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*U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program*

Interview of **Commander John M. Richmond, USCGR**

USCG Reserve Career, 1958-1980

Conducted by **C. Douglas Kroll, Ph. D., U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary**

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Hacienda Heights, CA

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**Commander John M. Richmond, USCGR (Ret.), 2013.**

## Biographical Summary

Born in Washington, D.C. on 1 November 1936, John M. Richmond was the first child of Lieutenant Commander and Mrs. Alfred C. Richmond, USCG (Commandant from 1954-1962). A little over two years later a younger brother Alfred C. Richmond, Jr. was born. He spent the first five years of his life residing in Arlington, Virginia. At the age of five he moved with his mother and brother to Santa Paula, California, when his father was assigned command of a ship home ported at Port Hueneme, California and stayed there until World War II was over. After the war his father was reassigned to Coast Guard Headquarters and the family moved back to their former home in Arlington, Virginia. His father would spend the rest of his Coast Guard career at Headquarters.

Following graduation from Washington-Lee High School in Arlington, Virginia in 1954 he entered Virginia Technical College. While there he participated in AFROTC [Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps]. He was a member of the "Pershing's Rifles" crack drill team and marched in President Dwight Eisenhower's second Inaugural Parade. While at Virginia Tech he married Nancy Y. Davis on 15 December 1956 in Sparta, North Carolina. He graduated with a B.S. degree in mechanical engineering in 1958.

He then applied for and was accepted at the Coast Guard's Officer Candidate School [OCS], then in New London, Connecticut on the campus of the Coast Guard Academy. Graduating at the top of his class in October of 1958 he was presented his commission by his father, then the Commandant of the Coast Guard. His initial six months of active duty was as the Coast Guard's Field Test and Development Unit in Glen Burnie, Maryland. While there their first son, Michael, was born. A second son, Glen, was born in California in 1960 and a daughter, Sharon, in 1961. At the completion of his six months active duty obligation he moved to southern California and spent the rest of his career in the Coast Guard Reserve as a member of the Organized Reserve Training Unit-Port Security [ORTUPS] in Long Beach, retiring in 1980 at the rank of Commander. During part of his time, Beau Bridges, son of actor Lloyd Bridges was a member of his reserve unit.

His civilian career was in pump marketing and distribution in southern California. In the late 1970s he formed his own marketing and distribution company, where he still works in a semi-retired capacity. He and his wife have seven grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.



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**INTERVIEWER:** When and where were you born?

**RICHMOND:** I was born in Washington, D.C. on November 1, 1936.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you tell me briefly about your childhood, especially growing up the son of a career Coast Guard officer? Where you lived? The schools you attended?

**RICHMOND:** My father, at that time, was stationed at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington and from my experience, other than later when I was about five years-old, moving to California for a stint when my father was in England, we always lived in the same house in Virginia and he was always at headquarters.

**INTERVIEWER:** You were five when you moved to California?

**RICHMOND:** My father went to Baltimore to work on commissioning the *American Sailor* [WIX; former-SS *Edgemont*], which was a ship that was subsequently stationed at Port Hueneme, California, for training merchant marines. The Coast Guard had a responsibility for that. So when I was about five, we moved to California, just north of Los Angeles in a town called Santa Paula. He was stationed over at Port Hueneme.

**INTERVIEWER:** So later on, during World War II, when he got transferred other places, you and your family stayed in California?

**RICHMOND:** After a year or two here, he was transferred to England, to be on staff over there as the senior Coast Guard officer planning the invasion of Normandy, under [General Dwight] Eisenhower. We just remained in Santa Paula, California, until he returned. Then he was transferred to Washington, D.C. and so we moved back there, shortly after I started the fourth grade.

