

TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY
THOMAS C. GILLMER, NAVAL ARCHITECT

Leshner: OK. We're talking to Tom Gillmer, naval architect today. It's January 23, 1996. We're interviewing him in his Eastport, Maryland, office and the interviewers are Norman Plummer and Pete Leshner.

Plummer: We were going to **ask** you a little bit about your early background.

Gillmer: Yeah. How early?

Plummer: As early as you'd like to start.

Gillmer: I was born in Warren, Ohio, in 1911, July, and lived there and went to school there until I graduated from high school and - uh -

Plummer: Tom, where is Warren?

Gillmer: Warren?

Plummer : Yeah.

Gillmer: It's about 40 miles southeast of Cleveland in the north east corner of the state - Trumble County.

Plummer: Uh huh.

Gillmer: It was really part of what they call the Western Reserve of Connecticut -

Plummer : Uh huh.

Gillmer: ...before they divided it. One of the 13 original states - it was a territory belonging to Connecticut. The strip ran right straight through west from Connecticut. I don't know when Ohio became a state, sometime about 1802 or in there. OK. Well, anyway then - uh - after I graduated from high school I went to prep school in Virginia. Nice little prep school in Manassas, Virginia, which no longer exists, probably all a big blacktop parking lot.

Plummer: Or shopping malls.

Gillmer: Shopping malls, right. And the following spring I took the exams for entrance to the Naval Academy and just barely passed and - uh -

Plummer: What year was that?

Gillmer: Actually that was in 1930 and I stayed at the Naval

Academy until February when I dropped out because of academic deficiencies. I went back to Cleveland, Ohio, and continued the rest of the semester at Western Reserve University and Case School of Applied Sciences. Case Western Reserve the name of the

) 6X

now
versity

'It put me back on my feet and it converted me from high school type to a more serious type looking for an education.

Plummer: Why did you apply to the Naval Academy?

Gillmer: Why? Well I'd always been interested in boats and - uh - I imagined someday I would be able to go to sea if I went through the Naval Academy.

ICU la W~*~ 1

Plummer: Was there any family history of interest in boats?

Gillmer: Well my father had a. He did. He encouraged me to seek an appointment which I did. And my father, ~felt lad (?). I was not a very good student in high school. So--I graduated in the class of 1935 at the Naval Academy and was ordered to the light cruiser USS Raleigh where I spent some four, four and a half years. At that point I -ah- decided against the great naval career and turned in my resignation. That was in the year of 1939 - fall of 1939. I was out about five or six months and called back to active duty because I was in -- when you resign from the navy you automatically are in the naval reserve.

Plummer: Backing up to the Raleigh for just a minute, it's a cruiser?

Gillmer: Light cruiser, yes.

Plummer: And where all did you go and what did you do?

Gillmer: Ah, I had a great time -- tour of duty on the Raleigh. The first year was out of -ah- it was a part of the west coast naval establishment. The fleet at that time, the U.S. fleet, was divided into two parts, the battle force and the scouting force and the Raleigh was the flagship of the destroyers in the scouting force. And that was pretty flexible duty. Um - got together with the battle fleet about once a year for exercises, and was based at San Diego and the battle force at Long Beach, California. I was temporarily on board the sister ship of the Raleigh one night because I was part of a contingent that was observing battle practice - we traded off because we had both similar or identical gunnery setup and -uh- I was awakened in the

NOB

He did. JbiaSHIMAWA

I don't know how this got in.

My father had a friend from the class of '21, USNA and

the

middle of the night while I was on the ship and told
 get in the boat alongside and to the
Raleigh, and we got back there ere ordered
 back to the East Coast to become the flagship of the
 temporary Mediterranean squadron that had just been
 created by Roosevelt because of the Spanish Civil War
 which had just begun. That was in and
 after a quick overhaul in m-Norfolk Navy Yard, we went
 to the Mediterranean which turned out to be very nice
 duty.

Learned
Naval Base
The Navy

Plummer: What kind of duty did you have on the ship?

Gillmer: Well, at that time I was assistant navigator. And I
 always prided myself -- Uh, we were delayed in getting
 started for the Mediterranean because of a hurricane that
 came up the coast from the Caribbean and we were lying
 alongside the pier - the outer pier at - s north
 of Norfolk, along in there. There's a naval operating
 based, uh, before another hurricane learned or S ~'
~. We heard there was another hurricane S, ZtAi"A US
 so we crossed the ocean between two hurricanes; and the
 water was rough and the sky was cloudy. I was assistant
 navigator, acting navigator, because the navigator me-s-
L' ! broke his leg in the shower, he was
 sick bay, so I navigated the ship all the way from
 Norfolk to --well, uh, the name of the point? Point
 something - the corner of Portugal there - Cape St.
 Vincent? Well, I think that's it. Anyway, and uh, as I
 say we were traveling practically dead-reckoning on a
 course that was changed er a" ---- 1°f~Ty; 'fo max e
 following the Great Cir'cle, tth captain called me in
 about the tenth day and said, "We're getting kind of
 close to Portugal, aren't we?" I said, "Yes sir." He
 said, "Well I'm writing up the night order book -- it
 looks like we're going to make landfall sometime during
 the night. Give me an approximate time." I juggled a
 lot of figures and made a few fancy guesses, gave him a
 time. And doggone it, the light came up off the--above
 the horizon within ten minutes of when I said. They
 called me "Magellan" after that.

imcyt'r'io tAl)

Well that part of it was pretty interesting navigation,
 but as an ensign you got shifted around, the first year
 anyway, to different duties, but I wound up as assistant
 navigator after a tour in the engineering department, in
 the seamanship and all that, in the different division
 of the ship. But by that time we had sort of settled
 down- we had the new class of ensigns coming out of the
 Academy. There were just about three ensigns out of my
 class on that ship). There were
 something like 25 officers I'd say on the ship, plus the

admiral and his staff Nowadays they have twice that many on a ship of that size.

Plummer: This was to be the flagship of the Mediterranean fleet?

Gillmer: Yeah. And we called it a squadron then because there were only four ships besides ourselves, three destroyers and one Coast Guard cutter. That made up the Mediterranean squadron. Now it's a real fleet, the Sixth Fleet or something V.)4I m

Plummer: Where was it based?

Gillmer: Well we were based just to the east of Nice in a nice little, deep harbor that went way back like a horseshoe called Villefranche - wonderful place to be based. The French fleet came in about once a year on their annual cruise and we had to get out when they came in. But Otherwise we had the run of the harbor and ocean liners like the Rex and the Savoia (V came in and dropped their passengers and picked up passengers, although they had to do it from an anchorage. They couldn't go alongside, there weren't any big piers, there was just the old, ancient waterfront there that they had for hundreds of years. And -uh- Nice was only about two miles over the hill from us, and Monte Carlo was only about ten miles to the east. So it was an interesting experience, but we had a run down to Spain about once every two weeks to take out refugees and things like that.. We got caught once in Palma, Majorca. We were -- We got our orders actually from the American Embassy in Paris because the American Embassy in Spain was pretty much deserted and the senior American ambassador was in Paris.

So, anyway, all our messages came through him, af. \ There was an American being held prisoner by Franco in Palma, Majorca, which is one of the Balearic Islands in the middle of the Mediterranean south of Spain. We were supposed to go in and pick him up and get out of there as soon as we could. But there was all kinds of complicated politics and stuff going on. We went in there in the morning and by dark we still hadn't got him, but they

finally made some kind of a deal that I wasn't part of it was the admiral's staff

, == Bum £ en tr g e~m
was how did we get out of there in the dark because the harbor was mined and everything was blacked

I'm still reacting now. 1, he a navigator was on duty at that time, too, but it took both of us, and dust travelin by y ew, stop watch along our course, an t en changin courses. We did have a map or a chart showing where the probability of the mines were, and

dead reckoning

5.

everybody was standing on their tippy toes getting out of there. It was about 45 minutes to clear the harbor. And there was always a little activity when we were going in to pick up refugees in one of the ports because t -were strictly under wartime conditions and... CW- " ~

Plummer: Was the ship ever attacked? _____

Gillmer: No, but we had one of the destroyers in our squadron that was bombed by -uh- Franco and knocked its fantail off and it had to be towed into Gibraltar. And whenever we got any big overhaul stuff we had to go to Gibraltar to do it.

we were in Marseilles - we generally dropped off refugees in Mars illes - and -uh- then when we got back to Villefranche a'dduple of weeks we dropped down on pain agan. °1-=-...- ~ b A- - .

