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Berkeley, California

Lee Sandahl:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Jess Rigelhaupt
in 2008

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Interview #1: June 22, 2008

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01-00:00:00

Jess Rigelhaupt: It's June 22, 2008. I'm in Occidental, California, doing an oral history interview with Lee Sandahl. This is tape number one. To start, let me just as you to say your full name and the year you were born.

01-00:00:21

Lee Sandahl: Leland Joseph Sandahl. September 28, 1945.

01-00:00:23

Jess Rigelhaupt: And since the interview is focused on the Oakland Army Base, I'd like to ask if you could describe your first experience at the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:00:25

Lee Sandahl: I'm not sure that I do remember the first. But I do remember very early on in my waterfront career coming in the main gate there at the base. Me being a Marine clerk, I came in by myself and parked outside the base in probably a general parking area where not only longshore folks parked but also administrative people working at the army base parked. Although, a lot of the longshore folks came over on busses from the longshore haul. So I do remember a lot of people. You could have over a hundred people working on one ship and there were probably two or three ships working that day. There were so many people and so much activity going on that I actually forgot what I was supposed to do and I had to call back to the Oakland dispatch to find out what ship I was on because there were three different ships there and there were so many different people.

All of my work at the Army base was at the military ocean terminals shipping facilities. At that point, in the early sixties, we were loading cargo. Later on, as the war started to wind down—probably getting into '69 and maybe the early seventies—most of our work there was taking cargo off of vessels.

01-00:02:46

Jess Rigelhaupt: In this time period, when you first started in the early sixties, could you describe the different roles ILWU workers were doing? Both for longshore, clerks and the different jobs people of the union were doing at the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:03:08

Lee Sandahl: There were a lot of different types of operations taking place. You had cargo that came into the army base that was inside box cars, rail cars. You also had large pieces of equipment that came into the Army base on rail cars, but these cars were flat cars. So you had longshoremen that came and they facilitated both of those operations—the discharge of the cargo out of the rail cars and, also, the discharge of the cargo from the flatbed cars. There would also be cargo coming into the terminal that was being trucked in. The longshoremen did not do the lift driving work, taking the cargo off of the trucks. That was

assigned to teamsters. But as soon as that cargo hit the dock, if it wasn't on a pallet board then a longshore gang, consisting of two men and a lift driver, would come along and pick that cargo up off the dock and put that onto a pallet board. A clerk would also be working with that gang and he would take that cargo into an assigned area where it was going to be loaded onto a vessel.

Then you had the vessels working, also. There would be a gang on the ship. Anywhere from eight to twelve men in a gang depending on the type of cargo. There would be a gang boss with the gang and there would be a walking boss on the ship and the boss oversaw the gangs and there would be a walking boss on the dock who oversaw the loading operation on the dockside part. There would be a clerk attached to each gang on the ship plus a clerk supervisor who would oversee the hatch clerks. There would also be a supercargo who was in charge of the loading operation along with the two walking bosses. The supercargos' duties were to keep track of tonnage and to make sure that cargo was getting stowed properly in the different hatches. The clerk supervisor's duties would be to pass out all of the paperwork that the hatch clerks would need—we call that a lineup—for their operation for the day. The basic clerk would get together then with his lift driver and that's who he'd be working with the rest of the day, taking the lift driver to the various locations where the cargo was going to be loaded from. The hatch clerk was also responsible for a cargo log which documented the amount of cargo, tonnage and stowage position of the cargo that was loaded onto the vessel.

Also, on the dock, attached to the vessel, would be longshoremen that would be in the gang but they wouldn't be in the hatch. They would be dock men. They would be slinging the cargo on the ship's gear that was going to be hoisted by the winch into the hatch.

Trying to think. I think that pretty well covers the manning. There were times that we'd have barges come in and then we would have a barge operation and longshoremen sometimes drove the barge cranes and other times the operating engineers would drive the barge crane. That really just depended on the arrangement the stevedore company had with the particular barge company. Sometimes they'd insist that they didn't want anybody else driving the crane except for their man and that's how that would go.

01-00:07:35

Jess Rigelhaupt: At this point in the early sixties, was there anything unique or different about working as a clerk at the Oakland Army Base versus other job sites?

01-00:07:46

Lee Sandahl: At the Army base, we loaded a lot of heavy equipment, whether it would be recoilless rifles, those large—really not cannons—those large-barreled guns on wheels, and we would load tanks and we also loaded diesel locomotives, which would come alongside the ship on a barge. It was the kind of work that didn't take place every day at a commercial dock. There was no containerized

cargo in the early sixties. Toward the end of the sixties, we started to load an eight-by-eight square foot box called a CONEX. And most of the CONEX boxes that we loaded had security cargo in them. All of the rest of the cargo was loose cargo, stored by hand or on a pallet board with a longshoreman in the hole driving the forklift.

01-00:09:05

Jess Rigelhaupt: So was it relatively clear that most of what was going out from the Oakland Army Base in the early sixties was in support of the war in Vietnam?

