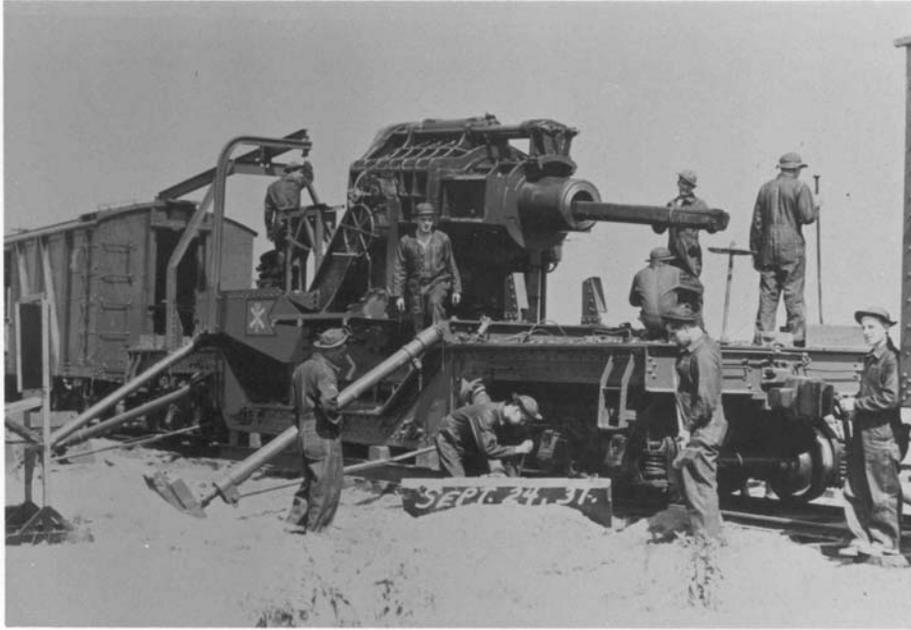


An Oral History Interview with
Charles "Ed" Hulit and Ed Gildner
52nd Coast Artillery, Battery C
1936 – 1939
Interviewed by Elaine Harmon, NPS
March 31, 1985
Transcribed by Jo Anne Carlson, 2009



12-inch railway mortar and crew during drills on the beach September 24, 1937
Battery C, 52nd Coast Artillery manned the 12-inch mortars.



Guard duty at Post # 1 outside the Guardhouse, Building 28.



Sub-caliber firing of Battery Kingman or Mills.
Photos courtesy NPS/Gateway NRA.

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

EH: It's 1985 and I'm Elaine Harmon, Museum Technician, and we have the pleasure of interviewing two Veterans of Fort Hancock, Ed Hulit of the 52nd Coast Artillery circa 1939 and Ed Gildner of the 52nd Coast Artillery from 1936, 1937, and 1938. And we're actually talking about three years time for Mr. Gildner at Fort Hancock and maybe one complete year for Mr. Hulit at Fort Hancock. So, they're going to reminisce together and summarize their memories at Fort Hancock. Mr. Hulit was remarking to me earlier that his career spans the Coast Artillery, to the Signal Corps up to Aircraft. It's kind of a fascinating time line for him and he remembers, actually, the early years. Give me some of your recollections. We are now talking with Ed Hulit.

Mr. Hulit: I remember reporting, having to report in on Sunday at Fort Hancock and I went down to Police Dock and got the New York Police to the Mine Planter.

EG: What was the name of that?

Mr. Hulit: *ORD*. The *ORD* was on the dock and they would take me out to Hancock. They couldn't get a train. The only train in the area, that I remember, on Sunday left late at Sunday night and got in around midnight in Water Witch, (Highlands) New Jersey. So, I came over on the Mine Planter and I got here just at the end of chow in the evening. I go down to C Battery Mess Hall and all they got was salami and hard bread and coffee.

EH: My goodness.

Mr. Hulit: That was on the weekend. They didn't have, that was when they economized. Each mess had its own, each mess sergeant had so much money, and he would delegate that and make his menu according to how much money he had for the month.

EH: Do you recall which barracks you were in?

Mr. Hulit: Yeah. It was right here across the street from the YMCA.

EH: Building 25.

Mr. Hulit: That was Headquarters Battery, 52nd Coast Artillery. The next building was my building, C Battery.

EH: Building 24.

Mr. Hulit: Then the other building had C Battery in it because they were expanding the Battery then.

EH: That was Building 23.

Mr. Hulit: In '39 they were beginning to build up the Army. So, Headquarters Battery, (Building 25) C Battery (24), C Battery (23), then E Battery and E Battery (Building 74). There were four or five barracks there.

EH: Right. The double barracks.

Mr. Hulit: I don't know where were you Ed?

EG: The double barracks.

EH: Ed Gildner was in building, which is now, 74.

EG: Yes.

EH: And on each arm of it...

EG: One the north wing of the building.

EH: And that was C Battery.

EG: The south wing was E Battery.

EH: I see.

EG: When I first came, when I came in, I came in from Fort Slocum, New Rochelle.

EH: Fort Slocum, New Rochelle?

EG: I was supposed to go to Panama. We came down here on what they called the harbor ship. We came down on the *ORD* from Fort Slocum, New York. From Fort Slocum I came right straight here. And I stayed here until February or March 1936. I was sent home on an emergency furlough. My mother wasn't expected to live. When I came back my outfit had shipped out to Panama. I was assigned originally to infantry for Panama and I never made it.

EH: You just missed it then.

EG: When I came back I already, by that time I had six months so they asked me if I wanted to transfer. I said, "All right, I will transfer." So, I stayed here in the Coast Artillery for three years.

EH: How about Ed Hulit? What do you remember?

