



# PanCanal Alumni Association

*Where Panamanians Unite*

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## Our Alma Mater

### Paraiso High School



**A Tribute to PHS School Faculty**  
To view Album  
[Click Here](#)

### **School Memories** Class of 1978 & 1979 High School Memories

To view Album  
[Click Here](#)

### Balboa High School



## Genealogy Links

Looking for an Ancestor in the Panama Canal Zone 1904-1914 by Robert Ellis ([click here](#))

Death Records Gorgas Hospital Mortuary Panama, 1906-1991 ([click here](#))

Panama Canal Census Tract database dated back to 1930 ([click here](#))

## Alumni Newsletter

### **PanCanal Alumni Noteworthy People**

*To Commemorate Remarkable Panamanians*

PanCanal Alumni Association  
**SALUTES Captain Earle Hubert Holder Hunte**  
**FIRST BLACK MASTER PILOT OF THE PANAMA CANAL**  
By Beverly D. Barnett, CEO



This month I had the honor to meet and interview Captain Earle Hubert Holder Hunte. Captain Holder is the First Black Master Pilot of West Indian descent to pilot and command ship transits through the Panama Canal. He worked for the Panama Canal for half a century (50 years!!). He was hired on January 23, 1940 and retired on June 2, 1990. Captain Holder was and still is until today a very passionate individual that is proud of his service to the Panama Canal and he brings over 5 decades of hands-on PanCanal knowledge to our community. We therefore SALUTE Captain Earle Hubert Holder Hunte as the first alumni to be spotlighted in PANCANAL ALUMNI NOTEWORTHY PEOPLE, which is a series of interviews that will be conducted to commemorate remarkable Panamanians. Captain Holder also plans to join us at the PanCanal Alumni Association All Class Gala Event on December 31, 2008 in Panama City, Panama. Everyone attending the event will get an opportunity to meet this remarkable Panamanian in person.

Captain Earle Hubert Holder Hunte was born on September 14, 1923 in Red Tank, former Canal Zone Bldg. 503 (also known as Rio Grande). He is the son of James Holder Pyle and Inez A. Holder Hunte; both were natives of the Island of Barbados. Other siblings from this marriage include: Edene Holder-Miller, James H. Holder (deceased 2006), Inez A. Holder-Smith (deceased 1976) and Rev. Arthur H. Holder (deceased 1966). Captain Holder (now a widow) was married to Maxima Rosales de Holder and from that marriage they had six children: Daniel Holder, Maxima Lee Holder, Karen Melina Holder, Anthony David Holder, William Howard Holder, Phillip Edward Holder (deceased);

## ALUMNI NEWS

### YEARBOOKS:

[Balboa High School](#)  
Class of 1979

[Paraiso/Balboa High School](#)  
Class of 1978  
(yearbook missing)

[Paraiso/Balboa High School](#)  
Class of 1978  
Graduation List

[Paraiso High School](#)  
Class of 1976

[Paraiso High School](#)  
Class of 1973 **NEW!**

[Paraiso High School](#)  
Class of 1963

to add yearbooks to our site email us at [info@pancanalalumni.com](mailto:info@pancanalalumni.com)

### Alumni Directory:

An Alumni Directory of Former Canal Zone Graduates is under development.  
Release Date: TBA

## Alumni Information LINKS

### Former Canal Zone Records

Birth, Marriage, Divorce  
[Click Here](#)

### Transcripts For:

[Paraiso High School](#)  
[Balboa High School](#)  
[Rainbow City High School](#)  
[Cristobal High School](#)  
[Canal Zone College](#)  
Click Image

and five grandchildren.

I am proud to announce that Captain Holder is also a PanCanal Alumni from the Class of 1937 and thus share his school experience during that period with us. During childhood he attended Paraiso Elementary School and was subsequently transferred to another Junior High School aka "Colored Schools" located in Gamboa because Paraiso was converted to an Army Base during World War II. He mentioned that when Paraiso School was disbanded, students had a choice to go to school in the towns of Gamboa, La Boca, or Red Tank. He then graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 1937 and was #1 in his class. He indicated that during that time high school ended in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Captain Holder recalls attending a school system that was strictly under the U.S. curriculum system and that his teachers were all of West Indian descent. He stressed that they were all very, very good educators. He also recalled that Spanish was introduced into the curriculum while in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade as a subject because of the efforts of George Westerman, a leading black man who fought for the rights of the blacks working for the Panama Canal. Mr. George Westerman felt that it was important that Panamanian born students attending Canal Zones Schools should learn the native language of the country. The schools were subsequently converted from Canal Zone Colored Schools to the Latin American School System. He hated to state this but it's the sole truth that due to the strong U.S. influence he was well versed in American history and not Panamanian history. He acclaimed those eight years of schooling as part of an excellent education system.