"that was just before he was r~e"Y"ieved -- he was an unpopular captain, and he couldn't handle his ship and he tried to get away from -- we were tied up alongside, well, what in this country would be a wooden bulkhead, they used stone bulkheads there. ~ ~

bottom and if you got too close ~fhemyou"d get 0 ~' ~' Mat-ts scratched up. Well, we had four propellers on our ship and the outboard propellers were pretty far away from the ship and did have some kind of a guard around them, but you couldn't always count on the guard, and as aim swug ~' Cr,

iv7^ -a ' to get out -- it's like a parking space when you try to get out of, the s&2*=iw4, goes in S 4-ex -n

of movement and you couldn't go, ~t a way -- the ship pivots around more or less an axis around the middle o- ' -- 0 LA

the ship - we ground that outboard propeller down to a rosebud and the ship was just bouncing and shaking like this and the captain was speechless. Well, I never heard an admiral correct a captain for doing anything before on

-t~bridge. He's supposed to let the captain handle his 6er own sh p, but this admiral Aol~t avoid r^^

ju ~ e sai "God damn t o something " He got in there himself and said, "Stop all engi s "~- -\ That was a miserable expe ence, ut we got a e p to Gibraltar to get a new propeller on the ship.

Plummer: You had to be drydocked?

Gillmer: Oh yeah. We had to be drydocked for a couple of weeks, I required

Plummer: Who was the admiral?

5 OW

6.

Gillmer: That admiral was named Pie, Admiral Pie -- P-I-E. He had some successful war duty later on. Then he was back at the Naval Academy where he was briefly a superintendant. A nice guy.

Well, anyway, I was the boat officer ONCE going in and picking up refugees and a 4hat-srt of 'Ning

In some ports we were dealing completely with people that had very little authority except they had more guns than the other guys and trying to round up a bunch of frightened foreigners -- at first we were only taking out Americans, then we were told to take out anybody that had a valid passport. Well that's what we were doing. I'd gotten this boatload full of people and we were just shoving off and this young man, he'd been sort of a translator for me in all our activity there. : =

Plummer: A Spaniard?

Gillmer: A Spaniard, yeah, and he was one of the good guys. We really couldn't tell who was a good guy, sort of like in Bosnia right now, who's fighting who. There wasn't a clear policy from Washington. Anyway, this guy as I was shoving off came running down the street yelling at me, waving his hands. Well, he was just about to be overtaken by a couple of guys who were carrying guns, more or less uniformed, I think they were Franco types. And he threw a big package and it landed in the cockpit of our 40-foot motor launch and he said, "Give it to your Captain," and so I did. Turned out to be candid photographs of the bombing of the American Embassy in Madrid. I turned them over to the captain who gave them to the admiral. I don't know what happened to them, sent them back to Washington, I guess.

Plummer: Probably in the National Archives.

Gillmer: Right, probably in the National Archives. Well, little episodes like that made the whole thing interesting.

Plummer: So then you came back to the United States?

Gillmer: Yeah. I was over there two years and at that time according to the law you couldn't get married until you were two years out of the Naval Academy. This was because Roosevelt had eased the navy back into a more active situation, building ships instead of putting them away in mothballs and stuff. Before my class, as a matter of fact, they were only graduating -- I mean only commissioning half the class to save money, I guess. Well, they eased it back in, OK we'll commission everybody, but give them a probationary commission for

line 124

7.

124 { ° 'two years, and so that's what we were doing for two years, and if you kept your nose clean for two years you got a permanent commission. And at that time you could take on some serious responsibilities. And so we got married over there in France, Annie and I. She came over on the i) and disembarked right there in Vi 3 rye harbor. We were married at 10 o'clock that morning.

Plummer: Now, 1938?

Gillmer: 1937. And there was a little red tape you had to go through with the French authorities. In the first place they said you, well, can't get married for 30 days. I'd been living here for 30 days. I said, "well look, I've ive er s ip for a lot longer than that," and they said... I got a little help from the American Consul over in Nice and they talked them into it and they said, "OK, you can go ahead and do it."

Plummer: You couldn't persuade the captain of the ship to perform the ceremony?

Gillmer: No, I don't think it was -- That was only on merchant ships and someone said it was only good for the duration of the voyage. Well, yeah, after two years over there we finally came back and were reassigned to the U.S. scouting force on the West Coast at San Diego again and then continued with the usual routine duties until I left the Raleigh in December 1939.

Plummer: The Raleigh went back from the Mediterranean to San Diego?

Gillmer: Yeah, and we were beamed with another light cruiser of the same style that I think was the USS Omaha. She us=* Y later than ii be-cause she ran aground going from the Caribbean up to Norfolk. They got some and — course () after she got off the bottom she went on and got repaired which took her six months longer and we got an additional six months. We called her the Omahaha.

~IfN

red red %t

But, well, as I say I left the regular navy late fall of '39 and was ordered back in the following" :° dITi actually, I could see the handwriting on the wall and I thought things were getting pretty hot and I guessed we were sure to be involved in something. Ap=6they were ordering reserves back to active duty and I thought well I'll get in here in Annapolis and be doing some work for Captain Weems who was running a navigation school here and doing pretty well, eakept he agreed with me/ you

117

8.

better pick out your duty if you can.

Plummer: A better choice if you had 4, ~L5

Gillmer: I had orders writte to be the executive officer of the USS Erie which ' gunboat down in Panama and, -w)r; while I was packing my suitcase I got another call which superseded those orders. I said, "Look, I've got orders..." He said, "Not any more you haven't, they've been changed, you're going to the Naval Academy as an instructor."

Plummer: Quite a switch.

Gillmer: Well, that's how I got started at the Naval Academy.

Plummer: Tom, how did you happen to come to Annapolis from San Diego?

Gillmer: Well I had to have some kind of work to do and I was looking around, being naive at that time. I had heard of the Weems system of navigation and that was located in Annapolis. And so I looked up Captain Weems and he was interested and so I came along. He didn't pay you very much but the work is interesting.

Plummer: Williams?

Gillmer: Weems.

Plummer: Oh, Weems. As in the Weems Line?

Gillmer: Huh?

Plummer: As in the Weems Line - the steamship company? W-E-E-M-S?

Gillmer: Yeah. W-E-E-M-S. It was a pretty prominent family, I think. They lived in the Bordley-Randall House here, which is a big colonial mansion right in the middle of the city, off Prince George Street. And, uh, that was interesting duty. I was trying to set up places teaching navigation in various places where they - what do you call these domes where they project the stars?

Plummer: Planetariums?

Gillmer: Planetariums. You know there's a big one in Chicago and a big one in Philadelphia and I was setting up celestial navigation at the school - classes and the rest.

Plummer: So they use the planetarium to teach star-sighting?

Gillmer: Yeah. This was celestial navigation, all about it, altitudes and azimuths, at proper times, that sort of thing.

Plummer: I never realized they had a planetarium to use for that purpose.

Gillmer: They have a great one over at the Academy, and my class donated the instrument that projects the stars. That cost them 90,000 bucks. But, uh, anyway, when I got over there to the Academy to instruct they sent me to the engineering department, of course.

Plummer: You had specialized in engineering when you were going through the Academy?

Gillmer: No. At that time and until relatively recently, yno.'it everybody takes the same course. Now hav
specialization in ('
 You can get a major in this, a major in that. They even have a pre-med course over there now. But it adjusts according to the navy's needs. They were getting some very poor doctors for a while, then decided to get their own. However, they **Wmm** go on after they graduate from pre-med course to some medical school to get their doctorate.

essional Subjects

Plummer: So you landed in the engineering department?

Gillmer: I landed in the engineering department, and in the department where they were (' T nava'l'-con'SEruction and damage control, and, 7y1. G4 r' v G .e. "U x O.

Plummer: This would have been in 1940?

Gillmer: 'MaI Yeah, and I made a number of summer cruises on... with the midshipmen. I was the ^{!Dg} officer in charge of i w w instruction and that sort of thing. on the Savannah. One summer we were out mucking around with the cruiser we were picking up German submarine blips on the sonar, a That was the closest we got to any action.

.e

Plummer: The Savannah was a cruiser?

Gillmer: Yeah, it was a heavy cruiser. She was just back from the Med, had landed forces over there in Italy until a bomb blew up her forward turret with the loss of a lot of people. And they sent it back and then sent her to the Naval Academy for duty. Well, mmd* -4wu, r d the end of the war....

