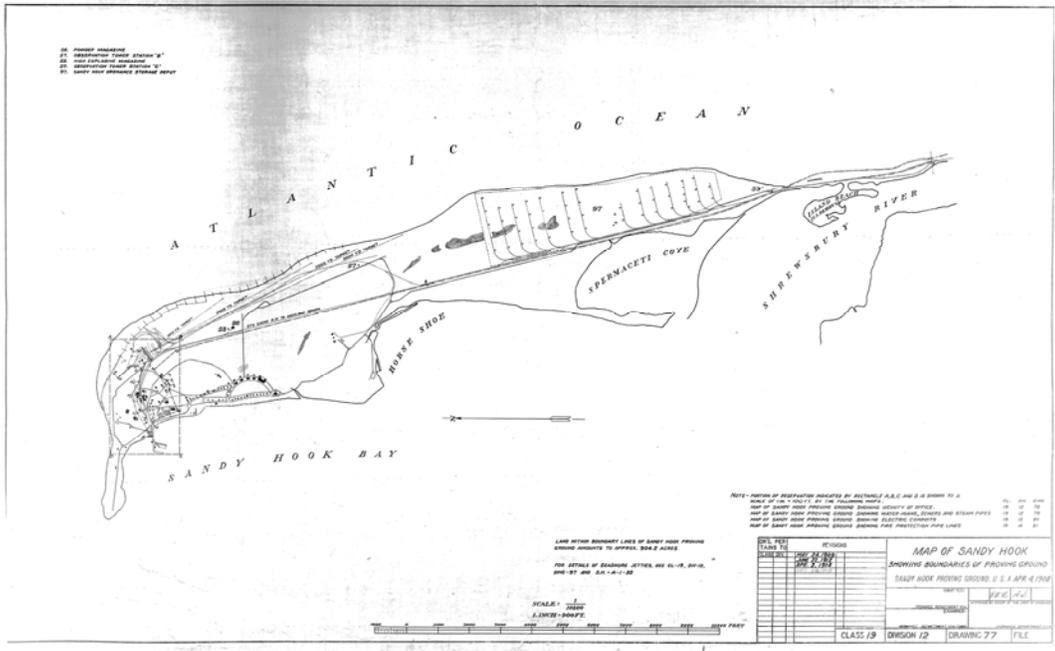


Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
 An Oral History Interview with Irwin "Blub" Parker
 Sandy Hook Proving Ground Civilian Employee
 1918-1920
 Interviewed by Tom Hoffman and Elaine Harmon, NPS
 Transcribed by Mary Rasa, 2011
 April 30, 1986



MUSEUM ARTIFACT #407

Map of Sandy Hook Showing Boundaries of the Proving Ground, 1908.

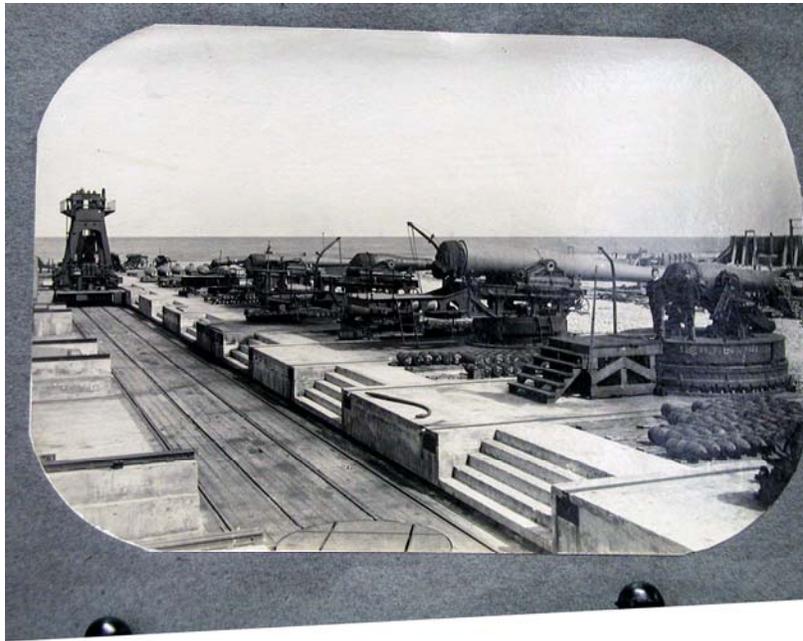


Image of the Proof Battery with guns and Gantry crane in back left on tracks. c. 1905.

(tapes stops and restarts)

IP: But anyway, she came here one day and she was telling us all about it and she lived out in Florence, New Jersey and she was setting outside telling us all about it. How they traced it and she got some money out of that. I don't know how much after the lawyers had pulled it apart she couldn't have got too much but she is the one that told me about my great-great grandfather because they traced it.

EH: Who is your grandfather? Maybe we can get some more recent time.

IP: My grandfather was William Parker. My father was Furman Parker. My great-great, I don't know what his name was. I wouldn't know it.

EH: You talked about an Indian. Do you know which tribe?

IP: No.

EH: You don't know.

TH: It must be from right here.

EH: Lenni Lenape you would think. Yeah.

TH: It's of course, the Parkers that...

IP: I often laugh that I read it so many times the Indians were allowed to go on the (Sandy) Hook and pick berries but you wouldn't and beach plums. You weren't as good as those Indians. (laughter)

TH: Yeah. They had rights.

IP: That's the truth. You couldn't go down there and pick beach plums but they could. That is a true story too.

EH: So, when, what years did you work at Sandy Hook? Let's track..

IP: 1918, 1919 and '20.

EH: What year were you born in?

IP: 1900. That's going back too damn far.

TH: No. It was just yesterday.

IP: Seems like it.

TH: How did you end up going down there? Were jobs open?

IP: Yes. Anybody could go down there and get a job, anybody. I don't care who it was. World War I if you went in the Army, if you had one leg or bum feet you went. That was it.

TH: Because of wartime.

IP: Yeah. But I got down there somehow and I was only 17 and I lied and said I was 18 and I missed the draft both ways by about two or three months, just enough to get in between, but the experience that we had on that Hook. Oh, my god. Is the tower still there in the (Sandy Hook) Proving Grounds? There used to be a big tower in the Proving Grounds.

TH: Long gone, but there is a base to one tower right behind the Proof Battery.

IP: Yeah.

TH: And its metal round cylinder

IP: Yeah.

TH: It goes up now about 10 foot. I mean it went much higher.

IP: Oh, yeah.

TH: But the Army tore the tower down, but they left the base of it, ten foot of the base.

IP: You know, they had a pair of glasses on the ceiling of that tower. My god, they were enormous big glasses and they would operate them with a wheel because I used to go up there and operate them. And you could adjust them and I never seen a pair of glasses like that. Never. You could see a freckle on a person's face on Coney Island on a clear day.

EH: Wow.

IP: They were powerful glasses.

TH: Like binoculars or...

IP: But they were too big to handle. They were on a tripod on the ceiling.

TH: For observation.

IP: Yeah.

TH: That must be, let's see...

IP: They were in the tower.

EH: We have brought some maps from the museum collection and which number do we have that we are looking at?

TH: This one is, where is our map number.

EH: Okay. Here it is. We are looking at 409.151.

TH: And here is the Proof Battery. And it was called Tower Station A and it's located right behind the Proof Battery. This is the ocean side over here.

IP: Yeah.

TH: This is where field artillery was tested to the real big guns.

IP: Yeah.

TH: In fact this gun emplacement it says 14-inch gun emplacement. But it says Station Tower A.

IP: Right through here must have been the railroad.

TH: Yes. You are right. The railroad is not on this map but the railroad line came right in the...

IP: Yeah. Right.

TH: So here is where they dumped the 18-inch (gun) right by the railroad. Because the damn jerks they didn't care about no one. They blow that whistle twice that meant it goes and they blew it and the train was going by and took the windows all out of the cars.

EH: Wow.

TH: When they fired it off?

IP: Yes.

TH: The train was passing.

IP: Yeah.

TH: And they shot that big 18-inch gun.

IP: Blowed all the windows out.

TH: Of the train. (laughter)

EH: You are talking about three cranes could not even budge...

IP: Well, they did but it was more than they could handle, three cranes.

EH: And you said the cranes were fastened to the railroad?

IP: Yeah. They had to bolt them down to the railroad to keep them from tipping over.

EH: Interesting. And the barrel cracked, was that....?

IP: Yeah. Yeah. And they dug a trench right here.

TH: That's the west side of the Proof Battery.

IP: And buried it right there. And I bet you they dug it up. I don't blame them because it's a lot of steel there.

TH: You were also saying that the 18-inch gun had been fired a lot; maybe about 20 times?

IP: I don't think it went that many. I could have been fired maybe...

Mrs. Parker: I hated it when they shot those big things off, even here in Highlands.

TH: I can imagine.

Mrs. Parker: The windows used to rattle and everything.

IP: It would shake the windows right out here.

TH: What was it like for you being down there at Sandy Hook? I mean you were even closer. You were on the Hook when they fired those guns.

IP: You got used to it. You didn't pay no attention to it.

TH: But do you remember, you know, the first couple of times did it startle you?

IP: Yes.

TH: Was probably real scary.

IP: We had one guy down there, Fred Johnson who he was a carpenter. I don't know what he was doing there when they were starting. I used to just drop down on knees and

you didn't have time to run. Well, he run and stuck his head under a beach plum bush and four or five of us had seen it and we got to laughing and we couldn't stop. Stuck his head under a beach plum bush. (laughter)

EH: Is that protection?

TH: It's a human reaction to get under something and it's only a bush.

IP: Probably that's what it was.

TH: Yeah.

IP: Four or five of us had seen it and we just started laughing 'til we couldn't stop.

TH: Because there's no real protection.

IP: A beach plum bush somebody hid under it.

TH: It's interesting that there was, was there only one 18-inch gun there? Was that the biggest that they ever made and they were trying to test it out?

IP: Yeah. They had two 16's (inch guns) up here, you know.

TH: In World War II.

IP: Yeah.

TH: Battery Lewis.

IP: And they fired them once each. Bob Johnson fired them. I forgot now what he was. He was some kind of officer.

TH: But he was in the Army.

IP: He lived here in Highlands.

TH: Okay. I know the name. Did he end up as commander of Fort Hancock because there was a Robert Johnson who commanded Fort Hancock after World War II but he had been in the Army?

