HHA# 00106
Interviewee: Tim Creswell
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz and David DiTucci
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[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling has not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. The majority of repeated words and false starts have also not been transcribed for the purposes of readability.]

Ethnographic preface:

Tim Creswell responded to the article in the Baton Rouge Advocate. Born and raised in Abbeville, he realized that the oil industry would be a good way to make money without going to school first. His first job in the oilfield came in 1953 after his sophomore year of high school; he worked in the marsh running pipelines. After graduating high school, he went to a few colleges, before deciding that was not for him. So in 1958 he went to work for Union Oil Company of California (Unocal) which was just beginning to get into offshore production; he worked as a contract dispatcher in Intercoastal City until 1963. After that he took a job in production operations and began working offshore. In 1974, he took a construction foreman's job where he supervised the building of offshore platforms. A year and a half later, he became a production foreman where he supervised two offshore complexes; several years later he took on the additional responsibility of being a shore base foreman, while losing one of his offshore complexes. Later, he continued with the production foreman job and took over the safety supervisory work (taught water survival). He did this until 1991 when the company completely reorganized when he became the logistic superintendent's job for the Louisiana Gulf Region. After having a quadruple bypass, he retired at the end of 1996. During this his first interview, he describes his career with Union Oil Company, as well as changes in the industry and the need for the Lafayette area to diversity its economy.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW] and [DD]

Interviewee initials: [TC]

SW: Interview with Mister Tim Creswell in our office. The date is August the fifth, 2002.

[Interview begins after talk about contacting Mister Creswell ("phone tag"), his love of fishing, and information about the project]

TC: I was involved in the ver-, well it wasn't called MMS then it was USGS. I was involved in, in uh, does it make any difference if I say who I'm retired from?

SW: No.

TC: Okay I'm retired from Unocal. Well, it's been Union Oil Company of California and a bunch of different names. But I was involved in the very first USGS inspection. When they started the, yeah, I mean, the, the, the serious inspections back in the '70s. I think this is in nineteen… I wanna say '69 or '70, back at Vermillion Block 14 Field. We were, I was working there then and I was an Operator One, which most companies called it a, called 'em field foreman. And our field was the first one to have a full USGS inspections that compiled the API-RP14C regulation; well it wasn't regulation, a recommended practice. It was a plum nightmare. [All laugh] 'Cause we didn't know anything, they didn't know anything, and it was like learn as you go. Fortunately we had some inspectors that were old oilfield hands and they knew the problems we were facing to come up to compliance. So-

SW: Is that where they got most of their inspectors back then, was the old guys that had been in the field?

TC: Oh yeah, oh yeah. 100 percent of 'em.

SW: They knew it, huh?

TC: Yeah.

SW: Makes sense. How about now days, is that different or?

TC: I've been out of that… my last production operations was in 1982. Since then I've been involved in transportation, and safety, and training, and whatnot, and I retired as a logistics superintendent. So, where the inspectors come from now, probably, they still are ex-oilfield. 'Cause you gotta have some kind of background, you gotta at least know the nomenclature. And, you know, and the way you get that is through working it. I'm guessing now that a major-, maybe some of your supervisor group were engineers or managers that were hired straight out. But I'm thinking your field inspectors are still ex-oilfield people. If not they had one hellacious learning curve. [DD chuckles] You know?

SW: I would imagine.

DD: You said that they were the first to inspect about compliance with recommendations. What were these recommendations?

TC: They were the recommendations that governed the production facilities. Was the recommendation by the American Petroleum Institute. Then that particular recommendation was API-RP14C. That took care of all the production equipment and production operations: the working pressure of the vessel, the drains, the skids, all of that stuff, that was all a recommended practice.

DD: And why were these recommendations made?

TC: To, I guess, update the safety regu-, they were gonna do it anyway. The USGS was gonna do it anyway. So I'm guessing they had a, in fact I'm pretty sure they had a memorandum of understanding that the USGS would utilize these API recommendations. There's a whole raft of 'em governing different drilling operations and whatnot.

DD: So it's mostly for safety?

TC: Uh… safety and probably a lot of pollution.

DD: Environmental concerns?

TC: Yeah, environmental issues.

SW: This was late '60s early '70s, I'm guessin' that was-

TC: That's when all that came along. Because before that time, um, take for instance your production skids. There was no panning, or very little panning in between the production skids and stuff. Even your older platforms are just grating, there was no decking. So that had to be all brought up to compliance, which is, like I said, a friggin' nightmare. [DD chuckles]

SW: They hadn't done that forever, they just weren't paying attention to that too much in the beginning and they were being forced to.

TC: Yeah. And it wasn't a… there wasn't a real critical issue in natural gas fields, but in oil fields it was critical issue. Because you stood a lot more chance to have a lot of pollution with oil production than you do with natural gas.

SW: So you say it was a good thing that they were-

TC: Uh hm.

SW: Puttin' this compliance on you basically.

TC: Yeah.

SW: Was there a lot of uh… well, let's back up first to see where you got into the oilfield, what year?

TC: Ooh. [Slight pause] My, between my sophomore and junior in high school, my dad's good friend owned a contracting service. And they put my butt to work in the marsh [for three months?]. Uh, running pipelines in the marsh between my freshman and junior year. Which would've been 1953.

SW: Okay. That marsh is-

TC: Yeah. [Pause]

SW: Was that, sounds kind of dangerous.

TC: No. You was born and raised in the marsh, it didn't.

SW: I mean runnin' the pipe or anything?

TC: No, uh uh.

SW: You didn't have any problems with that?

TC: No. It was all small interfield lines, you know, three inch lines and stuff like that. So.

SW: So your dad-

TC: Nasty, that's all. [All chuckle]

SW: Oh yeah. Your dad wasn't, this was your dad's friend?

TC: My dad's best friend had a contracting service.

SW: So, your dad was never in the oilfield?

TC: No.

SW: That wasn't kind of how you got into it or anything?

TC: No, uh uh.

