Veteran:	**MILLER, Warren Lee**
Service Branch:	**COAST GUARD**
Interviewer:	Collins, Kim
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Interviewer: What is your full name?

Veteran: My name is Warren Lee Miller.

Interviewer: And you are aware that this conversation is being recorded for Lee College

Veteran: Yes, I am.

Interviewer: What year was it that you joined the service?

Veteran: I joined the United States Coast Guard on June 20, 1966.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Veteran: I was seventeen years old. I had just graduated from high school.

Interviewer: What town were you living in?

Veteran: Here in Hardin.

Interviewer: What made you decide to join?

Veteran: Well, at that particular time the war in Vietnam—or the peace action in Vietnam—was going full force, and if you were of any physical shape whatsoever, you would be drafted into the Army or the Marines, and I decided I would choose the branch I wanted. I could have gone to college and took a chance on getting drafted, but I decided to go ahead and get it over with.

Interviewer: And you chose the Coast Guard over all the others?

Veteran: Yes. At that time, all the service branches took the same entrance exam, and you had to score higher on the Coast Guard than any of the other services. It was the least likely chance that I would be sent to Vietnam. There were Coast Guard people over there, but they were mostly volunteers. At least if I did go over there, in the Coast Guard I'd be on a boat, and I'd be sleeping in a bed at night and not in the mud.

Interviewer: Where did you go to sign up, or how did that happen?

Veteran: I enlisted in Houston, and started making arrangements the summer before I went to school. I talked to the recruiter and he gave me a list of things I had to have. There was a maximum number of cavities in your teeth that you were allowed to have, so I had to have some dental work done before I could pass the physical.

Interviewer: Other than that, you passed the physical?

Veteran: I passed the physical fine. I went to boot camp in California—a little place called Alameda, which is a small area in Oakland. I had my eighteenth birthday in boot camp.

Interviewer: How did your family feel about your joining?

Veteran: At seventeen years old, I had to have parental consent, and my mother and father thought that was alright. They never said they would have rather I went to college.

Interviewer: So in California, how long did boot camp last?

Veteran: Boot camp was eight weeks long, but you spent one week in what they called 'forming company,' where they issued all your clothing and you stenciled it, and they taught you how to march and stand at attention, and it was actually nine weeks. There were so many people joining the Coast Guard, that there was like a six month waiting list at that particular time, and sometimes people were in boot camp for ten or eleven weeks just because they didn't have enough regular companies to put in there, so they stayed in forming company for a week or two.

Interviewer: Was basic training really difficult for you, or what was your opinion of it?

Veteran: Being seventeen years old and having never been away from home and Mama for more than a week at church camp or something, it was a little difficult. I had grown men jumping up and down and screaming in my face and calling me names I had never heard before, so it wasn't as physically demanding as it was mentally. It was physically demanding, but it took a lot of getting used to.

Interviewer: So you were there for about nine weeks, and where did you go from there?

Veteran: I went to the 8th Coast Guard District, which is from Pensacola, Florida, to Brownsville, Texas—or it was at that time—and the headquarters for the 8th Coast Guard District was in New Orleans, so I was sent to New Orleans and stayed there for about two or three days , and then I was assigned to Captain of the Port Unit in Houston. I kind of swung that deal, because I was in a band in boot camp. I played my tenor sax in a band, and somebody in Seattle had paid for the Coast Guard marching band to cut a record, and I volunteered to stay. It wasn't but three days more for this record, and as a reward for that the band director pulled my green sheet, where you wrote down your choices of where you would like to be sent, and they usually sent you anyplace but there {Laughter}, but anyway, I got sent to the 8th Coast Guard District. I was stationed in Houston for just a little over a year.

Interviewer: What were your duties? Describe an ordinary day?

Veteran: When I first got there I was placed into what they called base maintenance pool, which I did yard work. I cut grass; I scraped paint on buildings; I cleaned floors. Just regular building and yard-type maintenance. Then I was sent down to the little utility boats that they ran up and down the ship channel as a deck seaman for a short period, and then I got a chance to do some office work since I could type, and I went up to help the yeoman, which is the military term for a secretary. I was processing port security cards that longshoremen, stevedores, and people that worked on the docks needed to get on community blocked ships. There were a couple of ships from Poland that we were selling grain to, and they had to have clearance to get on these things. They had to bring in pictures, and I had to take their fingerprints, and I had to send all of this off to the F.B.I., and all this rigmarole. I don't know if they even those require cards anymore.

