

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HA # 00221

Interviewee: Henry Harrison

Interviewer: Steven Wiltz and David DiTucci

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

Interview Site: Lafayette, LA

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Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling and repeated words have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. The audio goes in and out at some points, making bits of the interview inaudible.]

Ethnographic preface:

Mr. Henry Harrison was born in Arkansas in 1928. In 1936, because of the Depression, his father was forced to abandon his work on his family's plantation and in favor of work in the oilfield. His father was a driller and tool pusher, and the family moved around a lot while he was growing up. He graduated from a high school in Florida in 1946 and went to work as a roughneck. After a year he decided he wanted to be an engineer and enrolled at the University of Florida. Over the next 10 years he continued his study, with a four year break wherein he served in the Air Force during the Korean Conflict; he graduated from Louisiana State University with a degree in engineering in 1957. He got an engineering position with the California Company in Venice and stayed there six years before taking a job as a district engineer with Signal Oil and Gas Company in Lafayette. In 1965 he became the district manager for Signal. He remained with the company when it was sold to Burma Oil and Gas (and was vice president of overseas operations for a time), but was fired in 1978 after it was sold to Aminoil. The following year he opened up a small rental tool company with his ex-boss; they sold the company in 1983 after it went bankrupt. After that he began consulting, something he continued until recently, and moved to east Texas. He describes the secrecy and competitiveness surrounding the lease bidding process and hiring employees with experience.

TRANSCRIPTION

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Interview Date: August 8, 2002

Interviewer initials: [SW] and [DD]

Interviewee initials: [HH]

DD: Interview with Henry Harrison. It is August eighth, 2002, t-, 10 a.m. in the OCS office.

SW: Are you originally from Louisiana?

HH: No, originally from Arkansas. [Clears throat] [Slight pause]

SW: What year were you born?

HH: Nineteen twenty-eight.

SW: You went to school up in Arkansas, you were raised up in that area?

HH: Uh, no, my, my father was in the oilfield and we moved around quite a bit. I graduated from high school in Florida. He went down there on a special project with Penrod Drilling Company for Sun Oil Company. And I graduated from there.

SW: So uh, what did he do for the oilfield? Was he an engineer?

HH: No, he was a driller and toolpusher.

SW: Okay. So he got involved in it way back in the beginning.

HH: Yeah, he left Arkansas in 1936 and went to, started in the oilfield.

SW: Right when it was comin' out and-

HH: Yeah, they had a, he and his father and his uncles had a plantation up in Arkansas, it went under the Depression. They struggled with it for awhile and he left.

SW: And so the oilfield kind of offered a job.

HH: Yeah, [Chuckling] the oilfield offered a means of feeding his family.

SW: There you go.

HH: 'Cause at that time there was three of us. Three children.

SW: Is that how you yourself eventually got into the oilfield was because your father-

HH: Association.

SW: Association?

HH: When I graduated from high school I didn't know what I wanted to do. In '46, and uh, so I

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

went to work as a roughneck. [Pause] I worked about a year of that and I found out there was somethin' better. I met a couple of engineers that worked for Sun Oil Company down there in Florida. Talked with them, I decided that's what I wanted to do.

SW: So it just took about a year's worth of busting your fingers and [Chuckles]

HH: Uh, about a year out there snow, rain, sleet, and hail.

SW: Where was that?

HH: In Florida.

SW: In Florida?

HH: Yeah. See we, at uh, in 1947 my dad moved back to Louisiana and they had started a company called [Justice-Mirrors?] Oil Company. Some Penrod people started it and so he came back and got into that. And then the family followed him after I got after school. I was goin' to University of Florida. And as soon as we left there, soon as he left, soon as I finished that year, then I went on, came back to Louisiana. [Pause]

SW: So how much schooling did you take to get the engineering position?

HH: Me, I had uh, let's see, I started in '47 and I went into the service in January of '50. The Korean Conflict. Then I came back and started back to school in '55 and graduated in '57. So it was 10 years [Chuckling] from the time I got out of high school to where I graduate, but a lot of that was [filled?] with [Inaudible].

SW: Oh, in the three years-

HH: Yeah, I was in the Air Force, actually it was four years. In fact uh, three weeks and four years. [Inaudible] over four years.

SW: Where did you get your engineering school-

HH: LSU.

SW: LSU. So you got, so you guys came, all came back to Louisiana once you left Florida?

HH: Yeah.

SW: Came back here, then you went into the service. And-

HH: Well I went to uh, Florida and then when I came back I went to Kilgore Junior College. For one year. And then I came over and started LSU to get, I went over there to gather up a few credits [Inaudible] I needed to get into engineering. And then I came back and then Uncle Sam intervened in my [Sighing] my junior year I guess it was. Then I had to come back and finish.

SW: Finish it.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Started back in uh... January of '55, back to school and graduated in February of '57.

SW: Fifty-seven. And in the meantime while you were away in the war and at school, I mean, your father was still working for the company they had started?

HH: Yeah, he was at that time he became drilling superintendent for Justice. And uh, he stayed there 'til he retired in uh... '73 I believe it was when he retired. [Pause]

SW: When you finished up your schooling at LSU, what happened?

HH: In December I accepted, the wife, I was married at that time. I say "we." We accepted a job with at that time it was California Company, a division of Standard Oil of California. And uh, that was in February of '57. [Slight pause] And we were s-, assign-, sent to Venice, Louisiana.

SW: Sent to Venice.

DD: Well that was, must've been-

HH: Well uh, we had, we weren't able to debate, uh, the company had a company camp at Venice. Complete you know with uh, houses and everything for their people. But there wasn't a vacant one at that time. So we, my wife and daughter stayed in New Orleans. And I visited when I wasn't on the rigs. We were supposed to work six and three, but it, generally it wound up from [could 'til can't?]. [SW and DD chuckle]

SW: That's a good way of puttin' it.

HH: We had a number of rigs workin' in uh, California Company believed in puttin' you out. [Chuckles] Didn't give you much OJ uh, training in the office, it was OJT.

SW: Put you out there. Okay. I hear that a lot. [Chuckles]

HH: Well that's primary reason I went to work for 'em. Was to get the engineering experience.

SW: You didn't have any before, it was-

HH: I had uh, I had the practical experience roughnecks and such as that, but no engineering experience.

SW: Were there other um, oil companies at the time that were hiring people, but looking for experience? Or was-

HH: Yeah, all of 'em were hiring uh, and the fact that uh, some of us had experience counted pretty heavy I think. Yeah. There were several of the companies, you know, that hired primarily the A students and uh, that would, I think they probably wanted them for research and stuff like that. And practical students, they used experience people. And at that time I had a, was out of service, so I wasn't eligible for that with the Vietnam Conflict comin' up. So uh, well of course at that time they, it was just uh, a thought in people's mind. It hadn't come to fruition yet. But that was uh, I had several job offers. And this looked to be the best.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

SW: So would you say this was a point in time, you like you said they, some companies were looking for experience, they wanted it, but still somebody without any experience could get hired on and get trained on the job. Was that-

HH: During this period of time uh, that was in '57, some friends of mine graduated in '59 and couldn't get a job. It was the, it was a downturn in the industry.

SW: Oh, okay, because of the downturn basically.

HH: Yeah, and there was uh, just there was not a shortage of engineering personnel at that time. See with uh, California Company uh, I think they hired one or two people that year, but it's normal where they would hire five, six, seven, somethin' like that. But uh, things slowed down. We got to go home at least once a week. [All chuckle] See in Aug-, in August of that year, of '57, we had a vacancy in Venice and we moved to Venice. I moved my wife and daughter down here.

SW: So yeah, they were in New Orleans at the time and you were staying, you were in Venice, so they uh, they, these camps, that was the housing?

