

Narrator: Glen Hanna (GH)

Company Affiliations: Canada Steamship Lines, Paterson Steamships

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Summary: Former deckhand and ship fireman for Canada Steamship Lines and Paterson Steamships' lake vessels Glen Hanna discusses his brief career on the Great Lakes. He begins by telling the story of riding a boxcar from Fort Frances to Toronto, stopping off in Thunder Bay, and getting a job as a deckhand on the *Kenora*, a package freighter that also carried grain. He describes some of his responsibilities as a deckhand, like swinging out on a bosun's chair to tie up the ship at docks and going through the locks. He then discusses his change to a fireman shovelling coal for the engines on both the *Bricoldoc* and the *Lemoyne*. He explains the number of crew on the ships and cargoes on the backhaul of a grain trip, and he shares memories of loading and unloading cargoes. He describes the busyness of the Thunder Bay port in the '40s and the captains dealing with Lake Shippers Clearance Association. He also discusses joining the Navy during World War II, and he shares stories of bad weather on the lakes.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
<p>NP: It's 2009, and I'm sitting in the common room in the Holy Protection Millenium home interviewing Glen Hanna about his remembrances of the ships on Lake Superior and whatever he can add related to his experience related to grain and those ships. Glen, introduce yourself, and tell us a little bit about your history and how you came to be on the ships in Thunder Bay.</p> <p>GH: Well, at the age of 16, I left home by rail, and I found that it was a lot easier riding in a boxcar than the tanker. I got as far as Fort William, downtown, and then walked from Fort William toward Port Arthur. At that time, there were trails through tag alders. I remember I slept that night in a huge sewer pipe—corrugated sewer pipe—pulled a bunch of hay, and shoved my head in a packsack. In the morning, I woke up half-frozen, and I walked up town and—that would be onto Algoma Street—and an older</p>

gentleman came out of a house and looked at me and he said, “God, kid you look cold.” And I said, “I’m just about froze.” So he said, “You come with me,” and we walked a couple of blocks, as I recall, and we were at the Hoito Restaurant, and I couldn’t believe what I saw. You eat, seated at just benches, and huge tables just like the lumber camps. My breakfast was 20 cents, you help yourself from serving bowls. I thought that was fantastic.

NP: Can I just back you up for a minute? Getting on the train--.

GH: In Fort Frances.

NP: What train would this have been? And was it usual for people to just hop on a train?

GH: A freight train, yes. Many a young men rode freights in those days. You must remember that many that formed the first division in our army were fellows riding the rails, looking for jobs. Anyway--.

NP: So that would’ve been what year? You said you were 16?

GH: That would be 1939. Later on in the day, I wound up at the station in Port Arthur. I was sitting there, waiting for a train to pull out, and so were quite a few other fellows. A CPR policeman showed up, and all these fellows disappeared. I was always taught that the policeman was your friend, and he came up to me and he says, “Where do you think you’re going?” And I said, “East.” He says, “You come with me,” and we walked down the train to an open boxcar that had about 18 inches of straw in it. He says, “You get into that straw when the train is stopped, and you don’t get off there until the train is stopped.” Which I did. So it was quite a story, leaving Port Arthur, and eventually getting to Toronto.

I had never been alone in a huge city before in my life, and I walked up pretty dirty looking from the smoke from the engines. I found a little restaurant—I believe it was on Dundas Street if I remember correctly—but anyway I found this restaurant and I bought a pint of milk and a hamburger. It was a pretty nice day, and I went outside, and I sat on a bench, and I was drinking this pint of milk and eating this hamburger. I checked my money, and I had 90 cents left in my pocket, and I thought, “Well, Hanna, you better find a job, and you better find a job that has board and room with it.”

Just then, along came a fellow delivering milk. He was actually running with cases of milk. I waited until he got up pretty close. I went across the street, and I spoke to him, and I said, “I’d like to know who the owner is of this company.” He says, “You’re talking to him.” Well, I said, “Do you need any help?” “Well, yes I do,” he said. He said, “Did you ever have any experience in a dairy?” And I said, “Well, I was raised on a farm, and I worked for Mrs. Flinders who ran the biggest dairy in Fort Frances. So I know all

about washing bottles and capping milk.” “Oh, well, fine. Come on with me.” So I had a job at a dollar a day. And I promised him, I said, “I’ll stay with you for a month. I won’t promise more than that.” I said, “If I’m not satisfied, well, you can me.” Well, he seemed to be quite happy with me for the month, but as soon as the month was up, I decided that getting up at 4:30 in the morning wasn’t my idea of what I was really looking for. So I told him, “I promised you I’d stay a month.” He seemed quite peeved that I was leaving. There was a bit of a problem even collecting my \$30, but eventually I did, and I went into-- This was outside Hamilton at a town called Ancaster. That was the closest town to the farm.

