

Interviewee: Domingue, Eddie

Interview Date: June 19, 2002

HHA# 00138

Interviewee: Eddie Domingue

Interviewer: Steven Wiltz

Interview Date: June 19, 2002

Interview Site: Lafayette, LA

Interview Module & No. : MMS: SW003

Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling and "uhs" and "ums" have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. The audio quality is not the best and I had a hard time understanding some of what was said. Transcription ceased 20 minutes into taped interview due to audibility problems.]

Ethnographic preface: Eddie Domingue was born in 1927 on the outskirts of present day Lafayette. He did not finish high school, because he tried to enlist in the Merchant Marines, but then decided not to do that and got training in marine and radio electronics. After finishing his training he got a job with Keystone Exploration in about 1942 on a seismic crew and doing electronic work; although they moved him around a lot, he stayed with them because it provided him with a deferment from military service during World War Two. He left the company after the war, but was called back to do hot shot work for them twice in the early 1950s; he was in demand because he had a radio license and shooters offshore needed that. When not working for Keystone after the war, his main job was running a service company that took care of jukeboxes and pinball machines. He describes how they would use dynamite and the rules they were supposed to follow. He also explains that his ability to talk to local landowners, and his knowledge of dynamite and electronics made him valuable to the company.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [ED]

SW: Interview with Eddie Domingue at his shop. Uh, 11222 [Inaudible]. Okay, [Inaudible]. And uh, everything you were just telling me, that's the kind of stuff we want to know. Uh... if you could maybe give me a little background information on yourself about uh-

ED: Okay well uh, I've only three grades of school. 'Cause when the war started I uh, tried to enlist in the uh, Merchant Marines. I didn't know they were [Inaudible] on ship. [Both chuckle] And uh, good [Inaudible]. And uh, so I couldn't do that. I decided to go to work for the shipyard. So I went to Southwestern and took a, a 400 dollar course in marine elect-, uh, marine electrician. Course work [Inaudible]. I finished the courses in 268 hours at the top of the class and uh, I realized how much I liked electronics, you know. So I started takin' a correspondence course in radio electronics, five dollars a month. And I completed that and then uh, had to find somethin' in electronics. I went to work for a seismic crew where I could do, I was a, started off at [Inaudible], but I started fixin' the cables and the [Inaudible], doin' things. And during the war they had supply a man from Houston, every time we had problems electronically. So they find that I could do most of it, so they switched me from one crew to the other. We had three crews that they could, I'd been [Inaudible] 27 pounds in three years, two years.

SW: Wow.

ED: They just kept movin' me around. When they needed me I went go repair, get everybody ready xx [to go in that crew?].

SW: Yeah, you were workin' for a company at that time?

ED: Ke-, Keystone Exploration.

SW: Keystone Exploration. When did you start with them?

ED: Huh... I was uh, barely 17, so uh... I was born in '27, that was about '42 started with them.

SW: Nineteen-, or thereabouts.

ED: Yeah. Forty-three and four is the years that I worked the first time.

SW: And they moved you around a lot you said.

ED: Yeah.

SW: Did they uh-

ED: But I had to keep because they'd get me a deferment from the service. By then I did find that I didn't wanna be drafted. I would rather, you know, so uh, I'd get [exempt to being called?] [Inaudible]. 'Course they'd give me a deferment, you know. I was worth more to the war effort here than-

SW: You were there.

ED: As a, you know, I'm [Inaudible]. So I, I'da been uh, you know, just a xx [probably?] [Inaudible] washin' dishes somewhere. So they kept me out of the war and after the we-, after the war I got out of it, you see. But then they called me back twice after that to uh, do hot shot work. That's when all the crews here are working without a radio license. You got a phone, lines on your cable. [It's what you detect?]. You could also [hook on?] the [phone?] and talk to a recorder. We didn't, they talked to each other. But uh, I had got a radio license where I could, you know, when we start workin' in the marsh [Inaudible]. And uh, then after that every time they'd get a crew with lines that go under water or something, then they needed a radio. And so I we-, they'd call me back. And I got called back in nineteen fifty... [Sighs] one I think. At the end of '50, fifty-, '51 somewhere. To go to [Delta Duck?] Camp at Buras. And I worked there a few months. But I, I was, I had my own helicopter then. They'd drop me off at the shot point, you know, and I'd load my, my charges, they'd move me back a few hundred feet, set me up up wind, and then he'd get xx way the hell out of there. But I'd hook onto the bottom of the helicopter with my little pontoon, you know. And uh, so I did quite a bit of that. And when they got through with me there they called me again to go offshore. We started shootin' offshore, we some of the first ones that shoot offshore that same year. Uh-

SW: In '51?

