

HHA#00148
Interviewee: Elmer Duplantis
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: February 5, 2003
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA
Interview Module& No.: MMS: SW038
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 interview has been saved on two separate tracks on one VCD.]

Ethnographic preface:

Elmer Duplantis was born and raised in Chauvin, Louisiana. His father worked for Texaco for nearly 30 years. He received a scholarship to Northwestern State College, but after a year volunteered for the military service where he worked mainly in Europe during the time period after World War Two. He got out of the service in 1948 and got a job with Texaco. In 1949, wanting to better his position in life, he sought and acquired a roustabout position with Superior Oil Company; later he was promoted to roughneck, derrick man, relief driller, and driller. In the early '60s, Superior stopped their offshore drilling operations and he was sent to production as a roustabout and later as a production foreman. By 1976 he had been moved to Lafayette and a year later had a permanent position as a superintendent. Two years later he began working overseas on troubled jobs. After working in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Europe, and seeing Superior bought out by Mobil in 1982, he asked to take a retirement package in 1986. Since being retired he has gotten into real estate. During the interview he discusses what it was like after Mobil bought out Superior, issues related to differing hydrostatic pressures in different regions of the world, changes within the industry and "drilling by the book," his nine years in the production department, and Mister Charlie.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [ED]

SW: Recorded interview with Mister Elmer Duplantis. The date is February fifth, 2003, and we're in his home. As I said we're just asking, we're out to interview about oilfield experiences basically. I like to get a little bit of background from the beginning. Uh, where you were born and where you were raised and what your parents did for a living.

ED: I was born and raised in a little settlement uh, south of Houma, Louisiana, called Chauvin, C-H-A-U-V-I-N. My father was a Texaco employee for 29 years. Mostly in the lakes of uh, south Louisiana or the lakes of, south of Terrebonne Parish. And during the Depression uh, he was like the rest of the people in that area, cleaning ditches for 75 cents a day. I lived through that. Not anything that uh, I think this country could go through today like we did. I left uh, Chauvin after high school with a scholarship to Northwestern State College. Stayed up there a year and I felt like I was needed in the service, so I volunteered. I stayed three years overseas. Well, a year here and two y-, 27 months overseas. Mostly in Germany and France. And it was uh, it was after the war, we, it was the occupation, the repairs of some of the stuff. I had been inducted in the uh, uh... Corps where I was more or less in telephone and electrical because I was doin', I was takin' an electrical engineering course. And most of my work overseas was uh, in repairing telephone service for all of the damages in Germany most. I, when I got out of service, uh, jobs were hard to find, that

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was in 1948. I'm not too proud of this, but I, being my daddy was working for Texaco, I went to work for Texaco also. But to me the money wasn't very great. I'm not criticizing the money that my daddy made, he was satisfied. He put food on our table for 29 years, you know. But the thing is at that time I could see myself, I wanted to better myself and the money that I was makin' there was not enough to do any good. So I'd heard of the company called Superior Oil Company. Uh, I contacted one of the drillers that worked for them and he told me who to contact for a job. I contacted a man by the name of Curtis Smith. He hired me and I worked from a roustabout in 1949 to a superintendent's job by 1977. Steppin' up the ladder and havin' all kinds of problems on every rung to be able to get the next job. But I was successful, I worked hard. But I have to say about Superior Oil Company, I was paid well. They were the best paying company in Louisiana at the time. Uh, we had been offered a buyout by Texaco twice and uh, that was turned down. In nineteen and seventy-nine I started workin' abroad, mostly on troubled jobs uh, where they were havin' blowouts or uh, problems of not being able to test wells that were being drilled. But let me go back some. In 1959 the company quit their drilling program. In 1960, I had had cancer surgery and when I went back to work they told me I could do one of two things. I could find me another job with another company or I had to go to work in production. Well after startin' there as a roustabout, three months later, later I got a production foreman's job. I stayed there nine years. In '69 Superior started a big drilling program and mostly we put together land rigs. And it was just a subsidiary of the company and they named it differently, they didn't call it Superior Oil Company. We had one rig left, it was called the "Keck". The W. M. Keck. And it was a showboat. Had five levels and there wasn't any other rig that had a, any kind of elevator on it. We even had an elevator to go from bottom to top, from top to bottom. That was put under me. In other words, I took care of it and uh, I redid it uh, did, spent a little over a 100,000 dollars gettin' it all repainted and uh, in tip top shape at that time. Because it had been laid up for awhile. It had gone to Holland for a year and had never turned the wheels on it and they brought it back here. So there was a lot of work to be done with it. But it didn't have anything to do with all of the land rigs they had put together. They had another group of people that were running that. Anyhow, the uh, company was gettin' much bigger and was having way more trouble because they got rid of the land rigs, they didn't have the right people to run it. And got some more uh, one offshore barge and then started drilling offshore again. And that was in '76, when I came to Lafayette. So I've been here that long, because I was officed in Houma or little place called Dulac, just takin' care seven, of producing fields. And I had 86 people under me. When I got to Lafayette and I came here with the intentions of relieving someone who had had a heart attack. And after a year I had a permanent job here as a supervisor. Oh, I mean a superintendent. And uh, we ran about uh, anywheres from 14 to 16, 17 rigs. And that was way before satellites and uh, uh, telephones. Uh, we took everything, all of our reports longhand uh, at the office at four o'clock in the morning and so we could have everything ready for the secretaries at six-thirty or seven o'clock, get 'em all typed up. Uh, those were long days in that time. It wasn't anything for each of us, there was only two superintendents to be takin' care of each eight, nine rigs and for any time off whatsoever, we took care of the whole bunch of 'em. Fifteen or 16 of 'em.

