

Interviewee: Stemmans, Donald

Interview Date: August 5, 2002

HHA # 00417

Interviewee: Donald Stemmans

Interviewer: David DiTucci and Steven Wiltz

Interview Date: August 5, 2002

Interview Site: Lafayette, LA

Interview Module & No.: MMS: DD007

Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of "uhs" and "ums", repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability.]

Ethnographic preface:

Don Stemmans was born in 1936 near Carencro. He spent 16 years in the oilfields for Superior Oil Company, then quit to shoe horses and work at the racetrack. The oil industry treated him well, they paid well, and had excellent benefits. He discusses various experiences from his days in the oilfields and on the rigs.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [DD] and [SW]

Interviewee initials: [DS]

DD: Interview with Don Stemmans. It is August fifth, 2002. Two p.m. in his office.

SW: As you might remember from our conversation and from the newspaper article, we're just trying to get the oil experience, experiences in the oil patch basically. 'Bout how many years did you spend out in the oilfield?

DS: 'Bout 16.

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SW: Sixteen years?

DS: Yeah. [Slight pause]

SW: And what year were you born, sir?

DS: Nineteen thirty-six.

SW: And you're from this area?

DS: Yes.

SW: Born and raised?

DS: Born in Carencro area.

DD: Carencro?

DS: Uh huh.

DD: What'd your father do?

DS: He was a blacksmith. Horseshoe and blacksmith.

SW: [I noticed you?] got the horse.

DS: Yeah, uh hm. I was a horseshoer, too, I shoed horses. In fact that's when I quit the oilfield, to go shoe horses.

SW: Go shoe horses.

DD: Wow.

SW: Okay. When did you start in the oilfield?

DS: In 1954.

SW: Puts you right out of high school basically.

DS: Yeah, uh hm. Fifty-four. And I worked the wireline unit and in '55 I went to work on a drilling rig.

SW: Offshore?

DS: Uh, no, I worked on land for a company called The Superior Oil Company. [Phone rings] And we worked on land and went inland barges and then [Phone rings] we went o-, offshore too. You know, you get transferred from one to the other. [Phone rings]

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SW: They move you around.

DS: Uh huh.

SW: You stayed with The for a long time?

DS: The Superior Oil Company.

SW: Whole time?

DS: Yeah, the whole time, 'til '66.

SW: So from about...

DS: Fifty-four to '66, 'bout 14 years.

SW: How did you get on with that company?

DS: Oh they were hiring in Bosco Oilfield. They were hiring in Bosco Oilfield near, not too far from here. And it was a workover rig. And my w-, I got, they told me they were hiring, so I went out there and got a job. I started roughnecking on the floor. And of course the, I was very young and first thing you know well I go up in the derrick and I really liked that more than anything else.

SW: You had any experience doing that before?

DS: No.

SW: Just trained you?

DS: They trained me.

DD: [Inaudible]-

DS: On the job training.

DD: What made you decide to go there? Just it was a job to-

DS: The job and there was not that many jobs. And I'll tell you what, they were payin' a dollar ninety-six an hour for a roughneck. And that was good money.

DD: Oh yeah.

SW: In 1954?

DS: Fifty-four, '55.

SW: Well over-

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DS: Fifty-five, '55.

SW: Well over the minimum wage. [Chuckles]

DS: Yes. Thirty-five cents about that time.

SW: So I'd imagine it was-

DS: Oh yeah, it was big time money.

SW: Competitive to get those jobs.

DS: Dollar ninety-six, yeah. Got to be a derrick man and that was two, two eleven I think was what it was.

SW: Yeah, well it went up. [Chuckles]

DS: Yes, I went to work derricks and-

SW: Is that how they were doin' it? They were just hiring anybody that wanted to do it and training 'em on the rig?

DS: Well, if they knew 'em, if they knew of 'em a little bit. They just wouldn't hire just anybody, but they did hire, and they'd fire right quick, too.

DD: Oh yeah?

DS: They'd fire. They, if you didn't work hard, they'd fire you. You, let me tell ya, you have to really roll.

SW: Physical, fast work. Have to keep up.

DS: Yes, uh huh.

SW: What kind of work schedule did you have?

DS: We worked day, uh, we worked shift work. Either eight to three, or three to 11, or 11 to seven. It depend what ever tower you on. We switch, every week or so we'd switch from graveyard to, from 11 to seven to daytime and stuff like that.

SW: You'd work a dayshift for a week and then-

DS: Yeah, switch on.

SW: Was it seven on and seven off or-

DS: No, uh uh.

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SW: It was just Monday through Friday?

DS: No, Monday through F-, Monday through Sunday.

SW: Sunday?

DS: Yeah, sho-, we didn't shut that rig down. [SW chuckles]

DD: Is that [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

DS: Yes.