01-00:09:24

Lee Sandahl: Yes. That was very clear. There would be an occasional at the base and I don't remember myself actually being involved in a situation where there was a real action protest by the protesters. In other words, they would be joining hands and trying to keep people out from work. That may have happened on occasion but it never really happened when I was working there. Most of the cargo was destined for the war in some way or another. Before the Vietnam war, vessels came and there was always cargo that was going to Japan and always cargo going to Korea and always cargo going to Okinawa and the Philippines. Now we had a lot of cargo going to places like Cameron Bay and Saigon, which eventually became the main destination for most of the cargo. Even the cargo going to the Philippines, at this point, was in support of the war in Vietnam.

01-00:10:56

Jess Rigelhaupt: In addition to the large guns that you described, the occasional tank, locomotives, what was some of the other cargo you remember shipping in support of the effort in Vietnam?

01-00:11:10

Lee Sandahl: We shipped a lot of jeeps. We shipped a lot vehicles that looked like, I forget what we called them, they were like troop carriers. A lot of heavy duty, four-wheel drive trucks of all sorts. Some trucks had large gasoline tanks on them. They were tanker trucks. Some of them you could tell they had the benches inside the back. They were going to be carrying troops around. There was probably more of that than any other type of wheeled vehicle. And it was constant. As soon as a line of cars would get their cargo discharged from them—I mean discharged off of the rail cars—then those cars would be switched out and a whole line of new equipment would come in. It went on for years like that, pretty much nonstop.

01-00:12:22

Jess Rigelhaupt: Could you describe how you get the large equipment—the troop carriers, the large four-wheel drive vehicles, the locomotives—how do you get that equipment onto the ship?

01-00:12:33

Lee Sandahl: The longshoremen would drive it from the yard. And again, all the cargo in the Army base was segregated by the particular ship that that cargo was going

to go on and then it had to be segregated again by port. So maybe the ship was going to go to Manila and then from there it was going to go down to Saigon and maybe make a stop in Cameron Bay. So we had many different ports and we would drive that vehicle up to the ship. There was special gear. It was a special bridle and there were hooks on the bridle that came down underneath and kind of grabbed the wheels in a basket kind of a form. We would signal the winch driver to take the slack out of the gear to kind of tighten up the baskets. The thing that made the basket tight on the wheel was the pressure from the cable that was going to hoist the truck onto the ship. So the winch driver would take all the slack out of the cable. The dock men would check the wheels to make sure that everything had been sitting right and that the basket was sitting firm on the wheels, then we would hoist the truck up. The winch driver would hoist it into the hatch.

01-00:14:37

Jess Rigelhaupt: So how big were the hatch openings?

01-00:014:42

Lee Sandahl: A regular general cargo hatch was probably twenty by twelve. Maybe a little bit wider. Some of them a little bit smaller. It depended on the ship.

01-00:15:16

Jess Rigelhaupt: How would you describe the physical layout of the Oakland Army Base? What is was like from the moment you entered the base and went to one of the docks that were working there?

01-00:15:37

Lee Sandahl: I'd come in off of Maritime Street and there was a road alongside me called Burma Road. But that was not the road I came in off of. I came off the Maritime, past the cafeteria. I'd park where I could in the lot which was between Burma Road and this road that I came in on. Then, to get into the base, everybody had to have security clearance. I would walk in. If I was early enough, then I could walk in and I could also get on the bus with the longshore folks and if I was going way down to Pier 7, I could get on the Pier 7 bus that would take me down. There were busses for Pier 6½ and for Pier 7. Actually, the same bus would stop at 6½ and 7. It was more than one bus, there were three or four buses that would take everybody down.

So, as you walked in, over to your left would be Pier 10 and straight in front of you was Pier 6. Pier 10 had a berthing facility for one vessel, Pier 6 had enough room for two vessels. In between Pier 6 and Pier 7 was a large open area. As I'm heading down Pier 6, I'm heading down right alongside the traffic lanes for the bay bridge. So I'm heading right out that way. As I look to my left, on the other side of the fence were people commuting back and forth on the bridge. So there was a long, open area between Pier 6 and Pier 7 and we called that Pier 6½. Room for one ship. Pier 7 kind of made a turn to left a little bit and that berth stuck out into the Oakland outer harbor and it was called Pier 7 and it had enough berths for three vessels.

01-00:17:59

Jess Rigelhaupt: The buildings at the Oakland Army Base. Could you describe them and what role they were playing? Were they housing troops? Was it storing cargo? What actual, physical building —

01-00:18:18

Lee Sandahl: Where I work—when I talk about the piers—the piers were for cargo storage. In the very front of the pier, in a small area, were people that handled all the documentation. In other words, each piece of cargo that came into that pier had a piece of paper. On that piece of paper, it had the name of the ship, it had the name of the port that it was going to go to, it had the weight and the cube of the cargo, and that piece of paper would go into one of those offices. That would all get put together on a pre-plan for that vessel.