From there, I wound up in St. Catherines. I wound up talking to a fellow that said, “You should try shipping out on the Great Lakes.” So this is at Thorold, and that’s where I wound up on the *Kenora*. I started as a deckhand and then fired. The next season I went to the Lakehead again. I should say, the package freighter *Kenora*, while it carried package freight, it also carried grain, and it had two decks. It had the main deck and then the package-freight deck and below that, were grain holds. I know that we took the special barley down to Montreal that they would make whiskey out of, eh? That was probably the best barley you could buy.

NP: What was it like being a deckhand on a ship? It would’ve been your first experience, I would think, at that type of work.

GH: It was okay.

NP: What kinds of things would you have to do?

GH: This is when the old Soulange Canal was in operation, eh? This is long before the Seaway was through. Of course, once you got down to Cardinal, that would be the first lock leading into the old Soulange Canal. It always seemed to me that we were going out on a bosun’s chair and tying up and boarding again and trying up—seemed to me that from just below Cornwall you were almost awake steady, tying up and letting go, going through locks.

NP: So as a deckhand, what would be your responsibilities when--?

GH: That was one of them, was tying the ship up. You’d be swung out on a bosun’s chair, which is just a plank with a hole drilled in the middle of it, a knot underneath, and you’d sit on that. You swing out, they drop you down, and then you take a heaving line, and you pull the cable with an eye on it, and you slip it over the bollard on the dock and the ship ties up. Then you’ve got to do the same thing all over again in reverse.

But anyway, I much preferred the firing job when I got firing. And the next year, when I left for the opening of the season, I wound up not going with Canada Steamship Lines. I wound up on the *Bricoldoc*, which was Paterson's Steamship. It was an excellent job, I thought.

NP: Before you go onto that one, I have no idea what firing is. What does it mean when you are a firer on the ship?

GH: You're a stoker, you're keeping the steam gauge up. This is what keeps the ship going—the engine going.

NP: And what did you like about that? Shoveling coal?

GH: It was a good job. I was making \$52 a month. I was proud. [Laughs]

NP: Good physical labour.

GH: Yeah. Three hours on, six hours off. From the time you fired the boilers in the spring, the most time at one time that you ever had off was six hours. Six hours, until you tied up in the fall and pulled the fires and the ship was laid up, you'd be--. The safety valves would be taken up to Western Engineering for calibration, and repairs made to pumps. Then you went home and found a job in the bush in those days, for the winter.

But a sad thing happened to me on the *Bricoldoc*. The only time in my life I was ever fired. I had done something pretty foolish all right. I drank a little bit too much of that alcohol and--.

NP: On the ship or in port?

GH: Oh no, in port. I wound up--. The second engineer, he said, "Go ahead and plaster that mud drum." I knew nothing about how to mix anything, I didn't have a clue. So I didn't do it. But anyway, to make a long story short, I was canned. He said, "You're all done at the first Canadian port." And that first Canadian port was Little Current. There was absolutely nothing there. So it was the old railroad again to Port Arthur from Little Current, CPR. When I got in there, I got to the union hall and the *Lemoyne*, the flagship of the Canada Steamship Lines needed a fireman, so I went on the *Lemoyne* and finished a season. The *Lemoyne* wound up with the record bulk load, seems to me 18,000 tonnes of iron ore from Duluth. The *Lemoyne* had four huge Scotts marine boilers. It was three fires in each boiler, so you had twelve fires. You had three firemen on a shift. Each fireman had four fires to look after, and you had to blow tubes, clean fires, shoot ashes, and keep the pin on 240 pounds.

NP: What does shoot ashes mean?

GH: They had what's called an ash gun and the ashes, when you cleaned the fire, you had to pull the ashes out and those had to be discharged. They were just discharged into the lake. Wouldn't be allowed if they were doing that today but they're all diesels, eh? When you think of going from a little package freighter, I think 250 feet long, the *Bricoldoc* was 400, and the *Lemoyne* was 585 I believe. I was progressively in larger vessels.

