

## CHARLES KING

**SUMMARY:** Charles King talks to Betsy Peterson about his career at the US Coastguards. He explains the work involved in being part of the merchant marine safety unit. He also talks about the difficulty in finding good quality personnel to replace those that retire and stresses on the importance of safety and training in the industry.

00:00:10 Date January 11, 2012. Interviewer Betsy Peterson. Interviewee Charles King. At Buffalo Marine Service, Houston Ship Channel. At a portion of the the original ship channel used by the Allen Brothers. Brady island to deepen channel.

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Born in Bozeman, Montana in 1938. Wanted to go to air force academy. Coastguard recruiting academy. Was appointed as cadet in coastguard academy.

Coast guard academy in New London, Connecticut on banks of Thames River. CG came to be with merger of lighthouse and lifesaving service in 1790.

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4-year training program not unlike other military academies. State maritime academies that have state scholarships. Federal Merchant Marine academy at Kings Point, New York and graduate merchant mariners. Maritime Administration supervises that. Merchant ships of the US are not competitive in the world market. because of cheap labour that is available on most foreign ships. US pays more for licensed and unlicensed seamen. Union got involved. Training became important and expensive. US ownership makes competition very hard. no foreign ships can run from port to port and carry cargo. Come to the US, discharge and load at one other port in the US. Not more than one. and cant discharge at more than one port. This is to prevent from competition with other US ships that travel from port to port. US laws are very restrictive. Protection for merchant seamen. Shanghaied.

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Jones act. Part of the Cabotage laws - Seafarers protection law. Advantageous for seamen.

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Started as deck officer. Graduated with Bachelor of Science in Engineering. Easiest to get accredited then. Can now graduate in many more fields like, international affairs, engineering etc. Graduate with 4-5 opportunities to specialize. Assigned to wherever there is a vacancy for junior officers.

Coastguards charged with merchant mariner - those who man the US merchant ships. Coastguards inspect the ship and then gives a certificate of clearance. Ship plans are

reviewed by coastguard. Today, same plans are reviewed in conjunction with the American bureau of shipping and other classification agencies. Help coastguard determine some factors. More specialized.

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Merchant Marine safety. Captain of the Port offices. Responsible for the port as far as commercial ships are concerned. OCMI. Officer in charge of marine inspection. Senior inspector of personnel. Oversees licensing and credentials of mariners. Senior inspector in charge of structural inspections on ship. Senior investigating officer in charge of determining conduct of seamen. Bureau of marine inspection and navigation. Alive because river boats had steam engines which were capable of exploding. BMIN needed to get involved to prevent boiler explosions on river boats.

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Initial placement was in Port Arthur and then Washington. Search and rescue work. Law enforcement. After that - deck watch officer. Wanted to be an engineer. Called a student engineer. Learnt power plants, auxiliaries, security of the vessel according to structure and integrity. Then qualified as an engineering watch officer and then assistant engineer. Was then transferred to a Buoy depot in Astoria, Oregon. Supervised the industry of maintaining buoys. Got him into an engineering persuasion. Small enough base to become an executive officer and engineer. Learnt a lot about people. Did offshore cruises for aid and navigation work. Every 4-5 months, had a 30 day ocean station patrol. Along with aid to navigation carried weather bureau officers. They would take weather observations at the point in the Atlantic and report them back to land for analysis. Was a primary purpose of the radio beacon. Also to provide search and rescue efforts. Buoy depot was responsible for care and maintenance of all aid to navigation equipment in that area. Buoy has a 8-10 ton sinker and sometimes 2 of those attached to a lower end of the chain which comes up to the bottom end of the buoy that is a floating structure and supports the batteries for the light and the foghorn. Colored a certain color to mark either the starboard or port, right or left of the channel. Also developed other types of marks to denote intersections along the channel.

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Markers are primarily changed for maintenance Developed other methods to control the fouling of the buoys and ships. There was a three year cycle on buoys because of can maintenance. Every year they had to change batteries out. Lead batteries would only last for a year.

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Did an isolated tour for 14 months on a long range aid to navigation station in the middle Pacific. Fortunate enough to have a commanding officer on first ship. Was an OCMI before commanding officer. Applied for merchant marine safety assignment. Asked for SFO, LA, San Diego. Was assigned to Port Arthur, TX. Wife got to know of posting

through the Navy Times. Could talk on radio once a week. Came back from tour, took 30 days vacation and then drove to Port Arthur from Montana. Was a bit of shock because it was unknown. But learnt to live within those parameters. (TAPE STOPS)

(TAPE RESUMES)

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Port Arthur was a merchant Marine safety assignment. Opportunity to learn a lot about what had happened before and how coastguards had changed all that. Began involvement with marine industry of the US. Worked as a regulatory agency with merchant marine personnel. Being in Port Arthur, primary function was tank ships that hauled all petroleum products. Lot of construction for offshore industry then. Vessels including drill ships were all inspected and certified by coastguards. Create service industries. A lot of cleaning needs to be done. With all those shipyards many had own service industries. Provided a lot of opportunity for employment.

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Was in Port Arthur for three years, Coastguard wanted well rounded and qualified officers, went back to sea and headed to Vietnam. Ship was home ported in Long Beach, CA. Was assigned as an engineering officer. Went through a training period of 2 1/2 months. In 1970 headed to Vietnam for 10 months. Went in support of the navy, Coastguard had armament that was good for the short bombardment. Needed more conventional type of weapon in Vietnam which the coastguard had. Was in patrol almost every night. Offered naval gun support.