SW: If your b-, if your fellow supervisor take time off-

ED: Well if you needed to have any time off, you know, you had to take care of his job too, they didn't have any relief for us.

SW: That's how you did it. Okay.

ED: In '79 uh, was my first job uh, overseas. Uh, we had hi-, had a blowout just off the coast of New Guinea. And I was goin' over there to drill a directional well into it to kill it. Well, at the time uh, some reason or other, and I forget what it was. Oh, I know what it was. No, I don't remember what it was. I couldn't go, but they send somebody else to load the barges for me in Singapore. And by the time we got everything loaded up, because we had a list of materials that had to go to that site before even the rig got there. And I uh, this other gentleman went in my place just to load the barges and by the time he got through, uh, the well died. So I didn't have to go there. But not three months later they had had problems in Peru. We had a concession with the Peruvian government to drill two wells. And they had lost first hole. In other words the main sand that they wanted to test, they had uh, oh, lost so much junk in the casing they couldn't get back to it. So I went down there and cut a wind in the casing and drilled another 500 feet and set a line and cemented it and went through the whole thing just to test another sand that made [Inaudible]. Well after

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seeing just drilling that little portion, I knew that the pressure was not equal. In other words, we were using 17 pound mud to be able to stop the flow of salt water. But it wasn't that great. In other words, it didn't flow, it was a tight sand. Uh, we'd get back on bottom, make 100 barrels of saltwater. And just throw it away and then we would go back to drilling. I mean it didn't hurt us that much is the only thing that we were gaining, I mean that gas was gaining on us all the time, little gas in the saltwater. Well, they wanted to drill a second well. That one naturally was a dry hole, so they wanted to drill a second well and it was 27 miles away. It had taken forever to get the rig out in the jungle and to set it up and to drill that and the cost of that one well was 34 million dollars. So I gave 'em my ideas on how to move the rig instead of flying it. And in uh, 27 days they had the rig moved and rigged up again and I went down there and drilled a second well. I didn't go immediately, I waited until they set intermediate. And I had big discussions here about not being able to use oil mud and all of that because I couldn't mix it in the jungle and these people that were telling me that, they had never been in the field, I mean, most of that stuff was just book learning, it wasn't experience. And I said, "Well send me down there and I'll drill that well with oil, and I'm not gonna have all the saltwater intrusion that we had on the other well." Well, I did. I converted everything to saltwater af-, I mean to oil after the uh, intermediate was set [at?] about eleven-eight, somethin' like that, 11,800 feet. And we went ahead and drilled a well and tested all of the sands. They were all at the same level as the first well, they were all tight sands, they all made saltwater. And it took quite a bit to uh, get the engineers to agree that this was not uh... in other words, low pressure wells, these were high pressure wells. But they weren't flowin' that great because of the tight sands. Anyhow, from there I went to the North Sea, I had two rigs running in the North Sea. Drilled about uh, let's see, three, four... five wells on that concession. And then when I got back over here, I stayed here about uh, maybe three months and then they wanted me to go to Indonesia. By that time Mobil Oil had bought Superior Oil Company out, and that was in '82. In fact they bought 'em out while I was in uh, in Scotland. Went to Indonesia for a year and I relieved all of the superintendents down there and worked in the field a bit. Uh, they had all of their wells, all of their first wells that they had drilled down there was flowin' open hole, didn't have any casing set across. So I started a workover program while I was there. To run casing in all of these open holes that they had. And perforate lower in that uh, uh, section they was flowin', they were just makin' dry gas and no liquids at all, they were just flowin' out of the surface in those zones. So I had started that before I left and then I came back here in nineteen and eighty-five. They wanted me to go back to Scotland. No, they asked me to go start a new concession in uh, the English Channel with a jack-up rig. So I went over there and drilled a first well for 'em and then they wanted me to go back to Scotland and take care, they were having trouble in the North Sea. And I had had experience while, the little while I stayed in, in uh, the English Channel with what was goin' on up north and who was running it. And I said, no, I wasn't goin'. I said, "I'd much rather take a package and retire." And that was in '86. So I've been retired since 1986. [Pause]

SW: Because of all, it's just too much chaos in the industry at that point, huh?

ED: Well, uh, they had too many people uh, they wanted someone on the job that they could point a finger to if the job went sour. And they never patted you on the back for any good things you did. [Audio breaks in and out] [Inaudible] retirement. I mean, I, I came up with uh, family-owned company, you knew everybody uh, uh, the people that worked with were like brothers and sisters. And in, when I got with Mobil that was a uh... different company altogether. You were just a number there. And the Mobil people didn't wanna recognize you as knowin' what you were doing. In other words, they did the best work. And anywheres I went overseas for them I was havin', I was the only one, I couldn't very well defend myself. Now the Superior people that stayed here, in other words they were respected a little bit better than I was. In fact I stayed in Indonesia right at 11 months and my wife, they wouldn't even give her a green card to be able to go to the American stores and shop. She had to depend on some of the other Mobil women to take her. I mean, it's, you know, it's just the way the company was.

SW: You-

ED: And I, I was just tired of that.

SW: Superior was better?

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ED: Oh, well I guess Superior was better in every way than Mobil was.

SW: That's what I hear uh-

ED: But Mobil is uh, gettin' their lick-, lickins now from Exxon.

