



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
Jack Allen Davis, 1922-2006

June 2 & 12, 1998
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PREFACE

I became friends with and shared many memories regarding the early development days of Shelter Island on Point Loma with Jack A. Davis. He was one of the earliest business pioneers in that area. For those interested in San Diego bay front development this oral history is recommended.

Jack Davis was also a pioneer in private aviation. He founded Palomar Airport in Carlsbad and brought to San Diego many planes from around the U. S. A. Humorously retold are his exploits in post-World War II aviation.

Edward Barr, Interviewer 15
July 1998

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

This is an interview that is taking place for the San Diego Historical Society's oral history program with Jack Davis in his home. I am Edward Barr, the interviewer, and I would like to get for the record a little biographical profile. The date is June 2, 1998.

EDWARD BARR: What is your full name, Jack?

JACK DAVIS: Jack Allen Davis.

EB: And your birthplace and date, please?

JD: I am a native-born San Diegan, born on the corner of 27th and L Streets on September 4, 1922 at home. My mother had me at home.

EB: So you lived in San Diego your entire life?

JD: My entire life.

EB: Your father's name was?

JD: John Clay Davis, born in Clay Center, Kansas.

EB: And your mother's name?

JD: Harriet Amanda Defrate, her maiden name, born in San Diego, the same place I was, in the same block. I don't know the year.

EB: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

JD: I had one sister who has passed away. She was three years younger than I. Her name was Betty Jane Davis. She went to Point Loma High School. Her birthday was May 8, 1924.

EB: And your schooling?

JD: The little grammar school in southeast San Diego; then we went to Memorial Junior High School. Then to Roosevelt Junior High School (to get away from all the black folks moving into southeast San Diego), by using my aunt's address. Then we went to Point Loma High School in 1937, after my mom and dad had built a nice new house up at the top of Bangor Street and Lucinda Street.

I went to Point Loma High School until my 11th year and then I quit and went to work for my dad. I didn't make it through the 12th year at all.

EB: Okay. Now let's get started on your experiences in San Diego. What was your first involvement with the waterfront of San Diego? You were growing up here, you were born in San Diego, so the waterfront was obviously something you were aware of. But what was your first observation of being involved with waterfront activities?

JD: I always thought I wanted to be in the boat rental business so I thought I would go down on that waterfront and see what I could find in the way of a spot to rent boats on the weekends. Just take them down on a trailer, you know, just small boats that I could stack and put on a big flatbed trailer.

I started doing this down at the end of Qualtrough Street on Sandy Point, [Point Loma] which is now the Southwestern Yacht Club. I was there for about two and a half years on weekends. Then I built a little shack down there to keep my oars and anchors and equipment in for the boat rentals. I built a dock out of driftwood.

EB: Were you in high school then?

JD: Oh, after high school. You see, I was working for my dad and I figured I could make a little extra money by doing this weekends. That is why I did that.

EB: What was your dad's occupation; what was he doing?

JD: He had a garage at 27th and L Streets, next door to our house there. He was a mechanic, did body fender work; he painted cars. He painted two cars a day for Townsend's [J. R. Townsend, automobile dealer] on his used car lot, trade-ins. He was there until 1958 when he sold his business and retired. My father passed away here in a boating accident in 1985.

EB: This renting of boats on weekends--actually, it was at La Playa Cove which was the end of Qualtrough Street where the Southwestern Yacht Club is. It is now known as La Playa Cove, to indicate for the record what the common name is now. What you refer to now, I assume, is before Shelter Island was even there?

JD: Right. We called it Sandy Point in those days before they built the yacht club down there. It was just a nickname. That is where we used to do all our water skiing and boating. On the weekends people would come down with their boats and launch them there. The speedboat club would come down with their trailered boats and launch them. Of course I belonged to the San Diego Speedboat Club, too.

Right along with my boat rentals I had my little speedboat there. I would take people out and let them ride water skiing behind my boat, \$10 an hour in those days. If I would take them for a speedboat ride, it was three bucks a head.

EB: So how long did you continue the rental operation on Sandy Point?

JD: It was a little over two years until one day I was down there renting boats and a city car drove up. Mr. John Bate, the new port director for San Diego harbor came over and talked to me. He introduced himself and wondered who I was. I told him and he asked how long I had been there. I told him that I had been there for a couple of years and he said, "Who are you paying rent to?" "Oh, I don't pay any rent," I said. "You mean you are just squatting here?" he asked. I told him that my mother was a cousin of Joe Brennan, the prior port director and he told me to go down there and find a spot and see what I could do.

EB: Did Bate ask you to stop encroaching on the rights of the harbor?

JD: "Well," he said that, "This was all illegal and we are going to have to do something about it. We have some new land coming up for lease over on the Byron Street mole and if you will come to my office and talk to me and show me what you would like to do, we can get you a good piece of legal land over there. If you wanted to lease it you would be legal to operate." That was in the latter part of 1948.

EB: For the record, Byron Street is now called Shelter Island Drive which leads on to Shelter Island. But that was before that road was connected to the island. The island existed but there was no connection to the mainland; it was just a pile of sand out there in the bay.

JD: Right. There was nothing on Shelter Island in those days. You had to go by boat, rowing or swimming, or however you could get out there.

