

# Blagg.Alex1

## Tape 1

Thu, 5/5 4:49PM • 17:14

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Shipyard, job, hired, portsmouth, school, paint, tank, little bit, home, Shops, neighborhood, olive branch, life, kids, clockwork, ship, pretty, preservation, career, timeframe

### Interview Particulars

<b>Date:</b>	May 4, 2022, Wednesday
<b>Time:</b>	11:00 AM – 11:50 AM
<b>Location:</b>	IC Norcom High School TV Production Set
<b>Interviewee:</b>	Alexander Blagg
<b>Interviewer:</b>	Savian Rowe
<b>Camera/Tech:</b>	Robert Edwards
<b>Instructor:</b>	Jasmine Painter

00:00

**Interviewer:** Good morning and thank you for participating in the Oral History Project. I'm Savian Rowe and today I'll be interviewing you about your life story from childhood to adulthood, your Shipyard career and, lastly, my, last life after retirement. Your kind of young to retire. So let's start. Could you please tell us where you were born?

00:25

I was born August 31 1988, here in Portsmouth, Virginia. And I had lived for the majority of my life at my parents' residence, which is over in the Simonsdale-Olive Branch area.

00:43

**Interviewer:** What was the neighborhood right during this time?

00:47

At that point in time, it was pretty quiet. There were, there was no trouble. We didn't hear gunshots all the time. You didn't hear much about people having cars broken into, houses broken into. It was peaceful. Kids could go out run the neighborhood not have to worry about a thing.

01:05

**Interviewer:** Who were some of your childhood friends?

01:08

I had a couple friends in the neighborhood. I had a friend named Josh Morrison who lived down the street from me. One that was around the corner from him, about two or three houses down from him, Anthony Childress. And then I had Ramon and Andrei Perez, who lived a block away from me.

01:32

**Interviewer:** What are some things you like to visit as a kid?

01:36

I like to actually want to Coleman's nursery when it was still around, which, I believe is where the YMCA is now currently.

01:45

**Interviewer:** The downtown one, the Effingham one?

01:48

The one off of High Street? Over in churchmen. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** 01:54

Could you tell us what you remember about elementary and middle school?

01:58

So elementary school, I went to Simonsdale, the old Simonsdale, not the new one. And I remember doing a lot of arts and crafts. And I do remember getting in trouble. Because I had brought one of those pullout sword, like lance things to school. And I was carrying it on my back when we were going to recess and it opened up as I was walking in hit the girl behind me in the eye and the teacher took it away from me, and I never did get it back. And the rest of my elementary school career was actually at Olive Branch Elementary, which I think is now something else. But over there, it was pretty good for the most part. There was one teacher in particular that didn't like me named Miss Baker. And that was probably because she didn't like my brother. He was a little bit of a troublemaker, and he came through her class before me. So she didn't like me too much. And I remember she tried to fail me in reading but my homeroom teacher didn't believe her and pulled me out of her class and gave me a test and found out I was actually advanced reading and kept me in her class instead.

03:30

**Interviewer:** What was high school like for you?

03:23

High school? It was, well, it was Wilson. So. It was, it can be pretty hectic at times. At the time that I went there, during like lunchtime, you were as a student allowed to roam the halls. That changed later on. But during that timeframe, when you were allowed to roam, everyone had their own little cliques or groups that they went to. And it was a little bit of segregation there, believe it or not. The white kids kind of all went to one area and the black kids all went to another area. And that's just how it was. No body caused any issues with each other. White kids would be over there playing hacky sack and all the black kids would be over there just chillin', hanging out, or listening to rap or some r&b or something, because they all brought in like their phones, they'd sneak 'em in, like we all did. And for the most part, it was pretty peaceful. Everyone kept to themselves. But there were plenty of fights. I can tell you that.

