

HHA # 00304
Interviewee: Ronnie Miguez
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: January 14, 2003
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA
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Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling and repeated words have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability.]

Ethnographic preface:

Born in 1942, Ronnie Miguez was raised in Iberia Parish; he spent most of his school years in New Iberia, living with his grandparents, but went to middle school in Weeks Island. His father did a number of jobs, but spent 27 years doing carpentry work for a briquette plant. After graduating high school in 1962, he spent a few months working as a butcher, before getting a job with Peanut Well Service as a derrick hand off Avery Island. After two weeks he thought he could do better than that job and went to work for Weston Auto, but after six months of that he found it was not enough to support his family. Over the next few years he worked for Wilson Supply in Houma and Harvey, and for Schlumberger in Broussard. With Schlumberger he worked as a hot shot driver and was appointed liaison to the company grievance committee. After being fired, he spent three years doing work with floor covering. Since 1975 he has done contract drilling and construction work as a crane operator for a variety of companies both in the U.S. and abroad. Currently he operates a crane for Fluid Crane out of New Iberia. He describes how politics eventually led to his termination with Schlumberger. He also discusses safety and accidents offshore, and how some company men continue to use intimidation to get workers to do unsafe things. He talks at length about life on the rig in terms of horsing around, harassment, drugs, and alcohol.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [RM]

SW: Interview with Mister Ronnie Miguez in the OCS office. The date is January fourteenth, 2003. And let's see uh... just a little bit of background. [You know Regina?] and everything, I know you live in Rayne-

RM: Rayne, Louisiana.

SW: Are you from Louisiana?

RM: Oh I was originally born and raised in Iberia Parish. New Iberia for a number of years. I lived there as a kind comin' up on the uh, Weeks Island, which is 20 miles south of New Iberia. My father was a trapper for a number of years and when we got school aged, they remained on Weeks Island and I moved to New Iberia to live with my

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grandfather and grandmother for a number of years. And then I went back to Weeks Island probably went to sixth grade, finished junior high, then came back to Catholic High for one year and finished up at Senior High.

SW: Did you go on to college?

RM: No, I didn't go to college, no. [Slight pause]

SW: What year were you born?

RM: Nineteen forty-two. [Pause]

SW: You said the, what did your mother do?

RM: Mostly housewife, homemaker. She worked a little bit at a drugstore, used to be old Gary's Drugstore in New Iberia. She worked over there for awhile, not, no, not very long.

SW: But your father was a trap-, fur trapper?

RM: No, he was a trapper, started that, he worked in a [bee?] business uh, he worked, majority of his time was as a carpenter at Weeks Island in a, not in a salt mine, but in, outside what they call a [briquette?] plant, acid plant, and he was doin' carpentry work for 'em and stuff. The cement slabs and what have you. He put in about 27 years over there.

SW: After high school what did you uh, what did you end up doing?

RM: Well first [Chuckles] first job I think I ever had uh, I worked at a butcher store down in Louisa. Got to learn how to cut meat. I stayed there probably about uh, three or four months. From there I went to uh, started off into the oilfield with uh, Peanut [SS?] Well Service workin' as a uh, as a derrick hand. First time on a little drilling rig, workover rig, workin' off Avery Island. Workin' for Exxon. And they put me in the derrick. Didn't know anything about drilling rigs, I had never seen a drilling rig. And put me in a derrick breakin' pipe with a 24-inch pipe wrench. And that's how we, we come out, that was just a daylight operation, work from six in the mornin', six at night, seven days a week. And makin' six fifty an hour. That was the thing I tell people today. I say, "Look at the wages," you know. But then those days everything was a lot cheaper than what it is today. Gasoline was 17 cents a gallon. Nobody, we couldn't, you know you envision you know that today you're paying a dollar seventy-five, we were paying 17 cents a gallon at the time. And we went a lot further.

SW: That was, that would make it around the late '50s that-

RM: No it was the '62, '63.

SW: Sixty-two, '63.

RM: Sixties, I got out of school it was '62. [Slight pause] And I didn't stay there but about two weeks. I realized that I had, I had a high school education, but I said, "I believe I can do a little bit better than this." And one of the things that impressed me gettin' the high school education at the time was that when I interviewed for this job, they had two men sittin' in the office applyin' for the same job, had years of experience, but could not read or write. And I got that job because I had that high school education. Just that little, I bring that up to a lot of people, a lot of young kids that I can talk to the importance uh, you know, 20 years from now you're gonna have to have a college education. It's almost to that point now. But years ago that high school education was the ticket. And made me realize how important it was at the time. You know, see these guys had seven, eight years experience and I got that job primarily because I had that high school education and I could read and write. You know, they could probably work circles around me on a job.

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SW: But like you said they had all the experience.

RM: They had all the experience.

SW: What brought you from, was it the butcher shop when you went to the derrick hand?

RM: It was the, was drawn to what, probably money, financial reasons. And, 'cause I was still single, I wasn't married or anything. And when I left that, I thought, I went to work for Weston Auto. We inside sales uh, workin' on commission and salary. And when I got married that's where I was workin' at. But within six months, I, I say, "Hey, we can't afford a family right here. Not on this type of work." And that's when I ventured into the oilfield just about full-time after that. I went to work for Wilson Supply drivin' hot shot in Houma. I had to move the family to Houma, left New Iberia and went to Houma. And started in the oilfield there, worked myself up to uh, to office manager, and they put me runnin' a store in Harvey, Louisiana. I stayed there a few years and from there they wanted me to go open up a store in Venice. And I could not see movin' the family to [Chuckling] Venice, Louisiana. Uh, it was to me is no place to raise a family. And I turned that down, I got into Wilson S-, uh, the fishing tool division. I came back to Houma from Harvey, worked fishin' tools, learned how to clean tools, learned the uh, the downhole of fishing tool end of the oilfield business for about six months. And then I went to work for Schlumberger [liquid line?]. That was uh, probably one of the better moves I made there. It was uh, one of the premier, and it's still a large conglomerate today worldwide. And it started slowin' down uh, oh about '67, '68. I got an offer to transfer closer to home and I worked in the uh, production side of Schlumberger in Broussard, sorry. I was able to move back to New Iberia, but work out of Broussard. And that's where the politics come in to play even with jobs in the oilfield. You had a lot of personality clashes and Schlumberger had a, had what you call a grievance committee and they had one person uh, every three months you would meet with the district manager and one district member from every location in southwest Louisiana. And you had to run for that office. And it was set up to discuss all of the inner problems within a company, within your district.

SW: With people?

RM: With the people, the people you're workin' with and who we're workin' among and with. And I ran for that office uh, and got elected over a lot of older people that was there. And then you, I, you know, I would speak up. And then they had a box, a suggestion box, and once every three months I had to take everything out of this suggestion box. And if it was open I could discuss it with the location manager. But if it was a sealed envelope, I had to take it to Lafayette and that didn't fair well with the location manager. Anytime somebody had somethin' sealed they didn't want to discuss with him, they wanted me to discuss it with the higher up, it made, it made him kind of look bad, because he wasn't takin' care of business. And we had people that were terminated unjustly. I got three guys jobs back at that meeting. I brought up all the information that I had, the location manager had terminated these people, you know, didn't give them the benefit of the doubt or anything. No good evaluation. And they wound up gettin' their jobs back. Well that didn't set well with me and the location manager. And he put me transferred, he was transferring me from truck to truck. And he used that sayin' I was gettin' a different experience workin' with different engineers. Well, the last one he put with me was an alcoholic, 'cause the engineer he would be loggin' a well and he'd be drinkin' fifths of vodka while he was loggin'. And I put up with this for about three months. And I went in one night about seven o'clock, they were gamblin' at the shop, had come in off a job. I had a big garbage can with vodka bottles I had. And today I know I didn't handle it properly, but young, I grabbed that garbage can and I just threw all the bottles right there in the shop in front of everybody. And I told him I wanted off that truck and I wanted off today. Well he took me off the truck, put me on another truck. But they turn around and put a letter of reprimand in my file. Put me on probation for a year, couldn't get a merit raise. I stayed on that other truck, not a problem. The engineer when I come off that year, that engineer put me in for a merit raise, the location manager called me in three days later, asked me if I wanted to quit my job. I said, "No, there ain't no reason to quit." I said, "I feel like I can work here the rest of my life." And he terminated me. Bad conduct. And I didn't fight it, I let it go. I got out and I went, then I went, I got out of the oilfield for three years. I went in business for myself in floor covering. I installed floors and uh... done that for [the public?] competition-wise, everything else. It was a good living uh, at the time. It was dealing with

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the public, that's a whole different animal. You really got to have a lot of patience and understand with 'em. I had the understanding, but I didn't have the patience at the time. Oooh. Uh, I stayed there three and a half years and a friend of mine that I had met partying uh, asked me if I was interested in goin' overseas. In 1975 I ventured back into the oilfield in construction on a big derrick barge. And I've been in the oil patch ever since.

