BOEM DEEPWATER GULF OF MEXICO HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee:	Ollie Otis "O.O." Jones
Date:	July 22, 2009
Place:	Houma, Louisiana
Interviewer:	Jason Theriot
Ethnographic preface:	Ollie "Double-O" Jones grew up near Natchitoches, Texas, where he finished high school in 1949. Soon after graduation, the Tennessee Gas Transmission Co. (Tenneco) came in to survey a pipeline path, and Jones joined the company that August. Jones moved so as to follow the progress of the work, and stayed on, surveying other lines like the Grand Chenier in the early 1950s. While still in his mid-20s, Jones worked as a "rod man" on the Muskrat line from the Atchafalaya River eastward, clearing the way through the brush and vegetation. After a long career with Tenneco, Jones retired in 1996, having accrued an impressive forty-seven years with the company.

JT: This is an interview with Mr. Double-O Jones.

OJ: Yeah, O.O.

JT: What's that stand for, Mr. Jones?

OJ: Ollie Otis.

JT: Ollie Otis Jones. We're over here in Houma, Louisiana. The date is July 22, 2009. Mr. Jones is originally from the Natchitoches area and we're talking about his experience with Tennessee Gas, all the way back to the Muskrat Line. This is Jason Theriot for the Muskrat Line Project.

All right, Mr. Jones, we're looking at a map. You were cutting bushes in Natchitoches for eighteen cents a day or something like that, you were telling me?

OJ: Originally I was working for my daddy. When I got out of high school I worked for my daddy. He was a plumbing contractor. Well, I was working for $27.50 a week with him. [Newsome] Carraway came into Natchitoches with a survey crew to run the survey from Kinder, I mean from Natchitoches to Kinder. So they hired me in August of '49.

JT: Wow.

OJ: I remember Glen Smith and Willis Brown, Carraway, another one. Well, he hired Jeff Debileux and myself and Norman Fletcher. Anyhow, we struck off south to Kinder. At that time there was another crew starting at Kinder north to meet us around Fort Polk. That was under old man Ohlinger, which they'd hired at the time. He was an old retired Shell surveyor, party chief. I think he'd been over the exploration crew in South America.

JT: Wow. What was your qualifications to work on a survey crew?

OJ: None. My only connection was Jeff Deblieux. His daddy had a hardware store and he sold guns, and old Zufaw, which is another party chief like Carraway, knew him and he told Jeff's daddy that they wanted to hire some hands to cut brush. So Jeff told me and we went down there and we got hired. It was supposed to be a temporary job. I was making 88 cents an hour, and I think I worked three or four days out of August and got three times the money my daddy was paying me.

So they was supposed to leave us in Natchitoches, just temporary work, and leave us, but when I got that hourly pay plus $5 a day expense money, well, I had to go with them, so we moved over to Leesville, Louisiana. At that time, the survey

crew under Bert Reeves and old man Ohlinger had started north and we met up around Fort Polk and that finished that up.

Then we moved off down in South Texas and ran a big line down there toward the Mexican border. Then we came back and started running the line from Kinder south. It was the Grand Chenier Line that followed the highway all down and then turned, went down the Grand Chenier Ridge. We surveyed that. E.J. Zufaw was there. I was working for Carraway. Then, later on when they built that, Harry Long wound up on that and he wound up being president of the company there years later.

JT: But none of this, this extension all the way to the southeast was not there yet?

OJ: Oh no, not at that time. Then this part of the South Louisiana line was built on in to Abbeville and New Iberia and it was picking up this stuff. That's when the big decision was made to make the Muskrat Line. Actually, I think that line came on down here.

JT: Yeah, it came to Bayou Sale, right?

OJ: Bayou Sale, that's what it came to pick up.

JT: It comes this way and then I think—am I correct that this is the Bayou Sale Line south of Franklin?

OJ: This is the Pecan Island Line, we built that next, I think, after that. Then the Pecan Islands, I mean and then the Bayou Sale.

JT: Is it just a mainline valve there or is there a facility?

OJ: No, there's no facility there. There used to be a pipeline warehouse over at Abbeville.

JT: Explain to me, if you're picking up gas, let's say here in Bayou Sale, let's say in 1953 or '54, and this is the furthest you guys got was Bayou Sale, how do you push that gas from here up to New Iberia or even to the Kinder compression station?

OJ: Well, it's just well pressure or compression from the producers.

JT: And that's enough to push that gas this hundred miles or whatever?

OJ: Yeah, yeah, and then that takes off from there. We all knew Kinder was going to be the hub at that time.

JT: A compressor station, in other words, when the gas gets here, it compresses it to send it. It doesn't work to pull the gas, correct?

OJ: No, no.

JT: It just pushes it.

OJ: It went this way up. This is our mainline system right here. This was the 800 line. It was built years later. Let's see. I'm trying to think of what came next.

I guess we could go ahead on into the survey of the Muskrat. The Muskrat started—for me it started about Atchafalaya River. They had had some land crews come in through the swamp over here, and it was kind of a different construction because that was all wooded and a different deal, but it did start with a flotation ditch over here around just to the west of Atchafalaya River. But the parts that I was on was from Atchafalaya River on to the east.

JT: So you were a party chief?

OJ: No, no. I was a rod man, chopping bush. It was two crews, two helicopter crews that was set up. Old man Ohlinger was the one over the deal in the field, and H.J. Meyers was a party chief and O.C. Bell was a party chief, and I worked for Bell. It was only three of us, it was Bell, myself, and Lester Diesel. We had a helicopter and a survey tower made out of aluminum and a thousand-foot aircraft cable for measuring chains. I've got a picture that I could show you. Dailey [Berard] probably already showed that pictures when we first started one day getting out of that roseau cane out there.

JT: Yeah, Hoss Meyers is in there with a cowboy hat?

OJ: No, I believe that's me.

JT: Oh, is that you with the cowboy—

OJ: I got to go get it.

JT: Oh, yeah, sure.

[interruption]

OJ: That's old Herschel Perdue there. He was from Kentucky, a slow-talking dude. That's Chester Matlow; he was from Tennessee. That's Hoss Meyers back there.

JT: Oh, okay, he's hiding.

OJ: That's myself. That's Nieman with that canteen hanging out of his belly. That's Dailey Berard and that's Eddie Parker.

JT: Was Dailey the only one from South Louisiana?

OJ: Yeah. Hoss came from Port Arthur, Texas. Yeah, he was the only one. He was from New Iberia.

JT: So I guess having a French-speaking Cajun like Dailey around kind of helped you guys out when y'all were in some of these areas down here in the southeast, huh?

OJ: No, I don't ever remember using it there. We understood everything that we needed to. We didn't see anybody out there.

JT: Where's this at?

OJ: That's later on. That's how we tapped into those big lines.

JT: Oh, that's a hot tap. Dailey's got a picture of this, but he's got it encased in a frame and there's no way to take the picture out.

OJ: Well, you're welcome to it.

JT: Would you mind if I make a copy of this?

OJ: No, you can keep it if you want.

JT: Thank you. Yeah, that hot tap. Let's see. Any idea where this is? In Lake Barre, you think?

OJ: No, that's right just a little bit to the east across, what is that, Grand Caillou, Little Caillou? From our Cocodrie plant. We made a hot tap there to pick up some stuff that was coming up from the south.

But there's a bunch of old hands there. That's Fred Clark and that's myself. Zane Wiles, he was there, and David Monroe. That's Hoss Meyers, O.C. Bell. See, that's the two party chiefs right there. I worked with this guy. There was two helicopters and two three-man crews that went with them.

I don't know who in the devil got that stuff rigged up with PHI, the helicopter company, but they had those things. I imagine it was old man Ohlinger, because he'd been around some of that stuff. But our first surveying with helicopters was over here on the Pecan Island Line.

JT: Had any other companies, to your understanding, had used helicopters before?

OJ: None that I know of, unless old man Ohlinger showed them how to put together that stuff, because that platform, that survey platform and the tripod and those thousand-foot cables, that's pretty well-thought-out stuff. PHI might have been doing it for somebody before, but I certainly don't know where at.

JT: Did you say that Ohlinger was working for Shell before?

OJ: Yeah.

JT: Maybe that's where he got the concept.

OJ: Yeah, he was in South America.

JT: Shell had been down in here like in the thirties.

OJ: Yeah. I guess. I don't know. I knew that—who was that had first drilled over there around Morgan City?