HH: Yeah, it was housing. And also we had a um, what they call the visiting quarters there, which where I stayed if I wasn't out on the rig. During my time down there. Or if I had a couple days off, I went to New Orleans.

SW: Okay. And you were six and three?

HH: Well that's, supposedly. Six days out and three days off, but that uh, [Chuckles] I've had several times my wife and daughter would meet me at the heliport, I'd come in on the helicopter and hand her my dirty clothes, she'd hand me some clean ones, and I'd catch the Cessna and go down and [Inaudible] somewhere. [SW chuckles]

SW: Okay. So they didn't get to see you that much at that time.

HH: Not at that time, no. My daughter, it become the joke around the family is that she was four years old before she found out all daddy's didn't get off of helicopters. [All chuckle] We came home from work, we got off helicopters.

SW: That's a good one.

HH: 'Cause that was our means of transportation offshore was helicopters and Cessnas. We had some boats, but normally uh, the uh, drilling foreman, engineers traveled by helicopter or a Cessna.

SW: That's, so Venice was your base camp so to speak, and then just hop off [Inaudible].

HH: Yeah, well see at that time the California Company was pretty active on both sides of the river down here.

SW: Okay. And what were those living quarters like? Were they nice or-

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Oh, yeah, yeah, it was very nice.

SW: They took care of-

HH: It was, the house was uh, it was a frame construction, had three bedrooms, a bath, and a kitchen, living room area and all. And the re-, what was good about it was 16 dollars a month with all utilities furnished.

DD: Wow.

SW: Oh, so it was a rent controlled kind of thing. I see.

HH: Yeah, well it was uh, they just charged us 16 dollars a month and uh-

SW: For the whole thing or per person?

HH: No, the whole thing.

SW: The whole thing.

HH: Per month, yeah.

SW: Wow.

HH: Sixteen dollars and they furnished the lights, water, gas.

SW: Wish I could get that deal right now. [Laughs]

HH: Well I'd be proud to have somethin' like that now, too. But uh, it was a kind of an inducement for people to come down there, because it was, there was only one road in. And uh, times there was, in Empire, there was a drawbridge and at times when that bridge was up and let shrimp pass through you might sit there two or three hours. And then during the hurricane season the bridge, you know, there stayed up a lot, because-

SW: Boats were comin' in.

HH: Yeah, boats comin' in, out of the o-, Gulf out there. [Slight pause]

SW: Okay. That's pretty-

HH: But that was it, like I say, it was an inducement. 'Course uh, my wife had to go 11 miles to Buras to buy milk for the baby and I could get a beer just across the road. [All laugh] That was-

DD: Well we know who it was set up for then.

HH: Yeah. It was a paved road, by then they, the road was paved. In fact it ended right there at California Company camp and then Tidewater's was further down and it was black-, it was gravel. So we had the luxury of a paved road from New Orleans to our camp.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

SW: [At least?] for that yeah. [Chuckles] Did you guys cook for yourselves or uh-

HH: You mean-

SW: At the camp. [Maybe?] you had a cook?

HH: Oh no, my, no uh, no we had a cook there for the, when we were there by ourselves.

SW: Yeah.

HH: Yeah, it was a regular mess hall. They had breakfast, and lunch, and dinner. And uh, then we had the rooms and we paid so much a night for the room, you know, nominal fee. And they had somebody come in and clean it up. But I stayed there very seldom. Most, if I got a chance, I, if I got just one night off, I'd head home. It wasn't but, you know, 60, 70 miles home from [Inaudible].

SW: That's when you weren't out on the rigs.

HH: Yeah.

SW: What about on the rigs, how was it out out there? Um-

HH: Oh, you had uh, the only, on the offshore jobs where we had the tenders and the o-, uh, they catering service. Generally on the in-, inland barges, no, you didn't have the catering service. Those inland barges worked their crews uh... a regular, normal tower, eight hour day. They would boat 'em in and out on, most of 'em. And uh, there was one, one or two rigs out there that had a cook on it strictly for the toolpusher and the uh, maybe the boater man or somebody that stayed out there all the time. And then of course we could eat with them. But we would bring groceries out there. A lot of our eating was done off of Halliburton boats and uh, Lane-Wells' barges, uh, these various service companies that came out to the inland barges. See they would be uh, like Halliburton they had regular boats, the ship shape boats that came out and they carried a cook with them. So uh, we had them out to do any cementing or anything like that, always managed to get a couple meals off of them.

SW: Oh okay.

HH: And then uh, we didn't starve by any means. [HH and DD chuckle]

SW: No, no. How was, was the food good or?

HH: The food was good offshore, yeah. It was uh, it was hearty. They always had two or three starches. You'd have white beans, rice, potatoes, you know, and all. But uh, you know, had pretty fair food I would say. [Pause]

SW: And then uh, I see on here you said after awhile they had a room at the place where your wife and your daughter were moving.

HH: Well that was a house.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

SW: A house? Oh okay.

HH: Yeah, well see, once, in August of that year the house became available. There were 43 houses in the camp. And somebody had moved out and we were on, next on the list.

SW: So what year was that?

HH: Uh, '57.

SW: Fifty-seven.

HH: Yeah, in August of '57. [Pause]

SW: So that made things easier, you didn't have to take the six and-

HH: Oh yeah. Yeah, that's what I say, uh, if I, if I got a chance to come in at night, I'd catch the late helicopter in and be there at the house and go out again the next morning, you see.

SW: That was much better. Your daughter was what, four at that time? That-

HH: No she was born uh, she was just a year old. Or she wasn't quite a year old at that time. She was born in uh... she was born in December of '56. And then we went to work in January or February of '57, so she was just six weeks old when I went to work.

SW: Right away.

HH: Uh huh. But when we moved to Venice she was about eight months old. And then we had two sons [Audio goes in and out, inaudible for a few seconds].

SW: Okay, your daughter's the oldest.

HH: Yes.

SW: Two boys after that.

HH: Had to go to New Orleans [Audio goes in and out, inaudible for about 10 seconds] decided to [Inaudible] later for the two boys, so [Audio goes in and out, inaudible]. That was one of the drawbacks of livin' down there is the lack of [close?] care. My son busted his [lip?] up, we had to take him into New Orleans [Inaudible, chuckling].

DD: What uh, what were the other, some of the other drawbacks of living way out there in Venice?

HH: Oh, uh... I guess the availability of certain amenities to life. Uh, you know, you wanted uh, you, they had pretty good grocery stores up there in Buras and uh, one there in, a little small one there in Venice. But uh, most of the time people would gather up and make two or three women [who they want?] on a Saturday if the men were on and they'd go into New Orleans shopping. And uh, doing things like that, or, you know, you'd have to go into the doctor and that was a,

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

they, it was some of the amenities.

DD: Yeah, mo-, mostly just-

HH: Yeah, the staples were there, but the amenities were a little scarce. [All chuckle]

DD: And how long did-

SW: So was, I'm sorry, it was like a small community.

HH: Oh yeah.

SW: But an oil community right there.

HH: Yeah.

SW: And so what else, when you guys were offshore working, what did the wives do? I mean, what did they have to do?

HH: Tended kids. [Chuckling] We had our first Christmas down there in '57, we had a hundred and, I think, 107 children there at the Christmas party for 42 families, so, and it's, they saying around there was that there wasn't one of those kids old enough to blow the other one's nose. [SW and DD chuckle] Just all little.

DD: Little ones.

SW: Everybody was little, yeah.

HH: So they had their hands full with that.

SW: What about uh, if they got older sometimes, was there a school for 'em?

HH: Yeah [Audio goes in for several seconds, inaudible]. Yeah, they bus 'em up to Buras.

