

Interviewee: Pyle, Morris

Interview Date August 7, 2002

HHA# 00361

Interviewee: Morris Pyle

Interviewer: Steven Wiltz and David DiTucci

Interview Date: August 7, 2002

Interview Site: Lafayette, LA

Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW062

Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling and repeated words have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. The interviewee's son, Kevin Pyle, also contributes to the interview. I had difficulty hearing the interviewee in places because his voice was very low. Almost thirty minutes into the recording a lot of beeping from the recorder begins; audibility is very low after this point.]

Ethnographic preface:

Morris Pyle was born in east Texas in 1927. At the age of 24 his uncle got him a job on a seismic crew in southern Louisiana swamps and he moved to Lafayette. He describes his early days on the seismic crews in the swamps, particularly noting the importance of the local workers for moving about in the swamps.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW] and [DD]

Interviewee initials: [MP] and [KP]

DD: -with Morris Pyle, also participating Kevin Pyle. It is August seventh, 2002 in their office.

SW: Okay Mister Pyle if you could uh, maybe give us a little bit, am I talkin' loud enough? It's loud enough, okay. Sorry, I don't have a very loud voice to begin with, so it's kind of difficult for me. Uh, can you give us a little bit about your personal background? When you were born and where you're from, and where you were raised?

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MP: Well, I was born in uh, that's a long, far back I forgot. [All laugh] Let's see, born in east Texas, 1927.

SW: Twenty-seven, okay. Alright, and you were raised in east Texas as well?

MP: Yeah.

SW: Okay. When did you move to Lafayette? [Slight pause]

MP: Well we were [move?] to Lafayette I was about uh... 24 years of age. [It's bringing me back?] a long ways here.

SW: Why did you come here?

MP: Uh, I had uh... I lived with my aunt and uncle in Houston and uh, my uncle had a friend in Houston who had uh, a couple seismic crews workin' in south Louisiana. So he got me a job and brought me over here. And I guess I was about 23, 25 somethin' like that. Somewhere in there [Inaudible]. And I've been here ever since.

SW: Did you have any seismic experience or did they train you?

MP: No. Hadn't had any. But uh, the crew that they put me on was workin' in deep swamp in south Louisiana. And uh, so they decided to give me a little field experience. [Chuckles] So, but it wasn't too bad really. It was, I saw a lot of young fellas that [Clears throat] they'd hire out in the cities or might be overweight so forth, but they'd last about a day or day and a half in that swamp. [SW chuckles] 'Cause if you're overweight, you just can't walk a swamp hardly. [Water in to here?], but the overweight guy the water would be here. [SW chuckles] You're not gettin' anywhere. But uh, that was quite an experience. I'd never seen a swamp before. I [slept half my wages?]. [DD and SW chuckle]

SW: Did you see lots of snake and alligators and things like that?

MP: Uh, they have, you don't see many alligators in the uh, what we consider a true swamp. Most of your alligators you'll see on the edge of the swamp and where the marsh begins. [They'll be?] goin' toward the Gulf of Mexico. We saw a lot of alligators in that area, that's where most of 'em are. But uh, they don't bother anybody. They just stick to [Inaudible]. [DD and SW chuckle] And he could bother you if you, you know, if you grabbed ahold of him [Inaudible].

DD: He'd really bother you then.

SW: Yeah.

MP: Extremely powerful. And seven or eight foot alligator knock your head off with that tail, get you [Chuckles]

SW: I'll stay away from 'em. [Chuckles]

MP: Hm?

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SW: I'll stay away from 'em.

MP: Yeah.

SW: And I don't like snakes either, I really don't like snakes, so I don't-

MP: Oh yeah-

SW: You saw lots of those?

MP: Oh, I was more aware of snakes and alligators didn't bother, alligators they go on about their happy way and get out of the way. But uh, lot of that uh, most of that work was done off of marsh buggies. And uh, in the early days the marsh buggies had uh, four big round wheels and it would float. So it was very slow. And uh, oh, eight, 10 years later some fellas in uh, Lockport, Louisiana, it's down on the other side of Houma-

DD: Bayou Lafourche.

MP: Yes, on Bayou Lafourche. They uh, they came up with what they called a track buggy. And it revolutionized the seismic industry. And able to get around the marsh must faster, easier, quicker. And it had tracks, two big long tracks on each side, one on each side. And it was quite an, quite an adventure. Made workin' in the marsh a lot better, probably 10 times faster.

SW: So you were with a seismic crew and y'all were pokin' around in the swamps?

MP: Yes, that's, workin' uh, most of the time uh, well a lot of the times in the field and uh, we would have a large quarter boat and an office on the boat, a cook, so forth, and sleepin' areas.

