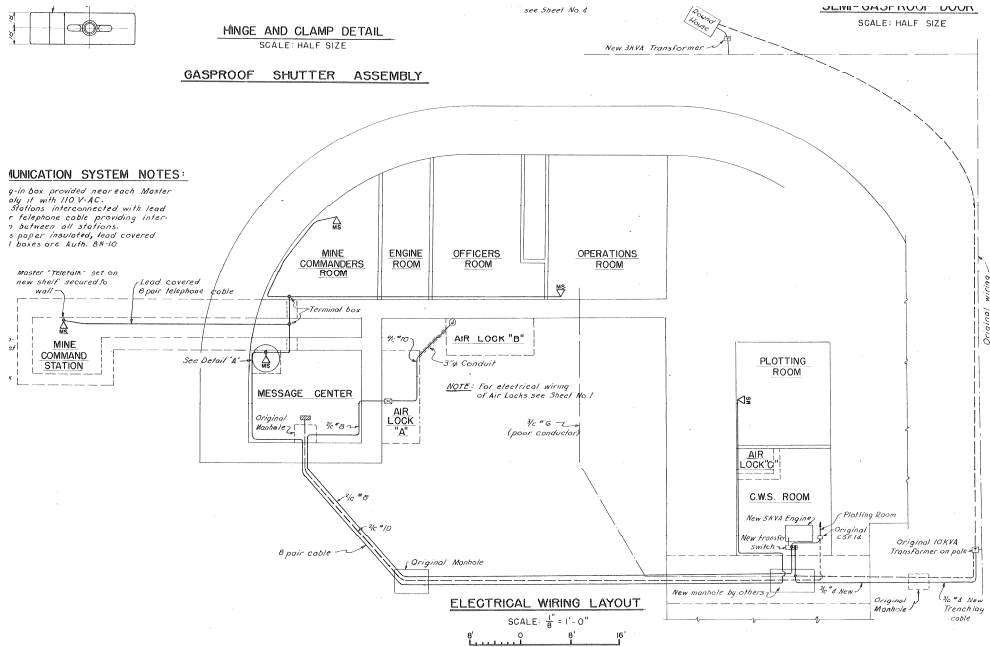


Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
 An Oral History Interview with Robert Wilson
 U.S. Navy, Underwater Mines
 1956-1959

Interviewed by Tom Hanley, Monmouth University student intern
 February 10, 2004
 Transcribed by Mary Rasa 2011



Mr. Wilson at Fort Hancock Building 102 in 2004.



Blueprint of mining casemate from before Mr. Wilson's time in 1943. The layout was similar when the Navy took over the mining operations.



Aerial image of northern part of Sandy Hook including the Coast Guard Station, LORAN and SHORAN Towers, docks, and Mining Casemate. Photo circa 1960.



Aerial image of Building 102 and adjacent barracks, circa 1960.

Images courtesy NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

TH: It's February 10, 2004. I am Tom Hanley and I am here with Bob Wilson at Fort Hancock. Good morning, Bob.

RW: Good morning.

TH: I have a couple of quick questions that are just general information questions. When and where were you born?

RW: Moline Hill, Illinois 1935, September 1st.

TH: Did you attend high school?

RW: Yes.

TH: Where did you graduate from?

RW: United Township High School, East Moline Hill.

TH: Was your father or your grandfather in the military?

RW: Yes. My father was in the Second World War. He went in when he was thirty-one years old. He was in he went on an LST 464 which went into New Guinea, the Battle of Leyte Gulf, he went into Melbourne, Australia and the he went into, I forgot all the other battles. I have that information at home. But then when the war was over, he had signed up for the duration of the war and he got out in October 1945. I went in the Navy on September the 5th, 1952. I was still seventeen years old and I went to school at Great Lakes for my boot camp. Then I was assigned to a school in Yorktown, Virginia for what they called Mineman's School. And after graduation from there I was stationed at the Naval Ammunition Depot at Hawthorne, Nevada. It was the largest ammunition depot in the world, 365 square miles. Our job was to fill the explosives in the mines and test all the components that was used in the mines and set them up for all over the world. The other place that did that was Yorktown, Virginia. From there I was stationed, I was sent to Hawaii. I went to what they call Naval Ammunition Depot West Loch which was in Ewa Beach, Hawaii and we worked on underwater mines and portions of torpedoes that were qualified to work on. From there I was sent back to school which they called it a "B" school. Went to school on the new type mines and learned harbor defense and after harbor defense I left there in September of 1956. (I) was stationed here at Fort Hancock, New Jersey. All the mines were still over at the Naval Ammunition Depot Earle which is now a Naval Weapons Station Earle. All the buoys and the nets were stored at Bayonne, New Jersey and the hydrophones that were used here were kept here in a building behind the Coast Guard. It was a red brick building. I have no idea what the number was. Our HECP which is Harbor Entrance Control Post was in the casemate behind the Coast Guard facility. We had a radar that could go out forty miles. I'm sorry. You could go