SW: How far was Buras again?

HH: Uh, it's about 11 to 12 miles.

SW: Not too far.

HH: I [Inaudible], you know, [Inaudible], it's not, it wasn't far. There was Buras, and then Empire, and then Pointe a la Hache, and then Belle Chasse, and on up in through there.

SW: About how big was Buras that time? [Slight pause] A little hamlet?

HH: A thousand. Uh, all told, it was all scattered up and down the road. They were doing primarily fishing.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

SW: Yeah. A little fishing community.

HH: Yeah a fishing. [Slight pause] Fishing and orange groves, they had some orange groves and most of those orange groves they made what they call orange wine down there, which was terrible.

DD: Orange wine?

HH: Oh yeah. It was pretty, it was a thing down there. I bought a jug [Inaudible] down here. When we left six years later, I still had three-quarters of it. [All laugh] It was tough.

DD: So how long did you stay down there with California Company?

HH: I left in uh, February of... '63. [Pause] And came to Lafayette.

DD: Okay. Were you still with California Company?

HH: No, I quit California Company and went with one of the people I'd worked with at California Company was starting a division of a company here that was based in California, Signal Oil and Gas.

SW: Signal?

DD: Okay.

HH: And uh, he hired me to come over here and help 'em get started.

SW: Okay. Before we jump to Lafayette I just had one more question back about when you were over there. That was a company that was constructed for that area.

HH: Yes.

SW: And it's, so how did the local people that were in the surrounding area feel about that this outside oil company come in and setting up camp and bringing in all these outside people? Was uh-

HH: We never had any real problems that I can recall. I mean, uh, sometimes in a local bar there was an argument or two, but uh, that was, that wasn't, I, as far as being uh, the thing that we did have a problem with was getting registered to vote. I remember that. See this was back in Leander Perez time.

SW: Yeah, okay. [Chuckles]

HH: And uh, we had a snitch in the camp that every time someone talk about goin' up to register to vote uh, we'd get up there and it would be d-, the votin' place would be closed. So one day we were gonna sneak up there and so several of us were gonna get on the helicopter and go up there and get registered to vote. But they heard about it and when we got there, land in the school yard, went in and it was closed. [Slight pause]

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

DD: Was there a specific reason for that? Did the, were they-

HH: Well uh, we weren't uh, I guess you might say we weren't on Leander's call list.

DD: Okay.

HH: [Chuckling] Yeah.

DD: Okay.

HH: The company hadn't donated all that much money and uh, done all this. In fact at one time they came over there and uh, to each one of us they sent a letter to us for us to buy a brick for that Fort Jackson Memorial over there across the river. Five dollars a brick, somethin' like that.

[Chuckles] And, you know, it left no doubt that you mi-, oughta do this. They uh, they put one, one, got one of the people in jail one night and had to take somebody out to put him in there. [HH and DD chuckle] It was a place to put him.

DD: Wow.

HH: When they found out he was California. I mean, it was tough politically.

SW: Yeah, that, it's n-, maybe not the actual people didn't have a problem with you being there, but if you weren't part of the machine, then you'd have a problem.

HH: Then you had a problem. 'Cause, and see of course those people are all intermarried down there, too, that was quite a [Chuckles] it was quite a...

DD: Everyone was related.

HH: Everyone was related, yeah. And you just didn't, if you across one of 'em, you was across the [Audio goes in and out, inaudible]

SW: The whole clan was after you. Well, just, I would imagine that, you know, just the amount of [Audio goes out, inaudible] bein' moved in by a company and you guys had a pretty big camp there.

HH: Yeah, we had 43 houses, livin' house, plus we had our, all of our facilities there. Had a dock and all that stuff. Our tax base was pretty good for the parish.

SW: So you guys were bringin' money in?

HH: Yeah. Plus the fact that they charged, you know, we had to pay for the parish taxes on all equipment and all that kind of stuff.

SW: But still, I mean, it's, remote areas like that you can imagine sometimes outsiders, there's just gotta be a little friction sometimes.

HH: Oh yeah. Ever-, it was, yeah.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

SW: Could be expected basically.

HH: Uh hm. But it [Inaudible], it wasn't [Chuckles] [shootin' or blowin' up buildings or anything?]. [DD and SW chuckle] No, it was primarily just uh, [Audio goes in and out, inaudible] don't like you. [SW chuckles]

SW: So did things change when you moved to Lafayette? Were people here a little bit more friendly?

HH: Well Lafayette was becoming the center see for the offshore industry at that time. We were welcomed with open arms so to speak.

SW: That was in 1963. Had uh, did y'all move into the Oil Center?

HH: Yeah. You know where uh... on uh, on South College where there's a bookstore over there or a cleaners? The bookstore may not be there. It's comin', when you come off of Pinhook up South College there's a chicken place there now on the corner.

SW: Right there, yeah, okay.

HH: Yeah, well that, well then, right up there there's a line of buildings, a strip mall kind of thing.

SW: On the left side?

HH: That was our, we, first office there.

SW: Oh, okay. Yeah, I don't-

HH: Where Ike's Barber Shop, right next to where Ike's Barber Shop is.

SW: Yeah. There's a Hub City Diner and there's a-

HH: Well no, this is further back towards Kaliste Saloom from there.

DD: Yeah, but around like where [Profernies?]-

HH: I mean Pinhook, Pinhook.

DD: Yeah.

SW: Yeah.

HH: Yeah, right there and there's a cleaners there, a dry cleaners.

DD: Yeah.

SW: Yeah, there's martinizing is still there and there's a little, I think there's a alley down and there's another strip mall over there. There's [Inaudible] Diner and there's a newsstand and

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

whatnot. But I don't think they-

HH: Right. But we were in that first section there.

SW: I see, yeah.

HH: In fact where the martinizing cleaners is now it's in two, one of those was ours. Martinizing cleaners was the first one and Signal Oil and Gas was the next one. And then there was a book-, bookstore. With a magazine stand.

SW: Was that road right there, that extension, [South Congress?] was that paved at the time?

HH: Oh yes.

SW: Okay. Nineteen sixty-three, yeah.

HH: Yeah it was paved.

SW: So y'all, your's pretty much on the edge of the Oil Center.

HH: Yeah we were gettin' towards the outer edge of it so to speak. In fact at the time we looked at a house to buy where Acadiana Mall is now. It was out in the country.

SW: Yeah, definitely.

HH: When we first moved here. But we lived, we uh, rented a house on Ottoman and then bought on later on by-

SW: By [Inaudible].

HH: Which we waited about two months and didn't move in, 'cause they were puttin' in the sewer system.

SW: Oh okay.

HH: If we'd moved in we'd have to put in a septic system, so we just waited two months. [DD chuckles] While we put in the sewer system. We had to pay for it anyhow.

SW: Nineteen sixty, 1963 right there you're just on the other side of the Judice Inn which at-

HH: Yeah, yeah, Judice-

SW: That was the edge of town.

HH: Yeah, Judice Inn was here and [Inaudible] was right up the street from it. Used to be the old farmers in there.

SW: Right. You guys were out on the, way on the edge there.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Uh huh.

SW: Pretty much-

HH: Yeah we, well they were just in next, just puttin' the sewer out in that part of town.

SW: Yeah, they just keep moving out. [Chuckles]

HH: Yeah, I t-, I wished we'dve bought that place where the Acadiana Mall is now. [Chuckles]

DD: Yeah, I know, huh.

HH: But at that time, whew, she had, we had three babies less than six years old. All three of 'em. So she decided she needed to be closer to town.

SW: Oh so your children were not very old. The a-, children, the range of the age is pretty close.

