man gang. So, there would be one guy on the outside, and the welder would blow the rivet from the outside, and then there would be a fitter and a helper there. And the fitter would stick a hammer into that hole there—that was shaped to fit inside the hole—and hold it, and then the helper would hit it with a sledgehammer to knock the rivets out. That's how

they used to knock the rivets out of the holes when they were repairing it. They were taking that all apart. So they did that. They took all the rivets out, dropped the plate, dropped all the angle irons out. Everything was connected with rivets on those things.

And then when they put it back together, they had to do it opposite, of course. They'd make a big frame, and they used to use the drawings a lot to check where the holes would be when they put the new frames in, because it was pretty hard to check where they would be. They knew from the drawings how to space them. They put a new one frame in, one at a time like that, and then they used to get this thing they used to call a template made out of basswood. Depending on the size of the hole they had to fill, they'd make a template maybe about two inches short all the way around out of basswood. Some of them were quite huge, so you had to have ten guys carry them out to the boat and lower them down the side with ropes. And then you used to pin it into place, used to call them hairpins. They were just a big pin with a round end on it and two things, and you used to shove it onto the side of the basswood onto the whole plate to hold it in place. And they did that on the frames too.

EE: Now was this on the outside of the ship?

TC: On the outside of the boat, yeah.

EE: On the outside of it? I see.

TC: On the outside of the frames. And the fitter would go inside—they used to call them shell platers, used to make the plates up—he'd go on the inside of the boat with a pencil, and he'd mark all the holes with a pencil. And then he had what he'd call a space-stick, and he went around the outside with that space-stick marking onto the basswood the shape of the panel all the way around with that. That's how they used to do it.

[0:10:02]

And then once that was all done-- . It usually would take a little while because some of them were 30 feet long. So, then we had to carry it back into the shop, and he would put it on a big plate, and he would centre punch all the areas that he'd marked, all the holes he'd marked. He'd centre punch everything, and he'd snap some lines on her with a chalk line for the length and width of the plate. They would burn the plate. And then they had this big machine. They used to put the plate onto this carriage on this machine, was run by levers and pedals. And, naturally, all the holes that had to be punched in there, centre punched quite deeply. Used to have to use a hammer with a centre punch on it and a sledgexhammer to make them deep enough so that the punch of the press would get inside it. So anyway, this thing was on a carriage. The guy could move these levers around, pedals, so the centre punch mark would go right under the punch and then he'd hit a pedal and it would punch a hole in it. So that took a little while to do that.

Once that was done, they brought it onto the table again, and they had a big countersink. You had to countersink the holes for the heads of the rivets.

EE: Sure. Because the end result has to be smooth.

TC: Yeah. Well, they had to countersink the outside so that when the rivet went in there, the head would fill in that hole and hold it in place there.

EE: And all of this is done by force? By, was it compressed air?

TC: Oh, yeah. Yeah, you had one or two guys pushing down the countersink to do all those holes.

EE: What thickness was the plate you were working with?

TC: Well, depending on the area of the boat it varied from—with those riveted jobs—it varied from--. Depending on, well, it's quite a few different things. It would vary the thickness of the plate depending on how big the boat was and how old it was. It varied from five-eighths to one inch thick.

EE: Steel plate?

TC: Yep. The heaviest part, naturally, the heaviest plates would be on the bottom.

EE: Right.

TC: And the thinner ones would be on the sides.

EE: The plates that you were working with, or the steel, would come in in sheets?

TC: Oh, yeah. Big sheets.

EE: What size?

TC: Oh, 40 feet long at least. Yeah, 40-foot-long sheets.

EE: Brought in by ship or by--?

TC: Well, they used to bring it in by rail.

EE: By rail.

TC: Yeah. That whole place was connected by the rail line all the way through to each shop. There was tracks going in and out of all the buildings.

EE: Yeah. So you're punching holes and then it's got to be cut to size? Anyway, I interrupted.

TC: Yeah, they cut it to size. Well, that wasn't the half of it though. Then they'd bring it back out, and naturally they had all the frames in place already and tack welded in. Well, they couldn't tack weld it, they used to bolt them up. They'd bolt them up onto brackets from inside the boat, the bottom and the top, and then there'd be all the holes in the frames coming down. The old plate at the top part of it would have a series of holes running across it too, but they would go in sort of like a saw pattern like this along the top. Well, that's the way the holes had to be on the top of the plate that you're putting back too. All the other holes had to line up pretty close to the holes on the frames and everything else.

EE: Sure.

TC: So anyway, they'd lift that up, they'd sort of hold it in place with the crane, and then the helper would go inside with bolts. And he used to stick a bolt in every second hole on the frames, and they'd criss-cross this way along the top, like a snake across the top of the plate with these bolts. And the fitter would be on the outside, and he'd tighten up all the bolts. He'd have to put some washers on there and tighten it up. And the helper would be on the inside with a spud wrench holding the thing from spinning around. So you'd tighten it up so that every second hole had a bolt in it. It was tight as you could get it. Then the helper used to come outside, and then the fitter and the helper used to get a big air machine. It was quite heavy. It weighed, oh jeez, about 50 pounds I'd guess. It had a handle on one side for on and off, and you put a big reamer in it. Ridge reamer. He has to ream each hole to make sure each hole wasn't offset or anything. You had to make it so it went straight all the way though. We had to ream each one of these holes, every one of them had to be reamed. And then that went back, and then the riveters came.

And there was one guy on the inside with a machine that had a--. He was a backer-up--. A bucker-upper they used to call him, and he had an air machine. And then on the outside, there was the riveter, of course, with the riveting gun, but there was two different

ways of heating the rivets at that time when I started there. They used to use the small coke ovens, and then if they were in a real hurry, they had an electric machine. They used to heat them up electrically too. They had an air system for getting the rivets inside the holes. We used to call them drop holes for working with. You'd have air lines going in there, plus there were holes there for shooting the rivets in. And they had a little machine like you used to see at Eaton's there. Do you remember the old days those pneumatic machines?

[0:15:04]

EE: Oh, yes. The pneumatic.

TC: Well, that's how this used to run. The guy heating the rivets would grab one of those things out of there, and he'd put it in the thing. *P-shoo!* It'd go shooting inside and it would be the helper inside that had a cup. He'd get it in the cup, and he'd put a pair of tongs up and he'd stick it in the hole. Then the bucker-upper turns the machine on. When you turn the machine on, it would start riveting the square head into the thing. And then the telescopic thing would run back and hit a frame. So, it stayed like that, and he just kept on pushing that button like that. And it would *duh-duh-duh-duh-duh*. And then on the outside, the riveter would start riveting on the outside with his gun.

EE: Because he'd have to hold it against the ship?

TC: That's right, hold it in safe so it wouldn't come back.

EE: Right.

TC: So that's what happened. The riveter would go on the outside until it got to the point where the head fit exactly into the die. And it'd cool off, and he'd stop. Another rivet would go through. Just steady like that all day long. Used to go through lunchtime sometimes to get it done on time. Sometimes they didn't, but sometimes they did. They told me in the old days that when they were buildings all those warships or when they had to get something done fast, they said lots of the guys who had to go to the washroom and sometimes they couldn't make it. [Laughs] So they had to go in their pants. But that's what happened in those days. That was a pretty rough place, eh?

EE: How wide would one of these rivets be?

TC: Well, depending on the thickness of the plate, that would be the determination of the diameter of the shaft of the rivet.

EE: It could be--.

TC: The head of the rivet would be quite big.

EE: Yeah, larger lip. So, the rivet could be as large as about an inch across to use the old Imperial system?

TC: The diameter of the shaft of the rivets varied, but depending on--. On that one there, I would say, oh jeez, at least maybe an inch and a half when you were finished. At least an inch and a half. She'd be at least that big. Inch and a half, two inches across after we're done.

EE: Of course, it's holding a big steel plate on the ship, isn't it?

TC: Yeah, well that's how they used to rivet them anyway.

EE: Why were the rivets heated? Because they'd expand if they were heated, would they not?

TC: Well, they had to get them red-hot because it was part of the riveting process. See, I forgot to mention one thing. Before they put those plates up, they used to coat all the frames with red lead, and they used to put red lead wherever the other plate had to lap onto it, where the holes were. Used to put red lead across there. And that was put across there as a gasket. So once that dried, it created a gasket. And you had to do that because there was always imperfections in the plate and in the frames. And in order to get it watertight, you had to have some kind of seal there. So that was the gasket material, red lead. Anyway.

EE: The plates would overlap?

TC: At certain areas, yeah.

EE: At certain areas. They weren't butting up against the next one, but overlapped?

TC: Only on the sides they were butted up because they had to butt them up there, and that's where the welds were. But at one time they didn't even do that there. But by the time I got there, they actually started welding the butts. Before that everything was riveted. They had to overlap it a certain way to make sure all the rivets--. It's hard to explain it on tape. You'd have to have a drawing to see it.

EE: Yes. In the old wooden ship days, they talked about Carvel-built and Clinker-built, have you ever heard those terms before? Carvel and Clinker?

TC: Well, those are terms that came from shipwrights.

EE: Yes, they did indeed.

TC: They had shipwrights there, as a matter of fact. Well, when I started there in my department, there was shipwrights, stage builders, the riggers, and the shipfitters, and the riveters, and the chippers. Riveters and chippers were interchangeable. When they weren't riveting, they were chipping. The chipper would chip off welds that they didn't want around there with a chisel and almost the same as a riveting gun, but smaller. Whenever a plate was welded up or a frame was welded up, in those days they had to gouge them out. The chipper used to V it out with a thing. He had a special tool that he would V this out. Once it was welded on one side, he'd V the other side so they could weld it up, so it had close to perfect penetration for the welder. He used to do all of that back then. So that was a very, very work-intensive place. There was hundreds of guys there. When I started there, there was 500 people on the seniority list.

EE: Really?

TC: Yeah. That was back in '66. So that's pretty well how they did the riveting. It didn't vary much, except thickness of the plate or the size of the rivets.

EE: Because the riveting of ship hulls would be the original form when they went to iron and steel ships. It was all done by rivet.

TC: Yeah. Yeah.

EE: And how long did that continue? You were still working on rivet ships, I suppose, into--?

[0:20:01]

TC: Oh, jeez. Well, that--. See actually, most people don't even know that the first time they started riveting was probably back in the Civil War. That's when they first started making ironclad ships.

EE: Well, maybe in England even earlier.

TC: Yeah, even earlier than that. But they used to use--. They never had pneumatic tools at that time, air-run tools. So, they used to have to use hammers, sledgehammers. It would be somebody standing behind that rivet that was put in there, holding it in there with a long pole or something—with a piece of steel in it so it wouldn't burn—and then the other guy would use a sledgehammer to flatten the head of the rivet out on the outside. That's the way they originally started doing it.

EE: Yeah. I don't know whether the heating you described, how it was done, the reason for it. When it--?

TC: Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you that. Ok.

EE: When it cooled, it would shrink, would it not, a little bit?

TC: Well, with the welded seam what would happen--. The rivet, when it was heated, would expand a little bit bigger than the hole it was going into. Now when they riveted it, it would completely fill that hole. Completely. Because all the preparation had already been done. So any imperfections, any little bit of idiosyncrasies had been done when the reaming had taken care of that so that the holes lined up and that went in there. And then when he riveted it in there, all the metal compressed inside that hole completely. So then when it cooled off, it shrank, and it pulled everything extremely tight together so it was watertight. That was the reason why they had to do that.