SW: I hear everybody refer to it as THE Superior Oil Company.

ED: Well yes, it was at one time THE, you had to put a "the" there. [Inaudible] [Pause; recording might be turned off]

SW: Sorry about that. [Chuckles] Makin' sure it was right. So maybe the people who didn't work for it had a different opinion right? [Chuckles]

ED: Well they had a different opinion. Of course, I, I would think that some of the supervisors just carried it a little too far. In other words, when our uh, invoices were made if there weren't uh, uh, the heading was not correct and it was just "Superior Oil Company," they'd make 'em take it back and put "The Superior" on it. I, I think they went a little too far with it, but that's what we're known for and we were proud of the company we worked for. And like I said uh, we probably worked harder than anybody worked for any other oil company, but we were better paid than anybody else. [Slight pause]

SW: When did uh, when did you guys arrive here in Lafayette?

ED: We came here, I came here uh, thinkin' that I was just relieving somebody in 1976. And I was just livin' in a hotel and then it got a little worse because just at that time the uh, highway department was displacing me where I lived in Houma. 'Cause they come through with a new Highway 90. So I had to fight the highway in Houma and my wife was constantly traveling between here and, and Houma or a settlement we lived at called Gray, between Thibodaux and Houma. And I told the company, I said, "Look, I don't know how long I'll stay here, but I, I gotta get out of that hotel." "We'll get you an apartment man, don't be livin' in a hotel." So we got an apartment here for about uh... eight months. And then they made my job permanent and they said, "Well uh, you can go ahead and move." But I was still fightin' the highway when I moved over here. I bought a house here in November of '77. And I had moved here in September of '76, so went a little yea-, a little over a year before I actually bought a home. And then we settled with the highway uh, after goin' to court with 'em. Uh, two, two groups of people in this world that you can't get along with. The transportation department and the IRS. You just cannot talk to either one of 'em. But uh, my settlement was not as quite, not quite as much as what I was worth. [Coughs] But it was better than what, it was better than what the highway had first offered me. I made about a third more than what they offered me, so to me, I had, my wife and I had discussed it and I says, "If I have a quarter more than what they're offering me, at least it's worth it to me." Moved here in '76 and... worked the rigs for awhile because uh, after my partner got back off of his heart attack, I went back on the rigs and what started me there, we had a blowout in one of the lakes. So I went on that rig, the Keck, the W. M. Keck, killed the well, stayed on it I guess about 10, 12, 15 days, I don't remember exactly. Then they brought me in the office and say, "Well, we'll office you here." I knew that I had a job on the rig, but I didn't, I wasn't too sure I had a job in the office, see. Even if they had moved me to work in the office. So they gave me an of-, gave me an office here in Lafayette. Since the beginning of '78 until '86 when I retired, I was workin' out of that office here in Lafayette. When they sold, when I came back from Scotland they wanted to transfer me to New Orleans and I said no. I, I had lived too close to New Orleans. In fact uh, I didn't like it when I left Houma, 'cause New Orleans was too close. And then they said, "Well fine, we'll send you to Houston." So I worked in Houston, but commuted on weekends for I don't know, four or five months. And then they sent me, well I had some work to do in the Mediterranean and then I went to Indonesia. And then from there I, I did that concession in the English Channel and...

SW: When there's, when there was problems off-, overseas they, they called you out?

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ED: I was gone. And when they-

SW: You got out there and then fix it.

ED: I was a troubleshooter.

SW: Okay.

ED: I went on two blowouts in Indonesia. The first one they cu-, they carried me out in a canoe. I was just that close to the bank, see, they took me out in a canoe. Never went to, through uh, customs or anything. I got there off the plane and I didn't know where in the heck I was, somebody come and pick me up said, "We're gonna take you to the boat right away." "Yeah, well I have to go through customs." "Oh no, don't worry about that." They put me in a pirogue, I guess, uh, or a canoe. I was about a half a mile offshore. I stayed there about eight or 10 days killin' that well. Didn't do very much all, the only thing I did was tell 'em what to do, you know. They brought me back in the same way and I got on an airplane and came back to the States. [Chuckles]

SW: What was uh, what was the difference between uh, killin' a well here in the States and doin' that overseas, in the North Sea or in Indonesia? Was there a big difference in the way you guys handled things?

ED: No the, the procedure's similar whenever you do, you have to do those things. Uh, and... it's controlling pressure that's what it is. And knowin' uh, how much hydrostatic you have to put on that pressure. As long as you don't uh, break your formations down to where you lose return, you, you get to where you're pretty successful at killing wells. But lot of people are scared, they don't want it to flow too much. I learned my lesson in west Texas in nineteen and... seventy-nine and ninet-, no, take that back. Nineteen and sixty-nine and 1970. I went to west Texas and relieved the supervisors they had there on oh those land rigs. And we'd get back on bottom, we'd have to chug-, choke those wells out. Sometimes it would take you another 45 minutes or an hour before you could get to drilling. That's how much gas would uh, uh, seep into your well bore while you were makin' a trip. In other words, you were gaining mud the whole time you made the trip, but didn't worry about it. Then you got back on bottom, but you had to choke that well out. And a lot of the learning experience that we had was choking those wells out of west Texas with all of that gas in, you know. They weren't trouble because you knew what to expect when you got on bottom. Here in Louisiana it's a little different. You have to watch, I, I don't think that there was any formation in west Texas that you could break down and lose returns on, but here in south Louisiana your formations are so porous that the least amount of overburden that you have on these uh, uh, sections you lose returns. Then that's when you start having problems. Just don't know, just don't know how much mud you have to put in for what you had to take back, see.