SW: Okay. So they started you doing that, then what happened, you-

TC: Well, I finished high school. And uh, I went to a couple of colleges. Then I decided well that wasn't for me. So I went to work at the Union Oil Company shore base in Intercoastal City in October of 1958 as a contract dispatcher. And there was, at that time, Union Oil Company had no production offshore, nothing. We were just in the, it was in its infancy. In fact, I took Union's first offshore production report… the first part of '59, I don't remember, but it was Vermillion 67A platform was our first pr-, Union's first production. Then after that, in '65, you had the Union-Pure merger. Now we took over Pure and Pure had some older production that came on in '49 and '50, but Union Oil Company first production was in early spring of '59. And I worked there as a contract dispatcher 'til '63, and got hire on by Unocal and then went into the field in production operations.

SW: Production?

TC: Yeah. [Pause] I worked onshore at White Lake for uh… three years and then went offshore as a production operator.

SW: So you spent most of your time offshore?

TC: In production, yeah.

SW: In production?

TC: Yeah.

SW: Tell us a little bit about that then, what exactly did you do? [Slight pause] Production, you-

TC: Just, if you were an operator, I went to Vermillion 14 Field, like I said earlier, which was Unocal's biggest field at the time. At that point in time, I think we were sellin' 250 million feet of gas, which is a lot of gas in those days. And it was a lot of, we had two major platforms with living quarters on 'em. And then we must have had uh… 15 or 20 satellites all the way around in the field. So it was a lot of time. It was helicopter operations, we flew a G4A helicopter. And every one of these platforms had heliports. The top deck essentially was a heliport. So you hopped around. And it was high pressure wells, it was high pressure, high corrosive wells, so we had to do a lot of what we call slugging, chemical injection.

SW: Yeah, keep it from shooting out-

TC: Well to keep the corrosion from eating the tubing up. So we did a lot of that. And then your just, your normal production operations: your reporting, your testing, your chemical injections, keeping 'em flowing in

the wintertime, which was a gargantuous pain the butt [SW and DD laugh] with high pressure wells, you had a lot of freezing problems.

SW: Yeah.

TC: And uh- [Slight pause]

SW: What kind of schedule were you working?

TC: Worked seven and seven.

SW: Seven and seven.

TC: And we, at that point in time, I think there was six of us on each crew. [Slight pause] Yeah, it was six people on each crew. And then we had a contract cook and then a pilot.

SW: And that was it?

TC: Yeah.

SW: How was that seven and seven? Did you like that?

TC: Oh that was lovely. [SW laugh] Oh yeah.

SW: You'd be out there for seven days and you'd be home for seven days?

TC: Yeah. Home for seven days.

SW: What about when you were on the rig, you, what was your shift work?

TC: Days. The way we worked, there was nobody on at night. We had a alarm set on the sales meters, and if the sales meter, well, I don't know if either one of you have ever seen a meter chart. It's a round chart and you know just about where your sales are, so we could set the alarm within that framework, where the truck, and if something were shut in the meter would drop. The sales meter would drop. What it was is gas sales going through an orifice, and if that pin would drop, it would set off an alarm and wake us up. So we worked straight days, six in the morning to six at night.

SW: 12 hour shift?

TC: 12 hour shifts, yeah.

SW: You sales meter, you mean that was the gas being piped through?

TC: Right. At the sales point, you had a meter, that was your checkbook. 'Cause that told you how much gas you were selling a day, and we had an alarm set on that meter. If that pin on that meter would drop, it would set the alarm off, if that well shut in.

SW: So you had to work during the day and go to sleep at night and get up the next day and just do it?

TC: Yeah.

SW: So the hole had already been dug, the gas was there, it was being piped out-

TC: Oh yeah, yeah.

SW: All y'all were doin' was-

TC: Producing.

SW: Producing and keeping it in flow.

TC: Yeah.

SW: Preventing problems and whatnot, everything. So it was just goin' out.

DD: It could almost do it by itself, half the time.

TC: Well, yeah, but, but-

DD: I know there was more to it than that, but-

TC: Yeah. But there, you did a, there was a lot more to it than that.

DD: What exactly was there to it besi-, the gas, the hole was dug, or drilled, and it was pumping through the pipeline. What exactly did it take to keep it pumping?

TC: Well, you had all of this, at this particular field, was high pressure, high volume, and a lot of those wells had a lot of fluid. But it was a paraffinic fluid. If you had, you know what grating is?

DD: Yeah.

TC: You seen grating? If you would have one of those high pressure wells develop a leak in one of the needle valves or somethin' like that and start dripping, in the wintertime that stuff would stack up that deep on grating. It was paraffinic. That in itself gave you a lot of trouble. Because if it was solidifying, it would solidify on your vessels and stuff like that. So, the other thing we had to inject was a paraffin solvent to keep that stuff in a fluid state. 'Cause if it would, if it paraffin up in your separators, oh man, you talk about a mess. Or in a [glycol?] system. Glycol is used to dry the gas. If it would get in your glycol system, you wouldn't separate everything out, it would just come out of everywhere. So it was a constant fight on those high pressure wells with the paraffinic fluid.

SW: Y'all were watching it all the time.

TC: You had to, oh yeah, you had to be on your, you had to watch it all the time. Sometimes you'd wake up in the morning, you'd have that, 'xcuse the expression, that yellow calf shit stacked everywhere. [All laugh]

SW: Was any of this work dangerous?

TC: No. It, it, it um… I guess some people would consider it. You know, you're flying all the time, maybe have 60 or 70 takeoff and landings a day. But it was something you just do.

SW: What about-

TC: Hell of a lot less dangerous than driving on Interstate 10. [Laughs]

DD: That's true.

SW: Or in Lafayette.

TC: Yeah.

SW: Um, but uh, you know, you working on the rigs and stuff like that, you got to kind watch yourself.

