

This interview is with Ron Noullett, who is a retired longshoreman with ILWU Local 502. The major themes of this interview are car ships, cranes, and winches, but Noullett also talks about considering working for the US military in Vietnam during the 1960s.

Interview Date: May 6, 2015

Interviewer: Pamela Stern

Date Range: No dates given, though generally 1960s to present.

Sound Recording Length:

Clip #1: 14:19;

Clip #2: 0:17.

Ron Noullett is a retired longshoreman and member of International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU) local 502. In 1962, Noullett began working as a longshoreman at the age of 16, and after 10 years of working as a casual he earned ILWU membership. Although he retired in 2011, Noullett still remains active in the union on various caucuses and committees, and currently is a part of an education committee teaching new local 502 members about the history of the union. Throughout the interview he speaks highly of about his experience working on the waterfront. Noullett states that he worked everywhere throughout his whole career, in the interview he mentions Pacific Coast Terminals (PCT), Overseas Transport, Delta rice mills, and Fraser Surrey Docks.

Section 00:00 – 07:21

- In this section, Ron talks about photographs he had taken of damaged vehicles and describes the event depicted. Discussing a photo labelled “Damaged Fords #4,” he said, showed “false decking.” This involved 40”x40” platforms that went on top of scaffolding, and cars would be driven on to it. It was not used for loads of lumber or steel, a deckload of cars weights a lot less than a deckload of lumber or steel. There is a whole evolution of car ships: initially they were cargo ships that contained cars. Cars would be removed using a system of nets, and taken out of the hatch using cranes/winches. Then, there was a “frame” which included “fingers” that wrapped around the wheels. After this, there was a cage that would be lowered over a car in the hatch. When the cage reached the deck, you could attach the cage to the car, the car would be put in neutral, and the car would be moved to the dock. He doesn’t recall anyone driving the cars. He said compared to today’s car ships it was a very slow process, but it was quicker than the nets and the fingers. Today they use the ro/ro system, which he describes as being like a “big ferry.” He isn’t aware of where these evolutionary changes come from, but he speculates they might have come from the initial manufacturer/export country (eg. Japan).

Section 07:22 – 11:47

- In this section, Ron talks about cranes and winches. A crane “swings out”, the same as a swinging stick. Winches however are standing gear, which includes a fixed, centre boom called a “mid-ship” boom, and one boom that’s fixed and over the dock or scow, the “yard boom.” The mid-ship boom and the yard boom were linked together. Each boom has a winch with a cable going up to the tip of the boom, and the booms were joined in the centre. The weight would shift from the mid-ship boom to the yard boom and vice versa as cargo was being loaded or unloaded in or out of the hatch. Initially, there were two winch drivers, one on each winch. Eventually the employer decided that one person could operate both winches, one for each boom, and Ron describes this transition as involved “quite the art.” With experience, the two winch drivers got better and often were able to predict what the other

was going to do. Ron agreed that this was like a “ballet”, and some guys could “make those machines sing.”

Section 11:48 – 14:19(end of Clip #1)

- In this section, Ron talks a bit about crane operators today. Today, a crane operator sits up in a cab (not a gantry crane but a boom crane). He sits between the two booms, and he can pick up a load of cargo, and move it in and out of the hatch. A boom crane and a gantry crane have many differences. A gantry crane does not have a swinging boom.

Section 0:00-0:17 (the whole of Clip #2):

- In this section, Pam summarizes the key points from a story Ron told off the record, including the story of a ship which sprung a leak, all the cars sashed around and got wrecked, though Ron intervened to say that he was not sure how the water got in. The clip cuts off mid-sentence.