SW: You stayed out there for awhile or?

MP: Yeah, we usually have a work 10 days, take four or five days off, somewhere in that neighborhood.

SW: And it was 24 hours a day work? You worked a night shift and-

MP: Well you can't work at night out there.

SW: Only during the day.

MP: Yeah, just during the daylight hours, but pretty long days.

SW: Yeah.

MP: Worked real good. In the earlier days before they had good quarter boats, get [boats?] in. We spent most of our time travelin' back and forth. [Chuckles] Dry land to where we're workin'. It'd be, we'd spend more time travelin' than we would if we lived on the quarter boats. And as we work around off of the quarter boat, then we started to get a little further away from it, well we'd move the quarter boat. [On the?] river, canals, all over south Louisiana. So you could stay pretty

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close to the work from a quarter boat.

DD: What exactly was it that the seismic crews did and how did they, how did the seismic work at that time, when you first started?

SW: Did you go around and drop dynamite in holes?

MP: Well we, it was uh, drill holes, possibly 80 foot deep, put five to 20 pounds of dynamite in the hole. And then they would string these detectors out for uh, say 1,000 foot each side of the hole, in a straight line. And then they would shoot this dynamite, all the detectors would pick up the sound waves when they come back and it'd be recorded on a tape in the field. And then we'd take these tapes and uh, work 'em, make maps from 'em, the different levels. We would map some of those areas uh, I have a real good producing sand say at 10,000 feet. Well we'd, we would map the, a level on these tapes at 10,000 feet. 'Course [each thing/these things?] had a time on 'em and we knew the velocity, so we could figure out exactly where we were. And map from it.

SW: Okay. How did you guys know where to do this? Would the geologists point you in the direction-

MP: Well uh, there was-

SW: Or were y'all were just taking a guess?

MP: Well there was uh, previous uh... previously there were different uh, methods of uh, tryin' to map the subsurface. One of 'em was, that was far back, I don't even remember what it was. But it wasn't as uh... a good a system and with the sei-, with the seismic and the detectors we used, it virtually changed it. Before they used uh... hm, golly, you guys are takin' me too far back. [All laugh] [Pause] A gravity systems. And they mapped that the best they could, but it was uh, it had to have uh, quite a structure. In south Louisiana there are s-, there are salt structures all over the place. And a lot of these salt structures uh, affected the surface even at the, they still do at this time. So those things were very prolific, 'cause they had raised your different sand beds and that oil would seep right up there in these sand beds, around these salt structures. And they, those were the first uh, wells that we produced in south Louisiana. Around the salt domes. But later on we found that out and away from the salt domes there were some more and deeper very uh, smooth anticlines and they had large sand bodies and full of oil. [All chuckle] So that's what we were doing when I was first went in there, workin' out there, that's what I was, we were primarily workin' on at that time. Previous stuff was very antiquated and very slow and just a lot of guess, guesswork.

SW: So you guys-

MP: All of south Louisiana was shot several times, in the marsh, the swamp, and on land. Many, many crew. There were a lot of crews all over, all over the Gulf Coast. [Inaudible] detectors, the detectors, what we would do, we would drill a hole about every thousand feet, put five, 10, 15, 20 pounds of dynamite in it and sit them, string these detectors out about, oh, for a 1,000 feet this way and a 1,000 foot the other way. And then they just shoot those things and those vibrations would be picked up with a uh, instrument that they had in the field with it. And those things

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would, they would make these records right there in the field and we'd bring 'em in in the evening, wash 'em off good, and dry 'em out. The next day we, we'd work on 'em and map from 'em.

SW: Okay. You were makin' the maps so that they could find the, find the oil.

MP: We made the maps. [They're really?]-

SW: Okay. Give it to a drilling company and they would?

MP: Yes. Well, to an oil company, and you workin' for different oil companies. And uh, after we'd work, oh, maybe 20 mile, 'bout 20 mile area, we get it all together, and send it to 'em. Well we would make maps off of it first at different levels. Because you got, you got an oil that's been trapped at different levels and different sands. And of course some of 'em were extremely prolific, some weren't near as prolific. Uh, in your subsurface there are a lot of faults. Your sand, you might be mappin', there might be 100 foot thick and all of a sudden, CLCK, it might slip two, three hundred foot, it'd be deeper. And where those things would crack like that were perfect traps. The oil goes up and hits, when it hits that shale, your oil's in the sand. So when you put shale when it cracks, that traps it. You gotta another [trap to work with you?]. Almost all those faults, most of 'em traps. Some, at some level or other. Some of those were big faults, they uh, come all the way to the surface, some of 'em were buried, lot of 'em were buried in different levels, some of 'em might be, we might be chasin' one around there and it be buried at 10,000 feet or 12,000 feet they was trappin' oil down there.

