

CLYDE ROBBINS

Sam: It's the twentieth day of October, 1990, and I've finally persuaded Clyde Robbins to sit down in front of the camera

Clyde: Thank you Sam. I'm delighted to do this. I hope it doesn't bore anyone to tears, but they can always turn it off.

My career in the Coast Guard started by chance, really. I had wanted to go to two years of college for naval flight training, I wanted to be a Navy pilot. I had heard that the Naval flight training was the best in the world. So that was my aim and my goal.

My twin brother and I decided to get our education; we'd go off to the University of Michigan. I went there for a year; we were both paying our way through Michigan. It was very expensive for those days, a sum total of about \$1500. a year. We were out of state students and it seemed like we would be owing \$6000 at the end of our education and how would we ever pay back that amount? When you hear me say "we" it's because my life included, until I was nineteen, another guy all the time.

So when we got home at Christmastime, we saw a picture at the post office, along with all the people who were wanted, a poster that said "free education". We read further and it said apply to the Commandant, and we did. We took the exam later in the year, this was in early 1950. I passed it and Lee did not. I was offered an alternative appointment and I finished up my year at Michigan and didn't hear anything more from the Academy, so assumed I wasn't going and lost the thread.

I went home for summer vacation and was earning enough money on the farm helping my dad to pay my bills. I didn't have to work on the fourth of July, so I was taking a nap, and I heard a car drive in. My brother came into the room and said: Hey commander, come down here. I knew exactly what was up because ever since he hadn't passed the exam, he came out with this "commander" business. The telegram said for me to report to the Academy immediately.

There was a lot of running around trying to decide if I wanted to go in the middle of summer. I wasn't ready for the kind of discipline that existed at the Academy. I talked to my older brother, who had been in the Army, and he said if I didn't like it, I could quit. So I tried it. Got on a train and went to New London, Connecticut with great trepidation because I knew what an academy was like. I'd had a good friend who'd gone to West Point and knew what I was getting into, but when I got there, I really didn't like it.

When I took the physical exam, I tried to stand flat footed. I wouldn't quit, but I was hoping maybe they'd throw me out, but they didn't. I figured I'd get two years of flight training under my belt, and then I'd go out there. Then I decided, I'd stay as long as they didn't throw me out and they didn't and here I am today, still in the Coast Guard, so it was the beginning of something.

The Academy wasn't the greatest experience in the world for me. It was a means to an end. I wanted to be out doing things and the Academy was a lot of study and hard work. I enjoyed certain parts of it, like sailing on the Eagle. I enjoyed working with the tug boats, practicing tying them up to the piers. I enjoyed dating at Conn. College, but the studies really weren't my strong suit and I guess it probably still isn't. But I got through the Academy and went to the Half Moon and that was an interesting experience.

It seems as you go through your career, every time you move some place you start out the junior man and you're at the bottom and working your way up. Being a first classman at the Academy was close to being god, but going aboard the ship was not.

I remember the day I was to go aboard and I remember my first captain, Sam Guill. I was probably immature, I would have to admit. I wasn't fully ready to be an officer in the Coast Guard but everybody kind of gets shoved into it and you hope you have good commanding officers to help you not get into too much trouble and get things under control, which I did.

When I reported aboard on Sunday morning, I had received a telegram that didn't impress me too much because I was on summer leave and the telegram said to report a week early. I reported aboard and they were getting the supplies aboard the ship and I got to the top of the gangway and the quartermaster who was on watch that day was sitting on deck and saw this new ensign coming aboard and decided to have some fun. He was very informal and asked me what I wanted. I told him I was reporting on board. He shrugged his shoulders. I asked if he wanted to see my orders and he said he'd never had an

ensign report aboard before. I asked if there was an OD. He said yes. I asked where he was and he said he was up in the ward room. I asked what his name was and he said Fishback. I thought what have I gotten into here? He really pulled my chain.

Close behind me was ^{Don} ~~Don~~ Scalabrini. He wasn't too impressed with the quarter master either but the quarter master didn't try to pull Don's chain.

Things were squared away in a hurry on the quarter deck. The ship hadn't had an Exec for a while and being just ready to get underway, it didn't give the best impression in the world, but it turned out fine.

Ray ^{Coplin} ~~Copeland~~ reported aboard and we went out and the next morning we weren't in the best shape we could have been. The CO asked us who was senior and I had to admit that Ray was two numbers senior to me. Maybe only one. He said you can be in the ops division or the decks division and Ray wanted to be the navigator, so I became the gunnery officer.

The guns on the ships that we had in the Second World War weren't the most modern in the world. The Half Moon had a system, I can't remember the number, I think it was the 54 system and everybody else had the 52 system. The only other one was the ^{Macinac} ~~Macinac~~ that had the same gunnery ^{control} ~~patrol~~ system and it was kind of a technical nightmare. Very difficult keeping it going. Nothing was funded well and we didn't have all the spare parts that we needed and we had a lot of ships, and major ships. Where we have twelve 378s now, we probably had forty of them then. The Halfmoon was an AVP seaplane tender. Flat bottom, hard riding, diesel driven ship. That was good, because we got stuck in a hurricane. We got qualified right away, so we were deck officers very soon, maybe even after first patrol. We had a lot of fun on the ship. We also had a lot to learn.

