Narrator: Tom Chauvin (TC)

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

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Interviewer: Ernie Epp (EE)

Recorder: Owen Marks (OM)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich

Summary: The second interview with retired shipbuilder and former president of the local United Steelworkers Union Tom Chauvin. Chauvin describes the step-by-step processes for various shipyard projects like repairing ships, building debarkers for the pulp and paper industry, bending large angle irons on "the slab", forming pipes for Ontario Hydro, creating massive storage tank bottoms, and riveting ships. Chauvin also discusses his involvement in the workplace health and safety committee, the dangerous working conditions throughout his career, on-site alcohol use, and workplace fatalities. Other topics include ownership changes at the shipyard, sister shipyard operations in Ontario, ethnic diversity, and World War Two veterans in the workforce.

Keywords: Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company Ltd. (Port Arthur Shipyards, Western Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company); Shipbuilding; Port Arthur; Ship repairing; Skilled trades; Trades work; Manual labour; Lake ships; Lakers; Barges; Drydocks; Riveting; Riveted ships; Collingwood; Port Weller; *Alexander Henry;* Boat launching; Alcohol and drug abuse; Steelwork; Welding; Ship fitting; Canada Steamship Lines (CSL); Workplace accidents; Workplace injuries; Workplace fatalities; Health and safety; Labour unions; United Steelworkers Union (USW); World War II veterans

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

Time, Speaker, Narrative
OM: That's what we didn't do. This thing here isn't red. Push red, yeah. EE: Push the middle of it. OM: Push the button, there we go. Now you've got to start over. This thing here, just--.

EE: The little thing in the middle.

TC: Ok, now I see it.

EE: Yeah, I hadn't bothered looking at it. Well, it's good to be meeting with you this afternoon Tom for the second interview with you. It's going to build on what we did the last time, but let's do the official part at the outset. I ask you to give your full name first.

TC: My full name is Thomas Lewis Chauvin.

EE: And where you were born and the date of birth?

TC: I was born Port Arthur, Ontario on November 11, 1946.

EE: Splendid. Thanks very much. Well, last time we talked about--. You narrated your experiences in the grain trade in relation to it as an employee at Port Ship. Today we want to talk, or we want you to tell us, about the history of the Port Arthur Shipyard. So why don't I open the door or the floor or whatever and let you go to work on the basis of notes you've made and your impeccable memory, and you'll tell us about what you know.

TC: Well, I don't know if my memory's that impeccable, but I'll just start off from when I started down there. I'll just read what happened to me—what I saw in different instances—and you'll see. It's going to be a real eye opener when you hear it. Some of it you won't believe, but--. And there's no reason for me to lie about it. I was right there. I saw it happen with my own eyes. I participated in it. So anyway, here we go.

I started in 1966 in the late fall. I worked 60 days and then I was laid off. I returned in January 13, 1967, and because I wasn't gone for a full year, I carried over my days. At that time the *Lake Winnipeg* was tied up on the waterfront dock, and the *George M. Carl* was in the drydock. Both flat-deckers, which means there was no self-unloading boom on them. There was some side damage work on the *Lake Winnipeg*—there was quite a few plates—but the major work was on the *George M. Carl.* The whole tank-top in the cargo hold was removed from one end of the boat to the other. All internal webs and frames were replaced where they were damaged. Then a two-inch by three-inch flat bar was tacked onto the side tank walls and on the bulkheads just below where a new tank-top was to be placed.

I helped make the new tank-top plates in the punch shed, as it was called. All metal fabrication for ships was produced in this shop. It was called the punch shed because of all the flywheel-run punch and cutting machines that were in there for making various parts.

EE: I might ask this. With all the flywheels and belts and so-on, it was run from, what, a central steam engine? Or would it have already been a diesel engine or something of that sort that was powering that shop?

TC: No, there was an extremely large powerplant there. And the power was brought into the plant and then it went into that powerplant—their own powerplant. They made their own power there for everything.

EE: Just electricity then?

TC: Yeah. Their own electricity for everything. They had big generators in there that ran on belts, and I think there was four of them. And that produced the electricity for the whole place. So they had electric power for these machines in the shop, and the machines were run by electric motors which had belts on them. Once you started them up, the electric motor would start a huge wheel going around that had teeth in it, and that would move other wheels that had teeth in them, and then a big flywheel would start moving around. It weighed tonnes. That's how each one of these machines was run. It had a big flywheel for its punch, its power.

EE: The momentum or the inertia of that wheel would drive points through steel, I suppose, and so on?

TC: Oh, yes. Yes. They punched holes with them, and they bent things with them, and they cut things with them. They had cutting machines that worked on that principle. They could cut a steel angle iron that was about three-quarter by three-quarter by eight by eight in thickness with one machine that they had there.

[0:05:11]

EE: Steel that's three quarters of an inch thick?

TC: That's right.

EE: Wow.

TC: But it made a hell of a noise. [Laughs]

EE: I can imagine it would.

TC: When you use it, you push the--. There was a stop at the back of the hole, and you set that for the length that you wanted right up to the cutter. You pushed it up so it bounced right up against that. And then there was a piece of hardwood that had two steel plates screwed to it, and you jammed that under a bar that went across the top onto that angle iron so it wouldn't jump. And then you put your foot down on the pedal. It made a revolution, and *kapow!* I mean *kapow!* It went flying out of the back. You had to make sure there was nobody behind there when you cut stuff there. It was an extremely noisy place at some times because of when they had all the punches and everything going. Sometimes they did. They had quite a few different machines in there, and I've got like a movie inside my head of every machine that was there when I started there.

EE: Did they go to cutters later? There would be a shop in which you had welding-type cutters or plasma cutters. Did you go to that?

TC: Well, they had oxyacetylene burning torches there back right at the beginning of the First World War. But they had a machine there that they used to use for bevelling things, and it was quite a thing. It was like a long table, probably—what's this?—probably about 30 feet long, and I guess they probably got it from England or something at one time. They used to put a plate on there, and then there was large steel bolts that used to be bolted down to it. The edge of the plate would be jutted out a little bit, and then this guy would be sitting on this seat. He would turn the machine on, and then the machine would go back and forth. It was called a scarfer. It would take a run at the edge of the plate, curl a piece off, and then run back. Meanwhile, that guy would be sitting there as it went back and forth.

EE: Yes. It's a variant on a wood plane, on planing wood. It's something like that, but this was doing it on steel.

TC: Well, not--.

EE: It's mechanical, though.

TC: Yeah, it's mechanical and it had a steel bit for cutting the steel. They used that on very light plate because they didn't want to waste the money on burning it with an oxyacetylene torch. But they've always had oxyacetylene torches there right back when they started building them, because they needed those for specific purposes, especially in the dock.

EE: You'd weld things—I'm quite aware of welding—but you could also use them for cutting. And was some cutting done with--.

TC: Well, the oxyacetylene torches were mostly used for cutting, except for when they wanted to braze something. In that case, it was a little bit different. They used the brazing rods, and they had to use a flux to treat the edges of the steel. They could braze with it, and they used different metal for brazing. They could use a torch for that, but that was about the only time they really welded with an oxyacetylene torch.

EE: Right. Well, back to getting the plates cut for the repair of the ship.

TC: Well, anyway. First thing they did, they made two large flange, wide-flange beam jigs. It's called a jig or a set for production platforms. Half-inch plate about 20 feet by about 30 feet long was placed in the jig with a shop gantry crane. Then I had to flatten out the plate's edges by hammering in large steel wedges under clips attached to wide-flange beams with an eight-pound sledgehammer. Once the plate was flattened out, a fitter I was with and myself—the helper—proceeded to fit 12 by half-inch steel channels to the surface of the plate. This was done by placing hairpin dogs, they called them, over the channels where they didn't touch the plate, and a welder welded those dogs over that area. Then I had to use an eight-pound sledgehammer to score off the channels and tighten them to the plate until the channel was tight enough for the welder to tack weld it on both sides.

[0:10:00]

The fitter in charge checked the channels for tightness and squareness. He was in charge of our three-man gang—a fitter, a tacker, and a helper. Square plates were inserted under the channels at appropriate lengths and tacked in place by the welder. Once we were finished this, we moved to the other jig about 15 feet away and repeated the process there while two welders proceeded to weld all of the channels on the other plate with a machine called a union melt. The machine had two large spools of heavy welding electrode, which welded both sides of a channel at once.

EE: And this is electric welding, arc welding, that you're doing now?

TC: That's right. Yeah. It had big, large spools of electrode on it that had a spiral shape to it, and it was coated with the flux. It went to a small gizmo at the end of the machine, and it spiraled into the metal on both sides of the channel to weld it up. So one channel was welded up like that. It went along tracks. It just went from one end to the other, and when it was completely welded, it stopped, and the guy backed up, moved the tracks over to the next channel, and repeated the process. It was quite a machine.

EE: Yes, it certainly would be.

TC: The--.

EE: And it would produce a high-quality of join, I presume, the welding?

TC: Oh, the welding there was excellent. The guys knew exactly what they were doing. Most of the people, when I started there, were in their thirties or forties, and a lot of them already came through the Second World War. They had a pretty tough crew there, and they knew what they were doing. You didn't have to tell them twice how to do something. They knew it. They just did it. So the welding was considered--. Down there, some of the best welders in the world came out of that place, and they became teachers and went all over the world.

EE: I can well imagine. The machine would have the virtue of keeping the arc steady, wouldn't it?

TC: Yeah.

EE: Making a good join. Because I've done a teensy little bit of arc welding and maintaining the arc is the important thing. The hand will tremble a little bit or whatever, so the if the machine keeps it steady, it's going to lay down the join much better.

TC: Yeah. Well, it was a two-man crew on that, and usually they had a very experienced welder running it. He set up the speed of the machine plus the speed of the travel of the electrode coming out off the drum. There was two large drums on each side of the machine that held about, *phew*, oh, about 200 pounds of spiral electrode. It was quite a machine. [Laughs] They had to move it over with the crane after because it was so heavy, but that's how they moved it. Once they set the track for the next run, they picked it up with the crane and moved it over onto the track. They had to make sure the track was straight. Then they set up the machine according to the track and how far away it was from the channel. They knew what they were doing, believe me. There was nothing--. There was very few mistakes made. So anyway.

EE: Interesting.

TC: The small square steel plates were welded by hand after the full lengths of channels were welded. The welded plate was left to cool, and then I had to remove the large steel wedges from the edges. The fitter got the shop crane, and we hooked up the finished plate and started making three piles of these plates at the front door of the punch shed. When things were done at a certain section in the shop—in the ship, pardon, excuse me—a plate was shipped out to be placed in this area. It was tough, hard, dirty, cold work. The shop wasn't insulated. To get warm once in a while and have a smoke, there was fabricated heaters to stand next to.

EE: [Laughs] You observed that you were back in January. Of course, we might put on the record what the usual drydock and shipyard work period was. It was basically winter work, wasn't it?

TC: Well, it just depended. They used to have a lot of ships in the summertime, but their main body of their work was from about beginning of December until maybe the beginning of May. That's when they did the big jobs.

EE: Through into the beginning of the shipping season.

TC: Yeah. So it was pretty cold.

EE: Yeah.

TC: Anyway, I'll give you a little description of these heaters. This was quite a contraption. You wouldn't want to have one in your house. [Laughing]

EE: Did this involve a barrel by any chance?

