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Interview Date: July 23, 2003

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Interviewee: Claude Sonnier
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: July 23, 2003
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA
Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW061
Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of "uhs" and "ums", repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. The interviewee is somewhat hard to understand and the interviewer often talks over him.]

Ethnographic preface:

Claude Sonnier was born in 1918 in Scott, Louisiana, into a farming family. He attended Southwestern Louisiana Institute (SLI) from 1937-40, earning a degree in electrical engineering. After graduating, he got a surveying job with S and W Construction, but was soon drafted into the Army during World War Two, where he stayed for five years. Upon leaving the military in December 1945, he was immediately hired by Humble Oil Company (now Exxon) and soon made operator. Three years later he was put in charge of his first crew. During his career he worked in many different locations including Florida, Houston, west Texas, east Africa, and the North Sea. In 1978 he retired from Humble after working for them for 32 and a half years. He describes working on a seismic crew in the late '40s, working in the Florida marshes, new technologies (e.g., 3-D instruments), and the various animals he encountered in the field.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [CS]

SW: Interview with Mister Claude Sonnier, it's July twenty-third, 2003, in the OCS office. Write your name down here. Can I ask you what year were you born, sir?

CS: Nineteen eighteen.

SW: Nineteen eighteen. And that was here in the Acadiana area?

CS: Yes, Scott.

SW: [Inaudible] Scott?

CS: Scott, yeah.

SW: That makes you old enough to remember the big flood then.

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: You remember-

SW: It was a bad scene? [Chuckles]

CS: Yeah, it was bad for us, but I mean it [Slight pause] floods of '27 you're talkin' about?

SW: Yeah. For the people east of here it was pretty bad, huh?

CS: Yeah. Pretty bad.

SW: What did your parents do for a living?

CS: Farm.

SW: They were farmers?

CS: Farm.

SW: You had any i-, you had any goals of becoming a farmer?

CS: No, sir.

SW: [Chuckles] Didn't wanna do that.

CS: Didn't, [uh uh?].

SW: You had mentioned that you went to college here at, it was SLI at the time.

CS: SLI, yes, I went '36 to, well '37 to '40. Graduated.

SW: And you started off in electrical engineering?

CS: Yeah.

SW: What, why did you go to electrical engineering, what made you-

CS: Well I had a com-, couple of cousins that graduated with electrical engineering. And I knew I wasn't gonna farm, so.

SW: [It was?] another option for you? [Chuckles]

CS: Yeah. That was the option.

SW: Did you have any goals of starting with the oil industry or did you have another idea-

CS: No, no, oh no. No. In 1940 you couldn't buy a [gallon?]. And the first job I had was to, well I was offered a job with [Arette?] to [climb poles?] and I said I'd rather pick cotton and, you know, I don't have to climb poles. But the, in about September I went to work for S and W Construction Company building Camp Livingston. I was a surveyor. There wasn't [electrical with it, I didn't learn enough, there was?] [Inaudible] difference between the electrical and mechanical and the civil. So.

SW: Oh, you took a lot of the same courses?

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CS: Oh yes, all the same courses. [Inaudible] difference between the three. So I went to work in [Inaudible]. But my draft number was pretty high. So I missed it, January draft of '41 'cause they had enough volunteers, but the second draft they caught me in March. So I spent five years in the Army.

SW: Did you do any, you see any action in Wo-, it must've been right-

CS: No, no, it was all in the State. I spent in the State.

SW: That was after school? After you finished here at SLI?

CS: SLI, yes. Yeah, it was in '41, see I finished in '40. But I worked five months for, building Camp Livingston. And I left there Wednesday, on a Wednesday and I came, I was back there the [Chuckling] Saturday as a draftee. I was number five to be drafted in Lafayette Parish.

SW: Oh really, the fifth person to be drafted? Wow.

CS: [Was?] there just for a year, but then the war declare. And then the, then they, you know, for the duration, see.

SW: You stayed here the whole time, so-

CS: Yeah, in the States here. But my electrical engineering degree kept me here, 'cause I went in as a [quasi?] control engineer with, I was with anti aircraft and I knew all the electrical parts and the other things, so.

SW: Oh so you were more valuable if you stayed here?

CS: Yeah.

SW: To the Army?

CS: Yeah, I [Inaudible].

SW: Better than puttin' you out there and gettin' shot at, huh?

CS: [Inaudible, overlapping speech] get shot. I left my outfit and I went to OCS so I could earn a little bit more money there.

