MMS OFFSHORE GULF OF MEXICO

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: HOUSTON LEJEUNE

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Interviewer: Jamie Christy

Houston Lejeune

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Bio

Houston LeJeune was interviewed on the history of Sun Oil. He went to work for Sun at the age of 18 in 1945 in Opelousas, Louisiana and worked for them for nearly 29 years. He worked around Sunset, Galveston, Padre Island, Laguna Madre, Bay St. Louis, and many other places in Texas and Louisiana. Mr. LeJeune came to Morgan City in 1948. He performed primarily seismic work for the company and relates laying shot and the difficulty of working in the swamps. He remembers special problems with blasting caps and power lines. Mr. LeJeune was drafted in 1951 for the Korean War (Air Force). He remembers a big change in leadership and Sun Oil says workers in the early days were measured by "integrity." He remembers the Great Depression, WWII, and the oil boom and bust. He was 77 years old at the time of the interview.

Side 1

JC: This is Jamie Christy and I am at the Morgan City archives. Today is March 22, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Houston Lejeune. Mr. Lejeune, could you tell us a little bit about your experience with the Gulf Oil industry here?

HL: I was with Sun Oil Company and hired on with them in 1945 in Opelousas, Louisiana. I was 18 years old then, just a growing kid. When I went to apply for the job, the chief told me, he said, "This is hard work. You are just a young kid." I said, "I think I can make it." And it was just fine from then on.

JC: How did you get to Sun Oil? What made you go to Sun?

HL: I had a good friend that was working for Sun Oil Company. He told me, he said, "We need some help." I said, "Well, I am available."

JC: What was he doing, your friend?

HL: He was a drill helper. His brother was a driller on the crew and Lawrence Bergeron

was a driller's helper.

JC: Had you been in the war? You had not gone into the service? You were only 18.

HL: No. I worked for about one year in Opelousas. The company was forming a Gulf crew that was going to be out on the Gulf. And they were taking the men off the different crews to man the crew that they were sending the men to go out offshore.

JC: You had worked in shore in Opelousas for the first year?

HL: Yes.

JC: What did you do over there?

HL: I was a helper. I was laying out lines and geophones and doing anything they asked me to do.

JC: Did you do any seismic work with them there?

HL: This was seismic work. I was with the seismograph department.

JC: So, just like a normal day, what was it like out there?

HL: We went to work at 7 o'clock in the morning with lunch and we had a picnic every day for dinner. Most of the time, we had to drive several miles to the project where we were going to do the oil exploration. Our time started when we got to the office at 7 o'clock and time stopped when we could come in from work. It was hard work, but I did not think it was. I was so determined when it got too rough for anybody else, it was getting just right for me. So, with that kind of attitude, the hard work did not bother me a bit.

JC: What was so difficult about it? What were some of the things you found hard about it, or the other guys found hard?

HL: Other guys found it hard. The surveyors went through first. They got the assignment from the party chief, the guy that was in charge of the whole crew. And he got his assignment from the geologist in Beaumont. The geologist would say this is a good place for us to explore for oil. And he called the chief and he would give him the triangulation of where the line was going to start and the direction the line was going to run. The direction had to be precise. They used survey equipment.

In those days, we did road work a lot. There weren't too many homes and bridges and stuff that were keeping us from making our shots because we had to be careful cause when the shots went off, it would rock the earth. And if you had a brick home too close, you would crack the walls. If you shot too close to a well, it caved the well in. We did not want to do that. We wanted to keep in good graces with the landlords. That was very important. We did not do anything that the landlords asked us not to do. We did not cut fences. We did not leave gates open where the stock would get on the highway and get injured. We did our do's and we did not do our don't's. The surveyors went through first. They measured the distance between the shot locations and that had to be precise. Next was the drillers. They would come in and drill in a precise location. The next group through was our crew. We were called. We laid the lines out, put out the geophones. See, when a shot went off, we recorded reflected energy. When a shot went off, the energy went down several thousand feet. If the energy would hit a structure, it would bounce back. That is what we recorded – reflected imaging.

JC: And you used dynamite?

HL: Yes, we used dynamite to cause a miniature earthquake, you might say. It was a

safe operation. Everyone was safety conscious. We had a safety meeting every month.

JC: What year did you start with Sun Oil?

HL: 1945.

JC: And so, even back in 1945, you had safety meetings?

HL: Oh, sure. If we had a safety meeting and you did not attend, you were in bad grace. I would see people get fired for not attending safety meetings. Sometimes, we had to do it on our own time, but it was so important that they would cut you no slack. You had to be there.