(END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1)

Gillmer: I forgot, probably, to mention since I got into boats and boat building when I was still in high school - "I guess I was in junior high - I don't remember exactly, I wasn't very old, I know I was riding a bicycle back and forth from home to school, but in the winter I wasn't riding a bicycle because there was too much snow on the ground. I was smart and I knew how... They didn't have school buses then either. I lived downtown and this school was a mile away an walking was something. I used to ride a snow plow. The snow plow in those days was pulled by a horse and only plowed the sidewalks. They didn't want to plow the street because we had sleds and commercial wagons on **obas** that were towed by horses. They had to stay in the street, but on the sidewalk they had snow plows. It was nothing but a couple of two-by-twelves nailed together, sort of a triangular fashion, and a platform over it and a couple of big irons, <d\$Pl'"-"for orses' s harnesses to hook on and there was only room for one or two boys to jumpp on it. Riding along oft the sidewalk was a lot of fun. Didn't go very fast.

*and in winter
snow was
always with us
and
runners*

plowing

Well anyway, as I was saying, I was walking home one winter night from school and I remember just a block or two away from where I lived was a downtown place, vac a r post office, and on the corner was a jewelry store and when I was on the corner there I noticed in the jewelry store a ship model. And this was not just made out of diamonds or gold or silver or anything. It was made out of wood. A real ship model with all the details on deck and I was fascinated by that little thing. It was probably only about 30 inches long. And I told my dad and the family that evening at the table what I had seen and my dad said, "I know the man who built that, want to meet him?" I said "w=0 the next couple of days, I guess, he arranged for us to meet a fellow by the name of George Woodside who ws oe sailor in the navy, he was running the post office garage, and it didn't eep im too busy in e ay ime and he made ship models, and he was pretty talented. He ' was in the battle'of Santiago in the Spanish-American War and he was the only... he had the honor of being the only sailor to be injured in that battle.

yes, when!

now

Plummer: The only American sailor?

'je 5'

Gillmer: He fell down a ladder and broke his leg. He always walked with a limp after that and anyway he had a lot of these sea stories to tell and I used to sit around watching him build his ship models and he was building some pretty good ones. I remember his last piece before

11.

01a Trop-j

I went away to school was a model of the USS Constitution, "Old Ironsides." He didn't know much about building a plank-on-frame model, but he built it from the deck up and put the guns on the gun deck where they belonged and all the other details, and put the spar deck on top of that. And so he had the ship more or less finished inside as well as outside. I remember he sold that to a museum in Youngstown for the great sum of \$600 which wasn't too bad tvt -s- t1q Z P s.

Well, that got me interested in it and one time I was 1⁴¹ down there, I guess I was probably... I was about_ ' or
13 ..- years old. He got talking about the boats he'd sailed when he grew up in Prince Edward Island and his father was a ships blacksmith up there. He told me all about the.., seeing the great clipper ship Marco Polo break up on the shores of Prince Edward Island. He said they wanted to break it up. He said they w-e ~ about a mile and sailed it right directly toward shore. He said that when it hit, he said the upper part of the ship kept going and the lower half was sheered off. There was a great incident. He said most of the village went out and watched it.

Plummer: And salvaging pieces, I'll bet.

Gillmer: What?

Plummer: And salvaging pieces of it.

Gillmer: Yes. Salvaging pieces. Probably did it for insurance or something.

Well anyway, he got me interested in sailing a boat. He said, "Look," he said, "I can build you a little sailboat here and that will sail pretty well." He said, "I remember what they were like up in Prince Edward Island." He said it would be lapstrake. I told him I didn't know about that. He said we'll bend some oak frames on the inside and -uh- so I learned the secrets of building a wooden boat by watching this thing grow every day. How you'd hold one end of the plank as you were
~)c , la_nki~n~ it, the other end. Well anyway, my dad... as we got cse3' toward the finished boat I thought that I'd better break the news that I was getting a boat. And he said, "Well, how much is it gonna cost?" So I, at that point being pretty naive about money, I asked George Woodside, I said, "My dad wants to pay for this boat now, how much is it going to cost him?" He said, "Well," he said, "The Lord give us the wood. It'll have to be about \$45." That was \$45. It was a little lapstrake skiff that was 14 feet long. *=centerboard in it. He got a

Uri fh a

stepped X
So in 1940's
mast together for me, but my mother helped me make the sail on her sewing machine. So it was a pretty decent little sailer with a big, broad rudder. It was a catboat rig. I up in the bow. So I sailed that, (a long, long time. As a matter of fact it wound up here in Annapolis after I got out of the navy. I sent home for it) sailed it around down here. The last time I saw it, it was over here in Eastport in somebody's front yard with geraniums planted in it.

Plummer: Where did you sail it in Ohio?

Gillmer: Lake Erie. We had a on Lake Erie where we spent summer. Wasn't mull to sail = up there because it was a long, sandy beach, but I sailed it down to Ashtabula once which was ten miles away, which was **mV** tom. Sort c~
+ cruise destination. (I'n — ~1

Well anyway, I guess we better get back to 1946 or so and, uh, they mustered me out of the navy at that point and, I,, I didn't have any other plans about where to o apart from checking a couple of possibilities and then I thought that maybe I'd stay and teach as a civilian. Well, I accepted a job as the lowest-tee l('owo-k 0 % academic ram— Instructor was just one rung below assistant professor t, c2d.ee_

Leshner: No tenure.

Gillmer: No, no tenure, and, uh, they advised me also to start a program of post-graduate studies, which I-did. Johns Hopkins, which was a commute.

Plummer: Well, what did you study there?

Gillmer: Uh, I did courses in steam engine, turbine design, that sort of thing. But it never led to a degree because **COU NS's** uh... well, I got most of the II can most of the academic work for a masters degree, but didn't do a thesis because they began to nail it down to a **Aigu V" off i work** e) that interfered with my So I think the thing that got me more than the was the 4, fact that courses I was working with nee e textboo I managed to lengthen the curricula to change Coy mtyb #z the old course of ship construction and damage control to a more academic course in naval architecture. And so, that's one thing... About 19--uh, well, it was the end of the 50s, we were changing to a new academic regime and we got a naval architecture course to be the backbone of a VS f, Gte a major, at least a minor, study, and it's gone on from there.

beginnin

The Naval Academy

13.

Plummer: Was that the first book?

Gillmer: Yes. The first book I wrote was 1952 or 3, I guess. It was called Naval Construction Ship Stability and that went through nine different printings, I think, and I sort of enlarged on it to do Modern Ship Design, and these were always the textbooks in this course. And **bbmr** fte.+~ became the naval engineering department which consisted of the studies of naval architecture, marine engineering (which was mostly the study of marine engines like turbines and combustion engines and that sort of thing,) and then ocean engineering ('

Plummer : *Ik Co W4 ~"* *r'* *th Q'es - I A* *w - (n roel , c c~*

and for the last five or **six** years I was the chairman of naval engineering and I didn't like that too much because it **war** much of an administrative job. And I wound up teaching one group three times a week.

Plummer: And that was which one, which course?

Gillmer: Naval architecture. Yeah, and **um** finally promoted to professor.

Plummer: About ¹⁹⁵⁻7

Gillmer: I was promoted to full professor in 1962, probably the longest stage of associate professor. As there was always somebody, "Oh, you gotta have a doctorate." (euu e) -se y stepped in and said, "Look, this guy has provided the textbooks everybody's learning from, he ought to be a full professor. It's embarrassing to us." So it was sort of a threat.

The Academic Dean

Plummer: And then you continued teaching there regularly for how long?

Gillmer: I retired from the active faculty somewhere around 1967. That's when I started to set up a little practice here.

Plummer: You could not do anything on your own while you were teaching? Or did you have a business going before you retired?

Gillmer: Well, actually I... See that boat up there o the Blue Moon. That's probably my first successful design. I designed a couple of boats before that that were built. But that was published in Yachting magazine in 1946. I designed it. And you know I'm still selling plans for that design. It has gone through all kinds of

(Pv^o IV-

publications.

Plummer: Has anybody built one lately? That you know about?

Gillmer: Well, to tell the truth, what I'm building now is half 13lue Moon. Enlarged a little bit. And this started from, uh, well sometime, I think, last July. Bill Beasman up in Baltimore, I don't know if you know him, oh sure, he's on the Board. Well, I got to know Bill when he was the chairman of the Pride of Baltimore Corporation. Anyway, he called me up last July sometime and said, "Look, you know my boat's getting too big for me." He said, "I always liked that little Blue Moon you designed." He said, "You suppose you could make it a little larger on the same lines?" He said we could get it built by the guys that built the Pride, he said most of them, or a lot of them are doing nothing but building kitchen cabinets. And I said, "Well, sure. Let's have them build two of them." So we worked out a new set of lines and enlarged it to 27 feet and mine is pretty well along right now and Bill's is following short behind. He okayed the keel backbone set up about, well, two or three weeks ago. He said, "Look, I'm not sure I'm buying much but a bunch of pieces of wood." (Laughter) They went ahead with the other, which is my boat. Mine is all set up ready to frame now.