SW: So you guys were goin' around in the swamp and, goin' around in the swamps blowin' things up?

MP: [That's it./What's this??]

SW: Basically y'all were goin' around in the swamp and blowin' dynamite up basically. [Chuckles]

MP: [Chuckling] Yes.

SW: To find the oil, sort of.

MP: Well-

SW: How did the people that lived in those areas feel about that? Did they have anybody that uh, that lived around there that you were-

MP: Well, yeah. We, in uh, oh we had a lot of those people that lived in it, in the swampie and swamp areas and marsh areas. Uh, trappers and so forth. But we hired a lot of those guys.

SW: Oh, okay.

MP: They were the best hands we had. Get that stuff moved and of course they knew the marsh buggies, a lot of that stuff, 'course in the early days they didn't have any marsh buggies, all on

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foot.

SW: And that worked out well?

MP: The marsh buggies?

SW: Well the trappers, hirin' these people?

MP: Hm?

SW: Hiring the people?

MP: Oh yeah, yeah.

SW: That worked out well?

MP: Yeah, they were, well they were excellent hands. You gotta walk the swamp. And, you know, they were sendin' us nice big, strappin', strong boys out of Houston and send 'em out there to work. But they can't, they didn't know how to walk in the swamp, they just bog down. I mean they, they didn't know how to move. We'd tell 'em, "Don't send 'em out here. They don't know how to walk."

SW: So it was better to hire the people who lived in the swamp.

MP: How to walk.

SW: They would-

MP: They were raised in the swamp and they could, those guys could pick up 50 pounds and walk all day long and never get wet above their waste. The rest of us were wet up to here. [All laugh] It's an art.

SW: Yeah, I s-, this sounds interest-, and did they welcome the job?

MP: Oh yeah.

SW: Did they want to be hired or?

MP: Yeah. They, we paid 'em good, they could make more money doin' that than they could trappin'.

SW: Okay. D-

MP: 'Course trappin' season leave, they, some of 'em would quit and go do their trappin' anyway.

SW: That's what I would-

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MP: Then they would come back after the season.

SW: That's what I was gonna ask, they still trapped sometimes.

MP: Yeah-

SW: Because that's how they made their living. But they could make some money from the seismic crew, they would-

MP: Right.

SW: Come with you guys. That's interesting. So they were more or less happy to see you?

MP: Oh yeah, yeah. They were, they were just excellent hands and most of 'em were uh, really nice guys. I had uh, boy some of 'em I had to get an interpreter to talk to 'em, some of 'em didn't speak English at all.

SW: That was my next question. How many of 'em spoke English? [Chuckles]

MP: Yeah. They, I'd say half of 'em didn't like, they could speak some, but they didn't like to 'cause they knew it wasn't very good, so they'd, they'd interpret for us. Nice guys, I made good friends with, you treated them right and man you had a friend for life. I could go down there now and find some of those guys. They'd invite me in for dinner. [Chuckles] I mean that's many years later.

SW: Well that's good. Now usin' dynamite, usin' TNT sounds a little bit dangerous, did anybody ever get hurt?

MP: Yes. Uh, one of the worst accidents on a seismic crew was Petty Geophysical in the earlier days and uh, what they do they take these uh... this dynamite comes in a tube, has a cardboard tube and they might be uh, five pound each. And this had, and they could screw together on that cardboard, it was [made?] [Inaudible]. And you'd, you might screw it together 'til you got 50 pounds. Put it down the hole, screw a next piece on, put it down hole.

SW: [Inaudible].

MP: Uh, some, uh, a lot of 'em the only way they really ever had a bunch of people killed was Petty Geophysical and what they were doin' they were shooting maybe uh, 15 or 20 pound charges. And that charge might be at about 100 foot deep. And then you'd have to take these poles, they're 10 foot long poles and they latch onto each other and you'd [raise?] these poles, put it down. Put the next one on, raise it up, push it down, 'til you get the charge to the bottom. Then you jerk on it and take these poles out, one at a time. Well, [most of the guy?], well we all knew it. They were, some of these guys at old Petty Geophysical was the name of the company where this actually happened. When they'd shoot that charge down there, they'd blow all the water in the hole, on top of it, and it was [Inaudible] water. Went SHOOP! Like that. Well if you had a charge already made up [and it had?] a little uh, wire tu-, two little wires on it attached to the, to the cap. There was caps about the size of your finger and it made a, stick a hole and stick that thing in there, and then tie that to it. Well when this charge go off, then there'd be a suction down.