SW: So you never had any weekends off?

DS: Well not at that time, no.

SW: And how long-

DS: And we got overtime.

SW: That was over in Bosco?

DS: Bosco-

SW: They paid you overtime?

DS: Oh yeah [it was?] overtime. And then a couple of years later went on a... inland barge out of Lake Arthur. And you ride a boat two hours and they paid us I believe [Inaudible] might be an h-, a dollar an hour to ride the boat. And we'd ride two hours to go, two hours to come back and work eight hours on the job. And I think by the end it had gone up a little bit, maybe two and a half or somethin' like that.

SW: So you got four dollars just for the ride. [Chuckles]

DS: Yeah. We thought it was big money and big thing.

SW: Ah yeah.

DS: And it was, too. Uh, and worked out there quite a bit and we'd work, it was six days a week. You had one day off there. It just kind of floated around, it never the same time, same day.

SW: So it wa-, you still weren't on any set seven and seven-

DS: Uh uh, no. No.

SW: Or 15 and 15, or-

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DS: But then I went in the Gulf in uh... [Pause] in '59 [Slight pause] '58. Fifty-eight went in the Gulf. And then we were working 10 and five. But that ended up being really 11 and four because there was one day traveling, you know. So kind of 11 and four. And before that, right after Hurricane Audrey, I got sent to a rig that had got in bad shape with Hurricane Audrey. It was a steam rig. And there's no more steam rigs now. I don't know why, it was down in Rockefeller Refuge. [A little lake?], again, we had two hour boat ride goin' and come back. And it was a great big rig. And I worked on that rig, worked derricks there. And uh... there was, oh, five boilers on that rig. It was a great big thing. And Hurricane Audrey had dismantled it in the way where the derrick stayed, but the barges around it got moved when the wind and the high tide come through there. And we went after Audrey to help 'em put it back, we shut the little rig we were workin' on and went out there and helped 'em. And everything you picked up had a snake under it too. [All chuckle] It was a very, it was very kind of a, you know, a person was scared of snakes, he didn't want to stay there. But that, it was in Rockefeller Refuge.

SW: Yeah, they were just hiding. [Chuckles]

DS: Uh hm. They were blinded. Salt water got in.

SW: Oh really?

DS: It blinded them snakes.

SW: They'd lash out at you any time you come anywhere near 'em.

DS: Uh hm.

SW: Yeah, I don't care for snakes too much. [Chuckles]

DS: Uh hm, [Inaudible].

SW: I see you don't have any in the store.

DS: Uh huh, no snakes. Got the snake food, it's the mice, white mice. [SW and DD chuckle] And people buy that for the mice [and snake?]. And uh-

SW: See that's uh...

DS: Fifty-nine I was in the Gulf, '60 I was in the Gulf. And then um, I started, I came into Bosco again and run a wireline crew for 'em. Superior did everything themselves. We did not have no ca-, I've never been on a rig with a casing crew ever. We run our own casing, we did everything ourselves, other than cement and Schlumberger, that's the only two things other people would come on the rig. And all our fishing tools, we had 'em all ourself.

SW: Are they still around or they-

DS: No, they sold to Mobil.

SW: Mobil. Yeah, everybody sells-

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DS: They sold to Mobil probably uh... oh, I don't know, probably in the early '80s, somethin' like that. [Slight pause] But I quit in '66.

SW: Why'd you get out of it?

DS: To come shoe horses. Come on the racetrack, come home and stay around the house.

SW: Was it the work schedule that was just?

DS: No, no no no. I had a good job and I'll tell you what, at that time when I quit I was makin' 11 dollars an hour in 1966 and four weeks paid vacation. And I didn't have to drive a vehicle other than to Bosco Oilfield. They furnish a truck from there. And, no, I'm gonna tell you, they were good people to work for and there was no, never no problem.

SW: They took care of your health benefits and everything?

DS: Oh yeah, yeah. We had John Hancock Insurance. [SW chuckles] And of course my, I had gotten married and uh, my wife was teachin' school. So-

SW: While you were workin' offshore you were married?

DS: I got married when I, while I was offshore.

SW: How was that with your family life being offshore?

DS: No problem.

SW: Didn't have any problem?

DS: Uh uh.

SW: You had children at the time?

DS: No children. We didn't have no children 'til '66, seven years later.

SW: I hear stories from the guys tell me their wives were happy to see when their husbands would come back in. They're just as happy to see 'em go back out. [Chuckles]

DS: Yeah, also they had a check with 'em when they come. Usually-

DD: Yeah, that's true. [Chuckles]

DS: And uh, you could make a lot of overtime. You could do whatever you wanted to. And they fed good. Superior, The Superior Oil Company was one of the best companies for takin' care of the employees. They'd feed you rib eye steaks for breakfast if you wanted. [DD whistles]

SW: Wow.