SW: Is that a difference because of the geography? Louisiana has marshes or uh-

ED: Well-

SW: Salt underneath or, or-

ED: Yeah. Uh, your, your formations are so different here, are so pressured in, in uh... you could have a normal pressured sand below a high pressure sand here and that's where you having trouble, see. But you don't find that in any other part of the world. Because in the North Sea, I mean, all your pressures were normal pressure. And you knew exactly how to treat it. Here you're not too sure. You could, you could be drilling and drill a high pressure sand and control it with whatever weight you needed to hold it, and then drill another 75 or 80 feet and get into something that doesn't hold that kind of hydrostatic on that formation and then lose returns. Then you have problems. That's what causes wells to come in if, you know, if they're done correctly. And another thing uh, people that just don't know the area can drill into something way high pressure and not have enough weight on it to, hydrostatic weight to hold it, see. [Slight pause] We, I say "we" because I guess everybody that worked for Superior feels the same way that I do, uh, worked for one of the better companies, like we talked about before. That this state has ever had, or we'll ever

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have. Gave us a free hand on doin' exactly what we thought was best for the wells and I'm not talkin' about in the office, I'm talkin' about in the fields. And then when you had problems that you couldn't handle, you always had someone that you could call and get a different idear, maybe, of what you were doin'. You don't have that anymore. In fact you didn't have it anymore when I took retirement. You sure you don't want any coffee?

SW: No thank you.

ED: You don't have anybody to get you out of any kind of problems, don't have anyone in the office that knows exactly because they haven't got the field experience to be able to tell you, "Well this is what you need to do." Uh, the fabricate some story, you know, and go do it, and get you in more trouble than what you already. And there's no way, there's now way that I could uh, work in the oilfield anymore. I mean I think I had some of the better times to work with a free hand on whatever you wanted to do. Because before I went to work for Mobil and 'course they, they continued the same way, they were doin' everything according to the book. I got down in Indonesia, they were takin' anywheres from 62 to 67 well, I mean uh, days to drill a well from surface to bottom and, and they knew exactly the depth that they were goin'. And they knew exactly the pressures they would encounter, 'cause everything ran at a certain depth. Uh, six-, uh, 62 to 67 days to complete the well, ready to flow. And I went down there and I did it in 27 days. Cut their costs down a little bit more than half. I mean the longer you stay on it, the more costly it is. Yeah, we're talkin' about the Peruvian well. The first well cost 34 million. The second well I drilled only cost 19 and I got the rig out of the jungle for that price.

SW: You wanna get the ri-, you wanna get, drill the hole and get production flowin' as quick as possible.

ED: Well my, was to drill a well and, and uh, not be a dry hole, to be a, you know, good producin'. But uh, we encountered the same sands that we had in the first well and f-, even from the first sand we drilled I knew that we were probably uh, uh, be at the same level with the rest of the sands. And, and we had a lot of government problem down there. They were sabotaging the well, they were droppin' stuff in there that I, I spent two or three days fishing for a bit or uh, I would twist off. So I shut down. Well, before I shut down, got the government send soldiers out on the rig to watch these people. They knew they were fixin' to move out, fixin' to finish a well and move out, you know. And they were gonna be out of a job. So they were doppin' some pieces in, in the well and I never did find out what it was. Pieces of lead that we got back out of that well. And we were drilling with diamond bits at the time, see. Yeah, I backed off one time, left a bit in the hole. And went back in and screwed to the, to the same bit and jarred enough to where I got it loose. Uh, yeah, we had all kinds of problems. I stayed out of the hole, I shut down, stayed out of the hole 17 days on the second well. And they wanted me to go back and we still had 800 feet to drill and uh, concession called for us to get five million dollars back from the Peruvian government and they didn't wanna give us that money. Finally, after all of the arguments and uh, tellin' 'em why we didn't wanna go back in the hole, uh, we didn't have anything there anyhow. S-, they agreed to pay us uh, the five million back, see. But uh, [Inaudible] drilling according to the book and I don't know had written that book, but uh, it was totally different from what we had learned. I say "we," uh, with Superior Oil Company. T-, I guess we taught a few of those guys uh, a little something. I, I had changed the mind of quite a few in Indonesia before I left. And then I had done some work in the Mediterranean and they, they were drilling with regular saltwater. And by the time you made a tri-, trip and got a new b-, a new uh, bit on bottom, it would take you four or five hours to clean the hole out to get to your original depth. You just about warn the bit, the hole had filled in just that much, you know. You probably had sections in that hole as big as this room. So the minute I got over there I put mud in the hole, anything to stop that well from flooding in. Oh I had done something, man, I had stopped their good drilling. But what's good drilling if you have to clean for five hours before you can get to your original depth? And uh, take the chance of stickin' your pipe and all kinds of problems. I stayed down there 47 days, was nothing but misery. I had just changed to mud when I got relieved, you know. But that's drilling by the book.

