

HHA # 00299
Interviewee: Lyle Mellington
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: June 19, 2003
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA
Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW056
Transcriber: Lauren Penney

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

Ethnographic preface:

Lyle Mellington was born in 1925 near Sedan, Kansas, the southern part of the state. His father was a pumper in the oilfields and moved the family to Oklahoma when Mellington was about 10 years old. He graduated from high school a few months early because he was drafted into the Navy at the tail end of World War Two (1944); during that time he was trained in international Morse Code and spent time in the Pacific. When he returned to the U.S. he spent a year at a school in Missouri learning American Morse Code and in 1947 got a job with Interstate Pipeline Company (an affiliate of Standard Oil of New Jersey) as a telegraph operator in Oklahoma. In 1949 he was transferred to the Carter Oil Company (also affiliated with Standard Oil of New Jersey) in Kansas; there he worked on a gang and did a myriad of different jobs; later he worked as a foreman supervising drilling operations and workers. Carter merged with Humble Oil Company in 1958 and Mellington was transferred to Lafayette eight years later. After doing relief and drilling work for a few years, he got a permanent position in production in the Avery Island and Weeks Island Fields; he was later promoted to senior field superintendent there. During the 10 years before he retired in 1986, he was the senior field superintendent in the North Crowley Field, as well as in charge of the gas plant in Opelousas.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [DD]

Interviewee initials: [LM]

SW: We're ready to go- [Recording breaks off] This is interview with Mister Lyle Mellington. June nineteenth, 2003 in the OCS office. I like to always start out by asking you just a little bit about your background, when and where you were born and raised.

LM: Okay.

SW: And some family things, about what your father did and your mother did and things like that.

LM: Okay.

SW: Uh, where-

LM: That'd be fine.

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

SW: Okay, when were you born sir?

LM: I was born August the ninth, 1925, south of a little town called Sedan, Kansas. And was, in the old field house. My dad worked in the oilfield. And was, I was born in the old house [Chuckling] I wasn't born in a hospital. And that was in 1925, so I'm, I'm 77 years old now, be 78 August the ninth.

SW: And that's comin' right around the corner.

LM: And he was a, he, my dad worked in the oilfield too. He, he was a pumper there in the, that's the southern part of Kansas. [Pause]

SW: So that, that puts him workin' in the earliest part of the twentieth century?

LM: Yes.

SW: Did they have a lot of oil exploration going on at that time?

LM: Well, up in that part of the country they were pretty shallow wells and not real big wells, but mostly oil. And uh, it was in southern Kansas. And uh, that's what he did I guess all his life is worked in the oilfield.

SW: And you were raised in that area? You went to school?

LM: Yeah, I went to, I started school there, they had a little grade school about a half a mile down the road from our house. And the school was just a one-room school and the [Chuckling] first grade sat in the first row and the teacher would teach the first grade and then she'd, they'd move back and then she'd teach the second grade and they'd move back, and clear up to the eighth grade. And I learned more about the eighth grade than I did the first grade. [Chuckles] But it was an old country school and that was, we lived there 'til I was about seven or eight years old, then we moved into town at Sedan and then we didn't live there long and then we moved to Oklahoma. We moved town to Osage, Oklahoma. Then my dad got a job as a pumper there in the oilfield and he had wells out in the middle of the Arkansas River and he'd go to 'em in a row boat. Not a motor, but a row boat. He'd go out to 'em and I'd go with him to work a lot and, you know, out to the wells and uh, he also while he was workin' he had hoop nets and he fished in the river and caught fish [Chuckling] 'cause they didn't pay him very much money, you know. And so we had outside of his job and catchin' fish and a little garden, well that's how we survived. [Chuckles]

SW: And they had, they had a little derrick out in the middle of the river?

LM: Yeah. They had a platform and a derrick and it was high enough to when the river would get, raise, rise, well it would be up above the water and it, but that's, it was pumpin' wells, it was pumpin' wells.

SW: Did it look anything like an offshore rig or?

LM: No, no, it was, it was just an old, old standard type derrick and they just, when they drilled the wells they just left 'em there. You know, they left 'em over the well. But that's back in the early '30s you know. And uh, I can't remember too much about it, but uh, I do know that they had those wells. They had some other wells on land there too, but there was about three or four of 'em was out in the middle of the river and they had to go to 'em in that boat, except when the river got real, real high and then I think they'd just kind of didn't go. [SW chuckles]

SW: A little dangerous maybe, huh?

LM: Yeah, it was a little too dangerous.