To start with, we used a seismograph instrument – the same type instruments they use to record earthquakes. It might have been a little bit different format inside the instrument but we did the same thing with this instrument that the people that record earthquakes did. And what we had to do, we had to lay out lines. When I started, we were using 1,200 foot lines, cables. It was on the reel. One guy laid the cable out. The next guys would come through, hooking up the geophones onto the cable. And

the geophones were huge. They weighed about 5 pounds a piece. And each guy carried several of them because they had to be hooked on the line every so often to record the energy. And these were real sensitive to any kind of noise – like livestock walking around these, we called them, detectors. Livestock walking around these detectors was false information on our records. We did not want that or tractors running in the field or farmers with mules and plow working nearby. That was false information. We would ask them to stop just less than a minute while we made a shot when everything was really ready. And everybody cooperated. There was no hassle.

JC: What was the first plot you did in Opelousas?

HL: Which one?

JC: The first place you went to in Opelousas? Where were you working at?

HL: Just out of Sunset. We worked a lot of different communities.

JC: Do you remember some of them?

HL: Oh, yes. Sunset, New Roads, Maringuin, Church Point, Lartel, Eunice. We went as far as Jennings out of Opelousas. That was quite a drive. In those days, roads were not so good. We worked out of Washington, Port Barre, Crotz Springs, Arnaudville, Leonville – many, many places.

JC: So, you were basically laying the line. You would have go to out into the swamps? So, you were more or less working in the swamps?

HL: Wherever the line went across, we had to wade it or swim it.

JC: So, did you see people have a hard time with that, in the water?

HL: Yes, some people had a hard time in the swamp. People that was not in shape, they had a hard time in the swamp. And there is an art in walking through a deep swamp and not getting too tired.

JC: How do you do it?

HL: You have to learn what type of grass will support you and what type of grass would not, especially in the marsh. The greater part of that marsh – what type of grass you

walked on. And you learned as you went.

JC: You mentioned some people used boxes or dynamite crates.

HL: That was across mud flats. The mud flat was the very worst. Mud flat is an area where the silt was brought in by floods and you might have maybe 8 or 10 feet of slush and you had to be careful or you'd sink up to your armpit. You might have to have help to get out. So, these dynamite boxes, they were wooden. Some of the guys were using them. They tried to tie their shoes inside the box. They worked like snow shoes. It was effective most of the time. It was comical! But that was hard work.

JC: Did you ever see anybody get stuck?

HL: Oh, yes.

JC: Could not get out?

HL: Yes. We had to throw ropes and drag them out. Sure.

JC: Did you ever see anybody get injured from the dynamite?

HL: No, I never have. Now, Sun Oil Company had an explosive truck that blew up and they had small pieces left. And there were some fatalities. See, that stuff is so powerful. But if you learned what not to do and if you learn what to do and follow these rules, you are safe.

JC: You saw some of the trucks blow up?

HL: No. I saw pictures of it. It is not something you want to . . .

JC: What had happened?

HL: They do not know. See, that is the problem. A guy could only make one mistake and he won't live to tell the other guys, "Don't do that." It killed me and it might have killed several other people.

In the early days, the electrical blasting cap was very, very sensitive to static electricity. Now, that was a hazard. It was a hidden hazard. You just have to know what caused static electricity. Rain was bad. Snow and dust was the worst.

I worked in Oklahoma and if come a dust storm, you shut the operation down. It was that dangerous.

JC: So, the cap could get static electricity and cause it to ignite?

HL: Yes. The cap would set off your main charge. In the early days, that was our worst hazard. Power line was another great hazard. You see, along the Gulf Coast, we drilled holes usually about 80 feet deep and you lowered your charge down to the bottom of the hole. Well, if there was a power line nearby, you had to put anything over your hole to fall on the heater, to keep it from going over the power line. When a shot went off, everything come out of the hole – mud, water, and your cap wire. And if the wind is blowing towards the power line, that cap wire is going to go across the power line and it was going to burn up the instrument usually, and electrocute anybody or anything that was in contact with the cap wire. That is how dangerous it was.

JC: Did you ever see that happen?

HL: No, I handled explosives I guess, 15 years. I have never put a cap wire across a

power line. Now some of the guys will do it – through carelessness. The best way that we found to file the cap wire, to keep it from flying uncontrolled out of the hole was to cut a piece of hurricane fence about four foot square and we went to the machine shops and had some very heavy iron rods about three feet long with some chain and some hooks. We'd drive those steel rods towards the hole and put the cap down, the hurricane fence over the hole and hooked the hooks on the hurricane wire to keep it steady over the hole when the shot went off, and that worked. That was a great hazard. You got to where you did not have to look for a power line. When you were getting ready to shoot a hole, that was the first thing . . . you did that subconsciously. You looked for power lines because you realized the danger.

JC: So, once you found the spot, did you then move on to the next place to find the next spot?

HL: Are you talking about daily operations?

JC: Yes.