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DS: There was never no problem about the food.

SW: You'd get fat out there on the rig.

DS: Oh yeah. Well, I gained some weight. I went from about 160 to 190 out there. [Slight pause]
And then I quit in '66 to come on the racetrack.

SW: This is what you wanted to do anyways.

DS: I wanted to do that. I like horses, I've always had horses. I had, all the time I worked for Superior, I had ropin' horses and [I rode him?], did a little rodeo. Never very good, but amateur only, but I enjoyed it.

SW: What about when you were offshore? What kind, I know you were working 10 and five, but what about the daily schedule? Were you still doing the shif-, was it 12 hour shifts?

DS: Twelve hour shifts.

SW: Twelve hour shifts on the deck.

DS: Twelve hours, uh hm. And like I said if they needed any extra, they'd wake you up and come on back. But it wasn't no forcibly. We, you wanted to 'cause they took care of us good. They never forced into it. We didn't mind it, no.

SW: Kind of different in the oil companies these days, huh?

DS: Uh hm. And they paid overtime, they paid everything. It was, they were a good company. Uh hm.

SW: You said they fed you, too. Did you ever, I mean your wife is from here?

DS: Yeah.

SW: So she was, the cuisine is the same. But did they ever feed you anything out there that you came back here and that you wanted her to cook for you? [Chuckles]

DS: Yeah, sure. You bet. They had some of [hell of?] cooks. They had cooks for, every crew had a cook. And I'm tellin' you it, you just, pies, a lot of things that they gave me the recipes and I brought back to my wife, yeah.

SW: Oh really? Okay. But did they, I mean, and so it kind of affected your diet in a way.

DS: Well yeah-

SW: It made you eat some different stuff.

DS: Like a steak and I don't see that cooked like that anymore. I can't eat that much meat no more anyhow, but they take a grill and this guy would take the salt and put on top of the grill. It

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was white on the gri-, not thick.

DD: Not a lot, but-

DS: But just, it was white. And then he'd throw his steaks on that thing. And what it would do it would sear 'em real good and you-

DD: It would seal all the juices in.

DS: And then, yeah, and then your inside of your meat was just tender. And sure we had good meat now. They didn't skimp nothin'. They didn't skimp anything. No, they were fun people to work for.

SW: That's good. What about the, when you were out there you were still roughnecking?

DS: Yea-, I was working, I was relief driller.

SW: Relief driller.

DS: Yeah. I'd work derricks five days and drill five days.

SW: How was life on the derrick? How was the work? Was it kind of dangerous in any way?

DS: Uh uh, no-

SW: You have to be careful?

DS: Hm, but you, yeah, you have to be careful.

SW: Always have to watch yourself.

DS: If you get on that street out there you gotta be careful.

SW: This is Lafayette, so. [Chuckles]

DS: Yeah. But it was not overly dangerous. They didn't uh, I got all my fingers and. [DD chuckles] Uh, it was not overly dangerous. Just, there's some people that are really careless about working, you know. And that's not the job, it's them. Like you see around horses. Every once in awhile a guy gets kicked. And usually they'll get kicked again. [DD chuckles] And because [Phone ringing] they just don't know how to approach a horse or how to handle it. Some horses are mean, mean horses, but you gotta find a way to get to 'em.

DD: It's the same thing offshore-

DS: Same thing with that, with the oilfield. We did, we was on platforms out there in the Gulf. There was no rockin' boat or nothin' like that, we on solid platform. And you drill a well here and when you got through drillin' a well, you would skid the derrick over about 16, 18 feet and drill another well there. Then you could skid the well this way or that way or this way, you could, we'd

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slide the derrick. It was iron to iron, the derrick was iron to iron, you know. And they would skid, only thing you had to keep it on them skids, you know, you had to keep it straight. You have to go both times, both legs at the same time. And we'd do that.

DD: So the platform stayed in the same place.

DS: Uh hm.

DD: You'd slide the derrick around and drill a hole in a different spot.

DS: Uh hm, uh hm. And I worked on one rig for them, the W. M. Keck. It was the biggest barge [and/in?] the biggest drilling rig in the world at that time.

SW: The W. M. Keck?

DS: Uh, W. M. Keck.

SW: [M.?] Keck.

DS: Keck, K-E-C-K. [Slight pause] It was the Kecks that owned Superior Oil Company out of California. It was a showpiece. Y'all a little familiar with rigs at all?

SW: Uh hm.