04:26

**Interviewer:** What did you do after you graduated from Wilson High School?

04:30

After I graduated from Wilson, I attempted going to college for a little bit. And it really wasn't for me. I wasn't a big fan of school in the first place growing up, as I'm sure a lot of students can understand. And I wanted to take a year off. My parents wouldn't let me. They wanted me to keep going to school. So I ended up at ODU for a year. Didn't do too great. So I stopped going to college and just started working full time. And eventually that led me to Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

05:09

**Interviewer:** Can you remember attending any local Portsmouth events?

05:15

Yeah, I mean, we used to go to all the parades and stuff that they would have on different holidays. We'd go, come and see the fireworks like on Fourth of July. When they would do the Christmas lights and stuff down here, they used to do, I think some at the art museum too, when they move Coleman's we used to go over there and see the exhibit there as well. And then when I was in school, you know, all the Christmas chorus events and stuff. I was participating in those. So I'd be already down there. So when we were done, we just walk around and see what was going on

05:55

**Interviewer:** Was your favorite about, like favorite memories that you had in Portsmouth?

06:01

Favorite memory in Portsmouth? Oh, that's a tough one. I mean, I always liked the Fourth of July fireworks. But that I wouldn't say that was specifically a Portsmouth thing, because that was kind of divided between Portsmouth and Norfolk since it was on the water between us both. But it was always fun going out and sitting out here and watching them. And being that it was late at night, you always had to end up running through the neighborhoods to get back to your car before the cops gave you all tickets. So

06:42

**Interviewer:** What are some of your stories, memories growing about your family life involving the shipper?

06:48

Well, I do remember that, the schedule was like clockwork. So both my parents, even when I was a young kid, I think ever since I was born, had been working in the Shipyard. So it was like clockwork, whenever they showed up at home. I knew exactly when they were going to come pick me up if when I was really young from the babysitter. And if they weren't there, then something happened. But that didn't usually happen. So it was always my dad would be home at 430 Like clockwork. So say I was sneaking out of school or something, I knew what time I needed to not be in the house so that he wouldn't see me home early. But uh, I remember as a young kid, I'd have to go with my mom when my dad did have to work late, we'd have to drive into the Shipyard and I used to hate it. Just sitting in the car waiting for 30 minutes. Because they had the old time clocks, where you actually had punch your time out and wait in line to get out. And that, when you have 1000s of workers on the waterfront, all waiting on two or three time clocks, to punch their card to come out, it takes a long time. So we'd sit there for 30, 45 minutes just sitting in the car waiting on Dad to come out of work.

08:03

**Interviewer:** Before getting hired, what was your impression of the Shipyard?

08:10

Well, my impression was that I kind of had an idea of what it was going to be like, since my parents had worked there their whole lives. They had already given me a lot of intel on what to expect, and how it would be and how I needed to act and what I needed to do. And what I should and should not accept from others while I was there. So I went in with a pretty good idea of what was going to be going on and I knew it was going to be a career. And it's not

something that you go into and say I'm just going to work this job for a couple years, then I'm out of here. You go in there with a career mindset like this is where I'm going to be probably for the rest of my life working. I can do stuff on the side. But this is retirement. This is you know your future.

09:03

**Interviewer:** How much were they paying at the time and did that, did that encourage you to apply?

09:08

So when I came in, it was a little different. I came in through the Apprenticeship program. So I came in in 2011. And I actually didn't even know I had gotten hired at the time. I never got an acceptance letter, no emails, nothing. I found out because I was working my current job and on August 30 of 2011, we had a tropical storm come through or hurricane or something and they were delaying their orientation by a day and I had gotten a phone call from them at my home saying hey, your orientation has been delayed, don't show up tomorrow, show up the day after. And they called me and I was confused. I was like "What are you talking about?" I never got hired. I didn't get anything. They're like, "Oh no, you got hired. You didn't get your letter of acceptance". I was like "No, I said I've gotten nothing". Like "Oh, well, congratulations, you have a job". So I went straight from there to my boss and said, "Hey, I quit", and just walked out, because I hated that job. But as far as the pay goes, at that point, I think you started off at \$10 an hour, which was good for that time, because minimum wage was, what seven, I think. And, but it goes up incrementally throughout the Apprenticeship. So six months, you get a raise, and another six months and other raise, until you hit graduation on your fourth year.

10:38

**Interviewer:** Tell us about the first job you ever held as shipped.

10:42

So when I came in, like I said, it was as an Apprentice for the Shipyard and the school portion, because I was the first year when they, or were the second year, when they started doing their new way of doing the school. So now you go to school for six months, on the clock, paid during work hours, and they pay for everything. And for me, that was fun, because the school was down the street from my house. So during the breaks in the study halls, I was going back to the house, you know. But they got a little bit more strict on that. They were catching us do that. And they kind of started putting hall monitors on us like we were in high school again, and keeping tabs on us so that we couldn't get away with that anymore. But then when that was done, that's when the real work started. That's when you are back at the Shipyard. And that was a little bit of an eye opener. So when you first start off, your bottom of the totem pole, so

all the jobs that nobody wants to do, guess what, that's your job. You got to do it. It's your time. So all the nasty tanks that nobody wanted to go into and clean, that was my job. So for like the first two years, I think I spent in tank line, cleaning out tanks, pressure washing 'em, scraping out, you know, mud, grease, dirt, whatever was in there. Had to get cleaned. And that was the worst of it. But once you got past that part, it got a little bit easier. Then you're just into the preservation side, which is, you know, removing old paint putting on new paint, making sure that there's no visible rust or anything, you know, that wasn't so bad. So