EE: So, the shrinking as far as the length is concerned, sort of the outside and the flattening on the inside, is tightening it up then?

TC: Yeah, that's right. It would tighten the whole thing up so it was watertight because they had that red lead seal on the inside.

EE: Sure.

TC: That's why they had to have it red-hot. But they use cold rivets now too. I don't know if you ever heard of those, but they do have them. They run on a little bit different principle. I've seen guys use them, but I haven't done it. I don't rivet. It's sort of like a big bolt that has phony threads on it, and then you sort of just use a machine that just pushes a head on there, and it tightens it up. But I don't think it would be as good as the old method because it wouldn't completely fill that hole in with that red-hot steel, and that was the purpose of it. There was always imperfections, and sometimes the holes would be a little off, so you had to fill that in with red-hot steel. If you didn't, it would leak. It would go past the hole and leak.

EE: So, you were able to do all of this work using the original framing of the ship inside, I suppose.

TC: Yeah. You worked off the original framing, yeah.

EE: Right. And rarely--. Although the ship had, say, run aground, I suppose the bottom of the frame could be dented? Could be bent? Or did that rarely happen?

TC: Oh, well, that happened lots. Lots of the frames were bent in terribly. You wouldn't--. Lots of times what they had to do--. They had drawings, of course, so they knew what the radius of the frames was and everything from one area, from one piece of the ship to the other, because it changes constantly from the middle of the ship to the front, and then it changes to the back because of different radiuses of the frames. But they had that, but sometimes—a lot of times—they would go to the other side of the ship to pick it up.

EE: Because it was duplicate. Mirror image.

TC: Yeah. So, then they would use that to pick up--. And a lot of times, they used to bring the old frames and everything into the shop, pick up stuff off of that, because it was a lot easier than trying to pick it off something else. But--.

EE: So, this is where pattern makers would come in? I mean, your original training could have been useful there. [Laughs]

TC: Oh, yeah. Well, I did--. That's what they used to call that. They had a pattern-maker shop upstairs.

EE: I've been in it, actually, so that's why I'm asking.

TC: Yeah, well that was a--. But a shell-plater was sort of a--. Well, he was a pattern maker, but he made the patterns right from the ship. A normal pattern maker would make patterns off of drawings of specific parts of the ship and make them out of basswood so that when you're building something brand new, you use these patterns. You just slapped them on a plate, the centre points and everything, marked it, and they would cut according to that pattern for the new ship. That was the pattern maker's job, was mostly new stuff. He never fooled around with the repair.

EE: The work that you were doing in repairing these ships was on ships that had been built mostly in other shipyards, though?

TC: Oh, yeah. But we had one or two that were built there.

EE: Yes, of course, but I'm thinking--.

TC: I think the last one they built in it, the last real lake ship they built there in the Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company was the *Imperial Redwater*. And then they did build--. That was in '51 or '52. But they did build some minesweepers—aluminum minesweepers—there in the '50s. Most people don't know that, but there was some built there. But they didn't them in the dock. They'd built them on one side of the dock and then pushed them in the water after. Those were built. And then they built, of course, they built the *Alexander Henry* there, '56. But that was all.

[0:25:06]

EE: And you built half the *Aird*? The *John Aird*, *J.B. Aird*? Or *Sir John Aird*.

TC: Yeah, that was the bulb. They built the bulb on that. They did that a few times to different boats.

EE: With the stern being built at Collingwood, which was the sister yard.

TC: Yeah.

EE: Were many of the ships built at Collingwood?

TC: Quite a few of them were built there, but there was also quite a few built at Davie's in Lauzon and--.

EE: In Quebec?

TC: Oh, yeah. There was quite a few built in Quebec.

EE: Did Port Weller build?

TC: Uh, yeah. They built too. Port Weller built there too. But Collingwood was the main building shipyard in Ontario at the time. I think that was a two--. And, of course, after 1956 when they built the *Alexander Henry* here, they didn't really build a real laker after that. But they did build ferry boats and barges and things like that up until the '70s.

EE: I was asking partly in terms of the patterns or the drawings of the ships. Were they obtained from these other shipyards where the ship had been built? Or did the owners buy them so that the shipping line would be able to provide them to you?

TC: Well, I think lots of times lots of the ships were basically the same except for differences that the owners wanted.

EE: Sure. But the hulls would be standard?

TC: Pretty well. There was minor differences inside to save weight or something. But probably the best pattern they ever had was probably from the '50s and '60s because it was built to be repaired. Everything was set up to repair it. It was easy to get in, as far as working on it was, because they had the double side tanks and everything, but there was manholes all over the place to get in and out. And they had walkways inside so you could walk, you know, when you had to repair things. So that type of ship was a lot easier to work to repair. The ones they have now are horrendous. It's really terrible to try and fix them inside. It takes way longer to fix them.

EE: Are they really?

TC: Yeah. Well they were, like I said, the other ones were built to be repaired. They knew they had to repair them. But the old, riveted ships were probably built to last 80 years because in those days they thought that was the standard for everything, you know? That's the way they made them. And they still, the Americans still use some of theirs. They've got lots of riveted ships down there. They're so well made that as long as you paint them and take care of them, they'll last you 80, 90 years.

EE: Well, if you can replace the plates where they need to be replaced.

TC: Oh, yeah. That's easy to do.

EE: So the plates themselves, where I didn't ask the thickness of the plate before—or did I? How thick would the side of the ship be?

TC: Most cases, the side of the ship would be three-quarters.

EE: Three quarters of an inch of steel?

TC: Yeah.

EE: And the hull was--?

TC: Well, that would vary depending on--.

EE: Or the bottom of the hull, I would say.

TC: That would vary depending on the ship, but it would go from three-quarters to one inch. Because the sides would come up and then when you got to the top, they had what they called the spar deck. It was extremely heavy plate there, about an inch and a half, but it wasn't all the way across the deck. Most people think it is, but it doesn't. It just goes to the edge of the hatches, and then there's a very, very thin plate—only about three-eighths of an inch thick—that goes across in between the hatches. Real, real thin plate. Half-inch, yeah. They try to save weight that way. And it's still strong because it's sort of like a big circle, like a big ring around the outside.

EE: Sure. It would provide rigidity at the top for it.

TC: Oh, yeah, it does. But they save weight. They can't have that going all the way across or they'd lose a lot of cargo.

EE: There was scheduling in terms of the repair work to be done. A ship was inspected every--?

TC: Well, in those years, they had to do it every three years with three inspections.

EE: Every three years?

TC: Every three years they had to come in. They had to have the thickness of the hull tested for thickness, and they had to check the bearings and everything in the tail shaft and all that stuff. They had to check the wheel—well, they call it the propeller—we used to call it the wheel. Check the propeller and check the rudder, see if it was leaking or if it was working properly. All that had to be inspected every three years.

EE: Was this done by government inspectors or--? Department of Transport?

TC: Well, there's three sets of inspectors that came in to check this, and they usually came in together. Sometimes the owner would send his own down first to see what the extent of the damage was. But then you'd have Lloyd's from the insurance company and

then the Federal inspector and the company inspector. They would go through the whole ship and decide what they wanted fixed. If it was an insurance job, usually there was no quibbling, eh? They just wanted it done right and that was it. But if it wasn't insurance and the company had to pay for it, well then they start picking and, "Well, that's too--. Ooh ooh!" [Laughs] You know?

[0:30:03]

But originally, I should mention here, they would go through, and they would say, "Well, fix that whole area there." And then somebody like me—like I was a shipfitter—I'd have to go in there with a straightedge of some kind. I'd put the straightedge wherever it was crooked. As soon as it got crooked, I'd stop. I'd put a mark there. I'd put a line there and mark out all the crumpled area that had to be cut out. Same thing with the frames, I'd mark it myself. Now, it's completely different. The inspectors go in there and they mark a thing. "Two feet. I want that out." They decide how much is coming out, and that's what's changed over the years.

EE: Would you say that's an improvement in the regulation?

TC: Oh, no. No. Not for the ship owner or the people that repair it. It's an improvement for the insurance company. That's what it is.

EE: They're minimizing the cost?

TC: That's right. That's right. Well, in some cases, it's the shipowner too because if he has to pay for it--. If there's no insurance on this and he has to pay for it himself, it minimizes his cost. But as long as the insurance and the government inspectors agree with the company inspector—let him do what he wants—well then, that's as far as you can go. It's just like working and getting your car repaired. You go into a car repair shop, and you know what's the matter with it, and you say, "I want that fixed and this fixed and that fixed. And that's all I want fixed." And they say, "Ok. But there might be some other stuff though." "Well, let me know what that is, and I'll let you know if I want it fixed or not." And it worked exactly the same thing. It's exactly the same. You don't just bring it in and do whatever you want. You've got to do what they tell you. Yeah.

EE: Sure. On the ships that you've described being repaired, the welders seem assistants. They seem to be primarily there to sort of tack it in place or whatever, but the riveting is what counts. Did welding take over at some point in terms of--?

TC: Well, welding--. When I started there, like I said, they were still riveting, but that's only because there was still riveted boats. But there was a lot weld--. It was mostly welding when I got there. But the riveted boats would come in and you'd still need

riveting on it, but it was mainly welding. I was talking about that three-man gang, well that was--. It would be the shipfitter, a helper, and what was known as a welder-tacker. Those guys would put the pieces in. But at that time, they used to have a guy that just used to burn the old stuff out. That's all he did was burn with a torch all day long.

EE: Cut a piece out?

TC: Yeah. If there was any trimming that needed to be done, he'd cut it for you. And he'd burn the old pieces out and trim the new stuff before it went in and everything like that. That's all those guys did.

EE: It was acetylene welding?

TC: Oxyacetylene torch, yeah. So then once you got the pieces in--. Normally when you went inside the boat, the tacker-welder had to cut some pieces too because the guy on the outside doing all the burning on the plate and everything, he couldn't come in there and jump back and forth. So naturally the tacker had to do some burning too. So, the helper would help the welder and the fitter. He would help pull the lines around and bring all the tools around and everything else. So it was pretty efficient that way. In my estimation, it was probably faster than it is now because now we don't have helpers anymore. We have to do everything ourselves now, so it's a lot tougher.

EE: Well, I daresay.

TC: But there was lots of welding. Once that was done, the regular welders would be called in there, and they would start welding it up by themselves. Everything was in place, all tacked into place, so they'd start doing--. They'd have them sometimes three shifts, just welding.

EE: Once a plate was riveted into place, then it was welded around it as well?

TC: Just the butts.

EE: Just the butts.

TC: Just the butts, like on the vertical butts were welded.

EE: The ends of it?

TC: Yeah. But all the--. I mentioned, all welding now. Not just on the riveted plates. But there was connections that still had to be welded because when you took a small piece out of something, sometimes you couldn't rivet it in. You had to weld it back in. Small piece on the riveted stuff. But newer boats--. I think they were riveting up until about, let me see now, about '65. And the way they did it was there was a slow progression away from it. See, they found out during the Second World War that—when they were experimenting with this—that some things didn't have to be riveted. They were trying to get away from riveting because it was really, really work intensive and it took longer to do.

So they slowly started getting rid of the rivets. What they did was they eliminated all rivets except for a bottom seam along the bottom, from the bilge up about eight feet. There was a riveted seam there. And then when you got up to the deck, what they called a tumblehome, which is the side of the ship, was welded to a large, large angle iron--. I mean riveted to a large, large angle iron, and that in turn was riveted to the spar deck. Then all the hatches—around the outside of the hatches there's an angle iron around them—that was all riveted.