DS: They had two sets of drawworks on every rig they had. That's standby drawworks. I don't know what for. It really was not needed, but they had a standby drawwork on each rig. All the rigs they had. This rig could pull five joints of pipe, but we never pulled five. We pulled five sometimes changed the bit or somethin' like that. But other than that, we pulled four all the time. It was a [foldable?] derrick. They had three foldable derricks. The Keck, Rig 21, and Rig 8, and Rig 6. They had four. Four foldable. They big, oh yeah, tell you what. Foldable derricks are comin' out of the hole with some limber pipe, you had to have somebody on the middle [finger?]. With big pipe you could muscle it. But you really needed somebody on a middle finger. And they put somebody. If they needed it, they put it. There was never any problem that you get in a bind with 'em. But we had to work, let me tell you. It was work.

SW: You were hustlin'.

DS: Oh we had to work all the time. It was, there no, if we got through [go in?] a hole, we'd clean up. Paint, chip, and do whatever we had to do.

SW: Make you earn that money they were payin' you.

DS: Uh huh. Oh yeah. There was never no slack time to sleep or anything like that. [DD and SW chuckle] Oh no. Oh you know, too, I mean that wasn't a thing.

SW: You were young and-

DS: Oh yeah, we could all the time.

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DD: The company took care of you, so you took care of them basically.

DS: Uh hm, uh hm.

SW: Would you, I don't think, personally I don't notice that too much these days. Would you say the same thing about the company-

DS: They tell me it's different.

SW: Employee relationships-

DS: They tell me it be different, all different. You know, you have, people just don't have the work ethics that we used to have. And some still do, but some people just don't. And then now they can't pass the drug test most of 'em. [DD chuckles]

SW: Yeah. You say that the people, not, from the older days of course, but also you think the people around here had a good work ethic?

DS: Oh yes. Oh yeah.

DD: Better than others?

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech] work hard?

DS: Oh yeah.

DD: You think?

DS: Yeah. All our people here, like in [Phone ringing] they had a little recession and they brought some of the drillers and tool pushers from west Texas. And they worked for us on the floor. And I was 19, 20 years old and drilling and I had a floor man that was 60 years old. [DD chuckles] You know? He'd got bumped down. Then after a while it picked back up, they went back to Texas, they got their jobs back, you know. And they were good people. They'd help, a lot of times I'd let them on the rig, I'd go back, but I'd get paid for the d-, the job, you know. It was easier for 'em, so I let them do it. But yeah, I was very young.

SW: Sometimes the oil industry does this.

DS: Uh huh.

SW: Did you ever feel like you were gonna lose your job?

DS: No. No. Not with this company.

SW: Nowadays they have some big layoffs [Inaudible].

DS: Yeah, and they layoff the people that don't work too good. That's who gets laid off.

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SW: But if you work-

DS: If you work, you don't have to worry about job. It's the way it is. I mean, I'm sure it's like that everywhere. If I needed a job, believe me, and of course I'd have to be a young man, but if I went to look for a job, I'd go to the man, I'd say, "Look," of the person, whoever it is, I'd say, "Look, put me on. In two weeks if you don't want to, [Inaudible] need to pay me." And I'd worked. And I'd make him look at me and show me, show him that I can work. And I guarantee in two weeks he won't want to fire me.

DD: That's good.

DS: Because we worked. I mean, there was no, but you could get a job most of the time pretty easy. But they wanted some workers.

SW: I think that's pretty much the same in the oil industry now, too. [Chuckles]

DS: Uh hm, uh hm.

DD: What was the difference between working onshore and working offshore?

DS: You didn't have to cut the grass.

DD: Didn't have to cut the grass! [All laugh]

SW: Where, offshore or onshore? [Chuckles]

DS: Onshore, you didn't have to cut the grass offshore. [Chuckling] Other than that, I, it was a little bit neater jobs offshore.

DD: Really?

DS: Yeah. It was neater 'cause, you know, you clean up and that was way before the environmentalists came, and you just wash everything on the floor, you know, most everything, oil, grease, whatever it is, just wash it in the Gulf. But-

DD: Even without just [Phone ringing] washing it in the Gulf is probably-

DS: Yeah. But we had some pans on. We couldn't just, we didn't, we, shoot, I'll tell you what.

DD: [Inaudible, overlapping speech, something about "dump"]

DS: We didn't, no, we didn't dump anything. Even if we didn't give a damn, the company would not let us throw things around. But offshore was uh, different, because they treated, they bed us down there. And we had new beds every mor-, every day. When we went to bed, we had a clean sheets and clean bed and made up every day for us.

SW: Had somebody took care of that for y'all?

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DS: Uh hm.

DD: Who did take care of that?

DS: They had janitors. Janitors on the rig. Uh-

SW: Sounds to me like they pampered you guys out there?

DS: They sure did. They really-

SW: I guess 'cause they figured if you way out there you can't leave, they're gonna keep you happy for a little while. [Chuckles]

DS: Uh hm. They were good, I mean. But they'd tell me, a lot of other companies [Phone ringing] didn't feed and do the things that Superior did.