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So they'd have, they had this little cap wire for the, for to shoot it with and they would throw the next charge in the hold and SHOOOP! It suck it right down to the bottom. And they wouldn't have to take these poles and shove it down there 10 foot at a time. You know, that take 30 minutes, a lot of hard work. Well what happened, they uh, they had this charge, both charges made up, with one in the hole. And uh, shoot it. But what they did they hooked up the wrong charge layin' up there on the ground and it's 20 pounds or more, whatever it was. Kill seven men in one [wife?] standin' there. So it was a rule never to make up another charge until the one in the hole's been shot. [DD chuckles]

DD: Good rule.

SW: You had to be real careful.

MP: Oh yeah. I mean, well I fired quite a few people from doin' that.

SW: Oh somebody, somebody did somethin' wrong or broke the rules, you fire 'em?

MP: Well see, yeah. 'Cause if they have a charge already made up, got the cap in it, after that first charge goes off, then there's a suction, you just throw that charge in and they had a high speed uh, thing with the, this line just wrapped on it. And it just sucked that dynamite right down to the bottom and it keeps that old boy from havin' to shove that damn thing down there, which takes about 20, 30 minutes of hard work. Two men. That uh, I fired quite a few guys from doin' that. [Chuckles]

SW: You had, you had specific rules on how to do these things. And i

MP: Absolute-, and if you-

SW: And if somebody broke the rules, they gone.

MP: Yeah, I reckon that one of the [rule?], never make up two charges at the same time.

SW: People would get hurt.

MP: You hook up the wrong one and you kill everybody around there, and usually four, five, seven people. But Petty Geophysical killed seven people and one wife. That's the only uh, one that I knew of or ever heard of, that killed people, but. And that was a long time back in the earlier days.

SW: Yeah. This was in the '40s.

MP: Oh yeah.

SW: Nineteen forties?

MP: Yeah. Yeah, in the '40s. Yeah, early '40s where they first, you know, really got to goin' with the dynamite charges. But it uh... didn't change much for a long time. And now in modern crew those detectors were pretty good size, weighed several pounds, so finally uh, the latter years I was

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workin' there that thing was that big around and that tall. [All chuckle] When I was first workin' there was, it was oh, a good size detectors [Inaudible]. And a man could carry about four or five of 'em and I would carry 15 or 20 of 'em [Inaudible]. I

SW: You mentioned uh, you mentioned you lived on the boats, you lived a boat. So when you were out on the swamps, you guys lived on a boat. You said-

MP: Yeah, along with uh-

SW: What was that like?

MP: Some areas, a lot of areas where it was quite inaccessible we'd have a quarter boat. And uh-

SW: Wh-, what was that like?

MP: Well uh, like a big two-story house. It had a big kitchen, a cook, people to maintain it. And they have a [trawl?] boat to move it around. And as we progress we, oh maybe every, we might have, well the quarter boat would work from it in an area maybe for several weeks, then we might move several miles and shoot that area up.

SW: What uh, how-

MP: Or sometimes we [Inaudible] quarter boat over here in south Louisiana and they moved it all the way to Texas. [All laugh] Yeah, it took about a week to get it moved over there. [Inaudible] I ride in my car just met 'em over there.

KP: What about that hurricane that, and you were in a quarter boat?

MP: Oh, well. [Chuckles] Scary. Uh, when they had the hurricanes comin', they'd bring those quarter boats in to drier areas where you had uh, places where big boats could tie up. You know, [Coast Guard?] and so forth, you tie those things up the best you can. [Inaudible] some of those big, two-story quarter boats where they [saw/thought hell?]. And in a hurricane they were pretty uh, they were real disadvantage. [Come on, get a wave?]. SHHH. First time they come through [Inaudible] and, you know, [they're big light boat and?] everything else is marshes out there. Tear 'em all to hell a second.

SW: How was the food on-

MP: Hm?

SW: How was the food on the quarter boats?

MP: The crews?

SW: The food.

MP: The food?

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SW: Yeah, how-

MP: Most of the time it was real good.

SW: You had a cook that-

MP: Oh yeah, we had-

SW: That [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

MP: We had a cook and we had a couple helpers and two or three helpers and then they had another guy or two on there to keep the place clean. It was uh, it was a first-class operation.

SW: Bein' from eat Texas, not from Louisiana, I'm sure the food was a bit different for you, it was somethin' new for you.

MP: Yeah, well I'd been down there for awhile.

SW: You had been here awhile, so there was not much of a change there?

MP: Yeah. Yeah. First crew I ever saw was right over here at Breaux Bridge, Louisiana.