SW: Did uh, did you go to college or-

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

LM: No sir I didn't go to college. I uh, I went to uh, let's see we moved to Osage in, I graduated out of the eighth grade at this little town of Osage, Oklahoma. That's, that's right on the Arkansas River and it's 35 miles from Tulsa, Oklahoma. I graduated out the eighth grade and at that time we moved further south into Oklahoma to Okemah, Oklahoma. And he had a pumpin' job there and we lived in an old shot gun house out there on the lease by a little gas plant. And he had those, oh, they were power houses. He had, he had uh, I don't know if you've ever seen any of 'em or not, but there's a power house and it's called an [eccentric?] wheel. The, one engine run with a big wide belt run back and this big wheel was layin' down and the belt would go around that and turn it and you had rod lines goin' all directions to your wells and it would pump the wells from there, see. And uh, you could hook the wells on and off there at that power station, you know. But he worked there for, oh we lived there and then well you was askin' about my education, but from there I went to high school. I rode the school bus seven miles to high school. I finished high school in 1944. And that was when World War Two was goin' on. A-

SW: I was gonna ask, did you get drafted, it must've been mighty close.

LM: Yeah. I got drafted, I was a senior in high school, I got drafted and I went in the Navy. It was like about two months of finishin' school, but my superintendent gave me high school diploma. Then, and I went to the Navy, went to boot camp in San Diego, California and uh, I came back to Texas A and M and went to radio operator school. And uh, took oh about five months I think to go through that school and then I went back to California to a place called Shoemaker, California. That's by Oakland and San Francisco. And they was gettin' us ready to ship us overseas and we sailed out under the Golden Gate Bridge and went to, we went straight to New Guinea. Took us 21 days on that ship. And we got off there and we stayed in some old barracks that didn't even have sides on 'em, all we had was mosquito nets. [Chuckling] And, and we needed 'em too. And uh, then we had uh, we went up a couple of places there and then I got on the ship that I was assigned to at Leyte Gulf, in the Philippine Islands. And I spent about the next year in the Philippine Islands, the whole year of 1945 I spent in the Philippine Islands and we, our ship was on, we was on three major invasions on the island. We carried the troops on our ship and we'd hit the beach and let 'em off, then we'd, our anchor'd pull us back out and we'd take off. And we carried the infantry, we carried the infantry soldiers. And uh, and then while we were there we was slated to come back to the United States. And of course they dropped the atomic bomb on Japan and ended the war. And they changed our orders and instead of comin' back to the United States we went to Okinawa after the big battle of Okinawa. And then we went to China, went to Shanghais, China. And I guess my worst experience there was when we was goin' from Okinawa to, to Shanghais, China, we got in a typhoon. And a typhoon is more or less like a hurricane here in Louisiana. It's uh, a very strong winds and high seas. And we spent five days and nights just goin' north and south in that China Sea and the water was, the waves was 40 foot high. [Chuckling] It was, it wasn't too pleasant an experience. Everybody, everybody gets, nearly everybody got sick, you know, and so-

SW: Goin' up and down?

LM: Yeah. And we spent a little time there and then we made two or three places there in China up and down the coast and then we finally come back to the states. Stopped in Hawaiian Islands for a couple weeks, returned our ship, and got back. And I got out of the service there in uh, 1946 I believe at uh, I got discharged at New Orleans. I come to New Orleans and got discharged and uh, and I had gone to that radio operator school, I was a radio operator. And I had heard about this school in Chillicothe, Missouri that would switch you over from the international Morse Code to the American Morse Code, then you could go to work for railroads and pipeline companies. And so I went to that school for about a year and switched over to the American Morse Code and uh, I had really planned to go to work for the railroad company. But I found out the pipeline company paid more money and so I started checkin' on the pipeline companies. And uh, I checked with Interstate Pipeline Company, which is a affiliate of Standard of New Jersey. And uh, they told me to come to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and I went up there and they gave me a job. And that's when I went to work in the oilfield in 1947 at Wewoka, Oklahoma, in the pipeline gang. And I did a lot of relief work at the main line pump stations as a, as a telegraph operator. At that time they, they still used the telegraph operators to relay the message, message of your tank gauges and stuff every hour, every hour you'd call the main office and relay your messages of how much t-, uh, oil you had, how much you was pumpin', how much you receivin',

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

how much is pumpin', and so forth. And I did that there at, around Wewoka and then I transferred to Ardmore, Oklahoma, did the same thing down there for Interstate Pipeline. And Interstate was a good company, but they was, when I was in the gang they had, we packed our suitcases about every week 'cause they'd send us somewhere, you know. And we'd stay, we'd stay in some little old hotel and I believe it was 1949, I'd worked for 'em a couple of years, and they was talkin' about a layoff or a transfer and layoff and this and that, you know. So I went to work at, I was workin' at the main pump station down there by Ardmore, Oklahoma and I went to work at day and uh, the chief engineer wanted to talk to me and he said, "You're bein' transferred to Kansas." [Chuckling] And I said, "Well, when do I need to go?" And he says, "When do I need to let you know?" And he says, "Right now." I says, "Well, I need to talk to my wife." And so I talked to my wife and also called the old boy that worked for Carter Oil Company, and that's who I was bein' transferred to, which is an affiliate company with the Interstate Pipelines. And they's all affiliated with Humble, Humble Oil and Refining. It was all Standard of New Jersey, you understand?

SW: Uh huh.