HL: Yes, when I first started, I shot every 1,200 feet. That was called "straddles." We were shooting "straddles." You would lay a line 1,200 feet up from your shot, 1,200

feet back from your shot, and you record that 2,400 feet of subsurface. And you only get half . . . say, your spread was 2,400 feet – 1,200 feet up and 1,200 feet back – you only get half of that in subsurface coverage because your energy would go down into something like shooting billiard. It will bank at an angle. Running instruments, you had to learn that real quick.

JC: So, you kept moving, moving on and on?

HL: Oh, yes. You kept moving all through the day. And when we were shooting on the roads, shooting 15-18 holes a day was a good day's work.

JC: That is a lot.

HL: Yes, that was a lot of walking.

JC: You walked the whole way?

HL: Well, if you were shooting on the road, usually you had a vehicle that would carry your detectors and after you got through laying your line, they would carry you to the back line, to pick up the back line once the shot was made. See, you only picked

up your back line. Your front line stayed out. But you laid the next line out past the one that you had laid out already.

JC: So, you were going forward?

HL: Yes, always going forward.

JC: That is why you said some of those guys had a hard time because that is a long day's work in the swamp?

HL: Yes. In the swamp, you did not shoot that many holes.

JC: How many in a swamp did you shoot – not 15?

HL: It depends on the going. If it was a real bad swamp, sometimes two, three holes is a good day's work because in the swamp, you had to pack everything. We used a small portable pump. It weighed maybe 70 pounds. And you had to carry that equipment from one hole to the other through the swamp, two guys carried the pump. You tied the pump onto a drill pipe was 10 feet long that we used to drill with because it is aluminum, it is light when we were carrying everything. And we

tied the pump onto the drill pipe and two guys carried it on their shoulders. Another guy carried the drill stands. Another guy carried the explosives. And so forth.

JC: So, did they have a tendency to hire people who were bigger so they could carry all that? Did your size have anything to do with any of these jobs?

HL: That helped. Of course, if you were too big and you was real fat, you did not perform very well in the swamp or the marsh. It was a hazard then.

JC: To get around?

HL: But, a six foot guy weighed 180, 200 pounds.

JC: So, you might be more likely to get a job if you are a big person?

HL: Well, now, during the war, it was hard to get labor so you hired whoever came along. Workers were real hard to get.

JC: In 1945?

HL: Oh, yes.

JC: Did you think that working there in an oil company would mean success for you later down the road? I know you had a friend who did it but what did you think about the oil industry in 1945.

HL: I was looking for a career with Sun Oil Company. Sun Oil Company was a real good company to work for. In the early days, the old Sun heads said their employees were the most valued assets, and that is the way they treated you. But then, as time went by, they started merging with different companies. Some people were laid back and usually, the people that they merged with were chomping at the bit. They were taking over the companies' functions and they had a different attitude towards their employees.

JC: When did you see things like that change?

HL: Probably 10 years after I hired on when they merged with Sun Ray DX first. And then, they started merging with other companies. There is no Sun Oil Company as such anymore. It was bought out by Kerr McGee.

JC: Who would you say were some of the better leaders of Sun Oil?

HL: The old Sun heads. The people that had college degrees, they hired them with the company just as laborers. They became supervisors. They are the ones that came up through the ranks and they knew the problems that the employees had, and they were always very helpful.

JC: And that changed later as more guys did not come up through the ranks?

HL: Yes, some of those 90 day wonders!

JC: What is a 90 day wonder, Mr. Lejeune?

HL: A guy with a lot of education and not much common sense. Did not know what the problems were.

JC: You saw that happen?

HL: Oh, yes. But I enjoyed every day that I worked for Sun Oil Company. The work was hard, very hard, at times. The way Sun Oil Company promoted their employees,

the way they measured you, was by your integrity. If you were not a person with integrity, you did not get promotions.

JC: And you had a relationship with the people you work with and for?

HL: Yes, sure. And I always enjoyed working with people with integrity. You knew you could depend on these people and they could depend on you.

JC: You were with Sun Oil for how long?

HL: Almost 29 years.

JC: And what did you do . . . after you did the seismograph, did you do something different?

HL: I was in seismograph all the time I was with the company.

JC: The entire time?

HL: I was a helper for, I guess . . . let me start over again. I hired on at Opelousas and

worked there a little over a year, then got transferred to High Island, Texas. A little "one-horse town." Had a movie on Thursdays. The only movie that you could see was on Thursdays! That was your only entertainment . . . all they had was one mile off Gulf, off the shore. So, we went swimming a lot on the off time.

JC: Where are you from originally?

HL: I grew up around the Opelousas area. I was born just out of Church Point which is still a little quaint Cajun town. I am a Cajun. I guess you could tell by my Cajun accent!

JC: High Island, Texas, was a long way for you.