12:31

**Interviewer:** After that what other jobs and duties did you hold at the Shipyard?

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So, I'm in the paint Shop. When I started off with his Apprentice, like I was just telling you, we did the tank line. That's just one portion. I also worked in, we have a building where we do spray paint operations, where we have a spray booth and you spray paint. I've worked in there. I've done, they also have in that same building, they do sandblasting inside a booth for that. And I did that. I've also did sandblasting inside tanks, which is removing all the paint down to bare metal using high pressure sand grit of some sort. And I went from there, I started doing hydroblasting which is using hundreds of 1000s of psi of water to try to get all the grease out of pores inside the metal and any oil or anything in there so that you can actually preserve it. Went, after that, I ended up on the Nuke side of the house, which starts off with, pretty simple, it's like basic preservation, you're in like a reactor or in nuclear areas, and you have to preserve surfaces. And from there, I went to where I'm at currently, which is radiological vacuum system installation, maintenance and removal, which is probably the most technical thing you can get to in my Shop as far as what you need to know and what qualifications you need to have.

14:14

**Interviewer:** How are you able to move up within the company?

14:19

So, it's not so much moving up because I haven't moved up yet. But your, your promotions are pretty much guaranteed. They're set on that timeframe. So you get step increases every now and then. So it's a six months, then it'd be a year then maybe two years, until you cap out. Once you cap out. That's it. There's no more pay increases. If you want to apply for other positions. First the position has to be open. It has to be open to the inside. If it's an internal hire, you got to know about it in the first place, which what a lot of Shops do is they don't tell you. They will tell the person that they want to have the job, "Hey, we're going to open up this job posting for two days, on these days, make sure you got your stuff ready and get it in". And

they shut it right away once he applies. And they got the job because nobody else knew. There's a lot of shady stuff that goes on.

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**Interviewer:** You got to have connections to get the information?

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You, it, they say the good old boy system is not alive and well, but I assure you it is very alive and well. They've just found ways to circumvent the systems that were put in place to try to stop it. Now you can transfer out of your Shop to other Shops, if you have experience or if you have the knowledge. You can even go to engineering, if you have school. That's one of the things that they have. Our requirements now is you got to have school if you want to be an engineer. There is such a job like Engineering Techs, which don't require school, but they don't really hire those anymore. I've already spoken to several of my engineer friends, they, they don't do many Engineering Techs anymore. But it's the same process for everything. Usually, you want to know somebody in there have a good reputation with that person, make sure that they all know you. And make sure you have good work ethic. You know, if you're gonna get hired by them, they are going to see your whole job history of what you've done, and they're going to be calling your old bosses and be like, "Hey, so and so used to work for you. How was he as a worker?" If you were lazy and always trying to get out of work, they're gonna find out right away, they're not going to want you

16:34

**Interviewer:** That's understandable. What are your most memorable projects at the Shipyard?

16:40

So for me that was when we did the very first time ever doing hydroblasting inside the NFP tank on the submarines. So the NFO tank is fuel oil. And normally you can't preserve that with paint because the oil seeps into the pores and the paint won't adhere so it'll just come right off if you try to paint it. So, they. the Navy, worked with Penn State to create a system that they could use

## Blagg.Alex2

## Tape 2

Thu, 5/5 3:43PM • 17:14

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

tank, people, ventilation, work, boat, push, staying, west haven, portsmouth, live, pay, called, apartment, point, job, yard, washing, years, moving, webster