LM: And so that's, that's when I transferred from Ardmore, Oklahoma to Washington, Kansas. That's northwest of Wichita, Kansas. And uh, there's an old oilfield up there that was uh... drilled in the '30s and uh, and it was, it looked like an oilfield because the derricks that they drilled the wells with they left 'em standin'. And there was like 90 feet tall and 136 foot tall. And uh, they's steel, steel derricks. And they left 'em standin'. And they was all, mostly all of 'em was on 10 acre spacings, which is pretty close. And, and these wells were in wheat fields, so it made a pretty sight, you know, to see all these derricks lined up in a wheat field and that wheat would be golden, like a golden color and the wi-, and the wind was always blowing, you know, and was blowin' that wheat. So I worked there uh, for two or three years and then they gave me an opportunity to, I was in the gang there and I worked in the gang and we dug ditches and fixed pipelines and I also relieved pumped, pumped and drove trucks and mechanic work and stuff like that. And then I got started relievin' the foreman at that time, that was, that was probably 1952 or '53. And uh, and the Carter Oil Company had a, a little drillin' boom goin' on out in the Oklahoma panhandle and southwest Kansas at that time and the old boy I was relievin' there at Washington was out there workin' on them wells and so he wanted to come back home, so they sent me out there on a temporary assignment in about 1953. And we was drillin' wells as fast as we could drill 'em out there. And uh, what we would do is we would, we would do about everything. We would, we would stake the location, and uh, we'd get bids from two or three contractors, and get bid out and see who was gonna drill the well, and we'd make the location, they'd move in and drill the well and we'd supervise drillin' the well what was there, the company that drilled it would have their own toolpusher, but we would be supervisin' the whole works, how we wanted it drilled and so forth. And uh-

SW: So you weren't just radio operating at this time?

LM: Oh no.

SW: You were doin' the whole thing.

LM: That radio operatin' was over with. See I-

SW: Yeah.

LM: See they didn't have radio uh, telegraph operators for Carter Oil Company. That was just on the pipeline.

SW: I see.

LM: And uh, but I was just doin' foreman work and we, we looked after drillin' the wells and then when we got the wells drilled we'd, we would set the pipe, we'd run the pipe, and set it and cement it, and then usually the drilling rig would move off and we would move a workover rig on and complete the well. Log it and perforate it and uh, test it. Have a [swab?] unit and test it and bring it in and see what the well would do and test it. And at that time if you made

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

a well, well then we would get prepared and set a tank battery and separation equipment and tanks and hook it up to a pipeline. And uh, then start producin' as soon as we could, you know. And we also looked after the uh, pumpers and the people that did the work, you know. And uh, I did that there at Liberal, Kansas for uh, well, in nineteen forty-s-, 1956 I w-, I was out there on a temporary basis you understand, away from home. I was 180 miles away from home. And at that time I had two little boys about this high [Chuckles] and didn't get to spend much time with 'em because we, we worked day and night, you know. And, and you didn't get much time off. And it was kind of hard to do, but in 1956 they made me a permanent foreman and let me move out there. See all the time I was workin' out there for about three years I was livin' back up here at Washington, a hundred, 180 miles away.

SW: Because they could've moved you or transferred you at another time or something and then.

LM: Yeah.

SW: So you didn't want to move your whole family there just in case that they had another job for you out of the state or something?

LM: Yeah.

SW: Was that the concern?

LM: Well, see it was a temporary assignment. It was when they made me a permanent uh, gave me a permanent job as a foreman, well then they let me move my family out there. But out, out, up until then, see, I was just workin' on an expense account and workin' away from home and whenever I'd get a chance I'd go home, but we didn't get too many chances, 'cause we had like five or six drillin' rigs runnin' all the time and you always had somethin', somethin' goin' on, you know.

SW: I see. You, did you, you got married when you came back from the service?

LM: Yes, I got married after uh, uh, I told you I went to that school. I, when I first, I went to work in '47, well me and my wife got married in '48. We got married in '48 and uh, we had two boys. Uh, Brett was born in 1950 and Craig was born in 1951. So we had two boys. They're almost as old as I am now. [Chuckles]

SW: So how was that on your family? I, you said when you were back in uh, in the '40s before you, late '40s, before you even moved to Kansas they were movin' you around every-

LM: Yeah.

SW: You were livin' out of a suitcase.

LM: Yeah.

SW: So it must've been hard then too.

LM: Yeah, it was. It was, it was, we didn't, we didn't uh, you didn't have too good a home life because you was workin' somewhere. And, and it's like when you was in the, drillin', when you're doin' uh, supervisory work, see that puts you on a 24-hour call. And it's not overtime or nothin' like that, it's, it's, it's whatever's to be done, you need to do it if it takes 24 hours to do it. So it's not easy to do. And if I had it to do over again I don't know if I'd do it. [Chuckles] But [Chuckles] it, it's, I guess it pays off in the long run because I ended up with pretty good job and, and uh, 'course the pay got better as we went along, you know.

