

Interview Log

Interviewee: William Wallace, Sr.
(W. W.)

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Interviewer: Virginia Jenkins
(V.J.)

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Phonetic spellings: Fore pete, shaft tonging
Should be forepeak

BEGIN SIDE A

V.J.: --and when, if you're willing to do that, and give me your name.

W.W.: Okay. Well my name is William Thompson Wallace, Senior, and I normally don't give my whole name out like that. So -- I was born and reared in Deal Island, Maryland, Somerset County, which is 15 miles southwest of Princess Ann. So before I went to school, I was on the water because my father was a waterman. And the only babysitting arrangements they could make was to take me to on the boat with him. At that time, he was doing shaft tonging, shaft tonging and crab scraping. So that's how I started out. I was on the water before I literally went to school. And school for me was -- the first year of school was a traumatic experience because no one told me that come September I would have to go to school and no longer be with my dad, and I didn't understand that. So I hated school. So that's how that part of that world fits in there.

V.J.: And I understand your father was a skipjack captain?

W. W.: Yeah. In his -- well I won't say -- well I guess it was in his later years. He was a relatively young man, he was 55 when the boat capsized and they were all drowned at sea. For years, he had been a skipjack captain. This was the first time he'd owned his own boat. This was his own boat that he was able to purchase, and I think he loved it dearly. I'm quite certain he loved it dearly. And unfortunately, that was the one that took him away from us.

V.J.: What was his name?

W.W.: My father's name was Thompson. The boat was the Claude W. Somers, I think. It's been so long now, I've kind of forgotten. I should remember, but I think that's what it was, the Claude Somers. Now I didn't work on the Claude Somers that much. I worked with him on the Ida May. And the Ida May is still moored down to Deal Island. I don't know whether they're working her this year or not, but I know she's down in Deal Island. That's the one that much of my life I remember him being the captain of. And prior to that, I think he did some work with a bugeye. That's the one that blew up on him. I won't say he blew it up, but the boat blew up. And part of that was because -- it's funny now, but then it wasn't funny. At that time, I think they had both a gas stove and a wood stove in the cabin. And the day before, I think they had been down and they'd been doing some work and whatever, and whatever, and perhaps someone forgot to turn the gas all the way off and it was seeping. And they went down the next morning to light the wood stove. And during those times, they used a lot of kindling, and wood and coal oil, we used to call it coal oil then. And spontaneous combustion, I guess. When they dropped the match in the stove it (descriptive sound) blew up.

He frightened us for awhile because we were younger elementary school kids, no more than sixth grade I think. Frightened us for awhile to see this person living in our house all messed up and whatever because much of his face was burned. Not seriously burned, but burned enough that he had to have medication for it and all that kind of stuff. So we were kind of fearful of him for awhile, but then that soon passed. And then he began to captain the Ida May, which is, as I said, it's still down Deal Island. And through the years, they've done work on it, so to describe what it was, I'm doing this -- I tried to think of

some of the particulars last night, but we're talking almost 20, almost 30 years ago now. So I'm one of the old ones, one of the old ones now.

The cabin -- well pretty much at that time had a stove in it, and by then we were only using one stove which generally was propane gas. We were using it for both cooking and heat. Depending on the size of the boat, and Ida May wasn't one of the larger boats on the bay, we could sleep three people, three persons in the cabin itself. There would be one on the port side, a berth on the port side, and one on the starboard side, and one right up under what we call the aft. Where you go down, there was a berth up under there. And then there were three, possibly four in what we called the fore pete, and that's where I preferred to sleep, up on that area.

It was interesting because although the quarters were small and cramped, that's basically where we spent our week. During that time, we would come up on Sunday night, early Monday morning and stay until Friday, and that's where we lived, that was our home. We didn't do like they do now days, they come in and tie the boat up and everybody goes home. We literally stayed on the boat, and that was where we had all our entertainment, we had our portable radios, battery-operated radios. Couple of the boats, not many of them, would've had portable televisions for something to do, but most of us about that time, typical rowdy bunch, you may want to put that in quotes, typical rowdy bunch would go up and visit the neighboring activities for the evening, and then come back and work all day. And then repeat the same cycle all over again. And it was very nice. Generally, at least on the boat that I was on, the Ida May, there was a person designated as a cook, but he also was a person who worked in the deck with the rest of us.

V.J.: Do you remember his name?

W. W.: Oh, they varied. One time it was my younger brother, whose name was Gerald. And then my other younger brother, whose name was Gordon. One time it was an uncle. It varied. So there were several people. Whoever wanted to do it, basically, would be the person who would -- I never got into that one, into the cooking part. I guess they didn't trust my cooking skills.

V.J.: How did they learn to cook?

