

HHA # 00188
Interviewee: Ben Garacci
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: November 21, 2002
Interview Site: New Iberia, LAI
Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW029
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.]

Ethnographic preface:

Originally from Franklin, Ben Garacci first forayed in the oilfield as a roughneck with Humble Oil in 1948 and worked out of Grand Isle. Wanting to be home at night, he left the industry for a bit, but after he found he made much less money, went back into the industry by taking a job with Rowan Drilling Company. After two years and feeling that he was being passed up for promotions, he took a job with a smaller drilling company; when they looked like they were going to go under, he rehired with Rowan and stayed with them about six years. At that time he hired on with Movable Offshore (later Teledyne Movable Offshore). He started out as a driller and then became a toolpusher, where he spent some time overseas in Nigeria. In 1970 he was promoted to superintendent and later went to Singapore where he acted as project engineer on the construction of a number of rigs. When he returned to the area, he was promoted to assistant operations manager, where he stayed until he retired in 1992, after 30 years with Movable. After retiring, he worked as a private consultant helping to move rigs.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [BG]

SW: It's interview with Mister Ben Garacci, it's November twenty-first, the year 2002, in his home. And [Clears throat] you were tellin' me a little bit about your background. And you started with Humble Oil in uh, 1948. What did you uh, what did you get hired on to do for them?

BG: Uh, I got hired as a roughneck. And I worked with Humble Oil approximately three years. And long about then I had just gotten married and uh, I decided the smart thing for me to do was go ahead get a job at home. Well I did [Chuckling] and I almost starved to death.

SW: Where, where were you working for Humble?

BG: Out of Grand Isle.

SW: [Whispering] Okay, out of Grand Isle.

BG: Uh hm.

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SW: And so you're originally from New Iberia?

BG: No, I grew up in Franklin.

SW: In Franklin, okay. So you tried to go get a job back in Franklin?

BG: Well, Franklin, wherever so I'd be home at night. And at any rate, along about then Cabot was building a carbon pipe plant down in Bayou Sale, which is just a little south of Franklin. And uh, I stayed there not very long. Uh, 'cause I wasn't makin', I'd been makin' two dollars, about two dollars and 50 cents an hour with Humble and these people were payin' like a dollar 50. [Chuckles] So anyway uh, after about starving to death I had to sell my car to pay my grocery bill. [SW chuckles] And uh, I decided it was time to go back to the oilfield. And I went out and got hired by Rowan Drilling Company.

SW: Rowan?

BG: Rowan. R-O-W-A-N. [Pause] And with Rowan I was hired out as roughneck but wasn't but a matter of weeks I went to work in derricks. Uh, I stayed there about two years I guess. And uh, looked like I was bein' passed up for promotion, so I decided the time to quit. I got a job on a little small drilling outfit that they were just comin' on the market, which was called [Blackie?] Drilling Company. And uh, I went to work for them. I don't know, I worked for 'em a year and a half or so I guess and I could see the handwritin' on the wall that these old boys wasn't gonna be there long. [Chuckles] So-

SW: They uh [Clears throat] they weren't, they weren't a large company?

BG: No, they only had, well they ended up having three rigs. [Pause]

SW: So you wanted to get out before-

BG: Yeah, before they went under. So I, I got out and I motored on down to New Orleans and visited with Rowan and rehired with Rowan.

SW: Oh okay.

BG: And that time I stayed with Rowan probably long about five or six years.

SW: So all this time uh, when you were workin' at Bayou Sale, you, you were living in the area?

BG: No, we live on the rigs.

SW: You live on the rigs, okay.

BG: You see, we lived on these LSTs.

SW: Okay. [Slight pause] Uh, what kind of schedule did you work?

BG: Uh, for Humble we had a schedule, we called it "quarter boat schedule." You worked uh, five days a week. But you, if you had an evening tower you, you made your first uh, first tower in the evening, knocked off midnight, went to bed, doubled back at eight o'clock in the morning and then worked during time and went in. What that did for you it gave you like a three-day weekend. And uh, the whole time I was with Humble that's what we worked. Now with Rowan you worked every day. And I mean Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays. [Chuckles]

SW: Did you have any time off at all?