[0:35:28]

EE: The spar deck would lie on the angle iron or be fastened?

TC: The hatches would rest on the light spar deck, the three-eighth inch spar deck, and that would be riveted right to there.

EE: But I was thinking around--.

TC: The angle iron--.

EE: The outside of it.

TC: Yeah. The angle iron would be attached to the hatch and then to the deck. So there was rivets going into the hatch and into the deck all the way around.

EE: This would be, I suppose, discovered building all those liberty ships, would it? They discovered--.

TC: Oh, they were--.

EE: They discovered what they could get away with without riveting?

TC: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, I knew some of the older fitters. When I started, I started with the older fitters. When I started, they were in their forties and thirties and fifties, you know? So they'd seen all this, and they said, "Well, we were doing a lot of fitting on the--." Like once they launched the boat into--. They used to do side launches there. The actual ships were built beside the dock. They had building berths on each side of the dock. They could build four ships at a time, four of those destroyers or minesweepers at a time. And then they were built on big timbers.

Then when they were going to launch it, there used to be a wooden railway on one side. They had to dismantle all that. The whole thing was connected to chains. There would be big, huge chains connected at each end of the boat. They were connected to ropes, big hawser ropes that were splayed out, like they were splayed out over blocks. And once they--. They used to use the whole, just about everybody in the shipyard would drive wooden wedges under these beams to push it up in the air so it was off the blocks it was sitting on. And then everybody would get out of the road, and it was one guy on each end of the boat with a big axe because the rope was splayed over the block. The foreman would blow a whistle and they'd both swing the axe at the same time, hit this rope, and cut it. And it would slide into the dock, into the dock full of water. A matter of fact, sometimes they went so violently that, well, they had to board all the windows up in the carpenter's shop so they wouldn't blow all the windows out—the wave wouldn't blow them all out. But they used to launch it both ways, from right side end to left side. They had two building boat.

But my dad was telling me—like he used to deliver bread down there—and he says, "That place was lit up all night long." He says, "You used to hear riveting guns going all the time." Steady all night long when they were building those destroyers and minesweepers and everything, eh? Pounding and riveting and grinding. That's all you heard there.

EE: So, Current River could be a nice place to sleep [laughing] in those days?

TC: Well, I don't know. I don't know. Well, I don't know if they got much sleep back then. But there's another interesting thing I should mention about that, is that when I started there, they used to have these little shacks on the outside, and they had heaters in them. They used to call them "rod shacks". Welders used to put their rods in there to keep them warm, and they'd have drawings in there in case you wanted to look in and see what part of the ship or whatever. There was a big table there with drawings there and then there was rods stored in heated containers to keep them from getting moisture in them. Well, I thought that's what they were for. And they were built on skids so you could drag them around in the wintertime, eh? Built on log skids so you could drag them around in wintertime. And I couldn't figure, "What the heck?" I never really thought about it. And there was lifting lugs attached to them so you could lift it up with a crane and everything. You could put them wherever you wanted. There was about ten of them there.

I didn't find out until about two or three years after that when they were actually made. A guy said, "Oh, that was built during the wars." He said, "Those were guard shacks." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "They used to have soldiers in there with rifles in those shacks watching everybody all the time so nobody would sabotage anything or anything like that." I said, "Holy jeez!" He says, "Yeah. That's the truth." Sometimes they'd walk around, but most of the times they stayed in the shack and looked out the window and make sure nobody's trying to steal anything or doing anything that shouldn't be done. There was about 1,500 people working there then.

EE: There was that kind of concern about the quality of the workforce and the job being done, eh? [Laughing]

TC: Well, they had to keep an eye on them because they kind of--. Well, I should just mention sort of a funny thing that I'll say here anyway because it was a funny thing. Like we had a manager named Don Page there. He was a good manager, but he was a little bit off the wall. Everybody liked him, but like I said, he was still a little bit off the wall. He used to have this red golfcart parked up at the office. And he'd come tearing off. He's jumping the thing and he'd come tearing down the road into the yard, doing 40 miles an hour on that thing! Tearing just--. Screech up in front of the superintendent's office, jump out of the thing, and run into the thing here. They'd have a meeting in there in the morning, eh? Then he'd jump back into the thing. *Vroom!* Up the road there. Just cloud of dust cloud up there. Back and forth like that.

[0:40:26]

I didn't think much about it. While I was still a little bit green behind the ears, I had to go and see the superintendent at the time who was Bob Gooder. So I went into his office, and there he had his own private office there. Don Page was in there talking to him, and I wasn't trying to intrude or anything or eavesdrop or anything. His door was open, you know. I was just going to bang on the door, but I saw him in there, so I figured I'd better wait. That's the manager talking to the supervisor, I'd better wait outside. So he says, "You know Bob, you've got to watch yourself around here." He says, "Why?" He says, "Well," he says, "You know, most of the people who work here," he says, "they're either drunks, thieves, or murderers." [Laughing]

EE: Now there's a job reference!

TC: That's what he said! And Bob looked at him and he started smiling. So, I didn't think much about it. But I'm just giving you an idea that it was a pretty rough place, you know. There was a lot of things. They had a very high turnover of people there because it was so cold in the wintertime. And naturally they had a lot of heavy drinkers there too, you know. Well, at 12:00 half the place would be empty sometimes, it was that bad.

EE: It was that bad, eh?

TC: Well, it's the conditions. The working conditions were extremely dangerous. When I started, it was extremely dangerous and people used to do things that would make you gasp, you know, just watching them.

EE: Well, I have a sense that health and safety became a real concern of yours, almost an obsession.

TC: Yeah. Yeah, well I didn't really notice much myself to be perfectly honest because I was drinking myself, at the time. When you're drinking, those things don't concern you, believe it or not.

EE: No, you hardly notice them.

TC: You don't even think about it. You just take chances without thinking about it. You're not doing it because you're afraid. You just do it. And it wasn't only until I quit drinking myself that I saw that all this crazy stuff was going on. Like, "What the heck is going on here?" So that's when I tried to make some changes.

EE: Did management support you in--?

TC: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, they did everything. Because we used to have--. Every Christmastime, they'd shut down the whole place around 10:00 just before they sent you home for Christmas. That place was shut down.

EE: Christmas Eve or--?

TC: That was place was shut down at 10:00 and everybody used to bring the bottles out, you know? So when Chris Hibbard got there, I'd quit drinking at that time, and I said, "You've got to do something about this." I said, "I'm scared somebody's going to get hurt." You know, we had people get hurt like this before. Just tripping drunk all over the place. So they went along with it and they banned all of that. No more of that.

EE: Because men were bringing liquor out on the worksite, eh?

TC: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. It was bad.

EE: They'd been doing that for years, I take it.

TC: Yeah, yeah. Well, there's an old story I can tell you about that. I guess it doesn't matter. I just explained it. Maybe half the place would be empty sometimes because guys had bad hangovers. They'd walk out at 12:00. They used to call them "pass-outs." A guy would say, "Give me a pass-out before I pass out!" [Laughing] Yeah. But it was--.

EE: And this would be drinking that morning?

TC: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah.

EE: Not the night before.

TC: Well, you know, you see a lot of those guys--, I'm not trying to make up stories or anything. I know. I worked there. I'd say a lot of them—well, let's say about half of them there—probably had a mickey in the locker, and they'd go take a snort every once in a while if they got cold or whatever. Go back to the job. And as a matter of fact, there was one guy who used to drive the company truck that used to go pick up all the supplies and everything. He used to go. He used to--. They used to give him a couple more dollars to get a couple more bottles. [Laughs] I'm not kidding! It was pretty rough. But it all sort of cleaned up after that. A lot of those guys were gone there, and they retired and whatever and died and such.

EE: Was there any pattern, any characteristic of the workforce that one could describe? Or were they men of all the various backgrounds?

TC: Well, everybody that came there was different, but I would say it wasn't--. The kind of people that came there to work there were, they were kind of rough people. They were rough. I don't mean like--.

EE: Well, it was rough work. Rough, tough work.

TC: Yeah, it was a rough place. It was a rough place to work. It wasn't like working in a library or a church, you know. The language went along with that. Some of the language was pretty rough. You'd talk like that all day long, and that's just the way it was. Because it was a dangerous place, and you'd use that language to try to push the danger out of your mind, you know? I think that's why a lot of people drank too, to get rid of the fear. Because we used to do some terrible things down there without getting hurt. It's scary stuff.

[0:45:06]

EE: I suppose the workforce when you started would in good part have been built up during the war?

TC: Oh, yeah. They had a good crew there. They had a lot of--. I would say they had, when I started, they had the best crew you would have ever had there because all the fitters knew exactly what to do. Everybody knew what to do. You didn't have to tell them. You'd just say, "Well, we've got to do this," and then guys would just get the tools and go out and do it. That was it. The foreman didn't hang around. I didn't have to tell them, "Put that over there. Do this or that or this or that," or nothing, eh? They just got their stuff and went out and did it. Then, well, those guys sort of died off there. A lot of them retired in the '70s and '80s. Right now, those guys are gone.

EE: Sure.

TC: So, I'm what's left from '66 onward. There's a few other people there that are still there that were there from that time, but not too many.

EE: So, you've described your own starting there. Was work hard to find in '66?

TC: Not really, just for me, for my type of work that I was looking for, was probably hard to find. There was all kinds of manual labour out there at that time. You could quit one job one day and go somewhere else and walk in the door somewhere else just like that. There was all kinds of work here. But that's when it was Port Arthur and Fort William, see.

EE: As the welding took over, I suppose skilled welders were wanted at the shipyard, were they?

TC: Oh, yeah. They've always been wanted there. And I would say they produced some of the best welders in the world there. Because if you could weld on some of the junk that comes into that dock and do a good job and make it watertight, you can weld anything. Those guys were all--. They went all over the world, lots of the guys there. They'd become trainers. They'd become licenced in giving tickets, and everything. Just the best. That's all there is. I would say—this is just from my point of view, but—to learn how to do a trade, that was the best place in the world to work, to learn how to do a trade, to learn how to trade, because they had almost every trade there. There was my own trade, which was shipfitting. There was welding. There was the shipwrights—who actually worked with timbers more than anything else when I got there. There was no wooden ships, it was all timber work. There was the scaffold builders. There was sheet metal workers. There was boiler makers. There was the riggers. There was pipefitters. There was operating engineers, carpenters. I think I mentioned riggers. There was machinists, there still is. There's machine fitters,

which is sort of like a millwright. So, there was all kinds of trades, and if you wanted to learn how to work, that was the place to go. Because if you spent maybe four years there, you could go anywhere.

EE: The ship repair could involve the machinery, the engines, and whatnot as well?

TC: Oh, yeah. There was lots of that.

EE: The skills you're describing, of course, would be--.

TC: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, a lot. See the way it works down there, the machine fitter would--. Machine fitter is actually the guy that goes out and, well, they used to help the riggers--. Riggers used to help them. Riggers used to rig everything up and take the pieces off for them, the heavy pieces. But the machine fitters used to go in there and unbolt everything and all of the parts that were connected to the tail shaft and the plumber block—which is a plumbing device to keep the shaft from jumping up and down. The plumber block, and then it's connected to the engines, the engine gears. So it was still work intensive when I got there. Even when the riveting started drifting away, we still needed hundreds of people. The quality of the work was excellent. You couldn't find any better workers there. They knew what they were doing.