SW: Buildin' rigs?

RM: Uh, buildin', workin' on the rigs uh, movin' platforms around in the Gulf, overseas. Uh, I worked in Africa with McDermott. I was in Brazil on a gloater workin' on drilling rigs, workin' 28 and 28 at this, this strictly oilfield. Drilling and construction.

SW: For McDermott the whole time or-

RM: No no no. At different companies, different companies.

SW: It's whoever was contracting.

RM: Oh yeah, right, that's right, that's correct.

SW: And is that what you, you're still doing that?

RM: I'm doing construction work and operating a crane for Fluid Crane, right out of, south out of New Iberia. On a rig, I was workin' for [Neighbors?] uh, the last 15, 18 months [and on rig stacked?]. So I went, got into construction after the rig stacked. And it's, hopefully the rigs, they're tellin' us the rig, drillin' is gonna start pickin' up in about another couple of months. Hopefully I can get back into drilling. 'Cause you've got more of a set schedule. Here I don't have a definite 14 days off. With drilling we had 14 and 14 schedule, and you knew you had your 14 days off. You could plan stuff with your family. Construction you don't know if you're gonna get those 14 days off or not. You could come in for three days and they could call you, they want you to go on another job.

SW: Which is kind of what's happening to you right now.

RM: Right, that's correct. That's correct, that's correct.

SW: So do you uh [Clears throat] that was sort of my next question, based on what you were telling me, you were working six, six a.m. to six p.m. for-

RM: Right, right, that was, yeah.

SW: Before.

RM: Right.

SW: How does the schedules now compare to what you were doing back then?

RM: I think they're a lot better. The families uh, they can offer a man a better package today. Uh, years ago, you know, they, well you had a seven and seven schedule that was intact for years in production and in drilling. And they started, they feel like they could cut down on expense, they wanted to go 14 and 14. And that's, that was a big thing now is to cut down on helicopter flights because it cuts down on expenses. But it also, it has led to more accidents, because after seven days they have found that a man starts driftin' away from his job. He starts gettin' irritated with the people around him, he may have family problems at the house, and all that leads is that he's taking his mind off of work and he's gettin' in small accidents. When you get enough small accidents and that big one grabs you. 'Cause, just this last job we with uh, Amerada Hess we're workin' for. Their production people were workin' seven

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and seven. We started that job workin' 14 and 14. Within six months we had about four reportable accidents. Amerada Hess came back and said we have any more accidents, we're goin' seven and seven. Two more weeks went by, we had two more accidents. We went seven and seven. The next 14 months workin' seven and seven we didn't have an accident at all. And I told 'em, "The stats are there, so you need to look at it. Seven and seven you're not gonna have, you may have some accidents, there're not gonna be as many as workin' 14 and 14." The men, for some reason, will not keep their mind focused on their job for 14 days. Uh, BP Emco has come into the Gulf in the last four or five years. It's mandated that you cannot stay on their platform no longer than 21 days. 'Cause in construction I've got a couple guys that relieve me, they can go out there and stay a month and a half if you'll let 'em. But BP says 21 days and you go home. And you have to be off four seven days before you can come back on their platform. Some guys'll try to go on another platform and work, BP found out about it, they called the company tell 'em, "Send 'em back home," or, "Don't send this man on the platform again." They want you seven days off before you come back on that platform. And I can understand that, that's the safety fact of having a man fresh mind, you know. [It's comin'?] back. 'Cause we've had a couple guys try that, leave BP platform after 21 days, go home for one day, go back and try to go to another BP platform and start working again. And BP picked up on it. Sent 'em back to the house. And, because of safety factor.

SW: Why, why are these, are these guys doin' it for the money?

RM: They're doin' it for the money, that's what it is, just money.

SW: 'Cause you could double the time, days when you're out there.

RM: Because you're gettin' overtime, you're gettin' 40, you're gettin' 40 hours and you get 44 hours overtime after, everything after 40's overtime. And construction does not pay what drilling, 'cause when you're, I'm in construction now, when I was in drilling, I'll give you an example, drilling was paying, we're paid seventeen fifty an hour for crane operators. Construction is paid 14 dollars an hour. So it's uh, it's a good size pay cut. So that's why these guys are stayin' out longer to try to make up the difference that they're losing.

SW: What about, how does production compare to those two?

RM: Production, production pays a lot better than drilling and uh, construction.

SW: Both of 'em?

RM: Oh about uh, yeah, constr-, uh, production, some production operators will make up to 22, 23, or 24 dollars an hour. And uh, they've got good benefits. Uh, we've got a lot of these little independent production companies they might pay well, but their benefits might not be as great. And that's the one thing a lot of guys'll look at ya, you know, "Hey, you could pay me 25, 26 dollars an hour, I'll pay for my own hospitalization." You know, that's their [objective?].

SW: As long as they have workman's comp [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

RM: As long as they got workman's comp on the side.

SW: What uh, why do you think that there's that difference? Is one more dangerous than the other or?

RM: Noo, I think they're all got the same danger element. Anytime you're on an offshore platform or derrick barge or drilling rig, that same danger element is there, it can grab you at any time. Uh, I think production you probably, you're dealing with uh, with natural gas uh, day in and day out when you're on that platform. Uh, and it's just a ma-, small leaks, and you got to be on your toes constantly. Uh, you got, it's a whole, to me it's a whole different animal workin' production than workin' drillin'. That's why you've got to have some experienced people on that production platform. And they'll, a lot of production people are lacking right, you know, they're beggin' for people to get into production,

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because they don't, people that, companies have cut back and guys have just gotten out of the oilfield altogether. So they've got to sort of retrain a whole new group of people.

SW: Do you see the, because the industry goes up and down as I'm sure you know and people get out of work, do you see that the industry is losing experienced people because they're afraid to come back to work?

RM: They are, they're definitely, they definitely, I uh, example, when I was on that floater uh, in 1998, I broke out three crane operators and three young good crane operators. Ten months later they got laid off, they never came back. They're workin' in the plants in central Louisiana, makin' 60 dollars a week, they're at home every night. And they told me, one of 'em, uh, Kenny [Barber?] was his name, he said, "Mister Ron," he said, he said, "I'm 10 minutes from the house." He said, "I'm not goin' anywheres."

SW: He wanted a stable schedule-

RM: Oh it's stable, oh yes. And you can't blame him, you can't blame him. You know, I put in the years that's why I've stayed in it, I had too many years, you know, to try to restar-, retrain myself at my age. I said, "No, I'm not gonna, I'm gonna stick it out." And I've been very fortunate. You know, I've been laid off twice in my whole time. No, I've been very fortunate.

SW: Would you say though that for every one of these guys that [Clears throat] went away from it and they got that stable schedule, you still have another guy who's willing to take that chance because the money is good?

RM: Oh yes. Yes. It-

SW: Is that where they're getting their people from?

RM: That's where they're getting their people from. They're puttin' uh, a big money package together, you've got some uh, I haven't run across 'em, but I've read it and I've heard it, some of 'em are givin' 'em sinu-, signing bonuses to try to get 'em, you know, to go. And you don't have the experience, they'll train you. Like in Neighbors we got a trainin' rig. They'll actually take you over there, put you on a seven and seven schedule, or 14 and 14 schedule, and keep you there and show you everything on that rig. "This is what it's gonna be like when you get offshore." They won't let you leave the grounds or anything. They'll keep you right there, they got living quarters set up for you and everything. And they gonna put you in that frame of mind to see if you can go out there and do the same thing. And that's what they're, you know, it's really, it's comin' down to. They try, they're tryin' to get the people minds set. Say, "Look, you want this job? This is what it's gonna be like. We're gonna see if you can actually do it."