Mr. Hulit: A lot of people don't realize that the Army, up until 1939, to the last of 1939 when the build up was getting much larger, the Army only consisted of 186,000 officers and enlisted men. And it's hard for people to realize that there were men stationed here in 1936 where they would have two batteries living in one building. They didn't have many men. Part of the attraction by the War Department for Coast Artillery Defenses (was they) required very little men to maintain the batteries compared to other types of installations. So dollar for dollar it was the best way to maintain a harbor defense. They had very few people around and they were just enough to maintain the batteries and keep them going. In 1939, when I got here we began to work on the guns.

EH: You told me about Kingman-Mills. Was that where you were assigned?

Mr. Hulit: The gun that I worked on was Kingman, Battery Kingman 12-inch barbette.

EH: 12-inch barbette carriage?

Mr. Hulit: Yeah. We chipped all the rust off it and all the paint off the thing. We painted the gun.

EG: They were here when we were here.

Mr. Hulit: The Department of Defense, the War Department in 1939 did not do anything until about April or May of '39. And then when England began to get bombed in September, then they took it seriously. And they began to build up the Army real fast. Our recollection here is that the Army was just a sleepy little Post nine miles from the barracks to the Gate, no bus service. If you wanted to get into town, you walked or hitchhiked. They put you in the Guardhouse.

EG: If you were caught hitchhiking you were put into the Guardhouse.

EH: Into the slammer?

Mr. Hulit: Yeah. You get two days in the Guardhouse for hitchhiking. Most of the officers (who) had cars were pretty good. If they saw somebody walking on the road, they'd stop and give you a lift. One or two fellas had a car, I remember.

EG: I'm trying to think of the cars name. He had a '36 Ford.

Mr. Hulit: He was a gangster's relative, part of the Mafia. (laughter) And they gave him that car in the Army.

(inaudible talking)

EH: Ed Gildner, you served guard, you were actually on the guard, right?

EG: Oh yes, right here.

EH: And what post? Did you always change posts?

EG: I was Corporal of the Guard. The office was here. (referring to a room in Building 28) That was the entrance to the building over there.

Mr. Hulit: Yeah.

EH: So, the north entrance was the main entrance.

EG: That was the main entrance. Yes.

EH: The center door now, was not used.

EG: We never used it.

EH: So the Corporal of the Guard was in the South west corner. And what did it look like?

EG: About the same as it does now. Inside here was the barracks where the guards were. That wall over there was not here then.

EH: Right. And were there cots around the room? That's what I'm told.

EG: Right in here on both sides. And then we would bring the prisoners out and take them on detail. Mine was right here. Corporal of the Guard was here.

EH: And was there a rifle rack in the center of the room which everybody tells us about?

EG: No in that room right there.

EH: Oh really.

EG: That little closet. We would lock the rifles in there. Put them in there and close the door.

EH: Who were the people you remember? Both of you remember names of people. And you have a particularly good recollection, Ed Gildner.

EG: Almost all the sergeants. Yeah, I remember them. Captain Richard C. Lowry, at that time. He was here when I got here and First Sergeant Sandleburn. Sandleburn was the Mess Sergeant. Hudak was the Supply Sergeant.

EH: Hudak is in the photographs in History House.

EG: Tom Flaherty was in that photograph. Reardon and.... There were three of them. I have to remember them.

EH: Reardon is one of them?

EG: Yeah. Reardon is one of them.

Mr. Hulit: I think Reardon was here when I was here.

Mr. Gildner: He probably was.

EH: And how about your other pals, Eugene Dow.

EG: Dow, well there was three of us that hung out together and we married three cousins. My wife, Dow's wife and Corteses' wife.

EH: Vincent Cortese? Huh.

EG: Yeah.

EH: Vincent Cortese, Eugene Dow and Ed Gildner were like the "Three Musketeers" hanging out together.

EG: (laughter) Yeah.

EH: Did you all meet here at Fort Hancock?

EG: No. I met my wife on the Boardwalk in Asbury Park. And from that she asked me to bring down the other two girls and I brought them down and the other two guys met

them. And then they were married and we were the last ones to get married. The other two were married, Dow, and Cortese was married first, then Dow, then I was married.

EH: What was it like? Both of your typical day like at Fort Hancock?

EG: You had reveille, you get up, you stand your formations, you eat first.

EH: What time was reveille?

EG: Six o'clock was reveille. Then the Mess Hall opened at 6:15 am. You go down and have something to eat. You took a shower first then you go and have something to eat. Then you get your detail. Guard duty was eleven o'clock in the morning. You went on at eleven o'clock and got off the next morning at eleven o'clock. By the time you got back to the barracks most of the time the men already had a shower. The rifle was heavier. We had pistols, .45's.

Mr. Hulit: They switched from the .45's to the rifles because somebody didn't like the, the officers didn't like the guard walking around with their hands in their pockets, which is easy to do if you have a .45. You can't keep your hand in your pocket if you got a rifle. I walked # 3 Post opposite the Guardhouse here at Headquarters. Then we started to walk along the seawall, down through the dock where the Coast Guard is, down through the gun park, machine shops where the old Rodman gun is, in back of that. Behind the Rodman gun is the stable.

EH: That's right.

Mr. Hulit: The officers used to keep their horses there and play polo over in Fort Hamilton on Sundays.

EG: When I came here they still had horses. We used to go down on Wednesday afternoon and ride the horses. Take them out for exercise.

EH: No kidding.

EG: And Post 4 was way down by the gun battery.

EH: Battery Potter?

EG: No, way down where all the guns are, the gun park.

EH: Nine Gun Battery, you mean?