SW: So you-

MP: The uh, just, you know, go ahead and work, work all day long and come in. Rent a room from one of the residents there and they rent you a room. Quarter boats in the southern part state were quite an operation. You had uh, didn't have [Inaudible], you had to have good boats, good tools, people that knows how to tow somethin' like that. A two-story quarter boat is really a very uh, tricky thing to move around. [Trawl?] boat take just a little breeze and all of a sudden that thing starts, the boats here and you got big tows with uh, long tows of iron full of oil and gas and all those sort of things. Goin' the other way. You get in his way, he can't stop that thing. He just tear you all to hell. [Chuckles] So, uh, the boat skippers were extremely important. Had an old boy named... called him [Garvey?]. Big [Inaudible, from this point on beeping interferes considerable with audibility] was raised in Raceland, Louisiana, [next to the water?] one of these big uh-

DD: On Bayou Lafourche.

MP: Bayou Lafourche, right.

DD: Right north of Lockport.

MP: Huh?

DD: Right north of Lockport.

SW: That's David's neck of the woods.

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MP: Lock-, it's [Inaudible, beeping interferes with audibility] now. But he was a, he couldn't read or write, he was the best boat skipper in south Louisiana to move the quarter boat. [Inaudible] And never [tore one of those quarter boats up?].

SW: What did you guys do for uh, in your spare time when you weren't working in the day and at night, on the quarter boats? Did you have a radio or did you play cards with each other and-

MP: [We had radio on?], and uh, we uh, [Inaudible, beeping interferes with audibility] [you gotta go to work in the evenings?]. They'd bring the records in there and we'd have to dry 'em out and then start off with [Inaudible [fold 'em?] and number 'em, so we know [Inaudible]. And uh, that was [Inaudible] map 'em. Make maps from 'em. It was a busy uh, [Inaudible] all day and [Chuckles] you know [Inaudible, beeping interferes with audibility].

SW: Were you married at the time?

MP: Yeah.

SW: You were married. Your wife is from-

MP: Well earlier [Inaudible] quarter boat. [They stayed in?] [Inaudible]. And uh, got to be a [Inaudible] [engineer?].

SW: So how was that if you're gone 10 days at a time and she's back home [Inaudible]?

MP: Yeah. We'd work 10 days and take four or five days off and come home. It was on speed boat, [Inaudible]. Yeah, we were [gone a lot?]. [Inaudible] south between Lockport, [Inaudible] Mississippi River. [Inaudible] southern part of the [country?]. [Inaudible]

SW: Was the, did they pay you well?

MP: Yeah.

SW: Was there good money [Inaudible]?

MP: Yeah, [over 50 dollars?]. And those guys [Clears throat], hands had some experience and work on quarter boat [Inaudible] [expenses?]. [Inaudible] But a regular land crew, they'd have to buy their own [Inaudible] buy meals and [that sort of business?]. So quarter boats was a good deal. [Inaudible] [you work for it?]. You had to travel back and forth every [Inaudible] every day without a quarter boat, you'd never get to finish. You could've been out there workin' [Inaudible].

SW: You uh, you told me that you um, you, your friend got you, told you about the seismic job. And so that's when you came from Texas to work for the seismic company, right? What other, why did you do that work? Was there another, were there other job opportunities that you could've taken at the time or was oil, the oil industry the best option for you?

MP: The uncle I was livin' with had a friend who owned the seismic company, he owned [Inaudible] he had crews, [25-man crews?] in south Louisiana. He only had one in Texas and one,

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and two of 'em in south Louisiana. [Inaudible] Anyway, my uncle asked me if he could find me a job. I said, "Sure, I'll work on one of those crews." [Inaudible] know the guy that owned the company, he was [goin' down here?] and I rode over with him. And they had a little office in Thibodaux, Louisiana. And they were workin' swamp in Thibodaux. So they uh, showed me how to, you know, [Inaudible] work for 'em. [Inaudible] work 'em.

[KP?]: [Can you tell 'em where?] [Inaudible]?

KP: All the way down [Inaudible].

MP: [Inaudible]. And then uh, I did that for a few days and then they uh, the [Inaudible], "Oh he needs a little field experience." I said, "Oh man, that's great." [But I wasn't so?] [Inaudible]. [All laugh] They were bad swamps. Quite an experience.

SW: Back in east Texas, what other kinds of jobs could you have done? Why did you, was there a specific reason that you picked to work in the oil industry or was there something-

MP: No, I think it's [Inaudible]. My uncle knew this-

SW: Yeah, he had a friend-

MP: That owned a seismic crew and-

SW: That was your connection.

MP: And I was lookin' around for a job. So he, he got me that job with seismic crew. [Inaudible] [Worked good?], that was the guy that owned it was [Inaudible] first-class kind of guy.