00:00

used to hydroblasting inside these tanks. And we all had to get special training from them, and go through everything. And then the actual project started. And at first I wasn't in charge because I was still an Apprentice at the time. We had a work leader. But he was also the smallest guy on the crew, which does not make him happy because there was one pocket in that tank that nobody on the crew could fit into, except for him. And that was the very first pocket we had to do. And it took him two weeks because it was such a tight space to get that one area done. And then he called out because his back was hurting him for the rest of that project. And once he was gone, my boss came to me said, "Hey, this job is yours. You take over, you run it, you're in charge." So then I got to start working with the Penn State engineers and, believe it or not, some things that I thought were common sense were apparently not common sense to them. So I was explaining to them how things worked in the Yard, telling them better methods that they could use, what we needed to get done. And, apparently, they had passed that up the chain to the Lieutenant Commander that they were working for, that hired them and paid them, and she came down to see me and congratulated me for that, gave me her card, said if you need anything for this, you have any issues, you give me a call. Skip everybody, you give me a call, I'll get it for you. So that was a pretty good feeling. I ended up getting a monetary award because we ended up finishing it on time despite being two weeks behind. So we pushed and got everything done on time.

01:42

**Interviewer:** What was the name of that submarine?

01:45

Which submarine was that? I don't want to give you the wrong one. But, because we've had so many there. I'm not sure if that was the Maryland or if that was the Rhode Island. We had a bunch of subs there at the time. I'm not sure exactly which one it was at this point.

02:04

**Interviewer:** What about the MTS Webster?. What was your role on the Webster.

02:08

Oh, on the Webster. So the Webster was the very first boat I ever worked. And that's where I started off, like I was telling you about the Tank Line. So the very first tank they put me in was the aft trim tank and the zone manager at the time had the paperwork changed. Originally it was supposed to be blasted and sprayed. He changed it to power tool, hand tool, and after



that pressure washing, power tool hand tool and then repainting everything. And then we went into that tank, you might not know what it is, but mill scale is just layers and layers of rust and corrosion that build up. So normally, it's not that much on there. This had about six inches of mill scale throughout the whole tank.

03:03

**Interviewer:** You had to go in there?

03:05

We had to go in there and we had to get all of it off. It took us months. What should have been a two week job turned into about six months in that tank by itself.

03:16

**Interviewer:** You had to scrape it all off?

03:17

We had to use power tools. So we have what's called needle guns or knuckle busters. And that helps with it. And then that gets like the big chunks off of it. But you still have to clean all that up because you can't leave it in the tank. So you're down there with, you know, brooms and stuff, trying to sweep it into trash bags and handing it out to people. And then after that, then you get down to where you're grinding off the residual leftover on the metal itself. Then you gotta wait for inspectors to come by and inspect the metal. Once they give you the okay, then you can go about re-preserving it and putting new paint on it. But that was pretty tough. And that was my first time in a tank and that tank, I remember it vividly because it had a pipe running right through the entrance. It was a drop down, you stepped into the tank. So the tank itself was about, I'd say five, maybe six feet, no it had to be about five feet because only my head would stick out whenever I stood up straight and I'm six, three. And the pipe runs right through the middle of that entrance. And everyone else is shorter than me on the crew, they could step on that pipe and just climb out of the tank. My legs were too long. My knees were getting caught on the top of the tank, and I couldn't push up out of the tank like that. So the first time in there, I had to have them toss that rope down and have them pull me out until I could figure out a method to get out of it. Which ended up being another little beam all the way against the wall that I would have to push off of at an angle and just get up high enough to get my arm comes out of the tank so that I could push myself up out of it. Yeah, so

05:09

**Interviewer:** [inaudible] Any other Shipyard memories you wish to share? [inaudible]

05:20

So as much as that was one of my least favorite times, probably the worst I've ever had, which wasn't necessarily a difficult job. It was, it's dealing with heat. That's a big problem. Like wintertime, yeah, you get cold. I have been down in the drydock. We've been pressure washing the sides of these boats, with snow still on the boat, and the water coming off of it splashing back is ice by the time it hits you. It has been that cold. And I've been down there and the water heaters were busted. So you had cold water. So it was not fun. But the worst was probably on the Simon Lake, which was a decommissioned vessel as well. We were doing a process of sampling for anything that might be in the paint that was volatile to the environment so that we could remove it. But the problem was that everything had already been ripped out of that boat. There's no ventilation. There's no electricity. There's nothing. They are running temporary lighting. You're relying on that lighting to keep functioning. They, you had to have a flashlight when you went onto that boat. They would check you before you went on and if you didn't have a flashlight you weren't allowed on because if that power goes out, you're in the dark. You gotta find your own way out now. And on top of that, there's no ventilation in there. So we're there in the middle of summer, prime heat, it's over 100 degrees, and you're inside a metal boat. It's an oven. And they are like, "Oh well, we got some temporary ventilation". Well the ventilation was exhaust. It's pulling air. It's not pushing cold air in. So we're just cooking the whole time. And because of the nature of the job, you also have to wear what's called Tyvek coveralls so that nothing gets on you. And that, by itself, anyone that has ever worked there and had to wear Tyveks will tell you those Tyveks get really hot. So you put all that together, plus you're wearing a respirator which makes you sweat too. It was not fun. You just come back, then you leave for lunch, you are just drenched from head to toe. Like I remember I'd bring in changes of jeans, underwear, shirts, and at lunchtime, I'd have to go change everything. That's how bad it was. And then by the end of the day, I was soaked through again. So I'd go through two sets of clothes every day.