JT: I want to write down the names of the folks in this photograph. Let's go from the right and on from right to left. This is the picture of the hot tap. I'm just going to write down the last names.

OJ: Okay. Let's see. I don't see a boat captain. Okay, that's Jones—

JT: That's you.

OJ: —Clark, Wise—

JT: W?

OJ: W-i-s-e. Meyers, Bell. That's Tim LeBoeuf, that's the pipeline crew there. And one kneeling, I don't know. Then Parker, I can recognize him with his head to the back, and this guy standing way over here is a contract hand. I don't know who he was.

But that was the caisson. It had horizontal and vertical doors, wide ditch, and slide it on and close all those doors and pump it out and put that lead weight, a 500-pound lead weight core.

JT: Dailey said he had kind of helped design some of these.

OJ: Yeah, yeah. He did. You got that thing on or off? It's on?

JT: It's on, yes. Want me to turn it off? I'll turn it off.

OJ: Well, I meant to tell you before we ever got started that anything I might say a little derogatory about Dailey, I certainly don't mean it. I'm just thinking, and the way we thought of Dailey, his peers, is he patted himself on the back a little bit too much to suit us. [laughs] A lot of the stuff that he says in his writings he was in charge of, he really wasn't. But he certainly did work. Fred Clark came up with the idea of that thing, I think, and Dailey worked on it. He was the main deal behind getting it designed and put together and working it out. I used to run the whole deal, when to pump it out and when to put another lead weight on and all that. But every bit of that came from Dailey Berard.

JT: You mention this LeBoeuf fellow. He was the contractor.

OJ: No, no, he was in the pipeline crew here in Houma.

JT: And this photograph is, if you said it's south of the Cocodrie, so that'd be—

OJ: I believe we made this hot tap right here to pick this up. No, it was for a little old bitty feeder line. It probably doesn't even show on here. This is, I think a line that—

JT: Because Lake Barre is—

OJ: Lake Barre's right there.

JT: —is right there.

OJ: So it's right near the Bayou. It wasn't no place from the—what is it, Little Caillou?

JT: Yes, sir. And that was to tap for a line going offshore?

OJ: Well, we made a big one here. That was a twenty-four-inch line that we laid here. But when we got to Cocodrie, before Cocodrie plant was really built, we made a twenty-four by twenty-six-inch tap inside that rig there, and it's only ten-foot in diameter. A fellow wound up losing his life in there too.

JT: Really?

OJ: Yeah, we were using nitrogen to isolate where we'd tap the line. We all knew that it wasn't poison, but we didn't know that you couldn't survive if very much of it got to you. When we cut open that pipe down in that caisson, we had bags to stop that nitrogen from coming in on us. Everybody was supposed to have air masks on. In the rush, beating concrete off and cutting and everything, enough of them didn't have air masks on and something happened over on one end and

nitrogen come in there and it knocked a bunch of fellows down, two or three, and one of them died.

JT: I'll be damned. Was he—

OJ: He was a contractor man.

JT: I'll be damned. You think that was on this line down here?

OJ: Oh, I know it was, yeah. I wrote up the procedure how to do it. It's kind of hard when you're cutting a pipe ten foot under water and you've got it this way and the end of it was the bad part. But we cut it exactly right and got it in there. That's hard to do when you've got a twenty-six-inch T going in a twenty-six by twenty-four-inch T going in a ten-foot-diameter caisson. But that's got nothing to do with it.

Anyhow, the three-man crews on those two helicopters. We started at Atchafalaya River in the roseau cane there and we had to cut the line out on foot, couldn't do nothing with a helicopter. We started out on Atchafalaya and got out into open country, and then Dailey took Matlow and Herschel Perdue and they started on the Amelia Line. There was just a little bit of opening there. They used boats and their feet, all by hand, and I remember Herschel and Matlow, they wouldn't talk for days, they were so mad. They'd hire contract labor to help them chop brush and measure and everything, and they couldn't keep anybody; they just wouldn't do it.

JT: It was just too doggone hot and probably muddy and swampy.

OJ: It was. That was trees, you see. We couldn't use a helicopter in there. But we did all this. I don't remember just where the other crew started. They called them—we were the Red Button crew and Hoss Meyers was Black Button crew. I think Hoss started probably at Leeville and they went on this way. Well, now then, what the hell's going on there?

JT: They went east?

OJ: Yeah.

JT: The backside of Grand Isle?

OJ: Oh, yeah, yeah, they went to the backside. All that little old string of islands along there, and all that mess is out in the water now, wide open. Deblieux got done over here, we run the Halter Line and another one or two with the helicopters. Then we came over here to help Hoss and them. They ran into some bad roseau and stuff. Then we helped them survey all this stuff up.

I remember crossing—we put a tag line, which is a steel cable, 1,500, 2,000 foot long, markers on it every ten foot. That's how we'd profile those bigger rivers. We'd stretch it across there. We got it hung up in Pass a l'Outre [Mississippi River Delta]. Yeah, it was Pass a l'Outre. It was real sandy and we couldn't pull it out by hand, so we had a helicopter pilot. He didn't care, he'd do it. So he hooked onto that darn thing with that helicopter, and he had it turned this way and pulling on it. He got it out of there. But as soon as he turned it loose, it coiled up just like a spring. We had to throw it away. About a $2,000 measuring device. If that thing would have broke, there's no telling where—his name was Roy Jones, I think.

JT: Now, at the Calumet, at Wax Lake, is that pipeline going over or is it going under the Wax Lake outlet?

OJ: It always went under. I know all those you see there, there's about five of them there. But we went under and put a dual crossing in there for safety with a header on each side. If one goes out, I guess the theory was, or if we looped it, you know, we had a line in there already. But years later, that thing washed out and we had to come in there and drill under it with that directional drilling. We don't have any more trouble now.

But that Wax Lake was something else. Man, the water come through there. I profiled it going up and downstream there and it was eight, ten foot like a washboard, just like that. Anywhere there's a little something hole in it, well, it would go over and wash out a big hole. Our pipeline didn't break, but it's done it in other places just the same thing.

But the details of the surveying were just a matter of setting up and started off with two or three stakes in line. We used sixteen-foot-long two-by-twos with a big old white flag on them for stakes and we put them on the side of the helicopter. We'd line up two or three of them with a transit on that tower and measure off at thousand-foot intervals. Then we'd go to doing what they call eyeballing then. We'd just look back down the stake line.

The way we got our foresight was to put the man on the tower. Then the helicopter would go down the line to where we wanted to go. Then he'd make a big old circle so that guy with the transit could see him. Then he'd go up and he'd come straight down over it and just hover right over the point. We'd make ten-mile shots like that. Then it was eyeballed all the way in between.

JT: How much y'all could do in a day, you think, on a good day?

OJ: On a good day, of course, Parker and them, when they ran that Little Lake, I remember him saying that they did the whole deal. I don't remember just what it

was. Where is it? Yeah, there it is, right there, I guess. No, that's the Bully campground. This is it. They ran this line here because they'd gone ahead and they spotted gasoline for the helicopter and they spotted stops in the marsh and everything, and they ran the whole thing in one day. I don't remember. Well, they had twenty-something miles, I believe. These little feeder lines were not there then. These lines here, they go into that loop underground storage thing. But you could, in a good day we could get eight miles.

JT: That's not bad. Three guys and a helicopter?

OJ: Yeah. Those first helicopters like we used over there at Pecan Island, my lord, those things were a mess. You had a weight that you'd hang on the tail boom, and a battery that would sit up there under the seats. Depending on whether you had just a pilot or a load in the front, well, you had to get out and flop those weights around. It's kind of hard to do in the marsh, reaching that tail boom.

JT: So you could fit the pilot and the three guys, the three workers?

OJ: No, no, just two.

JT: Even the helicopters y'all were using out here?

OJ: Yeah, yeah, they were the same thing except for a little bit later model. I think they had a little more horsepower to them. But those guys had to watch those things all the time. We had a time or two that the carburetor ice, you know, they had the heat controls on the controls, and they'd be going along there, hovering, pulling that cable, and I remember one time along in here, it iced up and, bloop, down he come. [laughs] And they would practice auto-rotation with us all the time. We were glad of it, because that's going up, and if something goes that bad with the thing, well, he just goes into auto-rotation, gets to the ground and flares and sets down just as good as you please if the motor quit, which made me feel good.