Pier 7 was the same thing. It was large. I actually believe Pier 7 is still standing. Pier 6 may also still be standing, I'm not sure. Both of them are huge warehouse facilities built specifically for the Korean War. The interesting thing about the Army base is that the dock itself was poured concrete and it was two feet thick. I don't think I've ever seen anything quite like that in any other docks I've ever worked on. A piece of concrete, and so thick.

I know there were barracks across the street down towards the end and there was a cafeteria that was very close to Pier 6 although outside the restricted cargo area. That cafeteria was designed because there were a lot of buildings that took care of all the documentation for everything the military was doing there with billalanes and so forth. Those cafeterias were for those folks. Over on the other side of the base, further down towards the Naval Supply Center, was the military housing barracks. And there was also a cafeteria in there. I talk about food a lot because that's one of the things that I did. I had usually breakfast and lunch there and sometimes dinner.

01-00:21:00

Jess Rigelhaupt: You mentioned a restricted area. What was in that restricted area?

01-00:21:07

Lee Sandahl: In the restricted area was the cargo. In order for me to be able to work at the Naval Supply Center and the Army base, I had to go through a security clearance with the U.S. Coast Guard—which actually, I had the FBI in my neighborhood knocking on the doors of my neighbors, asking who I was.

01-00:21:45

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did your neighbors tell you anything that they were asked?

01-00:21:50

Lee Sandahl: They just said they told them good things.

01-00:22:00

Jess Rigelhaupt: The issue of clearance from the Coast Guard was off to something that goes further back in the Navy's history as far as some people being screened off a

particular job during the Korean War. Did you get a sense when you were working there that there were some people that were not being allowed to work certain jobs because of screening from the Coast Guard?

01-00:23:27

Lee Sandahl: I don't think I really understood what I was hearing until probably 1968 or 69. I had heard about folks that didn't want to work at the military because they were against the war. I didn't really have that choice because I wasn't a registered union person at that time. I was an extra permit clerk. Most of the work that was available to me was at the military and if you turn down work, you probably weren't going to work awhile. So I worked there although I'm not particularly a fan of war at all. I had heard stories about folks and I really didn't understand what that was about until 1968, maybe 1969. I actually got to know a couple of the people and the reason why they didn't have a clearance to get in there. We also had folks who didn't want to work there—probably could have had a clearance but chose not to work at the military because of their views on the war.

01-00:24:11

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did you get a sense that people chose not to work there particularly as a way to avoid having to go through the Coast Guard clearance?

01-00:24:26

Lee Sandahl: That may have very well been, but I was actually pretty preoccupied with the work that I was doing. That could have had a lot to do with some of the folks not working over there is that maybe there was—yeah.

01-00:25:00

Jess Rigelhaupt: The cargo that you mentioned in the restricted area—did you ever get a sense that there was dangerous cargo moving through the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:25:06

Lee Sandahl: We loaded ammunition. We loaded small arms ammunition. All of the large-scale munitions were loaded out of Port Chicago. In fact, sometimes a ship would come in and it would have a lot of what we would call dunnage and cribbing—leftover shoring material in the hold of the ship, lumber that had been used to secure the cargo when it was loaded before so that way, if the ship was out at sea and it was rolling, this cargo was going to stay in place. We would be assigned, the longshoremen, to clean the hatch of the ship—actually get a broom and come down and sweep it and have it really clean before it went up to Port Chicago to load munitions, is what they really loaded up there.

But I do remember quite often small arms ammunition in crates. Later on, a lot of that went into these eight-by-eight CONEXes that I was talking about earlier. But at the very beginning, it would go into crates. It would go into the security lockers on the vessel.

01-00:26:41

Jess Rigelhaupt: Was there ever potential for explosions with the small arms ammunition or was it relatively safe to work with?

01-00:26:51

Lee Sandahl: I don't know.

01-00:26:54

Jess Rigelhaupt: This wasn't something that you or your coworkers talked about?

01-00:27:02

Lee Sandahl: There was concern. We loaded a lot of different types of cylinders of compressed gas and that was cargo that had to be stored on deck. So we knew that, immediately, cargo that was going to be stored on deck, we called that "label cargo." It even had a little thing on it that said "Handle with Care." I knew there was some concern with that sort of cargo. I know, on my load plan, a lot of times, I really didn't know what the commodities were, but we had green, red, and yellow labels and those labels could not go together. They could not be stowed on the same side of the ship together, they could not be stored in a compatible compartment. They were just not compatible. They had to be separated up on the ship when they were loaded up there. Sometimes I'd load a label hatch and I'd load that hatch all day. Most of the label cargo was stored up at the front of the ship at hatch number one of the ship or at the back of the ship by hatch number five or hatch number seven in what we'd call "the poop deck." It was always stowed outside, never in the hatch.

So I think there was a reason for that, and certainly if it was stowed improperly or if the labels were together, I don't know what the series of events would have been to trigger an event. But I think there was always a concern with loading the label cargo.

01-00:29:17

Jess Rigelhaupt: On a typical day in this time period, in the early sixties, how many people would you estimate were working on the base?

01-00:29:28

Lee Sandahl: When you say "on the base," do you mean the cargo operation part, the ship loading? Because that's the only part that I have any historical knowledge about.