EB: So you visited John Bate who was the port director at that time and got some kind of a lease on some property down there at the foot of Byron Street.

JD: He told me I had to have a 100-foot frontage and a 150-foot deep piece of land. Then I had the same amount of water to go with it to build a dock for them to lease me the land and the water rights there. He charged me \$250 a month to get started in March of 1949. That is when I started that operation.

EB: Initially your interest in that location was to be a continuation of what you had been doing down at La Playa Cove, that is, renting boats and launching boats. Actually, just a facility for rentals, is that right?

JD: That's right. Then I had this speedboat that I used for speedboat rides and water skiing for people who wanted to rent the boat and have me drive it to tow them around to water ski. I had quite a little business built up there.

EB: At some point you got involved in a much bigger operation than just launching boats and renting boats. You might want to describe what happened then.

JD: I decided I wanted to put in a little restaurant there because we had a tuna cannery across the street called High Seas Tuna Cannery. It was quite a business; there was a lot of action there. I could see where I could make some money by putting in a small hamburger stand, a little beanery with chili and hamburgers, hot dogs and beer.

EB: A lunch stand, in other words.

JD: It was a small operation. It was 24 feet long by 12 feet wide, the building was. There was like a counter with stools where people could come in and have a bowl of chili and a hamburger.

EB: Did you have a name for that place?

JD: We called it the Point Loma Cove. My friend, John Jennings, renamed it, "Ulcer Gulch." It got around the waterfront. It was kind of funny because everybody when they came in would say, "Hey, we've heard that you have a new name for your place, Ulcer Gulch." So it got a nickname and everybody got a kick out of coming there. We did a pretty good little business.

EB: How many years did you have the lunch stand? Did you have breakfast?

JD: No breakfast, no dinner, just lunch is all, a daytime operation altogether.

EB: But you were still running at the same time the launching facility, renting boats and so forth.

JD: The launching facility was right in front of the lunch stand and people would pay me \$2 to come down and launch their boat because they wanted to get out and go fishing. They had to park their cars out in the street or wherever they could find a place because I didn't have any room inside to park; there wasn't that much space.

John Bate came in there one day and said, "What are you doing here with all these guys going in and out your launching ramp?" I said, "They are paying me two bucks a head to launch their boats. They do their own launching, but some of them I have to help. They go fishing and they come back at the end of the day, haul their boat out to go home and pay me again two bucks to haul out."

I was making a few dollars doing that. That was all in March of 1949 up until about 1957. That was when we built the Red Sails Inn and did away with Ulcer Gulch out back. But there is a prior story to that. We will get into that later, with the marina we bought across the street called the Point Loma Anchorage. Herbie Sinnhoffer and I decided to buy that from the fellow who was getting out.

EB: Was Herb at that time just a sailmaker?

JD: Oh, yeah, he was a sailmaker and quite a famous sailmaker around San Diego. He had the loft upstairs above the Marine Exchange, next door to my little lunch stand. That is how we got acquainted. He used to come and eat at my Ulcer Gulch. He and I bought that marina. I had my broker's license, but I didn't have anyplace to bring my boats and park them while we displayed them and sold them.

So it worked out good for me with my broker's license. He wanted to take the old Coast Guard building on the same lease and make a big sail loft over there, which he did.

EB: So you identify the Coast Guard station that was the Coast Guard Auxiliary Station that was built during World War II. It was located right next to the San Diego Yacht Club. So by your time, the Coast Guard Auxiliary buildings after the war were independent buildings and were not part of the yacht club. Who occupied those old Coast Guard Auxiliary buildings after the war?

JD: We only had the one Coast Guard building there as I remember. It was a good-sized building. It was on our lease that we bought out from this other fellow.

EB: Did the Point Loma Anchorage include the Coast Guard Auxiliary building?

JD: It was part of it. It was donated to the city as it was built on city property, the harbor department, so they became the landlord. So with the lease we got that building along with the marina that was already there. I ran the marina and Herbie ran the sail loft. I used my broker's license and sold quite a few small yachts out of there. The biggest boat I ever sold was the *Malabar 8* (a John Alden design). It was 58 feet, the biggest deal I ever made. We had a lot of fun and we were there from 1954.

In the latter part of 1956 John Bate was part of the board of directors at the San Diego Yacht Club. He came over and asked us to sell to the San Diego Yacht Club as they wanted to expand. I told him that I would have to talk to Herbie about that because I don't know whether he wanted to do it or not. We'd have to have a meeting here and talk it over, and he said find out what Herbie would like to do and get back to him.

I talked to Herb. He and I had a good, long talk and I said, "You know, I've always wanted to build that restaurant over on my other lease and wanted to call it the Red Sails Inn if I ever built it."

EB: Just on that one point, since Red Sails did have an existence earlier, it didn't exist there, in fact, but downtown there was a Red Sails Inn back in the early 1930s. How did you get the name Red Sails? Were you deliberately trying to reactivate the name Red Sails? Had you heard of the earlier restaurant downtown?

JD: I went to the city where the fictitious names are filed and found out that that name was still in existence with a fellow by the name of Werts. I called him up and told him that I would like to buy that fictitious name from him if he intended to not use it anymore. He said he would be happy to give it to me. So I already had permission to use that name if I built the restaurant.