IP: It could have been. I could have been because while I was there in 1918 I think a Lt. Colonel Kirk, nice man. Capt Oster was a nice man down there too, but Lt. Col Kirk, you couldn't meet a nicer man.

TH: Being you were working there in 1918, did you ever get to see them fire the guns at the Proof Battery, you know, because they had all different kinds of guns?

IP: Oh, yeah every day. Everyday.

TH: That must have been one heck of a racket. Could you describe what they were doing there because we have no idea of how the Army would because you loaded up the shells?

IP: Yeah. They fired them. We didn't fire them.

TH: But did you ever get a chance to see them firing the guns, test firing the guns?

IP: All the time.

TH: All the time. Could you describe what that was like because we have no idea of what they were doing?

IP: You get used to it that you didn't pay no attention to it.

TH: Yeah. Because you were doing work around there.

IP: Yeah.

TH: And it became a matter of fact.

IP: Right.

TH: But they went from, as I understand it, they went from the ocean side field guns where they would test fire field guns and they would graduate up to the big guns.

IP: Yeah. The big ones were next to the railroad so they didn't have too far to carry or handle them.

TH: Right. Because, you know, what I am saying is this we have the photograph of the Proof Battery right by your left arm over there and it shows all these guns lined up. Were they firing all these guns at once or would they take their time?

IP: It didn't make no difference. An officer would come down to fire this one. An officer would come down to fire this one. They didn't care. They would fire them all at once. It didn't make no difference. Each one had their own duty to do and job to do and they didn't care about you, me or nobody.

Mrs. Parker: At one time didn't they have a target out in the ocean that they used to do that?

IP: They used to tow a target and Bahr's down here called a *Jack Bahr* boat which is like a tugboat. Well, they put a bid in and they got a job with the government towing this target. Well, it is alright to tow the target. It is a big target. Well, Al Bahr was running

the tug and, of course, they had an Army officer out on the tug too and they could communicate back and forth from shore to the tug and a couple of days went by and Al said, "This is the life." He said, "Beautiful weather and nobody firing nothing," he said. He said, "We go down towards Asbury we turn around come back," and he said, "Nobody fired nothing." One day, they fired and went right over top of the tugboat. (laughter)

EH: Wow.

IP: He said, "That's enough." (laughter)

TH: Just that one round?

IP: They must have had a mile line out. How they could have missed that much I don't know.

Mrs. Parker: They messed up.

TH: Yeah. I was gonna say they always is that human error.

IP: You should hear Al Bahr tell about that. Fired right over their heads. He said it took the windows right out of the tugboat. He couldn't believe it, he said, "How could they miss it that much." 'Cause I know they used to tow the targets out there but it seemed to me that they had at least a mile rope on it.

TH: Yeah. Real long cables.

IP: Yeah right.

TH: But there is always that human error where they get it mixed up. Because at that great distance you got two things out there or just for the heck of it. I'm sure somebody was..

IP: We went down one day and we were gonna put a water line in out towards Battery Peck. I think it was Peck. It was right on the main road. And we had four or five men digging this trench and I'd come back with a pipe and they were gonna put water in it. In them days the soldiers used to have a wooden bottom, wooden sides up about four feet and the rest of it was canvas. And that is what they lived in all winter. They were cold places.

TH: That is a cold place in the wintertime.

IP: There was about fifteen, twenty soldiers in each one of them places and we were putting this water pipe in and here comes a couple of officers and a sergeant with them and they were down there and they pulled with this god darn gun, a disappearing gun. Well, it went along for about an hour and finally the sergeant came over and he says,

“When I pull my handkerchief out of my pocket,” he says, “you people get out of this trench and keep going.” And I said, “What do you expect trouble?” He said, “I have a couple of bobtails here,” he says from where was it, New York state...

EH: Adirondacks?

IP: No, where the officers train.

EH: West Point.

IP: He says, “I’ve got a couple of bobtails,” and he says, “they are going to fire a gun,” and he says, “they are going to kill themselves.” So, he told us, “There ain’t no alcohol in the jacks.” I said, “If there ain’t no alcohol how are they going to raise it?” He said, “I don’t know.” I said, “Ain’t you gonna tell them?” He said, “You ain’t allowed to tell an officer what to do. An officer is over you. You can’t tell him.” If he’s under you, you can tell him. Well, after a while he waved the flag, the handkerchief and we took off but we took off so we could watch them. Well, they fired it. I don’t know what size gun it was, pretty big 10 or 12 (inch gun) they fired it. There was no alcohol in the jacks so the gun went off and out across the street. If there was anybody in back of them it would have killed them. The gun went clear across off the mount, clear across the road over in the next yard.

EH: Oh no.

TH: This was one of the disappearing guns?

IP: Yes.

TH: Was it in an emplacement or in the Proof Battery?

IP: No. In the emplacement.

TH: In the actual defenses up there?

IP: Yeah. Yeah. How he got it over, how he got it up over the concrete I don’t know. She raised and he got it up to the elevation he wanted it and he fired it. It was a good thing he wasn’t standing in back of it.

EH: Oh, my gosh.

IP: And I said to the sergeant, Why don’t you tell him there ain’t no alcohol,” he said they weren’t allowed to. He said, “You can’t tell an officer something. You can’t tell an officer nothing.” That’s what he said.

TH: Officers were known as gods back then.

EH: Incredible.

IP: Ain't that something. He stood there. He know it was going to happen but he wouldn't tell them. I don't know if he was right or not but he said you ain't allowed to. He said, "If he was lower than me I could tell him what to do but," he said, "if he is over me I can't tell him nothing."

TH: You mentioned by the way at the Proof Battery they would sound a whistle.

IP: Yes. But he was at the...

TH: At the gun emplacement.

IP: Yeah. No guns or nothing, just firing.

EH: How about the time you were talking to us before about hiding among the powder bags? There were about twenty guys. Tell us about that time on a mound you said there was a huge mound.

IP: That must have been ten tons or more of powder in there. They used to keep powder in there all the time. Well, the train track used to come in and we used to have to open the big double door and then we used to have to put a strain over the smokestack and then the train would come in and bring in you wouldn't know what they were gonna bring in, but lots of times they would come in just to take the powder out, the shells out that you had already assembled. Well, this time it came in and it had this English trench motor that ran maybe for four or five days and this English officer had to get back to England and they left it, the trench motor there in back of the powder and the train backed out and we took the screen off and closed the door because it was cold and then we didn't have no powder to make up because it was raining so much and nobody was firing guns. So we climbed up in this heap of powder, mountain of powder and we watching down to see what the hell they were going to do next. You got that all.

EH: Yes.

IP: So, we are standing up there and they had a half a dozen American officers there and they were writing down this, that and the other. We were watching them peeking down through the bags and it went on for maybe a half hour and they were elevating it and all different and then he must have said, "Now all you do is pull the rope." So, he pulled the rope. My god, it was loaded. That thing was pointed up about 75 degrees. If that was pointed at that heap of powder there wouldn't be no Hook. There wouldn't be no Hook because that powder was so enormous that twenty of us could go up there and hide and you couldn't find us.

EH: And you said it glowed red.

IP: Everything turned blood red and you couldn't hear your own ears after that gun went off. You couldn't and I looked up and there was about a twenty foot square hole in the roof. Went right through the roof. It was a good thing nobody was standing in back of that thing because when that went off that flatcar went backwards about a hundred feet.

EH: Amazing.

IP: But nobody would admit how it got loaded. Nobody was going to take that blame. I guess they questioned everybody on the Hook. Nobody knew how it got loaded.

TH: Yeah. Looking at a map of the Proving Ground, here is the Proof Battery again.

IP: Yeah.

TH: Here is where the 18-inch gun, in fact here is the railroad.

IP: Right. Right. Right. When the railroad, when the train got somewhere's in here they fired and it took all the windows on that side of the train out. I wonder if someone didn't get cut all to hell in that train with all that glass.

TH: Sure.

IP: But they didn't care.

TH: But I am wondering where this, where when the mortar went off. I am wondering where that was.

IP: That was in the powder house here.

TH: Is that the, that was a brick building. There was a wall built around it to I guess. Protect it if they had any guns exploding at the Proof Battery. They built a concrete wall. It's an L shaped wall.

IP: They had it built so the train could go in and come around and come out.

TH: Because all these, see, these are the railroad rails here. This is what is mystifying me. By the way, these are the walls here that they used to lay the gun barrels on. Did you ever see them? These concrete walls pairs of walls and they would lay the gun barrels on these walls.

IP: No. I can't remember them.

TH: I am just wondering where this building was with all the gun powder.

IP: This is all railroad track in here. Isn't it?

TH: Yeah. That's all tracks.

IP: Because at nighttime they used to put all the cranes up in here. And one night man would keep the fire up on all the cranes during the night. And they didn't have far to walk from one to the other.

TH: From one to the other. Yeah. I could see how that...

IP: All the cranes were together and somewhere's down in here they had the coal yard for the cranes. I think this here, (Building) 48 could be the coal yard. (looking at the map)

EH: What is 45?

IP: Oh, is it 45.

EH: Yeah. There is a key.

TH: It says coal and scrap bins.

IP: That's it.

EH: Boy you are sharp. That's amazing. What a memory.

TH: That's it. That's it. Right there. Coal and scrap bins.

EH: We are looking at 407.2 and # 45 was the coal yard. Incredible.

TH: These, most of these walls were destroyed by the Army back in the 1930s. I guess to use for concrete rubble around the Hook, but these are still over there.

IP: They are huh?

TH: These three are as thick as your living room and on the back sides on the north side are archways, recessed archways and it is my belief that when the guns were ready for firing at the Proof Battery. The soldiers would retreat behind this huge concrete walls. Stand there when they fired.

EH: In the archway? They would stand in the arch?

TH: That's what I thought.

IP: I never watched where they went but two toots on the whistle and I would fall on my knees, but I never looked up to see where they stood or where they were.

TH: Was that a steam whistle which would make a big sound?

IP: Yes. Yes.

TH: Everybody heard it.

IP: I don't remember if it was steam or electric. It could have been electric but everybody would hear.

EH: Where would you be at the time?

IP: Well, anywhere in this powder magazine and there was a little building here where we used to make up the...

TH: The shells.

IP: The shells for the anti-aircraft.