SW: What's OCS?

CS: Officer Candidate School.

SW: Oh, Officer Candidate School, okay.

CS: Officer Candidate School.

SW: This project is called the OCS project, but it's Offshore Continental Shelf. [Chuckles] Kind of confuses me sometimes. What did you do after the Army, after you-

CS: After Army, well I started to stay on, but my old colonel called me into his office, he says, "Sonnier," he said, "Get out while you got a chance." He says, "You're not a regular Army. In peacetime," he said, "you're not gonna," I had promoted to captain and I started to stay, but I, 'cause I knew I couldn't find a job. I thought that [Inaudible], but then I was discharged in Fort Bliss, Texas, and I road the train, I stopped in Houston then I got hired right off the bat.

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SW: Oh really?

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CS: Oh yeah, they short of men for that type of work.

SW: What company did you get hired on-

CS: Ex-, uh, Humble Oil at the-

SW: Humble at the time, okay.

CS: Humble Oil.

SW: They were lookin' for people?

CS: Oh yeah, yeah they were shorthanded.

SW: Okay. That was just after the war then, so they didn't-

CS: Yeah, it was January. So I, that was in December of '45 when I stopped in Houston.

SW: So if all the boys were still away fighting and some of 'em weren't [coming?] back home-

CS: No, oh no, no. They were all, everybody was out. I didn't, the reason I didn't get out before that 'cause you had to have so many points. You get extra points you go overseas and extra points if you're married, I was single. So you had to wait, I don't remember how many points you had to have, but it, that's why I was discharged late in December of '45. The war had been ended before.

SW: Oh I see. So they hired you and you took the position?

CS: Yeah.

SW: It was a-

CS: I was [detached helper?] they called it in the days. But I made operator, which is, I was operating the instruments. I was familiar with all that stuff before.

SW: Oh, with the seismic crew.

CS: Sure, yeah.

SW: That you were workin'. Well-

CS: The recording instruments with a camera, you know. 'Cause that's all we had was that wiggly [trace?] that you saw that guy lookin' at. That's all we have in those days until we got to an analog deal back in the late '50s. Then '60 was starting to goin' digital recording in the field. But you still took a wiggly trace record every shot. Yeah.

SW: That's a good way to tell what was happening.

CS: Oh yeah, you could tell if your instruments is working.

SW: Well besides the fact that you, it was difficult to find a job, what else drew you to the oil industry?

SW: They offered you a position-

CS: I was look-, I was lookin' for a job period. Period. I didn't wanna go back in, on the farm.

SW: And so this is a good opportunity that presented itself.

CS: Yeah, [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

SW: Okay. Was, how was the pay in the oil industry at the time?

CS: The pay was good compared to some, 'cause it was 209 dollars a month back in '46.

SW: Two oh nine. So that was better than within somethin' else?

CS: Oh yeah-

SW: Better than farmin'. [Chuckles]

CS: Better than farming and. [Slight pause]

SW: Is that something that made it attractive to you?

CS: Well, yeah, but I was, wanted to work.

SW: Wanted to work anyway, it didn't really matter, huh?

CS: Yeah, it didn't matter.

SW: What kind of schedule did they have you guys workin' at normally on a seismic crew?

CS: On a seismic crew with the, see we had to work, all the crews are working except on the land with the quarter boats. When you [Inaudible] offshore on the boats were worked nine days and off five. Then we, the hours, you couldn't shoot anything before sun up or after sun down, so that was the state law and the conservation law. But sometimes we worked long days depending on the weather. Sometimes we didn't work at all. Stayed down in the quarter boats when the weather was so bad. Sometimes it's too cold or somethin' like that.

SW: What, you couldn't shoot anything before or after sunrise, was that because of some, was that a danger?

CS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. See we had a state conservation [mad with us?] all the time. We had to pay... 350 dollars a month to [stay with us/surveying?] and then [boarding?] of course. And he made sure that we didn't violate any, do any damage or anything like that.

SW: The oil company had to pay him?

CS: Yeah. Oh yeah.

SW: But you had no choice, he had to be down there with you any way.

CS: No, no, it was a polic-, political job. [Chuckles]

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SW: Ah. Sounds like a, an easy thing.

CS: Oh yeah, it was a. [Slight pause]

SW: And he'd follow you guys around and he'd look over your shoulder-

CS: Oh, he st-, stay with us all the time.