SW: How different was it to work with these crews overseas versus the crews here in Louisiana and Texas? Did you have language problems or-

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ED: No, because all the while I worked at Peru I had an interpreter with me. Uh, I guess I put my wife in more problems than I had, because she had to learn Spanish and uh... as far as the crews, everywhere I worked the crews were uh, regular natives. And they had uh, people that spoke both language, English and wherever I worked, to run these crews. So we didn't have no language problem. Uh, in fact I didn't, I never encountered in, even workin' out in, out of uh, Scotland you had more problems there, because you had no interpreter and you couldn't understand the people. [Chuckles] I had a old gentleman at the dock he, he was just so willing and, and uh, give you the shift off of his back if uh, if you needed a shirt, but I couldn't understand him over the phone. I'd have to go to his house in the evenings to find out what he was talkin' about, you know. A lot of times on the phone I'd tell him yes, when I should've told him no, and he says, "Well, really I don't think we ought to do that Mister Duplantis." But I'll say, "We'll talk about it tonight." When I first got there I, I needed to move a string of drill pipe, we needed to switch a string out we had had problems on one of the rigs with. And we had to move it to the docks about uh, I'd say 45, 50 miles from the service company that was that far away. And I told him, I said, "Jim, we gonna need some trucks to move that pipe because I'd like to get it loaded u-, loaded on a workboat tomorrow." He said, uh, "You need what?" I said, "I need some trucks. Trucks. Yeah," say, "we gotta move that drill pipe." "Oh, you talkin' about lorries." "Well if that's what you call 'em, yeah, that's what I need." I says, "I'll need about three lorries." "And Mister Duplantis, you want 'em articulated?" [Slight pause] I said, "Articulated?" "Yeah, you know," he says, "those with a bend in the middle." [Chuckling] I says, "Definitely I want a bend in the middle." Oh, I mean they, they had stuff in their language that was hard to uh, understand. But they were a fun people. I mean, when you made a friend there, you never lost it. In fact, it was botherom-, bothersome. [Chuckles]

SW: Every time you went overseas uh, your wife went with y-, went with you? The company sent-

ED: Uh, no, not when I worked in England. Uh, she uh, uh, she has equilibrium problems from flying, you know. And we had just got back from Indonesia when they wanted me to go to, go to England. And she was sick. Uh, so I made uh, a deal to where I'd work 28-

[END OF TRACK 1, TO TRACK 2]

ED: and 28 there. Unless they were in trouble and I had to stay any longer. And I don't know, I worked about three, four months at 28 and 28 and drilled two wells. They were fairly shad-, shallow wells, it didn't take long to drill 'em. And she stayed here.

SW: So they fly you out every time and they fly you back.

ED: Yeah, and fly me back in.

SW: A month out, a month back here.

ED: They had problems on the second well that I had, on my days off I had to go back over there. We had real good pushers on that rig and I'd always tell 'em, "Now, I'm as close to you as a telephone, you know." 'Cause they had phones on the rig then. And then they called me one time and said, "We think you need to go back." Uh, my, my boss was in Dallas and he called me one night, he says, "I think you need to go back over there." And I said, "Well, I'll leave tomorrow morning." It wasn't, wasn't major, you know, it was just something they wanted me there. Uh, she came to Peru with me uh, two different times. Indonesia. Uh, the first time I went uh, she didn't come with me, but we lived down there for about 11 months I guess. And then I went to Sicily, but she didn't come with me that time, I just go and relieve somebody that wanna, had to come back to the States and I stayed forty... I don't know, 40-somewhat days on the job. Came back. But I was always compensated for that time. I'd get back over here and they never said, "You have to come back to the office tomorrow," you know, "Take a week off or whatever time you need." And in 1983, well that's when I uh, had been workin' in the Mediterranean. She planned the trip 'cause she wanted to go to Europe and Switzerland. So I told her, I says, "Plan it for such and such a date." And then I was five days late, but I met her in London. And we had just crossed the Channel and the house that we had here burned. So they call us