HH: Yeah, well our youngest one was only two months old. And then the middle boy was three and the daughter was six. [Pause]

SW: So uh, when you got here to Lafayette did you, oh, when you got here to Lafayette um, said that it's different atmosphere than Venice, of course, people a little more friendly or they was a little more open. But things were exploding here at that time.

HH: Well uh, it was also your uh, your logistics was a lot better. See if you needed something in Venice you better order it a couple, three weeks [Chuckling] ahead of time.

SW: Yeah, here you'd-

HH: Here it was almost available immediately 'cause uh, there was all of your supply stores were here, all your service vendors were here, uh, we had, we operated our boats and everything out of Morgan City, which was uh, also getting I guess the oilfield notoriety along the coast. And the helicopters were operatin' out here, Petroleum Helicopters.

SW: PHI. Plus for personal, on the personal side, you had many amenities available.

HH: Oh yeah.

SW: The town was [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

HH: Doctors.

SW: Every-

HH: Schools, uh, you have a choice of schools. Uh-

SW: Was OGMC built at that time when you were right there?

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: What?

SW: OGMC, the hospital? Right there in the Oil Center?

HH: No.

SW: It wasn't built at the time?

HH: No we, they had [Lords?] and uh, we had, we took my son to get his tonsils and adenoids out, some-, I don't know what it was, it was a place over here on uh... oh what's that street that runs up uh, [Mooton?]. It was a clinic at that time where we took him. Now at Lafayette [Pause] there was a hospital there, too, I'm thinkin' back. Uh, 'cause that's where they brought me and Bill one night when we had a wreck. Uh, to that hospital. But it wasn't the big modern one like it is now.

SW: Yeah, yeah. But there was somethin' there, yeah, I can [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

HH: Yeah, that was in uh... '66 or '67 we had the wreck.

SW: Just a car wreck?

HH: Yeah. Fella turned across the street in front of me and I was goin' about 70 miles an hour. [DD chuckles] It was kind of like this.

DD: Ow.

HH: But it was, that was on the route comin' back from New Orleans, that's before we had I-10.

SW: Oh yeah.

HH: We were on nine-, on that-

SW: Comin' up this way.

HH: Yeah we'd, we were there at Livonia. And uh, this guy, they had a, didn't have a median or anything, he just decided he needed to make a turn there. He did. And so we, we got, I happen, I was uh, I wasn't hurt all that bad and uh, I was able to convince that ambulance driver, he wanted to take us to Baton Rouge, 'cause that's where he was from. I finally convinced him by threatenin' him bodily harm if he didn't take us to Lafayette. [Chuckling] I guess I wasn't bad enough with blood drippin' off of me. [DD laughs] He wasn't gonna take a chance but Bill didn't have his seat belt on and he got scalped.

DD: Ooh.

HH: He didn't go all the way through the windshield, but he had [come into it?] [Inaudible]. It was all folded [Inaudible] and they sewed that back over. And that was in '67 and he said every once in awhile he still gets a little sliver of glass out of it. [SW chuckles] After all these years.

DD: Wow. Those doctors didn't do a good enough job did they.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Well they took a lot out of him, but they's, you know, they're so fine, you know.

DD: Yeah. It wasn't that safety glass like they have now.

HH: No. And uh, I just had my nose broken and a couple of my fingers busted up over on the steering wheel.

SW: And that still happens every day on I-90. [Chuckles]

HH: Oh yeah.

SW: They call it, they don't call it "Blood Alley" for nothing.

HH: Not it's been that for years. And we were just cruisin' along talkin' ab-, we had been down to uh, a police sale and were comin' back up 90. We real happy, we had had a good sale and bought some good property.

SW: Still with Signal Oil?

HH: Yeah.

DD: Was there any difference in the work you did in Lafayette as opposed to Venice? Or were you basically doing the same thing?

SW: Not really, it was the same type of work. I had a little more responsibility in what, I had the last six months with Chev-, with California Com-, which is now Chevron.

SW: Yeah.

DD: Oh, okay.

HH: Yeah, that's a, it went through several name changes before it got to Chevron. But uh, I had, got more responsibility. We were doing special projects. And uh, then I came up here as a district engineer. And uh, we had, we had several rigs runnin' offshore and uh, I was, we had some good capable drilling people out there, but I spent a lot of time out there. But I had a helicopter and I would go out and come back. [Chuckles]

SW: Lafayette was a good base of operations?

HH: Uh hm, yes.

SW: It was centrally located with uh, you had more amenities as we said then Venice, but you still had a pretty good location, go out to your spots basically.

HH: Uh hm.

SW: Not as close to the water as Venice was, but uh, just-

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Well Venice, yeah, it was close, but you also, you had good transportation in Venice, don't get me wrong, but uh, it was a, a lot of times it wasn't available like it was to me once we got to Signal.

DD: Right. Just didn't have as much transportation I'm sure.

HH: Uh hm.

SW: Did you uh-

HH: We had our own helicopters with Chevron, with California. Had their own helicopters. And then of course they were-

DD: Instead of hiring PHI to bring you out there-

HH: Right. They had their own helicopters. We had some Jays and some [Cycorskies?].

SW: Carries two or three people at a time?

HH: Uh hm, yeah. [Pause]

SW: Did you eventually progress to more office work? And get less, less fieldwork at the time?

HH: Yeah we uh, in fact, after about a year I hired an engineer, I hired a couple engineers to work with me.

SW: And they did the fieldwork-

HH: They did more of the fieldwork and I doin' more of the leg work. And then in sixty... how long was it, '65 I think it was, uh, they made me district manager here. And the man that was district manager went on to Houston as the uh, area manager, regional manager. [Slight pause] And then uh, we stayed that way. We uh... added, we kept addin' properties and we have a group called SLAM, which was Signal, LL and E, [Amalaw?], and [Marathon?]. That was the, that was our operating group and Signal was the operator for the group. [Pause] And we were pretty active in lease sales. We had several platforms that, big fields we developed. [Pause] And then in uh, I guess it was '71 or '72 Signal Oil and Gas became the Signal Companies. And uh, they just, the man that had started Signal Oil and Gas, Mister Moser, passed away and his nephew, [Shunway?], became CEO. He was a lawyer and he uh, decided to diversify. [All chuckle] And uh, it became apparent real quick that what money we was making was being spun off into other things. And we weren't getting the money we needed to maintain our position with the SLAM group. So uh, they finally, the board of directors gave Signal Oil and Gas president and the operatin' committee permission to uh, [ought to buy her?]. 'Cause they, Signal Companies had decided this was, the oil industry was too cyclical for them. They were more of this, this lawyer was more, you know, keep rising [Chuckling] but don't let it rise like that. So anyhow, we met, we uh, we were able to negotiate a sale to an outfit called Burma Oil and Gas, which was a British outfit. I mean, is all this relevant? You-

DD: Yeah, yeah yeah.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: It's relevant?

SW: Oh yeah.

HH: Okay. And uh, Burma Oil and Gas was a subsidiary of the Burma Company, was the British tanking, shipping outfit. They were the big supertankers they was. And this sale was closed in uh, believe it was December of '73. Which is around the embargo time. Well not too long after that, Burma ran into money problems, financial woes. All of their supertankers were owned, they owned on day charters, they weren't on long term charters. And all of a sudden there was no charters. They had all these supertankers with these tremendous notes to pay on 'em. So Burma got in financial trouble and they started huntin' a buyer for Signal Oil, the Signal part [of Signal?]. Well it turned out that they sold it to an outfit called Aminoil. Which was a s-, a pseudonym for American Independent Oil Company. Who at one time had some concessions in Saudi Arabia. And it turned out that Aminoil was a subsidiary of R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. [All chuckle] And what they wanted, they lost a bunch of tobacco during the embargo because they couldn't get natural gas to fire their curing systems, for their gas. And they decided that they were not gonna have that happen again, they were gonna buy a company that has gas production. And we had a lot of gas production. And they could make arrangements to swap gas here for gas on the eastern coast.