W.W.: Well there wasn't a whole lot. We weren't having gourmet dinners out there. (Laughter.) Basically, a pot of beans. Something that was quick. In the morning, we'd have bacon and eggs and generally, if you had a real good cook, homemade biscuits and stuff, and then occasionally some of the guys would make, those that were real good, unfortunately we didn't have anyone like that on our boat, would make cakes and things of that nature, some kind of dessert. A lot of staple foods. Beef, chicken, and stuff. Something that you could put in the pot and not really have to look at it because your primary responsibility was to be working in the deck, which included taking care of the sails and the jib and all of that. So you didn't have a person that was designated exclusively to doing the cooking. So ate a lot of hot dogs, and all those kind of, used to be healthy foods but no longer healthy foods because of whatever reason. So that person basically would do the cooking for us, and then we'd all come down at various times, or sometimes we'd all eat together. And that basically would be it. Again, it was crowded but it was space enough for us. You didn't have much more than one or two foot square foot room per person kind of deal.

V.J.: Was there a table?

W. W.: No, there was not a table. We weren't that elaborate. We basically -- well on the side of the berths, there were -- I guess you could call them little areas in which we could sit down which provided some place. And then --

V.J.: Like the top of a locker?

W.W.: Well I guess you could equate it to a locker, but I wouldn't want to give it that kind of upscale distinction. Generally it would be something like this table, not much wider than this, and it would be part of the configuration of the boat itself, the cabin. And then behind it would be the berth where persons were lying -- were sleeping. So we would generally hold our plates -- the only thing about it is we used real silverware and real china, so we used a whole lot of plates and ate that way. So we learned all the unhealthy and impolite table manners while you were on the boat. But you had to be fine when you left and went elsewhere.

V.J.: Did somebody ask a blessing at the beginning of the meal?

W.W.: It depend. It depend. I don't think there was a let's bow our head in prayer. I think it was more of an individual kind of thing. And sometimes that depended on how much time you had and what you were doing in the process, or if we were on a real good, what they used to call real good lick of oysters, sometimes we'd come and eat one at a time and whatever. Or if it was a calm day, we'd all go down and eat together. So it was more or less an individual thing. But I think we all were aware, I think all the watermen at that time were aware of the awesomeness and certainly acknowledged and affirmed God even though there were times in which we act as if we didn't even know God, but still I think we had that respect for God. And I'm not saying that we all were super religious, super Christian or anything of that nature, but we knew. A couple of boats would have interesting little plaques on there and talk about the awesomeness of God. I think the Thomas Clyde had one in which there was a poem about the awesomeness of God, and how big the water was, and how small the boat was, and yet affirming God and petitioning God's protection in that process 'cause we'd go out morning and night, whatever the case might be. So no, we weren't let's bow our head to pray kind of thing, but we all were aware of the significance of our prayer.

V.J.: What was a normal dinner?

W. W.: Well it depend on the day. On Friday, there was no dinner because Friday was pay day, and you wanted to get out of there and get home as quickly as you could. It depend. Sometimes you would have beef and potatoes, we'd have chicken and vegetables, and sometimes you'd have pork chops. Depending on how much -- because the food that you purchased each week, we'd make a food list, an order, and we would purchase that, but it also came out of your pay. So that was good when there was good pay, I mean that was okay so you could eat high on the hog, if you will. But when money became scarce, you scaled back accordingly. So that's when you got probably more beans than anything else because they were less expensive. But we'd have beef and chicken and pork chop and things of that nature. I remember one day we were out and we happened to catch -- instead of oysters, we caught fish. So that night, we had fish for dinner. So that was interesting.

V.J.: How was it prepared?

W.W.: Fried. Of course, fried. (Laughter.) Everything basically was fried. And we would all take turns and scale and clean them, whatever the case may be, and then we'd

fry. A couple of times, not that often though, oddly enough, we would have oysters. Sometimes my dad would, I guess, depending upon what his taste was that day, he would shuck some oysters, and we'd either stew them, or fry them, stew them up with potatoes and something of that nature, and that would be our dinner. And then sometimes we'd just go up to the local eatery and get something to eat there, and hang out for the rest of the night, and that would be it and come back. We normally would sit around and listen to the seniors of the crew talk about days long gone when they used to do it, how they used to crank `em in and all that kind of stuff, and how they used to load the boats. At that time, you could load on deck, and load in the holes, there was no law as to how many you could catch, and how many you couldn't catch. They would share those stories, and sailing up and down in rough waters, and calm waters, and things of that nature. We just sat there and listened to that and, as kids would say, diss each other, now days. But, you know, joke on each other and stuff like that. That's basically how we would entertain ourselves.

V.J.: Who slept in the cabin?

W.W.: Well, generally, the captain slept in the cabin. The cook, obviously, for the most part would sleep in the cabin, and generally the first mate. And again, that person -- those persons, except the captain, would -- depended on whoever wanted to assume that role. They were -- I think that was simply part of the nature of the experience more so than this person is designated as the first mate, and this person is designated as the cook then whatever the case might be. And the rest of us would sleep up in the bow of the boat in the fore pete.

V.J.: What was the fore pete like?

W.W.: Basically same thing. We had in ours relatively small, maybe not even a foot long and maybe six inches, 10 inches wide, small gas stove up there. We would have oil lanterns sometimes. A couple times we would hook up a line from the battery to some of the lights and things of that nature. But that was a rare occasion, we didn't do that very often. Same kind of arrangement. We had generally behind the mast there would be a berth. And then on each side, on the starboard side and the port side, there would be a berth there on the Ida May. But then there was the -- oh, geez. Can't think of the name of it now. Well we call it the board. And that's in the center of the boat so that when you're sailing -- you know about it, you sail -- so she won't flip over.