SW: That was my other question. I guess they were paying you pretty well, because uh, what, what was to keep you from getting another job that would've kept you in one place? Or were those jobs, those jobs didn't exist.

SW: Was it the oilfield that had good employment?

LM: Yes. Uh, you take a job with uh, Carter Oil Company or the Humble Oil Company, was a pretty good job. And everybody uh, kind of wanted a job like that. And I don't, I don't know what I would've done if I'da quit my job and gone somewhere else, I guess I could've done somethin', but uh, 'course when I was in high school I worked in the grocery store a lot, you know, as a uh, clerk and shelvin' groceries and stuff like that. But, but uh, I wasn't a, I wouldn't've quit my job for anything I don't suppose, even though under the circumstances of havin' to sleep in the back of my car. And that's another thing, up there at, then, in the '50s and uh, '60s, uh, we had contractors drill the wells and they'd come and go, you know, and uh, we didn't have big trailer houses and bunk houses on every rig like, like I'm sayin' they do now, 'cause I know Exxon now has two or three trailer houses and uh, has pretty good, pretty, and food, food to eat. We didn't have that. See, we, we ate out of crackers and bologna and stuff like that. If you, and of course we'd go to town to eat, but we didn't have any food cooked on the rigs. But we drill, we drill those wells a lot faster than they do down here because up there in that country, that panhandle country, well our wells were uh, probably a average of six to eight thousand feet deep. You'd drill one to 10,000 every once in awhile, but most of 'em was in the neighborhood of six to eight thousand. It was, and most of it was uh, a sand called Morrow sand, it went across the country for a long ways and, and uh, we drilled a lot of wells up there and we, we was also in that uh, Hugoton Gas Field, which, which is a big, huge field over southwest Kansas and Oklahoma panhandle and the Texas panhandle. It's just a huge gas field, shallow gas wells. But uh, we lived there, lived there in Liberal for 10 years. And-

SW: Into the 1960s?

LM: Yeah, in the 1960s and, and I had, I looked after uh, the oil and gas production and pumpers and roustabouts and also drillin' wells. And in 1966 I got, well, let me go back a little ways and tell you when our Carter Oil, the company I was workin' for merged with Humble Oil Company. And I believe that happened in 1958. And they called it Humble Oil and Refining Company, Carter division. And it stayed that way for quite awhile and then later they dropped the Carter division, just called it Humble Oil Company. And then ther-, then they later changed it to Exxon. And uh, I got transferred to Lafayette in 1966. [Slight pause] That's 850 miles [Chuckling] I got transferred. And my boys, my oldest boy was a sophomore in high school and my youngest was in eighth grade. And of course they didn't want to move and, but uh, in fact the youngest one wanted to stay [Chuckling] he wanted to stay up there. We made him move anyway. And uh, we moved here to Lafayette and I went to work on a relief job here in uh, this area, which included Avery Island, Weeks Island Fields, North Crowley Field, Pecan Island, [Chackley], Roanoke, uh, Cameron, Duck Lake. And did relief just for a couple years and I also worked on some drillin', they put me in the drillin' department for awhile. And I worked on barge drillin' rigs for awhile, like at Pecan Island and Duck Lake and places like that. And uh, I uh, I asked 'em if they had a job in production, I'd rather be in production. And so this job came up at Avery Island and uh, they gave it to me as a permanent job. It was Avery Island and Weeks Island fields and it's uh, well we had I guess over a 100 wells there at Avery Island and then probably 30 wells over at Weeks Island, and most of it's in canals. And uh, we had operated with boats and barges and uh, but when we drill well there, well after I came down here, well uh, we had people workin' in the drillin' department, you had the drillin' department and production department so you was either in one of 'em or the other one, see.

SW: You said you, you preferred production, why was that?

LM: Well production is uh, it, see drillin'... well I had been used to in drillin' department is you's up day and night. Whatever happened to a well you stayed there 'til, 'til you got it fixed. If you had blowout or lost circulation or whatever, that was your baby until you got it under control and got if fixed. But in production, well, usually you'd get to go home at night and [Chuckling] sleep in the bed. And uh, 'course the way they do it out here, well after I come down here, we had relief. You'd work like three days on, three days off, or four days on, or seven days on, seven days off. And that's, that's not too bad. But 'til I came here we didn't have that relief, so probably the best thing that

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

ever happened to me is when they moved me to south Louisiana to Lafayette. 'Cause uh, I, I apparently got a better job and I got a raise in pay and all of that. So I just kind of preferred the production rather than the drilling.

SW: It's more consistent, you had an easier schedule?

LM: Yeah. It's-

SW: More uh, more predictable schedule.

LM: Yeah.

SW: It's sounds-

LM: And then it doesn't make your insides turn so much when you get down fixin' the drill into a high pressure zone, you know, [Chuckling] you're not worried that much about it.

SW: Would uh, so you'd say drilling was more dangerous than production?

