An Oral History Interview with James Pike
Railroad Worker for Ordnance Department and Quartermaster Corps
1917-1949
Interviewed by Tom Hoffman and John Mulhern
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Transcribed by Jo Anne Carlson 2006

Railroad workers at Sandy Hook Proving Ground Roundhouse. James Pike, left.

Close up of James Pike with train engine.

Sandy Hook Proving Ground engine and passenger cars.
Photo courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ( )

James Pike: …. We had three passenger cars but then we had a trestle down through Sandy Hook that entered by the old bathing house.

JM: That's right. Yeah.

JP: Then it was filled in with sand and we put a track right on top of the old dead wood and built it.

JM: Is that right?

JP: Yeah.

JM: The trestle there was all covered up with sand.

JP: The old brick Guardhouse was way up at the other end, you know.

JM: That's right.

JP: Then we had another Guardhouse down at this end right next to Sandlass Bathing House (at southern end of peninsula adjacent to Highlands Bridge). Well, that was the trestle all the way down. We had a storm come through and cut that all up in there. We used to drive the old wagons through there years ago, the old flatcars. We used to drive under this trestle and around here and back up to Hancock. It was an old gravel road.

JM: I remember that old gravel road.

JP: We used to drive right underneath the trestle.

JM: I guess the first concrete road was built around 1916 or ’17.

JP: Yeah, I guess it were.

JM: Around the time of World War I and they put through that single lane concrete road.

JP: Yeah.

JM: Part of which is still there.

TH: Jim when did you first go to work down there?

JP: I went to work down there was on I think it was the 27th of February 1917. I guess I come down here.

JM: That was before World War I?

JP: The War broke out just after that.

TH: A couple of months after that.

JP: April.

TH: Yeah. April.

JP: You know what I got for the first days work down there? How much money I made the first day?

JM: I wouldn’t even guess at this point.

JP: Two dollars and 50 cents for one days work. (laughter) Then it kept increasing every week, you know 10- 20 cents. I was drawing pretty good wages. Patty Burke, he was the foreman for the Proving Grounds there and he made me a foreman.

JM: That was Patty Burke from the Highlands.

JP: Patty Burke from the Highlands, you knew him.

JM: Oh sure, and I knew all the sons too.

JP: Poor old Patty, he died of cancer.

JM: Yeah.

JM: I met him one day when I was going up somewhere or another to get some tool from the tool shop. He come down and said, "Hey, Pike, how about making you a foreman? I think you'd be a good foreman." I said, "I wouldn't suit you Patty." Mr. Burke, I called him. He said, "You go ahead. You think it over." So, I thought it over and I come home and I went back the next morning and told him. So, he gave me the papers to fill out, Civil Service and I filled them out. I went up to the doctor in Atlantic Highlands. I had a devil of a time passing. The doctor turned me down on my heart. We went out the back door right down to the Oaks. There was a gin mill right down there.

JM: Yeah. I remember it.

JP: We went down to Oaks and had a couple of drinks. He said, "Jim." He tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Jim, give me them papers." I am going to make some changes. He wrote down about the heart problem. He okay'd about the heart problem. So, I went back and turned them in. Next day they put me out with the gang. I was foreman there for years. He made me utility man all around, you know.

JM: Trouble with your heart then and you're 92 now so you can't always be too sure that they know really what they're talking about.

JP: That's right.

TH: What did you first work at Jim?

JP: Well, I went to work there as a laborer with Ordnance, you know, then they made me foreman. I was there about a month. And then I was foreman when the Ordnance Department transferred and went down to Maryland. (Sandy Hook Proving Ground relocated to Aberdeen, MD.) They put me in charge of the railroad.

TH: They still kept the railroad here?

JP: They still kept the railroad gang and I was in charge. I had Johnny Ash. I had all the old time Irishmen.

JM: Did Jim Concannon work for you or with you?

JP: He worked with me. He was a fireman for Kelly.

JM: Oh yes, Jim Kelly.

JP: And of course, I had experience with locomotives and cranes before I ever come in the Army, you know. In logging camp is where I learned it in Alabama.

JM: In logging camp, huh?

JP: So, they made me a crane operator. Then from crane operator made me a locomotive engineer. Then after that I was transferred and they made me a plumber for about three months. Post Plumber. I was everything down there. Then they changed that back and put me back, laid me off first. I was laid off for about two weeks.

JM: That was probably the first of July. (Federal Government Fiscal Years started July 1st until 1976.)

JP: Yeah, then I went back as a crane operator. (laughter)

JM: I know, my Father used to worry about every year.

JP: I was laid off twice while I was down there, you know and you'd get called back in a week or ten days. Short of money you know from Governors Island (Army Headquarters for Department of the East). They found out I was an ex-G.I. you know, and they took me right back.

JM: That gave you some priority there.

JP: You bet it did. I had good records in the Army, you know.

TH: Were you born in this part of the country?

JP: No, I was born in Alabama.

TH: Alabama.

JP: (inaudible), Alabama.

TH: You mentioned that you were a veteran. Did you serve in the Army?

JP: Yeah, I was in the Army for pretty near twelve years.

TH: Was this after you were an engineer or before?

JP: Before, before I went to take the Civil Service examination. I took the Civil Service examination test when I was in New York at the age of 17. 16 or 17, I don't know. I'd have to go back and look at my papers. But anyway, I got a high percentage then. I always wanted to come down to Hancock. I had acquired a friend here in Atlantic Highlands. (inaudible) She got me a set of papers and I filled them out and I got appointed down here at Fort Hancock.

JM: Were you ever in the Army at Sandy Hook, Jim?

JP: No. I was there as a civilian in the Ordnance Department. (Sandy Hook) Proving Grounds it was at that time. I'll never forget the day I went up there. I went up and

reported to the Commanding Officer. He was glad to see me and he called his orderly over and said "Take this fella out to Mr. Burke and introduce him to Mr. Burke," that's Patty Burke . So, we started out to the Proving Grounds from where Headquarters were and we met Patty in the road coming up and we stopped and introduced me. So, I told him I was sent out here to work. "Well," he says, "you know it's a temporary job. I came out here I don't know how many years ago and I'm still here yet." And I stayed there the limit.

JM: Who was the Commanding Officer then?

JP: I forget now who it was. We had so many dang many of them in there.

JM: I can remember Colonel Connelly and Colonel Berol and I thought of one name the other night and I forgot it now. That was way back around the time of World War I or shortly thereafter.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. You were only a young kid then.

JM: Yeah I was born 1904 and we moved there in 1908 so I was just a little shaver at the time.

TH: What were your impressions when you arrived here?

JP: What?

TH: What were your first impressions when you got down to the Fort?

JP: Well, it was all new to me. The first thing when I got off the train and I walked up to the engineer and talked with him. Kelly was the engineer, fireman, rather. Jim, watch-a-ma-call-it, was the engineer then. One of the Kelly boys was the fireman. No, Dugan was the fireman.

JM: Oh, Dugan.

JP: Yeah, Dugan, no he died down in Maryland.

JM: I had forgotten his name.

JP: Then I went to report to the Commanding Officer you know and he sent me out to see Burke. We met Burke out there. Burke said, "You come down here for a temporary job?" I said, "Yes." I said, "I passed the Civil Service examination." "Well," he said, "it's a temporary job I don't know." I said, "I'd like to have a couple of days off. I want to go back to Brooklyn and have my furniture shipped down here." He said "Shipped down here on a temporary job?" I said, "Yes, I'm going to be permanent down here." He said, "Well, I come here so many years ago the same way." He said, "and I'm still here." He said, "All right, you take the days off and report back." The end of the week, I

reported back. My first check was, I don't know, a small amount anyway. It was $1.57 a day for the first week and I worked Saturday.

TH: This was in 1917?

JP: Yeah. I guess it was. I hadn't been here very long and the War broke out.

TH: Was there a lot of activity? Were there a lot of soldiers?

JP: Oh yeah there was a lot. And I was an ex-gunman (inaudible) and that was what they wanted handling those big guns you know?

TH: We've got a photograph of the Proof Battery out there where they used to test fire all those guns? Maybe you could…

JP: I've got to put my glasses on. They are somewhere.

TH: You see, that's the, that Proof Battery is still out there. You didn't see it by any chance?

JP: Yeah. There used to be a lot of buildings right out there. There was track, railroad track and cannons they call it. The tracks in here and they lift those guns right out you know. When they tested that gun, this thing here would come down and he'd straddle that and bring it right out and put it on a flat car.

TH: The crane?

JP: Yeah.

JM: I think they used to call those Gantry, wasn't that what they called those, Gantry Crane?

JP: Yeah. Very big because they straddled a gun, you know. Straddled a gun and put the slings around it. They are run by electricity, you know, you start the motor up and it's like letting an egg out of a crate. In fact, Tom Petite, he was the engineer on the big 165 ton crane. He'd take it off the (railroad) car and put it on the rack. You had to raise the rack out to set the guns on. I don't know if you can see it or not, but there's a place out here where we put the guns.

TH: Would it be something like this Jim? I think we have a photograph somewhere in here where the guns are ….. (Looking at photographs)

JP: Yeah, that's right. We'd transfer them there. Then when you wanted to get one there was a certain number and we'd get one of them and take it back and test it. And then ship them out. They'd be shipped to different places, you know.

TH: This is would be your job when you used to be engineer out there? Would you do this sort of thing?

JP: Well, I handled some of those big guns. A lot of them in the lift there were condemned and we sold them for junk. We had to load them up. We'd take two cranes, small cranes, 30 tons to lift them. Those big guns were heavy. And then we had a 16-inch gun that we fixed it up and sent it to Panama.

TH: Yeah, the Panama Canal Zone.

JP: Yeah. That's right. How did you get all these pictures? Did you take them or did you copy them?

TH: Yeah. They are copied from the National Archives down in Washington, D.C. There's a 16-inch gun there.

JP: Yeah. Well, I worked on that fella.

TH: That one right there? That 16-inch gun?

JP: Yeah. There's a story right there you wouldn't believe it. I had about 18 or 19 fellas with me. We just made a test, you know, and was cleaning it. They were always used to, you know, cleaning it from the breach. You know what the breach was? By the time you clean that you had to clean the muzzle 'cause you get it dirty. So, I told them to clean it from the muzzle. They never saw a gun cleaned from the muzzle before, you know. I said, "I've been in the Army a long time and that's the way we did it."

JM: It took a long ram-rod to go down that muzzle.

JP: By going down the muzzle we saved about 14-15 feet of ramrod, you understand. They couldn't understand why I did it. Then Burke came along about that time and he come up and shook his head and said, "By gosh you have a good idea there. Good idea." (laughter)

JM: Yeah you could get right close to the muzzle from the muzzle end.

JP: The breach side you go up to the other end and clean you save 14 feet and you don't have to take out half the ramrod to clean the breach out.

TH: You said about 18 or 19 men would have to do all that?

JP: Yeah. We had civilians, you know, working. Seven or eight (men) on a ramrod pushing it back and forth.

JM: And they had to do that after every round was fired too.

JP: Well, we didn't. We only made two or three tests. We shot right down over Asbury Park and down through there. These shells went right over Asbury Park.

TH: That far?

JP: Oh yeah, right over the ocean. That old gun I don't know where it is now maybe it's in the scrap pile.

JM: There was only one of them there, as I remember, Jim, only one 16-inch gun.

JP: Well, that's all. We had only one 16-inch gun. The rest were 10 or 12-inch. We had a row of Battery's 8-inch that are no longer up there. I saw them torn down. They had a crew come in here with a crane. Cut them all up in pieces and loaded in the car. They load them in a car. We hauled them out in cars.

TH: When was this Jim? Do you mean the disappearing guns or the Proof Battery?

JP: The disappearing guns. All of them, five or six of them all along the line there this side of the Proving Grounds, there.

TH: Yeah. Those were the disappearing gun pits, right. You mean you were working there too when they started taking the guns out?

JP: Yeah, I was there. I guess it was about 1948-'49. Just before I retired. We carried the last locomotive down and turned it over and I went back and retired I guess in a couple of days.

TH: Then you retired. When abouts was that? You said when did you retire?