07:52

**Interviewer:** Can you tell us about what neighborhood you lived in throughout working at the Shipyard?

07:57

So when I started off, I was still living at my parents' house over in Simonsdale. I was still relatively young, early 20s. And, but within my first year I had moved out and I was actually living in downtown Portsmouth right in front of the Navy hospital over there. And I stayed there in those apartments for probably about, I want to say three or four years, staying there, which was great being so close, close to work. So when lunch came, since I was so close, I could

drive home, be in my apartment, be nice and cool, do what I wanted for my break, and then get back to work. I didn't have to wake up super early because I'm on this side of the tunnel. Don't deal with traffic don't have to deal with any of it. So it was great there. But eventually, which you'll find out in your life soon enough. apartment prices go up and they start wanting too much. So that's when I started looking at houses and I ended up in West Haven over there across from Mary View. And that's where I still currently live. And so far it's been pretty peaceful. I live three blocks from my brother actually, one street over three blocks over and I'm maybe two three miles from my parents still over in Simonsdale and I still don't have to deal with traffic. And that is the main draw staying in Portsmouth if you want to work, there's no traffic.

09:29

**Interviewer:** What has kept you at the Shipyard this long?

09:32

The money's too good man. So they pay you well. You might not start off initially. Yes, you're gonna have some bad jobs that you're not going to enjoy. Everyone has to do their time. Even the people at the top have spent their time doing that job at some point. Maybe not doing the exact same thing as you but whatever would be comparable in their Shop or Code they came out of. So they've all got an idea of what they're asking you to do. They're not asking you to do something they haven't done themselves before. So they pay you well for it, eventually. You start off at the bottom, you work your way up. And eventually you get to where I'm at after 10 years, which is capped out as a mechanic. And then from that it's a career. So you got your retirement. They give you all the information on your TSP. And they actually match I think, up to 5%, completely. I could be mistaken. It's been some time since I looked at it. But you can invest into your retirement that way so that when you retire, you're not just taking out of your Social Security. You've got that extra money coming to you. And that's worth it. In addition to that, travel. If you want to travel, you want to go around the world, because they go around the world, or if you just want to stay in the country, even and travel to different states, different cities. It's a place to be. I have been up and down the East Coast quite a bit. I've been to New York. I've been to Charleston. I've been to Georgia. Been to Guam. I've been to Hawaii. There are people that have been to Japan, to Seattle. I mean, Puget, which is, not Puget, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the other Portsmouth. I haven't been up there. My brother has been there several times. So just don't go in the winter.

11:32

**Interviewer:** What do you plan on doing once you return?

11:36

Once I retire, I plan on traveling. I do not plan on staying down. I'm going to be probably just like my parents are. I'm not sure what my brother is going to do. But I've always enjoyed traveling. I've been out of the country a few times, and I want to go more, see more of the world?

11:57

**Interviewer:** What's your favorite thing about working at the Shipyard?

12:00

Favorite thing You mean besides the money? Honestly, I've grown to like the people that I work with quite a bit. So that's one thing you learn. When you get there, it's kind of like an, you're all new, you're all working with new hires. And it seems like nobody cares about anybody. But the truth is, it's all your family. You spend more time with them than you do at home with your own family usually. So the people I have worked with on the crew I'm with now, I've worked with them for seven years, same people day in day out. So I know a lot more about their lives than I probably should know. And some of them I communicate with outside of work, you know, go hang out or give them a hard time every now and then. But it gets real tight knit and they become like family to you. So it's a great place if you want to have make friends or, you know, extend your family out a little bit. It's a great place for that. It just comes with time.