Even though Captain Holder's father was among the canal construction employees at the Dredging Division of the Panama Canal, it took a few years after Captain Holder's graduation to secure employment with that Division. He started in 1940 in the role as a Boy for 3 months from January thru March 1940 at the rate of 13 cents an hour, he saved his money and bought his first bicycle for \$35.00 just right before World War II started. He then got a job as a Boatman at \$42.50 a month from April to November 1940. Captain Holder acquired varied and invaluable experience while serving in the Survey Dept. and as a Boatman. He was soon promoted to the motor boat department where he served as a Launch Operator, but in 1959 he was moved up into the Navigation Department stationed in Balboa. In 1968 a four-year apprenticeship program was instituted for six tug-boat operators then consisting of 3 Panamanians and 3 US Citizens. However, Captain Holder and two U.S Citizens were granted a special two-year program instead, so as to qualify them as two-boat masters. That two-year study program led toward the transitioning of large vessels through canal waters; and from that point on Captain Holder became the first Black Panamanian of West Indian descent to pilot and command ship transits through the Panama Canal. In 1970, he became a tug-boat master; and by 1978 he initiated a career as a Pilot in Training becoming the third Panamanian in the pilot force. He gradually progressed up the ladder to Pilot and on May 24, 1987 was promoted to Senior Pilot. It is to be mentioned that during the years that he underwent pilot training, he experienced many obstacles with his peers. This made his learning process even more difficult. These adversities did not hinder his performance or perseverance; he demonstrated to all,



management and peers, that despite lack of maritime experience and other obstacles encountered, he was quite capable of becoming an excellent pilot and a credit to the pilot force. As a Pilot he was expected to perform at various levels: first with 225-foot boats, then 400-foot, and then 525-foot boats. Captain Holder is thus rated among Senior Pilots to command the 98-foot beams and pilot the largest ships of the world to transit the canal. During his career he piloted at least 1,500 ships thru the canal to include passenger ships, tankers, yachts, submarines, containers ships, oil tankers, etc. He was responsible for briefing ship captains as soon as he stepped aboard and supervised ship and locomotive operators within his line of duty. Captain Holder had outstanding maritime skills, engineering, and technical capabilities. He also has the ability to get along with all types of people from around the world.

During his career he never ceased in his endeavor to learn from more experienced pilots, and to pass on his knowledge to the less experienced pilots. He is an excellent example of a Panama Canal Pilot and a gentleman. His distinctive personality and friendliness were great assets to the pilot force. In 1977 Captain Holder was distinguished with a Special Achievement Award for an outstanding record of performance. Captain Holder was also the recipient of the Canal Zone Government-Panama Canal Company Industrial Accident Prevention Certificate Award in recognition of his successful accident prevention efforts as a Supervisor of the Balboa Tug Crews. In 1987 he was distinguished with an Outstanding Performance Award. In 1989 he attended the Buckle Up America awards ceremony in Washington D.C. and received the Federal Employee Safety Belt Recognition Award for avoiding injury or death wearing a seatbelt while riding in a company car involved in an accident. Captain Holder consistently maintained awareness for safety and contributed significantly towards enhancing the Panama Canal Commission worldwide reputation for excellence.

Parallel to his piloting accomplishments, Captain Holder was well known for the many years he supported sports activities in pro of youngsters throughout the Republic of Panama. Worth of mention is the many hours of his personal time spent at the Pilot Reporting Station in Diablo, so as to be available when and if needed during the events of December 1989.

The Panama Canal Commission also awarded the Master Key to Captain Earl H. Holder in the grade of Master Mariner with all rights, privileges and prerequisites of a bearer of the Golden Key to the Locks of the Panama Canal presented to him on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1990. Captain Holder is also an active member the Panama Canal Pilot Associations, NAFE National Association of Retired Federal Employees.

On behalf of everyone in the community that we serve, PanCanal Alumni Association would like to thank Captain Holder for sharing himself with the world through his dedication and service to the world renowned waterway "The Panama Canal" for over 50 years. Captain Holder you are indeed a Remarkable Panamanian and we Salute You!

Special thanks to Pablo A. Smith Holder (aka Pfunk),

Alumni from Paraiso/Balboa High Class of 1979 and Luis E. Smith Holder (aka Cholu) Alumni from Paraiso Class of 1968 for coordinating the interview with their uncle.

We encourage everyone reading this tribute to visit our guestbook and show your appreciation to Captain Holder. Remember our Motto is PanCanal Alumni Association is a place where Panamanians Unite!

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