But then after we chained off these thousand-foot intervals, then we'd have to go back in there. We had a little 500-foot tape and a 200-foot tape. We had to stop at the nearest flag, stobbs we called them, and measure from whatever that station was to the edge of the bayou or the property line or whatever it was, and then profile the stream or tie-in property corners. That was pretty time-consuming, going back doing that.

JT: So for the whole time you guys either slept in hotels or camp boats or whatever and you just went to work every day?

OJ: Every day, yeah, we all stayed in Houma and we drove. The base we'd leave from was Amelia. That's where we'd leave from and we'd just do it. It didn't

take all that long to get across there. We'd hit a patch of trees and we'd have to get down and shut the helicopter down and then cut our way through and bring the line through and then set up the tower on the other side and get started again.

JT: And did you go all the way to the Delta with the crews?

OJ: Well, we surveyed this section here. Then the other crew surveyed into about here. It got so rough in here, we had to go down. We had finished in here pretty well, except we had to come back and survey some feeder lines. But we had to go down and help them run this on out in here.

JT: So your crew ran basically the first half of the Muskrat Line?

OJ: Yeah, it was split roughly in half. Yeah, we used to have a contest between the Red crew and the Black Button crew.

JT: Is that what the two crews were, Red and Black Button?

OJ: That's right. I don't know, they didn't call Dailey and them anything. They wouldn't talk to us. [laughs]

JT: Well, Dailey, it took him forever to run out that Amelia Line, I believe.

OJ: Yeah, and I'm sure he must have run another one or two. And I don't remember what he did during construction, but once we got it built, he had a helicopter and himself and two people and they came through.

See, there was only three landowners, basically, on the whole deal that we messed with. There was Continental Land and Fur, and LaTerre, and then Louisiana Land and Exploration. Louisiana Land had good maps. We could pick out their property lines. They had everything marked. And everybody wanted Lambert coordinates and geodetic coordinates on all the turns and everything. We had to map all that in.

But after it was built, Dailey took a crew and they ran through and ran what they call the final survey with coordinates on the PIs, the point of intersection, and the curves, with the big old sweeping curves. Dailey ran all of that with—I think Jeff DeBlieux was with him on that after construction.

I don't know much to add on the survey end of it.

JT: I've got some questions that probably either came during the survey or after. I've gotten into some documents. Old man Hancock got me some of the original copies of the original documents, where there's a lot of memos and a lot of intercommunication between Houston, Houma, and the crews down here. And

one of the things that I'm focusing on are what I call the big challenges, not necessarily the technological or the engineering challenges, but the environmental challenges that you guys were faced up against. One of the big issues, and maybe you can comment on this or not, was the oyster beds. Charlie Rhodes spoke on this to a great detail about when Tennessee Gas came in, United Gas and Texaco had already run some of the early pipelines in '50, '51, and '52 down in this area and one of the big issues was running into oyster beds and oyster leasers and some of those guys down here. Charlie Rhodes said he got shot at a couple of times. Did you guys have any problems or any issues with landowners or leases or shrimpers?

OJ: No, no, not doing the original survey. Hell, nobody knew we even passed. We didn't know an oyster bed from a flower bed. [laughs] Didn't give a damn. All we needed was point one to go to and get a survey line run through there.

I remember one time we had to make a line change around Lake Barre. We needed a place. We couldn't just come, I don't think that's clear to there, but it might as well be. We hit some of Louisiana Land's stuff and they didn't much want us destroying little islands and things like that, you know. We come through with a forty-foot ditch later on, it's going—and they said if we stayed on that island, we was going to fill it up with clamshells and it would run into a bunch of money, so we did make a line change. But that's the only way, just about, we could get across there and we had to hit those little islands and stuff.

But we never even thought about an oyster bed. I know it all came later, but I don't ever remember of making any line changes for oyster beds doing the original construction. Now, later on I damn can tell you, later on we dug and, man, we'd do anything to stay out of oysters. Naturally the oyster beds proliferated once the big money came through. Everybody and his brother had a oyster lease then.

JT: Tell me a little bit more about what you were saying about Louisiana Land. I always thought that the line went directly across from Cocodrie to Leeville, but it looks like here, like you said, that you guys had to take a detour.

OJ: Yeah.

JT: Tell me, was there some Louisiana Land property in here and exactly why—

OJ: It was all Louisiana Land. All this was—let's see. I guess LaTerre was right in here and then Continental Land and Fur was over this direction in western Terrebonne, and LaTerre's in the middle, and Louisiana Land, hell, they owned it all. I think LaTerre owned some down here too. But I don't remember that. See, this thing's not exactly accurate. I don't remember that dang dog leg being that big, but we did go island hopping, you might call it, to have a point to set up on.

It was all open water and we couldn't see across it, and we were pretty dumb in them days. There wasn't enough information down there for us to triangulate it and, of course, we didn't have to triangulate all that.

JT: So the idea was to possibly avoid running a flotation canal though these little small islands in Lake Barre area.

OJ: Well, they didn't want us to, but we did. We did hit several of them.

JT: But it looks like here, I mean, if this is even close to accurate, that you guys tried to stay along kind of the beach, the beach area, and not go straight through the big bay.

OJ: That's exactly right. Further out here you get, the rougher it's going to be for laying the thing, and that was our same idea going along here where Hoss and them surveyed, all that stretch of land across there with all those passes and all that. That's exactly what caused that. I don't think that dog leg's as pronounced as they got it drawn on here. It don't make any difference, but that's exactly what we did, we surveyed a mile in the island, triangulated and measured the best way we could at the time. There was no such thing as GPS, or anything.

JT: Did you participate, either during construction or after construction, in installing those bulkheads and those plugs and earth plugs and those type of things?

OJ: Yeah, after the survey, I was here and I had this section from the Atchafalaya River, from here to Dulac. That's the section I had, including the river crossing. So I started right there on the west side of the Atchafalaya River and let's see, we had a deal crossing there too, with a header and a platform on either side.

Yeah, I re-staked all of this and kept progress and overlooked the dredging coming through. They dredged a forty-foot-wide canal with one dredge, and in places where there was no side bayous and things, they'd cut out little places for storage area for pack barges when they come along later on. If you couldn't get in in front with your pack barges, you had to have them there ready for you to get in there before you topped up your ditch with a lay barge. But anyhow, the dredge would come through and dig a forty-foot by eight-foot-deep ditch and then a ditching dredge would come along and dig the eight-foot to get the pipe on down to minus-ten, which is very deep.

JT: Let me ask you. You just said something that is new information that I've heard. If you've got your flotation canal here, your forty—

OJ: Forty-foot wide.

JT: —your forty-foot, and you need a pipe barge to turn around, would they have to dig another canal for that rascal to turn around, is that what you're saying?

OJ: No, no, no. I'm saying for pipe barges. See, you run along there and the landowners didn't want us doing that. They didn't want us digging more than they'd have to, but just cut this out. What they'd do is your lay barge is all set. Your pipe ditch would be out here, which that makes no difference. But what we would do is go in here and cut out, say, 100-foot wide by 200- or 300-foot long. Then would either come in ahead of time or later with pipe barges and stack them in here with all the pipe on them. Then the lay barge would be coming along here, and if it didn't have any bayous or anything, it's where we'd get them in front, but we'd have to get these pipes from here and bring them to the front of the lay barge.

JT: I see. Kind of like a depot, a pipeline depot, where you can just stack it on the side as the thing's moving down.

OJ: Yeah, that's exactly right, like on the railroad, the deal where they set on the side. Another thing, see, this is all new to us because all these lines over here were done by push ditch. That's all done by push ditch, and the way they do that is your line goes like *comme ça* and if you've got a highway or something, you're leaving dry ground, well, you set up your barge and you would make up your pipe and push it off. You've got a marsh buggy or two marsh buggies, and they'd strap barrels on it to make it float and easy to pull. Then it'd get up here to the next bayou and they'd push that pipe on up to here and that lay barge come in here and they'd dig out a place, and he'd set up and then he'd push on down to the next one. But you can't get a deep ditch like that, and all this is laid with shallow stuff.

JT: This is twenty-four-inch, so that required—

OJ: It didn't require, but that's the thing that always amazed me, is how the people in Houston that designed this thing had the foresight, because all of this had been push-ditched and there's only a three-foot cover on it. All this is to minus-ten, which is about twelve or thirteen feet of cover on it. That let's anything—if you want somebody else's pipeline to come across, well, you don't have to do anything with yours. When anything over here happens, if you're blocking the landowner, if somebody else wants to come across it, you've got to go in there and pick your pipe up and cut it and bury it, and that's damned expensive, very expensive.