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BG: Hm, well every uh, every six weeks you changed tour, from morning tower to evening tower. And when you make that change you ended up getting a whole 32 hours off.

SW: Not even two days. [Laughs]

BG: [Chuckling] No, not even two days.

SW: So you w-, so you were married at this time now right?

BG: Oh yeah, yeah. I was married had uh, had two, two kids, yeah.

SW: So it must've been kind of difficult if you couldn't be home a lot.

BG: It was. So anyway I uh, stayed there 'til 1962. And I decided well hell, the kids were growing up and they didn't know who their daddy was [Chuckling] 'cause he was never home. And uh, 'bout that time Moveable Offshore, which ended up being Teledyne Movable, started in the business. And they were paying pretty decent wage. And uh, I hired on with them. I stayed there for 30 years.

SW: Oh okay. You retired with Movable?

BG: Uh hm.

SW: Okay, what are they called now you said?

BG: Uh, they're out of business.

SW: Oh, okay.

BG: But they, they were bought out by Teledyne.

SW: Teledyne, that's it.

BG: Uh hm.

SW: What year did you retire?

BG: Ninety... 10 years ago, '92 I guess.

SW: What did you do for uh, for Movable?

BG: For Movable Offshore I hired on as a driller. And I drilled for about uh... I don't know, maybe... maybe two years. And then I went to pushin' tools. And I worked as a toolpusher hm, 'til 1970.

SW: Long time.

BG: While I was workin' as a toolpusher uh, Movable farmed me out for about a year to Mobil Oil in Nigeria.

SW: Oh, so you went off.

BG: So I was over, over in Nigeria for a while.

SW: How was that?

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BG: Ah, it w-, wasn't bad. Like [first?] oilfield. They find the worst place in the world [Both chuckling] that's where they drilled the well. And anyway, at 1970 I was promoted as a superintendent in the, in the office. [Pause]

SW: So at that time you weren't goin' offshore anymore?

BG: Oh yeah, I was goin' offshore, but not going, staying offshore. I'd go out and visit and make some nasty comments to the hands. [Chuckles]

SW: But up until 1970, up until this promotion when you were workin' for all the other companies you, you were offshore?

BG: Offsh-, offshore, on and off.

SW: On and off, on and off?

BG: Ten and five, then two and two, and uh-

SW: [Clears throat] As a supervisor you, you could stay onshore more and just kind of go-

BG: Oh yeah. Now after I, after I was promoted into the office, yeah. I went out there when they had problems.

SW: So this was a pretty good position, it's uh-

BG: Uh hm.

SW: It gave you a lot more stability to be home and-

BG: Right. And uh, let's see, that was 1970... 1972 Movable elected to build some of these drilling rigs and we went to Singapore and I was over there. [Pause] As a, same position in construction of the rigs. We had constructed the first rig and the old boy that was uh, managin' the project quit and got run off some, I don't know, whatever. So I was promoted at that point to project engineer on construction of the second rig. Which turned out to be a pretty good deal. Then after that in seventy... six I believe, [Inaudible, talking softly to himself], yeah. In '76 we returned the states and brought the rigs that we had built over there back here. And those rigs by the way were 250 water depth [mad?] jack-ups.

SW: Why, why were they being built in Singapore?

BG: Cheap, cheap.

SW: Cheap to build 'em over there and bring 'em over here?

BG: The labor, the labor's cheap, yeah.

SW: Oh okay.

BG: Well-

SW: How long does it take to build a rig?

BG: About a year, nine months to a year depending how it going. And we built the, we, we built the first rig uh, 'bout seven point eight thou-, million dollars. And then we built the second rig in Singapore again for about nine million.

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[Pause] And then we built two in, let's see... [Talking to himself] 16, 17, 18. We built two in the States. And one, the next rig cost uh, 'bout 18 million.

SW: Whew.

BG: And when we were through with that one we started another one and it run 30 million. And at that point I got to say that uh, they was off the same blueprint. [Chuckles]

SW: They just-

BG: From '72 to about '81 you can see what, what had happened to inflation.

SW: Just 10 years plus also you were building in S-, Singapore instead of the United States.

BG: Well we, we only built the two in Singapore. The rest were built here.

SW: Did your, did your wife and family go with you to Singapore?