Interviewer: Your particular service there with the Coast Guard didn't really involve weapons or anything of that nature?

Veteran: No. We had an armory that had weapons in it, and when a community blocked ship came into port, we had a dockside surveillance team that carried 45 caliber Colt automatic service revolvers, and they had a shipside surveillance that had an M-1 Garand, the weapon that you see the Army use in all the World War II movies, onboard that little thirty foot boat, but nobody had an occasion to use one.

Interviewer: You stayed there about a year and a half?

Veteran: About a year. I went in the Coast Guard in June and got out of boot camp in August. I was in Houston from August of '66 until October of '67.

Interviewer: And then they moved you?

Veteran: I had a chance to go to electronics school in New York City, New York—a little island off the tip of Manhattan called Governor's Island, so I went to New York City. I had extended my enlistment for four months to get to go to that school. I had to have three years left.

Interviewer: Was this school within the Coast Guard or was it totally separate?

Veteran: It was a Coast Guard school. I don't remember what branch of the service had this Governor's Island before the Coast Guard, but there were buildings and all types of schools already there. They had radio operator schools and other schools to teach people the crafts that they needed to maintain and operate the equipment in the service.

Interviewer: So you went to electronics school at New York City. How long did that take?

Veteran: Six months.

Interviewer: Did you enjoy that?

Veteran: It was rather grueling. Not that I think they would just out-and-out lie to you—they may have stretched the truth a little. They told us that we would get in those

six months the equivalent of three years of college. They crammed it in, but I learned quite a bit. When I went to that school, the only thing that I knew about electricity was that AC was in the wall socket and DC was in the battery—nothing else other than that.

Interviewer: Did you have a choice of electrical or radio school, or is that just where they wanted to send you?

Veteran: That's what I wanted to go to. I applied for it. When I got out of there, I was capable of working on receivers and transmitters for communications. I went from there to New Orleans to an electronics repair center, and there I worked on AM and FM communications—radios, radar, sonar. We had radio beacon transmitters at some of the down river stations that we were maintaining, also.

Interviewer: After the six months of school, they sent you to New Orleans?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: How long were you there?

Veteran: Two and a half years.

Interviewer: Is that where you finished?

Veteran: That's where I got out in 1970—August 19th.

Interviewer: What you just stated is everything you did at New Orleans?

Veteran: If a boat or one of the stations had a problem with their communication radios, they had a backup, like FM transmitters and receivers and AM transmitters and receivers. All the boats had both the FM and AM. At the down river stations, there's one at Southwest Pass, which was a Texas tower, which is a big round tube that had a spiral stairway in the middle of it, and the rooms were in the radial region around the outside of the center of the tube. They had radio beacon transmitters. South Pass had radio beacon transmitters. They were where the Mississippi River dumped into the Gulf of Mexico. The New Elms Light Vessel, which was an old World War II vessel, was stationed at the sea buoy for the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, which was another avenue of getting from the Gulf

of Mexico into the Mississippi River to go to New Orleans, which has a fair size port. They all three had radio beacon transmitters. They were in a chain of, I think, five or six stations. I can't remember for sure. But they each had their one minute timeslot period where they transmitted their call letters, like the New Orleans light vessel would use Morse Code to transmit NONONO, and it would do that for fifty seconds, and then the last ten seconds it would have a solid tone so that someone could get a fix on where they were from the direction that the signal was coming to them from, and once you get that one and then the next one, then you can try and relate and find out where you are. That's how they navigated. We also had LRAN units on boats, not transmitters, because we didn't have any LRAN transmitters but just the receivers. LRAN stands for Long Range Aid to Navigation, and we maintained those on the boats. That's another method of finding your position.

Interviewer: So when you say 'on the boats,' would these boats be brought to where you were and you would work on them, or were you actually ever out on a boat in the water.