LM: Well, I don't know if it's more dangerous, it's, it's uh, to me it might be because uh, you have a, you're drillin' in to like we drilled into uh, uh, zone down here in uh, White Lake and uh, Pecan Island and was drillin' at 18,000 feet. And uh, that thing blew out. And it's, it's not too, too good when everybody has to leave the rig and get away from it, you know. And that happened on one of the wells down there. But uh, I just, I just preferred the production end of it because it seemed like it's more stable and not movin' around. You see when you drill a well you have to, you have to go wherever they drill 'em. If it's 100 miles from here or 20 miles or whatever, but your production stays the same all the time.

SW: 'Cause the well has been drilled, you just monitor the stuff coming out of the ground?

LM: Right. You're, you're producin', you, you set your tank batteries and your separators and tanks and, and uh, flow the wells or pump the wells and sell the oil and gas.

SW: It still could be a little dangerous, those high pressure-

LM: Well it's uh, there's a lot of dangers, yeah.

SW: High pressure production or something like that?

LM: Yeah. And a lot of things can happen, just like one of my wells at Weeks Island uh, out in the canal started makin' sand and cut the, cut the choke out, cut the well head off and caught on fire. And we had, spent several days gettin' uh, boots and coots re-, well we got Red Adair over here from Houston and, to get in under control, you know. So you got dangers in your production as well as, because you got so many lines, so many high pressure lines and low pressure lines and you have leaks and uh, you have a lot of things happen in these oilfields that makes it kind of dangerous in a way. You have to be pretty cautious. But uh, well, I, I enjoyed the production more than drillin' I guess because uh, you, you, you get set up, you had your office there and you go there just like you come to your office, well I'd go to my office everyday and I'd have, well when I was down at Avery Island, Weeks Island I had probably 25 or 30 men workin' for me. And uh, you just have to uh, supervise all of 'em and, and uh, see that you get your production. And you have allowables to make. In oil and gas you have allowables to make and each well has an allowable on it and you try to make your allowables. And uh-

SW: I heard that, doesn't the government regulate the allowables?

LM: Oh yes. State.

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

SW: I don't quite understand that, could you explain that a little bit for me? I've read a little bit about it. What-

LM: Well they have-

SW: What is the allowable?

LM: Well they, you have a different, different allowables. You have the zone that you're in, the depth, the depths and the zone that you're in there's a certain allowable. And the state sets that.

SW: They, they allow you to take so much at a time?

LM: Yes.

SW: Is that what it is?

LM: So much a day.

SW: So much a day and you can't go over that number?

LM: You're not supposed to overproduce. You're not supposed to overproduce, yeah. You can get in trouble with the state by overproducin'.

SW: Wh-, for what reason did they set allowables?

LM: Well-

SW: Is it uh-

LM: I guess it's to keep companies from guttin' the wells and just goin' in there and, say you got a good well. And you could, it'd produce 5,000 barrel of oil a day, well you might produce it 5,000 barrel a day for a few months and, and then you might pull in water, you pull in sand, and you ruin the well. So they're tryin' to regulate it to where you preserve your reservoirs and keep from pullin' 'em and ruinin' 'em.

SW: I see.

LM: And that's, that's my, my opinion of it, because if, if you, if you don't regulate it and have allowables on it uh, people or, want to make as much as they can, as fast as they can, and they'll take all they can get, you know. So allowables are, are set up to, to preserve the reservoirs and keep, keep your oil and gas er, reservoirs as long as they can, you know.

SW: Was there an economic reason too, to keep uh, to o-, keep overproduction from flooding the market?

LM: Probably so, probably so. 'Cause the, the, they regulate that and they, that's the problem they have now, you know, regulatin' the amount of oil we get. Of course now we get over 50 percent of our oil from overseas I guess. But it hasn't always been that way. That uh, you know, for years and year oil here was three dollars a barrel. I can remember it was three dollars a barrel for years. And now what is it? Thirty, over 30 dollars a barrel I think.

SW: Something like that.

LM: Yeah. But it's, it's uh, see if the state and the federal government didn't regulate it well it would, your oilfields might not last long, you know, for one reason. And then, then uh, I guess you need, well the companies, they need to

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

regulate it too because, so they can keep operatin' for a longer period of time. We pull all them wells in and ruin 'em, you'd be out of business.

SW: That's, that's what it kind of seems to be too.

LM: Yeah, that's an, that's what it always seemed to me. Is 'cause we, I know we've had uh, wells that we set up and, and uh, put 'em in a unit. See sometimes you put wells in a unit and, and you can produce so much out of that unit. So if you got one well that's a good well and one well that's not too good a well, you can get the production out of that good well if it's in a unit, 'cause you can get an allowable out of that unit, which might have five wells or 10 wells or several wells in it, you know. But uh, that always made you pull, pull some wells harder than others when they's in a unit, 'cause you's, you's allowed to do that. They had a unit allowable. But most places you just have an allowable on each well, you know. [Coughs]

SW: Sorry I side tracked you there, I was just, I was curious because I've heard that word "allowable" so much. [Chuckles]

LM: Yeah. Yeah, well we used to hear it and then, then you, you can't, you're allowed so much over each month which like uh, I forget now it's, see I've been retired 17 years [Chuckling] and I forget a lot of that stuff. But uh, I think y-, I think you can produce over, if you had say 100 barrel allowable on a well, I think you could produce over maybe three days or somethin' like that and you wouldn't be out of line. But then if you get over that, you're overproduced and you, you're not allowed to overproduce.

