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Interviewee: Leon Comeaux  
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz  
Interview Date: August 15, 2002  
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA  
Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW024  
Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: Most of the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed.]

Ethnographic preface:

Leon Comeaux was born in Carencro, Louisiana in 1936. His father was a dairyman for a while and later became a salesman selling dairy-related products. He went to Southwestern Louisiana Institute from 1954 and received a degree in geology in 1958. Jobs were hard to find, so he ended up roughnecking and roustabouting for Superior Oil Company. After being knocked out on a rig, he started doing relief office work in Dulac. In 1960, he got a position as a geologist. He did geology work (evaluating and logging wells, mapping, paleo) onshore and offshore; in 1967, he got into unitization work as well. In 1976, He left the company when it began to be reorganized; he went to work for Ted Hoz, a premier unitization geologist. Hoz gave Comeaux the business when he retired in 1986.

## TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [LC]

SW: Mr. Leon Comeaux. It's August fifteenth, 2002, in his office. And uh, usually we just start off, like I said, a name like Comeaux, I figure you're from around here.

LC: I'm from Carencro.

SW: Carencro. What year were you born?

LC: Nineteen thirty-six.

SW: That's my father's generation. And obviously raised here and went to school at UL. What did your family do? What'd your father do for an occupation?

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LC: He was a dairyman for awhile and then he uh, he just sold [beer?] or sold dairy feed or, 'cause he knew something about the dairy. And then that's wh-, he had little jobs. [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

SW: Not much, not much involvement in the oil industry at all?

LC: Oh no, not at all. He was even a, a newspaper delivery in his old, old age.

SW: You did what you could back then, huh?

LC: Well, you gotta make a livin'.

SW: How did you get involved in the oil patch?

LC: I got a degree in geology and went to school. Didn't know for sure what I wanted, but uh, it sounded interesting and it was the area, the Louisiana ar-, oil and gas, so uh, I did uh, go through the four-year program.

SW: So at that time, things were up and coming and maybe it was-

LC: Well, in, in '54 when I started, uh, things were lookin' great. By the time I got out in '58, uh, there were no jobs. There were no jobs. I think in, there were 38 people in our class and uh, I'm not sure that maybe a half a dozen that actually went into, into geology itself. You know, they were all in some other related, probably related industries, but uh, it was tough. I ended up starting out as a roughneck for Superior Oil Company. That's how I got in and I didn't tell 'em I had a degree.

SW: No, because they would've tried to make you do-

LC: Well, no, they wouldn't have given me the job.

SW: Oh, you were overqualified?

LC: Right.

SW: Okay. That was in 1958 for Superior?

LC: Yes.

SW: You went offshore or onshore?

LC: I was, started out as a, as a... roughneck on a workover rig in Bosco.

SW: Oh, alright.

LC: And uh, and uh, that was in November of 1958. Took me a few months to get that job. Before that I was laying cement on a cement [hopper?]. Just before my wife had our first child. And so uh, at Christmas time I was told that they were shutting the rig down. We had a miserable Christmas. It was bad. I went home. But he said, "We might call you back." The pusher said, "We might call you back." Well they did. In January I got a call and uh, I was sent uh, offshore.

SW: In '59?

LC: In '59.

SW: You still with Superior?

LC: I was still with Superior.

SW: And you roughnecked out there?

LC: I didn't, I roustabouted out there.

SW: What's the, I've heard different definitions, but your [Inaudible], your definition, the difference between the roughneck and the roustabout.

LC: Well the roughneck is handling pipe and, and the drilling aspect. The mud, handling the mud, that's what they do. People on the rig. The, the, uh, [two of?] the other guys, uh they ha-, they were hauling pipe around, they were painting and scrubbing and chipping and, you know, keeping the rig in, in good shape.

SW: Okay. Which one's better?

LC: Ohhh. Offshore in wintertime there isn't any. [SW laughs] I was there in January. It was cold.

SW: Yeah, I [been in/I bet on?] the water.

LC: It was terrible. And uh, we were sent from the main rig to a little bitty platform. It was no more than 10 by 10. It was a little bitty platform. And we were taking the tubing out. We were replacing tubing in this, this well. There's no protection. And the wind is blowing. You got a little [Inaudible] unit that's pulling one joint at a time and stacking it. And we stayed there all day long. And then they come pick you up, bring you in at night.

SW: Oh, how far offshore?

LC: Well, we were, we were probably no more than 40 feet of water, so it was inland.

SW: Close inland.

LC: It was probably still in uh, in the state waters. You know, within the three mile limit. Because today, you know, [Inaudible] today you drilling in, in six, seven thousand feet of water.

SW: So that was, could you see the land at that point?

LC: No.

SW: Or was it too far out?

LC: It was probably a three or four hour boat ride, you know, one of the slow boats.

SW: They brought you out and brought you back every day?

LC: Yeah, yes.

SW: So you didn't stay out-

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LC: Oh no, no, no. No, no. We went back to the main rig.

SW: Oh, okay.

LC: The main, main drilling platform.

SW: And go out to these other [ones?]-

LC: Yeah, it was a ten-, we were workin' ten-and-five. Ten hour-, 10 ou-, 10 out and four in-, four in, 'cause we lost the time coming in and out.