JP: January '49. My age is on the 28th of the month. I was sixty-five years of age then and I went down and put in. That's when I had enough service in and everything else. So, I went and put in retirement and got it in a couple of days. They gave me a radio. A lot of stuff they gave me for presents for leaving. And I had $1,100 vacation pay coming to me.

JM: You really saved up your leave there.

JP: Besides my pay, yeah.

TH: Were the men still active there? I mean, the Ordnance Proving Ground, when abouts did that close down? Do you remember they moved everybody down to Maryland?

JP: Yeah. Well, it must have been around the twenties. I couldn't tell you the right date. I remember backing up a little some working with the railroad crew. There was a lot of work going on down there.

TH: I'm thinking because like you were there all those years even after they packed up. I think it was right after World War I they started.

JP: Well, they worked night and day down there. They sent out crews at night with stuff going down to Maryland by train, you know, leaving at night time. Strings of cars loaded with ordnance and stuff. I went down, but I couldn't get a house down there. I went down and saw the fella in charge of the Pumping Station. That's the Pumping Station down where his Father worked about a job. They were laying everybody off, you know. The fella said, Yeah. When they get through with you when you come down, we'll give you a job as fireman." So, they didn't lay me off. They just kept me and my crew on. Transferred me right over to the railroad from the Ordnance Department right over to the Quartermaster Department.

TH: At Fort Hancock.

JP: At Fort Hancock and I stayed there until I retired.

JP: I was a jack of all trades: plumber, engineer, everything. (laughter)

TH: What about the railroads though then?

JP: No the railroads, all that track had been taken up and sold. Bushes growed up down there taller than I am down on the railroad track.

TH: Yeah but I mean when was this? When were the railroad tracks ripped up? By the way, here's a map of the railroad system there at Sandy Hook.

JP: Well, I don't know, they must have taken that up a year after, anyway. They were taking it up everywhere, all the track. There were a lot of spurs too.

TH: I can see that on the map there.

JP: Where'd it start at this end?

TH: That's the docks. And there's tracks that go out there, all these tracks. That's the Proving Ground right there.

JP: Yeah. That's right. And the coal trucks out there, the coal yard

TH: I think it was right there.

JP: That's all tore down. I looked over there the other day.

TH: Just before we put the tape recorder on, you mentioned when the last train ran.

JP: 1949 I think. It was sometime in December. Must have been around the first of December when we shipped the last locomotive out of there. We brought it down and turned it over to the engineers of the Central Jersey Railroad and they took it to Red Bank/Matawan. Then we went over and disconnected the cogs from the motor, you know, so she could be handled by freight and shipped back to Baltimore again.

TH: December '49 then that was the last run for all trains on Sandy Hook then.

JP: Yeah. They all disappeared then. '49 I went up and put in for retirement. We stayed around there I guess for a few days waiting for my papers to come in. I remember I was down there loading a truck and the Commanding Officer wanted to see me before I retired and he made a little speech. I had too many drinks and I was half drunk. (laughter) (Objectionable material edited out) I worked down loading this truck up, you know. My hands were dirty and I had on old greasy overalls. But I went right on in and saw him. He bid me good luck and farewell. He retired shortly after that too.

TH: Maybe you could name the different types of engines that were out there?

JP: Well, both locomotives were steam. Of course, we had that for years. Then after that around 1950, we got diesel locomotive, diesel. Then I had a gasoline train before I left there. I used to run the old steam trains. And we shipped them out and had them repaired back and forth and finally they got so bad with repairs that we cut them up and sold them as junk and they cut them up. Loaded them on flat cars and shipped them out.

TH: Seems like everything, you know, when it outlived its usefulness was sold for scrap.

JP: Scrap iron. Those big guns 14, 16-inch out here mounted at the (Twin Lights) Lighthouse on the hill (Highlands), you remember?

JM: Yes.

JP: They were cut up for junk too.

JM: Is that right? I didn't know what happened to them.

JP: Well, they were cut up for junk. It was a shame, two of them.

TH: Up on the hill here.

JP: Yeah. Up by the Lighthouse. And all the lead cable I used to love to send out, reels and reels of cable were put in the ground. Somebody cut that up I guess it was junk too.

JM: You know, out there at the point of the Hook now, if there is one, there must be fifty reels of cable. Right out at the point as far as you can go. And that was the mine control cable.

JP: Yeah. It was no good, only for that purpose. It was put out to protect the end of the point. And we done the same thing down at (inaudible).

JM: Is that right?

JP: We put two car loads of cable over there. And then they had me go down and pull it out of the Ocean again. I couldn't pull it out with the crane**.** Finally, they sold it to some junkie and he went in there and cut it up and got what he could, you know. And it ended up at that Guardhouse that old brick Guardhouse. I had to get one of those old tractors, you know, and pulled it up where I could reach it.

JM: That's in there some distance from the point of the Hook. That's just near the old target butts. That's where some cable was found too.

JP: I imagine there's a lot of that laying around. To protect the beaches, was what they used it for. It's no good for nothing else.

JM: I've seen bits and pieces of that steel armored cable around through the woods and here and there along the beach too. You know, that steel armored about that thick.

JP: They weigh about 10-15 tons a reel. I handled hundreds of them. Some fella fell through that little dock there handling those big cables coming in. All that cable was running from Hancock to them forts over there. What do you call them?

JM: Wadsworth, Hamilton, Tilden….

JP: All them. I handled all them danged big reels on them docks. That was some job.

JM: Well, that dock is in worse shape now than when you were there. It's in bad shape.

JP: Wouldn't want to run an automobile out there.

JM: You wouldn't want to walk out there.

JP: I repaired that dock with the Quartermaster out there. All the timbers were rotten. We put all new timbers on the bottom. We had another crew coming in there they put a lot more piling too underneath. And I went down there with my crane to help them out too.

TH: Jim, what was it like running the trains then?

JP: Huh?

TH: What was it like running the old steam locomotives?

JP: Well, it weren't a hard job. It weren't a hard job at all.

TH: Was there any set procedure like you would go through to start an engine?

JP: We had no signal like that if that's what you mean. We had no signal lights like they have on the main road. We had clear right-away all the way. All we had to do was watch out for the crossings, you know. I come dang near hitting a school bus. I was coming up with seven car loads of coal and a diesel engine. This school bus went right in front of me. It was dark. I was blowin' and I had my headlights on. Good headlights. I don't know what was wrong with that driver. He said he didn't see me until he got right on me, at that curve down there.

JM: At the "Y"

JP: This side of the old Coast Guard building where the "S" turns around, well that where I pretty near hit him one night. Well, my heart went up.

TH: About how fast could you go out there?

JP: I was going around 45 mph.

TH: About 45?

JP: Yeah about 45. I'd shut the throttle off after awhile and coast all the way to the point of the Hook. When you shut her off coal burns and everything went just as smooth as a dime.

TH: How fast, you see when I was still a little boy and I still remember vaguely the steam locomotives. They were being phased out in New Jersey. I was just wondering what it was like to serve on them. You were on the Baldwin locomotive?

JP: Yeah. The Baldwin locomotive is what we had.

TH: I was wondering what it was like to throttle one. If you can maybe recall what it was like going down to the Hook.

JP: What a job.

TH: Well, what would you go through? Can you recall anything about starting one up? What you had to do to start one up?

JP: Well, first you let the gas out, you know the steam. After you got started you push your throttle in. Set up high at whatever speed you wanted, 40 – 50 mph. Then you just use your whistle. Course if you saw anything in danger ahead, you just shut your throttle off and apply your air brakes.

TH: These were you put coal in them too right?

JP: Yeah, coal.

TH: I was just wondering what was the last type of engine to run?

JP: Diesel is the last we had there. We had two of them, 35 tons.

TH: When do you think they started tearing up all that track? There was an awful lot of track out there.

JP: Well, they tore it up after I left there.

TH: So when you retired…

JP: Everything was there. The railroad tracks and everything else was there. They tore up all the tracks from Sea Bright to Asbury Park. Then the trains only come in as far as the Highlands there. I remember I come down there with the last load of soldiers one day. I went to the other engine and opened it and our tracks were the Central Railroad tracks I went on down and I had about three car lengths and I was coming down at a pretty good speed. I saw the end of the tracks blocked off. Boy, you should have seen me put the emergency's on. I came about 30 feet before the come and backed up and take the passenger car away from me and I was all right.

JM: Jim, when you wanted to fire up a locomotive, a cold locomotive for instance, how long would it take to get one of those under way? To build a fire in the thing, to get the steam pressure up……

JP: Well, it depends a lot on the weather too. Just as soon as you can get a little air through the exhaust pipe, you know, that will help it burn a little quicker. It would take about an hour or an hour and a half.

JM: From a cold locomotive to the time you got underway.

JP: If you got enough steam to work your blower and the blower to draw the fire up, you know.

JM: Well, I guess there were two systems: an exhaust blower and I guess a…

JP: Some firehouses we had an air hose you could blow right into the smokestack and that would make an awful draft.

JM: Induced draft.

JP: But we never had no air over there.

JM: And the air compressors, of course, were driven by steam too.

JP: We had a big air compressor in the other building part of the motor pool there. Run pipes out to the motor pool.

TH: What's the fastest you ever went? Can you recall the fastest you had ever gone?

JP: You mean over there? I guess about 45 is the fastest I've ever went. That's fast enough. That's on a short run. Not like if you had a 40 or 50 mile run and were going to Jersey City or Philadelphia or Washington. That's a different thing.

TH: Sure. When you first came in and I met you before, you were talking about a schedule. Did you take passengers besides loading a lot of equipment up? Was there any passenger…

JP: Only working people. We only run the cars for the working people coming in and out and the school children, you know.

TH: Where were these stops, about, around the Hook? Were there different stops?

JP: Yeah, we had several stops. We had one at Gunnison, one at Camp Lowe and one at the Coast Guard, by the Coast Guard Station that white building over there.

TH: The one that's still out there?

JP: Yes. A lot of the soldiers, I mean Coast Guard had small houses outside the boundaries there. There were four or five families there. They had children going to school so we picked them up and dropped them off.

JM: That's interesting. I never really knew how many people lived out there. And I never knew how many families lived at the Coast Guard Station. You asked me about that some time ago. I said that I could only remember one bunch of kids. But Jim I'm sure is right. There was probably four or five families living out there.

JP: There were four of five houses out there and one big long one down there next to the road. Two families lived in there. That was built down there during the War, the first World War you know. That was an Ammunition Depot down there.

TH: Yeah, that area just north of the old Coast Guard Station.

JP: On both sides there. Ammunition.

TH: What period are we talking about now? What years was that?

JP: Well, that was about 1918 I guess.

TH: Yeah, World War I.

JM: (inaudible)

TH: You mentioned Camp Lowe. Where abouts is that? At Horseshoe Cove out there?

JP: Yeah. Camp Lowe was down near the Pumping Station.

TH: I see.

JP: Down where the track went. There ain't no railroad there now. The track went up the other way, the back road. Around by the plant was up near the beach at the other side.

TH: What was in there? Army Barracks?

JP: Well, there used to be towers.

TH: The high steel towers?

JP: Different things for the night drills for the guns, you know.

TH: I've walked through that area down there, the old Camp Lowe area, and you see a lot of cinders and little pieces of coal. I guess that's from the old railroad days?

JP: Yeah. That's right. They had regular track all through there**.** I've been on all of them; cranes and locomotives both.

TH: And also in that area too, there was a roundhouse at Horseshoe Cove? Mr. Mulhern keeps mentioning a turn table down there

JP: That was the old Central Jersey Railroad. That was years ago.

TH: From the old civilian railroad?

JP: There used to be a dock out there at Camp Lowe out there. There might be some old pilings sticking up out there now.

TH: They still are. Yeah.

JP: That's where the Central Jersey Railroad Docks were and they used to run the railroad from there to Asbury Park.

TH: Yeah I've read about that. That wasn't in operation though when you were there.

JP: No. No. That was done away with. Then when the government took over the rest of the railroad all the way down to the beach here.

TH: I see. The original tracks were incorporated as part of the Ordnance.