HL: Yes, it was. That was my first time away from home.

JC: Is that right?

HL: I tried to go back home as often as I could. You know, we had old cars because they did not make new cars during the war. All the factories went to the tanks and war vehicles. And the roads were real bad and real narrow. And a lot of people had just

learned to drive. A lot of farmers would come to town, bought them an old car and the old car was not in good shape. So traveling, you would see some bad head-on collisions because the pavements were real narrow and you had a hard time keeping those olds cars in your lane.

JC: Most of the guys you were with in High Island, were they from Opelousas? Were they from Louisiana?

HL: We were from different towns in Louisiana and Texas. And we worked Galveston Bay. That was my first worker job. I enjoyed that. The work was a lot easier and it was good experience.

JC: How did it compare to you working in Opelousas?

HL: It was entirely different. We did the same thing but doing it out of boats is different fishing. I worked at High Island about almost one year, we worked Galveston Bay and West Galveston Bay and we did a little bit of land work – not very much on Galveston Island.

JC: So then, you are dropping the explosives from the boat, is that right?

HL: Yes, we were drilling off a barge. The rig was on the truck. Drove the rig on the barge and we drilled off of the back end of the barge. And casing and loaded that dynamite through the casing. The shooters came along and loaded the holes and I shot whenever the signal was given. And from there, we went to Padre Island. Have you ever been to Padre Island?

JC: Yes, sir.

JH: This is in 1947. We went there the first of the year and we set in Padre Island that whole year. That was a different experience. We were working strictly on sand, salt flats, and the wind blew 24 hours a day. And you had to watch for wind burns and also sunburn because it was hot. We had to use marsh buggies. That was the only thing that really traveled on that sand and the mud flats and sand flats and what have you. So, all during the time that we worked on Padre Island, I operated a marsh buggy. Sled wheel marsh buggy. I got a 10 cents an hour promotion. I was making $1.00 an hour. Oh, I did not know what I was going to do with all that money!

JC: So, you started out with Sun at 90 cents?

HL: Oh, no! I started out with 53 cents an hour and I got promoted right quick. I tried to make a good hand and be appreciated. I was at the top helper about one year after I hired on.

JC: It did not take long!

HL: It did not take long.

JC: So then you got to one dollar at Padre Island?

HL: Oh, that was big money!

JC: What did you do with all that money?

HL: I banked a little of it and I was helping my folks. They was elderly. In those days, kids helped their parents instead of the parents helping the kids, as parents do today. And from Padre Island, we went to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. We were going to do some work there. And we got phone calls to come to Morgan City, Louisiana, that is your next project. And we stayed around Morgan City for many years.

JC: When did you first get to Morgan City?

HL: This is in the first of 1948.

JC: Where were you working around Morgan City?

HL: We worked the swamps, we worked the marsh, we worked all the bays, the lakes.

JC: Putting out seismographs?

HL: Yes.

JC: And had things changed by the time you were doing them in Morgan City?

HL: Not very much except you had to have different equipment when you were working on the water, because we had experience working in water because we were at Galveston Bay in those days. We also worked Laguna Madre between the Texas Coast and Padre Island, there was that long body of water.

JC: Did you have many Mexican people that worked for the company?

HL: No.

JC: Any at all?

HL: No.

JC: No?

HL: No.

JC: Any blacks that worked?

HL: Not in the early years but later on, they did, yes.

JC: What did they do when they first . . . I mean, they weren't helpers when they came out, were they?

HL: Oh, yes. Sure.

JC: That is the first thing they did?

HL: Yes, that was your first job was as a helper.

JC: So, when did you start seeing black workers?

HL: The first black help I had, I guess was in the 1960s, late 1960s.

JC: Until then, it was just . . .

HL: Just whites.

JC: So, how was it when they first came out? A big change?

HL: No. They were accepted.

JC: Did the company say, this person has to be accepted?

HL: Well, they gave you some strong hints! We were not prejudiced people. I never was a prejudiced person. I enjoyed my freedom so much that I would have never

taken the freedom or liberty from another person. That was my attitude.

JC: Were there other guys who had problems with it?

HL: Well, some guys were not as liberal as I was, you might say, but you did not harass a black person. The first help I had, he had a health problem. What is that predominant black . . .

JC: Sickle cell anemia?

HL: Yes. He had a touch of sickle cell. But he was a great hand. During the hot days in the middle of the summer, I had to slow him down at times. I would tell him, I said, "You know your capabilities. Don't reach the peak. When you feel that you need a rest, find you a shade tree or get under a vehicle in the shade. I would never harass you."

JC: So, did they have separate living quarters?

HL: Oh, no.

JC: Everybody was in the same . . .

HL: We were working on high land then. Now, we worked on quarter boats for many, many years. All the times we were working off Morgan City, we were working off a quarter boat most of the time.