Veteran: I was never stationed on a boat, but they had forty-foot utility boats that they ran up and down the river and into the ports. There were eighty-two footers that had communications gear—sonar and radar—and I would on occasion go on one of those to get me to wherever I needed to go to work on other things. I never was actually stationed on a boat or a ship. I was always attached to the land base, but I rode them to get to where the problem was with the radios or equipment. On one occasion, I even had to ride a helicopter all day long looking for a boat that they couldn't find that because the radio had gone out. Their AM radio had gone out, and they couldn't contact it on FM. FM is line of sight, and when you get far enough away in the curvature of the Earth, you can't receive. They were a little concerned about it. It was shortly after, I guess the best word is 'disaster'—we had a buoy tender called a 'white altar' that was somewhere between eighty and a hundred foot long that got ran over in the Mississippi River below a town called White Castle on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7th. I think that year was '68 or '69, and I can't remember how many men were on it—like sixty or seventy men or something, and there weren't but two or three guys that made it off alive.

Interviewer: That was someone you were actually looking for?

Veteran: No, I was looking for another one, but it was shortly after that, and they were kind of a little paranoid about not being able to make contact with it. I finally found it over in Morgan City.

Interviewer: And everybody was OK?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. That helicopter put me down on a little station that was close to there, and I rode a small boat over to the larger buoy tender and fixed the radios and went back to the helicopter, and rode back to New Orleans.

Interviewer: Well, that sounds pretty interesting. Did you like the helicopter ride?

Veteran: It got old after all day long up and down the river, and back and forth out in the Gulf. They didn't know where it was.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the equipment that you worked or trained with? Was it top-notch equipment? Was it just stuff that you just had to piece together?

Veteran: The tools I had to do my job with were up to par. They were good tools that were available at the time. As far as the hand tools and electronic equipment that we had to work our radios were always good equipment. A lot of the radios and the radars, some of them on the vessels were World War II vintage. I mean they were still workable, and they worked good—they did their job. They were just old technology. Before I got out, they got some newer AM communications radios that we put on most of the vessels. They were more modern technology. Most of the stuff that I worked on was tubes. The transistors were relatively new back then, and there was just a couple of instances where they had things that had transistors in them. Most of it was tube-type stuff.

Interviewer: What about the housing—where you stayed? What was that like?

Veteran: In Houston, they didn't have any barracks on base. They only had enough sleeping quarters for the ready and the standby boat crews. They had no mess facilities or food commissary-type facilities, so as a consequence, they paid us

extra money—which they called Subsistence in Quarters, S&Q—to eat and sleep off base. I had an apartment in Galena Park that I stayed in.

Interviewer: Did you stay by yourself, or did you room with somebody?

Veteran: I usually had at least one roommate, and sometimes I had two. We swapped around whenever better apartments came along, but then guys would get transferred. We always split the rent.

Interviewer: Was the money that they gave you sufficient?

Veteran: Oh, yeah—sure. It was more than sufficient. Without the Subsistence in Quarters, I think I would have been getting $55 every two weeks, but with the Subsistence in Quarters, I was getting $119, I think it was, every two weeks. It put lots of gas in my car, which I burned the roads up with.

Interviewer: At that time, I guess you didn't have off-duty time, or did you?

Veteran: Yes, we had duty. I can't remember for sure what type of duty—I think it was every third night, and every third weekend we had duty. I think that's the way I worked in New Orleans, too, although in New Orleans I didn't have to stay on the base like I did at Houston. In Houston, I had to be on the base for one of the boat crews, but in New Orleans I was on standby duty, which meant I had to be within an hour of the base so that I could go out when there was something broke and I could be there to go out and repair it.

Interviewer: When you say 'on base,' you mean when you were on duty?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Because the apartment was not on base.

Veteran: No, the apartment was a civilian apartment. I had an apartment upstairs over a dentist's office. When I first got to the base in New Orleans, they paid S&Q there, also. Now they moved the Captain of the Port over to right next door to where the Electronic Repair Service Center was, and they had barracks then, but by then I had gotten married, so I was still getting S&Q and had an apartment off base.

Interviewer: So you got married while you were in the Coast Guard when you were in New Orleans?