SW: So did you work a night shift too or 12 hour days?

LC: Just 12, 12 hours.

SW: Twelve hour days. Nights, nights [Inaudible]?

LC: [Oh yeah?]. They don't take the lights off off the rig.

SW: [Chuckles] That's what I hear. [Pause] So, how long'd you do that for?

LC: Oh, no, uh, uh, just a few months.

SW: Just a few.

LC: And just about the time that uh, the toolpusher find, found out I had a degree.

SW: Oh.

LC: He found out I had a degree and uh, he said, "Well we need you in the office?" [Inaudible] on the offshore rig. And I'm supposed to report to the office the following morning, a Monday morning. Sunday afternoon they call and they said, you needed, they needed so many men to relieve for vacations in Houma. Yes. So off I went. I never got to the office. [SW laughs] So I, I ended up on a, on a steam rig. [Inaudible] they were drilling deep, deep wells. It was on a steam rig, which was a little bit different uh, than the other types that I. So I did that for a few months and then I was, I was working on the middle finger on [four-bolt?]. You, you pulling four joints. And I was workin' the middle finger, helping the guy upstairs to pull the pipe as you're stacking and you're coming out of the hole, going in the hole. Four joints is a lot for one man to, to, to handle. So I was working middle finger and I uh, we were out the hole and I, so I'm coming down and I'm gonna help him break the bit. So we come out the hole to, to change the bit, put a new, new bit that's worn and go back and start drilling again. You just come out and then you go back in.

SW: And the deeper you get, the longer the time takes to pull it out and go back in.

LC: That's right. Well, when I got to the floor, I'm, I'm messin' around and helping everybody and there's a backup tong that, that you break the pipe, pipe with, you know, the joints. Well the back up cable, or the cable on the backup tong broke. And it hit me in the chest and knocked me out. And so they naturally got me into the hospital immediately, but uh, it was just, I was knocked out, but no, no injury. And so uh, I never went back. I never went back to the rig. Now this was in the marsh. But, there was a production office south of Houma, called Dulac. Superior had this little production office. And they needed somebody for uh, to, to uh, relief for vacations.

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SW: Again. [Both chuckle]

LC: Again. So uh, I moved in there and uh, I was on a eight-hour shift, from three to 11. Five days a week. My days off were Monday and Tuesday. I did that for about nine months.

SW: Sounds like a man could make up, make a career out of relievin' people-

LC: Well, it, it worked out for me, 'cause I, you know, I needed to work. And uh, eventually I was so bored sitting there answering the, the phone, radio operator is really what it was.

SW: Oh okay.

LC: And uh, you know, gettin' stuff from rig to office, you know, orderin' supplies and stuff like that, that I was bored, so I had came to Lafayette and I asked uh, this, they needed a superintendent. And I told 'em I had a degree and that I, I, I, you know, I could do more than, you know, answer the phone. And uh, I suggested that he help, he allow me to read the charts, the gas charts. So I started doin' that. But in the meantime, he uh, he found a slot for me. One of the geologists quit. And so I got the call and I came in as a geologist, which was in June of 1960. Now I am a geologist.

SW: So it's like uh, they wouldn't have hired you if you told 'em you had a degree, so, so you let 'em hire you to do the bottom stuff so you could get your foot-

LC: I had about a year and a half of GOOD, GOOD experience.

SW: And get your foot in the door.

LC: Well, now, you know, I can talk about the rig, I know, I, I did, I've worked the mud pit. You know, I, I did a lot of things that maybe a geologist moving right into an office and starting to map. You know, I know a lot of, in fact, even before that, I forgot, I did also put a three-month stint as a uh, a roustabout in the production pro-, see I had, I had switched to production. And I, they sent me for three months, I was hooking up, now, I'm, I'm just a hand now. But I was he-, hooking up heaters, and treaters, and separators. Things, things that, that you have to have to get, to produce that well. So I, I [had?] more experience. So I, after a year and a half, you say, gosh, I wasted a year and a half. Now I'm a geologist, but it was not wasted at all. It was really good experience.

SW: Which did you prefer, the production or the drilling?

LC: Uhh, it's, it's the same. All the same. It's nothing like geology.

SW: Was one more dangerous than the other?

LC: Oh, probably the rig. You know the first day, the first day on that, on that workover rig, you coming in and out of the hole and you have a chain that helps you uh, spin the pipe. Well, I'm looking around at the guys around the, around the, the, the floor there, and you see this guy's got this finger missing and this guys got these two. And, and that's the first job I had. I mean, the first day I'm on, I'm, they give me the, you know, you got some gloves on and they give you this, and, and you, you throw the chain and then the, the driller pulls on, on his lever and, and it's, it's spinning. And you're holding it. And it, and you have to be careful when you get to the end that, that you don't get your finger caught in that, in that chain.

SW: Oh okay.

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LC: Yeah, so it's uh, it was uh, that, that's a little more, plus getting hit with that, with that backup tong. Heck if I'd been stooping down a little bit-

SW: [Inaudible].

LC: Although I had a safety had. I did have a safety hat. [Both laugh] I'm kiddin' with you. But uh, so that gets me to uh, roustabouting. And then I came I the office. I, I was a, a junior geological engineer. I was working in a, in a drilling department. We didn't have a geological section. We were geologists, we were four geologists, but working with the engineers. We did the mapping and stuff like that. But uh, we were not in a geological department. The engineers were in control.