EG: Yep. All the way down, that is where Post # 4 was. Usually the new guard would be already on duty by the time that that man got back from his Post, back to the Guardhouse. You usually would go right from Post right back to the barracks. That's how Cocatula got caught.

EH: Who was Cocatula?

EG: He was just a private. He was on duty down on Post 4 when we had the .45 then. He came back from Guard Duty and got up to the barracks up there and Podock said, "Where's Cocatula at? He was down at Post 4 and he hasn't gotten back yet." He's gone on Pass. He took off with the .45. Six months later the MP's (Military Police) from Fort Jay brought him back. I think he got six months in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

EH: Was your primary job the railway guns, though, Ed Gildner?

EG: Yes. We were on the railway guns.

EH: And yours was (Battery) Kingman.

Mr. Hulit: Kingman and the railway guns.

EH: Both?

Mr. Hulit: We had that and we had two .155's (guns) on the beach.

EG: And we had the 3-inch anti-aircraft on the battery down below there.

EH: Did anything ever happen when something misfired or you had any you know calamity?

EG: No. We moved down on maneuvers in '37 to Lewes, Delaware. Set the guns up on the beach down there. The first shot when off, the number one gun where I was on, the number one gun. That gun split those big bolts, flipped, popped off and the end of firing. We fired one shot.

EH: What happens to the gun when that happens?

EG: Nothing happens to the gun. There was no mishap. Nobody was hurt or anything like that. It's just that these big bolts snapped right off from the concussion of that gun. There was fifty five pounds of black powder.

EH: Wow.

EG: (inaudible) The shell was seven hundred pounds.

EH: That's pretty dangerous when you think of what could go wrong.

Mr. Hulit: A friend of mine, I can't remember his name, he was on the 12-inch mortar gang. The 12-inch mortars were mounted on flat cars. They were firing out towards Ambrose Light(ship) and the big bolt on the breech of the gun cracked and blew apart.

The old breech is about this big around and about that long and the nut like this and sent the gun down to the river. The breech block was read were patented in 1898.

EH: Did either one of you stand at the “Guard of Honor” for the King and Queen of England in June of 1939?

EG: No. I didn't.

EH: Ed Hulit did?

Mr. Hulit: That was 1939.

EH: June 10th, right, and what part did you play in that?

Mr. Hulit: They were standing along the road. They had soldiers

EH:lined up along the road, right.

Mr. Hulit: All the way down the whole length of road and they also had soldiers walking through the brush to make sure that nobody did land, keep the newspaper reporters from landing with little boats coming ashore taking pictures.

EH: I heard that the day before that happened that they had a major check of the whole Sandy Hook to make sure that there was nobody hiding out or you know, that the Post was top security.

Mr. Hulit: They turned the battery's out complete sets. That I don't remember.

EH: Do you recall seeing the King and Queen at all? In full view?

Mr. Hulit: Yes. We saw them right along here.

EH: Right along Officers' Row, you mean?

Mr. Hulit: Yeah, right along Officers' Row and I kinda remember something about guards. I remember # 1 Sentry was...

EH: #1 Post was in front of the Museum.

Mr. Hulit: In front of the Guard House.

EH: Right. That's what I'm told.

Mr. Hulit: And that's the only one that I remember. The rest of them I couldn't tell you where they were. And another thing, today they walk at Fort Dix, they walk guard with a little club. We were using load and lock.

EG: We were using live ammunition.

Mr. Hulit: You get out of the Guardhouse. You get down to the bottom of the step. You load your gun, load and lock.

EH: Did you ever use it?

Mr. Hulit: No.

EH: Describe to me your uniform of the day.

EG: There were three different stages. Wrapped leggings...

Mr. Hulit: Yeah.

EG: Patten leather fatigues then hip boots and then to slacks.

Mr. Hulit: Yep.

EG: I don't know what it was after I got out.

Mr. Hulit: No. I had slacks.

EH: Was Lieutenant Guin (inaudible away from microphone)

Mr. Hulit: No he wasn't.

EG: What?

EH: Lieutenant Guin..

EG: No. The only Lieutenant I remember was Lieutenant Bezos. He was in C Battery. And the Battery Commander was.....I lost it there for a minute there. I'll think of it. I remember Corporal Cisco, who was the Hawaiian Island Boxing Champ.

EH: Really. The Hawaiian Island Boxing Champ.

Mr. Hulit: I used to train with Cisco. I was his sparring partner. When he was, we used to go from here to Fort Hamilton on Wednesday nights, fight four rounds and get about forty dollars for it.

EH: Gee.

Mr. Hulit: ...which was a lot of money in those days. Corporal Cisco used to fight over there. And the building that they converted to a PX (Post Exchange moved from Building 53 to Building 70) during the War (World War II) was the old gymnasium.

EG: The one right behind it was the old PX right here.

Mr. Hulit: They keep switching it back and forth.

EG: Do you remember the Bowling Alley?

Mr. Hulit: No.

EH: It's still in there. In the old Post Exchange (Building 70).

EG: The pins are still there.

EH: Really? Gee.

Mr. Hulit: The building in back of the Headquarters Battery there was the PX (Building 53) when I got here, the gymnasium. It was later converted to a PX again during World War II. I wasn't here then. I'm trying to think....

EH: How about your experience, Mr. Gildner, with the *Hindenburg*. I think that was an experience.

EG: That was May of '37.

EH: Tell us about that.

EG: We spent three days down there.

EH: The phone call was in the middle of the night you were telling me, nine o'clock or.....

EG: No. Lights go out at nine (p.m.). The lights had gone out and we were all in bed and bang the lights came back on. Everybody said, "Where we going?" They said, "You're going down to Lakehurst and staying there for three days." When we got there, there were so many people. The first thing we did was form straight lines and everybody was to get civilians off the Post itself. And then after they did that some of the fellas on guard duty went right along the highway. The rest of us went down and we had a ring around the wreckage....