TC: Well, yeah, you had to, but we had uh… we had certain things to watch out for. You just was careful. You didn't-

SW: So you didn't see any real serious injuries-

TC: Oh yeah we've had, yeah we'd get people banged up every now and then. In fact we, I had a couple people killed, but it was like… there again, like driving on Johnson Street. I'd much rather be offshore than drive on Johnson Street every day. And that's gonna happen. But that's gonna happen in any industrialized industry where you, you know, working with large equipment and behind pressured wells and stuff like that.

SW: Did you ever get hurt yourself in any way?

TC: A couple times but nothin' major.

SW: Minor stuff?

TC: Yeah.

SW: Sprain an ankle or something like that.

TC: Yeah. So nothin'-

SW: That's what I hear from most people, a slip on the deck and hurt your wrist, and stuff like that.

TC: Yeah. Well in wintertime, you know that stuff gets slick. Slick slick slick. And that's when you had a lot of your trouble. And if you would get the fatigue factor involved in it. Say you stayed up a couple, three days and having to keep these wells going, and wind up where you get tired, and when you get tired you don't pay attention. And that's when it'll reach up and bite you on the butt. [SW chuckles]

SW: So you out there 14 and four-

TC: Seven, seven.

SW: You said uh, you liked it. What about your wife, how did she feel about you being gone?

TC: Um… the w-… it was all we knew at the time. You know, so it wasn't a big, she just at the time had to take care of all the things on, and then we had, not when we first started, but a little, a couple, three years after that we had microwave telephones. So you could always, you know, she could always get a hold of you if she had a problem, deep freezer went out, or somethin' like that.

SW: She'd get a hold of-

TC: Yeah.

SW: Before that, there was short wave radio?

TC: Yeah, you'd use radio and they could patch you, the dispatcher'd patch us in.

SW: Yeah but it wasn't uh, what do they call it?

TC: It was-

SW: [Constant?] communications, it was a talk and a stop.

TC: Yeah. That's right.

SW: A talk and a stop. Yeah, that's kind of aggravating.

TC: And then the only time they would get a call was a real emergency, somethin' was wrong.

SW: But then as things got better-

TC: Yeah.

SW: Now they uh-

TC: Oh-

SW: Everybody out there has a cell phone.

TC: That's it. [All laugh]

SW: I've heard some of the guys talk, though. They say their wives were happy to see 'em, by the end of that seven days, they were-

TC: They glad to see 'em go. [TC and DD laugh] Well it's just, you know, it's just like working a regular five and two schedule. You know, you're home at night, but your wife's glad to see your ass go to work the next mornin'. Get out of her hair for a day. So it's just, you get used to it.

DD: You can't spend 24/seven with someone.

TC: It took me, no no no no. It took me a long time to get used to workin' five and two after working seven and seven for a lot of years. It's an adjustment. And really, when you look at seven and seven, when you have young children, you actually spend more time with your kids on a seven and seven basis than you do-

SW: When you come back in. You had kids at this time?

TC: My first boy was born in 1970, which I was, and my second was born in 1974. Just at the time I was makin' a transition.

SW: I see. So you went from about 1963 to about 1974 offshore?

TC: Yeah.

SW: About that, it's what I've got down.

TC: Yeah, seven and seven. [Slight pause]

SW: Just, we like to try to keep a timeline, you know, make it uh, we make it chronological. So you switched to an office job after that?

TC: No, in '74 I took construction foreman's job. They gave me a construction foreman's job, which was, you know, setting these production platforms in place, hooking everything up, and putting it on the line. So I did that.

SW: That's on land?

TC: Well, no, not really because all of our stuff was offshore.

DD: So you would go out and supervise the building of the platform offshore?

TC: Yeah. Right. And in the yards, when we had some stuff to do in the yards. We learned that it was a lot more cost effective if you could take a deck section and have it in a yard, and take all the production equipment and get it all rigged up on the deck section, every piece made ready to tie in, and then take that deck section and make one hitch, one lift offshore. Then tie your production, you was on production a lot quicker. So we did quite a bit of that. So I would hook up the production equipment on the deck section on the bank, then take it offshore, set it, make the tie-in, turn the wells on. So it was a lot quicker, it was a lot more cost effective, and it was a lot less dangerous. 'Cause when you're working derrick barge work, that's critical, critical move. So the less lifts you have with a derrick barge, better off you are. So you just had to get a bigger derrick barge. [DD chuckles] You know.

SW: And you had your weekends off at this point?

TC: Yeah, sometimes, more or less. The official schedule was seven and seven, but when I was working, tyin' this stuff in the bank, would work five days a week, and I was home every night, so I'd take the weekend off. Or if it was a real critical job that we were in a hurry, we'd work seven and seven, but onshore there's be two of uh, on the, and keep it goin' twenty-four, I mean, uh, seven days a week. So it was, I was on a salary by then, so it didn't make any difference.

DD: As long as it got done, it didn't matter how many days you worked, as long as it got done.

TC: Yeah. Right.

SW: And the oil company just wanted it done.

TC: Yeah. [SW chuckles]

SW: So the pay was pretty good too? Even when you were workin' seven and seven on the rigs.

TC: Oh yeah. Yeah, you were, we were… we were on the upper end on the pay scale for this part of the country. Always has been, whether you were a roughneck on a drilling rig, or production operations normally paid better money. So yeah, we were on the upper scale. In uh… in '74 I think I was makin' twenty-three or twenty-four hundred dollars a month. That was a lot of money in those days.

SW: Oh yeah.

DD: Still a good bit of money.

TC: Yeah. Good money, yeah.

SW: Six grand, today. Six grand a month today about.

TC: Yeah.

SW: So when you shifted from the marshes and went into the production and wherever, you said after college a little bit, that was pretty much OJT [Note: "on the job training"] though, when you started with, and they just brought you out there and you started workin'.

TC: Oh yeah. You'd learn on the job.

SW: You didn't have any, yeah, you didn't really have any education that was geared towards that?

TC: Uh uh. Not-

SW: How about getting that job, you didn't have any problems doing that? They needed people? They needed people to go out there, or?

TC: Yeah, and that's when the oilfield was growing.

SW: It was growing, so you just latch on with it.