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and we were in Brussels, Belgium, when the kids called us. My son tells me, "I don't know how to tell you this, but to tell you as it is, you know." And I says, "Yeah, that's, wha-, what's the problem?" He said, "Your house burned to the ground last night." He says uh, "But don't, I don't want this to interfere with your vacation." "Oh," I says, "come on, there's no way that I could continue a vacation like this and enjoy it, you know." I came back, that was in September of '83. I came back. In fact to get back to London, I had to charter a plane. I came back here and Superior Oil Company gave me a little over six weeks off to get started on a new house. And told me when I went back to work, "We don't have anything for you overseas. You're here in the office, but if you're needed home, make sure, you don't need to ask anybody to leave this office, you go." And in February... in January, that's why I didn't go to the blowout that was in uh, New Guinea, 'cause I was building a house here. They sent Jerry [Kreasy?] in my place to load all of the equipment I was gonna need. And they knew that by in February I could leave, see. But when February came around, tenth of February, we had moved in the house here, didn't have the second floor finished, but we had everything in the bottom floor and we had borrowed this table from Brown, we had borrowed a bed from Brown. Didn't have a stitch of furniture other than a table with six chairs and a bed. And on the fourteenth of February we left and went to Scotland. 'Course it was still Superior then, you know. When I came back from Scotland it was Mobil. Superior never paid me extra money for goin' overseas, they'd always give me stock options. And I felt that that was better, I never looked for more money when I went overseas. In other words, I was doin' the same job overseas that I did over here. As long as you give me a place to live, that's all that's necessary. I got back [Inaudible] with Mobil and I stayed uh, 11 months in Indonesia, I didn't have anybody down there to sign my expense account. They owed me 18,000 dollars when I got back to the States. My boss was horrified. He says, "You mean to tell me Sam Carnahan wouldn't sign this?" I says, "I asked him, he told me to ask one of the superintendents down there and they already uh, didn't care too much for me and they said no, they hadn't requested that I go down there, so why should they sign my expenses onto their budgets." "Can't believe that Elmer." I says, "Yeah." So he says, "Well, just give me your expenses, I'll get it for you." And it's the very next year, you know, that uh, I find myself in, retired. And the same guy that, that was uh, uh, managing the uh... overseas projects that didn't wanna sign it, my uh, expenses, he's in Scotland. And he calls my boss in Dallas and he says, uh, "Call Elmer, we need him here real bad." So, I'll never forget this, I had retired in, I got a retirement in November and this was May of the following year, in 1987. My old boss calls me and he says, "Elmer, I just got a call from Sam Carnahan, he wants uh, he wants you to pack you and your wife and enough clothes to be able to stay in Scotland. He's havin' a bunch of problems." And he says, "Looks like the same problems we talked about a year ago." I says, "Who's gonna be running the show?" And he told me the guy, the same name that, of the guy that was there before. I said, "Look, if you'd be taking care of the international job I wouldn't wait 'til tomorrow to leave, I'd leave tonight. But Sam Carnahan, tell him he can stay over there and take care of his own job." And I didn't go. I says, "Besides that, my wife's flowers have just started blooming." I says, "We haven't seen 'em in two years. There's no way I can move her away from here." And I didn't need to go. I had good enough retirement to where uh, they just paid that many, that much more taxes. But I've enjoyed my work. I've worked hard, but, and when you get to a point, and I'll tell you this and you can remember this, if you get to a point to where you don't enjoy your work, it's time to move on. Go to another job and find something that you enjoy. But when you, you know, when you're gettin' harassed and criticized by the people that you're workin' for. It's time to move. It's time to get out. If you don't enjoy your job, don't stay there and suffer. I tried it with Mobil and I suffered for two years, well really three and a half years. And I, I'd be much better for it if I wouldn't've stayed. Because I wouldn't feel as sour as I do toward Mobil Oil Company. [Slight pause] Because after workin' for Superior and they took care of their people so well, to see a company as big as Mobil couldn't care less for you. In fact, never tried to protect you in anything, just blamed you for anything that happened. And that was more or less my experience in the oilfield. I stayed in production. I stayed in production nine years. That was the worst job I ever had. If I'da had a computer at the time it'd've been okay. Uh, took care of seven fields and 86 people and I did all of the uh... gas calculation and oil calculations for all the wells. Uh, I seen myself one Christmas Eve uh, spend it with a pad and a pencil and all of the information I had on the wells, because uh, I didn't wanna uh, overproduce any of 'em. I wanted to stay within the guidelines and it was, wasn't but about three years after I had been with uh, in production. And they said uh, "Why didn't you call somebody to help?" You had nobody that wanted to help ya. In other words, when they gave you a job, it was yours. It was too much of a headache. A lot of times I'd come home at night and my wife would uh, uh, heat my supper three and four times before I got to eat it. I lived on the telephone. Can you imagine 86 people havin' problems in the field and they'd call and you'd find out what to do about it? [They didn't] have any phones to

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communicate from the field, they'd have to call you once they hit the bank, you know, and on, on their time off. "Well I'm having problems at such and such," or, "This is not correct, it has to be, we'll have to do this to it. Can we do it, Elmer?" "Well sure if we have to do it, sure we gotta do it." And I was workin' for, under someone that just didn't care. He couldn't care less what happened in the field, you know, and I tried to keep everything just in the up and up, and in the best shape that I could possibly get it with the budget we had, you know. [Slight pause] But when I got out of the there and I went back in the drilling department, it was like goin' to heaven. And I enjoyed my 40 years with the exception of the three and half to four years I worked for Mobil, I can't say that that was as gratifying as the other 35 years I had spent with Superior.

SW: You prefer, you preferred the drilling aspect over the production aspect?

ED: Oh definitely.

SW: That's what it sounds like-

ED: Any day. Any day. [Slight pause]

SW: If you were 20 years old today, would you go into the oil industry right now?