JC: You rented those quarter boats?

HL: Oh, yes. The company didn't own them.

JC: From different local people?

HL: The *JoAnn*, the quarter boat, *JoAnn*, was from Bird Towing Company out of Port Arthur. They built it brand new for us when we went to Padre Island. That was a brand new quarter boat. And we had a shock barge and water barge. We ran it there, that boat.

JC: And the captain's as well?

HL: Yes. The boat operators were working through Bird Towing Company. It was the

same thing when we came to Morgan City. We rented local boats from any boat company, Dudley Mayon Road Company. They gave us very, very good service. When we needed bigger boats . . . they only had, say, crew boats . . . when we needed bigger boats, we rented from companies that had bigger boats.

JC: So, you saw Morgan City really grow, I would imagine.

HL: Oh, yes. The trash problem, because of the trash problem, everybody dumped their garbage across the highway from where Cannata's store is now. Would you believe?

JC: Is that right?

HL: Yes, that was it. That was the edge of town where the auditorium was, from that trash dump all the way out, was deep swamp. All that had to be filled in. Morgan City needed other subdivisions they would build a levee and drain it. And, wait so many years and let the mud dry up and fill in what they had to. That is when real estate was really at a premium.

JC: So, the guys that worked for Sun Oil here with you in Morgan City, they were from all over the place?

HL: A lot of the people were local because the people away from the swamps and the marshes, they didn't stick very long. They said, "Well, we don't need to do this."

JC: Why did they think they did not stay?

HL: Because it was good hard. They had never experienced this kind of terrain. This is brand new to them. If you were from my hometown and you came to New York City to work, that was atrocious. You did not want to do that if you could learn a living doing anything else.

JC: It is hard work.

HL: Yes.

JC: So, after Morgan City then, where did you go?

HL: Well, I left the company – I was being drafted.

JC: What year was that?

HL: 1951.

JC: For Korea?

HL: Yes. I had taken my physical and I was accepted and I was waiting to be inducted into the Army. I decided I did not want to go alone, that I was going to . . . if you were going to be drafted to the Army, you were going to be drafted for two years and if you volunteered for the Air Force, you volunteered. So, I took four years in the Air Force rather than two years in the Army cause boy, that Korean War was wicked! We lost a lot of people freezing to death – did not have the proper equipment to survive the winters.

JC: How did Sun Oil . . . you told them, "I'm coming back?"

HL: Yes. Very few companies did this. Sun Oil Company paid the people that went into the service. The company paid them the difference between the government pay and your company pay. Oh, that saved the day!

JC: So, that was hoping that you would come back when the war was over?

HL: Yes. And, believe me, we did. There was a law that you had to be offered the same job that you left.

JC: When you came back.

HL: And when you came back, at the same pay or better.

JC: So, you came back from Korea when?

HL: In 1955.

JC: Do you feel like you were a little different? You had seen some things, right?

HL: I got stationed . . . I went through basic in San Antonio, stationed in San Marcos. I went to Korea for one year. That was right after the shooting stopped, so I did not see combat.

JC: And when you came back, you went right to work for Sun again?

HL: Yes. When I left, I was a shooter handling the explosives. I got promoted handling explosives, I guess, two or three years after I signed on with the company. And I was a shooter for the company all the time except the time that I drove a marsh buggy on Padre Island. I shot all that time. And when I came back, I started handling the explosives again. I handled explosives, I guess, until probably in the mid 1960s. No, in the early 1960s.

JC: Did you stay in Morgan City all that time?

HL: Oh, no, we started moving. Sometimes, we would move every three months. The crew would move every three months sometimes. Sometimes, we stayed in a place one year. In the early days . . . most of us had mobile homes . . . in the early days, we had to pull our own mobile homes. We would pull our mobile homes with our cars. Mobile homes were a lot smaller than they are now. My first mobile home was a 28-foot mobile home and that was a monstrosity in those days.

JC: It was your own or it belonged to the company?

HL: It was mine.

JC: But, you needed it for work, right?

HL: Oh, yes. We would much rather have our own mobile home than have to have an apartment every where you went. Have to clean it. Sometimes you could not find an apartment. You had to send your wife back home. You stayed in the motel or hotel.

JC: So, you were married at this time?

HL: Yes, I got married in 1950.

JC: And your wife went with you?

HL: Most of the time, yes.

JC: And how was that?

HL: My marriage was not blessed with kids. We could not have kids. We tried adopting but with moving around, they would not even talk to me. They would not let you adopt children as long as you were moving around. So, another move was just

another experience for us and we loved every place we have lived because we had our attitude set to where we knew we were going to love the next place we were going to live, and we did. A lot depended on your attitude, your frame of mind, as to how you coped moving around.