EH: Encircling the *Hindenburg*.

EG: It was still burning when we got there. Then, we stayed there that whole night. Then the next morning, I was put on guard duty inside the hangar with all the bodies there. Oh, what a sight.

EH: Oh my goodness.

EG: What a sight it was.

Mr. Hulit: Yeah. I can imagine.

EG: I just kept my head high. Everything just shoved right down.

EH: Burned.

EG: No, it came down. It was up in the air, everything just came down. (inaudible)

EH: Well, you saved the newspaper of the *Daily News* and you have a piece of the fabric of the fuselage.

EG: The clipping of the headline, a piece of the fabric, and two small pieces of the framework.

EH: Right. You said that actually the rivet blew onto your arm.

EG: They stick right to you on my arm.

EH: Because it was hot?

EG: Yeah. It was hot. Ganeres (spelling?) was in our outfit. Do you remember him?

EH: Who was that?

EG: Ganeres.

EH: Ganeres.

EG: He spoke German. He was German. He spoke German. Aboard the *Hindenburg* itself, was a little cabin boy. He must have been 10 or 11 years old, a little cabin boy. He lost his shoes. He had no shoes on. He was walking around down there in the sand with no shoes. Ganeres got a pair of those old fashioned sheepskin slippers and put them on him. Ganeres had a size 13 size shoe, so the only way to keep them on the kid's feet was to put a rubber band around them. That boy walked around in those shoes the whole time he were there. We stayed there for three days and we came back to our barracks. I don't know what happened to him afterward. I was down there two years ago on May the 6th, you know the anniversary of it. I tried to get in to see if they have anything there, a museum or anything. No museum at all.

EH: In Lakehurst.

EG: I asked somebody about it. I found out later a man who works there said there is a metal plaque on the ground, a bronze plaque down there (that says,) “This is the spot where the *Hindenburg* crashed.” So as of now...

EH: So it’s just a marker of the place.

EG: There was, the line already was tied to the mooring mast. When it went back up again they released the line, and the line laid on the ground. There was two big (inaudible) there ready to be loaded aboard. (inaudible) There was wine bottles that survived it. Glassware never even broke in the fall, the burning everything. Never even broke.

EH: You said you found a ladies shoe and a ring.

EG: A heel of a shoe and a little bit of the (inaudible) were there, wrist watch all melted down and the ring and they were picked up and put in a little bag and from that, they identified the woman. It was quite an experience for me. (inaudible) Were there any other soldiers who were there...?

EH: You are the first and only person who remembers the *Hindenburg* experience that’s ever walked into this Museum. But actually how many men, you did tell us out of the 52nd Coast Artillery, Battery C, about how many men were sent down to guard the wreckage?

EG: (inaudible) Anybody that was not out on guard duty or on special duty or on pass who were here at that time. The whole outfit went, the whole complete Battery. I don’t remember if all E went or C went or Headquarters (batteries of the 52nd Coast Artillery) went, I don’t know that. You ought to try to find out if either one of those other Batteries went. C Battery definitely was there.

EH: C Battery was comprised of, what, a hundred men? Roughly?

EG: I would say roughly, one hundred and twenty five something like that.

EH: 125, that’s a fairly good number. How many were in yours, Mr. Hulit?

Mr. Hulit: It’s hard to tell. I’d say how we could tell is we could look at the menus.

EH: That’s true. Count the names. Right

Mr. Hulit: all the names are on the menu.

EH: Right.

Mr. Hulit: When I got here they were just beginning to get Recruits here.

EG: The whole Army completely what they had here in the states, in Panama, Hawaii, the Philippines, like he said were a hundred and some odd thousand men.

EH: What'd you say, a 186,000?

Mr. Hulit: 186,000. The Chief of Coast Artillery was Archibald Sunderland. Major General Archibald Sunderland.

EH: Wow. Sunderland.

Mr. Hulit: And I met him when I was stationed at Fort Sam Houston (Texas). I was chief of maintenance in the Signal Depot there and I met General Sunderland. He was retired and I talked to him. I also talked to General Raymond just before he died.

EH: You mentioned you went from Fort Hancock to Fortress Monroe (Virginia). That was a Coast Artillery School.

Mr. Hulit: The school for enlisted specialists in the Coast Artillery School at Fort Monroe.

EH: How long were you there?

Mr. Hulit: Nine months to go through the Radio School.

EH: Wow. That's a long time.

Mr. Hulit: And I graduated from there and I was sent to Fort Eustis.

EH: Fort Eustis, Virginia, right.

Mr. Hulit: I took the examination for the school.

EG: Fort Eustis was the original Headquarters of the 52nd. They came from Fort Eustis to Fort Hancock.

Mr. Hulit: Yeah.

EH: Is that right? So the founding of the 52nd was actually in Fort Eustis.

Mr. Hulit: No, not the founding.

EG: I don't think the founding was there. They go back to World War I.

Mr. Hulit: When they brought the troops back from World War I they put part of C Battery, as I understood it, from the old timers that I talked to, part of C Battery and E Battery and part of Headquarters Battery at Fort Eustis, Virginia. They left the rest here at Fort Hancock. Then when they closed it up I don't know what they did but I imagine they brought all the people back. I don't know, but I imagine they brought them back here.

EG: What I understand is that during the War (World War II) they split C Battery up into all different outfits, all the Coast Artillery outfits. They brought them all over the country. Because I knew one fella, Lotion was his name.

EH: What was his name?

EG: Lotion.

EH: Lotion.