SW: They're lookin' for somebody with that mentality.

RM: That's right.

SW: That's gonna stay out there.

RM: That's' correct, that's correct.

SW: Well [Clears throat] speakin' of those living quarters and those conditions and everything, how was it different back then than it is now when you're doing it?

RM: Oh-

SW: You were working offshore back then too, right?

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RM: Yes. The living quarters uh, certain companies, big drilling companies, your living quarters are fantastic. I mean, it's, they've got state of the art facilities out there. And that's what they, one of the main things they knew they had to do to really keep the people out there. Uh, you got, I mean, you got telephones in your own room. And all you do is put your clothes in a box outside, you wake up the next morning, your clothes are right there all folded for you, neat and clean. They're washed, you know. The rooms are just immaculate. I mean, like you said, you got a phone, you just dial right there and you can dial your family from your own room. Uh, the food is fantastic. Uh, it's still when it comes to a hurricane evacuation, it's same old thing. Uh, you've got a lot of, a lot of nervousness. And a lot of companies are still waiting too long to get people off platforms. That's been a big problem with a lot of the employees complainin'. Uh, some of the companies don't wait as long, but they've got some that, that'll still just, well they think the storm's gonna go the other way, maybe, you know, you wind up wait another 10 hours and the storm's on top of you. You can't get a boat or a chopper out there to get you. They uh, I've had a couple of buddies of mine, companies doing that and they wound up got hurt trying to swing off the rope. One never made it back offshore. He was injured permanently and he's home now. And that's uh, I think that company learned, you know, they learned it was almost a fatal mistake for them. I think they learned from it. Uh-

SW: Sometimes it's better just to shut it down and walk away.

RM: Oh yeah, shut it down and walk away, get away from it. Get away from it. That's the one thing I can say about BP, now they're good about it. These two storms we had four days we had, BP had us on the platform and we were gone and we didn't go back until four or five days after. You know, they take every precaution possible. That's the one thing I, BP has brought a lot of safety into the Gulf.

SW: I've heard that about British Petroleum.

RM: From co-, from coming from overseas.

SW: It's a foreign company, they-

RM: It's a foreign company, correct.

SW: They have their own rules and it's a little bit more stringent than a lot of the other companies that are already here in the Gulf.

RM: It is, it is. That's right. It's like we call when we loads, we come from the boat as a crane operator, we like to see all of the packages come preslung. It makes it a lot easier and a lot faster to get off a boat if you get into choppy seas. BP, that's one of BP's policies. Anything comin' from the dock to the rig, everything is preslung. They've got slings on it, they're ready to hook onto. When we leave the r-, when we load it from the rig to the boat, everything is preslung goin' back to the dock. That is one policy I really, I would like to see that mandatory for all the oil companies in the Gulf. You know, that would be great. That, that would save a lot of time and it saves, cut down on injuries. 'Cause you got, your in choppy seas and I'm comin' down with four slings and these guys are tryin' to grab them slings and they're movin' all over the place, it makes for an accident. BP has shut all that down, have them slings already hooked up, all I got to do is come down with the stinger, hook onto it, and we can go.

SW: You think it's because they've had lots of problems in the past?

RM: In the North Sea they've had, you know, with the rough seas they've had to operate over there. Then they come to the conclusion that's the way they have to do. And then they brought that same, same decision, you know, made the same decision when they're comin' in the Gulf, they brought it with 'em. And I'm glad they did. [Pause]

SW: Did you yourself ever get hurt when you were workin' offshore?

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RM: No I've been very fortunate. I've never been injured offshore.

SW: But you've seen others?

RM: Yes, oh yes.

SW: Was it um, was it because of decisions by the company mostly or was it uh, decisions by the actual worker themselves that brought this, or was it a combination of all-

RM: It was a, it was a combination of uh, young workers and, and uh, third-party personnel. Uh, in my case, in uh, the crane I was operating one night we had a fatality. And it was uh, a young roughneck and I was following directions like everybody, we had [two blocks?] meeting and everything. And we had a snarl on the strap. That broke with a piece of equipment. And the equipment fell on that rough-, roughneck and killed him. And I didn't see, they had a wall on the front of it. I seen when it fell, it probably fell about 10 feet. It was, I had about t-, I was coming down with a load. And when the piece of equipment fell, I thought I, I heard it, I thought it hit the deck. And I seen one of the roughnecks runnin' to get the medic and that's when I knew somebody had got hit. I didn't know how serious it was. And when I got there I seen that, it just kind of caught him right here and it was about uh, oh I guess about uh five, six thousand pounds. Fell right on him, just crushed him. He never knew what hit him. And he was a roustabout for me. That was thing even hurt worse. This man had worked for me for about four months. And I told the toolpusher, I said, "You see his attitude? I won't keep him long." I said, "He's one hell of a worker." He was the type of young man that if he wasn't dirty, he wasn't doing anything. He could wallow in the mud and just have a good time doing it. And uh, he, that, that night right there he had no business where he was at. He, that's the type of individual he was. He wasn't gonna sit back and do nothing, he was gonna have his hands on something. His, his aggressiveness is what got him, what got him that night. 'Cause it wasn't, nobody was in a bind or anything. He was out helpin' somebody else and that person left to go eat lunch instead of him stayin' right, he came right there try to help. And that's what happened there. But again, followin' directions uh, this company guy that I was pickin' up his equipment, we had a two blocks meeting with all my roustabouts and he told me how to hook it up and everything. And that's what the rou-, the roustabouts heard it, he was right there. And that's exactly what they done on the boat. Again, workin' at night, limited visibility, couldn't see they had a jagged edge underneath that. And time I picked it up with the stinger, that, and by the time I got it over there, the jagged edge had worked into the strap and just cut that strap. That's uh, that was the only accident I've had in 25 years offshore operating. And I don't wish that on anybody. [Slight pause] Life's too short. And that's where today as a crane operator you've got uh, [why?] because you've got so many young people, so many inexperienced people out there. They wanna hurry up and stand underneath loads, you know, you can't get 'em, "Well that loads not gonna fall." Well I know, I know better than that. It can be steel cable, steel cable could pop. The cable on the crane can pop. You know, I went on the job, we were about 10 miles from the job, I think it was 1990 on a Shell platform. Crane operator pickin' up four people on a boat. Policy is when you pick 'em over the hand rail, soon as you clear the hand rail you swing 'em over the water in case something does happen, the basket falls in the water, you have a chance of surviving if you hit the water. Well this operator picked 'em up and he kept 'em over the boat. Mechanical failure went wrong on the crane. The basket fell back on the boat, killed all four of 'em. That's, that's the kind of stuff that can happen out there. That's the kind of stuff that can happen. [But again?] policy. You know, that crane operator would've swung 'em over the water, they could've probably survived. You know, they could've jumped, you know. They could've jumped in that water. Even if they'dve hit the water still on the basket, they had a better chance of surviving than hittin' that boat. And they were about, they told me about 60 feet in the air. And then just a free fall, just drop out of midair. That's the kind of stuff that, that goes on. We had a near fatality on this platform I just come off of just three weeks ago. And that was m-, that was disregard for every safety policy we got in the Gulf, what this company man did. And I don't know if they're gonna hold him responsible. But that man, that man's in a burn unit right now. Goin' through, through surgery. He had three surgeries and he may have to have a couple more, skin graft. And, because of, "Hurry up," gettin' in a hurry. That's what caused that accident. That was bad. Young man, 24, 25 years old. He got a couple kids. And he had years of experience, he should've known better himself. But that's where company men'll try to intimidate you. They just start calling you names and doing everything to get you to do what they want to do now. And he was in a, gettin' in the hole that had been closed up for years. Had

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diesel oil, waste water. They had fumes. They had no oxygen inside that hole. And needed a confined space permit, you needed a sniffer, you needed to ventilate that hole. They had a crew at the dock waitin' to come out to do that. And that company man kept yappin' at that, the [Inaudible] mechanic to get inside that. Well he took one of them little pumps, went down in that hole, and it was gas operated pump. Natural gas. And he had a air compressor, for what reason to u-, that he'd use a air, I don't know. But it went with that natural gas and that gas line busted that little pump. And something [Snaps his fingers] ignited that natural gas. And that guy was trying to climb up and that little pump was just feedin' them flames. And it caught him in his face and his hands, his hands are still damaged. He hadn't, he hadn't seen his hands since he was at the platform. And that was, that was neglect on the company man. There were no two ways about it.