SW: And that was 1960?

LC: Nineteen sixty.

SW: And you pretty much stayed, you've been doing that sort of thing since-

LC: Well-

SW: Or?

LC: Um, not really. Uh. Primarily what we were doing is, is evaluating the wells as they are being drilled. You know if you're drilling a well, you, you don't want to drill to [TD?] and not know what you have in that hole. You know, if you have a 15,000 foot well, well you have to do it anyhow, because there are levels of pressure, see. So you drill to 12,000 feet and you're reaching a point where the pressure's gonna start increasing. Well, the shallower formations have lower pressure, so you have to protect the, the lower pressured formations because if you drill deeper, then you're gonna get a blowout. So that, you have to set up a, a program, a casing program.

SW: Yeah, you've got casing around it-

LC: Yeah, to, to protect the sands that have less pressure. So we would go out and log the wells, evaluate the sands, if they were productive, or we'd run the various tools, the induction logs, the micro logs, the uh, the sonic logs, the, all of these various logs, although today it's a lot more sophisticated than that. Uh, but anyhow, that's, we evaluated wells.

SW: As, as it's being drilled, uh, how, are you getting samples from in the hole?

LC: Oh, I, by the way, I, I was also a paleontologist.

SW: Okay.

LC: Yeah. Uh, I, I didn't, did uh, we did evaluate the, the cuttings as, as they're drilling. It's in a, in a bag and it's every 30 feet they catch a sample of the cuttings.

SW: In, in, the drilling, the pipe that's drilling, doing the drilling? [Slight pause]

LC: Well, what's happening is when you're drilling, there are some jets at the bottom of the bit. So that you, you're, you're drilling, but you, with, with fluid, called "mud," you're, you jetting and then those cuttings have to come out of the hole. You-

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SW: [Inaudible]-

LC: Oh you can't, you can't, it'll, it'll s-, uh, it'll lock it up. So, and it's coming over a shaker. These samples come over the shaker, the mud goes back in the bit, the samples go, you know-

SW: [Inaudible].

LC: And then you, every, every 30, whenever you have a joint, you go ahead and fill up the little bag. Now, I was doin' that too when I was offshore. And, at [Inaudible, sounds like a place name]. Uh, but when I became a geologist, I also started doin' paleontology. Uh. There are little animals that are made of calcium. Now the animal dies, this is a million years ago, the animal dies, but the shell is very hard. And they're microscopic. But that, we can, we can process that sample and it, it breaks down the shales, because the, the little bugs are in the offshore waters. And there're millions and millions. In fact, I wish I had my microscope, I'd, I'd show you some samples. I have, you know, a lot of samples from 18 years of, of looking. In fact, I wanna, I wanna take my samples to s-, to some schools. You know, let the kids see that, really get 'em interested in, in, in something, anything, you know. But uh [Pause] we used to sit on, out on the rig looking for these pressure points I'm talking about. We're, we're drilling down and we know that we're getting to pressure. And sometimes there's gonna be a little big that comes in just above pressure. Well, you're out there looking for a sample and you're, you're washing a sample, you go look at it, then you come back because it's a long way out there. And you don't want that thing to blowout with you on that rig. You know, so, so you, you continue washing samples and keep looking for that bug, and if you can find it, you'd stop. And then we'd log and then we'd find out where we were, because we were comparing this drilling well to a well that's already drilled.

SW: Or maybe seismic charts that have uh-

LC: No.

SW: Measures. A well that's already drilled, 'cause y'all goin' on that same reservoir?

LC: Well, uh, we'll find out after we drill.

SW: I gotcha.

LC: I mean, we don't know. There may be, we may be drilling in a, in a separate [fault?] line. Uh.

SW: Things like that, it's complicated. [Both laugh] Well I just, I, I have a basic understandin' just from talkin' to people, but I like to, to get-

LC: Right, right.

SW: Get more, you know, as I go-

LC: But, you know, we, you can compare well to well. Just like we comparing the paleontology, these, there's various little regional foraminifera, which is what it is. These little animals we're talkin' about. They are, you can, you can follow them from well to well. And, and when you, when you washing those samples you can find, and then, then you have a depth here and you have a depth here. Or you have a depth here. And then you have to figure out well what, why is it, is it just structure or is it faulting? You know, what's, what's causing that.

SW: Right, because you have some shallow wells and then some that are deeper.

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LC: Well, the deeper you go, the less control you have. That's, that's standard.

SW: Tell me how, how you, they know that, that the reservoirs at, at 2,000 feet or whatever? So they start drillin'. What do they do right before they get to it? If they get to it and they hit it, and they puncture it, isn't it gonna blow it out?

LC: No. Well... in most cases no. If it does blowout that means you didn't have enough mud weight. You, you're mud has to, has to be heavy enough to control that pressure. But at 2,000 feet there isn't pressure.

SW: Yeah, right. It's much further lower.

