



*Cadet Robert L. Davis, USCG*

Interview of **Captain Robert L. Davis, USCG (Ret.)**

WWII Coast Guard Veteran

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

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Location of Interview: Newhall, CA

## Biographical Summary

Born in Washington, D.C. on 13 April 1923, Robert L. Davis grew up in Arlington, Virginia. Appointed a cadet at the Coast Guard Academy as a member of the Class of 1946 in the summer of 1942, he flunked out in the spring of his first year, returned home, took the entrance exam again and was re-appointed a cadet in the summer of 1943 at a member of the Class of 1947. The Class of 1947 was the last World War II class to complete the curriculum in three years, graduating in 1946. During his cadet years he took brief training cruises in Long Island Sound aboard DANMARK, participated on the boxing and cross country teams and was chairman of the ring committee.

Upon graduation and commissioning his initial assignment was to CLOVER (WLB-292), a sea-going buoy tender in Dutch Harbor, Alaska. During 1950-51 he was a student at the Naval Supply Corps School. He would later Command Coast Guard Supply Center on the east coast and serve as the Executive Officer of several cutters. In 1959 he took command of LAUREL (WLB-291), homeported in Rockland, Maine. While there twin sons, Robert and Richard were born. In 1961 he became the Contract and Supply Official for the 14th Coast Guard District. He commanded the AVOYEL (WAT/WMEC 150) out of Eureka, California from 1964-1966.

Following that he returned to the Coast Guard Academy as the Chief of the Administration and Personnel Division. His final tour of duty was as a Special Assistant to the Superintendent of the Coast Guard Academy for Foundation Affairs. He retired at the rank of Captain in 1972.

Upon retirement he moved to Torrance, California and accepted a position as Vice-President of Fundraising for Little Company of Mary Hospital. In 1978 he accepted a fundraising position at Orthopedic Hospital in Los Angeles, primarily working with wealthy individuals who set up trusts for the hospital. In the late 1980s he fully retired and moved to Weed, California. He currently lives in a retirement home in Newhall, California.



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**INTERVIEWER:** Where and when were you born?

**DAVIS:** On Good Friday, April 13th in Washington, D.C.

**INTERVIEWER:** In what year?

**DAVIS:** 1923.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you tell me briefly about your childhood?

**DAVIS:** I grew up in Arlington, Virginia. I was raised by my grandmother—my mother's mother. My father loved to travel, and by the time I graduated from high school I had visited forty-three states.

**INTERVIEWER:** What high school did you graduate from?

**DAVIS:** I can't remember the name.

**INTERVIEWER:** If you think of it later, we can add it.

**DAVIS:** While you were in high school Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese. Do you remember how you reacted, or others reacted?

**DAVIS:** My reaction, as I remember, was "O God, we are going to have a war!" I was not in favor of war and that was probably my thought.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you learn about the Coast Guard Academy and why did you decide to apply?

**DAVIS:** I was a young person, trying to decide where I should go to further my education and what sort of a career I would want. Having said that, I checked into Annapolis and the Coast Guard Academy. It seemed to me that Coast Guard activities were more in line with my beliefs. I would rather assist people than kill them. It was as simple as that.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you know there was a Coast Guard Academy?

**DAVIS:** I don't know how I knew; it was just available to me. Washington, D.C. had a lot of publicity for the armed services, perhaps that is how I knew about it. I liked the Coast Guard because I knew it also assisted people in trouble on the water.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you apply?

**DAVIS:** There was a national exam given on a given day and you had to go where it was held. Mine was probably in Washington, D.C. It was a competitive exam. There were no congressional appointments, which I liked.

**INTERVIEWER:** And they notified you that you passed and were offered an appointment?

**DAVIS:** They did. It turned out that you didn't have quite the same set up all way along as you do with the other service academies. The Coast Guard Academy is relatively unknown. That also appealed to me.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you travel from Arlington to New London, CT?

**DAVIS:** I took the train and then walked to the Academy from the train station.

**INTERVIEWER:** What day did you get there and report in?

**DAVIS:** Early June. [Class of 1946]

**INTERVIEWER:** That was 1942 and the Academy had greatly enlarged, due to the war, by then.

**DAVIS:** Not as much as people think. The Coast Guard Academy had 300 cadets altogether. I kind of liked that too. We all stood on the steps of Hamilton Hall when we were sworn in. From there we went to Chase Hall. We were assigned three to a room. It stayed that way quite a while, while they were building more on to Chase Hall.

The Academy was expanding at that time so there was a lot of construction. Thank goodness it was all done later. At the time it was rather disruptive.

**INTERVIEWER:** What did you do that first summer that you were there? Did you go on a cruise? Did you have classes?

**DAVIS:** The first summer we cruised on the DANMARK in Long Island Sound for a couple of weeks. Just up and down Long Island Sound. It was a brand new experience for me and I liked that about it. We took a short cruise on the DANMARK every summer. I thought that was good training. The rest of the summer was spent in classes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Since the Academy was shortened to three years during the war, did you start regular college classes that summer?