JT: So you're saying the forethought of those engineers in Houston, since this was going to be one of the first big pipelines—

OJ: Yeah, and it was the headers cutting off everything.

JT: The best thing to do was to put it down as deep as you could.

OJ: And they did it.

JT: It'll always be there.

OJ: That's right, and that was a fine deal. I've seen it over years and years. The ones we've had to go into, like some of these little push ditches here and down in here, and it costs a lot of money to get in there. At times you just can't hardly get equipment in there without costing way too much money.

JT: That's interesting. I'm wondering, with the engineers in Houston with Tennessee Gas, since this was one of the first big—this was the first big twenty-four-inch line to go through there, had those engineers and designers in Houston had any experience with sharing knowledge with some of the other companies, like maybe Texaco or United Gas, who were operating down here? Was there any exchange that you know of, possibly?

OJ: I don't know of any and I don't know of anybody else that had done it either, because they had to rig up the regular old dig barges, put spuds on them and spud winches, and then rig up—they just run regular land tractors on them for the welling stations, and that's the way they moved them ahead was those side-boom tractors. After we got it staked and dug, then I was on that same section of construction and we worked twenty-four hours a day and that's when we had—well, we didn't have—we ran all ours with crew boats. Perdue, this guy here, he ran a feeder line and they stayed in a houseboat. I had a picture of that thing. I don't know what I did with it. But anyhow, we had a crew boat for our survey crew. Well, the inspectors, we had welding inspectors, coating inspectors. We had to keep a line staked in front for the ditch and measure all the pipe that went in the ground.

JT: So you were on the lay barge twenty-four hours?

OJ: No, I didn't stay. We took turns, see. We had, I think, five of us in the construction crew. We had our own crew boat and we'd haul the inspectors and we'd take turns. One man would stay out there at night to tally the pipe, and in the daytime we'd get all the re-staking and the measuring and what done with the rest of the crew. We'd take turns. I included myself. We'd spend the night one day at a time.

JT: Boy, talk about a learning experience for a young fellow like you, huh?

OJ: Yeah. Yeah, I was, what, twenty-five years old, I guess. But, you know, it was more than just that, getting that darn pipe coated, getting the people in here and

the yards went to setting up in New Orleans and Houma and one at Morgan City for this line to put the coal tar enamel on it and then to put the darn reinforced concrete on it and the right negative buoyancy in the different places, because I don't remember taking any soil samples of anything. We made some mistakes down in here. We had some pipe come up because it was too light. It was heavy enough to go down, but when that sand gets fluid in a storm, well, it came up, hell, for a mile or two along in here.

JT: Is that right?

OJ: Yeah.

JT: So that would have been near the Grand Isle area, or what is that, Bastian Bay area?

OJ: Yeah, that's exactly where it was, Bastian Bay. It came up, my goodness, all across that open bay there and they had oysters in there. Man, they knew it by then. But we took what they call sand suckers, little bitty suction dredges that don't have much of a cutter head on them. You get three or four of them in there and put the pipe back down and it stayed. We might have put weights on it, I don't remember now.

JT: Any idea what year that might have been?

OJ: Yeah, that was later on. That was in the sixties, I believe. Maybe the seventies.

JT: You had [Hurricane] Camille that come through in sixty—

OJ: I don't remember.

JT: Was it '65, maybe?

OJ: See, the first one that hit us down here was Flossie. No. Yeah, Flossie, and it didn't hurt us too bad. I remember riding over Grand Isle, I saw the biggest bunch of drum you ever saw right up near the beach.

JT: The what, sir?

OJ: Drum fish.

JT: Oh, dead?

OJ: No, they wasn't dead. And then alligators, see, but there wasn't any alligators down here. I remember seeing one nest and when on construction, those hands found a few in this area here, but there wasn't hardly any, and a little bit around

Gretna, and then we got down to that federal land around the Mississippi after that hurricane, goddamn, them alligators was everywhere. I never saw so many alligators. About like they are now.

But we did the construction, and in places where the crew boats would fill it in and everything, Houston contractors built what they call a stumping barge. I don't know if—

JT: I never heard of that either.

OJ: —this is what you're thinking about, or what you want. But anyhow, I remember old Cowboy Lytle was on it, and what the thing was, was two spuds on a barge and it had like half-track rollers on each one of them and a cradle. That pipe was down there and they would put those rollers over that pipe, that half-track, and they had that barge pumped full of water and they could pull down on them spuds, and they'd put the weight of that barge on that and he'd run up and down it with a tug, pulling it up and down, and they'd call that stumping. [laughs] We learned better. You could do it on the big pipe without any damage. But up in Lytle they tried that and, hell, all they did was mess it up out of the water in a big loop, so we quit that.

But then on the bulkhead thing, I know people have said over the years about the erosion, but I was on the construction of all the bulkheads through here and there was many a one of 'em. What we'd do is—let me see your pencil there. You got a place I can write and not mess up your stuff?

They'd build what they call Wakefield sheeting. This is, well, I guess, twelve- to sixteen-inch lumber by two. Wakefield sheeting, they'd nail it about halfway like this and go like this and then *comme ça*, and that made a tongue and groove out of wood. You see, we had the piling, we'd drive the piling across. See, that would be the marsh, and that would be the marsh, and drive on out here for the wings and then put whalers across here and then come along and drive these sheetings like that, see. That'd be the whaler, this'd be the whaler, and that was waterproof. The next one would fit over this, and the next one, and the next one on. That'd be a waterproof structure, but you had to get it reinforced real quick. Because of the tide movement, it just wallered back and forth, and then fill the whole thing in with clamshell. Each one of them took about 600 yards of clamshell. And on the marsh, usually the marsh in this area was plus two. When we built it, at least that wing out here, that wing would be at least two foot, two foot high above the marsh.

JT: How far into the marsh?

OJ: We'd generally go twenty foot, which turned out to be not near enough. We could have went 150 foot, it wouldn't have been enough most of the time. Most

all of these, I've watched them over the years and especially around Grand Isle they went down and over towards the river. The subsidence, subsidence, however they call it, hell, they all, the top of them, the water's over them. I couldn't figure that out for the longest, god durn, the water ain't coming up, and I knew we drove seventy-foot piling and a little bit of it's sticking out. That had me fuddled for many a year, and I went to reading about the subsidence and stuff, and that's exactly what it was.

JT: You guys built those plugs, too, right?

OJ: Yeah, yeah, I built every one of them. I was the lone inspector on every one of them in this area I'm telling you about, all through Terrebonne. From Atchafalaya River on over, we built the platforms on either side, and of course we had the side platforms, we built them.

JT: So for the plugs, explain to me the process of making the actual material and then putting it in the ground.

OJ: Well, there was nothing but I guess it was three-by-twelve or three-by-sixteen, just what I was showing you there. They were sixteen-foot long, sixteen- or twenty-foot long, and then seventy foot long in ole creosote piling. We did it with nailing those boards together like I showed you there, and make that Wakefield sheeting and then drive those individuals interlocking and then cover it up with clamshell. I guess I know what you're talking about, something Dailey come up with later on. Then they come up with pre-stressed concrete bulkheads later on, but the original ones was a different deal.

JT: I'm trying to find something here. A picture of the actual plug.

OJ: Yeah, that clamshell's washed off of there, see. I believe the bulkhead, the wood part that goes across and that's clamshell.

JT: Oh, that's clamshell on top.

OJ: Yeah.

JT: See, in the documents that I'm reading, it says that they called this an earth plug and what they used to make it was sand, I think, gravel, concrete mix, and muck, and then—

OJ: Oh, later on they went and tried to plaster over and then Dailey come up with making cable-connected sheets, say, eight-by-fifteen concrete slabs and they'd hook them together with a cable across the top to protect the wash later on. At first they just went in there and was trying to pour concrete over all that mess.

JT: So this is an actual bulkhead that's covered over?

OJ: Yeah, that's clamshell on it. That's one of the original ones there. You see how it's washed off there. What would happen is those fishermen, too, or trappers or whatever, you're not going to hold the water. It's going to go somewhere, and if it can't go through there, if it hasn't had a little outlet somewhere else, you see things like this, it'll go around there and eventually wash out the whole damn end of it, and it looks like that's about what's happened here. Then people go to using it and it goes out.