TC: Well, these heaters were made out of extra heavy 24-inch pipe that had a cap welded on the bottom. An attachment for a pneumatic air line had a half-inch leader hose and a brass hand valve connected to a three-quarter inch rubber hose that attached to a valve on a station attached to one of the support beams in the buildings. There was a lot of pneumatic air in there. All the machines they used at that time used pneumatic air for the handheld ones.

[0:15:26]

EE: Sure.

TC: There was 110 pounds square inch pressure on the line. We used to put paper and then kindling into the bottom of the pipe, then about six inches of coke on top. The welder would light up a cutting torch, start the mess on fire, and then someone would open the air valve on the leader to create an airflow to burn and help the coke, keep the coke hot. We kept putting more coke on as the day progressed. The pipe got real hot and was quite warm. Four or five guys could crowd around it to warm up their hands and feet. This was, of course, the first thing done every morning during the winter before we actually started doing some real work.

There were about six of these heaters burning at one time in the shop. Of course, the lunchrooms and the washrooms were also finally a chance to warm up whenever they were used.

EE: How big of pipe--?

TC: It was 24-inch diameter, the inside diameter. It was extra heavy pipe.

EE: So it was two feet wide and you've got it full of coke?

TC: Oh, yeah, it was extra heavy. Well, the thickness was about three-quarters of an inch thick, and it used to get red-hot. But once--.

EE: How much heat did it actually radiate out?

TC: Oh, well, you--. The sides of the pipe were red-hot right from the coke down. Then, oh, I can't tell how hot it was, but it was--. You could get close to it, and you had your hand like that, and you could warm your feet. So four or five people would hang around there when it got cold because that's the only source of heat there was in the shop. You had to go somewhere. You could work for a short period of time, but you've got to remember, if it was 25- or 30-degrees Fahrenheit below zero outside, it was the same thing in that shop because we were standing on steel all the time. There was no insulation on the walls or nothing.

EE: There could have been, I suppose. They could have insulated.

TC: Well, it was too big to heat, and they were constantly opening doors all the time to bring stuff in and out. So it would be impossible to heat it. They did have heaters on the walls. I guess one time they tried to heat the place, but there was no way the heat would stay in. It was just a waste of time.

EE: What working men in this city have endured!

TC: Oh, I'd say half the--. You'd be surprised how many people in this city worked there. I'd say about half the population of this city worked there at one time or another. Especially during the Second World War.

EE: Not many as long as you have, though.

TC: Well, there was one fellow there that was on our executive of the union, his name was Bill Sheleski. He started when he was 16 years old, and he was a marker boy in what they used to call the boiler shop. When he retired, he had put in 52 years. I think he was the longest worker there.

EE: Sixteen to 68, boy.

TC: Yeah. So he--. There was a pension plan there at the time—it wasn't a very good one—and anyway, the results of that pension plan was that he got $52 a month. So he got $1 for every year he worked there! [Laughing] What a right kick in the head that was.

EE: Yeah, I'll say.

TC: And he worked hard. Anyway, we'll continue.

EE: Right.

TC: The pipe got red-hot. It was quite warm. This is--. Oh, ok. Anyway, we'll get on to the drum debarkers. I think you might be interested in this. This was quite an operation too. They made them for the Provincial Mill just up the street from us.

EE: Ok. So we're off to the support for the paper industry now?

TC: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Right.

TC: This was quite a long thing. I think it was about 40 feet long. I can't be sure. The drum bark--. We used to call them barkers—drum barkers—but they were actually drum *de*barkers was a big job. The plates were marked, and holes punched into the plates in a line at about where the middle points would be later on in sections in between the staves. The staves were three-quarter inch flat plates that were pressed into a half circle and then joined and welded at beveled joints into 40-, 45-foot-long lengths. The drum plates were rolled and then welded together into one big section on moving rollers. End plates were also tacked onto the ends to contain the finished staves. The drums were then placed on flatcars on railroad tracks that had been welded with clips to the shopfloor.

[0:20:24]

EE: And so how wide--. What was the diameter of one of these debarkers?

TC: Oh, the diameter—inside diameter—was quite huge. I'm trying to think. I'd just been looking at this.

EE: So, you're suggesting it was, say, 40 feet long?

TC: Oh, I would say it was probably at least 30 feet diameter. Pretty close to 30 feet.

EE: And 40 feet long?

TC: Pretty close to 40 feet long, yeah. I can't be sure now because I--.

EE: And you may, at the mill--. Or were you going to describe what happened at the mill?

TC: I didn't go to the mill. I'm just telling you how we made them.

EE: So presumably it was turning, was it?

TC: Yeah. Well, once it was all everything was done, the whole thing would--. They'd throw a bunch of logs in there. I guess it was set up at an angle, and they'd throw a bunch of logs in there and water would be running through there. The drums would turn, and as they turned, they would debark the wood. And the holes that were in between the staves would cause the water to flow back down where it was supposed to go, and the logs would go out the end. I don't know what the heck they did with the refuse. I can't be sure exactly how that went, but that's what they were designed to do.

EE: Now one possibility at a paper mill—or certainly at a sawmill—with that sort of thing is that you've got a fuel. Once it's dried out, you can burn it. You'll see these beehive burners in BC sawmills, I well remember.

TC: I don't think they did that with that stuff at that time. I think they made it into pressboard and stuff like that.

EE: Well, they may. Certainly, if you could make a good you could sell instead of burning it up.

TC: I think they chipped it up. Yeah, I think they chipped it up.

EE: Hog fuel was the term applied to some of this waste once upon a time, but--.

TC: Yeah.

EE: Ok. So that was something aside from the shipbuilding. Although, what it underscores is that Port Ship has served a lot of industries and businesses in the city over the years, hasn't it?

TC: Well, yeah. Well, wait until I finish this. You might get a real eye-opener here! The staves were welded together, had to be inserted into the drums that had the rings on each end. The rings, I think, were about ten inches wide. I can't remember exactly, but somewhere around there. But this was a tricky job. Two shop gantry cranes were brought over and picked up the staves one at a time, lift one end of the stave inside the drum. The other crane took off. The crane that was left there, lifted out the outside end of the stave until the whole stave was shaped like a banana. Then the power was pushed on suddenly until the crane caused the stave to slide quickly inside the drum. The brakes were jammed on just before the chain would hit the outside of the ring and cause the stave to hit the other end of the drum up against the inside of the ring. [Laughs]

EE: This involves some pretty fancy operation of the crane, by the sound of it!

TC: Oh. Well, I'd know because I was in the crane. [Laughs] The crane was jumping up and down when I did that. [Laughs]

EE: You were actually running it?

TC: Oh, yeah. I made the staves, put the staves together, and then they wanted me to run the crane because the crane operator went on a drunk. So I had to run the crane. I went up and there was another fellow on the other crane, and we put--. He took off and I had to put them in. He was too scared to do it because once--. Well, I was kind of leery of it at first too, but once I got the hang of it, it was kind of fun. But it scared the hell out of everybody else in the shop when I did it. You had to go up like this. *Whoosh!* It went in fast. Like I said, I had to jam the brakes on with the chain carried right inside the stave, inside of the drum, and then it was disconnected. And sometimes it didn't go all the way down to the other end, so I had to go around the other end and stick a hook in there. They had a little hole in the other end just for that, and they'd pull it right up tight. Then--.

EE: Were there a number of staves inside the drum?

TC: Oh, there was quite a few. They went all around the inside.

OM: How big were they?

TC: The height of them when they were finished was probably around four inches. They were approximately eight inches wide and three-quarter inch thick. There was 2 inch different between each one of them—like distance between them—between each long stave all the way around. So you could just imagine how many staves were inside there.

[0:25:16]

EE: Yeah, because you've got to--.

TC: And there was holes punched in between the staves, and then later on, they cut the holes out. They made one long loop to take the thing out so I guess the water would drain out better. But it was quite an operation. Oh, yeah.

EE: Or the bark would fall out.

TC: Oh, yeah. That's why I'd like to explain it to you, so you see how these things work. It was quite a thing to do!

EE: Probably the bark would be falling out as well, I would imagine.

TC: Could very well be. It's hard to say. I never saw them do it. Anyway. Then a fitter, a welder, and a helper went inside to fit the stave tightly to the inside of the drum. This was done using heavy steel dogs they used to call them. They weighed about 25 pounds, maybe heavier. They had one-inch pins which fit into the holes—into each—into the plate and overtop of the staves wherever it wasn't tight to the inside of the drum. They were hooked on the bottom. They were hooked on the bottom, you put them in there, and then you stuck a large wedge in there. We had to drive them in with sledgehammers. This procedure was repeated over and over until the whole inside of the drum had staves tacked on it. The drums had to be placed on the same type of rollers used to originally fit them together with the drums on top of the flatcar. The rolls were right underneath the drums on top of a flatcar.

There were two drums, and staves were inserted into the opposite ends of each of them because of space. There was two drums made and placed on these flatcars and in the shop. So we were working on two debarker drums at one time. The drum had all of its tacked-on staves in place, and then had a large strong beam inserted that went the full length of the inside of the drum and stuck out

about eight feet on each end of the drum. A straight track was placed on this beam for the automatic union melt welding machine. This was used to weld both sides of the stave at a time and the ends were welded by jet rod.

Then the beam was lifted up by the two cranes, the drum was rolled into position, and then the procedure was repeated until all the staves and ends were welded solid. The completed drum barker was then shipped to the mill on a railroad track that went through our own gate and over to the mill. This was done with a diesel electric crane that the shipyard used outside, throughout the whole yard.

EE: Mmhmm. So this was being done for the Provincial Mill just down the shore?

TC: Yeah, that's right.

EE: Yeah.

TC: Now, a little introduction to the slab. The slab was an area inside the punch shed. This area was covered with six by four inch cast iron plates that had square holes placed evenly on its surface. There were two large fuel-fired furnaces there at one end of the slab for heating things red-hot before bending them to shape, usually in a circular pattern. There was usually a slab man and a four-men crew to help him when things needed to be bent to shape. First, the main furnace was fired up to the right heat. Then the set or metal jig needed to bend the pieces to shape was placed on the slab and pinned and dogged down into place. The pins had square pegs on their ends and some round pins. This was to get it into place and move it into position. Then the hairpins that were about 30 inches long by about one and a half inches round and bent in the middle were hammered down on the set to keep it from moving or popping up. Was shaped like this. You hammered it in with a ten-pound sledgehammer and it tightened up on the top of the material, and it tightened up inside the hole. That's why they call them hairpins.

Anyway, material to be bent was piled up with the ends hanging over the end of the slab directly across from the large door of the furnace where the set was pinned down. Once the furnace was fired up to the proper heat, the large semicircular door was raised and locked into place. Then two men with a pair of tongs about 15 feet long pulled one piece of material—usually angle iron—from the pile in front of the slab, then slid it across the slab and pushed it completely into the furnace. The door was closed, and we all waited for the metal to get red-hot.

[0:30:30]

The slab man would periodically look into the furnace through a swinging loophole to check the redness of the material. Once it was white-hot, the door was raised, locked into place, and the angle iron was pulled out with the tongs by the two men. It stood along side the set so one end of the angle was at one end of the set. It was pushed over, it was dogged down, then the action began. It was fast and furious and had to be done quickly before the angle iron could cool. I was on the wheel. [Laughs] That's what they called it. It was a cast iron semicircular bender that had a round pin in the middle near the handle, and a handle that was attached to a two-and-a-half-inch diameter pipe about nine feet long. Weighed about 85 pounds. The heavier model used for thicker material weighed 125 pounds, so it was usually used by two men.