ED: Hm?

SW: In '51? Nineteen fifty-one?

ED: Yeah.

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SW: Okay.

ED: We were shoo-, I was shootin' fifty-, uh, three one hundred fif-, three 50 pound charges of dynamite, tied together. And they'd lay the cables on the ground in the Gulf and they'd put, you know, buoys where the, I'd run across the line, drop my charge, go up wind [Both laugh] and blow it. And they'd record it, you see, so we was doin' the first the shooting offshore. I think it was the, that might've been the beginning of uh, but I was on a boat then, I didn't have the helicopter.

SW: Call it seism-, uh, hot shotting. But you're like a seismic engineer kind of thing is what you were doing with Key. You were-

ED: Well, you just, ju-, I was still shooting, because dyna-, was shooting, you see, uh, you uh, you know how to handle dynamite, you don't get anybody blown up. zz

SW: Right. And then you let the [Inaudible, overlapping speech] measure it.

ED: And they trust you because, well being the shooter on land you have to have radio line. I was a shooter with a radio license, when there was a demand I had to go back twice.

SW: You go offshore.

ED: They called me back on hot shot jobs. When a land crew would drill offshore and they had to have a shooter with a radio license, so that's why I got called back twice. I made good pay.

SW: Yeah, they paid you well and then-

ED: Yeah, and then-

SW: If there was a, if there was a downturn, they still needed you then [over?] some other guy. So you were, your job was more secure.

ED: Yeah.

SW: Wow.

ED: If they, they, well I didn't, they'd uh, like if the crew left in the marsh at five in the mornin' they'd get there at eight for the job start. Then the chopper leaves at a quarter, at seven-thirty and we get paid the same hours them. On the way back we'd stop back at Delta [Inaudible] and uh, get a xx couple beers and sit in the [copt?] to go back to the camp. We'd get back there and the crew still wasn't there and we'd get paid, I'd get paid to-

SW: [To wait?].

ED: Yeah. And uh, I got real friendly with the, I was scared of these helicopters at the time. They take off goin' like this, you know. And they [Inaudible, laughing]. And to reassure me he'd take me up and he'd just cut the motor off and [Inaudible]. And then we'd just barely go, you know, go down WHOO WHOO WHOO. [Inaudible] pontoons. [Inaudible] He was, he was good at it. Eh, he got killed about three months after that [Inaudible].

SW: In a crash?

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ED: In those days helicopters were [Inaudible] worked 40 hours, I think it was 400 hours and you had to go back in com-, completely redone.

SW: Redone, yeah.

ED: It was the beginning of, you know, [Inaudible] [that there?].

SW: What kind of uh, what kind of schedule did you work? Did you work all the time or?

ED: Well on this hot shot? Before, let's go back to '42 and three. I was working full time then. I don't remember. I was making probably xx [fifty?] cents an hour. 'Cause I know when I start out I was roughneckin' for 80 cents and that was big money. zz