SW: You, you say-, you were sayin' to me you were uh, this is when you were workin' down at Weeks Island and Avery-

LM: Avery.

SW: You were livin' in Lafayette at the time and workin' down there?

LM: Yes, yes. I was because uh, they didn't make me move. I could've moved to New Iberia of course, but uh, they give me a choice of where to live and I picked Lafayette 'cause at the time when I picked Lafayette I was workin' the whole area on that relief job and workin' the drillin' department too. But in uh, 1976... well while I was at Avery Island, Weeks Island they made me a senior field superintendent. That was a pretty good promotion, pretty good raise in pay. And uh, so I was a senior field superintendent and in 1976 uh, they transferred me to North Crowley Field and I had North Crowley Field and because I was a senior field superintendent they, they put Opelousas' gas plant on me too. So I had the North Crowley Field and the Opelousas gas plant and that was in 1976. So I'd go to North Crowley, I had an office at North Crowley. And I had a, a plant foreman that helped me from, at Opelousas. But I would go to Opelousas everyday and check on everything and uh, that's what I was doin' when I retired. I was workin' at North Crowley and Opelousas. And I retired in 1986. There was, the company had come up with a incentive to, for people to retire and a whole bunch of 'em along the coast here retired and uh-

SW: Gave you guys a package?

LM: Yeah, gave us a package deal. They gave us, they offered us annuity retirement or a lump sum retirement. And uh, they was uh, golly, I don't know. I think about 2,000 retired for Humble, for Exxon. All along the coast here. And uh, I was 61, see I had planned to work 'til I was 65, that's kind of when everybody retired, but uh, because of this packaged deal, I retired when I was 61. Well I had, you know, really planned to work 'til I was 62 because that's when you can get social security, too. But I retired when I was 61. Then I got partial social security and then at 62 I started gettin' full social security plus my Exxon pension.

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

SW: Were they offering you guys those retirement deals because that was right in the middle of the big bust? They needed to liquidate some employees?

LM: I think so. I think, see the, they, they, these oil companies have done a lot of things to lower their costs and everything, and that is one of 'em, because you take people that, my opinion is people that's been workin' for years and years and years have got to their peak in uh, ability and earnin', earnin' power and wages, and so if they can retire a bunch of those, they get rid of a lot of overhead expenses.

SW: Payroll.

LM: Payroll and, and I think that's probably was one of 'em and, and uh, and cuttin', cuttin' back too, you know, because there's a lot of jobs when they retired this huge group of people. There's some jobs they didn't replace 'em. And I hope this is not goin' on uh, Exxon internet. [Laughs]

SW: No, no, no, no.

LM: [Chuckling] I wouldn't care if it did.

SW: It's uh, from what I hear it's pretty standard. I've heard that from lots of people, not just you.

LM: Well that's, that's what they, you see people, see I had worked for 39 years, that's how long I worked. And I had, I, I wasn't makin' top money I don't guess, but I was makin' quite a bit and, and when they get rid of people like me and a lot of other people like me, well they lower their money goin' out and, and uh, people that replace, replaces the older type people are makin' less wages and lookin' after more work.

SW: And they had less experience than you guys.

LM: Less experience.

SW: Did, do you think that hurt the company, companies or, not just Exxon, but any, any of the oil companies-

LM: Well, I, I don't know, it, it's bound to have hurt 'em a lot of places because we had so many older men that had the knowledge and experience that's hard to replace. It just, you can't hardly replace it instantly, you know, you can't, you can't just up and replace somebody that's worked for 39 years and the things that they've gone through and the things they've done and the experiences they've had, you just can't replace it right now. You know, it's, but in spite of that they survive and they make it, you know. It's just like one old boy said one time about the things we did with the company, he says, "In spite of what we do, we still make money." [Chuckles] That's funny I thought, I thought that was pretty good because says if all of us would do a little better, look how much more money we could make. And, and that's the truth. But that's, that's about the, that about runs me out on where I worked and everything and I, I uh, I had in my letter there you'll read that most of these places where I worked down here I had about oh, probably an average of 25 employees workin' under me. And uh, and we'd have, I'd have to call my office every mornin' and report production and whether you's in the drillin' department or in production, we called in our office every mornin' and had uh, gave your report on what went on and how much production was and the troubles you's havin'. And we did that everyday and Exxon was very strict on keepin' their thumb on everything and, and uh, lookin' after everything as well as we could. And uh, we did that and I did, I also did a lot of relief work, in the office relievin' my, my boss, who was the operations superintendent. And I did a lot of that when he'd be on vacation and sick and different things like that. And uh, I'd be workin' in the office and when you's in the office, well you always had the morning meeting. And uh, that would be after all the field people had called in and gave their reports to you and uh, where you's like a drillin' well, where you's drillin', what you's doin', settin' pipe or cementin' pipe or whatever. Or if a workover rig, were you swabbin' or perforatin' or whatever. And that report'd be called in and in the morning meeting well your superintendent, the district superintendent, and the engineers and the operations superintendent would all discuss