My job was to insert the bender near the angle iron into a square hole and bend the angle iron over to the set, hold it in place until it was pinned down, and continued to the end of the angle iron until it was all pin dropped down into place. The final end of the angle iron was still red-hot at the end of the set when I was finished off, that's how fast they had to go. You had to go fast because once it cooled, you couldn't do it anymore.

EE: No, no. It would have to be while it's red hot.

TC: Oh, oh. It was deadly work.

EE: What did the pinning down, the dogging, involve?

TC: Well, as I was bending it, the other four guys would be putting pins on top of the edge of the angle iron and dogging it down as I was going along. I would bend it, hold it, they'd pin it. I'd take it out, bend it, hold it, pin it. We went like that. I can't remember exactly how long it took to do an angle iron because some of them were heavier and longer than others, but we had to go fast. It was done within a matter of a couple of minutes.

EE: It would have to be that fast, wouldn't it, because the heat would be lost very quickly.

TC: Yeah. So everyone had to work together and quickly. There was no time for mistakes. If we were too slow, we couldn't complete bending the material. Of course, the material had to be just about white-hot to begin with, especially the heavier and longer material. The material was usually about 20 feet long. When we bent angle iron, tool out was quite a bit easier. When it was tool in, it was a lot harder and required more pounding and pins. Ten-pound sledgehammers were used, except for the slab man who had a twelve-pounder.

Large channel wide-flange beams were also bent by the hydraulic pushes on coasts. It has a one-foot ram or push where it was usually used by the slab man while the rest of us pounded with sledgehammers. We also did pipes. Some were quite large internal diameter and edge thickness. The pipes were usually filled with sand after having one end capped and welded at the pipe shop. They were hung up in the air, and the open end was filled with sand. The pipe was pounded on its side to settle the sand and make it compact with sledgehammers. Then the open end was capped and welded shut. It had a pulling lug welded to it. A hole was drilled into the pipe on that end that had the pulling lug to release steam build up or the pipe would explode.

EE: This is all preparation before it's heated?

TC: Yeah. The pipes were bent using the hydraulic machine on coasters and an electric winch capable of pulling ten tonnes to bend it around the set. Small snatch blocks were set up on the slab at different locations for pulling and locking operations. The cable had to be placed in them quickly and released quickly depending on the angle of the pipe as it came around the set. Had to be done as quickly as possible with no time for errors again.

[0:35:18]

Whenever we did a job, we made sure there was nothing around our feet to trip over. All pins and dogs were placed behind us at least four feet from the set. There were very few accidents except for minor burnings. The biggest job and hardest they ever did on the slab was when they—when I was employed there—was to build two large endcaps for some huge storage tanks for a company in Alberta or BC. The final result would be two large domes. The larger second furnace in the slab was readied with new firebrick and a large set about 40 inches high in the middle, about 7 feet wide, and about 20 feet long was made that had compound roll—it rolled from side to side and from end to end. It was constructed of sheets of metal welded together to form the proper shape.

The plates used to construct the two domes were cut into pie shapes. It had two courses or rows—a top and a bottom row—of pie-shaped plates that had to line up perfectly after completion to form the two domes. They were three-quarter inch thick. The large set was pinned down not far from the centre of the second furnace door. The plates were placed in front of the slab and dragged up one at a time with the electric winch—slings, cables, snatch blocks at appropriate places. The plate was dragged up over the set and then guided into the red-hot furnace with a long four-inch pipe that had a fork on the end, which they used with the winch and cables. The plates were deliberately made extra wide and long—about four inches wide all along—to accommodate the pounding that would be required to make the pieces form properly.

When the plate was white-hot, the door was opened, locked, and a two-foot-long hook on the end of a winch cable was inserted in a hole at the end of the plate. The plate was dragged up over the form with the aid of the winch to large pinch stoppers at the end of

the set. There was nine of us including the slab man guiding the plate along the top of the set with long pinch bars under it until it hit the stops. Then, long three inches by three inches square bars that had a curve to them—had these seven foot six inches long—were lifted up by two of us over to the appropriate are on top of the red-hot plate. Swinging dogs were swung up over the bars. The bars again were lifted up by the two men who places two large steel wedges under the bar over the red-hot plate.

The middle of the plate was pounded down by the slab man and another worker using two 50-pound hardwood-headed sledgehammers. Then the steel wedges were pounded into place with 12-pound sledgehammers so the plate was tight to the set all the way along, one end to the other. The plate was allowed to cool dead cold before removal and marking and cutting and beveling. They were piled up outside the slab. We were giving old welder's helmets that had fine copper screens fitted to the front to protect our faces, and we had heavy gauntlets—gloves. The slab man only wore a green mask over his face and a fedora. It was 30 below degrees Fahrenheit outside and even in the shop, but not on the slab where we worked.

EE: A lot hotter inside.

TC: [Laughs] Oh! You'd never seen heat that hot.

EE: Yeah.

TC: The work was--. It took two months to form all the plates needed. There was only one accident. One man tripped over a pin and fell on top of the plate. The slab man immediately grabbed him and threw him about ten feet away from the set, and we threw buckets of water on him. He got off lucky but had third degree burns to the bottom of his arms. If he never had a parka on, he probably would have been burned to the bone.

EE: Yeah.

TC: Anyway, the plates were marked, cut, and beveled. Two large forms of sets had been built outside under a large gantry crane alongside the portside of the dock on timbers. A steel plate base on top of the timbers was erected, all levelled off all the way around. Plates were fitted around the bottom course of the front row first, then the top row, and all welded together. The finished products were perfect as far as diameter was concerned, but were not a perfect spheroid shape. However, no one else could do the job, so the imperfection was ignored, and the final domes were accepted. They looked sort of like pumpkins. [Laughs]

[0:40:48]

EE: Did--. Had you finished on that particular project?

TC: Yeah.

EE: Did the management ever apologize to you for the contracts they'd taken on? Because, I mean, this sounds like a wild one! [Laughs]

TC: No, no. They took whatever they could get. The stuff they took there, the stuff that came into that place, nobody else could do. That's the kind of stuff they took, and it was big money. That was a big-money job. Those domes were huge. They were probably 35, 40 feet in diameter when they were finished. And like I said, there was two courses of steel plates. There was a bottom course and a top course. That's the only way we could do it. There's just no room to do it any other way. And nobody else in Canada could do it.

EE: There wasn't any other shop around, eh? Or that was--. At least they told you that.

TC: Nobody could do it because nobody had a press big enough to do that. So we had to do it red-hot. It was murder, believe me. Oh. [Laughs] Anyway, it took us two months to do it and it was super hot.

EE: It was steady employment. [Laughing] That could be said for it.

TC: Yeah, I guess you could say that, yeah.

EE: I suppose when you're talking about the size of the equipment there, we could think about what Whalen originally used. This is probably the original equipment of the drydock and the shipyard, was it? Or had it been added during the Second World War perhaps?

TC: Well, most of the stuff they got--. The gantry cranes in the shop came from England. Most of the other equipment came from a defunct shipyard down in Michigan. This was about 1909.

EE: So it is the original equipment that Whalen put into the yard?

TC: Most of the stuff was, yeah, but there was some newer stuff that was placed in along the years.

EE: Of course, the drydock you have there is itself an indication of kind of the extent of business he expected to do. How big was that, is the drydock?

TC: Well, it was quite wide. I can't remember the exact width of it, but it was 752 feet long. They added a notch to it to make it a little longer because some newer boats came in that had a longer bow on them.

EE: So the canallers were how long?

TC: It just depends. You know, they were all different kind of lengths. The average ship was about 700 and something down to 600. And then they had smaller stuff. It's hard to say.

EE: Because Whalen built that shipyard originally with a drydock large enough to handle anything that could go through the Welland Canal.

TC: Yeah, at that time. At that time, yeah.

EE: Because later on, I guess, did the Eisenhower locks include up to 1000 feet or something?

TC: There's no way they could get that in there.

EE: No, you wouldn't have been able to do that.

TC: Yeah, no. They couldn't do any of that kind of stuff.

EE: Not drydock, no. You could do it on the side dock, which you--.

TC: Well, they never brought any of that stuff here. Never. They always went down to the States because most of those kind of ships—those 1000-footers—were Yankee boats, so that's where they--.

EE: Did you ever visit the yards at Collingwood or St. Catherines?

TC: No, I never went there. No, never went down.

EE: Because I did, actually, when I was **[0:44:03 criting]** for shipbuilding in the 80s. I did visit both of those yards, but of course, I was a layperson. I didn't have the full appreciation. I'm just wondering whether either of them had a drydock as big as yours.

TC: Oh, yeah. Well, the Port Weller drydock, which was in St. Catherines, had an actual drydock and the other one was called a graving dock. It was for building boats and launching them.

EE: At Collingwood?

TC: Yeah. No, not Collingwood. Port Weller. Port Weller.

EE: Oh, at Port Weller.

TC: Collingwood had an actual dock, but they used to build ships there. Port Weller used to build them two, but they had—what did I say?—two docks. They had an actual drydock and then they had a graving dock. But Port Weller rented that property from the government for $100,000 a year. That property's actually owned by the government, Port Weller, at that time.

EE: Because it's right next to the Welland Canal.

TC: Yeah.

EE: I've gone by it a number of times now because of the relatives in Niagara-on-the-Lake that I visit, so we take the road past the drydock—or the shipyard.

[0:45:05]

TC: They did change the graving dock into an actual drydock after, so they had two docks there. So they had--. They got a lot of our repair work. It was kind of aggravating to us because we were making all the money and they were--. They never seemed to make any money down there. I don't know what--. I think there was--. Well, they had bad overhead. I think the overhead. Mostly the bad overhead. They had too many management people there. They had almost one management person for every two workers there. It was just ridiculous. It was a big—what would you call it?—marshmallow. We kept that place going for years. The money they took out of the shipyard went down there to keep the other place going. That's the way it was. They never made a nickel down there. They made millions at Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company—made millions there—but most of the money was never invested in their property. It was always shipped off to somebody down at the other end.

EE: So you were part of a—what was it?—shipbuilding and engineering. What was the name of the company for quite a while at--?

TC: Well, when I started it was called Port Arthur Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited. And then over the years, they changed it to Port Ship and then PASCOL [Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company Limited]. And then the last time--. Well, they've had about three or four. Well, they had a couple more different names, and then it was—what the heck was it called?—I can't think of it now. I've been away from there a couple years. I don't even want to think of it anymore. [Laughing]

EE: Back in the 70s, for example, the owners--.

TC: Well, back then it was called--.

EE: This yard was owned by the same people as the Collingwood yard, wasn't it?

TC: Yeah, yeah. I think that might have been Paul Martin was in there.

EE: I think it was part of the Canada Steamship Lines [CSL]. It was affiliated with Canada Steamship Lines.

TC: At that time, yeah. Yeah. That place had different owners. The Canada Steamship Lines was actually started by famers. They started off with one ship to ship their grain. They got a ship built to ship their grain, and then after that it grew. Originally our—the company that I worked for—was actually owned by the Grey Nuns in Quebec. We had a heck of a time trying to get anything out of them when we were working, then finally it shifted over and Power Corporation bought it. I can't remember the guy's name. Paul Desmarais.

EE: Paul Desmarais, yes.

TC: Paul Desmarais took it over, and he owned Kingsway Trucking and the Kingsway buses and everything. So it went pretty good for a while. Then they had another owner come in, and it just changed hands so many times because people got--. It wasn't because they weren't making money there, I guess they got tired of all the headaches connected to shipbuilding. Because there is quite a few headaches to it.

EE: Yeah, there are. Well, you have more to tell us about, too, for that matter. I certainly didn't mean to interrupt.