TC: Yeah. Uh hm. I had the good years. From the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, that was the good years.

SW: Okay. Did you see a lot of ups and downs at that time?

TC: Oh yeah. [All laugh] Oh yeah. I can remember before I left… sixty… two. [Slight pause] Yeah, I think it got real, real bad. The shore base ran 24 hours a day. But in '62, we had a recession, it got real bad. Union didn't lay any people off, offshore people. There was no drilling goin' so there wasn't really any need to keep that shore base open 24 hours a day. So they let, they um, laid off the other two dispatchers, there were three of us, and I worked five days a week, and I locked the doors when I left in the afternoon. Now they could uh, that was before the days before the days of the beepers and all of that, so I was on call on the weekends and had to hang around. But uh, and that stayed that way for, at least about six or eight months before things started pickin' back up. And after that, in the late '60s, the whole '70s, and the early to mid '80s, it was just a-

DD: How bad was this 1962 recession?

TC: It was bad.

SW: That was nationwide.

TC: It was nationwi-

DD: Was a nationwide?

TC: Yeah.

DD: So in other words, Union was strong enough at the time where they only had to lay off two people?

TC: Yeah, there was nothin', as far as any Unocal, Union Oil kinda people being laid off, no. But we just had to make some adjustments at the shore bases. But you gotta understand [Slight pause] the difference in the philosophies of then and now. You were a company, and not just Union Oil Company, all the companies took pride in their people. Now-

DD: [Inaudible].

TC: Oh, it's expendable commodity.

SW: Yeah, there's no loyalty.

TC: No. No, that's a-

DD: Either way.

TC: It don't [Inaudible] either way.

DD: Either way, yeah. But then it was both ways?

TC: That's right. Yeah, that's one of the things I told both of my sons. I geared both of my sons away from the oilfield. 'Cause the good days is gone. One of 'em is a paramedic, and the other one is uh, is a IT specialist. And uh, he got his uh… certification at the technical college, and then he went to MCSE school on his own. And uh… the computer age, that's just in its infancy. This is just beginning.

DD: Yeah. Like when you got in oil, basically.

TC: Right. But what I made them aware of, and I did this not too long ago. I said, "Both of you gentlemen need to understand one thing. You saw your daddy, when y'all were born, I was workin' for Union Oil Company, I was almost guaranteed retirement, unless I thoroughly just screwed up, big time." And it had to be big time. "And you saw me when I got a telephone call in the middle of the night, or somethin' like, no bitching, griping or nothin' like that, I just got up and did my job. But I knew I was gonna be taken care of. Those days are gone. You, you two gentlemen have to act like you are independent agents. You take care of yourselves first. Now I'm not saying don't do your job. But you have to understand that that philosophy is not there anymore."

DD: You do your job, but-

TC: "Do your job but you watch out for yourself."

SW: You talkin' about any industry.

TC: I'm talkin' about any industry.

SW: Yeah, yeah, you-

TC: You look across the spectrum. There's no loyalty either way.

DD: No, either way.

TC: No.

DD: And-

TC: And you know when it started? And I told my vice-president when it took place. It started in the oilfield with these stock options and bonuses.

DD: Ah, interesting.

TC: That's where it started. And look what's happened, look where it's gone to now. [Slight pause]

DD: Now everyone has stock options.

TC: And, but look what it's causing.

DD: Yeah. Yeah. What is it at right now, 8,000, the stock market? It's really low right now.

TC: Look what, because what that does, that's fine if you live in a perfect world. And, but we don't live in a perfect world. So when you promisin' to, they had stock options all the way down to my level. And bonuses. When you get down that far, get down any level, the fella's mindset is gonna change, you can't help it. He's gonna do, and not all of 'em, but a lot of 'em gonna do what he needs to do to make damn sure he pushes that button to make himself eligible for that stock option, get to that level, whatever that goal is. Whatever he' got to do, whatever he's got to step on, he's gonna worry about that. Irregardless of what's good for the company. There's no long-term company goals. It's short-term individual-

DD: Let's make these numbers by this time period.

TC: That's it. That's it. And, you know-

SW: It used to be, you do your job and the company takes care of you at the end.

TC: That's correct, yeah.

DD: And they had more of a long-term plan in the past-

TC: Yeah.

DD: Where they would try to grow over a long term instead of trying to grow just as much over a shorter period of time.

TC: Yeah. Irregardless of whether it's good for the company or not. And that's not just in the oilfield. Look at what's takin' place at all these, the happenings with, yeah.

DD: In pretty much any industry.

TC: Any industry. You hire a fella, you give him an honest day's wage for an honest day's work, and you're in good shape. When you start playing with the games, he's gon-, and I saw it happen with me, with people I had to deal with in transportation. I could see it happen. They did what was right for their asset, it didn't make a big damn what was right for the company.

DD: Their little part of the comp-, make themselves look good.

TC: That's correct.

DD: Do you think that's a good thing or a bad thing?

TC: It's a bad thing.

DD: Okay.

TC: It's a terrible thing in the long run.

DD: Yeah, alright.

TC: In the long run.

DD: Um, why is that? Could you-

TC: Because you don't, the company… the company's goals is completely secondary. He's gonna meet what he needs to meet to make sure he gets that bonus and stock option.

DD: And it's short term.

TC: It's human nature.

DD: Yeah. Take care of yourself.

TC: That's it.

DD: And there's no long term goals anymore?

TC: No. Uh uh. And that's not good. That's not good at all.

SW: That's the answer, we were eventually ask you the question about your kids, did they go into the oilfield or not.

TC: No. [SW chuckles] I steered both of 'em away from it. Because those, the good days are gone. You know, everything on the shelf has just about been drilled up. Everything now is gonna be deep water. It's expensive, it's high risk, it's uh… you've got to make one hellacious find in five and six thousand feet of water to make it commercial. [Pause] Oh, no no. Both my boys out of the oilfield.

SW: That's gonna make it tougher on the companies because as it was, on the shelf, the drilling companies were getting together and taking percentages because they didn't have enough money or resources-

TC: It's gonna be even more so now.