forty but it wasn't high enough. You could only do twenty mines. You could go out to the horizon. We had a SHORAN tower that was used for communicating with the ships as they were coming in. The LORAN was by the Coast Guard but SHORAN was by the Navy. We worked with Fort Tilden, Fort Totten and Fort Wadsworth and we set out sonar buoys. We set out hydrophones and we could actually listen to ships coming in, listen for submarines and we could hear just about anything we wanted out there. We had magnetic nets out. The magnetic nets were laid out that we could actually as a ship went over them we could actually hear the, I mean see that magnetic characteristic. See most ships wherever they were built will pick up the magnetic characteristic of where they were manufactured. They always tried to build a ship when they were pulling north they would always try to get as close to north as they can so they don't set up a different type of magnetic field. We put practice mines out because in 1956 there was no real threat at that period of time. But we did put a lot of practice mines out. Then in 19-, let's see, they had the Nike site here then. They had the Nike Ajax. That was something else we did. We did work on a forty foot picket boat. We had (a) fifty foot diving boat. We had a sixty-three foot L boat. It weighed that weighed 80 tons and we had some Boston Whalers that we had here that we could work out on the different stuff we had out in the ocean. We had triangulation station. They were huge large bunkers like. They were approximately probably eighteen by eighteen by twenty feet high that we could set up azimuth and we could read through the azimuth with a telescope and tell them where to plan all the different sonar buoys where we could plant the mines. We could plant the mines or where to put the hydrophones. We could use a triangulation from Fort Tilden and from Fort Wadsworth so we could actually set up a point and put up exactly where we wanted so we could put on the chart in the HECF, the Harbor Entrance Control Post so we could monitor anything coming and know exactly where that ship was coming through. The British tried to send some miniature submarines in and we caught them. So, it was quite, it was a lot of fun catching them.

TH: When did that happen? The British sent submarines?

RW: Yeah. They first tried it in Yorktown, Virginia in 1953. We caught them down there and when they came up here they changed their submarine and they thought (it) was going to be quieter but we still caught them.

TH: But why were they...?

RW: They were testing us.

TH: Oh, they were just testing.

RW: Oh, yeah. It was called an exercise.

TH: Just a friendly thing between allies.

RW: And it was like an operational exercise to see how well we were doing and we didn't know what was going to come through. We thought it was going to be bigger

submarines. We had these huge panels and the mines were made where you could set up all the mines if anybody would come through it would come off or if anybody came through we could set them off ourselves or we could set that maybe just one mine was activated. So, we could activate all the mines at one time or we could activate a few at a time or we actually fire one. And they had what they call a search coil on them. And it's a great big rod wrapped in copper wrapped in this coil like that is about five foot high and used to stand straight up vertical and as the ship would come over it, it would break the magnetic signature and give us an alarm that we were getting somebody to protect up to the channel and that would put what they call a net tender that he would actually take that when they come through the net. The net tender would move all the other nets that were on these buoys and they would come through and they would back down and put the nets in further. It is hard to explain. But we could actually see if anybody was, well if somebody went under the ship we, of course, would never know but we could detect a lot of people out there. The sonar buoys were huge. They were eight foot in diameter and the frequency was FM. And we could actually listen to the television stations in New York at the time because they were in FM radios but we use the radar continually. We had sonar men come in here who actually handled the sonar. We had radar men who worked on radar. We had lineman who laid cables and stuff like that. 'Cause the cable was an armored cable to put out in the ocean and then we had boatswain's mates who manned the boat. We had (an) engineman, of course, who ran the engines and we had three officers stationed here at that period of time. I guess it was Lt. Commander Remington was the CO (Commanding Officer), Ensign Bar was the XO (Executive Officer), and Operations Officer and Chief Warrant Officer Buckley was the Maintenance Officer and Engineering Officer. I stayed here from 1956 to 1959. Then I was stationed, I was transferred from here. I am trying to think of some things that happened.

TH: You told us a lot of what you did here at Fort Hancock. How did you get stationed here exactly?

RW: When I went to special school in June of 1956 I was learning all the new mines and then they had the harbor defense unit. We had the Army and some of the minemen that went out to California underneath the, I can't remember the base now, the Presidio (San Francisco, California). That's where the Harbor Defense School for the Army. And a lot of the Navy guys went out there. Mel Conesca, he went out there for the school and Danny Priest went out there for schooling. And when they came back they started here at Fort Hancock and left and went down and started teaching in '56 about the mine portion and different things for the harbor defense. So, when I learned that, my orders were to come here because I went to school not just for harbor defense but for a lot of harbor defense.

TH: One of the questions that we used to ask is do you know what your job was when you came. So obviously you did.

RW: Oh yeah, because we were totally trained for it.

TH: I guess that is kind of a no brainer question for me to ask but I just want to get it. Now, what was your rank or title?