TH: Because one building, Building 39, is the bag sewing room right there. 39. That's a small building right there because 38 is the main magazine.

IP: Yeah.

TH: 39 is a bag sewing room and 100, these two buildings called 100 are igniter houses.

IP: And this here would be the big, wasn't it the toilet?

EH: The latrine was 46.

TH: 46, that the brick latrine you were telling us a story about that.

IP: Yes.

EH: About the breech block. Tell us what was it again?

IP: Yeah. I guess, I know it was cold because we went in there to get warm and when I went in it was maybe ten or twelve, maybe fifteen guys standing in there getting warm too and of course, we get talking, getting warm and they fired a gun. I don't know what size and it took about five feet on both sides right across. It took the corner of the building right off, a brick building. Took it right off and some of it, I know some of the men that was in there it must have missed them by two or three feet because the shell went so quick nobody had seen nothing.

TH: Yeah. It's a split second. I mean its fast.

IP: So, you heard a crash of bricks blowing. That's all and toilets flying in the air.

EH: Amazing.

IP: So, you couldn't get warm in there no more.

TH: Kind of make it air-conditioned. (laughter)

IP: Yeah. It sure did.

TH: You were also telling us about, what did you call it again, you see it in the picture of the Proof Battery?

EH: The sand butts.

TH: The sand butts, right. And about your friend's close call over there.

EH: Ainsley Wright was his name?

IP: Ainsley Wright.

EH: Ainsley Wright, yes.

IP: He was operating a crane here. Well, they used to put up steel plate up there. Water was the steel plate would come in all different thickness. Some of it was half inch some of it was inch, two inch and then they would fire these guns through plates and then the shell would go through and inside of the sand butt, what they call a sand butt and then the cranes would have to go in there and dig the shell out.

TH: Would they study these shells?

IP: Yeah.

TH: Okay.

IP: So, I heard two toots on the whistle and I heard a lot of people hollering and I looked and it fired right through the crane. Ainsley Wright was his name. I was talking to him and I said, "Are you alright?" He said, "Yeah." I thought it was a colored guy because he had short kinky hair. Remember in those days Ainsley? (to Mrs. Parker)

Mrs. Parker: Ainsley? Yeah.

IP: Short kinky hair but he was black.

EH: Covered with black powder.

IP: It must have been the something what not from the boiler inside the crane. So, they fired right through it. They didn't care.

TH: This is pretty close. I guess this is point blank firing here. 'Cause this sand is not far at all from the Proof Battery, not a hundred yards.

IP: I don't know how far it was away but they had a flock of these sand butts there.

TH: Going down the dunes there, beaches.

IP: Yeah. They had a flock of them.

TH: I'm sorry.

IP: They had a flock of them and maybe this crane and this gun would fire this one and this fire a different one and they all used different thickness of steel plates firing through. And it was all tests, you know, to find out what the shell could do and which powder it would take to do it.

EH: Would one person just recording, recording just statistics?

IP: No. Each one had its own gun.

EH: One person would be positioned at the gun then recording all the information.

IP: Right.

EH: Because you data, I mean you, the experiments were for data for information.

IP: No. Each one had its own gun.

TH: You were telling us how those pieces of steel plating would end up.

IP: Yeah. Some of them some of the steel plates would crack, would crack, oh in maybe a thousand pieces would fly all over.

TH: Wow.

IP: Others it would put a straight hole just like you bored it. Just clean and some of them had curls all around it about that high of the steel. (It) looked like you drilled it with a wood bit.

TH: Corkscrewed it.

IP: Yeah. You could see the curls of steel standing up like that where it went through like it must have drilled its way through. And different types of steel and I don't know they must have been experimenting on what type of steel to use on submarines maybe and..

TH: Battleships.

IP: And battleships and what not.

TH: This is also interesting. This was your line of work early, the shells. Can you tell how you were loading them up? The inside would be empty and you would...

IP: Well, we used to put the blasting cap in first and then there would be a pad there to tell you how much powder this shell would take and then you would have to mark it on the side of the shell and then the shell itself went on and then it went to another outfit that put the time fuse on the front. So when it hit it exploded so many seconds...

TH: After firing.

IP: After firing.

EH: You did say the time fuses had to have two wrenches actually?

IP: Yeah. Two wrenches to lock it in place.

EH: That is interesting.

IP: Outside of that when it went slipped off the table on the floor and they were going out the door three abreast.

TH: The guys in the room? (laughter)

IP: Yeah. I was..

TH: That's the one that you say it was like sizzling when it hit the floor?

IP: Yes. Hit the floor. It was sizzling and I looked up and they were going out the door and the door wasn't as big as that I don't think. Three abreast I think. I was so damn dumbfounded I couldn't move. I didn't move. I stood right still. If it went off I don't believe it would have done us any good to move but I was dumbfounded. I couldn't move.

TH: Do you recall the, this in reading some of the Army history notes on the Proving Ground operation they had what they call the 80-ton Gantry Crane and this was the crane that was on, you could see the wheels here because the lower part moved on...

IP: Yeah on the track.

TH: On the track here and then it could transfer itself...

IP: Anywhere.

TH: Yeah. Anywhere over...

IP: Anywhere.

TH: Was that there when you were?

IP: Yeah. Yeah. They had more cranes on Sandy Hook. These are one here and here is another one here.

TH: Moving the ammo up to the...

EH: Shells, right.

TH: Breach.

IP: They had plenty of cranes out here. Sandy Hook was loaded with cranes. They must have had 25 cranes. But they used to have chain, they used to anchor them to the track to keep them from upsetting while they were handling them big cranes, big guns.

TH: Back in 1918 all year long, winter, spring, summer, fall were they always testing?

IP: Yeah.

TH: No matter what the weather?

IP: The weather didn't make no difference. Winter, spring, summer, fall they were knocking the winter right out of Highlands.

TH: Because here looking at the Proof Battery here there is the Atlantic Ocean like it is today. The beach is built up a little bit more out here on the east side but..

IP: Is it?

TH: Yeah, because you can't really see the ocean that much. This picture was taken around the early 1900s and there is the ocean in the background. Today, you stand there and it very hard to see the ocean because the sand dunes is built up over here.

IP: I'll be darned. I've got to get down there.

TH: Yeah. I wish, well, if we know you are coming we would love to walk around with you and show you around.

EH: What did you get paid? Do you remember what you got paid as a civilian employee?

IP: Yeah. Yeah. When Amsterdam moved in we all got a raise.

TH: That's the other construction company. I couldn't remember the name. Amsterdam Construction Company.

IP: Amsterdam Construction Company. We all got a raise and then we got a penny a minute. Sixty cents an hour.

EH: My gosh.

IP: Big money then. Yeah we all got a raise, 60 cents an hour, a penny a minute.

EH: And who did they take over Blub?

IP: Amsterdam?

EH: You said who took over from who? Was there a previous company?

TH: I don't know.

IP: What's that?

TH: When Amsterdam came in did they replace somebody else or did they just...?

IP: No. They were hired by the government and they come in there to build barracks and what not.

EH: One penny a minute.

IP: And they are still in business today building Monmouth Memorial Hospital.

TH: Is that Turner Construction Company?

IP: Turner Construction Company.

TH: That's Turner but there is also Anderson. Are they around?

IP: Yeah. It's the same company.

TH: Oh, they are the same company.

IP: Yeah. The same company.

EH: Incredible.

TH: I wanted to ask the area going south where's the...

IP: I remember the boss, old man Shields we used to call him. The two of us went in the greenhouse down there one day to get warm and we were standing in there in the sun in this greenhouse and he come up there and knocked on the window and said, "Don't let the boss catch you." He was the boss. (laughter)

EH: Old man Shields?

IP: Yes.

EH: That is interesting.

IP: He worked for Turner Construction Company.

TH: This is the greenhouse right here.

IP: Yes.

TH: Building #7. It says the greenhouse.

EH: Gosh.

TH: And this is the building right here which you know when the Proving Ground moved to Aberdeen, Maryland...

IP: Yes.

TH: Right here, this building became the Officers' Club but was originally called the Red Brick House.

IP: Yes.

TH: Called the Officers' Quarters for officers working at the Proving Ground but right down the walk there. It's part of the green lawn now because the Army tore the greenhouse down.

IP: Well, this down in here must have been where the carpenter shop and the machine Shop is.

TH: This says eight wagon stables. See this is all stables. Here is all the machine shops. Yeah, the red brick. These are all very large red brick buildings. Especially this one, 71 still has the railroad tracks going right into the building. 71 is called machine and blacksmith shop.

IP: They had a roundhouse there for the locomotives.

TH: Right there, #17 is the roundhouse. The foundation is still there with the tracks in the concrete foundation.

IP: I'll be damned.

TH: Because after World War II, you know, the Army was tearing down a lot of these buildings because they deactivated Fort Hancock in 1950.

IP: So then the so in here was where the machine shop.

TH: This one is listed as machine and blacksmith shops, 71.

IP: There was a blacksmith there that you had never seen before in your life. I never did. He was from Highlands and his name was Hunter. What was Herb Hunter's father? You don't remember his name do you?

Mrs. Parker: Oh, not at all.

IP: Thanks. (laughter)

Mrs. Parker: I don't remember his father. I remember Herb. He used to play baseball. He took baseball to Japan.

IP: I'd say old man Hunter was the blacksmith down there. When he would get a bunch of suckers in there, me for one and he would maybe get fifteen or twenty of us in there and he would collect a dollar off of each one of us. And he would take his gold watch and put it on the air hammer and break the crystals. So, he would bet us all and we suckers would put up a dollar and he would put his gold watch up there and he would start this air hammer and broke the crystal and didn't touch the watch.

EH: Well, he wanted to show how accurate he was?

IP: Yeah. Old man Hunter. I can't remember his first name but he could handle that air hammer.

EH: He was considered probably the master blacksmith that...

IP: Yeah. Right. He was.

EH: You could ever find. Huh. Well, he collected a few dollars.

IP: I guess he did. He got me. (laughter)

EH: That's great.

TH: Right across from what is listed as the machine and blacksmith shops here. This is called Building 70 right across the way is called the carpenter, plumbing, and paint shops, right in here and this large area is called the lumber storage yard.

IP: Yeah.

TH: Right there and these are storehouses. See, this whole complex is still there. These are all red brick buildings.