BG: Uh hm. Sure did. Well, my two boys by then had graduated high school, one was in college, one was uh, well actually both were in college except my youngest son went to Bro-, Brooks University of Photography and uh, that's where he went to school. Come back and started his home business in Houston, where he still lives today, he's strugglin'. [Chuckles] That's a dog-eat-dog business. Worse than drillin' business. [SW chuckles and coughs] So anyway uh, when the rigs were built, we built, uh, the ones in the States were built in Beaumont. [Pause]

SW: How do you uh, how do you move those things after you build 'em?

BG: Well, that's another story. [Both chuckle] What, what you do is uh, you take the rig as it is, let's say it's floating. And you calculate your CGs, vertical and horizontal. And uh, could calculate it to where wanted to go down, it'd go down. [He?], it's got three legs and you jacked the legs on down to bottom and then bring it on up the rest of the [Inaudible].

SW: They just float it to the spot.

BG: Uh hm.

SW: And then they dropped the legs and-

BG: Well they don't exactly drop them. You jack 'em down.

SW: Oh okay.

BG: This particular type of rig, you jacked 'em down hydraulically. Had uh, one, two, three... [Pause] six, six 18-inch jacks on each leg. Anyway, when I got back uh, they made me assistant operation's manager. And that's where I stayed until the day that I retired, whenever they decide that they had enough. [Chuckles]

SW: Had enough of you?

BG: No, enough of the drilling business.

SW: Oh, okay.

BG: Teledyne sold out, well they didn't actually sell out, they just closed the door and sold the equipment.

BG: And uh, let's see. Since then I notice on my uh, I notice on my uh, retirement check that they were sold out to [Alaganeous?]. Now it's been a couple years ago now. [Pause] I don't know if Teledyne even appears on the market anymore. I'm sure it does. They still got [Inaudible].

SW: Yeah, yeah.

BG: All that other stuff. [Slight pause] What else do you need? Want to talk a little bit about when we started?

SW: You started? Yeah, back in the early days.

BG: Yeah, equipment-wise.

SW: Sure. Uh, well how 'bout uh, what's the difference between a driller and toolpusher?

BG: Okay. A driller is got, is actually the individual that operates the machinery, the drawworks, makes the trips, and watches the well on a full-time basis. The toolpusher is the supervisor of the unit. [Pause] So in other words the toolpusher has 35 to 50 men under his wings at all times.

SW: Okay.

BG: And he's head honcho on the rig.

SW: He gives the orders, but he's also responsible if something goes wrong right?

BG: Right.

SW: Okay.

BG: And in my position I dealt with the toolpushers. [Pause] Anyway, when we started out of Grand Isle I'm pretty sure, I'm not positive, I'm pretty sure we started out in Grand Isle Block 18 on a little platform. [Pause] In 18 feet of water. [Both chuckle] Eighteen, 20 f-

SW: In the bay? In the bay or out off-

BG: In the Gulf right off of Grand Isle. We used World War Two PT boats for crew boats. But bear in mind that they took out those gas guzzlin' [Packard?] engines and put 671 [Jimmies and they're diesels?]. And what that did for 'em is slow them down from about 30 miles an hour down to about 12. [SW chuckles]

SW: [Referring to a picture] That, that's, like this what you're talkin' about?

BG: No, that's an LST. That was support vessel.

SW: Okay.

BG: I'm talkin' about the uh, crew change boats.

SW: Oh, when they bring you out to the rig and bring you back?

BG: Uh hm. Yeah.

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SW: Okay. [Pause] Back then uh, did you, did you sleep, you said you, I'm a little confused uh, there were no, there were no quarters on the rig itself, right? You stayed on the boats?

BG: On the type of rigs that we were building, yeah, there's quarters on the rig. But these right here uh, submersible, the first rigs like that, the quarters were on the LST.

SW: Okay.

BG: And you had a uh, had a walk, that go from, from the platform [Rustling of papers].

SW: Oh yeah, they, they called it the "widowmaker."

BG: Yeah.

SW: Okay.

BG: Okay.

SW: Yeah, now I got it.

BG: Go from the platform back and forth.

SW: So in the old days you had the rig and you stayed on the boats to sleep and eat and everything.

BG: Right.