EG: Yeah. He was in the 2nd Ranger Battalion because my wife and I met him on the boardwalk in '42 or 43' walking the boardwalk in Asbury Park. He had 2nd Ranger on there (uniform tab), so I know he was a Ranger. I don't know if Al Zwiazak knows about that.

Mr. Hulit: They sent people from here to Fort Hamilton (New York) and they called it the Panama Increment Detachment. It was supposed to be forerunner of the troops to Panama. Then they took some people here and they sent them to Fort Totten (New York) to the 62nd, something to do with the Anti-aircraft.

EH: But you were primarily in the Signal Corps? That was your next step in

Mr. Hulit: No. When I was commissioned (as an officer) I was commissioned in the Signal Corps because of my, Artillery had better communications and had a better School of Communications, than the Signal Corps did. So, any man from the Artillery that had any background in the communications when he got into the Signal Corps OTS (Officer's Training School) he was better off than a lot of the other soldiers because of their background.

EH: Then where did you go? I'm trying to trace your career from Fort Eustis to.... From Fort Monroe to Fort Eustis to

Mr. Hulit: To Fort Monmouth (NJ) OTS in 1943. I was commissioned in March 1943 in the Signal Corps. And I went from there to Germany. After Germany I came back and I was teaching in the Cryptographic School at Fort Devens (Massachusetts). (tape turned over)at Fort Monmouth.

EH: At Fort Monmouth.

Mr. Hulit: And after graduating from there I was sent down to the Depot as chief of maintenance, signal maintenance at general depot at Fort Sam Houston in Texas. And from there I went to Turkey.

EH: From Texas to Turkey? Oh my gosh!

Mr. Hulit: From Texas to Turkey and then from Turkey I came back to the Army Aviation Board at Fort Eustis. And I retired from Fort Eustis.

EH: And your rank at that time?

Mr. Hulit: Major.

EH: A major, god, and that is what twenty years time? Am I right?

Mr. Hulit: (inaudible)

EH: No. That's twenty year's time, am I right?

Mr. Hulit: Just about.

EH: Right. And Ed Gildner where did you go? From Fort Hancock to where?

EG: Out.

EH: That was it?

EG: Finished.

EH: '36, '37, '38 and then you were....

EG: I got out in '38 and went to work in 1940 in the shipyard in Kearney, New Jersey, when the War broke out. None of us ever got called back.

EH: Is that right?

EG: All three of us were never called back.

EH: Why is that?

EG: Well, Dow, was working for General Motors making building airplanes. Cortese was working in the shipyard also at the time the War broke out. So, we were all automatically put on deferment. (inaudible)

EH: What do you recall? Were there any major storms or floods or really incredible, I remember the snapshots, there was a hurricane in September....

EG: One thing, you never seen ice like there used to be here. In '36 I bet you could walk right outside here two hundred feet and there was the (Atlantic) Ocean. Chunks of ice out there used to pile up. There was so much of it, I swear. And the (Sandy Hook) Bay was halfway frozen halfway across. You could walk right across to the Highlands. At Fort Slocum we could walk across. It was rock solid in January in '36. In '38 there was....

EH: In '38 there was a major hurricane.

EG: In '38, oh god that was bad.

Mr. Hulit: In '39 when I lived here there was a hurricane.

EH: In '39 there was a hurricane?

Mr. Hulit: Yeah. We walked guard along the sea wall. I was on Post #3. I always drew Post #3 for some reason.

EH: How lucky. (laughter) And the water was crashing over the sea wall, I bet.

Mr. Hulit: Over the sea wall? It didn't have to come over the seawall, the water went out here.

EH: Is that right.

Mr. Hulit: Yeah. Right over the Parade Ground. You could walk out here you had to have boots on. I remember when I came back to the Guardhouse I had water in the barrel of the gun. I didn't have one stitch on me that was dry. I was wringing wet 'cause the wind whipped you.

EH: Yeah.

Mr. Hulit: I had a rain coat on and it went right through. At that time they had all slate roofs.

EH: Yeah.

Mr. Hulit: Almost every one of them had a basement. When I took the entrance examination for the Coast Artillery School at Headquarters across the street from the Guardhouse, I remember some of the old timers talking that ever year when they graduated classman from the Coast Artillery School they would post the names of the graduating students on all the Army Posts. And all the young girls used to go there to find out if they knew any of the fellas because they were the only ones that could get married. A staff sergeant could get married. Any grade below that it would be sixteen years until you could get married if you were a buck sergeant.

EH: Oh gosh.

Mr. Hulit: So the girls would look for eligible husbands there. That was a good grade. You were given quarters. You were living in the ...

EH: Sergeants' Row.

Mr. Hulit: Staff sergeants...

EG: Quarters 101 down there.

Mr. Hulit: Yeah. You live in staff sergeants quarters now.

EH: 101? I live in the second house on Sergeants' Row. The master sergeant is Tom's residence I'm in the next house, half a house.

EG: Yeah. It was the top three grades.

EH: Right. Do either of you remember the Lighthouse being painted in camouflage? We have a lady who came in here one day with a snapshot of a Lighthouse actually painted completely in camouflage. Just around World War II.

EG: I don't know. They may have done it. I don't know.

EH: Right. Did it look very different from the way it is now? As far as Pershing Field, beside the fact that it was manicured.

Mr. Hulit: A lot different.

EG: Everything, you look out the window and see beautiful grass.

EH: It was perfect, yeah.

Mr. Hulit: Beautiful grass.

EG: The Parade Ground was beautiful. You could walk out here and you wouldn't find a stick or anything, not anywhere, everything was spotless.

Mr. Hulit: All the quarters were burning coal in those days. Everything had furnaces. Men from each battery were on special duty and they would get extra money by taking care of Officers' Row furnaces.