SW: When you say that the company man was "yapping," you mean telling him [Inaudible]? [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

RM: Yeah, yeah, "We wanna get this done." They wanted to cut the crane, the old crane loose off the pedestal and send it to the yard for repairs. And he was in a hurry, he didn't want to wait. Yeah, helicopter was gonna bring the crew out within an hour. He didn't want to wait that time. He wanted to go there and start cleanin' that hole out now. That's his attitude toward-

SW: And this was encouragement by the supervisor to do something dangerous.

RM: Uh hm. That's exactly, exactly. And even the production people told that mechanic not to go in the hole. He was told not to go in that hole. The company man kept yappin' at him, he went ahead and he done it anyway. And it almost cost him his life.

SW: Have, have you seen a lot of that in the past or-

RM: Oh yes, in the past. Oh! Yes. D-

SW: In the past?

RM: In the past. Oh! As a crane operator uh, 10 years ago, 15 years ago they would tell me, "Hey," well if I'd tell 'em it was too rough, I said, "It's too rough, we're gonna shut it down." They would, they would try to intimidate, they'll tell you, "Well I'm gonna run you off." Call you all kind of names. "I'm gonna get another crane operator out here." Oh they would try to intimidate you big time. And a lot of guys would do, were scared they'd lose their jobs, so they go ahead and do it. Today MMS, we've got that written in paper now. I keep a copy in my, my briefcase all the time. That if I tell a company man or anybody that, "It's too rough, I'm shuttin' the job down because of safety factor." And they give me some lip, I can call up and have them wrote up and a fine anywhere from twenty-five hundred to five thousand dollar fine. I've got it in writing today. And a lot of company men uh, understand it now. They don't, they're not intimidatin' like they were. I had one come on, that Amerada Hess job. I had a night toolpusher, I had five boat loads of stuff to get off that boat and the weather was way too rough. And I told that toolpusher, I said, "It's too rough, we're not gonna do anything 'til this weather settles down." Boy and he kept yappin' on me. The company man came right on the side of me, he said, "Did you hear what that crane operator told you?" He said, "You go to your office and do your paperwork." He said, "When that man says shut down, we'll shut down." That's the kind of company man you want to work for. You know. You appreciate people like that. You'll work your butt off for somebody like that. If toolpusher, they got some toolpushers'll still try to intimidate you, you have to stand up to 'em. And as an old operator, it's not hard for me to do anymore. The young operators still have a problem with it. They still have a problem with it.

SW: But at least, at least now you have the-

RM: I've got somethin' in writing. I've got the backings, regulations, yes.

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SW: Some backing, some regulations that say you can stand up for yourself.

RM: That's correct, that is correct. I mean a lo-, young, a lot of young operators don't know that because they don't have that paper I have. I was given that by a crane certification, when I got certified as, recertified as a crane operator three years ago. That guy gave me a copy of that. I don't know if he gives every crane operator that he's recertified a copy, I don't know that. But I got a copy and I keep it with me. I say, "No," I said, "I've got some protection in writing."

SW: You oughta laminate that to keep it in good shape.

RM: [Chuckling] Oh yes, ohhh yes. [Laughs]

SW: [Inaudible] water, so it won't get wet.

RM: No, no. Oh no. Not at all.

SW: When did that, those regulation come into effect?

RM: That was uh, two years ago. That we got, I got this in writing.

SW: Well is it because that regulation is two years old or is it actually older than that?

RM: Oh no, no, it's older than that, well, enforceable, it probably wasn't in effect two years ago. It wasn't in wri-, it wasn't in writing until two years ago. So it was just my word against, you go take it to court, it's my word against somebody else's word in court. But today we have it in writing and it's uh, you got a lot more to deal with. A lot more, more leverage. And uh, you can, they can [Inaudible] a lot, I'm sure some toolpushers are aware of that, but some of 'em aren't aware that it's in writing now. And some could care less. They still got that old attitude of 1960s, you know, they've got that mental attitude, you know, "Hey, you're gonna do what I say do, I'll find, I'll find somebody else to replace you." You've still got a few toolpushers like that.

SW: I've, I've, I've heard this from many different interview subjects, who say the same thing.

RM: Uh hm, oh yeah, they, they've got like the I-, well, bringin' in uh, women offshore. That is another facet that has changed uh, over the years. You know, 20, 30 years ago you wouldn't dream of seein' a woman offshore. They're all over the place offshore now. And a lot of men don't like, they don't believe in that. Now that had a couple, one of 'em with Pennzoil uh, almost lost his job because of sexual comments that he was makin' about the woman and she walked up right behind him. And he never would stop, he kept mouthin' off. And she filed a complaint with the company. And the company called her, they asked her what she wanted to do. She could've named her ticket. Well he was taken off our rig, he wasn't allowed to come back on our rig, and he had to go to counseling for six months. He was lucky he didn't lose his job. But it was again, here's a man been in oilfield 30 years. Mentality is woman belongs at the house having kids, that's how he thought.

SW: Well when he started workin'-

RM: Oh no, there wasn't, no, not at all.

SW: Just changing and he keeps-

RM: And he, he won't, he won't accept the change. He won't accept the change.

SW: Have you guys seen, you've seen a lot of problems with women offshore? Is it just with certain people?

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RM: Hm. No, just with certain people. It hasn't been a major problem. They've had some instances of individuals. Uh, I guess one of these jobs on a Chevron platform their whole galley crew was all women. The [BR?] people are people and women that make your beds and everything. Mop your floors, cook, the whole catering services were women. And it was a fantastic crew. Women, women done a great job and nobody got out of hand. You know, it was, it was great to be around a-, a lot of elderly women, and they had 'em mixed – elderly, middle aged, and young women. Then they kept rotatin'.

SW: So like you had said you'd put your clothes out and then the next morning they'd be done and everything else.

RM: Oh yeah.

SW: But before, before they had women offshore, you had the galley were men cooks and-

RM: Men galley, BR hands and stuff. In a lot of places uh, we had to wash our own clothes. Where the night crew, the night crane operator and the roustabout crew were washing the clothes. Oh, we washed our own. And in the daytime they would have somebody washin' our clothes.

SW: Oh you washed for each other?

RM: Oh yes, yes. Yeah, we sure did.

SW: [So it just must run?] continuously.

RM: Just one continuous cycle. One continuous cycle. We sure did.

SW: And now they have, of course, like you said, the complete facilities, the washing facilities and everything. And there's a catering crew that-

RM: Catering crew that handles all that.

SW: And they contract out to the company that you work for?

RM: That's right.

SW: They just go to the rig and-

RM: Yeah. They do all the services.

SW: What about, what about quarters? You have, of course you have to have women in separate quarters than the men, [there's no problem with that?]?

RM: Yeah, yeah, that's what we had. No, we had no problems with that, we're, on our drilling rig we had uh, they, well it was separate rooms, but it was right adjacent to ours. 'Fact, the room I was in with two crane operators and right next to us were the women, the women quarters. We had uh, we had three women on the rig. We had a hundred and... 105 people on that rig. And we had three women. And they were the room nex-, right next to us. They had their own room, they had four bedrooms in there. They got their [full/four?] baths and everything. And that's where they stayed there. They had a separate facility.

SW: You also saw, I guess, I guess now you see out there not just with catering service, you see women working as, as roughnecks? Or-

RM: Uhh, I haven't seen any-

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SW: Roustabout or anything like that?

RM: I've seen a couple of 'em as roustabouts, I've seen a couple of 'em as service hands, come [Inaudible] tubing. I run, run into that. A lot of 'em will do office work. They'll work inside in production a lot, that's where you'll see a lot more women on the production side of it than on drilling rigs. Chevron is big on that, [Marathon?] has got a lot of women working production. Uh, Exxon has got a few also.