TC: Well, I got quite a bit there, but I don't know if we've got time. I'll try to get through it anyway because I--.

EE: We're doing well, I think--.

TC: I think you're going to find this interesting stuff for somebody who had never seen it or heard about it before.

EE: Well, for me, it's interesting in part because I did visit the—tour—the yard at least once back in the 80s too. So I have a mental picture of some of these buildings in my mind as you're describing what was going on in them.

TC: Well, I've got every building in that place inside my head.

EE: I bet!

TC: Oh, yeah. Well, I'll tell you about the--. I'll finish off with the slab and then we'll move onto something else. They also formed a huge pipe ring-shaped expansion device for Ontario Hydro, about 30 feet in diameter, on the slab in sections. The pipe was 24-inch extra heavy pipe. It was joined by flanges at various lengths, and it had all kinds of other pipes with flanges on their ends welded along the circumference after. Anyone working with the slab man forming red-hot metal was given a premium of three cents an hour rate on top of their regular earning rate. [Laughs]

EE: Three cents an hour?

TC: Yeah! That was the premium, yeah.

EE: What was the basic? How many cents--?

TC: Well, it depended on what you earned, but the basic rate was the helper rate, and then they put three cents an hour on top of that. [Laughs]

EE: For the heat?

TC: We were actually getting our own rates for being over there. We weren't actually helpers, we were--. Like whoever was sent there knew what they were doing. The guy asked. The slab man specifically asked for certain people.

EE: Sure.

TC: Because he knew that they knew how to do that particular job, and most of those guys were already getting their A-rate or top rate, but they got another three cents for--. [Laughs]

EE: What kind of rate would you have been having?

TC: Well, at that time I wasn't getting a heck of a lot, when I was doing that. I can't remember what I was getting. I think I was getting B-rate at that time. I started off as a helper and I went to an assembler. I can't be sure now what the rate was. It wasn't very much. Maybe about, oh jeez, six, seven bucks an hour, I guess.

EE: Six or seven dollars an hour?

TC: I can't remember for sure.

EE: And so three cents on that?

TC: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Because I wondered the kind of relationship--.

[0:50:01]

TC: The slab man was getting premium rate. He had gotten almost more money than anybody in the place almost.

EE: Because if you were being paid six dollars and hour, three cents would be, what, 0.5 percent?

TC: [Laughs] I can't be sure. It's a sneeze anyway. It was a sneeze. It was a laugh. It was a joke! It was a joke.

EE: If you were getting one percent, it would be, what, six cents? [Laughs]

TC: Yeah, something like that. But anyway. The slab man was big, strong, and tough, but relatively kind-hearted. He was the boss of the area of the shop. He did his job the best he could, and he expected everybody else with him to do the same without getting

hurt or killed. His rule was to shut down the furnace at 3:00 and get things out of the way for the next day. So we all got about an hour and a half from the extreme heat. He knew it was like. He worked there for years, so he felt sorry for all of us. So he shut her down 3:00. Nobody could argue with him. Didn't matter. The supervisor from--. If the manager come down and told him he had to--. He'd tell them to you-know-what pretty quick. [Laughing] And he'd have a sledgehammer in his hand when he said it! So the manager would take off. "Ok, Mike. Ok, Mike." [Laughs]

EE: So what would your day be, eight hours there? 8:00 to--?

TC: Well, it was an eight-hour day. Yeah.

EE; 8:00 to 4:00 or--?

TC: Yeah, it was 8:00 to 4:30.

EE: 8:00 to 4:30 with half an hour for lunch, I suppose?

TC: Yeah. And we had two 12-minute coffee breaks. But that's--.

EE: I was thinking the fellow in charge knows the work, he does the work, and so he's the absolute boss there really.

TC: He was, yeah. You couldn't argue with him. He'd tell you and you had to do it because you're working with red-hot steel. And you know in your mind that he was telling you what you had to do, and if you didn't do it the right way, you were going to get hurt or burned. So you had to do what he said. That was it. It was that simple.

EE: Yes.

TC: Even though he was--. Sometimes he was overbearing. You wanted to punch him in the nose, but he was the boss. You had to do what he said because if you didn't, there'd be a sledgehammer flying through the air in your direction. He'd get mad. He didn't want anybody to get hurt, and if you got in the road and you did the wrong thing that could cause somebody to get hurt, well, you heard from him pretty quick.

EE: Well, if a foreman supervisor on the job is concerned that no one get hurt, that is in fact the most important bit of mind one can imagine.

TC: Yeah. Well, he wasn't actually a foreman. He was still in the union, but he got a top rate.

EE: Well, I was thinking of whatever term might apply, but he's the boss there, but--. Lead hand.

TC: Oh, he was a very strong, strong guy. I saw him swing a 30-pound sledgehammer like it was an 8-pound sledgehammer. And they had those hammers on the slab. You had to use them sometimes for really heavy jobs. The heaviest one I used there was a 12-pounder.

EE: Yeah. Can you say more about his career? Some idea of when he might have started and how long he worked?

TC: Well, I guess he started off in the shop as a helper back in the 30s, and then he worked his way into--. I guess he started off as an apprentice of the slab man, and that's--. When I got there, he was the slab man. That was '66. As far as I know, he was the slab man right at the start of the 50s. So he knew his job.

EE: Yeah. Physically a big fellow?

TC: He wasn't--. He was maybe around 5'11", but he was built like an ox. He had very wide shoulders. He was very muscular, and he used to like chewing tobacco. [Laughs] He didn't smoke, but I knew he had a drink once in a while. I knew that. But he didn't smoke.

EE: Sure. What was his name?

TC: Mike--. Let me think. Mike Bodnarchuk.

EE: Bodnarchuk.

TC: I don't know if that's--. I used to think it was Russian. I couldn't be sure. Or Ukrainian or something.

EE: Yeah. I'd be guessing it might be Ukrainian.

TC: Yeah. Bodnarchuk. He was a pretty tough cookie.

EE: Passed on by now, I suppose.

TC: Oh, he died a few years back, yeah. But the funny thing was after he retired, when I saw him in the street after that it seemed like he shrank about a foot! [Laughs] He didn't seem to be as big to me after that.

EE: Well, it's quite possible that he was muscled because of the demands of the job and that once he was retired, some of that muscle just gradually disappeared.

TC: That could be, maybe. That could be. But he was a powerful son of a gun. You wouldn't want to get in a fight with him, I'll tell you that. He could grab you with one hand and throw you. Like I told you, he grabbed that one guy with one hand! Because he had a sledgehammer in the other, he grabbed that one guy that fell on the plates with one hand, and he threw him about ten feet away from the plates. If he didn't do that, that guy would've lost both his arms. They would've been burned to a crisp.

EE: Saved his life or--.

TC: He kept his arms for sure. Yeah.

EE: Would he have been the toughest guy in the facility?

TC: Well, there was bigger guys than him. There was bigger and tougher guys than him. Some of them were riveters. But in that area--.

[0:55:58]

OM: Oh--.

TC: Finish up.

OM: Oh, just the tapping is picked up by the mic. [Laugh]

TC: Oh! I didn't know. Sorry about that, I didn't know.

EE: Well, we're talking about riveting so, bang away already! [Laughing]

OM: Remember, 500 years from now, somebody will think it was a secret code or something. [Laugh]

TC: Oh, ok. All right!

OM: I'm sorry.

TC: Uh--.

OM: Well, Bodnarchuk. There was a hockey player, Gus Bodnar, and it probably was an abbreviated form.

EE: With the -chuk dropped. Quite possible. I'm trying to remember whether I haven't run across Bodnarchuks myself.

OM: It's a well-known name in Thunder Bay.

EE: It is, actually, I daresay.

TC: Well, I don't know what you want to get into. I've got--.

EE: What's the next thing in your notes?

TC: Well, I can sort of give you a general dissertation here for a little while and then you can get into whatever pops into your mind.

EE: Sure.

TC: There was a lot of ships and barges that were constructed at Port Ship, as it was called then. I believe the *Imperial Redwater* was the first—no, pardon me—was the last laker they built in 1952. That was the last lake ship that they built there. It was called the *Imperial Redwater*. They built some new aluminum minesweepers for the Navy in the 50s under the large gantry crane outside beside the drydock. And then they built the--.

EE: Half of the *Sir John Aird.*

TC: They built the *Alexander Henry* in ’56.

EE: This is the ship, the icebreaker?

TC: Yeah. It was extremely well made with an extra thick icebreaking bow. The only thing wrong was its engine, which was not a marine engine.

EE: Hm!

TC: This was not found out until they were installed, and the ship was first used. When the ship rode up on the ice to crush it down, the oil in the engines would run back and cause the engines to overheat.

EE: Oh, darn.

TC: Yeah. I don’t know if they ever rectified this situation or not, but they used that thing for a long time. The ship worked well for many years before it was sold for a dollar to the government and moved back east as a tourism attraction and bed and breakfast. The last time it was in drydock after inspection, the hull was found to be perfect. They must’ve used boilerplate and hard steel for that shell. They had built their own repair tug, which was used for quite a few years on outside jobs at the elevators, Seaway terminals, and ships anchored out in the lake. I believe it was built in ’48. It had an all-welded construction and three-quarter inch boilerplate welded to its bow. It could carry four welding machines, four oxyacetylene portable burning machines, and tonnes of repair materials. They also had a large steel raft that was constructed in the 30s for working on ships rudders and side damage.

Hm. **[*… pages flipping*]**

EE: More construction there?

TC: Yeah. I got a--. I had to jump back there because--. Ok. In the 70s, they built the *Scotty Gall* and the *Learmonth* alongside the drydock and side launched them into the drydock. It was actually a two-part barge designed for supplying villages in the far-north with fuel and foodstuffs. The front part had an ice cutting bow, which went under the ice and then up to break it. Both sections could be joined together in the middle if need be. A large tug was supposed to push and/or pull it around. There was a provision for attachment of the bow of the tug at the back end of the *Scotty Gall*—which was the front part of the barge—and the second half, the *Learmonth*, could be attached to the back of the tug. Or both sections of the barge could be joined together and pushed from the *Learmonth* section. This way, one section could be left to unload while the other was used in another area nearby to unload.

EE: Was this for Arctic service?

TC: Yeah. Yeah.

EE: Hm.

[1:00:00]

TC: I helped to launch them. Hm, hm, hm. **[… *pages flipping*]** Trying to see where I was here. Fifteen. **[… *pages flipping*]**

EE: We could maybe just cut it off for a few moments, or are you--?

TC: Oh! A bubbling system was installed which would sink back and forth in a zig-zag pattern under the water alongside the waterfront dock and partway out towards the opening in the breakwall. This was constructed with flexible plastic pipes which had scrap steel weights attached along its length to keep it on the bottom of the lake. It was drilled full of quarter-inch holes. This system—which was an excellent idea—created air bubbles which kept the area above it relatively ice-free or helped to rot and weaken ice as it moved into the area. This was done to make it easier to dock and undock boats at both the waterfront area and drydock. In the wintertime, there was usually tonnes of broken up ice in the drydock after dock a ship in it. This had to be removed before work could be done.

There were many, many three-year inspections done in the 50s and up to the 80s. This was changed to five-year inspections by the insurance companies and ship owners, with the cooperations of the Federal government. I saw many, many unsafe, rotten, structurally weakened ships as a result of this practice.