01-00:29:44

Jess Rigelhaupt: If you could start there, but you could also give an impression of some of the other activities and numbers of people you observed doing other things that you may not be as familiar with. Just your observations and your recollections.

01-00:30:00

Lee Sandahl: Each ship that was working—if you had a gang of ten men and you were working three hatches—that's thirty men. I'd say you're probably going to have close to sixty men per ship. That's including all the clerks, all the bosses.

Typically there would be three to four ships working every single day and night. So we're going to have around 200 people involved on the ships.

Then we're going to have all the dock side operation going on, too. I think you might get close to 400-500 ILWU [International Longshore and Warehouse Union] longshore folks working on the base. It could possibly be more if there were more than three or four ships. There was berthing room for seven ships and there were times when I went there when there were seven ships working. So I think you might have 500 folks from the ILWU and a constant stream of commercial truck drivers bringing cargo to the dock. Typically, you would probably have over a hundred loads of cargo a day on trucks. Then you'd have clerks assigned to each pier to facilitate the documentation for the trucking operation and a lift driver also. You could have seven to eight to ten clerks at each pier. At Pier 6 and Pier 7.

I'd say 500 is probably a good number, but quite possibly more.

01-00:32:30

Jess Rigelhaupt: And then what about other parts of the base? Did you get a sense of how many troops were there and what other types of activities did you observe?

01-00:32:50

Lee Sandahl: I had occasion at time to go over into the administrative offices. There was a period of six months where I took a job with Matson Lines and it was a summer job. I spent the whole summer working not as an ILWU clerk but working as a mailperson for Matson Lines. So I was in charge of picking up all of the different cargo documentation when a vessel is finished and taking that over to the main office in San Francisco, and then taking any kind of documentation from that main office over to the various piers which included the Naval Supply Center, the Oakland Army Base, Matson's operation—a small container operation over in Alameda, which I believe the year that I did this was either 1966 or 67—and then Matson's large terminal operation over in San Francisco at Pier 30 and 32.

So I had occasion to go into some of the large offices that were right adjacent to the Oakland Army Base but not in the restricted area. Those offices were full of people. They were three story buildings. I don't know how many people were in those offices. Probably as many people as there were and more that were working on the docks over there. A figure might be, I don't know—there was three or four of those buildings and I say there were at least a couple hundred people in each building. Probably more because they were three-story buildings. They were all involved with the movement of goods.

01-00:34:51

Jess Rigelhaupt: Were these mostly active military people working in these buildings or was it more civil service people?

01-00:35:00

Lee Sandahl: The employees themselves were civil service. The oversight was done by the military. So there may have been a civil service supervisor along with a military person, but all of the people doing the typing and preparing the documentation were civil service employees.

01-00:35:20

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did you ever get a sense of how many troops were shipping out of the Oakland Army Base and headed toward Vietnam?

01-00:35:35

Lee Sandahl: I didn't. I think part of the reason why was, although the troops were housed at the Oakland Army Base, the transport ships sailed from the naval supply center. Although I did occasionally work at the naval supply center, I don't ever remember working there when a transport vessel was there. That was just the way it was. There wasn't any reason, it's just how circumstance prevailed. So I don't know, no.

01-00:36:19

Jess Rigelhaupt: How integrated were the activities at the Oakland Army Base and the naval supply center? Was there any coordination between the activities going on at one another or were they really completely separate?

01-00:36:37

Lee Sandahl: They were, from my recollection, pretty separate entities. A truck driver may get into line at the Army base and before he got up to the gate to get up to the security area realize that he was in the wrong line and he belonged down the street at the naval supply center. Or every once in awhile, a truck might get in and we'd be looking at the documentation and we'd see "NSC - Naval Supply Center" on there and we'd have to send him down there.

01-00:37:32

Jess Rigelhaupt: Toward the later years of the Vietnam War as it's winding down, you mentioned that more cargo was coming back to the U.S. What were you unloading?

01-00:37:46

Lee Sandahl: We were unloading a lot of the wheeled vehicles that we had sent over. All of that kind of equipment was coming back.

01-00:38:17

Jess Rigelhaupt: One of the things that another person I interviewed mentioned about both World War II and the Korean War is caskets of soldiers who had died were also coming back to the Oakland Army Base. I'm wondering if that's something you saw during the Vietnam War.

01-00:38:40

Lee Sandahl: We sent the caskets over. I don't remember caskets coming back through the Army base. And they very well may have I just don't recall that. Most of my jobs there were on loading operations. Vessels were coming back and

discharging stuff. Most of the discharge went into Pier 6½. That's where most of the real heavy duty equipment was also loaded because there was no shed there. That was a big open area.

01-00:39:44

Jess Rigelhaupt: Was there anything unique about the work you did at the Oakland Army Base compared to other job sites other the specific security clearance—you needed approved by the Coast Guard.

01-00:40:11

Lee Sandahl: It was unique to me because you knew there was a war going on and you got a sense of it. We loaded a lot of soda pop and beer. Sometimes whole ships full of soda pop, beer and cigarettes. And you just kind of got a sense that there was really something going on over there.