SW: So they uh, the roughneck part is [handling the drilling?]-

RM: That's, they handle all the drilling pipe, the tongs, the elevators, and that, that would be kind of hell for-

SW: That's physical labor.

RM: Physical labor for women, you know, doing a constant basis. A-, but now I've heard on land uh, I think it was like Delta Drilling years ago had women doing this type of work. You know, they had to be some bulky women, you know, not little 110 pound woman I think's gonna handle some five-inch tongs day in and day out and pull elevators, you know.

SW: That's just a physically difficult job.

RM: It is. It is.

SW: So I guess that's why the roustabouting I understand is uh, is just-

RM: You do, roustabout does everything on the rig. He does, he does painting, chipping, washing, he could go on the floor and roughneck, relieve the roughnecks when they go eat. That's how they learn. It's a moving step. While the roughnecks go and eat, I'll send one or two roustabouts on the rig floor to relieve the roughnecks while they take a rotation of eatin'. And at the time it's a training period for the rough-, for the roustabouts. He may do this for six, eight months. If an opening comes up, I, and I evaluate one, which one would be the best one, he's been there longer, you know, he go-, he'll move up. If he doesn't move up there, they may transfer him to another rig if it's got a opening or gets a good recommendation from me and the toolpusher, then he can go someplace else.

SW: And you want to do that because your pay scale's higher.

RM: Oh yes. On the pay scale's higher, yes.

SW: [Inaudible] roustabout [Inaudible].

RM: That's how you keep the incentive for hiring people. That's one thing I never stop a man from movin' up. And that's one of the, I think my strongest part is being a crane operator is uh, one of the guys asked me when I, in interview with [Setco Floorex?], he said, "We put you on the payroll, what is your strongest asset to this company?" I said, "My ability to communicate with people." And I still believe that today. Crane operatoring is only 10 percent of my job. Ninety percent is to be able to listen and talk to everybody on that rig. 'Cause you got different personalities. And that's where I think communication plays a bigger part in my job than anything else. [Slight pause] And that should be for every crane operator and not every crane operator has that quality, 'cause a lot of 'em are quick tempered, they lose that, they lose the temper, they start hollerin', and that's the one thing I learned-

[END OF TRACK ONE; TO TRACK TWO]

RM: -not. I may holler to get your attention, but I'm never gonna get in your face and holler at you. I've always remember, I was a roustabout one time, I know, I never forgot where I came from. I never forgot that. And-

RM: And I'll treat a man with respect as long as he's respectin' himself.

SW: You learn-, you learned on the job, too.

RM: I learned on the job.

SW: It, and that's, I understand that's how a lot of what went on over there. But they, they, in the old days they used to keep a lot more people.

RM: Oh yes.

SW: So you had those experienced people. Nowadays is it still OJT or is there, do they have training schools?

RM: They got tra-, well like I said, Neighbors, we got training schools at uh, with Neighbors. I don't know if the other companies have the training schools. But Neighbors got a training school where they will put you on that rig and they'll keep you there and break you in. Which I think is great. I'd like to see a lot of companies do that. But drilling has gone down, it's just fluctuating and it's hard for even the companies to keep these training schools open. 'Cause they can't justify keepin' these guys on a payroll and not having anybody going to school. That's why they're lookin' at cuttin' costs. 'Cause I got a toolpusher right now, they got, the rigs went down so much they got him as a safety coordinator right now. That's, you know, he took one hell of a cut in pay right there, but, you know, he's got a job. If he doesn't take that he's out of work. He's out of work. And uh, it's bad, it's down. People don't realize how the oilfield is suffering right now. When they go to look at the construction at the Port of Iberia and see, there, there's not that much goin' on in construction either at the port right now. And oilfield is hurtin' bad right now. Especially, I wouldn't recommend a young man get in the oilfield right now. Uh uh. It'd be too much. He'd better be a single man, maybe livin' with mom an dad for a few years. No, it's a, it's not a pretty sight right now.

SW: It's risky.

RM: It is, it is.

SW: I know am-, a lot of these guys are finishing school in engineering and then going out there. What's the difference between these guys that have four years of education versus the guys that learned OJT but had all the experience on the rig?

RM: Oh again it's the, that's where the paperwork comes into effect. This guys gonna have that education, that company's gonna look at that degree before they look at the man with the experience. And that's what irked us as old oilfield hands. We see these young guys comin' out of college and comin' on the rig and we have to answer to them. And they don't have a clue of what's goin' on. That's frustrating. That's frustrating.

SW: And then must create some dangerous situations sometimes.

RM: It does. It does.

SW: So if he's got that paper and he'd kind of arrogant and thinks he can call the shots, but he hasn't been out there like you have.

RM: No not at all. No, he hasn't had, he doesn't have a clue what's goin' on. But he's got that paperwork.

SW: Has this created, you said with you and a lot of old, this must've created a lot of animosity.

SW: And it's sort of forced changing of the guard within the industry.

RM: It has.

SW: It's been bad for the industry, too, you think?

RM: Uh... I think it's, on, depends on a company. Some companies will take that into consideration and what they'll do if bring a young man out there, but they'll bring a seasoned experience man with him. And he'll have him, like a watch dog, be watchin' over him. He'll let him, you know, go out there and let him make decisions, but at the same time he's watchin' the decision he's makin'. And, you know, if it's the wrong, he'll take him off to the side and correct him. And that's my, as a crane operator, that's when I can appreciate when I see a company man doing that. But I've seen company men come out there and just, he'll go to bed and just let that young man out there by himself. And that's where it can cause havoc with everybody on the rig. He can put that whole rig in danger. And I haven't s-, I haven't seen a great deal of it, but I have seen some of it. And I have seen seasoned guys with a college degree even worse than a young man at times. I mean, he'll get, I had one company man get in my face one night. Well you couldn't have put a toothpick between our noses. You know, I mean, it's, and a roustabout walked off. He said, "Mister Ronnie," said, "I thought you were gonna hit him." You know, that's, and three days later he comes apologize to me. But it's stuff like that, you know, it makes, that's where your personality clashes and that's where you got to learn how to back off. And that's what, when that communication factor comes in. You got to be able to know, "Hey look, this guy, just, just get away from him, leave him alone. Yeah, he'll cool off." And that's what you have to do. Because that's the one thing you don't want to do is start a physical brawl offshore, 'cause the Coast Guard'll come pick you up and it's not a pretty sight.

SW: They come, they pick [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

RM: Oh they'll, oh yeah, you fight, you get in a fight offshore, Coast Guard'll come pick you up and you're goin' to jail. You're going to jail.

SW: Is that now or then or that's how-

RM: No, it was always been like that. It's always been like that. The thing that has really stopped, we had a great, I mean, it was, oh it was an insurmountable uh... it was horseplay. Uh, we had tremendous horseplay on the rigs 20, 30 years ago. Today, because of the lawsuits and the dangers that has come with it, you don't see the horseplay on the rigs anymore. And that's somethin' I've never got into, but I've seen some serious [where?] with dopin', what you call dopin' guys first come offshore. They like to take some dope [Inaudible], just dope you all over and I've seen a couple guys come down with cancer because they're dopin'.

SW: Uh, what do you mean?

RM: There's the pipe that they dope the uh, the pipe with when they're makin' the pipe, the two joints up with.

SW: It's like a lubricant?

RM: It's a lubricant, but it's a paste also. It's chemical. I mean, it's just grease is what it is. And they'll actually take a man's clothes off and just put dope all over him and dope him in his rectum. And two of 'em come down with cancer. And it, it get out of hand.

SW: That was initiation for them being offshore for the first time?

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RM: Yep, being offshore, being offshore. Yeah. Yeah, uh, I've seen some, seen some sick stuff. They'd even take you with a handsaw, with a little old saw that you cut wood and just slap it on your butt and I've seen them almost draw blood on a couple of guys. I tell ya it got out of hand, but when the lawsuits started comin' and one of the major lawsuits you may have read about it, I don't know, about four years ago. A young man quit his job and he filed a sexual harassment suit against the company. And this was male against male. That has never been done. All the lower courts through it out. His lawyer kept appealin', it wind up to the US Supreme Court and they heard it and they ruled in his favor. Because of that, you can have sexual harassment male against male today. And then, 'cause he felt his job, he, they felt he was gonna be molested on the rig. That's why he quit his job. And I think that's a plus for oilseal-, oilfield. That helped cut out a lot of, a lot of harassment. A lot of harassment.