We built and launched the *Wolfe Islander* ferry in 1975 at the portside of the drydock in a side launch. That was only the second time I participated in a launching at the drydock. There was a platform set up with all the fanfare and eye-catching colourful trappings of a circus. There was a food and booze table for all the bigwigs, and pop and tea and coffee for the rest of us. [Laughing] A launch is usually really something to see. First the gantry crane had to be moved back to the end at the forward part of the drydock. All the railroad's supporting timbers from the front of the dock to the end of the gantry crane that was used by the gantry crane as a runway had to be unbolted and moved after being marked as to the location along the dock. Then the actual launching took place.

There were two large anchor chains coiled up in steel boxes below ground. They had their ends coupled to large lifting lugs on the side of the vessel. Then there was two large hawser ropes that were connected to this same box under the dirt about 40 yards back. These ropes were connected to reinforced brackets on the side of the vessel. About ten yards from the vessel, the rope's individual strands were placed splayed out over two hardwood blocks about knee-height. The vessel itself sat on greased runways spaced so that there were six runways. The runways were placed on large timbers. When a whistle was sounded, about six men on each side—or 12 to a runway—started driving in wooden wedges to put the vessel--. **[… *pages flipping*]**

EE: To get the vessel sliding on it?

TC: At the appropriate--. Eh. What's this? To lift the vessel up off the blocks. The runways were underneath it. **[… *pages flipping*]** Jeez.

[1:05:35]

EE: Maybe we should interrupt the recording for a few moments and let you put the papers in order for your notes.

TC: Ok. Here we go.

OM: That's all you have to do, Ernie, is threaten stopping the machine! [Laughing]

TM: The blocks--. All of the wedges were supposed to be hammered in in unison so the vessel would rise easily. Once the vessel was at the appropriate height and angle, whistles were blown to stop the men, who got out from under the vessel and grouped back about 30 yards away from the vessel. When it was ensured no one was underneath, the all-clear was given. Then at a time signal from stopwatches, both splayed restraining ropes across the blocks were chopped at the same time with broad-headed axes, about 16 inches wide and 30 pounds apiece. Choppers immediately retreated, and the vessel slid down the runways with wedges and blocks flying all over the place.

Then the attached chains stopped the vessel from hitting the other side of the dock when they unravelled. The shipyard whistle was blown with blasts, and, of course, everybody cheered. Celebration followed and beer was broken out for the men, and "Thank God I'm a Country Boy" started playing. [Laughing] The next day, we started to clean up the whole mess and replace the track and timbers for the gantry crane.

EE: Did anyone do a movie of all of that?

TC: Oh, there should be one done, I'm telling you.

EE: A recording of that?

TC: Oh, that was--. I got the foundry here, if you want to hear it?

EE: Do you have anything about the *Sir John Aird* in your head?

TC: Well, that was just the bow we made for it.

EE: You built just the part of it?

TC: Just the bow, front part of it.

EE: We'll come to the foundry in a moment--.

TC: Ok.

EE: But can you say something about that?

TC: Oh, yeah. Well, that was--. That *John B. Aird* was done down east. I think it was done in--.

EE: Collingwood, I think the--.

TC: Collingwood at that time before they closed it down. They were busy there, so they didn't want to finish the bow off. They knew that we knew how to a better job than them, so they shifted it up to us, and they put it in the dry dock. We put the bow on. It was launched and put over to the side and they were going to have a big fanfare after, but two guys got killed on that thing after. Got electrocuted.

EE: Oh, was it on the *Sir John Aird* that--? Down in the--?

TC: Yeah. Yeah. That's the one. '83, 1983.

EE: This was Osadic was one of them, right? Rod Osadic's--?

TC: No, it was Walter Osadic. His father.

EE: Yeah, his father.

TC: He was a foreman.

EE: Right.

TC: Walter Osadic and Barry Dornan got electrocuted down inside under the bilge. There was three deaths before that. There was the *Richelieu* was in, those three guys got burned to death in the spring there. It was a terrible time. I could tell you what happened there. I know exactly what happened if you want to hear it.

EE: By all means.

TC: Ok. Well anyway, I'll start off with the *Richelieu.* With the *Richelieu,* I was just walking into the washroom from the shop, and a guy named Mike Sopko—who was a machine operator in there—he says, "Chauvin, you better go outside and take a look. It looks like there a fire on that ship out there. There's black smoke coming out of the front end of the boat. Somebody must've caught a mattress on fire or something." And I says, "Well, I've got to go to the washroom right now. I'll go out and take a look." I went to the washroom. I came back, there was firetrucks and cop cars and everything out there. There was people running all over the place. I figured, "What the hell happened?"

So I went out there, and of course, they wouldn't let anybody on the ship by that time. And what had happened was this—and I know this happened because I talked to all the people that were there and involved and everything. What happened was that there was a welder on night shift, his name was Jim Kempton, and he had been using this torch. There was a bubble on the oxygen part of the torch right at the end of the torch. Right on the rubber line was a bubble forming there, and it was at the end of his shift, so he went and told the foreman about it, and he left the torch up on the deck. He told the foreman, "There's a bubble there. You've got to get somebody to fix that before they use it." He turned off the torch and then he left. It was 4:30. Well, just as he left, somebody scooped that torch and they brought it into the—what do they call it now?—the anchor chain room.

[1:10:24]

EE: On the ship?

TC: On the ship, which is in the bow of the ship. There was two manholes going down into the forepeak of the ship, and it's separated by a bulkhead. There was four guys working in the portside of the ship, and the only way to get in and out of that forepeak was through that manhole. The lower level they were working at was 30 feet below that manhole. Now the torch had been brought into the area and left right beside the manhole by the welder that had brought it in there. I worked with that welder a week prior to that. His name was Stanley Humar. He was only about 21 years old. He had left it there, and then--. I guess 4:30 just about he needed a torch, so he scooped the first one he could find. He saw it on the deck. He brought it down there, and he put it right there. And somehow or another, nobody knew that torch was there. So he had left it there, and the he took off at 4:30.

In the meantime, they turn all the gas off at 4:30. There used to be a station in the punch shed where they turned all the oxyacetylene off for the whole yard, but that didn't mean anything because there was still gas in the lines, just it wasn't flowing anymore. But what had happened is just after he left, I guess that bubble burst, and all the oxygen in that line and from huge lines that supplied it went through that line and into that area and just flowed down the hole like water. So he got there in the morning. The gas had been turned on so that he could tell that was leakage. He went over, he saw it, he crimped the line with a welding rod to keep it from leaking, and he went to get the repair kit. Well, the other three guys were already down below working.

He came back, he fixed the torch, lowered it down into the hole, and they got down there. There was four of them down there. There was two machine fitters and two welders. Both machine fitters were working with welders. They had been repairing what they call a lazy rod that was attached to a valve down there. The lazy rod ran from the valve right up to the deck, and it was attached to a wheel so you could turn the wheel at the top of the deck without going down into the forepeak, which would be full of water at the time. So they had repaired the valve, taken the valve apart, run it back to shop, they fixed it, and brought the valve back. They had to do that to a couple of them in there, I guess. They put a new gasket in it and then put it back in place, attached it.

Well, one of the welders was welding a clip to the wall to hold the lazy rod from rattling. And I guess there was some gasket material inside his save-all—it's a flat bar that's raised around the bottom of the valves in case they leak, so it'll catch it if there's oil. So this gasket material fell inside that save-all. I know this happened because one guy got out of there alive. So what happened was that he turned around for some reason, and he saw the welder trying to put out a fire that was caused by this gasket material. He'd been welding there, and I guess the gasket material caught fire because the whole thing was full of pure oxygen. They didn't know. They didn't know it was full. He tried to put it out with his foot.

As soon as he touched it, the flames went right up his overalls, and he was just a huge flame. One of the other welders went to try to put him out, he went up like a torch. So then the other machine fitter tried to put them out, and he went up. So he got scared and he ran. He had a bum leg. He jumped on ladder to get help and went and got up the ladder. The last guy that tried to help them, his name was Stanley Humar, who I had worked with a week beforehand. Somehow or another, he got halfway up the ladder. I don't know how, but we know he did because his hands were clenched where he had been climbing, and we found his body at the bottom of ladder. There was still blood in his body, and he had hit the bottom of the ladder and there was a pool of blood there. So he, somehow or another, he got halfway up before he fell. He was on fire when he went up.

They had to cut a hole in the side tank to get them out after. There was no way they could get them through the hole because the hole was too small. The firemen had to cut a hole right in the bulkhead to get them out through the cargo hold in a stretcher with a crane. So after, they had to identify the bodies, and I was surprised when they asked me because I knew one of the guys. I worked with him a week before. It was Stanley Humar. I says, "Ok, I'll try to go there." It was the first time I ever went to a morgue like that. It was Tom--. Can't remember the name. He was the--. Tom something. Hinsperger or something. He was the mortician at that time.

[1:15:38]

So I went there. I got there and there was three slabs, three large tables, and I looked. And on two of the tables there was just bones with black pieces of soot stuck to the bones here and there. The other one I could--. It was a body. I could identify it as a body. I went over and I says, "That's Stanley Humar." I knew it was him. I recognized his facial features, but all the skin had melted off his body. His ears and nose was melted off. You could see all the muscles underneath. It was like looking at somebody who had been skinned alive without any blood. So I knew that was him. I said, "That's Stanley Humar." I didn't know who the other two guys were. They had another guy with me, and his name was Francois Michaud. He knew the other two guys. I guess he used to drink with them and whatever. So he looked at one of the bodies. He saw a watch around one of their wrists, and he said, "That's so-and-so." So then we knew who the other guy was. But that was a pretty scary thing to see. I never saw anything like that in my life and I never want to see it again.

EE: Yeah. Because the yard had had a pretty good safety record over the years.

TC: That place was a hellhole.

EE: But in terms of--. Had there been many deaths?

TC: That happened before, but they never got outside. One of the welding foremen down there, he was in the area under the engine room, and he brought a torch in there, and it started leaking. He didn't know. Actually, he kicked the torch as he was welding in there and it turned the valve on it, and it filled up with oxygen. And he left it in there and he went out for coffee. Come back, it was full of oxygen. He came back, lit the torch. *Poof!* He caught on fire, and he got out of there. They put him out, but he burned from the middle of his head right to the back of his neck was all burned with third-degree burns.

OM: What changes were put into effect after that?

TC: Well, just a minute. There's one more guy after that. Most people don't know this because it wasn't in the papers. But anyway, there was one more guy. Similar thing happened. This guy was down under the engine room. Same thing. His name was Esko Heitikko. He was a Finn guy. I knew him well. I used to drink with him the odd time at the Finn Hall. He was down under there with a machine fitter under the gears and everything working in there, and they were covered in grease and everything. Same thing happened to him. He didn't know the torch was on. Sometimes you're crawling around in there, there's no room to move around. You can't get up on your--. You have to crawl around on your hands and knees all the time, and he must've kicked the torched accidentally and turned that oxygen valve on.

Same thing happened to him, but only he wasn't so lucky. I just happened to go outside the punch shed and I looked. I was just walking down towards the end of the dock, and I saw somebody run down the end of the gangway. There was a gangway from the engine room to the dock. They were completely on fire. I could see flames coming off their back. They ran down the gangway. They ran over to the drydock and they jumped in the lake. That was him. He was completely on fire. One of the welders got him a safety skip. He tried to get him out of the water, and he didn't want to get out. He said, "Leave me! Leave me! Let me die!! Let me die! Let me die!" They got him out of there. He had third-degree burns all over him. That happened before, but it was always hushed up.

