

# Oral History Interview

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum  
“The Culture of Tugs and Tugs in Culture”

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Interviewee: Andrew (Andy) Langley (A.L.)  
DOB: 04/26/1962

Interviewer: Michelle Zacks (M.Z.)

Date: Sunday, December 11, 2011

Location: Tangier Island Firehouse

Comments: Andy grew up in Louisiana (Cajun country) and has people who have worked on the water (crabbing, shrimping, gator hunting) in his family background, but he was not a waterman himself. His wife, Lisa [maiden name?], is from an old Tangier family. Her father worked on tugboats, and through him he got pointed in the direction of tug work. He received his Merchant Mariner's Seaman's Document (physical, drug test, pay fee) from the Coast Guard's regional exam center in Baltimore.

He started out with Steuart Transportation Company in Piney Point, Maryland. In 1992, they changed their name to Piney Point Transportation. In 1997, Vane Brothers bought the company, and he has been with them since.

Five years ago, he was put on a brand new, 50,000 barrel oil barge, the DS 53 (DS means double-skinned). It is a self-contained black oil barge. He is the barge captain. There are two tugs associated with it, the *Choptank* and the *Anacostia*. His launching base is at the City Dock on the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. He and Kim “Socks” Parks were two of the first people on Tangier to be involved in tugboating. Once the two of them got involved, they invited Vane to come and do a recruiting session.

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M.Z.: Today is December 11th, 2011. This is Michelle Zacks for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and I'm on Tangier Island speaking with Andy Langley, and this is part of the upcoming Tug exhibit at CBMM. So, Andy, thank you very much for taking the time to meet with us today.

A.L.: Sure, no problem.

M.Z.: We don't have a whole lot of time so I guess we'll just cut to the chase. If you could tell us a little bit about your experience working on the tugs, and how long you've been working on the tugs. I understand that you were a waterman to begin with?

A.L.: Well, no, actually I'm originally from Louisiana, South Louisiana. So I grew up around the water all my life. And when I eventually moved here, I started off as the town police officer 'cause of coming out of the Army to Atlanta Police Department to here. My wife was born and raised here. That's how we met, in the Army. Once I got there, I honestly got bored with the police job because there was nothing to do, so I got looking at her father who was a professional mariner, a tug captain. I asked him about it, and he says, "Well, I'm not gonna get you the job, but I'll point you in the right direction." So he gave me a phone number, and I called this company called Steuart Transportation. I got a phone call one Monday morning, said, "The airplane's on its way; we need you right away. Go ahead and start."

In the meantime, I had to go to the Coast Guard and get my mariner's papers and everything. At that time, they called it the Merchant Mariner's Seaman's Document. It almost looked like the Captain's license. It was a big piece of paper you had to have to even sail on a lot of company vessels, merchant vessels, you have to have that to even get on there.

M.Z.: What did you have to do in order to get that?

A.L.: Which was submit a physical, drug test, and then pay a fee, of course, with everything. I had to go to Baltimore because at that time, we had to go to a regional exam center for the Coast Guard, they called them. I think they still call them that today, but you had to go to one of, I believe it was twelve back then, and had to go actually in person to show who you were, take your pictures there and everything, and then they would present you with this document. And so then I started with Steuart's.

M.Z.: But there wasn't any kind of sea component of the exam?

A.L.: No, no, not at that time, because you were starting on an entry level. You were going in as a deckhand. I was going on as a deckhand.

M.Z.: So you were born in Louisiana.

A.L.: Well, no. I was born in England. My father was in the Service over there, but my family all traces back to Louisiana to the Cajuns, Arcadians from Louisiana.

M.Z.: Did you, personally, or other members of your family have experience on the water there?

A.L.: Yes, working the water, crabbing, shrimping, catching alligators.

M.Z.: Was that you, personally, or other people in your family?

A.L.: Other people in my family and myself. During the summertimes when I wasn't in school, I'd go down with my grandfather and spend time shrimping some, and catching alligators some and doing things. I have an uncle who's retired now, Kenneth Langley, who was a tugboat deckhand, cook and engineer for probably thirty-five years. So that's actually where I got the bug kind of in my mind about working on tugboats listening to his stories and seeing him do things and talk. My father, he was in the Air Force. Both my brothers were in the military. So I tried the military at first with law enforcement, but then the actual tugging thing started here. It was in my mind 'cause of my family members having done it.

M.Z.: Do you think it's the case in a lot of communities where people are really dependent on working on the water as commercial fishermen that a lot of them turned to tugging as it gets harder to make a living?

A.L.: Well in this case here particularly, the state here has put the moratorium on licensing. So what that's caused in a community like Tangier – 400-year-old community that that's basically all they've done all their lives through the history – now, say if I was a crabber, had my boat, and my son wanted to follow in my footsteps, for him to do that, I would have to sell my boat or my license and agree that I'm not gonna commercial fish any more just because there's only a certain number of licenses.