SW: So there was a lot of that goin' on, not just horseplay.

RM: A lot of, no.

SW: Not just guys foolin' around and playing practical jokes on each other.

RM: No.

SW: There was some harassment.

RM: Oh yeah, oh yeah, a lot of harassment, lot of harassment.

SW: Because I've heard some stories about these guys-

RM: Oh I'll tell you one of the most sick-

SW: Work with each other so much that uh, they just knew each other, they just pull pranks.

RM: Yeah.

SW: But uh, harassment [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

RM: But I seen one of the, one of the most serious cases that I've ever heard of. And I was on a rig and I got transferred to another rig. I had four roustabouts on that rig. Well when I left the, one of the roustabouts they were married, he had one or two kids. And one afternoon at two o'clock five guys on that rig undressed him right there on the pipe rack and masturbated him. All five men were promoted. They wasn't fired, they were promoted. The young man got himself a lawyer, started filing for back injuries and stuff. And he went nuts, he wound up getting a divorce. And back injuries, he wound up getting 75,000 dollars out of court settlement. The, the driller was promoted to a night toolpusher and sent to our rig. Well two of the roustabouts livin' next door to me called me and told me what had happened. I was holdin' the safety meetings on our rig. When he came in, I closed the door. We had 45 people in that room. And that's the first thing I told them exactly what he had did. And I told him, I said, "You put your hands on one of my roustabouts I'm workin'," I said, "I'm gonna help him, we're gonna cut you up and feed you to the fish." And that was it. I never had any problems with that man after that. But as, then his wife turn around and filed a suit and she collected I was told about three and half, four million dollars. That young man, they tell me, he just went friggin' nuts. But that's the kind of stuff that was goin' on. That was one of the most serious things that I've ever seen. And like I said it happened two weeks after I left the rig.

SW: There was a lot of harassment you would say or was it just sometimes?

RM: Uh, it was just at some times. It wasn't a lot of like this right here, that was the most serious case that I, that I've ever, you know, been around. That I've ever heard of. They had a lot of it went on. Lot of stuff you don't hear about. But there was a lot of it that was goin' on.

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SW: Any time you saw a new guy come onto the rig-

RM: Oh yeah, we had college, even the college guys that they really get after. We'd have 'em mixin' chemicals. And you makin' a ba-, big man. You know, they tell you, "Put this sack over here." You have [the sack over the head?], one guy on the back of 'em, had a knife just cut it, all the chemicals would just fall on him. And then he'd have to go wash himself, if it was gel, he'd go wash himself off, you put that water on that gel and it'd just start cakin' up. Ah, and he would just cake up all over. And it would take you three and a half, four hours to clean hisself off. That was the kind of pranks, no, but it was chemicals. You get this stuff, chemicals in your lungs and stuff, you know, you never know what you come down with. That's the kind of stuff like that, a lot that went on. Oh you'd see guys, you know, cuttin' sacks all the time.

SW: The company man didn't see any-

RM: The company man was, we had company man. Now today you got two company men. One work at night and day. Uh, today, years ago just one company man, one toolpusher. So the driller was in charge of the whole operation at night on the drill floor. They had no night company man. No, every, they didn't know what was going on. If you had problems, then you woke the company man up and you woke the toolpusher up. Today you got one of each at night. It uh, it's a lot safer. And you'll get a lot more accomplished also. And it cuttin' the horseplay out also.

SW: Some of that comes because sometimes they learn their lesson over the years I guess. Uh-

RM: And some, you still got some that want to try to horseplay out there. Yeah, it's uh, it's cut down to where somebody'll bring it their attention, you know. And that's the one thing I'll always stress with the roustabout, I said, "I'm tellin' you now, no horseplay now." I said, "I catch you horseplayin', you're goin' to the house. I'm not gonna put up with it."

SW: Not the kind of environment you should fool around in.

RM: No. Not at all. No I don't mess with it. I don't horseplay and I don't want nobody that's workin' underneath me they're not gonna get into that either. I said, "You get promoted, you get the roughneck job, you go on that rig floor, do what you want." I said, "You, the driller's in charge of you now, you're workin' for that driller, you're not workin' for me." But I said, "As long as you're workin' for me, there will be no horseplay." And I've never had a problem with it. I've never had any roustabouts get out of hand. But you got to set the guidelines early. And that's the main thing.

SW: You mentioned when you were with Schlumberger on that truck uh, you'd see guys gambling and that other guy was an alcoholic.

RM: Uh hm. Oh yeah.

SW: You had a lot of that rigs offshore, gambling and alcohol use?

RM: Uh, yeah, we, not alcohol. Well, the alcohol, drinking problems you're gonna have, what I, we encountered was with the galley people. 'Cause the galley people, catering people, you had a lot of alcoholics that came out there. And they would stay out there four, five, six, I seen one stay nine weeks out there. 'Cause they don't pay 'em that much. They, minimum wage at the time was like three fifty an hour. And they would stay out there for six weeks to try to get a sizable amount of money. Lot of 'em would be drinkin' Listerine. That's how bad it would get. 'Cause they didn't have alcohol so they'd bring big bottles of Listerine and they'd drink Listerine. And they'd get back home within two weeks they blew all their money. And we seen a lo-, I seen a lot of galley people. One guy, one guy come on the boat drunk. Cook. Sent him back home. Sent him back home.

SW: And if they show up offshore drunk-

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RM: Oh you're gone. That's history. We got drug screen. Some sort of random screens every six months. That's the one thing that we kind of did in 1980 to me we had more drugs offshore than you had on land. And they would send the dogs, they'd come, they had the dogs come, you know, twice a week. Well when they do that, they suspend [Inaudible] just like this right here. And then put the drugs in a seal. Dogs couldn't get up there and sniff.

SW: They couldn't pick it up when they were on the ground?

RM: Oh no, no the dog, the drugs were up in the air. And you couldn't get the dogs up on the top. But they'd come search your lockers, your bedrooms, twice a week they'd have the dogs come. They wouldn't go on the rig floor, they had a lot of 'em on the rig floor, but they would never go over there. I can give you one instance on one hitch, we had a driller come out with 18 bags of pot. Had a uh, a motorman had 16 hits of speed and a derrick man had 40 hits of quaalude. All in one seven, they were workin' seven and seven. That driller would be smokin' at the break while he was drillin' he had a joint in his hand workin' at night. Toolpusher and the company man's in bed sleepin'.

SW: This was in the early '80s you say?

RM: Early '80s, '79, '80, '81.

SW: It was mainly dope and things like that?

RM: Yeah, oh yeah.

SW: Smokin' while he was workin'?

RM: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, I seen in the port when the rigs were stacked, I'd work, I work at the port at times operatin' the cherry picker. I've seen welders work, weldin' on construction job at the port. He'd raise his hood up, he had a joint, he had a joint in his hood. He was welding, he was smoking while he was welding.

SW: Sounds kind of dangerous. [Chuckles]

RM: [Chuckling] Oh it is. But, you know, society, that's, you know, we don't want, that's gettin' into politics, but we, we don't want to get rid of drugs. Law enforcement makes mo-, money off of drugs. You know, we take the initiative that Saudi Arabia has, Saudi Arabia if you get caught with drugs you're executed. There's no rebab [plenty?], and there's no second offence. Your head is cut off.

SW: That takes care of the repeat offenders. [Chuckles]

RM: That's correct. That's correct. It saves tax payers a lot of money. Law enforcement [Inaudible] 'cause law enforcement makes a lot of money off of that. 'Specially the money they can confiscate on drugs, big drug rings. They split it up between all the law enforcement agencies. That's how they buy a lot of their equipment. Uh, but we'll never get rid of drugs with the mentality we have in our federal and state government. They don't wanna get rid of it.