SW: Roughneckin' at 80 cents an hour. zz

ED: Yeah I went to that, I got on derrick at 90 cents. Uh, but then it get cold at four o'clock in the morning and get wet, and your clothes would freeze on ya. That's when I took the electronic xx work. I had taken marine electrician before that, electronics. Anyway, in the '40s we movin' around a lot. Then we, they move, they sent me on the first crew where a [Inaudible] foreman, you know. And that was in the Atchafalaya Basin. We were shooting what, average 80, 85 b-, uh, shots [Inaudible]. And with 80, 85 pounds of dynamite. We'd go in there with a uh, a pipe. And bottom of the pipe was folded, made into like a drilling bit with a hole in it. We'd carry a bunch of those, take two chains on 'em, with two men standing in the mud, drill a hole 80, 90 feet deep. And we had a swivel on the pipe for a little water pump, pump the water in to drill the hole with. And when you get it down you take your little swivel off, put another pipe. You would get down, it would get too heavy at 90 feet, [just how deep you go?]. And we'd shoot it. And boy that pipe would drill [Inaudible, chuckling]. But the [Inaudible] of it is we couldn't get boats to get us out there. During the war they didn't make nothin'. We had two little boats and two [10s/tents?]. So we find an old man with some uh, [shalong?], [Inaudible] pirogue. Had to [buy those?] [Inaudible]. Double [end?] with no motor. So we go out there in the [Inaudible] look, "Oh no," he said, "Look on the crack." He had a, but it was cypress. The old man say, "Hey, come back in three days, I'm in hurry." So I knew somethin' about boats and I told the [Inaudible] people, said, "It is, they gonna swell when he puts 'em in the water, you know. Old cypress boat." So we put 'em in the water next time we went, and [Inaudible]. So we [raided?] this [Inaudible] three shalongs, it's like a little barge [Inaudible]. I mean, square on both ends. And one pirogue for 18 dollars a day. zz

SW: That's pretty good money.

ED: Yeah. So uh, he was desperate we'd pay him, you know. Now he, somebody would meet him there in the morning with supplies and he'd take the supply man and the pipe and the water pump and bring us to the shot point. By the time we'd get there, he got everything there for us. And uh, that's when we'd get in there with smaller boats, like a shalong or somethin' [Inaudible]. With the [mooring?] pushing by hand, you know. It's like little barges. They're long and they were uh, probably about 22 feet long and about three feet wide. They were like Indian boats. You familiar with old Louisiana boats?

SW: Like a-

ED: No wait, wait. There's one right here. [Papers shuffling] I had one here to show somebody and I hope it's still here. Yeah, here it is. This was taken in 1927. Look how long [is it?]. Long and narrow.

SW: Can we make a copy of this?

ED: Yeah.

SW: Okay.

ED: And this is the kind of boats this guy had. He had three of 'em, you know.

SW: Maybe [Inaudible]. I'll tell you what, I can just uh, I can [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

ED: Yeah you can get that.

SW: Yeah, I can get that at uh, the library. Mark that date. [Inaudible] 26, 1929. [Inaudible, talking to himself as he's writing].

ED: But that was called a shalong. And we'd go through the marsh with those and, you know, with some poles. We, there was no motors, you know, we couldn't get the outboard motors in there, it wouldn't work.

SW: Yeah. Exactly. So y'all used what y'all had to use and made it work.

ED: Yeah. So we had rented all that from this old guy, you know.

SW: Did you work for Keystone Exploration the whole time or did the company change names?

ED: Uh, [the whole thing?]. When they went over there, that's when they called me back. Twice they called me back for hot shot work. Three years continuously in different areas and then after the war I went back on two hot shot jobs for 'em.

SW: In 1951 and then when the second one?

ED: Well '50 and '51. End of '50 and of course I don't remember the exact date, but that's when we started shootin' offshore with the dyna-, with the big sticks, see. I used to shoot little five pound sticks that we'd thread together. These were xx 50 pounds and you'd tie three of 'em together, you know. And we'd drop a buoy on 'em eight feet so that they don't kill the fish.

SW: Ah, okay.

ED: We had to, you know, let it [float?] and [shoot the top?]. And we'd make a pretty zz

SW: Huh. You worked for them for about 10 years maybe, a little more?

ED: No no, I uh, I wor-, you know, I j-, those two jobs were about one-month jobs, those hot shot jobs. They'd call me, I still ha-, by then I was working uh, juke boxes and pin ball machines. Was my first love. I, I, in electronics. But when uh, I was gettin' good money workin' uh, for those days and uh, it kept me from, you know, the draft.

SW: So, I see.

ED: Bein' I was only limited service, I couldn't be of any use uh, just a flunkey, so [SW chuckles] I was worth somethin' then. So I, that's why I stayed with 'em, I didn't like moving around. But one thing was fun is the [Inaudible] [told me one time?] when they'd move into a town, I think they had the first two or three weeks uh, they'd furnish you a room and, and, and board.