RW: When I was here I was what they call a Mineman 2nd Class. It was an E-5. When I left here, well I got married and we left here for Key West, Florida for Diving School. I went to Diving School there and was stationed off of Guam. That's where I made E-6 and Mineman 1st Class.

TH: What unit or department did you work for?

RW: The underwater ordnance. We were in charge of all the different mines but we also worked, everybody was trained to work on everything. We worked the radars. We worked the sonars. We just learned everything. It was part of our job. We could take somebody else's position if we had to. The only thing that nobody else could do was except install the mines which was the mineman because we were specially trained to handle explosives which sonar men and radar men and boatswain's mates weren't. We were and then we in 1965 the Navy got rid of the mines and they were all put out on a livery ship off of Pearl and taken out to sea and the ship was sunk at a certain depth and they exploded the whole thing. So, all them mines, them mines weigh 6,000 pounds, had 3,000 pounds of explosives. It was a cast explosive. Cast means it was made into a liquid and poured into the mines. The mine was in a circumference and it was about thirty-six inches high and it was about six foot wide and we had special stuff to install what they called a detonator. They had what they call a booster and they had a main explosive. That's how it was operated. It was all electrically fired those weren't contact or anything. It was all electrically fired.

TH: So, if a ship bumped into it, it wouldn't set them off?

RW: It wouldn't set it off. No.

TH: So, you would have to do...?

RW: Or we could set it where it would go automatically if the ship electronics or the magnetic field would set it off.

TH: Alright so...

RW: Or we could fire it ourselves.

TH: So, there were two settings; one that you could actually be there if the ships coming in or you could take it out yourself.

RW: Right.

TH: And the other setting would be if the ship ran a magnetic barrier then the mine would go off.

RW: Yeah.

TH: But let's say if you had it set on the manual control, a ship could go over them...

RW: Well, that was an override, the manual. That was an override otherwise the field was always on.

TH: The field was always on.

RW: Yeah, because what we could do we could set up four fields. Now when a ship, when the friendly ships come up we would shut it down so they could get through and then what we would do as soon as they came in we would set it back up. And then they would go through another field and we would shut it down so they wouldn't get destroyed.

TH: What was the extent of the mines in the area of between New York and New Jersey, the water around here?

RW: You know, I really don't know exactly how many there were out there but during the Second World War there was a lot of them out there. There had to be thousands.

TH: So, pretty much the entire (Sandy Hook) Bay maybe and...

RW: Yeah.

TH: ...the harbor.

RW: Because it started from, it started out from Sandy Hook over to Long Island. They went all the way out to Long Island. They didn't, because that was where Fort what was it, Fort Tilden is. So, it went from there out. Because they went from just Scotland Lightship used to be out here and out almost out to Ambrose Lightship was out there. So, it was it was a big area.

TH: Now, with these mines you had them obviously in World War II.

RW: Yeah. They were a little bit different mines then. The Army had the mines in and they were granular TNT. And what they would do they were a cone shape, an inverted cone and they would actually pour from boxes into that. It was granular TNT. Like I said ours was made into a liquid and then made into a cast. But theirs was granular and then when we took over the mines we changed all the configurations of them.

TH: And you, this was more of a Cold War defense precaution?

RW: Yes. Yeah. Same as the Nikes. Yeah.

TH: Now when we had the Nikes here, were the mines still here or were those all gone?

RW: They were all over.

TH: So, the mines were or the Nikes?

RW: The mines were all there. (at the same time)

TH: Oh okay.

RW: Because they were stored there we could put them out in no time at all.

TH: Oh, so there were times like during the Cold War where there wouldn't be any mines?

RW: No. Just exercise type. What we would call dummy mines.

TH: Now, during when you were stationed here were you, you were here until 1959 as you said.

RW: Right.

TH: Where were you during the Cuban Missile Crisis?

RW: Oh, I was in, I was stationed at Long Beach, California.

TH: Did you have mines out there?

RW: Yeah. It was what they called Drill Mine Prep Facility. We did all, in fact, we did some mines for President Kennedy to fly over to look at. These were the floating type mines. They called them the old Mark 6 and 16s. They were an actual contact mine. They had, they had spikes on them. I guess you would call them. They were fired by contact and galvanic action. It was a small battery in it to fire the detonator. But they had like a vein in there and like when a ship would come along and hit one of those spikes the spike was made of Bakelite over copper and then there was a cup that was attached to the mine and that spike was screwed into another piece of copper and what would happen is when that spike was bent it would hit the steel and the copper and the steel with the salt water would make galvanic action and it was small vein inside and whatever direction it went it would make contact and sent electricity to the mine to the detonator and blow the mine.

TH: And during the Cuban Missile Crisis were you on a special state of alert because of that at all?