JP: I guess so. I don't know what kind of deal the government had when they took over. Then we extended our tracks from Camp Lowe to the end of the point. There was two different size rails. We had the bigger rail and the old Central Jersey had the smaller rails.

TH: The different gauges?

JP: No. The difference in weight and size, you know.

TH: Oh, I see. What about the World War I period? I guess, you were starting to say it was quite active there.

JP: Oh, good god yeah, lots of action down there. We'd bring in 1,000-1,500 soldiers a day and tomorrow we'd ship out that many. In and out week after week for months and months.

TH: Where would you take them Jim, on the trains?

JP: We'd take them down to Island Beach (Plum Island) and the Central Railroad would take them back in. Just back in 10-12 cars away from us. Then the side track had 10 or 12 more cars to pull them back in. Just load up the next morning.

TH: The soldiers were on passenger cars?

JP: Yeah passengers cars. They would be shipped to different points and overseas for wartime.

TH: Jim, Mrs. Mulhern was saying did they come in by boat? Or was it all done by trains?

JP: No. They would come in by train and a lot of them would come in by boat sometimes. They were shipped from different points, you know. They'd stay there a week or two weeks then be shipped right out.

TH: What would they be doing while they were waiting to go to the next place? Do you recall what they would be doing?

JP: I don't know. I was so busy I never got around the Parade Ground to know what they were doing. I imagine they had some kind of instruction.

TH: Also you must have worked there during World War II?

JP: Yeah, I worked during two wars.

TH: And that was the busiest time when they had so many men stationed out there.

JP: Oh sure. A lot of those buildings have been torn down now.

JM: A lot of them were burned up too, Jim.

JP: I imagine so.

JM: Remember some of those fires they used to have down there on a cold windy night. Take a look at those (looking at photos) and see how many you remembered.

JP: Who's at the Pumping Station now, John?

JM: The place is really closed up. They just have a few electric pumps in there now. And they have the water filtration system is there. Those mechanical filters, there were two when Pop was there and I think they have eight there now, all at the same site where they were. All the old steam pumps have been taken out. All the old electrical generating equipment has been taken out. The Jersey Central Power and Light supplies all the electrical requirements through an enlarged transformer station. Before Pop had left down there they had put in one transformer station, sub-station. They enlarged that considerably now and that's all effectively closed off. There isn't anybody in there now except a kind of caretaking force. They do some water testing there now in that laboratory they built.

JP: They had one fella living there in the same building that your Father lived in.

JM: They have a man there now living in that building. And incidentally that building was built in 1896. I found out from Tom's records. That old house that we lived in is about twice the size as it was when we lived in it. They've added on rooms and changed it around inside.

JP: When I was over there I looked at it but the danged bushes were, you know, I couldn't see the house. You know, that's growed up so over there. You can't see it from the road. And right there this side of the Pumping Station is where the railroad run a track that went out to where the engineers docked. I forget the name of that battery.

JM: (Battery) Arrowsmith. (Located in Horseshoe Cove)

JP: Arrowsmith. I fixed that track up to take those guns out of there.

JM: Is that right.

JP: And I got this finger cut there from building that trestle.

JM: Jim, do you remember when that was? Is that about the same time 1949 or something like that?

JP: Oh no, it was way before that. It must have been around in the 20's.

JM: Oh yeah, that's right the (19)20's. And then they put the anti-aircraft in there.

JP: Yeah, I had to fix up the track and those other bridge trestles in there.

JM: Over the creek.

JP: Yeah over the creek. That's when them danged things…. Boy we have to get this timber down without reinforcing that bridge. The danged prisoner turned everything loose before everything was done and rolled right out and mashed that finger and I went to the hospital. I thought it was broke, but it was just mashed up.

JM: We were down there some time ago. Tom and I were down there at Arrowsmith.

JP: They got that road going out there yet?

JM: The road is still there but you can't drive over it. You're not supposed to drive over it.

JP: I know it was pretty rotten.

JM: And you know what they did when they got into the demolition of the live ammunition some smart guy went down there into the rooms inside of Battery Arrowsmith and exploded the live ammunition inside the rooms of the Battery. And it just blew that thing in all kinds of shapes. You know, real smart.

JP: I wonder why they done that for. Silly, yeah.

JM: They could have exploded it on the beach. They could have done anything they wanted.

JP: We was all young school kids. (Looking at photos)

JM: That's right that's when I was going to school there. You know that gal that's sitting in the middle, standing up there in the middle? Remember her? I bet you do. That's Miss McDonald. Anna E. McDonald.

JP: It is? Well, I'll say.

JM: That's about when I was in the second, third or fourth grade down there. That was in my Mother's house out in Queens Village. My Sister had the job of cleaning out my Mother's house when they moved out of there. And finally, my Mother came down here.

Anyhow, that was among the things that my Mother had saved all these years. So then Mary gave it to me.

JP: You remember the Hanson girls, don't you?

JM: Certainly, yes sir. I'm glad you mentioned that. Now, Sally Hanson, and John Hanson and Tucker Hanson…

JP: Tucker's dead.

JM: Yes and Sally is still in Riverview (Hospital), I understand.

JP: No. She has a private job now. She may go to Riverview once and awhile. She works about one or two days a week now.

JM: Now, there is some question about where they had lived at one time or another. And my memory serves me that they lived right down here in Buttermilk Valley (Middletown).

JP: No. They lived up, you know where the old post office is, the Navesink Post Office. Well, they lived just up the road about a half a mile just off the road. Up that-a-way you turn in there.

JM: Monmouth Ave. Well, I was under the impression that right after they moved out of Sandy Hook …

JP: They moved back, because they own that place up there. The old man did.

JM: I see. Yeah. Did John Hanson die in Panama?

JP: No. He died at home here. He come in one night I think, she said, from working and he just dropped dead right inside the door.

JM: He went down to work at the Canal Zone.

JP: He come back and he dug that big ditch for the telephone cable all the way from the Hook down to the point. You know that big old cable.

JM: Yes. Where all those telephone stations are along the road.

JP: He dug that ditch with one of my cranes, our cranes.

JM: Is that right?

JP: That's the last job he had. No. It wasn't the last job, he got on railroad bridge, the Central Railroad. He retired from there. He was working the night that he died.

JM: I didn't know. I couldn't remember exactly what happened there.

JP: I remember. I seen poor old John sweating from digging that ditch to lay that cable in. Johnny Simpson laid it in, him and his gang.

JM: And that too is another thing we're trying to run down. I talked to Pete a short while ago. Pete Simpson, they live right over here you know in Highlands.

JP: They do? I wondered whatever become of Pete. The old man and the old lady are both dead I guess.

JM: Oh yeah. Pete is the only one that's left and he lives on East Lincoln Ave. I think it is. I've been talking to lots of people on the telephone, just like I called you about anything that I can find out that I can turn over to Tom that he can get in the record for this. They live at 32 East Lincoln Avenue. But he's in Florida now. Pete just left for Florida a few days ago.

JP: He married a Baker, what's their name?

JM: Gail House. Yes.

JP: Gail House. Yeah, didn't he marry Gail House?

JM: Yes. And I talked to his daughter this morning. That's Gail, Gail Simpson. And you know who else lives over here right on the road over here is Tommy Gould.

JP: He does?

JM: Do you remember Tommy Gould?

JP: Yeah.

JM: You know, that little antique shop right on Route 36 when you go down toward the Highlands at Sears Avenue? That little place that's on the left side of Route 36?

JP: I used to go over a lot with my laundry there every week till I quit driving my car I used to take it over every week there. Of course, I was driving my car and I never noticed what was going on over there.

JM: Well, Tommy Gould lives there. I've taken him down to Sandy Hook a couple of times. And Tom spent an afternoon here about a month ago, I guess, talking about ya know. He went to Florida too. He left the first of November, and his brother Billy Gould, lives in North Palm Beach. That's where Tom is going and he'll be there until after Christmas then he's coming back here shortly after Christmas again. His Daughter lives down there.

JP: Well, I've had more news from you than I learnt in the last five years about people. I don't get out to know what's going on anymore.

JM: Do you remember Pearl Murray?

JP: Yeah.

JM: Well, she's still down at the Twin Lights. You know her Father was in the Postal Telegraph Tower there. Well, they tore down the tower some years ago, you knew that.

JP: I guess he retired.

JM: Oh, long ago. And she stays home most like yourself, most of the time. And we've talked to her a couple of times. I only talked to her again the other day. And Tom and I are going over to see her maybe next Tuesday or so.

JP: When I spoke of Hanson, I was thinking about Hankison.

JM: Oh yeah, Ella May Hankison.

JP: They're in one those pictures maybe or maybe not. I don't know if they are or not..

JM: No she's not. She came after this, Ella May came after this. They're down in Florida now. She married that fella Butch and they are living in Florida. They sold the business over there in Red Bank, the car wash business. They sold that and they are living in Florida now. And we also were talking to Ralph Pixley. Do you remember Ralph?

(Break in conversation. First tape ends. Pause to change the tape.)

JP: I don't know where the girls are now. There were three girls. The oldest girl was married before I ever left the Hook and I think one of them as being a nurse.

JM: I think all the girls are still alive. I was talking to somebody about them not so long ago. But the boys, all except Pete, are dead. I think seven.

JP: The last Simpson I saw, me and Liz was down having supper at the Bahr's, the restaurant down at the Highlands. One of them was in there one night. I was talking to him. That's the last time I saw any of them. That was 20 years ago, I guess.

TH: Well, his Grandson just came in last week. Johnny Simpson's Grandson came by and he wanted to see the Fort. So I took him out. He and his Wife came down.

JM: Well, that must be Gail, then. Was his Wife's name Gail?

TH: Yeah, she was expecting.

JP: Can anyone get into the Hook now without a pass?

TH: Well, they still have it closed. They're afraid with all of those gun batteries out there that somebody would get hurt.

JP: Buddy Dugan, you know worked out here in the Park. He take me.

TH: Oh I see. It's very hard for people to get in there.

JP: I went down one time. I thought it'd be open like Monmouth over there. They turned me back, but never tried no more. I'm sorry I turned my pass in. Pass wouldn't have been no good no more.

JM: You know we still have one of my Father's passes.

JP: You have.

JM: We still have.

JP: The night I went out and everybody was going out and retiring and being laid off. They took the pass away and they took mine away.

JM: That's pretty small potatoes, really. But they still do things like that.

JP: I could have got it back, you know, going in to see someone working at the time, but I never bothered about it.

JM: I don't know if you'd have any trouble getting in there now if you wanted to go in.
Tom would certainly take you in. And I'd certainly be happy to.

JP: I could get Dugan or Bryant to. They work down there.

JM: Is this the fella who was the fireman, Dugan?

JP: He worked in the Park down there during the summer months. And Bryant, he's in charge now he's working nights down there 4 to 12 (pm).

JM: Down at the guard gate?

JP: In the Park there. Any of them would take me down, if I was able to walk. I wouldn't mind going down again.

JM: Well, you know any time you know you could take it easy. You don't have to rush.

TH: Jim, I live down there. I work as a Park Ranger there. It's a new National Park. I've been there since February of this year.

JP: What part do you live in? By the hospital?

TH: Well, all those Enlisted Men's Barracks, all those big yellow brick barracks.

JP: There's some trailer camps over there.

TH: That's the one. The trailer park behind all the Enlisted Men's Barracks.

JM: Back of the laundry.

TH: I'm right behind that.

JP: Yeah, I remember all them old buildings. I worked in all of them when I was a plumber. Oh, boy, that hospital was a heck of a job too.

TH: Why is that?

JP: The hospital on the end. The rats would eat the dang lead pipe up. You'd put it in one night and then come the next night and there'd be a big hole in it. The rats would come up from the beach and eat holes in the sewer pipe you know.

TH: Really.

JP: There's no hospital detachment or nothing there now.

TH: No. They made like a laboratory.

JP: A laboratory for fish.

TH: To study fish and the pollution out there.

JP: Yeah. Don't they have plants out there to inspect that some way or another too?

TH: Over in the Highlands they have that purification plant.

JP: Oh, it's in the Highlands now.