SW: But then as-

BG: Then when the uh, when they, when the uh, advent of the uh, floating rigs like we were buildin', well then the people were on, on the rig itself. If I'm not mistaken, I think the first jack-up rig or floating rig was Mister Charlie. And I believe that rig is on this bay in Morgan City.

SW: Yeah. Do you know what year that was? [Pause]

BG: That had to be... early '50s, but I'm not real sure.

SW: [Sniffles and clears throat] And by the time, when you were supervising the building of the rigs, all the rigs had quarters on the rig itself?

BG: Yeah, not all, but most.

SW: Most of 'em. But back in the early days it was always on the boats, right?

BG: Uh hm.

SW: 'Kay. What was the food like?

BG: Food's always great. That's one thing that they did do they [Inaudible]. Pretty darn good food. 'Course every once in awhile you got a sorry cook. [Both chuckle]

SW: The company wanted to keep you guys happy and fed, right?

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BG: Oh yeah. Well, figured you worked better. [Both chuckle] [Slight pause] Of course back in those days you didn't have the, the mechanical equipment you have nowadays. You had a sack of cement to carry, you put it right there and you walked off with it. Now it's in the pneumatic tank, turn the valve [Chuckling] and the cement comes out.

SW: Comes out.

BG: Yeah. Cranes cam-, became into, into the, became into the picture. And that was uh... prior to the crane all you had was what they called a "cat line." You familiar with that?

SW: Uh uh.

BG: All it is a rope and run, you run it all the way up to the top of the derrick and back down again. And it's got cathead, which is a round, [Inaudible] lookin' thing. And put a, grab [Inaudible] rope and friction pick it up. But that, all the, all pretty near every rig that's out there's got it, cat line on it. Uh, not very many of 'em [Chuckling] use 'em. Steve you're going to ask me some questions?

SW: [Chuckles] Well, uh, what, what other things did you see change in, in this, the tools you were using in the beginning versus now?

BG: Oh well, what I saw change, and I don't know in some, some sense it's probably better than others, it, it hindered the companies and that is regulations. Then of course the uh, MMS is one of the culprits. [Chuckles]

SW: One of the main culprits, yeah, that were out there.

BG: Yeah.

SW: Well what was that, when did you see that comin' in? When did the uh-

BG: Oh it, it, it came on for years. Prior to that uh, prior to... say the early '70s, uh, it was mostly uh, Coast Guard. They'd come by and check lifes-, lifesaving equipment. But they didn't interfere with the, with the drilling of the well. MMS, they controlled your well [factor?], you had no control on what they put the guidelines out for your well, your drilling, your mud, your... and that... nineteen seventy... I may be wrong on this date, 1978 I think MMS finally got subchapter [IA?] into the regulations. And that, what that did was it put some regulations that applied to drilling rig, quote unquote. Prior to that you know you, it was kind of left to the operators. And, and uh, I don't know if you want this tape [Chuckles] uh, anyway, it's good. 'Cause I, I recall when we were working back in the early, early '50s and we'd bring a well in and then test it, they'd run a couple hundred feet of pipe out there, open that well up, and PACHOOM, [let it run in the bay?].

SW: The oil?

BG: Yeah. So in, in, in that respect it was uh, I'd have to say it's probably a good thing.

SW: So they um-

BG: Yeah.

SW: They, they helped with environmental issues you think.

BG: Uh hm, yeah, well, and of course by, like the U.S. government control industry, they always go too far.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

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BG: And they required in addition to what we just mentioned, they required that roughnecks have training of some sort, and called T-1 training. Drillers and other key personnel on the rig would have uh, license for drilling. If you were one of the rig builders, like myself, you had to have master license, which I had an unlimited master's license. [Chuckles] Which I couldn't [move?] nothin' but drillin' rigs.

SW: Did that make it harder to find qualified people?

BG: Well you had to train 'em.

SW: You had to train 'em.

BG: Uh hm.

SW: So it was a little more difficult to get guys out on the rig.

BG: Yeah.

SW: When you needed people out there.

BG: Right. But people like that didn't stay on the rig. You generally knew ahead of time when you wanna move, so a day or two before you'd bring, which by the way uh, after I retired I did a little rig movin'. I moved a few rigs for different companies.