And in this case, the state is trying to buy a lot of them up from the watermen, and with the more restrictions that they're imposing, taking away crab dredging from the guys – this case is for Tangier and some of the people in the lower bay here that do that. They got to a point where from October to March, they got nothing. They had nothing. And some of the guys were looking at myself and Socks and different ones and basically reached out and said, "We wanna try this." So we got some of our guys from Vane Brothers to come here, right here in this port near where we're doing this interview at, to do recruiting sessions, so to speak.

"This is what we've got, this is what we can offer. We'll help you out with the paperwork. We'll help you get your Coast Guard papers, do what's got to be done." The guys were fallen into it where I believe we had probably fifty or sixty guys working on tugboats now, a majority of them working for Vane Brothers.

M.Z.: You have fifty or sixty guys from Tangier Island working on tugs.

A.L.: Yes. Working on tugs and barges.

M.Z.: Most of them for Vane?

A.L.: For Vane. We have a couple with Penn Maritime, several with Express Marine, Allied, Dann Towing, I think are the four main companies that the guys are working for.

M.Z.: So you did a recruiting session here. When was that, do you remember?

A.L.: Well, it's been I want to say at least five or six years ago. It actually has been done several times. It helped the guys get into entry-level positions. They come in as deckhands. We have several guys that had talents with engines, were mechanic guys 'cause that's what they did here, and they saw that they were more mechanically inclined so they guided them toward the engine rooms to be engineers, helped them out with what they needed to do to get their engineer's license.

Again, with Vane, because of the size vessels we have, they really do, they push the guys to get their engineer's license. They will help the guys get their tankerman's tickets, tankerman's license to work on the barges, and they've really been helpful. I mean, most of us work an equal schedule, two weeks on, two weeks off. There are a few that work a different schedule twenty and ten, but what I stressed for years, guys were coming to me in Tangier talk, "That's good job you got, got to be away from home all this time," but they I looked at it, I said, "Okay, what insurance do you have? What, after you retire, guarantees do you have, or what do you have to look forward to? Do you have a pension? Do you have a 401K?" They don't.

They didn't have any of that to live by. And as it went along, when the guys saw that these jobs were available, they actually did a re-look at themselves and a look at the thing and said, you know, getting up at 4:30 every morning to go hunt pots and go do this, and when our family gets sick, we're having to be all this money out, excess money and excess things, and we're having to do it Monday through Saturday, the only day we get off is Sunday and then right back into it again.

And then we have that period where you're off for four or five months where there's nothing to do, tugboat's not a bad job. You're working six months a year, you're off for six months, basically you got a vacation every two weeks. You can do with your family, you can have more family time. In the long run, you actually do have more family time because during that two weeks, you're home, you're there, you're available to your family twenty-four hours a day. And then with the benefits, the insurance benefits, the retirement later on, it's turned out to be a pretty good job. I've done it for twenty-four years. I started off the first four years in the deck department.

M.Z.: And that was for Steuart did you say?

A.L.: That was for Steuart's right, from '88 to '92.

M.Z.: '88 to '92.

A.L.: And then in '92 to '94, I worked as an assistant engineer in the engine room.

M.Z.: For the same company?

A.L.: Same company, and then '94 to '97 with that same company as a tankerman, and that was Steuart Transportation.

M.Z.: And where are they located?

A.L.: They were located in Piney Point, Maryland. From '92 to '97, they had changed their name to Piney Point Transportation.

M.Z.: Steuart Transportation, and they're petroleum?

A.L.: Steuart Petroleum, and they are no longer in existence at all now.

M.Z.: But that was what they were hauling?

A.L.: Originally, yes. Black oil, diesel fuel, gasoline, jet fuel, asphalt.

M.Z.: Okay, and I keep interrupting your personal history here. So you were in Louisiana, you were in the military, you and your wife got married, you were a policeman.

A.L.: We met in basic training, actually. She was departing to be an MP also.

M.Z.: And she's from Tangier?

A.L.: She's from here, yes, ma'am. And I moved here just because it reminded me so much of Louisiana, the areas in Louisiana I lived in, grew up in, but without the crime. You'd sleep with your doors and windows open, you know, and you don't have all that as much as we had down there as it's getting in a lot of places.

M.Z.: And I guess if you marry into a Tangier family, it's a little easier to become part of the community.

A.L.: Well, yeah. I always joke with them too, I always josh, "Yeah, the reason you all let me stay was 'cause the tree was going like this, straight up, and needed a new branch off there." The main reason I say they let me stay is, I've seen in the twenty-five years I've been on the island, if someone comes here and tries to change things, they don't make it here. But it's the old adage, if it ain't broke, don't fix it, let the islanders decide what they want to change different like with the tugboating.