In the fall we underwent training in Rhode Island, ^{Narragansett} ~~Aragsaset~~ Bay. At night we tied up to a buoy and were underway most of the day. I remember we were tied to the buoy one night and everybody was ashore, a third was aboard and I was the OD. A rain storm came up and blew like the dickens. The Navy had assigned a boat to us, seemed like it was 90' long. We had it tied to one side when this storm came through and we didn't have it tied well enough. Someone came up and told me the boat had broken loose and was headed for the rocks at the other end of the bay. I was pretty smart and called for the guy on watch, by the name of the Turtle. He was a first class petty officer at the time and later made chief. I ran into Turtle, he works for the Department of

Transportation in Maine, when I was in Boston in the eighties. Turtle told me he'd take care of it. He got the boat crew up there and captured the boat before it went on the rocks.

I considered I had screwed up by letting that happen. The captain was ashore and I didn't know how to tell him. I hadn't been aboard that long and wanted to make a good impression and I was a little scared of Sam, as I think most ensigns are of commanders. He came back, went up to cabin and I, with great trepidation, went up and told him what happened. He's smoking his pipe and lets me talk and when I'm done he said I got out of that one with a slight tightening of the bowels. It was a surprise to me, the humor, and I remembered those words for years. It was an interesting part of my life on that ship.

Not too much later, we were on echo patrol and got run over by a hurricane. That was impressive. I had never seen water piled so high in my life. It seemed like that ship was on one end and then the other. It was a diesel ship, minimum speed was about 6.6 knots, that's one screw turning at its slowest speed. You didn't want to drive it into those mammoth waves, so captain ~~Guil~~ ^{Guil} ~~Warr~~, who was a very good seaman, had us maneuvering on one screw and taking the heavy waves on the starboard or port bow, depending on which engine we were running and controlling it. Taught us a lot. We went through that hurricane and the ^{ship} ~~boat~~ had little damage. If anyone ever thinks that that amount of water spilling over a ship isn't impressive, he or she hasn't been to sea yet.

It reminds me of someone who wanted to put collapsible bows on ships so that when they ran into each other they wouldn't hurt each other. After seeing what the sea can do to a ship, I'm certain a collapsible bow wouldn't work. There was great deal of good seamanship that the captain had. We learned lot from him and the weather.

The only other outstanding event I recall was the time we were going down to the Chesapeake Bay Canal. It was at night and I came up to relieve Ensign Fishback. I asked him where we were and he pointed to the chart but I didn't pay much attention, went around and looked at barometer. I made sure the captain knew I was on the bridge and that I was doing a proper relief. I told the captain I was relieving Ensign Fishback on the deck and he told me he was going below and I thought I didn't know where I was. He had

confidence in me, but I didn't, so I started scrambling around to find out where we were.

I didn't get much help from the people on the bridge and I was scared to death. It was dark and there was a thundershower in the area. I was trying to figure out what the lights were ahead- I didn't have the picture. Up ahead, I could see a red light going from right to left and moving into path I wanted to go. I decided to go into all stop and reverse and just as I was going to do that, a lightening bolt lit up the whole world and I could see up ahead a long ways. A ship was moving in a channel some distance from us and I got a picture of the whole thing,. I looked at the charts, saw where we were, and I was on my way. I came that close to aborting that course.

After that we made a number of weather patrols. Cliff ^{Gerde} ~~Gurdy~~ came on as commanding officer. He had not been to sea in a long time. In those days they didn't pay too much attention to how long somebody had been ashore before they sent them back to sea. I think he'd told me he'd been ashore about fifteen years. A man by the name of McMinniman came aboard to be his Exec and it had been seven or eight years since he'd been to sea. When you've been an ensign aboard a ship and been underway a lot and had the kind of training with two good captains, we were really in pretty good shape after a year. Not cocky, but knew we'd had hard times and come out okay. So ^{Gerde} ~~Gurdy~~ and ~~and~~ McMinniman came aboard and kind of used us as their mentors, which was kind of nice for an ensign. I would stand the mid-watch and have a JOD and we'd do the night watch and then ^{Gerde} ~~Gurdy~~ asked me to be on the bridge for drills and exercises, so I was kind of getting him up to speed with what was going on the ship. That's neat ensign's duty.

Sam: I'd like to interrupt briefly. Do you remember coming off the echo patrol when we went into Bermuda?

Clyde: I was trying to forget Bermuda (laugh)

Sam: I have this long memory that you had met some of your classmates from the ^{Casco} ~~Casper~~ and you came back all excited and you wanted me to verify that you could have a boat drill in the morning. I thought to myself at that time that you didn't know what end was up. You were challenging a ship that had been in port doing nothing but boat drills and it was sad.

Clyde: I remember some other things about that call in Bermuda... what was the name of that yacht club? I remember trying to empty out all the beer that was in there and I had a lot of help. I'm surprised I could find my way back to the ship.

We went to Bermuda a couple of times after that, as I recall. The only responsibility we had was to the ship. We weren't married and it was an interesting time. It was during that time that I decided I wanted to go to flight training. I knew I wanted to go before that, but that was when I put in for it. I sent the application through the commanding officer before Capt. Willard left the ship and he called me up to the cabin and told me he'd approve it but said I'd never command one of the ships. I said I was aware of that. In those days the ships needed a lot of loving care that we didn't have the money for and that's exactly why to fly.

In 1936, a year and a half after I came aboard, I went to flight training. Ray Coplin and a bunch of us went down- the class of '54 was sent to flight training. It was not very difficult for me because I had learned to fly with my older brother when I was quite young and had flown off and on for a number of years. I enjoyed it and made it through without causing any problems and then went on to my first air station in 1957.