RW: Yeah. We were because all of the mines at that point in time were in Seal Beach, California. The only time I was on alert for anything was on the Seven Day War in,

when Israel took over the Suez Canal up to the Suez Canal. I was on alert then. I was stationed in Sigonella, Sicily which was a village outside of Catania. We had set up we were going to blockade the Suez Canal if anything happened but it never did. For us it didn't. We were prepared though to do it.

TH: You did a lot of stuff in the military in your career. Was Fort Hancock one of your first places where you started up from?

RW: No. My first duty was Naval Ammunition Depot Hawthorne, Nevada. I can say we worked on what they called components. They were electronics. Mines worked on three actually four different things. One of course is contact. One is electrical or magnetic, the other is acoustic and the other is pressure. So, what happened we could set up the mine that worked on magnetic, acoustic or pressure. We could work on a mine that made acoustic or pressure or we could make a mine that was magnetic acoustic or magnetic. So, we had all different configurations. That was what we called bottom mines. Your floating mines worked on what they called a magnetometer but those were made for submarines. The contact mines were also made for submarines. They put a copper cable in between the mine and what they called a small buoy in between the skin of the submarine would hit that copper cable and cause galvanic action and would fire off the mine. So, we also worked on depth charges. We worked on different rockets we worked on. I'm trying to think there was, we worked on a few different types of explosives. We, like I said, were qualified to do almost everything. Worked on bombs for Vietnam.

TH: So, would you say your experience, the original work that you did here at Fort Hancock aided in your future work? You already had that experience under your belt before then.

RW: Oh no, because I had already been stationed like I said at Hawthorne, Nevada and then NADE Oahu. What they call West Loch. That, what I learned working on actual components or stuff like that. We did mines for the Korean War while I was in Hawaii. We did other things too but that was the main purpose, getting mines set up for Korea because I was in during the Korean War. Minemen went aboard, we had mine layers at that period of time. We had the *USS Shea* which was a DM 30. There was all kinds of them. Plus we went aboard sub tenders. We had mines that could be fired from submarines or dropped from aircraft. The bottom mines dropped from aircraft. So, we flew in P2V's which dropped our stuff and the P3O Ryan's could drop mines. And the old fleet type submarines could lay our mines. What they call old Mark 27 mine. But it was a lot. My actual experiences were that when I left the Navy I had such a background I was offered jobs in New York in the bomb disposal which I didn't want to do. I worked on stuff that people knew what they were making. I was offered a job with Alcohol, Firearms and Tobacco (ATF) because I knew explosives but I didn't because I was tired of being shot at. I had a lot of experience in Vietnam but my experiences were how to handle people. I worked with a lot of foreign nationals. I went to the Vietnamese Language School. I went to Coronado, California for that and I loved working with people. I worked with Crete Nationals when I was stationed in Sicily. We had a facility in Greece. I used to travel over there a lot and that means I did that when I retired I went

into management right away of different facilities. (I) went to work for United Parcel Service. I went right into management. They called us the 10 %ers because 90% of the people in management were drivers at one point in time. But I went into customer service. I worked with the different customers and sold UPS. And I was also qualified tractor trailers, so I taught tractor trailers at UPS. And stayed there for nineteen years and retired from there too.

TH: In the military there were a lot of things you could have done.

RW: Oh yeah.

TH: Because it prepared you so well.

RW: I had no college degree whatsoever but I had enough experience that I knew how to work with people and I knew how to get things done. I did alright. I did very well so...

TH: While you were here at Fort Monmouth, Fort Hancock...

RW: That's alright. I worked at Fort Hancock

TH: Thank you for clarifying anyone who is listening to this tape. I just wrote down Fort Monmouth by accident. But while you were here at Fort Hancock were there any potential enemy attacks? Were you on alert for anything?

RW: No. The Nike's did. They I think most of theirs was exercises also. As far as us, no. We had no alerts.

TH: Except for maybe the one time with the British.

RW: Well, that was an exercise. That was, I am trying to think, there was a name for it. I can't think of what it was. I'll find out. I'll ask around and get the information on it.

TH: Well, what building did you work in while you were here at Fort Hancock?

RW: At the casemate. It was built in 1921. There was a big number on it. It was built in 1921. It was all concrete with a sand barrier and inside we had the radar station and then we had a tower for observation tower and then in the one section we had it was under the concrete was the HECP, the Harbor Entrance Control Post. In the red brick building over where the Coast guard does the sandblasting of the buoys we had all our cable in there. They were huge reels. They were probably about eight foot high and six foot wide with inch and a half armored cable we had that all stored in there. Then we had the search coils that was used in the mine station here and used to test them here all the time. We had to test them every six months to make sure they were capable of doing things. We did the testing of those and then we would do the testing of all the I am trying to think of the name, of the consoles for the out of when we would test the different sections because when we had the lines out there we had what we called a DB box, the DB box and cables

going all the way out there. Now, if they told us we had to plant mines we could go out there and if there was a buoy we could pop the buoy. It was a detonator in it and pop the buoy and we could raise that up and we could start laying out our mines right away so we were quite capable of doing things. It takes weeks though. It doesn't take hours or days. It's not like today when you can drop a mine in the water and they could close up this whole harbor within an hour or so. But at that time it was all manual, all manual labor. There is a picture of the minelayer in your historical building over here.