I'm not sure I ever really felt too good about the whole thing. And I had spent some time in the military. I had joined the National Guard. I had been back in the proving grounds in Aberdeen, Maryland and I had gone to school back there for several months. They also had a Vietnam jungle which sort of was a training course for people that were going over to Vietnam. I knew I wasn't going, but I also knew that once you were in the military that the military had control of your life. They could have changed my circumstance at any time, which is what this particular political administration in Washington has done with the reserve units and the National Guard. So that really never left my mind either when I was in the military. Until I got back home, I knew that my life wasn't really mine. And I still had another four years of meetings to go to, also, so anything could have happened during that time.

There was a sense that we were at war and the reasons for us being there were very, very unclear.

01-00:42:38

Jess Rigelhaupt: You mentioned the soda pop, the beer, and the cigarettes being shipped over brought home to you the idea that something was going on over there. Now why did those items resonate bring home the idea that something was going over in a way that—and maybe I misheard your statement—the large weapons being shipped over didn't signal to you that something was going on, in the same was as soda, beer, and cigarettes.

01-00:43:11

Lee Sandahl: I don't know. I looked at all the beer, and I said well, in order to be there, you'd have to really probably medicate yourself in order to get through this. I saw the weapons and I knew the bullets and I knew that big shells came out of them, but there was a stronger sense of the relationship with the actual, with that stuff and the people that were there, for me. I saw the nicotine as being a stimulant and I saw the beer as knocking off the edge (besides everything else you could get your hands on over there), and I says wow, this much beer? This must not be too good!

01-00:44:01

Jess Rigelhaupt: How did the work at the Oakland Army Base change at the end of the Vietnam War? I imagine that it did take awhile to wind down as far as stopping to see cargo to come through, but how did work change at the Oakland Army Base as it did wind down?

01-00:44:30

Lee Sandahl: Well it changed for me because the job availability wasn't there anymore. I was actually spending less time there now and more time at the commercial docks. In '69, I became a union member so I was kind of picking where I wanted to go. Since I had spent very little time at the commercial docks, I chose to go see what was going on there. There were other times when I was in the dispatch hall and that was the only work there was, so I would go to the Oakland Army Base. Although we were still sending a little bit of cargo over, mostly, now, ships were coming back and I noticed how high in the water the ships sat when they came back. You could almost tell what kind of cargo was in them by how high in the water they came in. Rolling stock took up a lot of room but it didn't necessarily have a lot of measured ton to it. So you'd see these ships come back and it would be all full vehicles—vehicles that were shot up and flat tires and sometimes you'd see the tire would have this bamboo punching stake driven into the tire. Sabotage.

01-00:46:21

Jess Rigelhaupt: Certainly, the Bay Area at the time was known as one of the hotbeds of an anti-Vietnam War sentiment. Did that ever influence discussions you had with coworkers or dealing with what it was like to be working at the Army base during the Vietnam War simultaneous to a lot of anti-Vietnam War sentiment and movement, activity {inaudible}?

01-00:47:01

Lee Sandahl: I was somewhere between the age of twenty-two and probably twenty-six. There were very few folks my age working on the dock. I was working with people in the longshore industry who were in their fifties or older. There were some younger folks also, and I used to listen a lot. But people my age were very, very few.

So I did a lot of listening and yes, I'm sure for the union folks, the choices were, the union could do the work, and if we chose not to do it then the civil service would do it. Those were issues that I'm sure were brought up at the membership meetings at the longshore local. These were our choices. We can have this work opportunity and if you don't want to go there, then we won't go. However that came down, the vote was certainly to go. For whatever the reasons.

I think most of the people that had anti-war sentiment probably didn't go. While I was working at the Army base, because of the large age difference between me and the people I was working with—plus I was new in the industry—I didn't say a whole lot. I did a lot of listening. I heard some

grumbling once and a while. For the most part, I think most of the folks that chose to work there went there for a day's pay.

01-00:49:40

Jess Rigelhaupt: And the union itself was anti-Vietnam War.

01-00:49:50

Lee Sandahl: It was.

01-00:49:52

Jess Rigelhaupt: So it sounds as the decision was made that it was still better to have the work there than not, even if a lot of union leadership and members themselves were opposed to the policy.

01-00:50:08

Lee Sandahl: I think the union leadership at the top, if they had chosen to not work there—if that is what Harry had wanted to do, then we wouldn't be working there. I'm not sure what his choices were. His choice may well have been something along the lines of well, we have these folks over there fighting and somebody's going to load those ships, whether we do it or the military does it. It's going to happen. It's probably a politically correct gesture, even though we do oppose the war. Somebody has to take care of those folks that are over there. This is just what I'm thinking.

01-00:51:11

Jess Rigelhaupt: With technology in general, do you get a sense in those years that you were doing a lot of work with the Oakland Army Base, that the military was ahead or behind of commercial ports in using technology to expedite the loading and unloading process?