At that point, we were out in the boon docks in Florida going through flight training and I still wasn't married, but I had this friend I used to know way back when I was in high school and I decided to write to her and see what she was doing. She wrote back and said that she was unmarried and a dietitian in a New York hospital so then we started corresponding. I promised her in my letters that once I graduated from flight training I would go to New York because everybody got sent to New York. But in February of '57 our orders came out and I was ordered to go to Bermuda. I called Betty and told her I wasn't coming to New York and she said she'd written her last letter to me. I asked if she wanted to go to Bermuda with me and she said yes. After I got out of flight training, we got married and went to Bermuda and had a nice two years there at the naval station, seaplane base.

I was flying BPMs and eventually transitioned into B5Ms. My first air training commanding officer was Ira McMullen and he was an interesting character. This guy was more of an operator than an administrator, didn't care much for paperwork but he sure liked to fly airplanes and he knew how

to fly them. He could fly anything and didn't need a handbook to fly it. Went out and found the right switches and off he swnt. He was a fine commanding officer.

Fletcher Brown was our XO and he was a taskmaster and we became very good friends. But he expected us to get our collateral duties done and I was the officer taking care of personnel records and that sort of thing and McMullen would come by and ask me to go skin-diving or something and I'd tell him I had work to do and he'd say that could wait until tomorrow and I flunked the course. Bermuda was a lot of fun because, like my first tour on a ship, I was learning a lot. There weren't very many young officers there, in fact, I was the only one who wasn't an aircraft commander. There were seven lieutenant commanders and a couple of lieutenants and a commander. All of these guys were checked out in the airplane and whenever they went flying they liked to take a nice green co-pilot and teach him a few things. It was a super tour.

I had 700 hours and they made me an aircraft commander- that was a lot of airplane and that's not much time. It wasn 't because I was Lindbergh, but they needed aircraft commanders. I had the toughest check I've ever had in my life. I don't think he was sure, when we started the flight, that I ought to be an aircraft commander, but by the time we were done with this long check, he taught me enough that he was willing to let me take the airplane by myself. It was a neat experience.

Betty would have liked to go to New York and work in that area again because she hadn't been able to work as a dietitian. So I put in for New York and got St. Petersburg. Things were tough all over. So we went there and then transitioned to Pensacola to learn to fly helicopters. We had the H34. It was a lot of good flight time and a very good tour as well and I'm learning all the time.

I remember one incident when there was a hurricane headed up to the gulf and they decided we ought to evacuate all the aircraft. I assumed all the senior aircraft commanders would go, but it was decuded that I should evacuate one of the airplanes, so we flew to Bermuda to get away from the storm. After the storm had passed through and we could leave Bermuda, we went down through the Keys to do a hurricane recon flight before going back to St. Pete. We didn't have union rules in those days and if we flew sixteen or seventeen hours. We were coming out of Bermuda and we were chock a block with fuel.

It was a B5M, which is an interesting airplane because it was made so we could have bombs, tanks or Bombays under each engine. We had converted ours so that if we didn't want to carry bombs, we could have fuel tanks under there. There was about 6600 pounds of fuel in those tanks, but the airplane, even though it had the big 3350 engines on it, still didn't have enough power to keep it airborne with those tanks full, so they had put in a system so that you could push a switch on the console and salvo the tanks. The Bombay tank doors would open, the tanks would drop out, and the doors would close. Supposed to take seven seconds. The whole idea was to get rid of them as quickly as possible and get those Bombays closed because there would be a lot of resistance.

We were about 125 miles out of Bermuda and had another P5M accompanying us, and the right engine quit, just like that. We went through an emergency procedures as quick as we could, but nothing seemed to work. Mike Goodrow, because he was getting ready to get his first pilot check, I let him make that heavy take off. We were at 5000 feet and he had started a turn back to Bermuda as we were trying to cycle the tank.

If something can go wrong it will. You'd think the salvo switch would be on the co-pilot side, but it's on the pilot's side. So Mike's over there trying to fly the airplane and salvo the thing, so I took over flying the thing while he tried to salvo the tanks. The switch had what was supposed to be a break away wire on it but he couldn't break it, so the flight engineer had to find a pair of pliers. He finally cut the wire, pushed the salvo switch, the doors opened, one tank started to drop out, but got stuck and the other didn't even budge and Those things had been tested.

So now we're headed for the water. We had a manual system that the flight engineer was using on the flight deck and finally one tank broke loose and we got rid of that. We were about to hit the water and we decided we weren't going to get rid of the tank that had all the fuel in it and closed the Bombay so when we went in, we wouldn't sink. When we closed the Bombay, the airplane struggled just over the surface and Mike was able to stay airborne. So we started throwing everything over the side to make the ship lighter. People were throwing bottles that weighed 145 pounds apiece out the door. By carrying very high power on the other engine, we were able to keep ourselves in the air. We were pumping fuel out of that Bombay tank and jettisoning it so we were getting lighter and lighter, but we were still about

fifteen miles out of Bermuda and the other engine decided it was tired of working that day and it quit. I suppose we had burned up the spark plugs.

We ditched right beyond the reef line and fortunately we didn't hit anything. Eventually we anchored and there happened to be a world renowned diver was out there getting lobsters for his dinner and he asked if he could help. I told him he could help us back through the reefs to Bermuda. He thought he could do that, so I put him in the right seat and this one engine would idle and that was enough to have directional control. So we put people on the wings and that's the way we went back. Never touched a thing. He was so good. Today it seems strange having people running around on the wings to move them in one direction or the other. We got it back and ended up changing the engine that we lost and they put plugs in the other one.

Sam: Did the other aircraft escort you?

Clyde: Yes, they escorted us until we finally ditched and then he took off and went back and did our patrol for us. Everybody performed very well. Then we transitioned and I went to helicopter school. Started out in the H1s, a little bell helicopter. By the time I got back to St. Pete to start flying operationally, we were transitioning into the HUFs. Good airplanes, a lot of horsepower. The Coast Guard had about six of them at that time.