DD: You were with this same company the whole time it was being sold?

SW: Yeah, even when it was-

HH: Yeah. I went through, yeah, it was Signal, then Burma, then Aminoil.

DD: And it's, and it stayed Aminoil or did it continue to be sold?

HH: Well they fired me. [Chuckles]

DD: Oh they fired you?

HH: [Chuckling] Yeah.

SW: Oh no.

HH: They ran us all off, all the old Signal bunch off.

SW: When? In the late '70s?

HH: Uh... no, let's see. It was '78. Well in the meantime, let's go back a little bit. Let's go back to uh-

DD: Yeah, let's, go ahead.

HH: The Aminoil buyout. Before Aminoil bought out, Burma had some, had a uh, concession in Ecuador. And uh, Signal in with a group down there, which was Signal, City Service, Superior, [Demonex?], a German company, and uh, Mistu-, Mitsubishi-, [Mitsaluma?], which was a

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

Japanese company. Had concessions in the Amazon Basin, in Peru. So in all the shenanigans goin' on around 'bout that, I wound up bein' vice president of overseas. And I went to South America. With uh, at that time we had a company in there called Signal Crude Petroleum. And we had operations in Columbia in joint with Superior and we had operations in Ecuador with a company that Burma had, Anglo America. So we drilled a couple wells in Ecuador. We were there about six months and while I was settin' up in Peru, there wasn't anything active in Peru, but Burma had already started operations settin' up stuff in Ecuador, so I went down and took that over. And we drilled two very good wells out in the jungle, but they were uneconomical. You know, there's 150 million barrels of oil there. But at three dollars a barrel, we couldn't lay pipelines over the Andes. And that was the only way we could get the oil out at that time. So we just plugged 'em and went on to Peru. Then we drilled four wells down there.

[END OF CD1 to CD2]

HH: Then we drilled four wells down there. They were all nonproductive. And by that time it was '76, Amin-, uh, Burma had sold it to Aminoil. And Aminoil, first thing they did was shut all overseas operations down. We, in the North Sea, all the stuff they had in the North S-, all that down in South American, they shut everything down. And uh, I came back to Houston and I was working in Houston and then we had a change in operations over the years so the boy that had taken my place, he went to New Orleans to handle that operation down there and I came back and was here [Clears throat] as regional manager. And that was in seventy... seventy... '76. And in '78 the Chris-, Thanksgiving of 1978 they fired me. Along with all of our, my boss was replaced with an accountant. I was replaced with a uh, an accountant. Aminoil really ruined what we had built up over a number of years. Eventually Aminoil got out of it. And most of it was sold to Phillips.

SW: They just cleaned house basically.

HH: Yeah. Yeah, Aminoil just uh, Aminoil got in there with the idea they wanted that gas and all of a sudden they found out [Chuckling] everything that was involved in the oil business. And they didn't, they weren't ready to pursue it, so.

SW: And they wanted their people in there too, obviously.

HH: Yeah, well yeah, 'cause we weren't uh, we, the tobacco business was very accounting-oriented. And uh, [Chuckling] we weren't. I mean, uh, you would've thought that uh, o-, and I have [lethargic sons?], long as we have [Inaudible]. I had a [lethargic assignment?], 10 million check. You know, things like that. They just couldn't understand that. [DD chuckles] They uh, so it uh-

SW: They don't like one person signing things, they like to have a committee.

HH: Well that plus the fact that they don't want, they want somebody up on the executive committee sign anything over about 10,000 dollars. [Chuckles] This kind of stuff. But we uh, my boss was fired, his boss was fired, my counterpart in California was fired, my counterpart in uh, the northern area was fired. So we were all let go within about six months. And uh, at that time it was kind of devastatin', but now I look back on it, probably the best thing that ever happened to me. 'Cause I was fixin' to get in bad trouble with them folks. [Chuckles]

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

SW: So what'd you do after that? Did you, you switched uh, fields?

HH: Nah, uh, the boss that got fired, he and I decided that uh, which was a bad deal, we decided to start a rental tool outfit. And at that time he had gone to work, he went to work for Pennzoil as a senior vice president. So he and I floated enough money to start a rental tool outfit here in town in uh, '79. And of course you know what happened about that time. The oilfield, we started the thing with uh, money in interest, [Chuckling] money at 15 percent. But went for two or three years, we did real well. We, just a little small company and uh, then we sold it in '83. Actually we went bankrupt and then sold it. And uh, then uh, Bill wanted me to come over to Houston to go, I said, "No, I'm goin', I'm just goin' start consulting." So I started and I started myself. I wasn't gonna have a bunch of people workin' for me, I just wanted to do it myself.

SW: Keep it simple.

HH: Uh hm.

DD: And that's what you continue to do?

HH: Yeah.

SW: You s-

HH: Well now, in '88, in uh, I had been consulting and it was doing okay. But in '88 Bill called me [with Shell?] [Inaudible]. And was gonna do some work up in Carthage, Texas. And uh, where they had a little field up there and he wanted to know if I could go up there and take a look and, you know, work with him and all that jazz. I really wasn't interested, I was happy doing what I was doing down here, just 'cause I was, I have a, when we came back from South America, I built me a house out in Sunset and had a lot of acreage out there and was, had cows and some horses, and just-

SW: You were set up.

HH: Playin', playin' a country squire so to speak. He said, "Well what would it take you to go up there?" And I told him. He said, "Well could you leave tomorrow?" I thought, "I should've told you twice as much."

DD: [Chuckling] Yeah, exactly.

HH: But I went up there, he wanted, was gonna drill six wells and wanted me up there. And so anyhow I wound up drilling 92. [Chuckling] In about two years. But uh, up there, see that's in that uh, hard rock. It's in hard rock gas country. You gotta frak everything and uh, to get production out of it. And it was on 660 acres at that time. Well when I first got up there, they had changed to 320 acres. 'Cause they found out that 660 was not draining the area around the [bowl?] because of the, it was so tight. Had permeability about zero. And you had to frak everything to get anything out of it. But once you frak it's good production for awhile. So they had bring down to uh, three-, it was six-, 640 and it went to 320. And just a couple months after that they went to 160. Eventually they went down to 40. And that's what, these wells we were drillin', we just kept bringin' the rigs in and drililn' on these spots where we'd have one here that

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

uh, had a six, we'd come drill one here, here, here. [DD chuckles] On that acre. So uh, that, that's why we had the 92 that we drilled. And then we finished that program and they had talked about, you know, me goin', signin' on with [Inaudible]. My wife was born in Henderson, which is only 20 miles from here. So we uh, moved up there and, she moved up there in '90, we sold out down here. Our children had all moved and we had no roots here, so we moved back up to east Texas where I'd gone to school, she had gone to school. So that's where we're at now. And uh, I still doing, I've retired three times, [Inaudible]. [All chuckle]

SW: When you were in Sunset, were you a parishioner of Saint Johns? [Slight pause]

HH: No. Uh, no I'm Methodist.

SW: Oh okay. [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

HH: [Chuckling] I mean it was hard getting, yeah it was, it took us awhile to get settled in there because of the fact that we, you get, we had probably more problems gettin' settled there than I did in the business. [HH and DD chuckle] I know my wife went to the lumber yard one day to get some stuff for me.

SW: DiMaggio's?

HH: Yeah.

SW: Over there in Sunset.

HH: Yeah, that old man uh, what was the old man's name that used to be there?