Plummer: I think Jack Cane has gotten some pictures of it.

Gillmer: He did some pictures when they started, but I haven't seen him around...

Leshner: He's been back a second time, when the frames were half up.

Gillmer: That's interesting.

Plummer: Going back to 1946, you had -a- this was published in Yachting?

Gillmer: Yeah.

Plummer: Which month, do you know?

Gillmer: I don't remember

Plummer: Sometime in 1946?

Gillmer: Yeah, it was sometime in 1946. And it was republished in Rudder a few years later, and I had the boat built myself after a lot of other people had built them. I finally (inaudible) (laughter)

e7(te- @Ce j /, 7 ~, work . S cu. vs yS

Plummer: How many were built?

Gilimer: Haven't any idea. I don't know. I have a whole stock of little cards of people that bought the plans that probably built it. I sold more than 150 designs...

Plummer: Maybe out of that...

Gilimer: I don't know what the percentage was. I helped people build them, I mean I helped get them a builder.

Plummer: Are there any around Annapolis?

Gilimer: No. Not that I know of. The last one I saw around here was my own Blue Moon which was built in Norway. I couldn't find any builders nearby and I was leafing through the National Geographic, one day and I came across - this was on Norway - that had a picture of a builder building a nice frame-planked-up boat and I wrote ~ a letter the next day to see if they were interested in building a boat of my design that was only 24 feet long. He said, sure. So I sent them the plans and he started out. Cost me \$1800. Plus \$300 more to ship it from Stockholm... hkY"

Plummer: I was going to say...

Gilimer: ...to Baltimore.

Plummer: By freighter?

Gilimer: Yeah.

Plummer: Is it still around?

Gilimer: It was until just a couple of years ago and I don't know what's happened. A fellow owned it down in Norfolk, getting a lot of fun out of it. And he had replaced some rotten wood and so forth. After all, it was getting on to 40 years old. And, uh, he sailed it up here one day and tied it up to the pier where I used to tie it. I took some pictures of it. It looked pretty good.

Well, anyway, the one I'm having built now is - is identical sections of Blue Moon from midship to the transom. I changed the bow a little bit and cut away the keel. Looks a little more modern and of course it has a modern rig. I could show you some of the profiles if you're interested, but that won't record very well.

Plummer: Why don't you tell us about the other recreational boats

that you built? Or that you designed. I mean this was the first in a series.

Gillmer: Well, it's an interesting thing because we got to know some of the people that I designed for. I mean ^{od j, ~e} One of the boats which developed from W ^{a good friend} into fibreglass was a Norwegian style doubleender that I designed. And it was built first by ^{who} is out in Japan on duty, and he had it built in Japan. That was in the early 50s sometime. Well, that design got quite a bit of publicity and sometime, I forget when it was, 1972, around in there, Clark Ryder who ran a fibreglass boat building shop up in Rhode Island called me up and said, "Could you convert this wooden boat" - I can't remember what he called it, the design - "to fibreglass?" I said, "Well, I guess so." He said, "I'd like to go into production with it." And that became the series that he called the Southern Cross series. That's the model of it up on the wall.

41a, va-
f ices

(Inaudible) : The yellow one?

d, y-tc. qq.

LLd

Gillmer: Yeah, yellow. And (^{at,} e) he had a thing he said, "The boats I build, I like double nders." And he commissioned me to do a sloop that was 32 feet. Then he commissioned me to build a 40 footer and, uh, I don't have a half-model of that here, I've got one at home. And that was the Southern Cross, he called it 39 because it was 39 feet, 9 inches, pretty close to 40 feet. But anyway - that's a picture of her up there, sailing. And then he built a 28 footer and a 35 footer~ I think the 35 footer the best, I like it best, anyway - that's it up ere.

Plummer: And they were all called, they were all the Southern Cross series?

Gillmer: Southern Cross according to their length. But I think probabl the that's the most successful was not built im but built by Allied Yachts which was called the Seawind. The first Seawind was... A young lawyer from Wilmington came down and asked me to design a boat that had such-and-such a style which I did and after he had it built in fibreglass - all the tooling was done up in Long Island, I forget the name of the outfit up there. They ^{design} did fibreglass work for the navy, but never built a bo ^{jF,} before. But they built of them an t en an -- organization in New York, they were ya ht brokers, I can't remembers the names of all of these people at this time. They got together and set up a plant ^{son,} in Catskill, and called it--V" Allied Yacht And t eY bought the design ancT`went into production up there and

on the
Hudson
Riv

they built about, oh, something like 175 boats before they sold out. And I got one myself, number After they built that many of them I though they we going pretty good.

Plummer: What period did that cover?

Gillmer: That covered a period of about and a half years...

Plummer: From...? *ig(v2 -1'775*

Gillmer: ...but number 11 of that series was the first fibreglass boat to circumnavigate the world. It got a lot of publicity and helped sell a lot'of cruising boats.

Plummer: What was it called?

Gillmer: That boat was called the..., the... What's the point 4M- t4o- in astronomy which is the opposite to nadir? Apogee.

Leshner: It was called the Apogge?

Gillmer: It was called t Apogt.

Plummer: And do you know who sailed it?

Gillmer: Allen Eddy. He sailed it singlehanded all the way until he got to Cape Town and then he met a girl in Cape Town who went aboard for the last leg from Cape Town up to the Caribbean.

East to West

Plummer: It was Eddy? E-D-D-Y?

Gillmer: Yeah.

Plummer: It's interesting. Do you know what year that was?

Gillmer: It took him about two years to do it.

Plummer: In the 70s?

Gillmer: No, it was in the 60s.

Plummer: Oh, in the 60s. ~~ **br**

Gillmer: I think around . It had to be right around there. It was pretty early.

Plummer: So these 175 boats that were built by Allied span the late 60s into the early 70s?

Gillmer: Yeah. And there are still a- "of them around. They're selling for a pretty good price. Allied changed hands from time to time, different ownership, but they still carried the name Allied Yachts. One way or another Allied was in the name. They had me do a bigger one. It's the old American idea, well, if this is going to be bigger it would be better.

So

they built a Seawind 32. The first Seawind was a 30. In fact...

Plummer: The Apogee was a 30 foot?

Gillmer: Yeah, **wah.** So the new -one was 32, feet. And they said well let's make it bigger, make it look like a sea, **ww& 30** (laughter). So, I never, re- anybody (j=xxX11F) F ows rS ins a.r designW.- I simply cut it in half like a watermelon and made it about one fifth wider, 12 inches, and faired in the lines into the new center, to about 32 feet, 2 inches. o,-t. 1^ .._

Plummer: Well, they used to do that with steamships.

Gillmer: Yeah.

Plummer: They may still do it for all I know.

Gillmer: Well, it worked pretty well. It was a stiffer boat because it got more - a higher percentage of ballast. But I sailed both boats. I still liked the first boat better. It was quicker and more responsive.

Plummer: Are any of them here in Annapolis?

Gillmer: Still two or three Seawind II's around Annapolis. Every once in a while I see a Seawind I. People keep them up, you know, like an old classic car.

Plummer: But these are fibreglass boats?

Gillmer: Yeah. Fibreglass all the way.

Plummer: But fitted out with teak?

Gillmer: Yeah, teak trim, teak interiors.

Plummer: Decks are fibreglass?

Gillmer: Yeah.

Plummer: Did you go to the Allied factory while they were molding it?

Gillmer: Several times. And on the Seawind II it was under a different management then, but, uh, after I'd designed the preliminary design, and they okayed it, and I did the structural specifications, they didn't have the capability at that point to build a mold. So they had it molded, they call it. Well, they have to build a plug t^hat's a d^efect of a "e gape of the boat*--") but they did this work down in New Orleans. They sent me down to New Orleans to sort of supervise it. There was a guy down there that was trying a new method of fibreglass reinforcing, particularly with the molds. They make the plug and then make the mold after that. The mold is the negative part...

really a 3 D pattern

Plummer: Yes. The plug is wooden.

Gillmer: Yeah, they're generally wooden ~ IL .odS

Plummer: And then they build the fibreglass shell around, that which...