SW: All the time.

CS: They was all good guys [Inaudible]. But we [did?], we didn't do anything to hurt the environment or anything like that.

SW: What kind of laws did they have at that time? Besides you couldn't shoot dynamite before or after sunrise. What else kind of rules did you guys have to follow?

CS: Well we didn't have much rules, we just stayed on [Chuckling] the straight and narrow path. In other words, you had to... but-

SW: Don't put dynamite on somethin' that you weren't supposed to blow up? [Chuckles]

CS: Yeah. And see when we first started, they didn't have this [nitromon?], it was nitroglycerine. And that was kind of dangerous. [You put the, yeah?] you watched, you didn't get it on your hands and rub your face with it, you'd get a headache [really quick?].

SW: Oh really?

CS: Yeah, we was in the f-, Atchafalaya Basin one time, this black bear, I don't know, there could've been more than one. [They ate?] 50 pounds [of this?]. I mean they chewed it up. They, [it was heavy cardboard?] wrap a little bit of wax on it. They chewed all that up and then, I mean, they ate every bit of that nitroglyc. They must've had [Chuckling] some terr-, headaches.

SW: It didn't kill 'em?

CS: Well I don't know, we didn't see 'em.

SW: Maybe they [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

CS: It probably [did?]. They walked away from that. Like I say, we didn't go look for 'em. [SW chuckles] That swamp, you didn't wanna walk away. You just walkin' for yourself most of the time tryin' to get out of it. When you walk in mud and stuff like knee deep and so.

SW: To your ankles. Well that's what I've asked you before, you walkin' around in the swamp, they have alligators and bears and snakes and all.

CS: Yeah. Well the bears, we didn't see any. They come in at night, you know, they fool around with the instrument. See all the instruments we packed we'd find the stump or somethin' at night or cut some limbs and then make a [Inaudible] cover 'em with a [Inaudible]. When we walk out the only thing we had to walk out with 's a battery. We had to have a heavy-duty battery to operate those instruments all day long. Have to bring it in to charge it at night on the quarter boat.

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SW: Oh, so you could leave everything else out there, but you had to bring that battery back and recharge it so that you could use it the next day.

CS: But they was a heavy, they was, oh, 50 pounds and they had a s-, bucket to hold it in there, put, to put it on your back, you know, they strap. We had good padded straps, they wasn't too comfortable. Then we'd take turns walkin' it [up?].

SW: It must've been hard to walk in the swamp carryin' 50 pounds on your back.

CS: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

SW: You didn't sink all the way down? [Chuckles]

CS: Ah yeah. It wasn't easy.

SW: You showed me the picture of that guy standin' up in the pirogue.

CS: Yeah.

SW: On his head.

CS: Yeah.

SW: Did some guys, was it easier for some guys to walk in the swamp than others?

CS: Oh yeah, I mean those guys, man they had one guy, he wouldn't get wet hardly. He'd hop along. [Pousan?] the name, I'll never forget [his name?]. He could walk around the swamp like a frog [Chuckling] jumpin'.

SW: Well he was a local? A local boy?

CS: Yeah, well they were raised, born, we had quite a few that were born and raised in the swamp.

SW: Oh-

CS: See those in the pirogue, now they grow up in the swamp. They were trappers and they were fishermen, you know.

SW: Oh the company hired those guys too?

CS: Oh yeah, yeah, we hired a lot of local guys. Lot of 'em were in that [Inaudible] and stuff like that.

SW: Okay. And they knew their way around the swamps.

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: So they could help you guys out. Oh that's, what about uh... what about the conditions of, when, you sleep on the quarter boats right?

CS: Yeah.

SW: Okay. I guess if you can't do any work before sunrise or after sunup, so I guess you were maybe 10 hours a day you were out there doin' work or somethin' like that?

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CS: Yeah, well it mostly, it was less than that the actual work. 'Cause most of the time we come in early, you know, that's when they show off on the pirogue and stuff like that. You'll be sittin' on the deck of the quarter boat, everybody watchin' them and-

SW: [You're?] foolin' around.

CS: Yeah, they fool around. 'Cause they had some of 'em, you dare 'em to do somethin', I mean they do it. We dare one guy, we had a deep channel there way above his head, we dared him to walk down with a [reel?] on his back. You know, reel that, you see me winding? You put 'em on your back, you know, and lay there and then you put 'em in the, your front to reel the cable back in. It was about a quarter inch cable with six [conductors?] in there. And-

SW: He had to put it on his back and walk in the water?