We lived next door to Ham McMann, he was a lieutenant commander at the time. He and his wife Dotty were walking down the road and a B47 had taken off and he was looking at the airplane and saw a wing suddenly depart the aircraft. There was a fire in the wing and it departed and the airplane started a slow roll and they watched as three people ejected in different directions, their parachutes opened and they went out of sight.

John Redfield, took an HUF and got airborne. It was a flat night, no wind, high humidity. Went out and found the crew picked up two of them and unfortunately, when he went back to pick up the third one, the airplane began to leave the sky and become a water monster and he couldn't get it back and ended up ditching the helicopter and we had six people in the water.

Don Reed had come in when he heard about the case, he was the XO at the time. He and a co-pilot and two crew members, so there were four in the airplane, and on the way out they lost an engine and they ditched a second HUF. Now we had ten people in the water.

Fortuantely, there were boats in the area and they started picking up survivors. No one was hurt, but we lost two very nice helicopters that night. Got them out of the water the next day, a buoy tender and barge got them out, but they were ruined. A lot of magnesium in the fuselage and it ate right through them. So when we lost them, we got our H04s back and then we operated one HUF and HU4s . There was some question about the performance of that airplane, I don't know what our problem was, no one knows what really happened, but the Coast Guard made the decision to look for a different helicopter. It was good, because we ended up buying the H52 and flew it for years, in fact just now gotten rid of them, That occurred in about 1960, so they operated for about 25 years and it's been a fine helicopter.

At the end of St. Pete, they send me orders to go to Seward Airforce Base to fly C130s. They were fairly knew in 196,1 so I was delighted. I didn't want to ask where they were going to send me, but I knew they had them in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and I knew they were putting them in Argentina, Newfoundland.

We went through C130 school, and my wife and family weren't too fond of it because I went up there in November and spent Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years near Nashville Tennessee going through that school. Oscar Jansen and I were flying partners and Artie Shaw had come down from Argentina and the four of us were going through flight training. It was an interesting ten weeks. We learned a lot about the airplane and left as qualified aircraft commanders. Went back to St. Pete and got orders to go to Argentina where we would be doing ice patrols and search and rescue.

When I got up there, we didn't have C130s yet. Elmer Crock was just leaving as CO and Glen Thompson was relieving him and Bill Murphy was the XO. That was very demanding, and the best instrument flying tour I'd ever had. I started out flying the R5D, Ed Nelson checked me out, and then transitioned into the C130. Seems like I spent most of my flying career transitioning into some aircraft, but it was a super airplane to fly up there.

The ice patrol was interesting. Some procedure, we'd try to find them on radar and then try to locate them and ^{sight} ~~see~~ them and plot them and send them off to be put on a chart for the mariners. While I was there we had a case I will never forget. I had gone into work in the morning, the weather was really sour, a lot of snow, the runways were covered with ice and a lot of wind. The weather was bad throughout the north Atlantic and the Ambassador, a British

ship, called in to say that their cargo had shifted and they were laying on their side with 36 men aboard and they were about to sink and needed help.

It was 500 miles from Argentina, but we were the closest to them. So the skipper and the operations officer asked me if I thought I could get an airplane airborne. You never said no. I had more guts than brains. We got the airplane running and taxied it out of the hangar into the ice and slithered up the ramp to the runways. We had no traction on the ground, so you kind of pulled it along with the propellers. We had plenty of wind and the runway was into the wind, so as soon as we got on the end of the runway we were airborne with no problem. We flew down and found the ship and were able to home on it and sure enough it was laying on its side and the crew boats on the downwind side were all smashed and the other ones were laying on the side of the ship. I would guess the ship probably had a 45 to 50 degree list to it and the lower rail was in water. Standard procedure in the manual at the time was to tow a trail line, and then as we passed the ship, put it over the side with the assumption that it would float past the ship and they could retrieve it. There were two problems with that: the wind was blowing so hard and the ship was blowing down wind and a ship doesn't blow directly down wind, it blows about thirty degrees off wind. Trying to put that all together with those high levels of wind, it was impossible for us, and I obviously didn't drop it in the right place cause it didn't go aboard and I'm not sure they could have retrieved it anyway. That was the second problem, trying to get the trail line in those kind of seas aboard the ship.

So Don Prince, who had done a lot of work on standard drop procedures, suggested that we drop it into the wind. I told him I didn't know where to drop it. He said he'd compute it for me and I was a bit skeptical. He got out his little computer and made some notes on a paper and said to fly up wind and drop it four seconds after you pass overhead. I thought that was a long time and he said do it, so I did. I followed what he told me to do and it went right aboard and landed on the bridge and I told him he was the luckiest SOB I'd ever seen and asked him how he did it. He said drop another one. I said okay and that one landed on board also, so they had two rafts that they wouldn't have had otherwise. He was a good co-pilot in many ways but he made you angry because he never was wrong, and you kind of like people to be wrong occasionally. But you've got to like a guy like that because he kept you out of trouble.

That night we stayed on the scene and really stretched the legs of the C130. We didn't want to leave the scene until they were all right. They had the rafts, so if they had to abandon ship they could do it. Seven of them decided they would abandon ship and got in one of the rafts and it blew upside down and they were all lost, so the rafts weren't the greatest thing in that kind of wind. They've done a lot of work on them since then. But we stayed on the scene until there was a ship close enough to contact and had to depart the scene. We were called back to Argentia so they could be back out at first light with the airplane. We only had two C130s at the time. We called them back and said there was no way we were going back to Argentia, it was 500 miles away and there were icy runways up there. They said to go back to Halifax, but the reason they wanted us to go back to Argentia was so that we could change crews. They got even with me and we went into Halifax, but we had to be back out on scene at first light. When I got the airplane put to bed it was eleven at night and then we had to be back out there at first light. You could do those things in those days. We went back out and eventually a Norwegian ship came alongside and the people got off- it was the prettiest piece of seamanship I've ever seen in my life. Eventually the ship sank.