SW: I've heard this, yeah.

DS: But this company, it was super.

SW: Did you have any experience with any unions that tried to-

DS: No. I'm not a union person. [Intercom rings; DS told he has a phone call]

[RECORDING TURNED OFF AND TURNED BACK ON]

SW: Did you ever, did uh, I know that there's a lot of anti-union feeling around here. Did they ever try to come and talk to you guys?

DS: They've talked to us, yeah, they did.

SW: They did-

DS: Then about the time that I was workin' uh, they had this guy, Cecil Babineaux. He was a uh, a big bluffer and a big union person, you know. And he did talk to me, this guy talked to me, but I told him I wasn't interested. And uh, he went on a rig down around uh, Church Point out there. And he was kind of musclin' around there and he acted as though he was pullin' a gun, that guy shot and killed him.

DD: Wow.

DS: Uh hm. Guy by the name of [Haem Hickenbottom?]. He didn't fool around with him. Cecil went, he was a big bluff and a big guy that just kind of try to throw his weight around. Well, that was his last trip.

SW: Huh. So the unions weren't too welcome around here.

DS: Uh uh. That must have been in the... '60s.

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DD: So Babineaux, actually he was pullin' a gun?

DS: Yeah, he pulled a gun.

DD: And so the other guy-

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

DS: No.

DD: Oh.

DS: He acted though, he didn't have a gun.

DD: Yeah, he was acting like it.

DS: Yeah.

DD: So the other guy actually had one-

DS: Had one, he shot him. And he was a dead guy.

SW: That's a dangerous bluff.

DS: I had some old run-in with a union guy, I'll tell you all after we get through this. It wasn't in the oilfield.

SW: Oh okay. Yeah, sounds like you don't have good feelings for that. But the reason we ask we the question is because we know that they did try to unionize the oilfield workers.

DS: They did try.

SW: And in some cases they did, but it was a lot of suspicion.

DS: Yeah, it wasn't, they try. This guy here tried. I'm gonna tell you what, he didn't make it.

DD: He didn't make it.

DS: Uh uh.

SW: Not at all. When you guys were out on the rig, what did y'all do besides, you said you-

DS: We had-

SW: You had some [breaks?] [Inaudible], what did y'all do your spare time?

DS: TV and play cards.

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SW: Play car-, any gamblin'?

DS: Yeah. Sure. Poker.

SW: Poker and Bourre?

DS: B-, not much Bourre, most of the guys liked to play Poker. Uh hm. [Slight pause] There were some who-

DD: Anybody lose their paychecks out there?

DS: Oh no, we wouldn't play no big stakes, but we play, you know, you'd win 100 dollars or so or lose that in a hitch, you know. Everybody kind of made [that way?], there was nobody cuttin' [at the table?], there was no house man. So without a house man, it's not bad gamblin'.

SW: Yeah, there's lose-

DS: [So/But?] when you have a house man. [Chuckling] They, you can't win. [All laugh] You can't win.

SW: You always had your money anyway, [you?] couldn't spend it out there anyway.

DS: No we couldn't spend it.

SW: 'Cause they provided everything for you.

DS: Well, people'd bring a little bit of money with 'em, you know.

SW: [Inaudible].

DS: I was uh, well I was single there, but I always carried some money on me.

DD: You wouldn't bring more than you could lose.

DS: No. No, but I never was worried about that.

DD: Yeah. [Chuckles]

DS: I never was [worried about that?].

SW: Said y'all watched TV, y'all caught some good reception out there?

DS: Yeah, it wasn't bad. We, well we used to, we wasn't used to a whole lot better so. [SW chuckles]

DD: That's true.

SW: Yeah, now they got satellites.

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DD: Back in the '60s.

DD: Yeah, we'd get off at midnight and uh, you could catch one or two stations out there. And they didn't have movies like they have today and stuff like that. And then if you got off at noon, well then you can watch maybe a ballgame in the afternoon or somethin' like that.

DD: Radio?

SW: Big Saints fan?

DS: Yeah, you had the radio. There was no Saints then.

SW: That's true, they came in '67. [Chuckles]

DS: Yeah, there was no Saints. I'm not a football [kind/guy?].

SW: Oh okay. Always gotta ask that question and see who is. [Chuckles] [Phone ringing]

DS: [Inaudible]. I, these guys, they big old overpaid bunch of guys [SW and DD chuckle] and they catch a pass they want to celebrate. That's that guy's job. That's their job.

DD: Exactly.

DS: I love baseball, I watch baseball all the time. I like Houston and I like Atlanta. [Pause]

SW: Um, like David said, how 'bout, how did y'all communicate with the shore? Was it radio?