SW: So I was gonna ask, you they took of you for that?

ED: Right. And, but the, one day the [Inaudible] say, "Yeah, you know, when you've been here awhile and get off the, you know, the allotment to start with, that you get at the start, you sh-, you stay there awhile then you're back to eatin' hamburgers. Well boy them first 10 days we'd [sink?]." [Both laugh] And instead of a motel, you go find a r-, a house somewhere where you rent you a room.

SW: Try to be nice to you since you just movin'.

ED: Yeah, they movin' you around.

SW: Okay. [Inaudible]-

ED: So it's-

SW: So when did you, when did you stop working for Keystone?

ED: Well I stopped at the end of the war.

SW: At the end of the war and you came back-

ED: And I came back on two hot shot jobs, '50 and '51.

SW: Were those mainly-

ED: But then they paid me quite a bit.

SW: Did you ever work for any other companies other than Keystone in this period time you worked for?

ED: [No?].

SW: What about uh, when they moved you, were you married at the time?

ED: No.

SW: Oh, so it didn't affect your family-

ED: No.

SW: [Inaudible].

ED: I didn't get married 'til I was 22 and I was in my [teens then?].

SW: When you were doin' this, oh okay.

ED: Yeah, I started, when they called me back I was married see for the hot shot jobs. But then I'd only go for a limited time, then I'd come back, 'cause by then I had a few jukeboxes, you know.

SW: Yeah.

ED: So I'd [bring?] some other people and had a few of my own.

SW: I see.

ED: I had a service company where I charged like, you'd buy so many machines, you pay me so much a week and I'd keep 'em running.

SW: Yeah.

ED: I worked for [Inaudible] and people like that. aa That was s-, there were some characters in those days. But that's not the oil business.

SW: Oh no, I mean it's interesting anyway. I see that, I saw your files, so I see you kind of still do that [Inaudible].

ED: I stayed 50 years in it.

SW: Did you uh, did you ever get hurt when you worked for Keystone?

ED: No. Closest I ever came uh, and the reason I got a shooters job, I was a loader and uh, we, you know, we load, when the poles come I drop 'em down and like I give the shooter the signal. You know, it's okay. I pull, I'm loadin' uh, two, two and half pound charge with uh, what we call a weathering shot. You don't go deep, shake it loose and uh, I don't know why they call it a weathering shot. And uh, when I came back up with the pole, [it stuck to the signal?], when I dropped it down I could hear the old wino over there sayin', "Okay, shoot. One, two." I reached down and broke the wires and I took off after him. xx He run back to town, we never saw him since. The next mornin' I got the job as shooter. [SW laughs] He was an old wino, but he knew a lot about, you know, dynamite and [Inaudible]. So I learned a lot from him. And uh, they let the old drunk go and give me the job, and I was only 17. zz

SW: Movin' up quick. aa

ED: Well xx I had, I broke that, if that'd got to their insurance company, oh boy.

SW: Ah, yeah, it probably would've been a bad deal. zz

ED: 'Cause you're not supposed to, like they were makin' us preload the charges. You're not supposed to do that. In other words, you lower the charge, you put it in, you know, you put it, then you're not supposed to load another one. But we'd load another one, put the wire on it, and as soon as it [boom?] you [hurry put it in?]. That suction would bring it down. And we'd keep the driller from coming back and redrill another hole for the next shot.

SW: Oh, okay.

ED: And that was strictly a no no, but we were doin' it.

SW: Yeah. But that was against company policy? Did they have that set or that was just something you shouldn't do?

ED: You shouldn't do, but they, if they asked me to do it, I'd do it, you know. We know [Inaudible] insurance companies supposed to know anything about that.

SW: That, that's another question I had about the uh, since you're handlin' dynamite, a dangerous material.

ED: Right.

SW: What kind of rules did the company have? Did they have anything set?