IP: Yeah. The machine shop is still there, huh.

TH: Yeah. Right there, it's still there. Everything is gone inside of it, but the tracks you can still see the railroad tracks right in the floor.

IP: Yeah. I'll be darned.

TH: Although the roundhouse doesn't stand this concrete foundation with those tracks right in there is still there too.

IP: We used to have to go down on Sundays to work and this Sunday we went down but they didn't send the train out. They sent what they called, what we used to call it the butterball out to get us to take us in on Sunday and I don't know maybe held a dozen people at the most. And we get down there near the Y and one officer, one officer crossed right in front of us at the Y.

TH: Do you mean the famous Y right here where the ...

IP: He shot right across and we just missed him. And the guy that was driving this butterball he said, "I will get you at the next crossing," and he was only kidding. He got him dead center. He hit that car. Threw us off the track, upset us the butterball and all. Nobody got hurt.

EH: Wow.

IP: There was a really investigation on that. I bet you called me up on the carpet about ten times on that and I didn't know one guy for the other. I wasn't lying for none of them. I told them just what I had seen and that was it. He had just beat us here and he comes down here and it was a tie. Now both guys know that he was going to come out there. The driver of the butterball and the driver of the car they both know it but one tried to beat the other I guess.

TH: Just a silly race.

IP: Yeah, a silly race. Nobody got killed but..

EH: It's lucky isn't it.

TH: Yeah. You had all these close calls out there with shells going off.

IP: Yeah. Nobody got hurt.

EH: That's amazing.

TH: I like your saying for the Hook that you wonder how it is still there.

IP: Yeah. I am. I am still wondering how it got there.

TH: Was your, by the way was your first job to clear those...

EH: Blowing up those stumps.

TH: Blowing up those stumps?

IP: No. No. No. I can't remember to tell you the truth which was first. I know that Amsterdam did these. Amsterdam Construction Company.

TH: Amsterdam Construction Company did the railroad spurs for the Ordnance Depot.

IP: And they built the magazines too, the Amsterdam...

TH: Yeah. These little squares along each spur with a magazine spaced out.

IP: And my god, the people that handled that powder. They were green as gray at 4:30.

TH: Please tell us that story again.

IP: Huh.

TH: Please tell us that story again.

IP: Every time you looked up a green guy would come out. His hair and all would be green from the powder.

TH: Was it the chemical from explosions or was it...

IP: No. It was just the dust from the powder because they used to, the locomotive used to bring it in all the way down and stop one here, stop one here and another one here and they would be all loading filling these magazines with this powder and these men crazy I ain't getting it all of them would take time out somewhere over here and smoke. Green, hair and everything would be green from the powder.

TH: They could have touched themselves off with all the powder.

IP: Sure.

EH: How daring can you be?

IP: Huh.

EH: That is very daring. You know.

TH: They didn't care right.

IP: Didn't care.

EH: It didn't phase them at all?

IP: It didn't seem to. No. It didn't seem too.

EH: Well, you said you had a sack, a big sack that said Hercules in a wagon you were remarking?

IP: In a fifty pound box of sixty percent dynamite. You throw it and it wouldn't go off or if you did anything with it, it wouldn't go off.

TH: That's considered like a low grade.

IP: Yeah. You could break the wax paper onto it and throw it in the fire. It wouldn't go off. It would just burn. But we used to, they wouldn't let us use a knife. Afraid it would cause friction a spark. So, they used to make us have wooden sticks and we would make a hole in one of the sticks of dynamite and put the fuse cap in there and put a couple of half inches onto it and maybe tie four or five of them together.

TH: So you would have a clump of dynamite sticks like you see in the movies. (laughter)

IP: Yeah. Right. You put that under each one of the stumps and then you had a gang of men come along and dump dirt and fill the holes with it.

TH: Just to lead into this story you were telling us earlier your first story when we got here. The officer asked you if you knew anything about dynamite. (laughter)

IP: Yeah. I asked too much. I asked how much does it pay and it paid better than the other so I said, "Yeah, I know all about it". So, I got the job and didn't know the first damn thing about it. The first stump I tried, I tried a single stump and I put one stick of dynamite in and I was scared when I set it off and it just blew a little dirt away. I said that has got to have more than that. So I worked it up to where I was putting four or five sticks in there. Well, that worked good, and then the catch comes I got down by the long pond where we were putting the dirt. Well, the stumps here were in water.

TH: Because it's swampy there.

IP: Yeah.

TH: All that water.

IP: So, I was putting the same amount of dynamite in and tamping it down as we would come along we were hooking all 25 of them. Well, in the water the dynamite acted four times as strong as in the beach.

TH: Because the sand is loose.

IP: I didn't know that. So, I blew stumps from one spur to the other. Right threw the air stumps and one of them come down on the horse's back and killed him.

EH: Wow, what force.

IP: Because the water made it, I don't know tight or something.

TH: Yeah. Heavier because the sand is loose. Dry sand over the wet ground. Yeah.

IP: And, you know, every night for about more than a week I would come home to a terrific headache. And I never know what caused it and after a while it dawned on me that dynamite was doing it.

TH: The concussions.

IP: No. The powder on your hands and you rub it on your forehead or something.

TH: The chemical.

IP: And it was the dynamite that was the cause of the headaches.

TH: Chemical compounds probably.

IP: Boy, it would give you a terrific headache.

TH: You also mentioning that all these stumps were these the holly trees?

IP: Holly trees, cedar trees...

TH: Wild black cherries too?

IP: Everything. Anything that was in the way when it moves. Anything they went and some of them it was a crime. Some of them holly trees, my god must have been 50, 60 feet high and that big around. Beautiful big holly trees.

TH: Big huge trunks.

IP: Oh my god. They had to go.

TH: Well, that whole area it's pretty it well today it's pretty gone back to nature. It's really you know, it's hard to walk through there. Yeah. It's so much under brush and trees and things now. And that is probably what it was when you got there to put the lines in.

IP: Yeah. Yeah. And I got, I don't know how many fish hawks that used to have the nests in there.

TH: Oh, the Osprey.

IP: Yeah.

TH: It sure was a lot more back then, right?

IP: Yeah. And what you do, you had your orders you had to blow them.

EH: So the birds went too.

IP: Yeah.

TH: They were nesting in that area. By the way just yesterday coming up the road right here right over that part of the south end of the long pond was a pair of Osprey.

IP: No kidding?

TH: Soaring around about a hundred feet up in the sky real close the tree line right about here.

IP: I'll be darned.

TH: Right around here they were circling around but there were probably a lot more back then.

IP: Oh god yeah. The woods used to be full of them.

TH: There nests up in those trees.

IP: Yeah and I noticed them wherever there was a nest, that tree was dead.

TH: They picked out, they like the dead trees.

IP: I don't know. Maybe they killed the trees. The oil off the fish that they were eating all time.

TH: Hmm. That could be.

IP: I noticed when we were blasting through there was a big fish hawk nest and there was a dead tree every time.

TH: When they put these when they got the stumps and everything out of the way you were mentioning that everything was being burned.

IP: Yes.

TH: All the trees were being put in piles and what happened?

IP: Well, Willy Worth.

EH: Was that Jack Worth?

IP: That was Jack Worth's brother.

EH: Okay. Willy Worth he had maybe 20 or 25 five colored guys to pick these trees up and throw them in big piles. My god and set them on fire. They had these bon fires going bigger than Ida's house across the street. And I had about 25 stumps all wired up and ready to blast and one guy had to go one way with a red flag and another guy had to go another way with a red flag and I had a box of dynamite hooked on my arm and we were taking off and I hollered to Willy Worth, "We are going to blow." He hollered to his men, "Better get moving." Better move and about that time this whole big fire blew in the air. Well, I upset turned over a couple of times. I've got a box of dynamite I thought the box of dynamite blew. I didn't know what the hell had happened.

TH: That you were carrying?

IP: Yeah. I thought that blew because I remember turning over a couple of times in the air.

TH: Blew you over.

IP: I looked on the ground and the fire was gone but there was a big hole there big enough to put that house in there. And the shovel was there and the handle was cut off as clean as a whistle. It looked like it was soldered off it was so clean.

TH: Just cut right off.

IP: Yeah. It must have been a 10 or 12-inch shell down there in the ground and they put this bonfire right on it and didn't know it.

TH: No one knew it was there and the heat blew.

IP: I guess some of them (word removed for African-Americans) are still running.

TH: You were saying some of the guys would just go and never come back.

EH: Never came back. I wonder why.

IP: Some of them never come back. I remember Willy Worth...some of the colored guys I guess took it for granted. Said this is enough and they never came back because Willy Worth said to me he said, "Did you find any dead men?" I said, "Nobody got hurt." He said, "My men never came back."

EH: Oh my goodness.

IP: They took it all and ran.

TH: You were also saying it was remarkable that nobody got hurt especially when you look at that shovel I guess being cut by I guess a fragment

IP: And you looked at that hole and said, "Oh my god." I could stand up in it and see no part of the top. That was a big shell.

TH: A huge crater.

IP: Must have been a big shell and god knows, how many trees. There must have been 50 trees on top of that berm.

TH: Because the brush piles were a big berm all over.

IP: Yeah, because they were three or four guys and throw it on top of the heap and they had an enormous fire going there.

TH: You also, I asked you earlier (about) poison ivy from it.

IP: Oh god, I was covered in poison ivy down there and you know I went to Dr. Offman and he gave me something to put onto it and it took it away and you know since then I can chew it.

EH: Wow. You're immune to it. You are totally immune?

IP: Yes. I can chew it. In fact, I chew it lots of time just to show that it won't bother you.

EH: Was Dr. Oppen in the

IP: Offman.

EH: Offman was he in the Post Hospital or..

IP: No, he was in town.

TH: Here in Highlands.

EH: Local doctor.

TH: Was it some liquid medicine that you drank or did you put it on your skin?

IP: No. Just something that you rubbed on your skin. It turned it white. I don't know what it was. It cleared it up and it didn't bother me no more after that.

EH: Well, John Mulhern described to us Carron Oil.

IP: Carron Oil?

EH: Yeah. Well, that was for sunburn. Maybe it was the same type of thing?

IP: Could have been.

EH: You don't know.

IP: I tell you one thing if you get a spot or any poison ivy on your hand, don't go to the doctor because he ain't going to cure it. He ain't going to do nothing for you. Get a bottle of New-skin and cover it. In two days it's gone.