V.J.: Right.

W.W.: I don't know what you guys call it.

V.J.: Centerboard.

W. W.: Centerboard. You call it centerboard. Well we call it the board. The board so she won't flip over on you. And parts of that would extend and kind of partition the fore pete off. But otherwise, it was pretty cramped. You had to be extremely short in order to stand up in it, so not many people were able to stand up. But you had sufficient room to do whatever you needed to do. We'd keep our clothes down there. It was interesting, it was warm, very warm, very warm in there. I don't remember having difficult sleeping. Sleeping was very nice, very nice. Very calm and serene. And I guess the rocking of the boat and the hitting of the water against the side of the boat had some kind of calming effect on us and whatever. And a lot of times, we'd set up on the sides of the locker to use your language, set up on the lockers and go to sleep. Didn't matter. It was just an interesting life.

V.J.: What kind of bedding did you have?

W.W.: Generally it was a mattress. No more than four inches thick, if that. Four inches thick. Sometimes you could get a piece of the -- not the Styrofoam, but the other stuff, and place with your mattress. Of course, you know, mine -- I liked mine. Mine was rather comfortable. I would always fix mine up and bring down some couple quilts and put on it and make it even more soft and comfortable, and couple of blankets and a pillow. That was it. That was it. Needless to say, there weren't any bath facilities, you know. Didn't matter. Everybody on the boat was men, and generally we docked in areas in which there weren't any housing around, you know, not immediately anyway. The thing that was interesting, and I've gotten away from it through the years, but it was something that we did every morning, at least I did every morning, is we'd always -- I would come on deck, and for the most part take what was pretty close to a bath. As I said, you won't be polluting the air or anything of that nature, and it would be cold mornings. And it's something that you got used to, and you just didn't worry about it being cold. You just did it. And so that was good. We had a wash basin, bucket or something, well generally a wash basin that we would use for those purposes.

Now the cabins have changed 'cause I was looking at this boat. That's not the original cabin that they had on that boat. You see where they've extended it and changed it much more. Most of them were generally low. And there they've arranged it so that you can stand up a little bit in some portions of it. The heat was good, and it was fun, it was fine. You could read by the lights that were there. Very seldom did it get cold enough that you could feel it inside. I don't remember ever it getting that cold that we had a problem. What else did we do on there?

V.J.: What did you have to drink?

W. W.: Well it depends on who was doing the drinking and what your taste was. (Laughter.) Now I had an uncle who, God bless his soul, was an avid gin drinker. So he always had his gin somewhere. And we probably knew, we knew, but we didn't bother it. And generally sodas. Of course, we had our water and things of that nature. But basically it was sodas that we drank, a lot of sodas.

V.J.: Coffee?

W. W.: Of course, coffee. I wasn't a coffee drinker so I didn't think of coffee, but coffee and, I think by that time the substitute for coffee, I was drinking hot chocolate. So we'd have hot chocolate, coffee, things of that nature. And, again, that was each person's preference as to what they wanted. But I think just about everyone, few exceptions, had their coffee in the morning. Or at some point during the day, they would drink their coffee, and I would drink my cocoa. So that's it.

V.J.: How did you carry water?

W. W.: Generally, we had a barrel, a barrel of water. At one point, we used a wooden barrel in the earlier years. When I first started, I think we had a wooden barrel. And I guess, you know, as things are, they'd wear out. It wore out, and then we went to metal kind of barrels for our water purposes. We also stored our gasoline on deck as well in 50, 55 gallon drums. Something of that nature. So you had to be careful as to which barrel you were in. But we had 'em marked anyway. We had 'em marked. And then sometimes we had those five gallon plastic jugs and things of that nature for our water purposes. We -- I'm trying to think. Did we have, I'm not sure whether we had an ice box.

I know we didn't have a refrigerator or anything of that nature. If it was, it was one that we basically used, but we used ice to cool things. I'm trying to think how did we keep our meats cool. I think we had some kind of ice box thing that we just put `em in there when we came up and put ice on them and whatever. Of course, now you're talking cold winters, not much colder then than they are now. So you really didn't have to have a whole lot of cooling stuff to keep ice -- not ice, but keep your meats and things cool. So and then if you went back far enough under the aft of the boat, it would be cold back there anyway, so you could stuff stuff back there. Just remember what you put back there.

What was interesting, though, in some places when we would tie up, you had to be aware that the raccoons would come. And they would actually take the food, the meat and stuff away, so you had to be aware of that.

V.J.: Did they swim out to the boat, or were you tied to a pier?

W.W.: Well sometimes, I think more so in Tilghman Island before they built it up in there, we would tie up in there. And on one side of it was like a marsh, wooded area, and they would come out of there and come on board. Just like walking down the wharf and just jump right on, take what they want and go on about their business. So you had to deal with them. But other than that, that was okay. No problem. It was a lot of fun, though. A lot of fun.