EH: To be a striker, yeah.

Mr. Hulit: They were paid extra money for taking care of it. It was special duty.

EG: You know, most of them had “dog robbers.”

Mr. Hulit: Yeah.

EH: They were what?

EG: We called them “dog robbers.”

EH: What is a “dog robber?”

EG: Each officer was entitled to one enlisted man. He would be in the building, the quarters upstairs on the third floor. They used to live up there. If you were married and had family they lived up there.

EH: Where did they get the name, “dog robber?”

EG: Well, it was just a nickname, dog robber.

Mr. Hulit: They gave them a nickname. In the modern Army they don’t use that term.

EG: It was slang for, that’s all.

EH: Never heard of it.

EG: That’s like a soldier was called a “dog face.”

EH: Dogface?

Mr. Hulit: They got the name G.I. in World War II.

EG: Would you believe it or not, when I was, after we came back from the *Hindenburg*, we all got a weekend pass. I was sitting on the boardwalk in Asbury Park in uniform, in uniform. A fella walked up to me and says, he says, “Pardon me, are you one of those fellas that was on that *Hindenburg*?” I looked at him and I said, “What do you think I’m a German soldier or something?” I said, “What does this here say, it says U.S. on it. That means United States.” I stood up and said, “Take a good look because the next time you see this, you’ll know it. I’m what you know as an American soldier.” It burned me up he was that stupid that he didn’t know.

Mr. Hulit: I was riding the subway in New York in uniform. I sat down in a seat along side of a young girl with her mother. Her mother grabbed the girl and pulled her close to her, as if I were dirty. I was cleaner than both of them. I don’t know where they got that. There were sign in New York, “Dogs and Soldiers Keep Out”.

EH: My goodness. What was the prejudice?

EG: At the time to be a soldier was you're too god damn lazy to go and get a job.

EH: Is that it? That you had a comfortable life? Is that it? That you people had a...

Mr. Hulit: It was during the depression that it came about. If you were in the Army, you were a bum. That's the only thing you could do.

EG: You were too lazy to go to work.

Mr. Hulit: People then had no use for the Army. But from 1939 to 1940 it sure changed a whole lot when they started drafting people. Then they had busses to take the poor soldiers around.

EG: During the War when they started bringing them in, they weren't in the United States Army. They were in the Army of the United States. Anybody who said they were in the United States Army, they were Regular Army.
(speaking in background)

EH: What was your salary?

EG: Twenty one dollars a day, once a month, private. (laughter)

EH: And how about yours, Mr. Hulit? What was your salary?

Mr. Hulit: Twenty one dollars. It was sixteen dollars until the C.C.C. (Civilian Conservation Corps) came in. It was 16 dollars (before). When the C.C.C.'s came, the C.C.C. got \$30. Twenty five (dollars) for home (sent directly to the family) and five (dollars) went to the man. When Mike Lakomie was here, he was getting more money than I was.

EH: Is that right? Was that resented?

EG: Oh yes.

Mr. Hulit: They increased the pay to \$21 a month.

EG: Actually they didn't get \$20 dollars a month. They got \$15 because \$5 sent home.

EH: Went home to their parents.

Mr. Hulit: No \$25 went home. \$5 when to the C.C.C. (members).

EH: Is that right?

Mr. Hulit: It's like everything else. The country goes through times when the Army, it was a disgrace to be in the Army.

EG: When you went into the Post Exchange (PX) to buy a pack of cigarettes it cost you fifteen cents just like anybody else.

Mr. Hulit: We didn't get no break on anything.

EG: (inaudible talking in background) Actually we got \$20.75 a month. Twenty five cents went to the Old Soldiers' Home. In case I come a little older I don't have anyone to take care of me, I can go to the Old Soldiers' Home.

EH: It still exists, really?

Mr. Hulit: That 25 cents would get you (inaudible)

EG: Oh yeah.

Mr. Hulit: Oh yeah. It was no picnic like everybody thought it was. They had no idea.

(Tape shut off. Interruption of conversation.)

EG: Beagles was a sergeant. Beagles he became....

EH: Feagles?

EG: Beagles yeah. He became first sergeant of new battery that formed, I think D Battery.

EG: Yeah he was an older man. He was a first lieutenant in World War I.

Mr. Hulit: No. No. Later on we got a new first sergeant in C Battery. He had held a commission of first lieutenant in the (Army) Reserves. He was responsible for getting me kicked off from the maintenance. Later on, he was called back to active duty as an officer.

EG: (inaudible) The Captain himself, Richard C. Lowry, he came up through the ranks. And I think Reardon, and another one who was very, very hard of hearing. I forget his name.

EH: We never finished the day, the typical day. Reveille was six o'clock in the morning. Then you took your shower and you ran to the Mess Hall by 6:15 am. We never finished the day. What went on?

EG: We got in formation. Then you go with this one, you go with that one, so and so go with that one. We go on detail here. The other fellas were going down to the guns to practice.

Mr. Hulit: Yeah.

EG: Whatever that might be.

EH: What time was formation?

EG: About eleven o'clock we would all break and come back to the barracks for chow. Then about four o'clock in the afternoon we'd all be back for five o'clock retreat. There was formation for retreat. Then it was your own time.

EH: From after what time five or six?

EG: Yeah. Five o'clock after retreat then you went in for dinner, we had supper rather.

EH: What did you do with your free time?

EG: We had the Post Exchange. We had the Theater down here. We could go to the theater, the YMCA, the Library right next to it. The building right next to it was the library. You could go in there and read if you wanted to.

Mr. Hulit: They had a day room in each barracks.