CS: Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. He, we dared him [Chuckles] and I'll be doggone, he walked under water, it was pretty wide and we had to pass him to go around and walk on dry ground. [Chuckling] You didn't tell 'em to.

SW: Some of those trappers are a little crazy? [Chuckles] It sounds like.

CS: They just, they had some character.

SW: [But uh?], when you back to the boats after workin' all day, did you have to, the information that you had, did you have to process anything?

CS: No, see we had two men, they were usually geologists, they did the interpretation. They was on the quarter boat and then they was in the office and they stayed there all day long and they did, do the interpretation. We'd bring 'em into, bring the records in, put in the engine room, and then dry 'em up, and then they did, start workin' on 'em. And they spend a day there.

SW: So when you came back from bein' out in the field all day, you didn't have to work anymore.

CS: Yeah, you have to clean up and then-

SW: Eat and sleep and what have you.

CS: Eat and eat and sleep. We ate good. Some, of course some of 'em always complain, you know. I kept tellin' that they, when I had the crew, you know, I say, "If you can eat better than that, you've got no business to be workin' here in the swamp." [SW chuckles]

SW: They had some good food out there?

CS: Oh, oh yeah it was good.

SW: They fed you guys well?

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: Wanted to keep you happy.

CS: We had a good cook.

SW: What else could you do if you, after you were eating if you didn't want to go to sleep? What kind of entertainment did-

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CS: Oh they had [Chuckles] poker games or somethin' like that down there they'd, and then [Inaudible] oh yeah, they always had a card game goin' on.

SW: Did they gamble money?

CS: Oh then they had TV, TV.

SW: Did they gamble money in the poker game?

CS: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, they'd gamble.

SW: A lot of money?

CS: Oh yeah. [Chuckles]

SW: They ever have any hurt feelings sometimes?

CS: Yeah. We had to work, working in Gonzales. Got off the quarter boat and then we, what they call a suitcase. You go over there and work a weekend and off a week. And one old boy, he got started on a slot machine, he [Inaudible] he said, "Mister Mason," he says [Chuckling] "I've gotta have some more money." And you know, he was one of the [Inaudible] standin' on his head. But he [Inaudible] in the swamp all the time, the little w-, the slot machine [Chuckling] got the best of him. That was back in '47. And, well see he had to quit, he says, "I'm sorry, but," he says, "I can't make it on that pay that I had." He was doin' all right quarter boat, see.

SW: [Inaudible]-

CS: He'd lose a little poker, but sometimes he'd win, you know. But [Chuckling] slot machine you don't beat 'em.

SW: No, they always eventually get it back from you. [Chuckles]

CS: Oh yeah, yeah.

SW: You said y'all watched TV out there too?

CS: Yeah, they had TV.

SW: Had TV. Could y'all catch good reception out in the swamp?

CS: Oh yeah, we had pretty good, but it was just local station. We had [installed/a tall?] antenna on the quarter boats that.

SW: You said you were working a nine days on and five days off at that time?

CS: Yeah.

SW: How did y'all, how did you get out of the quarter boats?

CS: Well they usually met at the landing and they had a speed boat, crew boat that they carried us all to the, met at a certain time and you park your car over there or somewhere.

SW: And from the quarter boats y'all had swamp buggies or the pirogues-

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CS: The pirogues. Little skiffs and stuff like that to.

SW: 'Kay, 'cause yeah, because you were going into places where the big boats couldn't go, right?

CS: Couldn't go.

SW: Yeah, I see. It sounds like a little dangerous, too, foolin' around with all this dynamite and nitroglycerine. [Chuckles]

CS: Yeah, oh yeah, nitroglycerine, nitromon is pretty safe if you, you don't have the problem with it. I mean, it just-

SW: It's okay.

CS: It's okay. And we kept the primers locked in a box separate, the little things that.

SW: The guys that actually had dynamite in their hands, did they have a lot of training?

CS: Yeah, no, oh no. They just regular guys, but they knew not to fool around.

SW: What kind of safety procedures did you have to follow? Did the company have specific rules that you always had to follow?

CS: Oh, oh yeah, oh yeah.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

CS: Yeah, but see we did, on the boats, that's where it was dangerous [from the thing?]. You couldn't have but one shot line on the boats at one time. We had an extra shot line in case one of 'em breaks. But then it couldn't be on deck of the boat. It's back deck or, but you have to let it drag out, oh, about 150 feet away from the boat to keep from [hurtin'?] the boat through the concussion.