DS: We had two-way radio.

SW: Two-way radio?

DS: Two-way radio. Uh h-, no telephones. Oh when you went out, you never talked back to your family before, unless you was in a bind. They'd call 'em or if they needed you, they could get ahold of you. They'd call, they called [Inaudible] our base. The [Inaudible] 24 hours there.

SW: How did y'all guys get out to the rigs? Boats?

DS: Uh, by boat it was, if the weather was bad and by helicopter if it was a good clear day.

SW: When did the helicopter start bringin' you guys out there?

DS: Well, I, they were there when we got there. Then I, when I got there. In the '50s they were there.

SW: Fifties, they were still runnin' 'em out there?

DS: Uh hm.

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SW: Sturdy helicopters or?

DS: Oh yeah. You'd give your weight and you could carry so much weight and um, the guys would 160, 180, one 200 pounds, and then they stopped and you would carry maybe 1,000 pounds at a time. And they'd make sometimes two trips. I think now they carry almost any weight.

DD: Yeah, they have those big freight helicopters [anyway?], so.

DS: Yeah. But at that time you could only carry... I think somebody to-, I told somebody, I said, "If I went to work in the derrick now, I'd have to work with my feet, I'd be holdin' on with my hands." [SW and DD chuckle] In them days, you know, you could walk, I mean, really it was like walkin' on the floor in there. I mean, but I wouldn't be able to do it no more. [SW chuckles] I know I couldn't do it.

SW: Did, anybody ever did any fishing off of the rigs?

DS: Yeah. Yeah, there were some fishing. There were some fishing. And you could catch, you could watch for the [ling?] fish, the lemon fish? And you'd watch for 'em and they caught a lot of fish. And some people brought it home. I might've brought some home a couple times [that/but?] I-

SW: You had to sneak that on the helicopter though?

DS: Huh? Oh yeah.

SW: [Maybe?] it added too much weight?

DS: No, but we'd tell 'em. Tell 'em [Inaudible, overlapping speech] weight.

SW: Tell 'em, just bring it on-

DS: If you had [Inaudible, overlapping speech]. Whatever the amount of weight you bring, you'd tell 'em. Turtles, sea turtle.

DD: Sea turtles?

DS: Yeah, we'd catch that. We killed one one time. I think it just go up over the water and dive back down. They just keep goin'. And this guy had a rifle. Now today I don't believe they carry-

DD: I doubt it.

DS: And uh, oh yeah, when he come up, he TWOO, it hit him. And uh, the turtle stayed on top of the water. And one guy from Cameron, I'll never forget, jumped overboard and swam out to where he was at. And he had to swim um, nearly... 50 yards, I'm gonna cut it back to 50 yards. Uh, he swam out there and got ahold of the turtle and [pulled?] him back to the rig, and that turtle, brought it back. Turtle wouldn't go down anymore, 'cause it would burn him, that-

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DD: Yeah, the saltwater.

DS: Uh huh. 'Course he had that blood comin' out, it was dangerous if a shark or somethin' would-

DD: Sharks.

DS: But we watched for the sharks. The water was clear, you could see-

DD: Do you eat those sea turtles?

DS: Huh? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we butchered that big thing, we brought it up on a crane, and brought it up on the rig, and butchered it. And took the shell and uh, I had put some caustic soda in it and kind of burn all that inside. And I don't really know whatever happened to that shell. I never brought it back. We put it up on the rig to dry and maybe the wind blew it over. They had a hel-, heliport up there.

SW: That old boy swam out there and [rowed/rolled?] that turtle back?

DS: Yeah.

SW: That's crazy.

DS: [Gavin Bineaux?], Bineaux did that.

DD: It sounds like somethin' a Bineaux would do. [DD and SW chuckle]

DS: Bineaux. [It was crazy?].

DD: I know them, so many Bineauxs and some of 'em are crazy too. [Chuckles]

DS: Yeah, well.

SW: That's a good story.

DS: Yeah, he got that horse, uh, that turtle back. And the roast on that turtle were big. I mean, there was some big pieces on it. I brought some home.

SW: Hm. I never tasted that. Curious.

DS: Turtle?

SW: Yeah.

DD: They eat a lot of it in the Caribbean, I know that.

DS: Uh hm.

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SW: In your opinion, what did the oil industry do for south Louisiana?

DS: [Inaudible] we didn't think there was a way to make a livin' other than on the drillin' rig.

SW: Really?

DS: So, and I worked alongside a cousin of mine. Me and him worked and went rig to rig together. We'd stay together. If I was drillin', he'd work derricks, if I was workin' derricks, he'd work on the floor. But he could've been a driller, he could've been anything he wanted to be. And in '66 we both quit to come on the racetrack. And we went broke.