LC: Right. But, but it's, again, and the guy on that rig, that mud man, well, the toolpusher's makin' sure that he's, he's got his mud at the right viscosity and mud weight. You know, and there's chemicals that they mix, uh, you know, to, to keep that, that mud in good shape. And uh, so if, if you have enough mud weight, in fact, in the early days, for Superior Oil Company, we always had our mud way, way to high. Too, too heavy. Which slowed the drilling down. But today the technology is, they want that mud weight to be just, just enough. Not, not three pounds over, they want it just enough. And, and, and the drilling goes a lot faster.

SW: Right, but you guys were doing it for safety reasons.

LC: Well, no, I, I-

SW: Or were they just-

LC: I wasn't doin' it for any reason, I'm doin' it because somebody told me to do it. You know, I'm, I'm not the toolpusher.

SW: I'm just followin'-

LC: I'm just a hand. See so, yeah. But even, even on, even the geologist on the rig has nothing to do with telling, telling them what kind of mud weight. That, that's not what we were doin'. We were just there to get in the Schlumberger unit and, and witness the logging of that section, that new section. And then we splice it on to our previously logged section, and then we correlate to the other well, the surrounding wells, and then we call in and say, "This is what we've got. We've got, we've got a sand uh, the [bomex?] sand at uh, 13,644 feet, and it's 100 feet thick, and it's full to the base." Or, "There's a water level in it. We only have 50 feet of column, 50 feet of productive sand in 100 foot of sand." You know, we'd evaluated the well. And then-

SW: That was, that was-

LC: Hopefully come home.

SW: That was for Superior?

LC: Yeah.

SW: But you'd go out on a Schlumberger drilling rig, 'cause they contracted-

LC: Well, it's not a drilling rig. There's a, Schlumberger has a unit, a Schlumberger logging unit on, on the rig.

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SW: Oh. I see.

LC: We just go in and, and witness. We, we didn't, we didn't log it, they did that. I didn't know how to do that part. And uh, but they had to furnish me the product.

SW: Right. And this mud you're talkin' about, if this is the, the drilling pipe, and the casing is going around it, the mud goes in around the pipe?

LC: Yeah. It, well it, it's between the drilling, see the jets are in the drill pipe. And you're pumping down the drill pipe as you're, as you're drilling. Well, that, bu-, well even, you have the casing, but at some point you drill out of casing. And then you have another open hole below that. So the mud is, that, that mud is coming up the open hole and then it gets into the casing, comes on up, until you set another string of, of casing.

SW: I see.

LC: And you put one string of casing in the other.

SW: It goes in the hollow part of the drilling pipe and comes out at the bottom and fills it up, and that's what keeps the underneath pressure from blowing the thing out.

LC: Well, mud weight is what controls the, you need enough mud weight to off balance the pressure as you get deeper.

SW: Okay, how much weight we talkin' about, just a normal hole you talking about?

LC: Just normal it's, you know-

SW: It's a, let's say-

LC: It's shallow it's uh, maybe 10 pounds of mud. You get a little deeper it might be 13, a little deeper it might be 15 pounds per gallon.

SW: It just stacks on top is what it is.

LC: Well, the deeper you go, the heavier the weight of, of mud to hold the pressure back.

SW: I got you. It's very interesting. [Chuckles] What about uh, when you were out there, you workin' ten-and-five and, and all of this. Did they feed you guys out there?

LC: Oh my goodness. [Slight pause] Superior Oil Company was known for that.

SW: You mentioned that on phone.

LC: Now, now I do have, that's the only company I ever worked for, so I, I really can't compare, but let me tell you, they had, they had the best food. Uh. E-, not only in the offshore rigs, but they had uh, Superior had the, the [William Keck?]. It was a premier drilling rig. It was fantastic. You know, living quarters and all of that, you know. Food was outstanding.

SW: They had outside catering or uh, somebody who worked for the company-

LC: All company, company workers. Yep.

SW: Would feed-

LC: Then, now I don't know later on what happened, I left.

SW: Yeah, I think some of 'em have changed.

LC: Yeah.

SW: [I hear that uh?] they'd cook you any one, at any time you want [Inaudible]-

LC: Well, it's meal, four meals a day, they were cookin' four times a day. Plus you get a snack [Inaudible].

SW: Did they want to keep you guys happy?

LC: Oh, I don't-

SW: [Chuckling] Keep you well-fed?

LC: I don't know why they did it, but they did it.

SW: What about entertainment, what'd you guys do uh, if you uh, when you weren't working? Were you too tired, just went to bed?

LC: Oh no, no. I, I don't recall, I'm, so I'm sure they had T.V. I guess.

SW: T.V. Radios, stuff like that.

LC: Slept.

SW: Slept, yeah, well, that's what some of the guys were tellin' us, said, "We were just so tired, we ate and went to bed." [Laughs]

LC: Well when I, well, that, that was the case when I was roust-, roustaboutin' I'm sure. But once I became a geologist, uh, you know, I, I just messed around and did whatever I wanted until I, they were ready for me.

SW: It wasn't as physically demanding-

LC: But sometimes you had to sit there and wait three or four days if they were havin' trouble with the, with the, with the drilling of the well.

SW: [When?] something backed up it always affected you.

LC: Well, I'd just have to wait. We road the boats for several years before they started using helicopters, before I got to use the helicopters, put it that way. You know. Uh, but uh, in the end, I, I was there 'til '76, uh-

SW: So you did geology work offshore 'til '76?