TH: Is that a liquid medicine that you can buy?

IP: Yeah. Take and you put it on there and it stops the itch right away. No more itch. In two days it's dried up, gone. Because I have tried it time again. I get poison ivy rash here once in a while and I come in and put this New-skin on.

TH: You didn't have that back then though?

IP: Oh no. No. No. I'll show you that New-skin because that is the greatest stuff I have ever found. It stops the itch right away.

TH: Well, I need it. I could have used it March 3rd. Because March 1st is the day I was walking, just walking through the woods and I knew it. I saw all the vines and everything but there were no leaves and I was just trying to avoid all the vines as possible.

IP: Well, Sandy was telling me last summer he was watching last summer he used to sit and eat his dinner right on the poison ivy down there and I said, "You are kidding," and he said, "no."

TH: People constantly do that. They don't know. I saw a whole family laying in it. They had their beach towels and they were having a picnic at Horseshoe Cove by the side of the road about 20 yards in all the vines they were in poison ivy. I see it all the time.

Mrs. Parker: Sandy is my granddaughter's husband. They live down the street here a little bit.

EH: Yeah. We finally made the connection.

TH: Something was familiar and we couldn't place it but now I understand we know everybody. I have been down there for twelve years.

Mrs. Parker: You have?

TH: Sandy Hook, yeah. When the Army was leaving I came in and I wanted a job here. I am born and raised in Newark.

Mrs. Parker: In Newark.

TH: In Newark, New Jersey my mom's family.

Mrs. Parker: You used to come to Highlands on vacation?

TH: As a little boy my father and my mother's father they would come down here.

(Tape cuts off and starts again.)

TH: Yeah. Do you remember Jim Pike?

IP: Yeah. Yeah.

TH: Because he told me he was hired, he had been in the Army in the old Coast Artillery Corps and then he got out and he like you went down here to get a job. They hired him on and he told me he was a jack of all trades, but he finally ended up a railroad engineer. He told me he loved eels.

Mrs. Parker: Didn't Tommy Colcannon...

TH: Tommy Colcannon is another name.

IP: Tommy Colcannon run the train.

TH: Yeah.

IP: The Sandy Hook train. Pit Johnson was the fireman on the train. They tried to couple a train up there down here one day and the two couplings wouldn't go together and they took his foot. About that time the train backed up and it took his toes right off.

TH: Geez. I thought you were going to say he was going to kick it and.. I didn't know that was going to happen.

IP: Pit Johnson, yeah. Well, he only took the job because he had to take some kind of a job or go in the Army during the War and that was a good government job.

Mrs. Parker: We had a lot of people from Newark that came down here for the summer.

TH: To vacation on the railroad, they came right down on the railroad?

Mrs. Parker: No. I don't know how they got here. I forget that much but I know they used to come down here all the time.

TH: Because John Mulhern, his dad was employed there from 1908 to 1927 but World War I the family had to live up here in the Highlands because they weren't allowing the civilian families to live in Fort Hancock. But he used to work down here at Sandlass Beach at the soda fountain.

IP: Yes.

TH: And he says boy he says on the weekends the excursion trains would bring all these people on the weekends from Jersey City and Newark from all the northern cities this is how they spend their vacation like you are saying. That's why I said the trains.

Mrs. Parker: The bulk of them would take a bungalow down here for the whole summer.

TH: Hmm. They would hire out a bungalow.

IP: Yeah.

EH: Do you remember Sandlass, any of the Sandlass family?

Mrs. Parker: Sandlass, oh yes. I used to sneak over there and go swimming. (laughter)

EH: Without paying? Do you recall their personalities?

IP: No. All I remember of them they were nice people all of them. All the Sandlass were nice people and they had the bathing beach across there. They used to have a number of bath houses. They had enough numbers to write on each one they called it Highland Beach.

TH: Yeah. Highland Beach.

EH: We have some postcards.

TH: Yeah. The postcards show it on that bathhouses' in big letters.

IP: (inaudible) They were nice people I think Sandlass it seemed to me it was. And then just in back of Sandlass was when they had young Coney Island in there at one time.

Mrs. Parker: Roller coaster.

EH: Oh yes.

Mrs. Parker: Did I ever show you?

EH: Yes. You gave us that photo of the roller coaster. It's like a wooden frame. Very primitive roller coaster.

IP: Yes.

EH: Yes. You showed us that.

TH: I mentioned Jim Pike because when you said eels. When he was living up here John Mulhern said, "You know who is still around, Jim Pike. You have to meet Jim Pike." So we went up there and he was confined to a wheelchair up on what was the street back here when you go up...

IP: (Inaudible)

TH: Yeah. Well, they are side by side but Jim was down, it's a dead end street and he was off to one side down there and he was in a wheelchair, but you could see he had been a real big man, a tall man. He was sitting there. He was telling us about working at the Hook for all many years and ending up a railroad engineer. He said, "You know what I miss. I miss going to the Hook and I love eels. I love a mess of eels." John Mulhern says, "Well, next time we come I am going to bring you a mess of eels," and he did. And I would like to try it sometime. I notice in the fish stores around here the smoke eels.

IP: Yeah.

TH: Are they good to eat?

IP: Good. Very good. But get the small ones. Don't get the big ones.

TH: The small ones are tastier?

IP: Well, the big ones are too greasier. Too greasy the small ones are better.

EH: You talked about Adder snakes on Sandy Hook?

IP: Yeah.

EH: That's kind of curious.

IP: I am gonna find that book.

EH: Okay. For a fact that was very common?

IP: Adder and they said black snakes, but the black snakes was harmless. If they bit you they couldn't hurt you. But the Adder was very poisonous but the Adder's killed all the pigs.

TH: Sheep, pigs, right. Pigs.

IP: This book told that. Killed all the pigs off. But the pigs used to run them down and eat them. Eat the snakes.

TH: Did you when you were working down in the area where you were blasting the stumps out, did you see much wildlife because Sandy Hook is full of rabbits, cottontail rabbits.

IP: Oh god, I often wonder how so many rabbits but then again they used to be Tom, Dick and Harry on the Hook and when they moved they would leave the cats and the damn cats would chase rabbits because they had to have something to eat.

TH: Yeah. Something to eat so they went after the rabbits.

IP: Rabbits, yeah. There used to be an awful lot of cats on the Hook.

TH: Yeah turned wild. We still have some prancing around here.

IP: Yeah. I have once seen the deer on the Hook.

TH: That was my next question. Really?

IP: Now, I have come to the conclusion that he either swam across or he walked over on the ice at one time because that used to freeze over solid. You could drive a team of horses across there.

TH: At the time you were working here and I think they had a real cold winter and the bay froze over sometime during World War I?

IP: 1914. That was the coldest winter 1914, I think it was. It got me one day down there when I was working down there. That had to be 1918 or 1919 we went down to go to work and I think it was seven below and they said it's too cold to work. Well, what are we going to do? We can't get home because the train wasn't going to go. So, we will walk home. I couldn't get in my head why if it is too cold to work what the hell are you going to do, walk. So we walked home from Sandy Hook in the cold, a hundred of us. Too cold to work but we could walk home.

EH: How many miles are you talking?

IP: Well, from one end of the hook to the other you are talking seven miles.

EH: Wow we.

TH: I was going to say that's quite a walk. I have done it so I know.

IP: That's got my goat. It was too cold to work but it wasn't too cold to walk. It didn't make sense.

EH: It doesn't.

TH: That's the government for you. (laughter) Also you mentioned the historical find of the sword that you didn't get a chance to really look at.

IP: No. I never got a chance to do nothing boy that officer was on horseback where the hell he come from I don't know.

TH: All of a sudden an officer on horseback appears and took the sword away from you.

IP: Yeah. Took the sword.

TH: When that was found was that when they were grading.

IP: Blowing the stumps.

TH: Blowing the stumps out and you were saying it was still in the scabbard.

IP: Yes it was. It looked pretty rusty on the outside.

EH: We were talking about burials on Skelton Hill Island a little earlier. Can you tell us a little about that?

IP: Yeah. Well, they told me. I don't know but they told me when the English had the Hook they had the cholera right down there and all the soldiers that died they buried them on this side, on the river side. And they called it Skelton Hill because there were so many soldiers buried there and every soldier that was buried there had these big English

pennies on their eyes. We used to go down there looking for the pennies. We never would bring the skeleton's out I never did. I left the skeleton's there just to get the pennies.

TH: But you saw them? Did you find some?

IP: Yeah. Yeah.

TH: That's outside here now. Another interesting thing is that water from the bay finally broke through here making Skelton Hill an island and at low tide you can almost walk across still but at high tide...

IP: You can't.

TH: Its ended up an island but that is the area with the wind blowing and everything.

IP: But that is what they told me the English buried all the soldiers out there.

EH: From the cholera epidemic.

IP: Yeah. I remember down on the Hook that they had another place down there where they buried English soldiers too.

TH: That was over up here where the Horseshoe Cove, the what they call Lt. Halyburton and his sailors were trying to catch deserters off their ship. And a blizzard came up and they died and they tried to either get back to their ship or try to make it to shore and a blizzard came in and apparently tipped their boat over because after this two day blizzard they found Halyburton and his men all dead or frozen and they were eventually buried right somewhere in here and then back in 1908 the army came through building one of these roads. I am not sure if it's this road we see here for vehicles or the railroad because they made a railroad spur through the area.

IP: It was for the railroad.

TH: The railroad bed.

IP: Yeah because there was one monument one little monument right by the railroad tracks.

TH: That's there now. The monument that they got there now.

IP: It should be right by the railroad.

TH: This is what mystifies the army has bulldozed and changed stuff so much that it is hard to see what was where but somewhere down in here is where they found those skeletons back in 1908.

IP: That Hook has been changed so many times. But it's like I say it's a miracle its there. It is a miracle its there.

TH: Another funny story by the way is what you were telling us about the old life saving stations.

IP: Yeah.

EH: With the mascot. That was interesting.

IP: And one of the outfits, I don't know what outfit it was now, army company they had a tent here.

TH: This is in the back of the Spermaceti Cove Coast Guard Station

IP: They had two or three tents here, this outfit did and they had a bear for a mascot and there was nobody around there. There was carpenters up there putting on a new roof on.

TH: Okay on the old station.