JC: What kind of people do you think were not able to cope with that?

HL: People that had kids in high school. Most of the married people moved their kids as long as they were in elementary grades. When they got in high school, they figured they had better not try to move the kids as long as they were in high school. So, they would send the families back home. Well, that might last a year or two. A married man does not function very well or work well without his family. Sometimes, we was away from the families. They did not get to go home but maybe once a month. So, we have lost a lot of good people saying "We can't live away from our families and we can't move our kids – they are in high school."

JC: So, you would take that mobile home . . . would you all live like . . . when you got to the spot you were going, you would put all you mobile homes together and live in kind of a little settlement?

HL: Yes, because some oil company people and their families were close. We were a family, you know? That helped a lot. I have seen us make a thousand dollar move, moving a brand new town and you had 15-20 friends with you and then 10-12 kids that you had spoiled rotten, too. So, you moved into a brand new town but you had all these friends with you, so that helped, yes.

JC: So, you got to see some different places then?

HL: We have seen the country. We have seen so much of the country, my wife and I do not leave the state of Louisiana maybe once every 15 years because we have more fun in Louisiana than we have had anyplace else. We are Cajun dancers and we love to dance to Cajun music. Louisiana is the only place where you find Cajun music. Our music is going nationwide, is going worldwide. But it falls apart when you get out of Acadiana.

JC: So, you went to some pretty remote places. You said you went to Oklahoma?

HL: Oh, yes.

JC: What part of Oklahoma?

JC: I did very little work in Oklahoma. This was on a hot shot job out of El Rio, Oklahoma. We were shooting rows in the power lines along every road. But I was running an instrument in those days. One of our biggest joy with running instruments when we were along the power lines, we got interference from the power line. We got a 60-cycle signal on the power line entity that would work its way into our instruments. And we had to eliminate this 60 cycle signal. And if it is real strong, that was time consuming because that gave us a false signal on our information.

JC: It was a lot easier to do it places where you did not have . . .

HL: Cross-country. It is hard to get around but it is just easier because, like I said, every road in Oklahoma had a power line, and we had to keep the cap wire away from the power line and also had the hazard of the 60 cycle in our instrument giving us false information.

JC: So, by this time, you were reading the instruments?

HL: No, we did not read the information that we got. We made sure that everything

worked. I have pictures of the records. Our records are long pieces of paper. Information came in a form of . . . you have seen a heart EKG? Our information came in that format, only in the early days, we had twelve pickup signals. Well, we had fourteen. Our cap was one break and our up hole was another break. We had fourteen strings. It just was in photo of an EKG. We could tell when we were getting good records because the lines would line up better. But we could not tell if there was oil under there. Our information was sent to our lab in Beaumont, and it was computed manually by mathematicians.

JC: I mean, before, you did not have all that, right, you know, when you went out there and you were doing your . . . you were reading the information yourself, weren't you more or less?

Side 2

HL: Our records come in a long photo roll of paper that had to be developed after the shot was made. This paper was rolled into a canister. After the shot was made, you had to close your dark house doors. It had to be in the dark. You could have a little red light, a small red light, and you developed this record. You put it in your _____ so it would not have any blind spots on it and you would dip it in the developer. Then, you could see all the lines. And then, you dipped it in your fixer

which stopped the development . . . no, you dipped it in stop bath first, then you dipped it in your . . . that last bucket was developer, stop bath and fixer. Your third bucket of solution was your fixer. And that stopped the record from developing any more. That set your record the way it was going to keep for years. And then, we looked at it. The guy that was running the instrument looked at it, saw that everything worked and it was dried in the office when you got it from the field, it was rolled up, sent in the mail and sent to our lab in Beaumont, Texas. And it was computed and the geologists would look over the information. It was not a true science in the early days and it is still not. But the geologists picked the most likely spot where oil could be found. The production department was always three, four, five years behind us. We did not come in contact with the guys in production who drilled for the oil. They were always behind us. What kept us in business all these years was the technology kept improving, and it is still improving. The latest is called 3D. I am not familiar with this. I am going to have to locate a 3D crew and go and pick their mind and see how that works, but it is so much more . . .

JC: Efficient?

HL: Yes, it is so much more efficient.

Before I went into the service in November of 1951, we did not move around near as much as we did in the latter years. We worked off the quarter boats a lot. I went in the Air Force, November of 1951, and came out November of 1955, and went back to work for Sun Oil Company. That is when we really started moving. Sometimes, we would move every three months. Sometimes, we would stay in a place six months. Sometimes, if we were fortunate, we might stay in a place one year. We stayed along the Louisiana Gulf Coast usually. And then, I got transferred to another crew and we started moving out of state. In the period of 1-1/2 years one time, I worked in 9 different states. Now, all those were not moves. We were subject to work away from headquarters a lot. The company would rent a motel and rent an office and we billed expenses. That job might last maybe six weeks. Then, we would go back to our headquarters. We did that more and more as time went on.