Then later on they came with pre-stressed concrete bulkheads, just pads in between the slabs and the piling were all pre-stressed concrete, and that fit, but there still was the subsidence and getting around the end. It'd wash out, they'd dig around it, and we covered them in rock at one time too. The way that people would do it then, they'd go and move the rock out of the way. [laughs]

JT: If they needed to get through, yeah. I've been hunting in South Louisiana, in Cypremont Point, which is right here, for the last twenty years. We've got 2,000 acres of brackish marsh. When we first got in there, we had a couple of *trainasse*s [trappers ditch] that we wanted to try to shut off because it's all tidal, and when a strong northerner comes through, we can't get to our duck ponds and there's no water in there.

OJ: We all know what that is.

JT: So my dad's in construction, and he and I built a weir, and, boy, we spent a lot of time, we put in, like you said, sheathing, creosote slabs, and we built a little bulkhead. Man, it held water that first season. We came back the next year, it had washed out about five foot around the side and had dug a hole about twenty-foot deep.

OJ: Anytime that water's moving on the downside, it's going to dig you a hole, and that's what happened with our big pipe. That pipe fell off in there and then before that, even, if the current has been moving just a little bit, even that great big pipe, it'll break just like twists in a wire. We've had it happen time and again.

JT: Here's a side profile of the canal. Here's forty foot. This is a three-foot-by-three-foot ditch where the pipe lays, correct?

OJ: No, it was about five-foot-by-four- or five-foot. Well, it had to be more than that because the pipe was two-foot. It had to be five- or six-foot.

JT: But anyway, the pipe is right here and then it's covered and then you guys would come on top with a bulkhead like this. What happens when you would hit the pipe? You would just leave a hole for it?

OJ: No, we'd just go down and we could tell—we were just mashing it down there with a rock hammer and when you tell, you just stop it and saw it off on top.

JT: You said these were seventy-five-foot, some of them?

OJ: Seventy. Seventy-foot, all of them.

JT: No wonder those things are still there. [laughs] A couple other questions, Mr. Jones. What was your impression of the folks down in this area? You're from what we say North Louisiana. My in-laws are from the Shreveport area.

OJ: Yeah, but Natchitoches is about as French as you can get.

JT: Is that right?

OJ: Yeah, my mother's name was Rouget.

JT: Oh, come on. So what was your impression of the people, the local inhabitants when you—

OJ: I didn't meet anybody except—well, over in here it was all well and good. We got along fine over around Jennings and all that on the Pecan Island Line. But in here the one that I remember, I think his name was Mr.—well, whatever. He was from Morgan City. He had one—we call them a Bayou Sorrel Cadillac, an old wooden boat with a six-cylinder Chrysler in it, about twenty-foot long and six- or eight-foot wide.

JT: Bayou Sorrel Cadillac?

OJ: Bayou Sorrel, that's from up around toward Baton Rouge. But we just kept seeing a lot of ducks down there below Morgan City, and Bell and I are both big duck hunters. There used to be a big old factory, it was out in the marsh at that time. Where in the hell was it? It was down below—

JT: Might have been Avaca Island, or one of those islands?

OJ: No, we were way south of that. We were down below that. But there was a big old smokestack out there. I don't know if it had been a cane field or a cane sugar factory out there or something at some time, I don't know. But in that area there was a bunch of ducks. Man, we couldn't stand it. So one day we got that pilot to drop us off with our shotguns in the afternoon and come back and get us right before dark. And they did. We killed some ducks the first day. Then we saw a big batch the next day and got him to drop us off. It was a different spot. Hell, it wasn't very far, 200 or 300 yards. The pilot forgot that we changed spots. God

dang, it got dark. I could spot exactly where that deal was. I believe that that must be at Avaca Island right in there.

JT: Right, and then there's Bateman Island, which is south of that.

OJ: But anyhow—

JT: Then Deer Island's on the east bank and then I think that's Shell Island and then Halter Island is somewhere down here.

OJ: Well, let's see now. There's something wrong here. This map's not right. We've got a line that goes down to—

JT: To Halter Island.

OJ: —Halter Island, yeah. But anyhow, that don't show on there. But we surveyed that Halter Island. I know the Deer Island and Lake—I mean not Lake, but the Penchant, Bayou Penchant. I've been all through here.

JT: Penchant Bayou. Lot of ducks in that area, huh?

OJ: Yeah, and he dropped us off. It wasn't 300 or 400 yards away, and that damn pilot come back and he come back and, goddamn, he'd go to the place where he'd left us off before. It got dark, goddamn, that was the end of it. We were surrounded by deep water. It had little old float thrown out there in the middle and that's what we were on, but the more we moved around in trying to keep out of the water, well, the more it sunk. And the mosquitoes got bad. We finally found some old logs and stuff, branches and piled up and kind of got up out of the water and covered up with our damn hunting coats from the mosquitoes. We figured we were there for the night.

And sure enough, about midnight, we heard something a-blowing and it sounded like it was downwind of us. But we hollered like hell, and that pilot had come to Houma. Yeah, he was living in Houma. They'd land in Berwick with the helicopter. But he come up here and I guess he got to studying about it. Maybe told old man Ohlinger. Old man Ohlinger didn't give a damn. [laughs] Anyhow, that pilot come over there and he knew—what was that fellow's name? Right there at—anyhow, the old man got his old Bayou Sorrel Cadillac out and he went down there and they found us. We were surrounded. We tried to wave. We could hear boats, you know. We knew where we were, but we were surrounded by water too deep, deep water. That pilot come in there, he found the durn pirogue, had a little levee around that thing, and he come in there and couldn't take but one out at a time. I was trying to be nice, "You go ahead, Bell."

He says, "No, you go ahead."

I said, "Okay." [laughs] We got out of there that night. We got in about daylight. That old man, that's the only one I remember there.

But then, I didn't have too much contact with anybody. Hell, we were working six days a week and glad it wasn't seven, because we couldn't have took it. Man, that was horrible.

But then when I got down around Larose, running that West Delta Line and things, I got to run into people there. It amazed me how they could set up with nothing but strings and straightedges and how they built those big old things. That just amazed me. I loved those people down there along the bayou. Heck, yeah, wound up with a bunch of friends down there. Of course, most of that's all gone now. My second wife was from Golden Meadow.

JT: Is that right?

OJ: Yeah.

JT: Well, just a few more questions. You had mentioned a couple of things that I wrote down. You had mentioned the one place near Bastian Bay where the pipe came up. But over the years, did you guys ever have any other trouble, maintenance issues-wise, with the pipe breaking? I'm not talking about recent hurricane. I'm talking about in the sixties or whatever, or the pipe coming up or breaking or issues where you guys had to go back and fix it?

OJ: Yeah, it wasn't necessarily on the Muskrat. Except for Wax Lake outlet, it didn't break, but we had to go horizontal drill under it. Then we had some trouble on the Mississippi River on the later lines. We had to horizontal drill them. Then we had one blowout at Narin, which was after we built the Muskrat, then we built all this stuff up into Port Sulphur.

Where we crossed the river there with that first line at Narin, that thing blew out. No, it wasn't. We surveyed it and it was. No, it was. We reported it, because I remember when the Ohio River blew out the same damn way. Bud Camel, I think, was president at that time, and he said, "There's going to be some heads rolling here if these engineers don't find us ahead of time."

So we set up, we re-surveyed every one of these major streams. We had a little old rig set up with a measuring device and music wire on it. We'd run arcs across there and then run the tote boat. We had the Lambert maps and with a fathomometer, we could pick it up where that pipe was really exposed. We found it at Narin, and it blew out. We had it documented. We had reported it.

[interruption]

OJ: Then when I originally lined up here at Natchitoches, they put aerial crossings in and two or three submerged crossings went across there, and that was the damndest pipe you ever saw. They didn't have the strength of pipe that they have nowadays. They built it in two layers.

JT: Really?

OJ: Yeah. I don't know how in the hell they built that damn pipe. It was laminated, though, and an inch and a quarter thick, wall thickness. When we pulled it out of there, you could see it. You didn't need no heavy weight on that, no concrete on that. But we found one exposed up there. It didn't bust. We just reported it and then they shut it in. We had all those dual crossings there, plus a aerial crossing. It gave us plenty of time to go in there and horizontal drill across the river at Graneco. That's up here.

JT: Did most of the pipe come from the Pennsylvania area?

OJ: Far as I remember, Youngstown Sheet and Tube and then Bethlehem. Then later on we got to buying some pipe out of Baton Rouge, but that was smaller pipe.