Then we got into the, not building the new ships, but conversions. They did a lot of conversions there. I can't remember how many they did, but they converted the flat-deckers into self-unloaders by putting booms on them and all kinds of things down below in the cargo hold. There was a lot of pyramids and sloped plates put in down below to allow the grain to slide down into the areas where the belts would pick it up.

EE: The ships you were working on were pretty well all single hulled, I guess, were they?

TC: No, no. They were all double hulled mostly.

EE: Oh, were they all double hulled?

TC: Well, most of the lakera were double hulled, but there were some older ships that the double hull only went up partway. It was called--. What the heck did they call it now? Normally they call it the side tank. The side tank would go up, and then there would be a small deck over the top of it. Well, that would be what they call the main deck, and that was usually half-inch thick. But a lot of the older ones and the smaller ones had shoulder tanks. It wasn't a complete double side tank.

[0:50:12]

EE: Was it double hulled above the waterline?

TC: Oh, yeah. Usually.

EE: So that was the--. Right. How far apart were the two hulls?

TC: Normally they were quite far apart. Down below, when you got under the double bottom, there were maybe, depending on how they built it, maybe about four, maybe five feet from the double bottom to the bottom of the hull. And then as you go up into the side tanks, they were maybe--. Let me think now. Jeez, they were--. Eh. They were quite wide.

EE: As much as eight and ten feet perhaps?

TC: Yeah, they were quite wide. I'd say about from here to there.

EE: So, there wouldn't be claustrophobia, really, in there, even under--?

TC: Well, if you were under the double bottoms, you could get claustrophobic, I'll tell you [EE laughs] because it wasn't easy crawling through those lightening holes. They had lightening holes.

EE: Of course, that's the other thing. The braces and all.

TC: Yeah. Well, when you crawled through there, there was what they called a floor. They called them floors. I don't know why, but that's what they called them. They were actually vertical, and they ran this way. Say the length of the boat was like that, well, they ran this way. They were stiffeners, and they were maybe half-inch thick. But they had holes cut in them, oblong holes cut in them so you could walk through there and so the water could flow through there. It had those, and those went right through and into the side tank, and they went right under the double bottoms. And there was--. Once the side tank went down, it was separate from the double bottoms under the middle of the boat. When I started, they were separated. You had to get in there through a manhole or you had to cut a hole in the tank top to get in there. Now they're common. They don't have--. You can just go right through there now into the double bottoms.

But then when you got to the middle of the boat, there was what they call the central vertical keel, which was a big heavy steel plate that went right down the middle. It was exactly in the middle of the boat from one end to the other, and that separated--.

EE: From front to back? Bow to stern?

TC: Yeah. That was a supporting plate to keep the boat straight and to prevent it flexing too much.

EE: Sure. Give it rigidity.

TC: It still separates the boat. You have a portside and a starboard side.

EE: Sure. So the cargo would be kept dry, as well, thanks to the double hull?

TC: Yeah. Double hull, yeah.

EE: So, I suppose there would be a certain amount of water bilged down in the bottom under--.

TC: Well, you see those tanks are used mainly to balance the boat. It's not actually to protect the cargo. Because Lake Superior is one of the roughest lakes there is, and they use it to balance the load. So when they load the ship, even when they're loading the ships, sometimes they'll start pumping or increasing water in the tanks—in the side tanks or the double bottoms—to balance it until it's balanced fairly. You've got lights there, a lighting system that shows you exactly when it's balanced port to starboard and stem to stern. They have dials and everything else for that too, but they did have a lighting system so you could see. When one light went off, you knew it was too far over one way or whatever, eh? They used it to balance the boat and balance the load of the boat so it's not sticking up one way or the other. Because it could be pretty tricky if you get big waves and the boat isn't balanced.

EE: Oh, yes. Yeah, you'd want that cargo as--. The ship as balanced as possible both ways.

TC: Yeah. That's right, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And that's why the bulkheads are actually walls between each cargo hold, and they extend right to the side tank. They're watertight. They can't leak any water at all because there's that much pressure in there with the water in there. But if you don't keep them, they call them, those walls watertight, when you're balancing the boat or say you get a leak in one of those walls—you're out on the lake and you get heavy waves—well, the water can go right into another tank, and that would unbalance the boat, and then you're in bad trouble. That's why they had to be perfectly watertight.

So the guys down there knew what they were doing. It's a rough crew. I worked with lots of those guys. I used to hate their guts, to tell you the truth, because it was rough, you know. There was a lot of mouthing off at each other and everything else during the day because it was just the conditions that made it like that. You had to take your anger out at somebody, so you took it out on the guy you work with, or you took it out on what you're working on, one or the other.

EE: This is sort of a contradiction for the layperson outside, to think that the guys who were as rough-hewn as the ones you're describing [laughing] were also highly skilled workmen in the various trades.

TC: They were. I just, I don't know why it was. But they were, yeah. It's that kind of a thing. There was a lot of people that came in there that, I would say, they probably couldn't get a job anywhere else because just their nature. If they tried to work somewhere else, you just couldn't get along with people. It was just the way it is. But there's a lot of people that worked there and they didn't want them, and they went somewhere else. You know, you had to--. But I would say about half of them were pretty rough. Some weren't. Some weren't.

[0:55:27]

EE: Did they come from elsewhere? Come to Thunder Bay to work at the--?

TC: Well, the main crews that used to come down there--. They had a basic crew that was on the seniority list, most of them used to come there in the wintertime. That was actually when most of the work was done.

EE: Yes, it would be, indeed.

TC: They used to come from the elevators and the Seaway terminal. That's where we used to get all our riggers and helpers and everything, from there. They had a main crew there still, couple hundred guys that that was their job. That was their only job. But there was still a big crew that used to come in for the wintertime to do the work, help us do the work, or we never could have got it done.

EE: Yeah. The men that work--.

TC: They came from all different areas. They came from the mills. Some of them got laid off from the mill, they'd come there during the wintertime. Or elevators they'd come there, or Seaway terminal. Wherever. Mines sometimes.

EE: It's one of those odd things, isn't it, that in the grain trade, the symbiotic relationship was sort of seasonal. You could work at the elevators for eight or ten months of the year and then two to four months, find employment at Port Ship in another vital part of the grain trade repairing the ships.

TC: Well, I've talked to a lot of different people, those people that I've--. I didn't even know them, and I just happened to start talking to them. "Oh, yeah. I worked there. I worked there." I would say over half of the people probably in this city have worked there at one time or another. It's not a great place to work. It's still, you know, it's hazardous. You've got to watch what you're doing all the time. But it's a stop-gap place. It's a place—I don't know why it is—but when there's no work anywhere else, there always seems to be work there somehow. And it just saves. It saved a lot of peoples' lives, I'll tell you that. If that place wasn't open when it was open, they probably would have went bankrupt or been on welfare.

EE: Yeah. Getting through the winter.

TC: Oh, yeah. Getting through the winter.

EE: Of course, one of the hard realities of Canadian life through the 19th century into the 20th was the seasonal nature of the economy across Canada. And Port Ship would be a real contradiction to it. Here's a place where most of the work is done in the wintertime.

TC: It's strange, yeah. But yeah, I think the biggest--. Well, they had a big boom with those self-unloaders. They built quite a few of those. And then they did a few bows for different ships, and they built some barges for up north—*Scotty Gall* and *Learmonth*—that they used to ship oil and supplies up to Moosonee with. They built a ferryboat for Wolfe Island. *Wolfe Islander* ferry, they built that. They built some more barges after that and stuff like that, but nothing really big anymore. No real big ship. But they did launch--. I'd been on a couple of launches, that's how I know how they launch them. I was there when they launched the *Scotty Gall* and the *Learmonth*, and they launched the *Wolf Islander* ferry. So it was interesting watching. I mean, you learn a lot of stuff, but you've got to remember it's all bullwork. And most of the time you've got to do it the hard way, whether you want to or not because that's the only way to do it. There's no other way. There's no easy way to do things down there.

EE: Well, that's the way of the shipyards, I suppose, until Cad/Cam came in and laser-cutting and all the rest of it.

TC: Yeah, yeah.

EE: I visited a shipyard in Vancouver back in the '80s, and it was a marvel to behold what could be done.

TC: Oh, yeah.

EE: But, of course, they also need the business, and the big yards just didn't find the business in Canada.

TC: I should give you a little aside to that because you might find it hard to believe but--. The sister shipyard at Port Weller had got a big contract to do a bunch of vessels for a Dutch company. I think it was about seven vessels or something. Well, they got kind of balled up there somehow. I don't know what happened, but they were working the old style. I think they had just too many people on management, and they were sort of trying probably to gouge those people, you know? So it fell apart on them. They had built one, and we were building the front parts of it here for them. And we were two weeks ahead of the thing, and they were, for some reason or other, they were falling behind all the time. I don't know what it was. The way that Dutch company worked, they would give you so much money for, say, one third of the job. You had to complete that before you got any more money, and that's the way they were doing it. Well, Port Weller wasn't [laughs] flying kosher there, and everything fell apart on them. So that was when they went bankrupt that time. That was in 2006.

EE: Oh, that recently?

TC: Yeah. Yeah, they went bankrupt, and they dragged us down with them because they weren't paying the bills. So it got back together, Jack Leitch bought the place. He owns it, so everything seems to be running pretty good now. But it's not the same as it was. I would say it was probably, even though it was more dangerous to work there in the '60s and '70s—it was probably more dangerous—it was a different kind of mental attitude. Like it was almost fun. It was almost fun. But it's not fun anymore. [Laughs] It's not fun anymore.

[1:00:30]

EE: The years that you worked there, it was owned by what? Canadian Engineering and Shipbuilding, which was a subsidiary of Canada Steamship Lines?

TC: Oh, jeez. Well, there was--.

EE: Or am I just picking out one part of the history?

TC: There was about four different owners. Actually, it was owned by the Grey Nuns at first. And then they passed it onto Power Corporation. Power Corporation bought it. That guy from Montreal there. Can't remember the guy's name.

EE: Desmarais?

TC: Might be him, yeah. Paul.

EE: Paul Desmarais.

TC: He got into it. Used to own Kingsway Trucking and all that? He bought it and then it shifted hands--.

EE: He came out of Voyager Bus Lines in Sudbury is what he came out of.

TC: That's right, he owned that too. Yeah. Then he shifted it—somebody shifted it—the ownership shifted to somebody else, and it was owned by three or four. Paul Martin Jr. owned part of it.

EE: This would've been out of the CSL connection, I guess, Canada Steamship Lines.

TC: Yeah. CSL. Well, Paul Martin Jr. was in CSL. And it was CSL and a couple other outfits owned it, and then it shifted hands again until its last time. It's Jack Leitch and Upper Lakes Shipping own it. It's not the same as it was. It's downsized to hardly nothing there now, but they're still excellent at repairing things. They still know how to--. Any kind of mechanical or engineering stuff they can do. They can do any of that kind of stuff. They're still good at all that kind of stuff. Just that the place is smaller now, that's all. It's been downsized. And I was--.

EE: It can be said that it survived to this point. The yard in Collingwood is completely gone. It's turned into residential properties for Torontonians who want to have a place up on Georgian Bay and all the rest of it. I've gone by it, and it's really--. I mean, it's sad if you know what was there. I visited. I had the joy of visiting Collingwood and Port Weller about '87, I guess, when I was critic for shipbuilding in the caucus.