TH: In the Museum?

RW: In the Museum yeah. Not in where, not in where provost marshal's office was or the jail but where the...

TH: Okay.

RW: There is a big case which shows the mines and shows everything so if you want to it is quite interesting. Because you had davats (crane) to bring over the mines you could probably take out a series of mines at that time I think you could take out...(Tape ends. Conversation begins with a new topic.)

The building we are in right now (Building 102) was a red brick building and this building not only quartered us, we lived on the second floor we had bunks up there. There was fifty of us stationed here at that period of time. We went from the officers' quarters and the chiefs' slept on the first floor, the base of the building on the left side and the officers' offices was on the right side. They had three officers there at that time. Down below on the basement side was our galley and mess hall. That's what we had where we ate. We had two cooks and we had great meals. I am trying to think of what else. That was about it. The two white buildings on the outside was the Naval Reserve. They, that's when they, they weren't allowed, well their officers used to come in here and work. But that was where they did all their training.

TH: The two white barracks?

RW: The two white barracks. Yeah.

TH: For those of you listening we are describing is the Education Center which is the red brick building, but the cannon and the two World War II barracks was used at the time you were here for.

RW: Naval Reserves, yeah. The building behind it that was the, that was the stables up above was Enlisted Mens' Club. We used to call it "The Powder Keg."

TH: Why did they call it that?

RW: Yeah. They had a bar up there and everything. It was great. We had a, it was a nice facility.

TH: The room that we are in right now, the Education Center which I guess if you were in the building and you were facing the Bay would be on the right. What was this building?

RW: It was a nice, they had separated. It was also a training room. I'm sorry. This was also a training room for us. We could come in here and they would do different training and like I said the officer. It was only Mr. Bar who lived in here and one chief I can't think of his name right now that slept in here. But this was the actual training room. We had two heads (bathrooms) downstairs. There is only one in there now I understand. We called them heads.

TH: Yeah. I know the term.

RW: Whatever you want to call them.

TH: You mean on this floor?

RW: Yeah.

TH: As of right now what I know there is one here and two on this floor.

RW: Right.

TH: I'm not sure if they are both the same ones that were here when you were here.

RW: Yeah.

TH: The second floor there is also two.

RW: Right.

TH: I don't know if you had those. Did you have those?

RW: Right. Plus showers were in there.

TH: Yes. There are showers.

RW: Right.

TH: I believe the one upstairs is still intact. We recently had like if you were here just a week ago I am pretty sure that it would have looked that same as it was when you were here. Now you, what part of the building did you live in?

RW: I was in a bunk up on the second floor.

TH: Second floor. Are we right below it right now?

RW: No. I was on the other side.

TH: The other side.

RW: If you were facing the Bay it would on your left side. We had, but the whole twenty five, well maybe more, but there was fifty of us living up there and we bunked, so there was two people to a bunk.

TH: So, fifty at any given time, fifty upstairs.

RW: Yeah, there was always fifty. There could have been more at the period of time I can't remember if there was always fifty of us there.

TH: So, in the Education Center there was always fifty men living upstairs?

RW: Correct.

TH: You had two officers living in here?

RW: Right.

TH: And a training facility on the first floor?

RW: Right.

TH: And on the other side of the first floor where all the offices are...

RW: Were all of the offices.

TH: So, they are being used as offices...

RW: Our CO's office, our commanding officer's office was over there. The maintenance officer, the engineering officer and the XO.

TH: And in the basement you said there was a...

RW: Mess hall. Yeah, mess hall was I believe directly underneath here. Underneath the building but the wing section going out below as the galley and we had two cooks.

TH: And in regard to walls and stuff, have any walls been knocked down that were here? Would you say or is this pretty much the way it would have looked?

RW: It looked about the same to me. I only came in here once because it was officer quarters.

TH: Okay.

RW: And I was an enlisted man so, but the topside was complete open.

TH: Well, it's not anymore. We can take a look if you would like actually after we are done here we could take a look upstairs.

RW: Okay. Sure.

TH: It's very sectioned off now. But we are very glad to have this information about our Education Center. So, thank you for this.

RW: Yep

TH: So, did you eat here?

RW: Oh yeah. Down below in the mess hall.

TH: Were there any social activities that you took part in at the Fort?

RW: We did a lot of fishing here. (laughter) It was great striped bass fishing. Dig clams all the time. This is how I met my wife. The telephone operators of Keyport, Atlantic Highlands and Keansburg were invited to a party here and so all the single girls came here for a dance. And we had a dance. In fact, it was in the mess hall. They had the dance in the mess hall and I had seen a young girl and we were invited...oh and that was another fella. His name was Jack Anderson and he was going with a girl by the name of Tracey. They invited me to a Valentine's Day party and that is where I actually met. And we got married in 1958. So I met her in 1957, Valentine's Day of 1957.