**INTERVIEWER:** That was the same house in Arlington that you had lived in before you moved to California?

**RICHMOND:** Yes, the same house.

**INTERVIEWER:** So the rest of your schooling was in Arlington, Virginia while you were growing up?

**RICHMOND:** It was. I graduated from Washington-Lee High School at Arlington, Virginia. During High School I had an opportunity to attend Boy's State at Virginia Tech. I enjoyed that and wanted to be a mechanical engineer, so that's where I went when I graduated from high school in 1954. At that time, unless you qualified to be in a civilian status, you had to be in the cadet corps. I was in the cadet corps for four years, in Air Force ROTC. I got my mechanical engineering degree in June of 1958.

**INTERVIEWER:** You graduated with a B.S. in mechanical engineering?

**RICHMOND:** Yes, and I was scheduled to receive my 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant's commission in the United States Air Force. I had a love for flying, but very shortly before graduation, a physical exam determined that I had a slight, right eye muscle stigmatism. I had married a year two years before and my wife was pregnant with our first child at that time, and I had no idea where I was going to go, what the situation was going to be, except I knew I was going to have fly as tech officer in the back seat in a jet and not front seat pilot. So, right before graduation I gave up my commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, U.S. Air Force. I then enrolled to go to OCS at the United States Coast Guard Academy.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did your father encourage you to go to Coast Guard Reserve, or was that your idea?

**RICHMOND:** He would always have been proud if my brother or I went into the Coast Guard, naturally. I suppose I could have gone into the Coast Guard and flown but having gone to Virginia Tech, they had either Army or Air Forces ROTC, that's where I got involved there. But he was a wonderful person and never pushed my brother or myself to go into the Coast Guard. I think he was very pleased when I ended up at Coast Guard OCS. I thought my brother was going to make the Coast Guard his career, but he ended up in the Marine Corps, and retired a colonel in the Marine Corps. But my father never pushed us either way. But it was a lot of fun after I got into the Coast Guard. He was able to give me my commission when I graduated at New London.

**INTERVIEWER:** What did you have to do to apply for OCS?

**RICHMOND:** OCS at that time was at the Coast Guard Academy. Subsequently I think they moved it down to Yorktown, Virginia. The program was technically a reserve program. It was what they called a "6 x 8 program". You graduated after four months with your commission as an Ensign in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve and then you spent six months on active duty and then you were required to spend eight years in the Coast Guard Reserve.

**INTERVIEWER:** About how many people went through OCS with you?

**RICHMOND:** I don't think there many more than 40 in my class.

**INTERVIEWER:** OCS at the Academy was in the old wooden buildings, right?

**RICHMOND:** Yes, it was. I'm sure of it because I remember that all night fire watch duties our class had to stand.

**INTERVIEWER:** Just east of Chase Hall, the Cadet barracks. Did you live in those temporary wooden buildings and have your classes there as well?

**RICHMOND:** I was fortunate, having four years of cadet corps at Virginia Tech, I was up to speed on all of the military drills, rifle handling and everything. As a result I was more able to concentrate on the studies and help some of my classmates with the rudiments of drill that was new to them. I had one roommate. He was a boatswain mater who wanted to become an officer, but not a warrant officer, and he was really shaky on his military drill and math with regard to navigation. I was able to help him immensely and we became good friends at OCS but I didn't keep in touch afterwards. He was really worried about not being able to "cut it" and afraid of flunking out.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have any interaction with the cadets at the Academy?

**RICHMOND:** No, there was no interaction.

**INTERVIEWER:** You used the same auditorium or other facilities, just not at the same time?

**RICHMOND:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you use the Academy's main drill/parade ground in front of Hamilton Hall or did OCS have its own drill/parade ground?

**RICHMOND:** I am sure we didn't have our own drill field.

**INTERVIEWER:** What type of classes were taught?

**RICHMOND:** This was long before GPS. LORAN-C was the most modern we had. It was the sextant and the stars and gunnery.