TC: Yeah. Well, I think they still built one or two for Paul Martin at that time.

EE: At Collingwood?

TC: Yeah.

EE: Yes, I think so. Well, the *Aird* was built. Of course, that's earlier. It was the engine house and the stern--.

TC: Stern part of it.

EE: All of that was built out of Collingwood and then brought--. It was floated up here and then put together up here?

TC: Yeah, they floated it up here. We built the bow for it here and attached it here.

EE: Yeah. Now--.

TC: But--. Go ahead.

EE: We've been talking about all the ship repair and all that work. The skills of the tradesmen at what I want to call Port Ship—because that's what it was in those days—enabled the company to do a lot of other work as well. In fact, you mentioned tanks being constructed for Moosonee and so on, did you say?

TC: Oh, those were barges. It was a--.

EE: Oh, barges.

TC: It was sort of a self-propelled barge. It was kind of unique at the time. It had two pieces to it. The front part of it had an icebreaking plow on it, and then there was a notch on the back of that part for a tug to go into. And it would connect at the back of that to push it. And then the other part of the barge could be connected to the back of the tug, so it could push and pull the whole thing wherever it wanted. Or the other back sections could be connected to the front section, and the tug could push the whole thing. That's the way it was built. It was built for this tug to slip right into a notch.

EE: I see.

TC: It was quite a gizmo. It worked fairly well for a while, but I don't know what happened. I think it might have sank up there. This was quite a few years ago.

EE: Was this a design developed here in Thunder Bay?

TC: I don't know for sure. Somebody made it up. I don't know where they made it up. But they'd done all kinds of things there. You wouldn't believe what they've done there over the years. They've shipped stuff--. Well, when they had the foundry going there, they had quite a few different shops. They had the foundry going, used to ship stuff to Russia. All over the world. They used to--. Well, they built a lot of manhole covers and stuff here for the city. All kinds of stuff was going on in there.

EE: The two main foundries in town would have been Port Ship and Woodside, I suppose?

TC: Well, they had three, actually.

EE: Was there a third one?

TC: Oh, yeah. Most people forget about that one. There was Port Ship, Woodside, and the one at Bombardier. Canada Car, they had one too.

EE: Oh, yes. Of course, they certainly--.

TC: They had one too, yeah.

EE: Bombardier would have to have a foundry.

TC: But there was one thing I should mention but it was really something. They couldn't have built it anywhere else. It would have been impossible. They built this huge, big dome made out of three-quarter plate, and it couldn't be pressed anywhere. So they bid on it. I just wish I would have took pictures of it or something as they were doing it because it's hard to believe they even did it now. But what they did to make this thing, they created a pattern of a big dome and they cut it into pie slices. So it was a pie slice on the top and a pie slice at the bottom. And then they build a big form in the punch shed on a slab for it. They used to drag these pieces of metal into the furnace to get them red-hot, pull it up on top of this form with a winch, and then you had to lift these big iron bars over the top of it, lift these little levers over that, and then drive steel wedges on the sides to form the plate over this big steel form.

[1:05:39]

EE: The form was steel?

TC: The form was steel, and we formed the plates. We bent the plates over these forms. They were extra big, you know.

EE: Yes.

TC: And they built, I don't know how many. It took two months to do it. That was a terrible--. Oh! The heat. The heat was almost--. I had to do it for two weeks. They had welding shields that had the glass taken out, and they had copper screening in place of it. You had to have that on the--. The heat was so intense. The plate was red-hot, and you had to get almost right over it. It was like this. When I'm standing, it was about this high. It was almost chest high.

EE: Yes. Sort of four, five feet high. Four and a half?

TC: Well, four and a half. And you had to lift an iron bar over the top and hook it on one end, and it was, I think, five others. We had to lift them up over the top like that. And there was a little hook on the side, and then we'd stick a steel wedge under there to get the edge formed. Then if it went up in the middle, they had a big wooden mallet, and the guy would pound the bumps out with a wooden mallet and form it over this--.

EE: So it was basically done by might and muscle?

TC: By hand. That's all it was, yeah.

EE; And of course--.

TC: And that's why I say most people wouldn't believe it was done like that.

EE: Heated steel.

TC: And that was a big dome. The dome was--. Holy macaroni. I'd say, gee wiz. Oh, boy. It was even longer than this room.

EE: Twenty, thirty feet across? Thirty?

TC: Oh, yeah. Easily.

EE: And how high?

TC: Oh, jeez. It was, oh, maybe ten feet high, maybe more than that. Well, it had to be more than ten feet high because those plates were long. Those plates were, holy jeez, the plates were--. What's that from here to there? That's--.

EE: Surely someone took some pictures of it?

TC: Well, there was pictures taken of it. I had an album. I should have grabbed that album because it disappeared. Anyway. But the--.

EE: Who was it made for? Or what purpose did it serve?

TC: I don't know. It was the bottom of some kind of huge tank. See, they could form the tank. I think it was one inch steel or three-quarter inch steel. I can't remember exactly. I think it was one inch. They could form the sides easily enough because it was a round cylinder, but they had to have a dome for the bottom. And the cap was just like some kind of pressure cap on the top. It was for some horrendous pressure for something. I don't know what it was. For holding something. So anyway, then when they got the--. They had a pattern for that, of course, for the whole diameter of the thing and all of it. And they put the wooden templates on it, and they marked the plates out after. They were made extra big, as I said, for size. They were all cut and bevelled. And brought them outside and you build the big form outside. Then they slapped these pieces up against the form. Then you joined them all together and tack welded them, and you welded them all up. Oh, it was just--. They made two of them. There was two big domes they made.

EE: And I bet there was sometimes some cursing about what the order people had got you? [Laughing] Because you had to deliver on what they had--.

TC: Oh, boy. Oh, yeah. Well, they did it during the wintertime. The pieces were made during the wintertime. Dead of winter because it was--.

EE: Would help a little in terms of the sheer heat of them.

TC: Yeah. Well, in a way it was ok because the shop wasn't heated, so you had some heat there. [Laughing] Matter of fact, well, I was on the shop crane at the time when they were doing it. Like I said, I was only it for two weeks. I watched them, and holy jeez.

The sweat was pouring off them, boy. And those hammers were heavy. You had to swing a heavy hammer. Everything was heavy. I had parked the crane. It was a gantry crane. I parked--. Because I used to have to haul the plates out. Bring the plates in and haul them out for them. I parked the gantry crane, the shop crane, right in front of it. And they'd just finished one and it was cooling off in the pattern that they'd made for it. I looked over the edge there and I was watching this guy—I used to know him for quite a while—and I says, “Hey, Albert.” I says, “What’s going on down there?” He looked up. He gave me a real dirty look. The sweat--. He was just completely soaked! So just to sort of bug him a little bit. I put my hands over like that and I rubbed them together. I says, “Jeez, it’s nice down there!” [Laughing] You should’ve heard what he said! I won’t repeat it here. [Laughing]

[1:10:02]

But I paid for that because a week later, one guy didn’t come in, so I had to go down there. But I got a good taste of it. It was only for two weeks. [Laughing] It was terrible. But they used to--. They bent a lot of things on that slab. I should mention this because there’s a lot of history to this. I should--. I used to work on these quite a bit. Used to have these long angle irons—some of them were quite heavy—and of course they had a form there that was made for it. And they used to set the form up right in front of one of the ovens and then you’d get the piece of--. Angle iron are quite long. Some of them are cut to a length so you can handle them, but sometimes they weren’t. You had a bend. They wanted one big bend. They didn’t want any welding joints, so some of them were about 20 feet long, 25 feet long. Some of them were quite heavy.

So there was two of us. My job was I got these big iron tongs. I clamp onto it and the other guy would hang on. We used to push it into the furnace, release it. The guy would lower the door—it’s like a big firebrick furnace—they’d heat it up red-hot, grab it like that, and you haul out, run out. “Stop! Stop!” He’d put like a hairpin they used to call it. It was like a big V made out of round metal like that. They used to put it in a square hole and just tap it on top of there, and that would pin it down into place. The spring action would pin it into place. Then there was a pin to hold it so it wouldn’t jump away from the form. So there’s pins all the way along like that, eh?

So my job was--. I was on the wheel, what they called the wheel. It was like a big, big half a circle thing. There was two of them. One weight 85 pounds, the other one weighed 125, depending on what heaviness of angle iron we had to bend. So my job, I had to bend it. [Laughs] I had to pick that thing up, stick it in a hole, and push. Mold it in place. Well, they pounded the thing down and put pins on it. Then I’d lift it out. And some of them, the other one was heavier, so I had to have two of us to use that in the heat. Another guy would help me lift out. The two of us would push it. But they also did pipes there. Big, huge pipes. They had--. Some of them were quite huge.

EE: Fifteen, twenty inches across?

TC: Oh, yeah. They had to fill them with sand so they wouldn't kink them when they heated them up, bent them. They filled them with sand, and they'd drill a pilot hole on each end to let the steam out, otherwise it would've *poof!* Used to heat those up the same way, but they used the other side of the slab that they used to build those big domes that I was telling you about. There was a bigger furnace there, so they used to shove the pipes in there and then pull them out around the form with that--. They had an electric winch there that they used to use for pulling it out. Put it in place up against the form, pin it, and then they used to use the electric winch and they had this hydraulic pusher. They used to be able to push out about a foot, and they used to push that up against it and they had to put pins on it to keep it in place. We'd go all the way around the length of it like this. Some of those pipes were quite long. Heavy, heavy pipes.

Did a lot of that, a lot of angle iron. We used to bend the angle iron two ways. It's called the hard way and the easy way. [EE laughs] Well, the hard way was forcing--. You had to tow the angle up against the form. That's the hard way. The easy way was you had the backside of the angle up against the form. So there was two different ways because the customer wanted it rolled differently. That was a growing concern for quite a while until they finally brought an angle roll in there, and that did most of the angle rolling after that.

EE: Well, it sounds as if a lot of this was hard physical work--.

TC: Oh, yeah. It was.

EE: Which could have been done by machinery elsewhere, eh?

TC: Yeah. Well--.

EE: No?

TC: In some cases, no. Like I said, those domes, they couldn't have made them any other way. No way they could've made them anywhere else. It was impossible.

EE: The dome does sound a specialized piece of work.

TC: See that's the kind of work you used to get. They used to get work that nobody else could do, or nobody else wanted to try to do.

EE: Right.

TC: And so they grabbed it because they knew--.

EE: The latter particularly. [Laughs]

TC: Yeah. They grabbed it because they knew the guys down there could do it one way or the other. And that's the way that--. See, they had a funny mentality there. Like that place it's very innovative. The guys are rough and everything, but they always come up with solutions that nobody else would think of. It's because of the roughness and the danger and sometimes the hurry. The hurry, hurry to get the thing done, you come up with solutions that nobody else would think of. Some of them don't look right to somebody that had a modern factory, but they work down there. And sometimes they were more efficient than in a modern factory, and that's why they can be able to do what they've done. It's amazing.

EE: Was there ever a contract that they were not able to complete? Or did you manage them all?