A sidebar to that was, I got home and walked in two days later and Betty was a little upset because nobody called her and told her where I was or that I was coming home. I asked why she didn't call the station and she said if they wanted her to know something, they would call. Now she calls the office occasionally and she got used to the business of being away a lot.

But the tour in Argentia was good because of all the instrument flying. It was probably like the ones they're now flying in Alaska a lot. It wasn't so good for the wives because the women were alone a lot and the kids were sick and it was a tough place to live, but we went off from there to San Francisco.

En route I made lieutenant commander, and that was sort of an amazing thing. In aviation, a lot of people are lieutenants and JGs, because when you get out of flight training, you've gone to sea first. But when you're lieutenant commander, you're a little higher and I suddenly found that I had to be careful what I said because people were beginning to believe what I said. It was certainly a step forward.

There, I flew C130 and H52 helicopters for two years. Ray Goodman and I were stationed together and he was the safety officer and pilot. He had been chosen to go on a far east trip on a C130. I would like to have gone, but I

understood seniority. Ray had duty the night before they were to leave, so I offered to take it for him. He said I didn't need to, but I talked him into it. I reported in for duty and had been there just a few minutes and the gong went off and I ran to the helicopter. There was a boat up along the coast and it was going down and the wind was blowing from off shore. So I went out, got in an H52 with a guy by the name of Jay Crow. He was new to the air station but had gone through helicopter school and we took off. We searched under the Golden Gate bridge and up along the coast. Visibility was very bad and when you're flying blind like that, you get a whole different feeling about determining distances and that sort of thing. You're almost in a tube and you aren't paying too much attention to which way your airplane is pointing because you're trying to find your way along the coast. We had flown for some time and we hadn't seen a thing that looked like a boat breaking up on the rocks. Jay looked down and said we were headed south and land was on our right. When you're going up along the west coast and you're headed north, how can you get land on your right? It doesn't make any sense at all and it really takes you back when you're in the fog. What we'd done was fly too far north and come around Point Blaise and were heading south.

So we turned around and found the boat and sure enough there were five men on it, waving their arms.. I don't know how we missed them the first time, never did figure that out. There was a cliff where they were going into the rocks and we couldn't get in close enough to that cliff to pick them up. First of all the handbook said we couldn't hover if the wind was thirty knots and it was gusting at over that, so I thought the only thing we could do was back in as close as we could and see if we could get the basket to them. Jay was watching out the rear end of the helicopter trying to see that we didn't knock into the cliff with the tail rudder, and all of a sudden he said get out of here. I asked him what happened and he said the tail rudder was kicking rocks on the cliff. I said I didn't feel anything and he said there were rocks flying all around and he thought we'd hit it.

Now I thought there was a chance that we had a wounded helicopter, but there were people down there and no one else in the area. So I said we still had to try to get them out and I tried something I didn't think would work. It took almost full throttle to keep the helicopter straight. We got the first man, and then the next two people were so eager they both got in the basket, and on the third hoist, we brought the other two up. The rule is if you're flying a

helicopter that might be damaged, you land as soon as possible, so I decided to go up on top of this cliff to see if I could land. I've never taken such a ride in my life- you couldn't possibly land there because it was so turbulent. So we flew back to Chrissy Field and landed there and examined the helicopter. Apparently we hadn't touched anything with the tail, but the change in the air caused by the tail rotor was kicking up rocks on the cliff.

When we got there the press was there, so it was my first experience with television. When I got back to the air station, I called Betty told her what channel I'd be on and when. The kids were watching and I think this was when my son Jim decided he wanted to be a helicopter pilot. Jim is a coast guard pilot now and has been for some time. He's flying C130s in Alaska. I thought he might want to go into one of the other services because I was very well known in the Coast Guard, but he wanted to be a Coast Guard pilot. Eventually he wants to fly helicopters. I think the best part of the story is that I got the air medal out of it and my crew got like commendations. Ray was madder than hell, but he got the trip to the far east.

My tour at San Francisco was marred by an accident. This fellow that I mentioned, Don Prince, who was a super pilot came to San Francisco from Argentinia and he checked out as a helicopter pilot in the winter of 1965 in northern California. He flew all day rescuing people and that evening took the helicopter to the airport and the aids to navigation were out and he was tired and still had four civilian passengers aboard and ran into a tall hill and they were all killed. The loss of a very close friend and I'm still close to his family. It happened right before Christmas.

When I went to San Francisco, Bruce Inge was the CO . H was there for a year and then was transferred to headquarters. I liked Bruce a lot. Then Jay Lewis showed up and a guy by the name of Jim Maher was the XO. I had a good tour, a good group, right there at San Francisco International Airport..a nice two years. My previous CO had been stationed in Argentinia with Glen Thompson and had gone back to become chief assistant of aviation, increasing the number of people they had in the Aviation Division back at headquarters. So I got sent over and worked in the Aviation dDivision. Spent the next five years there- 1966 to 1971. It was a good tour. It was good for my development. I flew from Washington National carrying passengers, but my main job was to work in search and rescue and I was the Administrative Assistant to Chet Richmond who headed the Search and Rescue Division. It broadened my horizons. There