I left Sun Oil Company in 1972 because the companies cut down on the seismograph crew and just kept one crew. I was offered a position on the crew but my wife's mother was here in Morgan City by herself and her health was failing. We knew we were going to have to come home. So, I took early retirement and we came home again.

But, to get back in the early days, when I got out of the service, we moved a lot. Our job kept getting harder and harder because in those days, they were building bigger homes and more homes along the roads. So, we had to start going cross-country to get away from the homes because we could not shoot within 1,000 feet of a bridge or home and we had to limit the size of our charge, which was not very good for our information. That cut down on our information source. And the jobs kept getting shorter. So, most kept getting closer and closer together. But, like I said, what kept us in business all these years was the technique of finding oil kept improving. And we kept going back and redoing the job that we had done before with better equipment. And we might come back later on, three, four, five years later and reshoot that job over again because our techniques had improved in that period of years. So, if our equipment had not kept improving, it would not have taken us long to shoot the country and shoot ourselves out of business.

Also, in the early days, things were real secretive. You did not tell anybody else what you were doing. You did not tell people you were using seismograph.

JC: Really?

HL: People asked you what you did, you said, "I work for Sun Oil Company." "What

kind of work do you do?" You say, "I do anything they ask me to do." You know, you did not tell bold face lies – you just beat around the bush!

JC: Now, why did you not want anybody to know you were in seismograph?

HL: Different companies thought they had the best techniques. They did not want their competitors to catch on to their technique of doing things.

JC: Who would you say had the best technique or was the most technologically advanced throughout your career?

HL: It was pretty much tit for tat because different companies had scouts to go out and scout the other companies.

JC: Were they scouting for spots or personnel?

HL: Spots and technique out in the field. Oh, yes. If someone would walk up to you and say, "Who do you work for?", and if you did not think he was the landlord, you might say you worked for someone else.

JC: You were saying how being on a seismograph crew is kind of . . . you had to keep that confidential.

HL: In the early days, it was very secretive. Most of the oil companies that had seismograph crews were sending out scouts to scout other crews to find out if they had a technique that was better than theirs. So, you had to be aware of the scouts and be real secretive and do not give out any information.

JC: Could you lose your job for giving out information like that?

HL: If you did it on purpose, yes, you would. And if you did not understand the seriousness of being secretive, you could very well lose your job, yes. It was very serious. But in later years, it was not as secretive.

JC: Were there guys who went from company to company getting a better offer with the next one?

HL: Do you mean Sun employees?

JC: Yes, who might have got one of these scouts and gone with another company?

HL: No.

JC: They were pretty loyal?

HL: Sun treated their employees as well as any company, so it would not have been to your advantage to go to some other company. You would lose your seniority. Sun Oil Company respected your seniority for promotions, and your ability and your integrity. That was their measuring stick.

JC: Did you notice a change when it went from Sun Oil to Kerr McGee? Did you notice a change in the company?

HL: No, when I left the company, it was still Sun Oil Company.

JC: In 1972?

HL: Yes. I guess Kerr McGee acquired Sun Oil Company maybe three, four years ago. But Sun Oil Company had been merging with other companies all through the later years.

JC: So, what would you say was maybe the biggest impact that working for Sun Oil had on your and your family?

HL: Job security and being around people with integrity. I enjoyed that very much and I enjoyed the outdoors. We saw part of the country that only the landowners would see because see, in later years, we went cross-country mostly and we would see beautiful farms that were way back from the roads. Beautiful scenery. We would see sections of rivers, small rivers that you could not see from the road. Stuff like that.

JC: So, Sun was a good experience for you?

HL: Oh, very much. I enjoyed every day I spent with Sun Oil Company.

JC: Well, is there anything else that you would like to add?

HL: That is about it. I think I said before, I was hired as a helper and after about three years, I was promoted to handling the explosives. And then, I drove the marsh buggy for about a year. Then, went back to handling explosives and I learned to

operate the seismograph machines when I came out of the service in 1955. Now, I relieved the guy that ran the instrument when he went on vacation and he would lead the surveyors because he was a surveyor, too . . . when the surveyor went on vacation, and all that time, I was running the instruments myself. Finally, they told me, "This is where you are going to have to be," because I would rather shoot than do anything. I would rather handle explosives. That was a good job. I knew the job, I knew how to do it safely, and I enjoyed it. But I did not turn down the promotion. I started running the instruments. That was a lot, sitting in the dark house during the day.

JC: What is the dark house?