Speaking at the same time: Each barracks had a Day Room. It had magazines and a pool table and a billiard table.

EG: I built the magazine rack in C Battery for C Battery. Remember that one? I built that.

Mr. Hulit: Yeah. The organization would subscribe to about every magazine you could think of that would be of interest and you could go in and read.

EH: Did the soldiers feel bored?

Mr. Hulit: They made their own entertainment.

EG: They weren't concerned with the welfare of the soldiers. They had the Post Exchange downstairs had the Bowling Alley. You could go bowling. The Gymnasium was here. You could go in and basketball and track. Upstairs in inclement weather we used to run around the track.

Mr. Hulit: In back of there they had the long building here.

EG: When I was here that was the library. Brookdale College is there.

Mr. Hulit: They had no library here when I was here that I recall. I'm not doubting it. I am just saying that the Post changes in three years. He left in '36. Three years makes a big difference.

EH: '38.

Mr. Hulit: Colonel Williford was the Post Commander when I was here. My battery commander was (inaudible) We had a Lieutenant Beasley. Woodbury, Captain Woodbury was the Battery Commander. I met Captain Woodbury at Fort Devens (MA) after the War and he was a full colonel. From a captain to a full colonel during the War was not a big jump for a West Point Officer. It shows that not many of them made colonel. Colonel Williford was promoted to brigadier general and was sent up to San Francisco during the build up 1940 sometime. He was sent to San Francisco. (inaudible) I remember when I was talking to Woodbury he said, "You did alright for yourself." I had started out as a buck private and when I had seen Colonel Woodbury at Fort Devens after the War, I was a captain. He was a colonel. You know, he had gone from a captain to a colonel. I made the jump from a private to a captain in the Army. He said, "You did alright for yourself." He remembered me because he "gigged" me. It was the first "gig" I ever got for inspection. He asked if my shirt was a clean one. I said, "No Sir," because I had worn it for inspection the week before and immediately after inspection went into the barracks took the shirt off and hung it up in my locker so it wouldn't get dirty. When I told him it wasn't a clean one I got "gigged" and I got put on KP (kitchen police) Saturday and Sunday.

EH: Oh my goodness.

Mr. Hulit: On Saturday after inspection, you were turned loose to try to catch the Mine Planter so you could get a ride out to Brooklyn to get to New York. If you didn't make that you never got to New York because it's a long haul if you had no money. I knew when I got gigged it was no sense going anyplace because my name was posted on the bulletin board right away. KP Saturday and Sunday.

EH: Oh boy.

Mr. Hulit: What he called a dirty shirt. Remember Max Duze, Ed.

EG: Yeah. I remember him.

Mr. Hulit: He ran the Tailor Shop.

EH: We still keep in touch with his son Bernie.

EG: Max Duze I remember him.

Mr. Hulit: He was an odd sort of individual. He had a heart as big as gold. I had one of those old World War II hats, World War I, wait a minute, World War I hat. It was a garrison cap, the old World War I type. And they all wore tailor made caps. You could buy it from the tailor shop for \$1.25. I didn't have the \$1.25 and Max Duze said, "You take it and you can pay me on payday."

EH: He trusted you then.

Mr. Hulit: Oh yeah. He had a heart as big as gold. He was a real nice guy.

EH: Do you remember any practical jokes? Was there a big pass time of practical jokes? All sorts of crazy things? We have some good photos of these practical jokes.

EG: Short sheeting. (laughter)

EH: Short sheeting, what was that?

EG: A guy would go out on pass and you'd take his bed and pull it all apart. You take the sheet and fold it up halfway. Then you make his bed up real nice and his bed is all made up. He goes to get in it at night and can't put his feet all the way down. We used to take the springs, the bunks had springs on the end of them. You get a pair of pliers and pull all the springs off and tie them up with rope. The guy would go to jump in and BOOM, down on the floor. (laughter)

EH: That was nice.

Mr. Hulit: (inaudible) They would tie shoelaces together and yell, "Fire" and everybody would go running out the door.

EH: Oh ,no, really and his shoe laces would be tied.

EG: And give them a hot foot.

EH: A hot foot, what is a hot foot?

EG: You take a match and put it under here and light it up. And then you know the guy jumps up and it got hot too.

EH: Were you ever punished for these pranks?

Both men: Naaahhh, No.

EG: Stuffed the reveille gun with gravel or something like that when they fired it in the morning.

EH: Stuffed the reveille gun with gravel.

Mr. Hulit: It never happened when I was here but I heard some people say it did. That gun was always kept loaded because after sundown if that gun was fired after sundown that meant there was a fire on Post. And then all the guards would come to a central point and the Corporal of the Guard could locate anyone if he needed to. The entertainment and things were simple in those days.

EH: Were you here when Lana Turner was here? I think in 1940 to '41. Do either of you remember that?

Both men: No.

EH: Were there any other big dignitaries?

Mr. Hulit: Not that I recall where I was here.

EG: What I recall was General Drum he pulled a surprise inspection.

EH: Right. Nobody knew he was coming. Man, you want to see people jump? It went through Post like crazy.

EH: No kidding. How did the word leak out, if this was really a surprise?

EG: The men down there,

EH: At the entrance.

EG: The word spread like wildfire.

Mr. Hulit: The grapevine was terrific. Who was gonna get married, you snap to when the officer came around. (inaudible)

EH: Do you remember him personally though, walking around?

EG: Oh yeah.

Mr. Hulit: He was the Major General commanding the Second Corps area. The Army of the United States was divided into four areas. This was Second Corps area.