SW: Oh it had to be that far out?

CS: Yeah, that far out. So, but the, and then the, they had the safety switch that they had to use [Inaudible]. In other words, you couldn't be diddlin' around and [crashin' your ear?] with just one switch, see. We had two, you had to pack two [hands?] and they was separate and they, there's no way you could, when you tell the shooter that you were ready, then you lift both [handles?] and then the shooter would set the charge off inside the cabin.

SW: You never really did any of that, you were workin' with the machines.

CS: Yeah, yeah-

SW: The measuring machines?

CS: Operatin' machines.

SW: You stayed with Humble for your whole career?

CS: Oh yeah, [stayed with Humble?].

SW: You said 32 years I think.

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CS: Thirty-two and a half years exactly.

SW: What year did you retire sir?

CS: Seventy-eight. In July the first, '78.

SW: I like to ask this question because I know the oil industry does [Gesturing] this and this and this and this. Did you ever have any concerns that you might lose your position or your job because there was a downturn or did you-

CS: Not, not really. Not the position I was in, see. See I was a operator, operated the instruments for about three years and then they gave me a crew, a [party?] chief that runs the crew. And actually I didn't, now they, see we went in June of '46 we went offshore with a crew. I went out as a operator, operatin' the instruments. And then in about mid '47 the observer on the crew that I was on, the swamp crew, got sick, so I had to leave that, leave there and go relieve him. Then I stayed there for about six months and he got better, then they formed another offshore crew and I went on the other offshore crew as the observer. Then in '51, 'bout in June of '51 they decided to open up another crew offshore, so they gave me that crew and I was. [Slight pause]

SW: Oh I see.

CS: So. [Slight pause]

SW: You kind of stayed busy then, you had-

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: You had a position where you were um-

CS: Oh yeah. See-

SW: You were kind of stable.

CS: Oh yeah. Yeah, I [Inaudible].

SW: Did you ever see a lot of other people go get laid off or-

CS: Not, not too much. [Well?], in '58, see, they shut down the offshore crew altogether. That's when I had the offshore crew, but then I went back to [Inaudible] that quarter boat crew. [Slight pause]

SW: So they at first uh, I guess, could you say they moved out into the swamps from land first?

CS: Yeah.

SW: And then they went off in the marshes and then they went offshore, is that kind of how it-

CS: [Inaudible, overlapping speech] yeah they [Inaudible], I don't know what [Inaudible] the company, major company decide on that, but they just had idea I guess.

SW: Started getting a-

CS: But then they, back in '58 they started using contract crew. That way in case they had to lay off they, 'cause see it was costin' more for the benefits than the company, we had a good benefits and other thing, retirement. So they'd hire a contract crew and then when they were through, then they let 'em go.

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SW: They didn't have to pay those guys benefits.

CS: Pay those guys benefits.

SW: They just contract 'em for six months and then they're done. Was that a standard procedure in the oil industry?

CS: Oh yeah. [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

SW: With all the companies?

CS: Yeah, they's, all the companies did the same thing.

SW: Yeah. And that was motivated by the money, the benefits?

CS: Oh yeah they [try to?] [Inaudible].

SW: I see. What, how did you see that the equipment that you used in your job, how did that evolve? How did that change?

CS: Oh it, you couldn't get a percentage high enough to, how much it improved. In the [Inaudible] everything, 'cause at first out there we had to sweat it out to get [10?] amplifiers to work and then we get to we had 48 amplifiers, 48 [set of?] geophone offshore. On land they had 24; they started off with just six in the swamp.

SW: And that was as many as they could do.

CS: As many as [Inaudible].

SW: And the measuring equipment got better too you said.

CS: Oh-

SW: You went from the geophone to the analog?

CS: Yeah.

SW: And then digital.

CS: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. But uh, at first it was just a plain old [galvanometer?] deal that recorded. And it, you recorded analog, then you could reproduce it and everything. This other wiggly trace you couldn't, you could reproduce it but it is not, it wouldn't be easy or anything like that.

SW: And you said that the little trace marks, it wasn't on paper, it was on film, right?

CS: Yeah-

SW: It actually put [Inaudible] on film.

CS: Put it on film.

SW: You guys had to develop it in the [field?].