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Was in Danang Harbor 3-4 times. When there were spare parts in Danang, would go ashore to pick it up and then get it back to the dock. Felt safe on the ship but not so much on land. Were trained on what to look out for etc. Lasted a year. Did ocean station, searched rescue, navigation support and fisheries investigation and support in the Gulf of Alaska. Because fishing is so good in those waters the Japanese, Chinese and Russians would come in to fish. Had to enforce boundaries strictly otherwise marine life would have been depleted.

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Always had to keep an eye out for the fishing. Radar was not so good back then. Could only see the mother ships but was difficult to discern the small fishing boats. Sometimes they were sided by the fisheries enforcement officer who were on board. Hefty fines for the operating company, so often the fleets were operated by the govt. under the guise of a company.

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After this went to another assignment in San Diego. Was the senior inspector at the San Diego shipyard that was building tank ships for the American Merchant Marine.

Subsidized for construction and operation of the merchant vessels. Reason subsidy was necessary was because of the less expensive construction and crewing of vessels in foreign countries. Japan as rebuilding, Korea was starting up. Not as regulated as the US. Gave them an opportunity to be less expensive to build and crew.

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Got into the container business early on with Sealand. Europe had used more coastalized and into cargo movt than US had. US had a better transportation infrastructure. Their waterway system was more utilized. Internationally as early as anyone, nationally not so much. Trying to develop containers on barges to move them up the river system. Requires pretty large barge for efficiency. Boxes take up a lot of cube. Grain does not add up too much. Built tank ships in San Diego for 4 years. Was transferred to the headquarters and did 4 years in merchant marine safety. Chose to retire in 1980 from the coastguards. Got acquainted with Buffalo Marine service during next posting. Left shipyard in 1990. Moved back after a year and started consulting in Marine and environmental safety at that time. Shortly after that ended up with a law called OPA 90 - Oil pollution Act of 1990 as a result of Exxon Valdez. Helped the local towing industry with the new laws that were implemented. Has developed into a huge business. Were very effective in preventing spills. Prevention, containment and clean up. Need to continually train. Had written the spill contingency plan for the business. Enjoy being a part of the marine industry in Houston.

Have grown into the largest bunkering company in the area. Bunkering is a term that comes from coal bunkers. When coal was used to fire the boiler on the ship, it was stored in a bunker. When oil became the fuel for the boiler, the name still stuck. When bunkering used to bring coal, now bring oil.

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Oil is delivered by going to a terminal or a refinery, tank farm and hook up to a shore side pipeline and piped on to a barge, in several tanks. some have 10-12 tanks. Have pumps on board the barge. When going alongside a barge, have a flexible hose that gets hooked up and oil is delivered. Remake those connections to check for leaks. Use a new gasket for every hook up. All the piping is pressure tested periodically. to make sure it is not a source of pollution for the water.

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Training has become more cohesive. Safety has become very important, Environment has also become important. Steps taken to make sure environment is not polluted. Marsh helps break up tidal wave if there is a hurricane. Hurricane Ike was not too bad, because Houston was on the right side of the hurricane. Only high water. Port Arthur was badly devastated. Wiped out fishing and hunting camps. In Houston had high winds, high water. Learnt to handle that pretty well. (Someone walks in and interrupts)

((Interview resumes))

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Only way to handle hurricanes is to make sure to get info as early as possible. Port needs to cooperate with coastguard.

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Cooperation is growing industry wide. Last 20 years have learnt a lot from East and West Coast. Even though they are competitors, learn a lot from each other. Gulf Coast water is a lot cleaner than it used to be. Learnt lessons from California and Washington.

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Cant employ anyone other than US citizens. Get TWIC cards through a screening process. TSA does the screening process. Cant get merchant marine license unless with a TWIC card. Because of the increase in responsibility used a lot of merchant marine safety officers in the law enforcement dept. for years after 9/11.

Inspection program for towboats, for navigation, firefighting and life saving equipment and for drugs. Drillers and support people were not regulated. Transition from shoreside to off shore. Boats will be coastguard inspected like deep sea are.

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AWO presented their comments to the docker. Individual companies were impacted differently. It will be a big transition. Reassure customers that things will be better. Safety management systems have been an assurance to customers. Management systems are nothing more than written policy and procedures on how you comply with them. Changed more because of awareness to environmental sensitivity. Safety training involves environmental awareness and sensitivity.

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One of the biggest challenges at Buffalo will be the satisfactory replacement of mariners as they get older. Have not done very well at getting communities or schools to realize the potential in the marine workforce. Real intense training program at Buffalo. Not an easy environment for families. hurts the industry. End up with men and women who are not family people. Try to make the atmosphere more personal. 9/11 has made it a bit more difficult to implement. Only hire TWIC card carriers. Biggest challenge is getting personnel.

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The most important thing to know in the coastguard is development of relationships. Cooperation. Need to get a job that a person loves. Difference between younger and older inspectors. Older one knew who could be trusted, younger one did not. Younger one was more by the book. Coastguard has had to deal with that ever since they became the regulatory authority for the merchant marine.