IP: Yeah. And they had a couple of ladders up and I was up there with a tractor getting gas and the bear went up the ladder. How, I didn't see him go up and I hear the men hollering and I looked up and here some of them are jumping off the roof and the bear was up on the roof and they had to get the soldiers out to come out on the roof and get him. I wouldn't go near him, no how. I can still hear him. He might have been clawed but he was making weird sounds this bear I wouldn't go nowhere near him.

EH: Any other photos show you things that you recall, like do you remember this entrance?

TH: This is the station. This is the entrance down by the main road into the depot because the depot had a fence going around it, this fence it's hard to see because it blends in.

IP: Yeah you could see the..

TH: The wires...

IP: Yeah.

EH: Is this familiar to you?

IP: No. It isn't.

TH: It was all completed.

IP: No. It's not familiar.

TH: Here is the sign. Its says Sandy Hook Ordnance Depot because on either side of the old Life-Saving Station or Coast Guard Station at Spermaceti Cove they used to have all those railroad spurs. It's funny because you can still go up the road between where the Visitor Center is and the South Beach road and you can still make out the traces of some of the spur roads.

IP: Yes.

TH: They are all overgrown with underbrush and all but you can still see where they were.

Mrs. Parker: Was it Coast Guard down there that used to live across from us when we used to live downtown? Bill Savage.

IP: Joe Savage, Sandy Hook Ordnance Depot.

TH: This is their guardhouse. Here is the fence and right inside the fence I guess their guardhouse, the soldiers on guard duty. Could you tell us about what you know about this German submarine incident?

IP: All I know is that more damn spotlights come up. I didn't hear any guns go off. But they said that a submarine fired three shots at the spots in daytime that they picked out where the shells hit they were after the ammunition dump. They know where that dump was.

TH: Are we talking about the Ordnance Depot?

IP: Yeah. No. We are talking about the one at the front. Down the front of Sandy Hook near your troop (inaudible)

TH: Oh, way up in the Proving Ground area?

IP: Now, they said it was a U boat. I don't know I didn't see a boat for all I know they put on more damn spotlight than (inaudible) somewhere down in here they fired the shells in here and they were after the ammunition dump. They know they must have had good information on that.

TH: And you say..

IP: It's funny that you don't remember Morgan exploding. You should know that.

TH: I have always heard of the Black Tom. (A munitions explosion on July 30, 1916 in Jersey City, New Jersey.)

IP: That was afterwards. Black Tom that was a terrific explosion.

EH: In Keyport you were talking about. Why don't you tell us?

IP: What year was that? Do you remember?

Mrs. Parker: (Laughs) My memory ain't no good. I remember all the people from down there walking in here to Highlands to get the steamboat to get back into New York City.

TH: Was it Morgan like (an) ordnance plant? (The T. A. Gillespie Company Shell Loading Plant, also called the Morgan Depot, exploded on October 4, 1918 killing many workers near South Amboy, New Jersey.)

IP: Yeah.

TH: Was that a civilian that was contracted by the government to make ammunition?

IP: That was a damn big plant too. Very big.

TH: At Keyport?

IP: It wasn't at Keyport. It was called Morgan. Maybe I can find it on the map here and give you an idea on the map.

TH: Was the actual town of Morgan?

EH: Morganville, maybe you mean Morganville?

IP: I don't know. Is it Morganville?

TH: But you were saying that they had an explosion there where somebody with the powder...

IP: Whoever set it I can remember that they set it on the change of the shifts. They got the new shifts coming in and the old shift going out and they walked from one building to the other with this can of powder and they must have had it opened just enough to have it spread. 'Cause the fire was going bing, bing, from one thing to the other and a couple of days later we went over there and that ammunition went off for two or three days.

TH: Once it got going they couldn't stop it.

IP: After it was over we went over there and there was a fella who used to live downtown called Monk Harvey.

EH: Monk Harvey.

IP: Monk Harvey, yeah he used to live downtown here and he worked over in Morgan and I went over with Captain Lockwood and he went in one of the buildings there and I was out by the car and I met this Monk Harvey. I said, "What are you doing Monk?" He said, "I've got a baker's wagon gathering up the dead." I said, "You are kidding." He was a crazy son of a gun anyway. So, he dragged this body all the way over and put it in a box and he said, "He's short an arm." So he goes looking around and he's got a leg and he said, "What the hell's the difference a leg is as good as an arm," and he put the cover on him.

EH: Oh, my gosh.

IP: I don't know how many he had done that with legs, arms, he threw something in it.

TH: From this big explosion?

IP: Yeah.

EH: Good grief.

TH: This is where you were in Capt. Lockwood's car, right? You got under the car right?

IP: No. This was after the explosions. A couple or three days there were no more explosions and they were gathering the dead up over there.

TH: But you were saying earlier that the ammunition was raining down?

IP: Yeah.

TH: And was it his car that was hit?

IP: Two pieces of shrapnel went through the hood of his car.

TH: And that was called a National, the brand name of the car?

IP: Yeah. National. And it was a grey National car.

TH: And that was his personal car or was that provided by the Army?

IP: I don't know if it had Army plates on it or not. I can't recall.

TH: Was he stationed here at Sandy Hook though?

IP: Yeah. Captain Lockwood but you never met a guy like Colonel Kirk. I remember one morning I was going somewhere by the Officers' Quarters.

TH: There's the Officers' Quarters, the Red Brick House. (looking on a map)

IP: Yeah. I was going by there and he come out on the porch. He said, "I don't know your name," he said, "but come in and have breakfast with me."

EH: Wow. That's Colonel Kirk.

TH: Colonel Kirk, K-I-R-K.

IP: Lt. Colonel Kirk. He was a nice man.

TH: Its, there's Morganville, south of Matawan and Keyport. Morganville.

EH: That's what I thought. Thank you for finding it on the map.

IP: It was a big ammunition dump. That was a big one.

TH: I guess this is the predecessor to where they later built Earle? Yeah. Here is Earle right down in here.

IP: Yeah.

TH: Yeah. But Morganville was an actual ordnance plant?

IP: You know, what 20 years after they moved out and the explosion they found ammunition.

TH: Well, I believe it. Yeah. All it's exploding up over the countryside. The same thing like we were saying about Sandy Hook. There is so much out there right. At the old Proving Ground

IP: They will never get it.

TH: I wanted to ask you, the area south of the Proof Battery I notice is marked here is the Proof Battery and they say a 1,000 yard target, a 2,000 yard target, a 2,500 yard target and finally a 3,000 yard target. This area of sand dunes and beach. Was that ever marked off by the Army with signs back then or was it general knowledge you should stay out of there?

IP: No. That's it. No signs.

TH: Just sand dunes and beach.

IP: Because I remember what was the guys name down on the point of the Hook. He lived there.

TH: You mean up near the tip end, Simpson?

IP: Simpson.

TH: Johnny Simpson.

IP: Johnny Simpson. We wanted a tractor because we couldn't use a car. We wanted a tractor and he was the only one that had a tractor and we went out and gathered the barbed wire up from the point of the Hook here all the way up to #2 Coast Guard Station off the beach. The beach was lined with barbed wire.

TH: Back in World War I?

IP: Yeah. And so Johnny Simpson said, "Parker, that thing has been laying there for about two years. Nobody can start it." He said, "If you can start it you take it." Well, I tried and finally went down and got an order to go down to the hospital because they had a hospital on the Hook at that time and I got some ether and I come back and I took all the plugs out and put the ether in and I said, "I better try it with the plugs out first. I don't want to blow it up." So, we used to put a rope on the crack. I wouldn't dare crank it. It was too big for me to crank anyway. We'd get two or three men with the rope and yank it and it started. Johnny came running out of the house and he said, "How did you start that?" I said, "It started. Look at the spark plugs." They were snapping up and down laying on top of the motor. I left them out, you know. I was afraid of blowing the motor up with the ether. He said, "I can't believe it." So, we had it run for two or three minutes to warm it up and I shut her off and put the spark plug in and put a rope on her with a rope and we took all the barbed wire up from the point of the Hook up to #2 Coast Guard Station off the beach.

TH: Was that like on the sand dunes or was it all on the beach?

IP: Right up the beach.

TH: Wow. Did they have it staked up on metal stakes or was it just coil?

IP: Coils.

EH: We have found them. We have found rods.

TH: Yeah, from World War II we have found them.

EH: Oh, they are not that early?

TH: No.

EH: We have found rods. There's like a spool to the barbed wire.

IP: Could have been.

EH: Maybe it's that old?

TH: I think it is World War II. Could be World War I but I think it is World War II.

IP: I remember we just about got it all up to the Coast Guard Station, #2, Coast Guard and we pulled in there to get gas and we got gas and we started the thing up and nobody would crank it. We all pulled the rope and inside I think I remember it right is five pedals.

TH: Five.

IP: Yeah. You didn't know whether you were going frontwards or backwards you had to feel them out. (laughter)

EH: Oh, my gosh.

IP: Yeah, well it was regular Army tractor but the gun wasn't there that's all. So, you can slots there and look out. I could see out. Well, we gassed up, cranked it, got back in it and I heard the motor race something awful. I said, "Oh god, what is the matter?" and the motor was turned up it seemed to me a thousand miles. There was so much noise you couldn't hear. So, I come up out of the thing and they said the fly wheel off the motor and went right through the side of the motor, right out through the side and shot the metal right off.

TH: Shot right out.

IP: Shot right out and went down the beach. They said all you could see was sand flying and flywheel come right off and that was the end of the tractor. That was the end of that. (laughter)

TH: With all this barbed wire strung out do you know if Army soldiers were patrolling the beach in 1918?

IP: I don't think so.

TH: It's just that they were playing it safe having all that barbed wire out there.

IP: The only one that I know of that was patrolling the beach down there was the Coast Guard with guns.

TH: Hmm. They were armed.

IP: Yeah. Coast Guard. That's the only ones that I know of that were patrolling the beach. No soldiers that I know of. In fact, you had very few soldiers on the Hook during World War I.

TH: Really?

IP: Yeah.

TH: Small garrison.

IP: Yeah. What few you had Turner Construction Company built wood sides about four feet off the ground wood bottom and then put a tent up on top and then the soldiers lived in that. And I am telling you it was cold. Damn cold.

TH: In the wintertime it is incredibly cold out there. You also it was an interesting thing you were saying it was like down in here this area is full, the old ordnance area is full of ordnance, shell and everything.