The guys that tugboated, we never pushed our way onto people, we let things go, and they came to us and said, "Hey, we need some help, you know, we want to try this out because we're getting where we don't have anything else." And it's turned out that

probably per capita, there's not another city or town around in this part of the country that by ratio, has more people, men working for a particular single company or single thing because I mean, there's a little less than 500 people left on the island and say forty, fifty, almost sixty of them, are tugboaters.

M.Z.: A lot of it has to do with you it sounds like.

A.L.: Well, no, it's Socks too. I mean, Kim had part. Both of us worked for Vane. Some talked to him, some talked to me, and we both basically talked to the same person, his name was Tom Lamm. And Tom said, "Yeah, sure, I'll come." And, of course, then they came to me for setting the firehouse up, but I'm not taking credit. The guys themselves made the step to ask. Like I say, we didn't push anything on anybody, we just said, "Here it is. Here's the offer, here's the opportunity. If you want it, come get it. If you don't, then keep fishing."

There's some guys around here that just cannot get away from crabbing. It's all they've known all their lives. But there's some guys like myself and Socks that, once we got into the tugboating, we can't imagine doing anything else. In my tugboat career, I've gone from Tampico, Mexico; to, accidentally, Cuba; to Portland, Maine; all up and down the East Coast; all up and around the Gulf Coast, and gotten paid to do it where other people are paying big money to go on cruises to do this kind of stuff, and I'm getting paid to do it, and see these different places and the different lifestyles.

Just last tour, I was up in Massachusetts. We were on a job, and we were there tied up for three days, and we got to catch lobsters, fresh lobsters, had for Thanksgiving. Where any other job, you wouldn't necessarily been able to do that. But you're getting paid to do something, to travel and see different places and different cultures. I just can't think of any other jobs, other than the military, where you get to do this and then get to come home.

And the two weeks you're home, you don't have to worry about the phone ringing, you don't have to worry about somebody calling and saying, "Hey, we need you back to work," which I can't say that fully because I have been called back to work. It's not the norm. Normally when you're home for your two weeks, it's your two weeks. Like when me and my partner get off that's on the barge with me, we have two guys that work the barge, we have crew changes every other Wednesday. Crew changes are always Wednesday for Vane. When they come on, we have a short meeting to let them know what's happened, if there's been any repairs needed, it's their barge for two weeks.

Me and Bear go home. He flies to Idaho, and I fly here. Two weeks, for right now, I'm starting to kind of get geared up in my mind, getting ready to get back to work, I go back Tuesday. But for the two weeks you're home, you don't have to worry about those things. You don't have to worry about the tugboat, you don't have to worry about the barge; you just get to pay attention to family and worry about family. And like I said, that part's a great job.

M.Z.: So let's get back to your history then. You were a tankerman for Steuart, but then they changed their name to Piney Point Transportation.

A.L.: Right.

M.Z.: So you were a tankerman from '95 to '97?

A.L.: Right, just a regular tankerman. And then from '97 to present, I've been with Vane Brothers. They came in and bought the company, and they went and assessed everybody that were doing the job, and they bought our barges. Told the guys, they came and said, "Look, you know, we want you all to come with the equipment. We'd be foolish not to offer the jobs to you rather than us having to try to retrain somebody to work your equipment."

And the ones that were there, that had the seniority, they appointed as barge captains and let us stay, and that's the position I've been in ever since then. Five years ago, Vane gave me to work a brand new 50,000-barrel oil barge, that's all self-contained. We live right on the barge, stay.

M.Z.: What's the name of your barge?

A.L.: The *DS* or *Double-Skin Fifty-Three*.

M.Z.: And what's the tug that's associated with it?

A.L.: We actually have two. We have the *Choptank* and the *Anacostia*.

M.Z.: And this is not an ATB I take it?

A.L.: No, it's not an ATB, it's a regular towboat and barge. When we had to go up and down the coast to New York, any places outside, they put us on the wire.

M.Z.: So can you maybe describe to us what a typical routine is for you like when you go back on, did you say Tuesday, you're going back?

A.L.: Well, where we live away, they put up a hotel for us so we come in on Tuesday nights and stay in a hotel there in Philly.

M.Z.: That's where the barge is based?

A.L.: Uh-huh, that's where we meet. Well, that's our base of launching from is from a place called City Dock. It's on the Schuylkill River in Philly. And then we get there, and if say our barge is in New York, barge and boat rig, then they'll take us, put us in vans, drive us up. Most of the time we'll know ahead of time if it's in New York, we're going to be leaving between six and eight in the morning. So they can get up there and get that

crew off around nine, or around ten or eleven during the day and then get them back home so they can all go home to their families.