SW: Oh, I for-

HH: Anyhow he was the old fella in there and she went in there one day and uh, was gettin' me something, I don't remember what it was. She'd gone to the grocery store there to, little, where the [Janice?] is at. Grocery store.

SW: Community Store?

HH: Yeah. And so she, I told her to stop by and pick up some nails or somethin'. Well the old man wouldn't sell 'em to her. Uh, said, "Tell Mister Henry to come get it." He said, and [Laughs] so finally she got on the phone and called me. And told him, you know, "Go ahead let her have 'em. [Inaudible]." "Oh women don't do that kind of thing." [SW chuckles] They wasn't gonna, you know, she was a non-, a non person.

DD: She couldn't even buy you nails?

HH: No, she was a non person in somethin' [Inaudible, chuckling].

SW: Wow.

HH: But uh, eventually she got to where, you know, she could [Inaudible, chuckling]. But I

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

always thought that was a funny thing.

SW: That's, I grew up in that area. So that's why I was asking-

HH: Uh huh. Well we lived back there on 724, goin' towards Church Point. We lived about three or four miles out there. You know where Black Lane is? Well we lived right there across from where [Heshing?] [had that big?], build a, house we built that place out there.

DD: Now your daughter mentioned something about secret studies. And she said to make sure I asked you about 'em.

HH: About what?

DD: Secret studies.

HH: [To himself] Secret studies. Well that was probably the Air Force. When I was in the Air Force.

DD: Oh, well she's ment-, she said something about secret studies.

HH: Oh well, uh, yeah. It was, all uh, what she was talkin' about was lease sales.

DD: Oh okay.

HH: Yeah. And that was a, that was a uh, I mean, you know, you were pretty, like our uh [Pause] whenever we started preparing for a lease sale, well no one group, geologists, engineers, reservoir people, uh, material people, none of them knew what part they were doin'. In other words, the geologist might work up on a certain area, but they didn't know where it was. It was nig-, had a code name to it. Say like the code name may be uh... oak. And I may be workin' on that same project as far as [one goes?], and my code name may be birch. We'd have three names. The reservoir engineers there's may be uh, lemon tree or something.

DD: [Chuckles] Right.

HH: And there was only one or two people in the company at the top that knew how to uh, coalesce all these different things. As to what block they was bidding on.

SW: Oh, it was for the bid price, because-

HH: Yeah, for the bid process.

SW: I see.

HH: That's what that was all about, what she was talkin' about. Oh we had some [Chuckles] had a-

SW: So you guys-

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Lot, lot of [Chuckles] and uh, you would drill wells, we drilled a block in west [Delta?], Block 79. And there was two blocks right beside it. And we had a good field. And we were gonna, prepared to bid on those. But we noticed there about six months before leasing started, there was a awful lot of helicopters and boat traffic around out there. So we got to where uh, we didn't allow anybody to come, you know, up on the platform. And the helicopters if they, they fly around out there, we just wave at 'em. But if we had to make a trip or something, we would do it at night so they couldn't count the pipe, found out how deep we were and things like that. Or if we, we would ship casing out maybe instead of shipping it out of Venice, the casing for that job we would ship it maybe out of Houston. And we would time it to be there at night to unload it.

SW: This was just to keep your competitors-

HH: Keep the competitors from knowin'-

DD: Knowin' what you're doin', those scouts.

HH: Yeah, yeah. And instead of having scouts drivin' up to a location like you would on land, you got the helicopters and boats out there.

SW: I see.

HH: So y-, they, you know, a man could count, he could count stands of pipe comin' out the hole, tell how deep you were.

DD: Yeah.

HH: See. Or he, if uh, see if the casing come out, he'd know, "Well, look, there's protective string, they're gonna drill deeper." This kind of thing. So that's what all the secrets and stuff was.

SW: Yeah. The code names that, you were working on a project and you didn't know that it was such and such well here, you just-

HH: Or you didn't know which area it was or anything.

SW: It was the peach tree project and that was it.

HH: That was as far as my part of it was concerned. And what they would do would tell me, "We're gonna drill a well to 15,000 feet. It's gonna have so much bottom hole pressure. It's gonna do this and this. How much it gonna cost to drill the well?" You know, case it and everything. Then the reservoir engineers would figure out how much it'd cost to complete it.

DD: Right.

HH: Production reservoir engineers. The geologist would say how deep you got to drill. But no y-, no, they didn't know that what I was doing, they knew I was doing something, but they didn't know what block it was for. And it was only a certain number of people up in the very top that would be able to pull all this together and say, "Here we go." So we bid on that block in west Delta 79, I think it was 83 million. And we beat Shell Oil Company just by [Chuckling] a couple

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

hundred thousand dollars. [SW and DD chuckle] So it was that clo-, and that's one eventually that uh, it was a, oh, it was a, shoot, we made half, they made a half billions dollars out of that field.

SW: The bid process is very competitive too.

HH: Oh yeah, the bid process is-

SW: Yeah, you've got to watch how high-

HH: Well you didn't uh, you had your banker ready and at the last minute is when you'd throw in your bid. I mean, even the banker didn't know, you told him a range. But then he had that certified check there and you filled in the number on it. And uh, turned it over to him when you bid on it. At that time it was the USGS.

SW: Yeah. That's pretty interesting. The secrecy-

HH: We had uh, we drilled 12 of those wells and we drilled one well out there with a jack-up on that west Delta 79. And it was uh, when we got ready to log it, my boss went out there to log it. And the Schlumberger people set it up and then they left. And then he ran the log and everything. And he had a scramble phone and my-, back then it wasn't like these little deals now, you know, they have a scramble on like the little James Bond stuff. It looked about like that uh... deal over there, that uh, multi-, multi-

DD: Uh, power strip.

HH: Yeah, it was about this long. [DD chuckles] And you fit your phone down in it and you had to hold it like this.

SW: Oh okay.

HH: And-

DD: Like the ones you see in those old uh, Vietnam and Korean War or World War Two movies, one of those-

HH: Yeah, kind of like the deal like that, 'cept this is the phone cradle in there. And uh, it, [Chuckling] my wife says it sounds like a [Chinese war?] run backwards to listen to it, 'cause, you know, it was good, it scrambled up. And my boss would talk to me out there on the field or I would talk to my people out there and supposedly nobody else would know what we were talkin' about. And if, you were paranoia about that. When we got ready to start biddin' on that one, one of the big jobs out there, uh, one of the people [Pause, here shuffling in background]

SW: How you doin' Mister [Graseau?].

HH: One of the two-

SW: [Talking in background] Yeah, I'll keep it. Sorry, sorry about that. Don't stop. [Chuckles]

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Okay. One of the people uh, in our security came over and checked my office for a bug. 'Cause he said that uh, [Inaudible, shuffling in background] he said it uh, 'cause my wall was made out of [Inaudible].

SW: Cypress?

HH: Yeah, it was [petricypress?], you know the ones got the little holes in 'em.

SW: Yeah.

HH: The walls in my office were pretricypress.

SW: Oh, so they thought they could hide something in 'em.

HH: Yeah. There's all these little pecky holes in that cypress. They thought maybe, you know. So anyhow, they swept all my office [with one of those kind of things?] and we had uh, I, we had a special line put in to my office from my boss' office in Houston. It didn't go to a switchboard or anything.

SW: Oh it was direct line. Direct line kind of thing.

HH: Yeah. Yeah, we, it pretty paranoia.

SW: Yeah, but uh, this-

HH: [A lot of worth?]. [Chuckles]

SW: Is a lot of money. Lot of money-

HH: It's a lot money.