IP: Yeah.

TH: But you said something interesting is that the smaller caliber shell, the bigger ones were firing at the tow targets off shore.

IP: Yeah.

TH: Back then because of the tremendous range.

IP: Well, I don't know what they were trying to prove then but I wasn't working on the Hook then. When they used to tow the target and Al Bahr had the boat called the *Jack Bahr*.

TH: Yeah. You were saying that earlier.

IP: And he used to come in and say boy this is the life. He says, "Beautiful, hot day out there and just riding it."

TH: That's okay. And then one day the shell went right over. (laughter)

IP: One day it wasn't so beautiful. They fired this gun off of the Hook and it went right over top of the *Jack Bahr* and Al Bahr said, "That is enough for me." He says, "They can't come no closer than that to a target." He said, "I don't want no part of it."

TH: Speaking of ammunition, tell us about you were carrying, what happened when you were carrying, what was that...

IP: Well, they put them in your lap. They had the guy there that would stand up straight like that and they put a 4-inch shell here and a 4-inch shell here. Lay it on your shoulder and that is the way you would walk out with two and you, if the gun went off you dropped on your knees anyway. And we cart the shells out and stack them out there because when they started firing you didn't have time to carry them out. They fire them that fast.

TH: The rapid fire...

IP: Yeah. There used to be a gang of us to cart them out.

EH: And they were stockpiled.

IP: Yeah. And they used to cover the sky you would look up and the sky would be about that big the spot you know.

TH: You mean the explosion puffs.

IP: Yeah.

TH: The smoke up there exploding puffs.

IP: The time fuses up there.

TH: Up in the sky? What did that officer say? Remember you said the officer said something about the, what was it missing a spot?

EH: There was one space.

TH: There was one space.

IP: Oh, he says somebody said something to him. I don't know what he said. He said, "I am trying to fill that vacant spot up there." He said, "I am trying." I looked up there and there was one spot up there maybe that day. It was nothing and he was trying to hit that one spot. (laughter)

EH: Oh my goodness.

TH: That's an awful lot of ammo going up in the air.

IP: To them they didn't care, my god. And they used the same shells over and over. Take the shells back inside and you put new caps in the bottom.

TH: They reload it. Reload it back up again?

IP: Yes. The same shell right over.

TH: You mean the cartridge.

IP: Yeah.

TH: With a new primer.

IP: Right.

EH: You said there was two inches of sawdust remember back earlier. What was that about?

IP: That was in the room where they set the time fuses. The time fuses when on the nose of the anti-aircraft shell and they had a big I'd say big about fifteen foot long metal topper bench in there I remember and they had about two inches of sawdust on the floor and this bench they had it covered with these what do you call them fuses that went on top of the gun on top of the shell.

TH: Time delay?

IP: Time fuse

TH: Time fuse, yeah right.

IP: And then they used to whatever the paper called for you had to set the stills and then you would lock it fast so it couldn't move no more and some of us set them for three seconds, five seconds and this one day they had a big order and this bench was covered with these time fuses and one of them got slid, pushed off on the floor.

TH: That's the one that was sizzling, okay.

IP: And it started sizzling.

TH: With all the sawdust on the floor, okay that's yeah.

IP: It started sizzling and I looked up and they were going out that door three abreast and I still...

TH: That's where you froze, yeah.

IP: Yeah. I froze. I couldn't, you couldn't get out of the door anyway. There were too many going out. I couldn't move. I froze but it was set on safety. It hadn't been set yet. If it had been set it would have blowed.

TH: That would have been it.

IP: Yeah, but it hadn't been set yet. It was on safety. But if I remember they didn't set the fuse until after the fuse was put on the shell.

TH: Okay. So they put the fuse in first...

IP: The last thing was when they set the time fuse. That was the last, they set the time fuse and then it was up to you to cart it outside.

TH: There's two other things I would like to ask. Do you remember when they had the Mortar Battery down at Fort Hancock, there at Sandy Hook and then during World War I they brought four of the mortars up here up to the Highlands and they built what they called the Highlands Mortar Battery?

IP: Yeah.

TH: Do you remember any goings on like them building it or did they ever fire that?

IP: They never fired it but the Army come in and they brung water from out plant here. They run a water main all the way up to that.

TH: So, they could have water at the Mortar Battery.

IP: And that base is still up there. You have seen that?

TH: It's down there in that ravine. Down you have got Henry Hudson High School up there and then the ground goes down around there it looks like a round pond that is one of the bases for the ...

IP: And I remember that they had a lot of trouble setting the foundation for the 16-inch up..

TH: Up on the hill there.

IP: Yeah. Up on the hill and they had a couple of contractors come in there because the ring for that base must have been 20 feet I guess. A big ring.

TH: They had to go down into the ground.

IP: Well, and it had to be set perfect, level. A guy come in there after two or three contractors gave it up come in there and no schooling at all and he set that thing so perfect you. It was regardless I don't care how you do it. He filled it with water. He leveled it with water and the other contractors couldn't figure out how to do it and this guy didn't have no schooling and he come in there and he set it with water and he leveled it. And then Bob Johnson, I forget now what he got in the Army he used to work in the machine shop down the Hook and during the War he got an officer's job down there and he fired both of those guns once. That was it. 16-inch.

TH: Big 16-inchers.

IP: Yeah.

TH: Do you recall when the Proving Ground moved out of Sandy Hook.

IP: Yes.

TH: Could you tell us a little bit about it? What you can remember?

IP: What I remember about that was it was a pity to see it go. They loaded everything up event the 16-inch guns they loaded on flatcars. Two flatcars put a 16-inch gun on.

TH: Because it's so big and long.

IP: Yeah. And everything went out on flatcars. They took the whole, it took weeks and weeks to take everything out.

TH: Was this in 1919 or 1920 to the best of your knowledge?

IP: To my knowledge, I think it would be at least '20, at least '20.

TH: Then they went down to Aberdeen.

IP: Yeah. It was a shame to see it go because at one time down here they employed over 5,000 people. (That number is high.)

EH: Is that right? Wow.

IP: Yeah. It was you could go across here in the morning. You got across there at 7:30, I guess, the train pulled out. From the bridge all the way across the train was black with people. And they said, "There was over 5,000 people working on the Hook." I believe it.

TH: Back then in 1918 in World War I. But the one thing we don't have I know there is a postcard view of a farewell dinner at the Officers' Quarters.

IP: There is?

TH: Yeah. I have seen a postcard of it. We don't, it is a picture but we don't have the old postcard that this picture was made from. But it looked like a real big affair. You know the last officers' goodbye dinner at the Proving Ground.

EH: Do you recall any photographers by the name of Smedley or C.D. Heath?

IP: No.

EH: That actually photographed. We have pictures of soldiers on a wall with like rods sticking out of a concrete wall and it's signed by C.D. Heath and it looks like a test at the Proving Ground and I was just wondering if you knew of any photographers who would record some of this.

IP: No.

TH: It's like where they blew a target apart. It's a big chunk of concrete with reinforcement rods all tangled and twisted with five or six soldiers sitting up.

EH: Perched on the wall.

TH: Perched on what is left of this target and I think it is about 1912 maybe, 1912, just before the World War began in 1914 taken at Sandy Hook.

EH: Were you ever in the ordnance laboratory? We have a photo that looks like the mad scientist laboratory. Were you ever in the testing lab?

IP: No.

TH: The lab is going towards the docks. Here is the docks, and here is the lab which later became back in the 1930s became the Fort Hancock School house, but here is where all the railroad, rails went out on the docks.

IP: Oh yeah.

TH: But this is the Coast Guard docks now.

IP: Yeah.

TH: But it was originally the Army docks but right here at the corner.

IP: I think the ordnance owned this dock.

TH: Yes. That was the Ordnance dock right there and the...

IP: The engineer had his.

TH: This was Quartermaster and that's the Ordnance and you come to this corner and this was called the Ordnance Laboratory. It's a yellow brick building that still stands there and this is right opposite of the roundhouse, the railroad roundhouse.

IP: And that was the old schoolhouse, huh?

TH: Later on, later on it became the Fort Hancock School house back in the 1930s.

EH: What we have is a photo of the interior of what we think is the laboratory and it looks like a mad scientist.

IP: I never entered, I never..

EH: We just wondered if you, we would love to know, you know, for a fact if that was the lab.

TH: Do you recall what it looked like when you went into have breakfast that day inside the Officers' house, the Red Brick House?

IP: No. I can't.

EH: Colonel Kirks is that it?

TH: Kirk, Lt. Colonel.

IP: No. I can't remember. He just wanted somebody to eat with I guess.

EH: How nice.

IP: A nice man.

TH: I hope you can come out some time if he ever has the time and you go around.

IP: Where would I find you people out there?

TH: In the guardhouse. The Fort Hancock Guardhouse is the Museum there. That is where we work.

IP: Which Guardhouse?

TH: The Fort Hancock on the Parade Ground there. Right opposite the parade field is the Headquarters, the old Post Headquarters by the flag pole you have got on the main parade the big flagpole and right across the way the Headquarters and we are right across from the Headquarters.

IP: I used to feel sorry for some of them soldiers. They had them out on that parade field and they would drill them, drill them and drill them. Boy, I am telling you eight hours wouldn't be nothing for some of them poor devils. I don't whether they just didn't understand it or just didn't want to understand it.

TH: That's what it was all about. Turn them into soldiers.

IP: Yeah. So, after they got done drilling them they would have a certain amount left over and they would take these poor devils and they were good for eight hours out there. And the one in charge, I felt sorry for him he had to drill them. He had to stay there with them. And some of them soldiers I think were doing it on purpose. Left, right and they would turn the other way.

TH: Sometimes they were really dumb kids too. You know.

IP: Yeah, could be.

EH: We brought in an article about Bob Weiss and it said, "He first entered the War Department working in 1914 working at the Sandy Hook Proving Ground as a machinist. Rob White was the foreman in charge, Weiss," excuse me, "was the foreman in charge of the machinist for installing the gun emplacements for testing the first 14-inch railroad mounts." Is that correct?

IP: Yep.