NP: What were the crew sizes? In general.

GH: The *Lemoyne* would probably be about 34 in total. Captain Robinson from Goderich, that was his hometown, he was the only captain the *Lemoyne* ever had in the very early '60s.

NP: And who was the captain of the *Bricoldoc*?

WH: Captain Odiss (sp?), and he would up taking out the *Senator*, which was the flagship of Paterson's in later years. He was another excellent captain. Bert Smith, the chief engineer on the *Bricoldoc*, was a wonderful, wonderful man.

NP: What makes a good captain, would you say?

GH: There's a big difference between a peacetime captain and a wartime captain, but I would say any captain that would be an excellent captain is hard but square. In later years, while I was in the Canadian Navy, that's exactly what he was—he was a hard, but he was square. He was a type of a captain that you would follow to hell and back. [Laughs]

NP: During the time that you were even on the packet, when did you first become familiar with the elevators?

GH: As soon as I joined the *Kenora*, as soon as we got to the Lakehead, we were automatically taking some grain down east. I think we delivered some to Port McNicoll. But again, it would've been special grains. The *Bricoldoc* went into Port McNicoll a lot.

NP: To take on grain or to deliver it?

GH: Deliver it, yes.

NP: Flour mills?

GH: Yes. Well, there were elevators there. You'd have a huge arm would go down with an endless chain inside that steel arm and these huge cups that would just go down into the hold of the grain and the endless chain would be--. It was amazing how fast they could unload a ship.

NP: Did you have to do anything while that was going on? Or was that the job of the land crew?

WH: The deckhands would be involved in cleaning out the holds, sweeping them out. If you were down in the lower lakes of course you'd try and make it pay both ways. You'd load up with coal and bring coal from Lorain, I believe. I'll never forget my first observations of that. It was a long slope, and all these coal cars were on a grade. One man would release those ajax breaks on the coal car and it would roll down and then up a grade. A huge hook would come in and hook onto the axle and go up to top of that grade and then that whole coal car would turn and dump into a huge chute into the holds of the ship. [Laughs]

NP: And these are the same holds that the grain would then be in afterwards?

GH: Oh yes. That all had to be swept out and cleaned and then the same thing had to be done at the head of the lakes. All the coal dust and everything had to be cleaned out before they could put grain in. But the firemen, being a member of the black gang, I didn't have to do any of that anymore. It was strictly three on and six off.

NP: Coming into Thunder Bay harbour in those days--.

GH: Sometimes it was pretty tough, I remember Captain Eddie Poitaven wondered whether we were going to make it because we had a deck load of barbed wire and terrible storms and, oh boy, the deckhands—everybody—was chipping ice and steam hose. He was afraid we were way overdraft with the weight of the ice. So that was an experience.

NP: Which ship was that?

GH: The *Kenora*. A package freighter. Captain Eddie Poitaven.

NP: Did you have other close calls?

GH: No but the old Lemoyne, she popped lots of rivets. Long before I ever fired it, it had automatic stokers, and the story I got was that the stokers played cards on their shift. Those automatic stokers were all taken out and everything was handbound, all handled

by shovel, eh? I remember years later after I was married, and my wife and my two daughters, we--. Somehow, I found out that Gib Miller was the second engineer of the *Lemoyne* when I was on it, and I understood he was now the chief engineer of the *S.S. Hudson*, another package freighter. And I said, "Let's go down to the Hudson. I see where it's in. I read the paper and I saw where it was in." We went down and I remember Gib Miller—I had to tell him my name, and then he remembered—he took us through the engine room. You could eat off the floor! Everything was spotless. I'll never forget, my two daughters and Ida Mae and I, we went into the boiler room, and this young fireman was there. He's telling my daughters, "This ship burns 12 tonnes of coal every 24 hours." And the chief engineer Gib Miller said, "Yes, but when your daddy was firing for me on the *Lemoyne*, we burned between 75 and 80 tonnes every 24 hours, running on the lake." That's hard to believe if you know what a tonne of coal looks like. You think of 75 or 80 tonnes every 24 hours--.

NP: By shovel.

GH: Had the tubes blown and the ashes shot.

NP: So I imagine the activity in the harbour at the elevators was quite different then than it is now.