V.J.: Where were the other provisions stored?

W.W.: Well we had little cabinets down in the cabin that we would put them in, canned goods and other staple foods we'd put them in there, our jellies and our coffees and eggs and things, we'd put those in there. And they were readily accessible. Normally they would be up front of the cabin. Ours was like the stove generally was in the middle, and on either side, we had a shelf, I think, across the top of the stove. It was generally a Martha Washington small stove, four burners and an oven interestingly enough, and then we'd have shelves under there, and then the cabinets and we store stuff all along there. And then I think, I don't know for sure, but I think we had two shelves on the back of the cabinet, near the end of the cabin on which we put some stuff, I think, but I'm not sure whether that was on the Ida May or on one of the other boats, but that's the kind of arrangement that we generally had.

V.J.: Where did you store the plates, and mugs, and pots, and pans?

W.W.: Generally in the same area. And sometimes if there was an unused berth, that became the storage place, for some reason. A lot of the guys, sometimes you'd pick guys that were -- part of the crew would be guys who were from the community. So, therefore, at the end of the day, they would go home. So you had an extra berth. So we would just fill it up. That became the storage place for whatever didn't fit somewhere else. So that's where we sometimes had life preservers, and our oil skins and things of that nature that we didn't need for that particular day. And gloves and all that kind of stuff. So it became a storage area, our closet for storage, storage room rather.

V.J.: Did you use eat fish?

W.W.: Occasionally we would have some hake fish, but not that much, not that much. That was one of the things that we didn't fool much with, and I suspect that that was because of the preparation process more so than it being available because you had to soak it, and then soak it and get all the salt out of it and then mix it up and all that kind of stuff. So we didn't fool with that all that much. Every now and then we would have

some, but not that much. Some of the holidays, depending on whether we were going to come home for Thanksgiving or not, we'd do something extra. Get maybe a portion of turkey, not necessarily the whole turkey, but something of that nature, but not that much. But what happened in the later years it changed because instead of staying the whole week, we would come home generally on Thursdays and normally would not work on Fridays. So that kind of changed a lot of dynamics there as well. So that made a lot of differences into what was going on, particularly in regards to the holidays. But for the most part on Thanksgiving, we had the traditional beans and whatever. That's when I made up my mind that as I got older, I was not going to include beans as a part of my household meals. So I avoid beans as much as possible.

V.J.: What kind of beans were used?

W. W.: Well it depend. They had, of course, the navy beans, they had the lima beans, and the pinto beans. We didn't have any -- very seldom we had black eyed peas, but generally those kind of beans. They were just -- and then put all the healthy stuff in `em, a great big piece of fat meat in it, and all that. Put `em on there and let them cook down. And that would be about it. And, of course, you always had the biscuits to go along with that, either biscuits or some kind of cornbread or something to eat with that. It made for a good meal.

V.J.: How about desserts, sweets?

W.W.: Most of our desserts were store-bought. We didn't have, again, we didn't have a cook who that was his thing. So we would buy buns, and cookies or whatever as we felt that we wanted them. We would just stockpile them or whatever. And then a lot of guys, we each would get our own little things that we wanted. I had a cousin who had a fondness of candy, so he kept a lot of candy and stuff like that. And, although there were sodas provided as part of the supplies, we generally would get our own sodas and keep them. Well we shared them, but keep them for ourselves and whatever the case may be. So desserts was not something that we did regularly. Run up to the store and get yourself a couple of Tasty Cakes or something, that was about it. Occasionally, though, someone would decide, and daddy would do that occasionally, would make a rice pudding or something. And that would be about it. I don't remember anything other than that. And then I like raisins in my rice pudding, so that would be -- as a matter of fact, I think I'm going to make some tonight now that I'm talking about it, rice pudding and raisins and things of that nature. That's basically --

V.J.: How about molasses or syrup?

W.W.: Of course, of course. Pancakes were a regular breakfast kind of food. And syrups and sausage and all that stuff you don't need to put in your system when you're out there on the water, and that grease, all that kind of stuff, be bouncing up, and it would start to work on you and all that kind of thing. But, yeah, sausage and ham. We ate ham, because again it was stuff that was quick to fix and you didn't have to give it a whole lot of attention because much of your activity was on deck and you didn't want to be spending a whole lot of time down there.

And, again, it might be, you know, daddy might say to one of us, hey, come down here and put something on the stove, and that was it. Because we did not have, again we did not have a person that was designated exclusively for that. And some of the boats would, some of the elderly men, they would -- just to give them something to do because they

hadn't -- they weren't -- they were at the point in their life that it was best for them not to be on the deck. But they still wanted to be a part of the working condition. So some of them would take them along and give them the task of providing and cooking food for us, but other than that, that was about it. Not much of anything. Breads, of course, breads and milk. But not a whole lot of cereal. Because cereal wasn't, for that kind of work, cereal didn't have the stick-to-itness that you needed. Oatmeal would be an exception there. Oatmeal or some kind of cream of wheat or something would be helpful because that would, as they say, stick to your ribs kind of thing. But the other cereals, no, very seldom, very seldom.