EB: Was he the one who was the original creator of the name Red Sails Inn?

JD: He was the original of the Red Sails Inn down there at the foot of Market Street on the old pier.

EB: So he registered the fictitious name, the Red Sails?

JD: Yeah, he just gave it to me. He said to get the papers that I needed to have him sign off and he said, "I'll sign it, have them notarized and you can have it because I own the Brass Rail downtown now and it is a going concern. I don't want to get back on the waterfront and I don't intend to use that name. I'll be happy to give it to you."

EB: Is that the same Brass Rail that moved up to Hillcrest that is now at Robinson and 5th Streets?

JD: I think it is. That is the same guy, Werts.

EB: Okay. So you now have the name and was it your intent to have it just a lunch spot, or did you have bigger plans for it?

JD: Oh, I had bigger ideas about that before I ever got the okay from John Bate on that. I had been denied building a bigger restaurant once before by the harbor department. We kind of had old John over the barrel because when we had our second meeting, Herbie and I decided what we wanted to do. Herbie wanted to stay in the sail making business on the premises of the yacht club in that old building and I wanted to build my Red Sails Inn on my other lease.

So we just flat out told him that if he would give me permission to build the restaurant I want to build on my other lease and Herbie can stay here in the San Diego Yacht Club and pay rent to the yacht club, that is the way we would do it and sell him the yacht club property for x-number of dollars. And we did that. They accepted the deal and we got the deal we wanted.

EB: So what did the yacht club buy? You gave something to the yacht club?

JD: The yacht club bought the marina and they ended up with the lease.

EB: So they essentially took over Point Loma Anchorage lease? And the Coast Guard buildings stayed there on the lease?

JD: They stayed there on the lease which was already the harbor department's property. I guess they tore that down when they remodeled the yacht club.

EB: So the new Red Sails Inn started off with what--breakfast, lunch and dinner?

JD: It was January 27, 1957 that we opened up. We had a beer and wine license; we did not have a liquor license at that time. We had a little bit of dining area, but a lot of counter space service. We had some tables in the dining area, but we didn't have the dining room that is out back now. Then we put in a fish pond that was full of lobsters outside of the windows of the dining room.

That stayed that way until I sold the business to my bartender in 1966. His name was Chuck Adams. He bought my half interest because I sold a half interest to Carl Reed about two years into the operation of the Red Sails Inn so that I could go into the flying business.

Carl was to run the restaurant and we would split our take. He would get a 60 percent take and I would get a 40 percent take because he was doing all the work. Carl was a real fine fellow and a good operator. He and I got along well and we made a lot of money down there at that old Red Sails Inn.

He had been a restaurant operator from San Francisco. He had two other restaurants up there, but he wanted to move to San Diego. He bought a home down off of Kellogg Street someplace in Point Loma off of Rosecrans Street. He had a wife who was an "alkie" [alcoholic] and a beautiful daughter who used to swim nude in one of those bars down in Mission Valley. They called it the Mermaid Bar and his daughter was the mermaid. It was at the Stardust Hotel. Carl didn't like that.

EB: The Stardust Hotel became famous for their mermaids.

JD: I don't have any idea where he is nowadays. He might have gone back to San Francisco; I know he is out of town. I think his wife had to be put away in one of these rehab [rehabilitation] places because she was really bad off on alcohol. Poor guy, he tried to work and keep his wife out of trouble and that kept him going all the time.

EB: So where is the interface? If you had a 40 percent interest and Carl Reed had a 60 percent interest, at some point Carl Eichenlaub, Jr. gets into the picture. How does that happen?

JD: He bought Charlie Willets out next door to the Red Sails Inn on the east side. Willets was an engine mechanic for boats and overhauled engines. He had a little railway there where he could haul boats out--not too big stuff, maybe 30- or 40-footers. He was a very active gentleman and he just up and sold out to Carl Eichenlaub.

I am sure Carl is the one who bought it from Charlie because he is still there now at the same spot. I know that Carl didn't start from scratch; he was already in operation there when he bought it. So it would have had to be from Charlie Willets.

EB: So now you had a new neighbor. Carl Eichenlaub, Jr. had an operation right next to Red Sails.

JD: He had been there ever since I had the Red Sails Inn, and a little before. He is still going strong, but he is not building boats anymore.

EB: Didn't he have some kind of an ownership in the Red Sails, or some kind of a partnership interest in it?

JD: Oh, no way. He didn't have any interest in it at all in the Red Sails Inn. He had the lease next door. He was my neighbor. A nice fellow; we always got along good. He is a hard-working guy. I visited him just a while back and he introduced me to the new owners of the Red Sails Inn. There are three people now. The third ones since I sold out.

I had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman, one of the partners. He was really glad to have me come in. Carl introduced me to him. He wanted to know what year I built that restaurant because he had no way in the world of knowing. I gave him the dates and he wrote it down so he could put it on his menu, I guess. He was really interested in that, a nice fellow.

EB: Most of the history of the Red Sails has been passed along in time through rumors. Very few people have had a personal knowledge of how that all evolved on Shelter Island. So consequently that is why we are taping all of this because at least you actually experienced it because you owned it. So that puts you in a little different category than most people who are what we call waterfront gossip. Most of it is baloney. So you operated the Red Sails for approximately nine years.