See, they had a procedure there for checking the air, but most people didn't know about it, what you had to do to ask your foreman to have somebody go in there and check the air. And they had a machine for checking it that had tubes. At that time, they had the tubes, but nobody knew about this. They never told anybody! That's how this happened. So anyway, after this happened, I jumped on them. I was steady battling there for years over safety. I didn't know anything about the properties of those gases. As a matter of fact, I tried to find out the week before that, but I couldn't find out.

EE: The layperson would think that having an enclosed space filled with oxygen is good news because we need oxygen to breathe and so on. And you don't realize the consequences because, of course--.

TC: Well, I'll tell you a little aside about that. When we used to work under the double bottoms when it was really hot outside, we used to use the torch to cool ourselves off! We'd spray ourselves with that pure oxygen to cool ourselves off and get a breath of fresh air. That's what we used to do because we didn't know. Nobody told us!

EE: No.

TC: Yeah. That's how stupid we were.

[1:20:00]

EE: The chemists tell us, of course, that corrosion and combustion and so on and so forth is oxygen at work, that it is in fact a really corrosive element. But because we need oxygen to live, being burned in our body or combining in our bodies, we don't appreciate what will happen when you have too much oxygen. And then suddenly you've got fire there by some other means.

TC: Well, that oxygen is comparable to being soaked in gasoline and somebody throw a match on you. You haven't got a chance. Once you've been breathing it in, your whole body is just saturated with pure oxygen. All your clothes are saturated with it, so you go up like a candle, and there's no way to put it out unless you spray the guy with about ten fire extinguishers.

EE: So the fellow pulled out of the lake, did he survive?

TC: Eh?

EE: The fellow--.

TC: Yeah, he did. Yeah.

EE: He did survive, eh?

TC: He'd never come back there though. That was it.

EE: No, no.

TC: Nobody would want to after something like that. I saw similar accidents there where things happened that--. Like these things never got into the press because they were confined to that area, to that yard. But it was a terrible place to work. It was extremely dangerous. I had a steady battle with them all the time because at that time up until those accidents, the system was set up that there was half management and half union people on the health and safety committee. So in order to get something done, the majority of the vote had to go in favour of getting that done, otherwise they wouldn't do it—unless it was a direct violation of the Health and Safety Act. So I had to be on the ball all the time. I had to have that book in my hand all the time and go after them steady. And I had to make sure I had enough guys on my side to vote the right way otherwise--. I used to go there on my vacation. I used to go there on my vacation when there was a health and safety meeting to make sure that we got this stuff done. Because if I didn't go there, I know damn well they wouldn't do it.

EE: You had to convince at least one person from management of the importance of the work, I presume?

TC: Well, I had to convince all of them. Every foreman. It was all the foremen were on the management side and then there was us. There was five of us.

EE: And presumably all of you were in agreement?

TC: Yeah, we had to convince all of them that, you know--. If we didn't convince all of them, if they voted--. We had to vote on all this stuff because this was money. This was the way it was set up.

EE: You didn't need everyone in agreement?

TC: Oh, yeah.

EE: So it wasn't just a bare--.

TC: It had to be 51 percent, or they wouldn't do it. Yeah.

EE: So one foreman would be enough, I suppose, would he?

TC: What do you mean?

EE: Well, if you'd have the five of you and then one foreman from the other side would give you a bare majority?

TC: Yeah, then we'd have it. Yeah.

EE: But you didn't have to convince--.

TC: If we--.

OM: As far as a tie or anything--.

TC: But if it was a tie, they wouldn't do it.

EE: No.

TC: Because you've got to remember the chair of the thing was number six, he was management. So if it was a tie—half said yes, half said no—he wouldn't do it.

OM: Who were the foremen? Mechanical, electrical?

TC: Well, they had foremen from various places. They had--. I keep trying to remember now how many was at that meeting. Actually, there was quite a few people at that meeting. There was more than five from our side because I know we had one from each department, and there was quite a few departments at that time. I made sure of that. I represented the shipyard department, then I had one from the boiler shop, I had one from electrical department. But if they didn't show up, then we were caught short, you see. That's why we had to make sure--. The guy got off sick or didn't want to come or something, then we were in trouble. It was a terrible system, but that's the way the system was set up. You had to vote. Unless it was a direct violation and I could prove it, they wouldn't do it.

EE: Yes. How many areas were there at the shipyard? You mentioned you were representing the yard part, but then there were the various other--?

TC: Well, there was--. When I started there, there was about--. Uh, let me think now. I'll just mark them down on this piece of paper so I can tell you. There was the shipyard department, which was represented by the United Steelworkers of America. There was various other trades that were represented by the Steelworkers. There was the electricians, the shipwrights, the riggers, the boiler shop, the foundry, the pattern shop, and there was the operating--.

EE: The woodworking?

TC: Eh?

EE: The woodworking? Or is that--.

TC: There was the woodwork. Well, we didn't represent them, but that was another. These are all represented by the Steelworkers.

EE: Ok. I see.

TC: The pattern shop. I'm just going by them first. And then who else was there? I'm trying to think now. Ah. Maintenance. And who else? Duh-duh-duh.

[1:25:15]

EE: And each of these departments would have a rep on the health and safety?

TC: Well, what happened was you couldn't have 20 people, so they had to represent a couple of departments. That was the downfall of that thing because even though, say, you represented two departments, if you weren't knowledgeable about what went on in the other department, unless those people in that department give you the information you needed, there was sort of a downfall. There was a--.

EE: You mean, in a sense, you didn't need a rep from every one of the departments.

TC: You did, but we didn't.

EE: No.

TC: But I think that was us. Then there was the operating engineers. Just to show you how many different--. Then the cranes. And, oh yeah, we also had the power house. I forgot about that. We had the power house as another. There was a lot of different departments there, boy, I'm telling you. It was a large place. The power house, we had maintenance. We had the warehouse. So you

can just see how many people that had to be represented there. Then there was operating engineers. They were on their own. Then there was the pipe fitters. That's another union. Then there was the carpenters was another union. They weren't in with us.

EE: Carpenters and joiners would have their--.

TC: Yeah, jointers. Yeah. They used to call them joint-ters. Used to call them jointers. I don't know why. Joint-ter because the joint. Never called them joiners, called them jointers. [Laughing] Now you know! Something else you didn't know!

EE: Yeah.

TC: Jointer, they called them. Carpenters, jointers, then there was--. I'm trying to think of all the other ones. The office workers had a union, but they weren't in with us. That was completely--. That was not anywhere near the work areas. Operating engineers, pipe fitters. Who else? I'm trying to remember who else there was. Carpenters, jointers.

EE: How many people--?

TC: Oh, sheet metal were there too when I started, but then that disappeared.

EE: The numbers of workers varied over time, I'm sure.

TC: Yeah.

EE: But could you provide a number for the employment there?

TC: Well, when I started there, there was over 500 people on the seniority list. But some of those people had seniority in different departments. So overall I would say probably about 450 people were there.

EE: 450.

TC: Actually there. Some of them had seniority in different departments for job holding rights. In case they were laid off in this department and there was work in the other department, they could go there if they had the seniority. You see?

EE: And how many of the 450 would have been Steelworkers, members of the Steelworkers Union?

TC: Oh, that's a tough guess. That just depends on what kind of work was going on then.

EE: Three quarters of them?

TC: Mm, maybe two thirds.

EE: Two thirds.

TC: I think so, yeah.

EE: You joined the--. Well, you had to be a member of the union to be employed there.

TC: Yeah. But it was--. Ours was a union shop.

EE: Yes.

TC: It was not a closed shop. The other unions had closed shops. You had to go through the union to get employed. We had to go through the company, and then the union would give it the rubber stamp after we paid our dues, and then we were in. It was a different kind of system.

EE: How quickly did you become a member of the executive of the union?

TC: Well, I'll tell you what happened. I'll just go as fast as I can on this, so--. I can tell you a whole story about this too.

EE: Long and complicated history?

TC: It would be another book! [Laughs] It would be another book, but it would be an interesting one too. You'd make your eyes pop out of your head. But anyway, let's put it this way. I started there '66. 1975, something happened to me. I went off work for about a year and a half. I came back, '77, went back to work, and I started getting involved in the union at that time because I suddenly realized how bad things were. It was terrible. Terrible. Dangerous. You wouldn't believe how dangerous it was! I suddenly saw it because now I wasn't drinking anymore. I'd put myself in a place to quit drinking. I saw how dangerous it was. I thought, "Jesus Christ! This has been going on?" But I didn't see it because I was in another world with the--. You know?

EE: Were most of the workers in that world?

TC: Yeah. About half of them were in the same world I was in, that's why it was--. I think that's where they got a lot of the courage from to do some of the jobs. Just for an example—I don't want to go on and on about this—I'll tell you there was probably, from that wall to that wall, when the riggers had to work in the tail shaft--.

EE: A seminar room on the third floor of the Ryan Building is what we're using as the measure here.

TC: That would be, I'd say probably about 35 feet, maybe longer. But that long, they used to have wooden horses alongside the--. When they took the propeller and tail shaft off?

[1:30:10]

EE: Mmhmm?

TC: We used to have these huge wooden horses that went up to the same level where the tail shaft was.

EE: This is on the ship in the drydock?

TC: Yeah. Wooden horses would be placed on either side of the vessel at the back end when they went and took the propeller and the tail shaft out. They used to pull that out in one shot sometimes, the whole thing.

EE: The propeller is how many feet up in the air, actually?

TC: Well, this whole thing would probably be about--. The actual scaffold that had one plank on it for that length--. Hear what I said? One plank! No guardrails. That's on top of a wooden horse. No guardrails. Wooden plank on that whole length, either side of where the tail shaft came out. You couldn't have a big pile of lumber on there because of the way they were doing it. The riggers had to work on it, the one plank, and they had to hook up things to the boat, had to put snatch blocks and everything under there to use cables for all of their--. They used cables to pull the tail shaft out and take the wheel, we used to call it the wheel. So they had snatch blocks and big heavy stuff, big heavy cables that ran off two winches. So they had to hook all this stuff.

EE: Because it was all hooked up, it wasn't going to drop to the ground or anything like that sort of--?

TC: No. They had to hook everything. They had lifting lugs specifically welded underneath the ship for just taking these things out. They were heavy. They were two inches wide, two inches thick. So we had to get the--. They used to use a crane sometimes to bring the riggers underneath, and then two or three guys would have to lift one of these big, huge snatch blocks up there. Snatch blocks weighed about 200 pounds, had a bunch of shivs in them. They had to string the cable through the shivs, and back this way, and back that way, down the shivs down below, and this way and that way. Oh, it was extremely dangerous. You had to watch every move you made. That's why those guys--. Well, I'll tell you the--.

EE: Couldn't you have had a safety harness with a rope up?

TC: [Laughs] No way! You can't. It's impossible. Where are you going to connect it?

EE: Top of the ship? [Laughs] No?

TC: No. Wouldn't do it, no. Because you're underneath.

EE: You're under the ship.

TC: And if you fall, you're going to swing back or fall down.

EE: The curvature, yeah. Well, anything to avoid dropping to the ground.

TC: Well, there's no way. The only way to do it would be to jump off or something. But anyway, that's all there was. And I'm talking one plank. The planks were quite thick. They were three-inch planks, but they were maybe about—rough, rough wood—maybe about 13 inches wide. And those had to be moved down the road when the appropriate time came. But that's what those guys had to work on. And they had to carry slings and everything, and they had to jump up on top of the tail shaft—or jump up on top of the wheel first—and then they put--. After they got off the plank, the wheel was higher than--. The wheel would be about three feet higher than the planks. They had to get on top of that, put heavy cables wrapped around it, and put what we call a shackle in the end of the cable. Then they had to hook all the other stuff, the other gear, up on the top.