TC: I think they did everything. They might have lost some money on one or two jobs. [EE laughs] But most of the time they made money. It was very seldom they didn't. I should mention this before it ended all this. We've been joined to Port Weller for quite a few years now. There was Port Weller and Canal Contracting and ourselves, is the main companies or company. And the only two that made any money was this place here at the Lakehead and Canal Contractors. Port Weller never made a penny. They always lost or they just barely broke even. And unfortunately, they seemed to favour them down there than they do us. Most of the money that was made here has always been funneled down there to keep them going, and that's why everything collapsed the last time—just sucked all the money out of here. They made millions of dollars here for them. The ship repair and even building the new stuff. Very seldom they lost money on any ship repair or anything like that. I don't think they ever did.

[1:15:52]

EE: You did work for the mines and the pulp and paper companies in the way of steel fabrication?

TC: Oh, they did lots of work for the mines, lots of work for the pulp and paper industry, and actually work for the elevators too. There's a lot of mechanical stuff they fixed up for the elevators and things that had to be manufactured for the elevators. Bases and stuff like that they did there for them too and the mines, as you say. They did a lot of stuff. They made conveyors down there. I know because I was there when they made them. They made conveyors for different places. Anything, like I said. But the only

thing they couldn't build down there was maybe spaceships. That was about it. But they did everything else. They actually made the time clock for Maple Leaf Gardens there. Most people don't know that. Made that during the Second World War.

EE: Yeah, I've heard that story, actually, when visiting.

TC: Yeah. It's true.

EE: Of course, all of this has been steel. They also worked in wood down there. There were carpenters.

TC: Oh, yeah. Oh, they made all kinds of stuff out of wood. I couldn't mention it all because I'm not a carpenter, but I do know they made this--. Their handiwork is still all over the city.

EE: Cabinetwork of all sorts.

TC: Second to none. Second to none. Cabinetwork, any kind of heavy beam work. They did a lot of beam work. They did a lot of balustrades, bannisters, you know? Curved stuff. Curved stuff. Pieces that they don't do too much of anymore. They had to be soaked in water and then curved, formed first before they even started milling them or other.

EE: I was thinking of that. My father did a project once building runners for something. I won't say anything more about it. [Laughing] These were oak planks that he heated up in the wintertime and bent and so on. Of course, he also learned blacksmithing from a fellow in Manitoba and had his own little blacksmith shop on the farm.

TC: We mentioned that wood. I should mention one thing there that most people don't know. Most of the ships out there, lakers, have wood bearings in them where the tail shaft goes through this certain area. The bearings are made out of wood. They're made out of what they call *lignum vitae*. It's extremely hard, dense wood, and you have to keep it soaked in water so it doesn't dry out. Either that or they coat it with wax. It's very, very heavy. It's almost like a lead. That's used as bearing material because it's so hard and dense.

EE: Even better than any kind of metal?

TC: Well, it's still better than aluminum or anything. Or I mean than any kind of plastic stuff. It outwears it. They still use that. But that stuff used to be there in big, big blocks. They used to cut it all up in the carpenter's shop. Now they order small pieces of it and then somebody--.

EE: Where did it come from the--? Was it a tropical wood?

TC: I'm trying to think now. It is tropical wood, yeah. It grows in mangroves, eh? It's always submerged.

EE: I see.

TC: So it's--.

EE: Out of mangrove, not orchards, but groves, I guess. Well, mangroves.

TC: I can't remember now where the heck they pick it up. I think it's--. Yeah, yeah. Maybe the Philippines or somewhere down there. I don't know exactly where. But it's in swamps, eh? And it's very hard and dense and just soaks up the water. If you let it dry out, it starts to crack.

EE: I see.

TC: It has to be kept in moisture.

EE: With this variety of skills on the site, the organization of labour—and of course I'm driving it—the industrial organization, the unionization of the workforce could have been a challenge. Was it difficult to get them all into one union? Because you were all in one local, I gather?

TC: Well, I got in--. To tell you the truth, at one time, I think there was about 17 unions in that place.

EE: Oh, really?

TC: For each trade. There was a union for each trade.

EE: The boiler makers and the machinists and so on and so forth? [Laughing]

TC: Yeah! Yeah.

EE: The carpenters.

TC: Yeah. They mostly came in during the Second World War. Then in 1956, because when they went into negotiations you had all these different unions, they couldn't really get anything because they all wanted this, they all wanted that. You wound up with a couple pennies as a result of that. There was always argument amongst the unions about what to go for.

EE: And they didn't even have a joint table or anything? A joint committee?

TC: Well, they all went in together, but they all had their own agendas. So it was almost impossible to get anything. They weren't united in what they wanted to get. So back in the '50s, there was three people, they brought the Steelworkers in to try to make it easier to get something because it was just no good the way it was. So, one of the guys' name was Harv Bryant. The other guy's name was Steve Pawlowski, and there was Joe Carniato. They were actually the founders of the union I'm in now. They met secretly and they contacted the Steelworkers and they formed--. They brought the Steelworkers in to take care of the fitters, the welders, the electricians, the shipwrights, the riggers, the machine shop, and the scaffold builders, and the welders, because they were all separate at one time and they couldn't--.

[1:20:54]

So they brought them in, and since that time, they've managed to make gains. That was in 1956. That was when that United Steelworkers Union [USW] came in there.

EE: Right. And who was--? There were groups that were left out? Office workers, first of all.

TC: Oh, yeah. All the other groups stayed in their own unions.

EE: I see.

TC: Yeah.

EE: Which would include what? The boiler makers?

TC: Well, the other groups that stayed in their own unions was--. No, no. Boiler makers were in with us too.

EE: They were in with you. Machinists?

TC: The only ones that weren't--. No, no. Machinists were in with us too. The only ones that weren't were the operating engineers, the pipe fitters, the sheet metal workers, and there was one other. Hm. Well, there was one other one. The powerhouse used to have their own. I think they were under the operating engineers though.

EE: And how long did that continue? Did they eventually all come in or--?

TC: No. What happened is that the membership of the other unions died off, so they were barely being represented anymore. I think right now there's just the pipe fitters and the operating engineers as the--.

EE: Those are both still there as separate unions?

TC: That's the only one, yeah. The carpenters were given over to us because they only had one member left there. So, I talked to Wilf Macintyre about it. I says, "We've been giving this guy strike pay and he's not even in our union." He says, "Well, how about giving him to us?" He says, "You're not making anything on him anyways." So I says, "Ok." So he came over to us.

EE: Sure.

TC: But that's--. Yeah. There was quite a crew there that went down. Now I think I've got about 120 guys on the seniority list now.

EE: What was your own rise in the union? What positions did you hold and when did you became president of the--?

TC: Well, it was about 1975, just after we launched that *Wolfe Islander* ferry. It was Christmastime, I guess. And I used to drink in those days, and [laughs] I went on a little binge, eh? And I didn't come back for two months. [Laughing]

EE: Now that is a binge!

TC: Yeah, yeah. So, I phoned the personnel officer and explained the whole situation to him. I says, "You know, I want to quit drinking." He says, "Okay, no problem," he says. So he put me on the sick pay insurance at the time, and I told him what I was going to do. He knew where I was. I put myself in the LPH [Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital] to dry out. I came out of there, and I got back to work. I think it was '76, '77, because you used to be able to go on that for a year or so, as long as you got the doctor to say you were still sick on the same thing. And then I started going back and forth to work from a halfway house. I went over to a

halfway house over in Fort William that was sponsored by AA [Alcoholics Anonymous]. I lived in there for a while, yeah. After I got out of the LPH, I went over there, and I stayed there for as long as the sick pay was up. In the meantime, I started working again. I used to pedal a bicycle back and forth from Lily Street to the shipyard every day.

OM: Three Cs?

TC: Not Three C's, no. It used to be--. Uh--. Bah-bah-bah. I can't think of the name of it. But they had the old barracks, nurse's barracks, from Hogarth Hospital. They had that, and they had two houses across the street. And I think it was called--.

OM: Crossroads?

TC: Crossroads! It was called Crossroads at the time, that's right.

EE: This was a pretty fair operation by the sound of it.

TC: It was big. Well, at that time, that was—I don't know whether you could call it a business or not—but boy, that LPH and Smith Clinic were just packed with people that were coming and going steady. I was just fortunate enough to get in there. They had fairly strict rules. You had to attend two AA meetings a month, and if you came in drunk, they kicked you out. If you came in with a bottle on you, they kicked you out. But they were fair rules because there was a big line up of people to get in there. There was hundreds of people trying to get through that whole system because that was a time when there was still a lot of drinking and drugs going around. So I learned a lot from that. I went back to work again in about 1978. Well, I got in as a steward. As soon as I got back there, I realized how crazy everything was, so I thought, "Oh, this has got to stop." So, I got in as a steward, then I got on the health and safety committee.

[1:25:06]

EE: Who was leading the union when you--?

TC: His name was John Halgren. He was the president of the union at that time. John Halgren.

EE: And sober, I suppose?

TC: Oh, yeah. He was okay. And then I think the rest of the executive was Bill Kozolowski, Harv Bryant, and Bill Sheleski. And I think Pete--. I can't think of his name now. He used to be in a foundry. Pete Sloza [sp?] was in there too. So they had that for the executive. And then in 1978 the president died, so I ran for president. And I ran against Bill Kozolowski. I got in. I must be doing something right because I'm still there. [Laughs]

EE: Yeah. So you've been the president for 31 years?

TC: Yeah. Yeah.

EE: I hadn't realized it was quite that long.

TC: No, it's quite a while, yeah.

EE: So, congratulations! I mean that's quite a record.

TC: Well, I don't know if it's good luck or what, but it wasn't very pleasant, I'll tell you that.

EE: And yet you were up for re-election, what, every--?

TC: Well, it's--. I think the main reason is that--. See, when I got in there, I told everybody, I said, "Look." Some people want to get paid for that position. I says, "I didn't get in this to stuff my pockets." I said, "I got in this for one reason." I said, "I want to keep this union strong. I want to get a better contract, and I want to make it safe. I want to make sure you've all got jobs." I says, "That's why I got in here." I said, "I didn't get in here to stuff my pockets. I want to protect myself," and I said, "And I'm going to protect you." I says, "That's why I got in here. For no other reason."

EE: Yeah.

TC: So there was a lot a guys, about half of them, hated my guts because when I got in there, they thought I was some kind of special privilege to get in and do this, but it's not. It's all hard work. There's no thankyou's for anything, you know? You get very few thankyou's. There was only one guy ever thanked me there. Only one guy ever thanked me for anything I've ever done there! So the rest of it--. You think, well, you've got to do that. That's your job.

EE: It comes with the job.

TC: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, but I'll tell you, it hasn't been very pleasant at all. I learned a lot of things. I learned to keep my temper because I used to have a bad temper. But I learned that you had to have compassion, even though somebody you're trying to help--.

EE: "That rat doesn't deserve it!" [Laughing]

TC: He doesn't deserve it, and you have to do it anyway. And you have to try and be kind about it. He might rant and rave at you, and you say, "Well, you know, you can rant and rave all you want, but I'm just trying to help you." And eventually, one of two things happened. Either they come over to your side or they leave.

EE: [Laughs] I was thinking the second option.

TC: Well, that's what happens because they start to realize that I'm not in there trying to make things bad for them. I'm trying to keep it all together. Sure, I'm doing it for myself too because if I don't then my job's gone too!

EE: Yeah, You're part of the local.

TC: But that's why I don't want to get paid for it. I told them. I said, "I don't want to get paid for this." I says, "If this is a paid job, you're going to have people getting in there to get the money, not to save anybody's jobs." And I says--. That's the kind of people I tried to eliminate from the executive. I tried to keep them out. If I know somebody's crooked or something, I do everything I can to get them out because I don't want crooked people on the executive of the union. So far, I've kept it honest, and that's the only reason it's all stayed together. Yeah.