JD: Well, from 1957 to 1966. That is when I sold out. We were operating on a 60-40 percent of the profit because he was doing the work. I finally sold my half to the bartender, Chuck Adams.

EB: So now you are out of the restaurant business?

JD: Thank God. I don't want anymore restaurant business.

EB: What was next for you?

JD: The next thing I wanted to do was get into the flying business. But I did that before I sold the Red Sails Inn. That is why I had Carl Reed come in as a partner to run the place so that I could go into the flying business up at Palomar Airport in March of 1959. I operated that airport until 1966. I sold it the same year I sold the Red Sails Inn. Somebody wanted it worse than I did, so I sold it. That was a mistake because the airport is really a success now. At that time it was just barely making it. I had a 20-year lease on the airport.

EB: Were you the sole owner of the Palomar, or did you have a partner?

JD: We had a corporation. It was called Airstream Aviation. I had a doctor and a building contractor as two partners in the stock. I operated the flying service, but they continued with their doctoring and building careers.

EB: Were you an instructor? When you say air service, that doesn't mean anything to me.

JD: I learned to fly in 1936 with Bill Gibbs here in San Diego. He is one of the old-timers. He taught me to fly a 40-horsepower Cub. I've been flying all my life up until two years ago when I had to give it up because I lost my eyesight in my right eye.

EB: Jack and I were discussing the Red Sails Inn physical layout. From the get-go to begin with, apparently there were docks built in front of the Inn out into the water. Jack, were those docks designed originally?

JD: Yeah, I think we had something like 12 slips in there that could take pretty good-sized boats, 30 to 40 foot boats, nothing over 38 foot, the biggest boat down there.

EB: Did you figure out a way to use that saltwater pond out in front of the restaurant like putting fish in there, lobsters, or something?

JD: We had a big fish tank outside the dining room windows of the Red Sails Inn so that we could put live lobsters in there and the customer could go out, pick one out with a net, or dip him out of there himself. The cook would pick it up in a pot, take it in and cook it for the customer. That was a big deal; they liked that.

EB: You couldn't complain about the lobster since you had picked it out yourself. Is that right?

JD: It was really a unique idea. Of course we ended up with an oyster bar later. That was a pretty good payoff. We had fresh, live oysters all the time down there.

EB: Where did you get those?

JD: They came from the Peoples Fish Market, as I remember. Of course Carl did all the ordering when we had the oyster bar. He knew all about that. I was kind of into the flying business at that part of the operation.

EB: Were the lobsters bought from local people?

JD: From local fishermen. They would bring them in and we would buy them directly from them.

EB: Drop them into the dock?

JD: They would come into the guest dock, take a look and dump them in there after they weighed them. We would just pay them off, buy our own fish. You make a little better profit doing that. We had the end dock as a guest dock so we could load and unload what they called cattle boats. Sport fishermen would buy a ticket and go out as an individual customer to go out fishing for the day, or half day.

We had one operator who had about a 45-footer. He was our man who took all the people out fishing. We'd sell the tickets up front and we'd sell the tackle and charter boats if somebody wanted to charter a boat. My dad's boat was for charter all the time. He used to take a lot of movie people out on his boat Mauna Loa. He would go over to the del Coronado Hotel and pick them up, like Gene Raymond and Jeanette McDonald were on his boat. I've got pictures of them on the back deck of dad's boat. I was deckhand on that boat that day for him.

EB: You know the Southwestern Yacht Club was founded in 1926 and the first commodore was Dr. Chartres Martin, who also happened to be one of the physicians that attended John D. Spreckels. He was in the upper echelon of being a very well-known physician. Ten years later your father became commodore of the same yacht club. How did he get into the yachting scene? This is unusual for somebody who does body work on cars and paints cars for J. R. Townsend. Now he becomes commodore of the Southwestern Yacht Club in Point Loma. How does that happen?

JD: Southwestern Yacht Club started down at the foot of Grape Street over where the Civic Center [County Administration Center] is now, in that area. That was in the 1920s. I remember that. I used to have my little gaff-rigged 15 foot sloop that I used to sail around the bay when I was about 15 years old. In fact, I used to sail it over to Lindbergh Field on high tide before it was ever completed. On low tide, if you were out over Lindbergh Field you stayed there until the tides came in. I've had that happen, too.

EB: It wasn't used as an airfield then?

JD: They just had all dirt runways and that sort of thing. It was just a sand-filled airport.

EB: But it was used for aviation, but only at low tide?

JD: Ryan Aeronautical was operating out of there. They had those trainers and all of that. When the tide would go back up in there you could sail your boat back up in there. It was just kind of sloughs, you know. Then when the tide went you'd better get out before it went all the way down because you'd get stuck up there and you'd have to stay until the tide came in again. Those were the good old days.

Dad ended up with an old water taxi that he bought from Star & Crescent. It was a 32-footer that was just a hull when he bought it. He had it hauled out and put on a big trailer. He brought it home and parked it behind his garage where he had his shop. He would work on the boat in the evenings, cleaning, scrapping and painting.