SW: Exactly. That's gonna put less workers out there.

DD: More mergers.

TC: Yeah. Yeah. And when you have more mergers, you've got less jobs.

SW: You put less workers out there because there's not too much goin' on.

TC: Yeah. But, like I said, they look at it as an expendable commodity now.

SW: You lived in Abbeville this entire time you were working out there?

TC: Uh hm. Yeah.

SW: What uh, after '74 uh, construction foreman job in '74, what happened after that?

TC: I went, I did some well work for about a year. Remedial work, plug backs, recompletions, stuff like that. And in seventy… middle part of '75, I took a production foreman's job. And that was five days a week. I was supervising two of what we call two offshore complexes. And I worked out of Intercoastal City. We had a shore base there where all the production foremen, I say "all," there was four of us. That's where we were officed. And we took care of Union's operations in the central Gulf, from the south Marsh Island area to the west Cameron area. That was our-

DD: Basically you were just supervising that one area?

TC: Those areas, yeah. That's what this district supervised at that time.

SW: How long did that last?

TC: I stayed a production foreman from '75… to '80 or '81. And, in that interim, they moved the office to Lafayette. And my boss, who was the production superintendent at the time, was taking care of the shore base part-time. So they moved all this group to Lafayette but the production foremen stayed at Intercoastal. And there was nobody supervising the base. That went on for about a year. And I, we had a new area manager that could see that things were, and everybody knew that I was an ex-dispatcher. And they asked me to take over the shore base foreman's job, and I agreed to, but I wanted to keep one of my production complexes offshore. So I was shore base foreman and production foreman for the West Cameron 280 complex offshore. And that went on for a couple years. And they wanted to expand the safety and training program in our area at that time. So at that time I kept the production foreman job, took over all of the safety supervisory work, and did all of the training. I taught the first aid, CPR, water survival, marine rescue, that whole shootin' match.

SW: I hope they were paying you well, because it looks like you were doing a lot of work? [Laughs]

TC: Yeah. No Union took uh-

SW: You're all over the place.

TC: Yeah. Union took good care of us. We developed uh… an offshore, a water survival school, comparable to what Miss [Mack?] taught. She was on the, she, Miss Mack helped me a lot. 'Cause I had been through her school, and we saw the need to teach our people water survival.

SW: Just in case somethin' happened on the rigs out there?

TC: Right. And in flight.

SW: That's true too.

TC: So we developed a water survival school comparable to her's, and I taught it. We had the helicopter simulators and the whole, we, everybody ran through that once a year. We used Pecan Island High School [DD chuckles] as a, it got an indoor pool there. So we used their facility to teach water survival.

SW: Pecan Island has an indoor pool?

TC: Um hm. It was paid for by that district.

SW: I went to school here in Lafayette and we didn't have a pool. [TC chuckles] Even outdoors.

TC: You didn't throw your suction in the right pit. [Laughs] Now the people of that Pecan Island District taxed themselves. See they were so remote that they taxed themselves and built the swimming onto the school. Beautiful facility. So we rented it during the summer months in the morning, the kids would swim in afternoon, so we'd teach the school in the morning.

SW: Oh okay. You're the first, one of the first people to tell us about that, were all the other companies doing the water training survival stuff?

TC: That's when, that's just about the time when USL, uh… aw hell, what they call it there at the lakes?

DD: Marine-

TC: Marine Survival Center?

SW: Something like that.

TC: That's just when it was getting' off the ground. So we taught some other companies, I taught come other companies, but then the companies started uh, I just didn't have that much time to devote to that. So that's kind of when, and I'm trying to remember the name of the boy that's the head of it now. [Pause] It's called a senior moment. [All laugh] I can't remember his name right now. And then we developed, myself and Bill Lovell, who's also retired, we developed a marine rescue drill that if people fell overboard, we developed some techniques to get 'em back on to the platform, to get them back on the boats, to uh… sling stuff to 'em by helicopter. And was uh, it's a recommended practice by the API. Bill submitted it and it's a recommended practice. So it's all right to survive, but the trick is getting' that person from out of the water, back up on to a boat or a helicopter in a remote area, or somethin' like that.

SW: Y'all ever have to use any of that stuff?

TC: Yeah, on a couple of instances, helicopters went down and stuff like that. You know you sling a life raft to 'em until the boat could get there, especially in remote areas. It's nice to say you've got a Mae West but that's about an uncomfortable sonofabitch when you've got it on inflated. [SW laughs] You know, so it's all psychological, uplift, if you've got on a life raft that you can get in. So we've used it a couple times.

SW: Oh that's good. [Pause] And then uh, when did you, we're comin' up on your retirement, huh?

TC: No no. That went on until… hm, '91, I did all that. And in '91 we had a complete company reorganization. The Louisiana uh, districts were all combined into what's called Louisiana Gulf Region. And uh, which encompassed offshore Texas, offshore Louisiana, offshore Alabama. We took over all of that into the Louisiana Gulf Region. And uh, I was asked to take the logistic superintendent's job for that region. I took care of all of the shore bases on the Gulf coast and all the transportation, helicopters and boats that

operated out of shore bases, for production, construction and drilling. [Slight pause] Now that's what led to retirement. [Laughs]

SW: Was it the company reorganization, or?

TC: Yeah. It was a complete company reorganization.

SW: Was that kind of what put you off after a while, they changed?

TC: No, no no. I, in, in um, in ninety… I did all this from about '91 through '96. I took my company physical in '96, I'd been runnin' for 30 years. And uh, we had, the department heads had to take physicals periodically. So I took a physical, and my doctor called me and said everything's fine, but your cholesterol's elevated. Said, "Okay." He said, "That warrants a stress test." I said, "Doc, I've been runnin' for 30 years." He said, "Humor me and come take the damn stress test." Well he stopped the stress test after 10 minutes, he said, "You feel anything?" I said, "No." He said, "There's somethin' here I don't like, but," he said, "I'd rather you see a cardiologist." He said, "Who you wanna see?" I said, "Beats the hell out of me, I've never been to one in my life." So I went to see Joe Kowalski with CIS [Note: Cardiovascular Institute of the South] on a Thursday. We did an angiogram on a Monday, and on a Tuesday morning I had a quadruple bypass.