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CS: Yeah, in the field, yeah. [Down?] on the land crew we had a d-, we just closed the door in the operatin' cabin. And you had a red light so then you could see what you were doing. The other way you had to use [Inaudible]. But I did that in the Army, see, we had that same thing in the Army.

SW: Oh so you were trained for it, you knew.

CS: Oh yeah, yeah.

SW: Well how did, when the new technology came out, though, what did you, did you have to learn somethin' new?

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: Or you kind of understood it?

CS: I, I had to go to school all the time in Houston.

SW: [Inaudible]-

CS: [We had a?] new set of amplifiers, somethin' like that, you have to go to Houston.

SW: The company would-

CS: [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

SW: Company would pay for your training and show you how use it and everything.

CS: Mother used to say [Chuckling] "You ever gonna quit goin' to school?" I [Inaudible] [Chuckles] Scott's [Inaudible], she was livin' in Scott then. [Pause]

SW: Do you have any regrets for workin' in the oil industry like you did?

CS: [Barely audible] Oh no, oh no, no regrets.

SW: You enjoyed your work?

CS: Oh yeah, I enjoyed my work. I didn't enjoy Houston traffic, but that's, at the end. See when I left, I was in Fort Myers, Florida, for two years before I went to Houston. And then I, when I first went to Houston it wasn't bad. [Data processing?] [Inaudible] doin' the checkin' the field records. They all, one, all the crews, we had about 15 crews, they all come in there and I had to monitor record from each crew. [Slight pause]

SW: That was okay.

CS: The crew would take a test record in the mornin' before they started working. And then we run that. If you had problem develop [when they're?] processing, then we go back and recheck it to make sure that they, it was alright.

SW: I see. And that wasn't too bad.

CS: Oh no.

SW: But then the city grew too much. [Chuckles]

CS: [Oh yeah?].

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SW: You mentioned, you talked to me about the Everglades too, when you were in Florida. And you showed me the picture of where y'all were drilling. You had said I think um, the marsh in Louisiana was a lot more soft.

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: A lot softer. But y'all had to use that drill.

CS: Oh yeah, we had to have a drill, that quarter boat crew, [well?] you see the drilling rig that, they drilled maybe s-, 150, 200 foot hole. Set the charge at the bottom. You had to have the charge in somethin' solid. Now you think the old river bottom they call it on this side of the Mississippi now, but the old river went there. Texaco drilled some wells there. And they dropped the surface casing, which is a big casing 'bout 700 feet before they hit somethin' solid. The silt had built up. And we shoot a line across that and we couldn't get nothin', it was just, out wiggly trace was just a straight line. That's muck and stuff like that [Inaudible] they wouldn't reflect back up.

SW: That's from the Mississippi, right?

CS: Yeah, that-

SW: It would just spread everything out like that. It was different when you were in Florida. You said there was a limestone down there.

CS: Oh yeah, over there it's altogether different set up.

SW: Yeah. The ground is a lot more firm.

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: Right there, so y'all drilled just three feet, you said, and drop a charge in there.

CS: Yeah.

SW: Did you prefer workin' in the Florida marsh or the Louisiana marsh? [Chuckles]

CS: Well the Florida marsh was easier to get around in. But only, Florida they had alligators but the worse part were the rattlesnake. Oh they-

SW: They have rattlesnakes over there?

CS: Oh, great big ones. They had a lot of food to eat I guess. They were big. And I had a lot of rattlesnake in west Texas on the Matador Ranch over there. But then they wasn't anything compared to Florida.

SW: Really? Wow. What about the water moccasins here in-

CS: In Louisiana, oh, they had quite a few. I had one guy when I had the crew that was bit by a water moccasin. He stayed in the hospital a week. His arm just [spread out?], he had big arms to start off with, but-

SW: It swoll up.

CS: Big, swolled up.

SW: He had the poison inside.

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CS: Yeah. And they said that a snake won't bite you underwater, but he was reaching, he had [Inaudible] the propeller on his boat, a small [Inaudible]. He reached underneath that to reach it and that's when she, snake bit him.

SW: And underwater.

CS: Underwater.

SW: Ah.

CS: And they [swoll?]. So that's a bunch of-

SW: Yeah. See I've always heard that, too [CS coughs] that they won't bite you underwater.

CS: Yeah. That's not so.

SW: Not in that case, huh. He can tell different.

CS: Oh yeah. You can tell different.

SW: What do you think the oil industry has done for Louisiana? Or south Louisiana?