TH: In this building?

RW: No. I met her, it was a New Years' Eve party. I had seen her, but you know and then Valentine's Day I met her and we got married a few years later.

TH: Now, while you were at the Fort did you attend any sporting events?

RW: Well, we played baseball. It was very strict at that time because the Army was strict. They had a general here and we were limited. The Navy was, well, I guess a lot of people didn't like the Navy here.

TH: Yeah. Actually people I have talked to.

RW: Yeah. There was fighting. We didn't have to go into their marching drills or anything out there like that.

TH: So they were different.

RW: They were a totally different outfit. Yeah. But I knew a lot of the guys that was with the Nike outfit, but they used to have dances at the Club and we used to go to those dances. I am trying to remember if they had a two lane bowling alley or not. It was you set the pins up on pegs. I wonder if it is still here.

TH: Yeah. I didn't even know about it. This is interesting.

RW: Yeah. When I think about it, it was where you come in around the circle going the back way of the Parade Grounds. It was the first building there. That was where we did all our dances. In fact, I was sent a postcard. It showed in the 1940s they had a dance group out here had a dance party. But I thought there was a two lane bowling alley out here. I think it was underneath that. 'Cause behind it was the Post Exchange and behind it was they had a gas station there. Used to, it was actually a privately owned gas station.

TH: Really? Not military run, privately owned?

RW: Oh yeah.

TH: It was for you if you wanted to buy gas.

RW: Oh yeah. Privately, I don't think the guy worked for the government because it was, I am trying to think of the name of the gas company. He might have worked for the government but the gas actually was, I am trying to think of the name of the company now. I thought it was Skelly but it might have been something else at the time. And then the Post Exchange, Post Office and receiving building is where the railroad tracks are by the red brick buildings before you get to the Provost Marshal's office. It's on the left hand side. If you are looking at the Bay it is on the left hand side. That's where the Post Office was and receiving building. And the, I can't think of it now. I want to take a break.

TH: Sure go ahead.

RW: Well, you shut it off.
(Tape shuts off and restarts.)

TH: Did anything humorous occur while you were here at the Fort?

RW: Oh, of course, there was a couple of them but I like I think the funniest one was we had a sergeant that was in the MPs. His wife had got caught speeding a couple of time and she had to go before a federal judge and so, but she used to go out of town all the time and he got tired of it. And he saw her speeding himself he ticketed her and had his car impounded so she wouldn't leave base anymore. So, we thought that was hilarious. When they built this new SHORAN tower our skipper didn't like the way it was painted. So, all of us had to make up bosun's chairs and actually spring them alongside and actually paint the international orange and the international white and I was a little scared

of height but we were up there swinging and painting all this and this tower by the way was over one hundred and fifty foot high, about one hundred foot maybe one hundred and fifty. As I recall it was every twenty five feet so it was white, orange, white, orange yeah about 125 feet. So, what happened one night I get a call from the Coast Guard and they said you got a guy up on top of the tower. So, I had duty one night. So I go down there and one of our sailors had got drunk, inebriated and was up on top of the tower and was shaking and I got swaying so much that he couldn't stop it and the wind kept swaying it. We actually had to go up and get him down and I had to take him before the skipper and the guys name was John so what happened the skipper said, "Well, I am going to give you extra duty." So what happened he had to go out in front of the barracks here of the Education Building and where the sidewalk goes out to the street he had to dig holes and I had duty that night, to plant, the skipper loved bushes and stuff so he started digging out there and I was really going to make him dig so I told him to get down to four foot and the skipper came out and he said, "Does it have to be that deep?" And I said, "Oh yeah." I said, "We can even go deeper." He said, "No. I think that is deep enough." So John got out and he planted the bush and the bush was down so deep we couldn't see it. (laughter) So, I had to have him fill it back up and we put the bushes back in. So, it was, I wanted to punish the guy because I had to climb up that stupid tower with my own life again.

TH: You actually had to climb up on the outside of it?

RW: Well, what it is you go up ladders inside. They had a like hoops so when you went inside if you fell you would hit the hoops and you...and you went up a certain level and you stand up on the platform and you go up another level. But it was tiring and I was scared to death of going up there especially in the middle of the night trying to get this guy down.

TH: Yeah. What kind of a tower was it? Was it circular tower?

RW: No. It was a standing like a radio tower.

TH: Oh okay.