SW: As a [Clears throat] as a private consultant?

BG: Yeah, as a consultant.

SW: Oh okay.

BG: Also did some consultant work on welding and you know.

SW: Okay. Um, you've mentioned back in the beginning that you were, you were starving and you had to sell your car [Chuckling] to pay uh, your grocery bill.

BG: Uh hm.

SW: Is uh, and you went back to the oilfield. Was, at that time the oilfield had, had the best paying jobs?

BG: Yeah. I, they uh... maybe not on a per hour basis, but remember you worked a lot, so.

SW: Yeah, you got a lot of work time.

BG: You know, the more you worked, the more you brought home. But uh, we were buyin' groceries you know at a grocery store and had a charge account. I ended up with a 450 dollar grocery bill and no money in the bank, I sold my old Chevrolet for 500 dollars [Chuckling] paid my grocery bill. And then I bought me a bicycle to drive around town in. No it's uh, there a lot of hardships along the way.

SW: Did you see a lot of other people who were getting into the oilfield for the money?

BG: Oh yeah, uh hm.

SW: It was a-

SW: What, what other options were there at that time if you didn't-

BG: In this part of the world?

SW: Yeah.

BG: Not a hell of a lot my friend. Not a hell of a lot.

SW: You could uh, farm maybe or-

BG: 'Course that don't pay much, you know. Fishin' mostly. That sort of stuff. Yeah, there's a lot of hardships. Louisiana never has [Chuckling] been noted for lot of jobs, you know. It's uh, I don't know, too many crooked politicians [SW chuckles] or what it is, but anyway.

SW: It's somethin' in the water, huh?

BG: Some-, maybe somethin's in the water.

SW: So it looked, it sounds to me like you s-, you saw uh, when the oilfield came in it really changed things around her, really opened things up.

BG: Oh yeah. Yeah.

SW: You would say that?

BG: You see when I went to work the first time for the contractor we were makin' like 90 cents an hour. [Pause] Well hell we worked everyday, you know. [Slight pause] I don't know what the oilfield wages are now, but I'm sure they're, they're close six, seven dollars an hour, or better.

SW: Yeah, I think so.

BG: That makes sense.

SW: Yeah, that would make it with inflation and everything, yeah. Uh, I, I've talked to a few people who still work and they say, yeah, it's about eight or seven or eight or whatever. But you uh, the overtime, they work a lot of hours like you said.

BG: But and also you might want to mention, I don't know [Inaudible] I already said I went to Nigeria and we went to Singapore. While in Singapore I traveled pretty much all over Southeast Asia lookin' for work for the rigs. And uh, Borneo, which I lived in Indonesia, Singapore, Taipei, uh... we talked about Nigeria.

SW: Uh hm. [Extended pause]

BG: And [Inaudible].

SW: What about-

BG: Malaysia, yes.

SW: Okay.

SW: Oh no, I interrupted you, I'm sorry.

BG: That's alright.

SW: You uh [Clears throat and pauses] bein' that the uh, the oil industry offered good wages, even though you, you, you worked really hard for it and everything, a lot of people got into the oil industry and started depending on them but uh, as we all know the oil industry has, has-

BG: No, it's-

SW: What happened during those down times? How did, how did the people around here uh, cope?

BG: Well, most went into some sort of industrial-type of work, which not a hell of a lot around here, but I guess if they traveled the state they probably find somethin'. And because of that, we lost a lot of good people in the industry. They didn't like, you know, when it picked back up, they uh, they didn't uh, go back because they're afraid, hell, they go back six months they run into the same damn thing'll happen.

SW: Right, there was no security.

BG: No security whatsoever.

SW: You worked for uh, for Movable for 30 years, so it seems like you had some security, huh?

BG: Yeah, well in my case and several others, uh, we were in management, you know, we had a little bit of [Inaudible]. 'Course we didn't get that because we were pretty [SW chuckles] we had that 'cause we worked out butt off. [Chuckles]

SW: That was the, the lower guys that always got laid off first.

BG: Yeah, uh hm, oh yeah.

SW: And then six months later when it picked back up, you try to find those guys again and they're not around, huh?