JT: So when you say blowout, you mean it popped up?

OJ: Well, there are different kinds. No, well, like bending a wire, it breaks. So long time, it'll break and then depending on what the bottom is, whether it flops around or anything. I've never known of one on fire. We had one go out on—

Leblanc: Not down here, but there's been some up in the country.

OJ: Had caught fire?

Lelanc: Caught fire, yeah.

OJ: On the water?

Leblanc: No.

OJ: No. And you asked me about on the originals, we has—where in the hell was it? One of these lines down here, I think it was on the original deal, and evidently, it was designed with too much negative buoyancy, and all that is that old river mud and it's soft, and that thing blew out and they could only tell it from the producer's gauges and stuff. We went down there with an old tugboat, trying to punch it out, and we could find it in some places, but we found a big hole with a fathometer and everything. But that stuff, it blew out and it sunk down. It must

have went forty foot down in that damn mud, whether it jetted itself down or what, but that's bad news when you make them too heavy.

And that's another thing I admired those guys for. I think it's blind luck. Because there's no way. They didn't take core samples or anything through here. I know there was a bunch of information from the government about different types of soil. But, lord, it don't take much and a long section of pipe, if it's too heavy in that damn mud, you know, that's the same thing that happens when it goes fluid. The sand goes fluid in a storm, that heavy pipe will go on down and it will pull in too.

JT: So when, for example, if when it sinks it's going to break apart—

OJ: Yeah, it'll break apart, right.

JT: The records do show that at like Atchafalaya and at the Mississippi are core samples, but like you said, I seriously doubt if they took samples through Terrebonne or Lafourche or Plaquemines, down there.

OJ: I don't know what it is, the Agriculture Department, I've seen aerial photos that were around at that time. I had a bunch of Terrebonne Parish at one time. It shows the different types of soil, but still, you don't know the specific gravity or anything else, really.

JT: What about, did you have any dealings with old Perez down there in Plaquemines?

OJ: Oh yeah, we went down there. That was a little later on when we were trying to build all these feeder lines and stuff, and yeah, the president of the company comes over here on that kind of stuff.

The only trouble we had was some of the boats that we were used to using out of Bayou Lafourche, they couldn't get in there unless they paid their dues. Of course, that wasn't connected to us. Pretty well we had to hire boats from down there at that time and later. Yeah, I know those land men can tell you about a lot of trouble.

JT: Some of the records show—I guess they're called, I don't know if they're called T-sheets or whatever, but from like November of 1955, when the Muskrat Line was in full survey and they expected construction to begin on December first, but they weren't ready for it—

OJ: On account of Perez?

JT: Well, that and then the oyster issue, the oyster bed issue because—

OJ: That was all down in Plaquemines, St. Bernard, I imagine.

JT: The Fish and Wildlife Commission would not grant Tennessee Gas the okay. What they wanted it to do was to go way out here and to avoid. They wanted it to go like twenty-two miles south to avoid all these oysters. Technically, in 1955, the Fish and Wildlife did not have jurisdiction or authority to deny a permit.

OJ: Is that right?

JT: They could just comment, you see. But Tennessee Gas officials went in there and said, "No, we want everybody to be on board with this. We want everybody's approval. Even though we don't need it, we want everybody's approval before we go through," because they knew ten, fifteen, twenty years later, it could cause some problems. But looking at the T-sheets, it's showing progress, you know, "Bell crew surveys five miles today," and then you see the Plaquemines area, which is like I think it was Delta Farms or one of the feeders right here, is zero, no progress whatsoever. Then from November to December, you've got nothing going on over there. And Dailey tells me that he had to go down there with a couple of guys and go and meet with him, meet with Perez, and they had to work Perez over pretty good.

OJ: Shit. [laughs] I think Dailey had some dealings with Chalin or Leland [Perez] when the old man was gone. But Joe Perez was the big stud duck in Houston and he's the man that went down there and bit the bullet for the judge. And I understand that there was documents where we had to move our pipelines for anything they wanted to do. Remember that thing that Joe Chaney used to brag about that he had or some bullshit, but you did what the judge wanted you to do.

JT: Right, which could involve a monetary payment or no telling what, huh?

OJ: Yeah, exactly. I've got a book back there on Judge Perez if you'd like it.

JT: I've read that one. It's the biography by Glen Jeansonne?

OJ: I don't know who it's by. The one with the picture of him on the horse?

JT: Yeah, that's it. But Dailey, and I don't know if he was bragging or what—

OJ: Well, I notice where Dailey's took command of a lot of things that was in his later writings. He really wasn't in command. [laughs]

JT: He told me the story about going to meet with Judge Perez and they got to talking about various species of cattle, because Dailey was saying that his family had some cattle back in St. Martinville. Judge said, "Aw, that's nothing but shit

cattle. We've got the nice cattle." They were comparing and then maybe they became friends or whatever happened, but the judge finally eventually agreed to allow Tennessee Gas, and Dailey said that McGee, McGee—

OJ: Maggie McGee.

JT: Maggie McGee, the vice president, he said, "Yeah, Maggie McGee gave me a 150-dollar-a-month raise after that." [laughs] I said, "All right, well, whatever."

OJ: Yeah, yeah, whatever. That's not all I could say about that.

JT: But the bottom line is, in talking about the challenges of putting this project together, you had political challenges right here in Plaquemines Parish.

OJ: Not really. There's a Desiniere [phonetic] or something that owned land along the Mississippi River and the rest of it was who belonged to who. We didn't have any problem.

The problem we had surveying ended up them twenty-foot-tall roseau cane as thick as the hair on a dog's back. I remember when we finished up in here I had typhoid. Hoss had had it and old Bell caught—what's that durn stuff like AIDS? You catch it in nutria piss. It affects your liver.

JT: Oh, I never heard of that.

OJ: Yeah. And, hell, it's wondrous that all of us didn't get it. That might have been what we had. But Hoss went down and I was down for two weeks. I had a fever of 104. Anyhow, Hoss was running some stuff down there, he and Cassidy and Parker and I went down there to help them. I was off two weeks and I guess I thought I was well. But in that damn cane, the only way we had to get through there was to take one of those sixteen-foot two-by-twos and cut it in half. Three of us would get on it and push that thing down just hour after hour, and it liked to kill me, man. I was still weak, didn't know how weak I was. [laughs]

JT: Yeah, that cane, if you're not careful, it'll cut your hand up.

OJ: Yeah, we had gloves—

JT: Like a razorblade. I've got scars myself.

OJ: I remember later on that Buddy Higgs and I were down there running one of those lines off of—hell, I can't remember the name of the pass, but old boy Buster Hughes. What the hell was his name? Anyhow, he had a marsh buggy over there at that platform. I went over and asked if there was any way we could use it. He said, "Hell, yeah, take that thing." It was one of them big-wheeled buggies, them

old Cheramie buggies. God durn, we got that guy started, even cut the curve out with that marsh buggy. Man, that's nice to knock that down.

I was just a rod man, or instrument man, I guess. I wasn't into all that higher up. Of course, I'd hear about all the stuff later on, the construction problems and burning boats and all that in Plaquemines Parish. I came damn near get put in jail myself down there one time, arguing with two deputies. But I got out of it. I didn't want to go to Point la Hache.

JT: What was at Point la Hache?

OJ: That damn jailhouse without no screens on it or nothing.

Leblanc: It had open windows, just bars. They say that was bad. Mosquitoes would eat you up.

JT: A jail in the marsh, huh?

OJ: Well, no, it ain't the marsh. It's across the river over there. Got the marsh close by, though.

JT: You had mentioned, you were pointing right here and you made reference to something called Bully Camp, the Bully Camp Line. What was that?

OJ: That's a feeder line we built at the time when we built the—that's it right there. When we built the twenty-four-inch, the Muskrat, well, we left the side valve there. That wasn't a hot tap. We left the side valve. Then they used a lay barge out here in this water and everything, and when they got up in here, then they pushed all the way up in here.

JT: Past Golden Meadow?

OJ: Yeah, Little Lake.

JT: Was it an actual campsite somewhere, Bully Camp?

OJ: No, that's just what they call different oilfields and stuff. Gulf had a big old oilfield up there.

Leblanc: It was probably named for one of them wells or something, don't you think?

OJ: Well, yes, the field, the name of the oilfield.

JT: It was Bully Camp.