SW: That was in the swamps in the 1940s. Uh, what did you do after that? Did you, did you ever do any offshore work?

MP: [Inaudible], yeah. [Inaudible]. Well not, not fieldwork. We'd work offshore records. They'd bring those in and we'd work 'em in the office.

SW: So after you worked here in the swamps, what did you do? Did you move on to somethin' else?

MP: No. Just kept on makin' maps from it.

SW: Maps, okay.

MP: Yeah. [Inaudible] there's been a lot of change in the business. [Inaudible]. Like I'm not uh, I [would?] probably be surprised [if I went out there now?] see how they do do it now. It's changed a lot.

SW: Yeah, you're doin' the 3-D seismic now where they just map everything out. What was the name of company you um, your friend's company? Your uncle, your uncle's friend's company? [Pause]

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MP: Oh I, I can't even remember the company name.

SW: Are they, they're not still around are they?

MP: It's too far back.

SW: How long did you work for 'em?

MP: Oh... probably I worked for 'em for a year and a half, somethin' like that. And then I uh, they were moving out of the area I think. They didn't need as many hands. I got [Inaudible] some other guys [drillin'?] Houma and Thibodaux area. Had other crews that were swamp areas, so I got a job on one of those. And, you know, I had some experience then [from this job?]. ['Cause they workin' the office over there?]. I stayed in the office, well, quite a while, then later on turned crew over to me. We shot all up and down the [Chuckling] country from [Inaudible]. [Pause] But in uh, seismic data and things, there were procedures that changed [with time?]. Later on they didn't, they stopped havin' [the work right?] on the crew for interpretations with the crew. See they would just have one area, one town, and then maybe the data from five or six different crews would be comin' in. It kind of centralized. And it changed procedures, but it was faster and so forth. Lot of changes.

SW: Less dangerous? Some [Inaudible].

MP: [Inaudible] that stuff when they shoot out there in the Gulf, man [Laughs] them boats are movin' [all the/the whole?] time. It's unbelievable what they do out there. They can cover a lot of country out there, a lot of big area quick. Onshore in the swamp it might take you a month, they do it in a day out there.

SW: Did you ever have any experience with a helicopter?

MP: What?

SW: Did you ever have any experience with helicopters?

MP: Yeah, yeah, I sure did. [Chuckles] I thought that was a great invention 'til I found out how dangerous they were. [MP and SW laugh] 'Fact I'd go out and make a trip, goin' down there uh, in Larose area, on Bayou Lafourche. I'd make a trip out in the field [there in marsh?] oh maybe once every other day on the helicopter. They'd transport, we had a marsh buggies out there in the marsh several miles from land. So we'd take two men, drop 'em off out there, and you'd be back in just a few minutes. Two more and come out [Inaudible] they would take marsh buggy maybe two, three hours to make that trip. And they could do it in the helicopter in about 10 minutes.

SW: With all the people?

MP: Yeah.

SW: Okay.

MP: And just leave the marsh buggies out there instead of bringin' 'em back and forth. You

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spend all your time just travelin'. So I had all the helicopter I needed uh, oh I thought it was great 'til I found out how dangerous it was. [SW chuckles] [Inaudible] dangerous.

SW: Did you ever see any crashes?

MP: What, yes. I saw one crash. It got too close to high line where it landed. Tore the helicopter all to hell. Had it [Inaudible]. Very dangerous piece of equipment.

DD: Any other incidents with helicopters you can remember? Any other incidents where you saw a helicopter, how they were dangerous other than that one crash?

MP: Uh, that's the only one I ever [Inaudible].

SW: Just only one crash, that was it.

MP: Saw, you know, up close.

DD: Yeah.

MP: They uh, they were really worth their money, though. That moved things, speeded the [shooting?] up tremendously. Four or five times more so than regular what we call marsh buggies. So slow.

SW: Really changed things.

MP: Yeah. But uh, uh, when I found out how dangerous those helicopters were, I quit goin' to the field. [All laugh] One of those uh, little old boys that drove those helicopters and two [sticks?] on each end. One of 'em moves it this way, then the other one this way. [Inaudible] he done nothin' but think about that helicopter. It surprises me how dangerous it was.

SW: So you started workin' in the offices at that time?

MP: Well I'd been workin' the office a long time before.

SW: That was a better schedule for you, you worked regular office hours right?

KP: Yeah.

MP: Oh yeah.

SW: So uh, a little better for your family life and your social life at that point right?

MP: Uh, yeah, probably a lot.

SW: How did y-, your wife is from Louisiana?

MP: Yeah, she was Breau Bridge.

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SW: How did you meet her?