SW: What about offshore now? You still see a lot of-

RM: I don't think, no, the drugs, it's not a bad uh, problem anymore because companies are still going through random drug screens. Uh, for this last job with Amerada Hess on that Neighbors' uh, rig, we had uh, we had three screens back to back. And we got rid of four people at each screen. And two of 'em were crane operators. So you still have people that's doin' drugs, but it's not as prevalent as it was in the '80s. It's not near, no where near the problem.

SW: And all-

RM: Because companies are staying on top of it.

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SW: Do they see that it affects the productivity or the workers?

RM: Oh yes. Yeah.

SW: So they get rid of 'em, they get the right people in there.

RM: They get the right people in there. And lot of companies will go o-, above board with the drug policies that if you go to 'em and you tell 'em you have a drug problem, they'll send you to rehab and they'll pay for it. You talk, but if you get busted, you're gone. But a lot of companies will hire you six months later you come back and take another, pass, they'll hire you back. Now that I don't believe. I think a man once he busts a drug screen, he's got a drug problem and he doesn't tell the company about it, and he's busted, he should never be allowed to work for that company again. That's my own personal opinion. That's the way I feel about it.

SW: So they-

RM: Man is doin' drugs offshore, I don't want him nowheres around me. I don't want him nowheres around me.

SW: How many times would they hire this guy back if he [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

RM: Oh I've seen, I-, I've seen one construction company hire a guy four times. Four times in one year he was back workin' for the company.

SW: He'd go to rehab and then come back.

RM: Oh he wouldn't even go to rehab, he just goes work for somebody else, pass a drug screen and he might go two or three months on a construction job and they, they lay 'em off, and no work, lack of work, and he makes the rounds, he comes back to this company, passes the drug screen, they put him back on the payroll.

SW: Is it, is it because they can't find enough people to [do drill work?]?

RM: That's exactly, construction-

SW: They take what they can have.

RM: They, that's it exactly. Exactly.

SW: And these guys, the, the, seems to me they'll do it because they lose a job here, they-

RM: Oh yeah, they can go, they can, they can go anywheres. They can go anywheres.

SW: They just keep [hoppin'?] around.

RM: It's like construction your always gonna have them floaters, there gonna be drifters. Like I'm working for Fluid, but I can go tomorrow and go to work for another construction company right here in Abbeville. 'Cause I got all my paper, I got the experience. You know, they need people. They, I mean they got an ad in the paper everyday lookin' for qualified people. So the jobs right now in construction are a lot easier to find than in drilling. 'Cause your drilling rigs are workin' in deep water, but shallow water drilling rigs they're not workin' right now. The oil companies are still buyin' that oil from overseas.

SW: Because of the political climate right now, they wanna get as much as they can before [that stuff?] happens.

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RM: Oh yes, yes. Yeah. And now they payin', they payin' for it, 'cause oil's up at 32, 'bout 32, 33 dollars a barrel, so they payin' high dollar for that oil right now. Not like when it got down to 10, 12 dollars a barrel. That's when you can really buy it, buy up and stock pile it, but now they're payin' 32 dollars a barrel. And they got to pay, they're payin' some money instead of drillin' for it. But again we go into environmental issues with drilling here the United States compared to overseas and that's another big problem we face because they got so many stipulations for drilling over here in the Gulf compared overseas you hardly have anything that you're faced with. You know, I mean we got place like in Mobil, in uh, like over in Mobil, Alabama, Mobil Bay, it's pollution free. You drop nothing overboard. They have environmental people on the rig that stays there 24 hours a day watchin' this. You don't, you don't drop nothin' overboard. Cigarette butts, anything. You goin' to the house if they catch you. It's pollution free. It's hard for oil companies, you know, drilling rigs to go out there and drill in an environment like that. That's one of the big factors that we face over here in the Gulf. They, they got, whew, they got regulations. Like for food you gotta be so many miles out before you can dump your garbage overboard, you know, your tri-, your food, plus you gotta, you gotta grind it up in one inch cubes, then you can let it go. Chevron got more containers about that high, that big around, they put all the food in there and they ship it into the dock, then they gotta pay for the disposal when it gets to land. So you got a lot of different, different rules you have to follow today.

SW: The regulations have made it more expensive.

RM: Oh yes, big time.

SW: 'Cause they used to just throw it off the side of the rig.

RM: 'Cause when you [charge anything in?] the oilfield industry they have the price. 'Cause I've seen it, me and you can go buy a little electric heater from Walmart, we pay 38 dollars for that heater. That same heater goes to a drilling rig, they charge 68 dollars for it. And that's anything that goes to an offshore platform like that, you're gonna, you're gonna pay out your nose for it. And that's the one thing I've seen over the years, that's, I couldn't believe that when I seen prices come out there. It's just, it's just [real bad/unreal, man?]. They [gozzin'?), that's [Chuckles] they're makin' money big time. Just because this oilfield industry.

SW: They know they can get away with it.

RM: Oh yes, there's nothin', nobody in the office is contestin' it. And they get away with it.

SW: I wanted to ask you a question, gettin' back to the galley people. Uh, you said that BP wouldn't let you as a crane operator or somebody else like that work more than 21 days, but in the galley-

RM: Yeah the people with BP's the same thing. Galley people with BPs gotta go in 21 days.

SW: They, that, that's just a mandatory, across the board for every employee?

RM: That's, that's correct. It's every employee. That's correct.

SW: That's interesting because you figure they're not doin' somethin' that's necessarily dangerous.

RM: No. No, the only thing that these guys dealing with the electrical uh, stoves and everything they got in the galley and all that. You know, but uh, there 21 days, they have to go. That's BP's policy.

SW: They put too much sugar in your food when they make it. [Both laugh] That's another thing, I found that interesting. What about gambling? Anything uh, anybody gamble at all?

RM: Yeah, they got small card games. They've got, yeah, you have regular mar-, card games, we got football pools, uh, we got a lot of that during the football season. But uh, the only I seen big time gambling when I was on a derrick

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barge. Uh, on this LOOP project, this was in 1980, workin' for a French company here in the Gulf. And uh, they had big time gambling there. 'Course you had welders that were makin' 18, 19 dollars an hour. And I watched [sat at a?] table and watchin' five, six thousand dollar pots. Yeah, this was big time, and they had about four tables on that derrick barge. We had 450 people on that barge. And uh, they had big time gambling there. We were workin' schedule 28 and 14 on that, on that barge. And they had a lot of gambling, lot of gambling. And you had a lot of drinkin', 'cause every, you had the French had their lo-, them galley jugs of wine. At every meal they had four gallon jugs of wine at every table. And on Sundays at noon that whole job was shut down and they had a big barbeque on the heliport. They had 30 gallon [Inaudible], some Heineken, [Slits?], and Budweiser. And nobody went back to work until Monday morning at seven o'clock. This was every Sunday. And-

SW: That was in the Gulf?

RM: Out here in the Gulf of Mexico. Yes sir. I was on that job for six months as the deck crane operator and rig foreman. Every, every Sunday that job was shut down, we had a barbeque.

SW: That kept the employees happy?

RM: Oh lord yes. [Laughing] Oh, yes, yes. Oh and, and, and every day besides the Sunday, everyday the French had their wine at every meal at every table. I mean, you could, you could feed 300 people in that galley. And they had tables all over, you had gallon jugs of wine at every table.

SW: And this never presented a problem with-

RM: No, not at all. Not at all.

SW: 'Cause you know there are some other companies that wouldn't even [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

RM: Oh, [American?] companies wouldn't allow that. No, there's not an American company that would allow alcohol in the Gulf. That's the only, the only time ever, ever have seen it like that. You know, this was a French company.

SW: Was it mostly French workers or they had-

RM: No, we had American, we had probably about 200 American workers on that barge, the rest were French. And it was a communication problem also with French.