BG: No. Yeah, that's a shame, because [we hired?] a lot of good people out there [we?] lost in the industry. 'Course because of the regulatory bodies that we have in place nowadays uh... it's hard [Inaudible] get [Inaudible] people work in the oilfield anyway. One other thing I didn't mention in nineteen seventy... BIBOBBOO, between '76 and s... '71 and '76 is when subchapter IA I think came into play. And I worked with the U.S. Coast Guard, several of the Coast Guard people and uh, buildin' and implementing those regulations. I made a couple trips to Washington. One of the things that really soured me on that regulatory deal was that the Coast Guard was willing to follow the guidelines set out by the Norwegians. Now, the Norwegians ain't very damn good at drillin' oil wells, but they know boats. And they were tryin' to implement laws on drilling rig that applied to deepwater, or blue water as we called it, vessels. And I, I raised the issue a number of times [Inaudible] it did some good. Now these proposed regulations had been in place almost uh, hell, about 10 years they'd been talkin' about it with the Coast Guard. And uh, we had a meeting in [New Orleans?] when it gettin' towards the tail end. The Coast Guard was havin' the pressure put on them and we were tryin' to keep it [Inaudible, chuckling]. And uh, they had one commander... I think his name was Anderson. Some of the, some of the rig people really gave that old boy a rakin' over the coals. And that captain got up and he [Chuckling] he told, he told 'em how [the cow eat the cabbage?]. He said we had 10 years of work and hadn't done anything, which is true. But we, you know, you'd come up with stuff but they never would accept everything. And of course, you know, they were doin' one thing, we were doin' another one, so. [Chuckles]

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SW: Is it, is it still like that now?

BG: I don't know. See I been out of the business for 10 years. But probably not because the regulat-, regulations are in place and have been since 'bout '78. [Slight pause] Let me, let me see somethin'. By the way young man in case you don't know, I've got [Parkinson in town?]. [Clears throat] Myself and my vice-president and the uh, Humble, the Arco representative had gone to the rig and uh, [Lou Roberson?], our drilling engineer, had come out there with us. When we got to town my wife Jenny would fix dinner for visitin' people, which was [Inaudible], the VPs. And [we asked Lou to stay?], but Lou used to practically live at my house over there. He was single. And uh, we asked him if he wanted to come to dinner, he said, "No, no, no." He says, "I don't wanna interfere, y'all might wanna talk business." He said, "But I'll tell you what," he said, "I, I need some money, can you loan me some [Inaudible]?" I say, "Yeah, how much you want Lou?" I gave him the equivalent... I don't know, maybe 50 bucks. And he took off and went to town, went to his hotel room. And uh, went out and drank a few beers. He's walkin' back 'bout three of those locals, Indonesian hoods jumped him. Took his watch and wallet. And one thing that I had stressed to all of our people was if someone robbed ya, give him what you got, 'cause it ain't worth nothin'. Now Lou had, he had one 10 dollar Singapore bill in his pocket. Little old watch that he paid 35, 40 dollars for and what few bucks I had given him. And it upset him and he took off and chased 'em. I don't know if you familiar with Indonesia, but over there they had what they call traffic circles. [Let me, let me see?]. [Chuckles]

SW: Draw it on the back of that.

BG: It's not something you need?

SW: It's my questions, but you can draw it on the back there.

BG: [Draws and describes traffic circles around 38:15] Well anyway, there was a policeman standing here. And sidewalk's over here, and Lou took off after these old boys. And he caught one of 'em. And when the policeman saw the struggle he run towards 'em. And of course this old boy all he wanted to do was get away. He had, they used those [crisp?] snake-lookin' knife. Shoved it right through his heart.

SW: Killed him?

BG: [Inaudible] deader than a doornail. [Slight pause] So, but other than that he's the only one we lost over there. Well, hm. [Pause]

SW: You mind if I ask you few uh, opinion questions?

BG: No, go right ahead. [Referring to photos] Look, 1948 Hudson. [Pause] That was before [Inaudible], this here our uh, mechanical supervisor, inside, that's what the inside of those rigs looked like [Inaudible] you can see there. But go ahead with your question there Steve.

SW: Oh okay. Well, I just was wonderin' what uh, in your opinion Louisiana is rich in minerals, why is the state so poor?