MP: Uh, I think I... I was uh... we had a shootin' crew right in close there at Breaux Bridge, and I'd go, a number of us had rented, you know, bedrooms in different houses in town. One of the guys was a local introduced me to her. [Inaudible] ever since. [SW chuckles]

SW: How many children did you have?

MP: I don't know [how?] we got five. [All laugh] Kevin's the younger.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech] five.

MP: Huh? Good, good guys, all of 'em.

SW: All boys?

MP: No, have daughter and four boys.

SW: I noticed Kevin's here, working here. How many of your children went into the oil industry?

MP: Three of 'em, three boys.

SW: What do they do?

MP: I don't know, what do they do?

KP: Bill's a geologist, Jeff is just, oh he uh, does instrument for Chevron, offshore Louisiana. And I do geological mapping for [Inaudible] geologist.

SW: That's what you're doing with those maps?

KP: Got a brother-in-law who uh, does coastal conservation and [Inaudible, squeaking chair]. So the whole family is in the oil industry.

SW: Did you ever have any experience with unions?

MP: Unions?

SW: Yeah. Out in uh, the marshes or?

MP: Uh... yeah, I think so, they didn't bother us much, though, in those days. If I'da still been out there on a crews in latter years, that's a lot more [static out of 'em?]. [Pause] Unions could be very dangerous, just slow things down. [Chuckles]

SW: So maybe the people didn't like 'em too much?

MP: Well not really, a lot of the reason for the union was uh, some of these people that worked a lot of men, they might workin' way over time and wouldn't want to pay 'em any overtime. A lot

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of 'em didn't realize there was such a law after eight hours supposed to give the guy uh, a check in a half or whatever it is, it varies. But it was a good thing [to work for?]. A couple lawsuits to get what they should have. But there was a lot of, for years there was a lot of people here doin' [Inaudible] pretty good. [All laugh] They just didn't know it. And particularly in uh, south Louisiana, 'cause had lots of people couldn't read or write [and were screwed?]. And most of those guys were the better hands. They excellent workers.

SW: Physical labor.

MP: Hm?

SW: Physical labor they could do that, huh?

MP: Yeah. And of course, you know, you take a guy that's raised in the marsh and swamp country, and who's trapped in it, trapped for muskrats and so forth, he knows how to walk in it. And uh, a guy like myself, I'm up to here and he's, he just goes above his knees [Inaudible]. It's just, it's an art that they can walk in it. So I'd walk behind him.

SW: [Chuckles] Follow him. [Chuckles]

MP: Oh yeah. It all looked alike to me.

DD or KP: Yeah.

MP: But nice, nice guys. Most of those guys were, they were illiterate, but they had, they had a lot of sense. They knew how to do things physically. They were excellent hands. Now they were, without those guys in the swamp, you couldn't make it. [We saw?] people move, seismic crews into that, those swamp areas, all their hands, they never seen a swamp. They couldn't, they couldn't get anything done. Just didn't know how to work in it. A big difference. It's an art, walkin' in the swamp.

SW: Did you ever uh, in your work crews, did y'all ever work with any women or black people at all?

MP: Uh... yeah, I, I hired uh, several blacks in uh... you know, on the crew one time. I was havin' trouble findin' enough hands. We were workin' in, in swamp. And uh, I hired about five or six of 'em. I told 'em, said, "Now, remember now, this hard work. We're in the swamp." "Oh, we," said, "We work hard all our life, we're not scared of work." Well the end of the first day, I only had one left. [All chuckle] But, and they weren't ha-, they weren't scared of hard work, scared of snakes. [Laughing] They said, "There's snakes out here!" They had never actually really worked in it, boggy marsh. You're sittin' there up to your waist and an old cotton mouse sittin' right here, by you lookin' at you. [SW laughs] Gonna scare the hell out of you. Yeah, I only had one left the first day and the second day he was gone. [All chuckle] So, they just, they never worked, they'd been workin' in cane fields all their life. And good workers.

SW: So they knew how to work hard, but they just didn't-

MP: They could, yeah, but they didn't know, they didn't have any idea how difficult it would be

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walkin' in a water, swamp. And all those guys we had down there around Chackbay and south of uh, just north of uh, Thibodaux, there's a ridge down there. It's about 40 miles long. There's one road and [Inaudible], all they've done-

DD: Choctaw.

MP: Is, is walk in these swamps and trap. That's all they'd ever-

DD: Choctaw.

MP: Right. Exactly right. They were experts at it. And those little guys, they wouldn't be wet above the knees and I'd be up to here. [DD and MP chuckle] Nice guys, too. But once we found out about those guys, [they was?], oh we were shootin' that thing up like we were runnin' on dry land. [DD chuckles] Quite a big difference. Good guys. One of 'em uh, the thing that's real good is most of 'em spoke French, quite a few of 'em [Inaudible] [Indian?], but we had an interpreter. Little boy's name was Dooley [Ardeaux?], I'll never forget it. He was my interpreter. [DD laughs]

SW: The co-, the company hired the interpreters?