ED: I'd have a different outlook. I'd go back to school if I spent three years in the se-, uh, three years in the service, I'd go back and get my degree before I'd go back in. And I'd uh, try and start at a higher level than a roustabout. Knowing what I know today. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not dissatisfied with my life. If I'd have to redo the things at the time that I did 'em, I'd do the exact same thing. Because at the time that I got out of the service, jobs were hard to find, times were hard. You think that the economy's bad today, check the economy in '49 and see what it was. I saved coke bottles to buy bread after we were married and had our first child. So that was in '51, I was livin' in Franklin. Times were hard. But uh, there was no other way of makin' a living. You were fortunate to even have a job. And startin' as a roustabout, I went back to work makin' 97 cents an hour. But I came out of the service being paid uh, 42 dollars a day, once a month. So, I mean, that was big money then. And then I moved from roustabout after two months, they put me on the rig floor. And I worked two months as a roughneck and then I started working in the derrick. And if you don't think that, well if you think that it's cold here on land, just get up there about 120 feet up in the air where the wind's blowing and a little drizzly rain in mid winter. And I did that for about a year and then they needed a relief man. He'd drill three days and week and he worked derricks three days a week. I did that for nine years with Superior. Uh, no I wanna take that back. I did that for eight years, because in '60... nine years, I'm correct, because in 1960 they gave me a permanent drilling job offshore. Then in '63... '63 I had surgery for cancer and that's the time that they were gettin' rid of their offshore rigs. And uh, when I was ready to go back to work they said, "Well you can do one of two things. You can find another job or we'll put you in production." "Well where do I start in production?" "Roustabout." So I went back to roustabout in production. I was drill-, I'll never forge that. I was digging four-by-four-by-four holes in the marsh at Bayou Penchant, which is south of Morgan City, repairing oil leaks. And I had a boss that uh, was too damn lazy to crank the little jagger pump we had to keep the water out of the hole where I was diggin'. I wished him all the bad luck in the world and while I was workin' for him he got in an accident and died. Then I really felt bad, you know. I didn't mean, I didn't wish that bad for him. But anyhow, it happened. And then they said uh, "Well we gonna send you back offshore." For someone that I knew real well. He was a production or, the uh, he was a production foreman offshore. They had just brought in a platform of nine wells and they wanted to test 'em, so they could put 'em online and start selling. And I went out there for that man and I tested two wells. He says, "Elmer, I need some help. You wanna assist me as production foreman I'll get you the job." "Oh hell yeah," says, "And I'll still test the wells, I'll be out here with whoever you want to test the wells. I'll be here with 'em." "Well if I get you that job, you gonna have to move to Lafayette or move to Intracoastal City." I said, "Bob, I can't move now, I've got two kids in school, but I can move come this summer." And I guess it must've been around February, about that time. "Oh," he says, "I can arrange that." In the meantime we had a man in Bosco that died. He was a production foreman in Bosco. They took the production foreman from Houma, sent him to Bosco, take that job. Took me out of the Gulf and send me to Houma. And I told the manager, I said no way I could work down there. I says, "I just come

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out of that field hatin' the guy that runs it. I mean, out of that office and you're puttin' me in the office next to him? No way, I can't go back down there." "Yeah, you gonna go because," he said, uh, "the uh, Lafayette manager says that that's where you're goin', that's where your next check's gonna be." And he said, "If you need some help, just call me, I'll, I'll go settle the fight." Says, "Okay, remember that you said that." Well I call, I had to call him twice, but he never come there to settle no fight I'll tell you that. [Chuckles] Didn't get along with that guy. When he died I was called and said uh, just a couple, two, three years ago. One of my men that worked for me, "Elmer did you hear that so and so died?" I said, "No, I didn't hear it." "But we're dressing, we're going to the wake." I says, uh, "Jimmy, when you get back from the wake, would you give me a call?" "Oh yeah." I says, "Call, let me know. Make sure it's him in that coffin." [Chuckles] Oh, there was no love lost when he passed away or even when I got away from him. I'll tell you what the manager from Lafayette come down there and he says, "Elmer, I don't want no problems when you leave here." He says, "I know that uh, you and so and so don't get along." And I said, uh, "You don't have to worry about that." I said, "Because if I had to kill anybody, I'd kill him the first week I was here." I says, "I'm not that kind of a person. I'll leave quietly." He says, "Take all of your stuff out of this office," he said, "he's comin' back Monday. Make sure they decided the evening when you leave here that your car's loaded with everything that you got in this office." "Yes sir." And he says, "Monday, I want you to report to Lafayette." Well I guess, I was gone that day. But he was on vacation, he had another week off. [Pause] And that's about all I can tell you about the oilfield really. The best experience you can get is not in the office. The best experience you can get is out in the field. To work with a man that knows something about what he's doing. And I worked with two people that were probably the best supervisors that Superior Oil Company had. They were tough to work for, but they were good people. They were easy to get along with, because they'd try and teach you what was goin' on downhole. And another thing, when I was over the Keck and I worked on the Keck, I always had a class of about uh, five or six people. I was teachin' 'em what went on downhole and how to do cement work and everything that I knew I tried to pass it on to 'em, and they all wound up being supervisors for Superior Oil Company. And we still have two of those people still workin' for Mobil. I can say that, that all of those kids that I taught there was probably... oh, uh... 10, 12 years younger than me are still workin'. Good jobs. Makin' well over a 100,000 a year. But you don't have that anymore. You don't have the companies that you can say, "I'm gonna work 40 years for and make something of myself." Go back to thinkin' of what happened to those poor people workin' for Enron, you know. They sank everything they ever made in the company and then they don't even have a retirement. And when I was in the oilfield I did the same thing. I bought everything that I sank was in Superior stock. Didn't by any other stock. But those people there were not after doing things like Enron did to their people. [Slight pause] No, I got good retirement. Uh, 'course I've kept busy since I retired. [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

SW: See the gardens, yeah.

ED: But that's a big job. We have uh, 36 daylily beds and thousands of daylilies. Thousands. It took me all day to spray 'em yesterday. But goin' back to the oilfield, uh, I'm not a bit sorry for things that I did. Uh, and since I retired I, I kept busy. I had uh, eight apartment, two four-plexes, and a little patio home that I did that for about eight or nine years. I invested some of my money, I bought into 'em. Well, I had one that I had built for my kids when they moved to Lafayette. But then I bought another four-plex and I bought a little patio home, that was a good buy. And since then I passed two of 'em to my daughter. And my grandson uh, bought the little patio home. So they paid for themselves in the time that I took care of 'em. And I got good money for 'em when I sold 'em. [Pause] And then now I'm on, I'm in the real estate business. Buy property and I sell. We still own a bunch of property in Houma and Gray, where we were livin' before. But I also got with some other people and bought some more property right there. It's a good intersection, is where US-90 comes though and intersects with 24. And we own both sides of the highway. So I say "we," some of the properties are owned by the family, I just got through buying out 25 percent of the family, so I own 55 percent of the family property. And then my wife has, has 21 acres that was already divided to her, you know. And I have to go down there, keeps me busy just going down there and gettin' things straights with uh, the parish, because they have so many different rules and regulations on what they want done, you know. Now we fightin' drainage. Four hundred feet from Highway 24 is where the property crests. We can drain 400 feet into Bayou Terrebonne, but the other 27 acres on the back of that 400 feet we gotta drain to the back, to another bayou. And that's what we're discussing right now. They want me to give 'em 42 feet wide to put a drainage ditch on 170 acres of