**INTERVIEWER:** So it was four months there. Did the Commandant normally attend OCS graduations?

**RICHMOND:** He made a special effort to attend my commissioning. Unfortunately, my wife, who was pregnant, as previously mentioned, could not attend. Our first son was born in November and I graduated from OCS the October before. My father and mother were able to come up for the graduation ceremony at the Academy (photo, right).

**INTERVIEWER:** But normally he wouldn't attend.

**RICHMOND:** I don't believe so. I don't think anyone put any pressure on me because of being a son of the Commandant. I made no issue of it. I tried to earn my own way. As I said, it was easy from a military standpoint because my experience at Virginia Tech.



**INTERVIEWER:** So you graduated in October of 1958. Where did you spend your six months of active duty?

**RICHMOND:** I was stationed, I don't know if it was because I had a degree in mechanical engineering, at the Field Test and Development Unit in Glen Burnie, Maryland. That was an interesting experience. It was a lot of fun. We were testing a catenoidal fog horn. It was supposedly a fog horn that was more efficient. Unfortunately, the diaphragm in the fog horn would get hot and it wouldn't maintain the same sound level. I remember one day, the yeoman's wife, who lived just off base, kept complaining of headaches and heard this buzzing in her ears. It wasn't in her head, it was our fog horn!

**INTERVIEWER:** You spent all six months there?

**RICHMOND:** Yes, at the Field Test and Development Unit.

**INTERVIEWER:** Then where was your next reserve assignment?

**RICHMOND:** I had been offered at a job with the Allis Chalmers Manufacturing Corporation when I graduated from college. As soon as I got out of OCS in October I went with them. I spent three months training with them in Philadelphia. Three months in Cincinnati, and then went to their home office in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Then a job opportunity in the company opened up in California with an employee who had to go into the California National Guard for six months. So I had every aspect or thought of going to the east coast, but instead we came to California. Where I was experienced and had a grandmother out here. We came out in August of 1960 and have been here ever since.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you didn't stay too long in Milwaukee?

**RICHMOND:** No. I went with a reserve unit in Milwaukee and spent my first two weeks of summer active duty training at Great Lakes Naval Air Station. Then in August of 1960, we came out to California. All of active duty for training here in California was at Alameda or Vandenberg Air Force Base during the summers and all my "hands on" experience with the Coast Guard Reserve was with the Captain of the Port of Los Angeles/Long Beach.

**INTERVIEWER:** In those days did reservists drill one evening each week or a weekend?

**RICHMOND:** It was one weekend a month.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where did your reserve unit meet?

**RICHMOND:** We actually met in Long Beach at the Captain of the Port facility. We would train there. Also do on-the-job training. Sometime we would board ships for inspections---with regular Coast Guard officers.

**INTERVIEWER:** You were actually assigned to this Organized Reserve Training Unit?

**RICHMOND:** Yes, ORTUPS, Organized Training Unit-Port Security.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have your own commanding officer [C.O.], executive officer and a self-contained command?

**RICHMOND:** That is correct.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you stay in the unit the rest of your career?

**RICHMOND:** I think the unit numbers would change. There were several ORTUPS in Long Beach. I was in an ORTUPS unit under a C.O. and then gradually I became the commanding officer. Then there was a period of time, due to promotions, people would have to go into a Volunteer Training Unit [VTU] so another officer would have the opportunity to serve as the commanding officer. I was in that for a couple



of years and wrote some training manuals on leadership for the Reserve. Then I was transferred back to an Organized Reserve Training Unit. I did that up until 1980 when I retired from the Coast Guard Reserve with the rank of Commander. I spent 22 years in the Coast Guard Reserve.

**INTERVIEWER:** About how much of the time was in a VTU?

**RICHMOND:** About two years.

**INTERVIEWER:** What did you normally do on your two weeks summer active duty for training at Alameda or Vandenberg?

**RICHMOND:** It would be training of a certain type. One year it was on teaching, how to prepare lesson plans. I remember the two weeks at Vandenberg with the Air Force was a security seminar. That was very interesting. That was the year they had just had Camp David [Accords, 17 September 1978] and shortly after [Anwar El] Sadat [President of Egypt] was assassinated. It was a type of war games exercise. They had officers from other services at that training course at Vandenberg.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have contact with Coast Guard reservists in other units?