01-00:51:34

Lee Sandahl: They were way behind. Because you get into the mid-sixties now and we have containerization. Right across from us was Sea-Land, McLean Industries. John McLean, actually—containerization was his idea, it was his invention. By the mid-sixties, in the commercial cargo end of it, you could see the transition. Although it was slow, you could see it being made. In fact, more and more containers were being loaded onto break bulk vessels using the gear from the ship. McLean Industries, Sea-Land, they had already had cranes right across from the Oakland Army Base and Madsen Navigation over in Alameda also had a small container operation going.

01-00:52:38

Jess Rigelhaupt: And was the military ahead or behind in its use of intermodal transport in the sense that lots of trucks were coming in, lots of trains carrying locomotives, large four-wheel drive trucks—in the sense of the close integration of trucks, rail, and ships at the Oakland Army Base? Did you see parallel use of intermodal transport at commercial ports nearby in this time period?

01-00:53:10

Lee Sandahl: That particular dynamic that you're talking about really prevailed at the Oakland Army Base. More so than if you took the whole rest of the commercial docks in the Bay Area. That transportation process—truck, rail to ship—I'm not sure I'll ever see anything like that again.

How well it was facilitated, I couldn't tell you. I was too far away from it, really, to know.

01-00:53:58

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did you get a sense then that the use of that intermodal transport inspired other commercial shipping lines and, say, the Port of Oakland to try and integrate these rail, trucking, and bring them very close together to facilitate and expedite the loading and unloading of ships?

01-00:54:22

Lee Sandahl: No, I did not get a sense of that. At the commercial docks, working the break bulk ship, you might load one or two pieces of large cargo along those lines. The vessel might work for three or four days and maybe one of those days would be doing what we would call heavy lifts. Later on, in fact up to this point, even now, you have special ships that are designed for heavy lift equipment and that's all they do. That wasn't the case back then on the commercial docks. The military, in fact it must have been fairly coordinated because, as I said earlier, as we would finish a load of flat cars, the train would come in and pull those empty flat cars out and then back in with a whole load of stuff. So they had already had stuff staged outside waiting to come in. The same engine that pulled the stuff out did not bring it back in. There was another engine with that lined up. So there was no real standby time other than waiting for that other train to bring the stuff in.

01-00:55:47

Jess Rigelhaupt: Now the containerization is used more and the containers coming off ships and onto ships fit directly onto rail cars and trucks. Do you now see a more parallel use of the different modes of transport that you saw that Oakland Army Base?

01-00:56:12

Lee Sandahl: There is some comparisons there. There is. Whether commercial shippers were looking at that and using that as a template, I don't know.

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02-00:00:00

Jess Rigelhaupt: I'm on tape number two of Lee Sandahl. Did you ever get a sense that there were different environmental regulations or different chemicals in use in the sense that—in my understand at least—the military has different rules and regulations they have to follow than, say, commercial entities or a commercial

port? Did you ever get a sense that there were ever any special environmental concerns at the Oakland Army Base versus other places you worked?

02-00:00:53

Lee Sandahl: The Oakland Army Base is the only place that I recall loading hazardous cargo. Certain commodities were not compatible. Most of the hazardous cargo, including batteries, had to be stowed on deck. We called it “label cargo” because each piece of cargo had a colored label on it with also, I believe, a Coast Guard-documented number. I remember red label ran from 3.1 to 3.5. That was the category. There was compressed gas. There was a label for ammunition. There was a label for rolling stock batteries. Actually, there’s a whole large register of regulations. We had to pay particularly close attention to that when we were loading these types of cargo. They were also stored segregated on the dock, separated from other cargos and separated from themselves if they were not compatible. So we had what we called a “label area” on the dock.

02-00:03:01

Jess Rigelhaupt: Could you describe the military presence to me? Obviously there was—it was the Oakland Army Base. But how often did you see military police, security, and if you could, describe how that was different than other places you worked.

02-00:03:20

Lee Sandahl: In the secure area, there were military personnel in there all the time. There were more nonmilitary than there were military. But there were military personnel in there and there was a military cargo specialist assigned to each vessel. And there were always people going back and forth between the cargo documentations offices just on the outside of the secured area and coming back in to the secure area where the vessels were being loaded with whatever information—new information, new loading instruction, whatever they were doing. I don’t know what they were doing but I know that that they would come back in and they’d meet with the union cargo supervisors and they would discuss new strategy or whatever.

02-00:04:20

Jess Rigelhaupt: How would you describe the relationship between the Oakland Army Base and the West Oakland community just next to the base?

02-00:04:39

Lee Sandahl: I don’t know what the relationship was. I’m not sure how much—and this not really a loaded question, but you know, me being a Caucasian person and just by the color of my skin, I’m being privileged as it is, that West Oakland community was a tough spot. I don’t know how much revenue from the military poured over into that community and if the community benefited from any of that. Maybe a little bit did. The community itself wasn’t really set up to probably capture a lot of that revenue if it was there.