CS: Oh [Inaudible], got it on its feet by god. It's a pity that, pity the politicians kind of messed things up. You know, they had a depletion allowance that the, if you drilled a dry hole you could run [out the costs?] and then not pay taxes on it. But the, Russell Long had a small oil company, see, the Long faction they confiscated all that oil [to that?]. And he voted to get rid of it for the major company and even for the small company. So you see a bunch of small companies spring up, but they couldn't hold a line [Chuckles] so they finally conked out. But then the meantime, that was a good deal for the major company to recover their lost. They got a lot of, they had a well offshore Alabama, over there, it cost over a million dollars. And it dry hole. So you gotta make a few dollars to catch that up, you know. And like I said, we didn't average more than one out of nine.

SW: One of n-

CS: [Inaudible].

SW: You think the odds are better, you said, now because of the 3-D seismic and all that.

CS: Ah yeah, 3-D come. Incidental, I worked on that 3-D deal, [help out with the?] instruments at north Crowley Field when they first started, '63. Exxon got the credit to develop that 3-D.

SW: Okay, I've heard that before.

CS: Yeah. And they uh, but see they, the engineers in Houston didn't have the [trucks?] and the instrument. And we had a crew workin' in Crowley. I was on that, I was originally, that was the original crew I was on when first started, but then the, it was on a land crew. And they had the instruments and everything right out of Crowley. And any time you [started something new?] you shoot between two wells that you had a known log that you can tell which way it dips or anything like that. On the Matador Ranch we shot between two wells and we had a [seis?] dip [Chuckling] [where the?], the dip was to the north from the well log. So you just, it was unpredictable, I mean, at time.

SW: But you enjoyed that type of work? You-

CS: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Oh, it was challenging.

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SW: Well it sou-, seems like you worked in a lot of different locations and it was always somethin' different you had to deal with.

CS: Yeah, but I went bird dog a crew in the North Sea in '64. 'Bout four months over there. And that was the worst records. I could, we shoot close to shore the high cliffs and stuff like that, Cliffs of Dover and stuff like that. And I, man, we get a rebound and reverberates, you know, that messed up record.

SW: Mess up everything. Made it difficult to do.

CS: Yeah.

SW: But I know they, they're still doin' a lot of exploration out there.

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: But they're going very deep.

CS: Yeah. That was in '64. We didn't have the right boat. The boats they were designed for the Gulf of Mexico, had no business to be in. But I was bird dogging, they call it bird dogging a crew, contract crew. Western Geophysical. They had to have a company man with that crew to make sure that they kept things in order. [Chuckles] Then I went to east Africa, on the coast of east Africa. That was pretty good shooting. The only thing we had sharks over there and they'd chew up our cables.

SW: The sharks would eat the cable?

CS: Oh yeah, they ate the cable. They had a, they call [a bird, they had control on the boat, it was just flaps on the airplane?]. You could make it dive, you get the cable to dive down. You didn't want any wave action on your geophone. So you had to begin to dive down. As long as you had it down, but when it comes to the surface those sharks would just puncture those, and when they puncture hole in there, it was a [violent?] tubing on there. They had oil in it and, to keep insulation, and the oil conductor inside. And they chewed that up. They had a, those birds had a three-quarter inch [monal?] shaft to, for those wings. And one shark hit it and bent that shaft, and you could see the teeth marks on that [one time?]. So it must've had a bunch of tooth ache. [Chuckles]

SW: That sounds like some big sharks though.

CS: Oh yeah, they had some big ones.

SW: They were, they-

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: You wouldn't want to go in the water, huh? [Chuckles]

CS: Oh no. And we shot all along the coast of east Africa. I was on a United Geophysical crew there. No, I can't complain at all about my work.

SW: It sounds like you've had some exciting times, too.

CS: Yeah.

SW: You've really done a lot.

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CS: Yeah.

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SW: That's excellent. Well I thank you for the interview.

CS: Yeah.

SW: It was very-

CS: The only thing-

SW: Very informative.

CS: Only thing I regret when I got out I didn't like mortgages, so I sold half of my stock, company stock to keep from paying mortgage on my new house here.

SW: Oh okay. [Chuckles]

CS: And then I made the mistake 'cause the stock split three times-

SW: And then you would've made a, made up all that money on it.

CS: Oh yeah.

SW: Oh well. Live and learn, huh? [Chuckles]

CS: It's too late. [Chuckles]

[END OF RECORDING]