**RICHMOND:** Yes. We did because there were fellowship functions that we would have. We also did Armed Forces Day parades in Torrance and we would march with other reservists.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you know if there were any cutters designated as reserve training ships on the west coast.

**RICHMOND:** Not as I recall. Now while we were at OCS at the Academy they had the *Cuyahoga*, a 125-foot reserve training vessel. But out here on the west coast, nothing.

**INTERVIEWER:** While at OCS did you make a training cruise or spend any time aboard the USCGC *Cuyahoga* [WIX-157]? If so, what do you remember from your time on board?

**RICHMOND:** We took a cruise on the *Cuyahoga* to New York and up the East River. We berthed overnight at Martha's Vineyard and I remember standing a watch on the bridge from 0400 to 0800.

**INTERVIEWER:** How many people were in your ORTUPS here in Long Beach?

**RICHMOND:** I would say about forty. We had some interesting opportunities for people. I remember Lloyd Bridges of "Sea Hunt" and one of his sons, I believe it was Beau, was in our unit. Lloyd was very pro-Coast Guard. He made his son "toe the line." If Beau was doing a movie and had to have his hair long he would have to wear a hair net. They were all fine people.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did Lloyd ever come to visit the ORTUPS?

**RICHMOND:** We did see him once. I was not the commanding officer of the unit at the time, so it wasn't my job to "crack the whip." It was our commanding officer who had the conversations with Lloyd Bridges to make sure Beau was properly groomed if he was going to be allowed to attend drills and receive credit. If Beau was doing a movie or television series with his father at the time and needed to have his hair longer than our Reserve regulations permitted and thus the agreement between our commanding officer and his father to allow Beau to wear a hair net.

**INTERVIEWER:** You did get to meet Lloyd Bridges though?

**RICHMOND:** Yes, I did.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were there any major changes in the Coast Guard Reserve during your time in the Reserve?

**RICHMOND:** Not really. The thing that I noticed, quite honestly, was that it depended on what regular Coast Guard unit you were working with. As an example, I don't remember the names of the Captain of the Ports in Long Beach, but they probably looked on us as neophytes. The Coast Guard Reserves had to prove themselves, that they were really capable of taking on and working side-by-side with the regulars on a mission. The regulars were not always happy, or willing to turn things over to us. I can understand that. There was one incident, I do not remember the year, but it occurred in Long Beach. A Union Oil tanker called the [SS] *Sansinena* blew up one night [17 December 1976]. It blew part of the decking over on a guard shack and killed one or two [six] people. I got a call about 10 o'clock at night, when I was at a party, to get my uniform on and get down to Long Beach, because the reservists were going to have to fill in on duty to help out the regulars. That went a long ways toward letting the Captain of the Port at that time to know that we were ready, willing and able, on a moment's notice to pitch in a help his regulars. I think today the quality of training, I've seen evidence since I retired in 1980, for both Auxiliarists and Reservists, is superb.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have much contact with the active duty regulars as a reservist?

**RICHMOND:** We had very little contact with the regulars, except when we met at the Captain of the Port facility in Long Beach we would see the officer of the day and the duty section. But I remember once a couple of us were invited on a weekend to board a Russian cargo ship with the regulars. They checked the manifest and throughout the ship for things, while we met, up in the Russian captain's quarters. We did have a relationship with the regulars, but this is only time I remember them including us.