OJ: Yeah, it's just like around here, there's Crescent Farms and—what's that one out there by the country club?

Leblanc: I don't know.

JT: The reason why I ask is because in some of the documents, I think it was either Superior or Continental that had a field down here, and when you guys were crossing, they said, "Oh, man, would you guys mind putting a side valve and build a little small line to our camp?" I don't know if it was a camp. I'm sure it was a camp for the workers.

Leblanc: Yeah, that happens all the time.

JT: But I was wondering if maybe that was it, the Bully Camp.

OJ: Oh, no, no, that was about twenty-two, twenty-five miles there. I was up there on this end of it. I think Parker was down on this end and I was on the push end up here, on the construction. Those guys, one of them, well, it turned out to be my damned brother-in-law later on, after I divorced and married that other lady, and they come out there duck hunting on them pirogues going duck hunting and they'd have built-in cages on them pirogues for them live decoys. I couldn't believe it. Hell, live decoys have been gone since the thirties, I guess. But there they were.

JT: So they had ducks that they were actually using?

OJ: Yeah, live decoys, yeah.

JT: They would tie a string to the leg?

OJ: Well, some of them, they'd have to. Some of them, just use one with the string tied. But, hell, some of them they just had them trained. They'd turn them loose and they'd "quack quack" and they'd head on the boat and them things would jump back up there and get in the cage. [laughter]

JT: I never heard of such a thing.

Leblanc: You reckon they had their wings clipped?

OJ: I don't know. They were tame ducks but they were French ducks.

JT: That's a good idea.

OJ: Well, yeah, that was bad, bad all over the country a long time ago.

JT: A lot better than them old mojo things, man. They work sometimes but, boy, getting the batteries and all the saltwater corrosion and all that, it's a big hassle.

OJ: Yeah, I saw some of those things. The guy put them in his yard over here. He's a big duck hunter. I didn't know what it was at first.

JT: Now, you mention about the loop storage right up in this area. Explain to me how this is involved in that.

OJ: Well, it wasn't at first. We built this line here. That Leeville, that going north, what's the name of that line? Anyhow, that's a long line. We went up here to Little—is that Little Lake up there? I know there's a Little Lake here. But what is this lake? Anyhow, we went all the way up into that dang lake. There was oilfields in there. That's what we went after, was the gas. This is one of the old Cowboy Lytle stumped a loop in it, and I can't remember the names of it, but these are all feeder lines feeding in this. That line's not north from 524. Damn, it's right on the tip of my tongue. But there wasn't no loop at that time, but the oil and gas fields were there. I guess that loop thing must be a salt dome. That's where a lot of the gas and oil was. They built that later on and then we connected up to that for some reason. But we had lines already in there. I don't know if we were supplying them gas for pumping or what, but I know we built this little line here. We had to make a hot tap to put it.

JT: Okay, so it had something to do with the underground storage—

OJ: Not at that time, no. This was going strictly to pick up gas up here. No, it didn't have nothing to do with the loop. They built that years later. The same thing with this one here, the West Delta.

JT: Let's talk about this for just a little bit, Mr. Jones. One other thing that's really interesting about what the Muskrat Line was able to accomplish is that all these oil and gas fields down here, Shell and Continental, Superior, and all these guys out here, in these oil and gas fields they were basically flaring the natural gas. Was that something that you guys were aware of?

OJ: Oh, yeah, we were aware of that way back. I remember going through Beaumont in '49, '50, and all of those old wooden towers up there and every one of them flaring gas. That was '48, '49.

JT: In reading some of the Federal Power Commission records, one of the big things that they were interested in is eliminating the flaring for conservation purposes. But this was the first major construction gathering system to go in there and get that gas, whereas before it was wasted.

OJ: I guess you could say the same thing go back to '44 and Texas Eastern built theirs and we built ours going up here, you know, it comes from all the way down there, and, hell, I guess they had to flare that gas everywhere it was. They needed it for the war effort in Virginia, West Virginia, and we built the pipeline to it.

Another thing, see, we didn't know when you—at that time I say "we," the designers knew, and that's why where we knew there was going to be activity we'd drop off these side valves to pick up the gas in the future. A lot of hot taps been made that don't show on this map. This is for something mainly to people driving around. They got that wrong up in Mississippi. They got the pipeline showing on the wrong side of the interstate.

JT: Now this moves 100 miles offshore. The original backbone is now extended well into the deep Gulf of Mexico.

OJ: Oh, lord, yeah, we've got a thirty-six-inch that comes across here and ties in.

JT: The CATCO system is one of those. Dailey was telling me that he worked on—

OJ: Oh, the CATCO, no, that's from when we first started offshore. Dailey was on some of the first ones going offshore there, he sure was. Block 49 and the CATCO, I believe, went out from Grand Chenier, I mean from, yeah, from the Kinder plant, the Grand Chenier plant.

JT: Charlie Rhodes was telling me he worked on the Lapeyrouse Line. We were trying to find it. Because I know where Lapeyrouse is, down there in Cocodrie. Is this the line, do you think? It must have been a little six-inch, eight-inch feeder.

OJ: Yeah, yeah, that looks like it. That looks like it. There's another line that we built a little bit later on that comes on up right at Chauvin. But yeah, that's it, because I remember that's where it turned, and we lost a bulkhead that blew out and didn't have tiebacks on it.

JT: When I go to this facility, what can I expect to see? I look at it on Google Earth and you can see it. It's got storage tanks. It's a compressor station, correct?

OJ: It's a compressor, separation, dehydration, you name it. It's a bunch of shit there.

Leblanc: Where is that, Cocodrie?

JT: Yes, sir, on the island.

OJ: Yeah, it's a hell of a facility. When they first built it, it was not even a compressor. I think it was mostly just for separation.

Leblanc: Separation, yeah. I think I'm the one that put that compressor in later. Or is that a separate compressor?

OJ: I guess. I guess.

Leblanc: I can't remember if they had one before.

JT: I don't think in the original drawings. I think that this was just a mainline valve. I don't think there were compressors.

OJ: Oh, yeah, definitely, it was just a mainline valve, yeah.

JT: Then Charlie Rhodes was telling me that he worked on the Cocodrie to Leeville line, which was a thirty-inch. So it loops. There's two lines going from Cocodrie, and I'm wondering if with that extra gas, that precipitated the need for a compressor at Cocodrie.

OJ: That's that line there. I damn sure don't remember Charlie Rhodes being around then. But that's the thirty-six-incher. I was on construction of that, Joe Chaney and myself.

JT: So any idea what year they might have started work on that facility, sir, down there on Cocodrie Island?

Leblanc: Yeah, [unclear] was there when they made the tap part.

OJ: Yeah, he got a picture of that right there. Does it have a date on it? Oh, no, that's not the picture. That's not it.

JT: Sixty-five.

OJ: That's the one of the tap that we made for Cocodrie.

Leblanc: I think it's in the middle sixties there, when that was done.

OJ: It had to be in the sixties, yeah.

Leblanc: I was there when they made that tap, or when you made the tap.

JT: Did they buy that land?

OJ: Right-of-way. Yeah, they bought the land down there. Yeah, that's Louisiana land. They didn't buy much, because they had to surround it with rocks. [laughs] I guess you'd have never bought enough. It all washed away.

Leblanc: You reckon it's bought or that's leased property?

OJ: It's probably leased like they did at John Paul Crane over there, lease it for ninety-nine years or something.

Leblanc: They don't sell much of that stuff.

JT: Yeah. But it's a big facility. I'm from New Iberia, but my family's from Cocodrie and I've been coming down here all my life. But I've never gone that far down Petite Caillou, at least to where I can remember, and I don't remember that facility. But you look at it on a map and it's a huge facility. I was telling Mr. Jones that I've got the okay to go down there on Friday, to go visit, go check it out.

OJ: Who's the superintendent down there? You don't know?

Leblanc: Slovig's gone. It was Slovig.

OJ: Yeah, that's right.

Leblanc: They don't have no superintendent there. It's a foreman, that's Donny and somebody else.

JT: Mike Gill?

Leblanc: Mike Gill might be the other foreman. He was working down there.

OJ: See, they've got a district office here in Houma, where the district superintendent is, and he's over to Cocodrie and they have a foreman down at Cocodrie.

Leblanc: I think over Port Sulphur too.

OJ: What, they still run that concrete barge down there?

JT: I don't know.

OJ: Oh, they over Port Sulphur. Oh, there ain't no superintendent at Port Sulphur no more?