ED: Every, yeah, [it was/everybody's?] supposed to very, very safe, but a lot of times the boy, whoever's runnin' the crew will get in a hurry, it's gonna rain or somethin', we take a shortcut 'cause we gotta finish this. Get out of this field 'cause it's gonna be mud. I did a lot of work before uh, see that time I was very valuable to them. Not only was I a dynamite man, I could fix the tech-, I could do the work the equipment and I worked with the surveyors as a, gettin' permit. Most of those people in the [marshes?] had [Inaudible], the big landowners couldn't talk English. And they remembered when you go to get a permit to shoot, the big holes we used to shoot, you know, that was [Inaudible]. It'd make a big hole in your land, you know. And we had to assure 'em that this was gonna be deep enough where it don't cave in and if we could, we'd put it close enough to where you could make a well out of it. And I had to, plus we could-, I could go talk French to 'em. And get a permit for nothing, instead of havin' to pay to shoot. See they paid me [Inaudible] to run a cable across [Inaudible]. [SW chuckles] So, but-

SW: [Comin' back?].

ED: In those days we were gettin' it free, but I guarantee 'em if we break a bridge or somethin', we'd put a new one there.

SW: Did the people, the land you were usin', y'all were on land, did uh, how did the people receive you? The oil companies comin', were they suspicious or-

ED: Well that's it, that's why they used me. I was, I could talk their language.

SW: Their dialect.

ED: I didn't English 'til I went to school. [Inaudible]. So I could talk to 'em and assure 'em, they had, you know, they'd have [Inaudible], but I'd talk to 'em in French. Said, tell 'em, "Look we're not gonna break the bridge. We break a bridge, we'll put you a new one. [Inaudible], we're not gonna, and there ain't gonna be no sink ins. We're gonna drill at least 80 feet and we're not gonna shoot over so many pound." By that time I had the knowledge of dynamite and all that. So I could talk to, I, I was, [Inaudible] as a permit man.

SW: I see. Did y'all ever do any damage that y'all had to uh-

ED: Oh, bridges.

SW: Bridges mainly.

ED: Sometime uh, got an old bridge that we run a heavy truck over, they put 'em a new one. [Both laugh] You know, [the people were nice?] [Inaudible]. The company was allowed so much [per foot?] for that.

SW: Okay. And if you ever messed up anything you had it, the company [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

ED: Yeah, was, right, we'd make sure like we don't go out and ta-, you know, you take these big truck and [tear it down?] fast. So after assure 'em that we were gonna be, you know, not go in there at the wrong time and all that.

SW: Yeah, did they-

ED: They could have confidence talkin' to me, you see. Where, uh, these, and [Inaudible] would come in, you know.

SW: If anybody-

ED: See in those days we were still, before World War Two we were still not [Inaudible, same as Inaudible above]. You, you were [mighty tame?] we [Inaudible] that. We did, you know, most of us were illiterate then.

SW: You're from my father's generation, my mother and father were the same, they didn't learn English 'til they went to school.

ED: And they didn't trust the [Inaudible, same as two inaudibles ago] too much. Well they, most of the paperwork was done by the priest and that's how we get different names, you see. My family on my mother's side [Gean?]. And we go back it is Gean. When they came here they become [Gehan?].

SW: Ah.

ED: The Spanish priest, he put an "h" in there.

SW: Put a, yeah, and he changed-

ED: So my great-grandfather was a Gean. So we still use the word Gean. But now it's spelled Gehan. aa So a lot of that happened.

SW: You were born, you were born around here?

ED: Yeah, right here.

SW: Laf-, Lafayette?

ED: This was my grandfather's ranch. I was born back here where the two c-, the three [cougar's?] meet. My father had a [caban?]. When they build a little shack when you first get married, you know. My grandfather had one right here. Right where, where [you went, that neighbor?].

SW: Yeah.

ED: He had a little place where he was born. He planted those trees right there at turn, at the turn of the century. My grandmother was planted, planting some flowers [Inaudible] from uh, the year my father was born, 1999. And uh, my daddy build a house here. He had taken the caban over there and added two wings to it and made a barn. The barnyard was there and this was the new house. Right where this house is.

SW: Oh okay.

ED: So-

SW: Your last name is Gehan?

ED: Hm? That was my, I'm talkin' about Gehan on my mother's side, this was Gehan. Domingue.

[Transcription ceased 20 minutes into taped interview due to audibility problems]