EG: I think it was in '36 when we went to Fort Jay in Governors Island (New York). The Second Infantry went on maneuvers to Plattsburg Barracks, New York. We took over guard duty at Fort Jay and left a skeleton crew here. The rest of us went up there. That was C Battery. I don't know if the other ones went or not. There was an old Fort there that goes back to the Civil War times called Castle Williams. It's a round building. It's a prison. All the walls on the inside have got a metal railing. In the middle of winter cold, man, that place was cold. We had ferries that went across.

Mr. Hulit: It was a common practice to go to Fort Jay or Fort Wadsworth (both New York). When their personnel was sent to some other place they called on Fort Hancock to do guard duty. Security... (talking in background makes it inaudible) Then we went to Lewes, Delaware and we went right out on the beaches. There was nothing there, no railroad tracks or anything. We brought our own tracks. The tracks went into....(stop in tape)

EH: I was looking at a photograph of the barbette carriage at Battery Kingman and Ed Hulit was telling me something very interesting that I never really noticed, there are chains or is it ropes? What would be on the barrel? There are two ropes that would be suspended from the end of the barrel and I never knew what they were. Ed Hulit was describing what would be the action of the gun crew. So why don't you tell us about that it's very interesting.

Mr. Hulit: Well, vaguely I remember we used to get out there and pull the gun down in position so it could be reloaded more quickly. The gun would come down by itself but to help it come down more quickly we'd pull on the ropes. And also as the gun traversed from right to left, once in awhile I'd get out and pull it around a little bit to help the mechanism.

EH: What was the sound of this gun going off? Also, by the way it was not casemated in 1939. We were talking about the casemate being poured around in the 1940's.

Mr. Hulit: It has kind of a crack. And a mortar, as far as I'm concerned a mortar is the worst gun to hear go off. It's harder on the ears. The bigger gun a crack to it, more of a crack to it than the other.

EH: You talked about having a machine gun mounted to ..

Mr. Hulit: They used to mount a .50 caliber machine gun on top of the gun. It was called a fire sub-caliber. You would operate the gun just as like you would if you were firing it normally except the only thing you would fire would be the machine gun. This was for practice and it was very economical way of training a gun crew. The gun crew would go through the whole procedure of loading the gun with a dummy shells but the only gun that was fired was the .50 caliber machine gun on top.

EH: So it saved ammunition, basically.

Mr. Hulit: It saved ammunition and during the 30's the Army was very hard up for money and that was about the only firing that was done until about 1939. Then in 1939 the batteries all along the coast here began to require different batteries to get them limbered up.

EH: What were you remarking about the ramrod and wetting the barrel. That was something I hadn't known about.

Mr. Hulit: After the gun is fired, the big long ramrod would go in the length of the barrel with a big long brush on the end of it. And then run it through the barrel in order to cool it. The barrel had to be cooled. If you put powder and ammunition in the back of the breach it was liable to explode.

EH: That's interesting.

Mr. Hulit: You put that in a hot gun and the breach was hot it would explode.

EG: We had the 12-inch mortar (railway gun) and we had a ramrod clean it out. We had two 50 gallon garbage cans. And they would take the swab, only into the breech, only into the breech of the gun, that's all. Those bags of powder, 55 pounds of black powder is a high volume of gas. Behind that, if I remember correctly, was seven pounds of nitrocellulose powder which is very fast burning. That would make a big volume of gas. The only reason for the swabs that we had at that time on our gun was these bags were made out of pure silk but any residue might be in there, you couldn't take a chance for the next one going in. Because if you put a bag in there and there was a little residue in there, it's gonna go up. So that's why they did it. It more or less cleaned out that chamber where the powder went into it.

Mr. Hulit: You look on the pictures here, these bags, this is chunk powder this is slow burning powder but it comes in chunks so this is another story about artillery all together. From 1870 to 1900 was a great improvement in artillery. They found that they could control the burning time for the powder.

(stop in tape.)

EG: There were four 12 (inch) and there were four 8-inch. And every year they used a different one. The three years we were here we had three different guns.

EH: What were the three guns you had?

EG: Well, we had four guns.

EH: Okay.

EG: Four 12-inch mortar. E Battery had four 8-inch rifles there. Every year you used a different gun. You didn't use the same gun. You kept everyone in working order. All four were in working order. We would fire this one this year. The next year we would fire this one. When we fired here we'd took one gun. When we went to Lewes, Delaware, we took a different gun.

EH: What was the purpose of a gun being on a railroad car? That's a very simple question.

EG: Mobile

EH: Mobility.

EG: Mobility. From World War I this is what we had. During World War I, they made these railway cars and took them to Europe. But they never got very big with them over in Europe because they moved too fast.

EH: But the 52nd here was the first railway regiment. Is that correct?

EG: Right. Yeah.

EH: That's correct. And if you said you were part of that unit was that considered a very special privilege, you know like something to be proud of?

EG: You were Coast Artillery, that's all.

EH: Was Coast Artillery considered the upper class of the Army, you know special?

EG: Yes. It was to a certain extent because if you were in the Infantry and you wanted to transfer to a different outfit, the only thing you could go to was another Infantry outfit. If you were Infantry, like in my case, I was here in the Infantry and when my mother took sick, like I said, I transferred to the Coast Artillery because I could transfer up, but I couldn't transfer down. In other words, someone in the Coast Artillery here couldn't transfer to the Infantry. You would have to finish your term out and then re-enlist in the infantry. On re-enlistment you could go wherever you want.

EH: Was Fort Hancock considered a very high class place to be?

EG: Well, it was an Artillery outfit, let's put it that way, Coast Artillery.

Mr. Hulit: It wasn't very well known.

EG: I don't think its one of the better known forts around the country. California got more build up because of the news media, I guess. Like Tacoma, Washington one fort up there

END OF INTERVIEW