TH: Yeah. They keep a watch over the water to see how polluted it is. That's one of their many jobs out there.

JP: Have they found the clams fit to eat?

TH: They still say it's polluted. Just last year one of the doctors, you know professors who works out there says that the clams at Horseshoe Cove are edible. That was in the newspaper. It was an interview with Dr. Pierce out there. I don't know how true it is.

JP: You know there used to be a good bed of hard clams right out there at Camp Lowe.

TH: Still is. Horseshoe Cove.

JP: Used to just come in and dig them.

JM: Did you know Harry Mount at the Highlands?

JP: Yeah.

JM: Well, you know Harry is still around. We were out there boating five years ago I guess it was in Horseshoe Cove. I saw this big fella over there. You know Harry Mount was a big fella. He was as tall as you are I think. Anyhow, we saw this this big fella and we moseyed over in this little dingy that we had with the sailboat out there and got talking to him. Sure enough it's Harry Mount. And he was digging hard clams in there. Before we went back to the boat we said, "Harry, we'd like to have a few of those. Can you sell us a couple of dozen clams or something?" He gave us a whole little basketful. You know, I went to school with Harry in Highlands during World War I. So, there was Harry. Every winter he goes to Florida. In the summertime he's back up here digging clams.

JP: Well, they wouldn't allow anyone to dig clams in there, you know.

JM: I know the government wouldn't.

JP: But we used to sneak in there and do it once in awhile, you know. If they'd catch you, they'd just shoo them off.

JM: That's about all it amounted to.

JP: I had a gang down there and it was Thursday and we wanted a mess of clams for Friday. We'd send George Lyman**.** He was a great clammer, you know. He'd go out and bring up a basket and he'd sit down and open them up. A quart a piece in every lunch box. He'd sit outside and open them up. He'd be working.

JM: Shuck 'em.

JP: Yeah. Boy, he could open clams quicker than a chicken picking up a grain of corn. And we'd have fried clams. And if we wanted clam broth with the clams, we'd send him out there to get them. We'd wash them off, build a little fire and have clam broth. Many a days we'd have them out there. We'd be working on the railroad and I'd say, "George go out and get us a bucket of clams."

JM: Yeah, right there at Horseshoe Cove.

JP: Nobody would bother us. We were just as independent as a jack rabbit eating.

TH: Jim when you worked out there, did you live out there?

JP: I lived out there when I was a plumber for 3 months. I rented this house out. Boy, it took me six years to get it straightened out again.

JM: Where did you live when you were down there Jim?

JP: I lived where Johnny Simpson lived. Right next door to Johnny.

JM: Three or four of those big houses are still there; those big framed houses.

TH: Right out there by the Coast Guard, the big framed buildings by the Coast Guard.

JM: There used to be a couple of them. Johnny Simpson lived out there and you lived out there.

JP: Johnny lived in the biggest house and I lived right next door to him.

JM: And there were a couple of other civilians lived out there. Do you remember what their names were by any chance? I've been trying to think of who they were, but you think I could think of them, no.

JP: Right off hand I can't. One of them that lived back there was Joe Lipsick. He lived out there back of the Commissary, (Building 47) the old Commissary down by the coal bin there. He had his own house, you know.

JM: He lived in there in one of those little bungalows near where Weatherby lived.

JP: Yeah, that's right.

JM: And Ballard, Sergeant Ballard lived in one of those little shacks.

JP: Yeah. There was a lot of them down in there between the woods and the Pumping Station. There were a lot of those little shacks down there.

JM: There were about eight of them.

JP: They lived down in there, you know. They didn't have no rent to pay, got their water for free and the food from the Commissary. They lived like millionaires until they retired.

JM: Do you remember when that four masted schooner came ashore there on the beach? And those guys stole that lumber off the ship and moved it across Sandy Hook. That's what they built most of those little houses out of. You remember that, don't you?

JP: Yeah, sure.

JM: Sergeant Humphry lived there, Sergeant Glidewell, Sergeant Mitchell, Sergeant Lacey. Who were the others?

TH: Did you first live out there when you came in 1917?

JP: Huh.

TH: In 1917, did you first live out there?

JP: No, I guess it was around 1928 or something like that.

JM: Yeah. My Father left there in 1927.

JP: I was a plumber there, plumber. One of the officers insisted I move into the Hook you know as a plumber 'cause I could be called any time of the day or night. So I moved out. I didn't like it. I got rid of the job.

JM: Things were getting worse out there at that time. When we first went out there, everybody could buy in the Commissary. But then, sometime after World War I, they got into this business that the civilians could not buy in the Commissary.

JP: Well, you know why, they were buying it there and taking it out and selling it. They buy sugar at three or four cents a pound and sell it for ten or twelve cents outside. Canned goods for five cents. They'd get ten to twelve cents outside.

JM: And they still do that in the Commissary.

JP: Yeah. Girls getting $30 or $40 dollars a week. They'd spend that much in the Commissary. They knew there was something wrong, you know. They just cut it out.

JM: And then the only place you could buy was the PX or the Canteen, as they called it. And nothing was cheap in the Canteen.

JP: No, no. That's right. So, I used to have a charge account there. I bought my meat there. I would get it on my way home, watch-a-ma-call-it Jim was the butcher down there. I don't know the name.

JM: I'm sure I do too.

JP: Nelly Norton she was an assistant in there. I wonder if she's living yet.

JM: Norton?

JP: She was an operator for awhile. She worked at the Post Exchange with Jimmy – oh what's his name, right down the road there? My memory gets bad.

JM: I can't remember names some time either, but they come back sooner or later.

JP: Yeah. He was over there when they closed the thing up anyway.

JM: I remember those two. You remember Bob Kay, I guess.

JP: Yeah sure.

JM: Didn't he run the meat market there at the Canteen for some time?

JP: I believe he did.

JM: Then of course, Greenspan used to come in from the Highlands.

JP: Yeah. I think Jimmy was the last one from down the road down here. Him and Mrs. what you ma call it. The good old days.

TH: I've got to ask, maybe if Jim could collect his thoughts, about a typical work day there. What time would you, did you have different hours?

JP: Yeah. We mostly went to work at 7:30 in the morning and quit at 4-4:30 (pm). Different Quartermaster officers would come in and want you to change the hours. Like you could have one hour off for lunch. Then another would come in and make you take a half hour for lunch, you know. And quit at maybe 4 or 4:30 or 4:15. If you had a gang out it would take them maybe fifteen minutes to get your tools put away.

JM: Then I guess with the train schedule too….

JP: We had to be in there early to get that train ready of the school kids. The school kids left at 7:30 am in the morning you know.

JM: Before that, I think you had an earlier trip than that, didn't you? When you went out to the Highlands to get the workmen to bring them into the Ordnance Shops?

JP: Yeah. I guess I left there about 7 o'clock, you know. Get in about 7:30. It only takes about twenty minutes to get in there.

JM: And then there was one trip about one o'clock in the afternoon. And then Jim would go out about three-thirty, three o'clock, to pick up the school kids and bring them in.

JP: Then go out and take the workers out.

JM: About 4:30 I think it was, wasn't it?

JP: Yeah.

JM: Then you'd go out and lay in Highland Beach for about a half hour or so and then go back into the Hook. And then I think the last trip ….

JP: And pick up the freight out there.

JM: I forgot about the freight. That used to be about 6 o'clock – 5:30 (p.m.)

JP: Well, there were two of us. One would take the morning shift and one would take the afternoon shift.

JM: I think that's part of what you're thinking about. How many hours …

JP: After we'd run the school kids and the bus taken over we'd cruise out of our job of handling kids, you know. I don't know what year they got to run the bus, you know.

TH: Well, there was still a lot of equipment moving. I guess you had flat cars.

JP: Yeah, yeah. We shipped all those flat cars and all that railroad material out on a separate track before I left there. I guess all the last of the equipment went out. We brought it down one afternoon, me and Tom. Turned it over the Central Railroad engineers and they took it down to Red Bank/Matawan. Then we took the cogs underneath the motors, you know, disconnected them. Locked them so nothing would happen to the motors.

JM: Do you remember when they had the four wheel drive trucks as locomotives.

JP: I remember I was (inaudible) We had a (inaudible) down there at Camp Lowe. We were trying to get home the armed services in the armory didn't have no way. The fella had to come in there with the school kids and pulled in that danged old baggage car that had the school kids in it. We made it down there to Camp Lowe. There were sand banks on both sides and it was fog and the track was like grease. I jumped right off of that sand bank.

JM: That's where that Halyburton Monument is. Do you remember where they dug up those skeletons there.

JP: Yeah, right in there, that's right. I had to go down there the next day and take that locomotive crane and pick that old truck up and set it right to one side and pick up the baggage car and set it right back up on the track and pull that train all the way back in.

JM: I think the baggage car shows on your picture of the train.

TH: Oh, the photograph here of the engine?

JP: Just one car for the kids. They laid Kelly off and done away with it, you know. Do you remember when they laid Kelly off, the engineer?

JM: Yes. I do.

JP: And we had Bob Wise come in and he got canned. He didn't take the job.

JM: Bob Wise was a machinist.

JM: This is not the baggage car. They had another car that was about a third of the car was for baggage and the rest was passenger space.

JP: Yeah. That's right.

JM: But these are just the two passenger cars.

TH: I see. Is that the type of locomotive you were on Jim? The Baldwin there?

JP: Yeah, yeah that's the one.

TH: We had a gentleman come in. He's the one that alerted me that you were living out here and he said that he thought that one of these two fellas there was you.

JP: Well, I have got a picture of me here with one locomotive somewhere. Let me see here. I showed it here to someone not long ago and I think I stuck it out here. John, I hope you'll never have to do this.

JM: Well, I keep hoping that I won't either, but if I have to I will.

(talking low in the background)

TH: There are some things I can't think of things that happened last month or one week ago. (laughter) I am so confused because my days off are Tuesday-Wednesday I am always referring to things as happening last week. It's not really so. I am wondering, Jim was working there when Battery Kingman and Battery Mills was started. That was started in 1918 and it was all completed by 1922. I'm wonder if Jim didn't bring in some guns or something.

JM: I'll bet he remembers that too.

TH: Everything I noticed was, you know, done by train. It seems that it was quite efficient back then.

JM: They are still efficient.

TH: We've been discussing a mass transit link-up. They wanted a ferry system to link all the units of Gateway but, gee wiz, they still have all the old railroad beds both on Sandy Hook and over here and on the mainland.

JP: Tom Callander he didn't live long after he retired either.

JM: No. He didn't. That's right.

JP: No. I was over to see him before he died.

JM: And he looked like he'd live forever.

JP: Yeah. I think it's in here now. (looking at photos)

TH: Oh boy, look at that, that's great.

JP: Recommendations you know when I retired, you know. This says the 21st^{h} of January 1949.

TH: Jim, who are they, besides yourself there, right?

JP: Well, one of them is Pea Soup and the other is a soldier. That guy with his hand up is a soldier. He was in the Quartermaster Corps and they sent him over as fireman. And we made him engineer over there before I left. That's Pea Soup and then that's me there. That other one was Jimmy Mount down here. He's dead. Do you remember Jimmy Mount?

JM: Yes, very well, sure. He was a fireman, wasn't he?

JP: No he was a checker, a card checker, you know. Sat in a chair in the office most of the time.

JM: Yes, we know that whole family. Mrs. Mount they had the Mount house there in Highlands. They had two daughters. Dolly Mount. Dolly and Jimmy were and they had another daughter.

JP: I think some of them died if I'm not mistaken.

Mrs. Mulhern: Frances and May. Frances married… They had seven children. She became deaf. Frances and May. May married Harrington, I think.

JP: That locomotive there was cut up right about where it stands now.

TH: Where was that photograph taken Jim?

JP: It was taken right by the roundhouse. I'll show you when we come back. You can see the top of the stacks by the roundhouse. You see part of the roundhouse back there?

JM: Yes, indeed, I do.

TH: It's a shame they cut everything thing up. Everything, guns, locomotives…

JP: They cut them up with acetylene torches and we loaded them up on big flat cars and hauled them right out. (objectionable material edited out)

JM: They're still making it too.