So most of those guys were half-corked when they did that. It was extremely dangerous. I had to work with them a few times. I know. They start throwing things around and you've got to watch. You had to duck. I can give you an aside to this. I might as well

just say it because it was known by most of the guys there anyway. I'd say about three quarters of those riggers used to bring a bottle of wine in there with them in the morning and knock it off before they started the job.

EE: Yeah. And management accepted that? Because they must've, they probably knew?

TC: Well, they went like that. And I'll tell you why they went like that because their foreman used to have a bottle of whiskey in his drawer. He kept it quiet. He used to take a shot out of there. Well, they caught him. It was the manager. They finally caught on of what was going on. It took a long time. The manager, Bob Sutton, he just figured something was rotten in Denmark, so he come walking down there one day, and he didn't knock on the door or anything. He just opened the door of the foreman's office, and here the foreman was just pouring himself a drink out of the bottle of whiskey. And that was it. He says, "You're out of here. Get the--." I won't say what he said, but he just told him. There was witnesses heard him say it. "Get the--. And take your junk. Get out. That's it."

EE: Fired him on the spot?

TC: Right on the spot he was gone.

EE: But the difficulty is that if this was part of a situation in which a lot of the men were corked--.

TC: Yeah. Well, I'll be perfectly honest with you. When I was there, I'd say about half the guys there had a bottle in their locker. You know, because they had hangovers and they wanted to get rid of the hangover and have a couple of shots. It got so bad there--. [Laughing]

EE: Hair of the dog that bit you.

TC: Yeah, hair of the dog, keep on going so you'd throw up or--. Yeah. And they used to have a thing called a pass-out system there. You'd get a pass-out so you didn't pass out. I'd say there was such a high turnover at noon that it was almost ridiculous. And it was so cold out there, and if you had a hangover or something like that, you wanted to get the hell out of there and get a couple of drinks, straighten out. And if you didn't have a bottle there, you had to go to the bar. So the foreman would write pass-outs all the time for these guys that take off about 2:00 in the afternoon or something. They couldn't handle it anymore. Some of them left at 12:00. So your work crew would diminish a little bit. Oh, it was terrible. But like I said, some of the guys were half-corked all the time.

[1:35:26]

EE: Sutton presumably didn't think he had any choice when he actually saw the fellow drinking on the job?

TC: He saw. He caught him. He had to do something.

EE: He had no choice, but generally speaking, the management realized that there was a lot of fluid courage in the place?

TC: Well, they knew it was going on. They knew it was going on, but they put their blinders on because they realized--. They knew how dangerous it was, and they realized that if these guys weren't half-corked, they couldn't do the job. And that was like that with a lot of things because--.

EE: I mean that's the ultimate test for management, whether the work's being done.

TC: Well, yeah. That was your courage! That was your courage. When you were half-shot, you didn't give a damn about anything.

EE: Anyway, back to your union.

TC: Well, anyway, with the thing there was quite a few different departments there. And anyway, to make a long story short about the other stuff, when they tore the whole place down, I went back behind the shop where there was the rigger's shack there, where they used to have all the gear inside. The foreman's shop was in the front of it, and there was two buildings there—there was a warehouse right beside it. When they tore it all down, they must have found about 2,000 empty wine bottles in between the two buildings.

And then when they went up to the office and tore that down—I went up there, I know—I had to go down there and take some of the records and stuff out. I went down into the basement. They had--. It was a kind of funny place. It was like a castle in there. You walked into a room up in the top, and there was like a door in a closet. You opened that door, and then there was a spiral staircase that went down into the basement. Like a secret door in a--. [Laughs] You got down in the basement and that's where the lunchroom was. They had a washroom down there and everything. They had the old-style washrooms, you know? The big urinals look like bathtubs. Everything was like back in the '20s, and it was all pristine! It had brass, just like you walked into a 1920s disco or something.

EE: This was the management lunchroom, was it?

TC: That was, yeah, down below with the washrooms and everything. So anyway, they tore the walls down. They found about 2,000 empty whiskey bottles in there. [Laughs] So you can just imagine what was going on up at the office! But they used to have regular parties there all the time for their customers, you see, to oil them up a little bit so they'd bring their boats in there. They used to oil up some of the inspectors to make them look the other way and stuff like that. They were doing a lot of that. There was a lot of stuff going on over the years. I saw it with my own eyes. I saw the bottles there. That's why I said, "Holy shit!" He says, "Well, we've got to get them out of here so nobody can see it." I had to pile the damn things in boxes. We threw them all in the bins outside after. But that was that part, but it was--.

Well, it got so bad. I'll just tell you. It got so ridiculous there—I don't know whether you can call it ridiculous or not—but at noon when the guys ran out of booze, they used to get the truck driver to go into town to the liquor store to get them some more because he was into it too. He had a mickey in his back pocket all the time. So they used to buy him a bottle, and he'd go in and load up some more and bring some more in. That's what was going on. And I know it was going on. I was right there to watch it. But I was just--.

EE: So you were cold sober for the last 30 years of your employment?

TC: Pretty well, yeah. Pretty well, yeah.

EE: Because, what, you retired in --?

TC: Uh, 2011 was my last year.

EE: Yes. So that's--.

TC: But I got into the union thing, what happened there was after I--.

EE: I mean that's 44 years of being sober in that place!

TC: Well, 44. Well, 33, let's put it that way. I started--. When I quit drinking in '75, I got back in. I saw how bad it was.

EE: Yeah, I guess you're right, 33.

TC: In ’77 I got back in, or I got in as a steward, and then I got on the health and safety committee as fast as I could. And in ’78, the president of the union died. His name was John Hogman. He died, so I ran for president. I got in, and I managed to hang in there until 2011.

EE: Yeah. Because you served as president then for--?

TC: Thirty-three years.

EE: Thirty-three years.

TC: Yeah.

EE: Did you get any thanks?

TC: *Gah!* There’s only one guy ever thanked me there. One guy, that’s all. One guy in the whole place ever thanked me. It shocked me when he thanked me!

EE: [Laughs] Out of custom as you were.

TC: He was the only one. You’ve got to realize that when you got into a place like that, you’re dealing with rough people. These people weren’t like the kind of people that came out of a--. Well, let’s put it this way, most of them didn’t come out of PACI [Port Arthur Collegiate Institute]. [Laughs]

EE: Would you be able to characterize the workforce in ethnic terms?

TC: Well, there was a mixture. A mixture of everybody was there. We had--. Like a lot of the guys came out of the Second World War. We actually had some German guys there. We had guys that came right over from Germany that were in the Second World War. We had Estonians. There was one guy there was Werner Elwinger. He wasn’t a bad guy. I used to get along with him. He was a German guy, but he used to fool around, you know? Joke around. I found out after that he had been on a submarine. And he told everybody that he was only the cook there, but I think he was the guy that was putting the torpedoes in the tubes to tell you the truth! [Laughs] But he was one.

[1:40:30]

Then there was another guy I used to work with, his name was Leo [inaudible]. He never smiled a day I saw him there. Not once! He was always straight-faced, and he was Estonian. I got a good hint of why he was like that. I found out after. At noon at Christmastime, the place broke open. You know, it was Christmas Eve, bottles came out. And I mean, everything. There were guys stumbling all over the place, going from one--. "Hey, hey!" You used to hate the guy in the other shop, but you'd go over and have a drink with him at Christmastime. Everything was smoothed over with that booze, eh? So the guys were stumbling around from one shop to another. Well, he had got a couple of drinks in him. He never smiled, but he loosened up a little bit. I asked him, I says, "Well, you know, you had it pretty tough." He said, "Oh. It was pretty terrible. In the Second World War," he says, "It got so bad we had to eat roof rabbits." I says, "What's that?" He says, "Cats." Because that's how bad it was. They had nothing to eat. And he says, "Then the Germans forced us to enlist in their armies. If you didn't go, they'd put you in a gulag or something," he says. Or who knows what happened. They'd shoot you or something. "So," he says, "I had to go." So he says, "I got in there." He says, "They put me on the Eastern front." And he says, "It was terrible." He says, "The Russians just kept coming and coming and coming." He says they were mowing them down like cutting grass, but they just kept on coming.

EE: To be on the Eastern front by '43 or so, which is probably when he was in there, the last year or two would be hell.

TC: Oh, yeah. He was there. He was right there. He saw it. He saw it there.

EE: Because the Russians were fighting back by that time.

TC: Yeah, yeah. They were coming at them. So he saw it. And he says his gun, he went to put another bullet into the chamber and he says, "The gun jammed because it was full of dirt." Those Mausers were good guns, but he had to watch it and keep them really clean because they got dirty. So he said--. Well, I won't tell you what he said, but he said *eck!* and he threw the gun down. He got out of the hole, and he started running back towards the German lines. Next thing you know, he woke up in a German hospital. Somebody had shot him in the back. He didn't know whether it was the Germans or the Russians, but somebody got him in the back. So that was it for him for the war. Luckily, he got shipped back close to the border of Germany, and he managed to get out of there before--.

EE: Yes, if they don't kill you, it's a lucky wound in a sense.

TC: Yeah. But I knew a lot of guys that came through. The other guy, he used to be one of the best hockey players in the world was Frank Harp--. Not Frank Harper, Frank Parker. Wasn't a very big guy, but he was interned in a Japanese Prisoner of War camp.

They damn near killed him there and he got back. He was a crane operator in one of the shops, but he drank heavily after that. He was never really in good shape after that.

EE: No.

TC: A lot of them did because of that war. They drank. That's why they had the habit, you know? They got out of that, and they wanted to put it out of their mind. And they couldn't.

EE: So you're thinking the drinking was particularly heavy amongst older men who'd--.

TC: Part of it, yeah. Yeah, it was.

EE: Who were veterans and so on.

TC: Yeah, and then as the younger guys come in there was--. Like the kind of people who used to work in the shipyard were pretty rough. It wasn't, like I said, they didn't come out of PACI. Some of them, no doubt, came out of--. Well, I knew quite a few of them personally. I won't get into where they came from, but let's put it this way: If you didn't know them, you had to watch yourself. You say the wrong word to them, they'd flatten you in one second. That's the way that place--. It was like being in the army almost because a lot of these guys--.

Just for an example, there was one guy--. This younger guy was into dope, and he was fooling around. He was a pretty big guy. He was about almost six feet tall, and he must've weighed about 265. He was pretty muscular. He was about 22 or something and he was fooling around. He was bugging this Finn guy, and I says, "You leave that guy alone." I says, "Leave him alone." "Eh, that's stupid." He called him a square head. I says, "You leave that guy alone." He used to be a bucker-upper. He used to work with the riveting guns and chipping guns, and the guy was like that. He wasn't very tall, but he was like that. He came out of the Second World War. He was in the winter war in Finland. He didn't know who he was fooling around with. This guy had killed people! You know? He killed people. You don't fool around with people like that.

I mean, he was chipping there, minding his business. He's like, "I'm going to shut that sonofabitch up." So he went over there, he banged the guy in the back. The guy turned around. He'd spoke in broken English. His English wasn't very--. "What's the matter?" he says. He says, "Shut that thing up!" He says, "Get out of here!" He says, "I do my job." He had a chipping gun. He had a chisel in his hand, and he took the chisel--. He had the chisel, and he was holding it like this. Well, that guy kicked him in the crotch. He pushed the guy right up against the side of the boat, and he had the chisel right under his chin. He says, "Why you do that?" He

didn't feel a thing when he kicked him. And the guy was standing on his toes. He had him right up on his toes like that. He says, "You don't do that no more." The guy said, "No, no. No, no, no!" He let him down. He would've killed him right there.