V.J.: Who did the shopping?

W.W.: Well generally what we would do is -- my dad for the most part, on our boat he did, oddly enough. Because the person that he worked the boat for prior to getting his own, the person that he worked the boat for owned the -- well I guess now you would call them convenience store, but he owned a community store. So we did all of our, obviously, talking about monopolies here, he did all of the shopping right there. So on Friday, he would go in and take a list, and the guy would fill the order for us, and we'd pick it up Sunday afternoon or early Monday morning, and that would be it.

V.J.: Where was this place?

W.W.: In Chance, Maryland. In Chance.

V.J.: Do you remember the name?

W. W.: His name was Albert Gladden. Now what the name of the store is, I have no clue because I don't remember seeing a name on the store. All I knew, it was Albert Gladden's store. So I guess that's how it was identified for me. And we would get all of our food stuff right there with him, our beef, our chicken, our hot dogs. Not too much hamburger, though, not much hamburger.

V.J.: What about cheese?

W.W.: Of course, you ate cheese. You ate cheese with everything almost. Cheese with coffee, and cheese with cocoa, and cheese with crackers, and cheese with everything. So, yes, cheese very much was a part of the diet. What else did we --

V.J.: Did people put cheese in their coffee?

W.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

V.J.: Yes.

W.W.: Yeah. Take little small cubes of cheese and drop it in your coffee, and it would melt. It wouldn't completely disintegrate, but it would melt such that I guess it would, it was okay. I mean they were doing it, and they seemed to enjoy it. I watched my grandmom do it a lot. So I guess it did do something. Now what it did, don't ask me. I have no clue. They just did it. Cheese and -- what else did we have?

V.J.: Dried fruit?

W.W.: Huh-uh (Negative).

V.J.: No?

W.W.: No fruit. Very seldom would there be fruit. I don't remember ever seeing any fruit, unless it was a -- let me rephrase that though. No dried fruit, but maybe we would have some canned peaches or canned pears or something. More so peaches than anything probably, along with the canned string beans, and the canned peas and all that kind of stuff, but no dried fruit at all. Nothing of that nature. I'm not even sure whether dried fruit had gotten down to Chance by that time. Maybe in other cities it may have, but

wasn't a whole lot of dried fruit coming around there, with the exception of the raisins. That would be the exception there. Otherwise, a lot of candy was being eaten. I think everybody had a sweet tooth on the boat, probably. What else did we do down there? It generally became our home for the week. That was it.

V.J.: So you sailed with family as crew?

W.W.: On our boat, it was. We were all family. As a matter of fact, in '77 when the Claude Somers went down, it was -- it was all family. It was my father, my brother, my uncle, two cousins and a friend. There were six of them. So it was all family. Some of them weren't quite as all family like we were. There were various -- and, of course, there were some integrated crews as well. And there was one other, I think, European Americans that was all family. But other than that, it was integrated kind of thing. I think we did it that way simply because we all are crazy about the water. And we all wanted to be out there, and we figured well, if you're going to be out there, no better person to be out there than to be with your dad. So go with your dad, you know. So that's what we did. And it was a gradual process for us because we each graduated from high school at various stages, and what was interesting, though, is although we would get other jobs, come later September, October, see ya, we're going on the water. So that's what we did. And we enjoyed it. I have two brothers now who are working on the water.

V.J.: Where do they live?

W.W.: Deal Island, of course, Deal Island, Princess Anne. But they can handle it now. I can't handle it. I can't deal with it now. I loved it when I was doing it. I remember when I graduated from high school being uncertain as to what I wanted to do, definitely knowing that I didn't want to continue going to school. And to be on the water is what I wanted, but at that time, you could make a good living at it. It's not like it is now where you have to work five times as hard and make very little money. You could make good money then, it was worth the endeavor then. But now, I don't think I can. I don't think I'd want to go out there and watch them do it anymore. But I probably would, but I don't think I want to. On a day like this, I wouldn't mind. A nice day. But when it gets cold, and rainy, and windy, no, I don't think I want to deal with it. Not any more. But it's a great life. At least I thought it was then a great life. It was hard, but I think the joy was knowing that whatever I took home on Friday, is because I made it, that to be my -- either I worked hard to do it, or if I didn't do anything, then I had nothing to show for it. So that was the joy of it. And, plus, the freedom. The freedom of knowing that you may go out there one day and spend two hours and catch your limit and you're done, or go on out there another day and spend all day and not catching anything. You know, that was part of the package, that was part of the, I guess, the mystique of being involved. You have to ask some questions here because I will -- (Laughter).

V.J.: What was your favorite meal?