wasn't anything opening up in aviation that I was really interested in and I liked Washington, so when he asked me to stay, we did. I told him I wanted to use his clout the following year to get the billet I wanted, but he didn't make me any promises. The CO spot that was opening up was at Arlington, which we changed to Washington National Air Station, but in 1971, I went over to be the commanding officer. The reason I wanted to was because I wanted to fly the Grummond Gulfstream Two, the jet. That was a super tour. Did a lot of things. Had a lot of fun. At the end of it, I have to admit, it was getting a little boring. We had restraints because of the oil crunch and weren't flying as much as I'd have liked, so I was ready to do something else. I flew quite a few people while I was there, but there are two that stick out in my mind. One was Admiral Sergeant. He was a fun guy to fly. We became good friends as a result of that. But Wolby was a character, he was a guy that I also enjoyed a lot. When we landed somewhere, there was always a limousine for him. Paul Breed told me to make sure the people bringing the limo had seatbelts out because he wouldn't move without a seatbelt. Paul used to see Wolby getting into the backs of these cars without a seatbelt and Paul was very strong on safety in automobiles. So one day when Wolby was getting in, Paul held the door open and wouldn't let it be closed until Wolby put his seatbelt. He told Paul he didn't wear a seatbelt and Paul told him he was in charge of safety in the Department of Transportation and he should wear his seatbelt. So he put it on and after that he would never ride without a seatbelt. I'm not sure I would have had the guts to do that to Wolby.

Later on I was flying Secretary Brenniger on a trip to Rome, he got off and Wolby said hello and gave me the Italian hug. He was ambassador to Rome at the time. He asked me what I was going to do that afternoon, I had planned a little sightseeing, and he asked me to take him out to Trent. So instead of spending my time enjoying Rome, I flew up to Trent and we stayed overnight up there. It was an interesting place to visit because nobody spoke English. Now it's a great tourist place, but this was 1972. I also went to Bucharest.

At the end of that tour I wasn't eager to go as somebody's exec and was told I couldn't get another aviation command, so I put in for a tour^{of} aviation. I had no idea what that would result in. Wayne Caldwell was Chief Officer of Personnel at the time. Admiral Jenkins was Chief and his deputy was Lew Dunhall, I think. When I put in this request, Lew called me and asked if I was turning in my wings. I said no, but I was told I couldn't have a command so I

wanted to do something different. He offered to help me and called back in a couple of days and asked if I wanted something in W, which had to do with safety and environment, that sort of thing. I said that would be interesting, so Caldwell called a few days later and asked me to go to Mobile as Captain of Port. I said that sounded fine. Then I wondered what COTP meant. I looked it up in the book and called deputy Al Reed back and said Wayne called me and asked me to go to Mobile as COTP- that doesn't sound right and he said that's not right- it's Galveston.

There are different points in your career when you take a Y in the road and you don't know why but it's kind of interesting, as you wander through, to look back at it. I had been flying the G2 and had a skill I could sell on open market and there were people interested in hiring me and I talked to some, but not seriously. The year before I was ready to be transferred, some of my classmates and people in the class of '55 had been selected for captain and I hadn't been. That was kind of depressing in some ways. Some I thought were better than I, some not. It made me stop and think where I was going. The following year I was surprised to be selected myself. I still wasn't in the zone and they went fifteen below to pick me up, but it sent me a signal that my previous evaluation was wrong.

So now I'm in Galveston, and there's a tanker carrying crude oil going up to Houston in the ship channel. About 28 miles offshore, the third mate who had the lookout recorded that there was something dead ahead and the mate that had the bridge at the time went over to look at radar to see what it was and it was an offshore rig that had been there forever. They weren't where they were supposed to be and it opened up the side of the ship. Fortunately, I ^{suppose} (??) it only opened up one tank along the side, but there were five barrels in it and that got into the water and enough sparks that it burned. The ship burned for five days and all we could do was let it burn. Seven people were killed.

I ^knew nothing about it and learned a lot. An aviator normally doesn't get to do this. They set up a transit along the ship.. There were 36 tanks and I thought that they would pump one out and then another, but you can't do it that way. Have to keep the ship level, keep from twisting it. It took us a long time and halfway through, a hurricane started up down in the Gulf and we were trying to decide what to do. Some said I had to bring it in, others said don't. Didn't want it to break up out there. I decided to wait out the storm.

Then we were trying to decide how to off load the ships foreign crude and the only barges we had were domestic. I thought they were tanks, let's use them, but people said we couldn't put foreign crude in a domestic barge. We finally worked our way through that. A guy by the name of Smith, vice president for Exxon was involved. He came fifty miles down from Houston and practiced his speech all the way. Exxon was on my side and we left it offshore.

During this tour, I was selected to go to the National War College, the industrial college of the armed forces in Washington. I pointed out I had only been at the job for a year and didn't think it was a good idea to leave, so they called me back and said they'd promise it to me the following year. I was happy with that because I needed two years under my belt and that experience in Galveston was good for someone who doesn't know what they want to do. There's so much gong on, so many decisions to be made, on a grander scale than almost any other vocation in the Coast Guard..

After that, they gave me a choice whether I wanted to go to ICAP or the war college so I went to the war college for ten months, graduated in 1977. Had a good time there. At the time they didn't have exams. It gave me the opportunity to write papers and do background work and I traveled to Europe on an extended visit to look at ports and vessel traffic systems. I probably should have gone to ICAP because they wanted me to be chief of the division that was in charge of putting together the budget and running g interference through DOT and Congress. It was a little more technical. But it worked out all right.