BG: You don't really want me to answer that, huh? [Both chuckle]

SW: If you'd like, you don't have to.

BG: Well, let me put it to you this way, if I had a sand pile out there and got a handful of sand, and you took that handful of sand, you pass onto this boy and he passed it on to that guy, what happens to your sand?

SW: It gets spread out.

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BG: Too many, number one man, our governor, look where he's at. Probably a minimum security prison, but still he's a prisoner. You know. And this state has been known for these ty-, type of shenanigans. Look at Long. [Slight pause] What Long [Clears throat]. And we had another governor who was in prison, I can't think of his name now. Back in the '30s.

SW: Was it Williams? Williams?

BG: Uh uh. But anyway.

SW: He's the guy that came right after Huey Long.

BG: Yeah.

SW: I can't think of his name either.

BG: But anyway that, that's what happened and I, I don't know, I don't know if we ever gonna change that. Really and truly.

SW: Any regrets about uh, your, your career in the oilfield?

BG: Uh, I have only one. And uh... that is I wished I'da had a college education. But it didn't turn out that way. I had to help my father support the rest of the family, I put the rest of the kids through school. And uh, I got one who's got a master's in physics. One brother.

SW: Really?

BG: He's retired now. Yeah.

SW: You wanted the, you wanted that college education for yourself.

BG: Yeah, but I would've probably gone up the ladder. They, I, you know, I, I didn't get any further than where I was 'cause I didn't have any sheepskins. [Chuckles] Makes a difference my friend. Don't let nobody tell you it doesn't. Doesn't matter, although I think that probably I had as much knowledge as a lot of engineer, young engineers and did a lot of the engineers work, which I had checked by PEs. But I still wasn't, still didn't have that education. And I think for an old country boy with a high school equivalent education I guess, maybe I didn't do too badly.

SW: No.

BG: What's your next question.

SW: That's it.

BG: That's it.

SW: Do you have anything you wanted to add? Any, do you have any, any interesting stories, any instr-, uh, things that happened out on the rig that uh, you look back on and maybe laugh at or uh, did you guys play practical jokes on each other on the rigs?

BG: No.

SW: Didn't have time? [Chuckles]

Interviewee: Garacci, Ben

Interview Date: November 21, 2002

BG: They'd get fired they did that. They'd get caught. We don't allow that. Yeah, I got one. [Chuckles] We were workin' down out of uh, Port of [Ramses?] I believe it was, somewheres in that area. We had one old boy on the rig [Clears throat] somehow or another he got himself some dope, oh he had in a flashlight. And he bailed off of that rig 70 foot in the air and started swimmin' for the bank. [Chuckles] They kept hollerin', "Man overboard," they took the crewboat and went out there to get him. And uh, tried to get him and get on board. And, no, he wasn't gettin' on board. Because they got guy up there was a Ku Klux Klan gonna [Chuckling] kill him if he did. They never got that man on board.

SW: But he jumped off of the rig and into the water?

BG: Off of the rig, into the water. [SW chuckles] Yeah, pretty intelligent. And the other, you know, drugs has, has always been a problem, particularly in the offshore environment because of the hazards caused by heavy machinery and drillpipes and whatnot have you. And it's a full time job. And they'd manage to sneak it out there sometimes, somehow or another. And I know I made, I'd make these drug searches out there and I'd always find something. But the [mason?] thing is, was I, only drugs I take are what the doctor gives me. [Chuckles] But [Clears throat] I've had 'em come in, hire out, you sit there and you interview 'em, well really and truly I, I don't know if you're old enough, but I was old enough to know when an old boy wasn't tellin' me the truth. And you'd ask 'em, "You're doin' drugs?" "Oh no, no no no." I'd say, "Well, okay." I'd give him his doctor's paper, they go out and they take a test. Sure enough they'd flunk the drug test. Come back here and I'd say, "Well son I thought you told me you didn't do drugs?" "Oh," he says, "I don't." He said, "There was people in the car and blah blah blah." And always had some excuse. I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do." I said, "We'll go back up there to that doctor's office if that doctor finds you're on drugs, you pay his bill. If you happen to be clean, well I'll go ahead and take care of it." "Oh I'm clean." You know they knew damn good well that they messed with drugs. You know they [when we got?] to that damn doctor for another, 'nother shot. I couldn't believe it.