Veteran: Yes, that's correct.

Interviewer: What about your clothing and uniforms? How did that work? They gave you so many outfits, or what?

Veteran: Yes, when you went to boot camp they issued you a certain amount of clothing. You had dungarees, blue jean-looking outfits, and what they called chambray shirts, which is a blue work shirt. You had work blues and one set of dress blues. You had white uniforms for summer usage. Part of your pay, and I can't remember exactly how much it was, but it was for clothing allowance, so in that $55 every two weeks, $10 was in there for you to buy clothing with.

Interviewer: What else were you issued?

Veteran: Yeah, because things would wear out. You could order or purchase other clothing. In boot camp, they issued you everything. {Tape stopped then restarted} When you get there, you're in civilian clothes and they issue you all your clothing—your sea bag they called it—which is underwear and t-shirts, your dungarees, your chambray shirts, your blues, your whites, and they take you into a big gymnasium, I think, and they give you a big stencil kit, which was an ink pad. You broke the little plastic letters off and made you a stencil. You had a short stencil, which was your initials and your service number, and your long stencil was your last name and your two initials and your service number. You stripped off completely naked in front of everybody, and you were stenciling your clothing. You stenciled your underwear first and put them on. Those guys that were telling you how to do this, they had been doing it for months and months and months, and so they sat there with a very monotone drawl, and, "You have four sets of boxer shorts. You will get a small stencil, and that goes on the right hand side of the pants leg. Do it!" And they wouldn't give you time enough to stencil. People had stencils all over everything—ink everywhere. About forty or fifty naked guys in there trying to get their underwear stenciled so they could get their clothes on, and stuff all this into their sea bag and get out there and line up

like you were supposed. They only gave you a certain amount of time to do this. It was part of the mental harassment to prepare you, because their aim in boot camp was to break you down mentally, and build you back up again so that you would without question obey an order that was given to you, which in time of would be necessary. It could save your life. If you questioned an order, it could get you and other people killed or hurt, and that was their aim.

Interviewer: I guess in boot camp you did have to eat their food, but otherwise you really didn't?

Veteran: That's correct.

Interviewer: How was the food in boot camp?

Veteran: The food in boot camp was passable. It was alright. During your eight weeks there, your sixth week was your galley week, where you had to work in the kitchen and prepare the food. I'm sure they had some permanent cooks in there. Being in the band, I got out of galley week. We flew to Seattle for a week for the Seafarer Celebration and marched in parades every day for a week. It was pretty neat.

Interviewer: How did you get to be in the band? Was it a voluntary thing?

Veteran: Yes. I went my week in forming company, and I had two weeks in regular company, and then I turned in my M-1 for a saxophone.

Interviewer: What's an M-1?

Veteran: That's the rifle. Everybody had a rifle.

Interviewer: You probably didn't need it anyway being in the Coast Guard.

Veteran: No, in boot camp, they issued everybody and M-1, and it wasn't like they gave it to you when they gave you your sea bag. It was in the rifle rack at the barracks for the company that you were attached to. There was one of them that was yours, and they taught you how to do all of the left-shoulder/right-shoulder stuff.

Interviewer: So you traded that it for a saxophone?

Veteran: Tenor saxophone.

Interviewer: Had you played the saxophone in high school?

Veteran: I played the saxophone from the sixth grade through the twelfth grade in high school.

Interviewer: Did you have other friends or anybody else in your company that was also in the band?

Veteran: No one from my company, but there was a young feller that rode over on the airplane with me. He got held over in forming company so he was a week behind me, and he got into another company, but he got into the band, also. He played the base drum. He was from Columbus, Texas.

Interviewer: How long did that band thing last?

Veteran: Just through boot camp. The Coast Guard, unlike the other services, does not have a professional band. They had two professional musicians in the entire Coast Guard. One of them was the band director at Cape May, New Jersey—the boot camp on the East Coast—and the other one was the band director at Alameda, where I went. The band was made up of a nucleus of permanent-duty people—people that had other jobs there on the base. For instance, our drum major was a six foot seven inch skinny guy that was a damage control man, which is kind of like a general repair person that does carpentry or pipefitting work—Lynn Crissler(?) was his name. He could bend over almost thirty degrees backwards when he was marching. It was impressive for a seventeen year old.