RW: It was this huge radio tower. A huge base on it and up on top was this SHORAN antennas where they could actually the SHORAN was actually was what they call a visual radio antennae in other words it could only radio transmit frequency as far as you could see. It was called SHORAN. But they, the Navy dropped it and that all got torn down. There was a Lt. Potts I think his name was Potter. I can't think of his name. They named a place over in Earle I think there is a Potts Lane or a Potters Lane. The other tower that we could look out of they wanted to get rid of it so they sent our EOD over, Explosive Ordnance Disposal and he wanted to take a picture of it and this was a catastrophe really, a tragedy and when they blew it a piece of it came over and took the top of his head off. But they named it after him over there. I think it is Potters Lane or Potts Lane. It's right behind the Administration Building at C-1 so, but there was a lot of funny things. We took, the skipper used to let us take the boats and go fishing so we had

a lot of fun fishing. We used to go fishing a lot. Helped the Coast Guard in the summer. The summer was so bad out here. They used to towing, Tony's U-haul or Tony's Rent a Boat and they used to get out here in the Bay and the engine would crap out and we'd be towing them at three different times so the Coast Guard was helping him out for awhile. That was Chief Nickels he was a chief boatswain for the Coast Guard. And then we used to go out and tell people that were tied up to the buoys to untie them. The Coast Guard would be able to give them federal tickets. We didn't. We just go out there and tell them to stop it. And we had seaplane that turned over out here and we assisted the Coast Guard to bring it in. This was in 1958, the summer of '58. But there was a lot that went on here. I can't think of anything else that was funny.

TH: You mentioned (inaudible)

RW: Oh yeah. That was Commander, Lt. Commander Remington's children. He had five kids or six. I don't remember and I was going out the casemate and it was so foggy I was going very slow and I had my windows open and I heard this ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling. I said, "What in the world is that." So, I got out of the pickup truck and walked over and here was a three or four year old, four year old at that point in time. Lt. Commander Remington's child, a little boy and he is on his tricycle ringing the bell and it was a good thing he was ringing the bell or I would have ran over him, you know. But it was just so funny. Then one day we got a phone call and we had to rush over to the Officers' Club and here was this four year old on top of the Officers' Club, up on the roof. So, they went and got him down. But whenever anything happened, "Oh it's the Remington kids again." (laughter) They were a good bunch and Mr. Buckley lived he lived in Middletown and Ensign Bar was a good guy and he had funny stories. What could have been a tragedy one time, we were planting DB boxes and like I told you we put detonators into this it's a chamber it's got what they call a cutting blade. It looks like a chisel which is exactly what it is and when you ignite it the chisel hits the cable and it comes up so I asked Frenchy, I says, "Give me one of the detonators." He says, "Yeah okay." He opens up one of these foul weather jackets and his life vest and inside he's got them inside his pocket. Well, these were filament mercury which are heat sensitive and heat enhanced. Well, here he had them above his armpit. I said, "Oh, I can't believe you did that". He was protecting them from getting wet. And it was ten of them in that little cartridge like that. There was five in a row and five in a row and they set inside this little box like. And I said, "I can't believe you did that." I said, "You are not supposed to carry them on your person." So that could have ended up, the guy could have gotten hurt pretty bad. One time one of the sonar buoys blew, broke loose and we were trying to hit it with a grappling hook but couldn't get it so I dove into the water and swam up to it because the boat would come alongside and it would just wash it away even as slow as we went inside of it and I hooked up a line an I had to sit on it and be towed back the whole buoy back in. It broke loose from its mooring.

TH: And how far out was it?

RW: Oh, we were out maybe three or four miles. It was quite an experience. So, that was about it.

TH: Wow, that's a lot. I can say that. Did you attend any religious ceremonies when you were here?

RW: Yeah. I it was a friar, he was Father Anderson, he was the priest here. He lived in a little white building over here just before you go into the Coast Guard Base and that is where he had his Chapel. I went with him and studied with him and went to all of his Masses while I was here. And then when I went to New York I went to St. Patrick's. It was Father Reverend. He was a Friar Monk. Great guy.

TH: Did you ever go to the beach while you were here?

RW: Oh, continually. 'Cause we, the officers had a beach here and the enlisted men had a beach here. That's where we had all those big towers. Some of them have been taken down by now. The section from I'm trying to think of the battery but it was the last battery on the left here from there on was where we took all our cables out to sea from there and you are not allowed to use any metal detectors or anything because there is a lot of unexploded ordnance out there. We had fisherman bring up some ordnance. They had brought them up on nets here and we had to...

TH: Still live?

RW: Some of them were. Yeah. They brought in a mortar. A huge mortar from Potter? What's the, what were the mortars? Potter was the.... but they brought in a huge one they brought in torpedo ones right over there to the Coast Guard where we had our boats too.

TH: Did you take any excursions to New York City?