SW: And he had to pay the bill?

BG: Oh yeah. Absolutely.

SW: What was the company policy? Did, did you guys fire guys like that or would just get rid of them?

BG: Yeah, we wouldn't mess with them. If I can I say it's, it's too uh, too risky. Yeah.

SW: That was in the maybe '70s that became a problem? Seventies on or it wasn't much, it wasn't much of a problem before the '70s?

BG: Not really, no. Either that or we, we didn't know what the hell we was lookin' for. In the '70s, 'bout middle '70s [Slight pause] it became a, kind of a problem.

SW: Did you ever um [Clears throat] did you ever work with any or did you ever supervise any women offshore?

BG: Oh boy, yeah. [Both chuckle] That's another story. Yeah, we uh... we, I guess [Clears throat] equal opportunity I think gave us a quota we had to go by. And uh, we hired a few women. Mostly in the kitchen and roustabouting end of it. And they caused more problems than they cured. Every once in awhile one of 'em would get caught beddin' down one of the [Chuckling] guys on the rig.

SW: So-

BG: So then you'd fire both of 'em.

SW: They had separate quarters, though?

SW: They were supposed to right? [Chuckles]

BG: Uh hm, supposed to be.

SW: When, when did you, when did that start happening, the women coming on-, offshore? In the '60s or the '70s?

BG: No, no, it was in the '70s sometime. Probably after '70s, yeah, '78. [Pause]

SW: H-, how is it now, or by the time you retired? Were there more before or was it uh-

BG: Uh, no, we, we still had the same quotas. Somehow or another we [Chuckles] it managed to uh, to not really have a big problem with that.

SW: Yeah. Well the quota said you had to hire so many, but they didn't say where you had to put them.

BG: Right.

SW: So you could-

BG: And you, you could, you had to hire the Blacks, which I think that's a good thing, 'cause those people needed [Clears throat] needed to upgrade their station in life. But we hired a Black woman for instance. She fit two categories.

SW: Two categories, okay.

BG: And uh-

SW: Did you, you saw a lot of that, too?

BG: Oh yeah.

SW: Okay. That's interesting. What, what about the Black people, when did you start seein' more of them out there? Around the same time?

BG: About the same time, yeah. [Pause] Yeah, I think that Blacks were held down way, way too many years. I don't really agree with their philosophy that we owe 'em somethin' because their great-grandfathers were slaves. My great-grandfather wasn't a slave, but he's so god damn poor, he couldn't [hop?]. [Chuckles] He had to come to America. But they, they deserved the work.

SW: Did you ever, were there problems with uh, on, on the rigs with them, or did they work like the other guys-

BG: Yeah, they pretty much, if you screened 'em real well before you hired 'em, pretty much, they did o-, a-okay. Uh, I don't know if you want this on film, but in my opinion some of the Blacks are just [Inaudible]. But you've got a lot of good ones.

SW: Well you said you screened 'em, but you, you wanna screen all of your employees anyway, because you wanna get the right guy out there.

BG: Yeah. Yeah, but when you went through your screening process, you know, you can tell.

BG: You know what one of the things that amazed me, and this is as recent as 10 years ago when I retired, the kids that come out of high school, they can't read and write or spell. [Pause] Some of the words, somethin' about the rig floor let's say for instance, they come down there and they'd write, "floor," F-, F-L-O, flo. [Chuckles] That's an example. They just don't, I don't know, I don't know how they get out of high school without bein' able to read. [Pause] 'Course I compensated for my lack of education because I read everything that was technical that pertained to my business. I didn't read comic books or story books, I read somethin' I could [Chuckling] learn somethin' from.

SW: Somethin' useful for your job.

BG: Yeah. Yeah.

SW: You must've read some carpentry books, because you built this, this garage. [Chuckles]

BG: Well I don't know. I uh, I guess I've always been pretty handy. I've take courses in electrical, courses in hydraulics, mathematics, and... I guess two or three others. [Pause] Well Steve I'm about to run out of ideas here.

SW: Okay, well that's all I've got. [Chuckles] I'll go ahead and turn it off, I thank you though.

[END OF RECORDING]