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

what was goin' on with these wells. And if you had a problem, well 'course they'd discuss that and see if you had a way to solve the problem. But uh, and, and uh, I'll tell you right now that, that oil has probably changed since I retired. I've been retired 17 years and, and from what I hear they do it, do a lot of it different than they used to.

SW: I would imagine.

LM: In fact I, I've got some, you had mentioned on your letter you's interested in offshore stuff. Well I have some stuff to tell you that I didn't do, but my son does it. Craig, my youngest son. Now he's worked for, he, he went to work for Exxon in Grand Isle uh, let me get my notes here. But he, he's worked 29 years [Chuckling] for the company. And uh, but he, he's uh... [Papers shuffling] I'll show you. Uh, he, Craig is doin' a real good job and I'm real proud of him. And uh, but he, he went to work, here I made a some notes. Uh, Craig went to work in 1974 in Grand Isle and he's worked 29 years right now. And his, his uh, the first job he worked on out there was [alena?], it was a guide tower. It was out, it's out of Grand Isle, it's in the Mississippi Canyon, [280?]. It was in 1,000 feet of water. Uh, was 1,000 feet high, it's in 980 feet of water and it had 20 guide cables. And it was a big, it was a big thing at the time. And he also worked in the first fields that Exxon had down there off of Grand Isle, Block 16 and 18. And uh, the last, the last thing he's done, and I'm gonna show you, show you what it was, is uh, and he didn't go to college either. See I didn't go to college and Craig didn't go to college. And my older son he went to, he went to USL. And he's been workin' at uh, Lord's Hospital for probably 30 years. Had a, he's had a good job there. But Craig didn't go to college, but Exxon called him to Houston about four or five years ago to help build this big uh, Hoover Diana project that sits in uh, forty-eight hundred feet of water. And it's a floatin' rig. And it's, well right now it's got uh, 15 wells on it. Six, six are on the platform, nine are subsea. And they're producin' 50,000 barrel of oil a day and 160 million cubic feet of gas. That's, that's the Hoover Diana. And, and here's a... [Showing SW something from a magazine] this is a... this was, this is a company magazine and this is, this tells about it here. It's a Hoover, that's Craig, that's my son. But this is a story about it. And it might, if you're interested in offshore rigs-

SW: Oh, I know about this.

LM: You know about that?

SW: When they, I saw the video.

LM: Did you really?

SW: When they put that thing out there.

LM: Yeah.

SW: Isn't it one point six billion dollars or somethin' like that?

LM: Yeah, yeah it's a big, see Craig, this article here has got Craig's name in it several times. It's a pretty good write up. But this is, this is my son Craig right here.

SW: Outstanding. Uh, we have a, we have a copy machine up here, I'll make a copy of this.

LM: You wanna make a copy of that?

SW: Sure, and I'll give, [Inaudible] on your way out, I can just-

LM: Yeah, I'll wait for it. But see here's the-

SW: Yeah, this thing is amazing.

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

LM: It's amazing, it really is. See there. I got a video of it, too, at home. If you'll make a copy of that, well I, and here's, and here I brought this to show you.

SW: Do you know a geologist, I think he's a geologist by the name of Billy Rogers?

LM: Yeah. I do.

SW: He, he's the one who showed me the video.

LM: Oh is that right?

SW: I interviewed him-

LM: Yeah, I know Billy.

SW: A few months ago. I interviewed him two or three months ago and he showed me, I went to his house. He showed me the video.

LM: Now this is-

SW: Amazing.

LM: That's a picture of it right there. [Pause]

SW: I just, it, it's amazing to me. It's not even rooted in the ground. It's not-

LM: No, no, it's floatin', it's floatin'.

SW: It's floatin'. And it has anchors that go all the way down.

LM: Yeah. Huge chains and anchors that, that goes to the bottom of the ocean. And these, these, Craig went to Finland and looked at these, but the, the tube uh, they built it in Finland and floated it over here in two sections. And uh, then they weld it together, but it's, it's 713 feet long and 124 feet across. And then they set the substructure on top of that. But it's a, but it floats with the ocean. And it's, it's really a big operation.

SW: It's an amazing feat of engineering.

LM: Yeah it is. It is and this, see this shirt here?

SW: Uh huh.

LM: What does that say on there? To hell and back or?

SW: That's it.