LC: Yes. Well, but I mean, not only offshore, but I, we were doing Louisiana, we were doing offshore, we were even uh, logging wells in uh, in Alabama and uh, heck, we even did some in the [Jay?] Field in Florida. But that was minimal. [Pause] And that was the beauty of our job, we only had four people workin' all of those areas. So we never felt uh, we were gonna lose our jobs. Even, even in the hard, you know, even the

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slowdown periods. We had, still had plenty to do, so, yeah, we were workin' a little hard. I, I don't know that I was there for any of my five children. You know.

SW: That's what I've, I've heard is that the oil companies they, they, y'all were always undermanned, so they always-

LC: And, and, but the more people you have, then, with four, with four of us, it, it, I never felt uh, worried about my job.

SW: You always had job security, that's good. 'Cause, you know, a lot of other people that [Inaudible]. [Chuckles]

LC: Yes indeed.

SW: So uh, so it was just a, just a uh, ah, I'm tryin' to get my timeline straight. Uh, right around 1960 you did the roughneck, roustabouting stuff.

LC: Uh hm.

SW: And then you got the geology job. So, when you got the geology job, you did continue to go offshore in some cases?

LC: Oh yeah, oh.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech] and that was still 1960s.

LC: Probably every week. But Superior had, probably had eight or nine rigs goin' at that time. So we were really, really busy.

SW: When you weren't-

LC: Offshore and onshore. Both on-, onshore, too. You know, we, we had a lot of land work.

SW: [Things?] goin' on.

LC: Oh yeah.

SW: When um, what was your, your schedule as a geologist when you went offshore, just job completion or did you have a set schedule if you went out there?

LC: No, just go log the well and come in.

SW: Then you'd come in, that was it.

LC: Oh yeah.

SW: You were done. If you had to wait for [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

LC: Well, it, yeah. Yeah.

SW: But it wasn't back like the ten-and-four or seven-and-seven?

LC: Oh no. No, no, no.

SW: A little bit different.

LC: And if I'm sitting on a well with, lookin' for that bug, uh, it may last a week, it may last 10 days, it just stay there until-

SW: 'Til you see it.

LC: Don't let it blowout.

SW: That's the key. [Both laugh]

LC: Yeah.

SW: A blowout's not too good from what I hear.

LC: I don't swim well. [SW laughs] I'm not a good swimmer.

SW: When did the helicopters come in? When did you start ridin' 'em?

LC: Oh, I don't know, it was uh-

SW: Sixties, mid '60s?

LC: Probably later than that. But I, I really, I don't remember.

SW: Was that a better way to travel?

LC: The weather, when the weather was bad, we'd take the uh, these big, big war boats that hauled the Schlumberger units out. And the s-, the personnel, you know, with all of their equipment. Uh, if not, we would, we would uh, go in on a crew boat. And I remember one time we uh, had a hurricane coming. And uh, so they decided to send us in. So we got on the boat and it was a diesel, diesel. Boy it was rough. And we had, you had to swing off, there was a rope hanging, uh, and then you go down to the platform and then you'd, you'd swing onto the boat. Now that was difficult. 'Fact a friend of mine-

SW: Sounds like fun.

LC: Friend of mine fell in the water. He fell in the water and the boat's coming, [Claps] hit him against that, that [bulkhead?]

SW: Yeah, so you have to watch him.

LC: And he fell in, now, he didn't, lucky he didn't, he [moved?], he, I don't know how he, he didn't get killed, but he didn't. But uh, we were comin' in and it was rough and everybody was gettin' sick so we decided we got to open the [back/pack doors?]. Diesel started comin' in there. Everybody, everybody's sick as dogs. [Laughs]

SW: It made it worse, huh?

LC: Oh, my goodness. But uh, the weather gets bad out there. Although this is, and this is shallow. And uh-

SW: 'Cause y'all could still take a boat out there and-

LC: Yeah, yeah.

SW: [Took a/in a?] decent amount of time.

LC: But if we had taken the big war boat, if it had been available, it wouldn't have been as bad.

SW: Yeah, the bigger the boat, the less-

LC: Yeah.

SW: When the helicopters came out, sure you'd get out there much faster.

LC: Well, but there's a problem with that. If there's a fog you can't fly. Yeah, then you got to decide, "Well, okay guys, do y'all want to go in a boat and take four hours or do you want to wait for the 'copter, which should take you 30 minutes?" Well, if the, if the fog doesn't lift, you still there. So you go to make that choice. So you, sometimes we'd take it, go on the boat, sometimes we'd go on, on the 'copter.

SW: You prefer 'chopter, helicopter?

LC: Oh, oh, oh yes. [Laughs]

SW: [Inaudible].

LC: [Absolumo?]. [Both laugh]

SW: I talked with an old boy in Abbeville, he said the first 'chopter he got on, they didn't take the uh, on land they didn't take the rope off. He took off and crashed. He said the company sent another 'copter out and picked 'em up and sent 'em offshore. [Laughs] Nobody was hurt, so they just-

LC: Yep, [alright?].

SW: They shipped 'em off to work. But he didn't like 'em since then. [Both laugh] Did you ever, you have any crashes or saw any crashes?