W.W.: My favorite meal? I'm not sure what my favorite meal was, but my least favorite meal was a pot of beans. Probably beef, probably. Probably beef I think we did more beef than chicken. Because again, the emphasis being upon you cooked what was convenient, what took the least amount of time to prepare. And beef, you could clean it, wash it, put it on the stove, leave it alone. You didn't have to worry about it any more, unless you were going to do something extra to it, put your potatoes in, your onions and the other vegetables or whatever. Yeah, we did have vegetables. No fruit, but we had vegetables. Potatoes, and onions, and carrots and things of that nature. And you can

leave it alone. But unless you're going to bake a chicken or whatever, fry it, normally if we did fried chicken or any kind of fried foods, it was after we had finished the day's work, we'd unloaded our oysters, we'd cleaned up the boat. And the person designated as cook would go down and prepare and cook something of that nature. Normally the person who did that got a little extra because, you know, well we would feel he was doing something different that needed to be done, but really we didn't want to do it. So we would all give him a little extra for his efforts in that. And it wasn't because he was the best of cooks, just simply because he did the job that no one else really wanted to do. So that's how that worked. So I would say my favorite food would be maybe a toss up between beef and ham, beef and ham.

V.J.: And what would you have with the ham?

W. W.: Well with the ham -- we had just about potatoes with everything, except beans. Beans would standby themselves. Beans were beans. We had potatoes and some onions, and either baked bread or cornbread or something of that nature, and of course, soda or whatever it is that you --

V.J.: Did you have cabbage with a meal?

W.W.: Sometimes we would. Not a whole lot. But sometimes, When the cook really felt like being nice and generous. So we didn't bother the cook. We'd bother everybody else, but wouldn't bother the cook. But we had cabbage and ham. And with our beef, we'd have beef and generally potatoes or some other kind of vegetable to go along with it. It wasn't a -- it was, in terms of nutritious value, many a doctor probably would cringe about it. But, you know, it stopped you from getting hungry, and it kept you in some kind of shape that you could do the work that you needed to do, and I think that was the main concern more so than anything else. Otherwise, some cooks really did it up great. Some just said look, here it is, eat it, do what you got to do with it and leave it alone. We all would chip in and wash dishes.

V.J.: How was that done?

W.W.: With a pot. With an old-fashioned pot. Put water and dish whatever, put in whatever, how many you could get in there and just wash `em and dry `em off and stick `em up in the cabinet and that would be it until the next time.

V.J.: How did you dispose of the water. Carry it up on deck?

W.W.: You don't really want to know how we disposed of it, do you? Throw it overboard. (Laughter.) Throw it over. That was it, as we did pretty much with everything. But see we're talking 30 years ago, that long ago now. They didn't have all the -- unfortunately, they didn't have all the concerns then that they do now. I guess they had them, they just didn't enforce them as much. I don't think there was anything, from my scientific opinion, there wasn't anything that would've been environmentally harmful to the elements at that time, I don't think. Some kind of Tide washing powder or something, or dish lotion. That would be about it. Butter, we had butter. Peanut butter sometimes. A lot of -- not a lot of, but we had applesauce. Applesauce was probably served as one of those fruit --

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B)

W.W.: So that's -- what else did we have down there?

V.J.: Did you bring food from home, canned preserved food?

W.W.: No.

V.J.: No.

W.W.: No, we bought just about everything. Bought everything at the store and brought it up. Very seldom -- no, I don't remember ever bringing anything from home and using it. Didn't do that, didn't do that. Went to the store and got it. We'd come back with boxes and bags of groceries and bags of potatoes, and bags of onions, smaller bags, obviously, of carrots and stuff like that. I'm trying to think of some of the stuff we actually had in there.

V.J.: How many eggs would you use in a week?

W.W.: Oh, gosh. Sometimes we'd have at least three or four dozen, dozen eggs a week. We got just about eggs every morning. And some of the guys were very ferocious eaters. I wasn't much of an eater, obviously, but some of them did right good. Some of them would eat three or four eggs at a time in one setting. So I didn't care much for that. You probably could cook at least a dozen, dozen and a half eggs for one breakfast. Everyone would say -- the cook would come down -- well once the cook got there would generally be one of the first persons up and get the preparations ready, and cook the other stuff, the bacon. We had bacon.

The bacon, and both cut bacon and uncut bacon, we'd have that and fatback and stuff like that. When you came down, the cook would ask you how many eggs you wanted, and you'd say two, three, whatever, and he sat there and cooked it. But it wasn't too much of how you wanted it. (Laughter.) They would either fry them or scramble them. And again, sometimes we scramble them with cheese, cheese in them and things of that nature. So you ordered what you want, and the cook would fix it up for you, and that'd be it. Biscuits, of course, and molasses. And mix up -- had some terrible eating habits now that I think about it. Mix up molasses and butter and stir it on up, make some kind of concoction. Or, ready for this one? Molasses -- really, I wouldn't advise it but it is good eating. Molasses and grease. It is good eating. With hot bread. You take the molasses and pour, you don't saturate it with grease, but pour some of that -- particularly if it's bacon grease or something or fatback grease, pour it in there, stir it up. And as the old folk used to say, sop it up. Taste pretty good. It really did. It's going to do murder to your system in terms of cholesterol and deposits of fat and all that kind of stuff but it tastes real good. It tastes real good.

V.J.: I think if you're working that hard in the cold, you need it.