13:06

**Interviewer:** What are your hopes and dreams for the future of the Shipyard?

13:10

Well, I plan on eventually either moving up in my Shop or moving out of my Shop, to maybe a different code, maybe to engineering or something, maybe work packaging, anything, safety. So I finally reached the point, like I said, where I capped out as mechanic so it's time that I start looking towards either making work leader or supervisor, or moving on to something else that will pay more

13:37

**Interviewer:** What's some advice for people interested in working there?

13:42

Um see, advice if you're interested in working there. If you want to make good money, it's the place to go. But keep in mind you're gonna have to work hard, and it's very strict about

attendance. So you're going to work a set schedule. It's guaranteed 40 hours every week, paid bi weekly. You got your guaranteed money. Anything outside of that, you accumulate leave. So it's not like you got to work a year before you get time off. You start accumulating it from day one. So save it, because you're going to need it in the future, when you get sick or you want to take a vacation. There are people that take months off, paid, because they never use their leave for, like say, the first five years they were there. Yeah, so they get a month paid off. It's crazy, right? What other job can you do that's gonna pay you to stay at home and do whatever you want for a month. Yeah. So I mean, it's a great place for career oriented individual that is going to start at the bottom and work up. Anybody can move up. It does not matter where you come from. Doesn't matter what your background is. Leave all of that at home. When you come in you're there to work. You're there to make money, help support each other at work. What do you do outside is of no concern so just don't bring it in. Because that's the mistake a lot of people do is they bring in anger and resentment from outside. They'll bring that to work and it just causes problems all over the place.

15:17

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, how has Portsmouth evolved over the years?

15:21

Well, it's changed quite a bit in my experience. So where I grew up in Simonsdale was actually, at the point where I was living there, it was completely all white people. You did not see any black kids anywhere around there. All of them, I guess, lived elsewhere. I don't, I'm not sure at that point, I know a lot of them lived right around Wilson itself, Wilson High School. And there were a lot that live closer to the downtown area. But other than that, I mean, I was still young, I didn't go out much. We didn't see any black people move into the neighborhood until I was probably about 16. And it was a guy from the Navy, who bought a lot across the street and built a house across the street from us. They had split, you know, bought the property from that house owner because they had a huge yard and just built his house there. And that was the first black people we had ever seen living near us. And since then, I've seen things become a lot more integrated. So in the neighborhood, like even in West Haven, because I had friends that lived in West Haven, it was all white at the time. Like West Haven Park is a different story. But West Haven itself was white. I didn't see any black people there. But now, I mean, I think 1, 2, 3 or my 4 neighbors are black people and you know some of them work at the yard actually. I know the one right next to me works in 361. Code 361 at the Yard, and I talk to him. You know, one of the guys owns a towing company. He's across the street from me and another lady, I'm not sure what she does, but she rides motorcycles. So it's become a lot more integrated, a lot more

# Blagg.Alex3

## Tape 3

Thu, 5/5 9:07PM • 14:37

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Shipyard, work, day, systems, old timers, boats, radiological, license, hangers, engineers, hazards, radioactive, generation, contamination, paperwork, family, training, building, allowed, stage

00:00

friendly, you know, a lot more, less segregation going on. And everything's become a little bit more accepting.

00:10

**Interviewer:** Lastly, where do you see Portsmouth and the Shipyard 20 years from now?

00:15

Where do I see what?

00:16

**Interviewer:** Portsmouth and the Shipyard 20 years from now.

00:19

It'll still be there, I'm pretty sure. I mean, it's the largest Shipyard we have on the East Coast. And that's going to be kind of hard to outdo. I mean, I know Mayport down in Florida has got its eyes on the prize, but they don't have a nuclear license. So that's what keeps us in business. If we ever lose our nuclear license at the Shipyard, that's going to be the beginning of the end. So as long as we are able to maintain that license, we should be good, even 20 years from now. So I think it'll be the same. The Shipyard culture that as much as we would like to change it, as much as every captain wants to come in and change that culture, I don't think it's going to really change all that much. It's very difficult. Because you're trying to tell, you know, 10 to 15,000 people, you have to change everything you've done for the past 20 years you've worked here, and everything that your bosses did for you when you were coming up it, they're just going to rebel against it or just find ways to circumvent it, it happens all the time.

01:29

**Interviewer:** I have a question. How do you, how is it possible, how do you lose that license?

01:36

I mean, there's many ways to lose it. So if we have too many incidents, like if we lose radioactive material, say they put it in the wrong place, or they can't find it. and they have to send people out to find it. Like I know there was an incident some years ago where a guy took home some radioactive boats, all the way to Virginia Beach, put them in his back pocket, and took them all the way home.