EH: "The first guns were used in smashing the Hindenburg Line shipped overseas during World War I." Then it says, "In 1920, while Rob Weiss was working at the Proving Ground the International Yacht Race between the American contender, *The Resolute* and Sir Thomas Lipton's, *Shamrock 4* was off Sandy Hook a few miles south of New York Harbor. And the first race, *the Resolute* met with a series of mishaps and had to be repaired in order to continue the races. Commanding Officer of the Proving Ground assigned Rob Weiss to the job of reconditioning, *The Resolute*. It was necessary for him to work night and day in order that the resolute could be repaired in time to compete in the race."

IP: We used to watch the *Shamrock*.

TH: Sailing around.

IP: Yeah.

EH: And then it says here, "*The Resolute* captured the coveted Vanderbilt Cup which still remains in the possession of the New York Yacht Club." And then he left the War Department in 1924. You remember him fairly well?

Mrs. Parker: He used to live right across the street.

EH: Right opposite of you on Highlands Avenue.

IP: Yeah. He lived right over here.

EH: Is that right?

Mrs. Parker: Three houses.

IP: He was a nice man, very nice.

Mrs. Parker: He had a son. His name was Bob too. He got a job with the government. He was a smart boy, real smart, he was down in Washington. I forget what he had to do but he was a smart boy.

TH: Johnny Simpson was down there for a long time according to the family. He was a water boy when they were building the concrete gun batteries. He got a job as a water boy in 1896 and was there in 1948 and due to ill health he had to retire.

IP: I tell you one thing about Johnny Simpson there was nobody gonna out work him. He would go out there for eight hours and I am telling you, you couldn't keep up with him. He was a tough man. He was a worker.

(inaudible)

TH: What was, oh another man you might have known working at the Proving Ground got hired the same year you did.

EH: F. Lee Feakes.

TH: F. Lee Feakes.

EH: F-E-A-K-E-S. Feakes.

TH: He got hired at the Proving Ground. I think it was 1918.

IP: You know, the funny thing during World War I, when you look at it now. At that time it didn't bother it didn't dawn on us. I don't care who it was when out there to get a job they didn't even investigate you.

TH: Maybe that is why they were able to blow up the Morganville Ordnance Plant.

EH: That's true.

IP: I know that went up quite a while before Black Tom went up. Black Tom was went up about three o'clock in the morning and it was the loudest explosion that I ever heard and that is quite a ways from here.

TH: Yeah. Is that up around like Jersey City?

IP: Yeah.

Mrs. Parker: I remember hearing that name Black Tom, where was that?

IP: Up around Jersey City.

TH: Yeah, the Jersey City, Hoboken dock area.

IP: That one blew up around three o'clock in the morning quite a while after the Morgan explosion there. They must have had the same bunch setting them off.

TH: Saboteurs getting in there.

IP: No wonder they didn't get the Hook because they..

TH: Didn't check people out.

IP: No. They didn't check nobody out. I was down there and got a job and they didn't ask me nothing.

TH: Nowadays for what they call a sensitive government job. They will check you back to the day you were born.

IP: No kidding.

TH: Now they never checked me and you know I showed up and wanted a job down there and they have always taken everything I have written on the resume as the gospel truth. I don't think if they ever checked out to see if I have, they never asked to see if I have a piece of paper to see if I have a college degree.

EH: Or diploma of any sort.

TH: Yeah or high school diploma. But I know what you mean especially in wartime you think it would really be..

IP: I know we were doing guard duty down there. They were so sort of men that they'd come and ask you if you wanted to do guard duty tonight. So, what the hell, you are after the money so you say sure. So, we caught an officer taking pictures at nighttime. I don't know what his name was. I didn't remember.

TH: Was it German.

IP: I don't know. He had an officers' uniform. Well, I marched him right up to Headquarters.

EH: And your wife said she was out are we talking about the '20s. When were you out at Sandy Hook.

TH: Oh for the dances.

EH: Yeah. What was your experiences there?

Mrs. Parker: Oh, I didn't have any experience, only dancing is what I went for.

TH: Did they bring over a bus for you?

EH: Truck?

IP: No. They run trains to the dances.

Mrs. Parker: It was a truck most of the time we went out in cattle cars.

TH: Literally, they were really cattle cars?

Mrs. Parker: No. They were great big covered wagons. I don't know what they looked like they sent out here for the women to dance with the soldiers. They were nice soldiers. At that time they weren't anything like the kids nowadays.

IP: You know the soldiers used to have light blue uniforms with a red stripe.

TH: The dress uniform.

IP: Beautiful

TH: Yeah, the dress uniforms.

IP: They were beautiful.

TH: Red for artillery.

IP: Real light blue and they really looked like something with them suits on.

TH: They looked very sharp. In fact, a lot like the U.S. Marine Corps. That was originally dress uniform, the blue with the red stripe if you were in the artillery.

IP: The town used to be full of them wherever you looked you seen the light blue uniform going.

Mrs. Parker: Oh, they used to be out here all the time.

IP: And they were nice fellas, real nice soldiers.

EH: Would you know of a man by the name of Captain Kelty or Kelt or Kelty who had a little summer bungalow in Highlands? We have some mysterious photos from the..

TH: The World War I period.

IP: His name sounds familiar but I can't place him.

TH: Living down here in a bungalow in Highlands. Was that 19--, dated 1920 that picture?

EH: Roughly.

TH: 1919 or 1920.

EH: We can tell by the license plate we have to it's an interesting photo.

TH: Oh, it says 1919 on the New Jersey license plate. That's what it is. The bungalow is down in Highlands.

EH: It's kind of a mysterious photo we always wondered. They have a few shots of Captain Kelty with his wife in a snow scene on Sandy Hook and then you see another few shots of him at his summer bungalow in Highlands and I just wondered if you ever came across that name?

IP: His name sounds familiar but I can't place him.

EH: And he had a few cats. One perched on the car one perched you know I don't remember it all but its kind of an interesting you know posed photo.

Mrs. Parker: What was the name?

EH: Kelt I think it is Kelt.

TH: We have the photograph at the Museum.

EH: When you came out to the dances were the soldiers polished up and you know looking pretty super? Is that what you recall?

Mrs. Parker: Yes. They used to have the nicest dance hall down here in Highlands. Creightons they called it.

TH: Yes. John Mulhern told us it was right on the water. Was that the one that went out over the river?

IP: Yeah. It went out over the river. And that used to be packed.

TH: That's what John Mulhern said. It was real popular.

Mrs. Parker: The summer people and all the town people went there. Then they used to have “colored excursions” that would come down from the city. All these colored people would have dancing down there and we went down and watched them. Some of them would get in fights.

IP: They would always get in fight because at that time they wouldn't let (word for African-Americans removed) into town. No (word removed) could live there.

TH: Segregated, huh?

Mrs. Parker: I mean they used to fight among themselves.

TH: At that dance hall there? Get rowdy.

Mrs. Parker: Get liquored up. Somebody would be dancing with somebody else's wife and they didn't like the way they were dancing.

TH: Sounds familiar. Well, I would like to invite you down there at some time. 101.

IP: It was the bedbug ward because I lived upstairs.

TH: Okay. Here it is. When it was the Proving Ground building it was Building 32 and when this became Fort Hancock property the Fort Hancock number was Building 101. People like Bernie Duze, the son of Max Duze the Post Tailor call it the 101 Ranch. I have heard that name apply to that building. Mulhern has told me and Max Duze has told me that was where the Post Office was located.

IP: I had a room upstairs. I used to live there. That was when I had two jobs. I was working for, a chauffer for Capt. Lockwood and working in the Fort. But they named it right when they named it bedbug ward. (laughter)

TH: You mean the waterbugs?

IP: No. Bedbugs.

TH: Oh bedbugs, actual bedbugs.

EH: Really?

IP: Yes. That building was crawling with them.

TH: Well, the building was built in 1890 and it was still standing in World War II. And all of a sudden that period 1946 to 1950 when the Army was getting ready to deactivate they tore down I would say a good one third of the buildings at Fort Hancock.

IP: They must have taken the bedbug ward.

TH: Oh it went. Because see in the 1951 map, see we have a 1944 map of Fort Hancock and then we have a 1951 map and you look at the two maps and all of sudden a lot of buildings are gone in the 1951 map. So, we know that was the period that certain buildings went and your favorite there went. (laughter) But they moved the Post Office. It was originally in there then they moved it down to building a yellow brick building called Building 65. Then they moved it to Building 32 which was the Quartermaster warehouse and office building which still stands and that is apparently where it still was because Dennis Soyka remember...

Mrs. Parker: Did you have any fires out there lately?

TH: No. Please.

IP: What is causing that?

TH: Arsonists and somebody apparently who is out there or was out there.

EH: Was, past tense.

TH: Was past tense. They had suspects but nobody is talking. They never caught the person.

IP: They should have.

EH: John Mulhern said a Sergeant Murray lived in 101. Is that true in your time? Sergeant Murray was the Post Baker who lived in one end of 101.

TH: Oh yes. The Post Baker was a Sergeant Murray but was he there in World War I.

EH: Maybe no.

TH: See John Mulhern was four years old in 1908 so he remembers things from 1908 to 1927.

EH: Right. So it may not be the same time period. Because I remember Sergeant Murray his description of him that he was a rather stern baker. Do you remember the bakery at all?

IP: Yeah. But I remember this room on top of the old Post Office and they took me up and said, "This is your room. Take care of it," and the first night I slept there I couldn't sleep. Finally I got up and put the light on and that damn room was run away with bedbugs. We called it bedbug ward after that.

EH: My goodness they are tough to get rid of. Tough to eradicate.

IP: Yep.

TH: Another thing how was the mosquitoes and ticks. We have an awful lot of ticks down here.

IP: Yeah they always did. Plenty of ticks.

TH: Even back then.

IP: Yeah.

TH: How were the mosquitoes? Were they worse back then? Mosquitoes.

IP: We didn't have many mosquitoes there but we had plenty of gnats.

TH: Oh, the little ones you can hardly see?

IP: Yeah. You go along the shore they would get like a cloud the damn gnats.

TH: Yeah. They are still there.

IP: You keep them there. (laughter) I don't want any part of them. They bite like hell. You know back in them days you didn't have any, hardly any poison ivy, not anything like you got today.

TH: You mean it was there but it was...

IP: Very little.

TH: Really?

IP: Now they tell me I don't know they tell me the damn Hook is covered in poison ivy.

TH: Yeah it is. I found that out.

(inaudible then tape ends)

END OF INTERVIEW