He put a cabin on it, put a motor in it and got it so he could go fishing. We called it the Betty D for Betty Davis, my sister. We used to go marlin fishing with it; we used to go on yacht club picnics that they had over on North Island at Whalers' Bight. We used to ride in there on the high tide and all the guys with their yachts would pull in there and anchor, go ashore in their dinghies. We would have a big beach party there about once a year. It was really fun. All the new members had to wear white sailor outfits. They got initiated by getting a swat from a great big mustard paddle out of a five gallon mustard bucket that we had for our hot dogs, right on the seat of their pants. I remember seeing that cause I thought that was funny. I was just a young fella in those days.

EB: So your dad liked to participate in the social affairs of Southwestern Yacht Club?

JD: Oh, yeah. He had a lot of fun in that club. Of course they had to shut that down when they built the Civic Center in there [1933] and get all those people out. Al Haltainius used to have a dry dock on the north side of the Southwestern Yacht Club back in the 1920s. They did have to get out of there and I can't remember what year they moved into what I call Sandy Point and start building over there. That is a pretty nice operation now. Dad was a commodore after they had moved in to Point Loma.

EB: In 1935 Southwestern Yacht Club had not been built on that Point yet.

JD: It was not there in 1935? Then he would have had to be the commodore of the old yacht club when it was at the foot of Grape Street.

EB: I don't remember exactly what occurred, but I remember personally after World War II the yacht club was not there. That was in the 1940s. Southwestern Yacht Club where it is now, was built there after World War II.

JD: It was built after World War II because I was there [poaching on the Point] until 1945 or 1946 when I had to get out.

EB: That was when John Bate suggested that you ought to go down and get a legitimate lease from the director of the port.

JD: My dad's picture is hanging up at the Southwestern Yacht Club right down there with all those other guys. I still call it Sandy Point. My stepmother is real proud of that picture of my dad hanging up down there. She tells everybody about it. Even you have been down there, too, haven't you, Ed?

EB: Yeah, I've seen it. It is a good picture of your dad, very clear.

JD: He was a good-looking guy in his day.

EB: Let's see, anything else about the club we should know? Did he encounter any unusual experiences in his responsibility as commodore?

JD: He used to like to fish a lot. The Mauna Loa was the name of the second boat he built. He built that in our backyard. It was a 38-foot Hackercraft. He had a yacht builder come out and work weekends and evenings with him. It took them three years to build it in their spare time. They launched it in 1936. That was the year before we moved out of that area and moved to Point Loma. He kept it behind my Red Sails Inn all the time I had the marina there. He got free dockage.

EB: Do you remember a fellow who had a loan institution by the name of Fred Houser in Pacific Beach? He kept a boat down there. It was one of the very few old power boats that had dual ignition system.

JD: Behind the Red Sails? I guess I am getting old, I can't seem to remember some of those names. I remember old Kenny Stockwell. He used to be on a little boat that he lived on down at our docks. He was a pretty nice guy. When Chuck Adams, our bartender, bought the Inn from me, he took Kenny up to his big ranch in Jamul someplace. Kenny moved up there with him to take care of his animals, the horses. He later died up there on Chuck's ranch. Then Chuck's wife died of cancer on the ranch. Chuck sold the Red Sails Inn to get out of town; he just couldn't handle those people dying. That is when he got rid of the Inn to the people who have it now. I think they are the third owners, the people who have it now.

EB: There has been sort of a blending there. Rick Hill and Grant Calloway were the owners when I lived at Red Sails (1976-1981).

JD: They were the ones who Chuck sold out to, I think.

EB: Grant Calloway died of cancer and that made Rick the sole owner. He sold his partner's interest to the people who are presently there. Rick Hill still is a major partner, as far as I know. I believe he is still a 50 percent owner of Red Sails Inn.

JD: So he'd be the third owner.

EB: But it was sort of a blending. Everybody didn't sell out totally, but new people came in by buying a 50 percent interest. It sort of evolved.

There is one other area that we need to cover and that is how the High Seas tuna factory that was located just to the south of Byron Street, which is now Shelter Island Drive leading onto Shelter Island functioned. The way it was for years was the pier for that factory was right next to the yacht club to start with. That is where the tuna clippers would come in. They put out so much foam from cleaning fish and cleaning the fish tanks and all that sort of thing that the yacht club people were complaining a lot to the port.

JD: That was before Byron Street was connected to Shelter Island. They did have to run them out of there. Well, they didn't run them out, they just moved all those tuna boats back over on the commercial side and put a pier next to where Eichenlaub's place is now. Then they put a big giant pipe that you could walk through underground from the dock next to Eichenlaub, underneath Byron Street to the High Seas Tuna Cannery, which was directly across the street from the Marine Exchange and the Red Sails Inn. We could watch them clean the fish out the window.

EB: The end result was that it became less and less efficient for the tuna cannery to operate on Point Loma which was not really an ideal location for processing fish. They even went to the point where they took fish off the tuna boats and started trucking them downtown to another processing plant. Ultimately they just decided to close their doors and not do canning of tuna there on Point Loma anymore. So that is where the name Commercial Basin came from, and Yacht Club Cove, because once they put in Shelter Island Drive on the side where the San Diego Yacht Club is, it became known as Yacht Club Cove. And the side over where the pier for the tuna boats were tied up was called the Commercial Basin.