DD: Really?

DS: And he went back in '66, no, he went back at the end of '66, in the fall of '66. He worked for Ocean Drilling Company. And uh, he, then things got a little better in '67, '68, and then we had some nicer horses, we had some, had more work. And he was quittin'. And about the hitch before he was gonna bring his clothes back, he got killed.

DD: Oh.

DS: Yeah.

SW: On the rig?

DS: No. On [describes circumstances surrounding his cousin's death – unrelated to oilfield.] It was a big, that was a big thing in my life. We were like twins. I mean, when you'd see one, you'd see both of us. And if we didn't have nobody to fight with, we'd fight me and him. [All laugh] He was some-, he was a man.

SW: So y'all went together to [Inaudible, overlapping speech] it didn't matter what you did.

DS: Oh yeah, everywhere. Everywhere together.

SW: What other options would you guys have had, what other, what else could you have done if it wouldn't've been for oil? Work on the farm?

DS: On the farm, [unless/I guess?] I drive a truck or somethin' like that. But the oilfield was the only thing that really you could make money at, you know. To have a job truck drivin', hell, you couldn't make no money drivin' truck. Thirty-five cents an hour probably.

SW: Oil was where it was at.

DS: Maybe five dollars a day, somethin' like that. So you, oilfield was [Inaudible] that.

SW: Yeah. Let me flip the question around, what did south Louisiana do for the oil companies? [Slight pause] The people or just the area?

DS: Well they furnished 'em some good hands, that's one thing. The people over here have good

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work ethics. And uh, we, the people in this area learned the business pretty, real good. We had some real good, smart oilfield people come out of here. They didn't all have to come out of Oklahoma or Texas or anywheres like that.

SW: Which is where they were originally comin' from in the first place.

DS: Well yeah, a lot T-, a lot of Texans.

SW: We caught up fast huh?

DS: But the Cajuns caught the thing good. Bosco was all Cajuns working there. All Cajuns.

DD: Tell us a little bit more about Bosco. We've heard it was really rough out there.

DS: Well, it was a lot of work. And there were no backhoes, there were no forklifts, and the, there was a lot of things they didn't have then, you know. You really had to work. And like the pipeline, if you run a pipeline, uh, we didn't have a cat to carry that pipe a quarter of a mile, we just two men'd put a joint of pipe on our shoulders and walk with it. And you didn't catch to much of the end, because it would leave too much of a [bed?] in the middle and it would bounce too much. You learned to-

DD: Kind of in the middle a little bit.

DS: Uh hm. And you learnt to lay them boards down and pickin' 'em up. And that's not no easy job. [DD chuckles]

SW: That's earnin' the money.

DS: Puttin' 'em down's not too bad, 'cause they usually dried and cleaned a little bit.

DD: Pickin' 'em up with all that mud on the bottom.

DS: Pickin' 'em up, suckin' down that mud, when you pick 'em up they were just SLURP suck up. Now they got, they don't even have that now. They have a forklift or a big crane puts down a mat. And the mat's eight foot wide and 14 feet long, you know.

DD: So they never have to go out there until they're ready to walk.

DS: That's it.

DD: A lot easier.

DS: Oh yeah. It's different, it's a whole lot different.

SW: Yeah. How did the people in the community of Bosco feel towards the-

DS: The oilfield? They were good.

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SW: They were welcoming, then?

DS: Oh yeah. Uh hm.

SW: Was, y'all make a lot of noise at night, didn't bother 'em? [Chuckles]

DS: No, they had flares. They had lot of flares. They might've had, I don't know, maybe 50 flares all over Bosco. Burnin' the excess gas, 'cause w-, at that time we didn't know [Inaudible] save the gas.

SW: Yeah, they just burn it off.

DS: You just burned the damn flare. They might've had 50 or maybe more flares. Just like [Inaudible]. They didn't have street lights, but they didn't need 'em.

SW: Naw, kept the place lit. [Chuckles]

DS: Kept it lit.

DD: Yeah, that's true. [Chuckles]

SW: I've read some stuff that the [Someone talking in background] that the, it was kind of rough out there. There was, the people drinking and fighting and everything.

DS: Oh that was, that, that's stories of them beer joints and stuff like that, yeah.

SW: Stories-

DS: But um, uh, let me tell you, yeah, them people [who work well out there?] if you were one of them out of towners and you [Inaudible] try to [hug up on their?] women or somethin' like that, they gonna get their knife in that.

DD: Really?

DS: Or somethin', they call 'em [Inaudible]. It was tough over. But like myself, hell, I was a Cajun then, it didn't make no difference. But they... if you went there and had a good time and didn't mess with nothin'...

SW: No problem.

DS: Yeah. People that got in trouble wanted trouble.