02:03

**Interviewer:** Bolts?

02:04

It was something like that. I don't recall exactly what it was. But I remember hearing about it. We were told about it and training and they still talk about it and training every now and then, about making sure you know your paperwork, do everything by what your paperwork says, and make sure you do everything as you're trained to do. When people start getting lax on it. Stuff like that happens. I've actually had to go search for lost RAM myself. Not my own. Somebody else. They pulled some hangers, not like coat hangers, hangers for pipes and stuff that were in an area that was marked for radiological reasons and they were told, incorrectly, to just throw it away. And it ended up in a dumpster in the trash guy came and picked it up and took it. And it hadn't left the Yard yet. So they have another little site at the Yard where they'll take all the scrap metal and stuff before they ship it out and I had the honor of having to go with like 50 other people and dumpster dive to try to find those specific hangers, with engineers coming over and every time you pull one out, they have to say, "Yes, that's it or no, that's not it". And that was not fun. So if too many incidents like that occur, or if they come by, they have audits on us where they'll come by, and they'll see how our work practices are, they'll give out random test to individuals with certain qualifications. I myself have been in them a few times. And if too many people fail, they start revoking the license or they will and then you have to meet certain standards before they will give it back to you again.

03:50

**Interviewer:** How's your generation leaving their work on the Shipyard?

03:55

My generation? Well, a lot of my generation has come in with a different attitude than what a lot of what we call the "old timers" in there have. So I work with a lot of old timers, I think, other than one person, I'm the youngest person on my crew, and I'm 33. And they have a very older mindset where you just get the job done. They don't worry about paperwork too much. They



just go and do what they need to do to get the job done. And they don't like change. Whereas my generation we came in and we see some of the ways they're doing things and we're like, "why are you doing it like this, you can do it better if you do it like this, it'd be quicker, it'd be easier, be more efficient". "Well, we've always done it like this." Doesn't mean it's better. So we've started implementing a lot of things, that which I'm sure anyone who's paid attention has seen. There's been a lot of changes. New innovations came out. Changes the way documentation is written or that we've taught, Worked closely with engineers. Like my generation, we're not as afraid of the management as what the old timers were, because it was a different time when they came in. We don't have time clocks anymore. We don't have to worry about that kind of stuff. But at the same time, we're more willing to work with our engineers to make sure that we have what we need and that it's fixed so that we don't come across those problems in the future.

05:33

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else you want to share? Anything interesting?

05:36

Anything interesting? [inaudible] I mean, the only thing I can say is the last piece of advice I would give to anybody that's looking to go to the Shipyard is, yes, it's a family, but mind your safety. There have been too many people that have gotten permanently hurt. People that have gotten killed. And it's what I've told many Apprentices in my Shop that have come in. I've said, don't do stupid stuff. I said it. Think about, I said it. If it sounds stupid, don't do it. And then one of the Apprentices actually came back and told me a year later about something that he did. He was up on some staging about five stories high from the drydock, all the way on top of the boat, and he had climbed up the ladder, he had been working up there for some time painting, and he was done. And he was getting ready to climb down. And the top of the ladder came on attached. And he stood up on the staging with the ladder not attached now. He said, "Well, I looked down at the next level down, it was only about you know, six feet, so I just hung off the side and swung on to it, and you know, I started falling backwards but thankfully there was a, you know, the, the railing was there, and it kept me from going over". I was like this, "Let me get the straight". I was like "You hung off the side of the staging that is 50 feet in the air and just swung to the next level down and prayed that you had a strong enough grip that you weren't gonna fall that 50 feet and you got lucky that you ran into a pipe and didn't fall down that stage pipe that was there". He was like, well yeah. I was like, "What did I tell you on day one? Don't do stupid stuff. And what did you just tell me? You did stupid stuff." I was like, "Okay". I was like, "Next time that happens", I was like, "what are you gonna do?" He's like, "Don't do that". I was like, "So what should you have done?" He was like, "Probably should have called somebody". I was like, "Yeah, you think. It's like you could have died". I was like. So pay attention to it. Even supervisors, management will push you to try to do things you're not supposed to do, in the name of getting the job done. But at the end of the day, you want to



go home, home, it's not worth it. If you got to delay the job by a day or two to make it safe, do so. Nobody can do anything about it. As much as they will threaten you sometimes to try to get the job done, they cannot do anything about it.

08:11

**Interviewer:** Thank you.

08:12

Yep.