SW: [Lot of questions?]. [Chuckles]

RM: 'Cause I was the first, when I got on that barge in Galveston, we were gettin', preparin' it to go into the Gulf, I was the only American on that barge for three months that could speak any amount of French, so I done most of the interpretation for the first three months. Then when we got into the Gulf we had about maybe another four, five welders that came in from the Houma area that were fluent uh, French speakers, so they was able to pick up on it there. But you had to slow down, 'cause this was the real French that they were speaking and speaking too fast I couldn't break it up. But as long as I got 'em to slow down, I could understand everything they were saying. And that's where a lot of people are embarrassed to speak French today. You know, they, a lot of toolpushers don't like for us to speak French offshore because they think we talkin' about them. But I had, I, we, me and welder were speakin' one night, just, you know, busted up French and we had a toolpusher said, "We'll have none of that. We have none of that." And he was, he got red, red because he couldn't understand a word we were sayin' and he was afraid we were talkin' about him. I've seen a lot of that. A lot of that.

SW: It's uh, this is interesting, I've never talked to anybody who worked on a rig like that before. Uh, how did, how did that, that rig compare to some of the other rigs you've worked on?

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RM: Well this was a construction barge, this wasn't a rig, this was a construction, this was a pipe barge. We were layin' uh, 48-inch pipe and 56-inch pipe. We took three sections of 56-inch and then we took a 48-inch and went 28 miles inland to what they call Fourchon, Port Fourchon. That pipeline is right on this side of Port Fourchon. And all the oil that comes from land goes to that 48-inch and it goes to them three 56-inch and they got some [esbian?] tank buoys and them big oil tankers come to each one of them buoys and get that oil. And we, that's where we put that project together. That was a const-, uh, pipe-, what you would call a pipe laying barge. And uh, we, well it, we had, fed-, it was a federal job. They had like a 58 or 68 million project. And they had federal inspectors inspectin' the wells one that and everything. And we were on like a schedule 28 and 14 Americans. The French workers were three months on and one month off.

SW: 'Cause they'd go all the way back home.

RM: And they had, they had to go all the way back home. And then we had Vietnamese as the catering people. Now that's where we had a little problem with that because they started stealing. They 'd break into our lockers, we had 'em locked, they'd break into your lockers, take your wallet, money, credit cards, your liquor. 'Cause we was allowed to have liquor on the barge. And they would, they would take, take everything. So we had a problem with that for awhile.

SW: And this is, this is on the ship, a barge?

RM: A big ship.

SW: But it wasn't, it wasn't a rig?

RM: No, it wasn't a rig, just a, just a big lay barge. We call it pipe laying barge.

SW: You had, you said there was 450 people on it, so it was a big, big ship.

RM: Oh it was big, yeah, like I say it was [670?] foot long, 150 food wide. Yeah, it was a-

SW: And y'all, understandin' this right, y'all were layin' the pipe from where the rig was going to be-

RM: [On/from?] the platform.

SW: To the, to the plat-, production platform.

RM: Go all the way, you know, we go in with three, three sections of pipe and then they put a platform right connecting those three pipe. And then we took one pipe, 48-inch and went all the way to the l-, to the beach with it .And that connected to another pipeline on the beach. And that oil flowed from land into the water. And then from there they were directed three ways, they had three ships waitin', gettin', tankers to get that oil.

SW: How long does it take to uh, to lay a pipe from uh, I guess if say you're a mile out?

RM: Oh it doesn't take long it's a mile. And if you got good weather, well you'd probably do that in about maybe uh, three, four hours. Depends on the size of the pipe. Smaller pipe it won't take as long [as a well?]. So you could just, just go in and drop and gone. You just x-ray it, you code it and you x-ray it, pass inspection, just lay in the water. Doesn't take long. Providin' you have good weather.

SW: Yeah, you gotta make sure it's sealed tight, too.

RM: That's correct.

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SW: You don't want leaks or anything.

RM: No, not at all. Not at all. And your pressure up on it, what they call a pig, you run that little pig inside of it and put pressure behind it, make sure there's no obstructions, all, and then blow it from one end to the other clean the, clean the hole completely out. And then they can run in it gas, whether it's gonna be a gas line or an oil line, they, it start flowin'.

SW: I always wondered how they did, I know that they used to pipe the oil from the production platform.

RM: Uh hm, yeah. Yeah.

SW: Did, so you enjoyed workin' on that ship with all the s-

RM: Oh it was-

SW: It seems like an international [Inaudible].

RM: It, it was, it was, it was. And I got along with the French because while we was in Galveston I'd take 'em out and party with me on our time off and I would say, "Well, you know, they gonna have trouble communicating with the people in the Galveston." But they did, they got along fine. They would make people understand what they wanted. And I had no problem, but again they had some of the French that was dope smokin' people. 'Cause I, on my first day [Chuckling] I remember this, I got my bag on and I'm climbin' up this ladder to get up on this ship, and when I get there, they got about eight or nine Frenchmen waitin' for me right there and the first thing they ask me if I got some marijuana. [Laughs] That's the first thing, you know, they wanna know if I got some marijuana. I say, "My, what is this?" You know. Oh yeah. That's the first th-, the first, the first thing they wanted to know if had some dope on me.

SW: They thought because you were American [you'd have some?]?

RM: Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. You see to them you see all Americans smoke dope. [Laughs] I say, "Wow." Say, "You in for a change."

SW: Yeah, they need to come visit over here [Inaudible] think about that, huh.

RM: Oh, ooh. No, it was, it was, it was somethin' to be on a barge like that. And that, that was just French. The derrick barge and this construction barge in the North Sea in '75 well we had five nationalities of people. We had Americans, we had English, Spanish, French, and Dutch. It was a Dutch company. Now that caused some havoc because the English, which I feel are one of the most rudest people I've ever come across, they would actually try to ridicule the French and the Spanish. They thought they was so much better than them. We would go in town in Stavanger, Norway into the pubs and drinkin', partying. And the British would try to get the, the bartenders not to serve the French and the Spanish. They, they didn't want to be associated with 'em that's, I didn't have no use of the British people at all. I mean, they and these were divers, these, all this, I don't know if they're different, you know, but uh, I didn't have much respect for these people right there. And that was my experience with the British in 1975. That, it wasn't a pretty sight over there.

SW: And the French over here in the Gulf, what year was that?

RM: Uh, 1980.

SW: Nineteen eighty.

RM: Nineteen eighty.

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SW: Well yeah it makes sense, you told me that's when you started seeing all the drugs coming in.

RM: Uh hm, uh hm.

SW: And these guys were asking you for it right when you come on the boat.

RM: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah. In '79, '80, '81 you had a lot of drugs in the Gulf. We had one guy uh, one black guy from Houston was on that uh, pipe barge in '80. And he was the one bringin' in the drug from Houston. And they finally busted him out there in Fourchon, we had a drug bust one afternoon gettin' on his crew boat. And they busted him.

SW: How would they, how would they get the drugs on the boat?

RM: Well he was bringin' it in a paper bag.

SW: Just hide it?

RM: He's hide it, he put it in his knap-, in his uh, bag with his clothes. And we had a, we had a drug search that day and uh, he had left it in the car. He came in and [his bag?], he cleared, you know, everybody went on the boat. Uh, they kind of suspected that was him, but he didn't have nothin', so they went back in the little office. They had the dog there and everything. Well about a half hour later he gets off the boat and he goes back to his car. And he's gonna try to come back with another package, but that's when he, he brought the, he was goin' to get that paper bag, pretty good size bag, and he was bringin' that bag back on and they come, they come back at him. That dog just went crazy. [Laughs] Yeah, yeah. They put handcuffs on him right there. Never seen him again. No. And that was it, you never seen, I stayed on that barge probably another four months and I never seen or heard of anybody else, you know, tryin' to bring dope on the barge after that. That was just that one guy and they, they told me he was makin' about six, eight thousand dollars a month sellin' dope.

SW: Offshore?

RM: Yeah. Yeah.

SW: I've heard that drug dealers here onshore make money, too.

RM: Oh yeah.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

RM: Oh yeah, he was in, he was the only one, he was the only one that pipe barge, he, he had a good thing goin' there until they busted him.

SW: But like you said some of these pipe barges were pretty big, too.

RM: Oh yes.

SW: So I guess you could have uh-

RM: Oh yeah.

SW: Enough clientele.

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RM: Oh lord, yes. Oh yeah. Especially the French. The French was his biggest customers. [SW laughs] Oh yes.
[Recording goes silent for a few seconds]

SW: Okay. Um. We have the option here, we're gettin' ready to run out of this tape. And uh-

[END OF RECORDING]