EE: Do you want to comment on the management of the company during these years? A break?

TC: Anyway, we had different managers there. I think the best one we had was--. What the heck was his name? It was Bob--. Jeez, it's hard to remember now. Darn. He was there before Don Page got in there. I can't think of his name. He had a moustache. He was the best guy. He wanted to--. He used to come down to the job. He'd talk to the guys and everything. He wasn't friendly, but he'd listen to you, and he wouldn't tell you to take a hike or anything like that. He was interested in trying to make the place go.

EE: These would be the general managers?

TC: Yeah, he was the general manager, and he was out trying to get work. “Get working there,” and trying to make the place go. Keep it going. He was probably the best.

EE: Was the manager involved in finding work, in looking for contracts?

TC: Oh, at that time he was. In that time, he used to be breathing down the necks of everybody that was out looking for it. They used to have salesmen there that used to go around looking. I think they had about three or four salesmen. He used to walk, say, “What have you got here? Let me see. Oh, okay. Well, try this place here. Try that place there.” That’s the way he did it.

EE: Sure. Because finding work was very important.

TC: Yeah, oh, yeah. Well, that was his job on the line too. If he didn’t keep the work, then his job was gone too. But he was about the best. Page was good too because he did the same thing. Although, he was a little quirky. I remember one time, like I said, he’d be tearing around in the buggy. So one time, I’d just come off this tug—we had a tug in the dock—just got off the tug and I was still, well, I was president at the time. He’d come over to me. He pulled up in the—*screech*—he pulled up in that thing. He jumped out of there. There’s a tug in a dock, and I was looking over there. And I just saw this guy come out of the tug and he was a machine fitter. He was just covered in grease! He’s black all the way, like he’d rolled around in a mud puddle or something--just black with grease. His face, he went like that and streaked black grease over him. And he just got a rag, and he wiped his hands off like that. And you could tell he was fed up and really, really angry, you know?

[1:30:25]

Page was watching this guy, eh? Said, “Eh,” like this and he pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He stuck one in his mouth, and he lit it up. He went *phew* like this, and he was doing it up against the side of the tug on the deck because he’d just crawled up from down below. Page says, “What’s that lazy guy doing there? What’s that lazy guy doing there?” And he said it quite loud. And I said, “I think he’s smoking a cigarette.” And I said, “I think you better leave him alone.” [Laughing]

EE: Yeah. He’s obviously been in some very difficult and dirty work.

TC: Yeah, yeah. So, there was one other thing happened down there that I’ll say. So anyway, we had two other incidents that I’d like to mention about Page down there because it was kind of humorous, actually. It was scary at the time, but it was humorous. Anyway, one day I got this call from Page. He wanted the whole executive of the union up at the office. “Right away! Drop everything you’re doing. I have to see you right away!” So we went up to the office. “Jesus Christ, what the hell is going on here?”

So we went there. And this was the first time he had ever asked to see me up there. “Well, what’s going on?” “We’ve got a bomb scare.” He said, “What are we going to do?” I said, “Well, let’s get the [pause]out of here!” [Laughing] So we all cleared out.

So, the cops come down there and checked all over the place looking for this bomb. I guess some nutbar drunk on the nightshift, welder, was laughing his off about that, I guess. Phoned the cops--. Phoned him and said, “There’s a bomb down there!” They had the cops combing all over the place, looking inside the gate and in the pump house. I guess that guy, whoever it was, was laughing his head off. [Laughing]

EE: Back off half a mile and watch. [Laughing]

TC: Yeah. So that was going on. A few other things like that happened too. But he was a quirky guy. Well, he was almost nutty, eh? But then we got, after he left, we got this Scotchman come in there, Stewart Tomes. He was kind of, well, he was a manager. Scottish manager, you know, like this. “I’m king.” You know?

EE: Did he come out of shipbuilding in Scotland?

TC: Well, yeah. Well, not Scotland. I think he came from Collingwood.

EE: I see.

TC: But he was in with the crew down there, the people, the know-it-all guys. He was actually an engineer, actually. But he wasn’t too bad. I got along with him. But I remember at one time we had a guy down on the dock. He was a hard worker, but he was haywire. He was in the maintenance department. And he had two skips down there and he’d just filled the skip up with mud. We used to have to dig all the mud out of the bottom before we could start cutting things out of there, eh? Inside the ship

EE: Out of the ship?

TC: Yeah. Oh, yeah. You’d cut a hole in there and you’d get in there and you had to muck it out. That stuff was about that thick sometimes. Clay and everything. He’d just finished two skips. And he was a big guy, and he’d get down there, stuck his shovel in there, and he was fed up too. There was mud all over him, eh? Like he had the rainsuit on, but still it was all got inside. And “*Meh!*” He was going “*Meh!*” like this. He went in there and got a smoke, lit it up. And I was just leaning on a handrail, and I was looking down there. And wouldn’t you know it, Stewart Tomes comes walking right behind me looking down there. He says--.

This is almost the exact same thing that happened with the tug! He saw the guy down there, eh? So then, I didn't think much about it, and then he just walked away and went in the superintendent's office.

Next thing you know, they wanted to fire this guy because he's leaning on a shovel! He just came crawling out of there, and he was sweating like a bull. But he was kind of haywire anyway, I knew that, but he was a hard worker. So I had to go up to the office about this guy. So we were up there talking about him. He said, "We want to get rid of this guy. He's no good." I says, "Well, the guy's a hard worker. Why do you say he's no good?" He says, "I was at the top of that dock. I watched for 20 minutes. He didn't do one thing." I says, "You mean you were standing there for 20 minutes, and you didn't do anything either, eh?" I says, "You're complaining about that guy down there." I says, "You're the manager of the company." I says, "What are you complaining about him for?" So he turned beet red. He didn't know what to say! [EE laughs] He turned beet red in the face. "Well, okay. Well, just forget about," he says. So I took off, eh?

He was a sneaky guy, but he wasn't too bad. But he, yeah, he got 18 boats. We were doing 18 boats a year there. It got so hectic there--.

EE: So enthusiastic.

TC: One after another. It got so hectic there that--. Well, I used to complain to him. I said, "Look, you've got to keep the shops full of work or you're going to lose some guys." He says, "Well, we're just concerned about the boats now." I says, "That's fine, but you've got to keep a crew in the shop. You've got to keep things going in there or you're going to lose that business." I says, "That's a valuable business there." I says, "When there's no work on the dock," I said, "the guys can go into the shops and do stuff there."

EE: Sure.

TC: So. But it was at the point--. It got ridiculous. Like they had so many boats to do. It was getting--. Like normally before a ship leaves the dock, before you flood it, you take everything out of there. Everything. Staging, everything out of there. Everything gets out, you take it all out with the crane, and pack it up on the side of the ship. Well, they were just flooding the dock and taking a boat out of there with the staging and everything still sitting there! That's what they were doing. That's what was going on.

[1:35:15]

But he used to drink pretty heavy, that guy too, but then he--. I talked to him one time. I says, "What happened?" I says, "You don't seem to be red in the face anymore." "Well," he says, "that stuff doesn't work." He says, "I found out the hard way." I said, "You're right. It doesn't work." But in the end, he invited us all up to his place there, and he had drinks if you wanted drinks there, just before he left. Right, that's the first time I've ever seen that happen. He invited everybody from the union executive up to his house, and he had a pretty nice house too, out in the sticks there. Looked like a palace for Christ's sake. We used to have the bucks. But he was, yeah, his name was Stewart Tomes. His brother was some kind of big shot down the other end there. I can't think of his brother's name. His name was Brian or something like that. I can't remember now.

But I remember then after he had left, Wesley Allen come in there. And when Wesley Allen come in here, he had the same kind of attitude, you know? "I'm the boss and that's it." You know what I mean? So anyway. He was trying to see how far he could go with me. There was one--. Well, he played King Kong for a while and then there was something that happened. And he used to have meetings with his foremen all the time, try to scare the living daylights out of them to get them to crack the whip, eh? So, we had a ship down there, and it had this new stuff that they used for coating the inside of the tanks. They weren't going to paint them. They were using this stuff that's called fluid film. It was made out of sheep lanolin and fur. They ground it up and it made like a, looked like a yellow paste, except it was consistency of--. I don't know, what the heck? Sort of like melted butter or something. Even looked like melted butter.

So they sprayed that on the inside of these ships. Well, they brought one in what had that stuff on there and I did a test on it. They painted the inside of a box with this stuff, and then they put the cap on it, and they welded it up and they burned into it to see what would happen, wanted to find out if it would explode or anything. So anyway, they found out they had to scrape all of it off at least a foot away from where they had to burn something, because what would happen was that when you heated it up, it got red-hot. It would vaporize. And once it started creating a vapour, the vapour would ignite from the red-hot heat. See? So you had to watch. It got explosive.

Matter of fact, one plate blew right off a plate. Right off the side. Some guy, they did clean it out enough. That's when I started hopping all over. I didn't realize what was going on because this guy was doing this on nights. They didn't have somebody telling him that it should have been all scraped off. So he started burning it, and he almost got right around to the top and then that stuff ignited and blew the plate right off. He went right off the staging. He landed right on his back. Just lucky that plate didn't land on him. All the frames were twisted inside from the explosion. So I went after him about that. I said, "Why wasn't that scraped out?" "He should've known!" I said, "What do you mean he should've known?" I says, "The maintenance guy's supposed to go in there and clean that out before you even start burning." So I went after him about that. I don't know what he did about it. Things tightened up after that and they started doing a better job of scraping it off.

I was down there with one of the foremen, and he was kind of a bootlicker that guy. I never did like him. But anyway, I had to go down there, and he tells me, he says, “Go in there, we have to scrape that stuff out of there.” He says, “But we have to burn a hole in the bottom first.” I said, “What do you mean burn a hole?” I says, “You’ve got to get somebody to go in there now and scrape it out.” “Oh, no. We’re just going to burn a little hole about this big. A drop hole,” he says. He says, “Here’s a pail. Go in there and put that over the hole, and that’ll catch all the sparks inside the pail.” He says, “It won’t go anywhere.” And I said--. And I walked away. I said, “If you try to get anybody else to do that,” I says, “I’ll go right to--. I’ll put a grievance in.”

So you know what he did? When I left, he went in. He held a galvanized pail over that place where that guy was going to--. The guy started burning, the pail caught fire, and he damn near died from the smoke and everything coming out. They had to haul him out of there, carry him out of there on a stretcher. I went up to Wesley Allen and I says, “I don’t know what you told that guy,” I said, “but you almost got him killed.” I says, “You almost got him killed. Because I told him not to do that.”

Anyway, and then after that, well, you know what happened after that. We’d got a couple guys killed down there. That was in 1983. The first two guys, we had the *Richelieu* in there. The *Richelieu* only had one manhole going down into the forepeak of the boat, down below.

EE: I do remember now vaguely.

TC: Yeah, well I thought I’d mention that just so you know. It’s part of the history. It should be told.

[1:40:02]

EE: They were welding down there?

TC: No, what happened was four guys—there was two machine fitters, and there was two welders—and they were dismantling a lazy rod in a valve and then reconnecting it, because the gasket material had deteriorated inside the valve. So they put some new gasket material in there and put it back together, and then had a connection sort of thing for the lazy rod so it wouldn’t wobble around. Lazy rod connects up way the heck up above to a deck where there’s a wheel. That’s why they call it a lazy rod, you don’t have to go way down below to turn the valve. The rod goes way up, eh?