LM: Well Craig and his, they had, got an inspection crew and they went and Craig went with 'em, they went halfway down to the, in that, inside of that thing. They inspected and see, see how the wells and everything was holdin' together. And uh, they went down there and inspected that and uh, they'll be doin' some more inspections like that. But he says it was in pretty good shape, you know. But uh, the ladders goin' down on the inside of that thing, they got all kinds of tanks and stuff in there, you know, inside of it. But the ladders go down, down like that. He says a pretty good job to [Chuckling] climb and down them ladders. See they went like 300 feet. He said now 300 feet might not

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

seem like very far, but if you're standin' up there lookin' down in the hole, lookin' 300 feet down, it's quite a ways. You know. [Chuckles]

SW: Yeah.

LM: But, but he uh, he's done a, he's done an amazing job of that without havin' a college education. See he, he was in there helpin' build it, helpin' design it and everything, and he... I think that's a picture of it too. You can make a copy of that too.

SW: I, I'd like to. I remember this, this video was so interesting. Just the sheer numbers and how far out it is and-

LM: I think, I think Craig gave me a copy of that video of uh, of when they, see when they, when they took that rig out and set it up it was about Christmas time in 2000. And uh, and he, it's on this huge barge with them draglines. The biggest, I guess they're the biggest ones in the world. And, but the, the ocean, the current in the ocean got 'em 13 miles off of where they wanted to set it. And so they had to fight like hell to get it back, you know, where they wanted to set it. And it wasn't the easy to take that thing out there [Chuckling] and get it set up. But they did it. It's amazing that they could do it.

SW: Yeah, yeah. If you, if you have a copy of it, we can make a copy of it, too, here.

LM: Of the-

SW: Of the video.

LM: The video?

SW: We have a double cassette and you plug 'em in and you let it go.

LM: Yeah. Yeah.

SW: Uh-

LM: I got, he, he gave me a copy of uh, of somethin' and I haven't played it on my machine because he played it for me when he was here. And uh, and Craig came to, see we have an Exxon, we have an Exxon [annuity?] club that our company has been generous enough to sponsor it. And we pay see it's like me and my wife pay five dollars a year and we have quarterly meetings and we have a big dinner and everything for five dollars. [Chuckling] For a year. And, and so, we have speakers, we have speakers with the company, there's outside speakers come, we got a president, and everything. And Craig came and showed the film of, of settin' that rig up and everything. It was down at New Iberia I think when we did that. It was real good. And he did a good job of presentin' it to us. It's uh, it's an amazing thing that uh, and it's hard, it's, it's just kind of hard for me to imagine, you know, workin' onshore all the time, it's hard for me to imagine how they produce them wells off the bottom of the ocean. You know, it's... they got, now one, one, one of these [Shuffling papers] one of these uh, subsea, Craig, Craig worked on this alabaster is a fixed platform, but the zinc was in fifteen hundred feet of water and it's an undershore platform. And you send little robots down there to operate everything. And that was, that was amazing to me. But he worked on that too. So he's, he's had, he's had a lot more experience offshore than, than I ever did. I didn't ever work offshore, but he has and right now he lives in Houston. But uh, he'd, he'd probably be glad to talk to you sometime if you wanted to.

SW: I, how, how old is he?

LM: Craig's 51.

SW: Possibly. We're, we're, we're tryin' to target people-

Interviewee: Mellington, Lyle

Interview Date: June 19, 2003

LM: Older people?

SW: A bit older than that if possible.

LM: Yeah, yeah.

SW: Because we needed to have a cutoff date. If we didn't than that, then there'd be too many people, we wouldn't be able to even finish the project.

LM: Yeah.

SW: So we kinda, I, I'd probably like to, but it might be a little difficult.

LM: Yeah. Well I-

SW: But if he ever comes in town maybe we can arrange it.

LM: You got uh, but, but the information there would give you a lot of, of pretty, pretty much up-to-date stuff because that, that Diana cost to, I don't know, a billion.

SW: I think it was one point six billion.

LM: Billions of dollars. Now Craig told me they was, they was makin' a million dollars a day off of, you know, the oil they were producin' and stuff, they makin'-

SW: How much is it costin' 'em per day to run it? [Chuckles]

LM: I don't know.

SW: Gotta be a lot.

LM: I know, it's gotta be a lot, that's true, 'cause you got a lot of men out there, they got contractors and, yeah.

SW: And they've gotta make the money back that they put into it.

LM: Yep. It takes a lot to pay off a, you know, uh, Steven that's what a lot of people don't understand. Uh, 'bout the oil industry. A lot of people think that just like these service stations when your gas goes up and everything said, "Boy they're stickin' it to us," and everything you know. But that's not so because uh, people, the general public don't really understand what it costs to drill an oil and gas well. And they're not cheap, I'll guarantee ya they're not cheap. And look at the number of wells you drill that are dry holes, you don't get a cent back. And so I don't know if people just don't understand that. They think that the damn oil just comes out of the ground from nowheres at all, but it's a, it's a big operation to produce oil and gas.

SW: I think the uh, I think we're at the end here. Yeah we've got about a, I'll go ahead and shut it off.

[END OF RECORDING]