DD: Wow.

TC: [Chuckles] Didn't know nothing was wrong.

DD: Wow.

TC: And what they call a "widow maker" was 90 percent blocked. [SW or DD whistles] He said, he called "asymptomatic." And he said, "I won't know for a year, but," he said, "I think I know why you're still alive." [Laughs] We did all that and I did a nuclear profusion a year after and he showed me in my heart where the capillaries had, he showed me a vein that should've been the size of a pencil head and it was the size of a pencil body. He said, "With your runnin', your heart forced open other capillaries to increase the circulation." He said, "Otherwise you'dve been dead-"

DD: I've seen that happen before where the heart develops new capillaries to bypass itself.

TC: Yep. That's what happened. Yeah, it's essentially what it did was bypassed itself. So I figured, well, you've had your good years. I had almost 35 years. I said, "January first, '97, I'm goin' speckle trout fishin'."

DD: There you go.

TC: "I've enough of that."

SW: I don't blame you. I can't wait to retire. [All laugh]

TC: And that's just about it in a nutshell.

SW: That's an impressive story.

TC: But you uh… it's not only in our industry. I guess in most industries, and people see it, the oilfield, and I can just speak for my end, the oilfield is not run by oilfield people anymore. It's run by the bean counters, the accountants; and their relationship with Wall Street. And uh, you can tell by, what Union just laid off 300-somethin' people. [SW or DD whistle] Yeah. You know. [Slight pause] Good people. But it's just uh… there

again the short term goals I was tellin' you about. Some of these managers allow things to happen like uh… that, then they wind up in a crisis. And what happens is they gotta make their goals, so people gotta go.

SW: Yeah. Oh yeah, you hear these stories that if they get so much production minus expenditures, they get a bonus if you hit a threshold.

TC: Right. But you-

SW: So they fire one guy and it brings that bonus up.

TC: Brings his bonus up and not only that, you get so much production, if you ain't drillin', the whole time you're producing your reserves is goin' downhill. And your reserves is what you take to the bank. So if you don't maintain those reserves, eventually, you know, you-

DD: You got a problem.

TC: Yeah. You got a shell of a company. And it's not just my company. I see a-

DD: Any company?

TC: Yeah. But there again, you're back to managers with short-term goals. They're gonna grab their marbles and run. You know. [Slight pause]

DD: It's true.

TC: Oh yeah. And it's not uh, relegated just to the oil companies. You see that all over.

SW: It's just corporate now.

TC: Corporate now, yeah. And it started with the stock options and the bonuses. That's where it started.

SW: When did that come in in the oifield, in the '80s? [Slight pause]

TC: There was always stock options and bonuses for your higher managers.

SW: For your upper tier, yeah.

TC: But Union Oil Company always grew their own managers. So they always had a mindset, you know, that was secondary, we're gonna do what's right for the company. But when they started hiring-

SW: Outside.

TC: Outside, okay, is where, and it, I could see it coming in the late '80s and early '90s, 'cause when it, when all that took place, I was very good friends with my general manager, he and I had been together, I said, "That's gonna reach up and bite us on the ass before it's over with." He said, and he'd been in the oilfield as long as I, he said, "I know." Because, he said, "Not everybody's dedicated Union Oil Company people the way we are." And he said, "It's gonna get us." And it did.

SW: You guys were the old school guys.

TC: Yeah.

SW: Everybody we talked to that's in the same boat as you, it was you work for the company, they take care of you.

TC: That's it, yeah, that's it.

SW: And everybody comin', that's the same thing you're tellin' us.

TC: And they took damn good care of 'em. I got to, well, in the end it was Carl Hebert who took very good care of [us?]. It was an individual. But he was our general manager. He was born and raised Union Oil Company, just like I was. And there's something amiss now to all of that. The structure of the companies.

DD: Right.

TC: And it's not for the betterment. You see it all over the place, you see it all, everywheres around. Some of these companies in the financial condition they're in, it's completely absurd with the money they make. But it's piss poor management. They may try to blame it on a bunch of other things, but that's not what it is, it's poor management. They got some people that got promoted that wasn't even good engineers. I mean piss poor engineers and they, and they-

DD: 'Cause they counted the beans right.

TC: That's it. That's it.

SW: Counted somebody else's beans too. [Laughs]

TC: Oh yeah.

DD: Yeah. [Laughs]

SW: What do you think the oil industry did for south Louisiana?

TC: Oh good god almighty.

SW: That's a broad question. [Slight pause]

TC: Well it… you can, economically speaking… it brought us out of being primarily an agricultural uh… economy, you might say. Because before the oilfield, there wasn't nothing else in south Louisiana except agriculture. That was it. And it built this town. It built this university. You look at the big endowments before the recent past. It was oil-related industry endowments. And it built this Oil Center. You know, and that was the foothold into it. It, without the oilfield in south Louisiana, it'd still be an agricultural economy. And people like myself wouldn't be in the financial condition I'm in without it.

SW: Yeah, in 1953, when you were in the marshes, well, after high school and everything, what other options did you have, besides oil? You got into it, was there anything else you could've done? [Slight pause]

TC: That was about it, unless it was agriculture. Yeah. You know, that was it. There wasn't-

SW: [Inaudible]-

TC: There really wasn't anything else. You'd get further up the country, you had agriculture, but it was farming and timber.

DD: Yeah.

TC: You know, so-

DD: There's only so much, so many people that can get into that.

TC: That's it. That's it. Oh it built this part of the country. You realize what Lafayette would be without? [DD chuckles] It's-

SW: Brought in more people.

TC: Yeah, right. But you, Lafayette has been smart enough, they learned from that '80s downfall to diversify. They could, yeah, they could see that, the people with vision could see that this oil industry, there's just so much of that stuff down there. And at some point in time it's gonna run out. Then what do we have?