So anyway, they’d done that, and they’d reconnected that sort of guide thing to keep the lazy rod from bouncing around. A welder was welding that, and some sparks went down and caught the gasket material on fire. Well, prior to that, they didn’t know, but they’d had an oxyacetylene torch up at the top right above the manhole. I guess when they left that night at 4:30, the oxygen tube

on the torch popped off. So when they turned the gas on in the morning, pure oxygen went down in there, and it flowed down inside that hold. So the whole inside of the area was full of pure oxygen where these guys were working. They didn't know. The welder found it, and he got a welding rod, and he crimped it, and he went to repair it. I saw him walking with it. I worked with him a week before that. He went in and got the stuff and repaired it, and he brought the torch down below with his torch down there. So that's why that material caught fire so quickly, because it was just pure oxygen, just like pouring gasoline in there.

So anyway, it ignited. He went to put it out with his foot like this. *Pfew!* It went up his clothes. He caught fire. The other welder tried to put him out. He caught fire. Another guy tried to catch him. He caught fire. One guy got scared—and he had a bum leg—he ran up the hold to get help. He got just about out of the hold and the explosion from the torch blew and then blew him right out of the hold. So three guys died in about three minutes. They were dead in three minutes. I had to go try to identify the bodies at the morgue. I knew one of the guys because I worked with him the week before, but it was still hard to tell because-- Well, we had another guy in there, Francois Michaud, was there—welder—he knew two of them. So, he identified one of them because he recognized a watch on one of them.

EE: They were that badly burned, eh?

TC: Well, it was just bare bones with touches of black stuff, soot or whatever, connected there the two bodies. The other one I recognized, Stanley Humar, because I worked with him. He was taller than the other two, so I knew that was him. What happened with him was that all his skin had melted off his body. You could see all the muscles and everything underneath. Nose and ears had melted off. And apparently, he got halfway up the ladder before he fell. They found him in a pool of blood on the bottom. I don't know how he got up there. I can't-- He caught fire and then I guess he tried to get-- He was still on fire halfway up the ladder and he fell off. They found-- Because his hands were like this where they had been on the rungs, and they found him at the bottom. He didn't completely burn up like the other two guys. He managed to get away from it. I guess the explosion blew it out. When it blew off-- He must've fell off the ladder at the same time as the explosion.

So the only thing left of anything that was in there, the torch was there and the steel toes from their boots were there and one parking bin left over in the corner. That's the only stuff that didn't burn. Everything else had just been completely burnt up. That was the first three.

The other two guys happened on the *B. Aird*. We'd just put the bow on. They parked it over in the waterfront. They sent some people in there to clean all the materials in the side tanks because all the rods and everything had fallen. So they decided rather than going down there and cleaning it up with pails that they were going to just dump it all down into the bottom., sweep it all down through the lightening holes down into the bottom, and then wash it all down there with hoses, and then go down there and clean it

out from the bottom. So, they had three guys on nights that were sent to do this. At that time, they had no ground fault interrupters or anything. Nothing. It was all just live wires. They had explosion-proof lamps, but nobody thought to get them. Nobody was told to get them.

So, they went in there with rainsuits on and with these electric extension lights that weren't connected to any ground fault or anything. And they brought them down there with them and everything was soaking wet. So anyway, there was a foreman there, Rod Osadic, which was--. No--.

EE: Rod Osadic?

TC: No, no. Not Rod Osadic. Hm. It was Rod Osadic's dad. His father. Anyway, Mr. Osadic was a foreman and there was Barry Dornan and this other guy. I can't think of him. He was an older guy. But anyway, Barry Dornan was down below and Walter Osadic—that was the foreman's name—Walter Osadic had just come up the hole and left Barry down there. They had a couple lights down there. He just went up to see the guy on the top and tell him blah-blah-blah-blah and make sure the guy was staying over the hole, and if he needed help to go down and help him. So anyway, he took off and he waited, and the guy stood up and the hole because he was down in a confined area. So anyway, everything went black. The guy got worried, and he didn't know what to do. He didn't want to go down in the hole, so he waited until the foreman come back. The foreman come back, and he told him. He says, "Everything went black." He says, "Just a couple of minutes ago. I was going to go down, but I was scared to go down there."

[1:45:51]

So the foreman went down there with a flashlight, and there was a lightening hole that the water flows through in those things. And I guess Barry Dornan had been sitting in that lightning hole, and I guess he had put his flashlight in between his knees like this because the light had burned out and he was trying to take that bulb out of there. Well, he was soaking wet. I guess the bulb broke, and his hand touched the filament, and he was electrocuted right there. He was just frozen like that from the electricity. They know this happened because we went in there to investigate it after.

So anyway, I guess Walter Osadic had come down with his flashlight and saw him frozen like this with his flashlight between his knees and hanging onto that cage. So Walter Osadic, without thinking, grabbed the cage out of his hand to try to pull it out of his hand. And when he did that, he had a ring on, and a ring touched the inside and electrocuted him. He fell down and died right there, and Barry Dornan fell right through the lightening hole like this. When we found him, the flashlight was shining on his face. So there's two guys died right there because they didn't have the proper electrical equipment. Well, I don't know who you can blame for that.

EE: Did this change things around there?

TC: Oh, yeah. Well, we changed the whole thing. Everything was changed around after that. We got ground-fault interrupters and everything. Any area now is very strictly enforced. We've got a policy made up for all the safety stuff now. It's a written company policy about this--. All the different procedures for everything. Everything. Entering confined spaces, everything's been written up. It was a joint thing, eh?

EE: You were president of the union, of course, of the local by this time?

TC: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, I went after them right after that because I knew once that happened--. I went after them for everything. I managed to get a folding gate put all around the drydock and that because we had nothing there. It was just open space. You walk there, you slip and you--.

EE: Yeah, you could just fall in.

TC: Yeah, so we had that. It goes in sections. You just pull pins out and you slide it down. It falls right down to the ground. When you want it up, you pull it up and you put the pins back in. It's all around the dock like that. Well, I went after them for everything because I knew memories were short. I knew that this attitude wouldn't last long. We had the Ministry of Labour in there and we set all this up, this whole committee up. He said, "Well, something has to be done. We have to change the way things are done." Because prior to that, when we went into a health and safety meeting, you had to make sure you had all your members there because you had to vote on everything. Everything was done by voting. And if you had one guy short, well then whatever you wanted there was voted down. You couldn't get it even though the regulations were there. You had to follow the regulations, but if it was something that was needed for safety purposes, unless everybody voted the right way, it wasn't done.

EE: This was, what, on the committee?

TC: Yeah! This was done before this happened. So I used to go there on my vacation just to make sure we had enough guys to vote for things to get things done. But after this happened that was the end of that. There was a consensus from now on after that because we couldn't have the--. I told them what was going on. I says, "This is the way it was. I used to have to come here on my vacation to make sure we could get some safety stuff done." I said, "That's the way it was." And the inspectors didn't do anything about it. So that was all changed. And I knew that attitude wouldn't last too long, so I did everything I could within the next three, four years to make it as safe as I could down there. I got everything I needed in the contract to reinforce that. And they've got their

policy now. It's about that thick now. So they don't fool around anymore. They realize, no, that you get more work out of a guy and it's more productive the safer it is.

EE: Sure.

TC: It took a long time to do that, but it's--. So that's where we are now.

EE: Right. And this had continued with the new management of the new company now?

TC: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. The new guy, Steve Allen, he's pretty good. Well, he came right out of the dock himself. He actually used to work for Camowa [sp?] which used to do all of the warranty work on all of those stainless propeller blades and all that, because they're adjustable, like you can adjust the pitch and everything. Well, he used to be working with them. He was the guy that used to come down and make sure all the work that was done on them was done properly by our guys. He was sort of like a foreman. Well, they appointed him as the manager because he's got this qualification before that, plus he knows how to work down there. He knows what happens.

[1:50:12]

EE: So, he's someone who has come up through the workplace?

TC: Yeah, he can say he's actually had his hands on something. So he doesn't blow his top when something goes wrong. He just says, "Fix it up." That's all. "Get it fixed up. Okay. It's haywire? Repair it or fix it until it's ok." He doesn't blow a cork like some of them did.

EE: Well--. [Laughing] This has been fascinating, but we're pretty well out of time on the card.

TC: There's a lot more than that on there, but--.

EE: There is indeed!

TC: I'd have to write it down.

EE: Well, there are all kinds of questions I haven't got anywhere close to asking you, and I'm wondering, Tom—we shouldn't be wasting time with the card, I suppose, for me to be saying these things—but maybe we should take another run at it next week. Friday? Actually, I don't know if anyone--.

TC: Well, I'll be back at work next week.

EE: You will be back at work?

TC: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Well, we're--.

TC: Just got called in. I've got to go in Tuesday.

EE: I see.

TC: I was hoping I'd get a couple more months out of it, but no way.

EE: Darn! Well, we've caught you during the lay-off period then.

TC: Oh, it's supposed--. That's the best--. I take two months off every year because I just can't take the winter anymore. I froze my hands down there four times. Now when its ten below Fahrenheit, I have to wear mitts.

EE: So the time you take off is in the worst of the winter then?

TC: I try to, yeah, but I won't be able to do it this time because--. That's the way it goes. I only got--. Like I say, unless I win the lottery, I've got to hang in there two more years because I haven't got any money. That's the way it is, eh?

EE: Indeed. The pensions have been maintained?

TC: Well, we don't really have a pension plan there. The pension plan was dismantled in '92 when they downsized. What happened there was that the guys who were already pensioned off, they maintained a pot for them to keep that pension going, but then it was dismantled. And now it's an hourly thing, like so much per hour goes into an RRSP, an individual RRSP for each one of us. I think

that's a better thing anyway because then there's nobody managing it but the individual himself. No union overseeing it or nothing. Nobody picking away at it.

EE: Well, you're suggesting real fears about pensions. I'm not sure it's the best response, but it's better than some that you've clearly seen.

TC: Well, I wish we would've had that from the beginning because when they dismantled the old pension plan, it was a real pension plan. It was based on the amount of hours you had and how old you were when you packed it in.

EE: Sure.

TC: So the older you were, the more time you had in there, the more pension you got out of it. It was like a big pot. At that time, when they started it was three cents an hour went into that thing. That was back in '71. Three cents an hour went into it, went into a big pot. And all the unions used to oversee it. It wasn't--. But they never touched the money, they just oversee, watched everything, and sort of managed it. And then when that was dismantled, it was up to the individual himself now to manage his own money, which is better in my estimation. I'd rather have it that way.

EE: Well, the two things I'd say about that is, one, is it's very, very important as to how the money is actually managed, invested and so forth for the fund to be built up.

TC: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

EE: The other is that the dismantling is outrageous. If it takes money that was actually deferred pay, that's the part that's outrageous.

TC: Well, the bad part of the dismantling was that--. I'll just give you an example. See, as I say, it went according to how many hours you had. Well, there was one guy there, he had 15 years, but he had worked there longer--. Like his age was there. He got \$18,000 out of it. I had worked there 25 years and I got \$9,000 out of it. So that shows you how there's a disparity.

EE: So money was dispersed, but not necessarily fairly?

TC: It was yeah. Yeah, yeah.

EE: Right.

TC: Not fairly, no.

End of Interview.