GH: It was a beehive. The ships were so much smaller. Then, of course, when war was declared that changed everything. The shipping increased that much more.

NP: Did you have to wait to come into the elevators? Or was your timing pretty good?

GH: No, it was pretty well geared. You pretty well came straight in. I guess you'd--. I'd imagine the Lake Shippers Clearance Association, the captain I'm sure would be in contact with them before he got in. By the time he got to the Welcomes, I would think he would know where he was going. It was interesting.

NP: So you started about 1940?

GH: Yeah, '39.

NP: And then you went off to war at some point?

GH: Yes. In '42 I went saltwater. We wound up along the East Coast in the Panama Canal and into the Pacific and back. Then, we took a load of arms to Liverpool first, and I'm pretty sure that we unloaded boxed Hawker Hurricanes from Fort William, unloaded

them in Liverpool before we went to Arcangel. We thought we were going to Murmansk, but we anchored in Kola Inlet. I went to sleep and when I woke up to go for my breakfast, we were on the move, and I said, “Are we going into Murmansk now?” “No, we’re going into Archangel. See that got the material closer to where it was needed.” I think we had to steam for about a day and a half from Kola Inlet where Murmansk--. I think it was about a day. It was quite a sight. There was an icebreaker there—a Russian icebreaker—that would make the *Samuel Risley* look like a little canoe. [Laughs] Huge black icebreaker.

NP: Were you ever involved in bringing grain over to--?

GH: No, I made that one trip, and I decided that I wanted to get on something that had a fighting chance.

NP: And you chose, when you came back from war, not to go back onto the water?

GH: I would’ve liked to, but Ida Mae and I wanted to get married and that’s no place to be. Unless your wife could be the cook on the ship. Some people did that.

NP: But that wasn’t Ida Mae’s idea of a good time.

GH: Oh no, no.

NP: Keeping in mind the sort of narrow theme of our project, which is the grain industry, Thunder Bay’s part in it, and any information about the elevators, are there any other things from your experience that you’d like to add to our history?

GH: Not really. I remember once, coming in with the *Bricoldoc*. Of course, they would fill the holds with a lot of water for ballast if they were coming up empty, eh? Then they’d pump them out before they got inside the breakwater. Once you’re light, it’s awful hard to control a ship when it’s light, and if you’ve got a storm and wind--. A friend of mine from the *Bricoldoc*, he was a wheelsman, and later years we finally teamed up again, and he came and visited us in Rainy River. We visited him in Penetang [Penetanguishene], but Moon was the wheelsman, and oh boy, the wind caught them when they were trying to get into the dock and we slammed into the dock! I thought the old *Bricoldoc* was going to be smashed in half.

NP: Would that have been on the Kam or would that’ve been at the--?

GH: I honestly came remember that elevator would be, but I would think that it wouldn’t be on the Kam, it would be on of these--.

NP: Port Arthur stands?

GH: Yes, I think so.

NP: What was it like on Lake Superior?

GH: Well, I'll tell you, when I was on the *Kenora* and we were coming back up the lake and leaving Sault St. Marie, there was an old firemen on there—Casey was his name—he said, “Did you ever see a real storm, kid?” And I said, “No.” Well, he says, “You’re going to see one now.” He was an old saltwater man. He was sick as a dog, and I wasn’t sick at all.

NP: [Laughs]

GH: But it was a terrible storm. I’m sure the bow would be going up 40 feet and down 40 feet. [Laughs]

NP: And where would you be? Tied in underneath?

GH: The seamen's mess was right in the bow. That would be terrible there. That was one thing that was a big difference in the navy. You were in a hammock, and it didn’t matter what kind of weather you were in, really you couldn’t be thrown out of a hammock, but in a bunk you sure could. [Laughs]

NP: And were you?

GH: No. I’ve belted myself in in a bunk though. It was quite an experience.

NP: Well, thank you very much for sharing your experiences for our project. I must say that you are a braver man than I would’ve been, [laughs] and a stronger one. I can’t imagine three hours of shoveling coal.

GH: When I think of what some of our sailors went through, I didn’t go through anything compared to what some of them did. You take Ernie Takalo on the *Athabaskan*—torpedoed and he had to swim from his sinking ship to his sistership, the *Haida*. That’s why I’ve often said you’d find it a very, very interesting interview with Ernie.

NP: Yes, I imagine. Well, thanks again.

End of interview.