02-00:06:44

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did you get a sense that there were a fair number of people, a small number—I mean it's probably hard to quantify or describe in detail—but did you get a sense that a fair number of people from West Oakland worked at the Oakland Army Base in whatever different types of positions might have been available?

02-00:07:02

Lee Sandahl: I didn't. Most of the people that I knew, and because of doing that job with Matson Lines for that particular summer, most of the people I knew were commuting from outside the area. Civil Service folks. I'm sure there were people from the community too, and there were longshore folks that lived in West Oakland and certainly in Berkeley. A large number of folks lived in the Emeryville/Berkeley area at that time.

02-00:07:58

Jess Rigelhaupt: So it certainly didn't appear to you, though, that there was a clear, close connection between jobs at the base and the people who lived in West Oakland?

02-00:08:10

Lee Sandahl: No, I don't think that there was any kind of targeting for the community, no.

02-00:08:22

Jess Rigelhaupt: Now did you have much opportunity to continue working at the Oakland Army Base after the sixties? It sounds like your time there wound down around 1969. Did you ever go back and work there after that?

02-00:08:40

Lee Sandahl: There was some occasional work in the seventies. Actually, there was a period of time where we had a longshore strike in 1971. It was a long strike. Many months. Not a whole year, I think it was seven or eight months of really no work. Also, during that time, the transition of the cargo change in the industry from break bulk to containerized cargo was taking place rapidly down in southern California because Los Angeles and Long Beach, those two ports, sit right on the ocean, which was very easy to fill in.

We saw a transition in cargo. When we had break bulk cargo, the Bay Area, I think, predominantly was the larger port. Into the mid-seventies, a lot of the containerized cargo was now going through the ports in southern California. For me, being a B-registered clerk and not a full A-member, there was a period of time where I worked occasionally but very little for three years. I stayed up here at my home in the Sebastopol area. I actually worked in the apple orchards a little bit and drove tractor and picked apples and pruned trees and things like that. That containerized transition thing that was happening in the industry gave us less work opportunity up here in northern California. As folks retired from the industry, and really didn't hire anyone in this industry from almost twenty years—from 1969 to 1989—because we had more folks

than we needed due to the containerization, the automation thing that was happening.

So by the time I got back into the full swing of things again in the Bay Area, the military base was not shut down, but there were just regular clerks that worked there all the time. Once in awhile, a job would become available. But most of my time was now spent at the commercial docks.

02-00:11:47

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did you notice any changes at the Oakland Army Base in the seventies and the later years that you worked there on occasion?

02-00:11:59

Lee Sandahl: There just wasn't a whole lot going on as far as that goes. That was the big change. There was still cargo going to South Korea and still to the Philippines. We were still supplying all our bases in the Pacific. A lot of cargo going to Hawaii. But it was almost like a ghost town at times because I was so used to seeing many ships there to where there would be days without a ship. I'd be working on the commercial docks and I'd look over there and it would be a week or so and then a ship would come in. Very seldom would there be two ships at one time.

02-00:12:48

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did you notice any build up in activity around the first Gulf War in '91 at the Oakland Army Base?

02-00:12:54

Lee Sandahl: There was a lot of all of a sudden activity. In fact, there was so much activity that some of the ships were chartered from foreign companies because we didn't have enough ready, available break bulk cargo ships. The military, still at this time, had not really gotten into containerization, so they were still reliant on a cargo transportation system that was getting pretty antiquated at this time. In fact, we didn't have enough folks left in the longshore local to be able to supply all the people that were needed in order to rig the gear on these ships and drive the winches. So, at times, there would be ships that we just couldn't fill all the gangs that we needed to do because we didn't really have the skilled people in the union anymore that knew how to do that kind of work.

02-00:14:10

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did you have any actually opportunities to work at the base during the first Gulf War, or was this just observations and things you heard from coworkers?

02-00:14:23

Lee Sandahl: I was in there a couple of days. I didn't work there a lot but I was in there a couple of times but I went because I also had this thing about ships and this romanticism and I knew that there were all these older vessels there and I wanted to go over and see them. So I went. But it was a little chaotic. It was not as well-organized as what was going on in Vietnam and there were a lot of

people who had their way of doing it and they really didn't seem to be able to get together and I saw pieces of cargo going in and pieces of cargo coming back out because they didn't fit. I said, well. During the Vietnam War, when the walking bosses that were there—and this had nothing to do with walking bosses during the Gulf War—but those older folks had been in the industry for many years and they knew cargo. They could look at a piece of cargo and they could tell you by looking down in the hatch if that was going to fit or not. They knew. They knew ships and they knew cargo. By the time Gulf War came along twenty years later, most of our folks had been at container terminals. All of a sudden, they were thrust over into this area that was, for some of them, really new stuff. So things actually had to be measured. You had to measure the hatch and you had to know whether you had the room or not and if you were taking the chance because you were in a hurry, you could sometimes be wrong.

02-00:15:59

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did that surprise you that the military hadn't integrated containerization as much in their operation?