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property. And they want me to pay to get it done. I said I'd rather not sell another lot than to do that. If I give it to the parish, you gonna do the work. And that's gonna be what we're gonna be discussin' tomorrow. See parish people says, "Well why is that equipment doin' work for Elmer?" "Well, Elmer gave so much property to that parish." And, and when I give it to the parish, I'm givin' it to you also, you know. So why not? Pay me for my property by doin' a job that has to be done. So I think that that's what we're gonna talk tomorrow. And they more or less agree on that. So that's a far piece from the oilfield. But I gotta do something to keep busy other than daylilies. My wife does the daylily stuff. Uh, all I gotta do is spray and mulch and cut the grass and rake the leaves and-

SW: And do interviews with me. [Chuckles]

ED: But-

SW: I, I've asked you-

ED: It's, it's a restful afternoon for me, see.

SW: I've asked you all my questions, so I don't wanna take any more of your time.

ED: Well, uh, I'm not gonna go outside and work because it's too cold for me.

SW: Yeah, it's-

ED: And it gets to a point to where it's too hot. In other words, uh, the wind gets to me. Now there's no wind, I can go out in that cold, it doesn't bother me. But uh, no, I gotta few things to do. [Continues discussing some of his daily activities, noting he got up at three-thirty the previous morning to do something]

SW: Well most likely you were gettin' up at four in the morning to fill out those reports.

ED: Right. [SW chuckles] It's a different time, though. Different time. Here all I have to do is go upstairs, those days I had to go to the office. Get some coffee brewing and start writin' longhand reports and then by six-thirty, a quarter to seven you had uh, secretary and, "I don't understand this? What is this word?" And, "Let me see. Hm," I says, "your guess is as good as mine, Mary." [Chuckles] You know, you get to where you're writin' so fast that uh.

SW: Speakin' of email I'll uh-

ED: Yeah, bein' we didn't talk about it and I don't know what the man told you.

SW: Well I've heard several people tell me stuff about that.

ED: Okay.

SW: That first well was 1947?

ED: In 1947 it was drilled off the beach of Creole. And it was set up, the platform was set up on pilings right at the beach. The well was serviced, or the rig was serviced from the offshore section. From Cameron with offshore workboats. And they had a board road to the platform from Creole or from the highway, from 182, goin' to the beach to the well. Uh, I went to work for Superior in 1949. So uh, I was never on that platform, but heard so much about it, you know, that it was the first well that was ever drilled. Uh, I don't know if anybody has passed this on to you, the museum that they have in Morgan City, the Mister Charlie.

SW: Uh hm.

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ED: That was the first offshore rig that was ever built. It's a posted barge. I worked on it a little over a year. And it has done so much work offshore it's pathetic. 'Fact it stayed with us for a little over four years. Superior kept it. We drilled uh, quite a number of wells off of Ven-, Vermillion Bay here off of Southwest Pass. And that barge with high currents or high winds it moves off the bottom because the silt, you see, and it'll move on bottom. And when the well we drilled with, it did, we didn't have to float it on the well and move it back in another direction and set it back down. But it's a drilling machine. If you want offshore information that's the place to go. If you ever have a chance that you go through Morgan City, I would encourage you to visit that and see how that ru-, rig was put together. We're drilling one night and uh, you, you always here those pumps on that rig. And it looks like it put you to sleep, but if it stops it wakes you up. I woke up 'cause the pump stopped pumpin'. I got up and I say, "What's goin' on?" "Oh, we lost returns." So I walked up on the rig floor, they lookin' down the hole with flashlights. And uh, I say, "You lost returns?" "Uh, yeah." "But," I said, "the hole is still full." "Well that's what we can't understand." The pumps are in the bottom barge. The mud tanks are at the top. We had a suction that busted in the bottom barge and lost all of the mud from the tanks into the pump room. And they thought it had gone downhole, see. Well I says, "Did y'all go downstairs in the pump room?" "Well they got someone goin' down there now." They had an elevator to go down or you had stairs that you could. They call back up and says, "Hey, y'all, the mud's in the pump room." They thought they had lost returns. But that was a good rig to work on. It was owned by... uh... I forgot who owned it at the time. Offshore Drilling. [Pause] But it has drilled some wells offshore. Now it couldn't go in very much deep water, I mean, it did everything in shallow water. It had uh, an eight foot barge on bottom and I think also about 24 feet. So we were talkin' about uh, 32 feet.

SW: Yeah.

ED: But we drilled a lot of wells off of Verni-, Vermillion Bay with it. Had a lot of directional work. [Pause] And that's about it that I can think of right now.

SW: Okay. Well, if you, in the future if you wanna do more we can, you can do another interview.

ED: Okay.

SW: I'll go ahead and shut off.

ED: But I encourage you to go see that-

[END OF RECORDING]