If the barge is in town, they may either put us on a tug and have the tug take us to where we need to go to meet our barge. We have our little crew change real quick, bring our crew out and the other crew comes off. And then as soon as we get on, the first thing I'm doing is checking orders. If we're in the middle of a job, loading or discharging, assess that. We decide what we're going to do, what we need to do.

There's been times we've been close to topping the barge off, in other words getting full, and we just have to shut down and say, "Wait a minute, we need to get changed, get into some work clothes, get our PPE on," personal protective equipment, steel toes, work vest, hard hat, if needed, if we got cranes or stuff over our head, and then, I mean, we just jump into the job. Each time we do a job, we send our paperwork and everything in, then we call for the next job.

There might be times where in a two-week period we might sit for three, four, five days and not do anything. We just hang out at anchor or tied up to the dock, and during those times is when we get a chance to get up on maintenance: painting, cleaning the engines off, cleaning up any little bit of oil or something that might have dripped on the deck. Our gaugers are not exactly the cleanest people in the world.

M.Z.: Your what?

A.L.: The gaugers, the guys that are independent from the customer to us, and they come in and measure the amount of product that we have on the barge. And with some of the equipment they're using, they're dripping stuff down the deck so we have to always keep that clean, be constant for the EPA and Coast Guard regulations, keep that stuff cleaned up. While we're doing a job, that's the number one thing. Our idea and the guy I work with is, you know, everything else doesn't matter; what matters is keeping the oil in the can is our saying. Keeping it inside the barge, keeping it out of the water, we're going home, we're safe, there's no environmental problems, everybody's happy.

Like I said, during the off times if we need something, we need to paint, do some maintenance, knock the rust off, we knock the rust off, paint and chip, do whatever we need to do during those times. And then it rolls around two weeks, the next crew comes back, we just keep repeating the cycle, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

M.Z.: But when you're not tied up and when you're actually doing a job, what is it that you're actually doing?

A.L.: With the barges, if we're loading, we're going to a dock, a boat takes us in, they tie us up, we get tied up, they break down. In other words, they take their lines and cables and everything that had to get us to that point off and they break away. Then in a lot of states, they have requirements for booming in. A small boat comes in with floating boom, booms us into the dock, then we go through the procedure of having conferences with the

dock. "See, this is what we're going to do. This is how much we're going to load. This is the hose we're going to use. Do you want to use your hose?"

Some docks have what's called a check stand, which is actually a metal pipe, pinched pipe that kind of swings out and connects to our barge, to a fixed manifold on our barge. Whereas, most of the cases, we swing a hose over. We have eighty foot, eight-inch diameter hoses, special type of hoses just for what we do.

We run pressures of 100, 150 pounds, pumping or loading and swing it over. Then we have a set up. After everything's hooked up, then we go through inspections with the dock, we have a list that we have from the Coast Guard that we have to do, checking everything from communications to scuppers to double checking the manifolds, making sure all the bolts are tight, all our gaskets are in.

M.Z.: What's a scupper?

A.L.: A scupper is a manual plug. You have what's called a spill rail. It's normally anywhere from six inches high to some instances eighteen inches high. It goes around your deck, and it's basically an oil dyke. If you have a spill, a hose ruptures and the oil gets on it, that dyking will keep the oil from getting in the water. And the scuppers you have to have in there because when you're going up and down the coast, you're loaded, you'll get water in those, and those fill up and they cause extra weight on the barge and, if you got a full load of oil on, it could cause your barge to sink.

So when you're transiting and only transiting, or you're sitting at the dock with no job, you're just sitting there waiting for the next orders, you're allowed to have those scuppers out. And that just allows rainwater, water you might get in from seas banging up going up and down the coast. But any other time, if you're loading or discharging, you have to have those plugs in and you have to have them tight. They're just a rubberized plug, it has a brass plate on one end, a brass plate on the other end, a screw goes through the middle and then a big wing nut.

They're made out of brass for non-sparking, and when you put them in, you just start tightening. And what it does, it causes the two plates to draw toward each other, thus pushing the rubber out and expanding it, gives you a good tight seal. So you want to make sure all those are in. And then once everything, all the criteria on that DOI, Declaration of Inspection is done, we also have a Declaration of Security, DOS, courtesy of 9/11, and that's basically that you're checking IDs, you know who's coming on your barge, who's not, you're constantly keeping a watch on the water to make sure nobody's sneaking up on your, your safety rails, all your chains are in place so people can't just come up aboard. Chains, you have openings in your safety rails where you can put your lines up. Once you get your lines up, you put the safety chains to make it harder and somebody can't just climb up the side of your barge.

But you're got proper communication. Then we have to have contact numbers between us and the dock. They know who they can call if something was to happen, the

tankermen were incapacitated due to fumes or some kind of attack, they'd know who to call. They could call our office, chief security officer, where I'm a vessel security officer. Then once all that paperwork is done and every thing's in place, then we agree to start. And if we're loading, we open our valves and we tell them to start their pumps and they start loading to us.