SW: Being sunk into these kind of things and-

HH: Yeah, you know, we often talked about that that if Shell had just had any idea, they could bid a couple hundred dollars more than us and got it. But-

SW: Right. Just undercut you enough just to get the job.

HH: Right.

SW: But not lose money on their end.

HH: Not lose. Yeah. See when we left, most we ever left on the table was right about a million dollars. And that's, we overbid that by that much from what the next one was.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

HH: So. But that was good.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

SW: It's al-, it's always a guessing game, though. You're trying to not lose money, but you don't want to-

HH: You don't want to let somebody else have it.

SW: Not too much. Yeah. Because then they'll just steal it from you.

HH: See that uh, we built that west Delta 79 block up. We had wound up with about six or seven platforms out there. And a lot of those platforms had 48 wells on them. And they were all high pressure oil. So it was a very productive. And then of course we had one out in Main Pass where we had five platforms out there when Camille came through and Camille wiped out one of our, it didn't wipe the platform out, just took the rig off.

SW: Yeah, that was in the early '70s?

HH: Sixty-nine.

SW: Sixty-nine.

HH: Yeah.

SW: Audrey was '57. Was it Audrey?

HH: Audrey was uh, yeah, we still was Chevron then.

SW: Fifty-seven.

HH: It was [Inaudible]. And then uh, in '65 and '66 was uh, Hazel and uh... there's one of 'em came past Lafayette on the left side and one came by Lafayette [Chuckling] on the right side.

SW: Yeah, Lafayette's built on sacred ground. It never comes right for us.

HH: But it, one on each side, you know, [Inaudible]. But uh, no I just uh, I, after uh, '88 I retired for awhile and didn't do anything. And then a friend of mine called me and said he had a special project he'd like to talk to me about. I went down and talked to him about it and I was doing two or three jobs a year for him, special things. And, but I quit, I just quit the oilfield completely here recently. It was just taking too much of my time, I had other things to do.

SW: Yeah, I see. Well that's uh, that's pretty good. I've got a couple of other questions for you.

HH: Go ahead.

SW: If you don't mind.

HH: Oh no, I don't mind. I've got an appointment at one o'clock.

SW: Oh okay.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Take my grandson to dinner, lunch. [Chuckles]

SW: Oh alright. We might go back a little bit in time.

HH: Fine, go ahead.

SW: But uh, you've takin' perfectly with goin' from the beginning up 'til now, which is chronologically-

HH: I was filing.

SW: Yeah, you don't always have an interview like that. It seems like people want to jump all over the place. [Chuckles]

HH: No, it's-

SW: But you've, I'd have to say this is a good interview. You're hitting it perfect. [Chuckles]

HH: Well thank you.

SW: You got into the oil industry by association with your father, what other options did you have at that time? Was there any other kind of jobs you could have done? Or-

HH: Oh yeah. Uh, I had a brother that came out of school and, see in the summertime when I was going to school we would work, my dad would let us work up there. Me and a couple other boys that were goin' to school might get a little uh, work on a rig, go out and do some. My brother got out of school in 1950 and came to work [for me?]. And about three weeks later we were livin' at home and I got up to go to work. Eddie wasn't there. I asked momma where he was. Said, "Well he didn't come home last night." I said oh well. So I had, I come home in the afternoon. She said, "Well I found out where Eddie is." I said, "Where?" Said, "He joined the Air Force. Said it beat workin' for you. [HH and SW chuckle] So that was his option. And now my option was uh, I, we'd go to school. And I had uh, kin folks that were lawyers, I had kin folks that were doctors, I had kin folks that were other types of engineers, you know. But I had just, I had seen just enough of the oilfield to romanticize about it.

SW: Oh alright.

HH: And that was what-

SW: Drew you into it.

HH: Yeah. That old boy I stayed on that rig, that fella by the name of Churchill, he worked for Sun Oil Company down there in Florida. And he was an engineer. And I thought, "Man, look at that, he's tellin' use when do this and do that and all that. That's what I want to be." [Chuckles]

SW: You didn't want to be the guy bein' told what to do though. [Laughs]

HH: No I wanted to tell.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

SW: Yeah, okay.

HH: As my wife says, I'm the best in the world [she's seen in pointing?]. [SW laughs] Just that.

SW: Go here, drill there.

HH: Now see that's another thing, too, about in the oil business. My wife was in the oil, her fa-, family was in the oil business too, so she beca-, she was not like a lot of women that uh, when I didn't come home every night she didn't worry about it. She, it was uh, she knew what the oil business was like.

SW: Yeah. 'Cause she'd been, her father had been part of it.

HH: Her father was a toolpusher Penrod Tool.

SW: Okay. And I'm sure the pay was pretty good, too, as well.

HH: Oh yes. When I got, when I accepted that job with uh, California Company that was in December of '56, 475 dollars a month. And before I went to work, they had a cost of livin' increased and raise-, got me over 500 dollars.

SW: Wow.

HH: See. First of January they had a cost of living increase. I think it was three or four percent, somethin' like that.

SW: You had just been hired and you already-

HH: Yeah, and I already got a raise. I thought, "Man, look at this. This is great."

SW: You got on at the right time.

HH: I think it was a year [Chuckling] before I got another one, but.

SW: Wow.

HH: But uh, yeah, and then when I left uh, when I left them in '57 and uh, went to work, no in '63 I went with Signal, well I was hired at 1,000 dollars a month. As the district engineer.

SW: That's uh, a little less than 10 years later.

HH: Well it, no, it was six years later.

SW: Six years later.

HH: Yeah.

SW: So yeah, six years later-

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: I went from 500 in six to a 1,000.

SW: To a 1,000, that's pretty good.

HH: Well yeah, that's-

SW: It's faster than the inflation rate.

HH: Yeah, a 100 dollars was, a 100 dollars a year is uh, that was what 10 percent. So uh, but it was quite jump. I think I jumped from 775 to 1,000 by being from Chevron, uh, California Company as an engineer to Signal as a district engineer. That was, [Inaudible]. [Chuckles]

SW: Yeah, there we go. Fringe benefits. [Chuckles]

HH: Yeah. Fringe benefits. [Laughing] I got a car take me to the heliport to catch the air-, helicopter.

SW: When um, I know some of the work that you do offshore as an engineer, maybe not necessarily as an engineer, but the other stuff, it's kind of dangerous.

HH: Oh yeah.

SW: Did you ever get hurt or did you ever see anybody get hurt?

HH: Oh yeah, yeah. I saw a man get killed uh, on, running casing. Stabbed right in the derrick, fell out of the derrick uh, bottom, I was standing on the floor right there beside me. And uh, he just twitched a couple times, that was all. And uh, one of our engineers, a boy I went to school with uh, we hired, you see California Company hired him, they hired me in February, I went to work in February. Tom came and went to work in August, I believe it was. And first thing he did out on a rig was to fall through the pipe rack and break a leg. I mean, things like that.

SW: Things like that.

HH: It was-

SW: But sometimes it was serious, because-

HH: Oh yeah.

SW: If you weren't care-, you had to be careful.

HH: Well you watched, it was, there was a snake around every corner on drilling rigs.

SW: Yeah, yeah. On the land rigs.

HH: Uh hm. Well, they were on those offshore rigs.

SW: Really?

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: Oh yeah, they were, I'm talkin' about when I say "snake," that somethin's bad's gonna get you around.

SW: Oh.

HH: That, that's a, what would you call it? An allergy. And uh, allegory. You know, the snakes gonna [walk?] and he's gonna bite you. You walk around that rig somethin' might bite you.

SW: Right there, huh.

HH: Uh hm.

SW: I just, that was the nature of the work, though, basically.

HH: Yeah, uh hm.