TH: You mean the junk dealers.

JP: Tons of brand new rails you know and all that down there. You can see the roundhouse in thee. The main line came out back and ran this way down.

TH: That's a beautiful locomotive. You know where Allaire State Park is down this way? They've got an eight mile railroad down there. They just got a second locomotive back from a company out in Idaho. They've got one that's completely restored and they've got an eight mile long railroad through Allaire State Park down there. Now they're going to restore the second one that's just come in from Idaho. And we were just discussing here that everything years ago when you were there was done by railroads. It was efficient and there was passenger service. There was all the equipment was moved in. Eventually they are going to need mass transit to Sandy Hook. All these cars, you probably heard it on the radio or T.V. during the summer months the way its all clogged up. Someday they will probably have railroads again for passenger service.

JP: I think they will. I hope they will.

JM: You were talking about, Jim, Battery Mills and Kingman.

TH: Oh yeah. In 1918, they started to build those big emplacements down by Horseshoe Cove at Kingman and Mills.

JP: That'd be Kingman? Those were big guns in there. Yeah.

TH: I was wondering did you bring in any equipment to help them construct that or was that done by someone else?

JP: Well, that was all done by contractors. I brought in, I'd done some work with a crane down outside there. That was up the engineers I know that. I had done some work there. I was in there with something else. I think I was unloading some big heavy shells for that battery. They used to have target practice there. I think I had a flat car full of shells I took down there. Put them off and roll them inside. Ammunition.

TH: How would you get them off the flat cars?

JP: Tongs. They would have the regular tongs, you know. You'd get around and hook them with the tongs.

JM: Just like an ice tong.

JP: Yeah like an ice tong.

JM: The more you'd squeeze the handle, the tighter it would get.

JP: The tighter it would get is right.

TH: Was it done mechanically done like?

JP: No. I'd have a helper and he'd take the hook of the crane and hook them up. I'd say take them up and take them over to the carrier you know and they'd carry them in, shove them right in, line them up, in the regular place inside there.

TH: Yeah. Storage.

JP: Yeah, storage room.

JM: That bulkhead along there, Jim, is practically all gone.

JP: It is?

JM: I was only down there a couple of weeks ago and I was surprised to see that.

JP: I haven't been down there since I went down there and dug some sand for Johnny Simpson. About a half a days work I did for him down there. That's the last time I was in on that track with a crane.

TH: I'm wondering about this photograph. Do you recall when this was taken? Did you mark it?

JP: No. I didn't mark that. That was some time around the 50's, I guess.

TH: Well, that could have been in the 50's then.

JP: Yeah, well I guess it could.

TH: Well, you told me that the last railroad was scrapped….

JP: Well, I guess around '38 or something like that when that was taken. Tom Kilcannon had his leg broke. I knew when he had his leg broke. He was in the hospital with his leg broke at the time when this picture was taken. I was in charge of the whole thing at that time, you know. I was just getting ready to go out and somebody came along with a camera and took our picture, you know.

TH: Do you know who took the photograph? Cause you got a copy of it.

JP: No. I don't. Some soldier, I think.

JM: Do you remember Smedley?

JP: Yeah.

JM: This picture of the kids at Sandy Hook School was taken by Smedley.

Mrs. Mulhern: He took a lot of pictures.

JP: Yeah, there used to be a lot of fellas liked to take pictures.

Mrs. Mulhern: It would be nice to get a copy.

TH: Yeah. Do you think we could get a copy of this made? 'Cause I know you want to hold on to it.

JP: Well, yeah, you could take it if you want have a copy made out of it, go ahead.

TH: Yeah. Mr. Mulhern do you think you can handle it because you made a copy for us once before? Who do we take it to?

JM: I can take it to Dorn's.

TH: Okay. Because we'll have a copy made and we'll have a record made of this down at Sandy Hook.

Mrs. Mulhern: Do you have the names of all the people?

TH: Well, we've got it on the tape. From left to right. You know those are bygone days.

JP: That fella's dead, that fella's dead, that fellas dead. (looking at photos) I don't know if that soldier is living or not, and I'm half dead.

TH: No. Don't you believe it.

Mrs. Mulhern: I think you are great, just great.

JM: Let me put this down in here and then it won't get turned over. This is where I keep my special pictures in here.

TH: Before, I've been down there by the old railroad bed, like in Spermaceti Cove there's a real long straight away down in Spermaceti Cove up to the Horseshoe. I've stood there many a time and been nostalgic about it. I say in your face, you were thinking about back to the old

locomotive being on it and going up and down. I wonder if we'll ever see it come back. It must have been beautiful to go down that straight away.

JP: That old railroad track was perfect from Camp Lowe clean up to the Proving Ground straight as a bee line that track was.

TH: That section, but I'm talking about down at Spermaceti Cove way down over on the Bay side. You're still out in the salt marshes there. Right by the Bay it's a very, very straight away. That's where I was talking about. But I know what you're talking about. There's a lot of coal on the ground over there up in that section.

JM: They apparently fired the boilers with hard coal at one time.

JP: We used to have these WPA's (Works Progress Administration) down there and they had coal piled up on the bank. I supposed that some of that left there. We had a prison camp (U. S. Disciplinary Barracks) there too right by Camp Lowe, a prisoner camp. I guess all them buildings are torn down too?

TH: Yeah it's all gone but I know the site you're talking about, yeah.

JP: We had a prison camp in there too. We had hundreds and hundreds of prisoners during war time.

JM: The only thing that's left there is the old balloon hanger.

JP: Is it still there?

TH: Well, that's a warehouse that stood by the balloon hanger. Cause the balloon hanger is real big. I've seen a photograph in the historical record book.

JM: Isn't that it?

TH: No.

JM: Well, maybe not then.

TH: It's a building that stood right by it.

JP: What's those crews they used to have I forget the name of them. Those boys that we had in the time of war. It weren't the WPA's.

JM: The CCC's? (Civilian Conservation Corps)

JP: Oh, the CCC's they used to have a camp right there too where the balloon hanger is now. I remember they had a beer joint there and I used to stop there to get beer once in awhile.

TH: Three point 2 beer?

JM: And then they also had the CMTC Camp. Do you remember that? Civillian Military Training Corps.

JP: Yeah, that's right.

TH: Who are those fellas, by the way, that MTC?

JM: The CCC?

TH: No you mentioned the MTC?

JM: The Motor Transport Corps.

TH: Oh, there was the Motor Transport Corps?

JM: Yeah. That was the people who had to do with transport. That was in development as I remember it in World War I when the Motor Transport Corps was started. They took over the operation of vehicles. I think that's when that happened.

JP: I believe it did too.

JM: And then that went on. That was a big political move. Then somebody later decided that that was not the thing to do and they turned it back over to the Quartermaster Corps.

(inaudible)

JM: Well, there was the other two things, CMTC Civilian Military Training Corps and CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps.

JP: Them CCC's, they were young boys you know.

JM: Yes. That's right.

JP: They done good work. I had one firing for me up on the train. I remember a lot of times we used to let them off on Friday at 1-2 o'clock. They lived down in south Jersey. I said, "Beat it out the back way. Don't let nobody see ya."

JM: Well, there were a lot of fellas for whom there was no work.

JP: That's right there was no work for the poor kids.

JM: And they got them involved in that semi-military kind of a thing and of course the Civillian Conservation Corps …

JP: They're families could hardly feed themselves. They'd give their families so much money and them so much money and board. They done a good job working down there. They did an awful lot of work at Hancock. I guess they had them two or three years, a couple of years anyway.

JM: Well, I guess they did a lot of clearing out in the woods.

JP: Yeah. They done all kinds of work. All kinds of work; cement work, carpenter work. Every different kind of work they did. Whenever you would want one of them you'd get a gang together and some of them were very good workers and some of them were no good. You'd find that amongst all of them.

JM: My Father used to kid about some of the soldiers that used to go down to fire for him. And when they used to go down to become fireman at the Pumping Station, my Father would say, "Have you any experience firing?" They would say, "Yes, I used to fire on the L&N," you know, Louisville and Nashville (railroad).

JP: I know what it is.

JM: Because they didn't know anything about firing but everybody knew about the Louisville and Nashville. A lot of those fellas were from down south and lots of other places too and my Father used to kid about that. So, it got to the point, after several times, when a new fella would come down, about the first thing my Father used to say to them, "Did you ever fire on the L&N?" You know, and that would kind of disarm the guy right on the spot.

JP: We had some good soldiers firing and some lazy ones you know.

JM: Remember Frost, the Indian, little short guy?

JP: Yeah. I remember one time I met Paris down there unloading coal down there and I went down and was only working a half a day on Saturday. I went by to pick Paris up you know. There used to be big piles of coal there you'd pick it up and throw it into the bin at the top. He had about a ton of it laying in there that would be enough to keep him all day.

JM: Was he the fella that lived over here in Buttermilk Valley?

JP: Yeah his Son lives over here. They sold out and live in south Jersey now. Paris Wilson.

JM: My Father never had much use for them either. For Paris, I mean.

JP: Anyway, I went by and there he were sitting out on the boon with a pint of whiskey drinking it. I said, "Get the hell out of here." I went up and I stripped right off and I went in there and in about a half an hour I had enough coal for Monday. Next day it was the same thing. Only the next day the lieutenant caught him. He was sitting out on the boon with a pint of whiskey drinking. He canned him right away.

JM: That was quite a job down there. Originally they used to hand shovel the coal out of the coal gondolas into the bunkers there and then wheel it into the boilers to fire up the boilers. Then I guess, later than that, they got you with the shovel to pick it up with the bucket and drop it down …

JP: We cut a hole the top of it so we get the coal in there.

TH: Where was this?

JM: The Pumping Station, where my dad was.

JP: The tracks ran right up to the side of it.

TH: Yeah. I heard about the tracks.

JP: I remember (inaudible) Wright ran a crane down there and he got canned too.

JM: They lived right up there in Buttermilk Valley, too, didn't they?

JP: Yeah. I don't know where his Wife went, but he's dead long ago. Bossy. He's got a Son that lives over here around the Highlands somewhere.

TH: Jim before you mentioned about being a serviceman, you being in the service. Were you in the infantry?

JP: Artillery, yeah.

TH: Oh, you were in the artillery? Was it Coast Artillery?

JP: Coast Artillery, yeah. I was in Fort Mansfield, I was in Fort Schuyler, I was in Fort H...

JM: Harold G. Wright, H.G. Wright?

JP: Yeah.

TH: There were Coast…

JM: Right around here. Fort Schuyler is on Long Island Sound. And H.G. Wright is where?

JP: Yeah. That's on the Island too. Right across… About 14 miles from New London, Connecticut.

TH: What unit were you with, Jim?

JP: I was with 88 and 157th.

TH: Coast Artillery. Were you on one of those big guns that they used to have?

JP: Yeah, I was in command of one of those big guns. I was a gun commander and also a gun sighter too. That paid extra money you know.

TH: Really?

JP: Three dollars a month more. (laughter)

TH: What was your rank there, by the way?

JP: I was a Sergeant.

TH: What years did you serve in?

JP: 1905 up until 1911, I think. 1913.

TH: Can I ask you something then? I got some photographs here. These are photostatic, we made these copies and there's a shot of a crew on the disappearing guns and I'd like to know what kind of uniforms. These fellas looks like are in..

JP: Well we just had regular old fatigue clothes and all. It's hard to tell what kind of uniform that is.

TH: I think those were blue coats.

JP: Now, that's what they swabbing out the breach of the gun what should be done down here. That's why all of them were sitting around one night and I told them how we do that job, you know.

JP: Where was this taken at?

TH: This we believe was right down at Fort Hancock, Battery Granger.

JP: No doubt it is. If you had more daylight you could see the background. You can't see the background.

TH: That's because it's a copy. The original photograph is back at the Fort.

JP: Down in here is storage and all like that. They had a row of them guns over there at the Hook.

TH: Yeah, we still got the row out there. Did you serve on the disappearing guns?

JP: Yeah sure. They had leavers here that would trip you. The gun would rise and go straight out. Here's the gun pointer. He's sighting out and getting his readings from the azimuth, range, and position. And they had a fella sitting down here sitting on the ring, you know.