We're all constantly monitoring all the tanks. We have gauges, and levels, and alarms on everything. You know, we don't trust the alarms because they're something mechanical. We always trust our eyes more than anything else. And we're physically, every five, ten minutes looking in those tanks, walking around checking hoses, checking our lines, making sure they're not getting too tight. We don't want anything to bust loose on the barge, you know, get loose on the dock. You don't have a tug made up to you, you're going on a Missouri boat ride if those lines break.

M.Z.: Missouri boat ride?

A.L.: That means the current's taking you wherever it wants to get, and you got no way to stop it unless you drop your anchor. We have anchors on all equipment. Oil barges were, after a certain year, I can't remember the year, were required to have an anchor system on it so that we could drop it in an emergency if we had to. If something happened, say, if your tug lost power, you're getting ready to collide with another ship, another tug, you could run out, drop that anchor and stop everything in place. Luckily, we haven't had to do that.

The only time we drop anchor is if we're waiting to get to another dock somewhere. And then you're just constantly monitoring it. When it gets close to your agreed amount of products you're going to have, which we base on 50,000 net barrels – you base everything on temperature. At sixty degrees, water expands. Sixty degrees below, water contracts. So you figure a net, and we have conversion charts. If the oil's 130 degrees, we're got to be sure to load enough that if that oil cooled down to 60, it would be 50,000 barrels.

So we generally load around 51,000, and it's all a lot of math involved, but once it gets to that point, then usually you have a plan worked out fifteen minutes prior to topping off or finishing up, you give the dock a warning. They'll have somebody go stand by their pumps, and you're standing by. Five minutes, they slow the pump. You give a five-minute standby, and they'll slow the pumps down to half. And then once you top everything off, you work your way up from the stern of the barge.

Most of the captains would like us to have about a foot trim, about a foot higher than the stern. So that way if they got a tow, the barge will tow nice and straight. If you got it down by the bow, it'll hog, which means it'll start drifting side to side.

M.Z.: Hog?

A.L.: Hog, like a hog rooting through looking for something to eat, the barge will spin side to side which makes for a very long trip 'cause they're having to fight the barge if they have us on the tow wire. But generally, we put about a foot drag so that way she'll tow right straight. No resistance whatsoever, and then a gauger comes on. One of us will go around with the gauger and gauge all the tanks, get how much level's in there, and then we'll go work it up. We have charts, strapping charts they're called.

An independent company has come in and took measurements of the tank and figured out for each inch of that tank, how much product is in it and made us a chart so once we add up everything, we know how close we are. Most companies give us a 1 percent variance so if you've got a 50,000, you can go 50,500. You can be within 500 barrels over or 500 barrels short and nobody will send up any red flags or say anything.

Then we usually have a discharge berth set up, whether it be right there in Philly or whether it be we'll load in Philly and go to New York to discharge. So then we get ready to leave for New York, the tug will take us out to usually the mouth of the Delaware Bay, or sometimes they'll do it sooner depending on the weather. If it's a little bit rough, they might do it sooner or they'll break down a pushing gear, what's called a pushing gear. In other words, they're right behind the barge in an indentation called the notch.

They're up in there and they're pushing us, or they'll break out of that and then they'll come up on the bow, bank up alongside. They'll send a line up to us, we'll attach it to our towing gear, and they'll pull it over to their boat, hook it up to their towing wire. They'll swing around, and they'll start putting wire up; most of the time around 1,600 feet we'll be behind them on the towing line. That's just for weather because in the seas, you can't stay in pushing gear, it's too much. You'll pop cables.

M.Z.: Too much, how do you describe that in words?

A.L.: Too much sway: side to side, up and down. Barge is going in one direction, tug's going the other direction because of sea conditions. Most tugs can push in three-to-four-foot seas. We don't really use steel cables any more for towing cables. Our pushing cables used to all be steel cables, but now they use this stuff called Spectra Line. It's a chemically-made fibrous line, a chemical fiber, that if say you had a two-inch cable, you have a two-inch Spectra Line, the Spectra Line is three to four times stronger than that cable.

If you push in three-to-four-foot seas with the cables, we would have a fifty-fifty chance that that cable's gonna break, and then you're having to rush to try to get new cables out, get everything going or just go ahead and go on the hawser. A lot of boats used to be hawser boats, which was about an eight-inch in diameter line that they hooked up to us, and they'd have to reel in on old caps then when they'd pull us in. Now, most of your boats are considered towboats, have a big towing wench, which is all steel cable.

But anything over say three-or-four-foot seas, unless it's an ATB, which an ATB is articulated tug and barge rig, have a large pin and cam system that the pins push out from

the bow of the tug into a locking track on the barge, and they can lock it in rigid, almost like a small ship. Those can push anywhere up to fifteen-foot seas. We do have two of those, the *DS 141* and the *DS 143*. Tugs are called the *Brandywine* and the *Christiana*. And those generally push anywhere they want to go.