Gillmer: Build only to the sheer line, and they make a deck mold separately. Well, anyway, I went down to New Orleans and watched this guy doing it. He was pretty good. He'd been building a lot of racing sailboats and he was using long strips of glass fibre which was only round about the size of a pencil which he laid on horizontally for reinforcement of the molds. And then he sent the f back to lw. JA*A A' tk y ,

(END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2)

(START OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1)

Gillmer: [Talking about moving s from New Orleans to Allied] ...moving on the truck. Someplace in the Appalachian Mountains going up towards Catskill, it fell off the truck. I mean the whole thing. Down in the gulley. So I guess they pulled it out in a couple of days and got it to Catskill, and they called me up and asked me to come and check it out and see if anything was bent out of line. It was remarkably sound and I couldn't find any damage to it. They went ahead and used it.

Plummer: It's a credit to both the designer and the builder.

Gillmer: It proved his system of those long pencil-like rods of glass laid across the cloth. But that's the story of the Seawind II. They built, well, not quite as many as they did of the Seawind I, but quite a few.

Plummer: Over a hundred?

Gillmer: Yeah, ⁴¹¹¹ee a number of them still around Annapolis here and they may still be around some other places, too. And they still carry a price tag that's fairly substantial. For a second-hand boat that's in reasonably good condition they still get \$40 or \$45,000 for it.

Plummer: When was the last one built?

Gillmer: Oh, they were forced into bankruptcy because of accumulated debt and the last president of Allied named Freeman, it's too bad he couldn't have been president earlier because he had imagination and drive. He wouldn't have gotten the company into debt like they did. They were building boats of other designs and the company one time was owned by somebody down in New York who was (e). He was a U o is capital investment and building stuff of his own, but it was doing the company no good. Anyway, they had accumulated too much of a debt that they couldn't get out from under it. They closed it up, I think, in 1984.

*a big wheeler V~
Dealer*

Plummer: So the Seawind II would have been built up to roughly that time?

Gillmer: Yeah. And they were... said, "I'm going to start building Seawind I's again." He said, "The molds are out there in the bullrushes down by the river." He said, "I'm going to pull it out and refinish that mold," and he did. And he built about six new Seawind I's from that old mold. I don't know what's happened to them. They were new boats in the 1980s, I mean if that's recent.

So, we've got to get into somewhere along the line where the Pride of-Baltimore started, don't we?

Plummer: Well I was...

Gillmer: Or are you saving that for last?

Plummer: Not necessarily, but I was just going to ask you, over your career about how many recreational boats do you think you designed?

Gillmer: It's hard to say. The Allied and the...

Plummer: Blue Moons? Southern Crosses?

~~ Gillmer: No, I'm thinking of the production boats. They were Allied and Southern Cross and also an outfit down in, of

all places, Arkansas. I way-building something that I named the Privateer. Those are good little boats and there are still a few of those around. They had- it ¹ ~cr clipper bows on them. I don't have a half model of them around here, but I kind of like that boat.

Plummer: How big was it?

Gillmer: Well, they built t4* different sizes, Privateer 28 and Privateer 35 and the Privateer 35 was a substantial boat that would be a good cruising boat for ocean-going, although e). They used to race a lot of fir. ^{L-1} \$
they only built about ten
 y ~bui t a lot of 'em for Texas waters, I mean Gulf waters, and a lot went to California, too. I think they probably built more production boats than either Allied or Southern Cross.

Plummer: Are they the... Is one of them the one that has a rail around the stern?

Gillmer: It looks like it does. There was a little raised deck.

Plummer: Yeah, with a wooden rail around the...

Gillmer: No.

Plummer: I'm sure I've seen a Privateer somewhere.

Gillmer: Maybe somebody did it on a custom basis. I don't know.

Plummer: I think this one was down in the Virgin Islands somewhere.

Leshner: Before you get onto your replicas, your historic replicas, you did some work with... a study of fishing boats from various parts of the world that led to one of your books...

Gillmer: I'm glad you brought that up. I think that was a rather significant bit. And that was done in the end of the 50s, 1958, 9. I got a publication called the Maine Coast Fisherman which you've probably heard of.

Leshner: Yes.

Gillmer: Now it's called the National Fisherman and John Gardner was the technical editor and they had a readers' column that they published every once in a while and it was interesting and these guys were always talking about boats they build and how they could make them better. Then some kind of an argument broke out about the fastest kind of a lobster hull, or any kind of a local fishing

launch, and Howard Chapelle wrote a letter which attracted my attention. He said, "It's too bad we can't do some model testing with these hulls, but the cost of model testing is too great to get into that sort of thing." And I thought, Howard you don't know much about the facilities at the Naval Academy. So I wrote a letter to the editor and I immediately got a letter from Howard Chapelle.

We got together. He sent me a couple of drawings of typical Maine coast boats and a couple of Chesapeake Bay models, and, well one thing I got myself into was how do I get the models to test, then I'll test 'em. But it wasn't any problem to get them from Maine. John Gardner built one of them and, uh, a builder at Booth Bay who was building a lot of lobster boats, although he was doing yacht-type boats in the same form, too. He supplied models. And I guess the Chesapeake boats, I persuaded that... At that time I didn't have a model-maker to do anything like that, but I relied on a pattern-maker's shop, they made a pretty good model. So they made the models of the Chesapeake types and we tested them in the tank, and then it began to get (' writing to John Gardner in the Maine Coast Fisherman and it attracted attention.

Well, at that time t ~~attracted at~~ f the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization. They had a fishing boat scion and he said would **yerlike** to write a paper about this activity, and I'll have you come to the next meeting of the International Fishing Boat Congress at which I was invited to present this paper. That was im-to e 1 Rome. Well I was all set up to go and read the paper until - that was about 1958, I think - I got sick at the last minute with some kind of a (' infection and ~ I couldn't go. But they read the paper anyway. was all finished. The next Fishing Boat Congress I was invited to I went. And by that time I was... we were testing log canoe hulls for places to locate outboard Motorsl '°I've written a couple of times in different books that the most numerous type of boat all over the world is a log canoe. I was amazed at how many log canoes were in two countries along the Gold Coast of Africa, something like thirty thousand. Anyway, they'd just go in and pick out a big tree in the woods and drag it down and carve a pretty respectable shape hull and they were generally alike. regional C1VP-'neSS- They weren't very different s t We tested two or three different shape- of oa canoe hulls art I'm still supplying papers to people when they're studying this problem. It was a problem. I don't know if the outboard motors

ung was

14.

-1%13

A man named the head of the

I'm well inside the hull. They are double enders.

sl y

solved it, but they helped a little bit. Because, the way it was, these people were putting these log canoes into the open ocean, and they had a nice big sandy beach to work from, but if the surf was up a little they didn't go fishing or if it was up a little high they'd try to get a boat out and it'd turn over and they'd all go home for a few days. But with outboard motor

Six guys on each side paddling these things which were pretty big. There were some of them 700 ee d'n. They would, hql_c. many guys, but at the same time you could 66re fish in the boat if you had less men in it. But, uh, the trouble was, you put ou oab`rc motors in I don't know who bought the outboard motors but it sure helped the outboard business.

ummer: There were thirty thousand customers that needed them.

Gillmer: The United Nations, I guess, was paying for it and the trouble is after some of these engines got out of gas and they didn't have any fuel supply. Also what they didt,,, & some of them did, and they didn't know how to repair them. So it was the same way when they tried to introduce a steam locomotive in Saudi Arabia 50 or more years ago. It stayed on the track because it ran out of fuel and they didn't know what to do.

Plummer: Were these 70 foot log canoes, were they single logs?

Gillmer: L1

Plummer: Had the ever developed the chnique that was used here in the bay?

Gillmer: Well, one of the models I got, my tank test model, I retired I took it with me, just took one F -), L of display, but they had a section with straight sides, a rounded bilge and a flat bottom.

Plummer: It was a one-log...

Gillmer: It was one log. I guess (ire e ~~little bit of~~ some boats like an elongated dory, only it ha

chine Plummer: You wrote a book as a result of this?

Gillmer: No, I wrote a couple of papers which I presented... I presented a paper on the log canoe at the Fishing Boat Congress which was in Gothenburg, Sweden. Howard Chappelle was there, too, and read a paper. I had some long talks with Howard, because he and I were about the

only Americans at the Congress.

Plummer: When did you meet him?

Gillmer: Where did I meet him?

Plummer: When was the first time you met him?

Gillmer: Well, it was, *organized* it was a meeting that lead up to the al 4-rrzde., y regular meetings every two years ow ca ed the Naval History Symposium here at the Academy. They're too elaborate now, and I don't think they get down to the nitty-gritty. Our first meeting was not called the Naval History Symposium, it was called, um, just historical b &~ sill s..It was by the Naval Institute t-here and they invited me, along with Howard Cha~pelle and a bunch of other people around... Who was the famous sage over on the Eastern Shore?