W.W.: Yeah, probably would help. Well it took several fellows away because of cancer and all that kind of stuff. Probably related to that. So it served its purpose in one way, but then it was a detriment on the other. Let's see, what else did we have down here? I did mention oatmeal and stuff like that, cream of wheat, bologna, we had bolognam, because that was -- Bologna and hot dogs.

V.J.: With the beans?

W.W.: No. No, that was strange. Never with beans. Very seldom we had bologna with -- I mean, bologna, hot dogs with the beans. Now we'd have, for quick lunches or something, we'd have stuff like Vienna sausage, potted meat and crackers, or sardines, oddly enough, sardines or something of that nature. But that generally would be for a quick kind of lunch kind of thing, get something in your system so you can keep on working 'caus you probably figured well, we aren't going to be here much longer. We just about got our limit, so we aren't going to be here that much longer. So we picked

something like that up just to carry so we can make it through the day. That was, pretty much -- I probably will get home and think of all these other things. Pretty much stuff like that. What else did we do down there?

V.J.: What about changing clothes and doing laundry? Did people do that? Wear the same clothes all week?

W.W.: Some did and some didn't. Laundry was done when you got home for the most part. I would always take -- I think I would change maybe every two days, and then -- take about three different, maybe two to three different change of clothes. Always, of course, something different to wear home. So that would be about it. And then you come home and wash it all out and take it back. You had your, whatever, specific thing that you would use, and used them the whole winter, either until the winter was over or they wore out, generally like that. And again, for privacy, if you really wanted to take a full-scale, as best you could, full-scale bath, then you had access to the fore pete and then the cabin as well. Because most of them did not have windows in them. Most of them weren't even raised up. It was later years, they started raising the cabins up a little bit. Most of 'em didn't. So you had lots of privacy if you really wanted to take a full-scale bath. But most times, you didn't take a full-scale bath, obviously, because you were in the winter, and you didn't want to open up your pores and allow all that cold to get in there. So you just waited 'til you got home on Friday, come back the next week and start all over again. So that was about it. As long as we didn't get too offensive, we were okay. (Laughter.) When we started getting a little too offensive, I think maybe some other arrangements would had to have been made.

V.J.: Would somebody let you know?

W.W.: In a nice way. In a nice, joking way. But we didn't have that problem. I don't remember anyone ever having that problem. And then sometimes the guys would go up into the neighboring communities for entertainment or whatever the case might be. So they would always carry themselves in a way that they weren't noticeable in that department anyway. Hygiene was well done, was well done. Given the circumstances, it was well cared for.

V.J.: Difficult.

W.W.: Difficult, yes. But it had to be done, so you did what you had to do. And you know, we were all, most of us were -- well, we were all relatives, and particularly when my brothers and I were together, all our lives we'd grown up together with each other. So you know, and our dad, of course, and uncles and things of that nature. So our close family friends, really didn't make that much of a difference any way.

V.J.: What did you do on slow days for entertainment, if there was no wind?

W. W.: Well it depends. If we were already out and it became calm, then depending on what mood the captain was in. Sometimes he just let us set out there. Why, I don't know. He just let us set out there. I don't know. And we just set there. And sometimes we'd listen to music, sometimes we'd sleep. Or if we had cards, play cards, you know, just stuff to amuse yourself Set around, well not set around, but stand around the engine box and just talk, just kid each other and whatever. If it were bad -- well if we were already in port and it was a calm day, sometimes the guys would go home. Go home, or they'd go up in the neighboring communities. If it were a real bad blowing day and we didn't get out, we had the option, sometimes the guys would go home, some of them

would go wherever they wanted to go. We just set around and do the same thing, sleep, go to the store, sleep, talk, sleep, eat, that basically would be it.

V.J.: Where did you dredge?

W.W.: Well much of-- we were, sometimes we were up to Sandy Point. We dredged out of Sandy Point. We dredged out of Sandy Point, Tilghman. I didn't do a whole lot because by that point, I was beginning to get out of it when they started dredging around home, down to Deal Island. I didn't do a whole lot of dredging down in Deal Island. And go up into Annapolis and dredge out of there. That's when they would allow -- before they built it up, they would allow dredge boats to come in there, and you could tie up down there. But then they started building these offices, and hotels, and business and all that. They didn't want them old dredges in there, them old boats coming in there. So we had to stop that. Once or twice, we were up in the Magothy, up out of that area. On the, I guess it would be the north side, the north side of the Bay Bridge, and all those areas. I mentioned Sandy Point, right?

V.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

W. W.: And Sharp's Island. I didn't -- I didn't like Sharp's Island. Too many rocks, and too many shells and stuff. Dig through dredges of shells and get very few oysters, just was not my kind of tea. And then to catch all of those rocks and you've got to throw them suckers back overboard. Didn't care much for that. They weren't small rocks. They were big things. I didn't care much for them, places like that. Couple times, we dredged out here in the Choptank, did some stuff out there. And we spat before they put the new bridge on. We spat on the other side where the hospital used to be, the Eastern Shore Hospital, all out there. We'd spat all out there then take them on up the bay and all that kind of stuff. So we used to -- I think it was in here. We used to dock all up in here way back when, but now you can't do it anymore. Well there were a couple in here yesterday, dredge boats. But I guess they'll let them back in at night. Other than that, areas like that. Then Hooper's Strait, Hooper's Island, all those kind of places we'd dredge. Did I mention Tilghman? Tilghman Island. All of those areas. We'd dredge out of there. It was all right. It was okay.