**DAVIS:** Yes. As I remember, initially it was review. A lot of people who came to the Academy then didn't have too much engineering education. Of course, the Academy at that time had an educational curriculum that I found difficult. Not too many of us had not had any college. I had high school and I felt it was going to push me to get through. And it did. But it worked out in the long run. I flunked out on calculus that following spring. It surprised me a little because I had normally done fairly well in math. However, calculus was a little different flavor. I think calculus is more of a science and I guess I got fooled. So I flunked calculus and flunked the re-exam and they kicked me out. I turned around and came back in right away again. I wanted a career in the Coast Guard at that point in time. So when I left the Academy it seems to me I was back in again in a few weeks.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you went back home of Arlington and retook the test?

**DAVIS:** Yes. I had gotten all straight "A's" in high school and then when I got to the Academy I had to do other things. I didn't realize soon enough that calculus was different. When I did, it was too late. I had never flunked any math classes, but I did.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did the classes include history and English or just engineering, math and science?

**DAVIS:** As I recall it, none of those humanities that were taught.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you go back to Arlington, take the test again, get reappointed and come back as a member of the next class? [1947]

**DAVIS:** Yes. I was actually only out of the Academy for perhaps several weeks.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you get to skip things when you came back?

**DAVIS:** No. I had to take everything all over again, which was probably a blessing because I went on through then. I never did get remarkable grades, but I did pass everything. As far as I was concerned that is all that I needed to do.

I had trouble with academics again, which surprised me. I struggled with my classes my entire time and was on Academic "trees" [mandated extra instruction] my whole time as a cadet, and since they were held on Saturdays, that took up my Saturdays.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long did they last?

**DAVIS:** About three hours.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were they taught by faculty?

**DAVIS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did they help you?

**DAVIS:** Yes. I think "trees", from the academic standpoint, are a very good thing---for the person who has to attend them. It was tedious, though. As I recall I was not on "trees" my last year, but was on them the previous years.

**INTERVIEWER:** Anything that sticks in your memory from you time as a cadet?

**DAVIS:** I played the accordion and kept it in my room. The academy was a tough place to keep any food in your room, but my accordion case made a great hiding place for it.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you get the nick-name "Ring" as a cadet?

**DAVIS:** I was chairman of the ring committee.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you remember the famous boxer Jack Dempsey visiting the Academy while you were there? You were on the boxing team. Did you get a chance to meet him?

**DAVIS:** Probably.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were you involved in any other sports than boxing?

**DAVIS:** Yes, I ran cross country.

**INTERVIEWER:** What kind of weapons did you have in your room as a cadet?

**DAVIS:** We just had wooden rifles for drill.

**INTERVIEWER:** What kind of military training did you have? Did you have anti-submarine warfare classes, deck watch officer classes?

**DAVIS:** Strictly engineering classes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have any marching instruction?

**DAVIS:** We had some, but not very much. We mustered in the quadrangle and marched in sections for our classes, and then we would always march back from our classes. Sometime we would form up in front of Chase Hall and march down the road in front of Hamilton Hall to classes and back again. I didn't mind that, but a lot of guys did. I thought it was a good way to handle it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have any contact with the OCS classes that were at the Academy at the time?

**DAVIS:** No. We were totally separate.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were Cadets required to go to chapel at the time?

**DAVIS:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where did you go for chapel services?

**DAVIS:** To McAllister Hall, in the auditorium that was sort of like a theater.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were both Catholic and Protestant held there?

**DAVIS:** Yes, but not at the same time.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do any instructors stand out?

**DAVIS:** Paul Foye, I forget what he taught. [English]

**INTERVIEWER:** How was the food at the Academy?

**DAVIS:** The food was great and plenty of it.

**INTERVIEWER:** You passed all your classes and graduated in 1946. Where was graduation held?

**DAVIS:** At that time graduation was held in the theater. We were the last class to graduate in three years.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you remember anything about your graduation?

**DAVIS:** Only that I was glad to make it!

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you get to choose your first assignment when you graduated?

**DAVIS:** No, they didn't even ask us where we wanted to go. I was assigned to a ship in Alaska, a buoy tender, the CLOVER. I was the only member of the class to be assigned directly to a buoy tender in Alaska. Later another classmate was assigned to the same tender as me.

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you remember most about your time at the Academy?

**DAVIS:** Getting use to the routine. We didn't have much free time. When you did cadets would usually walk to New London. No time to meet girls or date, except we had to have a date for a few dances.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you date for those dances come from Connecticut College?

**DAVIS:** Yes, it was very convenient.

**INTERVIEWER:** While you were at the Academy World War II came to an end. Was there any kind of a celebration at the Academy?

**DAVIS:** Not that I recall. I imagine it was celebrated by people who weren't cadets.

**INTERVIEWER:** If you were to talk to a young man or woman today who was considering the Coast Guard Academy, what would you say to them?

**DAVIS:** I would tell them to give it much consideration. I got a great education there. I found the Academy a great experience, as hard as it was for me. Some of my classmates breezed through because they had gone to college. One person in particular was Bill Miller. He ended up being the Textron president. He was quite smart. He was in my first class ['46].

The Coast Guard is a different type of life. A different type of people join it. Most of them that do, at least going to the Coast Guard Academy, I think stayed in. That's probably different from the other services academies.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thank you for sharing your memories with me and future generations.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