Plummer: John Earle?

Leshner: Jim Richardson, or...

Gillmer: No.

Leshner: Or Brewington, or Burgess?

Gillmer: Who?

Leshner: Brewington?

Gillmer: No, I knew Brewington pretty well, too. But anyway, I S_v-(c.~ think it probably amounted to 50 people, (' was qlb invited and always had a pretty good story to tell, and Howard Chap4elle. And we had the meeting sitting in a circle discussing different things, about naval ~" architecture, boat design, whatever. And the afternoon, after lunch, was given over to a sail on the old schooner Freedom, and it was without the so-called figurehead, which I think is, w.b lid. But anyway, Howard Cha0pelle end d_eceidewe didn't want to go on the Freedom sail. ~ t r I'd sailed on the Freedom, and he had something to do to get back to Washington that afternoan-0swe sat-around~ and talked for several hours. That was the first time I./ wi -- t_v t M h ~-w,

Plummer: And when was that?

Gillmer: That was probably in the late 50s. And then I learned later, fit' that he had been involved in the FAO program of Fishing Boat design and he worked over in Turkey for about a year and they had a towing tank over

there at the American University and a really good naval architecture course.

Plummer: He did a lot of work with Turkish boats?

Gilimer: It was a very nice little line, and then we were both on the FAO, well, panel of experts **ImpavaW** they called it. He and I were the only two American members of that - ere was air guy, I forget his name now. But this is where we'd see eac other and we had meetings in that was at (Araatdd%deron Iog 'canoes; another one in Copenhagen and, uh, I guess these are the only two that Chappelle and I went to. What else is there to say about him?

Plummer: How would you characterize him?

Gillmer: Well, he was a very generous guy with his knowledge, I think. And he was, I suppose, very much of a stickler to his own methods and his methods fell short of what some other naval architects thought he should do. He was a little bit lax on stability and this sort of thing. I can understand that because running a stability curve takes an awful lot of time and effort, before the days of computers you had to do all your mathamatics by hand. Or with a slide rule or something like that. But anyway, I liked ChapSpelle.

Plummer: And you knew him up until the time he died?

Gilimer: Pretty much, yeah. I wrote his epitaph for the Wooden Boat magazine and I still have the letter that Mrs. Cha#pelle, his wife, wrote in gratitude. And, indeed, I foundfa good more about his activities outside of the country, most people did.

Leshar: He certainly had an interest in appropriating historic types for use in yacht design, or something like that. You've sort of taken that one step further in... in coming up with designs for replicas...

Gilimer: Yeah

Leshar: ...that r-- more, if you will, sort of true to the type.

Gilimer: Yeah. I don't think that he... well, he designed one vessel that people called a Baltimore Clipper which it really wasn't. It was built, I forget the name of it, it was built up in New England and sailed out to California and was owned by a couple of movie stars. But it wasn't a real Baltimore Clipper, I don't think he would claim it was.

Leshner: How did you get involved in that. Was the Pride of Baltimore your first one? Your first replica?

Gillmer: No, not really. I don't know whether you'd call it a replica or not, but you people [the CBMM] have a model of the Pegay Stewart over there built by Melbourne Smith. I ran into Melbourne Smith one night at a party somewhere here in the Annapolis area and he said, "Look!" he said, "Somebody ought to build a Peaay Stewart. They're having a ceremony up in Boston every year called the Boston Tea Party with something that doesn't look anything like a contemporary ship of the period." He said, "Why don't we get together and build a Peggy Stewart?" And we didn't know much more about what the Pegay Stewart looked like, of course, than they did what the Boston Tea Party ship looked like. They converted some kind of an old Baltic trader for up there, rigged it as a brig, and that's their Boston Tea Party ship. They gave a name to it; I forget what it is. Then we built... we got. Jim Holt interested in supporting the idea of a design for a edgy Stewart and it turned out that the board of directors of the Chesapeake Bay museum - it wasn't very old at the time - contributed money to do the design of the Peagy Stewart which I did and Melbourne made the model. And so I suppose that was my first effort towards that. j m 4, -*des~

Plummer: Where did you get the information on which to base the design?

Gillmer: The research that we did was local records of the ship. It was owned by Mr. Stewart who lived on a street right outside the Naval Academy. Anyway, the records show what the tonnage of the ship was. I don't think there was a carpenter's certificate available, but with the tonnage you can do some figuring and it was a brig and it was built somewhere on the bay, on this shore and not on the Eastern Shore. And it may have made two trips to England from here, and it was on the end of its second voyage with a load of tea in the harbor here. I guess this part is history.

Plummer: Was it built by the shipyard that was the one...

Gillmer: Could h e been built 3dy,,,,the one that's just been excavat a ihawt down here.

Leshner: The Stewart?

Gillmer: j. 1 Oo - - ° ~ ~

Leshner: But that was enough to get you a start when the City of Baltimore was interested in doing a Baltimore Clipper

replica?

Gillmer: Yeah. That came about a little later, 1973 or 4. It's interesting. That's when they started to remodel the inner harbor and, uh, there was a guy in charge of whoever the agency was - it was called the Inner Harbor Redevelopment Agency. I guess I'd probably gotten some sort of a standing as a naval architect, and also the city planner here lived right next door to me. He said, "There're people up in Baltimore who are interested in getting a Baltimore Clipper built." And I said, "Well, I'm not a builder, I'm a designer. He said, "I know, but can I tell them you're interested in designing it?" I said, "Well, if you want to." And so in the next couple of days a guy called me up and said I'd like to talk to you about it, and he came down and we had quite a session talking about it. The roadblock as far as I was concerned - I said, "You can't build it in the City of Baltimore in the middle of town. You have to have some kind of facilities for launching it and building it." So that was the end of that until I met Melbourne Smith at a party that year and he said, "You know, we could build that Baltimore Clipper in town if you want." And I said, "Well you'll have to take the responsibility for all the transportation of material and so forth." I said, "I can design it." He said, "OK, how about we get a contract?" So that was the beginning of Pride of Baltimore.

Plummer: And your contract was with the City of Baltimore, or...

Gillmer: Actually, no. Melbourne was the entrepreneur. He got the contract with the city and he did all of the talking. He was an artist and he painted a picture of what this would **look like** and so forth. He didn't ask me what it would look like. So he gave me a contract to design it and paid me 16,000 bucks. So, I designed Pride I. It was, I think it was a first because it got, its success got a lot of other cities around the country interested in replica ships to attract people to the waterfront. Just so happened that Baltimore was building a new waterfront at the same time.

Plummer: Did you have to do a lot of research before you started doing the actual design?

Gillmer: I had always been interested in Baltimore Clippers, and I had Chappelle's books and that sort of thing. And I just followed my instincts to design) 1115\$
Tell me how big you want it, and we decided... That's what the people in Baltimore wanted to know, of course. How much it was going to cost and how big is it, because they took the money to build it out of the harbor

development thing. And **itre** a lot less than you have to put down now to get a keel Aarted. I think the first contract that Melbourne had with them, the cost was estimated to be \$300,000. And about halfway through the construction - their idea at first was to just ^{1fiake} a waterfront exhibit out of it. Just have it sitting there for visitors and tourists to go aboard and that sort of thing. And somebody got talking with the mayor...

Leshner: Shaefer.

Willaw- Donald Si... 4t

Gilmer: Shaefer, right, our good friend Mayor **Siwog=r**. "You know you can make use of this vessel to advertise Baltimore if you'd let her go around the sea and sail a little" Well, at that point they told us - I would say the hull was about thirty percent along - and, well, I said, "Melbourne, we're going to have to have an engine in this and this will get a little bit off the track from authenticity, but we can isolate the engine, a diesel engine." And so we got a big Caterpillar diesel. But that made a difference because it was a centerline job. We had to bore a shaft hole through the sternpost, make an apperture in the rudder for the propeller, and in boring the shaft hole - the ship was already / ^{A42eI}

(END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1)
(START OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2)

Are tkzAz

Leshner: ,~,...ways of putting the propeller apperture through the keel after it had already been drifted together?
^{bar7}

Gilmer: Yeah. We did it, but that changed its ure authenticity. However, otherwise it was an authenti ship. Open all the way through as it was originally ' with no bulkhead separating anybody, except ossibly the captain, but that wasn't a watertight bulkhead, it was just a private..'.
^{bar7}

Plummer: Partition.