RW: Yeah. We went we used to have every third day we had duty here and every day there was a boat crew that had to stay here 'til 10 o'clock at night. After 10 o'clock at night we wouldn't get any phone calls but we wouldn't have to maintain them here. So, one night commander Remington called and had been at the Officers' Club and the generals and the colonels were there and he wanted to take a he wanted to go up and see the Statue of Liberty. Well, it was midnight and I had let all the crew go. So, he says well, you'll get somebody. So, I says, "Okay and I woke up a bunch of different people and we went down to the dock and we light an eighty ton boat and called Elbow EB and the general and them were coming out and the back tires went through the dock. (laughter) The dock wasn't in that great of a shape. We used to walk out. We knew it was bad. We didn't know he was gonna drive so one of the tires when through the dock. We had to pull that out. We got that out. Then what we did, we went out and as we were going up it was Crowley, myself, Incadella, another fella, I think it was Frenchy and so we get up and at that period of time there wasn't a Verrazano Bridge so we went up to the Statue of Liberty and went around it and coming back everything turned totally black because you could see the Belt Parkway where we were at. So, it dawned on me that something was wrong so I turned the wheel to the starboard and we wiped out our mast

from an anchor chain. A ship had caught on fire out at sea and what we didn't see was the anchor lights and so it wiped out our mast we didn't need that for running so as we are coming back the fog rolls in so I had Incadella go up forward and tell me when he could see because we would have lost our radar so he did say when somebody sees a buoy let me know. Well, all of sudden we hit a buoy and crash. He said, "You are right on course. You hit a buoy." And I said, "Okay thanks." So we get up here and for some reason or another I was hearing this bell that was on my right but should have been on my left. I didn't realize I was on the other side of Sandy Hook. I had to back down almost onto the beach I had to back her down with an old diesel engine in it and back down and we are coming in and the skipper says let me bring it in. So I said, "Well, you are the skipper. There isn't much I can do about it." So he came in and we had this brand new fifty foot diving boat. Beautiful all teak and everything and he brings it in and brings the stern around and smacked into the brand new diving boat. So Crowley went and took it over and we tied it up and we went out and we were watching the diving boat start to sink. So I came back to the barracks here and woke everybody up. Frenchy Labeau, were already down there, John woke up, Kawaski, we all went down there and what we did it was like a railroad track that went into the water and we had a dolly and had to boot the engine up on top. We had a cable to bring in up and they couldn't get it to start. It was cold, deathly cold out there and all these guys are in their under dress blues so what we did was we cranked up the diving boat brought it around and hit the dollies and I told we had lines on the outside and I told Frenchy Labeau, I said, "Frenchy when we get it, when I hit the dollies it will come out of the water take a 4x4 and throw it behind the dolly wheels and that will stop it from rolling back." So he says, "Okay." So we hit the dolly rolled up on the tracks and the wood slipped out of his hands. So he grabbed a line why I don't know. The next thing I know I am going back down the water and here's Frenchy Labeau holding the line and flipped him out in the water. No life vests or anything. Here is it deathly cold and he's got no life vests or anything he's got his blues on, his undress blues so we got him out of the water and I told one of the other kids, I said, "Do this," and he says, "Okay." So, we got it out of the water and we got it up enough that it wasn't going to sink. Broke about three ribs in the boat though. So that was just one of those things that happened. It was a funny story but it wasn't funny for Frenchy. We had to get blankets put around him and get him back to the barracks. But we made a few excursions up to go see the Statue of Liberty. So we would go up there and that night also because like I said the ferry boats were up there and our boat was so slow that if we went up towards the Brooklyn Navy Yard the current would be so much that it would turn our boat around. It was such a heavy boat. It wasn't made to go up there. And the ferry boats were chasing us all over up there. That was the old 69th Street Ferry. It used to go across from Staten Island to 69th Street in Brooklyn. Trying to think, but we made a lot of trips up there.

TH: But that time you went up there in the dead of the night because who wanted to see the Statue?

RW: The CO, the commanding officers. All the officers decided they wanted to see the Statue of Liberty that night. It was a Saturday night.

TH: At midnight they just wanted to see it?

RW: Yeah. They just decided let's go for a boat trip. But we, it wasn't a big deal but I said, "It's after 10 and you told me after 10 to let the boat crew go." He said, "Well you can find someone." And Dale Ernmane was the engineman. He did the engines. But it was we had a lot of fun here. We worked hard. We would go to work at seven in the morning and we would work to four or four thirty in the afternoon. We took an hour for lunch maybe an hour. I'm trying to think of what we did with the Army. Well, we played ball against the Army. They would always whip us. The Coasties, they were busy guys. They didn't have much time to themselves. They were always busy. It was a good experience here.

TH: Were there any, while you were here were there any servants or minorities or woman that worked at the Fort that you knew of?

RW: We didn't think about it. We had Stokes here with us. He was a cook. I don't the only thing that I knew was the general's men had, they were regular steward. They were like a Navy steward. But they were corporals and privates. I never saw anything like that. No. I never saw anything like that.

TH: Did you keep in touch with anyone that you knew from Fort Hancock?

RW: Oh yeah. Ed Caffrey but he's dead now. John Widner, he's dead now. Mel conesca...

(Tape cuts off)

END OF INTERVIEW