Then, of course, when Dennis Conner was able to win the America's Cup, the Unified Port District fathers or politician people decided that we could not have the America's Cup syndicate groups in the Commercial Basin. It just didn't sound good when you are on international color television--in San Diego, to say that the syndicate from France is located in the Commercial Basin.

So they renamed the Commercial Basin to "America's Cup Cove." And to this day that is its technical and legal title. But nobody ever calls it that anymore because the minute they named it the America's Cup Cove, they lost the cup to New Zealand! So we don't have a cup and the name is moot. Now it has reverted back and by popular use to the Commercial Basin. I think that is about it for our interview. It is getting late and I think we have enough on this tape and the transcriber, I am sure, will have a real challenge to get it all down.

Jack, I want to thank you very much for sharing all this personal history of Point Loma and early yachting experiences that you had there, and especially your flying experiences. So, basically, for you it is two careers overlapping. Most people are satisfied with one career, but you couldn't say no to challenges and opportunities. So thanks very much for sharing that with us.

JD: And, thank you, Ed. I really enjoyed talking with you this evening.

Continuation of interview with Jack Davis June 12, 1998, subject:

START EARLY PRIVATE AVIATION IN SAN DIEGO

JD: "Sailor" Main was a used car dealer. He was a very famous dealer here in San Diego because he ran such asinine ads in the newspapers to get customers. He'd write poems, he'd write up all his jalopies and all kinds of crazy ads. Everybody knew him in town. He was really a popular car dealer. He and I were pretty good friends. In 1946 I had traded him the T-6 (a fighter-trainer, single engine, 650 horsepower retractable gear airplane) for a Cadillac. He gave me \$2,000 cash difference.

He said, "Let's go over and have a drink. It is closing time." It was about ten o'clock p.m. We went next door to Tops Drive-in and had a drink or two. We were looking at his bid sheet that he had gotten in the mail that day from war assets. It showed a bunch of Fairchild PT-26s, Fairchild Cornells. They were Canadian airplanes. They were going up for sealed bid with a fixed base price on them. He said we could buy them for a straight-out price of \$875, all we wanted. If we wanted to bid on them we could bid less. Maybe we would get them or maybe we wouldn't.

EB: Was this war surplus? What year was that?

JD: That was in 1946. We went back east in the T-6 to get them. That is how we got this whole thing started. Sailor said he would see how many cars he would have to move off the lot before we could get the T-6 out on the street to taxi it down to the airport. Maybe there was some other way we could go.

We went over to his car lot. We were all dressed up in our suits; we'd had a snort or two. I said, "You know what, Sailor, there is only one thing that keeps me from driving that airplane right off the sidewalk and over the curb onto Pacific Highway and that is that great big light post in front of us. That isn't yours, is it?" And he said that belonged to the City of San Diego for sure.

"How are we going to get that thing out of the way?" I asked him if he had a cutting torch back in his shop and he said he had. By this time it was eleven o'clock at night. I said, "Give me that torch, I am going to get down on my hands and knees and chop it off. Then you push on it so it will go

out into the street when it hits the deck. We don't want to drop it on a car going by. Whenever you say, 'Cut the last part,' and I will. Then you shove it out into the street, but don't let it land on the airplane."

So we got with it. He was pushing on the light post and I was down on my hands and knees cutting the bottom of the pipe. The lights were on full tilt. When I cut it all the way around, he said, "Okay, I'm ready." And I said, "I'm ready, too, and it is going to go any minute." He started pushing like hell and it went out into the street. As it went out into the street it blew all the circuits and the light bulbs broke. There were about five bulbs. The reflectors were laying out in the street and we had to drag them out of the way. The power had gone off from the short circuit somewhere or other, so the lights on the street had gone out.

I said, "We are going to have to move fast before the police come, so I'll get in the airplane and start it up. You get out into the street with a car and block traffic so I can taxi off of the curb one wheel at a time. Then we will go on down northbound on Pacific Highway and get up to Laurel Street, make our left turn and go down to the Coast Guard Station. You are going to have to get ahead of me to open that gate to get me onto the airport."

I got into the T-6 and lit it off, turned the rotating beacon on and the landing lights on and the navigation lights on so nobody would hit us on the highway. He got a limousine he had at the back of his lot. He parked it across Pacific Highway while I taxied the plane off of the curb. I had the canopy back and was just sitting in there. I didn't have the seat belt on or nothing. I made my right turn and was heading on down Pacific Highway northbound.

I had to taxi by Tops Drive-in, the restaurant and bar. Of course, with all this noise, everybody came out to see what was going on. We were only about three blocks from the airport. They knew it was an airplane because that old T-6 made a hell of a roar. I just went on by and I started zigzagging because you cannot see over the nose of that airplane unless you make what they call "S" turns while going ahead. You make a turn to the right and look and then you make a turn to the left and look. You make "S" turns. Sailor is doing the same thing with the limousine to keep people on the highway from passing me.

We get down to Laurel Street and here are all these people who have come out to see what the noise was. They came out onto the porch at the bar. I am waving to them and they are waving back. The traffic light went green from red and I had to make a left turn. I stuck my hand out of the canopy to make a left turn onto Laurel Street to the Coast Guard Station. He got ahead of me with the Cadillac limo he was driving and he pushed the gate open with the bumper of the car because it was on an electric bump gate of some kind that the Coast Guard had control of.