MP: No, I hired him.

SW: Oh, you hired, they worked, they worked-

MP: Yeah, he worked on the crew, too.

SW: You'd get a local person that spoke the Cajun French?

MP: Yeah.

SW: And bring 'em along and [Inaudible].

MP: You had to have an interpreter. [All chuckle]

DD: There's still people down there who don't speak English.

MP: Oh I'm sure that's true.

DD: I've met some.

KP: [Inaudible]?

DD: Mostly older people.

MP: Hm?

DD: Mostly the older people, though.

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MP: Yeah. The younger ones now they've been taught English. They were very congenial people. Very, good workers. Just first-class people. They were the nicest bunch of people I've ever met in my life, really. [Inaudible] has changed now. [Slight pause] Dooley Ardeaux, yeah, that was my, he was my interpreter. [Chuckles] He was raised down there, too. He had finished high school. Had a good command of the English language too, as well as French.

SW: He finished school, so he was a little different than some of those around there.

MP: Yes, oh, a lot of 'em never even saw the inside of a school. But good workers, all they done is work in that swamp all their life.

SW: I have a sort of question, it's sort of an opinion question. What do you think the oil industry did for south Louisiana?

MP: What [Inaudible]?

SW: What do you think the oil industry did for the state of Louisiana, for south Louisiana?

MP: It put it on the map. [Chuckles] Probably the money made in this industry in south Louisiana, or in Louisiana. [Pause] Yeah, south Louisiana is loaded with good oil fields, oil and gas. And then parts of Texas, along the Gulf Coast.

SW: East part right there.

MP: Uh hm.

SW: Let's turn the question around. What did Louisiana, or south Louisiana, do for the oilfield?

MP: What did south Louisiana do for the oilfield?

SW: What did the people here do for the oil industry? [Pause] Kind of, sort of more difficult-

MP: Gave 'em a lot of jobs. [Pause] And those jobs are still here. [Pause]

KP: How come you think uh, we're so poor in the state, bein' so wealthy in minerals?

MP: [Chuckles]

SW: Good question.

MP: Well, I don't know. Lot of that money's goin' out of the state, you're right.

SW: Do you think it's goin' somewhere else, it's being taken out? Goin' somewhere?

MP: Yeah. But there's a lot of that money still here. It, oil industry put south Louisiana on the map. Prior to that it was just, and of course offshore business has really changed things. They've found tremendous size oilfields out there. Found 'em fast, quick. Move the equipment in there and drill 'em, too. When you movin' equipment in a swamp you have a slow [Inaudible]. Very

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difficult.

SW: Do you have any regrets, any regrets at all workin' for the oilfield or workin' the swamps or-

MP: No, not really. No. I [Pause] [generally speakin' now?], most of the guys I worked with over the years have been first-class kind of guys and a lot of those couldn't read or write, but real good people. Some of the best people I ever met, really.

DD: Anything else you'd like to add to?

MP: Oh, I think we covered it pretty close. Pretty good.

SW: You have a story, you have a crazy story that-

MP: [Chuckling] Crazy story?

DD: Or just a good story, you know.

SW: Somethin' that just, somethin' that's just, that make people say, "I can't believe that."
[Chuckles] Anything.

MP: Uh... no, not offhand I can't.

SW: Okay. Well.

MP: Just comin' out of it alive is a pretty good story. [All laugh]

DD: Well.

SW: That's pretty much it. Um, you said you, you've pretty much covered it, so.

MP: Well good. Well I enjoyed [helpin' you gentlemen?]. [Inaudible].

SW: So did I.

MP: [Hope it was?] helpful.

SW: Yes sir. This was a good interview. I learned about the swamp.

MP: [Chuckling] Hm?

SW: I learned about the swamp.

MP: Swamp and marsh.

SW: Yeah.

MP: There's a big difference between a swamp and marsh.

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DD: What's that difference?

MP: Hm?

DD: What's the difference?

MP: Swamp has trees.

DD: Okay.

MP: And it's a tree area flooded with water. Of course seismic crew [Inaudible] you can walk in it. But when you get to the marsh, no trees, you're goin' down.

DD: Sink straight through that mud.

MP: You can't walk in it. In most of it. Then you gotta have marsh buggies [to take you?].

DD: Um, I'd like to get a photo if that would be okay. Wait a minute, there we go.

SW: There you go, put up a card.

DD: Yeah. One-

[END OF RECORDING]