Leblanc: No.

OJ: I'll be damned. I didn't know that.

JT: Is there someone at this facility twenty-four hours a day?

Leblanc: Yeah, that's right.

OJ: Yeah, yeah.

Leblanc: They work twenty-four hours a day too.

JT: How many people are there, do you think on a given day, a crew?

Leblanc: Ten men.

JT: Really?

Leblanc: That's twenty-four hours. There's probably six or seven and then three at night or something like that.

JT: Is that strictly to monitor all the valves and all the equipment and make sure everything's running smoothly?

Leblanc: A lot of the times, that's dehydration. The things stop up and you've got to work on it constantly.

JT: And the dehydration is to take the water out of the gas?

OJ: Yeah.

JT: Is that right?

Leblanc: They also take fluids out of the gas there too.

JT: That's probably why they have the storage tanks.

Leblanc: Yeah.

OJ: Oh yeah, they barge that stuff out of there. At one time they were talking of building an oil line up to New Orleans.

JT: Is that much crude?

OJ: Or, whatever they're getting out of there. You see, whenever we first went offshore, wherever, we had strict, strict rules that the dew point on the gas, it could only be so damn much fluid or water or anything else in it. But when we branched out, it was sort of us first, and then first thing you know, we done made Tenneco Oil Company, and of course Tennessee Gas bought all them others up, the tractor company and the Newport News and all that, then the Tenneco Oil got

to be the big dog. Well, hell, we was the underlings then. They had some damn wells out there, they pumped whatever they wanted in it, whether it was sand or goddamn water.

We had bad problems, too, with running our pipelines with sand in it. It goes over a well, in the internal side of a well just like water, it'd dish out on the bottom side there. Plus, they got steel mites that eat that stuff, too, eat that steel. I guarantee you, it's kind of like bacterial corrosion. Damn, we got into that later on, but the ones we dealt with on land was on the outside. I never could understand that. That pipe would crack longitudinally. But they pumped that shit in there and where it would hit one of those wells, it would wash out. Sure enough, you had leaks in it. Plus the damn crap they put in there was corrosive. That's why Cocodrie got so big, I guess, trying to get a bunch of that shit out of there. Before Cocodrie, we had it over here at Empire. Not Empire—

OJ: Clovelly. There it is, big plant. Over here, Shell had a big plant here and they would separate for us. They'd take the stuff. We've got pipelines, two, three, I guess, two to go up, gas, and then one goes up, oil line. What's the name of that outfit, that oil line? Goddamn, boy, you supposed to help me remember it, memorize this.

Leblanc: It'll come around sooner or later. [laughter]

JT: Norco, you mean?

Leblanc: No, it wasn't Norco.

OJ: No, it was the name of a company that was a subsidiary of ours at one time. I don't know what it is now.

Leblanc: It wasn't Crescent. It was—

OJ: Crescent was the pipeline that furnished the aluminum factory and all that stuff up around Chalmette.

JT: So what did you do after the Muskrat Line? Did you jump right onto the Delta Portland Line or you came down here to work on the line?

OJ: Well, that was a constantly expanding deal there and it was constantly expanding over here. See, I left here. We finished construction in '56 of the main line, and I left and went off up north on compressor station construction. Then I come back in 1960. They had built a bunch of the stuff down the river from 1960 on. They went mostly offshore. Then I left here and went to Lafayette in 1980 and came back in '86.

JT: What did you do in Lafayette? You worked in the office?

OJ: Yeah, we had a division office there and I went over there to work. They sent a fellow to take my place here in Houma. Chester booted me out and they put me over there. [laughs] I guess they thought they was going to run me off. That's about the times whenever they was wanting people to retire and all that. When was that? That was '80? All them retirement packages come out.

JT: So is that when your time with Tennessee Gas ended?

OJ: No, my time at Tennessee Gas ended over here. I came back over here, left in '80 and I came back in'86, and I retired in '96. Forty-seven years.

JT: You started in '49. Man, that's a long time.

OJ: Yeah, ain't no more companies like that, I don't guess.

Leblanc: Who do you work for?

JT: I work for the University of Houston. I'm a historian and I'm doing research on Tennessee Gas Muskrat Line.

OJ: You know, when we was working, I started work, it was pretty well that way all the way up to the end, till El Paso bought us out. Of course, I was retired. They bought us out a year after I retired. But, hell, we had so much loyalty in the company. We felt like the company was taking care of us and we did everything we could, anything they asked us to do. It was unreal.

JT: I got an opportunity to go to a pipeliners' luncheon in Houston last year. Mr. Hancock invited me to come, and there was maybe twelve or fifteen guys there. Just like what you was saying about company loyalty, here's a guy who's ninety-five years old, and everybody in the room, he's the oldest, but everybody in the room, including his secretary, who is probably in her eighties, and then all these guys are eighty and they're still talking as if they're working for Tennessee Gas, just like it was yesterday. Like you say, most people these days, they'll work for three, four, five different companies in their lifetime.

Leblanc: Oh, yeah, if not more.

OJ: I bet you I can tell you who all was there, too.

JT: Yeah, this was it.

OJ: [laughs] I went over there one year for that and got over there that afternoon. They had it at eleven o'clock in the morning. That kind of bugged me because, hell, if you're going to have a party, I'd rather have it at night. I want to drink.

JT: That's what B.B. McCurdy was saying. They had—let's see, what's his name, [George] Benoit—

Leblanc: I think he's still working. Benoit's still working.

JT: He just retired.

Leblanc: Oh, is that right?

JT: I've been trying to get in touch with him, actually.

Leblanc: I heard you say you was from New Iberia. My mother was from New Iberia.

JT: Oh, yeah?

Leblanc: Yeah.

JT: What's her name, sir?

Leblanc: She was a Norris.

JT: Yeah.

Leblanc: She was brought up out towards Coteaux over there, but she went to school and all in New Iberia.

JT: Our connection to Cocodrie and Houma area, my grandfather's from the Chauvin area. Then he moved to New Iberia after the war and that's where my family was raised. That's where I was raised.

But anyway, I wanted to tell you about—I sat next to George Benoit.

Leblanc: George and I went to high school together.

JT: Really?

Leblanc: Yeah. He's a couple of years older than me.

JT: He was like me; we were kind of in awe of all these old guys, you know. George picked up the tab on everybody's lunch that day. I remember that. I've been trying to get in touch with him, but I had his wrong phone number, but now I got

it. I borrowed his phone number off of your list here. I'm going to give him a call. I think he's retired.

OJ: Really? I didn't know.

JT: He told me he was retiring.

OJ: I called him one time and I talked to his wife, Charlotte, and asked him to call me. Hell, that rascal never did. That's years ago.

This is, I believe, the first party chief meeting that was held in Houston. They used to have it in different places. This is not the oldest party chief, but it's an old one.

JT: That's all the party chiefs?

OJ: Yeah, well, and company people. That's Caraway right there, and Dick Scroggins, William Suggs, Dick Sanderson, and there I'm standing, and, hell, I can tell you all of them.

JT: Who's these two guys?

OJ: That's Kenny Britten. He was a chief engineer at one time. That's Mac Dunkin. He was the head electrical—

JT: I know who that is.

OJ: Oh, yeah, he got to be right in the middle, him. [laughs] You're talking about you don't want to go meet Willie Brown, well, there he is in his younger days.

Leblanc: I just passed by Willie's house a while ago.

OJ: Did you?

JT: This was during Muskrat?

OJ: Oh, no, that's later on. We had something going on there. We wanted some kind of little feeder line coming in across the river from our plant at Port Sulphur.

JT: Is this the pilot?

OJ: No, that's Brown.

JT: This is Brown?

OJ: Yeah, that's the summertime boys, see. Really, I was working in the office, but I wanted to go over there and see. We had to chop out something to be able to look. No, there's the pilot sitting right there. [laughs]

JT: I wonder what kind of getup he's got on, man.

OJ: It was wintertime, I guess. Don't look like it's too cold for me, though.

JT: Out there in that marsh.

OJ: I don't know. B.B. must have been around. He sent it to me all mounted and everything. It had to be. Anybody took pictures, it was B.B.

Leblanc: Let me see.

OJ: That's old Don Williams. I guess that was before you come over here. There's another meeting of a bunch of—

JT: I'm going to turn this off, Mr. Jones.

[End of interview]
[Final Edit, Jason Theriot 21 October 2009]