But the barge I have has to be towed roughly three-to-four-foot seas. You don't want to have anybody get hurt. That's the primary concern, safety. You go breaking a cable, you got rough seas anyway, you got guys standing on the bow, standing on the stern of the barge, they're trying to get cables out with the barge going up, tug going down, both of them are swaying next to each other, banging into each other. It's just not a safe condition.

M.Z.: Have you ever been in a really dangerous situation? Can you describe anything hairy that's happened to you?

A.L.: A couple times. I was in a shipyard down in New Orleans, Louisiana, a place called LA Dry Docks. We had a barge called the *Annie Maine*, it was an asphalt barge, another manned barge. We were down there and they were doing some welding, replacing our air conditioning unit on top of the barge. The shipyard, there was supposed to be a gentleman down inside the cruise quarters on fire watch. They had our chairs and stuff covered up with fire cloth.

The only problem is, being like most shipyards, they don't always use the best stuff, and they had some holes in the fire cloth. Well, the welder all of a sudden said, "Hey, come up here and help me." And he called the fire watch out. We were up on the bow, myself and the other tankerman were working on getting our anchor chain replaced, and we looked back, and there's smoke pouring out of everywhere, and guys were running for cover.

Come to find out, they had asked the fire watch to come upstairs to help him hold something in place so he could weld it, and some slag fell down through the hole and completely gutted our barge system out. Well, that was a problem. It could have been 'cause we had the fuel tank closed but, luckily, the fuel tank was empty and we were on shore power. But the situation is, here's a barge on fire now. Well, they got that out. The absolutely worst situation I was on, where I've actually had to abandon ship was, we were down in the gulf, same barge, we had a charter company towing us across the gulf going to Florida.

Correction, we were coming back from Florida. We were light, empty. The mate on the tug fell asleep, barge was on autopilot. Wind was coming from the southwest, pushed the barge over to the right side of the tug. The tug was, you can't see this on tape, but the tug was here, we were drifting well over to the right side, and there are a lot of gas wells down in the Gulf of Mexico, which are not ten, fifteen feet off the water. Well, we're sitting in the galley. All of a sudden, boom, we're getting knocked out of our chairs, big collision basically.

We thought a ship or something had hit us. What had happened was, the mate had fell asleep on the wheel, hadn't noticed the barge had drifted over, pulled us on top of a gas well.

M.Z.: Well, when you're in a barge, you don't have much control.

A.L.: No, we didn't have any control over that at all. The control that we had is we got about halfway up the barge, and we could hear the gas expanding. We could hear the gas coming out of the well. We couldn't smell it because natural gas has no smell. That's a chemical that they add to natural gas to make it smell. So coming right out of the well, there was no smell, but we could hear the gas coming. And the barge is doing a number like this, moving up and down. First thoughts of ours, "We're getting ready to spark; we're getting ready to light up."

So me and the other tankerman run back. I tell him grab the survival suits. He's grabbing the survival suits, I'm grabbing a portable radio, and then we both throw the life raft over the side, inflatable life raft. And because of the way the wind was blowing, once we got on the life raft, we cut loose; it just drifted us right away. Well, in the meantime, they were working on getting things back together. Well, once they saw us, we called them on the radio, and we told them, "Look, we're already off the barge; you got to come find us or you got to come get us."

But the situation was that we could have exploded right then and there, and we reacted to immediately evac from the place. Of course, we had to jump off a barge sixteen feet up out of the air, which that was fun. Of course, I was twenty-eight, twenty-nine at the time so I was still kind of crazy. But, of course, you hit the water in what we call Gumby suits or survival suits, you go underwater. But then in those things, you're flying up, you're completely off the water when you come up from that depth 'cause they're just one solid piece of flotation. But we got lucky. There weren't any sharks in the water around in the area at the time, and the gulf is notorious for sharks and stuff, especially around the rigs.

M.Z.: Did it end up blowing?

A.L.: No, it didn't, and we still to this day don't know why, maybe just because the area we could hear things or the fact that there was a lot of water coming in, splashing too could have, you know, lubricated or kept stuff wet enough that there wasn't any sparking. But luckily, there was a crew right within a couple miles from us that were working on another rig, they were able to come over and get the rig shut off, and it took several days to get the barge off 'cause they actually had to bring a crane barge out and lift the barge up and then let it set back down in the water.