Interviewer: Ya'll would have band practice every so often?

Veteran: Every day. We had band practice every day. When I got into the band, they moved me up into a different barracks, which was the band and Honor Guard, and the Honor Guard was the guys that did all the fancy twirling and the routines with the M-1 rifles, which had the big chrome-plated, shiny, sharp bayonets on the end of them. You may seen them on TV.

Interviewer: What was the last thing you recall doing with the band?

Veteran: We had a parade just about every weekend where we were the only people there that were trainees that got to leave the base during boot camp. We got to leave just about every weekend. The last thing I did with the band was to record the record that we made the Saturday after I graduated on a Friday. Sunday I had off, and then Monday I caught my airplane to Houston.

Interviewer: Did you get a copy of that?

Veteran: Yes, I did. I don't have it now. I had loaned it to the band director here at Hardin High School when my kids were in the band high school, and during the summer someone broke into the band hall and stole all of the records, and all of the stereo equipment, and my record went with it. Irreplaceable.

Interviewer: I don't know how you would ever get that back.

Veteran: You couldn't replace it.

Interviewer: What did you think of the quality of leadership?

Veteran: I think the leadership was adequate. It's like any other situation in secular life or business world. It depends on the individual. There were officers that were professionals that had been in there for quite a few years, and there were reservists that were doing their six months of active duty prior to going on to their reserve duty, and there were officers that had just gotten out of Officers Candidate School (OCS) that were not much more experienced than I was. By and large, I would say that most of the officers were adequate to do the job that we did. The job that I do, although we were in a wartime-type situation, it was way over there, and our job was mostly to police the waterways, to maintain the aids to navigation, and to do search and rescue missions for people that were in distress in the waters. Just a police action of the inland waterways.

Interviewer: Do you recall any cases of soldier violence from officers, like in boot camp or anytime? Did you experience any of that or see it take place?

Veteran: No, in fact the whole time I was in boot camp none of the non-commissioned officers or the commissioned officers either one even laid a hand on any of the recruits that I knew of. I saw no instances of it whatsoever. They would

mentally harass you, and scream and holler at you, and make you do a hundred and fifty pushups. The old Army back in the beginning of World War II and even afterward, and even maybe up into the Korean Conflict may have been a little more physical in the settling of some of the disputes, but I didn't notice that—certainly not with the officers. Some of the enlisted men would sometimes get a little rough and rowdy with each other, but not the officers.

Interviewer: When you were off-duty living in your apartment or wherever you were, what types of things did you do in your spare time?

Veteran: Mostly we drank a lot of alcohol and chased women.

Interviewer: That's probably what I was looking for.

Veteran: That seemed to be the thing to do.

Interviewer: When you were in boot camp, was drinking a big problem in your unit, and was it snuck in, or did people get in trouble for that?

Veteran: Not really. The boot camp that I was on was a small island in an estuary. There was about two or three foot of water and about ten foot of mud between you and the bank. There was a short bridge maybe fifteen or twenty yards long that connected the little island to the mainland, and it was guarded.

Interviewer: No drugs or anything like that?

Veteran: No drugs or alcohol. The electronics school was a little bit different. In boot camp, nobody got to leave. If they left, they were on a bus and they went to the naval station to do firefighting school, or they went someplace up in the hills for the rifle and pistol range to learn to shoot the weapons, and they were never out on their own during boot camp, so there was never any occasion for that.

Interviewer: I guess it's obvious you probably made a lot of friends during boot camp or even during this whole four-year experience. Do you still keep in touch with anyone, or do you know the whereabouts of any of these people that you met?

Veteran: No, I really don't. I haven't ever attempted to keep track of any of them. When I got out of the Coast Guard in New Orleans, I came back home and went to Lamar University for a couple of semesters, and I never did try to find any of them.

Interviewer: What did you think of the discipline in both boot camp and the other camp. Were the officers or generals moderate, fair, strict, or harsh?