LC: Oh no. No. You know, I heard about 'em, but lucky I never experienced that.

SW: Figure with all the traffic, somethin's gotta go wrong at some point. You ever see any women offshore when you were workin'?

LC: I don't, I don't think so. [Pause]

SW: No roughnecks or roustabouts or just?

LC: Not, not that I, not that I recall.

SW: How about Black people, any Black people or, or minorities [Inaudible, overlapping speech]?

LC: I don't think so.

SW: [Inaudible]

LC: I just don't think so.

SW: Yeah, well, most of the people I've talked to say, "A few here and there, but not much," usually.

LC: But [none?] of my experience offshore was-

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

LC: In, in that respect, uh, I, I, I run out there and do my thing, and come home.

SW: You weren't stayin' out on the rigs a lot so. But you had a short period of time when you were out there, so [you know it's?] a little different. Uh, did Superior, uh, did I ask you if they paid you well? [Slight pause]

LC: Yeah. I raised five kids. Put 'em all through college.

SW: That's pretty well. [Chuckles]

LC: So. Yeah. Uh. Started out I think at uh, 19... well, actually I probably took a little cut in pay when I left the rig, because I was doin' a lot of overtime, 'cause I [Inaudible]-

SW: Yeah, that, that's where you make it.

LC: I makin', yeah. And uh, when I went in the office, I think I was makin' 600 dollars a month. That was in 1960.

SW: That's, that's pretty good, yeah.

LC: And uh, and then every year I get my little, my little raise, every year. And that went on uh, until I started uh, doing [unitization?] work. That's another, 'nother part of my life, which is what I'm, what I'm doin' now.

SW: [Inaudible].

LC: And I don't know, I started looking at stuff maybe in '65, '66. And I started actually representing the company maybe in '67. You know, actually presenting evidence in support of, of units. Who's gonna share in the production. About in '67. And then I continued doing that along with mapping, along with paleo, along with logging wells.

SW: More duties, huh?

LC: I doing, yeah. But we were all doin' that. I mean, it's, it's the way, that's what, that's what I was hired for. And uh, and I did that until 1976. I was, I was the man. I was hearing unitization [demand/command?]. Although I didn't have that title, I had a, I was just, well, by then I was a senior geological engineer. And uh, the funny thing about that is is when I hired on, the uh, my boss says that, "You're on a six-month probation. We're gonna watch you for six months." Eighteen years later, I'm senior man and I, and I'm [leading/leaving?] and nobody had ever told me that I was past the probation stage. [Both laugh] I thought that was funny. But it never came around. Nobody ever said, but I still got my raises every year, so I knew I was doin' okay.

SW: They never came to you and said, "Alright, you can still work here." [Laughs]

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LC: Yeah, right. Ne-, never happened. But uh, in '76, I, there was a unitization specialist uh, who was an independent out of New Orleans and they, I, I had been doin' all this [steering?] work and I was competin' against him and uh, he liked what he saw. And he started in '74 to get me to leave the Superior Oil Company.

SW: So he was tryin' to recruit.

LC: It took him two years. It took him two years. In '76, Superior Oil Company had hired a, an ex-Mobil executive to reorganize the company. See, Superior was a, a family-owned company. And uh, this guy came in and I'm telling you, it was bad. You know, he, he'd have these meetings and he'd say, "Okay gentlemen, I'm gonna, I'm here to show you all how to find oil and gas." And then he'd hire Exxon and Mobil people to come in. But now we were the guys who were showing them, you know, all of the fields and, you know, getting their feet on the ground. That's what we were doing for them. And uh, by April, by April of uh, of '76, uh, I saw the hi-, the writing on the wall that more than likely, some of us were gonna be gone, because they were bringin' in these high-powered [Slight pause] you know, people from these big companies. And so I made a phone call and I told my, my former partner, "I might be ready." And he uh, he said, "Look, I'm uh, I'm comin' to town Saturday." He was dating a girl. And so he came to town, we met at the uh, Sheraton that's not there anymore. The big vacant lot. There was a restaurant in there. And we sat down. Now remember, I've been with the same company [in my little cubby hole?] for 18 years. So we sit down and first thing he says, he says, "What do you want?" [Both laugh] I'm sittin' there, "What do I want?" I said, "Offer me somethin'." He offered me something. I said, "Hey, that's fine. That's fine." He wanted me to go to New Orleans, though, and uh, I, I wouldn't go to New Orleans. So he said, "Well, I need an office Lafayette." So we opened an office in Lafayette. That's what I did, I opened an office in Lafayette. And I told him, I said, "I know you [Inaudible], I accepted what you offered me, but," I said, "it won't take you long to know I'm worth more than that." And six months later I had 10 percent of the business. So it, it just, it, I was wor-, I worked hard. You know, but he saw his, my value and, and from then on, he just kept giving me more and more and more. And I didn't need a contract with him either. His word-

SW: No probation period.

LC: His word was, you know. And uh, 'fact he and I owned this building together.

SW: Oh, what was his name again?

LC: Ted Hoz. H-O-Z. He, it was THE premier unitization geologist forever. Now I know Frank Harrison is another one. Uh, but this guy, he retired in '89. Gave me the business.

SW: [Inaudible] at right now.