But then they had to tow the barge backwards because if we towed it forward, the whole bow of the barge would've filled up full of water, but they towed the barge backwards and got us back up into New Orleans to get the barge fixed. But that's probably the biggest, not the scariest moment, but the one moment that almost stopped me from being a tugboater over here at Piney Point. It was one Christmastime, we had a barge over

there at that time, it was called the 410. It had a load of JP4, jet fuel. Had taken it up to Andrews Air Force Base, and at that time, you did your own cleaning. You didn't have specific companies, OPA90, different things, did a lot of stuff for getting the environmental companies involved. But for some reason or another, I just look at it the Lord's will, they got us away. We were going to help another tug, I was on the *Peggy* then, we we're going to go help another tug that was down river with one engine down.

Well, as we all got turned around about seven miles down the river, boom, a spark from somewhere happened, and JP4 was a very volatile type of liquid to use. It was 20 percent high octane, high-tested gasoline, 80 percent of the clearest, purest kerosene they could use. So you had to be real observant with sparks and everything like that. Well, apparently there was a spark from somewhere, and it completely took the number five tanks off the barge, took what's called the transverse bulkhead between the two, the wall between the fours and fives completely off, and it took four men's lives that night.

We could feel the explosion from seven miles away. Almost quit, but I said, "No, well, for some reason I wasn't there to get hurt, get killed, and I'm going to keep trying it out," which I'm glad I did. I mean, twenty-four years later, I'm still here, still doing it. And now working on those very things that I saw blow up that night. But in relation to them, the safety conditions, the type of equipment, is so much more advanced in the safety aspects of it, clothing, the type of clothing we're required to wear, type of tools we're required to use, non-sparking tools, intrinsically-safe radios.

Intrinsically-safe radios means they have vapor seals to keep the vapors out of them, to keep sparks from being allowed to come out. They're all marked with little green dots on their battery connections, and it all says, "Intrinsically Safe." The flashlights we use, again, are intrinsically-safe flashlights, which means they won't cause a spark or an emission source in a hazardous area, a vaporous area.

M.Z.: So conditions have improved quite a bit.

A.L.: Oh, conditions have improved so much. And every time an accident does happen, it makes it better for us because they look at the incident and they see what caused it, and they immediately change the guidelines, you know, "This is what we're going to do." The industry's always changing, but the paramount thing: safety. Get the crews home. You're out there, we want to make sure you get back home to see your family, and that's the one thing I've loved the most actually about the career is that every year it seems like it's more paramount about safety, watching the people.

And Vane Brothers in particular, as I was telling you earlier, they're a family-run company. We're not just a number. For instance, they just sent everybody tee shirts with our position on the back, "Tankerman always pumping," "Crew always working," "Engineers it's all about the horsepower," little funny things. They try to keep us going, let us know that they do care, they are thinking about us. And Duff Hughes, who's the owner of the company, he always makes sure to put personal letters in there and just something like this. Ten years, they gave us a crest ring, just to let us know they're

thinking about us, we appreciate your loyalty, and every ten years they're going to add a little stone to it. My wife, she has several things going on medically-wise: lupus, fibro and diabetes, and they're always asking, "How's your wife doing?" Well, there's 750 maritime employees. That's a lot of people, but they still take the time to single us out and say, "How's Lisa doing?" And they know her by name. It's not just, "How's your wife?" "How's Lisa doing?" And that's the nice thing about the maritime industry; we're all family. It's just one big floating family.

M.Z.: You were describing where you guys live on the barge, that you have a little apartment. And then one other thing is, when I was talking to Steve on the phone, he was telling me about shoveling snow off of the barge being one of the jobs that you have to do. If you could tell us a little bit about that.

A.L.: Well, see, I work on a black oil barge. Our products are heated. I was telling you about that earlier. Our products are 120, 130 degrees. So we got an advantage over Mr. Steve. Steve works on a clean oil barge. With gasoline, diesel, you don't really want a lot of heat on that because of boom. But, yeah, we've had times where we originally started out as a clean oil barge where I can think of one case in particular.

We had twenty-eight inches of snow on the barge, and you can't move around your tank. So you don't try to shovel all the snow off; but what you do, you look around and you look like something out of a road map. You've got paths cut to your tanks to your valves, then you've got a path down this side, and you're going down this side. And you got to shovel your lines out, which most of the fifty barges, like Steve's on two, we hang our lines up just for that purpose because we know we're working up in areas that they're not necessarily prone to snow, but it's always the possibility in the wintertime: New York, upper New Jersey, Maine, Rhode Island, all those places like it.

We know we're eventually going to get snow so we try to keep our lines off the deck, but you still have to shovel out. Then we got bags of salt, the salt melt. Well, like an old farmer feeding his chickens, you're walking around with a fifty-pound bag, and you're walking down, rip, walking down the deck, scatter the salt everywhere. A constant thing in the wintertime we have to watch out for is ice.