[1:45:16]

EE: He could have.

TC: He could've, oh yeah. That's the kind of people that were working there. You've got to understand that. These guys came out of the Second World War, and a lot of them had killed people, and they knew how to do it. They were trained to kill, you know? So that's what you were working with. And you were working with these kind of people, and you were working with--. Most of them were easy to get along with. Like I got along with every one of them. I don't know why, maybe because I was as bad as them. I don't know! [Laughing]

EE: Well, you had a certain kind of respect for them. You'd have to.

TC: Well, yeah. Because I--.

EE: The respect that you'd had to give people who could kill you!

TC: Yeah. Well, I never mouthed off to any of them because I knew where they came from, and I knew they went through hell. I knew they went through hell. You don't badmouth people like that. You leave them alone and you try to help them out. Then after a while, they become your friends, you know? That's what happened. I knew every one of them very well, and I never had any trouble with any of those guys. It was just some mouthy kid come off the street and thought he was King Kong. He learned out fast, really quick. He never bothered that guy again. I says, "You better leave these guys alone." I says, "Most of these guys are like that." He never bothered anybody after that. He found out real fast he could've been dead just like that. One second, he would've been dead. He would've had that chisel right through his throat.

EE: Sure, sure.

TC: But that's, like I said, that's the kind of people that was there. And there was a lot of, well, there was a lot of bad people there that came from different areas too because that's just--. People seemed to gravitate towards that place.

EE: Well, I was just going to ask, did Port Ship have a recruiting policy or did people drop by when then were in need of a job?

TC: A lot of, I'll tell you, a lot of it was word of mouth. Like some of the foreman and people like that would recommend certain people to the personnel officer and that's who they'd hire, right? A lot of it was like that.

EE: Was there anything like nepotism or--?

TC: There was some nepotism. There's no doubt about it.

EE: Or people of my ethnic background, some of that?

TC: Well, there was some nepotism, yeah. There was some things. Some guys were held back. See, you've got to remember, most of these shipyards were run by Scotchmen and Englishmen. You've got to remember that.

EE: At the top, sure.

TC: Almost every one of them. So there's a bias there, and the management was biased like that. So they naturally–.They'll hold some people back from getting into positions so they could get some of their so-called friends into those positions rather than them. That was going on all right. I saw it with my own eyes. I remember talking to one guy, Polowski. I don't know if you know Polowski? I think his kid's a doctor now. But anyway, his name was Steve Polowski, and he--.

EE: Yeah, we--. Have we interviewed Steve Polowski? I think I know Steve. Carry on.

TC: Well, he's dead.

EE: Oh, I see.

TC: Well, anyway, he used to be a riveter and stuff like that. He worked tough all of his life. He says, "You know, Tommy--." And I never used to get along with him. I didn't like him, but--. He was one of the guys I didn't like. If you had to work with him, he'd come there, and all of a sudden, he'd take off and you didn't know what to do. Well, I found out after why. He was going like this. He'd come back after he'd had enough. Where were we? Oh, yeah. Well, he did this and then he'd take off again. He'd leave you standing there, and the foreman would come and go, "Well, what's going on here?" I says, "Well, I don't know. Steve had to go do--. He went on an errand or something." I had to lie, you know? But anyway, he'd had it pretty tough, and he told me after. He says, "You know, those bastards," he says, "I had the time and everything, but they would never let me get into the mold loft so I could

learn something. So I could learn something about prints or nothing." He said, "They'd never let me do it." He says, "They always made sure they had certain people in there and that was it." He says, "Nobody else could get into that mold loft." Because it was nice and clean and warm in there. It was like--. The mold loft was just above the punch shed.

EE: The mold office, sorry?

TC: No, no. Mold loft. L-O-F-T. It was called the mold loft. What it was was a large floor inside the punch shed on the second floor. There was an elevator going up to it. What they did there, they could lay out a whole boat on that floor. They made templates for a whole boat on the floor. Design a whole boat, put it all out, and make it out of wooden templates. That's what they did. And they would never let people like him in there. There was only certain people they would let in there.

EE: This is where the Anglo-Celts were, I suppose?

TC: Pretty well, yeah. That's where they went. Because you had to crawl around on your hands and knees, but it was nice and warm and clean. Some sawdust maybe and that was about it. But everybody else, there was prejudice there and stuff like that. There's no doubt about that. But I got along with everybody. I worked with Italians, Ukrainians, Polish guys. I always did. I used to hang around with those kind of people all my life. Finlanders, I got along with all of them.

EE: In terms of skills, welders would be--?

TC: Well, everybody--. To be in my trade, you had to know what you were doing because you were actually the boss of a three-man gang. You had to know how to work with steel. The welders were—well, I hate to say this—there was hardcore welders there that were excellent, but the company looked at them as being a dime a dozen. Until they got, say, about 15 years seniority, then they were excellent, but until then, they looked at them as a dime a dozen. They didn't care whether they hung around or not because there were all kinds of welders out there that needed a job.

[1:50:29]

But then they got a big job—they had a big conversion coming up—and so they had a thing called on-the-job training. They set up a shop right on the slab that I mentioned before, and they had four large tables set up there that had a divider on each table. The table was divided into like slots, so you had room there for an individual person to practice welding. They had about 24 guys there practicing welding, learning how to weld. They had one of the top welders—one or two of the top welders—showing them how to do it and everything. So that was on-the-job training right there, showing them. Some of those guys turned into some of the best

welders in the world. Some of them went out, taught welding at schools. Jimmy Dyson's one of them. I don't know if you know Jimmy Dyson. He was out at Con College teaching. There was a bunch of them did, went out teaching. Some of them were all over the world. If you can weld something in a place like that, you can weld anything.

EE: I daresay.

TC: Oh, I'm telling you. You should see what they used to have to weld.

EE: Because actually you're working with dirty steel much of the time.

TC: Oh, some of it is, yeah.

EE: Dirty iron and so on. Rusted.

TC: Dirty and rusty and some of it's so thin you could just tear it. Some of it was about as thin as a razorblade. They'd try to get them to weld it up and they'd say, "I can't!" Well, you've got to do it.

EE: You've got to replace the plate. That's what you should--.

TC: Well, you're supposed to, but sometimes you couldn't. And sometimes you were in an area that they'd missed, and they would be welding along and then all of a sudden, they should've taken a piece out, but they didn't, and it was cracked. And they had to try to weld it up. So anyway, but it was all rotten and, oh, it was terrible.

EE: Reminds me of that terrible moment when you're in the muffler shop and asking whether you need the muffler replaced, and he's going over it, punching holes through it. You say to yourself, "Why do you do that!" [Laughing] Except, of course, that if the steel's rusted--.

TC: Oh, some of those things were really bad. There was just nothing left of them.

EE: The transition from riveting to welding, was some of that going on in your time as well?

TC: Well, when I got there, they were still riveting. I got into it. I saw how they did it. I know. I got the whole scope of that too because I had to do some of the work. That was an extremely interesting thing. I've got it all in my head. Anyway, what they did-. I'll explain it to you if you've got any time left over. There's some time left on that tape?

EE: We've got a few minutes left.

TC: Well, you won't be able to get it all, but I'll go. I got one more thing in there about the foundry I'd like to get to because that's really interesting.

EE: We'll have to do another--.

TC: We might have to do it another time, but that's--.

EE: We'll do another time.

TC: Oh, I'm telling you. You hear that one--. You thought the slab was something, that foundry was something too.

EE: Foundries are great fun.

TC: But anyways, what it was, I'll tell you what they used to do. They'd bring somebody like me down there with a welder and a helper. What happened was that the welder--. Well, first of all, they brought somebody else down there before we even got there, and we used to call him--. He used to what they call blow the rivets. He used to bring a big oxyacetylene torch down that had a really big tip on it. And what he used to do was heat the head of the rivet red-hot, and then he'd move it around in a circle real fast with the oxygen on it and that used to blow the head off. And he used to blow a lot of the stuff from inside. He did a bunch of those and left maybe one or two rivets at the top. Until I got the plates separated from the other one, I used to stick a couple of wedges in there and then I'd put a shackle in there and I'd hook up the crane. Then he'd get the other couple of rivets out of the row.

EE: And then the plates swung free?

TC: No.

EE: No?

TC: No, just--. Well, I went ahead of myself. I used to have to--. I had the helper there, and he had this hammer that had a square head on it. It was about that long and then it tapered off to a pin that had a square head on it. That was a--. They used to hang a--.

EE: Six or eight inches long? Not just taking your--.

TC: Well, the head was about like that. It was called a knuckle hammer that had a handle on it. He used to stick that into the hole, and I used to have to get a sledgehammer and knock the rivets out. Knock them out to the other side. So once we got all the rivets out—once I got to the area up at the top—I'd knock a couple out there so I could pry the plates back and put the thing in and hook the crane up. Then I'd knock the rest of the rivets out. Then it would swing free. Not all the time. Sometimes I had to drive wedges in between the frames and the plate to get it out of there because it'd be stuck so bad.

EE: How large would the plate be as a rule?

TC: Well, it just depends on how much of it they wanted to do as quickly as possible. Sometimes they were 30 feet long. They'd probably be at least the height of this room, 10, 12 feet. I think the maximum was about 10 feet. Ten feet by 30 feet.

EE: So 10 by 30 feet.

TC: Ten by 30 feet, yeah. That'd be probably the maximum. I can't remember the width of the plates they could get. They might be able to get a 12-foot plate out. I can't be sure now. But anyway, what would happen was after they got all the rivets out of there, then they had to start taking the frames out. They'd take all the frames out, cut them all out, hook them up to the crane. The guy would finish one little cut, cut it off, and swing it out, take it away. Then after that, they had to replace the frames.

[1:55:24]

So what they did, they put brand new frames in place there, and they used to try to--. Well, they knew what the spacing was on that, so they just put that same spacing on those new frames. Then they, of course, they had to bend the frames if there was a bend to them.

EE: Yeah, curvature or whatever.

TC: Yeah, that was done on the cold press. It was a thing that had a bunch of steel rollers, and the steel rollers wound from each side. And then in the middle was like a big cast iron thing that was shaped like a big anvil and this big iron fist that used to push

like that in between two things. And I used to bend them in there to shape. Four--. Got two guys at each side and one guy running it, the slab man running it. Push down the lever and *kaboom!* The ends would bounce. You had to push it back and forth. Some of those things weighed about 700 pounds.

OM: Any--. We've got less than two minutes, but what sort of health issues? Hearing problems?

TC: Oh, well, when I started there--.

OM: Or maybe we'll save that for next because that's an interesting--.

TC: Well, when I started, the only thing they had for the riveters in there was that cotton batting for their ears.

OM: Is that right?

TC: That's all they had there. There was no nothing for anybody else. You had real flimsy facemasks. You might as well have a piece of toilet paper over your face.

EE: Well, I guess we should probably thank you for installment one of interview two. [Laughing] Look forward to hearing about the--.

TC: Too bad we couldn't get that on there. I'll save that for the foundry.

EE: About the foundry and other things.

TC: Oh, there's more than that.

EE: Thanks very much, Tom, for this.

TC: There's more than that. That's just the beginning. There's tonnes and tonnes. I've got stuff here that--.

EE: Yeah.

TC: But there was all kinds of departments. There was about 17 different departments there.

OM: Thank you very much.

End of Interview.