SW: Did uh, did the company encourage situations that were dangerous or, these companies you worked for, were they more or less concerned about safety of humans?

HH: Safety. Oh yeah, yeah, they were-

SW: Pushed it.

HH: They were [very strict?]. Yeah they were real concerned about safety. Uh, in fact we had certain penalties on these rigs offshore and on the, we had certain procedures to follow. We'd have fire drills, we had uh, blowout drills, and all this kind of stuff. We uh, we were concerned about it. And most all of your rigs would have someone trained in first aid. And of course we had helicopters that were available if we had a man seriously hurt. And we, and I'm sure you've heard 'em come over here goin' to the hospital, with carrying people in from offshore.

SW: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

HH: All of our helicopters, all the hospitals, Morgan City, Houma, Thibodaux, New Orleans, all have helicopters ports, heliports there.

SW: Yeah, just for-

HH: Now. They started that back in probably the late, middle to late '60s. When offshore really got to booming.

SW: Yeah, I've just, I've heard from some people we've talked to that some companies could've cared less about their employees. You know, they figure a man gets hurt or killed, they just replace him.

HH: Well that's primarily the service companies.

SW: Yeah.

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

HH: 'Cause those people were transient more than, you know, there wasn't any long term employment in most of your service. Now Halliburton were very safety conscious.

SW: Well they're a big-

HH: Schlumberger, things like that. But the smaller, the uh, like that casing crew outfit. I don't know, they just, he had a rope up there that hadn't been checked evidently. [Pause]

SW: And that's like you said because these people weren't comin' in and work for six months and then maybe leave the company whatever. They didn't really have any core, loyal employees.

HH: Uh uh. No, they [Pause]

SW: But uh, I've also noticed uh, you guys from the older oilfield you had company loyalty and the company had loyalty to you as well. Nowadays, they say it's-

HH: No, no, nowadays, no. [Chuckles]

SW: There's nothin' goin' either way.

HH: Uh uh. There's uh, that, this friend of mine that worked for Mitchell Energy uh, let's see Mitchell Energy's been, well Pennzoil was bought out by an outfit out of Canada called [Derong?] several years ago. Well now Derong's also bought Mitchell. And they're [threading?] the people out as they come in. They had a cadre of uh, experienced people that carried over from Pennzoil and now they, [Chuckling] they don't need all these from Mitchell, so. It's a, no, there's no uh, loyalty-

SW: I think that's an, in pretty much a lot of industries nowadays, too. It's just the environment.

HH: Yeah.

SW: What about-

HH: That's why I've gotten into another, my wife and my daughter are both nurses. And they've got me into this health and wellness business. [Both chuckle] So that's what I'm doin' [with friends now?], I just, you know, tryin' to get them on that as a, I call it their plan B. [SW chuckles] Get into it and then you, if your company doesn't make it, you've got this to fall back on, that kind of thing.

SW: Yeah, definitely. Always a-

HH: Excuse me for interrupting your question.

SW: Oh no no, that's okay. Um, what about uh, job security during all of this? You mentioned there was a downturn in '59 and so they-

HH: Well no, there was, I, while I was in charge there from fif-, from sixty... '65 or '66, I can't remember. The last part of '65, first part of '66, until I went to South America, I had to lay off

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

two people for downturn and that was all.

SW: That was it.

HH: Yeah. And these were two drilling people and they were uh, some old people that we had hired and they were [Chuckling] kind of glad I think to get back out of it. But that was all as far as the downturn.

SW: I've noticed a difference, nowadays they're willing to hire a bunch of people, but then as soon as there's a downturn [Snaps] let 'em go. But back in your day they hire-, they hired less people and y'all did more of the actual, you did more work, so that-

HH: Well we were always undermanned. [Chuckles] Let's put it this way.

SW: So when there was a downturn, you didn't have to always let somebody go.

HH: Yeah. We were glad to see it, 'cause that, maybe we could have maybe a vacation.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

HH: Which we didn't have before.

SW: [Chuckles] Yeah, I've noticed that difference. It's

HH: And uh, it was too back then, we hired, now we hired some people out of school, but normally if we needed a uh, say we needed an engineer with experience or a geologist, I would go hire an older person, whereas nowadays, you know, they're tryin' to get rid of the older people and hire 'em, 'cause they don't cost as much. But I would go out and hire uh, I wouldn't go hire an engineer, when I hired those first two engineers I had, both of 'em had anywhere between 12 and 15 years of experience. I mean, they had more experience than I did. So I went and got them. And then I brought along several from Chevron, California, 'fact we moved from this spot on South College over to uh, next to where Chevron is now. In that little strip mall there where [Ashley?] had a place in there. We moved into there. Well, Joe Leblanc who was headin' up the Che-, uh, at that time California Company, he had been in Venice down there when we were down there. And also his financial or chief accountant, Joel Zimmerman. Well Joe was also in charge of the building. [Chuckling] So Joe called me that night and he said, "Boy have a got a tab on you." I said, "[Inaudible]." And I said, "What's that?" He said, "Joe told me to lock that door on that end of the building close to your building." I said, "[Why's he doin' that?]." He said, "If those people don't quit and go to work for you, they got to go out the front." [SW chuckles] 'Cause I'd hired about six or eight people off California Company. [Chuckling] So Joe was, "If you're gonna, if you're not goin' to use that in door, they gonna have to go out the front door." [SW chuckles]

SW: Make sure they be seen, huh?

HH: Yeah. [SW chuckles] [Pause] We uh, Bill and I were in New Orleans one night for a lease sale and I called one boy that used to work with us. And I told Lloyd, you know, wanted to talk to him. He said, "I'll come talk to you." But he said, "Don't let it out." Said, "I'm bein' considered

Interviewee: Harrison, Henry

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

for a promotion here with California Company.” “Fine. We’ll meet you at uh, [Monalies, there T. Monalies?].” Said, “It’s dark, we’ll meet you there.” So we met. Man, we sittin’ there talkin’ and all of a sudden somebody tapped over, somebody tapped on his shoulder. Turned around and it was [Inaudible] Julian Dupre, who was the vice president of [Chuckling] California Company in New Orleans. And leaned over and said, “What are y’all doin’ here?” I said, “We’re havin’,” [Chuckling] I don’t know what I said at the time. [SW chuckles] And then he saw [Shell?] and he saw Lloyd, and he said, “Oh my god.” I said, “Yeah, we just visiting, old friends. There’s nothing going on.” I talked to Lloyd a couple weeks later, he said, “Well Julian must believe just that ‘cause I got that promotion.” [HH and SW chuckle] But said, “He did ask me. He said, ‘Were you considering going?’” Lloyd said, no, he wasn’t going anywhere, said, “They haven’t even asked me.” But uh, and it, people were pretty competitive on people back then, too.

SW: Yeah. Especially somebody with experience.

HH: Uh hm, yeah. Yeah, that’s, see we operate, Penn-, uh, California Company at that time and Signal when I was there, we operate on the theory that I could take an engineer and make a good drilling man out of him. But I couldn’t take a drilling man and make an engineer out of him. I couldn’t take a driller and make an engineer out of him, I could take an engineer and make a driller out of him to get the experience. But I couldn’t work the other way.

SW: Yeah. So always want to try and grab an engineer if you could.

HH: Yeah.

SW: Make it easier for you.

HH: Yeah.

SW: Did you guys ever have any dealings with unions?

HH: No.

SW: Nothing at all?

HH: No, they tried a time or two and they got throwed off of boats. [HH and SW chuckle] They got their tires slashed uh, it was a, no, they’ve tried off and on to union, the, this part of the oil industry. They’re of-, you know, refineries are all unionized. And uh-

SW: Yeah, that’s like a fact-

[END OF RECORDING]