08:15

**Interviewer:** I have one question for you. You've worked at Coleman Nursery during the Christmas show.

08:21

I did not work at Coleman's.

08:23

**Interviewer:** That was Ben?

08:24

Yeah, he used to work there quite a bit.

08:29

**Interviewer:** Well speaking about Christmas, I don't think we touched on this, do you attend any of the holiday parties or any of the other Shipyards celebrations? If you, we just wanted to kind of hear your perspective. A few people have spoken about it.

08:39

About the Shipyard celebrations?

08:45

**Interviewer:** Was it Family Day?

08:46

Oh, Family Day

08:47

**Interviewer:** Family Day and Christmas.

08:48

So I haven't done the Christmas Party. I mean our. Every group has kind of like their own little Christmas party that they'll do. So my section does one for us, just us. But other than that I did do Family Day, which was eye opener for my wife because my wife is from Brazil. So she's not American and I had to go through. Yeah, so I had to go through security, to be able to get her, you know, pre vetted. They gotta do background check, because she's not an American citizen, to get her and for Family Day. And she had never seen, you know, what the US boats look like or anything. She had just seen, you know, the videos and like the movies and stuff, which doesn't do justice, you know. And so I was friends with the deputy director of security because she worked in the same building as me. And she had already known I'd married a foreign national, I'd already put it on my paperwork. So that went through. It took, you know, couple of weeks for them to do the background check. It came back good. Family Day came. We showed up. She gets a special badge since she's a foreign national. So she wasn't allowed to go onto any of the boats because they were doing tours on the carrier. So she couldn't go on it. But she could look at it from the outside. So she got the walkthrough, the waterfront, the buildings that they had open to the public where you can just walk in the entrance, she was allowed to see. I could show her the building from the outside, at least, that I worked at, but she couldn't go into anything. But she got to see some of the stuff we do. She got to see the carriers, which was a lot bigger than she thought it was. So to give you a little bit of perspective, think about five to seven houses stacked on top of each other. That's about how tall it is. Yeah, it's pretty big. And yes, it's all stairs for us. Only the Navy is allowed to use the elevators they have in there, we are not.

10:55

**Interviewer:** You mentioned, I think your current job is radioactive something, but could you just elaborate a little more on what the duties are, and, of course, just remind us of the name.

11:11

Okay, so I work for the, in a section that does preparation, installation, maintenance and removal for radiological vacuum systems. So what that entails is, say you're working in a reactor compartment, they have what's called contamination. So you have radiation, which I'm sure you're somewhat familiar with. And you have what's called contamination, which are the actual particles that emit that radiation. So they'll work in systems that have a lot of that in there. And how they would clean it up or try to keep it clean and keep it from getting out is they'll put containments and stuff around it. And they use our vacuum systems which have HEPA filters, which are high efficiency particles, particle filters. They're about 99.999% efficient, give or take, because I do testing on those too. That's a whole different story. But so

we have to assemble these systems for them, put them in the locations that they need them to be so they can use them to keep those areas clean, to keep that debris from getting out into the air onto you and anywhere else. And then when they're done with it, I have to go in and disconnect all the different pieces of that system so that the things that can be saved can be saved from that system and the things that need to go away and get, what we call radioactive wasted, can get wasted. And so that's what I do is I have to make sure that that system is installed per the standards that the engineers write out. That it matches what they need for the job. That it's labeled correctly for all the different constituents that might be in it because you got radioactive. You got contamination. You also have different hazards that you encounter in everyday life. Like, there's lead, like, I know you all know about lead paint. So from way back when that still exists.

13:27

**Interviewer:** That still exists?

13:28

Yeah, these boats are old from back in that day so they can have lead paint sometimes.

13:34

**Interviewer:** I thought lead was cancerous.

13:35

It can be if you have continued exposure over years and years, or an acute exposure which is a lot all at once. So we have to have a lot of training for all the different hazards. So when we're talking about hazards, we're talking about radiation, contamination, toxic metals, which would include stuff like lead, asbestos, PCBs, any little thing you can think of that you might encounter, I have to have training on it, because anything that they're working with, I have to be trained to work with as well. So we will go in, put them in, if anything goes wrong while they're using it, we have to go fix it or figure out what the problem is. And find a way to fix it until the engineers, so they can write the corresponding paperwork. And when they're done, go take it out and get rid of it.

14:34

**Interviewer:** Thank you. I think we saved the best for last.