Up on your bow, your bow's sloped up and you get sea spray out there so everything gets covered with ice in the wintertime. So you're constantly having to go up there and shovel or salt. If you know you're getting into a dock at a certain time, the captains are good about telling us. We go up, and we'll take about two hours or an hour before and we start throwing salt, and you want to make sure to try to get as much melted as you can to make it safe for everybody. You don't want nobody falling, busting an ankle, breaking a back or an arm or something like that. So, yeah, that is one of our jobs.

Another one of our jobs is raking leaves. I've had that happen. On our city dock, we have an area called The Sticks. It's just some pilings up that they tie us too. You got one little spot on the dock you can put a ladder down, but you have all these big overhanging trees. So in the fall, at any given time, you might have, like your front yard, covered in

leaves. So rather than having to walk in those and tracking them into your crews' quarters, you're out there with a thirty-six inch push broom, you know, instead of a rake, and you're pushing leaves all everywhere.

Granted, when you're towing or pushing, the wind does a good job of clearing them off for you, but sitting on the dock sometimes for three or four or fives days, you know, you just got to get out there and try to get them off the best you can. It's like our home. It's our home away from home.

M.Z.: Can you describe the living quarters a little bit?

A.L.: Oh, yeah. In most instances on a barge, there are what we call partially submerged, and I just say that, I don't mean as in water, but as you've got your deck, you don't want, say a room this size, sticking up above the deck 'cause then it blocks the wheelhouse's view. So what they do is they will inset or recess your crews' quarters down into the deck. So our quarters, we only have about maybe four feet sticking above the deck. So you got a door, you're walking down a little ladder. Everything's a ladder. There's no steps. On a ship, everything's a ladder.

It's steps, you know, stairs, but everything's a ladder. So you're going down, and first off we walk in, we have a dual-purpose galley and living room/office, which encompasses say, half of the living quarters. So refrigerator, freezer, sink, stove, table, a bench on one side, just a chair like this on the other, then we have an office desk with our computer, everything we do for the jobs, keeping in touch with the office, radio bank. And then over here we have a door that goes into the crews' quarters. We have three bunks in there.

So that's say a quarter of the living room. Cabinets everything in there. And then on the other quarter here, just as you come down the steps, that's the head or bathroom, which is washer and dryer in there. We have an electric facility, toilet system called the Incinolet, not supposed to put any water or anything in there, and it burns everything up and that's fun. And then sink, shower. Like I said, it's basically a small, like a one-bedroom apartment.

M.Z.: And you guys are completely separate from the crew on the tug.

A.L.: Yes, ma'am, yes.

M.Z.: You cook separate, you sleep separate.

A.L.: Yeah. Company gives every man a little over \$200 for two weeks for their groceries. Me and the guy that I work with, he's second man; I'm captain, and we put our monies together and I do all the cooking. And he told me as long as I keep him fed, he'll do all the cleaning, wash the dishes.

M.Z.: So you just worked that out between the two of you.

A.L.: Yeah, we worked that out between the two of us. Your standard boat crew is five people, on a standard boat crew. Now, ATB's a little bit more because on an ATB, your tankermen are part of your boat crew. They also work as ABs, able seamen, on the tug also. So most of your ATBs, they don't have living quarters on the barge; they just have an office, and so everybody actually lives on the tug or ATB. And standard ATB is about nine crewmembers, but they're a huge tug compared to – we have a 4,200 horsepower class that usually has five people.

But they're got bunks for seven because in some of our instances, due to Coast Guard regulations and what's called ABS, American Bureau of Shipping regulations, if we're a certain distance offshore, we have to go on the tug. Still ain't figured that out yet how that tug is any more safer than that big floating barge. There's been a lot of cases where they've had problems where the tug has sank, and that's how they found the tug 'cause they found the barge still attached to it floating with the men up on the barge.

M.Z.: Now, so the tug that you're with, that's a 4,200 horsepower?

A.L.: Forty-two hundred, yes, the *Choptank* and the *Anacostia*. We have a 3,000 class, 4,200 class and then we got the *Chesapeake*, which is a 5,000, and then we have our ATB's.

M.Z.: And how long is your barge?

A.L.: Three hundred sixty-five feet by sixty-five feet wide and twenty-seven feet high. Holds 50,000 barrels.

M.Z.: And that doesn't mean you have actual barrels; it's just the hold, it's the equivalent of the volume.

A.L.: Yeah, it the equivalent of 50,000 barrels. Forty-two point five gallons per barrel so that let's you know how many gallons. Roughly forty-two gallons per barrel is the standard measurement.

M.Z.: Well, I'm sure we could keep talking for a lot longer, but I'm afraid we're going to have to wrap things up so we can go get our boat, but thank you very much for taking the time.

A.L.: No problem.

M.Z.: And maybe if I get your phone number, if I have any follow-up questions. I just want to let this run for a few seconds without us talking just so we have the sound of the room for when we're doing audio editing, we might need that. Okay, I think that's going to be fine. Thank you very much.

[End of interview.]