DD: And this downturn may happen again.

TC: Oh hell yes. Yeah.

DD: They had to-

TC: It's gonna happen again.

DD: Yeah, it's gonna. [That's how it works?].

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech] now.

TC: It's inevitable. Yeah, it's inevitable. It's gonna happen. Just, just got so much oil and gas below the ground, in this area. And the onshore stuff is drilled up. Oh, you got a few pockets here and there. The shelf has been primarily drilled up.

SW: They gotta go deep.

TC: You gotta go deep.

SW: What about goin' back and reworking some of those old wells uh-

TC: 3D seismic has-

SW: With new technology?

TC: 3D seismic has brought a lot of stuff back on, but [Clears throat] they just about run 3D seismic all over the shelf now. They just about got everything there is to get. Unless some new technology comes up to replace 3D seismic. But there you're going even deeper. Because everything 3D seismic has found has been deeper. And when you're talking about deeper, you're talking about more expensive. So, for Lafayette the, the, has been smart enough, I say Lafayette, this area has been smart enough to diversify, where uh-

DD: Most of the area.

TC: Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause the last time of the downturn, supposedly downturn of the oilfield, there was no effect here. Look at the effect… or lack of it, when Unocal moved out uh… and all the rest of these

companies moved out: Exxon moved, Mobil, and they, all that stuff are gone. There was some residual effect, but not to the magnitude that happened in the early '80s, when it was said, "The last person out, turn the lights off." This place was devastated in the early '80s. But it didn't have that much of effect this time. The people with vision were smart enough to get, [Stuller's?] Settings is an excellent example.

SW: Yeah they bring in some outside industry and diversify.

TC: Yeah. Yeah.

DD: Tourism.

TC: Yeah. [Break in recording about 10 seconds; when it comes back on, goes back to "was just devastated in the early '80s; transcription picks up where it left off]

DD: And-

TC: The computer industry.

DD: Computers. [Slight pause] Goods and services mostly.

TC: Yeah, but in goods and services you've got computers.

DD: Right, exactly, yeah.

TC: It's-

SW: Before it was just oil executives eatin' at restaurants. [All laugh]

TC: Exactly.

SW: That was the auxiliary.

TC: I spent a few days there.

SW: Oh yeah. [Pause] Let's reverse the question. What did south Louisiana do for the oil and gas industry?

TC: Give 'em people like me.

SW: Outstanding. You see the people here p-, uh, people-

TC: Well we were raised… and not only people like me, I don't want to say peop-, but I mean people of my generation, people that were raised, born and raised working. We had a work ethic. [Slight pause] The people in south Louisiana have a work ethic. And that's, you know.

DD: Yeah.

TC: That's what, that, that, they needed that. 'Cause you take them highland boys and turn 'em loss in that marsh and get them waist deep with moccasins and everything else, "You must've lost your mind if you think I'm gonna work there." But we were born and raised in that stuff.

SW: You just did it.

TC: You did it-

DD: It wasn't anything special.

TC: No it wasn't no big deal. But it, and then, like I said, a lot of us, I didn't come off of a farm, I was raised in the country when daddy moved back. We had acres, but, we worked, you know. And the other boys, that they'd come off of farms, they'd been workin' since they were, they were mechanically-inclined also. They were used to fixing tractors, and combines, and they were born and raised working and repairing and whatnot. And that's what a production operator does. You repair pumps, and, you know, uh, compressors, and-

SW: You make things work with what you have on hand right there.

TC: That's it, yeah.

SW: Make do.

TC: Yeah. And that's not, I don't think south Louisiana has cornered the market on the work ethic, [Slight pause] but I think we're at the top of the hill.

DD: Yeah. Okay.

TC: In work ethic in the southern part of Louisiana.

SW: Part of that stems from the survival mentality.

TC: Yeah.

SW: Just livin' in a poor area.

TC: Yeah. And that was people that were a little bit ahead of me, because, you know, we weren't, I wasn't that, I wasn't poor, I wasn't rich. But daddy always, you know, but we still had to work, you still worked.

SW: It wasn't as bad as you hear, so and so Cajun couple got married because they needed the rice.

TC: No. No. [DD and SW laugh] But that happened.

SW: Yeah.

TC: You know, that happened.

SW: But uh, there was not too many uh, not too many Rockefellers around here or anything. [Chuckles]

TC: No, no, not really. Unless you had, like an old friend of mine said, "Unless you had a couple of them old grease holes on your property you wasn't-" [TC and DD laugh] [Inaudible, overlapping speech and laughing]

DD: Grease holes?

TC: That's what he called 'em. He wasn't, weren't from here, he was from south Texas, a place we used to hunt. Boy by the name of [Sonny Teal?]. Poor as a church mouse. He had uh… I think about 3,000 acres of land, and run a few head of cattle on there. But he was al-, you know, 3,000 acres of land down there is a

hell of a lot different than 3,000 acres of land here. He just could hardly get by. Had a little bitty old house and whatnot. Well, lo and behold, then they come drill some wells.

DD: He had a few grease holes.

TC: I think he had 13 of them grease holes in his place. [DD whistles] And he said, "Boy," he said, "you know," he said, "them old grease holes sure make you a smart rancher." [All laugh] But he never changed his way of livin'. Air-conditioned the house for his wife, but that was it. He never… but no, it uh… it's a work ethic that the oil companies [Inaudible]. [Pause] They profited from it. [Pause] But the good days is finished.

SW: Yeah.

DD: Oh yeah. Where do you see it goin' from here? [Slight pause]

TC: Oh you gonna still have production and drilling and whatnot, but you'll never see the stuff, the magnitude of the late '70s, middle to late '70s, you'll never see that. That's a done deal. And, and the… the entrepreneurial effort in that uh… is not gonna be as available as it was, 'cause it takes so much money. So much money. It's gonna be the big boys.

DD: No more wildcatting.

TC: Yeah.

SW: Yeah the independents are phased out.