I went from war college to the CPA for three years and that was a learning experience. The budgeting that I had done in search and rescue put me in a good position to do the budgeting for the Coast Guard. That's a tough job. probably one of the more responsible captain's jobs in the Coast Guard as far as a staff job is concerned. After that I had a call from Paul Yost who asked if I wanted to be his chief of staff. I said I would like to do that, although it was a big move. Betty said we'd go where I wanted, but I knew she'd prefer we go to Boston. So I slept on it, and when I got up, I called Al Tingley who was the Chief Officer of Personnel at the time. I said I told Paul I'd be his chief of staff, but I really would prefer to go to Boston and be Ray Wood's Chief of Ops. I asked him not to tell Paul Yost that I'd turned down his offer and he said no one would know. I went to Boston.

That was a bittersweet tour because I went up there, had a good year as Chief of Ops and then did become the Chief of Staff, but at the same time Ray Wood was discontinued and retired. I think he had a lot to offer and never understood that decision. He got out and Lew Smpstein came up. Lew and I were friends, but he was discontinued while there and there's a great deal of unhappiness when one is forced out of the Coast Guard. I don't always understand it. I learned a lot. Gave me a good background in operations.

Lew had some medical problems and retired early so I ended up as District Commander there for several months. I knew I was competitive and I thought there was a chance I might make ~~flight~~^{flag} officer. When the ~~Flight~~^{Flag} Board met, I was at work. Lew was off somewhere and they called and wanted to talk from the commandant's office. They wanted Lew to call as soon as he got in. I said what do they want to talk about? She said it was about the budget. That didn't make sense. When Lew got in, he called and asked what was going on. He asked what the commandant wanted and I didn't know, but thought somebody on the staff had made ~~flight~~^{flag}. He said I had a big head, and I said it may not be me. He said it would be. I went home and talked to Betty, told her I thought I might have made flag. Told her about the phone call. Sure enough, when the commandant called, Admiral Hayes, I didn't sleep much that night. We couldn't tell anyone in the Coast Guard, so went over to our neighbors and told them and they broke out bottle of champagne. It was a nice evening

Right after that, the next spring, I was the one in the hole, no spot for me and an additional one didn't retire, so they frocked me. Admiral Gracey took over and he wanted to do study on drug law enforcement, so I put together a study. We met in Washington and I spent several months down there. We needed a staff symbol and they wanted it under "O" and another letter. I said how about "Z"? It was a good group, in fact, I'm thinking about hiring someone from that group to be my planner for the job I have now.

I did that study and was frocked and remained frocked for a year. Didn't get my number until April of the following year and then was District Commander of the 14th. That was a good way to go, to have my first tour as a ~~flight~~^{flag} officer as a district commander. You move from one area to the next.

I talked about people believing you, well, that's another step when you become a flag officer. I remember well being out in the lawn and the guy who took care of the yard was out there and I said it would make a nice putting green and the next day there were stakes in the ground. I asked what the

stakes were and he said he thought I wanted a putting green. I said yes I do, but you're not going to put one here. You have to be careful. Another day we were talking to a three star airforce officer at an evening function and he said the same thing. If you say you want a loaf of bread at two in the morning and say it to somebody working for you-you'll get it. He may have to break down a door or window, but you'll get it. People try to overhelp and of course people take advantage of that position and become a little arrogant and think that's their due. They're headed into troubled water.

We traveled around the Pacific and a lot of the outlying islands, Japan and Singapore and Korea. We were doing a lot of ship inspections over there at the time. It was a good tour. I worked a lot with the other services. I was the component commander in that area so there were certain things I got to do because I was wearing two stars. That's a term used in the other services were the components- army, navy, marine- the senior person for the service is called the component commander. So I was the component commander for the Coast Guard and we were working closely with them and at that time were just going into maritime defense. That's where I met Admiral Crowe and worked closely with him. He later became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. They couldn't have selected a better person because he was a super officer, very smart and a nice guy.

After that Admiral Gracey asked me to come back and be the Chief of Operations. That was a tough job. They've split it up so that the search and rescue and some of the other things are in a different shop now, but it was a seven day a week job. Educational as well as demanding. Got to work with the intelligence community and the State Department. Got some new airplanes and after a year, I was working for Paul Yost.

Paul was very aggressive and doing new things and pushing the Coast Guard to new heights and I was pleased to work with him. Then he selected me to go out to be the Area Commander in the Pacific, which was a delightful assignment. I had thought if I were there, I would be happy to retire quietly and it would be a nice transition- didn't think it would be too busy. If I went to New York there was a lot going on in the drug business and some contentious relationships with other agencies that I didn't expect to have and didn't out on the west coast. But what I did have was the Exxon oil spill and the earthquake and that put a monkey wrench in a nice quiet tour.

I was the Maritime Defense Zone Commander and that was a new endeavor for me and an interesting one. Had a good amalgamation with the Navy and at the same time set up the Joint Task Force for the drug business.

On top of that, the Exxon Valdez ran aground on March 21, 1989 and that set new standards. I was on the phone a lot. A lot of press. Paul Yost said he'd been to the White House and they had indicated that they wanted him to take charge of this spill. He said he thought that the idea was ludicrous and then he found out whose idea it was. He was behind the power curve and offered my body rather than his to be the on-scene coordinator. He told me to get my bags packed and that was Thursday I was in Valdez Alaska by Sunday and spent six months up there.

Interesting operation. It was a seven day a week thing. Early in the morning to late at night. I traveled around to the different areas and met a lot of people and put together an organization that supervised the clean up. While I wasn't involved directly at the time of spill, we were still doing skimming when I got there and most of it was coordinating the efforts of Exxon and being the go-between for EOM and State and various interests. I've never seen so many interest groups in my life. It was a big operation and a lot of pressure. I learned a lot. When I left there in October, I left behind a lot of good friends that are now distributed throughout the Coast Guard. I think that it went as well as it could, once you put oil on the rocks. I flew a lot, not actually flying the planes, although they did let me fly an H3 and land it once, which was fun. I got to use a lot of air resources and that was fun. Even got to see my son in Kodiak. When I came back to San Francisco in October, the earthquake happened on the 16th.