LC: Well I took in, in eigh-, in ninety... '94-, in, well he, he gave us the business in '89 and then I took in, you know, the younger guys that had been with him for 20 years. I took them in as my partner until '94 and at that, at that point, in '94, things were startin' to slow down. They had an office in New Orleans and I had this office here. So we were, we were partners. But in '94 the business started slowing down a little bit. And so we decided maybe it's best if we all split up and then we'll fight each other. So that's what we're doing today. We're all-

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech] associates.

LC: With my group, my son David is here. He's a '86 graduate of USL. And great, doing just unbelievable. And then I have Bill McAllister, who has been with me about 28, 21 years. LSU graduate. Uh. Unbelievable workers.

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SW: So good guys.

LC: So, so now, they are becoming, they're, they gonna be taking over the business, because if my partner gave it to me, I gotta give it to them. Now, it's not, no problem giving it to my son, but the other guy has been so faithful. 'Fact, that guy he had left me for two years, but his father was a geologist who had gotten a contract and he wanted his son to go work with him. And I said, "Well, Bill, go ahead. I mean, I, I'm delighted that you and your dad can work together." But he got a two-year contract and two years later uh, the contract expired and the guy didn't renew the contract. So Bill uh, is out lookin' for a job. Well he had interviewed with a woman in, in uh, Atlanta. And he had given my name as a reference. So the woman calls me and she tells me about, she had interviewed Bill McAllister. "Oh," I said, "great man." I said, "This guy, he is just, he is as good a worker as you ever gonna find. Hire him now, right now." So she does. Well, he calls me and he tells me he got the job and he's uh, moving up there. He's gonna report Monday morning. So Sunday I'm, I'm struggling with that. He's such a good hand. I don't need him. I call him up Sunday night. Now he has four little children, four small children. He's got to go rent an apartment, work, then he has to come back on weekends. Gotta get the apartment, he's got expenses, he's got a family here, he's got. I said, "Bill, tell you what I'm gonna do." I said, "I will pay you whatever they're gonna pay you over there." Consider what he's gonna save. "And you come back to work and if we start getting back, you know, I'll get you back to your salary that you were." You, Monday morning he's there. And he's been with me ever since. And I'm gonna give him the business. See? So it uh, it's worked out for me just beautiful. Just great.

SW: Sounds like a good story.

LC: Well, I'm stickin' to it.

SW: [Laughs] No, I didn't mean. [Both laugh]

LC: Yeah.

SW: Um, so doesn't sound like you have any regrets for the oil industry? [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

LC: Oh, my goodness no. You know, coming from Carencro, just a small community.

SW: My parents live down there.

LC: Uh, I had a, I had a, an engineer that went to A and M, he and I were rooming in the same little cubby hole. And uh, I, I, I listened to him talk about A and M. And he, in so many years he was gonna be making, you know, thousands of dollars and more than he's making. And, you know, he had his, the whole thing planned and I'm sittin' there, I'm so delighted with my little job. I mean, I feel so, so thankful that I have this, this job. Man, I'm, I'm, I'm happy, I, my wife loves me, my children, you know, everything's great. And then I never, never, never had these great aspirations. But now after 44 years I look back and, you know, what, what I've done. Uh, I feel good about myself. I just feel good about myself. I'm not great, but I, I've, you know, fed my family and uh, I've done over a 1,000 hearings representing. In fact, when I left Superior, I went in to tell my boss that uh, "I'm leaving." And so we talk about it and I remember I'm the only one who's doing their work. And uh, so I tell him bye and uh, as I'm walking out, I mean, I'm, I'm at the door, gettin' ready to go out, he says, uh, "By the way, who's gonna do our hearing work?" And from that day on, I did every hearing for Superior Oil Company until Mobil bought 'em out. And then after Mobil bought 'em out, that was 12 years, after that I continued working for Mobil.

SW: As contract?

LC: As, as a consultant. Yep.

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SW: You were able to come here and get the best of this kind of world, but also contract out to your old company, basically.

LC: I got my, I brought them with me, which made me more valuable to my-

SW: Absolutely.

LC: To my boss. And, and uh, it's just been great.

SW: You mentioned that you didn't see your kids that much, that worked out okay, though. Your wife was-

LC: Oh yeah.

SW: Able to, to take care of that end.

LC: Oh sure, now, it uh, you know, I've spent a lot of time off before I went independent, but even after I went independent, you know, you, this is, it's by the hour. I mean, that's how you make your money. Now with Superior it was salary. And uh, so yeah, I've spent a lot of time offshore uh, and then even when I started doin', doin' hearing work uh, it requires a lot of time. And we, we've always been busy, so I, I'm really thankful for that.

SW: That's good. In your opinion, what did the oil industry do for south Louisiana?