TC: Oh no. Yeah, you see it every day. They're beginning to ph-, now what they, where the independents are able to make money, is, and the individual operators, I'm thinkin' of two of 'em now, they're ex-Union Oil Company engineers, they're goin' around buying up these old fields, some of these old fields, and recompleting the stuff, and maybe not gettin' as much production, but enough production to make a good living for them and their people. Where a large company can't survive on that. So that's where some of these boys are ma-, still making some money. But, as far as the way these independents were cropping up in the '70s, every time you look, you saw a different one-

SW: Yeah. It's 'cause they had the opportunity for them to do so.

TC: Right.

SW: And now there's just a few that are hangin' on, have to struggle to find their little niche.

TC: That's it. That little niche, they gotta find that little niche.

SW: And then they can make some money.

TC: They can make some money. But as far as for goin' into deep water, that's relegated to the big boys. And a conglomerate of the big boys.

SW: Right, they gotta get together.

TC: Yeah.

SW: They were doin' that on the shelf anyway before too, 25 percent Unocal, 25 percent Slumberger, whoever.

TC: Yeah. Oh yeah.

SW: Whoever.

TC: We had very few 100 percent fields. Very few. And in the deep water, it's gotta be, that's the big dollars over there.

SW: Yeah. Ten percent for each one. [Chuckles]

TC: Big money.

SW: Yeah. [Slight pause] That about does it for questions, David, unless you have anything else? Do you wanna uh, you have any, any uh, funny stories? Anything you might wanna just throw out, anything funny that hap-, interesting?

TC: Well you always, you know, to make seven days go by, you always had practical jokes and, oh now, that was the… I was up uh, we had, I had some, when I went over to Main 39, one incident comes to mind. I had a seven-man crew I think. And they was always messing with each other, all the time. And each one of 'em had a, you know those little 50 caliber ammo boxes?

DD: Uh hm.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

TC: Each one of 'em had one of those.

DD: That [Points to ammo box]?

TC: That. Tool boxes. You know each one of 'em had one of those as toolboxes. Well they went over one of the outlyin' fields, two of 'em did, and went fishing. And there was a shrimp boat down below, and he gave 'em some mackerel. And this is on a Wednesday. So they fished, got finished up work, caught a few [langy?], and come on back, and they kept some of those mackerel. And if you've ever been around mackerel that's been, well they got the other two hands that went with 'em that afternoon late, it was a Wednesday, they had it in Ziplock bags, it was a Wednesday, they opened that toolbox and they slipped some of those mackerels into that toolbox. And they put the toolbox in the locker, and we were gone for seven days. Man when we come back. [SW or DD whistles] Man he opened up that toolbox, good god almighty. Well they knew right off what had happened. Never said nothin'. They cleaned all their tools up and whatnot, everything was real quiet. Well I knew the shit was gonna hit the fan somewhere, [SW and DD laugh] I didn't know when it was gonna happen, but I knew it was gonna happen. And at the end of the hitch… it, no it was a couple of hitches after. They bided their time. And all of a sudden these two boys come up to me, they said, "Seen our toolboxes?" "No," said, "What's the matter?" "Can't find my damn toolbox, somebody stole my damn toolbox." "Uh uh, not me," I said, "You remember when I got you all those toolboxes." I say, "I bought you a toolbox, after that you repair, you replace your own." I knew somethin' had happened, I didn't know what it was. So I walked out of the camp to go on across the catwalk, and I just, I don't know what made look towards the sewage unit. Looked at the sewerage unit, and I saw two pieces of rope hangin' out of the sewage unit. I said, "I know where the toolboxes are." I called 'em, I said, "You wanna know where your toolbox is?" I said, "Look at it right there." "Goddamn," said, "What do you want me to do." I said, "I ain't goin' in there and get that sonofabitch, that's for sure." [SW and DD laugh] And then

about five minutes later you saw the long rope pullin' that toolbox across the catwalk where they could get the fire hose and clean 'em off. You know, there was always stuff like that. Getting' eggs in the boots. [SW laughs] Fixin' your door. They'd rig up a door. We had a highlight over our door in one of the old camps, and it was just enough of a ledge where they could put a small container of water over it.

SW: Oh yeah, okay.

TC: And op-, when you opened that door-

DD: You'd get wet, yeah.

TC: There was always somethin'.

SW: And then somebody'd do something to somebody, and they wanted revenge, so payback.

TC: Oh yeah that was always goin' on. Always goin' on.

SW: It was somethin' to pass the time.

TC: Oh yeah. Yeah. And it was just like a family, because most of us, we had, like I said, a seven man crew, maybe not every hitch, but about every three or four hitches there was a barbeque at somebody's house. You know, we all had young kids, and it was all, you know, even the pilots. The pilots were, were, you was just, there was no, 'He's a contract pilot," or, "He's a contract cook," it was just one big family.

SW: So you all got to know each other pretty well?

TC: That was the good times. That was the good times.

SW: When uh, when everybody was workin' toward that end goal of the company.

TC: Yeah. Uh hm.

SW: And you knew y'all were being taken care of.

TC: That was the good-

SW: Not like now where-

TC: Uh uh. Oh no. You're talkin' boys workin' offshore now, and they're just waiting for the next foot to fall. [Pause] Every time I see one of 'em say, "Boy, you jumped the pit at the right time." I said, "I could see this comin', I could see some things comin'." No it was an interesting… I had an interesting life. And I had some hard times, but-

SW: Yeah. But uh, no overall regrets for getting in the oilfield?

TC: Oh no. Definitely not. Union Oil Company's a good company to work for. An excellent company to work for. [Slight pause] Until the recent past.

DD: Right.

SW: Well, it's just not the same entity that you were dealing with.

TC: No. Excellent company to work for. And most of ‘em were. You know, most of those companies took care of their people. It was a commodity that they treasured. Not no more.

SW: Different atmosphere.

TC: Not for the good either.

DD: Yeah.

TC: I thank you all, I appreciate it.

DD: We thank you, very much.

SW: I’d like to get a picture of you.

[END OF RECORDING]