Gillmer: Partition, yeah, and we had inside access t-Qe. tlNtt" (Inaudible). Anyway, I, would say the first Pride -Q-f' Baltimore was a very outstanding vessel, but it was not a copy of any particular Pride of Baltimore... I mean any particular Baltimore clipper. But with some research... I sent... I communicated with the museum in England...

/~ Plummer: Greenwich. The National Maritime Museum?

Gilmer: Yeah. They had records of Baltimore clippers that had

been captured by the Royal Navy.

photostat

Plummer: Lynx?

Gillmer: lynx was one of 'em, eah, which was a good one. I got about ten different opi some O'them were rather indifferent and poo - I would say not poor draftsmanship,, but copies. But anyway I took the statistics and the general form to use as an amalgamation of those. I think perhaps the Lynx was the closest one I used. Anyway we put the ship together according to that amalgamation of information and I think she served a nearly ten years of pretty good service, and the final accident or tragedy had nothing to do with her sailing ability, except she was knocked down by a very fierce, sudden burst of wind that the U.S. Weather Bureau acknowledged they - they had weather planes up during that period and they almost pinpointed that little spot that hit the Pride. If the Pride had been five miles away on either side it wouldn't have happened.

Plummer: It's a microburst.

Gillmer: Yeah.

Leshner: Did you do any more design of replicas before the Lady Maryland came along?

Gillmer: As I say, I did the Pegcy Stewart.

Leshner: Right.

Gillmer: And Pride I was built before the Lady Maryland. Actually we were working on the Lady Maryland when Pride sank.

Leshner: Right, right.

Gillmer: And she was in framef about that time, I think. And Pete Boudreau was the builder.

Leshner: Right.

Gillmer: And Dennis O'Brien was the sparkplug that got that started and he was a very good friend of William Donald Shaefer, which helped.

Plummer: Where was she actually built?

Gillmer: Huh?

Plummer: Where was she actually built?

Gillmer: Right where the Pride was built.

Plummer: Oh, was it?

Gillmer: Same spot.

Leshner: Right alongside Harbor Place.

Gillmer: Yeah, and where Pride II was built. The property was funded under the guidance of that science center, and every time they did a landscape () a ship to be built.
pt, \ frwx

Plummer: You'd mess up their whole landscaping.

Gillmer: We finally built a building for Pride II which was a pretty good shipyard building. We had a shed that we worked out of Lady Maryland and the first Pride it was
t, ~a roof hung up on poles and open on all sides, except at one end was a blacksmith shop where Jerry Trowbridge had his c anvil and forge, and the other end was sort of an office. But otherwise it was all open. We made the spars and blocks and all that stuff in there. [Tape interrupted.]

Plummer: Shall we review that?

Leshner: Yeah. Looking at your other replica experiences.

Gillmer: Yeah, the, ah... we're talking about the Peggy Stewart?

Plummer: Yes.

Gillmer: The PeOCry Stewart was commissioned by the museum for Melbourne to build and me to design and Melbourne did most of the active work to set up the process and negotiate the building, but...

Plummer: And it was to be built on the grounds of the maritime museum?

Comm
Gillmer: To be built on the grounds of the maritime museum and it was considered several times by the Board of Directors, mostly by executivejr. I think that's when they enlarged the executive committee, and I remember sitting outside. The meetings were held over in the Crab Claw. Not in the dining room but, you know, in the back room. So we sat out eating crabs. And that's while the board was negotiating, or the executive committee. There was one fellow who lived over there, farther up the river. Fairly wealthy, who died.

Leshner: Peter Black?

Plummer: No. I think you're thinking about the donor of the bug-eye... um... Kimberley?

Gilmer: No. No. He's a big, tall craggy looking guy.

Plummer: Not John Kimberley?

Leshner: Or Hammond Gibson.

Gilmer: Anyway, it was when he died that I became a member of the Board. That's neither here nor there, except that he was a very strong proponent of building the Peggy Stewart, too. Anyway, it didn't go through because of the astronomical cost involved [telephone rings].

Leshner: Okay, you were talking about the termination of the Peggy Stewart project.

Gilmer: Well, yeah. The termination of the Peggy Stewart project came up as the Board of Directors found it financially impossible. Then they went ahead and paid us for the design, and I don't know why Melbourne got more than I did out of that.

Plummer: When was that, Tom?

Gilmer: Huh?

Plummer: When was that? When did they actually cancel that out?

Gilmer: Um... I'd have to guess. The late 60s. I can tell you if you want to know the date, look on the plans of the Peggy Stewart, (inaudible) and you have the originals. Jim Holt insisted I give you the original plans and not blueprints, so I gave the originals. Except I have the original pencils.

Leshner: You've done a couple of other designs including the one of the draketail John Gregory.

Gilmer: Yeah.

Leshner: The draketail maritime project that's down in Anne Arundel County.

Gilmer: Didn't take long to do.

Leshner: Was that just an expansion of your design for the towing tank model of a Hoopers Islander?

Gillmer: I used that as a basis, but it's not the same.

Leshner: It's not the same.

Gillmer: It's beamier because he told me he wanted to take a lot of kids out in this thing, and a draketail, particularly the model I had in the book, or did the tank tests on, was pretty narrow.

Leshner: Okay.

Gillmer: And I didn't see kids running around on that boat too much. So we made it bigger and wider.

Leshner: Maybe we should move on to your involvement with the Constitution.

Gillmer: Oh, that's been a fairly recent period.

Plummer: Um, could I ask a question before that? Did you and Howard Chappelle ever talk about the "Constellation question?"

Gillmer: No. I shouldn't say "no." I think that's about the time he was having a hassle with what's-his-name up there. But he sort of sneered at it a couple of times. I think the of) ridiculous. So, I wasn't particularly interested whether it was or was not at that point. I had Lid) and I guess my interests hadn't gTown^T to digger ships that I couldn't get involved in, and I suppose that leads up to the question of the Constitution. But that was a later time, and I think the reason that that started, the write-up of the successful Pride or Baltimore II and the building of it, it was written up in Wooden Boat magazine showing pictures of it under construction and so forth, and my name was on a prominent display in that. But it was interesting. The head of this navy Ship Structures Division called me up. He said the Constitution was facing another drydocking. This is a standard rotating period, he said, but we have problems with what to do with it and its strength is in question and he said it has increased its hogging. He said, "If you'd be interested in giving us your opinion and making an assessment of the thing and what should be done to correct it." I didn't wait too long to say "yes." But it did seem to be a very interesting project.

Plummer: What was the name of the naval person that called you?

Gillmer: He wasn't naval, he was a civilian naval architect that was the head of the Ship Structures Division and his name is Cleveland. And they sent a committee down here and we

talked right around this table about it. Had several meetings and so he said, "Would you take the job of doing an assessment?" They wanted to do an assessment and they wrote up all the specifications that they wanted to know about and so forth, an analysis. So I did. I took about six months doing that. They wanted a report and it was acceptable, except I was unaware of the separation between church and state. So in the Navy Department between what they called up there the Boston Naval History Detachment, which is a bunch of - run by historians. At that point I was expecting that the Navy Department here - it belongs to the navy and is in commission and all of that, and there wasn't very much talk between the two organizations. But I did get acquainted with Don Turner up there and he is the superintendent of k and there was good cooperation. I did a lot of on-board research and he was very supportive. But Don Turner was under this Cleveland fellow who is - after they drydocked it, he sort of took charge of the rebuilding. And he's plugging along emtd tCrt stuff, although they did follow my suggestions in my study of putting in diagonal riders, which should have been in the ship when it was built.

Plummer: Which were in the original Joshua Humphrey design?

Gillmer: Yes.

Plummer: Which you found in the archives?

Gillmer: But in those days what the designer did was just work with a drawings and the rest was specifications, written. But I finally got a hold of Joshua Humphrey's written specifications for the three large frigates, 44-gun frigates, and that would include not only the Constitution but President and the United States. In all of them he specified these diagonal riders and spelled out where they were to go and so forth. Only one thing he didn't mention was the scantlings and the dimensions for them, and that's what they guessed at up there. But when they first came out I told Don Turner, I said, "Those are too massive." He said, "Two feet wide and one foot thick, that's what they are." I said they don't have to be that heavy and you're only just adding weight, so they pared 'em down a little bit. I didn't get to look at them myself until last summer when I was invited to go up to the change-in-command ceremony. And the new captain, who I met, he came from the Naval Academy to go up and take that job, but they held him off for a year 'til they finished the interior. But he and I sat around this table talking about the i : upthere, \$, f-u planning on sailing the vessel on its 200th birthday.

Plummer: What's his name?

Gillmer: ¹⁶
Mike peck.

Plummer: And he's the superintendent up there?