LC: Made a lot of people rich. And not only oil companies. Look what it does for the economy of the area. You know, a guy goes out and drills a well. He's spending a lot of money before he drills that well. And those people, all of those landowners, and they're leasing, right now leasing is at a fifth or a quarter. The big, big companies, the big, big land companies they, they want a third of the royalties if they, if you hit.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

LC: But even, even just that front money. That all comes out of that oil company's pocket. You know, 200 dollars an acre, plus a fifth royalty if it hits. And that's what we do. We'll form the unit, now you're, you're 100 acres that gets put into a 500 acre pool, that's 20 percent, but then you lease for a, for a quarter. Well then you, you get, you can get five percent total risk free. Risk free.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

LC: The other guy, the other guy took all the risk and he's gonna get more, but he took the risk. If you [Inaudible] hole, you got your, you got your lease money, you had potential chance of getting royalty income. The other guy went home, that money's gone. So, you know, it's worked out tremendous. People got rich. People are getting rich. Especially in the, in the early '80s when they were, gas had, you know, the deregulated, the deep gas. Ten dollars, 10 dollars in MCF. Right now that's worth two-fifty maybe. Three dollars, somewhere in there.

SW: MCF is thousands cubic foot.

LC: Thousand cubic feet. Same thing.

SW: Yeah, it's, it's uh, I know uh, it goes up and down, but, yeah, I remember in the '80s it was high.

LC: Ahh. Unbelievable.

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SW: Makin' some money. [Laughs]

LC: Unbelievable. I had done a-

SW: And they used to burn that stuff off, too.

LC: I had done an estate valuation for a, a little lady. She came over here and she was paying too much taxes. And I'm not sure what year that was, but at one point, uh, you know, it was 50 percent tax. Seventy percent unearned income. But it might have been after that. But anyhow, this woman came to me. It was a Kaplan. And she was in some units that I had created for Superior. And she wanted to give some that royalty away, so we had to make an evaluation. You know, how much is it worth to be able to give it. There's taxes involved. And I said, "Well, do you have any, any run tickets? Give me an idea how much money you getting." And she came back with two years of, of production. Her share was a quarter of a million dollars each year. [Pause] So, see what I'm saying?

SW: Yeah.

LC: Some of these people with, with s-, and not a, not a whole lot of land. We're not talkin' about thousands of acres. But you get a 100, a 100 acres in a 200 acre pool, uh, and well produces well, there's, people get rich. And on one side you get rich and on the other side you didn't get in, so you get nothing. And that's hard to explain to landowners, you know, how these units are, are formed. Uh, it's difficult, you know. We, we geologically, maybe there's a fault that cuts off the reservoir and it's happens to be along that fence line. [Chuckling] Well you can't convince 'em that it's not the fence line that caused the problem, not the fault. You know, and, and I can understand that.

SW: Then there's some suspicion because some people-

LC: Well of course, of course. Of course.

SW: Did you, do you speak French?

LC: A little bit.

SW: So did ya, I don't know if you ever had to uh, to use that to explain to someone-

LC: I, I do my best. No, my mo-, my grandmother couldn't speak any, any English at all and I spent a lot of time with her, so I, probably, back then when I was small I was doin' real well, but over the years, nobody's speaking French. We had, we had no problem in, in Quebec. Uh, France they talk too fast. [Laughs] You know, we, we, the vocabulary, we don't have no more vocabulary.

SW: Yeah, that's what it is.

LC: Oh yeah.

SW: And if you hear Cajun French being spoken every now and then, [Inaudible] hear the word "airplane," "car."

LC: [Chuckling] Yeah, right.

SW: English keeps poppin' in there.

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LC: Absolutely.

SW: Yeah.

LC: Absolutely.

SW: That's the base of it. What did you see uh, develop while you were living here in Lafayette as a result of the oil industry? What did it do just for this immediate area? [Pause]

LC: Just built up. But then, but all areas build up. I, you know, thank goodness we had this. We didn't have any industry, we didn't have manufacturing, we didn't have all these other, but we had oil and gas. So that's what helped us. In other areas it's somethin' else.

SW: What else would we have had without that? Would we still be a farming community you think? [LC chuckles] It's possible, huh?

LC: It's possible. You know, I dated a girl back in 1952 in [Bendell?] Gardens.

SW: Oh, right there.

LC: That's when it was shell, it was a shell road. Beverly Drive with shell. Yep.

SW: And so that was, that's back when you were gettin' into it, in the late '50s.

LC: That was before. Yeah, I was still in high school.

SW: [Kind of muttering] Before, high, yeah. When you were in college. When you got into the uh, when you got on with Superior, though, what else could you have done at that time? What other jobs or options were available for you?

LC: Well I don't know. Depending on what I had, what, what, gone into. You know, accounting. There's all kinds of other things that require workers. I'm a good worker. No matter what. I, I'd, I worked hard. [SW chuckles] But you have to have the opportunity. You have to have the opportunity. That's what I keep tellin' everybody. [Slight pause] Yes, you don't need that, you don't need that college education. You know, you might be smart and, and you may be successful, you may be successful, but boy, it sure lets you in that door. You know, the degree and you've proven that you can fulfill those requirements.

SW: Start what fin-

LC: And, and at least you get, you know, you can get in. Now, after you're in and they give you a chance, you got to prove yourself. But, hey, that education is important. It is important. [Pause]

SW: I agree. That's why I'm here. [Both laugh] I'm gettin' my graduate degree with this.

LC: Are you? Great, great.

SW: Anything else you'd like to add?

LC: No, I 'preciated the opportunity.

SW: This has been a wonderful interview. [Laughs]

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LC: Well, good.

SW: Got lots of in-, good information off 'ya. Alright. And-

[END OF RECORDING]