V.J.: And where did you sell the oysters?

W. W.: Well normally, we sold ours to the buy boat, the guy would come out with a scowl, as they used to call them, the scowls, and we'd put out there. So normally for the most part when we came in, came back in the harbor, we came back empty boat, we'd sell out there. Then all we had to do was tie up and that was it for the day basically for us. And then some of us were rather either crazy or ambitious, because after we worked all day and when the buy boats came in, we would shovel them off. We would shovel them off. Make pretty good extra money like that too. Sometimes it would be 12, 1 or 2:00 in the morning before we finished, but it paid good, it paid good. Then couple of the guys would go in the oyster house and shuck oysters at night. So but it was making that extra dollar. So they enjoyed it and it was fun. It seemed like a lot of hard work, and it was a lot of hard work, make no mistake about it, it was a lot of hard work, but I think that if it was something that you were accustomed to, you really enjoyed it, really enjoyed it. 'Cause you had guys who were -- who've done nothing else but that for years. And you had a lot of guys who were 70 and some of 'em probably older than 70 who were still in the middle of the day working. That's not easy work to do for an elderly person. But they just wouldn't give it up. They enjoyed doing it.

V.J.: Where did you get your water from?

W.W.: The water? Well normally we could either get it from one of the stores in the area where we would tie up, or sometimes they would have water down by the wharf and we would get it from there.

V.J.: From a hose?

W.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yup. The only thing we had to worry about -- well the bottled gas, had to worry about that, going to get that. And then, of course, we'd come in like over there to the Shell station, or whatever it would be, and gas up. And the thing about it, there was a camaraderie that you didn't worry about, very seldom did you hear of anyone stealing somebody's gas. It just didn't happen, it just didn't happen. And there was, for the most part, there was no kind of protection on a drum of gas, nothing at all. Anyone could have access to it, but not one would bother it. Very seldom did you hear anyone say well somebody stole my gas while I was gone the weekend. Very seldom did that happen, very seldom. We always would put our shovels in the hole. But it wasn't locked down or anything. People knew where they were. All they had to do was go down there and get it. And you did have some -- occasionally you'd have the scandals (sic) or the rascals who would take your shovel or something and give you theirs that was probably broken up or bent or something. But that's not that much, not that much. It worked out pretty good. Very good.

Our cabin was basically made of, well obviously wood. And I think it was most -- for the interior was, I think, plywood, painted plywood. Some guys left theirs the natural finish and put some varnish or varnish or shellac on it at that time and did it that way, but ours was painted white, white for the most part.

V.J.: What was on the floor?

W.W.: We generally had a carpet, Linoleum rug on the floor to -- well, of course, absorb, not so much absorb, but for water purposes and whatever on our boots and stuff. We just take a mop or a mop handle -- not a mop handle, but a mop head and just wipe it up and keep right on going. That was generally about it. If you wanted, you could provide your own pillow or something for the locker. But other than that -- set on the locker, other than that, it was just the bare wood. And believe me, they do get hard. They do not soften up a bit. They get hard. What else did we have down there? That was about it.

V.J.: Anything decorative?

W.W.: No, no, no. (Laughter.) Nothing decorative.

V.J.: Anything for good luck?

W.W.: Maybe a mirror on the wall or something. Other than that, that was about it. Nothing for good luck that I was aware of. No horseshoes, no shamrocks, rabbit's foot or anything of that nature. No. No good luck charm. Just out there. That's about it. That's the joys of it. Oh, see now with this one where they have it raised, but on ours where they put that addition in?

V.J.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

W.W.: You had the doors, but we had a sliding top that we could where if you went down, you would push it forward, and then when you got in there, you'd slide it back and kind of close out the elements, so that was slightly different. See this one opens. Came all the way up here, step on down, step in there. That was our way of getting down there. And the fore pete, for the most part, either had the same kind of sliding top, or you just lift

up, go on down there. Had a little sliding piece that we could lift up so we could step down rather than step up and then go down, so we could step right down. But other than that, that was about it. Nothing fancy. No luxuries. You were there to make money, you were there for the hardness of it. And you really got to see it first-hand. What else did we have on that thing? We used the top of the cabin for storage sometimes. We had our dredges up there and stuff like that that we would need on the middle of the deck or on deck. Dredges and kind of tools that we might need to fix something, for those purposes. And sometimes you had little set-down spots and that was it. That would be it. Let's see, what else did we do on that thing. I can't think of anything else.

V.J.: Okay.

W. W.: Unless you have a couple questions, I might be able to find an answer for you.

V. J.: I think you've answered my questions.

W. W.: Okay,

V.J.: Thank you.

W.W.: I'm glad I could.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)