HL: That is where you kept your instrument. As long as I was running the analog instrument, the dark house was not air-conditioned, and it was hot because part of the time you had to be completely closed in when you were developing your records, and it got really hot. And then, I started reading a digital instrument. Well, it had to be air-conditioned. The dark house had to be air-conditioned. That was a lot better. But I still enjoyed being outdoors much better than I enjoyed being in the dark house most of the time because when you are shooting fast and furious, you did not have time to go outside and enjoy the day. You were confined to your

instrument dark house.

The instruments kept improving all the time. They kept getting more and more complicated. They broke down a lot more. So, I enjoyed my years of running analog instruments, the summers were much hotter running the analog instruments because the dark house was not air conditioned.

JC: Do you remember a lease called Lease 340 where they had a dispute over the three mile versus ten mile line . . . not long after Huey Long was the governor and there was a dispute of the three mile, ten mile . . . do you remember anything about that?

HL: I do not remember that part as to him. Now, I do remember the day he was assassinated?

JC: You do?

HL: Very well, yes.

JC: How do you think people responded to Huey P. Long? What was Sun Oil's position on Huey Long or the people you knew?

HL: I was not with the company then. Now, Huey was real popular because he did so much good for the state of Louisiana. He had his ways. He had the deduct box. Do you know what the deduct box is? He had his clique. I guess he won every election he ever ran for once he got his clique established but he did a lot of good for the state of Louisiana. He built a lot of roads. He built a lot of bridges. He built a lot of schools. He gave the kids free textbooks, free pencils, free paper. Those were his projects.

JC: So, you were in Opelousas when he was shot?

HL: We lived just out of Opelousas in a little community called Mallett, between Eunice and Opelousas. My father was a sharecropper. We moved around a lot in those days because, I guess, my father kept looking for better land to farm. We moved all our furniture, farm implements, cattle, poultry, in the wagon. It took several trips. The neighbors helped.

JC: Did he grow sugar cane? Was that the crop he . . .

HL: No, cotton and corn. Well, we grew enough sugar cane to make syrup for our own

use. Had the community bring a certain meal where you brought your cane in and they would cook the cane and mix it up for you.

JC: So, you saw a lot of changes in Louisiana over the years?

HL: Oh, very much, yes.

JC: How would you say the oil company was connected to those changes, Sun and other oil companies?

HL: The oil companies brought in lots of money in circulation. You see, I grew up during the tail end. I grew up in the dead end of the Great Depression. Times were hard. You could not buy a job. But most of the people lived on small farms out in the country. Usually, we did not have two nickels to rub together but we never did go hungry because we raised everything we had. The only thing we sold was the cotton to buy clothes, to buy sugar, coffee, and tobacco if you used tobacco. The rest of it, we raised. We canned vegetables. We had our own chickens to slaughter. We had our own hogs to slaughter. We had our own milk house. We lived very well. We were poor but we did not know we were poor because everybody was poor. There were very few rich people in the countryside. I lived on the farm until I

was about twelve years old.

JC: So, the oil companies brought lots of money?

HL: Much prosperity, yes. Seismograph was going full bloom. Production was coming on. Lease money brought a lot of money for the land owners. Do you know what lease money is? Yes. That brought a lot of money in. Also, in the later years, the land owner would charge you to shoot on that property. They would charge you maybe $10-$25 for every hole that you drilled on the property to shoot.

JC: So, do you think it changed the area besides bringing money?

HL: Yes, it had a definite change. A lot of the people moved to town, got off the farms, got jobs working . . . during the war, a lot of people moved to town and got defense jobs. Maybe moved to town in Morgan City to work in the ship yards. In my part of the country, they might move out of the country and essentially locate the families, maybe in Opelousas, and maybe they drove to Baton Rouge to fabricate the gasoline plants. They might board a week in New Orleans to work on Higgins boats, and stuff like that. Now, that was the big change from World War II. That was the great big change in Louisiana. A big, big change.

JC: You say a lot of it had to do with World War II and then the oil boom?

HL: Yes. The Great Depression did not ease up, in my part of central Louisiana until World War II. Everybody lived on a farm and we were all poor but we did not know we were poor, like I said.

JC: So, do you think working for Sun Oil, you changed? Obviously, you changed what your family had done?

HL: Yes. Life was much easier. Standard of living came way up. People could afford cars, afford better homes, higher wages. Of course, inflation was in there, too, but the standard of living was coming way up, from World War II on.

JC: Is there anybody else you can think of that you may have worked with or known that was in the industry that we maybe could talk to as well?

HL: With time to think about that I could bring up people, I am sure.

JC: O.K., well, that would be great. You can maybe just let me know.

HL: Yes. I have outlived a lot of my friends. I am 77 years old. The crew that I was with here in Morgan City for several years, there are very few of those people left. There are very few of those people left that were on that crew.

JC: O.K. Is there anything else you would like to add?

HL: I think we have covered it.

THE END