**INTERVIEWER:** During your reserve career were you still working for Allis Chalmers?

**RICHMOND:** I had been transferred to the west coast on their behalf in 1960, but after about a year or two I left them and went to work for another company headquartered in San Jose, because my wife and I had spent a winter in Milwaukee and I realized that if I stayed with Allis Chalmers I would end up back in Milwaukee, and that was not something I desired to do.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where did you work for Allis Chalmers in California?

**RICHMOND:** Right here in Los Angeles.

**INTERVIEWER:** Then you took a job in San Jose, correct?

**RICHMOND:** I stayed in Los Angeles. I got involved with sales. When I went to Milwaukee on the six months training I told you about in 1959, I had graduated with a B.S. in mechanical engineering. I remember in college taking, I think it was called the Cooter Preference Test, it was the type of test to discern what your aptitude and vocation interests were. And naturally if they had a question like would you prefer to invent something that could save the world or would you rather sell flowers and pencils door-to-door. I of course was going to invent the thing to save the world, but the flowers and pencils door-to-door sounded more like marketing. When I got to Milwaukee I joined a toastmasters speaking group and enjoyed the people that were in it and they were all in marketing. So when I went in to interview for final placement, they told me that they planned to use me as a draftsman in such and such department. I said, "wait a minute, I want to go here and be in marketing." "No, your test doesn't show that" they responded. I realized I had to do a little wine-and-dine and a little dog and pony show to let them know my real vocational interest was in marketing. So that is how I got into marketing. That's how I got to be in California in their sales office here. When I left Allis Chalmers I became the Los Angeles sales representative for this pump company headquartered in San Jose.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long did you stay with them?

**RICHMOND:** I think about eight or nine years. I thought I knew everything about pumps but then I came across a company that acquired the marketing rights for what was supposed to be a unique, new type of pump. I thought a pump is a pump, but this was a kind of Pitot tube pump. It had been invented way back in the 1930s and the Germans had tried to use it during the Second World War for rocket fuel



injection. We took that device and marketed it to another pump company locally to manufacture it. It had some problems mechanically, not due to the general concept. It is still being marketed today.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were you doing this about the time you retired from the Coast Guard Reserve?

**RICHMOND:** I think so. No, I was not. In 1977 I joined another pump company. I left the company that was marketing the Pitot tube pump, as we called it. I had named it the Roto-Jet. The new company didn't work out that well. They were owned by an aerospace company. They came in and really decimated the work force. I left them in 1978 or 1979 and started my own company. I retired in 1980 from the Coast Guard Reserve.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did your father come to your retirement ceremony?

**RICHMOND:** There wasn't a retirement ceremony, as such. It was just kind of a cutting of the apron strings. He was here, of course, because he had retired in the early 1960s and moved to Claremont, California. He passed away in 1984. My mother passed away about 1972.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the most memorable moment of your Coast Guard Reserve career? What was it so memorable?

**RICHMOND:** My most memorable experiences were my two weeks of ACDUTRA each year when I received "hands on" specialized training. I especially remember my national security seminar training at Vandenberg Air Force Base at Lompoc, California where we received real insight into "war games" training and an appreciation for the seriousness and significance of thorough planning with alternative options.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is there anything that I didn't ask you that I should have or something you would like to include, or something that you think people years from now might be interested in about your Reserve career?

**RICHMOND:** I can't think of anything specific. I mentioned the key things. It was interesting. I do remember that when I first joined the reserve unit, that we initially met in Pasadena. It wasn't always down in Long Beach. I do remember a funny incident. It taught me a lesson. I was teaching diesel engines to about eight reservists in the classroom. I had drawn a diagram on the board of an electrical system with a diesel engine. Then the C.O. called me out of the room for a moment. When I came back in, one of the students asked me "Mr. Richmond, what is that line between there and there?" They had drawn it when I was out of the room. I tried to figure out what it could be (laughing), but I finally couldn't. Finally they were honest enough to laugh and tell me that it doesn't do anything, they had done it while I was out of the classroom. It taught me not to try to tell something if you don't really know the answer.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thank you very much.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