TH: By the way how was the gun fired off?

JP: They had a lanyard. They actually had a what you ma call it. He placed the lanyard on a long rope. They somebody would holler "fire" and you'd pull that thing and off she went. The whole gun would just come back down like she is there now.

TH: Yeah. What did you think of the guns when you served?

JP: Oh, boy, I don't know. I pretty near got killed. I remember getting up in Rhode Island they had gun practice up there. I run along out of the way and there was a steel door there. I had just about, well, if I had been about 2 inches from the steel door it would have killed me. The pressure gun, you know of that thing when it fired. That door just went by me. It would have either knocked me down in the basement or it would have killed me. That's how close I got to being killed. I'd only been in the Army a short time, you know.

TH: What was it like serving in the Coast Artillery in those days?

JP: Oh, it was all right. We didn't have it too bad. About two hours of drills a day that's about all. The rest of the day we bummed around, fishing, baseball, winter time, football and all like that.

TH: Your uniforms, by the way….

JP: We had beautiful uniforms in my time. We had blue uniforms you know with red stripe.

TH: On the pants leg?

JP: On the pants leg and three stripes for sergeant.

TH: That's great because you know what we want to do is re-create a first sergeant …

JP: I'd like to run into some of my old buddies that used to be in 88 Company with me. I went back to the 88th Company. I was transferred from Fort Schuyler. I was up there once back to my old outfit. I made Corporal. As soon as I got in the office the next morning I made Sergeant.

TH: That's rapid advancement.

JP: I had a just put corporal stripes on my collar.

JM: Jim there's a point that's come up a several times about a couple photograph that Tom has having to do with the mortar battery firing. And Tom has a couple of pictures taken right from

behind the gun where you can see the projectile going up out of the gun. Do you remember those pictures? Did Smedley used to take like that?

JP: Yeah, sure.

JM: And a lot of people have argued with Tom and said to him that it was impossible to see that shell when it left the muzzle of that gun.

JP: Well, that dang thing goes practically straight up then gets to a certain height and it takes and angle down.

JM: I'm sure you've seen….

JP: Yeah I've seen them. I've been out there watching them shoot them.

JM: I've maintained right along that you could do that.

JP: The ones at Hancock , they did away with them. The ones that I saw was up in New York State.

JM: Up in Schuyler?

JP: It was in Fort HG Wright.

TH: Seacoast Mortars.

JP: Yeah.

JM: Now, that's a confirmation.

JP: To fire it you sit right down there and you pull the lanyard it went up this way. Little ole short things would be sticking up in the air. You could see that dang shell after you got (inaudible) Oh yeah you could see it.

JM: Once it started to come down you could never see it again, though.

JP: No. No. When she went down she went down fast as she left the gun. That's where they rigged them up to the ship, you know, downfall. I don't know if they ever hit a ship in their life.

JM: Well if they got close, they'd scare you.

JP: The little round ball we used to have. Before I was born, the old round cannon ball they called it, you know. They got one of them old cannon balls setting over there at the Hook now, right? They used to be right close to the old theater there where the road goes out there further than the officers' quarters.

TH: Yeah, that's right. We got a couple of real big cannon balls for that big…

JM: 20-inch.

TH: Yep.

JP: Sandy Hook down there next to the Proving Grounds we got all shells down in there buried. Even down in that park, I bet there's shells there eight to ten feet underground. I got out there once to pump some water. I dug down to put the pipe in I got a 14-inch shell out of there. It was only about 2 feet under the sand. It's full of shells out there.

JM: Once they hit on the ground they didn't go in very far because the wet sand was just like concrete.

JP: Fire all around and land down there in the woods somewhere. We didn't bother with them.

JM: Jim, do you also remember those steel targets they had there out on the beach? Those great cubical that they had with the steel armor plates on them? That they used to shoot the guns against?

JP: Yeah.

JM: Those are the things I was telling you about Tom. I think they were about 30 or 40 feet square as I remember. Built on 12 x 12 or 14 x 14 or something like that. Huge timbers.

JP: All what the government spent on improvement and all that.

TH: What about barracks life? I mean, you mentioned you would train for two hours on the disappearing guns.

JP: Yeah, we'd have a half hour/hour drills on the guns a day. Every day except Saturday, we'd have inspection then, you know.

TH: You had to keep them clean right?

JP: Yeah.

TH: In A-1 shape.

JP: Yeah. For about 10 or 15 minutes everyone would have a rag and a can of polish polishing the brass. A lot of brass on those guns, you know. Every handle had brass on it, you know. So many would be polishing, so many behind the corner smoking cigarettes. (laughter)

TH: Around all that ammunition? What was the barracks life like?

JP: Well, it weren't too bad. We'd play pinochle or some kind of game you know or down playing pool or something like that you know. Laying around waiting for the mess hall bugle to blow.

JM: I guess every barracks had its own pool table. That was a regular thing in the day room, I guess they called it.

JP: Oh yeah, that's true, yeah.

TH: God, there's so many questions. We can keep going on and on. I hope you don't mind.

JP: No, No. I don't mind.

TH: Because we were trying to re create the soldier in 1899, First Sergeant Coast Artillery soldier. And gee whiz, you served just a few years after that and they still had the same uniforms. The Blue coat with the gold buttons.

JP: Well, some of them has gotten back they tell me that the blue uniforms. I had a blue uniform with the sergeant stripes and had a red cord that went over down in the basement here. In one of the dressers, the wife stuck it down in the cellar. I looked down there and the dang thing, the moths had eaten it all full of holes. So I ain't got no uniform to be buried in.

TH: Did you throw it out?

JP: Yeah. I threw it out. It was rotten. Do you think 1917 would be any good now?

TH: I don't know.

JP: It might have been if it had been put in the proper place and had the proper care.

JM: Well, I've kept one of my uniforms, Jim. So they can bury me in that someday.

JP: Don't do like I did. Put it where it can be kept.

JM: Yeah. We've got it carefully kept away in plastic bags. Got my hat put away. Gonna put my hat and picture on the casket, close up the box and that's it.

TH: Oh, stop it.

JP: I had a pair of them old fur lined gloves. I got tired of them. I used them in car driving. Boy, he fell in love with them. I guess he lost them.

JM: There the ones with the rabbit skins on the ends of them.

JP: They were warm too.

JM: How about that rabbit skin hat? Did you ever have one of them?

JP: Oh sure. I remember one that I had I put on a hot radiator you know. We had steam you know. I came in from the wet snow and put it on the hot radiator. I'd forget the dang thing and it was all shriveled up. I had to get a new one.

JM: I had one of those until very recently and I gave it to one of our grandchildren, I think. That hat that I wore in Korea for a long time, that rabbit skin hat. They were warm.

JP: In cold climate they issued that stuff, you know. In Rhode Island was cold space and I got issued me all that stuff.

JM: We have one of those, we still have it at home. One of those hoods the guards wore when they were on Post. You know, they wore some kind of hat under it and they had that great big hood. Coast Artillery was lined with red and you could button it on the collar of your coat.

JP: You don't mean ponchos?

JM: No, no.

(Break in conversation. Tape #2 ends. Begin tape #3)

JP: We didn't bother it. It's running nowadays. We never bothered it. I remember it now seeing it there. The sewer runs right along side. Right close to that bridge out there.

JM: That's right. Now they have a couple of great big culverts under there where there used to be an open bridge before and the soil or the dirt is piled down on top of those culverts. That's where we used to go eeling up there. We called that eel hole. We used to set eel pots in there. That was a good place to get them.

JP: Yeah. I haven't had a mess of eels in a long time.

JM: Well, I like them too. I like them smoked but I like them better fresh.

JP: I do too.

JM: And here some time ago I thought I wanted to go catching eels. And of course, you catch them on a line. A lot of eels this year too.

JP: They are?

JM: Yeah, but I wanted to get out with an eel pot. So, I tried all the local hardware store, no eel pots.

JP: You have to build them yourself I guess.

JM: Yeah. So, I went up to the Belford fish place up there and I thought sure those guys will know where I could get one, or, they will have one. So, I talked to a couple of fellas and they didn't know about it. Then I got talking to another fellow, who was talking with a group of lads, and I said to him, "Do you know where I can buy and eel pot?" Then these fellas, three or four of them had a little chat among themselves and one of them said to me, "What do you want it for decoration?" I said, "I want to catch some eels." Then he said, "I have 500 pounds out there in the car. I'd be glad to sell you those." I said, "Well that's a little much for me." But, I never did get the eel pot. Nobody bothers to make them anymore. And you know those little weirs that they put in there. The little knitted weirs would be hard to make yourself.

JP: Yeah that's true. I don't know you may be able to get one down in the Highlands.

JM: I know somebody's got them someplace. But you know ….

JP: The Mount boy, he should be able to fix you up.

JM: Harry, that's right. You know, you go into some of these fancy seafood restaurants around here now and you'll see eel pots hanging up on the wall. Decoration.

JP: Yeah.

JM: I don't buy eel pots for decoration. I'd like a few eels.

JP: You'd like a few eels to eat, like me.

Mrs. Mulhern: Well, they say now that eels are not very popular.

TH: No. They're not.

JM: They're not popular but they're plentiful.

JP: I don't get much seafood since the Gooch's left the Hancock. They kept me in fish and everything over there.

TH: Did you say Gooch?

JP: Yeah, the daughter came in.

TH: Sergeant Gooch?

JP: Yeah.

TH: The daughter came by Sandy Hook. She's still living.

JP: He retired as a Major. When he died he was a Major.

JM: I wonder if that's the fella that was over at Fort Monmouth for awhile? There was a Gooch over there.

JP: I don't know if it was some of the boys. Some of them were officers in the Army. I know they came in here. The mother came up to see me when she was up here. She was in Florida. The boys all been officers in the Army. I couldn't say. Jimmy, he retired, he's out in California now. The old man, he was always out fishing. Frost fish time, he would always have a bag of frost fish. Summertime he'd have black bass and all.

JM: My Father and I used to go frost fishing over there on the beach and drag them home on our backs usually in a gunny sack and cleaned them, salted them, and dried them and then we would have them and put them in the butter burket and then we'd have them till summertime.

JP: Yeah, that's true.

JM: I was telling Tom, or somebody down there at the Visitor Center at the Park at old number 2, the Coast Guard Station, (Spermaceti Cove) about catching frost fish right out there on the beach. That was one place where we used to go sometimes.

JP: Oh, sure, I did too. I've been up that beach a million nights and got fish. The best place I ever saw frost fish at night, was a place up in Rhode Island by our barracks. We had about a mile and a half of beach, you know, and just about dark you'd start out up there and you'd have a cart and you could pick up a cart load and thirty feet of you, you wouldn't go over thirty feet. I never seen so many fish in my life on the beach in my life. Every kind of fish, they'd get. If we wanted fish on a Friday, we'd send a cart and a mule from the stables and get a cart load of fish in about five or ten minutes. Bring them down. There'd be a detail down there by the kitchen to clean them.

JM: And this was in the Army.

JP: Yeah, in the Army. And we had the same thing over at Fort Wright.

JM: Sandy Hook the soldiers used to go out once in a while, but not very often. It was a long haul at Sandy Hook from the beach to over where the barracks were.

JP: Up there near the beach and everything else we always had plenty of fish up there.

JM: Do you remember, Jim, when the mine planters used to go out to explode the mines?

JP: Yeah, I know.

JM: And they'd send out the L40. The guys would pick up the fish that had their breathing mechanism spoiled by the ….

JP: Yeah I was in the mining company awhile myself.

JM: Is that right?

TH: When you were in the service?

JP: 157 (Company), yeah. That was the last outfit I was in the 157. That was the mine outfit. I didn't care much for it. I didn't finish my service. I bought out of the service. I was so disgusted with it. It only cost me $30 to get free.

JM: Did you ever hear of buying out of the Army, Tom?

TH: Vaguely, vaguely.

JM: Tell, Tom about that buying out of the Army business.