I taxied it up onto the field, but before I got up too close to the airport where the tower was, I shut all the lights off because I could see well enough to get it up onto the field. I just put it on the field by Ryan Aircraft, shut the engine off and he picked me up. We took off for his car lot again to get my car. We didn't get caught. If we had gotten caught, both of us would have gone to jail and probably got the electric chair for what we did. But anyway, we got away with it.

Sailor and I took off the next morning in that airplane and headed for North Dakota. We made it there by dark. We bought eight airplanes back there, these Fairchild 26s. Then we had a problem because we had nine airplanes with the one we had flown back there to take home and only two of us could fly. Sailor had never flown a T-6, nor had he ever flown a PT26. The only thing he had ever flown was a little Taylorcraft, side by eights that he had. He had a student's license, though. I said I would check him out in one of these PT-26s to where he was able to fly it safely. "You fly one home and I'll fly one home and we'll leave the T-6 here. We'll get somebody else to fly some, if we can."

We went around the airport to all the pilots we could find and asked them if they would like to fly an airplane to San Diego and we would buy them an airline ticket home to get a little free flying time. one guy said, "Yeah, I'd like to do that. I've been flying B-25s in the military, but I'm out of the

service now. I haven't flown anything like this in a long time. If you want to check me out, I'll fly one out and you buy me a ticket home by airline." I flew with him until he was capable to fly it.

So I said, "Okay, tomorrow we will take off with three of them and head for San Diego. I'll be the lead plane and the navigator because my friend here is a student pilot and he doesn't know where we are, so you just stay with me and we'll take these things and go home." And we did that.

Anyway, the whole thing I am building up to tell you, the poor guy (Sailor) just died here last week. He was 81 years old.

We sold all those airplanes after we got them home. We sold some to PSA [Pacific Southwest Airlines] and sold some to North American Aviation. Another guy bought one and Sailor kept one for himself and crashed in it. He busted himself all up and had to go to the hospital. They put a pin in his leg and he always hobbled after that. He never could walk very good. I would see him every once in a while on his car lot. He moved to El Cajon Boulevard and we would reminisce about the old days. We had a lot of fun together. Old Sailor died at the age of 81 with heart failure here in a rest home last week. I didn't know about it until Tommy Warner called me and said old Sailor had died. John Carroll called me and my son-in-law, Bob, called me and said he had read it in the paper. He saved the paper for me and sent the article to me. So I just thought I'd tell you guys about that. I don't know if I had told you that wild story about those old T-6s that we bought right after the war. We sent a station wagon back to Fargo, North Dakota with five pilots to get the rest of the planes. Sailor Main owned the station wagon. He was using that as kind of a company car, with a secretary along to drive it back after she dumped us all out.

So there were six pilots in this one car and the secretary. She drove with us and we got all the way back to Fargo, North Dakota. One of the pilots was an ex-Navy WASP [Women's Air Force Service Pilot]. Her name was Mary Ring. She was a hell of a pilot because she had flown all the military stuff ferrying it around the country. I put her in charge of five of those airplanes and the five guys and I flew the T-6 back. That is the way we got them all home. It was quite a deal. We made a few bucks off of it, but not as much as we thought we would.

Well, as I said before, I am only going to do this one side of this 60 minute tape, which is equal to the two sides of a 30 minute tape. It is just about to peter out so I am going to say Adios.

END OF INTERVIEW

ADDENDUM

(This is a Jack Davis monologue recorded by him on May 17, 1998 before the oral history interview with Edward Barr, June 2, 1998.)

JACK A. DAVIS: Let's talk about Jack Davis' background. I am a native-born prune picker from San Diego, born here September 4, 1922. I am 75 years old now. Born and raised down in southeast San Diego, grew up there in the 1920s. I left there and moved to Point Loma in 1937 to get away from all the black people over in that side of the town. We built a nice new home up on Lucinda Street at the top of Bangor Street at Lucinda Street. I went to Point Loma High School. My mother was a native Californian also. Her name was Defrate before she was married. My grandpa was also a native Californian. He used to pick up the United Parcel packages at the old train depot at the foot of Broadway with a horse and carriage back in the early, early 1900s.

My father was from Clay Center, Kansas. He was born and raised back there. He moved to San Diego and married my mother in 1920. He built his own shop on the corner of 27th and L Streets, back in the 1920s. He was an automotive mechanic, body fender man and painted cars for J. R.

Townsend [automobile dealer]. I worked for my dad for about nine years and then went into the boat rental business down on Sandy Point, Point Loma. I called it Sandy Point because that is what they called it back in the olden days before the Southwestern Yacht Club was put on Sandy Point. That is what they called it then. The club now has the whole Point, but I started there in 1946 with a little makeshift building I built out of driftwood. I kept my oars, anchors and life jackets and all my boat rental gear in the little building I built. I built a dock out of driftwood and had a float to get in and out of the boats. We had six rental rowboats, a couple of outboard motorboats and six little sailboats. Most people would rent the boats and put their own outboard motors on them and go fishing. I did that for two or three years. I was just bootlegging it because my mother was a cousin of Joe Brennan's, the old port director before John Bate. One day I was down there minding my own business and waiting for the next customer, and here came a city car driving up. He got out and walked over and says, "What's your name?" I told him Jack Davis. He said, "I'm John Bate, the new port director for San Diego harbor."