Sam: The day before, I was in the Los Angeles area and made a date with Paul Breed, and both of us felt something...

Clyde: One of my hats out there was the regional emergency transportation coordinator and with three jobs, you put them in priorities, and I hadn't spent a lot of time on that. Fortunately, I had a very good assistant. Ed was with the program, worked very hard on it, so we weren't in bad shape when it occurred. Of course you're never really prepared for that kind of thing. I had just gotten home, come over the freeway, that overpass that collapsed and the bridge that

collapsed. I was home when it hit. I was upstairs in the lighthouse quarters where we lived and I thought the building was coming down.

Then the reports started coming in. I saw a Coast Guard helicopter flying over and tried to see where it was going and saw that the bridge was down. It was on TV because the World Series was about to start. I went down to the base and got a boat over to work and had a call from the Secretary. He was coming to San Francisco and he wanted to get briefed when he arrived at 3 am, along with the vice president. After that he wanted to fly around and look at all the damaged areas and then he wanted to call all the mayors in the area. That was quite an undertaking. I don't think he knew how many mayors there were. Probably thirty. Trying to get them all together with problems with communications and roads, it wasn't an easy task. I had people start making phone calls and recommended he not go flying at night. He agreed. Some of the people from the Joint Task Force that were stationed at the operations office came in to see if they could be of any help. Nick Schoenger, my chief of staff, was coordinating the effort, making calls to all the mayors.

I had met the vice president up in Alaska. He might not have remembered me, but somebody probably reminded him that I was the guy up in Alaska as the on scene coordinator. He got me aside, looked around to see if there were any mikes in the area, and whispered in my ear- Clyde, doesn't anything good happen where you are? I began to think that perhaps that was right.

We went out and looked at the area and met with the mayors. I had them all come over to Alameda Air Station and we offered them transportation. I didn't ask which mayors would be there and I did notice that the mayor from San Francisco was the only one that was missing. I thought- he's a Democrat,- maybe that's how they operate. I found out later that he was really angry with the vice president because after we left there, we walked around the streets of San Francisco for awhile and never did see the mayor.

They took off the next day there was a phone call from the Department of Transportation asking if we had invited the mayor of San Francisco. We said yes. He said he wasn't invited. They asked if we had a record of calling him. We found out it was the Army captain assigned the responsibility and he had kept copious notes. He saved our bacon because the mayor was shooting off his mouth about not being invited and it was front page news. We sent a copy of the notes, it went to the White House and they released it. So the captain got

phone calls from all the newspapers to comment on what the story was. He said all he did was make the phone calls.

We were able to expedite, because of Secretary Skinner's involvement, getting some money for the ferries and the air corps. We learned a lot and if there is a bigger earthquake, we'll be better prepared.

^{I was to retire}
^{Kline called}
Bill Kline me and told me about this job. As the result of the Pan Am 103 demise, there had been a presidential commission that recommended that there be an assistant secretary for intelligence and security at the department. They had met the commandant and FAA people in Chicago and discussed what they were going to do and decided that the secretary should establish an office and have a director of the office to report directly to Secretary Skinner. I was asked if I'd take the job and I talked to Betty. She was ready, willing and able. Thought another tour in Washington would be great. It was decided that the best thing for me to do was to take a recall and be back on active duty and I've been in this job for just over three months. We're still getting it set up and like most of my career, it should be interesting. I'm enjoying working for Sam Skinner and hope I don't have any more incidents like the PanAm 103 or my employment may be very short, but it's certainly a very challenging and interesting job. Something new and different. That's my career in a nutshell.

Sam: You have the farm in Troy and were planning to go there and rebuild fences and stuff like that.

Clyde: That's right, I had already hired a builder to help me restore the house and now he's doing it all himself. It will be ready for us when we're ready. I promised I would stay in this job for two years and I noticed they wrote orders for three, but it will depend. If after two years, they still want me to do the job and it's still a challenge and I'm enjoying it, I'll do it.

Sam: In the meantime, you've bought a townhouse. When I lived here in high school, this was an all Black area.

Clyde: Yes, and now it's a mixture and a healthy mixture.

Sam: Two blocks down, there are people selling fish-looks like a sidewalk bizarre- is that a daily occurrence?

Clyde: Just on the weekends, like a large garage sale .And the Eastern Market is down just a couple blocks. A handy place. Takes me six minutes to drive to work and half hour on the subway. I could even walk to work. Last night we can go down street to good restaurants. Now if we can get moved into our house and settle down.

Sam: That'll be done just in time for you to go back to the farm.

Clyde: Yes. Where are living now Sam?

Sam: Port Townsend, where the incoming ship comes down the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and if they don't make the turn there, they become a permanent monument on Whidbey Island. That has happened.

Clyde: That's a nice area.

Sam: I have a home on the eastern shore of Discovery Bay and I look out over Protection Island, named by Captain Vancouver because he anchored there to escape the western gales, with the lights of Victoria beyond. When I'm home.

Clyde: Are you home much?

Sam: The last couple of years, about half the year on the road doing this.

Well, Clyde , if you have something more you want to say, on the record that is, this is your opportunity.

Clyde: I can't think what it is, I kind of went on and on.

Sam: You have done a mighty fine job and I want to thank you for being so forthcoming with the memories, which I share.