JP: Well, you put in for it you know. You had to have a job, a paper or letter to show that you have a job you know, for living wages. You could go out there to these butchers, a soldier, you know and get a letter. I had a butcher over in New London that I dealt with and I told him to give me letter to get me a job. So he wrote me out a letter you know typed me a letter. I turned that in and I got me a discharge.

JM: You got an honorable discharge when you bought out of the Army.

JP: Yeah. An honorable discharge. You'd get your statement stating your time served, you know. Then I come to Brooklyn and I worked with the BRT (subway) crew. I got appointed there.

JM: A motorman, I suppose.

JP: Yeah, a motorman. And I took the examination, Civil Service and I passed that and down the Hook I went. And all them years, here I am. I ain't been sorry about what I went through.

TH: You know, it's fascinating that besides working on the railroad out there, you were also in the Coast Artillery.

JP: I was in the Coast Artillery before I went to be a motorman up in Brooklyn.

TH: You know, you were serving before radio was invented.

JP: Oh, yeah. (inaudible) at that time.

TH: I was wondering what you would do. You started to mentioning about playing billiards and playing card games. Did the fellas ever go out together? You know like you and the fellas of the company?

JP: Yeah, three or four fellas we'd go out somewhere in New London or Rhode Island. Different places, you know and spend the night. You'd get a room for a half a dollar and a meal for a quarter.

TH: Really?

JP: Beer for a nickel a glass. Left with maybe $5.00 and maybe come back with a dollar and a half. (laughter)

TH: That's fantastic. What did you do for entertainment when you went out like that on the town?

JP: Well, you could pay a dime to go to the theater and see a moving picture, you know. You'd get tired from drinking beer you'd go back to the room and go to bed. Get up the next morning and go down and have bacon and eggs for a quarter and maybe a few drinks and back home we'd go.

TH: What was the Army by the way. What was that like?

JP: Well, the Army consisted of the common grub, you know, roast beef, gravy, mashed potatoes, Vegetables of all descriptions.

TH: Was it good food?

JP: And baked beans on Friday. We'd call beef stew slum. That was good too. We never got hungry. We had plenty to eat.

TH: What was Army pay like back then when you were in the service?

JP: I think I'd draw $13.75. (laughter)

TH: Did it go far? That was a month, right.

JP: I'd always have a dollar and a half at the end of the month.

JM: And you'd always have a few canteen checks left.

JP: Yeah, you could go down and sign up and you'd get checks, you know, at the Post Ex(change) to buy whatever you needed you know.

TH: You mentioned that you had a pretty neat uniform. You had a blue coat and…

JP: Yeah, blue with stripes.

TH: Did you favor that uniform? Did you like it?

JP: I loved it. Yeah I liked it. I liked it better than that olive drab, you know.

TH: That's not one of the reasons you got out of the Army?

JP: Olive drab you know had laces down your leg, you know and you had to lace them up. That was a nuisance.

JM: As I remember there was a dark blue coat and light blue trousers and a red stripe.

TH: Red Stripe. What about your hat at that time?

JP: It was a little cap, you know. And white gloves, we all had white gloves. I suppose there's some white gloves downstairs here.

JM: And I suppose it was brown shoes, or was it black shoes?

JP: Black shoes.

JM: Black shoes with that uniform.

JP: They changed from black when they went back to the olive drab uniform you know. And we had to have those brown shoes, you know.

TH: When about did they change? Was that around 1913? From blue to olive?

JP: Yeah that's about when they changed about 1912.

TH: Did they also come in with those campaign hats? You see the doughboys of World War I. They were wearing those campaign hats.

JP: As far as I know we had those campaign hats for as long as I was in the Army. Nineteen hundred and five and on up. But we only used them at certain times, camping, you know.

JM: On the range.

JP: The khaki uniforms, you know, kinda had those light hats, you know. There's one right in the closet there now.

TH: What about the shirt? See we just got this collection, Jim….

JP: Well, we had the olive drab shirts you know.

TH: What kind of material, because we want to make one?

JP: I don't know. It'd be wool, I guess. I'd be wool. Olive drab shirt. They'd sell for about $5 or $6 dollars now but they used to be around eighty or ninety cents I imagine in them days.

TH: What kind of buttons would they have? Were they eagle buttons?

JP: No, regular kind of bone buttons.

TH: Bone button. I looked at the regulations for 1899 and they still had the long johns underwear. I am amazed that people would wear a one piece undergarment during the summer months. Did they have that issued them back then? Maybe Mr. Mulhern would know?

JP: Yes. Sure. We didn't know what pajamas were during war time. We slept in our underwear just like we sleep in pajamas now.

TH: Was that the one piece long john?

JP: Yeah, long john. And I wear them today.

TH: Yeah. I wear them during the winter. It gets cold out there. (laughter)

JM: It's kind of strange and coincidental, when my Father first came to this country, you know what job he had? He was working as a motorman on the street railway in New York.

JP: He was?

JM: And that was a job that you had. And then of course, he went into the utility business so did you, really.

JP: Yeah. Well, I had no problem getting on the BRT being an ex-soldier. I remember me and three more English boys who just come over from England and they just got out of the service, you know they just got discharged in the Army you know and came over here to America. Only three of us out of five hundred got hired that morning out of Brooklyn.

JM: Where did you run street cars in Brooklyn, Jim?

JP: Well, I run all over Brooklyn, you might say. Anyplace in Brooklyn.

JM: Did you have something like Coney Island Avenue?

JP: Yes I went to Coney Island may a times. I had night runs down in there. I got (inaudible) coming out of Brooklyn/Coney Island one night down there. We didn't get home till 3-4 o'clock in the morning. The sweepers coming to get us had to pull us out, you know.

JM: It was a long run from the barn on Third Avenue.

JP: 58th Street.

JM: 58th Street and Third Avenue.

JP: Yeah, I used to run over to Chambers Street across the Brooklyn Bridge over there. Many a night I went across that old bridge.

TH: What was the fare like then?

JP: A nickel.

JM: You could ride all day for a nickel.

TH: Fantastic. I guess Coney Island was….

JP: Get on the Subway at 98th-100th Street and you'd ride all over New York somewhere and get off and get on another one, all for a nickel.

JM: Same thing you'd do on the Ferry boats. Ride back and forth across the river all day for a nickel.

TH: You started talking earlier about the steamboats coming down from New York City and people would get right on that it was known as the Long Branch and Seashore Railroad.

JP: They'd get off at the dock. The regular dock there. They'd get off there and get on the train and ride to Asbury Park and Long Branch and get off there.

TH: That wasn't in operation when you started working.

JP: No, no, that was way before that. I remember Jim Kelly was the engineer at that time of the Central Railroad he was telling me all that stuff. He used to be an engineer over there at the Hook before he died, before he retired. He retired before we got the job. We had to wait our turn coming. We stepped up you know.

TH: That was quite a transportation system because they could come right down from New York City and hop right on a train.

JP: Well we used to have steamboats coming down here from to Atlantic Highlands. They used to have 3 or 4 trains. You remember, John, those trains used to go down …..

JM: Sure do. Rode on them.

JP: Fastest train was the express ahead with maybe two locals behind him.

JM: Yeah, Sea Bright Express.

JP: Yeah. Sea Bright Express.

JM: Didn't stop at (inaudible) didn't stop at Water Witch. Went right on down to Sea Bright. There used to be what was it Jim, about three trains would meet each boat.

JP: Yeah, that's right three trains would meet each boat. Them was good old days.

TH: The good old days.

Mrs. Mulhern: It was a beautiful ride down.

JP: You'd hear them old trains whistling out over the hill here and they were traveling too.

JM: They sure were.

TH: I'm just trying to remember, who was president when you were in the service, Jim?

JP: Well, let me see. I think it was, name a few of them back then.

TH: Was Taft president then?

JM: Wilson?

JP: Oh, that's right. Wilson was when I got out of the Army.

TH: How about Howard Taft? Wasn't Taft president then?

JM: Teddy Roosevelt.

JP: Teddy Roosevelt, yeah.

TH: Did you ever get to see any of these earlier presidents, you know as a young man?

JP: No I didn't. I always stayed out of the way.

TH: Oh, I thought that maybe on a parade or something or when they visited New York City, you might have seen a president or someone like that.

JP: No. I was in a moving picture when I was in the Army. We had taken pictures somewhere up there in New York. We were out all day with it.

(inaudible talking)

JP: I usually have the television on at night.

JM: Do you want your glasses there Jim?

JP: I got them in my pocket. I was just trying to get them. I have very poor fingers. Sometimes I get hold of money I don't know whether I have a nickel or a dime in my hand. I got it all right now.

JP: Sandy Hook steamboat. They used to carry an awful lot of people on one of those boats.

JM: And those boats went like scared rabbits.

JP: July the 9th to September the 29th. That was the beginning and ending of the season.

JM: That's the same fella that gave those cards from that estate, that book also came from him. He used to keep the scrapbook. And the old timetables of the Jersey Central boats, the Jersey Central trains, stories about the old railroad, stories about the boats going to Sandy Hook.

JP: Old steamboat days.

JM: All in that volume. Did I show you that before?

TH: Yeah, when you first got it you brought it all down that day.

JP: That old steamboat leaving.

JM: We're going to have to get together that stuff and turn it over to you. You better stay on the job there.

TH: I'll stay as long as I can.

JM: You've got a lot of stuff to get into the record here.

TH: I know. I'd like to if I could just keep talking about the Coast Artillery days, I was wondering Jim, you know, Fort Hancock had all those defenses out there, all those types of guns. I'm wondering if even when you ever served on those guns, do you think you could have defended an attack, if there ever was one, you know, with that type of defense with a disappearing guns? You know if a battleship showed up, do you think it would have served its two cents?

JP: Oh, I think it would have done some good firing.

TH: About how many men were on a gun?

JP: Well, the crew?

TH: Yeah. The crew.

JP: I guess it was about eight or nine in a crew, you know. Ammunition, projection, one to put the powder in, one for the traverse, one for the azimuth, one for the range and everything else.

TH: You said you were a “sighter” up there?

JP: Yeah I was a gun pointer.

TH: A gun pointer? What would that take in?

JP: That’s looking at, you know, keeping the gun on the target. Them days, you turned a wheel, you know. Kept following the target and then you give the command to fire, you know, when he was ready.

TH: About how long did it take to load up one of those disappearing guns?

JP: It would take long, boy, they were right back and then, BOOM, the artillery would go in the gun. The next would come the powder right in and close the breach, stick the fuse in the back and the gun pointer would holler that he was ready and then someone would holler, “FIRE!” Very quick.

JM: Ever have a misfiring of the big guns?

JP: Not that I can remember. Not in all of my days.

TH: Who usually commanded in the pit? Was there a sergeant or an officer?

JP: There was always an officer in charge. There was always an officer.

TH: Would you have a first sergeant around?

JP: Yeah. We always had a first sergeant. He was always hanging around.

TH: What would he do?

JP: He’d just be a wise guy. (laughter)

TH: What were your friends like? Your friends in the service, in your company, that you served with?

JP: Well, we got along all right.

TH: Do you know where any of the other fellas were from? You mentioned like to met them if anybody’s …

JP: Well, I guess in my time, we had more damned soldiers from Pennsylvania than any other state. Pennsylvania from the coal mine district.

TH: Yeah. Got out of the mines.

JP: We'd have them from all states around, you know.

Mrs. Mulhern: That's interesting.

TH: I was wondering, you mentioned that the first sergeant would be, not a wise guy, but he'd be a real boss then?

JP: Well, we had some that were pretty decent, you know. They didn't meet up with the rest of the men. It was business, you know. Something like that, you know. Then some that would come and play cards with you. Then they got the word afterward, that I noncom (non commissioned officer) couldn't play with the privates at all, you know. If a Sergeant had a big room like this, you know, he'd have a big card game he'd invite in so many of us. Whether it's a private or a noncom, he'd play with us.

TH: On your work details, would the first sergeant oversee the men? Like cleaning the gun and keeping it spic-and-span?

JP: He wouldn't have anything to do with that. It would the men in charge of the guns. Each gun commander had his own battery, his own gun and his own crew. And he would take care of what needed to be done.