He asked me how long I had been here and I told him a couple of years. He asked me if I paid any rent and I told him, "No, I'm just a freeloader, just a squatter." He told me that that was illegal and he said, "We've got a new area that we are going to be leasing out over on Byron Street." It is called the Byron Street Mole (now Shelter Island Drive). He said I was going to have to get off of there because it was illegal and that he would be happy to talk to me if I would go down to his office. He said he would lease me a piece of land on the Byron Street Mole on the commercial side. That would be the side that the Red Sails Inn is on. He said I could rent boats and do whatever I wanted to do there, "if you rent the piece of land from the harbor department."

I went down to his office. He was a very nice gentleman and I talked with him. He told me that I would have to have at least a hundred foot frontage to get a lease, with 100 feet deep. Then I would have to have 150 feet of water behind that to go with the lease. That is the way they did things in those days.

He said that would cost me \$250 a month. That is when I opened my cafe place called Ulcer Gulch. It was a little beanery, like we had beans and we fed the tuna fish cannery people across the street, the old High Seas Tuna Cannery. They would come over for lunch and have a bowl of chili and a bottle of beer, a hamburger or a hot dog for lunch. My wife and I ran that place from March 1949 through 1954 or '55. That is when we wanted to build the Red Sails Inn. In the meantime I bought a half interest in the Point Loma Anchorage next door at the north side of the San Diego Yacht Club with Herb Sinnhoffer, the sailmaker. We bought the Point Loma Anchorage and 150 slips in there. We were there just about a year.

Then the San Diego Yacht Club wanted to expand their facilities. John Bate was on the board of directors of the club at that time. He came over and talked to us and said that we were asked to sell our business to the San Diego Yacht Club as they wanted to expand and would we do it. I told him that I wanted to build a bigger and fancier restaurant over on my lease on Byron Street, and if I could get permission to do that I'd be interested in selling. Herb said that if he could stay there in that old Coast Guard building and make sails like he had been doing right along, he would be willing to sell his half interest.

John said he would go back to his board's meeting and tell them what we had established and see what they wanted to do. He came back and said, "You can have your permit to build your restaurant, or whatever you want to build on your lease on Byron Street and Herb could stay here in the Coast Guard building. He would have to pay rent to the yacht club, so if we would sell our interests to them they would be happy to pay cash for it and buy us out." So we did. We sold it to the San Diego Yacht Club in about 1956.

Then I got my permit and built the Red Sails Inn. I opened it up January 27, 1957. It is still going strong. My wife and I ran it for about three years. I took in a partner, Carl Reed. He was a half owner of the restaurant. He did all the work while I went into the flying business up at Palomar Airport and

established the county airport there at Carlsbad. It was called Air Stream Aviation. I was there until 1966 when I sold my flying service. I also sold the Red Sails Inn to my bartender, Carl Reed, the same year.

I also had a yacht broker's license there at the dock at the Red Sails Inn. We put in a marina behind the Inn and had about 17 to 20 slips. We had a sport fishing operation out at the end of the dock where sport fishers would take people out on the "cattle boat" trip, you know, where they would buy a ticket and go out fishing. We had a tackle store on the east side of the Inn where we sold the tickets to go out on the sport fishing boats. We also had a fuel dock behind the Inn back in the earlier days.

I might go on to say that Carl Eichenlaub, Jr. came in and bought the gentleman out next door to me on the east side. His name was Charles Willets. He had a marine boatyard there where he overhauled engines and things like that. As I remember, he sold out to Carl Eichenlaub.

The peninsula, the Byron Street Mole, was not connected to Shelter Island back in those days. Later on, about two or three years later they did connect the two at Shelter Island and started developing the island. There have been a lot of changes made there since I started back in March of 1949.

Another incident that happened that I want to tell you about back in the old days. I was letting people use my launching ramp there on the east side of the Red Sails Inn to launch their boats to go out fishing. They didn't have a public launching ramp down on Shelter Island when they connected the Byron Street Mole to it.

People would pay me to come in and launch their boats on my ramp. It got pretty hectic. I was the only guy on the mole there who had a launching ramp. They would have to park their cars and trailers out in the street and then haul their boats back out of the water when they came back from fishing.

John Bate came by one day and saw this action and he noticed that I was getting kind of swamped with my activity. I told him that I had more than I can handle. I told him, "You know, they are going to need a public launching ramp out on Shelter Island some day for these people who have their private boats on trailers. We ought to look into the future and put a place down there for people to launch their boats."

He said, "I'll get you in the car and we are going to take a drive down there. You show me where you think we ought to have a launching ramp down there someplace on Shelter Island and I'll see to it that we get one put in." So I got into John Bate's city car and we drove down and looked the place over. I told him that that is where I'd put it, right where it is today, and told him that I would put a little jetty around it to keep off the wakes from all the boats going out to sea from slamming the boats on the trailers. He went ahead and made the most beautiful launching ramp down there that you can imagine.

END OF INTERVIEW