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Lee Sandahl: I was probably more surprised that the working relationship between the union and the military seemed to be fractured. And you'd have to throw the stevedore company in there too. In fact, I saw the union take a step backwards because of, at times, inexperience and just take orders from the military or the stevedore company and just do what they were told. I think I was more surprised at that than the fact that the ships that they were using were kind of antiquated. Where were the roll-on, roll-off vessels? I knew they were out there because they had been built in the eighties. That would have been the way. Which is what they've done with this latest conflict in Iraq. It's all rolling stock on these other vessels.

02-00:17:26

Jess Rigelhaupt: So it was just a few years after the first Gulf War that, in 1995, the Oakland Army Base was put on the base closure list. I'm curious to know what you think about the decision to put the Oakland Army Base on the closure list.

02-00:17:44

Lee Sandahl: That was all political. That was all a backlash from the Bush administration on a get even with the folks in California type of thing. Because, if you look around the Bay Area, you'll see that every military base was close. Mare Island, Treasure Island, Alameda Naval Air Station, the Oakland Army Base, and the Naval Supply Center. The only thing that was left open was the Concord Naval Supply Center, the ammunition area. Our work in the Bay Area was moved up to the state of Washington and our work at the Naval Air Station at Alameda, all of those ships were either moved up to Everett in Washington or down to San Diego. I believe there's still a large repair facility in Long Beach with the Navy. But they don't like our liberalism in the Bay Area. They wiped us out! [laughter]. It was a real get-even. And not good for

the communities, a real disaster for places like Vallejo, which have not recovered at all.

02-00:19:17

Jess Rigelhaupt: What have you heard about the redevelopment of the Oakland Army Base and your impression on how that felt?

02-00:19:30

Lee Sandahl: I'm somewhat involved. I had asked the Port of Oakland a couple years ago to what their plans were going to be for Pier 7 when the building was completed with the Bay Bridge. I had let them know that at that time the union was still interested in having a marine facility that handled break bulk cargo. Although I never got a response back from the port, my feeling is that the Port of Oakland is not interested in break bulk cargo. Actually, there would be a lot of space there also to have an automobile receiving center and processing center for cars. Subaru was in there at one time.

I think the way the port looks at cargo revenue is: container revenue is real clean revenue. You get your money up front for that box. You charge so much for each particular box that hits the dock. Break bulk revenue is a lot harder to recover. You usually don't get your check until all the cargo's been delivered because they only time you know how your outturn is going to be, whether all the cargo was there to begin with. I would like to see the port interested in keeping a facility like that open. I don't think it's going to happen.

I'm not sure what their intentions are. Most of my time now is spend up in Sacramento. We have folks in the local unions that are attending the meetings with the port. All the warehousing across the street, I would have liked to have seen something happen with that as far as cargo is concerned, too. I think that the port or the city may own some of that at this point and they're talking about some kind of car dealership row in there, which, to me, is not compatible with cargo. I would have liked to have seen some sort of a rail operation there in the back. Maybe even have Maritime completely shut down so containers can go right across Maritime onto rail and be railed out of the port, which is really the clean way at this point to move that cargo, because you're going to eliminate a lot truck trips, and the teamsters are not going to like me for this. The fact is that your pollution is coming from these trucks and if you can get those rails in close to the terminal and you can take that box from the ship and move it to the rail without having to move it onto a truck and take it off again and put it on the rail, you've eliminated a lot of trucking trips and you've eliminated a lot of noxious emissions, which the people in West Oakland and my folks on the dock are breathing every day.

02-00:23:35

Jess Rigelhaupt: And did that go, in your impression, more smoothly, in a sense of when the naval supply center closed, it more quickly became a part of the port's operation in the interest of furthering the container ships that could come in and out of Oakland?

02-00:23:58

Lee Sandahl: Say that again.

02-00:24:00

Jess Rigelhaupt: From what I've read, when the naval supply center closed, it quickly became a part of the Port of Oakland. The land very much became integrated into the Port of Oakland operations, while the Oakland Army Base has been more of a process. I'm curious if that's your impression as well, that when the naval supply center closed, compared to the Oakland Army Base, more quickly became part of the port operations.

02-00:24:26

Lee Sandahl: It did. That transition was made quickly. I think there were plans there. Maybe this thing with the Bay Bridge has kind of put a lot of stuff on hold at this point.

02-00:24:53

Jess Rigelhaupt: Did you ever work with civil service gangs or was it all ILWU workers that were loading and unloading ships?

02-00:25:03

Lee Sandahl: There were occasions at the naval supply center were there were civil service gangs. Civil service gangs worked all of the fleet supply vessels.

02-00:25:49

Jess Rigelhaupt: Those are largely my questions. The way I like to end is to ask two more questions. 1) Is there anything I should have asked but didn't? 2) Is there anything you'd like to add about the Oakland Army Base?

02-00:26:12

Lee Sandahl: There's a soft spot in heart there because I spent so much time and I think that's why I was facilitating with the people from the port to try to look at that facility as still being some sort of an operational cargo operation. Of course, for my folks in the union, that makes work for us. No, I think your questions were good. I think we covered a lot of ground.

[End of Interview]