TH: We want to re-create this first sergeant of Coast Artillery, say 1899. We are going to have someone next summer, we hope, walking around in the uniform you used to wear around Fort Hancock showing visitors around the different gun batteries. And he would be talking as if he were a soldier in 1899. That's why I'm asking questions on this period like when you served. I wonder what a first sergeant was like. Maybe he wasn't educated and maybe he was mean to the fellas, or maybe like you say, some of them was nice guys.

JP: Well, I couldn't speak about the education you know. It seemed like there was always somebody bright enough to be chief clerk to make the payroll out.

JM: That's important.

JP: Make everything out the papers.

TH: I was just wondering what a first sergeant would do at a gun emplacement when you were going thru a drill?

JP: Well, he generally was the head of the gang. When he gets there the gun crew would take his post. Take you post and everybody would take their post. Do his duty. Everybody had a number you know. Everything had a certain number, you know.

TH: You mean the men?

JP: Yeah. Each had a number. One and two was on the (inaudible). So many were on the (inaudible). So many for ammunition and so many numbers for powder, you know. There would be two men for every one of the job.

TH: I see. And we're saying that the sergeant would be in charge of all this?

JP: Well, yeah, he'd be there seeing that everything was all right, you know. He'd line the men up and give orders to close station. Why then they would put everything away and then line up and he would march them back to the barracks and dismiss them. And most of the time they were through for the rest of the day. They could play ball and do as they please, you know and be there for supper whatever it may be.

JM: I guess the first sergeant was principally an administrator.

JP: Yeah.

JM: You know, just like later the company captain became an administrator. And really didn't get too much involved with what was going on but just was responsible as they are now to a great extent. They don't do any work, you know.

JP: The Army has changed so much now. Boy it's different. Look at the pay they get now. They tell me a private gets about $300 or $400 dollars a month. What we would get was $12.75 and .25 for the Old Soldiers' Home. Yeah. .25. Till they got so much money that they didn't know what to do with it.

TH: Did you have any real old timers when you were serving like you know, like 30 year men or 40 year men?

JP: Well, I had some pretty close to that, yeah. Just a few in my time that retired, several of them retired. Retired 30 years, you know in the Army that was it. I don't know if they made any changes in the time or not now. Civil Service is a little bit different. You can get a pension five years and on up now I think. How many years did you have John?

JM: Thirty-one, all together.

JP: You must drawn a pretty good pension, then.

JM: I do. I retired as a major. That helped.

JP: That helps a lot too.

JM: Then of course, there's terminal promotion and get paid for being lieutenant colonel and 26 years for pay as a lieutenant colonel. So that's not exactly hard to take.

TH: I was just wondering if you run across any Civil War veterans there? You know, if they had been serving up until that time. Probably would have been officers by then if they stayed in that long.

JP: Well, I was a civilian during all the Wars so I was tied up that way. I was a key man most of the time in most of the places, you know. What I call a key man can do most any thing.

JM: Well how about the Mexican fracas, 1912?

JP: I was ready to go but we got cancelled.

JM: Is that right?

JP: Yeah, I was in Fort H.G. Wright at that time.

TH: By the way, did you ever drill with the rifle? Did you ever drill with a rifle as a soldier?

JP: Oh good god yeah, many times.

JM: IDR, huh?

JP: I've been in parades all over New York, and Brooklyn. Boy, I'd be glad when that end come. Boy, my feet would be so tired. All the time when we hadn't done it, they'd make us march somewhere else. I hated those Brooklyn, New York. When I left Fort Schulyer one or two for parades, you know. When you'd get back way up in New York state you wouldn't have so much change. I don't think we ever went out at Fort H.G. Wright, to any parade. The only parade we had was on the parade ground there.

TH: I was wondering also the bugle calls back then. Did you respond to different bugle calls. Did your day start...

JP: Yeah, we had to go by the bugle calls, whatever they were.

TH: Can you name some of them? I guess there was Reveille, of course.

JP: Reveille in the morning and taps at night.

TH: Was there anything else they used to have back then?

JP: Pay call. We had pay call. When the boat was coming in the bugle would blow pay call. I forget now how it went but anyway you'd look out and see the boat almost to the dock and everybody was lined up getting ready for the paymaster, you know. They went alphabetical according to rank also, you know.

TH: Anything like a mess call or anything maybe?

JP: Mess call three times a day.

TH: Was it by bugle?

JP: Yeah, by bugle, mess call.

TH: Also, what type of gun? Was it Springfield rifle if you could remember what type of rifle?

JP: Yeah, the regular rifle was the Springfield rifle with five shells loaded in the magazine, you know.

JM: 30.06, huh?

JP: Yeah. I had a lot of them shells we used for Guard Duty, you know.

JM: Blanks.

JP: I don't know why they were afraid we'd take them out there and burn them up. (inaudible)

TH: I was also wondering about the type of belt. Up until the 1899's they wore a type of belt plate with US on it, the belt buckle, I should say. It's like a brass plate with US stamped on it. I was wondering if that was that uniform when you served?

JP: No. No. We didn't use that. We had the big wide belt with just the regular buckle on it.

TH: I see. Any cartridge boxes or anything back then?

JP: Cartridge box?

TH: Yeah. If you had the leather cartridge boxes for any use?

JP: We had the little canvas thing to put them in.

TH: The pouch.

JP: You put them in that. The belt went around and you know we had five clips in a package, you know. One, two, three, four, five, twenty, or thirty.

TH: It changed over by then because they used to have leather boxes.

JP: You'd shot five shots and you'd pull out and just take the clip out and put it down and shove it right down in the magazine. Ready again, five more.

TH: I bet those mortars and disappearing guns, Mr. Mulhern and I discussed this, about went off with quite a bang.

JP: Oh yeah it was quite a racket. I was standing on the bank looking down in the hole. They were quite a gun, but I don't think they lasted many years. I think they had gone away before I left the service.

TH: Yeah. By the way, what was the diameter of your gun? Was it like 8-inch gun?

JP: Yeah, 8-inch. Yeah, mostly we had three 6-inch batteries and one, two batteries of 8-inch in my first outfit. In the other outfit we had 6-inches, 10-inches and 12, but I was only assigned to a 6-inch, the last battery I was assigned to. Each company has a different battery they are assigned to. My last battery that I was assigned was in Fort H.G. Wright was a 6-inch battery.

TH: Even though you left the Army and all you saw the Coast Artillery in action in all those years at Fort Hancock. Does it bring back memories for you? You saw those fellows drilling and training on the guns.

JP: Yes, I saw a lot of it. Saw a lot of practice. A lot of tests made. One day I was out making a test on the battery near down there near the Proving Grounds they shot off a 6-inch battery up there and it come down and went through the sand butts, you know. The sand butts, they came right over me and the mechanic and machinist we were calibrating the turning on this big gun you know getting ready to mount it. It hit the gun and grazed over. It just missed us. The 6-inch shell. You should see the thing coming you know. The nearest I ever had.

TH: Wow, close call.

JP: I was assigned to go to the machinist, you know to give him a hand calibrating the turnings you know the turnings. Getting them cleaned up and this shot come down. We were supposed to take cover. We didn't take cover. We managed to dodge around that gun. It hit the gun but didn't do no damage. Pretty close call. No telling where those shells go when they come out of those sand butts. They go off down in the woods there somewhere and bury themselves we don't bother looking for them. They used to shoot so many out in the water. I bet that water out there about 10-15 miles I bet there are thousands and thousands of shells out there. They'd shoot them for all kinds of tests you know.

JM: Jim, do you remember about how many rounds could you fire out of a rifle before it had to be retubed?

JP: I don't know, John, just how many you could.

JM: You know when they talk about Navy ammunition, navy armament the guns they mount on Navy vessels, are only good, the big guns are only good for 20 rounds. And then they have to re-tool them, like the 14-inch guns on the major battleships. So they're fussy about how many times they fire those because of that. I wonder if the Coast Artillery weapons…..

JP: I know we had trouble up there one coming in looked like they met together about half to a six inch is about the worst I'd ever saw. I never remember realigned the rifles, you know, but this darn thing just come apart.

JM: The weapon just exploded.

JP: Then afterwards they just dismantled the 6-inch gun altogether.

JM: I know that down around Sandy Hook there at one time, I don't remember where it was, but one of the guns with just the muzzle sticking up out of the ground. It was one of those guns that exploded on test and the whole front end of the muzzle just left the thing and flew off and buried itself in the sand. I can remember that from way back when but I can no longer picture just exactly where that was.

JP: Well, we had practically the same thing but it didn't come right off and we couldn't fire it no more. That was just an accident that just discontinued, dismantled.

JM: The one that I'm thinking about was a gun that was on test.

JP: There's all kinds of stuff at Fort Hancock Proving Grounds, yeah.

TH: Any outstanding explosions or anything or guns that you remember being tested?

JP: I don't remember ever having any there mishaps at all. But we came in, my gang pretty near being wiped out one time. I had about fourteen w*** (objectionable words referring to Italian-Americans edited out) and they are all under this place, you know. We had this place under the bus about a 6-inch plate put up in front of this to shoot through, you know. When I hollered, "Take cover," these w*** all ran behind this plate. They got in there and they left the shovels in there. When I got in there and I said, "Are you ready?" He said, "I think you better look again, in there, Pike, some of your men are behind the pit, behind the plate." I went over there and got them damn g***** over there. If he hadn't checked it there would have been about fourteen dead g*****. I lost all the shovels anyway. The shovels splintered. By the time we got back to the bunkers, you know, we were in a safe place, they fired. I walked back and said, "What'd you do with your shovels?" "Me left my shovel where it were." I had to send someone back up to get fourteen more shovels. They had to dig for the shell, you know. That's what I had them for. That's when I was in the Ordnance Department.

JM: Maybe we ought be thinking about going on. We'll come over some time again and see you.

JP: I hope so.

TH: There's just one more question, though. Did you feel an era was ending, Jim, when the railroad you know took the last train…..

JP: Well, I wasn't worried about it because I knew I had enough time in to get a pension, you know.

TH: I mean as a historical era. I mean the last of the railroads.

JP: Yeah, I felt bad. I said, "Well, this is the end of old Hancock," I'd say. And the end of cranes and locomotives you know. I knew I'd be all right. I had a pension coming. I could live off of that.

TH: I just meant that as far as an era, you know it was the last of the locomotives.

JP: Well, yeah, it was like taking your family out to the graveyard. It's about the same way I felt.

TH: Yeah. Okay. I'd like to thank you very much. I hope we get together again.

JP: I do too. Come over again.

TH: I'll bring over some uniform like the canteen that they used to have during the Spanish-American War. Maybe it was the same type that you had.

JP: I think I have one of those too. The cans, aluminum. What'd they call them canteens? I had some bad boys over here that stole all the beer I had, wine I had, cigarettes. I was only gone twelve minutes out of the house. They come in here with bags and robbed me of everything they could get their hands on. Even the cigarette lighter, four pipes, cans of tobacco, lighter fluid. I don't know what the hell they didn't get. They just cleaned me out. I had a damn boy here the other day cutting grass for me. They spotted everything they wanted. They saw me go up by (inaudible), you know. I was only gone about ten-twelve minutes. I even gave them the barracks bags I had. I had three or four of them in the garage. I had already given them. They come in. The woman saw them getting it. I never reported it to the cops 'cause I didn't want the family to get in trouble, you know. We got some bad ones in this valley. It's a good thing I had all the money with me in my pocket.

TH: Well, thank you very much Jim. It was nice meeting you.

JP: I was glad to meet you too. Come over again.

TH: Sure.

JP: You are perfectly welcome. This will remind me of a lot of things now. It's been 20 years, you know. In 20 years, you forget a lot of things.

TH: But Sandy Hook hasn't changed much has it?

JP: Oh no, no. And old Hancock is still there. And what are they ever gonna do with that (inaudible) the government will never turn that loose.

TH: They're going to preserve it.

JP: I think they should. It's just like a home to me. I put some tough hard days in there and some easy good days in there. I did all kinds of work in there and everything.

JM: Well you know really, Jim, when you look back at it, hard work never hurt anybody.

JP: No. That's true.

End of interview