Veteran: There were rules, and you always knew what the rules were. They were posted or told to you and explained to you. If you violated the rules, there were penalties for it, and the penalties were the same for everybody. Whether they were harsh or not, not really. I never was on the receiving end of a great deal of punishment. I never had a Captain's Mass or anything. I avoided one time I could have had a Captain's Mass by just volunteering to arbitrarily do a bunch of extra duty so it didn't go on my record.

Interviewer: What is that?

Veteran: When you violate and have an infraction of one of the rules. In this particular instance I was issuing port security cards. They were classified documents—the blank cards and the application forms—and they were in a cabinet that was supposed to be locked up, which I neglected to do one evening when I left the base. It was found to be open, and I had to count all the cards, and the fact that all the cards were there and there weren't any missing, there was actually no compromise of security of any kind, made it a lesser offense, and I was given the choice by the officer that was over me—an Ensign Scofield—to go to a Captain's Mass where the most I could have had would have been maybe fourteen hours of extra duty, or I could take about twice that much arbitrarily and avoid the Captain's Mass and have nothing on my record, which I did.

Interviewer: So Captain's Mass is something you wouldn't want on your record.

Veteran: It's like going before a judge when you get a traffic ticket. Maybe a little bit more severe, because the Captain's Mass you could be penalized in a lot of different ways. You could even get brig time, or go to jail in other words if the offense warranted it. There was no jury or panel of judges, it was just you and the captain.

Interviewer: So instead of doing that, you opted to do extra duties that kept you from having to do that.

Veteran: Yes, extra work after everybody else got off at the end of the work day.

Interviewer: Did you ever need to receive medical attention? What happened if someone got sick?

Veteran: Of course, there were doctors at boot camp. In Houston, you had to go to public health, but fortunately I never suffered any damage to my person in Houston. Now, in New Orleans after they built the new base next our base our repair center, and the Captain of the Port moved from Lake Ponchatrain over there to the Industrial Canal, they had corpsmen that I guess you would say they were skilled like an EMT today. They had medical skills, and once or twice a week they had a real, live doctor that you could see if you needed to, but the corpsmen could do things like stitch up your finger when you cut it open, lance boils, and things like that.

Interviewer: Do you remember any popular songs during this time?

Veteran: 1966 to 1970, there was a variety of songs that was popular. One of the songs that was popular in boot camp was *They're Coming to Take Me Away*. "They're coming to take me away—ha, ha—they're coming to take me away. It's the funny farm for me." {Laughter}

Interviewer: What about the songs that the band played. What kind of songs did the band play?

Veteran: The band played march music—John Philip Souza. The theme song for the Coast Guard is *Semper Paratus*, "always prepared." The Air Force has their song, and the Navy has their song. The Navy song is *Anchors Away*.

Interviewer: What military slang words or phrases were popular, like what you said the secretary was called?

Veteran: The yeoman—that was his occupation. There were storekeepers, and there were gunners mates that were skilled in the maintaining of the weaponry. Myself, I

was an ET, and electronics technician, and there were ATs, aviation technicians, TTs, telephone technicians, and bosons mates—you were a boatswains mate if you couldn't do anything else. {END OF SIDE A—START OF SIDE B}

Veteran: It's pronounced bosons mate. They were the boat drivers. You had an engineman that maintained the engines on the boats, and deck seamen that didn't have a particular occupation. They were the ones that handled the line, etc.

Interviewer: Did you recognize any instances of racial or religious discrimination?

Veteran: No. There were blacks in the Coast Guard, and Hispanics and Filipinos. I didn't notice any racial problems. As far as religious persecution, I wasn't really serving the Lord then, so that wouldn't have been something I'd have paid attention to.

Interviewer: As far as racial, the blacks and Hispanics were even in boot camp with you?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Previous to that time, everything was segregated, in World War II even.

Veteran: Probably yes. I know in high school, my senior year we integrated at Hardin—the fall of 1965. Some of them had to go there—they didn't have any choice. They were forced to.

Interviewer: Tell me again when you completed your service and when you went home.

Veteran: I got out in August 19th or 20th of 1970.

Interviewer: At the time you were still living in New Orleans?