Gillmer: He's the captain of the Constitution, U.S. Navy, four stripes, no, he's a three striper. But he's running the ship. He told me frankly - I guess I can put it on the tape. He said, "If they don't sail it," he said, "They

G -- ' giving fire orders." ' So he's a the 48th captain of the Constitution, for which they've had billets for 200 years.

Plummer: What's the status of it right now?

Gillmer: They're rigging it and she's afloat.

Plummer: It is afloat?

Gillmer: Oh yeah. When I was up there for the change-in-command she was still in drydock and they had the whole ceremony there and all dressed up, and the captain that was being relieved and the new captain in 1812 costumes which looked pretty ridiculous. But, anyway, it was a very interesting occasion. She had the lower masts in at that point and the bowsprit, but not any of the upper topmasts, jibboom, or anything like that, of course. She
~, about the longest jibboom I've ever seen.

Plummer: Well, when you see pictures of those old frigates, the jL boom is almost as long as the hull.

Gillmer: And they sometimes attach a flying jibboom on to the jibboom. But he wants to sail it on her birthday using the same sailing pattern that was used by Isaac Hull when she beat the Guerriere, which is probably a very nice sailing pattern. Just, mostly, the three topsails, one main and mizzen topsail, with the lower courses brailed up.

Plummer: When they went into battle they always did that.

Gillmer: That's right. They didn't want to go too fast, having all the men handling sails.

Plummer: That's right. They needed them to man the guns.

Gillmer: Yeah. That's right. Well, those are the presnt plans for the Constitution.

Plummer: Is the money going to be there for that?

Gillmer: Well I don't know whether it'll cost a lot of money. His idea - I don't think he made the suggestion or took mine -but we both agree it should be done with midshipmen of the U.S. Naval Academy. We've got a problem now of training these guys' to get up on a square yard and do their thing, but I think they'll have a lot of advice from the Coast Guard.

Plummer: I was going to say, they could borrow a few from the FacYle.

Gillmer: Yeah, we've talked about that. He's got an advisory board going now, a committee, and the guy who's the head of Mystic Seaport, I don't know what he's going to contribute, but he has some resources and he's got the former captain of the Eacile, he's not captain now. These people are studying the problem of getting the crew together. The thing that worries me most, they don't have the sails made yet.

Plummer: And that's an expensive proposition.

Gillmer: Yeah, shoudn't be that expensive, but they gotta get started. They really only have to make about four sails, I think. Well, I guess those main courses, they need something they can brail up and look like sails.

Plummer: What about the rigging?

Gillmer: Well, they're rigging her, they're rigging now and she's got new masts.

Plummer: Are they trying to...

Gillmer: She had all her standings shrouds and stays on when I was up there last July. ([1995]

Plummer: And those are all made of synthetic fibres now?

Gillmer: Yeah. Well, we're making some pretty heavy stays for this replica here. That's how we're going to provide it, cable 1 stuff made out of dacron.

Leshner: This Kalmar is your current project?

Gillmer: Yeah. Not enjoying it too much at this point. It's being built in Wilmington. Do you want to get on the Ralmar project or not? Before lunch. Okay, well we should knock off for lunch anyway.

Plummer: What I was going to **ask** you to do before we wrap up this part **is**, if you'd just-name all the replica vessels that you've designed. You know, the Lady Maryland, and Pride

Gillmer: The only thing we haven't talked about is this Viking ship.

Lesher: Ah, okay.

Gillmer: Want to talk about that now?

Plummer: It's up to you. Yeah.

Gillmer: It's not a whole lot to talk about.

Lesher: Okay.

Gillmer: Um, it was done for an organization called the Boston Viking Ship Society. The Viking Society t'
They wanted a ship to work on, to exercise on in good weather, and so on and so forth, and they commissioned me to design it. Well, I made good use of making several trips to Scandanavia to do research.

Plummer: There are several survivors around, aren't there? In museums?

Gillmer: Recent discoveries ^r are most helpful. The first ship raves, they found, brought up two vessels that were in pretty gozsc1 coriftion. One is the Osberg ship and the other's the ship. The Osberg ship is a long ship ^t was used as a sort of a queen's yacht. It really wasn't a working Viking vessel, and they just used it in the nice flat fijords where there's no waves o- and carried her around where she went. And it was beautifully done with all of those nice carvings on the the stem and stern posts that they didn't put that on a regular working Viking ship. But the. w-ship .-.:.. appears to be a type of ship where they carried some fighting Vikings on. It doesn't have any decorations on it.

in runway
Gokstad

Plummer: What is the size of the one you designed?

Gillmer: It was going to be 52 feet long.

Lesher: Did it ever get built?

Gillmer: No. It unfortunately... **O**I had a fellow in Nova Scotia who had a source of wood,,because he had a man from Copenhagen, Denmark, who knew about what "They called the

Naval Oak Grove in Denmark. And this goes back with an interesting history. When the British beat the Danish, ty l'~ battle of Copenhagen, (Admiral Nelson was in on that and { they were so ashamed of themselves, . the Danish people, that they didn't have enough warships because they were lacking the wood to build them, that they bitift,,a big ~.w grove of oak trees that are now mature. It took years to grow them into mature tress. It didn't do the Danes any good. This guy had access to, the, were going to cut some of the trees down. If we could build a ~ r tb SDU12E " another Viking ship, he could supply the oaks. And it was another case they couldn't get their money together to do this job. We had the builders and everybody all standing by, with the design phase (' She would have made a nice ship, I think. cu-,~tc' %

Leshner: Well, shall we break off here for lunch?

Plummer : Okay.

[LATER]

Leshner: ... for our last session.

Plummer: How did you get involved with the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum?

Gillmer: Well, the first involvement, I think, of course, was with the Peggy Stewart experience, which we've gone over, and that's when I got pretty well acquainted with Jim Holt. And then this vacancy came up on the Board and they called me up and wanted me to fill it. I wish I could remember his name. Jim Holt could tell you.

Plummer : Ah, the person who (^{-M A'OU-}) the vacancy? C /4e d1e d)

Gillmer: Yeah. So, I got on the Board for a while. I told, uh... That was just, well Jim was the Director for maybe a couple of years while I was on the Board. Then John Valliant came along and Jim retired. And, uh, I was getting sort of frustrated going over to the Board meetings. I'm sure that most Board members do, and all they do is rubber stamp something the Executive Committee has come up with, and it's nothing but a place to go for hors d'oeuvres.

Plummer: And to meet people you know.

Gillmer: Yeah. And I didn't know too many of 'em, because I think I was the only member on the (sic) Shore except for Dick Miller, he was a member, too. u think I wrote a letter to John Valliant and expressed my

opinion and I said there isn't much for us to do, why don't you give us something to do? Well, he scratched his head, I think, and said... This is about the time they acquired that skipjack, the...

Plummer: The Collier? E. O. Collier.

Gillmer: Yeah. "Why don't you and Dick Miller survey it?" or something.

Plummer: The one that was surveyed. The first HABS, the first HABS-HAER survey.

Gillmer: Yeah. [REDACTED]
 for dniv a. And, anyway, that didn't come about. Then the, uh, the, uh... What's her name who was the chairman of curatorial before I was?

Leshner: Jane Tucker.

Gillmer: Oh, Jane Tucker, who was a good friend of mine, but she, her term ran out and they needed a replacement and so, they convinced me ...

Plummer: You got nailed.

Gillmer: What?

Plummer: You got nailed.

Gillmer: I got nailed, right. So, and that got me more intimately involved in the museum. I, I think I did a few things that, that were rather innovative that Jane Tucker didn't think of. But you know the history from there on.

Plummer: Yeah. Did you ever, did Howard Chappelle and you ever have any conversation about the museum, or...

Gillmer: No. He didn't, wasn't particularly convinced that the museum was a good thing.

Plummer: He wasn't?

Gillmer: And, uh, who was the fellow you mentioned a little while ago?

Leshner: Brewington?

Gillmer: Brewington. Brewington and Chappelle got along like a couple of buzz saws. And I knew Brewington pretty well, too, because when I first came to Annapolis, I had made a practice while I was in the Mediterranean of

39.

photographing all the little beach boats and all of the special boats over there I came across. And I thought, well, I better record some of this stuff and that was about the time the American Neptune was being published. Chajpelle was on the first board of directors and Brewington was the secretary up there. And I guess I sent it into the magazine. Brewington showed up on my doorstep after I did that and he said, "Hey, this is pretty good stuff, I'd like to publish it." He said, "Let's write some more on it ..."

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2 and END OF TAPE]

(Tape transcribed by N. Plummer; completed 2/9/97.)