SW: They were lookin' for it, huh? [Chuckles]

DS: Uh hm. Uh hm. [Pause]

DD: Anything you had wished you had done in the oilfield that, do you wish you had stayed in the oilfield or not gotten into it at all?

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DS: No. No, I was glad to go on the racetrack. I love horses. Dogs, cats, I try to run over 'em if I see 'em in the road. [DD chuckles] I love horses. And I wanted to be with horses and I figured I could come on the racetrack and shoe horses. And my daddy was a horse shoer down the road and he really raised hell with me to quit that job to go come and shoe horses. But he would charge like five dollars to shoe a horse. On the track at that time was 17 dollars. And now it's closer a h-, 85 to 100 dollars, same job. But uh, I would, I'd shoe, and I shoed a lot of horses. A lot, a lot, a lot of horses. I got under them horses and. Lot of people say they, they're horse shoers and whatever, but you gotta get after, you gotta have a good back, not too smart [SW chuckles] and good heart to get under them horses.

DD: I'm sure you do.

DS: I did that, I did, I'll tell you what, I shoed uh, I try to average 60 head a week. Horses.

DD: Did you encourage your children or discourage your children from going in the oil industry or?

DS: No. But neither of 'em went.

DD: None of 'em went. Hm. You think they saw what you were doing and-

DS: My, I have three children. My oldest runs my place over here and I run the horse for 'em too. And she runs, she does all the bookwork, all of 'em. She graduated from Tulane. My oldest, my son, he graduated USL and he's a [Phone ringing] a [Inaudible] conservationist for Iberia Parish. And my youngest daughter she graduated USL, got a master's at Monroe, and she's got a doctorate degree in sport's medicine. And she's teachin' in Indiana.

DD: A good place.

DS: Indiana. You know, you from-

DD: I, no, I've lived there for a little while though.

DS: She's at Terre Haute.

DD: Terre Haute? Okay. Been through there. Quite a few times.

DS: And I, I don't know, USL never get to par with the rest of 'em on that kind of proj-, program. Don't look like it. [All chuckle] But she's happy over there. She's not married, she's single. She comes home 'bout every six months. [Slight pause]

SW: When you were workin' on the rigs, did you ever see, I know it probably wasn't very common at that time, did you ever see any women or any black people workin' on the rigs?

DS: No. No.

SW: Not at all?

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DS: No women and no blacks at all. There were no such thing in that. The only time, on Sundays sometimes the women would come on a fishing crew, a fishing uh, and they'd be fishing down below. That's the only time you saw any women there.

SW: Never on the rig?

DS: No no. Uh uh.

DD: Did y'all hoot and holler at the women? [SW chuckles]

DS: Oh yeah.

DD: Hadn't seen any in a week.

SW: [Yeah, you'd give?] 'em a hard time. [Slight pause]

DS: Yeah, there was no women. It's hard for me to believe that.

DD: Really?

DS: And I've been raised with black people, but I never went to school with any.

DD: That's true.

DS: And I never worked with any blacks in the oilfield. In Cameron, Holly Beach and [place like?]. If you sent a truck driver, black truck driver there and he had a breakdown, you might as well go get your truck, 'cause you didn't have no more driver. He would not sleep there.

DD: Really?

DS: Oh yeah, they'd kill him. They'd bring, they'd feed 'em to alligator.

DD: Wow.

DS: That wasn't no bullshit either.

DD: I believe you.

SW: Down by Hackberry and all those places?

DS: Hackberry, yeah, Hackberry, that's the place.

SW: Yeah, I know where you're talkin' about.

DS: Hackberry, oh no. I worked in Hackberry, too.

SW: Some good crabbing right there. [Chuckles]

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DS: Oh yeah. On land, I worked on land down at Hackberry. [Pause]

DD: Anything else you'd like to add?

DS: [Inaudible]-

SW: Any regrets?

DS: No, I don't have no regrets. Got all my fingers.

SW: And they paid you some good money.

DS: They paid me good money. And I don't have nothin' to do with this, nothin' bad to say for the company.

SW: Yeah, you worked for a good company.

DS: I worked for a good company. And you know today we still have a reunion every year of the old Superior hands. And they still, they call m-, I didn't retire with 'em, I just quit. And they still got me on the list and I, whenever I can I meet with 'em, I go.

SW: When does that happen? [Slight pause]

DS: Usually about April.

SW: Okay. [Suggests that some of those guys would like to be interviewed; DS suggests they contact A. G. Domain.] That's pretty much all we have, unless you wanted to add somethin'?

DS: No.

DD: Or did you want to add the story about the unions when you were-

DS: No.

DD: After you, or you want us to turn it off first.

DS: Well I'll tell ya after you turn it off. [Phone ringing; DD chuckles] You kno-

[END OF RECORDING]