Veteran: I was living on base in New Orleans. My wife had come to Texas and set up residency in Beaumont so that I could pay in-district fees and not out-of-district fees when I went to school. I got out of the service two months early to go to school. Although I extended my enlistment for four months, I got out two months only, so I only served four years and two months of active duty.

Interviewer: How did you get out two months early?

Veteran: I applied for it.

Interviewer: Did you use any of the benefits for your schooling?

Veteran: Yes. I used my V.A. schooling allowance to go those two semesters. I did an eighteen hour load the first semester and a nineteen hour load the second semester, and so I wasn't working anywhere. I was married and had a son that was about three years old, and I think I was getting $270.00 or $280.00 a month. It wasn't a whole lot.

Interviewer: Plus your schooling? They paid for all your schooling?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: What about medical benefits. Do you get those or use those today?

Veteran: I'm not entitled to any medical benefits from the service. You had to retire from the service to be able to have commissary and grocery store and medical-type benefits.

Interviewer: When you finished those two semesters at Lamar, what occupation did you have?

Veteran: I was just going to work for the summer and go back to school, but I never went back. I think I went to work for U.S. Steel in the tool repair cage, given my electronic background. That only lasted for the summer. They had a lay-off, and I got laid off.

Interviewer: So, even the occupation that you have today, can you say that what you learned being in the Coast Guard definitely helped you?

Veteran: Oh, definitely. At one point after U.S. Steel, I worked for six months in a television repair shop here in Liberty for a gentleman named Larry Hudson. Various and other sundry jobs that I had along the way, I finally got into the electrical profession by doing construction electrical work, and then moved on up in it from there.

Interviewer: One more question. Could describe your most memorable experience from serving in the military all those four years? What is the one particular story or anything that just stands out in your memory?

Veteran: In the two and a half years that I was stationed in New Orleans, I went through three hurricane seasons, and we had a hurricane every year that I was there. I can't remember whether it was the second one or the last one was the hurricane that wiped out Biloxi, Mississippi.

Interviewer: This was after boot camp?

Veteran: Yeah, this was when I was in New Orleans. I think it was something like a twenty foot wall of water—the tidal surge—and the winds were up two hundred miles an hour or something. It just really wrecked the whole Mississippi coast. I know I went down river to Venice, and the peninsula of the Delta got a little bit of that, but it turned to the east.

Interviewer: What year do you think that was?

Veteran: It was either '69 or '70. I can't remember the name of it right now for nothing. A couple of days after the storm had passed and gone inland, we went to Gulfport, Mississippi. There was a Coast Guard station there, and the highway that runs along the coast—Highway 90—there were nice big houses that looked like something out of the Old South mansions up the hill from the coast on the left as you were headed east, and on the right were the little gazebos with the boat houses, and all of those were gone. You could see the foundations and a few blocks. There were mid-sized boats pushed up on the bank, and in Gulfport there was even one large freighter that was beached that couldn't get out to sea quick enough to ride the storm out. When you were little, if you were playing at the beach in the sand and had built a bunch of stuff, and you got ready to go and just took your hand and wiped it all away, it was that devastating.

Interviewer: And you had never seen anything like that, I guess.

Veteran: I had never seen anything to that magnitude. Having lived on the Gulf Coast all my life, I had seen lots of hurricanes and storms, but that was really a bad one.

Interviewer: Would you encourage younger people today to join the military?

Veteran: I would, yes. I think that probably the best thing the military did for me, having not been terribly spoiled at home, but my father worked in the oilfield, and back in those days you worked for Humble Oil Company and made good money. I had plenty of clothes. When I was in high school, I got my drivers license when I was fourteen. I was always able to get the family car, and had money to go to the picture show. I just had it real easy. I never had to work. I did work a little bit with some of my cousins and did odd jobs, but when I got into the military, it taught me more and made me to mature, and gave me some of the values and work ethics that I have used all my life. It didn't do much for my moral values, but that came later in life. I finally woke up and decided that I needed to serve the Lord, but the military did good by me as far as teaching me how to be a man. I guess that's the best way to explain it.

Interviewer: It does that for everybody?

Veteran: If they allow it to. If they don't rebel and get thrown in the brig, or let it ruin their life. Even today, I use things that I used in the military.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}